

# THE IRGC COMMAND NETWORK

## FORMAL STRUCTURES AND INFORMAL INFLUENCE

A REPORT BY AEI'S CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT

JULY 2013

WILL FULTON



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Cover Image: Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei addresses IRGC commanders, Tehran, July 2011. Left to right: Mohammad Bagheri, Ali Saidi, Mohammad Ali Jafari, Qassem Suleimani, Mohammad Pakpour, Gholam Ali Rashid. Credit: leader.ir.

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# ABOUT US

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## ACRONYMS

AFGS:	Armed Forces General Staff
IRGC:	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
IRGC-CN:	IRGC Command Network
IRGC-IN:	IRGC Influence Network
IRGC-GF:	IRGC Ground Force
IRGC-PN:	IRGC Political Network
IRGC-QF:	IRGC Quds Force
IRGC-SSC:	IRGC Strategic Studies Center
IRGC-XN:	IRGC Extended Network
LEF:	Law Enforcement Forces
PDO:	Passive Defense Organization

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The election of Hassan Rouhani as president has reignited intense debate both inside and outside of Iran about the future of the Islamic Republic. Most in the West expected a hardline candidate favored by the Supreme Leader or the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to win and the status quo to remain unchallenged. The unexpected turn of events suggests that there are still forces in Iran that wish to make meaningful reforms within the context of the current system. But even if Rouhani indeed desires to make reforms, can his government make substantive changes on issues that most concern the U.S., such as Iran's nuclear program and support for Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria?

Answering this question depends largely on how the regime's other powerful stakeholders react to the new government, especially the IRGC – the single-most powerful organization in Iran whose leaders are positioned to directly influence regime decision-making. Fully understanding the dynamics between the IRGC and other regime forces, however, requires a deeper familiarity with the human networks that make up the IRGC's senior leadership.

This report examines the formal structures that comprise the IRGC's senior leadership and the informal influence networks that dominate it. The central focus is a faction within the IRGC referred to here as the "Command Network" (IRGC-CN), and its extended branches.

The IRGC-CN is a group of ten commanders with deep ties dating back to the Iran-Iraq War. Its members include the IRGC and Quds Force commanders, as well as key operations and intelligence officials in the Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS), the body charged with overseeing the military affairs of both the IRGC and Iran's conventional force (Artesh).

Members of the IRGC-CN's extended networks also occupy influential positions in the IRGC and AFGS, such as commander of the IRGC's Greater Tehran unit and head of the AFGS Operations Directorate. Members also extend into the political realm, and include the mayor of Tehran, a deputy of Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, and the governor of Zanjan province.

The IRGC-CN has endured through conflicts and crises since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, including the 1999 Tehran University clashes, 2009 post-election protest movement, and changes in organizational command in 1997 and 2007. Where one would expect significant purging of or divisions in the IRGC's leadership following these events, we saw the opposite: IRGC-CN members retained and expanded their control over the IRGC's key command and staff positions.

The IRGC-CN will be a dominant voice in the regime for the foreseeable future. Based on its demonstrated ability to remain cohesive through periods of instability, the Command Network will likely continue to retain formal control of the Guards in the face of internal and external pressures. The IRGC-CN has also begun to selectively recruit the next generation of commanders to fill key positions as senior leaders slowly retire or transition into politics, ensuring that this network's interests are safeguarded.

If President-elect Rouhani desires to make fundamental changes to the Islamic Republic's core national security policies, he will need to win the support of the IRGC-CN or subvert it. Either scenario presents Rouhani with considerable challenges, as this network has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and has previously shown a willingness to act aggressively to protect its interests.



## INTRODUCTION

The election of Hojjat al-Eslam Hassan Rouhani in Iran's 2013 presidential election surprised many analysts outside of Iran. Most expected that a candidate closely allied with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei or the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), such as nuclear negotiator Said Jalili or Tehran Mayor Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, would win through Khamenei's overt or behind-the-scenes support. As it happened, the Iranian people came out in large numbers and voted for the candidate who most represented a change from the last eight years in Iranian politics, characterized by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's ultra-conservative and combative policies.<sup>1</sup> Khamenei and Iran's Guardian Council had vetted every candidate, even excluding former president Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, for example, indicating that the leadership found Rouhani acceptable. Even so, it seems clear that his overwhelming electoral victory indicates that Iranian voters chose the least radical and most reform-minded of the limited choices available to them. The result was a rebuff to the IRGC in that its own preferred candidates, Qalibaf and Jalili, were soundly defeated.

This outcome is surprising because the IRGC is the single-most powerful organization in Iran, dominating military and security affairs, commanding large sectors of the Iranian economy, and steadily expanding its presence in various state bodies.<sup>2</sup> The IRGC's leaders proudly present the organization as the chief defender of the Islamic Revolution's achievements and values, including an interpretation of the *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurisprudent) that grants Supreme Leader Khamenei absolute political authority and requires absolute obedience to that authority from others.<sup>3</sup> The IRGC and the Office of the Supreme Leader appeared to have made their grip on the regime into a stranglehold in the years since the violent suppression of Green Movement protests following the 2009 presidential election.

What, then, are we to make of Rouhani's victory? Rouhani is very much a "regime insider," having served as both the Supreme Leader's representative to the Supreme National Security Council and the secretary of that council for 16 years, beginning with Khamenei's accession to power in 1989, although he is moderate in comparison

to Iran's hardliners.<sup>4</sup> He was also Iran's chief nuclear negotiator under President Mohammad Khatami from October 2003 to August 2005.<sup>5</sup> There is no evidence, however, to indicate that Rouhani is in any way an IRGC insider. On the contrary, Rouhani was openly critical in his election campaign of policy issues that some IRGC leadership have vigorously supported, such as a "resistance" approach to nuclear negotiations (as pursued by current negotiator Said Jalili).<sup>6</sup> Rouhani also criticized the country's "security atmosphere" in Iranian civil society, which is itself largely a product of efforts of the IRGC and like-minded officials to stifle opposition in the wake of the 2009 post-election protests.<sup>7</sup>

We cannot yet explain the significance of Rouhani's election from an Iranian political perspective, but we can and must evaluate its importance with respect to the issues that most concern the U.S. Rouhani's ability to influence Iran's policy on national security matters, including the nuclear portfolio and Syria policy, depends entirely on the correlation of forces within Iran's leadership ranks – even assuming that Rouhani does, in fact, desire to change current Iranian policy on



these matters. How will the IRGC react to any attempts at change that seriously undermine its preferred policies or its prerogatives?

That question is crucial to understanding the potential future direction of the regime in Tehran in both the near and the long term. Answering it requires understanding *who* precisely we are talking about when we discuss the influence of the IRGC. All analysts recognize that the IRGC is positioned to influence policy, but few discuss the personalities or personal networks that comprise the upper echelons of its leadership; that is, those individuals and groups who are able to exert influence directly, both on the IRGC itself and on the regime's national security policy. This is the group that Rouhani will have to win over – or defeat – if he wants to change the regime's course in any important way. That reflection should be disheartening even for those who believe in Rouhani's good intentions because the depth, coherence, power, and determination of the core of the IRGC leadership present a daunting spectacle to its internal opponents. If Rouhani wants to shift the regime's position on the nuclear program, Syria, Iraq, Hezbollah, or any other matter of supreme concern to the IRGC leadership, he has an enormous fight on his hands.

### Understanding the IRGC Leadership Networks

This report examines the formal structures that comprise the IRGC's senior leadership and the informal influence networks that dominate these structures in order to identify and describe the human networks that actually control Iran's most powerful organization. I have coined the term "IRGC Command Network (IRGC-CN)" to refer to the group of individuals, which forms a faction within the IRGC leadership, that has remained cohesive and constant since the



PHOTO 1 | MOHAMMAD ALI JAFARI AND QASSEM SULEIMANI ATTEND MOURNING CEREMONY FOR HASSAN TEHRANI MOGHADDAM, DECEMBER 2011. (SOURCE: FARIS NEWS AGENCY)

Iran-Iraq War. Members of the IRGC-CN have publicly demonstrated their political unity during points of potential conflict or crisis, and endured these inflection points while advancing to dominate nearly all of the key command and staff positions within the IRGC (the methodology for assessing membership in the IRGC-CN and its extended networks is described below).

Why is understanding the IRGC-CN important to discussions of regime dynamics and the future of the Islamic Republic? Put plainly, the IRGC-CN will be a dominant voice in the regime's national security decision-making process and a significant voice in other realms for the foreseeable future. Based on its demonstrated ability to remain cohesive during and after political and security crises, it is reasonable to conclude that the IRGC-CN will continue to retain formal control of the IRGC's military structures in the face of future internal and external pressures. The IRGC-CN has also begun to appoint members of its extended networks to key positions, and will likely play the primary role in shaping the next generation of IRGC leadership. As long as the IRGC continues to be the central player in Iran's domestic and international security policies in anything like its current form, the IRGC-CN is likely to control it.

The IRGC-CN is, of course, only one identifiable cohort of senior commanders. This assessment is not intended to suggest that there are no other influential factions within the IRGC. A number of senior IRGC commanders who occupy influential positions do not have demonstrable ties to the IRGC-CN (although most of these have scanty personal histories available to researchers outside Iran).<sup>i</sup> This assessment is not intended to suggest that the methodology used to identify the members of the IRGC-CN encapsulates all of the influential members of this particular network, nor is it intended to suggest that the IRGC-CN is a monolithic faction that is unified on all positions.<sup>ii</sup>

i. Minister of Defense Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi is a good example of an influential commander who does not have extensive demonstrable ties to the IRGC-CN. Vahidi was head of IRGC Intelligence during the latter years of the Iran-Iraq War and participated in at least four meetings with IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, and IRGC-XN members during that period (see definitions in next section of report). Following the war, Vahidi was appointed head of the Quds Force, a position he held until Qassem Suleimani took over in 1998. Vahidi returned to IRGC Intelligence at that time, but was later appointed Ministry of Defense Planning Deputy under Ali Shamkhani, Deputy Minister of Defense under Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, and then Minister of Defense in 2009. It is unclear whether Vahidi is distinctly unaffiliated with the IRGC-CN, or if it is by virtue of his sensitive positions in IRGC Intelligence and the Quds Force that there is no available evidence linking him closely to this network.

ii. One notable example of a senior commander with extensive ties to IRGC-CN who does not meet the methodological criteria for assessed membership in any of the discussed networks is Senior Military Adviser to the Supreme Leader Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi. Safavi held a series of senior IRGC command positions during the Iran-Iraq War, including IRGC Operations deputy, IRGC-GF deputy commander and IRGC-GF commander, putting him in regular contact with IRGC-CN members such as Gholam Ali Rashid, Mohammad Bagheri, and Mohammad Ali Jafari, Qassem Suleimani, among others. Safavi was appointed IRGC commander in 1997 and senior adviser to Supreme Leader Khamenei in 2007, and one plausible explanation of Safavi's absence from the 1997, 1999, and 2012 letters is that lending his signature to these letters would have given them the appearance of organizational messaging (in 1997 and 1999) or the Supreme Leader's position (in 2012), rather than the position of a faction. It is also plausible that Safavi's opinion



PHOTO 2 | YAHYA RAHIM SAFAVI AND AHMAD VAHIDI, NAM SUMMIT, TEHRAN, AUGUST 2012. (FARS NEWS AGENCY)

For example, this report focuses on the IRGC's military leadership but does not explore the networks that control the IRGC's economic interests – which this network apparently does not. It is certainly possible that these two groups disagree over those areas where their decisions impact one another's interests, although our research has not so far turned up reliable data to demonstrate such intra-mural disagreements. The data that is available, however, shows that members of this particular network have been publicly unified on key issues such as

actually diverged on these issues; however, our research has not uncovered evidence to indicate that this is the case, nor has Safavi presented positions on key issues that diverge from IRGC-CN positions. In fact, Safavi's recent messaging has aligned with that of the IRGC-CN. See: Will Fulton, "IRGC Messaging on Critical U.S. National Security Issues," *AEI's Critical Threats Project*, April 2, 2013. Available: <http://www.irantracker.org/analysis/fulton-irgc-messaging-april-2-2013>

An example of a senior IRGC commander in a position to exert influence, but for whom there is very little open-source data available, is Brigadier General Komeil Kohnsal. Kohnsal is currently a senior adviser to IRGC Commander Major General Jafari as well as the adviser to the Supreme Leader in the IRGC's influential Center for Strategic Studies. During the Iran-Iraq War, Kohnsal had ties to the IRGC-CN: Kohnsal served as a deputy to IRGC-CN member Morteza Ghorbani in the 25th Karbala Division during the Val Fajr VIII operation. Kohnsal also appears in an early post-war photo alongside IRGC-CN members Mohammad Ali Jafari, Qassem Suleimani, and Mohammad Reza Zaedi, and IRGC-IN member Morteza Ghorbani. Kohnsal later went on to command the 25th Karbala Division during the war. It is unclear where he served from the end of the war through 2010.

Iran's nuclear program, support for the Bashar al Assad regime in Syria, and its opposition to "extreme" reformist currents.<sup>8</sup> The IRGC-CN is not merely cohesive and powerful; it is also tightly unified in its opposition to internal reform or international moderation.

