

# US Officials Admit Covert Tech Program Is Fueling Iran Protests

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*After major protests hit multiple cities across Iran in November following a drastic government slash in gasoline subsidies which quickly turned anti-regime, broad internet outages were reported — some lasting as long as a week or more nationwide — following Tehran authorities ordering the blockage of external access.*

And during smaller January protests over downed Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752, [more widespread internet outages](#) were reported recently, likely as Iranian security services **fear protest “crackdown” videos would fuel outrage in western media**, and after months ago Mike Pompeo [expressly urged Iranians in the streets](#) to send the State Department damning videos that would implicate Tehran’s leaders and police.

But now Washington appears to have initiated the [“Syria option”](#) inside Iran: **covertly fueling and driving “popular protests”** to eventually create conditions for large-scale confrontation on the ground geared toward regime change.

*Financial Times* reports Washington’s ‘covert’ efforts are now increasing, and are more [out in the open](#):

US government-funded technology companies have recorded an increase in the use of circumvention software in Iran in recent weeks after **boosting efforts to help Iranian anti-regime protesters thwart internet censorship and use secure mobile messaging**.

The outreach is part of a US government program dedicated to internet freedom that supports dissident pressure inside Iran and complements America’s policy of “maximum pressure” over the regime. A US state department official told the *Financial Times* that since protests in Iran in 2018 — at the time the largest in almost a decade — **Washington had accelerated efforts to provide Iranians more options on how they communicate with each other and the outside world**.

Similar efforts had long been in place with anti-Assad groups prior to the outbreak of conflict in Syria in 2011, [WikiLeaks cables](#) previously revealed.

The US State Department is **now openly boasting it’s enacted this program for Iran**, which includes “providing apps, servers and other technology to help people communicate, visit banned websites, install anti-tracking software and navigate data shutdowns,” according to [FT](#).

Confirmed: Drop in internet connectivity registered at [#Sharif](#) University, Tehran from 11:50 UTC where students are protesting for colleagues and alumni killed on flight [#PS752](#); national connectivity remains stable despite sporadic disruptions on third day of [#Iran](#) protests [pic.twitter.com/LjaNnd4Ut2](https://pic.twitter.com/LjaNnd4Ut2)

— NetBlocks.org (@netblocks) [January 13, 2020](#)

And dangerously, many Iranians may not even realize they could be in some instances relying on such US-funded countermeasures to circumvent domestic internet blockages:

“Many Iranians rely on virtual private networks (VPNs) that receive US funding or are **beamed in with US support**, not knowing they are relying on Washington-backed tools.”

Iran is on occasion [known to round of citizen-journalists](#) and **accuse them of being CIA assets** — thus the State Department’s open boasting about its program, which is further connected to a broader \$65.5 million “Internet Freedom program” in troubled spots throughout the world — could only serve to increase this trend.

*“We work with technological companies to help free flow of information and provide circumvention tools that **helped in [last week’s] protest**,”* one US state department official told the FT. “We are able to sponsor VPNs — and that allows Iranians to use the internet.”

**So there it is: US officials explicitly admitting they were actively assisting in organizing recent protests** which followed Soleimani’s killing and the Ukrainian airliner shoot down.

I have asked the Iranian protestors to send us their videos, photos, and information documenting the regime’s crackdown on protestors. The U.S. will expose and sanction the abuses. <https://t.co/korr5p0woA>

— Secretary Pompeo (@SecPompeo) [November 21, 2019](#)

At least one circumvention software is actually identified in the report as being produced by Canada-based Psiphon, which receives American government funds. Of course the company sees its role more as facilitating “free flow of information” and less as essentially a willing asset in pursuing covert regime change in Tehran.

Interestingly, the revelation comes just as other US-funded propaganda campaigns related to Iran are coming to light:

One of the most viral videos about Iran last week — and a reason [#IraniansDetestSoleimani](#) was trending — was made by a lobbyist who had worked for a militia group in Libya <https://t.co/fN7v6Vztyo>

— BuzzFeed News (@BuzzFeedNews) [January 17, 2020](#)

All of this suggests [neocons in Washington could be a big step closer](#) to fulfilling their long-term dream of seeing US-sponsored regime change come to Iran — a policy plan which goes back to at least the 1990's and was [given greater impetus and urgency](#) under the Bush administration.

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