



**Center for Strategic and International Studies**

**Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy**

1800 K Street, N.W. • Suite 400 • Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 1 (202) 775-3270 • Fax: 1 (202) 457-8746

Web: <http://www.csis.org/burke>

# **Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and Other Intelligence and Paramilitary Forces**

*Rough Working Draft*

**Anthony H. Cordesman**  
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy

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# I. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Pasdaran, or Vezarat-e Sepah Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Islamic)

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is a product of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini established the force to protect the Islamic order of the new Iranian government. The IRGC has since evolved to be a major political, military, and economic force in Iran. It is believed to have close ties to the Supreme Leader, but has its own factions--some of which have loyalties to President Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad who is a veteran of the IRGC. It is far more political and ideological than the regular armed forces. A number of senior officers in the IRGC have relatives or close ties to leading members of Iran's leading clerics.

The IRGC (Pasdaran) has contributed some 125,000 men to Iran's forces in recent years and has substantial capabilities for asymmetric warfare and covert operations. This includes the Al Quds Force and other elements that operate covertly or openly overseas, working with Hezbollah of Lebanon, Shi'ite militias in Iraq, and Shi'ites in Afghanistan. It was members of the IRGC that seized 15 British sailors and Marines, who seem to still have been in Iraqi waters, in March 2007.

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The IRGC operates most of Iran's surface-to-surface missiles and is believed to have custody over potentially deployed nuclear weapons, most or all other chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons, and to operate Iran's nuclear-armed missile forces if they are deployed.

The links between the IRGC and Iran's nuclear program are so close that its leaders were singled out under the UN Security Council Resolutions passed on December 23, 2006, and March 24, 2007, and had their assets frozen. The commander, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, deputy commander, Brigadier General Morteza Rezaie, and the heads of the IRGC ground forces, naval branch, Al Quds Force, and Basij (Mobilization of the Oppressed Force) were all involved.<sup>2</sup>

UN Security Council Resolution 1747, passed on March 24, 2007, included a wide range of Iranian officials involved in nuclear or ballistic missile activities, including the following members of the IRGC command structure:<sup>3</sup>

- Ministry of Defense and Other Officials
  - Fereidoun Abbasi-Davani [Senior Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL) scientist with links to the Institute of Applied Physics, working closely with Mohsen Fakhrizadeh-Mahabadi, designated below]
  - Mohsen Fakhrizadeh-Mahabadi [Senior MODAFL scientist and former head of the Physics Research Centre (PHRC). The International Atomic Energy Agency has asked to interview him about the activities of the PHRC over the period he was head, but Iran has refused]
  - Seyed Jaber Safdari (Manager of the Natanz Enrichment Facilities)
  - Amir Rahimi (Head of Esfahan Nuclear Fuel Research and Production Center, which is part of the Atomic Energy Agency of Iran's (AEOI's) Nuclear Fuel Production and Procurement Company, which is involved in enrichment-related activities)

- Mohsen Hojati (Head of Fajr Industrial Group, which is designated under Resolution 1737 (2006) for its role in the ballistic missile programme)
- Mehردادا Akhlaghi Ketabachi (Head of Shahid Bagheri Industrial Group (SBIG), which is designated under Resolution 1737 (2006) for its role in the ballistic missile programme)
- Naser Maleki (Head of SHIG, which is designated under Resolution 1737 (2006) for its role in Iran's ballistic missile programme. Naser Maleki is also a MODAFL official overseeing work on the Shahab-3 ballistic missile programme. The Shahab-3 is Iran's long-range ballistic missile currently in service)
- Ahmad Derakhshandeh [Chairman and Managing Director of Bank Sepah, which provides support for the AIO and subordinates, including Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group (SHIG) and SBIG, both of which were designated under Resolution 1737 (2006)]
- Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps key persons
  - Brigadier General Morteza Rezaie (Deputy Commander of IRGC)
  - Vice Admiral Ali Akbar Ahmadian (Chief of IRGC Joint Staff)
  - Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Zahedi (Commander of IRGC Ground Forces)
  
  - Rear Admiral Morteza Safari (Commander of IRGC Navy)
  - Brigadier General Mohammad Hejazi (Commander of Basij resistance force)
  - Brigadier General Qasem Soleimani (Commander of Qods force)
  - General Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr (IRGC officer, Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs)

## IRGC Land Forces

The IRGC has small elements equipped with armor and has the equivalent of conventional army units, and some units are trained for covert missions and asymmetric warfare, but most of its forces are lightly equipped infantry trained and equipped for internal security missions. These forces are reported to have between 120,000 and 130,000 men, but such totals are uncertain. They also include conscripts recruited from the same pool as regular army conscripts, and training and retention levels are low. The IRGC land forces do, however, control the Basij (Mobilization of the Oppressed) and other paramilitary forces if they are mobilized for war.

Some sources, like the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), report a force structure with 20 "divisions," but most IRGC units seem to be battalion-sized elements. According to a *Jane's* report, estimates of the IRGC's organization differ sharply. Some sources claim that there are two armored, five mechanized, ten infantry, one Special Forces division, and about 15-20 independent brigades. The report concludes that many alleged divisions are equivalent to large brigades and the personnel numbers of the IRGC could support only three to five divisions.<sup>4</sup> The total manpower pool of the IRGC could support only about five to six light infantry divisions. There is also supposed to be one airborne brigade.

