

Iran Crisis Update, November 18
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The ongoing, anti-regime protests are likely creating fractures among senior regime officials within the Iranian security establishment. Uncorroborated social media accounts circulated reports that the regime's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) held two emergency meetings that resulted in SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani's resignation.¹ Anti-regime outlet Iran International previously reported that some hardliners were advocating for Shamkhani's dismissal on November 6, citing an informed source.² Another unverified social media account reported that Saeed Jalili--a hardliner who served as the SNSC secretary from 2007-2013—blamed unidentified security officials for failing to violently suppress anti-regime demonstrations. The account additionally claimed that IRGC and Iranian Law Enforcement Command officials expressed concerns about bandwidth constraints and low morale among personnel.³ CTP cannot verify these rumors and such accounts should be treated with skepticism. SNSC-affiliated Nour News Agency denied that Shamkhani has resigned on November 18, suggesting that the report had garnered enough attention to merit a statement.⁴ Nour's denial is not dispositive, as the outlet has been known to deny things that have turned out to be true.

Regime officials and regime-affiliated actors alluded to disagreements over protest suppression tactics within the Iranian security apparatus on November 18, however. A Raisi administration official stated that the regime could expeditiously end unrest as soon as "the relevant authorities were willing" on November 18, suggesting divisions within the regime about how much violence security personnel should use to quell protesters.⁵ A regime-affiliated cleric in a Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari town similarly stated that officials who lacked the courage to do "great things" should be removed from power and replaced by others more capable of implementing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's vision.⁶ Hardline editor Hossein Shariatmadari, who is reportedly a close confidante of the Supreme Leader,⁷ additionally advocated for greater use of force against protesters on November 18.⁸ Statements calling to violently escalate against protesters—and criticizing the officials who are purportedly failing to implement this tactic—corroborate CTP's previous

assessments that critical nodes of the regime are unable to reach a consensus on how to confront the Mahsa Amini protests.⁹

Divisions within the SNSC—particularly Shamkhani's resignation or ousting—would be especially significant given the importance of the council within the regime. The SNSC is the most senior national security and foreign policy decision-making body in the Iranian regime, and Shamkhani has served as the Supreme Leader's personal representative within the council since 2013. Shamkhani has additionally held several senior security posts within the regime and is an extended member of the IRGC Command Network—the informal human network forged by service together in the Iran-Iraq War that has controlled the IRGC and, increasingly, joint IRGC-Artesh organizations—for decades.¹º Shamkhani is a trusted advisor of the supreme leader, and calls for Shamkhani's resignation may be an indirect criticism of the Supreme Leader's protest suppression response. Criticisms of Shamkhani—and holding him responsible for ongoing unrest—could alternatively suggest that Khamenei is playing a less active role in executing senior policy decisions than he typically would.

Shamkhani is a most unlikely public scapegoat. He does not have a prominent public persona and is most important as one of the most inside of insiders. He may have considerable influence over the course of SNSC discussions that determine the shape of the regime's response to protests especially if the supreme leader is inaccessible or unable, mentally or physically, to fulfill his responsibilities. It is noteworthy that Khamenei has not appeared in public recently and has reportedly participated in other events without posting any current photos or videos. The shadow of a possibly imminent supreme leader succession has covered the entire protest period and could be manifesting as a challenge to one of Khamenei's closest and most trusted advisors and mouthpieces.

The IRGC has threatened to launch a ground invasion into Iraqi Kurdistan in the coming weeks. *AP* published additional information on November 18 about IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Ghaani's November 14 meeting in Baghdad with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid – A Kurdish politician – and several other Iraqi and Kurdish officials. Ghaani reportedly warned that the IRGC will conduct ground operations against anti-regime Kurdish militants based in Iraqi Kurdistan unless the Iraqi army fortifies the Iran-Iraqi Kurdistan border and disarms all anti-regime Kurdish militias operating within Iraqi Kurdistan. ¹² The IRGC has intermittently conducted artillery, rocket, and missile attacks into Iraqi Kurdistan since Iranian protests began in September 2022. ¹³ The Iranian regime has blamed anti-regime Kurdish militias operating on both sides of the Iran-Iraq for fomenting Iran's ongoing domestic unrest, as CTP has previously reported. ¹⁴

