

Iran Update, March 6, 2023

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The Iran Updates are produced by the Critical Threats Project (CTP) at the American Enterprise Institute with support from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). To receive Iran Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).

This special edition of our daily Iran update continues our focus on the chemical attacks in Iran. It includes maps and characterizations of protests in Iran on March 4, 5, and 6, and in Iraq on March 5.

- Over 110 separate student poisonings occurred throughout Iran on March 6.¹ Some have framed these incidents as “mass hysteria.” They are not. Someone is deliberately poisoning Iranian children—we are just not sure who.
- Students—primarily Iranian schoolgirls—have reported hundreds of chemical attacks in recent weeks, especially since March 1.² Their symptoms include headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, and numbness.³
- Some have compared these recent reports to previous instances of “mass sociogenic illnesses,” in which presenting symptoms are caused by anxiety rather than—in this case—chemical attacks.⁴
- Mass sociogenic illness is not completely implausible in Iran. The Islamic Republic has, indeed, stoked fear and even terror through its brutal treatment of Iranian girls, especially those who participated in the Mahsa Amini protests.⁵
- No one wants to believe that anyone would deliberately poison schoolgirls, but dismissing the countrywide, months-long chemical attacks as psychogenic will not do.
- Regime officials *themselves* have acknowledged that some form of intentional poisoning is occurring in Iranian schools, although they deny the extent and scale of these reports.⁶
- Reports of chemical attacks have now expanded beyond a single demographic—Iranian schoolgirls—to schoolboys and teachers at targeted schools.⁷
- Iranian officials today stated that tested samples consisted of multiple chemicals, consistent with reports from a Tehran doctor treating poisoned patients in the ICU.⁸
- Iranian media and social media reports suggest that several individuals have required ICU treatment after the poisonings, too, and some hospitals are crowded with victims.⁹
- The regime response to mass poisonings in Iranian schools is also unlike what any civilized country’s reaction to countrywide reported attacks on some of the most vulnerable segments of its population would be.
- The Iranian police only announced that they would deploy security personnel to protect schools today—three months after the first reported poisoning occurred.¹⁰

- Security personnel and school officials behaving normally would not violently handle distressed citizens following an attack as some Iranian officials did.¹¹
- Some students reported being told to immediately return to class following a reported attack—an almost unimaginable response in most countries.¹²
- It is unclear who is perpetrating these chemical attacks on Iranian children. But someone is making them happen. And regime officials have been behaving oddly.
- Iranian girls are not hysterics. Iranian officials are not all monsters. Something odd and awful is happening in Iran. We hope to understand it soon.
- And, of course, we hope that it will stop at once.

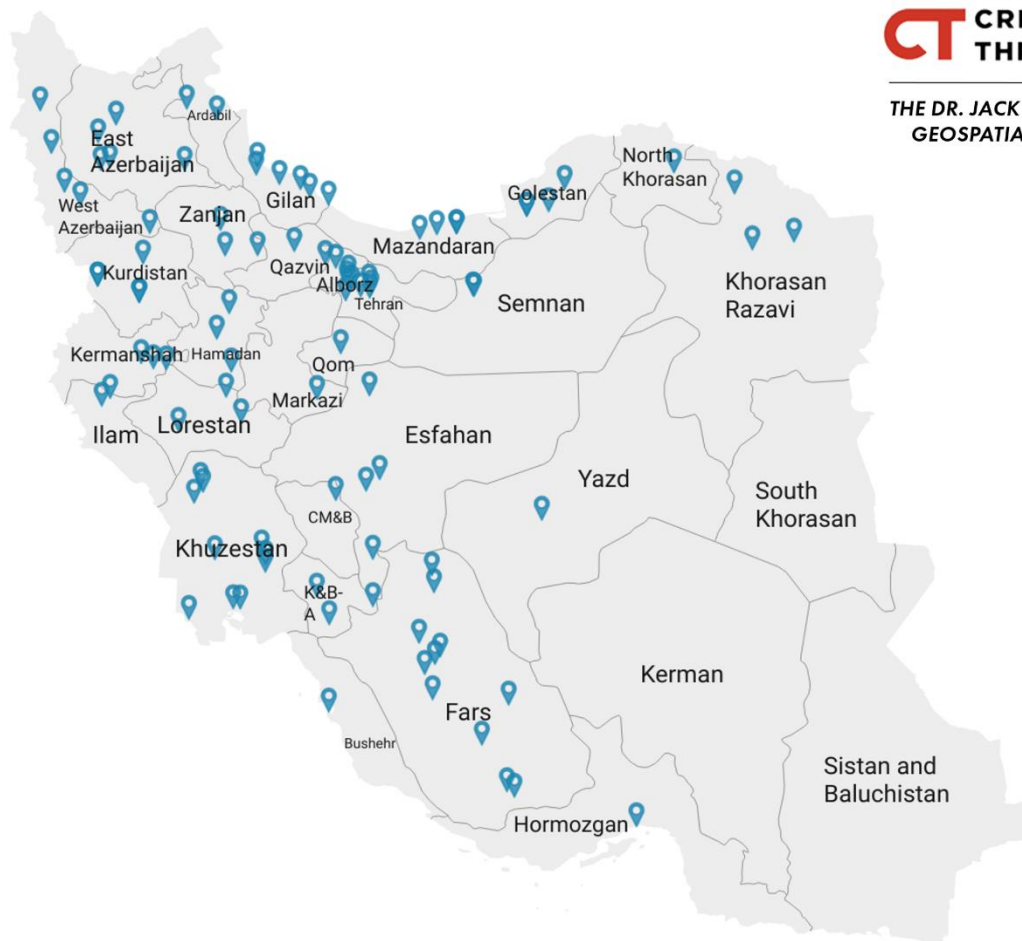
Iran Student Poisonings by Province - March 6



