

# THE HOT TAKE

BY THE STUDENT STRATEGY & SECURITY JOURNAL

FOURTH  
RELEASE



SHOULD LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES SUPPORT **IRAN'S** WOMEN'S PROTEST MOVEMENT? IF SO, IN WHAT WAY?

HAS THE WAR IN **UKRAINE** BROUGHT EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY CLOSER, OR PUSHED IT OFF THE AGENDA?

# LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM AS THE ONLY SOLUTION, AGAIN

*By a political science undergraduate at Queen's University, Canada*

Being a liberal internationalist, of course, I believe liberal democracies should support Iran's women's protest movement.. Iran is currently experiencing brutal protests that have been marked as the boldest challenges to the government since its 1979 revolution, which was already historical in itself. Records have reported "326 Iranian deaths, including 43 children and 25 women," out of the brutality of their oppressive government in response to their people's attempts to peaceful protest.

Iranians' large demonstrations against their oppressive government sparked out of the unjustified killing of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was detained by the morality police for not wearing her hijab properly. Appalled by the killing of the young woman, Iranian people stepped forward in protest to say they would no longer commit to the oppressive government. Iranians' demonstration of freedom of speech was met by violence and corruption by the Iranian government and continues today. Many other states in the international arena have thus stepped forward to signify their opposition to the Iranian government's actions. This includes larger G7 nations like the United States which continues to maintain the JCPOA to protect Iranians from the deployment of nuclear weapons;

Canada which plans to bar ten thousand members of IRGC from Canada as a consequence of supporting supreme leader Ali Khameneu and is committing to UN intervention; and even the international superpower of the European Union is in opposition. The EU has decided to impose additional sanctions of travel bans and asset freezes to "send a message against Tehran's use of force against peaceful protesters." While there is mass global outrage for the pure violence of the government, Iranian representatives are still justified in their government's choice of a brutal response.

The Iranian representative at the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee claimed that **"women and girls in Iran are fully aware of their rights and they do not need western countries to advocate for them."** Further, the Iranian Foreign Minister states that it has no duty to listen to countries with a long record of systematic human rights violations, like Canada and its historical treatment of Indigenous peoples. He further called that resolutions to the issue and opinions were made out of "baseless accusations," all while a live internal war is ascending within the nation. It is, therefore, up to third-party international institutions to govern these hateful nations to maintain

# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

peace and promote the international freedom of people. Liberal internationalism argues for the necessary intervention of third-party international institutions to govern states and maintain peace, as peace does not occur naturally and rather must be created. Woodrow Wilson in the development of international liberalism argued that “peace could only be secured with the creation of an international organization” and this holds weight in the case of Iran. We see the relevance of Wilson's words as the United Nations, an international organisation, has decided to step forward to combat the increasing violence.

The United Nations met at the General Assembly Third Committee. Here the UN committee approved a draft resolution on Iran's human rights situation and the alarmingly high death penalty in the country. The resolution of the UN is “urging the Islamic Republic to cease the use of excessive force against protestors.” This Resolution is aimed to hold them accountable starting November 24th and is viewed as part of the only saving grace to bring justice back to Iran's people. The Iranian government's brutality towards its own people is only one case out of many that signifies the importance of international liberalism as a dominant regime today. Iran's ignorance to respond to its people's cries for help signifies the importance of liberal democracies and international organizations' intervention.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/14/eu-uk-sanction-dozens-of-iranian-officials-over-rights-abuses>
- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211163481>
- [https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9780192559586/epubcfi/6/50\[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dc6\]!/4/10/14/1:730\[%20f%2Cit](https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9780192559586/epubcfi/6/50[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dc6]!/4/10/14/1:730[%20f%2Cit)

# EXAMINING IRAN'S CLAIMS TO CULTURAL RELATIVISM IN ITS HANDLING OF PROTESTS

*By a political science undergraduate at Queen's University, Canada*

Yes, liberal democracies should support Iran's women's protest movements.

However, this should not be the question, but rather to what extent should liberal democracies support the movement?

Simply denouncing the actions of the Iranian regime is support, yet negligible support. Therefore, this response will attempt to adjudicate how liberal democracies should support women's rights movements, as it relates to the empirical 'support' presently observed. The actions of liberal democracies must demonstrate there is no compassion for the actions of the Iranian regime. Moreover, it must also be demonstrated that should Iran choose to act in a manner that violates the shared values of the international order, the benefits of globalised inclusivity should no longer be enjoyed. The sanctioning of Iranian officials by the UK and the EU meets the threshold of the two provisions offered. Such sanctions demonstrate disapproval of Iranian actors in accordance with the views of women's rights movements. The United States with its great sphere of influence has also sanctioned Iranian officials and seeks to support the rights of the citizenry. However, so far that is all that has been done -

offensive attacks on the economy of Iran.

In addition, the actions of the French are worth commending, as it appears to be understood by the French government that it is of the utmost importance to first deal with the Iranian regime's ill-suited handling of the protests, prior to paying any mind to the ongoing nuclear negotiations. In sum, the regime has purportedly killed more than 326 of its own citizens, and should the protests continue, it is likely that number will rise - not to mention the more than 1000 people that have been jailed. It is important that states respect and honour the sovereignty of other states, thereby limiting the actions states can take. However, so too is it important that states respect the freedom of life and liberty of the citizenry. Indeed, there are times when human rights are violated to such an extent that it justifies foreign intervention. Of course, liberal democracies have a duty to uphold democratic values, that is not to say bestow our values onto the East; likewise, there is a duty to uphold the institution liberal democracies have, largely, created. The actions of liberal democracies across the West are appropriate then, for the current situation. Sanctions respect the sovereignty of Iran while disproving the actions of the state.



# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

I do think liberal democracies should support Iran's women's protest movement, without trying to necessarily topple the Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the current regime. Shown in the high death toll of protesters and the ability to control the media, Khamenei and the regime are powerful actors willing to use their power to control Iran's citizens. If liberal democracies, for example, Canada and the United States, were to invade Iran for the protection of the protesters and stop the regime it would only create more violence and death before resulting in any good. This is due to the fact Khamenei has demonstrated his abuse of power to showcase a point. For example, the protests began over the death of Mahsa Amini. Over simply the fact many Iranians feel there has been a violation of human rights, now over 1,000 people in Tehran province have been charged and at least 326 people have been killed by security forces.

If liberal democracies were to invade, it is scarcely unknown what type of violence they could respond with and potentially bring more harm to more citizens. Furthermore, the control of what is shown in the media is another factor as to why liberal democracies cannot just proceed militarily against the Republic's regime. If Khamenei is able to place control over what is accessed on social media, he just as easily has the ability to put out political propaganda into the media and potentially create a revolt. I feel what the UN is currently doing is a slow start, but a good approach to this complex issue. By first just getting a committee of strong states

within the UN to urge the Islamic Republic to cease the use of excessive force against protesters, it allows a message to be sent without potentially increasing violence or having to forcibly take action.

If the UN continues the course of action, it can be hoped that the Islamic Republic will feel outnumbered in terms of power and will have no choice but to stop all violence before becoming the UN's main target.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/14/eu-uk-sanction-dozens-of-iranian-officials-over-rights-abuses>
- <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-722392>
- <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20221114-macron-calls-iran-protests-a-revolution-says-crackdown-harms-nuclear-deal-chances>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html>

## ARE HUMAN RIGHTS RELATIVE?

*By a political science undergraduate at Queen's University, Canada*

Liberal democracies ought to support Iran's women's protest movement as it has surpassed concerns of respecting cultural differences and entered into the territory of the outright violation of core human rights pertaining to protestors' right to life.

Questions pertaining to whether liberal democracies ought to support Iran's women's protest focus considerably on issues of cultural relativism within human rights, and the extent to which western states may legitimately interfere in post-colonial states without engaging in an imperialist undermining of their different cultures and way of life. Throughout this crisis, Iranian officials have taken a cultural relativist approach, condemning all human rights resolutions as an attempt to exploit human rights to advance western liberal political goals and insisting that westerners cannot understand the complexities of non-western global conditions and ought to remain neutral.

However, since thousands of Iranians took to the streets to protest the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's morality police in October, Iranian security forces have killed over 326 people and begun indicting people with charges punishable by death for participation in peaceful demonstrations. Their ongoing violent and lethal actions against Iranian protestors indicate that the

government has long surpassed its ability to claim cultural relativism in its approach. Any claims Iran makes to such a notion have now reached into authoritarian relativism, wherein claims to cultural relativism are misused to justify gross human rights violations. Consequently, in keeping with their responsibility to protect, liberal democracies ought to support Iran's women's protest movement.

In keeping with long-established procedures, countries have already begun implementing non-military actions against Iran through considerable sanctions, as laid out in the United Nations Charter. Should these have any effect on the Iranian government's approach to protests, such non-militaristic efforts ought to be continuously employed. Should they have no impact or sway in preventing the deaths of thousands of protestors, it may be pertinent to consider more considerable forms of intervention, such as UN peacekeeping, as is necessary to save the lives of the approximately 15,000 protestors who have been arrested and await trials that are likely to result in many receiving the death penalty. Any such action ought to be undertaken under the eye of the United Nations Security Council, the only body with the legitimate means and ability to undertake such a task. While issues of sovereignty will undoubtedly be raised, the extreme nature of Iran's actions and mass casualties already faced by the

# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

Iranian people undoubtedly warrants the intervention of some sort, lest the world is willing to watch as hundreds die for exercising a widely held human right under a brutal authoritarian regime.

- Newsroom, I. I. (2022, November 17). Un body approves resolution over Iran's human rights violations. Iran International. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211179959>

## SOURCES

- al Jazeera. (2022, November 14). EU, UK sanction dozens of Iranian officials over rights abuses. European Union News | Al Jazeera. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/14/eu-uk-sanction-dozens-of-iranian-officials-over-rights-abuses>
- Justin Trudeau, P. M. of C., Helen ROWE | AFP | Nov 22, 2022, Agence France-Presse | AFP | Nov 22, 2022, & Kaouthar OUDRHIRI | AFP | Nov 22, 2022. (n.d.). Iran lashes out at Canada over UN Rights Resolution. Al. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/11/iran-lashes-out-canada-over-un-rights-resolution>
- Mendonca, D., Bairin, P., Ehlinger, M., & Magramo, K. (2022, November 13). At least 326 killed in Iran protests, Human Rights Group claims. CNN. Retrieved November 22, 2022, from <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html>

# WHY DIPLOMACY IS THE ONLY OPTION

*By a Canadian Political Science undergraduate, Queen's University*

After the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, protests erupted all over Iran.

Men, women, and children are joining in protests that originally started as a call for the Iran government to take accountability for Amini's death, but have slowly become about the deeper systematic issues that are becoming ever more apparent in Iran. In response, the west has stood with the protesters thus far by imposing sanctions on certain individuals, calling for the UN to hold Iran accountable for various human rights violations, and demanding that the government take accountability for the killing of Amini instead of saying that she "fainted".

Western governments should continue to support the protestors through diplomatic efforts and restoring internet access in the region to show that they stand with the protestors and do not tolerate the abuse of human rights.