The IRGC often claims to conduct very large exercises, sometimes with 100,000 men or more. The exact size of such exercises is unclear, but they are often a small fraction of IRGC claims. With the exception of a limited number of more elite elements, training is limited and largely suitable for internal security purposes. Most forces would require substantial refresher training to

act in any mission other than static infantry defense and using asymmetric warfare tactics like hit-and-run operations or swarming elements of forces when an invader appears vulnerable.

The IRGC is, however, the center of much of Iran's effort to develop asymmetric warfare tactics to counter a U.S. invasion. Work by Michael Connell of the Center for Naval Analysis notes that the IRGC has been systematically equipping, organizing, and retraining its forces to fight decentralized partisan and guerrilla warfare. It has strengthened the anti-tank and anti-helicopter weaponry of IRGC battalions and stressed independent battalion-sized operations that can fight with considerable independence even if Iran loses much of the coherence in its command, control, communications, and intelligence capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Its exercises have included simulated attacks on U.S. AH-64 attack helicopters with Iran's more modern man-portable surface-to-air missiles, using mines and using improvised explosive device (IED)-like systems to attack advancing armored forces.

The IRGC, like the army and Basij, have attempted to develop and practice deception, concealment, and camouflage methods to reduce the effectiveness of U.S. and other modern imagery coverage, including dispersing into small teams and avoiding the use of uniformed personnel and military vehicles. While the credibility and effectiveness of such tactics are uncertain, the IRGC claims to be adopting tactics to avoid enemy radars and satellites. Both the IRGC and the army have also attempted to deal with U.S. signals and communications intelligence collection capabilities by making extensive use of buried fiber optics and secure communications and developing more secure ways to use the Internet and commercial landlines. Iran claims to be creating relatively advanced secure communications systems, but its success is uncertain.<sup>6</sup>

Connell notes that the IRGC is developing such tactics in ways that could form a layered or "mosaic" defense with the army and air forces, where the IRGC kept up constant pressure on any advancing U.S. forces. He indicates that the IRGC has developed special stay behind units or "cells" that would include some 1,800 to 3,000 teams of three to four soldiers whose main mission would be to attack U.S. lines of supply and communication, strike at elements in rear areas, and conduct ambushes of combat troops. This could include sending units forward into countries like Iraq and Afghanistan to attack U.S. forces there, or encourage local forces to do so, and sending teams to raid or infiltrate the southern Gulf States friendly to the United States.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, Connell notes that if the Iranian Army was defeated and an attacker like the United States moved into Iran's major cities, the IRGC, the Iranian Army, and Basij are now organized and trained to fight a much more dispersed war of attrition in which force elements would disperse and scatter, carrying out a constant series of attacks on U.S. forces wherever they deployed as well as against U.S. lines of communication and supply. Such elements would have great independence of action rather than relying on centralized command. The IRGC and the Iranian Army have clearly paid close attention to both the limited successes that Saddam's Fedayeen had against the U.S. advance on Baghdad, and the far more successful efforts of Iraqi insurgents and militias in attacking U.S. and other Coalition forces following the fall of Baghdad.

One technique such forces organize and practice is using cities and built-up areas as defensive areas that provide concealment and opportunities for ambushes and for the use of swarming tactics, which forces an attacker to disperse large numbers of forces to try to clear and secure given neighborhoods. Connell indicates that some 2,500 Basij staged such an exercise in the

Western suburbs of Tehran in February 2007. Once again, Iran can draw on the lessons of the fighting in Iraq. It also, however, employed such tactics with great success against Iraqi forces during the Iran-Iraq War, and it has closely studied the lessons of urban and built-up area fighting in Somalia and Lebanon.

The IRGC remains the center of Iran's hard-line security forces, but has become steadily more bureaucratic and less effective as a conventional fighting force since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988. Corruption and careerism are growing problems, and the IRGC's role in the defense industry has led to financial abuses. At this point in time, it is the elite elements of the IRGC that give it real meaning beyond serving the regime's need to control its population.

One source identifies a trend that will eventually render the regular army more technologically advanced and more modern in general. According to this report, the IRGC, in contrast, is to focus on "less traditional defense duties," such as enforcing border security, commanding the country's ballistic missile and potential weapons of mass destruction forces, and preparing for a closing of the Strait of Hormuz with military means.<sup>8</sup>

## **The IRGC Air Force**

The air force of the IRGC is believed to operate Iran's three Shahab-3 intermediate-range ballistic missiles units (whose true operational status remains uncertain) and may have had custody of its chemical weapons and any biological weapons. While the actual operational status of the Shahab-3 remains uncertain, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, announced in 2003 that Shahab-3 missiles had been delivered to the IRGC. In addition, six Shahab-3s were displayed in Tehran during a military parade in September 2003.<sup>9</sup>

It is not clear what combat formations exist within the IRGC, but the IRGC may operate Iran's ten EMB-312 Tucanos.<sup>10</sup> It also seems to operate many of Iran's 45 PC-7 training aircraft, as well as some Pakistani-made trainers at a training school near Mushshak, but this school may be run by the regular air force. It has also claimed to manufacture gliders for use in unconventional warfare. These are unsuitable delivery platforms, but could at least carry a small number of weapons.<sup>11</sup>

## **The IRGC Naval Forces**

The IRGC has a naval branch with some 20,000 men, including marine units of some 5,000 men. Such a force could deliver conventional weapons, bombs, mines, and CBRN weapons into ports and oil and desalination facilities. It is operational in the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman and could operate elsewhere if given suitable sealift or facilities.

