



**Iran Update, February 22, 2023**

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**Growing elements of the regime are publicly recognizing that the Islamic Republic has lost the confidence of its people as Iran faces a period of severe economic disruption that risks further popular discontent.** CTP has previously assessed that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei will tolerate limited criticisms of the regime, particularly those that pertain to Iran's deteriorating economic conditions.<sup>1</sup> Actors from across the political spectrum have subsequently acknowledged such issues and discussed the economy with urgency in recent days, suggesting that the regime must improve Iran's economic conditions to regain the trust of an increasingly disillusioned populous. They have become increasingly vocal as the Iranian rial hit a new all-time low on February 21--valuing at around 500,000 for one US dollar--and as inflation rates hold at roughly 50 percent.<sup>2</sup> The regime must implement significant economic reforms in order to meaningfully address Iran's economic conditions, although it is presently unclear if Iranian officials have articulated and cohered around such a solution.

**Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf framed anti-regime sentiments as economic in nature and called for a change in governance in an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated conference on February 22.** Ghalibaf identified economic conditions as the primary issue facing the regime. Ghalibaf claimed that foreign actors were capitalizing on the regime's shortcomings to foment dissent, a prevalent talking point among hardliners, but noted that they would not have shortcomings to seize upon if the regime had been functioning efficiently. Ghalibaf also stated that "if we don't pay attention to [the foundations and principles of the revolution], they will be stripped of their meaning," insinuating that the regime had deviated from its ideological core. Ghalibaf specifically called on the IRGC to improve economic conditions and reexamine its role within Iranian society, using the collective "we" throughout his address. Ghalibaf stated that the IRGC must play an active role in "unraveling the knots" within the Iranian economic system and stressed the importance of having "a people's economy," suggesting that the economy no longer belonged to the people. Ghalibaf reminded his audience of the IRGC's role within Iranian society, stating that "we must preserve our spirituality and know that we are not solely a military institution" and claimed that "we can solve the country's economic problems, but we have to change our perspective and the way we govern."<sup>3</sup> It is unclear to which changes Ghalibaf was referencing, although the IRGC plays a dominant role within the Iranian economy and is an obstacle in allowing it to operate efficiently.<sup>4</sup> Ghalibaf has

previously endorsed economic and sociopolitical reforms in response to the Mahsa Amini protest movement, as CTP previously reported.<sup>5</sup>

**Parliamentarians are explicitly blaming the Raisi administration for Iran's economic shortcomings.** Hardline Parliamentarian Ahmad Naderi publicly announced on February 22 that a planned meeting among Raisi administration officials to discuss currency fluctuations had been postponed until February 25. Naderi emphasized that First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber and Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin could not attend the original meeting. Naderi may have been trying to portray these Raisi administration officials as apathetic towards and responsible for Iran's worsening economic situation.<sup>6</sup>

Hardline Parliamentarian Lotfollah Siah Kali separately called for the impeachment of unspecified Raisi administration officials during a public parliamentary address on February 22.<sup>7</sup> This follows Iranian media reports on February 21 that parliamentarians held a closed-door meeting demanding the impeachment of "at least two to three" Raisi administration officials.<sup>8</sup> Parliamentarians may follow through on impeachment threats to convey that they are actively working to confront Iran's deteriorating economic conditions.

**Raisi officials have presented several superficial economic policies in recent days to confront growing criticisms of their administration.** First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber headed a meeting on February 22 in which several Raisi administration officials approved a plan on sustainable food supplies. This plan likely seeks to lower Iran's dependence on foreign food imports and may be an indicator that the Iranian rial's depreciation is hampering the regime's ability to purchase basic goods from abroad. Mokhber's plan follows reports on February 21 that Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Secretary Ali Shamkhani wrote a letter to President Ebrahim Raisi warning of an impending basic goods shortage.<sup>9</sup> The time required to establish new domestic food sources and current unfavorable environmental conditions make it highly unlikely that Iran will become agriculturally self-sufficient in the near future. This plan is likely intended to alleviate public frustrations in the short-term rather than providing long-term solutions to Iran's economic problems.

**Ideological hardliners are blaming inflation and the depreciation of the Iranian rial on foreign actors, signaling that they may be unwilling to pursue meaningful reforms to improve Iran's economy.** Raisi Administration Spokesperson Ali Bahadori Jahromi stated on February 21 that Iran's enemies had recently prioritized the economic dimension of their purported "hybrid war" aimed at overthrowing the regime.<sup>10</sup> Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Legal Council Chairperson and Expediency Discernment Council and Assembly of Experts Member Gholam Reza Mesbahi Moghaddam separately blamed the depreciation of the Iranian rial on "the US' currency war against Iran" on February 21.<sup>11</sup> Such statements underscore that some hardline officials are cognizant of Iran's dire economic conditions, but are reluctant to take responsibility for alleviating them. The regime can—and did not—make meaningful concessions on the core political and sociocultural issues that sparked the Mahsa Amini movement, which will likely exacerbate public grievances with the regime if it fails to resolve ongoing economic issues.