### The IRGC Command Network

The IRGC-CN is a network of IRGC commanders with relationships dating back to the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1989) that has remained remarkably cohesive and constant since that time, enduring several points of potential conflict or crisis while consistently gaining control of the uppermost echelons of the IRGC and the Iranian Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS).

The criteria for membership in the IRGC-CN adopted in this project include: participation in at least ten senior operational planning meetings during the Iran-Iraq War in which at least one other current senior IRGC commander (brigade command or above) was present; signing both the 1997 and 1999 open letters expressing political unity among certain IRGC commanders during key inflection points, and; currently occupying a position within the Commanding Heights (defined in the next section). Each of these areas is explored in detail below. IRGC-CN members are highlighted in red in the graphics presented in this report.

This report also considers three networks whose members meet many of the criteria for membership in the IRGC-CN but not all. These networks retain significant influence and are not necessarily truly separate from the IRGC-CN. On the contrary, these networks are fluid, and many members are enmeshed in the IRGC-CN and might even meet the IRGC-CN criteria if we had enough information on their previous activities. The three

additional networks and the criteria used for assessing membership in them are as follows:

- **IRGC Influence Network (IRGC-IN):** members of this network meet the same criteria as IRGC-CN members but do not currently occupy a position in the Commanding Heights, though some have done so previously. All currently occupy a position in the IRGC or AFGS. IRGC-IN members are highlighted in orange in the graphics presented in this report.
- **IRGC Political Network (IRGC-PN):** members of this network meet the same criteria as IRGC-CN members but currently hold a political position in the Islamic Republic, not an active IRGC position. IRGC-PN members are highlighted in blue in the graphics presented in this report.
- **IRGC Extended Network (IRGC-XN):** members signed either the 1997 or 1999 letters expressing IRGC political unity, or a later letter issued in 2012, and have demonstrated ties to IRGC-CN members dating back to the Iran-Iraq War. All currently occupy a position in the IRGC or AFGS, some in the Commanding Heights. IRGC-XN members are highlighted in gray in the graphics presented in this report.



PHOTO 3 | GREAT PROPHET III EXERCISE, JULY 2008. LEFT TO RIGHT: ALI FAZLI, MOSTAFA MOHAMMAD NAJJAR, MOHAMMAD ALI JAFARI, HOSSEIN SALAMI, GHOLAM REZA MEHRABI. (FARS NEWS AGENCY)



### The Commanding Heights

This report uses the term “Commanding Heights” to describe the key command and staff positions in the IRGC that one would need to occupy in order to fully control the organization. These positions control planning, operations, intelligence, strategic concept development, covert operations and irregular warfare operations, command of major or central units, and military internal security. This construct is based on Western conventional staff structures to establish an objective analytical baseline of positions of military influence and authority within the IRGC. It is applicable in Iran because the senior military hierarchy of the IRGC largely mirrors that of a conventional military and general staff structure. In fact, Iran’s military during Reza Shah Pahlavi’s era was modeled after the U.S. military.<sup>9</sup> These conventional structures carried over after the Islamic Revolution with the Artesh (the conventional Iranian military), and, despite its

revolutionary origins, were replicated by the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War. Elements of these structures were formally established in the IRGC’s Statute, published October 1983.<sup>10</sup> Research and analysis using available evidence, including reporting by the IRGC’s media organs and publication houses as well as other Iranian media outlets, indicate that these formal structures are still in place today.

A small number of positions only found in the Islamic Republic, such as the IRGC-QF and Basij Organization commanders, have also been included in the Commanding Heights assessment, as these positions control organizations that are deeply involved in key Iranian national security issue areas. Important positions within the AFGS are also included. Although the AFGS is responsible for overseeing the military affairs of both the IRGC and the Artesh and is, therefore, technically not an IRGC entity, it is dominated by senior IRGC commanders: three of the six active IRGC major



PHOTO 4 | COMMANDERS DURING A VISIT BY THE SUPREME LEADER TO IMAM HOSSEIN UNIVERSITY, TEHRAN, MAY 2011. LEFT TO RIGHT: ALI AKBAR AHMADIAN, HOSSEIN SALAMI, JAMAL ABEROUMAND, ALI FADAVI, MOHAMMAD ALI JAFARI. (LEADER.IR)

generals occupy key positions in the AFGS.<sup>iii</sup>

The chief of the AFGS is a Basij member whose authority appears to stem from his close relationship with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.<sup>iv</sup> The following positions are included in the assessed Commanding Heights (Table 1, page 34).

The Commanding Heights, as identified here, do not represent all influential positions within the IRGC, nor do they make up the entirety of the IRGC organizational structure as we

iii. The six active IRGC major generals are: IRGC Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari, IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Suleimani, Deputy Chief of the AFGS Gholam Ali Rashid, AFGS Intelligence and Operations Deputy Mohammad Bagheri, AFGS Strategic Affairs Deputy Mostafa Izadi, and Senior Military Adviser to the Supreme Leader Yahaya Rahim Safavi. Head of the Armed Forces Strategic Studies Center and former senior IRGC commander Ali Shamkhani is also a major general; however, Shamkhani is technically an Artesh officer since taking over the Iranian Navy after the Iran-Iraq War.

iv. Chief of AFGS Major General Hassan Firouzabadi's close relationship with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei spans over four decades. Firouzabadi first met Khamenei in 1972 when the former was a second year medical student at Mashhad University. Khamenei had been recently released from prison and was teaching a course titled "Complete Design of Islamic Thought in Qur'an" at a local mosque. Firouzabadi attended the sessions for two years and claims to have "learned all of [his] intellectual, religious and governing foundations in the Qur'an from [Khamenei]." At this time, Firouzabadi also consulted with Khamenei on the measures that Mashhad University Muslim student activists could have taken to support Egypt during the Yom Kippur War. Their relationship was shortly disrupted in 1975 when Khamenei was imprisoned again. Later, Firouzabadi met Khamenei in South Khorasan at the site of the 1978 Tabas earthquake. Following the quake, Firouzabadi was a member of the Imam Khomeini Emergency Camp Central Council, and Khamenei visited the emergency camps as then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini's representative from Tehran. In 1980, Khamenei personally requested Firouzabadi to accompany him on an official Islamic Revolution propaganda trip to India. Firouzabadi explains that while he was then-Prime Minister Mir Hossein Mousavi's defense deputy in 1986, he was Khamenei's "closest friend" and "student." Based on Firouzabadi's telling, Khamenei has been his mentor since well before the revolution. This relationship may help explain why Khamenei appointed Firouzabadi and retained him in this position since 1989, even though Firouzabadi does not have a formal military background.

assess it. Moreover, as in U.S. military and intelligence organizations, there are individuals who occupy positions outside conventional formal structures but nonetheless are positioned to significantly influence national security policy. The ministries of defense, interior, oil, as well as the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) are staffed by commanders linked to this same network, for example, although examining these organizations is beyond the scope of this report.

### The Iran-Iraq War

The importance of the Iran-Iraq War in shaping the current senior IRGC leadership can hardly be overstated. The regime calls it the "Imposed War" (*jang-e tahmili*) or "Sacred Defense" (*defa'-e moghaddas*), and the brutal trench warfare of this eight-year conflict was the key formative era for the IRGC and its current leadership; IRGC commanders gained combat expertise and experience, developed as military professionals, and, most importantly for the purposes of this assessment, coalesced into the informal influence network that makes up the IRGC-CN. Napoleon's aphorism, "To understand a man, you have to know what was happening in the world when he was twenty," applies well here; the vast majority of current IRGC commanders spent their twenties leading operations on the frontlines against an enemy (Saddam Hussein's Iraq) that was supported by the United States and most Arab states with the exception of Syria.

The IRGC's Center for War and Research Studies has published 14 volumes (over 10,000 pages) of a projected 57-volume set entitled, "Chronology of the Iran-Iraq War" (*ruzshomar-e jang-e iran va eragh*).<sup>11</sup> The available 13 volumes span the entire eight years of the war, though there are gaps due to the incomplete publication of the set, and detail IRGC unit and individual commander planning for and participation in operations. This



PHOTO 5 | IRGC COMMANDERS DURING IRAN-IRAQ WAR. LEFT TO RIGHT: MOHAMMAD ALI JAFARI, GHOLAM HOSSEIN BASHARDOUST, MORTEZA GHORBANI, GHOLAM REZA MEHRABI (BACK), YAHYA RAHIM SAFAVI, HASSAN TEHRANI MOGHADDAM (BACK), ALI FARDAVI, UNKNOWN, AMIN SHARIATI (BACK), UNKNOWN. (MASHREGH NEWS)

detailed history makes it possible to establish the origins of the IRGC-CN. By extracting data on all senior IRGC commanders discussed in the chronology, it is possible to establish that a relatively small group of currently-active IRGC commanders participated in at least ten operational planning meetings where at least one other senior IRGC commander (brigade command level and above) was present. These commanders, listed in Table 2 (page 37), comprise the full IRGC-CN and IRGC-IN and part of the IRGC-XN and next generation of up-and-coming IRGC leaders. It should be noted that those individuals listed here who do not meet the criteria for assessed membership in the IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, or IRGC-XN constitute an extended network, but fall outside of the bounds of the objective membership construct used in this paper.

In addition to these meetings, many members of the IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, and IRGC-XN served side by side with one another during the Iran-Iraq War. For example, Morteza Ghorbani helped establish the 5th Nasr Division along with fellow IRGC-CN members Esmail Ghaani and Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, as well as signatory of both the 1997 and 1999 letters Nour Ali Shoustari, (d. 2009).<sup>12</sup> Ghorbani stated in December 2012 that he, Ghaani, Qalibaf, and Shoushtari fought together in the Val Fajr I Operation.<sup>13</sup> IRGC-CN member Mohammad Ali Jafari was under the command of IRGC-IN member Ahmad Gholampour in Iran's southwest during the earlier years of the war.<sup>14</sup> Jafari and Gholampour also served on the joint IRGC-Artesh Khatam ol Anbia Base's planning group along with Ahmad Vahidi, Gholam



Hossein Bashardoust (a current adviser to Jafari), Hossein Alaei, and Mostafa Rabii.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, IRGC-CN members Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf and Mohammad Jafar Assadi served in the base's planning advisory group along with IRGC-PN member Amin Shariati and signatory of the both the 1997 and 1999 letters Ahmad Kazemi (d. 2006).<sup>16</sup> IRGC-CN members Mohammad Bagheri and Gholam Reza Mehrabi, Bagheri's current deputy in the AFGS, held "regular meetings" during the war, and Mehrabi was "in the trenches" with Gholampour, current Senior Adviser to the Supreme Leader for Military Affairs Yahya Rahim Safavi, and Ambassador to Iraq Hassan Danaeifar during the Badr Operation.<sup>17</sup> Examples such as these abound.

The IRGC's "Iran-Iraq War Chronology" was published between 1999 and 2008, so those who currently dominate the IRGC's senior leadership have been positioned to influence the editorial process by emphasizing their war-era roles or historicizing events. It is possible that the facts presented in the chronology have been altered to present the current leadership in a better light. Though such distortions may have occurred, it is unlikely that there are significant distortions to individual roles. The events of the Iran-Iraq War are well-documented in the Islamic Republic – from formal monographs and full websites to blogs of *basijis* that served on the frontlines – and any major distortion would be publicly discounted by fellow veterans or the various opponents of the IRGC. Moreover, if the IRGC has given more attention to the roles of certain present-day commanders, that fact only reinforces the notion that these commanders are members of a select group that is influential enough to have its historical role made prominent.

It is also important to note that, though fairly comprehensive in scope, the IRGC's "Iran-Iraq War Chronology" is only one history within a massive field of work on the Iran-Iraq War published in Iran. A comprehensive review of this literature could very well yield results that indicate that there are other core networks in the IRGC that coalesced during the war, or that there are other commanders that had close ties to IRGC-CN members at that time. I have, in fact, collected a significant amount of data from various other Persian-language texts, such as the memoirs of IRGC Commander Jafari and then-President Rafsanjani, and websites documenting the IRGC's role in the Iran-Iraq War. Thus far, an examination of these sources has not challenged or significantly altered the Command Network assessment. This report uses only the "Iran-Iraq War Chronology" for the historical element of its assessment because the chronology is a single data source that presents a comprehensive view of the IRGC's involvement in the war as it, as an organization, has historicized it.



PHOTO 6 | IRGC COMMANDERS DURING IRAN-IRAQ WAR. LEFT TO RIGHT: MORTEZA GHORBANI, UNKNOWN, GHOLAM ALI RASHID, MEHDI ZEIN ALDIN, MOHAMMAD ALI JAFARI. (MASHREGH NEWS)

## Key Inflection Points

There have been five key points of potential conflict or crisis in the Islamic Republic since the end of the Iran-Iraq War after which one could have expected to see significant purges, demotions, or divisions among the IRGC's senior leadership. These five points include two changes of the overall IRGC commander, two major internal security crises, and one instance of serious dissent by a former senior IRGC commander and Iran-Iraq War veteran. These inflection points demonstrate the remarkable cohesiveness of the IRGC-CN. Whereas such crises could be expected to expose fissures in the IRGC prompting turnover in the upper echelons, we have seen the exact opposite: the IRGC-CN has endured these challenges, all while retaining and expanding its control over the Commanding Heights and other positions of influence.

