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## The struggle for regional hegemony how the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps continues to influence Iraq

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THE STRUGGLE FOR REGIONAL HEGEMONY: HOW THE  
IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS CONTINUES TO  
INFLUENCE IRAQ.

by

JULIANA VELASCO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science  
in the College of Sciences  
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Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Houman A. Sadri

## ABSTRACT

Due to the recent war in Iraq, the Middle East has once again jumped to the forefront of everyone's mind. The world has been focused on Iraq and Iran for a decade now because Iran has established a strong foothold in Iraqi life since the toppling of Saddam Hussein. However, in order to understand this issue and attempt to solve it, an extensive study must be made of all the reasons that Iran is succeeding where the United States has not.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the historical influence that Iran, particularly the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has had on Iraq since its creation. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has taken over its home country and a historical analysis will chronicle its rise. Case studies of Iran and Iraq will be used to understand the geopolitical, military, economic, and religious reasons for the IRGC's ever-increasing influence. Previous studies and news coverage have only focused on one issue at a time; however, it is rare to find a study which combines all the reasons. This thesis will not only compile an analysis of these reasons, but will also explore and suggest what steps or policies Iraq can adopt in order to prevent it from being a puppet to other world powers.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, whose support has given me the drive to complete it. Also, to my brother who has always pushed me to strive for greater things in life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A great many thanks to Dr. Houman Sadri, my thesis chair who convinced me to undertake this project and backed me every step of the way, to Dr. Özoglu and Dr. Morales, who were both integral parts of my committee and to the Burnett Honors College at UCF which gave me all the tools necessary to complete this endeavor.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Iran and Iraq have brought to mind strong memories and emotions to people around the world since the Ottoman and Persian Empire. The older generation remembers the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Ba'ath Party takeover of Iraq in 1968 and Saddam Hussein's subsequent presidency starting in 1979. Americans specifically tend to remember the Gulf War in 1991 led by President George H. W. Bush. The events of 9/11 and the Second Gulf War, initially led by President George W. Bush, shot the Middle East into the minds of the younger generation and encouraged the works of scholars to focus on that region. Clearly, the Middle East has been an issue that the world cannot disregard.

Iran and Iraq have been fully aware of one another as well, with several struggles between Arabs and Persians going back centuries. Some scholars even claim that the modern era of the Middle East began with the arrival of Napoleon in the Ottoman Empire through Egypt in 1798, and a following new era began with the demise of the Ottoman Empire due to World War I.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is not a stretch to claim that the Middle East has been a quarrelsome region in the world. Due to all of these events, including the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1988, one can understand how scholars have attempted to understand many different aspects – military, political, economic and religious – of the array of issues that continue to

shape Iran and Iraq. These studies are critical not only for understanding such a complex area of the world but also to attempt to construct resolutions that benefit all the players involved.

Due to the many governmental positions that top members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) hold, some may claim that the IRGC is operating as if it were the government. However, it has furthered its ambitions and has continued to have a long standing, profound impact in Iraq as well. The IRGC's influence affects the entire system in Iraq and those within it - including the top government officials, the media, and the masses through their similar religious beliefs. Its influence is seen through military power, also known as hard power,<sup>2</sup> but also through soft power, such as increased trade and greater diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

While the American public was glued to their televisions watching the war unfold, Iran was watching with equal vigor. When Saddam Hussein became the Iraqi leader, his secularist rhetoric was an affront to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini<sup>4</sup>, the prominent Shiite Imam who brought about the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and created the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the capture, and subsequent demise, of Saddam Hussein inspired no sympathy from the IRGC. In fact, it was quite the opposite; Iran saw this liberation, as the American government called it, as an opportunity that could not be passed by.

Ironically, Iran has the same goal in Iraq as the United States – to create stability. However, Iran would like to see a Shiite-dominated government through the democratic process which would be easily achieved due to the Shiite majority in Iraq. In 2005, the Shiites won a near majority because Iran financially supported the Islamic Da'wa party<sup>6</sup>, one of the oldest Shiite political movements in Iraq. This was beneficial for Iran because Ibrahim al-Jaafari , who was then the Prime Minister, was also the head of the Da'wa Party and had spent the duration of the Iran-Iraq War in Iran.<sup>7</sup>

If one can peel back the layers of the IRGC's influence and comprehend how that influence is impacting the perspective of many Iraqis, then it may be easier to formulate a plan in which the Iraqi people can combat this influence and become truly autonomous. Combating the influence of the IRGC is of particular interest to the United States (US) on the level of policy perspective because if Iraq does become self-sufficient, it is possible for a workable relationship to be formed between the two nations. However, the policy that the United States takes towards Iraq will also influence the IRGC's response. Consider, for instance, if the United States "democratized" Iraq. It is highly likely that Iran will feel threatened and possibly invade Iraq, or in the worst-case scenario, carry out an attack against the United States itself – most likely through terrorist attacks.

Conversely, if Iran managed to establish a stable and strong voice in Iraq, then even if the United Nations heaped sanctions upon Iran, it could withstand

those because Iraq could supply Iran with what it needs to survive the onslaught. An additional consideration is the potential of a backlash from the Middle East should the UN put sanctions on both Iran and Iraq. Before any actions can be taken; however, it is crucial to understand what has led Iran and Iraq down this path.

## **Definitions**

Due to the varying definitions that exist for “power” and “influence”, an explanation is required on how the words applied within this thesis. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, power is “a possession of control or authority over others” while influence is “the act or power of producing an effect without apparent exertion of force or direct exercise of command.”

## **Background**

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has been affecting their home state since the moment of its creation following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, created the IRGC in order to protect the revolution. More specifically, the IRGC was created in order to protect Khomeini from possible coups by pro-monarchical protestors, as well as the US.<sup>8</sup> Under the current Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the IRGC has

acquired near immeasurable power due to the president's appointment of current and former members of the IRGC into state level and gubernatorial positions.<sup>9</sup>

In Iraq, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has most strongly affected the politics, the economy and has also increased its influence by using the fact that both Iraq and Iran are Shiite-majority nations. After Saddam Hussein was toppled by the US in 2003, the IRGC entered Iraq in the hopes of stabilizing the war torn nation for their benefit. The IRGC has poured money for reconstruction, cheap goods, and services into the struggling Iraqi economy. It also provides electricity to various parts of Iraq and has also supplied and trained Shiite insurgents.

Furthermore, Iran has close ties with many of the top leaders in Iraq today, most of whom were previous exiles from Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

The United States has also, by default, assisted the IRGC in its goals by simply toppling Hussein. There are a few factors associated with this but it is mainly due to the ejection of the Sunni government from power.<sup>11</sup> This is a primary factor because a Shiite headed Iraqi government is much more likely to cooperate with the Shiite led Iran, especially since Iran allowed Iraqi refugees to enter Iran during the reign of the Ba'ath regime, including current Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki.<sup>12</sup>

However, it is far too early to claim that Iraq will become part of Iran. There is resistance among the Iraqi Arabs. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the head cleric

in Iraq, does not believe that religious figures, such as himself, should be involved in the government.<sup>13</sup> Despite his extended stay in Iran, even al-Jafaari shares Sistani's views.<sup>14</sup> A stronger source of resistance is the fact that Iraqis view themselves as Arabs first, not Muslims. Therefore, the tension between Iraqis and the Persians continues to be a divisive issue and makes the Iranian influence difficult to maintain.<sup>15</sup>

