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## SOLEIMANI, SAFAVI, JAFARI: GUARDIANS OF THE REVOLUTION OR IRANIAN "GODFATHERS"?

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**JCSP 43**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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## INTRODUCTION

Every year on February 11<sup>th</sup>, Iranians stop to celebrate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. The 1979 revolution was led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who, like many Iranians, opposed the pro-Western Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's six-point White Revolution. The reforms initiated by the Shah included land reforms, nationalizing the forests, the privatization of state-owned enterprises, allowing women to vote and non-Muslims to hold office, industrial profit-sharing, and a literacy campaign.<sup>1</sup> The systematic secularization and westernizing of the state was the nexus that the Ayatollah exploited to oust the Shah and take his place as the Supreme Leader. As the Supreme Leader, he introduced the concept of Velayat-e Faqui, which translates to the "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist". To ensure the success of this guardianship, Ayatollah Khomeini established the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution on 5 May 1979. Some refer to this institution as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The main goals of the IRGC are to protect the Islamic system and to defend against external interference, as well as, a coup by the regular military.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on three top-ranking representatives from the IRGC against the backdrop of recent sociological analysis of this institution. The three individuals are Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, and Major General Qasem Soleimani. The main research question is to determine whether these three leaders of the IRGC fit the description of the ideal member of the Guard or are they really gangsters in uniform.

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, "White Revolution," last modified 12 September 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/The-White-Revolution>

This paper will be divided into four parts. The first part of the paper will provide a description of the IRGC, including its function within Iranian society, its internal mechanics, and underlying culture. The next three parts of the paper will focus on each one of the three Generals to describe how they rose to their various leadership positions, how do they contribute to the overall goals of the IRGC, and what are their politics.

## **WHAT IS THE IRGC**

In Canada, as in Iran, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces is not an elected official. In Canada, the Governor General is bestowed that title and in Iran, it is the Supreme Leader; however, this one common thread is where the similarities stop. In the Canadian system, the Governor General, although the Commander-in-Chief in title, has no direct control over the activities of the Canadian Armed Forces. The day-to-day running of the Canadian Armed Forces is the responsibility of the duly elected members of the Canadian Government. In the Iranian system, the Supreme Leader exercises his authority directly over both the regular armed forces, known as the Artesh, and the IRGC. Whilst the Supreme Leader would purport to speak for the entire population of the Islamic Republic, the concept of civil control of the military that permeates throughout Western militaries is not practiced in Iran.

The IRGC was formed in May 1979 and according to the Iranian constitution Section 3 Article 150 the duties and responsibilities of the IRGC in relation to the other Armed Forces “shall be laid down by law emphasizing the brotherly cooperation and coordination between them.”<sup>2</sup> The idea of brotherly cooperation has not always been easy for the two groups that are often at odds, in fact Ali Alfoneh states that “[m]ore than three

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<sup>2</sup>Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” accessed 20 April 2017, <http://www.president.ir/en/president/functions>

decades after the Revolution, the Army, and the IRGC remain entangled in a rivalry which the Army — should the hitherto trend continue — is bound to lose.”<sup>3</sup> The Artesh did not necessarily need to be concerned about the IRGC when it was first established as a group of 6,000 militiamen, but now that the IRGC numbers are in excess of 125,000 it has become such that it could threaten the very existence of the Artesh.<sup>4</sup> The Guard is comprised of ground forces consisting of 100,000+ soldiers and a naval force consisting of 20,000+ sailors, in addition to 5000+ marines. The Guard is currently commanded by Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari who relieved Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi of that position in 2009.

The IRGC also has a special operations force known as the Quds that is estimated to be in excess of 15,000 troops.<sup>5</sup> The Quds are the extraterritorial arm of the IRGC and are responsible for “exporting” the revolution outside Iran. The Commander of the Quds, Major General Qasem Soleimani reports directly to the Supreme Leader.

