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Iran Crisis Update, December 15

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Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 15, 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](#).

Contributors: Kitaneh Fitzpatrick and Johanna Moore

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is likely conducting an information operation to discredit the neighborhood youth protest organizations among demonstrators. IRGC-affiliated media outlets and social media accounts claimed on December 15 that these neighborhood groups have helped security forces identify and arrest protesters who send the groups information.[1] These IRGC outlets claimed, contradictorily, that the neighborhood groups are reporting protesters to perpetuate unrest in Iran. These outlets also accused these neighborhood groups of having ties to Saudi Arabia and the Mojahedin-e Khalq. The claims that these neighborhood groups are simultaneously cooperating with the regime and its external adversaries seem incompatible but are likely part of an information effort to confuse protesters and sow distrust. The IRGC is likely trying to deter protester cooperation with these groups and prevent protesters from attending the groups' planned demonstrations. These IRGC reports are the first major regime acknowledgement of the neighborhood youth groups, reflecting how seriously the regime perceives the threat they now pose.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi discussed expanding regime censorship in a speech on December 15—comments which the regime later denied that Vahidi made. Vahidi warned that an uncontrolled internet will destroy the minds and spirit of Iranian youth and that therefore “cyberspace is becoming completely restricted.”[2] The Interior Ministry soon denied that Vahidi made such remarks.[3] Iranian state media excluded Vahidi's remarks about censorship in its reporting on his speech.[4]

Key Takeaways

- **The IRGC is likely conducting an information operation to discredit some protester coordinators among demonstrators.**
- **Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi discussed expanding regime censorship in a speech—comments which the regime later denied Vahidi made.**
- **At least three protests took place in three cities across three provinces.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests took place in three cities across three provinces on December 15. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Abdanan, Ilam Province[5]

- Size: Small
- Note: Celebrations for the regime releasing a protester imprisoned for over a month.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[6]

- Size: Small

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

Eslamabad-e Gharb, Kermanshah Province[7]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Mourners
- Note: Protest martyr Alireza Karimi's 40-day commemoration ceremony.



The Hamedan Neighborhood Youth called on protesters to glue shut public facilities on December 15.[8] The Hamedan group stated that potential targets include banks, electrical and telecommunications facilities, government offices, and schools.

President Ebrahim Raisi traveled to South Khorasan Province to meet with economic managers and officials on December 15.[9] Raisi's visit comes as Iran faces a mounting fiscal crisis, but it is not obvious why he would attempt to address these problems in South Khorasan.[10]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan proposed a series of trilateral meetings between Russian, Turkish, and Assad regime officials.[11] Erdogan suggested cabinet-level trilateral meetings would strengthen diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Assad regime, which would also serve as an antecedent to the three leaders' meeting.[12] Erdogan claimed that Russian President Vladimir Putin has communicated that he is in favor of the proposal.[13] Erdogan likely intends to use the potential diplomatic thaw to secure approval from the Assad regime for a renewed ground invasion into SDF-held territory in northern Syria.

Local residents killed an Irish peacekeeping soldier in southern Lebanon on December

15. Residents shot and killed the soldier as his convoy traveled through al Aqbieh, South Province, Lebanon.[14] The area is a support zone for Lebanese Hezbollah, but Hezbollahi leadership has labored to give the impression that the incident occurred without their orders.[15]

[1] <http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/24/2821749>;
<https://t.me/SEPAHCYBERY/58541>

[2] https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:1YVmr0_homkJ:https...dotir/fa/news/707058/%25D9%2588%25D8%25B2%25DB%258C%25D8%25B1-%25DA%25A9%25D8%25B4%25D9%2588%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2581%25D8%25B6%25D8%25A7%25DB%258C-%25D9%2585%25D8%25AC%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B2%25DB%258C-%25D8%25A8%25D9%2587-%25D8%25B7%25D9%2588%25D8%25B1-%25DA%25A9%25D8%25A7%25D9%2585%25D9%2584-%25D9%2581%25DB%258C%25D9%2584%25D8%25AA%25D8%25B1-%25D9%2585%25DB%258C%25E2%2580%258C%25D8%25B4%25D9%2588%25D8%25AF-%25D9%2587%25D8%25B1%25DA%2586%25D9%2586%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B4%25D9%2585%25D9%2586%25D8%25A7%25D9%2586-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B1-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25B3%25D8%25AA%25D9%2588%25D8%25B1-%25DA%25A9%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B1-%25D8%25AE%25D9%2588%25D8%25AF-%25D8%25B3%25D8%25A7%25D8%25AE%25D8%25AA-%25D9%2581%25DB%258C%25D9%2584%25D8%25AA%25D8%25B1%25D8%25B4%25DA%25A9%25D9%2586%25E2%2580%258C%25D9%2587%25D8%25A7-%25D8%25B1%25D8%25A7-%25D8%25AF%25D8%25A7%25D8%25B1%25D9%2586%25D8%25AF&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk

[3] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/24/2822026>

[4] <https://www.irna.com/fa/news/84971218>

[5] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1603445219218931714?s=20&t=nO4OJwIlan...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603442059272241189>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603441370890469376>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603445967273218048>

[6] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603500950337032192?s=20&t=Ra9H-Z...>

[7] https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1603394862950367233?s=20&t=28sWg_NfCT...

[8] https://t.me/hmd_javanan/335

[9] <https://president.ir/fa/141409>

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

[11] <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-seeks-trilateral-mechanism-with-rus...>

[12] <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-seeks-trilateral-mechanism-with-rus...>

[13] <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-seeks-trilateral-mechanism-with-rus...>

[14] <https://www.reuters.com/world/irish-soldier-killed-un-peacekeeping-missi...>

[15] <https://www.reuters.com/world/irish-soldier-killed-un-peacekeeping-missi...>

Iran Crisis Update, December 16

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

December 16, 5:00 pm ET

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Protest organizations and coordinators are increasingly promoting consistent and sustainable acts of anti-regime defiance as the Mahsa Amini protest movement enters its fourth consecutive month. The United Neighborhood Youth of Iran circulated a translated, two-page text attributed to American author Robert Greene on December 16 that encouraged protesters to continue anti-regime demonstrations and overthrow the regime.[1] The text called on protesters to remain united and engaged in anti-regime activity. It is unclear where this text originated from, although it was likely adapted from Greene's December 7 Youtube video on the Mahsa Amini movement.[2] The Neighborhood Youth Group of Karaj also circulated the translated text and issued a five-point plan that incorporated Greene's recommendations. The group framed the plan as a progressive and natural next step of the protest movement.[3] The Karaj group called for regular acts of anti-regime defiance to sustain the protest movement, including:

- Chanting anti-regime slogans every night;
- Writing anti-regime slogans throughout the city;
- Distributing written calls to protests and other information pertaining to protest activity to reach populations that are less active on social media;
- Thinking of new and innovative ways to demonstrate against the regime;
- Engaging in new protest activity in crowded and well-known areas.[4]

The Neighborhood Youth of Karaj Group's plan, if successfully implemented, would likely pose a challenge to local security personnel attempting to quell acts of unrest throughout different areas of the city. The group's emphasis on non-protest related acts of anti-regime defiance could also invite participation from broader segments of the Iranian population.

Increased calls for non-protest related acts of anti-regime dissent do not mean that protests will entirely subside, however. Social media users circulated calls for countrywide strikes and protests on December 19, 20, and 21, as CTP reported on December 14.[5] Protest organizations have recently demonstrated the capability to coordinate large-scale, country-wide strikes and increased protest activity from December 5, 6, and 7 as well.[6]

Iranian Parliament and the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council did not release an opinion on the mandatory veiling law--or how the regime chooses to police this law--on December 16. Prosecutor General Mohammad Javad Montazeri had stated on December 1 that Iranian officials were examining mandatory veiling and would release their findings by December 16.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **Protest organizations and coordinators are increasingly promoting consistent and sustainable acts of anti-regime defiance as the Mahsa Amini protest movement enters its fourth consecutive month.**
- **The Iranian Parliament and the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council did not release an opinion on the mandatory veiling law or how the regime chooses to police that law on December 16.**

- At least eight protests took place in six cities across four provinces.
- Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid condemned the regime for sentencing arrested protesters to death in his weekly Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.
- A pro-Iran Iraqi official stated that former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi would be arrested in connection with IRGC-Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis' deaths.

Anti-Regime Protests

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

Dehgolan, Kurdistan Province[8]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Killed protester Shademan Ahmadi's seven-day commemoration ceremony

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[9]

- Size: Medium

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[10]

- Size: Medium
- Notes: Followed Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's weekly Friday sermon

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Killed protester Ali Rouzbahani's 40-day commemoration ceremony

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

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province[12]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: High school students

Chabahar, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[13]

- Size: Medium

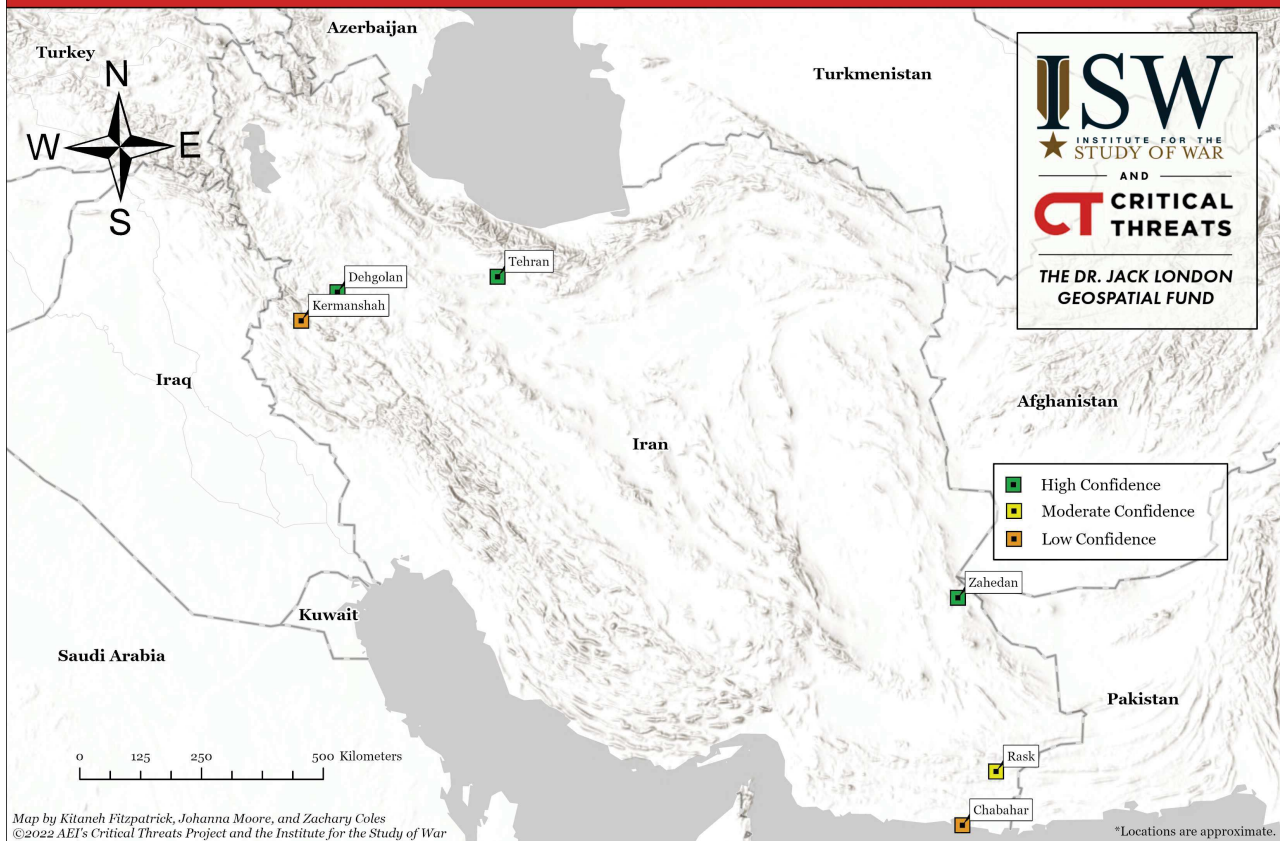
Tehran City, Tehran Province[14]

- Size: Undetermined
- Area: Chitgar

Tehran City, Tehran Province[15]

- Size: Undetermined
- Notes: Seemingly spontaneous protest, reportedly little to no security presence in said area

Protest Activity in Iran as of December 16, 5:00 PM ET



Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid condemned the regime for sentencing arrested protesters to death in his weekly Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Abdol Hamid stated that the Islamic Republic was managed by “weak leadership” and that the Iranian population was united in their grievances against the regime.[16] Abdol Hamid additionally praised deceased Khash city Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Moulavi Abdol Vahed Rigi and stated that “they [killed] him” without specifying who “they” were. Unidentified assailants kidnapped, shot, and killed Khash city Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Moulavi Abdol Vahed Rigi in the vicinity of Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on December 8. State-affiliated media outlets and social media users framed Rigi as a pro-regime actor and described him as a “martyr.”[17]

A local Sunni cleric in Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province is reportedly missing and cannot be reached. Malouvi Abdol Ghafar Naghshbandi’s father stated that his son’s whereabouts were currently unknown after he had had been summoned to a special clerical court in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province.[18] Social media users claimed that the IRGC Intelligence Organization had additionally summoned and interrogated Naghshbandi’s brother.[19] Rask residents were documented expressing support for Naghshbandi on December 16.[20] Naghshbandi had previously confirmed the rape of a 15-year-old Baloch girl by the Chabahar, Sistan and Baluchistan LEC Commander on September 27. He was the first Sunni cleric to confirm the rape.

IranWire reported that Iranian security personnel tortured and killed Tehran doctor Aida Rostami for treating wounded protesters on December 12.[21] Protesters have established informal medical networks to avoid hospitals and clinics where security forces frequently infiltrate, as CTP has previously reported.[22]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iran-affiliated Iraqi State of Law Coalition official Fadel Mowat al-Zarijawi stated that former Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi would be arrested in connection with IRGC-Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis' deaths. [23] Iranian officials have alleged that Kadhimi facilitated the US airstrike and have issued calls to prosecute Kadhimi.[24] The Iraqi Integrity Commission has pursued former Kadhimi officials on corruption charges in a likely retaliatory campaign.

[1] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1603794408465383426?s=20&t=pReWj4wZB7_...

[2] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fr4FTI9PqqM>

[3] https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1603816214899236864?s=20&t=pReWj4w...

[4] https://t.me/javanane_ka/344

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

[6] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-5>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-6>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-7>

[7] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-4#_...

[8] https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1603823719817805826?s=20&t=NRjRgHAzH_GL...; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1603728798129717251?s=20&t=NRjRgHAzH...>; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1603658585417961473?s=20&t=NRjRgHAzH...; <https://twitter.com/SrwaZand/status/1603828380658434051?s=20&t=NRjRgHAzH...>

[9] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603698262002761728?s=20&t=aUrNZx...>; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1603760179828465665?s=20&t=aUrNZx3jC...>; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1603697685994913794?s=20&t=aUrNZx3jC...

[10] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1603715308497391621?s=20&t=RX5O-hf...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1603694669224886272?s=20&t=YWw7C4j...>

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<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603699360918900736?s=20&t=RX5O-h...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603822472943599617?s=20&t=RX5O-h...>

[11] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1603712222601285633?s=20&t=RX5O-hf...>; <https://twitter.com/Vahid/status/1603768468897161217?s=20&t=RX5O-hfRFngT...>; <https://twitter.com/Vahid/status/1603771516579155969?s=20&t=RX5O-hfRFngT...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603777316357918722?s=20&t=RX5O-h...>

[12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603736091391033344?s=20&t=RX5O-h...>

[13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603707138747994112?s=20&t=RX5O-h...> ; <https://twitter.com/SedayeShahrivar/status/1603830901300875264?s=20&t=KW...>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603862513384316936?s=20&t=GQrkAp...>

[15] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1603772967342727170?s=20&t=RX5O-h...>

[16] <https://t dot co/7Dd3NAKe3O>

[17] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-9>

[18] https://twitter.com/avatoday_news/status/1603754886348283904?s=20&t=lfld8...

[19] <https://twitter.com/IranIntlbrk/status/1603740034674352128?s=20&t=RX5O-h...>

[20] <https://twitter.com/shabnam68284948/status/1603710201793757184?s=20&t=uO...>

[21] <https://iranwire.com/en/politics/111407-tehran-doctor-tortured-and-kille...>

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

[23] <https://twitter.com/najahmalii/status/1603762459210235904>

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[https://www\(dot\)alrabiaa.tv/article/40095/%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%22%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%85%D9%8A%22-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3-40095](https://www(dot)alrabiaa.tv/article/40095/%D8%B5%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AF%D8%AB-%D8%B9%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%22%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B8%D9%85%D9%8A%22-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B3-40095)

[24] <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/452938/Iran-calls-on-Iraq-to-pursue-Sol...>

<https://en.mehrnews.com/news/154858/Iran-to-legally-pursue-case-of-US-as...>

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Iranian security personnel clashed with prisoners in Karaj, Alborz Province on December 17, reportedly killing one and injuring up to 100 others. A foreign-based Iranian human rights organization reported that Karaj Central Prison security personnel violently suppressed prisoners protesting inmate executions and other acts of violence, citing an informed source. The source alleged that protests erupted after security personnel transferred four prisoners to solitary confinement and intended to execute them at an unspecified time. Inmates from units two, three, and five reportedly chanted anti-regime slogans and broke doors and cameras within the prison. [1] Prison guards opened fire on the protesting inmates in an attempt to quell the unrest, resulting in roughly 100 inmate casualties and at least one death.[2] Karaj residents and social media users additionally reported local internet outages and a heavy security presence in the vicinity of the Karaj Central Prison on the evening of December 17.[3]

State-affiliated media and a local judiciary official confirmed clashes between prison guards and inmates held in the narcotics ward of the Karaj Central Prison on December 17. Iranian media initially claimed that some inmates had set fire to blankets, which security personnel allegedly contained rapidly and without casualties.[4] The Alborz Province Judiciary Chief later acknowledged that the clashes resulted in the death of one inmate and injured several others but claimed that casualties were sustained by prisoners "throwing stones" at one another for unspecified reasons.[5]

The regime's violent suppression tactics suggest incompetence and mismanagement within the Karaj Central Prison. Large-scale riots are indicative of poorly-run prisons with insufficient resources. Competent prison authorities and guards should be able to control prisoners without resorting to lethal force. Losing control over a state-owned facility to this extent constitutes a significant failure of the regime, which may be struggling to handle the enormous influx of inmates it has generated by mass arrests of protesters.

Some protest organizations could be playing increasingly prominent roles within a localized and relatively de-centralized anti-regime actor nexus. The Neighborhood Youth Group of Karaj circulated a five-point plan on how to sustain acts of anti-regime defiance on December 16, as CTP previously reported.[6] The group called on its followers to plan protests in crowded and well-known areas and conceptualize new ways to demonstrate against the regime. Social media users documented several protests on multiple Tehran subway platforms the next day on December 17. [7] CTP has observed protest activity in Tehran metro stations before, and this protest location is not novel. Increased anti-regime demonstrations within Tehran subways could nevertheless suggest that protesters are adapting their tactics to adhere to the Neighborhood Youth Group of Karaj's recommendations. IRGC Intelligence Organization officers similarly described an arrested 15-person protest organization located in a town neighboring Karaj as local leaders on December 17, although the regime has previously used similar language to characterize arrested protest coordinators in other areas.[8]

The regime may struggle to contain decentralized protest and strike coordinators. Anti-regime activity and calls for unrest on December 17 showed participation from diverse swaths of the Iranian population, including medical professionals, workers, and neighborhood youth groups. [9] Iranian media has publicized the arrest of several leaders within the protest movement in the past several weeks. These arrests have not stopped the movement, however, which continues to adapt under regime pressure and to put renewed pressure on the regime in turn. The absence of public leadership and coordination among multiple anti-regime actors will likely complicate security efforts to stop the unrest.

