



Iran Crisis Update, January 24, 2023

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Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas discussed deepening military cooperation with senior Iranian officials in Tehran on January 24. Abbas met with President Ebrahim Raisi, Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Hossein Salami. Salami stressed the importance of strengthening Iranian-Syrian military cooperation and stated that the IRGC is prepared to provide the Syrian armed forces with unspecified cyber, information, and electronic warfare capabilities.¹ Abbas stated that Syria should play a more active role in the so-called “Axis of Resistance” and endorsed greater cooperation during his meetings.² Abbas previously discussed improving bilateral economic and defense ties in a meeting with Armed Forces General Staff Chief Major General Mohammad Bagheri on January 24, at which Bagheri called for joint military exercises between Iran and Syria.³ Salami’s meeting with Abbas suggests that the IRGC may participate in such exercises.

Iran likely seeks to consolidate its military influence in Syria, especially as Russia reportedly decreases its military footprint there. The Kremlin has reportedly drawn down its forces in Syria within the past year to send reinforcements to Ukraine, leaving a vacuum for Iranian and Iranian-backed forces to fill.⁴ Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with Syrian President Bashar al Assad in May 2022, allegedly to discuss transferring Russian positions to Iran and its proxies.⁵ The regime may seek to further leverage a decreased Russian military presence in Syria by offering the Assad regime equipment and support that Russia cannot provide due to the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Parliamentarian Ahmad Alireza Beygi suggested impeaching Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi for the Law Enforcement Command’s (LEC) brutal suppression of protests in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in September 2022. Iranian authorities violently cracked down on anti-regime demonstrations in Zahedan on September 30, 2022, killing over 80 protesters.⁶ Beygi implied that Khamenei wants the Raisi administration to remove Vahidi, although his comments more likely reflect his own opinion.⁷ Beygi previously criticized the LEC’s crackdown in Zahedan in October 2022 and accused the LEC of generating mistrust.⁸ Beygi had also called on the Armed Forces General Staff to “reconsider the management and structure of the LEC” on a later date in October 2022.⁹ It is unclear whether any of Beygi’s calls will generate traction among other lawmakers.

Beygi previously served as the law enforcement commander for Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, and Esfahan provinces from 1994 to 2004 and Fars province from 2004 to 2006, although he has previously criticized the regime's protest suppression. Beygi additionally called to impeach former Interior Minister Abdol Reza Rahmani Fazli under the Rouhani administration in April 2021, stating that Fazli's hands were "stained in blood" due to his involvement in suppressing the 2019 Aban protests.¹⁰

Key Takeaways

- **Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas discussed deepening military cooperation with senior Iranian officials in Tehran. Iran likely seeks to consolidate its military influence in Syria, especially as Russia reportedly decreases its military footprint there.**
- **Parliamentarian Ahmad Alireza Beygi suggested impeaching Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi for the Law Enforcement Command's (LEC) brutal suppression of protests in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province in September 2022.**
- **At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Unidentified individuals shot and killed two LEC officers and wounded a third in Bampur, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 24.**
- **Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei criticized on January 24 regime-imposed internet restrictions aimed at preventing cheating on the national university entrance exam.**
- **Parliamentarian Abbas Moghtadaei criticized Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Minister Isah Zareh Pour over Iran Telecommunications Company employee benefits in an open-parliament session.**
- **The Iranian Supreme Court appeared to reverse a decision to grant clemency to arrested protester Mohammad Ghobadlou.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in two cities across two provinces in Iran on January 24. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that protests occurred in the following location:

Tehran City, Tehran Province¹¹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of prisoners sentenced to death