In addition to its regular troops, the IRGC also commands the Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij, translated, it means “The Mobilization of the Oppressed” or as it is simply referred to, the Basij or “The Mobilization”. The Basij is a paramilitary arm of the Guard comprised of a volunteer militia. They are largely responsible for providing internal security, serving as law enforcement auxiliary, providing social services, organizing public religious ceremonies, policing morals, and suppression of dissident groups. The Basij is estimated to have approximately 90,000 full-time uniformed

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<sup>3</sup> Ali Alfoneh, "Eternal Rivals? the Artesh and the IRGC," *The Artesh: Iran's Marginalized Regular Military* (November, 2011): 35.

<sup>4</sup> "Chapter Seven: Middle East and North Africa," *The Military Balance* 116, no. 1 (2016): 328. Although this reference puts the IRGC at 125,000, there are others that believe that they could number upward of 150,000.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Martin Kleiber, *Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities: The Threat in the Northern Gulf*, Westport, Conn: Praeger Security International, 2007, 79.

members with a part-time reserve of approximately 300,000 and a mobilization contingent of one million.<sup>6</sup> However, if you are to believe the former commander of the Guard, Major General Safavi, in an interview he gave in 2006, the Basij number close to 10 million.<sup>7</sup> Considering that the Basij accepts men and women between the ages of 18 and 45 and that the relevant population of that group is approximately 50 million, it would require that 1 in 5 of that age group be a member, which is possible, but unlikely.

From its beginnings as an Islamic militia, the IRGC has taken an ever more active role in nearly every aspect of Iranian society. The Guard has greatly expanded its social, political, military, and economic role both within Iran and externally.

From a political perspective, on 6 September 1982, the Iranian Parliament passed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps statute which prohibited individual members of the IRGC from political activity and forbade them from belonging to specific political parties.<sup>8</sup> Although this prevented them running for office, there are still many levers that can be used to influence the political course of the country. Even with this in place, by the time of Khomeini's death, the Iranian political elite feared that the IRGC had become too involved in political matters so they re-iterated the Supreme Leader's "Political and Divine Testament", which states:

My emphatic counsel to the armed forces is to observe [and] abide by the military rule of non-involvement in politics. Do not join any political party or faction. No military man, security policeman, no Revolutionary Guard, or Basij may enter into politics. Stay away from politics, and you'll be able to preserve and maintain your military prowess and be immune to internal

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>7</sup> Clip #1318, MEMRI TV, 6:08, 12 November 2006, <https://www.memri.org/tv/iranian-revolutionary-guards-corps-commander-general-yahya-safavi-shahab-3-missile-cluster>

<sup>8</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards is Turning Theocracy into Military Dictatorship*, Washington, D.C: AEI Press, 2013, 18.

division and dispute. Military commanders must forbid entrance into political ties by the men under their command.<sup>9</sup>

Over time, the IRGC has moved away from these principles. After Khomeini's death in 1989, their political involvement and interventions seems to have accelerated. Their first major foray into Iranian politics began during the presidency of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. Khatami was a reformist that advocated for free markets and freedom of expression. He was very aware that the IRGC was growing ever more powerful, so he attempted to weaken the Guard by pressuring the Supreme Leader to remove Major General Mohsen Rezaei, who had been the IRGC Commander since 1981. One of the major reasons for wanting to get rid of General Rezaei was that he was seen to be meddling in politics by supporting Khatami's rival in the election. Ayatollah Khamenei agreed and soon Major General Safavi was installed as the Commander of the Guard. Much to Khatami's chagrin, the new Commander did not share his reformist views and continued along the same line as Rezaei.<sup>10</sup> A great display of the IRGC's political influence came in 1999 during the student protests. The students supported the reformist views of the President, but this was deemed, by the IRGC, to be a threat to the Islamic state, which they clearly have the mandate to protect. In response, top ranking members of the Guard including Generals Safavi, Jafari, and Soleimani wrote a letter threatening the President with a coup if he did not act immediately to suppress the protests.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, one of the main motivations for creating the IRGC was to prevent a military coup and in this instance, the IRGC were prepared to conduct one. Once the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Rizvi, M. Mahtab Alam. "Evaluating the Political and Economic Role of the IRGC." *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 4 (2012): 589.