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian security personnel clashed with prisoners in Karaj, Alborz Province, reportedly killing one and injuring up to 100 others.**
- **Some protest organizations could be playing increasingly prominent roles within a localized and relatively de-centralized anti-regime actor nexus.**
- **At least 11 protests took place in seven cities across five provinces**
- **The Iranian rial reached a new all-time low.**
- **Iranian media reported that Meta rejected regime demands to nominate a representative to Iran, setting conditions to block or permanently restrict domestic access to Instagram and WhatsApp.**
- **A large, unattributed explosion occurred in Kani Qirzhala, Erbil Province, Iraqi Kurdistan.**
- **Turkish forces shelled alleged Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militia positions near Amedi, Duhok Province, Iraqi Kurdistan.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least 11 protests took place in seven cities across five provinces on December 17. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Asalouyeh, Bushehr Province[10]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Oil and gas workers
- Protest Activity: Strike and protest

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Chamran University students

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[12]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Oil and gas workers
- Protest Activity: Strike and protest

Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province[13]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Oil and gas workers
- Protest Activity: Strike and protest

Gachsaran, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province[14]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Oil and gas workers
- Protest Activity: Strike and protest

Tehran, Tehran Province[15]

- Size: Undetermined
- Location: Unknown metro platform

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

Shiraz, Fars Province[16]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Shiraz Medical University students
- Protest Activity: Chanted anti-regime slogans

Tehran, Tehran Province[17]

- Size: Undetermined
- Location: Darvazeh Shemiran station

Tehran, Tehran Province[18]

- Size: Undetermined
- Location: Artillery subway station

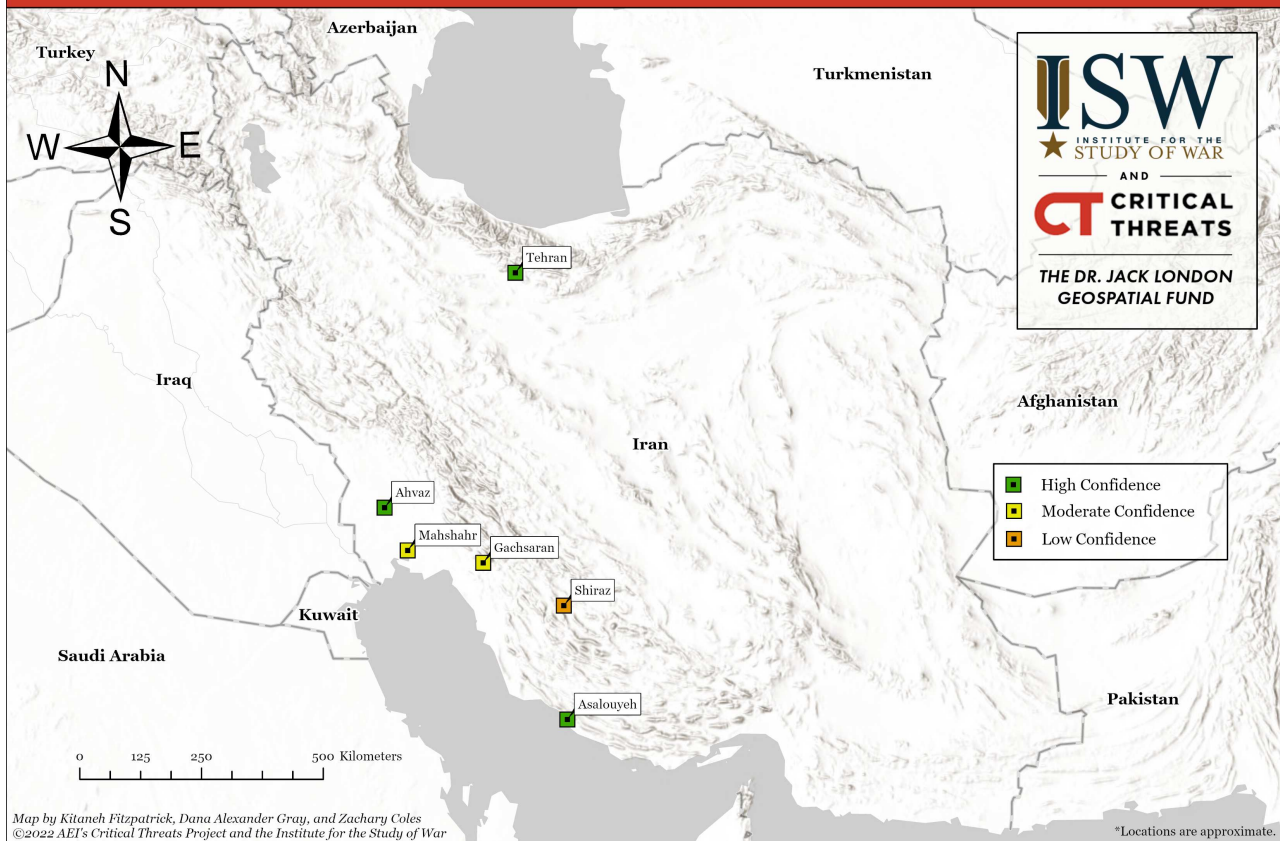
Tehran, Tehran Province[19]

- Size: Undetermined
- Location: Darvzadeh Dolat station

Tehran, Tehran Province[20]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protest Activity: Chanted anti-regime slogans on a metro train
- Location: Tehran Metro Line One

Protest Activity in Iran as of December 17, 5:00 PM ET



The Iranian rial reached a new all-time low on December 17. The US dollar sold for as many as 395,600 rials on the unofficial market, up from 386,800 on December 16.[21] Some parliamentarians urged market intervention in response to the rial's declining value.[22] Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf minimized Iran's economic challenges in a speech to a regime youth group, however.[23] Iran's Central Bank Governor similarly claimed that Iran's monetary policy would stabilize markets in the coming year.[24] It is unclear how regime officials will concretely accomplish these tasks and improve the Iranian economy.

President Ebrahim Raisi, Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf endorsed prosecuting arrested protesters in a meeting on December 17.[25] Raisi, Ejei, and Ghalibaf also called on public officials to build trust with the Iranian people, although this objective is fundamentally incompatible with the continuation of sham trials for arrested protesters.

Iranian media reported that Meta rejected regime demands to nominate a representative to Iran by December 17, setting conditions to block or permanently restrict domestic access to Instagram and WhatsApp.[26] The regime's ultimatum to Meta could signal rhetorical fissures within a political establishment divided on how to quell ongoing unrest. It is possible that actors who support increased internet censorship issued the ultimatum to justify protracted restrictions to moderate and reformists, who have become increasingly critical of the economic ramifications of such measures.[27]

Tehran and Alborz Province officials canceled most in-person university and high school classes from December 18-20 ostensibly due to high air pollution levels.[28] Class cancellations coincide with calls for country-wide strikes and protests on December 19, 20, and 21. Remote schoolwork would require internet access, which may complicate regime efforts to censor coordination and documentation of anti-regime activity scheduled on these dates.

Iranian Parliament and the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council have still not released an opinion on the mandatory veiling law--or how the regime chooses to police this law--on December 17. Prosecutor General Mohammad Javad Montazeri stated on December 1 that Iranian officials were examining mandatory veiling and would release their findings by December 16, as CTP previously reported.[29]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Turkish forces shelled alleged Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militia positions on December 17 near Amedi, Duhok Province, Iraqi Kurdistan. The artillery strike hit mountainside locations away from populated areas in Amedi.[30] Kurdistan Regional Government officials did not report any casualties as a result of the attack. Turkish forces conducted the artillery strike likely in response to armed clashes between Turkish forces and PKK militants that took place on December 15 in Amedi.[31]

A large, unattributed explosion occurred on December 17 in Kani Qirzhala, Erbil Province, Iraqi Kurdistan. Social media footage showed a building that was on fire before the explosion, indicating the fire likely triggered the subsequent blast.[32] Iranian proxy social media channels circulated unsubstantiated claims that the building was an ammunition storage facility used by US and Peshmerga forces.[33] Kani Qirzhala is approximately seven kilometers from Erbil International Airport; it is otherwise not in the immediate vicinity of any Kurdistan Regional Government facility or any of the foreign consular located in Erbil.

[1] <https://www.hra-news.org/2022/hranews/a-38422/> ; <https://twitter.com/IHRights/status/1604082231449993216?s=20&t=FUeBejBF6...>

[2] <https://www.hra-news.org/2022/hranews/a-38422/> ; <https://twitter.com/IHRights/status/1604082231449993216?s=20&t=KY2Gkgufo...> ; https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1604139144619429890?s=20&t=RIj8Fx...

[3] https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1604133625359998978?s=20&t=akpvUj-... ; <https://twitter.com/SedayeShahrivar/status/1604163857215127552?s=20&t=Jy...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604176893372137475?s=20&t=J4YT76...>

[4] <http://isna dot ir/xdMXJy>

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

[7] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1604163724050309126>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604175827247177729>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604175068833234946>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604188427905388545>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604189009843994625> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604175827247177729?s=20&t=J4YT76...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604189009843994625?s=20&t=C0zHol...>

[8] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/26/2822688/%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A7...> ; <https://www.khabarfoori.com/fa/tiny/news-2978067>

[9] <https://twitter.com/IranIntlbrk/status/1604134143868121088?s=20&t=A1YRww...> ; https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1604170832640479233?s=20&t=tjtC4wF... ; <https://twitter.com/BeniSabti/status/1604025794614898688?s=20&t=hVG5xejB...> ; □HYPERLINK
"https://t.me/poyesh_karkonan_rasmi_naft"https://t.me/poyesh_karkonan_rasmi_naft

[10] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604035755935932420, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604065289062293504>

- [11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604144220641447938> ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1604155586614009857?s=20&t=H4i2tS...>
- [12] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604090173456777217, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604046527567208448> ; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1604059549786316800?s=20&t=0JRGMAj0z...>
- [13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604056070003064832> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604090173456777217?s=20&t=voYc0q...
- [14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604079274633338881> ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1604123197485764609?s=20&t=zl0mtx...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604090173456777217?s=20&t=voYc0q...
- [15] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1604163724050309126>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604175827247177729>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604175068833234946>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604188427905388545>, <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604189009843994625>
- [16] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604144841893597186>
- [17] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604189009843994625?s=20&t=C0zHol...>
- [18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604188427905388545?s=20&t=C0zHol...>
- [19] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604175827247177729?s=20&t=J4YT76...>
- [20] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604217774796161025>
- [21] <https://t.co/isfN0V3Hol>
- [22] <https://isna dot ir/xdMXHs>, <https://isna dot ir/xdMXCN>, <https://isna dot ir/xdMVzB>, <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/26/2822490/>-افزایش قیمت-ارز-و-سکه-نتیجه-آشوب-های-اخیر-در-کشور-بود
- [23] <https://www.ilna dot ir/fa/tiny/news-1310010>
- [24] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/26/2822411/>-شوکی-های-تورمی-سال-آینده-تکرار-نمی-شود-کاهش-رشد-نقدینگی-به-زیر-30-در-صد-تا-پایان-امسال
- [25] <https://president dot ir/fa/141470>
- [26] <http://isna.ir/xdMXkD>
- [27] <https://www.etemadonline.com/fa/tiny/news-587620>
- [28] <https://isna dot ir/xdMXDX>, <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/26/2822804/>-مدارس-و-دانشگاه-های-البرز-تا-سه-شنبه-تعطیل-شد
- [29] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-4#_...
- [30] <https://www.shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/Turkey-s-artillery-bomb-sites-in-Kur...>
- [31] <https://www.shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/Clashes-between-PKK-Turkey-s-militar...>
- [32] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/66087>

[33] <https://twitter.com/sabreenS11/status/1604250611406573569?s=20&t=EasSdff...>

Iran Crisis Update, December 18

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 18, 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 and significant parts of his inner circle are continuing to misdiagnose the core problems driving the ongoing protests. Senior officials close to Khamenei and his inner circle emphasized the need to promote engagement and interactions between Iranian religious institutions and universities on December 18.[1] The officials framed such cooperation as the correct response to the protests and necessary to establish an “Islamic civilization.” These officials include Alireza Arafī (a senior cleric and Guardian Council member), Ahmad Marvi (the custodian of Astan Quds Razavi), and Mohammad Mehdi Tehrani (the president of Islamic Azad University). Either Khamenei or his inner circle have selected each of these individuals for their current positions.[2] Their rhetoric likely reflects a predominant sentiment in the office of the supreme leader.

Khamenei and his inner circle have defined the protests as a sociocultural and religious issue and seem to believe that the solution is trying to further ideologize the population. These ideas are not entirely new; Khamenei and his advisers have articulated this theory for years.[3] But Khamenei’s insistence on viewing the current protests through this lens will impede—if not prevent entirely—any serious effort to address protester grievances.

Protests and strikes may increase in the coming days. Protest coordinators and organizations have repeatedly published calls for protests and strikes on December 19-21.[4]

Some protesters have increasingly focused on imposing economic pressure on the regime as the Iranian rial continues to devalue. The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth reiterated on December 18 calls for citizens to withdraw their money from banks and warned that Anonymous hackers will conduct cyberattacks against banks in the coming days.[5] The Mashhad group separately claimed that workers at several prominent Iranian ports will join the planned strikes on December 19-21.[6]

The net effect of the ongoing protests and strikes could further stress the Iranian economy and its supply lines, especially if the port strikes materialize and are sustained. Oil and gas workers protested in at least four cities on December 17, as CTP previously reported.[7] It is too soon to assess whether these protests and strikes will amount to any serious economic disruption, however. CTP will continue to develop this assessment in future updates.

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and significant parts of his inner circle are continuing to misdiagnose the core problems driving the ongoing protests.**
- **At least two protests took place in two cities across two provinces. Protests and strikes may increase in the coming days.**
- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and significant parts of his inner circle are continuing to misdiagnose the core problems driving the ongoing protests.**
- **Some protesters have increasingly focused on imposing economic pressure on the regime as the Iranian rial continues to devalue.**

- **LEC Tehran Provincial Commander Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi** announced the seizure of a man-portable rocket launcher and around 50 other small arms.
- **An LEC Border Guard regiment commander, Colonel Hossein Ali Farahi,** announced that the LEC clashed with unidentified militants near Esfandak, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.
- **Unidentified individuals stabbed and wounded four clerics in Qom City, Qom Province.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests took place in two cities across two provinces on December 18. Iranian protest coordinators and organizations did not call for protests or strikes on this day, which may have driven the relatively low level of protest activity. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Tabriz firefighters
- Protest Activity: Protest and strike

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

Dehloran, Ilam Province[9]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Cement factory workers
- Protest Activity: Protest and strike



Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Tehran Provincial Commander Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi announced the seizure of a man-portable rocket launcher and around 50 other small arms since December 15.[10] Rahimi added that the LEC has arrested over 900 individuals during these seizures. There has been an uptick in regime seizures of illegal arms in Iran in recent months, but CTP has not previously observed the seizure of a rocket launcher.[11]

An LEC Border Guard regiment commander, Colonel Hossein Ali Farahi, announced on December 18 that the LEC clashed with unidentified militants near Esfandak, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[12] Farahi claimed that the militants were trying to enter Iran from Pakistan. Anti-regime militancy is common in this area and not necessarily related to the protests.

Unidentified individuals stabbed and wounded four clerics in Qom City, Qom Province on December 18.[13] Two of the clerics were hospitalized.

The parents of arrested protester Mohammad Mehdi Karami released a video on December 18 calling on the Judiciary to lift his death sentence.[14] Security forces arrested Karami in connection to the death of a Basij member during protests in Karaj, Alborz Province. His parents claimed that Karami was innocent and that their Judiciary-appointed lawyer would not answer their calls. Mohammad Mehdi Karami previously told his father that the state security services tortured him into making a false confession.[15]

Iranian Surgeons Association President Eraj Fazel warned that poor domestic conditions are driving a brain drain in Iran on December 18.[16] Fazel stated that Iran will not have enough heart surgeons in five years and that patients will need to go abroad for treatment. Fazel was the science minister and health minister under Ali Khamenei and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, respectively, when each was president.

Iranian security personnel clashed with inmates during a prison riot in Ghaem Shahr, Mazandaran Province on December 18, marking the second consecutive day of prison riots.[17] A foreign-based Iranian human rights organization reported that a riot broke out amongst inmates in response to security personnel preparing to execute a prisoner--similar to the December 17 prison riot in Karaj, Alborz Province.[18]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah met with outgoing Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Ali Abdul Karim Ali in Beirut on December 18. Nasrallah and Karim Ali discussed improving bilateral cooperation between Lebanon and Syria despite “external and internal pressures.”[19]

Local Iraqi Kurdish administrative official Ramazan Hussein clarified that the December 17 explosion in Kani Qirzhala, Erbil Province was unrelated to any facility associated with US forces.[20] Iranian proxy social media channels have circulated unsubstantiated claims that the building where the explosion occurred was an ammunition storage facility used by US and Peshmerga forces.[21]

Jordanian protesters clashed with security forces while demonstrating against rising fuel prices in Amman on December 16.[22] Protesters in southern Syria also have held demonstrations against the Assad regime and poor living conditions since at least November 4.[23] CTP is monitoring these protests for shared slogans, grievances, or any direct connections to ongoing protests in Iran but has not so far observed any.

[1] [www.mehrnews dot com/news/5659004](http://www.mehrnews.com/news/5659004); [www.mehrnews dot com/news/5658995](http://www.mehrnews.com/news/5658995); [www.mehrnews dot com/news/5658962](http://www.mehrnews.com/news/5658962)

[2] <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/khamenei-reinstates-conservative-clerics-as-...>
[http://english.khamenei dot ir/news/6590/Ayatollah-Khamenei-appointed-Sheikh-Ahmad-Marvi-as-the-custodian](http://english.khamenei.ir/news/6590/Ayatollah-Khamenei-appointed-Sheikh-Ahmad-Marvi-as-the-custodian); [www.basna dot ir/fa/news/975](http://www.basna.ir/fa/news/975)

- [3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-second-step-of-irans-islami...>
- [4] https://t.me/teh_javanan/75; https://t.me/javanane_ka/367; https://t.me/hmd_javanan/348
- [5] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2063
- [6] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2064
- [7] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-17>
- [8] <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1604442958123917313?s=20&t=mXU02KT...>; <https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1604497660248981505?s=20&t=JRg3jvbyqlmR...>
- [9] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1604421078247505920?s=20&t=Y28ef_isz...
- [10] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401092718018>
- [11] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-3>
- [12] www.mehrnews.com/news/5658822
- [13] www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/27/2823445
- [14] <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c4n61e40leno>
- [15] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-protester-death-sentence-karami-executions/...>
- [16] www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/707391
- [17] <https://www.irna.ir/news/84973896/%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3-%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1>
- [18] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1604545625948794880?s=20&t=-JgAAx7-Q...; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-17>
- [19] <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=48765&cid=113>
- [20] <https://www.rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/181220228>
- [21] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-17>
- [22] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/16/jordan-protests-spread-over-ri...>
- [23] <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/4045806/charles-lister/latest-su...>

Iran Crisis Update, December 19

Iran Crisis Update, December 19

Nicholas Carl, Zachary Coles, Dana Alexander Gray, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 19, 6:30 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 coordinators and organizations are trying to reclaim religion from the regime, essentially arguing that one can be devoutly religious and still oppose the Islamic Republic. The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth published a statement from “a group of Iranian Muslim and Shia youth” that accused Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei of using religion to control and manipulate.[1] The statement argued that Khamenei does not represent true Islamic values but is rather undermining religion. The framing of the group as representing “Muslims and Shia” is noteworthy and may suggest outreach to the Sunni community in Iran. The Mashhad group separately asserted that the regime has not upheld some of the founding principles in the constitution. [2] CTP has previously reported how protesters have tried to reclaim ideas of revolution, Iranian nationalism, and secular martyrdom from the regime for their own movement.[3] The regime has long labored to appropriate many of these ideas for its own purposes.

The fact that Mashhad youth may spearhead this effort to reclaim religion is notable given the significance of the city to the Iranian clerical and religious community. Mashhad is the home of the Imam Reza shrine—one of the most significant religious locations in Iran. The Mashhad Friday prayer leader, Ahmad Alam ol Hoda, is an outspoken hardliner and the father-in-law of President Ebrahim Raisi, who himself was born in Mashhad.

The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth explained part of its protest doctrine on December 19, promoting the idea of decentralized, “neighborhood-based” protests.[4] Protest coordinators and organizations frequently use this term, neighborhood-based protests, when planning demonstrations. The Mashhad group explained that neighborhood-based protests involve small groups of protesters shuffling to different nearby neighborhoods where they know the environment but will not be recognized by other locals. Protester lookouts warn the small crowds to disperse into nearby alleyways to avoid incoming security forces, and these crowds reconstitute once the security forces leave. The Mashhad group argued that simultaneous, neighborhood-based protests throughout a city exhaust and strain the bandwidth of security forces, creating a “cat-and-mouse game.” This theory is consistent with CTP’s assessment that security forces have faced bandwidth constraints, exhaustion, and low morale since September 2022.[5]

The regime is reportedly torturing arrested protesters to extract forced confessions. The lawyer of an arrested protester on death row claimed that state security services blindfolded, beat, and subjected his client to electric shocks until he falsely confessed to killing a security officer.[6] Another arrested protester similarly told his father that state security services tortured him until he falsely confessed to killing a Basij member.[7] The regime has almost certainly tortured many others in recent months in addition to the horrific acts of sexual assault and violence that the regime is committing against arrested protesters.[8]

Key Takeaways

- Some protest coordinators and organizations are trying to reclaim religion from the regime, essentially arguing that one can be devoutly religious and still oppose the Islamic Republic.
- The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth explained part of its protest doctrine, promoting the idea of decentralized, “neighborhood-based” protests.
- The regime is torturing arrested protesters to extract forced confessions.
- At least 10 protests took place in five cities across four provinces.
- Anti-regime militancy has increased in Sistan and Baluchistan Province since December 18.
- The *Guardian* reported that dozens to possibly a few hundred protesters have fled Iran into Iraqi Kurdistan since the protests began in September 2022.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least 10 protests took place in five cities across four provinces on December 19. Protest coordinators and organizations have called for countrywide protests and strikes on December 19-21, likely driving the increased protest turnout. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Karaj, Alborz Province[9]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protest chants and slogans focused on economic grievances and denouncing the regime’s decision to execute Majid Reza Rahnava.

Rasht, Gilan Province[10]

- Size: Small
- Protest Activity: Protesters set fires on Rasht streets during night demonstrations.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Demonstrations occurred in the vicinity of the Islamic Revolution Square metro station.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[12]

- Size: Small
- Protest Activity: Protesters set fires on Tehran streets during night demonstrations.
- Notes: Demonstrations occurred in the vicinity of the Naft Ponk neighborhood.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[13]

- Size: Undetermined
- Notes: Demonstrations occurred in the vicinity of the Ekbatan neighborhood

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[14]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Activity: Funeral ceremony for protest martyr Mohammad Hajji Rasoul Poor

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[15]

- Size: Small
- Protest Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Faiq Mam Ghadri

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[16]

- Size: Undetermined
- Notes: Demonstrations occurred in the vicinity of the Jamal Zadeh Neighborhood.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[17]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Rasoul-e Akram Hospital residency students
- Protest Activity: Protest and strike

Tehran City, Tehran Province[18]

- Size: Undetermined
- Notes: Demonstrations occurred in the vicinity of the Towhid Metro Station.

Pr as of D

Azerbaijan

Anti-regime militancy has increased in Sistan and Baluchistan Province since December 18. CTP has recorded three clashes between regime security forces and unidentified militants in the past 48 hours. The LEC clashed with militants near Esfandak on December 18, as CTP previously reported. [19] Militants separately attacked an LEC patrol near Rask, injuring three, on December 19. [20] Militants also clashed with elements of the IRGC Ground Forces 44th Ghamar Bani Hashem Brigade near Saravan, killing one IRGC member and three Basij members, on December 19. [21] Iranian state media reported that the militants crossed the border into Pakistan after some of these clashes.

