



Iran Crisis Update, December 22

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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](#).

Social media accounts reported that Iranian security forces have begun violently killing and mass arresting citizens in Izeh, Khuzestan Province since December 21.¹ Some accounts have claimed that the regime has arrested over 350 individuals thus far and completely disrupted internet services in the area.² Others have claimed that the regime has established checkpoints on the major roads leading into and out of the city.³ CTP cannot verify these reports at this time, and the information space remains extremely muddy. We will provide more information on the situation in Izeh in future updates.

This reported escalation follows weeks of violence in Izeh. Unidentified gunmen shot and killed at least six Izeh residents and injured at least 15 on November 16.⁴ Iranian state media described the event as a “terrorist attack,” while the mother of one of victims—nine-year-old Kian Pirfalak—accused security forces of conducting the attack.⁵ The regime tried to blame the attack on the Islamic State in the following days.⁶ Security forces killed two and arrested another two in Izeh for their alleged roles in the attack on December 20.⁷

One of Iran’s most senior military officers discussed how the regime can adapt to control its domestic information space on December 22. Major General Gholam Ali Rashid called for the establishment of a “media headquarters” to counter enemy information operations.⁸ The precise function of this media headquarters is unclear, although the regime would likely use it to more aggressively promote pro-regime narratives in media. Iranian political and security leaders frequently accuse the West, Israel, and Saudi Arabia of using media outlets to incite protests in Iran.⁹ Rashid is the commander of the Khatam ol Anbia Central Headquarters—the most senior Iranian military body responsible for joint and wartime operations. Rashid is also a member of a close human network of IRGC officers who have known one another since the Iran-Iraq war and have historically worked together during domestic political crises to advance their hardline agendas.¹⁰

Key Takeaways

- Social media accounts have reported that Iranian security forces have begun violently killing and mass arresting citizens in Izeh, Khuzestan Province since December 21.
- One of Iran's most senior military officers discussed how the regime can adapt to control its domestic information space.
- At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces.
- The Tehran and Mashhad neighborhood youth groups announced their alignment and solidarity with a group called the Seventh of Aban Front.
- Protest coordinators and organizations called for protests and strikes throughout Tehran on December 24.
- Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib appointed a new Director General of Intelligence for West Azerbaijan Province.
- The Wall Street Journal reported that anti-regime actors have smuggled roughly 200 Starlink devices into Iranian territory.

Anti-Regime Protests

At least three protests occurred in three cities across two provinces on December 22. CTP assesses with moderate to high confidence that protests occurred in the following locations:

Semirom, Esfahan Province¹¹

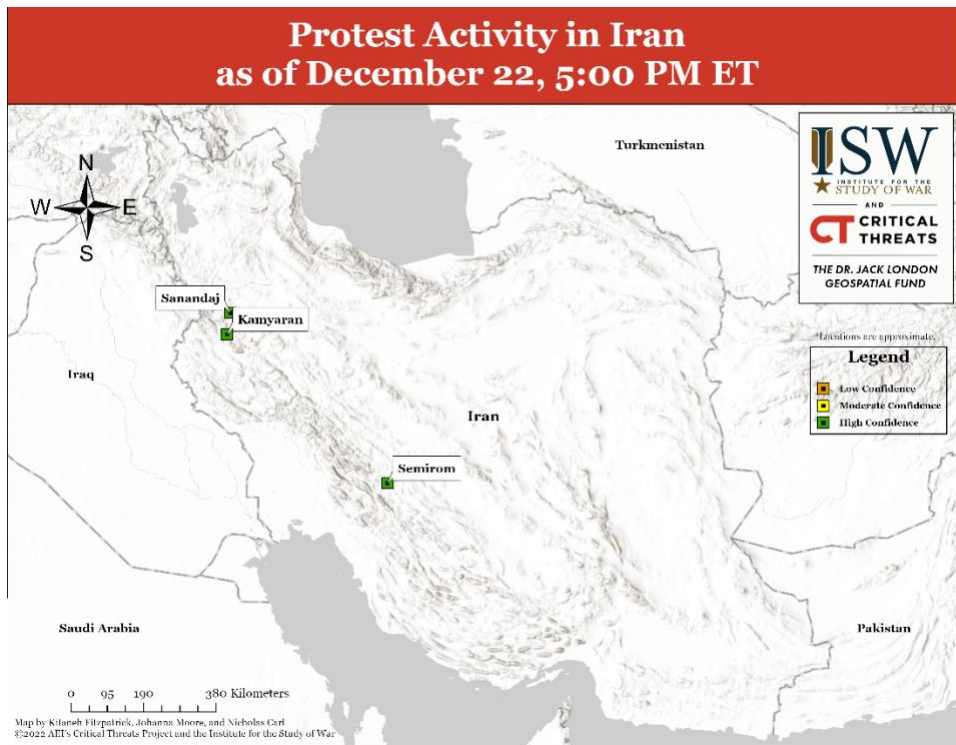
- Size: Small
- Protester Activity: Set fire in the street
- Notes: Protest activity follows killed protester Morad Bahramian's 40-day commemoration ceremony

Kamyaran, Kurdistan Province¹²

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for killed protest Fouad Mohammadi

Sanandaj, Kurdistan Province¹³

- Size: Medium
- Demographic: Mourners
- Protester Activity: 40-day commemoration ceremony for three killed protesters