First, it is in everyone's best interest to maintain support for the protests in Iran. For the protestors, having the support of western countries like Canada and the USA is of utmost importance, since the military and economic power that these countries have over the Iran government gives them the leverage needed to fight for real change. The US government stepping in and calling for the Iranian government to take

accountability for Amini's death should worry Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as the involvement of western governments could lead to harsher sanctions which were otherwise relieved as a part of the nuclear deal.

As well, it is in the best interest of western countries to show their support for the protestors, as the subject of the protests is one the bedrock of all western democracies; without respect for human rights, governments have no respect for the people they rule over, as made clear by news headlines that question whether or not this protest will lead to the toppling of Iran's government. Western democracies not only want to make everyone aware of just how much they support the upholding of human rights, but also make it extremely clear to other dictators what will happen if human rights are blatantly ignored in their countries. Thus, western democracies should continue to provide diplomatic support to the Iranian protestors.

To continue, the US should provide support through diplomatic means. First, it should connect with tech companies like Starlink so that internet access can be restored to the region. Currently, the Iranian government has been working to cut internet access and remove Iranian citizens' access to reliable and unbiased information. Doing this will not only show their support for the



## Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

protestors but also work to help reform the media systems in Iran. Second, the US should continue to intensify sanctions and other means of diplomatic pressure without resorting to any sort of military intervention. The US and Iran have been trying to work out some sort of nuclear arms deal for some time now. Iran has access to enough resources to create 10 nuclear missiles. If the US sends in any sort of military support, this could anger Iran enough to spark a renewed conflict that could have nuclear threats. It is important that the US sticks to solely diplomatic efforts, like increasing the sanctions that Iran is currently under, as this sends the message that western countries do not approve of Iran's behaviour without starting a war.

### SOURCES

- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211163481>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html>
- <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-20>
- <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-iran-nuclear-deal>

# LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES MUST TAKE A SUPPORTIVE STANCE ON IRAN'S WOMEN'S PROTEST MOVEMENT

*By an Undergraduate at Queen's University, Canada*

Liberal democracies have a responsibility to support Iran's women's protest movement. They must do this by condemning the Islamic Republic, showing solidarity for Iranian women, and taking action. Iran is in the midst of a revolution after the death of Masha Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman who was detained by the morality police after being accused of not wearing her hijab properly. Masha's arrest has sparked a movement in Iran, as women are coming forward to oppose the oppressive nature of the Iranian government. It is important for liberal democracies to support the movement, as the women of Iran have unsuccessfully been fighting for a fair democracy and freedom for over a century. In order to maintain the Shia Islam establishment in power, the Islamic republic has been drowning out the voices of ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual minorities. Liberal democracies must first speak up, and then follow up these words with actions that show their support of the women in Iran.

Western governments must stand as a united front when facing this issue, and first must condemn the Iranian government's reactions to the protesters advocating for human

rights. According to the Norway-based Iran Human Rights Group (IHRNGO), the Iranian government has already killed 326 people participating in protests during the last two months. Liberal democracies can not respond to these casualties with silence, as it only would further perpetuate the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. Iranian women activists have already stated that they do not feel supported by the Western world, many of which have liberal democracies. It is important for liberal democracies to unite and support the women of Iran by making a verbal statement, issued by the president or a head government official, to state their solidarity.

Next, the words of liberal democracies must be put into action. This can be done by governments putting sanctions on individuals or groups that are human abusers in Iran. For example, the United Kingdom's liberal democracy has Magnitsky-sanction regimes which they can use to target issues related to human rights. These sanctions could include travel bans and freezes, which would make it clear to any regime that the UK does not tolerate their behaviour. Liberal democracies could use sanctions, and make executive decisions, to show

# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

Iranian women that they support the movement. This is one action that democracies could take to show they stand in solidarity with the movement. It is clear that the struggle for equality in the Islamic Republic will not be over soon, but liberal democracies must take a stance on the issue to help the women of Iran get the justice they deserve.

## SOURCES

- <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/event/iranian-women-on-the-frontlines-strategies-for-change/>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html>
- <https://redress.org/magnitsky-sanctions/>
- <https://freedomhouse.org/article/how-ongoing-protests-iran-are-part-historic-womens-rights-movement>
- <https://institute.global/policy/why-west-and-its-feminists-need-support-iranian-women>

# IF LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES ARE TO BE LANDMARKS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM, THEN THEY MUST DENOUNCE IRAN'S ABUSES

*By an undergraduate at Queen's University, Canada*

Modern liberal democracies view themselves as paragons of virtue, who, by way of their constitutions, freedom of the press, and democratic governments, protect human rights within their borders. The United States, often perceived as a model for democracy around the globe, has a history of extending its respect for liberal values and human rights outside of the confines of its territory. The country has been involved in numerous campaigns to aid oppressed populations, at the cost of resources, time, and lives.

Roughly two months ago, on September 16, Masha Amini was arrested by Iran's morality police, detained in police custody, and eventually died from the mistreatment she endured. Her death sparked protests, anger, and a bold response from Iran's constituents, who rose up against this tragedy to demand justice. Their retort has been met with abject violence, with protestors being killed and others detained, and the suppression of freedom of expression, as Internet access has been denied for many.

In the face of such blatant disrespect for human lives and rights, it is of utmost importance

that the international community responds vociferously to oppose Iran's police force, Revolutionary Guards, and government. Liberal democracies, who have built their entire systems of governance, education, and society on principles of freedom, justice, and human rights, must condemn Iran's deplorable actions. Otherwise, silence and idleness might give Iran the idea that its behaviour, against its own citizens, is acceptable, or at least, that it will not be punished. If liberal democracies wish to maintain their standards of morality, then they must respond when other countries callously disregard their own populations' freedom, lives, and safety.

