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THE SUPREME LEADER AND THE GUARD

Civil-Military Relations and Regime Survival in Iran

As the Islamic Republic concludes its fourth decade, the country faces three converging threats. The first involves its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who turns eighty this year and is, according to some reports, in poor health. The succession process could create a severe political struggle, possibly unsettling the entire regime. The second challenge is growing dissatisfaction among the population, evidenced by a rising incidence of strikes and protests throughout the country. These now occur daily. And the third has to do with economic hardships associated with the reimposition of U.S. sanctions, a development that could potentially exacerbate ongoing protests and further destabilize the regime.



To neutralize these threats, the Islamic Republic and the Supreme Leader are increasingly relying on their security and coercive mechanisms, foremost the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its civilian militia force, known as the Basij. Indeed, the most important factor in the survival and transition of political regimes is the loyalty of the armed forces. Dictators cannot stay in power if they lose support from their national military. As long as they enjoy military backing, a mass uprising cannot ultimately undermine their power, no matter how pervasive.¹ Even in the case of Iran's Islamic Revolution, the monarchy collapsed when regime-aligned forces submitted to revolutionary fighters on February 11, 1979.²

Just as dictators rely on the armed forces to maintain power, the military can overthrow them and confiscate that power, as illustrated by the cases of Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. In Tunisia, the military stopped supporting the dictator after protests started in 2011 and became "the guarantor of the revolution." In Egypt, the military, which initially helped facilitate the collapse of the Mubarak government, staged the coup against the post-revolutionary administration of Mohamed Morsi. In Syria, the army mainly stayed loyal to the Assad regime, helping him slaughter hundreds of thousands of Syrians and crushing their dreams for freedom and dignity.

What about Iran today? With rising mass discontent and protests around the country, will the IRGC stick with Ayatollah Khamenei until the end as the military did for President Bashar al-Assad in Syria, or will it stage a coup against him, as in Egypt, or stop supporting the regime, as in Tunisia? What about the post-Khamenei era? In what ways will the IRGC evolve or reshape then?

In seeking to answer these questions, this paper will examine the model of civil-military relations promoted by Ayatollah Khamenei, and look into ways he controls Iran's military, especially the IRGC. While a few publications focus on Iran's armed forces in general and the IRGC in particular, these cover mainly developments within the IRGC, the Guard's role in Iran's economy, politics, and society, and its involvement in foreign policy.³ In fact, a few studies do exist of Iran's civil-military relations, but most are outdated or based on secondary sources.⁴ Despite growing interest in this field, gaps persist in the scholarship, and this paper seeks to fill them.

This study is divided into four sections. The first examines the IRGC's position and structure within Iran's military. The second looks at the mechanisms and strategies Ayatollah Khamenei uses to control the Guard, especially indoctrination, which is carried out through entities known as ideological-political organizations (IPOs) across Iran's military. This section outlines, in particular, the internal structure of the IPO within the IRGC, and its role in subordinating the Guard to the Supreme Leader. The third section discusses the character of ideological-political indoctrination, and to what extent the Guard internalizes this process. The fourth covers debates on other policies, such as surveillance and coercion, which Ayatollah Khamenei uses to maintain his control over the Guard. This section analyzes the Organization for the Protection of Intelligence and military leadership in detail to illustrate how the Supreme Leader controls the IRGC. In concluding, the text explains the importance of the clerical-IRGC relationship in a post-Khamenei era.

IRGC Position Within Iran's Armed Forces

The government of Iran has a bifurcated structure, whereby the Supreme Leader is balanced by the president, the Majlis (legislature) by the Guardian Council, and the judiciary by the Special Court for Clerics. The same applies for the military, which has two main branches: the conventional army, known as the Artesh, and the revolutionary military forces, or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Eslami*). Whereas the Artesh is mainly responsible for guarding the independence and territorial integrity of the country, the IRGC is charged primarily with defending and protecting the Islamic regime.

The Artesh and IRGC, as well as the police force, NAJA (*Nirou-ye Entezami-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran*), are subordinate to the Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS; *Setad-e Kol-e Nirouha-ye Mosallah*), which is responsible for coordinating their activities, establishing training programs, and providing logistical backing. The AFGS itself is under the direct control of the Supreme Leader, who holds the title Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic. The office furnishing Khamenei with this power is the Mili-

tary Bureau in the Office of the Commander-in-Chief (*Daftar-e Nezami-ye Farmandehi-ye Kol-e Qova*). Little public information is available on the structure of this office, which houses the Supreme Leader's military advisors. Still, the office—which offers a direct line of communication between Khamenei and the country's military leadership—is headed by Brig. Gen. Muhammad Shirazi, a Basij officer with close ties to the Supreme Leader. His brother Hojatoleslam Ali Shirazi is Khamenei's representative to the IRGC's Qods Force. These two brothers have close personal ties to Khamenei that predate the Islamic Revolution, thanks to a relationship between Khamenei and their older brother, Hojatoleslam Abbas Shirazi, who headed propaganda efforts during the war with Iraq and died in 1984. The special rapport between the Shirazi brothers and Khamenei helps explain why Brigadier General Shirazi has served in his position for more than twenty-five years.⁵

The Artesh consists of 130,000 professional and noncommissioned officers and 220,000 conscripts, who serve mandatory stints lasting between 18 and 24 months.⁶ By comparison, the IRGC is the more ideological force with greater loyalty to the Islamic regime; like the Artesh, it has 130,000 professional officers and NCOs, along with 50,000 conscripts, drawn mainly from active members of the Basij militia. Unlike in past decades, when conscripts could complete their required military service with the IRGC, since 2010—when the Guard instituted a new system for evaluation and appointment—it has preferred to draft only active members of the Basij. According to Col. Gholamali Kolakaj, who supervises staffing at the IRGC provincial corps in Khuzestan, more than 70 percent of draftees in the Guard are active Basij members.⁷ In big cities, where demand for IRGC military services is higher than elsewhere, 100 percent of draftees are active Basij members. The less formal, less regimented nature of the Guard relative to the Artesh facilitates this flow of personnel. For their part, non-Basijis are assigned to the army for their mandatory military service. The intent has been to incorporate into the IRGC the most ideologically reliable fighters—even though some Basij undoubtedly join for opportunistic or materialistic reasons—as opposed to youth who are drafted for their mandatory twenty-one months only to subsequently end their relationship with the IRGC.

Religiosity also figures into this calculus. Since the new measures were implemented in 2010, the Guard has shrunk its pool of recruits to those with a conservative-ideological worldview. Valued attributes include having a parent in the IRGC, being the relative of a martyr or veteran (e.g., of Iraq or Syria), being a “devotee of the Islamic Revolution,” and belonging to the Basij. This contrasts with past years, when the Guard was more open to recruiting people from a broader ideological background.

The Artesh has more-diverse personnel compared to the IRGC, whose religious-ideological members are less representative of Iranian society. Yet even as the army has been regarded as the clerical regime's neglected stepchild, it is more professional and respected among the Iranian people, despite being less well-equipped. Iranians consider the Artesh the national force in the service of the whole country, while viewing the IRGC as the force serving the regime and clerics.

When the IRGC was established by Ayatollah Khomeini on May 5, 1979, the goal was to create a check on the Artesh and thereby coup-proof the military. The regime's lack of trust in the army has persisted, and the leadership has sought over the years to keep the army completely apolitical and controlled. It has done so mainly through the creation and expansion of the Guard. Since its inception, the IRGC has been responsible for defending the regime and neutralizing any coup attempts by the army, and it has likewise discovered and neutralized several coups attempts by anti-revolutionary groups. An early such attempt by backers of the shah was stamped out in July 1980.

In 1980, when Iraq invaded Iran, the IRGC worked alongside the Artesh to protect the country, although the Guard's role was at first small relative to the conventional army—and even though defending Iran's borders is not the IRGC's primary mission. Boosted by clerical support, the IRGC was expanded in September 1985 into three main branches—land force, air force, and navy—paralleling the three Artesh branches and intensifying the rivalry between the two forces. Following the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2001 and 2003, respectively, the Islamic regime perceived increasing threats to its survival. In response, the IRGC adopted an asymmetric military doctrine aimed at guarding the republic, based on four main elements: decentralizing IRGC ground

forces, expanding diverse missile programs managed by the IRGC Aerospace Force, developing an asymmetric naval strategy through the IRGC navy, and creating and supporting aligned paramilitary groups in the region through the Qods Force (see figure 1).

In addition to coup-proofing the regime and deterring external threats to the clerical establishment, the IRGC and Basij have been involved in suppressing internal dissent, especially since 1990. Over this almost thirty-year interval, these forces put down waves of domestic protest in 1993–94, when postwar economic austerity was under fire; 1999 and 2003, when students rose up; 2009, during the ascent of the Green Movement; and 2017–18, amid widespread social protests. Rapid social and economic change in Iranian society, the loss of regime legitimacy, and state inefficiency have led to mass disappointment and dissatisfaction among Iranians, as manifested in the widening recent protests. One response has been a higher profile for the IRGC in ensuring regime survival, a role secured by the Guard’s reputation as a trustworthy ideological protector of the Islamic Republic and its core values.

But since its inception, even preceding its efforts to suppress domestic unrest, the IRGC has gradually been transformed, first, into a conventional military force and, second, into a huge, complex organization deeply entwined in Iran’s politics, society, and economy. This augmented IRGC has taken on an array of missions, leading some commentators to regard the organization as a veritable state-within-a-state, or a “deep state.”⁸ Since 2005, when then president

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad hired IRGC commanders to serve in his administration, the relationship between the Guard and the clerical regime has only become more enmeshed.

Some have argued that the increasing power of the Guard, especially under Ahmadinejad, has effectively transformed Iran into a military dictatorship.⁹ From this perspective, Ayatollah Khamenei is a puppet in the hands of the IRGC’s commanders, who are the country’s true rulers. To the contrary, others contend that clergy retain the upper hand and Khamenei is the puppeteer, manipulating the commanders at will.¹⁰ The presidency of Hassan Rouhani might appear to support the latter contention. He has returned technocrats to power and marginalized the IRGC, at least within his administration.

