

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1015
Land:	Iran
Kilde:	Institute for The Study of War
Titel:	Iran Crisis Update, March 1 - March 31
Udgivet:	31. marts 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	1. maj 2023

Iran Update, March 1, 2023

Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 1, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

CTP assesses with moderate confidence that the Iranian regime is tolerating a country-wide, coordinated campaign to poison Iranian school girls. Social media users documented incidents of chemical poisoning at 26 girls' schools throughout the country on March 1 alone.[1] Hundreds of Iranian schoolgirls have reported respiratory and neurological poisoning symptoms since November 2022, many of whom have required hospitalization.[2] The first reported incident occurred on November 30, 2022, in Qom City, Qom Province when 18 Shahed Razaviyeh Secondary School students reported experiencing nausea, coughing, difficulty breathing, heart palpitations, and lethargy.[3] Initial poisoning cases primarily affected female high school students in Qom. In recent weeks, however, poisoning cases have spread across Iran and have also targeted elementary, middle school, and university students, as well as less frequent incidents at boys' educational facilities.[4] CTP recorded a significant increase in poisoning cases on March 1, with students from at least 26 schools falling ill. Most poisonings on March 1 occurred in Tehran and Ardabil Provinces.[5] It remains unclear why these cities appear to have been disproportionately targeted.

There is presently no evidence to indicate which individuals are responsible for this months-long campaign against Iranian school girls, and Iranian officials have acknowledged and are investigating such incidents.[6] CTP nevertheless assesses with moderate confidence that a network of individuals whom the regime tolerates has coordinated this campaign and that the regime has allowed them—at least for now—to do so. CTP bases its assessment on indirect evidence that shows the regime has not sufficiently responded to the poisonings despite their severity of the harm to Iranian girls. Iran also maintains a security apparatus capable of handling such matters, as it has demonstrated in responding to larger-scale developments. Iranian officials have not articulated a coherent narrative explaining who is perpetrating these poisonings and why. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi placed blame for the poisonings on female students, stating on March 1 that 90 percent of the reported cases can be attributed to “stress.”[7] State-affiliated media outlets have similarly described poisoning incidents as students attempting to escape exams.[8] Other officials, such as Qom Deputy Governor Ahmad Hajizadeh, have conversely acknowledged that the poisonings are anomalous and likely intentional.[9] Iranian officials have seemingly failed to take concrete steps to protect students from further poisonings, however. An Iranian social media account claimed that some school principals have ordered students not experiencing symptoms to immediately return to class following chemical poisoning incidents.[10]

However, the nature of ongoing chemical poisonings suggests that a country-wide network of individuals or groups are coordinating the attacks. The victims of chemical poisonings are predominately female students living in populated urban areas and describe the chemical agent and its effects in similar terms, suggesting that the perpetrators are coordinating on whom to target and which compounds to use.

Iranian security personnel have previously identified and arrested small networks of individuals with whom it has identified with the Mahsa Amini protest movement.[11] The regime has also taken extensive measures to securitize cities—particularly girls' schools, which have become

regular sites of anti-regime defiance—following recent unrest. Iran has previously used facial recognition technology to issue “warnings” to unveiled women drivers using an extensive and fully operational network of security cameras.[12] Security cameras are, in fact, visible in footage of at least one school targeted on March 1.[13] One student who reported to have been poisoned twice told the *BBC* on February 28 that “They [officials] tell us: ‘All is good, we’ve done our investigation.’ But when my father asked at my school, they told him: ‘Sorry, the CCTV has been down for a week and we can’t investigate this.’” The student added that her school principal erroneously claimed that she was hospitalized because of a heart condition when she experienced chemical poisoning on a separate and second occasion.[14] Other students reported seeing plainclothes officers on school property before attacks, and claimed that school authorities restricted their ability to contact their parents.[15] A prominent citizen-journalist Twitter account also reported that Iranian security personnel prohibited parents of hospitalized students from visiting their children in an emergency room in Tehran City, Tehran Province on March 1.[16]

The regime’s tolerance of a country-wide and months-long effort to poison schoolgirls would be consistent with its treatment of Iranian youth throughout the Mahsa Amini protest movement. Iranian security personnel killed a 16-year-old girl in a violent crackdown on a high school in Ardabil City, Ardabil Province on October 13.[17] Security personnel had reportedly targeted the high school because students failed to sing a pro-regime song in a regime-organized rally.[18] The regime has additionally arrested, tortured and killed scores of young protesters participating in the Mahsa Amini protest movement.[19] Reports of poisonings at educational facilities are not anomalous, either. Iranian university students had previously reported incidents of mass food poisonings that required medical intervention in late 2022, coinciding with the Mahsa Amini protest movement.[20]

CTP maintains the alternative — that the Iranian intelligence and security apparatus failed to preempt the months-long campaign to poison Iranian school girls and lacks the capabilities to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of the attacks—is unlikely. It is unclear why the regime would take several months to identify a widespread network of individuals seeking to harm Iranian schoolgirls, especially when they have previously demonstrated that they possess the capabilities to do so.

The regime’s failure to protect Iranian schoolgirls from the ongoing poisoning campaign is exacerbating anti-regime sentiments. At least two protests occurred in Tehran City, Tehran Province on March 1 in response to the regime’s inaction vis-a-vis increasing student poisonings. Protesters in Tehran’s Narmak and Tehransar neighborhoods chanted “Death to the child-killing government” near schools where students were poisoned on March 1, emphasizing that the regime is complicit in failing to identify the cause and perpetrators of such attacks, even if they are not directly culpable.[21] Security forces also violently suppressed concerned parents who gathered near schools. Social media users circulated a video of a plainclothes officer grabbing a mother’s hair in front of the Sizdeh Aban High School in Tehransar, Tehran as she inquired about her child’s condition.[22] Security forces, conversely, have not violently confronted economic protesters in recent days. Protest organizations have called for demonstrations on March 4 in response to regime officials’ handling of the student poisonings, suggesting that the regime’s response to poisonings could serve as a catalyst for renewed unrest.[23]

Russia is possibly concerned that Iranian-backed militias will target US military positions in eastern Syria in the coming days or weeks. *Deir Ezzor 24* reported on February 28 that the Russian-backed Syrian Arab Army (SAA) Fifth Corps ordered its personnel stationed in Deir ez Zor Province to share information on Iranian-backed militia movements with Russian military police.[24] Local Fifth Corps military leadership specifically instructed personnel to report any indication that Iranian-backed militants are preparing to launch rockets or kamikaze drones at US-led International Coalition military positions located approximately 20 kilometers from the eastern bank of the Euphrates River near Deir ez Zor City and al Mayadin.[25]

CTP has observed a substantial influx of IRGC Quds Force and Iranian-backed personnel and military equipment since February 6. Military personnel and materiel have primarily Syria entered via the al Qaim border crossing near Abu Kamal, Deir ez Zor Province.[26] Some of the incoming

forces and material may have stayed in Deir ez Zor Province to reinforce existing positions, although these reinforcements do not necessarily indicate that Iranian-backed forces intend to attack US positions in the immediate future. The Iranian regime has increasingly employed rhetoric the blames ongoing economic and currency crisis on US and Western interference.[27] Although the regime could use this narrative to set rhetorical conditions for an attack, the narrative itself likewise does not necessarily indicate preparations for an imminent attack.

Iranian-backed militants last attacked US forces in Deir ez Zor Province on February 18, as CTP previously reported.[28] Iranian-backed militants occasionally conduct low-intensity attacks—such as launching unguided rockets—against US forces in eastern Syria to retaliate for regional developments that Iran perceives as hostile and perpetrated by the US.[29] CTP previously assessed that Iran may have ordered the February 18 attack in response to a series of Israeli airstrikes on January 29 and 30 on Iranian convoys likely attempting to smuggle weaponry and materiel into eastern Syria.[30]

Deir Ezzor 24 additionally claimed that Russian and Iranian military officials held an “urgent meeting” after the February 18 attack.[31] Russian MPs approaching local Fifth Corps personnel for intelligence on Iranian kinetic activities suggests that the standing military coordination mechanisms between Russia and Iran in Deir ez Zor are inactive or ineffective. The request also may reflect Russia’s lack of confidence in Iranian officials to provide advanced warning of attacks on US positions.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime is tolerating a country-wide, coordinated campaign to poison Iranian school girls.**
- **The regime’s failure to protect Iranian schoolgirls from the ongoing poisoning campaign is exacerbating anti-regime sentiments.**
- **Russia is possibly concerned that Iranian-backed militias will target US military positions in eastern Syria in the coming days or weeks.**
- **At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on March 1.**
- **Raisi administration-controlled *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)* reported on March 1 that prominent Sunni cleric and regime critic Moulana Abdol Ghaffer Naghshbandi fled the country.**
- **The value of the Iranian rial appreciated to 546,500 against the US dollar.**
- **Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami denied reports that Iran has enriched uranium to 84 percent purity while acknowledging the fact that traces of 84-percent enriched uranium were discovered at one of Iran’s nuclear facilities.**
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed normalization efforts between Turkey and the Assad regime with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on March 1.**
- **Unidentified senior Russian military officials met with their SAA counterparts near Tel Rifaat, Aleppo Province on February 28.**
- ***Israel Alma*, an Israeli think tank focused on regional security issues, released a report claiming that as many as 1000 alleged Iranian aid convoys have entered Syria from Iraq and Lebanon since February 6.**

Internal Security

At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on March 1. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[32]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Tehran City, Tehran Province[33]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of individuals sentenced to death for drug-related charges

Tehran City, Tehran Province[34]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 21
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Death to the child-killing government.”

Tehran City, Tehran Province[35]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 8
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Death to the child-killing government.”

CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[36]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees



Protest coordinators and organizations called for anti-regime demonstrations on the following dates:

March 4[37]

- **Location:** Countrywide
- **Notes:** Calling on students and teachers to boycott schools and universities

March 8[38]

- **Location:** Countrywide, city centers at 18:00 local time
- **Notes:** Commemorating International Women's Day

March 13-15[39]

- **Location:** Countrywide
- **Notes:** Coincides with a Zoroastrian fire festival—Chahar Shanbeh Souri—on March 15

Raisi administration-controlled *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)* reported on March 1 that prominent Sunni cleric and regime critic Moulana Abdol Ghaffer Naghshbandi fled the country.[40] The IRNA also stated that Naghshbandi fled out of fear of arrest and the revelation of his purported ties to foreign actors. Naghshbandi's office published a statement on February 24 calling for mass protests in response to security forces' "siege" of the Grand Makki Mosque in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[41] Naghshbandi also warned that he would issue a "historic fatwa" if security forces continued their brutal tactics, as CTP previously reported.[42]

Reformist Association of Combatant Clerics Member Mohammad Taghi suggested that the regime should grant "special privileges" to veiled students on March 1. Taghi stated that the Iran's sociocultural problems require "rational reforms" that would reward veiled women and "guide" those who did not adhere to the regime's veiling standards.[43]

Economic Affairs

The value of the Iranian rial appreciated to 546,500 against the US dollar. The rial's appreciation on March 1 is minor improvement from yesterday's value at 556,500 to the US dollar and a significant improvement from the record-low of approximately 600,000 on February 26.[44]

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) published a report on Iran's inflation rate on March 1. The price of goods and services in urban areas has increased by roughly 4.5 percent over the last month. The CBI also reported that consumer prices have increased by approximately 55 percent since February 2022.[45]

Nuclear Program

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami denied reports that Iran has enriched uranium to 84 percent purity while acknowledging the fact that traces of 84-percent enriched uranium were discovered at one of Iran's nuclear facilities.[46] Eslami claimed that traces of the highly enriched uranium were so insignificant that they "could not be seen under a microscope," instead drawing attention to the much larger stockpile of lower but still highly enriched uranium as the main indicator of the level at which the AEOI continues to enrich (namely 60 percent). 60 percent enriched uranium is not as close to weapons-grade as 84 percent, but it is still inconsistent with peaceful purposes and can be used to construct a compact nuclear explosive. Eslami concluded his remarks by reiterating the AEOI's continued technical cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to address international concerns about Iran's nuclear program. The IAEA has not indicated that Iran has resumed previous levels of technical cooperation with the Agency.

IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi will travel to Tehran this Friday, March 3 to participate in high level meetings with regime officials.[47]

External Security and Military Affairs

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed normalization efforts between Turkey and the Assad regime with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on March 1. The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that Lavrov and Cavusoglu met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi, India to discuss normalization and security cooperation in northern Syria.[48] Lavrov also discussed earthquake relief efforts with United Nations Special Envoy to Syria Geir Pederson in Moscow on February 27.[49]

Unidentified senior Russian military officials met with their SAA counterparts near Tel Rifaat, Aleppo Province on February 28. *North Press Agency* reported that a 16-car convoy with armored transports brought Russian and SAA commanders to a military base in al Wahshiya near Tel Rifaat.[50] Two Russian combat helicopters accompanied the convoy and patrolled the area around al Wahshiya while the meeting took place.[51] The high-security convoy suggests that relatively senior Russian and SAA officials participated in the meeting. The unidentified officials may have discussed Russian reposturing in northern Syria in relation to the February 6 earthquake. Tel Rifaat's proximity to the frontline between the Assad regime and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army suggests that an SNA or Turkish military official may have attended the meeting as well.

Israel Alma, an Israeli think tank focused on regional security issues, released a report claiming that as many as 1000 alleged Iranian aid convoys have entered Syria from Iraq and Lebanon since February 6.[52] The IRGC Quds Force is likely disguising shipments of weapons and military equipment amongst the aid convoys entering from Iraq, possibly complicating efforts by Israeli intelligence to identify and target shipments as they enter Syria. CTP has previously reported that some of convoys have arrived at likely Iranian military positions in Deir ez Zor, Hama, and Homs Province instead of Aleppo Province, where the ongoing humanitarian crisis is centered.[53] CTP will continue to monitor Quds Force efforts to smuggle weaponry and military equipment into Syria under the guise of humanitarian aid.

[1] https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1631018148378865666?s=20 ; <https://t...>

[2] <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c805j9v820zo>

[https://www dot sharghdaily dot com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-220/870311-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7-%D8%B3%D8%AA](https://www.sharghdaily.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-220/870311-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%88%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7-%D8%B3%D8%AA)

[3] <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202302278504> ;

<https://twitter.com/abelbalb/status/1630064638879571973>

[4] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1630914164498497538?s=20> ; <https...>

[5] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630976918882320385?cxt=HHwWgoC87...>

[6] [https://fa dot shafaqna dot com/news/1524603/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85/](https://fa.shafaqna.com/news/1524603/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85/) ; <https://t.co/q9PGwVvDFW> ; <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c805j9v820zo> ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85044613/%D9%85%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D...>

[7] <https://www.dot.irna.ir/news/85044761/%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%AA>

[8] <https://t.co/760XT7VrGd>

[9] <https://fa.dot.shafaqna.com/news/1524603/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85/>

<https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c805j9v820zo>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630966434435145728?cxt=HHwWgIC90...>

[11] <http://mehrnews.com/xZ7D6> ; <https://www.rokna.net/fa/tiny/news-854370> ;
<https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/26/2822688/>

[12] <https://t.co/b32rzLGgNj> ; <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-hijab-alternative-punishment-jalali-protest...>

[13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630851985732784134?cxt=HHwWjMC-r...>

[14] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64797957>

[15] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1630954002190827520?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1630954002190827520?s=20>

[16] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1630961455162966018?s=20

[17] <https://t.me/kashowra/13123>

[18] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-schoolgirl-killed-refusing-song-ayatollah/3...>

[19] <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/02/19/iran-black-sites-investigati...>

[20] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1599411619683045378?s=20&t=R3s2xA...

[21] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1630849508966793218?cxt=HHwWhICwgZ...>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630861807081357312?cxt=HHwWgICwj...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630852973189275648?cxt=HHwWgICxv...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1630865375775674368?cxt=HHwWgMC--eTa...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630851985732784134?cxt=HHwWjMC-r...>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630882971963072515?cxt=HHwWhoC94...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630915541857714176?cxt=HHwWgIC-s...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630854307321901056?cxt=HHwWgMCzx...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630878255241654272?cxt=HHwWgMCzu...>

[22] https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630967411586236428?cxt=HHwWmICw_...

[23] https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1631020760310349826?cxt=HHwWhICw-a2vxq...

[24] <https://deirezzor24 dot net/en/the-russian-leadership-in-deir-ezzor-is-closely-following-the-activity-of-the-iranian-militias/>

[25] <https://deirezzor24 dot net/en/the-russian-leadership-in-deir-ezzor-is-closely-following-the-activity-of-the-iranian-militias/>

[26] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023;>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-21-2023;> ...

[27] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-22-2023>

[28] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-21-2023>

[29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-21-2023>

[30] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-21-2023>

[31] <https://deirezzor24.net/en/the-russian-leadership-in-deir-ezzor-is-close...>

[32] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630903711273762816?cxt=HHwWgIC21...

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1630888136505974785?cxt=HHwWgoCzzdGH...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630906732862922752?cxt=HHwWgICzo...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630906989235544064?cxt=HHwWgICxs...>

[33] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630897981414154241?cxt=HHwWgoC98...

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1630917046673317889?cxt=HHwWgoC9kbea...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630909064841420801?cxt=HHwWgoCz7...>

[34] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630882971963072515?cxt=HHwWhoC94...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630915541857714176?cxt=HHwWgIC-s...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630854307321901056?cxt=HHwWgMCzx...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630878255241654272?cxt=HHwWgMCzu...>

[35] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1630849508966793218?cxt=HHwWhICwgZ...>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1630861807081357312?cxt=HHwWgICwj...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630852973189275648?cxt=HHwWgICxv...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1630865375775674368?cxt=HHwWgMC--eTa...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630851985732784134?cxt=HHwWjMC-r...>

[36] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630974957290176516?cxt=HHwWiIC27...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1630945912464842752?cxt=HHwWgIC9hdKq...

[37] https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1631020760310349826?cxt=HHwWhICw-a2vxq...

[38] https://twitter.com/javanane_g/status/1630299842005041154?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/javanane_g/status/1630299842005041154?s=20

[39] https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1629174055491215362?s=20

[40] <https://www.irna dot>

[ir/news/85044082/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA](https://www.irna dot)

[41] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023>

[42] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023>

[43] <https://t.co/Jl9Qq0rEZA>

[44] <https://bonbast dot com/>

[45] <https://www.irna dot> [ir/news/85044184/%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%AE-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85](https://www.irna dot)

[46] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/10/2860924/>-اسلامی-غنی-سازی-84درصدی-نداریم-آژانس-هم-تأیید-کرد

[47] <https://www.reuters.com/world/iaeas-grossi-visit-iran-friday-2023-03-01/>

[48] <https://www dot almayadeen dot>

[net/news/politics/%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%81-%D9%88%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%BA%D9%84%D9%88-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82;](https://www dot almayadeen dot)

<https://twitter.com/MevlutCavusoglu/status/1630881199022325761?s=20>

[49] <https://aa dot com dot tr/en/politics/russian-foreign-minister-un-special-envoy-hold-talks-on-syria-situation/2833248>

[50] npasyria dot com/en/93870/

[51] npasyria dot com/en/93870/; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGuXvG13Mlc&t=7s>;
[https://www dot syriahr dot com/%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%81%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%89-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84/590567/](https://www.syriahr.com/%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%81%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%89-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84/590567/)

[52] <https://israel-alma.org/2023/02/28/the-earthquake-in-syria-iranian-takeo...>

[53] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023; ...>

Iran Update, March 3, 2023

Iran Update, March 2, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Johanna Moore, Amin Soltani, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 2, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

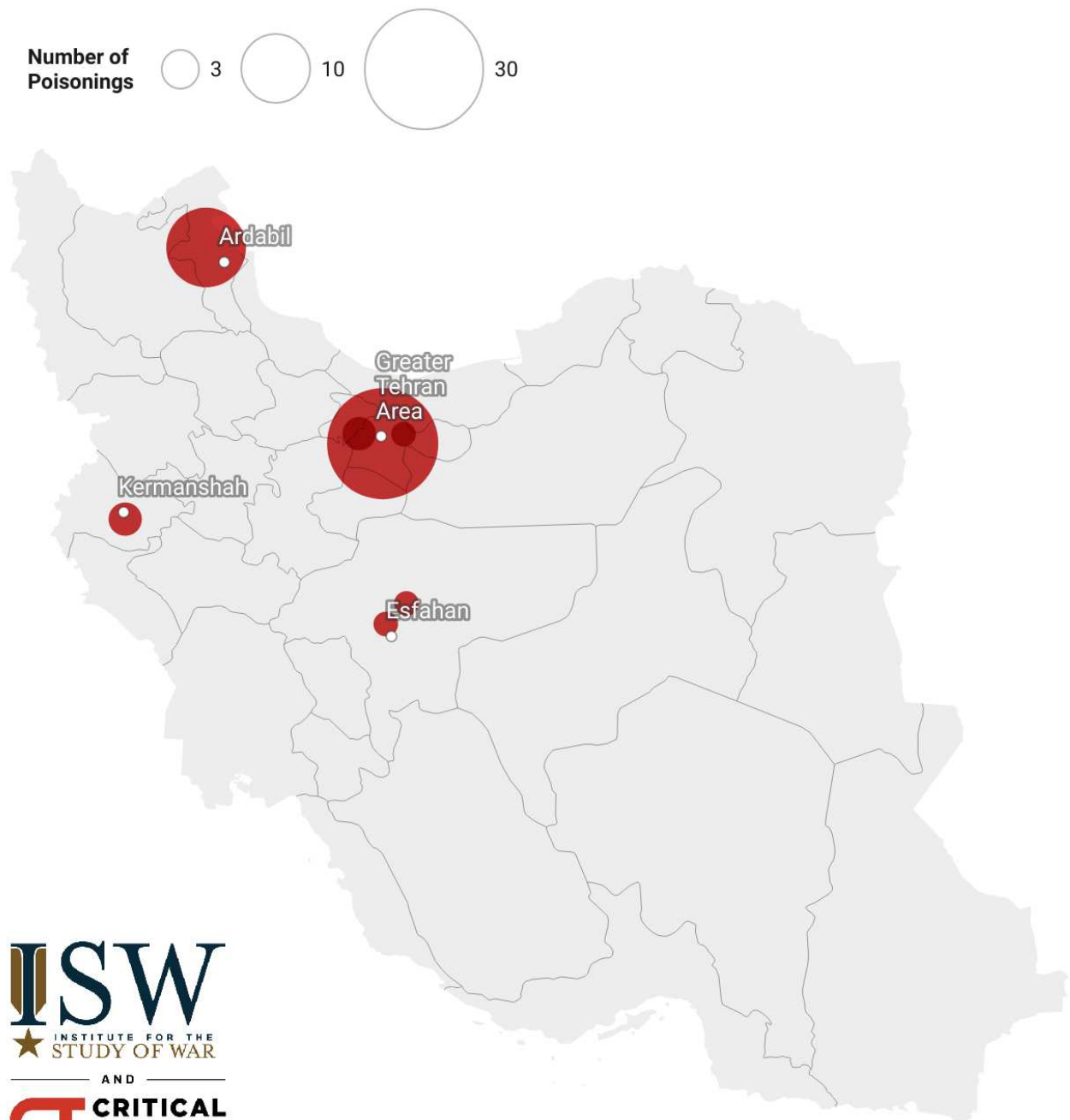
The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Contributors: Anya Caraiani and James Motamed

The Iranian regime has apparently failed to take measures to protect schools following 46 separate reports of chemical poisonings targeting schoolgirls throughout the country on March 1.[1] Social media users documented additional attacks on a girls' schools and a dormitory in Ardabil and Alborz Provinces respectively on March 2.[2] Iranian officials, media outlets, and the clerical establishment expressed alarm at ongoing attacks targeting Iranian schoolchildren on March 2. Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali announced that President Ebrahim Raisi ordered the formation of a special committee to investigate student poisonings.[3] Two senior Iranian clerics separately urged the security and intelligence apparatus to address the issue on March 2.[4] The Iranian Law Enforcement Command (LEC) denied that a plainclothes officer who was captured forcibly arresting a parent in front of a targeted school was affiliated with the LEC, and claimed that it had arrested four individuals connected to incident.[5] It remains unclear, however, what meaningful action the regime has taken to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of ongoing attacks or secure Iranian educational facilities. There is currently no indication of who is responsible for this months-long campaign against Iranian school girls, and Iranian officials have blamed both foreign and domestic actors.[6] CTP nevertheless assessed with moderate confidence on March 1 that a network of individuals whom the regime tolerates has coordinated this campaign and that the regime has allowed them—at least for now—to do so.[7]

It is noteworthy that the regime has apparently failed to mobilize elements of its security apparatus to secure educational facilities that are vulnerable to ongoing attacks. Incidents in a months-long, country-wide, and coordinated attack on young girls would result in significantly enhanced security around such schools in most countries. Most countries would also ensure that school buildings attacked or even reportedly attacked with poison gas were fully cleansed and certified safe before allowing students to return, whereas students at some schools were required to return to class on the day of the attack.[8] The Iranian regime rapidly deployed security personnel to violently suppress demonstrations at Iranian universities and some grade schools throughout the Mahsa Amini protest movement, by contrast.[9] It also increased its use of facial recognition software and security cameras to enforce the hijab laws during and after those protests, but has failed to use those technological capabilities to identify poisoners in highly populated areas.[10] This failure is noteworthy because many of the targeted schools reportedly have security cameras, and the attacks occurred in daylight while the schools were full of students and teachers.[11] The regime's continued failure to respond in the ways that any normal, modern government would is almost inexplicable.

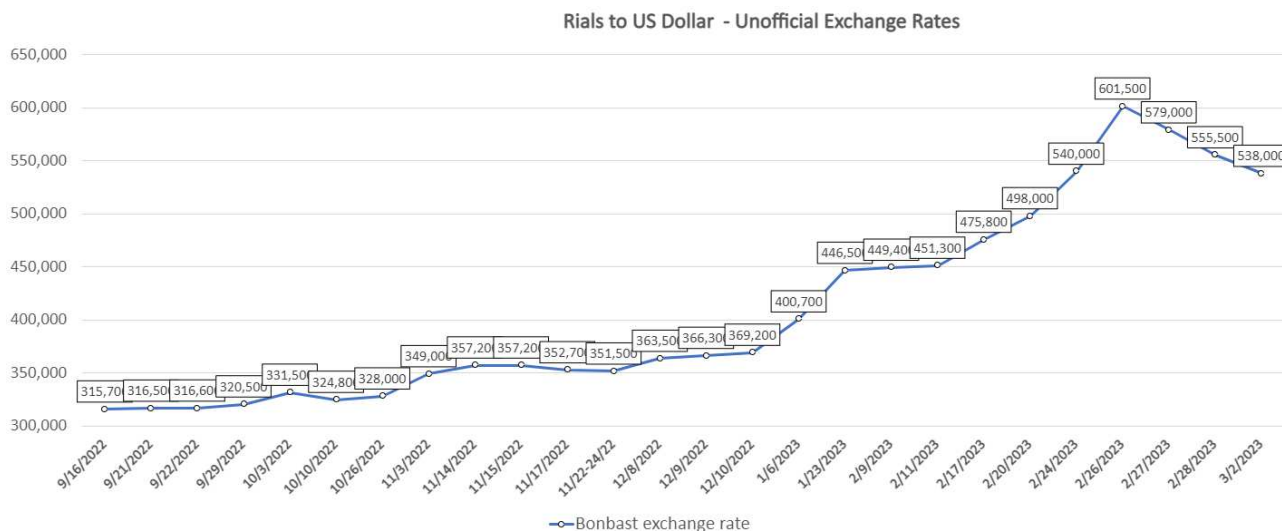
Iran Student Poisonings on March 1, 2023



As of March 2, 2023 4:00 PM ET

Map: AEI's Critical Threats Project • Source: 1500Tasvir • Created with Datawrapper

The regime is taking short-term measures to address economic grievances that will likely exacerbate Iran's economic crisis in the long run. The regime has succeeded in raising the value of the Iranian rial in recent days after it fell to a record low of 600,000 rials to the dollar on February 26.[12] The regime's methods for strengthening the rial—injecting foreign currency into the economy and paying off discontented segments of the population—will likely undermine the regime's ability to permanently stabilize the economy, however.[13]



The regime is expending its foreign reserves to stabilize the Iranian rial. The regime abandoned brief efforts to stop the exchange of rials for dollars when Iranian Exchangers Association Secretary General Kamran Soltani Zadeh announced on February 28 that Iranian citizens can exchange up to 1,000,000,000 rials--roughly equivalent to 1,700 US dollars on that date--at authorized exchange centers.[14] The Central Bank of Iran had announced on February 21 that it would stop supplying dollars to currency exchanges.[15] Resuming the provision of dollars to the exchanges means that the regime is using some of its limited supply of hard currency to strengthen the rial, but this approach will likely provide only temporary relief. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported in April 2021 that Iran's foreign currency reserves were \$12.4 billion and \$4 billion in 2019 and 2020, respectively, and that Iran's foreign reserves were projected to cover roughly two months of imports in 2021.[16] The regime likely lacks the hard currency reserves needed to stabilize the currency. President Ebrahim Raisi emphasized on March 2 that Iran's foreign currency reserves "are not at all worrying," suggesting that some within the government or public are, in fact, worried.[17]

The regime is also trying to buy off segments of the population that have participated in recent economic protests. President Ebrahim Raisi gave a speech at the South Pars Oil Refinery in Asalouyeh, Bushehr Province on March 2 in which he called on the Oil Ministry to support contract workers and stated that workers' salaries "should not be delayed by even one month." [18] Raisi likely made these statements in response to the February 20 protest among South Pars Oil Refinery contract workers, suggesting that he is trying to regain the confidence of Iranian citizens hurt by the economic crisis.[19] Social Security Organization Head Mirhashem Mousavi separately announced on March 2 that this organization will distribute new year's payments of at least 18,000,000 rials--roughly \$32--to four million retirees at a total cost of at least 72 trillion rials (roughly \$131 million).[20] The regime is seeking to pay off retirees whose fixed incomes have lost value under the current currency crisis and who have also constituted the bulk of protesters in recent economic demonstrations. These distributions appear to be separate from planned and budgeted expenses and would be made as the regime reduces the hard currency reserves backing the rial--which makes them very likely to be both inflationary and damaging to the value of the rial. Such policies risk plunging Iran into an even deeper and more complicated economic crisis.

Parliament approved a resolution on March 2 that will exempt "all ranks of the Basij" from paying electrical, gas, water, sewage and municipal taxes.[21] This resolution may be a response to reports of low morale among security forces during the Mahsa Amini protest movement.[22] Exempting the Basij from taxes, however, will deprive the regime of much-needed income, further undermining the rial's backing and increasing pressure on the regime either to simply print money or to cut costs in other areas.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian gave an interview with CNN on March 1 likely in an attempt to convince the US to return to the suspended nuclear negotiations. Amir Abdollahian explicitly stated the Raisi administration's desire to "continue the talks to return to the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” further claiming with some urgency that there are only “one or two remaining issues which can be easily finalized, and we can conclude an agreement.”[23] IRGC-affiliated news agencies’ coverage chiefly focused on the Raisi administration’s desire to remain on “the road to dialogue and agreement,” further underscoring Amir Abdollahian’s likely motivation for the CNN interview.[24] The Foreign Affairs Minister began the interview by denying the regime’s brutal protest suppression tactics, mistreatment of women, and widely-documented human rights violations in extremely implausible terms considering how well known and documented are the instances of regime brutality, mistreatment of women, and human rights abuses.[25] Amir Abdollahian also absurdly rejected reports that Iran has supplied Russia with drones and other armaments in the latter’s war effort in Ukraine despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, which in addition to the above concerns is one of the reported reasons why the US has suspended negotiations with Iran.[26]

The government’s desire for nuclear negotiations likely reflects in part its desperation for immediate sanctions relief to help stabilize the currency and address looming crises caused by a collapsing currency, inflation that could become hyperinflation, and exhaustion of hard currency reserves. The Central Bank of Iran released a report on March 1 stating consumer prices have increased by approximately 55 percent since February 2022.[27] Economic grievances have been the focus of the more recent protests, as CTP previously reported.[28]

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime has apparently failed to take measures to protect schools following 46 separate reports of chemical poisonings targeting schoolgirls throughout the country on March 1.**
- **The regime is taking short-term measures to address economic grievances that will exacerbate Iran’s economic crisis in the long run.**
- **Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian gave an interview with CNN on March 1 likely in an attempt to convince the United States to return to the suspended nuclear negotiations.**
- **CTP did not record protest activity on March 2.**
- **Raisi administration officials struck a conciliatory tone on March 2, and stressed the need to address deepening divides between Iranian leadership and its people.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric and regime critic Moulana Abdol Ghaffar Naghshbandi ‘s family stated in an interview with Radio Farda on March 2 that they are not aware of his whereabouts.**
- **Iranian officials and state-affiliated news outlets reported on increased Russo-Iranian economic ties on March 2.**
- **The Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued new sanctions targeting Iranian energy exports on March 2.**
- ***Bloomberg* reported on March 2 that Iran is seeking to obtain S-400 air defense systems from Russia, citing insider sources.**
- **The US Naval Forces Central Command announced that US forces supported a UK-led interdiction of an illegal Iranian weapons shipment in the Gulf of Oman on February 23.**
- **Iraq’s Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee went to Diyala to discuss “security breaches” likely in response to the 20 February massacre of Sunni civilians.**
- **Former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki is attempting to return to Iraqi politics as a major political actor.**

Internal Security

CTP did not observe protest activity on March 2.

Protest coordinators and organizations called for anti-regime demonstrations on the following dates:

March 4[29]

- **Location:** Countrywide
- **Notes:** Calling on students and teachers to boycott schools and universities

March 8[30]

- **Location:** Countrywide, city centers at 18:00 local time
- **Notes:** Commemorating International Women's Day

March 13-15[31]

- **Location:** Countrywide
- **Notes:** Coincides with a Zoroastrian fire festival—Chahar Shanbeh Souri—on March 15

Raisi administration officials struck a conciliatory tone on March 2, and stressed the need to address deepening divides between Iranian leadership and its people. Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei called for increased dialogue between the regime and various factions of the Iranian population in a meeting with clerics in Qom. Ejei acknowledged that the regime had “weaknesses with regards to democratization and popularization which (it) must address” and urged the need to differentiate between corruption and “when it is necessary to be open minded and increase our tolerance.”[32] Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili separately admitted that Iranian women had not been sufficiently publicly recognized and promised “to compensate (for this) and defend women’s rights.”[33]

Internal Security

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Ghaffar Naghshbandi ‘s family stated in an interview with Radio Farda on March 2 that they are not aware of his whereabouts. Raisi administration-controlled *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)* reported on March 1 that Naghshbandi fled the country out of fear of arrest and the revelation of his purported ties to foreign actors.[34] Naghshbandi’s father stated that the cleric was summoned to the Special Court for Clerics in Mashhad and disappeared on the way. His family has apparently tried to contact him to no avail. Naghshbandi’s reportedly told his father that “if anything happens to me...the IRGC and intelligence officials of the Sistan and Baluchistan Province are responsible.”[35]

Economic Affairs

Iranian officials and state-affiliated news outlets reported on increased Russo-Iranian economic ties on March 2. Semi-official *ISNA* reported that Russian Central Bank Head Elvira Nabiullina will travel to Iran on an unspecified date in the near future without providing further details.[36] Deputy Foreign Minister Mehdi Safari separately discussed “political and economic relations” with his Russian counterpart Sergey Vershinin during a meeting on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan on March 2.[37]

The Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued new sanctions targeting Iranian energy exports on March 2. OFAC designated six entities linked to Iranian petroleum or petrochemical trade and identified 20 vessels as property or interests in property of these entities.[38]

External Security and Military Affairs

Bloomberg reported on March 2 that Iran is seeking to obtain S-400 air defense systems from Russia, citing insider sources. *Bloomberg* added that it would take less two years for the S-400s to become operational.[39] *The Wall Street Journal* previously reported on February 28 that the International Atomic Energy Organization (IAEA) confirmed the discovery of traces of 84-percent

enriched uranium--near weapons-grade--at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant, as CTP previously reported.[40]

The US Naval Forces Central Command announced that US forces supported a UK-led interdiction of an illegal Iranain weapons shipment in the Gulf of Oman on February 23. US forced provided airborne intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance that resulted in the discovery of anti-tank guided missiles and missile components from a naval vessel tied to Iran. The interdiction occurred on a naval route typically used to illegally transport weapons to Yemen.[41]

Iraq's Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee traveled to Diyala to discuss "security breaches" likely in response to the February 20 massacre of Sunni civilians.[42] The Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee is chaired by Badr-aligned Abbas al-Zamili and is responsible for drafting legislation and conducting oversight of security forces.[43] The committee met with the PMF Commander of Diyala Operations Talib al-Musawi on March 1 to discuss unit deployments in Diyala governorate, administrative borders, and unit responsibilities. Zamili's meeting took place about a week after Iran-backed Shia militias likely massacred Sunni civilians in Jayalah, Khalis district, Diyala province.[44]

Turkish forces reportedly killed two Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) affiliated commanders in northern Sinjar district, Iraq on February 27 and March 1. On February 27 a Turkish drone strike killed the commander of the 80th PMF Regiment Bir Jako in Khana Sor village.[45] Turkish forces killed a second commander from the Sinjar Resistance Units, Sherzad Qirani, in an air strike on March 1.[46] The 80th Regiment is a component of the PMF-affiliated Sinjar Resistance Units and is comprised of Yazidi militants.[47] Turkish Armed Forces target Sinjar Resistance Units and Kurdistan Workers Party militants in northern Sinjar district as a component of Turkish counterterrorism operations.[48]

Iran-backed militia Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq threatened to retaliate for the Turkish air strikes using drones and rockets on February 27.[49] Iran-affiliated media posted anti-Turkish rhetoric criticizing the Turkish government for attacking a PMF unit following PMF-directed earthquake relief aid shipments to Turkey and Syria.[50] Targeted threats against Turkish entities suggest that Iran-backed militants are setting rhetorical conditions for a strike on Turkish Armed Forces at Zeilakan Camp in Bashiqa, Ninewa governorate, Iraqi Kurdistan. Liwa Ahrar al-Iraq conducted several rocket attacks on Zeilakan Camp in retaliation for Turkish air strikes on February 1.[51]

Former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki is attempting to regain significant political influence in Iraqi politics. Maliki's State of Law Coalition is the primary supporter of a new election law that would heavily favor his political bloc.[52] Nouri al-Maliki also instigated claims that Iraqi Parliament planned to hold early elections.[53] A NINA report on March 2 cited unnamed political actors who claim that a political coalition plans to appoint Maliki as Vice President of Iraq. [54] CTP cannot independently verify these claims at this time. Nouri al-Maliki previously served as Vice President of Iraq from 2016 through 2018 and as prime minister from 2006 to 2014.[55]

[1] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1630914164498497538?s=20>

[3] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85045469/%D8%AE%D8%B2%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%DA%A9%...>

[4] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401121108216/%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%DA%A9%D9%87-%D...> ; <https://t.co/yXLoE3Ra8q>

[5] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401121108140/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8...> ; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/11/2861617/>-امیر عبداللہیان-متأسفانه-برخی-از-دولت-های-اروپایی-دچار-خطای-تحلیل-شدند

[6] <https://www.dot-hamshahrionline.ir/news/745789/%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA->

%DB%B1%DB%B0-%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-
%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-
%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-
%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2-
%DB%B2%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%B1-
%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AA

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-1-2023>

[8] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630966434435145728?cxt=HHwWgIC90...>

[9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-2 ;...>

[10] <https://www.voanews.com/a/iran-issues-warning-on-mandatory-headscarf-in-...>

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630851985732784134?cxt=HHwWjMC-r...>

[12] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-27-2023 ;>

<https://bonbast dot com/>

[13] <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-economy-rial-centralbank/irans-cent...>

[14] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85043278/%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%87-%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DB%B5%DB%B2-%D9%87%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7>

[15] Iran Update, February 21, 2023 | Institute for the Study of War (understandingwar.org)

[16] <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/REO/MECA/Issues/2021/04/11/regional-...>

[17] <https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401121108314/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%B0%D8%AE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[18] <https://www dot hamshahrionline dot ir/news/745837/%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%AA%DB%8C-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A8-%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%81%D8%AA%D8%AF>

[19] https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1627573547622100993?cxt=HHwWgsCz_...

[20] <https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401121108187/%D8%A2%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA-%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9>

[36] [https://www.isna](https://www.isna.ir/news/1401121108020/%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9-%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%B2%DB%8C-) dot ir/news/1401121108020/%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9-%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%B2%DB%8C-

%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%DB%8C-
%D8%A2%DB%8C%D8%AF

[37] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401121108325/%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8...>

[38] <https://www.state.gov/designating-iran-sanctions-evaders/> ; <https://ho...>

[39] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-02/israel-rethinks-iran-...>

[40] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-28-2023>

[41] <https://www.cusnc.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/3315919/us-forces-...>

[42] <https://iq dot parliament.iq/blog/2023/03/01/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%85%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%ac%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%ac%d9%88%d9%84%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%af%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%a7/>

[43] <https://manhom dot com/%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A/>

<https://www dot iraqoilreport.com/news/qa-jawad-bolani-member-of-the-parliament-security-and-defense-committee-45493/>

[44] <https://www.ina dot iq/178726--.html>

[45] <https://www dot kurdistan24.net/en/story/30795-Turkish-drone-kills-three-PKK-affiliated-fighters-in-Sinjar:-Kurdish-anti-terrorism-group>

<https://shafaq dot com/en/Kurdistan/Turkish-drone-strikes-PKK-members-in-Sinjar>

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/71365>

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/71359>

[46] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1630908298743390210

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/71447>

<https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82>

<https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%B6%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D8%B9%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1>

[47] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/امن/الحشد-الشعبي-ينعى-حد-قياديه-قضى-في-قصف-جوي-شمالي-نينوى>

[48] <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-02-27/three-killed-in-tu...>
(Reuters)%20%2D,Iraqi%20Kurdistan's%20counterterrorism%20service%20said.

[49] <https://twitter.com/IraqiQahwa/status/1630272561614299140>

[50] <https://twitter.com/ahmadabdulsada/status/1631221495820083201>

https://twitter.com/irq_now/status/1631050186842570753

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/71488>

[51] <https://twitter.com/IntellabQuds/status/1621115272923840512>

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/69411>

https://twitter.com/1shaayib/status/1620652321821847558?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

[52] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9>

[53] <https://t.me/Tura313/38609>

[54] <https://t.me/Tura313/38849>

<https://www dot ninanews.com/Website/News/Details?key=1037923>

<https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%84%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

[55] <https://web.archive.org/web/20151222125630/http://english.aawsat.com/201...>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nouri-al-Maliki>

Iran Update, March 5, 2023

Iran Update, March 5, 2023

Amin Soltani, Annika Ganzeveld, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 5, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

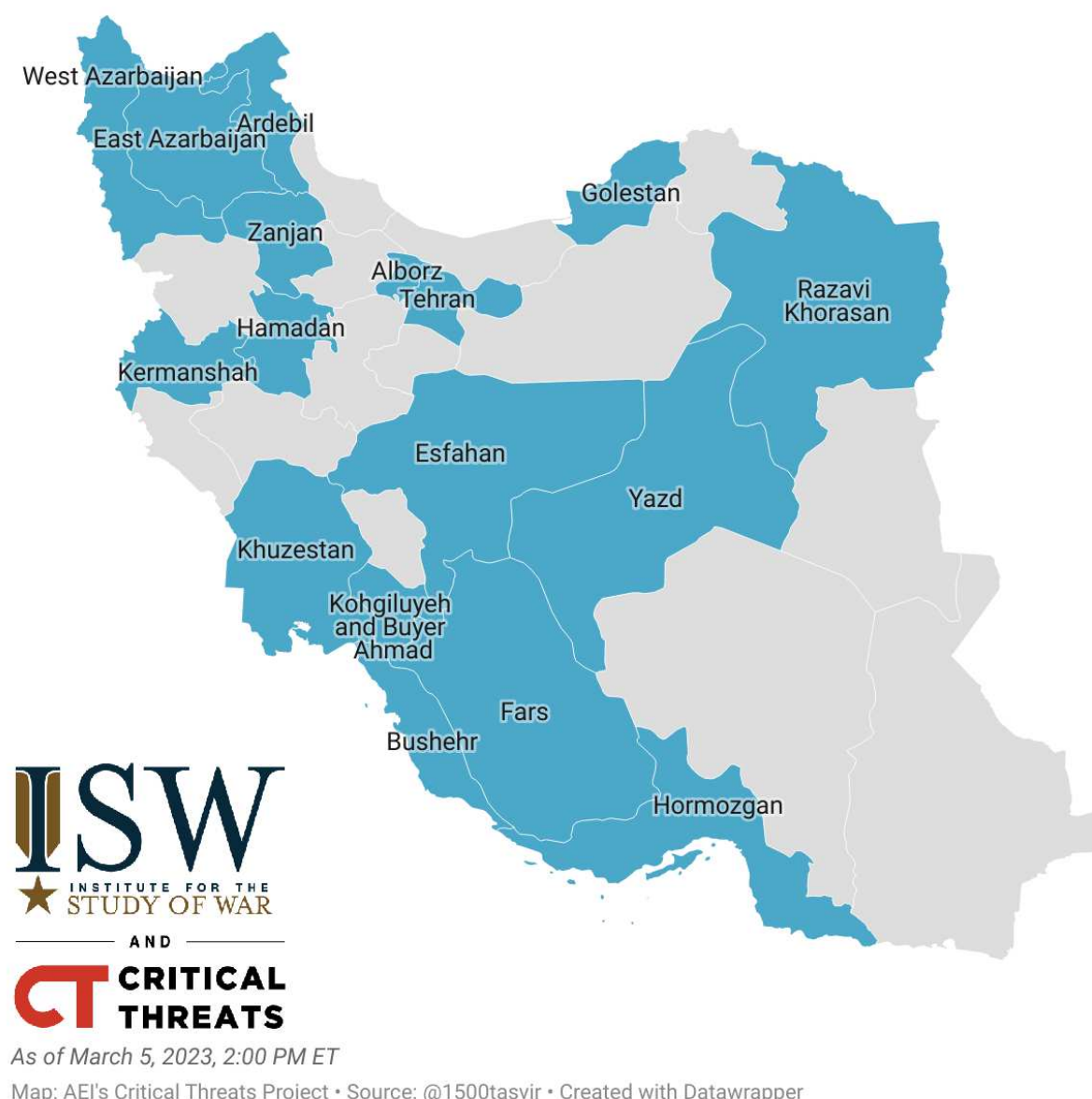
The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

ISW and CTP are publishing a special edition today in response to the dramatic escalation in poisonings of Iranian schoolgirls on March 4 and 5. We will resume regular updates on March 6.

The Iranian regime has permitted the country-wide, coordinated attacks on Iranian schoolgirls to escalate. Between March 4 and March 5 alone, there were at least 300 attacks across 16 provinces, a significant increase from the 46 reported poisoning attacks on March 2 and the other sporadic attacks from November 30, 2022, onward.[1] The nature of these attacks, targeting primarily schoolgirls in urban areas who report similar symptoms, escalating over a period of four months, indicates that this is an organized and deliberate campaign, as CTP has previously assessed.[2]

An organization able to conduct sustained attacks such as these likely has a number of distinctive characteristics. First, it has members who are either widely dispersed throughout Iran or else able to move rapidly across the country. These capabilities are essential for a group conducting attacks on dozens of locations in more than half of Iran's provinces each day for two consecutive days. Second, it must have a stock of whatever chemical agent it is using sufficient to conduct all these attacks. Third, it must be able to distribute that stock to the target locations. Fourth, its agents must be able to approach their targets undetected, deliver the agent by some means, and depart without being intercepted before, during, or after the attack. Fifth, its agents must either be unidentifiable, including by facial recognition, or protected in some way. Sixth, it must either be willing to risk having its agents identified, arrested, and unmasked (with the additional risk that the organization's identity will be revealed) or else it must be confident that they will not be for some reason. Seventh, it must regard the advantage gained by poisoning schoolgirls without killing them to be sufficient compensation for the risks involved in the undertaking.

Iran Student Poisonings by Province - March 5



This list of necessary attributes narrows the field of organizations that could possibly be conducting these attacks considerably. It likely excludes groups such as ISIS or al Qaeda (which have never shown a proclivity for attacks of this variety in any event), as well as foreign intelligence services, Iranian officials' accusations notwithstanding. The Iranian government has every incentive to identify, catch, and reveal foreign agents involved in attacks by such groups, and those agents have no reason to expect that they will be able to continue approaching schools and delivering poisons on target without being caught. Nor is it likely that a foreign intelligence organization that has agents with excellent cover so widely dispersed throughout Iran would risk losing them and being unmasked in order to poison schoolgirls. The available evidence does not support any firm conclusion about what organization might be conducting these attacks, however.

The regime's response to these attacks continues to suggest that it is deliberately tolerating them. It has not changed its law enforcement posture despite the dramatic increase in the number and locations of attacks on March 4 and 5. The regime has still not deployed the security and surveillance capabilities it used to violently suppress the Mahsa Amini protests to protect schools. Reports indicate, on the contrary, that many of these capabilities have instead been either disabled or, if used, have been deployed to restrain schoolchildren and their families or to limit the spread of crucial information. Many of the affected schools have CCTV security cameras. One schoolgirl who experienced poisoning symptoms reported on February 28 that she was told that her school's

cameras had been “down for a week,” however.[3] Another affected parent complained to school authorities on March 5 that cameras had been shut off at the Sizdah Aban Girls Elementary School in Tehran before the attack.[4] Plainclothes officers have violently detained schoolgirls at some locations and either beaten or otherwise prevented concerned parents from trying to enter an impacted school.[5] It would make sense to keep parents out of schools thought to have suffered chemical attacks if the authorities were not then forcing school children either to stay in them or to return to them. In one instance plainclothes officers prevented students from leaving an impacted school while the students screamed “We don’t want to die!”[6] At other times, students were told to come back to school immediately after an attack.[7] Law Enforcement Command (LEC) officers have also discouraged people from coming to impacted areas and recording video, even confiscating phones on several occasions.[8] Anti-regime outlet Iran International reported that security forces have prevented parents from obtaining medical test results that could contain information about the chemical agent used in the attack.[9]

These regime reactions are extremely anomalous and support the assessment that elements of the regime are tolerating the attacks. A government facing a crisis such as this would normally focus on rapidly deploying law enforcement to schools to deter, stop, and detain the perpetrators. A regime as heavily securitized as Iran’s would normally turn all its advanced security infrastructure on rapidly identifying the culprits. When a school is attacked with a suspected chemical agent, the normal response would be to clear everyone out of the building, treat anyone with symptoms, offer counseling and solace to children and their parents, have specialist teams attempt to isolate samples of the agents, and then thoroughly clean the facility to ensure that no potentially toxic residues remained. It is difficult to fathom any civilized country requiring children to go back into a building that has suffered a chemical attack on the very day of that attack—still less refusing to allow students to leave. Such actions require either remarkable unconcern for the lives and health of young children or confidence that the agents used have either dispersed or were not that dangerous to begin with. Considering that the regime has not offered any indication that it knows what agent(s) are being used, it is difficult to say why regime and local officials should be confident that it is safe to force children to return to their schools on the day of the attack.

Medical professionals from across Iran have reported students experiencing a common set of symptoms after being poisoned. Yasouj University of Medical Sciences Deputy for Medicine Mahmoud Shehamat, Parliamentary Health and Medical Committee Vice Chairman Morteza Khatami, and Shiraz University of Medical Sciences Deputy for Medicine Mehrdad Sharifi have all described similar symptoms experienced by victims of the poisonings: headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and numbness.[10] It appears that most students who report poisoning symptoms and are brought to medical centers are discharged within a matter of hours or days.[11] Apart from shortness of breath, CTP has not observed any reports of symptoms such as burning lungs, severe skin irritation, and watering eyes that would suggest that the attacks are the result of choking agents or blistering agents.[12]

The Iranian regime’s response to these attacks is anomalous and difficult to explain unless regime officials are complicit in at least allowing the attacks to continue. The most straightforward explanations require that at least some senior regime officials are knowingly allowing these attacks to occur for some reason, but there is only circumstantial evidence to support them. Other explanations require more elaborate schemes attributing motivations and capabilities to anti-regime actors, whether foreign or domestic, that are even harder to substantiate. The available evidence does not support attributing these attacks to any particular group but does appear to show that the regime has been willing to allow them to continue. CTP will continue to monitor the situation and update this assessment as more information becomes available.

[1] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632443003024424960?cxt=HHwWgIC-9e...>

https://www.instagram.com/p/CpYKcWaqe22/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link;
https://www.instagram.com/p/CpZs7soKAPq/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link; h...
; <https://twitter.com/EtemadOnline/status/1632269284373045248>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-1-2023>

- [3] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64797957.amp>
- [4] https://www.instagram.com/reel/CpXmJeQKaVY/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
- [5] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632016020121571329?s=20;
<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632309193091821571?s=20;> <https://...>
- [6] https://www.instagram.com/reel/CpZ98n0KJFz/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
- [7] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630966434435145728?s=20;>
https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1632312478209130496?s=20
- [8] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632328734245044224?s=20;>
<https://www.iranintl.com/202303055637>
- [9] <https://twitter.com/IranIntlbrk/status/1632270946894577667?s=20;>
https://www.instagram.com/p/CpZezuBoRNZ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link
- [10] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121410559;> <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121309017;>
<https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121410461>
- [11] <https://www.imna dot ir/news/645697>
- [12] <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R42862/5>

Iran Update, March 6, 2023

Iran Update, March 6, 2023

Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Johanna Moore, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 6, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

This special edition of our daily Iran update continues our focus on the chemical attacks in Iran. It includes maps and characterizations of protests in Iran on March 4, 5, and 6, and in Iraq on March 5.

- Over 110 separate student poisonings occurred throughout Iran on March 6.[1] Some have framed these incidents as “mass hysteria.” They are not. Someone is deliberately poisoning Iranian children—we are just not sure who.
- Students—primarily Iranian schoolgirls—have reported hundreds of chemical attacks in recent weeks, especially since March 1.[2] Their symptoms include headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and numbness.[3]
- Some have compared these recent reports to previous instances of “mass sociogenic illnesses,” in which presenting symptoms are caused by anxiety rather than—in this case—chemical attacks.[4]
- Mass sociogenic illness is not completely implausible in Iran. The Islamic Republic has, indeed, stoked fear and even terror through its brutal treatment of Iranian girls, especially those who participated in the Mahsa Amini protests.[5]
- No one wants to believe that anyone would deliberately poison schoolgirls, but dismissing the countrywide, months-long chemical attacks as psychogenic will not do.
- Regime officials *themselves* have acknowledged that some form of intentional poisoning is occurring in Iranian schools, although they deny the extent and scale of these reports.[6]
- Reports of chemical attacks have now expanded beyond a single demographic—Iranian schoolgirls—to schoolboys and teachers at targeted schools.[7]
- Iranian officials today stated that tested samples consisted of multiple chemicals, consistent with reports from a Tehran doctor treating poisoned patients in the ICU.[8]
- Iranian media and social media reports suggest that several individuals have required ICU treatment after the poisonings, too, and some hospitals are crowded with victims.[9]
- The regime response to mass poisonings in Iranian schools is also unlike what any civilized country’s reaction to countrywide reported attacks on some of the most vulnerable segments of its population would be.
- The Iranian police only announced that they would deploy security personnel to protect schools today—three months after the first reported poisoning occurred.[10]
- Security personnel and school officials behaving normally would not violently handle distressed citizens following an attack as some Iranian officials did.[11]
- Some students reported being told to immediately return to class following a reported attack—an almost unimaginable response in most countries.[12]
- It is unclear who is perpetrating these chemical attacks on Iranian children. But someone is making them happen. And regime officials have been behaving oddly.