States, including Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and even the coalition of states of the European Union, have imposed sanctions on Iran, including travel bans and asset freezes for influential members of Iran's police and government. For instance, Canada's prime minister Justin Trudeau has announced that he plans on investing 76 million dollars towards enforcing sanctions on Iran's regime and imposing a life-long ban on 10,000 members of Iran's Islamic

# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Liberal democracies have also expressed their support of Iranian women and their fight for justice by engaging in their own protests, such as the recent rally that occurred in Toronto.

Consequently, the international community must join to form an organized, strong, and firm opposition to Iran. This should begin by investigating the allegations and purported crimes and establishing a researched, well-evidenced report of the crisis in Iran. Discussions about the renewal of the 2015 nuclear deal should also be used as a bargaining chip to persuade Iran to stop its crimes and violations. If Iran does not change its behaviour, then it cannot benefit from a nuclear entente with other nations. Finally, the United Nations Human Rights Council must use its resolution, which denounces the reported deaths, arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as gender-based violence against Iranian citizens, to ensure the protection of human rights in Iran. This resolution must be decisive and list necessary changes that Iran must implement. This can include reinstating Internet access, ensuring freedom of expression and opinion, and protecting civil protestors. This resolution must hold Iran accountable for its crimes, and if Iran does not budge, it must be forced to do so through increased sanctions and economic losses.

Accordingly, dress codes and peaceful protests should not be punishable or enforced by law, especially when they come at the expense of women's own lives, volition and freedom. If liberal

democracies wish to sustain their moral high ground, then it is time they fight as moral state actors.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20221114-macron-calls-iran-protests-a-revolution-says-crackdown-harms-nuclear-deal-chances>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/10/7/canada-barring-entry-to-irgc-members-in-new-iran-sanctions-push>
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/14/eu-uk-sanction-dozens-of-iranian-officials-over-rights-abuses>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk>
- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211163481>



# WHY IRAN NEEDS DEMOCRACY

*By an Iranian student at Queen's University, Canada*

In present-day Iran, the demand for justice against genocide, oppression and crimes against humanity is more prominent than ever before in the twenty-first century. In my humble opinion, yes, liberal democracies should support Iran's women's protest movement, because, Iran is a country that is suffering from crimes against humanity and is unable to bring the perpetrators to justice, due to a dysfunctional government or ongoing civil war.

Then, yes, it is up to the international community to take measures to deter these mass atrocities and large-scale crimes. Liberals are firm believers in the principle that every human being deserves the right to be protected. In cases like Iran, where there are serious violations of humanitarian law, the international community has a collective responsibility to protect these people.

Back in September 22-year-old, Mahsa Amini was murdered after being taken into custody by morality police for not wearing her hijab properly. The outrage in the aftermath of this unlawful murder sparked an uprising against Islam's oppression. The Republic only hit back harder, arresting thousands of peaceful protesters. What's more, Iranian authorities are **"indicting people with charges punishable by death for participation in peaceful demonstrations."**

In response to Tehran's widespread violence against peaceful protesters and women, the United States and the United Kingdom implemented sanctions on Iran. Furthermore, with respect to women's rights, it is fundamental for liberal democracies to unite against Iran's authoritarianism. Liberals hold that while sovereignty is vital, it is not a state-exclusive notion. They believe that states can be punished for crimes committed within their borders, and that sovereignty can be overstepped when it serves the interests of the wider population. If that is the case, then yes, outside intervention from liberal democracies will be necessary if these atrocities continue against the Iranian people.

## SOURCES

- [tps://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html)
- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/14/eu-uk-sanction-dozens-of-iranian-officials-over-rights-abuses>
- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211163481>
- [https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9780192559586/epubcfi/6/50\[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dc6\]!/4/10/14/1:730\[%20'f%2C](https://bookshelf.vitalsource.com/reader/books/9780192559586/epubcfi/6/50[%3Bvnd.vst.idref%3Dc6]!/4/10/14/1:730[%20'f%2C)

# WALKING ON THIN ICE: PROTECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OUTSIDE OF A NATIONAL CONSTITUTION

*By a liberal realist political science student at Queen's University, Canada*

Liberal democracies provide the Iranian protest movement with a sense of hope, strength and unity by expressing their concern of Iran's actions through strict sanctions. A carefully executed response made by liberal democracies is essential to hinder Iran from committing further human's rights violations, while maintaining general international peace. As globalisation's effects appear more significant than ever, the interconnectivity of every sovereign nation has substantially increased. Although the Iranian women's protest is happening within the borders of a different nation, other liberal democracies have a challenging time ignoring the measures of the Iranian government that serve to oppress their citizens. With that being said, these nations feel an obligation to look after the rights of individuals that are having their rights oppressed by governmental forces, even if it may damage their current relationship. The best way for liberal democracies to express their disapproval somewhat cautiously is through sanctions.

Many states such as the UK, Canada, and the European Union members have shown their condemnation of

Iran's actions through such sanctions. It is important for these liberal democracies not to overstep their boundaries as overly harsh measures could potentially disrupt the situation further. Canada demonstrates how the proposition of initiatives that are perhaps too ambitious can be met with a great deal of backlash from Iranian representatives. This can be seen in plenty of news sources that display the many harsh words of Iranian officials towards Canada. This event expresses the importance of post-colonial governments being mindful that it may appear they are trying to engineer regime change in developing countries because they hold different values than they do.

Be that as it may, the rise of various stories speaking to the breached human rights of Iranian women's protesters have circulated around the world and are inexcusable. As time progresses and more individuals have their lives on the line, it is imperative that other nations voice their concerns about Iranian implementations by sanctioning them appropriately.