Map: AEI's Critical Threats Project • Source: 1500tasvir • Created with Datawrapper

Student Poisonings Sweep Iran

November 2022 - March 6, 2023



AEI's Critical Threats Project | Source: Author's Research | Created with Datawrapper

Protests erupted in Iraq against the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF)—an umbrella organization for Iran-aligned political parties—on March 5. CTP recorded demonstrations in at least five cities in response to SCF-backed electoral reform legislation that the Iraqi parliament is considering. Independent and minority Iraqi political parties failed to remove the legislation from the parliamentary agenda on March 4.¹³ Ratifying this legislation would reverse several previous reforms meant to promote proportional representation in parliament that Iraq adopted after the Tishreen protests in late 2019.¹⁴ The State of Law party—the party of former Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki—would likely expand its political influence due to these proposed reforms at the expense of some independent and minority parties. Protest organizers called on citizens to burn down signs associated with the SCF along main roads and

warned that protests will continue if the election law passes in the Iraqi parliament.¹⁵ CTP has characterized each reported protest at the bottom of this update.

At least five protests occurred in five cities across five provinces in Iraq on March 5. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Hamza, Babil Province¹⁶

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fires in the street; released statement against the SCF
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Sadr City, Baghdad Province¹⁷

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fire to tires in the street blocking traffic; released statement against the SCF

Kufa, Najaf Province¹⁸

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Blocked traffic

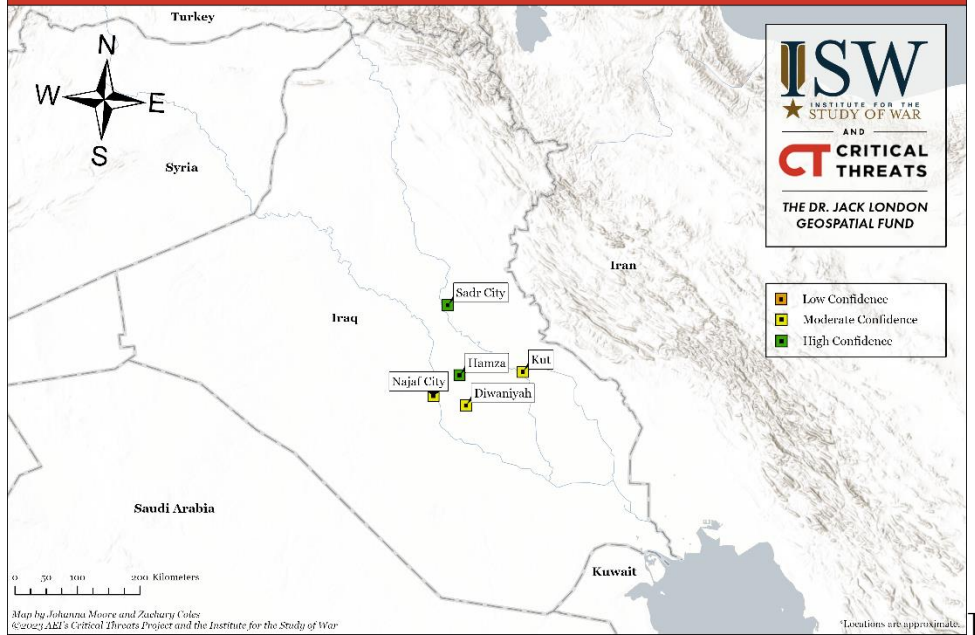
Diwaniyah, al Qadisiyah¹⁹

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fires in the street blocking traffic

