



The Killing of Qasem Soleimani is a Major Loss to Iran, But May Serve as an Opportunity to Reexamine Iran’s Modus Operandi in the Region
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Executive Summary

► **The killing of the Commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Qasem Soleimani, in early 2020, dealt a serious blow to Iran’s ability to promote its strategic goals in the Middle East.** The determination, operational capacities, military and political skills and proximity to the Supreme Leader of Iran made Soleimani into a “puppet master” and a central actor overseeing Iran’s expansionism and subversion in the region. It is doubtful that his replacement, Esmail Qa’ani, will be able to fill his shoes.

However, Soleimani’s death raises the question not only whether Iran can find a proper replacement for him, **but whether such a replacement is needed at the current stage.** Undoubtedly, over the past decade, Soleimani was “the right man at the right time,” against the backdrop of regional upheavals that swept the Middle East in 2011. Soleimani wisely exploited the weakness of the regional system and used his skills to expand Iranian influence and promote Iran’s goals in the region. But the blow to ISIS and the nearing end of the Syrian civil war, **necessitate Iran to reexamine its policies, particularly in light of the external and internal challenges it has been facing in recent years.**



The incoming Commander of the Qods Force, Esmail Qa’ani, reading Soleimani’s will at a ceremony commemorating forty days since his death (Mashregh News, February 13, 2020).

► Over the past decade, the Qods Force underwent far-reaching changes in its modes of operation and that of its commander. Since its establishment in 1990, the Qods Force served

as a relatively small elite unit, which focused mostly on clandestine, low-signature operations, usually utilizing proxies, and as much as possible, without the ability to trace the actions back to Iran. The goal of the organization was to promote Iran's strategic aims through terrorism and political subversion. Following the civil war in Syria and the campaign against ISIS, the Qods Force became a central actor in shaping and overseeing the military campaigns in Syria and Iraq. **The intervention of the Qods Force in Syria, particularly starting in 2015, reflected a significant shift in Iran's military conduct. To that point, Iran largely avoided dispatching large forces to wage combat operations beyond the country's borders.**

► **Soleimani's conduct also underwent a transformation.** Until recent years, Soleimani made sure to keep a low profile and was largely unknown to the Iranian public (although his name was mentioned in the context of his involvement in subversion and terrorism Iran carried out beyond its borders). His central role in overseeing the military campaign in Syria and Iraq **significantly bolstered Soleimani's media exposure in Iran and beyond. Soleimani, who preferred until the mid-2010s to work behind the scenes, came into the spotlight.** Starting October 2015, he personally oversaw the campaign led by the IRGC, Shia militias and the Syrian Army in northwestern Syria against the rebels. In the summer of 2015, he came to Moscow to encourage Russia to directly intervene in the fighting against the rebels. Starting in 2014, he also coordinated the campaign against ISIS between the Iraqi Army and Iraqi Shi'ite militias operating under the IRGC.



Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in Iraq. Both were assassinated in a targeted strike in early January 2020 (Fars, January 4, 2020).

► Over the past two years, however, due to the achievements made in the campaign against ISIS and in the civil war in Syria, **the circumstances in the two main arenas of operation of the Qods Force have changed.** The collapse of ISIS as a territorial entity and the gains made

by President Assad provided Iran with new opportunities to expand its hold over Syria and Iraq. **However, they also placed impediments and new challenges before Iran, as it seeks to bolster its regional influence.** Israel's activities have been able to delay the pace of Iran's military entrenchment in Syria, Hezbollah's armament with precision-guided missiles, and curtailed Iran's ability to provide a satisfactory response to Israel's strikes. The presence of Russia, the United States and Turkey also limited Iran's ability to shape Syria and Iraq as part of its sphere of influence. In addition, Soleimani's growing involvement in meddling in the internal affairs of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon aroused growing political and public opposition in the Arab world. The continued investments Iran is making beyond its borders, at the expense of addressing the hardship of Iran's citizens, has also led to escalation of domestic criticism in Iran.