<sup>11</sup> <http://irandataportal.syr.edu/irgc-commanders-letter-to-khatami>.

student protests were violently suppressed, Khatami lost credibility and the IRGC gained further momentum in the political arena.

The next big step of the IRGC on the political stage came in 2005 with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the President. There were allegations that the vote was rigged in favor of Ahmadinejad. Even though members of the IRGC are forbidden from running for office, this did not stop the new President from placing serving and former IRGC in top posts in the executive. This included half his cabinet posts, nearly a third of the governors, and 80 of the 290 seats in parliament. The trend of vote rigging was even more of an issue during the 2009 election, as the Basij and the IRGC were accused of manipulating the results in favor of Ahmadinejad and were used to crush the opposition protests after the alleged, fraudulent election.<sup>12</sup> This honeymoon between the President and the Guard would soon come to an end, as in 2011, Ahmadinejad threatened to expose the Guard of corruption if his aides were arrested.<sup>13</sup> The allegations were that “unnamed” government agencies were using their dockyards to import goods, such as cigarettes without going through customs and paying the required duty. Of course, Major General Jafari was forced deny this accusation. Ahmadinejad was able to ride out the rest of his term; however, the damage to the hardliner side of the political system was already done and another moderate, Hassan Rouhani, assumed the Presidency on 3 August 2013. The results of this election shocked many throughout the world and may signal a decline in the IRGC’s influence on the political stage and even possibly the future of the Islamic Republic. Despite this potential decline, Rouhani will need to tread carefully as Will

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<sup>12</sup> Ruhollah Vahdati, "President Ahmadinejad Turns Against Regime’s Guard in Iran," *The Times*, 5 July, 2011, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/president-ahmadinejad-turns-against-regimes-guard-in-iran-3wkf6w9c3bp>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Fulton points out the IRGC “has previously shown a willingness to act aggressively to protect its interests.”<sup>14</sup>

Although the IRGC’s involvement in the Iranian political landscape is a key component of its power in society, their involvement in the economic sector of the country is equally as significant. The IRGC is involved many sectors including construction, oil and gas, Iran’s financial and banking, as well as, telecommunications and even auto-making.<sup>15</sup> The IRGC started out slowly in the years after the revolution under the guise of building up the Islamic state through the Construction Jihad. This support of the reconstruction efforts developed into the IRGC Cooperative Foundation in the early 1990s, which demonstrated the Guard’s early involvement in Iran’s economic arena.<sup>16</sup>

As the IRGC gained more political traction, it was able to use its influence to access large governmental projects, use its insider knowledge to acquire companies during privatization, and finally, it used its control of the borders to avoid customs. In addition to these advantages, in 1993 the Supreme Leader decreed that the IRGC were now exempted from taxation, further advancing their economic enterprises. The Guard’s stranglehold on the Iranian economy was further strengthened by Ahmadinejad as he gave control over state enterprises to the IRGC at a low cost by granting them special privileges.<sup>17</sup> Between 2005 and 2011, the IRGC was awarded \$25 billion in contracts in

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<sup>14</sup> Will Fulton, *The IRGC Command Network: Formal Structures and Informal Influence*: AEI Critical Threats Project, 2013, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Rizvi, 590.

<sup>16</sup> Hesam Forozan and Afshin Shahi, "The Military and the State in Iran: The Economic Rise of the Revolutionary Guards," *The Middle East Journal* 71, no. 1 (2017): 73.

