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REPORT

# EXCLUSIVE - Trouble in Iran: An interview with Jaish al-‘Adl of Baluchestân

VINEET (Author)

FARAN JEFFERY (Editing & Translation)

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## Background:

On September 30, the judge of the second branch of Sarāvān City Prosecutor's Office was targeted in an attack by armed individuals. On the same day, Jaish al-ʿAdl took responsibility for the same and said in a statement that this attack was carried out in order to make the (Iranian) regime accountable for the [killing of protestors](#) in Zâhedân city.

[According to Rights Group Amnesty International](#), “Iranian security forces unlawfully killed at least 66 people, including children, and injured hundreds of others after firing live ammunition, metal pellets and teargas at protesters, bystanders and worshippers during a violent crackdown after Friday prayers on 30 September in Zâhedân, Sistân and Baluchestân province. Another 16 people were killed in separate incidents.”

Jaish al-ʿAdl was quick to react and release a statement. The organization said, an hour before claiming the attack, that “it has been observing the current issues in the country...and its strategy has been to refrain from taking any position in order to continue the peaceful protests and also to prevent the regime from making any excuses for the bloody suppression of the protestors.” “But,” the statement continued, “after the bloodshed in Zâhedân...the organization announces that it will enter the field with all its power to hold the regime accountable.”

Iran has been gripped by protests since the custodial [death of Mahsa Amini](#) on 16 September. She was arrested for allegedly breaching the Islamic dress code for women.

The first big protests erupted at Amini’s funeral in her hometown in the Kurdish region of Iran. The near-daily demonstrations continued, flaring up again 40 days after she was buried.

*(Note: It's a tradition in Shīʿite Islam to mark the al-Arbaʿīn -- 40 days -- after someone's death, usually with a show of grief. Thousands of people, mourners and protesters took to the streets in Saqez.)*

The subsequent crackdown launched by Iranian government forces has further led to public outrage and after nearly 50 days since its inception, [the protests show no sign of ending](#).

More than 130 universities have participated in protests nationwide and nearly 400 university students have been arrested as of 2 November, [according to the Human Rights Activists News Agency](#) (HRANA) based in Washington. Overall, thousands of people have been detained and hundreds killed, according to rights groups (exact figures cannot be verified due to reporting restrictions).

Jaish al-ʿAdl (the “Army of Justice”) is a Salafī -Jihadist group founded in 2012 that operates in southern Sistân and Baluchestân province of Iran and parts of Pakistan. The group is waging an insurgency against the Iranian government to liberate the province of Sistân and Baluchestân.

According to various media reports, the group was formed by the remaining members of Jundullah after the leader of the latter, Abdolmalek Rigi, was executed by Iran in 2010. Following the appointment of Abdul Rahim Mollazadeh, alias Salahuddin Farooqui, as the leader of Jundullah, Abdul Rahim Rigi (brother of Abdolmalek Rigi) declared the establishment of Jaish al-ʿAdl through the unification of armed factions.

Since then, it has carried out attacks against Iranian government officials and military personnel.

Israel Defense [reported in 2019](#) that the group has over 500 members and followers. The number of active fighters is said to be over 100. Some of them are seasonal, including some from Pakistan, who are called upon for occasional attacks against Iranian government forces.

Salahuddin Farooqui is the current leader of Jaish al-‘Adl. He was born in 1979 in Rāsk, Sistān and Baluchestān. It has been reported that he has close ties to Baloch tribes in Pakistan's Balochistan region and has lived many years among the people there. He has voiced opposition to Iranian involvement in Syria and the backing of al-Assad’s regime. [Farooqui has been consistent](#) that the organization is only fighting for the support of Sunnis and ethnic Baloch in the region. In an interview with Al-Arabiya, he actively denied having any links to ISIS or al-Qā‘idah.

Another important leader of the group is Mullah Omar Darakhshan (unrelated to the Afghan Ṭālibān leader). He is the brother of Maula Bux Darakhshan, alias Mauluk, an Iranian Baloch who founded Sipah-e-Rasūl Allāh (“Army of the Prophet of Allah”) in the 1990s and allied it with Pakistan’s anti-Shī‘ah Sunni militant groups.

After Darakhshan was killed by Iranian forces in 2006, Omar, a clean-shaven man in his early 40s, led the anti-Iran group from Kulaho village in the district of Kech in Pakistan’s Balochistan province.

