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Iran Crisis Update, January 2

Iran Crisis Update, January 2, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Johanna Moore, Dana Alexander Gray, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 2, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

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The Iranian state security services have intensified their protest crackdown and social oppression in recent days. Security forces have substantially increased their presence in some cities, such as Javanroud and Semirom, according to social media users, after significant protests occurred there on December 31.[1] The Khuzestan Neighborhood Youth similarly reported that security forces disrupted electricity and telephone lines and shot at citizens in Izeh on January 1.[2] The regime has escalated efforts to reimpose social control as well. Security forces have arrested two reformist journalists in recent days and resumed using surveillance cameras to identify women not properly adhering to the mandatory hijab law in cars.[3]

The regime is likely escalating out of concern that protests are reigniting. Demonstrations saw a relative spike from December 29-31 compared to recent weeks.[4] Protest coordinators and organizations furthermore have called for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on January 6-8 to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) shooting down a Ukrainian civil airplane.[5]

This regime escalation could tire security forces ahead of the planned protests and strikes on January 6-8. The regime is seemingly struggling to secure small towns, such as Izeh, Javanroud, and Semirom, and has deployed a large number of security forces to these locations. One social media account claimed, for instance, that 1,000 officers from the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Special Units deployed to Semirom, although this number could be an exaggeration.[6] The regime commonly shuffles its security forces around Iran to wherever they are needed most—typically major cities and the restive border regions—because it does not have enough forces to cover the entire country.[7] The regime will likely redeploy some—if not most—of the security personnel in Izeh, Javanroud, and Semirom to other locations ahead of the planned January 6-8 protests and strikes, likely tiring these forces in the process and possibly straining their morale. LEC Tehran Provincial Commander Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi denied that police personnel are experiencing fatigue or low morale on January 2—comments which suggest that the security forces are indeed facing these issues, occasioning Rahimi's denial.[8]

One IRGC member died and three other members were injured during protests in Semirom, Esfahan Province on December 31.[9] Protesters gathered in front of a local government building and lit fires in the street in Semirom on December 31, as CTP previously reported.[10] Around 72 security officers have died since the protests began in September 2022.[11]

The IRGC or its foreign proxies could attack US positions in Iraq and Syria in the days surrounding the three-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al Muhandis. The IRGC and its proxies have organized attacks during the previous anniversaries in recent years. The IRGC released a statement on January 2 reiterating its pledge to avenge Soleimani.[12] Other senior Iranian military officers and proxy outlets echoed these threats on January 2.[13] Iraqi protesters gathered in Baghdad to commemorate the anniversary as well.[14] Social media users reported that Iranian proxies in Iraq planned to coordinate protests in front

of the US Embassy in Baghdad, although CTP cannot corroborate these reports at the time of this writing.[15]

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian state security services have intensified their protest crackdown and social oppression in recent days. The regime is likely escalating out of concern that protests are reigniting. This regime escalation could exhaust security forces ahead of the planned protests and strikes on January 6-8.**
- **One IRGC member died and three other members were injured during protests in Semirom, Esfahan Province.**
- **The IRGC and/or its foreign proxies could attack US positions in Iraq and Syria in the days surrounding the three-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al Muhandis.**
- **At least one protest occurred on January 1, and three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 2.**
- **A telecommunications union chief, Mehdi Mohebi, stated that around 800 Starlink devices are active in Iran.**
- **The Sari Revolutionary Court sentenced 18-year-old protester Mehdi Mohammadi Fard to death, according to a HRANA report.**
- **Some Iranian banks are prohibiting cash withdrawals, according to social media users.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least one protest occurred on January 1. Social media users documented severe air pollution in Tehran, which may have depressed protest activity within this province.[16] CTP assesses with low confidence that a protest occurred in the following location:

Semirom, Esfahan Province[17]

- **Size: Undetermined**
- **Protester Activity: Fires lit in street**
- **Notes: No date provided in social media reports, footage may be protest activity from December 31, 2022**

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 1, 5:00 PM ET



At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 2. Social media users documented severe air pollution in Tehran, which may have depressed protest activity within this province.[18] CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Dehgolan, Kurdistan Province[19]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Type: Commemorating birthday of killed protester at cemetery

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[20]

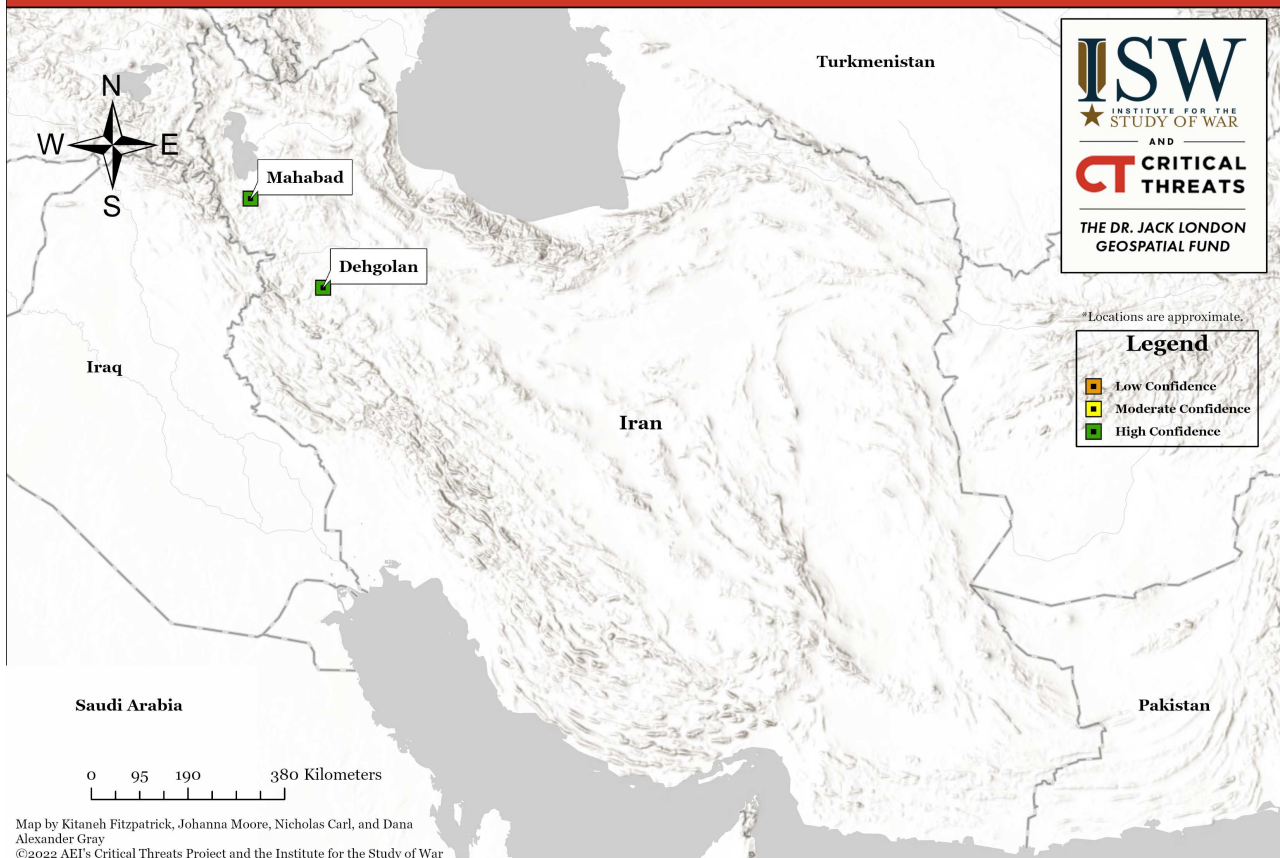
- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Type: 40-day Commemoration ceremony for killed protesters

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following location on January 2:

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[21]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Fires lit on street

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 2, 5:00 PM ET



NOTE: CTP defines small protests as fewer than 100 individuals, medium protests as between 100 and 1,000, and large protests as over 1,000.

Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following dates:

January 6-8[22]

- Type: Demonstrations and strikes
- Location: Countrywide

January 8[23]

- Type: Calls to place flowers on graves of “victims of the Islamic Republic”
- Location: Countrywide

A telecommunications union chief, Mehdi Mohebi, stated on January 1 that around 800 Starlink devices are active in Iran.[24] This number would be an extraordinary increase from previous estimates if confirmed. Elon Musk tweeted on December 26 that almost 100 Starlink devices were active in Iran on December 26.[25] The proliferation of these terminals inside Iran allows citizens to better communicate with one another and document the brutal protest crackdown, despite the expanding regime censorship and internet disruptions.

The Sari Revolutionary Court sentenced 18-year-old protester Mehdi Mohammadi Fard to death, according to a HRANA report on January 2.[26] The court convicted Mohammadi Fard of “corruption on earth” and “waging war against God.” Either charge can carry the death penalty. Simultaneously convicting Mohammadi Fard of both charges reduces his likelihood of successfully

appealing the sentences. HRANA reported that state security services denied Mohammadi Fard a lawyer and tortured him to extract a forced confession.

Some Iranian banks are prohibiting cash withdrawals, according to social media users. Some ATMs in Tehran reportedly displayed error messages when users attempted to withdraw cash on January 1.[27] Another customer claimed that bank employees in Ghazvin Province told him they did not have money for him to withdraw on January 2.[28] The Hamedan Neighborhood Youth previously claimed on December 31 that local banks were facing a liquidity crisis.[29] CTP cannot corroborate these claims, although such rumors are plausible given that the regime has faced a mounting fiscal crisis in recent weeks and that protest coordinators have encouraged a run on the banks.[30]

Former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani praised Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in an interview on January 1 commemorating Qassem Soleimani. Larijani said Khamenei had fought against dictatorship for more than 60 years.[31]

Protesters threw Molotov cocktails at a regime propaganda building in Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province, after reportedly destroying local surveillance cameras on January 2.[32]

The United Neighborhood Youth issued an updated political manifesto on January 2. The group initially released a 43-point charter aimed at establishing a democratic and secular Iran on December 11.[33] The amended document largely resembles the original manifesto but now contains 42 points nested under seven categories: human rights, government and politics, economics, health, culture and education, armed forces, and environment.[34]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iranian media confirmed reports that Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah is ill. An Iranian state-affiliated media outlet stated that Nasrallah had contracted the flu, citing an informed source.[35] Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Manar TV additionally reported that Hassan Nasrallah was forced to reschedule a speech after becoming ill with influenza.[36] Unconfirmed reports previously claimed that Nasrallah had suffered a stroke.[37] CTP cannot corroborate either of these reports.

[1] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32203701.html>; <https://www.iranintl.com/202301015168>;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609477638388580352>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>

[2] https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1609602171288289283?s=20&t=_BprQXg...
https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1609659071019507712?s=20&t=_BprQXg...

[3] <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3...>
<https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3...>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-29>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-30>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-27>

[6] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609477638388580352>

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Whatever-it-t...>

[8] <https://www.etemadonline.com/fa/tiny/news-589628>

- [9] <https://twitter.com/Alfoneh/status/1609532809923772416>
- [10] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>
- [11] <https://www.ilna dot ir/fa/tiny/news-1314959>
- [12] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011012000357>
- [13] <https://www.ilna dot ir/fa/tiny/news-1315024>; <https://t.me/sabreenS1/67099>
- [14] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/67086>; <https://t.me/sabreenS1/67092>; https://twitter.com/Husseini__1/status/1609949970727149572; <https://twitter.com/JamalCheaib/status/1609950236247474181>
- [15] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1609571978968547332
- [16] <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1609482108728377345?s=20&t=rg93eTz...>; <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1609467033951023104?s=20&t=rg93eTz...>
- [17] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609592468588077058>
- [18] <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1609907483417665542?s=20&t=rg93eTz...>
- [19] <https://twitter.com/Javanmardi75/status/1609910155390423041?s=20&t=rg93e...>; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1609952508792668161?s=20&t=rg93eTzNH...; <https://twitter.com/kayvanrassooli/status/1609934836608679936?s=20&t=rg9...>
- [20] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609883210170916869?s=20&t=jeLmmY...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609883870920335364?s=20&t=Q-na9O...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609904656041271296?s=20&t=54u9La...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609902906551017472?s=20&t=KGD5xB...>; <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1609879921341390850?s=20&t=BSP5kkEbg-...>; <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1609888363279949824?s=20&t=kVR6spjsp0...>
- [21] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609950645791899648?s=20&t=rg93eT...>
- [22] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1609883019308843010?s=20&t=SW6ER8c...
- [23] <https://twitter.com/esmaeilion/status/1609663751879270401?s=20&t=bKh2nca...>
- [24] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/11/2829844/>
- [25] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-26>
- [26] <https://www.en-hrana dot org/18-year-old-mehdi-mohammadi-fard-sentenced-to-death-over-protests/>
- [27] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1609500603700371457?s=20&t=h9g6cq...; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1609517793807843328?s=20&t=h9g6cq...
- [28] <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1609901247829774339?s=20&t=rg93eTz...>
- [29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>

- [30] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-26>
- [31] https://twitter.com/alilarijani_ir/status/1609697588340576256
- [32] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609969657708154880>
- [33] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-11>
- [34] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1609920142414348294?s=20&t=1I2VPnrkSZy...
- [35] <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202301020352>
- [36] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32203786.html>
- <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-726341>
- [37] <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/bkafmsx5o>

Iran Crisis Update, January 3, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 3, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The organizational structure of the protest movement is continuing to evolve and morph as its leaders try to cohere the movement. Several different umbrella organizations for the smaller protest groups have emerged in recent months. These umbrella organizations include the Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) and the similarly named Iranian Neighborhood United Front (INUF), among others. The INYU and INUF have both circulated lists of their members in recent days, highlighting how some protest groups belong to both umbrella organizations, and other protest groups belong to only one.[1] This apparent disunity may indicate that different protest leaders are vying for influence within the movement. This possibly internal struggle is a somewhat natural consequence of the growing cohesion within the protest movement. It does not mean that the protest movement is irrevocably divided but is a challenge protest leaders must overcome.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei have both expressed concern about the Iranian economy in recent days, possibly indicating their doubts that President Ebrahim Raisi can improve the economic situation. Ghalibaf stated that he is trying to reach a consensus within the regime on “modernizing regime governance” to solve economic issues.[2] Ghalibaf praised Raisi for replacing the Central Bank of Iran governor on December 29 but added that further “structural, policymaking, and managerial reforms” are necessary. Ejei similarly stated that the regime does not have a coherent economic plan.[3] The Iranian rial has depreciated significantly in recent months, and social media users have claimed that some Iranian banks do not have enough hard currency for cash withdrawals.[4] Ghalibaf’s and Ejei’s comments follow previous reports of frustration with the Raisi administration. The Fars News Agency bulletin that leaked in November 2022 reported that Ghalibaf told Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that the Raisi administration is indecisive and unorganized.[5]

Unidentified individuals shot and killed an IRGC member outside his home in Tehran Province on January 3.[6] The IRGC commanded local Basij members in his neighborhood. Around 73 security personnel have died since the protests began in September 2022.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **The organizational structure of the protest movement is continuing to evolve and morph as its leaders try to cohere the movement.**
- **Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei have both expressed concern about the Iranian economy in recent days, possibly indicating their doubts that President Ebrahim Raisi can improve the economic situation.**
- **Unidentified individuals shot and killed an IRGC member outside his home in Tehran Province.**
- **At least two protests took place in two cities across two provinces.**
- **The LEC clashed with an armed “terrorist team” in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**

- The IRGC Intelligence Organization seized 700 kilograms of explosive materials in Gharchak, Tehran Province.

Anti-Regime Protests

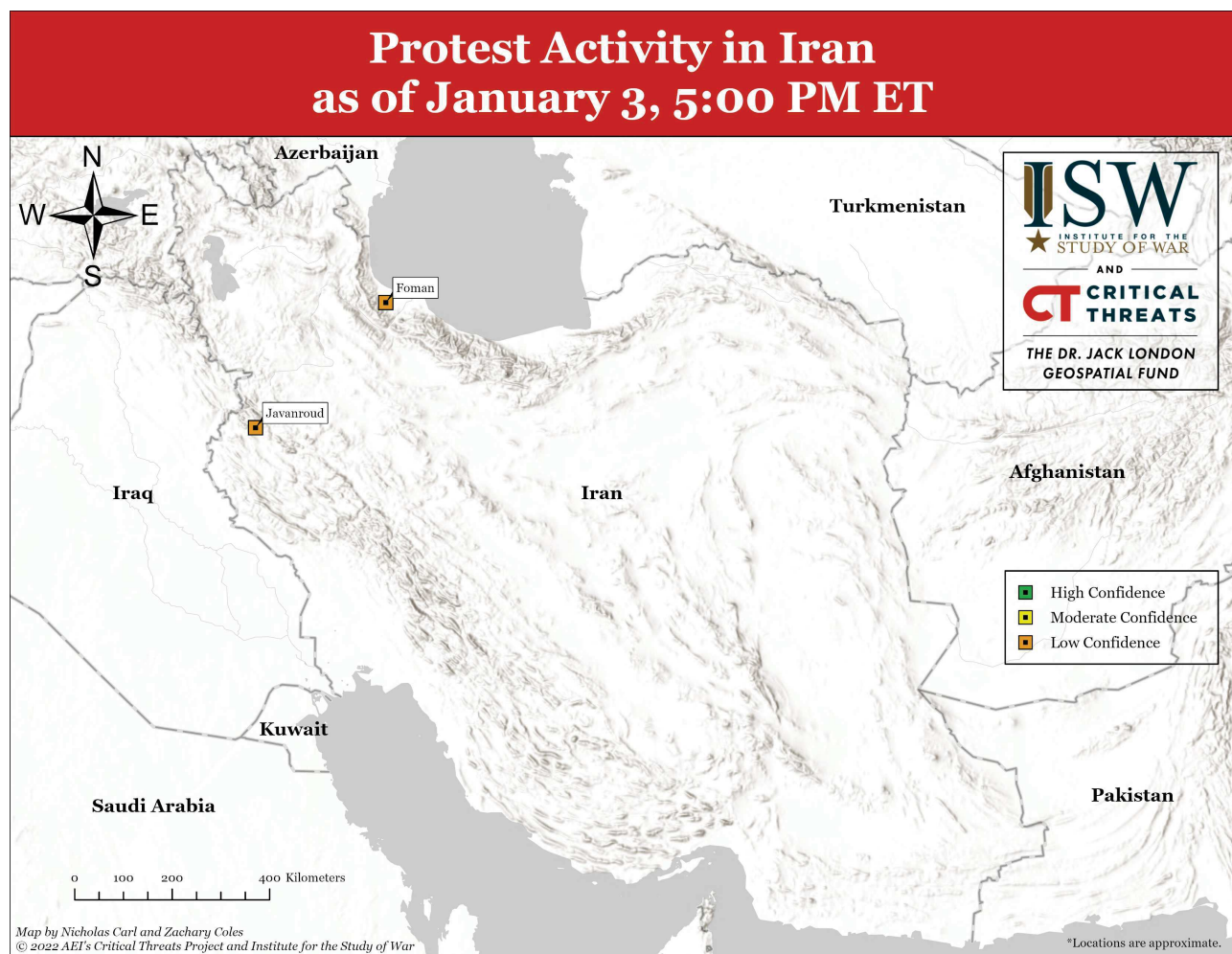
At least two protests took place in two cities across two provinces on January 3. CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Fouman, Gilan Province[8]

- Size: Small to Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: Protesters gathered for the 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Mehran Basir Tavana

Javanroud, Kermanshah Province[9]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Students



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 6-8[10]

- Type: demonstrations and strikes
- Location: countrywide

January 8[11]

- Type: placing flowers on graves of citizens whom the regime has killed
- Location: countrywide

The Law Enforcement Command (LEC) clashed with an armed “terrorist team” in Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 3.[12] The LEC reported that it has arrested the gunmen and accused them of attacking police patrols in recent weeks.

The IRGC Intelligence Organization seized 700 kilograms of explosive materials in Gharchak, Tehran Province, on January 3.[13] The IRGC Intelligence Organization also arrested an individual during the seizure. The explosive materials included lead oxide and aluminum powder, which the BBC reported is commonly used to produce homemade fireworks in Iran. Protesters have used these materials to produce rudimentary hand grenades as well.[14]

An explosion occurred at a steel factory in Garmsar, Semnan Province, on January 3.[15] The explosion killed one and injured five.

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid tweeted on January 3 criticizing security forces for attacking mourners at ceremonies commemorating killed protesters.[16] Abdol Hamid added that citizens using anti-regime protest chants does not justify regime brutality.

Iranian journalist Saeed Aganji has continued tweeting on intra-regime infighting to replace Ali Shamkhani as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Aganji previously claimed on December 30 that Asghar Ali Hejazi—a senior political and security adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—blocked former IRGC Intelligence Organization Chief Hossein Taeb from becoming SNSC secretary.[17] Aganji later claimed on January 3 that at least three different human networks in the IRGC (the Khuzestan circle, the Mashhad circle, and the Shiraz circle) are competing to install their preferred candidate.[18] Western analysts commonly divide senior IRGC officers into these human networks based on their hometowns or local connections. [19] These human networks are described in greater detail below. Aganji suggested that the Khuzestan circle prefers Gholam Ali Rashid, the Mashhad circle prefers Saeed Jalili, and the Shiraz circle prefers Ahmad Vahidi. CTP cannot verify these rumors and is treating them with skepticism.

Khuzestan circle:[20]

- Former IRGC Commander and current Vice President for Economic Affairs Major General Mohsen Rezaei
- SNSC Secretary RADM Ali Shamkhani
- Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Major General Gholam Ali Rashid

Mashhad circle:[21]

- Parliament Speaker Brigadier General Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf
- IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani
- Former Basij Commander Brigadier General Alireza Afshar

Shiraz circle:[22]

- Interior Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi
- Former Basij Chief Brigadier General Gholam Hossein Gheyb Parvar
- Former Roads and Urban Development Minister Brigadier General Rostam Ghassemi (now deceased)
- IRGC Sarallah Regional Operational Headquarters Deputy Commander Brigadier General Hossein Nejat
- IRGC Quds Force Deputy Commander Brigadier General Reza Fallah Zadeh
- Expediency Discernment Council Secretary Brigadier General Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah delivered a speech to commemorate the third anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani.[23] He offered reassurances that he has recovered after canceling a speech on December 30 due to health concerns.

Iranian proxies in Iraq and Syria did not attack US forces on the three-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani.

[1] https://t.me/gor_javanan/119; https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1610300028777537538

[2] <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3...>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-2-2023>

[5] <https://www.iranintl.com/202211304302>

[6] [www.fa.alalam dot ir/news/6496783](http://www.fa.alalam.ir/news/6496783)

[7] <https://twitter.com/Alfoneh/status/1609532809923772416>

[8] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1610316686137098252?s=20&t=Ylde-Y...>

[9] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1610352991093014530?s=20&t=zm2Uy8...>

[10] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1609883019308843010?s=20&t=SW6ER8c...

[11] <https://twitter.com/esmaeilion/status/1609663751879270401?s=20&t=bKh2nca...>

[12] [https://www.irna dot ir/news/84988397](https://www.irna.ir/news/84988397)

[13] [www.farsnews dot ir/tehran/news/14011013001030](http://www.farsnews.ir/tehran/news/14011013001030)

[14] https://t.me/hmd_javanan/251

[15] [https://isna dot ir/xdN4Hd](https://isna.ir/xdN4Hd)

[16] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1610345961548812288>

[17] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>

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Iran Crisis Update, January 4, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 4, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

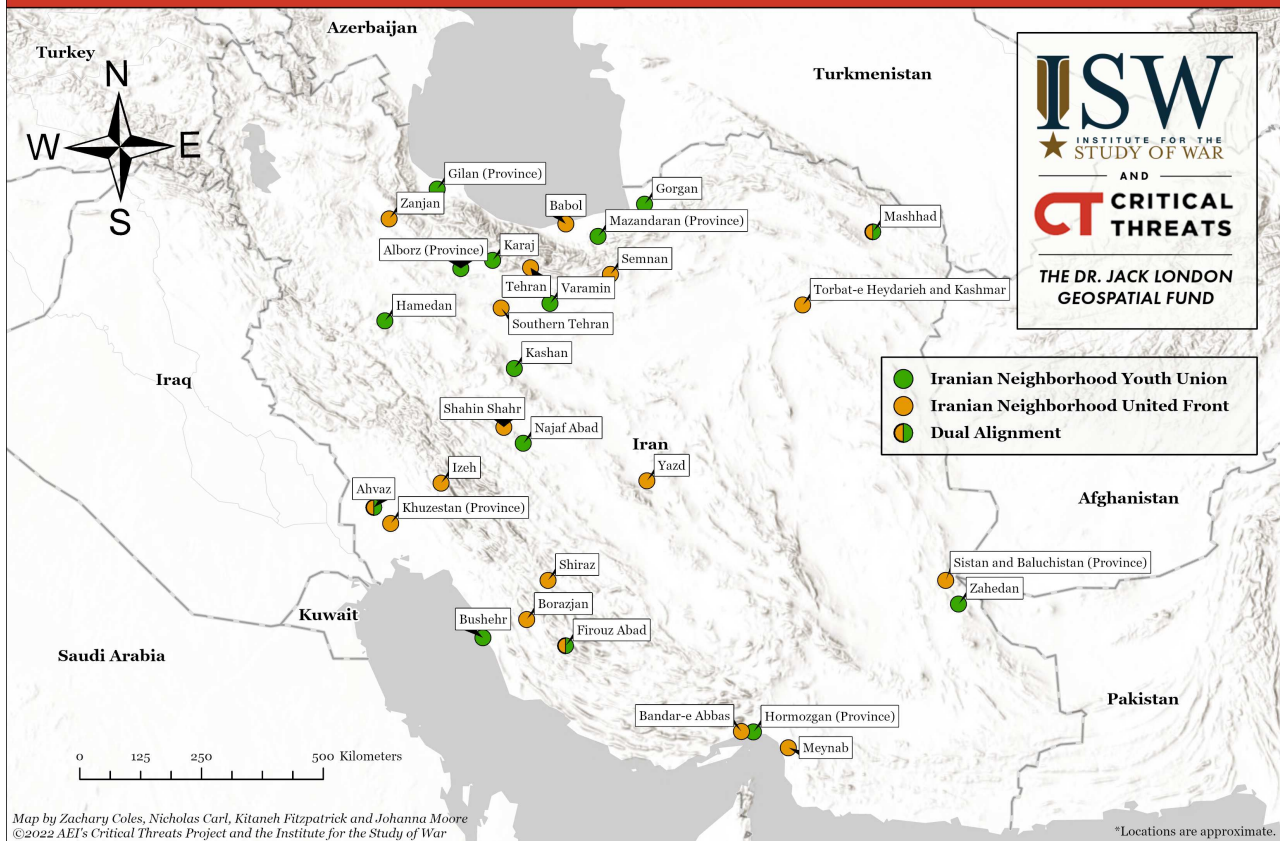
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Protester umbrella organizations appear to disagree on the timing of the upcoming planned protests. Protest coordinators from the Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union have called for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on January 6-8 to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) shooting down of a Ukrainian civilian airplane. [1] Other protest groups, such as those allegedly aligned with the Iranian Neighborhood United Front, have called for demonstrations only on January 8 (the Iranian Neighborhood United Front published a statement that it claimed its members signed, but not all members have confirmed their alignment with this umbrella organization thus far).[2] This divergence suggests that the emergence of different umbrella organizations vying for the allegiance of local groups may have created a fault line within the protest movement. Such disunity could indicate that different protest leaders are competing for influence within the movement, as CTP previously argued.[3]

This division may be one of the factors depressing protester turnout. CTP has recorded a sustained reduction in protest activity since December 2022.[4] We have yet to record a day without at least one protest, but the inconsistent messaging is likely generating confusion and stoking mistrust among demonstrators. Protest leaders failing to resolve dissonant calls and messages may continue to degrade the movement's effectiveness.

The graphic below illustrates the distribution of the protest groups that have reportedly expressed alignment with one or multiple umbrella organizations. Two protest groups—the Iranian Neighborhood Tigers and the Countrywide Youth—are not illustrated on this map because they are not clearly affiliated with a single geographic location. Both have reportedly expressed alignment with the Iranian Neighborhood United Front.

Distribution of Alleged Protest Group Alignments



The regime continues to adopt more overtly authoritarian language and policies. Senior Iranian officials have discussed implementing a countrywide internet shutdown for several hours on January 19-20 to prevent cheating on a scheduled university entrance exam. An education official, Hassan Morovati, announced these plans on January 4.[5] Science, Research, and Technology Minister Mohammad Ali Zolfi Gol denied Morovati's claim that there will be a countrywide shutdown and asserted that the regime will only cut internet in the locations where the test is administered.[6] Information and Communications Technology Minister Isah Zareh Pour separately stated that the State Security Council is reviewing the motion to block the internet and has not yet made a decision.[7] This inconsistent and mixed messaging suggests that the Raisi administration has not yet reached a consensus on the potential internet shutdown. But regime officials openly discussing such extreme measures to prevent cheating on a standardized test reflects how the regime is normalizing such oppressive behavior. The regime could be considering the potential internet shutdown to expand censorship and suppress dissent rather than prevent cheating.

Key Takeaways

- **Protester umbrella organizations appear to disagree on the timing of the upcoming planned protests. This division may be one of the factors depressing protester turnout.**
- **The regime continues to adopt more overtly authoritarian language and policies.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city across one province.**
- **Iranian media reported that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has dismissed Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari as law enforcement commander.**
- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reiterated the mandatory hijab requirement during a meeting with female leaders.**
- **Likely Iranian proxies launched two rockets at US forces stationed at the Conoco International Coalition base in eastern Syria.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on January 4. CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Chovar, Ilam Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Petrochemical industry workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest
- Notes: Petrochemical workers protested inadequate compensation at a petrochemical facility and subsequently at a municipal labor office building.



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 6-8[9]

- Type: demonstrations and strikes
- Location: countrywide

January 8[10]

- Type: placing flowers on graves of citizens whom the regime has killed
- Location: countrywide

Iranian media reported on January 3 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has dismissed Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari as law enforcement commander.[11] These reports should be treated as unverified rumors until the office of the supreme leader confirms them. If true, the

removal of Ashtari likely indicates Khamenei's dissatisfaction with the performance of the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) in suppressing the protests. The removal of Ashtari would be particularly noteworthy given Khamenei's apparent trust in him historically. Khamenei has shuffled and replaced many senior officers responsible for internal security after previous major protest waves in Iran.[12] But Khamenei has kept Ashtari in his position since appointing him in 2015—even after the 2017-18 Dey protests and 2019 Aban protests.

Iranian media suggested that Khamenei may appoint Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan to replace Ashtari.[13] Radan was the law enforcement deputy commander from 2008 to 2014 and has directed the LEC Strategic Studies Center since then. The Iranian armed forces occasionally send senior officers to military and security think tanks to devise new operational concepts and plans before assigning those officers to senior command positions to implement those ideas.[14] Radan could introduce new concepts and doctrine to the LEC based on his experience at the LEC Strategic Studies Center if he replaces Ashtari.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei reiterated the mandatory hijab requirement during a meeting with female leaders on January 4.[15] Khamenei described the hijab law as an irrevocable, religious necessity and emphasized support for women fully veiling. He added, however, that one should not label women who only partially wear the hijab as counterrevolutionary or irreligious. Khamenei is essentially announcing that the regime should continue to enforce the hijab law but tolerate women who only veil partially. Khamenei expressed a similar idea during his first major speech on the protests on October 3, stating that some of the regime's strongest female supporters do not wear the full hijab in public.[16]

Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad released a video statement on January 4 criticizing the regime protest crackdown.[17] Ahmadinejad stated that the regime should allocate its resources toward improving domestic conditions rather than suppressing protests. These remarks are the first from Ahmadinejad that CTP has recorded since protests began in September 2022.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Likely Iranian proxies launched two rockets at US forces stationed at the Conoco International Coalition base in eastern Syria on January 4. US CENTCOM issued a statement confirming that the attack did not cause any casualties or damage to equipment.[18] Syrian Democratic Forces personnel discovered a third, unlaunched rocket where the attack originated. Iranian proxies last attempted to attack US forces in eastern Syria on November 17, 2022.[19] The January 4 attack marks the only instance of Iranian-backed militants targeting US forces in the days surrounding the third anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani. Iranian-backed militants contrastingly conducted multiple attacks against US forces in Iraq and Syria over several days surrounding the 2022 anniversary.[20]

[1] https://t.me/fa_UYI/31; https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan

[2] https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1610690542987509760; https://twitter.com/iran_javanan/status/1610674732642504704; https://t.me/teh_javanan/90; https://twitter.com/javanan_SHZ/status/1610712109456801805; https://t.me/javanan_Khuzestan/59; https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1610300028777537538

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

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/data-analysis-of-the-mahsa-amin...>

[5] <https://digiato.com/article/2023/01/04/internet-cutoff-exam-security>

[6] <https://t.me/PadDolat/89088>

[7] <https://www.yjc.ir/fa/news/8326091>

- [8] <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1610749488792014849?s=20&t=UAljAx1wJBWP...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1610677502476783617?s=20&t=QVFQgG...>
- [9] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1609883019308843010?s=20&t=SW6ER8c...
- [10] <https://twitter.com/esmaeilion/status/1609663751879270401?s=20&t=bKh2nca...>
- [11] https://www.borna_dot_news/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-4/1418742-%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%85-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA
- [12] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Whatever-it-t...>
- [13] https://www.borna_dot_news/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-4/1418748-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1
- [14] <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/what-do-structural-changes-...>
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- [17] www.t.me/gooyadotcom/18770
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- [19] <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/...>
- [20] https://shafaq_dot_com/ar/%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%80%D9%86/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%B4%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AA-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7
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<https://twitter.com/nafisehkBBC/status/1478723635535912960?s=20&t=UAljAx...>
https://twitter.com/nafisehkBBC/status/1478250046684553219?s=20&t=tuD6_0...