## SOURCES

- At least 326 killed in Iran protests: human rights group IHRNGO | CNN
- EU, UK sanction dozens of Iranian officials over rights abuses | European Union News | Al Jazeera
- Canada sanctions Iranian drone makers amid Russian strikes in Ukraine - National | Globalnews.ca
- Macron calls Iran protests a 'revolution', says crackdown harms nuclear deal chances (france24.com)
- UN Body Approves Resolution Over Iran's Human Rights Violations (iranintl.com)
- Iran Rejects Canada-Drafted UN Resolution as Political Exploitation of Human Rights - Al-Manar TV Lebanon (almanar.com.lb)

# MONEY AND STATUS SPEAK VOLUMES: HOW LOUDLY IS THE GLOBAL SYSTEM WILLING TO TALK: SHOWING SUPPORT FOR IRAN'S WOMEN'S PROTEST MOVEMENT

*By a contributor who wishes to say that their "opinion is that of a white, privileged, Canadian woman with access to education and resources. My opinion must be viewed in that context, as I have been afforded privileges others have not been."*

Yes, liberal democracies should support women's protest movements. Liberal democracies owe it to the women of Iran to show up for them on a global scale.

A society under duress with no access to the outside world deserves outreach from developed and democratic countries with the resources to help. Mahsa Amini was a victim of the oppressive Iranian regime and the inciting force of the protests engulfing this country. Her brave act of defiance, wearing her hijab incorrectly, was enough for her to be assaulted, arrested and killed in custody.

The women of Iran have been pushed to the point of protest and their government has turned against them. The protests have become violent and deadly, and with no end in sight, it may be time for more aggressive shows of support by liberal democracies. Especially with the government's oppressive regime cutting off access to the outside

world, the country has lost access to communication and social media networks; therefore information or pleas for help cannot be heard. The women and protesters of Iran deserve support for their existence when there is an oppressive regime looming over them.

Liberal democracies should show support for Iran through social sanctions applied globally. If Iran receives social and economic sanctions at the highest level, it sends a message that the international system is not on its side. Economic sanctions speak loudly, like French President Emmanuel Macron's threats to not revive the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. Acts like threatening to expel Iran from the UN are a significant deal, and hopefully, they can push the Iranian government away from the violent protests and towards upholding their human rights duties towards their own citizens. Money and status talk, and if pleas for humanity from the Iranian people

# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

are not enough, hopefully, liberal democracies can speak on a global scale.

It could be argued that the many years of Western occupation in the Middle East and its ongoing conflicts gave way to the political instability we see now. The lack of structure as a result of constant war and conflict gave way for oppressive regimes to gather momentum. Liberal democracies, primarily the West, have the ability to give help to a vulnerable and conflict-ridden society and its citizens' voices deserve to be uplifted by societies that can help.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/14/eu-uk-sanction-dozens-of-iranian-officials-over-rights-abuses>
- <https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/12/middleeast/iran-protests-death-toll-intl-hnk/index.html>
- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211163481>
- <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20221114-macron-calls-iran-protests-a-revolution-says-crackdown-harms-nuclear-deal-chances>



# GENUINE CONCERN OR NEO-IMPERIALISM: WHY LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES MUST PREVENT IRANIAN WOMEN FROM BEING INSTRUMENTALISED

*By a political science student at Queen's University, Canada*

Liberal democracies should support Iran's women's protest movement by placing sanctions on the Iranian regime and funding domestic Iranian feminist resistance groups. Although it is important that liberal democracies show support for the Iranian women's protest movement, it is even more crucial that concern for Iranian women is not weaponized as a justification for neo-imperialist action from Western powers.

Until this point, Western democracies have done a good job of imposing sanctions on the Iranian regime and the officials responsible for enforcing the regime's oppressive will. For example, there have been five separate sanction packages imposed on Iran by the Canadian government in 2022; this includes travel bans, the freezing of assets, sanctions on corporations, and more. The culmination of sanctions from many members of the international community demonstrates the collective condemnation of the Iranian regime's actions, and creates financial strain within the state, making it difficult for the regime to continually fund its attack on the rights of civilians. In order for liberal democracies to support the Iran

women's protest, believers of the rule-based liberal international order must continually impose sanctions on the Iranian regime to complicate the enforcement of their will and create a financial strain on the resources funding their attack.

As highlighted by the Iranian UN representative, the women and girls of Iran are aware of their rights and how to interact with the government; therefore, there is no need for Western advocates to speak over them. With this in mind, support for the Iranian Women's protests from liberal democracies should focus on funding and providing resources for domestic feminist organizations leading the movement in Iran. This approach would encourage revolutionary actions from within Iran - with reform being dictated within historical and cultural contexts that are only properly understood by Iranian citizens. By providing resources and support for revolutionaries within Iran, liberal democracies can support the transformation of the Iranian regime and support the rights of women without implicitly imposing neo-imperialist policies through their aid.

# Should liberal democracies support Iran's women's protest movement? If so, in what way?

It is absolutely crucial that Western concern for the well-being of Iranian women does not become a justification for neo-imperialist action from the Global North. For example, following the attacks of 9/11, the US media began pushing concern for the well-being of Afghan women living under the oppressive rule of the Taliban. By emphasising this concern, the US symbolized Afghan women and used them as a justification for the decade-long War on Terror, which was a neo-imperialist operation that sought only to reinforce US hegemony. With this in mind, it is absolutely crucial that hegemonic Western powers restrain from utilizing these protests as a means of justifying military intervention, as such an intervention would primarily focus on achieving US interests within Iran - for example, reaching an advantageous agreement on the JCPOA and containing the nuclear threat of Iran within the context of international security, while the well-being of Iranian women would be only a secondary concern.

Overall, liberal democracies should impose sanctions on the Iranian regime and fund domestic feminist resistance efforts in Iran in order to avoid the protests from becoming a justification for neo-imperialist actions.

