



August 21, 2012

## The Qods Force, an elite unit of the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, spearheads Iran's global terrorist campaign. The terrorist attack in Bulgaria was, in our assessment, part of the campaign.



Ghasem Soleimani, Qods Force commander, bows his head to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Picture from the Asriran.com website, July 3, 2011). Terrorist and subversive activities carried out by the Qods Force around the globe are fully supported by Khamenei and the upper echelons of the Iranian regime.

### Overview

1. A series of terrorist attacks and attempted terrorist attacks in various countries around the world in recent years **have again shown that Israel is being subjected to a global Iranian terrorist campaign**. The attacks, which take a variety of forms, are organized and orchestrated out by the **Qods Force**, an elite unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). **Hezbollah** serves as the Qods Force's main proxy abroad for its terrorist missions. In our assessment, the terrorist attack targeting the bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria was carried out by Hezbollah as part of the Iranian campaign and from their point of view the most successful to date (five Israelis, the Bulgarian bus driver and the terrorist were killed and 36 Israeli tourists were wounded.)

2. **The objective of Iran's terrorist campaign**, which accelerated during the past year, has several objectives. One is to counteract what Iran feels is a covert campaign being conducted against it. In concrete terms, its goal is to exact revenge for the deaths of Iranian nuclear scientists and senior Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh, for which Iran and Hezbollah attribute to Israel. Thus Iran seeks to deter Israel from taking other action against it and **to strengthen its position in the campaign against the United States and Israel. It also seeks to signal that it has the operational capabilities to respond strongly should it be attacked.**

3. During the past years Iran and Hezbollah have targeted **Israeli diplomats** posted to various countries, **Israeli tourists** and in at least one case **Jewish public figures** (in Azerbaijan). In addition, the Qods Force has also tried to carry out terrorist attacks against Saudi Arabian and Bahraini targets, the most conspicuous of which was the **attempted assassination of the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States on American soil.**

4. To date, attacks in the Iranian terrorist campaign against Israel (accelerating since May 2011) have been carried out in several countries, among them **Bulgaria, Cyprus, Kenya, Azerbaijan, Indian, Georgia, Thailand and Turkey** (See the Appendix for details). In most instances the attacks failed or were prevented, either at the planning and intelligence-collecting stages or during implementation. In some instances local security services found Iranian and Hezbollah footprints which could have caused diplomatic incidents and complicated Iran's relations with the various countries. In India in February 2012, terrorist operatives affixed a magnetic explosive device to the car of the representative of the Israeli ministry of defense, and his wife, who was driving the car, was wounded in the ensuing explosion.

5. In retrospect, Iran **has shown both daring and the determination** to continue its efforts to attack Israeli targets despite a series of failures. **The successful Hezbollah attack in Bulgaria, which ended the series of operational failures, is liable, in our assessment, to encourage Iran to continue and even intensify its terrorist campaign.** According to the Wall Street Journal, **"Iran has developed plans to disrupt international oil trade, including though attacks on oil platforms and**

**tankers,"** both inside and outside the Straits of Hormuz, in retaliation for international sanctions and other pressure exerted on it.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Structure of the Paper**

6. This study is **the first part of a comprehensive paper on Iran's terrorist and subversive activities around the globe and of its export of the Islamic Revolution, with emphasis on the Qods Force in carrying out operations around the world during the last decade.** Two additional studies, which will be issued, will deal with the **main arenas of Iranian terrorist activity** (according to national and continental distribution) and an analysis of the **particular methods employed by Iranian terrorism.** Another study will deal with **the terrorist activity of Lebanese Hezbollah,** which serves the main proxy for both the Qods Force and the Iranian regime.

7. The current study is composed of two parts:

### **Part One: Introduction – Iranian terrorism and its objectives**

- 1) Iran as a global exporter of terrorism
- 2) The ideological dimension: the concept of exporting the Iranian Islamic Revolution
- 3) The role of the Shi'ite communities in the Iranian campaign of terrorism and subversion
- 4) The regional dimension: exporting the revolution in view of the upheaval in the Arab world

### **Part Two: The Qods Force**

- 1) Overview
- 2) Objectives and activity
- 3) The founding of the Qods Force
- 4) Structure and organization
- 5) Unit 400
- 6) Profile of Ghasem Soleimani, Qods Force commander

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<sup>1</sup> <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10000872396390444097904577537221896965492.html>

7) Profile of Ismail Qaani, Qods Force deputy commander

8) Interim balance sheet of Qods Force activity

Part Three: **Appendix:** Terrorist attacks carried out by the Qods Force and Hezbollah against Israeli and Jewish targets around the globe since May 2011.

## Part One

## Introduction – Iranian Terrorism and its Objectives

**Iran as an Exporter of Global Terrorism**

8. **The Qods Force is the long arm of Iran, which for the past three decades had led global terrorism.** According to the Country Reports on Terrorism 2010, issued by the United States Department of State in August 2011 (ITIC emphasis throughout),

**"Designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism in 1984, Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2010.** Iran's financial, material, and logistic support for terrorist and militant groups throughout the Middle East and Central Asia **had a direct impact on international efforts to promote peace**, threatened economic stability in Gulf, and undermined the growth of democracy.

**"In 2010, Iran remained the principal supporter of groups implacably opposed to the Middle East Peace Process. The Qods Force, the external operations branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), is the regime's primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorists abroad..."<sup>2</sup>**

9. **The Qods Force, an elite unit of the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC-QF), according to the State Department report, spearheads the implementation of Iran's policy of support for terrorism.** To that end the Iranian regime **invests vast resources, including finances, qualified manpower and military equipment.** The regime **is also willing to accept political and operational risks** which could damage Iran's relations with other countries, should its terrorist attacks and subversive activities be exposed.

10. Iran's terrorist and subversive actions **are not limited to the Middle East, but are spread over the entire globe.** Iran's terrorist tactics, which it modifies from time to time, **include indiscriminate suicide bombing attacks and targeted assassinations** (including diplomats). The Iranian terrorist targets are **Israel and the Jewish people, the United States and its Western allies, Arab countries which oppose Iran** (especially Saudi Arabia and Bahrain), and **Iranian activists who**

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/170479.pdf>, page 150. On July 31, 2012, the Report for 2011 was issued, and was not significantly different from the previous one. In a press briefing on July 31, 2012, Ambassador Dan Benjamin, the State Department's coordinator for counterterrorism, said that "...Iran is and remains the preeminent state sponsor of terrorism in the world. We are deeply concerned about Iran's activities on its own through the IRGC-Qods Force. And also, together with Hezbollah, as they pursue destabilizing activities around the globe..." <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/rm/2012/195898.htm>.