Iran Crisis Update, January 5, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 5, 2023

Zachary Coles, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Johanna Moore, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 5, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Regime officials and entities are endorsing an expansive, collective-punishment model to implement mandatory veiling laws as anti-regime demonstrations enter their fourth consecutive month. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi stressed the importance of the hijab on January 5. Vahidi confirmed reports that the regime began issuing texts warning unveiled women drivers to adhere to hijab laws and described veiling as a “legal issue” and core component of the Islamic Republic’s religious values.[1] The judiciary has additionally submitted for review a draft bill that would replace Article 638 of the Islamic Penal Code, which outlines the consequences for failing to adhere to the state-imposed hijab law, within the past several days.

The judiciary’s proposed bill would expand the degree to which the regime can penalize unveiled women and introduces new punishments for repeat offenders, including “social deprivations” that would deny women basic social services and the right to leave the country, and mandatory religious courses. The bill would additionally penalize third-

party actors like business owners and supervisors for failing to enforce veiling online or in-person. The bill fails to define the standards to which women must adhere, which would allow the regime to arbitrarily police and prosecute Iranian women. Article 638 currently states that women who do not adhere to state-approved veiling practices are subject to imprisonment and fines. Iranian media suggested that offenders would continue to be subjected to imprisonment and fines under the judiciary's proposed bill, although this remains unclear. The bill did not mention the morality police, who brutally killed Mahsa Amini for "improper hijab" on September 16.[2]

The regime is hardening its stance on hijab rather than offering any meaningful concessions. The Islamic Republic is doubling down on its commitment to impose harsh sentences including prison, fines, and something that sounds much like reeducation on women for failing to meet its standards of dress. The vagueness of the standard to which it is legally holding Iranian women is not a concession, as it reserves to unspecified regime officials the right to decide arbitrarily on a case-by-case basis whether a woman has met the regime's legal requirements.

The Iranian regime is likely escalating against Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid in an attempt to quell ongoing demonstrations throughout Sistan and Baluchistan Province. A

website that reports on Sistan and Baluchistan Province reported an increased security presence in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province ahead of Abdol Hamid's January 6 weekly Friday prayer sermon.

[3] Security personnel additionally detained at least 113 Zahedan residents, including children, in a mass arrest campaign likely aimed at intimidating anti-regime protesters throughout the city within the past several days.[4] Protesters often gather to demonstrate against the regime after--and possibly during--Abdol Hamid's Friday sermons, and regime officials have previously accused Abdol Hamid of inciting unrest. [5]Abdol Hamid has reportedly refused recent demands from regime officials to cease criticizing the regime in his sermons.[6]

The regime likely is attempting suppress protests in Zahedan while avoiding another wave of mass violence similar to what occurred on “Bloody Friday” on September 30, 2022. Security forces opened fire on protesters, many of whom had emerged from Friday prayers sermons, killing scores of civilians.[7] Security forces may partially have struggled to disrupt ongoing protests in Zahedan because they originate within mosques, inhibiting the regime’s ability to disperse the crowds and quell unrest. Security forces may be escalating against Abdol Hamid through intimidation tactics such threats and arrests in hopes of preemptively reducing protest turnout.

Key Takeaways

- **Regime officials and entities are endorsing an expansive, collective-punishment model to implement mandatory veiling laws as anti-regime demonstrations enter their fourth consecutive month.**
- **The Iranian regime is likely escalating against Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid in an attempt to quell ongoing demonstrations throughout Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces.**
- **WhatsApp established a feature that allows Iranians to partially circumvent regime-imposed internet restrictions.**
- **An Iranian court sentenced a detained protester to death on December 5 for purportedly leading anti-regime demonstration efforts in Mazandaran Province.**
- **Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* claimed that the IRGC sanctioned the January 3 death of IRGC officer and Tehran Basij Commander Ghasem Fathollahi.**
- **Iraq’s Supreme Judicial Council may weaponize investigations into Soleimani’s death to target pro-Western entities in Iraq.**
- **Lebanese Hezbollah Deputy Secretary Naim Qassem met with Supreme Leader Foreign Affairs Advisor Ali Akbar**

Velayati in Tehran on January 5.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on January 5. Social media users documented snow and rain throughout Iran on December 5, which may have depressed protest activity on this date.[8] Weather conditions may interfere with coordinated calls for protests and strikes on December 6, 7, and 8. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[9]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Hamad Salehshor

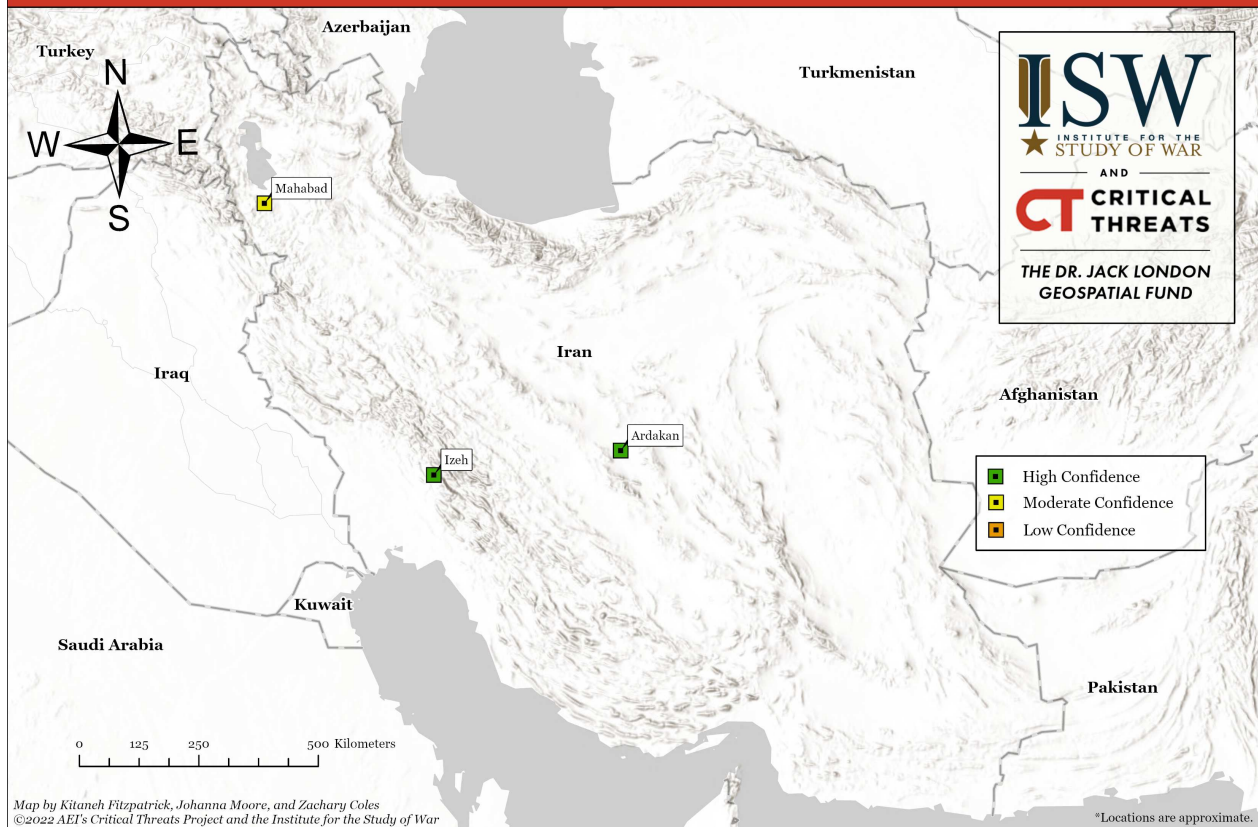
Ardakan, Yazd Province[10]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Activity: Seven-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Mahdi Zare Ashkazari

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Soresh Niknam

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 5, 6:00 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 6-8[12]

- Type: demonstrations and strikes
- Location: countrywide

January 8[13]

- Type: placing flowers on graves of citizens whom the regime has killed
- Location: countrywide

WhatsApp established a feature that allows Iranians to partially circumvent regime-imposed internet restrictions. WhatsApp announced that users can indirectly access the social media platform through a proxy server set up by volunteers on January 5.[14] The Iranian regime has implemented ongoing internet and

telecommunication restrictions, particularly on Western social media applications like WhatsApp and Instagram, since September 2022 in an attempt to impede anti-regime protester coordination and organization. [15]

An Iranian court sentenced a detained protester to death on December 5 for purportedly leading anti-regime demonstration efforts in Mazandaran Province. The court accused 18-year-old Arshia Takdastan of damaging public property and providing material to foreign-based Persian diaspora media outlets. Takdastan was convicted of “corruption on earth” and “waging war against god,” both of which are crimes punishable by death.[16]

Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* claimed that the IRGC sanctioned the January 3 death of IRGC officer and Tehran Basij Commander Ghasem Fathollahi. *Iran International* alleged that an IRGC Intelligence Organization-affiliated actor assassinated Fathollahi in his home after intelligence officials concluded that Fathollahi was communicating with protesters, citing an inside source.[17] Regime officials previously reported Fathollahi died in a burglary on his home that was unrelated to ongoing protests.[18] Some social media users have speculated that *Iran International’s* narrative is an information operation by the regime aimed at obfuscating the possibility that anti-regime protesters killed Fathollahi.[19] CTP cannot independently verify either of these claims.

Several Iranian officials gave public addresses threatening Israel on January 5. Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian claimed that Israel will face “severe consequences” for “desecrating” the al-Aqsa mosque compound in Jerusalem in a phone call with the Islamic Cooperation Organization Secretary General Hossein Brahim Tahah. [20] Defense Ministry Political and Ideological Organization Head Hojjat ol Eslam Ziaddin Aghajan Pour similarly warned Israel that it would “raze Tel Aviv and Haifa to the ground” if it made a mistake and boasted that Iran possessed missiles that could target “the heart of Israel.”[21] IRGC Deputy Commander for Operations Abbas Nilforoushan

additionally threatened Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a public address.[22] Regime officials' warnings may be in response to reports that Netanyahu aims to adopt a tough stance on Iran, although such threats are not unusual and occur frequently.[23]

Social media users circulated unverified reports that unidentified assailants shot and killed an Iranian judge in a northern Tehran neighborhood on January 5.[24] CTP cannot corroborate the veracity of this report and such accounts should be treated with skepticism.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council may weaponize investigations into Soleimani's death to target pro-Western entities in Iraq. Head of the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq Faiq Zaidan announced that Iraq's judiciary will pursue legal action against Iraqi and foreign individuals accused of assisting in the assassination of former IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani.[25] Pro-Iranian political actors may use the low investigative threshold to retaliate against pro-US officials from the Kadhimi Administration.

Lebanese Hezbollah Deputy Secretary Naim Qassem met with Supreme Leader Foreign Affairs Advisor Ali Akbar Velayati in Tehran on January 5. State-owned *Islamic Republic News Agency* reported that Velayati and Qassem discussed "regional and international issues." [26] Velayati characterized Lebanese Hezbollah's role in the 2022 Lebanon-Israel maritime border demarcation agreement as an "honorable victory" against Israel. [27]

[1] <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1158126/%D9%88%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%B4-%D9...>

[2] <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/1158051/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8...>

[3] <https://haalvsh dot org/2023/01/05/11413/>

[4] https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1610665563457454081?s=20&t=_BRB-9dkM...; <https://haalvsh dot org/2023/01/05/11413/>

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-30>

[6] <https://haalvsh dot org/2023/01/05/11413/>

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-september-30>

[8] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1610916513074102272?s=20&t=B4dQ9NmHI...> ; <https://twitter.com/IranIntlbrk/status/1611004591453224963?s=20&t=B4dQ9N...> ; <https://twitter.com/IranIntlbrk/status/1610954388125761536?s=20&t=B4dQ9N...>

[9] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1610961045903785985>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1610981967696375809>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1610993080051683331>

[10] <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1611056954314756097?s=20&t=ARNueVU...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1611017579254149123>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1611020782955597827>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611018486926528519; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1611028974947139589>

[11] <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1611032754476716034?s=20&t=ARNueVU...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1610974012284313600>

[12] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1609883019308843010?s=20&t=SW6ER8c...

[13] <https://twitter.com/esmaeilion/status/1609663751879270401?s=20&t=bKh2nca...>

[14] https://faq.whatsapp.com/520504143274092/?cms_platform=web

[15] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-september-29>

[16] <https://www.mizan.news/4582672>

[17] <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202301055710>

[18] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-revolutionary-guard-shot-dead-during-b...>

[19] <https://twitter.com/azadikhahi1/status/1611105046342651936?s=20&t=wxnrXB...>

[20] <https://mfa.ir/portal/NewsView/706401>

[23] <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-724424>

[24] <https://twitter.com/SaeedAganji/status/1611125197469356035?s=20&t=YztqIK...>

<https://t.me/SEPAHCYBERY/59745>

[26] <https://www.irna.ir/news/84989407/%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%84%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86>

[27] <https://www.irna.ir/news/84989407/%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84->

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Iran Crisis Update, January 6, 2023

Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Zachary Coles, Johanna Moore, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 6, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime failed to suppress demonstrations in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 6. Protesters participated in anti-regime demonstrations in Zahedan after prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continued to criticize the regime in his weekly Friday prayer sermon. Abdol Hamid condemned Iranian leadership for extracting forced confessions from protesters and suggested that some Iranian officials were unlawfully behaving as though they possessed supreme religious authority. Abdol Hamid additionally maintained that demonstrations would continue in spite of mass arrests.[1]

Security forces reportedly increased their presence in Zahedan and carried out mass arrests in the days preceding Abdol Hamid's January 6 sermon, as CTP previously reported.[2] The regime's increased security presence and arrest campaign – both of which likely intended to disrupt protest organization and intimidate participants – did not apparently impact protest activity, however. Protest turnout in Zahedan on January 6 largely resembled protest activity recorded on December 30.[3] Abdol Hamid's defiance and increasingly direct criticism of the regime is likely sustaining demonstrations in Zahedan, and the inability of security to prevent demonstrations from forming within mosques may be allowing protesters to organize more easily and readily in Sistan and Baluchistan than in other provinces. The regime could further escalate against protesters and Abdol Hamid in response, although taking direct action against Abdol Hamid risks inflaming the situation.

Confusing messaging from prominent protest organizations may risk further reducing protest activity. Several neighborhood youth groups circulated a poster commemorating the four-year anniversary of the Iranian-owned Sanchi oil tanker collision and tied the incident to the Mahsa Amini protest movement. The poster did not include calls for anti-regime demonstrations, as posters circulated by protester organizations typically do; it is unclear why protest groups circulated it.[4] Protest coordinators have additionally issued discordant instructions on countrywide demonstrations and strikes on January 6-8, possibly signaling internal disagreements within the movement.[5] Inconsistent and misleading messaging from protest leaders may continue to degrade the movement's effectiveness.

It is not immediately apparent how protest organizations and coordinators are seeking to reinvigorate anti-regime demonstrations or to what they attribute decreased protest activity. CTP has recorded a sustained depression in anti-regime demonstrations since December 2022, although we have yet to record a day without at least one protest that meets our reporting threshold. Social media users have circulated detailed safety instructions ahead of protests scheduled for January 8, which could suggest the groups assess that fear or intimidation is preventing greater participation in demonstrations. Neighborhood youth groups and other prominent organizations would likely need to assuage such concerns by sharing their assessments on why protest activity has decreased and through establishing a robust, internal infrastructure that would guarantee protesters' financial and physical safety, if safety concerns are, in fact, the primary driver of lower turnout. It is not obvious that they are, however, as protesters have continued to demonstrate in many parts of the country even after brutal suppression, regime killing of protesters, and mass arrests.[6] Protest movements can also fade as would-be protesters conclude that they must turn their attention back to their ordinary lives and livelihoods, especially in the kinds of

difficult economic circumstances that reportedly are taking hold in Iran. Protest organizers in such circumstances can be challenged to find ways of identifying and providing necessary economic support to would-be demonstrators.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime failed to suppress demonstrations in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 6.**
- **Confusing messaging from prominent protest organizations may risk further reducing protest activity.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Several Friday Prayer Leaders stressed the importance of enforcing mandatory veiling laws on January 6.**
- **The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned seven individuals associated with Iranian drone and ballistic missile sales to Russia**

Anti-Regime Protests

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

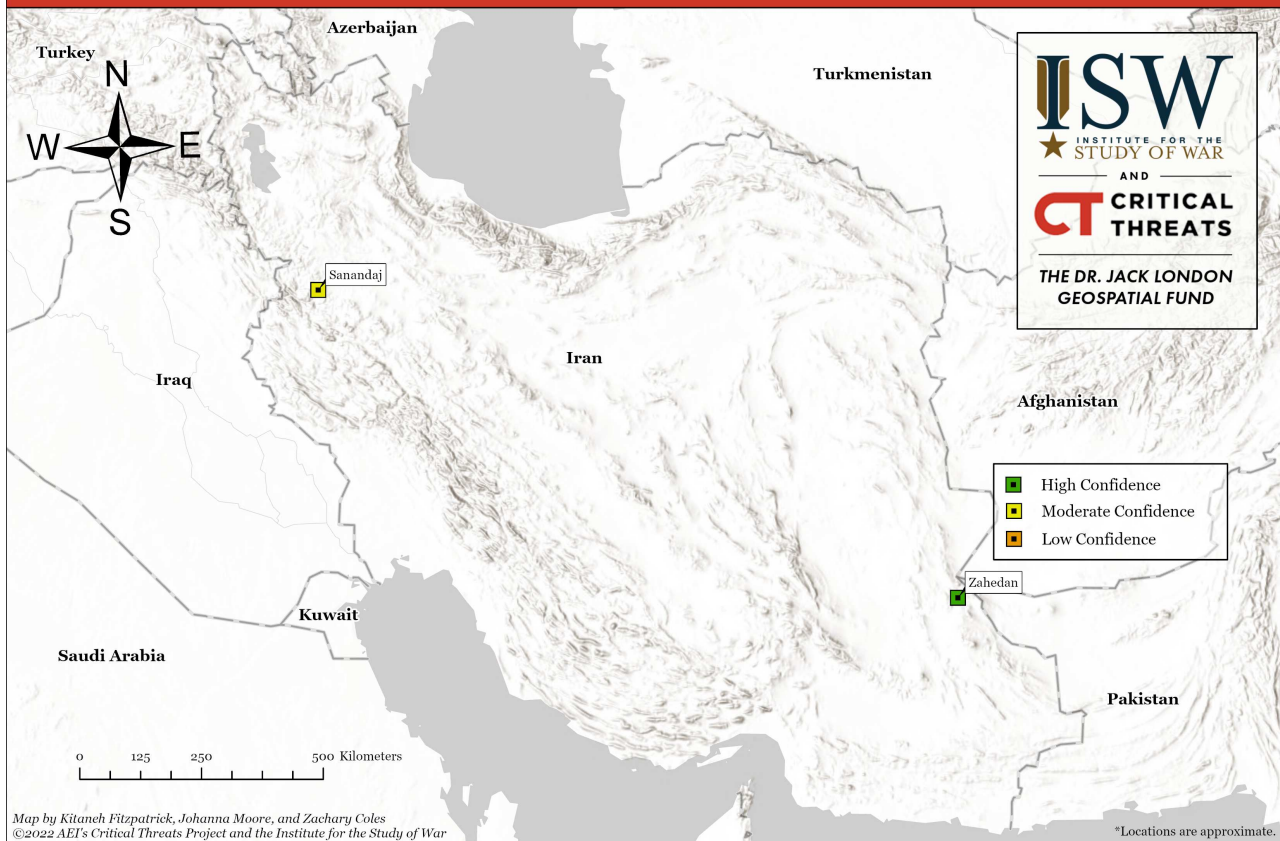
Sanandaj, Kurdistan[7]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Set fires in the street and blocked traffic

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan[8]

- Size: Medium
- Notes: Protesters marched through Zahedan streets after a Friday Prayer sermon

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 6, 5:00 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 6-8[9]

- Type: demonstrations and strikes
- Location: countrywide

January 8[10]

- Type: placing flowers on graves of citizens whom the regime has killed
- Location: countrywide

Several Friday Prayer Leaders stressed the importance of enforcing mandatory veiling laws on January 6. Iranian Friday Prayer Leaders receive their talking points directly from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's office and their rhetoric can often be reflective of Khamenei's intended messaging. The Ahvaz, Karaj, Qom, and interim Tehran Friday Prayer leaders stated that the Islamic Republic and its citizens have a collective obligation to chastise unveiled women but added that this obligation should not lead to physical confrontations.[11] Friday Prayer Leaders' messaging suggests that the regime may no longer seek to penalize women who fail to adhere fully to the regime's hijab standards so as long as they are veiled. Such rhetorical shifts should not be viewed as concessions, however. Regime officials have discussed employing an expansive collective-punishment model to penalize unveiled women in recent days, as CTP previously reported.[12]

Mashhad Friday Prayer Leader Hojjat ol Eslam Ahmad Alamolhoda primarily discussed the Iranian economy in his weekly sermon, a notable rhetorical divergence from other Friday prayer sermons on January 6. Alamolhoda is the father-in-law of President Ebrahim Raisi and although he does not

officially speak for Raisi, it is reasonable to infer that Alamolhoda's comments may occasionally reflect Raisi's position. Alamolhoda claimed that "currency fluctuations are not so important" and blamed economic conditions on Iran's enemies on January 6.[13] Alamolhoda separately argued that the regime could not definitively enforce mandatory veiling on January 4.[14] Alamolhoda's January 4 warnings that the regime cannot effectively enforce veiling could cohere with Raisi's position, particularly if Raisi fears that he would be held responsible for such efforts by angry Iranian citizens.

The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned seven individuals associated with Iranian drone and ballistic missile sales to Russia on January 6.

[15] OFAC sanctioned six executives and board members of the Qods Aviation Industries (QAI) and the director of Iran's Aerospace Industries Organization (AIO). QAI primarily produces Mohajer-6 drones which have been used by Russian forces in Ukraine. AIO Director Nader Khoon Siavash was sanctioned for his participation in the production and sale of Iranian ballistic missiles to foreign buyers. Iran and Russia have continued to pursue closer and mutually beneficial security cooperation in recent months.

Regime-affiliated media outlets denied reports that unknown assailants shot and killed a prominent Tehran judge.

[16] Social media users had previously claimed that Abolghasem Salavati, who was responsible for sentencing two executed protesters, died in Tehran on January 5. [17]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report.

[1] <https://abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/01/06/13224/>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-5-2023>

[3] <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1611315567524253696?s=20&t=lt...>; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1611312863536353280?s=20&t=lt...>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611314362047766528?s=20&t=ltmcjw...; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611333470952865795?s=20&t=ltmcjw...; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1611381400736874496?s=20&t=ltmcjwq...>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611321882405396480?s=20&t=ltmcjw...

[4] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1611357545091719169?s=20&t=Ia-7hpGhX4u...

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-20...>

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-14> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-4> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-30> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-23>

[7] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611411432989409292?s=20&t=ltmcjw...

[8] <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1611312863536353280?s=20&t=lt...>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611314362047766528?s=20&t=ltmcjw...

<https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1611381400736874496?s=20&t=ltmcjwq...>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611333470952865795?s=20&t=ltmcjw...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1611321882405396480?s=20&t=ltmcjw...

[9] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1609883019308843010?s=20&t=SW6ER8c...

[10] <https://twitter.com/esmaeilion/status/1609663751879270401?s=20&t=bKh2nca...>

[12] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-5-2023>

[13] <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/709689/%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D...>

[14] <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1715225/%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4...>

[15] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1182>

[16] <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/732882/%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6%DB%8C-%D8%...> ; <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5674759/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8...>

[17] https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1611251244076785664?s=20&t=Tnl8RBr... ; <https://twitter.com/PanteaModiri/status/1611322094347771904?s=20&t=Tnl8R...>

Iran Crisis Update, January 7, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 7, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 7, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei continues to empower hardline security figures to enforce his uncompromising position toward the protests and mandatory hijab law. Khamenei appointed Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan as law enforcement commander on January 7.[1] Radan will thus head the Law Enforcement Command (LEC)—Iran’s national police force and first line of defense against protests. Khamenei called on Radan to provide public security, improve LEC capabilities, properly compensate LEC employees, and train specialized police units for different security missions.

Radan is a hardline member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and has extensive experience crushing political dissent and protests. Radan joined the Basij and IRGC as a teenager to fight in the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s.[2] He transferred to the LEC after the war, where he held several key positions, including commanding the police units responsible for Kurdistan, Sistan and Baluchistan, Khorasan, and Tehran provinces. Radan likely acquired experience quashing anti-regime dissent and militancy while overseeing police forces in the restive border provinces. Radan served as law enforcement deputy commander from 2008 to 2014, during which time he played critical roles in cracking down on the 2009 Green Movement and suppressing protests in Syria. [3] Radan traveled to Damascus in 2011 to meet with Syrian security services and support their crackdown against the Syrian people. He finally headed the LEC Strategic Studies Center from 2014 to 2023, where he likely developed new concepts and doctrine that he could introduce to the LEC.

Radan will likely adopt a hard line on enforcing the mandatory hijab law. Radan was an architect of the morality patrol program while he was law enforcement deputy commander.[4] He is an aggressive supporter of the hijab requirement and of penalizing citizens for attire that the regime deems inappropriate. CTP has previously argued that the regime may end or reduce the morality patrol but will likely use other means to enforce the mandatory hijab law, such as facial recognition and surveillance cameras.[5]

Khamenei likely appointed Radan as law enforcement commander partly due to dissatisfaction with the performance of the incumbent in responding to the protests. Radan replaced Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari, who had held the position since 2015. The dismissal of Ashtari is particularly noteworthy given Khamenei’s apparent trust in him historically. Khamenei shuffled and replaced many senior officers responsible for internal security after previous major protest waves in Iran.[6] But Khamenei kept Ashtari as law enforcement commander—even after the 2017-18 Dey protests and 2019 Aban protests—likely reflecting Khamenei’s confidence in him at the time. Ashtari may have since lost that confidence. It is unclear what position he will hold next.

The Judiciary executed two additional protesters—Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Mohammad Hosseini—on January 7. Iranian authorities tortured Karami and Hosseini and convicted them in sham trials for their alleged roles in killing a Basij member Ruhollah Ajamian in Karaj, Alborz Province on November 3.[7] The regime may have timed these executions

immediately before the planned protests on January 8 to intimidate citizens and reduce turnout. Karami and Hosseini mark the third and fourth individuals whom the regime has executed since protests began on September 16. Iranian human rights organizations and activists estimate that the judiciary has sentenced at least 14 other arrested protesters to death and that these individuals face imminent executions.[8]

Protest organizers tied to the Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union again failed to generate increased protest activity on January 7, despite their repeated calls for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on January 6-8.[9] Protest groups affiliated with the Iranian Neighborhood United Front have contrastingly called for protests only on January 8. CTP has previously argued that discordant messaging and internal fissures within the protest movement may be one of the factors driving decreased turnout.

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei continues to empower hardline security figures to enforce his uncompromising position toward the protests and mandatory hijab law.**
- **The Judiciary executed two additional protesters—Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Mohammad Hosseini.**
- **Protest organizers tied to the Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union again failed to generate increased protest activity, despite their repeated calls for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on January 6-8**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Unknown gunmen shot and killed one person and injured two others at the Gachsaran Oil and Gas Company in Gachsaran, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province.**
- **State security services arrested reformist journalist Saeid Seyf Ali, according to his wife.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 7. CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

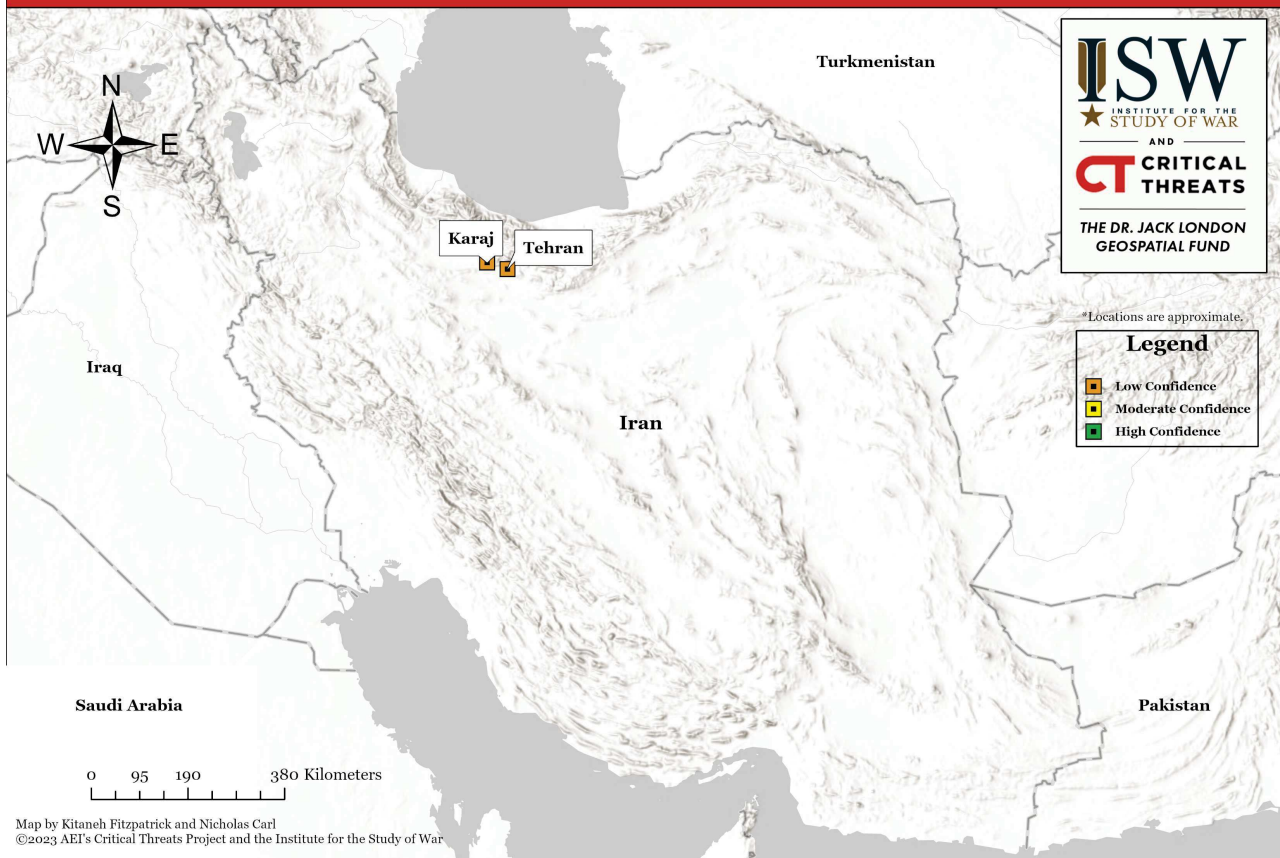
Karaj, Alborz Province[10]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Footage may be from January 5 or 6, which marked the birthday of killed protester Hadis Najafi

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- Size: Small

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 7, 5:00 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 8[12]

- Type: demonstrations and strikes
- Location: countrywide

January 8[13]

- Type: placing flowers on graves of citizens whom the regime has killed
- Location: countrywide

Unknown gunmen shot and killed one person and injured two others at the Gachsaran Oil and Gas Company in Gachsaran, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province on January 7.[14]

State security services arrested reformist-affiliated journalist Saeid Seyf Ali, according to his wife on January 7.[15] Seyf Ali is the manager of reformist-affiliated outlet Didban Iran. Seyf Ali is at least the third journalist tied to the reformist faction whom state security services have arrested in recent days.[16]

Iranian website Jobvision reported that one in five Iranian online workers have become unemployed within the past four months due to ongoing internet restrictions.[17] A separate study estimated that Iranian internet outages in 2022 resulted in a cumulative loss of \$773 million. [18]

Parliament is considering legislation that would restrict international travel for former Iranian officials. The proposed bill would particularly affect former officials who hold dual

citizenship or whose families live abroad. The legislation, if approved, would require designated officials to obtain permission from regulatory entities, such as the Judiciary, IRGC, and LEC, before leaving the country.[19]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report.

[1] [http://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26235](http://www.leader.ir/fa/content/26235)

[2] [http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/17/2833046](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/17/2833046)

[3] <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/tg1224>

[4] https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f10_iran_police_hijab_unveil/24233430.html

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-23>

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Whatever-it-t...>

[8] <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iran-executes-2-men-detail...> ; <https://iranhumanrights.org/2023/01/two-more-men-executed-in-iran-in-con...>

[9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-2023>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1611750403485351938?s=20&t=l4iJ0W...> ; <https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1611397845818671104?s=20&t=l4iJ0WwjA...>

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1611779520113041410?s=20&t=UWJtoX...> ; https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1611768966287966208?s=20&t=y5zZCg...

