

Scientific-Analytical Article

Is Iran Moving Toward a “Hunger Revolution”?

A comparative analysis of economic collapse, the Islamic Republic's altered military posture, and the pragmatic logic of society in relation to the political leadership of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi

Analytical version for strategic use — May 2026

Methodological Note

This article is based on the scenario proposed by the author, published reports available up to 17 May 2026, and a comparative study of uprisings driven by hunger, inflation, and the collapse of livelihoods over the last three hundred years. The purpose of the article is not to predict the future with certainty. Its aim is to build a scientific framework for assessing the probability, trajectory, and consequences of a “hunger revolt” or “livelihood revolution” in Iran. The article offers no violent, military, or security-related operational recommendations. It is solely a political-sociological analysis and risk assessment.

Abstract

In 2026, Iran stands at a point where political crisis, economic collapse, a transformed apparatus of repression, external war, and public expectation of liberation have become intertwined. Following international reports about the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in American and Israeli attacks, and after damage to the previous command structure, the Islamic Republic appears to have moved toward a form of “defensive Talibanisation”: dispersal of forces, reliance on mobile columns, reduced dependence on fixed bases, and an attempt to turn the country into a network of fluid nodes of repression. Under such conditions, classical war against the regime becomes more difficult. At the same time, however, the regime's economy is under severe pressure from inflation, currency collapse, shortages, food-price increases, erosion of legitimacy, and the decline of ordinary purchasing power.

The central question of this article is whether Iran is moving toward a “hunger revolution”: a situation in which broad masses of people rise against the structure of power not necessarily through a coherent ideology, but because of hunger, desperation, humiliation, and the absence of any horizon of survival. The article argues that uprisings of the hungry usually occur when four factors converge: the price of staple food moves beyond social tolerance; the government responds with repression or denial rather than reform; intermediary social and political networks stop functioning; and people feel they have no future left to lose. A comparative reading of France in 1789, Russia in 1917, Egypt in 1977, Tunisia in 2010-2011, Haiti in 2008, and Sudan in 2018 shows that hunger alone does not make a revolution. Yet when it combines with a crisis of legitimacy, war, corruption, inequality, currency collapse, and elite fragmentation, it can ignite either political transition or mass revolt.

The strategic conclusion is that the Iranian people's support for Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi should not be interpreted merely as dynastic loyalty or nostalgic sentiment. A major part of this tendency is pragmatic: society has seen him as a symbol of order, liberation, a lower-cost transition, state reconstruction, and prevention of chaos. If this hope in the management of liberation is not converted into political organisation, effective diplomacy, and an emergency economic programme, and if people are forced to pay the main price themselves through hunger and death, the previous symbolic capital may rapidly change direction. Therefore, the strategic question for the opposition is not who is more popular; the question is which force can prevent liberation from turning into an explosion of hunger.

1. Defining the Problem: From External War to a Hunger Revolution

The political scenario examined in this article has three layers. The first is war and a blow to the command centre of the Islamic Republic. Reports from international media in February and March 2026 indicated that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had been killed in joint American and Israeli attacks. At the same time, fact-checking reports showed that some images circulating on social media were fake or generated by artificial intelligence. A scientific analysis must therefore distinguish between the political report itself and the war of images and rumours. The second layer is the transformation of the Islamic Republic's military-security posture: the more the regime moves away from fixed bases, centralised command, and formal structures, and relies instead on mobile, dispersed, quasi-guerrilla networks, the more costly external attack and target identification become. The third layer is the livelihood crisis: currency collapse, food-price inflation, unemployment, and the collapse of hope push society toward mass and unpredictable forms of behaviour.

In the language of political science, “hunger revolution” is not usually a precise institutional term. It is a descriptive concept for a situation in which direct material deprivation — the inability to secure bread, food, fuel, medicine, and the minimum conditions of life — becomes the main force of mobilisation. Such an uprising differs from a classical ideological revolution. In an ideological revolution, people may mobilise for a constitution, freedom, justice, independence, or equality. In a hunger revolution, the starting point is simpler and harsher: “We cannot live.” Yet this initial cry can rapidly become political, because people usually do not interpret a shortage of bread as merely an economic issue. They see it as the result of corruption, incompetence, injustice, and the government's indifference to human life.