The naval branch has bases in the Gulf, many near key shipping channels and some near the Strait of Hormuz. These include facilities at Al-Farsiyah, Halul (an oil platform), Sirri, Abu Musa, Bandaer-e Abbas, Khorramshahr, and Larak. It also controls Iran's coastal defense forces, including naval guns and an HY-2 Seersucker land-based anti-ship missile unit deployed in five to seven sites along the Gulf coast.

Its forces can carry out extensive raids against Gulf shipping, carry out regular amphibious exercises with the land branch of the IRGC against objectives like the islands in the Gulf, and could conduct raids against Saudi Arabia or other countries on the southern Gulf coast. They give Iran a major capability for asymmetric warfare. The Guards also seem to work closely with

Iranian intelligence and appear to be represented unofficially in some embassies, Iranian businesses and purchasing offices, and other foreign fronts.

The IRGC naval forces have at least 40 light patrol boats, 10 Houdong guided missile patrol boats armed with C-802 anti-ship missiles, and a battery of HY-2 Seersucker land-based anti-ship missiles. Some of these systems could be modified to carry a small CBRN weapon, but hardly are optimal delivery platforms because of their limited-range payload and sensor/guidance platforms unsuited for the mission.

## **Proxy and Covert CBRN Operations**

The IRGC has a complex structure that includes both political and military units. It has separate organizational elements for its land, naval, and air units, which include both military and paramilitary units. The Basij and the tribal units of the Pasdaran are subordinated to its land unit command, although the commander of the Basij often seems to report directly to the Commander-in-Chief and Minister of the Pasdaran and through him to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

The IRGC has close ties to the foreign operations branch of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), particularly through the IRGC's Qods force. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security was established in 1983 and has an extensive network of offices in Iranian embassies. It is often difficult to separate the activities of the IRGC, the Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar, and the Foreign Ministry, and many seem to be integrated operations managed by a ministerial committee called the "Special Operations Council" that includes the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, President, Minister of Intelligence and Security, and other members of the Supreme Council for National Defense.<sup>12</sup>

Other elements of the IRGC can support proxy or covert use of CBRN weapons. They run some training camps inside Iran for outside "volunteers." Some IRGC still seem to be deployed in Lebanon and actively involved in training and arming Hezbollah, other anti-Israeli groups, and other elements.<sup>13</sup> The IRGC has been responsible for major arms shipments to Hezbollah, including large numbers of AT-3 anti-tank guided missiles, long-range rockets, and some Iranian-made Mohajer unmanned aerial vehicles.<sup>14</sup>

Iran exported thousands of 122-mm rockets and Fajr-4 and Fajr-5 long-range rockets to Hezbollah in Lebanon, including the Arash with a range of 21–29 kilometers. These reports give the Fajr-5 a range of 75 kilometers with a payload of 200 kilograms. Iran seems to have sent such arms to Hezbollah and some various Palestinian movements, including some shiploads of arms to the Palestinian Authority.<sup>15</sup>

It has provided arms, training, and military technology to Shi'ite militias in Iraq and may have provided such support to Sunni Islamist extremists as well, which led to attacks on U.S. and Coalition forces. These transfers have included relatively advanced shaped charge and triggering components, which have sharply increased the lethality of militia and insurgent attacks using IEDs on U.S. and Coalition armor. There were also growing indicators that similar training, weapons, and other aid were being provide to Shi'ite forces and Taliban elements in Afghanistan in 2007.

## **The Quds (Qods, or Jerusalem) Forces**

The IRGC has a large intelligence operation and unconventional warfare component. Roughly 5,000 of the men in the IRGC are assigned to the unconventional warfare mission. The IRGC has the equivalent of one Special Forces division, plus additional smaller formations, and these forces are given special priority in terms of training and equipment. In addition, the IRGC has a special Quds force that plays a major role in giving Iran the ability to conduct unconventional warfare overseas using various foreign movements as proxies.<sup>16</sup>

In January, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) decided to place all Iranian operations in Iraq under the command of the Quds forces. At the same time, the SNSC decided to increase the personnel strength of the Quds to 15,000.<sup>17</sup> Current force strength data for the Quds are not available.

The al Quds forces are under the command of Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani and have supported nonstate actors in many foreign countries. These include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the Shi'ite militias in Iraq, and Shi'ites in Afghanistan. Links to Sunni extremist groups like Al Qaeda have been reported, but never convincingly confirmed.

Many U.S. experts believe that the Quds forces have provided significant transfers of weapons to Shi'ite (and perhaps some Sunni) elements in Iraq. These may include the shaped charge components used in some IEDs in Iraq and the more advanced components used in explosively formed projectiles, including the weapon assembly, copper slugs, radio links used to activate such devices, and the infrared triggering mechanisms. These devices are very similar to those used in Lebanon, and some seem to operate on the same radio frequencies. Shaped charge weapons first began to appear in Iraq in August 2003, but became a serious threat in 2005.<sup>18</sup>

On January 11, 2007, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency stated in a testimony before the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that the Quds force of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has the lead for its transnational terrorist activities, in conjunction with Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran's MOIS.<sup>19</sup> Other sources believe that the primary mission of the Quds has been to support Shi'ite movements and militias, and such aid and weapons transfers seem to have increased significantly in the spring of 2007.

