



Iran Crisis Update, December 18
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Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and significant parts of his inner circle are continuing to misdiagnose the core problems driving the ongoing protests. Senior officials close to Khamenei and his inner circle emphasized the need to promote engagement and interactions between Iranian religious institutions and universities on December 18.¹ The officials framed such cooperation as the correct response to the protests and necessary to establish an “Islamic civilization.” These officials include Alireza Arafī (a senior cleric and Guardian Council member), Ahmad Marvi (the custodian of Astan Quds Razavi), and Mohammad Mehdi Tehranchi (the president of Islamic Azad University). Either Khamenei or his inner circle have selected each of these individuals for their current positions.² Their rhetoric likely reflects a predominant sentiment in the office of the supreme leader.

Khamenei and his inner circle have defined the protests as a sociocultural and religious issue and seem to believe that the solution is trying to further ideologize the population. These ideas are not entirely new; Khamenei and his advisers have articulated this theory for years.³ But Khamenei’s insistence on viewing the current protests through this lens will impede—if not prevent entirely—any serious effort to address protester grievances.

Protests and strikes may increase in the coming days. Protest coordinators and organizations have repeatedly published calls for protests and strikes on December 19-21.⁴

Some protesters have increasingly focused on imposing economic pressure on the regime as the Iranian rial continues to devalue. The Mashhad Neighborhood Youth reiterated on December 18 calls for citizens to withdraw their money from banks and warned that Anonymous hackers will conduct cyberattacks against banks in the coming days.⁵ The Mashhad group separately claimed that workers at several prominent Iranian ports will join the planned strikes on December 19-21.⁶

The net effect of the ongoing protests and strikes could further stress the Iranian economy and its supply lines, especially if the port strikes materialize and are sustained. Oil and gas workers protested in at least four cities on December 17, as CTP previously reported.⁷ It is too soon to assess whether these protests and strikes will amount to any serious economic disruption, however. CTP will continue to develop this assessment in future updates.

Key Takeaways

- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and significant parts of his inner circle are continuing to misdiagnose the core problems driving the ongoing protests.**
- **At least two protests took place in two cities across two provinces. Protests and strikes may increase in the coming days.**
- **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and significant parts of his inner circle are continuing to misdiagnose the core problems driving the ongoing protests.**
- **Some protesters have increasingly focused on imposing economic pressure on the regime as the Iranian rial continues to devalue.**
- **LEC Tehran Provincial Commander Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi announced the seizure of a man-portable rocket launcher and around 50 other small arms.**
- **An LEC Border Guard regiment commander, Colonel Hossein Ali Farahi, announced that the LEC clashed with unidentified militants near Esfandak, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.**
- **Unidentified individuals stabbed and wounded four clerics in Qom City, Qom Province.**

Anti-Regime Protests

At least two protests took place in two cities across two provinces on December 18. Iranian protest coordinators and organizations did not call for protests or strikes on this day, which may have driven the relatively low level of protest activity. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Tabriz, East Azerbaijan Province⁸

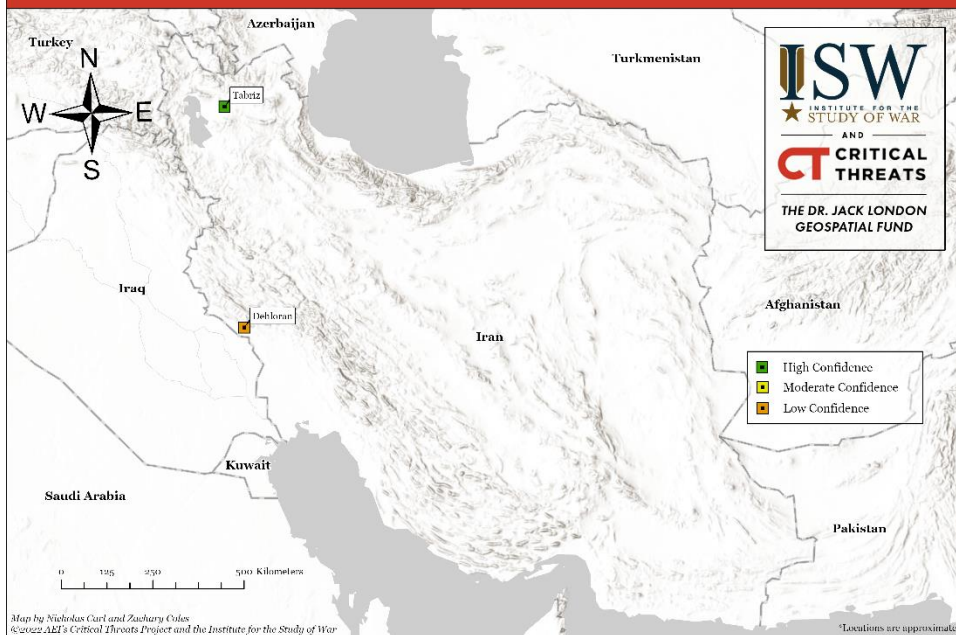
- Size: Small
- Demographic: Tabriz firefighters
- Protest Activity: Protest and strike