Anti-regime militancy is common in these areas and not necessarily related to the protests. Salafi-jihadi militant groups, such as Jaish al Adl, operate around the Iran-Pakistan border and regularly attack regime security forces. Jaish al Adl has called for armed resistance against the regime and claimed that recruitment has increased in recent months. [22]

The IRGC may have sent elements of the 44th Brigade to Sistan and Baluchistan Province to reinforce its military footprint there. The brigade is based in Shahr-e Kurd, Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari Province—a considerable distance from the southeastern borders. The IRGC has a relatively small presence in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, maintaining one only the 110th Salman Farsi Independent Special Forces Brigade in Zahedan. [23] The IRGC may be trying to increase its presence in Sistan and Baluchistan Province to counter anti-regime militancy and protests without diverting elements of the 110th Brigade away from Zahedan or using Artesh forces in such operations.

The *Guardian* reported on December 19 that dozens to possibly a few hundred protesters have fled Iran into Iraqi Kurdistan since the protests began in September 2022. [24] State security services, such as the IRGC Intelligence Organization, have historically targeted dissidents abroad and may pursue these protesters if the *Guardian* article is true. An unidentified Iraqi central government official denied the reporting in remarks to Iraqi Kurdish outlet *Shafaq*. [25]

An unidentified source told IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* on December 19 that the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) may soon increase bank deposit interest rates, likely to discourage citizens from withdrawing their savings from the banks. [26] Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* reported that Iranian banks are experiencing a shortage in hard currencies according to unidentified Iranian banking sources. [27] CTP has previously reported calls from protester coordinators and organizations urging citizens to withdraw their money. [28] CTP cannot, however, verify the reporting from *Iran International* claiming that this bank run has produced a currency shortage. The fact that this uncorroborated reporting is consistent with other uncorroborated social media reports does not validate it.

Hardline Parliamentarian Esmail Kowsari stated on December 19 that Parliament is considering legislation to downgrade diplomatic ties with the UK for its alleged role in stoking protests. [29] Kowsari added that Parliament is reevaluating diplomatic ties with France and Germany as well. Kowsari is a retired IRGC brigadier general who is close to IRGC leadership but does not hold much formal authority outside his regular duties as a lawmaker. [30] His rhetoric does not necessarily indicate whether Parliament will implement measures to downgrade diplomatic ties with the UK, France, and Germany

Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei reiterated his hard line on the protests on December 19. [31] Ejei ordered judges to implement finalized sentences, including death sentences, without delay. Ejei also advised judges to ignore related social dynamics, likely referring to some political and religious figures criticizing the death penalty in recent weeks. [32] Ejei's comments reaffirm his commitment to these brutal punishments against protesters. His comments may indicate that the regime will carry out the execution of Mohammad Mehdi Karami, whose parents issued an emotional video appeal for the commutation of his death sentence on December 18. [33]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Israeli combat aircraft conducted airstrikes on Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and Iranian-backed militia positions around Damascus International Airport on December 19. Israeli combat aircraft targeted an SAA air defense battery recently deployed to the airport and a military warehouse used by Iranian proxies in the Sayyeda Zeynab suburb of Damascus. [34] *Breaking Defense* reported on December 16 that Iran had resumed regular shipments of weaponry and munitions through Damascus International Airport. The resumption followed an intensive Israeli air campaign in eastern Syria that disrupted ground-based shipments. [35] Israeli combat aircraft targeted the main runway at Damascus International Airport several times in 2022, temporarily disrupting Iranian shipments into Damascus International Airport. [36] The resumption of Iranian cargo flights also coincides with an *Al Sharq Al Awsat* report that claimed Israeli officials threatened to bomb Beirut airport if they confirmed Iran was flying military equipment directly into Lebanon and with the statement by Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati on December 19 that Iran is not, in fact, using Beirut International Airport for weapons shipments. [37]

[1] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2127

[2] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2131

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

[4] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2147

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-13;%...>

[6] https://twitter.com/Al_Sharifzadeh/status/1604573147050774529

[7] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-protester-death-sentence-karami-executions/...>

[8] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-6>

[9] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1604898223012839424?s=20&t=xPRR8HU...>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604888310102560769?s=20&t=xPRR8H...; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604904584627245058?s=20&t=tlswQS...>

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604902940434698254?s=20&t=tlswQS...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604903284506267650?s=20&t=tlswQS...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604904184138108930?s=20&t=tlswQS...>

[11] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604890411457208322?s=20&t=6qaNiV...; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1604890779977412608?s=20&t=uSnPBHs...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1604897557934575616?s=20&t=Uyk0BTj...>

[12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604911945924345856?s=20&t=o7KD8L...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604921772863897600?s=20&t=nxAJkW...>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604925020886761496?s=20&t=PtYqEe...

[13] https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1604928790626541568?s=20&t=a_wAxP0...

[14] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1604839159717597184?s=20&t=swfy2eEQp4...>; <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1604787442170707968?s=20&t=YhldtMGABH...>; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1604827108932550656?s=20&t=dhT2ydf...>

[15] <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1604856724678410240?s=20&t=w-F7-7E...>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1604848791580016646?s=20&t=1zDPXT...

- [16] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604934607857942530?s=20&t=VbIPse...>
- [17] https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1604862358249246720?s=20&t=jVME3DrJu...
- [18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1604928001841537024?s=20&t=Pklp4L...>
- [19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-18>
- [20] <https://defapress dot ir/562441>
- [21] <https://isna dot ir/xdMYdC>
- [22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-8>
- [23] <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Irans-Reserve-of-Last-Res...>
- [24] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/19/escape-from-iran-protester...>
- [25] <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%86%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86>
- [26] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/28/2823985>
- [27] <https://www.iranintl.com/202212193053>
- [28] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-18>
- [29] <https://www.mashreghnews dot ir/news/1447187>
- [30] https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/pdf_uploadana...
- [31] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/28/2823809/>
- [32] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-11>
- [33] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-18>
- [34] [https://www dot timesofisrael dot com/syria-says-israel-carrying out-strikes-near-damascus/](https://www dot timesofisrael dot com/syria-says-israel-carrying-out-strikes-near-damascus/); <https://www dot jpost dot com/breaking-news/article-725327>
- [35] <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/12/israel-eyeing-kinetic-non-kinetic-op...>
- [36] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-attacks-vicinity-syria...>
- [37] <https://english dot aawsat dot com/home/article/4035341/israel-threatens-bomb-beirut-airport-if-used-deliver-iranian-weapons>; <https://www dot haaretz dot com/middle-east-news/iran/2022-12-15/ty-article/.premium/the-new-axis-of-hezbollahs-intensification-the-international-airport-in-beirut/00000185-11f0-dd6a-abcf-b3fd2dd50000>; <https://www dot alahednews dot com dot lb/article.php?id=48801&cid=113>

Iran Crisis Update, December 20

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

December 20, 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](#).

Protest activity did not surge significantly outside of the Iranian capital region on December 20, despite calls from protest coordinators and organizations for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on December 19-21. CTP has observed slowly diminishing protest turnout since the regime intensified its protest crackdown in mid-November 2022. The regime issued its first death sentence on November 13 and deployed the IRGC Ground Forces in Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan provinces beginning on November 19.[1] These escalations combined with the colder weather, mass arrests, and possible disorganization among protester coordinators may have led to the declining turnout over the past month.

This reduced protest activity does not, however, indicate the end of the anti-regime movement. The regime may have been able to diminish protest activity through its use of intimidation, force, and expanding censorship. The fact that CTP recorded at least eight separate protests on December 20 despite these factors is remarkable in and of itself. The regime will struggle to sustain this level of oppression indefinitely, especially given the degree to which this crackdown has strained the security forces. Protest coordinators and organizations are contrastingly

exploring ways to sustain regular acts of political defiance and have been forming the requisite networks and infrastructure for months.[2]

Senior regime officials discussed expanding domestic internet restrictions on December 20. President Ebrahim Raisi chaired a Supreme Cyberspace Council meeting to review a document discussing the “rules and conditions of publishing content on social media.”[3] The Supreme Cyberspace Council includes Iran’s top military and political figures and enforces state censorship. Raisi stressed the importance of establishing an Iranian intranet as soon as possible. Supreme Cyberspace Council member Reza Taghi Pour separately promoted an Iranian intranet on December 20, framing it as the solution to quelling the protests.[4] Taghipour added that the regime would lift some current internet restrictions once the domestic environment has stabilized.

It is unclear to what extent the regime can fully operationalize an intranet, even if it has the necessary technologies. A prominent Iranian activist and internet researcher circulated a twenty-five-page document purportedly from the Information and Communications Technology Ministry assessing that the regime could not likely build a complete intranet.[5] The ministry allegedly reported that the regime is too dependent on foreign services and social media applications to successfully transition to a national intranet. CTP cannot corroborate the veracity of this document, but regime officials have previously discussed some of the limitations they face. An Iranian parliamentarian cited in 2020 a lack of server infrastructure as a primary obstacle to developing an intranet.[6]

IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani threatened domestic and foreign media outlets and reporters who “do media work” against the regime on December 20.[7] Ghaani stated that Iranian authorities had recorded the actions of these media outlets and reporters and will “strike” them. Ghaani reiterated the accusation that the US and Saudi Arabia are inciting protests.

Key Takeaways

- Protest activity did not surge significantly outside of the Iranian capital region, despite calls from protest coordinators and organizations for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on December 19-21.
- This reduced protest activity does not, however, indicate the end of the anti-regime movement.
- Senior regime officials discussed expanding domestic internet restrictions.
- IRGC Quds Force Commander Brigadier General Esmail Ghaani threatened domestic and foreign media outlets who have criticized the regime.
- At least eight protests took place in three cities across three provinces.
- An Artesh soldier reportedly expressed support for the protesters and opposition to the execution of protesters in central Tehran.
- Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid warned the regime against ignoring the will of the people.
- Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with the families of the victims of the October 26 ISIS attack in Shiraz, Fars Province.
- IRGC Coordination Deputy Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi acknowledged that economic issues have partly fueled the protests.
- Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian participated in the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in Amman.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least eight protests took place in three cities across three provinces on December 20. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Karaj, Alborz Province[8]

- Size: Small

- Protester Activity: Fire lit in street
- Area: Golshahr

Karaj, Alborz Province[9]

- Size: Small
- Area: Gohardasht

Gorgan, Golestan Province[10]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Seven-day commemoration ceremony for killed protester Aida Rostami

Tehran City, Tehran Province[11]

- Size: Small

Tehran City, Tehran Province[12]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Rasoul-e Akram Hospital personnel and medical university students
- Notes: Second day of consecutive protests recorded from this demographic at this location

Tehran City, Tehran Province[13]

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

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

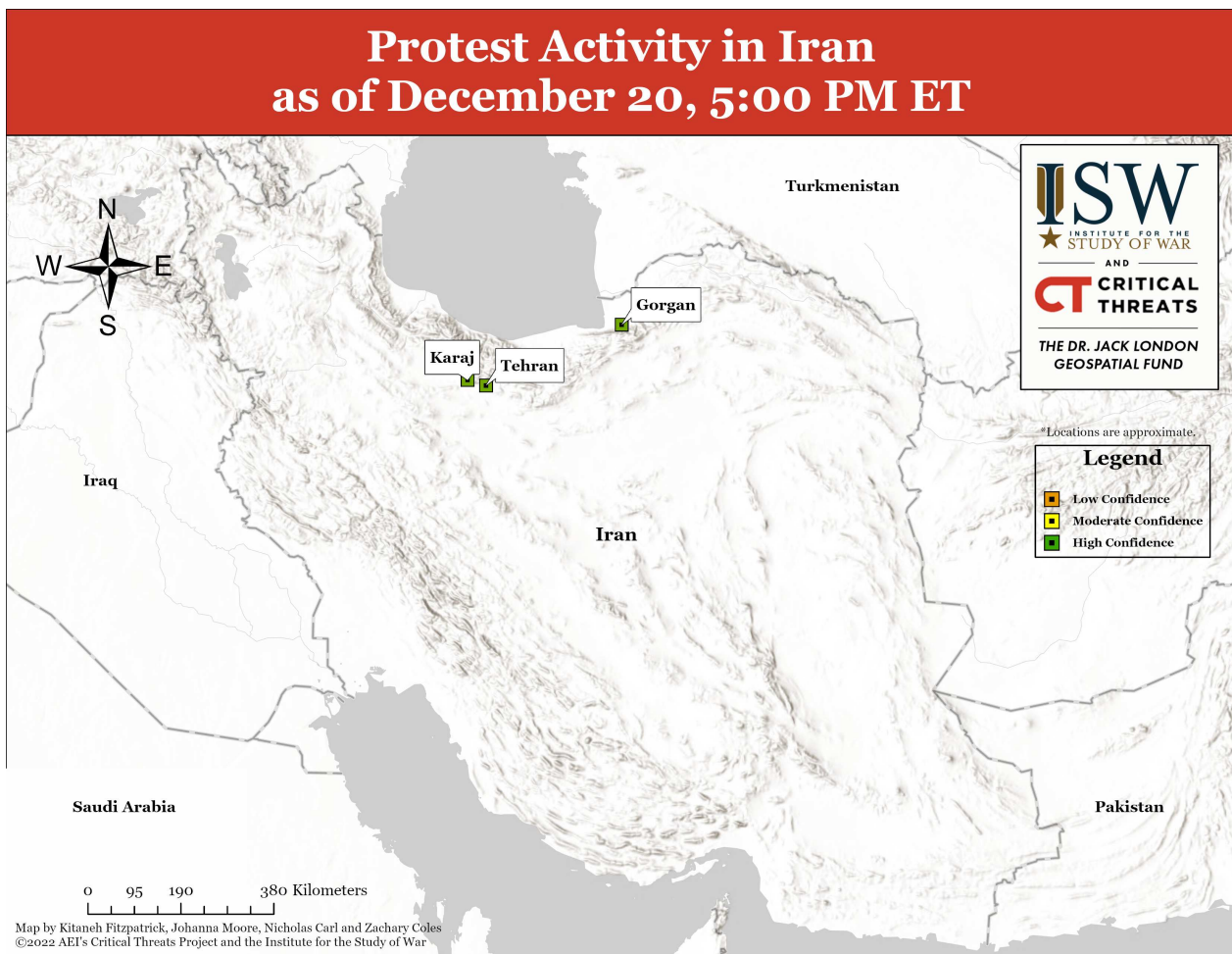
Tehran City, Tehran Province[14]

- Size: Undetermined

- Regime Repression: Sounds of gunfire in some footage in the vicinity of protest location
- Area: Ekbatan

Tehran City, Tehran Province[15]

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



The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth issued guidance to its “operational teams” on December 20, instructing them to target regime buildings and facilities.[16] CTP has not observed protests in Mashhad in recent days, despite calls from this group for protests, calling into question its capability to generate street protests.

An Artesh soldier reportedly expressed support for the protesters and opposition to the execution of protesters in central Tehran on December 20.[17] The soldier walked atop the walls around the

perimeter of an Artesh facility with a noose around his neck. CTP cannot verify whether the individual was an actual member of the Artesh, but this reporting is plausible, especially given that Artesh personnel are generally less committed ideologically than those in the IRGC.

Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid warned the regime against ignoring the will of the people on December 20. Abdol Hamid tweeted that Iranians residing within and outside Iran have concluded that domestic conditions have become “unbearable” and added that “changes must be made.”[18] Abdol Hamid has used increasingly critical rhetoric toward the regime in recent months, almost normalizing overt rhetorical attacks from him.[19]

Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* published footage on December 20 claiming that a bank in Tehran refused to dispense more than 10 million Iranian rials (approximately 240 US dollars) to customers trying to withdraw cash.[20] If true, this reporting suggests that the regime is, indeed, facing a hard currency shortage and may be struggling to fulfill bank withdrawal requests. Protest coordinators and organizations have called on citizens to urgently withdraw their money from banks, as CTP previously reported.[21]

Judiciary Spokesperson Masoud Setayeshi defended the issuance of death sentences to and execution of protesters on December 20.

[22] Setayeshi argued that Sharia laws justified this capital punishment and warned that the judiciary rejects “comments without evidence that disturb public opinion.” Setayeshi’s comments mirror those from Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei, who has repeatedly defended the executions and instructed judicial authorities to ignore critics in recent days, as CTP previously reported.[23]

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met on December 20 with the families of the victims of the October 26 ISIS attack in Shiraz, Fars Province.

[24] Khamenei blamed the attack on the US, which he accused of “creating” ISIS. Khamenei called on the Iranian cultural institutions and media to continue producing propaganda to explain these claims to the youth.

IRGC Coordination Deputy Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi acknowledged that economic issues have partly fueled the protests on December 20.^[25] Naghdi stated that the regime must examine whether officials responsible for the economy have failed to implement the guidance and recommendations of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Naghdi then criticized former President Hassan Rouhani for prioritizing negotiations with the West rather than enhancing domestic production capacities.

A compressed natural gas station in Yasouj, Kohgilouyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province exploded on December 20, injuring a nearby worker. ^[26] The cause of the explosion is unclear.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian participated in the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in Amman on December 20. Abdollahian discussed the nuclear negotiations during a meeting with EU officials at the conference.^[27] Abdollahian's comments coincide with the circulation of a video of President Joe Biden stating that the nuclear agreement is "dead, but [that the US will not] announce it."^[28] The video is from an election rally on November 4. Abdollahian may have been aware of the circulated video during his meetings in Amman and may have used it to frame the US as uncooperative.

[1] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-13>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-19>

[2] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-16>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-17>

[3] <https://president.ir/fa/141497>

[4] <https://www.irna.ir/news/84975741/>

[5] <https://twitter.com/NarimanGharib/status/1605286773252407296>

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

[7] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/562606>

[8] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605260443185979392 ; <https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1605310016025759749?s=20&t=HolvCGwEE...> ; https://twitter.com/kaveh_shirzad/status/1605313912467079171?s=20&t=rYw_...

[9] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605280707881877504 ; <https://twitter.com/Vahid/status/1605308920678981632?s=20&t=p2RuBE55sVAh...> ; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1605294444927778817?s=20&t=p2RuBE5...>

[10] https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605192882327097344?s=20&t=WEozp_... ; https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1605270947787051008?s=20&t=WEozp_zVX... ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605210759457345536 ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605237647756386304?s=20&t=JkaiTX...>

[11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605233431566327809?s=20&t=megXeV...> ; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1605236169792716800> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605233101315215362?s=20&t=roDFSV...>

[12] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605237969237024771?s=20 ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605197925935681536>

[13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605303050683682819> ; <https://twitter.com/FattahiFarzad/status/1605294616575586304?s=20&t=Z6Lo...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1605312763848523780?s=20&t=Z6LokNB6n...>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605270743155089435> ; <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605260829548584961?s=20&t=pD4NwP258...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605274452631212055?s=20&t=4pK4Xr...>

[15] <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1605312763848523780?s=20&t=TnaGqKUuC...> ; <https://twitter.com/kayvanrassooli/status/1605308216786550785?s=20&t=Tna...>

[16] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1605079341792079872?s=20&t=6y...

[17] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605246248524685314

[18] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1605235913663320065>

[19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-13>

[20] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605109812748029954?s=20&t=tPELg2FND...>

[21] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-18>

[22] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401092919544>

[23] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-19>

[24] www.farsi.khamenei dot ir/speech-content?id=51528

[25] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/562601>

[26] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401092919762>

[27] <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/12/iran-fm-talks-nuclear-deal-...>

[28] <https://twitter.com/DamonMaghsoudi/status/1605084721016209411>



Iran Crisis Update, December 21

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

December 21, 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](#).

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appears to be personally directing the regime’s approach to protests in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Senior Iranian cleric Mostafa Mohami stated during a meeting with local university students on December 21 that Khamenei has taken a “personal interest” in the unrest in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.[1] Mohami asserted that Iranian authorities had taken a different approach in Sistan and Baluchistan Province—framing this approach as a marker of Khamenei’s interest in the region. He added that Khamenei instructed the Supreme National Security Council—the regime’s most senior foreign and security policy body—to listen to the demands of the people of the province.

Khamenei has sent his own representatives to address local issues and engage university students in Sistan and Baluchistan in contrast with the engagement of presidential and parliamentary officials in other provinces. Mohami is Khamenei’s personal clerical representative to Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Khamenei had previously dispatched a senior clerical delegation to the province on November 13, which he has not done in other provinces.[2] Government officials from the Raisi administration and Parliament have been the ones engaging students in other provinces. [3]

Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid discussed the regime’s approach to Sistan and Baluchistan Province in less favorable terms than Mohami on December 21. Abdol Hamid alleged that the brutal protest crackdown in Zahedan on September 30, which killed around 90 protesters, was premeditated.[4] Abdol Hamid accused Iranian authorities of discriminating against the locals, especially Sunnis.

Khamenei’s special focus on Sistan and Baluchistan Province may be in part meant to deescalate with Abdol Hamid. Abdol Hamid is the only publicly known leader of protests and anti-regime sentiments who remains free. He is also a cleric himself with a history of occasionally working with the regime. These factors may be driving Khamenei’s attempts to engage with him cleric-to-cleric rather than via government officials. Anti-regime militancy and sentiments are high in many areas throughout the province, moreover, presenting the regime with a unique security challenge. CTP has reported an uptick in anti-regime militant activity in Sistan and Baluchistan Province in recent days especially.[5] Khamenei’s attention to the province further underscores the complicated dynamics that the regime must navigate in trying to impose social control there.

Iran may face mounting gas shortages in the coming winter months. President Ebrahim Raisi and local officials emphasized the need to conserve gas on December 21.[6] Raisi called on the Oil Ministry and state media to encourage the public to reduce energy consumption. One provincial official in Gilan Province declared December 22 a local holiday for conserving energy. Raisi administration officials have expressed concern over these worsening shortages for months. [7] Domestic energy concerns could inflame anti-regime grievances as these issues mount.