**oppose the regime.** The fact that the terrorist attacks are sponsored by a state, equipped with many resources, strengthens the **terrorists' operational capabilities and makes them far more dangerous than those of local terrorist organizations operating without governmental support.**

11. In many cases, the terrorist attacks sponsored by Iran are carried out by proxies, that is, terrorist organizations handled and supported by Iran. **The most prominent are Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Shi'ite militia in Iraq.** Using proxies enables the Iranian regime to obscure or hide its involvement in the attacks and use local terrorist operatives for its terrorist-subversive campaign, individuals who are more familiar than the Iranians are with the political-social-cultural environment of their countries. However, **Iranian operatives are directly involved** in some terrorist attacks, **members of the Qods Force or other Iranian apparatuses (such as the ministry of intelligence. They are often supported by national or semi-national Iranian institutions** (embassies, airlines, banks, shipping companies, "cultural centers" sponsored by Iran, Iranian socio-religious funds and foundations, Iranian religious institutions and NGOs, etc.).

12. **The intensive use of terrorism and subversive activities carried out by Iran to promote its strategies pose a threat to the political stability and social order the Middle East and beyond.** In addition, it can be assumed that **as Iran comes closer to achieving nuclear weapons capabilities, its confidence will increase.** In such circumstances, with the assurance of "nuclear security" which will, Iran assumes, deter its enemies from responding, **Iran is liable to become more daring in its use of terrorism and subversion in the Middle East and around the globe.** The lessons of the past have taught that **terrorism and subversion may not be directed solely against Israel and the Jewish people, but also against the interests of the United States, other Western countries and pro-Western Arab states as well.**

## **The Ideological Dimension: The Concept of Exporting the Revolution**

13. The urge to export the ideology of revolution subversion and terrorism is a well-known phenomenon, and was prevalent during the French and Bolshevik Revolutions. That is because revolutionary regimes, which regard themselves as subject to both external and internal threats, have a comprehensive ambitious ideology. They find it logical to export the revolution as a weapon against opponents, and as a means to

strengthen the revolution and impose it on others. The **Iranian regime does not admit to the use of terrorism and subversion to promote its strategic objectives** (even when such actions have been exposed), **but in effect, from its inception, it has made extensive use of terrorism and subversion against both domestic and foreign opponents.**

14. The desire to export the Islamic Revolution to other Muslim societies (and to humanity at large) **is an integral part of the philosophy of the Ayatollah Khomeini, who initiated the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979.** Khomeini and his supporters sought (in this context) to ignore the religious differences between Shi'ites and Sunnis, as well as the national divisions in the Arab-Muslim world. They wanted to create an Iranian-led revolutionary Islamic force which would defeat and eradicate the superpowers, Iran's political and ideological rivals which, according to the Iranians, were corrupting the world. According to that concept, which is **deeply embedded in the Iranian regime led by Ali Khamenei,** Iran's principal enemies are the **United States** ("the big Satan") **and its allies, especially Israel** ("the little Satan").

15. For Khomeini and his heir, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, **exporting the revolution is used to leverage Iranian strategic interests in the Middle East and around the globe.** Iran's principal strategic interest is to achieve **regional hegemony** by eroding Western influence in the Middle East and by gaining influence over various countries and organizations, especially those in the **"resistance" camp (including Syria and terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad).** Iran also **aspires to widen its political, ideological and religious influence in Muslim population centers around the globe, especially in Africa, South America and Central Asia.**

16. In short, **exporting the Islamic Revolution and terrorism is part of Iran's overall strategy.** Since its founding in 1979, one of the regime's favorite strategies for promoting its ideology and vital interests has been **using terrorism as a weapon.** It is a dominant factor in Iran's domestic and foreign policies since the days of Khomeini and has been directed against opponents of the regime, Israeli, Jewish, Western and Arab targets (and in fact against any target deemed "infidel" by the Iranian version of Shi'ite Islam). Revolutionary Islamic ideology served as an excuse to legitimize acts of violence and murder carried out by the Iranian regime against innocents who, it claimed, threatened the survival of the regime and acted contrary to religious law as it was interpreted by the Ayatollahs who ruled the regime.

## The Shi'ites in Iran's Campaign of Terrorism and Subversion

17. **In many instances, Iranian terrorism and subversion, both in the Middle East and beyond, rely on Shi'ite Muslim communities.** In a number of countries in the Middle East, Central Asia and other locations, **there are Shi'ite populations which are, from the Iranian point of view, fertile ground for the export of the Islamic Revolution.** The revolution's ideology is exported through intensive social, economic, cultural and religious activities. They **prepare the ground for the establishment of militias and terrorist organizations within the local Shi'ite populations,** handled by Iran to promote its interests and policies.

18. **The most conspicuous example of Iranian success within a Shi'ite population is in Lebanon,** where the IRGC established **Hezbollah, which over the years has gone from being a local militia with terrorist capabilities to an organization with state military capabilities,** and with the ability to attack the Israeli home front and with political influence in internal Lebanese politics. In **Iraq** Iran is trying to create Hezbollah-like militias within the Shi'ite population, but so with less success than in Lebanon. Muslim countries like **Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Yemen,** where there are Shi'ite communities opposing the various regimes, **are also important to the Iranian effort to export the revolution** and establish Shi'ite militias (but so far with little success). However, the American withdrawal from Iraq along with the recent regional upheaval, are liable to increase Iran's potential for advancing its subversive objectives and strengthening its ties with the Shi'ite communities.

### The regional aspect: exporting the revolution in view of the upheaval in the Arab world

19. The Arab upheaval **strengthened Sunni political Islam,** weakened the pro-Western anti-Iranian regimes and reinforced the anti-Israeli anti-Western trends in **key countries such as Egypt and Jordan.** Iranian policy, and the Qods Force as the most important factor in exporting the Islamic Revolution, **seek to exploit the new opportunities for advancing Iranian interests** in countries such as **Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and North Sudan** while responding to challenges and threats.

20. **The main opportunities Iran seeks to exploit are the possibility of changing the Western orientation of the various Arab regimes,** encouraging Islamist forces in

the various Arab countries which have common interests with Iran, strengthening ties and reinforcing Shi'ite communities, eroding America's regional influence, and destroying signs of normalization with Israel, especially Israel's peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. So far **Iran has not recorded outstanding success, but apparently the Iranians are determined to pursue their policies and the Qods Force is their main tool.**

21. Alongside the dangers inherent in the dramatic events unfolding in various Arab-Muslim countries, **Iran faces threats and challenges which it must tackle.** For Iran, the main regional challenge is **the on-going uprising against the bleeding Syrian regime**, Iran's strategic ally in the so-called "resistance camp." In addition, if the Syrian regime falls, **Iran's region influence may be weakened.** If Bashar Assad's regime falls, **Hezbollah** may be harmed, among other reasons because of the loss of its Syrian logistic backyard, which is vital for the delivery of Iranian support to the organization.

22. That major challenge was a blow to Iran-Hamas relations. It was the result of Hamas' pulling its headquarters out of Damascus, its criticism of the Assad regime, and the strengthening of its ties with Egypt and Turkey. To the list of challenges facing Iran can be added the ongoing political crisis in **Iraq**, which threatens the survival of the current Shi'ite government led by Iranian ally Adnan Maliki, and which may weaken Iran's influence in Iraq (alongside the considerable window of opportunity created for Iran there by the American withdrawal).

