



Iran Crisis Update, January 19, 2023

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The Iranian regime is likely escalating against prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid. Social media users continued to document a heightened security presence in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province ahead of Abdol Hamid's weekly Friday prayer sermon and protests throughout the city. Security personnel within the past several days have reportedly blocked all roads leading to Zahedan, established new checkpoints restricting movement into the city, and detained custodians of the mosque where Abdol Hamid delivers his sermons.¹ Social media users have additionally reported mass arrests and internet restrictions.² Uncorroborated reports claim that the regime also deployed to the Zahedan airport security forces not normally assigned to the airport, alleging that Iranian officials had lost confidence in the local Basij members formerly entrusted with securing the airport.³ CTP cannot verify this report. An advisor to Abdol Hamid attributed the intensified security environment in Zahedan to LEC Commander Ali Reza Radan, whom Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed on January 7.⁴ CTP previously assessed that Khamenei likely appointed Radan, a hardline member of the IRGC with extensive experience in crushing political dissent, as law enforcement commander partly due to dissatisfaction with the LEC's response to the Mahsa Amini protest movement.⁵

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

Protest organizations and coordinators seemingly failed to increase protest activity on January 19.

Protest groups had widely issued calls for nation-wide demonstrations on January 19 and 20, as CTP previously reported.⁷ CTP recorded no significant upticks in anti-regime protests on January 19, however. Protest activity may still surge on January 20 in a pattern similar to January 8, wherein anti-regime demonstrations notably increased in scale and size on the final day of a three-day call to protest.⁸ This pattern may suggest that protest organizations intentionally failed to generate turnout on January 19 in

attempt to obfuscate their organizational efforts and confuse security personnel. Calls for protests are also likely straining the bandwidth of security forces regardless of protest turnout. The regime reportedly deployed the Law Enforcement Command (LEC)'s Special Forces Unit—which is chiefly tasked with suppressing unrest—in Tehran in attempt to discourage protests on January 19, and security personnel have heavily securitized Zahedan in anticipation of unrest on January 20, as discussed in the preceding paragraph.⁹

Key Takeaways

- **The Iranian regime is likely escalating against prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid.**
- **Protest organizations and coordinators seemingly failed to increase protest activity on January 19.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **The European Parliament adopted a resolution urging the European Union (EU) and EU member states to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization on January 19.**
- **Netblocks and social media users reported mobile internet disruptions in a manner consistent with announced preventative measures aimed at preventing cheating on the Iranian university entrance exam.**
- **Tehran universities threatened and took disciplinary action against unveiled students.**
- **President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.**
- **A Katai'b Hezbollah-affiliated group claimed that it targeted a US logistics convoy using improvised explosive devices.**

Anti-Regime Protests

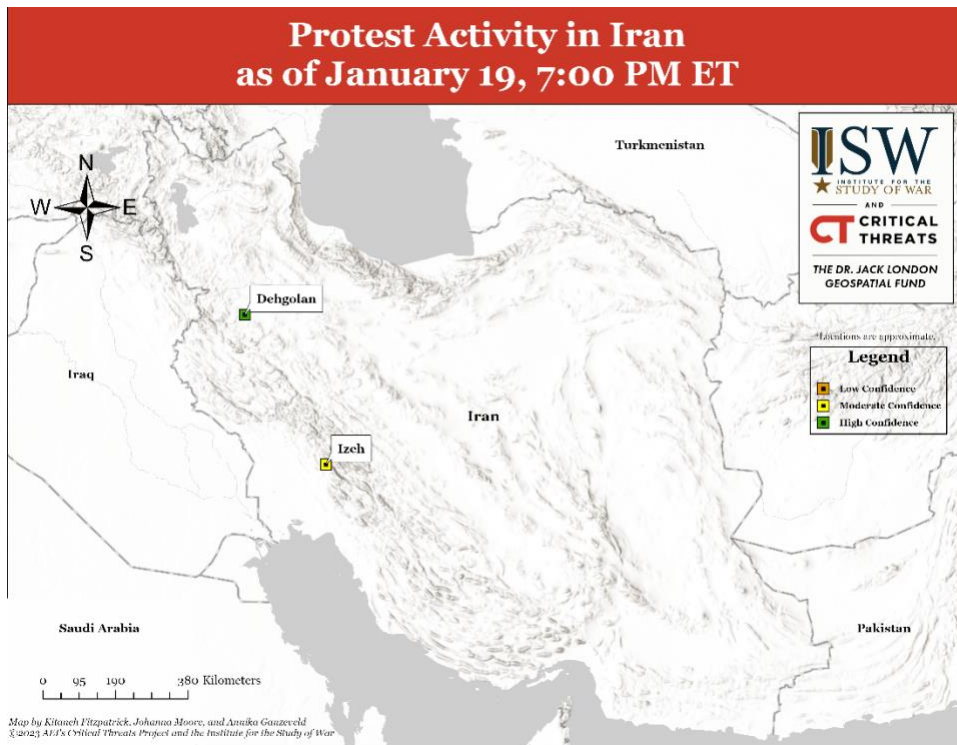
At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 19. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Izeh, Khuzestan Province¹⁰