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appears to be personally directing the regime's approach to protests in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**
- **Iran may face mounting gas shortages in the coming winter months.**
- **At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.**
- **Some protest coordinators and organizations announced plans to regularly publish printed bulletins.**
- **The Interior Ministry may be shuffling around provincial governors to improve internal security.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on December 21. Significant rainfall and snowfall are forecasted in several western provinces on December 22-24 and may reduce protest turnout on those days.[8] The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth called for countrywide protests on December 24 to commemorate the 100th day of protests, although this group has seemed to struggle to generate protest turnout.[9] CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[10]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: First footage of protest activity in Saghez since December 8

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[11]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: First footage of protest activity in Sanandaj since December 11

Tehran City, Tehran Province[12]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Imposed roadblocks
- Area: Saadat Abad

Tehran City, Tehran Province[13]

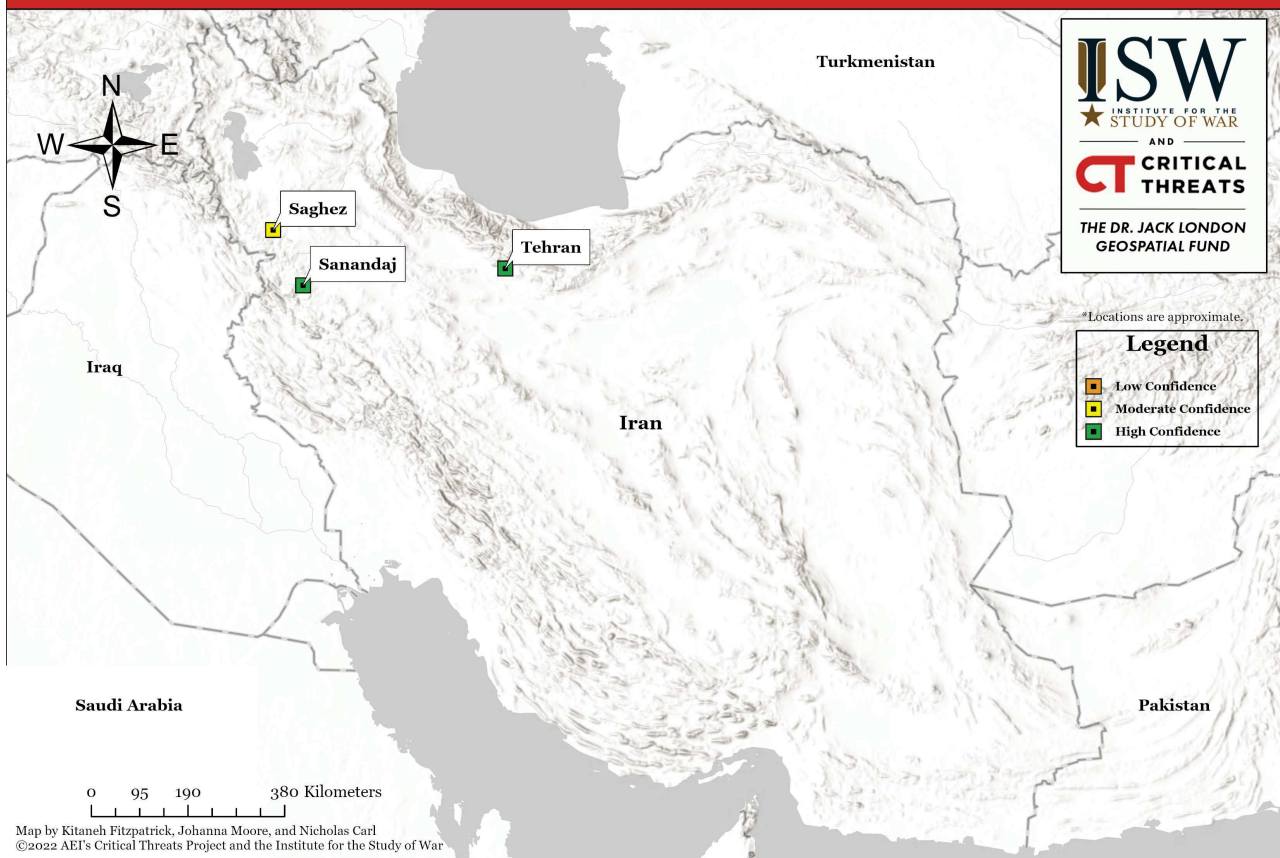
- Size: Small
- Area: Enghelab Street
- Notes: Some footage shows protesters participating in a silent march, other footage shows protesters chanting.

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province[14]

- Size: Undetermined
- Area: Amaniyeh

Protest Activity in Iran as of December 21, 5:30 PM ET



Some protest coordinators and organizations announced plans to regularly publish printed bulletins on December 21. The Karaj Neighborhood Youth stated that it has begun distributing evening newsletters relevant to the protests.[15] The Karaj group encouraged its readers to distribute the newsletters to trusted family and friends. These publications include updates on arrests, calls for protests, strikes, and Western reporting. The Hundred Neighborhood group similarly shared plans to publish a weekly publication. It is unclear in what format this weekly will be.[16]

The Interior Ministry may be shuffling around provincial governors to improve internal security. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi appointed Mohammad Tabib Sahraei as Kermanshah provincial governor on December 21.[17] IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* described Sahraei as an academic and Kermanshah native. Sahraei replaced Bahmad Amiri Moghaddam—an IRGC brigadier general—whom Raisi appointed in January 2022. Vahidi told reports that the Raisi administration may also replace more governors.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhan, among others, on the sidelines of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in Amman on December 21.[18] Abdollahian expressed readiness to reestablish diplomatic relations.

[1] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2824683>

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

[3] <https://www.sharghdaily.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-6/861020->

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%D8%AF%D8%B1%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-
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%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA-
%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF; [www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/08/09/2796894](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/08/09/2796894)

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

[5] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-19>

[6] <https://president dot ir/fa/141562>; <https://www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/707833>

[7] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/84915088>

[8] <https://www.irna dot ir/news/84977173>

[9] https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1605635769032376363?s=20&t=hc...

[10] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605596977739100160?s=20&t=cTlxMg...>; <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605644257150341124?s=20&t=cTlxMg1GU...>; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1605675703441186820?s=20&t=cTlxMg...>

[11] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605649397978636288?s=20&t=l11BW0...; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1605664624589737984?s=20&t=l11BW0Mcc...>

[12] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605597355985833984?s=20&t=4QGCKh...; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605590018017202178?s=20&t=1aM4f0...>; <https://twitter.com/FattahiFarzad/status/1605619877925883904?s=20&t=1aM4...>

[13] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605636925125165099?s=20&t=AFiRg7VIv...>; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605677833472200704?s=20&t=cl5_Z-...; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605678548684922880?s=20&t=l11BW0...>

[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605634811992866818?s=20&t=4QGCKh...>; <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605629197778550794?s=20&t=Rgfm4LgW...>

[15] https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1605474771407319041?s=20&t=aIpf_Qh...
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605560549093376001?s=20&t=4QGCKh...

[16] https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605184484068007936?s=20&t=4QGCKh...

[17] www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2824828

[18] www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2825093

Iran Crisis Update, December 22

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

December 22, 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](#).

Social media accounts reported that Iranian security forces have begun violently killing and mass arresting citizens in Izeh, Khuzestan Province since December 21.[1] Some accounts have claimed that the regime has arrested over 350 individuals thus far and completely disrupted internet services in the area.[2] Others have claimed that the regime has established checkpoints on the major roads leading into and out of the city.[3] CTP cannot verify these reports at this time, and the information space remains extremely muddy. We will provide more information on the situation in Izeh in future updates.

This reported escalation follows weeks of violence in Izeh. Unidentified gunmen shot and killed at least six Izeh residents and injured at least 15 on November 16.[4] Iranian state media described the event as a “terrorist attack,” while the mother of one of victims—nine-year-old Kian Pirfalak—accused security forces of conducting the attack.[5] The regime tried to blame the attack on the Islamic State in the following days.[6] Security forces killed two and arrested another two in Izeh for their alleged roles in the attack on December 20.[7]

One of Iran’s most senior military officers discussed how the regime can adapt to control its domestic information space on December 22. Major General Gholam Ali Rashid called for the establishment of a “media headquarters” to counter enemy information operations.[8] The precise function of this media headquarters is unclear, although the regime would likely use it to more aggressively promote pro-regime narratives in media. Iranian political and security leaders frequently accuse the West, Israel, and Saudi Arabia of using media outlets to incite protests in Iran.[9] Rashid is the commander of the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters—the most senior Iranian military body responsible for joint and wartime operations. Rashid is also a member of a close human network of IRGC officers who have known one another since the Iran-Iraq war and have historically worked together during domestic political crises to advance their hardline agendas.[10]

Key Takeaways

- **Social media accounts have reported that Iranian security forces have begun violently killing and mass arresting citizens in Izeh, Khuzestan Province since December 21.**
- **One of Iran’s most senior military officers discussed how the regime can adapt to control its domestic information space.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.**
- **The Tehran and Mashhad neighborhood youth groups announced their alignment and solidarity with a group called the Seventh of Aban Front.**
- **Protest coordinators and organizations called for protests and strikes throughout Tehran on December 24.**
- **Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib appointed a new Director General of Intelligence for West Azerbaijan Province.**
- **The Wall Street Journal reported that anti-regime actors have smuggled roughly 200 Starlink devices into Iranian territory.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on December 22. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Semirom, Esfahan Province[11]

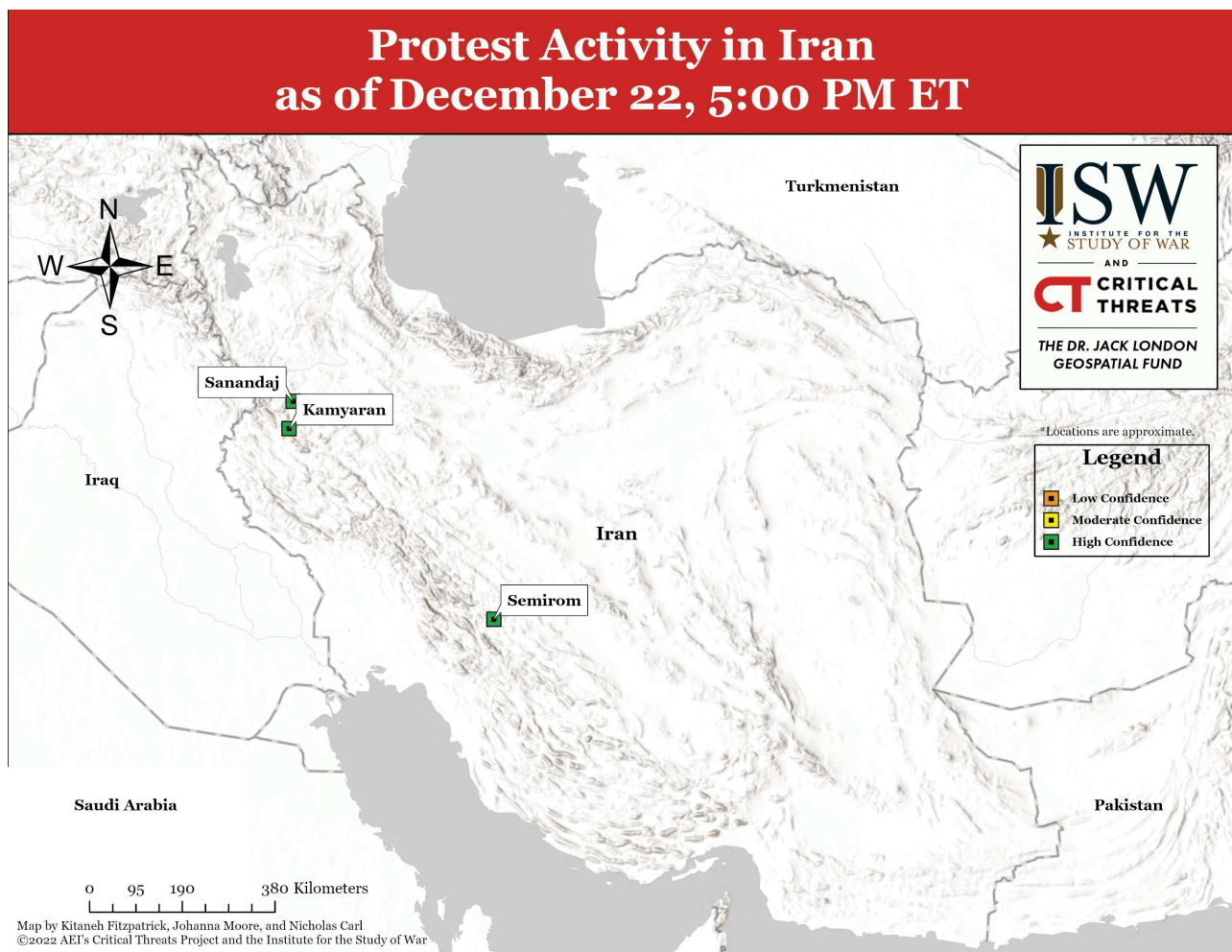
- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Set fire in the street
- Notes: Protest activity follows killed protester Morad Bahramian's 40-day commemoration ceremony

Kamyaran, Kurdistan Province[12]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for killed protest Fouad Mohammadi

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[13]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for three killed protesters



The Tehran and Mashhad neighborhood youth groups announced their alignment and solidarity with a group called the Seventh of Aban Front on December 22.[14] The Seventh of Aban Front is a Brussels-based organization comprised of anti-regime activists, including a former editor at Radio Farda.[15] The stated objective of the group is to unite the protest movement and

replace the Islamic Republic with a democratic government. The seventh of Aban represents an unofficial holiday—Cyrus the Great Day—in the Iranian calendar year. The regime has long sought to suppress celebrations around this holiday given its occasional affiliation with Iranian monarchists. The Seventh of Aban Front—and any other foreign-based protest organization—will likely struggle to direct and orchestrate anti-regime activities in Iran given the muddy information space and expanding regime censorship. It is unclear what relationship this group has with the United Neighborhood Youth—an umbrella organization for protest coordinators that announced its formation on December 4.[16]

Protest coordinators and organizations called for protests and strikes throughout Tehran on December 24.[17] These protests are meant to commemorate 100-consecutive days of protests, according to these groups. The 100 Neighborhoods group urged protesters to disable surveillance cameras ahead of December 24.[18] Some social media users criticized the protest locations that the 100 Neighborhoods group proposed, claiming that security forces are concentrated around some of them.[19]

Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib appointed a new Director General of Intelligence for West Azerbaijan Province on December 22. Khatib gave a speech endorsing the use of state-run and privately-owned media outlets to circulate pro-regime rhetoric in a ceremony introducing the new director general. Khatib additionally praised the IRGC Ground Forces Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada Operational Headquarters for securing the province.[20] Iranian authorities previously deployed the IRGC Ground Forces 27th Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada Division to violently suppress protests in Mahabad on November 19 and other cities throughout the province in the weeks thereafter.[21] Iranian media did not include the name of the new director general nor information on their predecessor. Khatib additionally visited the West Azerbaijan Directorate to discuss the security situation within the province.[22]

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on December 22 that anti-regime actors have smuggled roughly 200 Starlink devices into Iranian territory. Iranian officials are reportedly aware that Starlink is active throughout the country but do not know who owns the devices nor where they are located. Starlink terminals provide users with a means to circumvent the regime's ongoing internet restriction and censorship measures, thereby facilitating communications among protest coordinators.[23]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

[1] <https://twitter.com/AtenaDaemi/status/1605876359003344898?s=20&t=OXi0Fpg...> ; <https://twitter.com/MansouriSirwan/status/1606012140896153601> ; <https://twitter.com/Dorchida24/status/1605710605402324992?s=20&t=OXi0Fpg...> ; <https://twitter.com/kayvanrassooli/status/1605698173057605632?s=20&t=OXi...> ; https://twitter.com/_Injaneb96/status/1605946287211155457?s=20&t=OXi0Fp...

[2] https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1605725621656633346?s=20&t=OXi0Fpg...

[3] <https://twitter.com/DaiKatuo/status/1605932639441113094?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCM...>

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

[5] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-seven-killed-terrorist-attack-izeh-protests...> ; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/18/iran-protests-izeh-kian-...>

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

[7] <https://www.mehrnews dot com/news/5660415>

- [8] <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/562936>
- [9] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-3> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-13>;
- [10] https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/pdf_uploadana...
- [11] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606009887179214848>
https://twitter.com/IranIntl_Ar/status/1606016420520857621
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606026511772880896>
<https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1606021907471540234?s=20&t=zOfAXqzdo...>
- [12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605898233451945986>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605899117917372416>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605917333872168962>
<https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1605914391815372801>
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605921667011706890?s=20&t=rBSgK6... ; <https://twitter.com/Shahinlooo/status/1605913158098599944?s=20&t=rBSgK66...>
- [13] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605967988716363776?s=20&t=QLDD7T...
<https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1605952749165694978>
- [14] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1605873597775478784;
https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1605982891497861120
- [15] www.7aban.org/about.php
- [16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-4>
- [17] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1605944547145555968;
https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605833399905787905;
https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605694549434802186
- [18] https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605937962163863559
- [19] <https://twitter.com/DaiKatuo/status/1605982131217346560>
- [20] <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9...> ; <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85...>
- [21] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-19>
- [22] <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85...> ;
<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9..>
- [23] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/irans-online-crackdown-prompts-smuggling-of...>

Iran Crisis Update, December 23

Nicholas Carl, Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 23, 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 is likely in a mounting confrontation with citizens in Izeh, Khuzestan Province. Izeh has seen weeks of violence since November 2022. Unidentified gunmen shot and killed at least six people and injured another 15 at a shopping center in Izeh on November 16. [1] Iranian state media attributed the attack to the Islamic State, although the group has not claimed responsibility. Security forces conducted a direct-action raid in Izeh on December 20 targeting individuals for their alleged roles in the terror attack. [2] Unconfirmed social media accounts have claimed that security forces have begun killing and mass arresting citizens in Izeh since the raid. [3] Others have claimed that the regime has imposed a total internet blackout there and established checkpoints on the major roads leading into and out of the city. This most recent reported escalation suggests that citizens may have protested and reacted angrily to the raid. The information space remains incredibly murky, and obtaining reliable and verifiable information is thus difficult.

The ongoing situation in Izeh underscores the credibility crisis that the regime faces. Several conflicting rumors are circulating in the Persian-language information space. Some, including the mother of one of the victims, have claimed that the regime conducted the November 16 terror attack—not the Islamic State. [4] Protest organizations and other social media accounts are separately claiming that the individuals killed and arrested in the December 20 raid were innocent. [5] CTP cannot assess the veracity of any of these rumors. The prevalence of such rumors highlights the mistrust of the population toward the political establishment, however, as the regime's abuse of its people continues to undermine its credibility.

Unidentified individuals detonated explosives at a Basij base in Ghahdrijan, Esfahan Province on December 23, marking a possible inflection in protester tactics. [6] Protesters have regularly thrown Molotov cocktails at security forces' facilities throughout this protest wave, but CTP has not previously observed the use of explosives like the ones used in this attack. The attackers may have produced improvised explosives themselves or accessed materials from industrial or military sources.

Vice News published on December 17 a video indicating dissent among the state security services. [7] Vice News interviewed an alleged former employee of the Intelligence and Security Ministry who defected during the crackdown. The individual claimed that some Law Enforcement Command (LEC) members have opposed the crackdown and that the IRGC Intelligence Organization has arrested them. The Vice News video also interviewed a reported Basij member who similarly expressed frustration over the brutality of the crackdown. CTP cannot verify the authenticity of this report, but it is consistent with previously observed trends. The regime has long struggled with dissent among the security services during violent crackdowns. [8] Iranian security personnel, especially the less ideological, have sometimes refused to use extreme force against their fellow citizens. The arrest of these dissenting security officers could spread frustration among their families and security units.

These defections highlight one of the many challenges that the protests pose to regime longevity. The ongoing protests—even at low levels—continue to strain the bandwidth, energy, and morale of

security forces, increasing the likelihood of further dissent. Protesters can likely sustain varying levels of demonstrations and strikes longer than the regime can sustain its crackdown.

The recent behavior of the regime demonstrates that it will likely keep the mandatory hijab law but look for new, and perhaps more effective, ways to enforce it rather than using the morality patrol. The regime has not yet released an opinion on the hijab requirement even though it pledged to do so by December 16.[9] The continued silence suggests that Iranian leaders have decided to maintain the law but want to avoid enflaming protests with a public announcement. CTP has previously argued that the idea that the regime will relax its hijab law is fundamentally incompatible with the vision that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has for the future of the country. [10]

Some Iranian officials have described alternatives to using the morality patrol to enforce the hijab requirement. Former IRGC Intelligence Organization Chief Hossein Taeb stated that the morality patrols do not work, and that the regime needs to evaluate different methods on December 23. [11] Parliamentarian Hossin Jalali similarly stated that the regime is enforcing the hijab requirement “through smart methods,” implying the use of advanced technologies such as facial recognition and surveillance cameras.[12] CTP has previously suggested that the regime could adopt such an approach.[13] This emphasis on alternative enforcement methods underscores that the potential abolition of the morality patrol, which is not yet confirmed, does not mean that the regime will relax its mandatory hijab policies. The regime might instead continue to expand an Orwellian surveillance-punishment model relying on collective punishment through shutting down non-compliant businesses and remote punishments such as seizing financial assets in state banks as alternatives to physical confrontation.

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime is in a mounting confrontation with citizens in Izeh, Khuzestan Province. The ongoing situation in Izeh underscores the credibility crisis that the regime faces.**
- **Unidentified individuals detonated explosives at a Basij base in Ghahdrijan, Esfahan Province, marking a possible inflection in protester tactics.**
- **Vice News published a video indicating dissent among the state security services.**
- **The recent behavior of the regime demonstrates that it will likely keep the mandatory hijab law but look for new, and perhaps more effective, ways to enforce it rather than using the morality patrol.**
- **At least four protests occurred in four cities across three provinces. Citizens frustrated by the regime’s suppression of Sunnis played a prominent role in the protests**
- **Protest activity may increase on December 24 to commemorate 100 consecutive days of demonstrations.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least four protests occurred in four cities across three provinces on December 23. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Galikash, Golestan Province[14]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Sunni worshippers
- Notes: Protesters expressed support for Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Malouvi Abdol Ghafar Naghsbandi, who reportedly cannot be reached after being summoned to a special clerical court in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province. Protesters also demanded the return of Azadshahr, Golestan Province Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Mohammad Hossein Garij after Garij was dismissed in December 2021.