23. To deal with the consequences of the regional upheaval, **through the Qods Force Iran has invested great resources in various countries so that eventually it will be able to set the tone for the local revolutionary movements, encourage the establishment of pro-Iranian regimes and advance its opposition to the United States and the West in general.**<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the difficulties faced by Iran in making political capital from the regional upheavals also reflect **its limitations and those of the Qods Force in strengthening regional Iranian hegemony.**

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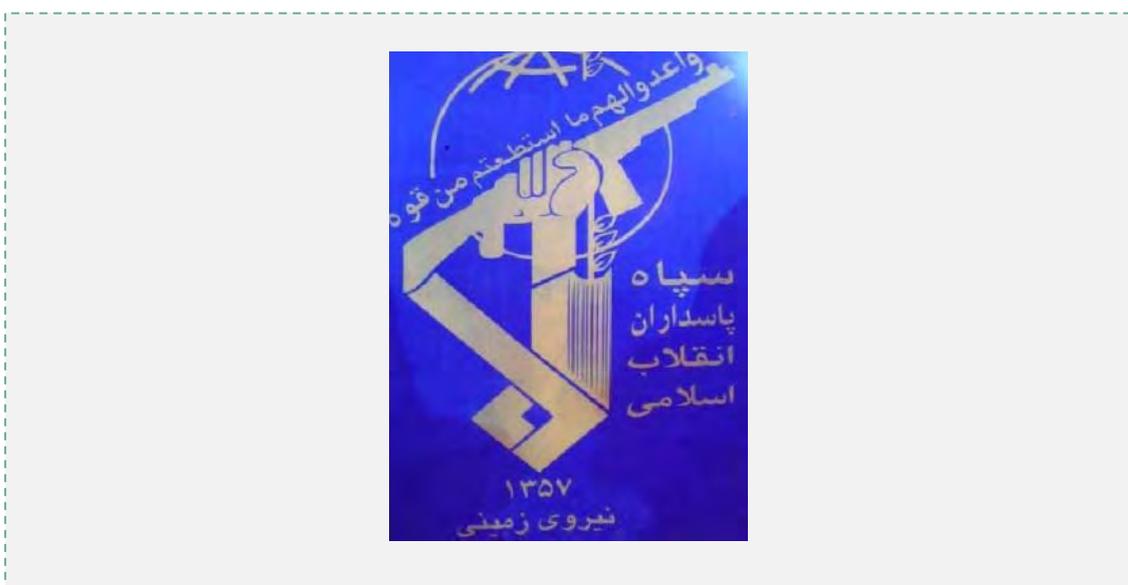
<sup>3</sup> That basic assumption was manifested in a speech given by Qods Force commander Ghasem Soleimani on January 18, 2012. he stated that Iran had a presence and influence in Lebanon and Iraq and boasted of Hezbollah's achievements in the Second Lebanon War, which, he claimed, increased its ability to deter Israel.

## The Qods Force

### Overview

24. **The Qods Force** spearheads the drive to export the revolution and carries out terrorist and subversive activities abroad. **It is the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' elite unit**, the strongest military-security force in Iran and the regime's main prop. **It was established in 1990** as an organized framework for operational and political activities to export the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran's borders. Eventually it became **the long arm of Iranian clandestine terrorist activity, enabling the regime to strike perceived enemies abroad**, especially the United States, Israel and pro-Western Arab countries. The **Qods Force handles its activities through proxies, careful to hide or obscure Iranian involvement.**

### The Qods Force Logo



Above the rifle is a Qur'an quotation: "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power..." (Surah 8, An-Anfal, Verse 60). For the Muslim militias, it is the call to prepare a military force to wage war against an enemy.

25. The Qods Force has staff branches, specially designated headquarters, and **regional geographic headquarters. The Qods Force has prestige within the Iranian leadership, has many resources, and influences the strategic and security decisions made in Tehran**, including regarding sensitive issues of Iranian foreign policy in places like Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip. **Since March 1998 the Qods Force has been commanded by General Ghasem Soleimani**, who in 2011 was put on America's terrorist list after the discovery of his involvement in the Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the

United States. Soleimani is the Qods Force's second commander, replacing **Ahmad Vahidi**, today Iran's minister of defense, who is also on the American terrorist list as a result of his involvement in the terrorist attack which blew up the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1994.

## Objectives and Activities

25. **The Qods Force** (in collaboration with other Iranian agencies), by **activating its special operations Unit 400**,<sup>4</sup> carries out a variety of clandestine activities beyond Iran's borders. Those activities include terrorist attacks as well as organizing, training, equipping, financing and directing Shi'ite, and sometimes Sunni, Islamist networks. Their terrorist and subversive activities are intended to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) **To exact revenge from Iran's opponents and deter them from trying to harm it:** The targets are **Israelis and Jews, the United States and Western countries, hostile Arab states** (especially Saudi Arabia and Bahrain), **and opponents of the Iranian regime abroad**. Iranians may be involved either directly or indirectly through proxies, **the most prominent of which is Hezbollah**. During the past year (beginning May 2011) **Iran and Hezbollah have made unprecedented efforts to attack Israeli targets abroad** (especially diplomats) to avenge the deaths of Hezbollah senior terrorist Imad Mughniyeh, and Iranian nuclear scientists, ascribed by Iran to Israel. Until the Hezbollah attack against the bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria, most of their efforts were stunning failures.
- 2) **To create an artillery, rocket and missile threat to the Israeli home front for a premeditated attack, with deterrence and response** from Lebanon and the Gaza Strip as **backup and to complete the threat of a direct rocket attack launched from Iran and/or Syria:** The Iranians are directly and mainly responsible for constructing the rocket arsenals of Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations, **with respect to both quantity and quality** (increased rocket range, precision of hit and effect of blast).

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<sup>4</sup> According to a British Sky News broadcast, April 2, 2012 (Sky.com website).

- 3) **To strengthen the military and political might of the so-called "resistance camp" in the Middle East**, composed of **Iran and its ally Syria, Hezbollah and the Palestinian terrorist organizations** (especially Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad): For the past year **Iran has been providing the Syrian regime, its main ally, with extensive support. It includes large quantities of weapons, strategic advice, specific training and financing, all for the sake of propping up the faltering Syrian regime and preventing it from collapsing.** Syria receives the support directly from the Qods Force and through Hezbollah. Ismail , deputy Qods Force commander, admitted that **there was a presence of Iranian forces in Syria supporting the regime of Bashar Assad.**<sup>5</sup>
  
- 4) **To establish a network of terrorist sleeper cells around the globe**, some of them with **the support of the Lebanese Hezbollah**: Iran's aim is be able to activate the cells against the United States, other Western countries and Israel and the Jews, depending on its strategic considerations (for example, in response to a military attack against it or as part of any offensive action initiated by Iran).<sup>6</sup>
  
- 5) **To help organizations, militias and political figures carry out subversive activities** in countries and regions where Iran wants **to increase its influence and reduce that of the West**: Special emphasis is given to countries hostile to Iran which have large Shi'ite populations (Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Yemen and other countries).
  