The thesis is not meant to cast judgment on Iran, Iraq, or the United States. Its purpose is to bring understanding to the current situation as well as a history of how it came to be. For any state to try to assist Iraq into becoming a self-sufficient state, the analysis that this thesis undertakes is crucial. However, this thesis is limited in that it does not explore every option. It does not examine the effects of other states, such as Turkey, on Iraq. It also does not explore the Arab-Israeli conflict and its effect on the evolution of the current Iraqi government. These issues are important as well, but as Iran is Iraq's closest and largest neighbor, and is the state having the most influence on Iraq today – despite the United States' efforts to hold that position -, a thorough examination is vital. From the perspective of the United States, Iran is of even greater concern in the ongoing struggle to be the reigning hegemon. The idea that Iraq could be annexed by Iran, even figuratively<sup>16</sup>, should be at the forefront of these considerations.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE RISE OF THE GUARDIANS

### The Birth

During the Iranian Revolution of 1979, also known as the Islamic Revolution, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was deposed and replaced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had recently returned from exile. With a newly formed Islamic Republic in his hands, Khomeini created the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) with the purpose of protecting the revolution from possible inside coups and also silencing dissenters. The IRGC was intended to be the Iranian version of the United States' National Guard, which answered only to the supreme leader.<sup>17</sup>

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has many names, including the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, Pasdaran, and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – all of which are interchangeable. By whatever name it is known, however, what remains is its ever increasing influence in every aspect of Iranian life. The IRGC's influence has taken place through its main body and through its subgroups. These groups include not only a personal army, air force and navy, but also the Baseej - a home-front force, the Quds - an international force, and various other paramilitary forces.<sup>18</sup> Not only does the IRGC have jurisdiction to oversee domestic and foreign operations, it controls Iran's missile forces and the IRGC alone can patrol Tehran – Iran's capital city.<sup>19</sup>

## **Pasdaran Forces**

### **Air Force, Army and Navy**

The IRGC is equipped with its unique ground forces, air force and navy. Unfortunately, due to a lack of solid information flowing from Iran, it is extremely difficult to ascertain how many men are involved in these forces. In 2006, the Pasdaran Air Force was reported to operate three Shabab-3 missiles.<sup>20</sup> The Shabab-3 is a ballistic missile of intermediate range – 1,000 km – which are based on the design of North Korea’s No Dong-1 missile. The No Dong-1 is capable of carrying up to an 800 kg warhead.<sup>21</sup> However, in 2008, new information showed that Iran has up to 100 Shabab-3 missiles that have been modified and can now reach up to 1,600 km and deliver a 1,158 kg warhead. In addition, Iran also has been developing the Shabab-6 missile, which can reach roughly 10,000 km and deliver a 1,220 kg warhead.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, Iran is quickly developing their ballistic missile capability along with its quest for nuclear capability.

The ground forces of the IRGC are composed of an “army” and all paramilitary forces, including the Baseej. Together they have been reported to be composed of 130,000 men. This estimate includes the soldiers in the regular army. The structure of the ground forces is uncertain but they conduct a variety of training exercises in decentralized, guerilla warfare, most of which are meant to

prepare the soldiers against an attack by the United States. They are in control of the tanks, attack helicopters and IEDs (improvised explosive devices).<sup>23</sup> The IRGC navy is in control of a variety of ships and bases that protect oil platforms but also ensure basic defense for Iran. Furthermore, this navy, composed of roughly 25,000 men, is capable of conducting various exercises, similar to US Marines, and raids on other shipping vessels in the Gulf.<sup>24</sup>

### **Baseej-e Mostazafan – Mobilization Resistance Force**

The Baseej (Basij) Force is a volunteer militia created simultaneously with the IRGC by Khomeini in 1979, although it did not come officially under the control of the IRGC until 1981.<sup>25</sup> It is estimated that about 800,000 Baseej volunteers were sent to the front line of the Iran-Iraq War and were the main force responsible for martyr-style deaths during that time.<sup>26</sup> Today, the Baseej is entrusted with internal riot suppression as well as controlling the dissenters, whether they are peaceful or not. Because it is composed of average volunteers from all walks of life, such as farmers, teachers, students, government workers and various other sectors<sup>27</sup>, the Baseej also is used to draw information from the public – similar to a secret police - , and to ensure that Islamic Sharia law is followed.<sup>28</sup> Baseej numbers are difficult to attain given that so little information is provided by the IRGC; however, in 2008 the then commander of the Baseej, Hasan Taeb, reported to Fars News that 13.6 million people are in the Baseej. This number includes women and schoolchildren;

therefore, how many military age men and women are able to pick up arms is still disputed.<sup>29</sup>

There are five units within the Baseej – Pupil (also called Seekers), Student (Vanguard)<sup>30</sup>, University, Public Service and Tribal. The Pupils are school-aged children who are indoctrinated into the system at an early age and inculcate the next generation.<sup>31</sup> Also, the Baseej is separated into men's and women's battalions. Al-Zahra is the women's battalion while Ashura is the men's. Together they are composed of roughly 2,500 battalions.<sup>32</sup>

The Baseej has been trained to attack US military troops should they invade Iran. Through their practice of deception and camouflage that is capable of deceiving modern imagery coverage, they have practiced dispersing into smaller teams and executing effective ambushes. This is a useful arrangement because each small Baseej team could work independently of a central command; thus making them harder to find and extract information from. They are meant to be a strike force and attack isolated units.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the years, the Baseej has been in limbo between being under direct control of the IRGC and being its own separate organization. In 1981, the Baseej went under the control of the Ministry of the Interior; however, it never actually separated itself from the IRGC.<sup>34</sup> In 2007, Major Mohammad Ali Jafari was appointed as the Commander and Chief of the IRGC by Grand Ayatollah Ali

Khamenei. Jafari officially merged the Baseej into the IRGC due to his assessment that both the Baseej and the IRGC were a “military-political-cultural organization sharing the same goals...”<sup>35</sup> He also stated that since many of the IRGC’s missions are assigned to the Baseej, they should be combined. However, Jafari also promised that the Baseej would not be swallowed into the IRGC.<sup>36</sup>

Conversely, since the 2009 election, and the riots that followed, some scholars are speculating that the Baseej is deteriorating. Particularly after the Baseej shot many protesters, its leadership role in suppressing opposition has been minimal.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Hossen Taeb was removed from his position as leader of the Baseej in October 2009 and the Baseej was officially integrated with the IRGC under Brigadier General Muhammad Naghdi.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Quds Forces - The Jerusalem Forces**

Within the IRGC, the Quds are the elite force. The majority of their missions are composed of international operations. They work with Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The Quds force has even been reported to have ongoing operations in Argentina.<sup>39</sup> Their primary objective is the training of Islamist terrorist groups and organizations. The Quds operate in many states including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and North African countries.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the Quds force has had increasing influence in Iraq since

the Iran-Iraq War. Roughly 12,000 Arabic-speaking Shiites from various countries make up the Quds branch of the IRGC and roughly 15,000 Iranian Shiites are in the Quds.<sup>41</sup> In Iraq, the Quds have made efforts to infiltrate Iraq's southern region, which contains a large Shiite majority.<sup>42</sup> In Iraq, the Quds do not wear uniforms, whether military or other, making them difficult to identify in the nation. However, they engage in both recruitment/training and locating pro-Iran Shiite governors in each province where they operate. In addition, they organize the shipment of weapons from Iran to Iraqi militias.<sup>43</sup> General Petraeus, the commander of the American forces in Iraq, reported to Congress in 2007 that the US had found Quds operatives in Iraq and with them, found hard drives that had documents planning and approving an attack that resulted in the death of five American soldiers in Karbala.<sup>44</sup>

The Quds force has different groups for each country that they operate within and many of their bases are outside of Iran. In addition, this force has offices in various Iranian embassies, although the sections of these embassies are closed off to all other staff. Due to the lack of knowledge about this branch of the IRGC, it is unknown whether or not the ambassadors themselves have control of or any knowledge about what the Quds do within the embassy or the country where they reside.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the Quds work closely with the IRGC Intelligence Branch, which is made up of roughly 2,000 members. This branch is entrusted with

gathering information from everywhere in the Muslim world and participating in the trials of those accused of working against the Revolution.<sup>46</sup>

