

Ideology And Influence Balancing Conservative And Neoconservative Power In The Islamic Republic Of Iran

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IDEOLOGY AND INFLUENCE:
BALANCING CONSERVATIVE AND NEOCONSERVATIVE POWER IN
THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

by

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the *Pasdaran* over the past thirty years has brought the group further away from its original role as a protector of the revolution and closer to a parallel, if not competing, economic, political and social institution. In the last decade, conflict dominating the political landscape of the Islamic Republic of Iran has shifted from being defined primarily by the Reformists (Islamic Left) and the Conservatives (Islamic Right), to a multi-dimensional struggle between the Reformists, Conservatives, and Neo-Conservatives, represented by the IRGC and President Ahmadinejad. The IRGC's defiance against the authority of the clerics, evidenced by President Ahmadinejad's deteriorating relationship with the Supreme Leader, is an indication of a shift in the sources of influence in domestic and foreign policy making and the necessary attempts of the ruling regime to compensate for its loss of control. It appears that the IRGC may be in a position to seriously challenge the authority of the clerics; however, this research hypothesizes that as the organization has evolved parallel to the *velayet-e faqih*, it does not have the necessary autonomy or cohesion to effectively usurp the rule of the clerics. This study proposes that the competitive disunity that has propelled the growth of the IRGC over the past three decades is prohibitive of the collective consolidation of influence necessary to wrest authority from the clerical regime.

For Mom, Dad and Bru, I could not have completed this project without you.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EFP – Explosively Formed Penetrator

GHORB - Gharargah Sazandegi Khatam Alanbia

IED – Improvised Explosive Device

IPC – Iran Petroleum Company

IR – International Relations

IRGC – Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

IRI – Islamic Republic of Iran

JAM - Jaysh al-Mahdi

JBDA - Jihad Al Binna Developmental Association

KAB – Khatam al-Anbiya

LEF – Law Enforcement Force

MIR - Mujahidin of the Islamic Revolution

MKO – Mujahedeen e-Khalq

MODAFL - Ministry of Defense Forces and Logistics

NIOC – National Iranian Oil Company

OPEC – Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

QF – Quds Forces

SBO - Student Basij Organization

SCIRI - Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

SGC - Special Group Criminals

TCI – Telecommunications Company of Iran

UN – United Nation

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On October 11th, 2011, the United States released information revealing a plot by an Iran-born US citizen to assassinate the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to the United States. The report detailed the objectives of the man and his coconspirators, belonging to an organization known as the Quds Force, and immediately unleashed a frenzy of speculation about the role of the Iranian government in the plot. The Quds Force, a branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, is known to operate abroad in covert missions to promote the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹ The Quds Forces commander, Qassem Suleimani, reports directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, leading reporters and analysts to question whether the Iranian government had a direct role in the failed plot on the life of the Saudi Ambassador.² In order to address the question, it would be necessary to determine whether the IRGC and the Quds Forces operate independently of the central government. Where in Iran's complex bureaucracy and executive political structure does power originate? Speculation about the longevity of the clerical regime has naturally followed this question; if the IRGC and the Quds Forces were indeed able to plot the assassination of the Saudi Ambassador without the approval of the chief executive, the Supreme Leader, does it follow that the IRGC has the resources and legitimacy to usurp the clerical authority in Iran?

Thesis Statement

Contemporary analysts describe the ascension of the IRGC and the expansion of its economic and political influence as a silent, or masquerade, coup.³ In an interview following the revelation of the IRGC plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador, noted analyst Fareed Zakaria

stated that what we are seeing is essentially a military takeover of the regime by the IRGC.⁴ The statement is debatable, but the evolution of the organization over the past three decades has indeed brought it further away from its origins as a protector of the revolution and closer to a parallel, if not competing, economic, political and social establishment. This evolution occurred in stages which began with its overshadowing the *Artesh*, the state military, in the 1980s, the growth of its economic ventures and monopoly of reconstruction efforts in the 1990s, and the challenge to both the Islamic Left and Islamic Right political groups beginning in 2003. In the last decade, conflict dominating the political landscape of the Islamic Republic of Iran has shifted from being defined by the Reformists (Islamic Left) and the Conservatives (Islamic Right), to a multidimensional struggle between the Reformists, represented by Mehdi Karrubi and Muhammad Khatami; Principalists, represented by the clerics and the Supreme leader; and Neoconservatives, represented by the IRGC, President Ahmadinejad, and his Chief of Staff, Eshfandiari Mashaei.⁵ The belligerence displayed between all three political institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran is an indication of a shift in the sources of influence in domestic and foreign policy making and the necessary attempts of the ruling regime to compensate for its own loss of control.⁶

Significance

As the report of the assassination plot has illustrated, the operations of the IRGC outside of the borders of Iran are of great significance to the global diplomatic community. The Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution allows the IRGC a broad interpretation of its foreign policy mandate and the organization has chosen from the outset to utilize its resources and influence at

home and abroad to further the goals of the establishment.⁷ While those objectives vary depending on the dominant actors within the IRGC, they consistently involve the ideological and material support of the enemies of the West. As will be discussed in further detail in this research, the goals and interests of the IRGC differ, but the Quds Forces that represent the foreign operations wing of the Pasdaran have left no doubt as to their foreign allegiances. The IRGC directly and indirectly supports terrorist and militant groups and therefore it is vitally important for the United States to take note of the Guard's foreign operation as well as their domestic activities.⁸

Iran's foreign and domestic interests are multidimensional and are influenced at a very deep level by conflicting institutional and individual interests. This is a feature that defines the politics within conservative, neoconservative, reformist and various other political factions. The conflict is epitomized in the combative relationship between the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which culminated in 2011 with President Ahmadinejad boycotting cabinet meetings for almost two weeks.⁹ The Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejad represent competing associations, each seeking to manipulate the political and ideological trajectory of the country in their own favor. At the frontline of the rivalry between neoconservative and conservative interests is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Iranian political and social institutions have evolved over the past thirty years into the contemporary structure which is lacking of a distinct center of power. The necessity for a proper understanding of this trait of Iranian social and political landscape cannot be overemphasized; Western diplomats are arguably justified in their concerns with regard to the nuclear ambitions of

the Islamic Republic of Iran, but a persistent simplistic analysis of the source of power in Iran could potentially lead to impotent measures of reproof. Accumulating economic sanctions, for example, could strengthen the Pasdaran by increasing demand for black market goods that various factions of the group provide, leading to a disproportionate growth of influence and the destabilization of the status quo. What has been called a “velvet revolution” could yet become a violent revolution.¹⁰

Hypothesis

Research Question and Variables

Iran’s pursuit of nuclear capabilities and substandard 2009 presidential elections brought a resurgence of public interest in the United States’ foreign policy towards the nation, leading to a rise in demand for hard facts and data that can explain the sources of leadership and political control in the Islamic Republic. The constant theme in existing analyses is the search for a *center* of power in Iranian politics. Scholars and analysts debate, based on evidence from government reports, local and international media and individual testimonies coming from Iranians themselves, over whether the theocratic rule which dominated domestic and foreign policy in Iran following the Revolution is potentially being challenged by the rise of the praetorian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.¹¹ The dispute is divided along a spectrum of beliefs ranging from those who maintain that the Islamic Republic, including the IRGC, is controlled almost exclusively by the theocratic regime and those who believe that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leverages its economic and social influence to control nearly *all* aspects of domestic and foreign policy. The aim of this research is to qualitatively measure

the influence of the IRGC and the degree of autonomy that it has from the clerical regime by studying the evolution of the Guards and the role that individuals, business and groups within the association play in public policy, economy, defense and society.

Internal conflict in Iranian politics is evidenced in media reports beginning in 2009; the best example perhaps coming from the unconcealed hostility between Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad. Iran is facing a shift in sources of political influence but the trajectory of this change is not headed towards a center of power; rather, it is being re-diversified among the various political factions, many of which exist under the umbrella of the association of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This study makes the argument that, while the IRGC does hold a significant degree of legitimacy and autonomy in Iranian domestic and foreign policy making, it does not possess the organizational infrastructure or political homogeneity necessary to organize a coup against the clerics. In this study, the autonomy, legitimacy and unity of the IRGC are measured in material, financial and social capital.

The factional divisiveness and decentralization of power in the IRGC contributes to its effectiveness as an organization and the Guards' rate of growth over the years can be attributed to this competitive disunity. However, the factional nature of the IRGC that has catalyzed the growth of the group's influence over the past three decades is prohibitive of consolidating influence to unseat the clerical regime. The IRGC holds vast amounts of influence in the form of economic and military leverage; however, the organization's political factions are not cohesive in their ideology, policy or constituency base. As factionalized as the Guards are politically, they are unable to unify their social capital in order to gain the autonomy necessary to successfully

run the Islamic Republic. IRGC's longevity is more likely to be guaranteed in the status quo system in which the organization exercises its political influence through the economic and military means available to it instead of seeking control of the executive branch of government.

Research Design

The scope of the material covered in this research will be limited to the study of interactions between the neoconservative IRGC and the conservative Clerical regime. This does not suggest that Iranian foreign and domestic policy making is bipolar in nature; many other existing institutions in Iran compete regularly in the political arena. In studying the distribution of power between the two major political institutions, this study will compare the political, social, economic and military leverage of each group as mediating or fundamental mechanisms affecting the balance of power. These variables will be examined through the longitudinal analysis of the evolution of the clerical regime and the IRGC as both demonstrate themselves to be complex and adaptable.

This study will conclude with a qualitative analysis based on the collective variables to support the hypothesis that the IRGC does not possess significant cohesion as an institution to pose a unified threat to *velayet-e faqih*. As this study is qualitative in nature, data will be gathered from a wide variety of sources including but not limited to industry and politics journals, existing published books, local and international periodicals.

Theoretical Framework

The study of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) necessitates an understanding of the development, evolution and function of the institution as both an autonomous and a socially conditioned entity. Institutional theories have been present in the study of political science for centuries, with more recent theories of new institutionalism emerging at the turn of the century. The perspectives and emphases of each paradigm of thought vary greatly to the point of being overly complex in the pragmatic interpretation of the actual case studies. It is for this reason that the following chapters examining the IRGC as an association of interests will attempt to incorporate all understandings of the nature of the organization. We must, nevertheless, tread briefly into theoretical territory for the purpose of explaining the need to study the institutional nature of the IRGC above theoretical bias.

The objective study of institutionalism has at its foundation the basic understanding that social and political life is modeled not only on the aggregated actions and worldviews of individuals, but by institutions as well.¹² It stands to reason, therefore, that institutions play a key role in defining the direction of a political system as it evolves over time. While no individual event or decision can be the sole causal mechanism resulting in the contemporary political structure of any one state, it is an intriguing exercise nonetheless to study the evolution of a nation state through the lens of institutional influence. Institutions evolve in a variety of ways, some through bold policy making and abrupt change and others through gradual growth of influence. Most institutional theorists maintain that institutions emerge as a by-product of competition for influence, acting as a solution to social and political conflict and developing in the context of struggle for power.¹³ Though this conflict visibly influences the development of

the institutions themselves, it more importantly shapes the evolution of the political system in which they function.

The following chapters on the sources of influence within the IRGC illustrate the evolution of the group from a policy enforcing organization to one that directly influences the politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The study will be conducted through a historical analysis of the three decades of domestic policy following the Revolution of 1979 as well as the IRGC's mandate to export the Revolution abroad and will investigate the different approaches that the institution has used to realize their various interests. This study will examine the role of the IRGC in three different potential positions of influence with the objective of demonstrating that the organization has emerged in recent decades from a position of enforcing the policy of the bureaucratic state to a position of not only influencing, but directing policy making.

One of the new Islamic regime's immediate priorities following the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran in 1979 was the abolition of former institutions that reflected the detested monarchic tyranny and the consolidation of social, economic and political groups that would support the Islamic State and the rule of the clerics. It was in this post-conflict climate that the IRGC was created as a *policy implementing organization*, tasked with maintaining the bureaucratic and judicial infrastructure to enforce compliance with policies made by other institutions within the state. Over the years the IRGC grew not only in membership, but in economic and military strength, evolving into a *policy influencing organization* as it influenced which issues are brought to the attention of policy makers, guided the means of implementation, and provided recommendations for the creation or modification of policies.¹⁴ Of increasing concern to US foreign policy makers and diplomats has been the development of the IRGC over

the past ten years into what appears to be a *policy-making association*; one that formulates state policies through formal and informal channels and interprets existing and developing policies, setting the precedence for implementation.¹⁵ As the following chapters examine the thirty years following the Revolution, the IRGC will be examined in the context of its policy interests, capabilities for policy enforcement or making, and the tangible influence as the product of the interests and capabilities of the organization.

Literature Review

Existing literature on the politics, society and economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is far from lacking. The 1979 Revolution threw Iran into the West's foreign policy spotlight and also brought an abundance of exiles and immigrants from the country, carrying with them an understanding of the IRI that few could rival with second hand knowledge. Scholars and journalists that study Iranian politics traditionally focus on the clerical regime. Media and publications up until about 2005 had been mostly concerned with understanding the influence of the Supreme Leader and clerics on the country and many of these perspectives carry the assumption that the division in politics fell simply along the lines of conservatives vs. reformists. Today, literature is struggling to catch up to the change in the leadership dynamics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As mentioned, this is largely the result of a lack of access to information coming from the centers of power themselves; research, therefore, is unavoidably superficial.

Institutional Change

Institutional theory is not a unified body of thought; rather, it is a foundation from which scholars of a variety of disciplines, including sociology, politics and economics, have studied the influencing mechanisms in the development, evolution, influence and products of institutions. In the study of the IRGC, a basic understanding of institutional theory is mandatory as there are many options for the direction of analysis of the organization's growth and influence in Iran.

The study of institutional change goes back centuries and has its roots in sociology and economics. Max Weber is the father of political institutional theory and laid the foundation for the study in his early research on the influence of bureaucratization on institutional change. In recent decades there has been a new trend in institutional theory termed "new institutionalism". New Institutionalism is no more cohesive than its predecessor; within the body of thought there are three parallel assumptions that differ from one another and have caused a split in the theoretical development of institutionalism, resulting in separate schools of thought. These three schools are historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism.

In brief, historical institutionalism developed within the field of political science and the body of thought studies the institutional organization as a function of the political economy and as a principle actor influencing political behavior.¹⁶ Scholars of International Relations theory might recognize this as a key tenet of the pluralist and neo-Marxist theories as historical institutionalism does not recognize the state as a unitary actor in politics but as an amalgamation of competing institutional interests. The major assumptions behind historical institutionalism are that institutions are constrained in their development by their historical relevance and that they

operate in a mimetic and bureaucratic path that is determined by their original purpose for existence.¹⁷ In the case of the IRGC, this theory would assume that the IRGC was founded as an alternative security resource for the Ayatollah's developing regime and that its current goals and interests are shaped by its original purpose. Another vastly important assumption of historical institutionalism is that institutions change very little over long periods of time, operating bureaucratically to defend the status-quo, but suffer critical moments of upheaval and crisis that force sudden change.¹⁸

The alternative to historical institutionalism is rational-choice institutionalism and, in contrast to the former, the latter holds to the belief that institutions base their decision making not on historical precedent but according to their varying interests over time. For example, where historical institutionalists would posit that the IRGC must continue to adhere to the interests that inspired its founding after the Islamic Revolution, rational choice institutionalists would maintain that the IRGC has changing interests over time and that the individuals that make up the institution act through strategic calculation in their own best interests. Two equally important assumptions of rational choice institutionalism are that the institution is fraught with conflicting groups that struggle for power and control and that this results in a competitive growth over time, known as the equilibrium order.¹⁹ This differs from historical institutionalists who maintain that institutional change occurs in periods of turmoil with static existence characterizing the years in between crises.

These two branches of institutional thought are only summarized in the paragraphs above and one must assume that the theories are more complex than illustrated here. The characteristics chosen to contrast the two are meant to illustrate the polar ends of the spectrum of

thought on political institutional change. There are theories that fall in between these two radicals and the newest and perhaps most applicable to the case of the IRGC is sociological institutionalism. The key tenets of these three positions are summarized in the table below.

Table 1
Institutional Theories

	Rational Choice Institutionalism	Sociological Institutionalism	Historical Institutionalism
Basis of compliance	Expedience	Social Obligation	Taken for granted
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Imitative
Decision Making	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Convention
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Culturally supported	Morally governed

Sociological institutionalism does not abrogate the two traditional schools of thought; instead, it adds an additional variable to the equation for scholars seeking to understand the causal mechanisms influencing institutional behavior, evolution and outcomes. Sociological institutionalists maintain that the cultural contexts in which institutions are born and evolve help to shape their characteristics.²⁰ The theory seeks to explain the actual practices of the institutions and their relationships to the interests, available means and product. Institutions are likened to culture and the influence of normative practices on individual behavior plays a great deal into the efficiency and effectiveness of the institution.

One can see, then, how sociological institutionalism does not nullify the rational-choice suggestion that individuals act rationally and are goal-oriented, only that the methods that are

chosen to pursue those goals are constrained by the normative dimensions of that individual's culture. With regard to this study of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the key tenet of sociological institutionalism that will be utilized extensively in our research is the belief that interests and means alone do not shape the decision making and the evolution of the institution. The key to understanding the IRGC is the recognition that pragmatic interests and logistical capabilities alone do not bring *legitimacy* to the institution. In the broader cultural environment of Iran, the IRGC is constrained in its efforts to pursue its own interests by the necessity to maintain cultural legitimacy. This "logic of appropriateness" can potentially lead the IRGC to make decisions that do not serve its long-term interests and will play an influential role in shaping the evolution of the institution over time.

This understanding of institutional change will shape the format of our study in the following pages as we investigate the socioeconomic and political factors in Iran that shape the interests of the IRGC, the capabilities of the institution to pursue these interests, and then normative dimensions in which the institution evolved from policy-implementing to policy-making. The structure of this research will be organized in a manner that recognizes both the historical and rational-choice institutionalists' understanding of institutional change. This study makes the assumption that while equilibrium of change exists throughout the evolution of the institution, social and political crisis can act as a catalyst to initiate abrupt institutional change. Therefore, the following research is conducted within three time frames based on the three decades in which the IRGC has been in existence; within each period this paper investigates the interests of the IRGC, the means available to achieve those interests and the normative dimensions within which the IRGC operates to achieve those interests. The outcome of these

three variables will be the degree of influence that the IRGC has held and it is our hypothesis that this influence has been shifting over those three decades from its conventional role of implementation to sanctioned policy making.