### *1997 IRGC Command Change*

IRGC Deputy Commander Yahya Rahim Safavi replaced Major General Mohsen Rezaei as IRGC commander on September 10, 1997.<sup>18</sup> Rezaei had commanded the IRGC for 16 years (since 1981), through the Iran-Iraq War and post-war reconstruction era, and his reported "retirement" was controversial. Rezaei had attacked reform-minded individuals during the 1996 parliamentary election, the same currents that swept Mohammad Khatami into office the following year, referring at one point to "liberals" in Iranian politics as a "cancerous tumor."<sup>19</sup> Rezaei also supported Khatami's conservative rival Ali Akbar Nategh Nouri during the presidential election.<sup>20</sup> After Khatami was elected president and Rezaei was replaced, some speculated that Rezaei had been forcibly removed from his position due to his previous attacks on Khatami.<sup>21</sup> In response, 33



PHOTO 7 | ALI FAZLI, MOHAMMAD REZA ZAHEDI, AND GHOLAM REZA MEHRABI, AFTER THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR. (DSRC)

former and current senior IRGC commanders signed an open letter expressing their admiration and support for Rezaei, effusing, "Your excellency's name has been intertwined with the names of martyrs and sacrificers."<sup>22</sup>

### *1999 Tebran University Protests*

Following the 18 Tir (July 1999) clashes between security forces and Tehran University student protestors in the summer of 1999, resulting in four deaths and dozens of injuries, the Iranian domestic political atmosphere was extremely tense.<sup>23</sup> Many Iranians reacted to the brutal crackdown on this popular protest movement by demanding that the government punish those responsible for the violent clashes and implement structural changes to the system.<sup>24</sup> An IRGC-linked media organ then published an ostensibly classified letter signed by 24 senior IRGC commanders sternly warning that the IRGC would intervene if Khatami was unable to rein in reformist currents before the situation became uncontrollable.<sup>25</sup> The letter reads in part: "Our patience is at an end. We do not feel it is our duty to show any more tolerance.... Mr. President, if you don't take a revolutionary decision today and (you) fail to abide by your Islamic and nationalistic duty, tomorrow will be too late and the damage done will be irreparable and beyond imagination."<sup>26</sup>

*1997-1999 Assessment*

The war-era IRGC-CN remained cohesive, and individual members of the network retained, and in many cases, were promoted to, positions within the Commanding Heights. This is a remarkable achievement following the departure of the IRGC's commander after 16 years in office and an internal security crisis that prompted the IRGC to threaten to intervene against the government to crush a popular protest movement.

Thirty-six current and former IRGC commanders in total signed either the 1997 or 1999 letters, and 21 signed both letters; it is from this select cross-section that we derive the IRGC-CN (Graphic 1). Six of these commanders occupied positions in the Commanding Heights in 1997 when Safavi was promoted, as did another three commanders who signed either the 1997 or 1999 letters. None of those individuals were demoted between 1997 and 1999; in fact, another two commanders of the group of 21 who signed both letters were promoted into the Commanding Heights during those two years (Graphic 2) (Table 3, page 38).

*1999-2007 Assessment*

From 1999 to 2007, following the 18 Tīr clashes and during the remaining tenure of Safavi's command of the IRGC, the IRGC-CN remained cohesive and continued to expand its control of the Commanding Heights. Fifteen of the 21 who signed both letters were promoted, four moved into the Commanding Heights for the first time, three upwards within the Commanding Heights, and one retained his same position in the Commanding Heights. Of the 15 who signed either the 1997 or the 1999 letter, nine received promotions, two into

the Commanding Heights and another three upward within the Commanding Heights (Graphic 3) (Table 4, page 40).

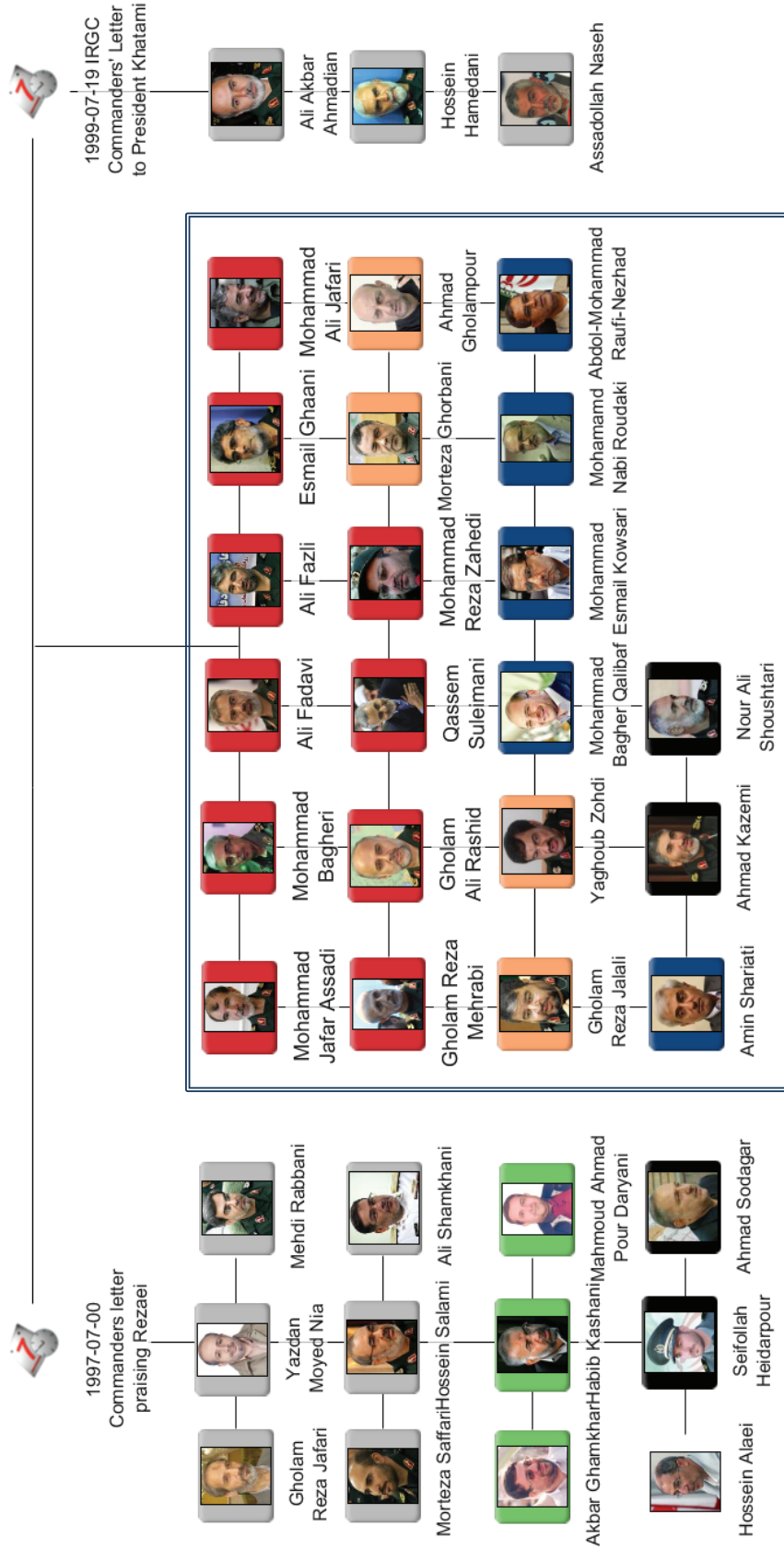
Of the 21 who signed both letters, three were moved from positions in the Commanding Heights to other offices, although it is not assessed that these individuals were demoted. Gholam Reza Jalali was moved from his position as IRGC Strategic Planning Deputy to lead the AFGS Engineering and Passive Defense directorate.<sup>27</sup> The Passive Defense division of this directorate was eventually expanded into the Passive Defense Organization (PDO), and Jalali was selected to lead this critical unit.<sup>28</sup> According to Jalali, the PDO was responsible for important projects such as construction of the Fordow nuclear facility outside of Qom.<sup>29</sup>

Mohammad Ali Jafari retained his Commanding Heights position as IRGC Ground Force (IRGC-GF) commander until 2005 when he was selected by Supreme Leader Khamenei to establish and lead the IRGC Strategic Studies Center (IRGC-SSC).<sup>30</sup> Although this position does not fit within the Commanding Heights model, it cannot be considered a demotion. It was within the IRGC-SSC that Jafari developed the doctrinal and organizational changes that he subsequently implemented after being appointed as IRGC commander in 2007.<sup>31</sup> Hossein Hamedani also left the Commanding Heights at that time; Jafari brought then-Sarallah Operational Base Deputy Commander Hamedani with him to be his deputy at the IRGC-SSC.<sup>32</sup> Hamedani was then appointed as Basij Forces commander after Jafari was appointed IRGC commander and formally folded the Basij into the IRGC-GF.<sup>33</sup>