- 6) **To spread the ideology of Iran's Islamic Revolution and provide social services through the establishment of educational and cultural institutions and charitable funds and foundations within Muslim communities (especially Shi'ite Muslim communities).** That is implemented in the Middle East and beyond, including the West. Spreading the Islamic Revolution's ideology and providing social services **conceal and support Iran's subversive and terrorist activities.** However, sharing a common ideology is not necessarily a condition for the receipt of Iran aid which in certain

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<sup>5</sup> **Ismail Qaani, deputy commander of the Qods Force**, interviewed by the Iranian news agency ISNA at the end of May 2012, claimed that the objective of the Iranian forces in Syria was to protect the Syrian people and the Assad regime from the rebels. He said that "if the Islamic Republic were not present in Syria, the massacre of the Syrian people would be far greater" (ISNA, May 27, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Iran's intentions were evident in a threat sent by the Iranian ambassador to Russia, Sajjadi, on February 8, 2012. He said that should Iran be attacked, **it had the capabilities to launch military attacks on American interests around the globe**, although it was not currently planning a preemptive strike against American targets.

instances it is provided on the basis of common interests (for example, to undermine American and Western influence), even when differences or even ideological hostility exist (for example, in the case of Iran's cooperation with Al-Qaeda).

- 7) **To use various methods, including assassination, to deal with public figures and groups opposed to the Iranian regime** and based in Western countries.
- 8) **To collect intelligence in the Middle East and around the globe**, including the West: Such information is used both for Iran's military-political needs and for the Qods Force and Hezbollah to carry out terrorist attacks in foreign countries.

## The Founding of the Qods Force

26. The Qods Force was founded at the end of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war when the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps became more active in subversive activities beyond Iran's borders. In a number of countries, particularly **Lebanon, Iraq and the Gulf States**, Iran's IRGC had already established terrorist and guerrilla networks and provided them with extensive support, and were eager to establish similar local networks in other countries as well.

27. To that end, **in 1990 the IRGC set up a new elite unit called the Qods Force**,<sup>7</sup> to concentrate and promote all Iran's foreign subversive activities. It was commanded at the time by Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, currently Iran's minister of defense. The high command of the Qods Force is **directed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei** and reports directly to him, although informally.

## Structure and Organization

28. The Qods Force is one of five IRGC's arms (in addition to the air force, the navy, the infantry and the Basij). In Iran it is regarded as the elite unit of the armed forces, **has a lot of prestige with the Iranian regime and enjoys great resources.**

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<sup>7</sup> The name refers to the "liberation" of Jerusalem (*Al-Quds* in Arabic), the Qods Force's stated goal.

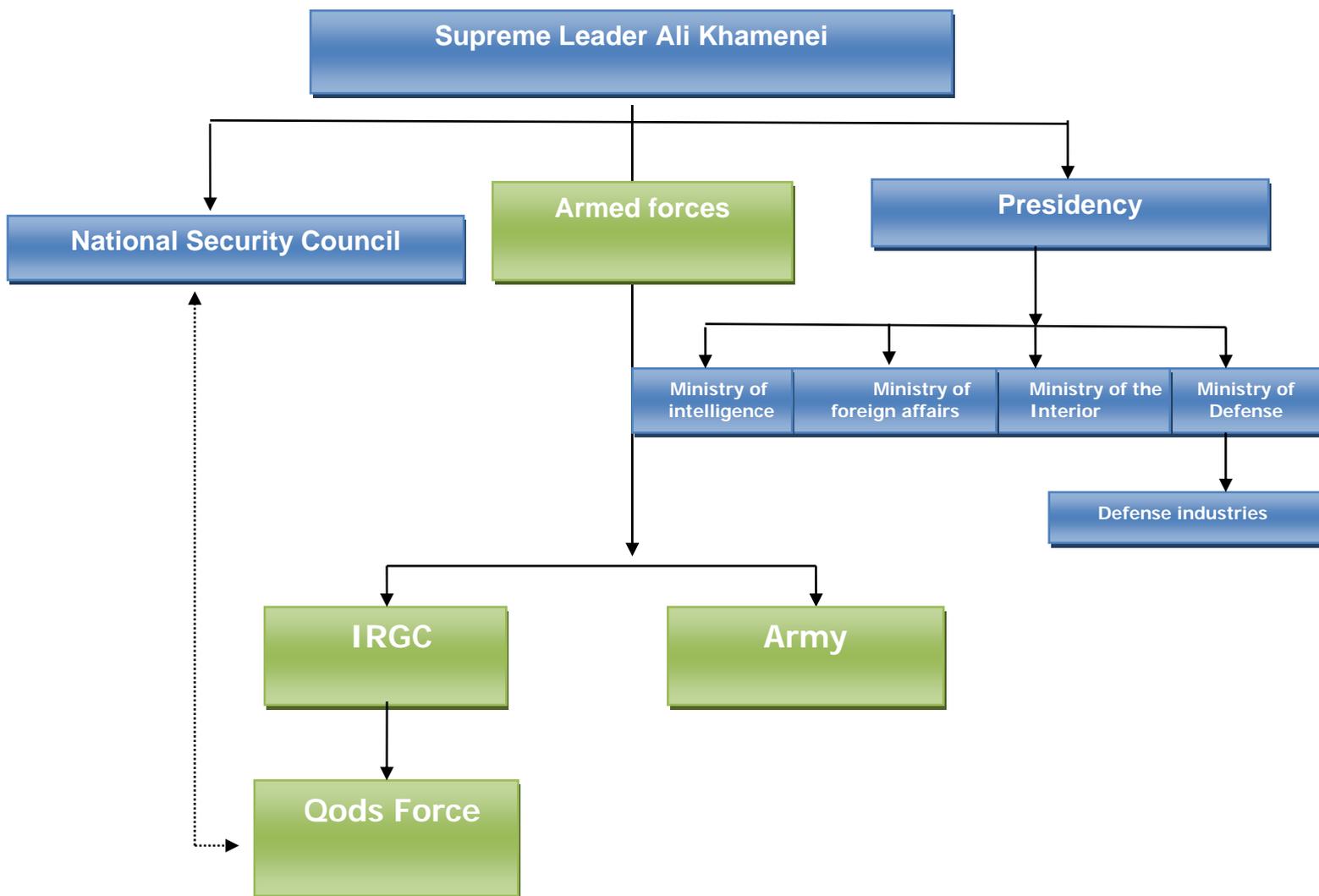
According to an American study carried out in 2009, as of that year its numbers had grown from an estimated 5,000 operatives to **an estimated 15,000**.<sup>8</sup>

29. The Qods Force includes **staff branches and various regional headquarters** (most of them **called "corps"**). **The regional headquarters deal with specific fields of expertise** and are defined by their geographical designations, such as **the Lebanon Corps, the Iraq Corps and the Ansar Corps, which is responsible for Iranian subversion in Afghanistan**. The Qods Force headquarters is responsible for the Force's ongoing management, its construction, maintaining its close ties with Supreme Leader Khamenei and other senior figures in the Iranian political and security establishment. They are also responsible for coordinating activities with other military, security and political institutions: the IRGC, the ministry of defense, the ministry of intelligence, the Supreme National Security Council, the ministry of the interior and the ministry of foreign affairs.