Another speculation is whether or not the funds for the Quds force are actually recorded in the Iranian budget or if they get special funds directly from the Supreme Leader Khamenei. If Khamenei supplements the Quds's funding, they may have more funds at their disposal than anyone is aware of. The biggest example of their power and influence, however, occurred in January 2007, when Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), transferred control of all Iranian operations in Iraq under the Quds authority.<sup>47</sup>

### **Increasing Influence**

Since their creation, the IRGC has been used for a variety of tasks both within and outside of Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini used the Guards to silence dissenters of the revolution and political adversaries early on, although he did not agree with the politicization of the Guards.<sup>48</sup> In his "Political and Divine Testament", Khomeini said that no military personnel were to involve themselves in any form of politics, including joining a political party. Furthermore, Khomeini emphasized that military leaders should forbid, without exception, the entrance of their subordinates into political practices.<sup>49</sup>

Despite this rhetoric, Khomeini immediately used the IRGC to completely purge the political system in Iran. The first party to feel the might of the new IRGC was the Tudeh Party. This communist party was accused of being followers of Stalin and was vilified by national papers until its leaders were imprisoned. Following the Tudeh Party, the next to feel the might of the new IRGC was the then Prime Minister Bazargan who had tried to persuade Ayatollah Khomeini to not involve the Guards in politics. However, the Prime Minister was forced to resign following the hostage crisis.<sup>50</sup> The trend continued even after Khomeini's death and the Guards soon succeeded in ousting Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr, the first president of the Islamic Republic. This attack came after Bani-Sadr tried to rein in the Guards' already growing voice in the political arena.<sup>51</sup>

Following Bani-Sadr, Ali Khamenei and Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani both attempted but failed to depoliticize the Guards during their respective presidencies. Rafsanjani even went so far as bribing the IRGC members to stay away from politics; however, this backfired because his bribes were used to fund the IRGC's agenda which was composed of accusing Rafsanjani of being a liberal.<sup>52</sup> The Guards used every source available to their disposal to further their reach.

Even the courts were used to silence the media and other dissenters, starting after Mohammad Khatami took the presidency in 1997. Many papers and magazines, including student publications, were banned throughout Khatami's presidency. Reasons included the amount of criticism that the IRGC was facing due

to its involvement in politics and the belief that intellectuals must respect the Guards because they protect the revolution.<sup>53</sup>

### **Pasdaran Influence Today**

Despite these leaps of political influence, at no time has the IRGC gained so much power and influence as under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The IRGC, particularly the Baseej, helped quell political protests after the disputed presidential election in June 2009. The Guards now hold various political positions throughout Iran. These positions include mayors, cabinet ministers – of commerce, defense, oil, welfare, and justice-, and top leaders at the state-run economic institutions.<sup>54</sup>

The top members of the IRGC are also heavily involved in Iran's nuclear program. Between 2006 and 2007, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, the IRGC commander, Brigadier General Morteza Rezai, the Deputy Commander, as well as the leaders of the naval branch, ground forces – including the al-Quds and the Baseej, had their assets frozen under United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1747.<sup>55</sup> The fact that the UN targeted specific commanders in the resolution shows how deeply entrenched the IRGC is in Iran. The IRGC commands and operates all of Iran's Scud missiles, chemical and biological weapons, and researches new military technologies. Furthermore, the IRGC controls Iran's

defense industry and buys arms and military parts through many cover organizations.<sup>56</sup>

With all this power within its own county, along with its fanatical dogma, it is no wonder that outside global institutions, such as the UN, are having such a difficult time keeping a rein on the IRGC. Now that Iraq is in a transition phase and the US public and government is insisting on a pullout from the region, Iran is taking up the role of directing the footsteps of that nation.

## **CHAPTER 3 – THE IRANIAN REVOLUTIONARY GUARD**

### **CORPS IN IRAQ**

The IRGC is still very much supportive of Khomeini's dream, including the idea of exporting the revolution throughout the world. With this belief and the current unstable nature of Iraq, it comes as no surprise that Iran has begun to move into the state. This influence has taken many forms, including political, military, economic, and religious. In addition, the IRGC uses its previous political ties, the media, and religious rhetoric to spread its belief. Both the IRGC and the United States acknowledge that US forces cannot be in Iraq forever while Iran is right next door.<sup>57</sup> This poses a threat to Iraq's attempt at becoming fully autonomous due to Iran's constant and pervasive reach.

#### **Why IRGC Vies For Power**

The reasons for Iran's interest in Iraq are speculative; however, all are plausible. Iran could use Iraq as a buffer zone, or as an additional ally, should any outside powers decide to attack. If the IRGC can create enough of an influence in Iraq and keep it weak enough to prevent another powerful dictator – who disagrees with them – from coming to power, then Iraq will be under Iran's thumb.<sup>58</sup> Politically, if Iran took over Iraq, they could propagate the religious factor,

suggesting that this new control is a sacred mandate and legitimizes the role of the Iranian government as it stands, and thus has the right to crush any calls for political reform. Essentially, Iran's interest in Iraq is a mixture of domestic interest and religious aspirations.

Considering their similar Shiite beliefs, Iran could hope to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. Even Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is from Iran.<sup>59</sup> Also, two of the holiest cities in the Shiite sect of Islam, Najaf and Karbala, are located in Iraq. Better relations would encourage more pilgrimage between the two nations.<sup>60</sup> Also, due to the Iran-Iraq War, there were many exiles in Iran, making, Iran's influence even stronger with those ex-refugees, many whom hold prominent positions in the Iraqi government today.

Lastly, Iran feels overtly threatened with the United States' influence in the region. However, the IRGC has to be very careful in how it approaches the situation. On the one hand, it does not want all out civil war because that could spill over into their borders. Furthermore, a civil war could also recreate the same situation as the Iran-Iraq War in which many refugees poured into Iran. A rise in refugees could further destabilize the Iranian Kurdish and Arab citizens.<sup>61</sup> In addition, although the IRGC does not want an Iraq that is friendly with the West, it is to its benefit to want democracy in Iraq because of the Shiite majority.<sup>62</sup> Through the different tactics demonstrated below, one can see how it is attempting to navigate this narrow path.

## **Military Influence**

Due to Saddam Hussein's early ousting of Shiites to Iran, coupled with Shiites who left of their own accord, Iran had many Iraqi exiles and refugees living within its borders until the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.<sup>63</sup> The Quds force was a main reason for the creation of the Badr Corps, which were made up of Iraqi exiles in Iran and operated under the Quds.<sup>64</sup> The Badr Corps received around \$20 million a year to support the revolution and conduct operations with the purpose of assassinating Saddam Hussein.<sup>65</sup> Though the war was a military failure on both sides, leaving one million dead and roughly three million wounded<sup>66</sup>, Iran continued holding an influence on the Badr Corps in Iraq.