This paper contends that while Khamenei still holds the edge in controlling the IRGC, the relationship has become more complicated as the Guard—and the republic—turns forty. In particular, the IRGC’s upward course after 2005, and the suppression in 2009 of the Green Movement, has empowered the Guard in its competition with the religious class. Moreover, the subtle power struggle between these two main actors can help us better understand Iran’s future. This future, sooner or later, will cease to include Khamenei, at which point the IRGC relationship with the clerics could change in dramatic ways.

Finally, in most countries, the police is a civilian rather than a military force, but in Iran the police, NAJA, relies on the AFGS for programming, planning, and other functions. According to the NAJA

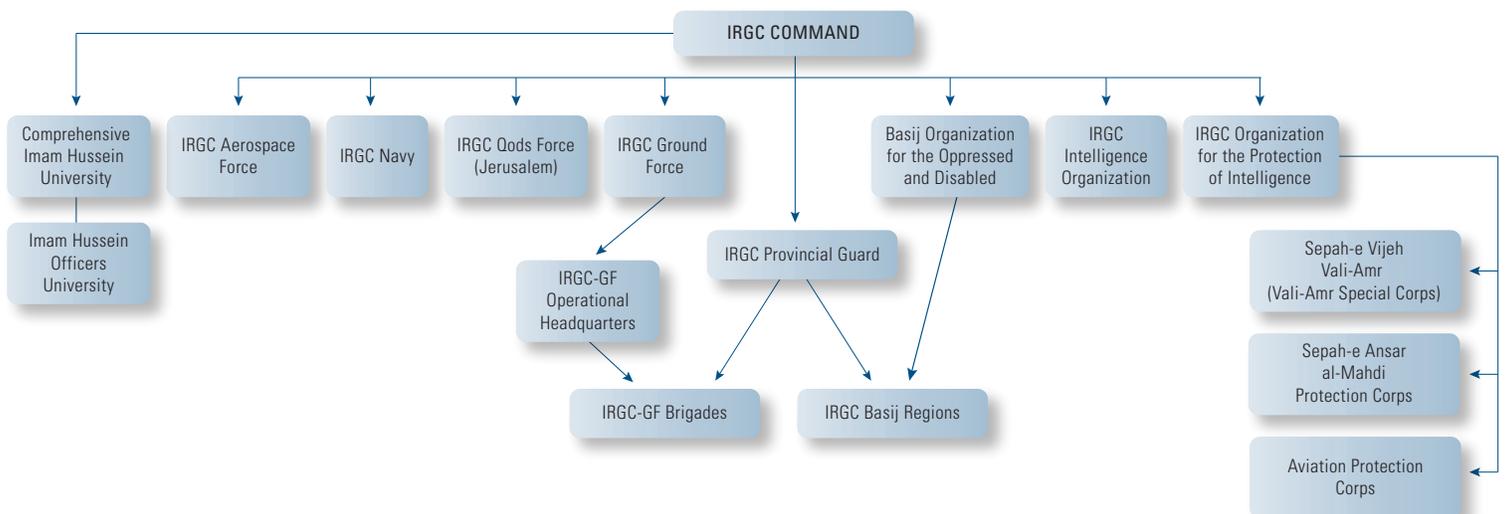


FIG. 1 IRGC Structure

charter, drafted in 1991, the organization is part of the armed forces, affiliated with the Ministry of Interior and formally subordinated to the Supreme Leader. In practice, Ayatollah Khamenei usually designates the interior minister as his proxy on NAJA affairs; the minister is also responsible for handling logistical issues, such as equipping and supporting the police force. Still, he serves in this position at Khamenei's behest.

The Benefits of Indoctrination

In seeking to control the military since he became leader in 1989, Ayatollah Khamenei has relied on the classic strategy of establishing his legitimacy through indoctrination, repression, and cooptation. Within Iran's armed forces, three main sectors help him implement these strategies: the ideological-political organizations (IPOs; *sazeman-e aqidati va siyasi*), the Organization for the Protection of Intelligence (OPI; *Sazeman Hefazat-e Ettelaat*), and the military leadership (*farmandehi*). According to the respective charters of the IRGC and Artesh, these three entities are to be represented at every level of the military, from the Joint Staff all the way down to each individual platoon. (For the structure of Iran's ideological-political apparatus, see figure 2.) They are autonomous but subordinate to Ayatollah Khamenei.

Whereas the IPOs are mainly responsible for legitimizing the regime and instilling the regime's ideology in the hearts and minds of the military, the OPI (aka Counterintelligence Organization) serves as the principal tool in the leader's hands for constant scrutiny of military personnel. The OPI's mission is to identify foreign agents and corrupt individuals in the military

while safeguarding military intelligence and other counterintelligence activity. Cooptation of military forces has been implemented through a bureaucratic system in which more-loyal and subordinate persons are promoted despite a lack of professional training.

Among these three strategies, indoctrination has been the most important and extensively used to control Iran's armed forces. This is not only because the Islamic Republic has, by its nature, an ideological regime, but because indoctrination is an especially subtle and successful means of control. Persuasion through indoctrination, if achieved, can create voluntary obedience, which is more stable than forced obedience achieved through coercion.

Relatedly, Iran's armed forces in general, and the IRGC in particular, derive their identity more from human capital than from technology. According to the commanders reporting to Ayatollah Khamenei, the military should always base its decisionmaking on personnel first and other factors second.¹¹ In recent years, with Iran having lost access to advanced weaponry owing to international sanctions, the country's military advantage rests on its access to a young population that can be inculcated with the national defense doctrine. During the Iran-Iraq War, the clerical establishment deployed a human wave of Basijis "in which thousands of ill-trained and ill-equipped Iranian troops crossed the border to face 'martyrdom' at the hands of the Iraqi forces."¹² In these relatively early days of the Islamic Republic, this was the foremost strategy meant to compensate for the lack of technical prowess and manpower. The strategy helped in the defense of Iran's territorial integrity, but led to deaths in the hundreds of thousands, mostly

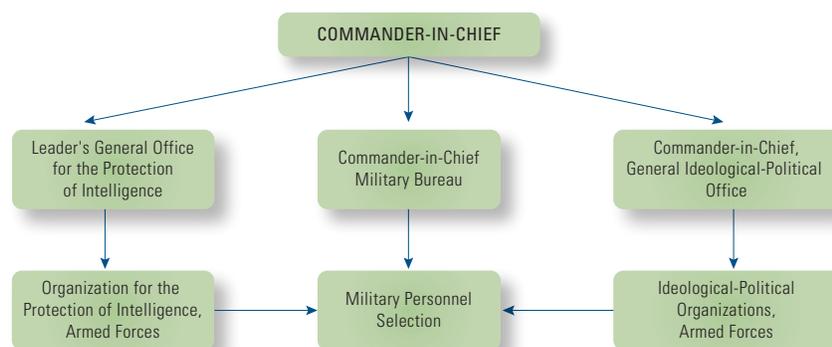


FIG. 2 Horizontal View of Iran's Military Structure

from among these nonprofessional and volunteer forces.¹³ Although Iran has since tried to advance its military technologies and has succeeded in areas such as missile programs, the human element remains the crux of its asymmetric warfare doctrine.

The idea that Iran's military motivation, and the IRGC's in particular, comes from committed personnel is reinforced by the Quranic edict that "a pious man will win in a confrontation with ten unbelievers." That is why the regime has focused mainly on political and ideological indoctrination to create a doctrinaire (*maktabi*) force based on religious principles and revolutionary values.¹⁴ This ideological army is at the center of Iran's warfare doctrine known as Alavi and Ashurai.¹⁵ The concept has roots deep in Islam and is essential to the ideology of the Islamic Republic. The term Alavi refers to Ali, the first Shia imam, whose forces lost the Battle of Siffin (657 A.D.) against Muawiyah, the first caliph of the Umayyad Empire. According to the Shia critique, Ali was defeated because his army did not heed his orders, instead pressuring him to make peace with his adversary in the interest of avoiding intra-Muslim strife. For the IRGC, the concept indicates the requirement of total obedience to the Supreme Leader and his orders, or *velayat madari*. The term Ashurai refers to the tenth of Muharram, the date on which Hussein, the third Shia imam, fell during the Battle of Karbala, which in 680 A.D. pitted his tiny band of fighters against the massive army of the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Although Hussein knew the outcome was foreordained, he sacrificed himself and his men for the cause of defending "true" Islam by taking on the Umayyads. The lesson culled by the IRGC from this historical event is that "oppressors" must be challenged, whatever the outcome. Related is the concept of *taklif garai*, or the belief in acting upon a religious commandment regardless of potential outcomes.¹⁶

Among the services, indoctrination holds a higher position in the IRGC than in the Artesh or NAJA. This is because the Guard is not only a military group but also a security organization responsible for protecting the revolution and the regime.

Role of IPOs in Legitimizing, Coercing, and Coopting the Armed Forces

Since its inception, the clerical regime has used the IPOs to control Iran's army and purify it of non-Islamic

personnel. But the reach of these organizations has expanded dramatically since the selection of Ayatollah Khamenei as Supreme Leader in 1989.

When he served as president of the Islamic Republic from 1981 to 1989, Khamenei did not have a close relationship with the IRGC, to which Hojatoleslam Mahmoud Mohammadi Araqi was his representative.¹⁷ But when Khamenei became Supreme Leader, he sought the deepening of the religious and revolutionary character of the IRGC, which had fallen off during the war with Iraq. To replenish the ranks, anyone had been allowed to apply during this period, regardless of their ideological pedigree or loyalty to Ayatollah Khamenei. On the Supreme Leader's orders, the IPO became responsible for managing all the culture and propaganda activities in the Guard, including publications and public relationships. One year later, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahedi Kermani was appointed as Khamenei's representative to the IRGC, a position he would hold for more than sixteen years. One of Kermani's tasks was to purge the IRGC of members seen as insufficiently loyal to the Supreme Leader, or those supportive of Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was initially designated as Khomeini's successor but removed from contention after critiquing the regime's ruthless suppression of political dissidents.¹⁸ As a result, members of the IRGC's first generation who either held left-wing Islamist views or backed Montazeri were kicked out. Others have been silenced in the years since.