30. The following chart illustrates the place of the Qods Force in Iran's political and security establishment:

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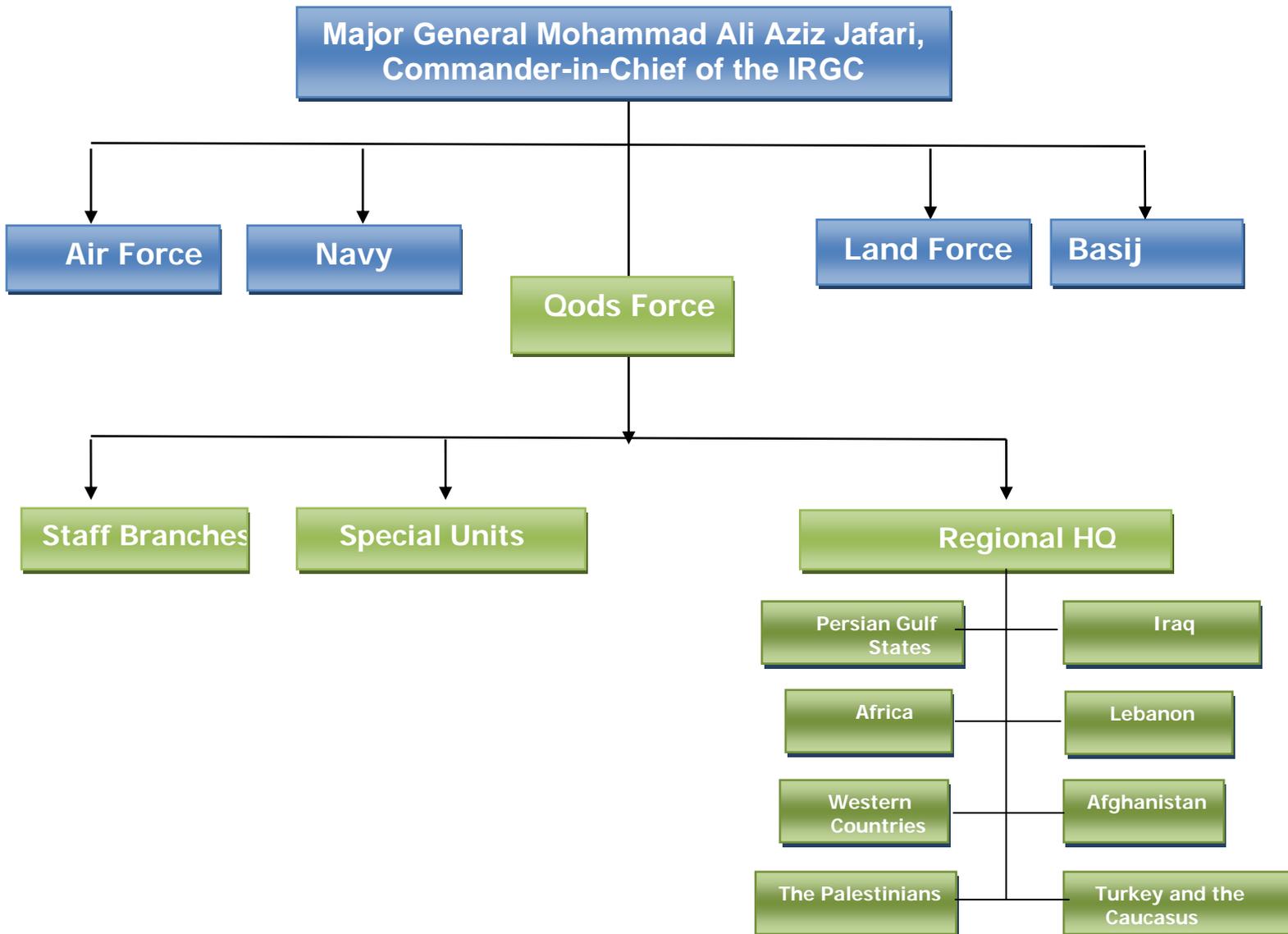
<sup>8</sup> Air War College, Air University; "Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC): An Iranian instrument of power" by Kenneth E. Duck, Lt Col, USAF (12 February 2009).



Directly subordinate \_\_\_\_\_

Linked .....

## The Structure of the IRGC and the Qods Force



**Note:** The Qods Force conducts terrorist and subversive operations in dozens of countries around the globe not necessarily under the jurisdiction of one of its regional headquarters.

31. Qods Force operatives are **stationed in Iranian embassies**. Members of the force also operate around the globe through **Iranian-handled charitable societies and religious and education institutions** in various countries. That allows the operatives to form social and economic ties with **Shi'ite communities** outside of Iran.<sup>9</sup> When the operational necessity arises, the religious, cultural, social, and economic

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Defense Department's unclassified report to Congress, "Military Power of Iran" ([www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com)). A specific example where an Iranian embassy was used for planning a terrorist attack was the bombing of the Jewish community building (AMIA) in Buenos Aires.

networks fostered by Iran **may serve as a convenient manpower pool** for promoting the Qods Force's terrorist and subversive operations.

## Unit 400

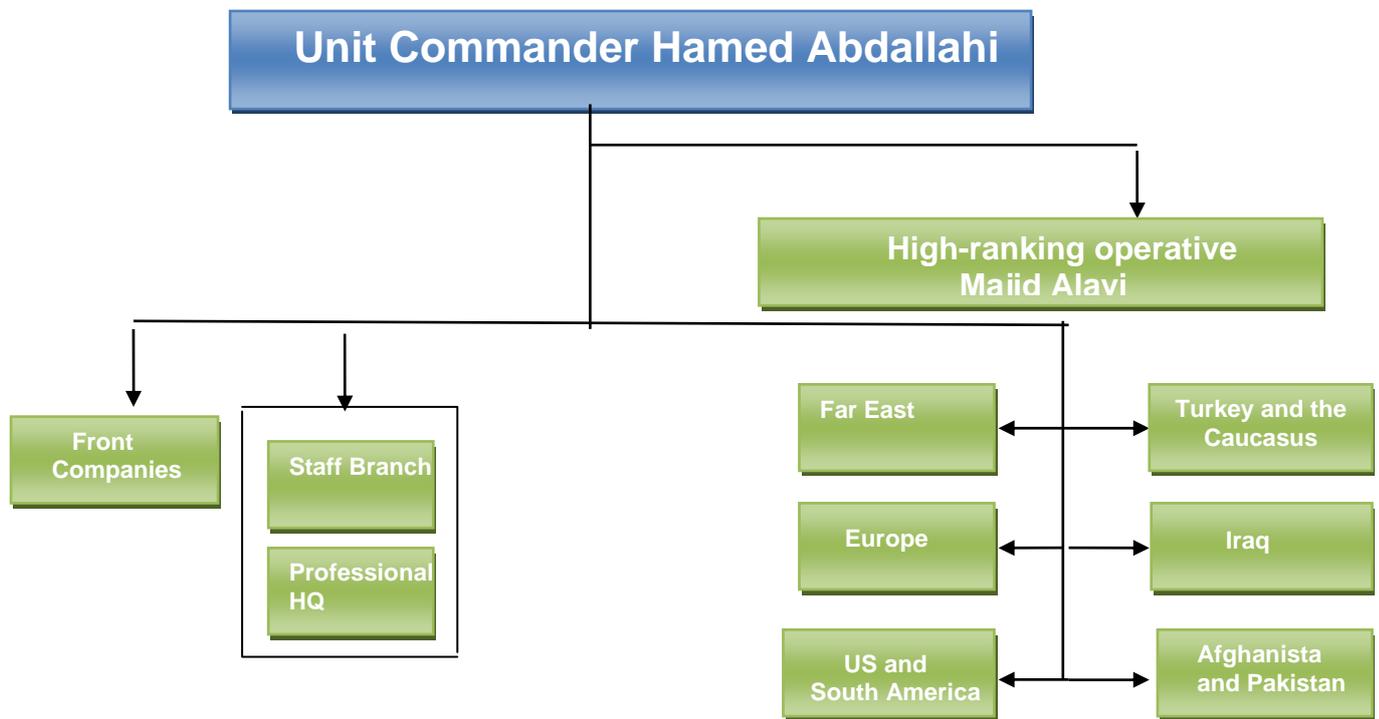
32. **400 is a covert unit within the Qods Force. It carries out “special operations” abroad under the direct command of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.** The unit is involved in planning and carrying out terrorist attacks abroad and helps opposition groups and local militias in various countries. It is headed by **Major General Hamed Abdollahi.**