[12] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1609883019308843010?s=20&t=SW6ER8c...

[13] <https://twitter.com/esmaeilion/status/1609663751879270401?s=20&t=bKh2nca...>

[14] [www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/709782](http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/709782)

[15] <https://www.sharghdaily.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3...>

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-2-2023>

[17] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32213387.html>

[19] [http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/17/2832909](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/17/2832909); [https://www.sharghdaily dot com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-6/866426-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%84%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%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3](https://www.sharghdaily.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-6/866426-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AC%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%84%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%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3)

Iran Crisis Update, January 8, 2023

Nicholas Carl and Kitaneh Fitzpatrick

January 8, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

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[Correction: A previous version of this update incorrectly recorded a protest in Javanroud, Kermanshah Province on January 8. CTP mistakenly used old protest footage and is revising this update to exclude Javanroud. We have updated our text and map to fix this error.]

Protest activity increased significantly on January 8—in line with the calls from protest organizers for countrywide demonstrations to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) shooting down of a Ukrainian civilian airplane. These protests are the most that CTP has reported in a single day since December 5, 2022.[1] Protests have seen reduced turnout in recent weeks, likely in part due to the discordant messaging and internal fissures within the protest movement.[2] But protest coordinators and organizations aligned at least in their calls for countrywide demonstrations on January 8, demonstrating that they can still generate substantial turnout, especially when their messaging is coherent and consistent.

The Iranian regime has reaffirmed its aggressive and hardline stance toward the protests and calls for social reform, which could enflame political dissent further. Social media accounts have reported that the Judiciary plans to execute two more protesters—one 19-years-old and the other 22-years-old—on January 9.[3] Protest organizers have called for gatherings outside the Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj, Alborz Province—where the two protesters are being held—and social media users have reported that crowds have begun to form.[4] The Supreme Cultural Revolution separately reiterated its support for the mandatory hijab law in a long-expected statement on the subject on January 8.[5] The council argued that veiling promotes sexual equality and condemned the West for allowing “nudity and promiscuity.” The council also repeated Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s argument that the regime should continue to enforce the hijab requirement but tolerate women who only veil partially.[6] Prosecutor General Mohammad Javad Montazeri previously stated that Parliament and the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council would issue an opinion on the hijab requirement by December 16.[7] The regime published no such opinion until now, suggesting Iranian authorities delayed issuing their opinion in support of the mandatory hijab law until they felt that the protest movement has lost sufficient momentum to avoid public backlash.

Key Takeaways

- **Protest activity increased significantly—in line with the calls from protest organizers for countrywide demonstrations to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) shooting down of a Ukrainian civilian airplane.**
- **At least 26 protests occurred in 16 cities across 12 provinces. This protest count does not include the situation at the Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj, Alborz Province, which is ongoing at the time of this writing.**
- **The Iranian regime has reaffirmed its aggressive and hardline stance toward the protests and calls for social reform, which could enflame political dissent further.**

- **Unidentified gunmen clashed with the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) in Khash, Khuzestan Province.**
- **An unidentified gunman shot and killed an employee of Allameh Tabatabaei University in Tehran.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least 26 protests occurred in 16 cities across 12 provinces on January 8. This protest count does not include the situation at the Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj, Alborz Province, which is ongoing at the time of this writing. CTP will cover this item in our update on January 9. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Karaj, Alborz Province[8]

- Size: Undetermined
- Notes: Reports of audible gunfire throughout the city

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[9]

- Size: Small

Najaf Abad, Esfahan Province[10]

- Size: Medium

Ghazvin City, Ghazvin Province[11]

- Size: Small

Bandar-e Anzali, Gilan Province[12]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Mourners
- Regime Repression: Security forces fired tear gas at protesters
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for killed protester Mehran Samak

Bandar-e Abbas, Hormozgan Province[13]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Fire lit in street

Dashti, Hormozgan Province[14]

- Size: Small

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[15]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Social media users recorded sounds of gunfire throughout the city

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[16]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Protesters gathered at a local cemetery to mourn the victims of downed Ukrainian civilian aircraft

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[17]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: Two clips show unidentified assailant throwing explosives in street

Arak, Markazi Province[18]

- Size: Small

Babol, Mazandaran Province[19]

- Size: Undetermined

Shahed Shahr, Tehran Province[20]

- Size: Medium
- Notes: Protesters held pictures of the victims of downed PS752 aircraft

Tehran City, Tehran Province[21]

- Size: Small
- Location: Sattar Khan (District 2)

Tehran City, Tehran Province[22]

- Size: Small
- Location: Enghelaab Street

Tehran City, Tehran Province[23]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Tehran University students
- Regime Repression: Security forces beat and violently arrested at least one protester

Tehran City, Tehran Province[24]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Soureh University students

Tehran City, Tehran Province[25]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Shahid Beheshti University Students

Tehran City, Tehran Province[26]

- Size: Undetermined
- Location: In a Tehran subway station

Tehran City, Tehran Province[27]

- Size: Undetermined
- Location: Shariati Street (Districts 1, 3, and 7)

Tehran City, Tehran Province[28]

- Size: Small
- Location: Haft Hoz, Tehran Pars (District 8)
- Regime Repression: Security forces threw tear gas at protesters

Tehran City, Tehran Province[29]

- Size: Small
- Location: Ekbatan (District 5)

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[30]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Protesters gathered at a local cemetery to mourn the victims of downed PS752 aircraft

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

Abdanan, Ilam Province[31]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[32]

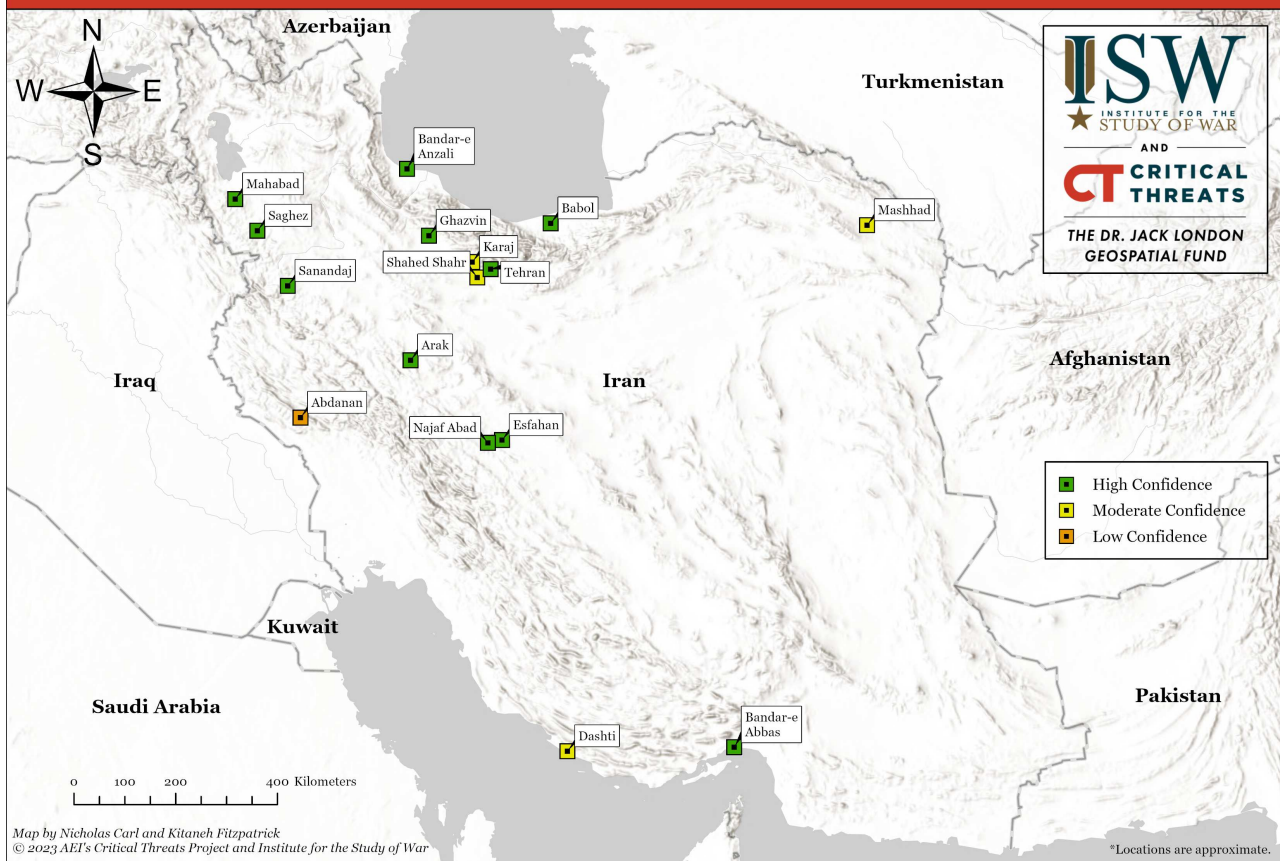
- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[33]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street

NOTE: CTP defines small protests as fewer than 100 individuals, medium protests as between 100 and 1,000, and large protests as over 1,000.

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



Unidentified gunmen clashed with the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) in Khash, Khuzestan Province on January 8.[34] The LEC killed two armed individuals.

An unidentified gunman shot and killed an employee of Allameh Tabatabaei University in Tehran on January 8.[35] Tasnim News Agency reported that unidentified individuals previously tried to assassinate the employee two months prior.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi denied that the regime uses plainclothes security and intelligence officers on January 8.[36] Vahidi asserted that security officers wear distinctive uniforms when working. Vahidi's comments contradict repeated footage documenting plainclothes officers violently arresting, beating, and shooting protesters.[37]

Deputy Parliament Speaker Ali Nikzad blamed protesters for ongoing, regime-imposed internet restrictions on January 8.[38] Nikzad claimed that users who had "incorrectly" used the internet to participate in protests forced the regime to impose countrywide censorship measures. A VPN review website recently reported that Iranian internet outages in 2022 resulted in a cumulative loss of \$773 million.[39]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

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

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

[3] <https://twitter.com/KhosroKalbasi/status/1612202398813937666>

- [5] <http://entekhab dot ir/002ygl>
- [6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-2023>
- [7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-2>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1612110652318924800?s=20&t=UmiIN9OPF...>
- [9] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612135397919711232?s=20&t=IhYH4T_...
- [10] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612013050860797952?s=20&t=uB-CwsU...>
- [13] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1612162788058611712?s=20&t=uLYYkE4br...>
- [14] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1612186098708398080?s=20&t=Q8jfFn...
- [16] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1612053363205570560?s=20&t=gAgLpO09UE...>
- [18] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1612164586291236866?s=20&t=Q8jfFn...
- [19] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612162085613408262?s=20&t=uLYYkE4...>
- [20] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1612109364583870464?s=20&t=uB-Cws...>
- [22] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612111371625435136?s=20&t=wlroE_C...
- [24] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612017682551042050?s=20&t=uB-CwsU...>
- [25] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1612159755639832576?s=20&t=uLYYkE...>
- [26] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1612145137450098690?s=20&t=uLYYkE4br...>
- [27] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1612177819894747137> ; <https://t...>
- [28] <https://twitter.com/Javanmardi75/status/1612131242350374914?s=20&t=n2BaH...>
- [29] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1612170168137809922?s=20&t=Q8jfFn...
- [30] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1612071387950202880?s=20&t=x7w2uvkv4B...>

- [31] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1612205677535023106?s=20&t=vbNfm8...>
- [32] <https://twitter.com/SamRasoulpour/status/1612142973390651393?s=20&t=uLYY...>
- [33] <https://twitter.com/Kolbarnews/status/1612147959801544709?s=20&t=uLYYkE4...>
- [34] <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/18/2833920>
- [35] <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/18/2833818>
- [36] <http://entekhab dot ir/002yfk>
- [38] <http://entekhab dot ir/002yfv>
- [39] <https://donya-e-eqtasad.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%A7%...> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023>

Iran Crisis Update, January 9, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 9, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Zachary Coles, Dana Alexander Gray, and Johanna Moore

January 9, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Protest coordinators and organizations may have successfully deterred the judiciary from executing two arrested protesters in Iran on January 9. Social media accounts reported that the judiciary transferred these two protesters to solitary confinement at the Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj with imminent plans to execute them.[1] Citizens gathered outside the prison in the early morning hours of January 9 after protest organizers called for snap demonstrations there.[2] The regime later denied that it planned to execute the protesters on January 9 but defended the death sentences.[3] Persian-language social media accounts asserted that the snap demonstrations prevented the regime from conducting the executions.[4] CTP cannot confirm whether the snap demonstrations actually delayed the executions, but their perceived success may encourage protest groups to organize additional gatherings outside prisons where arrested protesters are held.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei continues to use rhetoric that suggests he is not amenable to any meaningful political or social reform in Iran. Khamenei denied that the regime was responsible for the protests and instead blamed the West exclusively in a speech in Qom on January 9.[5] He repeated his accusation that the US and European countries use information operations and propaganda to incite unrest. Khamenei acknowledged that the regime faces economic challenges but alleged that protesters used economic and political grievances as excuses to try to “destroy the strength of the country.” His rhetoric in this speech was particularly harsh compared to other recent speeches. Khamenei has previously drawn a rhetorical line between peaceful protesters and “rioters.”[6] Khamenei did not repeat this rhetorical dichotomy in his most recent speech and only stated that all rioters are “treasonous.” CTP has previously argued that Khamenei and his inner circle continue to misdiagnose the core problems driving the protests.[7] They have defined the unrest as a sociocultural and religious issue and seem to believe that the solution is trying to further ideologize the population. Khamenei reiterated his endorsement for this approach in his speech on January 9.

The regime is having tone-deaf conversations on women’s rights with itself, highlighting that many officials have not internalized core protester grievances. Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei and Saeid Jalili—a senior adviser to Khamenei—separately argued on January 9 that the regime is a strong proponent of gender equality and women’s rights.[8] Ejei asserted that the mandatory hijab law empowers women. Jalili stated that the regime should promote its version of these values in its foreign policy. Another senior judicial official claimed at a ceremony honoring women’s achievements on January 9 that the West has conspired to raise marriage ages and thus reduce how many children women have as part of an effort to depress population growth in Iran.[9] Kayhan—a hardline media outlet—finally argued on January 8 that women refusing to wear hijabs would lead to infidelity from their partners and thus damage families.[10] These statements underscore how many regime officials largely view the role of women in Iranian society through the lens of marriage and motherhood rather than as individuals with an inherent right to the personal freedoms and liberties for which the protesters have been calling.

Khamenei likely dismissed Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari as law enforcement commander due to Khamenei's dissatisfaction with the performance of the Law Enforcement Command in responding to the protests. Khamenei appointed Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan to replace Ashtari as law enforcement commander on January 7.[11] Ashtari stated on January 9 that he “apologize[s] to the people and supreme leader for all shortcomings.”[12] Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri stated on January 9 that Ashtari will now serve as his personal adviser for security and law enforcement affairs.[13]

Key Takeaways

- **Protest coordinators and organizations may have successfully deterred the Judiciary from executing two arrested protesters in Iran.**
- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei continues to use rhetoric that suggests he is not amenable to any meaningful political or social reform in Iran.**
- **The regime is having tone-deaf conversations on women's rights with itself, highlighting that many officials have not internalized core protester grievances.**
- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei likely dismissed Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari as law enforcement commander due to Khamenei's dissatisfaction with the performance of the Law Enforcement Command in responding to the protests.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces in Iran.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid tweeted criticizing how the Judiciary has handled the legal cases of arrested protesters.**
- **The Judiciary sentenced three protesters to death.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces in Iran on January 9. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Karaj, Alborz Province[14]

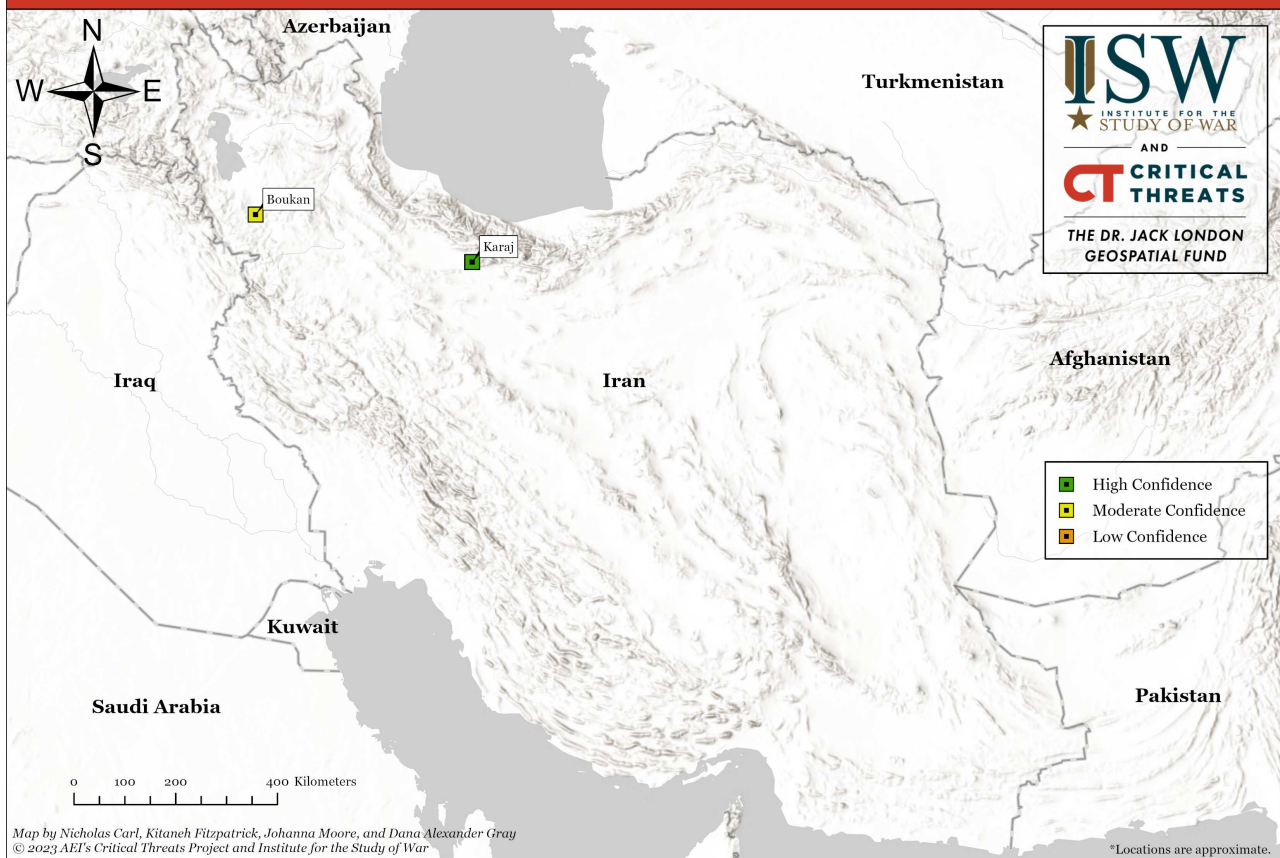
- **Size:** Small to medium
- **Regime Repression:** Internet outages
- **Notes:** Protesters demonstrated in the early morning hours against the reportedly imminent execution of two arrested protesters outside of the Rajaei Shahr prison

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[15]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Protester Activity:** 40-day ceremony for a killed protester

NOTE: CTP defines small protests as fewer than 100 individuals, medium protests as between 100 and 1,000, and large protests as over 1,000.

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 9, 5:00 PM ET



Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid tweeted on January 9 criticizing how the judiciary has handled the legal cases of arrested protesters.[16] Abdol Hamid stated that the snap demonstrations outside the Rajaei Shahr prison in Karaj indicate that many citizens believe that the regime has unjustly imprisoned these individuals.

The judiciary sentenced three protesters to death on January 9.[17] The judiciary convicted each of “waging war against God.” Iranian state media reported that the protesters shot and killed security officers in Esfahan. The Iranian Supreme Court can appeal these death sentences.

Expediency Discernment Council member Gholam Reza Mesbahi Moghaddam criticized the Raisi administration for lacking the necessary competency and strategy for solving economic issues on January 9.[18] The Expediency Discernment Council is a quasi-legislative regime body responsible for arbitrating disagreements between Parliament and the Guardian Council. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei have indicated in recent days possible doubts that President Ebrahim Raisi can improve the economic situation as well.[19]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

[1] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1612214881402372097?s=20&t=b1f4aHt...
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-8>

[2] https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1612199261143461888?s=20&t=GqMa6gJ...

[3] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/19/2834499>

- [4] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612368804427841537?s=20&t=GqMa6gJ...>
<https://twitter.com/HosseiniQashqaei/status/1612384808688050176?s=20&t=Gq...>
<https://twitter.com/HumanSelection/status/1612461566800310272>
- [5] <https://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26237/۱۳۵۶-دی-۱۹-قیام-سالروز-مناسبت-مردم-قم-به-مناسبت-سالروز-قیام-۱۹-دی-۱۳۵۶>
- [6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-19#...>
- [7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-18>
- [8] <https://isna dot ir/xdN6xH>; <https://www.eghtesadnews dot com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-57/547442-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%86-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C>
- [9] <https://www.ilna dot ir/fa/tiny/news-1318089>
- [10] www.kayhan dot ir/fa/news/257533
- [11] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023>
- [12] www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/710051
- [13] <https://defapress dot ir/566393>
- [14] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612267110071164929?s=20&t=5x6rvAy...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612255125183123461?s=20&t=5x6rvAy...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612253805256507393?s=20&t=5x6rvAy...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612252020374736897?s=20&t=5x6rvAy...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612249988293169154?s=20&t=5x6rvAy...>; https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1612288298759725059?s=20&t=eu4Fo_H...
- [15] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1612440228265869312?s=20&t=8rvXMg...; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1612450995283312642?s=20&t=5x6rvA...>; <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1612449824330362882?s=20&t=SNp8h...>; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1612542347924873256?s=20&t=SNp8hGWei...>
- [16] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1612454245164544001?s=20&t=5x6r...>
- [17] <https://www.ilna dot ir/fa/tiny/news-1317756>
- [18] www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/710043
- [19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-3-2023>

Iran Crisis Update, January 10, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Dana Alexandar Gray

January 10, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime is refocusing on enforcing widespread adherence to the mandatory hijab law after briefly and informally relaxing such restrictions in previous months. Women in Iran have increasingly gone out in public without a hijab in recent months, according to some media reports.[1] But the regime has taken several actions in recent days indicating preparations to resume mass enforcement. Iranian state media reported on January 10 that Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri has ordered the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) to impose the hijab requirement “decisively.”[2] Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan—an architect of the morality patrol—as the new law enforcement commander on January 7.[3] The LEC resumed using surveillance cameras to identify women not properly adhering to the hijab requirement in their cars on January 2 as well.[4] Regime officials may see an opportunity to again enforce the hijab requirement as protest turnout has decreased in recent weeks and security personnel have likely regained some bandwidth. Iranian authorities may be particularly eager to resume widespread adherence to the mandatory hijab law to promote to the public the impression that the unrest has receded.

The Sari Revolutionary Court sentenced protester Javad Rouhi to death on January 10.

[5] The court convicted Rouhi of “corruption on Earth” and “waging war against God.” The Iranian Supreme Court can appeal these sentences.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime is refocusing on enforcing widespread adherence to the mandatory hijab law after briefly and informally relaxing such restrictions in previous months.**
- **The Sari Revolutionary Court sentenced protester Javad Rouhi to death.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces in Iran.**
- **Social media accounts have claimed in recent days that the regime has arrested and sentenced an unidentified former senior official on espionage charges.**
- **The Parliamentary Legal and Judicial Committee reviewed and approved articles of the draft legislation to establish a police force for adolescents and children.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in three cities across three provinces in Iran on January 10. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Asalouyeh, Bushehr Province[6]

- Size: small
- Demographic: oil industry workers
- Protester Activity: strike and protest
- Notes: oil industry workers held strike and protest to demand higher wages

Esfahan, Esfahan Province[7]

- Size: small
- Demographic: University of Esfahan students

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[8]

- Size: small
- Demographic: Allameh Tabatabaei University students

NOTE: CTP defines small protests as fewer than 100 individuals, medium protests as between 100 and 1,000, and large protests as over 1,000.



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 13[9]

- Type: commemoration ceremony for killed protesters
- Location: Karaj, Alborz Province

Social media accounts have claimed in recent days that the regime has arrested and sentenced an unidentified former senior official on espionage charges.[10] Some social media accounts claimed that the official may be former deputy defense minister Alireza Akbari, who served in the reformist Khatami administration.[11] Akbari is reportedly close to Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani and former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani.[12] Unidentified sources told UK-based Amwaj Media that the regime actors responsible for the arrest and

sentencing may have sought to politically damage Shamkhani or Larijani.[13] Other sources noted to Amwaj Media that the regime arrested Akbari several years ago and suggested that the more recent arrest is related to a different former official.[14]

The Parliamentary Legal and Judicial Committee reviewed and approved articles of the draft legislation to establish a police force for adolescents and children on January 10.[15] Hossein Ali Hajji Deligan—a lawmaker on the committee—stated that the regime plans to establish a database to track minors who commit “violations.” Establishing a police force dedicated to adolescents and children will likely take the regime several months and may suggest that some officials view the protests among Iranian youth as a long-term threat. Some human rights activists have estimated that security forces have killed around 70 minors since the protests began in September 2022.[16]

IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami appointed Brigadier General Hassan Mortazavi as the commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Quds Regional Operational Headquarters on January 10.[17] This headquarters is responsible for all IRGC conventional units and internal security in Sistan and Baluchistan and Kerman provinces. President Ebrahim Raisi and his cabinet approved the former commander, Brigadier General Mohammad Karami, as Sistan and Baluchistan provincial governor on December 25. The new commander, Mortazavi, has served in the IRGC Ground Forces since the Iran-Iraq War. He previously commanded the IRGC Ground Forces Sameh ol Aemeh Operational Headquarters, which oversees all IRGC conventional units and internal security in North Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi, and South Khorasan provinces. [18]

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf announced that the regime has resolved its “misunderstandings” with Azerbaijan on January 10.[19] Ghalibaf paid an official visit to Turkey in recent days and met with Azerbaijani officials. Tensions between Tehran and Baku have mounted in recent months as Iranian officials have accused Azerbaijan of hosting Israeli intelligence agents, as CTP has previously reported.[20]

A fire at a pharmaceutical factory in Qazvin Province killed four and injured three on January 10.[21]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

[1] <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/women-go-without-hijabs-as-confusion-...>

[2] <https://isna dot ir/xdN6N3>

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

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-2-2023>

[5] <https://www.mizan dot news/4589463>

[6] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1612788770335490049?s=20&t=aGp2QQ...>; <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1612913671629570048?s=20&t=ukRcZ8U2xppK...>

[7] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1612789122342719488?s=20&t=aGp2QQ...

[8] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1612839817431191553?s=20&t=mJB3McA2A...

[9] https://t.me/javanane_ka/524

- [10] <https://twitter.com/AbasAslani/status/1612331672787107840>
- [11] <https://twitter.com/SaeedAganji/status/1612878839155412999>
- [12] <https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-trial-of-senior-ex-official-poi...>
- [13] <https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-trial-of-senior-ex-official-poi...>
- [14] <https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-trial-of-senior-ex-official-poi...>
- [15] <http://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011020000963>
- [16] https://twitter.com/HRANA_English/status/1612589346531540993
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- [18] <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Irans-Reserve-of-Last-Res...>
- [19] <https://isna dot ir/xdN6Jb>
- [20] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-17;>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>
- [21] <https://farsi.iranpress dot com/iran-i225721>

Iran Crisis Update, January 11, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 11, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Annika Ganzeveld

January 11, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

CTP recorded no protests in Iran on January 11, 2023 for the first time since September 16, 2022. Protest turnout has steadily declined since December 2022. It is possible, however, that some protests occurred on January 11 that CTP did not record. The information space has become increasingly muddy since the beginning of the protest movement, partly due to expanding regime censorship. Protesters have increasingly taken to the streets without their cellphones in recent weeks as well, which may be limiting the amount of information available in the open-source environment.[1]

The movement that began with the regime killing Mahsa Amini is not yet over despite the declining protest turnout. Protest coordinators and organizations have called for more demonstrations in the coming days (detailed below). CTP will continue to monitor the situation and report on the extent to which those planned demonstrations materialize. The protest movement has furthermore begun to set conditions, developing the necessary infrastructure and networks, to sustain a protracted struggle against the regime, and citizens continue to attack regime forces. An individual threw an improvised explosive into a Basij base in Shiraz, Fars Province on January 11, for instance.[2]

Regime plans to execute a former senior official may be related to infighting within the Iranian political and security establishments. The judiciary announced on January 11 that it sentenced Alireza Akbari to death on espionage charges.[3] Akbari was a deputy defense minister under the reformist Khatami administration and is a British-Iranian dual national. The Intelligence and Security Ministry accused Akbari of providing information to British intelligence services, and the regime reportedly arrested him in 2019.[4] UK-based outlets Amwaj Media and Iran International separately reported that Iranian state security services are targeting Akbari to politically damage Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani, although CTP cannot verify these reports. Akbari was a deputy to Shamkhani when the latter was defense minister from 1997 to 2005. Rumors have circulated in recent months claiming that some regime hardliners have sought to replace Shamkhani with their preferred candidates, as CTP previously reported.[5] One Iranian journalist, Saeed Aganji, has made uncorroborated claims in recent days that candidates to replace Shamkhani include:[6]

- Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Major General Gholam Ali Rashid;
- Supreme Leader Representative to the SNSC Saeed Jalili;
- Interior Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi; and
- Former Defense Minister and Interior Minister Brigadier General Mostafa Mohammad Najjar.

President Ebrahim Raisi submitted his proposed budget to Parliament on January 11, allocating significantly more funds to the military and security services and propaganda bodies.[7] The regime could use these greater funds to monitor its people, suppress protests, and promote disinformation more effectively. Radio Farda reported the following budget increases:[8]

- Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) funding by 28 percent;

- Artesh funding by 36 percent;
- Law Enforcement Command funding by 44 percent;
- Intelligence and Security Ministry funding by 52 percent;
- State Prisons Organization by 55.5 percent;
- Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting by 42 percent; and
- Islamic Propaganda Organization funding by 53 percent.

It is unclear to what these changes amount in real purchasing power, however, given the high rate of inflation in Iran. The Statistical Center of Iran estimated that the average inflation rate for the first nine months of the Persian calendar year (March 2022-March 2023) hit 45 percent overall. [9] Such a sharp increase in the prices of certain goods, in addition to the continued depreciation of the Iranian rial against other currencies, may negate the impact of some of the budgetary increases. Parliament will likely amend the budget before approving it as well, meaning these allocations could still change significantly.

Key Takeaways

- **CTP recorded no protests in Iran for the first time since September 16, 2022. The movement that began with the regime killing Mahsa Amini is not yet over despite the declining protest turnout, however.**
- **Regime plans to execute a former senior official may be related to infighting within the Iranian political and security establishments.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi submitted his proposed budget to Parliament, allocating significantly more funds to the military and security services and propaganda bodies.**
- **The Hamedan and Karaj neighborhood youth groups criticized on January 11 the regime mismanagement of the energy sector that has caused natural gas shortages in Iran.**
- **The Iranian Supreme Court suspended the death sentence of 19-year-old protester Mohammad Broghani.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.**

Anti-Regime Protests

Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 12[10]

- Type: protests commemorating executed protesters
- Location: countrywide

January 13[11]

- Type: commemoration ceremony for killed protesters
- Location: Karaj, Alborz Province

January 29-30[12]

- Type: demonstrations
- Location: countrywide

The Hamedan and Karaj neighborhood youth groups criticized on January 11 the regime mismanagement of the energy sector that has caused natural gas shortages in Iran.

[13] Regime officials have repeatedly warned of such energy shortages and urged citizens to conserve gas in recent months.[14] These shortages will likely drive some popular frustration toward the regime.

The Iranian Supreme Court suspended the death sentence of 19-year-old protester Mohammad Broghani on January 11.[15] The Supreme Court is reviewing his case and will issue a decision on a potential retrial.

Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei discussed women's affairs in a meeting with female judiciary employees on January 11.[16] Ejei ordered the judiciary to "establish a structure and mechanism to improve the situation and position" of female employees. Ejei also instructed the judiciary to adjust the working hours of female employees so that "they have the necessary energy and vitality to attend to family responsibilities and other matters such as continuing education when they return home." Ejei repeated his defense of the mandatory hijab law during the meeting as well.

