



Iran Crisis Update, October 18

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Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's refusal to concede on the mandatory hijab law is likely driving fissures among the political elite. Retired Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) general Hossein Alaei expressed sympathy for some protester grievances and suggested abolishing the morality patrol on October 18.¹ Alaei's statement follows several moderate and reformist politicians taking similarly sympathetic position in recent days. Three reformists separately proposed reforms to address public frustrations on October 17, as CTP previously reported.² Former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani stated that the Law Enforcement Command (LEC) and Basij Organization should not be responsible for enforcing the mandatory hijab law on October 12.³ Khamenei has shown no indication that he will remove the hijab requirement or offer a similar concession to the people and has instead taken a hard line toward the protests in his recent speeches.⁴ Khamenei has thus taken a position that some members of the regime--even the most ideological--may not be willing to defend.

Alaei previously published a letter in 2012 criticizing the regime and Khamenei for repressing the 2009 Green Movement.⁵ Senior IRGC commanders responded at the time, condemning Alaei and visiting his home to discuss the letter.⁶ The IRGC leadership seemingly convinced Alaei to stop criticizing the regime and Khamenei publicly, but his latest remarks indicate that he is again breaking from the political and security establishments.

The ongoing crackdown demonstrates how heavily the regime has begun using advanced and emerging technologies to impose social control. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on October 18 that the regime is using drones to surveil protests and public cameras and food-delivery services to track and identify protesters.⁷ Iranian

1 Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for the Study of War 2022.

leaders have built an increasingly adaptive and sophisticated police and surveillance state in recent years to secure their hold on power.⁸ They have observed how technology can secure other autocratic governments, looking to China as a model, and seek to emulate it.⁹ The regime is accordingly developing technologies such as artificial intelligence, facial recognition, and their national intranet to identify and monitor dissidents and assert greater control over the information space.¹⁰ The regime's years-long efforts to create these capabilities have shown remarkable limitations in the face of the current protest wave—something these capabilities were explicitly and clearly intended to prevent.

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's refusal to concede on the mandatory hijab law is likely driving fissures among the political elite.**
- **The ongoing crackdown demonstrates how heavily the regime has begun using advanced and emerging technologies to impose social control.**
- **Anti-regime protests occurred in at least nine cities in eight provinces.**
- **Worker strikes expanded to new locations and economic sectors.**
- **Protest organizations called for demonstrations in West Azerbaijan, Ilam, Kermanshah, and Kurdistan provinces on October 19.**
- **A Persian-language Telegram account posted instructions for protesters on how to use handguns.**
- **Iran may attack Saudi Arabia in retaliation for the perceived Saudi role in stoking the protests.**

Anti-Regime Protests

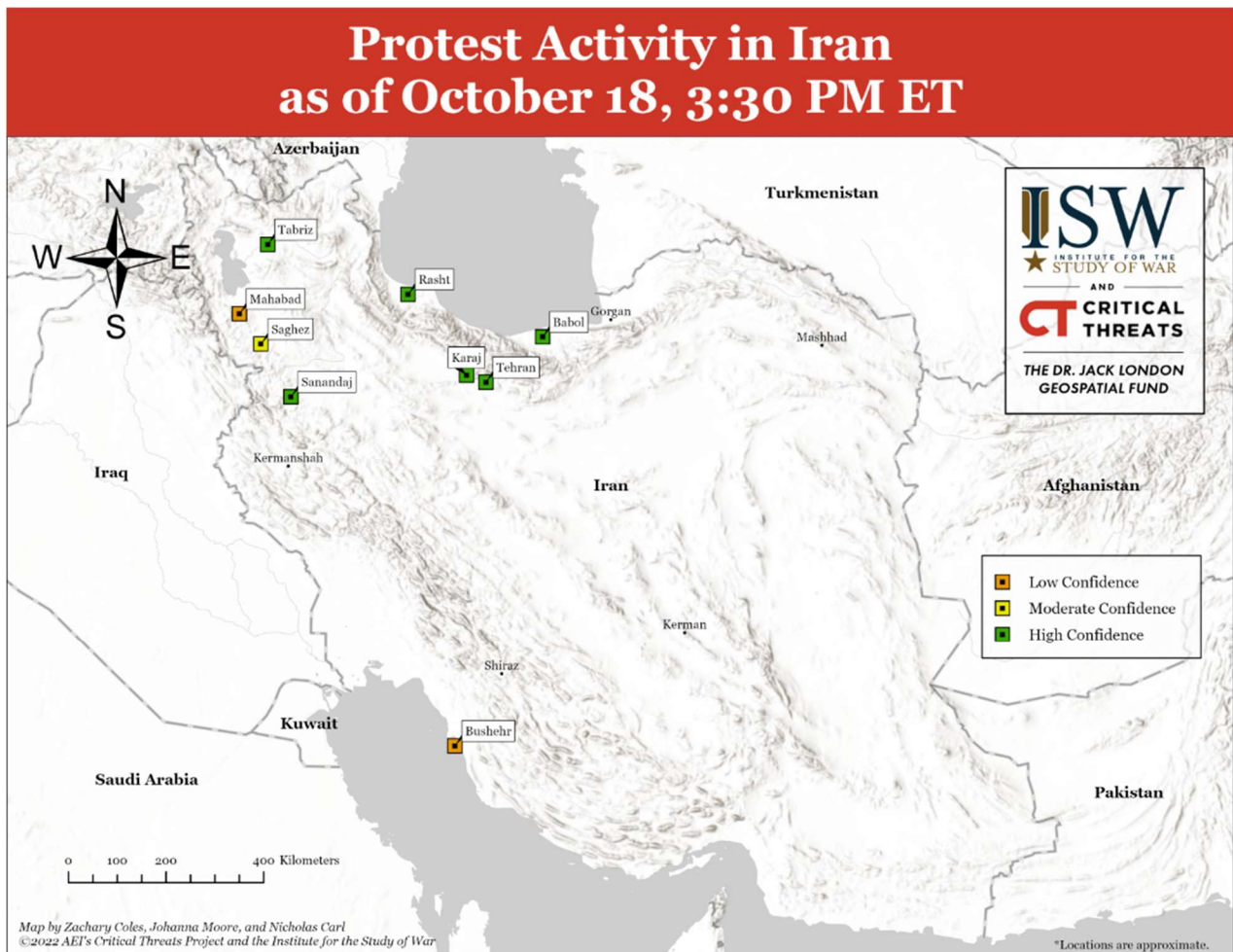
Anti-regime protests occurred in at least 9 cities in 8 provinces on October 18. CTP assesses with moderate or high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

