

**Guardians of the Islamic Revolution
Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran
(1979–2009)**

by

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List of Abbreviations

AE	(Assembly of Experts)
Ansar	(Ansar-e Hezbollah)
Ayat.	(Ayatollah)
Basij	(Basij popular militia, Basij Resistance Force)
Badr	(Badr Organization)
BBCMME	(<i>BBC Monitoring Middle East</i>)
BBCSWB	(<i>BBC Summary of World Broadcasts</i>)
BBCWM	(<i>BBC World Monitoring</i>)
Dawa	(Islamic Dawa Party)
GC	(Guardian Council)
Hamas	(Islamic Resistance Movement)
Fada'iyan	(Fada'iyan-e Islam)
Fadai	(People's Fadai, Fada'i-ye Khalq)
FBIS	(<i>Foreign Broadcast Information Service</i>)
IAEA	(International Atomic Energy Agency)
ILNA	(<i>Iranian Labour News Agency</i>)
IPRP	(Islamic People's Republican Party)
IRGC	(Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps)
IRP	(Islamic Republic Party)
IRNA	(<i>Islamic Republic News Agency</i>)
ISNA	(<i>Iranian Students News Agency</i>)
Jondollah	(People's Resistance Movement of Iran)
Khatam	(IRGC engineering firm, <i>Qaragah-ye sazan-degi-ye khatam al-anbia</i>)
LEF	(Law Enforcement Forces)
MDAFL	(Ministry of Defense and Armed Force Logistics)
MIR	(Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization)

MKO	(Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization)
NPT	(Non-Proliferation Treaty)
NIE	(National Intelligence Estimate)
OLM	(Office of Liberation Movements)
OSC	(<i>Open Source Center</i>)
<i>Payam</i>	(<i>Payam-e Enqelab</i>)
PLO	(Palestinian Liberation Organization)
PVPV	(Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice)
SAVAK	(National Intelligence and Security Organization of the Pahlavi regime)
SCIRI	(Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq)
SICI	(Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq, formerly SCIRI)
WMD	(Weapons of mass destruction)

Note on Transliteration

For the transliteration of Persian and Arabic words I use a modified version of the transliteration system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. In an attempt to simplify spellings I omit all diacritical marks, including those used to indicate the letter ‘*ayn* and the *hamzeh*, in transliterating most proper nouns. I do, however, include ‘*ayn* (‘) and *hamzeh* (’) diacritics in those Persian and Arabic terms placed within parenthetical marks. To more closely render Persian words as they are pronounced in Persian, short vowels follow Persian rather than Arabic pronunciation (i.e. “e” and “o” are used in place of “i” and “u”). Words and proper nouns that are commonly found in English, such as jihad, Imam, Shiite, or Khomeini, will follow their already commonplace spellings. The one exception is the word *Hezbollah*, which is both the name of a Lebanese militant organization and a term used to describe various groups in Iran, such as the Ansar-e Hezbollah organization. To distinguish between these usages, transliteration for the Lebanese organization follows Arabic pronunciation (*Hizbullah*) and the Persian term follows Persian pronunciation (*Hezbollah*).

CHAPTER I

Introduction: Military Power and the Making of the Islamic Republic

This study examines the construction of a new political order in post-revolutionary Iran through the prism of its revolutionary armed forces. I specifically explore the place of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in this process, and focus on its role in establishing and maintaining state control. Like all governments, the Islamic Republic's first obligation has been to ensure its survival.¹ In doing so it has relied on various mechanisms of coercion and control. Military power has been central to this effort. The military in post-revolutionary Iran is composed of two main segments: regular forces and revolutionary forces. The former—which comprise an army, navy, and air force—are holdovers from the pre-revolutionary period and have mattered little to the political development of the Islamic Republic. The revolutionary forces, however, which include the IRGC, the Basij popular militia, and other associated forces, have had a significant impact on the shape and nature of the Iranian state. Unlike the regular armed forces, the IRGC was given the additional mandate of “safeguarding the revolution.” Exercising this broad responsibility has led to the gradual permeation of the organization's influence in all sectors of the Iranian state, including the areas of domestic security, ideological promotion, cultural work, industrial development, foreign engagements, and politics.

Despite the IRGC's prominence in contemporary Iran, only a small handful of studies have engaged the subject directly.² The bulk of these are studies on Iran's military

¹ Barnett Rubin, *Armed Forces in the Middle East Politics and Strategy*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 2.

² While only a few works focus on the IRGC exclusively, most studies on post-revolutionary Iran provide some discussion of the organization and its participation in Iranian society. However, it should be noted that a few studies on post-revolutionary Iran have included substantial discussion and valuable insights on

capacities written from a strategic studies perspective.³ Although most of these studies provide useful analyses of the structure and capacities of Iran's armed forces, they are generally limited by their narrow focus, their intended audience (mostly American policy makers and defense analysts), and their concentration on secondary English-language sources. As such they tend to embody several assumptions regarding the underlying cultural, religious, ideological, and social factors that have shaped Iranian society and its military organizations. Most problematic, at least in my estimation, is the use of terms like "fanatical," "fundamentalist," and "Islamic" to describe Iran's leaders and military commanders. This is not to say that those terms cannot or do not have a place in such a discussion, rather it is to suggest that those terms left unpacked and poorly defined do little else but obfuscate the complex and nuanced reality of power and authority in Iran. They further perpetuate the belief held by many policy makers and analysts that Iran's leaders and policies are driven in toto by an implacable irrationality that can neither be understood nor engaged toward any meaningful end.

There are a few exceptions worth mentioning. Sepehr Zabih's *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, for instance, offers a brief but valuable early history of the IRGC.⁴ Published in 1988, Zabih marshals a variety of Persian sources and includes sections on the IRGC and Basij as part of a larger study on Iran's armed forces. The only real limitation of Zabih's study is its temporal and thematic scope. Regarding the latter, Zabih's chief interest in the IRGC is its place in Iran's greater military sector and he only briefly considers the organization's ideological, religious, and political roles. In addition to Zabih's work are two studies by the Rand Corporation. The first, a study on Iran's military published in 1987, is similar to Zabih's work in both subject matter and in the period covered. While the authors' treatment of ideological and religious factors is

the IRGC. See particularly, Ali Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: the Politics of Managing Change*. London: Chatham House, 2006; Anoushirvan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007; Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002.

³ See in particular, Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran's Military in Transition: Conventional Threats and Weapons of Mass Destruction*. West Port: Praeger, 1999; Anthony H. Cordesman and Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iran: Dilemmas of Dual Containment*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997; Michael Eisenstadt, *Iranian Military Power: Capabilities and Intentions*. Washington D.C.: Washington Institute of Near East Policy, 1996; Steven M. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009; Frederic Wehrey et al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East*. RAND, 2009.

⁴ Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

likewise limited, they provide an informative analysis of the early structure of the IRGC.⁵ Unlike the aforementioned, the second Rand study is both recent and exclusively focused on the IRGC.⁶ This study, published in 2009, offers a broad overview of the IRGC's current domestic activities and the organization's impact on Iranian politics. Its greatest strength is a survey of the IRGC's economic and financial interests, which although brief, provides the best introduction to the subject yet published in English. To this extent, this study is a valuable primer for policy makers and analysts for whom it was produced. However, the authors also perpetuate assumptions of IRGC fanaticism and as such do little to depart from the standard narratives of the organization and of the Islamic Republic in general. Further, as the authors' focus is on the contemporary, they only offer a brief and incomplete analysis of IRGC history.

Beyond these works, the only serious academic study dedicated solely to the IRGC is Kenneth Katzman's *Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard*. Published in 1993, this book considers the IRGC an ideological military organization with a stringent political agenda.⁷ Katzman, a political scientist, uses Samuel Huntington's theory of institutionalization to examine the internal make-up and development of the Revolutionary Guards. He concludes that although the IRGC has taken on the airs and some of the institutional characteristics of a professional military organization, its dedication to radical ideology and involvement in politics has prevented it from becoming a professional armed force. While his treatment of the IRGC and its internal development is valuable, Katzman's work suffers from a few major limitations. First and most importantly, Katzman relies on only English language sources for his research. Some of these are legitimate and helpful translations and overviews of Persian articles, such as those provided by FBIS and the Iran Weekly Press Digest. However, because of this limitation, Katzman was unable to analyze or even consider the vast amount of materials published by the Guards and other Persian sources concerning or associated with the organization. Secondly, I would suggest and others have argued that the

⁵ Nikola B. Schahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military under the Islamic Republic*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1987.

⁶ Frederic Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Accessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*. RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009

⁷ Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1993. Also see, Katzman's "The Pasdaran: Institutionalization of Revolutionary Armed Force." *Iranian Studies* vol. 26, no. 3-4 (1993), pp. 389-402.

explanatory capacity of Katzman's study is considerably restricted due to his use of Huntington's institutionalization theory, which as a model developed to understand western-oriented political institutions, seems ill-fitted to explain the development of an unconventional, clerically-sponsored, and religiously-minded armed force in post-revolutionary Iran.⁸ Third, while Katzman bases much of his argument on the Guards religious "radicalism" he never unpacks this term nor examines their actual writings on the subject. Finally, while Katzman provides useful information on IRGC history, the structure of his study scatters this information piecemeal throughout the book, which makes for a laborious and frustrating read. While these factors limit the success of Katzman's investigation, they do not tarnish the strengths of his work. Indeed, his book provides astute observations on the IRGC's structure and development, and offers a valuable analysis of IRGC factionalism.

There are three major limitations in this body of literature: First, with the exception of Rand's 2009 study, the majority of work produced on the IRGC is outdated, and no study to date has offered a current or coherent history of the organization. Second, while some of these studies (Zabih and both Rand publications) consider Persian materials, they largely do not explore the numerous publications of the organization or the many memoirs written by founding IRGC members and early leaders of the Islamic Republic. Third, while the IRGC's ideological nature is consistently emphasized, the development of the organization's ideological commitments, their cultural and religious dimensions, and the relationship between these factors and the organization's place and work within Iranian society have not been adequately explored. The present study is intended to begin addressing these shortcomings. To this end, my analysis considers the various dynamics and pressures which have shaped the IRGC over the last three decades and which have influenced its impact on the post-revolutionary Iranian state. In the following pages I briefly discuss the larger questions and issues at work in this study and the framework that will structure my discussion. Next I will introduce the central and sub theses of this work and what these arguments can tell us about the subject. Finally, I provide a brief summary of the subsequent chapters and list some larger questions to which I will return in the study's conclusion.

⁸ See James A. Bill's commentary in *Iranian Studies* vol. 26, no. 3-4 (1993), p. 403.

Conflict, Military Power, and Politics

The relationship between conflict and national politics is an underlying subject of this study. Over the last few decades countless studies in history, sociology, and political science have examined the war-making/state-making nexus. Macro-comparative investigations by scholars like Charles Tilly and Michael Mann (both rooted in the ideas of Max Weber) have produced useful theoretical models that place war and militaries at the center of state formation.⁹ Taken together, the overall model of war-making and state formation includes four major claims. First, the process of waging war created the institutional apparatus of the modern state, which relied on both technologies of extraction and coercion to mobilize the resources and man-power to make fighting war possible. Second, to facilitate the mobilization of resources and military personnel state leaders offered incentives such as the rule of law and representative government to their civilian populations. Third, through disarming its population and achieving the capacity to wage and fight war the state developed a near monopoly of legitimate coercive violence. Fourth, the development of civilian institutions eventually curbed the autonomy of military power and brought it under civilian control. This led to a division of coercive forces into those specializing in external conflicts (the military) and those concerned with internal threats (the police).

This model is helpful for understanding the place of military power in the state formation of modern Europe; however its European bias limits the utility of its application elsewhere. That is, the European model of state formation through warfare is, as has been noted by some scholars, more exception than rule. For instance, in a study on the significance of war to the creation of states and national armed forces in Latin America, political scientist Miguel Centeno questions the viability of Tilly's model of

⁹ See Charles Tilly's *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990; "Armed Force, Regimes, and Contention in Europe since 1650," in *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 37-81; and "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*. Peter B. Evans et al. eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 169-191. Also see Michael Mann's *The Sources of Social Power, Volume I: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; and *The Sources of Social Power, Volume II: The Rise of Classes and Nation States, 1760-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

state formation and military development for non-European states.¹⁰ Here Centeno posits that unlike the inter-state warfare—particularly the “total wars” of the first and second world wars—that helped define the national boundaries of modern Europe, Latin American states have been involved in only “limited wars” against mostly internal or marginal threats. Unlike the “total wars” fought by European states, fighting “limited wars” did not require the mobilization of large standing armies, the technological capacity to supply forces across large and disparate expanses, the requirement of a single and coherent national ideology, nor the development of professionalized and conventional militaries. Centeno’s work further suggests that the fighting of “limited wars”—as opposed to total wars—limited a state’s ability to concentrate the means of violence within society while European states were more successful in this regard. Though Centeno does see some parallels between the European and Latin American experiences in the twentieth century, specifically the direct link between armed conflict and state formation, he concludes that the above differences are significant and show the limited utility of Tilly’s model (and by extension other European-centric theories) for the study of non-European states.