Mullah Omar, clearly [said in an interview](#) that he does not lead a religious movement, although at the same time he maintained that Iran is suppressing the Baloch community because they are Sunnis and Baloch. He said that his group is fighting for its people’s religious and national rights.

The group has been designated a terrorist organization by Iran, Japan, New Zealand and the United States. The U.S. Department of State [re-designated the separatist group](#) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) on July 2, 2019. Jaish al-‘Adl was previously listed as an FTO with its former name of Jundallah, but the State Department decided to amend the designation to reflect its new alias.

The Iranian government has however time and again accused the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Israel of supporting and backing the group.

Iran has accused Pakistan of supporting Jaish al-‘Adl. After a suicide car [bombing](#) claimed by the group killed 27 IRGC members in Sistān and Baluchestān in February 2019, Iran [criticized](#) Islamabad for failing to crack down on the group and allowing it to find shelter on its soil. Iran’s Tasnim News Agency reported that Brigadier General Pakpour, a commander of the IRGC, claimed at a ceremony held to honor the victims of the attacks that three of the assailants responsible for the February 23 killings were Pakistani citizens. Qassem Soleimani at the time [lambasted](#) Pakistan, demanding concrete action from Islamabad and blaming Pakistan’s increasingly close connection with Saudi Arabia for the violence.

(Note: In 2008, Pakistan’s former Army chief General (R) [Mirza Aslam Baig said](#) that the U.S. was supporting the Jundallah in order to destabilize Iran by providing training facilities to Jundallah fighters--located in eastern areas of Iran--to create unrest in the area and “affect the cordial ties between Iran and its neighbour Pakistan.”)

Sources from the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis [suggest that Jaish al-‘Adl is organized into three military branches](#) across south-eastern Iran. They are named after three of its militants who were killed in clashes with Iranian forces. They are: Malik Mollazadeh, Nimatallah Tawhedi and Sheikh Dhai. The group also has an “intelligence branch” whose mission is to identify individuals working with the Iranian Regime.

Records suggest Jaish al-‘Adl has attacked only hard targets. These attacks were primarily focused on Iranian targets such as the Iranian National Police Force, the Iran Border Guard Police and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps.

#### **Confirmed attacks conducted by Jaish al-‘Adl:**

25 August 2012 - The first attack by the group [killed at least ten](#) members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Forces (IRGC).

On 25 October 2013, the group claimed responsibility for [killing 14 Iranian border guards](#) in the city of Sarāvān. The group claimed that the attack was in retaliation of 16 Iranian Baloch prisoners who were on death row. The prisoners were convicted of drug trafficking and extremism. As a result of the attack, Iranian officials hanged 16 prisoners on 26 October 2013.

On October 9, 2014, Iran's state news agency reported that [three members of Iranian security forces were killed by Jaish al-‘Adl](#). According to the news agency, the militants had called the police emergency line and once the members of security forces reached the area, they were attacked by militants belonging to Jaish al-‘Adl. Previously, one Iranian soldier was killed and two pro-government militiamen were wounded in an attack that was blamed on Jaish al-‘Adl.

In April 2015 - [Eight Iranian border guards were killed](#) by militants in a cross-border raid on the frontier with Pakistan.

26 April 2017- [9 IRGC members were killed](#) in Mirjaveh by long range weapons fired from inside Pakistan.

16 October 2018- [14 IRGC men were taken hostage](#).

29 January 2019 - [Two bombs exploded in front of a police station](#) in the city of Zāhedân in south-eastern Iran, causing minor injuries to three police officers. Jaish al-‘Adl claimed responsibility for the explosions. The group said it had targeted a police station with “two strong bombs,” damaging a police car and a motorcycle.

13 February 2019 - At least 27 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) were killed in a suicide attack in between the cities of Zāhedân and Khash in Sistân and Baluchestân province.