The Quds are also believed to play a continuing role in training, arming, and funding Hezbollah in Lebanon and to have begun to support Shi'ite militia and Taliban activities in Afghanistan. Experts disagree on the scale of such activity, how much it has provided support to Sunni Islamist extremist groups rather than Shi'ite groups, and over the level of cooperation in rebuilding Hezbollah forces in Lebanon since the cease-fire in the Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006. The debates focus on the scale of such activity and the extent to which it has been formally controlled and authorized by the Supreme Leader and the President, however, and not over whether some level of activity has been authorized.

The exact relationship between the Quds, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad is even more speculative. Some Iranian arms shipments have clearly been directed at aiding anti-peace and anti-Israeli elements in the Gaza Strip. There is some evidence of aid in training, weapons, and funding to hostile Palestinian elements in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Open sources do not, however, provide a clear picture of the scale of such activity.

Some reports indicate that the budget for the Quds is a classified budget directly controlled by the Supreme Leader Khamenei and is not reflected in the Iranian general budget. The active



elements of the Quds service operate primarily outside Iran's borders, although it has bases inside and outside of Iran. The Quds troops are divided into specific groups or "corps" for each country or area in which they operate. There are Directorates for Iraq; Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan; Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India; Turkey and the Arabian Peninsula; Asian countries of the former Soviet Union, Western nations (Europe and North America), and North Africa (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan, and Morocco).

The Quds has offices or "sections" in many Iranian embassies, which are closed to most embassy staff. It is not clear whether these are integrated with Iranian intelligence operations or if the ambassador in each embassy has control of, or detailed knowledge of, operations by the Quds staff. However, there are indications that most operations are coordinated between the IRGC and offices within the Iranian Foreign Ministry and MOIS. There are separate operational organizations in Lebanon, Turkey, Pakistan, and several North African countries. There are also indications that such elements may have participated in the bombings of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina in 1992 and the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires in 1994--although Iran has strongly denied any involvement.<sup>20</sup>

The Quds seems to control many of Iran's training camps for unconventional warfare, extremists, and terrorists in Iran and countries like the Sudan and Lebanon. In Sudan, the Quds are believed to run a training camp of unspecified nature in Sudan. It has at least four major training facilities in Iran. The Al Quds have a main training center at Imam Ali University that is based in the Sa'dabad Palace in Northern Tehran. Troops are trained to carry out military and terrorist operations and are indoctrinated in ideology.

There are other training camps in the Qom, Tabriz, and Mashhad governorates and in Lebanon and the Sudan. These include the Al Nasr camp for training Iraqi Shi'ites and Iraqi and Turkish Kurds in northwest Iran and a camp near Mashhad for training Afghan and Tajik revolutionaries. The Quds seems to help operate the Manzariyah training center near Qom, which recruits from foreign students in the religious seminary and which seems to have trained some Bahraini extremists. Some foreigners are reported to have received training in demolition and sabotage at an IRGC facility near Isfahan, in airport infiltration at a facility near Mashhad and Shiraz, and in underwater warfare at an IRGC facility at Bandar Abbas.<sup>21</sup>

On January 11, 2007, the U.S. military in Iraq detained five men accused of providing funds and equipment to Iraqi insurgents. According to U.S. military sources, these men had connections to the Quds.<sup>22</sup> On January 20, 2007, gunmen dressed as U.S. soldiers entered the Provincial Joint Coordination Center in Karbala and killed and wounded several U.S. servicemen. According to some sources, including U.S. military intelligence, the gunmen were members of the Quds. The sophisticated planning and execution of this attack made it unlikely that any Iraqi group was involved in it.<sup>23</sup>

General David H. Petraeus, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, stressed the growing role of the Quds force and IRGC in testimony to Congress in April 2007. He noted that the United States had found Quds operatives in Iraq and seized computers with hard drives that included a 22-page document that had details on the planning, approval process, and conduct of an attack that killed five U.S. soldiers in Karbala. Petraeus noted,<sup>24</sup>

They were provided substantial funding, training on Iranian soil, advanced explosive munitions and technologies as well as run-of-the-mill arms and ammunition...in some cases advice and in some cases even a degree of direction...Our sense is that these records were kept so that they could be handed in to whoever it is

that is financing them...And again, there's no question...that Iranian financing is taking place through the Quds force of the Iranian Republican Guards Corps."

Israeli defense experts state that they believe the IRGC and Quds force not only played a major role in training and equipping Hezbollah, but may have assisted it during the Israeli-Hezbollah War in 2006. Israeli intelligence officers claim to have found command and control centers, and a missile and rocket fire-control center, in Lebanon that was of Iranian design. They feel the Quds force played a major role in the Hezbollah anti-ship missile attack on an Israeli Navy Sa'ar-class missile patrol boat and that Iranians and Syrians supported Hezbollah with intelligence from facilities in Syria during the fighting.

## **The Basij (Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij, Baseej-e Mostazafan, Mobilisation of the Oppressed, or Mobilisation Resistance Force)**

Like the IRGC, the Basij force grew out of the Revolution of 1979 by direct intervention of Ayatollah Khomeini. On January 1, 1981, the Basij was put under command of the IRGC. The Basij is a popular reserve force of about 90,000 men, with an active and reserve strength of up to 300,000 and a mobilization capacity of nearly 1,000,000 men. It has up to 740 regionally commanded battalions, which consist of about 300-350 personnel each. It is controlled by the IRGC and consists largely of youths, men who have completed military service, and the elderly.