- Iranian girls are not hysterics. Iranian officials are not all monsters. Something odd and awful is happening in Iran. We hope to understand it soon.
- And, of course, we hope that it will stop at once.

Iran Student Poisonings by Province - March 6



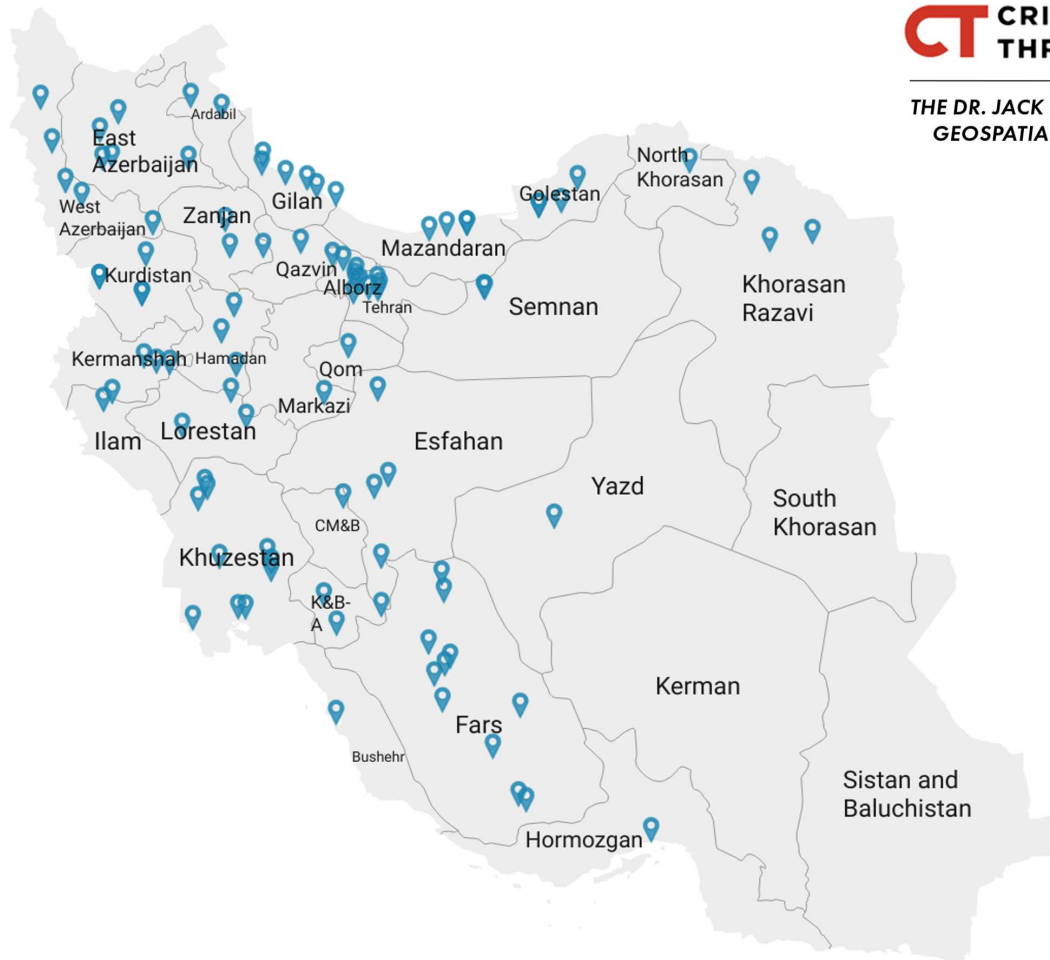
Map: AEI's Critical Threats Project • Source: 1500tasvir • Created with Datawrapper

Student Poisonings Sweep Iran

November 2022 - March 6, 2023



THE DR. JACK LONDON
GEOSPATIAL FUND



AEI's Critical Threats Project | Source: Author's Research | Created with Datawrapper

Protests erupted in Iraq against the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF)—an umbrella organization for Iran-aligned political parties—on March 5. CTP recorded demonstrations in at least five cities in response to SCF-backed electoral reform legislation that the Iraqi parliament is considering. Independent and minority Iraqi political parties failed to remove the legislation from the parliamentary agenda on March 4.[13] Ratifying this legislation would reverse several previous reforms meant to promote proportional representation in parliament that Iraq adopted after the Tishreen protests in late 2019.[14] The State of Law party—the party of former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki—would likely expand its political influence due to these proposed reforms at the expense of some independent and minority parties. Protest organizers called on citizens to burn down signs associated with the SCF along main roads and warned that protests will continue if the election law passes in the Iraqi parliament.[15] CTP has characterized each reported protest at the bottom of this update.

At least five protests occurred in five cities across five provinces in Iraq on March 5. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Hamza, Babil Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fires in the street; released statement against the SCF

Sadr City, Baghdad Province[17]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fire to tires in the street blocking traffic; released statement against the SCF

Kufa, Najaf Province[18]

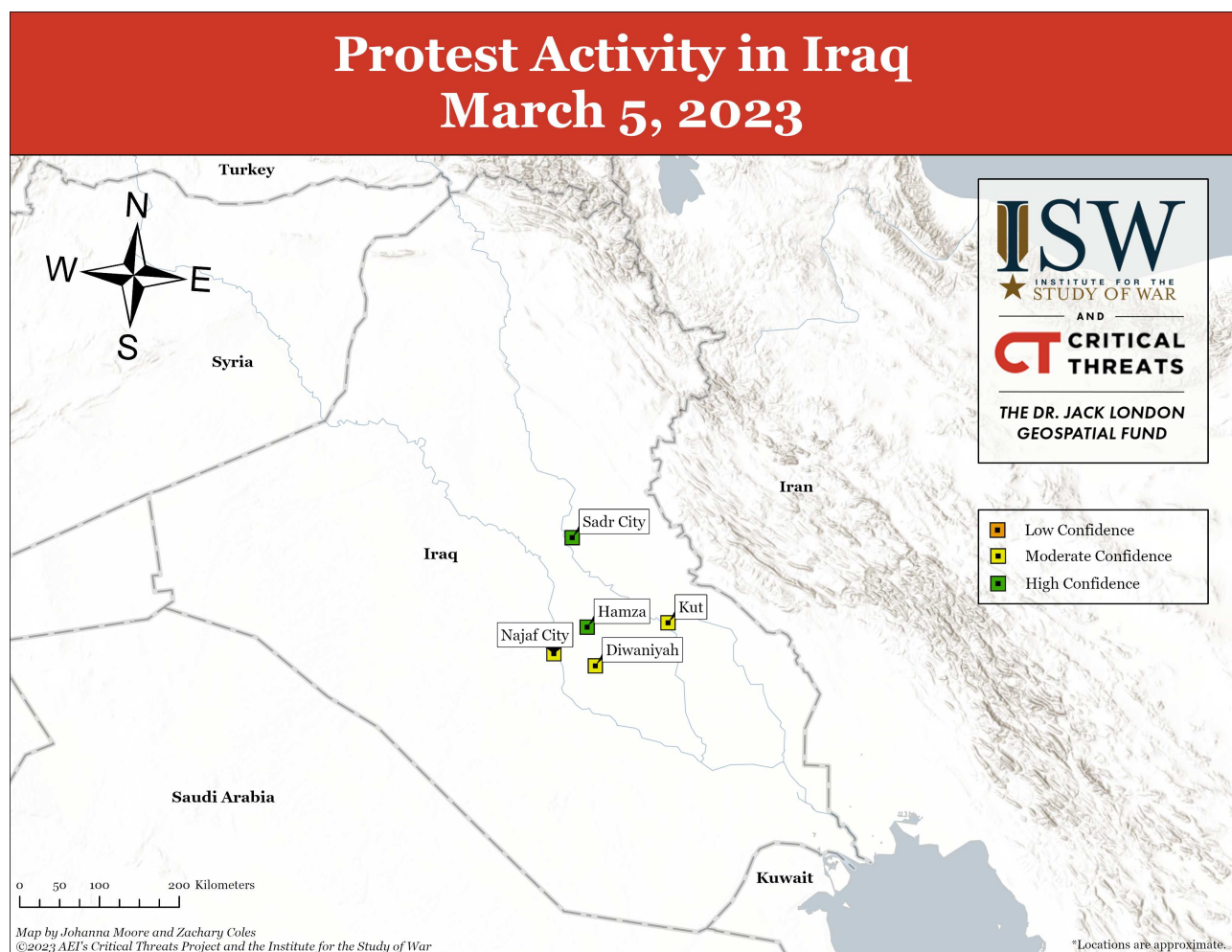
- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Blocked traffic

Diwaniyah, al Qadisiyyah[19]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fires in the street blocking traffic

Kut, Wasit Province[20]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fires in the street



Key Takeaways

- **Over 110 separate student poisonings occurred throughout Iran on March 6. Some have framed these incidents as “mass hysteria.” They are not. Someone is deliberately poisoning Iranian children—we are just not sure who.**

- **Protests erupted in Iraq against the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF)--an umbrella organization for Iran-aligned political parties.**
- **At least nine protests occurred on March 4, at least five protests occurred on March 5, and at least nine protests occurred on March 6.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least nine protests occurred in four cities across four provinces on March 4. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[21]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Spraying acid and poisoning, both are a crime.”

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[22]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings

Tehran City, Tehran Province[23]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 1
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Death to the child-killing government.”

Tehran City, Tehran Province[24]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 5
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Our enemy is right here, it is a lie, them saying it is America” and “Our children are our red line.”

Tehran City, Tehran Province[25]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 8
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings

Tehran City, Tehran Province[1]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mothers protesting student poisonings

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Yasouj, Kohgilouyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province[26]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Municipal workers

Tehran City, Tehran Province[27]

- **Size:** Small

- **Demographic:** Government workers

Tehran City, Tehran Province[28]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 4
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings

At least five protests occurred in five cities across three provinces on March 5. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[29]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[30]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[31]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoushtar, Khuzestan Province[32]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Tehran City, Tehran Province[33]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Disabled individuals

At least nine protests occurred in nine cities across eight provinces on March 6. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ilam City, Ilam Province[34]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[35]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[36]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan[37]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting the regime and student poisonings

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[38]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Mashhad, Razavi Khorasan Province[39]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[40]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Oroumیه, West Azerbaijan Province[41]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Yazd City, Yazd Province[42]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Iranian state media reported on March 3 that reformist leader Mir Hossein Mousavi has been hospitalized with flu-like symptoms.[43] Mousavi previously issued a statement on February 4 calling for a referendum on the Islamic Republic and the drafting of a new constitution if that referendum fails, as CTP previously reported.[44] The regime has kept Mousavi under house arrest since shortly after the Green Movement ended.

Nuclear Program

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi traveled to Iran and met with senior officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi and Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Director Mohammad Eslami, on March 3-4.[45] Grossi discussed technical cooperation to reinstall IAEA monitoring equipment at Iranian nuclear sites, among other matters, in his meetings.[46]

External Security and Military Affairs

Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani met with Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas in Tehran on March 5.[47] Ashtiani may have discussed the potential sale of air defense equipment to Syria during the meeting. The Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry is responsible for managing Iran's defense industries and arms sales and acquisitions. Ashtiani previously met with the Syrian Air Defense Forces Commander Salahuddin Kaser al Ghanem in Tehran to discuss the potential sale of air defense equipment on February 22, as CTP previously reported.[48]

- [1] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632674669516947458>
- [2] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64797957>
- [3] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121410559>; <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121309017>
- [4] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/06/what-do-we-know-suspected-...>
- [5] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-schoolgirl-killed-refusing-song-ayatollah/3...>
- [6] <https://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26361>; <http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/132895>; <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121511478>; <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/717912>; <https://t.co/g6kclHx4RZ>
- [7] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632723699748020224?s=20>; https://twitter.com/james_bidin/status/1630964995000524800?s=20; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632703800480874498?s=20>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1632108736406855686?s=20>; <https://t.co/g6kclHx4RZ>
- [9] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632753907620356096?s=20>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1631987009047736320?s=20
- [10] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/577222>
- [11] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632016020121571329
- [12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630966434435145728>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632734671585853442?s=20>
- [13] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%BA%D9%88>
- [14] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7>
- [15] <https://twitter.com/IraqiQahwa/status/1632396756762673155>; <https://twitter.com/salamAJ5/status/1632332958223720450>; https://t.me/One_Najaff/24091
- [16] <https://twitter.com/IraqiQahwa/status/1632442085843386368>
- https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1632441725544198150

<https://twitter.com/thaer350/status/1632463048949612544>

[17] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1632451901231968261

<https://twitter.com/IraqiQahwa/status/1632459236360822786>

https://twitter.com/Furat_97/status/1632462676847673345

<https://twitter.com/AbdallahAlbayat/status/1632454946791518208>

[18] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1632434991450734593

[19] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1632467694736875520

[20] https://twitter.com/Scope_iq/status/1632441390696132610

https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1632435703664582658

[21] https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631937312778067968?cxt=HHwWgIC9_...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631949622682828800?cxt=HHwWgIC-9...>

https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631965020820062208?cxt=HHwWgIC-_...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631985270462529542?cxt=HHwWjIC2y...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631989284088455169?cxt=HHwWgoCxt...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1631982516482473984?cxt=HHwWgICw6ffc...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1631996969290723328?cxt=HHwWgMCz0...

[22] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631967042101231618?cxt=HHwWhIC22...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631967654243172356?cxt=HHwWiIC8w...>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1631998895625478146?cxt=HHwWhICx-...

[23] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631937130703233025?cxt=HHwWgoCxt...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1631961049527189506?cxt=HHwWhIC8xbL7...

[24] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631918714684600320?cxt=HHwWgMCzs...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631922767904796672?cxt=HHwWgMCzn...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631947058427965440?cxt=HHwWgMC93...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631948677651603456?cxt=HHwWgIC98...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632012973307830272?cxt=HHwWgIC97...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632014634273107968?cxt=HHwWgMCzg...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1631936172569051136?cxt=HHwWgIC24a7T...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1631925564796809217?cxt=HHwWgsC92...

[25] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631953516443967489?cxt=HHwWgoC92...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631941576233562112?cxt=HHwWgMC9m...>
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1631947775913984001?cxt=HHwWgoC8t...
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631953772573278208?cxt=HHwWgIC2g...>

[26] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632055575725981696?cxt=HHwWgIC-z...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632047568006836224?cxt=HHwWgMCzuben...

[27] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632055347434102785?cxt=HHwWgoCx2...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1631990478701830144?cxt=HHwWgIC9_bKs...

[28] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632007620671287298?cxt=HHwWhMC9z...>

[29] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632383770350219265?cxt=HHwWgsCzj...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632384397918756864?cxt=HHwWgICz7cG9...
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632410219736096768?cxt=HHwWgICzs...

[30] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632379836218974211?cxt=HHwWhoC9xf6z...
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632501262934581250?cxt=HHwWhIC9i...>

[31] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632325879404560386?cxt=HHwWhICw-...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632323565860057093?cxt=HHwWisCz2c_o...

[32] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632496557546258432?cxt=HHwWgIC-m...>
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632413214691536899?cxt=HHwWhsC9x...

[33] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632418256760741892?cxt=HHwWiC8x...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632350571419107333?cxt=HHwWioC85caM...

[34] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632724685568851970?cxt=HHwWhIC-t...
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632682892198400008?cxt=HHwWkMC-xZWc...
https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632663612417294336?cxt=HHwWgIC2_...

[35] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632741975932776449?cxt=HHwWgsC91...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632675055464325120?cxt=HHwWgIC9qYHU...

[36] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632669199305777153?cxt=HHwWgoC9x...
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632672675087695874?cxt=HHwWhIC2kbrJ...
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632664439404019718?cxt=HHwWjIC2w...>

[37] <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1632810276331433984> ;

- <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632852533046652930?cxt=HHwWhMC9r...>
- [38] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632675346003767296?cxt=HHwWgMC9gfbk...
- <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632747740542255106?cxt=HHwWhIC-r...>
- [39] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632663818110107648?cxt=HHwWgICww...>
- https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632671024733888516?cxt=HHwWiCxbLp...
- [40] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632695090098450434?cxt=HHwWhMC9_Zbi...
- [41] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632748896093888513?cxt=HHwWgoCz8...>
- https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632691173025361921?cxt=HHwWgsC9wZb-...
- [42] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632750074085232640?cxt=HHwWgMC-z...>
- https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632695856804626434?cxt=HHwWhIC8seeO...
- [43] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85046506>
- [44] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-6-2023>
- [45] www.president dot ir/fa/142786; <https://www.mehrnews dot com/news/5724059>
- [46] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-concessions-iaea-largely...>
- [47] <http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/132926>
- [48] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-updates-february-2023>

Iran Update, March 7, 2023

Amin Soltani, Annika Ganzeveld, Johanna Moore, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 7, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

CTP assesses with moderate confidence that the Iranian regime is using the recent chemical attacks throughout Iran to set conditions to securitize the country ahead of major national holidays. A coordinated, countrywide campaign to poison primarily schoolgirls has been ongoing since November 2022, as CTP previously reported.[1] Regardless of whether the regime had any involvement in or knowledge of the attacks, it appears to be using these attacks to justify an increased security presence throughout Iran. There are signs that the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) has already deployed to areas around schools across Iran. LEC spokesperson Brigadier General Saeed Montazer al Mahdi announced on March 6 that the LEC has increased its patrols near schools and universities.[2] Social media users circulated footage on March 7 showing LEC patrol vehicles near one girls' school in Kowsar County, Ardabil Province.[3] Both Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi called on intelligence and law enforcement organizations to identify and apprehend the perpetrators of the recent attacks on March 7. [4] Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Hossein Salami noted on March 7 that the IRGC is prepared to "guarantee the security of the country" and "deal seriously with the agents causing psychological insecurity among Iranian families." [5] Several LEC officials indicated that the LEC will mobilize to address the "threats" posed by the upcoming holiday celebrations to "public peace" and the "environment" and that they will be prepared to make arrests.[6] Iranians will be participating in the *Chahar Shanbeh Souri* holiday on March 15, which involves the symbolic act of jumping over fires in celebration of the upcoming new year. Iranians will also celebrate *Nowrouz* (the Persian new year celebration) on March 20, which commonly involves gathering their families around a Haft Sin table and sharing gifts with one another.

The regime could be addressing a multitude of concerns if it decides to securitize. The combination of ongoing protests and the widespread domestic travel common during the holidays could pose major challenges for the regime's security services. Using the recent student poisonings to heavily securitize the country at this time could allow the regime to manage those challenges more easily. The regime might also be concerned that extra leisure time during the holidays could free people up to protest and might be trying to deter further protest activity. The regime might also be pursuing a securitized response to the poisonings at this time in order to arrest known protesters and protest organizers. IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* published an article on March 7 claiming that the countrywide poisoning campaign is meant to incite further "riots," indicating the poisoning campaign might be used as a pretext to crack down on protest groups.[7] The Interior Ministry published a statement on March 7 claiming that several individuals had been arrested in connection with the poisonings in Lorestan Province and that "three of them had participated in the recent riots." [8]

CTP has observed that the regime's failure to deploy law enforcement to protect schools during the previous months of poisonings was noteworthy since such a step would have been part of a normal response to such incidents. The deployment of some security and the promise of more deployments now would be less remarkable but for the timing. Having waited this long to start securing possible targets the regime appears to be leaning into securitizing schools just in time for a holiday period that might otherwise have challenged it. The securitization also coincides with an expansion of

poisoning-related protests. These connections are too tenuous to prompt CTP to conclude that the regime conducted the attacks for this purpose or any other. CTP continues to withhold judgment on who was responsible. We assess with moderate confidence, however, that the regime will use the poisonings to justify the securitization of the country in the coming days and weeks.

Security forces have responded more violently to recent poisoning-related unrest than they have to recent economically motivated protests and strikes. Security forces reportedly beat individuals protesting student poisonings in Esfahan, Esfahan Province on March 7.[9] Iranian media users also claimed that security forces used tear gas against protesters in Rasht, Gilan Province on March 7, although CTP is unable to verify these reports.[10] A plainclothes officer separately grabbed a mother by her hair as she inquired about her child's condition in front of the Sizdeh Aban High School in Tehransar, Tehran on March 1, as CTP previously reported.[11] These actions resemble previous violent regime responses to the Mahsa Amini protest movement, suggesting that the regime regards unrest fueled by student poisonings as more threatening than the more recent protests centered on economic problems. Security forces have arrested some economic protesters in recent weeks but have largely refrained from using the level of force against economic protesters that they are currently using against poisoning protesters.[12]

Sistan and Baluchistan Province recorded its first case of student poisoning on March 7. Zahedan University of Medical Sciences Crisis Secretary Ali Abdol Rezagh Nejad announced that 41 students experiencing nausea and abdominal pain were transferred to medical centers in Zahedan, Sistan, and Baluchistan Province on March 7.[13] It is noteworthy, given the persistence of weekly Friday protests in Zahedan, that whatever actor is conducting these attacks had not yet conducted one in Zahedan until this point. Prominent Sunni cleric Abdol Hamid responded to the poisonings in Zahedan by explicitly blaming the regime. He stated that "agents [of the poisonings] are likely in the system" and called on government officials to close schools until the cause of the poisonings is uncovered.[14] Abdol Hamid's rhetoric may spread the narrative domestically that the regime has been complicit in the chemical attacks.

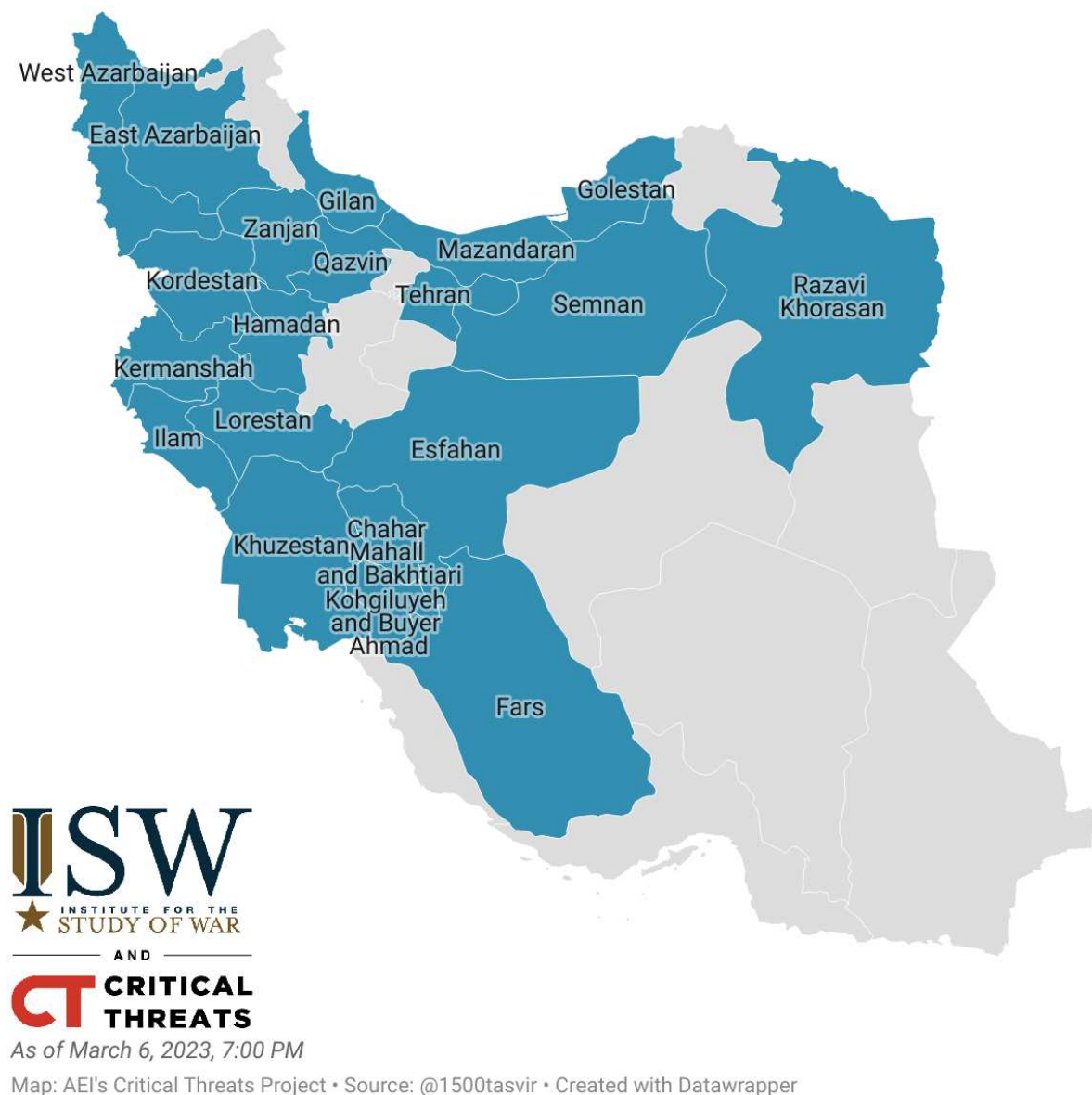
There were 27 reported incidents of poisoning on March 7, significantly below the numbers reported on previous days.

A map of Iran with several provinces highlighted in blue. The highlighted provinces are Kordestan, Kermanshah, Semnan, Razavi Khorasan, Esfahan, Chahar Mahall and Bakhtiari, Khuzestan, Fars, Bushehr, Kerman, and Sistan and Baluchestan. The other provinces are shown in light gray.



Note: A previous version of our March 6 map of student poisonings in Iran mistakenly shaded South Khorasan and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces. No poisonings were reported in those provinces on March 6. The revised map is [here](#).

Correction: Iran Student Poisonings by Province - March 6



Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani claimed on March 6 that countries are seeking to acquire the Iranian-made **Bavar-373 air defense system, possibly referring to Syria.** Ashtiani previously met with Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud on March 5.[15] CTP previously reported that Ashtiani and Mahmoud may have discussed air defense equipment sales during their meeting. [16] Iranian leaders may be considering selling the Bavar-373 to the Syrian regime in addition to or in place of the Khordad-15 that Iranian state media previously reported that Iran will likely send to Syria.[17] Iranian state media claimed that the Bavar-373 can detect fifth generation fighter jets commonly used by Israeli forces to target Iranian-backed weapons shipments into Syria.[18] It is unclear how Syria would pay Iran for the Bavar-373 or Khordad-15, however. Iran could seek economic, military, and political benefits in Syria in exchange for air defense systems.

Key Takeaways

- CTP assesses with moderate confidence that the Iranian regime is using the recent chemical attacks throughout Iran to set conditions to securitize the country ahead of major national holidays.
- Security forces have responded more violently to recent poisoning-related unrest than they have to recent economically motivated protests and strikes.

- Sistan and Baluchistan Province recorded its first case of student poisoning.
- Iranian Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani claimed on March 6 that countries are seeking to acquire the Iranian-made Bavar-373 air defense system, possibly referring to Syria.
- At least 20 protests occurred in 17 cities across 13 provinces.

Internal Security

At least 20 protests occurred in 17 cities across 13 provinces on March 7. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:



Karaj, Alborz Province[19]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers protesting student poisonings

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province[20]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Tabriz University of Medical Sciences students protesting poisonings

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[21]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Internet restrictions. Security personnel reportedly violently suppressed protests.

Shiraz, Fars Province[22]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly arrested protesters and attempted to disperse the crowds

Rasht, Gilan Province[23]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers and parents protesting student poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly used tear gas to disperse protests

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[24]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly attacked protestors

Neyshabour, Khorasan Razavi Province[25]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[26]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[27]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers protesting student poisonings

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[28]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel using tear gas

Babol, Mazandaran Province[29]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly violently suppressed protests

Sari, Mazandaran Province[30]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers protesting student poisonings

Tehran City, Tehran Province[31]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Allameh Tabataba'i University students protesting poisonings
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly violently suppressed protests

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ardabil City, Ardabil Province[32]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings

Karaj, Alborz Province[33]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of prisoners facing death sentences for drug-related crimes

Bandar-e Abbas, Hormozgan Province[34]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings

Kerman City, Kerman Province[35]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Protesting student poisonings

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[36]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers and others protesting student poisonings

Lahijan, Gilan Province[37]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers and other families protesting poisonings

Sari, Mazandaran Province[38]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Educators protesting the imprisonment of teachers and calling for officials to meet their livelihood demands

Foreign Affairs

President Ebrahim Raisi met with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Secretary General Zhang Ming in Tehran on March 7. Raisi and Ming discussed Iran's desire to join the SCO, and Raisi emphasized the importance of the SCO in countering unilateralism.[39]

External Security and Military Affairs

Israel likely conducted an airstrike on Aleppo International Airport on March 6, possibly targeting an Iranian drone facility.[40] A Thiqa report cited unidentified sources as claiming Iranian militias redeployed from al-Jarrah Military Airport, Aleppo Province to Nairab Military Airport at Aleppo International Airport on March 1.[41] Open-source Twitter accounts reported that the airstrike hit an IRGC weapons stockpile located at Aleppo International Airport and damaged the airport runway on March 6.[42] The last reported Israeli airstrike on Aleppo International Airport took place on September 6, 2022.[43] Israeli forces have previously preemptively blocked suspected Iranian weapons shipments into Syria via Aleppo International Airport and Damascus International Airport by bombing airport runways to prevent aircraft from landing.

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-5-2023>

[2] <https://www.entekhab dot>

ir/fa/news/717882/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%DA%AF%D9%88%DB%8C-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D8%B4%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%88%DB%8C%DA%98%D9%87-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%B5%D8%B5%DB%8C-%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3 ;

<https://defapress dot>

ir/fa/news/577222/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%DA%AF%D8%B4%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%88%DB%8C%DA%98%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3

[3] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633080241810821121?s=20>

[4] <https://www.leader dot> ir/fa/content/26361/کاشت-درخت-به-مناسبت-روز-درختکاری-و-هفته-منابع-طبیعی

<https://president dot> ir/fa/142858

[5] <https://www.farsnews dot> ir/news/14011216000971/-سرلشکر-سلامی-سپاه-آماده-همکاری-برای-تسریع-در-سازی-E2%80%8Cتعمیب-ماجرای-مسموم

[6] <https://www.isna dot> ir/news/1401121612041/-سردار-رادان-نگاه-پلیس-به-چهارشنبه-آخر-سال-کاملا-تاثیر-چهارشنبه-سوری-بر-حیوانات-و-<https://www.isna dot> ir/news/1401121612240/اجتماعی-است-اهمیت-اجرای-طرح-عملیاتی-پلیس-<https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/16/2864146/>فتا-برای-برخورد-با-مخلان-آرامش-عمومی-در-چهارشنبه-آخر-سال

[7] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/16/2863397/>-ماجرای-بدحالی-برخی-دانش-آموزان-در-مدارس-و-شایعات-قاتلان-و-سلاخ-ها-می-توانند-مدعی-باشند

[8] <https://www.entekhab dot> ir/fa/news/718101/های-دستگیر-شده-در-لارستان-E2%80%8Cدر-یکی-از-تیم-718101-سه-نفر-شان-در-اغتاشات-اخیر-فعالیت-داشتند-یکی-از-این-افراد-مواد-تحریک-کننده-را-از-طریق-فرزند-خود-به-داخل-کرد-او-پس-از-بروز-بدحالی-دانش-آموزان-بلافاصله-از-آنان-فیلم-تهیه-و-برای-E2%80%8Cمدرسه-منتقل-می-کرد-E2%80%8Cهای-معاند-ار-سال-می-E2%80%8Cرسانه

[9] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633127788210167808?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633125439609733122?s=20>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633045067630878720?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633081543575871488?s=20>

[11] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-1-2023>

[12] [https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-steelworkers-union-strike-members-arrested/...](https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-steelworkers-union-strike-members-arrested/)

[13] [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/718038/%DB%B4%DB%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF](https://www.dot.entekhab.ir/fa/news/718038/%DB%B4%DB%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF)

[14] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1633133068172025856>

[15] [dot com/news/482674/Iranian-defense-minister-says-no-need-for-Russian-S-400](https://www.dot.com/news/482674/Iranian-defense-minister-says-no-need-for-Russian-S-400)

[16] [http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/132926](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926)

[17] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023>

[18] [https://eurasian-times dot com/threatening-f-35-irans-upgraded-bavar-373-missile-system/](https://eurasian-times.com/threatening-f-35-irans-upgraded-bavar-373-missile-system/)

[19] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633179865032564736?s=20> ; [http...](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926)

[20] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633106970155667457?s=20> ; [https...](https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633127788210167808?s=20)

[21] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633127788210167808?s=20> ; [https...](https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1633170212940926976?s=20)

[22] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1633170212940926976?s=20 ; [ht...](https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633081543575871488?s=20)

[23] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633081543575871488?s=20> ; [https...](https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633075042186674176?s=20)

[25] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633075042186674176?s=20> ; [https...](https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633179170921406466?s=20)

[26] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633179170921406466?s=20> ; [http...](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926)

[27] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1633054498712109059?s=20 ; [http...](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926)

[29] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633020558756442114?s=20>

[30] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633064138590105600?s=20> ; [https...](https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633084144828796930?s=20)

[31] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1633084144828796930?s=20> ; [https...](https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633042655654322177?s=20)

[32] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633042655654322177?s=20> ; [http...](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926)

[33] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633176072824012801?s=20>

[34] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1633086203384811520?s=20

[35] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633080736319143936?s=20>

[36] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633018962555330560?s=20> ; [http...](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926)

[37] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633018523319431169?s=20> ; http...

[38] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633184522907811840?s=20> ; http...

[39] [https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401121612050/چرا-علی-باقری-در-مذاکرات-با-گروسی-حضور-نداشت](https://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401121612050/چرا-علی-باقری-در-مذاکرات-با-گروسی-حضور-نداشت)

[40] <https://apnews.com/article/syria-israel-strikes-aleppo-airport-139ba8dc5...>

[41] <https://thiqa-agency dot com/%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86-%d8%aa%d9%8f%d8%ae%d9%84%d9%8a-%d9%85%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ac%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%ad-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b3%d9%83%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%b4%d8%b1%d9%82%d9%8a-%d8%ad/>

[42] <https://twitter.com/BabakTaghvaeel/status/1632887029322194949>

https://t.me/mod_gov_sy/32244

[43] <https://www.reuters.com/breakingviews/israel-targets-aleppo-airport-syri...>

<https://apnews.com/article/syria-israel-strikes-aleppo-airport-139ba8dc5...>

Iran Update, March 8, 2023

Iran Update, March 8, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Zachary Coles, and Nicholas Carl

March 8, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime has validated CTP's previous assessment that it is using the recent chemical attacks to set conditions to securitize the country ahead of major national holidays. Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan announced the establishment of a headquarters to manage the upcoming Iranian New Years' celebration with the slogan "a different [new year] with a powerful and professional police" on March 7.[1] Although the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) organizes headquarters such as this one annually, the rhetoric Radan used in discussing this years' celebrations placed heavy emphasis on security and confronting protesters. Radan stated on March 7 that the LEC will not permit citizens to celebrate Chahar Shanbeh Souri—a festival that precedes Nowrouz—the Iranian New Years' holiday—on the last Wednesday of the Persian calendar—in "city squares." He added that celebrations must remain confined to "neighborhoods and alleys." [2] This indicates the regime seeks to keep the holiday celebrations out of city centers where antiregime protesters typically gather for large demonstrations. Iranian officials also have repeatedly described the youth who comprised a core demographic in the recent Mahsa Amini protests as easily excitable. Radan also implicitly warned parents to control their children, stating that "families must remain near their children" during the holidays and "keep an eye on [their children's] enthusiasm." [3] This suggests the regime seeks to convince parents to restrain their children from protesting.

The regime's threatening posture has not yet deterred protest activity nor silenced the population into compliance, though it could have either effect by the holidays. Protest activity continued on March 8, although not to the same widespread extent as the demonstrations on March 7. Protest groups have furthermore called for countrywide demonstrations on March 15. Protest groups have already called for countrywide demonstrations during the upcoming holidays.[4] Both protest groups and individual protesters will have to be much more cautious in the coming days and weeks as they plan and participate in demonstrations. They otherwise risk being identified and captured in a heavily securitized environment, where a mobilized security force could disrupt their networks to such an extent that they would no longer be able to function as organized groups. Despite these risks and the heavy costs they entail, both protesters and the population at large appear undeterred. This could change, however, as the people digest the threatening rhetoric, LEC presence increases, and IRGC operations continue. Protest groups might refrain from publishing further calls for protests and the rest of the population might not respond, cognizant of the risks involved. CTP will continue to monitor these developments in the coming days and weeks and will report any changes if they occur.

The regime also is trying to promote the narrative that protesters and foreign enemies were responsible for the chemical attacks and is censoring individuals who challenge this narrative. Kurdistan Province Chief Justice Hossein Hosseini announced the arrest of three individuals for spreading rumors about student poisonings in Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province on March 8.[5] Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei previously called for the creation of provincial "branches" to confront individuals spreading rumors on March 6.[6] Deputy Interior Minister for Security and Law Enforcement Majid Mir Ahmadi stated on March 8 that an

individual recently arrested in Larestan County, Fars Province for their involvement in student poisonings had shared anti-regime content online and had been imprisoned during “the fall riots.”[7] The Interior Ministry previously accused this individual of participating in “recent riots” on March 7.[8] IRGC-affiliated Tasnim separately published an article on March 8 in which it described the poisoning campaign as the “latest counter-revolutionary excuse to create a crisis inside the country.”[9] This news agency previously published an article on March 7 accusing “counter-revolutionaries” of trying to incite riots by “vandalizing schools and creating an atmosphere of anxiety.”[10] The publication of these articles one day after each other highlights regime efforts to sow public doubt toward the protest groups that have appeared in recent months.

The regime may struggle to sustain the narrative and public buy-in to the argument that the chemical attacks justify an increased security presence throughout the country through till the end of the upcoming holidays. Chahar Shanbeh Souri is on March 14—six days away—and Nowrouz is on March 20—twelve days away. CTP did not observe any poisonings on March 8, moreover. The absence of poisonings may make some Iranians question why the regime continues to increase security and thus undermine the regime’s narrative that it is securitizing the country for the Iranian people’s benefit.

Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) began constructing 500 prefabricated residential units near Aleppo International Airport on March 6, which the PMF may use to establish long-term housing for its troops.[11] PMF-affiliated *Al Mayadeen* claimed the “Al Muhandis Complex” residencies will house local families displaced by the February 6 earthquake.[12] This claim is likely a false narrative the PMF is using to counter recent accusations from Aleppo City residents that the PMF is harassing local women and reappropriating aid to exclusively Shia areas, as CTP reported on March 3.[13] The construction of military encampments and housing in and around Aleppo City supports CTP’s assessment that Iran intends to secure and strengthen positions along the Aleppo-Deir ez Zor transportation route, which is critical for moving military personnel and equipment into and across Syria.

CTP previously assessed that Iran is similarly consolidating its military presence along the Deir ez Zor-Aleppo transportation route with deployments from the Fatemiyoun Division—its Afghan Shia proxy—in southern Deir ez Zor Province. This would enable Iran to secure an important stretch of the M4 highway that leads deeper into the country toward Aleppo. Iran appears to be assigning control over certain sectors of the Deir ez Zor-Aleppo transportation route to specific elements of its proxy network. Fatemiyoun militants are stationed in Deir ez Zor Province in the vicinity of the security zone around the M4 where ISIS has concentrated many of its attacks at least since August of 2022. PMF units are concentrated in and around Aleppo City.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime has validated CTP’s previous assessment that it is using the recent chemical attacks to set conditions to securitize the country ahead of major national holidays.**
- **The regime’s threatening posture has not yet deterred protest activity nor silenced the population into compliance.**
- **Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) began constructing 500 prefabricated residential units near Aleppo International Airport on March 6, which the PMF may use to establish long-term housing for its troops.**
- **At least six protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on March 8.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least six protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on March 8. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Rasht, Gilan Province[14]

- **Size:** Small

- **Demographic:** Commemorating International Women's Day

Tehran City, Tehran Province[15]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Commemorating International Women's Day
- **Notes:** Chanting "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom."

Tehran City, Tehran Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Women holding banners commemorating International Women's Day

Tehran City, Tehran Province[17]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 8
- **Demographic:** Commemorating International Women's Day
- **Notes:** Protest occurred in the evening

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

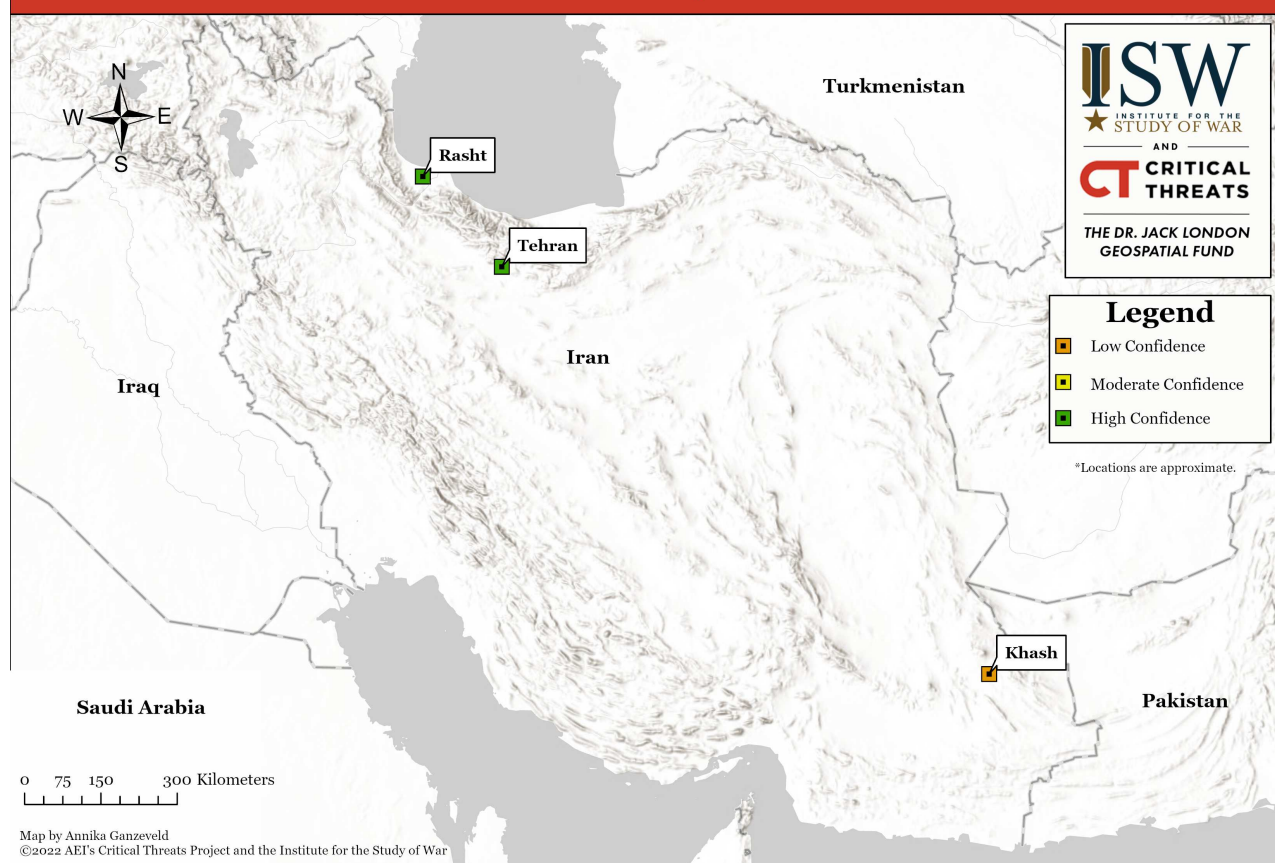
Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[18]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Women demanding the release of Sunni cleric Moulavi Abdol Majid Moroudzahi

Tehran City, Tehran Province[19]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Commemorating International Women's Day
- **Notes:** Singing the "Song of Equality"

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 8, 6:00 PM



Western media has reported in recent days on regime efforts to silence victims of the recent chemical attacks, including parents, teachers, and medical professionals.[20] CNN interviewed four medical professionals, all of whom claimed that unidentified regime forces had pressured them not to reveal any information about the poisonings. Sky News separately reported that regime security forces ordered school personnel, teachers, and students to not discuss poisoning attacks or else report false information.[21] One medical professional Iran reported that the regime was monitoring their phone. Security forces have cracked down on individuals protesting the school poisonings as well, as CTP previously reported.[22]

Prominent reformist politician Mohammad Ali Abtahi stated on March 8 that the present conflicts in Iranian society will eventually lead to necessary but “smooth” and “peaceful” changes to which the regime will accommodate itself.[23] Abtahi’s belief that the regime will easily accept social and political change aligns well with statements made by former reformist President Mohammad Khatami. Khatami has similarly called for reforms premised on the belief that the regime would be willing and able to implement such reforms.[24] Abtahi is a close associate of Khatami, having served in his administration in several different roles, including as his vice president for parliamentary affairs and chief of staff.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met with Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara to discuss Israeli involvement in the Caucasus, among other issues, on March 8.[25] Iranian officials have repeatedly expressed concern about an alleged Israeli intelligence presence in Azerbaijan and called for Azerbaijan to reject any cooperation with Israel in recent months.[26] Iranian officials may seek to persuade Turkey to address their concerns vis-a-vis Azerbaijan after the regime has failed to resolve these issues with Baku directly. The two ministers also discussed economic cooperation and common security threats emanating from Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq,

Economic Affairs

The Iranian rial depreciated slightly from 502,500 rials to one US dollar on March 7 to 513,000 rials to one US dollar on March 8.[27]

President Ebrahim Raisi chaired a meeting of the Government Economic Coordination Headquarters on March 8.[28] The headquarters approved a banking reform resolution meant to “increase the access of households and economic actors to banking facilities and credit and direct liquidity toward productive and job-creating activities.”

External Security and Military Affairs

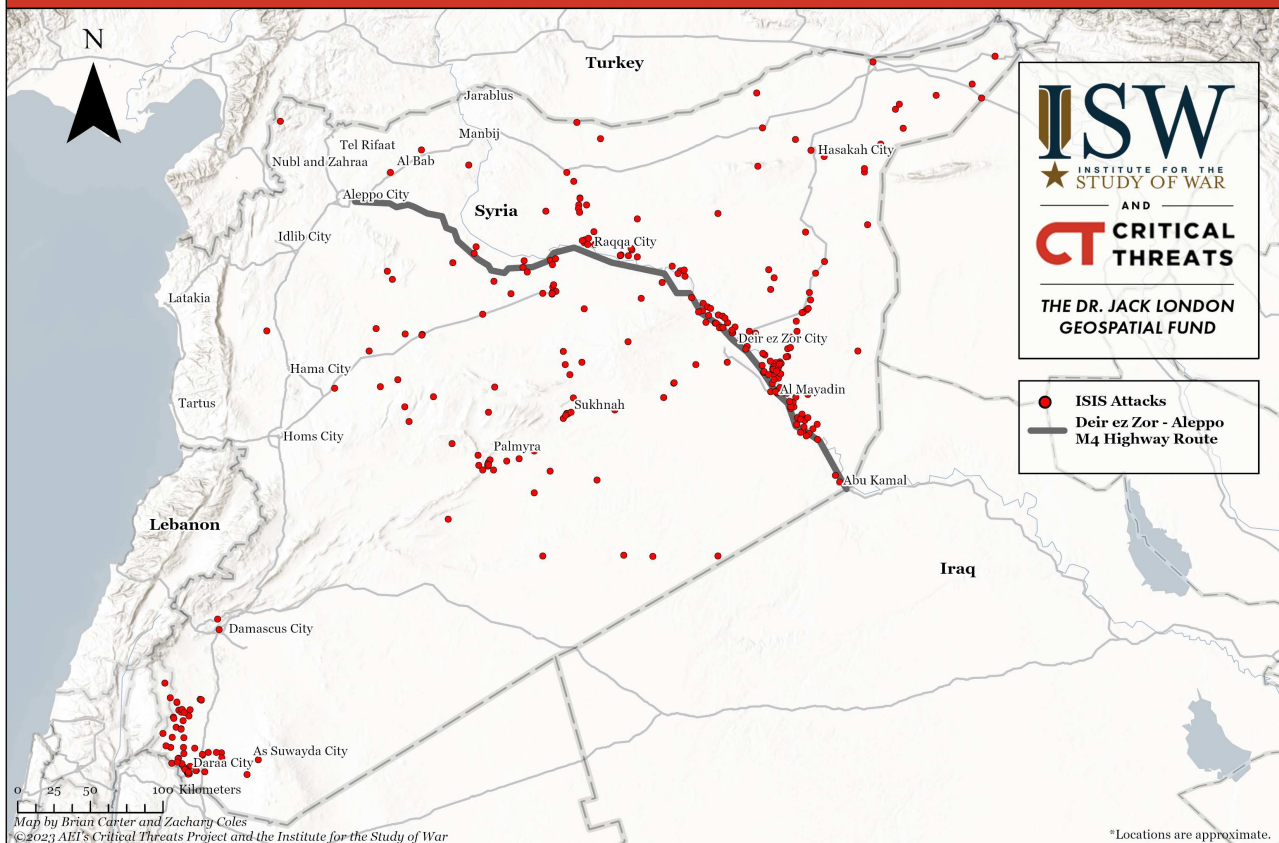
US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani and Defense Minister Thabet Mohammad Saeed al Abbasi in Baghdad on March 7. Austin discussed continued bilateral counterterrorism cooperation against ISIS in his meetings. [29] Sudani’s office released a statement reaffirming his government’s “keenness to strengthen and consolidate relations with the US.” [30] Iranian-backed Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba leader Akram al Kaabi and Kataib Hezbollah leader Abu Ali al Askari denounced Austin’s visit as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and called for Iraqi political parties to reconsider government policy related to the US military presence in Iraq. [31] Iranian-backed Asaib Ahl al Haq military spokesperson Jawad al Talibawi released a statement directly calling upon Sudani to expel foreign forces from Iraq, referencing a 2020 non-binding parliamentary resolution to remove all US forces from the country. [32] Expelling American influence from the Middle East is one of Tehran’s highest strategic objectives.

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani met with tribal and security leadership in Diyala Province on March 8 to discuss the February 20 massacre that locals blamed on Iranian-backed militias.[33] Sudani reassured local leadership that his administration intends to pursue legal measures against perpetrators of the recent violence. Sudani also partially acknowledged requests from Iraqi MPs in Diyala that he replace Iraqi security forces stationed in the province with new units and remove the Shia militias allegedly involved in the massacre. [34] He announced that he would deploy unspecified military reinforcements to the area within the next two weeks but made no mention of the Shia militias present in Diyala. [35] CTP previously reported that Sudani formed a committee to investigate the role of security forces’ potential negligence in facilitating the February 20 massacre. [36]

Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) began constructing 500 prefabricated residential units near Aleppo International Airport on March 6.[37] PMF-affiliated *Al Mayadeen* claimed the “Al Muhandis Complex” residencies will house local families displaced by the February 6 earthquake. [38] CTP is considering the hypothesis that the PMF will use the residences to house its troops. The construction of military encampments and housing in and around Aleppo City would support CTP’s assessment that Iran intends to secure and strengthen positions along the Aleppo-Deir ez Zor transportation route, which is critical for moving military personnel and equipment into and across Syria.

CTP previously assessed that Iran is similarly consolidating its military presence along the Deir ez Zor-Aleppo transportation route with deployments from the Fatemiyoun Division—its Afghan Shia proxy—in southern Deir ez Zor Province. This would enable Iran to secure an important stretch of the M4 highway that leads deeper into the country toward Aleppo. Iran appears to be assigning control over certain sectors of the Deir ez Zor-Aleppo transportation route to specific elements of its proxy network. Fatemiyoun militants are stationed in Deir ez Zor Province in the vicinity of the security zone around the M4 where ISIS has concentrated many of its attacks at least since August of 2022. PMF units are concentrated in and around Aleppo City.

