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## Commander says no 'military mafia' in Iran

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Amid talks of an exponential growth in the influence of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in Iran, the force's chief commander denies the existence of a "military mafia" in the country and brings to light an urgency to counter the enemy.

In an interview with the *Jam-e-Jam* daily, Brigadier General Mohammad-Ali Jafari said the elite military arm had grown in power only because it had to counter exceptionally well-equipped enemies inside and outside the country.

"Only because Sepah [IRGC] had to fight with empty hands against domestic and foreign enemy, equipped with the latest in military equipment, it has turned into an exceptional organization in the world," the IRGC commander said.

When asked if a possible military pole running large swatches of Iran's economy and politics could threaten the country, General Jafari argued that the IRGC is a "popular revolutionary structure" and does not have a "military identity by nature."

The Iranian commander told the daily that the IRGC bears no similarity to notorious military mafias in other countries.

"The stage where Sepah members operate is a stage without any rivals and for that reason it does not need monopolizing. This stage is set for sacrifice and anonymous efforts until martyrdom," Jafari opined.

Today in Iran, the IRGC is estimated to oversee nearly 130,000 forces, while the Basij forces is estimated to number up to 6 million and is active in most cities, towns and villages across the country.

The majority of Basij forces -- who form a smaller branch under the IRGC -- are actively involved in volunteer work at mosques.

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