Apparently, the Basij began to place emphasis on riot control and internal security missions in the mid-1990s. Therefore, it has created a formal military-style command system and set up special battalions for internal security missions (Ashura).<sup>25</sup>

Its mission has, however, increasingly been broadened to providing reserves and small combat elements for the IRGC in defending against a U.S. invasion. It would serve as a mobilization base for the IRGC, as well as provide cadres and small units for independent action against invading forces. It would also serve as a "stay behind" force and attack isolated U.S. units and rear areas. According to Connell, the IRGC has formed a wartime mobilization plan for the IRGC called the "Mo'in Plan," where Basij battalions would be integrated into the IRGC in wartime as part of the IRGC regional defense structure.<sup>26</sup>

It is far from clear how effective the Basij would really be in such missions. Similar forces have been created in a number of countries, including Iraq. In many cases, they have not materialized as a meaningful resistance force. Iran does, however, have extensive experience in creating and using such forces dating back to the Iran-Iraq War, and the fighting in Iraq since 2003 has shown that small cadres of activists using IEDs, car bombs, and suicide bombs can have a major political and military impact.

## **Role in Iran's Industries**

The IRGC plays a major role in Iran's military industries. Its lead role in Iran's efforts to acquire surface-to-surface missiles and weapons of mass destruction gives it growing experience with advanced military technology. As a result, the IRGC is believed to be the branch of Iran's forces that plays the largest role in Iran's military industries.<sup>27</sup> It also operates all of Iran's Scuds, controls most of its chemical and biological weapons, and provides the military leadership for missile production and the production of all weapons of mass destruction.

The IRGC is a powerful economic force, controlling key elements of Iraq's defense industry. It seems to operate part of Iran's covert trading network, a system established after the fall of the Shah to buy arms and military parts through various cover and false flag organizations. It is not clear, however, how much of this network is controlled by the IRGC versus the Ministry of Defense. For example, the same UN resolution dealing with Iran's nuclear proliferation listed a wide range of entities where the role of the IRGC is often unclear:<sup>28</sup>

- Ammunition and Metallurgy Industries Group (AMIG) (aka Ammunition Industries Group) (AMIG controls 7<sup>th</sup> of Tir, which is designated under resolution 1737 (2006) for its role in Iran's centrifuge programme. AMIG is in turn owned and controlled by the Defence Industries Organisation (DIO), which is designated under resolution 1737 (2006))
- Esfahan Nuclear Fuel Research and Production Centre (NFRPC) and Esfahan Nuclear Technology Centre (ENTC) (Parts of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran's (AEOI) Nuclear Fuel Production and Procurement Company, which is involved in enrichment-related activities. AEOI is designated under resolution 1737 (2006))
- Kavoshyar Company (Subsidiary company of AEOI, which has sought glass fibres, vacuum chamber furnaces and laboratory equipment for Iran's nuclear programme)
- Parchin Chemical Industries (Branch of DIO, which produces ammunition, explosives, as well as solid propellants for rockets and missiles)
- Karaj Nuclear Research Centre (Part of AEOI's research division)
- Novin Energy Company (aka Pars Novin) (Operates within AEOI and has transferred funds on behalf of AEOI to entities associated with Iran's nuclear programme)
- Cruise Missile Industry Group (aka Naval Defence Missile Industry Group)
- (Production and development of cruise missiles. Responsible for naval missiles including cruise missiles)
- Bank Sepah and Bank Sepah International (Bank Sepah provides support for the Aerospace Industries Organisation (AIO) and subordinates, including Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group (SHIG) and Shahid Bagheri Industrial Group (SBIG), both of which were designated under resolution 1737 (2006))
- Sanam Industrial Group (subordinate to AIO, which has purchased equipment on AIO's behalf for the missile programme)
- Ya Mahdi Industries Group (subordinate to AIO, which is involved in international purchases of missile equipment) Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps entities

It is clear that the IRGC has become a leading contracting organization, bidding for other contracts including at least some oil and gas projects. Like most Iranian entities associated with government projects, it is reported to get many contracts out of favoritism and/or without competitive bidding. It is believed to now be as corrupt as civil entities and religious foundations like the Bunyods.

## **Other Paramilitary Forces**

Iran also has 45,000–60,000 men in the Ministry of Interior serving as police and border guards, with light utility vehicles, light patrol aircraft (Cessna 185/310s and AB-205s and AB-206s), 90 coastal patrol craft, and 40 harbor patrol craft. The rest of Iran's paramilitary and internal security forces seem to have relatively little capability in any form of warfighting mission.

## II. Paramilitary, Internal Security, and Intelligence Forces

Iran has not faced a meaningful threat from terrorism. Its internal security forces are focused on countering political opposition. **Figure 2.1** shows the force structure of Iran's paramilitary and internal security services. Since 1990, Iran has maintained the same force structure, and its key agencies have not changed since the early years of the Revolution.

