The death of 22-year-old Venezuelan student Genesis Carmona at the hands of armed pro-government civilian militias, called "colectivos," bears a striking resemblance to the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, the Iranian student who was shot and killed in a similar fashion on the streets of Tehran during the Green Revolution of 2009. This has led many analysts to begin comparing the colectivos' tactics to those used by Iran's Basij paramilitary force. The similarity, however, is more than speculation. In April 2009, the current Iranian commander of the Basij paramilitary force, Brig. Gen. Mohammad Reza Naqdi, accompanied then-Iranian Defense Minister Gen. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar on a high-level visit to Caracas at the invitation by then-Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his foreign minister (now President) Nicolas Maduro. Several defense agreements followed, but one in particular is relevant to what is transpiring on the streets of Venezuela today. According to sources within the Venezuelan military, Gen. Naqdi's role in these high-level meetings was to serve as an adviser to Venezuela's Ministries of Defense and Interior to aid in training their civilian militias, the now-infamous colectivos. The first glimpse of this advisory support came during the 2012 presidential election in Venezuela, as government documents were leaked to the foreign press about the Chavista plans to stir up civil unrest if their leader, Hugo Chavez, were to lose the elections on Oct. 7 of that year. According to the leaked government documents, the Chavistas planned to mobilize the colectivos as a quick-reaction force called Redes de Movilizacion Inmediata, to quell opposition rallies and gain territorial control. Modeled after those of the Iranian Basij units, the force's tactics and functions included setting alphanumeric short codes for clandestine communication and infiltrating universities to gain intelligence. These tactics, while far from original, are definitely a step above the capabilities of the colectivos prior to Gen. Naqdi's visit. Born out of Venezuela's urban guerrilla warfare in the 1960s, these armed civilian militias saw a resurgence under Chavez, who used them as a way to maintain control over his populace and create a buffer against anti-Chavista military and police forces. Who better to enhance their capabilities than a man in part responsible for the Iranian regime's successful crackdown on opposition forces and student protests for more than a decade and a half? Gen. Naqdi, who previously served as the Iranian Police Force's counterintelligence chief, has a long list of human rights violations dating back to the 1999 student protests in Iran. After these protests, Iranian opposition forces tried to bring Gen. Naqdi to justice through a military court, only to have the court rule "not guilty" — to the detriment of many future Iranian victims, who would suffer human rights abuses at the hands of the general. The U.S Treasury Department is well aware of Gen. Naqdi's track record and has imposed sanctions against him "for being responsible for or complicit in serous human rights abuses in Iran," adding him to its Office of Foreign Assets Control blacklist. After Gen. Naqdi traveled to Venezuela in 2009, he was appointed by Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as commander of the Basij in October of that same year. Since then, it has been rumored that Gen. Naqdi

also traveled to Bolivia in May 2011, alongside the former Iraniandefense minister, Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, at the invitation of Bolivian President Evo Morales to inaugurate a partially Iranian-funded facility on the outskirts of the commercial capital, Santa Cruz. This facility, which is now operational, is the regional defense school for militaries of the Chavista-funded Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas. Training in asymmetric warfare includes, but is not limited to, the organization and deployment of civilian militias. Bolivia has a presidential election scheduled for October, in which many opposition members think Mr. Morales is also preparing armed civil militias similar to the colectivos in Venezuela, to take action in case the Venezuelan opposition protests spread south along the Andean ridge into Bolivia. Having someone of Gen. Naqdi's caliber in Venezuela (and potentially Bolivia) is no trivial matter. His experience as the former deputy director for intelligence of the elite Qods Force, and his firsthand tactical knowledge of how to repress peaceful protests and incite violence against opposition members is well-documented. The similarities in the death of Genesis Carmona and Neda Agha-Soltan are hardly coincidental once one understands that those who pull the triggers, beat protesters, run the prisons and engage in torture are inspired, advised and trained in the same ruthless strategies for repressing their own people. Iran's Gen. Naqdi has made a living out of perfecting such strategies, and while he is not the only foreign adviser to Venezuela's civilian militias, he may very well be the most notorious. Read the original article, from The Washington Times, here.