Legitimacy

The confluence of institutional interests, practical capabilities and social legitimacy brings us to the degree of influence that the IRGC has in Iranian policy making. Since the interests as well as the capabilities of the sub organizations of the IRGC necessarily adapt over time, it stands to reason that their influence has, as well. The few scholars who specialize in the history and contemporary role of the IRGC are keenly aware of a conspicuous concern facing the Guards both today and throughout its evolution: legitimacy. The legitimacy of the IRGC over the past thirty years has been found in its cultural relevance as well as its defensive capabilities. American Enterprise Institute scholar Ali Alfoneh, expert on the Pasdaran, emphasizes the ideological nature of the events of 1979 as being influential in the birth of the organization; however, it is clear that the continued growth of the IRGC has brought it further from its doctrinal origins. Three decades after the Islamic Republic's founding, "former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps commanders are infiltrating the political, economic, and cultural life of Iran."²¹ Alfoneh's perspective on this development is strictly aligned with those who perceive the IRGC as challenging the clerical regime with a unified purpose and interest. With multiple publications, Alfoneh has portrayed the IRGC as a monolithic institution that has spent the last thirty years working towards a complete takeover of Iranian politics and economy. While

this position is easily debated, the fact remains that the IRGC has come a considerable distance from its origins to gain some degree of influence in almost every sector of Iranian public life.

The sociological institutionalist theory would emphasize the cultural appropriateness of the IRGC, as we do also; however this is not meant to undercut the importance of the practical usefulness of the IRGC. As the organization has evolved from policy implementing, a task largely concerned with practical usefulness, to policy making, it has become increasingly crucial that the group maintain its legitimacy. In cases throughout history this cultural legitimacy has been achieved through ideological avenues. In Iran, the original ideology that gave the regime legitimacy was the pursuit of the Islamic state. As time progresses, the normative values of the Iranian people evolve and so too must the political and economic institutions. The IRGC has proven itself malleable to these normative expectations as the association continues to appropriately balance normative conventionalism with strategic instrumentalism.

The IRGC can easily be described as opportunistic; in the early nineties the organization's leadership was conscious of the fact that Rafsanjani was wary of their involvement in anything remotely political. While their political interests were not put aside, they bided their time. When the reformist movement began to gain momentum they seized this opportunity to "protect the revolution", thereby reinforcing their legitimacy. Similarly, the IRGC uses foreign policy goals to help them achieve economic goals. As in Sudan or Venezuela, the IRGC uses ideological footholds to create hubs for trading and meeting with extremist groups to further their economic interests, as well as to achieve other foreign policy goals.

It is this opportunistic approach that leads to the hypothesis that the historical and rational choice institutionalist theories are inadequate in their polarization of the options for institutional

change. The internal conflict of the IRGC results in a natural competitive growth that maintains a steady rate over time. Simultaneously, the IRGC as a whole is beholden to cultural appropriateness and is not likely to seize power where there is no legitimacy to support their gains. Therefore, as opportunities for gains present themselves that concurrently provide legitimacy, the IRGC historically seizes those opportunities. This trend shifts at inflection points which represent periods of crisis for the Islamic Republic of Iran. These crises are opportunities for the IRGC to pursue a rapid gain in influence; for example the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 or the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005.

As the IRGC balances its strategic interests with its practical capabilities and normative limitations, it has proven to be a perfect example of sociological institutional theory which proposes that institutional change occurs in congruence with instrumental necessity and conventional appropriateness.

Historical Perspectives

In “Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics”, David Thaler and the contributing authors provide policy makers with a detailed descriptive analysis of the nature of Iranian political leadership. The primary objective of this book is to illustrate the dynamic and fluctuating political landscape of Iran and, in doing so, the authors analyze Iran’s formal institutions in depth and identify the informal networks through which power is exercised. While these formal institutions are useful in the enforcement of state policy, they serve mainly as vehicles of influence, leveraged by key individuals and power centers.²² These power centers are driven by competition and cooperation, the implementation of either

depending on relationships between individuals. The networks of relationships that operate behind the scenes of these political institutions are vast, but the authors identify four major factions that define the competitive nature of Iranian factional politics: traditional conservatives, reformists, pragmatic conservatives and principalists. All four back the ideology of the *velayat-e faqih* but compete with each other for power, using the country's political institutions as their vehicles of influence.

The political process in Iran contrasts sharply with our own Western experiences and the authors warn US policy makers that they need to understand the unique nature of Iranian politics in order to build a diplomatic relationship with the country. The United States' foreign policy towards Iran cannot operate on the assumption that we are dealing with a unitary actor. Factional politics present unique challenges to the United States' diplomats, particularly because we do not have the intelligence resources to understand those schisms and the distribution of authority and influence. Therefore, Thaler et. al. advise US policy makers to avoid using domestic politics as a tool of diplomacy.²³

On the same note, the IRGC itself is not a monolithic institution that is unilaterally challenging the authority of the clerical regime. Frederic Wehrey, author of multiple works on the foundation, evolution and cotemporary role of the IRGC in Iranian politics, frequently emphasizes the fact that the growth of the IRGC has been largely organic, driven by competing interest groups within the Pasdaran. This is a common feature in all Iranian politics, but it is particularly difficult for Western scholars to understand in the context of the IRGC since many find it easier to analyze the organization as a unitary threat to the status quo. It is nevertheless a crucial aspect of Iranian politics that must be understood by scholars and statesmen alike in order

to properly analyze the developing events inside Iran and outside the borders of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Wehrey believes, is not a monolithic institution capable of a unified takeover of Iran's political system. The author does, however, leave room in his analysis for speculation as to whether the IRGC is capable, as an association of varied interests, of supplanting the authority of the clerical regime.²⁴

CHAPTER 2: IRGC MILITARY INFLUENCE

Guarding the Revolution

In the first decade of its existence, the IRGC's interests were largely correlated with the circumstances that prompted its founding. The Pasdaran's mandate is found in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where Article 150 states that "The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps ... is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements..."²⁵ From the beginning, the relevance of the Guards has been intimately tied to the clerical regime; the security and growth of the regime was of principle importance to the Pasdaran. Therefore, in legislation and in practicality, the objectives of the IRGC were quite simply to protect the security of the regime which brought them into being. In the decade following the ousting of the Shah, the resources of the IRGC were concentrated on the ultimate objective: to guard the new regime against the enemies of the revolution. The opponents against whom the Pasdaran was tasked with defending were, at the time of the writing of the constitution, those inside the state who opposed the Revolution. As such, the IRGC's early role was primarily internal, relating to domestic defense instead of international.

The Pasdaran's natural enemies were the few remaining supporter of the Shah. Other than existing quietly in society, these were found mostly in the Artesh- the Shah's military that failed to prevent the revolution. Rival factions opposing the Shah also existed, and many had fought alongside Khomeini's revolutionaries with the shared objective of ousting the Shah. After witnessing the success of their efforts, rival factions such as the Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MKO) and Fedayeen Khalq became enemies of the Revolution as they prioritized nationalism or

socialism over Islamic rule.²⁶ Dissent was also found in minority regions throughout Iran among Kurds and Arabs that feared marginalization in post-revolution society and politics.

The remnants of the state military, the Artesh, presented the new clerical regime with a dilemma. A country in any circumstance needs a military for the defense of its sovereignty; however, the existing forces had served the efforts of the ousted regime and their loyalties could not be guaranteed. Khomeini, under the pressure of time to consolidate his power in the post-revolution vacuum, needed muscle to back up his ideological legitimacy and the Artesh was not trustworthy for this role. The Pasdaran served the purpose of supporting Khomeini's leadership with hard power, but the threat of the Artesh still existed; there were various attempted attacks by military units against Khomeini, including a plot by the air force to bomb the Ayatollah's residence. The risk posed by the Shah's military was mitigated to some degree by the existence of the Pasdaran as a balancing force, but debate existed among leadership with regard to the extent to which the military should be purged of the supporters of the ousted regime.²⁷ Top military leaders were executed during and immediately following the revolution, but many believed that the current military should have been demobilized entirely and a new force built anew out of the revolutionary fighters. Khomeini's position settled on purging the Artesh of its disloyal elements, and merging the remnants with revolutionary militias. The maintenance of a strong military was necessary for meeting unknown threats and while the purge of the Artesh did take place, it was on a smaller scale than many of the Revolution's leaders had hoped for.²⁸

Sources vary in reports on the scale of the purge, but Iran itself recorded 10,000-12,000 dismissed military personnel.²⁹ Most of these came from ground forces; among those, up to 90% were officers.³⁰ Those who served the Shah more directly were imprisoned or fled; many were

executed. During the revolution, 250,000 had deserted the military and these were granted amnesty by the Supreme Leader, excluding those who had committed murder or torture.³¹ What remained after the purge of the Artesh and its merger with revolutionary militants was a semi-reliable army of useful size.

In the first few decades of its existence, the Pasdaran operated parallel with the Islamic Republic's army and the state intelligence organization. A little more than three months after the decree was issued that established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the ground forces were put to the test with a rising rebellion among Kurds in Iran's northwest region. The conflict began on May 5th in 1979 and was over only a week later, with the Kurds requesting to negotiate a ceasefire.³² Khomeini refused to negotiate with the Kurdish rebels and, instead, utilized the Guards to execute a total of 31 rebels.³³

From there, the Pasdaran extended their mission to crushing all dissent against the clerical regime. The leftist groups that had shared a common goal during their struggle to overthrow the Shah found that they had not achieved their personal objectives and were marginalized to the point of fighting, guerilla-style, against the Supreme Leader's Guard Corps.³⁴ The Pasdaran fell naturally into its role as protector of the Supreme Leader and the clerics. There was no shortage of domestic threats to the regime and the Guard Corps found its legitimacy in the product of its work: the elimination of the leftist, nationalist and ethnic militias and their supporters. The Guard Corps gained momentum in their struggle against the Fedayeen Kalq and MKO in 1982, executing or otherwise killing over 60 members of the two leftist organizations.³⁵ The un-Islamic values and practices of the groups were enough to justify the

IRGC's actions, but most raids and executions of the MKO and Fedayeen Kalq militants were followed up with accusations that the militant groups had been working for the United States.

Before the decree which established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and before the Revolution itself, there existed in Iran a group of vigilante enforcement squads, known as komitehs, which served to impose Islamic values and guard against opposition. With the birth of the IRGC, the komitehs found an increased role in the Islamic Republic as secret police for the Guard Corps. The komitehs operated outside of the law, ignoring even the decrees of the Supreme Leader himself, and they were generally hated.³⁶ Impertinent, uneducated and usually lower-class, the komiteh members served the clerical regime as a brute force against leftist and ethnic groups. Komiteh members justified their expansive authority, saying "There are no clear limits imposed on the komiteh guards in dealing with corruption and godlessness..."³⁷

The breadth of the influence of the komitehs put pressure of Iranian society and generated a great deal of hatred and distrust. In spite of the negative publicity and social distain, the Supreme Leader maintained that they served a necessary function in bringing stability out of the post-revolution chaos that defined Iranian society "until the authority of the government has been established"³⁸. Like the IRGC, the komitehs were useful to the clerical regime, which stood on an ideological foundation alone and needed that brute force to enforce its vision for the future of the Islamic Republic. The terror and destruction that the komitehs used to serve their objectives became a style of operations used in the decades to follow by the clerical regime, the IRGC and its paramilitary wing, the Basij.

Iran – Iraq War

The first test for the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps came soon after the group was first established; less than two years after the return of Ayatollah Khomeini to Tehran, neighboring Iraq invaded Iran beginning the Iran-Iraq War. In the eight years that followed, tens of thousands of young Iranians, recruited by the IRGC with promises of a martyr's welcome in paradise, went willingly to their deaths at the frontlines of the battle. What started as the culmination of a dispute between Iran and Iraq over control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway became a protracted war for the defense of the Islamic Revolution. Iraq's aim was not to overthrow the Islamic Republic, though there was a clear struggle for control over the Persian Gulf region; nevertheless, the clerical leadership viewed the attack as a direct threat to the Velayat-e Faqih.³⁹

The timing of the Iraqi attack was not by chance; the Ba'athist regime was aware of Iran's preoccupation with its own post-revolution internal struggle for power. As a consequence of the prolonged effort to consolidate power in Iran, the country was left with a distracted leadership and an emaciated military. The plans to merge the IRGC with the Artesh were in place, but Saddam Hussein struck before that plan could be implemented. The Artesh was lacking in leadership since higher rank officials were either executed or escaped the country. It was in this context that the Pasdaran stepped up to the plate and took on the defense of the Islamic Republic.⁴⁰ This role was a natural manifestation of the IRGC's purpose and the Guards found all the legitimacy they needed in their defense of the Islamic Revolution against the foreign invaders. Their interests were simple and the power given them to carry out their mission was virtually unchecked.

The invasion began in September, 1980, with the Iraqi objective of destroying Iran's grounded Air force. The air assault failed initially, but the ground attack that followed was successful in gaining control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and capturing the cities of Khorramshahr and Abadan. The Pasdaran were not able to fend off the Iraqi offense in open battle, but the military force of the IRGC was not without its skills. For months the IRGC's ground forces waged a steady war using urban war tactics, against which the Iraqi Air Force was not able to defend. The Ba'athist regime successfully took the two cities from Iran by the end of October, but spent the next year defending against the determined, if ineffective, air raids led by the Pasdaran.⁴¹ The Iranians bided their time, rallying the Pasdaran with the remainder of the Artesh, and in spring of 1981 the first offensive to regain their territory was launched. The Pasdaran and Artesh took back Khorramshahr and Abadan by May of 1982 and Iraq withdrew its forces back to the original boundary line between the two countries.⁴²

The cooperation between the Artesh and the IRGC had strongly influenced the direction of the battle and was responsible for Iran's eventual successful defeat of the Iraqi invasion. The war could have been considered at its end at that point, if it were not for the fact that IRGC leadership saw an opportunity to expand its role and decidedly took it. In Article 152 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, there is a mandate for the country to base its foreign policy on the rejection of all forms of domination.⁴³ Likewise, article 154 mandates supporting "the just struggles of the freedom fighters against the oppressors in every corner of the globe."⁴⁴ The IRGC adopted these directives as their own and their interests expanded from just defending the revolution, to exporting it. The Pasdaran's new objective was the overthrow of the Ba'athist Iraqi regime, beginning with the southern port of Basra.⁴⁵ With its powerful ideology and the

exuberance of tens of thousands of Iranian youth, the IRGC launched its attack against Iraq relying primarily on human wave tactics. This method was used for two years without success and the IRGC was forced to turn to the Artesh for support. In another two years, with the cooperation of the two military branches, Iran captured the Port of Faw thereby cutting Iraq off from the Gulf.⁴⁶ The move naturally shook the Iraqi regime, but equally important was the ripple of fear that it spread throughout the region and in the West. The resulting arms embargo against Iran strictly limited the ability of the Pasdaran and Artesh to continue in its mission to overthrow the Ba'athists. Iran lost control of the Port of Faw and by 1988 economic and political pressure from the West succeeded in forcing the IRGC into accepting a ceasefire agreement, as they were ordered to do so by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini.⁴⁷

Neither the blind ideological zeal of the IRGC nor the strategic proficiency of the Artesh was able to succeed against the combined fear of the world's leaders that Iran could emerge as a regional hegemon. Despite the IRGC's failure to overthrow Saddam, the Guards did succeed in vastly increasing their own influence in Iran.⁴⁸ The social indoctrination techniques used to convince young Iranians, soon to be known as the Basij, to become martyrs for the Islamic Republic became an ideological pillar that supports the establishment even today.⁴⁹ The necessary political and economic influence that grew out of the IRGC's military offensive are both foundations from which the Guards continue to expand their influence inside and outside of Iran.

The forced end to the Iran-Iraq war illustrates the early conflicting interests that existed between the clerics and the IRGC. The two institutions were temporarily aligned during the war in that the Iraqi invasion provided legitimacy to both the IRGC and the clerics. It also united the

much divided population in abhorrence of Iraq.⁵⁰ For the IRGC, even as they necessarily cooperated with the *Artesh*, the Iran-Iraq war solidified the image in the minds of Iranians of the Pasdaran as the protectors of the Islamic Revolution. At the end of the war, however, the Supreme Leader recognized the strategic necessity of accepting the ceasefire while, ideologically, the IRGC was unwilling to accept this. Many Pasdaran wished to continue on in their mission and disagreed with the clerics, failing to see the political interests of the regime as any more important than the ideological interests of the IRGC.