*A few days ago, Midstone Centre associate Vineet reached out to the spokesperson of Jaish al-‘Adl, Hossein Baloch, via an encrypted messaging app, and requested an interview. Our request was granted by the group’s spokesperson and a short interview was conducted in Persian. The views and opinions expressed by the individual interviewed are solely his own and are based on his own perspective and opinions. The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the author or Midstone Centre. In light of the ongoing protests in Iran and the subsequent crackdown by the regime, Jaish al-‘Adl announced support for the protesters. The intention behind this interview is to explore and understand the views and stances of Jaish al-‘Adl. The following is the English transcript of the interview:*

**1: Can you tell us about your organization? How was it established? What is its ideology? Who are the founder and the current leaders? Do you follow the same path as Jundullah (a group that was alleged to have had close ties with al-Qā‘idah)?**

Jaish al-‘Adl is an organization formed from the heart of society. It is not connected to any particular group. In Jaish al-‘Adl, you can find people from every community and ethnicity. Influential people from clans and tribes, scholars, workers, labourers, students, government employees, seminary students, and people who have suffered from social injustice. In general, you can find people of different layers and groups. When I say that Jaish al-‘Adl is an organization formed from the heart of society, it means that this movement is formed from the local community.

Jaish al-‘Adl was founded at the beginning of 1391 (Persian calendar) or 2012 (Gregorian calendar).

In a society where all the material and spiritual possessions of the local population are under threat from the government and their dignity has been ignored, armed struggle is an inevitable necessity. Definitely, the formation of the Jaish al-‘Adl, was an act of the oppressed people of Baluchestân to respond to their needs.

We represent the view of the oppressed people of Baluchestân and, beyond that, the troubled Iranian Sunni community, a community that has been suppressed in Iran and forgotten in the world. Our people feel that we have no option but to fight against this regime, even though there is no mention of our oppression and deprivation in the rest of the world. During the past 43 years, which will be 44 years in a few months since the establishment of this regime, it was only our faith and foreignness that gave our people the courage to resist and persevere against this regime. So, I want to say that it was only and only the anti-tyranny and enthusiasm of our people during this period that stood and resisted this regime. So, with these explanations, if I say anything about the methodology or ideology of the Jaish al-‘Adl organization, I must say that the Jaish al-‘Adl organization is an organization of people’s movements that has risen under the teachings of Islam against the oppression of our people in order to realize our national dignity, self-possession, and humanity.

The founder and current leader of Jaish al-‘Adl is Salahuddin Farooqi.

Regarding your last question, I must say that Jaish al-‘Adl and Jundullah are two different parties and organizations. Jundullah was disbanded two years after their leader [Emir Abdul Malik was arrested](#) in 1390 (2010).

How can two organizations go on the same pathway? If they are supposed to go the same way, why are there two separate organizations? They should have been one.

In the definition of Jundullah that you give, “a group close to al-Qā‘idah” I must admit that this is the first time I have ever heard such a label regarding Jundullah, as we used to hear regarding the relationship of Jundullah as well as Jaish al-‘Adl with the U.S. and Israel. These accusations are simply false.

## 2: What are you fighting for, and against whom have you started your armed struggle?

I must clarify that we are not an attacking group; we are only defending ourselves against a criminal. We are resisting oppression and fighting for our religious, national, and human dignity. We fight to protect our culture, language, identity, religion & beliefs. The goals we have set for ourselves are to target the repressive and intimidating parts of the regime and also to cut off the executive arms of the regime.

## 3: What is your complaint about the Government of Iran?

If I understood your question correctly, I must say that we don't have a complaint from the government because the government in Iran is an executor or an agent of the regime's policies. We have complaints from the regime. "Wilāyat al-Faqīh Regime" is an extremely religious and extremist government that has presented a personal perception of Islam by some Ayatollahs (Shī'ite Scholars) of the Shī'ite religion who have apocalyptic motivations, and the basis of this government is based on these ideas. Definitely, these kinds of thoughts and views that exist in the government are the main roots of the problems.

*(Note: "The [doctrine of Wilāyat al-Faqīh](#) forms the central axis of contemporary Shī'ah political thought. It advocates a guardianship-based political system, which relies upon a just and capable jurist (faqīh) to assume the leadership of the government in the absence of an infallible Imam. However, although the guardianship of a high-ranking religious scholar is universally accepted amongst all Shī'ah theories of governance, any disagreement is focused on the details such as the role of the jurist and the scope of his authority.)*

Our province is the most deprived province in the country in terms of the distribution of wealth, power sharing, and prosperity. For a bite of bread, our youth are compelled to do fuel trading, and from time to time, they have been killed by government agents or burned alive in fire. If you observe the list of statistics for the annual executions by the regime, most of them are from the Baloch community. In other words, the population of Baloch people in Iran is less than 3%, but their number among those executed by the government is more than 15%. On the religious front, our places of worship are not safe in most parts of Iran. You can always see and hear in the news about the sealing or destruction of worship places, the arrests, threats, assassinations, and executions of Sunni activists from different cities in Iran. If you see the map for the sharing of power, wealth, and prosperity, you will notice that the areas belonging to Sunnis are significantly deprived.