- Karaj, Alborz Province (*100-200 high school students protesting outside a girls' school; undetermined number of high school students protesting in Karaj streets*)¹¹
- Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province (*100-200 Tabriz Islamic Art University students protesting on campus and chanting "my spirit, soul, and body for my homeland"*)¹²
- Rasht, Gilan Province (*At least 100 Gilan University of Medical Sciences students protesting on campus and chanting "no headscarf, no turban for freedom and equality"*)¹³
- Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province (*Several dozen high school students protesting in Sanandaj streets; protesters throwing Molotov cocktails at a Basij station*)¹⁴

- Saghez, Kurdistan Province (*100-200 protesters chanting “death to the dictator” and setting fires in Saghez streets*)¹⁵
- Babol, Mazandaran Province (*50-100 Mazandaran students chanting “if one person is killed, a thousand people will be killed” on campus*)¹⁶
- Tehran, Tehran Province (*Several hundred students from at least four universities in Tehran holding sit-ins on campuses or protesting in Tehran streets*)¹⁷

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

- Bushehr, Bushehr Province (*Undetermined numbers of oil and gas refinery workers on strike; extrapolating from October 17 Bushehr strike footage suggests possibly as many as several hundred workers went on strike and protested on October 18*)¹⁸
- Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province (*Dozens of protesters lighting fires and clashing with security force in Mahabad streets*)¹⁹



Worker strikes expanded to new locations and economic sectors on October 18. Natural gas and petrochemical labor strikes either began or gained momentum at seven facilities in Bushehr, Hormozgan, and Khuzestan provinces in southwestern Iran.²⁰ Steel workers in Fars province and tire factory workers in Tehran began strikes on October 17.²¹ Footage from natural gas and petrochemical labor strikes features protesters chanting typical anti-regime slogans. Workers at the tire factory in Tehran began striking on October 17 to protest not receiving their medical benefits since July 2022.²² Workers' increasingly diversified motivations for striking suggests more workers in new economic sectors may join the strikes, intensifying economic pressure on the regime and further straining the bandwidth of security forces.

Protest organizations called for demonstrations in West Azerbaijan, Ilam, Kermanshah, and Kurdistan provinces on October 19.²³ Some of these same organizations have called for protests in East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, and Zanjan provinces on October 20 as well, as CTP previously reported.²⁴

A Persian-language Telegram account posted instructions for protesters on how to use handguns.²⁵ Other accounts have claimed that protesters have taken handguns from security officers.²⁶

Persian-language social media account Shirin tweeted a revised version of its political manifesto—named the “Charter of Iran”—on October 18.²⁷ Shirin stated that it updated the document based on feedback on the initial draft it published on October 14. Shirin reaffirmed its desire to establish a democratic, secular Iranian republic and commitment to civil liberties and women's rights in the new draft. Shirin called for referendums on whether to maintain the Islamic Republic and what should replace it. The group also proposed establishing a two-year transitional council and reiterated its readiness to welcome willing members of the current regime. Shirin changed its initial proposal of integrating the IRGC into the Artesh and instead called for creating a new professional military. Shirin stated in a separate tweet that it is not affiliated with any political organization.²⁸ It added that “most” of its members are in Iran.