2. Theoretical Framework: When Does Hunger Become Revolution?

A scientific analysis must avoid single-factor explanations. No revolution occurs only because bread becomes expensive. If that were true, every inflationary period would lead to the collapse of government. What is dangerous is the combination of several crises: uncontrolled inflation, declining purchasing power, a sense of having no future, political repression, distrust of government, absence of reform channels, cracks within the ruling class, and the emergence of an alternative symbol or narrative. Hunger is fire; but for revolution, political oxygen, social fuel, and fractures in the apparatus of power are also required.

Three theories are useful here. The first is the theory of “relative deprivation”, which argues that people do not revolt merely because of absolute poverty; they revolt when the gap between expectations and the reality of life becomes intolerable. The second is the theory of the “moral economy of the crowd”, which shows that in traditional and semi-modern societies, people understand bread and staple food as part of the moral contract between government and society. When the government violates this contract, revolt is not only economic; it is a revolt against moral injustice. The third is the theory of “political opportunity”, which argues that protest becomes widespread when people feel that the government is weak, confused, isolated, or internally divided.

In today's Iran, if economic reports about severe inflation, depreciation of the rial, food-price increases, and pressure on the middle and lower classes are placed alongside war, sanctions, siege, and political leadership change, signs of a high-risk situation become visible. Yet the movement from discontent to revolution is not inevitable. The determining factors are the government's ability to distribute a minimum livelihood, the degree of repressive violence, the possibility of nationwide strikes, the behaviour of the bazaar and markets, the position of the armed forces, and the opposition's capacity to offer a lower-cost path to liberation.

3. Comparative Study of Hunger Revolutions and Food Riots over the Last Three Hundred Years

To understand Iran, historical examples are useful — not for copying them, but for identifying patterns. Several key cases are examined below.

Historical example	Initial conditions	Course of events	Lesson for Iran
France, 1775 and 1789	Rising grain and bread prices, poor harvests, the monarchy's fiscal crisis, tax inequality, and distrust of the aristocracy.	The Flour War of 1775 and then the bread crisis on the eve of the 1789 Revolution helped destroy the monarchy's legitimacy. In some historical accounts, the price of bread in 1788-1789 consumed a very large share of a worker's daily wage.	When hunger combines with inequality and political blockage, economic protest can become a regime crisis.
Russia, February 1917	World War I, bread shortages in Petrograd, long queues, military exhaustion, Tsarist incompetence, and workers' strikes.	Women workers' protests over bread, combined with strikes and military disobedience, led to the fall of the Tsar.	A bread queue can become a public assembly of anger; if soldiers refuse to fire on the people, livelihood revolt can become political revolution.
Egypt, 1977	Anwar Sadat's decision to reduce subsidies on basic goods, including bread and food, in the context of new economic policies and fiscal pressure.	Widespread riots in Cairo, Alexandria, and industrial cities; the government restored order through the army and then retreated.	Governments that suddenly break the bread-and-subsidy contract may be forced to retreat; but if retreat is impossible, the crisis deepens.
Haiti, 2008	Sharp increases in global food prices, chronic poverty, dependence on imports, state weakness, and food insecurity.	Food riots and the fall of the prime minister's government after widespread protests.	In weak states, food inflation can lead directly to cabinet crisis and the breakdown of public order.
Tunisia, 2010-2011	Youth unemployment, corruption, administrative humiliation, high costs, livelihood pressure, and the global context of rising food prices.	The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi became a symbol of economic humiliation, and protests led to the fall of Ben Ali.	Hunger does not always appear as “bread”; sometimes it becomes revolution through job humiliation, the absence of a future, and the destruction of social dignity.
Sudan, 2018-2019	Tripling of bread prices, fuel shortages, currency collapse, inflation, and erosion of Omar al-Bashir's regime.	Protests began in towns and, through the organisation of professionals and the street, led to Bashir's fall.	Bread prices were the spark, but social organisation and cracks in the apparatus of power turned them into regime change.

