

Ahmad Vahidi: Islamic Republic of Iran Minister of Interior

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Table of Contents

Early Career Through to Becoming the First Quds Force Chief.....3

Defense Minister under Ahmadinejad.....4

Interior Minister under Raisi.....5

Ahmad Vahidi

In August 2021, the Islamic Consultative Assembly ratified the appointment of Ahmad Vahidi, former Defense Minister and [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\)](#) Quds Force commander, as Interior Minister. The Interior Ministry heads the Interior Security Council of the Supreme National Security Council, [leading some](#) to label the ministry as the most strategically important in the Islamic Republic, especially given the mass protest events in the country since 2017. Additionally, there is an Interpol Red Notice for Vahidi's arrest related to his alleged involvement in the 1994 bombing of the Jewish AMIA center in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people.

Early Career Through to Becoming the First Quds Force Chief

Vahidi was born in 1958 in Shiraz, Iran, with the surname Shahcheraqi. He joined the IRGC a year after the 1979 revolution. Vahidi very quickly rose to senior positions in the IRGC likely because of professional and personal relationships. For example, Vahidi was appointed deputy for internal security in the IRGC Intelligence unit and then intelligence chief in 1983, according to IRGC-linked Tasnim News. Akbar Barati, an early member of the IRGC and senior intelligence commander, [suggested](#) in an interview that Vahidi lacked proper intelligence experience upon his appointment in 1983, but credited him for his engagement and desire to learn. Tasnim News and other state media reports state that Vahidi served as IRGC Intelligence chief until the end of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Other accounts also [state](#) that Vahidi played a role in establishing the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) in 1983.

Vahidi represented the IRGC in negotiations with the Reagan White House between 1985 and 1987, according to Mohsen Kangarlu, who coordinated the covert discussions to trade access to American military hardware for American hostages in Lebanon. Reagan Administration officials had also hoped for the talks to lead to broader ties with the Islamic Republic. The revelation of the negotiations led to scandals in both Iran and the United States.

Another critical player in these secret negotiations was Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, then-Parliament speaker, deputy commander in chief, and later president. In his memoirs, Rafsanjani implied that he intervened to save Vahidi's career – if not his life – in the aftermath of the Iraqi-backed Mojahedin-e Khalq (MKO) offensive into Iran in 1988. Vahidi was the responsible military commander of Kermanshah province where the MKO advanced before being pushed back by an Iranian counter-offensive. In the aftermath, Vahidi was arrested by military police. Rafsanjani wrote that he ordered military judicial officials to release Vahidi, which “seriously angered corps commanders,” and that the then-overall commander of the IRGC Mohsen Rezaei had alleged charges against Vahidi for his poor performance during the MKO offensive, which he retracted under pressure from Rafsanjani.

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Vahidi managed to emerge from this potentially career-ending episode and was appointed first commander of the Quds Force, established as a branch of the IRGC to organize its external operations by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei around 1990. Vahidi consolidated pre-existing IRGC units under this one Quds Force command. The Quds Force's first major external deployment was in the Bosnian war in the Balkans in the 1990s.

The AMIA terrorist attack was carried out shortly thereafter in Buenos Aires. Argentinean prosecutor Alberto Nisman [concluded](#) in 2006 that the AMIA attack "was extensively discussed and was ultimately adopted by a consensus at the highest levels of the Iranian government." As a result of Nisman's investigation, an Argentinean court issued international arrest warrants for nine Iranian and Hezbollah officials, including Vahidi. Interpol subsequently issued Red Notices for Vahidi and five of his co-conspirators. Despite being an [internationally wanted](#) terrorist, Vahidi continued to rise the ranks of the Islamic Republic's government.

According to US intelligence officials, Vahidi also established a tactical alliance with senior al-Qaeda leaders in Sudan in the 1990s and met with Ayman Zawahiri, Osama Bin Laden's second-in-command, several times. According to a European intelligence official, Zawahiri [leveraged](#) his long ties with Vahidi to negotiate a safe harbor for some al-Qaeda leaders in 2001. Vahidi remained Quds Force chief until 1997 or 1998 when [Qasem Soleimani](#) was appointed.