The U.S. Department of State described the role of Iran's internal security apparatus as follows:

Several agencies share responsibility for law enforcement and maintaining order, including the ministry of intelligence and security, the law enforcement forces under the interior ministry, and the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps]. A paramilitary volunteer force known as the Basij and various informal groups known as the Ansar-e Hezbollah (Helpers of the Party of God) aligned with extreme conservative members of the leadership and acted as vigilantes. The size of the Basij is disputed, with officials citing anywhere from 11 to 20 million, and a recent Western study claiming there were 90 thousand active members and up to 300 thousand reservists. Civilian authorities did not maintain fully effective control of the security forces. The regular and paramilitary security forces both committed numerous, serious human rights abuses. According to HRW [Human Rights Watch] since 2000 the government's use of plainclothes security agents to intimidate political critics became more institutionalized. They were increasingly armed, violent, and well equipped, and they engaged in assault, theft, and illegal seizures and detentions.<sup>29</sup>

Iran maintains an extensive network of internal security and intelligence services. The main parts of the domestic security apparatus are made up of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Basij Resistance Force, the intelligence unit of the IRGC, and the law enforcement forces within the Ministry of Interior that largely are responsible for providing police and border control. The leadership of each of these organizations appears to be fragmented and dispersed among several, often competing, political factions. Public information on all Iranian security and intelligence forces is extremely limited and subject to political manipulation.

Key to most paramilitary and intelligence forces in Iran is the IRGC, as it holds control over several other organizations or parts thereof. All security organizations without exception report to the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), as the highest body in the political chain of command. The phenomenon of the fragmented leadership of the security organizations is reflected in their relationship to the SNSC as different security organizations maintain special ties to certain elements of the SNSC. The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, installed an advisory panel called Strategic Council on Foreign Policy in May 2006. This body is supposed to advise the Supreme Leader in a broad range of foreign policy matters. It can only be speculated what the implications of this body are, but its creation send a caveat to observers that there may be some significant tension among the security components in Iran.

In addition, it has to be assumed that other state organizations, most notably the police services, exert varying control over internal security. As with virtually all other organizations, the IRGC is believed to have considerable leverage over these services.<sup>30</sup> The effectiveness of the internal security organizations is unclear and the political will to use them is hard to predict. After local unrest in the Iranian province of Baluchistan in May 2006, police were unable to seize control of the situation against regional tribal forces.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 2.1: Iran's Paramilitary Forces' Force Structure, 1990–2007**

	1990	2000	2005	2006	2007

<b>Manpower</b>	1,045,000	1,040,000	1,040,000	1,040,000	1,040,000
Active (Interior Ministry officers)	45,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000
Reserve (includes rev. conscripts, BASU)	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
<b>Patrol and Coastal Combatants</b>	136	130	130	130	130
Misc. Boats and Craft	40	40	40	40	40
PCI	96	90	90	90	90
<b>Aircraft</b>	?	?	?	?	some
Cessna 185/Cessna 310	?	?	?	?	some
<b>Helicopters</b>	?	24	24	24	24
UTL Bell/205/206	?	24	24	24	24

Source: IISS, Military Balance, various editions, including 1989–1990, 1999–2000, 2004–2005, 2005–2006, 2006, and 2007.

## The Ministry of Intelligence and Security

The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), or Vezarat-e Ettela' at va Aminat-e Keshvar (VEVAK), was installed following the Revolution to replace the now-disbanded National Organization for Intelligence and Security (SAVAK), which in return was created under the leadership of U.S. and Israeli officers in 1957. SAVAK fell victim to political leadership struggles with the intelligence service of the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War. A compromise solution resulted in the creation of MOIS in 1984.

In 2006, the MOIS employed about 15,000 civilian staff. Its major tasks included intelligence about the Middle East and Central Asia and domestic intelligence and monitoring of clerical and government officials<sup>32</sup> as well as work on preventing conspiracies against the Islamic republic.<sup>33</sup> It can therefore be assumed that the Ministry maintains an elaborate domestic service network.

The MOIS staff is believed to maintain a professional service loyalty and therefore is not subject to easy mobilization by military, clergy, or other political forces. Some, however, believe that during former President Mohammad Khatami's rule the MOIS actively sought to rid the organization of hard-line officials.<sup>34</sup> Within Iran's political system there is constant argument about limiting parliamentary control over MOIS, indicating that the control over MOIS can be used as a powerful political instrument. Recently, there were efforts in Iran to extract the counterintelligence unit of MOIS and make it a separate entity. This proposal seems to be favored by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and some hard-line legislators.<sup>35</sup>

Until recently, the organization has remained under very limited public disclosure. In the 1990s, Ministry personnel were accused of killing political dissidents in Iran. Ensuing investigations have been covered up systematically. Apparently, MOIS has a comparatively large budget at its disposal and operates under the broader guidance of Ali Khamenei.<sup>36</sup> And it seems likely that the details about the Ministry's resources are partly undisclosed even to Iranian political officials.

## The IRGC Intelligence Branch

As part of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, the roughly 2,000 staff members of its intelligence force are a largely politicized force with a political mission. According to Jane's, their conformity and loyalty to the regime are unquestionable.<sup>37</sup>

The main task of the IRGC Intelligence Branch is to gather intelligence in the Muslim world. As far as domestic security is concerned, the organization targets the enemies of the Islamic Revolution and also participates in their prosecution and trials.<sup>38</sup> In addition, it works closely with the IRGC's Qods Corps, which also operates covertly outside Iran.

## **The Basij Resistance Force**

The Basij has already been mentioned briefly in the chapter on the IRGC (Chapter 5), but it performs broader functions than simply serving as a reserve for the IRGC. The IRGC oversaw the creation of a people's militia, a volunteer group it named the Basij Resistance Force (which means Mobilization of the Oppressed), in 1980. The Basij derives its legitimization from Article 151 of the Iranian Constitution, which calls upon the government to fulfill its duty according to the Quran to provide all citizens with the means to defend themselves. Numbering over 1,000,000<sup>39</sup> members, the Basij is a paramilitary force, mostly manned by elderly men, youth, and volunteers who have completed their military service.