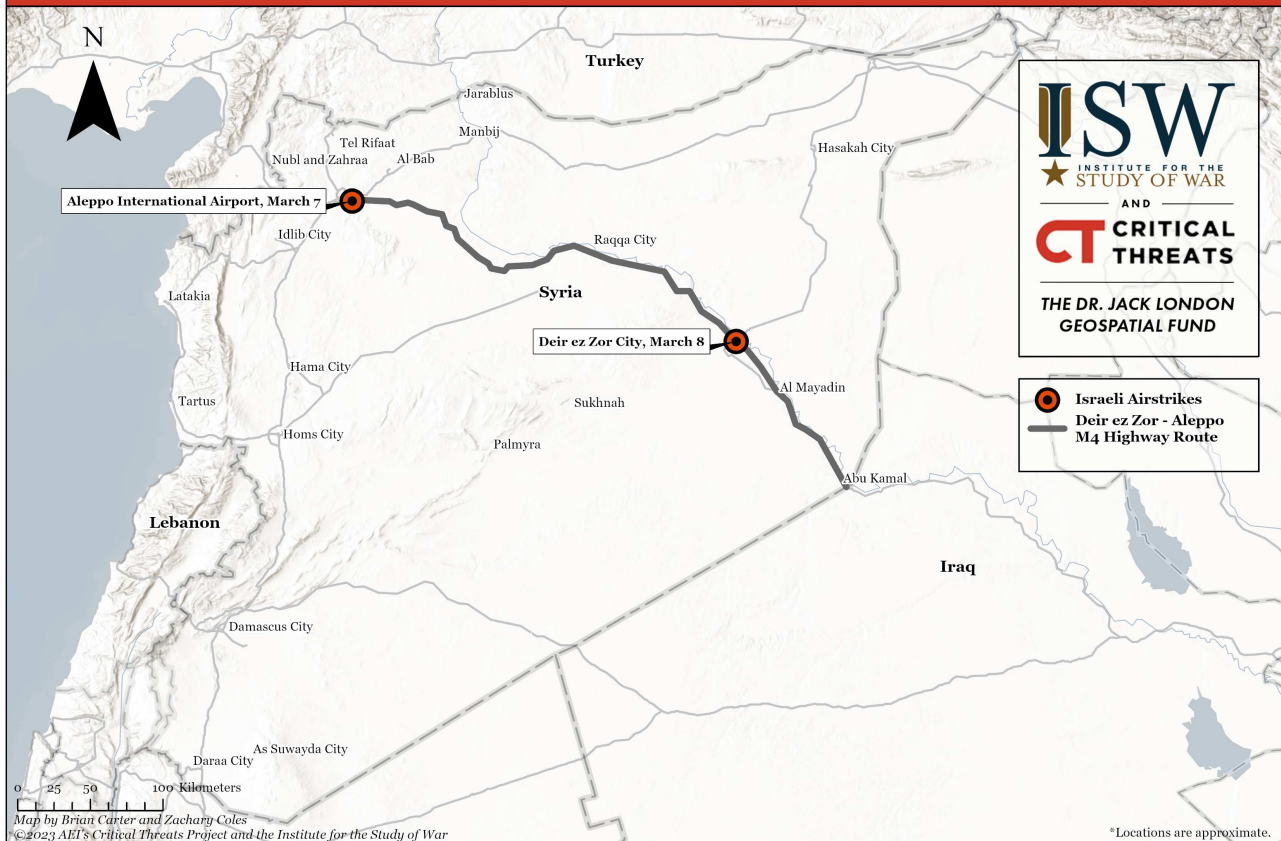
ISIS Attacks in Syria Since August 2022



Israel likely conducted a drone strike a truck likely smuggling Iranian military equipment and personnel in Deir ez Zor City, Deir ez Zor Province on March 8. Imagery from social media shows a charred truck parked next to a destroyed building after the attack.[39] *Deir Ezzor 24* and *Sada al Sharqieh* claimed that the destroyed building served as a munitions storage facility and headquarters for the IRGC Quds Force and local Iranian-backed militia officials.[40] Syrian state media attributed the attack without evidence to an ISIS IED attack.[41] Local Syrian media reported that the drone strike wounded 15 people and killed at least seven more, including three Fatemiyoun personnel and a Quds Force official.[42]

Syrian opposition media reported that ISIS militants assassinated the IRGC Quds Force Commander for Deir ez Zor and Eastern Homs provinces—Hajj Mehdi—on March 4. [43] CTP cannot corroborate these reports. The Quds Force relies on eastern Syria as a critical node in its logical routes into Syria and will likely give priority to designating a new commander for the provinces. Such an effort may involve Quds Force officials meeting in Deir ez Zor City—an important command-and-control hub for coordinating with Quds Force leadership elsewhere in Syria—to address any disruption to regular operations.

Israeli Airstrikes on Iranian Targets March 7 and 8, 2023



[1] [https://www.dot.entekhab.dot](https://www.dot.entekhab.dot.ir/fa/news/718103/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF)

ir/fa/news/718103/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF

[2] [https://www.dot.entekhab.dot](https://www.dot.entekhab.dot.ir/fa/news/718103/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-%)

ir/fa/news/718103/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-%

%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-
%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-
%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-
%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-
%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF

[3] [https://www](https://www.entekhabdot.ir/fa/news/718103/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF) dot entekhab dot

ir/fa/news/718103/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-
%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-
%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-
%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-
%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-
%D9%87%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-
%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85-
%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%B1-
%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-
%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-
%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-
%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF

[4] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1633193570449473539?cxt=HHwWh... ;

<https://twitter.com/mahallatezanjan/status/1633462562384912384?cxt=HHwWg...>

[5] [https://www](https://www.irna.ir/news/85051321/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DB%B3-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B4%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1) dot irna dot

ir/news/85051321/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-
%DB%B3-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-
%D8%B4%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B9%D9%87-
%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-
%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B5-
%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-
%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-
%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1

[6] [https://www](https://www.entekhabdot.ir/fa/news/717876/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D9%82%D9%88%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%81%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA) dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/717876/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-
%D9%82%D9%88%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C%D9%87-
%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8
%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-
%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%81%DB%8C-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA

[7] [https://www](https://www.entekhabdot.ir/fa/news/718119/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%BA%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF) dot entekhab dot

ir/fa/news/718119/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-
%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-
%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-
%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%AF-
%D8%BA%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%
86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85-
%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-
%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF

%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B0%DA%A9%D8%B1-
%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023>

[9] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/17/2864227/>- هاجت-شرافت-هاجت-
خراپکاری-شرافتمندانه-چه-کسانی-برای-ناامنی-در-جامعه-زمینه-سازی-می-کنند

[10] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/17/2864227/>- هاجت-شرافت-هاجت-
خراپکاری-شرافتمندانه-چه-کسانی-برای-ناامنی-در-جامعه-زمینه-سازی-می-کنند

[11] <https://twitter.com/AymanDas1/status/1633001269446033409?s=20>

[12] <https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b4%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d8%b9%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%82%d9%8a-%d9%8a%d8%a8%d9%86%d9%8a-%d9%85%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%b2%d9%84-%d9%85%d8%a4%d9%82%d8%aa%d8%a9-%d9%84%d8%b6%d8%ad%d8%a7%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b2%d9%84%d8%b2%d8%a7%d9%84-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%ad%d9%84%d8%a8>

[13] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633521984934928390?cxt=HHwWjICzz...> ;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1633538278254075928?cxt=HHwWsICzp... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633554798069809157?cxt=HHwWioCww...> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633549925450407936?cxt=HHwWgICz1...>

[15] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1633399307230408705?cxt=HHwWgsCzv... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633410065809002496?cxt=HHwWgMC-k...>

[16] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1633472544861741059?cxt=HHwWhoCzrYCo... ;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1633419394364604424?cxt=HHwWkICwp...

[17] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1633572819974881281?cxt=HHwWgoCwl... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633548497310953473?cxt=HHwWgsC9m...> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633507916538945543?cxt=HHwWjoC98...>

[18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633521402996301854?cxt=HHwWvIC96...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1633530612928880640?cxt=HHwWgIDRIYHc...

[19] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633409168051716096?cxt=HHwWgIC2q...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1633484310513696768?cxt=HHwWgIC-pe3U...

[20] <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/06/middleeast/hfr-iran-suspected-poisoning-g...>

[21] <https://news.sky.com/story/whats-going-on-in-irans-schools-is-deeply-sin...>

[22] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023#_ednf4...

[23] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401113022208/> نه-اعتقاد-به-براندازی-داریم-نه-راه-حلی-برای-مشکلات-درگیری-فعلی

[24] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401111612349>

[25] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85051478/> ir/news/85051478/%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%85 ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85051249/> ir/news/85051249/%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88-%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA%DA%AF%D9%88-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85051365/> ir/news/85051365/%D9%81%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86-%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87 ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85051341/> ir/news/85051341/%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%AF-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%DB%8C%D9%84-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%87

[26] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-19#_... ; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-21-2023#_e...

[27] bonbast dot com

[28] <https://president.ir/fa/142883> ; <http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/135106/>

[29] <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3320887/secr...>

[30] <https://apnews.com/article/lloyd-austin-iraq-baghdad-islamic-state-c65a6...> ; <https://www.pmo.iq/pme/press2023en/7-3-202303en.htm>

[31] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/> %D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%BA%D8%B6%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF ; <https://twitter.com/abualia>

laskry1/status/1633168263562641409/photo/1; https://twitter.com/Akram_Alkabee/status/1633191552251052035

[32] <https://ahluhaq.com/2023/03/08/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b7%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a8%d8%a7%d9%88%d9%8a-%d8%b2%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%b2%d9%8a%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%af%d9%81%d8%a7%d8%b9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%85%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%83%d9%8a/>
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/06/middleeast/iraq-us-troops-explainer-intl/...>

[33] <https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89>

[34] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A>; <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/node/6233823>

[35] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A>; <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/node/6233823>

[36] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023?mkt_to...

[37] <https://twitter.com/AymanDas1/status/1633001269446033409?s=20>

[38] <https://www.almayadeen.net/news/politics/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b4%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b4%d8%b9%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%82%d9%8a-%d9%8a%d8%a8%d9%86%d9%8a-%d9%85%d9%86%d8%a7%d8%b2%d9%84-%d9%85%d8%a4%d9%82%d8%aa%d8%a9-%d9%84%d8%b6%d8%ad%d8%a7%d9%8a%d8%a7-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b2%d9%84%d8%b2%d8%a7%d9%84-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%ad%d9%84%d8%a8>

[39] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

[40] <https://twitter.com/DeirEzzor24/status/1633361747342942212?s=20>; https://twitter.com/Sada_AlSharqieh/status/1633551033094774789?s=20

[41] <https://sana dot sy/en/?p=302923>

[42] https://twitter.com/Sada_AlSharqieh/status/1633551033094774789?s=20; <https://www.syriahr dot com/7-%D9%82%D9%80-%D9%80%D8%AA%D9%80-%D9%80%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%87%D9%85-3-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86/592230/>

[43] <https://eyeofeuphrates dot com/index.php/ar/news/2023/03/07/7908>; https://twitter.com/Sharqya_reporte/status/1632104048315834368?s=20

Iran Update, March 9, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Zachary Coles, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 9, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime likely assesses that it is losing its cultural campaign for Iranian women. Iranian women are reportedly defying the mandatory hijab law regularly in major urban areas in public, despite Iranian leaders' repeated emphasis on adhering to the hijab requirement. [1] Bloomberg, after interviewing a female Tehran resident, reported on March 8 that parts of Tehran resemble Istanbul, Dubai, and Beirut, where both veiled and unveiled women are present in public areas. [2] Iranian women who refuse to veil in public may believe that the regime will not violently confront them because it is fearful of reigniting public unrest. Several groups of women--some of which included unveiled women--organized protests in cities across Iran on March 8 to commemorate International Women's Day, moreover. [3] Their continued bravery underscores how many Iranian women remain determined to challenge the regime and have not lost confidence since the culmination of the Mahsa Amini protest movement in January 2023.

The regime is determined to win its cultural campaign by intensifying indoctrination efforts, however. President Ebrahim Raisi gave two speeches on March 9 in which he emphasized the need to prevent the Westernization of Iranian society. Raisi stated that the regime must protect Iranian youth from the West's "cultural vulgarity" during a sociocultural gathering with teenage girls. [4] He separately headed a meeting focused on society on March 9 in which he asserted that Iranian girls and women regard the hijab as a "safety-creating priority." [5] These remarks from Raisi are two recent examples of the near-constant emphasis that Iranian leaders are placing on the importance of the hijab law and the indoctrination of the youth. Iranian officials frequently attempt to portray the mandatory hijab as a measure to protect women from sins and harm--such as degradation, prostitution, and moral corruption--that these officials claim are rampant in the West. [6] Raisi argues that "explanation jihad"--the regime theory that ideologizing the population will increase public support for the political establishment--is the best way to prevent losing its female population to Western values. [7]

Raisi and other regime officials are focusing on coopting Iranian women rather than addressing the Iranian people's real concerns. Raisi stated on March 9 that "[the regime has] no doubt that women and girls who make us proud and are educated in the school of the Islamic Revolution will have the most support and respect for the law." [8] This statement underscores Raisi's disconnect from the general population because while he celebrates those who have been successfully indoctrinated, he fails to mention the chemical attacks which have recently hit Iran's education system. His praise for girls and women who comply with the mandatory hijab law implies that those who do not comply bring shame upon the regime, a statement that will likely alienate women and girls who are not aligned with the regime culturally. While Raisi has made similarly tone-deaf statements previously, these statements are particularly jarring as Raisi made them only one day after International Women's Day. They reflect the regime's effort to portray itself as the actual defender of women from the dangers and harms it claims beset women in Western societies despite the atrocities the regime itself has committed against its own women and girls.

Several protest groups appear to be trying to challenge regime efforts to securitize Iran ahead of the upcoming national holidays. The neighborhood youth groups representing Tehran, Mashhad, and Zanjan cities and Khuzestan Province have called for countrywide demonstrations on March 13-15 in anticipation of Chahar Shanbeh Souri—a major national holiday on March 15. [9] Protest organizers circulated the calls immediately after the regime’s security services indicated that they will be mobilizing to securitize the country during Chahar Shanbeh Souri and Nowrouz (the Persian new year celebrations), as CTP previously reported.[10] The protest organizers may be partly responding to the regime’s enhanced security posture. Some of the calls for demonstrations even mirror Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan’s threatening March 7 statement. Radan expressed the LEC’s willingness to arrest those who behave “above the law” during celebrations and warned parents that they will be held responsible for the actions of their children in order to deter large gatherings during Chahar Shanbeh Souri. The LEC Commander further announced that celebrations will not be permitted “in city squares” and must be confined to “neighborhoods and alleys.” The Tehran Neighborhood Youth Group contrastingly called on protesters to gather in the main city squares and streets of the country on the days leading up to and including Chahar Shanbeh Souri. Though other protest groups have not made such an explicit reference to Radan’s statement, their call for large gatherings during Chahar Shanbeh Souri is meant to confront the regime as it tries to securitize Iran during the holidays.

Protest groups will have to be much more cautious in the coming period as they plan and participate in demonstrations. They otherwise risk a major disruption of their networks by the state security services in a heavily securitized environment. The regime could still deter demonstrations from materializing, especially as security forces increase their presence in major urban centers and continue their threatening rhetoric and arrests of protesters. It is nevertheless noteworthy that protest groups have been bold enough to initially challenge the regime’s securitized attitude towards the holidays.

CTP has not observed any poisonings over the past couple of days, consistent with the steady decline in the number of attacks over the past week. The cessation of attacks follows the regime’s increasingly securitized rhetoric and action. The cessation could be the result of the regime’s increased security measures, but, if so, the question arises why the regime did not take such measures much earlier or at least after the major uptick in poisonings that began on March 4. [11] Alternatively, the drop in the number of attacks could be explained by the fact that schools have been closed for a long weekend from Wednesday through Friday. On the other hand, several chemical attacks have targeted locations other than schools and demographics other than schoolchildren, so the long weekend by itself should not have led to the complete cessation of incidents. If neither the long weekend nor the perfect efficiency of the regime’s security response explains the cessation of attacks, then the reason for the cessation remains as unclear as the identities of the perpetrators.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime likely assesses that it is losing its cultural campaign for Iranian women. The regime is determined to win its cultural campaign by intensifying indoctrination efforts, however. President Ebrahim Raisi and other regime officials are focusing on coopting Iranian women rather than addressing the Iranian people’s real concerns.**
- **Several protest groups appear to be trying to challenge regime efforts to securitize Iran ahead of the upcoming national holidays.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city across one province.**
- **Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met separately with senior Syrian and Turkish officials ahead of Syria-Turkey normalization talks scheduled in Moscow in the coming weeks.**
- **An OSINT Twitter account posted satellite imagery on March 9 of an Iranian over-the-horizon radar system allegedly deployed to an unspecified location in Syria.**
- **The Iraqi parliament delayed a vote on the Shia Coordination Framework-backed election law.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 9. CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans in the metro



Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on March 8. The two discussed economic cooperation and security affairs, according to the official Iranian and Iraqi readouts.[13]

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met separately with senior Syrian and Turkish officials ahead of Syria-Turkey normalization talks scheduled in Moscow in the coming weeks. Abdollahian met with Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara and told Turkish media on March 8 that Tehran seeks to play an active role in the upcoming Russian-hosted negotiations about normalizing ties between Ankara and Damascus.[14] Abdollahian also met with Latakia Provincial Governor Amer Hilal in Latakia and with Syrian President Bashar al Assad and Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad in Damascus on March 9.[15]

Abdollahian's March 9 visit is the latest component of a larger Iranian effort to set negotiating conditions with the Assad regime ahead of the next round of meetings in Moscow. CTP has observed an unusual frequency of Iranian diplomatic visits to Syria in recent weeks, likely in support of this effort.[16] Tehran is likely trying to shape the Ankara-Damascus normalization discussions in a manner favorable to Iranian interests—the continued Iranian military presence in

northwest Syria, restraining Turkish military activity in northern Syria, or possibly restoring Assad regime control over Idlib province.

Economic Affairs

The Iranian rial appreciated from 513,000 rials to one US dollar on March 8 to around 498,000 rials to one dollar on March 9.[17] The rial has regained almost 21 percent of its value since it hit a record low of around 601,500 rials to the dollar on February 26.[18] Domestic media outlets have largely shifted their primary focus away from the currency crisis to the recent chemical attacks in recent days, which has likely curbed the drop in public confidence in the currency at least for the moment.

External Security and Military Affairs

An OSINT Twitter account posted satellite imagery on March 9 of an Iranian over-the-horizon radar system allegedly deployed to an unspecified location in Syria.[19] CTP cannot corroborate this claim. CTP has previously reported that Iranian senior military officials have publicly discussed deploying Iranian-made Khordad-15 or Bavar-373 air defense systems to the Syrian theater.[20] CTP also reported on March 3 that Fatemiyoun militants—the IRGC Quds Force Afghan Shia force—will reportedly travel to Iran to undergo training on unspecified radar systems.[21] Iran may be preparing to send the Fatemiyoun to operate the air defense systems that Iranian senior military officials have discussed deploying. The March 9 satellite imagery could be an early indicator of such a scenario.

The Iraqi parliament delayed a vote on the Shia Coordination Framework-backed election law previously scheduled for March 9.[22] Iraq's Parliamentary Legal Committee released a statement that it was reviewing amendments submitted by independent and minority political blocs. The proposed election law, backed by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's State of Law Coalition, would undo 2019 election reforms that protect proportional representation and return to an electoral system that heavily favors the State of Law Coalition and other major parties. [23] Demonstrations erupted across Iraq against the Shia Coordination Framework on March 5, and protesters threatened to continue if the election law went forward for a vote.[24]

Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia militants likely used intimidation to remove certain Kurdish officials from office in Tel Kayf District, Ninewa Province. Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) parliamentary bloc members accused an unidentified “armed faction” of paying individuals to protest against local officials. *Shafaq* reported on March 9 that unidentified militants coerced several local officials in Tel Kayf, including the district commissioner and directors for education, electricity, and municipalities, to resign.[25] KDP parliamentarian Kavin Saeed warned that unspecified armed groups may intervene in basic government administration and service provisions to ignite ethnic tensions.[26] The KDP bloc called on Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Sudani to intervene and prevent further violations.[27]

Lebanese Hezbollah media promoted the narrative that the US is responsible for the recent protests in Iran. Lebanese Hezbollah (LH)-affiliated media outlet *Al Ahd* published a readout from LH Central Council member Sheikh Hassan Baghdadi's meeting with unspecified religious scholars in Qom, Iran on March 9. *Al Ahd* highlighted Baghdadi's warning that Western and Israeli intelligence seek to incite domestic unrest across the region similar to what he claimed has occurred in Iran.[28] *Al Ahd* published the original article exclusively in Arabic, suggesting that Baghdadi's message was meant for an Arabic-speaking audience. The *Al Ahd* article follows protests against Iran-aligned political actors across Iraq on March 5, suggesting a potentially coordinated media campaign to discourage and discredit anti-Iranian protests in Iraq and elsewhere in the region.

The IRGC Navy commissioned the Shahid Mahdavi forward-base ship and several dozen fast attack craft equipped with missile-launch systems in a ceremony at Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province on March 9.[29] Some Iranian state media reported that the IRGC Navy received 95 fast attack craft, while other outlets reported 99.[30] The Shahid Mahdavi can

reportedly be equipped with surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles and host drones, fast attack craft, and helicopters. The Iranian Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex (ISIOCO) —owned by state-owned industrial giant IDRO—constructed the ship.[31]

[1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-08/international-women-s...>

[2] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-08/international-women-s...>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023>

[4] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85052157/%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D8%A8%DA%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1](https://www.irna.ir/news/85052157/%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D8%A8%DA%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1)

[5] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87](https://www.irna.ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87)

[6] [https://dolat dot ir/detail/398199](https://dolat.ir/detail/398199)

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-31-2023>

[8] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87](https://www.irna.ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87)

[9] https://twitter.com/javanane_/status/1633847135987810304?cxt=HHwWgIC-3Y... ;

[10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023>

[11] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-5-2023>

[12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633911321744879624?cxt=HHwWkMC98...> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633874165597085697?cxt=HHwWgoDRg...>

[13] [http://www.president dot ir/fa/142884](http://www.president.ir/fa/142884); [www.pmo dot iq/press2023/8-3-202205.htm](http://www.pmo.ir/iq/press2023/8-3-202205.htm)

[14] [https://www dot mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-iran-disisleri-bakani-huseyin-emir-abdullahiyan-ile-gorusmesi--8-mart-2023--ankara.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-iran-disisleri-bakani-huseyin-emir-abdullahiyan-ile-gorusmesi--8-mart-2023--ankara.en.mfa); [https://www dot rudaw.net/english/middleeast/08032023](https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/08032023)

[15] [https://iranpress dot com/content/74880/amir-abdollahian-arrives-latakia-airport](https://iranpress.com/content/74880/amir-abdollahian-arrives-latakia-airport); [https://sana dot sy/en/?p=303071](https://sana.sy/en/?p=303071)

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023>; <https://sana dot sy/?p=1854095>; <https://sana dot sy/en/?p=302512>; <https://www.alwatanonline dot com/%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%a7%d9%81%d8%b8-%d8%ad%d9%84%d8%a8-%d9%8a%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%88%d9%81%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%b1%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%b1/>; <https://sana dot sy/en/?p=302306>; https://t.me/mod_gov_sy/32180; <https://en.isna dot ir/news/1401112620313/Iran-s-ambassador-meets-with-Syrian-deputy-FM>; <https://thiqa-agency dot com/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%80-%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%84/>

[17] <https://bonbast.com/>

[18] <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/iran-rial-plunges-new-lows-am...>

[19] https://twitter.com/morghe_tondar/status/1633525531596713984; <https://www.syria dot tv/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D8%AC%D8%B1-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%9F>

[20] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023>

[21] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023>

[22] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9>

[23] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7>

[24] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82->

%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-
%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-
%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%BA%D9%88

[25] <https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%81%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B3-%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A8%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%88%D9%89>

[26] <https://www.kurdistan24.net/ar/story/36451-%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81>

[27] <https://www.kurdistan24.net/ar/story/36451-%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81>

[28] <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=51620&cid=113>

[29] www.irna.ir/news/85051915

[30] www.defapress.ir/fa/news/577736; www.irna.ir/news/85051915

[31] <https://news.usni.org/2023/01/03/iran-building-drone-aircraft-carrier-fr...>

Iran Update, March 10, 2023

Iran Update, March 10, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, and Nicholas Carl

March 10, 2023, 6:30 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime is continuing efforts to dissuade Iranian citizens from celebrating Chahar Shanbeh Souri to forestall potential protests on that holiday. Iranians traditionally celebrate Chahar Shanbeh Souri—the last Wednesday of the Persian calendar year—by gathering in streets and jumping over fires. The regime fears that the combination of celebratory gatherings, fires, and a general lively atmosphere on this holiday will create an environment conducive to unrest. Friday prayer leaders throughout Iran used their sermons on March 10 to discourage celebrations for Chahar Shanbeh Souri. Tehran Interim Friday Prayer Leader Ahmad Khatami warned Iranians during his sermon that many people have “lost their lives, eyes, and limbs” while celebrating Chahar Shanbeh Souri.[1] Khatami added that this holiday is an “unwise custom” and called on Iranian youth to listen to his “heartfelt speech.”[2] Sanandaj Friday Prayer Leader Mamosta Faegh Rostami separately warned that Iranians should not allow the “fleeting pleasures” of Chahar Shanbeh Souri to cause a “lifetime of regret” during his sermon.[3] Abadan Friday Prayer Leader Abdol Hossein Ghobishavi additionally called on parents to “manage” their children on Chahar Shanbeh Souri, echoing Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan’s warning to parents on March 7 that they must control their children’s “enthusiasm” during this holiday. This coordinated rhetoric from Friday prayer leaders suggests that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his inner circle are directing this messaging campaign. Friday prayer leaders receive guidance for the content of their Friday sermons from the Office of the Supreme Leader. The regime’s continuing efforts to prevent Chahar Shanbeh Souri festivities validates CTP’s previous assessment that the regime is using the recent chemical attacks to set conditions to securitize the country ahead of major national holidays.[4]

The regime’s calls to not celebrate Chahar Shanbeh Souri may be part of a broader campaign to Islamize Iranian society. Chahar Shanbeh Souri and Nowrouz—the Iranian New Year that follows Chahar Shanbeh Souri—both have Zoroastrian origins. The regime has historically tolerated—but not enthusiastically endorsed—celebrations of these holidays, especially Chahar Shanbeh Souri. Regime officials also are likely criticizing Chahar Shanbeh Souri in order to achieve their short-term goal of preventing protests on this holiday. Downplaying the significance of this holiday is in line with the regime’s longstanding effort to Islamize Iranian society. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has previously explicitly called for Iran to become more Islamic. The third and fourth steps of Khamenei’s “five steps of the revolution” are to “establish an Islamic state” and “establish an Islamic country.”[5]

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continued to hold the regime responsible for the poisoning campaign and suggested that the aim of the campaign was essentially to Taliban-ize Iran. Abdol Hamid characterized the student poisonings as a “form of protest suppression” targeting schoolchildren who have protested the regime during his Friday sermon on March 3.[6] The cleric also criticized the regime for its unwillingness to protect schoolchildren and suggested that the regime knows who is responsible for the attacks and has lied to the public about them. Abdol Hamid expanded on these accusations in his Friday sermon on March 10, during which he suggested that the aim of the regime-tolerated campaign was to prevent girls from

pursuing an education.[7] The poisoning campaign has primarily targeted schoolgirls, as CTP previously reported.[8] Abdol Hamid spoke at length about women's ability to advance knowledge and make contributions to culture and society, stating "women should have the same rights as men" to contribute to the various fields of knowledge and that the regime should "make the appropriate plans for women" in this regard. Abdol Hamid also mentioned the Taliban at the end of his speech, possibly to intentionally or inadvertently invite congregants to consider the comparison between the regime and Taliban.

Abdol Hamid furthermore used his March 10 sermon to counter the regime narrative that the regime empowers women and promotes feminism. He underscored the need to prevent "local culture" from overpowering global trends and from contradicting "the commands of Islam with respect to women's rights." [9] He furthermore called on "Islamic regimes" to look to the global situation of women, including under secular states, and see what "arrangements they have made for women" such that women have been able to contribute to "theoretical, social, and practical advancements." Abdol Hamid may be responding to regime officials' near-constant assertion that the mandatory hijab law helps achieve equality while the West promotes moral corruption and promiscuity. President Ebrahim Raisi, for instance, stated on March 09 that the Islamic Republic's mandatory veiling laws have protected Iranian women from the West's "cultural vulgarity," as CTP previously reported.[10] Abdol Hamid contrastingly argued that Western secular states are the ones allowing women to flourish. CTP does not interpret Abdol Hamid's rhetoric as him calling for a secular state but rather him trying to counter the regime's public narrative.

Abdol Hamid has continually demonstrated since September 2022 a kind of savviness vis-a-vis his public messaging and efforts to shape the domestic information space. His Friday prayer sermons typically contain a direct response to recent regime rhetoric or other references to popular news hooks in Iran. It is noteworthy that Abdol Hamid has returned to reoccurring themes in his later sermons, only modifying them to apply to recent regime statements and actions. He has never called for violence against the regime during these sermons, though has supported calls for a referendum on the Islamic Republic. Abdol Hamid therefore appears to be carefully balance his actions and rhetoric to pressure the regime without instigating an overt escalation. The regime may be tolerating Abdol Hamid's continued criticism for now largely because he has not yet called for a violent uprising against the political establishment. Some Iranian leaders may, in fact, view Abdol Hamid begrudgingly as a restraining influence given the different anti-regime militant groups that operate in Sistan and Baluchistan Province and promote separatism.

Iran and Saudi Arabia reestablished bilateral relations on March 10—seven years after severing diplomatic ties in 2016. Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani signed a tripartite agreement to this end with Saudi National Security Advisor Musaid bin Mohammad al Aiban and senior Chinese diplomat Wang Yi in Beijing on March 10. Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to normalize relations and reopen their embassies in the months ahead.[11] Shamkhani stated that this agreement will strengthen "regional stability and security" and increase "cooperation among the countries of the Persian Gulf and Islamic world in managing existing challenges." [12] Iranian officials and state media are portraying this agreement as a "big failure" for the US and Israel.[13] It is unclear, however, whether this agreement will lead to Tehran and Riyadh resolving the old and complicated issues between them—such as Iran's involvement in the Yemeni conflict and Saudi Arabia's energy investments in Iraq. Overcoming these issues would require significant diplomatic and political breakthroughs that the two parties have not yet come close to achieving.

Senior Iranian officials engaged Iraqi leaders on March 8 likely to discuss the normalization of ties with Saudi Arabia and the implications for Iran-Iraq relations. Shamkhani held a phone call with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani, during which he thanked the Iraqi central government for its efforts to mediate between Tehran and Riyadh.[14] Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian similarly held a phone call with Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Fuad Hossein to discuss the normalization of relations.[15] Iraq has often been a theater of competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, especially over economic and political influence.

Key Takeaways

- The Iranian regime is continuing efforts to dissuade Iranian citizens from celebrating Chahar Shanbeh Souri to forestall potential protests on that holiday.
- Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continued to hold the regime responsible for the poisoning campaign and suggested that the aim of the campaign was essentially to Taliban-ize Iran.
- Iran and Saudi Arabia reestablished bilateral relations—seven years after severing diplomatic ties in 2016.
- At least two protests occurred in two cities across one province.

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least two protests occurred in two cities across one province on March 10. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Zabol, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals demanding that the Foreign Affairs Ministry pursue Iran's rights to the Helmand River.
- **Notes:** This event was not an anti-regime protest and was reported by regime-affiliated news outlets.

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[17]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting after prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's weekly Friday prayer sermon.



Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on March 10.[18] They may have discussed Iranian military support to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The phone call comes one day after Russian forces conducted a large-scale missile attack across Ukraine on March 9.[19] The attack also involved Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones.

External Security and Military Affairs

Iranian-backed Shia militias are likely taking advantage of security deployments to Diyala to target opposition groups. On February 20, likely Iranian-backed Shia militants massacred unarmed Sunnis in al Jayalah village, Khalis, Diyala province.[20] The Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee led by Badr-affiliated chair Abbas al Zamili conducted a fact-finding mission to Diyala province on March 1 in response to the “security breaches” and ordered a review to deploy additional forces to Diyala province.[21] Unidentified militants detonated an IED and fired on a vehicle killing eight members of the Bani Tamimi tribe including Sheikh Tamimi’s son on March 7.[22] Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani ordered additional security and military forces be deployed to Diyala following a meeting with local security tribal leadership on March 8. Diyala government officials criticized Sudani for believing accusations from local tribal leadership for recent crimes in the province.[23]

The Badr Organization-backed 1st Emergency Response Division established checkpoints in Diyala and conducted sweeping operations in March reportedly to arrest individuals connected to recent killings in Diyala.[24] Families of the Bani Tamimi tribe released a statement on March 10 calling on security forces to release members of their tribe that were reportedly arrested that morning.[25] Iraqi Special Forces arrested a Badr Organization commander Sabah Zaini in Muqdadiah on March 10.[26] Sabah’s brother, Najah Zaini held a rally demanding Iraqi Special Forces release Sabah and threatening the governor of Diyala province with armed violence in the streets. Unverified reporting suggests that Iraqi Special Forces released Sabah Zaini from custody on March 10.[27] The Iraqi Security Forces’ arrest of a Badr Organization commander in Muqdadiah, Diyala Province suggests that there is a disconnect between Popular Mobilization Force leadership and the Iraqi central government. Iraqi Security forces furthermore reportedly arrested four individuals in Muqdadiah on March 10 accused of taking part in the massacre of Sunnis in al-Jayalah village, Khalis.[28] Sectarian conflict in Diyala presents an opportunity for ISIS to establish itself as a security guarantor for Sunnis in the province.

IRGC-affiliated Mahan Air flew a plane from Tehran to Aleppo on March 10, likely to transport military resources.[29] The flight landed shortly after the airport reopened the runway, demonstrating coordination between Iran and operators at the airport.[30] Likely Israeli forces conducted an airstrike on the airport on March 6, temporarily closing the runway until this point. [31] CTP previously assessed that the likely Israeli airstrike may have prevented an Iranian weapons shipment from being transported through Aleppo International Airport.[32]

[1] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85052599>

[2] <https://www.irna.ir/news/850525998>

[3] <https://www.farsnews.ir/kordestan/news/14011219000251F>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023>

[5] <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/159482>

[6] <https://abdolhamid.net/persian/2023/03/03/13485/>

[7] <https://abdolhamid.net/persian/2023/03/10/13509/>

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-5-2023>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-6-2023>

- [9] <https://abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/03/10/13509/>
- [10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-9-2023>
- [11] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85052793>
- [12] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85052828>
- [13] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85052826>
- [14] <http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/135172>
- [15] www.mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/713714
- [16] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85052725>; <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121913467>
- [17] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1634147919216476160?cxt=HHwWgIC8t...
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1634159025209192448?cxt=HHwWgMC9w...
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1634168073828573186?cxt=HHwWhICx_...
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1634229484579594240?cxt=HHwWgICx3djD...
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634145247520342017?cxt=HHwWgoC-3...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634145544456077314?cxt=HHwWhIC8i...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634158873710829571?cxt=HHwWhoCx4...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634166858331848704?cxt=HHwWgICw6...>
- [18] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85047871>
- [19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/russian-offensive-campaign-asse...>
- [20] <https://www.ina dot iq/178726--.html>
- [21] <https://iq.parliament dot iq/blog/2023/03/01>
- [22] <https://www.alaraby dot co.uk/politics/%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A8-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%A9-8-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86>; <https://www.ina dot iq/179919--.html>
- [23] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A9->

%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7-
%D8%B1; [https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B0-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8](https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B0-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8)

[24] <https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634180311339737092>; <https://www.ina iq/180230--.html>

[25] https://twitter.com/ya_mihdi/status/1634170114600845313

[26] [https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87](https://www.shafaq.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87);

<https://twitter.com/modmiliq/status/1634184390841442305>;

[https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87](https://www.shafaq.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87);

<https://twitter.com/alssaanetwork/status/1634159993942429696>;

https://twitter.com/ya_mihdi/status/1634170114600845313

[27] https://t.me/One_Baghdad/27381;

<https://twitter.com/amiraljubori/status/1634226581781594112>

[28] <https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634243307676024844>;

<https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634243839736070165>;

<https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634243122128404483>;

<https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634240486641680394>;

<https://twitter.com/AlTaghierTV/status/1634107240931098626>

- [29] <https://twitter.com/SAMSyria0/status/1634120854123470850>
- [30] <https://www.flightconnections.com/flights-from-ika-to-alp>
- [31] <https://apnews.com/article/syria-israel-strikes-aleppo-airport-139ba8dc5...>
<https://twitter.com/SAMSyria0/status/1632887132233539584>;
https://t.me/mod_gov_sy/32244;
<https://twitter.com/guyelster/status/1632977345542860801>;
https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1632884845318746113;
<https://twitter.com/BabakTaghvae1/status/1632887029322194949>
- [32] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023?mkt_to...

Iran Update, March 13, 2023

Iran Update, March 13, 2023

Amin Soltani, Annika Ganzeveld, Zachary Coles, Johanna Moore, Karolina Hird, and
Nicholas Carl

March 13, 2023, 6:30 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime is preparing to deploy its security services to deter and likely crack down on the planned demonstrations during the upcoming Iranian holidays. Several judicial and security authorities have in recent days discussed announced deployments and threatened citizens who protest during the upcoming Chahar Shanbeh Souri holiday on March 15, during which Iranians commonly gather in public and use fireworks.[1] Iranian leaders likely fear that the holiday celebrations could catalyze anti-regime demonstrations. Tehran Provincial Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Abbas Ali Mohammadian reiterated the regime's plans to securitize on March 13, stating that security forces will be deployed throughout Tehran starting on March 14 to confront "those who disturb the peace." [2] An Esfahan provincial prosecutor threatened draconian measures against potential protesters during the upcoming holiday, including a prison sentence of up to one year as well as 74 lashes.[3] South Khorasan Law Enforcement Commander Colonel Alireza Abbasi stated that "police surveillance cameras [and] patrols will closely monitor" and confront reckless drivers during Chahar Shanbeh Souri, threatening to seize vehicles in the event of traffic violations.[4] That the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) can so readily deploy the surveillance equipment to confront traffic violations which was apparently failing during the recent countrywide campaign to poison schoolchildren, indicates that the regime tolerated the campaign, as CTP previously reported.[5] IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* furthermore published two articles on March 13 outlining the potential dangers and growing cultural insignificance of Chahar Shanbeh Souri, likely as part of the regime effort to dissuade citizens from celebrating the holiday.[6]

Student poisonings occurred on March 11, 12, and 13 in Iranian provinces that saw significant protest activity during the Mahsa Amini protest movement. Iranian media reported poisoning incidents in Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad provinces on March 11-13—the first reported incidents since March 7.[7] Iranian media reported that some students affected remain under medical care, which suggests that the students were exposed to chemical agents rather than experiencing psychosomatic symptoms.[8] The regime will likely use these attacks to justify continued securitization ahead of Chahar Shanbeh Souri and Nowrouz holidays. Most student poisonings on March 11-13 took place in Khuzestan and Kurdistan Provinces—two provinces that saw significant protest activity during the Mahsa Amini movement.

Iranian public figures continue to suggest that the regime or regime-adjacent actors are in some way responsible for the poisoning campaign primarily targeting schoolgirls in recent months. Former reformist President Mohammad Khatami criticized the regime for "acting as if nothing had happened" rather than immediately confronting the "crime." [9] The regime waited four months before it began deploying security forces to schools to protect schoolchildren on March 6, as CTP previously reported.[10] One could interpret Khatami's statement as criticizing the slow regime response to the poisonings. On the other hand, Khatami could be indirectly questioning whether the regime tolerated the group responsible for the attacks. Khatami's comments follow similar criticisms from prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid on March

3 and 10. Abdol Hamid stated that the poisoning campaign was meant to suppress protests and prevent girls from pursuing an education.[11] These comments from Khatami and Abdol Hamid may be spreading in the domestic Iranian information space the narrative that the regime is responsible for the attacks.

Khatami's focus on the regime's negligence may evoke among some Iranians memories of the regime response to two similar events during Khatami's presidency. Possible hardline elements in the Iranian state security services conducted an assassination campaign against political dissidents in the 1990s in response to Khatami's pursuit of political reform.[12] The regime first blamed these "chain murders" on foreign enemies in the same way officials have blamed the recent poisonings on foreign actors, as CTP previously reported.[13] Pro-regime paramilitary organizations, namely the Basij and Ansar-e Hezbollah, similarly violently suppressed student supporters of Khatami's reforms who were protesting the assassination campaign in 1999.[14] Khatami's comments thus could have the effect of relating the regime's toleration of nefarious activities by regime-affiliated actors in the 1990s to its unusual response to the recent student poisonings, especially for Iranians who remember his presidency. Several prominent Iranians have referenced the "chain murders" of the 1990s when considering which actors might be behind the recent attacks.[15] These comparisons inject into Iran's public discourse the questions about whether the regime or regime-affiliated actors are responsible for the poisoning campaign. And the regime certainly appears to have at least tolerated this campaign, as CTP previously assessed.[16]

Regime efforts to suppress and silence political dissent may inadvertently intensify anti-regime sentiment among the Iranian public. Iranian authorities reportedly arrested and forced a group of girls from Tehran who posted a video of themselves dancing without hijab on International Women's Day to "confess" on camera on March 13.[17] The regime seemingly views such forceful responses as the most effective way to prevent further public displays of anti-regime sentiment. These actions, however, not only give more attention to the very anti-regime activities the regime seeks to suppress but also exacerbates citizens' frustrations with the regime. Following reports that Iranian authorities were tracking down the "Ekbatan Girls," many individuals across Iran posted videos of themselves performing this group's dance.[18] This indicates that the regime's strategy of forcefully cracking down on political dissent—instead of curbing anti-regime activity—may have the unintended consequence of spreading and solidifying anti-regime sentiment among the Iranian people. Some Iranian men are similarly wearing the hijab to ridicule the regime. Iranian social media users recently circulated photos of male pharmacists in Iran wearing the hijab in response to the regime's closure of several pharmacies where Iranian authorities discovered unveiled women.[19] By publicly mocking the regime, these men are demonstrating that they are not intimidated by the regime's threats and violence.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met with Iranian officials in Tehran on March 13 to expand bilateral cooperation and bolster sanctions mitigations. Iranian state media reported that Lukashenko met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber.[20] Raisi and Lukashenko signed eight cooperation agreements in the spheres of comprehensive cooperation, trade, transportation, agriculture, and culture and noted that Belarus and Iran tripled bilateral trade in 2022 compared to 2021.[21] Raisi notably stated that cooperation with Belarus could be a way for both nations to counter sanctions.[22] Lukashenko has frequently acted as a Kremlin vassal in recent trips to foreign countries, and his visit to Tehran is likely a component of the Kremlin's wider effort to secure continued Iranian support in the face of international sanctions.[23] Iranian state media notably announced on March 11 that Iran has finalized a deal to buy Su-35 combat aircraft from Russia, indicating that military, political, and economic agreements between Tehran and Moscow are continuing to prove mutually beneficial for both parties.[24] The Kremlin will likely continue to leverage Lukashenko's influence to deepen cooperation with Tehran.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime is preparing to deploy its security services to deter and likely crack down on the planned demonstrations during the upcoming Iranian holidays.**

- **Student poisonings occurred in Iranian provinces that saw significant protest activity during the Mahsa Amini protest movement.**
- **Iranian public figures continue to suggest that the regime or regime-adjacent actors are in some way responsible for the poisoning campaign primarily targeting schoolgirls in recent months.**
- **Regime efforts to suppress and silence political dissent may inadvertently intensify anti-regime sentiment among the Iranian public.**
- **Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko met with Iranian officials in Tehran on March 13 to expand bilateral cooperation and bolster sanctions mitigations.**
- **At least three protests occurred on March 11, ten protests on March 12, and 17 protests on March 13.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on March 11. CTP assesses with high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Ilam City, Ilam Province[25]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Ilam University of Medical Sciences staff and employees

Tehran City, Tehran Province[26]

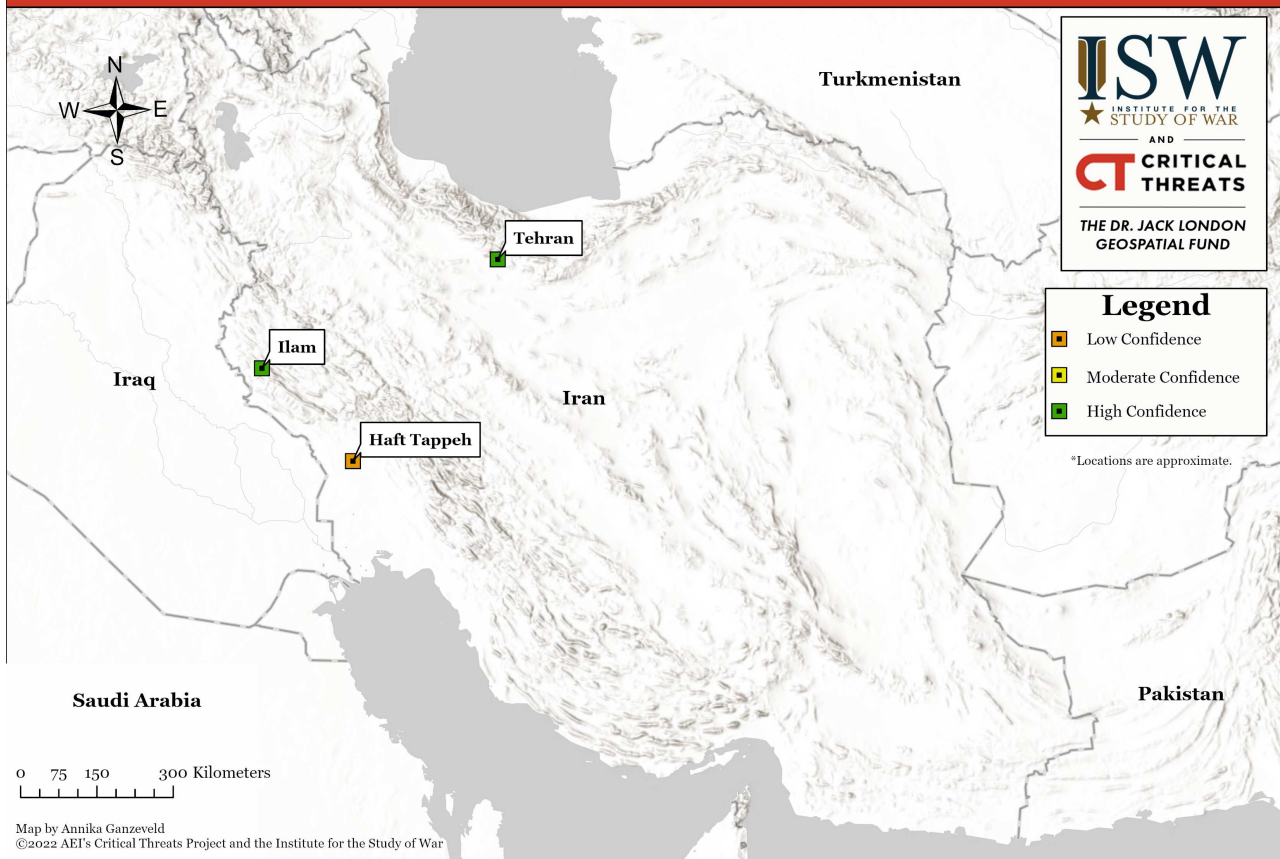
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Hospital workers

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Haft Tappeh, Khuzestan Province[27]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company employees

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 11, 6:00 PM



At least ten protests occurred in eight cities across five provinces on March 12. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[28]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Steel industry retirees

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[29]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[30]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoush, Khuzestan Kerman Province[31]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Haft Tappeh, Khuzestan Province[32]

- **Size:** Small

- **Demographic:** Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company employees

Tehran City, Tehran Province[33]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Steel industry retirees

Tehran City, Tehran Province[34]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals who lost money in the Azerbaijan Vehicle Industry Company

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Kerman City, Kerman Province[35]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoushtar, Khuzestan Province[36]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Tehran City, Tehran Province[37]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Government employees



At least 17 protests occurred in 11 cities across 11 provinces on March 13. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Karaj, Alborz Province[38]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Part of protests planned for Chahar Shanbeh Souri

Khorramabad, Lorestan Province[39]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[40]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Part of protests planned for Chahar Shanbeh Souri

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[41]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Part of protests planned for Chahar Shanbeh Souri

Tehran City, Tehran Province[42]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Tehran City, Tehran Province[43]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Part of protests planned for Chahar Shanbeh Souri

Tehran City, Tehran Province[44]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Part of protests planned for Chahar Shanbeh Souri

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Karaj, Alborz Province[45]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Ardabil City, Ardabil Province[46]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Ardabil City, Ardabil Province[47]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Moghan Sugar Factory workers

Ghazvin City, Ghazvin Province[48]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Part of protests planned for Chahar Shanbeh Souri

Ilam City, Ilam Province[49]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Ilam cement workers

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[50]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[51]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Yasouj, Kohgilouyeh and Boyer Ahmed Province[52]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

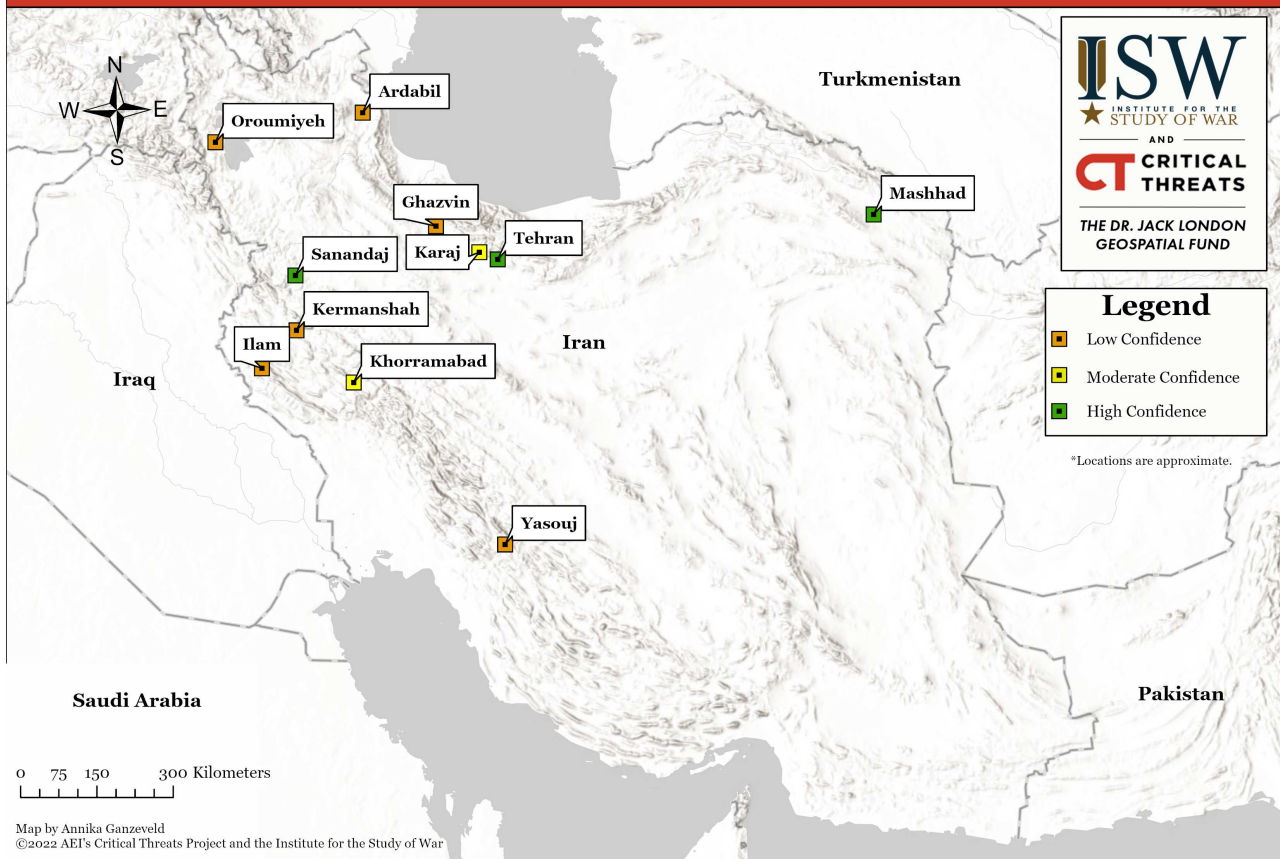
Tehran City, Tehran Province[53]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Metro passengers

Oroumīyeh, West Azerbaijan Province[54]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 13, 6:00 PM



The Interior Ministry announced the arrest of over 100 individuals in connection with the recent student poisonings on March 11. The ministry accused the arrested of trying to “create skepticism toward the regime” and cooperating with anti-regime group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK).

President Ebrahim Raisi met with Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei on March 11.^[55] The three discussed Parliament’s review of the budget for the upcoming Persian calendar year (March 2023-March 2024), the preparation of the seventh five-year development plan, social issues, and preparations for the Nowrouz holiday.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

***The Wall Street Journal* reported on March 12 that Iran had agreed to cease encouraging cross-border Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia in exchange for the Saudis restraining anti-regime outlet *Iran International* from continuing its critical coverage of the regime.**^[56] Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement on March 10 to reestablish bilateral relations, as CTP previously reported.^[57]

External Security and Military Affairs

Local and international press widely reported that Israeli combat aircraft conducted four airstrikes against Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and IRGC military assets in Hama and Tartous provinces, Syria on March 12. State-run *Syrian Arab News Agency* claimed that the attacks injured three SAA personnel, including a senior SAA air defense official.^[58] Israel-based *I24 News* claimed that airstrikes also killed an additional two “pro-Iran fighters.”^[59] Local media and open-source intelligence Twitter accounts geolocated the strikes to two IRGC missile and precision-guided munitions (PGM) manufacturing and storage depots in Masyaf, Hama province

and possibly a separate depot or an Iranian PGM convoy near a backroad outside Masyaf.[60] A fourth airstrike targeted the Tal Termos missile production facility in Tartous province.[61]

Israel may be responding to reports that Iran is increasing efforts to smuggle into or manufacture precision-guided munitions in Syria. Israeli media has reported in recent months increased Iranian efforts to establish missile and precision-guided munition factories in western Syria.[62] The IRGC has converted Syrian military research facilities near Masyaf, Hama province into production and storage facilities for mid- and long-range missiles, according to the *Jerusalem Post*. [63] Iranian rhetoric and recent activity in western Syria suggest that Iran is attempting establish the area as a forward-positioned launch site for missiles capable of reaching Israel. In addition to concerns over missile production, Israel may also be responding to reports that Iran is trying to bring air defense assets into Syria. Iranian senior military officials have also recently made public comments about deploying Iranian-made Khordad-15 or Bavar-373 air defense systems to unspecified locations within Syria.[64]

Iran likely ordered proxy forces in eastern Syria to conduct a rocket attack on US forces in retaliation for recent Israeli airstrikes. Likely Iranian-backed militants launched two rockets at US forces at an unspecified location in eastern Deir ez Zor province on March 13.[65] US Special Operations Levant Joint Task Force confirmed that the attack did not harm any US personnel or property. The official press release did not specify Iranian-backed militants perpetrated the attack, but the attack pattern suggests they are responsible. Iranian-backed militants last attacked US forces in eastern Syria on February 18[66] As CTP has previously assessed, Iranian-backed militants occasionally attack US forces in eastern Syria to retaliate for Israeli airstrikes and other regional developments that Iran perceives as hostile and perpetrated by the US.[67]

The Assad regime likely postponed an Ankara-Damascus diplomatic normalization summit scheduled for later this week in Moscow. Regime-aligned *Al Watan* reported on March 13 that Syrian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Ayman Sosan has not confirmed he plans to attend the summit.[68] *Al Watan* claimed that the Assad regime indefinitely postponed the meeting until Turkey announces a date for the withdrawal of Turkish forces from northwest Syria.[69] This demand amounts to an outright rejection from the Assad regime over attending the summit in the present circumstances given that Turkey is highly unlikely to withdraw forces at this time. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu announced the meetings would occur during a joint press conference with Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian on March 8, as CTP previously reported.[70]

Hadi al Ameri—the leader of the Iranian proxy Badr Organization—warned Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani against removing Badr-affiliated officials from security posts in Diyala Province on March 12, likely to maintain control over counterterrorism and security operations there. Hadi al Ameri hosted a weekly Shia Coordination Framework meeting with Sudani on March 12.[71] The Shia Coordination Framework is a loosely aligned political coalition of pro-Iranian Iraqi political parties. Ameri warned Sudani during the meeting that the Badr Organization will not accept any decision to dismiss its militants from security leadership roles in Diyala province. He argued that, instead, Sudani should rely on the Badr Organization to oversee security in Diyala. Ameri may have used the meeting to coerce Sudani into accepting the continued influence of Badr in Diyala Province.

