

# Iran Update, March 17, 2023

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**Some Iranian leaders continue to refuse to make the necessary changes that will meaningfully address popular frustrations.** They are instead reaffirming their efforts to “Islami-ize” Iranian society and suppress public displays of behavior they perceive as unreligious during the upcoming Persian new year celebrations. Regime officials have emphasized the “Islamic” part of the “Iranian-Islamic identity” in recent days by suggesting that Ramadan—an Islamic holiday—must take precedence over Nowrouz—the Persian New Year holiday with Zoroastrian origins. President Ebrahim Raisi previously argued that the “Iranian-Islamic identity” is a single harmonious identity on March 16.<sup>1</sup> Multiple Friday prayer leaders warned that Nowrouz must not overshadow Ramadan during their Friday sermons on March 17.<sup>2</sup> Several regime officials also emphasized on March 17 that Iranians must not “violate the sanctity” of Ramadan while celebrating Nowrouz.<sup>3</sup> Khuzestan Public Revolutionary Prosecutor Sadegh Jafari Chegani stated that “eating in front of those who fast [for Ramadan] is a crime.”<sup>4</sup> Chegani also announced that the Khuzestan Prosecutor’s Office issued judicial orders for officers to confront unveiled women and that failure to comply with these orders will be considered a “dereliction of duty.”<sup>5</sup> IRGC Operations Deputy Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan separately announced plans to implement “patrols for enjoining good and forbidding evil” in Qom Province between March 16 and the end of Ramadan, implying the resumption of morality patrols comprised<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that the IRGC is establishing these patrols in Qom, the religious heartland of Iran. This suggests the regime perceives that Qom residents will be less inclined to resist a new morality patrol than other Iranians due to the generally conservative nature of the city. Officials’ appeals to Iranians--particularly Iranian women--to “preserve the sanctity of Ramadan” will likely further alienate the regime from Iranians who condemn its imposition of religion on the public.

**Some regime officials acknowledge that the regime has not resolved Iran’s economic problems.** Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf stated during a visit to the Zarand Steel Factory in Kerman Province on March 17 that “inflation in the country is progressing at such a speed that the people’s purchasing power has in effect decreased.”<sup>7</sup> Some Friday prayer leaders made similar remarks. Kermanshah Friday Prayer Leader Mostafa Ulama stated during his Friday sermon on March 17 that the government must prioritize controlling and reducing the price of goods.<sup>8</sup> Tehran Interim Friday Prayer Leader Mohammad Javad Haj Ali Akbari similarly acknowledged during his Friday sermon that the Iranian people “have confronted many problems stemming from the excessive increase in prices.”<sup>9</sup> Although the regime has succeeded in raising the value of the Iranian rial after it fell to a record low of 600,000 rials to the dollar on February 26, the rial has not recovered to pre-Mahsa Amini movement levels.<sup>10</sup> The rial

was valued at around 298,200 rials to the dollar in September 2022, compared to 471,000 rials to one US dollar on March 17.<sup>11</sup> While the regime has increased the rial's value in recent days, moreover, it has not addressed high inflation. Iran's inflation rate remains at around 50 percent, as CTP previously reported.<sup>12</sup> The regime's inability to resolve Iranians' economic grievances in addition to its refusal to provide sociocultural concessions will likely fuel greater resentment among the population toward the regime.

**The regime's securitization of Zahedan in recent weeks failed to intimidate Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid into halting his anti-regime sermons, which may help normalize public discussions about creating a more inclusive political system.** Abdol Hamid argued during his Friday sermon on March 17 that his local supporters have avoided resorting to violence during their weekly protests. He lauded that there was “no war or insecurity,” despite security forces injuring and killing protesters. Abdol Hamid could be trying to attract the wider non-Baloch population to his movement by signaling to them that his protest movement is peaceful. CTP has previously reported on Abdol Hamid's attempts to appeal to the entire Iranian nation, irrespective of political, sectarian, and ethnic differences. His emphasis on the fact that the Zahedan protests did not cause any insecurity could also be part of an attempt to demonstrate that the regime has tolerated both his calls for inclusion and his other demands, signaling that the public discussion over these issues is possible and should be continued. These observations are consistent with CTP's previous assessments, namely that Abdol Hamid's careful balancing of actions and rhetoric pressures the regime without instigating a violence escalation and that the regime may be tolerating Abdol Hamid's continued criticisms because of his nonviolent posture, restraining the different anti-regime militant groups in the province.

