



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Khatam al-Anbiya Camp and the Future of the Revolutionary Guards' Empire

by Dr. Ardavan Khoshnood

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 2,014, May 3, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The West assumes that if the Islamist regime of Iran is granted some leeway, it will stop its aggression toward other nations. The Revolutionary Guards' push for absolute power in Iran and belligerent empire-building across the Middle East suggest otherwise.

When Ali Khamenei was appointed Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, he knew he lacked Khomeini's charisma. He needed the power of the military to subdue his rivals and consolidate his position, and accordingly pulled the Revolutionary Guards closer to himself. At the same time, newly elected president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who, as wartime supreme commander, had nurtured his own close relationships with IRGC generals, sought to exploit the public resources of the nation with fewer restrictions. He attempted to partner with the IRGC in his "privatization" movement, which was basically the mass transfer of public property, resources, and organizations from the government sector to regime insiders. The resulting Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Camp was the first, and remains the most notable, financial institution of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

In December 1989, Khamenei issued a decree establishing Khatam al-Anbiya with the purported aim of "utilizing the civilian capacity of the armed forces to develop the construction of the country." The Camp was originally intended to be run as a joint enterprise among all branches of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic, including the army, the IRGC, and the police. But over time, Khatam al-Anbiya turned into an exclusively IRGC venture, with managers and senior officials appointed by the Revolutionary Guards.

The sole body overseeing the activities of Khatam al-Anbiya is the IRGC Intelligence Protection Unit. No other regulatory bodies are mandated to

monitor or request performance reports from the Camp. The nominal commander of Khatam al-Anbiya is the Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Guards. While he delegates the handling of the Camp's day-to-day workings to others, he retains control over the scope and direction of the Camp's participation in financial and economic projects.

The Khatam al-Anbiya Camp grew exponentially during Muhammad Ali Jafari's long era of command over the Revolutionary Guards (2007-2019). During this period, the Supreme Leader, backed by his IRGC Praetorians, implemented a definitive "Look to the East" policy by systematically purging all ostensibly Western-friendly elements in the regime as well as Russifying and Sinicizing the intelligence apparatus and the military. With the ouster by the Revolutionary Guards of Hashemi Rafsanjani's circle and the so-called "Reformists", Khatam al-Anbiya succeeded—especially during the eight years of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013)—in monopolizing the lion's share of economic and development projects in Iran.

With the intensification of international sanctions against the Islamic Republic over the regime's nuclear ambitions and the forced emigration of multinational companies from Iran, the Camp seized substantial oil and gas and petrochemical projects. This provided the platform from which Khatam al-Anbiya grew into the leviathan that now dominates almost all financial, economic, and industrial sectors in Iran.

Khatam al-Anbiya is one of the main institutions tasked with implementing Khamenei's "Resistance Economy." This is nothing more than a concerted effort by the Revolutionary Guards to monopolize Iran's resources, mines, industries, and infrastructure projects in order to circumvent international sanctions and fund the ideological-military expansion of the Islamist regime in the region and beyond, as well as the ongoing suppression of popular dissent and protest inside Iran.

Khatam al-Anbiya is also responsible for preparing a "reverse sanctions list." According to this list, goods produced by domestic manufacturers—that is, companies affiliated with the IRGC—should not be sourced from abroad, meaning the IRGC can monopolize the production and import of goods in Iran. Thus, the Camp has played a key role in concentrating Iran's economy in the hands of the militant Islamists and the Revolutionary Guards as well as breaking the international sanctions regime against the Islamic Republic. Because of this, Khatam al-Anbiya has been sanctioned several times by successive US governments since 2010.

The sanctions have not impeded Khatam al-Anbiya's efforts to broaden the scope of its activities more and more every day and expand the Revolutionary

Guards' empire in Iran and across the Middle East. During the past two decades, Khatam al-Anbiya has thrived to such an extent that some of its commanders, such as Muhammad Baqer Qalibaf, Rostam Ghasemi, and Saeed Muhammad, have achieved—or are about to achieve—key positions in the regime's political hierarchy. The regime relies heavily on the Camp's seemingly unlimited and unaccounted-for revenues, and Khatam al-Anbiya accordingly enjoys the solid support of the Supreme Leader and his so-called Household.

Qalibaf was mayor of Tehran and then speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and now aspires to the presidency. Ghasemi was the oil minister in Ahmadinejad's government, a former adviser to Hassan Rouhani's first deputy, and a senior adviser to the former defense minister, and is also said to be a presidential candidate in the upcoming elections. Saeed Muhammad, the last commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya Camp and a model "young Hezbollah manager," recently resigned his post in the hope of becoming president and announced his readiness to run in 2021.

It appears the cadets of the Khatam al-Anbiya Camp will soon be the main executors of the Islamic Republic's policies, both inside and outside Iran. In view of the hard-line stances of the Supreme Leader and the generals of the Revolutionary Guards, it can be assumed that the Islamic Republic remains intent on intensifying its suppression of domestic dissent, animosity toward the West and the US, and expansionism in the Middle East against the security interests of Arabs and Israel.

As such, the insistence of the Biden administration and some European governments on either returning to the original JCPOA or concluding a new deal with the Islamic Republic to reduce the nuclear and missile threat it poses is far from realistic and unlikely to succeed. Peace in the Middle East is predicated on the dissolution of the Revolutionary Guards' apocalyptic empire and the subsequent establishment of democracy in Iran.

Dr. Reza Parchizadeh is a political theorist, [historian](#), and senior analyst. He can be reached on Twitter at [@rezaparchizadeh](#).