The Guard's second generation, entering in the 1990s, still came mainly from conservative backgrounds, but they lacked the ideological zeal of the first generation. When in 1997 the moderate candidate, Mohammad Khatami, defeated his conservative opponent, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, in the presidential election, some reports suggested that a substantial majority of IRGC members had voted for Khatami—and, effectively, against the Supreme Leader and the IPOs, which had backed Nuri. Whereas Khatami won 69 percent of the vote overall, he took about 73 percent among the IRGC, according to some reports.¹⁹ Leftist strains from the first generation, along with a failure to indoctrinate the forces, offered plausible explanations. Yet these tallies were still a shock to the IRGC, prompting the leadership to intensify its efforts to make members completely submissive, ideologically and politically, to Khamenei.

TABLE 1. THE SUPREME LEADER'S REPRESENTATIVES TO THE IRGC, 1989 TO PRESENT

Hojatoleslam Mahmoud Mohammadi Araqi	1989–1990	Conservative/Pragmatist
Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahedi Kermani	1991–2005	Conservative/Pragmatist
Hojatoleslam Ali Saidi	2006–2017	Hardliner
Hojatoleslam Abdullah Haji Sadeqi	2017–	Hardliner

To further this goal in the next decade, in 2001 Hojatoleslam Ali Saidi was appointed to serve as the deputy to the IRGC IPO (see table 1). Saidi had previously been head of IRGC counterintelligence during the Iran-Iraq War and head of the Islamic Propaganda Organization (*Sazeman-e Tabliqat-e Islami*). A hardliner assiduously devoted to his task, he dramatically expanded ideological and political training for the Guard, helping widen its involvement in politics. For the duration of Khatami's tenure, until 2005, the IRGC, aided by the Basij, had helped Ayatollah Khamenei and his conservative allies to block reforms, suppress reformists, and crush Iranians' hopes for peaceful change. Early during this period, in 1999, when student protests proliferated in Tehran and other cities, twenty-four IRGC commanders threatened Khatami's administration with a coup unless it stopped backing the students. When the conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president in summer 2005, Saidi was promoted to be head of the Guard's IPO, replacing the relative pragmatist Kermani.

In addition to increasing ideological-political training for IRGC members, the IPO became more aggressive in recruiting new personnel based on their ideological credentials. This shift relied on hiring from the Basij, whose members actively supported the regime. And indeed, the third generation of IRGC members, who began their service in the 2000s, demonstrated greater ideological zeal than the second generation, enlisted in the 1990s. In turn, the IRGC and Basij collaborated to suppress the 2009 Green Movement, which emerged amid that year's disputed presidential election. Besides a few commanders, mainly from the first generation, most IRGC members supported Khamenei and his favored candidate, Ahmadinejad, during the 2009 vote. The newer generation, many of them religious hardliners, has also been predominant among recent deployments to Syria and Iraq.

For more than a dozen years, Saidi had created a pervasive system of ideological-political education, expanded his IPO, and subordinated IRGC members to the leader. In recognition of these efforts, he was promoted in 2018 to lead the Ideological-Political Office of the Commander-in-Chief (*Daftar-e Aqidati va Siyasi-ye Farmandehi-ye Kol-e-Qova*), replacing Hojatoleslam Gholamreza Safai, who had led the office for the past twenty-four years, since the start of Khamenei's tenure as Supreme Leader. In Saidi's appointment letter, Ayatollah Khamenei ordered him to actively publicize the mission of the office, communicate more effectively with IPOs in the armed forces, and supervise the implementation of related plans. Since then, Saidi has expanded this office and empowered several deputies to better coordinate the work of all Iran's armed forces IPOs, including those in the Artesh, IRGC, NAJA, and Ministry of Defense.

Alongside the promotion of Saidi, his deputy in the IRGC's IPO, Hojatoleslam Abdollah Haji Sadeqi, was named the Supreme Leader's new representative in the Guard. Like his predecessor, Haji Sadeqi—who headed the Imam Sadeq Institute, the IRGC's Islamic research center—is from the hardliner camp, believing in the total subordination of the IRGC to the Supreme Leader.

Structure of the IRGC IPO

All Iran's ideological-political organizations are directed by clerical commissars who are appointed by and committed to Ayatollah Khamenei. The IRGC IPO (*Sazeman-e Aqidati va Siyasi-ye Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Eslami*) is the most developed and successful of them; it is alternatively known as the Office of the Representative of the Supreme Leader in the IRGC (*Hozeh-ye Namayandegi-ye Veli-ye Faqih Dar Sepah*). The IRGC IPO, and every other IPO, is controlled by Ideological-Political Office of

the Commander-in-Chief, which designs and implements all ideological-political training (IPT) for military and security personnel. One example of an order issued by this office, in 2011, was the mandate that the military refer to Khamenei as Imam, a label granted to only twelve Shia leaders along with Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Republic’s founder. The IRGC IPO controls ideological-political operations in the various IRGC branches, including the Aerospace Force, navy, ground force, Qods Force, and Basij.

The IRGC IPO’s duties—within the overarching mission of ensuring the leader’s control over the military and subordination to his will—include implementing IPT, propaganda, enhanced religious and spiritual competency for personnel, and sharia-based rules in all processes and procedures, including in mosques, staff housing complexes, and affiliated organizations. All these responsibilities can be broken down into four categories: (1) indoctrination of members of the armed forces; (2) propagation of Islamic ideology in the military; (3) assurance of ideological competency among military personnel; and (4) supervision of sharia implementation in the military.

The IRGC IPO itself has several bureaus, including the Bureau of Public Affairs and Publications (*Moavenat-e Ravabet-e Omoumi va Entesharat*), the Political Bureau (*Moavenat-e Siyasi*), the Bureau of Ideological-Political Training and Education (*Moavenat-e Amouzesh va Tarbiyat-e Aqidati va Siyasi*), the Bureau of Propaganda and Guard Culture (*Moavenat-e Tabliqat va Farhang-e Pasdari*), and the Bureau of Supervision and Confirmation of Ideological Competency (*Moavenat-e Nezarat va Tayid-e Salahiyat*). See figure 3 for the hierarchy.

Indoctrination in Practice

As implied thus far, the main responsibility of the IRGC IPO is educating and indoctrinating Guard personnel through program implementation. Enactment falls to the Bureau of Ideological-Political Training and Education (BIPTe; *Moavenat-e Amouzesh va Tarbiyat-e Aqidati va Siyasi*), which is tasked with IPT for all IRGC members, their families, as well as those conscripted soldiers who spend their military service in the IRGC and the Basij.²⁰ The training includes promotion of the superiority of the clergy, the centrality of the regime’s founding doctrine, *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurisprudent), and the legitimacy

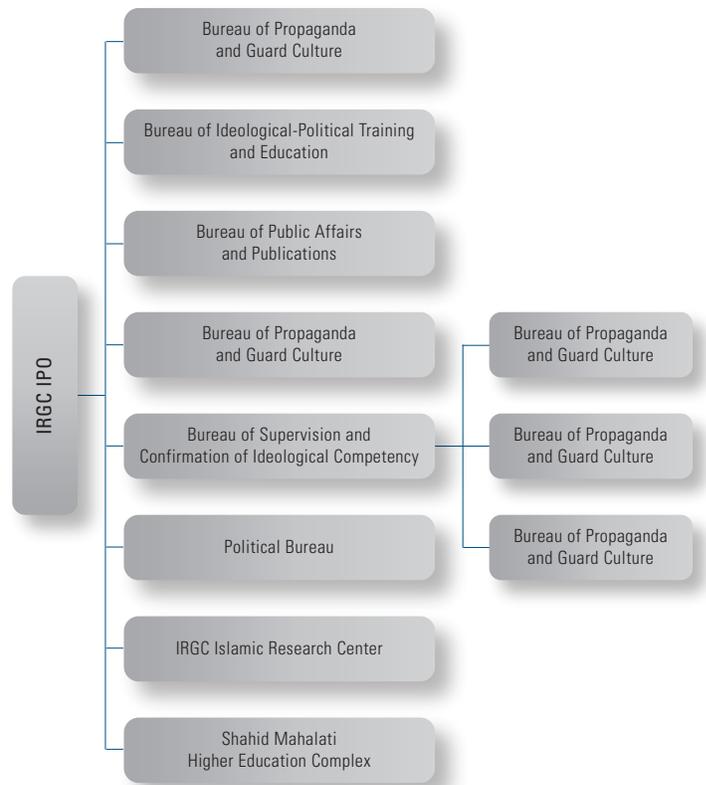


FIG. 3 IRGC Ideological-Political Structure

of the Supreme Leader’s claim to represent the “Hidden Imam”—a messianic figure in Shia Islam whom believers think is now in occultation but will one day return as an eschatological redeemer and ultimate savior of humankind. The charge of this bureau is to strengthen the religious beliefs of Guard personnel, consolidate their ideological foundations, nourish a culture of jihad and martyrdom, and reinforce a spirit of practical commitment to Islamic laws and regulations.

This bureau is also responsible for the recruitment and deployment of IPT instructors, both clerical and nonclerical; it has several sub-branches, including the bureau for IPT trainers, which supports more than nine thousand IPT trainers working in the IRGC.²¹ The planning bureau provides textbooks and is responsible for designing courses and their syllabi based on the different ranks and positions within the IRGC. Another branch is the Center for Technology and Virtual Training, designer and manager of the Seraj-e Andish website,²² which offers distance learning on ideology for Guard and Basij members.

While the Guard’s religious and ideological training is provided by BIPTe, political education falls to

the Political Bureau, founded in 1980 and known to be the most important office within the IRGC IPO. This privileged status derives from the bureau's reputation as the IPO's nerve center. According to the bureau's former head, it is charged with establishing and promoting the political vision of IRGC commanders. Other institutional responsibilities include deepening members' knowledge about internal and external political transformations, training political propagandists, surveying and evaluating the political views of Guard personnel, and censoring social and political analysis that deviates from the party line.²³ As IRGC involvement in Iranian politics and the economy has grown over time, including among individual members, so too has the clout of the Political Bureau in order to justify this involvement.

The Political Bureau has four main departments: the Department for Political Study, the Department for Information and Communications, the Department for Political Managers and Guides, and the Department for Study and Analysis. Among these, the first, the political studies department, is responsible for publications, including the daily *Akhbar va Tahlil*, the weekly *Sobh-e Sadegh*, and the quarterly *Motaleat-e Siyasi-e Rooz*, which is circulated to IRGC commanders. The second department, information and communications, maintains the Guard's political websites, the most important being *Basirat*, which disseminates political analysis for IRGC and Basij personnel.²⁴ The third department, political managers and guides, recruits, trains, and organizes a committed cadre of IRGC personnel to be political mentors. And the fourth, study and analysis, assesses national, regional, and international political trends toward maximizing the impact of each Guardsman. This department also prepares textbooks that serve as political guides. In this sense, the department is the intellectual center of the Political Bureau, providing sustenance for IRGC and Basij propagandists.

