Anti-government protests in Iran

What is the issue?

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- Iran is witnessing large scale anti-government protests.
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- Being a significant regional power, the unrest is making vibes in larger international relations.
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What are the recent developments?

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- The protests began in Mashhad, Iranian city.
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- They were initially focussed on deteriorating economic situation, official corruption and lack of social freedoms.
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- However, it gradually turned into political rallies and expanded to several cities.
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- Notably many were killed and hundreds of people have been arrested.
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- On the other hand, tens of thousands of people took part in counter-demonstrations backing the clerically overseen government.
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- Notably, President Hassan Rouhani acknowledged the public’s anger over the deteriorating economy.
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- However, he strongly condemned the resort to violence and showed tough resistance through the security forces.
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What was the US role in Iran?

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- Then US President Obama, to counter the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, encouraged Gulf rulers to fund the Sunni groups in Syria.
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- This had only worsened the chaos and ultimately led to the emergence of the more dangerous ISIS.
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- Subsequently, the US believed in Iran as a force with the will and ability to counter this radical Islamist force, though Iran was not its traditional ally.
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- It thus committed air assets and some military advisers to Iran.
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- The 2015 Iran-P5 nuclear deal was also an attempt to empower Iran.
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- The deal eventually emboldened Iran to gather Shia allies extending west from Iran to the Mediterranean.
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- Eventually, Russia joined as well, to grab an opportunity to regain influence in West Asia.
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What did these lead to?

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- The US backing of Iran, certainly strained the relations with its traditional allies Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
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- Iranian ascendancy has also made Israel nervous, as it perceives an existential threat from Iranian ally Hezbollah in Lebanon.
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- Obama was thus keeping many banking sanctions operational to balance these concerns.
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- This was on the pretext that they are related to Iran's support to terrorist groups like Hezbollah.
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- President Rouhani managed the internal consensus for the nuclear deal by convincing that foreign investment and technology would flow.
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- Unfortunately, that never happened, as the residual US sanctions still scared investors and the cash-rich GCC members.

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What are the international implications of the recent protest?

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- **US** - Since becoming the US President, Trump had been critical of the Iran nuclear deal.
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- He had recently declined to certify that Iran was complying with the nuclear deal. Click here to know more.
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- The President and Vice-President of the United States, in their tweets, have recently incited Iranians to engage in disruptive acts.
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- Iran has thus charged US of crossing limits in international relations by supporting anti-government protesters.
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- Top officials within Iran are also attributing the protests to foreign money, intelligence and foreign forces.
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- **Russia** - Russia has urged the United States to not interfere in what it calls Iran's “domestic affairs”.
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- Russia also firmly expressed that the Iran nuclear deal was not to be corrected and be continued.
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- The recent protest, in all, is reflective of the earlier Arab Spring for rooting out the governments in many West Asian countries.
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- It is also brewing as a potential focal point for world countries for alliances and counter-alliances.
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Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express

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