► Meanwhile, **the military accomplishments of the Syrian forces, with Russian assistance,** culminating in the recapture of Aleppo city in late 2016, allowed Iran to revert to relying largely on Hezbollah fighters and the foreign Shi'ite militias under its guidance, which operate alongside the Syrian Army, **and considerably reduce the number of Iranian forces stationed in Syria.** In addition, since Iran abandoned its "strategic patience" policy in May 2019, which it adopted after the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal and re-imposition of sanctions, **Iran has preferred to carry out operations itself (even if low-signature), instead of relying on proxy forces in the offensive operations it carried out in the Persian Gulf region.** Most of the attacks attributed to Iran in recent months, including sabotage of oil tankers in the Gulf (May and June 2019), downing an American unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) (June 2019), taking over oil tankers of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the UK (June and July 2019), and the attack of Saudi oil facilities with cruise missiles and UAVs (September 2019), **were carried out without significant involvement of the Qods Forces, but were led by other bodies within the IRGC, such as the aerospace force of the IRGC.**

This does not mean that Iran intends to give up on its strategic goals in the Middle East, but that the IRGC and the Qods Force now need to adjust their mission and modus operandi to the changing circumstances. Soleimani's successor will need to continue to maintain the web spun by Soleimani over the past decade of organizations and militias operating under the guidance of the IRGC and with its support. However, unlike his predecessor, **he does not need to wage a large-scale military campaign.** In the emerging reality in the Arab world, **Iran's leadership may prefer to revert the Qods Forces'**

operational patterns to those that characterized it in the past, as a small elite force in charge of covert activities, acting mostly through its allies and proxy organizations operating under an “Iranian umbrella” and Iranian control. The aim of these activities is to achieve Iran’s strategic goals, chief among them **removing U.S. forces from the region, and maintaining and expanding Iran’s influence in Syria and Iraq, as well as the continuing to funnel weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon.**

► It is possible that delegating some of the authorities of the Qods Force to Iran’s local proxies (while maintaining their dependence on Tehran) and low-signature activity **may in Iranian eyes better serve Iran’s goals in the Middle East at this moment.** In addition, **Soleimani’s removal from the scene may be exploited by other senior officers in the IRGC to bolster other units of the IRGC at the Qods Forces’ expense.** It is possible that these commanders, such as Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, the Commander of the IRGC’s Aerospace Force, may try to become involved in activities that Soleimani previously oversaw, both when it comes to bolstering the strategic capabilities of Hezbollah and the Shi’ite Iraqi militias, and in direct attacks on Israel.

► In leading the activities of the Qods Force in the Middle East, the incoming commander of the Force may seek the assistance of **his new deputy, Mohammad Hossein Zadeh Hejazi, who served as the Commander of the Lebanon Corps of the Qods Force,** and was involved in the project to increase the precision of Hezbollah’s missiles. **He will also likely rely on Abdolreza Shahlai,** who was put in charge of the **Qods Forces’ activities in Yemen** and has strong ties with the Shi’ite militias in Iraq as well. **The delegation of authorities to other commanders in the Qods Force and within the IRGC can also prevent the concentration of too much power in the hands of the commander of the Qods Force, which significantly increased the damage done to Iran as a result of killing Soleimani.**

In summary, **the killing of Soleimani is undoubtedly a major blow to Iran.** However, it can also serve as an opportunity for Iran’s political and military leadership **to reassess its goals in the region, examine new modi operandi required to realize its strategy, and adjust them to the set of pressures and opportunities Iran is facing in the international, regional and domestic fronts.** Iran has proved its ability **to turn threats into opportunities** and it is possible that it will find the way to exploit the harsh blow it suffered due to Soleimani’s killing **and adjust itself to the changing reality in a way that would allow it to realize its interests with greater efficiency.**

The Implications of Soleimani’s Assassination

► The killing of Qasem Soleimani by the United States in early January 2020 dealt a severe blow to Iran’s ability to further its efforts to entrench its regional influence. Since Soleimani was appointed as the commander of the Qods Force in early 1998, this elite unit became the tip of the spear in Iran’s effort to bolster its international position and promote its strategic interest through terrorism and political subversion. Against the backdrop of the upheavals experienced by the Middle East over the past decade, Soleimani became a “puppet master” and a central actor overseeing Iran’s expansionism and subversion in the region. His close connection to Iran’s top echelon, and particularly, the Supreme Leader Khamenei, as well as the network he created of leaders and senior commanders in the region, allowed him to advance Iran’s strategy, mainly through the use of proxy organizations.