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

Dehloran, Ilam Province⁹

- Size: Small
- Demographic: Cement factory workers
- Protest Activity: Protest and strike

Protest Activity in Iran as of December 18, 5:00 PM ET



Law Enforcement Command (LEC) Tehran Provincial Commander Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi announced the seizure of a man-portable rocket launcher and around 50 other small arms since December 15.¹⁰ Rahimi added that the LEC has arrested over 900 individuals during these seizures. There has been an uptick in regime seizures of illegal arms in Iran in recent months, but CTP has not previously observed the seizure of a rocket launcher.¹¹

An LEC Border Guard regiment commander, Colonel Hossein Ali Farahi, announced on December 18 that the LEC clashed with unidentified militants near Esfandak, Sistan and Baluchistan Province.¹² Farahi claimed that the militants were trying to enter Iran from Pakistan. Anti-regime militancy is common in this area and not necessarily related to the protests.

Unidentified individuals stabbed and wounded four clerics in Qom City, Qom Province on December 18.¹³ Two of the clerics were hospitalized.

The parents of arrested protester Mohammad Mehdi Karami released a video on December 18 calling on the Judiciary to lift his death sentence.¹⁴ Security forces arrested Karami in connection to the death of a Basij member during protests in Karaj, Alborz Province. His parents claimed that Karami was innocent and that their Judiciary-appointed lawyer would not answer their calls. Mohammad Mehdi Karami previously told his father that the state security services tortured him into making a false confession.¹⁵

Iranian Surgeons Association President Eraj Fazel warned that poor domestic conditions are driving a brain drain in Iran on December 18.¹⁶ Fazel stated that Iran will not

have enough heart surgeons in five years and that patients will need to go abroad for treatment. Fazel was the science minister and health minister under Ali Khamenei and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, respectively, when each was president.

Iranian security personnel clashed with inmates during a prison riot in Ghaem Shahr, Mazandaran Province on December 18, marking the second consecutive day of prison riots.¹⁷ A foreign-based Iranian human rights organization reported that a riot broke out amongst inmates in response to security personnel preparing to execute a prisoner--similar to the December 17 prison riot in Karaj, Alborz Province.¹⁸

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

Lebanese Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah met with outgoing Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Ali Abdul Karim Ali in Beirut on December 18. Nasrallah and Karim Ali discussed improving bilateral cooperation between Lebanon and Syria despite “external and internal pressures.”¹⁹

Local Iraqi Kurdish administrative official Ramazan Hussein clarified that the December 17 explosion in Kani Qirzhala, Erbil Province was unrelated to any facility associated with US forces.²⁰ Iranian proxy social media channels have circulated unsubstantiated claims that the building where the explosion occurred was an ammunition storage facility used by US and Peshmerga forces.²¹

Jordanian protesters clashed with security forces while demonstrating against rising fuel prices in Amman on December 16.²² Protesters in southern Syria also have held demonstrations against the Assad regime and poor living conditions since at least November 4.²³ CTP is monitoring these protests for shared slogans, grievances, or any direct connections to ongoing protests in Iran but has not so far observed any.

¹ www.mehrnews.com/news/5659004; www.mehrnews.com/news/5658995; www.mehrnews.com/news/5658962

² <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/khamenei-reinstates-conservative-clerics-as-guardian-council-members/30056469.html>; <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/6590/Ayatollah-Khamenei-appointed-Sheikh-Ahmad-Marvi-as-the-custodian>; www.basna.ir/fa/news/975

³ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/the-second-step-of-irans-islamic-revolution-exploring-the-supreme-leaders-worldview>

⁴ https://t.me/teh_javanan/75; https://t.me/javanane_ka/367; https://t.me/hmd_javanan/348

⁵ https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2063

⁶ https://t.me/mashhad_protests/2064

⁷ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-17>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1604442958123917313?s=20&t=mXU02KTi9AW6Otfzb-4DxA>;

https://twitter.com/ICHRI/status/1604497660248981505?s=20&t=Jrg3jvbyqlmR27ZoP_6G8A

⁹ https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1604421078247505920?s=20&t=Y28ef_isz7JuukQWVSKA7Q

¹⁰ <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401092718018>

¹¹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-3>

¹² www.mehrnews.com/news/5658822

¹³ www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1401/09/27/2823445

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/persian/articles/c4n61e40leno>

¹⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-protester-death-sentence-karami-executions/32174898.html>

¹⁶ [www.entekhab dot ir/fa/news/707391](http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/707391)

¹⁷ [https://www.irna dot ir/news/84973896/%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3-%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1](https://www.irna.ir/news/84973896/%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3-%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%DA%AF%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%85-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1)

¹⁸ https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1604545625948794880?s=20&t=-JgAAx7-Q9YhUWc9q4Lsyg;

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-17>

¹⁹ [https://www dot alahednews dot com dot lb/article dot php?id=48765&cid=113](https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=48765&cid=113)

²⁰ [https://www dot rudaw dot net/sorani/kurdistan/181220228](https://www.rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/181220228)

²¹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-17>

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/16/jordan-protests-spread-over-rising-fuel-price>

²³ <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/4045806/charles-lister/latest-suwayda-protest-serves-reminder-worsening-syrian-crisis>