# IRGC Commander Signatories of 1997 and 1999 Letters



Signed both 1997 and 1999 letters

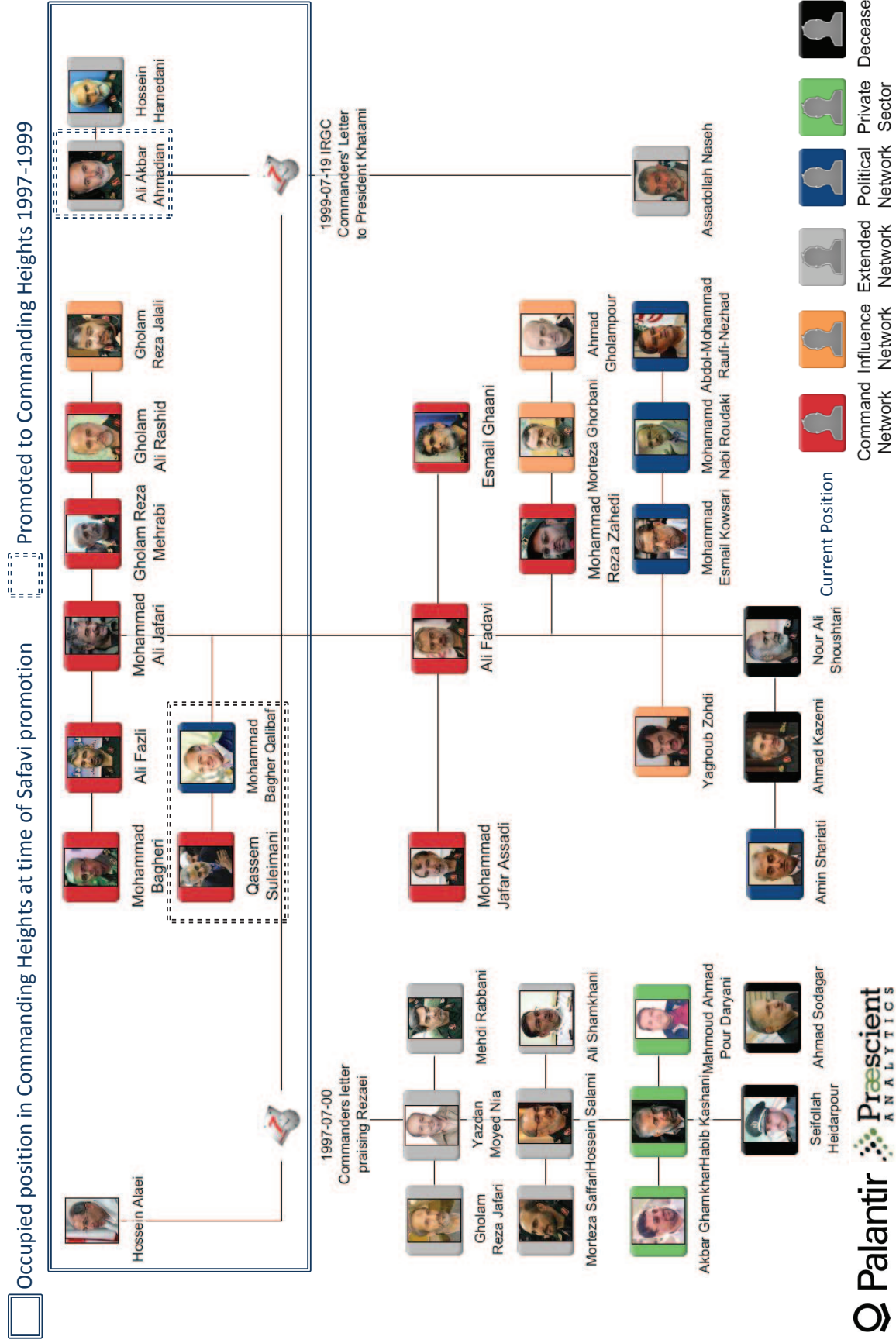


Current Position

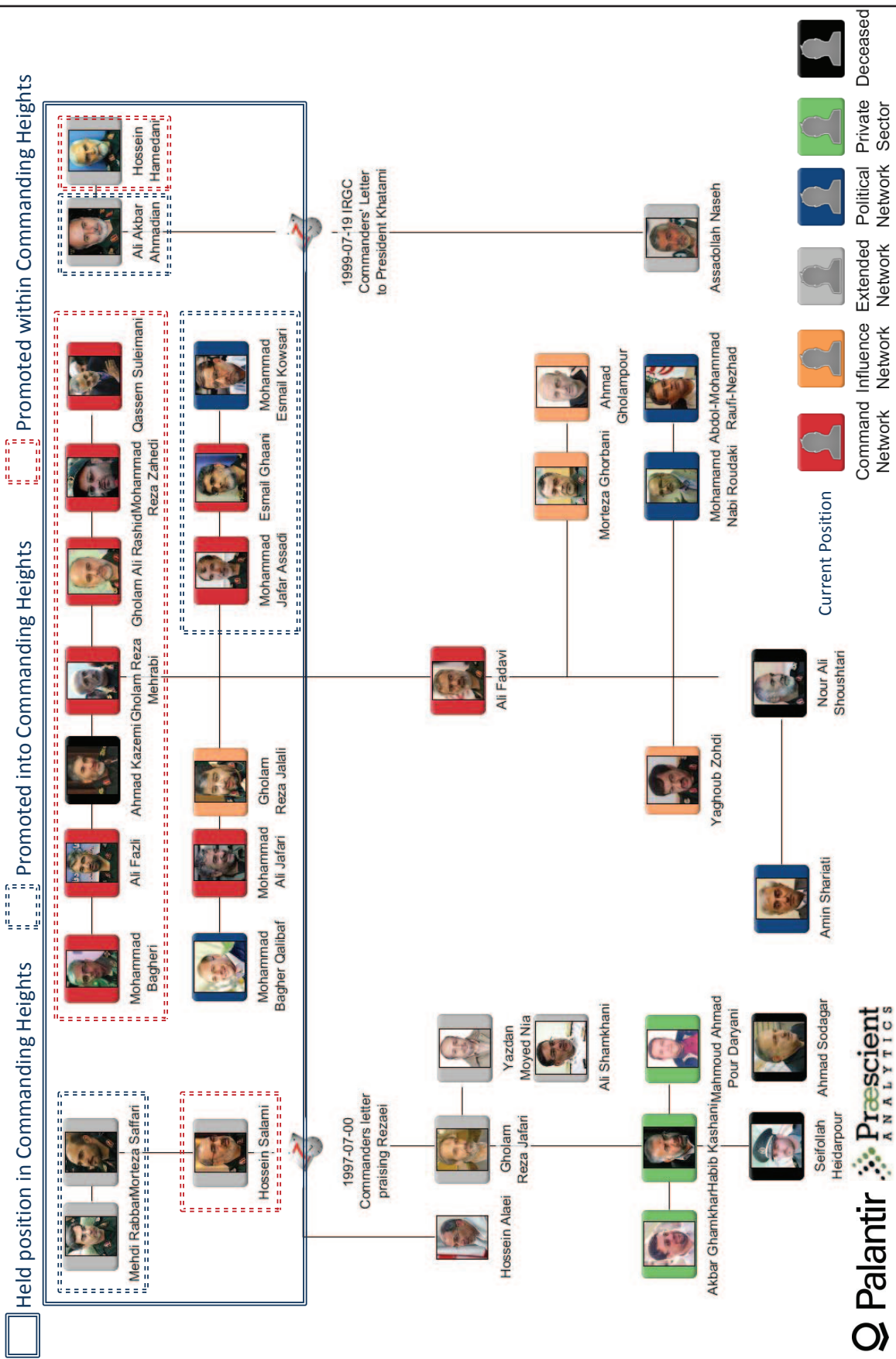




# 1997-1999 IRGC Command Network Assessment



# 1999-2007 IRGC Command Network Assessment





Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf was appointed commander of the LEF in 2000, after leading the IRGC Air Force for three years.<sup>34</sup> The LEF is not an IRGC organization and has, therefore, been excluded from this assessment; however, the LEF is unquestionably an influential organization in Iranian national security affairs: its roles in suppressing the 1999 and 2009 protests attest to this fact.<sup>35</sup> Qalibaf left the LEF in 2004 in order to enter politics, and he is currently the mayor of Tehran.<sup>36</sup>

The only signatory of either of the two letters who lost his position in the Commanding Heights during this period and was not moved into another influential position is Hossein Alaei. Alaei had been chief of the IRGC Joint Staff since September 1997 when he was replaced by Ali Akbar Ahmadian in July 2000.<sup>37</sup> There is no available evidence to indicate that Alaei has held an influential command or staff position within the IRGC or AFGS since 2000, and he is currently a faculty member at the IRGC's Imam Hossein University.<sup>38</sup>

There was one other notable open letter signed by senior IRGC commanders during this period. Following the death of IRGC-GF Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Kazemi and several other senior IRGC-GF personnel in January 2006, 43 current and former senior IRGC commanders signed a letter expressing their condolences.<sup>39</sup> Given that this letter is not an express manifestation of political unity and there was no political risk associated with signing such a letter, it has not been integrated into the assessment of post-war political events. It is worth noting, however, that of the 20 signatories of both the 1997 and 1999 letters (Kazemi was the twenty-first), only three commanders did not sign this letter. Nine of the 15 who signed either the 1997 or 1999 letter also signed the 2006 letter. The

other remaining signatories are senior IRGC commanders with various degrees of links to the IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, and IRGC-XN.<sup>v</sup>

### *2007 IRGC Command Change*

In September 2007, head of the IRGC-SSC Mohammad Ali Jafari replaced Yahya Rahim Safavi as IRGC commander.<sup>40</sup> Jafari's replacement of Safavi was much less controversial than Rezaei's dismissal had been. Soon after his promotion, however, Jafari implemented the "Mosaic Doctrine," a significant restructuring in which formal units were established in each province to diffuse command-and-control and further incorporate Basij military units into the IRGC-GF that he developed while leading the IRGC-SSC.<sup>41</sup> The IRGC Joint Staff was also eliminated at this time and replaced by the IRGC General Staff.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps more significantly, Jafari reoriented the focus of the IRGC from defending against external threats to combating internal threats.<sup>43</sup> Just days after his promotion, Jafari explained this shift to reporters shortly after his appointment, "Currently, the IRGC's primary mission is confronting internal threats."<sup>44</sup>

v. The remaining signatories of the 2006 letter are: Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs Ali Abdollahi, former MP Ahmad Avaei, member of the Islamic Revolution Resistance Front Central Council Amir Ali Amiri, Minister of Defense Ahmad Vahidi, former Imam Hossein University Commander Ali Hosseini Tosh, Adviser to the Minister of Defense Ali Shamshiri, former Governor of Khuzestan province Amir Hayat Moghaddam, Mahan Air Managing Director Hamid Arabnejad, Ambassador to Iraq Hassan Danaeifar, Head of Expediency Council Political, Defense, and Security Secretariat Hossein Dehghan, IRGC Seyyed al Shohada Base Commander Javad Estaki, former Ministry of Defense and Armed Logistics Preparation and Support Deputy Mehdi Moblaq, Judiciary Strategic Affairs Deputy Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, AFGS Preparation, Support and Research Deputy Mohammad Hejazi, IRGC-GF Commander Mohammad Pakpour, Expediency Council Secretary Mohsen Rezaei, former Imam Hossein University IRGC Officer Training School Commander Mostafa Rabii.

### 2009 Post-election Protests

The protests that erupted following charges of voter fraud in the 2009 presidential election and the subsequent violent crackdown by the regime's security services threatened to topple the regime, and created major cleavages among sectors of the regime elite.<sup>45</sup> Although IRGC Commander Jafari acknowledged in July 2009 that some members of the IRGC had been supportive of the protest movement, the IRGC's senior leadership overwhelmingly backed Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the crisis.<sup>46</sup> The IRGC's support was manifested in public statements of support for Khamenei and Ahmadinejad and, more importantly, in its leading role brutally suppressing the uprising.<sup>47</sup> The IRGC has also spent the last four years loudly condemning the "sedition" (*fitneh*), as hardliners refer to the Green Movement, and attempting to completely marginalize its remnants while emphasizing the IRGC's role as guardians of the revolution and its absolute obedience to the Supreme Leader.<sup>48</sup>

### 2007-2009 Assessment

The IRGC-CN continued to grow its influence after Mohammad Ali Jafari's promotion and his subsequent restructuring of the organization, retaining key positions in the Commanding Heights and advancing into others. Between September 2007 and July 2009, following the IRGC command change and Mosaic Doctrine restructuring but before the 2009 protests, 23 of the 36 signatories of the 1997 and 1999 letters occupied positions within the IRGC or AFGS. None of these 23 commanders were fired or demoted during this period. Of the 21 who signed both letters, 15 were active IRGC commanders during this time: six retained positions in the Commanding Heights and three advanced within the

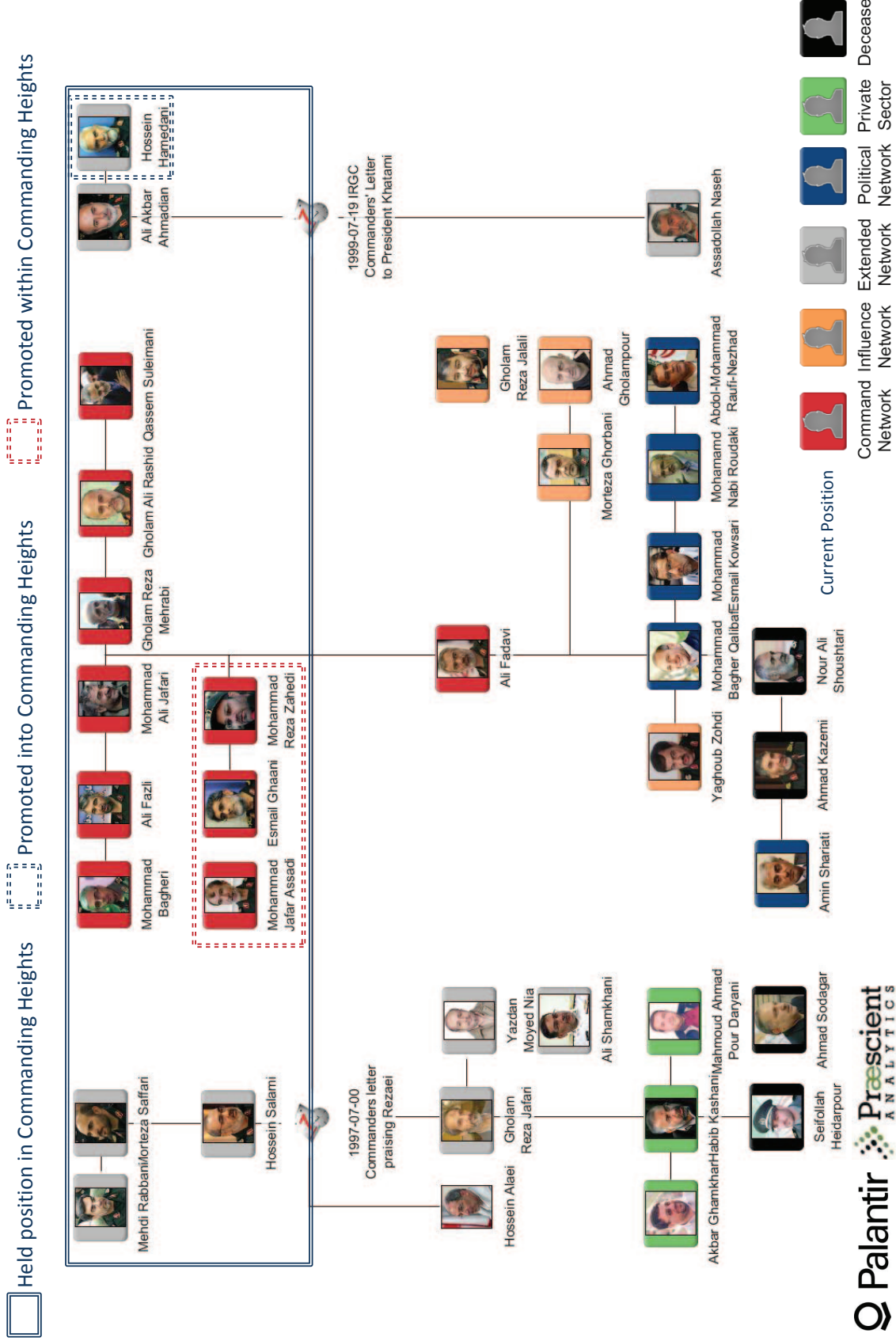
Commanding Heights. Of the remaining 15 who signed one of the two letters, four retained positions within the Commanding Heights, and one was promoted back into the Commanding Heights (Hamedani, as discussed above) (Graphic 4) (Table 5, page 43).