President Ebrahim Raisi appointed Abdol Hossein Khosrou Panah as Supreme Cultural Revolution Council secretary on January 11.[17] This council is a regime body that prepares resolutions on cultural, religious, and social affairs, which Parliament then reviews. Khosrou Panah is a philosophy and religion academic who has held various leadership positions in the Qom Seminary, Islamic Azad University, and the IRGC Baghiyatollah Socio-Cultural Headquarters. [18] Former IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari has overseen this headquarters since 2019 and manages various indoctrination and propaganda efforts there.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 11.[19] Official readouts stated that the two discussed economic cooperation, regional affairs, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

[1] <https://news.sky.com/story/iran-protests-teens-bravery-offers-glimmer-of...>

[2] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1613138598869475329?s=20&t=hRtF4X...>

[3] <http://www.mizan dot news/4592141>

[4] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64240226>

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-18;>

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-3-2023;>
<https://twitter.com/SaeedAganji/status/1613275221951143937>

[7] www.president dot ir/fa/141831

[8] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-1402-budget-military-propaganda-securi...>

[9] <https://www.voanews.com/a/iran-s-inflation-rate-topped-48-in-december/69...>

[10] [https://t.me/javanane_a/65;](https://t.me/javanane_a/65) [https://twitter.com/khiyar_shoor/status/1612904460006883328;](https://twitter.com/khiyar_shoor/status/1612904460006883328)
<https://twitter.com/OutFarsi/status/1612919265249599501>

[11] https://t.me/javanane_ka/524

[12] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...

[13] [https://t.me/hmd_javanan/457;](https://t.me/hmd_javanan/457) https://t.me/javanane_ka/526

[14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-28>

[15] <http://www.mizan dot news/4591368>

[16] <http://www.mizan> dot news/4591368

[17] <http://www> dot irna dot ir/news/84996143

[18] www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011021001106

[19] www.president dot ir/fa/141849

Iran Crisis Update, January 12, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 12, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Annika Ganzeveld

January 12, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

CTP recorded no protests in Iran for the second consecutive day on January 12, 2023. Some protest organizers called for demonstrations to commemorate executed protesters, but CTP did not record indications that these demonstrations materialized.[1] Regular expressions of anti-regime sentiment are continuing throughout Iran, however.[2] Protest groups have also called for demonstrations on January 19—20, which coincide with scheduled university exams. Gathering students in-person to take the tests could catalyze demonstrations. Regime officials have discussed issuing localized or possibly countrywide internet shutdowns on these dates ostensibly to prevent cheating on the exams, as CTP previously reported, and could use such measures to facilitate protest suppression.[3]

The judiciary may have executed Alireza Akbari—a former deputy defense minister and British-Iranian dual national. Iranian state media outlet, Jam-e Jam, reported that the regime hanged him the morning of January 12.[4] No other state-run outlets or officials have confirmed this report at the time of this writing. The judiciary previously announced on January 11 that it had sentenced Akbari to death on espionage charges.[5] IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency published an article detailing accusations that Akbari provided information to British intelligence services.[6] The article also implied that Akbari provided the information that helped Mossad assassinate senior Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri Zadeh outside Tehran in November 2020.

There is a growing number of indications that some elements of the state security services are coopting Akbari's case to remove Ali Shamkhani as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Akbari was a deputy to Shamkhani when the latter was defense minister from 1997 to 2005, and some UK-based outlets have reported that the Akbari's sentencing was meant to politically damage Shamkhani.[7] IRGC outlets speculated on January 12 that Shamkhani will soon leave his post.[8] Nour News Agency—an Iranian outlet affiliated with the SNSC and Shamkhani—published an article claiming that some officials are using Akbari's arrest to advance their own political agendas.[9] The article also argued that one should not connect Akbari to his former colleagues, implying Shamkhani.

Key Takeaways

- **CTP recorded no protests in Iran for the second consecutive day on January 12, 2023.**
- **The judiciary may have executed Alireza Akbari—a former deputy defense minister and British-Iranian dual national.**
- **There is a growing number of indications that some elements of the state security services are coopting the case of Akbari to remove Ali Shamkhani as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.**

- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid announced that he is engaging the regime on how to address his grievances.**
- **Unidentified gunmen clashed with the LEC at a checkpoint around Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, killing one police officer and injuring two others.**

Anti-Regime Protests

Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 13[10]

- Type: commemoration ceremony for killed protesters
- Location: Karaj, Alborz Province

January 19-20[11]

- Type: demonstrations
- Location: countrywide

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid announced on January 11 that he is engaging the regime on how to address his grievances.[12] He denied rumors that he sent a “negotiating team” to Tehran but stated that he sent “a few friends to Tehran to get a lawyer.” It is unclear to which rumors Abdol Hamid was referring. Abdol Hamid also emphasized the need for dialogue and negotiations and reiterated his criticism that the regime discriminates against its Baloch and Sunni citizens. He made these remarks during a meeting with local leaders from Zahedan and Khash. Abdol Hamid has become an increasingly outspoken regime critic in recent months and has used his weekly Friday sermons in Zahedan to inspire protests.

Unidentified gunmen clashed with the LEC at a checkpoint around Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 12, killing one police officer and injuring two others.[13]

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei discussed the protests in a meeting with eulogists and poets on January 12.[14] Khamenei repeated his accusation that the US and its allies incited the protests to destabilize and divide Iran. Khamenei also claimed that foreign enemies sought to stoke infighting among regime officials.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian discussed cooperation against terrorism in a phone call with Acting Afghan Taliban Foreign Affairs Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi on January 12.[15] Abdollahian condemned the Islamic State attacks in Shiraz in October 2022 and more recently in Kabul on January 11.

[1] https://t.me/javanane_a/65

[2] <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1613587621950771200?s=20&t=nEvptfP24HjX...>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-2023>

[4] <https://t.me/JamejamDaily/135540>

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

[6] [www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/22/2835977](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/22/2835977)

- [7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-11-2023>
- [8] <https://t.me/SEPAHCYBERY/60086>
- [9] [www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/125171](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/125171)
- [10] https://t.me/javanane_ka/524
- [11] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...
- [12] [www.abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/01/12/13256](http://www.abdolhamid.net/persian/2023/01/12/13256)
- [13] [https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011021001255](https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14011021001255)
- [14] [www.farsi.khamenei dot ir/speech-content?id=51746](http://www.farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=51746)
- [15] [www.irna dot ir/news/84996908](http://www.irna.ir/news/84996908)

Iran Crisis Update, January 13, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, Annika Ganzeveld, and Johanna Moore

January 13, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Some protest organizers in Iran are trying to push the protest movement into a new phase—one that could include more militant activity against the Iranian regime. The Karaj Neighborhood Youth has argued in recent days that the movement has entered a “new phase” and “second wave” as protest turnout has continued to decline.[1] The Karaj group has described this new period as featuring greater centralization and cohesion within the movement, external outreach, and insurgent activity. The Karaj group stated on January 4 that the movement has “intensified” its coordination and is making unified decisions regarding “approaches, fighting methods, assistance, etc.”[2] The Karaj group rebranded entirely on January 13, labeling itself as the international communications wing of the Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU)—a coalition of protest groups that formed in December 2022.[3] The Karaj group under its new name announced that the INYU is pursuing two efforts: “1. Building cohesion and cooperation among militant groups inside Iran [and] 2. Connecting with the international community (individuals, organizations, and media).”[4] The group added that the first effort “is currently underway, and soon most militant groups in the field will gather together.” It is unclear how much real influence the INYU has over the protest movement and to what extent its efforts will succeed, especially given the challenges that it has had in generating protest turnout previously.[5] Infighting over leadership within the protest movement could seriously hinder these efforts. It is also unclear to what extent the INYU will continue trying to coordinate overt acts of political defiance, such as demonstrations and strikes.

The rhetoric from the Karaj group highlights the long-term challenge that the regime may face vis-a-vis this movement even if daily protests subside. Even limited success in organizing anti-regime militancy will strain the state security apparatus. The regime already faces long-existing insurgencies in the country's southwestern, southeastern, and northwestern provinces. Iranian Arab, Baloch, and Kurdish militants have leveraged economic and political frustrations among marginalized minorities in the border regions to fuel these groups’ anti-regime agendas for decades. These groups, which include the Kurdistan Free Life Party and Jaish al Adl, have historically conducted attacks into Iran and clashed with security forces regularly in the border regions, where they are based. Increasing militant attacks against the regime would compound this pressure.

Protest activity increased on January 13, primarily in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, after a two-day period of no recorded protests in Iran. This uptick in protests is unsurprising given that CTP has recorded increased protests in Sistan and Baluchistan Province every Friday for several months.[6] Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continues to use his weekly Friday sermons to inspire protests criticizing regime discrimination against Baloch and Sunni citizens. He criticized Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei directly in his speech on January 13, stating that dialogue with poets and religious speakers will not solve the country's problems.[7] Abdol Hamid was likely referencing Khamenei’s meeting with eulogists and poets on January 12.[8]

Key Takeaways

- **Some protest organizers in Iran are trying to push the protest movement into a new phase—one that could include more militant activity against the Iranian**

regime.

- **Protest activity increased, primarily in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, after a two-day period of no recorded protests in Iran. At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces.**
- **Nour News Agency published an article denying speculation that Ali Shamkhani will leave his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi argued that women who do not fully wear the hijab could still support the regime and revolution.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces on January 13. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Tamandan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[9]

- Size: Small

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[10]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protesters held a demonstration in support of prominent Sunni clerics Moulana Abdol Hamid and Moulana Mohammad Hossein Gargij

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[11]

- Size: Medium-to-large
- Demographic: Sunni Friday prayer attendees
- Notes: Protesters formed a human chain around the Makki Mosque, where Abdol Hamid gives his weekly sermons.

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

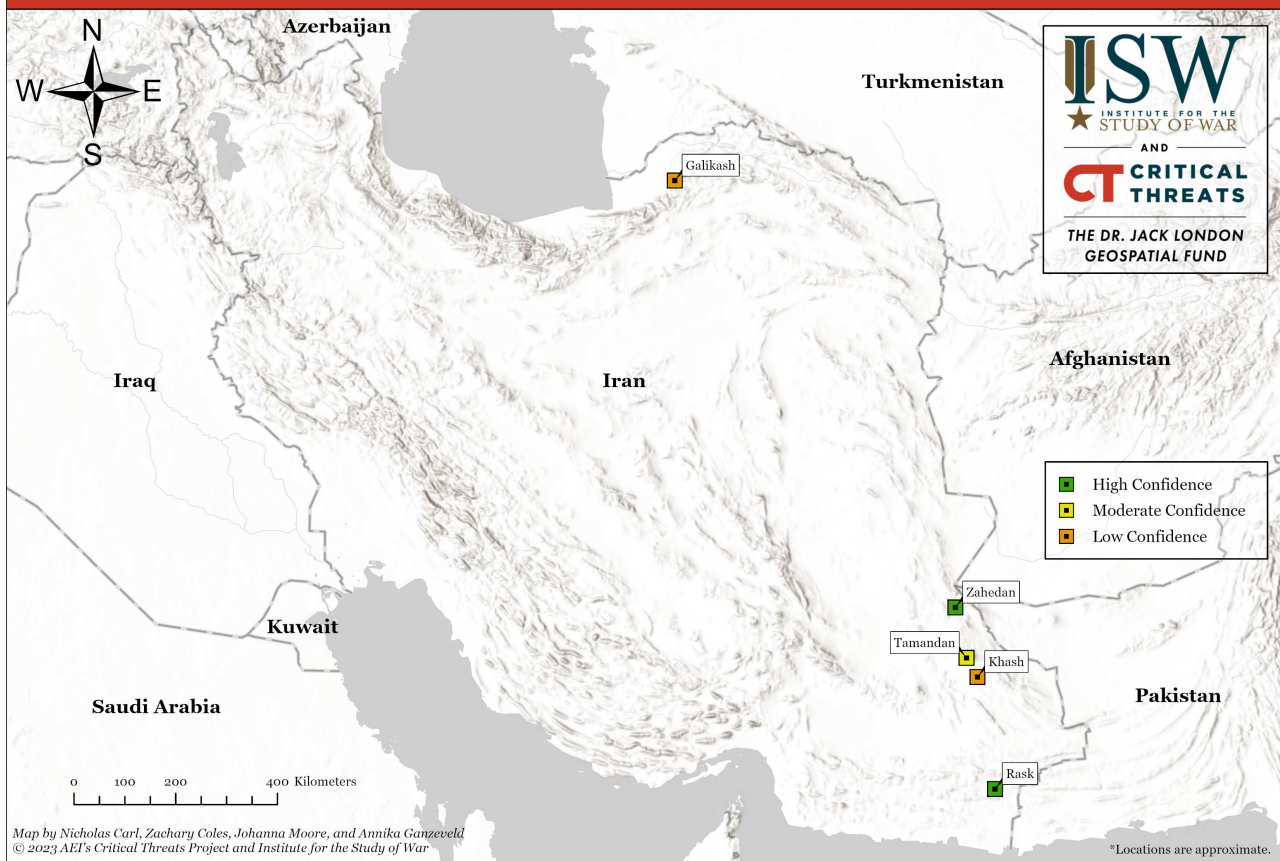
Galikash, Golestan Province[12]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protesters held a demonstration in support of Moulana Mohammad Hossein Gargij

Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[13]

- Size: Small

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 13, 5:30 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 19-20[14]

- Type: demonstrations
- Location: countrywide

Nour News Agency published an article on January 13 denying speculation that Ali Shamkhani will leave his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. [15] Nour News Agency is affiliated with the SNSC and Shamkhani. The media outlet previously published an article on January 12 claiming that some officials are using the arrest and sentencing of Alireza Akbari—a former deputy defense minister and British-Iranian dual national—to force Shamkhani from his position.[16] Akbar was a deputy to Shamkhani when the latter was defense minister from 1997 to 2005.

President Ebrahim Raisi argued on January 13 that women who do not fully wear the hijab could still support the regime and revolution.[17] Raisi was repeating the same argument that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has made in recent months. Khamenei has continually affirmed his support for the hijab requirement but argued that women who only partially veil still support the political establishment.[18] Khamenei has essentially announced that the regime should continue to enforce the mandatory hijab law but tolerate women who do not fully comply.

The regime is temporarily closing various public facilities in some provinces to reduce natural gas consumption. Officials have announced closures to municipal administrative buildings, schools, universities, and other various public facilities in provinces including Tehran, East Azerbaijan, and North Khorasan.[19] The Iranian National Gas Company has stated that Iran is

facing a “gas crisis.” Cold weather patterns persisting in several provinces in the days ahead could further stress gas supplies.[20]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Possible Iranian-backed militants fired a single rocket at the Khor Mor gas field in Sulaymaniyah Province, Iraqi Kurdistan.[21] The Khor Mor is one of the two largest gas fields in Iraq and is primarily operated by Emirati energy companies Dana Gas and Crescent Petroleum. Iranian proxies previously targeted the gas field on October 12 and on several separate occasions in June and July 2022.[22]

[1] https://t.me/ic_UYI/474; https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1613832061558849536

[2] https://t.me/ic_UYI/474

[3] https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1613832061558849536

[4] https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1613945014358540291

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

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/data-analysis-of-the-mahsa-amin...>

[7] [www.abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/01/13/13265](http://www.abdolhamid.net/persian/2023/01/13/13265)

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>

[9] <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1613959375059566594?s=20&t=evstaUqjtQP8...>;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1613928569251454980?t=awhjFePJdIG...>

[10] <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1613854590130343937?s=20&t=evstaUq...>

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1613836233892929538?s=20&t=aGKjFz...>; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1613862594657271808?s=20&t=ZX...>; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1613856400043831297?s=20&t=jN3vsr0...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1613836505679597571?s=20&t=bi7XGp...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1613929462906880001?s=20&t=LDQmph...>; <https://twitter.com/balo0chgirl/status/1613862831283126272>

[12] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1613902934458114048?s=20&t=evstaUqjt...

[13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1613868714855628801?s=20&t=idzn4-...>

[14] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...

[15] [http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/125185](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/125185)

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>

[17] [www.president dot ir/fa/141906](http://www.president.ir/fa/141906)

[18] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-2023>

[19] [http://www dot tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/23/2836503](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/23/2836503);
<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32222523.html>

[20] <https://weather.com/weather/tenday/l/Hor+Tehran+Iran?canonicalCityId=abb...>

[21] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/68156>

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/68155>

[https://www\(dot\)kurdistan24.net/en/story/30429-Rocket-targets-gas-field-in-Sulaimani-Governorate](https://www(dot)kurdistan24.net/en/story/30429-Rocket-targets-gas-field-in-Sulaimani-Governorate)

[https://www\(dot\)alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%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%AD%D9%82%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83](https://www(dot)alaraby.co.uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%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%AD%D9%82%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A8-%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83)

[22] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/missiles-target-khor-mor-gas-f...>

Iran Crisis Update, January 14, 2023

Nicholas Carl and Zachary Coles

January 14, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

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The Iranian judiciary announced on January 14 the execution of Alireza Akbari—a former deputy defense minister and British-Iranian dual national.[1] The judiciary previously announced on January 11 that it had sentenced Akbari to death for espionage charges.[2] Iranian officials and media have accused Akbari of providing information to British intelligence services. CTP has previously assessed that some elements of the security establishment are coopting Akbari's case to force Ali Shamkhani from his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.[3] CTP is not prepared to assess the likelihood of Shamkhani's departure, however.

The potential replacement of Shamkhani could have profound implications for the development and implementation of Iranian security policy domestically and abroad. The SNSC is the highest defense and foreign policy body within the regime. The council, under Khamenei, also dictates and oversees all efforts to quash protests. Its members are senior Iranian political and security figures, including the president, parliament speaker, judiciary chief, and the commanding officers responsible for the Armed Forces General Staff, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Artesh, and Law Enforcement Command (LEC). The supreme leader sends personal representatives to the council on his behalf to articulate his parameters and preferences. Shamkhani dual hats as the SNSC secretary and one of Khamenei's two representatives to the council. Then-President Hassan Rouhani appointed Shamkhani as SNSC secretary in 2013.

Some protest organizers have called for pro-Pahlavi demonstrations on January 16 to commemorate the anniversary of the Shah leaving Iran in 1979. The Iranian Neighborhood United Front released a statement with another group named the Voice of the People Coalition calling for such demonstrations.[4] CTP has no assessment of the degree to which this pro-Pahlavi sentiment represents any part of the protest movement. The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union—the other major umbrella organization for protest groups—has not acknowledged these calls for demonstrations at the time of this writing.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian judiciary announced the execution of Alireza Akbari—a former deputy defense minister and British-Iranian dual national.**
- **The potential replacement of Ali Shamkhani as SNSC secretary could have profound implications for the development and implementation of Iranian security policy domestically and abroad.**
- **Some protest organizers have called for pro-Pahlavi demonstrations on January 16 to commemorate the anniversary of the Shah leaving Iran in 1979.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **An LEC officer died in a hospital due to injuries he sustained in a clash with armed smugglers in Markazi Province days prior.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 14. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[5]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Family members of prisoners sentenced to death held a protest in front of a judiciary building in Tehran

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

Zanjan City, Zanjan Province[6]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Industrial workers
- Notes: Vegetable oil factory workers protested in support of higher wages



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 16

- Type: demonstrations to commemorate the anniversary of the Shah leaving Iran in 1979
- Location: countrywide

January 19-20[7]

- Type: demonstrations
- Location: countrywide

An LEC officer died in a hospital on January 14 due to injuries he sustained in a clash with armed smugglers in Markazi Province days prior.[8]

The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth urged protesters on January 14 to conduct “sabotage operations” against the regime.[9] The Mashhad group encouraged protesters to set banks and government buildings on fire.[10]

President Ebrahim Raisi met with Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan on January 14.[11] Raisi emphasized the readiness of his administration to support the LEC. Radan presented a report to Raisi on the current condition and objectives of the LEC. Radan is a hardline member of the IRGC and has extensive experience crushing political dissent and protests. CTP has previously assessed that Radan will likely adopt a hardline on enforcing the mandatory hijab law.[12]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met with Syrian President Bashar al Assad and Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad in Damascus on January 14. [13] Abdollahian announced that Assad had invited Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to meet with him in Damascus at an unspecified later date.[14] Abdollahian added that Damascus and Tehran plan to renew their long-term strategic cooperation agreement.[15]

[1] [www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/24/2836625](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/24/2836625)

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-11-2023>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>

[4] https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1614319626397323264

[5] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1614268416247971840?s=20&t=McJBY80dB...; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1614236157448970242?s=20&t=MyOWmc...; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1614365257472049152?s=20&t=XLeSZxh...>

[6] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1614182391437791234?s=20&t=U4PURk...>

[7] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...

[8] [www.hamshahrionline dot ir/photo/734630](http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/photo/734630)

[9] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1614274381106106370

[10] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1614274387984764929

[11] [www.president dot ir/fa/141927](http://www.president.ir/fa/141927)

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

[13] [www dot alahednews dot com dot lb/article.php?id=49696&cid=116](http://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=49696&cid=116)

[14] [www dot alahednews dot com dot lb/article.php?id=49696&cid=116](http://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=49696&cid=116)

[15] [https://sana dot sy/en/?p=296792](https://sana.sy/en/?p=296792)

Iran Crisis Update, January 15, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 15, 2023

Nicholas Carl and Zachary Coles

January 15, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

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Iranian protest organizers circulated calls on January 15 for the international community, and especially European parties, to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization. Many well-known protest groups—even those who occasionally seem to disagree with one another—circulated these calls in unison.[1] The protest groups published these calls in Persian and English. This external messaging is consistent with and may reflect the priorities some protest organizers have set in recent days. The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union emphasized its focus on expanding external outreach to the international community on January 13.[2]

Parliamentarian Shahryar Heydari stated on January 15 that Iran will receive an unspecified number of Su-35 fighter jets from Russia early in the next Persian calendar year (March 2023—March 2024).[3] Heydari added that Iran is also purchasing air defense systems, helicopters, and missiles. Heydari is a lawmaker on the Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee. Acquiring Su-35s would advance Iranian leaders' efforts to field an increasingly modern air force that is capable of conducting "offensive" operations and projecting strength abroad.[4]

Key Takeaways

- Iranian protest organizers circulated calls for the international community, and especially European parties, to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization.
- Parliamentarian Shahryar Heydari stated that Iran will receive an unspecified number of Su-35 fighter jets from Russia early in the next Persian calendar year (March 2023—March 2024).
- At least four protests occurred in four cities across four provinces.
- Parliamentarian Shahryar Heydari stated that the state security services have seized approximately as many illegal arms in the past three months as they would ordinarily over two years.

Anti-Regime Protests

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

Galikash, Golestan Province[5]

- Size: Small-to-medium
- Demographic: Supporters of influential Sunni cleric Mohammad Hossein Gargij
- Notes: Supporters gathered outside Gargij's residence to protest his January 12 summons from a special clerical court.

Bandar-e Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province[6]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[7]

- Size: Small

Gachsaran, Kohgilouyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Oil industry workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 16[9]

- Type: demonstrations to commemorate the anniversary of the Shah leaving Iran in 1979
- Location: countrywide

January 19-20[10]

- Type: demonstrations

- Location: countrywide

Parliamentarian Shahryar Heydari stated on January 15 that the state security services have seized approximately as many illegal arms in the past three months as they would ordinarily over two years.[11]

Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei met with newly appointed Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan on January 15.[12] Ejei emphasized the readiness of the judiciary to support the LEC. Radan presented a report to Ejei on the current condition and objectives of the LEC. Radan had a similar meeting with President Ebrahim Raisi on January 14.[13]

President Ebrahim Raisi met with officials from the Iranian National Gas Company on January 15 to discuss the natural gas shortages.[14] The regime has briefly closed various banks, public facilities, and universities in some provinces in recent days to reduce gas consumption.[15] These gas shortages have reportedly reduced steel production significantly.[16]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

[1] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1614646158462263296;
https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1614677154033188865

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-13-2023>

[3] [http://www.tasnimnews_dot com/fa/news/1401/10/25/2837056](http://www.tasnimnews_dot_com/fa/news/1401/10/25/2837056)

[4] https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications...

[5] https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1614641102027374593?s=20&t=e_IUF8k0lyZ_...; https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1614640178248794113?s=20&t=GyqsWkrL_CRc...; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/summons-sunni-cleric-iran-gathering-support...>

[6] <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1614605389366177796?s=20&t=rv2Cf6J...>

[7] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1614719278439346176?s=20&t=BCETHd...>

[8] <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1614689383348674560?s=20&t=yEoGXOmqePUJ...>

[9] https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1614319626397323264

[10] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...

[11] [http://www.tasnimnews_dot com/fa/news/1401/10/25/2836899](http://www.tasnimnews_dot_com/fa/news/1401/10/25/2836899)

[12] [http://www.farsnews_dot ir/news/14011025001005](http://www.farsnews_dot_ir/news/14011025001005)

[13] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-14-2023>

[14] [http://www.president_dot ir/fa/141946](http://www.president_dot_ir/fa/141946)

[15] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-13-2023>

[16] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/cut-gas-industry-steel-iran-shortage/322241...>

Iran Crisis Update, January 16, 2023

Nicholas Carl and Zachary Coles

January 16, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

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Ongoing gas shortages have sparked protests in northeastern Iran. Protesters gathered in front of the local governor's office and lit a fire in the streets in Torbat-e Jam, Khorasan Razavi Province on January 16.[1] Protesters were responding to the Iranian regime cutting gas services for thousands of customers in the city in recent days. Citizens have struggled to keep warm in the winter conditions. Some locals have claimed that the regime has cut electricity to the city as well. [2] These energy shortages could stoke further protests throughout Iran, especially in its northern and eastern provinces in the coming days. Iranian officials have increasingly warned of a national "gas crisis" in recent days and briefly closed banks, public facilities, and universities in some provinces to reduce gas consumption.[3]

The regime could escalate significantly against protesters in Torbat-e Jam if the demonstrations expand meaningfully. The Artesh Ground Forces 38th Mohammad Rasoul Ollah Armored Brigade is headquartered in the city. The regime is likely particularly sensitive to instability in this location because of this armored division, upon which the regime relies in its efforts to secure the Iran-Afghanistan border.

Protest organizers seemingly failed to generate pro-Pahlavi demonstrations on January 16. The Iranian Neighborhood United Front released a statement with another group named the Voice of the People Coalition calling for such demonstrations to commemorate the anniversary of the Shah leaving Iran in 1979.[4] CTP recorded no significant uptick in protest activity on January 16. The protests that did occur seemed related to domestic issues, such as gas shortages and political suppression, rather than about the Shah leaving Iran.

Key Takeaways

- **Ongoing gas shortages have sparked protests in northeastern Iran.**
- **Protest organizers seemingly failed to generate pro-Pahlavi demonstrations.**
- **At least four protests occurred in four cities across four provinces.**
- **IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi stated that 60 security officers have died and over 5,000 were injured in the protests.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least four protests occurred in four cities across four provinces on January 16. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Torbat-e Jam, Khorasan Razavi Province[5]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protest Activity:** Protesters set fires in streets and gathered in front of the local governor's office.
- **Regime Repression:** Security forces clashed with protesters.
- **Notes:** Protesters gathered to demonstrate against natural gas shortages.

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[6]

- Size: Small-to-medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for killed protester Houman Abdollahi

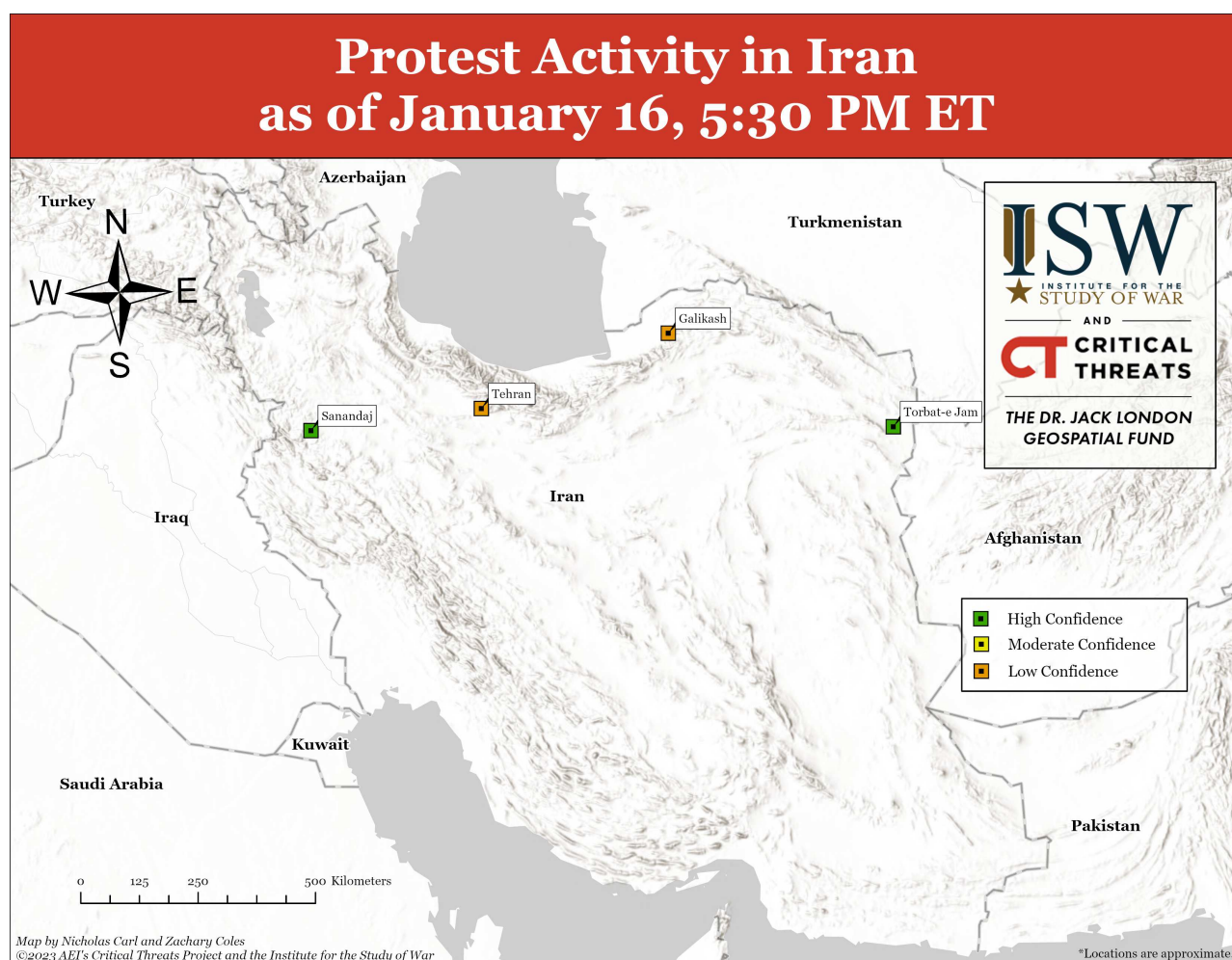
CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Galikash, Golestan Province[7]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Supporters of Sunni cleric Mohammad Hossein Gargij
- Notes: Supports gathered outside Gargij's residence to protest his January 12 summons from a special clerical court.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Family members of prisoners sentenced to death held a protest in front of a judiciary building in Tehran.



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 17[9]

- Type: Demonstrations to commemorate 40 days since the judiciary executed Mohsen Shekari

- Location: Tehran City, Tehran Province

January 19-20[10]

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry released a statement on January 16 denying that executed British-Iranian dual national Alireza Akbari served as deputy defense minister.[11] The judiciary announced Akbari's execution on January 14 after sentencing him to death on espionage charges.[12] The defense ministry statement alleged that Akbari only served as Defense Studies Department director in the ministry. This statement contradicts reports from Iranian state media that have explicitly labeled Akbari as the deputy defense minister for foreign relations.[13] The defense ministry is likely trying to downplay the significance of a former senior official being an alleged foreign agent. The defense ministry may be also trying to politically distance itself from association with Akbari. The Supreme National Security Council and its secretary, Ali Shamkhani, have also sought to distance themselves in recent days.[14]

IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fadavi stated on January 16 that 60 security officers have died and over 5,000 were injured in the protests.[15] Independent open-source analysts have assessed that closer to 73 officers have died since September 2022—the most that have died in a single Iranian protest wave since the revolution in 1979.[16]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani traveled to Baghdad to meet with senior Iraqi officials on January 16.[17] Ghaani's visit comes one day after Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed al Sudani advocated for the continued presence of US troops in Iraq in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*.[18]

[1] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-gas-cut-protest/32225417.html>

[2] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-gas-shortage-crisis-people-protests-in...>

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

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-14-2...>

[6] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1614957031818989569?s=20&t=5vvwE7...

[7] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1615012712055980037?s=20&t=pO_9DaqmL...

[8] <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1615026951869063173?s=20&t=5vvwE7XDuJgF...>

[9] https://t.me/teh_javanan/97

[10] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...

[11] [www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/125373](http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/125373)

[12] [.https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-14-2023](https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-14-2023)

[13] [www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/22/2835977](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/22/2835977)

[14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>

[15] <http://www.defapress dot ir/fa/news/567543>

[16] <https://twitter.com/Alfoneh/status/1610465044210278403>

[17] <https://twitter.com/sabreenS11/status/1614992262668386305?s=20&t=1dDEKQj...>

[18] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-prime-minister-supports-indefinite-u-...>

Iran Crisis Update, January 17, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Annika Ganzeveld, and Zachary Coles

January 17, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Protest activity among petrochemical workers increased significantly on January 17, suggesting protest coordination among some labor groups. Workers protested and went on strike in at least six different locations in five provinces in response to labor-related grievances. CTP has not observed calls for such actions in recent days, suggesting that workers used their own local networks to coordinate this activity. If workers did, indeed, rely on separate labor networks to organize these protests, that could indicate that Tehran confronts yet another source of organization and energy for anti-regime activities.