The Tehran and Mashhad neighborhood youth groups announced their alignment and solidarity with a group called the Seventh of Aban Front on December 22.¹⁴ The Seventh of Aban Front is a Brussels-based organization comprised of anti-regime activists, including a former editor at Radio Farda.¹⁵ The stated objective of the group is to unite the protest movement and replace the Islamic Republic with a democratic government. The seventh of Aban represents an unofficial holiday—Cyrus the Great Day—in the Iranian calendar year. The regime has long sought to suppress celebrations around this holiday given its occasional affiliation with Iranian monarchists. The Seventh of Aban Front—and any other foreign-based protest organization—will likely struggle to direct and orchestrate anti-regime activities in Iran given the muddy information space and expanding regime censorship. It is unclear what relationship this group has with the United Neighborhood Youth—an umbrella organization for protest coordinators that announced its formation on December 4.¹⁶

Protest coordinators and organizations called for protests and strikes throughout Tehran on December 24.¹⁷ These protests are meant to commemorate 100-consecutive days of protests, according to these groups. The 100 Neighborhoods group urged protesters to disable surveillance cameras ahead of December 24.¹⁸ Some social media users criticized the protest locations that the 100 Neighborhoods group proposed,¹⁹ claiming that security forces are concentrated around some of them.

Intelligence and Security Minister Esmail Khatib appointed a new Director General of Intelligence for West Azerbaijan Province on December 22. Khatib gave a speech endorsing the use of state-run and privately-owned media outlets to circulate pro-regime rhetoric in a ceremony introducing the new director general. Khatib additionally praised the IRGC Ground Forces Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada

Operational Headquarters for securing the province.²⁰ Iranian authorities previously deployed the IRGC Ground Forces 27th Hamzeh Seyyed ol Shohada Division to violently suppress protests in Mahabad on November 19 and other cities throughout the province in the weeks thereafter.²¹ Iranian media did not include the name of the new director general nor information on their predecessor. Khatib additionally visited the West Azerbaijan Directorate to discuss the security situation within the province.²²

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on December 22 that anti-regime actors have smuggled roughly 200 Starlink devices into Iranian territory. Iranian officials are reportedly aware that Starlink is active throughout the country but do not know who owns the devices nor where they are located. Starlink terminals provide users with a means to circumvent the regime's ongoing internet restriction and censorship measures, thereby facilitating communications among protest coordinators.²³

Axis of Resistance and Regional Developments

There was nothing significant to report today.

¹ https://twitter.com/AtenaDaemi/status/1605876359003344898?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCMs1Dhn2S9Wf_yA ;
<https://twitter.com/MansouriSirwan/status/1606012140896153601> ;
https://twitter.com/Dorchida24/status/1605710605402324992?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCMs1Dhn2S9Wf_yA ;
https://twitter.com/kayvanrassooli/status/1605698173057605632?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCMs1Dhn2S9Wf_yA ;
https://twitter.com/_Injaneb96/status/1605946287211155457?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCMs1Dhn2S9Wf_yA

² https://twitter.com/javanan_Kh/status/1605725621656633346?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCMs1Dhn2S9Wf_yA

³ https://twitter.com/DaiKatuo/status/1605932639441113094?s=20&t=OXi0FpgCMs1Dhn2S9Wf_yA

⁴ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-16>

⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-seven-killed-terrorist-attack-izeh-protests/32135345.html> ;

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/18/iran-protests-izeh-kian-pirfalak/>

⁶ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-17>

⁷ <https://www.mehrnews dot com/news/5660415>

⁸ <https://defapress dot ir/fa/news/562936>

⁹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-october-3> ;

<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-13>;

¹⁰ [https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-](https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/pdf_uploadanalysisThe_IRGC_Command_Network-1.pdf)

[content/uploads/2016/07/pdf_uploadanalysisThe_IRGC_Command_Network-1.pdf](https://www.criticalthreats.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/pdf_uploadanalysisThe_IRGC_Command_Network-1.pdf)

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606009887179214848>

https://twitter.com/IranIntl_Ar/status/1606016420520857621

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1606026511772880896>

<https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1606021907471540234?s=20&t=zOfAXqzdo7MHJxss9bMG2Q>

¹² <https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605898233451945986>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605899117917372416>

<https://twitter.com/iranworkers/status/1605917333872168962>

<https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1605914391815372801>

https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605921667011706890?s=20&t=rBSgK66Wkd8XLlbfqY1DTg ;

<https://twitter.com/Shahinloo/status/1605913158098599944?s=20&t=rBSgK66Wkd8XLlbfqY1DTg>

¹³ https://twitter.com/RadioFarda_/status/1605967988716363776?s=20&t=QLDD7TSbgej0QMc7abHZqA

<https://twitter.com/HengawO/status/1605952749165694978>

¹⁴ https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/160587359775478784;

https://twitter.com/Javanan_mashhad/status/1605982891497861120

¹⁵ www.7aban.org/about.php

¹⁶ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-december-4>

¹⁷ https://twitter.com/javanane_t/status/1605944547145555968;

https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605833399905787905;

https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605694549434802186

¹⁸ https://twitter.com/100_mahalle/status/1605937962163863559

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/DaiKatuo/status/1605982131217346560>

²⁰ <https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF> ;

<https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-23/588457-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%B7%DB%8C%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA>

²¹ <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/iran-crisis-update-november-19>

²² <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-23/588457-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%B7%DB%8C%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA> ;

<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

²³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/irans-online-crackdown-prompts-smuggling-of-starlink-kits-11671714080>

²² <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-23/588457-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%B7%DB%8C%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA> ;

<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

²³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/irans-online-crackdown-prompts-smuggling-of-starlink-kits-11671714080>

²² <https://www.etemadonline.com/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C-23/588457-%D8%AC%D9%86%DA%AF-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%B7%DB%8C%D8%A8-%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA> ;

<https://www.isna.ir/news/1401100100409/%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%B0%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%87-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

²³ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/irans-online-crackdown-prompts-smuggling-of-starlink-kits-11671714080>