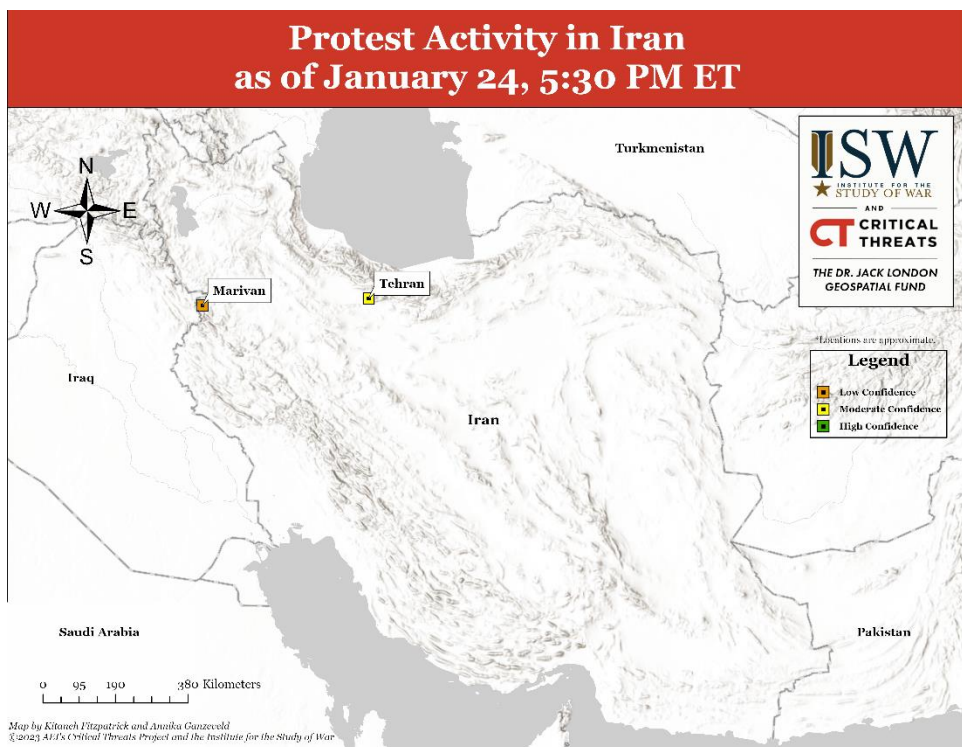
CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Marivan, Kurdistan Province¹²

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** City residents
- **Notes:** Reportedly demonstrating against water quality in the city. No available footage of protest. It is unclear if this event meets CTP's protest thresholds.

Tehran City, Tehran Province¹³

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Tehran University Students
- **Notes:** Sit-in, no available footage of protest. It is unclear if this event meets CTP's protest thresholds.



Unidentified individuals shot and killed two LEC officers and wounded a third in Bampur, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 24. The gunmen killed Major Mokhtar Momeni and Third Lieutenant Abouzer Omidvar. LEC Sistan and Baluchistan Provincial Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Ghanbari promised to identify and arrest the individuals.¹⁴

Judiciary Chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei criticized on January 24 regime-imposed internet restrictions aimed at preventing cheating on the national university entrance exam. Iranian authorities imposed mobile internet disruptions to preempt cheating on countrywide tests on January 19.¹⁵ Ejei stated that the disruptions created "significant issues" for the Iranian population--an implicit criticism of ongoing internet restrictions imposed by the regime to preempt and crack down on anti-regime protests.

Parliamentarian Abbas Moghtadaei criticized Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Minister Isah Zareh Pour over Iran Telecommunications Company employee benefits in an open-parliament session on January 24.¹⁶ Zareh Pour claimed that the ICT Ministry could not intervene because the Iran Telecommunications Company was privatized in 2008. Parliament condemned Zareh Pour's answers in an official vote.¹⁷ Retired telecommunications workers coordinated countrywide protests on January 23 over late benefit payments, as CTP previously reported.¹⁸ Parliamentarians previously began impeachment proceedings against Zahreh Pour in July 2021, although these proceedings did not culminate in an impeachment vote.¹⁹

The Iranian Supreme Court appeared to reverse a decision to grant clemency to arrested protester Mohammad Ghobadlou. A judiciary media official announced on January 23 that news outlets had incorrectly reported that the court accepted Ghobadlou's appeal.²⁰ Ghobadlou's lawyer said the Supreme Court accepted his client's appeal of his death sentence for murder but upheld his death sentence for "corruption on earth," a charge punishable by death, on January 24.²¹

This is not the first time that the Supreme Court has change its ruling on Ghobadlou's case. The Supreme Court initially retracted a statement that it had accepted Ghobadlou's appeal on December 24, 2022, as CTP reported.²² A criminal court likely sentenced Ghobadlou to death for murder while a Revolutionary Court sentenced him to death for "corruption on earth." The Supreme Court's apparent indecision may reflect a schism within the judiciary over how to execute the regime's response to the Mahsa Amini protest movement.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

See topline text.