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

Dehghan, Kurdistan Province¹¹

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



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

January 20¹²

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The European Parliament adopted a resolution urging the European Union (EU) and EU member states to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization on January 19. The resolution additionally condemned the regime’s violent suppression of ongoing, anti-retime protests and advocated for expanded sanctions on Iranian officials and entities responsible for human rights violations, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi, and Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri. European parliamentarians also endorsed further “restrictive measures” against the regime to hinder Iran’s efforts to provide unmanned aerial vehicles and surface-to-surface missiles to Russia.¹³ This resolution is non-binding for EU member states, although Reuters reported that the EU will add 37 entities to its sanctions against Iran on January 23, citing inside sources.¹⁴ Iranian officials and the most senior military body within the regime, the Armed Forces General Staff, separately warned the EU against pursuing further sanctions on the IRGC on January 19.¹⁵

Netblocks and social media users reported mobile internet disruptions in a manner consistent with announced preventative measures aimed at preventing cheating on the Iranian university entrance exam.¹⁶ Social media users reported three to four-and-a-half hours of mobile internet disruptions on January 19. It is unclear how widespread the internet restrictions were, although reports suggest that

disruptions are ongoing in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.¹⁷ The regime's internet outages failed to prevent cheating on the national exam however; Iranian media confirmed that unknown actors had leaked the test questions prior to the exam on January 19.¹⁸

Tehran universities threatened and took disciplinary action against unveiled students. Tehran University President Mohammad Moghimi announced that female students who refused to veil would face "disciplinary action."¹⁹ Several social media outlets additionally reported that unveiled students were barred from taking an examination at the University of Culture and Art in Tehran on January 19.²⁰ CTP has previously argued that the regime may end or reduce the morality patrol but will likely use other means to enforce the mandatory hijab law and isolate unveiled women.²¹

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

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

A Katai'b Hezbollah-affiliated group claimed that it targeted a US logistics convoy using improvised explosive devices (IED) on January 19.²³ Muqawamat al-Duwaliyah, the International Resistance Faction, media cell released a statement claiming that it had carried out the IED attack in Yusufiyah, Baghdad Province. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani had previously given an interview to the *Wall Street Journal* on January 15 expressing hope that US troops would remain stationed in Iraq.²⁴ IRGC Quds Force Commander Ismail Ghaani visited Baghdad on January 16 and met with senior Shia Coordination Framework officials and proxy militias.²⁵ Muqawamat al-Duwaliyah's statement was circulated on proxy media platforms, suggesting that the claim may have been directed towards a domestic Iraqi audience rather than intended as a threat to the US.

¹ https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616104316149895171?s=20&t=u2mllrE_BLzkzDqXkiKqWA ; https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616132136486027302?s=20&t=u2mllrE_BLzkzDqXkiKqWA ; https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1615799955569971208?s=20&t=u2mllrE_BLzkzDqXkiKqWA

² https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1615799955569971208?s=20&t=u2mllrE_BLzkzDqXkiKqWA

³ https://twitter.com/1500tasvir_en/status/1616074265828233216?s=20&t=u2mllrE_BLzkzDqXkiKqWA

⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023> ; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-zahedan-molavi-abdolhamid-abdolmajid-moradzehi/32230593.html> ; <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/prevent-gathering-protest-sistan-baluchestan-iran/32230066.html>

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

⁶ <https://www.irna.ir/news/85003839/%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%8C%D9%85-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%88%DA%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

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

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

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<https://twitter.com/CloudflareRadar/status/1616061427948699648?s=20&t=UPM6SBfZDu8N3LLt01wpUg>
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- ²¹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023>
- ²² <https://www.dotirna.ir/news/85003792/%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%86-%DA%AF%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88%DA%AF%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%81%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D9%88%D8%AA%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%DB%B1%DB%B0-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2>
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<https://t.me/sabreenS1/68520>
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- ²⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-prime-minister-supports-indefinite-u-s-troop-presence-11673785302>
- ²⁵ https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1615040031793549312