Defense Minister under Ahmadinejad

Following his tenure as Quds Force commander Vahidi [transferred](#) to the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL) as deputy for planning, a post he held until 2005. When former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president that year, Vahidi acted as the chief deputy defense minister, a sign that he could cultivate ties with officials outside of the Rafsanjani circle. He also acted as a committee chairman in the Expediency Council, an advisory body for the Supreme Leader that adjudicates disputes over legislation between the Parliament and Guardian Council.

During Ahmadinejad's second term in 2009, Vahidi served as defense minister for four years and in that role pushed to produce a wide range of conventional weapons, including tanks, fighter planes, missiles, and armored personnel carriers.

Vahidi's tenure as defense minister was controversial internationally due to his alleged AMIA involvement. In 2011, Argentina and its Jewish community [protested](#) Vahidi's invitation to Bolivia to participate in a ceremony. He was forced to leave the country, and former Bolivian President Evo Morales apologized to the Argentinian Jewish community for hosting him.

Between 2013 and 2016, Vahidi [directed](#) the Defense Strategic Research Center, the research arm of the Armed Forces General Staff. In 2014, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed Vahidi as a Strategic Council on Foreign Affairs advisory body member. In 2016, he left the Defense Strategic Research Center to [direct](#) the Supreme National Defense Universe. Vahidi has studied electrical engineering and has a doctorate in strategic studies.

Interior Minister under Raisi

In August 2021, Vahidi was [appointed](#) as Interior Minister by President Ebrahim Raisi. Vahidi's appointment was reflective of the IRGC functioning as the [foundation](#) of the Raisi administration, with the new president awarding key ministerial roles and many of the 874 senior government-appointed positions to IRGC members.

Following his appointment, Vahidi presented a plan to the Parliament that included 148 executive actions. He [pledged](#) to support domestic production (theme of the [Raisi](#) administration), develop border areas, address narcotics addiction, "strengthen and support individual and social freedom, and support law enforcement." The Islamic Republic, of course, has long pledged that it respects liberty, but its actions, including the widespread arrest of dissent and censorship, say otherwise.

A Parliamentarian who [voted](#) against Vahidi's appointment warned that Vahidi's plan to increase the strength of governors would increase corruption. On the other hand, a parliamentarian who supported Vahidi declared that "the Zionist regime and opposition powers became angry following Vahidi's introduction, and whenever the enemy is angry that means our path and selection is correct." Since becoming Interior Minister, Vahidi has both expanded the strength of governors and [appointed](#) numerous IRGC commanders to these ostensibly civilian positions. But this has earned him enemies. [In 2023](#), after a threat of impeachment, Vahidi was forced to fire his political deputy Mohammad-Reza Gholamreza after Gholamreza restricted members of parliament's power to meddle in the employment of local government officials to influence elections.

Vahidi is known for his hardline views and takes a methodical approach to his work, as indicated in his recent research and academic-oriented positions. Previously, he [warned](#) that Israel would draw its "last breath" if it attacked the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities. Following the 2020 US assassination of Soleimani, Vahidi [called](#) for "a series of incidents that would trap the air in the lungs of the Americans."

The Interior Minister is a sensitive post for Khamenei, since Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) are the first security forces deployed in the event of domestic unrest. Vahidi's predecessor Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, a civilian and associate of conservative politician and former Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, oversaw the [crackdown](#) on the 2017-2018 and the November 2019 nationwide protests. The latter resulted in hundreds of deaths over just a few days.

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[While serving as Interior Minister](#), the morality police under Vahidi's command murdered Mahsa Amini for wearing "improper hijab." His ministry then led the [deadly crackdown](#) against the ensuing protests. Due to his continued role in violent repression against political dissent, Vahidi has been sanctioned by the [U.S.](#) and [European Union](#). With new waves of protest on the [horizon](#), it is likely that Vahidi will continue to conduct such violent repression – particularly as he institutes new [programs](#) for public surveillance.