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Iran may attack Saudi Arabia in retaliation for the perceived Saudi role in stoking the protests. Iranian proxy media circulated Iranian officials' threats against Saudi Arabia on October 18. Lebanese Hezbollah (LH)-owned Al Ahed News republished an October 17 statement from IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami accusing Saudi Arabia of provoking riots against the regime.²⁹ Salami warned that the regime would impose a cost on Saudi Arabia. An Iraqi proxy Telegram channel published a similar threat from Iranian Interior Minister Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi warning

that actions affecting Iranian internal security would also “endanger the security of the entire Gulf.”³⁰

Iraqi proxy media repeated Iranian officials’ assertions that protests are quickly shrinking and entirely driven by external actors. An Iraqi proxy Telegram channel posted a statement from Interior Minister Vahidi claiming that Iranian security forces had arrested rioters and curtailed protests.³¹ Vahidi announced that the regime would pardon arrested individuals who confess that foreign actors influenced and manipulated them.³² The regime is offering conditional pardons to protesters likely to discredit the protest movement with false confessions that affirm foreign involvement. Iraqi proxy media released a statement from former IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari blaming foreign actors for ongoing protests and claiming that the US seeks to “seize the heart of West Asia.”³³

- ¹ <https://www.jamran dot news/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-12/1570652-%DA%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B4%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D9%84-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%B4%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%AA>
- ² <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-17>
- ³ <https://www.ettelaat dot com/archives/647060#gsc.tab=0>
- ⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-12>
- ⁵ <http://www.digarban dot com/node/4359>
- ⁶ <http://www.mehrnews dot com/FA/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1509070>; <http://basirat dot ir/news.aspx?newsid=234218>
- ⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iran-uses-covert-police-tech-to-crack-down-on-protests-11666104668>
- ⁸ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/whatever-it-takes-to-end-it-irans-shift-toward-more-oppressive-governance>
- ⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/whatever-it-takes-to-end-it-irans-shift-toward-more-oppressive-governance>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/whatever-it-takes-to-end-it-irans-shift-toward-more-oppressive-governance>
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<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1582299020814270466?s=20&t=AhjRpUNH5NPrOxPwPbZpZA>
- ¹² <https://twitter.com/IranNewsUpdate1/status/1582301717923647488?s=20&t=MD- ARJWnBkqDGLTwsrqBg;>
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1582338933018439681?s=20&t=HvOPeyMegZn59VEIGwpU6A>
- ¹³ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1582300677682122753?s=20&t=fsITXLPbXPcRc8r6s6sVg;>
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<https://twitter.com/javidirani30/status/1582394912309358597?s=20&t=sTOITgMNXNu5u3oYm-XRA>
- ¹⁴ https://twitter.com/beybun_rojihlat/status/1582445190912311297?s=20&t=4j_q50yW_OpS5KcZG6csvg;
https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1582338154757238787?s=20&t=zTSxNkJzK54IVIS_WQ6KA;
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- ¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/IranNewsUpdate1/status/1582427794382155777?s=20&t=AKVUtdZGQ8FcRsZ2azyWQg>
- ¹⁶ https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1582400883135959042?s=20&t=zTSxNkJzK54IVIS_WQ6KA;
https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1582310489203228672?s=20&t=A1_VcBfLgYUI0vJVbANE0g
- ¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1582302764981719041?s=20&t= oLmV2eguP2rZFggb1ceA;>
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<https://twitter.com/Javanmardi75/status/1582307938555035649?s=20&t=dc6LcNAYpmv9zCjLuiMwMq>
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<https://twitter.com/Aurora28927364/status/1582461475196932097?s=20&t=40vY696TLb-s5wbhC8DhzA>
- ¹⁹ https://twitter.com/NikoOmidi/status/1582425601981394945?s=20&t=Fx_qRM8mADC4dxRbMds8FQ
- ²⁰ <https://www.iranintl.com/202210182107;>
<https://twitter.com/1500tasvir/status/1582291764500926471?s=20&t=Uvt3EwO99dWZ7LEq4LX0GA;>
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<https://www.iranintl.com/202210182107>
- ²² <https://www.iranintl.com/202210182107>
- ²³ https://twitter.com/iran_javanan/status/1582084434307690496;
<https://twitter.com/RyIZ2022/status/1582223761297711104>
- ²⁴ https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-17#_edn00205000fc2f0dd0855153e48df7e78012
- ²⁵ <https://twitter.com/borzou/status/1582034747089637376>
- ²⁶ <https://twitter.com/borzou/status/1582034747089637376>
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- ²⁹ <https://www dot alahednews dot com dot lb/article dot php?id=46831&cid=116>

³⁰ <https://t.me/Tura313/34225>

³¹ <https://t.me/maymun5/11716>

³² <https://t.me/maymun5/11717>

³³ <https://t.me/maymun5/11718>