► Under his leadership, Iran was able to expand its regional influence; halt and reverse ISIS’ gains; save, with Russian assistance, the Assad regime from downfall; and provide advanced weaponry to Hezbollah and militant organizations in Gaza. Soleimani’s killing, in our assessment is unlikely to create a real change in Iran’s regional strategy or make it give up its overarching goals in the region (chiefly continuing to entrench its military and civilian presence, and cementing its influence in the region in spheres that serve Iran’s vital political, military and economic interests). However, Soleimani’s elimination, whose operational, military and political skills were exceptional, as was his determination to complete his missions, may challenge Iran’s ability to achieve these goals, at least in the near future. **Despite the long service of Esmail Qa’ani, the incoming Qods Force Commander, as Soleimani’s deputy and his deep familiarity with the regional system, it is doubtful he can**

serve as a proper replacement and successfully address the multiple challenges Iran faces in the region.



**Esmail Qa'ani alongside Qasem Soleimani
(Fars, January 3, 2020)**

- ▶ A senior Western intelligence official recently stated that Iran has been unable to fill the gap created by Soleimani's assassination. This official stated that Soleimani did in Syria and Iraq as he pleased, exerting great influence with sophistication, while maintaining direct contact with the Supreme Leader of Iran, operating freely throughout the Middle East. His killing, according to the official, dealt a serious blow to Iran's expansionism. He added that Qa'ani, Soleimani's replacement, lacks Soleimani's unique capabilities, and can not possibly fill his shoes (Israel Hayom, February 4, 2020).
- ▶ However, Soleimani's death raises the question not only whether Iran can find a proper replacement to him, **but whether such a replacement is needed at the current stage.** Undoubtedly, over the past decade, Soleimani was "the right man at the time," against the backdrop of regional upheavals that swept the Middle East in 2011. Soleimani wisely exploited the weakness of the regional system and used his skills to expand Iranian influence and promote Iran's goals in the region. But the blow made to ISIS and the nearing end of the Syrian civil war, necessitate that Iran reexamine its policies. In this context, Iran may prefer to revert to the patterns of operation of the Qods Force and the IRGC and of the man in charge of the force, to the modus operandi that characterized them prior to the regional upheaval. **In this sense, Soleimani's assassination may be an opportunity for Iran to adjust how it operates in the region to the current circumstances, despite the severe blow it suffered.**

Shifts in the Modus Operandi of the Qods Force and Its Commander Over the Past Decade

- ▶ **The past decade witnessed a significant shift in the modus operandi of the Qods Force and its commander, Qasem Soleimani.** Until the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, the Qods Force was an elite unit, probably made up of a few thousand members. The force, which was established in 1990, served as an organized structure for Iran's foreign activities and became **Iran's main covert arm operating beyond its borders.** This activity included carrying out special operations along Iran's borders and beyond them, supporting terrorist groups, operating a network of agents and terrorist infrastructure across the Middle East and the world, providing financial and military support for Islamist groupings in the Arab and Muslim world, collecting intelligence and carrying out operations against the diaspora-based Iranian opposition. The force focused on covert and low-signature activities, usually through proxy groups, and as much as possible, without an Iranian "fingerprint," for the purpose of furthering Iran's strategic interests through terrorism and political subversion.
- ▶ Since the 2003 occupation of Iraq by the United States, the Qods Force led Iran's cooperation with **the Shi'ite militias in Iraq**, with the goal of expanding Iranian influence through them, assisting them in their campaign against the United States and fellow Coalition members, and cement Iran's hold over Iraq's political and military leadership. As part of its involvement in Iraq, the Qods Force provided financing, equipment and weaponry to most of the militias. In addition, the Force coordinated the dispatch of Lebanese Hezbollah militants to Iraq to assist the insurgency against the United States. In addition, the Qods Force and its commander, Soleimani, established channels of communication with the Iraqi government and other powerful actors in Iraq's domestic political scene, so as to boost Iran's sway over the Iraqi political system and decrease American influence over the Iraqi government.
- ▶ **ISIS' significant gains in Iraq, particularly in the summer of 2014, compelled Iran to expand its military involvement through the Qods Force** in this arena as well. ISIS' takeover of large swaths of Iraq infringed upon its territorial integrity and brought a hostile and violent force closer to the Iran-Iraq border. The emergence and expansion of the "Islamic State," necessitated Iran to send weapons and advisers, led by Qasem Soleimani, who

oversaw the military campaign in Iraq through the Shi'ite Iran-backed militias, and in coordination with the Iraqi government.