Centeno’s study brings to the fore another weakness in the literature on armed forces and politics: the focus on conventional militaries. Conventional militaries are generally conceived as centralized national institutions that are subordinate to the state. These militaries include hierarchical command structures, rigid institutional cultures, and an officer corps comprised of the social elite. Further, and perhaps most significantly, these armed forces are designed to concentrate on external threats, particularly those posed by neighboring states, and have only a limited sub-national role. The focus on conventional forces thus includes a number of assumptions regarding the place of military power in national politics. Studies on conventional militaries and their role in political development created an impressive body of literature during the Cold War. Foundational studies in this genre generally referred to as civil-military relations include

¹⁰ Miguel Centeno, “Limited War and Limited States,” in *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 82-95.

works by Samuel Huntington, Alfred Vagts, Alain Rouquie, and Karen Remmer.¹¹ Collectively these works explore the ways in which militaries have either promoted or prohibited transitions to democracy. Instead of being concerned with state formation per se, these studies present different takes on modernization theory, particularly on the idea that the subjugation of military power to civilian leadership is essential to establishing a democratic regime. The framework they present focuses on the relationship between regime type (e.g., democratic, totalitarian, or authoritarian) and military power. Democracies in this typology are defined as regimes wherein civilian control over the military has been achieved and where the military is subordinate to the interests of the state and as such has a limited political role. Authoritarian regimes are defined as those wherein the military plays a more significant role in political and governmental matters, shares some authority with the state, and can be used to partly suppress civil society. In totalitarian regimes, on the other hand, the military dominates the state and uses its power to crush internal dissent and curb political freedom in all areas of society.¹²

These definitions have helped shape how politics and military power have been conceived by scholars and policy makers since the Cold War. However, a consequence of this static typology has been the perpetuation of certain assumptions regarding the relationship between regime type, military power, and politics, particularly in the post-Cold War era. In their important edited volume *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation* (2003) scholars Diane Davis and Anthony Pereira directly tackle many of these assumptions as well as some of those inherent in the state formation models of Tilly and Mann and argue that the existing literature has neglected the roles of unconventional, “alternative,” or irregular armed forces in national politics. To both highlight and begin to address this “intellectual blind-spot” the editors offer several persuasive articles by historians, sociologists, and political scientists that examine the place of irregular armed forces—such as militias, gangs, paramilitaries, youth groups,

¹¹ See, Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959; Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism*. New York: Free Press, 1973; Alain Rouquie, *The Military and the State in Latin America*. Trans. Paul E. Sigmund, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987; and, Karen Remmer, *Military Rule in Latin America*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

¹² Diane E. Davis, “Contemporary Challenges and Historical Reflections on the Study of Militaries, States, and Politics,” in *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in State Formation*. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 8-10.

mercenaries, war veterans, and various types of police and security forces—in the political development of states from Europe and the United States to Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Collectively, these studies aim to counter several misconceptions regarding military power. Their central thesis is that armed forces “do much more than make war.”¹³ As Davis argues:

[S]cholars rarely examine the wide variety of diverse social and political and even economic institutions in which military personnel or other “armed forces” play a part. These include intelligence agencies, militia, paramilitary forces, police, and even veterans associations; and they entail an understanding of the ways that these forces contribute to the development of [state] policies . . .¹⁴

Exploring the political impact of irregular forces in this way is the theme connecting the several studies collected by Davis and Pereira. Taken together, the editors make ten observations that contrast with previous assumptions regarding militaries and political development. Of these, four claims have particular relevance for the present study: First, the editors argue that irregular forces can play a significant role in a state’s efforts to monopolize coercive force and that their place in these efforts has been “underappreciated” by scholars. Second, they suggest that the “neat division” between external (military) and internal (police) forces characteristic of the political development of northwestern Europe does not occur in states where irregular military forces have a hand in domestic security. Third, the professionalization of military forces does not lead to increased civilian authority or control over armed forces; but rather, as the editors suggest, professional militaries can and often do intervene in politics in a variety of ways, the most extreme example being leading coups d’état. Finally, while mobilizing soldiers has been a major challenge for states, so too has retaining the political loyalty of veterans in the process of demobilization. The way that a state chooses to handle the question of war veterans can have a significant impact on postwar political development.¹⁵

Davis and Pereira present a new approach to the study of politics and military power, one that focuses on alternative types of armed force, coercion, and conflict. In this way their work is an important intervention and a departure from the available models of

¹³ Ibid., 394.

¹⁴ Davis and Pereira, *Irregular Armed Forces*, 14-15.

¹⁵ Ibid., 388-90.

political development. Though they do not attempt to boil down their findings into a rigid theory, their work nonetheless offers a new starting point for future studies on military power in society. In this way, Davis and Pereira's volume is a call for a new generation of research that breaks from past assumptions and explores the connections between armed forces, coercion, and politics in novel and different ways. For these reasons I use Davis and Pereira's framework as way to structure the present study on Iran's revolutionary armed forces. I find their work valuable for understanding the larger questions surrounding the political dimensions of military power and feel that the Iranian example lends support to some of their key findings (specifically the aforementioned). However, the present study also addresses what I consider to be weak spots in Davis and Pereira's volume. First, although Davis and Pereira emphasize the utility of their work to understanding contemporary and even future forms of warfare, coercion, military power, and political development, most of their case studies focus on long-term state formation from the seventeenth through mid-twentieth centuries and only three of the thirteen studies provided touch upon or focus on the post-Cold War period. Second, while Davis and Pereira cast a wide net by considering the role of irregular forces around the globe, they neglect the Middle East entirely and only present one piece (a comparative study on Western African states) that briefly considers armed forces in Muslim societies.¹⁶ Third, while the editors rightly address the assumptions of past literature, they follow those earlier works in ignoring the significance of culture, religion, and to a lesser extent, ideology. That is, like their predecessors, Davis and Pereira retain a bias for the secular state and do not take possible exceptions into account.¹⁷ They also do not examine the impact of culture on conflict and politics nor do they investigate connections between religion or ideology and military power.¹⁸

¹⁶ William Reno, "The Changing Nature of Warfare and the Absence of State-Building in West Africa," in *Irregular Armed Forces*, 322-345.

¹⁷ Davis and Pereira are not unique for their disregard of cultural and religious forces in state and political development. Both Tilly and Mann, for instance, were criticized for deemphasizing the roles of religion and culture in their theoretical models. See for example the critique of Mann's theory in John A. Hall and Ralph Schroeder, eds., *An Anatomy of Power: The Social Theory of Michael Mann*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. For a critique of Tilly, see Jack Goldstone's review of *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, "States Making Wars Making States Making Wars . . .," *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 2 (March 1991), pp. 176-78.

¹⁸ They do however argue against the Cold War typologies that linked state-ideologies such as capitalism and communism with regime types such as democracies and authoritarianism.

These omissions hinder an otherwise important reorientation of the field. Yet they also present an opportunity for scholars of the Middle East and Islam to contribute to this discussion. Indeed, it is in the Middle East and Muslim societies more broadly where irregular armed forces have had perhaps the most significant impact in the post-Cold War era. Vivid examples such as Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Occupied Territories, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards have all been considered terrorist organizations, fanatical militias, or fundamentalist movements, but they have generally not been understood as state-building armed forces. This is less surprising for the non-Iranian examples which—with the exception of the Taliban in Afghanistan from 1996–2001—are seen as sub-state or non-state actors; however with the increasing political participation of these groups, particularly Hizbullah and Hamas in the last few years, it seems that such a reconceptualization is warranted. This is not to minimize the violence generated by these groups or their destructive impact on society; rather it is in recognition of what this violence may achieve for these forces politically. Thus, in order to better understand the political capacities and trajectories of such groups we must first broaden how we conceive of them. What I am suggesting then, and what I will be exploring in this study on post-revolutionary Iran, is that irregular armed forces continue to be important to the political development of states in the contemporary period. I believe that by viewing militant organizations and movements through frameworks of conflict, military power, and politics, we can attain a more coherent and historical perspective about how militancy operates within society and why its prevalence continues in the Middle East today. My focus, however, is on post-revolutionary Iran; and though this study does not explore comparisons between Iranian armed forces and the groups mentioned above, I nonetheless hope that the present work will show the value of this method for the study of militant organizations in other Muslim societies.

Military Power in Post-Revolutionary Iran

I make two major claims in this study: First, military power has been central to the shaping of post-revolutionary Iran. Second, the proliferation of military power is directly related to various politicized conflicts that have and continue to occur in post-revolutionary Iran. In addressing these claims I depart from the traditional war-

making/state-making nexus and instead examine how conflict broadly-defined has impacted the contemporary Iranian state. I use this term to denote actual violent campaigns of warfare, varying forms of civil unrest, and perceptions of foreign aggression. More specifically, the forms of conflict that I will consider include the internal armed conflicts that erupted following the revolution; the eight-year war with Iraq; Iran's military involvement in foreign affairs; the sporadic but ongoing experience of anti-state terrorism by dissident groups and by groups operating within Iran's ethno-religious minority communities; the threat of Western-backed aggression perceived to varying degrees over the last thirty-years by Iran's leaders; the intense and at times violent political factionalism within Iran's leadership; and the cultural and ideological conflicts that exist at all levels of Iranian society and permeate its politics.

Simply put, I suggest that Iran in the post-revolution has been in a constant state of conflict and that the way Iran's leaders have chosen to engage these conflicts has led to the expansion of military power in the Iranian state. Standard definitions of military power generally only consider the lethal coercive capacities of conventional militaries. For instance, Michael Mann defines military power as the social organization of concentrated coercion and lethal violence.¹⁹ Such a definition, however, does not take into account the more complex relationship between irregular armed forces, national politics, and domestic society, especially as seen in post-revolutionary Iran. Nor does it consider the various non-lethal and extra-military roles that armed forces may play in society. For these reasons, I break from narrow definitions of military power and broaden the term to encompass all areas in which Iran's revolutionary armed forces are influential and to include all mechanisms through which that influence is exercised. The organization of coercion is still at the heart of this definition; however, forms of coercion outside the physical or lethal, such as spiritual, psychological, and political coercion, will also be considered.

I explore these issues within a thematic history of post-revolutionary Iran. That is, as this study moves forward chronologically chapter by chapter, it also moves laterally in examining different sub-topics and themes. Each chapter is in this way its own essay, but

¹⁹ Mann initially defined military power as the "social organization of physical force in the form of concentrated coercion," but in his response to criticism (particularly that of Gianfranco Poggi) he refined his definition to "the social organization of lethal violence." See, *Anatomy*, 351.

together they form a coherent history of the post-revolution. To begin, Chapter II, “From Ali to Khomeini,” gives a brief overview of Shiite Islam and the Islamic movement in Iran. My primary objective in this chapter is to introduce the Shiite religious tradition and to identify some of the central events in its early history. My intention is to explain these events as they are generally understood by lay Shiites and not to offer a critical analysis of Shiite history. These events, such as the succession of the Prophet or the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn, play a large role in contemporary Shiite culture and animate the Shiite-centric political ideologies of the Islamic movement and post-revolutionary period. A second theme of this chapter is the rise of clerical authority in Iran and the politicization of the clergy in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Clerical activism is a key feature of the Islamic movement in Iran and has been a dominant theme in the post-revolution. I also discuss the roles that political ideologies and militancy played in shaping the Islamic movement in Iran. These ideologies and the militant activism they inspired fueled Muslim participation in the revolutionary movement and played a role in the development of military power in the post-revolution.

Chapter III, “Guardians of an Islamic Revolution,” is the first part of this study that focuses on the Revolutionary Guards. The early history of the IRGC has been poorly constructed in previous works, so this chapter aims to fill in those gaps while providing a detailed narrative of the organization’s formation and first several months of operation. Compared to the chapters that follow, this chapter covers a short period of time, from the collapse of the Pahlavi regime in February 1979 to the ratification of the Islamic Republic’s constitution in December of that year. This crucial period witnessed the first major test for the revolution as various factions and organizations struggled for control of the post-Pahlavi state. As an armed force organized by clerics loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini, the Revolutionary Guards served as the leading coercive apparatus of the pro-Khomeini faction and helped this faction consolidate power in the early post-revolution. As I explore this process, I am equally concerned with providing an adequate pre-history of the organization and do so by examining the individuals, groups, and ideological disputes that led to its establishment. For most of this discussion I rely on the Iranian and foreign press reports that came out during the early months of the post-revolution;

however I also make use of the memoirs of founding IRGC members, clerical leaders, and other prominent activists of this period.

Chapters IV and V cover roughly the same period, namely the Iran-Iraq war and its immediate aftermath (1980-1989); however neither concentrates on the war itself. I avoid focusing on the Iraq war for two reasons: First, there have already been several monographs and numerous studies on the war that include detailed accounts of the IRGC's activities during this period; Second, by not rehashing the aspects of this conflict that have already been thoroughly covered by others, I am free to explore other questions that are more deserving of attention. Thus, in Chapter IV, "Exporting the Revolution," I address the oft-cited question of Iran's efforts to export its revolution to other states in the Middle East and the IRGC's role in these efforts. I am particularly interested in complicating the widespread assumption that the IRGC was the primary *proponent* of foreign military intervention during this period. To this end I explore the different ideological and political factors that made the notion of exporting the revolution *militarily* a contested issue within Iran's leadership. Proponents of exporting the revolution conceived the responsibility of Iran's new government through a radical-internationalist perspective and considered it the state's primary responsibility to assist in the global unraveling of Western imperialism by all means at their disposal. Opponents of this interventionist approach to foreign affairs felt that it was contrary to Iran's national interests to become intertwined in outside conflicts. Further, they contended Iran could not afford a dilution of its efforts in fighting the war with Iraq. These two positions highlighted a deep and fundamental divide between conservative and leftist factions in the Khomeinist movement and within the IRGC. The result of these disputes was a decline in leftist influence and the strengthening of conservative control over the state.

The fifth chapter, "Image and Identity," explores the development of IRGC identity through its own visuality. Here I focus on the images produced by the organization in its publications, primarily its official news organ *Payam-e Enqelab* ("Message of the Revolution"). I begin this chapter by discussing the organization's approach to ideological promotion and cultural activism. This work was a broad effort at producing and disseminating materials that communicated the IRGC's political, ideological, and religious positions to its members and to general society. Embedded

within these materials is a fascinating collection of visual imagery that has yet to be seriously explored. These images, from clip-art type iconography to photographs and political posters, offer unique expressions of the IRGC as an organization and of its membership. In exploring a selection of this imagery, I suggest that as the IRGC changed politically during the war so too did its self-conception. Further, I discuss how the IRGC conceived the war with Iraq and how it expressed its role in that conflict to its membership. Finally, I suggest what the development of the IRGC's self-conception over this period reveals about the organization. In this way, this chapter is equally about identity, ideology, and politics.

While Chapter V's discussion ends at the conclusion of the Iraq war, the ramifications of IRGC identity formation are central to the cultural positions and political activism of war veterans in the postwar period. I take up this theme in Chapter VI, "Politics of Demobilization," which explores the expansion of the IRGC, its subordinate forces, and war veterans groups into various extra-military state sectors. This chapter begins at a turning-point in post-revolutionary Iran, where the clerical leadership was forced to face two major challenges: constructing legitimate state authority after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and dealing with the process of demobilization in the postwar. These challenges were exacerbated by the deep divisions within the Khomeinist movement, and the way Iran's leaders addressed these issues intensified factional conflict. A key transformation during this period was the decision by Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to avoid total demobilization by instead expanding the purviews of the IRGC and its popular militia force, the Basij, to include domestic security and state-funded industrial construction. Although Rafsanjani hoped that such moves would help curry favor among these institutions for his political project, they largely had the opposite effect. Consequently, the expansion of these organizations gave the revolutionary armed forces a greater stake in state policies and more power with which to influence those policies. The permeation of military power into extra-military sectors paralleled the war veterans' movement and helped assist that movement's impact on domestic politics.