The Iraqi constitution forbids the Iraqi army from entering Iraqi Kurdistan, and the Iraqi army likely lacks the military capacity to meet Ghaani's demands. ¹⁵ A significant Iraqi army redeployment to Iraqi Kurdistan would likely enable ISIS to intensify operations in other areas of Iraq and undermine the popularity of the current Iran-friendly government in Baghdad. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Masrour Barzani called on Iran to cease military operations against anti-regime militants in Iraqi Kurdistan and warned Iran that its domestic "tensions should not be exported to neighboring countries" in a November 17 statement. ¹⁶ Barzani's remarks indicate that the KRG and

significant portions of the Peshmerga, the KRG's official military force, would likely actively resist any IRGC or Iraqi army efforts to operate against Kurdish groups within Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi and Kurdish politicians very likely will not accede to Ghaani's demands, suggesting he may have presented them with an unacceptable ultimatum to use as political cover for a planned ground invasion.

Recent Turkish threats to also conduct military operations against armed Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria increase the likelihood of an IRGC ground campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan and present Iraqi Kurdistan with the danger of simultaneous invasion from north and east. Multiple senior Turkish officials have accused armed Kurdish groups of detonating the bomb that killed at least six people and wounded 81 more in Istanbul on November 13.17 Turkish President Recep Erdogan and several cabinet-level officials warned that Turkey plans respond to the attacks by conducting military operations against armed Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria.¹⁸ The Turkish military consequently may intensify its air campaign against armed Kurdish groups in Iraqi Kurdistan. The US State Department's Erbil Consulate issued a warning to US citizens to avoid areas in northern Iraq and northern Syria due to a "potential Turkish military action" in the coming days, further substantiating the possibility of Turkish military operations in either or both regions.¹⁹ Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi and Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu held a phone call on November 17 to discuss issues related to "security cooperation against terrorism," possibly including the prospect of conducting simultaneous military operations against armed Kurdish groups in Iraqi Kurdistan.²⁰ A concurrent Turkish military operation would provide Iran with additional political cover to launch a ground invasion and, furthermore, increase the effectiveness of the invasion.

The potential renewal of Turkey's campaign against armed Kurdish groups in northern Syria may, however, impede close cooperation between the IRGC and Turkish military. Turkish rhetoric has emphasized that the November 13 terror attack is connected to alleged terror cells in the Manbij area of northeastern Aleppo Province.²¹ Syria. Iran has historically prioritized protecting the Shia-majority towns of Nubl and Zahraa located approximately 75 kilometers from Manbij; Hezbollahi militants maintain a significant military presence around the villages.²² A potential Turkish military operation aimed at Manbij may also include military activity nearby the Shia-majority villages, which Lebanese Hezbollah militants would likely fiercely resist. A direct military confrontation in northern Syria consequently may obstruct military cooperation between Iran and Turkey in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Key Takeaways

- The ongoing, anti-regime protests are likely creating fractures among senior regime officials within the Iranian security establishment and may have led to the departure of Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani.
- Iraqi Kurdistan is at risk of invasion by Turkish forces from the north and Iranian forces from the east.
- At least 33 protests took place in 31 cities across 13 provinces on November 18.
- Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continued to criticize the regime's violent protest suppression response on November 18 during his weekly Friday prayer sermon.
- Protesters allegedly burned the former home of Islamic Republic Founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Khomein, Markazi Province on November 17.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least 33 protests took place in 31 cities across 13 provinces on November 18. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Note: CTP is using asterisks to denote protests that included mourners commemorating killed protesters.

Ardabil City, Ardabil Province (population: approximately 529,374)

• An undetermined number of protesters set fire to a Basij base with Molotov cocktails during evening protests.²³

Bandar-e Deyr, Bushehr Province (population: approximately 18,454)

• An undetermined number of protesters gathered on a city street and cars honked in solidarity.²⁴

Bushehr City, Bushehr Province (population: approximately 223,504)

Footage captures dozens of protesters reportedly beating an unspecified security officer.²⁵

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province (population: approximately 1,559,000)

Hundreds of protesters gathered to commemorate Aylar Haghi and Ali Iraki, whom security
personnel killed for participating in anti-regime protests. Security forces attacked protesters
at the ceremony.²⁶

Esfahan, Esfahan Province (population: approximately 1,961,000)

• Social media footage shows security forces chasing an undetermined number of protesters down an Esfahan street.²⁷

*Semirom, Esfahan Province (population: approximately 26,260)

