



Iran Crisis Update, January 18, 2023

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Protest activity in Iran may increase on January 19-20. Protest organizers have issued widespread calls for demonstrations on these days.¹ These organizers have failed occasionally to generate significant increases in protest activity in response to their calls, possibly due to discordant messaging and internal fissures within the protest movement.² But protest groups are extraordinarily unified in their calls for demonstrations on January 19-20. Most major protest groups and umbrella organizations have urged citizens to take to the streets on these days.

The regime could use planned internet disruptions to suppress the upcoming demonstrations. Senior Iranian officials have discussed in recent weeks implementing a countrywide internet shutdown for several hours on January 19-20 to prevent cheating on scheduled university entrance exams.³ Information and Communications Technology Minister Isah Zareh Pour insisted on January 18 that the regime would only impose localized disruptions in “exam areas,” although it is far from clear whether the regime possesses such technical capabilities.⁴

Iran faces worsening domestic conditions amid the ongoing natural gas shortage throughout the country. These gas shortages are continuing throughout Golestan, North Khorasan, and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces.⁵ Social media users have documented long lines at gasoline stations in cities in Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, and Esfahan provinces.⁶ Other users have reported the deaths of thousands of livestock in Khorasan Razavi and Ardabil provinces due to increased air pollution caused by burning non-gasoline alternatives.⁷ Moinuddin Saeedi— a parliamentarian representing Sistan and Baluchistan Province —described gas as a “luxury commodity” within the province.⁸

The ongoing gas disruptions—and additional reports of water shortages in Esfahan and Khorasan Razavi provinces—could reinvigorate anti-regime protests in the coming weeks.⁹ Interior Minister Vahidi denied on January 18 that the regime has issued gas cuts, contradicting an Alborz province official’s statement on the same day announcing gas-preserving bank closures.¹⁰ Contradictory and tone-deaf messaging from Iranian officials—some of whom previously boasted about Iran’s large natural gasoline supplies—may inflame the protests planned for January 19 and 20.¹¹

Key Takeaways

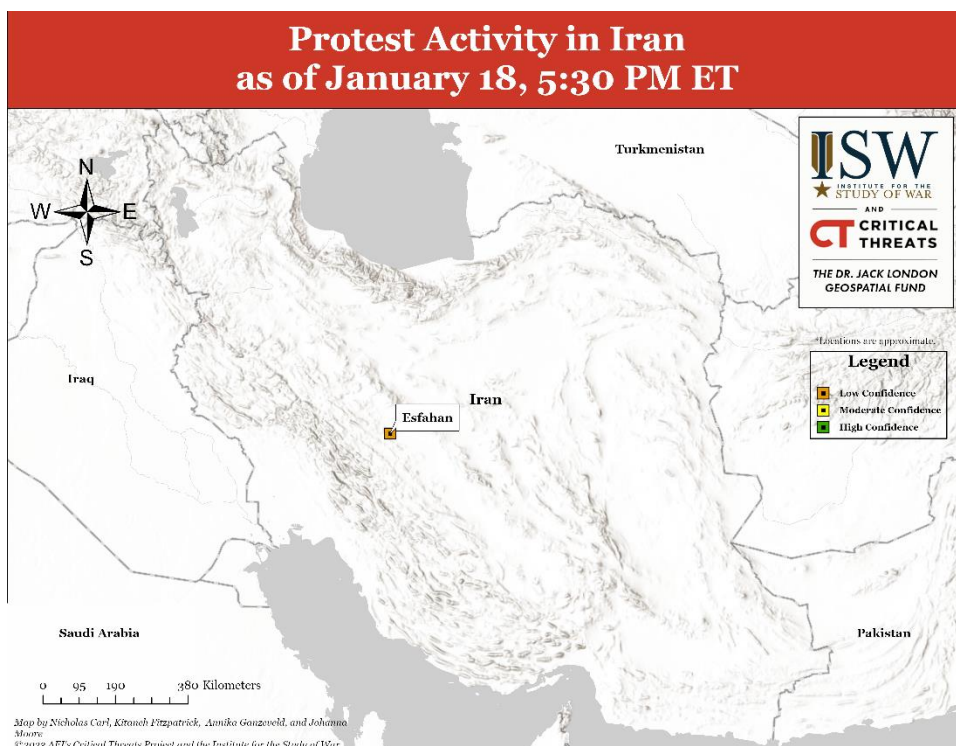
- **Protest activity in Iran may increase on January 19-20.**
- **Iran faces worsening domestic conditions amid the ongoing natural gas shortage throughout the country.**
- **At least one protest occurred in one city across one province.**
- **The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth tweeted declaring its support for and loyalty to Reza Pahlavi.**
- **Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi denied that Ali Shamkhani will leave his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary.**
- **Social media users reported a heightened security presence throughout Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**
- **The European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the EU to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization.**
- **Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al Jubier made a blanket statement calling on Iran to end its nuclear program during an interview with CNBC.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on January 18. CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province¹²

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Farmers
- **Notes:** Demonstration against the regime's mismanagement of water. Protest may have occurred on January 16, when a similar protest took place.



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

January 19-20¹³

- Type: Demonstrations
- Location: Countrywide

The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth declared its support for and loyalty to Reza Pahlavi on January 18.¹⁴ The Mashhad group described Pahlavi as the “coalition leader of the new revolution of the Iranian nation.” The Mashhad group is affiliated with the Iranian Neighborhood United Front, which also announced its support for Pahlavi on January 17.¹⁵ CTP has not observed significant support for the Pahlavi family in its coverage of the protests thus far.

Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi denied that Ali Shamkhani will leave his position as Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) secretary on January 18.¹⁶ Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib separately defended Shamkhani from unspecified political attacks on January 17, as CTP previously reported.¹⁷

Social media users reported a heightened security presence throughout Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on January 18. Footage circulated on social media shows IRGC and LEC checkpoints severely restricting movement into the city.¹⁸ It is unclear whether these IRGC personnel belong to the IRGC Ground Forces or Basij Organization. Other reports claimed that regime authorities have arrested dozens of Zahedan residents in recent days.¹⁹ Reports of increased security throughout Zahedan precede calls for countrywide protests on January 19-20 and prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid’s weekly Friday prayer sermon.²⁰

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with officials from the Islamic Propaganda Organization (IPO) on January 18.²¹ The IPO is a cultural and religious body that reports directly to the supreme leader and is responsible for promoting regime ideology and narratives. Khamenei ordered the IPO to “double its work and efforts.” President Ebrahim Raisi similarly discussed efforts toward achieving “cultural transformation” in a meeting of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council on January 17.²²

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

The European Parliament passed a resolution calling on the EU to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization on January 18.²³ The European Parliament condemned the IRGC’s repression of protesters, human rights violations, and drone sales to Russia. This resolution is non-binding for EU member states. Several Iranian protests groups celebrated the resolution as a victory for the protest movement.²⁴

Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al Jubier made a blanket statement calling on Iran to end its nuclear program during an interview with CNBC on December 18.²⁵ CNBC journalist Hadley Gamble asked al Jubier if Saudi Arabia was less safe with Iran enriching uranium to 60 percent. Al Jubier inaccurately argued that Iran is obligated to give up its nuclear program in accordance with guidelines of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The Non-Proliferation Treaty restricts Iran from developing a nuclear weapon but not from having a peaceful nuclear energy program, although it does require Iran to cooperate with the IAEA, which Tehran has not fully done.²⁶

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- ¹ https://twitter.com/UYI_fa/status/1615597475061981185; https://twitter.com/bmahalat_ir/status/1615790591396438016;
<https://www.instagram.com/p/CndZm60OLQu/>
- ² <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-7-2023>
- ³ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-4-2023>
- ⁴ <https://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011028000401>
- ⁵ <https://www dot radiofarda dot com/a/32228989.html>
- ⁶ <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1615799528954658816?s=20&t=J72WPXOSpgQaGVVk-XzDCA> ;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615794809465085952> ;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615823843699920896?s=20&t=J72WPXOSpgQaGVVk-XzDCA>
- ⁷ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615811106294857728?s=20&t=J72WPXOSpgQaGVVk-XzDCA> ;
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1615810671358185478?s=20&t=J72WPXOSpgQaGVVk-XzDCA>
- ⁸ <https://t dot co/FNDY4uov6M>
- ⁹ <https://t.co/LffXvjUKrU> ; <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1615696243526615040?s=20&t=jW6fRmSKcwBgIxnREDPteg> ;
<https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1615728850536902661?s=20&t=LNpcB-7ODdImvtBuNsd9qQ>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401102819412/%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%AA%DA%A9%D8%B0%DB%8C%D8%A8-%D8%B4%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%BA%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C> ;
<https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/819856/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%DA%A9%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B2-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87%D9%85%D9%86-%D9%BE%D9%86%D8%AC%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B7%DB%8C%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA> ;
- ¹¹ <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-gas-europe-winter/32228836.html>
- ¹² <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1615696243526615040?s=20&t=jW6fRmSKcwBgIxnREDPteg> ;
<https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1615728850536902661?s=20&t=LNpcB-7ODdImvtBuNsd9qQ>
- ¹³ https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy55H_foM3VXhy__9xNA
- ¹⁴ https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1615626031372840960
- ¹⁵ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-17>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401102819412>
- ¹⁷ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-17>
- ¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/161567827273775616?s=20&t=zCS-g7wTtR9WhY8wGlbSbg> ;
<https://twitter.com/balo0chgirl/status/1615793116908294148> ;
<https://twitter.com/Jangalkhoos/status/1615808736341200922?s=20&t=zCS-g7wTtR9WhY8wGlbSbg>
- ¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1615772301315768326?s=20&t=zCS-g7wTtR9WhY8wGlbSbg>
- ²⁰ https://twitter.com/Javanan_gilan/status/1613173107316908032?s=20&t=oZsy55H_foM3VXhy__9xNA
- ²¹ <http://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26250>
- ²² <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-17>
- ²³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0009_EN.pdf; <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-lawmakers-want-irans-guards-branded-terrorist-group-2023-01-18/>
- ²⁴ https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1614725793380458497?s=20&t=yeR5N_LJF8JCW5OSlzl9dw
https://twitter.com/javanane_hmd/status/1615719399670927368?s=20&t=yeR5N_LJF8JCW5OSlzl9dw
https://twitter.com/ic_UYI/status/1615701734856478721?s=20&t=yeR5N_LJF8JCW5OSlzl9dw
- ²⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/18/iran-has-an-obligation-to-give-up-its-nuclear-program-saudi-minister.html>
- ²⁶ <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/>