



**Iran Update, March 9, 2023**

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March 9, 2023, 6:00 pm ET**

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**The Iranian regime likely assesses that it is losing its cultural campaign for Iranian women.** Iranian women are reportedly defying the mandatory hijab law regularly in major urban areas in public, despite Iranian leaders' repeated emphasis on adhering to the hijab requirement.<sup>1</sup> Bloomberg, after interviewing a female Tehran resident, reported on March 8 that parts of Tehran resemble Istanbul, Dubai, and Beirut, where both veiled and unveiled women are present in public areas.<sup>2</sup> Iranian women who refuse to veil in public may believe that the regime will not violently confront them because it is fearful of reigniting public unrest. Several groups of women--some of which included unveiled women--organized protests in cities across Iran on March 8 to commemorate International Women's Day, moreover.<sup>3</sup> Their continued bravery underscores how many Iranian women remain determined to challenge the regime and have not lost confidence since the culmination of the Mahsa Amini protest movement in January 2023.

**The regime is determined to win its cultural campaign by intensifying indoctrination efforts, however.** President Ebrahim Raisi gave two speeches on March 9 in which he emphasized the need to prevent the Westernization of Iranian society. Raisi stated that the regime must protect Iranian youth from the West's "cultural vulgarity" during a sociocultural gathering with teenage girls.<sup>4</sup> He separately headed a meeting focused on society on March 9 in which he asserted that Iranian girls and women regard the hijab as a "safety-creating priority."<sup>5</sup> These remarks from Raisi are two recent examples of the near-constant emphasis that Iranian leaders are placing on the importance of the hijab law and the indoctrination of the youth. Iranian officials frequently attempt to portray the mandatory hijab as a measure to protect women from sins and harm--such as degradation, prostitution, and moral corruption--that these officials claim are rampant in the West.<sup>6</sup> Raisi argues that "explanation jihad"--the regime theory that ideologizing the population will increase public support for the political establishment--is the best way to prevent losing its female population to Western values.<sup>7</sup>

**Raisi and other regime officials are focusing on coopting Iranian women rather than addressing the Iranian people's real concerns.** Raisi stated on March 9 that "[the regime has]

no doubt that women and girls who make us proud and are educated in the school of the Islamic Revolution will have the most support and respect for the law.”<sup>8</sup> This statement underscores Raisi’s disconnect from the general population because while he celebrates those who have been successfully indoctrinated, he fails to mention the chemical attacks which have recently hit Iran’s education system. His praise for girls and women who comply with the mandatory hijab law implies that those who do not comply bring shame upon the regime, a statement that will likely alienate women and girls who are not aligned with the regime culturally. While Raisi has made similarly tone-deaf statements previously, these statements are particularly jarring as Raisi made them only one day after International Women’s Day. They reflect the regime’s effort to portray itself as the actual defender of women from the dangers and harms it claims beset women in Western societies despite the atrocities the regime itself has committed against its own women and girls.

**Several protest groups appear to be trying to challenge regime efforts to securitize Iran ahead of the upcoming national holidays.** The neighborhood youth groups representing Tehran, Mashhad, and Zanjan cities and Khuzestan Province have called for countrywide demonstrations on March 13-15 in anticipation of Chahar Shanbeh Souri—a major national holiday on March 15.<sup>9</sup> Protest organizers circulated the calls immediately after the regime’s security services indicated that they will be mobilizing to securitize the country during Chahar Shanbeh Souri and Nowrouz (the Persian new year celebrations), as CTP previously reported.<sup>10</sup> The protest organizers may be partly responding to the regime’s enhanced security posture. Some of the calls for demonstrations even mirror Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan’s threatening March 7 statement. Radan expressed the LEC’s willingness to arrest those who behave “above the law” during celebrations and warned parents that they will be held responsible for the actions of their children in order to deter large gatherings during Chahar Shanbeh Souri. The LEC Commander further announced that celebrations will not be permitted “in city squares” and must be confined to “neighborhoods and alleys.” The Tehran Neighborhood Youth Group contrastingly called on protesters to gather in the main city squares and streets of the country on the days leading up to and including Chahar Shanbeh Souri. Though other protest groups have not made such an explicit reference to Radan’s statement, their call for large gatherings during Chahar Shanbeh Souri is meant to confront the regime as it tries to securitize Iran during the holidays.