The Ameri-Sudani meeting follows recent tensions surrounding a massacre likely perpetrated by Iranian-backed Shia militias in Diyala province on February 20.[72] Local tribes blamed Iranian-backed militias for the massacre of Sunni civilians in Al Jayalah, Khalis district, Diyala province and demanded Sudani prosecute the militants connected to the crime. Sudani met with local non-Badr Organization officials and tribal leadership on March 8 in response to the massacre.[73] Iraqi Special Forces later arrested a Badr Organization commander on March 10 in connection with the targeted killings that took place in Diyala but released him after a Badr Organization official threatened the governor of Diyala.[74] The Badr Organization-backed 1st Emergency Response Division conducted sweeping operations in Diyala province independent of Iraqi Special Forces. [75] Diyala province's ethnic and sectarian diversity allowed al Qaeda in Iraq and Iranian-backed Shia militants to establish strongholds and conduct targeted attacks between 2006-2007.

[76] Sectarian conflict in Diyala province presents an opportunity for ISIS to establish itself as a security guarantor for Sunnis in the province.

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023> ; ht...

[2] [https://jamejamonline dot ir/fa/news/1401074](https://jamejamonline.ir/fa/news/1401074) /کشف-۴-میلیون-قطعه-مواد-محترقه-در-پایتخت
; [https://www.iribnews dot ir/fa/news/3786911](https://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/3786911) /توقیف-۸۰-تن-مواد-اولیه-ساخت-موادمحترقه-پرخطر

[3] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1635182661143605249?cxt=HHwWgsC9xe_9...

[4] [https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2867066/-](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2867066/) /توقیف-خودروهای-خطرآفرین-در-
چهارشنبه-آخر-سال-تا-پایان-تعطیلات-نوروزی

[5] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-5-2023#_ednbd...

[6] [https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2866822/-](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2866822/) /چهارشنبه-سوری-یا-میدان-جنگ-جشن-
[https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2866131/-](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2866131/) /مراقب-چهارشنبه-سوزی-باشیم-شبیه-که-شاید-یک-عمر-پشیمانی-را-به-همراه-
بیایم-فیلم

[7] [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/718526/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/718526/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86) ;

[https://www dot hra-news dot org/2023/hranews/a-40192/](https://www.hra-news.org/2023/hranews/a-40192/) ;

[https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122014020/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%BA%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9](https://www.isna.ir/news/1401122014020/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%BA%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9) ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634518707484389376?cxt=HHwWgMCzp...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634985001141014529?cxt=HHwWgsDQ4...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634990719277629442?cxt=HHwWhIDUm...>

https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635240126656954369?cxt=HHwWgoDS_...

[8] [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/718526/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/718526/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86)

[9] [https://www.sharghdaily dot com/-](https://www.sharghdaily.com/) /بخش-سیاست-6/873363-کسانی-که-بزرگترین-مسئولیت-شان-نگاهبانی-از-
جان-امنیت-است-از-کنار-حادثه-مسمومیت-دانش-آموزان-چنان-گذشتند-که-گویی-اتفاقی-نیافتاده-است

- [10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023>
- [11] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023#_edn0...
- [12] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-46356725>
- [13] <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2923&q=%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A8%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C>; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023#_ednba...
- [14] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/mde130692009en.pdf>
- [15] <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/amp/world/iran-says-suspected-schoolgirl-po...>
- [16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-1-2023> ; ht...
- [17] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/dancers-of-ekbatan-complex-go-through-force...>
- [18] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1635306995791060993?cxt=HHwWgoCz7...
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1635000567708672000?cxt=HHwWgICz3...
- [19] <https://ir dot voanews dot com/a/iran-drag-stores-men-scarf-/6993983.html>
- [20] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401122215997/%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%B3%DA%A9-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AF>; <http://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26368>; <http://www.president dot ir/fa/142935>
- [21] <http://www.president dot ir/fa/142935>; <http://www.president dot ir/fa/142954>; <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85055893/%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%87-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%88-%D9%87%D9%81%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86>; [https://www.farsnews dot ir/media/14011222000481/%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%85%7C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-](https://www.irna dot ir/news/85056217/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D9%84%D9%88%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%86%DA%A9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C)

%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3-%DB%B8-
%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85%E2%80%8C%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9
%87-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-
%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF;

[22] <https://www.tasnimnews dot>

com/fa/news/1401/12/22/2867005/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-
%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B4%D9%87-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-
%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3-
%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-
%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA-
%D9%84%D9%88%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%86%DA%A9%D9%88-
%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%A7-
%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA-
%D8%AC%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C-
%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA-
%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-
%D8%A8%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AF

[23] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar03012023>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar022823>;
<https://isw.pub/UkrWar022523>

[24] <https://twitter.com/IrnaEnglish/status/1634481569300709377>

[25] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634473170164957185?cxt=HHwWgoC26...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1634498985493770240?cxt=HHwWgMC9gduK...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1634478954080878593?cxt=HHwWgoC-r...

[26] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634478178130378755?cxt=HHwWhoC2i...>

[27] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634557006332690433?cxt=HHwWgoCw-...>

[28] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634874430131417089?cxt=HHwWgsDRx...>

[29] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634855754862821379?cxt=HHwWhoDQ-...>

[30] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1634880905528369153?cxt=HHwWgoCzgbHh...

[31] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634978163901202434?cxt=HHwWhIDQr...>

[32] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634969791810404353?cxt=HHwWgoDUt...>

[33] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634858498604564481?cxt=HHwWgoDUt...>

[34] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634899742877691905?cxt=HHwWgsDRm...>

[35] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634874810579681281?cxt=HHwWgoCwj...>

[36] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1634912358513655809?cxt=HHwWgoDSgZiL...

[37] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634825542569537537?cxt=HHwWgsC96...>

- [38] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635358457770700800?cxt=HHwWgMDTv...>
- [39] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635238806105497600?cxt=HHwWgIDRj...>
- [44] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635353847504998401?cxt=HHwWgsDUq...>
- [45] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635249496425918465?cxt=HHwWgsDTm...>
- [46] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635256644002275328?cxt=HHwWgIDT5...>
- [47] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635290285218594816?cxt=HHwWgIDQs...>
- [48] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635322637479215108?cxt=HHwWiIDUw...>
- [49] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635244919160979457?cxt=HHwWgoDS9...>
- [50] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635250231519645699?cxt=HHwWhsDUi...>
- [51] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635241751123464193?cxt=HHwWgsDQm...>
- [52] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635255978735329280?cxt=HHwWgIDTl...>
- [53] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635201636833570816?cxt=HHwWgMDRu...>
- [54] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635304897829834754?cxt=HHwWhMDU6...>
- [55] <http://www.president.ir/fa/142912>
- [56] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-plans-summit-of-persian-gulf-arab-and...>
- [57] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>
- [58] <https://sana.ir/en/?p=303250>
- [59] <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/middle-east/levant-turkey/1678597527-syria-says-israel-strikes-north-of-the-country-report>
- [60] <https://twitter.com/AuroraIntel/status/1634858037189173248>; <https://thiqa-agency.com/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B5-%D9%84%D9%80%D8%AB%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8/>; <https://twitter.com/AmerAlkhateeb83/status/1634828787740229632?s=20>; <https://ht.com/breaking-news/article-734048>
- [61] <https://eyeofephates.com/ar/news/2023/03/12/7951>
- [62] <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-716972>
- [63] <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-716972>
- [64] <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/574968/%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%B4%D8%AA%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%82-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-%>

%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-
%D8%AB%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-
%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85-
%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA; [http://www.nournews](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/132926) dot ir/fa/news/132926

[65] https://twitter.com/SOJTF_LEVANT/status/1635365416712429568?s=20

[66] <https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1627081544480493570?s=20>

[67] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-1-2023>

[68] [https://alwatan](https://alwatan.sy/archives/338589) dot sy/archives/338589

[69] [https://alwatan](https://alwatan.sy/archives/338589) dot sy/archives/338589; [https://www.syria](https://www.syria.tv/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7) dot tv/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7

[70] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-9-2023>

[71] [https://alrafidain](https://alrafidain.tv/57977/) dot tv/57977/

[72] [https://www.ina](https://www.ina.iq/178726--.html) dot iq/178726--.html

[73] [https://shafaq](https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7-%D8%B1) dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7-%D8%B1 ;

[https://shafaq](https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B0-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8) dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%83-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B0-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8

[74] https://twitter.com/ya_mihdi/status/1634170114600845313 ;

<https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87;>

<https://twitter.com/modmiliq/status/1634184390841442305> ;

<https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87;>

<https://twitter.com/alssaanetwork/status/1634159993942429696> ;

https://twitter.com/ya_mihdi/status/1634170114600845313

[75] <https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634180311339737092>; <https://www.ina dot iq/180230--.html>

[76] <https://www.understandingwar.org/region/diyala-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%...>

Iran Update, March 14, 2023

Iran Update, March 14, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 14, 2023, 17:30 pm ET

Contributor: Ashka Jhaveri

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian government is prioritizing mandatory veiling amidst poor economic conditions, recent student poisonings, and heightened protest activity. President Ebrahim Raisi discussed protecting “the culture of chastity and hijab in society” during a speech commemorating Martyrs’ Day on March 14. Raisi reiterated that Iran’s external enemies are responsible for the recent student poisonings and claimed that Iran can overcome its problems by “relying on God.”[1] The Parliamentary Cultural Committee separately published a report on chastity and hijab on March 14 emphasizing using an “indirect and intelligent approach” to enforce veiling as opposed to “physical confrontation.”[2] The Cultural Committee added that it held meetings with the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) to “review and follow up” on this organization’s “problems.”[3] The government’s “intelligent” approach involves--among other measures--placing responsibility for hijab enforcement on individuals such as shopkeepers as well as using facial recognition technology to identify unveiled women.[4] This approach—despite government claims—is, in fact, confrontational. While security forces may not physically confront unveiled women, using facial recognition technology violates their privacy, and the penalties the regime has discussed levying can prompt confrontations of various sorts. Iranian authorities have additionally shut down many stores, pharmacies, and restaurants where the owners of these spaces neglected to enforce veiling among female customers in recent months.[5] Recent reports by *Bloomberg* and *NPR* also suggest that a growing number of Iranian women in urban centers are defying the mandatory hijab law on a daily basis.[6] If this trend continues, the regime may have to decide in the near future whether to confront this outwardly defiant segment of the population.

The government’s emphasis on mandatory veiling is striking given its relative inattention to issues such as the economy and recent student poisonings. Iranian social media users have recently circulated videos of desolate bazaars which would typically be packed with holiday shoppers before Nowrouz, the Iranian New Year.[7] Social media users have also shared images of advertisements offering Iranians the option to pay for basic goods—such as chicken and meat—with monthly installments.[8] Although the Iranian rial has appreciated in recent days, Iran’s inflation rate remains at around 50 percent, making many basic commodities unaffordable for the average Iranian.[9] The government has also not identified the cause of recent student poisonings and continues to frame these incidents as attacks by Iran’s enemies on Iranian school children, as CTP previously reported.[10]

Protesters escalated against the regime on March 14. CTP recorded at least 20 protests in 14 cities across 8 provinces on March 14. Protest groups had called for protests for March 13-15 centered around the major national holidays, as CTP previously reported.[11] Iranians participated in the Chahar Shanbe Souri holiday on March 14. Traditional celebrations involve the symbolic act of jumping over fires in celebration of the upcoming new year. Social media users circulated footage of protest activities across the country, most of which included setting fires and throwing

firecrackers in city streets, activity that is consistent with the Chahar Shanbe Souri holiday and not inherently anti-regime.[12] Protesters were also documented using homemade incendiary devices and chanting anti-regime slogans, however, behavior that is inconsistent with the Chahar Shanbe Souri holiday.[13] Some social media captured protesters describing the devices as "handheld grenades," but it remains unclear what these devices are. Prominent anti-regime citizen journalist Twitter account 1500 Tasvir circulated images of similar objects yesterday, suggesting that they would be used in the protest activity today.[14] IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* also circulated images of the objects, stating that the use of these devices is intended to incite widespread violence.[15] Some protesters targeted security personnel and property with these devices in several locations across the country, marking a significant increase in the use of these items in anti-regime protests.[16] CTP has previously observed protesters throwing other incendiary devices, such as Molotov cocktails and fireworks, throughout the Mahsa Amini protest movement.[17]

Social media users also reported an increasingly securitized environment across the country.[18] This is consistent with CTP's previous assessments that the regime would heavily deploy its security services around the national holidays as part of an effort to deter and crack down on protests.[19] Regime officials and regime-affiliated news agencies continued their efforts on March 14 to deter people from participating in the Chahar Shanbe Souri celebrations.[20] Reports also indicate a major security crackdown on a medium sized protest in Rasht, Gilan Province, where regime security forces apparently fired at the protesters.[21]

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian government is prioritizing mandatory veiling amidst poor economic conditions, recent student poisonings, and heightened protest activity.**
- **Protesters escalated against the regime on March 14.**
- **At least 20 protests occurred in 14 cities across eight provinces.**
- **Some regime officials are continuing to deny that the recent attacks on Iranian school girls were poisonings.**
- **Iran and Bahrain could be considering normalizing their relations following the Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement.**
- **Iranian proxy Badr-affiliated Iraqi officials rhetorically targeted Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani for his handling of security operations in Diyala, likely to deter him from interfering in Badr operations in Diyala.**
- **Iran deployed proxy forces along the Al Mayadin-Abu Kamal segment of the Route Four highway likely to improve local operational security conditions.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least 20 protests occurred in 14 cities across eight provinces on March 14. CTP assesses with high to moderate confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Karaj, Alborz Province[22]

- **Size:** Undetermined

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[23]

- **Size:** Small

Bandar-e Anzali, Gilan Province[24]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Protester Activity:** Threw homemade incendiary devices

Rasht, Gilan Province[25]

- **Size:** Medium

- **Regime Repression:** Clashes between security personnel and protesters, sounds of gunfire audible in social media clips.

Divandarreh, Kurdistan Province[26]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Threw homemade incendiary devices

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[27]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly shot and arrested protester

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[28]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Threw homemade incendiary devices, burned Iranian flag

Tehran City, Tehran Province[29]

- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Area:** Ekbatan

Tehran City, Tehran Province[30]

- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Area:** Nezam Abad

Tehran City, Tehran Province[31]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** Sattar Khan

Tehran City, Tehran Province[32]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Sang Mahsa Amini protest anthem, Baraaye
- **Area:** Unknown, but may be IVO Ekbatan.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[33]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** Pirouzi Street

Tehran City, Tehran Province[34]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Threw homemade incendiary devices at security personnel
- **Area:** Tehran Pars

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[35]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Regime Repression:** Clashes between security personnel and protesters, sounds of gunfire audible in social media clips.

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Eslamabad-e-Gharb, Kermanshah Province[36]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Regime Repression:** Security personnel reportedly shot at protesters
- **Notes:** There is no available footage of protests in this area, and it is unclear if this incident meets CTP's threshold for protest activity.

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[37]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Protester Activity:** Threw homemade incendiary devices
- **Notes:** It is unclear if this incident meets CTP's threshold for protest activity

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[38]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Notes:** It is unclear if this incident meets CTP's threshold for protest activity

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[39]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Notes:** It is unclear if this incident meets CTP's threshold for protest activity

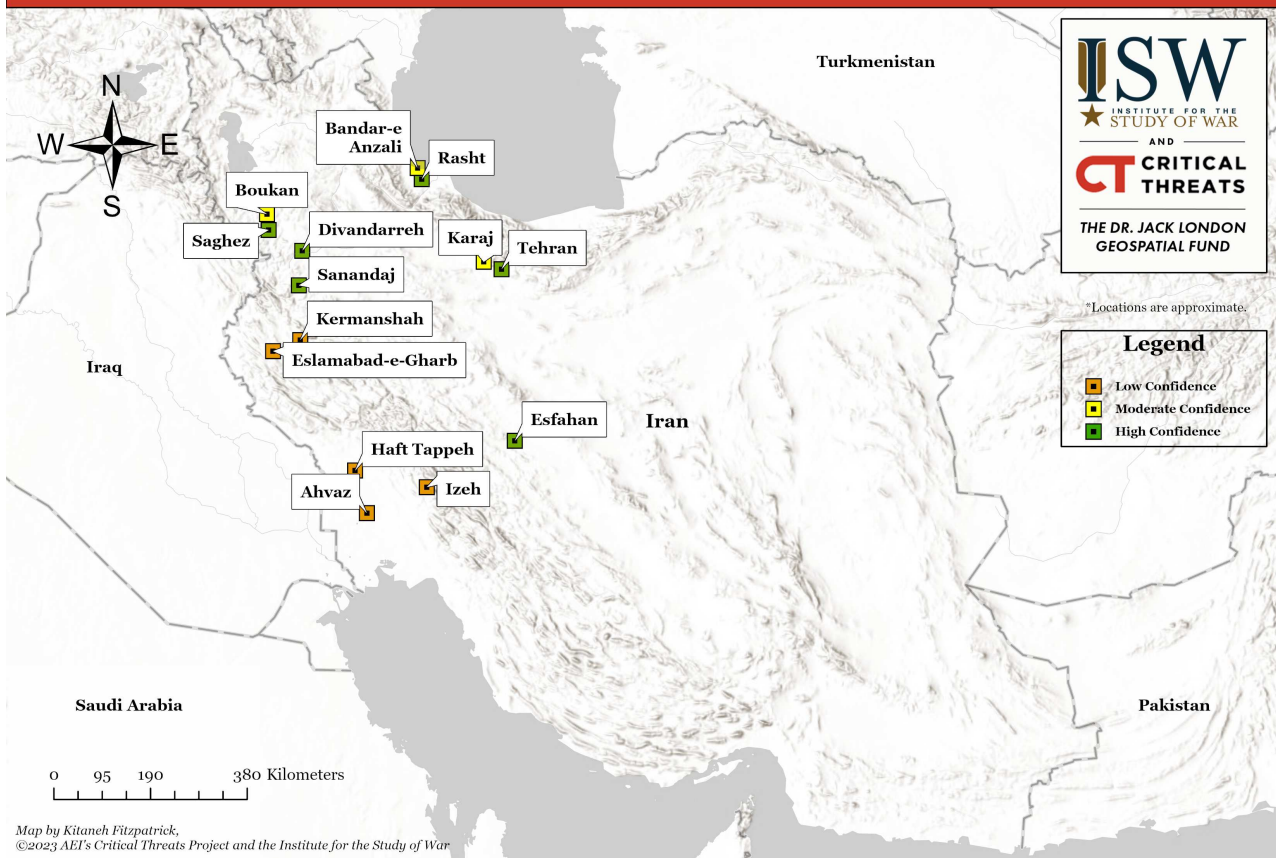
Haft Tappeh, Khuzestan Province[40]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Haft Tappeh sugarcane workers
- **Notes:** Strike and protest

Tehran City, Tehran Province[41]

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** Esfandiari

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 14, 5:30 PM ET



IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* criticized former reformist President Mohammad Khatami's March 14 statements suggesting that regime-affiliated actors were responsible for the recent poisoning attacks on schoolchildren.[42] *Fars* called Khatami's insinuation "deplorable" and characterized him as one of the many "radical reformists" who advance the enemy's "malice intentions." *Fars*' reporting validates CTP's previous assessment that Khatami's comments could solidify the suspicion that the regime was in some way responsible for the attacks. [43]

Some regime officials are continuing to deny that the recent attacks on Iranian school girls were poisonings. Judiciary Spokesperson Masoud Setayeshi described student reports of chemical poisonings as a general "malaise" on March 14."[44] Setayeshi added that specialized laboratories were investigating whether the recent school incidents were actual poisonings. The spokesperson emphasized that the regime would identify and prosecute the perpetrators "without mercy" and announced that security forces arrested eight individuals in connection with the attacks in Fars Province.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Iranian Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) Spokesperson Jafar Yazerlou stated that the CAO is reviewing resuming flights between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[45] The two countries agreed to reestablish bilateral relations on March 10, as CTP previously reported.[46]

Iran and Bahrain could be considering normalizing their relations following the Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement. UK-based outlet *Amwaj Media* reported that Iran and Bahrain recently held talks on "administrative and bureaucratic issues," citing an informed source.[47] The article added that the two countries could normalize their relations following "the reopening of embassies in Riyadh and Tehran." Semi-official *Iranian Students News Agency* (ISNA) separately recirculated

a *Sputnik News* interview with Bahraini Parliamentarian Mamdouh al-Saleh, who stated that normalization negotiations between Iran and Bahrain are underway.[48]

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on March 13.[49] The two foreign ministers discussed the recent Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement, developments in the Ukraine war, and Iran's inclusion in the talks to resolve tensions between Turkey and Syria. The Syrian regime likely postponed the Ankara-Damascus talks that were scheduled for later this week, as CTP previously reported.[50]

Economy

Guardian Council Spokesperson Hadi Tahan Nazif announced that the council finished its mandatory review of the budget bill for the next fiscal year and has forwarded the bill to parliament.[51] The Guardian Council is the governmental body responsible for reviewing and approving legislation passed by parliament, in addition to supervising elections and vetting candidates.

External Security and Military Affairs

Badr Organization–affiliated Iraqi officials rhetorically targeted Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani for his handling of security operations in Diyala, likely to deter him from interfering in Badr operations in Diyala. The Badr-affiliated Governor of Diyala Muthanna al Tamimi accused Iraqi Special Forces (ISOF) of falsely arresting a Badr Commander Sabah Zaini on March 10 and demanded the officers who arrested him be held accountable. [52] Sabah Zaini was arrested on charges of murder and kidnapping by ISOF on March 10 during sweeping operations to arrest individuals tied to recent killings in Diyala province.[53] Tamimi and several unnamed al-Fatah Coalition members of parliament demanded that Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi form a joint committee under the Human Rights and Security Committees to investigate Sabah Zaini's arrest.[54] Al Fatah Coalition is the Badr Organization's political wing in Parliament. Statements from the al Fatah Coalition indicate Sudani is losing influence within the Coordination Framework.[55]

Nouri al Maliki–affiliated Deputy Commander of Joint Operations Lieutenant General Qais al Muhammadawi reported that unspecified security forces arrested 162 individuals on suspicion of involvement in recent killings in Diyala.[56] The Badr-affiliated 1st Emergency Response Division and Iraqi Special Forces began separate sweeping operations in Diyala province on March 10. [57] CTP previously reported that Iranian-backed Shia militias likely took advantage of security deployments in Diyala to target opposition groups in the province.[58] Diyala province's ethnic and sectarian diversity allowed al Qaeda in Iraq and Iranian-backed Shia militants to establish strongholds and conduct targeted attacks between 2006-2007.[59] Sectarian conflict and sectarian behavior on the part of security forces in Diyala province present an opportunity for ISIS to establish itself as a security guarantor for Sunnis in the province.

Iran deployed proxy forces along the Al Mayadin-Abu Kamal segment of the Route Four highway likely to improve local operational security conditions. Unspecified Iranian proxy forces replaced local Syrian fighters in Abu Kamal and Al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province on March 14, according to *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*. [60] Iranian-backed militants also arrested 12 Syrian fighters for leaking information in Al Mayadin and Deir ez Zor cities on March 14.[61] The arrest and replacement of local militants with foreign proxies suggests that Iran intends to improve local security via proxy forces it has a direct and strong command-and-control relationship with—such as the Fatemiyoun, Iran's Afghan Shia fighters. Iran has reinforced specifically this section of the Route 4 highway with its proxy militias since the February 6 earthquake, as CTP previously assessed.[62] *Eye of Euphrates* reported on March 2 that local IRGC and Iranian-affiliated militia leadership met in Al Mayadin to discuss methods to limit information leaks and improve operational security along the Al Mayadin-Abu Kamal Route Four segment.[63] These solutions could have included replacing local militants with more dependable proxy forces.

[1] <https://president dot ir/fa/142973>

[2] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85056960/%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[3] <https://img9 dot irna dot ir/d/r2/2023/03/14/0/170248506.pdf?ts=1678783526101>

[4] <https://t dot co/xaKI46fimB>

[5] <https://www dot sharghdaily dot com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-220/871124-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%84-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D9%BE-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

<https://www dot farsnews dot ir/news/14011202000491/%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D8%B4%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA>

[6] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-08/international-women-s...>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2023/03/13/1157657246/iran-hija...>

[7] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634660040706490369?cxt=HHwWgoCw7...>

[8] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1634970133386129408?cxt=HHwWgMDTr...>

[9] <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/irans-currency-falls-record-l...>

<http://bonbast dot com>

[10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023>

[11] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023#_edn8b...

[12] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635671234070421505?s=20> ; <https://...>

[14] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635211196306698243?s=20> ; <https://...>

[15] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011223000397/>-همکاری-اینستاگرام-با-علی-کریمی-در-ترویج-خشونت-سیاست-دوگانه-دارد

[16] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1635691322735570956?s=20> ; <https://...>

- [17] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-crisis-update-decembe...>
- [18] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1635538976260993024?s=20> ; <https://...>
- [19] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023#_edn64...
- [20] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/23/2867759/>- چهارشنبه - پلیس - در خط قرمز عبور از - خط قرمز - پلیس - در چهارشنبه -
سوری - باعث - بازداشت - تا - پایان - تعطیلات - نوروزی - می - شود
- [22] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635693404108599303?s=20> ; <https://...>
- [23] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635691990720430080?s=20>
- [24] <https://twitter.com/ToukAlii/status/1635723988222590976?s=20>
- [26] <https://twitter.com/Kolbarnews/status/1635706277622841357?s=20>
; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635656081962684416?s=20> ;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635662288932700162?s=20> ;
<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635716977866965001?s=20>
- [27] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1635712087572856832?s=20> ; <https://...>
- [28] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635671234070421505?s=20> ; <https://...>
- [29] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635715007789891584?s=20> ; <https://...>
- [30] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635715073543897092?s=20>
- [31] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635713827307126803?s=20> ; <http://...>
- [32] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1635724696455880710?s=20>
- [33] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1635717350883196960?s=20
- [34] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1635691322735570956?s=20> ; <https://...>
- [35] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1635707188965416960?s=20>
- [36] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1635755511789281281?s=20>
- [37] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635714573041795098?s=20>
- [38] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635744222899740675?s=20>
- [39] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635741974266347554?s=20>
- [40] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635583703853285377?s=20>
- [41] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635724737065230336?s=20>
- [42] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011223000459/7%۰Cخط‌ویژه%۰E2%80%8Cاز>
گیر ی - خاتمی - تحقیر - آمریکا - از %۰E2%80%8C
- [43] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023>
- [44] <https://www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/718992/>- آموزش - دانش - مسمومیت - در - قوه قضاییه - در - مور د - مسمومیت - دانش - آموزان - بهتر -
است - از - کلمه بدحالی - استفاده کنیم - تا - الان - گزارش - یا - یافته علمی - مبنی بر - مسمومیت نداشته ایم
سخنگو ی - قوه قضاییه - در - مور د - مسمومیت - دانش - آموزان - بهتر - است - از - کلمه بدحالی - استفاده کنیم - تا - الان - گزارش - یا - یافته علمی - مبنی بر - مسمومیت نداشته ایم

[45] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/23/2867584/>-آغاز-بررسی-برقراری-پروازهای-ایران-و-عربستان-توسط-سازمان-هوایمایی

[46] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>

[47] <https://amwaj dot media/article/exclusive-bahrain-iran-held-low-profile-exchanges-amid-iranian-saudi-detente>

[48] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401122316352/%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%B1%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7>

[49] <https://mfa.gov dot ir/portal/newsview/714026>

[50] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023>

[51] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85057278/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AD%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%AC%D9%87-%DB%B1%DB%B4%DB%B0%DB%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%DA%AF%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF>

[52] <https://www.alaraby dot co.uk/node/6261387>

[53] <https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87;>

<https://twitter.com/modmiliq/status/1634184390841442305;>

<https://www.shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84-%D8%B4%D9%82%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8-%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%87;>

<https://twitter.com/alssaanetwork/status/1634159993942429696;>

https://twitter.com/ya_mihdi/status/1634170114600845313

[54] <https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/node/6261387>

[55] <https://www.mei.edu/publications/taking-stock-first-100-days-iraqs-new-g...>

[56] <https://www.dotalaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B6%D8%BA%D9%88%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9> ;

<https://t.me/wa3ediq/66578>

[57] <https://twitter.com/IraqiSpoxMOD/status/1634180311339737092>; <https://www.ina.iq/180230--.html>

[58] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023?mkt_t...

[59] <https://www.understandingwar.org/region/diyala-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%...>

[60] <https://www.syriaahr.com/%d8%a8%d8%b9%d8%af-%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%85%d9%86-%d8%aa%d8%ad%d9%82%d9%8a%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%b5%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%ad%d9%88%d9%84/593744/>

[61] <https://www.syriaahr.com/%d8%a8%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%aa%d9%80-%d9%80%d9%87%d9%80-%d9%80%d9%85%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%b3%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%a8-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%88%d9%85/593808/>

[62] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-update-march-8-2023>

[63] <https://eyeofeufrates.com/index.php/ar/news/2023/03/02/7862>

Iran Update, March 15, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Zachary Coles, Amin Soltani, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 15, 2023, 4:30 pm ET

Contributors: Anya Caraiani, Ashka Jhaveri, and Andie Parry

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Hardline officials are promoting conservative reforms, which will likely generate additional calls for political change in Iran. Hardline Islamic Coalition Party Secretary General Asadollah Badamchian called for constitutional reform within the bounds of the Islamic Republic during an interview with reformist news outlet Entekhab on March 15.[1] Badamchian's use of the term "constitutional reform" is the first CTP has seen from a hardline official. Badamchian did not specify which reforms he had in mind, but criticized some reformists' calls for a "Westernized constitution." Badamchian emphasized: "I say reforms as in reforms, not reformists. If anything is deficient, it requires corrections." [2] Several moderate figures within the Iranian political establishment have also called for liberalizing—as opposed to conservative reforms—in recent months. Examples of recent liberalizing reform proposals include reforming certain governmental bodies, such as the Assembly of Experts and the Guardian Council, to increase citizen participation in the political process.[3]

The government's pursuit of conservative reforms will likely fuel anti-regime frustrations and increase calls for political changes that address the Iranian population's ongoing economic, political, and sociocultural grievances. Iranian news outlets reported on March 15 that the Parliamentary Cultural Committee has proposed cutting internet and phone services for unveiled women who ignore SMS warnings to veil.[4] The Parliamentary Judicial and Legal Commission previously announced plans to block the national identification cards of unveiled women and bar them from banking services on February 3.[5] Iranian officials have also emphasized the importance of indoctrinating and ideologizing the population, frequently calling on educational institutions and the media to "explain the issues related to hijab and chastity." [6] These policies do not address Iranian grievances about the government's inability to stabilize the Iranian economy, disregard for the rights of women and religious minorities, and crackdown on civil liberties such as freedom of speech.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Hardline officials are promoting conservative reforms, which will likely generate additional calls for political change in Iran.**
- **Four protests occurred in four cities across three provinces.**
- **Information and Communication Technology Minister Issah Zahreh Pour confirmed reports of a country-wide, and hour-long internet disruption recorded on March 15.**
- **Supreme National Security Council-aligned *Nour News Agency* reported that Secretary Ali Shamkhani will travel to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates to meet with Emirati National Security Advisor Tahnoon bin Zayed al Nahyan on March 16.**
- **An unidentified person crossed into Israel from Lebanon and detonated a roadside bomb outside Megido Prison, approximately five kilometers from the northern**

West Bank border on March 13.

- **Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani ordered Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to conduct raids in Al Khalis, Diyala Province, Iraq on March 15.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least four protests occurred in four cities across three provinces on March 15. CTP assesses with high to moderate confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[8]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[9]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[10]

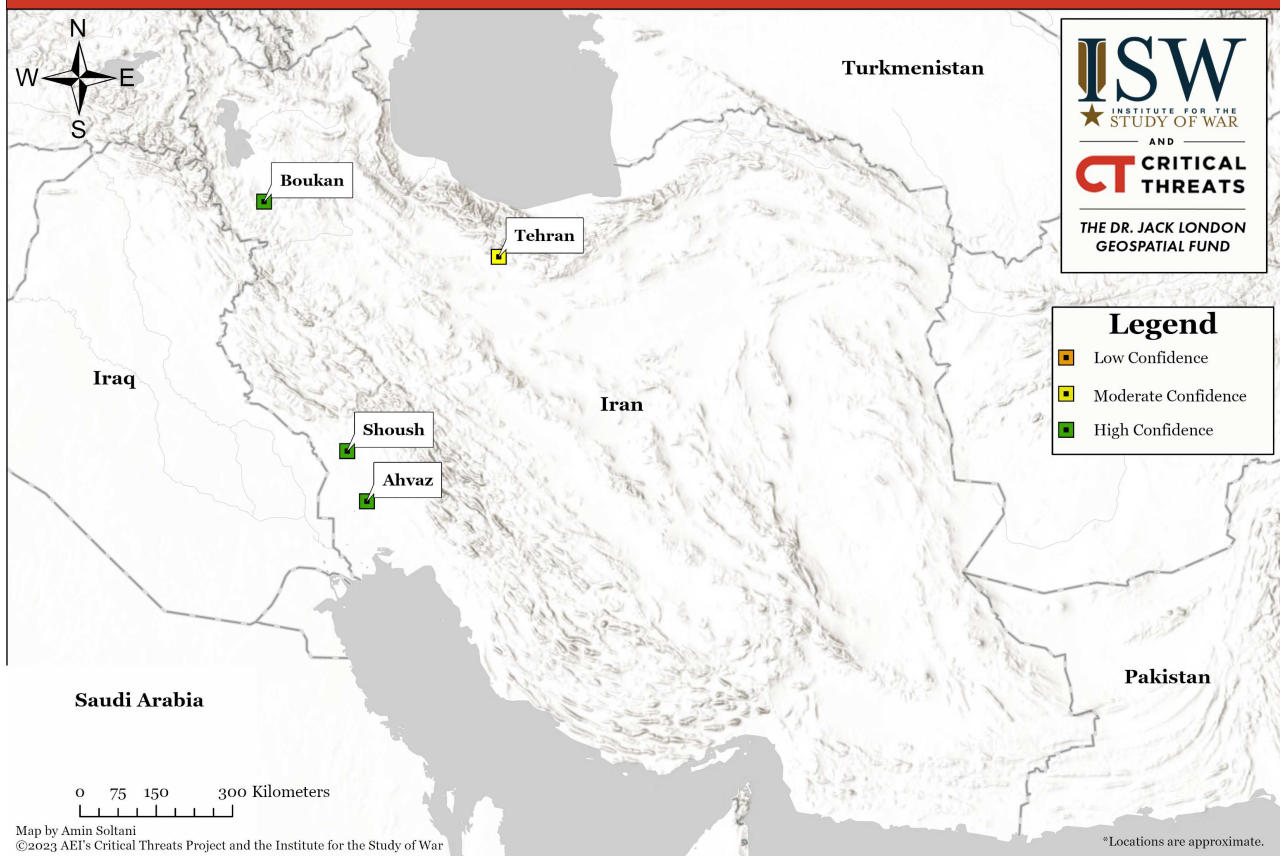
- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Protester Activity:** Fires lit in street
- **Regime Repression:** Sounds of gunfire audible in clip
- **Notes:** Protesting against the death/torture of Shirzad Ahmadinejad

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Veteran government workers

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 15, 4:30 PM



Protest coordinators and organizations called for demonstrations on the following date:

March 16[12]

- **Type:** Calls to commemorate protesters killed in the Mahsa Amini movement at their burial sites
- **Location:** Countrywide

Information and Communication Technology Minister Issah Zahreh Pour confirmed reports of a country-wide, and hour-long internet disruption recorded on March 15. Social media users and an Iranian internet watchdog organization reported wide-spread internet disruptions at roughly 9:56 am local time.[13] Zahreh Pour denied that a cyber-attack caused the disruption, stating that authorities had encountered “a small issue that will be resolved soon.”[14] Zahreh Pour announced on February 2 that unknown actors conducted a cyberattack that significantly impacted Iranian internet infrastructure on January 24, as CTP previously reported.[15]

Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Spokesperson Brigadier General Saeed Montazer Al-Mahdi announced on March 15 that the LEC Intelligence Organization arrested 118 individuals in connection with recent student poisonings.[16] Al-Mahdi added that around 4,000 police patrols have been monitoring schools in recent days and that the majority of reported poisonings were psychogenic. Al-Mahdi assured parents and students that “the case of this sinister phenomenon will be closed soon.”[17] CTP has not recorded any poisoning incidents since March 13.

Iranian news outlets reported on March 15 that Chahar Shanbeh Souri was more dangerous this year than previous years.[18] Iran’s National Medical Emergency Organization Head Jafar Miadfar stated that the number of Iranians who sustained injuries due to Chahar Shanbeh Souri festivities increased by 14 percent in 2023.[19] Semi-official ISNA separately published graphic

pictures of individuals injured on this holiday.[20] While Chahar Shanbeh Souri is an inherently risky tradition, Iranian media may be emphasizing the dangers of this holiday to justify the regime's securitization of Iranian society in recent days and to deter future participation.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Supreme National Security Council-aligned *Nour News Agency* reported that Secretary Ali Shamkhani will travel to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates to meet with Emirati National Security Advisor Tahnoun bin Zayed al Nahyan on March 16.[21] This follows Iran and Saudi Arabia's March 10 announcement that they have normalized relations, as CTP previously reported.[22] Iranian media circulated Saudi Finance Minister Mohammad al-Jadaan's March 15 statement that Saudi investment in Iran could happen "very quickly." [23] UK-based outlet *Amwaj Media* separately reported on March 14 that Iran and Bahrain have engaged in negotiations, also possibly to normalize relations.[24]

External Security and Military Affairs

Iranian media recirculated the Chinese Defense Ministry's announcement that China, Russia, and Iran launched a joint, five-day naval exercise in the Sea of Oman on March 15. The Chinese Defense Ministry framed the "Maritime Security Belt 2023" exercise as a demonstration of increased naval cooperation between China, Russia, and Iran. Iranian media stated that Iranian naval forces would use "floating and flying" units in the exercise.[25] China, Russia, and Iran previously held joint naval exercises in 2019 and 2022.[26]

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani ordered Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to conduct raids in Al Khalis, Diyala Province, Iraq on March 15.[27] *Shafaq* reported that ISF conducted a series of arrests in Al Khalis, the location of the February 20 massacre that locals have accused Iranian-backed Shia militias of perpetrating.[28] CTP previously reported that Hadi al Ameri—leader of the Iranian proxy Badr Organization—warned Sudani against interfering in the Badr Organization's control over security in Diyala, likely responding to Sudani ordering a similar set of raids across Diyala Province on March 10.[29] Iraqi media reporting on the raids did not confirm if the arrests included Badr Organization personnel. Sudani's willingness to order additional raids after Ameri's March 10 warning, however, risks miscalculation between Badr Organization militants and ISF personnel that could spark violence.

An Iraqi journalist claimed that Iranian proxy Kataib Hezbollah (KH) militants attacked Iraqi counterterrorism forces stationed at Majid al Tamimi Airbase. The journalist claimed in a Telegram post that KH militants injured two Iraqi Counterterrorism Forces personnel with automatic weapons and set fire to three vehicles.[30] CTP cannot corroborate this claim.

An unidentified person crossed into Israel from Lebanon and detonated a roadside bomb outside Megido Prison, approximately five kilometers from the northern West Bank border on March 13.[31] Israel Defense Forces (IDF) shot and killed the individual in Yaara, Northern Israel approximately five kilometers from the Lebanese border a few hours after the attack.[32] Lebanese Hezbollah (LH) may have supported the attack. The IDF announced on Twitter that unidentified militants entered Israel from Lebanon earlier this week and that it is investigating LH involvement in the 13 March attack[33] Israeli defense and intelligence officials stated the bomb resembles LH roadside attacks on Israeli positions during the Israel occupation of southern Lebanon from 1982 to 2000 and noted that the bomb did not reflect Palestinian capabilities.[34]

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Syrian President Bashar Assad in Moscow, Russia on March 15. NOTE: A version of this text will also appear in *The Institute for the Study of War's (ISW) March 15 Ukraine Update.*

Russian news outlet *RIA Novosti* claimed that Kremlin Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov said that topics for discussion included Syria-Russian relations, Syrian post-war reconstruction, and Syrian-Turkish relations.[35] According to the Kremlin readout of the meeting, Assad thanked Putin for the Russian military's "decisive contribution" in Syria.[36] Putin likely used the meeting to foster

relationships with international partner states such as Syria and maintain Russia's stake in Levantine affairs. Assad regime officials used the meeting to discuss issues surrounding the attempted and struggling Ankara-Damascus rapprochement with their Russian counterparts. State-affiliated Syrian media refuted recent Turkish claims that ministerial-level Iran-Syria-Russia-Turkey quadrilateral rapprochement talks would occur in Moscow on March 15 and 16, as CTP previously reported.[37] Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov assured reporters that officials discussed Syrian-Turkish relations.[38] The Assad regime's decision to discuss rapprochement issues with Russian officials after refusing to participate in the quadrilateral meetings may be part of a negotiating strategy intended to strengthen the Syrian position with intentional ambiguity.

[1] <https://t.co/xMt3TqoaI6>

[2] <https://t.co/xMt3TqoaI6>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-updates-february-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-february-1-2023>

[4] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-s-government-s-attempt-to-impose-compulsory-hijab-on-women/32319211.html>

[5] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1621519442202218498>

[6] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87>

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-30-2023>

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-25-2023>

[8] https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1636039522327707648?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1636027853388099584?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636021131659427843?s=20>

[9] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1635935999749419013?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635917763200839687?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1635995603757936640?s=20>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636077092168400896?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636075969516564480?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636075966689603586?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1636091888728956933?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1636079176145944576?s=20> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1636078348647448576?s=20

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1635927583144529921?s=20>

[12] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1635925384586747905

[13] https://twitter.com/Entekhab_News/status/1635908849579196418?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/Digiato/status/1635904737231925248?s=20>

[14] <https://t.co/chIC9zS8Vj>

[15] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-february-2-2023>

[16] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85058440/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DB%B1%DB%B1%DB%B8-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86>

[17] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85058440/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DB%B1%DB%B1%DB%B8-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86>

[18] <https://t.co/4d5c2ho1vP>

[19] <https://t.co/4d5c2ho1vP>

[20] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401122417487/%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DB%B2%DB%B5>

<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401122417365/%DB%B4%DB%B5-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DB%8C%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%DB%8C-%DB%B4-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%A7-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA>

[21] <https://nournews.ir/Fa/News/136400/%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%AF>

[22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>

[23] <https://t.co/4a4fv20VHd>

[24] <https://amwaj.media/article/exclusive-bahrain-iran-held-low-profile-exchanges-amid-iranian-saudi-detente>

- [25] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85058189/%D8%A2%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B1%D8%B2%...> ; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/24/2868274/>- ناو-های-چین-و- روسیه-برای-شرکت-در-رزمایش-مربک-وارد-آبهای-ایران-شدند
- [26] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-russia-iran-hold-joint-military-drill...>
- [27] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9>
- [28] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9>
- [29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023>
- [30] <https://t.me/StevenNabilIraq/1066>
- [31] <https://www.timesofisrael dot com/man-seriously-wounded-in-car-explosion-in-north-motive-unclear/>; https://twitter.com/Israel_Alma_org/status/1636060891056668672; <https://twitter.com/JoeTruzman/status/1635280884978040837>
- [32] <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/15/world/middleeast/israel-lebanon-bombe...> <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1636034736526114816/photo/4>
- [33] <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1636034741613862912>
- [34] <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/20/world/a-car-bomb-in-southern-lebanon-...>
- [35] <https://ria dot ru/20230315/siriya-1858023809.html>
- [36] <http://www.kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/70680>
- [37] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023>
- [38] <https://apnews.com/article/russia-assad-visit-putin-syria-civil-war-ed42...>

Iran Update, March 16, 2023

Iran Update, March 16, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 16, 2023, 7:30 pm ET

Contributors: Anya Caraiani

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Some Iranian leaders are likely concerned about their ability to convince the population that the national Iranian identity is inextricably interwoven with the regime's religious ideology. President Ebrahim Raisi discussed “reviving the national Iranian-Islamic identity” during a meeting with the Board of Trustees of the Iranology Foundation on March 16.[1] Raisi reiterated the need for more “explanation jihad,” stating that textbooks should familiarize students with this “noble and proud” identity.[2] Raisi's emphasis on “Iranian-Islamic” being a single identity underscores his efforts to frame Islam as an intrinsic part of what it means to be Iranian. Iranian officials have similarly emphasized the compatibility of Nowrouz—the Persian New Year—with Ramadan in recent days. These two holidays—the former of which has Zoroastrian origins and the latter of which is one of the most important holidays in Islam—will overlap in 2023. Several regime officials have argued in recent days that there is “no conflict” between these holidays and that Nowrouz and Ramadan festivities can take place simultaneously.[3]

The regime's struggle to reconcile the Islamic Republic's ideology with pre-Islamic Iranian identity is not new. Former Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini tolerated the celebration of Nowrouz but described Zoroastrianism as “fire-worshipping,” for example.[4] Iranian leaders, such as Raisi, may be giving greater attention to this issue now due to the coincidence of Nowrouz and Ramadan in 2023 and some protesters' use of Persian nationalist themes during the Mahsa Amini protest movement. Protest organizations called for demonstrations on Cyrus the Great Day in October 2022 to celebrate the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, as CTP previously reported.[5] Although these protests did not materialize, regime officials may assess that historical Persian nationalism still poses a major ideological threat to the regime. The regime's main strategy for countering this ideology—“explanation jihad”—may inadvertently increase historical Persian nationalism's appeal among Iranians, however.

Iranian officials and state media have scaled back their discussion on the recent student poisonings—an unusual response to this recent, large-scale security crisis. Regime officials and media have largely shifted their attention away from the poisoning incidents to other issues—such as the Iran-Saudi Arabia normalization agreement—in recent days.[6] Their lack of attention to the student poisonings that sparked panic across Iran is striking. In normal states government officials would discuss such a security crisis for weeks and debate how best to address the physical and psychological impacts of such an event on students and other victims. The regime's relative inattention to this issue is especially surprising in light of reports that state security services have arrested some perpetrators.[7] Regime officials accused some of the arrested individuals of cooperating with anti-regime group Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) and foreign intelligence services, as CTP previously reported.[8] If—as the regime claims—a foreign network did indeed infiltrate Iran and poison Iranian schoolchildren, the regime would undoubtedly publish images of these individuals and broadcast their forced confessions. Regime officials have also claimed that the

majority of poisonings were psychogenic, begging the question—if this is true—why the regime is arresting dozens of people for the poisonings.[9]

Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani visited the UAE on March 16—the most senior Iranian visit to the country since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited in 2007.[10] Shamkhani met with Emirati President Mohammad bin Zayed al Nahyan and National Security Adviser Tahnoun bin Zayed al Nahyan to discuss bilateral ties and regional security, possibly to include talks on Yemen.[11] This visit follows the announcement of the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia on March 10 as well as reports that Iran and Bahrain may be engaged in similar normalization talks.[12] Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin accompanied Shamkhani to the UAE as part of economic and financial discussions with Emirati officials. Iranian media reported that the purpose of Farzin’s visit was to pursue “monetary, banking, and foreign exchange agreements” with the Emiratis, which may support Iranian efforts to bypass US sanctions.[13] Iran has used businesses in Emirati commercial centers to circumvent US sanctions over the past decade.[14]

Key Takeaways

- **Some Iranian leaders are likely concerned about their ability to convince the population that the national Iranian identity is inextricably interwoven with the regime’s religious ideology.**
- **Iranian officials and state media have scaled back their discussion on the recent student poisonings—an unusual response to this recent, large-scale security crisis.**
- **Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani visited the UAE—the most senior Iranian visit to the country since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited in 2007.**
- **At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces on March 16. CTP assesses with high to moderate confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Marivan, Kurdistan Province[15]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals gathered around Mahsa Amini’s grave

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[17]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Demographic:** Individuals gathered by the graves of protesters killed in the Mahsa Amini movement

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[18]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals gathered in honor of those who lost their lives

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Divandarreh, Kurdistan Province[19]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals gathered by the graves of protesters killed in the Mahsa Amini movement



Amnesty International reported that Iranian security personnel tortured children as young as 12 for protesting in the Mahsa Amini protest movement. The report estimated that the regime likely arrested thousands of children protesters and corroborated prior reports that security personnel detained many children alongside adults.[20] Interviewed victims stated that Iranian authorities used inhumane acts, such as physical and sexual violence, to extract forced confessions from detained children.[21]

Hardline politician Gholam Ali Haddad Adel acknowledged ongoing divisions among hardliners during a speech to his political party—the Coalition Council of Islamic Revolutionary Forces—on March 16.[22] Haddad Adel emphasized the need for constructive interactions between the Raisi administration and Parliament and noted the need to overcome internal party disputes. Haddad Adel is close to the Office of the Supreme Leader as he is the father-in-law of Mojtaba Khamenei—the son of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Haddad Adel may have been signaling messages from Mojtaba or his father in the speech. Haddad Adel may have been referring to the recent debate between pragmatic hardliners and more ideological figures, on which CTP has reported previously.[23]

President Ebrahim Raisi stressed the unity between government and regime entities when inaugurating a cancer treatment center on March 16. Raisi stated that his administration did not view *nehad*, or institutions, as separate from his administration. Raisi additionally praised the role of the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order (EIKO) in providing services to the Iranian population.[24] The EIKO, also known as Setad, is a business conglomerate under the control of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and was estimated to be worth 95 billion US dollars in 2013.[25] The US Treasury designated EIKO and several of its subsidiaries as recently as January 13, 2021.[26]

Interim Tehran Friday Prayer Leader Kazem Sadeghi urged pious individuals to advocate for mandatory veiling standards on March 16. Sadeghi warned that those who remained silent on veiling “are not guardians of the religion.”[27] Sadeghi’s statements are consistent with other senior Iranian officials’ calls for “explanation jihad”—the regime theory that indoctrinating and ideologizing the population will increase public support for the political establishment and reduce anti-regime sentiment.[28] Sadeghi’s comments also adhere to recent regime endorsements of a collective-punishment model to enforce mandatory veiling.[29]

Economic Affairs

The regime has continued to succeed in raising the value of the Iranian after it fell to a record low of 600,000 rials to the dollar on February 26.[30] The Iranian rial further appreciated from 466,500 rials to one US dollar on March 15 to 463,500 rials to one US dollar on March 16.[31]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

***The Wall Street Journal* reported on March 16 that Iran had agreed to cease covert weapons shipments to the Houthis in Yemen.[32]** *The Journal* also reported on March 12 that Iran had agreed to cease encouraging cross-border Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia in exchange for the Saudis restraining anti-regime outlet *Iran International* from continuing its critical coverage of the regime.[33] Iran and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement on March 10 to reestablish bilateral relations, as CTP previously reported.[34]

Reuters reported that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei played a role in bringing China into the Iran-Saudi Arabia talks on March 16.[35] Reuters, citing two unidentified Iranian officials, reported that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei became frustrated with the slow pace of Iran-Saudi Arabia talks in September 2022 and held discussions with his team that ultimately led to China mediating.[36] It is noteworthy that the article specified that Khamenei held these discussions in September 2022—a time when rumors were circulating about Khamenei’s worsening health.[37] Reuters also reported that an unidentified Iranian official stated that Iran will use its “regional influence, particularly in Yemen, to help Riyadh’s security.”[38] These Iranian officials may have sought to convey to a Western audience that Khamenei has personally endorsed the normalization talks and thereby counter suggestions that the regime may be divided on a potential rapprochement with Riyadh.

External Security and Military Affairs

Badr Organization-affiliated Iraqi officials suggested that the Islamic State or intra-Sunni violence was responsible for a massacre in Diyala Province on March 16 that the Badr Organization likely conducted. Several members of the Parliamentary Security and Defense Committee, chaired by Badr-affiliated Hakim al Zamili, reported on March 16 that the committee is developing a security plan to counter the Islamic State and gang-related crimes in Diyala Province.[39] Zamili previously led the Security and Defense Committee on a fact-finding mission to Diyala Province on March 1 to investigate the likely Badr committed massacre and later called on the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service and Badr-affiliated Emergency Response Division to increase counterterrorism operations in the province.[40] Badr-affiliated government officials have criticized Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani’s security reform proposals and deployments to Diyala Province to arrest individuals tied to the recent killings in the province.

The Badr Organization is meanwhile trying to preserve and reinforce its security influence in Diyala Province. The Commander of the Popular Mobilization Forces Diyala Operations Command—Talib al –Moussawi—reported that Badr’s 1st Brigade, 23rd Brigade, 24th Brigade, and 110th Brigade have deployed to Diyala ostensibly as additional security for upcoming Nowrouz holiday events.[41] Badr Organization leader Hadi al Ameri previously warned Sudani against removing Badr Organization officials from security posts on March 12 and suggested that Badr should be responsible for security in the province.[42]

Syrian President Bashar al Assad reiterated Syria's demands for engaging in rapprochement talks with Turkish President Recep Erdogan and signaled close partnership with Russia in an interview with Russian state media outlet *Novosti* on March 15. Assad repeated his demand for Turkey to withdraw its troops from Syrian territory and retract its support for terrorist organizations in Syria prior to engaging in rapprochement talks.[43] Assad also expressed interest in establishing new Russian bases in Syria as well as hosting Russian hypersonic missiles and air defense systems. Assad and the Kremlin likely coordinated the interview to signal to Turkey unity between Damascus and Moscow, regardless of whether the Russian military presence in Syria changes. Russia's military presence in Syria served as a deterrent against Turkish ground incursions and Assad's interview is likely intended to garner further concessions from Erdogan in any possible normalization talks.