After the 1991 Gulf War, the Badr were called upon to recruit members from the various Shiite exiles. The Badr Corps also created network which they used to ease smuggling people and arms into Iraq, still with the overall purpose of assassinating Hussein and destroying the *Mujahideen-e Khalq*, which were Iranian exiles who cooperated with the Ba'ath Party because they believed in overthrowing the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>67</sup> In 2003, under tremendous outside pressure, the Badr Corps became the Badr Organization; however, it continued to receive monetary support from Iran and numbered around 10,000 men.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, many Badr members were given positions in the Iraqi government and some incorporated into the Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>69</sup>

The Badr Organization is now acting as a police force in many areas in southern Iraq, such as Basra.<sup>70</sup> With the growing amount of sectarian violence between the Sunnis and Shiites, the monetary assistance from Iran to the Badr causes a major problem; furthermore, the Badr have also been pursuing former Ba'athist leaders, both military and political, in order to exact revenge for the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>71</sup> If a civil war were to erupt, it would cause Iraq to remain weak; thus being more malleable towards Iranian interests.<sup>72</sup> However, to reiterate, it is more beneficial for Iraq to be somewhat stable as to prevent the civil war from spilling over into Iran's borders.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has supported many other groups as well, namely the *Jaish al Mahdi* (JAM), the personal militia of Moqtada al-Sadr – a radical Shiite cleric in Iraq.<sup>73</sup> JAM was trained by the Lebanese Hezbollah, particularly Ali Mussa Daqduq, who also received training by the IRGC, and after 2004, the IRGC began giving JAM “explosively formed penetrators” (EFPs) and other weapons such as rocket-propelled grenades and rocket launchers.<sup>74</sup> In April 2004, JAM engaged US troops both in Baghdad and Najaf while attempting to annihilate the Sunni population.<sup>75</sup> EFPs are especially dangerous because they are shaped like copper disks and can penetrate heavy armor by the sheer power of the explosives.<sup>76</sup> JAM also started to be trained in Iran by the Hezbollah as well as the Quds.<sup>77</sup> A reason for Iran to furnish such support for JAM is that this militia has

become the scapegoat for insurgent sectarian violence, thus taking attention away from the Badr Organization and making it seem less responsible.<sup>78</sup>

After 2006, the Quds separated the Iraq militias into cells, similar to Hezbollah. Qais Khazali was chosen to head the new network because of his close relations with Sadr. The new organization was named Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), and Ali Mussa Daqduq was the middleman between the AAH and the Quds. Funding for this new network was generous, being somewhere between \$750,000 to 3 million dollars in arms and training.<sup>79</sup> The 2007 killing of five US soldiers at the Karbala Provincial Joint Coordination Center, in addition to the kidnapping of five British citizens in Baghdad, was attributed to the AAH. After the attack, much evidence was gathered, which resulted in the arrest of Khazali and Daqduq. Three of the kidnapped men were killed and Peter Moore was held by the Quds force for two years before his release. The condition of his freedom was the release of Qais al-Khazali, a leading cleric in the AAH. It was found that Moore was a target of the IRGC and the AAH because he was installing a system that would show how a large amount of international aid was in fact being used to fund Iranian militia groups in Iraq.<sup>80</sup> The attacks continued through 2008. And even today, there are still insurgents who continue to go to Iran for training, then return to Iraq and attack both the US soldiers and other Iraqis who do not comply.<sup>81</sup>

## Political Influence

Along with military influence, Iran has been exerting its political arm in Iraq. Because of the rush of Iraqi exiles returning after Saddam, coupled with the debaathification process led by the US, Iran has managed to become extremely involved in Iraqi politics. Under Lieutenant Paul Bremer, the 2003 debaathification process had two steps. First, it made the Ba'ath Party illegal and dismissed roughly some 30,000 ex-Ba'athists from their government positions; second, it purged the Iraqi military of roughly 500,000 members.<sup>82</sup> Although Bremer attempted to dismantle the debaathification commission after claiming it was implemented unjustly and poorly, Iraq's interim government decided to keep the debaathification process in place.<sup>83</sup>

Interestingly enough, however, Iran has been favorable towards the democratic process in Iraq. Their support is only harnessed because, since Iraq is mostly Shiite – roughly 60% -,<sup>84</sup> the IRGC understands that a democratic process would easily launch the Shiites into power. Indeed, in 2005, the Shiites did gain political power under the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), who won 128 of the 275 seats in December of 2005.<sup>85</sup> The UIA includes the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), previously known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and the Da'wa (Islamic Call) party, which is very pro-Iranian.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, Moqtada al-Sadr is included in the UIA, and since Sadr is currently in Iran studying to become an Imam<sup>87</sup>, his inclusion is beneficial to the IRGC.

The ISCI was created under Ayatollah Khomeini and control the Badr Brigades, or the Badr Organization as it is now referred to. During the Iran-Iraq War, the ISCI fought for the Iranian side. The previous ISCI leader, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, returned from Iran in 2003 and was also the head of the UIA. Al-Hakim was pushing for an autonomous southern province in Iraq, specifically for Shiites. Iran fully supported this legislation because an autonomous Shiite area would theoretically turn to Iran for any economic and political assistance.<sup>88</sup> His son, Sayyed Ammar al-Hakim now heads the party. Another member of ISCI was Humam Hamoudi, the Chair of Constitutional Committee, who worked closely with al-Hakim. Finally, the former commander of the Badr Brigade, Bayan Jabr, was a senior member of the UIA and served as the Ministry of the Interior. He served as a member of the ISCI bureau in Lebanon and Syria after living in exile in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>89</sup>

Former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari and current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki are both members of the Da'wa Party. Al-Jaafari was the head of the Da'wa Party during his term as Prime Minister and had spent ten years in exile in Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, though he later moved to London.<sup>90</sup> Nouri al-Maliki was a resistance fighter in Iraq during Saddam's reign, although he fled after learning of several assassination attempts planned for him. Even so, there were still attempts on his life. He first went to Jordan, then to Syria, and lastly to Iran in 1982 where he lived for eight years. In 1990 he returned to Syria until 2003, after

Saddam was deposed. Prior to his appointment as the Prime Minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki was a member of the Debaathification Committee from 2003 to 2005 and the Head of the Defense Committee from 2005 to 2006. <sup>91</sup>

In 2005, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, called Iran a “brother country” and had been cooperating with Iran in order to root out terrorism and deepen relations between the two states.<sup>92</sup> The relationship between Iran and Iraq is expected to grow according to almost all leaders on both sides. The concern is whether or not Iraq will continue to maintain its autonomy despite the increasingly expanding influence of Iran.

## **Economic Influence**

In addition to military and political influence, Iran and the IRGC have been extensively working on become inexorably intertwined with the Iraqi economy. This has included the influx of Iranian goods into the Iraqi economy and the “donation” of funds towards Iraqi reconstruction, while providing energy to certain key areas in Iraq.

Due to the tremendous economic sanctions in Iraq during the 1990’s, the Iraqi economy had been on a downward spiral, which had been exacerbated by sectarian violence throughout the country throughout the stay of the US troops.<sup>93</sup> When the United States took over in 2003, the US Coalition Provisional Authority

opened the economy by suspending duties and tariffs on imported goods in hopes of jump-starting the devastated economy. Unfortunately, this opened up the Iraqi economy to Iran, which wasted no time sweeping into the nation.<sup>94</sup>

In a short time, Iran has become Iraq's largest trading partner. In 2006, Iranian exports were over \$1.8 billion – a large leap from \$800 million just two years earlier. Assisting this increase was the free-trade zone in the south, particularly Basra, where the rial – Iranian currency – is used.<sup>95</sup> A commonly cited statistic in 2007 showed that since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the trade between Iran and Iraq has grown steadily by 30% a year.<sup>96</sup> By 2009, bilateral trade was estimated at \$4 billion.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, Iran has also subsidized its exports to Iraq, which lowers the price of Iranian goods in Iraqi markets. While Iran is subsidizing its exports to Iraq, at the same time it has also raised import tariffs to 150%, making it impossible to maintain a trade balance.<sup>98</sup>

However, these estimates are somewhat uncertain due to the lack of numbers being released from Iran.<sup>99</sup> The Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister of Finance, Barham Salih, claims this is a problem because it is a one-way trade. The Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, a Kurd, claims that there are a number of agreements between Iran and Iraq regarding trade, energy, oil and pilgrims.<sup>100</sup> Most Shiite political leaders in Iraq today say that this relationship will only strengthen. Iran is attempting to double trade to \$8 billion by the end of 2010.<sup>101</sup>

Even today, however, Baghdad is overrun with Iranian air conditioners, books, busses, rice, and bricks - something Iraq was renowned for.<sup>102</sup> Basra alone imports \$45 million worth of a variety of goods including construction materials, fish, carpets and spices, according to Muhammad al-Waeli, the governor of Basra.<sup>103</sup> In many cases, Iran is truly providing products at a cheap price that Iraqi's could not otherwise afford. However, in the case of bricks, for example, Iran is undermining local businesses, which is destroying job creation in the fragile nation. Many Iraqi businessmen and manufacturers feel that this is not fair because Iraq is not strong enough to compete without enacting protectionist policies.