## SOURCES

- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211163481>
- <https://globalnews.ca/news/9282442/canada-sanctions-iran-drones-russia-ukraine/>
- <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211179959>
- <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20221114-macron-calls-iran-protests-a-revolution-says-crackdown-harms-nuclear-deal-chances>

# IT'S FINALLY TIME FOR EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY TO SHINE

*By a political science PhD candidate, Queen's University, Canada*

The war in Ukraine has had an undeniably profound impact on the political and security environment in Europe and on the European Union.

The European Union has a highly complex foreign policy, and the introduction of an active hot war against a traditional, for lack of a better word, frenemy, has introduced yet another factor. Russia has long been an insidious, untrusting partner that for a multitude of reasons the European Union has been forced to cooperate with and regrettably at times also willingly chosen to cooperate with. The fault of the European Union cannot be minimized, as they have had an important hand in the continued coddling of Russia and the acceptance of the atrocities they have committed. The war in Ukraine began not in 2022, but in 2014, and Russia's war against the European Union has been ongoing for even longer before that.

The technical definition of strategic autonomy is simply the ability of a country to pursue their own desired route in foreign policy without being too dependent on other states. The European Union's pursuit of strategic autonomy is marred by a long history of relying on American power to back up European diplomacy in its own backyard. Little has changed from the 1990s, when the European approach to the Bosnian War relied

on diplomatic efforts and the American one pushed consistently for military intervention. Despite increased American isolationism following Trump and American exhaustion from being the world's police, Europe is still, as once famously said by Belgian politician Eyskens, 'an economic giant, a political dwarf and a military worm'. In recent years, the greatest limitation on EU strategic autonomy is arguably the forced diplomatic dance with Russia where energy reliance and placation have dominated their relationship.

Despite institutional and capability-related restrictions, the European Union has now been given a rare opportunity to go their own path, defined by their values. Russia has given the EU a clear rejection of the values this union is built on, and this means that the EU has greater strategic autonomy now as the reality is that right now, Russia is not a partner that they must accommodate to as was previously required. The bridge to Russia has been burnt, and foreign policy now has a chance to be less restricted. The EU finally doesn't have to pretend that Russia is not the enemy or an opponent, because there is no questioning it now. Russia wants to destroy democracy and the freedom of a country to choose their own destiny.

## Has the war in Ukraine brought European strategic autonomy closer, or pushed it off the agenda?

The unprecedented unity of the EU in the face of Russian aggression is seen in statements, oil price caps, sanctions, the suspension of visa facilitation provisions, the closure of EU airspace for Russian aircraft, the prohibition on banking services, and more. There has never been a clearer common threat than now. Instead of being pushed off the table, there is now more focus on strategic autonomy for the EU. While there is far to go, and while there are nations and individuals in the EU who put this united front against Russia at risk, the EU has finally begun the long and painful process of disentangling itself from Russia politically, logistically and economically.

### SOURCES

- [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en)
- <https://dobetter.esade.edu/en/european-strategic-autonomy>
- <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>
- <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/86534>
- <https://www.ceps.eu/the-european-peace-facility/>

# STRATEGIC AUTONOMY COULD WORK, BUT IT CAN'T RIGHT NOW.

*By an MSc Political Communication student at the University of Glasgow, Scotland*

European Strategic Autonomy hinges on the idea that European nations should have a strategic footprint which does not rely on the US electorate. This is a slight hyperbole, but it has, after all, been reported that if successful in the pursuit of a second term as President, Donald Trump was prepared to withdraw the United States from Nato, the Alliance of western nations that remains coherent and well-funded largely due to US participation.

If this had been the case, the deterioration of security on Europe's eastern front would have likely been faster, more dynamic, and less predictable due to the power, capability, and funding vacuum in the Alliance which would result from such a move. While the US electorate is, at the time of writing, more than 80% in favour of continued membership of the Alliance, recent history has shown that European allies should be ready for anything.

A common question levelled at those calling for strategic autonomy centres on determining the end to which the Europeans are striving which would require autonomy. What does Europe want to do, that it cannot do right now? The answer is a complicated one because most advocates would actually pursue freedom from a US-centric strategy

in the first instance, rather than freedom to conduct out-of-area escapades under the flag of 12 stars.

The differing, yet related, approaches to the Nato-led counter-insurgency operation in Afghanistan and the French-led operation in the Sahel and Mali, show precedent for a European strategic endeavour. Both operations had the strategic goal of countering insurgency, but they were conducted in different theatres, with different tactics, and, it must be said different cultural baggage. Neither operation can be viewed as a roaring success, but the fact that France was able to lead an operation from political inception to the strategic formation, to on-the-ground tactics shows that European states can operate without US support outside of special forces and intelligence, shows that such operations can be conducted in future. France is, after all, a globally mobile, nuclear-armed nation. Germany has, albeit with some hesitancy, sought to boost its military spending and capabilities. These nations would likely form the backbone of any European strategic initiative, just as the US forms the backbone of Nato.

In this, we find a key answer which remains unanswered by those who advocate for strategic autonomy: who, or what is autonomous? Is



## Has the war in Ukraine brought European strategic autonomy closer, or pushed it off the agenda?

there to be a beefing-up of the European Defence Agency and European External Action Service into something resembling a Nato-like organisation? Or, is there to be an interoperability and political guidance project like the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC)? Both have their merits, but neither can realistically be undertaken as a political project while strategic concentration remains on Nato capacity building and bilateral support to Ukraine from States.