Turkish state-media newspaper *Sabah* claimed on March 16 that a deputy-level meeting between Turkish and Syrian officials is expected to take place within the next week.[44] No other state media outlet has reported on upcoming talks, however, possibly indicating that Erdogan is ready to resume negotiations, but Assad may not be. Erdogan may perceive an increased urgency to secure a political victory, such as normalizing ties with Damascus and sending back Syrian refugees, after the 7.8 magnitude earthquake on February 6 damaged Erdogan's popularity ahead of an upcoming election on May 14.[45]

[1] [http://www dot president dot ir/fa/143007](http://www.dotpresident.ir/fa/143007)

[2] [http://www dot president dot ir/fa/143007](http://www.dotpresident.ir/fa/143007)

[3] [https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122316477/%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%DB%B1%DB%B4%DB%B0%DB%B2-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%DA%86%DA%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF](https://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401122316477/%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%DB%B1%DB%B4%DB%B0%DB%B2-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%DA%86%DA%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF)

[https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122417063/%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B4%D8%A8-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86](https://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401122417063/%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B4%D8%A8-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%86)

[4] [https://iranwire dot com/en/features/69205/](https://iranwire.com/en/features/69205/)

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-26>

[6] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85052826/%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%81-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86](https://www.dotirna.ir/news/85052826/%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%81-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86)

[https://www dot tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/19/2865449/](https://www.dottasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/19/2865449/) -ایران و عربستان در -پکن حذف آمریکا از مناسبات مهم غرب آسیا

[7] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85058440/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86](https://www.dotirna.ir/news/85058440/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86)

%DB%B1%DB%B1%DB%B8-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-
%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9-
%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-
%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-
%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023>

[9] <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-23/601112-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1>

[10] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-iran-ahmadinejad/iran-presid...>

[11] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/25/2868554/> - شمعانی-نگاه-دولت-به-همکاری-های-
منطقه-ای-ایجاد-منطقه-قوی-است
<https://www.irna.ir/news/85059334/%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF>

[12] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023> ; <https://amwaj.media/article/exclusive-bahrain-iran-held-low-profile-exchanges-amid-iranian-saudi-détente>

[13] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/25/2868508/> - رئیس-کل-بانک-مرکزی-راهی-
امارات-شد

[14] <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/03/20/uae-continues-to-serve-as-hub-fo...>

[15] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636283027998273537?s=20> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1636291615101792256?s=20

[16] <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1636388503172042755?s=20> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1636395345516150785?s=20 ;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1636388283948347398?s=20 ;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1636419065328680962?s=20 ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636413124537643008?s=20>

[17] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1636413417786609664?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636370225808683008?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636315849987354629?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636315849987354629?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636340097086791681?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1636348780030177281?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636415090521157632?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636415618814558238?s=20>

[18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636370987460734976?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636429063760887808?s=20>

[19] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1636417018676101125?s=20

[20] <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/14/world/middleeast/iran-protests-childr...>

[21] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/iran-child-detainees-subj...>

[22] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85059284>

[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-updates-february-2023>

[24] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85058938/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4-%DA%A9%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%BA%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%B7%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B4> ;
<http://www.president dot ir/fa/142998>

[25] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-setad-news/exclusive-reuters-inv...>

[26] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sml234>

[27] <https://www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719279/%D8%B5%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%82%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%BA%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B3%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%DA%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B4%D8%A8-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84-%D8%B3%DA%A9%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF>

[28] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-31-2023>

[29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-5-2023>

[30] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-27-2023>

[31] Bonbast dot com

[32] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-agrees-to-stop-arming-houthis-in-yemen...>

- [33] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-plans-summit-of-persian-gulf-arab-and...>
- [34] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>
- [35] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/frustrated-khamenei-pushed-sau...>
- [36] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/frustrated-khamenei-pushed-sau...>
- [37] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-september-28>
- [38] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/frustrated-khamenei-pushed-sau...>
- [39] <https://almadapaper dot net/view.php?cat=285528>
- [40] <https://iq.parliament dot iq/blog/2023/03/01/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a3%d9%85%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d8%ac%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%ac%d9%88%d9%84%d8%a9-%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%af%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%a7/>
- [41] <https://al-hashed dot gov.iq/archives/168553>
- [42] <https://alrafidain dot tv/57977/>
- [43] <https://ria dot ru/20230316/asad-1858224485.html>
- <https://www.syria dot tv/%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88>
- [44] <https://www.enabbaladi dot net/archives/633739>
- [45] <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/05/europe/earthquake-hits-turkey-intl-hnk/in...>

Iran Update, March 17, 2023

Iran Update, March 17, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, and Nicholas Carl

March 17, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Some Iranian leaders continue to refuse to make the necessary changes that will meaningfully address popular frustrations. They are instead reaffirming their efforts to “Islam-ize” Iranian society and suppress public displays of behavior they perceive as unreligious during the upcoming Persian new year celebrations. Regime officials have emphasized the “Islamic” part of the “Iranian-Islamic identity” in recent days by suggesting that Ramadan—an Islamic holiday—must take precedence over Nowrouz—the Persian New Year holiday with Zoroastrian origins. President Ebrahim Raisi previously argued that the “Iranian-Islamic identity” is a single harmonious identity on March 16.[1] Multiple Friday prayer leaders warned that Nowrouz must not overshadow Ramadan during their Friday sermons on March 17.[2] Several regime officials also emphasized on March 17 that Iranians must not “violate the sanctity” of Ramadan while celebrating Nowrouz. [3] Khuzestan Public Revolutionary Prosecutor Sadegh Jafari Chegani stated that “eating in front of those who fast [for Ramadan] is a crime.”[4] Chegani also announced that the Khuzestan Prosecutor’s Office issued judicial orders for officers to confront unveiled women and that failure to comply with these orders will be considered a “dereliction of duty.”[5] IRGC Operations Deputy Brigadier General Abbas Nilfroushan separately announced plans to implement “patrols for enjoining good and forbidding evil” in Qom Province between March 16 and the end of Ramadan, implying the resumption of morality patrols comprised[6] It is noteworthy that the IRGC is establishing these patrols in Qom, the religious heartland of Iran. This suggests the regime perceives that Qom residents will be less inclined to resist a new morality patrol than other Iranians due to the generally conservative nature of the city. Officials’ appeals to Iranians--particularly Iranian women--to “preserve the sanctity of Ramadan” will likely further alienate the regime from Iranians who condemn its imposition of religion on the public.

Some regime officials acknowledge that the regime has not resolved Iran’s economic problems. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf stated during a visit to the Zarand Steel Factory in Kerman Province on March 17 that “inflation in the country is progressing at such a speed that the people’s purchasing power has in effect decreased.”[7] Some Friday prayer leaders made similar remarks. Kermanshah Friday Prayer Leader Mostafa Ulama stated during his Friday sermon on March 17 that the government must prioritize controlling and reducing the price of goods.[8] Tehran Interim Friday Prayer Leader Mohammad Javad Haj Ali Akbari similarly acknowledged during his Friday sermon that the Iranian people “have confronted many problems stemming from the excessive increase in prices.”[9] Although the regime has succeeded in raising the value of the Iranian rial after it fell to a record low of 600,000 rials to the dollar on February 26, the rial has not recovered to pre-Mahsa Amini movement levels.[10] The rial was valued at around 298,200 rials to the dollar in September 2022, compared to 471,000 rials to one US dollar on March 17.[11] While the regime has increased the rial’s value in recent days, moreover, it has not addressed high inflation. Iran’s inflation rate remains at around 50 percent, as CTP previously reported.[12] The regime’s inability to resolve Iranians’ economic grievances in addition to its refusal to provide sociocultural concessions will likely fuel greater resentment among the population toward the regime.

The regime's securitization of Zahedan in recent weeks failed to intimidate Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid into halting his anti-regime sermons, which may help normalize public discussions about creating a more inclusive political system. Abdol Hamid argued during his Friday sermon on March 17 that his local supporters have avoided resorting to violence during their weekly protests. He lauded that there was “no war or insecurity,” despite security forces injuring and killing protesters. Abdol Hamid could be trying to attract the wider non-Baloch population to his movement by signaling to them that his protest movement is peaceful. CTP has previously reported on Abdol Hamid’s attempts to appeal to the entire Iranian nation, irrespective of political, sectarian, and ethnic differences. His emphasis on the fact that the Zahedan protests did not cause any insecurity could also be part of an attempt to demonstrate that the regime has tolerated both his calls for inclusion and his other demands, signaling that the public discussion over these issues is possible and should be continued. These observations are consistent with CTP’s previous assessments, namely that Abdol Hamid’s careful balancing of actions and rhetoric pressures the regime without instigating a violence escalation and that the regime may be tolerating Abdol Hamid’s continued criticisms because of his nonviolent posture, restraining the different anti-regime militant groups in the province.

Abdol Hamid repeated his calls for an inclusive government during his March 17 sermon that involves more than just Shia representation. Abdol Hamid stated that all the “cries and protests are due to one religious view” governing the country.[13] He emphasized the diversity of beliefs inside the country, arguing that the socio-political domination of one religious view over all others has limited the open expression of diverse opinions. Abdol Hamid further stated that many capable individuals belonging to minority groups have been excluded from administrative roles in government. Though Abdol Hamid was echoing the long-standing grievances of his Sunni Baluch audience, he maintained a non-sectarian tone by stating “you cannot have one ethnicity, religion, or sect governing the entire country...governance needs to be transethnic, irreligious, and non-sectarian.” CTP does not interpret Abdol Hamid’s comments as advocating for a secular state but simply demanding the inclusion of all ethnic groups and beliefs.

Key Takeaways

- **Some Iranian leaders continue to refuse to make the necessary changes that will meaningfully address popular frustrations.**
- **Some regime officials acknowledge that the regime has not resolved Iran’s economic problems.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid intends to normalize public discussions in Iran about creating a more inclusive political system.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city and one province.**

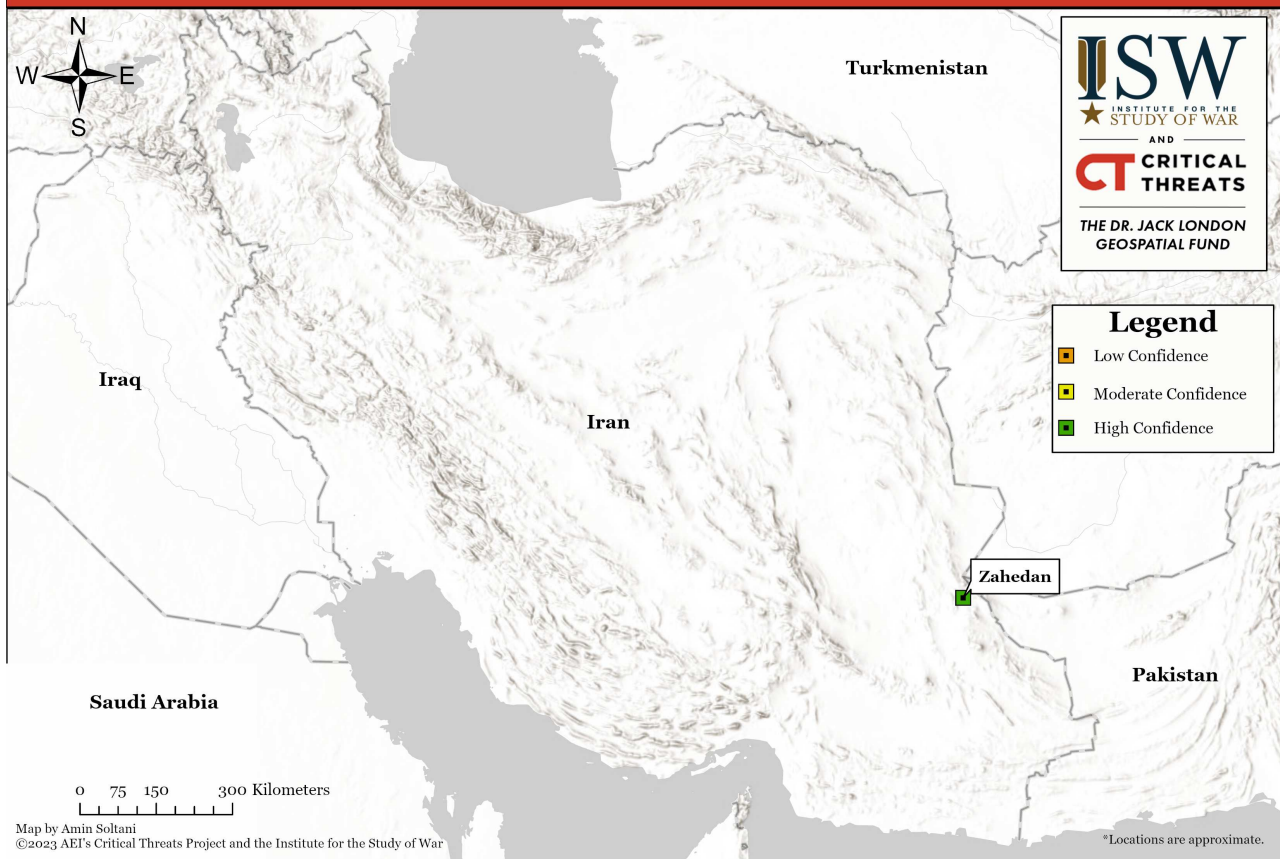
Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least one protest occurred in one city and one province. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[14]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans, some focusing on recent regime executions of political dissidents

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 17, 5:30 PM



Economic Affairs

President Ebrahim Raisi chaired an extraordinary meeting of the Market Regulation Headquarters on March 16.[15] Several economic ministers briefed the headquarters on government efforts to supply consumer goods to the public. Raisi called on provincial governors to ensure that trade unions are properly managing the consumer goods market.

The Iranian rial depreciated from 463,500 rials to one US dollar on March 16 to 471,000 rials to one US dollar on March 17.[16]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian tweeted on March 17 denying any divisions or tensions within the regime foreign policy apparatus.[17] Abdollahian posted this tweet in reference to Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani representing Tehran in the Iran-Saudi Arabia normalization talks rather than Abdollahian. Abdollahian emphasized that the regime foreign policy apparatus operates cohesively under President Ebrahim Raisi. Abdollahian's remarks partially contradict recent Western reports that claimed that the Office of the Supreme Leader—not Raisi—oversaw Iranian participation in the normalization talks.[18]

Iranian state media reported that Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani will likely pay an official visit to Iraq in the coming days to attend the fifth Baghdad International Dialogue Conference.[19] Security officials from various countries discuss political and security challenges in this conference. The fourth conference occurred in August 2021. Representatives from Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and the UAE will reportedly attend the conference.[20]

External Security and Military Affairs

Iranian proxy media claimed that unidentified gunmen targeted Anbar Awakening Council leader Sattam Abu Risha in Ramadi, Anbar Province on March 17.[21] These outlets suggested that militants controlled by Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi were responsible.[22] Sattam Abu Risha is affiliated with the Iranian proxy Kataib Hezbollah – who is currently leading an information operation against Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammed al Halbousi.[23] Iraqi Military Spokesperson Major General Yahya Rasool denied that there had been an assassination attempt and claimed that security forces intervened in the gathering after discovering flyers calling for volunteers for tribal militias.[24] CTP cannot independently verify either claim. Sunni tribes formed the Anbar Awakening Council in 2006 in partnership with Coalition forces in Iraq to counter al-Qaeda in Anbar.[25]

Senior Hamas officials met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and Special Representative of the President of Russia for the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov in Moscow, Russia on March 16.[26] The head of Hamas's International Relations Office Musa Abu Marzouk and Hamas member Izzat al Rishq led the delegation to Moscow. Hamas-affiliated *Palestinian Press Agency* reported that Marzouk and al-Rishq discussed Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Benjamin Netanyahu's administration, and other unspecified Palestinian issues.[27] According to a *Media Line* report, Lebanese Hezbollah has recruited fighters on behalf of the Russian government to fight in Ukraine.[28] CTP cannot verify Media Line's report. Hamas last met with Russian officials in Moscow on September 28, 2022.[29]

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023>

[2] [http://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122618717](http://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401122618717)

[http://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122618778](http://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401122618778)

[3] [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF)

[4] [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF)

%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-
%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-
%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-
%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-
%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-
%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-
%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-
%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-
%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF

[5] [https://www dot entekhab dot](https://www.dot.entekhab.dot)

ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-
%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-
%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-
%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-
%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-
%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-
%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-
%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-
%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-
%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-
%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-
%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-
%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-
%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF

[6] [https://www dot entekhab dot](https://www.dot.entekhab.dot)

ir/fa/news/719335/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-
%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-
%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-
%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-
%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4-
%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-
%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7-
%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA

[7] [https://www dot tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/26/2868865/](https://www.dot.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/26/2868865/)- قالیباف- قدرت- خرید- مردم- عملاً-
کاهش- پیدا کرده- است- کارگران- بابت- حقوق- های- دریافتی- گلایه- دارند- فیلم

[8] [http://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122618717](http://www.dot.isna.dot.ir/news/1401122618717)

[9] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85059783/](https://www.dot.irna.dot.ir/news/85059783/)%D8%AF%D8%B4%D9%85%D9%86-
%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AF%DA%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-
%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-
%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%84%D8%AA-
%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82-
%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C

[10] [https://bonbast dot com/](https://bonbast.dot.com/)

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-27-2023>

[11] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-currency-weakens-nuclear-deal-dead/32186097...>

[12] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-14-2023>

[13] <https://abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/03/17/13539/>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636738251691098116?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636692830562156544?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636682443062222853?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636681327457050627?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1636680836052336640?s=20> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1636714039425351680?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1636709530049343488?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1636706858139369472?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1636703378356027394?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1636700703535013889?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1636690363774652417?s=20>

[15] <http://www.president dot ir/fa/143012>

[16] <https://bonbast dot com>

[17] <https://twitter.com/Amirabdolahian/status/1636642851923668994>

[18] <https://www.middleeasteye dot net/news/saudi-arabia-iran-reconciliation-khamenei-office-agreed-stop-arming-houthis>

[19] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85060003>

[20] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85060003>

[21] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1636703481405767681 ;

https://twitter.com/BnT_AI_ansar/status/1636705626540703744 ;

<https://twitter.com/onenewsiq/status/1636723780423696385> ;

<https://twitter.com/Adammkmm/status/1636705337569935362>

[22] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/72236>;

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/72233>;

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/72237>;

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/72238>

[23] <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/87147>

[24] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B6-%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84>

[25] https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_2-1/Prism_3-18_AI-J...

[26] <https://hamas dot ps/ar/p/16918> ;

<https://www.haaretz dot com/middle-east-news/2023-03-14/ty-article/.premium/russia-invites-hamas-leaders-for-kremlin-visit/00000186-df39-dc06-afdf-ff3fd16c0000>

[27] <https://safa dot ps/post/349604/%D9%88%D9%81%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%81-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%88-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB-%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA>

[28] <https://themedialine dot org/top-stories/exclusive-putin-reportedly-paying-palestinians-from-lebanese-camps-to-fight-in-ukraine/>

[29] <https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-leaders-visiting-moscow-russian-offi...>

Iran Update, March 20, 2023

Iran Update, March 20, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 20, 2023, 7:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Iranian security leaders have announced in recent days that they will resume enforcing the mandatory hijab law with a confrontational approach. The social deputy of the IRGC Qom Provincial Unit—Major Ali Mehdi Babaei—announced on March 18 the implementation of a new initiative—the “Let’s Enjoin Good in Our Neighborhood” plan—to enforce the hijab requirement and other regime behavioral expectations in public in Qom Province.[1] Babaei described the plan as “neighborhood-centric” and mosque-based, suggesting that the IRGC will use the Basij Organization to implement the initiative. IRGC Operations Deputy Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan previously announced plans to establish “patrols for enjoining good and forbidding evil” in Qom between March 16 and Ramadan, as CTP reported.[2] It is noteworthy that the IRGC and Basij—rather than the Law Enforcement Command (LEC)—appear to be trying to take lead on hijab enforcement. Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan stated on March 19 that the LEC will increase neighborhood patrols during Nowrouz and confront women not properly adhering to the hijab law.[3] Radan specified that “travelers in Mazandaran Province must observe the hijab law much more than before,” indicating that his target audience was tourists—many of whom are likely from Tehran—traveling to the Caspian Sea for the Nowrouz holiday.

The security leaders directing this more confrontational approach may have won the intra-regime debate against more moderate figures over how to enforce the hijab law. Many parliamentarians have expressed support for a “smart” and “indirect” approach to enforce veiling in recent months.[4] The Parliamentary Cultural Committee proposed cutting phone and internet services to unveiled women in a report published on March 14, as CTP previously reported.[5] The Parliamentary Judicial and Legal Committee also announced plans to block the national identification cards of unveiled women and bar them from banking services on February 3.[6] Iranian officials have discussed using surveillance cameras with facial recognition technologies to identify unveiled women as well.[7] These measures would avoid physical confrontation with unveiled women and punish them indirectly.[8] Many of these measures have been proposed by parliamentarians who do not have the authority to enact them, however. It appears that those who have the authority—namely the security services—have opted to ignore these calls for restraint in favor of a more confrontational—and potentially more forceful—approach.

The IRGC may have decided to first launch its morality patrol campaign in Qom for several reasons. Qom is the religious heartland of Iran, and security leaders may fear that the presence of unveiled women in this city will tarnish the image and undermine the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic. Security leaders may also be securitizing Qom to deter potential dissent from some in the clerical establishment. Several senior clerics voiced criticism of the regime during the Mahsa Amini protest movement. Ayatollah Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad and Ayatollah Asadollah Bayat Zanjani criticized state security services for the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, as CTP previously reported.[9] Ayatollah Hossein Nouri Hamedani separately called on the regime to listen to the people’s grievances in September 2022.[10] Security leaders could use these patrols to message to these clerics that the regime has no intention of backing down from its crackdown on Iranian women. Security leaders’ efforts to reconstitute morality patrols are particularly striking in

light of UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Javād Rehman's announcement on March 20 that evidence confirms Mahsa Amini died on September 16, 2022 "as a result of beatings by the state morality police."[11]

Anti-regime outlets have published purported internal regime meeting notes detailing observations consistent with CTP's previous assessments about intra-regime fractures and major problems within the security services during the Masha Amini protests.[12] An anti-regime Telegram channel named "Freedom Time" published the document on March 18, claiming that it was the summary of a January 3, 2023, meeting between Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and regime security leadership.[13] *IranWire* and *Iran International* then separately reported on the document on March 18 and 19, respectively. CTP cannot independently verify the authenticity of this document. If it is a forgery, it is a high-quality one whose makers have a nuanced understanding of internal Iranian security affairs. CTP does not regard the document as an independent confirmation of our previous assessments, but some key points in the document are consistent with our previous assessments and hypotheses.

High-ranking security officials, according to the document, reported in the meeting with Khamenei that many security personnel had abandoned their posts, refused to use violence against protesters, and in some cases even misled security leaders to help protesters. Some of the officials in the meeting stated that the above issues were due to younger security personnel's empathy for their fellow youth. A provincial IRGC official identified the low salaries of security services as the root cause, citing an incident in which security forces looted a facility in Karaj, Alborz Province stocked with food. Others pointed to the diminishing ideological commitment within the ranks to the regime's core values. CTP has previously assessed on multiple occasions that Iranian security services were struggling with bandwidth constraints, exhaustion, and low morale and that regime officials were alarmed by these developments.[14] CTP had specifically assessed that less ideologically committed security personnel might struggle to sustain the level of violence that regime officials were demanding, and that the latter were concerned about low salaries leading to defections and insubordination.[15]

The discussions detailed in the document are furthermore consistent with CTP's prior assessments about intra-regime fractures over the security response to the protests. Different regime officials had varying accounts of the root causes and extent of the security services' inability to confront protesters and offered correspondingly different solutions. Those who identified low salaries as the cause called for tax exemptions and increasing the government's budget for the security services. Those who identified the security forces' declining ideological attachment to the regime as the cause called for the relevant political and cultural institutions to increase their ideological efforts. Several officials stated that the above issues within the regime's security and intelligence services were unprecedented in the history of the Islamic Republic. Others, including Khamenei, believed the reports were exaggerated and that regime officials should instead focus on the degree to which the services were both prepared and ideologically inclined to confront protesters. CTP previously assessed and reported on numerous occasions that the regime was internally split over the cause and extent of the security forces' inability and unwillingness to crack down on protests.[16]

The document included some information that CTP has not previously observed in the open-source information space. Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Major General Gholam Ali Rashid reported that the security services had thwarted plans by rogue elements to shell the Supreme Leader's office and personal residence. If true, this event would be far beyond any level of internal mutiny that CTP has previously assessed or reported.

Various regime actors continue to portray the economy differently. The Iranian rial depreciated nearly five percent from 471,000 rials to one US dollar on March 17 to 494,000 rials to one US dollar on March 20.[17] Parliamentarian Ahmad Alireza Beygi stated on March 18 that the Raisi administration "has lost its ability to control the market."[18] Parliamentarian Morteza Mahmoudvand similarly stated on March 20 that "not only are the poor suffering from economic pressures today, but the middle class is also experiencing serious damage."[19]

President Ebrahim Raisi and his circle have contrastingly continued to tout their purported “economic achievements.” He stated during the opening ceremony of the second phase of an oil refinery in Abadan, Khuzestan Province on March 20 that Iran’s economy grew four percent in the past year.[20] Raisi added that the second phase of the refinery has created between 7,000 and 15,000 jobs.[21] Oil Minister Javad Owji separately praised the administration for completing the Abadan Oil Refinery project—which he stated the Hassan Rouhani administration left “half-finished.”[22]

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian security leaders have announced in recent days that they will resume enforcing the mandatory hijab law with a confrontational approach. The security leaders directing this more confrontational approach may have won the intra-regime debate against more moderate figures over how to enforce the hijab law.**
- **Anti-regime outlets have published purported internal regime meeting notes detailing observations consistent with CTP’s previous assessments about intra-regime fractures and major problems within the security services during the Masha Amini protests.**
- **Various regime actors continue to portray the economy differently.**
- **At least two protests occurred on March 18, three protests on March 19, and five protests on March 20.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on March 18. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[23]

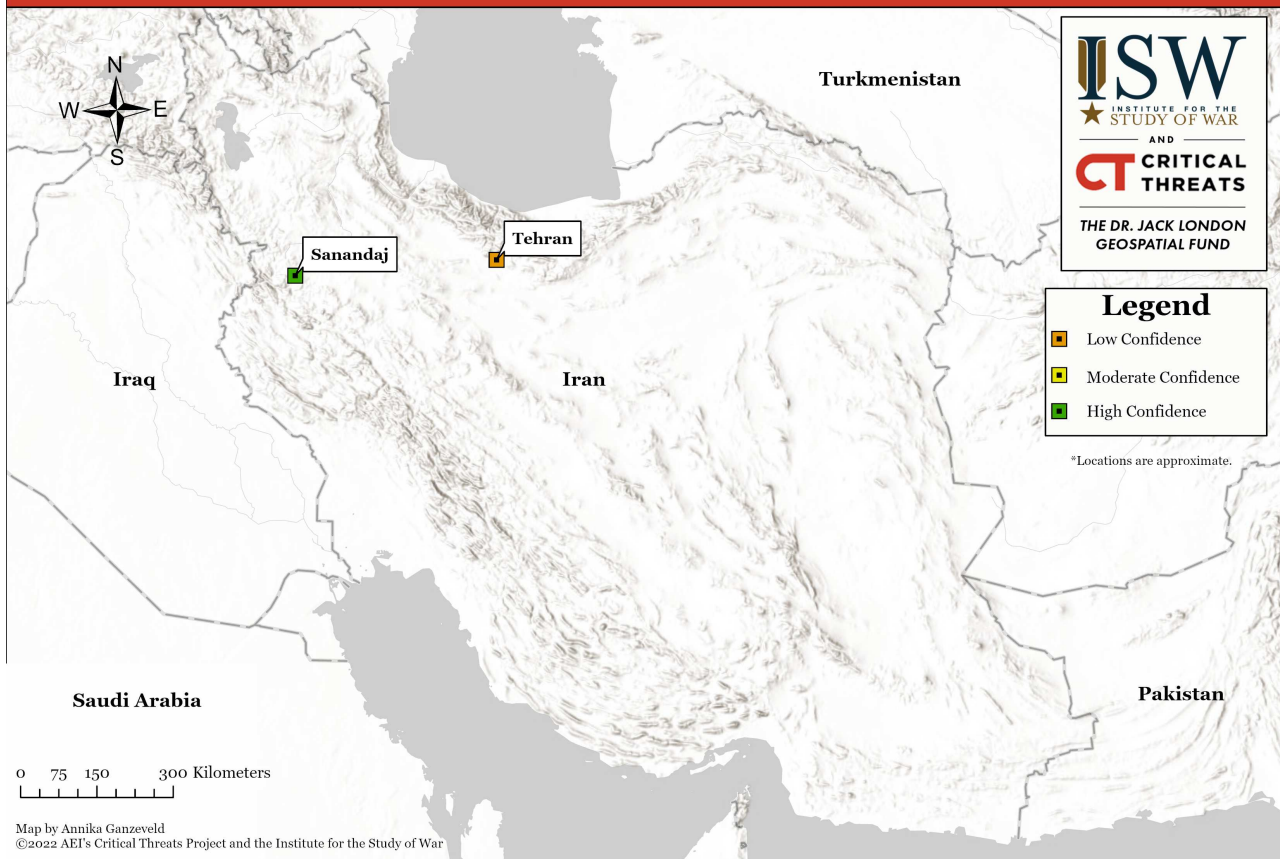
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals advocating for the disabled

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[24]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Taxi drivers on strike

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 18, 6:00 PM



At least three protests occurred in three cities across one province on March 19. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[25]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

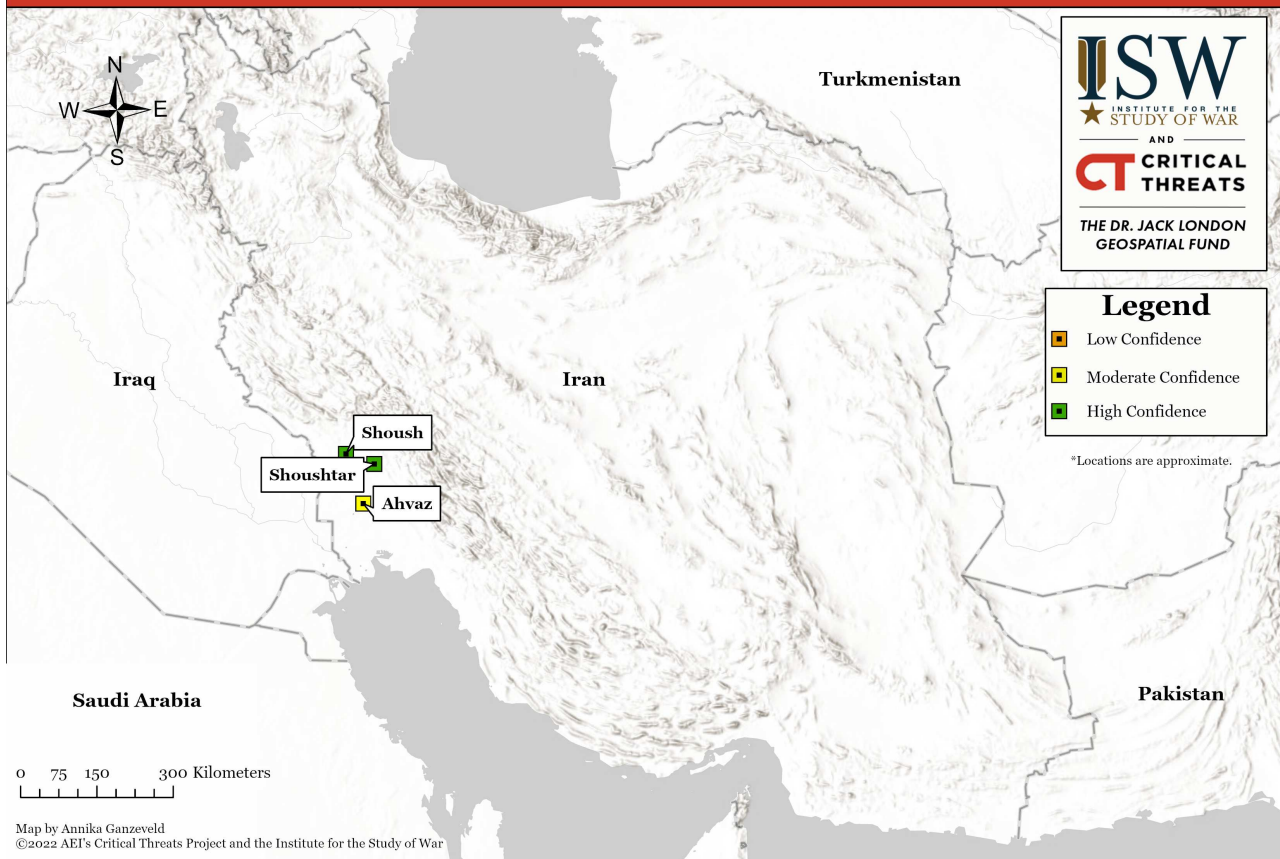
Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[26]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoushtar, Khuzestan Province [27]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 19, 6:00 PM



At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces on March 20. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[28]

- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans during Nowrouz celebrations

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[29]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans during Nowrouz celebrations

Marivan, Kurdistan Province[30]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans during Nowrouz celebrations

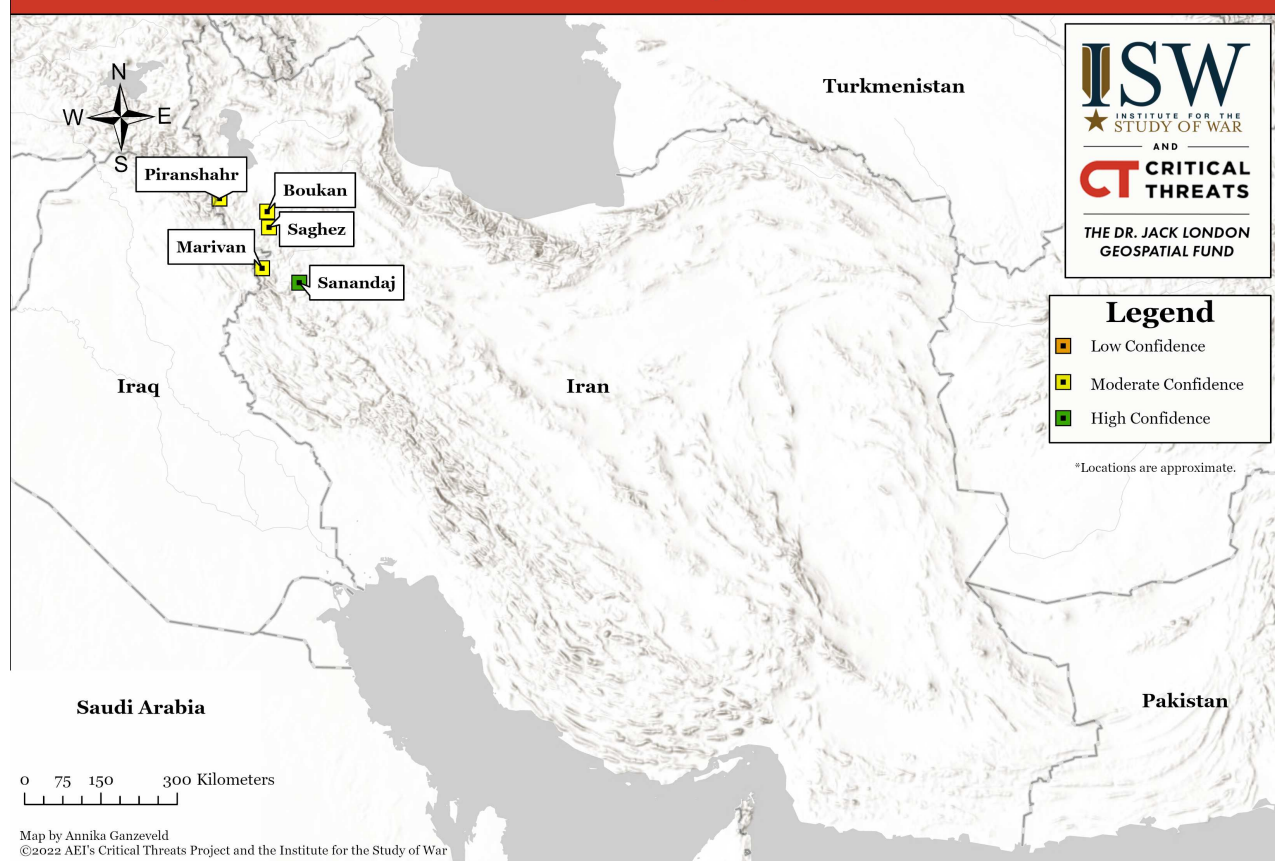
Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[31]

- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans during Nowrouz celebrations

Piranshahr, West Azerbaijan Province[32]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans during Nowrouz celebrations

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 20, 7:00 PM



The LEC discovered and neutralized a car bomb in Tehran Province on March 17.[33] The vehicle owner reportedly noticed an explosive underneath the car and called the police. Using an explosive in this manner is typically meant to kill a vehicle operator rather than nearby individuals. Iranian state media reported that the vehicle owner does not have “any important executive responsibilities in government agencies.”

President Ebrahim Raisi continued emphasizing the need to indoctrinate the population during a meeting with Rahian-e Nour tourists in Khuzestan Province on March 20.[34] The term Rahian-e Nour—meaning “Passengers of Light” in Persian—refers to regime-organized tours of Iran-Iraq War battlefields. Such tours are particularly common around Nowrouz. Raisi framed these tours and related services as critical to countering Western cultural influence. Raisi also called on artists and cinema workers to focus more on portraying “martyrs” from the Iran-Iraq War. These statements are related to the regime’s “explanation jihad”—a term coined by regime officials that means using propaganda to ideologize the population and increase public support for the Islamic Republic.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian engaged Turkey for a second time in recent weeks likely over Iranian security concerns in Azerbaijan. Abdollahian held a phone call with Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on March 17, during which the two discussed Iran-Azerbaijan relations.[35] The two previously discussed Israeli involvement in the Caucasus in a meeting on March 8, as CTP previously reported.[36] Regime officials have repeatedly in recent months expressed concern about an alleged Israeli intelligence presence in Azerbaijan and called for Baku to reject cooperation with Israel.[37] Regime officials may seek to persuade Turkey to address their concerns vis-a-vis Azerbaijan after they have failed to resolve these issues with Baku directly. Abdollahian and Cavusoglu additionally discussed the normalization of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia during the March 17 phone call.

Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani discussed security and economic cooperation during an official visit to Iraq on March 19. Shamkhani met Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani and National Security Adviser Qassem al Araj, among others. [38] Shamkhani and Araj signed an agreement to address Iranian security concerns in Iraqi Kurdistan. [39] Regime officials have repeatedly accused anti-regime militant groups and Israel of using Iraqi Kurdistan to facilitate operations into Iran. Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin accompanied Shamkhani and discussed financial cooperation and accelerating Iraq's payments to Iran during the visit. [40]

Presidential Deputy Chief of Staff for Political Affairs Mohammad Jamshidi tweeted on March 19 that President Ebrahim Raisi has accepted an invitation from Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz to pay an official visit to Riyadh. [41] Jamshidi added that they would discuss increasing economic and regional cooperation during the visit.

Parliamentarian Elham Azad stated on March 19 that Iran and Bahrain are working to reopen embassies with one another. [42] Azad also stated that Bahrain will invite Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf for an official visit. Azad was part of an Iranian delegation that attended the 146th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Manama on March 11-15.

Senior officials from the Strategic Foreign Relations Council are conducting an official visit to Syria. Council Chairman Kamal Kharrazi and Secretary Abbas Araghchi arrived in Damascus on March 19. [43] They plan to meet Syrian President Bashar al Assad, Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad, and Religious Endowments Minister Mohammad Abdul Sattar. The Strategic Foreign Relations Council serves as an advisory board to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Kharrazi has occasionally served as a personal envoy of Khamenei as well.

External Security and Military Affairs

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani visited Aleppo and Latakia on March 17. [44] Iranian state media reported that Ghaani oversaw earthquake relief shipments. Iran has reportedly moved weapons shipments into Syria under the guise of humanitarian, as CTP previously reported. [45] Ghaani previously visited Aleppo and Latakia to meet with Syrian, Iraqi proxy, Lebanese Hezbollah, and possibly Russian officials in early February 2023. [46]

Iraqi Interior Minister Abdul al Shammari chaired a meeting with security officials affiliated with Iranian proxies in Diyala province on March 20. [47] The meeting included Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Diyala Operations Commander Talib al Musawi, PMF-affiliated Army Chief of Staff Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah, Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH)-affiliated Diyala Police Chief Major General Alaa al Zubaidi, and Nouri al Maliki-affiliated Iraqi Joint Operations Deputy Commander Qais al Mohammadawi. The PMF deployed four additional Badr brigades to Diyala province on March 16 under the pretext of additional security for Nowrouz. [48] Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani deployed Iraqi Security Forces to Diyala province following a series of likely Badr Organization-affiliated killings. Iranian proxy-affiliated leadership has since worked to retain control of security operations and Diyala province under the PMF independent of Sudani.

The Iraqi parliament passed several amendments to electoral reform laws on March 20. [49] Parliament passed an amendment stipulating that individuals with prior misdemeanor or felony corruption convictions are barred from running for office. [50] The Parliamentary Integrity Committee under Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani's administration has abused corruption charges to target and arrest former officials under the Mostafa al Kadhim government and would likely use the amendment to further marginalize political opponents. [51] Parliament did not vote on amendments backed by former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki and the Shia Coalition Framework—a loose coalition of Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia political parties—that would reverse election reforms from 2019 during the March 20 session. [52] These proposed amendments would marginalize independent and minority political parties in favor of Maliki's State of Law Coalition.

Iraqi activist groups have called for protests in Iraq if Parliament passes Maliki's proposed election laws.[53] Parliament is expected to vote on the remaining election laws on April 1.[54]

[1] [https://www entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719481](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719481)

[2] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-17-2023#_edn4...

[3] [http://www dot ensafnews dot com/405357/خطو-نشان-رادان-برای-مسافران-بدحجاب-شما/](http://www.ensafnews.com/405357/خطو-نشان-رادان-برای-مسافران-بدحجاب-شما/)

[https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85060676/](https://www.irna.ir/news/85060676/)-سردار-رادان-تدابیر-انتظامی-برای-سفرهای-نوروزی-هموطنان-اندیشیده

[4] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85056960/%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA](https://www.irna.ir/news/85056960/%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA)

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-15-2023>

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-15-2023>

<https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1621519442202218498>

[7] <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/iran-crisis-update-january...>

[8] [https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85056960/%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA](https://www.irna.ir/news/85056960/%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA)

[9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-2>

<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32037877.html>

[10] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-2#_e...

<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/nouri-hamedani-urge-government-listen-people...>

[11] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/20/iran-rights-violations-crisis...>

[12] [https://iranwire dot com/fa/features/114903-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B5%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%BE%D8%A7%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C/ ; https://www.iranintl dot com/202303206758 ; https://www.iranintl dot com/en/202303192652](https://iranwire.com/fa/features/114903-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%B5%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%BE%D8%A7%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C/)

[13] https://t.me/Vaghte_Azadi/155

[14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-september-29...>

[15] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-30>

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-september-30...>
[https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-3 ...](https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-3...)

;

[17] <https://bonbast dot com/>

[18] <https://www dot entekhab dot>

ir/fa/news/719444/%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7-
%D8%A8%DB%8C%DA%AF%DB%8C-
%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-
%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%87-
%DB%B7%DB%B0-%D8%AA%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%DB%B2%DB%B8%DB%B0-
%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF-
%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AB%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AA-
%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7-
%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-
%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%84-%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%AA-
%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D9%87-
%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-
%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE%D8%AA%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF-
%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-
%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%AA-%DA%AF%D9%88%D8%B4%D8%AA-
%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-
%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4%E2%80%8C%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%86%DB%8C-
%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-
%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-
%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%84-
%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B2-
%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-
%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B4-
%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D9%87-
%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D8%A7-
%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2-
%DA%A9%D8%B3%D8%B1%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B4-%D8%B1%D8%A7-
%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1-
%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%87-
%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C-
%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B2-
%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-
%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-
%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B4%DB%8C%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF-
%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8-
%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%82%D8%B7-
%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AF%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%A7%D8%B4-
%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%B6-
%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%86%D8%AF

[19] <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719681/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%BE%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%86%E2%80%8C>

[20] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85062295/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1>

[21] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85062295/%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF-%DA%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1>

[22] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85062233/%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%AA-%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%A9%D9%81%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF%D9%87>

[23] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637018013902811138?cxt=HHwWhMC9m...>

[24] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637026942946889728?cxt=HHwWgMC-4...>

[25] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637397936760930304?s=20> ; <http...>

[26] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637398742969065473?s=20> ; <http...>

[27] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637408590293024770?s=20> ; <http...>

[29] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637849958593224709?s=20> ; <http...>

[30] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1637865821895548929?s=20 ; <http...>

[31] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637862273250123777?s=20> ; <http...>

[32] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1637906075813834753?cxt=HHwWgsCzh... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1637873084735602690?cxt=HHwWhIC2r...>

[33] www.farsnews.ir/news/14011226000525

[34] [www.president dot ir/fa/143057](http://www.president.ir/fa/143057)

[35] [https://mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/714517](https://mfa.ir/portal/NewsView/714517)

[36] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023>

[37] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-19#_...
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/energy/azerbaijan-iran-and-risin...>

[38] [www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/137592](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/137592)

[39] [www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/137589](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/137589)

[40] [https://www.irna dot ir/news/85062150](https://www.irna.ir/news/85062150)

[41] <https://twitter.com/MhmmmdJamshidi/status/1637447774651260931?s=20>

[42] [www.mehrnews dot com/news/5736326](http://www.mehrnews.com/news/5736326)

[43] [www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719684](http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719684)

[44] [https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/26/2869102](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/26/2869102)

[45] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-17-2023>

[46] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-16-2023>

[47] <https://t.co/Twaz5CN8Dh> ;

[https://www.ninanews dot com/Website/News/Details?key=1041578](https://www.ninanews.com/Website/News/Details?key=1041578)

[48] [https://al-hashed dot gov.iq/archives/168553](https://al-hashed.gov.iq/archives/168553)

[49] [https://iq.parliament dot iq/blog/2023/03/20/%d9%85%d8%ac%d9%84%d8%b3-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d9%88%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d9%8a%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b4%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b5%d9%88%d9%8a%d8%aa-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%86/](https://iq.parliament.iq/blog/2023/03/20/%d9%85%d8%ac%d9%84%d8%b3-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d9%88%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d9%8a%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%b4%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b5%d9%88%d9%8a%d8%aa-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%86/) ;

[https://shafaq dot](https://shafaqdot)

[com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84](https://shafaqdot.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84) ;

<https://www dot>

[alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84](https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84) ;

[50] <https://shafaq dot>

com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84 ;

<https://www.alaraby dot>

co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%91%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84 ;

[51] <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/11/will-iraqs-new-anti-corrupt...>

[52] <https://shafaq dot>

com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7

[53] <https://shafaq dot>

com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%BA%D9%88

[54] <https://shafaq dot>

com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84 ;

Iran Update, March 21, 2023

Iran Update, March 21, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 21, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei shut down intra-regime debates about political reform to address protester grievances and instead confined these debates to the economy during a Nowrouz speech on March 21. Khamenei stated that Iran's enemies seek to transform Iran by "changing the constitution or the structure of the regime" and that some individuals in Iran have echoed this rhetoric.[1] Khamenei undoubtedly directed this statement to reformist politician Mir Hossein Mousavi who called for "foundational" change in Iran on February 4 as well as to individuals, such as prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid, who have expressed support for Mousavi's proposal.[2] Khamenei may have also directed this statement toward pragmatic hardliners, such as Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who have called for political change within the framework of the Islamic Republic.[3] Regardless of who his target audience was, Khamenei made clear that those who call for constitutional change are counterrevolutionaries because, he said, the idea for political transformation originated with Iran's enemies.

Khamenei implied that the economy should be the primary topic of intra-regime debate. Khamenei stated that addressing the people's economic problems will largely solve Iran's political and sociocultural issues.[4] Khamenei implicitly ordered Iranian officials to stop debating governance and cultural problems by asking them to focus their attention on fixing the economy. Khamenei separately called on the media to "create hope" among the Iranian people to counter the efforts of Iran's enemies, who seek to disillusion Iranian youth.[5] This rhetoric suggests that Khamenei will continue to tolerate sociocultural discussions that focus on indoctrination and ideologization. Khamenei has not indicated that he will accept more substantial debates about the regime's disconnect from the Iranian people, however.

Several regime elements have reflected Khamenei's uncompromising stance toward sociocultural issues in recent days. IRGC officials in Qom have announced plans to reestablish morality patrols, as CTP reported on March 17.[6] Regime officials additionally continue to discuss the economy instead of addressing sociocultural grievances but blame the Mahsa Amini protest movement on Iran's foreign enemies.[7] The regime is likely focusing on the economy, in part, because this issue is not central to the regime's ideology. The hijab—and sociocultural issues more broadly—contrastingly challenge the very principles that underpin the Islamic Republic.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf may be testing the rhetorical boundaries that Khamenei identified. Ghalibaf stated in his own Nowrouz statement that "the way to realize a strong Iran... is through new governance." [8] It is unclear to what Ghalibaf was referring exactly when he said "new governance." Such rhetoric could refer to installing new executive managers, especially in the Raisi administration, or to more drastic measures, such as establishing a parliamentary system under the Islamic Republic. His call for some kind of political change is now new, however. Ghalibaf made an urgent appeal for governmental change during a parliamentary meeting on February 23, as CTP previously reported.[9] Ghalibaf did not call for constitutional change—and thus did not directly contradict Khamenei's guidance—but he also did not follow other regime officials who more closely mirrored Khamenei's rhetoric in their Nowrouz statements.

This rhetoric may indicate that Ghalibaf was indeed carefully challenging the Supreme Leader's order to cease all debates about political reform.

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei shut down intra-regime debates about political reform to address protester grievances and instead confined these debates to the economy during a Nowrouz speech. Khamenei implied that the economy should be the primary topic of intra-regime debate.**
- **Several regime elements have reflected Khamenei's uncompromising stance toward sociocultural issues in recent days.**
- **Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf may be testing the rhetorical boundaries that Khamenei identified.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on March 21. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[10]

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Gathered by the graves of killed protesters, chanting anti-regime slogans

Arak, Markazi Province[11]

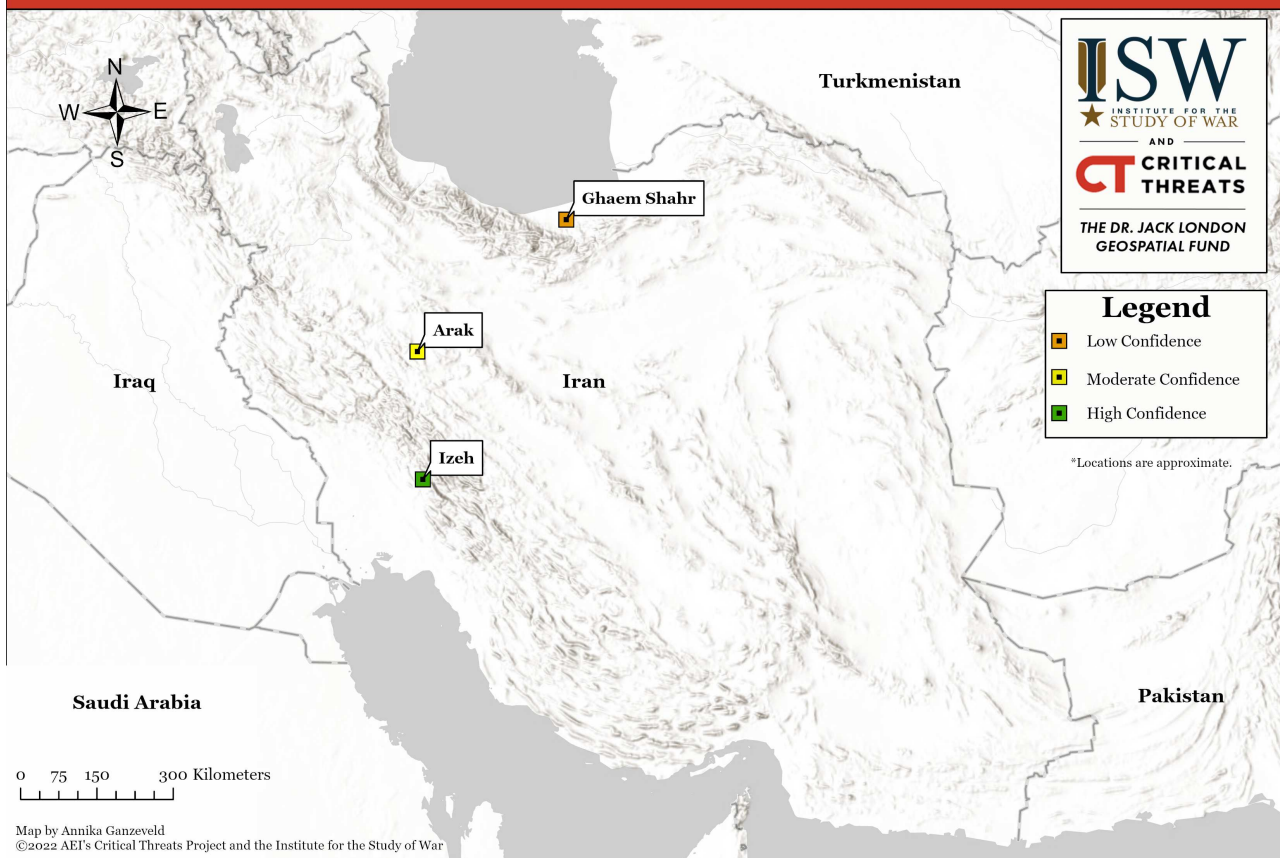
- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Gathered by the graves of killed protesters, chanting anti-regime slogans

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

Ghaem Shahr, Mazandaran Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Gathered by the graves of killed protesters, singing famous protest song

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 21, 6:00 PM



UK-based outlet Amwaj Media reported on March 20 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei may remove Mashhad Friday Prayer Leader Ahmad Alam ol Hoda from his post.[13] The article suggested that Khamenei may remove Alam ol Hoda due to his recent calls for vigilantes to enforce the mandatory hijab law and his generally provocative views. Alam ol Hoda is well known for his hardline stances, especially regarding women's rights. The EU sanctioned him on March 20 for undermining women's freedom and propagating hatred against women.[14] Alam ol Hoda's calls for vigilante enforcement of the hijab law could be especially problematic for the regime as it would undermine its authority to enforce its own laws. Other clerics in Qom have recently issued similar calls.[15]

Alam ol Hoda's calls for vigilantism are noteworthy in the context of the recent school poisonings. Senior clerics in the two conservatively religious cities of Qom and Mashhad could have had a hand in inspiring or directly ordering attacks on schoolgirls who protested the mandatory veiling law during the Mahsa Amini movement. Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid and former reformist President Mohammad Khatami suggested that regime-affiliated actors were responsible for the poisoning attacks, as CTP previously reported.[16] Khatami's statement was reminiscent of the 1990s "chain murders," during which senior clerics ordered vigilantes to assassinate political dissidents who they felt were not going to be prosecuted by the judiciary. The regime could be attempting to rein in overzealous clerics through its announced plans to implement a morality patrol in Qom Province, as CTP previously reported.[17]

Alam ol Hoda is the father-in-law of President Ebrahim Raisi and a member of the Assembly of Experts, the regime body responsible for appointing and monitoring the supreme leader (although the assembly has never really fulfilled the latter function). Raisi is widely considered to be a top contender to succeed Khamenei as supreme leader. The removal of Alam ol Hoda could damage Raisi's chances. It would be highly significant if Khamenei dismissed Alam ol Hoda, but CTP has not seen indications in the open source that Khamenei has made such a decision.

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continued his criticism of the regime in a celebratory Nowrouz message on his Twitter account on March 21.[18] Abdol Hamid called on the regime to release political prisoners and end discrimination, injustice, and poverty.

