

The Influence of Khomeinists in Italy

Giovanni Giacalone



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاؤنٹر ٹیرورازم

The 2023 spring season has been quite significant for Iranian pro-regime propaganda in Italy with five events held in different parts of the country. In at least three of them, the common denominator was the figure of Qasem Soleimani, the general of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards killed by a U.S. drone strike on January 3rd 2020 in Baghdad, presented in two different books: one published by the Rome-based *Imam Mahdi Islamic Center* and entitled “*Qasem Soleimani un combattente di Dio*” (Qasem Soleimani, a combatant of God) and the second one named “*Coraggio e Fede*” (Courage and Faith), authored by Hanieh Tarkian, coordinator for the Italian branch of the Qom-based *al-Mustafa Institute of Islamic Studies*. As, it will later be seen, both books promote an image of Soleimani that transcends his role of a military commander, giving him an aura of mysticism, idealizing his figure and displaying him as a martyr.

In addition, two other events were held on April 13th and April 20th at the already cited *Imam Mahdi Islamic Center* and the Celuc bookstore near the Catholic University of Milan. The first event was named “The Day for Jerusalem”, against Israeli occupation while the latter was a short conference organized by the *Sturm und Drang* student movement¹ with the already cited Hanieh Tarkian as the main speaker and entitled “Iran in revolt?”, basically questioning if the revolt in the country is autochthonous or rather masterminded in the West.

These events do not only show a general active propaganda machine operating in Italy and using the figure of Qasem Soleimani, but also some interesting connections on different levels. The impression is that the Iranian propaganda machine is moving beyond the religious aspect trying to create a breach in the extra-parliamentary political and student sectors, as it will later be seen.

The Books on Qasem Soleimani

The two previously cited books are both dedicated to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards General, Qasem Soleimani, who is in both cases presented as a war hero who operated against “terrorism”, as a martyr and even as a mystic. The 200 pages-long book, edited by Hanieh Tarkian, and entitled “Courage and Faith”, looks more like a biography, a history of Soleimani’s life, with a strong emphasis on his Islamic faith and alleged mystic tendency. The title itself indicates a union of both the material and the spiritual. In the description of the book, it is stated that Soleimani was able to unify mystics, politics, faith and pragmatism and he is indicated as a champion of the fight for sovereignty and freedom in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and Syria. Soleimani is defined as “a soldier of God in permanent service”.

The other book, edited by the Rome-based Imam Mahdi Islamic Center and entitled “Qasem Soleimani, a combatant of God”, provides a picture of the former General that is not very different from the one presented in “Courage and Faith”. Here too, the concepts of martyrdom, a man of faith and even protector of the oppressed are present, as well as the term “freedom”.

1 *Sturm und Drang* is a sovereignist ultra-Catholic university movement that takes the name after a literary and artistic movement active in Germany in the late 18th century. It is active in Milan’s Catholic University.

However, the 250 pages long book does not only publish several letters written by Soleimani to different people, but it also extensively relies on testimonies from people who were close to the General, such as family members, close friends as well as Islamist leaders such as Iraqi Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and the leaders of Hamas.

The introduction is left to Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi (1935-2021), an ultra-conservative cleric and member of the Assembly of Experts of the Leadership, the religious body responsible for choosing the Supreme Leader. He was considered to be one of Qom's most powerful and influential Islamic oligarchs and he became notorious for a series of [statements](#) against democracy and republicanism, claiming that "Islamic republic" is a contradiction in terms and that the "republican component" of the Islamic Republic of Iran was established as a concession to secular forces and should be "stripped" away to leave the true essence of the "Islamic system". In 2005, Yazdi [called](#) upon the people of Iran to vote for his former student, Ahmadinejad and he defined the Zionists as the fundamental source of evil on earth.

The Extra-Parliament Support

In May of 2023, two more presentations took place to present the books on Soleimani, in the city of Cesena, Emilia-Romagna region on May 5th, and another one in the Calabrian city of Lamezia Terme on May 27th. The first of the two events, where the book "Qasem Soleimani, a combatant of God" was presented, was organized by the *Imam Mahdi Center* and the far-right extra-Parliament group CasaPound in the presence of Marco Hussein Morelli (spokesman for the Imam Mahdi Center), Alyasa Puppini (Islamic Center of Rome), and Antonio Barzanti (CasaPound). It is worth mentioning that on May 24, 2023, Syria TV aired a panel with a delegation from the Italian CasaPound visiting Syria. Jamal Abu Abbas, the head of the Syrian community in Italy, said that early on during the Syrian civil war, members of CPI approached the Syrians in Italy, offered their support, and identified with the Syrian cause as their cause, as reported by [MEMRI](#).

The second event in Lamezia Terme had the objective of presenting Hanieh Tarkian's book "Courage and Faith". The event was organized in coordination with the far-right movement *Identità Tradizionale* (Traditional Identity) and *Gioventù Controcorrente* (Countercurrent Youth), two and with Tarkian as the main speaker. *Identità Tradizionale* defines itself as "a militant community born in January 2012 from the idea of some young people from Catanzaro to create an alternative to the models of life manufactured by today's society".²

As explained by a 2019 [article](#) in the local media, the ideals pursued by this community are those of a historic right but the group's adherents do not currently see themselves in any party or political force. The movement can count on about fifty sympathizers and militants aged between 15 and 35, and it is currently active in Calabria.

² As claimed on *Identità Tradizionale*'s website: <https://www.federazione-it.org/sedi-locali/identita-tradizionale-catanzaro>

Gioventù Controcorrente is another very small far-right community formed in the Calabrian city of Lamezia Terme described in its [manifesto](#) as “independent from any party or movement” and based on the principles of “God, homeland and family”. It is yet unclear when this community came to birth; it is however interesting to notice how, back in 2015, the news site *Lamezia Oggi* [cited](#) a connection between the community and [Corneliu Zelea Codreanu](#) (Romania 09/13/1899 – 11/30/1938) Founder and Leader of the "Legion of the Archangel Michael”, committed to the “Christian and racial” renovation of Romania and fed on anti-Semitism and mystical nationalism.

Conclusion

It seems so far clear that the pro-Iranian regime actors cannot currently find support within the mainstream Italian political arena, and they are therefore trying to look for it among small ideological and political groups operating outside the Parliament.

The common denominator can be found in a utopic representation of former Iranian General Qasem Soleimani which suddenly becomes some sort of utopic mystical and unblemished hero capable of bringing together Khomeinists, far right and ultra-Christian movements. Unfortunately, those latter ones do not seem to be aware of the persecutions perpetrated by the Khomeinist regime against Christians in Iran, as [explained](#) in a 2023 Report on “Violations to the rights of Christians in Iran” recently released by Article 18 along with other three Christian non-profit organizations. As a matter of fact, the year 2022 saw a significant increase in the number of Iranian Christians detained in the Islamic Republic; 134 Christians were arrested in 2022 for faith-related issues, more than double the 59 recorded in 2021.

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