### **Key Takeaways**

- **Growing elements of the regime are publicly recognizing that the Islamic Republic has lost the confidence of its people as Iran faces a period of severe economic disruption that risks further popular discontent.**
- **Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf framed anti-regime sentiments as economic in nature and called for a change in governance in an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated conference.**
- **Parliamentarians are explicitly blaming the Raisi administration for Iran's economic shortcomings.**
- **Raisi officials have presented several superficial economic policies in recent days to confront growing criticisms of their administration.**
- **Ideological hardliners are blaming inflation and the depreciation of the Iranian rial on foreign actors, signaling that they may be unwilling to pursue meaningful reforms to improve Iran's economy.**
- **At least eight protests occurred in four cities across four provinces on February 22.**
- **An Iranian official confirmed on February 22 that International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials were currently in Iran to investigate reports of 84 percent enriched uranium at an unspecified nuclear facility.**
- **Axios reported that Iranian officials are currently deprioritizing ballistic missile exports to Russia, citing a senior Israeli official.**
- **The IDF carried out a daytime raid to apprehend suspected Palestinian militants operating in Nablus, the West Bank.**
- **Kataib Hezbollah spokesperson Mohammed Mohie met with Aleppo Province Governor Ahmad Hussein Diab.**
- **Between 250-300 Syrian Arab Army (SAA) Republican Guard personnel deployed to positions along the right bank of the Euphrates River near Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province.**

#### **Internal Security and Protest Activity**

**At least eight protests occurred in four cities across four provinces on February 22.** CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

##### **Shiraz, Fars Province<sup>12</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Educators
- **Notes:** Demanded release of imprisoned teachers

##### **Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan Province<sup>13</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Protester Activity:** Fires lit on city street, anti-regime slogans

##### **Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province<sup>14</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Retirees

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

- **Size:** Small
- **Notes:** Protested lack of permission to build on land

**Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>16</sup>**

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Bazaar workers, Alladin passage
- **Notes:** Protested inflation and foreign exchange rates. Unclear if this protest encompassed another bazaar protest CTP recorded on February 22.

**Tehran City, Tehran Province<sup>17</sup>**

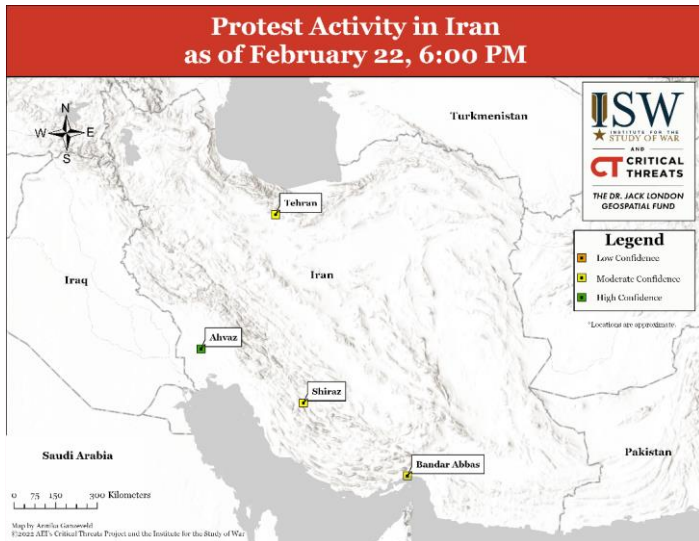
- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Tehran Grand Bazaar workers
- **Notes:** Protested inflation and foreign exchange rates. Unclear if this protest encompassed another bazaar protest CTP recorded on February 22.

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

- **Size:** Small
- **Location:** Unspecified metro stop

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

- **Size:** Small
- **Demographic:** Special housing residents



**Commented [AG1]:** Link to map:  
<https://criticalthreats.imeetcentral.com/ctp-iswresearch/folder/WzlwLDE1NzcwODU5XQ/WzlsODQxNjc2NzBd/>

Link to shapefile:  
<https://criticalthreats.imeetcentral.com/ctp-iswresearch/folder/WzlwLDE1NzcwODU5XQ/WzlsODQxNjc2Njld/>

## Foreign Policy and Diplomacy

**An Iranian official confirmed on February 22 that International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials were currently in Iran to investigate reports of 84-percent enriched uranium at an unspecified nuclear facility.** *Bloomberg* reported on February 19 that IAEA monitors had detected 84-percent-enriched uranium—the highest level of enrichment in Iran reported to date—in Iran, citing two senior diplomats.<sup>20</sup> Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Head Mohammad Eslami announced that IAEA officials had been investigating and “negotiating” in Iran since February 21 and stated that Iranian officials were working to “resolve ambiguities.”<sup>21</sup> Foreign Affairs Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian separately stated on February 22 that an IAEA delegation would soon visit Tehran. Amir Abdollahian expressed hope that IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi would reach a consensus with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran on “a technical point.”<sup>22</sup>