This force is organized in a regional and decentralized command structure. It has up to 740 regional "battalions," each organized into three to four subunits. Each battalion has 300–350 men. According to one source, about 20,000 Basij forces were organized in four brigades during an exercise in November 2006.<sup>40</sup> It maintains a relatively small active-duty staff of 90,000 and relies on mobilization in the case of any contingency.<sup>41</sup>

According to an IRGC general, a military exercise (Great Prophet II) conducted in the first two weeks of November 2006 employed 172 battalions of the Basij Resistance Force. According to the same source, the main mission of these troops was to guard "public alleyways and other urban areas."<sup>42</sup>

The Basij has a history of martyr-style suicide attacks dating back to the Iran-Iraq War, 1980–1988. Today, its main tasks are thought to assist locally against conventional military defense as well as quell civil uprisings. In addition, one of the Force's key roles has been to maintain internal security, including monitoring internal threats from Iranian citizens and acting as "a static militia force." The state of training and equipment readiness for the Basij is believed to be low. No major weapon systems have been reported for the inventory of the Basij.

The IRGC maintains tight control over the leadership of the Basij and imposes strict Islamic rules on its members. Recent comments by Iranian leaders indicate that the mission of the Basij is shifting away from traditional territorial defense to "defending against Iranian security threats." Furthermore, there are reports of an increased interest in improving the Basij under the leadership of President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the IRGC leadership questions the effectiveness of the Basij and might loosen its ties to the organization.<sup>44</sup>

In 1993, the Ashura Brigades were created from IRGC and Basij militia units as a response to anti-government riots. This unit is composed of roughly 17,000 men and women, and its primary purpose is to keep down civil unrest, although there has been some discontent expressed by senior leaders about using IRGC units for domestic contingencies.<sup>45</sup>

## **The Uncertain Role of the Ministry of Interior**

The police forces, which comprise about 40,000 police under the Ministry of Interior (MoI), participate in internal security as well as border protection. The Police-110 unit specializes in rapid-response activities in urban areas to disperse potentially dangerous public gatherings. The maritime police have 90 inshore patrol and 40 harbor boats. In 2003, some 400 women became the first female members of the police force since the 1978–1979 Revolution.<sup>46</sup>

The role of Iran's MoI is unclear, and open-source information regarding its structure and forces is limited. The same is true of other organizations in Iran's internal security apparatus. The Ansar-e Hezbollah is a paramilitary force that has gained questionable notoriety. It remains unclear to what extent it is attached to government bodies. Reportedly, the political Right in government has repeatedly made use of it to fight and intimidate liberal forces in society. According to reports, the Ansar-e Hezbollah's military level of training appears to be very poor.<sup>47</sup>





# Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Michalel Slackman, "Seizure of Britons Underlines Iran's Political Split," New York Times, April 4, 2007, p. 5; Sarah Lyall, "Iran Sets Free 15 Britons Seized at Sea in March," New York Times, April 5, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Robin Wright, "Elite Revolutionary Guard Broadens Its Influence in Iran," Washington Post, April 1, 2007, p. A21.

<sup>3</sup> UNSCR 1747, United Nations S/RES/1747 (2007), Adopted by the Security Council at its 5647th meeting on 24 March 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Jane's World Armies, "Iran," October 26, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Connell, "The Influence of the Iraq Crisis on Iranian Warfighting Doctrine and Strategy," CNA Corporation, Alexandria, April 2007; Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network, Network 1. 18:34 GMT, March 9, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Iran has said that experts at its Hossein and Sharif Universities are working on an "impenetrable intranet communications network." Connell indicates that Iran claims such a system was fielded during the Eqtedar exercises in February 2007. Baztab, web edition, February 20, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Connell, "The Influence of the Iraq Crisis on Iranian Warfighting Doctrine and Strategy," CNA Corporation, Alexandria, April 2007; Keyhan, February 20, 2007, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Jane's World Armies, Iran, October 26, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> "Iran Enhances Existing Weaponry by Optimizing Shahab-3 Ballistic Missile," Jane's Missiles and Rockets, January 20, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Reports that the IRGC is operating F-7 fighters do not seem to be correct.

<sup>11</sup> Reuters, June 12, 1996, 17:33.

<sup>12</sup> See Time, March 21, 1994, pp. 50-54, November 11, 1996, pp. 78-82. Also see The Washington Post, November 21, 1993, p. A-1, August 22, 1994, p. A-17; October 28, 1994, p. A-17, November 27, 1994, p. A-30, April 11, 1997, p. A-1, April 14, 1997, p. A-1; The Los Angeles Times, November 3, 1994, pp. A-1, A-12; Deutsche Presse-Agentur, April 17, 1997, 11:02; Reuters, April 16, 1997, BC cycle, April 17, 1997, BC cycle; The European, April 17, 1997, p. 13; The Guardian, October 30, 1993, p. 13, August 24, 1996, p. 16 April 16, 1997, p. 10; The New York Times, April 11, 1997, p. A1; Associated Press, April 14, 1997, 18:37.

Jane's Defense Weekly, June 5, 1996, p. 15; Agence France Press, April 15, 1997, 15:13; BBC, April 14, 1997, ME/D2892/MED; Deustcher Depeschen via ADN, April 12, 1997, 0743; The Washington Times, April 11, 1997, p. A22.

