



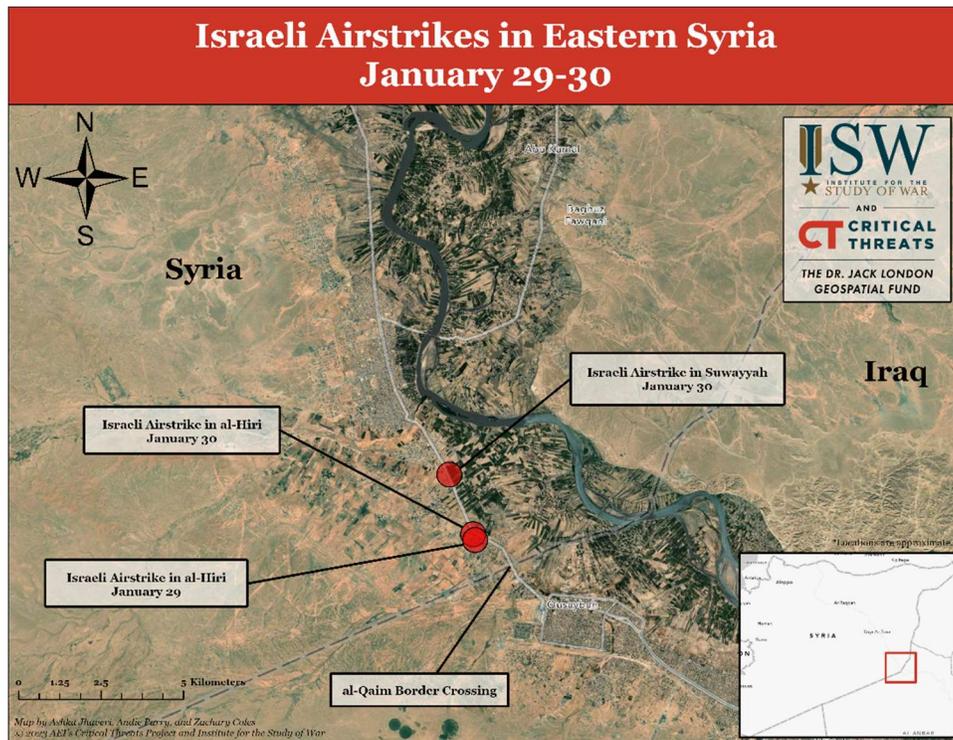
## **Iran Crisis Update, January 30, 2023**

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**Israeli combat aircraft conducted three airstrikes against likely Iran-backed militants in eastern Syria on January 29 and January 30.** Israeli combat aircraft targeted and destroyed six trucks traveling through al-Hiri, Deir ez-Zour Province shortly after the convoy crossed into Syria from the Iraqi al-Qaim border crossing on January 29.<sup>1</sup> Iranian proxy social media channels posted footage depicting a large fire in al-Hari immediately after the airstrike occurred, indicating that the attack may have detonated precision-guided munitions (PGMs) that Iran-backed militants attempted to conceal in what Iranian state media claimed to be a humanitarian convoy.<sup>2</sup> Iranian state-run *Islamic Republic News Agency* denied reports that the attack resulted in casualties among IRGC personnel.<sup>3</sup>

Israeli combat aircraft conducted two additional airstrikes against Iran-backed militants in al-Hiri and Suwayyah, Deir ez-Zour Province on January 30.<sup>4</sup> *The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* reported that the first January 30 airstrike targeted and killed a local Iran-backed militia commander whom had arrived to inspect damage from the January 29 attack.<sup>5</sup> CTP is unable to corroborate this claim. The second January 30 strike targeted a convoy transporting likely PGMs after it entered Syria through the al-Qaim crossing.<sup>6</sup> The January 29 and January 30 airstrikes reportedly killed at least 10 Iran-backed militia or IRGC Quds Force personnel in total.<sup>7</sup> Israeli airstrike activity within the past 24 hours marks a significant increase from the baseline level of activity and may be a response to a parallel uptick in Iranian PGM shipments into Syria.



**Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implicitly criticized the Raisi administration’s economic performance in a speech on January 30.** Khamenei’s address detailed his support for government-backed private sector growth. Khamenei stated that he would guide government officials’ economic strategy and suggested that he would adopt a more direct role in managing the Iranian economy, an implicit criticism of the Raisi administration’s failure to do so well.<sup>8</sup> President Ebrahim Raisi separately invoked Khamenei’s support for increased government-backed privatization on January 29.<sup>9</sup> Khamenei may increasingly seek to use Raisi administration members as scapegoats for Raisi as the Iranian economy enters a period of potentially significant disruption. Khamenei described First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber as bearing a specific responsibility for the Iranian economy in his address, possibly signaling that Khamenei intends to use Mokhber as a scapegoat for Raisi’s failure to cohere a successful economic strategy.<sup>10</sup>

**Some Iranian parliamentarians and important regime organs endorsed a legislative proposal that would significantly limit freedom of speech within Iran.** The proposal targets prominent Iranian political, military, scientific, and cultural actors, specifically those with large social media followings. The legislation would allow Iranian authorities to sentence well-known Iranians who circulate content critical of the regime to 10 to 15 years in prison and would ban them from the profession for which they are renowned for five to ten years. A hardline parliamentarian who endorsed the proposal attempted to defend criticisms of the legislation by stating in a rather Orwellian fashion that: “no one can be punished for having an opinion, but expressing that opinion in a free manner is not allowed.”<sup>11</sup> National Cyberspace Center Cultural and Social Deputy Ghassem Khalidi announced on January 29 that the Supreme Cyberspace Council and Ministry of Islamic Guidance—both of which are responsible for crafting and implementing some of the regime’s censorship policies—endorsed the proposal.<sup>12</sup> It is unclear if parliament will pass the bill, however. Only 24 of Iran’s 290 parliamentarians have currently endorsed the plan, and the proposal has received widespread criticism in recent days.<sup>13</sup>

## Key Takeaways

- Israeli combat aircraft conducted three airstrikes against likely Iran-backed militants in eastern Syria.
- Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implicitly criticized the Raisi administration's economic performance in a speech.
- Some Iranian parliamentarians and important regime organs endorsed a legislative proposal that would significantly limit freedom of speech within Iran.
- At least one protest occurred in one city across one province on January 29 and at least 18 protests occurred in 13 cities across 13 provinces on January 30. CTP did not record protests that met its reporting thresholds on January 28.
- President Ebrahim Raisi held a telephone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.
- Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Ukraine's charge d'affaires over Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak's comments on the January 28 Israeli drone attack in Esfahan City, Esfahan Province.
- Iran and Russia established direct financial communication channels between Iranian banks and more than 800 Russian banks.
- Artesh Navy Deputy Commander Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani announced on January 28 that the Artesh Navy entered Latin American waters.
- Law Enforcement Commander Ahmad Reza Radan appointed Gholam Reza Rezaian as Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Intelligence Chief.
- Internet watchdog organizations and social media users recorded significant internet disruptions in Kurdistan, Mazandaran, and Sistan and Baluchistan Provinces.
- Iranian authorities arrested Sunni cleric Moulavi Abdol Majid Mouradzahi on January 30 in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.
- Iranian authorities sealed two businesses for failing to observe laws that restrict women's role in the public sphere.
- Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Shahriar Heidari announced that committee members would travel to Esfahan and visit the target of the January 28 Israeli drone strike.

## Protest activity

At least one protests occurred in one city across one province on January 29. CTP assesses with low confidence that one protest occurred in the following location:

### **Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>14</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Families of prisoners sentenced to death
- **Notes:** It is unclear if these families are connected to arrested protesters



**At least 18 protests occurred in 13 cities across 13 provinces on January 30.** CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

**Kerman City, Kerman Province<sup>15</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

**Sanadaj, Kurdistan Province<sup>16</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

**Khorrabad, Lorestan Province<sup>17</sup>**

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

**Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>18</sup>**

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

**Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>19</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30. Videos show two distinct locations of protest activity within Ekbatan.
- **Location:** Ekbatan

**Yazd City, Yazd Province<sup>20</sup>**

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

### **Yazd City, Yazd Province<sup>21</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

CTP assesses with low confidence that protests occurred in the following locations on January 30:

### **Esfahan City, Esfahan Province<sup>22</sup>**

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

### **Rasht, Gilan Province<sup>23</sup>**

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

### **Gheshm, Hormozgan Province<sup>24</sup>**

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

### **Ilam City, Ilam Province<sup>25</sup>**

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

### **Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province<sup>26</sup>**

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

### **Mashhad, Khorasan-Razavi Province<sup>27</sup>**

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

### **Mashhad, Khorasan-Razavi Province<sup>28</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Fires lit on street
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30

### **Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province<sup>29</sup>**

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

### **Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province<sup>30</sup>**

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

### **Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>31</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Fires lit on street
- **Notes:** Pre-Islamic celebration of Sadeh, aligns with prior calls for protests celebrating Sadeh on January 30
- **Location:** Beheshti