All the plans and projects that the Wilāyat al-Faqīh regime in Baluchestān intends to implement have as their primary motive the realization of the ideological demands of the regime. For example, the commander of the navy army, who is responsible for implementing the development plan for the beaches of Makran, clearly states that "our goal in implementing this plan is to create a new Alevi (Shī'ite) civilization."

In a land where all people have Baloch culture and Sunni religion, what is the reason to create a new Alevi civilization, a Shī'ite culture and religion, and move five million people from this coastal strip.

#### **4: Apart from Baloch citizens, members of which ethnic groups have joined and supported your organization?**

Most of the members are Baloch citizens, but since we are part of the Sunni community and are Sunnis, most of the atrocities that exist are allowed against us. We believe that all people of Iran, mainly Sunnis, have a common pain that needs a common treatment and we believe that the oppression inflicted on us due to our religion made the Sunni community in Iran united. We welcome all Sunni ethnic groups in Iran, and we have many Kurdish, Khorāsāni, and Türkmen members in our organization. About the support of the organization, I must say that, in our opinion, most of the Iranian people, whether Shī'ite or Sunni, are supporting us; I am not talking about political parties and leaders; I mean the general civilians and public, as all the people who are opposed to this regime and don't see any other way except armed struggle and in the current situation, Jaish al-'Adl is the most potent organized armed group that is involved in the fight against the regime.

#### **5: What are the recruiting tactics and what is the reason for recruiting more Baloch citizens in your organization? A new but less known organization called "Mazaaraan Gomnām Baluchestân" has been launched in Sistân and Baluchestân. They have also taken responsibility for some low-level attacks against Iranian security forces. What is your perception of them?**

I must say that we don't have any tactics for recruitment. The government, by committing crimes, makes the suffering people contact us by themselves, asking to join us. Currently, after the massacre of the worshipers in Zâhedân, many people have come to us to join the Jaish al-'Adl organization.

In connection with your second question, I must say that I don't recognize any organization of the name you have mentioned, and I don't know any such group. But of course, I must clarify that in Baluchestân, there have always been conflicts between different tribes and the government forces; for example, there are people the government wants to arrest, and these people are part of the armed resistance, or there are people from whom government forces try to take personal revenge. Or there are drug smuggling groups with whom government forces get involved, and these incidents have always been reported from Baluchestân; lately, some media activists and Baloch politicians have intended to give this kind of aimless conflict a political direction, which is a good step.

#### **6: Are you coordinating your efforts with Baloch separatist groups (BLA, BLF, BNA, etc.) that are operating in Balochistan province (which is a part of Pakistan)?**

I must say that this question is due to the lack of your knowledge about the issues of Sistân and Baluchestân province as well as Jaish al-'Adl. It is appropriate to explain that Baloch independence armed groups in Pakistan who found their space in Pakistan narrowly fled to Iran. Unfortunately, most of these groups have fallen into the trap of the Iranian regime and the IRGC and have become a tool of this regime.

In their last effort in June 2021, they carried out a coordinated joint attack, with the support of IRGC forces, on one of our bases which was repelled by the vigilance of our comrades. Before this, during the year 2017, the **BLF and BRA**, in an adjacent area of Bam Pasht [Saravan County, Sistân & Baluchestân province], with the support of IRGC, attacked our forces and claimed that eleven fighters of our organization were martyred. Mr. Doctor Allah Nazar (the current leader of Balochistan Liberation Front) and Mr. Brahumdagh Bugti released a statement against Jaish al-'Adl and claimed responsibility for the attack. Furthermore, during this period, these groups attempted several assassinations and attacks against us. Due to their weaknesses, unfortunately, these groups have become unpaid soldiers of the IRGC.



