



Iran Crisis Update, January 27, 2023

**Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Nicholas Carl, Annika Ganzeveld, Amin Soltani, and Frederick W. Kagan
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Contributors: Anya Caraiani

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

An armed individual shot and killed the security chief of the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran and injured two guards on January 27. The gunman penetrated the embassy building and opened fire on personnel with a Kalashnikov assault rifle. Iranian officials have since arrested the attacker and identified him as 53-year-old Yasin Hossein Zadeh.¹ Iranian media described the event as an “armed attack” and reported that Hossein Zadeh was motivated by “personal and family problems,” citing a dispute between embassy personnel and Hossein Zadeh’s wife in March or April 2022.² Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev called the incident a “terrorist attack” and accused Iranian officials of failing to take action against prior threats made against Azerbaijan’s embassy in Tehran.³ The Azerbaijani Foreign Affairs Minister Jeyhun Bayramov announced the evacuation of the embassy on January 27.⁴ President Ebrahim Raisi called for a comprehensive investigation into the attack, and Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani warned Iranian media outlets against circulating speculative reports of the attack.⁵ Supreme National Security Council-affiliated Nour News separately published a tweet stating that the attack should not damage ties between Baku and Tehran.⁶

Iranian Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan appointed a new commander for the LEC Tehran provincial unit several hours after the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy. Radan seemingly demoted Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi, who has held the role since 2017, and replaced him with Brigadier General Abbas Ali Mohammadian, who served as the LEC Tehran city intelligence chief from 2008-2018 and the LEC Alborz provincial commander since 2017. The UK sanctioned Mohammadian in November 2022 for his role in violently suppressing anti-regime protests in Karaj, Alborz Province.⁷ It is not clear whether the embassy attack prompted Mohammadian’s appointment. Radan may have replaced Rahimi regardless of the embassy attack as Radan installs trusted officers to key security positions. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed Radan as law enforcement commander on January 7.⁸

Protest organizations and coordinators have blamed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy, although there is currently no evidence to

corroborate these claims.⁹ Protest groups may be circulating this narrative to support their efforts to persuade the international community to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization. The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) released a statement on January 26 emphasizing the importance of external outreach and using legal frameworks to present the crimes of the regime to the international community, as CTP previously reported.¹⁰

The US Justice Department announced on January 27 the arrest of three individuals in connection with a plot to assassinate prominent Iranian-American journalist and regime critic Masih Alinejad.¹¹ The three arrested individuals face murder-for-hire and money laundering charges and are members of an Eastern European crime organization. The US Justice Department claimed that an unidentified individual in Iran directed the group. Iranian agents previously tried to kidnap Alinejad in 2021.¹²

Key Takeaways.

- **An armed individual shot and killed the security chief of the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran and injured two guards on January 27.**
- **Iranian Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan appointed a new commander for the LEC Tehran provincial unit several hours after the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy.**
- **Protest organizations and coordinators have blamed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for the attack on the Azerbaijani embassy, although there is currently no evidence to corroborate these claims.**
- **The US Justice Department announced on January 27 the arrest of three individuals in connection with a plot to assassinate prominent Iranian-American journalist and regime critic Masih Alinejad.**
- **At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid inspired protests during his Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 27 as he has done weekly since September 2022.**
- **Protest coordinators published recruitment messages on social media on January 27.**

Protest activity

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

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province¹³

- **Size:** Medium to Large
- **Notes:** Anti-regime protesters gathered near the Makki Grand Mosque following prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid's Friday prayer sermon.

Izeh, Khuzestan Province¹⁴

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

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

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province¹⁵

- **Size:** Undetermined



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

January 30¹⁶

- **Type:** Gathering to celebrate a pre-Islamic holiday called “Sadeh.” One prominent protest organization framed the event as a demonstration of pan-Iranian unity.
- **Location:** Countrywide

Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid inspired protests during his Friday sermon in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 27 as he has done weekly since September 2022. Abdol Hamid repeated his regular criticisms of the regime but seemed to temper his rhetoric slightly more than usual.¹⁷ Abdol Hamid has previously suggested that he is negotiating with the regime over his demands.¹⁸ He is likely using his sermons to send certain messages to the Iranian authorities with whom he is negotiating. His sermon generated significant demonstrations in Zahedan, despite his slightly more measured rhetoric.