Domestic Capabilities

Ayatollah Khomeini's frequent references to a 20-million strong army conjure visions of a limitless military that inspires fear in the hearts of global leaders.⁵¹ The vision, however, never materialized to the scale that the Supreme Leader imagined it would. The IRGC was created initially as a light infantry force, meant to be an elite guard for the clerics and a counter balance to the untrustworthy *Artesh*. The eight-year Iran-Iraq war immediately put those intentions to rest. By 1986 the IRGC had established air and naval forces, though they consisted mostly of patrol boats and helicopters.⁵² What changed most about the Pasdaran in the first decade was its offensive capability. The group was never meant to be able to pursue an offense, but per the Iranian Constitution it was easy to justify offensive action against Iraq in order to protect the innocents from oppression. With this ideological mandate, the Pasdaran were able to recruit members for its new paramilitary branch called the *Basij*. The *Basij*, not officially a part of the IGRC until the 90s, were essentially used as human cannon fodder and were sent in waves against the enemy, sometimes without so much as a rifle to arm themselves. The human-wave

assaults were eventually ineffective and resulted in tens of thousands of casualties.⁵³ In the early 1990s the Basij numbered approximately 30,000, though by the end of the decade they boasted numbers upwards of 200,000.⁵⁴

During post-war efforts at institutionalization, there was a movement to formally merge the *Artesh* with the IRGC, but with 150,000 servicemen in the 1990s the IRGC did not need the *Artesh* and these efforts were eventually abandoned.⁵⁵ Under the conservative president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, a merger between the two forces would have bolstered the legitimacy of the regime, but it offered little in return to the IRGC. The Guards had already seen a decrease in their budget as the IRI's defense budget shrunk from 40% of gross national product to 10% by 1994; from Rafsanjani's perspective, the consolidation of the two branches would have also consolidated defense expenditures.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, during a time when the Iranian economy was in turmoil and infrastructure was outdated and in disrepair, the IRGC flourished. This was largely due to the Pasdaran's role in reconstruction, as will be discussed further on in this chapter. The IRGC was given the responsibility for reconstruction and development in part to get them out of the way of the *Artesh*, but the role suited them also as a means of supplementing their income. By the end of the decade, the IRGC had grown in membership to 170,000 and boasted control of most, if not all, of the country's long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction.⁵⁷ At the same time, the military force lost its Navy branch when the commander who oversaw both the *Artesh* and the IRGC simultaneously, Ali Shamkani, split command of the two forces, taking the IRGC's navy with him to the *Artesh*.⁵⁸

In retrospect, it is ironic that Rafsanjani's attempts to distract the IRGC by placing them in command of reconstruction efforts was the vehicle that enabled the institutionalization of the

group and the evolution of the Pasdaran from a light infantry ground force to a political challenge to both the Reformists and the Conservatives. The clerics have come to fear and resent the growing reach of the Pasdaran; well-known senior cleric Ayatollah Hossein Ali was quoted as saying “It is no longer the rule of the qualified jurist; rather it is the rule of the generals.”⁵⁹ The IRGC’s military and political capabilities are directly influenced by the economic means available which, for the IRGC, have been plentiful since the end of the Iran-Iraq war. The clandestine nature of the Pasdaran’s economic activities allows it to maintain secrecy in its military operations, as well; because the majority of its funding comes from its financial investments, the IRGC’s budget is mostly unknown. This facilitates the group’s participation in the pursuit of nuclear capabilities and its work in missile programs. The Guards are also suspected of using universities and other academic institutions to support and cover up its nuclear research.⁶⁰

In the meantime, the IRGC is pursuing the military capability to quell threats from regional external opponents. The Pasdaran’s Brigadier General Hossein Salami is seeking to bring self-sufficiency to the IRGC’s defense industry and has launched programs to develop military hardware such as missile delivery devices and aerial equipment in order to gain control of the defense industry.⁶¹ Under the leadership of Salami, the IRGC successfully tested medium range Shahab-3 missiles and solid-fuel missiles that have a range of up to 1,200 miles.⁶² At the same time, mass production of supersonic ballistic missiles with a range of up to 500 miles is currently underway. Salami describes the IRGC as combat ready and calls it a developed, modern organization with expertise in military combat, security and soft war.⁶³

Basij Organization

Being one of the primary sources of hard power for the clerical regime, the Basij force recruits volunteers, usually younger men, to serve in their ranks as enforcers of the regime's mandates. It is these young men who are often cited as responsible for the detainment of the regime's political opponents. The Basij serve three specific roles in the service of the Supreme Leader: 1) promoting the revolution and the vision of the *velayet-e faqih* in Iranian society, 2) carrying out indoctrination activities of the IRGC and 3) enforcing the mandates of the Supreme Leader. While the organization's founding was based on military necessity, in more recent years the Basij are being used to work on large development projects in rural provinces in Iran. These projects are funded by government contracts that were awarded (either through bidding or by bypassing the bidding process) to the IRGC's construction and engineering conglomerate, Khatam al-Anbiya. In 2009 the clerics expressed to the IRGC the need to expand the Basij's forces beyond the military role with the hope of attracting not only zealous young men, but also more skilled Iranians for civil services roles. In the view of the clerics and senior IRGC members, the emphasis on the Basij as a military unit was precluding the interests of those who are not military-minded. As a result, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, the Commander of the Basij, has sought out a variety of other needs in society that the organization could meet. In the pursuit of this mission, the Basij created an information system to collect details about the perceived social problems that Iranian citizens believe the government is responsible for solving.⁶⁴

Naqdi stated in a 2009 interview that the Basij Organization for the Oppressed is available to accomplish the objectives of the revolution where the regime itself is unable to. This raises questions about the loyalties of the Basij Organization; does it serve the clerics as an arm

of the IRGC or has it, much like the IRGC itself, devised its own goals and means apart from the regime.⁶⁵ The Basij Organization is devoutly ideological and still exists for the purpose of continuing the revolution; however, it receives its funding and its projects from the IRGC.

The organization is on a mission to makeover their reputation and image and is achieving this through the provision of humanitarian aid and infrastructure development. In the less privileged provinces of Iran, the organization provides jobs, vaccinates children and preserves historic monuments. In some aspects the Basij has been successful in this endeavor; they are viewed with much more favor in the remote provinces than in the cities where the organization is associated with the brutal suppression of populist demonstrations. With their new focus on social development, the Basij Resistance Force formally changed its name to the Basij Organization for the Oppressed, a clear move away from the past monopoly of military issues on the agenda of the organization.⁶⁶

An arm of the Basij, the Student Basij Organization (SBO), led by Reza Seraj, serves the IRGC's agenda by transforming and improving the student Basij groups on university campuses. The members of the SBO have offered their own suggestions in the current mission to change the image and focus of the Basij; this plan includes assisting the government in order to improve efficiency, providing humanitarian services, and promoting religious and cultural programs for university students. Seraj presented these goals as the contribution of the SBO towards the overall mission to Islamize university students and to increase IRGC military membership.

Exporting the Revolution

In the eight years that followed the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, as hundreds of thousands of young Iranian Basij were dying in waves of attacks on the border between the warring states, the young Islamic regime was simultaneously building the operational foundation for decades of future covert foreign influence. Today, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has its own clandestine foreign operations branch known as the Quds Force. The influential and lethal military force seeks to control and manipulate the economic, cultural, religious and political spheres of many of Iran's neighboring countries for the purpose of exporting the Islamic revolution and expanding the regime's influence outside of its own borders.⁶⁷ Though always consistent with this ideological goal of the IRGC, Quds Force operations take many different shapes depending on where they are at work and what the nature of the conflict is. The IRGC's foreign operations branch operates parallel to Iran's foreign policy executive and conducts covert operations not only in Iraq but in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkey and as far west as Venezuela.⁶⁸ The clandestine nature of their work necessitates a degree of speculation as to what the particular role of each foreign mission is, but one can make a reasonable assumption based on a comprehensive understanding of the ideology and interests of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Iran lost significant ground in the first months of the Iran-Iraq War and the eight years of conflict focused Iranian resources nearly entirely on the territory under dispute, leaving little else to fulfill the vision of the IRGC of spreading the revolution abroad. Before the formation of the Quds Force, foreign operations were carried out by a variety of smaller groups that were, during

the war, consolidated under the umbrella of the Mujahidin of the Islamic Revolution (MIR)⁶⁹. The MIR was headed by Mohsen Rezai who was eventually recruited into the IRGC as the head of the new ideological army, the Quds Force. The Quds Force was given two missions, at the outset: to protect the revolution at home and to export it outside of Iran. During the Iran-Iraq war the MIR followed Khomeini's lead and focused its efforts in Iraq. Almost immediately following the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War, the MIR began to work on behalf of the IRGC to expand the Islamic Republic's extraterritorial influence, beginning in Lebanon).⁷⁰ In 1990 the responsibility for exporting the revolution was transitioned to the newly formed Quds Force, though the degree to which leadership and organization remained the same is not clear. Mohsen Rezai no longer headed up Iran's extraterritorial efforts after 1990; this responsibility was given to Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, who spent eight years in this role and was replaced in 1998 by Brigadier General Qassem Suleimani, the current leader of the Quds Force.⁷¹

Iraq

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard has significant financial and military investments in Iraq and has focused a great deal of its efforts on training and preparing for violent conflict. This is not to say, however, that the IRGC does not take an interest in the political evolution of its neighbor, Iraq. The IRGC sees the advantage in controlling the direction of political parties like SCIRI and Dawah especially in the context of the open elections that Iraq had in January of 2005 and March of 2010. While keeping violent uprising as a backup plan, the office of the Supreme Leader instructed the Commander of the Quds Forces in 2005 to keep operatives in Iraq but to maintain clandestine positions so as to not identify any of the political participants with the Quds

Force, thereby skewing the outcome. It was the hope of the regime that, while it may not have had control over the outcome of the vote, that if it did turn in favor of Iran-friendly parties like SCIRI, that Iran would have a new channel for control.⁷²

SCIRI and Dawah both have close relationships with Iran and it was not clear, during the 2005 elections, whether Iran supported the success of one over the other. It was not ideal, however, for JAM's political wing, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, to have gained too much control in the legislature. Al-Sadr and JAM have ideological differences with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the relationship is strained by the lack of support that the IRGC has from Al-Sadr on the doctrine of velayat-e faqih. Al-Sadr is not useless to the IRGC, but politically he offers less stability than Iran is looking for. The IRGC sees the democratic electoral system in Iraq as an opportunity to gain control and Al-Sadr does not fit into that system; he is of greater use to the IRGC as an instrument of violence.⁷³

The regime of the Supreme Leader also had considerable interests at stake during the 2005 drafting of the Iraqi Constitution. While Iran was unable to directly influence the outcome of the process, the IRGC was able to influence those who did hold this power through its political connections, e.g. SCIRI and Dawah parties. These two parties were, at the time, proponents of federalism for Iraq, a system that benefits Iran because a decentralized state presents less of a threat to Iran and is more easily influenced subversively.

As able, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps provides weapons to Iraqi Shi'a militants through various smuggling routes. One of the most widely known is that of Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani, who in 2008 was named along with Deputy Commander of the Ramadan

Headquarters, Ahmad Foruzandeh, as an "individual fueling the Iraqi insurgency" based on evidence that Foruzandeh and several hundred individuals belonging to his smuggling network had transported a new type of improvised explosive devices known as an explosively formed penetrator (EFP) into Iraq from Iran.⁷⁴ The Sheibani network is believed to be connected to Iran based on the ties that it has to JAM and Badr Corps. It is important to Iran that they be able to continue to deny responsibility for continued violence in Iraq and therefore the Sheibani Network, because of its ties with Iran, does not carry out attacks itself. US and Coalition forces in Iraq have been largely unable to produce a "smoking gun" on the IRGC to prove that Iran is providing weapons to Iraq. Multi-Nation Forces have, however, discovered weapons caches that are suspected of originating in Iran. One MNF-I report claims that Coalition forces have discovered almost 200 weapons caches between July 2006 and May 2008 that are suspected of having come from Iran.⁷⁵

The capability of the IRGC to train Shi'a militants in and outside Iraq is beneficial to the regime's interests on several levels. Most obviously, training Iraqis gives them the intellectual and technological knowledge and skills that they need to fight the enemies that they share with the IRGC, e.g. the United States and Coalition forces. A simultaneous benefit of this training is the opportunity to indoctrinate Shi'a Muslims with the principles that guide the Ayatollah's regime. When trained Iraqis return to their homeland to fight they do not simply bring back knowledge and skills, they are transporting the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. While the focus of Iran's political manipulation is on SCIRI (now ISCI) and Dawah, the Quds Force's training initiatives are targeted towards al-Sadr's JAM and the Special Group Criminals (SGC).

The network that is used to train militants in Iraq is highly developed and has several areas of focus including logistics and support, weapons employment, engineering and explosives, tactics and information operations.⁷⁶ Training on this level is usually performed in Iraq, often by Lebanese Hezbollah representatives, and is themed around the broad vision of evicting US forces from Iraq.⁷⁷ Not all militants are trained in Iraq, however; the Iraqi Master-Trainer Strategy brings Iraqis to Iran for advanced training that they will return to Iraq with and pass on to other militants. This technique minimizes the risk for Iran and maximizes the results for militants with more reliable access to expertise coming from Iraqis themselves. The Master-Trainer course focuses on more advanced areas of warfare including explosively formed penetrators, projective weapons, conventional weapons and tactics and guerilla warfare.⁷⁸

The IRGC's master-trainer tactic has an additional benefit of eliminating unnecessary distrust and rancor between Iraqi militants and their Iranian benefactors. Despite the socio-religious ties that the two nations have with one another, there is a history of betrayal and conflict that speaks volumes over the ideological rhetoric of those that support the velayat-e faqih and Iraqi-Iranian solidarity.

Lebanon

Iran does not work clandestinely in Lebanon to the extent that it does in Iraq and no other proxy organizations other than Hezbollah itself have been set up by the IRGC to facilitate subversive weapons transfers, financial support or training. Hezbollah itself does use several organizations as the face of its operations to collect funds, manage financial services and

coordinate with the community and development projects. *Bayt al-Mal* ("House of Money"), with offices in six locations throughout Lebanon, serves as the terrorist group's bank and investment firm and it operates under the direct supervision of Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, though it is managed by Haysayn al-Shami. In 2006 the US Treasury Department named Al-Shami as an individual that provides financial support to the Iran-funded terrorist network.⁷⁹ The organization itself was also named as a supporter of terrorism. *Jihad Al Binna Developmental Association (JBDA)* is a company that has been set up to manage the development of infrastructure in Lebanese Shi'a communities. JBDA manages construction projects, educational initiatives and helps refugees and displaced Lebanese find shelter and homes. The JBDA also has several locations including in the Beqaa Valley and Beirut. Crucial to the operation of Hezbollah is the *Islamic Resistance Support Organization*, a branch of Hezbollah that collects donations in order to fund its operations. The organization advertises for donations on television, particularly the al-Manar network.

At first glance it may appear that Iran is the sole benefactor of Hezbollah and that the IRGC has full control of the terrorist organization. On closer examination, it is clear that Hezbollah provides Iran with a service in exchange for the weapons, training, and finances that it receives.⁸⁰ Hezbollah serves the Iranian agenda by provoking Israel and terrorizing Israeli civilians with rocket attacks. Hezbollah also provides training to the IRGC's other proxies, most importantly to Iraqis. Iran walks on eggshells in Iraq because the regime lives with the real threat of the US and Coalition forces camped across the border. Iran has far less to lose from the international world's indignation over its operations in Lebanon than in Iraq. Regardless of

what Hezbollah does provide Iran in return for the regime's support, it is also clear that Hezbollah owes its existence and relative success in terrorizing Israel to Iran.

Understanding the IRGC's position on Israel and Western expansionism and Lebanon's situation both geographically and politically, it is not difficult to see where the ideological similarities between the two nations come from. In recognition of these similarities, the Guards support Hezbollah through a variety of different avenues. For decades there have been IRGC cadres operating in Lebanon, supporting Hezbollah. More recently, however, intelligence reports have noted a decline in the numbers of Quds Force operatives that are permanently in Lebanon. The numbers are reported to have sunk as low as 15 (other reports say that there are at least 800 Iranian personnel still said to be in Lebanon).⁸¹ There are reportedly "reserves", as well, but they are not suspected of having real training and experience.⁸²

Perhaps the IRGC's most crucial contribution to Hezbollah and its efforts against Israel and Western forces are the military weapons and technology that are regularly transferred into Lebanon. Short range rockets are the primary IRGC export to Hezbollah in Lebanon; around ten thousand have small rockets with accompanying individual launchers have been delivered and these alone have ranges of about 19-28 km. The Associated Press reported in 2008 that at least 350 of these small, short-range missiles had been fired into Israel that year, alone.⁸³ These rockets are not Israel's greatest concern, however; recent attacks indicate that Iran has begun delivering longer-range missiles that can reach as much as 70 kilometers distance.⁸⁴ Of even greater concern is the Israeli intelligence that reported in April of 2010 that Syria (most likely receiving them from Iran) had transferred long-range Scud missiles to Hezbollah.⁸⁵ These Scud missiles have a maximum range of 435 miles, putting Jerusalem and Tel Aviv within range of

Hezbollah. Iran is known to have provided Hezbollah with an AT-3 Sagger anti-tank missiles that have been modified by an Iranian engineer to carry tandem warheads.⁸⁶

In addition to weapons, Hezbollah has benefited from training by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Forces in the past. Today, Hezbollah is more likely to be providing training on behalf of the Quds Force, instead of receiving it. Hezbollah partnered with the IRGC in 1989 to establish a training camp in Sudan, following a coup that brought the radical National Islamic Front to power. Hezbollah provides a valuable service to Iran by adopting Iraqi Shi'a insurgents for weeks at a time to train in tactics, weapons utilization and IED construction.

Afghanistan

The Fourth Corps of the Quds Force is responsible for exporting the Iranian revolution to Central Asia and operations are based out of Mushhad from the Al-Ansar base. US Officials disagree on whether the IRGC is involved directly in Afghanistan, or not. Iranian made weapons, particularly the explosively formed penetrator that is unique to Iran and has been used in Iraq, as well, have been used by Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan. AK-47s and C-4 plastic explosives have also been found that resemble what Iran transfers to Iraq and Hezbollah. More obvious assistance is given to Afghans by Iran in the form of sanctuary which the Islamic Republic offers Taliban fighters.⁸⁷

Little else in the way of evidence is available to the public that will prove or disprove direct Iranian intervention in Afghanistan. In 2007 ISAF Commander General Daniel McNeill reported that Coalition forces had captured two shipments of weapons that based, solely on appearance, seemed to originate in Iran. The characteristics that were assumed to have given

away the origin of the weapons were the explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) that are used in Iraq. The assumption is that the EFPs in Iraq come from Iran and, if they appear to be the same product, the EFPs in Afghanistan must come from Iraq, as well. In 2008, Under Secretary of State R. Nicholas Burns declared that the U.S. had irrefutable evidence that the Iranian regime was transferring weapons to the Taliban, however when Defense Secretary Robert Gates was questioned on the issue he indicated that there was no evidence of Quds Force operations in Afghanistan.⁸⁸ This is not to say that Iran is not shipping weapons to the Taliban, only that it is not clear that these weapons are coming from the IRGC's covert elite forces. Nevertheless, until this information is declassified or available on open source, it is difficult to make a judgment on Iran's activities in Iran. Iran's construction and development businesses have received multiple contracts in Afghanistan and speculation abounds as to whether these companies could be covers for transporting weapons to the Taliban.

Venezuela

Hezbollah was already in Venezuela as far back as the 1990s; it was from this location that the terrorist organization carried out the attacked against the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and the AMIA building in 1994, both in Buenos Aires.⁸⁹ Iran operates in Venezuela via the IRGC's Quds Force and works in partnership with the Lebanese Hezbollah. The dual goals of Hezbollah in Venezuela are to create an independent channel of funding for local terrorist networks to supplement the income from Iran and to employ criminal networks to train operatives and develop their skills and terrorist capabilities.