Propaganda

Since 1997, in line with the work of the Department for Political Managers and Guides, discussed in the previous section, the IRGC has established a network of political guides (*hadyan-e siyasi*) to propagate political ideas within the Guard and beyond. This network was formally recognized in 2002 and dramatically expanded with the emergence of hardliners

in the last decade. The department is responsible for the hiring and firing of guides, as well as for deploying political propagandists. Within the Basij, the Hadi website and *Hedayat* magazine serve political guides.

As of 2008, according to the IRGC IPO's Political Bureau, the Guard had more than 8,000 political guides. By 2011 and 2013, the figures had risen to 12,000 and 14,000, respectively.²⁵ These individuals are assigned to such specialties as political groups and ideologies in Iran, "soft war," contemporary Iranian history, ethnic politics, and regional studies. According to an IRGC colonel, 40 percent of IRGC guides are clergy, and the rest military personnel, but all are pulled from among the highest ranks of their respective spheres.²⁶ In their work, the guides seek to justify the regime's national, regional, and international policies and dispel any doubts expressed by Basijis. Other areas of focus include disseminating regime ideology, defending the Islamic Revolution, and increasing political-ideological adherence (*basirat-e afzayi*) within the IRGC. Guides also answer questions among the rank and file and monitor their activities. After the 2009 presidential election, each guide was assigned to monitor and support a group of twenty to fifty IRGC members.

Reinforcing the work of the guides, the Political Bureau has actually set up a nationwide office to respond to those harboring doubts. According to the former head of this bureau, Gen. Ali Ashraf-Nouri, "political clinics" in each city are established for this purpose. Before the nuclear deal, and its partial unraveling, one such question might involve why the Islamic Republic did not halt its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The network of political guides also prepares IPT educators to answer political questions.

Each year, the Political Bureau holds thousands of gatherings across its various national branches. On the local level, daily bulletins are issued on key social, political, and economic issues, with the goal of providing IPT educators the most effective responses to Basij members, especially in potential crisis periods occasioned by elections, political unrest, and so forth. For example, after the formation of the Green Movement in 2009, the political guides network published a series of new books for IPT educators titled *The Enlightenment Movement (Nehzat-e Roshangari)*, covering topics such as "velvet coups" (a term in use

by the IRGC), media diplomacy, and psychological warfare. These books were designed to give talking points on the Greens—described as an oligarchic movement of the rich—to both IRGC and Basij members and to the populace at large.

The propaganda mission is also carried out by Iranian agencies outside the Political Bureau—namely, the Bureau of Propaganda and Guard Culture and the Bureau of Public Affairs and Publications (see figure 4). The former, responsible mainly for promoting self-sacrifice among IRGC members and their families, has established a group of IRGC propagandists and cultural guides (*hadyan-e farhangi*) to help Guard personnel navigate the soft war. A particular task here is addressing children, who typically do not agree with their parents’ ideology.²⁷ Another involves enforcing Islamic codes and behaviors among family members. This bureau also runs programs that support IRGC writers, hosts Quran programs, and leads religious trips for Guard members and their families.²⁸

Separately, the Bureau of Propaganda is tasked with burnishing the image of the IRGC among the Iranian population, especially in poor areas. The bureau publishes two main journals, *Farhang-e Pasdari* and *Noursaqlain*, to disseminate its opinions. In its effort to Islamize society and promote Quranic culture, the bureau has also created thousands of centers of Quranic education.

The Bureau of Public Affairs and Publications is responsible for communicating with the media to boost the Guard’s popularity within society while neutralizing detractors. According to Brig. Gen. Ramazan

Sharif, who heads this bureau, it is the only official platform for disseminating IRGC declarations. The bureau has three main sub-branches: information and communications, publications, and radio and television.²⁹ The first of these, information and communications, works closely with Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), such as by hosting Guard officials on various programs. The bureau also publishes the official IRGC magazine *Payam-e Enghelab* and manages two official websites, Sepah-e News and Hamash.

Ensuring Ideological Competency

Indoctrination, a central plank of the IRGC’s identity, is the duty of the Bureau of Supervision and Confirmation of Ideological Competency, which seeks to confirm the ideological-political qualifications of military personnel looking to be hired, appointed, or promoted.³⁰ More minutely, the bureau monitors and acts to control the thoughts, words, and deeds of IRGC personnel to assess their level of belief in the clerical establishment and active support for the Supreme Leader. According to its head, Brig. Gen. Qasem Qurayshi, the following are the main responsibilities of this bureau:

- Continuous supervision regarding implementation of religious and revolutionary principles in the IRGC
- Inspection and investigation of other political, moral, and organizational violations and crimes

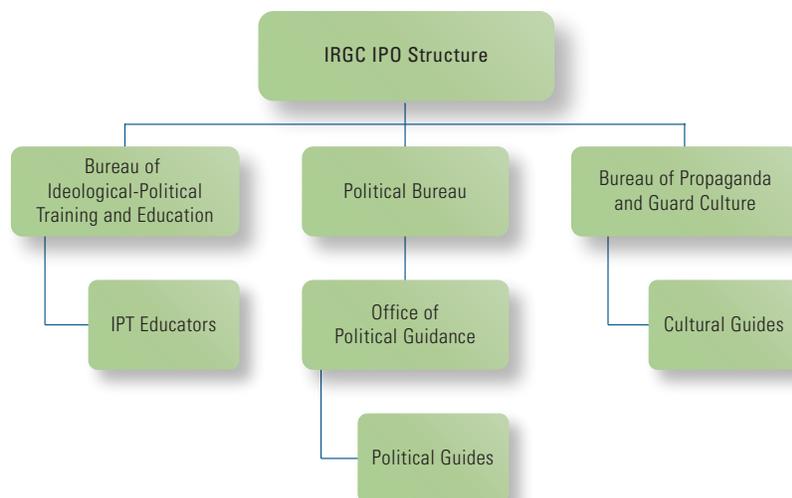


FIG. 4 IRGC Political Propaganda Agents

- Confirmation of ideological qualifications of personnel for recruiting, promoting, appointing, engaging in continuing education, and going abroad for missions
- Investigation and appointment of nonclerical IPO managers
- Evaluation of IRGC commanders for observance of Islamic rules
- Assessment of IRGC officials' performance in sharia observance

Since 2010, formalizing measures first floated in the previous two years, this “ideological competency” has become even more important than before for soldiers seeking advancement. Those with a demonstrated record of attending mosque or showing up at pro-regime rallies have a greater chance for rapid promotion, even without passing through the usual channels, than those who do not. Even command promotions can operate by this logic. This is known in official language as premature rank promotion or command assignment without attainment of appropriate rank. Given the vast clerical influence over the armed forces, the religious establishment holds control over agent selection and promotion in the armed forces. Officers cannot be promoted without such confirmation, regardless of their professional qualifications.

Sharia Implementation

The last mission of the IPO, alongside propaganda, indoctrination, and checks on ideological competency, is supervising and guaranteeing the implementation of sharia on both a personal and an IRGC organizational level. Any order, regulation, or program in Iran's armed forces must be based on Islamic law. To this end, the Office of Islamic Confirmation of Regulations and Plans (*Daftar-e Tayid-e Sharie Zavabet va Moqararat*) is responsible for checking all IRGC regulations against sharia and answering religious questions asked by IRGC personnel.

According to Shia Islam, every lay Shia should follow an authority in jurisprudence known as a *mujtahid*. One who holds this status has the authority to perform *ijtihad*, or interpretation of the religious texts, including the Quran, hadith, and *aql* (intellect or reasoning), and to rule in disputes. While many

maraji (sources of emulation) exist in Iran and the world Shia community, the IPOs in Iran's armed forces use only Ayatollah Khamenei's opinions for answering religious questions.³¹ This method helps the Islamic Republic instill the Supreme Leader's ideas among IRGC members. Further, although IRGC members are not officially banned from following other *maraji*, a great majority follow Khamenei as their *marja*. In fact, choosing another *marja* is viewed as a sign of deviance and lack of ideological competency, thereby disqualifying the Guard member from promotion or appointment.

IRGC IPO Personnel

The heads of IPOs and their bureaus are usually clerics, but the staffs include many military personnel as well. In fact, the people employed at the IRGC IPO usually come from two sources: the seminary and the military.

The clerical members of IPOs mainly come from the independent Brigade 83, Jafar Sadeq Corps, or from a clerical Basij organization.³² The Jafar Sadeq Corps (aka Imam Sadeq) and clerical Basij organizations are subordinate to the IRGC, with the mission to monitor and exert control over potentially wayward clerics.³³ For example, Imam Sadeq was used to suppress Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri after he explicitly criticized the legitimacy of Ayatollah Khamenei and his seminarian and religious credentials. The attack went beyond mere rhetoric: in October 1997, agents infiltrated Montazeri's home, destroyed it, and placed him under house arrest until 2003.³⁴ (Montazeri died in 2009.)

According to Hojatoleslam Abdol Ali Govahi, the head of the Jafar Sadeq Corps and Clerical Basij organization, 150,000 clergy belong to these two organizations.³⁵ In turn, these clerics are likely to be hired by the Islamic Republic's military and security apparatus to represent the Supreme Leader. Young seminary students likewise have a desire to work in security organizations, and many will achieve this goal. Their interest arises from factors such as status as well as high pay compared to other state bureaus, including the educational system. For this growing group, a kind of dual identity has emerged. While they have studied in seminaries, especially the Masoumeh madrasa in Qom, and wear clerical clothes, their primary job involves security and the military. This

shift toward a security identity explains why Ayatollah Khamenei has ordered his representative in the IRGC to strengthen the clerical composition of the service and remove barriers to entry.³⁶

Within the IRGC IPO, the Office of Clerical Affairs is tasked with assigning clergy to the IRGC and Basij. Clerical members can work either full or part time, with the latter option entailing employment at IRGC branches and affiliated organizations to disseminate propaganda and execute religious missions.