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[15]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protesters expressed support for Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Sunni Friday Prayer Leader Malouvi Abdol Ghafar Naghsbandi, who reportedly cannot be reached after being summoned to a special clerical court in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province.

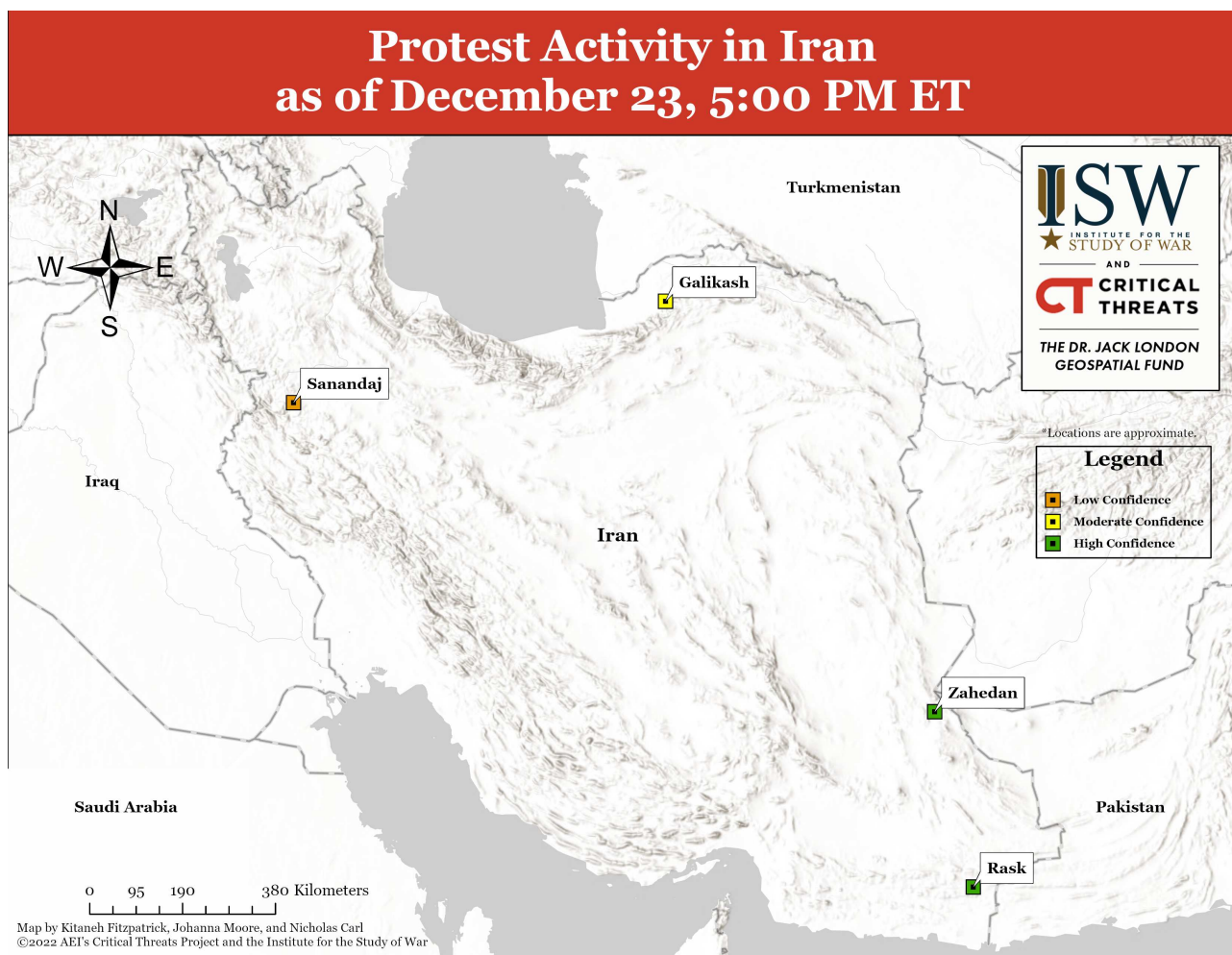
Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province [16]

- Size: Medium
- Notable observed chants: “Death to the execution republic”
- Notes: Protests followed Moulana Abdol Hamid’s Friday prayer sermon

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

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[17]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners, Isa Bigleri’s 40-day commemoration ceremony
- Notes: Footage may be from December 22. Weather conditions and chants similar to commemoration ceremony footage circulated on this date.



Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid criticized the regime’s use of force in recent weeks in his weekly Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on December 23. Abdol Hamid warned that “the regime cannot be maintained with weapons and militarism” and condemned authorities for prioritizing power over religious principles. Abdol Hamid suggested that Iranian leadership was executing decisions “above the decree of God.” Abdol

Hamid also warned that Islamic governance was “only good so as long as the majority of people want it” and stressed the importance of listening to the will of the people.[18]

Citizens frustrated by the regime’s suppression of Sunnis played a prominent role in fueling the protests on December 23. Three of the four recorded protests were related to Sunni grievances. The regime does not appear to be conducting a targeted campaign against Sunnis but rather trying to suppress dissenting voices in different locations. The regime, for instance, summoned Sunni cleric Maulvi Abdol Ghafar Naghshbandi to Mashhad after he confirmed the rape of a 15-year-old girl by an LEC commander in Chabahar, Sistan and Baluchistan Province. [19] Naghshbandi has been missing since his summons, driving protests in two different cities on December 23. The regime’s efforts to silence critics like Naghshbandi and Moulana Abdol Hamid may generate backlash from the Sunni community in Iran.

Education Minister Yousef Nouri announced the establishment of an entity to “diagnose the ways teenagers deal with political issues” on December 23.[20] Nouri’s announcement is the latest part of the Iranian effort to reeducate and treat dissenting minors. Nouri stated on October 11 that the regime sent arrested high school students to “psychological centers” to educate and reform them, as CTP previously reported.[21] *The New York Times* reported on November 14 that the regime forced arrested underage protesters to complete behavioral therapy under the supervision of a cleric and psychologist. Iranian authorities reportedly forced detainees who refused treatment to take psychiatric drugs.[22] These events highlight how some Iranian authorities are seemingly conflating political dissent with psychiatric issues.

Protest activity may increase on December 24 to commemorate 100 consecutive days of demonstrations. Protest coordinators and organizations repeated their calls for countrywide demonstrations and strikes on this day.[23] Many major cities are forecasted to receive cold weather and precipitation on December 24, which may depress protest turnout but also encourage strikes.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

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

[2] <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/5660415>

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

[4] <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-seven-killed-terrorist-attack-izeh-protests...>
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/18/iran-protests-izeh-kian-...>

[5] https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1606284749160398848;
<https://twitter.com/IzehTirak/status/1605849203598557184>

[6] <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1606344511260692498?s=20&t=NlXt0E...>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606315681871544320>

[7] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTFhAVB4R64>

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

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

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

- [11] <http://www.defapress dot ir/fa/news/562991>
- [12] https://twitter.com/fresh_sadegh/status/1605894015236247552
- [13] https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-5#_...
- [14] <https://twitter.com/VOAfarsi/status/1606298026531622912?s=20&t=Cnp91JGJ2...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606255156298817536> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1606257011133480960?s=20&t=Cnp91JGJ2... ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-16> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1606356744107597827?s=20&t=FPSe80bLo... ; <https://twitter.com/Jelebeh1/status/1472130980144164873?s=20&t=IBf5D5xQG...>
- [15] <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1606230170121035776?s=20&t=eG...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1606299739091255296?s=20&t=eGmCsRYLk...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606238303430352896?s=20&t=0HfUxb...>
- [16] <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1606247703393882112?s=20&t=vJ...> ; <https://twitter.com/SamRasoulpour/status/1606238515716554752?s=20&t=vJFB...> ; https://twitter.com/TheDrIman/status/1606283960186650626?s=20&t=vJFBY_TB... ; https://twitter.com/Sima_Sabet/status/1606238744985497600?s=20&t=vJFBY_T... ; <https://twitter.com/pouriazeraati/status/1606235079205715969?s=20&t=vJFB...>
- [17] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606242796083580928?s=20&t=wgGgxB...> ; <https://twitter.com/IHRights/status/1606264718150320130?s=20&t=TPBJncNc-...>
- [18] <https://t.co/eNdVWEEZLw>
- [19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-16>
- [20] <https://www.imna dot ir/news/628574>
- [21] <https://www.sharghdaily dot com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-6/858207-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%85-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%82%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4-%D8%A2%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D8%AF>
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Iran Crisis Update, December 24

Iran Crisis Update, December 24

Nicholas Carl, Dana Alexander Gray, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 24, 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](#).

Note: CTP will not publish a daily Iran Crisis Update on December 25 for the Christmas holiday. CTP will resume daily publishing on December 26.

The Iranian Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of 22-year-old protester Mohammad Ghobadlou on December 24 after rejecting his appeal.[1] The Judiciary convicted Ghobadlou of “corruption on earth” and sentenced him to death in October 2022. This charge—corruption on earth—is an extremely broad charge that the Judiciary often uses to justify executions. The Iranian penal code states that this charge can be brought against an individual who “extensively commits a felony against the bodily entity of the people, offenses against internal or international security of the state, spreads lies, disrupts the economic system of the state, commits arson or destroys properties, distributes poisonous and bacterial and dangerous materials, or [establishes, aids, or abets] places of corruption and prostitution.”[2] The Supreme Court published earlier on December 24 that it had accepted the appeals of Ghobadlou and Saman Seyyedi Yasin—two protesters on death row—but later retracted that report and stated that it had accepted the appeal of Yasin but upheld Ghobadlou’s death sentence.[3]

Protest activity increased only marginally for the planned demonstrations on December 24, likely in part due to inclement weather conditions. Calls for protests have largely failed to generate surges in turnout since mid-November 2022. CTP continues to assess that this reduced protest activity does not, however, indicate the end of the anti-regime movement.[4] The ongoing protests—even at low levels—likely continue to strain the bandwidth, energy, and morale of security forces.[5]

Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali commemorated Women’s Week in Iran on December 24.[6] Khazali celebrated the position of women under the Islamic Republic and accused foreign enemies of trying to promote immorality among Iranian women. She added that the regime will hold events and programs during Women’s Week to “raise awareness among Iranian women” about the role of foreign actors in stoking protests. The UN Economic and Social Council previously voted to expel Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women on December 14 in response to the regime’s oppression of millions of Iranian women.[7]

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of 22-year-old protester Mohammad Ghobadlou after rejecting his appeal.**
- **Protest activity increased only marginally for the planned demonstrations, likely in part due to inclement weather conditions. At least seven protests occurred in six cities across six provinces.**
- **Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Ensieh Khazali commemorated Women’s Week in Iran.**

- Some Iranian economic and political actors have acknowledged the economic consequences of the regime's internet disruptions.
- Iranian media reported that the Iranian rial reached a new record low of around 400,800 to the US dollar.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least seven protests occurred in six cities across six provinces on December 24. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Karaj, Alborz Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protesters chanted “our judges are murderers, the whole system is corrupt” during an evening demonstration on Karaj streets.

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province[9]

- Size: Small

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[10]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protest Activity: Protesters set fires on a Sanandaj street.

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Protest Activity: Protesters set fires on Mashhad streets
- Notes: Footage from social media depicted likely regime security forces patrolling a Mashhad street on motorbikes.

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

Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province[12]

- Size: Undetermined
- Regime Violence: Regime security forces reportedly clashed with and shot at protesters.

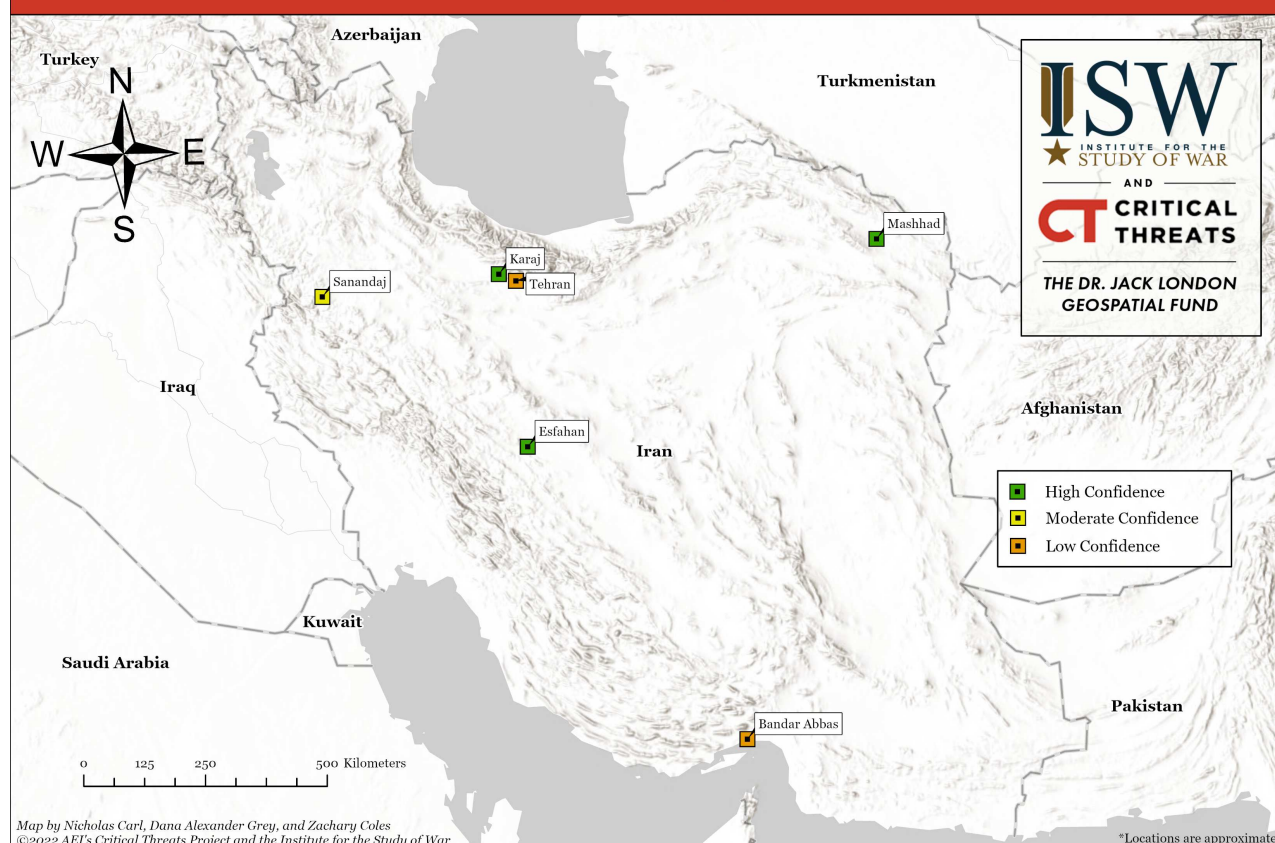
Tehran City, Tehran Province[13]

- Size: Small

Tehran City, Tehran Province[14]

- Size: Small
- Notes: Protesters marched in the vicinity of the Haft Houz neighborhood during an evening demonstration.

Protest Activity in Iran as of December 24, 5:00 PM ET



Some Iranian economic and political actors have acknowledged the economic consequences of the regime's internet disruptions. An Iranian journalist claimed on December 24 that some private internet providers have complained to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry regarding the financial losses they have incurred due to the internet restrictions. [15] These providers warned that continuing internet blackouts jeopardize their businesses. Former ICT Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi previously stated that on October 30 the regime's internet disruptions will sharply reduce the revenue of internet providers.[16]

Iranian media reported that the Iranian rial reached a new record low of around 400,800 to the US dollar on December 24.[17] The dollar sold for around 317,000 rials on September 16—when the protests began.[18] Parliamentarian Ehsan Arkani criticized the Central Bank of Iran for the currency devaluation and stated that it must answer to Parliament.[19]

Fourteen Tehran chapters of the Basij University Students Organization published an open letter on December 24 calling on Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei to establish an online database for information on prominent cases involving corruption and political and security issues.[20] The signatories also called for an online platform for clerical and legal experts to submit criticisms and opinions to the Judiciary. The Basij chapters stated that such measures should increase public confidence in the Judiciary.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

[1] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/03/2826108>

[2] <https://www.refworld.org/docid/518a19404.html>

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- [9] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1606705885740425216?s=20&t=Cy5MsT...; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606727813435908097?s=20&t=LiER4C...>
- [10] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1606692561615261696?s=20&t=FGEdgO...
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- [15] https://twitter.com/fresh_sadegh/status/1606712160918421504
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- [19] <https://isna dot ir/xdMZH9>
- [20] <https://isna dot r/xdMZHp>

Iran Crisis Update, December 26

Iran Crisis Update, December 26

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

December 26, 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 are encouraging citizens to demonstrate more regularly and spontaneously rather than awaiting planned protests. The United Neighborhood Youth called for decentralized demonstrations and for protesters to “break the cycle of waiting.”[1] The Karaj Neighborhood Youth published a graphic illustrating the protest activity that preceded the Iranian revolution in 1979 to argue that the movement must sustain itself through an extended period of spikes and lulls to gradually weaken the regime.[2]

These protest coordinators and organizations are likely trying to reverse a natural consequence of the growing cohesion within the movement. Many protesters may be increasingly awaiting calls for protests and other guidance rather than acting independently as the movement has developed more obvious leadership. But these protest coordinators and organizations have demonstrated that they cannot consistently generate significant surges in protest activity themselves, possibly due to mistrust toward them among demonstrators and/or the challenges of organizing under the tremendous pressure the regime is exerting against them. The persistence of protests has been a remarkable feature of this movement and has put great strains on the regime and its security forces. If the protesters can resume more decentralized and less predictable activities, they can add to that strain even with small numbers of demonstrators in the streets at a time.

Protest coordinators and organizations are continuing their efforts to stoke a fiscal crisis and disrupt the transportation sector. The Hamedan Neighborhood Youth reiterated its calls for citizens to withdraw their savings to further encourage a run on the banks.[3] The Iranian rial reached a new record low, selling for around 415,200 to the US dollar, on December 26.[4] The United Neighborhood Youth separately called for countrywide protests and strikes on January 6-8 to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the IRGC shooting down a Ukrainian civilian airplane. The group urged protests and strikes around airports, fire stations, and ports in particular. It remains unclear what net effect the fiscal crisis and strikes will have on the Iranian economy, but the continuation of this protest movement seems likely to generate some level of economic disruption.

Mounting economic issues could drive further protest activity in turn, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. Economic issues have fueled several violent protest waves in Iran in recent years, including the 2017-18 Dey protests and 2019 Aban protests.[5] The Gilan Neighborhood Youth called on protesters to remember the Dey protests, which began on December 28, 2017, and were focused largely on economic hardship and rising prices.[6] The dollar sold for around 42,010 Iranian rial when the Dey protests began.[7]

The regime is further shuffling the authorities responsible for internal security in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, likely to improve efforts to stabilize the province. President Ebrahim Raisi and his cabinet approved the appointment of IRGC Brigadier General Mohammad Karami as Sistan and Baluchistan provincial governor on December 25.[8] Karami has been the commander of the IRGC Ground Forces Quds Operational Headquarters—the military entity that oversees the

IRGC conventional units and internal security in Sistan and Baluchistan and Kerman provinces—since February 2020.[9] Karami will chair the Sistan and Baluchistan Provincial Security Council in his capacity as governor, coordinating and overseeing security affairs in the province. He may hold even more authority and influence if he continues to command the Quds Operational Headquarters as well; IRGC leadership has yet to appoint his replacement. The Law Enforcement Command (LEC) previously installed a new commander for Sistan and Baluchistan Province on November 9 as part of this effort to improve how the regime imposes social control there.[10]

The Khuzestan Neighborhood Youth posted a tweet claiming that the regime escalated against Izeh, Khuzestan Province residents on December 25 and 26. The regime deployed a large number of security forces and completely disrupted local internet services, according to the Khuzestan group.[11] The Khuzestan group reported the sound of gunfire and claimed that security forces blocked major roads leading into and out of the city.[12] The Khuzestan group also called for unrest in other locations throughout Khuzestan Province to stretch the bandwidth of security forces and prevent them from concentrating around Izeh. CTP cannot verify any of these rumors. They are plausible, however, given that Iranian authorities likely expected unrest in Izeh on December 26—the 40th day since the Izeh terror attack on November 16.[13]

Key Takeaways

- **Protest coordinators and organizations are encouraging citizens to demonstrate more regularly and spontaneously rather than awaiting planned protests. These protest coordinators and organizations are likely trying to reverse a natural consequence of the growing cohesion within the movement.**
- **Protest coordinators and organizations are continuing their efforts to cause a fiscal crisis for the regime and disrupt the transportation sector. Mounting economic issues could drive further protest activity in turn, creating a self-reinforcing cycle.**
- **The regime is further shuffling the authorities responsible for internal security in Sistan and Baluchistan Province, likely to improve efforts to stabilize the province.**
- **The Khuzestan Neighborhood Youth posted a tweet claiming that the regime escalated against Izeh, Khuzestan Province residents.**
- **At least five protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on December 25, and at least seven protests occurred in six cities across five provinces on December 26.**
- **Elon Musk tweeted that almost 100 Starlink devices are currently operating in Iran.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least five protests occurred in three cities across three provinces on December 25. The Iranian Meteorological Organization issued winter-storm warnings for several central and southern provinces from December 26-28, which may depress turnout during this period.[14] CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations on December 25:

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

Chersaneh, Kurdistan Province[15]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: Barhan Karmi's 40-day commemoration ceremony

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[16]

- Size: Medium
- Regime Repression: Security forces shot at protesters

- Notes: Protest began at a cemetery, 40-day commemoration ceremonies for multiple killed protesters. Protests then resumed on Boukan city streets. Both protests at the cemetery and on the city streets occurred during daylight hours.