One may argue that there is no point in having ‘European values’ without the means to defend them, but the EU is defending its values with the best assets it has. Nato has soldiers, sailors, and airmen, the EU has lawyers, policy officers, and accountants. The response to the conflict in Ukraine has shown that the interoperability between these forces, is enviable. At the European Union level, the block’s regulatory and financial might have been shown worthy of note, including some €17 billion of grants and loans, €450 million worth of lethal weapons, €500 million of humanitarian aid and the set piece Temporary Protection Directives which acted as a method of harmonising reactive refugee processing and housing policies. Nato, meanwhile, has also been acting as a coordinating hub, bringing together the spokes of member states’ intelligence, defence procurement, and airlift capabilities. As such, Europe is playing the role it is best at, a political and legal superpower.

This being said, there are difficulties. As reported in Politico: “American officials based in Europe are issuing internal warnings to Washington colleagues that some countries with populations that support Russia are growing angry over sanctions and blame the U.S. for rising costs. That sentiment could put pressure on European leaders to pull back support for the sanctions, officials said in internal reports circulated throughout the administration in recent days”. In this, we see a nightmarish hypothetical: if the leaders of European governments alluded to above could not rely on trans-Atlantic support, how long would it be before they cave to political pressure, some of which would be exacerbated by Russia’s active measures programmes?

In short, there is precedent for a version of European Strategic Autonomy. Powerful militaries and economies on the continent could make it happen. However, with the world as uncertain as it is right now, the focus should be on encouraging the soldier/lawyer interoperability laid out above, deepening ties, and not pursuing new political ventures distracting strategic minds.

## SOURCES

- Barnes, J. E. & Cooper, H., 2019. Trump Discussed Pulling U.S. From NATO, Aides Say Amid New Concerns Over Russia. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/nato-president-trump.html> [Accessed 3 December 2022].

## Has the war in Ukraine brought European strategic autonomy closer, or pushed it off the agenda?

- Bergman, Max, 2022. Europe on its own [online] Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/europe/europe-its-own> [Accessed December 9 2022]
- McLeary, P. & Banco, E., 2022. U.S. races to shore up European support for Ukraine strategy. [Online] Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/10/united-states-europe-support-ukraine-00066229> [Accessed 8 December 2022].
- Von Der Burchard, H. & Rinaldi, G., 2022. Germany backtracks on defense spending promises made after Ukraine invasion. [Online] Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-backtracks-on-defense-spending-promise-warns-about-delays-ukraine-war/> [Accessed 9 December 2022].

# EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY? YES, BUT ONLY ON A FEW SELECTED AGENDAS

*By a PhD Student in International Studies, University of Naples, Italy*

The war in Ukraine, shattering the illusion of perpetual peace in Europe, has marked a return to great power politics while non-traditional challenges and threats—climate change, disruptive technologies, disinformation—continue to inch forward at the horizon. As the range of threats and opportunities presented by the international system widens, it is important that security organisations articulate their initiatives in such a way to prevent duplication and overlap.

This process of “division of labour” seems to be well underway between NATO and the European Union. Arguably, a careful comparative reading of the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept and the EU Strategic Compass can shed light on the intended configuration of the emerging, complex and multifaceted Euro-Atlantic security structure. As a matter of fact, while the Strategic Concept insists on global-level threats coming from State actors (namely, Russia and China), the Strategic Compass appears to be more sensitive to sources of insecurity at the regional level.

This difference in focus opens a window of opportunity for the European Union to build a common defence identity and structures, starting precisely from those agendas in which EU members have

a vested interest, while the United States (NATO’s majority stakeholder) does not. Among these, we could surely mention: energy security understood as the protection of critical infrastructures, crisis management and the fostering of partnerships in the Enlarged Mediterranean, and the improvement of interoperability through joint investments among EU members.

The fact that the Strategic Compass puts forward actions and instruments to protect those interests is an unmistakable sign of the existence of the political will to finally take the EU common defence a step forward. For example, a Hybrid Toolbox, a Cyber Diplomatic Toolbox, and EU Cyber Defence Policy will help to detect, identify, analyse, and respond to menaces to its energy infrastructure, and in turn, its economic stability. The establishment of a EU Rapid Deployment Capacity and of bilateral and multilateral partnership agreements is meant to maintain stability in the Euro-Mediterranean area. Finally, forms of reinforced cooperation among EU member states have also been established to foster the autonomous development of advanced defence technologies.

To be sure, these first concrete initiatives will come with a set of very predictable limits: to begin with, a truly European defence can only

## Has the war in Ukraine brought European strategic autonomy closer, or pushed it off the agenda?

develop freely as long as it doesn't contradict NATO's actions and priorities; in other words, the Atlantic Alliance will remain the main pillar of Euro-Atlantic security. Secondly, the EU common defence and security policy will most likely be the result of a "variable geometry" effort, with only a few states being economically and politically equipped to implement the necessary updates to their defence systems. Third, while the Russian aggression of Ukraine has prompted EU countries to show unprecedented solidarity, it cannot be taken for granted that the security perceptions and priorities of the 27 members can be reconciled to form an organic policy.

- Tardy T., 2022. War in Europe: preliminary lessons, NATO Defense College, Research Paper, no. 36, [https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/new\\_s.php?icode=1696](https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/new_s.php?icode=1696)
- Bernadò M., 2022. European States Boost Defence Spending, Finabel, <https://finabel.org/european-states-boost-defence-spending/>

## SOURCES

- Pastori, G., 2022. The EU, America and NATO's New Strategic Concept: Not Just "Back to the Past", Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), <https://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/eu-america-and-natos-new-strategic-concept-not-just-back-past-35578>
- Gilli A. et al., 2022. Strategic Shifts and NATO's New Strategic Concept, NATO Defense College, Research Paper, no. 24, [https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/new\\_s.php?icode=1716#:~:text=At%20the%202022%20Madrid%20Summit,a%20key%20document%20for%20NATO.](https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/new_s.php?icode=1716#:~:text=At%20the%202022%20Madrid%20Summit,a%20key%20document%20for%20NATO.)