Chapter VII, "Gifts for the Enemy," examines the impact of post-9/11 American foreign policy on domestic Iranian politics. Here I argue that Iran was not only the main

beneficiary of the Bush administration's wars in the Middle East, but that the Bush administration's broader approach to containing the Iranian threat legitimized the further expansion of military power in domestic politics and facilitated IRGC influence in regional conflicts. In this way, the theme of Chapter VII is a continuation of that explored in Chapter VI; however, instead of examining the *internal* forces that encouraged an expansion of military power I highlight the *external* factors that have done so. Another difference between these two chapters is that Chapter VI explores the development of military power whereas Chapter VII explores the blossoming of military influence and its impact on the Iranian state. Concerning the latter, military influence and its proponents in the conservative clerical establishment helped propel hardline political factions to the fore of Iranian politics. This resulted in the contested presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, and the appointments of numerous former IRGC members and war veterans to prominent positions in the latter's cabinet and in state institutions. Although the empowerment of hardline factions was largely a domestic process, it was legitimated on the basis that only this faction and their uncompromising politics could adequately defend the Islamic Republic from Western aggression. Ahmadinejad proved to be an active proponent of military power and furthered the permeation of its influence domestically and in the realm of foreign affairs.

Collectively, these chapters provide a history of the IRGC and the development of military power in post-revolutionary Iran. While each chapter concentrates on separate questions and explores various sub-topics, they all relate either overtly or implicitly to the growth of military power and its impact on domestic politics in Iran. In Chapter VIII, the study's conclusion, I return to Davis and Pereira's framework and examine how the case of the IRGC and military power in post-revolutionary Iran corresponds or departs from some of their central claims regarding irregular armed forces and political development. Specifically, I address these five questions drawn from Davis and Pereira's work: 1) *Why is there a blurring of military and police forces in post-revolutionary Iran?* 2) *In what ways have war veterans most impacted postwar political development?* 3) *Has the increased professionalization of the revolutionary armed forces led to increased civilian control over these military organizations?* 4) *Have the revolutionary armed forces helped the Iranian state develop a monopoly of coercive violence?* 5) *What factors led to the*

proliferation of military power in post-revolutionary Iran and what does the current place of military power tell us about the nature of politics in the Iranian state? In addressing and answering these questions, my two central claims regarding military power and conflict in Iran will be sufficiently established. Further, by moving beyond the traditional models of state-making and military development this book demonstrates how Iran's particular experiences with conflict and military power have contributed to its particular political reality.

CHAPTER II

From Ali to Khomeini: A Brief History of Shiism and the Islamic Movement in Iran (632–1978 C.E.)

Today there is no longer any room for doubt that a teaching, an ideology, is among society's most pressing needs ... Ideology calls for faith. An appropriate ideology should, on the one hand, rest on the kind of world view that can convince the reason and nourish the mind, and on the other hand, logically deduce attractive goals from its worldview ... Islam, being founded in such a worldview is a comprehensive and realistic teaching. It considers every aspect of human needs, whether this worldly or otherworldly, physical or spiritual, intellectual or emotional and affectual, individual or social.¹

—Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari

We have two paths ahead of us: the first is martyrdom and departing for heaven, the second is victory over the enemies of Islam and establishing a government of Islamic justice. Therefore, we are not afraid of anything. We are not afraid of the army of America, nor are we afraid of the Soviet military. We are not afraid of any power. Because we have faith in the next life, faith in Day of Judgment, faith in meeting with God (*liqa allah*), and because we have faith that after death we will associate with the saints, the prophets, and the devoted, we are not afraid of death and we will make our country the graveyard of foreign soldiers.²

—Abu Sharif, IRGC Operations Commander

Religious ideologies played a significant role in Iran's Islamic revolution. These ideologies—rooted in the writings of prominent clergy like Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Shiite intellectuals like Ali Shariati—merged traditional Shiite beliefs with secular political thought. What emerged were highly politicized readings of Shiite history, which framed contemporary concerns through the lenses of divine justice and religious faith. In

¹ Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhari, *Fundamentals of Islamic thought: God, Man and the Universe*. Trans. R. Campbell. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1985, p. 56.

² Speech by Abu Sharif (Abbas Aqa-Zamani) to members of the Revolutionary Guards, *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 5, March 1980, pp. 36-38.

the post-revolution, the Islamic Republic has used ideology to legitimize its system of theocratic government by connecting it to the powerful traditions and spirituality of popular Shiism. Even as politics in the post-revolution have revealed significant differences in the interpretation of Islamic ideology by Iran's leaders, elements of Shiite ideology continue to impact all levels of Iranian society. Thus in order to understand the religious dimensions of post-revolutionary politics and their impact on military power, basic understandings of both the Shiite tradition and the development of modern Islamic ideologies in Iran must first be provided.

To this end, the current chapter discusses Shiite Islam and its development in Iran, from the beginnings of Islam through the Islamic movement of the twentieth century. It begins with a brief overview of the formation of Shiism, drawing attention to the key events that have come to define the religion and its traditions. It then discusses the development of Shiism in the premodern period and the rise of its clerical class. Next it explores the impact of Western imperialism on Iranian society and its affect on Shiite politics during the first half of the twentieth century. Finally, it considers the influence of Third-worldist politics on the development of Shiite political ideologies and activism. These ideologies gave rise to the Shiite revolutionary movement in Iran, which culminated in the 1979 revolution. After the revolution, the ideological thought of Ayatollah Khomeini came to dominate political life in Iran and pervade all levels of society. Though the primary aim of these sections is to briefly introduce the major elements of Khomeinist ideology, the place of militancy in pre-revolutionary activism and its roots in the Shiite tradition will also be stressed. I do not intend to draw a linear line connecting the violence of early Shiite events with the political violence of the pre and post-revolution; rather, I will focus on how early events in Shiite history have been used to frame and legitimate militant activism in modern Iran. In this way, grasping the religious and spiritual underpinnings of violent activism in the pre-revolutionary period is essential to understanding militancy and military power in the post-revolution.

PART ONE: SHIISM THROUGH THE 19th CENTURY

The Formation of Shiite Islam

After the death of Muhammad in 632 C.E. notables in the Muslim community disagreed on who would succeed the Prophet. This issue split the Muslim community into two main factions: those who supported Abu Bakr and his successors Umar and Uthman, and those who supported Ali ibn Abi Talib—the Prophet’s cousin, son-in-law, and most trusted confidant—and later his descendents. Those who supported Ali came to be known as the *shi`at`Ali* or the “partisans of Ali.” Although this was a political distinction, it was from Ali’s supporters (the Shia) that the Shiite religion gradually emerged as a separate and distinct variant of Islam. As the dispute over the succession of Muhammad is at the root of Shiite Islam, it is important to understand how Shiites understand this dispute and how it has influenced Shiite religion and culture.³

Numerous traditions (*hadith*) recognized by both Sunnis and Shiites attest to Muhammad’s favoring of Ali and the latter’s unparalleled valor and morality.⁴ For Sunnis, these traditions simply reinforce the notion that Ali was a central figure in early Islam and should be revered as such. Shiites, however, point to these traditions as evidence that the Prophet had intended for Ali, and later Ali’s sons, to succeed him in leading the Muslim community. Perhaps the most important tradition supporting the Shiites’ claim is an account from the last year of the Prophet’s life. This account, recorded in a Sunni collection of traditions, states:

We [the Prophet’s companions] were with the Apostle of God [Muhammad] in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We preformed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took `Ali by the hand and said to the people: “Do you acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?” And they replied: “Yes!” And he took `Ali’s hand and said:

³ For useful scholarly overviews of Shiism see, Moojan Momen’s *An Introduction to Shi`i Islam*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985; and Heinz Halm, *Shi`ism*. Trans. Janet Watson and Marian Hill. 2nd edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Also, for a sociological history of Shiism in Iran see, Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi`ite Iran from The Beginning to 1890*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

⁴ For an overview of these traditions, see Moojan Momen, *Shi`i Islam*, 12-17.

“Of whomsoever I am Lord [*mawla*], then ‘Ali is also Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports ‘Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.” And ‘Umar met him [‘Ali] after this and said to him: “Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e. forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.”⁵

To Shiites the implication of this tradition is clear. It shows that Muhammad appointed Ali his successor and indicates Umar (the future second Caliph) understood and acknowledged this fact. This is important to note because to Shiites it suggests that Umar’s later nomination of Abu Bakr as Caliph and the first successor to the Prophet not only betrayed the Prophet’s wishes but also went against Umar’s understanding of those wishes.

Another significant episode involving the Prophet and Umar, known as the Episode of Pen and Paper, casts further doubt in the eyes of Shiites on Umar’s faithfulness and on his role in usurping Ali’s rightful successorship. This tradition, which is recognized but also understood differently by Sunnis and Shiites, recounts a conversation between the Prophet and his followers as he lay bed-ridden during the last days of his life. The tradition states:

When the Prophet’s illness became serious, he said: “Bring me writing materials that I may write for you something, after which you will not be led into error.” ‘Umar said: “The illness has overwhelmed the Prophet. We have the Book of God [the Qur’an] and that is enough for us.” Then the people differed about this and spoke many words. And he [the Prophet] said: ‘Leave me! There ought not to be quarrelling in my presence.” And Ibn ‘Abbas [the Prophet’s cousin] went out saying: “The greatest of calamities is what intervened between the Apostle and his writing.”⁶

Shiites understand this episode as Muhammad’s attempt to write a will and testament that would have confirmed ‘Ali’s role as successor. Umar’s interference in this matter is yet another reason why Shiites came to consider him a chief conspirator against Ali.

Without a will Muslims were forced to choose a leader themselves. Soon after the Prophet’s death, Umar met with a group of Muslim notables in Medina to discuss matters of succession. It was during this meeting that Umar nominated and pledged his allegiance to Abu Bakr who was in turn elected by those present as the Prophet’s successor and the

⁵ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. 4, p. 281. Translation provided in Momen, p. 15.

⁶ al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Kitab al-‘Ilm, Bab 40, Vol. 1, p. 41. Translation provided in Momen, p. 15-16.

Caliph (*khalifa*) of the Muslims. This election, however, had taken place in the absence of Ali, who—along with his wife Fatima (the Prophet’s daughter) and much of Muhammad’s family—was preparing the Prophet’s body for burial. Although angered at the nomination of Abu Bakr, Shiites believe that Ali held back formal protest for the sake of Muslim unity.⁷

Although Ali continued to have his own avid supporters, there were two more successors (Umar and Uthman) to the role of Caliph before he held that office. Ali’s ascension to the Caliphate came on the heels of the controversial reign and murder of the third Caliph, Uthman, in 656 C.E. Uthman’s rule had brought the formidable Banu Umayyad clan to power. Under Uthman, the Umayyads, a native Meccan clan, had become entrenched in leadership roles throughout Muslim territory, including important governorships. This gave the Umayyad clan a privileged and powerful position in the Muslim community, but also caused resentment among many Muslim tribes, which eventually led to Uthman’s murder. After Uthman’s death, Ali’s supporters urged him to accept the Caliphate. Although reluctant, Ali ultimately accepted the role and became the fourth (and last) “rightly guided” Caliph. For Shiites, this was the first and only time in the history of Islam that the Muslim community was led by a faithful and true successor of the Prophet.⁸

The tumultuous political climate that led to Uthman’s murder continued after Ali came to power. The Umayyad clan and their supporters disputed Ali’s election to the Caliphate and blamed his followers for Uthman’s murder. Many of the Umayyad relocated to Damascus to support their own candidate for Caliph, Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan, the military governor of Syria. After Muawiya refused to swear allegiance to Ali, a conflict erupted between the armies of the two Muslim leaders. A court of arbitration was called to settle the conflict diplomatically, though little progress was made. Instead, some of Ali’s supporters, who thought his agreeing to arbitration compromised his claim to the Caliphate, turned against him. This group, known as the Kharajites (*khawarij*), argued that Ali’s choice of arbitration was against God’s will, and thus for having gone

⁷ For a traditional Shiite understanding of this and other foundational events in Shiite history see, S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi’a Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁸ For an interpretive history on succession and early Shiism see, Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

against God, Ali was no longer a faithful Muslim. This act of declaring Ali a non-Muslim (*takfir*) was the philosophical basis for the Kharajites' rebellion against Ali and their murder of him in 661.

The murder of Ali ended the only period in Muslim history where a Shiite Imam led the Islamic community. After Ali's death, the Umayyad's extended their control over Muslim lands and Muawiya was declared Caliph. Support for Ali and his descendents continued, though most of his supporters were isolated to the frontiers of Muslim territory, including a strong presence in the garrison town of Kufa (modern-day southern Iraq). Many of these supporters turned to Ali's sons Hasan and Husayn to continue their father's rightful struggle for leadership of the Muslim community. However, shortly after his father's murder, Hasan—the elder of the two and the second Imam in the Shiite tradition—renounced his claim to the Caliphate in order to avoid more bloodshed and disharmony among Muslims. Shiites believe that eight years after his abdication Hasan was poisoned to death by his wife on Muawiya's behalf.

It was not until the death of Muawiya and the ascension of his son Yazid to the Caliphate in 680, that Husayn—Ali's second son and the third Shiite Imam—would press his claim to the leadership of the Muslim community. Yazid's reputation as a morally lax drunkard made his successorship infuriating to many Muslims. Urged by his supporters in Kufa, Husayn decided to make a bid for his rightful claim to the Caliphate. He led a small group of companions and family members toward the Umayyad ruled town of Kufa where he planned to join up with a few thousand of his supporters and lead a campaign against Yazid in Damascus. When the Umayyad governor of Iraq Ubaydallah Ibn Ziyad discovered news of this plot he executed some of Husayn's leading supporters in Kufa and dispatched an army to block the Imam's access to that city. Despite being informed of this turn of events, Husayn continued toward Kufa only to be forced north of the city by Umayyad troops. Ibn Ziyad's army surrounded Husayn and his companions, making them decamp in the barren desert plains of Karbala. For the next several days the Umayyad's tried to coerce Husayn into renouncing his claim of leadership by cutting off the supply of fresh water to his camp. Finally, on the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram 680 C.E., after failed negotiations and Husayn's refusal to pay tribute to

Yazid, nearly 4000 Umayyad troops stormed Husayn's camp and slaughtered his companions.