The comparison above shows that hunger revolutions usually begin with a simple demand; but if the state lacks the capacity to respond, the demand for bread can become a demand for the fall of the regime. In France, bread became a symbol of class injustice; in Russia, bread became a symbol of failed war and Tsarist incompetence; in Egypt, bread marked the boundary of the social contract between state and people; in Tunisia, livelihood fused with dignity; in Sudan, bread combined with street organisation and elite fragmentation.

4. Iran's Situation: Indicators of Risk

In Iran, the warning indicators can be summarised under five headings.

First, inflation and the price of staple food. Reports published in April and May 2026 described sharp rises in food prices, declining purchasing power, and pressure on Iranian households. Under such conditions, price increases are not merely economic pressure; they become a feeling of humiliation, injustice, and anger.

Second, the collapse of the national currency. When the dollar and the pound become symbols of ordinary life moving out of reach, society feels not only poorer, but also cut off from the world. Currency collapse in authoritarian regimes usually destroys trust in the future.

Third, war and siege. War can have two opposite effects for the regime: on the one hand, the government tries to justify repression through the logic of national security; on the other hand, war raises the cost of living and reduces the state's capacity to distribute goods.

Fourth, a transformed architecture of repression. If the regime moves from a classical structure toward mobile quasi-guerrilla networks, it may become more resistant to external attacks, but more vulnerable to simultaneous urban uprisings, economic strikes, and logistical crisis.

Fifth, erosion of legitimacy. The Islamic Republic already faced a legitimacy crisis before the economic crisis. If hunger is added, protest will not remain merely economic; it will quickly become political.

5. The Scenario of a "Talibanised" Military Posture

The term "Talibanisation" in this article does not refer to the precise ideology of the Taliban. It refers to a survival style: a regime relying less on a classical army, fixed bases, and identifiable command structures, and more on mobile networks, large numbers of vehicles, geographical dispersal, small units, concealment, and blending with urban and rural environments. If reports about extensive use of light vehicles and dispersed forces are accurate, the Islamic Republic is reducing its vulnerability to air and missile attacks.

Yet this model has three weaknesses. First, its financial and logistical costs are high. A mobile network needs fuel, spare parts, food, communications, and command; in a collapsing economy, preserving this network becomes difficult. Second, dispersal can weaken central command. If forces are scattered across the country, the likelihood of local disobedience, corruption, equipment sales, and lack of coordination increases. Third, this model has no clear answer to simultaneous livelihood uprisings across multiple cities, bazaars, factories, and neighbourhoods. The regime can repress one square; but if the crisis of bread, medicine, fuel, and money appears everywhere at once, repression itself will face resource scarcity.

6. Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and the Pragmatic Logic of Public Loyalty

One analytical error among some political forces is to reduce public support for Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi to royal nostalgia or loyalty to the Pahlavi family. Undoubtedly, among monarchists there is an element of historical and emotional loyalty. Yet in Iranian protests, slogans and symbols connected to the Pahlavis have often carried a broader meaning: order against chaos, a national state against ideological rule, Western orientation against isolation, and hope for transition against collapse.

For this reason, the political capital of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi should be understood as "pragmatic capital". People have looked to him not only because he is the son of the former king, but because they have imagined that he could lower the cost of transition, persuade the world, unite scattered forces, prevent civil war, and open the road to the ballot box. This capital is highly important, but it is neither permanent nor guaranteed. If people feel that no management of liberation is taking shape, no effective external help is arriving, no emergency economic programme exists, and they themselves must open the path through hunger, bullets, and death, symbolic loyalty may give way to raw anger, social radicalism, or even distrust of all symbols based outside the country.

Here there is a simple sociological rule: people who pay the main cost claim the right to interpret the future for themselves. If Iranian society enters the field through a "hunger revolution", it may no longer wait for symbolic management from outside. Under such conditions, forces that organise, deliver bread, lead strikes, preserve neighbourhood security, or create the street narrative may gain credibility faster than symbolic forces. Therefore, in order to preserve the Crown Prince's national role, support for him must be converted into programme, organisation, diplomacy, emergency economics, a transition team, and a clear social message.