# ILLUSIONS AND IMPERATIVES: EUROPEAN OR TRANS-ATLANTIC STRATEGIC AUTONOMY?

*By a PhD student in International Relations, Queen's University,  
Canada*

The European Council's Versailles Declaration of 11 March 2022, issued only weeks after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, expressed the urgent need for a greater European Union Strategic Autonomy (EUSA) in defence, energy supply and the economy. EUSA is a wide-ranging concept expressing the need for EU member states to build up their joint capacity to act collectively as an independent global actor without relying on the support of other countries such as the USA in strategically important policy areas ranging from defence policy to the economy, and the capacity to uphold democratic values.

Efforts to create an independent and effective European strategic actor in defence and security matters have a long history. Following the devastation of World War II, European states attempted in the 1950s to establish a European Defence Community but failed to do so because of objections by European states to delegate powers in this critical field for their national sovereignty and independence. Ever since, this tension between European states' insistence on safeguarding their individual freedom of action in matters of defence and security and the need to develop an effective European capacity for military action in an era of globalisation and Great

powers' politics has overshadowed all attempts to promote EUSA in an effective and legitimate manner. Even today, as the European continent is engulfed in the most devastating military conflict since 1945, EU member states still do not agree on the geographical and functional parameters they should adopt in pursuing EUSA. With far-right nationalist movements forming governments in key EU countries such as Italy and overtly proclaimed 'illiberal democracy' ideologies taking over states such as Hungary, this impasse is unlikely to be resolved in the near future. In addition, the United Kingdom's exit from the EU in 2020 severely damaged the military capabilities of the EU and dismantled the Franco-British 'entente' that formed the core of EU defence capabilities in the air, at sea, and as nuclear powers. Thus, despite the ambitions expressed in this year's Versailles Declaration and the ongoing Ukrainian conflict, any EU ambitions of greater strategic autonomy in defence and security matters remain lofty dreams rather than realistic plans capable of being effectively implemented. As Richard Youngs recently stated in a commentary for the Carnegie Europe think-tank, **"it is not an absence of capabilities that has held the EU back from acting autonomously in recent years. Rather, it is political choice—strategic judgments,**



## Has the war in Ukraine brought European strategic autonomy closer, or pushed it off the agenda?

whether good or bad, more than insuperable capacity constraints. Simply adding a modest layer of capabilities through more joint European projects will not, in itself, change that underlying reality.”

This critique is endorsed by Bart M. J. Szewczyk in a commentary for the Foreign Policy magazine, where he starkly asserts that “Europe could do more but remains unwilling”. But his remarks go beyond critique to offer a realistic and visionary alternative by reaching back to the advice offered by George Kennan, the US architect of Soviet containment policy. Kennan proposed the construction of a trans-Atlantic community “so intimate as to bring about a substantial degree of currency and customs union, plus relative freedom of migration of individuals.” In defence and security matters, such a trans-Atlantic institution exists already but is in urgent need of significant reform if it is to achieve the effectiveness, adaptability and legitimacy indispensable for it to remain a relevant global actor in the 21st century – namely, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

From its inception, in 1949, NATO represented a truly transformative principle – that of a community of democratic states joining forces to guarantee each other’s security when threatened by foreign powers. But the NATO Charter went far beyond these states’ commitment to collective security expressed in the Charter’s famous Article 5. In effect, the mostly overlooked but critically important Article 2 of the NATO Charter clearly states that “[t]he Parties will contribute toward the

further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.” Article 5 remains the core of NATO 1.0 – the most successful military alliance of the modern era. To remain relevant deep into the 21st century, NATO must realise the full potential of its Article 2 and transform itself into NATO 2.0 – an effective, adaptable and legitimate Trans-Atlantic Community endowed with an overarching strategic autonomy that binds together liberal democracies on both sides of the Atlantic in an ever-closer union of free and democratic citizens.

The proposed project of a European Union strategic autonomy is both unrealistic and dangerous: it would divide liberal democracies and severely restrict their capacity to act when confronted with the global challenges of today. A reformed NATO 2.0 endowed with its own strategic autonomy based on principles of effectiveness, adaptability and legitimacy is the only realistic way forward for both European and North American states. Sweden’s and Finland’s applications to join NATO in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine emphatically demonstrated the continuing attraction of NATO for democratic states who want to safeguard their freedom and independence when

# Has the war in Ukraine brought European strategic autonomy closer, or pushed it off the agenda?

threatened by authoritarian regimes. Building on the solid foundations of Article 5 of the NATO Charter to realise the untapped potential of its Article 2 will take us beyond the perilous illusions of European strategic autonomy towards actualizing the imperative of a Trans-Atlantic strategic autonomy institutionally anchored in a reformed NATO 2.0.

- Youngs, Richard: “The EU’s Strategic Autonomy Trap”, Carnegie Europe, 8 March 2021. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/03/08/eu-s-strategic-autonomy-trap-pub-83955>

## SOURCES

- Damen, Mario: “EU Strategic Autonomy 2013-2023: From concept to capacity”, Briefing, EU Strategic Autonomy Monitor, July 2022. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EP\\_RS\\_BRI\(2022\)733589\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EP_RS_BRI(2022)733589_EN.pdf)
- Franke, Ulrike and Tara Varma: “Independence Play: Europe’s Pursuit of Strategic Autonomy”, Flash Scorecard - European Council on Foreign Relations, July 2019. <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Independence-play-Europes-pursuit-of-strategic-autonomy.pdf>
- Szewczyk, Bart M.J.: “Scholz and Macron Have a Perilous Ambition for Europe - The idea of “European strategic autonomy” just won’t go away”, Foreign Policy, 8 September 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/08/european-strategic-autonomy-eu-security-macron-scholz-ukraine-defense-nato/>