The Shiite recollections of this event—known as Ashura (literally the “tenth”)—are tragic and brutal. Husayn and about seventy of his supporters were killed. His eldest son, Ali al-Akbar, died a valiant death fighting the Umayyad forces. Husayn's half-brother, Abbas, was killed after both his arms were cut off as he attempted to deliver drinking water to the women and children of the camp. Husayn's nephew, Qasim, was killed on what was to be his wedding day in front of his bride. There is also the story of Husayn's infant son Ali al-Asghar, who was killed in his father's arms when an Umayyad archer shot the small child in the throat.⁹ In one popular Shiite oral tradition, Husayn is imagined to have lamented the deaths of his family and the tragedy that was to befall him:

The infidels [i.e. the Umayyads] are one side, and my sorrowful self on the other. The rose has fallen in one direction, and the thorns in the other. O friends, in one quarter Akbar fell by treachery, a martyr ... Kasim [Qasim] the disappointed, has been killed on one spot, and on the other I myself experience the cruel oppression of the spheres. In one corner the mother of 'Ali Akbar is smiting her head, while the sorrowful bride of Kasim is moaning in another ... I am sore distressed at the unkind treatment received at the hands of the cruel heavens. Pitiful tyranny is exercised towards me by a cruel, unbelieving army! All the sorrows and troubles of this world have overwhelmed me! I am become a butt for the arrow of affliction and trouble. I am a holy bird stripped of its quills and feathers by the hand of the archer of tyranny, and am become, O friends, utterly disabled, and unable to fly to my sacred nest. They are going to kill me mercilessly, for no other crime or guilt except that I happen to be a prophet's grandson.¹⁰

Ultimately Husayn was also killed and decapitated by Umayyad assailants. A few women and children—among them Husayn's son Ali Zayn al-Abidin (the fourth Shiite Imam) and his sister Zaynab—were spared, and along with Husayn's severed head, taken to Yazid in Damascus. After the slaughter the camp was put to fire.

⁹ This story did not begin to appear in descriptions of the battle of Karbala until several centuries after the fact. See for instance, Heniz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution*. Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1999, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰ *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*, Collected from oral tradition by Col. Sir Lewis Pelly, Vol. 1, London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1879, pp. 66 and 88.

The tragedy of Karbala is perhaps the single most important event in the early formation of the Shiite religion.¹¹ Before the martyrdom of Husayn, the supporters of Ali and his sons practiced the same form of Islam as their non-Shia rivals. Indeed, historian Heinz Helm suggests that the tragedy of Karbala “marked the ‘big bang’ that created the cosmos of Shiism and brought it into motion.”¹² It was through the mournful commemoration of Ashura that the Shia began to develop a separate religious identity.¹³ The Kufan Shia began the tradition of commemorating Ashura soon after the events at Karbala. Members of this community were burdened with an intense shame due to their failure to aid Husayn and his companions against Umayyad aggression. Instead, out of fear of the Umayyad authorities, the Kufan Shia—who had encouraged Husayn to come to Kufa with the promise of joining his struggle—did not rebel and were left with a guilt, that for many, was worse than death.¹⁴ In remorse, these Shia began commemorating Ashura in informal gatherings during which they would pray for Husayn and his companions and beseech God for forgiveness. A subset of this community, led by Sulayman Ibn Surad, looked for a more emphatic solution to their suffering. This group, known as the Penitents (*tawwabun*), wanted to die as Husayn had died in an attempt to absolve their sins for failing to come to the Imam’s assistance. Eventually they decided to lead a campaign against Umayyad forces that they intended lose. In early 685 they engaged a much larger Umayyad military contingent and most—as they had hoped—were killed.

Halm has argued that the movement of the Kufan Penitents marked the true beginning of the Shiite religion, as it “expressed all the essential elements and concepts of Shi`i piety. The willingness for self-sacrifice is the most outstanding feature, and it has remained unchanged to the present day . . .”¹⁵ Such thinking often links the campaign of the Penitents and their religious quest for martyrdom to the modern self-sacrifice (or “suicide”) operations undertaken by Shiite militants in such places as Iran and Lebanon,

¹¹ Also see, Hodgson, Marshall G. S. "How Did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol. 75, no. 1 (1955): 1-13.

¹² Halm, *Shi`a Islam*, 8-16.

¹³ On the Ashura commemoration see, Yitzhak Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of 'Ashura'." *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 161-181.

¹⁴ S.H.M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 222-233.

¹⁵ Halm, *Shi`a Islam*, 20.

but I would not suggest such a direct correlation. Instead, it is preferable to understand the sacrifice of the Penitents as part of the growing symbolism of Shiite piety and religious culture. As Halm suggests, the Penitents are part of the larger development of Shiite identity begun by the mourning faithful of Kufa. The ritualized practices of this group gradually increased in popularity and spread throughout the greater Shiite community. In this way, what originated as localized redemptive acts among the Shia of Kufa wherein the stories of the martyrs of Karbala, especially that of Husayn, were recounted, slowly emerged as the central tradition of Shiite Islam.

Later Developments in Shiism and the Rise of the Clergy

Following the events of Karbala and the campaign of the Penitents, the majority of Shiites turned inwards and practiced a quietist form of their religion for several centuries.¹⁶ Husayn's defeat ended the period of Imam-led military revolts and ushered in a period wherein the Imams lived in virtual house arrest under Sunni rulers. This contributed to the depoliticization of the role of the Imams in the Shiite community and to their marginalization in the political sphere of the Muslim world.¹⁷

Although understanding the lives of the eight Imams subsequent to Husayn is important, providing adequate discussion of their careers is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, a few brief points should be made. Each of these eight Imams lived under some sort of house arrest and none were able to exercise complete political control over the Shia community. They lived as political prisoners to the Sunni regimes that ruled the Islamic world during this period. Although these Imams remained the center of the Shiite community, they had limited political influence. In order to keep the Shia marginalized and oppressed, Shiites believe that all of the Imams (except for the Twelfth and final Imam) were killed by Sunni political forces, with most (like Hasan, the second Imam) murdered by way of poisoning.

¹⁶ This is not to say that other political revolts did not occur. See, S.A. Arjomand's *The Shadow of the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

¹⁷ Denis McEoin, "Aspects of Militancy and Quietism in Imami Shi'ism." *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* Vol.11, no. 1 (1984), pp. 18-20.

The case of the Twelfth Imam is more complicated. Shiites believe that the final (Twelfth) Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, never died, but rather passed into a spiritual occultation. Shiites contend this Imam will one day return and lead the Shia in an apocalyptic battle against the forces of evil, purify Islam, and restore justice to the world. A tenth century Shiite text serves as an example of how Shiites imagine the return of the “Hidden” Imam:

[A] cry (will come) from the sky (in such a way) that all the people will hear it in their own languages; a face and a chest will appear in the sky before the people in the centre of the sun; the dead will arise from their graves so that they will return to the world and they will recognize one another and visit one another; that will come to an end with twenty-four continuous rain storms and the land will be revived by them after being dead and it will recognize its blessings; after that every disease will be taken away from those of the Shi`a of the Mahdi, peace be upon him, who believe in the truth; at that time they will know of his appearance in Mecca and they will go to him to support him ... In his [the Mahdi's] time, injustice will be removed and the roads will be safe. The earth will produce its benefits and every due will be restored to its proper person. No people of any other religions will remain without being shown Islam and confessing faith in it ... At that time, men will not find any place to give alms nor be generous because wealth will encompass all the believers.¹⁸

The disappearance or occultation (*ghayba*) of the Imam Mahdi (“the rightly guided one”), and the messianic expectations surrounding his return (*raj`a*) are significant elements of the Shiite religion. The absence of the Twelfth Imam ended the line of Shiite Imams that began with Ali and led to a political and spiritual crisis within Shiism. The Shia believed that only an Imam could rightfully lead the Muslim community. Also, the Imam was the only one who had the authority to lead Friday prayers and declare an offensive jihad (i.e. a military campaign to spread the Islamic faith and expand its geographical domains). Without a living, infallible Imam interacting with Muslim society Shiites were forced to question the very legitimacy of temporal Muslim rule. This quandary led to the rise of the Shiite ulama or clergy as the de facto leaders of the Shiite community in the absence of the Imam.¹⁹

¹⁸ Shaykh al-Mufid, *Kitab al-Irshad*. Translation provided in Halm, *Shi`a Islam*, p. 37.

¹⁹ Said Amir Arjomand has written extensively on the Shiite tradition of occultation and to responses to the absence of the 12th Imam. See for instance, S.A. Arjomand, “Imam Absconditus and the Beginnings of a

The Shiite ulama, or clergy, were the first Shiites to grapple with the complexities of temporal rule without an Imam.²⁰ These scholars, trained in the religious sciences and Shiite jurisprudence, slowly emerged as the religious authorities within the Shiite community. Over the next few centuries Shiite clergy established a similar legal system to that of their Sunni counterparts.²¹ Although these scholars developed a strong intellectual tradition during this period, which focused on rationalist arguments and textual evidence, popular Shiite piety continued to be centered on the oral narratives of the Imam Husayn and similar Shiite lore. By the sixteenth century, it was the power of these stories and the rituals surrounding their commemoration that continued to serve as the basis for popular Shiite identity and activism. Clerical influence remained marginal and mostly confined to important Shiite urban centers in Iran and Iraq.²²

A major turning point for Shiism came in 1501 when Ismail Safavi, the spiritual leader of a Shiite Sufi brotherhood, led a tribal military conquest of Iran and established that country's first Shiite dynasty. Ismail, who had earlier claimed to be the Mahdi (or return of the Hidden Imam), declared himself *shah* (king) and decreed that Shiism would be the state religion of Iran. Although Ismail had originally claimed to be the return of the Hidden Imam, this fact was initially minimized and later ignored by his successors who instead claimed to rule on *behalf* of the Hidden Imam. In this way, the Safavid shahs, who claimed to be the representatives of the Hidden Imam on earth, found a unique solution to the question of temporal rule, where they ruled at the pleasure of the Hidden Imam but still awaited his return.²³

Theology of Occultation: Imami Shi'ism Circa 280-90 A. H./900 A. D." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 117, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1997), pp. 1-12; "The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shi'ism." *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Oct., 1996), pp. 548-571; and, "The Crisis of the Imamate and the Institution of Occultation in Twelver Shiism: A Sociohistorical Perspective." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Nov., 1996), pp. 491-515.

²⁰ See, Newman, Andrew J. *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi'ism*. Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000.

²¹ On the development of Shiite jurisprudence see, Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998; Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam: Abu- Ja'far Ibn Qiba Al-Razi and His Contribution to Imamite Shi'ite Thought*. Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993; and, Etan Kohlberg, *Belief and Law in Imami Shi'ism*. Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain, & Brookfield, Vt., USA: Variorum; Gower Pub. Co., 1991.

²² See for instance, Said Amir Arjomand, *Shadow of the Hidden Imam*.

²³ See Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes in Early Modern Iran*. Cambridge, Mass.: Center of Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 2002; also, Sholeh Quinn,

Iran was majority Sunni at this time with only a small Shiite minority. This made the spread of Shiism within Iran a difficult task for Shah Ismail and his successors. To help them in their effort, the Safavid shahs turned to Shiite scholars from the Arab world and offered them state patronage to relocate to Iran.²⁴ The introduction of Shiite scholars to the political scene helped the Safavid state routinize Shiite practice, law, and tradition within their territories. As the head of this campaign, Shiite clergy were granted a level of political influence they had not previously enjoyed.²⁵ This created a sort of power-sharing arrangement between the Shiite clerical class and the Safavid shahs, which granted the former jurisdiction over the religious affairs of the Safavid state while the latter claimed to rule at the behest of the Hidden Imam.

Through the reign of the Safavid Shahs (1501–1722) Shiism gradually emerged as the religion of Iran’s majority. The process of converting Iran was slow and gradual, and ultimately owed more to the growing influence of Shiite popular culture—especially the spread of narratives about the Imams Ali and Husayn—than to the empowerment of the Shiite clergy.²⁶ The clergy, however, gained unparalleled influence over their Shiite constituents during this time, which made them among the most powerful political actors in Iran.

By the nineteenth century, debates within the clerical ranks began to consider a way that would help centralize clerical control over the Shiite community. Up until this time, religious authority was dispersed among numerous clerics, who held generally limited and localized authority. The leading Shiite clergy wanted to establish a system of authority wherein the top-ranking cleric would be the central authority for all Shiites in the world. These debates gave birth to the institution of the *marja-e taqlid*, or the “point of emulation”—an office to be held by the most senior Shiite cleric. This cleric, or *marja*, would be the person to whom all lay Shiites had to “emulate” or imitate in matters

Historical writing during the reign of Shah Abbas: ideology, imitation, and legitimacy in Safavid chronicles. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000.

²⁴ On the emigration of Arab Shiite scholars to Iran, see Rula Abisaab’s *Converting Persia: Religion and Power in the Safavid Empire*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2004; also see, Andrew J. Newman, “The Myth of the Clerical Migration to Safavid Iran: Arab Shiite Opposition to ‘Ali Al-Karaki and Safavid Shiism.” *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993): 66-112.

²⁵ For more on the role of Shiite scholars in Safavid Iran, see Arjomand, *Shadow of the Hidden Imam*, 122-159.