Far different from many of its covert operations in other foreign countries, Hezbollah and Quds Force operatives are working in a small area in northern Columbia and northwestern Venezuela as missionaries, hard at work converting the Wayuu people to Shi'ite Islam. Another unique function of the Lebanese Hezbollah and Quds Force in Venezuela is training Mexican drug cartel members. Intelligence reports from the United States Drug Enforcement Agency revealed in 2008 that Mexican drug cartels are sending assassins to Venezuela and to Iran to receive training from the elite Quds Force and the Lebanese Hezbollah in constructing IEDs, sniping, commando warfare, tactics and weapons.⁹⁰ In October of 2006 two explosive devices were found near the Caracas American Embassy, though the explosives did not detonate. One of those explosives was boxed with Hezbollah Venezuela pamphlets. Hezbollah did claim responsibility, though no other explosives have been found and no attacks have been attempted since then.

CHAPTER 3: IRGC ECONOMIC INFLUENCE

Originally formed with the intention of creating a security force to defend the Supreme Leader and the clerics, the IRGC has developed into an economic establishment in its own right. Companies owned, operated and controlled by the IRGC have, over the past three decades, been forming an unofficial economic agenda. The “People’s Army” that protected the revolutionary regime now conducts business affairs in the defense industry, construction and infrastructure development, manufacturing and investment markets and in the black market. Whether or not these economic activities exceed the IRGC’s original purposes outlined in Article 147 of Iran’s 1979 constitution may be debatable, but it is hardly relevant as the Guards have gained a degree of influence over the Iranian economy that is virtually irreversible. The organization receives a share of criticism from home and abroad, but it is nevertheless extremely successful in its private and government contracts and appears to be on a path of continued growth.

Goals and Interests

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ economic goals reflect the group’s survival instinct and have a noteworthy influence on the Iranian economy, today. Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the nation turned its focus inward with an urgent need for rapid reconstruction and economic recovery. The heavy financial cost of the war and the embargos employed by the West took a noticeable toll on the Iranian economy.⁹¹ Simultaneously, Iran experienced a massive population boom that saw a growth from 34 million at the start of the revolution to 60 million.⁹² Food and energy subsidies that were established by the clerical regime with the goal

of garnering popular support quickly became an economic burden as the population increased steadily over the next 20 years. The modest war-time budget had an effect on the energy sector; with infrastructure development stalling, Iranian oil revenues declined sharply. Between 1991 and 1993 the government's revenue from oil dropped from 20 billion to 14.9 billion.⁹³

It was in this context that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was faced with the immediate need for a new source of relevance. With the war over and the Artesh regaining its position as the state military institution, the Guards were in a precarious position with regard to their survival. The organization's operations were a burden on the IRI's state budget and many viewed the Guards with distrust, fearing their politicization.⁹⁴ Ironically, it was President Rafsanjani who gave the Guards a role that would not only ensure their survival as an organization, but their growth into a multidimensional institution. Rafsanjani tackled both of the aforementioned problems with one solution: give the IRGC leadership of post-war development and reconstruction efforts.⁹⁵ The IRGC was at odds with the Rafsanjani camp in the early nineties and by encouraging the Pasdaran to focus on the economy and infrastructure, Rafsanjani was hoping to distract and remove the IRGC as a political burden.⁹⁶ This move also served Rafsanjani's larger mission to get government agencies access to business ventures in order to generate their own income.⁹⁷ Additionally, with the Artesh growing back into a position of strength and there was no need for two militaries to operate parallel one another. Rafsanjani feared the Pasdaran and the potential challenge that it posed to his presidency and the rule of the clerics but at the same time, the new Supreme Leader lacked the credibility of his predecessor and ended up relying heavily on the Guards for support, giving the association a long leash politically and economically.⁹⁸ These motivating factors that led Rafsanjani and the Supreme

Leader to give the Guards a role in the economy ended up providing the vehicles through which the IRGC was able to gain political influence in the later decades.⁹⁹

The interests of the Guards in the post-revolution context had changed in light of the fact that they needed a new source of legitimacy. Iran's constitution designates the IRGC as a security force that exists to protect the revolution, the regime and its ideology.¹⁰⁰ Without the common enemy that Iraq represented, the IRGC had to find a new means of ensuring its longevity. The constitution of the Islamic Republic does mandate that, in times of peace, the personnel and equipment of the military forces would be used in development of education and infrastructure.

“In time of peace, the government must utilize the personnel and technical equipment of the Army in relief operations, and for educational and productive ends, and the Construction Jihad, while fully observing the criteria of Islamic justice and ensuring that such utilization does not harm the combat-readiness of the Army”¹⁰¹.

Without affecting the combat-readiness of the forces, the IRGC would be permitted by the constitution to take a role in the post-war reconstruction.¹⁰²

Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Rafsanjani gave the IRGC control of one of Iran's largest economic foundations, *Bonyad-e Mostazafen*. The Mostazafen foundation was created from the remnants of several smaller foundations that were managed under the Shah; the assets of those foundations were consolidated under the umbrella of the newly created Mostazafen Foundation which has since become the largest of Iran's foundations.¹⁰³ The move that was initially meant to serve the goals of the Rafsanjani administration quickly became an end in itself

for the IRGC. The ability to produce its own operating budget through its economic ventures gave the Guards the autonomy from the ruling regime that it needed to become integrated into the nation's political landscape. The bonyads served as mechanisms for gaining not only political leverage, but social influence. They did not have a unified strategic goal at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, but the Pasdaran did have fundamental needs as an organization: funding and legitimacy. Had the Guards simply been allowed to remain an essentially unemployed military force tied to the regime, they would have failed to achieve either of these goals. Given a hand in the economy of the state, however, the IRGC was able to not only fund their operations, but invest for future growth. Simultaneously, control of the bonyads provided the opportunity to garner support from the rural lower classes in Iranian society, an inconspicuous but nevertheless important demographic in Iranian politics.

In addition to controlling one of Iran's largest foundations, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has made a name for itself across the world as a giant construction and infrastructure development conglomerate. With the encouragement of President Rafsanjani, the IRGC took control of factories that, during the revolution, had been confiscated.¹⁰⁴ From these small beginnings the Guards built headquarters for reconstruction that became known as *gharargah sazandegi khatam alanbia*, or Ghorb.¹⁰⁵ What is now called Khatam al-Anbiya is one of the country's largest contractors in industrial and development projects.¹⁰⁶ The organization is a conglomerate of agriculture, industry, mining, construction and transportation companies and is the IRGC's major engineering arm, as well. Khatam al-Anbiya operates using the resources of the IRGC, including volunteer labor from the Basij forces. As a result, the subsidiary companies

of Khatam al-Anbiya are able to bid well below its competitors for government contracts, although the bidding process is often waived in favor of Khatam al-Anbiya anyway.¹⁰⁷

Where the bonyads provide funding opportunities for the IRGC, Khatam al-Anbiya provides legitimacy. Students of legitimacy will know that legitimacy is achieved through one or more of three avenues: religious right, economic product or coercion.¹⁰⁸ The IRGC lacks religious right as a source of social acceptance the more it becomes involved in economic ventures; but simultaneously the subsidiary companies of Khatam al-Anbiya subsidize the loss of religious credibility with economic validity by providing infrastructure, gas, and other economic development to underprivileged regions in Iran.¹⁰⁹ Political groups and economic competitors have issued complaints with regard to the monopolization of entire economic sectors by the IRGC, but the Guards are viewed favorably by those in the rural and underprivileged regions of Iran who benefit from the economic development that the Guards oversee. The presence of the IRGC and the Basij in the rural regions of Iran produces an additional benefit in allowing the Guards to proactively prevent popular uprisings against the state. These uprisings are common even today among ethnic and religious minorities and the regional presence of the IRGC and the Basij acts as deterrence and prevents collective organization.

Many inside Iran and internationally accuse the Guards of involvement, and in some cases oversight of, Iran's black market trade.¹¹⁰ This accusation is as difficult to substantiate as it is to refute, however it is likely to have some validity. Political figures such as Mehdi Karrubi, speaker of the Sixth Majlis under President Khatami, have accused the Guards of using their access to trade ports to import illegal goods such as alcohol and narcotics. There is, in fact, a

vast quantity of illegal goods in Iran, also including satellite dishes and cigarettes, and many support the accusation against the IRGC with the argument that only the Guards have to influence and means necessary to carry out such a vast smuggling operation.¹¹¹

The objectives of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps can only be evaluated through the public statements of its representatives and the observation of the actions that the organization and the companies and individuals associated with it take. Public statements regarding the goals of the IRGC are consistently centered on the theme of Islamic unity and development of the Islamic Republic. Their actions, however, suggest some alternative interests. Two activities of the Guards in particular highlight the goals of the IRGC and the probability that those include economic control and social relevance. Among the Guards' many large development projects in the underdeveloped provinces, the largest and most significant has been the 900 km long gas pipeline running through Asaluyeh, Bushehr and ending in Iranshahr.¹¹² The delivery of natural gas itself is important to the underprivileged in the remote regions of the country, but the jobs and capital that the project provides is far more significant. The Basij play a large role in this "peace pipeline" project and perform labor on a mostly volunteer basis.¹¹³ While the Guards profit financially from the project, the social capital that is earned from the development of the Peace Pipeline is equally important. Another of the IGRC's more recent actions that demonstrate the organization's interests in economic monopoly was the 2004 seizure of operations at the Imam Khomeini Airport.¹¹⁴ A Turkish firm had won a bid to administer operations at the airport and the IRGC, clearly opposed to the idea, used its own air force to shut down the airport on the day it opened.¹¹⁵ In addition to pursuing control of the transportation

industry, it is thought that the IRGC wished to manage airport operations in order to protect their own smuggling activities.

Regardless of their motives, the Guards have thrived in their economic dealings and have developed to the point of being possibly the most influential patronage network in Iran. The Pasdaran do not openly declare their economic agenda, but their market and financial activities make it clear that the association of key individuals is seeking a broad influence in the Iranian market economy with holdings not just in construction, but in agriculture, transportation, industry and tourism. The Bonyad-e Mostazafen alone is estimated to represent at least 10 percent of the government's budget and has an estimated value of \$3 billion.¹¹⁶ These institutions possess a great degree of autonomy and receive their authority from the clerics, not the government. *Bonyad-e Mostazafen* today is the second largest commercial enterprise in Iran and it owns and operates approximately 350 affiliates and subsidiaries in a wide variety of industries.¹¹⁷ The Foundation earmarks 50% of its profits for charity, providing food and housing to the needy.

The IRGC has an agenda that includes gaining control of construction and engineering enterprises that place the Guards in positions of patronage to Iranians from rural farmers to powerful politicians.¹¹⁸ The IRGC stands to gain a great deal more than just financial wealth, as they become a key source of patronage. Still a defender of the revolution, still the "people's army", the group is nevertheless accused of nepotism, corruption and cronyism in their economic dealings.¹¹⁹ They has a vested interest in the economy, but this is not their primary role. The organization risks its own reputation, however, in its economic gains; the Pasdaran receives its authority from the clerics, who receive their legitimacy from the people. If the people become

suspect of the IRGC's dealings and connections, this becomes a concern of the clerics as well. The influence of the IRGC in the market economy may account for the growing tension between the clerics and the IRGC and may also hasten the Pasdaran's need to separate itself from the clerics and find its own source of legitimacy.

Means and Capabilities

As earnest as the ideology of that the IRGC subscribes to, it is constrained in its objectives by the resources available and the social and cultural context in which it operates. In spite of its strategic military mishaps in the years during the Iran-Iraq war, the IRGC has grown into a pragmatic and self-serving organization which can be relied upon to act rationally within its own means to achieve its interests. It is a necessary trait of a developing institution to seek to expand its own means, ensure its growth and bring security and legitimacy to its existence. While the Pasdaran was created to serve the clerics as a light infantry force, it was presented with the opportunity at the outset of the Iran-Iraq war to become much more than that, replacing the Artesh. In this position, the IRGC was able to acquire other military branches and merge with various militias with compatible ideologies. Within only a few years, the light infantry force had grown into a developed military with naval and air force capabilities.¹²⁰ Young as the force was and, perhaps pitifully equipped, the IRGC proved in these early years that it was capable of expanding its own usefulness to the regime and itself.

Contemporary analysts often describe the ascension of the IRGC militarily, the growing economic monopoly and the increased autonomy from its paternal regime as a silent coup.¹²¹ The evolution of the IRGC was less guided and calculated than a coup is usually assumed to be, but

its development over the past three decades has indeed brought it further away from its origins as a protector of the revolution and closer to a parallel, if not competing, economic, political and social institution. The evolution occurred in stages which began with its overshadowing the *Artesh* in the 1980s, the growth of its economic ventures and monopoly of reconstruction efforts in the 1990s, and the challenge to both the reformist and traditionalist political groups in the Majlis and executive political leadership beginning in the late 90s and taking off after Ahmadinejad's election in 2005.

Bonyads

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the IRGC's primary vehicle in the pursuit of their economic interests was the *bonyads* which had been entrusted to their leadership by Rafsanjani, as a means for placating and reducing the potential IRGC political threat. The first ventures of the IRGC in the Iranian economy were small; a few factory warehouses were purchased. Two companies were established initially, the *Moavenat khodkafae* (headquarters of self-sufficiency) and *Moavenat bassazi* (headquarters of reconstruction).¹²² In following with their new mission, the IRGC was given government no-bid contracts for the development and reconstruction of Iran's infrastructure.¹²³ The country's transportation and utilities services were in shambles after the eight-year war and the opportunity for profit in development was vast. The IRGC accumulated wealth rapidly during this period, bringing them not only further prospects for economic ventures but also autonomy from the political regime that had appointed the IRGC to the position of management of the *bonyads*.¹²⁴

Rafsanjani had appointed Mohsen Rafighdoost, the former Minister of the Revolutionary Guards, as the head of the *Bonyad-e Mostazafen*. Rafighdoost served as in this capacity until 1999, at which point another IRGC heavy-weight, Mohammad Forouzandeh, was appointed. Both men were required to give up their military roles in order to take on management of the *Bonyad-e Mostazafen*, but they continued to conduct business for the benefit of their IRGC brothers.¹²⁵

Industries

In addition to the *Bonyad-e Mostazafen*, the IRGC's construction conglomerate, *Khatam al-Anbiya*, was awarded contracts from dam building to railway reconstruction.¹²⁶ *Khatam al-Anbiya* was created in 1990 and would continue to earn large contracts from the IRI government throughout the decade. The business conglomerate earned itself some negative publicity through its growing monopoly and autonomy and in 1999 the reformist speaker of the Majlis, Mehdi Karrubi, issued a report that exposed the illegal dealings of the IRGC including the unauthorized operation of as many as sixty docks in the country.¹²⁷ Since the 2005 elections, the Guards have increased their control over smuggling, managing the arrival of contraband in Iran, as well. An estimated 30% of Iranian imports enter the country illegally through the smuggling activities of the IRGC.¹²⁸

Khatam al-Anbiya currently owns 812 subsidiary companies and manages government contract worth billions of dollars. The IRGC benefits financially from the profits that these lucrative government contracts generate as well as politically from their influence in industries such as oil and gas and nuclear energy. *Khatam al-Anbiya* owns and operates oil fields as well

as transport pipelines and the degree to which the company is invested in the energy sector highlights the importance of the energy industry for Iran's foreign and domestic policy.¹²⁹ Iran has been seeking energy independence for decades and, if the IRGC is seeking autonomy from its paternal regime then control of the energy sector could be the key to that independence.

The Revolutionary Guard's economic influence gained momentum after the election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. Under Ahmadinejad the IRGC's construction conglomerate, *Khatam al-Anbiya*, was given precedence during the privatization of former state initiatives. This movement towards privatization was announced immediately following Ahmadinejad's 2005 victory and amounted to the transition of \$120 billion worth of public assets into private ownership.¹³⁰ The company grew in its energy sector enterprises with an increase in government contracts for the development of gas fields and transit lines. The role of the Guards in the Iranian economy comes as no surprise given that Iran is seeking to privatize at the same time as keeping its enterprises at home in order to avoid foreign control.¹³¹

The IRGC, however, has limited experience in economic ventures and the increasing number of no-bid contracts awarded to the Guard's business conglomerates by Ahmadinejad's administration has garnered some criticism at home and abroad. In 2008 the IRGC's *Khatam al-Anbiya* was awarded a contract without bidding to complete phases 15 and 16 of the South Pars oil field development, a \$2.5 billion project. In 2010 *Khatam al-Anbiya*, far behind schedule, announced "financial difficulties" facing the project and requested an additional \$1 billion which was distributed from Iran's Foreign Reserve Fund amid much controversy. In 2009, the IRGC drew more negative publicity when it won a bid for the purchase of 51% of shares in stock for Telecommunications Company of Iran (TCI).¹³² The sale of the shares was prompted by

President Ahmadinejad's privatization of a number of state run companies. Media agencies in Iran were clearly aware of the significance of the IRGC owning the majority of shares in what is Iran's largest telecommunications company and the organization was portrayed in a less than favorable light.

The Guards' combined investments make the association of individuals and business the largest investor in Tehran's stock market. Most experts calculate that the IRGC controls at least one-third of the economy of the Islamic Republic.¹³³ Individual IRGC members, such as Mohammad Forouzandeh exercise their influence through bonyads, such as the Mostazafen, Shahid, and the Nur Foundations to serve their own interests, as well as the Guard Corps'. The unfortunate consequence of the Guards' growing economic presence is an increased pressure from the United States and other western countries to sanction the company's under the control of the IRGC.¹³⁴ The US Treasury Department has identified a handful of IRGC individuals who play roles in the organization's foreign military wing and who are accused of supporting terrorism; these individuals are effectively blacklisted from doing business with the United States and those cooperating with it. In addition, after years of lobbying, the US Treasury Department has succeeded in placing *Khatam al-Anbiya* itself on a list designating the organization as one that participates in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their delivery systems; as a member of this exclusive group, the company is unable to do business with American companies or individuals. In 2008 the European Union passed similar sanctions on *Khatam al-Anbiya*.¹³⁵ For those without access to primary sources of information inside the IRGC, the US Treasury Department's obvious concern sends a strong message about the role that the Guards play in Iranian economy. Prolific though they are in the investment and development markets,

there is little about the role of the Guards that is legitimate and esteemed. Within Iran, companies like *Khatam al-Anbiya* are perceived to be in pursuit of goals outside of their mandate to protect the revolution. Ahmadinejad's exclusive relationship as evidenced by the no-bid contracts given to the Guards' companies is damaging the administration as well as the public image of the IRGC. Capital investments are a necessity for any institution seeking to grow and expand its influence, but the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is challenged to find a balance in which it does not overstep the thin line of acceptable commercial conduct in pursuit of its own interests.

