



## **Iran Crisis Update, January 26, 2023**

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**Ongoing disruptions to Iran’s energy supplies may be generating severe air pollution.** Semi-official ISNA reported on January 26 that the city of Tehran has introduced “emergency ambulance buses” to transport citizens affected by dangerous air pollution levels.<sup>1</sup> Iranian media outlets have also reported school closures in various cities due to air pollution in recent days.<sup>2</sup> This pollution may be caused by power plants burning low grade fuel due to shortages of more refined product.

Iran’s ongoing energy crisis could both impede and trigger further protests. An usually harsh winter and high air pollution levels may explain why protest turnout has decreased in recent weeks. This crisis may increase frustration among the population and precipitate new unrest, on the other hand. The first known protest inspired by natural gas shortages during the Mahsa Amini protest wave occurred in Torbat-e Jam on January 16, as CTP previously reported.<sup>3</sup> Petrochemical workers across Iran have also protested against poor living conditions in recent days.<sup>4</sup> The regime’s inability to resolve this crisis may drive frustrated citizens to challenge the regime despite harsh natural conditions.

Iranian officials had hoped to benefit from a harsh winter in Europe and a mild winter in Iran, but have instead suffered from the inverse weather pattern.<sup>5</sup>

**The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) is apparently trying to cooperate with foreign governments and possibly the Iranian diaspora to internationally isolate the regime.** The INYU released a statement on January 26 emphasizing the importance of external outreach and using legal frameworks to present the crimes of the regime to the international community.<sup>6</sup> The INYU also claimed that the protest movement has had several achievements internationally, such as facilitating the UN removal of Iran from the Commission on the Status of Women, the European Parliament call on the EU to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, and the US de-prioritization of the nuclear talks. The INYU previously described

the protest movement as entering a new period characterized by external outreach, insurgent activity, and greater centralization and cohesion within the movement, as CTP previously reported on January 13.<sup>7</sup>

Such external outreach could be an effective means of generating support for the Iranian people against the regime within the international community. Ukrainian citizens have played a similarly essential role in defending their country and establishing broad international support through person-to-person engagement since the Russian invasion. Ukrainians have used decentralized and informal networks to help drive and maintain international support for Ukraine.

**Security forces have reportedly maintained their heightened presence around Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, likely in preparation for the weekly Friday sermon from prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid.**<sup>8</sup> Abdol Hamid criticized the “intensification of the security atmosphere” on January 25, as CTP previously reported.<sup>9</sup> Some social media accounts reported military helicopters flying above some smaller towns outside Iranshahr, Sistan and Baluchistan Province as well.<sup>10</sup> It is unclear in what direction the helicopters were headed.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Ongoing disruptions to Iranian energy supplies may be generating severe air pollution.**
- **The Iranian Neighborhood Youth Union (INYU) is apparently trying to cooperate with foreign governments and possibly the Iranian diaspora to internationally isolate the regime.**
- **Security forces have reportedly maintained their heightened presence around Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province, likely in preparation for the weekly Friday sermon from prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid.**
- **At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces.**
- **Shiraz City Governor Lotfollah Shibani announced January 26 that local merchants are required to deny services to unveiled women.**
- **Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi blamed the Mahsa Amini protest movement on a cultural schism between Iranian youth and the values of the Islamic Republic on January 26.**
- **Iranian media circulated a survey demonstrating limited domestic engagement with regime-endorsed social media outlets on January 26.**
- **Protesters gathered outside the Iraqi Central Bank in Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, and Diwaniyah to protest ongoing economic crises.**

### **Anti-Regime Protests**

**At least two protests occurred in two cities across two provinces on January 26.** CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

#### **Izeh, Khuzestan Province<sup>11</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mourners
- **Notes:** 40-day commemoration ceremony

CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

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

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Workers
- Notes: Gathered in front of the Education Ministry to demonstrate against low wages

### **Protest coordinators and organizations circulated calls for demonstrations and/or strikes on the following days:**

#### **January 27<sup>13</sup>**

- Type: Demonstrations in solidarity with oppressed Iranian Baloch.
- Location: Countrywide

**Shiraz City Governor Lotfollah Shibani announced January 26 that local merchants are required to deny services to unveiled women.** He warned that the regime recently closed a dentist's office due to the presence of unveiled staff and patients. Shibani's announcement reflects Iranian authorities' efforts to resume mass enforcement of the mandatory hijab law. The regime has refocused on enforcing widespread adherence to the hijab requirement in recent weeks after briefly and informally relaxing such restrictions in late 2022, as CTP previously assessed.<sup>14</sup>

**Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi blamed the Mahsa Amini protest movement on a cultural schism between Iranian youth and the values of the Islamic Republic on January 26.** Vahidi claimed that arrested protesters exhibited a "disconnection from spirituality and God" and blamed Western media outlets for exacerbating this disconnection. Vahidi additionally stressed the importance of prayer in safeguarding the regime, quoting Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.<sup>15</sup> Iranian leadership has endorsed greater indoctrination efforts to resolve public frustrations within the past several weeks, as CTP has previously reported.<sup>16</sup>

**Iranian media circulated a survey demonstrating limited domestic engagement with regime-endorsed social media outlets on January 26.** Only one percent of survey respondents stated that they had replaced foreign-based messaging applications with indigenously-made platforms.<sup>17</sup> Regime authorities have long sought to replace Western social media platforms with Iranian alternatives to crack down on domestic dissent and expand cyber monitoring of the Iranian population.

### **Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments**

**Protesters gathered outside the Iraqi Central Bank in Baghdad, Basra, Dhi Qar, and Diwaniyah to protest ongoing economic crises.**<sup>18</sup> Protesters demanded a stabilized exchange rate between the Iraqi dinar and US dollar, banking system reforms, and oversight measures to prevent corruption.<sup>19</sup> The Iraqi Dinar exchange rate increased to 1,460.50 IQD to 1 USD on January 26 following several weeks of fluctuation.<sup>20</sup> Iran-backed proxies and pro-Iranian media have attributed the currency devaluation to sanctions the US Treasury placed on several private Iraqi banks that have restricted dollars flowing into Iran.<sup>21</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> <https://www.dot.ir/news/1401110604632/%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%88-%D8%A7%DA%AF%D8%B1-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B3-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%DA%98%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.dot.irna.ir/news/85005527/%D8%AA%D8%BA%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B7%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D9%82%D8%B2%D9%88%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%BE%DB%8C-%D8%A2%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-16-2023>
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-23-2023>
- <sup>5</sup> <https://observers.france24.com/en/middle-east/20230125-iran-gas-shortage-electricity-blackouts-power-harsh-winter> ; <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Iran-Offers-To-Help-Europe-With-Oil-And-Gas-Deliveries-This-Winter.html>
- <sup>6</sup> [https://t.me/fa\\_UYI/81](https://t.me/fa_UYI/81)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-13-2023>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/150otasvir/status/1618625525622386689?s=20&t=jcYRZVCmMpLb1LYHpwpFQ> ; <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618634746908807168?cxt=HHwWgMDU6b7uxfYsAAAA>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-25-2023>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618636501755236358?cxt=HHwWjMDQuDHUxvYsAAAA> ; <https://twitter.com/haalvsh/status/1618592756091486208?s=20&t=jcYRZVCmMpLb1LYHpwpFQ> ; [https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618525177134084098?s=20&t=QI7w8PLwKE\\_LV425c4iW1w](https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618525177134084098?s=20&t=QI7w8PLwKE_LV425c4iW1w)
- <sup>11</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1618615530155577345?cxt=HHwWgsDU7faPvfYsAAAA> ; [https://twitter.com/javanan\\_Kh/status/1618606487424897025?s=20&t=BVILc3g1ejvs35U38kR7Uw](https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1618606487424897025?s=20&t=BVILc3g1ejvs35U38kR7Uw) ; <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1618627204195450888?s=20&t=BVILc3g1ejvs35U38kR7Uw>
- <sup>12</sup> [https://twitter.com/hra\\_news/status/1618596239527841792?s=20&t=JZ9xKobAnlPYGNp5ariRKA](https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1618596239527841792?s=20&t=JZ9xKobAnlPYGNp5ariRKA)
- <sup>13</sup> [https://twitter.com/javanane\\_zhnd/status/1618202946277371910?s=20&t=YZJWokykB5JooIwz\\_rKYvA](https://twitter.com/javanane_zhnd/status/1618202946277371910?s=20&t=YZJWokykB5JooIwz_rKYvA)
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-january-10-2023>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://diyarmirza.ir/1401/11/%D9%85%D8%B4%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D8%B4%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AE%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%8C-%D9%82%D8%B7/>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-31>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://t.co/SYLSirjQB3>
- <sup>18</sup> [https://twitter.com/Tammuz\\_Intel/status/1618163718889824262](https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1618163718889824262)
- <sup>19</sup> [https://www\(dot\).alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%80%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1](https://www(dot).alaraby.co.uk/economy/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%80%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%83%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1)
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-729103> ; <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/money-transfer/currency-converter/iqd-usd/>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/a/iraqi-pm-replaces-central-bank-governor-over-currency-drop/6929845.html>