Two individuals moved out of Commanding Heights positions, although they do not appear to have been "demoted" on principle. One of them, Brigadier General Ali Fazli, was among the 21 signatories of both letters. Fazli, who had occupied Commanding Heights position IRGC Operations deputy since 2005, was temporarily moved to command the Seyyed al Shohada Tehran province IRGC unit in July 2008.<sup>49</sup> Fazli's move may be partially explained by the fact that he had commanded the 10th Seyyed al Shohada Division – the force around which the provincial unit was formed – during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>50</sup> It is plausible that IRGC Commander Jafari brought Fazli in to assist in organizing this key provincial unit after the Mosaic Doctrine restructuring given his prior experience. Fazli then returned to the Commanding Heights as Basij deputy commander in December 2009.<sup>51</sup> Of the remaining 15 officers who signed one of the letters, Ali Akbar Ahmadian was selected to replace Jafari as head of the IRGC-SSC.<sup>52</sup> Ahmadian had been chief of the IRGC Joint



PHOTO 8 | GHOLAM REZA MEHRABI AND MOHAMMAD BAGHERI ATTEND BASIJ ACHIEVEMENTS EXHIBIT, TEHRAN, DECEMBER 2012. (BASIJ PRESS)

# 2007-2009 IRGC Command Network Assessment





Staff since 2000. Jafari did away with the IRGC Joint Staff after taking command, replacing it with the IRGC General Staff, which is led by the IRGC Coordination deputy.<sup>53</sup>

#### *2009-2012 Assessment*

Despite the IRGC's controversial role in violently suppressing the popular uprising that nearly toppled the regime in 2009, the IRGC-CN remained cohesive. Of the 21 officers who signed both letters, 14 were active commanders during this period: eight retained positions within the Commanding Heights, one was promoted into the Commanding Heights for the first time, and one was promoted back into the Commanding Heights (Fazli).<sup>54</sup> The remaining four active commanders also retained their previous positions. Of the 15 who signed either letter, eight held positions in the IRGC or AFGS at that time: three were promoted within the Commanding Heights and four retained their previous positions. One of these eight, Morteza Saffari, was moved out of the Commanding Heights. Previously the IRGC Navy commander, Saffari now leads the Imam Hossein University IRGC Officer Training School (Graphic 5) (Table 6, page 45).<sup>55</sup>

#### *Former Senior Commander Criticizes Regime*

In January 2012, former IRGC Navy Commander and Iran-Iraq War veteran Hossein Alaei published a letter in Iranian daily *Ettelaat* implicitly criticizing Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei for his actions during and after the 2009 post-election protests.<sup>56</sup> Without directly naming him, Alaei compares Khamenei to the former Shah Reza Pahlavi and poses a series of questions that the shah should have asked himself during the cycle of protests that ultimately led to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, such as, "Had I allowed the protesters to rally peacefully, and had I not

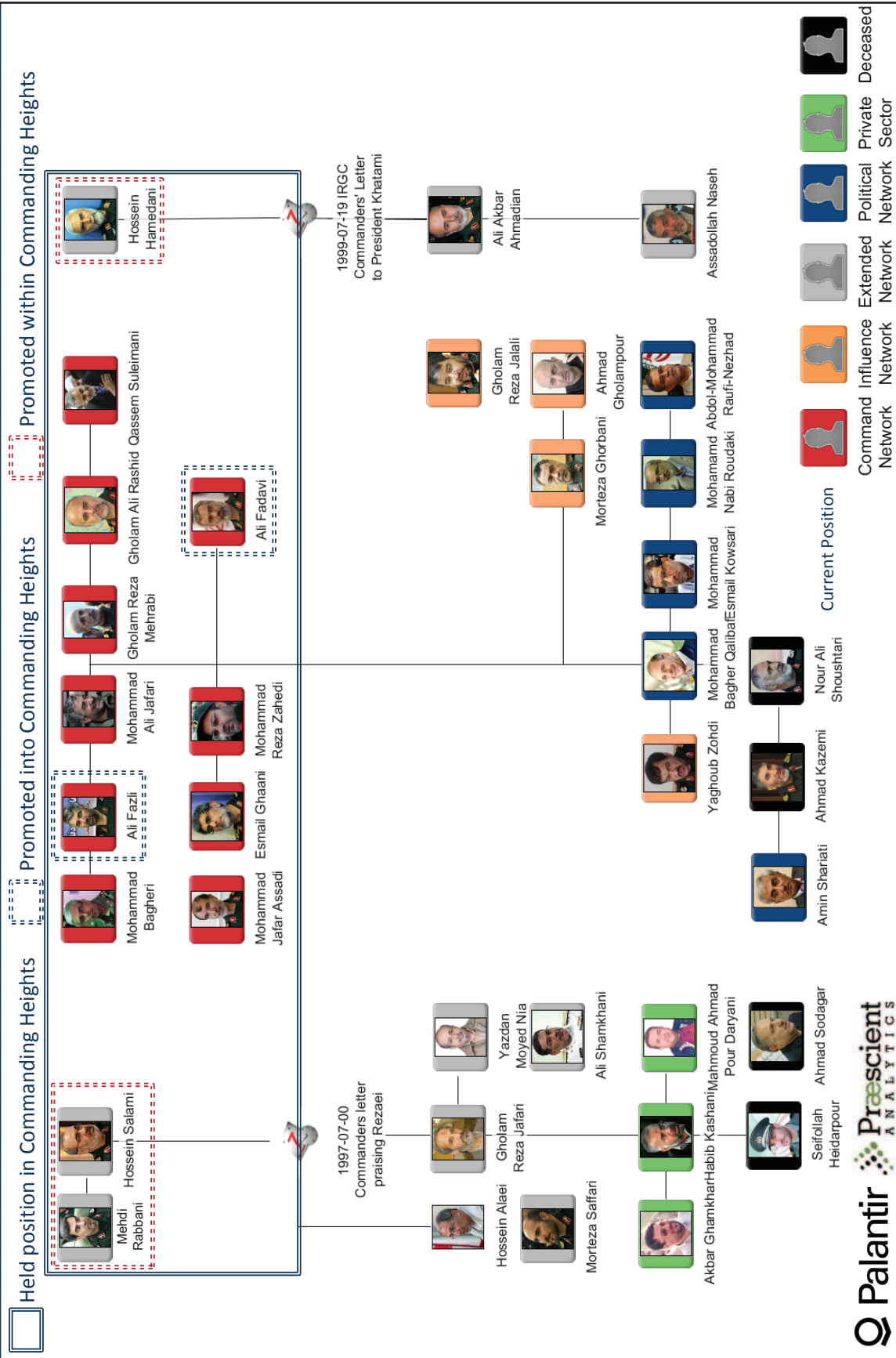
accused them of demonstrating their power and mobilizing their forces, would [those protests] not have ended?"<sup>57</sup> Alaei concludes: "Dictators consider themselves [to have] the eternal right to rule over the people. When the palace is encircled by sycophants, there is no opportunity to ask such questions."<sup>58</sup>

In response to this attack, ten current and two former senior IRGC commanders signed an open letter attacking Alaei for his "betrayal."<sup>59</sup> Three days later, a number of current and former commanders who had previously served under Alaei in the IRGC Navy, led by current Ministry of Defense Preparation and Support Deputy Brigadier General Majid Mir Ahmadi, met with Alaei to discuss the intent of his letter.<sup>60</sup> Mir Ahmadi reported after this meeting that Alaei indicated that there had been confusion over his letter, and quoted Alaei as saying, "The obedience and devotion that I had before [for Khamenei] is the same devotion that I [currently] have."<sup>61</sup> Following this meeting, the same 12 IRGC commanders who had published the first letter published a second open letter, characterizing Alaei's original letter as an expression of his "devotion and love" for the "sacred Islamic system and, specifically, the *velayat-e faqih*."<sup>62</sup> The following week, Alaei attended a martyrdom commemoration ceremony for



PHOTO 9 | HOSSEIN ALAEI SPEAKS WITH GHOLAM ALI RASHID AT MOURNING CEREMONY FOR AHMAD SODAGAR, TEHRAN, JANUARY 2012. (FARS NEWS AGENCY)

# 2009-2012 IRGC Command Network Assessment



a former IRGC artillery commander and was photographed sitting next to and speaking with IRGC-CN member and Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff Major General Gholam Ali Rashid.<sup>63</sup> In sum, a former IRGC insider criticized the Supreme Leader, a group of current IRGC insiders publicly warned him over his transgression, and then the former IRGC insider was shepherded back into the fold, or at least convinced to refrain from further criticisms.

### *2012-Present Assessment*

The 2012 letters addressed to Alaei are the third public manifestation of IRGC-CN political unity. While this particular demonstration of IRGC-CN unity may, at first glance, seem less significant than the previous instances since there were no associated security incidents or significant command changes, one should consider the context: criticism of the Iranian political system of any kind, particularly of the Supreme Leader, became a regime red line following the 2009 protests, and very few reform-minded officials had even dared to cross it, let alone conservatives. For a former senior IRGC commander to issue an open letter comparing the Supreme Leader to the despot Shah Pahlavi was treason, and opened the IRGC up to speculation on unity within its ranks, or worse, the organization's fealty to Khamenei. The event was a critical test of IRGC-CN unity.

Seven of the 12 signatories of the 2012 letters signed both the 1997 and 1999 letters, and another three signed one of them (Graphic 6) (Table 7, page 47). One of the two new signatories was senior IRGC Commander and current AFGS Preparation, Support and Research Deputy, Mohammad Hejazi, a member of the IRGC-XN and former occupant of Commanding Heights positions Basij Organization commander, IRGC chief

of Joint Staff, and IRGC deputy commander.<sup>64</sup> The other new signatory is war-era commander Ali Bani Louhi, who is now an author of Iran-Iraq War-related literature.<sup>65</sup> Although these letters originated from within the IRGC-CN, several members did not sign the 2012 letters, including the current IRGC and IRGC-QF commanders and deputy chief of the AFGS. One plausible explanation for their absence is that, unlike 1997 and 1999, these commanders are now in positions such that their signatures could lend the impression that these letters were organizational messaging and not the position of a faction within the leadership.<sup>vi</sup>

Another plausible explanation is that some of these commanders have actually moderated their previously hardline positions and no longer wish to be publicly affiliated with the IRGC-CN. Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, for example, has become well-known as something of a pragmatic moderate in the Islamic Republic since becoming mayor of Tehran, and even had to work to fight this image during his 2013 presidential run.<sup>66</sup> It should be noted, however, that IRGC-QF Commander Qassem Suleimani reportedly backed Qalibaf for president.<sup>67</sup> The Qalibaf campaign did not shy away from this support, and some of the candidate's informal media outlets even attempted to exploit this connection by publishing a video of Qalibaf comforting Suleimani during a mourning ceremony for former IRGC Commander Ahmad Kazemi.<sup>68</sup>

Although we do not have the insight necessary to fully interpret the absence of certain commanders, this most recent letter suggests that the IRGC-CN is still active and unified. There are four representative signatories from the IRGC-CN, two from the IRGC-IN,

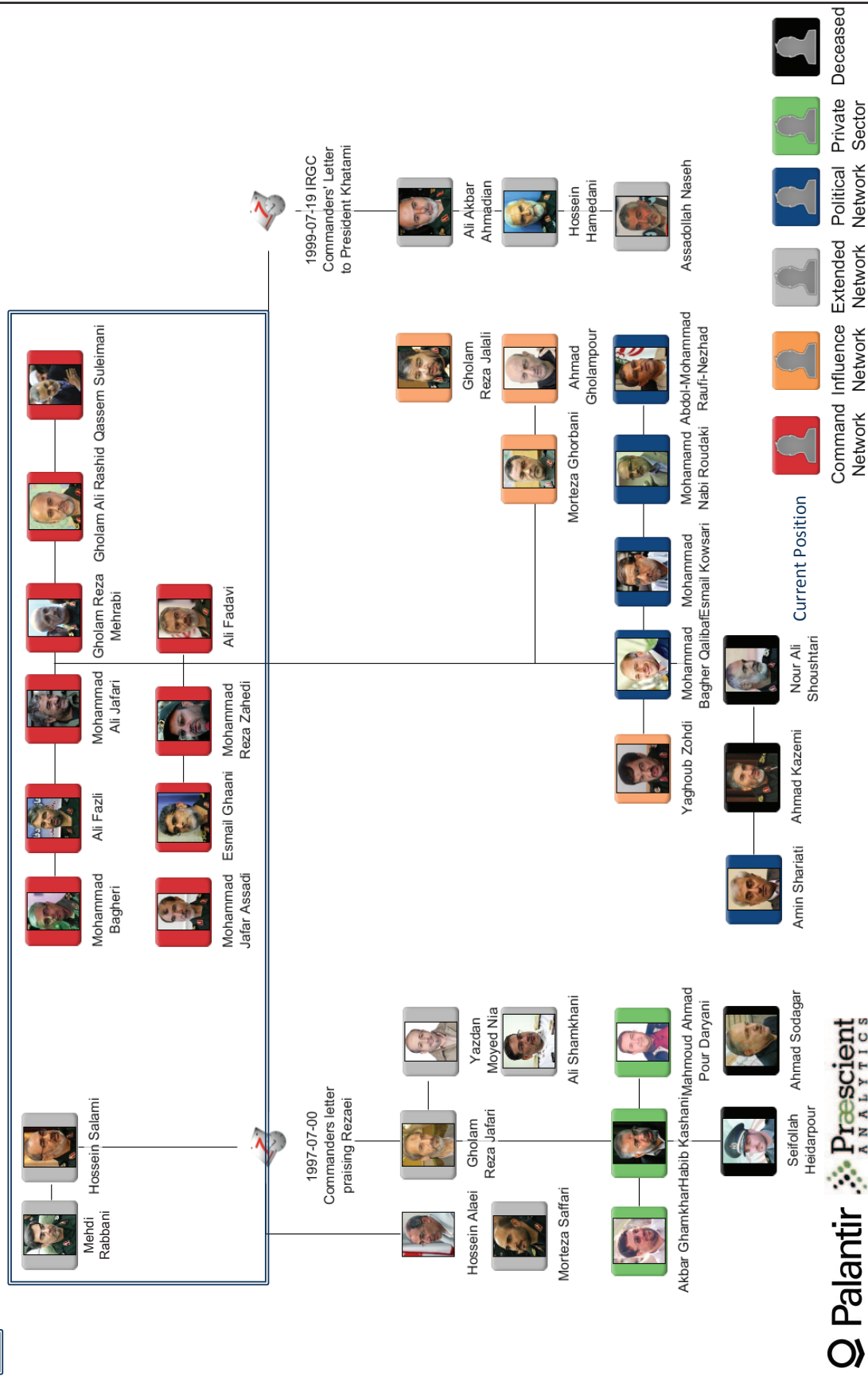
vi. Qassem Suleimani was commander of the IRGC-QF when he signed the 1999 letter; however, he was not a publicly known figure. At the publication of the 2012 letter, Suleimani was an internationally known figure and one of the Islamic Republic's most prominent security officials.



