

Alireza Kazemi: Minister of Education

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Alireza Kazemi

Hardliners within the Islamic Republic have long sought to consolidate [control](#) over schools and universities, as they have historically acted as focal points for political dissent among the Iranian people. Both [students](#) and [teachers](#) have served as the vanguard of various protest movements, particularly in 2022. Since the regime's inception, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has wielded influence and control within universities through the [Student Basij Organization](#) (SBO) and [Professors Basij Organization](#) (PBO), both of which have demonstrated a willingness to engage in espionage, radicalization efforts, and violence against students. At the primary and secondary level, the regime has implemented extensive [purges](#) – replacing trained teachers and administrators with clerics and functionaries and putting schools under the purview of extremist mosques. As a result of these actions, [curricula](#) have become increasingly centered on ideological indoctrination.

The regime's efforts to tighten its grip on the education system has been a point of [contention](#) for the supposed “reformist” faction, creating the [expectation](#) that Masoud Pezeshkian would make education overhaul a priority for his administration. However, his actions have indicated that this will not be the case, particularly the appointment of Alireza Kazemi as minister of education. A [brother](#) of the IRGC intelligence chief, [Mohammad Kazemi](#), and himself a [commander within the Basij](#), his record has been marked by [support](#) for ideological indoctrination and radicalization within Iranian schools. This is something he especially advocated for while serving in the administration of hardline former president [Ebrahim Raisi](#). It is all but certain that Kazemi will oversee a redoubling of these [efforts](#) while serving as minister of education, with Khamenei's [direct backing](#).

Education and Basij Affiliation

Kazemi was [born](#) in 1965 in the city of Mashhad, in northeastern Iran. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, while he was a teenager, Kazemi [entered](#) the seminary in Mashhad – the same [place](#) as powerful regime figures including both former President Ebrahim Raisi, and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

While still a seminary student, Kazemi [served](#) in the Iran-Iraq War for a seventeen-month period. Though reporting is sparse, it is clear that he served in the [Basij](#) – given his concurrent involvement with the Mashhad [seminary](#), his lifelong [affiliation](#) with the militia, and his personal [statements](#). During this period, his brother, Mohammad, began his own [involvement](#) in the IRGC, rising to become a key commander. Kazemi's early experience with the Basij solidified his ideological worldview, which aligns closely with those of Khamenei. He became a [staunch proponent](#) of the regime's stringent policy of compulsory hijab, the regime's [repressive](#)

[apparatus](#), and efforts to [radicalize](#) young people. This perspective has continued to define his career.

After his service in the Iran-Iraq War, Kazemi returned to higher education. Having completed extensive seminary studies, he [earned](#) a bachelor's degree in theology from Razavi University of Islamic Sciences – a university controlled by [Astan Quds Razavi](#), a bonyad (ostensible charity) under Khamenei's direction. He then went on to [earn](#) a second bachelor's degree in English language and literature from Ferdowsi University, also located in Mashhad, completing his studies in 1992.

Kazemi continued his studies through the 1990s, as the SBO was [rapidly expanding](#) on Iranian university campuses. He [participated](#) in these efforts, later describing the “mobilization of students and educators” as a key step in the Islamic Revolution. During this time, he also [earned](#) a master's degree in jurisprudence from Mashhad branch of the Khamenei-linked [Islamic Azad University](#), which has become increasingly intertwined with the Basij in recent years. Though he is often granted the title of “doctor” within regime-aligned media, Kazemi did not complete a doctorate. He began a PhD in strategic management from the [Supreme National Defense University](#), but [failed](#) to complete the program.

Despite leaving his doctoral studies, Kazemi was nevertheless [appointed](#) to an academic position on the faculty of Farhangian University, which specializes in training teachers under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. When the PBO was [formed](#) in 2001, Kazemi became closely involved. He later became the [head](#) of the militia's Farhangian University branch, directing all Basij activities on campus, a position he held until entering Ebrahim Raisi's [cabinet](#) in 2021.

Given his leadership within the PBO since its founding, Kazemi has held a key role in [critical junctures](#) for the regime, such as installing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the violent crackdowns against Green Movement protestors. Given that service in the IRGC (including its Basij militia) grants [lifelong affiliation](#), Kazemi remains closely affiliated with the paramilitary – and has outright [stated](#) that he will continue to represent its interests in the Ministry of Education.

[Early Involvement in the Ministry of Education](#)

Simultaneous to his involvement in Farhangian University, Kazemi held various positions within the Ministry of Education's activities in the Khorasan Razavi province. These [include](#) deputy director for research, human resources, and planning, and deputy director for cultural education. Eventually, he ascended through the ranks to become the province's director general for education.

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While leading the Ministry of Education's activities in Khorasan Razavi, Kazemi sought to [foster](#) a "revolutionary identity" among the students under his direction. He [encouraged](#) an extensive Basij activities within school facilities and university campuses, and [stated](#) that this was necessary to wage a "cultural and spiritual war" to consolidate the regime's power. Furthermore, Kazemi [identified](#) the province's poor and under-educated communities as susceptible to radicalization, and sought to enhance the presence of the Basij in these areas.