<sup>17</sup> "IRGC’s Dominance Over Iran’s Politics and Economy – Part 1," *Iran Focus*, 11 May, 2010, sec. Exclusive Reports.

the oil and gas sectors alone, plus with the Khamenei's 2005 privatization edict, the IRGC increased their holdings in the banking and finance sectors.<sup>18</sup>

The election of Hassan Rouhani as President seems to have started a decline in the Guard's power as he seems to be trying to systematically dismantle the Guard's political and economic power. First, in 2013 Rouhani defended the IRGC involvement in the economy by stating that the IRGC is not a rival for the private sector, nor has it ever been a regular contractor and that they should take on important economic projects that the private sector is not capable of managing.<sup>19</sup> On the surface, this statement appears to be supportive of the IRGC's activities, but essentially he is saying that private industry should come first and that the Guard should only be used as a last resort. The second move he made was to replace Brigadier General Rostam Qasemi as petroleum minister with Bizhan Namdar Zangeneh, who had no ties to the Guard. Soon after assuming the position, Zangeneh canceled fifteen oil and gas contracts, a number of which had IRGC interests attached. To counteract this, the IRGC went to a former Guard Commander and the mayor of Tehran to secure \$7 Billion in development projects.<sup>20</sup> It would seem that Rouhani has taken the first steps in taming the IRGC, but will likely require much more time than he has left in office to make any meaningful changes.

As shown above, the IRGC has moved significantly beyond its humble beginnings as an ideological militia to a large political and economic force in Iranian society. The Guard was established to defend the Islamic Revolution from external interference; however, it seems to have deviated from its roots and developed a

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<sup>18</sup> Forozan, 77-78.

<sup>19</sup> "IRGC Construction Projects Continue while Private Sector Lags," *Al Monitor*, 30 October, 2014, sec. Iran Pulse, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2014/10/iran-irgc-khatam-al-anbia-rouhani.html>

<sup>20</sup> Forozan, 82-83.

sophisticated and influential mafia of sorts. The rest of the paper will explore three of the ranking members of the IRGC to see how they rose through the Guard and whether they are still the guardians of the revolution or have become Iranian “Godfathers”.

### **MAJOR GENERAL QASEM SOLEIMANI**

Major General Qasem Soleimani was born on 11 March 1957, but where he was born is still debated. Several sources indicate that it is likely somewhere in Kerman Province. His family was extremely poor, so he left home for Kerman at the age of 13 to help make money to pay off the family’s debt.<sup>21</sup> According to Soleimani himself, his revolutionary activities started when he was about 20 years old through the teachings of Hojjat al-Eslam Reza Kamyab, who preached against the Pahlavi regime in Kerman in the late 1970’s.<sup>22</sup>

After the 1979 revolution, Soleimani joined the association of “honorary Guardsmen” established by the father of “Martyr Qazi”. Like most of the young revolutionaries joining the Guard, Qasem Soleimani had no previous military experience, but he demonstrated a high degree of skill during his training, so they made him an instructor. His first military mission was to suppress Kurdish separatists in northwestern Iran.<sup>23</sup> According to Ali Alfoneh’s research, participation in the operations against the Kurds was considered a sort of badge of honour and that Soleimani’s participation in that campaign was likely why he was chosen to serve with the Quds.<sup>24</sup> The Quds are the elite Special Forces that are the “exporters” of the revolution outside of Iran. When the Iran-

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<sup>21</sup>Raz Zimmt, *A Short Biography of Qasem Soleimani*, Home » Blog » Arab-Israeli Conflict » Qasem Soleimani’s, Crethi Plethi, 2015, <http://www.crethiplethi.com/a-short-biography-of-qasem-soleimani/islamic-countries/iran-islamic-countries/2015/>.

<sup>22</sup>Ali Alfoneh, "Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani: A Biography," *American Enterprise Institution for Public Policy Research* 1, (January, 2011), 3.

<sup>23</sup>Zimmt, *A Short Biography of Qasem Soleimani*.

<sup>24</sup>Ali Alfoneh, "Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani: A Biography," 3.

Iraq War broke out in the fall of 1980, he was sent to the southern front where he commanded the Quds force from Kerman. During the war, he quickly earned a reputation for bravery, and rose quickly through the ranks, eventually becoming the commander of the 41st Sarallah Division while still in his 20s. After the war, the 41<sup>st</sup> Sarallah Division returned to Kerman and began the fight against the drug traffickers that were using Iran as a gateway out of Afghanistan, where Soleimani continued to distinguish himself as a great leader.<sup>25</sup>

He assumed command of the Quds Force sometime in late 1997 or early 1998 and was promoted to his current rank in January 2011. As the Commander of the Quds, Soleimani has kept himself very busy exporting the “revolution” throughout the Middle East, including Afghanistan, Iraq during the 2003 US invasion, and currently in Syria and Iraq against Daesh.

