



Iran Crisis Update, January 29, 2023

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CTP is publishing an abbreviated Iran update today, January 29. This update focuses on the reported Israeli drone attack on an Iranian military munitions factory and other recently reported explosions and fires throughout Iran. CTP will resume publishing our regular Iran updates on January 30.

Israel conducted a kamikaze drone attack on a military munitions factory near Esfahan City, Esfahan Province on January 28, according to Western media reports.¹ Israeli agents used at least three explosive-laden quadcopters in the attack, suggesting that they launched the strike from inside Iran rather than a neighboring state because of the range of heavily laden quadcopters.² The Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ministry reportedly uses the targeted facility to produce ballistic missiles and drones.³ Unidentified sources told Western and Israeli journalists that the strike was "specific, surgical, and successful" and "a tremendous success."⁴ The Iranian defense ministry dismissed these reports in a public statement, claiming that Iranian air defenses largely prevented the attack and that the drones caused only minimal damage to the roof of the facility.⁵

Iranian officials have not blamed any specific actor for the drone attack at the time of this writing. They may avoid explicitly blaming Israel or any other actor until they have decided how they will respond. Iranian leaders could order proxy attacks on US positions in Iraq and Syria or into Israel in the coming weeks in retaliation. This attack will also likely further increase Iranian concerns over the alleged presence of Israeli intelligence services in Azerbaijan and Iraqi Kurdistan.

This attack underscores the extent to which Israeli intelligence services have penetrated the Iranian security sphere. This infiltration has become increasingly obvious and ostentatious in recent years. Mossad has likely conducted several high-profile operations in Iran in recent years, including:⁶

- Raiding a covert archive in Tehran and seizing sensitive documents tied to the pre-2003 Iranian nuclear weapons program in January 2018.
- Assassinating senior Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri Zadeh outside Tehran City in November 2020.
- Sabotaging the Natanz Fuel Enrichment Plant in July 2020 and again in April 2021.
- Conducting a kamikaze drone attack on a centrifuge manufacturing facility in Karaj in June 2021.

Social media accounts reported additional explosions and fires throughout Iran around the same time as the drone strike, although these events were likely coincidental accidents or misreported. Social media users reported an explosion in Khoy, West Azerbaijan Province and an extensive fire at a motor fuel facility in Azar Shahr, East Azerbaijan Province.⁷ Both occurred shortly after a nearby 5.9-magnitude earthquake in northwestern Iran, which very likely caused these events.⁸ Social media users also reported Iranian fighter jets flying above Tehran and the sounds of explosions in Karaj, Alborz Province; Dezfoul, Khuzestan Province; and Hamedan City, Hamedan Province in the hours following the drone attack.⁹ There is no evidence that any explosions occurred or images of any damage that might have been caused by explosions. These reports more likely suggest that the regime scrambled fighter jets from airfields that are close to these locations in response to the drone strike, and residents misreported the sounds of military aircraft as explosions.



Key Takeaways from January 28 and 29. CTP will report on these items fully in our next regular update on January 30.

- CTP recorded no protest activity in Iran on January 28. At least one protest may have occurred in Iran—specifically in Tehran City—on January 29.¹⁰
- Law Enforcement Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Radan continued to reshuffle senior officers in the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) on January 29. Radan appointed new officers to the positions of LEC Intelligence Organization chief and LEC cultural and social deputy (who is also the LEC official spokesperson).¹¹
- Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin announced on January 29 the “establishment of direct communication between Iranian and Russian banks.” Farzin characterized this communication as a financial channel between Iran and Russia.¹²
- President Ebrahim Raisi held a phone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on January 29. Raisi stated that Baku and Tehran will not allow “ill-wishers” to damage their bilateral ties.¹³

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- ¹ https://www.wsj.com/articles/israel-strikes-iran-amid-new-international-push-to-contain-tehran-11675004979?mod=hp_lead_pos10;
- ² <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/28/world/middleeast/iran-drone-attack.html>
- ³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/29/drone-attack-hits-iran-ammunition-factory-reports>
- ⁴ <https://twitter.com/BarakRavid/status/1619737041415327746?s=20&t=TFkT97Dr5voTyu606zNkqQ>; <https://www.jpost dot com/middle-east/iran-news/article-729959>
- ⁵ <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/11/09/2844489>
- ⁶ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Whatever-it-takes-to-end-it.pdf>
- ⁷ https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1619467905103536128?s=20&t=TFkT97Dr5voTyu606zNkqQ; <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/11/09/2844477>
- ⁸ <https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eventpage/us6000jk0t/executive>
- ⁹ https://twitter.com/no_itsmyturn/status/1619474199499739139?s=20&t=TFkT97Dr5voTyu606zNkqQ;
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https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1619474133167005696?s=20&t=TFkT97Dr5voTyu606zNkqQ
- ¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1619663211380494336?s=20&t=TFkT97Dr5voTyu606zNkqQ>
- ¹¹ <http://www.tasnimnews dot com/fa/news/1401/11/09/2844592>; <http://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011109000589>;
<http://www.farsnews dot ir/news/14011109000465>
- ¹² https://twitter.com/mrfarzin_ir/status/1619682664767946754
- ¹³ <http://www.president dot ir/fa/142121>