



## **Iran Crisis Update, October 20**

**Kitaneh Fitzpatrick, Zachary Coles, Johanna Moore, Nicholas Carl, and Frederick W. Kagan**  
**October 20, 4:30 PM ET**

**The Iran Crisis 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 Crisis Updates via email, please subscribe [here](#).**

**Anti-regime protests continued to subside in extent and scale on October 20 but may increase on October 22 and 26.** CTP noted protest activity in five cities in five provinces on October 20—a notably low level of protest activity given the calls for protests on October 20 and protesters' previous successes in coordinating countrywide demonstrations. Protest organizations had called for demonstrations specifically in Ardabil, East Azerbaijan, and Zanjan provinces.<sup>1</sup> Protest organizations have also called for protests throughout Iran on October 22 and 26—the latter being the 40<sup>th</sup> day since Mahsa Amini died.<sup>2</sup>

**The regime may have used the forces it previously mobilized for a military exercise to deter and/or suppress protests in northern Iran.** The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces conducted an exercise around the Iran-Azerbaijan border from October 17 to 20 in part to threaten Azerbaijan and also possibly to prepare to suppress nearby protests.<sup>3</sup> Iranian social media users reported severe internet disruptions in Tabriz on October 20.<sup>4</sup> The IRGC military exercises that occurred in the vicinity of Tabriz may have facilitated the regime's ability to restrict protest organizers' internet and telecommunication access and establish a security presence in the city. The main IRGC combat elements in the area are the 2<sup>nd</sup> Imam Zaman Mechanized Brigade and the 31<sup>st</sup> Ashoura Mechanized Division, which likely participated in the exercise.<sup>5</sup>

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Anti-regime protests continued to subside in extent and scale, occurring in at least five cities in five provinces on October 20.**
- **Protests may increase on October 22 and 26.**
- **Salafi Jihadi militant group Jaish al Adl published a video threatening to overthrow the regime and expressing support for Iranian protestors.**

### **Anti-Regime Protests**

**Anti-regime protests occurred in at least five cities in five provinces on October 20.** Many instances of recent protest activity include fewer than 20 demonstrators and therefore do not meet

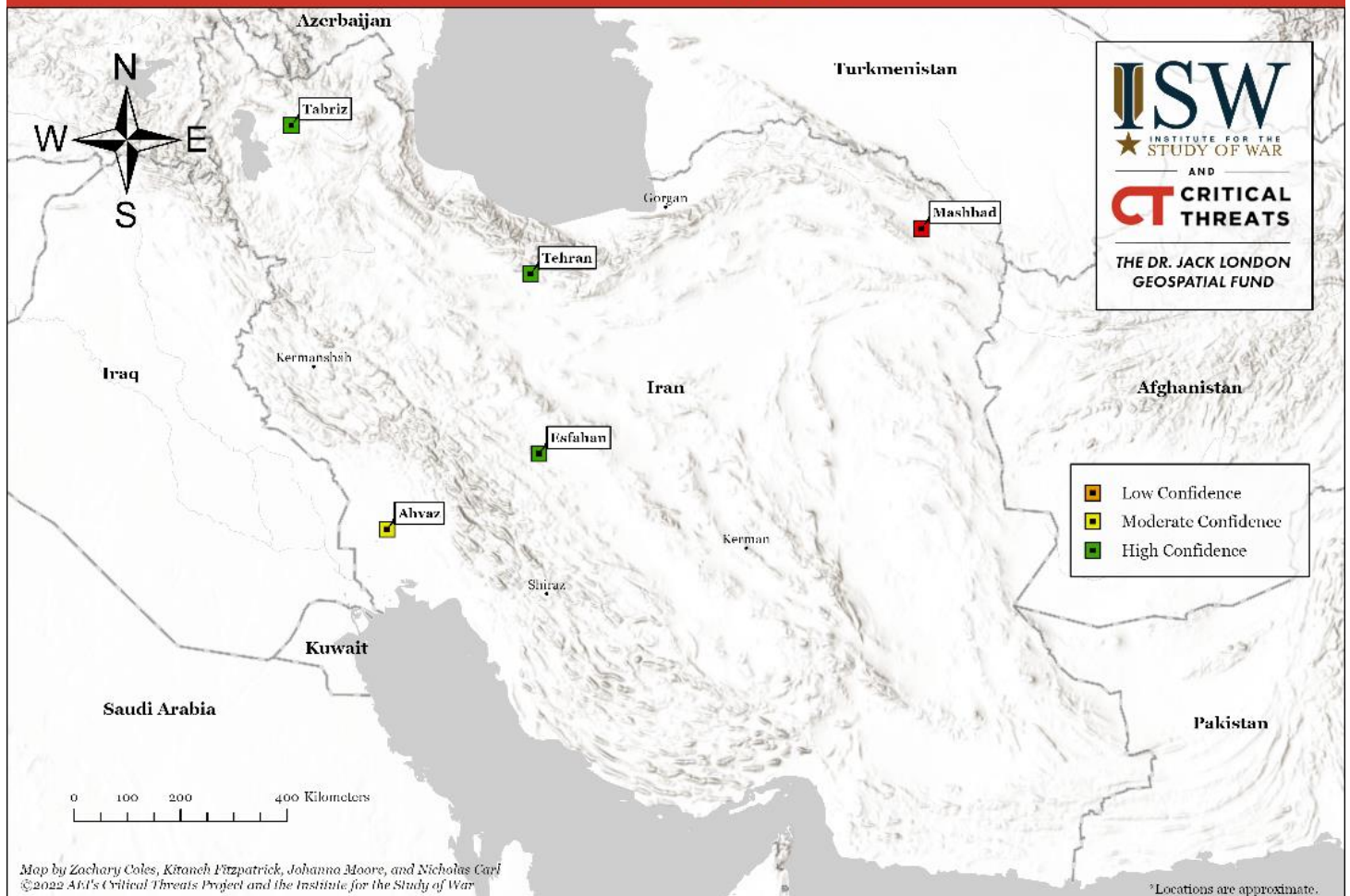
CTP's threshold for reporting. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

- Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province (*dozens of protestors, reported internet disruptions and violence*)<sup>6</sup>
- Esfahan City, Esfahan Province (*over 50 protestors demonstrating on the street*)<sup>7</sup>
- Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province (*undetermined number of Shahid Chamran University students*)<sup>8</sup>
- Tehran City, Tehran Province (*over 50 protestors chanting anti-regime slogans in the street in Ekbatan Town, Western Tehran*)<sup>9</sup>

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

- Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi Province (*undetermined number of hospital workers, possibly under 20, protesting in front of a medical facility chanting "we don't want a regime that kills children."*)<sup>10</sup>

## Protest Activity in Iran as of October 20, 3:30 PM ET



**Salafi Jihadi militant group Jaish al Adl published a video expressing support for anti-regime protestors and threatening to conduct attacks in the Iranian homeland. Jaish al Adl criticized Iranian security forces for killing dozens of protestors in Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province on September 30 and announced that it would overthrow the regime. The video shows roughly 200 to 300 armed fighters standing in formations in an unknown location.<sup>11</sup> One formation of around**

50 fighters wore all-white uniforms, resembling the uniforms of the suicide bombers of the Afghan Taliban. The US State Department designated Jaish al Adl as a terrorist organization in July 2019.<sup>12</sup>

**A social media user purporting to be an Iranian protestor circulated footage threatening to use a flame thrower on security personnel.**<sup>13</sup> CTP cannot authenticate this footage.

### **Axis of Resistance**

**Lebanese Hezbollah-owned Al Ahed News promoted regime talking points discouraging protests at universities.** Al Ahed news published a segment from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei October 20 speech warning that closing universities for protests “serves the enemy’s goals.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://twitter.com/iran\\_javanan/status/1581988702019997697](https://twitter.com/iran_javanan/status/1581988702019997697)

<sup>2</sup> [https://twitter.com/javanane\\_t/status/1582726896868917250](https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1582726896868917250)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-19>; <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-17>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/khoshnevisnaser/status/1583118130330894342?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ>;  
[https://twitter.com/vahid\\_bahman/status/1583160183043522560?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ](https://twitter.com/vahid_bahman/status/1583160183043522560?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ);  
<https://twitter.com/etelaf10/status/1583113441362878464?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Irans-Reserve-of-Last-Resort.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://twitter.com/javanane\\_t/status/1583169080546115584?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ](https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1583169080546115584?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ);  
<https://twitter.com/khoshnevisnaser/status/1583118130330894342?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ>;  
[https://twitter.com/vahid\\_bahman/status/1583160183043522560?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ](https://twitter.com/vahid_bahman/status/1583160183043522560?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ);  
<https://twitter.com/etelaf10/status/1583113441362878464?s=20&t=XTMQ1y8NzD0FpOoCJwI3IQ>;  
<https://twitter.com/RealMaHastim/status/1583082715188166657?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ>;  
<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1583199919975714817?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ>

<sup>7</sup> [https://twitter.com/javanane\\_t/status/1583189203114168320?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ](https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1583189203114168320?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ);

<https://twitter.com/OutFarsi/status/1583192451837108224?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ>

<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/begoonah1/status/1583101496744284162?s=20&t=hm9vyvaLT9oSAGld7mMRReQ>

<sup>9</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1583184563932909568?s=20&t=zrdN80jFDo4eppL0oWnSmg>;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1583207207591895040?s=20&t=zrdN80jFDo4eppL0oWnSmg>

<sup>10</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1583123307703939072?s=20&t=XPIJcUnkhQowyyv6oF3AjYQ>

<sup>11</sup> <https://twitter.com/khorasandiary/status/1583000129606684672?s=46&t=ytBL5z8n8141oFXp8Wta4g>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://twitter.com/rkzasafari/status/1582479852279455744?s=20&t=zrdN80jFDo4eppL0oWnSmg>

<sup>14</sup> <http://alahednews dot com dot lb/article dot php?id=46897&cid=116>