



Iran Crisis Update, December 30

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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 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 Province⁶

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

Izeh, Khuzestan Province⁷

- Size: Medium

Khorramabad, Lorestan Province⁸

- 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 Province⁹

- Size: Small

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province¹⁰

- Size: Large
- Protester Activity: Marched in streets

Piranshahr, West Azerbaijan Province¹¹

- 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 Province¹²

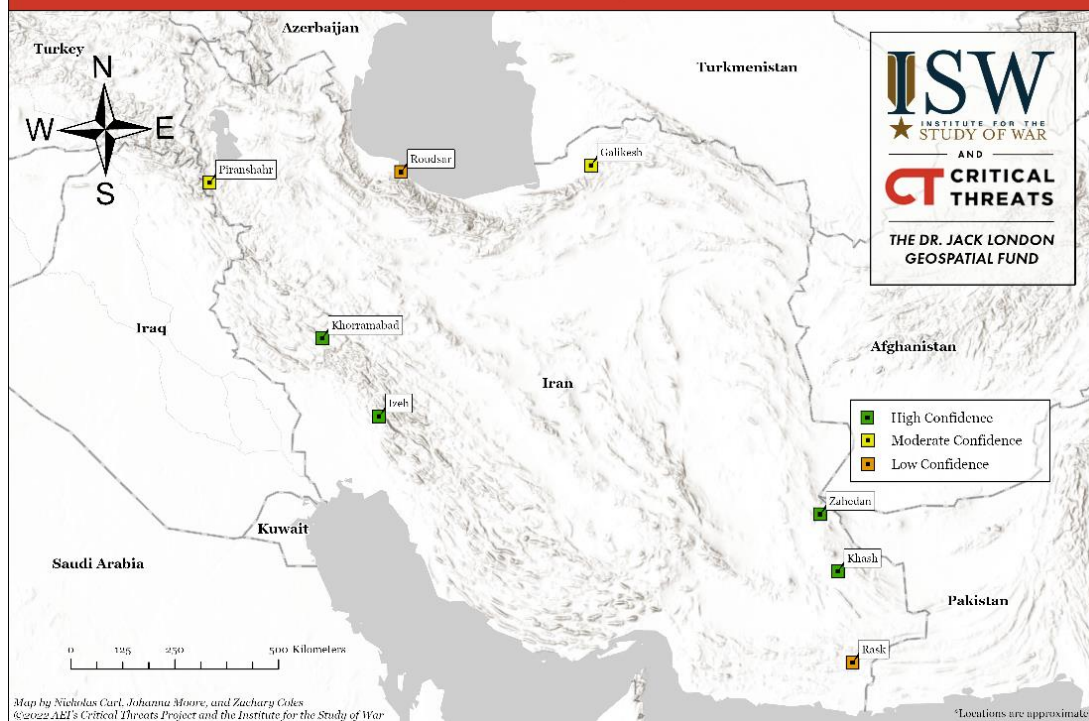
- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Set fires in the street and blocked traffic

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province¹³

- 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 Activity in Iran as of December 30, 5:00 PM ET



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.cnn.com/2022/12/30/iran-in-2023-protests-weapons-for-russia-and-the-nuclear-deal.html>

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=_dVlhwxFQogoHvosdJ_rJA;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/160625701133480960

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

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608837663792025600?s=20&t=_dVlhwxFQogoHvosdJ_rJA

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608840663834976256?s=20&t=_dVlhwxFQogoHvosdJ_rJA

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

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

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

⁹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608816749906112513>;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1608808059073363968>;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1608788306157871104?s=20&t=_dVlhwxFQogoHvosdJ_rJA

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=_dVlhwxFQogoHvosdJ_rJA

<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-attack-iran-two-or-three-years-2022-12-28/>

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-security-sources-say-2022-01-03/>;

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/five-rockets-land-near-iraqs-ain-al-asad-air-base-coalition-official-2022-01-05/>;

<https://twitter.com/nafisehBBC/status/1478250046684553210?s=20&t=usih5LiOIyGpTKouOo5PSg>