



Iran Crisis Update, December 21

**Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Johanna Moore, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan
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Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appears to be personally directing the regime’s approach to protests in Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Senior Iranian cleric Mostafa Mohami stated during a meeting with local university students on December 21 that Khamenei has taken a “personal interest” in the unrest in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.¹ Mohami asserted that Iranian authorities had taken a different approach in Sistan and Baluchistan Province—framing this approach as a marker of Khamenei’s interest in the region. He added that Khamenei instructed the Supreme National Security Council—the regime’s most senior foreign and security policy body—to listen to the demands of the people of the province.

Khamenei has sent his own representatives to address local issues and engage university students in Sistan and Baluchistan in contrast with the engagement of presidential and parliamentary officials in other provinces. Mohami is Khamenei’s personal clerical representative to Sistan and Baluchistan Province. Khamenei had previously dispatched a senior clerical delegation to the province on November 13, which he has not done in other provinces.² Government officials from the Raisi administration and Parliament have been the ones engaging students in other provinces.³

Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid discussed the regime’s approach to Sistan and Baluchistan Province in less favorable terms than Mohami on December 21. Abdol Hamid alleged that the brutal protest crackdown in Zahedan on September 30, which killed around 90 protesters, was premeditated.⁴ Abdol Hamid accused Iranian authorities of discriminating against the locals, especially Sunnis.

Khamenei’s special focus on Sistan and Baluchistan Province may be in part meant to deescalate with Abdol Hamid. Abdol Hamid is the only publicly known leader of protests and anti-regime sentiments who remains free. He is also a cleric himself with a history of occasionally working with the regime. These factors may be driving Khamenei’s attempts to engage with him cleric-to-cleric rather than via government officials. Anti-regime militancy and sentiments are high in many areas throughout the

province, moreover, presenting the regime with a unique security challenge. CTP has reported an uptick in anti-regime militant activity in Sistan and Baluchistan Province in recent days especially.⁵ Khamenei's attention to the province further underscores the complicated dynamics that the regime must navigate in trying to impose social control there.

Iran may face mounting gas shortages in the coming winter months. President Ebrahim Raisi and local officials emphasized the need to conserve gas on December 21.⁶ Raisi called on the Oil Ministry and state media to encourage the public to reduce energy consumption. One provincial official in Gilan Province declared December 22 a local holiday for conserving energy. Raisi administration officials have expressed concern over these worsening shortages for months.⁷ Domestic energy concerns could inflame anti-regime grievances as these issues mount.

Key Takeaways

- **Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appears to be personally directing the regime's approach to protests in Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**
- **Iran may face mounting gas shortages in the coming winter months.**
- **At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.**
- **Some protest coordinators and organizations announced plans to regularly publish printed bulletins.**
- **The Interior Ministry may be shuffling around provincial governors to improve internal security.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least five protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on December 21. Significant rainfall and snowfall are forecasted in several western provinces on December 22-24 and may reduce protest turnout on those days.⁸ The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth called for countrywide protests on December 24 to commemorate the 100th day of protests, although this group has seemed to struggle to generate protest turnout.⁹ CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Saghez, Kurdistan Province¹⁰

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: First footage of protest activity in Saghez since December 8

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province¹¹

- Size: Undetermined
- Protester Activity: Fires lit in street
- Notes: First footage of protest activity in Sanandaj since December 11

Tehran City, Tehran Province¹²

- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Imposed roadblocks
- Area: Saadat Abad