Protest groups will have to be much more cautious in the coming period as they plan and participate in demonstrations. They otherwise risk a major disruption of their networks by the state security services in a heavily securitized environment. The regime could still deter demonstrations from materializing, especially as security forces increase their presence in major urban centers and continue their threatening rhetoric and arrests of protesters. It is nevertheless noteworthy that protest groups have been bold enough to initially challenge the regime’s securitized attitude towards the holidays.

CTP has not observed any poisonings over the past couple of days, consistent with the steady decline in the number of attacks over the past week. The cessation of attacks follows the regime’s increasingly securitized rhetoric and action. The cessation could be the result of the regime’s increased security measures, but, if so, the question arises why the regime did not take such measures much earlier or at

least after the major uptick in poisonings that began on March 4.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, the drop in the number of attacks could be explained by the fact that schools have been closed for a long weekend from Wednesday through Friday. On the other hand, several chemical attacks have targeted locations other than schools and demographics other than schoolchildren, so the long weekend by itself should not have led to the complete cessation of incidents. If neither the long weekend nor the perfect efficiency of the regime's security response explains the cessation of attacks, then the reason for the cessation remains as unclear as the identities of the perpetrators.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **The Iranian regime likely assesses that it is losing its cultural campaign for Iranian women. The regime is determined to win its cultural campaign by intensifying indoctrination efforts, however. President Ebrahim Raisi and other regime officials are focusing on coopting Iranian women rather than addressing the Iranian people's real concerns.**
- **Several protest groups appear to be trying to challenge regime efforts to securitize Iran ahead of the upcoming national holidays.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city across one province.**
- **Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met separately with senior Syrian and Turkish officials ahead of Syria-Turkey normalization talks scheduled in Moscow in the coming weeks.**
- **An OSINT Twitter account posted satellite imagery on March 9 of an Iranian over-the-horizon radar system allegedly deployed to an unspecified location in Syria.**
- **The Iraqi parliament delayed a vote on the Shia Coordination Framework-backed election law.**

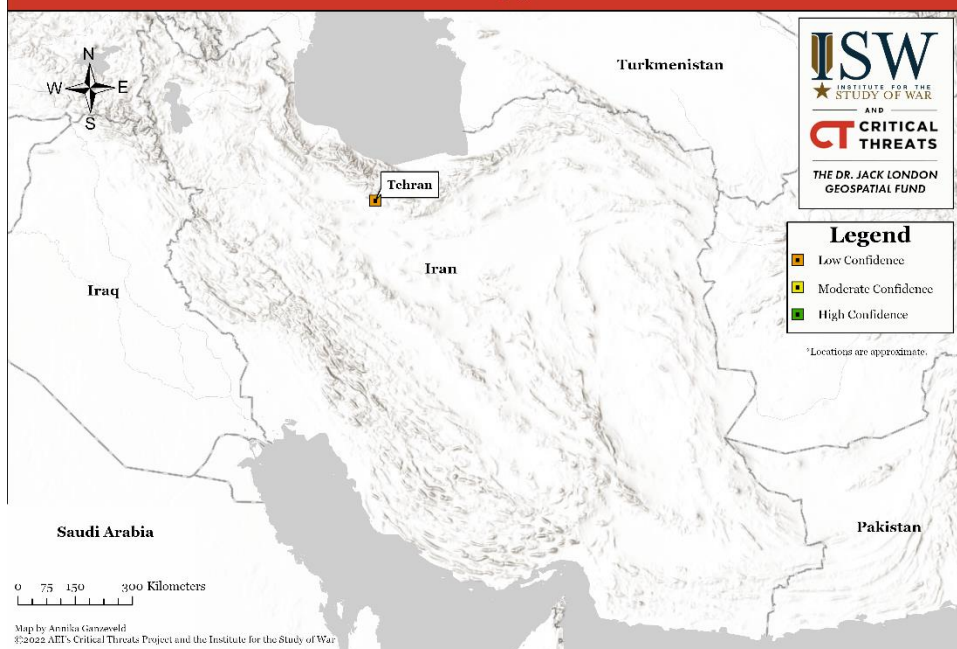
### **Internal Security and Protest Activity**

**At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on March 9.** CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

#### **Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>12</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans in the metro