Sanctions

Prior to the beginning of economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran and the classification of many IRGC owned businesses as terrorist supporting organizations, the financial institutions connected with the Guards engaged in business deals with European countries such as Germany. Wirth and Seli, German and Italian companies respectively, had sold tunnel boring products to subsidiary companies of the IRGC with the understanding that they would be used for civilian purposes. The IRGC itself has a monopoly on tunneling and underground rail systems contracts, a market that it has cornered with its security credentials¹³⁶

The resources sold to the IRGC owned companies by German and Italian companies were used specifically for Iran's water tunnel projects in Ghormroud and Kerman provinces and were exempt from existing embargos, since they were part of infrastructure development. The European countries have been accused, nevertheless, of aiding the country in its nuclear development plans since the underground tunnels that are dug exclusively by IRGC construction

conglomerates could be a part of the larger construction plans for nuclear bunkers. While trade with Iran is now severely restricted by Western countries, in the past the IRGC was suspected of using supplies that appeared to be intended for infrastructure development for purposes designed instead for their nuclear activities. In 2010 the EU as a whole still constituted Iran's second largest trading partner.

In response to the economic sanctions against Iran as a means of pressuring the country to end its nuclear development program, President Ahmadinejad has been forced to make some dramatic economic changes.¹³⁷ In most cases the representatives of the IRGC are known to do what is in their best interests; in this case, however, Ahmadinejad is being forced to act in the best interests of the country despite the fact that it might tarnish his own political reputation. For decades, Iran has provided economic subsidies to the poor for gasoline and food staples. Ahmadinejad himself brought new programs to the country that benefited the poor, his key constituency, such as low interest loans, debt cancellation and general social welfare programs.¹³⁸ In the current economic climate, however, these programs have become unsustainable and in order to lower the impact of sanctions on the state budget, the President announced in 2010 that subsidies on staple goods for the underprivileged would be reduced. At the time that the Majlis approved the reduction, subsidies were expected to cost about \$100 billion per year. In December of 2010 the subsidy on gasoline, an entitlement that Iranians have come to rely on, was lifted amid protests and general popular disapproval. Simultaneously, the president attempted to raise taxes on bazaar merchant incomes by as much as 70%; strikes and protests eventually succeeded in forcing the president to lower the increase to 15% but the overall impact of the tax increase has been disillusionment among the merchant classes with the

Ahmadinejad administration.¹³⁹ In this sense, the economic sanctions imposed by the Western nations are working to put pressure on the current government. However, Ahmadinejad does not represent all of the IRGC and although he is a champion for the country's nuclear development program, he is not solely responsible for it and he does not have the power to put a stop to it. Although the current administration and the people of Iran may be suffering as a result of the economic sanctions, it does not necessarily mean that the IRGC is suffering.

In fact, it is possible that the organization is actually growing stronger as a result of the economic hardship. The Guards control so much of how business is operated in Iran and the unofficial methods through which trade is conducted are immune to the official economic sanctions. The black market, which the IRGC is expected to control almost entirely, is damaged by economic sanctions about as much as the mafia was damaged by Prohibition in the United States in the 1920s; the more that access any marketable good is restricted by the law, the more it's trade will be driven underground, profiting those who run the black market trade. The United States' instinctive reaction to political developments, such as the revelation of a plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States, is to slap new sanctions on Iran.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately, these punitive reactions are likely to strengthen the individuals and groups associated with the IRGC groups that organized the plot.

CHAPTER 4: IRGC POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Political Landscape

Iran's first Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, was an advocate for the political neutrality of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; however, Khomeini's Iran is vastly different from the one that Ayatollah Khomeini had envisioned. In Ayatollah Khomeini's belief system, the politicization of the IRGC would undermine the battle readiness of the forces and he warned forces to "stay away from political parties, groups and fronts" and to "steer clear of political games."¹⁴¹ In spite of the first Supreme Leader's intentions, the course of events that took place in the Islamic Republic put the IRGC on a trajectory bound for significant political involvement. This chapter will investigate the evolution of the organization that led to the politicization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the influence that the Guards have in the country's political establishment today. In order to shed light on the influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran it is necessary to draw a summary of the contemporary Iranian political system.

Iran's formal organizational structure is easily represented in charts and graphs illustrating symbolic seats of power; however, this illustration would not be adequate in describing the actual political order in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The political establishment is well furnished with a variety of religious and bureaucratic institutions, with the clergy holding executive power and the democratically elected Majlis overseeing legislative procedures. These political institutions were designed with the intention balancing the two predominant political philosophies of the time: (1) the *velayat-e faqih* and (2) the democratic ideals that ended the reign

of the Shah.¹⁴² Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of the divinely appointed guardianship paved the way for the theocracy that would become the foundation of Iran's political system, but the people who were responsible for the toppling of the Shah's regime were not unified in support of this ideal and the Ayatollah saw the need for compromise and gave his blessing for the establishment of the democratically elected Majlis and presidency. In doing so, Ayatollah Khomeini did not sacrifice totalitarian power, which was still delegated to the office of the Supreme Leader, but he did successfully mitigate the high opportunity and financial costs of imposing a religious dictatorship on an unwilling population. The Supreme Leader himself is elected by a body of 86 clerics, known as the Assembly of Experts, to whom the Supreme Leader, in theory, answers to. The members of the Assembly of Experts are elected from a vetted list of candidates and serve eight year terms. Members of the parliament, or Majlis, are also democratically elected; however, these candidates are vetted by an institution called the Council of Guardians. The Council of Guardians has twelve non-elected members and the body of clerics is responsible for ensuring that the democratic system does not grow overly eager and attempt to take full autonomy from the Clerics.

Within these state political structures there is little or no ideological unity. Iran's political order is polycentric and multidimensional, with authority and legitimacy coming from a variety of sources and ideological backgrounds. Political processes are both dynamic and opaque, making a confident analysis of the sources of power in the country difficult. Some analysts would describe the system as chaotic, but this would be incorrect as there is indeed order to the Iranian political system; this order is simply not structured in the typical Western understanding of organizational systems. Legitimacy, a topic that will be investigated further in

the following chapter, can be derived from popular approval based on economic output, popular approval based on ideological grounds, or authoritarian power by coercive force. Political systems in the modern era are often studied as either democratic or authoritarian. Iran's system embodies both categories, hosting a popularly elected bureaucracy parallel to a divinely imposed theocracy that bridges the gap between the people and God. The negotiated political order receives credit for the endurance of the Islamic Republic, thus far, but there are forces at constant struggle to polarize the sources of legitimacy towards democracy or authoritarianism. The IRGC constitutes one of these forces of influence that are putting a strain on the balance of clerical coercion and popular participation.

In the first decade, during the process of consolidating their military influence, the IRGC achieved their political goals through indirectly influencing political actors. The Guards had no means of participating directly in politics, but as this was a time that the military organization was preoccupied with the Iran-Iraq war and subsequently keeping their autonomy from the *Artesh*, legislative power was not on their agenda. The tactics and means used to work in the best interest politically of the IRGC depend a great deal on the context in which the Revolutionary Guard is operating and the capabilities and resources available to them. In the case of Lebanon, for example, spreading the revolution through military and covert means is essentially a task of sponsoring terrorism against the state of Israel.¹⁴³ The best support that the IRGC is able to offer politically to those who support its own goals is funding. Tangible support in the form of monetary aid is frequently transferred through proxies to political groups to countries in which the IRGC has an interest, developing bonds of solidarity between the IRGC and legislators. Financial support of local political movements takes many forms including

supplementing political parties' campaign funds, paying salaries and recruitment bonuses and paying rent or other operational costs.¹⁴⁴

In spite of the Supreme Leader's desires to see the IRGC as a politically neutral organization, a political mandate is inherent in the very foundation of the Guards' existence. Delegated with the task of protecting and continuing the revolution would inevitably become a mandate to suppress rival political factions whether they are motivated by ethnicity, ideology or politics. The very existence of the IRGC quickly became a political issue and the directive to protect the revolution would necessitate the protection of the Guards themselves. Rafsanjani, for example, warned against the radical character of the IRGC and took it upon himself to mitigate the danger posed by the organization by attempting to integrate them into the *Artesh*. As this proved to be a lengthy process, he gave the Guards a distraction in the form of control of certain *bonyads* and the mission to rebuild the country's infrastructure. He also redirected military resources to the *Artesh*, leaving the IRGC with outdated equipment.¹⁴⁵ The Guards put to good use their connections with the office of the Supreme Leader and managed to survive Rafsanjani's administration; however, they did lose some autonomy when the IRGC was consolidated under the Ministry of Defense Forces and Logistics (MODAFL) with the *Artesh*. Today, both military branches answer to MODAFL, which in turn reports to the Supreme National Security Council.

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Having successfully purged the IRI of the Shah's loyalists, the IRGC was consumed in the early 1990s with its struggle against the People's Mojahedin Organization (MKO). In spite of the Supreme Leader's and Rafsanjani's efforts to keep the IRGC out of politics, the Guards held a handful of government positions. More importantly, it was in this decade that the Guards

began speaking out against members of the political establishment. Voicing their ideological position became increasingly important to the IRGC as the Reformist movement grew. In 1996 the commander of the IRGC, Mohsen Rezai, spoke during the Majlis election against the reformists, referring to the “cancerous tumor of liberalism” that was taking over the country.”¹⁴⁷ Clearly not enough to sway the voters, Rezai’s comments went unheeded when, a year later, Reformist leader Mohammad Khatami was elected as Iran’s fifth president. During the same year, Rezai was replaced by a more softly spoken and moderate Yayha Rahim Safavi as the leader of the IRGC and was promoted to be secretary of the Expediency Council.¹⁴⁸

1997 marked a turning point in the political path of the IRGC. Not only did the organization wrap up much of their domestic security affairs with the elimination of Shah loyalists and by ejecting the MKO from the country, but the Guards saw an increase in their economic footprint as well. The Guards clearly saw themselves as having arrived at an age in which they were allowed to have a political voice, and they made no pretenses at supporting the Reformist administration. The IRGC, in a unique show of unanimity, threw their support wholeheartedly behind the conservatives, at the time represented by Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri.¹⁴⁹ The conservatives, politically sidelined by the Reformists, were unwilling to blatantly speak out against a movement that had clear popular support; therefore, hardliners relied on the IRGC to execute their mission to intimidate and persecute those in the reformist movement.¹⁵⁰ The comparatively moderate leader of the IRGC, Safavi, used his position of influence to sabotage the efforts to reform Iran’s political system. Where Khatami loosened controls on media, the IRGC attacked newspapers and media channels and brought to court those who spoke out against the conservatives or the Guards themselves. The Guards had little support in the form of

political resources, but they held control of a significant portion of the economy and where that did not suffice, they made up for it with sensational rhetoric and intimidation.¹⁵¹ Since the conservative hard-liners were unwilling to risk their already weak footing with the public and Khatami's government was hesitant to take the battle to the Supreme Leader, the conflict was mainly fought between the Guards and the reformist-sympathizing newspapers.¹⁵² Khatami's election in 1997 marked a turning point for the IRGC's role in politics only in that it was given allowance to speak out in favor of the clerics, however the Guards did not hold any popular support from the voters themselves. It was not until 2003 that the Guards were able to rally themselves into an active participant in the municipal and national electoral process.

Khatami's "dialogue of civilizations" and the hope that he provided to the West for a new Iran animated young IRGC members who were eager to take their battle to the political field.¹⁵³ Between 1997 and 2003 the Guards were limited to tactics of intimidation and the occasional murder of belligerent reformists, but in the municipal elections of 2003 the country saw for the first time the political weight that the Guards held when the little-known Ahmadinejad was elected as Tehran's mayor. A member of the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran (Abadgaran), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was a former Basij and a leader in the new neo-conservative movement.¹⁵⁴ Two years after being named mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad was victorious in the race for president with almost 62% of the vote. His well-run campaign has consistently targeting Iran's impoverished and disenfranchised, making frequent promises to that demographic to "put oil money on the people's tables".¹⁵⁵

The entrance of the IRGC into the political field in the form of Ahmadinejad and the Abadgaran marked the beginning of a political realignment which may be partially responsible

for the success that Ahmadinejad and his supporters had.¹⁵⁶ The country seemed unprepared for the manifestation of a third contender in the political game. The three contenders represented groups of men who were brought together more by shared experiences than by ideology; therefore it is difficult to outline the policy foundations of each. There is frequent overlap in ideologies and, at least among the conservatives, conversions to neo-conservatism or reformist parties were not uncommon. In the 1980s and 1990s the bipolar political structure had forced reformists and conservatives to the center in order to gain a significant majority of voter support; the manifestation of the neo-conservatives resulted in a realignment of loyalties and ideologies that developed as an overall re-polarization of all parties. Today's political establishment features the following three prominent factions: conservatives, reformists, and neo-conservatives.

Conservatives

In the pre-2003 political landscape, conservatives were often defined as conservative pragmatists and conservative traditionalists. Conservative traditionalists were those who held with the original ideology of the *velayet-e faqih* including the isolationist policies that were intended to maintain the Islamic Republic's independence from foreign interference and manipulation.¹⁵⁷ Conservative traditionalists emphasize traditional values and lifestyle as well as cultural purity. The well-known Association of Militant Clergy represents one of the largest groups of conservative traditionalists.¹⁵⁸ Conservative pragmatists differ from traditionalists mainly in their support for the globalized market economy. These conservatives encouraged Iran to take part in the global economy much in the same way that China has, without sacrificing its ideals. Conservative pragmatists have no democratic leanings and have, in fact, mostly

reconsolidated with the traditionalists, now known as the Principalists, since the emergence of the Abadgaran.¹⁵⁹

Reformists

In 1988 an ideological split in the Association of Militant Clerics resulted in the establishment of the Reformists political faction. Inspired by Ali Shariati, who believed that Islam was compatible with modern political philosophies, the Reformists supported the democratization of Iran while retaining its Islamic identity. Mehdi Karrubi and Mohammad Khatami are the champions of the Reformists and they base their political foundation on the virtues of economic and cultural openness and the loosening of controls on society.¹⁶⁰ The Reformists spurred the political involvement of the IRGC and many analysts posit that the Reformist movement is dead, having never legitimized their platform with the necessary support of the Supreme Leader.

Neoconservatives

Neoconservatives compose themselves of what was formerly referred to as the “radicals” and they are now established in the Abadgaran-e Iran-e Islam, or the Developers of Islamic Iran.¹⁶¹ Abadgaran, for short, is made of mostly of veteran IRGC and Basij members. The name of the group intentionally seeks legitimacy in the role of the IRGC in the reconstruction of Iran in the post-war years. The ideology, goals and strategies of the IRGC through their proxies in the government will be examined in the subsequent section, but it is important to note that not all IRGC members and veterans are in line with the Abadgaran movement. Well known Guards

such as Mohsen Rezai do not align themselves with the neoconservatives; Rezai would rather consider himself a conservative traditionalist and ran against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections.¹⁶² The IRGC exists as a group of members from a background of shared experiences and they rally around multiple key personalities, instead of just one. For the IRGC members that make up Abadgaran, Ahmadinejad is one of these key personalities. He represents a patron, in the economic context and a leader in the political context.

Domestic Influence

As a whole, the goals for the IRGC inherent in their constitutional founding are to protect, continue, and export the revolution.¹⁶³ The mandate to continue the revolution is fundamentally political; in actuality, the IRGC is interested in protecting the revolution because it is represented by the clerics who enable the political and economic influence of the Guards. The IRGC would not promote or allow moderates or Reformists to gain political supremacy because these groups do not support the role of the Guards as the advocates of the revolution. The concern of the IRGC is not for the revolution itself, but rather for continuing the status quo in which they are allowed to continue the growth of influence into all sectors of Iranian political and economic life. To summarize, the IRGC is not as concerned with revolutionary principles as it is with political positions.

The clergy, recognizing the need of the IRGC to maintain the status quo, returns support for the IRGC in part to maintain a degree of control over the organization and in part because the clergy need the military power and the Basij to enforce their authority. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei shows his support for the Guards through multiple appointments of IRGC

commanders into politically influential positions such as defense, economy and revolutionary committees, increasingly their influence in domestic and foreign policy and economic affairs¹. Among these appointments include the current president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the head of the Supreme council of National Security, Ali Larijani; the head of state television and radio services, Ezzatollah Zarghami; and the head of the Expediency Council Mohsen Rezai. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Mohammad Forouzandeh resigned from his IRGC command post in order to head the influential Mostazafen Foundation, a position that he was formally appointed to by the Supreme Leader. Each of these positions lends opportunities to influence policy making in domestically and abroad.

Some analysts believe that the rise of the IRGC in politics has occurred as a part of the natural evolution of the careers of the Iran-Iraq War veterans. There is not much to be suspicious about when a former military member matures and decides to go into politics. Since the IRGC is not a cohesive political party, nor can it even be considered a coalition, it is not effective to identify the strategic goals of the Guards as a single unit. The competitive disunity within the IRGC is itself a feature of Iranian politics. This section will investigate, instead, the goals and interests of key figureheads in the organization. President Ahmadinejad is clearly an important figure in Iranian politics, both as the president of the IRI and as the leader of the coalition Abadgaran. Mohsen Rezai has been a significant figure in the IRGC since the Revolution and the fact that he ran against Ahmadinejad in 2005 is a sign of the disunity in the organization and a clue to Rezai's competing interests. Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, currently the mayor of Tehran, poses a potential challenge to the Abadgaran coalition in future presidential elections and as a former IRGC commander he represents a comparatively moderate voice among the Pasdaran.

Broad shared political interests could be attributed to key political IRGC figures, including the need to legitimize their own authority, delegitimize the clerics and flood the bureaucracy with those in the same patronage network- the IRGC. Each key IRGC member takes different approaches to achieving these goals, as will be demonstrated in the next section. The three aforementioned IRGC leaders have been chosen as representatives of three factions within the IRGC; Rezai represents a traditional conservative position, Ahmadinejad is the leader of the neoconservative camp and Qalibaf falls somewhere in between the two as a pragmatic conservative.