Economic Affairs

The Iranian rial continued selling for around 494,000 to one US dollar on March 21 for the second consecutive day.[19] The rial has depreciated rising from around 471,000 rials to the US dollar on March 17.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Senior officials from the Strategic Foreign Relations Council continued their official visit to Syria on March 21. Council Chairman Kamal Kharrazi and Secretary Abbas Araghchi met with Syrian President Bashar al Assad to discuss bilateral relations and international developments, including the normalization of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia.[20] Kharrazi and Assad agreed to facilitate communications and exchanges between Iranian and Syrian scholars to counter Western cultural influence, especially among youth. Kharrazi and Araghchi previously met with Syrian Religious Endowments Minister Mohammad Abdul Sattar on March 19 and Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad on March 20.[21]

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Pakistani Foreign Affairs Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on March 21.[22] The two discussed the growing relations between Tehran and Islamabad as well as the recent normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to normalize relations on March 10, as CTP previously reported.[23] Abdollahian described the Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement during the phone call as a “constructive factor” leading to the further development and stability of the region.

Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani announced he will pay an official visit to Yerevan, Armenia on March 21-22.[24] Tensions have flared between Iran and Azerbaijan in recent months over Baku’s efforts to connect Azerbaijan proper to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via a land corridor running through Armenia. Tehran has framed these Azerbaijani efforts as potential violations of Armenian territorial integrity and argued that this land corridor would furthermore block Iranian economic access to European and Russian markets.[25]

External Security and Military Affairs

Anti-Syrian regime media outlets reported that Russian forces transported military equipment to an unspecified Russian base in al Saeediyah, Manbij district, Aleppo province on March 21.[26] A *Thiqa* report claimed that the Russian military equipment includes 40 armored vehicles, logistical materials, and weaponry. This reported deployment of additional Russian assets around Aleppo may be part of a larger effort to deter a possible Turkish ground incursion into northern Syria in the months and years ahead.[27] Syrian President Bashar al Assad previously voiced his support for an increased Russian military presence in Syria during an interview with Russian-state media outlet Novosti on March 15, as CTP previously reported.[28] Continued Russian and Syrian military cooperation will likely place additional pressure on Turkish President Recep Erdogan in possible normalization talks.

Anti-Syrian regime media claimed that clashes occurred between various Iranian proxy militias around the al Qaim crossing on the Iraq-Syria border on March 20. Militants from Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH) and Kataib Seyyed ol Shohada (KSS) clashed with Kataib Hezbollah (KH) forces and took control of a border crossing from KH.[29] *Qasioun* reported that clashes occurred over several months of disputes over which militia should control Iranian convoys crossing the border. CTP cannot independently verify these claims. The al Qaim border crossing is a major arms and drug smuggling route for Iranian-backed Shia militias in Iraq.[30]

[1] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020101000395>

- [2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-6-2023>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-9-2023>
- [3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-23-2023>
- [4] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85062598>
- [5] <https://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26385>
- [6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-17-2023>
- [7] <http://www.president dot ir/fa/143067>
- [8] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85062778>
- [9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-23-2023>
- [10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1638115593051160578?s=20>;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1638065123460886529?s=20>;
<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1638169518382907392?s=20>;
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1638199519039967234?s=20;
https://twitter.com/dariush_Zand/status/1638216697415860229?s=20;
<https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1638229792116842523?s=20>.
- [11] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1638136780691046401?s=20>;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1638209587282075650?s=20>.
- [12] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1638164274513076226?s=20
- [13] <https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-is-khamenei-s-man-in-iran-s-top...>
- [14] <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/03/20/human...>
<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202303218166>
- [15] <https://www.hawzahnews dot com/news/1076625>
- [16] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023#_edn8...
https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023#_ednd...
- [17] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-17-2023#_ednb...
- [18] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1637904150615801857?s=20>
- [19] <https://bonbast dot com/>
- [20] www.scfr dot ir/fa/400/150214
- [21] www.scfr dot ir/fa/400/150132; www.scfr dot ir/fa/400/150181
- [22] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85063127/%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%88-%D8%AB%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%AF>

[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>

[24] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85062969/%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF>

[25] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-17>

[26] <https://thiqa-agency.com/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D9%84%D8%A8/>

[27] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/erdogan-says-turkey-rid-syrias...>

[28] <https://ria.ru/20230316/asad-1858224485.html> ;

<https://www.syria.tv/%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88> ;

https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023?mkt_t...

[29] <https://www.qasioun-news.com/ar/articles/261256>

[30] <https://sana.sy/?p=1841985>; <https://deirezzor24.net/en/iranian-militias-in-deir-ezzor-are-taking-advantage-of-the-earthquake/> ;

<https://asiatimes.com/2022/05/to-stem-iraqs-drug-trade-rein-in-the-militias/>

Iran Update, March 22, 2023

Iran Update, March 22, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Brian Carter, and Nicholas Carl

March 22, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber discussed privatization in ambiguous terms on March 22, likely in response to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's demand for concrete action to improve the Iranian economy. Mokhber stated that the Raisi administration is examining how involved "state and parastatal companies" are in the economy.[1] He added that "the industrial and economic activities of the administration are being relinquished to the private sector." [2] These remarks are likely a response to Khamenei's speech on January 30 in which Khamenei described Mokhber as bearing a specific responsibility for the economy as well as to Khamenei's Nowrouz statement on March 21, which focused primarily on improving Iran's economy.[3]

It is unclear whether Mokhber was calling for actual privatization or merely the transfer of government-owned companies, property, and assets to other parastatal organizations that exist outside the formal government. Iranian presidents and senior officials have historically interpreted the meaning of privatization differently. Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad pursued a policy of "privatization" between 2005 and 2013, for example, that resulted in many parastatal organizations acquiring state assets.[4] Former President Hassan Rouhani attempted to introduce real privatization in the Iranian economy during his tenure between 2013 and 2021. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and other parastatal entities quickly tried to shut down his efforts, however.[5] Mokhber himself was previously the president of Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order—a parastatal organization directly controlled by the supreme leader. [6] Mokhber may thus be discussing privatization in the sense of handing greater control of Iran's economy to the parastatal establishment. He may alternatively be discussing privatization in the real sense of the term, in which case he will likely face stark opposition from some hardliners and parastatal organizations—just as Rouhani did during his presidency.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf has called for real privatization and could be a potential political ally to Mokhber. Ghalibaf emphasized the importance of having a "people's economy" during an IRGC-affiliated conference on February 22, as CTP previously reported.[7] Ghalibaf separately stated that a significant part of Iran's economy is "khasoulati," or dominated by government-controlled organizations, during a parliamentary meeting on February 23.[8] If Ghalibaf and Mokhber are indeed calling for real privatization, they are correct in recognizing that parastatal organizations' disproportionate control of the Iranian economy is a major obstacle to improving Iran's economic health and efficiency.[9]

Key Takeaways

- First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber discussed privatization in ambiguous terms on March 22, likely in response to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's demand for concrete action to improve the Iranian economy.
- UK-based outlet *Amwaj Media* reported that Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs and chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani met with British, French, and German officials in Oslo, Norway.

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 22. CTP assesses with high confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[10]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees



Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Spokesperson Brigadier General Saeed Montazer al Mahdi announced that the LEC will deploy its special units across Iran during the Nowrouz celebrations.[11] The LEC Special Units are a highly trained, anti-riot force that the regime uses heavily in its protest crackdowns.[12] The LEC spokesperson justified the deployment of special units, saying they are needed to maintain the public peace during the Nowrouz celebrations. These deployments suggest that the regime is concerned about the possibility of protests erupting during the holiday and may thus be preparing to confront potential unrest. Many Iranians take time off from work and travel across the country to visit family in their homes during Nowrouz. The LEC separately issued a statement warning women to “observe chastity and the hijab” during Ramadan on March 22.[13] The LEC stated that the owners of commercial units should pay special attention to its message, suggesting that the LEC is placing some responsibility for citizens’ compliance with Islamic customs on these individuals.

Economic Affairs

The Iranian rial continued selling for around 494,000 to one US dollar on March 22 for the third consecutive day.[14] The rial has depreciated in recent days, rising from around 471,000 rials to the US dollar on March 17.

Nuclear Program

UK-based outlet *Amwaj Media* reported that Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs and chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani met with British, French, and German officials in Oslo, Norway on March 22.[15] The article characterized the meeting as “a brainstorming session” intended to demonstrate that “diplomacy is working.” The Iranians might be attempting to placate both the US and European powers to restart the stalled nuclear negotiations.

This meeting follows recent Iranian diplomatic activities centered around or adjacent to its nuclear program. Iran agreed on March 4 to reinstall International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring equipment at its nuclear sites and grant IAEA inspectors access to three previously undeclared nuclear sites.[16] Iranian state media has furthermore suggested that Iran and the IAEA will announce additional agreements in the coming days.[17] Iran has separately pursued diplomatic rapprochements with several Gulf states and held talks with Ukraine over Iranian military support to Russia in recent weeks.[18] Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian gave an interview with CNN on March 1 likely to convince the US to return to the suspended nuclear negotiations, as CTP previously assessed.[19] The Iranians are likely trying to assuage Western concerns about Tehran’s external and nuclear activities.

The regime could be particularly concerned about a European “snapback” decision in the United Nations Security Council, reopening Iran’s nuclear file and reimposing nuclear-related UN sanctions. The Europeans have strongly condemned both Iran’s unprecedented violations of its safeguards obligations as well as its military support to Russia.[20] The United Kingdom, France, and Germany (the E3) were prepared to introduce a censure resolution against Iran during the recent IAEA Board of Governors meeting in March, an escalatory step that could refer Iran’s nuclear file to the UN Security Council.[21] The Iranian strategy, since the 2002 revelation of their undeclared facilities and the formation of the E3 diplomatic process in 2003, has been to prevent these three European powers from joining calls for a hardline stance on its nuclear program. All the recent diplomatic activity, but especially the Oslo meeting, could be a revival of that effort.

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Senior Iranian officials from the Strategic Foreign Relations Council have concluded their official visit to Syria and traveled to Beirut to meet senior Lebanese officials. Council Chairman Kamal Kharrazi and Secretary Abbas Araghchi met with Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Bou Habib and Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on March 22.[22] Kharrazi emphasized support for forming a Lebanese government quickly and without foreign political interference in his meetings. Kharrazi and Araghchi previously met Syrian President Bashar al Assad, Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad, and Religious Endowments Minister Mohammad Abdul Sattar in Damascus on March 19-21, as CTP previously reported.[23]

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Emirati Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan on March 21.[24] The two discussed organizing a meeting of businessmen from both countries and strengthening relations between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Syria. Bin Zayed invited Amir Abdollahian to visit the UAE. This call follows the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia on March 10, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani's visit to the UAE on March 16, and a general increase in Iranian diplomatic engagements across the region following the March 10 Iran-Saudi rapprochement, as CTP previously reported.[25] Organizing a meeting of businessmen from both countries could support Iranian efforts to bypass US sanctions. Iran has used businesses in Emirati commercial centers to circumvent US sanctions over the past decade.[26] Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin accompanied Shamkhani to the UAE on March 16 likely as part of the same effort, as CTP previously reported.[27]

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held a telephone call with Kuwaiti Foreign Affairs Minister Salem Abdullah al Jaber al Sabah on March 21.[28] The two

ministers discussed the recent rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the beginning of Ramadan.

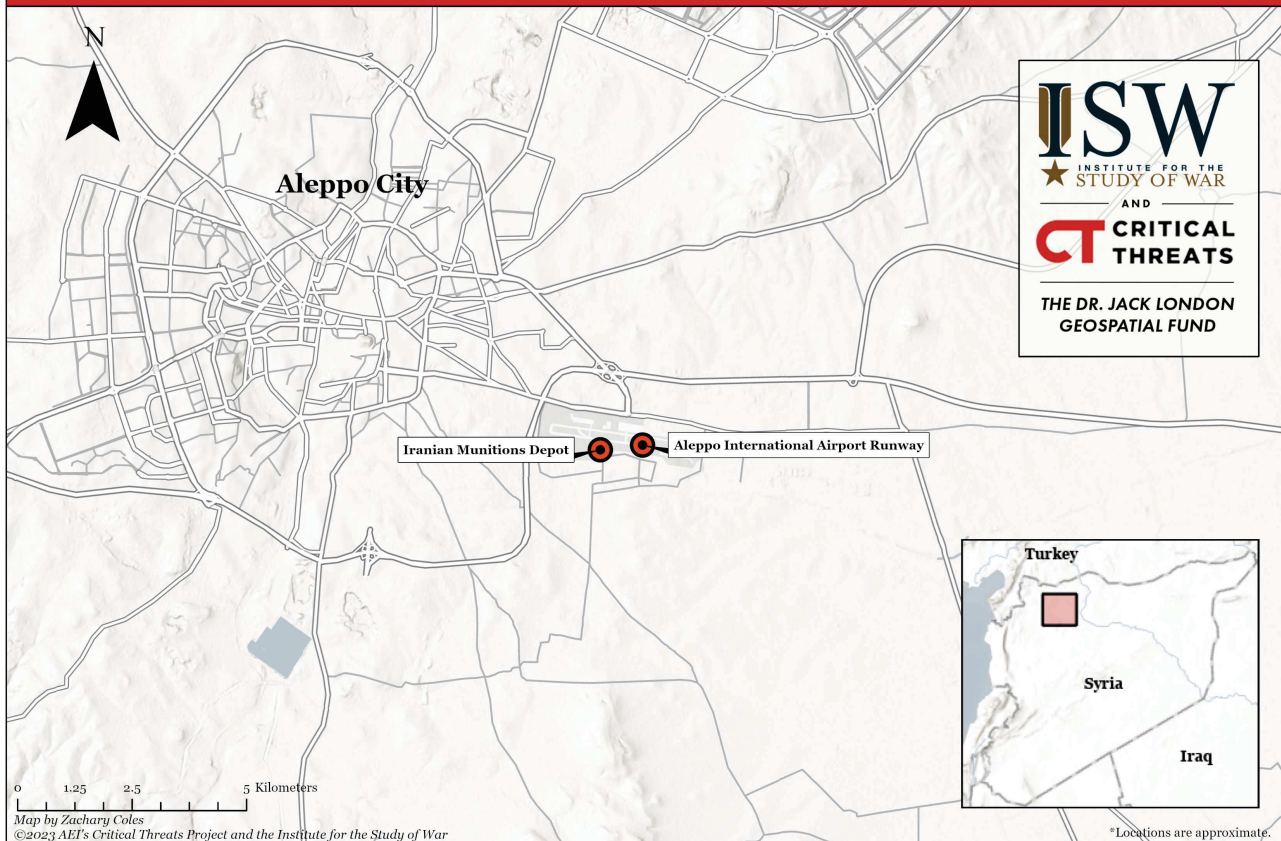
Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani met with Armenian Foreign Affairs Minister Ararat Mirzoyan during an official visit to Yerevan, Armenia on March 22.[29] The two discussed establishing a lasting peace in the Caucasus, focusing on Iran and Armenia's disputes with Azerbaijan. Bagher Kani committed to fostering a "peaceful dialogue" in the region. On the other hand, IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* reported on March 22 that the Azerbaijani army may be planning to invade Syunik Province, Armenia, which borders Iran to its south.[30] CTP cannot verify these claims, but its timing is noteworthy given Bagheri Kani's visit to Armenia.

External Security and Military Affairs

Iranian and Iranian-backed militia leadership arrived in Deir ez Zor province between March 19 and March 22 likely to discuss operational security. IRGC Quds Force Commander for Deir ez Zor province Hajj Mehdi and Zainabiyoun Brigade commander reportedly paid local militia members salaries in person at the Shia Crescent Camp, Haidariya area, al Maradeen District, Deir ez Zor province on March 22. Paying the militias directly rather than through intermediaries indicates Iran sought to reinforce the militias loyalty the IRGC Quds Force.[31] An unspecified high-ranking IRGC Quds Force commander and at least five IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah members also arrived in Deir ez Zor City, Deir ez Zor province from the Iranian embassy in Damascus according to anti-Syrian regime reporting.[32] Their arrival follows events that indicate the militias have struggled to preserve operational security as they expand operations in Syria. An unspecified Iranian-backed militia arrested and replaced at least 46 Syrian militia members suspected of leaking sensitive information on March 14.[33] Leaks from Syrian militia members may have damaged operational security and left Iranian convoys vulnerable to targeted attacks from ISIS or Israeli airstrikes. Anti-Syrian regime media outlet *Qasioun* reported that militants from Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH) and Kataib Seyyed ol Shehada (KSS) took control of the al Qaim border crossing from Kataib Hezbollah (KH) after several months of clashes.[34] The clashes reportedly forced the border to close multiple times, blocking Iranian convoys from crossing into Syria.

ISIS is also challenging Syrian regime and Iranian efforts in Deir ez Zor to secure ground lines of communication between Aleppo and Albu Kamal. The group is targeting the pro-regime Albu Saraya tribe north of Deir ez Zor city to drive a wedge between the regime and Iran-backed forces and the Albu Saraya.[35] ISIS is likely attempting to take advantage of historically poor relations between the tribe and regime-backed forces by illustrating the regime's inability or unwillingness to protect the tribe.[36] CTP will explore this assessment of ISIS activity further in this week's [Salafi-Jihadi Movement Weekly Update](#).

Israeli Airstrikes in Aleppo Province, Syria March 22, 2023

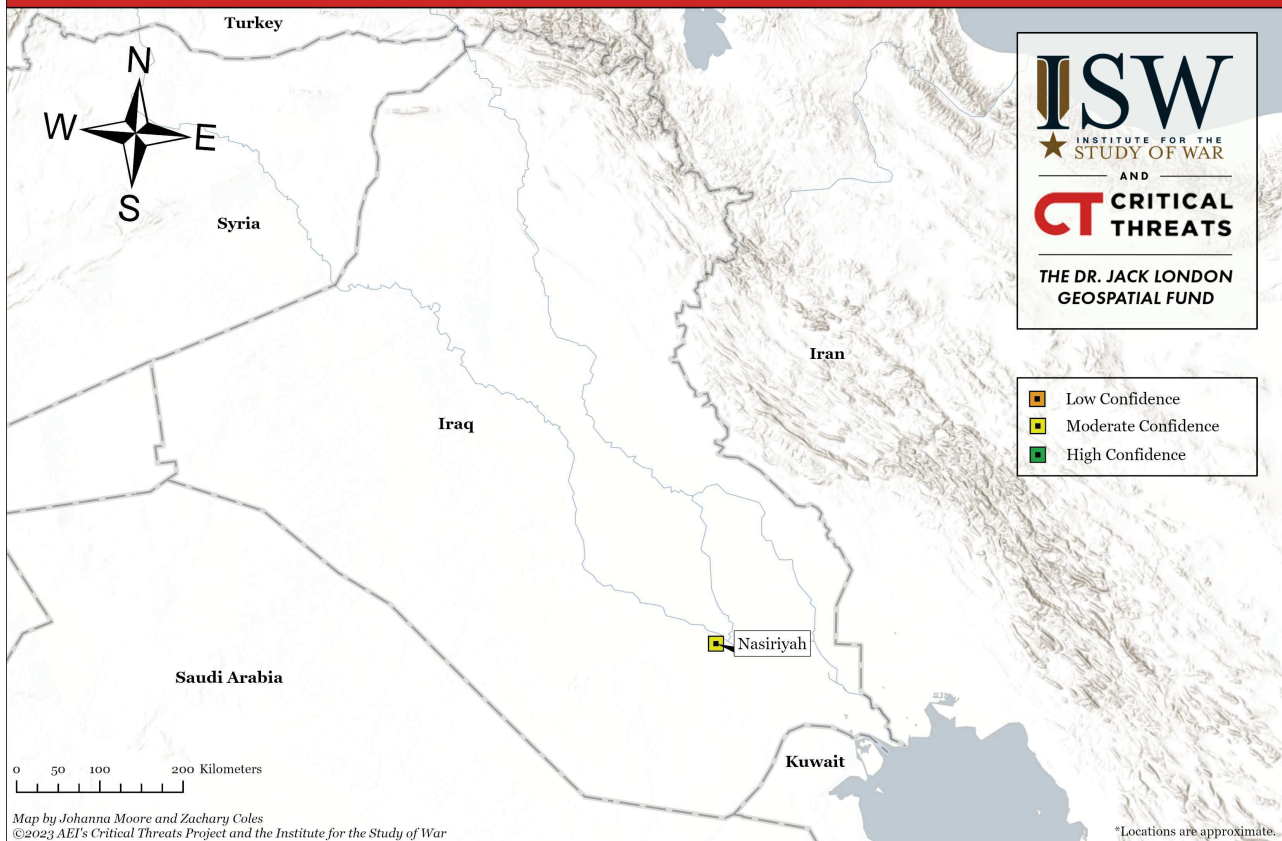


Israeli Air Forces (IAF) reportedly conducted an airstrike on Aleppo International Airport on March 21, targeting an Iranian weapons depot.[37] The airstrike damaged the runway and navigational equipment according to the Syrian Ministry of Transportation.[38] Local intelligence sources claimed the airstrike also targeted an underground Iranian munitions depot at the adjacent Nairab military airport according to a *Reuters* article.[39] Nairab airport was damaged in an Israeli airstrike that targeted a suspected Iranian drone storage facility on March 6.[40]

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani visited Aleppo on March 17 to inspect earthquake relief shipments according to Iranian-state media outlets, as CTP previously reported.[41] The Iranian regime has reportedly moved weapons shipments into Syria under the guise of humanitarian aid.[42] Russia's United Nations (UN) Vassily Nebenzia requested the UN Security Council discuss Israeli airstrikes in Syria on March 20.[43] An Israeli official claimed Israel had not anticipated Russia's call for the discussion and is concerned that Moscow could promote a resolution against Israel. Israel may be anticipating targeted Russian agenda setting as UN Security Council President starting on April 1.[44]

Protest Activity in Iraq

March 20, 2023



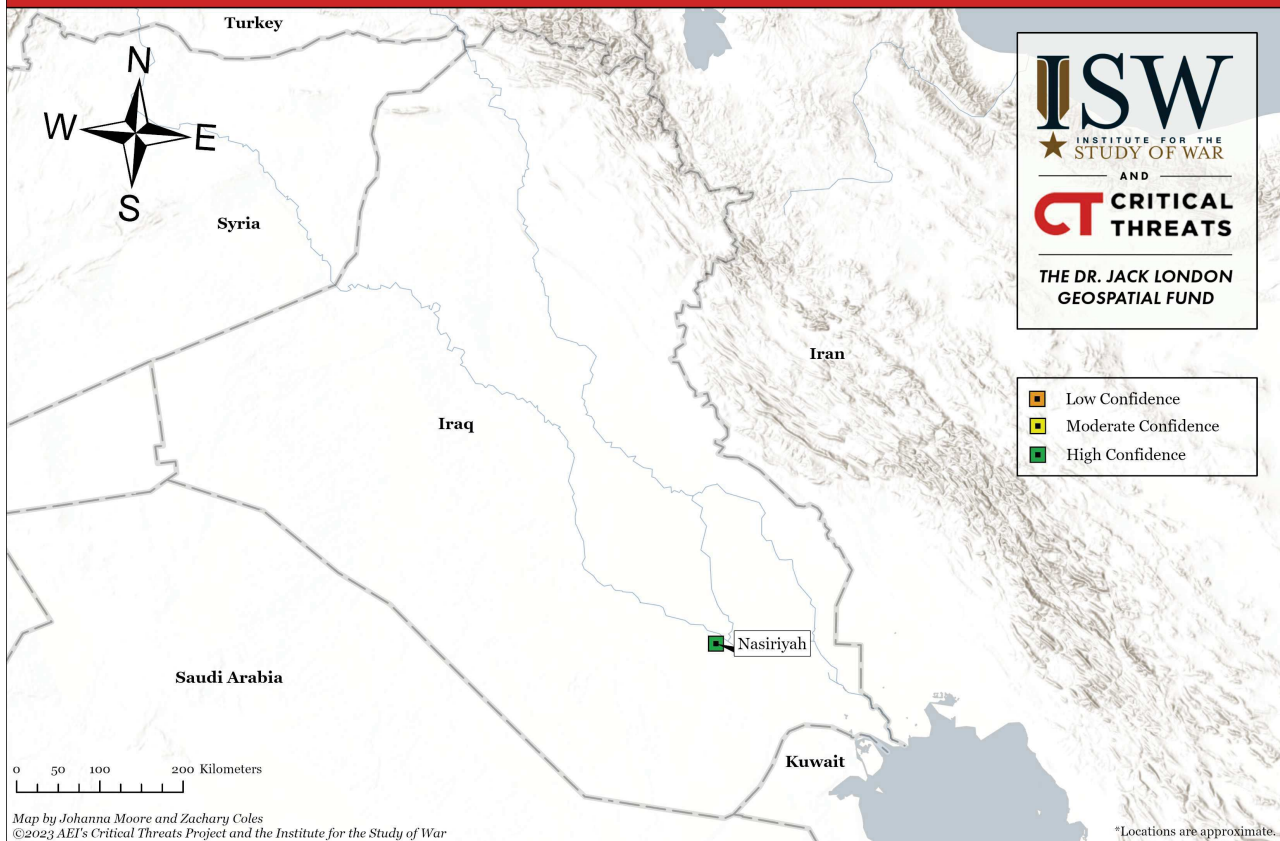
At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 20. CTP assesses with high confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province

- **Size: Small**
- **Protester Activity: Protesters gathered and chanted against the Coordination Framework-backed election law.**

Protest Activity in Iraq

March 22, 2023



At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 22. CTP assesses with high confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province

- **Size: Medium**
- **Protester Activity:** burned down the local State of Law Coalition political office; set fires in the street; released statement protesting the State of Law Coalition-backed election law.

Independent and minority Iraqi political parties submitted an appeal to Iraq's Federal Supreme Court to reverse election law amendments passed by parliament on March 19.

[45] Iraqi parliament passed five election laws backed by former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki's State of Law Coalition and the Shia Coordination Framework – a loose umbrella group of pro-Iranian political parties. Maliki's State of Law Coalition backed several amendment laws that are expected to reverse election reforms from 2019 and marginalize independent and minority political parties.[46] State of Law Coalition (SOL) member Thaeir Makhaif claimed that the SOL amendments will be voted on and passed April 1 during an interview with the *National Iraqi News Agency (NINA)*. [47] Several members of parliament have called for protests against the State of Law Coalition's election laws following yesterday's vote according to an independent Iraqi media outlet *Al Araby*. [48]

[1] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/01/02/2870722/>- مخبر-فعالیت-های-صنعتی-و-اقتصادی-دولت-به-بخش-خصوصی-و-اگذار-می-شود

[2] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/01/02/2870722/>- مخبر-فعالیت-های-صنعتی-و-اقتصادی-دولت-به-بخش-خصوصی-و-اگذار-می-شود

[http://www dot leader dot ir/fa/content/26378](http://www.leader.ir/fa/content/26378)

[4] <https://iranwire.com/en/features/70039/>

[5] <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202201127681>

<https://iranwire.com/en/features/64684/>

[6] <https://iranwire.com/en/features/70105/>

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-22-2023>

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-23-2023>

[9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-23-2023>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1638490532547633155?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1638487139817074688?s=20> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1638473588415033344?cxt=HHwWgMCztYbD...

<https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1638525216685948933?s=20>

های-یگان-%E2%80%8Cسایه-امنیت-گشتی [11] <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020102000386/>
ویژه-پلیس-برای-افزایش-آرامش-مردم

[12] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-crisis-update-january...>

[13] <https://www.irna dot>

ir/news/85063771/%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C%D9%87-
%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7-
%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-
%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4-
%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%81-
%D9%88-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%88-
%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-
%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C

[14] <https://bonbast dot com/>

[15] <https://amwaj dot media/article/scoop-iranian-european-diplomats-meet-in-norway-for-brainstorming>; <https://www.irna dot>

ir/news/85063615/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AD%DB%8C%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%B1%D9%88%DA%98

[16] <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/joint-statement-by-the-ato...>

[17] <https://twitter.com/nournewsen/status/1637884553845940230?cxt=HHwWjICx8d...ir/news/1402010100029/%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1->

%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%87-
%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D9%88-%D8%A2%DA%98%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3-
%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B4%DB%8C%D8%AF

[18] <https://amwaj dot media/article/inside-story-the-emerging-iran-ukraine-dialogue-in-oman>
; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023> ; h...

[19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-2-2023>

[20] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/e3-statement-to-the-iaea-board-of...>

[21] <https://www.axios.com/2023/03/08/israel-iran-us-nuclear-inspections-iaea>

[22] www.scfr dot ir/fa/400/150249; www.scfr dot ir/fa/400/150271

[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023>

[24] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85063291/%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D9%87> ; <https://mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/714785>

[26] <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2020/03/20/uae-continues-to-serve-as-hub-fo...>

[27] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023>

[28] <https://mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/714803>

[29] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020102000330/>-باقری-در-ارمنستان-از-تمام-ظرفیت-خود-برای-حل-آمیز-مسائل-منطقه-E2%80%8C%مسالمت

[30] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020101000591/>ها-از-تحرکات-ارتش-E2%80%8C%گزارش-جمهوری-آذربایجان-در-منطقه

[31] <https://eyeofephates dot com/ar/news/2023/03/22/8033>

[32] <https://www.syriaahr dot com/en/292490/> ;

<https://qasioun-news dot com/ar/articles/261241> ;

<https://eyeofephates dot com/index.php/ar/news/2023/03/19/8012>

[33] <https://www.syriaahr dot com/%d8%a8%d8%b9%d8%af-%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%b9%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d9%85%d9%86-%d8%aa%d8%ad%d9%82%d9%8a%d9%82%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b1%d8%b5%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%ad%d9%88%d9%84/593744/> ;

<https://www.syriaahr dot com/%d8%a8%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%aa%d9%80-%d9%80%d9%87%d9%80-%d9%80%d9%85%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%a9-%d8%aa%d9%80->

%d9%80%d8%b3%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%80-%d9%80%d8%a8-
%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%88%d9%85/593808/

[34] <https://www.qasioun-news dot com/ar/articles/261256>

[35] <https://twitter.com/GregoryPWaters/status/1634282575748386818?s=20; htt...>

[36] <https://www.mei.edu/publications/between-coalition-isis-and-assad-court...>

[37] <https://twitter.com/MrHimedan/status/1638351380350918657; https://twitt...>

[38] <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=584405817055561&set=a.247656954063784>

[39] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-air-strike-targets-syr...>

[40] <https://apnews.com/article/syria-israel-strikes-aleppo-airport-139ba8dc5...>

[41] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-20-2023>

[42] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-17-2023?mk...>

[43] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...>

[44] <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/presidency>

[45] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%88%D8%AB%D8%A7-%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA ;>

[46] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7>

[47] <https://www.ninanews dot com/Website/News/Details?Key=1042011 ;>

[48] <https://www.alaraby dot co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA>

Iran Update, March 23, 2023

Iran Update, March 23, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Ashka Jhaveri, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

March 23, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has trapped the Iranian regime by focusing public and government attention on improving the economy—an issue he does not yet appear willing to seriously address. Khamenei confined intra-regime debate to the economy—rather than addressing the socio-cultural issues that fueled the Mahsa Amini protests—and proposed various solutions to Iran’s economic problems during his Nowrouz address on March 21.[1] Khamenei called for privatization, stating that “the most important problem and weakness of the country is the governmental nature of the economy.”[2] Khamenei additionally acknowledged some critics’ use of the term “khasoulati”—meaning “state-controlled”—to describe the economic dominance of parastatal entities.[3] Khamenei’s reference to this term confirms that he is aware of some of the arguments made by pragmatic hardliners, such as Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, about what role the parastatal establishment should play in Iran’s economy. Ghalibaf has explicitly called for parastatal organizations to decrease their involvement in the economy in recent weeks, as CTP previously reported.[4] Khamenei’s recognition of and lip service to this conversation does not necessarily mean he is prepared to make the difficult decisions involved in seriously prying the economy from the grip of the state-owned economic giants. Meaningful privatization would require an overhaul of the Iranian economy which would likely take years to complete and would cause severe economic disruptions. Khamenei declined to take such measures when former President Hassan Rouhani advocated for them fervently, moreover.[5] It is thus more likely that Khamenei is discussing privatization because he has designated the economy as one of the only acceptable topics of intra-regime debate.

The regime’s intransigence on both economic and sociocultural issues will likely fuel greater instability and unrest. This rhetorical focus on the economy is not enough to address the underlying problems or address protest grievances. Khamenei’s focus on the economy will only lead to public disappointment if he does not plan to seriously reform the economy. The regime has furthermore reiterated its uncompromising stance toward sociocultural issues in recent days, affirming that such issues, such as the mandatory hijab law, are nonnegotiable. Regime officials have intensified their efforts to enforce mandatory veiling, including by announcing plans to reestablish morality patrols, for example.[6]

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has trapped the Iranian regime by focusing public and government attention on improving the economy—an issue he does not yet appear willing to seriously address.**
- **The regime’s intransigence on both economic and sociocultural issues will likely fuel greater instability and unrest.**
- **CTP did not observe any protest activity, possibly due to the Nowrouz holiday.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

CTP did not observe any protest activity on March 23. This decreased activity may be due to the Nowrouz holiday.

Economic Affairs

The Tehran Stock Exchange was closed from March 20-22 for the Nowrouz holiday.[7] The value of Iranian rial thus remains the same, around 494,000 to one US dollar.[8] The rial has depreciated in recent days, rising from around 471,000 rials to the US dollar on March 17.[9]

Nuclear Program

UK-based outlet *Middle East Eye* reported on March 22 that Strategic Foreign Relations Council (SFRC) Secretary Abbas Araghchi has held secret nuclear negotiations with unspecified Western powers in recent weeks.[10] This report follows online rumors claiming that Araghchi joined the nuclear negotiating team and traveled to Geneva with Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, likely to revitalize nuclear negotiations, as CTP previously reported and assessed. Araghchi is a career Iranian diplomat who played a prominent role in the nuclear negotiations with the West under the Hassan Rouhani administration. Araghchi serves as a foreign policy adviser to Supreme Leader Khamenei as SCFR secretary. Khamenei established the SCFR in 2006 to serve as his personal advisory board and foreign policy think tank.

The *Middle East Eye* report claimed that President Ebrahim Raisi was not aware of Araghchi's negotiations. CTP cannot verify this claim, although it is consistent with online rumors reporting that the Supreme National Security Council (which effectively operates under Khamenei rather than the president) has taken responsibility for the nuclear negotiations from the Foreign Affairs Ministry.[11]

The regime may be particularly concerned about a European “snapback” decision in the UN Security Council, as CTP previously assessed.[12] The regime could therefore be signaling its seriousness about negotiations primarily to placate European powers. The Europeans have strongly condemned both Iran's unprecedented violations of its safeguards obligations as well as its military support to Russia.[13] The UK, France, and Germany (the E3) were reportedly prepared to introduce a censure resolution against Iran during the recent IAEA Board of Governors meeting in March 2023—an escalatory step that could refer Iran's nuclear file to the UN Security Council.[14]

Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs and chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani confirmed reports that he held meetings with E3 officials, as CTP previously reported. [15] The Iranians are likely trying to assuage Western concerns about Tehran's external and nuclear activities in order to restart stalled nuclear negotiations, as CTP previously assessed.[16] This meeting follows recent Iranian diplomatic activities centered around or adjacent to its nuclear program, ranging from Iran's commitment to reinstall IAEA monitoring equipment and restoring Agency access to nuclear facilities to pursuing diplomatic rapprochements with several Gulf states and holding talks with Ukraine over Iranian military support to Russia.[17] Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held a telephone conversation with Swiss Foreign Affairs Minister Ignazio Cassis on March 23, during which Amir Abdollahian expressed Iran's commitment to ending the war in Ukraine likely as part of the same effort.[18]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Strategic Foreign Relations Council Chairman Kamal Kharrazi met with Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, Lebanon on March 23 to discuss recent regional developments.[19] Kamal Kharrazi and Council Secretary Abbas Araghchi met with Lebanese Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Bou Habib and Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri on March 22.[20] Kharrazi and Araghchi previously met Syrian President Bashar al Assad, Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad, and Religious Endowments Minister Mohammad Abdul Sattar in Damascus on March 19-21, as CTP previously reported.[21]

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhad al Saud on March 23.[22] The two agreed to meet with one another as soon as possible and discussed preparation for the reopening of embassies. This call follows the normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia on March 10, as CTP previously reported.[23] The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) declared its support for the Iran-Saudi rapprochement on March 23.[24]

Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova announced that Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian will travel to Moscow to meet with Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov on March 29.[25] Zakharova stated that the two ministers will discuss Iran's nuclear negotiations and mutual cooperation with respect to Syria, Afghanistan, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea.

External Security and Military Affairs

Unnamed Arab and Turkmen members of Iraqi parliament threatened in a joint statement on March 22 to withdraw their support for the State of Law Coalition-backed election law. [26] Iraq's parliament voted on five out of 20 amendments to the election laws on March 19. [27] Kurdish parliamentarians from Kirkuk Province voted in favor of the proposed amendments following an agreement to remove Article 35 from the list.[28] Article 35 would require voter identification cards for residents of Kirkuk. The Arab and Turkmen parliamentarians from Kirkuk province who signed the joint statement claimed Parliament had removed Article 35 contrary to a pre-negotiated list of demands and threatened to withdraw their vote supporting the remaining election laws.[29] Head of the United Turkmen Front Arshad al Salih warned that protests will erupt in Kirkuk if parliament votes on the remaining election laws without re-adding Article 35 to the agenda.[30]

Interior Minister Mohammed al Shammari led a delegation to Dhi Qar Province on March 23, likely to deter future anti-election law protests.[31] Shammari chaired a meeting with his delegation and local security officials on March 23 and announced the Interior Ministry's plan to deploy additional police forces and vehicles to the province ostensibly as part of a modernization effort.[32] Shammari's announcement is likely a warning to potential protesters in Dhi Qar Province. Protests against the election laws and government corruption previously erupted in Nasariyah, Dhi Qar province on March 22. Protesters set fires in the street and set fire to the local State of Law Coalition office building.[33] The Dhi Qar election office announced that it will suspend all operations until further notice, possibly indicating that additional protests are planned to take place in the Province.

Iraqi political figure Moqtada al Sadr ordered eight senior Sadrist officials to remain in Iraq during Ramadan in a public statement, possibly to warn Shia Coordination Framework leadership against interference in Dhi Qar.[34] Sadr announced that he and these officials will meet to discuss "important matters." Sadr has historically benefited from high popular support in southern Iraqi provinces like Dhi Qar.[35] Shammari's announcement to send additional police forces to Dhi Qar province coincides with Sadr's announcement and suggests that Sadr may seek to block Popular Mobilization Forces—a loose umbrella group of pro-Iranian militias—from exerting additional influence in Dhi Qar. Sadr had previously suspended all Sadrist militia operations in Diyala in a likely attempt to avoid direct confrontation.[36]

***Al Araby* and *Eye of Euphrates* claimed that two unidentified drones targeted an Iranian convoy in eastern Syria on March 22.**[37] *Al Araby* claimed the drone strike targeted a convoy of six vehicles traveling to Iran's Imam Ali base through the al Hari border crossing in Albu Kamal district, Deir ez Zor province.[38] The Imam Ali base is the largest Iranian military base abroad. The IRGC has used the facility to store drones and missiles and can house thousands of fighters there.[39] An anti-regime Twitter account published a video purportedly of the alleged strike. [40] CTP cannot independently verify the contents of the video. *Israel Alma*—an Israeli think tank—claimed that the strike targeted the Imam Ali base, citing "local reports." [41] Iranian state media attributed the drone strike to Israel.[42] The drone strike follows recent Israeli airstrikes against

Iranian and Iranian-backed forces throughout Syria. Israeli combat aircraft targeted an Iranian weapons depot at Aleppo International Airport on March 21, as CTP previously reported.[43]

[1] <https://www.ir/fa/content/26385/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>

[2] <https://www.ir/fa/content/26385/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>

[3] <https://www.ir/fa/content/26385/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-23-2023>

[5] <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/rouhani-criticizes-poor-iran-privatization-a...>

[6] <https://www.ir/fa/news/719335/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[7] <https://www.tradinghours.com/markets/tse>

[8] <https://bonbast.com/>

[9] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-2023#_ednd...

[10] dot.net/news/iran-officials-secret-talks-west-without-raisi-knowledge

[11] <https://twitter.com/SaeedAzimi1772/status/1637430437655060481?s=20>

[12] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-2023#_ednd...

[13] <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/e3-statement-to-the-iaea-board-of-...> ; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/20/eu-agrees-new-sanctions-over-i...>

[14] <https://www.axios.com/2023/03/08/israel-iran-us-nuclear-inspections-iaea>

[15] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85064024/%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B3%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C>; <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/01/03/2870920/-باقری-با-مدیران-سه-کشور-اروپایی-در-اسلو-دیدار-> داشتیم ; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-2023#_ednd...

[16] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-2023#_ednd...

[17] <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/joint-statement-by-the-ato...> ; <https://amwaj dot media/article/inside-story-the-emerging-iran-ukraine-dialogue-in-oman> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023> ; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-14-2023#_ednd... ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-15-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-17-2023> ; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-20-2023#_ednd... ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023>

[18] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/01/03/2870926/%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA%DA%AF%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AA%D8%A7%DA%A9%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%A7%D9%88%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86>

[19] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85064359/%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B5%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87> ; <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14020102000518/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AB%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[20] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-2023#_ednd...

[21] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023>

[22] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/01/03/2870923/%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88%DA%AF%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86%DB%8C->

%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-
%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87-
%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-
%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%AA%D8%A3%DA%A9%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1-
%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85-
%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-
%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87

[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>

[24] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85064354/%D9%88%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%87-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%AC-%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3>

[25] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1402010301032/%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%DA%A9%D9%88-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF>

[26] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA>

[27] <https://www.ninanews.com/Website/News/Details?Key=1042011>

[28] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA>

[29] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA> ;

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%d8%b9%d8%b1%d8%a8-%d9%83%d8%b1%d9%83%d9%88%d9%83-%d9%8a%d9%8f%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%b4%d8%b1%d9%88%d8%b7%d9%87%d9%85->

%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%ac%d8%b1%d8%a7%d8%a1-
%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%aa/

[30] [https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%88-%D8%AD-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA](https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%88-%D8%AD-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B8%D8%A7%D8%AA)

[31] [https://ninanews dot com/Website/News/Details?key=1042259](https://ninanews.com/Website/News/Details?key=1042259) ;

[https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%83-%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B0%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7-%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA](https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%83-%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B0%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B4%D8%A7-%D8%B1-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA)

[32] <https://twitter.com/saadmaanoficial/status/1638939388636790787>

[33] <https://twitter.com/BasharSabaawi70/status/1638310001813905411> ;

https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1638282337698959422 ;

https://twitter.com/AlArabiya_Iraq/status/1638281533160149014

[34] [https://www dot rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/220320239](https://www.rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/220320239) ;

https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1638631524399448067

[35] <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/08/understanding-iraqs-muqtada-al-sadr...>

[36] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1634520441812295680?s=20

[37] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%...>; <https://eyeofeuphrates.com/ar/news/2023/03/23/8044>;

[38] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%...>

[39] <https://israel-alma.org/2023/03/23/the-imam-ali-base-in-albukamal-a-cent...>

[40] https://twitter.com/Sharqya_reporte/status/1638602119182708742

[41] <https://israel-alma.org/2023/03/23/the-imam-ali-base-in-albukamal-a-cent...>

[42] <https://tasnimnews.com/en/news/2023/03/28/2870974/unidentified-drones-ta...>

[43] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023>

Iran Update, March 24, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, and Johanna Moore

March 24, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The US has become entangled in a regional escalation pattern between Iran and Israel. Iranian-backed militants conducted a kamikaze drone attack on US forces in northeastern Syria, killing one American, on March 23.[1] Iran likely ordered the attack in retaliation for recent Israeli airstrikes on Iranian-backed targets in Syria. Israel has conducted several such strikes in recent days, including attacking Iranian-backed positions at Aleppo International Airport on March 22, as CTP previously reported.[2] Senior Iranian military officers frequently threaten that they will hold the US accountable for Israeli attacks in Syria.[3]

The drone attack triggered an escalation cycle between the US and Iran, a timeline of which is presented here:

1. Iranian-backed militants conducted a kamikaze drone attack on a maintenance facility at a US base near Hasakah in northeastern Syria on March 23. The attack killed an American contractor and injured six additional Americans.[4]
2. The US conducted airstrikes on at least two Iranian-backed militant positions in eastern Syria on March 23 in retaliation for the drone attack. Some outlets have circulated unconfirmed claims that the US killed 11 Iranian-backed militants in the airstrikes.[5]
3. Likely Iranian-backed militants conducted a rocket attack on the US base at the Green Village base in eastern Syria on March 24, likely in retaliation for the US airstrikes. The militants used ten rockets in the attack but did not damage or injure US assets and personnel.[6]
4. Social media and Syrian outlets reported additional Iranian-backed attacks on US forces, using drones, rockets, or both, in the evening of March 24. This situation is developing at the time of this writing. CTP will provide further information in future updates.[7]

These Iranian actions suggest that Tehran is prioritizing its military efforts in Syria over its simultaneous diplomatic and political efforts in Syria. Iran has sought to consolidate its military position around Aleppo and moving weapons into Syria in recent weeks, using aid sent after the February 6 earthquake as cover, as CTP previously reported.[8] Iran has simultaneously encouraged the Assad regime in recent weeks to repair its ties with regional states, such as Saudi Arabia, which would move Syria closer to normalizing its position in the region. Doing so, in turn, would provide the IRGC an opportunity to secure lucrative contracts for reconstruction projects in Syria at a time when Iran is facing rapidly worsening economic conditions domestically. Tehran's continued efforts to entrench itself militarily in Syria and its escalations against the US and Israel risk destabilizing Syria and undermining any diplomatic effort to normalize Assad's position in the region. Qom Friday Prayer Leader Mohammad Saei captured this point on March 24, stating that diplomacy with the Gulf states will not end Iranian support for the Axis of Resistance.[9]

The US airstrikes on March 23 are insufficient to deter Iran from conducting further attacks against US forces in the region, especially in Syria. The Iranian attacks on March 24 demonstrate that Tehran remains willing to order its proxies to conduct attacks that risk killing Americans in the

region. Tehran has furthermore demonstrated that it is willing to risk the assets and personnel that it has brought into Syria to achieve its military aims, despite repeated Israeli airstrikes in recent weeks. This persistence suggests the American and Israeli airstrikes have not yet imposed a high enough cost on the regime.

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid on March 24 emphasized Iran is facing an economic crisis and requires political reform in refuting the main arguments that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei made in his Nowrouz address. Abdol Hamid stated that “the problem of the country is not just the economy and bread, the problems of the country are political problems.”[10] This statement violates the implicit order Khamenei gave in his Nowrouz speech on March 21 to cease discussions of political challenges and focus on the economy.[11] It also inverts Khamenei’s argument that addressing economic problems will solve Iran’s political and cultural issues by asserting that political problems are, in fact, the cause of Iran’s economic crisis. [12] Abdol Hamid furthermore stated that Iran’s economic problems are partially attributable to corruption, a possible criticism of the regime’s focus on “controlling inflation” and “increasing production” as the keys to improving Iran’s economic health.[13] Abdol Hamid’s challenge to Khamenei’s Nowrouz address is anomalous in a country where the supreme leader’s words are regarded as written in stone. Abdol Hamid’s decision to cross Khamenei’s red line and explicitly discuss political issues underscores that he does not intend to back down from his criticisms of the regime.

Abdol Hamid additionally challenged the regime narrative that Iran is a true democracy. He stated that most elections in Iran have been “appointments” rather than true elections and that the Guardian Council—the regime body tasked with vetting and approving political candidates—only allows the public to vote for “presidential candidates who don’t have the ability to run the country.”[14] Regime officials and media often portray elections as proof that Iran is a true democracy.[15] They additionally frame participation in elections as evidence of the public’s continued support for the Islamic Republic.[16] Abdol Hamid may have challenged the regime’s claims about Iranian democracy in his sermon because Khamenei specifically described Iran as an “Islamic democratic system” in his Nowrouz speech.[17]

Abdol Hamid’s criticism of the Guardian Council may be testing the red lines about constitutional reform that Khamenei set in his Nowrouz address. Article 99 of the Iranian Constitution tasks the Guardian council with “supervising elections.”[18] Abdol Hamid may have been calling on the Guardian Council to increase the number of candidates it allows to participate in elections, in which case a constitutional amendment would not be necessary. He may have contrastingly been calling for the elimination of the Guardian Council, which would require constitutional change. Khamenei implied on March 21 that those who call for constitutional change are counterrevolutionaries, as CTP previously reported.[19] Regardless of Abdol Hamid’s intention, criticizing an institution whose duties are engrained in the Iranian constitution immediately after Khamenei shut down debates about constitutional change underscores that Abdol Hamid will likely continue to challenge the principles and values underpinning the Islamic Republic.

Abdol Hamid may perceive that he has more room to not only criticize the regime in general, but also confront Khamenei more directly, due to decreased securitization in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in recent weeks. CTP recorded increased securitization in Zahedan on February 24 and March 3.[20] Security forces have been less noticeable and confrontational during weekly Friday protests in Zahedan since March 3, however. This de-escalation may be emboldening Abdol Hamid further and encourage additional verbal attacks on Khamenei and the regime in the weeks ahead.

Key Takeaways

- **The US has become entangled in a regional escalation pattern between Iran and Israel.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid on March 24 responded to and challenged the main arguments that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei made in his Nowrouz address.**

- At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.
- Multiple US officials expressed alarm over the Iranian nuclear program and reiterated the US commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on March 24. CTP assesses with high confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[21]

- **Size:** Medium to large
- **Demographic:** Zahedan residents protesting after prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's Friday sermon

CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[22]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals gathered around the grave of a killed protester



The Khuzestan Neighborhood Youth tweeted on March 23 a political manifesto allegedly prepared by the Union of Iranian Provincial Combatants, detailing how the organizations plans to conduct a revolution.[23] The manifesto called for further protests, widespread worker strikes, and the support of foreign governments.

Shiraz Friday Prayer Leader Lotfollah Dezhkam announced that “popular institutions” launched a “people’s outreach system” to enforce mandatory veiling in this city during his Friday sermon on March 24.[24] Dezhkam stated that the individuals in this system have received “training” to confront noncompliance with the hijab law. IRGC officials previously announced plans to reestablish morality patrols and mobilize the Basij to enforce mandatory veiling in Qom, as CTP reported on March 17 and 20.[25]

Nuclear Program

Multiple US officials expressed alarm over the Iranian nuclear program and reiterated the US commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley stated on March 23 that Iran could stockpile enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon within two weeks and could weaponize in several months. [26] Milley’s remarks echoed Undersecretary of Defense Colin Kahl’s February 28 statement that Iran could stockpile enough fissile material for a single bomb within 12 days. US CENTCOM Commander General Michael Kurilla similarly stated that Iran’s breakout timeline is less than 14 days and that it already has “sufficient nuclear material for manufacture of several nuclear explosive devices.”[27] These statements are consistent with the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) publicly available reports about the Islamic Republic’s current stockpile of highly enriched uranium and the number of its operating advanced centrifuges.[28] Iran has more than triple the amount that the IAEA considers a “significant quantity” of highly enriched uranium (even if not weapons-grade) needed to produce a single compact nuclear explosive, as CTP previously reported.[29]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian continued diplomatic engagements with regional officials on March 24. Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani to discuss bilateral cooperation on March 24.[30] Amir Abdollahian also held a phone call with the Omani Foreign Affairs Minister Sayyid Badr al Busaidi on March 23 to discuss the Sultan of Oman’s upcoming trip to Tehran, US sanctions, Iran-EU relations, and the recent rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. [31] Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhad on March 23, as CTP previously reported.[32] Yemeni news outlet Al Khabar al Yemeni reported that Farhad requested Iranian mediation between Saudi Arabia and the al Houthi movement.[33]

External Security and Military Affairs

IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pak Pour inspected units stationed along the Iranian border with Armenia and Azerbaijan on March 23.[34] This visit follows IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency reporting on March 22 that the Azerbaijani army may be planning to invade Syunik Province, Armenia, which borders Iran to its south.[35] Tensions have flared between Iran and Azerbaijan in recent months over Baku’s efforts to create a land corridor running through Armenian territory, which Iran believes would block their access to European and Russian markets. Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani met with Armenian Foreign Affairs Minister Ararat Mirzoyan during an official visit to Yerevan, Armenia on March 22, as CTP previously reported.[36] Bagher Kani committed to a lasting peace in the Caucasus and fostering a “peaceful dialogue” in the region.