Security forces did not conduct any visible crackdown on the protests in Zahedan, despite the heightened security presence there.¹⁹ The regime may seek to use these security forces to deter Abdol Hamid from becoming emboldened further and to collect information on local protesters. Iranian security leaders may seek to avoid using these security forces for a violent crackdown to minimize the risk of fueling protests further. The weekly demonstrations in Zahedan began in response to security forces violently suppressing protesters in Zahedan on September 30, 2022, in an event that has become known as “bloody Friday.”²⁰

Protest coordinators published recruitment messages on social media on January 27. The Esfahan Neighborhood Youth tweeted on January 27 that the regime has killed, injured, and arrested several of their members and announced that the group is accepting candidates for local field leaders, social media and graphic designers, and reporters and content producers.²¹ The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) group similarly encouraged "militant groups from various neighborhoods and cities across the country" who aligned with the INYU's mission statement to join their efforts in overthrowing the regime.²² This messaging aligns with the INYU's previously stated objective of "building cohesion and cooperation among military groups inside Iran."²³ It is unclear with which militant groups the INYU may engage, and cooperation with certain anti-regime actors may ultimately undermine its efforts to gain widespread support among the Iranian public.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report.

¹ <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-9/593835-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%88>

² [https://www.irna.ir/news/85011184/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86% ; https://www.irna.ir/news/85010929/%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B4%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%](https://www.irna.ir/news/85011131/%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1% ; https://www.irna.ir/news/85011184/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86% ; https://www.irna.ir/news/85011215/%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%AB%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D9%88-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1% ; https://www.irna.ir/news/85010929/%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B4%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7% ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunman-kills-security-chief-at-azerbaijan-embassy-in-iran/2023/01/27/d39aebaa-9e13-11ed-93e0-38551e88239c_story.html)

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunman-kills-security-chief-at-azerbaijan-embassy-in-iran/2023/01/27/d39aebaa-9e13-11ed-93e0-38551e88239c_story.html ; <https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-azerbaijan-government-fires-4c9c54dc12677ff47fe48acd84291337>

⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-azerbaijan-government-fires-4c9c54dc12677ff47fe48acd84291337>

⁵ [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunman-kills-security-chief-at-azerbaijan-embassy-in-iran/2023/01/27/d39aebaa-9e13-11ed-93e0-38551e88239c_story.html](https://www.irna.ir/news/85011184/%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86% ; https://www.irna.ir/news/85010929/%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%B4%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7% ; https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/gunman-kills-security-chief-at-azerbaijan-embassy-in-iran/2023/01/27/d39aebaa-9e13-11ed-93e0-38551e88239c_story.html)

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⁸ <http://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26235>

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¹⁰ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-26-2023>

¹¹ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-charges-and-new-arrest-connection-assassination-plot-directed>

¹² <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/27/politics/justice-department-masih-alinejad/index.html>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1619003230389944326?cxt=HHwWjIDS2Ya37fcsAAAA>

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¹⁵ https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618920617608364033?cxt=HHwWgoDSwa3ux_csAAAA

¹⁶ https://twitter.com/iran_javanan/status/1618702434918109184?s=20&t=y8Q-XIXM_YQuQnO_I6Z0Xw

¹⁷ <https://abdolhamid dot net/persian/2023/01/27/13334/>

¹⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-12>

¹⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-26-2023>

²⁰ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-6>

²¹ https://twitter.com/javanane_Esf_/status/1618904801403871235?s=20&t=l4CR01sPWLUDRuTkM6H9vA

²² https://twitter.com/UIYI_fa/status/1618903663963144192?s=20&t=g7ihMSLOJaV3iKaXcMo3RA

²³ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-13-2023>