From a political perspective, little is known about his views, but considering his position in the IRGC, one can assume that they are on the conservative side of the spectrum. He was also one of the signatories of the 1999 letter to Khatami calling for government action in response to the student demonstrations. Soleimani is considered by many as an Iranian hero and he commands the respect of the regime. He is extremely influential due to his close ties to the Supreme Leader, who has indicated on several occasions that he has full confidence in him. In a speech Khamenei made in 2005, he called Soleimani a “living martyr”, which is an extremely rare occurrence. He has also developed close relationships to senior Iranian politician, many of whom have known

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<sup>25</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, "The Canny General: Quds Force Commander Ghasem Soleimani," PBS.com. Accessed April 21, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/12/profile-the-canny-general-quds-force-commander-ghasem-soleimani.html>.

him since the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>26</sup> In an article entitled “Qasem Soleimani, Iran’s Celebrity Warlord”, Dr. Sadeq Zibakalam, a professor of political science at the University of Tehran, is quoted as saying that “Soleimani is trusted by reformists and conservatives alike, because he has stayed away from domestic politics and remained focused on his duties outside Iran.”<sup>27</sup>

There is no information available that shows whether or not Qasem Soleimani is involved any of the lucrative business ventures that the Guard has undertaken. However, in documents leaked on several Iranian websites in 2016, his monthly salary was said to be approximately \$170,000 USD!<sup>28</sup> In addition, he was personally mentioned in UNSCR 1747, which called for a travel ban and the freezing of all financial assets by individuals and organizations involved in Iran’s nuclear weapons program. Of the thirteen organizations listed in the UNSCR, there does not seem to be any direct link to Soleimani’s personal finances, nor was there information available on what his financial assets are. However, if the leaked report on IRGC salaries has any amount of truth to it, then his financial holdings could be quite substantial.

Overall, Major General Soleimani seems to be following the general trend that the Guard is following with respect to its involvement in politics and the economy. However, this involvement in Iranian society is contrary to the doctrinal ideals that the Guard should be following. This being said, he seems to be the least interested in politics of the

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<sup>26</sup> Raz Zimmt, *Qasem Soleimani’s Involvement in Internal Iranian Politics*, Home » Blog » Arab-Israeli Conflict » Qasem Soleimani’s Involvement in Internal Iranian Politics, Crethi Plethi, 2015, <http://www.crethiplethi.com/qasem-soleimani-s-involvement-in-internal-iranian-politics/islamic-countries/iran-islamic-countries/2015/>.

<sup>27</sup> Sina Azodi, *Qasem Soleimani, Iran’s Celebrity Warlord*, IranInsight - Showcasing a Multifaceted Iran. Atlantic Council, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iraninsight/qasem-soleimani-iran-s-celebrity-warlord>

<sup>28</sup> Eldorar Alshamia, "Can Never Believe it Imaginative Figure Monthly Salaries for (IRGC) Leaders," Accessed 3 May, 2017, <http://en.eldorar.com/node/2744>.

three characters analyzed in this paper, while continuing the Quds mission of exporting those ideals outside of Iran.

### **MAJOR GENERAL YAHYA RAHIM SAFAVI**

Yahya Rahim Safavi was born on 2 January 1952 in the village of Isfahan. There is no available information on his early career; apparently, he is not quite as popular or controversial as Qasem Soleimani! From what little information was available, he joined the IRGC on 21 March 1979 at the age of 27 and served with the Guard's ground forces, more specifically in the artillery. There are no indications in any of the research that he played any significant role during the 1979 Revolution. However, like all of the high-ranking members of the Guard, he cut his teeth during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war where he held a series of senior IRGC command positions including the Deputy IRGC Operations Officer, Deputy Commander of the Ground Force, and finally as the Ground Force Commander. This put him in regular contact with other senior members of the Guard such as Gholam Ali Rashid, Mohammad Bagheri, Mohammad Ali Jafari, and Qasem Soleimani.