33. Another of Unit 400's top commanders is **Majid Alavi**, the former deputy minister of intelligence. **Unit 400 has been responsible for a series of terrorist attacks in foreign countries in the past year**, including retaliatory attacks for the deaths of Imad Mughniyeh and Iranian nuclear scientists (most of which failed or were prevented).<sup>10</sup> A news agency in Azerbaijan, where attacks took place, reported that **Majid Alavi** liaised between the Qods Force and Hezbollah for joint operations. According to the report, Majid Alavi goes to Syria and Lebanon every month, even though the failure of the operation in Thailand exposed him (Iranazar, June 14, 2012).

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<sup>10</sup> Sky News, April 2, 2012 (sky.com).

## The Structure of Unit 400



34. When Iran makes the decision to proceed with a terrorist attack, Soleimani and Unit 400 are directly instructed to carry it out by **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**. The unit recruits foreign supporters into the operative squad, provides them with instructions and training in Iran, and then sends them back to the target region through a third country (to obscure Iranian involvement).

### Profile of Qasem Soleimani, Qods Force Commander<sup>11</sup>

35. Qasem Soleimani (Hajj Qasem) was born on March 11, 1957, in a village in Kerman Province in southeast Iran, and grew up in a mountainous tribal region. Soleimani's family was poor and unable to benefit from the reform plan established by the Shah in 1962. In 1970, when Soleimani was 13 years old, he graduated from elementary school and moved with a relative to the city of Kerman. The two of them

<sup>11</sup> This section is partly based on a biography of Qasem Soleimani written by **Ali Alfoneh**, who specializes in relations between the military and civilian systems in Iran, particularly the IRGC. Ali Alfoneh, "Brigadier General Qassem Suleimani: A Biography", *AEI Middle Eastern Outlook* (January 2011).

worked in construction for the Kerman Water Organization to help repay their fathers' debts.

36. Soleimani began his revolutionary activity in Kerman in 1976 when he joined forces with a high-ranking cleric (Hojjat-ol-Eslam) named Reza Kamyab, who was assassinated in 1981 by the Mojahedin-e Khalq (an organization opposing the Iranian regime and employing violence). Apparently, Soleimani was involved in the Islamic revolution which toppled the Shah's regime by participating in anti-regime sermons delivered by Reza Kamyab. Soleimani joined the IRGC in 1979, when they established a command council in the city of Kerman. Like other IRGC commanders, Soleimani had no previous military experience, but because of his high personal capabilities he was quickly appointed as an instructor. According to a fellow IRGC veteran, he participated in a 45-day military course.

37. In 1979 he was given his first military task, which was to **suppress a Kurdish separatist uprising which had broken out in West Azerbaijan Province after the Islamic revolution**. He was apparently stationed in Mahabad as part of a company-size irregular contingent sent to administer and protect the city. During its activity in the region, the contingent helped suppress the uprising and put an end to the bloody sectarian clashes taking place there between Azeris and Kurds.

38. After Mahabad, Soleimani returned to Kerman and was given the task of administering the local IRGC garrison. He was then sent to the southern front against Iraq, commanding a company from Kerman. **He remained on the front of the Iran-Iraq war from 1981 to 1988**, working his way up the ranks from company commander to division commander (Division 41, Tharallah).



**Qasem Soleimani (right) with a colleague during the Iran-Iraq War (basijpress.ir)**

39. After the Iran-Iraq war, the division under Soleimani's command was sent back to Kerman to fight local groups which **were operating against the regime along Iran's southeastern border** (Sistan-Baluchestan Province). The province has always posed challenges to the central government because it lies at a considerable distance from the power center in Tehran, has a Sunni majority and a rigid clan structure, combined with high unemployment and poverty levels that contribute to narcotics trafficking and the proliferation of drug cartels.

40. Soleimani's campaign along Iran's southeastern border claimed many lives, **but ultimately proved successful as peace was restored to the region**. His success in suppressing the Kurdish rebellion and restoring peace and security to southeastern Iran was one of the reasons why, sometime between September 1997 and March 1998, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei **appointed him commander of the Qods Force** (the exact date is unclear). He succeeded **Ahmad Vahidi**, Iran's current minister of defense, who had been the commander of the Qods Force since its inception.<sup>12</sup>

41. Qasem Soleimani's appointment as commander of the Qods Force came at a time when Iraq no longer posed a danger to the Islamic regime in Tehran. The regime's attention was now drawn to the developments in Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban, considered by Iran to be sponsored by Saudi Arabia. In addition to deploying thousands of Iranian troops along the border with Afghanistan, Qasem Soleimani dealt with the Afghan challenge using non-conventional military methods. He directed

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<sup>12</sup> **Ahmad Vahidi**, as commander of the Qods Force, was involved in mass-murder terrorist attacks against American and Jewish targets. The most notable were the bombing of the Buenos Aires Jewish community building in 1994, in which 85 people were killed and 151 were wounded, and the Khobar Towers bombing in Dahrnan, Saudi Arabia, in 1996, where 19 American soldiers were killed and 500 people were wounded.

subversive activities on Afghan soil from Tajikistan and the areas controlled by the Northern Alliance.

42. **The Qods Force has grown tremendously** in the years since Qasem Soleimani was appointed as its commander. The number of its soldiers has increased, and it has been involved in an increasing number of missions in the Middle East and elsewhere. Concurrently, **Soleimani's status in the Iranian leadership has become stronger**. For example, on January 24, 2011, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei promoted Soleimani to the rank of major general, the highest rank in the IRGC after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, and is equal to that of the IRGC chief.