In Nahrwan, a city located just northeast of Iraq, many brick factories are going out of business due to imports from Iran.<sup>104</sup> One brick factory owner, Dhary al-Shimary, is extremely worried about having to shut down his factory again. Though he was able to hire back many of his workers, the factory was attacked by Al-Qaeda and most of his transformers were damaged. Shimary is worried about what his workers will do if they are jobless. With a 28% unemployment rate for males between 15 and 29, may worry about how they will feed their families. One worker claims that he used to work for Sunni insurgents and plant explosives, not for shared beliefs, but because they paid him well.<sup>105</sup>

Electricity is another crucial necessity for Iraq and it may cause some to think Iran is being selfless towards its Shiite neighbors; however, the reliance of Iraq on Iranian energy only gives Iran another way to manipulate the populace.

Basra was shown this first hand when, in 2008, Iran shut down the electricity to Basra following the Iraqi's government attempt at a crackdown. Even though they did eventually restart the electricity, the Iraqi government has still to transfer the electricity sector back to Iraq.<sup>106</sup>

The border cities along the Iran-Iraq border are where much of Iranian funds can be seen in the form of electricity. According to the Iraqi electricity minister, Karm Wahid, Basra, the second largest city in Iraq, will soon have the capacity to draw 250 megawatts of power from Iran for only 5.2 cents per kilowatt-hour. Dilaya Province, which is northeast of Baghdad, imports 120 megawatts for a slightly higher price.<sup>107</sup> Altogether, as of 2009, Iran supplies 750 Megawatts of electricity to Iraq as well as supplying fuel to several power stations in Iraq.<sup>108</sup>

Iran has also become very involved in the banking system in Iraq, so much so that in 2007 Bank Melli opened a branch in Baghdad. Bank Melli has been tagged by the US Treasury as being the main bank that purchases materials for Iran's nuclear ambitions and funds the Quds Force, which, in turn, funds the insurgent militias in Iraq.<sup>109</sup> Other banks involved are the Tejarat Bank and the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI), who have opened branches in Sulaymaniyah, and several others have opened in Karbala, Najaf and Baghdad.<sup>110</sup> Could it be that the Iraqi populace simply does not know about the connection of these banks to the insurgent militias in their country? And if they did know, what could cause them to ignore this connection? For the government it could be a matter of going along with

Iran for the time being, considering their unstable position; however, for the people it could just be a matter of necessity, much like the brick worker who worked for the Sunni insurgents.

### **Religious/Social Influence**

Finally, one of the most difficult aspects to combat when it comes to curbing influences is the religious ties between Iran and Iraq. With only four Middle Eastern countries holding a Shiite majority, and only three having a Shiite-led government, similar religious beliefs form close ties among those of the same faith; however, these ties are being manipulated by Iran to spread their power.

Looking back to the Iran-Iraq War, Iran took in many Shiite exiles, and so, was sympathetic to their cause in Iraq. Also, Iran has donated a considerable amount of funds towards the reconstruction of Najaf and Karbala, two of the holiest cities in Shiite belief. Najaf was provided with \$20 million a year in order to improve the city for tourists. Karbala received even more funds and was part of a \$100 million project to renovate the area around the shrines of Imam Hussein and his brother, Abu Fadhil al-Abbas – prominent figures in Shiite Islam.<sup>111</sup>

Two schools of thought rule Shiite Islam regarding politics – Quietism and the Khomeinist tradition. As their name suggests, the Quietists believe that clerics should never become involved in politics. Instead, clerics should focus on leading

their followers. The Najaf Hawza, the older Shiite seminary, adheres to this tradition.<sup>112</sup> Conversely, those who follow the Khomeinist tradition believe that clerics should control everything, including politics, religious and social matters. The Qom Hawza follows the Khomeinist vision<sup>113</sup>, as Qom is the city in which Khomeini lived during the periods he was in Iran. The rebirth of Najaf as a center for Shiite learning has brought a challenge to Qom and to the Iranian Shiite belief about religious control of the government. Thus, by investing in the reconstruction of Najaf and Karbala, Iran could be planning on controlling what emerges out of the competing hawzas.<sup>114</sup>

Also, media is a common way in which governments try to influence and control the populace, particularly in lesser democratic nations. The IRGC, however, has taken to spreading its message in Iraq through its own television stations. Iran has a channel that broadcasts in Iraq called Al-Alam. It began in 2003 and broadcasted propaganda which compared US coalition troops to the Israelis in Palestine. Al-Kawthar, which started up in 1997, is another Iranian station that broadcasts in Iraq. Previously known as Al-Sahar, it is mostly neutral on Iraqi affairs; however, the station is extremely anti-Israel and refers to it as the “usurping entity”. Not much better is said about the United States due to the station’s support of the Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestine’s Hamas.<sup>115</sup>

Social influence in Iraq is tied to religious influence but has more immediate visible repercussions. For instance, parts of the IRGC have infiltrated southern

Iraqi cities and are enforcing Sharia. They are forcing women to wear hijab, as well as beating and/or killing unaccompanied women or couples that are not related to one another.<sup>116</sup> Though religious in intent, the IRGC is destabilizing the current social standards of many Iraqis and gearing them towards acceptance of and strict adherence to Sharia law.

It is clear that Iran is entrenching itself in the creation of the new Iraq. Even though President Mahmoud Ahmadienijad said that Tehran has “one soul in two bodies”, and went onto say that Iran is fully supportive of a democratic Iraq, it is highly possible that this statement is only valid as long as Iraq gives unilateral support to Iran and the IRGC in their endeavors.

## CHAPTER 4 – ALL IS NOT LOST

### Present Pockets of Resistance

Despite mounting concerns regarding Iraq's future as an independent and self-sufficient nation, there are still those who resist the IRGC's encroachment. Many Sunnis are extremely wary and sensitive about the IRGC's growing influence. Their concern is both due to their minority status and because, as some insurgent militias have shown, Sunnis are being singled out for victimization – particularly the ex-Ba'athists. Iranian influence only serves to heighten the tension between the factions and cause Sunnis to fear that they will become the silenced minority in Iraq. Some Shia's are equally upset at the reach of Iran's hand within Iraq, though for different reasons than the Sunnis. Although they share the same faith, Iraqi Shiites are Arab, unlike their Persian counterparts in Iran. This divide has been present for centuries and continues to be a primary divisive issue.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, many Shiites disagree with the theocratic dictatorship in Iran and are infuriated with the IRGC's attempts to infiltrate their country and enforce their code of law. Although Sharia law is a Muslim code, not all Muslims believe it should be the enforced justice code.

Lastly, there is still much resentment and anger remaining from the Iran-Iraq War. Although not many Iraqis believed in fighting for Saddam Hussein, many of them lost relatives in the war and harbor that loss to this day. To be aware of an

insidious Iranian takeover, even though it is not military, is to perceive that the Iran-Iraq War is being lost. Although powerful, these pockets of resistance are not enough to push back Iran or the IRGC. The Iraqi government has to take action in order to secure its autonomy. There are choices, of course, on how the government should approach this task – whether through military, political or economic means. However, any of these options or combinations will be met with fierce resistance and, therefore require preparation. These preparations will require the assistance not only from the international community, but also the cooperation of the government leaders – a difficult task when one considers how many of the members still harbor loyalty towards Iran.