There is little to indicate how he performed during the War, but by the age of 45, he became the second Commander of the IRGC, so he must have made a good impression on the Guard leadership up to this point. According to Will Fulton, Safavi does not seem to meet the normal criteria for a senior member of the IRGC; however, his participation in the Iran-Iraq war alongside the list of players above would have definitely contributed to his rise within the IRGC.<sup>29</sup>

Safavi held the command position for ten years and although his removal from this position was not as controversial as when he replaced Major General Mohsen Rezaei,

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<sup>29</sup> Fulton, 5.

it was not completely without some turbulence and speculation. As one Al-Jazeera correspondent commented, the move to make Safavi an assistant and advisor to the Supreme Leader is more like receiving a decoration, but at the same time being demoted.<sup>30</sup> Several sources indicate the likely reason for Safavi being replaced was for failing to take an attack from the United States seriously. In addition, he was criticized for the arrest of five Quds Force commanders in Iraq and the defection of a high-ranking IRGC General, Reza Ali Ashgari.<sup>31</sup> These criticisms seem slightly misdirected as General Soleimani should have been accountable for the arrests, as he is responsible for all Quds operations. Also, there is still some debate on whether General Ashgari defected or was kidnapped, which would have been completely beyond Safavi's control. Some analysts believe that Safavi's deliberate support for Ahmadinejad was causing dissent within the Guard, as one of the fundamental tenets of the IRGC is to not get involved in political matters.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly enough, he was one of a very few who abstained from signing both the 1997 letter showing support for General Rezaei and the 1999 letter condemning the President Khatami's inaction vis-à-vis the student protests. His non-signature does demonstrate that the Guard may not have been as cohesive as one would assume and that other members of the IRGC may have undermined him to ensure his removal as their Commander.

That being said, Safavi was extremely conservative in his views and is an active opponent of the reform movement, which explains why he seemed to favour

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<sup>30</sup> "Iran Replaces Guards Commander," *Al-Jazeera*, 4 September, 2007, sec. Middle East, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2007/09/2008525133822806387.html>

<sup>31</sup> Frederic M. Wehrey, Rand Corporation, National Defense Research Institute (U.S.), and United States, Dept. of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, Vol. MG-821. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009, 84-85.

<sup>32</sup> Vahid Sepehri, "Iran: New Commander Takes Over Revolutionary Guards," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 4 September, 2007, sec. Iran, <http://www.rferl.org/a/1078520.html>.

Ahmadinejad over Khatami.<sup>33</sup> During Khatami's time as President, Safavi made several public statements that criticized the government's foreign policy and internal affairs, even after Khatami warned him in September 1997 to steer clear from political interference.<sup>34</sup> Not only did he direct his comments directly at Khatami, he also targeted the minister of Islamic culture and guidance by saying his policies were threatening national security. Although his signature was absent from the 1999 letter to Khatami, he took swift and brutal action against the student protests by sending in the Basij to suppress their activities. His hard-line views continued throughout Khatami's presidency, but he was careful not to cross a line that would paint him as a traitor. As an example, while speaking at a combat camp, he said that the IRGC and Basij supported the Khatami government, but hoped to "strengthen" it.<sup>35</sup>

Ahmadinejad was a previous member of the IRGC and when he became President, Safavi's tone changed completely. As criticism of the President mounted, Safavi spoke out once again and stated the IRGC would "sort out" anyone who tried to obstruct the regime.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, his close relationship with Ahmadinejad and his staunch support of the regime were not enough to keep him from being replaced by Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari on 31 August 2007. In his new position as the Supreme Leader's special military advisor, General Safavi has continued to support the regime and has, thus far, refrained from criticizing the current government.