²⁶ On the spread of Shiism through popular culture in Iran during the Safavid period, see Kathryn Babayan’s *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*.

concerning religious life. In theory, there would be only one *marja* for the entire Shia world, and all Shiites would have to follow his decrees.²⁷ However, the institution of the *marja-e taqlid* only lasted in this form through the tenures of the first two *marjas*. Afterwards, and through most of the twentieth century, several of the day's top-ranking clergy could hold the rank of *marja* simultaneously. Their influence, instead of being universal, would be more regional in nature.²⁸

The creation of the institution of the *marja-e taqlid* was an important turning point in Shiite clerical authority as it expanded both the social and political influence of the clergy over Shiite society. An example of this came during Iran's Tobacco Revolt of 1890–91—an episode that occurred in response to growing Western intervention and imperialism in the Muslim world.²⁹ The British were especially active in this era, establishing imperial control over the Indian subcontinent and initiating exploitative commercial ventures across the Middle East. In one such venture, a British businessman was granted a monopoly over the production, export, and sale of all Iranian tobacco by the Qajar Shah of Iran (Qajar Dynasty, 1796-1925). News of this concession in March 1890—leaked to the public by anti-imperialist factions within the Qajar regime—caused popular protests across Iran. As historian Nikki Keddie explains,

The tobacco concession elicited far more protest than any other because it dealt not with areas that were unexploited, or almost so, by Iranian businessmen, but rather with a product widely grown in Iran, and profiting many landholders, shopkeepers, and exporters.³⁰

Thus the tobacco concession affected nearly every strata of Iranian society. In December 1891, a *fatwa* (religious edict) attributed to the Shiite *marja-e taqlid* of the time, Mirza Hasan Shirazi, was issued calling for a nationwide boycott of tobacco. With the religious authority and legitimacy of the *marja-e taqlid* behind this order, Shiites of the region from every class and standing (reportedly including the Shah's own wives) staged a

²⁷ See, Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁸ For a comparative treatment of the institution of the Marja through the contemporary period see, Linda S. Walbridge, ed. *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

²⁹ See, Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892*. London: Cass, 1966.

³⁰ Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, p.61.

successful boycott and massive protests that forced the Shah to cancel the concession. Although significant in and of itself, this event also marked the first time the Shiite populace was encouraged into political protest by a ruling *marja*, and signaled the emergence of the Shiite clergy as a leading force against Western imperialism.³¹

PART TWO: THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN IRAN

Roots of the Islamic Movement in the Twentieth Century

The long twentieth century saw the disintegration of empires, the rise of nation-states, the emergence of two superpowers, and the fall of one. This ebb and flow of global political power drastically affected the Middle East. The European powers of Britain and France reinvigorated their imperialistic hold on the Middle East in the first half of the century only to see these adventures collapse in the second. Later, during the Cold War, Middle Eastern states were used as pawns in the global chess match between the United States and the Soviet Union. By the end of the century, the legacy of Western imperialism left much of the Middle East embroiled in political and social instability.

The political impotence of Middle Eastern states and their leaders in resisting foreign domination caused unrest throughout the region. The influence of Western secularism drew the ire of religious traditionalists while the political oppression of Western-backed dictators inspired the activism of progressive elements. Dissent was fueled by the introduction and development of numerous political ideologies such as communism, socialism, and nationalism, which gained particular popularity among secularists and certain ethnic and religious minorities. The spread of these ideologies also caused a backlash by the religious sector, which considered secularism (in all its forms) to be a major threat to Islam. In order to counteract the influence of these ideologies and Western secularism, Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders began to develop their own political ideologies, which put an emphasis on the superiority of Islam over all other political systems. These ideologies, commonly referred to as Islamism, political Islam, or fundamentalism, gave motivation and religious legitimacy to political

³¹ See, Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: the tobacco protest of 1891-1892*. London: Cass, 1966; also, Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 184-221.

and militant organizations throughout the region. Although these ideologies have had a significant influence on both Sunni and Shiite societies, their impact on the latter, especially in Iran, has been more pronounced.³²

Muslim activism against the spread of Western culture and the adoption of Western forms of government was a powerful force in Iran during the first half of the twentieth century. During Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911—a popular movement that established a constitution and democratically elected parliament (*majles*) under Iran's Qajar regime—Muslim leaders denounced the idea of a parliamentary government as a secular threat to Islam.³³ Leading the anti-parliamentarianism campaign was Shaykh Fazlollah Nuri, a Shiite cleric and the chief organizer of clerical opposition to the Iranian parliament. Nuri articulated his faction's objections to parliamentary government in a series of published letters distributed throughout Iran and the Shiite centers of Iraq. Many of his objections concerned provisions in Iran's constitution which expanded the rights of women, allowed for freedom of the press, and gave equal rights to nationalities and religions. These innovations, Nuri argued, were against the “Sacred Law” of Islam and undermined the traditional authority of the ulama. Further, Nuri was troubled by the European trappings of the Iranian parliament and constitution, which seemed to devalue the divinity of Islam. On this Nuri wrote: “Fireworks, receptions of the ambassadors, those foreign habits, the crying of hurrah, all those inscriptions of Long Live, Long Live! (*zendeḥ bad*)! Long Live Equality, Fraternity. Why not ... Long Live the Sacred Law, Long Live the Qur'an, Long Live Islam?”³⁴

Nuri wanted to secure the centrality of traditional Islamic law (*sharia*) in Iran, which he felt was being weakened and replaced by Western-inspired civil law. To ensure the integrity of Islamic law in Iran, Nuri's camp pressed for and received changes to the

³² On the roots and development of political Islam see, Nikkie R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal Al-Din Afghani*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972; Immanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990; Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: the rise of an Islamic mass movement 1928-1942*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1998; Vali Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; and, Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

³³ On the constitutional revolution see, Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; also, Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

³⁴ Translation provided in S.A. Arjomand, “Traditionalism in Twentieth-century Iran,” in S.A. Arjomand, ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984, p. 201.

constitution which made all parliamentary legislation subject to ratification by a committee of five top-ranking clerics. In doing so, Nuri proved the power of the clergy in organizing resistance to any threat to Islamic law and traditional clerical authority in Iran. Although his faction ultimately crumbled—and Nuri later killed by constitutionalist supporters—he set a precedent within Iranian Shiism by giving the traditionally apolitical clergy a significant political role in the state government—a precedent that laid the foundation for Iran’s post-revolutionary theocratic government.³⁵

Nuri’s movement dwindled in the following years. With leading Shiite clergy returned to their traditional political quietism, Iran underwent a military coup d’état that toppled the Qajar dynasty and brought Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-1941) and his family to power. The new Pahlavi regime, led by Reza Shah, instituted several modernizing and westernizing reforms inspired by the secular nationalism of Kemalist Turkey. The new reforms took aim at traditional religion in Iranian society. Veiling for women was banned and other religious garb was restricted. Turbans were to be replaced by western hats and traditional robes for the western suit. Although Reza Shah was forced to abdicate his throne in 1941 by the Allied powers, his son and successor—the ineffectual Muhammad Reza Pahlavi—bore much of the fallout for his father’s policies.³⁶

One Shiite scholar vocal in opposition to the Pahlavi reforms was the young Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989).³⁷ Like Nuri before him, Khomeini’s main concern at this time was the perceived dilutions of Islamic law and the clergy’s traditional role in society. Khomeini not only considered clerical authority under attack by the secular Pahlavi regime, but also threatened by intellectuals and Muslim reformists. Khomeini was particularly worried about religious reformers, such as the Iranian historian Ahmad Kasravi, who he accused of espousing similar anti-clerical ideas as the Wahhabis of the Arabian peninsula. (Or, as Khomeini put it: the anti-clerical reformists who imitated “Ibn

³⁵See, Arjomand, “Traditionalism in Twentieth-century Iran.”

³⁶ On the rise and rule of the Pahlavi dynasty see, Homa Katouzian, *State and society in Iran: the eclipse of the Qajars and the emergence of the Pahlavis*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000; Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the rise of Reza Shah: from Qajar collapse to Pahlavi rule*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1998; Stephanie Cronin ed., *The making of modern Iran: state and society under Riza Shah 1921-1941*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

³⁷ For the life and work of Khomeini see, Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: life of the Ayatollah*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999; also see, Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the making of a new Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.

Taymiyya and the savages of Najd” and “the camel-herders of Riyadh.”³⁸) Khomeini argued:

You [secular intellectuals and Muslim reformists] want to reduce the power of the clergy and to eliminate its honour among the people, you are committing the greatest treason to the country. The undermining of clerical influence produces defects in the country one hundredth of which hundreds of Ministers of Justice and Police Departments cannot repair.³⁹

Khomeini also took the Pahlavi regime to task for its reforms concerning dress, writing: “They have put chamber-pot-shaped hats over your heads and gladdened your hearts with naked [i.e. unveiled] women in the middle of the streets and swimming pools.”⁴⁰ These statements exemplify Khomeini’s rhetorical approach to defending Shiite traditionalism and clerical authority from the onslaught of secularism and foreign influence. In this regard, his political project can be seen as an extension of Nuri’s during the Constitutional Revolution. This period of Khomeini’s activism marked the young cleric’s entrance into the political sphere; an arena he would come to dominate later in his career.⁴¹

World War Two brought increased foreign influence and intervention to Iran. Both the British and the Soviets had strategic and economic interests in Iran and used their political might to undermine and weaken the Pahlavi regime’s autonomy. The British and Soviet militaries respectively occupied southern and northern Iran during the war and continued to have troops on the ground for years to come. The Soviets used their supremacy in the north to instigate uprisings among the Azeri Turkish (1945) and Kurdish (1946) minorities of Iran’s northwest.⁴² The United States also had a small presence in Iran during this time, sending advisors such as Col. Norman Schwarzkopf to help develop Iran’s gendarmerie and internal security force along the American model.

³⁸ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Kashf-e Asrar* (1943). Translation provided in Arjomand, “Traditionalism in Twentieth-century Iran,” 205.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See, Moin, *Khomeini*.

⁴² See, Nikki R. Keddie and Mark J. Gasiorowski eds., *Neither East nor West: Iran, the Soviet Union, and the United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990; Miron Rezun, *Soviet policy in Iran from the beginnings of the Pahlavi Dynasty until the Soviet invasion in 1941*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff & Noordhoff International, 1981; Martin Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion: Soviet imperialism and Iran*. New York: Praeger, 1988; and, David B. Nissman, *The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: the use of nationalism for political penetration*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1987.

Despite the political interests of the Soviets their paramount concern centered on Iran's oil.⁴³ However, while the Soviets and American's were blocked from gaining oil concessions by Iran's Majles, the British had already established a monopoly over Iran's vast oil reserves in the south through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC).⁴⁴ Anglo-Iranian's control over Iran's southern oil fields was granted in a concession by the Qajar Shah in 1909. Resentment against this concession had been steadily growing throughout Iran since before the war and by the late 1940s it had become the number one issue among Iran's opposition factions. Iranian discontentment focused on two key issues: 1) the exploitative financial arrangement between the Iranian government and AIOC, which saw Iran receiving less than 25% of AIOC's annual profits; 2) the appalling working and living conditions of Iranian laborers at the AIOC refinery in Abadan (southwestern Iran). The director of Iran's petroleum institute during this period comments on the predicament of Iranian AIOC workers:

Wages were fifty cents a day. There was no vacation pay, no sick leave, no disability compensation. The workers lived in a shantytown called Kaghazabad, or Paper City, without running water or electricity, let alone such luxuries as iceboxes or fans. In winter the earth flooded and became a flat, perspiring lake. The mud in town was knee-deep ... When the rains subsided, clouds of nipping, small-winged flies rose from the stagnant waters to fill the nostrils, collecting in black mounds ... and jamming the fans at the refinery ... Summer was worse ... The heat was horrid, the worst I've ever known—sticky and unrelenting—while the wind and sandstorms whipped off the desert hot as a blower. The dwellings in Kaghazabad, cobbled from rusted oil drums hammered flat, turned into sweltering ovens ... In every crevice hung the foul, sulfurous stench of burning oil—a pungent reminder that everyday twenty-thousand barrels, or one million tons a year, were being consumed indiscriminately for the functioning of the refinery, and AIOC never paid the [Iranian] government a cent for it.⁴⁵

These comments echo the sentiments felt by Iranian activists during this period. While the nationalist faction led by lawyer and Majles member Mohammad Mossadeq spearheaded the campaign against the AIOC, activists connected to senior Shiite

⁴³ Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 110.

⁴⁴ For a detailed narrative of the AIOC and its impact on Iranian politics and society see, Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2003.

⁴⁵ Interview in Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*, 67.

leadership took the most drastic steps.⁴⁶ The Fada'iyān-e Islam, a small group of young radicals associated with the prominent Shiite cleric Ayatollah Abo'l-Qasem Kashani, gained considerable notoriety for a series of high-profile assassinations during the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁷ Formed in 1945 by Sayyed Mojtaba Navvab-Safavi, a young Shiite seminarian and former AIOC employee, the Fada'iyān-e Islam were the first Shiite Islamist organization to employ terrorism as a primary method of political activism. Similar to Khomeini, Navvab-Safavi first came to public attention in 1945 for his outspoken public lectures in Abadan castigating the "evil" anti-clericalism promoted in Ahmad Kasravi's writings. A year later, Navvab-Safavi and two of his followers (with the blessings of Shiite religious leaders) assassinated Kasravi and the writer's secretary. The assassination of Kasravi was hailed by some Shiite clergy as a righteous act.⁴⁸ The Fada'iyān later articulated the motivation for Kasravi's murder in their newspaper *Manshur-e Baradari* (The Brotherhood Circular):

For the first time in 1324 [1946], the sparkling fire of these manly youth burned the life and existence of Ahmad Kasravi, who was the greatest tool of the British imperialists and who was the agent assigned to create division among Muslims and to prepare the grounds for exploitative domination ... The bullet that struck his brain forced the British to retreat for a few years.⁴⁹

Over the next few years the Fada'iyān continued to assassinate prominent political figures. Their most notorious killing was that of Iran's Prime Minister, Ali Razmara. Razmara had been in charge of negotiating a new oil agreement with the AIOC, but the agreement he proposed to the Majles went against popular sentiment of the period, which favored nationalization of the oil industry. Blamed as the main impediment to oil nationalization, Razmara was assassinated in 1951 by the Fada'iyān. Navvab-Safavi later

⁴⁶ See, Homa Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the struggle for power in Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1990.

⁴⁷ On the Fada'iyān-e Islam see, Adele K. Ferdows, "Religion in Iranian Nationalism: the Study of the Fadayān-i Islam." Ph.D. Diss., Indiana University, 1967; Farhad Kazemi, "The Fada'iyān-e Islam: Fanaticism, Politics, and Terror." In S.A. Arjomand ed., *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984; Davud Salek, *Sevvomin parchamdar: zendaginnameh-ye shahid Sayyed Mojtaba Navvab Safavi*. Tehran: hawzah-e honari, 1999; and, Davud Amini, *Jam'iyat-e fada'iyān-e islam va naqsh-e an dar tahavvulat-e siyasi ejtema'i-e Iran*. Tehran: entesharat-e markaz-e asnad-e enqelab-e eslami-e Iran, 2002.