► **In the Lebanese front**, after his appointment at the head of the Qods Force, Soleimani worked to bolster ties with Hezbollah and transfer resources to the organization, which was focused until 2000 on fighting the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in southern Lebanon. **The Qods Force's support for Hezbollah persisted and even increased after Israel's withdrawal from the southern Lebanon "security belt," in May 2000.** This support allowed Hezbollah to establish an arsenal of long-range rockets that threatens Israel's home front, which was deployed during the 2006 Lebanon War. Through years of ongoing work and cooperation with Syria, the Qods Force was able to assemble an effective military arsenal for Hezbollah, which includes over 100,000 rockets and missiles threatening Israel's military and civilian infrastructure.

► **The civil war in Syria** and the campaign against ISIS brought about significant changes in the modus operandi of the Qods Force. From a relatively small organization, most of whose activities were carried out in the shadows, the Qods Force became a central actor in shaping and overseeing the military campaigns in Syria and Iraq. Since the Syrian uprising turned into a civil war in late 2011, the Qods Force the Iranian intervention in the country. During the initial stage of the war, **when the survival of the Assad regime was in doubt, Iran's involvement was intended to prevent the fall of Damascus and strategic locations around Damascus and the Lebanon border into the hands of the rebels, preventing the collapse of the regime.** Later, the involvement of Iran and its proxies was intended to assist the regime to expand the areas under its control, stabilize its rule in recaptured areas, protect the Shi'ite community and Shi'ite holy sites and gain control of the Iraq-Syria border area. In the long run, Iran's involvement is intended to ensure Iran's grip over Syria and influence over the Syrian regime, allowing Iran to use Syrian territory as a forward operating base for Iranian presence and activities in the region.

► **The intervention of the Qods Force in Syria, particularly since 2015, reflected a consequential shift in Iran's conduct.** Until September 2015, Iran generally avoided dispatching significant numbers of forces beyond the country's borders. Until September 2015, Iran's low-profile intervention in Syria was maintained through several hundreds of Iranian advisers and several thousand Shi'ite militiamen from Lebanese Hezbollah, Shi'ite Iraqi militias and Afghan and Pakistani fighters who were recruited by the IRGC in exchange

for a monthly salary and other benefits. The military presence of IRGC personnel on Syrian soil was initially focused on providing advice and guidance. At that stage, the Iranians avoided using Iranian military units against the rebel groups and were not directly involved in combat. But the combined gains made by ISIS and the rebels in northwestern Syria in 2014-2015, raised doubt among Iran's leadership concerning Assad's ability to survive in power over time.

► **This sense of alarm prompted Iran to significant expand its support for the Assad regime and alter the patterns of its conduct in Syria.** Due to the Assad regime's shortage of qualified manpower, in mid-September 2015, Iran bolstered its forces in Syria, increasing them to apparently about 1,500-2,000, some of whom took an active role in combat. The Iranian reinforcements were intended to assist the Syrian Army in an operation it undertook in early October 2015. In the spring of 2016, Iran dispatched to Syria a limited number among the regular Iranian Army (Artesh), probably numbering in several hundreds of soldiers, to bolster the IRGC's forces in the country. Following this dispatch of reinforcements, the Qods Force under Soleimani's command was essentially put in charge of a sizeable military deployment, which included fighters from IRGC's ground forces, the Baseej militia, the regular army, and over 10,000 Shi'ite non-Iranian fighters, all participating in the military campaign.



**Soleimani's visit to Albu Kamal, eastern Syria, after its capture from ISIS in November 2017
(ISNA, November 20, 2017)**

► **Over the past decade, Soleimani's conduct has also undergone a dramatic shift.** For many years, Soleimani made sure to keep a low profile in the media and was not well-known to the Iranian public, although his name was mentioned at times in the context of his involvement in subversion and terrorism Iran carried out beyond its border. His central role in overseeing the military campaign in Syria and Iraq, alongside the regional upheavals, led to a significant increase in his media exposure in Iran and beyond. Soleimani personally oversaw

that offensive operation of the IRGC and Shi'ite militias, supported by the Syrian Army, in northwestern Syria starting in October 2015, and the battle for Aleppo in December 2015. Prior to this, in the summer of 2015, he arrived in Moscow to cajole Russia to intervene militarily against the rebels.