# 2012-present IRGC Command Network Assessment



 Held position in Commanding Heights



and four from the IRGC-XN, representing the IRGC's key centers of military power, including five from the AFGS, two from the Quds Force, and one each from the Basij Organization and Imam Hossein University.

The trend of previous cohesion and control of the Commanding Heights among the IRGC-CN persisted through the 2012 incident. Fourteen of the 21 who signed both letters held active positions: ten retained positions in the Commanding Heights, and the remaining four retained their positions elsewhere. Of the 15 who signed one of the two letters, two have retained their positions in the Commanding Heights, and seven have retained other positions. Hossein Hamedani was replaced as commander of the IRGC Greater Tehran unit, a Commanding Heights position, was appointed adviser to IRGC Commander Jafari, and is now reportedly leading an element of Iran's training and advisory mission in Syria.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

The IRGC Command Network – the informal influence network that emerged on the front of the Iran-Iraq War, remained cohesive through leadership changes in 1997 and 2007, and survived internal security crises in 1999 and 2009 and a potentially serious public defection in 2012 – today dominates the key command and staff positions within the IRGC's military hierarchy. This identifiable network of senior commanders, as well as its extended networks, whose members have given every indication that they are fundamentally in agreement with the Islamic Republic's core policy principles, are positioned to retain control over the IRGC for the foreseeable future and have significant influence on key issues.

In the near term, the IRGC-CN can present a formidable challenge to president-elect Hassan Rouhani's administration if the new



PHOTO 10 | MOSTAFA IZADI, MOHAMMAD BAGHER QALIBAF, QASSEM SULEIMANI, JAMAL ABEROUMAND, AND HOSSEIN NEJAT ATTEND MOURNING CEREMONY FOR HASSAN TEHRANI MOGHADDAM, NOVEMBER 2011. (SOURCE: LEADER.IR)



PHOTO 12 | ESMAIL KOWSARI AND ALI FAZLI ATTEND INTRODUCTION OF NEW IRGC TEHRAN COMMANDER, TEHRAN, NOVEMBER 2011. (FARS NEWS AGENCY)

government attempts to encroach upon the network's interests. With respect to core foreign policy issues, such as Iran's nuclear program and support for Assad in Syria, there are no signs indicating that we are likely to see a shift in the IRGC-CN's position. On other issues that Rouhani has suggested he will take on, such as opening Iranian civil society, perhaps we may see more tolerance. Looking back to the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, however, the IRGC became an active opponent of similar attempts to create such an opening. The same core group that then controlled the Commanding Heights has only strengthened its grip in the intervening years, as we have seen, making Rouhani's challenges in some ways even greater than those faced by Khatami.

The IRGC-CN has largely refrained from publicly addressing the implications of Rouhani's victory, but, as one would expect, it has given no indication that it views its position in the regime as having been altered in any significant way. Several IRGC officials have remarked that the Iranian people's massive participation in the elections was the realization of the Supreme Leader's call during his March 2013 Norouz speech for a "political epic," but Basij Organization Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ali Fazli is the only IRGC-CN member who has ventured to message outside of this

regime platitude.<sup>70</sup> Speaking with a *Fars News Agency* reporter, Fazli remarked, "Those who accused the system of fraud in the [2009] election have realized with the people's epic participation in the recent election that their claims were complete lies.... Those who made improper claims of fraud and entered the election process with doubt and created suspicion among the Iranian people today should come and apologize to the people and the system."<sup>71</sup> This effort to erase the national trauma of 2009 from political discourse in the Islamic Republic has been echoed by other Principlist regime officials, and is not necessarily unique to the IRGC-CN.<sup>72</sup>

One member of the IRGC-PN, however, has been more assertive in laying out early red lines for the Rouhani administration. Three days after Rouhani won the election, former Sarallah Operational Base Deputy Commander, signatory of the 1997, 1999, and 2012 letters and current National Security and Foreign Policy Parliamentary Commission Deputy Brigadier General Mohammad Esmail Kowsari repudiated the influence of reformist leaders in the election and warned against bringing former presidents Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami, who supported Rouhani in the election, back into positions of influence. Kowsari argued that "the people fundamentally no longer trust" these two, or the Reformists.<sup>73</sup> One week later, Kowsari remarked that, although "the people have determined the [Rouhani] administration's priorities...and Mr. Rouhani must implement his slogans...it is more important to protect revolutionary, Islamic, and national values," adding, "Appointing capable ministers who can implement Iran's Islamic values is one of the main priorities of the [next] administration."<sup>74</sup>

The next week Kowsari escalated his rhetoric, warning that, though Principlists and





PHOTO 12 | AMIR ALI HAJIZADEH, MOHAMMAD BAGHERI, AND MOHSEN KAZEMEINI ATTEND COMMEMORATION CEREMONY FOR AHMAD SODAGAR, FEBRUARY 2012, TEHRAN. (FARS NEWS AGENCY)

Reformists can work together in “certain circumstances,” those Reformists “must not have had a role in the [2009] sedition or be extreme Reformists who pursue the desires of arrogant America or Europe.”<sup>75</sup> For Kowsari, the reintegration of certain figures in the Reformist current, particularly those who are affiliated in anyway with the 2009 Green Movement, is a red line. Because we understand that Kowsari is closely affiliated with the IRGC-CN, we can assess with moderate confidence that Kowsari, if not speaking on behalf of the network, at least reflects this particular faction’s views in part at this early stage.

In the long term, the IRGC-CN is positioned to retain significant influence in the Islamic Republic’s national security decision-making. This network has demonstrated its ability to survive significant domestic turmoil and, though it may be forced to adapt in some ways to new domestic political realities, it will not be pushed easily aside by any new

government. Even as IRGC-CN members “age out” of their positions, they are unlikely to cede territory to commanders who hold diverging viewpoints on core principles, such as support for the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader or a resistance approach to Iranian nuclear diplomacy.<sup>vii</sup> In fact, there is some evidence that the IRGC-CN is grooming the next generation of IRGC commanders to replace them as they retire or move into politics. Of the small number

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vii. An example of IRGC support for a resistance approach to nuclear diplomacy can be found in IRGC-CN member AFGS Intelligence Deputy Brigadier General Gholam Reza Mehrabi’s statement made on February 16, 2013. Regarding suggestions by some Iranian officials that Tehran should negotiate with the U.S. over Iran’s nuclear program, he said, “If we back down they will advance further, therefore we resist. Iran is a great country with abundant holdings; it has a powerful military, intelligent people, decisive leadership, many natural resources and energy. Therefore, if we are present and aware nothing will happen.” Mehrabi also dismissed the idea that negotiations will result in sanctions being lifted: “This is a lie. The goal of sanctions is to pit the people against the authorities, but one must accept that we have managed powerfully and moved past these problems.”

of commanders outside of the formal IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, and IRGC-XN who have recently broken into upper echelons of the IRGC command, most have varying degrees of evident links to these networks.<sup>viii</sup> We have also seen the next generation of commanders echo IRGC-CN messaging, and there have been no cases of them publicly deviating from IRGC-CN positions.<sup>76</sup> While this particular faction continues to dominate the upper echelons of the IRGC and retain unity on key policy issues, we can expect that the organization will remain steadfast in its hardline domestic and foreign policy positions.

President-elect Hassan Rouhani has the support of a majority of Iranian voters and, ostensibly, because he was among the eight candidates permitted to stand in the election, the Supreme Leader as well. It is too early

to tell whether Rouhani will attempt to use this mandate to challenge the regime's core policies, or if his authority will extend only far enough to address the symptoms of Iran's myriad economic, social, and political problems. If Rouhani actually endeavors to make substantive changes in Iran's foreign and domestic policies, it will be truly significant, as it could signal a shift in Iranian internal dynamics, whereby the Supreme Leader shifts his support away from the IRGC in order to rebalance regime power dynamics, or a shift in the IRGC's own willingness to accommodate more moderate policy positions. In any case, any major shifts are likely to come slowly, and not without an intense struggle among the regime's most powerful stakeholders, each hoping to protect its interests and shape the future of the Islamic Republic.

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viii. The following are examples of next generation commanders who have links to the IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, or IRGC-XN:

Head of the AFGS Operations Directorate Brigadier General Ali Shadmani was IRGC-XN member Hossein Hamedani's deputy in the 32nd Ansar al Hossein Brigade during the Iran-Iraq War.

IRGC-GF Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour was concurrently the IRGC Operations deputy under IRGC-CN member Mohammad Ali Jafari and the IRGC-GF Coordination deputy under IRGC-CN member Mohammad Jafar Assadi before being promoted to his current position replacing Assadi.

IRGC Coordination Deputy Brigadier General Jamal Aberoumand served as IRGC-GF Logistics deputy during the Iran-Iraq War and attended several operational planning meetings with IRGC-CN, IRGC-IN, and IRGC-XN members during that time.

IRGC-GF Deputy Commander Brigadier General Abdollah Eraghi was an acquaintance of former IRGC-GF Deputy Commander and signatory of both 1997 and 1999 letters Nour Ali Shoushtari (d. 2009) in the first years of the war. Eraghi also served as a commander with the 17th Ali Ibn-e Abi Taleb, 31st Ashoura, and 8th Najaf-e Ashraf Divisions during the war, commanded respectively by Gholam Reza Jafari (IRGC-XN), Amin Shariati (IRGC-PN), and Ahmad Kazemi (signed 1997 and 1999 letters, d. 2006).

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IRGC Coordination Deputy Brigadier General Jamal Aberoumand

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## TABLES

Table 1: IRGC Commanding Heights Positions and Western Equivalents

Position	Western Equivalent	Notes
IRGC Commander	-	The U.S. and most Western militaries have chiefs of staff rather than commanders at the heads of their armed forces.
IRGC Deputy Commander	-	Second-in-command of the IRGC <sup>1</sup>
IRGC combat service commanders: Ground Force, Aerospace Force, Navy	-	These positions would also more likely be chiefs of staff rather than commanders in the West.
IRGC Operations Deputy	J3 or Operations Officer	
IRGC Coordination Deputy	Chief of Staff	
IRGC General Staff Implementation and Support Commander	J4/XO (Logistics Officer and/or Executive Officer)	
IRGC Inspection Deputy <sup>i</sup>	Inspector General	
IRGC Intelligence Deputy/Head of the IRGC Intelligence Organization <sup>ii</sup>	J2/DIA (Intelligence Officer and/or Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency)	
Chief of the AFGS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff	
Deputy Chief of the AFGS	Deputy Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff	
AFGS Coordination Deputy	Director of the Joint Staff	
AFGS Intelligence and Operations Deputy	J2/J3 on the Joint Staff	
AFGS Strategic Planning Deputy	J5 or Deputy Chief of Staff for Future Plans	
AFGS Intelligence Deputy	J2 on the Joint Staff	
Head of AFGS Operations Directorate	J3 on the Joint Staff	
AFGS Inspection Deputy	Inspector General of the Joint Staff	
AFGS Basij Affairs and Defense Culture Deputy	-	This directorate includes the Passive Defense Organization, Bureau of Cyberspace Coordination, Foundation for Preservation of Sacred Defense (large charity organization), and Basij Affairs and Defense Culture and Propaganda directorates. <sup>3</sup> There are no parallels to the Basij organizations in the U.S., but the cyber functions of this office make it similar to U.S. Cyber Command.