## **Military Options**

Iraq has been taking steps to stabilize the nation with the help of the United States and partially from Iran. However, Iraq has not resolved to take direct military action against Iran due to many reasons. The most daunting reason is that Iran could incite more violence should they feel threatened by Iraq. Conversely, since 2007 the United States has officially been searching for IRGC members in Iraq, after President Bush admitted that he did order the missions to combat the IRGC and end their aid to insurgents.<sup>118</sup> Unfortunately, President Bush also declined a request from the Iraq Study Group – a ten-person bipartisan group

funded by Congress to assess the situation in Iraq and ways to resolve the many issues surrounding the new government -<sup>119</sup> to open negotiation with Tehran in order to find a common ground on how to end sectarian violence in Iraq.<sup>120</sup>

Instead, the US and Iraq have employed some of the militias with the purpose of quelling the violence. Specifically, the United States has agreements with the Sunni militia named al-Sahwa<sup>121</sup>, and the Shiite militia named The Wolf Brigade.<sup>122</sup> Both brigades are powerful forces in Iraq because they are additions to, though not part of, the official army of Iraq. Though this action seems to be a tangible step towards calming the populace of Iraq, the hired brigades have been accompanied by their own internal hassles, and the issue of whether or not they are to be incorporated into the official security forces is raising tensions among several factions in Iraq.<sup>123</sup>

Al-Sahwa (Awakening) was initially formed in order to decrease bloodshed in Azamiyah, a city just north of Baghdad, after a call to arms from a local imam, Sheik Ahmed Taha al Samarrai.<sup>124</sup> Soon after, the US forces took over and formally trained the militia and recruited members from neighboring Sunni clans. These men, roughly 80,000, were receiving about \$300 per month from the US in order to combat al-Qaeda and not attack US troops. Presumably, the latter condition was necessary because the same troops had been fighting against US troops earlier during the invasion. Currently, the Iraqi government has taken over paying the militia. <sup>125</sup>

The Wolf Brigade was started in October 2004 by Abu Walid, a *nom de guerre*. Walid is an ISCI member and a former three-star general. This brigade consists of about 2,000 predominantly young Shiite men from Sadr City.<sup>126</sup> Although they dress much like the Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard, in red berets and olive colored uniforms, they have been performing operations in Mosul against the resident Sunni population. The Wolf Brigade members earn roughly \$400 per month, and though they are not usually paid by the US, there is much cooperation between the two.<sup>127</sup> The Wolf Brigade is so well known in Iraq that, not only do they have their own TV show – *Terrorism in the Grip of Justice* - which shows them capturing insurgents and questioning them, yet allegedly the US troops use their name as a threat should any prisoners refuse to cooperate. This militia is extremely controversial, especially since the execution of six Sunni clerics has further heightened tensions.<sup>128</sup> The television show, which appears on a US-funded Iraqi station, has been heavily criticized by the international community because it violates the Geneva Convention by publicly humiliating detainees.<sup>129</sup>

A potential problem with the two brigades is that they are based on sectarian or ethnic identities. Therefore, it could be construed as discrimination if one of the militias entered an area populated with a different sect or ethnicity. Due to their often tribal identities, it is questionable whether or not they are loyal to the national government.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, not all of these militias can be officially integrated into the security forces of Iraq. Many of the Sunni brigades worry that

they will not be among the chosen ones to be integrated because of their different faiths.<sup>131</sup> This could lead to civil war because the Sunnis would feel disenfranchised. Conversely, if there were Sunni brigades integrated, it could also spark sectarian warfare among other groups. Kurds would be especially worried due to their previous relationship with Sunni forces.<sup>132</sup>

Whichever brigades are left out of the integration process will also lose faith in the government, according to the Iraqi Defense Minister, and could also give these groups, which are now armed, a reason to rebel.<sup>133</sup> In October 2010, rumors began about the al-Sahwa forces defecting to al-Qaeda because of their non-integration into the security forces.<sup>134</sup> These rumors have been strongly denied by the leaders who claim that al-Sahwa is there to rid Iraq of terrorists and have already sacrificed a large number of their members in their effort.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, many of the al-Sahwa members have been integrated across various agencies while others have been recruited for civilian jobs within the government.<sup>136</sup> Clearly Iraq is in an extremely precarious position; however, lacking another option regarding the security of such a large country, it seems that this is the most appropriate choice for today.

Iraq could pull these militias and brigades together in order to combat Iranian interference, particularly in southern Iraq, where Iranian influence is most prominent. There are calls for Iraq to cleanse the south of the Quds force and Iran in general, as well as petitions circulating calling for a UN investigation into

Iranian meddling in Iraq. The initial call came from Sheik Jasim al-Kadhim, president of the Association of Nationalist and Independent Iraqi Tribes, who claims that the only solution for Iraq is the ousting of the encroaching Iranian regime. The petition has thus far been signed by 14 members of the clergy, upwards of 600 sheiks and roughly 25,000 women of southern Iraq.<sup>137</sup> Additionally, over 300,000 Iraqi Shiites signed another petition to end Iranian terrorism in Iraq.<sup>138</sup> In order to combat the Iranian influence in the south, the Iraqi government could dispatch joint forces made up of official security forces and Shiite brigades – theoretically avoiding sectarian violence.

## **Political Options**

Along with military steps that the Iraqi government could take to curb the influence of the IRGC, there are also political steps. Of course, this requires navigating a narrow path that could be potentially costly to several members of the Iraqi government, especially when many of them are Shiite and have, thus far, been loyal to Iran. Within the political arena of Iraq, there are already those who disagree with the pervasive Iranian influence, including current Prime Minister Nouri Al- Maliki. Although Maliki has praised Iran previously for its help in reconstructing Iraq, as well as combating terrorism<sup>139</sup>, Maliki has harbored resentment towards Iran.

In Maliki's case in particular, after fleeing to Iran to avoid being assassinated by Hussein, Maliki began to work for the IRGC who was engaging in attempting to assassinate Hussein and topple the Sunni government during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>140</sup> During one of his covert runs, he needed a clearance to get into a border area; however, he was sent on a twelve-hour drive to speak to another official who promptly denied his application. Later, when Saddam was threatening to airstrike the refugee town of Ahwaz – where many of the Iraqi refugees had fled to during one of Saddam's many purges of the Da'wa Party – Maliki, a member of said party, had to transport his wife, who had just given birth and had an IV in her arm, to another city since no Iranian would come to help.<sup>141</sup> Events like those have caused Maliki to have a deep distrust for the Iranians.