Members of the IPO in all branches of the Iranian armed forces study at the Shahid Mahalati Higher Education Complex, an IRGC academy designated for this purpose.³⁷ This institution was first established in 1982 as the Shahid Mahalati University in order to train a group of instructors to teach ideological-political courses in the IRGC. In 1993, it was expanded to prepare a set of indoctrinated teachers and managers for service in other IRGC branches. Over the next decade, until 2003, the university graduated 1,284 IPT trainers and sent them to locales throughout Iran to do their work. Currently, the institution accepts applications for undergraduate and graduate admission in several majors, including Quranic sciences and hadith, IPT, political science, international relations, propaganda, media, cultural management, and public affairs. This academy is responsible for training not only the ideological-political educators and propagandists of the IRGC, but also personnel from other armed forces' branches to work in IPOs.

In 2008, the Shahid Meysami Center was established at the Shahid Mahalati Higher Education Complex to train clerics for service in the IRGC. In addition to courses on Islam, which students take in seminaries, they are taught how to indoctrinate IRGC personnel at every level of the organization. Each year, according to Hojatoleslam Hojatollah Sanaei, the head of this center, about five hundred clerics are trained for placement in the IRGC.³⁸ Moreover, the Higher Education Center for Culture and Communications, within Shahid Mahalati, is responsible for training a group of experts to serve in the Bureau of Public Affairs and Publications.

For IRGC personnel, the Shahid Mahalati Higher Education Complex offers several majors, including a bachelor's degree in political guidance and an associate's degree in political promotion. After graduation, those holding the political guidance credential join

political deputies at various ranks and branches in the IRGC, and recipients of the propaganda degree join the Bureau of Propaganda and Guard Culture. The Higher Education Complex also publishes a journal, the *Quarterly of Religion and Politics*, which focuses mainly on the research findings of university faculty.

Ideological-Political Education of the IRGC

In keeping with the Islamic Republic's prioritizing of indoctrination, every member of the military must go through a complete course in ideological and political education. As the text has shown, this indoctrination process, especially for IRGC members, is the most vital responsibility of the IPOs.

The first form of IPT is known as "vertical education" (*amozesh haye toli*), which personnel undergo starting from the time they enter service and then continue through their careers. This includes IRGC general education (*doreh-ye omoumi pasdari*), command and general staff courses (*doreh-ye sarparasti*), and strategic sciences education (*doreh-ye oloum*). According to the head of the IRGC-affiliated Imam Hussein University, more than half the instruction is allotted to religious, spiritual, and political topics.³⁹ This proportion has increased consistently over the years. For example, in 2002–2003, IPT accounted for about 20 percent of IRGC and Basij education, increasing to 30 percent by 2008–2009.⁴⁰

The IPT topics addressed in the Guard's vertical education regimen are vast and include the following:

- Islamic ethics
- Islamic commandments (*ahkam*)
- foundations of Islamic thought
- Quranic science
- jihad and defense in Islam
- familiarity with the Islamic Republic regime
- familiarity with the Quran (*ashnai ba Quran*)
- military ethics
- evaluation of the political and military campaigns of the Prophet Muhammad
- foundations of political science
- staffing in military organizations
- management ethics

- lives of military commanders in early Islam
- theology
- the Islamic defense system (*nezam defai Islam*)
- military jurisprudence
- Islamic thought in history
- “commanding the good and forbidding the bad” (*amr be marouf va nahi az monker*)
- history from a Quranic perspective
- Islam and international relations
- Islamic jurisprudence
- introduction to Quranic interpretation (*tafsir*)
- introduction to *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence)
- foundations of Islamic jurisprudence⁴¹

The second form of IPT is known as “continuing” or “in-service” training, to be undergone by all cadres, officers, employees, and conscripts. This training is a requirement for continued service as well as promotion. Before 2009, IRGC members took this course over one month every three years; since then, they take an intensive ten-day course once a year. The content and method of teaching have also changed over the past decade. Instead of focusing on simply increasing religious knowledge, instructors seek to ensure students truly absorb the content, doing so through more in-class discussion instead of lecturing.

The topics taught in general and continuing education courses are very similar. But continuing education, known as *tarbiyat va taali*, contains differing content for IRGC and Basij conscripts, officers, and commanders. The titles of these courses include:

- *The Seekers of What Is Right and Truthful*
- *Individual, Family, and Organizational Honesty*
- *Family Consultation*
- *Political and Ideological Question and Answers*
- *Visiting with Religious Ulama (scholars)*
- *Proficiency in Reading Quran*
- *The Islamic Iranian Lifestyle*

As the previous lists show, the Islamic Republic offers ample courses in Quranic learning for its armed forces. The goals include developing faith and spirituality, consolidating foundations of belief and deepening religious knowledge, promoting Quranic culture,

cultivating a spirit of prayer and practical commitment to Islamic law, and reinforcing a culture of jihad and martyrdom.⁴² Even in the Artesh, according to its navy commander, participation in these classes is required for any appointment or promotion.⁴³

In addition to IRGC, Basij, and conscript soldiers, variations on the *tarbiyat va taali* programs are designed for the families of IRGC and high-ranking Basij members. Through this effort, the Islamic Republic seeks to narrow differences between the generally ideological IRGC personnel and their families, whose children in particular tend to be less inclined toward a conservative or radical worldview. Attendance at these trainings is highly recommended for families of lower-level staff and mandatory those of higher-level members.

IPT Content

In ideological-political courses, which focus heavily on Islam and Islamic teaching, a core concern is the superiority and righteousness of *velayat-e faqih*, the doctrine affirming a Shia jurist as national leader and, by implication, the legitimacy of Ayatollah Khamenei’s rule.

Religious and ideological education focuses on strengthening Islamic theology (*din shenasi*), on Islam as a religion and an ideology, on prophecy (*nabovat*), and on Shia leadership (*imamat*), all toward helping learners enhance their religious knowledge and devotion. The religious programming starts with proving the existence of God, demonstrating the necessity of prophecy, establishing Islam as the most complete religion compared to other religions, and upholding the legitimacy of the Shia imams as successors to the Prophet Muhammad. The discussion of *mahdaviyat* (belief in the existence and righteousness of the Hidden Imam) is likewise an important part of ideological training. Talk of the Hidden Imam requires only a short jump to get to *velayat-e faqih*. For impressionable students in particular, the training can offer a credible case that the Shia *ulama* represents the Hidden Imam in both worldly and otherworldly affairs. Many Shia already accept this proposition for the religious-spiritual realm.

After accepting *velayat-e faqih*, the second element of IPT involves approving the legitimacy of Ayatollah Khamenei as the righteous jurist and highlighting the obligation of military forces to obey his orders

and follow in his path. In fact, the entire educational curriculum can be summed up as creating a *maktabi* force that is “religion-centered, armed with political vision and *velayat madari*” (a term introduced earlier that implies heartfelt acceptance of the political-spiritual authority of the Supreme Leader and active loyalty to him), according to Hojatoleslam Saidi, the current head of the Ideological-Political Office of the Commander-in-Chief. *Velayat madari* is a critical concept and the ultimate goal of IPT for Iran’s armed forces. According to an IRGC study on the Guard’s command and general staff courses, political topics are more often discussed than ethical and religious ones, and among all political issues, the *basirat*, or political vision, and *velayat madari* are the two most-often emphasized.⁴⁴ The intent through this emphasis is to change the model of subordination within the armed forces, especially the IRGC, from a dynamic based on legality to one based on love and faith, indeed blind faith.⁴⁵

This is why, in political lessons, all issues—from domestic to international—align with the Supreme Leader’s ideas. Specific material covered includes political history, the Islamic Republic’s constitution, elections, and the structure of political power in Iran’s Islamic movements, along with “knowing the enemy” (*doshman shenasi*),⁴⁶ political groups and ideologies in Iran (*jaryanhay-e siyasi dar jameh*), and the achievements of the Islamic Revolution (*shenakht-e dastavardehay-e Enghelab-e Islami*). In all related materials, members of the clergy are depicted as the saviors of Iran and heroes of the country’s independence. Unsurprisingly, the teaching approach gives no weight to critical thinking. Rather, like all ideological inculcation, clerics simplify reality to fit their worldview. This approach is epitomized by the earlier-mentioned concept of *taklif garai*: performing a duty without regard for the result.

The United States figures prominently in the Manichaean worldview propagated by IRGC teaching materials. They contend that the world is divided into two main axes: one of domination and one of resistance. The domination axis consists of so-called colonializing states that have been exploiting other countries for centuries. Within this framework, Western countries, especially the United States, have been successful in implementing their hegemony for decades. The IRGC holds that the system of world

domination (*nezam-e solteh-e jahani*) is inherently unstable, requiring the exploiters to engage in war and exploitation. While many countries have contributed to this unequal power relationship, some are trying to overthrow the system. Iran is one of these countries. In fact, it is the leader of the “resistance axis,” in the view of several IRGC commanders. The IRGC projects the United States and Iran as occupying two opposite poles: good (*jebeh-e haq*) and evil (*jebeh batel*). It depicts their confrontation as strategic, not tactical. On the international level, the IRGC is positive about supporting Islamic movements and negative about collaborating with the non-Islamic world. The IRGC’s perception of the West and the United States is in harmony with that of Ayatollah Khomeini and the hardliners, who stand against a policy of engagement.⁴⁷

The IPT focus on Islamic education highlights a corresponding stark absence: that of any social or civic education. Even traditionally nationalist or patriotic themes are left out, given the view by Ayatollah Khomeini and fellow IRGC spiritual leader Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi that patriotism counts only as a human and not a religious value.⁴⁸ While certain Guard members may harbor comparatively more patriotic sentiments, the IRGC IPO and other entities keep their focus on Islam.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, for example, tried to expand his social base by promoting an Iranian Islam, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, whose ideas are taught in IRGC IPT classes and who is especially influential among Guard clerics, attacked this notion by saying, “Certain people who are shamelessly promoting the Iranian school in place of the Islamic school are outsiders, not insiders.” He has consistently attacked patriotism as an animalistic desire, since “even the crows and wolves defend their territories.”⁴⁹ He views *shahadat* (martyrdom), by contrast, as a holy concept to be promoted. Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi Amoli, whose book on ethics and morality is widely taught at the IRGC IPO, said in a speech, “While Iran is our country and we will defend it, this country was saved by Karbala and Imam Hussein, not by ‘the glorious frontier’ [*marz-e por gohar*],” referring to a popular patriotic song.⁵⁰ “*Ey Iran*” (O Iran), considered the country’s unofficial national anthem, was composed in 1944 by Ruhollah Khaleqi. Moreover, Hojatoleslam Saidi, the head of the Commander-in-

Chief's Ideological-Political Office, defined the political groups in modern Iran as either leftist-Marxist, liberal, nationalist, or Islamist, and explained that the Islamic Republic is based on a religious-jurisprudence discourse and clearly distinguished from other discourses, including nationalism.⁵¹ Islamic discourse is indeed the main discourse of Iran's armed forces.

