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IRGC COMMANDER ACKNOWLEDGES MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN ELECTION POLITICS

Islamic Revolution's Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari's speech on September 2, delivered in front of early military leaders of the Iran-Iraq War is significant for several reasons.

First, it is noteworthy for his public acknowledgment of IRGC's direct involvement in the elections and the crackdown. This acknowledgment came in reference to a February 2009 statement by former president Mohammad Khatami

According to Jafari, Khatami said, "If in this election Ahmadinejad falls, then *rahbari* [office of the leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei] will be effectively eliminated...through the defeat of principlists, we must contain the power of *rahbari*."

In Jafari's telling, the IRGC had to enter the fray well before the June 12 election in order to prevent the weakening or even elimination of *rahbari*. It did this

by taking note of what the reformists were doing and identifying them as enemies of the Islamic state as embodied in *rahbari*.

If Jafari is to be taken at his words, even if in the official narrative the election had been won by Mir Hossein Mussavi, then IRGC would have had no choice but to enter the fray and overturn the results since such a victory would have brought to power people who wanted to undermine the Islamic Republic.

Jafari's second admission was that, in his mind, there is no difference between a change in the policy direction of the country and regime change.

The distinction made between a *bar-andaz* - someone who wants to overthrow the regime - and a critic has always been accepted in the Islamic Republic. But by equating behavior or policy change with regime

change, Jafari elevates policy differences to foundational challenges and admits that differences about how the country should conduct itself is at the core of the current crisis.

Former leaders are traitors not because they have engaged in illegal acts, but for thinking differently about the policy direction of the country.

Jafari's third admission came in the form of reporting on the previously unreported prison confessions of key reformist leaders, implicitly acknowledging IRGC's access to them. This was probably not a wise move. Since the election, there has been much talk about the violence that has ensued. No one has wanted to take responsibility.

Jafari's speech has now made it much easier for people to pin responsibility for the post-election gratuitous violence, indiscriminate arrests, deaths,



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tortures (of white and physical kind), and forced confessions.

The intriguing question is why would Jafari decide to acknowledge IRGC's role openly, eliciting immediate reactions from reformist leaders and organizations who have accused him of not only improper institutional conduct but also slander?

The leader of the reformist faction in the Parliament, Mohammadreza Tabesh, went as far as to suggest that "those who have given license to Sepah's [IRGC's] entry into elections and interrogations should be prosecuted and not those whose background and responsibilities chronicle their attachment to the system, rahbari and the deceased Imam."

It is difficult to decipher the reasons for Jafari's public admissions. Perhaps his frank talk marks the beginning of a move against high ranking former leaders of the Islamic Republic. By making the transition from accusing the reformists of "doubting" the election results – which no where is stated to be a crime in Iran – to one of attempted effort to undermine *rahbari* – which is considered a crime – Jafari may be setting the stage for a much bigger purge of reformist leaders.

Another possibility is that Jafari's talk is about justifying IRGC actions in the face of the reality that the trials and forced confessions that have so far not

revealed committed crimes.

Individual prisoners have acknowledged their mistake in doubting the election results, lamented the influence of foreign ideas and concepts on university curricula, talked about the pernicious role of the foreign press in highlighting divisions inside Iran, and deliberated in length on external designs to sow dissent inside Iran.

But none of the defendants have confessed to a serious crime. Some have accused others not present in the courtroom of financial misbehavior in the election and desire to win by all means. But no concrete evidence has been offered. In other words, they have "confessed" to crimes committed by other people, which in no body of laws, including Iranian and Islamic laws, is considered anything beyond an accusation and sufficient for prosecution.

Jafari's words may also be about intimidation in order to silence the outcry over the crimes committed the security forces, including killings, rapes, and savage beatings.

Unfortunately for Jafari, though, none of the reformist leaders he may be trying to intimidate is showing any sign of backing down on their charges that something has seriously gone wrong in the country. Incarceration on charges of sedition against *rahbari* is the only

way to silence them; a move that simply cannot take place without the consent of the commander-in-chief, meaning Khamenei himself.

If arrests are Jafari's ultimate aim, the intriguing question is why he is talking about them publicly, in effect pleading for them?

Why doesn't he, like all good military men intent on maintaining the status quo, simply work behind the scene to arrange for arrests without implicating himself and the IRGC in such a public manner? Why the urge to speak?

The answer to this key question in all likelihood is found in the felt need to defend the indefensible in front of a crowd of Iran-Iraq War commanders who remain highly skeptical of IRGCs politicization and its use as an instrument of repression against Iranian citizens in the name of saving the Islamic republic and its leader.

If so, this was not a speech given from a position of strength.

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