The timing of this protest activity is particularly noteworthy given the severe natural gas shortages in Iran. Iranian officials have increasingly warned of a national “gas crisis” in recent days.[1] The regime has cut gas service to some locations and closed banks, public facilities, and universities in some provinces to reduce gas consumption.[2] Protest coordinators may have intentionally organized the demonstrations and strikes to apply greater economic pressure on the regime.

Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib defended Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani from unspecified political attacks on January 17. [3] Khatib stated that “recent attacks” on Shamkhani were “unfair.” Khatib also praised the contributions that Shamkhani had made in the national security field. These statements support CTP’s assessment that some hardline elements in the Iranian security apparatus are trying to use the recent execution of British-Iranian dual national Alireza Akbari to remove Shamkhani as SNSC secretary, possibly as a continuation of a long-running campaign to do so.[4] Akbari was a deputy to Shamkhani when the latter was defense minister from 1997 to 2005, although the Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry has tried to deny this fact.[5]

Russian presidential aide Igor Levitin met with several senior Iranian officials in Tehran on January 17. Levitin discussed bilateral cooperation on transportation and oil and gas initiatives in separate meetings with Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani and Vice President Mohammad Mokhber.[6] Levitin also discussed bilateral cooperation on monetary and banking efforts, such as implementing mechanisms to evade Western sanctions, during a meeting with Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Protest activity among petrochemical workers increased significantly, suggesting protest coordination among some labor groups.**
- **Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib defended Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani from unspecified political attacks.**
- **Russian Presidential Aide Igor Levitin met with several senior Iranian officials in Tehran.**
- **At least seven protests occurred in seven cities across six provinces including the petrochemical workers’ activities.**

- **The Iranian Neighborhood United Front (INUF) tweeted declaring its support for Reza Pahlavi.**
- **A Tehran Provincial prosecutor announced that the LEC identified and arrested an alleged protest leader tied to a neighborhood youth protest group.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi discussed efforts toward achieving “cultural transformation” in a Supreme Cultural Revolution Council meeting.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least seven protests occurred in seven cities across six provinces on January 17. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Asalouyeh, Bushehr Province[8]

- Size: Small-to-medium
- Demographic: Petrochemical workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest
- Notes: Protest related to labor grievances

Ilam City, Ilam Province[9]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Petrochemical workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest
- Notes: Protest related to labor grievances

Abadan, Khuzestan Province[10]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Petrochemical workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest
- Notes: Protest related to labor grievances

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Regime Repression: Regime security forces reportedly used tear gas against protesters

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

Shiraz, Fars Province[12]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Ministry of Oil employees
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest

Bandar-e Lengeh, Hormozgan Province[13]

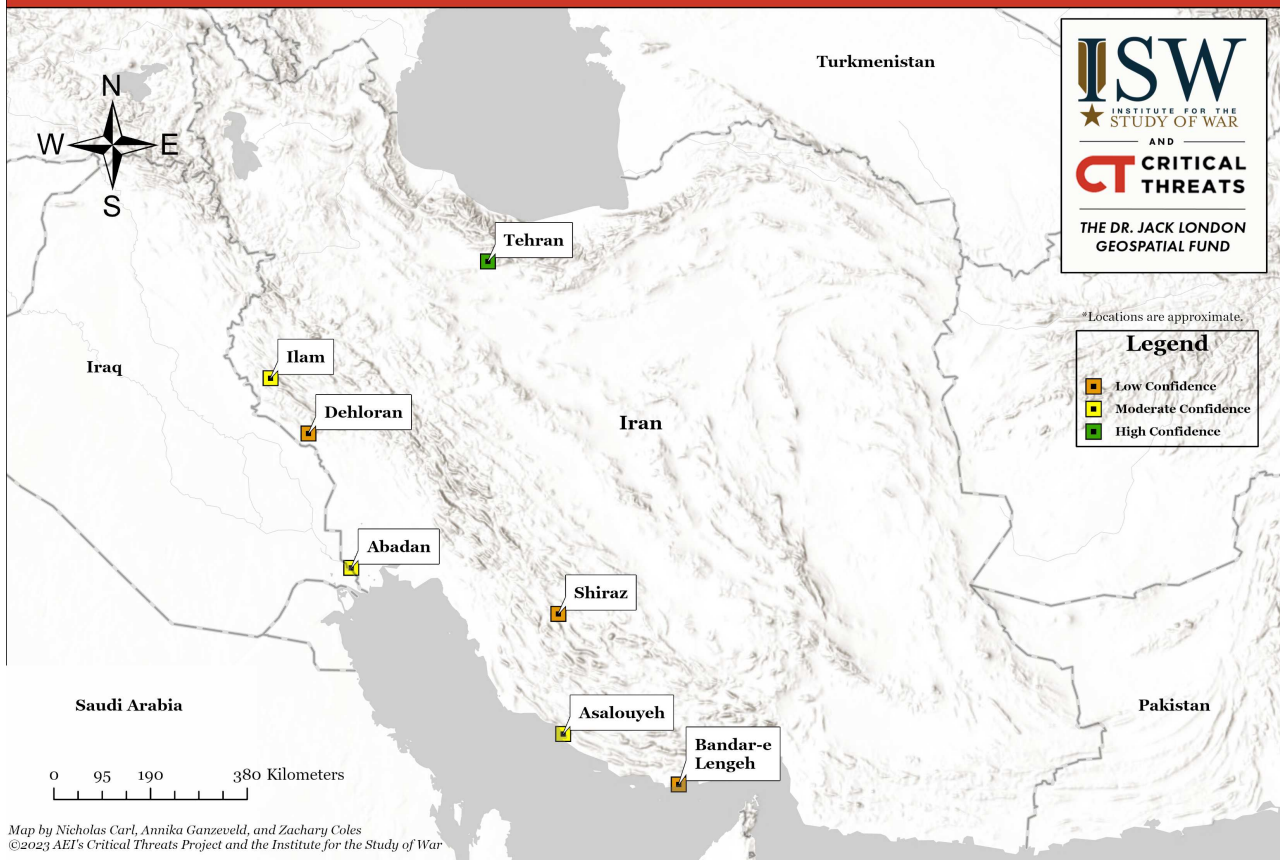
- Size: Small
- Demographic: Petrochemical workers
- Protester Activity: Strike and protest
- Notes: Protest related to labor grievances

Dehloran, Ilam Province[14]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Petrochemical workers

- Protester Activity: Strike and protest
- Notes: Protest related to labor grievances

Correction - Protest Activity in Iran as of January 17, 5:30 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 19-20[15]

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The Iranian Neighborhood United Front (INUF) tweeted declaring its support for Reza Pahlavi on January 17.[16] The INUF described Pahlavi as the best individual to defend the rights of the Iranian people in the international community and form a coalition of political parties to replace the Islamic Republic.

CTP has not observed significant support for the Pahlavi family in our coverage of the protests thus far. Demonstrators used pro-Pahlavi chants in some cases in previous major protest waves, such as the 2017-18 Dey protests, but CTP has not seen this sentiment reflected in any meaningful way in the current protests. The INUF tried to organize pro-Pahlavi demonstrations on January 16 but failed to generate any observable protest activity.[17]

A Tehran Provincial prosecutor announced on January 17 that the LEC identified and arrested an alleged protest leader tied to a neighborhood youth protest group.[18] The prosecutor claimed that the neighborhood youth group cooperated with foreign intelligence services to incite unrest in Iran and provide financial support to the protest movement. The prosecutor also accused the protest leader of communicating with UK-based Iran International—an offense that regime officials have argued is tantamount to cooperating with terrorists.[19]

President Ebrahim Raisi discussed efforts toward achieving “cultural transformation” in a Supreme Cultural Revolution Council meeting on January 17.[20] This council is a regime policy body responsible for drafting resolutions on cultural, religious, and social affairs for Parliament to consider. Raisi stated in the meeting that the council should act as a “cultural headquarters”—implying some kind of operational function—rather than solely making and monitoring the implementation of relevant policies. The council approved the appointment of Abdol Hossein Khosrou Panah to a four-year term as its secretary as well. Khosrou Panah is a philosophy and religion academic who has held various leadership positions in the Qom seminary, Islamic Azad University, and the IRGC Baghiyatollah Socio-Cultural Headquarters.[21] Former IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari has overseen this headquarters since 2019 and manages various indoctrination and propaganda efforts there.

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid criticized the regime on January 17 for the ongoing natural gas shortages.[22] Iranian officials have increasingly warned of a national “gas crisis” in recent days and closed banks, public facilities, and universities in some provinces to reduce gas consumption.[23] Abdol Hamid asserted that the regime “ignoring societal leaders and selecting inefficient managers” have caused these energy issues.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>

[3] <http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/27/2838433>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>

[6] <http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/125432>; <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401102718478/%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%DB%8C>; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85001536/%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D9%87%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%AA-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AF>

[7] <http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/126458>; <https://www.mizannews.com/4598602/%D9%BE%DB%8C%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1%DA%A9-%D8%A8/>

- [8] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1615337068024020993?s=20&t=V7pqOy...
- [9] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615343777698426882?s=20&t=ca9eBx...>
- [10] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1615414266391105543?s=20&t=PZ_Diu...
- [11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615411386674208775?s=20&t=wJtsx3...>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1615435232965951491?s=20&t=EsYQsi...; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1615429039388327936?s=20&t=ZMXK91R...>
- [12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615263435981479937?s=20&t=ca9eBx...>
- [13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615270060041572354?s=20&t=ca9eBx...>
- [14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615251054895026177?s=20&t=ca9eBx...>
- [15] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...
- [16] https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1615319475863097344
- [17] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
- [18] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/tehran/news/14011027000521>
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- [21] www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011021001106
- [22] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1615261112932392961>
- [23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>

Iran Crisis Update, January 18, 2023

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

January 18, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Protest activity in Iran may increase on January 19-20. Protest organizers have issued widespread calls for demonstrations on these days.[1] These organizers have failed occasionally to generate significant increases in protest activity in response to their calls, possibly due to discordant messaging and internal fissures within the protest movement.[2] But protest groups are extraordinarily unified in their calls for demonstrations on January 19-20. Most major protest groups and umbrella organizations have urged citizens to take to the streets on these days.

The regime could use planned internet disruptions to suppress the upcoming demonstrations. Senior Iranian officials have discussed in recent weeks implementing a countrywide internet shutdown for several hours on January 19-20 to prevent cheating on scheduled university entrance exams.[3] Information and Communications Technology Minister Isah Zareh Pour insisted on January 18 that the regime would only impose localized disruptions in “exam areas,” although it is far from clear whether the regime possesses such technical capabilities.[4]

Iran faces worsening domestic conditions amid the ongoing natural gas shortage throughout the country. These gas shortages are continuing throughout Golestan, North Khorasan, and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces.[5] Social media users have documented long lines at gasoline stations in cities in Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, and Esfahan provinces.[6] Other users have reported the deaths of thousands of livestock in Khorasan Razavi and Ardabil provinces due to increased air pollution caused by burning non-gasoline alternatives.[7] Moinuddin Saeedi—a parliamentarian representing Sistan and Baluchistan Province—described gas as a “luxury commodity” within the province.[8]

The ongoing gas disruptions—and additional reports of water shortages in Esfahan and Khorasan Razavi provinces—could reinvigorate anti-regime protests in the coming weeks.[9] Interior Minister Vahidi denied on January 18 that the regime has issued gas cuts, contradicting an Alborz province official’s statement on the same day announcing gas-preserving bank closures.[10] Contradictory and tone-deaf messaging from Iranian officials—some of whom previously boasted about Iran’s large natural gasoline supplies—may inflame the protests planned for January 19 and 20.[11]

Key Takeaways

- **Protest activity in Iran may increase on January 19-20.**
- **Iran faces worsening domestic conditions amid the ongoing natural gas shortage throughout the country.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city across one province.**
- **The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth tweeted declaring its support for and loyalty to Reza Pahlavi.**
- **Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi denied that Ali Shamkhani will leave his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.**

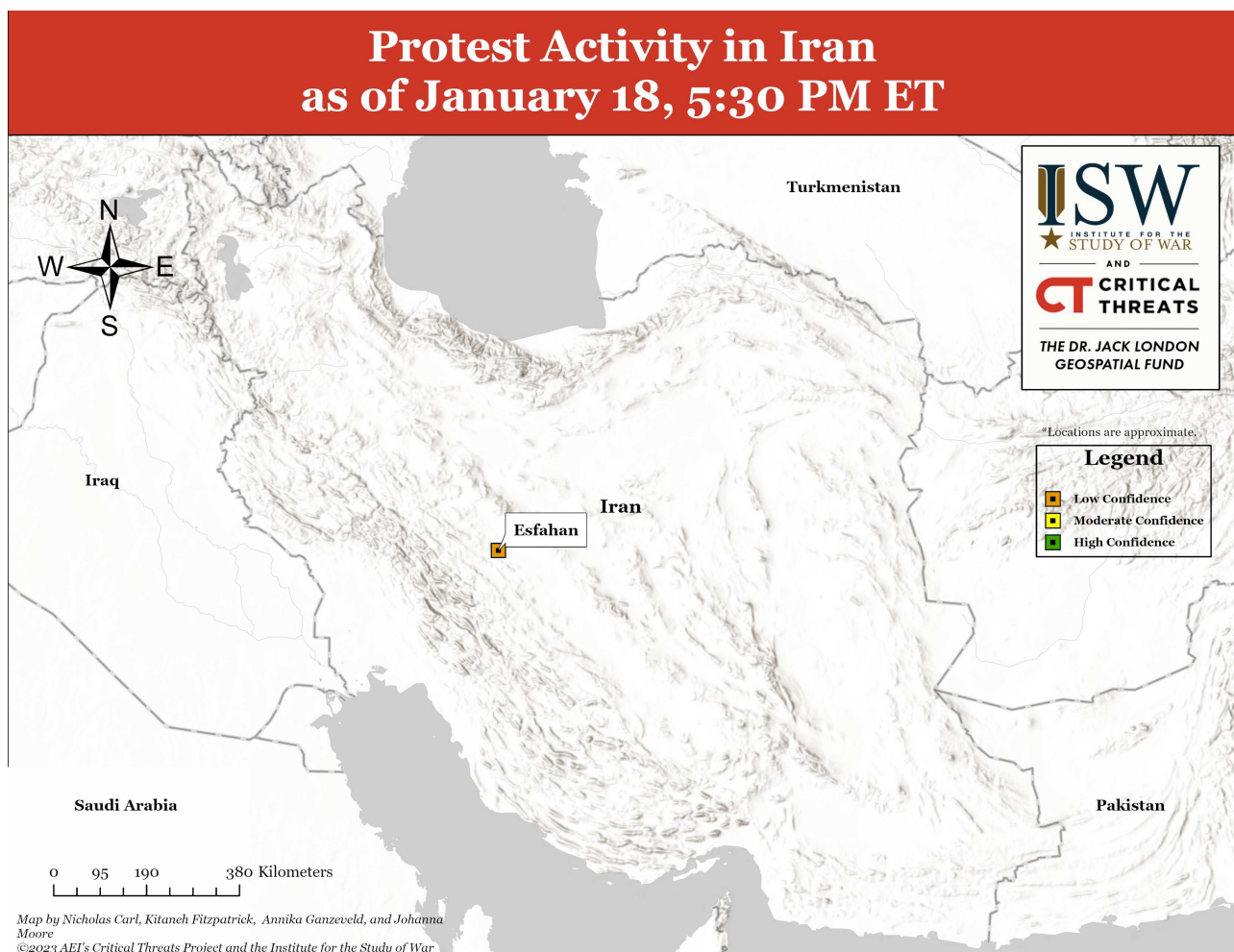
- Social media users reported a heightened security presence throughout Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.
- The European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the EU to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization.
- Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al Jubier made a blanket statement calling on Iran to end its nuclear program during an interview with CNBC.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on January 18. CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Farmers
- **Notes:** Demonstration against the regime's mismanagement of water. Protest may have occurred on January 16, when a similar protest took place.



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 19-20[13]

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth declared its support for and loyalty to Reza Pahlavi on January 18.[14] The Mashhad group described Pahlavi as the “coalition leader of the new revolution of the Iranian nation.” The Mashhad group is affiliated with the Iranian Neighborhood United Front, which also announced its support for Pahlavi on January 17.[15] CTP has not observed significant support for the Pahlavi family in its coverage of the protests thus far.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi denied that Ali Shamkhani will leave his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary on January 18.[16] Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib separately defended Shamkhani from unspecified political attacks on January 17, as CTP previously reported.[17]

Social media users reported a heightened security presence throughout Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 18. Footage circulated on social media shows IRGC and LEC checkpoints severely restricting movement into the city.[18] It is unclear whether these IRGC personnel belong to the IRGC Ground Forces or Basij Organization. Other reports claimed that regime authorities have arrested dozens of Zahedan residents in recent days.[19] Reports of increased security throughout Zahedan precede calls for countrywide protests on January 19-20 and prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid’s weekly Friday prayer sermon.[20]

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with officials from the Islamic Propaganda Organization (IPO) on January 18.[21] The IPO is a cultural and religious body that reports directly to the supreme leader and is responsible for promoting regime ideology and narratives. Khamenei ordered the IPO to “double its work and efforts.” President Ebrahim Raisi similarly discussed efforts toward achieving “cultural transformation” in a meeting of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council on January 17.[22]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

The European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the EU to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization on January 18.[23] The European Parliament condemned the IRGC’s repression of protesters, human rights violations, and drone sales to Russia. This resolution is non-binding for EU member states. Several Iranian protests groups celebrated the resolution as a victory for the protest movement.[24]

Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al Jubier made a blanket statement calling on Iran to end its nuclear program during an interview with CNBC on December 18. [25] CNBC journalist Hadley Gamble asked al Jubier if Saudi Arabia was less safe with Iran enriching uranium to 60 percent. Al Jubier inaccurately argued that Iran is obligated to give up its nuclear program in accordance with guidelines of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The Non-Proliferation Treaty restricts Iran from developing a nuclear weapon but not from having a peaceful nuclear energy program, although it does require Iran to cooperate with the IAEA, which Tehran has not fully done.[26]

[1] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1615597475061981185;
https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1615790591396438016;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CndZm60OLQu/>

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

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-2023>

[4] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011028000401>

[5] <https://www dot radiofarda dot com/a/32228989.html>

[6] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1615799528954658816?s=20&t=J72WPXOSp...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615794809465085952> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615823843699920896?s=20&t=J72WPX...>

- [7] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615811106294857728?s=20&t=J72WPX...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615810671358185478?s=20&t=J72WPX...>
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- [18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615678272737775616?s=20&t=zCS-g7...> ; <https://twitter.com/balo0chgir/status/1615793116908294148> ; <https://twitter.com/Jangalkhoo/status/1615808736341200922?s=20&t=zCS-g7...>
- [19] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1615772301315768326?s=20&t=zCS-g7w...>
- [20] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...
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- [24] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1614725793380458497?s=20&t=yeR5N_L...
https://twitter.com/javanane_hmd/status/1615719399670927368?s=20&t=yeR5N...
https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1615701734856478721?s=20&t=yeR5N_LJF8J...
- [25] <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/18/iran-has-an-obligation-to-give-up-its-nu...>
- [26] <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/>

Iran Crisis Update, January 19, 2023

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

January 19, 2023, 7:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The Iranian regime is likely escalating against prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid. Social media users continued to document a heightened security presence in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province ahead of Abdol Hamid's weekly Friday prayer sermon and protests throughout the city. Security personnel within the past several days have reportedly blocked all roads leading to Zahedan, established new checkpoints restricting movement into the city, and detained custodians of the mosque where Abdol Hamid delivers his sermons.[1] Social media users have additionally reported mass arrests and internet restrictions.[2] Uncorroborated reports claim that the regime also deployed to the Zahedan airport security forces not normally assigned to the airport, alleging that Iranian officials had lost confidence in the local Basij members formerly entrusted with securing the airport.[3] CTP cannot verify this report. An advisor to Abdol Hamid attributed the intensified security environment in Zahedan to LEC Commander Ali Reza Radan, whom Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed on January 7.[4] CTP previously assessed that Khamenei likely appointed Radan, a hardline member of the IRGC with extensive experience in crushing political dissent, as law enforcement commander partly due to dissatisfaction with the LEC's response to the Mahsa Amini protest movement.[5]

A provincial Sistan and Baluchistan intelligence unit separately announced on January 19 that it had dismantled two Islamic State-affiliated groups within the province.[6] It is possible that the regime may seek to coopt reports of extremism in Sistan and Baluchistan in attempt to justify the violent suppression of acts of anti-regime defiance throughout the province.

Protest organizations and coordinators seemingly failed to increase protest activity on January 19. Protest groups had widely issued calls for nation-wide demonstrations on January 19 and 20, as CTP previously reported.[7] CTP recorded no significant upticks in anti-regime protests on January 19, however. Protest activity may still surge on January 20 in a pattern similar to January 8, wherein anti-regime demonstrations notably increased in scale and size on the final day of a three-day call to protest.[8] This pattern may suggest that protest organizations intentionally failed to generate turnout on January 19 in attempt to obfuscate their organizational efforts and confuse security personnel. Calls for protests are also likely straining the bandwidth of security forces regardless of protest turnout. The regime reportedly deployed the Law Enforcement Command (LEC)'s Special Forces Unit—which is chiefly tasked with suppressing unrest—in Tehran in attempt to discourage protests on January 19, and security personnel have heavily securitized Zahedan in anticipation of unrest on January 20, as discussed in the preceding paragraph.[9]

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime is likely escalating against prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid.**
- **Protest organizations and coordinators seemingly failed to increase protest activity on January 19.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**

- **The European Parliament adopted a resolution urging the European Union (EU) and EU member states to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization on January 19.**
- **Netblocks and social media users reported mobile internet disruptions in a manner consistent with announced preventative measures aimed at preventing cheating on the Iranian university entrance exam.**
- **Tehran universities threatened and took disciplinary action against unveiled students.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.**
- **A Katai'b Hezbollah-affiliated group claimed that it targeted a US logistics convoy using improvised explosive devices.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 19. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

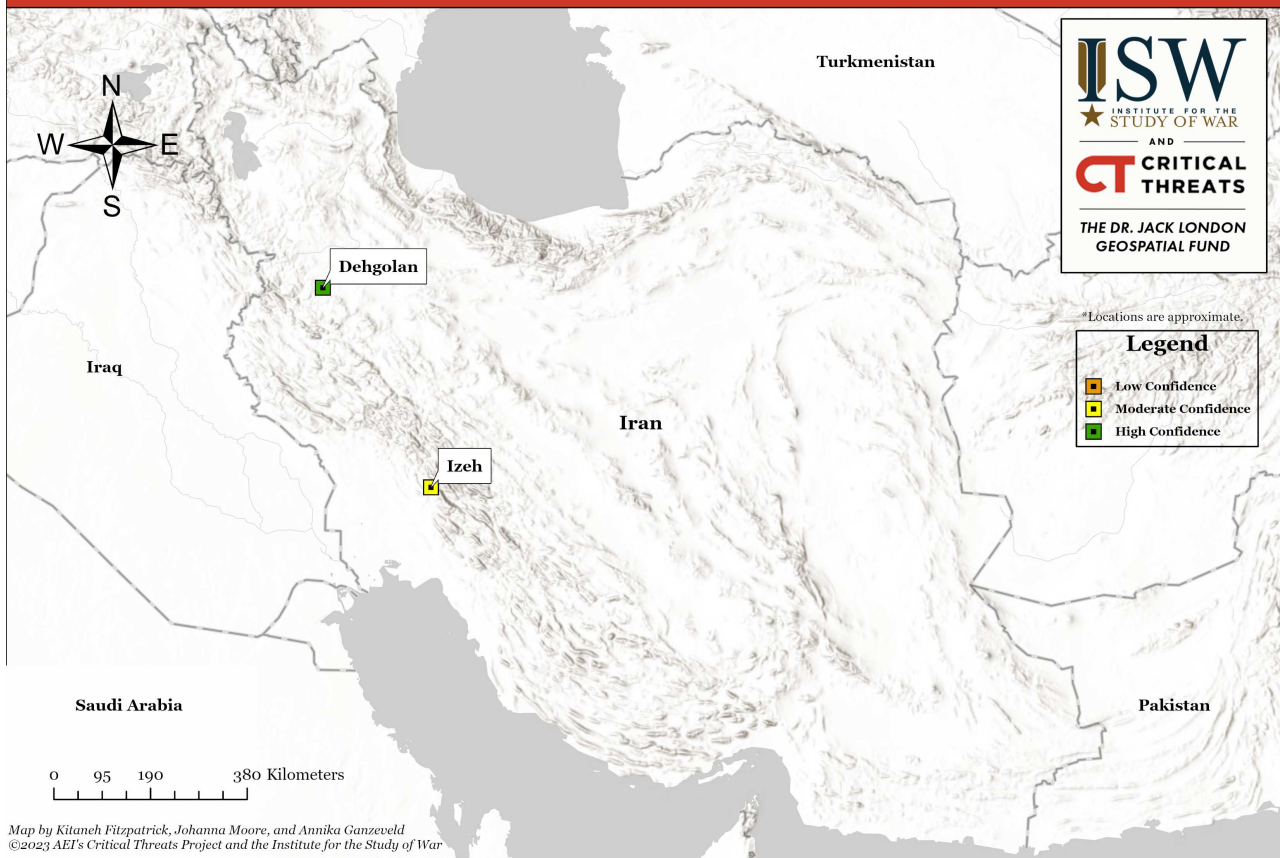
Izeh, Khuzestan Province[10]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Protest Type:** 40-day commemoration ceremony
- **Notes:** Pro-Pahlavi slogans

Dehgolan, Kurdistan Province[11]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Protest Type:** 40-day commemoration ceremony

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 19, 7:00 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations have circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following days:

January 20[12]

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The European Parliament adopted a resolution urging the European Union (EU) and EU member states to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization on January 19. The resolution additionally condemned the regime's violent suppression of ongoing, anti-retime protests and advocated for expanded sanctions on Iranian officials and entities responsible for human rights violations, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi, and Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri. European parliamentarians also endorsed further "restrictive measures" against the regime to hinder Iran's efforts to provide unmanned aerial vehicles and surface-to-surface missiles to Russia.[13] This resolution is non-binding for EU member states, although Reuters reported that the EU will add 37 entities to its sanctions against Iran on January 23, citing inside sources.[14] Iranian officials and the most senior military body within the regime, the Armed Forces General Staff, separately warned the EU against pursuing further sanctions on the IRGC on January 19.[15]

Netblocks and social media users reported mobile internet disruptions in a manner consistent with announced preventative measures aimed at preventing cheating on the Iranian university entrance exam.[16] Social media users reported three to four-and-a-half hours of mobile internet disruptions on January 19. It is unclear how widespread the internet restrictions were, although reports suggest that disruptions are ongoing in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[17] The regime's internet outages failed to prevent cheating on the national exam

however; Iranian media confirmed that unknown actors had leaked the test questions prior to the exam on January 19.[18]

Tehran universities threatened and took disciplinary action against unveiled students. Tehran University President Mohammad Moghimi announced that female students who refused to veil would face “disciplinary action.”[19] Several social media outlets additionally reported that unveiled students were barred from taking an examination at the University of Culture and Art in Tehran on January 19.[20] CTP has previously argued that the regime may end or reduce the morality patrol but will likely use other means to enforce the mandatory hijab law and isolate unveiled women.[21]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 19. Regime-affiliated outlets reported that Putin and Raisi discussed Syria, bilateral energy, and transport cooperation.[22] Raisi recently spoke with Putin on January 11, as CTP previously reported.

A Katai'b Hezbollah-affiliated group claimed that it targeted a US logistics convoy using improvised explosive devices (IED) on January 19.[23] Muqawamat al-Duwaliyah, the International Resistance Faction, media cell released a statement claiming that it had carried out the IED attack in Yusufiyah, Baghdad Province. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani had previously given an interview to the *Wall Street Journal* on January 15 expressing hope that US troops would remain stationed in Iraq.[24] IRGC Quds Force Commander Ismail Ghaani visited Baghdad on January 16 and met with senior Shia Coordination Framework officials and proxy militias.[25] Muqawamat al-Duwaliyah's statement was circulated on proxy media platforms, suggesting that the claim may have been directed towards a domestic Iraqi audience rather than intended as a threat to the US.

[1] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616104316149895171?s=20&t=u2ml... ; https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616132136486027302?s=20&t=u2ml... ; https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1615799955569971208?s=20&t=u2ml...

[2] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1615799955569971208?s=20&t=u2ml...

[3] https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616074265828233216?s=20&t=u2ml...

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023> ; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-zahedan-molavi-abdolhamid-abdolmajid-m...> ; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/prevent-gathering-protest-sistan-baluchesta...>

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

[6] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85003839/%DB%B2-%D8%AA%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B1...>

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-8>

[9] <https://twitter.com/INTELonIRAN/status/1616092395959103489?s=20&t=u2mlr...> ; https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616104316149895171?s=20&t=u2ml...

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616088757303709698> ; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1616114118339051527?>

s=20&t=K7a6ReQTs... ; <https://twitter.com/etelaf10/status/1616100213051068419?s=20&t=K7a6ReQTs...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616072907083649025?s=20&t=K7a6Re...>

[11] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1616044478019633155?s=20&t=SmCDNr... ; <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1616072845972410371?s=20&t=SmCDN...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616045356072017925> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616046509375782914>

[12] https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy...

[13] <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230113IPR66652/parli...>

[14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-18-2023> ; <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-729066>

[16] <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1616043593957019650?s=20&t=UPM6SBfZ...> ; <https://twitter.com/CloudflareRadar/status/1616061427948699648?s=20&t=UP...>

[17] https://twitter.com/TheDrIman/status/1616210140784459779?s=20&t=u2mlrE_...

[18] <https://t.co/M74HdMuq0p>

[19] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/tehran-university-imposes-new-rules-regarding-compulsory-hijab/32231012.html>

[20] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616127300986343424>

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

[22] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85003792/%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86-%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%BE%D9%88%D8%AA%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%DB%B1%DB%B0-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2>

[23] <https://t.me/Tura313/37647>

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/68520>

https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1615837816675606535

[24] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-prime-minister-supports-indefinite-u-...>

[25] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1615040031793549312

Iran Crisis Update, January 20, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, Annika Ganzeveld, Johanna Moore, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 20, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

The protest movement that began with the Iranian regime killing of Mahsa Amini has likely culminated for the most part. Protest activity has gradually decreased since December 2022, and protester organizers again failed to generate turnout on January 20 despite their heavily circulated calls for countrywide demonstrations. American military doctrine defines culmination as the “point at which a force no longer has the capability to continue its form of operations, offensive or defensive,” and “when a force cannot continue the attack and must assume a defensive posture or execute an operational pause.”[1] CTP analogizes that definition to the protest movement, using the term “culminated” rather than “ended” to reflect its assessment that conditions for a strong and vibrant anti-regime movement remain and that protests or other forms of anti-regime activity will likely resume at some point within the coming months.

Some components of the protest movement still retain their momentum. The protest movement has always consisted of a wide range of demographics and socio-economic strata, each of which has played a unique role in this wave of demonstrations and strikes. One such group consists of the Sunni communities in Golestan Province and Sistan and Baluchistan Province that continue to demonstrate every Friday. Demonstrators continue to gather in large numbers in Zahedan in particular.[2]

Mass protests could resume rapidly in the weeks and months ahead. Several factors, such as increasingly inclement weather and protester exhaustion, have likely caused this movement to culminate. These factors are temporary and will subside with time. The regime’s brutality did not outright quell the movement but has rather entrenched popular frustrations toward the regime throughout Iran, especially among the youth, as well as generating a wide array of new and deep grievances. CTP has reportedly extensively on how the state security services have killed and injured protesters and abused and tortured those it has arrested.[3] These victims include children. Iranian authorities have thus alienated significant portions of their population, which will likely harbor anger and resentment toward the regime for years, if not decades.

The protest movement has likely altered the trajectory of Iran’s political and internal security permanently even if most of the movement has indeed culminated. Every major protest wave in the history of the Islamic Republic has had such an effect to some extent. Iran has never simply returned to its previous state after each wave. This movement especially has generated a long-lasting impact that makes returning to the status quo of pre-September 2022 Iran extraordinarily unlikely. Protest coordinators have used this movement to cohere and organize the anti-regime movement in Iran and have begun establishing the networks and infrastructure to stage a protracted struggle against the regime. CTP has previously argued that some components of this movement have reached the threshold necessary to be considered a latent and incipient insurgency, which will likely continue its efforts to undermine the regime.[4]

It is especially noteworthy that most of the movement has culminated with protest organizations still in place and active online, even if they are for the moment unable to generate protest turnout. The regime has clearly failed to disrupt, infiltrate, or take down a number of prominent anti-regime

organizers. The regime has also failed to gain control of cyberspace despite decades of effort or to prevent online groups from reaching the Iranian people.