¹ <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/04/2842211/> -د-های-جنگ-الکترونیک-و-نبرد- /سردار-سلامی-آماده-انتقال-تجربیات-در-حوزه-های-جنگ-الکترونیک-و-نبرد- ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85008312/> /اطلاعاتی-به-سوریه-هستیم-سردار-سلامی-آماده-کمک-به-نیروهای-مسلح-سوریه-در-ابعاد-زمینه-های-

² <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/568868/> %D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D8%B4%D8%AA%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9-%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%84%DA%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%DA%A9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D9%85%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%88%D9%85-%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%DA%A9%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%87-%D8%B3%D8%B7%D8%AD-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D9%88-%D9%87%D9%85%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%E2%80%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85

³ <https://isna.ir/xdNc8q> ; <https://www.irna.ir/news/85007428/> /تاکید-ایران-و-سوریه-بر-بزرگ-ارای-رزمایش-مشترک-نظامی-

⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/russia-and-iran-double-down-on-their-strategic-partnership> ; <https://aawsat.com/home/article/3599111/> %d9%85%d8%b9%d8%a7%d8%b1%d8%b6%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%b3%d9%88%d8%b1%d9%8a%d9%88%d9%86-%d9%8a%d8%aa%d8%ad%d8%af%d8%ab%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%b9%d9%86-%c2%ab%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%b3%d8%ad%d8%a7%d8%a8%d8%a7%d8%aa-%d8%b1%d9%88%d8%b3%d9%8a%d8%a9%c2%bb

⁵ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/damascus-air-base-iranian-warehouse-said-hit-in-alleged-israeli-strikes-overnight/>

⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/10/iran-at-least-82-baluchi-protesters-and-bystanders-killed-in-bloody-crackdown/>

⁷ <https://www.etemadonline.com/tiny/news-593080>

⁸ <https://www.hamshahronline.ir/news/716442/> %D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87

⁹ <https://www.hamshahronline.ir/news/716442/> %D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%B4%DA%A9%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87

¹⁰ <https://oldiranintl.com/en/iran/iran-lawmaker-accuses-minister-having-blood-his-hands>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1617915429216829444?s=20&t=Hp6plO6MxeyTck3Xb43NeQ> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617892890079813632?s=20&t=Hp6plO6MxeyTck3Xb43NeQ ;

<https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1617956098312671234?s=20&t=Hp6plO6MxeyTck3Xb43NeQ> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617967715683106824?s=20&t=Hp6plO6MxeyTck3Xb43NeQ

¹² <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617792490349924352?s=20&t=Ss-GVraok-rkj3MsAeLw> ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617838823626493956?s=20&t=cdvIUli43v2uMRLGecCnRw

¹³ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1617934231749152769?s=20&t=Ss-GVraok-rkj3MsAeLw> ;

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1617955868108066835?s=20&t=H3Z-MrYYxQgd78FisL52hQ ;

https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1617894166805069824?s=20&t=H3Z-MrYYxQgd78FisL52hQ

¹⁴ [https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/04/2841977/](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/11/04/2841977) شهادت-2-مامور-پلیس-در-حمله-اشرا-ار-به-گشت-انتظامی-بمپور

¹⁵ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-19-2023>

¹⁶ <https://isna dot ir/xdNckd>

¹⁷ <https://isna dot ir/xdNcnv>

¹⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-23-2023>

¹⁹ <https://www.zoomit dot ir/tech-iran/384318-minister-of-ict-impeachment/>

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/FarahaniReports/status/1617541901594554376>

²¹ <https://www.etemadonline dot com/tiny/news-593313>

²² <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-24>