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<sup>33</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled* . . . , 28.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Eisenstadt, *Iran's Revolutionary Guard Commander Sends a Warning*. Policywatch 314. The Washington Institute, 1998, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-revolutionary-guard-commander-sends-a-warning>.

<sup>35</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled* . . . , 30.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

Similar to General Soleimani, there is no information available that shows whether or not General Safavi is involved any of the lucrative business ventures that the Guard has undertaken. However, he has always supported the IRGC's involvement in Iran's economy and often quoted Article 147 of the Iranian Constitution which states that in times of peace personnel and equipment can be used for "productive ends", as long as it does not degrade operational capabilities.<sup>37</sup> In addition, he was not personally mentioned in UNSCR 1747 and of the thirteen organizations listed in the UNSCR, there does not seem to be any direct link to Safavi's personal finances, nor was there information available on what his financial assets are. Because he is no longer an official part of the IRGC, his name was not one of the ones mentioned in the leaked salaries reports.<sup>38</sup>

Similar to Qasem Soleimani, Major General Safavi also seems to be following the trend of the Guard sticking its nose into the political affairs of the state. As the Commander, he also pushed the boundaries of the involvement that the Guard has in the Iranian economy. Therefore, his leadership of the IRGC further distanced it from the epistemological ideals that the Guard are required to adhere to according to the Constitution.

### **GENERAL MOHAMMAD ALI JAFARI**

Mohammad Ali Jafari was born on 1 September 1957 into an extremely poor family in Yadz. His family was so impoverished that he had difficulty attending elementary and high school. With the help of several people in his town, he was accepted to Tehran University School of Architecture in 1977. His part in the Revolution started

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<sup>37</sup> Wehrey, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Alshamia.

earlier than the other two individuals analyzed in this paper, as he participated in anti-Shah demonstrations in 1978 where he was arrested and imprisoned.<sup>39</sup> When he was released after the revolution, he helped found the Muslim Student Association, which participated in the takeover of the US Embassy in Tehran on 4 November 1979.<sup>40</sup>

He joined the Basij as soon as he was able and was assigned to its cultural unit. Jafari later transferred over to the IRGC in the intelligence unit and, as with Qasem Soleimani, was part of the force sent to quell the Kurdish separatists in the west. In June 1981, he was transferred to the military arm of the IRGC and rose to command the Ashura Battalion and the Quds Najaf Brigade. After the War, he returned to finish his education, graduating in 1992 with a degree in civil technology.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, he was promoted to Brigadier General and put in command of the IRGC Ground Forces.

Up until 1997, Jafari seemed to toe the party line and was uninvolved in politics; however, when Major General Rezaei was relieved of command of the IRGC, he was one of the signatories on the letter praising Rezaei for his service. Two years later, Jafari was in command of the Sarallah Garrison in Tehran when the student protests broke out. He used the Basij Forces to suppress the protests and then was one of the signatories to the 1999 letter to Khatami that threatened IRGC intervention should the government not take swift and appropriate action against the protesters.

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<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Sahimi, "A Hardliner's Hardliner: General Mohammad Ali Jafari," PBS.com, Accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/01/a-hardliners-hardliner.html>.

<sup>40</sup> "New IRGC Commander: Asymmetrical Warfare is our Strategy for Dealing with Enemy's Considerable Capabilities; we Aspire to Ballistic Missile Superiority," The Middle East Media Research Institute, Accessed 22 April, 2017, [https://www.memri.org/reports/new-irgc-commander-asymmetrical-warfare-our-strategy-dealing-enemys-considerable#\\_edn3](https://www.memri.org/reports/new-irgc-commander-asymmetrical-warfare-our-strategy-dealing-enemys-considerable#_edn3).

<sup>41</sup> "Mohammad Ali Jafari," Wikipedia, Accessed 22 April, 2017, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad\\_Ali\\_Jafari](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Ali_Jafari).