⁴⁸ Kazemi, "Fada'iyān-e Islam," 161.

⁴⁹ Translation provided in Kazemi, "The Fada'iyān-e Islam: Fanaticism, Politics, and Terror," 162.

took credit for the assassination in 1954 during a speech to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, reportedly telling the crowd of fellow Muslim activists: “I killed Razmara.”⁵⁰

After the assassination of Razmara, Ayatollah Kashani broke off support for the Fada’iyan. Kashani had entered into the National Front coalition of Mohammad Mossadeq, and once the latter had been installed as Prime Minister in April 1951, Kashani could no longer be an advocate for the Fada’iyan’s anti-governmental violence. This split also signaled a growing divide between the more quietist senior clergy and the growing militancy of a younger generation. Even though the Fada’iyan saw their project as a continuation of Fazlollah Nuri’s pro-clerical struggle, their militancy and use of terrorism marked their movement as the beginning of something new. In the organization’s manifesto the Fada’iyan proclaim their readiness to restore Islamic purity to Iran, purge all signs and manifestations of Western imperialistic influence from Muslim society through the violence. To this end, the Fada’iyan warned Iran’s leaders:

If you do not follow our instructions immediately or are slipshod in carrying them out, with the help of God, we shall destroy you and take revenge for the disrespect and crimes that you have committed against Islam and Muslims. We shall establish the just and rightful Islamic government and carry out all the rules of Islam. We shall put an end to the long-lived miseries of the Muslim Iranian nation with the help of God.⁵¹

Thus, with the Fada’iyan a new ideological strand of Shiite Islam began to emerge: an ideology that promoted both pro-clerical and anti-imperialist positions through the direct political activism of militancy and anti-governmental terrorism.

Mohammad Mossadeq came to power on an anti-imperialist platform that advocated the nationalization of Iran’s oil. With a broad coalition that included secularist, communist, and religious parties, Mossadeq began his short-lived tenure as Prime Minister (1951-1953) by signing a bill that nationalized Iran’s oil industry. This move infuriated the British, who not only considered Iranian oil to be their rightful domain but also feared that reverberations of Iran’s nationalization would undermine their interests in other parts of the Third World.⁵² The British set plans in motion to retake Iran’s oil

⁵⁰ See, Amini, *fada’iyan-e islam*, 314-316; also, Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.126, no.60.

⁵¹ *Rahnema-ye Haqa’eq*. Trans. A.K. Ferdows, p. 123.

⁵² See Kinzer, *All the Shah’s Men*.

fields by force; however, US President Harry Truman intervened and called a halt to British aggression. Truman, who was sympathetic to the demands of the Iranians, tried to solve the dispute diplomatically. The intransigence of both the British and Mossadeq hindered Truman's efforts from gaining any traction. The British and their allies organized a blockade against Iran's oil exports which had a crippling affect on the Iranian economy and weakened Mossadeq's position at home. When President Dwight Eisenhower took office in 1953, his administration quickly turned against Mossadeq due to the later unfounded fear that the increasingly alienated Mossadeq would turn to the Soviet's for support. Through a conspiracy between the CIA, MI6, and anti-Mossadeq elements in Iran, the CIA orchestrated a coup d'état that toppled Mossadeq and reinstated Mohammad Reza Shah on 19 August 1953. This coup, codenamed "Operation Ajax," marked an end to Mossadeq's popular anti-imperialist campaign and introduced the United States as the dominant foreign power in Iran.⁵³

The Islamic Movement and Revolutionary Ideology

After the 1953 coup, the clergy—who had largely turned against Mossadeq near the end of his tenure—briefly aligned themselves with the Shah's regime and were allowed a limited degree of political freedom.⁵⁴ Without prominent clerical support, anti-governmental activism met with little success. For instance, a failed assassination attempt on the new Prime Minister in 1955 by a Fada'iyan member led to the arrests of several Fada'iyan activists and the execution of its top four leaders (including Navvab-Safavi) in 1956.⁵⁵ Such stiff government action forced most anti-imperialist and religious activists to remain underground for the next several years. During this time, the Third World was experiencing great upheaval. Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal (1956), the Cuban revolution (1959), and the Algerian war for independence (1954-62), were but a few monumental episodes that signified the power of anti-imperialist movements and the successes they could achieve. Combined with the Shah's repressive policies and the

⁵³ For a detailed study on the 1953 coup d'état, see Mark J. Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'etat in Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Aug., 1987), pp. 261-286; also see, Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men*.

⁵⁴ See, Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

⁵⁵ See, Amini, *fada'iyan-i eslam*, 322–339.

increasing political influence of the United States, revolutionary movements and the literatures and symbols they produced helped fuel anti-imperialist and anti-governmental dissent in Iran. By the early 1960s Iranian intellectuals and religious leaders began to develop their own revolutionary ideas that were both inspired by and in response to the ideologies of Third World resistance. These Islamic ideologies used Shiite culture and symbolism as mediums through which new forms of radical political idealism were expressed.⁵⁶

The spread of revolutionary literature emanating from the Third World influenced some of Iran's leading intellectuals. One of these, Ali Shariati, became familiar with revolutionary politics and ideology while pursuing a Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Paris.⁵⁷ By 1962, Shariati had become convinced that only a revolutionary movement could topple the Pahlavi regime and liberate Iran from Western imperialism. In Paris, Shariati became familiar with the anti-colonialist works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon. Frantz Fanon's writings had a particular effect on Shariati, so much so that Shariati translated Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) into Persian, entitling the Persian edition *Oppressed (mostaz'afin) of the Earth*. In this book, Fanon addresses "natives" of the Third World encouraging them to rise up against Western colonialism and create new societies, which instead of merely imitating the West would find their own path. Drawing on his experiences fighting for the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) during the Algerian war against France, Fanon argued that foreign dominion over Third World societies was inherently violent, and as such, required greater violence to overcome:

The exploited man sees that his liberation implies the use of all means, and that of force first and foremost ... [C]olonialism only loosens its hold when the knife is at its throat ... [it] is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See, Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.

⁵⁷ On Shariati's life, activism, and intellectual work see, Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1968. P.61.

Inspired by Fanon, Shariati developed an entirely new interpretation of Shiism, reformulating the religion into a revolutionary ideology. Shariati argued that God had created Islam as a dynamic ideology to lead the Muslim community (*ummat*) to a classless utopia. In this schema, Islamic terms such as *towhid* (monotheism) and *jihad* were recast as “social solidarity” and “liberation struggle.” The Imams Ali and Husayn became revolutionary heroes, with the latter likened to a premodern Che Guevara.⁵⁹ Husayn’s battle at Karbala became the ultimate metaphor for revolutionary struggle of the oppressed versus the oppressors. For Shariati, Shiism was a complete ideology superior to all other political systems including capitalism and Marxism—the latter having gained wide currency in Third World resistance movements. In his words:

Shiites do not accept the path chosen by history. They negate the leadership which ruled over history and deceived the majority of the people [i.e. Sunnism] through its succession to the Prophet ... Shiites turn their backs on the opulent mosques and magnificent palaces of the caliphs of Islam and turn to the lonely, mud house of Fatima. Shiites, who represent the oppressed, justice-seeking class in the caliphate system, find, in this house, whatever and whoever they have been seeking [to overthrow the existing order].⁶⁰

Shariati also considered the clergy and their centuries-old hold over Islam to be one of the main impediments to the progression of Muslim society. He argued that there were two versions of Shiism: “red” Shiism—the true essence of revolutionary Islam—and “black” Shiism—the stagnant tradition under the clergy (i.e. what Shiism had become).⁶¹ In order to restore true, “red” Shiism, Shariati felt that it was incumbent upon intellectuals (*rowshanfekran*) to “rediscover and revitalize the original meaning of revolutionary Islam.”⁶² In this way Shariati considered both his writing and teaching to be laying the groundwork for the revitalization of Shiite Islam and revolution in Iran.

Shariati’s message inspired scores of activists during the 1960s and 1970s. He was considered by some leaders of the Iranian revolution of 1979 to be *the* ideologue of the revolution. His mix of Marxist ideology, third worldist anti-imperialism, Shiite

⁵⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, “The Islamic Left: From Radicalism to Liberalism.” In Stephanie Cronin, ed. *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*. London: Routledge, 2004. P.269.

⁶⁰ Ali Shariati, *Red Shi'ism*. Trans. Habib Shirazi. Tehran: Hamdani Foundation, p. 8.

⁶¹ See, Shariati, *Red Shi'ism*.

⁶² Abrahamian, “The Islamic Left,” 269.

symbolism, and Iranian nationalism proved to be a powerful combination. Young Muslim activists, who found the traditionalism of the clergy lacking in political sophistication and vigor, were inspired by Shariati's leftist radicalism and its strong Islamic foundation.⁶³ Most clergy, however, considered Shariati dangerous to Islam and a secular Marxist in disguise. His pro-intellectual and anti-clerical stance enraged the religious leaders, who accused him of "Wahhabist" (i.e. anti-clerical) tendencies. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, noted contemporary filmmaker and a teenage activist during this period, relates how he was inspired by a local mosque preacher to confront and perhaps assassinate Shariati:

And so, it was around this time that Shari'ati was coming to be known. We were already beginning to think more seriously about armed resistance, and so when this person Shari'ati came along and was starting to undermine Shiite causes, it seemed crucial to find him. I went with some of the other guys to investigate whether or not to kill Shari'ati ... I went [to his school] and listened to him speak, to hear what he was saying—I was thinking who is this person they [the clergy] say is attacking Imam Ali? He spoke for four hours, and I never returned to that mosque. I became a devotee of Shari'ati . . . The next day I began distributing Shari'ati's books, and they barred me from the mosque, from the library, people from the neighborhood began to avoid me, and I was treated like an infidel. But I kept on buying Shari'ati's books and giving them to my friends ... I read all of his books from beginning to end, twice over. I became a new person.⁶⁴

Shariati was particularly popular on university campuses, where his radical reinterpretation of Shiism resonated with young middle-class Muslim students. Some of these students were inspired by Shariati's call to take up armed resistance against the Pahlavi regime. The most important group to emerge at this time was the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO).⁶⁵ The MKO, or People's Mojahedin, began in 1965 as a revolutionary guerilla movement committed to the Islamic ideology of Shariati and inspired by the liberation movements and anti-imperialist thought of the Third World.

⁶³ See Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian*, 287-96.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mohsen Makhmalbaf, in Hamid Dabashi's *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*. New York and London: Verso, 2001, pp.167-68.

⁶⁵ For more on the history and ideology of the MKO, see Ervand Abrahamian's *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1989; also, Kenneth Katzman, "The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran." In *Iran: Outlaw, Outcast, or Normal Country?*, ed. Albert V. Benliot. Huntington: Nova Science Publishers, 2001.

They wanted to end foreign control over Iran, and in particular sever America's support from the Pahlavi regime. After the 1953 coup, the United States had an increasingly visible presence in Iran. As the US was the main foreign patron of the Pahlavi regime, many Iranian activists considered America complicit in the Shah's repressive policies. Thus, in order to undermine the Shah, the MKO decided to target American interests and personnel in Iran. Like the Fada'iyan-e Islam before them, the MKO used targeted assassinations and terrorism as their method of political activism, murdering several American servicemen and civilian contractors in the 1970s. However, unlike the Fada'iyan, the MKO were disconnected from the clergy and advocated against traditional Shiite authority. By the mid-1970s the Shah had imprisoned and executed most MKO activists, though a small cell under the leadership of Masud Rajavi survived and expanded its ranks in prison, later emerging as a significant force after the 1979 revolution.⁶⁶

Revolutionary ideas were also gaining steam within clerical circles during this period. The brief *rapprochement* between the clergy and the Pahlavi regime had fallen apart by the early 1960s as the clergy renewed its vocal criticism of the Shah's social reforms.⁶⁷ The Shah responded with a crackdown on clerical activists, culminating in the violent sacking of Qom's main theological college, Fayziyyeh, in March 1963. This event further radicalized a number of leading clerics and seminary students and provoked public outcry against the Pahlavi regime. At the head of this dissent was Ayatollah Khomeini, who had become the leading clerical opponent to the Shah. Khomeini considered the Shah's crackdown on the clergy an attempt to destroy Islam in Iran. In June of that year, during the Shiite commemoration of Ashura, Khomeini delivered a speech which likened the Shah's oppression of the clergy to the violent oppression of the early Imams by the Umayyads. Just as the Umayyads had tried to destroy the family of Muhammad, Khomeini argued, the Shah's actions proved the regime was "fundamentally opposed to Islam itself and the existence of the religious class." Khomeini also played on

⁶⁶ The MKO became split during this period resulting in competing Marxist-Maoist and Islamist revolutionary factions. See Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, 145-169; also, regarding the release of MKO members from prison in the build up to the 1979 revolution see, 170-185.

⁶⁷ See, Mohammad G. Majd, *Resistance to the Shah: Landowners and Ulama in Iran*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.

anti-imperialist themes evoking the memory of the British and Soviet occupations during World War II, and suggested Israel had influenced the Shah's attack.⁶⁸

By 1964, intense clashes between pro-clerical elements and government forces resulted in Khomeini's exile. Traveling first to Turkey and then settling in the Shiite center of Najaf, Iraq for thirteen years, Khomeini continued to criticize the Pahlavi regime and call for its overthrow. It was during this period that Khomeini articulated his solution to the dilemmas facing Muslim nations as the establishment of Islamic governments.⁶⁹ Khomeini argued that following the usurpation of Ali's rule by Muawiya, Islamic society had been governed by monarchies that separated temporal authority from religious authority. It was this division—akin to the separation of church and state—that was the root of Islam's present predicament. For Islam to truly reach its potential, Khomeini contended, Muslim states must be led by the clergy. Khomeini termed this form of Islamic government the *velayat-e faqih* or the “guardianship of the jurist.” In Khomeini's estimation, a true Islamic government must be headed by a senior cleric (*marja-e taqlid*) or by a committee of similarly high-ranking clergy (*fuqaha*). This role would give the ruling jurist (*vali-ye faqih*) the same temporal *function* (but not status) as the Imams. The jurist would be in charge of “the administration of the country, and the implementation of the sacred laws of the *shari`a*.”⁷⁰ Khomeini argued that establishing the government of the jurist would “deliver Islamic countries from the clutches of imperialism,” and restore justice to Islamic society.⁷¹

Although Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e faqih* was unpopular among the leading clergy of the early 1970s—as it went against the clergy's traditional aversion to government involvement—his influence over the revolutionary movement in Iran continued to grow. Through the distribution of works and sermons, Khomeini's popularity became widespread. Khomeini used vague catchphrases—such as “Islam is for equality and social justice,” “Islam will eliminate class differences,” and “The duty of the clergy is to liberate the hungry from the clutches of the rich”—which played to

⁶⁸ Ruhullah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*. Trans. Hamid Algar. North Haledon: Mizan Press, 1981, pp.177-80.