The Da'wa Party, although Shiite, is an Iraqi party. Iran took Da'wa Party members in and gave them an abandoned oil camp near the Iranian city, Ahwaz, to make their home. Other Da'wa members who defected from Saddam's Army military trained the nonmilitary refugees.<sup>142</sup> However, the Da'wa members and Iran came to an impasse when the Iranians continued to try to take over the guerillas and lead the war against Saddam. Another crucial point was that the refugees disliked the Islamic government that Iran had. Out of this conflict, the ISCI was born, with some members of Da'wa joining but most refusing and/or dropping out. Maliki was one of those who refused.<sup>143</sup>

Though Iran does exert influence, there are Iraqi leaders who are less than thrilled at the prospect of taking orders from Iran, particularly because of the Arab-Persian divide, but also because Iran still pursues its own national interests with very little regard to Iraq despite the shared Shiite faith. In return, Iraq has begun using Iran as a threat to its Arab neighbors in order to gain some benefits. Since becoming Prime Minister of Iraq, Maliki has been attempting to put further separate himself from Iran. In 2004 and 2005, many Shiite politicians were running for government positions on the platform of independence from Iran because they were aware that their constituency base would be eroded should they not separate from Iran.<sup>144</sup>

ISCI had also been doing well in elections throughout Iraq, but in the January 2009 elections the Da'wa Party managed to defeat the ISCI in local elections.<sup>145</sup> With tensions rising, Iran has been insisting that Maliki work with the ISCI.<sup>146</sup> Though Maliki is willing to have a coalition, it is unlikely that he will allow Iran to dictate the direction the coalition will go. In addition, a coalition with Maliki leading the way just may help separate Iraq's interests from Iran. Despite the ties between Iraq's political parties and Iran, the ISCI and the Da'wa Party do remain nationalist and thus, are likely to resist direct, or indirect, orders from Iran. If all else fails, Iraq has political checks in place to prevent religion from being the main source of law in Iraq.<sup>147</sup>

However, continuing to state their opposition to the Iranian government being entrenched in Iraqi affairs could prove troublesome for the stability of the nation. The more Iraq tries to assert its independence from Iran, the more Iranians can fuel the fire of the armed conflicts in Iraq to cause even more instability in this fragile government.<sup>148</sup> Tehran has supplied weapons to the Shiite insurgency, but has not provided many sophisticated weapons, nor does it attack US forces nearly as often as it attack Sunni militias.<sup>149</sup>

## **Economic Options**

Economically, Iraq has to take many steps to curb Iranian influence. As shown in Chapter 3, Iran has become entrenched in the Iraqi economy, either through providing reconstruction funds or supplying electricity. Although Iraq has benefitted from these donations from the IRGC, it has also indebted them to the IRGC. For this reason, Iraq has to try to diversify its incoming funding for reconstruction.

One step Iraq could take is to appeal to the United Nations and other states to assist it with reconstruction. Although this would put Iraq in debt to several nations – though debt is unavoidable at this point – Iraq would not be beholden to one state to repay its debts. Thus, one state could not control the direction that Iraq takes. Compromises would have to be made and Iraq would be inclined to be a more

centrist country, as far as policy making. However, most immediate is Iraq's need to stop receiving its electricity from Iran. As Iran has already proved, it is willing to turn the electricity off, should Iraq divert from Iranian plans. Iraq has to reconstruct or build new electricity grids and control the electricity itself.

Iraq should also curb the Iranian influence by reinstating tariffs on imported goods – particularly from Iran, but for the sake of fairness, to every nation that wants to sell its product in Iraq. Perhaps Iraq could lower taxes to nations who helped the reconstruction process, so it can insulate its domestic businesses in order to make them strong again. Iran is undermining the local businesses, causing Iraq to be increasingly more dependent on it and its products because they are sold at such low prices. The head of the Kurdistan Contractors' Association, Nowruz al-Khaffaf, says that he wants the Iraqi government to protect local farmers by limiting Iranian imports.<sup>150</sup>

Realistically speaking, however, it is highly unlikely that Iraq can completely disregard the role of Iran in the state, nor is that a goal that Iraq wants to achieve. Therefore, there are steps that both Iraq and Iran can take to achieve a medium that can reasonably please all parties. Some suggest that the United States should form a working relationship with Iran in order to promote and keep stability in Iraq. By no means should the United States ignore Iran's goals in Iraq. However, considering the extensive violence and instability present in the nation, assistance from neighboring countries would be invaluable.<sup>151</sup> In addition, as suggested above,

the United States should help form a coalition among all of Iraq's neighbors which would serve as an informal committee in order to advise the blossoming Iraqi government and which would brief the committee on a regular basis. <sup>152</sup>

## CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

Understanding how the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps – and Iran as a whole – is affecting Iraq is crucial in understanding what path Iraq must take in order to combat it. It is also invaluable for other nations to understand the ongoing effects in order to be able to assist Iraq, should they request it. Assistance, whether military, political, or economic, may have to be an option for Iraq due to its current instability coupled with the immense strength of the IRGC. However, this is not to imply that the United States is solely responsible for this assistance although it may be partially necessary for a time.

Iran has been training members for the IRGC in its own country for 32 years. Between the Quds, the Baseej, and the three branches of IRGC forces, Iran is strongly entrenched in Iranian life. The Baseej militia, in particular, has had the most domestic effect. Indoctrination begins at a very young age, with the Pupils.<sup>153</sup> Thus, the IRGC ensures its ideas are incorporated at every level of a citizen's life. As a whole, the IRGC is especially powerful today since President Ahmadinejad has appointed several key members to state-level and gubernatorial positions.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, several members of the IRGC have been specifically targeted by UN resolutions as having key positions in Iran's quest for nuclear capabilities.<sup>155</sup> Alternatively, the Quds force has had great power outside of Iran's borders, carrying

out international missions and training others who engage in terrorist activities, such as Hezbollah and JAM, under Sadr. The Quds have been especially successful in causing further unrest in Iraq, through funding several Shiite militias and providing several weapons.<sup>156</sup>

Furthermore, the Quds are using Shiite militias not only to attack Sunnis but also to combat US soldiers, who are compared to Israelis that occupy Palestine. Many of the militias in Iraq being funded by the IRGC are receiving between half a million and 3 million dollars per year for arms and training.<sup>157</sup> It is increasingly difficult for the Iraqi military and the United States to combat the increasing number of Quds members in Iraq, as well as the militias on their payroll.

Politically, Iraq is in a precarious position because many members of the government were once Iraqi exiles in Iran. Therefore, once the debaathification process took place, it was simple to have a Shiite majority win the elections and thus, have many members who feel beholden to Iran. The situation is made even more complex when one considers that Sadr, the radical cleric leader of JAM, is included in the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA)<sup>158</sup> and was a force to be reckoned with in the negotiation arena. The last two Iraqi Prime Ministers, including Nouri al-Maliki, are members of the Da'wa Party.<sup>159</sup> The Da'wa Party was started by Iraqi exiles in Iran and assisted by the Quds until a fall out which split the party into Da'wa and ISCI.<sup>160</sup>

Economically, Iran is doing the most damage to Iraq. Because Iraq does not impose import tariffs, and Iran subsidizes all its exports to Iraq, many of Iraq's domestic industries are failing at a rapid pace. This is especially dangerous because of the spike in unemployment, which significantly heightens the likelihood of Iraqi men joining militias in order to support their families. Furthermore, Iran has opened several banks in cities around Iraq, one of which – Bank Melli – has been tagged as a source of the Quds funding and also the purchaser of materials for Iran's nuclear ambitions.<sup>161</sup>

Iran's control of a good portion of the electricity of Iraq has also caused many problems. Those cities are dependent on Iran to function and, in that situation, it is extremely difficult to combat the IRGC's influence when they can just simply shut the power to entire cities, as Basra was shown.<sup>162</sup> Iranian electricity is also projected to grow in subsequent years, something which Iraq should seek to avoid with fervor. It is crucial for Iraq to have control of its electricity in order to not be forced to subject itself to the IRGC.