Qasem Soleimani in a recent photo, wearing his major general insignia (Al-Quds newspaper, November 12, 2011)

### Soleimani's Sources of Power

43. In addition to his personal skills, Soleimani's main source of power is **his relationships with important IRGC commanders**. Those relationships date back to the time when Soleimani was stationed at the front of the Iran-Iraq War, when he served alongside them. **He has maintained** the relationships and is **still closely involved with senior IRGC commanders**.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For details, see Ali Alfoneh, "Iran's Secret Network: Major General Qassem Suleimani's Inner Circle", AEI *Middle Eastern Outlook* (March 2011).

44. In addition, **Soleimani has close connections to Iran's political leadership**, beginning in the late 1970s. **His most important relationship is with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**, who trusts him and **provides him with support and backing**. Khamenei referred to him as "someone who was martyred at the front on numerous occasions and is a living martyr of the revolution" (Khamenei usually praises war heroes only after their death, but he made an exception for Soleimani).

45. **Soleimani established a working relationship with President Ahmadinejad** as early as 1979, while in Mahabad to suppress the Kurdish rebellion (Ahmadinejad was involved in the suppression as well).<sup>14</sup> However, **the increasing rivalry between the Supreme Leader, who plays a major role in the strategy of exporting the revolution**, and President Ahmadinejad may harm (and perhaps already has) Soleimani's relationship with the President.



**Qasem Soleimani with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Picture from the aqa313.blogfa.com website)**

46. In addition to supporting and backing the Qods Force, **the Supreme Leader directly supervises its activities** through his representative in the force (Khamenei also has a representative in the IRGC). On September 14, 2011, Iran's state-controlled media reported that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei had appointed **Hojjat-ol-Eslam Ali Shirazi as his representative to the Qods Force**. Shirazi succeeded Hojjat-ol-Eslam Esmail Sa'adetnezhad.

<sup>14</sup> Alfoneh, "Iran's Secret Network."

47. Ali Shirazi, who was injured during the Iran-Iraq war, formerly served as the Supreme Leader's representative in the IRGC's navy. He drew media attention in 2010 **by saying that Iran was willing to use the IRGC's navy to escort ships carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.**<sup>15</sup> In a provocative statement made in 2008, Shirazi warned the United States that "The first bullet fired by America at Iran will be followed by Iran **burning down its vital interests around the globe ... If they commit such a stupidity, Tel Aviv and U.S. shipping in the Persian Gulf will be Iran's first targets and they will be burned.**"<sup>16</sup>

### **Soleimani's Media Exposure**

48. In the past Qasem Soleimani kept a low media profile, even though his name appeared several times in connection with **subversive and terrorist activities carried out by Iran outside its borders** (including operations conducted through Shi'ite militias and groups in Iraq).

49. **Over the past year Soleimani has gained increasing exposure in Iran's media**, and was even mentioned as a potential candidate to someday replace Mohammad Ali Jafari, the current chief of the IRGC. In our assessment, the main reason Soleimani has taken the media center stage is the failed attempt on the life of the Saudi ambassador in Washington, after which **Soleimani was put on the American list of global terrorists.** That sparked an unprecedented wave of support for Soleimani (and, consequently for the policy he represents) from senior Iranian officials and the state-controlled media.

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<sup>15</sup> javanonline.ir, September 14, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Alfoneh and Will Fulton, "New Commissar, New Problems: Khamenei's New Representative to the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards", AEIdeas, September 16, 2011.



“We are all Qasem Soleimani” (bachehayeghalam.ir)

## Qasem Soleimani and the Regional Upheaval

50. Taking advantage of his exposure in the Iranian media, Qasem Soleimani has made public his optimistic view that **Iran will be able to use the regional upheaval to export the Islamic Revolution** and find solutions for the challenges it faces. That view was apparent in a **speech given by Soleimani** on January 18, 2012, at a preliminary session of the international Islamic Awakening and Youths Conference held in the city of Qom. His main arguments were the following (ISNA, January 18, 2012):

- 1) **Iran has the ability to shape the regional protest movement and to direct recent developments against its enemies.** Countries like Turkey and Jordan do not have such abilities.
- 2) **The protest movements in the various countries are gradually becoming more Islamic-oriented.** As time passes, **they will become more like the Islamic Revolution in Iran and will fight against the West**, which accumulates failures and is unpopular in the region. According to Soleimani, the failure of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan has considerably damaged its image (Soleimani said that, according to polls, the dissatisfaction with the United States in the Middle East reached 85%).

- 3) **Iran has a presence in south Lebanon and Iraq, and both regions are affected to a certain extent by the course and ideology of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.**<sup>17</sup>
  
- 4) **The second Lebanon war (the so-called “33-day war”) was a success for Hezbollah, which was able to take the fighting into the territory of the “Zionist regime.” Thus, Hezbollah went from being an organization under threat to one able to pose a threat, and has deterrent power.**<sup>18</sup>
  
- 5) **The people of Syria and the ethnic groups in that country fully support the Assad regime** and oppose any Western intervention in local developments. The opposition, on the other hand, has no broad support among the public (noting that the Syrian opposition had been unable to attract one million people to a rally against Bashar Assad's regime). Thus it can be said that **Syria’s “disease” will not be the death of the current regime. Note:** Meanwhile, the “disease” is proving fatal, accelerating the breakup of the Syrian regime.
  
- 6) In the past the **Muslim Brotherhood** had to be careful in its dealings with the West. **Such caution was also characteristic of the movement’s relationship with Iran**, a relationship which, the movement feared, could put it under increasing attack from the West. Recently, however, as the Muslim Brotherhood edges closer to power, **it is adopting an increasingly Islamic policy** both in domestic and foreign affairs (even though it is still too early to pass definitive judgment on the issue, Soleimani added).
  
- 7) **Since the beginning of the Islamic awakening, Qatar has been trying to establish its sponsorship over the countries undergoing the upheaval.** It is doing so using the media it has available (i.e., Al-Jazeera) and through funds.

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<sup>17</sup> This statement provoked **strong reactions in Iraq and Lebanon and was consequently denied by Iran.** For instance, Ghazanfar Roknabadi, Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, said that the media had misrepresented Soleimani's speech and that Iran didn't allow itself to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries (IRNA, January 22, 2012). Similar reactions were heard from Iran's ambassador to Iraq.

<sup>18</sup> **A similar theme could be heard during a Friday sermon delivered by Khamenei in Tehran** on February 3, 2012. Khamenei said that Iran had played a role in the “33-day war” fought by Israel in Lebanon (the second Lebanon war) and in the 22-day war fought by Tel-Aviv against Gaza (Operation Cast Lead). He claimed that both wars had ended with a defeat for the “Zionist regime”.

## Profile of Esmail Qaani, Deputy Commander of the Qods Force<sup>19</sup>

51. **Brigadier General Esmail Qaani**, deputy commander of the Qods Force, was born in the city of Bojnord in **North Khorasan Province**. His date of birth is unknown but he appears slightly older than his commander, Soleimani. He has at least one son, a student of electrical engineering at the Mashhad branch of Azad University (the largest university network in Iran, with many branches across the country). The son was allegedly arrested for participating in anti-government rallies in 2009 at university campuses in Mashhad. Qaani has dismissed the claim.