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[17]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: High school students

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations on December 25:

Pakdasht, Tehran Province[18]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Industrial workers
- Notes: Protest and strike

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[19]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: Footage captures fires lit at a later time of the day than other documented protests in Boukan on December 25



At least seven protests occurred in six cities across five provinces on December 26. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Dashti, Hormozgan Province[20]

- Size: Small to medium
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: Following 40-day commemoration ceremony of killed protester Hamed Melai, evening

Dashti, Hormozgan Province[21]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony of killed protester Hamed Melai, daytime

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[22]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony of nine-year-old killed protester Kian Pirfalak

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[23]

- Size: Small to medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony of seventeen-year-old killed protester Daniel Pabandi

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[24]

- Size: Small to medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony of killed protester Aram Habibi

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations on December 26:

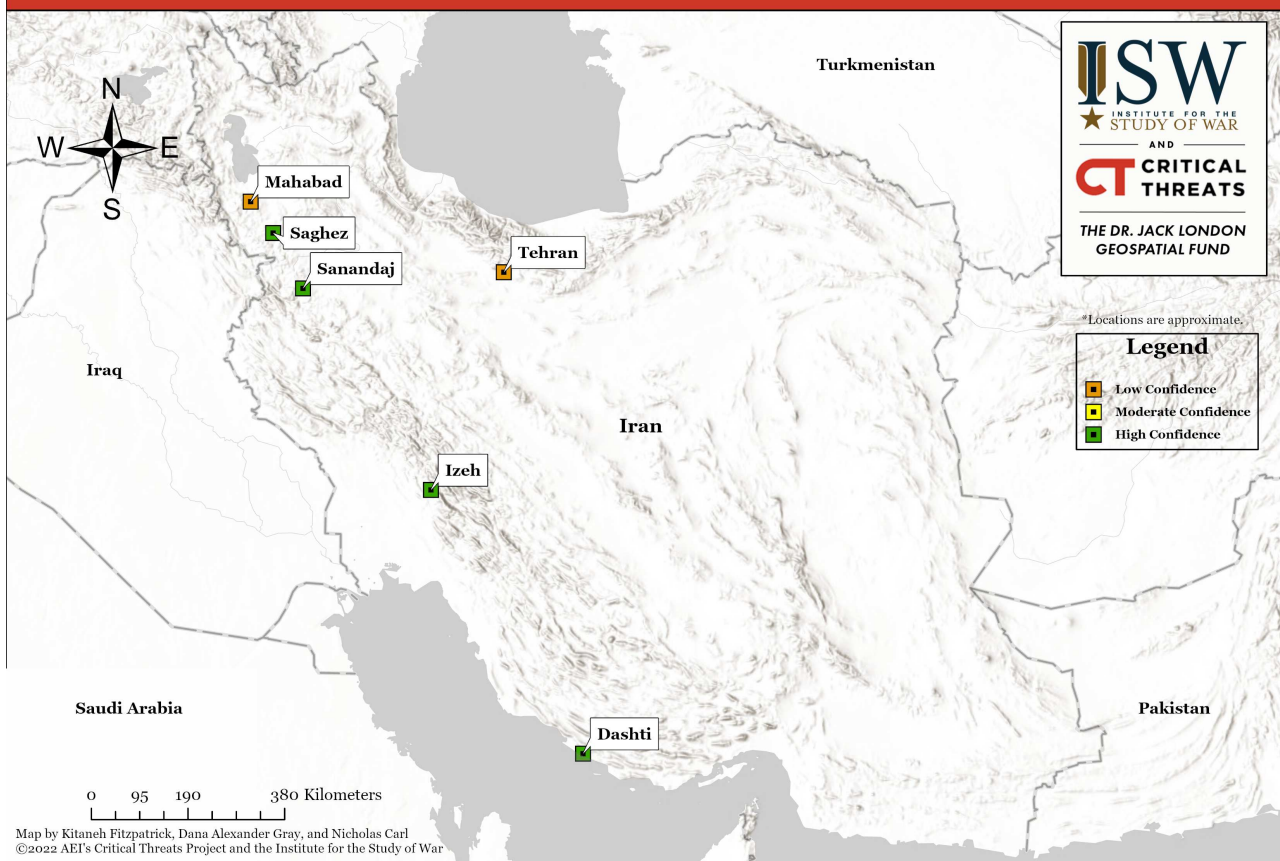
Tehran City, Tehran Province[25]

- Size: Undetermined
- Notes: Gathered in front of the Roads and Urban Development Ministry to protest land dispute

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[26]

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

Protest Activity in Iran on December 26, 5:00 PM ET



The Tehran Revolutionary Court sentenced arrested protester Mahsa Peyravi to 10 years in prison for failing to adhere to mandatory veiling laws on December 23.[27] The court charged Peyravi with “promoting corruption and prostitution” for allegedly waving her headscarf during a protest in Tehran.

Elon Musk tweeted on December 26 that almost 100 Starlink devices are currently operating in Iran.[28] The Wall Street Journal previously estimated on December 22 that smugglers have imported around 200 Starlink devices into Iran.[29] 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.

Iranian authorities ordered a Mahan Air flight transporting the wife and daughter of Ali Daei from Tehran to Dubai to divert to Kish Island so that they could be taken for questioning on December 26.[30] Mahan Air is tied to IRGC and historically supported regime efforts to send arms and personnel to Syria. Iranian media reported that the regime banned Daei’s wife from leaving the country over her alleged ties to anti-regime groups.[31] It is unclear why she was allowed on the flight to begin with if she had been banned from traveling or why the regime decided to take the drastic step of diverting a flight to question her. Daei has publicly supported the protests in recent weeks.[32]

A paint factory exploded and caught on fire, wounding at least 65 individuals, near Azar Shahr, East Azerbaijan Province on December 26.[33] Local officials claimed that a gas leak caused the explosion and fire.

The mother of Mohammad Ghobadlou—an arrested protester on death row—released a video statement calling for support to oppose his execution.[34] The parents of another arrested protester, Mohammad Mehi Karami, previously released a video on December 18 calling on the judiciary to lift his death sentence, as CTP previously reported.[35]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

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- [1] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1607404781030748161?s=20&t=b7qH3IP9sev...
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- [14] <https://isna dot ir/xdN2qh>
- [15] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607065170710347777?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; <https://twitter.com/FSeifikaran/status/1606983044841226242?s=20&t=g-Ch8O...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1607034146454396928?s=20&t=nJwXS8...
- [16] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607010872630583297?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607003729370251267?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607001838502678531?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607000322085425152?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607000032238276608?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607000032238276608?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1607071296449400834?s=20&t=0RXHo5... ; <https://twitter.com/FattahiFarzad/status/1606997375901487104?s=20&t=0RXH...>
- [17] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607120118407897090?s=20&t=0RXHo5...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1607118003807703040?s=20&t=ekVqyf...
- [18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607050797334036481?s=20&t=qsft2g...>
- [19] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607080383345991680?s=20&t=0RXHo5...>

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- [25] <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1607360908615094272?s=20&t=3Vx2vvL...>
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Iran Crisis Update, December 27

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

December 27, 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](#).

Some elements of the Iranian regime are increasingly framing the protest movement as an insurgency. Mohsen Heydari—a representative of Khuzestan Province in the Assembly of Experts—stated that the judiciary should convict protesters of *baghi* (armed insurrection) rather than *moharebeh* (waging war against God) on December 27.[1] The Assembly of Experts is the regime body constitutionally responsible for selecting the supreme leader. *Baghi* is a relatively new legal concept that Parliament introduced to the Iranian penal code in 2013.[2]

There is some evidence indicating that components of this protest movement have indeed crossed the threshold to be considered an insurgency, as CTP has previously noted.[3] Protesters have continually demonstrated varying levels of coordination and cohesion and used limited militant tactics against the regime on some occasions.[4] Over 70 security personnel have died in this protest movement—significantly more than in any other protest wave in the history of the Islamic Republic.[5] Protesters have furthermore likely developed the networks and infrastructure necessary to conduct a protracted struggle against the regime.

Heydari argued that some protesters deserved more severe punishments, likely referring to the death sentence, and should therefore be convicted of insurrection. Regime officials have regularly accused protesters of sedition since the beginning of the ongoing movement in September 2022, but labeling protesters as insurrectionists would justify even harsher legal penalties. *Baghi* is supposed to carry the death sentence, whereas *moharebeh* can but does not always lead to execution.

Senior officials have not yet indicated that they will adopt this harsher legal approach, but their recent rhetoric suggests that it is possible. Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei has repeatedly defended the execution of arrested protesters and instructed judicial authorities to ignore critics in recent weeks.[6] President Ebrahim Raisi stated on December 27 that the regime will forgive protesters “deceived” by foreign actors but will show no mercy to domestic enemies to the Islamic Republic.[7]

The external messaging of different protest organizations may indicate divergent focuses. The Karaj Neighborhood Youth continues to appear focused primarily on interacting with a domestic Iranian audience. The Karaj group has begun conducting increasingly regular polls in Persian to identify and understand protesters’ preferences in approach.[8] It also extensively interacts with Persian-language users in Twitter.[9] This approach is almost certainly one of the best ways to increase engagement with the group’s target audience. Other groups, such as the Tehran Neighborhood Youth and Mashhad Neighborhood Youth, appear focused at least partially on a Western audience. Both groups announced their alignment and solidarity with a Brussels-based protest organization on December 22, as CTP previously reported.[10] The Tehran and Mashhad groups have seemingly struggled to generate protest turnout more than the Karaj group, raising the question whether their external focuses have hindered any efforts to build credibility among actual Iranians.

The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth claimed on December 27 that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has ordered the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC) to give 1 trillion Iranian rials (approximately \$24 million) to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) over the past three months, likely to support protest suppression.[11] The IKRC is a parastatal “charitable foundation” that Khamenei controls and uses to expand regime influence domestically and abroad.[12] The IKRC wrote a letter to Khamenei on December 21 stating that it has no financial resources left to meet its regular payments, according to the Mashhad group. CTP cannot independently substantiate this rumor. The Mashhad group posted these claims in Persian, but they may still reflect the group’s partially external focus. The Mashhad group may hope to inspire Western, especially European, sanctions on the IKRC for any role it might have in the protest crackdown.

Protest coordinators and organizations called for demonstrations on December 29 to commemorate several different killed protesters. The Tehran Neighborhood Youth called for demonstrations in Tehran and Izeh to commemorate Hamid Reza Rouhi and Sepehr Maghsoudi, respectively.[13] The Khuzestan Neighborhood Youth called for demonstrations in Ahvaz to remember Ataneh Noami.[14] The family of a protester killed during the 2009 Green Movement tweeted on December 27 encouraging citizens to attend the funerals and commemoration ceremonies for protesters the regime has killed since September 2022.[15] The United Neighborhood Youth has separately called for countrywide protests and strikes on January 6-8 to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the IRGC shooting down a Ukrainian civilian airplane. [16]

Key Takeaways

- **Some elements of the Iranian regime are increasingly framing the protest movement as an insurgency. No senior officials have yet indicated that they will adopt this harsher legal approach, but their recent rhetoric suggests it is possible. There is some evidence indicating that components of this protest movement have indeed crossed the threshold to be considered an insurgency.**
- **The external messaging of different protest organizations may indicate divergent focuses.**
- **Protest coordinators and organizations called for demonstrations on December 29 to commemorate several different killed protesters.**
- **At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.**
- **Security forces are likely trying to contain commemoration ceremonies for the protesters killed when the IRGC Ground Forces deployed to West Azerbaijan Province in late-November 2022.**
- **Social media users documented children participating in various kinds of protest activity in Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province.**
- **Supreme Human Rights Council Secretary Kazem Gharib Abadi denied reports of sexual abuse of female prisoners.**
- **Iranian proxies in Iraq may attack US positions there to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al Muhandis.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on December 27. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province[17]

Size: Medium

Demographic: Mourners

Regime Repression: Heavy security presence reported, reports of several arrests and that security personnel violently arrested the killed protester’s father

Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony Aylar Haghi

Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province[18]

Size: Small

Demographic: Mourners

Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for killed protester

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[19]

Size: Small

Protester Activity: Lit fires on street

Notes: Footage shows protesters lighting fires in the street during daytime and after sunset. It is unclear if these are different protests or capture the same anti-regime demonstration.

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province[20]

Size: Medium

Demographic: Mourners

Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for three killed protesters

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

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province[21]

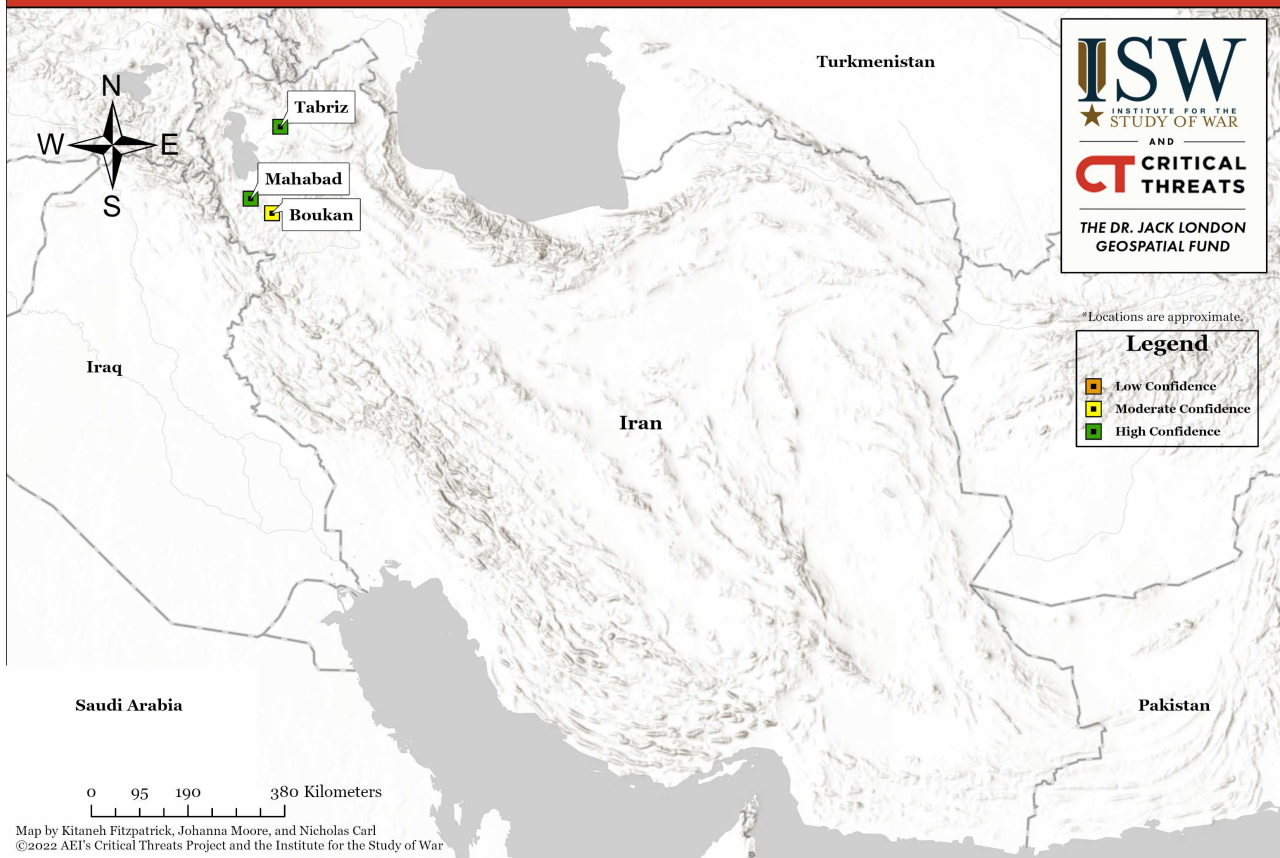
Size: Small to medium

Demographic: Industrial workers

Notes: Protest and strike

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

Protest Activity in Iran as of December 27, 5:00 PM ET



Security forces are likely trying to contain commemoration ceremonies for the protesters killed when the IRGC Ground Forces deployed to West Azerbaijan Province in late-November 2022.[22] Iranian Kurdish human rights organization Hengaw reported that security forces deployed to a cemetery in Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province on December 27. [23] December 29 marks around 40 days since the IRGC Ground Forces began deploying around the province, and 40-day commemoration ceremonies may thus occur in the days ahead.

CTP is currently hypothesizing that the regime has pulled back some of the IRGC military deployments in West Azerbaijan in recent weeks. Iranian authorities and state-run media outlets seem eager to frame the protests as over and promote that perception. But the coming 40-day commemorations around West Azerbaijan Province may have persuaded IRGC leadership to revert to a heavy security presence there.

Social media users documented children participating in various kinds of protest activity in Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province on December 27. One child chanted anti-regime slogans at a 40-day commemoration ceremony.[24] Other children carried tires along a street, purportedly to set them aflame and thereby block the road.[25] CTP has regularly documented the participation of minors in the protests since September 2022. Their participation highlights the long-term challenge that the regime will face in finding support among the younger generations. It also suggests that their parents are allowing or even encouraging these acts of political defiance.

Supreme Human Rights Council Secretary Kazem Gharib Abadi denied reports of sexual abuse of female prisoners on December 27.[26] Iranian human rights activist Narges Mohammadi wrote a letter detailing horrific acts of physical abuse and sexual violence against detained female protesters in Evin prison on December 24.[27] Gharib Abadi rejected Mohammadi's account, citing a recent visit to Gharchak prison in Tehran Province during which "no mention or complaints about sexual abuse were raised." [28] Other Western reports of sexual

assault and violence toward arrested protesters corroborate Mohammadi's claims, and CTP does not assess Gharib Abadi's denials to be credible.[29]

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid criticized the regime for suppressing protests rather than listening to them on December 27.[30] Abdol Hamid asked how the responsible Iranian authorities will justify their actions to God.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iranian proxies in Iraq may attack US positions there to commemorate the three-year anniversary of the US killing Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al Muhandis.[31] An Iranian proxy Telegram channel posted an image on December 27 depicting a hypothetical Iranian attack on the Ain al Assad airbase with the caption "happy Christmas American army in Iraq." Iranian military and proxy leaders have commemorated the death of Soleimani and Muhandis and escalated against the US every year since 2020.

[2] [www.iranhr dot net/en/articles/4725](http://www.iranhr.net/en/articles/4725)

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

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

[5] <https://twitter.com/Alfoneh/status/1605184629501304833>

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

[7] [www.president dot ir/fa/141636](http://www.president.ir/fa/141636)

[8] https://t.me/javanane_ka/438

[9] https://twitter.com/javanane_k/with_replies

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

[11] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2635

[12] <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/ideological-expansion/imam-khom...>

[13] https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1607778166545825793;
https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1607695943180386306

[14] https://t.me/javanan_Khuzestan/57

[15] <https://twitter.com/karimbeigimo/status/1607728217632169985?s=20&t=UxAIq...>

[16] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-26>

[17] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1607685531134984194?s=20&t=rixksoe...> ; <https://twitter.com/FSeifikaran/status/1607695387455897600?s=20&t=rixkso...> ; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607709937055981573?s=20&t=c_8RWs... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607683588803231744?s=20&t=UxAIqh...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607681815493459970?s=20&t=UxAIqh...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607681031343153153?s=20&t=UxAIqh...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607678180508438532?s=20&t=5sTVCv...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607673318471266306?s=20&t=UxAIqh...>

- [18] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607750120577331200?s=20&t=7veBX9...> ; <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1607730267933868033?s=20&t=7veBX...> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1607788696329232384?s=20&t=7veBX9edp...
- [19] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607792264822263808?s=20&t=WRcKTT...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607760696628109314?s=20&t=UxAIqh...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607760351407349761?s=20&t=UxAIqh...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607760215293792256?s=20&t=Vt7elS...> ; <https://twitter.com/kayvanrassooli/status/1607747402127007744?s=20&t=pxk...> ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1607793129427550212?s=20&t=4sKPye...>
- [20] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607785058949021698?s=20&t=UxAIqh...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607726656042434560?s=20&t=xrViKZ...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607725915529969664?s=20&t=kQPBu2...> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1607789125599481857?s=20&t=Km7P5WR9H... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607712026582818817?s=20&t=pzxlON...> ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1607717507229532161?s=20&t=pzxlON...
- [21] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607649954834841602?s=20&t=L23DqP...>
- [22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-21>
- [23] <https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1607722640424472576?s=20&t=UxAIqhbvw8...>
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- [25] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1607760696628109314?s=20&t=UxAIqh...>
- [26] <https://www.mizan dot news/4570689/%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81/>
- [27] <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64084709>
- [28] <https://www.mizan.news/4570689/%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81/>
- [29] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-25>
- [30] <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1607660879595671554>
- [31] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/66662>

Iran Crisis Update, December 28

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

December 28, 5:00 pm ET

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Iranian security officials and entities attempted to declare an end to protest activity on December 28 despite ongoing acts of anti-regime defiance documented throughout the country. The Artesh praised Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Iranian security forces for quelling protests in a December 28 statement commemorating regime-organized counter-protests to the 2009 Green Movement.[1] The Armed Forces General Staff—the most senior military body in Iran—also issued a statement commemorating the 2009 pro-regime counter-protests and claimed that the regime had neutralized the threat of recent anti-regime demonstrations. IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami similarly gave a speech claiming that the regime had decisively defeated unrest and accusing the US and Israel of fomenting dissent. Salami acknowledged that protest activity may resume at a later date.[2]

These declarations of victory appear premature. The regime has not deterred Iranians from continuing to participate in anti-regime protests and strikes, particularly in historically restive provinces. Social media users have documented regular protest activity in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province since late September, for example.[3] Protest activity has additionally increased in cities throughout Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan Provinces in recent days. CTP is currently hypothesizing that the regime may have pulled back some of the IRGC deployments in these areas, facilitating an uptick in anti-regime demonstrations.[4]

Iran's deteriorating economic conditions have the potential to further inflame anti-regime demonstrations throughout the country. The Iranian rial has depreciated by approximately 25 percent against the US dollar since protests began on September 16, hitting another historic low on December 28 at 422,000 rials per dollar on the black market.[5] Half of the currency's losses have occurred in the last three weeks, indicating the downward trend is accelerating.[6]

Iranian officials have blamed the protest movement for the rial's decline and corresponding economic maladies, but the regime's foreign policy adventures likely play a significant role.[7] A December 28 *New York Times* report stated that the Biden Administration is attempting to prevent Iran from acquiring the Western-made components necessary to manufacture suicide drones for Russian use in Ukraine.[8] Part of the Biden Administration's strategy involves aggressively applying export controls and sanctioning private actors linked to the drone supply chain.[9] The US and other Western countries pursuing a similar course of action have consequently restricted Iran's overall import and export activity. Heavy scrutiny from US compliance officials and the Iranian regime's resultant irregular payment arrangements have likely dissuaded some international vendors from doing business in Iran, regardless of the businesses' connection to drone supply chains. A December 21 *Reuters* report, for example, stated that the regime's "complex and erratic" sanctions-evasion tactics recently created a massive backlog of merchant ships containing sanctions-exempt cargo outside Iranian ports.[10] These unfavorable business conditions are likely discouraging private actors from engaging with the Iranian economy, driving the rial's exchange rate down further.