Some analysts and scholars of the Islamic Republic of Iran have hypothesized that the neoconservative movement represents the political goals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Assigning specific political goals to the IRGC as a single unit is not possible and it is inaccurate to describe the neoconservatives as representative of the IRGC. The Abadgaran coalition itself is made up of current or former IRGC members, but that is not to say that all IRGC members identify themselves with Abadgaran, the primary political vehicle for the neoconservatives. Although not likely to associate themselves with Reformists, IRGC members could be placed all along the spectrum of conservative political loyalties ranging from conservative traditionalists to neo conservatives; those in the middle such as Qalibaf would easily qualify as pragmatic conservatives.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Coming from an underprivileged background, Mahmud Ahmadinejad studied at the Iran University of Science and Technology in Tehran. He was a Basij during the Iran-Iraq war and

served in a number of administrative posts in West Azerbaijan. In 2003 he was surprisingly appointed as Mayor of Teheran and two years later, he won the presidential election, beating Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani with 62% of the vote.¹⁶⁴ Ahmadinejad has consistently used his impoverished background as a political tool for garnering social support; his trademark khaki suit is noticeably cheap and symbolizes to the public that he considers himself a humble equal to those who elected him to power. As an individual, he has touted human rights and is a voice for the underprivileged and oppressed. His political rhetoric in the 2005 race for presidential office promised to address social injustice, combat corruption and provide for the impoverished. After taking office, Ahmadinejad lived in his own home until security forces insisted that he move to the presidential palace, where the president promptly replaced the ornate furniture with less expensive décor. The source of jokes and ridicule among his political competitors, Ahmadinejad won invaluable support from the rural and less privileged in Iran. The man is notably fervent in his Muslim beliefs, though he may be considered a radical even to some of the more devout Shi'ites.

It is possible that Ahmadinejad's landslide victory against Rafsanjani in 2005 could be attributed to his appeal to the poor and rural voters, however many have also accused Ahmadinejad's Abadgaran coalition of using less than ethical means to secure victory.¹⁶⁵ American and UK overseers declared that the election did not meet the free and fair standards of democracy and the Interior ministry received as many as 300 electoral fraud complaints in Tehran alone. Although their methods are unknown, the results indicate that the IRGC has the means available to violate electoral rules without any legal consequences. The Reformist Karrubi, who also ran in the 2005 elections, publicly accused the IRGC of interfering with the

roll results; these accusations went unaddressed by the IRGC or Abadgaran and Khamenei supported Ahmadinejad, claiming that the elections results were a “profound humiliation” for the United States.¹⁶⁶

As for legitimizing their authority, the Ahmadinejad camp appeals to both the material needs of the underprivileged and the faith of the Iranian people. Ahmadinejad’s political approach emphasizes the Iranian peoples’ right to nuclear power and anti-Western, American and Israeli sentiments. The Supreme Leader’s support of Ahmadinejad was likely a result of his highly conservative political stance; his history as a former Basij lends some credibility to Ahmadinejad but is not enough to base a campaign on. In order to become a candidate for political office, aspiring politicians must pass the judgment of the Guardian council. Ahmadinejad and his competing fellow IRGC veteran brothers likely received their support from the council based more on their conservative politics than their IRGC roots. In the 2005 presidential elections both Ahmadinejad and Rezaei emphasized their conservative political stances, hoping to appeal to hard-liners and to gain support from the clerical regime. Ahmadinejad relied heavily on the hard-line message to maintain political legitimacy during his campaign and this approach is shaping the evolution of the IRGC itself, widening the schisms between neoconservative IRGC members and pragmatic conservatives IRGC members.

Although he pandered to the conservative clergy’s ideals in order to gain their political support, having won his victory Ahmadinejad quickly showed signs of moving away from clerical control. The first evidence of Ahmadinejad’s dissent was in his choice for vice president. Ahmadinejad wanted Esfandiar Mashaei in the position and Khamenei disapproved, proposing that Mashaei should manage the Pilgrimage Organization; Ahmadinejad refused and

appointed Mashaei. The conflict ended only when Mashaei himself resigned from the position of Vice President. Instead of backing down, Ahmadinejad publicly declared his displeasure with the Supreme Leader in a letter and appointed Mashaei as his own special advisor. The disagreement between the President and the Supreme Leader over political appointments was the first of many. More recently, Ahmadinejad attempted to dismiss several officials that had been appointed by the Supreme Leader as “babysitters” and, when the Supreme Leader reinstated these officials, Ahmadinejad boycotted political meetings for almost two weeks straight. The Ahmadinejad camp and the Clerics clearly have differing political goals, but both parties find that it is still in their best interests to support one another, at least in rhetoric if not in practice. The Supreme Leader is wary against the IRGC achieving too much political and economic influence and Ahmadinejad is not keen on playing the submissive puppet that the Supreme Leader expects from the President of the Islamic Republic.

Upon taking office in 2005, Ahmadinejad gave most of his cabinet positions to former or current Guards in the interior, intelligence, defense and oil ministries. Ahmadinejad has been using political appointments to exercise his political influence in the context of the clergy-controlled political landscape; but the appointments serve a simultaneous purpose of reinforcing his own influence not just in the big political sphere, but in his own political networks as well. During the Iran-Iraq War, the members of the IRGC formed bonds of social allegiance that remain an integral part of the social system thirty years later. The appointment of fellow Guards to economic or political positions does not immediately suggest a conspiracy to control the system, but may rather simply be the product of the patronage system in which a favor is granted in exchange for social capital. With the growing number of Guards in political positions, the

clergy necessarily feel pressured by what they view as interference. Likewise, when the presidential administration, increasingly dominated by IRGC veterans, has an appointment of a non-Pasdaran member forced into their ranks, the consensus is generally that the clerics are interfering in their affairs. President Ahmadinejad has boldly taken steps to rid his administration of this non-IRGC presence; for example, in 2009 the president dismissed Intelligence Minister Hojjatal Islam Gholam Hosssein Mohseni-Ejei, a man strongly opposed to the IRGC's growing influence and backed by the clerics. This was the first of many more battles between the President and the clergy using political appointments, and dismissals, as vehicles for executing political influence.

Mohsen Rezai

Mohsen Rezai, a conservative politician with a PhD in economics, ran against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential elections. Rezai was the commander of the IGRC for sixteen years, from 1981-1997, at which point he left the Guards to become the Secretary of the Expediency Council. Rezai pulled out of the 2005 campaign before election day, but ran again in the disputed 2009 elections. He has expressed his disapproval of the president's immoderate rhetoric about the country's nuclear program and has suggested that Iran use a more sensible approach with regard to its nuclear policy. He has directly accused President Ahmadinejad of being too aggressive, although this is not a critique that the President himself likely perceived as adverse to his reputation.

The most important feature about Rezai and his political campaigns is his stance on the West. Not only does Rezai believe that Ahmadinejad's lack of moderation and overly aggressive

attitude is detrimental to the West, but he has stated that the Obama Administration represents an opportunity for Iran to work with the West towards better relations and cooperation in Iran's pursuit of nuclear energy capabilities. His political platform for much of his career has been based on his message of moderation. Far from being a Reformist, Rezai is considered a conservative principalist. He does not advocate wavering on the issue of nuclear development, but rather suggests that a more moderate approach should be used.¹⁶⁷ Rezai denies that the IRGC is working towards the militarization of Iran and says, instead, that politicians such as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who he notes served only a few months at the front line in the Iran-Iraq War, as well as Iranian civilians, are attempting to militarize the country.¹⁶⁸ His critique of the Reformist candidates in 2009, Mehdi Karrubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi, is equally harsh, believing them to be too passive. Still the Secretary of the Expediency Council at the time of this writing, Mohsen Rezai holds a prominent position on Interpol's Wanted List for his role in the 1994 bombing of the Jewish Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf

Like Rezai, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf began his career in the military and served as the Commander of the IRGC's Air Force. During a short stint as the commander of the Law Enforcement Forces, Qalibaf made enemies of several hard-line paramilitary groups such as Ansar e-Hezbollah by cracking down on their vigilante activism. Whereas Rezai is a seasoned military man and markets himself as such in the political field, Qalibaf's strengths are as a business man rather than a strategist. He currently serves as the Mayor of Tehran, as position in which he has received much praise and commendation for his achievements. Qalibaf's political

position falls much along the same lines as Rezai's in that he strongly criticizes the extremism of the Ahmadinejad camp and maintains that moderation in tone is more likely to achieve the goals of the Islamic Republic. He unapologetically supports Iran's nuclear development but also suggests that Iran should be able to carry out respectful diplomatic talks with the United States.

Rezai and Qalibaf, running against each other and against Ahmadinejad, market themselves as conservatives, nevertheless devoutly loyal to the Supreme Leader, in the 2005 and 2009 campaigns and their less radical rhetoric highlights the extremism of Ahmadinejad and his neoconservative cabinet. In 2009, however, the race did not come down to a battle between the neoconservatives and the pragmatic conservatives; it became a conflict between the "conservatives" and the "reformists". In such a situation, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei was in the position to decide whether to support a reformist candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, or a conservative, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The decision to support Ahmadinejad has led analysts to speculate that the Supreme Leader is in bed with the IRGC; however, with an understanding of the internal schisms within the association, it is clear that the Supreme Leader simply chose the lesser of two evils. The Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejad are far from amicable and, had the Supreme Leader been forced to choose between a neoconservative IRGC member and a pragmatic conservative IRGC member, his likely choice would have been the comparatively moderate pragmatic conservative.

Foreign Influence

If an analyst or scholar were to conduct an in depth analysis of the Revolutionary Guard's Foreign Policy approach towards, say, just Lebanon, then one might conclude that the IRGC bases its foreign affairs policy on a strong ideological conviction. In contrast, however, one

might look at IRGC's actions in Iraq and conclude with confidence that the organization's foreign policy is based on a realist and geopolitical concern for its own security. A careful examination of the Islamic Republic's foreign affairs reveals a genuine reliability in Iran's approach to each of its neighbors, but a baffling lack of consistency overall; one possible explanation for this is the disconnect between the IRGC's domestic political operations and its foreign policy operations.

The foreign goals of the IRGC are simultaneously ideological and practical. Primarily, the IRGC utilizes the Quds Force, its foreign military division, to spread the ideology of the velayat-e faqih.. The IRGC is compelled by the ideology of the Islamic revolution to spread its beliefs especially to other Shi'a in the region, but also beyond its own neighborhood.¹⁶⁹ This ideology is the banner of the Islamic Republic and it is an inherent directive of the constitution to broadcast the revolution outside of Iran.¹⁷⁰ Shared religious beliefs are a significant variable that influences Iran's intervention abroad through covert and military means; though the IRGC itself may have alternative interests. The following chart lists countries with the highest population of Shi'a Muslims; of these eight, Iran is known to have covert operations in five: Pakistan, Iraq, Turkey, Yemen and Afghanistan.

Table 2
Shi'a Muslim Population by Country

Country	Total Population	% of Population-Shia	% of World Shi'a Population
Iran	66-70 million	90-95%	37-40%
Pakistan	17-26 million	10-15%	10-15%
India	16-24 million	10-15%	9-14%
Iraq	19-22 million	65-70%	11-12%
Turkey	7-11 million	10-15%	4-6%
Yemen	8-10 million	35-40%	5%
Azerbaijan	5-7 million	65-75%	3-4%
Afghanistan	3-4 million	10-15%	2%

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Research suggests that the IRGC still holds on to some of its original ideological interests; take the case of Lebanon for example. Very much unlike the relationship between Iraq and Iran, the nature of the relationship between Lebanon and Iran is not clandestine. In Iraq, Iran has a healthy fear of igniting US and Coalition forces indignation over more obvious support of violent militancy and igniting an attack on the Islamic Republic from the uncomfortably close position of just next door. In Lebanon, Iran and the IRGC are under no such obligation to remain sensitive to the United States' anti-terror sensibilities. It is, therefore, a simpler task to ascertain the goals of the IRGC in Lebanon. John Negroponte once stated that "at the center of Iran's terrorism strategy is Lebanese Hezbollah, which relies on Tehran for substantial portion of its budget, military equipment, and specialized training."¹⁷²

The IRGC's goal in Lebanon is a useful example of the remaining influence of ideology over the Guards. Approximately 45-55% of Lebanon's Muslims are Shi'a, a fact that results in an automatic ideological link between the two.¹⁷³ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is

obliged by its own nature to make an effort to spread its ideology abroad through the Quds Force, among other divisions of its organization. Lebanon is of key importance to Iran's exportation of the Shi'a Revolution. To date the IRGC has no greater foreign presence than in southern Lebanon where a large Shi'a community is located. Recruits have repeatedly claimed that when they went to Tehran for training they were taught not only how to fire a weapon or construct an IED, but were also instructed in the doctrine of Shi'a Islam and the velayat-e faqih principle. In a religious sense Lebanon is the first outpost in Iran's attempts to spread their Islamic Revolution throughout the Middle East.

Lebanon itself is limited in the resources that it is able to provide Iran and Hezbollah is largely an importer of weapons and an exporter of training. In terms of material resources, Iran has almost nothing to gain from its involvement in Lebanon. Additionally, Iran's influence in Lebanon does not increase Iran's security in an international sense. The financing and support of the terrorist networks in Hezbollah has been the source of diplomatic tension, to say the least. Iran's interest in Lebanon appears to be largely based on the concept of exporting its Shi'a revolution to the rest of the world and to obstruct the continued development and assimilation of the state of Israel into the Middle East.

The history of the relationship between Iran and Lebanon also involves Syria. The first Lebanese War in the 1980s wreaked havoc on the once thriving nation, leaving Lebanon's government and economy in collapse and greatly reducing Syria's influence in the region. It was around the same time period that the Islamic Revolution concluded and the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini began his rule of Iran. Recognizing the opportunity to export its revolution

to the center of the Middle East and, with Syrian approval, Iran moved 2,500 IRGC troops in the Shi'a dominated Beqaa Valley of Lebanon.¹⁷⁴ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was able to unite the warring Shi'a factions and establish Hezbollah, giving them money and training to fight Israel. It was through the development of Hezbollah that two tactics of Shi'a terrorism developed: suicide bombing and hostage taking. Hezbollah has since strengthened in southern Lebanon and continued its provocation of Israel while simultaneously building a history of dependence on Iran.

Defending the Revolution

In countries where religious beliefs are similarly aligned, ideological justification for foreign intervention is easy to come by. More realistically, however, the IRGC's Quds Force acts assertively to undermine attempts to weaken the Iranian regime as well as preemptively to prevent a foreign opposition to the regime from provoking insurrection in Iran or more overtly attacking the regime militarily. Potential foreign threats range from the state of Israel to the Coalition forces in Iraq. Khamenei's foreign policy decisions are strongly influenced by his rigid distrust of the West, particularly the US; the Ayatollah accuses the United States of working to destabilize the regime and believes that Washington is single-handedly responsible for the uprisings following the June 2009 elections.¹⁷⁵ Quds Force exists to spread the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran while securing the sovereignty of the regime.

From a realist perspective there are institutional interests that may, in the IRGC's opinion, necessitate covert interference or influence in a foreign nation. A list of Iran's export relationships (nations importing less than 3% of Iran's total export excluded) reveals that Iraq

and Afghanistan both share a significant portion of Iran's export volume; both nations are also in a state of great insecurity. Promoting security or ensuring control when the foreign state has regained security is essential to the economic stability of Iran and, consequentially, the IRGC.

Table 3
Iran's Export Relationships by Value

Country	Weight (Kg)	Value (Rial)	Value (\$)	% Value
United Arab Emirates	3,665,163,637	17,040,396,636,532	1,858,981,838	14.273
Iraq	3,313,075,774	16,587,080,653,082	1,809,862,469	13.896
China	6,772,455,047	9,107,122,159,571	992,551,828	7.621
India	2,279,654,207	8,206,256,246,743	895,409,697	6.875
Japan	1,495,686,825	5,978,327,663,083	652,322,022	5.008
Italy	549,333,797	5,273,824,741,428	574,703,384	4.412
Afghanistan	642,087,395	4,619,438,574,740	503,433,890	3.865

¹⁷⁶

Iraq is a perfect case where the IRGC's interests go far beyond ideology. Granted, sharing more than just a geographical border, the histories of Iran and Iraq are inextricably linked to one another socio-economically, historically and religiously. The religious and ideological connection is a strong one, but not the only bond between these neighbors; the two countries depend on one another for economic stability, as well. Iran and Iraq have the second and third largest oil reserves in the world, respectively.¹⁷⁷ Most of Iran's onshore oil fields are located on Iraq's southern border and control and access to these oil resources in southern Iraq is crucial to the internal stability of Iran, which depends on oil exports for economic growth.¹⁷⁸ At the end of 2009 it was reported that Iran crossed the southeastern border of Iraq to take control of a well in the Fauqa oil field, which has an estimated 1.55 million barrels of oil reserves, because the well had failed to be purchased in an auction held by the Iraqi government.¹⁷⁹ The well reportedly lies about a kilometer from the agreed-upon border between Iran and Iraq and yet, in spite of

complaints from Baghdad, Iran has thus far refused to remove the Iranian flag from the well and withdraw its 11 soldiers that now guard the well.¹⁸⁰ This issue illustrates not only the fragility of the border between Iran and Iraq, but also the relative inability or unwillingness of Baghdad to take more coercive action to defend itself against Iran. Inaction is likely the result of the current preoccupation of Iraqi forces with internal instability. As long as Iraq is unstable politically, Iran will pay the price economically and will attempt to balance the cost by taking action either blatantly, as was the case with Well 4 in the Fauqa Field, or covertly.

This case also illustrates the dilemma that Iran faces in its relationship with Iraq; the instability that has a great effect on the condition of Iran's economy also opens doors for Iran to assert influence in a manner that may not be possible in a state with greater security resources, stronger economic independence and a stronger sense of national identity and therefore greater resistance to ideological manipulation.

In the case of Afghanistan, the IRGC's interest in the conflict-ridden state is largely based on topography. On Iran's eastern border, the events in Afghanistan have a direct impact on Iran. Afghanistan also provides a region of underdevelopment which gives Iranian companies opportunities to gain lucrative building contracts. For instance, a road construction company partly owned by Qassem Suleimani recently received a major road construction project in an attempt to link Afghanistan's four major cities. The key to Afghanistan in this sense is stability; a stable, Shi'a oriented Afghanistan is the sought after goal as it would keep their eastern border safe.