Later that year, he was appointed as the Chief of the Centre for Strategic Studies where he put his experience and understanding of asymmetric warfare to good use. On 1 September 2007, Jafari was promoted to Major General and placed as the Commander of the IRGC. Alireza Nader describes his rise to power a combination ideological commitment and military vision.<sup>42</sup> Soon after his appointment, Jafari wasted no time in reorienting the Guard to focus on more internal threats to the Revolution including taking direct control of the Basij and fully integrating them into the Guard. In addition to this, he goes even as far as saying that the IRGC is not “solely a military organization” but also a “political and ideological organization.”<sup>43</sup> The other change that Jafari instituted is known the mosaic doctrine.<sup>44</sup> This new doctrine splits the IRGC into 31 commands, one for each province and two for Tehran itself. On the surface, this change may appear to be structural in nature as it spreads the force out considerably making it harder to pin down in the case of an invasion. However, a corollary aim is to provide tighter control over the population and, to do so, there are representatives from the Supreme Leader’s office embedded in each command to ensure he remains attuned to what is going on in each province.

Thus far, Jafari is more involved in domestic politics than any of his predecessors. To this end, he has repeatedly stated that the IRGC would oppose any reformists participating future elections.<sup>45</sup> Jafari seems to be going way beyond the role of the Guard established in the Iranian Constitution, while still enjoying the support of the

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<sup>42</sup> Alireza Nader, "Profile: Revolutionary Guards Chief Gen. Jafari," United States Institute of Peace. Accessed 22 April, 2017, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/jan/21/profile-revolutionary-guards-chief-gen-jafari>.

<sup>43</sup> Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled* . . . , 32.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Connell, "Iran's Military Doctrine," The Iran Primer, Accessed 22 April, 2017, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-military-doctrine>.

<sup>45</sup> Nader.

Supreme Leader; however, this has not escaped President Rouhani's attention, as he continues fighting to keep the Guard at bay.

Similar to the Soleimani and Safavi, there is no information available that shows whether or not Jafari is directly involved any of the lucrative business ventures that the Guard has undertaken. However, he was mentioned in the leaked document and his monthly salary was said to be approximately \$181,000 USD!<sup>46</sup> Additionally, Jafari is also a strong proponent of the IRGC's involvement in Iran's economy and often quotes Article 147 of the Iranian Constitution to justify the further involvement of the IRGC in the Iranian economy. In addition, he was personally mentioned in UNSCR 1747, which called for a travel ban and the freezing of all financial assets by individuals and organizations involved in Iran's nuclear weapons program. Of the thirteen organizations listed in the UNSCR, there does not seem to be any direct link to Jafari's personal finances, nor was there information available on what his financial assets are. Again, however, if the leaked report on IRGC salaries is to be believed, then his financial holdings could also be quite substantial.

Finally, Major General Jafari seems to be driving the Guard to further involvement in the internal politics, as well as, gaining a greater stranglehold on the Iranian economy. The Guard's increasing influence seems to be morphing it into a "new" Guard, which is further distancing itself from its doctrinal roots.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout the research for this paper, it is clear that there has been an evolution in the IRGC and its senior leadership, transforming it from an ideological organization to a political and economic powerhouse. Even though Guard members were specifically

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<sup>46</sup> Eldorar Alshamia.

directed by Ayatollah Khomeini not to get tangled up in politics, the level of political involvement and interference from Rezaei to Jafari, especially after the Supreme Leader's death, increased significantly over the Guard's 38-year history.

Although the Guard is discouraged from political involvement, the constitution specifically allows them to participate in the economy in times of peace. Over the years, the Guard has used this to their advantage to give them a monopoly over every major economic sector in Iran.

Major Generals Soleimani, Safavi, and Jafari have consistently pushed the boundaries of the IRGC's original *raison-d'être* by getting more and more involved in Iran's politics and its economy. The ruthless and calculated way that these three individuals have led the Guard over the last 30 years has certainly reshaped it to support their interpretation of its intended purpose. The political and economic control that they have seized over time, reads like something out of a Godfather movie. Therefore, the three Generals conform to the ideals of the "new" Guard, but would likely not have been as successful had the Guard maintained its adherence to the doctrinal ideals established by Supreme Leader Khomeini in 1979.

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