The US and other Western countries pursuing a similar course of action have likely dissuaded international vendors from doing business in Iran – regardless of the businesses' connection to

drone supply chains – and driven down the rial’s exchange rate, according to the *Times*. A December 21 *Reuters* report, for example, stated that the regime’s ”complex and erratic” sanction-evading payment methods have recently created a massive backlog of merchant ships containing sanctions-exempt cargo outside Iranian ports.[11]

The regime may increase the likelihood of a surge in protest activity by exacerbating economic conditions. Western responses to Iran’s enabling the brutal Russian targeting of Ukrainian civilians and an increasingly worthless currency are aggravating issues in Iran’s already ailing economy and may prevent the country from importing sufficient quantities of foodstuffs, refined petroleum products, and other resources necessary for stable economic conditions.

Natural gas shortages may reinvigorate anti-regime grievances as Iran’s economic situation worsens. Iranian officials previously endorsed leveraging the European energy crisis imposed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to increase Iranian natural gas exports.[12] Iran is, however, now suffering from the same energy shortages that it sought to capitalize on. The Raisi administration has expressed concern about the need to conserve gas in recent weeks.[13] A Gilan Province official additionally declared December 22 a local holiday for conserving energy, as CTP previously reported.[14]

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian security officials and entities attempted to declare an end to protest activity on December 28 despite ongoing acts of anti-regime defiance documented throughout the country.**
- **Iran’s deteriorating economic and energy conditions have the potential to further inflame anti-regime demonstrations.**
- **At least four protests occurred in four cities across four provinces.**
- **Protest coordinators reiterated calls for anti-regime protests and strikes on December 29 and January 6-8.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi and his cabinet appointed Hossein Mehrab as Khuzestan provincial governor on December 28.**
- **Former reformist President Hassan Rouhani discussed solutions to anti-regime activity with former governors from his administration on December 26.**
- **Social media users reported that petrochemical workers in Abadan, Khuzestan Province participated in anti-regime strikes for a third consecutive day.**
- **The Turkish, Russia, and Syrian Defense Ministers held a trilateral meeting on December 28 in Moscow.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least four protests occurred in four cities across four provinces on December 28. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Behmai, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province[15]

- Size: Medium
- Note: Local banks reportedly closed out of fear of a large gathering of protesters

Ghaloui Zendan, West Azerbaijan Province[16]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: 40-day commemoration march for Mehran Rahmani

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

Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province[17]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Blocked traffic

Saghez, Kurdistan Province[18]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Set fire to tires in the street; blocked traffic



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 circulated calls for anti-regime protests and strikes on the following dates:

December 29[19]

- Type: Protest, 40-day commemoration ceremonies for killed protesters
- Locations: Esfahan City, Esfahan Province; Marvdasht, Fars Province; Shiraz, Fars Province; Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province; Izeh, Khuzestan Province; Tehran City, Tehran Province

January 6-8[20]

- Type: Protest and strike
- Location: Country-wide

The Interior Ministry continued to shuffle around provincial governors to improve internal security.

President Ebrahim Raisi and his cabinet approved the appointment of Hossein Mehrab as Khuzestan provincial governor on December 28. Mehrab previously served in the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and IRGC Intelligence Organization and has held roles relating to economic policy within the Ahmadinejad administration and the Supreme National Security Council.[21] The Raisi administration previously appointed Mohammad Tabib Sahraei as Kermanshah provincial governor on December 21 and IRGC Brigadier General Mohammad Karami as Sistan and Baluchistan provincial governor on December 25.[22]

Former reformist President Hassan Rouhani discussed solutions to anti-regime activity with former governors from his administration on December 26. Rouhani encouraged the former governors to share their recommendations for resolving the Iranian population's grievances and claimed that he had offered suggestions to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other senior regime officials. Rouhani stressed the importance of reviving the regime and claimed that the loss of the Islamic Republic would damage the credibility of the Islamic faith. Rouhani cited economic and diplomatic isolation, ethnic and religious divisions, and the marginalization of reformist and moderate actors as reasons for ongoing sociopolitical issues.[23] Rouhani's meeting marks the first time that he has publicly commented on anti-regime activity since the Mahsa Amini protest movement began on September 16.

Social media users reported that petrochemical workers in Abadan, Khuzestan Province participated in anti-regime strikes for a third consecutive day.[24] Iranian authorities have allegedly warned Abadan petrochemical workers against continuing strike activity in recent days.[25]

A Europe-based Iranian human rights organization reported that over 100 arrested Iranians risk execution or death penalty charges for participating in anti-regime protest activity.[26]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

The Turkish, Russia, and Syrian Defense Ministers held a trilateral meeting on December 28 in Moscow. Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and Syrian Defense Minister Ali Mahmoud Abbas, along with their governments' respective intelligence chiefs, spoke with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu about humanitarian and security issues in Syria.[27] The participants agreed to hold additional trilateral meetings in the future.[28] The December 28 meeting marks the first time that the Syrian and Turkish Defense Ministers have met in over a decade, although Syrian and Turkish intelligence officials participated in bilateral talks as recently as September 2022.[29]

The December 28 meeting follows Turkish President Recep Erdogan's proposal for a series of graduated trilateral meetings between Syrian, Russian, and Turkish officials to rehabilitate diplomatic ties between the Assad Regime and Turkey.[30] Akar, Abbas, and Shoigu also likely discussed the potential Turkish military incursion into northern Syria, which Erdogan has repeatedly threatened to pursue.[31]

[1] <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/564123/%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%87...>

[2] <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/564123/%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%87...>

[3] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-1> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-27>

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

[5] [bonbast dot com/graph/usd/2022-11-01/2022-12-28](https://bonbast.com/graph/usd/2022-11-01/2022-12-28)

- [6] [bonbast dot com/graph/usd/2022-11-01/2022-12-28](https://bonbast.com/graph/usd/2022-11-01/2022-12-28)
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- [17] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608175708332855298>
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- [21] <https://www.irna.ir/news/84982398/>
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- [26] <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/5669/>

[27] [https://ria dot ru/20221228/siriya-1842000637.html](https://ria.ru/20221228/siriya-1842000637.html); https://t.me/mod_russia/22993

[28] [https://www dot aljazeera dot com/news/2022/12/28/turkey-syria-russia-defence-ministers-hold-talks-in-moscow](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/28/turkey-syria-russia-defence-ministers-hold-talks-in-moscow)

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[30] <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkey-seeks-trilateral-mechanism-with-rus...>

[31] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/erdogan-says-turkey-will-launc...>

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December 29, 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](#).

Funerals and commemoration ceremonies for killed protesters are continuing to sustain anti-regime activity throughout Iran as demonstrations enter their fifteenth consecutive week. Protest organizations successfully coordinated anti-regime demonstrations across five Iranian provinces on December 28. Six of the seven anti-regime protests that CTP observed on December 28 corresponded with prior protest calls from anti-regime organizations, suggesting that these groups may have assisted in generating turnout.[1] CTP additionally observed estimated crowds of over 100 protesters in three of the seven recorded protests on December 28. Previous anti-regime demonstrations commemorating killed protesters have historically generated higher attendance as well.[2] CTP previously reported that protesters have found secular martyrs around whom to rally and who sustain the momentum of the Mahsa Amini movement.[3] The regime may struggle to preempt further commemoration ceremonies and funerals for such secular martyrs in the coming weeks.

The Iranian regime has reportedly purchased Sukhoi Su-35 fighters from Russia. The *Times of Israel* reported that Russia is preparing to supply Iran with up to 24 Su-35 war planes in the near future, citing Western intelligence officials.[4] Asa'ib Ahl al Haq-affiliated *Sabreen News* additionally claimed that Iran will station a squadron of Russian Su-35 fighter jets at the 8th Shakari Base in Esfahan Province.[5] US intelligence officials had previously warned of strengthening Russo-Iranian ties on December 17.[6] Russian Su-35 fighters are fourth-generation aircraft without stealth characteristics and thus pose a limited threat to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other regional adversaries. Iran may employ them to support IRGC and Iranian proxy militia personnel in Iraq and Syria, however. The Iranians have long sought Russian combat aircraft, likely in part to reduce their reliance on the Russian Air Force to provide air support to the activities of Iran and its proxies in Iraq and Syria.

Key Takeaways

- **Funerals and commemoration ceremonies for killed protesters are continuing to sustain anti-regime activity throughout Iran as demonstrations enter their fifteenth consecutive week.**
- **The Iranian regime has reportedly purchased Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets from Russia.**
- **At least seven protests occurred in six cities across five provinces.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi appointed Mohammad Reza Farzin as the new Central Bank of Iran Chief.**
- **Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* circulated footage of Golestan Province Governor General Ali Mohammad Zanganeh requesting that local government officials refuse providing services to unveiled women.**
- **UK-based Amwaj Media reported that prominent Iranian hardliners are pursuing political reform in attempt to preempt further unrest, citing an inside source.**
- **A website purporting to represent the Iranian Sunni community reported that Iranian authorities arrested a Sunni scholar in Khorasan Razavi Province on December 27.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least seven protests occurred in six cities across five provinces on December 29. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Semiron, Esfahan Province[7]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Regime Repression: LEC forces seen driving to Semiron according to social media users
- Note: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Ali Abbasi

Marvdasht, Fars Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Note: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Arman Emadi

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[9]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Note: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Sadian Jo

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province[10]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Mourners
- Note: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Afteh Naami

Dehgolan, Kurdistan Province[11]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Note: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Mohsen Niazi

Tehran City, Tehran Province[12]

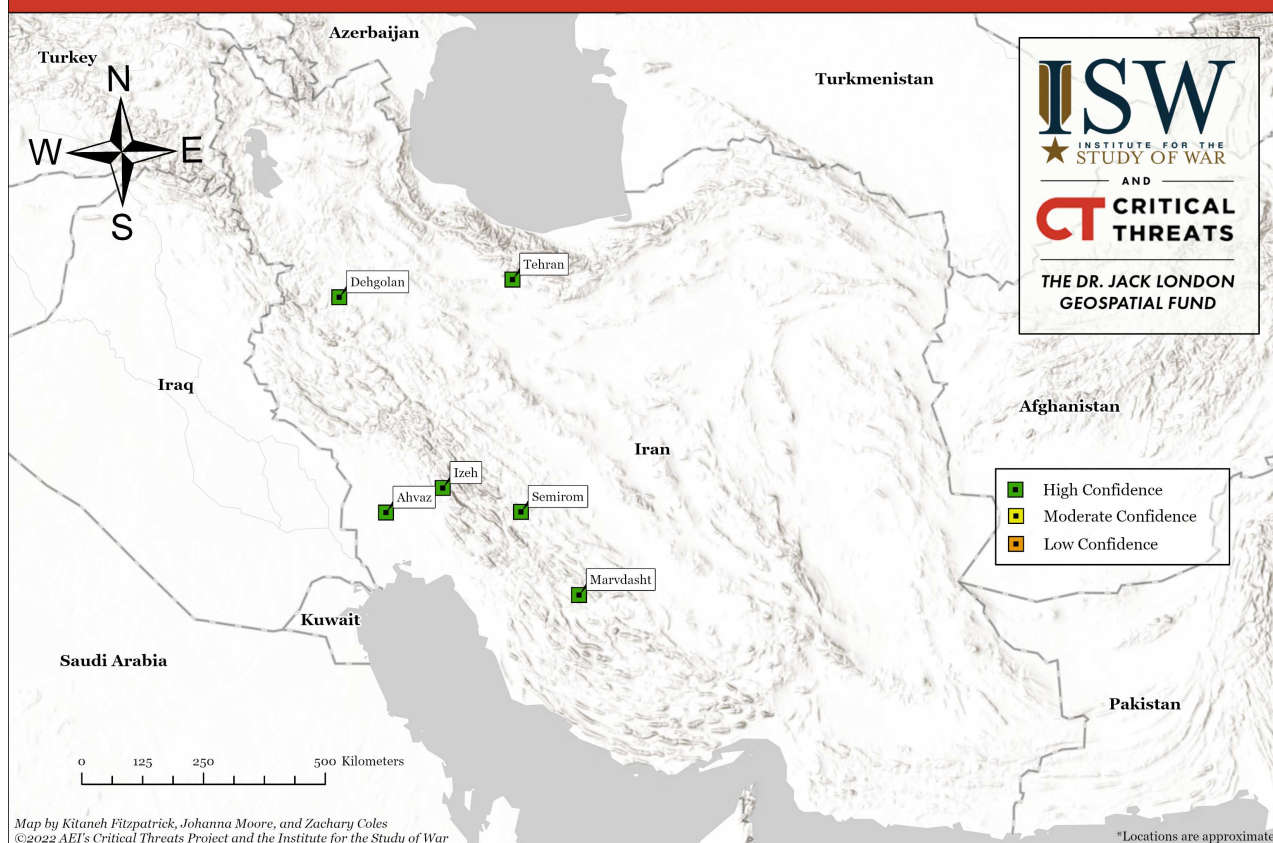
- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Regime Repression: Security personnel present at the protests, fired tear gas and beat protesters.
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in the street
- Note: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Hamidreza Rouhi

Tehran City, Tehran Province[13]

- Size: Undetermined
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protest Activity: Evening protest in front of Hamidreza Rouhi's house
- Note: Follows 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Hamidreza Rouhi

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 December 29, 5:00 PM ET



Protest coordinators circulated calls for anti-regime protests and strikes on the following dates:

January 6-8[14]

- Type: Protest and strike
- Location: Country-wide

President Ebrahim Raisi appointed Mohammad Reza Farzin as the Central Bank of Iran Chief on December 29. Farzin replaced Ali Salehabadi, whom Raisi appointed in September 2021. [15] Farzin previously served as the CEO of state-owned Bank-e Melli and was the Deputy Economy Minister under former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. [16] Raisi stressed the importance of managing exchange rates and reducing inflation in publicized comments on Farzin's appointment. [17] Farzin's appointment likely reflects the regime's growing concern with the Iranian rial's decline in recent months, although it is unclear how his appointment will rectify Iran's deteriorating economic conditions and endemic corruption.

UK-based *Amwaj Media* reported that prominent Iranian hardliners are pursuing political reform in hopes of preempting further unrest, citing an inside source. *Amwaj* reported that Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani, and Vice President for Economic Affairs Mohsen Rezaei are considering reforms with the support of Former Parliament Speaker and prominent reformist Ali Larijani and Expediency Council Member Mohammad Reza Bahonar. The source allegedly expressed doubt that hardliners would be able to persuade Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other conservative

figures within the regime to implement meaningful reforms.[18] CTP cannot corroborate the veracity of these claims. *Amwaj's* reporting aligns with prior statements that Ghalibaf has made endorsing limited sociopolitical reforms in recent months, however.[19] *The Wall Street Journal* additionally reported that Shamkhani discussed implementing unspecified "liberalizing measures" with reformist leaders in October 2022.[20]

Anti-regime outlet *Iran International* circulated footage of Golestan Province Governor General Ali Mohammad Zanganeh requesting that local government officials refuse providing services to unveiled women. Zanganeh stressed that officials should avoid normalizing the behavior of women who do not adhere to state-imposed veiling standards.[21] CTP previously assessed that the regime may be seeking alternative ways to enforce the mandatory hijab law, including employing an Orwellian surveillance-punishment model relying on collective punishment through shutting down non-compliant entities.[22]

A website purporting to represent the Iranian Sunni community reported that Iranian authorities arrested a Sunni scholar in Khorasan Razavi Province on December 27. The website claimed that the Special Clerical Court in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province summoned Malouvi Abdul Nasser Ghadri after Ghadri read a statement from local Sunni leaders expressing support for ongoing, anti-regime protests and prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid. [23] Abdol Hamid has become an increasingly vocal critic of the regime and has incited regular protest activity in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in recent months.[24]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

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

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

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

[4] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-russia-to-supply-with-iran-with-doz...>

[5] <https://t.me/maymun5/19877>

[6] <https://www.timesofisrael.com/cia-head-russia-looking-to-support-iran-po...>

[7] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608473465429843970?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>

<https://twitter.com/pouriazeraati/status/1608482159810977793?s=20&t=Omc-...>

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1608455991963652096?s=20&t=Omc-KXNNN...

<https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1608428793370140674?s=20&t=Omc-KXNNN...>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608412547119517698?s=20&t=Omc-KX...>

- [8] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608465150725558279?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>
<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608462693198925825?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>
- [9] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608487381329448967?s=20&t=Omc-KX...; <https://twitter.com/amirbakhtiar/status/1608447374648610818?s=20&t=Omc-K...>; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1608579822040616961?s=20&t=VFx5wQ-...>
- [10] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608482905998888961?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1608501000263946244?s=20&t=97COPEk...>
- [11] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608469675712876546?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1608472794253123586?s=20&t=Omc-K...>; <https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1608534851119972355?s=20&t=97COPEk...>
- [12] <https://twitter.com/Vahid/status/1608455303384956928?s=20&t=Omc-KXNNNkC1...>; <https://twitter.com/Shahinlooo/status/1608455524626104322?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/Shahinlooo/status/1608456305454243840?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608422775080763394?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608438961747251203?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608482396198023171?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608454872692854785?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608455345051140098?s=20&t=Omc-KXN...>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608461351604699136?s=20&t=Omc-KX...>
- [13] https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608554055017668609?s=20&t=VbbeXo...; <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1608535874337402880?s=20&t=BBDRGWb...>
- [14] https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1608163435551903744 ; https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1608146303971909632?s=20&t=P_g6slJ... ; https://twitter.com/javanane_hmd/status/1608177583384035328?s=20&t=P_g6s... ;
- [15] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/84983569>
- [16] <https://www dot irna dot ir/news/84983569>
- [17] <https://president dot ir/fa/141661>
- [18] <https://amwaj.media/article/inside-story-amid-protests-talk-of-reform-cr...>
- [19] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-10;>
- [20] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-22>
- [21] <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1608406220322258945?s=20&t=GX3udGZnv...>
- [22] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-23>
- [23] <http://sunnionline.us/farsi/2022/12/26053>
- [24] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-1> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-13>

Iran Crisis Update, December 30

Iran Crisis Update, December 30

Nicholas Carl, Johanna Moore, Zachary Coles, and Frederick W. Kagan

December 30, 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](#).

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid is likely trying to balance his political positions to maximize his domestic support and achieve meaningful reform. The rhetoric that he used in his weekly Friday sermon in Zahedan on December 30 reflected his efforts to appeal to multiple different constituencies.[1] Abdol Hamid regularly criticizes the regime's mistreatment of the Baloch minority but emphasized opposition to Baloch separatism in his sermon. He instead lauded unity among Iranians likely to assuage supporters' potential concerns that he is stoking societal divisions. Abdol Hamid reiterated his support for women's rights during his sermon but added that he believes that most Iranian women support wearing the hijab, possibly to appeal to more conservative supporters. He finally rejected the notion that he is using his platform for "fame" or "power" but framed himself positively as a political leader. He discussed briefly that he would not imprison political protesters or women protesting the hijab if he had such authority. It is unclear whether Abdol Hamid was referring to a particular accusation that he has a personal agenda. His remarks highlight his efforts to appeal to a broad base of Iranians without unnecessarily alienating a specific constituency.

Abdol Hamid's downplaying of Baloch separatism may be in response to limited separatist voices in the protest movement. The Zahedan Neighborhood Youth referred to the city by its old name—Dozap—in a tweet on December 30.[2] Local Baloch tribes used the name Dozop until shortly after the Pahlavi dynasty came to power. The Zahedan group may have used the name Dozop to evoke Baloch nationalism, suggesting that some limited separatist trends may exist in the protest movement.

The ongoing protests have likely altered the trajectory of Iran's political and internal security environment permanently. 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. CTP is not prepared yet to forecast exactly how this protest movement will evolve and shape the future of Iran. Some Western reports have suggested that the most likely scenario is that the regime succeeds in using suppression to end the protests.[3] But this movement has generated a long-lasting impact that makes returning to the situation of pre-September 2022 Iran extraordinarily unlikely. The regime could eventually quell the unrest (although it has thus far failed to do so), but this movement has already begun to cohere into a more enduring opposition that will likely outlive this specific protest wave. Some components of this movement may already meet the US military definition of an early-stage insurgency, as CTP previously argued. [4] Protesters are developing the networks and infrastructure necessary to stage a protracted struggle against the regime. Western analysts and observers should account for these trends when forecasting the trajectory of the protest movement rather than forecasting a return to the pre-September 2022 status quo.