7. Risk Matrix: Is Iran Moving Toward a Hunger Revolution?

Risk factor	Probability	Impact severity	Explanation
Food inflation and collapse of purchasing power	Very high	Very high	Rising prices of bread, rice, meat, eggs, medicine, and fuel directly target daily life.
Regime capacity to distribute goods and subsidies	Medium to high	Very high	If the regime cannot provide minimum bread and fuel, the social contract of fear and obedience breaks.
Fracture within the armed forces and the IRGC	Uncertain	Very high	In all hunger revolutions, the behaviour of the armed forces is decisive.
Opposition capacity to offer a path to liberation	Medium	High	The absence of a transition programme may push protest away from coherent political direction and toward dispersed explosion.
External war and subsequent attacks	Medium to high	Dual	They may weaken the regime, but may also strengthen security repression and defensive nationalism.
Local networks of aid, strike, and communication	Uncertain	High	A hunger revolution without local networks may become a set of scattered and bloody riots.

8. Three Possible Scenarios

First scenario: minimal containment. The regime keeps the crisis at the level of discontent through emergency distribution of goods, price controls, increased subsidies, limited imports, targeted repression, and psychological warfare. In this scenario, a hunger revolution does not occur, but society becomes more exhausted and future waves become more likely.

Second scenario: dispersed livelihood riots. Different cities and regions experience protests and clashes in response to bread-price increases, fuel or medicine shortages, or currency collapse. The regime suppresses some locations and temporarily answers some demands. This scenario is bloody, but it does not necessarily lead to the fall of the regime unless the bazaar, workers, students, civil servants, and part of the armed forces enter the field simultaneously.

Third scenario: hunger revolution with political direction. In this case, livelihood protest rapidly combines with political slogans, strikes, disobedience, fractures within the regime, and alternative leadership. This scenario becomes more likely when the government has neither the ability to distribute food, nor the ability to repress completely, nor the possibility of compromise, nor the legitimacy required to mobilise loyalists. The danger of this scenario is that, if there is no credible transition programme and political authority, collapse may be accompanied by chaos, local revenge, and widespread violence.

9. Strategic Recommendations to Prevent a Hunger Revolution from Becoming Bloody

- The opposition must move from purely symbolic politics to emergency transition politics: food, medicine, neighbourhood security, strikes, communications, and a provisional government must be designed from now.
- Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and the forces close to him, if they wish to preserve a national and reconciliatory role, must move from the level of loyalty slogans to the level of "transition management": a clear economic team, diplomatic team, legal team, civil-security team, and media team.

- The global message must be clear: the Iranian question is not religious civil war, political revenge, ethnic hatred, or extremism; it is the rescue of people from poverty, execution, repression, and state collapse.
- A distinction must be made between external attack and internal liberation. External attack may destroy part of the regime's military capability, but lasting freedom is built only when Iranian society can see the political, legal, and economic path after the fall.
- To prevent the radicalisation of the hungry, networks of trust, aid, information, and a civil code of conduct must be built now. If hunger enters the street without moral and political leadership, it can become purposeless violence.
- The opposition abroad must understand that future legitimacy is not separate from the level of cost paid by people inside Iran. The more people inside the country pay, the more sensitive they will be toward slogans produced abroad.

10. Conclusion

Iran is not mechanically and certainly moving toward a hunger revolution. However, the indicators of risk are serious. The combination of war, currency collapse, food inflation, erosion of legitimacy, transformation of the repression apparatus, and social despair can create the conditions for a livelihood-political explosion. History shows that hunger alone is not enough. But when people feel that the government gives them neither bread, nor freedom, nor security, nor a future, nor a path of reform, hunger becomes a language of politics.

Under such conditions, the role of Crown Prince Reza Pahlavi and any other national force is not merely symbolic popularity. The core role is to reduce the cost of transition. If people feel that liberation is possible through political leadership, diplomacy, economic planning, and global support, pragmatic loyalty can be preserved. But if people conclude that they themselves must pay the entire price through hunger and bullets, the political scene can change, and the street, with its own logic, may define the future. Therefore, the greatest task today is to transform hope into organisation, symbol into programme, loyalty into effectiveness, and protest into a safe path of transition.

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