- Over 100 protesters lit a fire and gathered on a city street.²⁸
- Over 100 protesters gathered for the funeral to commemorate Morad Bahramian, whom security personnel killed for participating in anti-regime protests.²⁹

Shiraz, Fars Province (population: approximately 1,566,000)

• Dozens of protesters attended a commemoration ceremony for Shiraz protesters killed by regime security forces.³⁰

Ghazvin City, Ghazvin Province (population: approximately 402,748)

• Over 100 protesters gathered for Sepehr Esmaili's commemoration ceremony. Security personnel reportedly shot a child while attempting to suppress anti-regime protests.³¹

Kermanshah City, Kermanshah Province (population: approximately 946,651)

• An undetermined number of chanted anti-regime slogans.32

Paveh, Kermanshah Province (population: approximately 25,771)

• Dozens of protesters lit a fire and gathered on a city street. Protests reportedly occurred in multiple locations throughout the city.³³

Izeh, Khuzestan Province (population: approximately 119,399)

 Hundreds—possibly over a thousand--protesters attended a funeral commemorating nineyear-old Kian Pirfalak, whom security personnel killed while suppressing anti-regime protests on November 16. CTP had erroneously reported that Pirfalak was ten –years old on November 17.34

Bijar, Kurdistan Province (population: approximately 50,014)

• Dozens of protesters demonstrated on a Bijar street and chanted "death to Khamenei." 35

Ghorveh, Kurdistan Province (population: approximately 136,961)

• Social media footage captures clashes between dozens of protesters and security personnel.³⁶

Saghez, Kurdistan Province (population: approximately 165,258)

• Dozens of protesters—possibly more- set fires and chanted anti-regime slogans on Saghez streets during evening protests. Iranian social media accounts claimed that protesters "took control of the streets" in unspecified areas of Saghez.³⁷

*Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province (population: approximately 461,000)

- Over 50 protesters marched through a Sanandaj street to commemorate Aram Habibi, whom security personnel killed for participating in anti-regime protests.³⁸
- Over 50 protesters set a fire on a Sanandaj street during evening protests.³⁹

Sari, Mazandaran Province (population: approximately 309,820)

• An undetermined number of protesters set fire to a police station with Molotov cocktails during evening protests.⁴⁰

Chabahar, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 106,739)

Dozens of protesters threw stones and advanced on security forces on a Chabahar street.⁴¹

Iranshahr, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 113,750)

 Dozens of protesters marched and chanted anti-regime slogans. Security forces opened fire on protesters.⁴²

Khash, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 56,584)

• Over 100 protesters marched through Khash streets and chanted "death to Khamenei" and other anti-regime slogans. One or two dozen protesters tore down a sign featuring the name of deceased IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani while they marched.⁴³

Noukabad, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 5,261)

• Dozens of protesters marched through a Noukabad street and chanted anti-regime slogans. Audible gunshots can be heard in the background.⁴⁴

Saravan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 60,114)

• Dozens of protesters gathered after a Friday prayer sermon and marched down a Saravan city street.45

Zahedan, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 587,730)

 Dozens of protesters gathered after Friday prayer sermons and marched through Zahedan streets chanting "death to Khamenei," "death to the dictator," and other anti-regime slogans.

Tehran City, Tehran Province (population: approximately 8,700,000)

• Dozens of protesters marched through Tehran streets and chanted anti-regime slogans during evening protests.⁴⁷

*Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province (population: approximately 193,501)

 Hundreds of mourners attended Milad Maroufi's funeral, whom security personnel killed for participating in anti-regime protests. Hundreds of protesters gathered and lit a fire in an undetermined location.⁴⁸

Khoy, West Azerbaijan Province (population: approximately 198,845)

• Hundreds of protesters gathered on a city street. 50-100 protesters chanted anti-regime slogans less than 10 meters away from security forces. No violence reported.⁴⁹

Piranshahr, West Azerbaijan Province (population: approximately 91,515)

• Hundreds--possibly over a thousand--protesters gathered in what appears to be a city street. Authorities reportedly cut electricity. Protesters reportedly damaged a local police station.⁵⁰

*Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province (population: approximately 168,393)

- Hundreds of protesters marched through Mahabad streets and attended commemoration ceremonies for killed protesters Ahmad Gagshi and Azad Hossein. Security forces used tear gas and reportedly killed at least one protester with live ammunition.⁵¹
- An undetermined number of protesters seized and set fire to an IRGC facility in Mahabad.⁵²