Rear Adm. Ali Fadavi, who has served since September 2018 as the IRGC's deputy commander for coordination, noted that neither the Guard's full name nor the Islamic Revolution even mentions the name Iran. The guarding of the revolution, in his explanation, is different from the guarding of a country or region. Another example of this sentiment was expressed by Brig. Gen. Gholam Hossein Gharib Parvar, the head of the Basij organization, who explicitly said that with martyrs from the Iran-Iraq War, the republic has no need for heroes such as Rostam from the Persian epic poem *Shahnameh*. The branding of Gen. Qasem Soleimani does present a bit of a question. The Qods Force general, especially following his efforts against the Islamic State in neighboring Iraq and Syria, has received high state-sponsored praise. But it is important to note that this propaganda has targeted the general Iranian population, not the Guard.⁵² The common source is the IRGC's Social and Cultural Bureau.

It is difficult to determine to what extent this education program has helped the clergy achieve its goals, or in what numbers Guardsmen are internalizing the intended lessons. Anecdotal evidence suggests that while some personnel simply go along in order to ensure promotion, IRGC members are generally more religious and radical compared to their counterparts in the army and police. Some studies show that values such as *velayat madari* have much greater adherence in the IRGC than in Iranian society at large.⁵³ Finally, a consensus among scholars focusing on the IRGC holds that IPT indoctrination has been more successful with the Guard than with army personnel.

The Imam Sadeq Institute

In standardizing IPT, all Iran's armed forces use textbooks provided by the Imam Sadeq Institute for Islamic Sciences, which is subordinated to the IRGC IPO.⁵⁴ This institute is responsible for designing the programs, preparing the syllabi, and writing the text-

books and materials for IPT programs for all branches of military and security forces, including the IRGC, Artesh, and police.

Based in Qom, the Imam Sadeq Institute also oversees the contents of any IRGC-published materials to ensure they accord with Islam and the regime's political ideology. The institute has three main "scientific" groups: on theology and Islamic knowledge, defense and security, and sociocultural and political issues. And it has a publishing house, Zamzame Hedayat, which has produced about a thousand books for IRGC IPT courses.⁵⁵ Textbooks on ideological-political issues, written almost exclusively by clerics within the IRGC IPO, draw from a handful of Islamic Republic ideologues, including Khomeini and Khamenei, Mesbah-Yazdi, Javadi Amoli, and Morteza Motahhari.

The institute also has three main journals: *Payam*, for clergy providing IPT to the IRGC; *Morabian*, for all IPT educators in the Guard; and *Hasoun*, designed to enhance ideological knowledge for IRGC commanders. The institute maintains a website, Touba, which provides access to its publications for the IRGC and Basij, as well as other military branches.

Controlling the Guard Through Surveillance and Coercion

In maintaining control over the IRGC and Iran's other armed forces, Ayatollah Khamenei relies not only on indoctrination but also on surveillance and coercion. In the Artesh, IRGC, and all other Iranian security entities, a comprehensive surveillance network serves as a first line of defense against a potential coup.⁵⁶ Three principal institutions are enlisted in this effort: the Organization for the Protection of Intelligence (OPI), the Armed Forces Inspection Bureau (*Moavenat-e Bazrasi-e Nirouha-ye Mosallah*), and the Commanders' Bureau (*Ashraf-e Farmandehi*).

Through the OPI, Ayatollah Khamenei, in the role of armed forces commander-in-chief, has created a pervasive apparatus aimed not only at identifying foreign agents and corrupt personnel but at identifying and suppressing any voices of opposition. Under this organization's watch, every last member of the IRGC and Artesh is subject to continuous scrutiny. Even minor offenses can draw rebuke. In many

instances, military personnel have been summoned to the organization for wearing short sleeves or blue jeans, generally in their workplace but even in public areas as well.

Organization for the Protection of Intelligence

The wide-reaching OPI operates with a centralized hierarchy under Ayatollah Khamenei's control, through the Supreme Leader's Office for the Organization for the Protection of Intelligence (*Daftar-e Omoumi-ye Hefazat va Ettelaat-e Farmandehi-ye Kol-e Qova*). The OPI has autonomy from the military chain of command and IPO, but the leadership in each military branch is required to provide logistical support for the organization. The Supreme Leader's Office for the Organization for the Protection of Intelligence is responsible for coordinating separate OPI directorates within the military/security infrastructure and for creating a unified approach among them in implementing the Supreme Leader's counter-intelligence orders.

From 1989 until 2017, the intelligence protection office was led by three Artesh generals: Mohammad Ali Nazaran, Abdollah Najafi, and Sayyed Hesam Hashemi. But in 2017, the Supreme Leader broke this trend by appointing Hojatoleslam Gholam Hossein Ramazani, the former head of NAJA and IRGC counterintelligence. Other public servants working in leadership positions for the OPI, across the Artesh, Defense Ministry, IRGC, and NAJA (police), include both clerics and military personnel. As dictated by law, they report to the Supreme Leader's Office for the Organization for the Protection of Intelligence and are approved and appointed directly by the Supreme Leader. Moreover, dismissal of the OPI head is the sole responsibility of the Supreme Leader. As for the prominent role of clerics, it dates back decades. Hojatoleslam Saidi, the current IRGC IPO deputy, led the Guard's OPI branch between 1983 and 1987. The leadership for NAJA has come from IRGC ranks,⁵⁷ including both Brig. Gen. Muhammad Naqdi and Hojatoleslam Ramazani, who successively led the unit between 1990 and 2000.

Other personnel within the various OPI branches tend to have a military background along with ideological and conservative views. They receive train-

ing at academies specific to their military organization—the Farabi Science and Technology University (*Daneshgah-e Oloum va Fonoun Farabi*) for the Artesh, the Imam Hadi Counterintelligence Academy for the IRGC.

In broad terms, the OPI is designed to preserve and protect the armed forces and its affiliated organizations by safeguarding personnel information, documents, facilities, equipment, and communications security.⁵⁸ According to Article 16 of the Artesh charter, the OPI's mission entails the following specifics: collecting news; producing, analyzing, and classifying intelligence; and detecting, preventing, and neutralizing subversion, spying, sabotage, dissatisfaction, political influence, and mission disruption. The OPI is likewise responsible for collaborating with Iran's Ministry of Intelligence through the Council for the Coordination of Intelligence (*Shura-ye Hamahangi-ye Ettelaat*), Iran's highest intelligence body. Item 3 of Article 16 requires the Artesh OPI chief to promptly report coup and sabotage suspicions to the attorney general and IRGC commander.⁵⁹ The OPI has also been used for political missions and to arrest activists and journalists. For example, in 1999, "the police's OPI incarcerated and allegedly tortured the mayor of Tehran, Gholam-Hossein Karbaschi, alongside other Tehran district mayors who had supported Khatami's presidential campaign."⁶⁰ In all, the massively powerful OPI infrastructure has fostered a climate of fear in the armed forces, stifling free expression from most soldiers. Through these intelligence networks, the clerical regime can closely monitor the armed forces.

Another important responsibility of the OPI is reviewing the security qualifications and competency of military personnel at all levels and all stages of their career advancement. Even for members of the Basij militia who want to be promoted to active status, the IRGC OPI must approve their security clearance. According to some reports, tensions have emerged between the IRGC commander and the head of IRGC OPI over failure to approve certain personnel. Back during the Iran-Iraq War, clashes between then IRGC chief Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezaii and then IRGC OPI head Hojatoleslam Ali Saidi prompted the dismissal of the latter in 1986 by Ayatollah Khomeini, at General Rezaii's request. Again heeding Rezaii's counsel, Khomeini appointed Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, a top-level intelligence official, to replace Saidi (see table 2).

One challenge for the IRGC OPI has been ensuring ideological purity within the Guard. In 2009, some members of the IRGC's first generation supported reformist candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karrubi. Since then, the regime has intensified its efforts to replace the Guard's first and second generations, sometimes through giving some incentives to retire after twenty-five years. By replacing these earlier generations, Khamenei has enhanced Guard loyalty, though of course even some members of the third generation are more opportunistic and less ideological. In addition, the Basij Foundation for the Oppressed has established an organization of retired Basij in order to draw on their experience. Meanwhile, the IRGC OPI has expanded its control over IRGC retired personnel by asking them to officially register their mourning and religious associations (*heyat-e azadari*); those that fail to register have been closed and their members summoned for investigation. When distance opened up between Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad during the president's second term, the IRGC OPI arrested several Guard members who supported Ahmadinejad against the Supreme Leader. Relatedly, IRGC members serving in Ahmadinejad's administration faced intense OPI scrutiny when having their positions approved and when reentering the Guard. According to Parviz Fatah, a former Guardsman who served as Ahmadinejad's minister of energy from 2005 to 2009, the OPI only approved his reentry to the Guard after years of inquiry, based on fears he answered first to Ahmadinejad or his Deviance Group (*Jaryan-e Enherafi*), so named after its members ceased to follow Khamenei's line.⁶¹ A different target of the IRGC OPI is mystical Islam (*tasavof*), whose mem-

bers the organization is responsible for identifying and arresting.

The OPI similarly exerts its influence over the online activities of military personnel, having lately ramped up such efforts focused on social media. IRGC members are thus often hesitant to use instant-messaging apps such as Telegram, although some remain active Internet users. In tightening restrictions, the IRGC OPI has banned using smartphones on Guard bases or other sites, although reports suggest these efforts haven't entirely succeeded. And military members must clear any prospective media interviews with the organization.