In 2017, Kazemi was [appointed](#) by the presidential administration of Hassan Rouhani to serve as deputy for education and culture in the Ministry for Education, making him [responsible](#) for nationwide school oversight. Following his approach as a provincial director, he [asserted](#) that developing links between the Basij, students, and educators was his primary concern in this role. According to Kazemi, the involvement of the Basij as an "arm of education" is necessary to maintain the adequate ideological framework within Iranian schools. As noted, during this time he also [served](#) a commander within the PBO – a key factor in understanding his approach to education.

As part of the broader effort to radicalize students, Kazemi [implemented](#) a range of other policies. These included expanding mandatory religious ceremonies, creating a national Quranic recitation contest, courses on the regime's morality code, and increasing the presence of clerics within schools. He also encouraged the Ministry of Education [to expand funding](#) for hijab-related education, including instructional classes, religious software, and guidebooks. These efforts culminated in [crackdowns](#) against student demonstrators during the 2022 Woman, Life, Freedom movement protests.

Acting Minister of Education

Kazemi served in various [roles](#) in the Ministry of Education through the end of Rouhani's presidency, including as deputy minister for secondary schools, director of arts and culture, and head of the national students' organization. Following the presidential election in August of 2021, Raisi's selection for Minister of Education was [rejected](#) by parliament. As a result, Kazemi was deemed to be an acceptable caretaker, and he was appointed acting minister of education for the subsequent three-month period.

As acting minister, Kazemi sought to be more than a placeholder and use his short-term position as a platform for his political perspectives. He [declared](#) his support for Khamenei's "Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution," and his efforts to "purify" the regime – along with [promises](#) to enhance the control of the Basij over the regime's education system. Following these statements, Kazemi [attended](#) national Basij conferences, used the Ministry of Education's public relations arm to [promote](#) activities involving the Basij, and laid the [groundwork](#) for the [replacement](#) of professional teachers with clerics and regime functionaries. Perhaps most

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significantly, he introduced an overhaul of textbooks used in Iranian classrooms to enhance their [alignment](#) with the regime's ideological framework.

Other [challenges](#) during this period included re-opening Iranian schools following Covid-19 lockdowns, navigating solvency issues, and avoiding teachers' strikes. As Kazemi dealt with these issues, his involvement with the Basij remained his key priority. Nevertheless, he earned [plaudits](#) from other officials and regime-aligned media for his handling of these challenges.

Though Kazemi was ultimately replaced by another nominee proposed by Raisi in late November of 2021, this period demonstrates Kazemi's approach to running the Ministry of Education. His return as permanent head will provide the Basij with an opportunity to consolidate its control over the country's schools and universities, a cause he sought to further as acting minister.



(Kazemi speaking at a Basij conference as Acting Minister, *SNN*)

Connection to Law Enforcement

After his brief tenure as acting minister, Kazemi was removed from the Ministry of Education. Instead, Raisi [installed](#) him as deputy head of the Anti-Narcotics Directorate, under now-Minister of Interior [Eskandar Momeni](#). In this role, Kazemi [oversaw](#) efforts to counter drug trafficking via the internet, [accompanied](#) Momeni to international conferences, and took on the [role](#) of spokesman for the directorate.

Perhaps most concerning from this period of Kazemi's career is the close working relationship he developed with Momeni, who is himself an IRGC commander. A close alignment between the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education has significant implications for future crackdowns against political dissent.

Conclusion

In August of 2024, Pezeshkian appointed Kazemi to serve as minister of education, a selection made with Khamenei's direction. This announcement was met with [significant criticism](#) from Iranian teachers and student activists, given his close affiliation with the Basij, his career within the Ministry of Education, and his strident support for the supreme leader's agenda. It is possible that teachers could mobilize in opposition, possibly mounting [strike action](#) as has occurred in recent years.

Given Kazemi's record and affiliation, it is clear that he [intends](#) to expand the regime's efforts to purge dissenting Iranian academics and students, expand indoctrination activities across schools and universities and empower ideological zealots within Iran's academic institutions. Such activities would indicate the continuation of the "Third Cultural Revolution" across Iran's universities and schools, which was spearheaded by the previous administration as per Khamenei's orders.

In line with this, Kazemi has also already sought to expand the presence of the Basij within higher education, [lowering](#) university entry requirements at Khamenei's direction in an effort to expand the enrollment of the militia's personnel. Furthermore, he has announced his intentions to [create](#) "behavioral certificates" for all teachers in Iran – a move that would monitor the ideological compliance of teachers and subsequently reward or punish them. These early actions by the new minister of education reveals Pezeshkian will not ease pressure on universities and schools in Iran, which have, in many ways, been the pulse of the anti-regime protests in Iran.