► Due to his notable success in the fighting against ISIS in Iraq, Soleimani's personal involvement in Iraq and presence across the various fighting fronts in Iraq. Starting in 2014, Soleimani began frequently visiting Iraq, although his presence in the country was officially denied by Iran until the summer of 2014. He led the efforts to plan the campaign against ISIS and oversaw the transfer of military assistance and intelligence from Iran to Iraq, coordinated the war effort between the Iraqi Army and Shi'ite militias operating under the IRGC and maintained ongoing contact with senior Iraqi officials in Baghdad and with the Kurdish leadership in northern Iraq. The fall of Mosul in ISIS' hands in the summer of 2014 was a catalyst for Soleimani's growing involvement in Iraq. With the participation of the Iraqi Army and Shi'ite militias, he developed a strategy intended to protect Baghdad and its environs from further advances by ISIS.

► **Soleimani, who preferred until that point to work behind the scenes, took center stage.** He played a key role in establishing and deploying the Shi'ite militias and in the past two years worked to advance Iran's efforts to cement its military presence in Syria, by establishing bases for the Shi'ite militias under Iranian command, transferring arsenals of missiles and UAVs aimed at Israel, providing assistance to Hezbollah's effort to increase the precision of its missiles, and was also involved in efforts to increase Iran's engagement and influence over Syrian civilian communities.

Iran, the IRGC and the Qods Force post-Victory in Iraq and Syria

► Following the victories achieved in the campaign against ISIS and the civil war in Syria, **the circumstances in the two main spheres of operation of the Qods Force, Iraq and Syria, changed significantly.** The collapse of ISIS as a territorial entity and Assad's victory in the civil war did create new opening for Iran and opportunities to expand its influence in both countries. At the same time, the challenges and difficulties facing Iran in its efforts to entrench its influence have also grown:

- ◆ **Israeli activities against Iran's expansionism in Syria** damaged Iranian targets and managed to slow down their pace of military entrenchment, delay Hezbollah's armament with precision-guided missiles, and also strained Iran's ability to provide a satisfactory retaliation to Israel's strikes.
 - ◆ **The activities of Russia, the United States and Turkey** have also limited Iran's ability to shape Syria and Iraq as part of its sphere of influence.
 - ◆ The ongoing Iranian meddling, and particularly, Soleimani's growing involvement in the domestic affairs of Iraq, Syria and Lebanon **aroused increasing political and public opposition in the Arab world**. The chants heard in recent months against Soleimani during protests in Iraq, and to a lesser extent in Lebanon, provided clear evidence to the growing criticism even among the Shi'ite community, of his meddling in the internal affairs of their countries.
 - ◆ **The continued investments made by the Iranian regime beyond the country's borders** at the expense of addressing the hardships of Iranian citizens **increased domestic criticism within Iran, particularly in light of the escalating economic crisis**.
- Meanwhile, the military gains of Syrian regime forces, with Russian assistance, culminating in the recapture of the city of Aleppo from the rebels in December 2016, **allowed Iran to revert to relying on Hezbollah fighters and other Shi'ite militias operating under its control**, which operate alongside the Syrian Army, while keeping a small nucleus of Iranian advisers. The Iranian order of battle in Syria is currently estimated to be comprised of less than 1,000 Iranian fighters, who are bolstered by over 10,000 Shi'ite fighters from Hezbollah and other foreign militias. In addition, Iran is working to recruit Syrian members to the militias it is supporting. In fact, **most of the force that Iran dispatched to Syria is not based on Iranian forces, but on Shi'ite militia fighters**. Thus, Iran reverted to one of the well-known modi operandi: **relying on proxy groups**.



**Training of the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade in Syria
(Tasnim, August 1, 2019)**

► This does not mean that Iran intends to give up on its strategic goals in the Middle East, but that the IRGC and Qods Force need to adjust their missions and patterns of operation due to changing circumstances. Soleimani’s successor need to continue maintaining and bolstering the network spun by Soleimani over the past decade of organizations operating under IRGC guidance and with its support. However, unlike his predecessor, he does not need to oversee a large-scale military operation.