Neither did the regime make any real concessions to address core protester grievances. It has doubled down on hijab laws and instituted a technology-powered surveillance system of enforcement as well as requirements on private institutions to enforce its oppression of Iranian women and girls.[5] It has not only failed to address economic grievances but in fact has brought the country to a significantly worse economic state than it was in when the movement began.

All the conditions remain present for the resumption of significant anti-regime activity, possibly including the renewal of major protest activity, at any time, particularly if the regime provides a spark in the form of some other heinous act such as the killing of Mahsa Amini.

Key Takeaways

- **The protest movement that began with the Iranian regime killing of Mahsa Amini has likely culminated for the most part although it could re-emerge in this or another form in the coming weeks or months.**
- **At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces.**
- **Prominent Sunni clerics Moulana Abdol Hamid and Mohammad Hossein Gargij criticized the regime in public speeches.**
- **Anti-regime Black Reward hacker group defaced and hacked the website of Imam Sadegh University.**
- **Likely Iranian-backed militants conducted a kamikaze drone attack on the Al-Tanf base, which houses US troops, in southeastern Syria.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least five protests occurred in five cities across two provinces on January 20. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Galikash, Golestan Province[6]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protesters gathered to express support for Sunni cleric Moulana Gargij in front of his home.

Gorgan, Golestan Province[7]

- Size: Small
- Regime Repression: Security forces prevented mourners from gathering at Aida's grave and arrested reportedly arrested several individuals
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Aida Rostami

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[8]

- Size: Medium to large
- Regime Repression: Internet disruptions
- Notes: Protests precede prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's weekly Friday prayer sermon. Makki Mosque officials reportedly identified and seized an IRGC-affiliated actor recording protesters' faces. LEC personnel reportedly searched all persons entering the city.

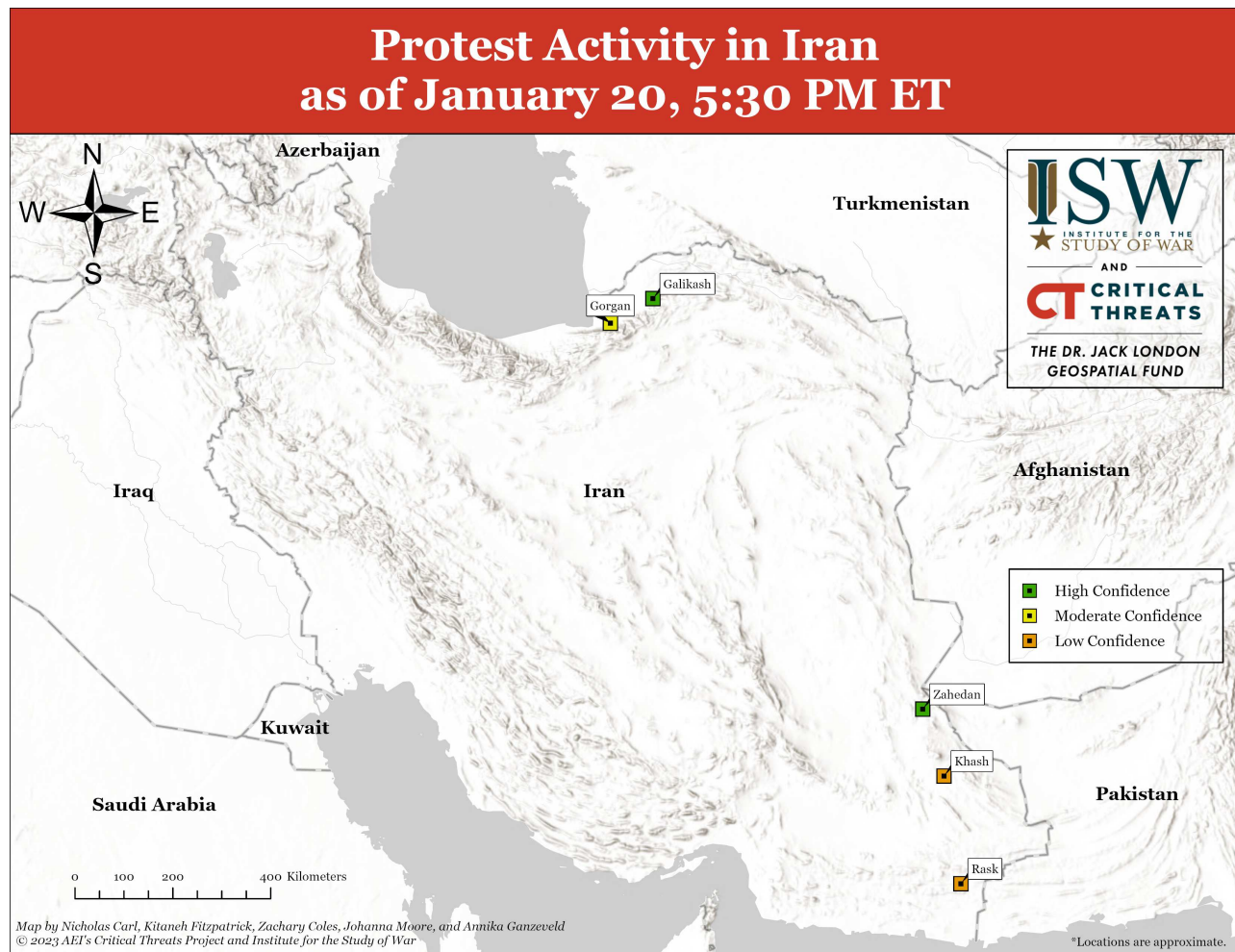
CTP assesses with low confidence that protests took place in the following locations:

Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[9]

- Size: Small

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan province[10]

- Size: Undetermined



Prominent Sunni clerics Moulana Abdol Hamid and Mohammad Hossein Gargij criticized the regime in public speeches on January 20. Abdol Hamid stated that "eighty- and ninety-year-olds" are incapable of making decisions for Iranian youth during his Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[11] Gargij stated that a government that ignores its people does not deserve to rule.[12] Gargij spoke to a gathering of protesters outside his home in Galikash, Golestan Province. These protesters were expressing support for Gargij, who the regime has barred from organizing prayers and placed under house arrest.[13] Gargij has continued to give Friday sermons during this period despite the regime efforts to silence him.[14] Abdol Hamid's and Gargij's continued criticisms thus reflect how regime efforts to suppress these criticisms from prominent Sunni clerics have backfired and generated greater unrest against the political establishment.

Anti-regime Black Reward hacker group defaced and hacked the website of Imam Sadegh University on January 20.[15] The group posted an image of a woman holding a burning hijab on the front page. The group also claimed that it will soon share files that it retrieved from the university website. Black Reward has previously hacked the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency and published internal documents from both.[16]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Likely Iranian-backed militants conducted a kamikaze drone attack on the Al-Tanf base, which houses US troops, in southeastern Syria on January 20.[17] US-led Coalition Forces shot down two drones, and one struck the base, injuring two Syrian personnel. Iranian-backed militants

have increasingly attacked al Tanf in recent years, including from Iraq. Likely Kataib Hezbollah militants conducted a drone attack on Al-Tanf base from Jurf al Sakhar, Babil Province, Iraq on August 15, 2022.[18]

- [1] https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18010-ADP_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf
- [2] <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1616402155644289024?s=20&t=2U...>
- [3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-21>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-25>
- [4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-17>
- [5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-23> ;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023>
- [6] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1616393808601649153?s=20&t=i5Yz2P... ; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1616475611429470216?s=20&t=DVIRASq...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1616378679516356609?s=20&t=DVIRASqLt...> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1616489538255261697?s=20&t=DVIRASqLt...
- [7] <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1616495460457320468?s=20&t=2U72vvU...>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1616364769270808579?s=20&t=2U72vvU...> ; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1616370846934700033?s=20&t=2U...> ; <https://twitter.com/balochcampaign/status/1616388970367127552?s=20&t=2U7...> ; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1616402155644289024?s=20&t=2U...> ; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1616396803183890432?s=20&t=2U...> ; <https://twitter.com/haalvsh/status/1616392109132779520?s=20&t=2U72vvUGj3...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1616382390049599489?s=20&t=bJEZN9... ; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1616540666418397204>
- [9] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616541240639557632?s=20&t=tnyr2A...>
- [10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1616379201195544577?s=20&t=2U72vv...>
- [11] <https://abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/01/20/13310>; <https://www.radiofardacom/a/molavi-abdolhamid/32232142.html>
- [12] <https://www.iranintl.com/202301206480>
- [13] <https://www.iranintl.com/202301206480>
- [14] <https://www.independentpersian.com/node/298176/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%...>
- [15] https://twitter.com/dr_abdolmaleki; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/32042577.html>
- [16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-23>;
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-30>
- [17] <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/...>
<https://t.me/Tura313/37724>

<https://t.me/Tura313/37724>

<https://t.me/Tura313/37726>

<https://t.me/Tura313/37725>

<https://t.me/Tura313/37727>

<https://t.me/sabreenS1/68819>

<https://t.me/Tura313/37729>

[18] <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/kataib-hezbollahs-ro...>

Iran Crisis Update, January 22, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 22, 2023

Nicholas Carl and Frederick W. Kagan

January 22, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

CTP is publishing an abbreviated version of our daily updates on Saturdays and Sundays. We will revert to publishing full updates on Saturdays and Sundays if the situation in Iran changes significantly enough to warrant more comprehensive coverage. We will continue to document and map protest activity throughout Iran daily in these updates.

At least four protests occurred in three cities across two provinces in Iran on January 22. CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[1]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Gathering in front of local government building over economic complaints

Shoush, Khuzestan Province[2]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Retirees demonstrate over complaints regarding social security benefits

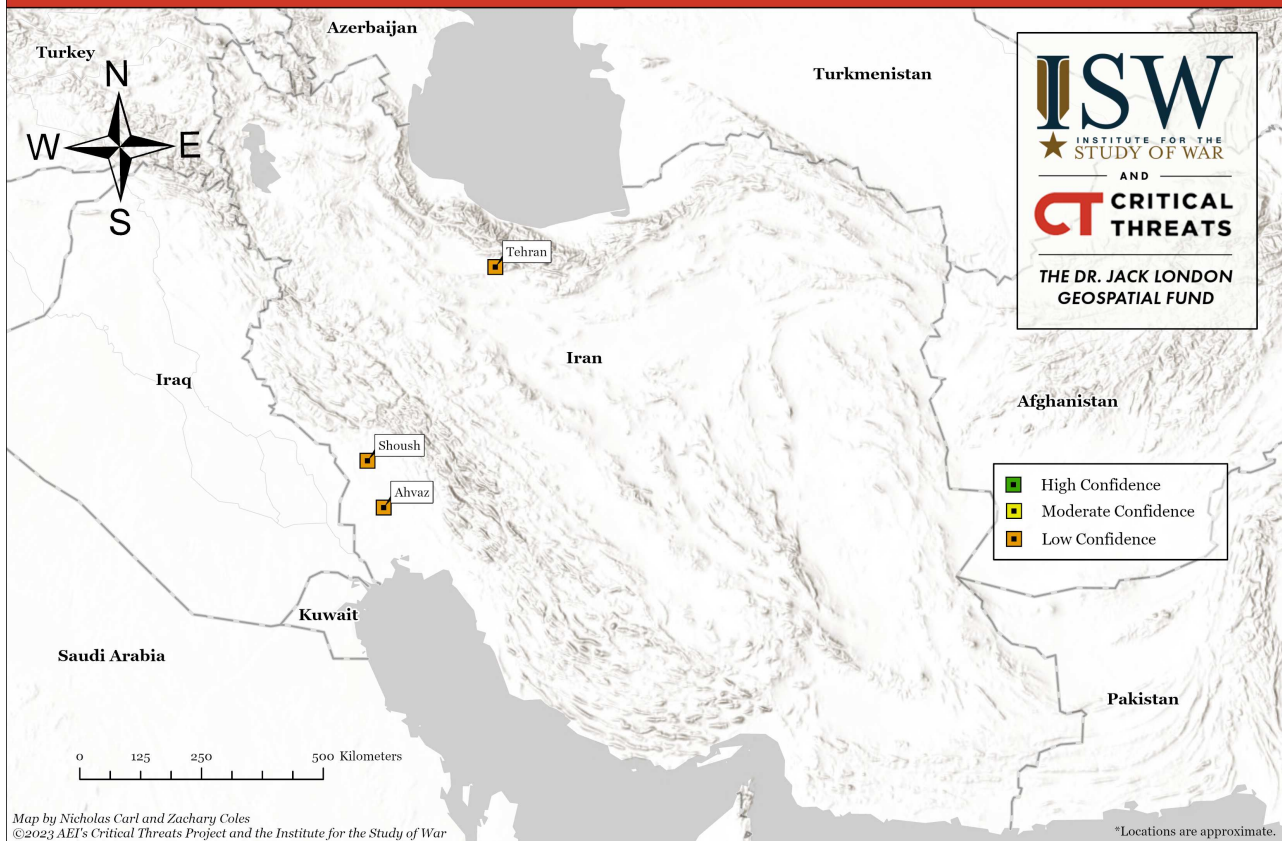
Tehran City, Tehran Province[3]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Ekbatan neighborhood

Tehran City, Tehran Province[4]

- Size: Small
- Regime Repression: Deployment of LEC Special Units
- Notes: Gathering in front of judicial building over economic complaints

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 22, 5:30 PM ET



[1] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617192292028407808>

[2] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617097144258666497>

[3] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617265486084849667>

[4] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1617094749302788096;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617178837875408897>;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617178553900040192>

Iran Crisis Update, January 23, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 23, 2023

Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Dana Alexander Gray, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 23, 2023, 5:15 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Protest activity in Iran increased on January 23, particularly among current petrochemical employees and retired education and telecommunications workers, suggesting some degree of coordination among workers. This protest activity is the most that CTP has recorded since January 8.[1] Protesters reportedly gathered to demonstrate against delayed payments, benefits, and the impact of mounting inflation. CTP previously observed seven protests among a similar demographic—currently employed petrochemical employees—on January 17.[2] The worker-led demonstrations on January 17 and 23 suggest that these groups have the networks required to generate protests despite the regime’s continued crackdown on protest groups throughout the past several months. These worker groups could play an increasingly prominent role in coordinating protests as economic conditions in Iran worsen.[3] The Iranian rial reached a record low--selling for as much as 447,500 rials for one US dollar—on January 23.[4]

Parliament approved the outlines of the annual budget bill on January 22, allocating greater funds to the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) to improve efforts to impose social control. [5] IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency reported that the bill will include a 43 percent increase in funding for the LEC, a one-percent decrease from what Raisi proposed on January 11.[6] It is unclear whether Parliament approved similar increases in funding for other state security services. President Ebrahim Raisi proposed substantial increases in funding to the IRGC, Artesh, and Intelligence and Security Ministry on January 11, as CTP previously reported.[7]

The net increase in real purchasing power of this budget expansion is also unclear given the high rate of inflation in Iran. The Statistical Center of Iran estimated that the average inflation rate for the first nine months of the Persian calendar year (March 2022–March 2023) hit 45 percent overall. [8] Such a sharp increase in the prices of certain goods, in addition to the continued depreciation of the Iranian rial against other currencies, may negate the impact of some of the budgetary increases. Parliament will likely amend the budget before approving it as well, meaning these allocations could still change significantly.

Key Takeaways

- **Protest activity in Iran increased on January 23, particularly among current petrochemical employees and retired education and telecommunications workers, suggesting some degree of coordination among workers.**
- **Parliament approved the outlines of the annual budget bill on January 22, allocating greater funds to the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) to improve efforts to impose social control.**
- **An IRGC-affiliated news outlet speculated that Iran may receive advanced Russian attack helicopters under an Iranian-Russo military co-production agreement.**

- **Information and Communications Technology Minister Isah Zareh Pour** announced on January 21 that the regime will soon lift internet restrictions on some foreign platforms.
- **Syrian Defense Minister Ali Mahmoud Abbas met with Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri in Tehran to discuss bilateral economic and military cooperation.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least 12 protests occurred in 11 cities across 11 provinces in Iran on January 23. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ardabil City, Ardabil Province[9]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment and benefits

Shahr-e Kord, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province[10]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment and benefits

Rasht, Gilan Province[11]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment and benefits

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment and benefits

Bandar-e Imam Khomeini, Khuzestan Province[13]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Petrochemical workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delayed payments and benefits

Tehran City, Tehran Province[14]

- **Size:** Medium
- **Demographic:** Retired teachers
- **Location:** In front of the Education Ministry
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against low wages and the impact of inflation upon livelihood

Tehran City, Tehran Province[15]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment claimed and benefits

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

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment claimed and benefits. No footage documenting purported protest.

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[17]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment claimed and benefits. No footage documenting purported protest. Social media users suggested that protest activity occurred in Kermanshah city, but it is unclear if this occurred in another city within Kermanshah Province.

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[18]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment claimed and benefits. No footage documenting purported protest.

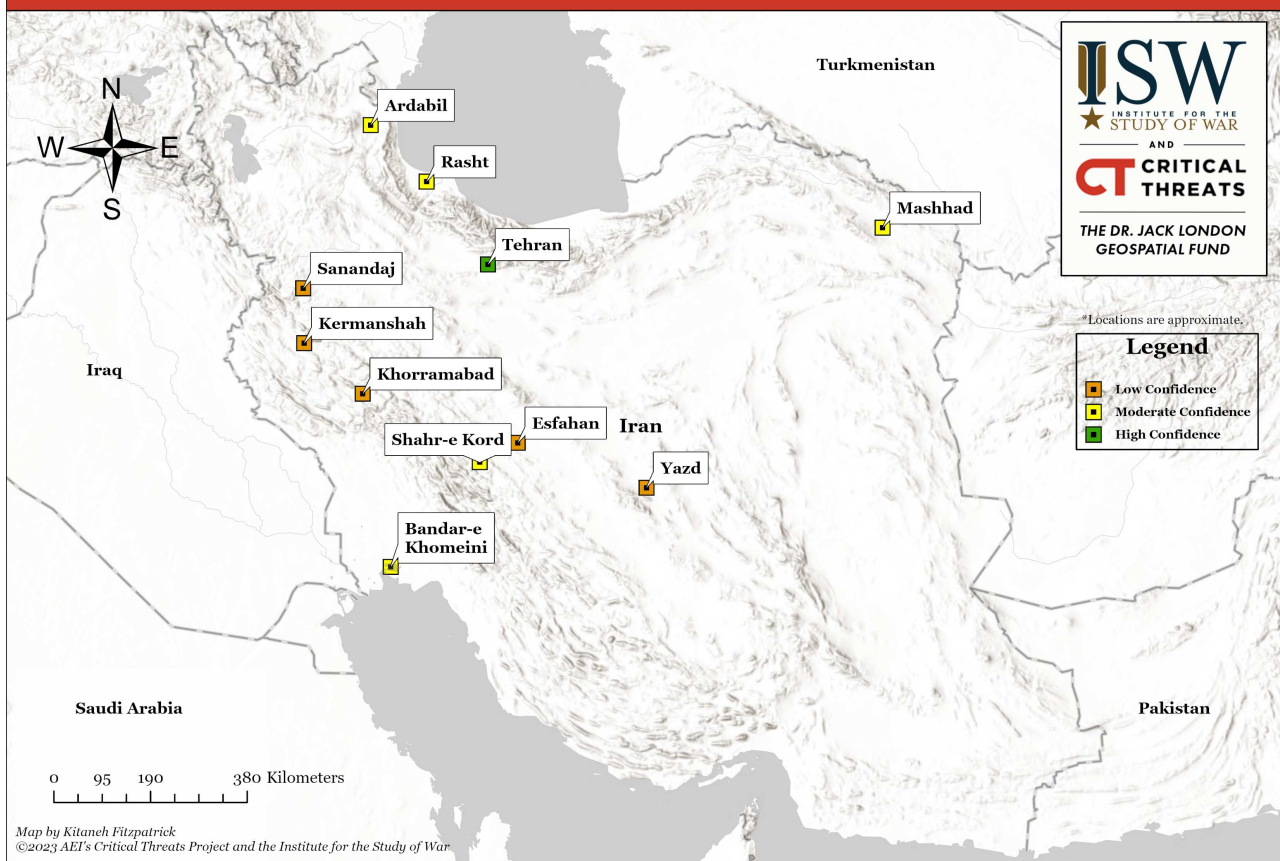
Khorramabad, Lorestan Province[19]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment claimed and benefits. No footage documenting purported protest.

Yazd City, Yazd Province[20]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers
- **Notes:** Demonstrated against delay in payment claimed and benefits. No footage documenting purported protest.

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 23, 5:15 PM ET



Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Ghomi met with Afghan Taliban Foreign Affairs Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to discuss Helmand River water rights on January 22.

[21] Ghomi's visit follows reports of water shortages in the Iranian border town of Torbat-e Jam, Khorasan Razavi Province on January 18, highlighting the water-shortage problem even though Torbat-e Jam likely does not receive water from the Helmand River.[22] Torbat-e Jam additionally witnessed protests sparked by gasoline shortages on January 16, as CTP previously reported. [23] Iranian officials may increasingly seek to pressure Taliban officials to improve Iranian access to water from Afghan rivers to preempt further unrest, although the Taliban is facing similar water shortages and is unlikely to make significant concessions on this front.[24]

Information and Communications Technology Minister Isah Zareh Pour announced on January 21 that the regime will soon lift internet restrictions on some foreign platforms but will continue to restrict WhatsApp and Instagram.[25] Zareh Pour separately claimed that 16 million Iranians have joined the regime-backed messaging platform Eitaa within the past three months in a likely attempt to promote further domestic use.[26] Iranian authorities have long sought to replace Western social media platforms with indigenous alternatives to reduce public reliance on foreign networking services and expand cyber monitoring of the Iranian population.[27]

An IRGC-affiliated news outlet speculated that Iran may receive advanced Russian attack helicopters under an Russo-Iranian military co-production agreement. Tasnim News Agency published an article arguing that a Russo-Iranian helicopter co-production agreement would let Iran purchase Mi-28 and Ka-52 attack helicopters. The IRGC currently flies Russian Mi-17 transport helicopters and American AH-1J Cobra attack helicopters, the purchases of which precede the 1979 Iranian Revolution.[28] The IRGC could use modern attack helicopters to intimidate and disperse anti-regime protesters or conduct cross-border raids against anti-regime militants. A Russo-Iranian co-production agreement might additionally allow Iran to service its helicopter fleet without relying on Russia for spare parts depending on the details. IRGC-affiliated media have previously

predicted Iran would receive Su-35 fighter aircraft before any official announcements, as CTP previously reported.[29]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Syrian Defense Minister Ali Mahmoud Abbas met with Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri in Tehran to discuss bilateral economic and military cooperation. Bagheri and Abbas called for joint military exercises between Iran and Syria and condemned Israeli military action in Syrian territory. It is unclear whether the Artesh or IRGC would participate in such services. Bagheri praised Syria for resisting alleged foreign conspiracies to destroy the Syrian state.[30]

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-8>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-17>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-20>

[4] [www.bonbast dot com](http://www.bonbast.com)

[5] <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202301226798>

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-11-2023> ; [https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/11/02/2840997](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/02/2840997) - افزایش 43 درصدی - سهم - فرا جادر - لایحه - /2840997/1401/11/02/2840997
بودجه - پیشنهادی - 1402

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-11-2023>

[8] <https://www.voanews.com/a/iran-s-inflation-rate-topped-48-in-december/69...>

[9] <https://twitter.com/Kolbarnews/status/1617462415959941120?s=20&t=iyuWM04...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617454642769858560?s=20&t=iyuWM0...>

[10] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1617460651491721216?s=20&t=eV6oNUNfD...> ; <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1617441666641858563?s=20&t=eV6oNUN...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617450631064690688?s=20&t=eV6oNU...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1617474593433997312?s=20&t=eV6oNU...

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617450050652876801?s=20&t=ynTFpJ...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1617447704518434817?s=20&t=ynTFpJ... ; <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1617447642086408192?s=20&t=ynTFpJu...>

[12] <https://twitter.com/Kolbarnews/status/1617450866276982784?s=20&t=awJhUm-...> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617449057793753090?s=20&t=awJhUm-b9...

[13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617611457054801923?s=20&t=nerWiv...>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617535837620822018?s=20&t=mBCP3f...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617537160365879298?s=20&t=2M0-Vp...> ; <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1617505481332854784?s=20&t=BTlhEUvbt...> ; <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1617528540240699393?s=20&t=oTnESBI...> ; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1617585016963227648?s=20&t=oTnESBI...> ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1617558903088201740?s=20&t=oTnESB...>

- [15] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1617500261026603011?s=20&t=r4UrjD... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617516319175475200?s=20&t=LVIRKA...> ; <https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1617582685953589253?s=20&t=LVIRKAU6Y...>
- [16] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617459941727420418?s=20&t=ZHdvJm...>
- [17] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617498731821113346?s=20&t=tQO8kzWXp... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617495704468873227?s=20&t=QDVVoVe...> ;
- [18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617475661312188417?s=20&t=YEWtyO...>
- [19] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617458059336617985?s=20&t=MctDcL...>
- [20] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617458231063859202?s=20&t=QDVVoVe...>
- [21] <https://www.dotmizan.com/news/4606329/%d8%af%db%8c%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%b1-%da%a9%d8%a7%d8%b8%d9%85%db%8c-%d9%82%d9%85%db%8c-%d8%a8%d8%a7-%d9%85%d8%aa%d9%82%db%8c/>
- <https://www.pashtovoa.com/a/qomi-to-supply-water-from-the-helmand-sea-to-iran-motaghi-we-are-facing-water-shortage/6929705.html?withmediaplayer=1>
- [22] <https://t.co/LffXvjUKrU>
- [23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
- [24] <https://www.pashtovoa.com/a/qomi-to-supply-water-from-the-helmand-sea-to...> ; <https://twitter.com/SamriBackup/status/1551094801528922113?s=20&t=bktgkf...>
- [25] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401110100218/%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9-%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%B7%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87>
- [26] https://twitter.com/Entekhab_News/status/1617555907327434752
- [27] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Whatever-it-t...>
- [28] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/02/2840386/>-سید-خرید- /میل-28 و- کاموف-52 در- سید-خرید- /بالگرد-از- روسیه-گمانه-زنی-در-باره-خریدهای-تسلیماتی-ایران
- [29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-9>
- [30] <https://isna.ir/xdNc8q> ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85007428/>-بر-سوریه- /برگزاری-رزمایش-مشترک-نظامی

Iran Crisis Update, January 24, 2023

Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Dana Alexander Gray, Annika Ganzeveld, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 24, 2023, 5:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas discussed deepening military cooperation with senior Iranian officials in Tehran on January 24. Abbas met with President Ebrahim Raisi, Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Hossein Salami. Salami stressed the importance of strengthening Iranian-Syrian military cooperation and stated that the IRGC is prepared to provide the Syrian armed forces with unspecified cyber, information, and electronic warfare capabilities.[1] Abbas stated that Syria should play a more active role in the so-called “Axis of Resistance” and endorsed greater cooperation during his meetings.[2] Abbas previously discussed improving bilateral economic and defense ties in a meeting with Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri on January 24, at which Bagheri called for joint military exercises between Iran and Syria. [3] Salami’s meeting with Abbas suggests that the IRGC may participate in such exercises.

Iran likely seeks to consolidate its military influence in Syria, especially as Russia reportedly decreases its military footprint there. The Kremlin has reportedly drawn down its forces in Syria within the past year to send reinforcements to Ukraine, leaving a vacuum for Iranian and Iranian-backed forces to fill.[4] Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with Syrian President Bashar al Assad in May 2022, allegedly to discuss transferring Russian positions to Iran and its proxies.[5] The regime may seek to further leverage a decreased Russian military presence in Syria by offering the Assad regime equipment and support that Russia cannot provide due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Parliamentarian Ahmad Alireza Beygi suggested impeaching Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi for the Law Enforcement Command’s (LEC) brutal suppression of protests in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in September 2022. Iranian authorities violently cracked down on anti-regime demonstrations in Zahedan on September 30, 2022, killing over 80 protesters. [6] Beygi implied that Khamenei wants the Raisi administration to remove Vahidi, although his comments more likely reflect his own opinion.[7] Beygi previously criticized the LEC’s crackdown in Zahedan in October 2022 and accused the LEC of generating mistrust.[8] Beygi had also called on the Armed Forces General Staff to “reconsider the management and structure of the LEC” on a later date in October 2022.[9] It is unclear whether any of Beygi’s calls will generate traction among other lawmakers.

Beygi previously served as the law enforcement commander for Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, and Esfahan provinces from 1994 to 2004 and Fars province from 2004 to 2006, although he has previously criticized the regime’s protest suppression. Beygi additionally called to impeach former Interior Minister Abdol Reza Rahmani Fazli under the Rouhani administration in April 2021, stating that Fazli’s hands were “stained in blood” due to his involvement in suppressing the 2019 Aban protests.[10]

Key Takeaways

- **Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas discussed deepening military cooperation with senior Iranian officials in Tehran. Iran likely seeks to consolidate its military influence in Syria, especially as Russia reportedly decreases its military footprint there.**
- **Parliamentarian Ahmad Alireza Beygi suggested impeaching Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi for the Law Enforcement Command's (LEC) brutal suppression of protests in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in September 2022.**
- **At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Unidentified individuals shot and killed two LEC officers and wounded a third in Bampur, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 24.**
- **Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei criticized on January 24 regime-imposed internet restrictions aimed at preventing cheating on the national university entrance exam.**
- **Parliamentarian Abbas Moghtadaei criticized Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Minister Isah Zareh Pour over Iran Telecommunications Company employee benefits in an open-parliament session.**
- **The Iranian Supreme Court appeared to reverse a decision to grant clemency to arrested protester Mohammad Ghobadlou.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces in Iran on January 24. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that protests occurred in the following location:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of prisoners sentenced to death

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

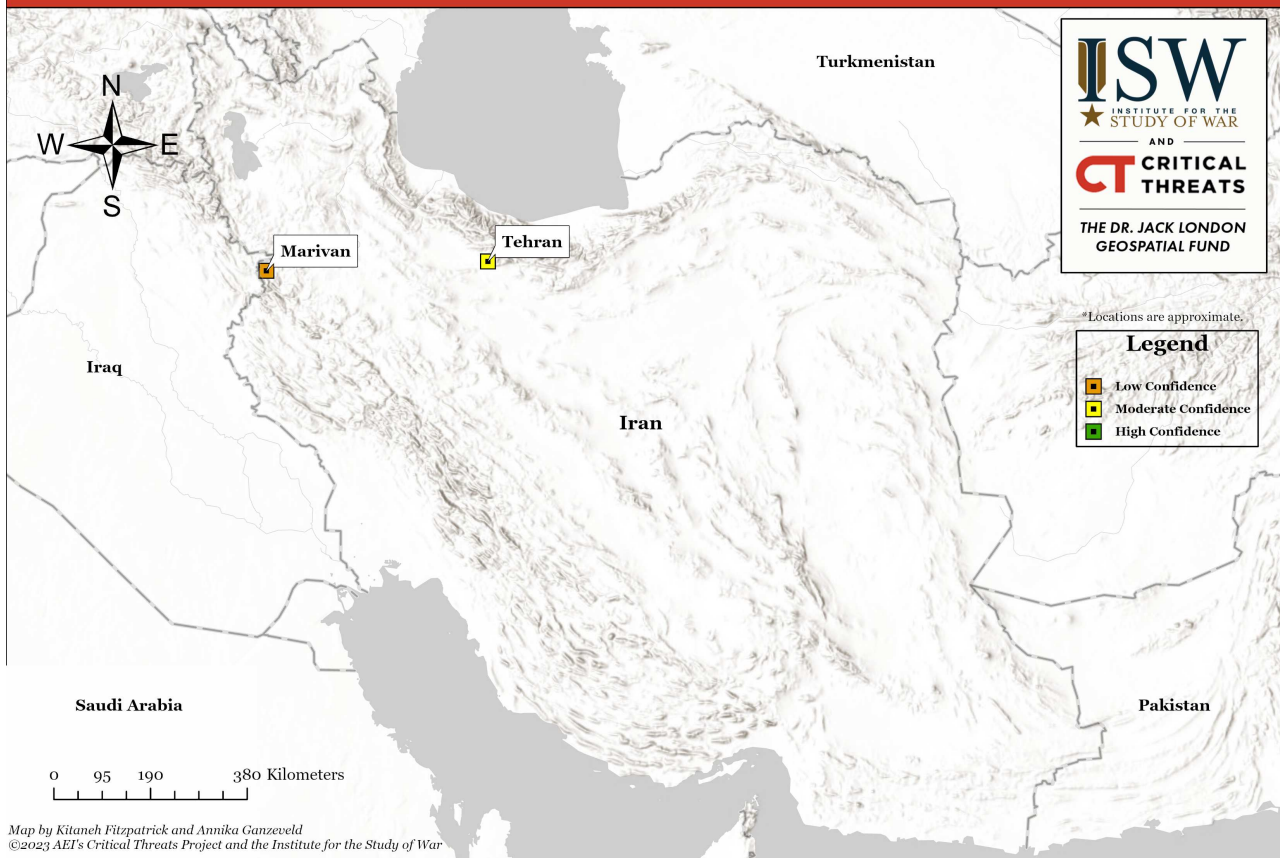
Marivan, Kurdistan Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** City residents
- **Notes:** Reportedly demonstrating against water quality in the city. No available footage of protest. It is unclear if this event meets CTP's protest thresholds.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[13]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Tehran University Students
- **Notes:** Sit-in, no available footage of protest. It is unclear if this event meets CTP's protest thresholds.