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces in Iraq on March 24. CTP assesses with high confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

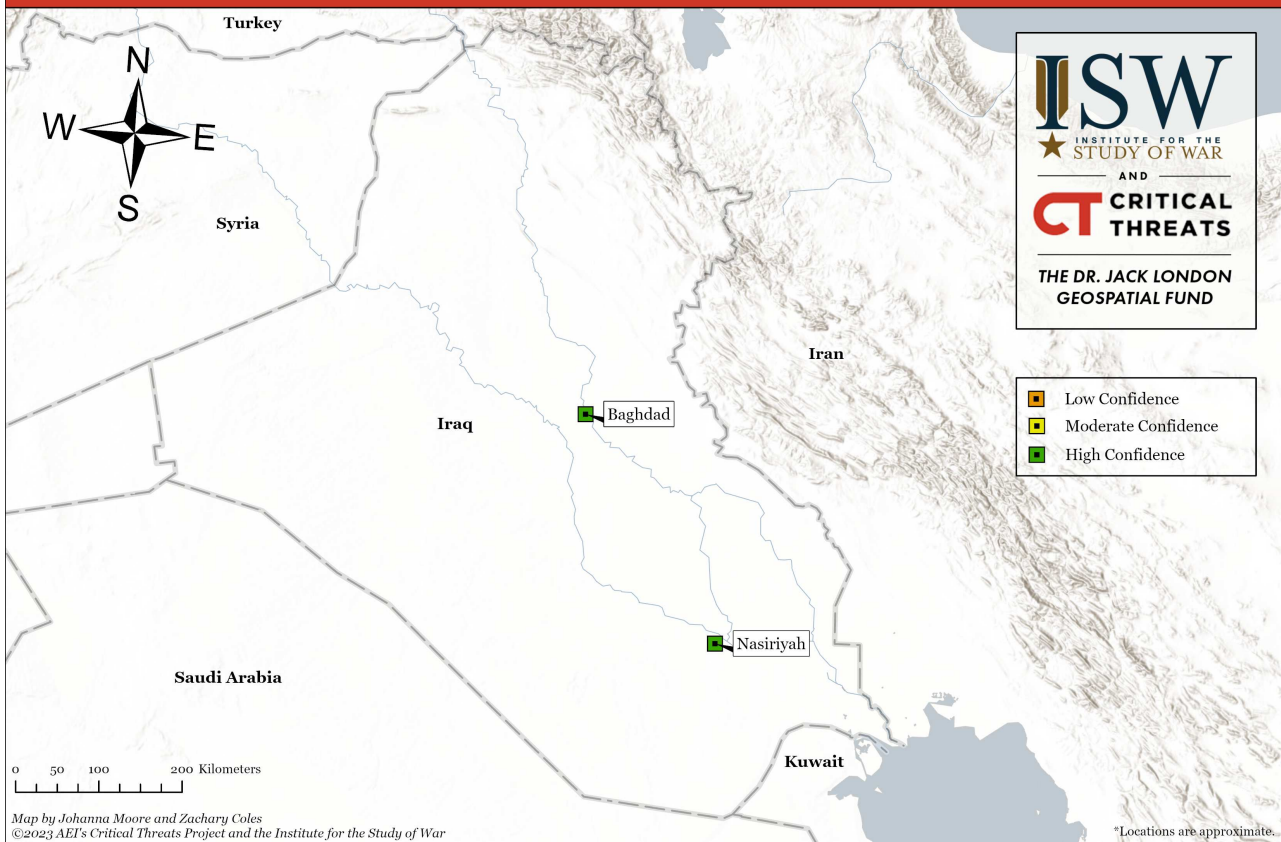
Nasariyah, Dhi Qar Province[37]

- **Size:** Medium

Baghdad, Baghdad Province[38]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Protest activity:** Protesters gathered in the streets; vans carrying protesters were seen passing through checkpoints

Protest Activity in Iraq March 24, 2023



The Shia Coordination Framework—a loose coalition of pro-Iranian political parties in Iraq—reversed a previous decision to withhold salaries for Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) employees, according to a report from UK-based *Al Sharq Al Awsat*. [39] An unnamed source from the Coordination Framework claimed that the coalition reached an agreement with the KRG to form political alliances that will sideline Moqtada al Sadr and his supporters from political activity.[40] Kurdish, Turkmen, and Arab parliamentarians from Kirkuk disagreed over whether to include Article 35 in the list of proposed amendments to the Iraqi election laws put forward by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki. Kurdish Kirkuk parliamentarians voted in favor of a select number of amendments on March 19 on the condition that the Coordination Framework removed Article 35 from the agenda.[41] However, Kurdish and Arab parliamentarians from Kirkuk threatened on March 22 to withdraw their vote backing Maliki's amendments in retaliation for removing the article.[42] Arab parliamentarians from Kirkuk threatened to boycott a vote on the remaining election amendments unless Article 35 is put up for a vote in Parliament.[43] The Shia Coordination Framework may have agreed to pay the salaries of KRG employees to secure votes from Kurdish parliamentarians in favor of Maliki's amendments if Article 35 is included on the agenda. Iraq's parliament is scheduled to vote on the remaining election law amendments March 25.[44]

Minority and independent Iraqi political parties and activists have called for a sit-in outside Iraq's parliament building March 24 to protest the Maliki-backed election laws.[45] Iraqi political activist Ayham Rashad reported that members of the Sadrist Movement will participate in the sit-in as well. [46] Protesters have blocked access to Iraq's parliament building previously as a tactic to delay or block Parliament from holding sessions.[47] A Coordination Framework-affiliated lawmaker from Babil Province and Sheikh of the Botif tribe Ahmed Fawaz al Watifi mobilized and armed members

of his tribe to counter protesters gathered outside Parliament on March 24.[48] Watifi is an associate of Nouri al Maliki.

[1] <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3339691/us-conduct...>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-22-2023>

[3] <http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1400/09/29/2629184/>

[4] <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3339691/us-conduct...>

[5] <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3339691/us-conduct...>
<https://www.syriaahr.com/en/293088/>

[6] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/missile-attack-targets-us-base...>
<https://twitter.com/CENTCOM/status/1639330061797949444/photo/1>

[7] <https://twitter.com/AuroraIntel/status/1639358368946028544?s=20;>
<https://twitter.com/AuroraIntel/status/1639377636433489920?s=20;>
<https://twitter.com/thiqanewsagency/status/1639361734111551504?s=>
<https://deirezzor24.net/%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%84-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7-%D9%88%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2/>

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-16-2023>

[9] <https://www.farsnews.ir/qom/news/14020104000441>

[10] <https://abdolhamid.net/persian/2023/03/24/13569/>

[11] <https://www.ir/fa/content/26385/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>

[12] <https://www.ir/fa/content/26385/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>

[13] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85062598/%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%B1%DB%B4%DB%B0%DB%B2-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%88-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%DA%AF%D8%B0%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF>; <http://www.ir/fa/143067>

[14] <https://abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/03/24/13569/>

[15] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/83606055/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C>

[16] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/83679793/%D8%AD%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%BE%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[17] <https://www dot leader dot ir/fa/content/26385/%D8%B3%D8%AE%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B7%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85>

[18] https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989.pdf

[19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023>

[20] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023>

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023>

[21] https://twitter.com/ICHRI_Fa/status/1639297552502644737?cxt=HHwWgoCzoYmc...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1639238778735955968?cxt=HHwWgMDQy...

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1639249092244303872?cxt=HHwWgMDTmaiX...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1639235123391479810?cxt=HHwWhIC-k...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1639234278042275847?cxt=HHwWjsDU5...>

[22] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1639145337423282180?cxt=HHwWiIDSx...

[23] https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1638996088085532693?s=20

[24] <https://www dot asriran dot com/fa/news/883849/%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%B4%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85%E2%80%8C%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C>

<https://twitter.com/Iraqifree00/status/1639338581041741845> :

<https://twitter.com/cDOISmSzTkgOqt3/status/1639367571400007681> ;

https://twitter.com/_____Aamed/status/1639367359658958849

[39] <https://aawsat dot com/home/article/4229976/%d8%aa%d8%b3%d9%88%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d8%a5%d9%82%d9%84%d9%8a%d9%85%d9%8a%d8%a9-%d9%82%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%aa-%d9%85%d9%88%d9%82%d9%81-%c2%ab%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d8%b7%d8%a7%d8%b1-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%86%d8%b3%d9%8a%d9%82%d9%8a%c2%bb-%d9%85%d9%86-%c2%ab%d9%83%d8%b1%d8%af%d8%b3%d8%aa%d8%a7%d9%86%c2%bb>

[40] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%AA%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%82%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1> ;

<https://aawsat dot com/home/article/4229766/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d8%af%d8%b1-%d9%8a%d9%83%d8%b3%d8%b1-%d8%b5%d9%85%d8%aa%d9%87-%d8%a8%d8%af%d8%b9%d9%88%d8%a9-%d8%ba%d8%a7%d9%85%d8%b6%d8%a9-%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%b1%d9%82%d8%a8-%c2%ab%d8%a3%d9%85%d9%88%d8%b1-%d9%85%d9%87%d9%85%d8%a9%c2%bb>

[41] <https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA>

[42] <https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA>

[43] <https://www dot rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/240320231> ;

<https://www dot rudawarabia.net/arabic/middleeast/iraq/230320234>

[44] https://twitter.com/Parliament_iq/status/1638995138973188096

[45] <https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/node/6309171> ;

<https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%82%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%BA%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86-%D8%AA->

%D9%8A%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%A7-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8
%AA-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%
AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%85-
%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B0%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%81 ;

[46] <https://www.alaraby dot>

co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-
%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%86-
%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D9%86-
%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%85-
%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-
%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%D9%8B-
%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%
AA

[47] <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/16/world/middleeast/iraq-parliament.html>

[48] <https://twitter.com/Mustafa5a1p0e3t/status/1639232467923025920> ;

<https://twitter.com/ShghqA/status/1639272292394958855> ;

<https://twitter.com/QnnqYnny/status/1639254674682290177> ;

https://twitter.com/Ammar_alhadithy/status/1639226882028630017

Iran Update, March 27, 2023

Iran Update, March 27, 2023

Zachary Coles, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Nicholas Carl, and
Frederick W. Kagan

March 27, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

Contributor: Andie Perry

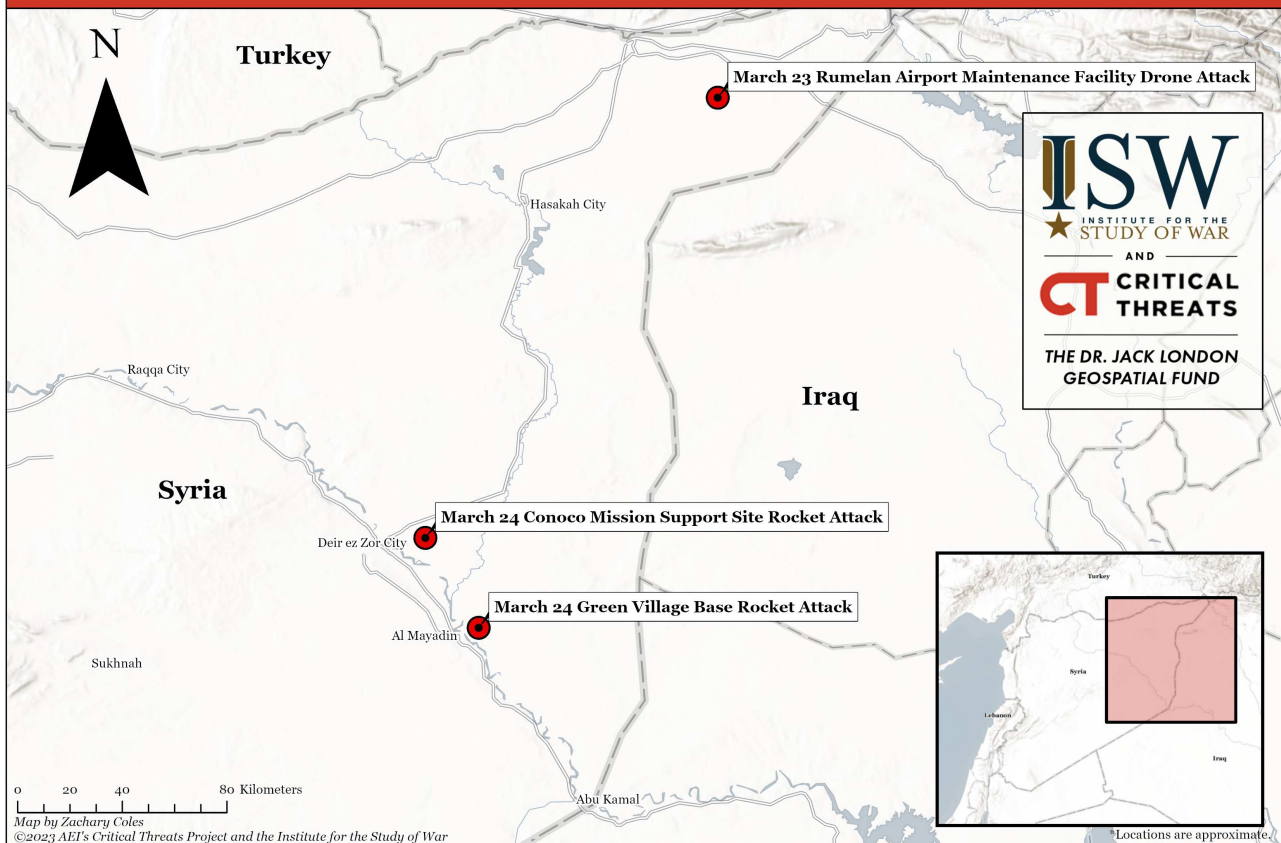
The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah have messaged that the Iran-led Axis of Resistance is prepared to continue escalating against American forces in eastern Syria. Iran uses the term “Axis of Resistance” to refer to the regional state, semi-state, and non-state actors with which Tehran cooperates to pursue its strategic objectives, including the Bashar al Assad regime, Lebanese Hezbollah, and various Iraqi, Syrian, and other proxy groups. The Iranian Advisory Center in Syria—likely a front for the IRGC Quds Force—issued a statement on March 24 warning the US that the Axis of Resistance has “the upper hand” in Syria and can retaliate against any US attacks.^[1] Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Spokesperson Keyvan Khosravi echoed these remarks on March 25.^[2] Iranian state media and Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated outlets have similarly emphasized in recent days that the Axis of Resistance is prepared to attack US forces in eastern Syria if the escalation cycle between them continues.^[3] The IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah are responding to the series of attacks between the US and Iranian-backed forces that erupted in Syria on March 23-24 after Iranian-backed militants conducted a kamikaze drone attack on US forces in northeastern Syria, killing one American.^[4]

The IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah are signaling their resolve against the US and readiness to absorb the military costs of further escalation in Syria. US and Israeli airstrikes have demonstrably failed to impose a high enough cost to persuade Iranian leaders to stop their efforts to entrench themselves militarily in Syria and push US forces out. The IRGC may calculate that it incurs a relatively low cost given that these airstrikes often destroy facilities that the IRGC can reconstruct and kill non-Iranian fighters whom the IRGC likely views as expendable. The failure of the US to deter Iran from attacking American positions is, in fact, the key reason that the US became entangled in this latest escalation cycle in the first place. CTP previously argued that Iran likely ordered the kamikaze drone attack that killed an American contractor in retaliation for recent Israeli airstrikes on Iranian-backed targets in Syria because Tehran feared Israeli responses more than it feared American reactions.^[5]

Israel has conducted a series of airstrikes against Iranian-backed forces in Syria in recent weeks in response to an uptick in Iranian military activity in Syria, especially around Aleppo.^[6] Iran has worked to exploit the earthquake in northern Syria to strengthen its military position there in recent weeks, as CTP previously reported.^[7] The IRGC is likely trying to bring advanced military capabilities and/or forces into Aleppo under the guise of humanitarian aid. It is unclear for what exactly Iran is preparing, but this activity has clearly crossed an Israeli red line.

Iran-backed Militia Attacks on US Forces in Syria March 23-24, 2023



An Iranian-backed group called the Al Ghaliboun Brigade issued a statement claiming responsibility for the kamikaze drone attack that killed an American contractor. Iranian state media described this militia as an Iraqi group, although other analysts have characterized it as a Syrian Shia militia.^[8] The group could alternatively be a front group for the IRGC Quds Force, which frequently claims attacks under false names.

Iran and its proxies may be trying to keep the escalation cycle confined to Syria. Iraqi Kataib Hezbollah leader Abu Ali Al Askari issued a statement disclaiming his organization's involvement in the attack and describing the perpetrators as the "Syrian popular resistance" when congratulating them for the attack.^[9] Iranian state media furthermore tweeted a map of US military bases in eastern Syria that the Axis of Resistance could strike.^[10]

Iranian regime officials remain split over how to enforce the mandatory hijab law in the aftermath of the Mahsa Amini protest movement. Hardline parliamentarian Hossein Jalali presented a new plan to enforce the hijab law on March 27 which, if implemented, would fine unveiled women up to 30,000,000,000 rials (approximately \$60,000).^[11] This extremely high fine would enable Iranian authorities to detain and arrest unveiled women who do not have the financial means to pay it. Jalali emphasized that the new plan is "completely 'smart' and there is no physical confrontation."^[12] Regime officials use the term "smart"—*houshmand* in Persian—to refer to advanced technologies, such as facial-recognizing cameras, that can identify unveiled women without physically confronting them. Jalali previously espoused a "smart" approach in December 2022, stating that "the hijab law is in place, but physical confrontation will not take place, no one will be arrested, a verbal warning will not even be given."^[13] Hardline politician and former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) officer Mohsen Rafigh Doust separately stated on March 25 that enforcing mandatory veiling with force "will generate a negative reaction."^[14] These individuals' calls for enforcing the hijab law without physical confrontation may be a direct response to security leaders' announcements in recent days that they plan to resume enforcing veiling with a confrontational approach, as CTP previously reported.^[15] IRGC Operations Deputy

Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan announced plans to establish “patrols” in Qom Province between March 16 and the end of Ramadan to ensure compliance with the regime’s morality standards.[16] The social deputy of the IRGC Qom Provincial Unit—Major Ali Mehdi Babaei—similarly announced a new initiative—the “Let’s Enjoin Good in Our Neighborhood” plan—to enforce the hijab requirement in Qom Province on March 18.[17]

The confrontational and “smart” approaches to hijab enforcement are not mutually exclusive. Political actors who support enforcing mandatory veiling with a “smart” approach may oppose physical confrontation because of the risk that it could trigger demonstrations similar to those during the Mahsa Amini protests. Those who support physical confrontation—including some commanders in the IRGC, Basij, and Law Enforcement Command (LEC)—seem contrastingly to view “smart” measures such as surveillance and facial recognition technology as supplemental tools to enforce hijab compliance. The LEC previously resumed using surveillance cameras to identify unveiled women in cars in January 2023, for example.[18]

Regime officials—regardless of whether they espouse a confrontational or “smart” approach to hijab enforcement—continue to speak about the hijab in a tone-deaf manner. It is noteworthy that the intra-regime debate is about how to enforce mandatory veiling—not about whether the mandatory hijab law should exist. Both those who support a “smart” approach and those who prefer physical confrontation agree that they will not make sociocultural concessions to Iranian women and will instead pursue the hardline stance put forward by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.[19] Tehran Interim Friday Prayer Leader Ahmad Khatami stated on March 27 that Iranian women should regard the hijab as a “blessing.”[20] Assembly of Experts Member Ayatollah Mohsen Araki separately stated on March 26 that unveiling is the equivalent of a “spiritual and cultural Corona [virus]” that “destroys society.”[21] These statements may resonate with women who already fully abide by the hijab law. They will likely further alienate and fuel frustration among Iranians who oppose the regime’s hijab policies, however.

Key Takeaways

- **Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah have messaged that the Axis of Resistance is prepared to continue escalating against American forces in eastern Syria.**
- **An Iranian-backed group called the Al Ghaliboun Brigade issued a statement claiming responsibility for the kamikaze drone attack that killed an American contractor.**
- **Some Iranian proxies have tried to avoid becoming involved in the escalation cycle, possibly to keep it confined to Syria and/or prevent the US from retaliating against them.**
- **Iranian regime officials remain split over how to enforce the mandatory hijab law in the aftermath of the Mahsa Amini protest movement.**
- **Regime officials—regardless of whether they espouse a confrontational or “smart” approach to hijab enforcement—continue to speak about the hijab in a tone-deaf manner.**
- **At least one protest on March 25, four protests on March 26, and one protest on March 27.**

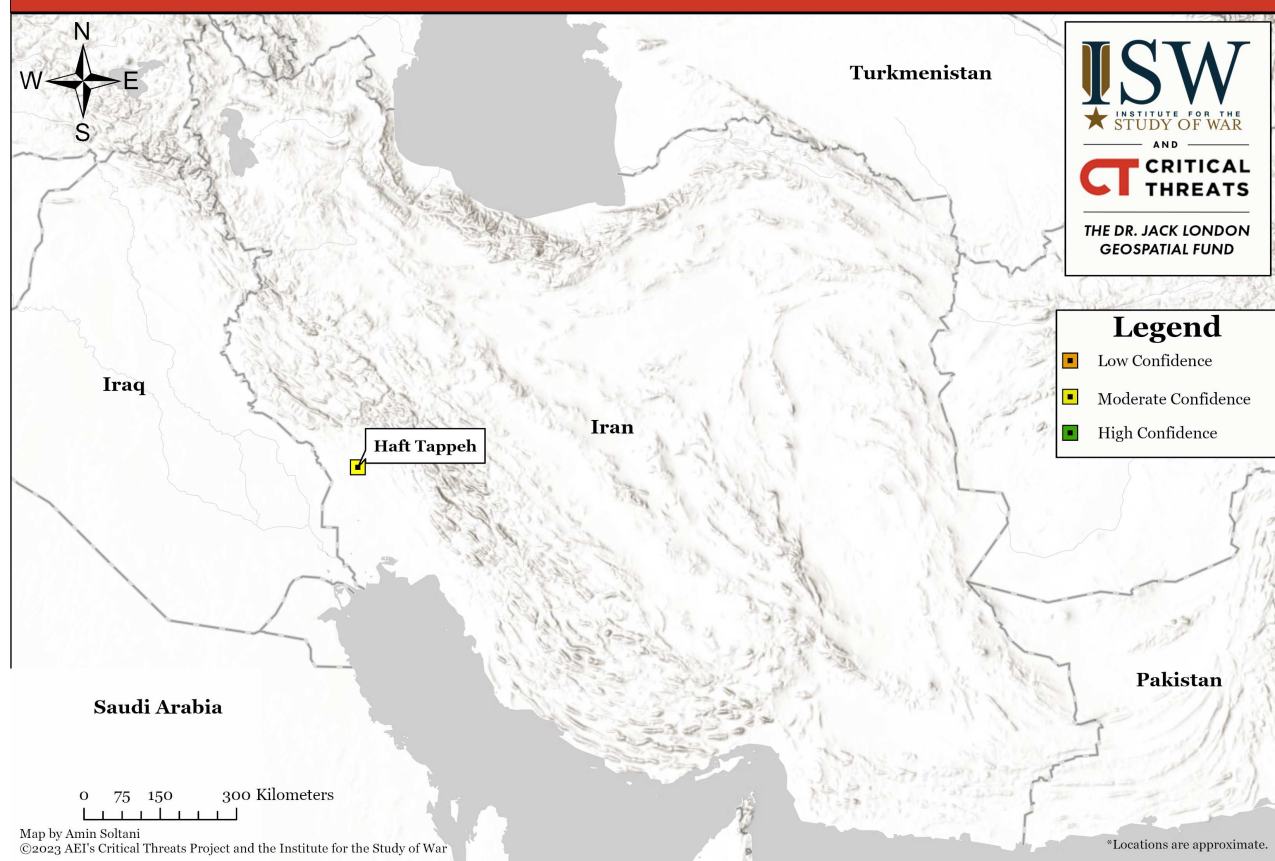
Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 25. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Haft Tappeh, Khuzestan Province[22]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Factory workers

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 25, 6:00 PM



At least four protests occurred in four cities across three provinces on March 26. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[\[23\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[\[24\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

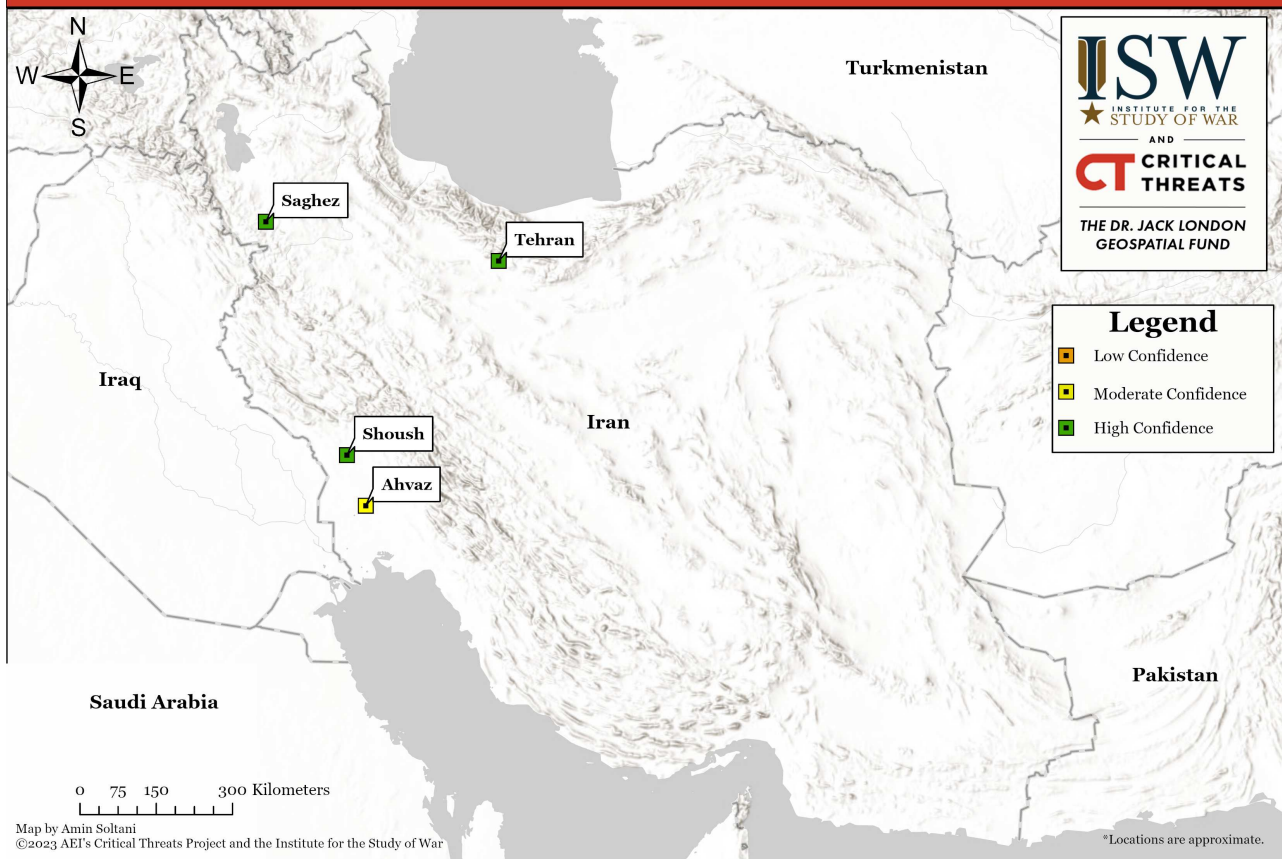
Saghez, Kurdistan Province[\[25\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers protesting the arrest of teacher union activist Soleiman Abdi[\[26\]](#)

Tehran City, Tehran Province[\[27\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals who lost money in the fake online trading platform “King Money”[\[28\]](#)

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 26, 6:00 PM

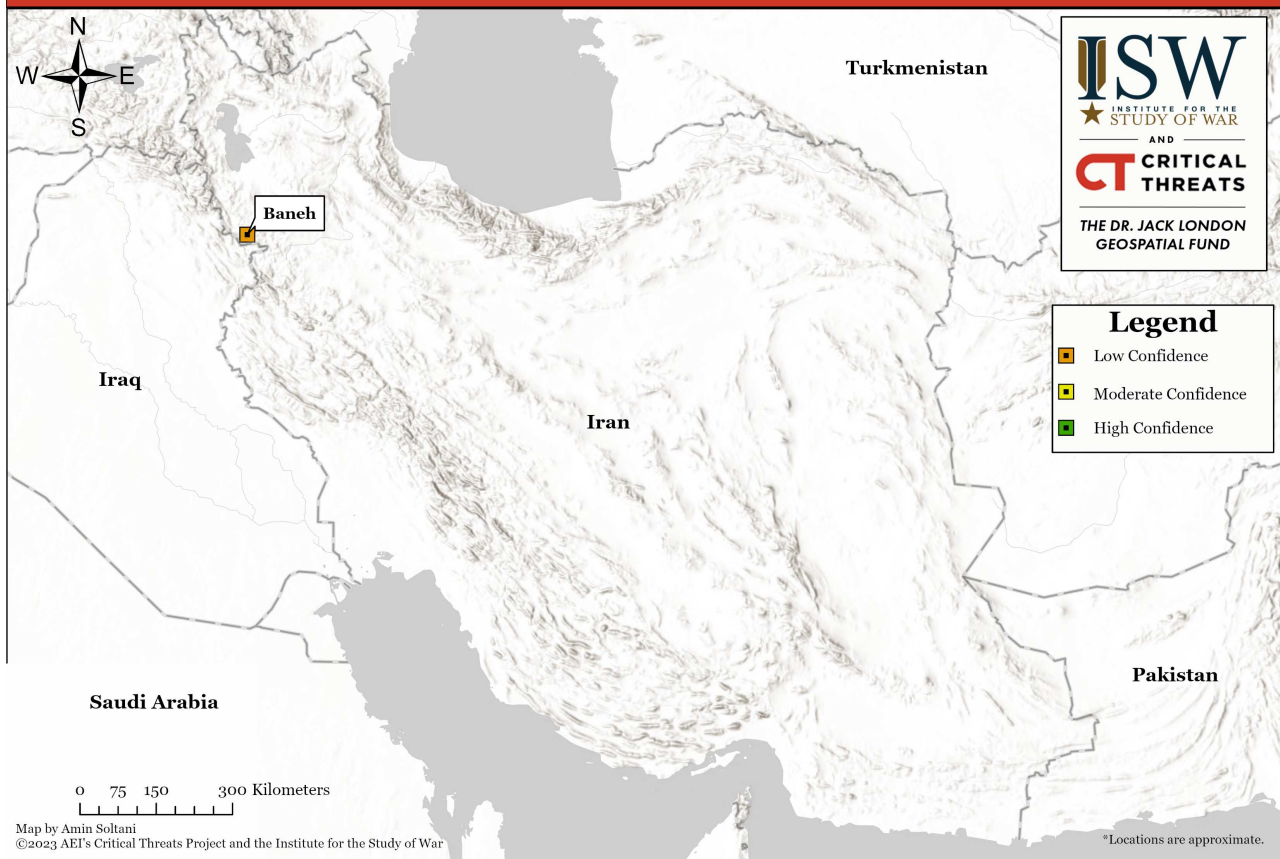


At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 27. CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Baneh, Kurdistan Province[\[29\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mechanics on strike

Protest Activity in Iran as of March 27, 6:00 PM



Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Special Units Commander Brigadier General Hassan Karimi announced plans on March 25 for the LEC Special Units deploy to 400 different locations across Iran in the new Persian calendar year in anticipation of protests.^[30] Karimi also added that the LEC Special Units will have to double their capacity to effectively cover those locations, suggesting that they do not currently have the manpower necessary. The LEC Special Units are a highly trained, anti-riot force that the regime uses heavily in its protest crackdowns.^[31] The Special Units were already deployed across the country during the Nowrouz holiday to confront potential protests, as CTP previously reported.^[32]

Iranian social media users circulated alleged footage of security forces establishing checkpoints along major roads leading into and out of Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on March 26.^[33] This securitization of Zahedan follows Zahedan Sunni cleric Abdol Hamid's fiery sermon of March 24 directly targeting positions that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had taken a few days before.^[34]

Economic Affairs

Raisi administration officials continued to echo Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's rhetoric on the economy and proposed ways to implement his economic vision in the new year. President Ebrahim Raisi reiterated his administration's readiness to decrease inflation, increase production, and grow the private sector during several meetings with senior regime officials between March 25 to 27.^[35] First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber likewise stated that the necessary conditions for curbing inflation are economic growth and the "popularization of the economy."^[36] Mokhber may have been again referring to privatizing parastatal entities as he did in another speech on March 22, as CTP previously reported.^[37] This rhetoric mirrors Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's Nowrouz address on March 21, during which he directed the regime to pursue economic policies that would "control inflation and increase economic production" and called for privatization,

stating that “the most important problem and weakness of the country is the governmental nature of the economy.”[38]

The Supreme Labor Council increased the minimum wage by 27 percent for the new Persian calendar year.[39] This wage increase will likely not significantly improve workers’ economic welfare, however, as it is far below Iran’s inflation rate which hovers between 40 to 50 percent, according to different reports.[40] The Supreme Labor Council is composed of various Raisi administration executives.[41]

The Iranian rial depreciated slightly from 494,000 rials to one US dollar on March 24 to 511,500 rials to one US dollar on March 27.[42]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani met with Qatari Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Mohammad bin Abdol Aziz Al Khalifa in Tehran on March 27.[43] Shamkhani emphasized that Iran has prioritized expanding cooperation with regional countries and that it places no restrictions on the expansion of regional relations. Al Khalifa expressed his satisfaction with the March 10 normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian similarly met with Al Khalifa on March 27.[44]

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian continued his increased rate of diplomatic engagements with regional officials on March 26 and 27. Amir Abdollahian held a phone call with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhad to discuss scheduling a meeting during the month of Ramadan—the second call between them since March 23.[45] Amir Abdollahian also held a phone call with Libyan Foreign Affairs Minister Najla El Mangoush to discuss reopening the Iranian embassy in Libya on March 26.[46] Amir Abdollahian lastly held a phone call with Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad to discuss regional cooperation on March 26.[47]

Strategic Foreign Relations Council Chairman Kamal Kharrazi denied rumors of divisions or tensions within the regime foreign policy apparatus on March 27.[48] Kharrazi stated that certain uninformed individuals were “misusing” Shamkhani’s and his own recent diplomatic engagements as signs of a growing rift between them and the Foreign Affairs Ministry. He stated that Iran’s foreign affairs and policy are well coordinated. Kharrazi visited Lebanon and Syria between March 19-22. SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani visited Iraq and the United Arab Emirates after having negotiated the rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, as CTP previously reported. Some news outlets and social media accounts have observed the conspicuous absence of Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian in the recent visits and negotiations, speculating that the Foreign Affairs Ministry has been sidelined by the Supreme Leader and the foreign policymaking organs under his direct supervision.[49] Amir Abdollahian also denied these speculations on March 17, as CTP previously reported.[50]

***The Wall Street Journal* reported on March 27 that Russia has supplied Iran with advanced surveillance software and cyberweapons in exchange for Tehran’s supply of drones for Russian use in Ukraine.[51]** The article lists internet-censorship software and communication-surveillance capabilities that would allow the regime to monitor, degrade, and deny mobile communications. The regime will likely use these capabilities to target both political dissidents and foreign adversaries.

SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani held a phone call with Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval on March 27.[52] They discussed the nuclear negotiations, regional cooperation, and the Iran-Saudi rapprochement.

External Security and Military Affairs

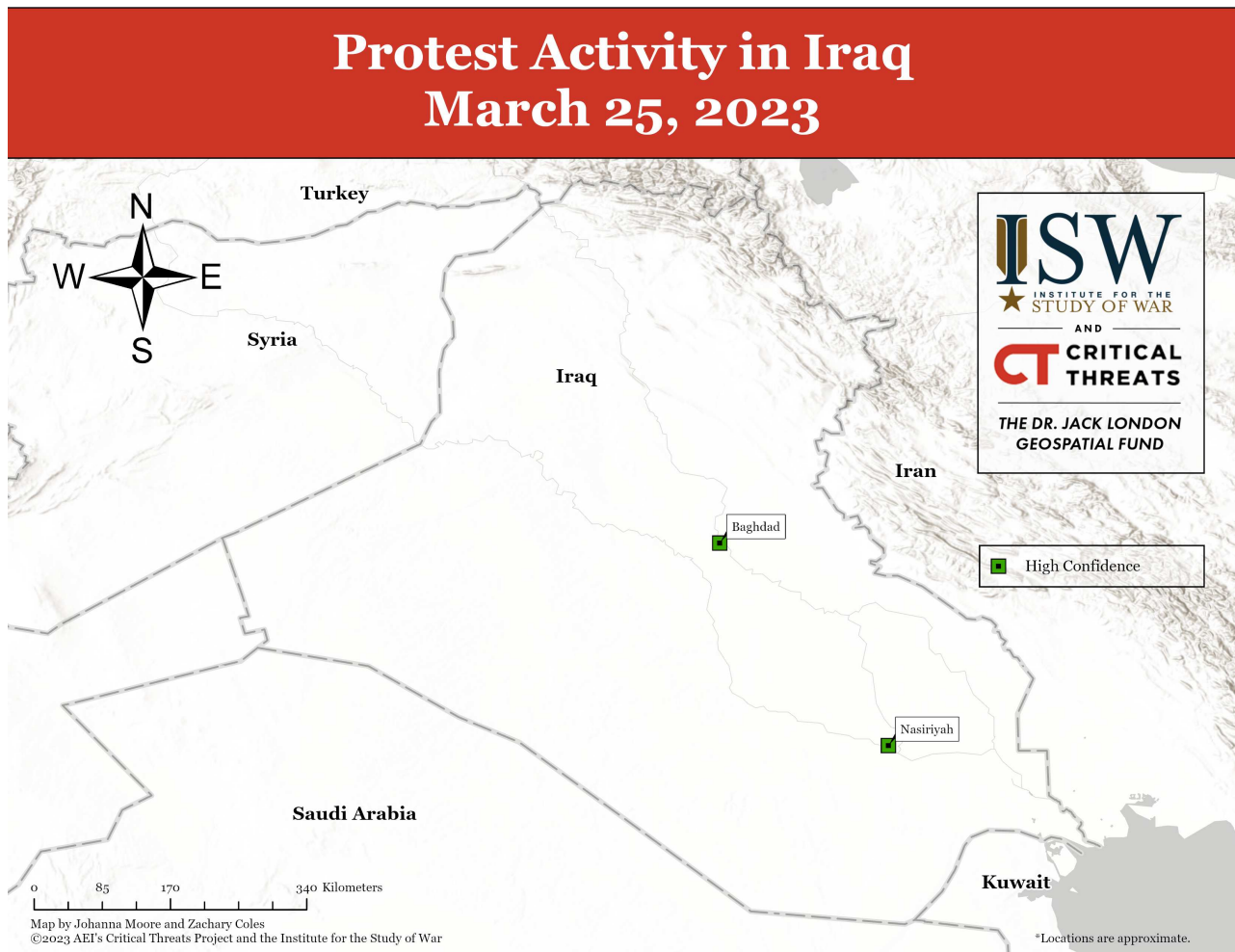
At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces in Iraq on March 25. CTP assesses with high confidence that two protest occurred in the following location:

Baghdad, Baghdad Province[53]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Protester activity:** Protesters gathered outside Parliament
- **Protest Suppression:** Riot police dispersed protesters from a park near Parliament

Nasariyah, Dhi Qar Province[54]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters blocked access to Zaytoon and Nasr bridges



At least six protests occurred in six cities across six provinces in Iraq on March 27. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that 6 protest occurred in the following location:

Al Shomali, Babil Province[55]

- **Size:** Small to Medium
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters blocked access to the main highway traveling to southern provinces; Protesters burned tires in the street
- **Protest Suppression:** Security forces heard using live fire rounds; Protesters seen clashing with riot police; Unconfirmed reports claimed Iranian-backed militias participated in protest suppression
- **Note:** Protesters released a statement claiming that parliamentarians who voted in favor of the election laws would be blocked from entering the province

Baghdad, Baghdad Province[56]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters gathered in Tahrir Square; Protesters released a statement rejecting the election laws and criticizing Sudani, Halbousi, and members of Parliament
- **Protest Suppression:** Unidentified security forces were deployed to Tahrir Square

Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province[\[57\]](#)

- **Size:** Small – Medium
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters blocked access to Al Halboubi Square with concrete barriers

Najaf, Najaf Province[\[58\]](#)

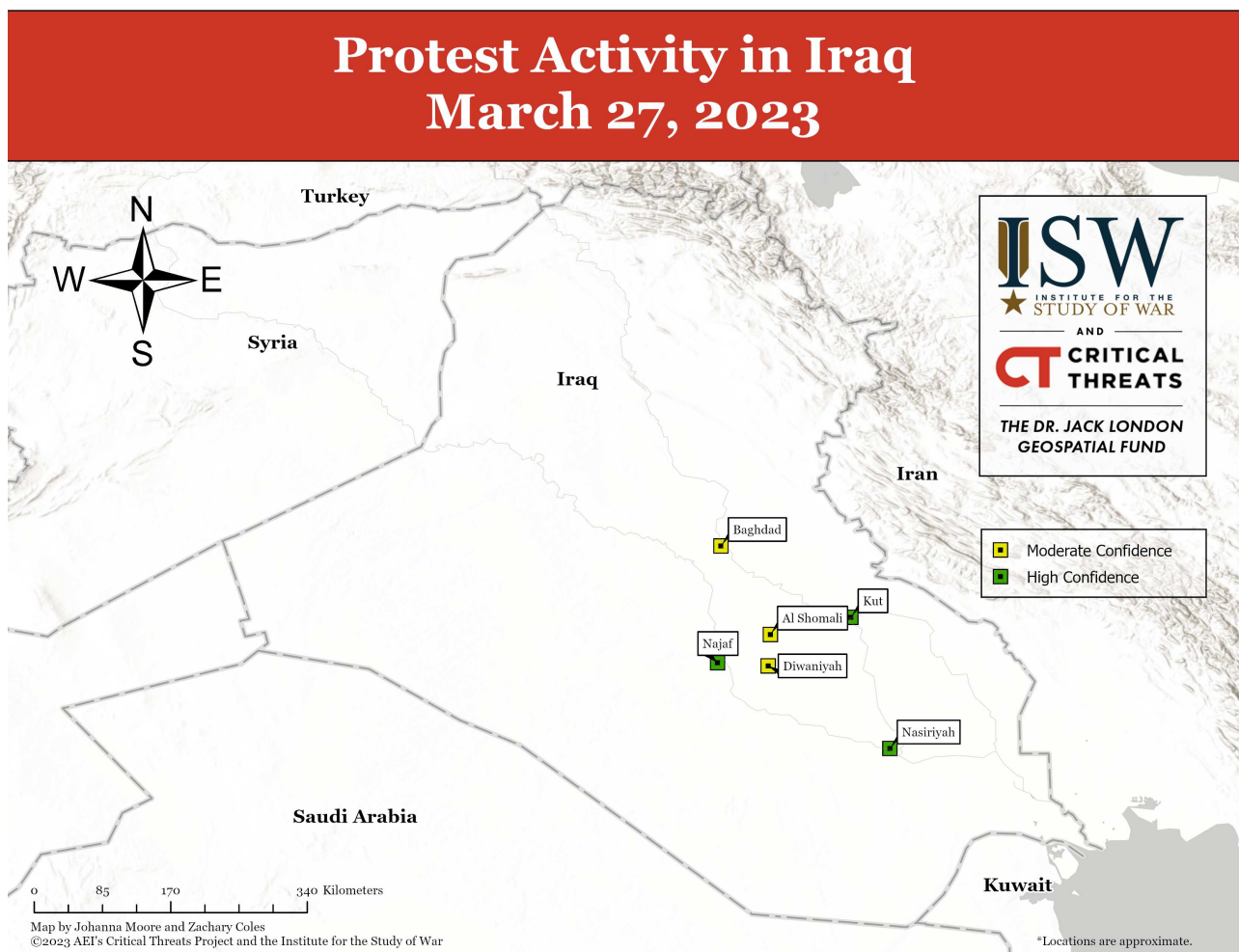
- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters set fires in the road, blocking traffic

Diwaniyah, Al Qadisiyah Province[\[59\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters stormed a local government office and later set fire to it

Kut, Wasit Province[\[60\]](#)

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters set fire to tires in the street, blocking traffic
- **Protest Suppression:** Riot police were seen deployed in response to protests



The Iraqi parliament passed all 15 State of Law Coalition-backed election law amendments on March 26, which will likely empower former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki.[\[61\]](#) The

election law amendments will advantage large political parties, such as Maliki's State of Law Coalition, at the expense of minority and independent political parties in future elections. These amendments reverse electoral reform laws passed in 2019 and 2020 in response to the Tishreen Movement—a youth-led protest movement that demanded election law and constitutional reforms to address deep-rooted corruption, economic issues, and poor government service provision. Parliament furthermore repealed on March 26 legislation from 2020 that established district-based constituencies, reverting legislative elections to multi-seat provincial elections. The district-based constituencies were meant to prevent major political blocs from overriding popular votes.

Iraqi protest groups called for more anti-government demonstrations on March 26 in response to Parliament passing the election law amendments.^[62] Protesters previously responded to calls for a sit-in outside Parliament from March 24 through March 25 to block Parliament from holding a voting session.^[63] Iraq's parliament initially announced it would hold a vote on the proposed election laws on March 25, however, the vote was delayed until March 26.

Lebanese Hezbollah-affiliated media published an article on March 26 describing how the Axis of Resistance and Russia are coordinating to expel US forces from Syria.^[64] The article stated that the Axis of Resistance and Russia play united but distinct roles in this effort. The article framed recent Russian air maneuvers over US positions in Syria as being connected to recent Iranian-backed militant attacks on US forces.

Iran Update, March 28, 2023

Iran Update, March 28, 2023

Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, Annika Ganzeveld, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Zachary Coles and Frederick W. Kagan

March 28, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

Contributors: Anya Caraiani and James Motamad

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour claimed foreign-backed threats are the source of unrest in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, possibly to set conditions to degrade Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's anti-regime following in Zahedan. Pakpour claimed that foreign-backed “evildoers and enemies” were responsible for unrest in the province and threatened to deal “severely” with these actors in a speech to local clan leaders, scholars, and critics in Sistan and Baluchistan Province on March 28.[1] The regime has both recently and historically blamed foreign actors to justify violently cracking down on domestic unrest.[2] CTP has not observed any significant increase in violence in Zahedan that would warrant a regime security response. This suggests Pakpour's statement referenced anti-regime protests inspired by Abdol Hamid, who has continuously criticized the regime during his Friday prayer sermons and generated significant unrest in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province throughout the past several months.[3]

Pakpour's framing could provide the cover under which security services manage to confront individuals in Abdol Hamid's clerical network or popular following as a matter of “national security.” The regime could be otherwise attempting to deter Abdol Hamid from escalating his rhetoric. Abdol Hamid has adjusted his rhetoric in response to the level of securitization in Zahedan. Abdol Hamid was emboldened in response to the decreased security presence since March 3.[4] He directly violated Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's rhetorical red line during his March 24 Friday prayer sermon, inverting Khamenei's argument that addressing economic problems will solve Iran's political and socio-cultural problems. Iranian social media users reported regime security forces have installed checkpoints in Zahedan and are monitoring the entrances and exits to the city, which suggests the regime may already be preparing for either course of action[5] The regime has previously established checkpoints in Zahedan to restrict movement into the city, as CTP previously reported.[6]

Key Takeaways

- **IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour claimed foreign-backed threats are the source of unrest in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, possibly to set conditions to degrade Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's anti-regime following in Zahedan.**
- **At least ten protests occurred in ten cities across 8 provinces in Iran.**
- **Raisi administration officials continued to discuss Iran's economic problems without presenting meaningful solutions to alleviate them.**
- **The Iranian rial depreciated from 511,500 rials to one US dollar on March 27 to 524,500 rials to one US dollar.**

- **Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian** stated that Iran responded to an invitation by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud for President Ebrahim Raisi to visit Saudi Arabia at an unspecified date.
- The Israeli Mossad issued a statement announcing that it aided Greek authorities thwart a plot by two Pakistani nationals with connections to Iran to attack Israeli and Jewish targets in Greece.
- The Emtidad Movement – an independent political bloc in Iraqi Parliament – announced that the party submitted an appeal on March 27 to overturn a list of election laws passed on March 26.
- An IRGC Quds Force (QF) delegation visited locations struck by US airstrikes in Deir ez Zor Province, Syria on March 27, likely to assess and reconstitute forces.
- The US and UK jointly sanctioned seven individuals affiliated with Lebanese Hezbollah and the Assad regime for their involvement in the production and exportation of captagon.

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least ten protests occurred in ten cities across eight provinces on March 28. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ardabil City, Ardabil Province[7]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs and release imprisoned teachers

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province[8]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs

Hamedan City, Hamedan Province[9]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs

Malayer, Hamedan Province[10]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[11]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Children singing “Baraaye” by the grave of killed protester Hamed Salahshour

Zanjan City, Zanjan Province[13]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to pay their salaries and address their livelihood needs

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[14]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs

Baneh, Kurdistan Province[15]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs

Bojnord, North Khorasan Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Teachers demanding the government to address their livelihood needs



Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Chief Brig. Gen. Ahmad Reza Radan stated that the LEC is attempting to increase police officer capabilities—in line with guidelines issued by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—in Shiraz, Fars Province on March 28. Radan discussed internal security with Fars Province Supreme Leader Representative Ayatollah Loftollah Dezkham, who urged the Iranian public to issue “verbal reminders” on chastity and state-imposed, mandatory veiling standards.[17] LEC Political and Ideological Affairs Head Alireza Aydani separately stated that the LEC would deal decisively with “disorder, sedition, and rioting” on March 28.[18]

Economic Affairs

Raisi administration officials continued to discuss Iran’s economic problems without presenting meaningful solutions to alleviate them on March 28. President Ebrahim Raisi ordered Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Minister Sowlat Mortazavi to create employment opportunities in “provinces with high unemployment rates” during a meeting of the Supreme Employment Council on March 28.[19] Central Bank of Iran Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin separately stated that the Central Bank is “trying its hardest” to reduce inflation on March 27.[20] Program and Budget Organization Head Massoud Mir Kazemi similarly stated that if the government “acts seriously,” it will be able to reduce Iran’s inflation to below 20 percent on March 27.[21] Neither Farzin nor Kazemi specified how the government should reduce inflation, however. Various government officials and institutions announced in recent days that Iran’s inflation rate is between 40 to 50 percent, as CTP previously reported.[22] The government’s inability to address Iran’s worsening economic conditions will likely fuel further frustration among the population. CTP recorded nine economically motivated protests on March 28 alone.

The Iranian rial depreciated from 511,500 rials to one US dollar on March 27 to 524,500 rials to one US dollar on March 28.[23]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated on March 27 that Iran responded to an invitation by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud for President Ebrahim Raisi to visit Saudi Arabia at an unspecified date. Amir Abdollahian told *Al Jazeera* correspondent Ali Hashem that Iran will offer to reciprocally host the monarch.[24] UK-based *Amwaj Media* separately reported on March 28 that such official visits will likely occur in the early summer, when embassies are estimated to reopen.[25]

The Egyptian Tourism Ministry announced on March 28 that Egypt will soon grant visas upon arrival for some Iranians entering South Sinai. The ministry added that Egypt will

“evaluate the experience of [Iranians’] arrival in South Sinai as a first step, and building on that, determine if [Iranians] will be admitted in other places.”[26]

External Security and Military Affairs



At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces in Iraq on March 28. CTP assesses with high confidence that two protest occurred in the following location:

Al Hilla, Babil Province[27]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Protester Activity:** Protester chanted calling to remove Iraqi Parliamentary Speaker from office

Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar Province[28]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters held a sit-in at al Halbousi Square
- **Protest Suppression:** Unidentified security forces dispersed protesters at al Halbousi Square; Unidentified security forces burned down and disassembled protesters’ tents and removed concrete barriers from local roads

Samawah, Muthanna Province[29]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Protesters displayed anti-Coordination Framework posters

The Emtidad Movement – an independent political bloc in Iraqi Parliament – announced that the party submitted an appeal on March 27 to overturn a list of election laws passed on March 26.[30] The Emtidad Movement claimed that Iraqi Parliamentary Speaker Mohammed al Halbousi violated parliamentary procedures by removing several members of independent political parties from the voting session on March 26 following an argument between Coordination Framework members and independent political parties.[31]

A senior unnamed Sadrist official claimed that the State of Law Coalition-backed election laws will not impact the Sadrist Movement.[32] The official argued that Sadrist Movement followers are loyal, and that the movement can position itself to undermine attempts to block the movement from obtaining seats in parliament. The same official claimed that Moqtada al Sadr – the head of the Sadrist Movement – has not given instructions for the political party to participate in local or legislative elections.

An IRGC Quds Force delegation visited locations struck by US airstrikes in Deir ez Zor Province, Syria on March 27, likely to assess and reconstitute forces. IRGC Central Support officer Hajj Shafea – a likely nom de guerre– led a delegation from Damascus to Dier ez Zor Province to visit Iranian-backed militia positions damaged by US airstrikes on March 24, according to the independent Syrian media outlet *Sada al Sharqieh*.[33] Anti-Syrian regime media outlet *Eye of the Euphrates* reported that senior IRGC Quds Force leaders held a private meeting to identify leaks within Iranian-backed militias and expand recruitment efforts on March 27.[34] Turkish-based news outlet *Syria TV* reported IRGC Quds Force leadership held a separate meeting with tribal Sheiks in Deir ez Zor City on March 27 to discuss establishing a new tribal militia with 2,000 members.[35]

The Israeli Mossad issued a statement announcing that it aided Greek authorities thwart a plot by two Pakistani nationals with connections to Iran to attack Israeli and Jewish targets in Greece.[36] The Mossad added that the Pakistani individuals were members of a “wide Iranian network that operates from Iran and out of many countries.”[37]

The US and UK jointly sanctioned seven individuals affiliated with Lebanese Hezbollah and the Assad regime for their involvement in the production and exportation of captagon.

[38] The UK government issued a statement describing captagon as a “financial lifeline” for the Assad regime worth 57 billion US dollars.[39] Captagon is a highly addictive amphetamine drug with approximately 80 percent of its supply originating from Syria.[40] The sanctioned individuals are closely involved with Lebanese Hezbollah and the Syrian Arab Army’s captagon manufacturing and smuggling operations.[41]

[1] [https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/580534/%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA](https://defapress.dot.ir/fa/news/580534/%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%B7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA)

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-september-28> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-february-1-2...> ; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023#_edn2...

[3] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-21#_... ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-5> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-21> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-27-2...> ; https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-10-2023#_e...

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-24-2023>

[5] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640073344161574915?s=20>

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-19-2023>

[7] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640699509654134788?cxt=HHwWiIC9g...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640668422538182656?cxt=HHwWgIC2-ZrP... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640806660821209104?cxt=HHwWoMC-t...>

[8] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640704779893481473?cxt=HHwWgoCxr...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640689306783170561?cxt=HHwWgoC-2eqO...

[9] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1640732550925635584?cxt=HHwWgMC-1... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640697784159313920?cxt=HHwWgICxi...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640660361887072258?cxt=HHwWhIC-tYL6... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640733905278959617?cxt=HHwWgoC8s...>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640701318313525249?cxt=HHwWgoC-y...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640684288860385282?cxt=HHwWhMCzoeDq...

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640667037121773568?cxt=HHwWgICw5...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640665687432519681?cxt=HHwWgoCz6YCw... ;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1640668447955734536?cxt=HHwWkMC-q...

[12] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1640817323685675008?cxt=HHwWgIC8-... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640785367245660175?cxt=HHwWnoCx9...>

[13] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1640732550925635584?cxt=HHwWgMC-1... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640703134040293380?cxt=HHwWiIC85...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640684288860385282?cxt=HHwWhMCzoeDq... ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640734083595620353?cxt=HHwWgsC---...>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640678095039483912?cxt=HHwWkMC-2...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640668422538182656?cxt=HHwWgIC2-ZrP...

[15] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640676291002204168?cxt=HHwWkIC8y...>

[16] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1640689306783170561?cxt=HHwWgoC-2eqO...