IRGC Sarallah Operational Base Commander/Deputy Commander		Commands Greater Tehran and Tehran province units. <sup>iii</sup> This office is superficially similar to the commander of the Military District of Washington, but with enormously greater combat power and influence.
IRGC Greater Tehran unit Commander		Responsible for security of Greater Tehran at the head of a large joint forces unit to which there is no analogue in the U.S.
Basij Organization Commander	-	Internal security force, beyond military power is extensively integrated in economic, social, cultural, and civil spheres. The Basij is uniquely Iranian, but more like the Komsomol or Hitler Youth than like anything found in the U.S.
Basij Organization Deputy Commander	-	Assessed that this position is in charge of Basij military training and integration with IRGC Ground Force <sup>iv</sup>
Quds Force Commander	-	Leads IRGC's extraterritorial military operations, combining the functions of the CIA's direct action arm and Special Operations Command, among others.
Quds Force Deputy Commander	-	Second-in-command of the Quds Force
Quds Force Lebanon Commander	-	Link to Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran's strategic depth in the Levant, critical to Iran's security posture

i. In a Western context, the inspector general is not a particularly influential position. In the IRGC, however, where fealty to the *velayat-e faghih* and ideological purity are ostensibly essential characteristics for members, especially for leaders, this position has the potential to be very influential. According to the IRGC's Statute, the Inspection Directorate is responsible for "helping the IRGC Commander in determining the qualifications of members," and advises the IRGC commander on performance of various IRGC units and departments.

"Esasnameh-ye sepah-e pasdaran-e enghelab-e eslami" [IRGC Statute], Majlis Research Center, October 3, 1982. Available in Persian: <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/90595>

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iii. The commander of the IRGC technically commands the Sarallah Operational Base, while the deputy commander of the base is charged with the base's day-to-day operations, which includes operational command over both the IRGC Mohammad Rasoul-Allah (Greater Tehran) and IRGC Seyyed al Shohada (Tehran province) units.

"Iran press: Paper on joint IRGC and Basij military exercises," *Kayhan*, November 12, 2006. Available on World News Connection.



“Esmail Kowsari: gharghah-e sarallah dar bazkhoubi-ha va gereftan e’terafat naghsh dasht” [The Sarallah Base played a role in interrogations and taking confessions], *Parsine*, November 1, 2009. Available in Persian: <http://www.parsine.com/fa/news/11962/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B9%DB%8C%D9%84-%DA%A9%D9%88%D8%AB%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B2%D8%AC%D9%88%DB%8C%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88-%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%AA%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%86%D9%82%D8%B4-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%AF%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA>

iv. I’ve assessed that the Basij Forces deputy commander is in charge of Basij’s military forces and their integration into the IRGC-GF. Following Jafari’s 2007-08 restructuring of the IRGC when the Basij was formally incorporated into the IRGC and its military units merged with the IRGC-GF, IRGC Commander Jafari appointed Hojjat al-Eslam Hossein Taeb, a cleric with an intelligence background, as head of the Basij Organization and Brigadier General Hossein Hamedani as deputy commander. Hamedani has extensive operational command experience in the IRGC-GF. In 2009, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naghdi, whose background is also in intelligence, was appointed as head of the organization, and Brigadier General Ali Fazli was appointed as deputy commander. Fazli also has extensive experience as a commander in the IRGC-GF, and was appointed Imam Hadi Base commander in September 2012. According to Fazli, the primary missions of this base are “organizing efforts for improving the defense and combat preparedness of Basij forces; increasing the efficiency of Ashoura and Al-Zahra [Basij] battalions, and Beit al-Moghaddas Rapid Reaction battalions; providing guidance and supervision over combat exercises and combat training with an emphasis on the regular Beit al Moghaddas exercises, and; preparing the Basij for realizing their strategic missions.”

“Sardar Fazli beh ‘onvan-e farmandeh-ye ghararghah-e razmi-ye imam hadi mansoub shod” [Commander Fazli appointed Commander of the Imam Hadi Combat Base], *Fars News Agency*, September 18, 2012. Available in Persian: <http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13910628000227>

Table 2: IRGC Commanders Participating in 10+ Iran-Iraq War Senior Planning Meetings

Name	Current Position	Current Rank	Assessed Network
Mohammad Jafar Assadi	Head of AFGS Inspectorate <sup>4</sup>	BG	CN
Mohammad Bagheri	AFGS Intelligence and Operations Deputy <sup>5</sup>	MG	CN
Ali Fadavi	IRGC Navy Commander <sup>6</sup>	BG	CN
Ali Fazli	Basij Organization Deputy Commander <sup>7</sup>	BG	CN
Esmail Ghaani	IRGC-QF Deputy Commander <sup>8</sup>	BG	CN
Mohammad Ali Jafari	IRGC Commander <sup>9</sup>	MG	CN
Gholam Reza Mehrabi	AFGS Intelligence Deputy <sup>10</sup>	BG	CN
Gholam Ali Rashid	Deputy Chief of the AFGS <sup>11</sup>	MG	CN
Qassem Suleimani	IRGC-QF Commander <sup>12</sup>	MG	CN
Morteza Ghorbani	Senior Adviser to the Chief of the AFGS <sup>13</sup>	BG	IN
Ahmad Gholampour	IRGC Strategic Studies Center member <sup>14</sup>	BG	IN
Yaghoub Zohdi	IRGC Training & Manpower Deputy <sup>15</sup>	BG	IN
Esmail Kowsari	Member of Parliament (Tehran) <sup>16</sup>	BG	PN
Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf	Mayor of Tehran <sup>17</sup>	BG	PN
Mohammad Abdol Raoufi Nezhad	Governor of Zanjan province <sup>18</sup>	BG	PN
Mohammad Nabi Roudaki	Passive Defense adviser to Mayor of Tehran <sup>19</sup>	BG	PN
Amin Shariati	Iran-Iraq Economic Expansion Committee Deputy Chairman <sup>20</sup>	BG	PN
Hossein Hamedani	Adviser to IRGC Commander, reportedly training pro-Assad forces in Syria <sup>21</sup>	BG	XN
Gholam Reza Jafari	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS <sup>22</sup>	BG	XN
Yahya Rahim Safavi	Senior Military Adviser to Supreme Leader <sup>23</sup>	MG	XN
Ali Shamkhani	Head of the Armed Forces Strategic Studies Center <sup>24</sup>	MG	XN
Jamal Aberoumand	IRGC Coordination Deputy <sup>25</sup>	BG	NG
Ali Shadmani	Head of AFGS Operations Directorate <sup>26</sup>	BG	NG
Mostafa Izadi	AFGS Strategic Planning Deputy <sup>27</sup>	MG	-
Mohammad Jafari Sahraroudi	Former Supreme National Security Council Deputy for Internal Security, reported IRGC-QF member <sup>28</sup>	BG	-
Iraj Masjedi	Senior Adviser to Quds Force Commander <sup>29</sup>	BG	-
Mohammad Reza Naghdi	Head of Basij Organization <sup>30</sup>	BG	-
Rouhollah Nouri	IRGC Sarallah Unit Commander <sup>31</sup>	BG	-
Mohsen Rezaei	Expediency Council Secretary <sup>32</sup>	MG	-
Ali Hosseini Tosh	Former Imam Hossein University Commander <sup>33</sup>	BG	-
Ahmad Vahidi	Minister of Defense <sup>34</sup>	BG	-
Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr	Judiciary Strategic Affairs Deputy <sup>35</sup>	BG	-

Note: CN = Command Network, IN = Influence Network, PN = Political Network, NG = next generation, MG = Major General, BG = Brigadier General

Table 3: 1997-1999 Active IRGC Commanders and Signatories of 1997 and 1999 Letters

Name	Position Retained	Position Appointed from	Position Appointed to	Date of Promotion	Status
<i>Signed both the 1997 and 1999 letters</i>					
Mohammad Jafar Assadi	IRGC-GF Deputy Commander <sup>36</sup>				Retained
Mohammad Bagheri	AFGS Intelligence Deputy <sup>37</sup>				Retained
Ali Fadavi		A commander with IRGC Navy <sup>38</sup>	IRGC Navy Deputy Commander <sup>39</sup>	July 1997	Promoted
Ali Fazli	IRGC Sarallah Base Deputy Commander <sup>40</sup>				Retained
Esmail Ghaani	Unknown				Unknown
Ahmad Gholam-pour	IRGC Command and Staff College Commander <sup>41</sup>				Retained
Morteza Ghorbani	14th Imam Hossein Division Commander <sup>42</sup>				Retained
Mohammad Ali Jafari	IRGC-GF Commander <sup>43</sup>				Retained
Gholam Reza Jalali	IRGC Joint Staff Planning Deputy <sup>44</sup>				Retained
Ahmad Kazemi	IRGC Hamzeh Seyyed al Shohada and Ramezan Bases Commander <sup>45</sup>				Retained
Mohammad Esmail Kowsari	27th Mohammad Rasoul-Allah Division Commander <sup>46</sup>				Retained
Gholam Reza Mehrabi	IRGC Intelligence Deputy <sup>47</sup>				Retained
Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf		IRGC Khatam ol Anbia Base Commander <sup>48</sup>	IRGC Air Force Commander <sup>49</sup>	October 1997	Promoted
Abdol Mohammad Raoufi Nezhad		31st Ashoura Division Commander <sup>50</sup>	41st Sarallah Division Commander <sup>51</sup>	Early 1998	Promoted
Gholam Ali Rashid	AFGS Intelligence & Operations Deputy <sup>52</sup>				Retained
Mohammad Nabi Roudaki	AFGS Inspectorate Deputy <sup>53</sup>				Retained
Amin Shariati	IRGC Engineering Deputy <sup>54</sup>				Retained
Nour Ali Shoushtari	5th Nasr Division Commander <sup>55</sup>				Retained

Qassem Suleimani		41st Sarallah Division Commander <sup>56</sup>	IRGC-QF Commander <sup>57</sup>	Early 1998	Promoted
Mohammad Reza Zahedi	Unknown				Unknown
Yaghoub Zohdi	Unknown, possibly IRGC-GF Artillery & Missile unit Commander <sup>58</sup>				Unknown
<i>Signed only the 1997 letter</i>					
Hossein Alaei	IRGC Chief of Joint Staff <sup>59</sup>				Retained
Seifollah Heidar-pour	IRGC 4th Be'sat Division Deputy Commander <sup>60</sup>				Retained
Gholam Reza Jafari	Unknown				Unknown
Yazdan Moyed Nia	Commander with 7th Vali-ye Asr Division <sup>61</sup>				Retained
Mehdi Rabbani	Unknown				Unknown
Hossein Salami	Nabi Akram Base Deputy Commander <sup>62</sup>				Retained
Morteza Saffari	Commander with IRGC Navy <sup>63</sup>				Retained
Ali Shamkhani		Iranian Navy Commander <sup>64</sup>	Minister of Defense <sup>65</sup>	July 1997	Promoted
Ahmad Sodagar	Unknown, position with IRGC-GF <sup>66</sup>				Unknown
<i>Signed only the 1999 letter</i>					
Ali Akbar Ah-madian		IRGC Navy Deputy Commander <sup>67</sup>	IRGC Navy Commander <sup>68</sup>	July 1997	Promoted
Hossein Hamedani	Basij Deputy Commander <sup>69</sup>				Retained
Asadollah Naseh	Unknown				Unknown

Note: Commanders highlighted in red occupied position in Commanding Heights



Table 4: 1999-2007 Active IRGC Commanders and Signatories of 1997 and 1999 Letters

Name	Position Retained	Position Appointed from	Position Appointed to	Date of Promotion	Status
<i>Signed both the 1997 and 1999 letters</i>					
Mohammad Jafar Assadi		IRGC-GF Deputy Commander	IRGC Lebanon Commander <sup>70</sup>	Exact date unknown (earliest date 2005)	Promoted
Mohammad Bagheri		AFGS Intelligence Deputy	AFGS Intelligence & Operations Deputy <sup>71</sup>	Exact date unknown (earliest date 2006)	Promoted
Ali Fadavi	IRGC Navy Deputy Commander <sup>72</sup>				Retained
Ali Fazli		Sarallah Base Deputy Commander	IRGC Operations Deputy <sup>73</sup>	November 2005	Promoted
Esmail Ghaani		IRGC Counter Intelligence Organization Deputy	IRGC Intelligence Deputy <sup>74</sup>	May 2006	Promoted
Ahmad Gholampour	IRGC Command and Staff College Commander			Unclear how long he held this position, next known replacement in 2006 <sup>75</sup>	Retained
Morteza Ghorbani		14th Imam Hossein Division Commander	Senior Adviser to Chief of AFGS <sup>76</sup>	Ghorbani held this position for six years, unclear when he transferred to AFGS advisory role	Promoted
Mohammad Ali Jafari		IRGC GF Commander	Head of IRGC Strategic Studies Center <sup>77</sup>	Selected to establish and lead this organization August 2005	Promoted
Gholam Reza Jalali		IRGC Planning Deputy	AFGS Engineering and Passive Defense Deputy <sup>78</sup>	Exact date unknown	Promoted
Ahmad Kazemi		IRGC Hamzeh Seyyed al Shohada and Ramezan Bases Commander	IRGC Air Force Commander, IRGC-GF Commander <sup>79</sup>	June 2000, August 2005, d. January 2006 <sup>80</sup>	Promoted