Finally, it is important to note that the IRGC OPI is different from the IRGC Intelligence and Security Organization (*Sazeman-e Ettelaat va Amniyat-e Sepha*), which was created formally in 2009. While the IRGC OPI focuses mainly on surveillance of IRGC and Basij members, IRGC Intelligence covers the broader public. The distinction came about like this: the IRGC, since its inception, has been involved in gathering intelligence and surveillance of political dissidents through its intelligence unit. However, after the creation in 1984 of the Ministry of Intelligence (*Vezerat-e Ettelaat Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran*), the IRGC intelligence unit narrowed its focus to military intelligence only. This scope lasted until 1999, when Ayatollah Khamenei enlisted the IRGC to block reformists, and the expanded purview, or "organization" status, has lasted ever since. Since the rise of the Green Movement, the IRGC Intelligence and Security Organization has been controlled by the Guard leadership, whereas the IRGC OPI reports directly to the Supreme Leader. A subtle rivalry exists between the IRGC Intelligence Bureau and the Intelligence Ministry, resulting in the arrest and even death of some agents serving one or the other.⁶²

Monitoring Role of the Inspection Bureau

Alongside the OPI, another Islamic Republic agency designed to coopt and coerce military personnel is the Armed Forces Inspection Bureau. This bureau is subordinate to the military commanders, answering to the head of each respective military unit and—like the other intelligence bodies discussed so far—carrying a presence in every sphere from the AFGS down to individual platoons.

Officially, the Inspection Bureau covers violations outside those handled by the OPI. While the OPI

TABLE 2. HEADS OF THE IRGC OPI

Hojatoleslam Ali Saidi	1983–1986
Hojatoleslam Ahmad Vahidi	1986–1989
Hojatoleslam Ali Saidi	1989–1993
Gen. Morteza Rezaei	1994–2006
Hojatoleslam Gholam Hossein Ramazani	2006–2009
Gen. Muhammad Kazemi	2010–

deals with political, security, or organized-crime-related offenses, the Inspection Bureau targets any violations outside these bounds, while identifying and arresting dissidents in the armed forces.⁶³ In such efforts, the Inspection Bureau works closely with both the OPI and the IPO to control military personnel. Without question, much overlap exists among the missions of these three organizations.

The Inspection Bureau also conducts investigations to guard against program mismanagement and malfeasance. Working through judicial officers (*zabet-e ghazai*) for the Judiciary Organization of the Armed Forces, the inspection deputy uncovers crimes, including gathering and preserving evidence, as well as identifying and locating the accused military personnel. Here, relative to Western governments, in which the inspector general does not hold a particularly influential position, the role in Iran’s armed forces is very powerful.⁶⁴ According to the IRGC charter, which dates to August 1982, the inspection deputy serves the military commander in determining the qualifications of members and advises the IRGC commander on the performance of various IRGC units and departments.⁶⁵ The deputy also identifies the merits of commanders for appointment and promotion, while the human resources directorate conducts such assessments for officers and NCOs. Finally, the inspection deputy reports to appropriate IPO heads on ideological, political, and ethical deviations committed by staff. In this, as in other tasks, the deputy collaborates with the IPO, and once again the work of these bureaus often overlaps (see figure 5).⁶⁶

In 2010, the IRGC inaugurated an evaluation system called the “General Merits of Guardianship” (*Shayestegi Omoumi-e Pasdari*), which assesses IRGC personnel based on twelve broad indicators:⁶⁷

1. Knowledge and Faith
 - Theology
 - Prophecy (*nabovat*)
 - Shia leadership
 - Knowledge of resurrection
2. Worship and Good Deeds
 - Prayer, fasting, commitment to Islamic commandments
 - Familiarity with Quran
 - Engaging in recommended, though not mandatory, actions in Islam
 - Observance of religious and customary appearance and dress codes
3. Family Origins
 - Family religiosity and support for the regime
 - Observance of the veil and Islamic appearance in one’s parents’ family
 - Observance of the veil by spouse and children
 - Participation in mosque, religious groups, and occasions associated with the Islamic Revolution
4. Belief in and Practical Commitment to *Velayat-e Faqih*
 - Love and attachment to the Ahl al-Bait (family of the Prophet Muhammad)
 - Avoidance of enemies of the Ahl al-Bait and expressing of hostility toward them
 - Promotion of the culture of Mahdism (Twelver Shiism)
 - Understanding the principles of *velayat-e faqih*
 - Acceptance of the rules and positions of the Supreme Leader
 - Enactment of the Supreme Leader’s recommendations and guidelines
 - Comprehensive defense of the Supreme Leader

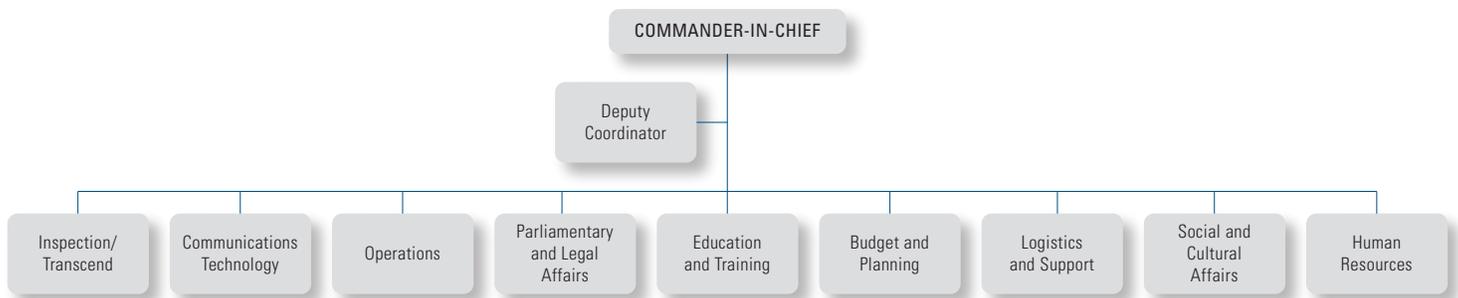


FIG. 5 Structure of IRGC Military Leadership

5. Piety and Virtue
 - Integrity in speech and deed
 - Chastity
 - Commitment to work
 - Self-evaluation
6. Moral Merits
 - Good words (*hussein-e kalam*)
 - Avoidance of flattery
 - Nonattachment to worldly position or money
 - Preservation of dignity and respect for family ethics
 - Education and consideration of children's affairs
 - Socializing with spouse and children
 - Respect and consideration for parents
7. Avoidance of Luxuries and Worldliness
 - Possession of only simple devices and appliances
 - Avoidance of congregating with the rich
8. Intuition and Revolutionary Action
 - Identifying the friends and foes of the Islamic republic
 - Understanding the system of domination and opposition
 - Knowing the Islamic Revolution and protecting it
 - Defending the values of the Islamic Revolution and promoting them
9. Jihadist Spirit and Ashurai
 - Tireless pursuit
 - Hardworking approach
 - Recognition of religious and revolutionary duties in organizational and social affairs
 - Practice of duties without concern for the work involved, and absolute devotion to the ideals of sacrifice and martyrdom
 - Avoidance of simply waiting for death, and acceptance of martyrdom in the name of God, oppression, and defending what is right
 - Defense of the oppressed, and commitment to fight against injustice and oppression
 - Defense of what is right in speech and action, courage, and risk-taking
 - Refusal to be intimidated by enemy numbers and weaponry
10. Mental and Intellectual Development
 - Interest and effort to learn
 - Balance and stability of character
 - Self-confidence
 - Flexibility
11. Social and Organizational Relations
 - Participation in popular gatherings
 - Popularity among people demonstrating humanity, according to regime values
 - Participation in Basij activities and operations
12. Physical, Military, and Intelligence Readiness
 - Fitness
 - Martial arts and self-defense
 - Counterintelligence knowledge

For any military figure seeking appointment or promotion, including officers, meeting these standards is critical. The process is managed by a directorate for appointments within the Inspection Bureau. Personnel must be approved by this directorate before continuing their education at the Command and General Staff College (for ranks of major and higher) or the Supreme National Defense University (for ranks of lieutenant colonel and higher).

In determining ranks from private to second brigadier general, a process of evaluation generally involves the Inspection Bureau, OPI, and IPO, with a focus on candidate performance and ideological competence. For IRGC personnel, the promotion to the high rank here, second brigadier general, takes three years, while for the Artesh it takes four. For this reason, a near majority of Artesh personnel retire with the rank of colonel, while in the Guard, a large number settle at second brigadier general. The rank of second brigadier general is the lowest among the five ranks for general within the IRGC. The other ranks mirror the one- to four-star system used in the United States. Promotion to a rank higher than second brigadier general requires approval by Ayatollah Khamenei. (See table 3 for values accorded to IRGC ranks.)

Yet since the new system was implemented in 2010, the old system in which promotion happened automatically after three- or four-year intervals has changed somewhat. Now personal loyalty to the Supreme Leader, joined secondarily by ideological loyalty, has become preeminent, allowing for faster

promotion than in the past.⁶⁸ In 2010, for example, the loyalist Farzad Ismaili was promoted by two ranks, from colonel to brigadier general, earning appointment as head of the Artesh Air Defense Force. The same incentive holds for other armed forces members.

A related insurance policy for military appointees is “religiosity,” seen by the Supreme Leader as a safeguard against betrayal.⁶⁹ Devotion to Shia Islam, alongside the earlier-noted ideological attributes, not only oils appointments and promotions, it is also the main indicator for holding a top-level position for decades, versus the usual three-year term. High-ranking military officials who fit this description include Gen. Muhammad Shirazi, who heads the Supreme Leader’s Military Bureau, Gen. Hassan Firouzabadi, the former head of Iran’s AFGS, and General Soleimani, the Qods Force chief. As noted at the outset of this paper, the Guard also has narrowed its pool of recruits to those with a conservative-ideological worldview. Valued attributes include having a parent in the IRGC, being the relative of a martyr or veteran (e.g., of Iraq or Syria), being a “devotee of the Islamic Revolution” (*isargaran-e Enghelab-e Eslami*) and belonging to the Basij. This contrasts with past years, when the Guard was more open to recruiting people from a broader ideological background.

Since 2010, moreover, recruitment to the IRGC often happens through shared nomination by members within the personnel department and the IPO. This system of “marking” (*neshaneh gozari*) and “finding members” (*ozv yabi*) is, once again, informed by an emphasis on ideological purity and fealty to the Islamic regime. After being selected, nominees attend the IRGC academies to take their exam and thereafter enter Imam Hussein University, where they undergo highly intensive ideological-political training.