Socially, the IRGC is already taking over in many areas of Iraq, particularly the South. Women are being forced to wear hijab and unaccompanied, unmarried couples are being harassed, beaten, or even killed.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, since Iran is funding reconstruction efforts for Najaf and Karbala, it could be attempting to influence what teachings emerge from the many hawzas there by enforcing a more

Khomeinist tradition of involvement in politics as opposed to the Quietist tradition that has been more prominent in Iraq thus far.<sup>164</sup>

Iran is also using the media to influence the views of many Iraqi. Two stations in particular, Al-Alam and Al-Sahar, broadcast in Iraq with anti-US and/or anti-Israel propaganda and both support Hezbollah and Hamas. Although it is difficult to measure how much of an effect the propaganda is having on public opinion, media is always a difficult tool to combat, although it is all too easy to manipulate. Now known as al-Kawthwar, Al-Sahar has been broadcasting as early as 1997. Although it has remained fairly neutral on Iraqi affairs, it is the most vehemently anti-Israeli station out of the two mentioned.<sup>165</sup>

The IRGC is attacking from all sides in Iraq and, despite the assistance from the US, is becoming increasingly troublesome. Although no sources claim that Iraq can be completely free from any Iranian influence, as the country is next door, there are steps that Iraq can take in order to mitigate the level of influence and retain its autonomy. Militarily, Iraq can continue what the United States has done and hire some of the already present militias, such as The Wolf Brigade or Al-Sahwa, to oust the Quds forces from the country.<sup>166</sup> Though this is a risky move, because not all of the militias can be hired permanently into the security forces, at the present time it is a viable choice. However, Iraq will have to find a way to fairly incorporate a few members from each ethnic and religious background to the security forces in order to keep from marginalizing any one group and causing further sectarian violence.

Iraq will also have to attempt to foster stronger nationalistic identities within the members of the government in order to end the loyalties that many have towards Iran. This may be easier to do for some members, such as Maliki, because despite their friendly rhetoric, they may hold some resentment towards Iran. In Maliki's case, his experience at Ahwaz has created his distrust for Iran, and particularly the Quds force.<sup>167</sup>

As mentioned above, Iraq has to acquire and maintain control of all the electricity in the country. However, Iraq also has to take steps in order to combat the Iranian takeover of its economy. The simplest way to achieve this is through import tariffs. Iraq could also achieve this by diversifying where it gets its funding for different projects. For example, it may create incentives for different nations to invest in reconstruction projects by lowering some tariffs, but never so much so that it enables said nation to sell its product for less than the equivalent domestic good.

The case study of Iraq, as it is being affected by the IRGC, is clearly composed of many complicated, interwoven aspects. Each area where the IRGC pushes its influence in affects multiple areas of Iraqi life – such as political, military, economic, and social spheres, as portrayed in the following table:

**Table 1: IRGC Effects on Iraq**

	IRGC Political Influence	IRGC Military Influence	IRGC Religious/Social Influence	IRGC Economic Influence
Iraqi Government	*Government more willing to engage in talks and agreements with IRGC.	*Iraqi government allows IRGC forces in Iraq.	*Shiite government loyal to Iran.	*Iraqi government keeping trade barriers down on Iranian goods.
Iraqi Leaders	*Few leaders willing to speak out against IRGC.	*Iraq reluctant to pursue IRGC members.	*Shiite leaders in Iraq support leaders in Iran.	*Leaders do not pass trade restrictions.
Iraqi Economy	*Economy staying open to endless influx on Iranian goods	*Continued violence makes Iraqi businesses unable to function.	*Changing values affect purchases made by Iraqis.	*Iraqi economy plummeting due to lack of protection for domestic goods.
Iraqi Masses	*Iranian TV stations affecting public perceptions. *Rapid election of Shiite leaders.	*Regions in Iraq overrun by IRGC. *Sectarian violence.	*Marginalized Sunnis. Some Shiites feeling imposed upon as well. *Imposition of Sharia law.	*Local businesses failing due to undercutting by Iranians.

Because of IRGC's ongoing political influence, the Iraqi government is more accepting towards engaging in talks and agreements with Iran. Though this is not necessarily a negative occurrence, it can prove to be detrimental towards Iraq, should Iran gain most of the benefits from the agreements. One such agreement between the nations is assurances that Iraq will prevent the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (MEK) – Iranian exiles in Iraq – from crossing into Iran while Iran prevents terrorists groups from entering Iraq through Iran.<sup>168</sup> However, the agreement is rather one sided given that the Quds are supplying weapons to Iraqi militia groups, thus funding the terrorists that are already present.

In addition, Iran's political influence on Iraqi leaders is proving to have a stronger effect. During Jalal Talabani's presidency, he was able to visit Tehran and meet with President Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.<sup>169</sup> Talabani was the first Iraqi to be able to visit Iran in nearly forty years, fueling US concerns about the growing closeness between the two nations. Many leaders are speaking about how Iran and Iraq will only grow closer and few are speaking out about the growing pervasive Iranian presence.<sup>170</sup>

In the economy, the IRGC's political influence is preventing Iraq from passing legislation that would create protections for Iraq's domestic goods. Although this would be helpful for Iraq to save its economy, it would end Iran's hold on it; thus, it is not conducive to Iranian aspirations. Iran's subsidies on its goods enables

it to have cheaper prices than domestic goods while their import tariff of 150% keeps Iraqi goods out of Iran.<sup>171</sup>

The masses are also affected by the political influence because of the Shiite led government. Shiites voted for Shiites in Iraq during the election and, with a Shiite majority, a Shiite government was elected. Many of the members were previous exiles in Iran. The masses are being affected by the lack of action of the government to protect them against the IRGC's influence. Furthermore, the Iranian TV stations that broadcast anti-Israeli and anti-US propaganda in Iraq only serve to heighten the tensions and influence public opinion towards violence.

The IRGC's military influence in Iraq causes no fewer problems. The Iraqi government has to feel the brunt of the violence the IRGC promotes and funds. Furthermore, with the militias already having significant influence, it is difficult for the Iraqi government to attempt containment or expulsion for fear that said militias will only incite more violence and unrest. Iraqi leaders are aware that the IRGC funded militias could easily cause more instability in Iraq and therefore, are reluctant to induce any major change that may provoke them. Without assistance from other nations, it is unlikely that this pattern will change.

The Iraqi economy is also affected by the military because any instability within a nation is going to cause dramatic change to its economy. The constant violence causes lack of employment and stable income, leading Iraqis to buy the

cheapest goods possible. The cheapest goods in Iraq are Iranian goods due to previously discussed subsidies. In a vicious cycle, the Iraqi public is affected because they must buy cheap Iranian goods, which does not give the economy any chance to grow and stabilize itself.

The religious and social influence that the IRGC is having on Iraq further destabilizes the society by holding power over the Shiite government and causing the leaders of the government to support Iran, one of Iran's goals. The social influence, particularly in the South, may cause a change in social values regarding the economy and causing it to remain weak in comparison to Iran and other surrounding nations. Also, the IRGC has swept into southern Iraq and has begun imposing Sharia law on the citizens.<sup>172</sup> With the effect that the IRGC has had on the government, the Sunni minority is now becoming marginalized, and in some cases targeted, by their own government. The religious aspect of the IRGC is one of the most difficult to combat because a close link exists between those of the Shiite faith due to their persistent minority within the Muslim world.

Finally, the IRGC's economic influence can be felt throughout Iraq. The Iraqi government and leaders are unwilling to combat the economic influence through tariffs due to the lack of strength of Iraq's economy, but also because of the threat of escalating violence by the IRGC. With this lack of protectionist policies, the Iraqi economy continues to plummet, continuing the cycle of dependence upon Iranian goods and services.<sup>173</sup> Many businesses are failing because they cannot compete

with Iranian goods and much of the public is unemployed and willing to work for violent militias if it means they can feed their families.

In attempting to ascertain in what ways the IRGC is influencing Iraq and how much power they already hold, it is daunting to find that their power is continually growing. Furthermore, in trying to find a way to combat the situation, one is only faced with more questions. How can Iraq combat the military influence of Iran without causing more damage to an already unstable economy and public space? How can Iraq diversify its funds for reconstruction so as not to be beholden to Iran? These questions lead one to conjecture about Iraq's future as a nation and its place as an autonomous, self-reliant country in the eyes of the world. Further studies should be undertaken to examine the questions that have arisen from this research. However, one truth will remain: Iraq, and the IRGC, will continue to be a source of much debate and many studies for years to come.

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