Mohammad Esmail Kowsari		27th Division Commander	IRGC Sarallah Base Deputy Commander, AFGS Security Deputy, Member of Parliament <sup>81</sup>	2000, exact date unknown, 2004	Promoted
Gholam Reza Mehrabi		IRGC Intelligence Deputy	AFGS Intelligence Deputy <sup>82</sup>	Exact date unknown, not later than 2006	Promoted
Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf		IRGC Air Force Commander	LEF Commander, Tehran Mayor <sup>83</sup>	June 2000, 2005	Promoted, Moved to Politics
Abdol Mohammad Raoufi Nezhad		41st Sarallah Division Commander	Governor of Kerman province <sup>84</sup>	June 2005	Moved to Politics
Gholam Ali Rashid		AFGS Intelligence & Operations Deputy	Deputy Chief of the AFGS <sup>85</sup>	August 1999	Promoted
Mohammad Nabi Roudaki		AFGS Inspectorate Deputy	Member of Parliament <sup>86</sup>	2004	Moved to Politics
Amin Shariati		IRGC Engineering Deputy	ASGS Engineering Deputy <sup>87</sup>	October 2001	Promoted
Nour Ali Shoushtari		5th Nasr Division Commander	IRGC-GF Deputy Commander <sup>88</sup>	Exact date unknown, not later than 2006	Promoted
Qassem Suleimani	Quds Force Commander				Retained
Mohammad Reza Zahedi		IRGC-GF Deputy Commander <sup>89</sup>	IRGC Air Force Commander, IRGC-GF Commander, Sarallah Base Deputy Commander <sup>90</sup>	August 2005, January 2006, March 2006 held concurrently with IRGC-GF Commander position <sup>91</sup>	Promoted
Yaghoub Zohdi	Unknown, possibly IRGC GF Artillery & Missile unit Commander <sup>92</sup>				Unknown
<i>Signed only the 1997 letter</i>					
Hossein Alaei		IRGC Chief of Joint Staff	Imam Hossein University faculty <sup>93</sup>	July 2000	Left formal command structure
Seifollah Heidarpour		4th Be'sat Division Deputy Commander	3rd Hamzeh Seyyed al Shohada Division Commander <sup>94</sup>	2000, occupied for three years <sup>95</sup>	Promoted

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Gholam Reza Jafari	Unknown				Unknown
Yazdan Moyed Nia		Commander with 7th Vali-ye Asr Division	10th Seyyed al Shohada Division Commander <sup>96</sup>	Exact date unknown, until 2006	Promoted
Mehdi Rabbani		4th Be'sat Division Commander <sup>97</sup>	Sarallah Base Deputy Commander <sup>98</sup>	March 2006	Promoted
Hossein Salami		Nabi Akram Base Deputy Commander	IRGC Operations Deputy, IRGC Air Force Commander <sup>99</sup>	Exact date unknown, earliest 2002; January 2006	Promoted
Morteza Saffari		Commander with IRGC Navy	IRGC Navy Commander <sup>100</sup>	July 2000	Promoted
Ali Shamkhani		Minister of Defense	Head of Armed Forces Strategic Studies Center <sup>101</sup>	June 2005	Promoted
Ahmad Sodagar		Unknown, position with IRGC-GF	Head of Sacred Defense Education and Science Research Center <sup>102</sup>	2005	Left formal command structure
<i>Signed only the 1999 letter</i>					
Ali Akbar Ahmadian		IRGC Navy Commander	IRGC Chief of Joint Staff <sup>103</sup>	July 2000	Promoted
Hossein Hamedani		Basij Deputy Commander	IRGC Sarallah Base Deputy Commander, IRGC-SSC Center Deputy <sup>104</sup>	Exact begin date at Sarallah unknown, to 2006, deputy at IRGC-SSC beginning 2005	Promoted
Asadollah Naseh		Unknown	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS <sup>105</sup>	Exact dates unknown, at least 2003	Promoted

Note: Commanders highlighted in red occupied position in Commanding Heights

Table 5: 2007-2009 Active IRGC Commanders and Signatories of 1997 and 1999 Letters

Name	Position Retained	Position Appointed from	Position Appointed to	Date of Promotion	Status
<i>Signed both 1997 and 1999 letters</i>					
Mohammad Jafar Assadi		IRGC Lebanon Commander	IRGC-GF Commander, Head of AFGS Inspectorate <sup>106</sup>	2007, not later than 2009	Promoted
Mohammad Bagheri	AFGS Intelligence & Operations Deputy				Retained
Ali Fadavi	IRGC Navy Deputy Commander				Retained
Ali Fazli		IRGC Operations Deputy	Seyyed al Shohada unit (Tehran province) Commander <sup>107</sup>	July 2008	Promoted
Esmail Ghaani		IRGC Intelligence Deputy	Quds Force Deputy Commander <sup>108</sup>	Exact date unknown, not later than 2008	Promoted
Ahmad Gholampour		IRGC Command and Staff College Commander	IRGC-SSC member <sup>109</sup>	Exact date unknown	Promoted
Morteza Ghorbani	Senior Adviser to Chief of AFGS				Retained
Mohammad Ali Jafari		Head of IRGC-SSC	IRGC Commander <sup>110</sup>	September 2007	Promoted
Gholam Reza Jalali		AFGS Engineering and Passive Defense Deputy	Head of PDO <sup>111</sup>	November 2008	Promoted
Gholam Reza Mehrabi	AFGS Intelligence Deputy				Retained
Gholam Ali Rashid	Deputy Chief of the AFGS				Retained
Nour Ali Shoushtari		IRGC-GF Deputy Commander	IRGC Quds Base Commander <sup>112</sup>	April 2009, held concurrently with IRGC-GF Deputy position	Promoted
Qassem Suleimani	IRGC-QF Commander				Retained
Mohammad Reza Zahedi		IRGC-GF Commander, Sarallah Base Commander	IRGC Lebanon Commander <sup>113</sup>	Exact date unknown, 2008	Promoted



Yaghoub Zohdi		IRGC-GF Artillery & Missile unit commander	IRGC Training & Manpower Deputy <sup>114</sup>	Exact date unknown, not later than early 2009	Promoted
<i>Signed only 1997 letter</i>					
Seifollah Heidarpour		3rd Hamzeh Seyyed al Shohada Division Commander	Adviser to IRGC Command	Exact date unknown, d. February 2008 <sup>115</sup>	Promoted
Gholam Reza Jafari	Unknown				Unknown
Yazdan Moyed Nia		10th Seyyed al Shohada Division Commander	Head of IRGC Commander's Office and Adviser to IRGC Commander <sup>116</sup>	October 2008	Promoted
Mehdi Rabbani	Sarallah Base Deputy Commander				Retained
Hossein Salami	IRGC Air Force Commander				Retained
Morteza Saffari	IRGC Navy Commander				Retained
Ali Shamkhani	Head of Armed Forces Strategic Studies Center				Retained
Ahmad Sodagar	Head of Sacred Defense Education and Science Research Center				Retained
<i>Signed only 1999 letter</i>					
Ali Akbar Ahmadian		IRGC Chief of Joint Staff	Head of IRGC-SSC <sup>117</sup>	September 2007	Promoted
Hossein Hamedani		IRGC-SSC Deputy	Basij Organization Deputy Commander <sup>118</sup>	July 2008	Promoted
Asadollah Naseh	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS				Retained

Note: Commanders highlighted in red occupied position in Commanding Heights

Table 6: 2009-2012 Active IRGC Commanders and Signatories of 1997 and 1999 Letters

Name	Position Retained	Position Appointed from	Position Appointed to	Date of Promotion	Status
<i>Signed both 1997 &amp; 1999 letters</i>					
Mohammad Jafar Assadi	Head of AFGS Inspectorate				Retained
Mohammad Bagheri	AFGS Intelligence & Operations Deputy				Retained
Ali Fadavi		IRGC Navy Deputy Commander	IRGC Navy Commander <sup>119</sup>	May 2010	Promoted
Ali Fazli		10th Seyyed al Shohada Division Commander	Basij Organization Deputy Commander <sup>120</sup>	December 2009	Promoted
Esmail Ghaani	IRGC-QF Deputy Commander				Retained
Ahmad Gholampour	IRGC-SSC member				Retained
Morteza Ghorbani	Senior Adviser to Chief of AFGS				Retained
Mohammad Ali Jafari	IRGC Commander				Retained
Gholam Reza Jalali	Head of PDO				Retained
Gholam Reza Mehrabi	AFGS Intelligence Deputy				Retained
Gholam Ali Rashid	Deputy Chief of the AFGS				Retained
Qassem Suleimani	IRGC-QF Commander				Retained
Mohammad Reza Zahedi	IRGC-QF Lebanon Commander				Retained
Yaghoub Zohdi	IRGC Training & Manpower Deputy				Retained
<i>Signed only 1997 letter</i>					
Gholam Reza Jafari		Unknown	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS <sup>121</sup>	Exact date unknown, not later than 2011	Promoted

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Yazdan Moyed Nia	Head of IRGC Commander's Office and Adviser to IRGC Commander				Retained
Mehdi Rabbani		IRGC Sarallah Base Deputy Commander	IRGC Operations Deputy <sup>122</sup>	January 2012	Promoted
Hossein Salami		IRGC Air Force Commander	IRGC Deputy Commander <sup>123</sup>	October 2009	Promoted
Morteza Saffari		IRGC Navy Commander	Imam Hossein University IRGC Officer Training School <sup>124</sup>	Exact date unknown, earliest reported 2010	Promoted
Ali Shamkhani	Head of Armed Forces Strategic Studies Center				Retained
Ahmad Sodagar	Head of Sacred Defense Education and Science Research Center				Retained
<i>Signed only 1999 letter</i>					
Ali Akbar Ahmadian	Head of IRGC-SSC				Retained
Hossein Hamedani		Basij Organization Deputy Commander	IRGC Mohammad Rasoul-Allah (Greater Tehran) unit Commander, Adviser to IRGC Commander, reportedly training pro-Assad forces in Syria <sup>125</sup>	November 2009, December 2011, exact dates in Syria unknown	Promoted
Asadollah Nasch	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS		Managing Director of Iran Global Housing and Construction Company (IGHCC) <sup>126</sup>	Concurrently holds position with IGHCC since August 2011	Retained

Note: Commanders highlighted in red occupied position in Commanding Heights

Table 7: 2012-Present Active IRGC Commanders and Signatories of 1997, 1999, and 2012 Letters

Name	Position Retained	Status
<i>Signed both 1997, 1999, and 2012 letters</i>		
Mohammad Jafar Assadi	Head of AFGS Inspectorate	Retained
Ali Fazli	Basij Organization Deputy Commander	Retained
Morteza Ghorbani	Senior Adviser to Chief of AFGS	Retained
Esmail Ghaani	IRGC-QF Deputy Commander	Retained
Gholam Reza Jalali	Head of Passive Defense Organization	Retained
Mohammad Reza Zahedi	IRGC Lebanon Commander	Retained
<i>Signed both 1997 &amp; 1999 letters, not 2012</i>		
Mohammad Bagheri	AFGS Intelligence & Operations Deputy	Retained
Ali Fadavi	IRGC Navy Commander	Retained
Ahmad Gholampour	IRGC-SSC member	Retained
Mohammad Ali Jafari	IRGC Commander	Retained
Gholam Reza Mehrabi	AFGS Intelligence Deputy	Retained
Gholam Ali Rashid	Deputy Chief of the AFGS	Retained
Qassem Suleimani	IRGC-QF Commander	Retained
Yaghoub Zohdi	IRGC Training & Manpower Deputy	Retained
<i>Signed one of 1997 or 1999 letters, and 2012 letter</i>		
Hossein Hamedani	Adviser to IRGC Commander, reportedly training pro-Assad forces in Syria	Retained
Gholam Reza Jafari	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS	Retained
Morteza Saffari	Imam Hossein University IRGC Officer Training School	Retained
<i>Signed only 1997 letter</i>		
Yazdan Moyed Nia	Head of IRGC Commander's Office and Adviser to IRGC Commander	Retained
Mehdi Rabbani	IRGC Operations Deputy	Retained
Hossein Salami	IRGC Deputy Commander	Retained
Ali Shamkhani	Head of Armed Forces Strategic Studies Center	Retained
Ali Akbar Ahmadian	Head of IRGC-SSC	Retained
Asadollah Naseh	Adviser to Chief of the AFGS	Retained
<i>Signed only 2012 letter</i>		
Ali Bani Louhi	Researcher and author of Iran-Iraq War literature <sup>127</sup>	Retained
Mohammad Hejazi	AFGS Industrial Preparation, Support, and Research Deputy <sup>128</sup>	Retained

Note: Commanders highlighted in red occupied position in Commanding Heights



## TABLE NOTES

1. “Vazayef, sakhtar, va shakhes-ha-ye sepah” [IRGC duties, structures, and characters], *Hosoun*, no. 17, 2008. Available in Persian: [http://nashriat-ps.com/article.php?id=26&article=4#footNumber\\_3\\_2](http://nashriat-ps.com/article.php?id=26&article=4#footNumber_3_2)
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5. “Falsafe-ye vojoodi-ye sepah siyanat az enghelab dar tamami-ye arse-haast” [The IRGC’s existing philosophy is defending the revolution in all arenas], *Fars News Agency*, June 23, 2012. Available in Persian: <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13910403000430>
6. “Sardar Fazli janeshin-e racis-e sazman-e basij-e mostazafin shod” [Brigadier General Fazli was appointed Basij Organization Deputy], *Dolat News Agency*, December 8, 2009. Available in Persian: <http://www.dolat.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Serv=0&Id=184426#>
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