### **Oroumijeh, West Azerbaijan Province<sup>32</sup>**

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



#### NOTES:

- CTP did not record demonstrations that met its protest activity thresholds on January 28.
- Some protest activity on January 30 adhered to protest organization and coordinators' prior calls for anti-regime demonstrations on Sadeh, a Zoroastrian festival that occurs 100 days before the spring equinox and Persian new year.<sup>33</sup>

**President Ebrahim Raisi held a telephone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on January 29.** An armed individual shot and killed the security chief of the Azerbaijani embassy in Tehran and injured two guards on January 27, as CTP previously reported.<sup>34</sup> Raisi expressed his condolences and stated that Iran would not permit "ill-wishers" to threaten ties between the two countries.<sup>35</sup> Azerbaijani authorities evacuated Baku's embassy personnel in Tehran on January 29.<sup>36</sup>

**Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Ukraine's charge d'affaires over Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mykhailo Podolyak's comments on the January 28 Israeli drone attack in Esfahan City, Esfahan Province.**<sup>37</sup> Podolyak suggested that the Esfahan strike was in retaliation for Iran's military support for Russia's war in Ukraine.<sup>38</sup> No evidence currently suggests that Ukraine was informed of or complicit in the attack.

**Iran and Russia established direct financial communication channels between Iranian banks and more than 800 Russian banks on January 29.**<sup>39</sup> Central Bank of Iran Deputy Governor Mohsen Karami announced that Iranian and Russian banks have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on financial messaging, effective immediately. Karami added that Iranian banks abroad were also included in the MoU and would be able to exchange standard banking messages with Russian banks.<sup>40</sup> Iranian officials and state-affiliated media outlets framed the MoU as a means to

circumvent Western sanctions on Iran and Russia and compared the messaging system to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), which serves as the world's largest financial messaging system.<sup>41</sup>

**Artesh Navy Deputy Commander Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani announced on January 28 that the Artesh Navy entered Latin American waters.**<sup>42</sup> Kaviani added that the Artesh Navy's 86th flotilla will arrive in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in the coming days.

**Law Enforcement Commander Ahmad Reza Radan appointed Gholam Reza Rezaian as Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Intelligence Chief on January 29.**<sup>43</sup> Rezaian previously served as the LEC Economic Security Police Chief. Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi, who was dismissed from his post as LEC Tehran provincial commander on January 27 possibly as a result of his handling of the Azerbaijani embassy incident, will assume the post of LEC Economic Security Police Chief.<sup>44</sup> Radan has reshuffled personnel within the LEC since Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appointed him as LEC Commander on January 7.<sup>45</sup>

**Internet watchdog organizations and social media users recorded significant internet disruptions in Kurdistan, Mazandaran, and Sistan and Baluchistan Provinces on January 29.** Netblocks reported a disruption to internet connectivity throughout Iran with a high impact to Mazandaran Province on January 29.<sup>46</sup> Reports suggest that Kurdistan Province and Zahedan in Sistan and Baluchistan Province were also impacted by severe internet disruptions for several hours.<sup>47</sup> Iranian officials attributed internet connectivity incidents to severed fiber optic cables between Babol and Sari, Mazandaran Province.<sup>48</sup>

**Iranian authorities arrested Sunni cleric Moulavi Abdol Majid Mouradzahi on January 30 in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**<sup>49</sup> Moulavi Abdol Majid Muradzahi is a former instructor at the Sunni Makki Seminary in Zahedan and is reportedly a close associate of prominent Sunni cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid. The regime has likely arrested Mouradzahi in attempt to escalate against Abdol Hamid, who has continued to incite unrest in Zahedan following his weekly Friday prayer sermons.

**Iranian authorities sealed two businesses for failing to observe laws that restrict women's role in the public sphere.** A judiciary official in Mazandaran Province confirmed that he had sealed a pharmacy in Amol for the "non-observance of Islamic rites and acts contrary to public morals" on January 29. Iranian media framed the closure as a penalty for failing to enforce regime-endorsed veiling standards.<sup>50</sup> A Mahshahr, Khuzestan Province Law Enforcement Commander separately announced that his unit closed a restaurant following reports that a woman sang to customers at the restaurant at an unspecified prior date.<sup>51</sup>

**Parliamentary National Security and Foreign Policy Committee member Shahriar Heidari announced that committee members would travel to Esfahan and visit the target of the January 28 Israeli drone strike.**<sup>52</sup> Israel conducted a kamikaze drone attack against an arms manufacturing facility in Esfahan City, Esfahan Province, as CTP previously reported.<sup>53</sup>

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

**See topline text.**

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