52. Esmail Qaani began his activities in the IRGC in December 1982. Toward the end of the Iran-Iraq war, IRGC Chief Mohsen Reza'i appointed him to command the Fifth Nasr Division, replacing Mohammad Bakr Qalibaf (Tehran's current mayor). In 1988 he was appointed to a high-level military position in the IRGC in Mashhad. In the early 1990s he was apparently involved in suppressing the 1992 unrest in Mashhad and in operations conducted by the IRGC against drug cartels infiltrating the Khorasan Province from Afghanistan. In the first half of the 1990s he commanded the fourth Qods Force Corps, responsible for activities in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Asian republics.

53. In the mid-1990s **Qaani was appointed deputy commander of the Qods Force**, and continued serving as the IRGC's counter-intelligence deputy commander. In his article on Qaani, Alfoneh notes that such dual function is unusual but not impossible. Alfoneh believes that Brigadier General Esmail Qaani is not as charismatic as Qasem Soleimani and not as good a military commander. However, his battlefield experience, network within the IRGC and long acquaintance with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei make him a suitable replacement for Soleimani if the latter leaves military service and turns into politics.

### Summary

54. The Qods Force, enjoys complete support from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and **employs terrorism and political subversion to extend Iran's influence in the Middle East and elsewhere, and weaken the country's enemies**. Its violent methods should not be seen simply as part of its tactics and purpose, they are also

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<sup>19</sup> Based in part on Ali Alfoneh, "Esmail Qaani: the next Revolutionary Guards Qods Force commander?" AEI *Middle Eastern Outlook* (January 2012). It was the fourth in a series of articles published in 2011-2012.

proof that **the Iranian regime is willing to resort to terrorism and violence in Middle Eastern countries and many other places.** By doing so, it seeks to advance its objectives, interests, ideology and religious worldview, **even at the cost of severely compromising its diplomatic relations with various countries and harming innocent civilians unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity of the Qods Force's terrorist attacks.**

### **Interim Summary of Qods Force's Activity**

55. An interim summary of the activity conducted by the Qods Force in its twenty-year existence indicates that it has suffered a series of **failures in carrying out terrorist attacks, and has had successes, some of them dramatic, in fostering military terrorist networks and activity in the Middle East which pose a threat to the interests of the West, Arab countries and Israel:**

#### **1) Carrying out terrorist attacks:**

A) In the 1980s and 1990s Iran and Hezbollah were able to successfully carry out showcase terrorist attacks against the United States and the West, Israel and the Jewish people. They took place in Lebanon, Argentina and Saudi Arabia, **and were orchestrated by the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC.**

B) **In recent years the Qods Force and Hezbollah have suffered a succession of failures in carrying out terrorist attacks against Israel in retaliation for the killing of Imad Mughniyeh and the deaths of Iranian nuclear scientists,** for which they blame Israel. The failures ended with Hezbollah's **"successful" terrorist attack in Bulgaria.** Recent attempts to **settle scores with opponents in the Arab world have failed or been prevented** (such as the attempt on the life of the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States and attempts to strike Bahraini and Saudi targets).

C) Despite the failures, however, Iran has shown **determination and daring.** It has continued using the Qods Force to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel around the globe, and in our assessment **it may have been even more**

encouraged by the “success” of Hezbollah in the terrorist attack in Bulgaria.

2) **Creating terrorist infrastructures:**

A) The Qods Force has been successful in its ongoing, long-term effort to **build large-scale military infrastructures for Hezbollah in Lebanon** (in cooperation with Syria), **for the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip** (particularly Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad), and for the **Shi'ite militias it handles in Iraq**. While not as intensively, the Qods Force also works to establish similar capabilities in other regions, such as Afghanistan.

B) Those infrastructures **include an arsenal of approximately 60,000 rockets and missiles in Hezbollah's possession in Lebanon, and many thousands of rockets held by the terrorist organizations operating in the Gaza Strip. The rockets and missiles are a threat to Israel's home front, and may be launched according to Iran's strategic considerations (in a defensive scenario, as a response to a potential attack on Iran, or in an offensive scenario, as part of an Iranian military initiative).**

C) **The establishment and handling of Shi'ite militias in Iraq** (and to some extent in Afghanistan) **which operated against the United States and its Western allies before the American army pulled out is also seen as a success by the Iranian regime:** It helped solidify Iran's political influence in Iraqi internal affairs after the US military presence, caused heavy casualties to the American army, and accelerated America's withdrawal from Iraq.

## Appendix

### Terrorist Attacks and Attempted Terrorist Attacks against Israeli/Jewish Targets by the Qods Force/Hezbollah since May 2011

#### Overview

1. The following table is a summary of terrorist attacks and attempted terrorist attacks which, in our assessment, were perpetrated by the **Qods Force/Hezbollah**. The table begins with May 2011, when Iran and Hezbollah apparently increased their efforts to carry out terrorist attacks. The table is **not exhaustive**, and some failed or prevented terrorist attacks which took place in other countries are not listed below.

Country	Date	Details on the attack	Believed to have been perpetrated by
Turkey	May 26, 2011	Attempt on the life of the Israeli consul in Istanbul by means of an explosive device. Eight Turkish civilians were injured. The attempted assassination followed previous attempts to carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli targets in Turkey in 2009 and 2010.	Qods Force through Hezbollah
Azerbaijan	January 24, 2012  May 2012  May 2008	Attempt to assassinate two Jewish figures in Baku (a school director and a rabbi) prevented  The media reported an attempted terrorist attack during the Eurovision contest at a hotel housing the Israeli delegation.  Terrorist attack on the Israeli embassy in Baku prevented.	Qods Force through local supporters  Hezbollah
India	February 13,	Attempt made on the life of an	Qods Force

	2012	Israeli Defense Ministry representative in New Delhi by means of a magnetic explosive device attached to his vehicle. His wife was driving the vehicle at the time and was injured in the explosion.	
Georgia	February 13, 2012	Attempt on the life of an Israeli diplomat in Tbilisi by means of a magnetic explosive device attached to his vehicle. The device was neutralized.	Qods Force
Thailand	February 14, 2012  Mid-January 2012	Attempt on the life of an Israeli diplomat in Bangkok by means of a magnetic explosive device attached to his vehicle. A "work accident" prevented the attack. Attack on an Israeli target in Bangkok by means of one or more explosive devices. The site of the attack is often visited by Israeli tourists.	Qods Force through Hezbollah; three people carrying Iranian passports were arrested  Qods Force in cooperation with Hezbollah
Kenya	Early July 2012	Two Qods Force operatives were arrested on charges of involvement in preparations for a terrorist attack in Kenya.	Qods Force
Cyprus	July 7, 2012	Authorities arrested a terrorist who was collecting intelligence on flights or an Israeli tour bus in preparation for a terrorist attack.	Hezbollah
Bulgaria	July 18, 2012	An explosive device detonated on a bus carrying Israeli tourists in the city of Burgas. The explosive device apparently went off prematurely in the back	Hezbollah

		<p>of the bus and killed the terrorist in what is referred to as a “work accident.”</p> <p>Five Israelis, the local bus driver, and the terrorist perpetrating the attack were killed. Thirty-six Israeli tourists were injured, three of them seriously.</p>	
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