IGRC and Iranian influence in Afghanistan is pivotal to the security of their state. The drug trade has dominated its border and has become a serious issue for the Iranian government. Suleimani's first post in the IRGC was on this border attempting to intercept drug traffickers into Iran. The drug trade which has allowed the Taliban to prosper also places large amounts of drugs within Iran's borders. The UN Office of Drugs and Crime estimated in 2008 the Iran could have as many as 1.8 million drug addicts.¹⁸¹

The development of a Pakistani-funded Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan also was of interest to Iran. This concern was further amplified by the arrival of American troops after September 11th. In Afghanistan, Iran appears to be attempting to use economic influence to bolster security; by injecting money into the country to build roads and other projects they are attempting to create an infrastructure dependent on Iran. Iran also has some benefit in supporting the Taliban itself; a weakened Afghanistan cannot form an alliance with the United States against Iran, a threat that the Islamic Republic is perpetually aware of.

Of increasing concern in the international realm are the growing ties between the IRGC and Venezuela. Regionally separated, economically independent of one another and ethnically and religiously distinct, these two nations have very little to recommend them to one another as allies, and yet there has been a strengthening of the relationship between Iran and Venezuela since 2005. The camaraderie that Iran and Venezuela share is based mainly on their anti-American ideology. Iran uses petro dollars as leverage against Venezuela while the Islamic Republic's own interests go beyond the economic or ideological spheres. Iran's goal is to gain a geographically strategic advantage over the US by posing a threat to American borders that

counterbalances the threat that Iran faces with the United States occupation of Iraq.¹⁸² Back in the ideological realm, it is possible that Ahmadinejad is also hoping to damage the relationship between Latin American countries and Israel. Lastly, the IRGC might hope to build intelligence and terrorism networks in Latin America from which terrorist attacks might be launched against the United States.

Most importantly, Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez share revolutionary aspirations. Both men are ruled by an anti-American ideology that paints every other issue with revolutionary interpretation and rhetoric. Chavez has mentioned more than once that he has a vision of establishing new world hegemony with a union of the Arabs, Iranians and Latin Americans.¹⁸³ Unlike Chavez's vision, Ahmadinejad envisions a Shi'ite union that courts Latin America because of the geographical advantage.

Political Interests

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has a personal interest in Iraq to the extent that the organization's leaders believe that the Guards have a responsibility to protect neighboring country against the imperialist aspirations of the United States. This perspective is characteristic of the ideology that the Islamic Republic is founded on; article 154 of the Iranian constitution declares: "the attainment of independence, freedom, and rule of justice and truth to be the right of all people of the world. Accordingly, while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations, it supports the just struggles of the freedom fighters against the oppressors in every corner of the globe."¹⁸⁴ The Guards interpret the actions of the United States and the Coalition Forces as "oppressive" and see Iraqis as freedom fighters.

As such, it is the obligation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard to defend the Iraqi nation against foreign aggression.

As a fellow Shi'a majority state, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a great deal of gain from public opinion when relations with neighboring Iraq are smooth and friendly. An open relationship with Iraq is by no means crucial to the survival of the regime, as we've seen through the Iran-Iraq war and the obvious health of the regime, to-date. It would, nevertheless, be a desirable benefit for Iran if Iraq were to institute a system founded on the doctrine of velayat-e faqih. The adoption by Iraq of such a system would not only improve Iran-Iraq relations but it would also add a great deal of legitimacy to Iran's system, which is currently in a state of crisis that is difficult to measure from the unprivileged perspective of being without access to classified intelligence.

Taking into consideration the abundance of interests that the state of Iran and its regime have in the security, economic stability and political structure of Iraq, it is without a doubt that the IRGC has some motivation to take whatever measures are within its capabilities to gain and retain control of its neighbor's political and economic condition. This has historically been achieved militarily, diplomatically and, of course, subversively. The foreign operations branch of the IRGC was founded under circumstances that were necessitated by the loss of diplomatic relations between Iran and Iraq's political regimes and has continued to grow, since.¹⁸⁵

Quds Force

The history of the Quds Force is strongly, though not exclusively, influenced by the relationship between Iran and Iraq. The IRGC division's first mission as a consolidated force

involved neighboring Iraq and since then it has not ceased to be a concern to the regime or the Quds Force. In the 1980s and 1990s the IRGC formed close relationships with two Iraqi political parties, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Islamic Dawah Party. The Dawah and SCIRI parties are led and sponsored by prominent Shi'a figures from Southern Iraq. They share ideological perspectives with Ayatollah Khomeini's regime but unlike SCIRI, the Dawah party is opposed to the principle of velayat-e faqih.¹⁸⁶

The IRGC was directly involved the founding of SCIRI and it filled positions with former Iraqi Shi'a refugees that had fled to Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. SCIRI and its militant branch, the Badr Corps, recognized Ayatollah Khamenei as their Supreme Leader up until 2007 when loyalties were shifted to Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al Sistani of Iraq.¹⁸⁷ Despite the fact that Dawah distinguishes its doctrine as separate from that of Ayatollah Khamenei, the bonds between the party and the IRGC are still strong. Dawah has a militant wing but has had little activity apart from 1983 bombings of the U.S. and French Embassies in Kuwait, which it claimed responsibility for.¹⁸⁸ The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq's militant wing, the Badr Corps, has a stronger presence within Iraq and is the progeny of the IRGC's Quds Force.

Much of the intelligence that is available on the Badr Corps and Quds Force operations in Iraq predates the Iraq War, and it is therefore difficult to locate accurate details on the numbers of militants, the amount of money that is handled between the Badr Corps and the Quds Force and the names of prominent leaders in command. The primary source of much of the information that will follow is a collection of intelligence reports from the Republican Guard that

were captured in the course of the Iraq War. This information was made available by Brian Fishman and Joseph Felter on the Harmony Database.

The tactics and means used to work towards the ideological, security and political goals of the IRGC depend a great deal on the context in which the Revolutionary Guard is operating and the capabilities and resources available to them. In the case of Lebanon, spreading the revolution through military and covert means is essentially a task of sponsoring terrorism against the state of Israel. The best support that the IRGC is able to offer covertly is tangible support and training. Tangible support in the form of monetary aid, weapons or medicine are frequently transferred through proxies to terrorist or insurgent groups to countries in which the IRGC has an interest in nurturing conflict. Weapons allow insurgent groups to fight for survival while money and medicines strategically develop bonds of solidarity between the Iranian-supported insurgents and the people that they live and fight with.

Financial support of local movements takes many forms including supplementing political parties' campaign funds, paying salaries and recruitment bonuses to militants and paying rent or other operational costs for militant groups.¹⁸⁹ While financial support often comes directly from the regime to proxy organizations that support opposition groups and militias, the most direct form of support offered by the IRGC abroad is through training. The IRGC has utilized the Quds Force to develop a comprehensive training program in Iran and proxy states through which militant leaders are trained and sent back to their countries to hand down expert knowledge and skills to their subordinates.

The IRGC's degree of influence is not uniform in each area of foreign policy; for example, the military branch of the IRGC, the Quds Force, may be forced to act in the best interests of the state regardless of the institutional goals of the IRGC. On the other hand, the level of individual influence that certain Quds Force leaders have in foreign policy decision making may enable them to manipulate the agenda of the ultimate foreign policy executive, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS

The preceding chapters demonstrate the degree to which the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is integrated into the society, military, economy and politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The proliferation of the IRGC's influence has ignited speculation over whether the Guards intend to usurp the rule of the Supreme Leader and the clerics and this debate has intensified in recent months with the demonstrated belligerence of President Ahmadinejad towards the Supreme Leader. The speculation is well warranted given the brazen defiance of Iran's president towards the man who essentially guaranteed Ahmadinejad's second term.

In June of 2009 it was repeatedly asserted by analysts and reporters that Ahmadinejad was the Supreme Leader's lapdog and his guarantee against the resurgence of the Reformist leaders in the Majlis and the office of the president. By spring of 2010 it was made clear that Ahmadinejad's relationship with the Supreme Leader was, at the least, not entirely submissive. Most recently, President Ahmadinejad was publicly humiliated when he dismissed the country's Minister of Intelligence, Heydar Moslehi, only to have the Supreme Leader immediately reinstate Moslehi to his position. Moslehi, a Mullah, was the only cleric in Ahmadinejad's cabinet of 21 ministers, 12 of which are representatives of the IRGC.¹⁹⁰ The move was clearly an attempt to demonstrate independence from the office of the Supreme Leader and, having failed, the president boycotted cabinet meetings for ten days, eventually returning with his tail between his legs as a probable lame duck for the remainder of his term in office.¹⁹¹

Those who made assertions in 2010 that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was on its way to eclipsing the clerical regime are likely surprised to see Ahmadinejad, the public face

of the neo-conservative faction of the IRGC, publicly humiliated and subdued by what they supposed to be a weakening regime. The Supreme Leader has more recently shown that he is not only willing to put a stop to anyone who steps out of line from his authority, but to take preemptive steps towards ensuring that they will never again be in a position of power to attempt a mutiny. It is clear from the events of the past year that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has a far bigger challenge than initially expected if it does indeed have the unified intention of gaining supremacy over the clerics. In order to be in a place to take that first step, the IRGC needs internal unity, autonomy from the regime, and legitimacy with the people they wish to rule. The preceding chapters have attempted to illustrate through descriptive analysis that the IRGC does not possess all of these characteristics and that it is, therefore, not in a position to be successful in such an attempt. In summary, the IRGC does maintain a degree of autonomy in its military and economic operations and it possesses the legitimacy or the means of bolstering their legitimacy with the people. The association of key leaders does not, however, have the conformity of ideology and political objectives to organize a political movement against the regime.

Table 4
Qualitative Measurements of Influence

	Autonomy	Legitimacy	Unity
Military	Original purpose for the IRGC	Guarding and continuing the Revolution	Loyalty based on local identities and shared experiences
Economy	Defense, energy and construction industry monopoly	Patrimonial networks	Pragmatic necessity only; loyalties based on networks of shared identities
Politics	Ultimate political control still retained by the Supreme Leader	The political credibility based on economic benefit	No consistency in policy, ideology or constituency base

Autonomy

To many, President Ahmadinejad represents the threat of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its potential goals to usurp the velayet-e faqih with a nationalist authoritarian rule. While the supposed victory of the Supreme Leader over the President's inadequate attempts at political autonomy have brought some sighs of relief among conservatives, speculation continues to grow as the IRGC proves itself to be capable of securing legitimacy and autonomy apart from the clerical regime in both economy and military. In October of 2011 the IRGC went from being a mostly unknown organization in the West to the headlines of prominent media outlets with the revelation of a plot by the IRGC's own Quds Force to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States. It is not known whether the Supreme Leader, who denies accusations, was aware of the plot. Ayatollah Khamenei cannot very well come out and acknowledge the existence of the plot without placing Iran in a precarious position diplomatically, but the fact that a plot may have been hatched by the IRGC apart from his

approval is equally shocking. If it was indeed planned without his knowledge, it is another piece of evidence that the IRGC has continued to gain military autonomy. Of equal importance is the fact that the IRGC was able to fund the multi-million dollar plot; it illustrates, again, the fact that the organization has become an economic establishment in its own right with the financial autonomy to execute its own policy apart from the regime of the Supreme Leader.

Concurrently, some analysts use the example of the June 12th demonstrations in 2009 to illustrate the growth of the influence of the IRGC not just in Iranian society, but over the Supreme Leader himself.¹⁹² Ayatollah Khamenei mobilized the IRGC and the Basij forces in 2009 to suppress the Green Movement, a task that it appears to have succeeded at. While the Guards take their orders from the Supreme Leader, it is likely that Ayatollah Khamenei now owes his political survival to the IRGC. Not only did the Supreme Leader lose some face in light of the fact that he had to bribe the IRGC with political and economic influence in order to carry out the counter-movement to suppress the protestors, but the world has now seen the light and is aware that the IRGC may now hold the key to the survival of the clerical regime.¹⁹³

It is developments like these that have inspired fears in the Islamic Republic and abroad that the country may be on its way to becoming a praetorian state. Many analysts are simply awaiting the death of current Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei before declaring the process complete. This perspective does not reflect the complexity of Iranian politics and security; the IRGC does not operate in a one-dimensional context in which military prowess and defense capabilities are equal to authoritarian control. The Guards face challenges that are not textbook obstacles, but are rather inherent in the traditions and political culture of society.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has, from its early years as an organization, been given broad allowances for the control of their own finances and budget. Following the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the appointment of IRGC officials as heads of several bonyads, or foundations, the individuals and businesses within the association retained their fiscal autonomy and grew in financial independence from the political regime. The bonyads existed before the revolution and were a product of the Pahlavi dynasty, officially intended as a vehicle for distributing charitable donations to the poor in the forms of food and energy subsidies. Unofficially, the bonyads exist as a means of distributing patronage benefits in exchange for political support or other profits. Since the bonyads were, by nature, autonomous from the political regime, the IRGC in fact inherited this economic autonomy instead of taking it. Again, the autonomy enjoyed by the IRGC was not sought and stolen, but rather came about as a byproduct of the social and economic context in which they operated.

Politically, however, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hold very little autonomy from the patriarchal regime. Speculations have been rampant about the potential move for independence from the clerics by President Ahmadinejad. The speculation has been fed plenty of fuel with the power plays between the Supreme Leader and the President in 2010 and 2011 and the use of political appointments as means of exercising influence and, in the case of the President, belligerence. Nevertheless, the success of Ayatollah Khamenei in censuring the president is a clear sign that the IRGC has no more political autonomy than any other group or individual in Iran. If there was any doubt as to Khamenei's confidence in his ability to maintain control over the office of the presidency, the Supreme Leader noted on October 15th, 2011, that the position of elected president may be abolished and replaced with a premier that is appointed

by the Majlis. The move suggests that the Supreme Leader is not taking his success in suppressing Ahmadinejad's dissent for granted and may be acting preemptively to prevent another power grab by the IRGC during the next elections.

Legitimacy

The legitimacy of both the IRGC and the Basij Forces is based on cultural support and social capital gained accrued as a result of the benefit of the services offered to civilians. Traditional institutional theories maintain that legitimacy can be either legally sanctioned or morally governed; sociological institutional theory gives allowance for cultural appropriateness and acceptance as the source of legitimacy. The IRGC's military credibility can be attributed to the fact that the individuals of the organization each belong to networks in society that are built on shared experiences and origins. In many cases, these networks of solidarity were built during the Iran-Iraq war and those who fought together on the front lines developed bonds that transcend ideology or public policy. President Ahmadinejad himself often falls back on his years as a Basij during the war in order to portray himself as a common man and garner political and social support. At the same time, this innate credibility is bolstered by the social services provided by the IRGC and the Basij Forces. A large part of the IRGC's public support base is located in the far-flung provinces in Iran; these are the regions that are less privileged and are traditionally underserved by public policy and infrastructure development. The IRGC has built respect and trust with these communities by bringing development to their neighborhoods in the form of energy, transportation and industry. The Basij Forces volunteer their labor for these projects and at the same time paid positions are created that are staffed by the locals. The

combination of humanitarian assistance work and job production gives the IRGC military branches vast amounts of credibility.

In an economy that depends on networks of patronage at the grass roots, it is especially crucial for the IRGC to garner social capital as a means of pursuing its economic goals. Growing their social capital involves becoming influential in a vast amount of patronage networks, leveraging key personalities and providing immediate economic benefits to those who can support the Guards in return either politically or economically. This means conducting business in a manner more closely resembling a mafia or cartel, instead of a free market economy. Traditionally, the clerics were the sources of patronage in Iran. The post-war political climate made it possible for the IRGC to supplant the patronage role of the clerics by giving the bonyads, or foundations, unfettered freedom. President Ahmadinejad spurred the IRGC's economic growth after 2005 by awarding an abundance of no-bid contracts. The awarding of these no-bid contracts reflects the patronage system in a bigger picture and it is the vehicle for achieving any political goal in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The bonyads and construction conglomerates that the IRGC is in control of are absolutely fundamental to the growth of the institution's autonomy and control. They are used to achieve any goals that the institution may have by purchasing the social capital needed for legitimacy.

In the current political landscape in which the Abadgaran coalition monopolizes the IRGC presence in the cabinet and legislature, the Guards do hold a degree of legitimacy with their constituency. Their constituency, however, is dominated by the underprivileged and Ahmadinejad and his cabinet, knowing this, have aimed the full force of their marketing campaign in this direction, leaving the neglecting the middle class. Since the IRGC does not

represent a unified political force, it must be noted that just because the Abadgaran movement has credibility among the underprivileged it does not follow that the IRGC has the political legitimacy necessary to lead the country. In order to do so, the IRGC would have to retain the features of the political system that Khomeini created, giving the electorate a voice while maintaining control over the most important government positions. The most likely individual among IRGC personalities to accomplish this would be Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, not Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Qalibaf has the level-headedness to manage both foreign and domestic policy and he has the popular approval to do so without rigging elections or sparking violent uprisings. Qalibaf has the ability to serve the material needs of the underprivileged while simultaneously fulfilling the democratic demands of those who are not preoccupied with putting food on the table.

Unity

In the 1990s the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps underwent some organizational changes that resulted in a hierarchical structure and a leadership principle built more on military professionalism and the tenets of Islam than on identity. Nevertheless, Basij and IRGC alike are often organized regionally and their loyalties are given to their local networks instead of the military institution or the Islamic Republic. In 1994 riots erupted in the city of Qazvin in the Qazvin province in northwestern Iran; the IRGC deployed local units to suppress the violence but commanders refused to fire on the protesters. The IRGC was eventually forced to bring in units from other regions in order to quell the protests. The event demonstrated the fractionalization of the IRGC at the military level, even among commanders, and raises

questions as to whether the higher-echelon commanders have the loyalty of their own subordinates in a violent struggle against the regime, if it ever became necessary. Loyalty towards the clerics is often given on the same basis; social identities and networks often trump ideological or political goals in the Islamic Republic of Iran and a battle that warranted inter-territorial violence would leave a lot of speculation as to the outcomes for the regime. It is necessary to postulate that the IRGC as a military organization does not have a monopoly on the loyalties of its members and that a military coup, if possible to initiate, would not likely be sustainable for a time period long enough to unite the resources of the IRGC into an effective resistance against a counter-coup.