► In this emerging reality in the Arab world, and particularly in Iraq and Syria, **Iran’s leadership may prefer to revert the Qods Forces’ operational patterns to those that characterized it in the past, as a small elite force in charge of covert activities**, acting mostly through its allies and proxy organizations operating under an “Iranian umbrella” and Iranian control. The aim of these activities is to achieve Iran’s strategic goals, chief among them removing U.S. forces from the region, through waging an attrition war against them, and particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan (an arena in which the incoming Qods Force Commander, Esmail Qa’ani, enjoys superiority, due to his deep familiarity with this region, as the commander of Qods Force activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan); mainlining and expanding Iranian influence in Syria and Iraq; as well as the continuing to funnel weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. It is possible that delegating some of the authorities of the Qods Force to local Iranian proxies (while maintaining their dependence on Tehran) and low-signature activities, may better serve Iranian interests at this stage.

► In addition, since Iran abandoned its “strategic patience” policy in May 2019, which it adopted after the U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal and re-imposition of sanctions, **Iran has preferred to carry out operations itself (even if low-signature), over relying on proxy forces in the offensive operations it carried out in the Persian Gulf region.** These actions

were intended to exact a price from the United States and its allies for the “maximum pressure” strategy and bring about the removal, or at least an easing, of the sanctions. These operations also aimed to drive up the prices of oil through sabotage of oil tankers and damaging oil production infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, in an effort to reduce the economic pressure placed on it. Most of the attacks attributed to Iran in recent months, including sabotage of oil tankers in the Gulf (May and June 2019), downing an American unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) (June 2019), taking over oil tankers of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the UK (June and July 2019), and the attack of Saudi oil facilities with cruise missiles and UAVs (September 2019), were carried out without significant involvement of the Qods Forces, but were led by other bodies within the IRGC, such as the aerospace force of the IRGC.

► The preference for direct action of the use of proxies through the Qods Force stemmed for **the supreme importance Iran places on its efforts to bring about the lifting of U.S. sanctions;** due to Iran’s assessment that **the effectiveness and quality of the proxy organizations is generally lower than that of Iranian forces;** due to personnel changes at the helm of the IRGC, including the appointment of Hossein Salami at the commander of the organization in April 2019; and possibly due to internal power struggles within Iran’s leadership, and an effort by senior commanders to prove their determination and abilities to realize the guidance of the Supreme Leader of Iran to respond to the “maximum pressure” policy pursued by the United States by increasing “resistance” from Iran. Although Soleimani’s killing may push Iran to revert to a strategy of using proxies that entails lesser risks for Iran, it is possible that Soleimani’s elimination may be exploited by other senior commanders in the IRGC to bring the Qods Force down to its prior status, and bolster other units of the IRGC at its expense. It is possible that these commanders, such as **Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, the Commander of the IRGC’s Aerospace Force,** may try to become involved in activities that Soleimani previously oversaw, both when it comes to bolstering the strategic capabilities of Hezbollah and the Shi’ite Iraqi militias, and in direct actions against Israel.

► The delegation of authorities to other commanders in the Qods Force and within the IRGC **can also prevent the concentration of too much power in the hands of the commander of the Qods Force,** which significantly increased the damage done to Iran as a result of killing Soleimani. In leading the activities of the Qods Force in the Middle East, the incoming commander of the Force may seek the assistance of **his new deputy, Mohammad Hossein Zadeh Hejazi,** appointed on January 20, 2020. Hejazi is considered one of the prominent

officers of the IRGC and the Qods Force as a whole. His involvement in the Lebanese arena, as the commander of the Qods Forces' Lebanon Corps, and particularly the project to increase the precision of Hezbollah's missiles, may benefit Qa'ani in realizing the Qods Force's missions in the western front of Iran, central among them, solidifying Iran's military enthronelement in Syria and assisting Hezbollah in growing its arsenal and capabilities. **He will also likely rely on Abdolreza Shahlaei**, who was put in charge of the **Qods Forces' activities in Yemen** and is considered to have strong ties with the Shi'ite militias in Iraq as well, due to his involvement in their attacks against the American forces following the occupation of Iraq by the United States.