**Axios reported that Iranian officials are currently deprioritizing ballistic missile exports to Russia, citing a senior Israeli official.** The source added that Iranian missile deliveries to Russia could eventually materialize “at some point.”<sup>23</sup>

## External Security and Military Affairs

**The IDF carried out a daytime raid to apprehend suspected Palestinian militants operating in Nablus, the West Bank on February 22.**<sup>24</sup> IDF personnel engaged in an extended firefight with multiple Palestinian militias during the raid.<sup>25</sup> IDF personnel killed 10 Palestinian militants and civilians and injured approximately 100 more during the raid. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), an Iranian proxy militia, claimed two PIJ militants died during the raid.<sup>26</sup> The Lions’ Den

(TLD), a West Bank militia that *Israel Hayom* claims is receiving funding from Hamas, reported six of its militants died during the raid.<sup>27</sup> Hamas Izz ad Din al Qassam Brigades spokesperson Abu Obeida warned that Hamas' "patience is running out," and PIJ issued a statement vowing to retaliate.<sup>28</sup> The IDF declared a state of alert for Israeli settlements near the Gaza Strip and West Bank in preparation for retaliatory rocket barrages and small arms fire from multiple Palestinian militias.<sup>29</sup> The February 22 operation marks one of the deadliest raids since 2021.<sup>30</sup> Rhetoric from TLD, PIJ, and Hamas and the magnitude of casualties from the February 22 raid suggests Palestinian militia factions intend to retaliate. Hamas militants may fire rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel in the coming days, and PIJ and TLD militants may pursue urban guerrilla-style attacks on IDF checkpoints near the West Bank.

**Kataib Hezbollah spokesperson Mohammed Mohie met with Aleppo Province Governor Ahmad Hussein Diab on February 19.**<sup>31</sup> A KH Telegram channel claimed Mohie and Diab discussed developments related to humanitarian relief for the February 6 earthquake.<sup>32</sup> CTP cannot independently verify the details of Diab and Mohie's conversation.

**Between 250-300 Syrian Arab Army (SAA) Republican Guard personnel deployed to positions along the west bank of the Euphrates River near Mayadin, Deir ez Zor Province on February 22.** *Naher Media* claimed the Republican Guard personnel deployed from their headquarters in eastern Deir ez Zor City, Deir ez Zor Province.<sup>33</sup> *Al Araby* reported that unnamed sources said the Assad regime deployed the Republican Guard unit as oversight for Iran-aligned SAA Fourth Division personnel.<sup>34</sup> Fourth Division personnel stationed in Deir ez Zor Province along border crossings into SDF territory have clashed with SAA Air Force Intelligence personnel about control over narcotics smuggling routes in recent weeks.<sup>35</sup>

CTP reported on February 14 that Iranian-backed militants departed from Deir ez Zor Province to possibly head to Aleppo Province where Quds Force and Iranian-backed militants have amassed personnel and materiel since the February 6 earthquake.<sup>36</sup> The Assad regime may have deployed the Republican Guard unit to Deir ez Zor Province to backfill for the militia departures, rather than to solely consolidate control over narcotics smuggling routes.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-14-2023>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-21/iran-rations-currency-sales-after-rial-weakens-to-new-record-low> ;

<https://www.reuters.com/markets/currencies/irans-currency-falls-record-low-sanctions-continue-2023-02-20/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14011203001041/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA%DB%8C%D9%85-%D8%AD%DA%A9%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%85%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irgcs-role-irans-economy-growing-its-engineering-arm-set-execute-40-mega-projects>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-13-2023>

<sup>6</sup> <https://t dot co/YxTKPAs4wy>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www dot isna dot ir/news/1401120301857/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%87%DA%A9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%B6%D9%87-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%88-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B3>

<sup>8</sup> <https://t dot co/szkQjRex4l>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202302218174>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.dot.irna.ir/news/85036594/%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2-%D8%A2%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%B2%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AE%D9%88%D8%AF-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%AF>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.dot.fardanews.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-73/1206441-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AD%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%85-%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%81-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AE%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

<sup>12</sup> <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1628440969442992128?cxt=HHwWgIC9leKbsZktAAAA> ;

[https://twitter.com/hra\\_news/status/1628404860801503232?cxt=HHwWgMC-6fvl0JktAAAA](https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1628404860801503232?cxt=HHwWgMC-6fvl0JktAAAA) ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628422578783023106?cxt=HHwWhMCziaXtqJktAAAA>