[17] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/01/08/2872543/>-سردار-رادان-پلیس-جمع-آوری- /مقتدرانه-معتادان-متجاهر-و-سارقان-را-آغاز-کرد

[18] <https://www.ilna dot ir/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-5/1343869-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[19] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85068344/%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%88%DB%8C%DA%98%D9%87-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A2%D9%81%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C>

[20] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85068389/%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%84-%DB%B2%DB%B0-%D8%AA%D8%A7-%DB%B3%DB%B0-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85>

[21] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85068395/%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DB%B3%DB%B0-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B5%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85>

[22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-27-2023>

[23] <https://bonbast dot com/>

[24] <https://alkhaleejonline dot news/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7>

%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%85-
%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%AC%D9%8A%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%A9-
%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%84-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A-
%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A7

[25] <https://amwaj.media/media-monitor/after-invitation-by-king-salman-iran-s...>

[26] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/egypt-allow-iranians-visas-arr...>

[27] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/72809> ;

[28] <https://t.me/wa3ediq/66933> ; https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1640696931180593158 ;
<https://twitter.com/nasiriyahnews/status/1640283387016495104> ; https://twitter.com/Gil_msh1/status/1640659149452107777?s=20

[29] <https://twitter.com/AlmirbadMedia/status/1640780928975773711>

[30] <https://www dot alaraby.co.uk/node/6323527>

[31] [https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%86%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%8A%D9%86%84%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A](https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9) ;

[32] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B4-%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%BA%D9%88>

[33] <https://www.facebook.com/SadaAlSharqieh/posts/pfbid0BWqwwD4SmezZFhD5QCkK...>

[34] <https://eyeofeufrates dot com/index.php/ar/news/2023/03/27/8078>

[35] <https://www.syria dot tv/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%82%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9->

%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%8A-
%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7 ;

[https://www.jesrpress](https://www.jesrpress.com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b1%d8%b3-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ab%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-%d9%8a%d8%b4%d8%af%d8%af-%d9%82%d8%a8%d8%b6%d8%aa%d9%87-%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d9%82/) dot com/%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ad%d8%b1%d8%b3-
%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%ab%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a-
%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-
%d9%8a%d8%b4%d8%af%d8%af-%d9%82%d8%a8%d8%b6%d8%aa%d9%87-
%d8%b9%d9%84%d9%89-%d9%82/ ;

[36] [https://www](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/mossad-says-it-helped-foil-planned-iranian-attack-on-jewish-targets-in-greece/) dot timesofisrael dot com/liveblog_entry/mossad-says-it-helped-foil-planned-iranian-attack-on-jewish-targets-in-greece/

[37] [https://www](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/mossad-says-it-helped-foil-planned-iranian-attack-on-jewish-targets-in-greece/) dot timesofisrael dot com/liveblog_entry/mossad-says-it-helped-foil-planned-iranian-attack-on-jewish-targets-in-greece/

[38] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1369>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tackling-the-illicit-drug-trade-fuell...>

[39] <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tackling-the-illicit-drug-trade-fuell...>

[40] <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2023/03/new-us-sanctions-target-syr...>

[41] <https://newlinesinstitute.org/power-vacuums-program/special-captagon-tra...>

Iran Update, March 29, 2023

Iran Update, March 29, 2023

Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Zachary Coles, Johanna Moore, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Riley Bailey

March 29, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

Contributors: Anya Caraiani, Aleeshyah Lightfoot, and James Motamad

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian alluded to Iranian involvement in the recent attacks on US bases in Syria during his meeting with Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow, Russia on March 29.[2] Abdollahian rejected US reports that Iranian drones were involved in the March 23 attack on a US base in Syria but added that Iran responded “decisively and clearly to the American side” in “the events that took place east of the Euphrates.” The US conducted airstrikes on at least two Iranian-backed militant positions in eastern Syria on March 23 in retaliation for a drone attack on a US base near Hasakah.[3] Likely Iranian-backed militants conducted a rocket attack on the US base at the Green Village base in eastern Syria on March 24, likely in retaliation for the US airstrikes, as CTP previously assessed. Amir Abdollahian’s rejection of Iranian drone involvement in the recent attacks was likely a reference to the March 23 drone attack on the Hasaka base. His second statement about the decisive “response” was likely a reference to the Iranian’s separate retaliatory rocket attack on the Green Village base, as CTP previously assessed.[4] Amir Abdollahian’s use of the Persian word “pasokh” or “respond” suggests that he may be claiming responsibility for the rocket attacks on the Green Village base.

Amir Abdollahian also announced that Iran and Russia are finalizing a comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement, that Iran has made progress in becoming a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and noted increased economic cooperation between the two countries. Amir Abdollahian did not deny recent reports about Russo-Iranian cybersurveillance cooperation and described such cooperation as “defensive.” Amir Abdollahian emphasized the need to maintain security in the Caucasus without upsetting the region’s current geopolitical balance and agreed to discuss resolving regional tensions between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran in upcoming talks in Tehran. Iran previously engaged Turkey to address Iran’s security concerns about Azerbaijan on March 17 and 20, and could be likewise consulting Russia on these concerns.[5] Amir Abdollahian also expressed support for a ceasefire in Yemen and promoted an intra-Yemeni dialogue to end the conflict. Iran reportedly agreed to stop encouraging cross-border Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia and to halt weapons shipments to its proxy in Yemen as part of the March 10 agreements with Saudi Arabia, as CTP previously reported.[6] Lavrov praised the Iran-Saudi March 10 decision to normalize relations. Lavrov also extended support for the Hormuz Peace Endeavor, a longstanding Iranian proposal for a regional security dialogue forum and confidence-building-and-security-measures between the littoral states of the Persian Gulf. Both ministers emphasized the need for resuming the stalled nuclear negotiations between Iran and the West.

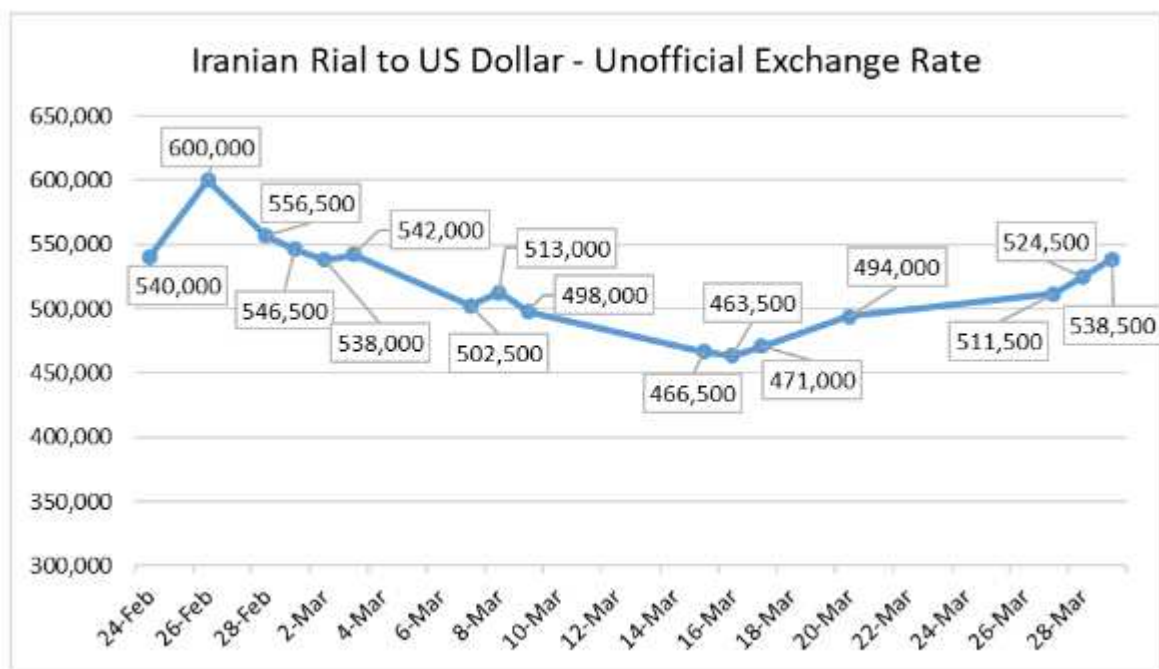
NOTE: The following text will also appear in The Institute for the Study of War’s (ISW) March 29 Ukraine Update.

Lavrov promoted Iran’s “Hormoz Peace Plan” for security in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman and stated that the Kremlin demands an immediate return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of

Action (JCPOA).[7] Abdollahian and Lavrov likely discussed continued Russian efforts to procure Iranian weapon systems for use in Ukraine and a finalized agreement for Russia to provide Iran with Su-35 attack aircraft.[8] The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported on March 29 that Iranian Pouya Air Transport resumed regular flights between Tehran and Moscow on March 13 likely to support weapons transfers.[9] The Ukrainian Resistance Center also reported that Iranian officials are planning to deliver Shahed-131 drones to Wagner Group personnel and that Wagner personnel have started training to operate the drones, although ISW has not observed confirmation that Wagner Group personnel have used Iranian-made drones in Ukraine.[10] ISW previously assessed that Russia is relying on Iran for military and technological support in Ukraine and that some Iranian personnel are likely in Ukraine directly supporting Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure.[11] Iran is likely attempting to solidify a bilateral security relationship with Russia in which the two are more equal partners and will likely increase weapons transfers to Russia in pursuit of this goal.

The Raisi administration's efforts to stabilize the economy in recent weeks appear to have failed. The regime temporarily stabilized the value of the Iranian rial between February 26 and March 16.[12] The rial has depreciated approximately 16 percent since March 16, however, reaching 538,500 rials to one US dollar on March 29.[13] This depreciation indicates that the government's previous economic solutions—namely injecting hard currency into the economy—were insufficient to stabilize the Iranian rial and economy for a protracted period of time.[14] The government's unwillingness to adopt meaningful reforms—such as limiting parastatal organizations' control of the economy—leaves it with very few economic solutions and forces it to announce policies that have the appearance of meaningful change but will likely not improve economic conditions.

President Ebrahim Raisi announced temporary economic solutions on March 29 that are unlikely to alleviate Iran's economic problems in the long term.[15] Raisi ordered First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber to form a working group to “prevent decisions that increase inflation” during a cabinet meeting on March 29.[16] Raisi previously tasked Mokhber with forming an economic working group on February 1 after Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei described Mokhber as bearing a specific responsibility for the Iranian economy in a speech on January 30, as CTP previously reported, although it remains unclear what this working group accomplished, if anything, within this timeframe.[17] Raisi thus likely announced the formation of a new working group on March 29 to publicly portray his administration as proactively attempting to resolve Iran's economic challenges instead of meaningfully providing an economic solution. Raisi additionally called on Education Minister Yousef Nouri [18] This directive is a response to nationwide teacher protests on March 28, indicating that the Raisi administration is prioritizing addressing immediate economic grievances among discontented segments of the population instead of pursuing long-term economic policies that will benefit the The Social Security Organization similarly announced on March 2 that it would distribute new year's payments to retirees--many of whom have organized demonstrations to protest[19][20]



Source: Bonbast.com

Some regime officials are increasingly advocating for a social pressure campaign to enforce the mandatory hijab law. Khorasan Razavi Province Supreme Leader Representative Hojjat ol Eslam Ahmad Alamolhoda called on the Iranian people to intervene in incidents of “indecent,” likely referencing mandatory veiling standards, during a speech on March 29.[21] Alamolhoda acknowledged that citizens who confront “indecent” may be ridiculed on social media but stated that “a true believer is someone who is not afraid of sacrificing his reputation, position, and wealth.”[22] Alamolhoda previously emphasized on March 17 that mandatory veiling should be enforced with “the effort of the people.”[23] Iranian authorities have continued to seal multiple establishments where shop keepers or restaurant owners failed to confront unveiled female customers.[24] Regime officials may be stressing the public’s role in enforcing the hijab law in response to some Iranian women’s regular defiance of this law in major urban areas.[25] Women who defy the hijab law appear to do so independently, an uncoordinated act of anti-regime defiance that Iranian authorities are unable to preempt. Iranian officials to coopt pro-regime loyalists to enforce mandatory veiling to prevent more women from openly defying the hijab law. It is far from clear if a collective punishment model to enforce mandatory veiling standards will succeed, however, and such efforts may further entrench societal divisions and anti-regime sentiments. Social media users have recently circulated videos of individuals confronting those reprimanding unveiled women, a trendline that may continue in the coming weeks.[26]

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian alluded to Iranian involvement in the recent attacks on US bases in Syria during his meeting with Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow, Russia.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi announced temporary economic solutions on March 29 that will likely not alleviate Iran’s economic problems in the long term.**
- **Some regime officials are increasingly advocating for a social pressure campaign to enforce the mandatory hijab law.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces in Iran.**
- **Iran cancelled its contracts with the Assad regime to rehabilitate two power stations in Aleppo and Hama provinces.**
- **Unidentified militants gunned down a Shia family in Al Khalis district, Diyala Province.**

- The Iraqi Wisdom Movement party and the Coordination Framework – a loose coalition of pro-Iranian political parties – are negotiating an agreement to remove judges from Iraq’s Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) according to a statement given to Iraqi news outlet *Al Mada*.

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on March 29. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Hamedan City, Hamedan Province[27]

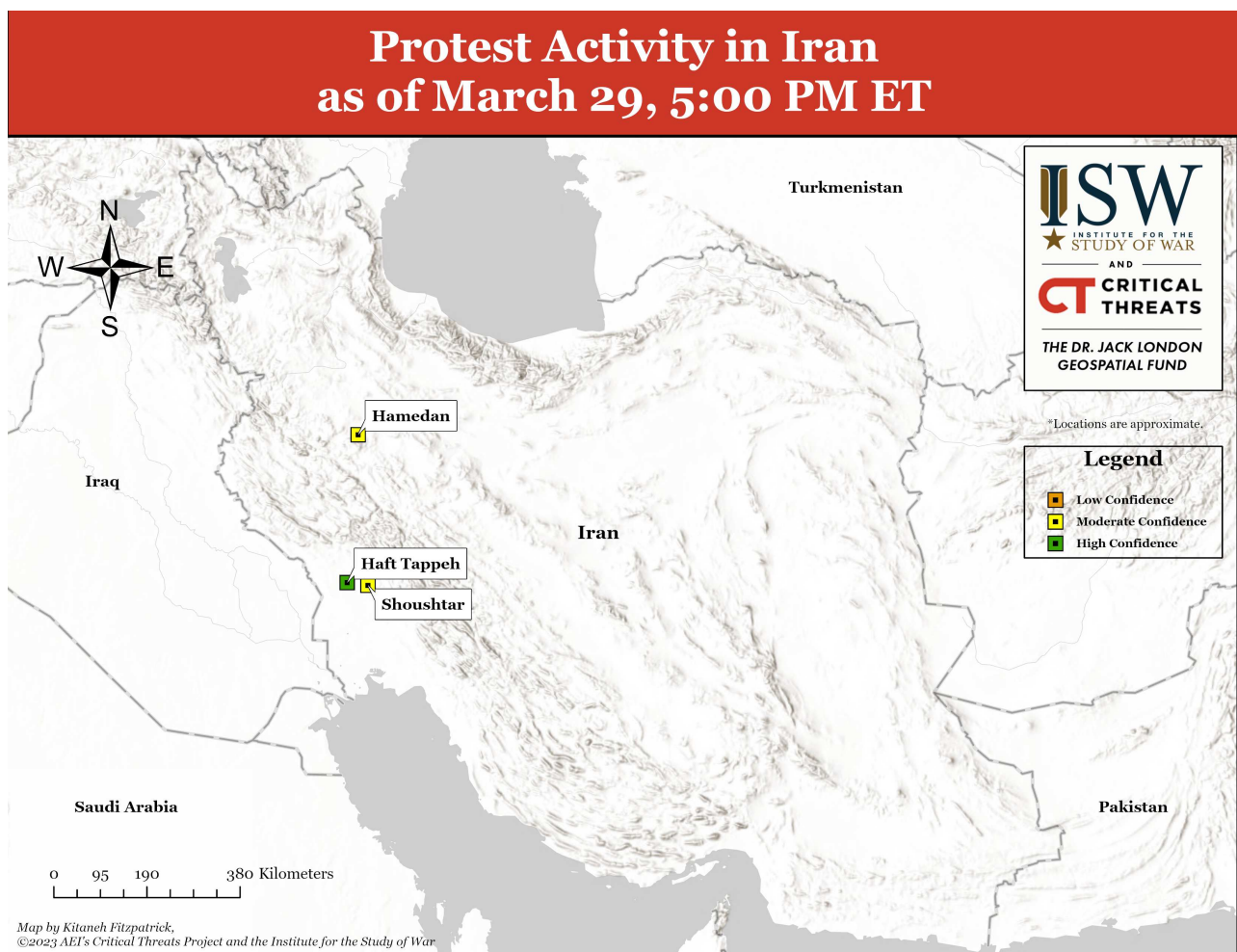
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Taxi drivers
- **Notes:** Strike and protest

Haft Tappeh, Khuzestan Province[28]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Factory workers

Shoushtar, Khuzestan Province[29]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees



Economic Affairs

IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* reported an increase in Iran's crude oil production from January 2023 on March 29. *Tasnim* claimed that Iran is currently producing 2.65 million barrels per day, over 20,000 barrels more than January of this year.[30]

External Security and Military Affairs

IRGC Spokesperson Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif described ongoing political events in Israel as a “golden opportunity” for Palestinians to destabilize the country on March 28. Sharif reiterated the regime's support for Palestine.[31]

Iran cancelled its contracts with the Assad regime to rehabilitate two power stations in Aleppo and Hama provinces on March 13. *Shaam Network* and *Enab Baladi* reported that work stalled on the powerplants after the Iranian company Pemanir refused to accept payment for the \$115 million contract in raw phosphate, as the Syrian government had previously proposed.[32] *Al Araby al Jadeed* reported that anonymous Pemanir officials said the refusal stemmed from the changing price of phosphate.[33] The price in US dollars for a metric ton of Phosphate rocks, however, has risen by more than 25% to over \$322 since the agreement was signed in October of 2021.[34] *Al Araby al Jadeed* claimed the true reason for Pemanir cancelling the contract is a larger Iranian pivot to reconsider its investments with the Syrian government after recent developments on the Assad regime normalizing ties with Iran's regional adversaries, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.[35]

***Eye of Euphrates* reported that a large number of IRGC Quds Force and Iranian-backed militia leaders met in Al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province on March 29.**[36] The officials reportedly discussed methods of mitigating operational security failures and responding to recent US airstrikes on Iranian-backed militia positions in Deir ez Zor province.[37] US forces struck the positions on March 23 and 24 to retaliate for Iranian-backed militants conducting a kamikaze drone attack on US forces in northeast Syria on March 23, as CTP previously reported.[38] The March 29 meeting allegedly included a discussion of how to identify local groups in SDF-held territory on the eastern side of the Euphrates that would attack US positions.[39] *Eye of Euphrates* claimed the meeting included a senior Lebanese Hezbollah commander for eastern Syria, local Fatemiyoun commanders, IRGC Quds Force Deir ez Zor Commander Hajj Abbas, and several other senior Axis of Resistance local officials.[40] CTP cannot verify the accuracy of *Eye of Euphrates*' reporting, and no other local media sources have corroborated the story. Such a meeting is nonetheless plausible and supported by prior reporting from CTP about IRGC Quds Force officials meeting with local officials to solve operational security issues on March 27.[41]

Unidentified militants gunned down a Shia family in Al Khalis district, Diyala Province on March 29.[42] *Al Araby* reported the militants burned down a local hut to distract from the attack.[43] The *Al Rafaidain International Center for Justice and Human Rights*, a local non-profit organization, claimed that Iranian-backed militants conducted the attack, while a Telegram channel affiliated with Shia militia Asaib Ahl al Haq referred to the incident as a terrorist attack perpetrated by ISIS.[44] Diyala-based Twitter sources blamed the March 29 attack and other recent violent incidents—including the February 20 massacre in Al Khalis district likely perpetrated by Badr-affiliated militants—on Iranian-backed Shia militias in an act of genocide against the local Sunni population.[45] As CTP has previously stated, sectarian conflict in Diyala presents an opportunity for ISIS to establish itself as a security guarantor for Sunnis in the province.[46]

The Iraqi Wisdom Movement party and the Coordination Framework – a loose coalition of pro-Iranian political parties – are negotiating an agreement to remove judges from Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) according to a statement given to Iraqi news outlet *Al Mada*.[47] A Wisdom Movement official, Fahd al Jubouri, inaccurately claimed that IHEC failed to prevent election fraud in 2021. Jubouri announced that the Commission's judges will be replaced with “experts” under the new agreement. IHEC is an independent government organization that conducts election oversight and issues rulings on election fraud, vote counting, and procedural violations.[48] Iraq's Parliament determined in 2019 that IHEC's Board of Commissioners will consist of independent judges to preserve election integrity in response to

demands from Tishreen Movement protesters.[49] It is unclear at this time how this restructuring will impact Iraq's election integrity.

- [1] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85069068>
- [2] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85069068>
- [3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-24-2023>
- [4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-24-2023>
- [5] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-20-2023#_ednc...
- [6] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-13-2023#_edn4...
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023>
- [7] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1402/01/09/2873132>; <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85069158>
- [8] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign...>
<https://twitter.com/IrnaEnglish/status/1634481569300709377>
- [9] <https://sprotyv.mod.gov dot ua/2023/03/29/iran-ta-rf-posylyuyut-spivrobitnycztvo/>
- [10] <https://sprotyv.mod.gov dot ua/2023/03/29/iran-ta-rf-posylyuyut-spivrobitnycztvo/>
- [11] <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021323>
- [12] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-27-2023>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023>
- [13] <https://bonbast dot com/>
- [14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-2-2023>
- [15] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85069076>
- [16] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85069076>
- [17] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-crisis-update-februar...>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-30-2023>
- [18] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85069076>
- [20] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-2-2023>
- [21] <https://t dot co/wUd4RjPfoh>
- [22] <https://t dot co/wUd4RjPfoh>
- [23] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/razavi/news/14011226000392>
- [24] <https://t dot co/jVOwm1u419>
- [25] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashh/status/1640848166328074240?cxt=HHwWgIC...

[26] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1641139339697455127?s=20>

[27] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641080207552413696?cxt=HHwWgICws...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641082142242353163?cxt=HHwWlsC9-e7g...
https://twitter.com/javanane_hmd/status/1641047884010332164?cxt=HHwWiC9...

[28] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641097665453719552?cxt=HHwWgIC88...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641003129985462273?cxt=HHwWgsCz4...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1640999780418568194?cxt=HHwWhIC-x...>
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641000017933529088?cxt=HHwWgMCzlc20...
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1641028891119681536?cxt=HHwWgIC8l...

[29] [https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641008629745700871?s=20;](https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641008629745700871?s=20)
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641028149642182661?cxt=HHwWioC23Yqa...

[30] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/01/09/2872956>

[31] <http://sahebkhavar.com/ir/news/59409788>

[32] <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/633311>; <https://shaam.org/news/syria-news/shrkh-iyanyh-trfdh-msuwl-ykshf-tfasyt-tathr-tahyl-mhth-mhrdh>

[33] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A9>

[34] <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/5d903e848db1d1b83e0ec8f744e55570-03...>

[35] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%86%D9%81%D9%88%D8%B0-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A9>; <https://amwaj.com/media/media-monitor/syria-s-assad-continues-normalization-push-with-gulf-arab-states>

[36] <https://eyeofephates.com/ar/news/2023/03/29/8088>

[37] <https://eyeofephates.com/ar/news/2023/03/29/8088>

[38] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-24-2023>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-27-2023>

[39] <https://eyeofephates.com/ar/news/2023/03/29/8088>

[40] <https://eyeofephates.com/ar/news/2023/03/29/8088>

[41] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-28-2023>

[42] <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86->

%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-
%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86-
%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-
%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-
%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-
%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-
%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9; [https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%88-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9](https://shafaq.com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%88-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9)

[43] [https://www.alaraby dot co.uk/politics/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9)

[44] <https://twitter.com/Hanan3Abdulatif/status/1641121626929479682>;
<https://t.me/sabreenS1/72815>

[45] <https://twitter.com/mahmoud64710503/status/1641089736424009734>;
https://twitter.com/linaassil_assil/status/1641107314361999360;
<https://twitter.com/Hanan3Abdulatif/status/1641121626929479682>;
<https://twitter.com/salehksaj/status/1641089155366019073>

[46] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-10-2023>

[47] [https://almadapaper dot net/view.php?cat=286429](https://almadapaper.net/view.php?cat=286429)

[48] [https://ihec dot iq/%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%a6%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ad%d8%b2%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%86%d8%b8%d9%8a%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9/](https://ihec.iq/%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%a6%d8%b1%d8%a9-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a7%d8%ad%d8%b2%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%86%d8%b8%d9%8a%d9%85%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9/)

[49] <https://iraq.un.org/en/139735-independent-high-electoral-commission-ihec...>

Iran Update, March 30, 2023

Johanna Moore, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Nicholas Carl

March 30, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Contributors: Anya Caraiani, Aleeshyah Lightfoot, and James Motamed

Iran and its proxies may target US forces in Syria in retaliation for multiple Israeli airstrikes on Iranian and Iranian-backed forces in Syria on March 30. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted two airstrikes targeting a likely Iranian or proxy officer and an Iranian-backed militant facility near Damascus on March 30.[1] Syrian media reported that the first airstrike targeted a “pro-Iranian” foreigner traveling in the vicinity of a possible Iranian air defense site, suggesting that the target was an individual of some significance to the Iranian project in Syria.[2] CTP previously reported that the IDF likely targeted an IRGC Quds Force facility and headquarters in the same general area on February 18, indicating that senior Iranian and proxy officers are present there.[3] Iranian leadership has previously warned that it holds the US accountable for Israeli airstrikes in Syria, and Iranian proxies have attacked US positions on several occasions in retaliation for such airstrikes, including the March 23 drone attack that killed an American contractor in northeastern Syria.[4]

Iranian officials and state media outlets have signaled their readiness to continue the escalation cycle against the US in recent days. The Iranian Advisory Center in Syria—a likely front for the IRGC Quds Force—issued a statement on March 24 warning that Iran’s Axis of Resistance can retaliate against any US attacks in Syria.[5] Iranian-state and proxy media echoed these remarks, emphasizing that the Axis of Resistance is prepared to respond to attacks on its forces.[6] State-controlled *IRNA* similarly reported on March 28 that some of the recent Iranian-backed attacks on US forces demonstrated that “the resistance forces are ready to respond to any American aggression.”[7] *IRNA* added that the American bases in Syria are “vulnerable,” despite having air defenses.[8] IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* separately reported on March 26 that Iran gave an “iron fist” response to the US in Syria and that the US decided to engage in a conflict with the Axis of Resistance in Syria because of its “reduction (in) position in regional equations.”[9] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated on March 29 that Iran responded, “decisively and clearly to the American side” in “the events that took place east of the Euphrates.”[10] The IDF’s latest airstrikes may therefore trigger Iranian-backed strikes on US forces meant to, in fact, deter Israeli airstrikes.



Key Takeaways

- **Iran and its proxies may target US forces in Syria in retaliation for multiple Israeli airstrikes on Iranian and Iranian-backed forces in Syria on March 30.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces.**

- Iranian officials continued discussing the mandatory hijab law with increased urgency.
- The Iranian rial depreciated from 538,500 rials to one US dollar on March 29 to 549,000 rials to one US dollar.
- Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated that the Iranian parliament could impose a deadline for nuclear negotiations during an interview with *Al Jazeera*.
- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the US must compensate Iran for freezing its assets and declared that it had no jurisdiction over the 1.7 billion US dollars' worth of Iranian assets frozen in the US.
- IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani in an unannounced visit to Baghdad.
- Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* published a purported interrogation video of an Intelligence and Security Ministry officer discussing Iran's covert operations in Africa.

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on March 30. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Haft Tappeh, Khuzestan Province[11]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Factory workers

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[12]

- **Size:** Small to Medium
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Notes:** Gathered around Mahsa Amini's grave

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[13]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mourners



Iranian officials continued discussing the mandatory hijab law with increased urgency on March 30. Masal County, Gilan Province Governor Gholam Reza Gil Chalani warned that “[hijab violations] will get worse in the summer” if the regime does not act against unveiled women. [14] Parliamentary Cultural Committee spokesperson Ahmad Rastineh separately stated that officials who disregard hijab violations are more guilty than unveiled women themselves. [15] Ahvaz Friday Prayer Leader Hojjat ol Eslam Mir Ahmad Reza Hajiti additionally stated that inflation and hijab violations are the two main problems facing Iran. [16] These remarks from a wide array of officials highlight the extent to which the hijab issue continues to dominate much of the internal Iranian political discourse. Regime officials may be discussing the hijab issue with greater urgency because failing to enforce the law may encourage more women to violate it, especially as Iran enters the summer months. The regime has discussed various methods—including physical confrontation, ‘smart’ and advanced surveillance, and social pressure—to enforce mandatory veiling in recent months, as CTP previously reported. [17] It is unclear whether these approaches will achieve the regime’s desired effect of increasing hijab compliance in the coming months, however.

Economic Affairs

The Iranian rial depreciated from 538,500 rials to one US dollar on March 29 to 549,000 rials to one US dollar on March 30.[18] Iranian social media users circulated footage of individuals in Tehran lining up to buy US dollars on the same date.[19]

Nuclear Program

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian stated that the Iranian parliament could impose a deadline for nuclear negotiations during an interview with *Al Jazeera* on March 29. [20] Amir Abdollahian further expressed that “the window of the talks to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action won’t remain open forever.” Amir Abdollahian likely made this remark to pressure US officials to return to the nuclear negotiations. Amir Abdollahian gave an interview with CNN on March 1 likely in an attempt to convince the US to return to the suspended nuclear negotiations, as CTP previously assessed.[21]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled on March 30 that the US must compensate Iran for freezing its assets and declared that it had no jurisdiction over the 1.7 billion US dollars' worth of Iranian assets frozen in the US.[22] The ICJ ruling was on a claims tribunal between the US and Iran. Iran filed the case with the ICJ in 2016, claiming that the US had violated its 1955 “Treaty of Amity, Economic Relations and Consular Rights” with Iran.

External Security and Military Affairs

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani met with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani in an unannounced visit to Baghdad on March 30. [23] Ghaani also reportedly met with the Coordination Framework—a loose coalition of pro-Iranian political parties—in Baghdad and separately attended the funeral of Sayyid Sadiq al Hakim in Najaf, a prominent Shia religious figure and relative of the leader of the Iranian-backed Wisdom Movement, later that evening.[24] Unverified reporting claimed that Moqtada al Sadr rejected a meeting with Ghaani on March 30.[25] Coordination Framework leadership and Sadr recently clashed over new Framework-backed election laws that could sideline the Sadrist Movement in future elections. Sadr has issued several emphasizing his popularity and alluding to a response. Ghaani may have sought to deescalate tensions between Sadr and Coordination Framework leadership. Ghaani last visited Iraq on January 16 and met with senior Shia Coordination Framework officials and proxy militias.[26]

Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* published a purported interrogation video of an Intelligence and Security Ministry officer on March 29 discussing Iran’s covert operations in Africa.[27] *Iran International* identified Hamidrezammad Abraheh as an intelligence officer operating in Tanzania. Abraheh stated that his main mission in Tanzania was to build a network of locals with access to high- and low-ranking Tanzanian officials to support intelligence collection and operations over the next five to ten years.[28] Abraheh added that the ministry's intelligence collection efforts were focused on the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Azerbaijan and referenced tensions between the Ministry and IRGC Intelligence Organization. tensions between the MOIS and IRGC Intelligence Organizations.

The Saudi Ambassador to Iraq Abdulaziz al Shammari and the Syrian Ambassador to Iraq Satam Jadan al Dandah may have discussed rapprochement between the two countries at an Iftar banquet hosted by Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem al Sadegh on March 30.[29] Sadegh is a former Quds Force officer.[30] Saudi Arabia is negotiating a rapprochement deal with Syria, according to unnamed sources in Western news outlets.[31]

[1] <https://www.syria.tv/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%85%D8%A9->

%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-
%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88 ;

<https://sana dot sy/en/?p=304893> ;

https://t.me/mod_gov_sy/32365

[2] <https://www.syria dot tv/%D8%A5%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88> ;

<https://damascusv dot com/archives/50126> ;

<https://twitter.com/SyriawatanNews/status/1641209037000785921> ;

<https://twitter.com/i/broadcasts/1eaJbrqAMORJX> ;

[3] <https://apnews.com/article/syria-government-sanaa-israel-damascus-445ae6...>

[4] <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1400/09/29/2629184/> ;

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-27-2023>

[5] <https://www.almanar dot com.lb/10471507>

[6] <https://www.alalam dot ir/news/6575788>; <https://www.alahednews dot com.lb/article.php?id=52286&cid=113>; <https://moqawama dot org/essaydetails.php?eid=36515&cid=330>

[7] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85067807/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AF>

[8] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85067807/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AF>

[9] <https://www dot farsnews dot ir/news/14020106000258/%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%B1%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%86%DA%AF%D9%88%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF>

[10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-29-2023>

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641402709768110080?s=20> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641412755679858689?s=20 ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1641439524629909504?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641403998187003907?s=20> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641512806871621664?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1641429527397269504?s=20>

[12] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641454945781141505?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1641442873257377793?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1641442005317476352?s=20> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641504437616140288?s=20>

[13] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1641440332884877318?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641504248553693184?s=20>

[14] <https://t dot co/vfQGyiKDQT>

[15] <https://www dot farsnews dot ir/news/14020110000487/%E2%80%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%DB%8C%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D9%82%D9%88%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%A6%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA->

[16] <https://t dot co/yhss8i4EuZ>

[17] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-20-2023> ;

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-29-2023>

[18] <https://bonbast dot com/>

[19] https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641432294555615233?cxt=HHwWgoC8_...

[20] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/29/iran-may-set-deadline-for-nucle...>

[21] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-2-2023>

[22] <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1l/k1lfjbd4s>

[23] <https://twitter.com/NewsShafaaq/status/1641501478442369024> ; <https://twitter.com/JasonMBr odsky/status/1641497239682965504?s=20>

[24] <https://twitter.com/cordinjury1/status/1641519563136278529> ; <https://twitter.com/rusulaljafri/s tatus/1641517854561386496> ; https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1641496273780891654?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/NewsShafaaq/status/1641501478442369024?s=20> ;

<https://en.shafaqna dot com/299118/ayatollah-hakims-son-passes-away/>

[25] <https://twitter.com/9ap9M/status/1641539428106526720> ;

<https://twitter.com/Fadk9c/status/1641543151600177156>

[26] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-19-2023>

[27] <https://www.iranintl.com/202303303004> ; <https://youtu.be/4c7AjUu8bf0>

[29] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1402011003704/%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82> ;

<https://www.syria.tv/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%85%D8%A3%D8%AF%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%81%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%B1>

[30] <https://shafaq.com/en/Report/Mohammed-Al-Sadiq-the-shadow-man-on-the-Iranian-helm-in-Iraq>

[31] <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/syria-china-key-peace-could> ;

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/after-iran-saudi-arabia-re-est...>

Iran Update, March 31, 2023

Iran Update, March 31, 2023

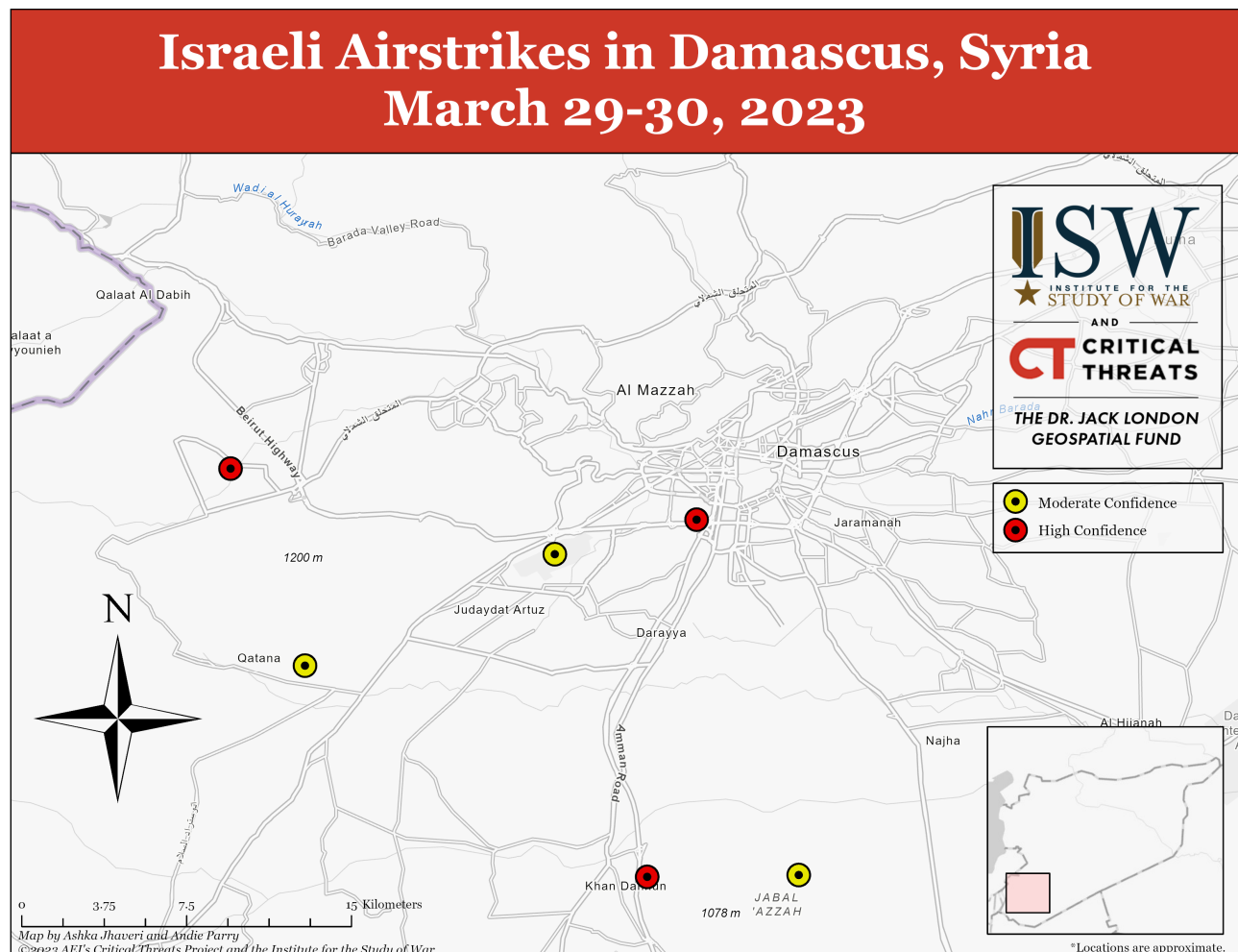
Zachary Coles, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Johanna Moore, and Kitaneh Fitzpatrick

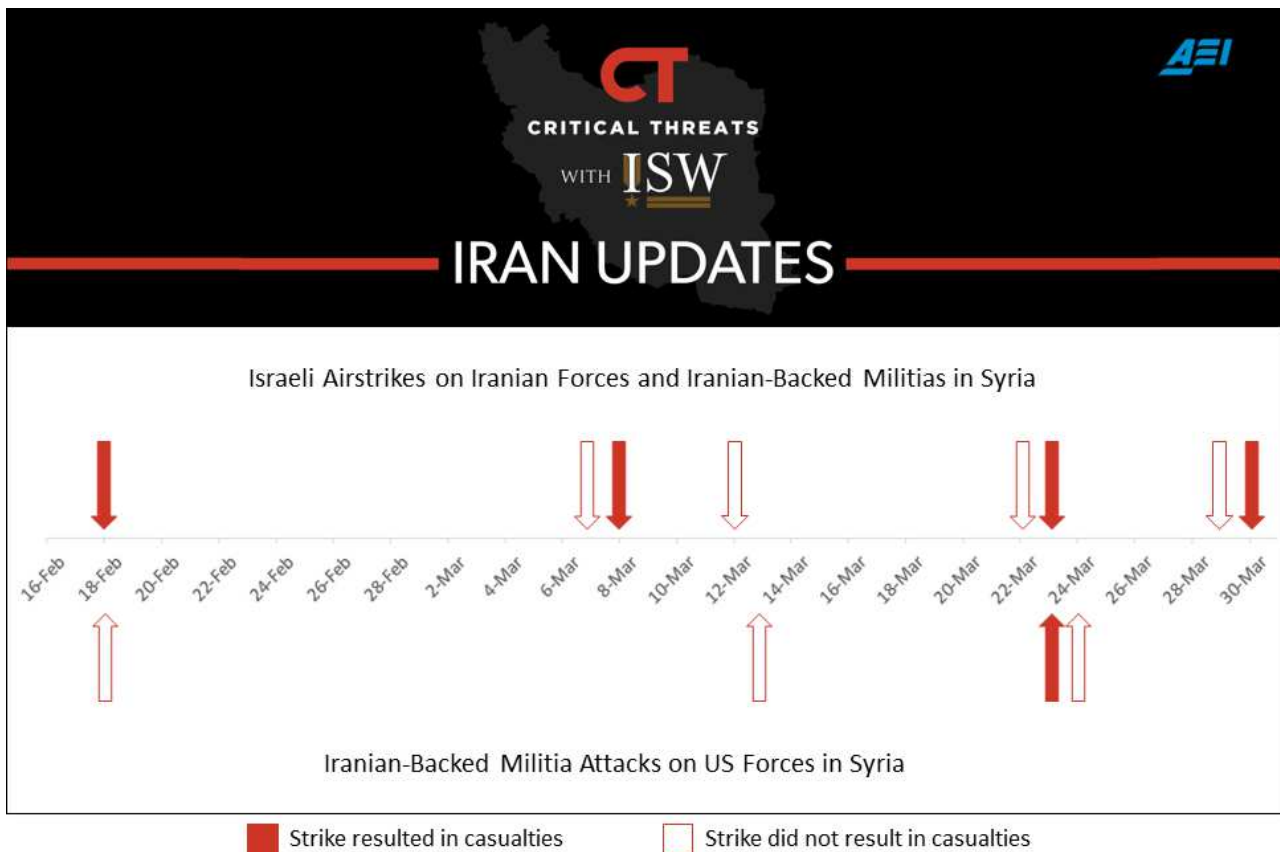
March 31, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Contributors: Anya Caraiani

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted airstrikes in Damascus, Syria on March 30 that resulted in the death of senior IRGC official Milad Heydari, which likely will prompt Iranian-backed militants to attack US forces stationed in eastern Syria in the coming days. Recent Iranian attacks on US forces in response to IDF airstrikes suggests a pattern in which Iran retaliates for instances in which IRGC personnel are killed. Local Syrian media reported that an IDF drone killed an IRGC official and a Lebanese Hezbollah official on March 23 near Abu Kamal, Deir ez Zor province.[1] The IDF drone strike occurred approximately 12-18 hours prior to the attack on US forces in Hasakah province, suggesting that Iran ordered the attack in response to the IDF drone strike and not the airstrike on Aleppo International Airport on March 22, which did not kill any IRGC personnel. CTP has observed several other Iranian-backed attacks on US forces that support this pattern, which are outlined in the timeline graphic below.





Iranian regime rhetoric suggests that Iran is preparing to respond with force. Iranian state-run *Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)* described Heydari as an officer in the IRGC's Cyber Command.[2] *IRNA* also described Heydari as "one of the military advisers" in Syria to Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Command.[3] Media outlets affiliated with the Iranian regime have uncharacteristically publicized Heydari's death and echoed threats of retaliation made by senior Iranian officials.[4] This unusual emphasis on his death and the related threats suggests the regime is setting rhetorical conditions to respond by attacking US forces in Syria.

The Times of Israel reported that the target of the March 30 IDF airstrike was an Iranian asset related microchips used in missile guidance systems and not Heydari.[5] Iranian convoys smuggling precision-guided munitions (PGMs) and warehouses in Syria that store the PGMs are commonly targeted during Israeli airstrikes, suggesting Heydari may be involved in the Iranian effort to produce and smuggle missiles and other precision-guided munitions into Syria.

Heightened Quds Force activity in eastern Syria is consistent with coordination or attack planning with local militias. *Deir Ezzor 24* reported that an IRGC Quds Force delegation arrived from Tehran to hold meetings in Al Mayadin, Deir ez Zor province with local Iranian-backed militias on either March 29 or 30.[6] The arrival of the IRGC Quds Force is consistent with the spike in IRGC Quds Force activity in Deir ez Zor province since March 25, which CTP additionally previously reported.[7] The Quds Force held these meetings potentially to survey damage, improve morale amongst local forces after recent US airstrikes, or to plan additional attacks on US forces.

CTP is not prepared to assess the location wherein such a strike would originate nor which US positions in eastern Syria the attack would target. Iranian-backed forces have targeted US positions across Hasakah, Deir ez Zor, and Homs provinces from positions in both Iraq and Syria.[8] The *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* reported on March 30 that unspecified Iranian-backed militants deployed to positions to Al Ulayyanyyah, approximately 30 kilometers from the Al Tanf Deconfliction Zone that surrounds the US garrison at Al Tanf in Homs Province.[9] CTP cannot verify the accuracy of this report, but Al Ulayyanyyah's proximity to the T3 pumping station and multiple Iranian-backed militia positions in Palmyra—locations where Iranian-backed

militants are known to store ISR and possibly kamikaze drones—suggest such a deployment may be in preparation to strike US forces at Al Tanf with a kamikaze drone.

Iranian-backed militants conducting a retaliatory strike against US forces in Syria could renew the tit-for-tat escalation cycle that occurred March 23-25, which would in turn risk additional attacks against US forces. As CTP previously reported, media outlets associated with the Iranian regime and Lebanese Hezbollah likely executed a coordinated messaging campaign to communicate that the Axis of Resistance is prepared to further escalate against US forces in the event of additional airstrikes.[10] US forces did not respond to a rocket attack in eastern Syria perpetrated by Iranian-backed militants on March 25. Iran may interpret the US response to another potential attack on US positions in eastern Syria as a continuation of the March 23-25 escalation cycle.

The Iranian regime signaled its agreement to uncompromisingly enforce the mandatory hijab law on March 30. The Interior Ministry issued a statement about the hijab on March 30 in which it wrote that “there has not been and will not be any retreat and leniency in religious principles and rulings and traditional values.”[11] The Supreme Cultural Revolution Council previously issued a statement about the hijab on January 8, as CTP previously reported.[12] The council’s statement emphasized the necessity of veiling but added that “the weakness of some women’s hijab should not be taken as a sign of their disbelief in religious principles,” evincing a degree of tolerance that is not detectable in the Interior Ministry’s March 30 statement.[13] Iran’s morality police operated—and may still operate—under the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) and Interior Ministry, further suggesting that the Interior Ministry’s statement may be an indication that the regime has decided that it might adopt a confrontational approach to enforcing the hijab law. Social media users have circulated a greater number of videos showing individuals who appear to be shop owners and local officials confronting unveiled women in recent days.[14] It is unclear whether this uptick in social media reports is due to regime officials cracking down on unveiled Nowrouz travelers or whether these reports are indicative of a broader regime campaign to enforce mandatory veiling through confrontation.

The regime likely considers coopting pro-regime loyalists to enforce the hijab law as a safer approach to confrontation because it places blame for hijab enforcement on pro-regime citizens as opposed to the regime itself. Several Friday prayer leaders seemingly referenced this strategy in their Friday sermons on March 31. Mashhad Friday Prayer Leader Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda called on the LEC and “airport and terminal officials” to issue warnings to unveiled women.[15] Karaj Friday Prayer Leader Mohammad Mehdi Hosseini Hamedani separately called on “pious and veiled women” to attend Karaj’s tulip festival and help officials enforce mandatory veiling.[16] This strategy may have long-term negative impacts on Iranian society, however. Placing responsibility for hijab enforcement on pious citizens may exacerbate the schism between regime supporters and dissidents. Iranian authorities arrested several “improperly dressed” girls who insulted and beat a veiled woman in Qom on March 27, for example.[17] This incident highlights that regime dissidents may increasingly equate pious citizens with the regime itself if the regime continues to call on these citizens to enforce mandatory veiling. The individuals who embrace the regime’s call to enforce veiling may additionally disregard regime officials’ warnings to avoid physical and violent confrontation with unveiled women. Iranian social media users widely circulated a video on March 31 of a man pouring yoghurt on two unveiled women in a grocery store in Khorasan Razavi Province.[18] Such incidents place the regime in a bind. It must either ignore acts of violence and assault against unveiled women and risk fueling greater public anger toward the regime or condemn such incidents and alienate the individuals whom it is attempting to coopt to enforce the hijab law.

Continued conversations on mandatory veiling are particularly noteworthy amidst the regime’s relative silence on how to address Iran’s deteriorating economic conditions. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implied that the primary topic of intra-regime debate should be the economy during his Nowrouz address on March 21, as CTP previously reported.[19] The majority of Friday prayer leaders discussed veiling more passionately and comprehensively than the economy in their sermons on March 31, however. Their focus on mandatory veiling—as opposed to the economy—highlights that the regime likely believes it can confront hijab violations more easily than it can

Iran's economic challenges. The regime is additionally unwilling to implement fundamental reforms that would cause short-term economic disruptions but ultimately improve Iran's economic health, as CTP previously reported.[20]

The Iranian regime's threats to securitize Zahedan have been ineffectual in deterring prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid from criticizing the regime in his weekly sermons.[21] Abdol Hamid indirectly endorsed a referendum against the regime, echoing his call for foundational change on February 17, as CTP previously reported.[22] He commented that when a political system falls apart, a referendum is "a great thing," and attributed the regime's crisis of legitimacy to its narrow-minded and sectarian worldview. Abdol Hamid noted that post-revolutionary Iran was not inclusive of different ethnicities, religious sects, genders, and diverse belief systems, and stated that the Islamic Republic does not represent the people and is neither "Islamic" nor a "Republic." Abdol Hamid's comments specifically referenced Islamic Republic Day, a public holiday in Iran celebrating the March 1979 referendum that established the regime.

Abdol Hamid continued to sustain his highly critical rhetoric despite the regime's threats to securitize his hometown of Zahedan. IRGC Ground Forces Commander Brigadier General Pakpour set the rhetorical conditions on March 28 to degrade Abdol Hamid's anti-regime following in Zahedan, as CTP previously assessed.[23] The regime has thus far allowed Abdol Hamid to occupy a permanent political space, making it increasingly difficult for the regime to suppress him and his movement as time goes on. Abdol Hamid will likely maintain his anti-regime posture without escalating to an overtly revolutionary position. The latter would likely instigate a violent regime crackdown in response, jeopardizing Abdol Hamid's ability to sustain his criticism of the regime without posing any danger to himself or his following.

Key Takeaways

- **Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted airstrikes in Damascus, Syria on March 30 that resulted in the death of senior IRGC official Milad Heydari, which likely will prompt Iranian-backed militants to attack US forces stationed in eastern Syria in the coming days.**
- **Recent Iranian attacks on US forces in response to IDF airstrikes suggests a pattern in which Iran retaliates for instances in which IRGC personnel are killed.**
- **The Iranian regime signaled its agreement to uncompromisingly enforce the mandatory hijab law on March 30.**
- **The Iranian regime's threats to securitize Zahedan have been ineffectual in deterring prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid from criticizing the regime in his weekly sermons.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces.**
- **The Iranian rial slightly depreciated from 549,000 rials to one US dollar on March 30 to 549,500 rials to one US dollar on March 30.**
- **Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanani strongly condemned Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister Eli Cohen's March 29 discussion on Iran with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov.**
- **An unidentified Iraqi political source claimed that IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani discussed the recent escalation in Syria with Iraqi Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) leadership in Baghdad.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on March 31. CTP assesses with high confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[24]

- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Demographic:** Zahedan residents protesting after prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's Friday sermon

- **Notes:** Protesters held a silent demonstration this week, reportedly because of Ramadan

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Galikash, Golestan Province[25]

- **Size:** Small

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[26]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Taxi drivers on strike



Economic Affairs

The Iranian rial slightly depreciated from 549,000 rials to one US dollar on March 30 to 549,500 rials to one US dollar on March 30.[27] The rial's continued depreciation marks an 18.5 percent decrease in value on March 31 compared to March 16, when it valued at 463,500 rials to one US dollar.[28]

Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanani strongly condemned Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister Eli Cohen's March 29 discussion on Iran with his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov. Cohen reportedly stressed that Israel and Azerbaijan "share the same perception of the Iranian threats" in his discussion.[29] Kanani warned that Azerbaijan was "expected to avoid the trap of enemy relations" and added that Iran would be unable to remain indifferent to improved Israeli-Azerbaijani ties.[30]

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed strengthening Iranian-Omani bilateral relations in a phone call with his Omani counterpart Badr Al-Busaidi on March 31. Abdollahian described Iran as a “neighbor and reliable friend for Iran.”[31]

External Security and Military Affairs

An unidentified Iraqi political source claimed that IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani discussed the recent escalation in Syria with Iraqi Popular Mobilization Force (PMF) leadership in Baghdad.[32] The PMF is an umbrella organization of Iranian-backed militias. Ghaani arrived in Baghdad on March 30 following the March 29 IDF airstrike targeting a “pro-Iranian” foreigner in Syria.[33] The IDF conducted a second airstrike on the outskirts of Damascus on March 30 shortly after Ghaani arrived in Baghdad. The timing of Ghaani’s arrival suggests he and PMF leadership discussed means of retaliating against US forces in Syria for Israeli airstrikes on March 29 and 30, one of which killed a senior IRGC official.

[1] <https://eyeofeufrates.com/ar/news/2023/03/31/8108>

[2] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85070468/%DB%8C%DA%A9%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF>; www.irna.ir/news/85070628

[3] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85070468/%DB%8C%DA%A9%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF>

[4] <https://twitter.com/NagiNajjar/status/1641823442759737347>; <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1402/01/11/2873755/شهادت-یکی-از-مستشاران-نظامی-سپاه-در-حمله-رژیم-صهیونیستی-به-سوریه>

[5] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-says-revolutionary-guards-officer-killed-in-alleged-israeli-strike-on-damascus/>

[6] <https://deirezzor24.net/en/an-iranian-delegation-arrives-in-deir-ezzor-from-tehran/>

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-28-2023>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-29-2023>

[8] <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20211026-syria-iran-behind-the-attack-...>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/15/syria-tanf-drone-strike-...>

[9] <https://www.syriaahr.com/en/294051/>

[10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-30-2023>; <https://www.alalam.ir/news/6575788>; <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=52286&cid=113>; <https://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=36515&cid=330>

[11] <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14020110000602/%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A8%E2%80%8C%D9%86%D8%B4%DB%8C%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C>

%D8%AF%D8%DB%8C%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-
%D9%86%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF

[12] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iran-crisis-update-january...>

[13] <http://entekhab dot ir/002ygl>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641759431204503556?cxt=HHwWiIC8-...> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641815880014221314?cxt=HHwWhMC-rYO2...

[15] <https://t dot co/TZhtGkc7tv>

[16] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/85070491/%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AC-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%B1%DA%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87>

[17] <https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/720341/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DB%8C%DA%A9%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B%8C-%D9%82%D9%85-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF>

[18] https://twitter.com/IranIntl_En/status/1641805731832778752?s=20

[19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-21-2023>

[20] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-23-2023>

[21] <https://youtu.be/eptHuPERwU8> ; <https://abdolhamid.net/persian/2023/04/01/13604/>

[22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-17-2023>

[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-28-2023>

[24] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641774547937513472?cxt=HHwWgMC-s...> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641774149503680512?cxt=HHwWgICw6...>

[25] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1641811391936856066?cxt=HHwWhICwyeSw...

[26] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1641726905484181505?cxt=HHwWgoCwu...>

[27] Bonbast dot com

[28] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023>

[29] <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-735852>

[30] <https://mfa dot ir/portal/NewsView/715811>

[31] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85070134/%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%87-%D9%88-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[32] <https://www.alaraby dot co.uk/politics/%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A2%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9>

[33] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/72894>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-30-2023>