Kut, Wasit Province²⁰

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Set fires in the street

Protest Activity in Iraq March 5, 2023



Key Takeaways

- **Over 110 separate student poisonings occurred throughout Iran on March 6. Some have framed these incidents as “mass hysteria.” They are not. Someone is deliberately poisoning Iranian children—we are just not sure who.**
- **Protests erupted in Iraq against the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF)--an umbrella organization for Iran-aligned political parties.**
- **At least nine protests occurred on March 4, at least five protests occurred on March 5, and at least nine protests occurred on March 6.**

Internal Security and Protest Activity

At least nine protests occurred in four cities across four provinces on March 4. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province²¹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Spraying acid and poisoning, both are a crime.”

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province²²

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings

Tehran City, Tehran Province²³

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 1
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Death to the child-killing government.”

Tehran City, Tehran Province²⁴

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 5
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings
- **Notes:** Protesters chanted “Our enemy is right here, it is a lie, them saying it is America” and “Our children are our red line.”

Tehran City, Tehran Province²⁵

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 8
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings

Tehran City, Tehran Province¹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Mothers protesting student poisonings

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

Yasouj, Kohgilouyeh and Boyer Ahmad Province²⁶

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Municipal workers

Tehran City, Tehran Province²⁷

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Government workers

Tehran City, Tehran Province²⁸

- **Size:** Small
- **Area:** District 4
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting student poisonings

¹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631954760805883905?cxt=HHwWgoC99auN76UtAAAA> ; https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632039734787686402?cxt=HHwWhIC-tb3flaYtAAAA ; https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632000920048238596?cxt=HHwWilCwiZWMhKYtAAAA



At least five protests occurred in five cities across three provinces on March 5. CTP assesses with moderate confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province²⁹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

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

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province³⁰

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoush, Khuzestan Province³¹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Shoushtar, Khuzestan Province³²

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

Tehran City, Tehran Province³³

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Disabled individuals



At least nine protests occurred in nine cities across eight provinces on March 6. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Ilam City, Ilam Province³⁴

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province³⁵

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province³⁶

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Mahabad, West Azerbaijan³⁷

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Individuals protesting the regime and student poisonings

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

Esfahan City, Esfahan Province³⁸

- **Size:** Small

- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Mashhad, Razavi Khorasan Province³⁹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province⁴⁰

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Oroumīyeh, West Azerbaijan Province⁴¹

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers

Yazd City, Yazd Province⁴²

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retired telecommunications workers



Iranian state media reported on March 3 that reformist leader Mir Hossein Mousavi has been hospitalized with flu-like symptoms.⁴³ Mousavi previously issued a statement on February 4 calling for a referendum on the Islamic Republic and the drafting of a new constitution if that referendum fails, as CTP previously reported.⁴⁴ The regime has kept Mousavi under house arrest since shortly after the Green Movement ended.

Nuclear Program

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi traveled to Iran and met with senior officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi and Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Director Mohammad Eslami, on March 3-4.⁴⁵ Grossi discussed technical cooperation to reinstall IAEA monitoring equipment at Iranian nuclear sites, among other matters, in his meetings.⁴⁶

External Security and Military Affairs

Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Gharaei Ashtiani met with Syrian Defense Minister Lieutenant General Ali Mahmoud Abbas in Tehran on March 5.⁴⁷ Ashtiani may have discussed the potential sale of air defense equipment to Syria during the meeting. The Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry is responsible for managing Iran's defense industries and arms sales and acquisitions. Ashtiani previously met with the Syrian Air Defense Forces Commander Salahuddin Kaser al Ghanem in Tehran to discuss the potential sale of air defense equipment on February 22, as CTP previously reported.⁴⁸