<sup>13</sup> [https://twitter.com/Javanan\\_bnd/status/1628497561278468096?s=20](https://twitter.com/Javanan_bnd/status/1628497561278468096?s=20) ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628505187156385792?cxt=HHwWgICztd21pktAAAA>

<sup>14</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628334263446929413?cxt=HHwWioDQxdTYgJktAAAA> ;

[https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628327411669426176?cxt=HHwWgICz6erJ\\_ZgtAAAA](https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628327411669426176?cxt=HHwWgICz6erJ_ZgtAAAA) ;

[https://twitter.com/hra\\_news/status/1628365286112886786?cxt=HHwWhlCwtbXmjpkAAAA](https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1628365286112886786?cxt=HHwWhlCwtbXmjpkAAAA) ;

<https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1628382344577966080?cxt=HHwWgICz8azHlptAAAA>

<sup>15</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628421064970600450?cxt=HHwWhlCwpZaVqJktAAAA> ;

[https://twitter.com/hra\\_news/status/1628428612968775681?cxt=HHwWgoCwocPMq5ktAAAA](https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1628428612968775681?cxt=HHwWgoCwocPMq5ktAAAA)

<sup>16</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranwire/status/1628437292917444608>

<sup>17</sup> <https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1628416796754681856?cxt=HHwWgIC9zd2coppkAAAA> ;

[https://twitter.com/hra\\_news/status/1628377153845841921?cxt=HHwWgsC-9ZqZlJktAAAA](https://twitter.com/hra_news/status/1628377153845841921?cxt=HHwWgsC-9ZqZlJktAAAA) ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628358009565900800?cxt=HHwWgMCz9e6-i5ktAAAA> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628358669707378688?cxt=HHwWgICwraXli5ktAAAA>

<sup>18</sup> <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628315313459630084?cxt=HHwWiMC4kdCJ-JgtAAAA> ;

<https://twitter.com/RadioFarda/status/1628367112405147652?cxt=HHwWilCzrdzQi5ktAAAA>

<sup>19</sup> <https://twitter.com/ManotoNews/status/1628349078311403520?s=20> ;

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1628310086312402945?cxt=HHwWgoCx7a7Z9ZgtAAAA>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-19/iran-nuclear-inspectors-detect-uranium-enriched-to-84-purity>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.imna.ir/news/643049/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A6%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A2%DA%98%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%B0%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF>

<sup>22</sup> <https://t.co/E8mgZfHGbn>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-tel-aviv-2e53465f-174e-4e0d-9003-3cee6d3591bd.html?chunk=4&utm\\_term=twsocialshare#story4](https://www.axios.com/newsletters/axios-tel-aviv-2e53465f-174e-4e0d-9003-3cee6d3591bd.html?chunk=4&utm_term=twsocialshare#story4)

<sup>24</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/politics-nablu-israel-west-bank-b29ffacdfefb473aae06542b01e0fdd>

<sup>25</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/politics-nablu-israel-west-bank-b29ffacdfefb473aae06542b01e0fdd>

<sup>26</sup> <https://twitter.com/JoeTruzman/status/1628413908062179328?s=20>; <https://t.me/areennabluss/219>

<sup>27</sup> <https://t.me/areennabluss/219>; <https://twitter.com/idfonline/status/1628378087233658882?s=20>;

<https://twitter.com/JoeTruzman/status/1628487421372542976?s=20>; <https://www.dot.israelhayom.com/2022/10/16/minor-incidents-could-spark-widespread-unrest-defense-official-warns/>

<sup>28</sup> [https://t.me/spokesman\\_2020/36](https://t.me/spokesman_2020/36); <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/22/world/middleeast/west-bank-nablu-palestinians-killed.html>; <https://apnews.com/article/politics-nablu-israel-west-bank-b29ffacdfefb473aae06542b01e0fdd>

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<sup>29</sup> <https://msdrnews dot com/214983/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%A8-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B6%D9%81%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%BA%D9%84/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/politics-nablus-israel-west-bank-b29ffacdfefb473aae06542b01e0fded>

<sup>31</sup> <https://t.me/centerkaf/3594>

<sup>32</sup> <https://t.me/centerkaf/3594>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www dot nahermedia dot net/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84-%D9%83%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A7/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www dot alaraby dot co dot uk/politics/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%B2%D8%B2-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%B1-%D9%88%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A8%D8%AC>

<sup>35</sup> [https://deirezzor24 dot net/en/a-dispute-between-the-national-defense-militia-and-the-fourth-division-east-of-deir-ezzor/;](https://deirezzor24 dot net/en/a-dispute-between-the-national-defense-militia-and-the-fourth-division-east-of-deir-ezzor/)  
<https://www dot syriahr dot com/en/289388/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-update-february-14-2023>