Abdol Hamid repeated his calls for an inclusive government during his March 17 sermon that involves more than just Shia representation. Abdol Hamid stated that that all the “cries and protests are due to one religious view” governing the country.<sup>13</sup> He emphasized the diversity of beliefs inside the country, arguing that the socio-political domination of one religious view over all others has limited the open expression of diverse opinions. Abdol Hamid further stated that many capable individuals belonging to minority groups have been excluded from administrative roles in government. Though Abdol Hamid was echoing the long-standing grievances of his Sunni Baluch audience, he maintained a non-sectarian tone by stating “you cannot have one ethnicity, religion, or sect governing the entire country...governance needs to be transethnic, irreligious, and non-sectarian.” CTP does not interpret Abdol Hamid's comments as advocating for a secular state but simply demanding the inclusion of all ethnic groups and beliefs.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Some Iranian leaders continue to refuse to make the necessary changes that will meaningfully address popular frustrations.**
- **Some regime officials acknowledge that the regime has not resolved Iran's economic problems.**
- **Prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid intends to normalize public discussions in Iran about creating a more inclusive political system.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city and one province.**

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

**At least one protest occurred in one city and one province.** CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following cities:

#### **Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province<sup>14</sup>**

- **Size:** Medium
- **Demographic:** Individuals chanting anti-regime slogans, some focusing on recent regime executions of political dissidents

### **Economic Affairs**

**President Ebrahim Raisi chaired an extraordinary meeting of the Market Regulation Headquarters on March 16.**<sup>15</sup> Several economic ministers briefed the headquarters on government efforts to supply consumer goods to the public. Raisi called on provincial governors to ensure that trade unions are properly managing the consumer goods market.

**The Iranian rial depreciated from 463,500 rials to one US dollar on March 16 to 471,000 rials to one US dollar on March 17.**<sup>16</sup>

### **Foreign Policy and Diplomacy**

**Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian tweeted on March 17 denying any divisions or tensions within the regime foreign policy apparatus.**<sup>17</sup> Abdollahian posted this tweet in reference to Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani representing Tehran in the Iran-Saudi Arabia normalization talks rather than Abdollahian. Abdollahian emphasized that the regime foreign policy apparatus operates cohesively under President Ebrahim Raisi. Abdollahian's remarks partially contradict recent Western reports that claimed that the Office of the Supreme Leader—not Raisi—oversaw Iranian participation in the normalization talks.<sup>18</sup>

**Iranian state media reported that Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani will likely pay an official visit to Iraq in the coming days to attend the fifth Baghdad International Dialogue Conference.**<sup>19</sup> Security officials from various countries discuss political and security challenges in this conference. The fourth conference occurred in August 2021. Representatives from Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and the UAE will reportedly attend the conference.<sup>20</sup>

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

**Iranian proxy media claimed that unidentified gunmen targeted Anbar Awakening Council leader Sattam Abu Risha in Ramadi, Anbar Province on March 17.**<sup>21</sup> These outlets suggested that militants controlled by Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammad al Halbousi were responsible.<sup>22</sup> Sattam Abu Risha is affiliated with the Iranian proxy Kataib Hezbollah – who is currently leading an information operation against Iraqi Parliament Speaker Mohammed al Halbousi.<sup>23</sup> Iraqi Military Spokesperson Major General Yahya Rasool denied that there had been an assassination attempt and claimed that security forces intervened in the gathering after

discovering flyers calling for volunteers for tribal militias.<sup>24</sup> CTP cannot independently verify either claim. Sunni tribes formed the Anbar Awakening Council in 2006 in partnership with Coalition forces in Iraq to counter al-Qaeda in Anbar.<sup>25</sup>

**Senior Hamas officials met with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov and Special Representative of the President of Russia for the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov in Moscow, Russia on March 16.**<sup>26</sup> The head of Hamas's International Relations Office Musa Abu Marzouk and Hamas member Izzat al Rishq led the delegation to Moscow. Hamas-affiliated *Palestinian Press Agency* reported that Marzouk and al-Rishq discussed Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Benjamin Netanyahu's administration, and other unspecified Palestinian issues.<sup>27</sup> According to a *Media Line* report, Lebanese Hezbollah has recruited fighters on behalf of the Russian government to fight in Ukraine.<sup>28</sup> CTP cannot verify Media Line's report. Hamas last met with Russian officials in Moscow on September 28, 2022.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-march-16-2023>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122618717](http://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401122618717)

[http://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401122618778](http://www.dotisna.ir/news/1401122618778)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719346/%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B1%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%87-%DA%A9%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%BE%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A8-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%82%DB%8C%D9%81-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www dot entekhab dot ir/fa/news/719335/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA](https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/719335/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AD%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A1-%D8%AE%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B7-%D9%82%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA)

<sup>7</sup> [https://www dot tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/12/26/2868865/](https://www.dot.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/12/26/2868865/)- عملًا- کاهش- پیدا- کرده-

است- کارگران- بابت- حقوق- های- در یافتی- گلایه- دارند- فیلم

<sup>8</sup> [http://www dot ir/news/1401122618717](http://www.dot.ir/news/1401122618717)

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%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%81-%D9%81%D9%8A-  
%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%83%D9%88-%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%AB-  
%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA

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