



## Iran: Not Fully in Control, Not Out of Control

by Paolo Pontoniere

European media outlets like the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, and Italy's *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* now offer a more nuanced view of Iran's internal dynamics. Instead of seeing the situation as a simple either-or—either imminent regime collapse or a clear long-term plan—coverage is shifting toward a hybrid understanding: recognizing a political system under significant internal pressure but still maintaining strategic capability.

Italian reporting has focused on the changing internal power dynamics. *Corriere della Sera* describes a “progressive strengthening of the military wing,” highlighting the growing influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This development is often seen as sidelining civilian leaders and making diplomacy more difficult, raising questions about “who really decides in Tehran.” Likewise, *La Repubblica* mentions that overlapping authority creates “calculated ambiguity,” which slows negotiations but keeps options open.

German coverage, including *Der Spiegel*, aligns with this perspective by describing Iran as “fragmented but not paralyzed.” Similarly, European reports consistently imply that while institutional rivalry and internal conflicts exist, they do not hinder the regime's capacity to act cohesively, especially when vital interests are involved.

Simultaneously, some analyses in Southern Europe propose that internal divisions might function as a strategic tactic. Tehran can utilize these multiple voices to slow decision-making, assess Western reactions, and negotiate concessions. What seems like disunity from the outside could actually be a deliberate form of controlled ambiguity—an adaptive approach rather than mere chaos.

This dual character is reinforced by Iran's continued coordination across key areas. European outlets

frequently highlight Tehran's calibrated signaling around the Strait of Hormuz and its use of regional leverage as evidence that, despite internal strain, the state retains operational coherence in critical domains.

In this context, several commentators—mainly in Italian and Spanish opinion pages rather than in straight news reports—have cautiously suggested using the concept of *taqiyya* as a cultural framework to interpret Iran's strategic ambiguity. *Taqiyya*, in Islamic law, allows individuals to hide their true beliefs or intentions when facing threats or persecution. Historically linked to Shia Islam, especially when Shia communities were minorities, it is typically seen by scholars as a defensive, context-dependent doctrine rather than an endorsement of deception overall.

Italian commentary occasionally uses this concept metaphorically, implying that Iran's use of concealment or indirect signals in its actions might reflect deeper historical traditions of prudence and survival during difficult times. For instance, opinion articles in *La Repubblica* and similar publications have mentioned “una cultura della dissimulazione strategica” (a culture of strategic dissimulation), though they generally do not claim that religious doctrine directly influences policy decisions.

Mainstream European analysts remain cautious about overextending this analogy. They often emphasize that Iran's actions are better understood through traditional geopolitical factors—such as security issues, regime preservation, and regional rivalry—rather than solely by theological reasons. In this perspective, *taqiyya* references serve as heuristic tools to identify patterns of ambiguity rather than providing a definitive causal explanation.

Taken together, European media portray Iran neither as a system on the brink of collapse nor as a fully unified actor, but as something more complex: a state navigating internal pressures while maintaining the capacity for deliberate, and at times sophisticated, strategic action—occasionally expressed through ambiguity that is as much political as it is cultural. 🌿