⁶⁹ On Khomeini's political thought see, Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Pp. 62-63.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, P.149.

populist sentiments and employed similar slogans to inspire the Shiite masses.⁷² One of these—the oft-cited “Every day is Ashura, every land is Karbala”—evoked the memory of the Imam Husayn and equated current socio-political upheavals with the Imam Husayn’s righteous struggle against injustice and oppression. By the revolutionary period of 1978-79, Khomeini had positioned himself as both a staunch anti-imperialist and a champion of Islam. The main elements of Khomeini’s political thought, what I will call Khomeinism—radical anti-imperialism, economically-conscious Shiite populism, and Islamic government under clerical rule—garnered him wide support among Islamist segments of the guerilla movement, activist clergy, and other revolutionary leaders. Such support and that of the hopeful masses enabled Khomeini and his supporters to seize control of post-revolutionary Iran and establish an Islamic Republic under the rule of the guardian jurist (*vali-ye faqih*).

Conclusion

Early events in Shiite history, especially those involving the Imams Ali and Husayn, as well as the perpetual expectation of the Hidden Imam’s return, are not only foundational to the Shiite religious tradition, they are also central to contemporary Shiite politics and activism. For example, the events at Karbala have become a chief metaphor in Shiism for the battle against good versus evil, or justice against injustice. In times of political or social turmoil, the image of Husayn fighting against all odds at Karbala has been evoked by religious leaders, politicians, and lay-people to inspire the Shiite community into action. The richness of this metaphor, its cultural and religious depth, as well as its eternal message, enables its use to describe virtually any conflict affecting the Shia world. This is especially true in pre and post-revolutionary Iran where the metaphor of Karbala has been an omnipresent fixture in political rhetoric and propaganda. In this way, the formative events of the Shiite religion continue to imbue modern political rhetoric in Iran with both a sense of religious authenticity and spiritual significance.

Thus, the story of Shiite Islam remains central to modern political activism in Iran. From the conspiracy against Ali and the injustice of Husayn’s martyrdom, to the rise of the clerical establishment and the institutionalization of Shiite religious authority, the

⁷² Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 31.

controversies and legacies of Shiism's history continue to animate its present. While history gives a semblance of unity to the Shiite tradition, it also exposes some of the latent fissures of Shiite society. For instance, though clerical authority is a central facet of Shiism, it co-exists with numerous strains of more popular-minded and sometimes anti-clerical religious sentiment. In the modern period, the Islamic movement in Iran embodied both of these traditions. Clerical activists like Ayatollah Khomeini advocated against Western cultural influence and condemned religious reform as both were considered threats to traditional clerical authority. Militants like Navvab-Safavi took similar political positions as Khomeini and engaged in forms of coercive violence like murder as protest. Though Navvab-Safavi argued a pro-clerical line, and was initially supported by prominent clergy, he was also willing to work outside of clerical oversight and even clash with the clergy in the political realm. Ali Shariati introduced perhaps the most evocative religious ideology of this era, and did so by taking an overtly anti-clerical stance. Some of those activists that he inspired, such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq, adopted this line as their own and put these ideas into effect through anti-governmental terrorism.

Although these political positions were articulated through a Shiite cultural framework, they exemplify the looseness of this religious community as much as they do its coherence. That is, though they represent Shiite reactions to imperialism, they also represent the diverse understandings of what was threatened by Western domination and what was required to combat it. For Khomeini, the place of traditional clerical authority was most at stake and expanding clerical authority over the state was his proposed solution. Navvab-Safavi wanted to retain the traditional features of Islam and considered militant activism to be the most direct way of restoring traditional religion in Iran. Shariati, on the other hand, was immersed in nativistic responses to foreign domination and was as concerned with restoring authentic Shiite spirituality to Iranian society as he was with bringing Shiism out of its traditionalist doldrums and into a new political modernity. Like Navvab-Safavi, his writings also embraced armed struggle but to a drastically different end.

I have emphasized certain historical episodes and modern political actors for two reasons: to provide a basic understanding of Shiite history and religious culture in Iran as background for subsequent chapters; and to introduce some of the key events and

individuals that influenced the IRGC and inspired militant activism in the post-revolution. While I make sporadic examples of this in later chapters, it should be noted that individuals such as Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri and Mojtaba Navvab-Safavi, as well as other historical activists not discussed in this chapter, were celebrated by the IRGC for their religious activism. Indeed, Navvab-Safavi was heralded by the Revolutionary Guards as the “pioneer” of the Islamic movement in Iran and his anti-governmental militancy highly praised.⁷³ With this in mind, it should be clear that lethal coercion and violent activism had a certain measure of legitimacy in the Islamic and revolutionary movements in Iran. As each of the ideologues and activists mentioned advocated political positions through a religious vernacular, the political activism they engendered likewise could claim to be in line with divine will. In short, what I am suggesting is that conceptions of legitimate violence based in traditional Shiite religion and culture have had a considerable impact on how violent activism has been understood and employed in modern Iran. That is, while the political violence generated by Shiite activists in the twentieth century had temporal causes and material aims, it was understood within a religious framework that allowed for such violence to be seen as a legitimate if not righteous response to perceived social injustice. This theme carries forward through the subsequent chapters of this dissertation and can be seen as the religious basis for military power in the post-revolution.

⁷³*Payam-e Enqelab*. Vol.4, no. 102 (21 January 1984), p. 40.

CHAPTER III

Guardians of an Islamic Revolution: Coercion and Consolidation in the Post-Revolution (February–December 1979)

I have said time and time again that to build a society on the basis of the principles of Islam is an ideological choice, not just a religious one. Islam in fact is an ideology, in which religion represents one aspect. In our view of the world, it is the people who interpret divine will and therefore the Islamic Republic can only be based on the peoples' will, in other words, universal suffrage.¹

Our nation gave its blood to create an Islamic Republic, not a democratic republic.²

—Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

Violence and coercion have always been key elements in human affairs, but their specific forms and the meanings attached to them have changed constantly and are changing still. In particular, societies have always contested the distinction between “legitimate,” state-sanction violence and coercion and its “illegitimate” counterparts, between war and peace and war-making and policing, between military and civilian, between insurrection or political violence and crime, and between legal and illegal violence, and have drawn the boundaries between these categories differently at different times. In making sense of all these distinctions, it might seem at first that little of general value can be said, except that coercion and violence form part of the interactive networks that hold large-scale societies together, as well as drive them apart (sometimes irrevocably), and that the capacity to assemble and deploy armed forces is an essential attribute of the state, without which it disappears.³

—Anthony W. Pereira

¹ Khomeini's January 1979 interview with Giancesare Flesca in Neauphle-le-Chateau, France, see “Khomeini Comments on Islamic Republic, Gas, Oil,” *L'Espresso* in Italian, 28 Jan. 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 7 Feb. 1979.

² Khomeini's 9 March 1979 speech in Qom, see “Khomeyni Speech at Qom Cemetery,” *Tehran Domestic Service in Persian*, in *FBIS-MEA*, 9 Mar. 1979.

³ *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in State Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 387.

On 5 May 1979, after three months of post-revolutionary confusion and turmoil, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (*sepah-e pasdaran-e enqelab-e eslami*) announced its establishment as an organ of the Provisional Government:

In his exalted name: By the command of the illustrious leader of the Islamic Revolution, the Imam Khomeyni [sic], the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps has been established under the auspices of the Revolutionary Council. The Corps Command Council has been approved and sanctioned by the Revolutionary Council. It is hoped that the chosen responsible officials and the competent persons involved, with the support of Almighty God and in accordance with the approved rules, will strive to fulfill the momentous task of the Islamic revolution and will be successful in carrying out the duties entrusted to them.⁴

The Revolutionary Guards' primary responsibilities, as articulated by this and another statement released the next day, concern internal security and the combating of counterrevolutionary elements.⁵ The Guards Corps is to assist in the arrest, prosecution, and at times, punishment of suspected individuals. The organization is also tasked with supporting foreign liberation movements in their struggles outside of Iran. The organization makes clear that its existence is at the behest of Ayatollah Khomeini and that its senior leadership has been vetted and approved by the Revolutionary Council. By claiming to act in "consultation" with the Provisional Government, the IRGC is careful to place itself *alongside* the government but not beneath it. This is indicative of the organization's close allegiance to certain radical clerics and its distrust of the more moderate civilian government.

By the time the Revolutionary Guards made these announcements, their organization needed little introduction to the Iranian public. Elements operating under the banner of the "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution" (*pasdaran-e enqelab-e eslami*) had been active throughout Iranian cities within days of Khomeini's return on 1 February 1979.⁶ The violent activism of these militants, often fighting alongside local

⁴ "Revolutionary Guards Corps Established in Iran," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 5 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 7 May 1979. This announcement followed a similar declaration by Ayatollah Khomeini, which was published in the revolutionary newspaper *Enqelab-e Eslami* (Tehran) on 6 May 1979. See Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p.225, no.3.

⁵ "Aims, Responsibilities" Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 6 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 7 May 1979.

⁶ Schahgaldian suggests that some elements operating as "guards" at this time included militants associated with socialist and communist organizations. However, he conflates these "guards" with the "Guardians of the Islamic Revolution" who were aligned with individuals and organizations supportive of Khomeini. See,

revolutionary committees (*komitehs*) and fundamentalist gangs (*hezbollahis*), quickly became a fixture of post-revolutionary turmoil. With Iran's armed forces in disarray due to the purges, forced retirements, arrests, and murders of its officer corps, the Guards were also entrusted with matters formerly reserved for the military, including suppression of the ethnic uprisings and civil unrest that had erupted throughout the country.⁷ Indeed, by the time the formation of the Revolutionary Guards was announced, only a few months after emerging as a Khomeinist militia, they had already become one of the most active and controversial institutions of the post-revolution.

This chapter discusses the establishment and early activities of the Revolutionary Guards from February 1979 to the ratification of the Islamic Republic's first constitution in December 1979. It explores the emergence of the Guards in the midst of revolutionary violence and the early role of the IRGC as an official apparatus of the government. It highlights the roots and founding leaders of the organization, and discusses how the commitments of these individuals and the factions they represented influenced the IRGC's martial and ideological roles in post-revolutionary Iran. During this period, the IRGC operated as the leading coercive element of Khomeini's ideological and political campaign. Motivated by a commitment to Khomeini, revolutionary Islam, and a zealous distrust of the left, the Guards served as the spearhead for the post-revolutionary regime's crackdown on leftist organizations and democratic influence. In this short but crucial period in Iran's history, the IRGC was transformed from a poorly-funded, loose coalition of Islamist guerilla factions into a formidable armed force with a national reach. Closely allied with the clerical leadership of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), the IRGC helped suppress and combat the ideologies and organizations considered to be in competition with or dissenting from Khomeini's own vision of an Islamic state under the "Guardianship of the Jurisprudent" (*velayat-e faqih*). With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the IRGC assisted Khomeini and his clerical supporters in commuting the diverse 1979 revolution into a distinctly Khomeinist enterprise. In this way, IRGC activism fused together the ideological and religious authority of the clerical

Nikola B. Schahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military under the Islamic Republic*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1987, p. 66-67.

⁷ On the scope and nature of the purges see, Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988, pp.136-61.

leadership with the effective organization of physical coercion. Though the Guards began as a loose coalition of like-minded militant groups and guerrilla leaders, its affect on the post-revolution was pronounced. Indeed, as I suggest in this chapter, it was primarily the combined influences of clerical authority and armed coercion that enabled the success of the Khomeinist faction. This religious-military network proved more formidable than political and economic forces during this period and helped secure Khomeinist dominance of the post-revolutionary state.

Revolution and a New Regime

Ayatollah Khomeini's return to Iran on 1 February 1979 after fifteen years of exile symbolized the end of monarchical rule in Iran. Arriving on the heels of the mass strikes and demonstrations that had crippled the Pahlavi regime and led to the flight of Mohammad Reza Shah on 16 January 1978, Khomeini's return further emboldened the revolutionary forces. For the next several days armed revolutionaries clashed with the remaining state entities loyal to the Pahlavi regime. The most significant confrontation occurred between the revolutionaries and the military. Although numerous military defections had already occurred in the build up to the "three glorious days" of February 9 to 11, the military remained the last bulwark against the revolutionary movement.⁸ The turning point came on 9 February when a group of 800 Air Force technicians and mechanics, known as the *Homafaran*, defected en masse and joined the revolutionary struggle.⁹ After watching a replay of Khomeini's return on state television, Homafaran stationed at *Dowshan Tappeh* airbase in Tehran demonstrated in support of Khomeini, provoking a violent reaction by loyalist Imperial Guards. The confrontation soon turned into an armed conflict between the Imperial Guards and the rebelling Homafaran, who were later joined by militants from major revolutionary groups—the Marxist-Leninist People's Fada'i and the Islamist-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq organization (MKO)—in an effort to overtake the airbase. Fighting continued through the following morning when

⁸ Zabih, *Military*, 69-78.