Finally, Iran’s armed forces do not engage in ethnic discrimination, but they do practice religious discrimination. Despite having to serve a mandatory twenty-one months, minorities such as Bahai cannot ultimately join the military or become officers. Generally, they serve in nonsensitive positions and in border areas such as Sistan and Baluchestan. Further, while non-Persians such as Shia Arabs, Kurds, or Baluch are recruited in massive numbers mainly by the Qods Force for missions in neighboring countries, non-Shia Persians cannot join the armed forces.

TABLE 3. VALUES ACCORDED TO IRGC RANKS[†]

20	General	<i>Ateshbod Pasdar</i>
19	Lieutenant General	<i>Sepahbod Pasdar</i>
18	Major General	<i>Sarlashkar Pasdar</i>
17	Brigadier General	<i>Sartip Pasdar</i>
16	Second Brigadier General	<i>Sartip 2 Pasdar</i>
15	Colonel	<i>Sarhang Pasdar</i>
14	Lieutenant Colonel	<i>Sarhang 2 Pasdar</i>
13	Major	<i>Sargord Pasdar</i>
12	Captain	<i>Sarvan Pasdar</i>
11	First Lieutenant	<i>Sotvan 1 Pasdar</i>
10	Second Lieutenant	<i>Sotvan 2 Pasdar</i>
9	Third Lieutenant	<i>Sotvan 3 Pasdar</i>
8	Command Sergeant Major	<i>Razmdar 1 Pasdar</i>
7	Sergeant Major (Staff)	<i>Razmdar 2 Pasdar</i>
6	First Sergeant	<i>Razmdar 3 Pasdar</i>
5	Staff Sergeant	<i>Razmavar 1 Pasdar</i>
4	Sergeant	<i>Razmavar 2 Pasdar</i>
3	Corporal	<i>Razmavar 3 Pasdar</i>
2	Private First Class	<i>Razmyar Pasdar</i>
1	Private	<i>Sarbaz</i>

[†]Ranks 16–20 known as *sardar pasdar* in the IRGC; *emir* in the army.

Another Agency to Keep Tabs on Military Personnel

Complementing the Inspection Bureau is a pervasive institution called the Commanders’ Bureau (*Ashraf-e Farmandehi*), created in 2002 by the Supreme Leader. This cluster network, which like others begins at the top within the AFGS and has tentacles extending down to individual units, serves to monitor the armed forces. It has a presence in all branches, including the IPOs and OPIs. Yet unlike the Inspection Bureau, which covers forces at many ranks, Commandership Dominance is focused solely on commanders and high-ranking personnel. Also distinct from the Inspection Bureau, which conducts evaluations, Commandership Dominance relies on self-reporting by commanders, who send assessments on their forces. These reports are sent to the Office of the Commanders’ Surveillance Bureau

(*Dabirkhaneh-ye Ashraf-e Farmandehi*) at AFGS, currently headed by Maj. Gen. Mostafa Izadi. Every year, this office sends a brief set of questions to the lowest units in the armed forces, based on the self-reporting, and the most successful units receive accolades.

Incentives are provided in part through salary and benefits. Despite an AFGS-approved system in 2008 granting equal pay across all branches, IRGC members still receive slightly better compensation than their Artesh and NAJA counterparts: perhaps an extra \$10–\$20 out of a total \$170–\$200 monthly. The gap in benefits, by comparison, is substantial—experienced in better health care, equipment, merchandise, education, recreation, and newer, more appealing housing. One account describes Artesh housing as “literally in ruins.” A simple comparison of the IRGC’s Shahid Mahalati Housing Complex (*Mojtame-ye Shahid Mahalati*) with Artesh housing in the southeast Tehran neighborhood of Qasr-e Firouzeh depicts the gulf between the two.⁷⁰ There are also “brighter career prospects in the IRGC compared with the Army,” according to one analyst, with the IRGC having the first pick in potential recruits.⁷¹ All these components generate loyalty to the Guard.

Conclusion

The IRGC is the most important organization for the survival of the Islamic Republic. It bolsters the clerical establishment by suppressing social and political protests, deterring external intervention and attempts at regime change, and keeping Iran’s conventional army (Artesh) in check, reducing the threat of a coup. The IRGC is under the control of Ayatollah Khamenei, who by creating a web of institutions in counterintelligence and ideology/politics has only tightened his grip. To do so, he has employed methods like cooptation, coercion, and indoctrination. For Khamenei, the IPOs are the principal tools in subordinating the Guard to his rule.

The Supreme Leader also asserts his authority over the Guard through his representative to the organization, as well as other appointments. Since his leadership began three decades ago, Khamenei has reassigned many responsibilities previously belonging to IRGC commanders to his representative’s office in the Guard, including in the key Politi-

cal, Public Affairs, and Propaganda Bureaus. These appointments show that while the IRGC has stretched its influence over many corners of Iranian society, the individual behind it all remains Khamenei, who has made a priority of indoctrinating members with the regime’s Islamic ideology and his own ultimate legitimacy as Supreme Leader. He is referred to as Imam instead of Ayatollah Khamenei only in the armed forces and especially in the IRGC. Thanks to all these policies and institutions, the current likelihood of the IRGC staging a coup against Khamenei is very low.

As this study has illustrated, Khamenei and his representative have made sure that the newest generations to enter the Guard hold more conservative and religious views than their predecessors. This follows upon a religious/conservative IRGC class from the 1980s, but an insufficiently ideological crop in the next decade, due to a recruitment method that allowed anyone to apply. These recruits from the 1990s were more pragmatic than any before or after, with high numbers voting for the reformist president Mohammad Khatami in both the 1997 and 2001 elections. But since then, a singular focus on the religious parts of society has produced far more radical-ideological members representing the Guard’s third (entering in the 2000s) and fourth (in the 2010s) generations. In appointing today’s IRGC commanders, the regime has passed over this second generation, instead naming members from the ideologically vetted third generation. In 2018, three IRGC commander appointees fit this description, in Hormozgan (Col. Hamid Dehghani), Semnan (Col. Abazar Salari), and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Provinces (Col. Hamid Khormdel).⁷²

The increasingly ideological-religious composition of the IRGC, reinforced by a thorough training regimen, has forged a widening gap between the Guard and the Iranian people. As illustrated earlier, ideology reigns, leaving no place for civic identity or traditional patriotism in the Guard, even as individual Guardsmen likely possess such views privately, acquired from other sources. Given all this work of indoctrination, the Guard’s current hardline trajectory, and specifically its support for *velayat-e faqih*, it will likely remain a bulwark for the Islamic Republic, putting down any potential uprisings that might threaten its survival. The increasing breadth and technical capacities of the IRGC, including its

intelligence wings and anti-riot forces such as the Ammar Brigades and Imam Ali Battalions, suit it for this role.

A countrywide uprising could, however, pose a greater difficulty for the Guard than sporadic rioting. To address this risk, in 2006–2007, the IRGC created provincial corps at the recommendation of IRGC commander Maj. Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, incorporating Basij forces with Guard ground forces in every province. He did so in response to the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, seeking to decentralize his forces' military might. But the military character of this plan changed to a security one in 2009, following the Green Movement and the realization that the United States was unlikely to attack Iran. The result for today is that the Guard has personnel in place throughout the country to defend against unwanted activity.

Another divide created by the radicalizing IRGC is one with a group of seminarians who support the separation of religion and state. Interestingly, seminaries are generally reverting to a philosophy in which they eschew politics, reflecting a Shia tradition based on the idea that no government is "legitimate" when the Hidden Imam is in occultation. All this is happening as the IRGC doubles down on a model in which Islam and the state are considered inseparable.⁷³ Many people close to or affiliated with the IRGC, including former IRGC IPO head Hojatoleslam Saidi, criticize these seminaries, arguing that seminarians must be revolutionary, not apolitical or neutral.⁷⁴ In September 2018, Hassan Rahimpour Azghadi, a former IRGC commander closely allied with Ayatollah Khamenei, criticized seminaries as "the root of secularism."⁷⁵ But fissures between the clergy and the IRGC are hardly new. When, in 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed Hojatoleslam Abdullah Nouri as his representative to the Guard, the cleric complained about being named to a force where everybody considered himself a *mujtahid*.

Responding to these cracks in the current scene, some have advised Khamenei to strengthen "the relationship between the Revolutionary Guard and the religious authorities, or Shia *maraji*."⁷⁶ One reason is that the rift could have real consequences in the post-Khamenei era. As one cleric in the IRGC IPO

cautioned, "How is it possible to criticize the clergy, seminarians, and jurisprudents as unknowing, and then accept the authority of the leader who will be elected by them...!"⁷⁷

One related fear is that the IRGC will not accept the next Supreme Leader, whose orientation will fall somewhere between radical religiosity and pragmatism, with the latter end including current president Hassan Rouhani, who has views far from Khamenei's notion of a revolutionary seminary. Rouhani and his allies hold the traditional belief that the seminary should not be subordinate to the political regime.

A final note on the next Supreme Leader involves the dynamic between the IRGC and the Assembly of Experts, the eighty-eight member body charged with selecting this potentate. Although the Guard has no legal leverage over the assembly to influence this decision, it has plenty of implicit power. To begin with, the assembly has a strongly conservative composition, making selection of a hardline successor likely. But should the assembly choose a more moderate figure, the Guard can show its displeasure in forceful ways. For starters, the IRGC's Ansar Corps is responsible for the very physical protection of the assembly members. Further, through its sleuthing, IRGC intelligence holds in-depth information about the assembly members' lives, including their families. Because many members have engaged in unsavory financial or moral acts, the Guard has the potential to embarrass or harm them. Last but not least, family ties unite the assembly and the Guard. Sons of clerics belong to the IRGC, and vice versa. For just one example, Gen. Mohammad Bagherzadeh's son is a cleric who has a very close relationship with Ayatollah Khamenei's son.

Invested with these powers, the IRGC will surely set the goal of making the next Supreme Leader its puppet. And should this occur, U.S.-Iran relations will undoubtedly continue to deteriorate. Because of the importance of the IRGC in shaping the Islamic Republic's future, including its domestic and foreign policies, the study of the IRGC, its commanders, and its educational regime is vital for U.S. policymakers. They should watch closely the evolution of the IRGC, especially after Khamenei dies, to identify where the most serious threats to U.S. interests arise.

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