*Images shared to Midstone Centre by Jaish al-‘Adl*

**7: Have you thought about entering into negotiations with the Iranian government or maybe ask for autonomy?**

Unfortunately, Iran’s government is highly ideological. An ideological government never compromises with anyone because they always believe they are right and innocent and that everyone else is wrong and evil.

**8: What about the areas of Balochistan that are currently part of Afghanistan and Pakistan?**

Baloch people are connected to us in two ways. Firstly, they are Muslims like all other nations, and they are our brothers in faith. Secondly, Baloch society has a tribal structure, and most of these tribes are scattered in these three countries; in other words, all Baloch are of our blood and descent.

We wish happiness, peace, and prosperity for all the people, especially Muslims, and especially for all Baloch people around the globe.

**9: What do you think about the interim government of the Afghan Ṭālibān? Amir Naroui, a leader of your group, was [killed last year](#) in a clash with a faction of Afghan Ṭālibān in Afghanistan. Do you consider them as your enemy?**

I don’t want to give my opinion in this regard.

**10: The Shāh-e-Chérāgh shrine was attacked (on October 26, 2022) by a gunman. At 15 people lost their lives and nearly 40 were wounded. The assault was claimed by ad-Dawlah al-Islāmīyah (Islamic State). Do you have any comment on this and what do you think about ISIS as an organization?**

We do not want to answer this question at this time.

**11: Indian media [quoted sources](#) from the Indian security establishment, saying that your organization, at the behest of the Pakistan Army, kidnapped and handed over the Indian Naval officer “Kulbhushan Jadhav.” How would you respond to this allegation? In addition, they have also claimed that you received financial assistance from Pakistani embassies and have cooperated with Jamā‘at-ud-Dawah (an affiliate of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba) & Lashkar-e-Khorāsān.**

These accusations are baseless, and I don’t see the need to discuss them.



**12: Do you support the demonstrations currently underway in different parts of Iran that are mainly led by women, especially in Sistân and Baluchestân?**

We are the same people; we have been raised with the pain and discrimination of this regime; how can we not support these protests that yell our demands? We tried our best not to interfere with these protests, but this regime gave us the reason with its massacre of the protesters [in Zâhedân] on a bloody Friday, which unfortunately forced us to take military action and enter the battlefield.

**13: How do you fund your group? Donors or sympathetic citizens?**

Our organization is a people's movement, and it is based on people's support in all fields, whether it is recruitment, economic issues, or any other matter.

**14: What is your opinion on the U.S. and Israel? Do you second with the narrative that the Iranian government puts forward against both countries?**

We are a poor and oppressed movement of the people of Iran and Baluchestân. Our pains are so great that, unfortunately, we cannot think about any other issue than our own. I want to say that we don't have any problems with anyone. It is only the religious authority [of Iran] that has a problem with us, and we want to save ourselves from this regime.

**15: What do you say about the accusations that your group is supported by some foreign governments? In this regard, the names of Pakistan, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. are mentioned by some, including the Iranian regime. In fact, a decade ago, [one report claimed](#) that Mossad agents, posing as CIA officers, were recruiting members of Jundullah for their secret war against Iran.**

I wish the discussion of support were genuine! At least the cost of the debacle of the Wilāyat al-Faqīh regime would be lowered. But unfortunately, none of these regime claims are true. The Iranian regime has extraordinary skill in lying and propaganda. I have to explain that the regime presents us as "separatists" among the Iranian nationalists and presents us as "affiliated with America and Israel" in the eyes of Islamic groups; in the eyes of Baloch people, they introduce us as "affiliated with the Pakistan army," and in the eyes of the local Iranian Shī'ah people, they teach about us as "affiliated with ex-communicators (takfīris)." If you pay attention, no party can relate to so many domains; these are all contradictions.

## **PUBLISHED BY:**

### **Vineet** (Author)

A student of Law and an Independent Researcher currently focusing on militant groups, insurgency and extremism with a special attention towards Indian Subcontinent region.

### **Faran Jeffery** (Editing and Translation)

Faran Jeffery is Director General Operations and Head Consultant at Midstone Centre for International Affairs. He is also the Deputy Director of UK-based counter-extremism think tank ITCT. His specialization is in counter-terrorism, national security and foreign policy issues. He can be found on Twitter ([@natsecjeff](https://twitter.com/natsecjeff)).