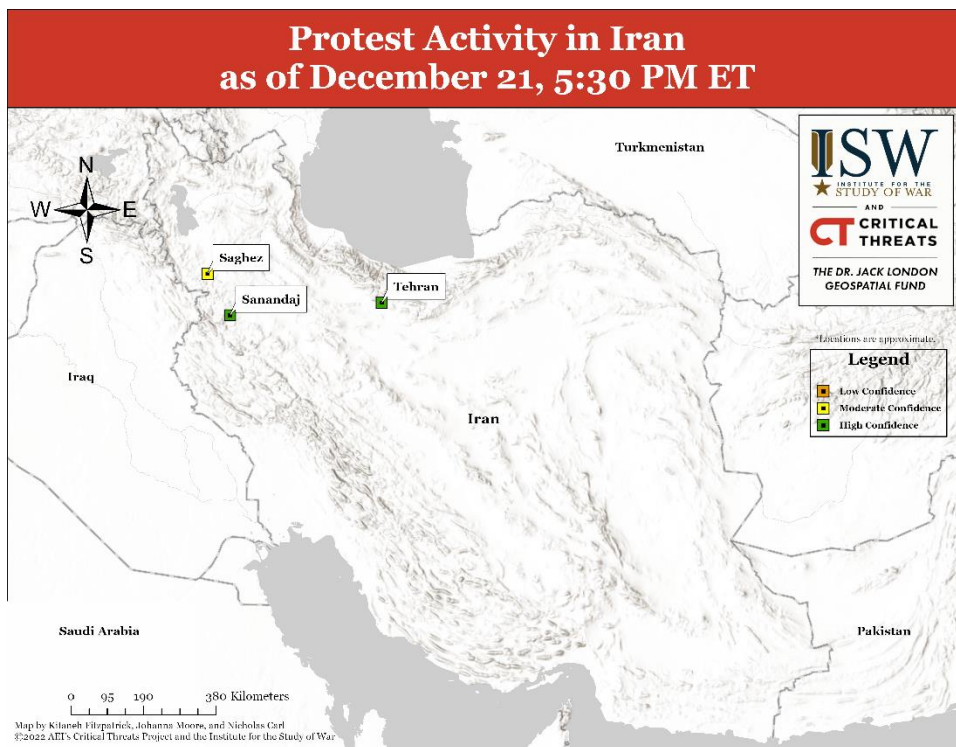
Tehran City, Tehran Province¹³

- Size: Small
- Area: Enghelab Street
- Notes: Some footage shows protesters participating in a silent march, other footage shows protesters chanting.

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

Tehran City, Tehran Province¹⁴

- Size: Undetermined
- Area: Amaniyeh



Some protest coordinators and organizations announced plans to regularly publish printed bulletins on December 21. The Karaj Neighborhood Youth stated that it has begun distributing evening newsletters relevant to the protests.¹⁵ The Karaj group encouraged its readers to distribute the newsletters to trusted family and friends. These publications include updates on arrests, calls for protests, strikes, and Western reporting. The Hundred Neighborhood group similarly shared plans to publish a weekly publication. It is unclear in what format this weekly will be.¹⁶

The Interior Ministry may be shuffling around provincial governors to improve internal security. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi appointed Mohammad Tabib Sahraei as Kermanshah provincial governor on December 21.¹⁷ IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim News Agency* described Sahraei as an academic and Kermanshah native. Sahraei replaced Bahmad Amiri Moghaddam—an IRGC brigadier general—whom Raisi appointed in January 2022. Vahidi told reports that the Raisi administration may also replace more governors.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian met with Saudi Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal bin Farhan, among others, on the sidelines of the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership in Amman on December 21.¹⁸ Abdollahian expressed readiness to reestablish diplomatic relations.

¹ <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2824683>

² <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-13>

³ <https://www.sharghdaily.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-6/861020-%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D8%B1%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF; www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/08/09/2796894>

⁴ <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-9/588356-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%AE%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86>

⁵ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-19>

⁶ <https://president.ir/fa/141562>; <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/707833>

⁷ <https://www.irna.ir/news/84915088>

⁸ <https://www.irna.ir/news/84977173>

⁹ https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1605635769032376363?s=20&t=hcZAgjsjm9TinZfldcbA53g

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605596977739100160?s=20&t=cTlxMg1GULplNuhAIOnkEg> ;

<https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605644257150341124?s=20&t=cTlxMg1GULplNuhAIOnkEg> ;

<https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1605675703441186820?s=20&t=cTlxMg1GULplNuhAIOnkEg>

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1605649397978636288?s=20&t=l11BW0Mcclt7hYjTksdWlQ> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1605664624589737984?s=20&t=l11BW0Mcclt7hYjTksdWlQ>

¹² <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1605597355985833984?s=20&t=4QGCKhqmDcGI6SI4RN5r2g> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605590018017202178?s=20&t=1aM4f0LmB-ASNBGCr2Y8Ng> ;

<https://twitter.com/FattahiFarzad/status/1605619877925883904?s=20&t=1aM4f0LmB-ASNBGCr2Y8Ng>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605636925125165099?s=20&t=AFiRg7Vlvp7pRNELm7H5lw> ;

https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605677833472200704?s=20&t=cl5_Z-TctgRcewrsQSTczg ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605678548684922880?s=20&t=l11BW0Mcclt7hYjTksdWlQ>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605634811992866818?s=20&t=4QGCKhqmDcGI6SI4RN5r2g> ;

<https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1605629197778550794?s=20&t=Rgfmm4LgW1UwxS4mK2vulQ>

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- ¹⁵ https://twitter.com/javanane_k/status/1605474771407319041?s=20&t=alp_QhdQNfzvaPKXr3a_g;
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605560549093376001?s=20&t=4QGCKhqmDcGI6SI4RN5r2g
- ¹⁶ https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605184484068007936?s=20&t=4QGCKhqmDcGI6SI4RN5r2g
- ¹⁷ [www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2824828](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2824828)
- ¹⁸ [www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2825093](http://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/30/2825093)