



Iran Crisis Update, January 17, 2023
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Protest activity among petrochemical workers increased significantly on January 17, suggesting protest coordination among some labor groups. Workers protested and went on strike in at least six different locations in five provinces in response to labor-related grievances. CTP has not observed calls for such actions in recent days, suggesting that workers used their own local networks to coordinate this activity. If workers did, indeed, rely on separate labor networks to organize these protests, that could indicate that Tehran confronts yet another source of organization and energy for anti-regime activities.

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

Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib defended Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani from unspecified political attacks on January 17.³ Khatib stated that “recent attacks” on Shamkhani were “unfair.” Khatib also praised the contributions that Shamkhani had made in the national security field. These statements support CTP’s assessment that some hardline elements in the Iranian security apparatus are trying to use the recent execution of British-Iranian dual national Alireza Akbari to remove Shamkhani as SNSC secretary, possibly as a continuation of a long-running campaign to do so.⁴ Akbari was a deputy to Shamkhani when the latter was defense minister from 1997 to 2005, although the Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry has tried to deny this fact.⁵

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

Key Takeaways

- **Protest activity among petrochemical workers increased significantly, suggesting protest coordination among some labor groups.**
- **Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib defended Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani from unspecified political attacks.**
- **Russian Presidential Aide Igor Levitin met with several senior Iranian officials in Tehran.**
- **At least seven protests occurred in seven cities across six provinces including the petrochemical workers' activities.**
- **The Iranian Neighborhood United Front (INUF) tweeted declaring its support for Reza Pahlavi.**
- **A Tehran Provincial prosecutor announced that the LEC identified and arrested an alleged protest leader tied to a neighborhood youth protest group.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi discussed efforts toward achieving “cultural transformation” in a Supreme Cultural Revolution Council meeting.**

Anti-Regime Protests

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

Asalouyeh, Bushehr Province⁸

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

Ilam City, Ilam Province⁹

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

Abadan, Khuzestan Province¹⁰

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province¹¹

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

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

Shiraz, Fars Province¹²

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

Bandar-e Lengeh, Hormozgan Province¹³

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

Dehloran, Ilam Province¹⁴

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



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

January 19-20¹⁵

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The Iranian Neighborhood United Front (INUF) tweeted declaring its support for Reza Pahlavi on January 17.¹⁶ The INUF described Pahlavi as the best individual to defend the rights of the Iranian people in the international community and form a coalition of political parties to replace the Islamic Republic.

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

Commented [NC1]: Corrected map and shapefiles here:

Map: <https://criticalthreats.imeetcentral.com/ctp-iswresearch/folder/WzlwLDE1NzEwODU5XQ/WzIsODQwNjIxNzNd/>

Shapefile: <https://criticalthreats.imeetcentral.com/ctp-iswresearch/folder/WzlwLDE1NzcxNDQxXQ/WzIsODQwNjIxODdd/>

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

President Ebrahim Raisi discussed efforts toward achieving “cultural transformation” in a Supreme Cultural Revolution Council meeting on January 17.²⁰ This council is a regime policy body responsible for drafting resolutions on cultural, religious, and social affairs for Parliament to consider. Raisi stated in the meeting that the council should act as a “cultural headquarters”—implying some kind of operational function—rather than solely making and monitoring the implementation of relevant policies. The council approved the appointment of Abdol Hossein Khosrou Panah to a four-year term as its secretary as well. Khosrou Panah is a philosophy and religion academic who has held various leadership positions in the Qom seminary, Islamic Azad University, and the IRGC Baghiyatollah Socio-Cultural Headquarters.²¹ Former IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari has overseen this headquarters since 2019 and manages various indoctrination and propaganda efforts there.

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

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments
There was nothing significant to report today.

¹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
² <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
³ <http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/10/27/2838433>
⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>
⁵ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
⁶ <http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/125432>; [https://www.irna dot ir/news/85001536/%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A2%D9%87%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%AA-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AF](https://www.isna.ir/news/1401102718478/%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%DB%8C;)
⁷ <http://www.nournews.ir/fa/news/126458>; <https://www.mizannews.com/4598602/%d9%be%db%8c%da%af%db%8c%d8%b1%db%8c-%d8%a7%d8%ac%d8%b1%d8%a7%db%8c-%d9%85%d9%88%d8%b6%d9%88%d8%b9%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%b3%d9%86%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%82%d8%af%d8%a7%d9%85-%d9%85%d8%b4%d8%aa%d8%b1%da%a9-%d8%a8/>
⁸ https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1615337068024020993?s=20&t=V7pqOysIL1UGJP4wqyxgWA

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- ⁹ https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615343777698426882?s=20&t=ca9eBxSA3_CWPJ-lbkLUA
- ¹⁰ https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1615414266391105543?s=20&t=PZ_DiuD2ox_JxUXoHATaZw
- ¹¹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615411386674208775?s=20&t=wJtsx3IIDGZTwkFyKc1PGw;>
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1615435232965951491?s=20&t=EsYQsizQUBCZHlckDj_Mww;
https://twitter.com/bbcpersian/status/1615429039388327936?s=20&t=ZMXK91RYq_RswH7VL2CWhA
- ¹² https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615263435981479937?s=20&t=ca9eBxSA3_CWPJ-lbkLUA
- ¹³ https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615270060041572354?s=20&t=ca9eBxSA3_CWPJ-lbkLUA
- ¹⁴ https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615251054895026177?s=20&t=ca9eBxSA3_CWPJ-lbkLUA
- ¹⁵ https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy55H_foM3VXhy__9xNA
- ¹⁶ https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1615319475863097344
- ¹⁷ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.farsnews dot ir/tehran/news/14011027000521>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-9>
- ²⁰ <http://www.president dot ir/fa/141990>
- ²¹ www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011021001106
- ²² <https://twitter.com/AbdolhamidNet/status/1615261112932392961>
- ²³ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>