Protest coordinators and organizations called for demonstrations and strikes in Tehran, especially around bazaars, on December 31.[5]

Key Takeaways

- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid is likely trying to balance his political positions to maximize his domestic support and achieve meaningful reform.**
- **The ongoing protests have likely altered the trajectory of Iran's political and internal security environment permanently.**
- **At least eight protests occurred in eight cities across six provinces.**
- **Unidentified militants shot at an LEC patrol in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, injuring one police officer.**
- **Unidentified gunmen shot and injured a seminary student in Qom on December 20 and a second seminary student.**
- **Senior military officers threatened to escalate regionally against Israel.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least eight protests occurred in eight cities across six provinces on December 30. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Galikash, Golestan Province[6]

- Size: Medium
- Note: Protesters demonstrated against the ban on Moulana Mohammad Hossein Gargij from giving Friday sermons after publicly denouncing capital punishment

Izeh, Khuzestan Province[7]

- Size: Medium

Khorramabad, Lorestan Province[8]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: Danced and celebrated in the street
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Hossein Zarinjoei

Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[9]

- Size: Small

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[10]

- Size: Large
- Protester Activity: Marched in streets

Piranshahr, West Azerbaijan Province[11]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Mourners
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for protest martyr Karavan Ghader Shokrii

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

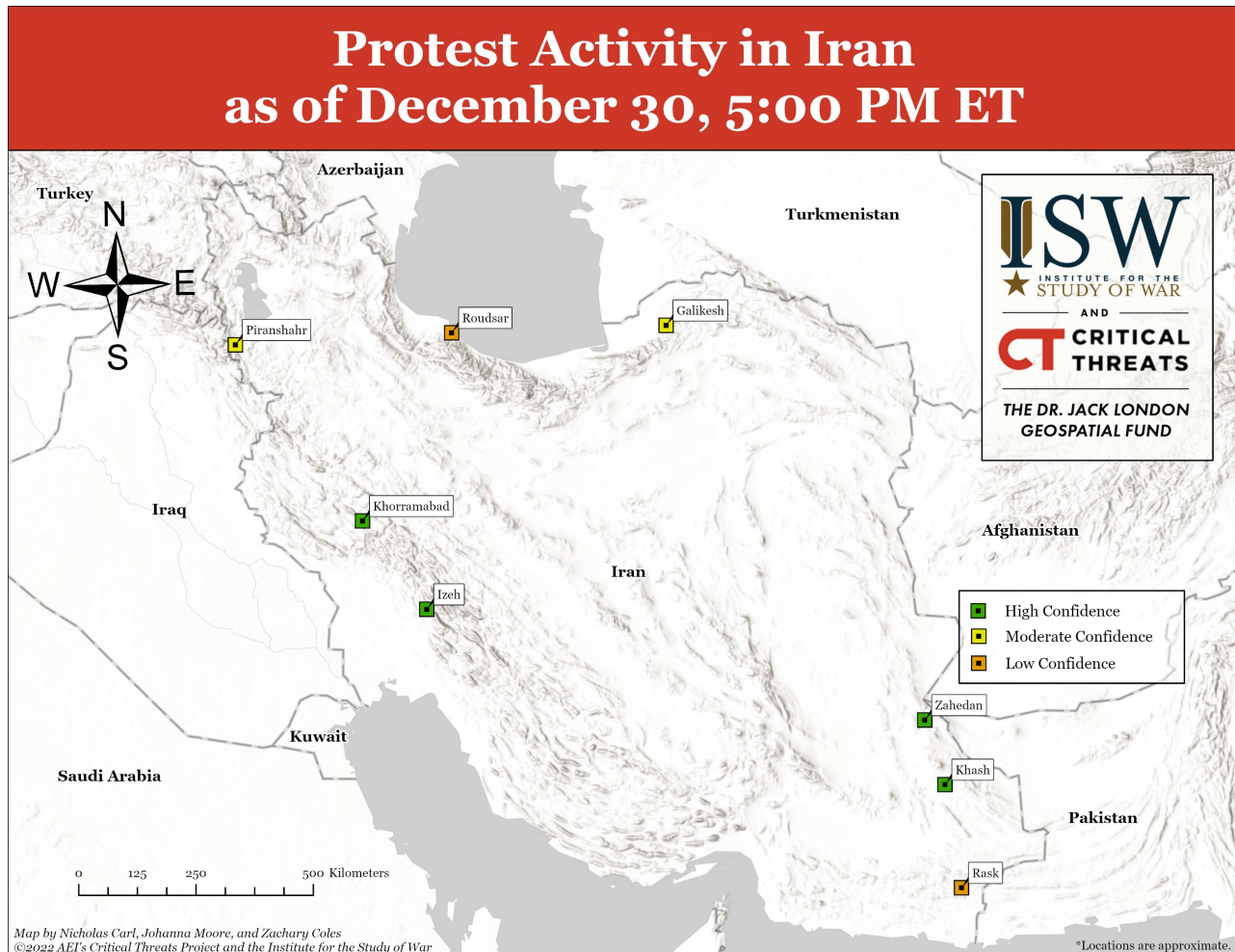
Roudsar, Gilan Province[12]

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

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province[13]

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Marched in streets
- Notes: Security forces deployed along the streets

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:

December 31

- Type: Demonstrations and strikes
- Location: Tehran, especially the bazaars

January 6-8

- Type: Demonstrations and strikes
- Location: Countrywide

Unidentified militants shot at an LEC patrol in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, injuring one police officer, on December 29.[14] The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth described the militants as “Baloch partisans.”[15] The Mashhad group did not likely have any connection to the attack, however.

Unidentified gunmen shot and injured a seminary student in Qom on December 20 and a second seminary student on December 30.[16]

Senior military officers threatened to escalate regionally against Israel on December

30. Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters Commander Major General Gholam Ali Rashid vowed to attack any Israeli bases that regional countries host.[17] Rashid was likely referring to the growing ties between Azerbaijan and Israel. Azerbaijan appointed its first ambassador to Israel on December 29. The Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters, which Rashid oversees, is the senior-most Iranian military institution responsible for joint and wartime operations. IRGC Spokesperson Brigadier General Ramazan Sharif similarly threatened Israel on December 30 “if it makes a mistake.”[18] Rashid and Sharif were also likely responding to the Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz suggesting that Israel may attack Iranian nuclear facilities in “two or three years.”[19]

The Artesh began conducting an annual, multiday military exercise along the southeastern Iranian coast near the Gulf of Oman on December 30.[20] The exercise included ground and naval elements. The Artesh used Ababil-3N, Arash, and Mohajer-6 drones in the exercise.[21]

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iranian proxies may attack US positions in Iraq in the coming days in response to the three-year anniversary since the US killed Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al Muhandis in January 2023. Iranian proxy media channels posted on December 30 an image depicting a crowd storming the US embassy in Baghdad with the caption “Merry Christmas.”[22] Iranian proxies conducted multiple drone and rocket attacks on US targets surrounding this anniversary in January 2021.[23]

[1] <http://www.abdolhamid dot net/persian/2022/12/30/13187>

[2] https://twitter.com/javanane_zhdn/status/1608822356197376002

[3] <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/12/30/iran-in-2023-protests-weapons-for-russia...>

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

[5] https://t.me/teh_javanan/86; https://twitter.com/iran_javanan/status/1608818704946728961

[6] https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1608883651575422977?s=20&t=_dVlhwxFQ0go...;
https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1606257011133480960

[7] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608825794578776064>

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https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1608853434756734977?s=20&t=_dVlhwx...

[8] https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1608917645419597824?s=20&t=_dVlhwx...

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608844904905465856?s=20&t=_dVlhwx...

[9] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608816749906112513>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608808059073363968>; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608788306157871104?s=20&t=_dVlhwx...

[10] <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1608765561030447106>; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1608844468018638849>; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608811853051998208>; <https://twitter.com/farzinkadkhodae/status/1608772230326161410>

[11] https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1608922652118319104?s=20&t=_dVlhwxFQ0go...

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608814474919804928>

[12] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608920385269174272>

[13] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608773221716987908>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608774147932585984>

[14] <https://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/08/2828668>

[15] https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2782

[16] <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401100904854/>

[17] <https://irna dot ir/xjLncj>

[18] <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/10/09/2828824>

[19] <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-minister-sees-possible...>

[20] <https://www.mehrnews dot com/news/5668371>

[21] www.defapress dot ir/fa/news/564437

[22] <https://t.me/sabreenS1/66912>

[23] <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/drone-attack-us-base-foiled-iraqi-secur...>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/five-rockets-land-near-iraqs-a...>; <https://twitter.com/nafeisehkBBC/status/1478250046684553219?s=20&t=us1h5L...>

Iran Crisis Update, December 31

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

December 31, 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](#).

Note: CTP will not publish a daily Iran Crisis Update on January 1, 2023, for the New Year's holiday. CTP will resume daily publishing on January 2.

Recent comments from Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) leaders reflect the ongoing divisions within the regime, and especially the IRGC, over the protests. Brigadier General Hamid Abazari stated on December 30 that some military commanders have “stood against values, the supreme leader, and the regime,” suggesting infighting over how to manage the ongoing unrest.[1] Abazari also criticized officials who have not publicly condemned the protests. Former Basij Organization Chief Brigadier General Gholam Hossein Gheyb Parvar, who is now responsible for organizing and training elite Basij units specialized in protest suppression, echoed Abazari's criticism on December 31.[2] Iranian media identified Abazari as an adviser to IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami. The IRGC's public relations wing released a statement on December 31 rejecting Abazari's remarks and denying that he is an adviser to Salami.[3] The statement said that Abazari was expressing his personal opinion but not using accurate information.

Abazari's remarks indicate that the divisions in the IRGC are between high-ranking officers. Abazari stated that the commanders to whom he referred had served in the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and are now generals. The commanders from this generation are currently in their 50s and 60s and generally serving in the highest echelons of the armed forces.

CTP has repeatedly argued that the protests and regime crackdown have fractured the Iranian political and security establishments.[4] The ineffectiveness and brutality of the crackdown have likely stoked these tensions.

Protests have been occurring at a lower tempo since late November, which may be partly driving the debate among regime officials.[5] The reduced protest activity has likely prompted intra-regime discussions about whether to continue the intense crackdown or begin relaxing the suppression. Iranian authorities have likely eased the suppression in at least some locations, possibly due to their eagerness to return to the pre-September 2022 status quo.[6] The regime does not seem to have sustained its IRGC Ground Forces combat deployments throughout Kurdistan Province, for instance.[7] Iranian leaders face a dilemma, however, given that the reduced suppression appears to be creating space for more protests that could in turn cause further fracturing within the regime.

The Iranian Supreme Court accepted the appeal of 26-year-old protester Sahand Nour Mohammad Zadeh on December 31, whom the Judiciary had previously sentenced to death. [8] A court in Alborz Province had convicted Mohammad Zadeh of “waging war against God.”[9] The IRGC Intelligence Organization arrested Mohammad Zadeh at his home on October 4 after identifying him barricading a street in CCTV footage.[10]

Key Takeaways

- **Recent comments from Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps leaders reflect the ongoing divisions within the regime, and especially the IRGC, over the protests. Protests have been occurring at a lower tempo late November, which may be partly driving the debate among regime officials.**
- **The Iranian Supreme Court accepted the appeal of 26-year-old protester Sahand Nour Mohammad Zadeh, who the Judiciary previously sentenced to death.**
- **At least seven protests occurred in seven cities across six provinces.**
- **Education official Hamid Nikzad stated that the Education ministry would require new teachers to attend seminary training.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least seven protests occurred in seven cities across six provinces on December 31. Social media users documented significant protest activity and regime repression in Javanroud, Kermanshah Province. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Javanroud, Kermanshah Province[11]

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Regime Repression: Security forces—reportedly LEC special unit officers and Basij members—allegedly shot live ammunition at protesters, killing one protester and injuring over 10 others. Social media users documented security personnel firing tear gas at crowds and into civilian cars and homes.
- Protester Activity: Protesters erected walls made of cinder blocks and created other road blockades throughout the city. Protesters also lit fires on Javanroud city streets. Social media users documented protesters looting an IRGC-affiliated bank and an agricultural bank. Protesters reportedly overturned a kiosk belonging to regime-affiliated actors near the cemetery.
- Noteworthy chants: “Kurds and Balochs are brothers, angry for the blood of our leaders,” “Mother don't cry for your child, we will take revenge.”
- Notes: 40-day commemoration ceremony for several killed protesters. Protest started at local cemetery and expanded into several areas in Javanroud. Protesters gathered in front of the home of a protester whom security personnel shot and killed at the commemoration ceremony on December 31. Reports of internet outages throughout the city.

Abadan, Khuzestan Province[12]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Oil workers
- Notes: Strike and protest

Najafabad, Esfahan Province[13]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: High school or university girls
- Noteworthy chants: “Our money is in Lebanon, our youth in prison”

Semirom, Esfahan Province[14]

- Small to medium
- Regime Repression: Security personnel shot at protesters
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: Protesters reportedly gathered in front of the Semirom Governorship building to demonstrate against the regime destroying banners commemorating killed protesters

throughout the city. Footage shows clashes and audible gunfire continue into the evening.

Tehran City, Tehran Province[15]

- Size: Medium
- Regime Repression: Security personnel attacked protesters
- Notes: Merchant strikes and protests and the Tehran Bazaar. Social media users reported internet disruptions throughout the city, particularly in the bazaar.

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

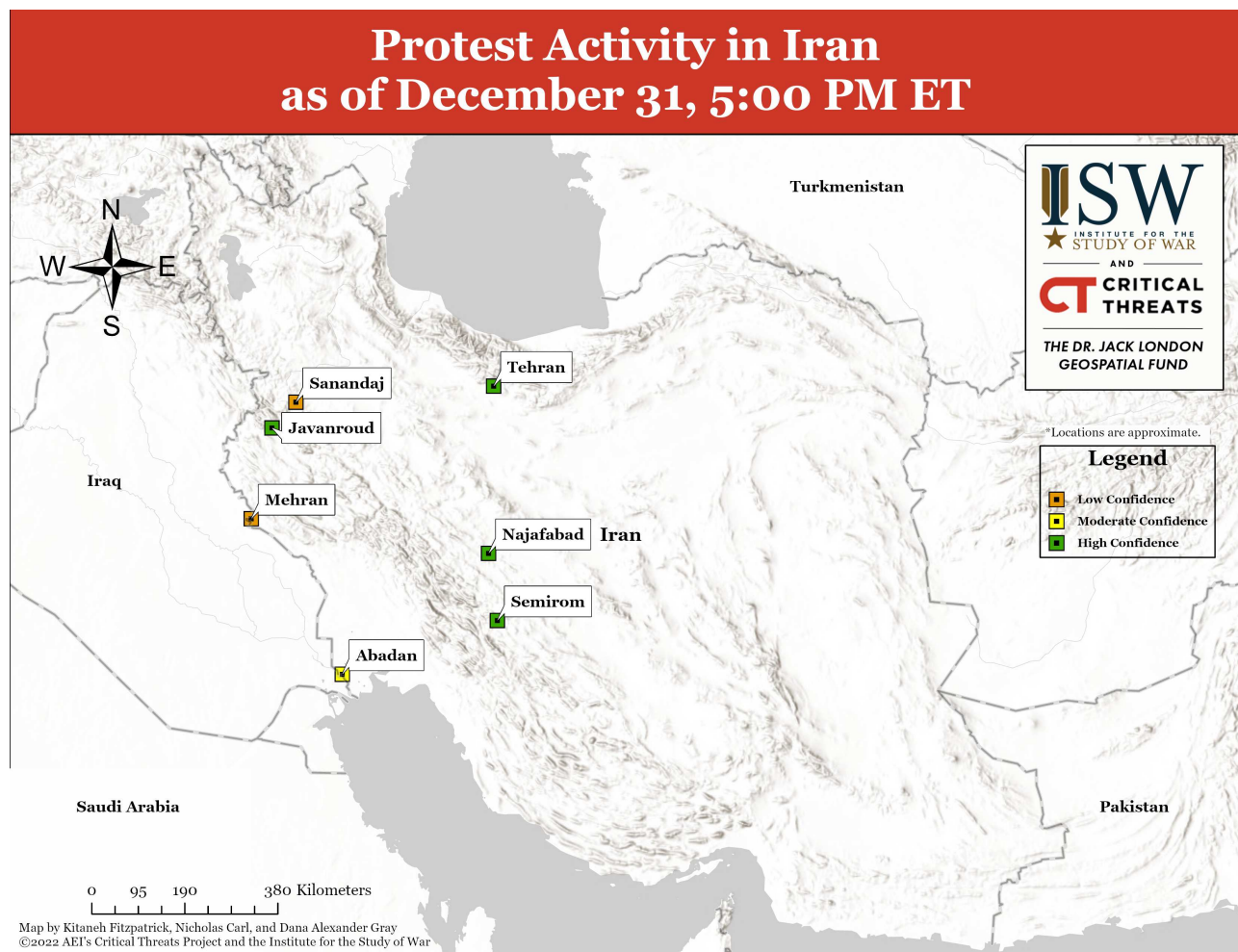
Mehran, Ilam Province[16]

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Oil workers
- Notes: Strike and protest

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province[17]

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit on 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 coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and strikes on the following dates:

January 6-8[18]

- Type: Demonstrations and strikes
- Location: Countrywide

Iranian journalist Saeed Aganji reported on dynamics within the office of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on December 30.[19] Aganji tweeted claiming that Asghar Mir Hejazi—a senior political and security adviser to Khamenei—blocked former IRGC Intelligence Organization Chief Hossein Taeb from replacing Ali Shamkhani as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary. Aganji also alleged that security forces have arrested individuals close to Taeb in recent days, and that the declining influence of Taeb has empowered other individuals in the office of the supreme leader, such as Khamenei’s executive deputy, Vahid Haghani. CTP cannot verify these rumors. They are consistent, however, with our previous observation that Taeb has become an increasingly public-facing figure in recent months, possibly to bolster his efforts to secure a new senior position within the Iranian security establishment, such as SNSC secretary.[20] Taeb is reportedly close to Khamenei’s son, Mojtaba.

Social media users documented industrial worker and merchant strikes across three provinces on December 31. Oil workers protested and went on strikes in Ilam and Khuzestan provinces, and social media accounts circulated footage of widespread store closures in Rasht, Gilan Province.[21]

The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth seemingly failed to generate snap protests on December 31. The Mashhad group called for snap protests in solidarity with other protesters throughout Iran. [22] CTP did not record any protest activity in Mashhad on December 31, however.

The Hamedan Neighborhood Youth claimed on December 31 that local banks were facing a liquidity crisis. The Hamedan group reported that financial institutions had imposed withdrawal limits of 2 million Iranian rials (approximately \$48) and claimed that currency exchange offices were issuing 15-day waiting times. CTP cannot corroborate these claims, and such anecdotes should be treated with care. These rumors are plausible, however, given that the regime has faced a mounting fiscal crisis in recent weeks, and protest coordinators and organizations have encouraged a run on the banks.[23]

Education official Hamid Nikzad stated on December 31 that the Education Ministry would require new teachers to attend seminary training.[24] Nikzad described plans requiring teachers to familiarize themselves with teaching methods from theological institutions. Nikzad presented the plan as part of the regime’s “explanatory Jihad” to increase regime popularity and support among Iranian youth. Nikzad added that the plans would encourage Iranian youth to embrace the mandatory veiling law. Nikzad is an adviser to Education Minister Yousef Nouri.

Former First Vice President Eshagh Jahangiri strongly endorsed reforms on December 1 to address the protests. Jahangiri described the protests as a “serious, real, and unprecedented challenge” and criticized the regime’s response to the unrest. He stated that the regime needs to fundamentally change its attitude, management and structure to ensure its survival. Jahangiri claimed that former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani privately expressed concern about the Islamic Republic’s treatment of women and reportedly stated: “I am worried about the day when the women of this country will take drastic action against us.”[25] Jahangiri is a reformist politician and served under former President Hassan Rouhani from 2013 to 2021.

The Artesh continued its annual military exercise along the southeastern Iranian coast near the Gulf of Oman on December 31. Iranian media celebrated the Artesh Navy’s use of the Ababil-5 multirole drone for the first time in the annual exercise to attack naval targets.[26] The regime previously unveiled the Ababil-5 in April 2022.[27] It has a reported range of over 480 kilometers and can use Almas guided anti-tank missiles and guided glide bombs.

A Mazandaran provincial official announced that local intelligence services were prioritizing cracking down on pet dog ownership on December 31.[28] Mazandaran Provincial Governor Mahmoud Hosseini Pour separately warned against normalizing the behavior of unveiled women and claimed that lenient veiling practices would result in “nudity” in the near future. Hosseini Pour is not a senior decisionmaker within the regime, but his comments likely reflect the extent to which some regime officials are removed from the demands of their constituents. This messaging is particularly tone-deaf amid the ongoing protests.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian expressed opposition to hostile foreign powers operating in neighboring countries during a phone call with Azerbaijani Foreign Affairs Minister Jeyhun Bayramov on December 31.[29] Abdollahian was likely referring to the alleged presence of Israeli intelligence in Azerbaijan. Iranian officials frequently accuse Azerbaijan of hosting Israeli agents.[30]

[1] <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-9/589329-%D8%AD%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8>

[2] <https://www.irna.ir/news/84984912/>

[3] <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/10/2829552>

[4] <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-10;>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-18;>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-28;>
<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-11>

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

[8] <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1314291>

[9] <https://www.ilna.ir/fa/tiny/news-1311733>

[10] <https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B0%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8>

[11] [https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1609158444208226306?](https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1609158444208226306?s=20&t=ubx2Ggj...)
[https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1609137802863841280?](https://twitter.com/KurdistanHRN/status/1609137802863841280?s=20&t=4P1-o...)
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[14] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609211083063005184?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609198986300112901?s=20&t=m6U_wV... ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609197100851466240?s=20&t=NtPkLM...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609197100851466240?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609194858337509376?s=20&t=NBTY01...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609172752828694528?s=20&t=yyIsQc...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609153761099882496?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609152587403517952?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609263253904834560?s=20&t=4P1-oL...>

[15] <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1609162245996511233?s=20&t=4P1-oLF...> ; <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1609135061525200896?s=20&t=4P1-oLF...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609198304415318016?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609192909898907654?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609192709105020929?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609167142125178881?s=20&t=-0Ra_F... ; https://t.me/javanane_ka/458

[16] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609154720970555394?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1609224835531431936

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

[21] <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1609170229107789828?s=20&t=4P1-oL...> ; <https://twitter.com/SedayeShahrivar/status/1609144387744968704> ; https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1609133344167444480

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[26] www.sahebkhavar dot ir/news/57946220

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