

Eskandar Momeni: Minister of Interior

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Eskandar Momeni

In the weeks following his inauguration, Masoud Pezeshkian named Eskandar Momeni, a senior commander in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as interior minister. Momeni's ties to both the regime's [repressive apparatus](#) and hardline regime figures like parliamentary speaker [Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf](#) made him a [suitable candidate](#) for the IRGC and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Despite presenting himself as a technocrat, Momeni has a long record of operating as a stringent regime enforcer. By appointing a figure with this background, the IRGC's continued [consolidation](#) of authority over the Ministry of Interior is assured. Only weeks after assuming the role of interior minister, on August 24, upon the direct orders of Khamenei, Momeni was [appointed](#) as the deputy commander-in-chief of the armed forces in the police force. His appointment explicitly reveals how Khamenei intends to create greater coordination between the interior ministry and the police force in anticipation of forthcoming anti-regime protests.

IRGC Service

Momeni was [born](#) in 1962 in the city of Qaem Shahr in the province of Mazandaran. Shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Momeni [enlisted](#) in the IRGC and fought in the Iran-Iraq War. He initially [served](#) within the 25th Karbala Division alongside prominent IRGC figures like current IRGC commander-in-chief [Hossein Salami](#). Over the course of the conflict, he also [led](#) an air defense battalion and a special division. Momeni was also a [commander](#) in the IRGC's counter-revolutionary campaign in northern Iran, which sought to violently quell anti-regime movements. This gave him an operational familiarity with repressive tactics, which he later implemented to suppress [anti-regime demonstrations](#) and within [restive border regions](#) in his capacity as a law enforcement official.

Following the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War, Momeni became a [leader](#) within the Mazandaran Martyrs Commemoration Congress, a veteran's group [promoted](#) by Khamenei that exploits the conflict for the purpose of radicalization. Throughout his later career, Momeni has remained closely associated with both IRGC [veterans' groups](#) and [current leadership](#). He also continues to use his IRGC [title](#) in an official capacity.

Early Law Enforcement Career

In the 1990s, Momeni [pivoted](#) from his IRGC service into the regime's uniformed police, the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), created in 1990. In addition to completing his police training, he earned multiple university degrees, including a [doctorate](#) in national security. For his first LEF post, Momeni [worked](#) within the police forces of Khorasan Province (northeast of Iran), becoming its commander in 2001 – a position he retained until 2002. In this position, he earned a national [reputation](#) for being a stringent law enforcement official, spearheading efforts to

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reduce crime in the province. In particular, he sought to [tackle](#) the border region's drug-smuggling crisis with a series of high-profile actions – though his efforts were ultimately met with [little success](#).

While commanding police forces in Khorasan, Momeni developed a close working relationship with Ghalibaf, who was then serving as the regime's top law enforcement official. Along with other law enforcement officials, Momeni [assisted](#) Ghalibaf in [establishing](#) the Police Emergency Center 110, Iran's emergency response system. In 2003, Ghalibaf [appointed](#) him to lead the newly established center, providing Momeni with his first position of national authority within the regime.

In the subsequent years, Ghalibaf's patronage continued to benefit Momeni's early law enforcement career. In 2004, he was [appointed](#) as deputy head of the LEF responsible for operations, a position he retained until 2007. After Ghalibaf departed the LEF, Momeni continued to enjoy the support of his superiors, becoming [commander](#) of Iran's traffic police. Through his six years at this post, Momeni assisted in leading significant crackdowns against political dissent. He notably [supported](#) efforts to curtail the 2009 Green Movement protests. In 2012, Ahmadinejad [bestowed](#) Momeni with the highest service award for law enforcement officials, rewarding his loyalty during this period.

Furthermore, under Momeni's direction, the traffic police also became heavily involved in [enforcing](#) morality codes, including the mandatory hijab. In part to advance these enforcement measures, Momeni also oversaw the [implementation](#) of extensive cameras and monitoring centers throughout Iran's major roadways. He also [expanded](#) the traffic police by thousands of patrol units. Since Momeni's tenure, traffic police have imposed fees, impounded vehicles, and [employed](#) violent measures to deter Iranians from violating the regime's repressive laws. Though corruption scandals have overshadowed these decisions during his tenure, they demonstrate his political instincts and outlook as a police official – both in favor of the regime's securitization.