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 24, 5:30 PM ET



Unidentified individuals shot and killed two LEC officers and wounded a third in Bampur, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 24. The gunmen killed Major Mokhtar Momeni and Third Lieutenant Abouzer Omidvar. LEC Sistan and Baluchistan Provincial Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Ghanbari promised to identify and arrest the individuals.[14]

Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei criticized on January 24 regime-imposed internet restrictions aimed at preventing cheating on the national university entrance exam. Iranian authorities imposed mobile internet disruptions to preempt cheating on countrywide tests on January 19.[15] Ejei stated that the disruptions created "significant issues" for the Iranian population--an implicit criticism of ongoing internet restrictions imposed by the regime to preempt and crack down on anti-regime protests.

Parliamentarian Abbas Moghtadaei criticized Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Minister Isah Zareh Pour over Iran Telecommunications Company employee benefits in an open-parliament session on January 24.[16] Zareh Pour claimed that the ICT Ministry could not intervene because the Iran Telecommunications Company was privatized in 2008. Parliament condemned Zareh Pour's answers in an official vote.[17] Retired telecommunications workers coordinated countrywide protests on January 23 over late benefit payments, as CTP previously reported.[18] Parliamentarians previously began impeachment proceedings against Zahreh Pour in July 2021, although these proceedings did not culminate in an impeachment vote.[19]

The Iranian Supreme Court appeared to reverse a decision to grant clemency to arrested protester Mohammad Ghobadlou. A judiciary media official announced on January 23 that news outlets had incorrectly reported that the court accepted Ghobadlou's appeal.[20] Ghobadlou's lawyer said the Supreme Court accepted his client's appeal of his death sentence for murder but upheld his death sentence for "corruption on earth," a charge punishable by death, on January 24.[21]

This is not the first time that the Supreme Court has change its ruling on Ghobadlou's case. The Supreme Court initially retracted a statement that it had accepted Ghobadlou's appeal on December 24, 2022, as CTP reported.[22] A criminal court likely sentenced Ghobadlou to death for murder while a Revolutionary Court sentenced him to death for "corruption on earth." The Supreme Court's apparent indecision may reflect a schism within the judiciary over how to execute the regime's response to the Mahsa Amini protest movement.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

See topline text.

[1] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/04/2842211/> - سردار - سلامی - آماده - انتقال - تجربیات - در - ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85008312/> - سردار - سلامی - آماده - کمک - به - نیرو های - مسلح - سوریه - در - ابعاد - و - زمینه - های

[3] <https://isna.ir/xdNc8q> ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85007428/> - تاکید - ایران - و - سوریه - بر - برگزاری - رزمایش - مشترک - نظامی

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[6] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-82-baluchi-...>

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[8] <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/716442/%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87>

[9] <https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/716442/%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87>

[10] <https://old.iranintl.com/en/iran/iran-lawmaker-accuses-minister-having-blood-his-hands>

[11] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1617915429216829444?s=20&t=Hp6plO... ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617892890079813632?s=20&t=Hp6plO6Mx... ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1617956098312671234?s=20&t=Hp6plO...> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617967715683106824?s=20&t=Hp6plO6Mx...

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[14] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/04/2841977/>-شهادت-2-مأمور-پلیس-در-حمله-اشرار-به-گشت-انتظامی-بمپور

[15] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-19-2023>

[16] <https://isna.ir/xdNckd>

[17] <https://isna.ir/xdNcnv>

[18] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-23-2023>

[19] <https://www.zoomit.ir/tech-iran/384318-minister-of-ict-impeachment/>

[20] <https://twitter.com/FarahaniReports/status/1617541901594554376>

[21] <https://www.etemadonline.com/tiny/news-593313>

[22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-24>

Iran Crisis Update, January 25, 2023

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

January 25, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Grievances related to deteriorating economic conditions and essential service provision have generated most protest activity in Iran in recent days. Petrochemical and telecommunication workers and retirees have held several small-scale demonstrations throughout Iran since January 22, as CTP has previously reported.[1] CTP has also documented electricity cuts and natural gas shortages across the country.[2] The regime, particularly the Raisi administration, has appeared unable to meaningfully address these issues thus far.

These poor internal conditions will likely stoke anti-regime frustrations and could reignite the protest movement in the months and years ahead. The protest movement has largely culminated at present, as CTP previously argued, but this culmination does not mean that the anti-regime movement has ended, nor does it mean that the regime has meaningfully addressed the root causes of the movement. The protesters likely retain their anger and frustrations toward the regime. The conditions for a strong and vibrant anti-regime movement thus remain.

The pro-Pahlavi Mashhad Neighborhood Youth urged protesters to continue their struggle against the regime on January 25.[3] The Mashhad group called on protesters to “conduct at least one operation [against the regime] each night,” such as attacking IRGC and Basij facilities and seminaries or producing anti-regime graffiti. The Mashhad group also advised protesters to “redo plans” and “identify your strengths and weaknesses.” CTP has not observed significant support for the Pahlavi family in its coverage of the protests.

Key Takeaways

- **Grievances related to deteriorating economic conditions and essential service provision have generated most protest activity in Iran in recent days.**
- **The pro-Pahlavi Mashhad Neighborhood Youth urged protesters to continue their struggle against the regime on January 25.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid criticized the “intensification of security atmosphere” on January 25, referencing the reported increase of security forces in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**
- **The Supreme Economic Coordination Council (SECC) convened on January 25 to discuss stabilizing the Iranian rial and operations at the Bushehr nuclear power plant.**
- **Iranian media outlets reported a ten-minute internet outage.**
- **Artesh Southwestern Regional Headquarters Commander Brigadier General Hamzeh Bidadi announced the confiscation of smuggled arms near Abadan, Khuzestan Province.**
- **Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan stated that the LEC is prioritizing expanding Iran’s “security umbrella” during a meeting in Khorasan Razavi Province.**

- **IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri met with newly appointed Law Enforcement Commander Brig. Gen. Ahmad Reza Radan.**
- **Anti-regime Black Reward hacker group leaked documents on January 25 suggesting that the regime permitted the Imam Sadegh University to engage in cryptocurrency activities, despite ongoing Iranian cryptocurrency restrictions.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on January 25. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Karaj, Alborz Province[4]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of prisoners sentenced to death
- **Location:** Gathered in front of a local prison. It is unclear if the prisoners were arrested in connection to the Mahsa Amini protest movement.

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

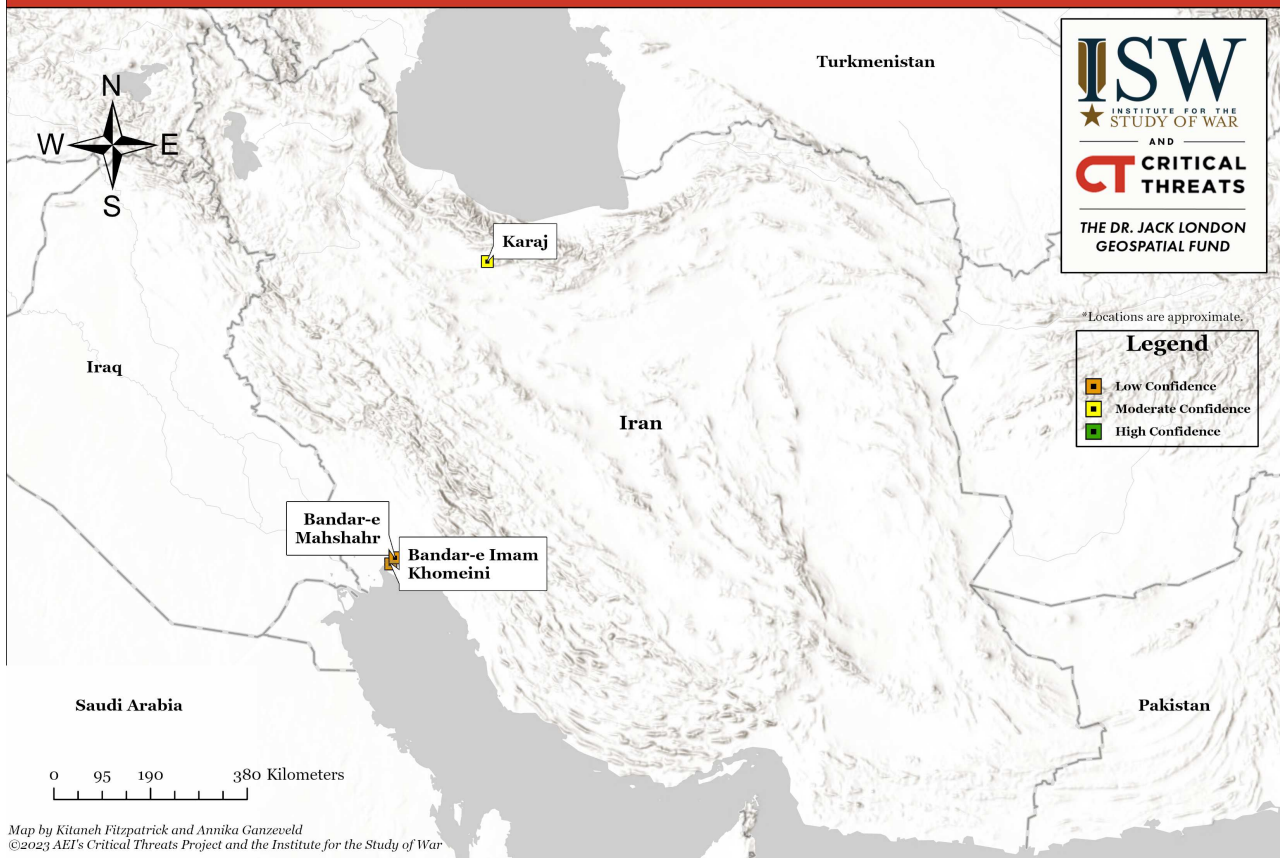
Bandar-e Imam Khomeini, Khuzestan Province[5]

- **Size:** Undetermined
- **Demographic:** Petrochemical workers
- **Notes:** Strike and protest

Bandar-e Mahshar, Khuzestan Province[6]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Petrochemical workers
- **Notes:** Strike and protest

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 25, 6:00 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and/or strikes on the following days:

January 27[7]

- Type: Demonstrations in solidarity with oppressed Iranian Baloch.
- Location: Countrywide

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid criticized the “intensification of security atmosphere” on January 25, referencing the reported increase of security forces in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[8] Security forces have conducted large-scale arrests and established security checkpoints around the city in recent weeks, as CTP previously reported. [9] Abdol Hamid added in his tweet that mass arresting citizens is stoking public frustration.

The Supreme Economic Coordination Council (SECC) convened on January 25 to discuss stabilizing the Iranian rial and operations at the Bushehr nuclear power plant. The SECC is Iran’s “economic war room” to mitigate sanctions and reach decisions on macroeconomic policies. [10] The council approved the Central Bank of Iran’s (CBI) request for increased control over the value of the Iranian rial and inflation rates.[11] Iranian media outlets framed the approval as a restoration of the CBI’s authority following the regime’s decision to limit the bank’s control over currency markets under the Rouhani administration.[12] The SECC separately discussed financing operations at the Bushehr plant.

Artesh Southwestern Regional Headquarters Commander Brigadier General Hamzeh Bidadi announced on January 25 the confiscation of smuggled arms near Abadan, Khuzestan Province. Bibadi stated that the confiscated weapons, which included 10 Kalashnikov rifles and 89 Colt guns, are “usually used in riots for killing and attacking police and security officers.”[13] The

Artesh making this announcement is noteworthy given that the IRGC and LEC are typically responsible for similar seizures.

Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan stated that the LEC is prioritizing expanding Iran's "security umbrella" during a meeting in Khorasan Razavi Province on January 25. Radan also emphasized the importance of developing an "intelligent police," possibly hinting that the LEC should adopt new technologies and techniques to thwart internal unrest.[14]

IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri met with newly appointed Law Enforcement Commander Brig. Gen. Ahmad Reza Radan on January 25. Tangsiri offered support to the LEC Coast Guard, especially regarding combating the smuggling of goods, fuel, and livestock.[15] The specific forms of assistance the IRGC Navy could provide could include surveillance, general training, weapons, drones, and naval infantry, although the readout of the meeting offered no concrete indications about what kind of support Tangsiri and Radan discussed.

Anti-regime Black Reward hacker group leaked documents on January 25 suggesting that the regime permitted the Imam Sadeq University to engage in cryptocurrency activities, despite ongoing Iranian cryptocurrency restrictions. The group previously hacked and defaced the university's website on January 20, as CTP previously reported.[16] The leaked documents suggested that the regime permitted the university to conduct cryptocurrency mining at various garment factories in unspecified locations within Khorasan Razavi Province, despite ongoing cryptocurrency bans aimed at reducing strain on the Iranian electrical grid.[17] CTP cannot corroborate the veracity of this document and such items should be viewed with skepticism.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report.

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-22-2...>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-23-2...>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-24-2023>

[2]

[3] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1618176699669286912

[4] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1618264436283969537?s=20&t=ydYTMT... ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1618306089392431104?s=20&t=WvVmYTwSU... ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1618264987998343170?s=20&t=WvVmYTwSU... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618298406602170368?s=20&t=WvVmYT...>

[5] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1618223064088707074?s=20&t=xjHxjY... ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1618280244472938496?s=20&t=Vw8qcp5w8...

[6] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1618286438713376769?cxt=HHwWgoC-xaS8...

[7] https://twitter.com/javanane_zhnd/status/1618202946277371910?s=20&t=YZJW...

[8] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1618319451933507585?s=20&t=nnIE...>

[9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-19-2023>

[10] <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-khamenei-economy-council/30275360.html>

[11] <https://president.ir/fa/142105>

[12] <https://ecoiran.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D...>

[13] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/569175/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%A7%DA%86%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B2%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

[14] <https://www irna ir/news/85009673/%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B4-%DA%86%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%87%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%BE%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[15] <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011105000058/>- دیدار فرمانده نیروی دریایی-سپاه-با-فرمانده-فراجا- سردار-تنگسیری-پلیس

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-20>

[17] <https://www.radiofarda.com/amp/balck-reward-imam-sadeq/32238005.html>

Iran Crisis Update, January 26, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 26, 2023

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

January 26, 2023, 4:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Contributors: Anya Caraiani and James Motamed

Ongoing disruptions to Iran's energy supplies may be generating severe air pollution. Semi-official ISNA reported on January 26 that the city of Tehran has introduced "emergency ambulance buses" to transport citizens affected by dangerous air pollution levels.[1] Iranian media outlets have also reported school closures in various cities due to air pollution in recent days.[2] This pollution may be caused by power plants burning low-grade fuel due to shortages of more refined products.

Iran's ongoing energy crisis could both impede and trigger further protests. An unusually harsh winter and high air pollution levels may explain why protest turnout has decreased in recent weeks. This crisis may increase frustration among the population and precipitate new unrest, on the other hand. The first known protest inspired by natural gas shortages during the Mahsa Amini protest wave occurred in Torbat-e Jam on January 16, as CTP previously reported.[3] Petrochemical workers across Iran have also protested against poor living conditions in recent days.[4] The regime's inability to resolve this crisis may drive frustrated citizens to challenge the regime despite harsh natural conditions.

Iranian officials had hoped to benefit from a harsh winter in Europe and a mild winter in Iran, but have instead suffered from the inverse weather pattern.[5]

The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) is apparently trying to cooperate with foreign governments and possibly the Iranian diaspora to isolate the regime internationally. The INYU released a statement on January 26 emphasizing the importance of external outreach and using legal frameworks to present the crimes of the regime to the international community.[6] The INYU also claimed that the protest movement has had several achievements internationally, such as facilitating the UN removal of Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women, the European Parliament call on the EU to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, and the US de-prioritization of the nuclear talks. The INYU previously described the protest movement as entering a new period characterized by external outreach, insurgent activity, and greater centralization and cohesion within the movement, as CTP previously reported on January 13.[7]

Such external outreach could be an effective means of generating support for the Iranian people against the regime within the international community. Ukrainian citizens have played a similarly essential role in defending their country and establishing broad international support through person-to-person engagement since the Russian invasion. Ukrainians have used decentralized and informal networks to help drive and maintain international support for Ukraine.

Security forces have reportedly maintained their heightened presence around Zahedan, Sistan, and Baluchistan Province, likely in preparation for the weekly Friday sermon from

prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid.[8] Abdol Hamid criticized the “intensification of the security atmosphere” on January 25, as CTP previously reported.[9] Some social media accounts reported military helicopters flying above some smaller towns outside Iranshahr, Sistan, and Baluchistan Province as well.[10] It is unclear in what direction the helicopters were headed.

Key Takeaways

- **Ongoing disruptions to Iranian energy supplies may be generating severe air pollution.**
- **The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) is apparently trying to cooperate with foreign governments and possibly the Iranian diaspora to isolate the regime internationally.**
- **Security forces have reportedly maintained their heightened presence around Zahedan, Sistan, and Baluchistan Province, likely in preparation for the weekly Friday sermon from prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Shiraz City Governor Lotfollah Shibani announced on January 26 that local merchants are required to deny services to unveiled women.**
- **Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi blamed the Mahsa Amini protest movement on a cultural schism between Iranian youth and the values of the Islamic Republic on January 26.**
- **Iranian media circulated a survey demonstrating limited domestic engagement with regime-endorsed social media outlets on January 26.**
- **Protesters gathered outside the Iraqi Central Bank in Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, and Diwaniyah to protest ongoing economic crises.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 26. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[11]

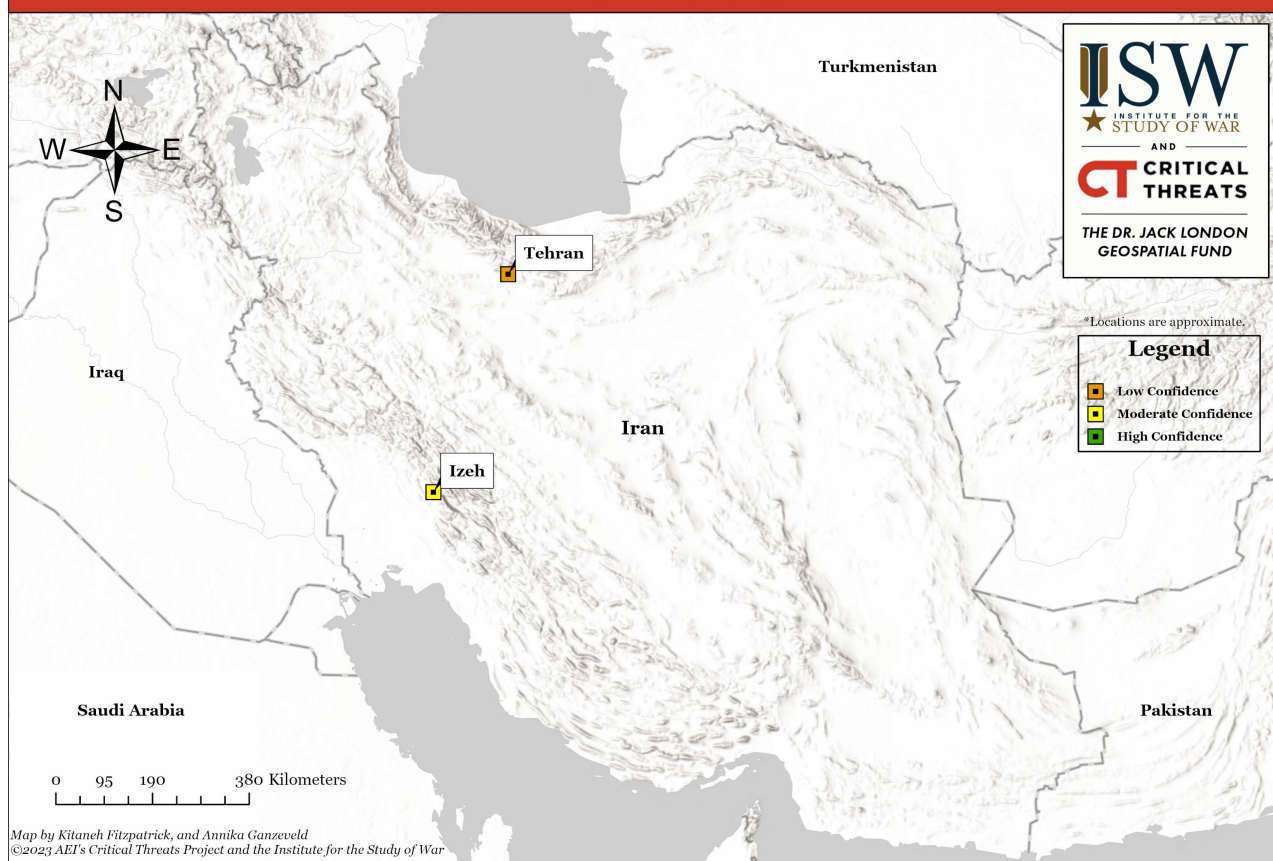
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Notes:** 40-day commemoration ceremony

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[12]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Workers
- **Notes:** Gathered in front of the Education Ministry to demonstrate against low wages

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 26, 4:30 PM ET



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and/or strikes on the following days:

January 27[13]

- Type: Demonstrations in solidarity with oppressed Iranian Baloch.
- Location: Countrywide

Shiraz City Governor Lotfollah Shibani announced on January 26 that local merchants are required to deny services to unveiled women. He warned that the regime recently closed a dentist's office due to the presence of unveiled staff and patients. Shibani's announcement reflects Iranian authorities' efforts to resume mass enforcement of the mandatory hijab law. The regime has refocused on enforcing widespread adherence to the hijab requirement in recent weeks after briefly and informally relaxing such restrictions in late 2022, as CTP previously assessed.[14]

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi blamed the Mahsa Amini protest movement on a cultural schism between Iranian youth and the values of the Islamic Republic on January 26. Vahidi claimed that arrested protesters exhibited a "disconnection from spirituality and God" and blamed Western media outlets for exacerbating this disconnection. Vahidi additionally stressed the importance of prayer in safeguarding the regime, quoting Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. [15] Iranian leadership has endorsed greater indoctrination efforts to resolve public frustrations within the past several weeks, as CTP has previously reported.[16]

Iranian media circulated a survey demonstrating limited domestic engagement with regime-endorsed social media outlets on January 26. Only one percent of survey respondents stated that they had replaced foreign-based messaging applications with indigenously-made platforms. [17] Regime authorities have long sought to replace Western social media platforms with Iranian

alternatives to crack down on domestic dissent and expand cyber monitoring of the Iranian population.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Protesters gathered outside the Iraqi Central Bank in Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, and Diwaniyah to protest ongoing economic crises.[18] Protesters demanded a stabilized exchange rate between the Iraqi dinar and US dollar, banking system reforms, and oversight measures to prevent corruption.[19] The Iraqi Dinar exchange rate increased to 1,460.50 IQD to 1 USD on January 26 following several weeks of fluctuation.[20] Iran-backed proxies and pro-Iranian media have attributed the currency devaluation to sanctions the US Treasury placed on several private Iraqi banks that have restricted dollars flowing into Iran.[21]

[1] <https://www.irnews/1401110604632/%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%88-%D8%A7%DA%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B3-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%DA%98%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA>

[2] <https://www.irna.ir/news/85005527/%D8%AA%D8%BA%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B7%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D9%82%D8%B2%D9%88%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%BE%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-23-2023>

[5] <https://observers.france24.com/en/middle-east/20230125-iran-gas-shortage...> ; <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Iran-Offers-To-Help-E...>

[6] https://t.me/fa_UYI/81

[7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-13-2023>

[8] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1618625525622386689?s=20&t=jcYRZVC...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618634746908807168?cxt=HHwWgMDU6...>

[9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-25-2023>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618636501755236358?cxt=HHwWjMDQu...>
<https://twitter.com/haalvsh/status/1618592756091486208?s=20&t=jcYRZVCmMp...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618525177134084098?s=20&t=QI7w8P...>

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618615530155577345?cxt=HHwWgsDU7...> ; https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1618606487424897025?s=20&t=BVILc3g... ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1618627204195450888?s=20&t=BVILc3...>

[12] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1618596239527841792?s=20&t=JZ9xKobAn...

[13] https://twitter.com/javanane_zhdn/status/1618202946277371910?s=20&t=YZJW...

[14] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-10-2023>

[15] <https://diyarmirza.ir/1401/11/%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B...>

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>

[17] <https://t.co/SYLSirjQB3>

[18] https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1618163718889824262

[19] [https://www\(dot\)alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%80%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1](https://www(dot)alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%80%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1)

[20] <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-729103>

<https://www.forbes.com/advisor/money-transfer/currency-converter/iqd-usd/>

[21] <https://www.voanews.com/a/iraqi-pm-replaces-central-bank-governor-over-c...>

Iran Crisis Update, January 27, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 27, 2023

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

January 27, 2023, 4:30 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Contributors: Anya Caraiani

The Critical Threats Project will not be collecting on or publishing updates about protest activity in Iran on January 28 or 29. Updates will resume on January 30.

An armed individual shot and killed the security chief of the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran and injured two guards on January 27. The gunman penetrated the embassy building and opened fire on personnel with a Kalashnikov assault rifle. Iranian officials have since arrested the attacker and identified him as 53-year-old Yasin Hossein Zadeh.[1] Iranian media described the event as an “armed attack” and reported that Hossein Zadeh was motivated by “personal and family problems,” citing a dispute between embassy personnel and Hossein Zadeh’s wife in March or April 2022.[2] Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev called the incident a “terrorist attack” and accused Iranian officials of failing to take action against prior threats made against Azerbaijan’s embassy in Tehran.[3] The Azerbaijani Foreign Affairs

Minister Jeyhun Bayramov announced the evacuation of the embassy on January 27.[4] President Ebrahim Raisi called for a comprehensive investigation into the attack, and Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani warned Iranian media outlets against circulating speculative reports of the attack.[5] Supreme National Security Council-affiliated Nour News separately published a tweet stating that the attack should not damage ties between Baku and Tehran.[6]

Iranian Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan appointed a new commander for the LEC Tehran provincial unit several hours after the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy. Radan seemingly demoted Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi, who has held the role since 2017, and replaced him with Brigadier General Abbas Ali Mohammadian, who served as the LEC Tehran city intelligence chief from 2008-2018 and the LEC Alborz provincial commander since 2017. The UK sanctioned Mohammadian in November 2022 for his role in violently suppressing anti-regime protests in Karaj, Alborz Province. [7] It is not clear whether the embassy attack prompted Mohammadian's appointment. Radan may have replaced Rahimi regardless of the embassy attack as Radan installs trusted officers to key security positions. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed Radan as law enforcement commander on January 7.[8]

Protest organizations and coordinators have blamed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy, although there is currently no evidence to corroborate these claims.[9] Protest groups may be circulating this narrative to support their efforts to persuade the international community to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization. The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) released a statement on January 26 emphasizing the importance of external outreach and using legal frameworks to present the crimes of the regime to the international community, as CTP previously reported.[10]

The US Justice Department announced on January 27 the arrest of three individuals in connection with a plot to assassinate prominent

Iranian-American journalist and regime critic Masih Alinejad.

[11] The three arrested individuals face murder-for-hire and money laundering charges and are members of an Eastern European crime organization. The US Justice Department claimed that an unidentified individual in Iran directed the group. Iranian agents previously tried to kidnap Alinejad in 2021.[12]

Key Takeaways.

- **An armed individual shot and killed the security chief of the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran and injured two guards on January 27.**
- **Iranian Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan appointed a new commander for the LEC Tehran provincial unit several hours after the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy.**
- **Protest organizations and coordinators have blamed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy, although there is currently no evidence to corroborate these claims.**
- **The US Justice Department announced on January 27 the arrest of three individuals in connection with a plot to assassinate prominent Iranian-American journalist and regime critic Masih Alinejad.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid inspired protests during his Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 27 as he has done weekly since September 2022.**
- **Protest coordinators published recruitment messages on social media on January 27.**

Protest activity

At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on January 27. CTP assesses with high confidence that protests occurred

in the following locations:

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[13]

- **Size:** Medium to Large
- **Notes:** Anti-regime protesters gathered near the Makki Grand Mosque following prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's Friday prayer sermon.

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[14]

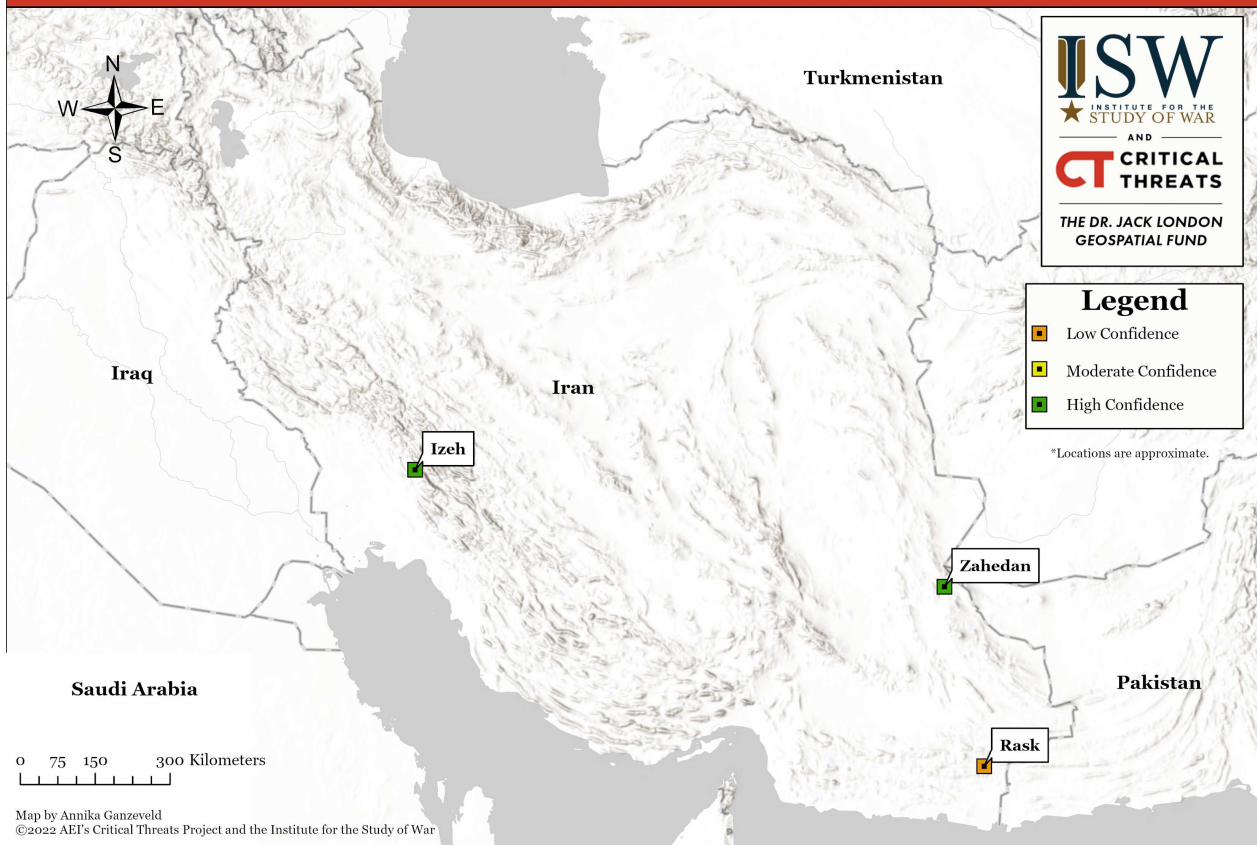
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Notes:** 40-day commemoration ceremony

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

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[15]

- **Size:** Undetermined

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 27, 4:30 PM



Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and/or strikes on the following days:

January 30[16]

- **Type:** Gathering to celebrate a pre-Islamic holiday called “Sadeh.” One prominent protest organization framed the event as a demonstration of pan-Iranian unity.
- **Location:** Countrywide

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid inspired protests during his Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 27 as he has done weekly since September 2022. Abdol Hamid repeated his regular criticisms of the regime but seemed to temper his rhetoric slightly more than usual.[17] Abdol Hamid has previously suggested that he is negotiating with the regime over his demands.[18] He is likely using his sermons to send certain messages to the Iranian authorities with whom he is negotiating. His sermon

generated significant demonstrations in Zahedan, despite his slightly more measured rhetoric.

Security forces did not conduct any visible crackdown on the protests in Zahedan, despite the heightened security presence there.[19] The regime may seek to use these security forces to deter Abdol Hamid from becoming emboldened further and to collect information on local protesters. Iranian security leaders may seek to avoid using these security forces for a violent crackdown to minimize the risk of fueling protests further. The weekly demonstrations in Zahedan began in response to security forces violently suppressing protesters in Zahedan on September 30, 2022, in an event that has become known as "bloody Friday." [20]

Protest coordinators published recruitment messages on social media on January 27. The Esfahan Neighborhood Youth tweeted on January 27 that the regime has killed, injured, and arrested several of their members and announced that the group is accepting candidates for local field leaders, social media and graphic designers, and reporters and content producers.[21] The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) group similarly encouraged "militant groups from various neighborhoods and cities across the country" who aligned with the INYU's mission statement to join their efforts in overthrowing the regime.[22] This messaging aligns with the INYU's previously stated objective of "building cohesion and cooperation among military groups inside Iran.[23] It is unclear with which militant groups the INYU may engage, and cooperation with certain anti-regime actors may ultimately undermine its efforts to gain widespread support among the Iranian public.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report.