<sup>13</sup> Riad Kahwaji and Barbara Opall-Rome, "Hizbollah: Iran's Battle Lab," Defense News, December 13, 2004, pp. 1 & 6.

<sup>14</sup> Amir Taheir, "The Mullah's Playground," The Wall Street Journal, December 7, 2004, p. A10.

<sup>15</sup> The estimates of such holdings of rockets are now in the thousands, but the numbers are very uncertain. Dollar estimates of what are significant arms shipments are little more than analytic rubbish, based on cost methods that border on the absurd, but significant shipments are known to have taken place.

<sup>16</sup> The reader should be aware that much of the information relating to the Quds is highly uncertain. Also, however, see the article from the Jordanian publication Al-Hadath in FBIS-NES-96-108, May 27, 1996, p. 9, and in Al-Sharq Al-Awsat, FBIS-NES-96-110, June 5, 1996, pp. 1,4; A J Venter, "Iran Still Exporting Terrorism," Jane's Intelligence Review, November, 1997, pp. 511-516.

<sup>17</sup> IntelligenceOnline.com, Tehran targets Mediterranean, March 10, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Gordon and Scott Shane, "Iran Supplied Weapons in Iraq," New York Times, March 26, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Michael D. Maples, "Threat Assessment", Statement of Michael D. Maples Director, Defense Intelligence Agency U.S. Army before the Committee on Senate Select Intelligence, January 11, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> The New York Times, May 17, 1998, p. A-15; The Washington Times, May 17, 1998, p. A-13; The Washington Post, May 21, 1998, p. A-29.

<sup>21</sup> A J Venter, "Iran Still Exporting Terrorism," Jane's Intelligence Review, November, 1997, pp. 511-516.

<sup>22</sup> Defense Department Documents and Publications, Coalition Targets Iranian Influence in Northern Iraq, January 14, 2007.

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- <sup>23</sup> Stephen Kaufman, "Bush says Iranian group certainly providing weapons in Iraq, February 14, 2007, available at <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2007&m=February&x=20070214171942esnamfuak0.7028467>.
- <sup>24</sup> Bill Gertz, "US General Calls Al Qaeda "Public Enemy No. 1" in Iraq," *Washington Times*, April 27, 2007, p. 4.
- <sup>25</sup> Jane's World Armies, *Iran*, October 26, 2006.
- <sup>26</sup> Connell, "The Influence of the Iraq Crisis on Iranian Warfighting Doctrine and Strategy," CNA, April 2007, p. 4; Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1, 18:34 GMT, March 9, 2005,
- <sup>27</sup> For typical reporting by officers of the IRGC on this issue, see the comments of its acting commander in chief, Brigadier General Seyyed Rahim Safavi, speaking to reporters during IRGC week (December 20-26, 1995). FBIS-NES-95-250, December 25, 1995, IRNA 1406 GMT.
- <sup>28</sup> UNSCR 1747, United Nations S/RES/1747 (2007), Adopted by the Security Council at its 5647th meeting on 24 March 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> U.S. Department of States, "Iran," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 2005, available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61688.htm>
- <sup>30</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, *The Gulf States: Armed Forces, Iran*, October 21, 2005.
- <sup>31</sup> Alex Vatanka and Fatemeh Aman, "The making of an insurgency in Iran's Baluchistan province", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, June 1, 2006.
- <sup>32</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, *The Gulf States: Armed Forces, Iran*, October 21, 2005.
- <sup>33</sup> Byman, Daniel, Shahram Chubin, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Jerrold D. Green, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, (Washington D.C.: RAND, 2006), 32.
- <sup>34</sup> Byman, Daniel, Shahram Chubin, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Jerrold D. Green, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, (Washington D.C.: RAND, 2006), 32.
- <sup>35</sup> Globalsecurity.org, *[MOIS] Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar VEVAK*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/vevak.htm>.
- <sup>36</sup> Globalsecurity.org, *Ministry of Intelligence and Security*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/vevak.htm>.
- <sup>37</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, *The Gulf States: Armed Forces, Iran*, October 21, 2005.
- <sup>38</sup> Globalsecurity.org, *Qods (Jerusalem) Force Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC - Pasdaran-e Inqilab)*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/qods.htm>.
- <sup>39</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, *The Gulf States: Armed Forces, Iran*, October 21, 2005.
- <sup>40</sup> BBC Monitoring Middle East, Iran's Guard commander comments on Tehran's missile power, November 13, 2006.
- <sup>41</sup> Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment, *The Gulf States: Armed Forces, Iran*, October 21, 2005.
- <sup>42</sup> BBC Monitoring Middle East, Iran's Guard commander comments on Tehran's missile power, November 13, 2006.
- <sup>43</sup> Globalsecurity.org, *Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij Mobilisation Resistance Force*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/basij.htm>.
- <sup>44</sup> Byman, Daniel, Shahram Chubin, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Jerrold D. Green, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, (Washington D.C.: RAND, 2006), 39.
- <sup>45</sup> Globalsecurity.org, *Qods (Jerusalem) Force Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC - Pasdaran-e Inqilab)*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/qods.htm>.
- <sup>46</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Country Profile: Iran*, March 2006.
- <sup>47</sup> Globalsecurity.org, *Ansar-i Hizbullah Followers of the Party of God*, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/ansar.htm>.