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- ¹ <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632674669516947458>
- ² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64797957>
- ³ <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121410559>; <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121309017>
- ⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/06/what-do-we-know-suspected-poisonings-schoolgirls-iran>
- ⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-schoolgirl-killed-refusing-song-ayatollah/32090116.html>
- ⁶ <https://www.leader dot ir/fa/content/26361>; <http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/132895>; <https://www.isna dot ir/news/1401121511478>; <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/717912>; <https://t.co/g6kclHx4RZ>
- ⁷ <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632723699748020224?s=20>;
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<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632703800480874498?s=20>
- ⁸ <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1632108736406855686?s=20>; <https://t.co/g6kclHx4RZ>
- ⁹ <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632753907620356096?s=20>;
https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1631987009047736320?s=20
- ¹⁰ <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/577222>
- ¹¹ https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632016020121571329
- ¹² <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1630966434435145728>;
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<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1632755431960395776?s=20>

¹³ <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%AA%D8%AA%D9%81%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B6-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%BA%D9%88>

¹⁴ <https://shafaq dot com/ar/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9/%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%84%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%82-%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/IraqiQahwa/status/1632396756762673155>;
<https://twitter.com/salamAJ5/status/1632332958223720450>; https://t.me/One_Najaff/24091

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/IraqiQahwa/status/1632442085843386368>
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<https://twitter.com/thaer350/status/1632463048949612544>

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/Tammuz Intel/status/1632451901231968261>
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<https://twitter.com/Furat 97/status/1632462676847673345>
<https://twitter.com/AbdallahAlbayat/status/1632454946791518208>

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/Tammuz Intel/status/1632434991450734593>

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- ¹⁹ https://twitter.com/Tammuz_Intel/status/1632467694736875520
- ²⁰ https://twitter.com/Scope_iq/status/1632441390696132610
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- ²¹ https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631937312778067968?cxt=HHwWglC9_d2V56UtAAAA ;
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- ²² <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631967042101231618?cxt=HHwWhIC22ZrY9KUtAAAA> ;
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- ²³ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631937130703233025?cxt=HHwWgoCxtZGL56UtAAAA> ;
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- ²⁵ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1631953516443967489?cxt=HHwWgoC92fTE7qUtAAAA> ;
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- ²⁶ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632055575725981696?cxt=HHwWglC-zcX5nKYtAAAA> ;
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- ²⁷ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632055347434102785?cxt=HHwWgoCx2aDsnKYtAAAA> ;
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- ²⁸ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632007620671287298?cxt=HHwWhMC9zZiSh6YtAAAA>
- ²⁹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632383770350219265?cxt=HHwWgsCzjf6YsqctAAAA> ;
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- ³¹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632325879404560386?cxt=HHwWhICw-aTvl6ctAAAA> ;
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- ³² <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632496557546258432?cxt=HHwWglC-mYi-5actAAAA> ;
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- ³³ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632418256760741892?cxt=HHwWiICx8a3wwactAAAA> ;
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- ³⁴ https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1632724685568851970?cxt=HHwWhIC-te6czagtAAAA ;
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- ³⁵ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632741975932776449?cxt=HHwWgsC91aWL1agtAAAA> ;
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- <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632664439404019718?cxt=HHwWjIC2wYnqsagtAAAA>
- ³⁷ <https://twitter.com/indypersian/status/1632810276331433984> ;
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- ³⁸ https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632675346003767296?cxt=HHwWgMC9gfbktqgtAAAA ;
- <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632747740542255106?cxt=HHwWhIC-reva16gtAAAA>
- ³⁹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632663818110107648?cxt=HHwWgICwwfTFsagtAAAA> ;
- https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632671024733888516?cxt=HHwWilCxbLptKgtAAAA
- ⁴⁰ https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632695090098450434?cxt=HHwWhMC9_Zbiv6gtAAAA
- ⁴¹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632748896093888513?cxt=HHwWgoCz8Yye2KgtAAAA> ;
- https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632691173025361921?cxt=HHwWgsC9wZb-vagtAAAA
- ⁴² <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1632750074085232640?cxt=HHwWgMC-zdXi2KgtAAAA> ;
- https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1632695856804626434?cxt=HHwWhIC8seeOwKgtAAAA
- ⁴³ <https://www.irna dot ir/news/85046506>
- ⁴⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-6-2023>
- ⁴⁵ www.president dot ir/fa/142786; <https://www.mehrnews dot com/news/5724059>
- ⁴⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-concessions-iaea-largely-hinge-future-talks-grossi-says-2023-03-06/>
- ⁴⁷ <http://www.nournews dot ir/fa/news/132926>
- ⁴⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-updates-february-2023>