LEF Deputy Commander and Anti-Narcotics Directorate

In 2015, Momeni was again [promoted](#), becoming deputy commander of the LEF with oversight of the National Police. One of his key initiatives in this position was to [form](#) the Economic Police, a new law enforcement body tasked with preventing currency-related crimes and [smuggling](#).

However, Momeni's tenure was marked by his [management](#) of the regime's actions during the 2017-2018 protests in Iran. He [accused](#) the protestors of being "rioters" and saboteurs under the employ of foreign powers, and [authorized](#) deadly crackdowns in his capacity as LEF deputy commander. This heavy-handed approach led to the [arrest](#) of thousands of Iranians by National

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Police. These actions amounted to Momeni leaning upon his hardline instincts and earned him extensive [plaudits](#) from other senior law enforcement officials within the regime for his “crisis management.”

Internal pressure within the regime prompted a [reshuffle](#) within the LEF shortly after the crackdowns. As a result, Momeni was transferred to [command](#) the Anti-Narcotics Directorate, a position relevant to his prior experience in Khorasan. In this role, Momeni ostensibly sought to counter drug smuggling, particularly in border regions like [Baluchistan](#). Additionally, Momeni spearheaded efforts to bring the Anti-Narcotics Directorate under IRGC [purview](#), [coordinating](#) various [initiatives](#) with the paramilitary and its Basij militia. He also [issued](#) various public statements hailing the IRGC’s international operations and [leadership](#), and declared support for the Axis of Resistance. Though this would appear contradictory, given the [IRGC](#) and its proxies earn significant revenue via [drug smuggling](#), it demonstrates the ideological nature of law enforcement under the Islamic Republic.

Nevertheless, over the course of his six years in this position, Momeni carefully worked to foster a new reputation as a respectable technocrat. Momeni has participated in various [United Nations conferences](#) and [international agreements](#) on law enforcement, and has publicized his new self-described “humanitarian” [programs](#) aimed at countering addiction. This has provided him with the appearance of competence, despite his record as a tough regime enforcer. Like [Pezeshkian](#) and other members of his cabinet, Momeni’s “[moderate](#)” credentials are superficial and do not reflect his record.

Conclusion

Momeni’s appointment as Minister of Interior demonstrates the limitations on Pezeshkian’s power as president, as he appears to be primarily the [choice](#) of Ghalibaf and Khamenei. The decision to keep this position in the hands of an ideologue IRGC commander with extensive experience waging counter-insurgency campaigns and crackdowns against political dissent also reveals that the regime may anticipate further protests in the coming months and years. It is worth noting that Momeni has made meetings with [IRGC](#) and [police force](#) commanders a priority since assuming his position. Though Momeni has sought to portray himself as a technocratic moderate in recent years, his political outlook is clear. He will defend the regime through force and is [unwilling](#) to relax the enforcement of the regime’s most repressive laws. Momeni is well positioned to coordinate and direct the regime’s security apparatus as required and is willing to use deadly force, as he has done in the past.

Ultimately, Momeni offers little change from the tenure of his predecessor, [Ahmad Vahidi](#), another seasoned IRGC commander. Like Vahidi, Momeni will continue to increase coordination between the interior ministry and the IRGC, not least in relation to domestic security. The most significant change is his deeper connection to law enforcement, enabling more effective

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coordination with his subordinates at the Ministry of Interior. It is now explicitly clear that this was Khamenei's precise objective, underscored by the fact that on August 24, 2024, the supreme leader [appointed](#) the new interior minister to simultaneously serve as deputy commander-in-chief of the armed forces in the police force.

Furthermore, Momeni will serve as an instrument for Ghalibaf and other hardliners to wield influence within Pezeshkian's administration and ensure the execution of Khamenei's domestic agenda – even as the new president pursues stylistic changes and sanctions relief on the world stage.