It is important to understand that the factional characteristics of the Islamic Republic of Iran's leadership, economy and military described in the preceding paragraph are prevalent not just among the IRGC, but throughout Iranian society. The reliance on social networks as vehicles of influence reflects the social fabric that makes the Iranian nation unique and its political system complex. In the months following the end of the revolution, Supreme Leader Khomeini utilized his own understanding of his culture to construct a political system that manipulated the sectarian conflict in order to secure the power of his own position and those of his closest allies. This system closely resembles the informal social networks in Iranian society known as *dowrehs*. Well-known scholar and author on the state and society of Iran, James Bill, explains that *dowrehs* are the lowest denomination, after the family, of social accountability, responsibility and paternalism.¹⁹⁴ These groups of neighbors can act as vehicles for discussing, negotiating or just gossiping about relevant social issues.¹⁹⁵ The social clubs often share

membership with other *dowrehs* or other networks that are based on economic or ideological interests.

Another important feature of Iranian society is the importance placed on key figures in religion or politics, such as the Supreme Leader himself. It closely resembles a multifarious cult of personalities with each key personality carrying vast amounts of power and influence simply in his name. In the IRGC, these figures include the current president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; the former commander of the IRGC and current secretary of the Expediency Council Mohsen Rezaei; Commander of the Quds Force, Qassem Suleimani; and Commander of the IRGC Mohammad Ali Jafari. These, among many others, began their careers as revolutionaries and rose in the ranks of the IRGC to positions of political and economic influence. Key personalities in Iran and in the IRGC are political by nature, not by ambition to drive their political careers forward.¹⁹⁶ Under and around these influential men gather the various subnetworks of influence, those who wish to profit economically or politically from the influence of the leader.

A study of Iran's political and social landscape reveals a system based on a web of groups that are unified not necessarily under political or ideological beliefs, but on informal networks.¹⁹⁷ These informal networks can be based on anything from shared experiences to patronage relationships; the IRGC represents both. Competitive disunity between these patronage networks has spurred the growth of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, but as a result of this growth, the original ideology that brought the Guards together in spite of their factional differences may no longer strong enough to keep them together. In the place of ideology, economic necessity and social allegiance have dominated as the primary means of

ensuring loyalty and cooperation. This feature encompasses the political, social and economic sectors of Iranian society and largely explains the factionalism in each.

Power centers in Iran are composed of key personalities and are run by networks based on relationships between individuals. While these relationships can be based on politics or ideology, they are more frequently based on shared experiences and financial patronage. The web of relationships become networks of influence and the sum of these networks comprise the Iranian system. It is difficult if not impossible to draw an organizational chart, illustrating the flow of power and influence in a hierarchical format. Instead, power is derived from positions of influence within one's network and the economic or social leverage that that network has in the bigger economic or political landscape. The IRGC is not itself one of these networks; instead, it is a larger web comprised of small networks of patronage and shared experiences. The IRGC does not possess the ideological or political unity to control a single party system, much less a multi-party political landscape that has all of the accessories of a democracy with the monolithic power of an authoritarian dictatorship.

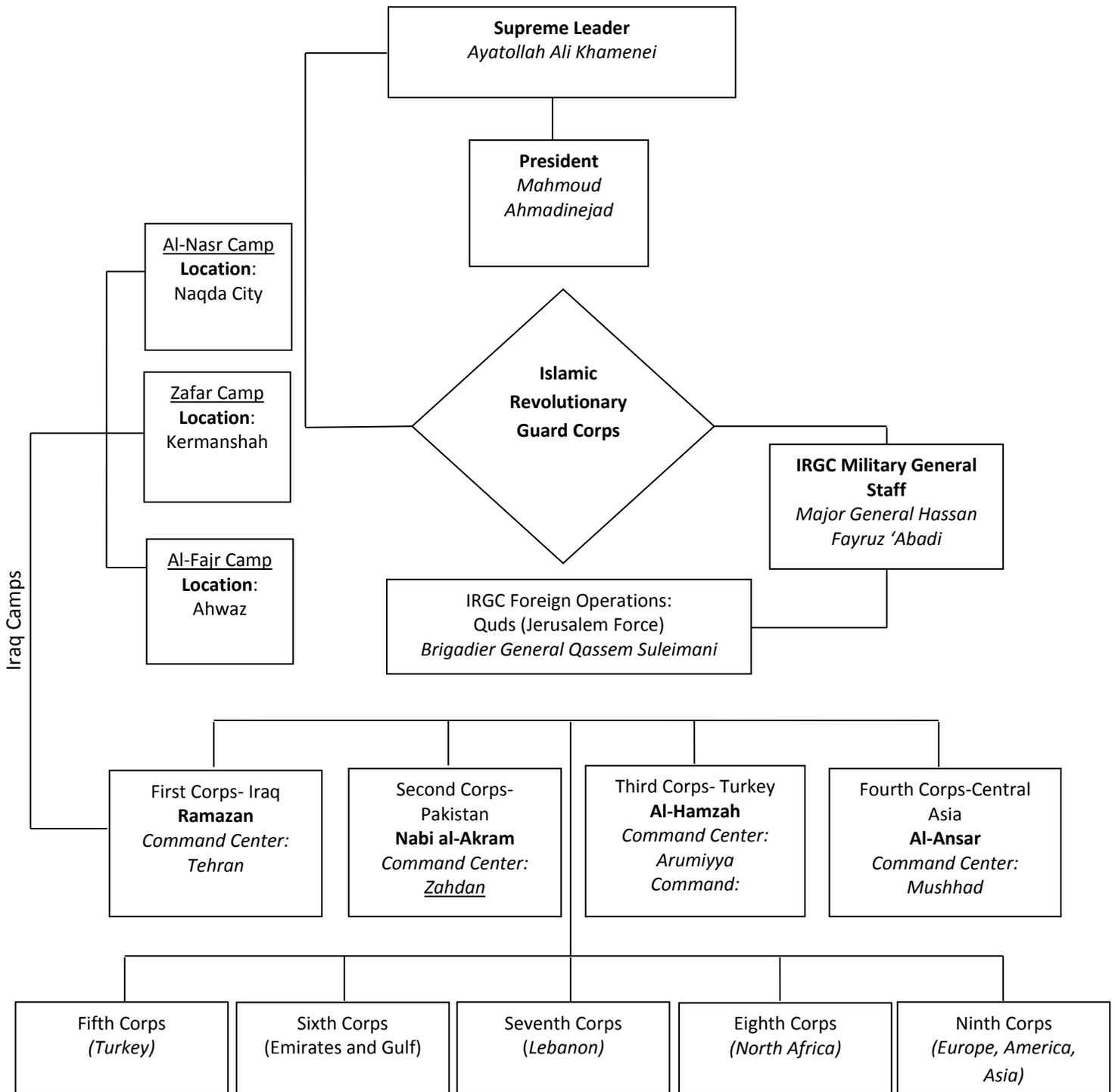
Conclusion

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is, by a matter of fact, referred to as an institution. As such it would be subject to the natural laws governing the evolution of the institution. For example, in Max Weber's theory of bureaucratization the IRGC potentially faces the same fate of all institutions: as it grows in complexity, spurred by internal competition, polarized factions will be forced into moderation in order to retain their legitimacy and will be assimilated into a bureaucracy of rules and norms. As the institution becomes bureaucratized, its

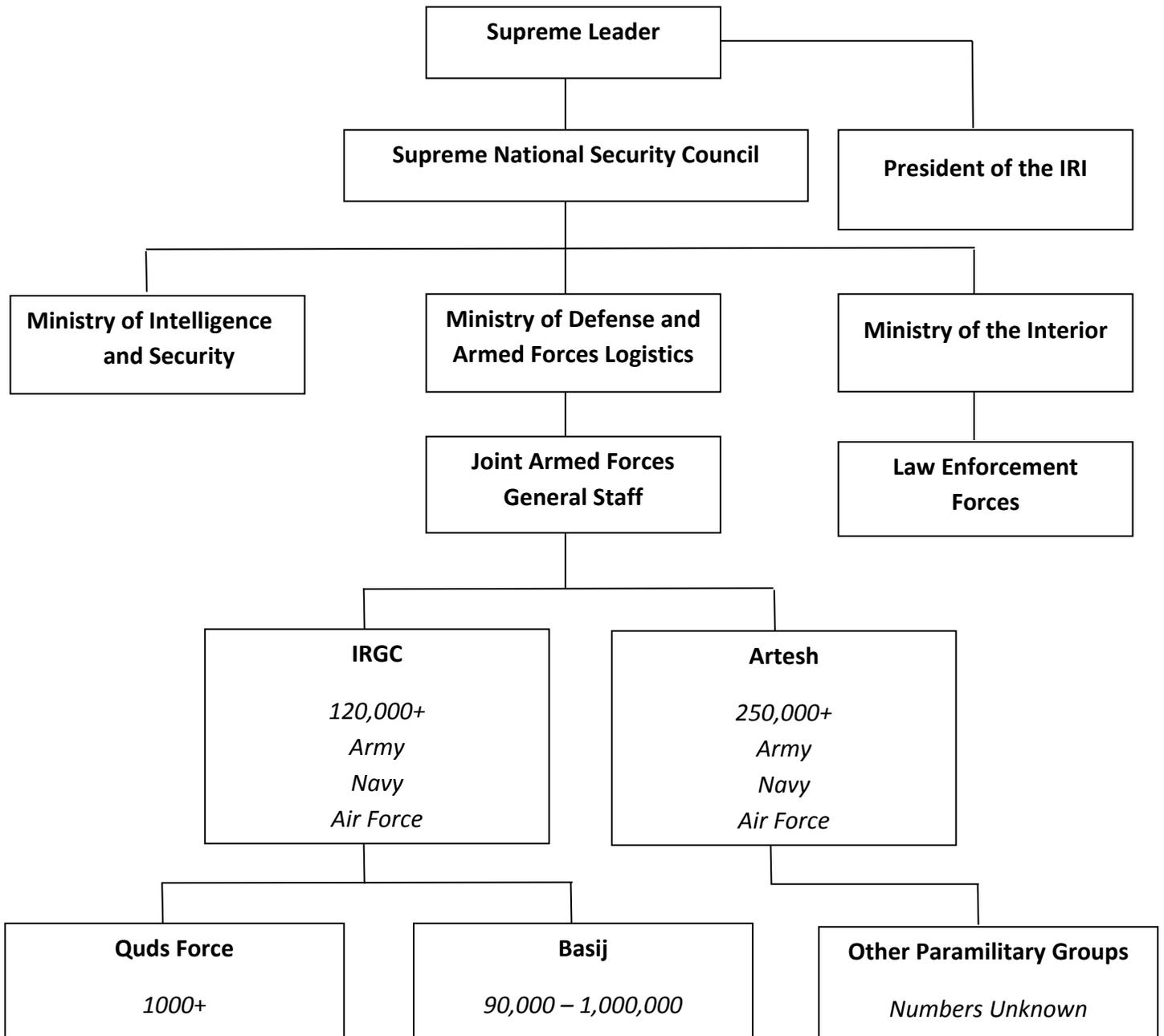
functions become increasingly specialized and differentiated. According to the Huntingtonian definition of an institution, the IRGC must prove itself adaptable, independent of control by a single interest group, complex in its structure and coherent in its organization. The Guards are inarguably adaptable, as they have shown themselves able to assimilate into the economy and politics of the Islamic Republic as necessary for their survival. They are independent of control by a single tribe, family or interest group and they are certainly complex in their structure. The Guards are not, however, coherent in their organization. The sectarian nature of the IRGC could arguably preclude the organization from being defined as “institutionalized”, and therefore it does not necessarily face the fate of moderation and bureaucratization that organizations do as they become unified.

The phase of evolution in which an organization adapts from an association of shared interests into an institution is catalyzed by the competition for power and control that goes on internally, but as it nears maturity the institution faces either sectarian political ineffectiveness or consolidated power and influence. The military objective the IRGC together is no longer sufficient for consolidating the power of the Guards and the competitive disunity that enabled its growth into the economic sector is now playing against the IRGC’s attempts to gain political autonomy. The Guards are simultaneously in a precarious position in which their praetorian hard power is officially legitimized by the revolutionary ideology of the clerical regime; the success of the IRGC in Iran and abroad depends on the proper balancing of pragmatic and ideological interests.

APENDIX A: QUDS FORCE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



APPENDIX B: IRI ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



**APPENDIX C: TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE
IRGC**

- 7/20/1999** Three hard-line newspapers published a letter written to President Khatami by Revolutionary Guard Commanders criticizing him and holding him responsible for recent unrest.
- 06/28/2000** Supreme Leader Khamenei Replaces LEF Chief Ayatollah Khamenei fired the National Police Chief and replaced him with an IRGC Officer, Brigadier General Muhammad Baqer Qalibaf
- 06/21/2004** IRGC Members arrested eight members of the British Royal Navy and seized three vessels in Iranian waters that were on their way to Iraq to assist with training police forces
- 06/17/2005** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is elected as president of the Islamic Republic of Iran with 62% of the vote.
- 11/03/2006** The IRGC successfully tested a new missile and an IRGC General warned the US to put a stop to military posturing in the region.
- 05/09/2007** Former IRGC Commander Baqer Qalibaf is reelected as mayor of Tehran by a thin margin.
- 08/15/2007** The United States blacklists the IRGC as a terrorist unit, allowing the US Department of Treasury to seize IRGC assets, finances and businesses.
- 09/01/2007** Ayatollah Khamenei replaces IRGC commander Safavi with the more moderate Mohammad Ali Jafari.
- 06/12/2009** Iran's elections results spark accusations of electoral fraud and the Supreme Leader, backing Ahmadinejad as the winner, relies on Basij to crackdown on rioting in Tehran.
- 07/17/2009** President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appoints Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei as one of his Vice Presidents and is chastised by the Supreme Leader.

Masha'ei resigns and is appointed by the President as his Chief of Staff.

07/23/2009

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad fires Intelligence Minister Hojjatal Islam Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejei who was appointed to the position by the Supreme Leader.

04/17/2011

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad fires Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi and the Supreme Leader publicly renounces the dismissal and reinstates the minister.

10/11/2011

A plot is revealed in which IRGC and Quds Force members are accused of plotting to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States.

APPENDIX D: BIOGRAPHIES OF KEY IRGC PERSONALITIES

Qassem Suleimani

Qassem Suleimani was born March 11, 1957 in the holy city of Qom, Iran. After earning his degree in Management in Tehran, Suleimani joined the IRGC and during the Iran-Iraq War and proved himself to be a distinguished leader. As a green lieutenant he engaged in numerous intelligence gathering missions behind Iraqi lines. Admired for his courage, Suleimani's was promoted to be the leader of the IRGC's 41st Tharallah Division. After the conclusion of the war he became an apprentice of sorts under President Rafsanjani. In recognition of his talents in covert intelligence, Suleimani was fast-tracked to higher leadership positions and eventually became the IRGC commander in the southeastern city of Kerman where he was tasked with fighting drug smugglers on the Iran-Afghani border. While acting as commander in Kerman, Suleimani was additionally engaged in covert activity in Bosnia and Central Asia. In 1996, He was tasked with heading up a liaison team with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and at that time he gained experience in developing and running cells that would prove valuable to his career, down the road. In the year 2000, he was appointed Brigadier General of the Quds Force and in 2002 he joined President Khatami on a trip to Kabul to meet with Afghanistan's President Karzai; it was at this meeting that western intelligence first took notice of this new figure in IRGC politics and operations.¹⁹⁸

Suleimani developed a strong relationship with Hezbollah and has close ties with leaders of the terrorist organization.¹⁹⁹ When Hezbollah and Israel went to war in 2006, Suleimani was deeply involved and was alleged to have been in the Bekaa Valley during the fighting. In addition, Suleimani was took a strong role in Iraq during the US-led war. Prior to the US invasion he was sent into Baghdad to set up a clandestine network to protect Iranian interests

after the fall of Hussein. And following the US invasion Suleimani was influential in supporting Al Maliki, who later went on to become prime minister.²⁰⁰ Perhaps his greatest achievement was a truce negotiation that happened on March 2007 between militants loyal to Shi'a cleric Muqtada Al Sadr and the security forces of the Iraqi government. The ability to halt tense internal conflict signifies the amount of power he holds within the inner circles of Iraq. Suleimani has appeared to become an extremely prominent figure with the IRGC, even answering directly to the Supreme Leader, Khamenei. The networks of the Quds Force extend to every country with a prominent Muslim population, and Suleimani's control of these networks has made him a substantial player. The growth of the Quds Force can largely be attributed to the leadership of Qassem Suleimani.

Ahmad Vahidi

Before the creation of the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics in 1989, the IRGC held its own office and command structure. The creation of the MODAFL brought the IRGC under its defense umbrella, marginalizing its former institutional autonomy²⁰¹. The MODAFL's minister oversees all military branches of the IRGC, holding significant political and military power.²⁰²

Ahmad Vahidi, a member of Ahmadinejad's cabinet, was placed on Interpol's (the international police agency based in Lyon France) "Most Wanted" list in 2007 for "crimes against life and health, hooliganism/vandalism/damage." Vahidi is suspected in involvement of the bombing of a seven story Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina on July 18, 1994²⁰³. The attack killed 85 people and wounded 200xxxxv. Hezbollah, a Lebanese militia

group with close ties to the IRGC (particularly the Qods force), is suspected to have been involved. The Qods force is involved in organizing and financing foreign Islamic revolutionary movement, including Hezbollah.

Vahidi was commander of the Qods force during the late 1980s to the early 1990s where in 1996 he was suspected of involvement in the attack on the U.S. Air Force barracks in Saudi Arabia known as the Khobar Towers¹. Before acquiring his position as Minister of Defense, Vahidi held a position as Deputy Defense Minister, Chairman of the Expediency Council's Political and Defense Committee, and is also reported as having also served as a former IRGC intelligence department chief.

Mahmud Farhadi

Mahmud Farhadi is the Brigadier General in charge of the Quds Force's Zafar Tactical Base located in the city of Kermanshah. The Zafar Base is in charge of operations in the north-central parts of Iraq and also specializes in shipping weapons, money, and people between the Iraqi-Iran borders. Farhadi has been involved in intelligence operations in Iraq for over a decade. He was arrested on September 20, 2007 in the Palace Hotel in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. It is believed he was there with a delegation signing contracts with Kurdish officials in regards to transferring goods between their borders. The Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, claimed that Farhadi was the deputy governor of Kermanshah who was in the region to develop closer economic ties. Mahmud Farhadi was released in 2009 and returned to Iran.

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