[1] <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3...>

[3] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunman-kills-security-chief-at-azer...> ; <https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-azerbaijan-government-fires-4c9...>

[4] <https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-azerbaijan-government-fires-4c9...>

[6] https://twitter.com/nournews_ir/status/1618952861764976641?s=20&t=k1PM5D...

[7] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/asset_data/file_data/103822.pdf

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Iran Crisis Update, January 29, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 29, 2023, 3:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

CTP is publishing an abbreviated Iran update today, January 29. This update focuses on the reported Israeli drone attack on an Iranian military munitions factory and other recently reported explosions and fires throughout Iran. CTP will resume publishing our regular Iran updates on January 30.

Israel conducted a kamikaze drone attack on a military munitions factory near Esfahan City, Esfahan Province on January 28, according to Western media reports.[1] Israeli agents used at least three explosive-laden quadcopters in the attack, suggesting that they launched the strike from inside Iran rather than a neighboring state because of the range of heavily laden quadcopters. [2] The Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry reportedly uses the targeted facility to produce ballistic missiles and drones.[3] Unidentified sources told Western and Israeli journalists that the strike was "specific, surgical, and successful" and "a tremendous success." [4] The Iranian defense ministry dismissed these reports in a public statement, claiming that Iranian air defenses largely prevented the attack and that the drones caused only minimal damage to the roof of the facility.[5]

Iranian officials have not blamed any specific actor for the drone attack at the time of this writing. They may avoid explicitly blaming Israel or any other actor until they have decided how they will respond. Iranian leaders could order proxy attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria or into Israel in the coming weeks in retaliation. This attack will also likely further increase Iranian concerns over the alleged presence of Israeli intelligence services in Azerbaijan and Iraqi Kurdistan.

This attack underscores the extent to which Israeli intelligence services have penetrated the Iranian security sphere. This infiltration has become increasingly obvious and ostentatious in recent years. Mossad has likely conducted several high-profile operations in Iran in recent years, including:[6]

- Raiding a covert archive in Tehran and seizing sensitive documents tied to the pre-2003 Iranian nuclear weapons program in January 2018.
- Assassinating senior Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri Zadeh outside Tehran City in November 2020.
- Sabotaging the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant in July 2020 and again in April 2021.
- Conducting a kamikaze drone attack on a centrifuge manufacturing facility in Karaj in June 2021.

Social media accounts reported additional explosions and fires throughout Iran around the same time as the drone strike, although these events were likely coincidental accidents or misreported. Social media users reported an explosion in Khoy, West Azerbaijan Province and an extensive fire at a motor fuel facility in Azar Shahr, East Azerbaijan Province.[7] Both occurred shortly after a nearby 5.9-magnitude earthquake in northwestern Iran, which very likely caused these events.[8] Social media users also reported Iranian fighter jets flying above Tehran and the sounds of explosions in Karaj, Alborz Province; Dezfoul, Khuzestan Province; and Hamedan City,

Hamedan Province in the hours following the drone attack.[9] There is no evidence that any explosions occurred or images of any damage that might have been caused by explosions. These reports more likely suggest that the regime scrambled fighter jets from airfields that are close to these locations in response to the drone strike, and residents misreported the sounds of military aircraft as explosions.

Reported Explosions and Fires in Iran on January 28-29



Key Takeaways from January 28 and 29. CTP will report on these items fully in our next regular update on January 30.

- CTP recorded no protest activity in Iran on January 28. At least one protest may have occurred in Iran—specifically in Tehran City—on January 29.[10]
- Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan continued to reshuffle senior officers in the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) on January 29. Radan appointed new officers to the positions of LEC Intelligence Organization chief and LEC cultural and social deputy (who is also the LEC official spokesperson).[11]
- Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin announced on January 29 the “establishment of direct communication between Iranian and Russian banks.” Farzin characterized this communication as a financial channel between Iran and Russia.[12]
- President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on January 29. Raisi stated that Baku and Tehran will not allow “ill-wishers” to damage their bilateral ties.[13]

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- [13] <http://www.president dot ir/fa/142121>

Iran Crisis Update, January 30, 2023

Iran Crisis Update, January 30, 2023

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

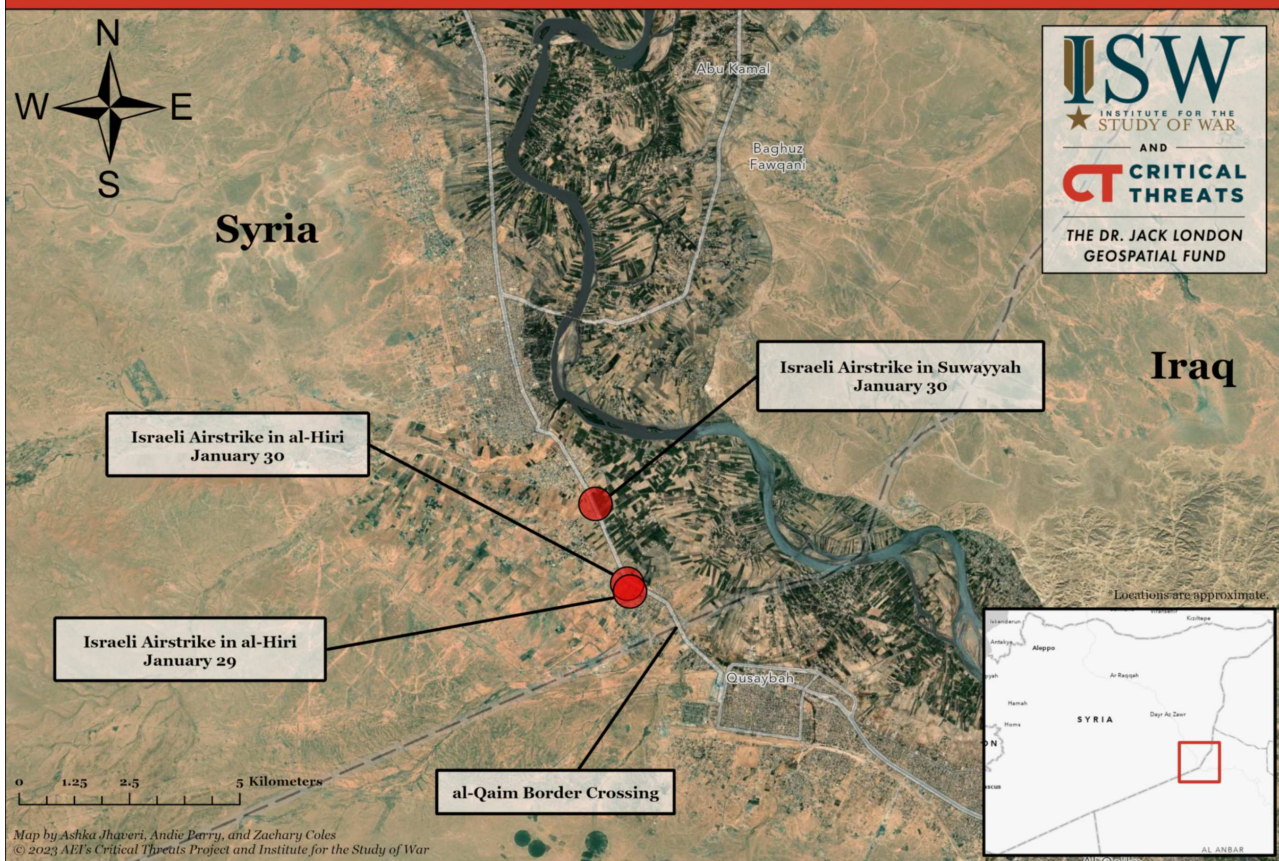
January 30, 2023, 6:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Israeli combat aircraft conducted three airstrikes against likely Iran-backed militants in eastern Syria on January 29 and January 30. Israeli combat aircraft targeted and destroyed six trucks traveling through al-Hiri, Deir ez-Zour Province shortly after the convoy crossed into Syria from the Iraqi al-Qaim border crossing on January 29.[1] Iranian proxy social media channels posted footage depicting a large fire in al-Hari immediately after the airstrike occurred, indicating that the attack may have detonated precision-guided munitions (PGMs) that Iran-backed militants attempted to conceal in what Iranian state media claimed to be a humanitarian convoy.[2] Iranian state-run *Islamic Republic News Agency* denied reports that the attack resulted in casualties among IRGC personnel.[3]

Israeli combat aircraft conducted two additional airstrikes against Iran-backed militants in al-Hiri and Suwayyah, Deir ez-Zour Province on January 30.[4] *The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* reported that the first January 30 airstrike targeted and killed a local Iran-backed militia commander whom had arrived to inspect damage from the January 29 attack.[5] CTP is unable to corroborate this claim. The second January 30 strike targeted a convoy transporting likely PGMs after it entered Syria through the al-Qaim crossing.[6] The January 29 and January 30 airstrikes reportedly killed at least 10 Iran-backed militia or IRGC Quds Force personnel in total.[7] Israeli airstrike activity within the past 24 hours marks a significant increase from the baseline level of activity and may be a response to a parallel uptick in Iranian PGM shipments into Syria.

Israeli Airstrikes in Eastern Syria January 29-30



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implicitly criticized the Raisi administration's economic performance in a speech on January 30. Khamenei's address detailed his support for government-backed private sector growth. Khamenei stated that he would guide government officials' economic strategy and suggested that he would adopt a more direct role in managing the Iranian economy, an implicit criticism of the Raisi administration's failure to do so well. [8] President Ebrahim Raisi separately invoked Khamenei's support for increased government-backed privatization on January 29. [9] Khamenei may increasingly seek to use Raisi administration members as scapegoats for Raisi as the Iranian economy enters a period of potentially significant disruption. Khamenei described First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber as bearing a specific responsibility for the Iranian economy in his address, possibly signaling that Khamenei intends to use Mokhber as a scapegoat for Raisi's failure to cohere a successful economic strategy. [10]

Some Iranian parliamentarians and important regime organs endorsed a legislative proposal that would significantly limit freedom of speech within Iran. The proposal targets prominent Iranian political, military, scientific, and cultural actors, specifically those with large social media followings. The legislation would allow Iranian authorities to sentence well-known Iranians who circulate content critical of the regime to 10 to 15 years in prison and would ban them from the profession for which they are renowned for five to ten years. A hardline parliamentarian who endorsed the proposal attempted to defend criticisms of the legislation by stating in a rather Orwellian fashion that: "no one can be punished for having an opinion, but expressing that opinion in a free manner is not allowed." [11] National Cyberspace Center Cultural and Social Deputy Ghassem Khalidi announced on January 29 that the Supreme Cyberspace Council and Ministry of Islamic Guidance—both of which are responsible for crafting and implementing some of the regime's censorship policies—endorsed the proposal. [12] It is unclear if parliament will pass the bill, however. Only 24 of Iran's 290 parliamentarians have currently endorsed the plan, and the proposal has received widespread criticism in recent days. [13]

Key Takeaways

- Israeli combat aircraft conducted three airstrikes against likely Iran-backed militants in eastern Syria.
- Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implicitly criticized the Raisi administration's economic performance in a speech.
- Some Iranian parliamentarians and important regime organs endorsed a legislative proposal that would significantly limit freedom of speech within Iran.
- At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on January 29 and at least 18 protests occurred in 13 cities across 13 provinces on January 30. CTP did not record protests that met its reporting thresholds on January 28.
- President Ebrahim Raisi held a telephone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.
- Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Ukraine's charge d'affaires over Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak's comments on the January 28 Israeli drone attack in Esfahan City, Esfahan Province.
- Iran and Russia established direct financial communication channels between Iranian banks and more than 800 Russian banks.
- Artesh Navy Deputy Commander Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani announced on January 28 that the Artesh Navy entered Latin American waters.
- Law Enforcement Commander Ahmad Reza Radan appointed Gholam Reza Rezaian as Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Intelligence Chief.
- Internet watchdog organizations and social media users recorded significant internet disruptions in Kurdistan, Mazandaran, and Sistan and Baluchistan Provinces.
- Iranian authorities arrested Sunni cleric Moulavi Abdol Majid Mouradzahi on January 30 in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.
- Iranian authorities sealed two businesses for failing to observe laws that restrict women's role in the public sphere.
- Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Shahriar Heidari announced that committee members would travel to Esfahan and visit the target of the January 28 Israeli drone strike.

Protest activity

At least one protests occurred in one city across one province on January 29. CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[14]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of prisoners sentenced to death
- **Notes:** It is unclear if these families are connected to arrested protesters

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 29, 5:00 PM



At least 18 protests occurred in 13 cities across 13 provinces on January 30. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Kerman City, Kerman Province[15]

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

Sanadaj, Kurdistan Province[16]

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

Khorramabad, Lorestan Province[17]

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[18]

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[19]

- **Size:** Small

- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30. Videos show two distinct locations of protest activity within Ekbatan.
- **Location:** Ekbatan

Yazd City, Yazd Province[20]

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

Yazd City, Yazd Province[21]

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations on January 30:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[22]

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

Rasht, Gilan Province[23]

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

Gheshm, Hormozgan Province[24]

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

Ilam City, Ilam Province[25]

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

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[26]

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

Mashhad, Khorasan-Razavi Province[27]

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

Mashhad, Khorasan-Razavi Province[28]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Fires lit on street
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[29]

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

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[30]

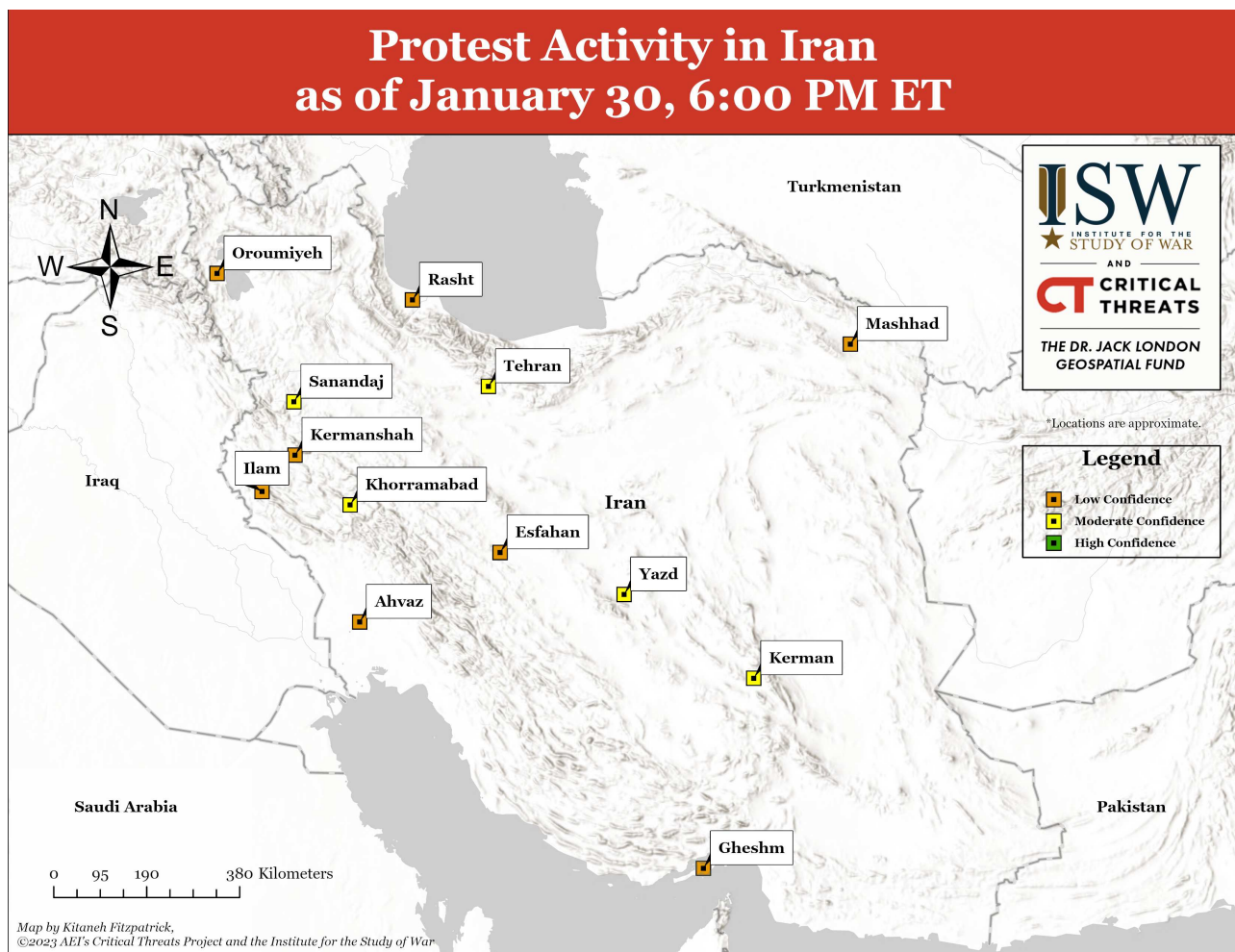
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Tehran City, Tehran Province[31]

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Fires lit on street
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30
- **Location:** Beheshti

Oroumijeh, West Azerbaijan Province[32]

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



NOTES:

- CTP did not record demonstrations that met its protest activity thresholds on January 28.
- Some protest activity on January 30 adhered to protest organization and coordinators' prior calls for anti-regime demonstrations on Sadeh, a Zoroastrian festival that occurs 100 days before the spring equinox and Persian new year.[33]

President Ebrahim Raisi held a telephone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on January 29. An armed individual shot and killed the security chief of the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran and injured two guards on January 27, as CTP previously reported.[34] Raisi expressed his condolences and stated that Iran would not permit “ill-wishers” to threaten ties between the two countries.[35] Azerbaijani authorities evacuated Baku’s embassy personnel in Tehran on January 29.[36]

Iran’s Foreign Ministry summoned Ukraine’s charge d’affaires over Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak’s comments on the January 28 Israeli drone attack in Esfahan City, Esfahan Province.[37] Podolyak suggested that the Esfahan strike was in retaliation for Iran’s military support for Russia’s war in Ukraine.[38] No evidence currently suggests that Ukraine was informed of or complicit in the attack.

Iran and Russia established direct financial communication channels between Iranian banks and more than 800 Russian banks on January 29.[39] Central Bank of Iran Deputy Governor Mohsen Karami announced that Iranian and Russian banks have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on financial messaging, effective immediately. Karami added that Iranian banks abroad were also included in the MoU and would be able to exchange standard banking messages with Russian banks.[40] Iranian officials and state-affiliated media outlets framed the MoU as a means to circumvent Western sanctions on Iran and Russia and compared the messaging system to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), which serves as the world’s largest financial messaging system.[41]

Artesh Navy Deputy Commander Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani announced on January 28 that the Artesh Navy entered Latin American waters.[42] Kaviani added that the Artesh Navy’s 86th flotilla will arrive in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the coming days.

Law Enforcement Commander Ahmad Reza Radan appointed Gholam Reza Rezaian as Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Intelligence Chief on January 29.[43] Rezaian previously served as the LEC Economic Security Police Chief. Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi, who was dismissed from his post as LEC Tehran provincial commander on January 27 possibly as a result of his handling of the Azerbaijani embassy incident, will assume the post of LEC Economic Security Police Chief.[44] Radan has reshuffled personnel within the LEC since Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed him as LEC Commander on January 7.[45]

Internet watchdog organizations and social media users recorded significant internet disruptions in Kurdistan, Mazandaran, and Sistan and Baluchistan Provinces on January 29. Netblocks reported a disruption to internet connectivity throughout Iran with a high impact to Mazandaran Province on January 29.[46] Reports suggest that Kurdistan Province and Zahedan in Sistan and Baluchistan Province were also impacted by severe internet disruptions for several hours.[47] Iranian officials attributed internet connectivity incidents to severed fiber optic cables between Babol and Sari, Mazandaran Province.[48]

Iranian authorities arrested Sunni cleric Moulavi Abdol Majid Mouradzahi on January 30 in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[49] Moulavi Abdol Majid Muradzahi is a former instructor at the Sunni Makki Seminary in Zahedan and is reportedly a close associate of prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid. The regime has likely arrested Mouradzahi in attempt to escalate against Abdol Hamid, who has continued to incite unrest in Zahedan following his weekly Friday prayer sermons.

Iranian authorities sealed two businesses for failing to observe laws that restrict women’s role in the public sphere. A judiciary official in Mazandaran Province confirmed that he had sealed a pharmacy in Amol for the “non-observance of Islamic rites and acts contrary to public morals” on January 29. Iranian media framed the closure as a penalty for failing to enforce regime-endorsed veiling standards.[50] A Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province Law Enforcement Commander separately announced that his unit closed a restaurant following reports that a woman sang to customers at the restaurant at an unspecified prior date.[51]

Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Shahriar Heidari announced that committee members would travel to Esfahan and visit the target of the January 28 Israeli drone strike.[52] Israel conducted a kamikaze drone attack against an arms manufacturing facility in Esfahan City, Esfahan Province, as CTP previously reported.[53]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

See topline text.

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[11] [https://www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/712905/](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/712905/)-طرح مجازات افراد برای اظهار نظر به هیات رئیسه مجلس- رسید جزئیات مجازات حبس از ۱۰ تا ۱۵ سال محرومیت ۵ تا ۱۰ ساله افراد از حقوق اجتماعی و ممنوعیت از شغل و حرفه ای که منجر به شهرت آنها شده

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Iran Crisis Update, January 31, 2023

Nicholas Carl, Annika Ganzeveld, Johanna Moore, Dana Alexandar Gray, and Frederick W. Kagan

January 31, 2023, 5:00 pm ET

The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

Iranian officials have threatened Ukraine and unnamed regional states for allegedly cooperating with Israel in response to the reported Israeli drone strike on a military munitions factory in Esfahan on January 28.[1] An unidentified source told Nour News Agency, which is affiliated with the Supreme National Security Council, on January 31 that Tehran may reevaluate its relationship with Kiev and changes its ostensibly neutral policy toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[2] The source was responding to Ukrainian Presidential Adviser Mykhailo Podolyak suggesting that the Israeli strike was retaliation for Iranian military support to Russia.[3] Nour News Agency characterized Podolyak's statements as tantamount to an admission of responsibility for the attack. There is no evidence that Ukraine was informed of or complicit in the attack. CTP does not assess that Tehran will escalate against Ukraine for Podolyak's comments but rather that Iran will continue to provide military support to Russia.

Iranian policy toward the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been characterized by unequivocal military material support in the form of hundreds of kamikaze drones that Tehran has blithely denied providing. The Iranian regime could use the Israeli strike and Podolyak's comments to bring its public position closer to its actual policy, attempting to justify ex post facto the provision of weapons Russia has used to target Ukrainian civilian infrastructure in a manner widely regarded as contravening international law.[4] It is unclear why Iran has been vainly attempting to obfuscate its involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine to this point, however, and it is possible that Tehran will simply continue to do so.

Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib separately on January 30 warned unnamed neighboring states to avoid cooperation with Israel "to maintain their own security"—likely referencing Iranian allegations that Israeli intelligence services use Azerbaijan and Iraqi Kurdistan to organize and support covert operations in Iran.[5]

Iranian officials are securitizing their disaster response to the 5.9-magnitude earthquake that occurred in Khoy, West Azerbaijan Province on January 28. West Azerbaijan Provincial Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Rahim Jahan Bakhsh announced on January 31 the deployment of three units of the LEC Special Units to Khoy to "provide security and prevent theft." [6] The LEC Special Units are a highly trained, anti-riot force that the regime uses heavily in its protest crackdowns. The Gilan Neighborhood Youth separately reported on January 30 that Basij members attacked and dispersed crowds seeking earthquake aid in Khoy.[7] The regime is especially sensitive to unrest in northwestern Iran because much of the recent protest activity concentrated there and resonated among Iranian Kurds. Anti-regime Kurdish militant groups, such as the Kurdistan Free Life Party, have historically operated in the region as well.

President Ebrahim Raisi continues to misdiagnose the root problems that have driven the recent protests. Iranian officials in recent months have defined the unrest as a sociocultural and religious issue and seem to believe that the solution is trying to further ideologize the population. Raisi reiterated on January 31 the need to pursue "explanation jihad"—the regime theory that indoctrinating and ideologizing the population, especially Iranian youth, will increase public

support for the political establishment and reduce anti-regime sentiment.[8] Raisi participated in a ceremony unveiling a digital encyclopedia about Ruhollah Khomeini and his writings. Raisi lauded the initiative, which he claimed will help spread Khomeinist ideology to future generations. [9] Iranian leaders viewing the protests through this lens will impede—if not prevent entirely—any serious effort to address many popular grievances.

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian officials have threatened Ukraine and unnamed regional states for allegedly cooperating with Israel in response to the reported Israeli drone strike on a military munition factory in Esfahan.**
- **Iranian officials are securitizing their disaster response to the 5.9-magnitude earthquake that occurred in Khoy, West Azerbaijan Province.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi continues to misdiagnose the root problems that have driven the recent protests.**
- **At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Several parliamentarians criticized the Raisi administration for its handling of the economy.**
- **The Central Bank raised the three-year maximum interest rate on bank deposits from 18 percent to 22.5 percent.**
- **Iranian and Iranian-backed militants in Deir ez Zour Province ordered their forces to prepare to attack US forces at the al Omar oil field or Koniko gas fields in eastern Syria, according to local Syria outlets.**
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that Russia will include Iran in future rapprochement discussions between Syria and Turkey.**
- **Parliamentarian Mohammad Sargazi described plans to expel Afghan nationals from Sistan and Baluchistan Province if the Afghan Taliban does not provide Iran water rights to the Helmand River.**

Protest Activity

At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 31. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Tehran City, Tehran Province[10]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Investors who lost money in Cryptoland—one of Iran's largest cryptocurrency exchange platforms

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

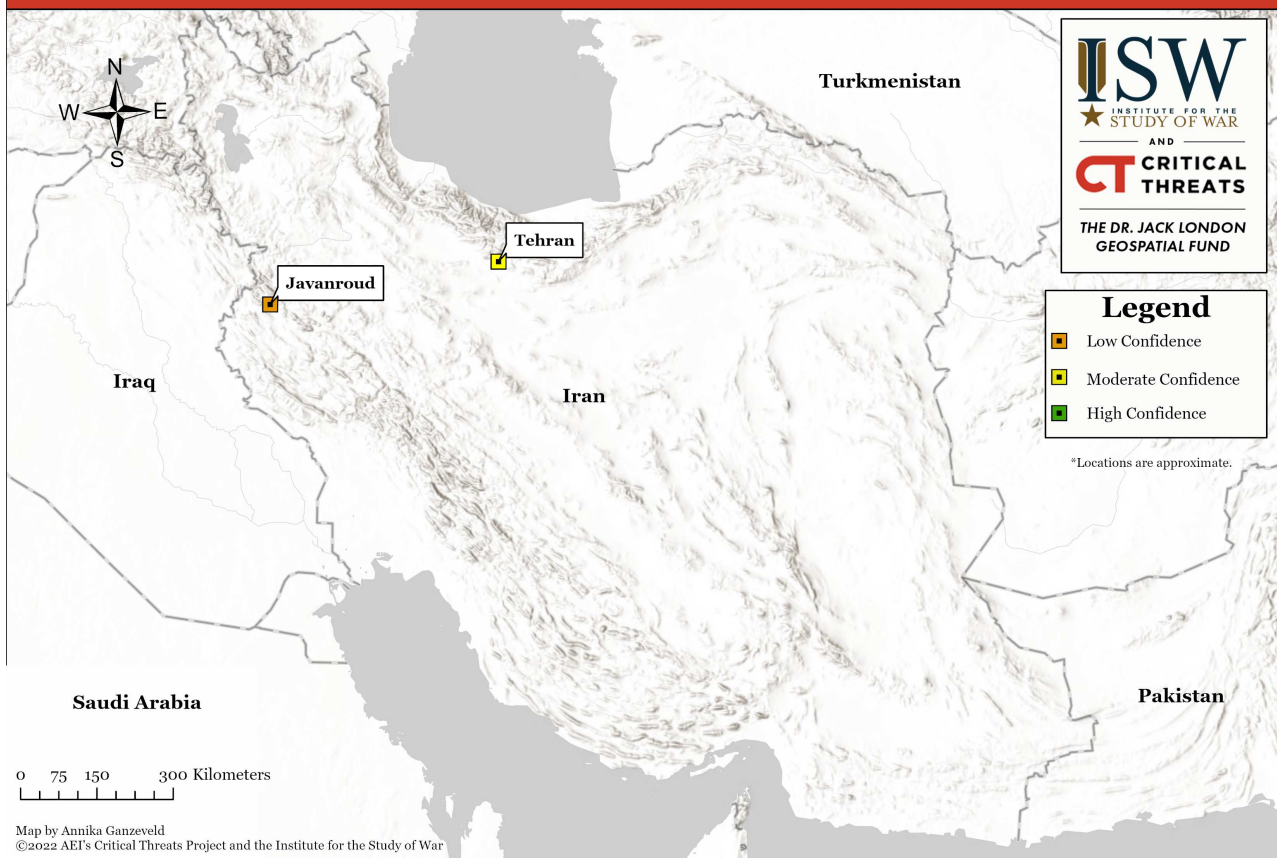
Javanroud, Kermanshah Province[11]

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Female students

Javanroud, Kermanshah Province[12]

- **Size:** Small

Protest Activity in Iran as of January 31, 5:00 PM



Several parliamentarians criticized the Raisi administration for its handling of the economy on January 31. These lawmakers include Jalal Mahmoud Zadeh, Javad Nik Beyn, Mohammad Safari Melak Miyan, and Rouhollah Izadkhah.[13] Malek Miyan and Mahmoud Zadeh have supported various hardliner policies and attacks on the Rouhani administration previously.[14] Nik Beyn specifically attacked the Raisi administration for failing to designate a single individual to manage economic policy, citing the overlapping responsibilities between First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, Vice President for Economic Affairs Mohsen Rezaei, and Economy and Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei designated Mokhber as responsible for economic policy on January 30, as CTP previously reported, possibly to begin clarifying this confusion in the regime.[15] It would be particularly noteworthy if Khamenei did indeed engage personally to resolve this issue since it may suggest Khamenei's frustration with President Ebrahim Raisi for failing to cohere his administration.

Parliamentary attacks against an Iranian president for his handling of the economy (among other things) are common; lawmakers regularly criticized former President Hassan Rouhani in the same way.[16] Previous hardline Iranian presidents, including Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also came in for harsh attacks.[17] These criticisms are noteworthy, however, given that Raisi is a top contender to succeed Khamenei as supreme leader. These parliamentarians are treating Raisi like any other Iranian president rather than the supreme-leader-to-be. If Raisi's presidency follows the normal trajectory of his predecessors he will face increasingly acrimonious attacks in Parliament and may find himself alienated from the supreme leader as well, as almost all his predecessors did.

The Central Bank raised the three-year maximum interest rate on bank deposits from 18 percent to 22.5 percent on January 31.[18] Economy and Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi explained that the increased interest rate is meant to promote macroeconomic stability.[19]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iranian and Iranian-backed militants in Deir ez Zour Province ordered their forces on January 31 to prepare to attack US forces at the al Omar oil field or Koniko gas fields in eastern Syria, according to local Syria outlets.[20] The Iranian and Iranian-backed commanders met at a local security office to discuss retaliation for Israeli strikes on Iranian convoys on January 29 and 30. Coalition forces are reportedly on high alert at the potential target locations.[21] Senior Iranian military commanders have warned in recent years that they will attack "all centers, bases, routes, and spaces used as sources or paths for [Israeli] aggression," holding the US accountable for potential Israeli strikes.[22] Iranian willingness to attack the US as part of its escalation cycle with Israel highlights the fact that Tehran likely considers American forces a safer target than Israeli targets, presumably because the Iranians see the risk of Israeli military escalation as being higher than the risk of American military escalation.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced on January 31 that Russia will include Iran in future rapprochement discussions between Syria and Turkey.[23] Moscow has mediated meetings between Syrian and Turkish officials since December 2022 and have thus far excluded Iranian representatives.[24] Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian held back-to-back meetings with the Syrian and Turkish foreign ministers and Syrian defense officials from January 14 to January 23, likely to reassert Iranian influence in the rapprochement discussions.[25]

Parliamentarian Mohammad Sargazi described on January 29 plans to expel Afghan nationals from Sistan and Baluchistan Province if the Afghan Taliban does not provide Iran water rights to the Helmand River.[26] The Raisi administration instructed Special Presidential Representative for Afghan Affairs Hassan Kazemi Ghomi to issue this threat to the Afghan Taliban, according to Sargazi, although it is unclear whether he has yet done so. Sargazi represents the city of Zabol, which relies heavily on water from the river. The regime has conducted mass deportations of Afghans on several occasions previously, such as when it expelled tens of thousands of Afghans in 2007.[27]

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