## Protest Activity in Iran as of March 9, 6:00 PM



### Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

**President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al Sudani on March 8.** The two discussed economic cooperation and security affairs, according to the official Iranian and Iraqi readouts.<sup>13</sup>

**Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met separately with senior Syrian and Turkish officials ahead of Syria-Turkey normalization talks scheduled in Moscow in the coming weeks.** Abdollahian met with Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara and told Turkish media on March 8 that Tehran seeks to play an active role in the upcoming Russian-hosted negotiations about normalizing ties between Ankara and Damascus.<sup>14</sup> Abdollahian also met with Latakia Provincial Governor Amer Hilal in Latakia and with Syrian President Bashar al Assad and Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad in Damascus on March 9.<sup>15</sup>

Abdollahian's March 9 visit is the latest component of a larger Iranian effort to set negotiating conditions with the Assad regime ahead of the next round of meetings in Moscow. CTP has observed an unusual frequency of Iranian diplomatic visits to Syria in recent weeks, likely in support of this effort.<sup>16</sup> Tehran is likely trying to shape the Ankara-Damascus normalization discussions in a manner favorable to Iranian interests—the continued Iranian military presence in northwest Syria, restraining Turkish military activity in northern Syria, or possibly restoring Assad regime control over Idlib province.

### Economic Affairs

**The Iranian rial appreciated from 513,000 rials to one US dollar on March 8 to around 498,000 rials to one dollar on March 9.**<sup>17</sup> The rial has regained almost 21 percent of its value

since it hit a record low of around 601,500 rials to the dollar on February 26.<sup>18</sup> Domestic media outlets have largely shifted their primary focus away from the currency crisis to the recent chemical attacks in recent days, which has likely curbed the drop in public confidence in the currency at least for the moment.

### **External Security and Military Affairs**

**An OSINT Twitter account posted satellite imagery on March 9 of an Iranian over-the-horizon radar system allegedly deployed to an unspecified location in Syria.**<sup>19</sup> CTP cannot corroborate this claim. CTP has previously reported that Iranian senior military officials have publicly discussed deploying Iranian-made Khordad-15 or Bavar-373 air defense systems to the Syrian theater.<sup>20</sup> CTP also reported on March 3 that Fatemiyoun militants—the IRGC Quds Force Afghan Shia force—will reportedly travel to Iran to undergo training on unspecified radar systems.<sup>21</sup> Iran may be preparing to send the Fatemiyoun to operate the air defense systems that Iranian senior military officials have discussed deploying. The March 9 satellite imagery could be an early indicator of such a scenario.

**The Iraqi parliament delayed a vote on the Shia Coordination Framework-backed election law previously scheduled for March 9.**<sup>22</sup> Iraq’s Parliamentary Legal Committee released a statement that it was reviewing amendments submitted by independent and minority political blocs. The proposed election law, backed by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki’s State of Law Coalition, would undo 2019 election reforms that protect proportional representation and return to an electoral system that heavily favors the State of Law Coalition and other major parties.<sup>23</sup> Demonstrations erupted across Iraq against the Shia Coordination Framework on March 5, and protesters threatened to continue if the election law went forward for a vote.<sup>24</sup>

**Iranian-backed Iraqi Shia militants likely used intimidation to remove certain Kurdish officials from office in Tel Kayf District, Ninewa Province.** Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) parliamentary bloc members accused an unidentified “armed faction” of paying individuals to protest against local officials. *Shafaq* reported on March 9 that unidentified militants coerced several local officials in Tel Kayf, including the district commissioner and directors for education, electricity, and municipalities, to resign.<sup>25</sup> KDP parliamentarian Kavin Saeed warned that unspecified armed groups may intervene in basic government administration and service provisions to ignite ethnic tensions.<sup>26</sup> The KDP bloc called on Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Sudani to intervene and prevent further violations.<sup>27</sup>

**Lebanese Hezbollahi media promoted the narrative that the US is responsible for the recent protests in Iran.** Lebanese Hezbollah (LH)-affiliated media outlet *Al Ahd* published a readout from LH Central Council member Sheikh Hassan Baghdadi’s meeting with unspecified religious scholars in Qom, Iran on March 9. *Al Ahd* highlighted Baghdadi’s warning that Western and Israeli intelligence seek to incite domestic unrest across the region similar to what he claimed has occurred in Iran.<sup>28</sup> *Al Ahd* published the original article exclusively in Arabic, suggesting that Baghdadi’s message was meant for an Arabic-speaking audience. The *Al Ahd* article follows protests

against Iran-aligned political actors across Iraq on March 5, suggesting a potentially coordinated media campaign to discourage and discredit anti-Iranian protests in Iraq and elsewhere in the region.