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

Fouladshahr, Esfahan Province (population: approximately 88,426)

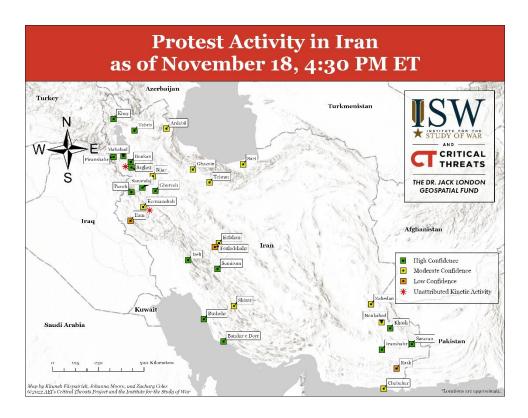
• Social media footage depicts likely protesters setting fire to a sign featuring Ayatollah Khomeini's name on it.53

Ilam City, Ilam Province (population: approximately 194,030)

• Social media footage reportedly shows protesters fleeing security forces down an Ilam street during evening protests.⁵⁴

Rask, Sistan and Baluchistan Province (population: approximately 10,115)

• Social media footage depicts regime security forces deployed to a Rask street, possibly indicating that protest activity occurred in Rask.⁵⁵



Protesters allegedly set fire to the former home of Islamic Republic Founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Khomein, Markazi Province on November 17. Social media footage shows protesters throwing multiple Molotov cocktails at a structure that was purportedly Khomeini's former home.⁵⁶ IRGC-affiliated media and local officials circulated an image of the home undamaged and claimed that the attack never occurred.⁵⁷

Prominent Sunni Cleric Moulana Abdol Hamid continued to criticize the regime's violent protest suppression response during his weekly Friday prayer sermon on November 18. Abdol Hamid stated that Sistan and Baluchistan residents would not surrender to threats nor compromise their demands.⁵⁸ Abdolhamid traced the origins of the present unrest in the province to the regime's unfair treatment of Iranian Sunnis and the Baloch since the 1979 revolution. ⁵⁹

The regime is continuing to sustain security personnel casualties. IRGC-affiliated Tasnim News Agency reported that protesters killed Sahneh City IRGC Intelligence Commander Colonel Nader

Birami on November 18.60 Tasnim also confirmed the death of a Basij member and IRGC officer in Boukan, West Azerbaijan Province on November 17.61

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

See topline text.

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- https://twitter.com/barin_omid/status/1593666746170351620?s=20&t=ZpoXhuD90KY47qLnCMx6Tw; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593716919521116160?s=20&t=75CoTK8svgvPa8j6CakQuQ
- https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593551428777385984?s=20&t=_fXsHBs49zO05FLzibNAOw; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593533038406864902?s=20&t=u805D53Giin6G2tjuKztqw; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593531441379524608?s=20&t=mtiH82VG0U1vcJhcbEzeQw; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593539181204148224?s=20&t=bUcO7pH-vENYNBjT9Xv4-A; https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593544112082395139?s=20&t=bxgQNWnG7fcv0sttltBpOQ
- ⁵² https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593539916734013441?s=20&t=uq58PiyjAhRRAPCm6gxfNg
- 53 https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593673412106485762?s=20&t=hV8D8u9YUzV fi1SvWSpew
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- 55 https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1593582387732135936?s=20&t=rlyp-46lVlDr17ea5DFpsw
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- $^{60} \underline{\text{https://www.tasnimnews}} \ \text{dot com/fa/news/1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%84-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%85\%D8\%B3\%D8\%A6\%D9\%88\%D9\%88-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%89-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%89-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%89-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%89-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%89-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/2806235/\%D9\%9-1401/08/27/280623-1401/08/27/280623-1401/08/27/280623-1401/08/27/280623-1401/08/27/28062-1401/08/27/28062-1401/08/27/28062-1401/08/27/28062-1401/08/27/28062-1401/08/27/2806-1401/08/27/2806-1401/08/27/2806-1401/08/27/2800-1401/08/2000-1401/0800-1401/08/2000-1401/08/2000-1401/08000-1401/08/2000-1401/08/2000-1401/0800-1401/0800-1401/0800-1401/0800-1401/0800-1401/0800-140$
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- %D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B4%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-
- %D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1
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- %D8%B4%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF-%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%B1-
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