**The IRGC Navy commissioned the Shahid Mahdavi forward-base ship and several dozen fast attack craft equipped with missile-launch systems in a ceremony at Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province on March 9.**<sup>29</sup> Some Iranian state media reported that the IRGC Navy received 95 fast attack craft, while other outlets reported 99.<sup>30</sup> The Shahid Mahdavi can reportedly be equipped with surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles and host drones, fast attack craft, and helicopters. The Iranian Shipbuilding and Offshore Industries Complex (ISIOCO)—owned by state-owned industrial giant IDRO—constructed the ship.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-08/international-women-s-day-ditching-hijabs-keeps-iran-s-protests-alive-in-tehran>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-03-08/international-women-s-day-ditching-hijabs-keeps-iran-s-protests-alive-in-tehran>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dotirna.ir/news/85052157/%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%88%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%B3%D8%A8%DA%A9-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B5%D8%B1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dotirna.ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87>

<sup>6</sup> <https://dolat.ir/detail/398199>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-31-2023>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.dotirna.ir/news/85052241/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A2%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87>

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/javanane/status/1633847135987810304?cxt=HHwWgIC-3YnUy6wtAAAA> ;

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023> ; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-8-2023>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-5-2023>

<sup>12</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633911321744879624?cxt=HHwWkMC98Zbs6KwtAAAA> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1633874165597085697?cxt=HHwWgDRgbT516wtAAAA>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.president.ir/fa/142884>; [www.pmo.ir/press/2023/8-3-202205.htm](http://www.pmo.ir/press/2023/8-3-202205.htm)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimiz-iran-disisleri-bakani-huseyin-emir-abdullahiyan-ile-gorusmesi--8-mart-2023--ankara.en.mfa>; <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/08032023>; <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/08032023>

<sup>15</sup> <https://iranpress.com/content/74880/amir-abdollahian-arrives-latakia-airport>; <https://sana.sy/en/?p=303071>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023>; <https://sana.sy/en/?p=1854095>; <https://sana.sy/en/?p=302512>; <https://www.alwatanonline.com/%d9%85%d8%ad%d8%a7%d9%81%d8%b8-%d8%ad%d9%84%d8%a8-%d9%8a%d9%84%d8%aa%d9%82%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%88%d9%81%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a8%d8%b1%d9%84%d9%85%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%a5%d9%8a%d8%b1/>; <https://sana.sy/en/?p=302306>; [https://t.me/mod\\_gov\\_sy/32180](https://t.me/mod_gov_sy/32180); <https://en.isna.ir/news/1401112620313/Iran-s-ambassador-meets-with-Syrian-deputy-FM>; <https://thiga-agency.com/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1->

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<sup>17</sup> <https://bonbast.com/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/iran-rial-plunges-new-lows-amid-unrest-international-isolation-2023-02-26/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://twitter.com/morghetondar/status/1633525531596713984>; <https://www.syria-dot-tv.com/>

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-7-2023>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-24-2023>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-3-2023>

<sup>22</sup> <https://shafaq-dot-com-ar.com/>

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<sup>23</sup> <https://shafaq-dot-com-ar.com/>

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<sup>24</sup> <https://shafaq-dot-com-ar.com/>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://shafaq-dot-com-ar.com/>

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www-dot-kurdistan24.net/ar/story/36451-%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www-dot-kurdistan24.net/ar/story/36451-%D8%B9%D8%B6%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%AE%D9%84-%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A4%D9%88%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%81>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.alahednews-dot-com.lb/article.php?id=51620&cid=113>

<sup>29</sup> [www.irna-dot-ir/news/85051915](http://www.irna-dot-ir/news/85051915)

<sup>30</sup> [www.defapress-dot-ir/fa/news/577736](http://www.defapress-dot-ir/fa/news/577736); [www.irna-dot-ir/news/85051915](http://www.irna-dot-ir/news/85051915)

<sup>31</sup> <https://news.usni.org/2023/01/03/iran-building-drone-aircraft-carrier-from-converted-merchant-ship-photos-show>