⁹ Nikki Keddie argues that the Homafaran and leftist guerilla groups were the chief elements in the military victory of the revolution. See, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, 238. Also see, S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 124-127.

the fighters finally succeeded in overtaking the airbase's barracks and looted the armory. The weapons from the armory were sent to mosques and other community centers to be distributed among revolutionary elements.¹⁰

The repercussions of the Dowshan Tappeh takeover were massive. Revolutionary organizations, especially the People's Fada'i, used the event to bring their members and supporters together in a centralized manner, instilling a sense of group solidarity that helped in the effective coordination of further attacks.¹¹ Revolutionary elements began attacking police stations throughout the city, leading to the capturing of additional armories and weapons-stores, which provided the militants with a flush of arms. The once proud military began to collapse from within. Mass defections of all ranks took place, including the top commanders of the Imperial Guards, Generals Neshat and Biglari, who ordered the complete surrender of their units.¹² By the morning of 11 February, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces convened a meeting during which a declaration of neutrality was drafted. The announcement of this declaration on state radio that afternoon sealed the fate of the Pahlavi regime and signaled victory for the revolutionary movement.

The victory of the revolutionary movement ushered in a period of transition and consolidation. Although Khomeini was the clear charismatic authority and the so-called leader of the revolution, political power in the post-revolutionary regime was divided into two main camps: 1) the Provisional Government under Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan—a prominent Muslim intellectual and leader of the pro-democratic Freedom Movement party—which was appointed by Khomeini but composed mostly of technocrats from the Freedom Movement and National Front; 2) the Revolutionary Council, led by Khomeini and dominated by anonymous members of the clergy.¹³ The

¹⁰ Arjomand, *Turban*, 124-127.

¹¹ Alireza Mahfoozi, In an interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 7 April 1984. Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, 19.

¹² Zabih, *Military*, 73.

¹³ In a February 2008 interview with the Persian daily *Hamshahri* in Tehran, Ayat. Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani states that Khomeini ordered the establishment of the Revolutionary Council in the months leading up to the revolution, and that its original members were Ayat. Motahari, Ayat. Beheshti, Ayat. Musavi-Ardebili, Hojjat al-Islam Bahonar, and Rafsanjani himself. He also mentions that Khomeini intended that additional members should be added to these five, but does not mention any names. Shaul Bakhash lists these individuals as: Abolfazl Zanjani, Mehdi Bazargan, Ibrahim Yazdi, Yadollah Sahabi, Ahmad Sadr Hajj Seyyed Javadi, Kazem Sami, Ezzatollah Sahabi, Mostafa Katiriai, Naser Minachi, Aali

Provisional Government took charge of the fractured institutions of the police, gendarmerie, and military, and held responsibility for general administration. It played a subordinate role to the Revolutionary Council, however, which had influence over the vast network of revolutionary committees, mosque-oriented gangs (*hezbollahis*), the revolutionary courts, and the Revolutionary Guards. Beyond these official centers of power, the post-revolutionary regime also had to contend with the numerous guerilla organizations, political parties, independent clergy, and localized militias that did not fall under the control of either the Provisional Government or the Revolutionary Council.¹⁴

Although the government controlled the police and military, both of these institutions were near-paralyzed by the damage they incurred during the revolution.¹⁵ The regular military, for instance, endured violent purges that decimated its officer corps. Both also suffered from an association with the previous regime, which gained them little favor in revolutionary circles. The vacuum created by the absence of these security forces at the local level was quickly filled by the numerous armed militias and neighborhood gangs that thrived in the resulting anarchy. Law and order took a back seat to vigilante justice and the extra-judicial settling of vendettas. The entire infrastructure of Iranian society, from basic governmental services to the rule of law, had been crippled by the revolution. In response, the Khomeinist aligned militias became increasingly active in all aspects of society across the country, partially filling the void left by the shattered security forces.

It was in this context that that the Revolutionary Guards first appear. Initially, they were associated with the command staff (*setad*) of the Khomeini-appointed revolutionary committees (*komitehs*) and worked in conjunction with them and other

Nasab, Hajj Kazem Hajji Tarkhani, Lieutenant General Ali-Asghar Mas'ud, and Lieutenant General Valiollah Qarani. Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani was also said to have been a member. See, interview with Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Hamshahri*, in *FBIS*, 19 February 2008.

¹⁴ Arjomand, *Turban*, 134-36.; Also see, Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*; New York: Basic Books, 1984, p.51.

¹⁵ The army in particular suffered great losses. Major General Qarani, the army's Chief of Staff under the Provisional Government, commented on this point on 20 February, "I inherited an army which in Tehran did not contain even one soldier, and which, because of treachery by some of the former military leaders, had its barracks emptied of arms and in most cases destroyed by fire." See, "Qarani on Army's Disintegration," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 20 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 21 February 1979.

Khomeinist militias.¹⁶ The Guards functioned similarly to other militias in that they primarily fought loyalist elements and were utilized to help secure important positions and telecommunications centers.¹⁷ At times, their areas of responsibility also included more mundane matters, such as directing traffic and trash removal.¹⁸ What separated the Guards from other militias, however, was the suggestion that they served in an official capacity under the post-revolutionary regime. This was partly due to Khomeini's inclusion of the Guards in some of his early messages concerning Iran's military. For instance, on 14 February Khomeini released a message to the "struggling soldiers" who had defected from the military in solidarity with the Islamic revolution. In this message, Khomeini commands these soldiers to "return to their relevant garrisons and units at the earliest opportunity and continue their sacred military service as the struggling soldiers of Islam." He adds, "It is necessary that the soldiers in service—the *guardians of the revolution* and the fighting sons of Islam—report to their relevant garrisons as soon as this message reaches them" [emphasis added].¹⁹ In this way, Khomeini hinted at a more official role for the Guards, which, unlike the committees and unofficial militias, placed them in the arena of Iran's national armed forces.

The Provisional Government's first official statement on the Revolutionary Guards implied something similar. During a 21 February press interview with the Deputy Prime Minister, Amir Entezam, the government announced that the Revolutionary Guards "Corps" would be formed and that the rules and regulations of its formation had already been established. Entezam suggested that the "decision" to establish the Guards Corps was made by the government, insinuating that the new Guards Corps was to be an organ of the Provisional Government.²⁰ This interview is the first time that the

¹⁶ "Tehran Communications, Mosque Attacked," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 14 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 15 February 1979.

¹⁷ Ibid. "Dasht-e Qazvin Transmitter Besieged," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 14 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 15 February 1979.

¹⁸ "Palestinian Report on Iran," *BBCSWB*, 9 February 1979.

¹⁹ "Khomeyni Calls on Soldiers," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 14 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 15 February 1979.

²⁰ "Guardian Corps To Be Established," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 21 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 21 February 1979.

government referred to the Revolutionary Guards as a “Corps” (*sepah*).²¹ This distinction elevated the Guards—at least in name—from a disparate band of militants into an army (or corps) associated with the state and its national armed forces. This was an important (if superficial) transition for the Revolutionary Guards that publicly strengthened their organizational legitimacy.

Despite this announcement, however, neither the government nor its Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, seemed to have much confidence in the Corps as an effective military institution. In his 28 February address, Bazargan highlighted the immense damage that the Iranian military had suffered as a result of the revolution. While he stressed the need for the public’s cooperation in achieving stability, he also lambasted the revolutionary militias that called for the complete disbandment of the “imperialist” army and its replacement by a people’s army composed of the revolutionary militias themselves. On this point, Bazargan asked:

Could the safeguarding of the realm and the defense of its borders—and at that a realm as vast as ours on which eyes are focused from the four corners of the world—be possible without an army? Could a people’s army or revolution guards be able so soon to take the place of regular, well-equipped armies, which possess aircraft, tanks, armored cars, and thousands of technical and military items? Could the training of such a cadre, which has been prepared after spending billions of dollars, be achieved so easily? Is there any country in the world, whether leftist, rightist, old or new, which could protect itself without an army?²²

Bazargan’s speech highlighted a tension between the radical revolutionary camp and the government. Like Khomeini, Bazargan stressed the importance of the military to Iran’s national sovereignty, an idea criticized by the left and certain segments of the Islamist bloc (including IRGC leadership) that considered the military a bastion of Pahlavi influence and a tool of Western imperialism.²³ Khomeini and the government argued that the revolutionary militias (including the Guards) lacked the training, expertise, and discipline needed to effectively protect the vulnerable post-revolutionary regime from

²¹ Ibid. Without the original Persian transcript of this interview it is impossible to know whether the term translated as “corps” by FBIS was indeed the Persian “*sepah*” or not; however, it is reasonable to assume it was.

²² “Bazargan Addresses Nation on Government Problems,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 28 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 2 March 1979.

²³ “Guards Operations Commander Interviewed,” Beirut *As-Safir* in Arabic, 1 December 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 4 Dec 1979.

outside forces.²⁴ Both Khomeini and the government seemed to question the loyalty of the major leftist militias—the Fadai, MKO, and the Tudeh—and, while both the Revolutionary Council and the government appeared to be backing the Revolutionary Guards, neither seemed ready to trust them with the military’s arsenal.

The government, however, continued to stress the Corps as a “national army” that would, in time, “operate as an army alongside” the other national armed forces.²⁵ The government suggested that before the Guards could reach the stage of a martial institution complimentary to Iran’s other national forces a national recruitment effort would have to begin and the new (and existing) troops would need professional military training.²⁶ Such public statements by the government portrayed the Guards as an institution that was in the initial stages of formation and had yet to begin its official duties.²⁷ The reality, however, was that militants operating under the name of the Revolutionary Guards had been continuously active since early February. By late March, Guards had been involved in security details, arrests, arms collection, and armed conflict throughout Iran, most notably in the cities of Tehran, Shiraz, Abadan, Qom, Mashhad, Sari, Tabriz, and Gonbad-e Kavus.

In each location, IRGC units seemed to operate independently and in different capacities.²⁸ The Guards of Mashhad, for example, underwent military training with advisors from the Palestinian Liberation Organization,²⁹ and Guards in Abadan established a “naval unit” to patrol the area waterways and prevent political dissidents from leaving the country.³⁰ In Gonbad-e Kavus, a contingent of Guards clashed with demonstrating Turkmen residents, setting a precedent for the IRGC in the suppression of the similar ethnic uprisings that began to erupt around Iran’s periphery. The Guards in

²⁴ Ibid.; “Khomeyni Calls on Soldiers,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 14 February 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 15 February 1979.

²⁵ “More on Entezam,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 4 March 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 5 March 1979.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ For instance, in Entezam’s 8 April press conference he says: “As long as the army of the revolutionary guards has not been properly formed and has not started its activities, the weapons will not be collected up . . . The revolutionary guards have been recruited under regulations similar to those used in the armed forces and are at the moment being trained.” See, “Amir Entezam’s 8th April News Conference,” *BBCSWB*, 10 April 1979.

²⁸ Schahgaldian lists several individuals (including civilian leaders and clergy) who controlled personal armed contingents associated with the Revolutionary Guards. See, Schahgaldian, *Iranian*, 65-67.

²⁹ “PLO Delegation to Mashhad,” 23 March 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 27 March 1979.

³⁰ “Navy Arrests Escapees,” Abadan International Service in Arabic, 5 March 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 6 March 1979.

Tehran were involved in numerous operations aimed at securing key positions and combating dissent, while the Guards in Qom and Sari were largely involved in security details and weapons collection. Although its units were highly localized, the Corps also developed a more national, centralized presence in the form of a Command Headquarters (*setad-e farmandehi*), which released its first public announcement on 24 March.³¹

The highly individual character of local IRGC units and the relative autonomy with which they operated led to numerous reports of abuses committed by the Guards. Most of the incidents arose as a result of the Guards' broad effort of disarming the populace and its arrests and detentions of suspected counterrevolutionaries as an arm of the shadowy revolutionary courts—areas in which the committees were also involved. These abuses gained national and international attention after the press reported that two sons and a “non-Iranian”³² daughter-in-law of Iran's second most popular cleric, Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, had been arrested, beaten, and detained for sixteen hours by elements of the IRGC. The main target of the arrest was Mojtaba Taleqani, a member of the Marxist-Leninist Paykar Organization,³³ who was suspected of illegally possessing firearms.³⁴ As a sign of protest, Ayatollah Taleqani, a key supporter of the government and co-founder of the Freedom Movement, went into hiding causing public outcry against the arrests and similar abuses linked to the Guards and committees.³⁵ Taleqani's widespread support among democratic and leftist organizations, as well as his allies in the Provisional Government (e.g., his protégé Mehdi Bazargan and other members of the Freedom Movement), led to numerous demonstrations calling for his return. These

³¹ “Revolutionary Guards' Announcement,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 24 March 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 27 March 1979. The coverage of this story by the BBC includes a transliteration of the term “Command Headquarters,” however I altered their rendering to conform to the style used in the present study. See, “Iran: In Brief; “Appeal to inform on ‘counter-revolutionary elements,’ *BBCSWB*, 21 March 1979.

³² See, Ali Danesh Monfared, *Khaterat-e Ali Danesh Monfared*. Ed. Reza Bastami. Tehran: Markaz-e esnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 2005, 91. Monfared, the Guards' lead commander at the time, specifically mentions that Taleqani's wife was a “non-Iranian,” which apparently added to the suspicions surrounding the Marxist activist.

³³ Rafiqdust, *Khaterat*, 174.

³⁴ Mojtaba Taleqani began his activist career as a member of the MKO, but later (in 1975) split from the organization on ideological grounds. He discusses his embrace of Marxist ideology and the inadequacy of Islam as a revolutionary doctrine in a letter to his father (c.1975). For the text of the letter, see Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, pp.157-62.

³⁵ Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mohjadein-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhellal (1357-1365)*. Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Eslami, 2007, p.85.

³⁶ “Protest leader marks open split on Iran's policies,” *The Globe and Mail*, 16 April 1979.

protests, especially those organized by the MKO and Fadai, exposed a growing rift between the parties and organizations that looked toward Taleqani for moral legitimacy and those forces loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini.³⁶ Faced with building public pressure and mounting discontentment both the government and Revolutionary Council were forced to address the incident.

Through its own investigation, the Revolutionary Council concluded that neither the “official committees of the Imam [nor] the leadership of the corps of the Revolutionary Guards” were involved in the incident. However, they conceded that “not all the branches of the corps of the Revolutionary Guards” had “been brought completely under the control of the Revolutionary Council,” thereby suggesting some complicity on the part of the local Guards.³⁷ Khomeini met with Taleqani in Qom to help resolve the issue, which led to some assurances by the former that committees would be purged of “seditious elements.” Taleqani, for his part, blamed neither the committees nor the Guards directly, but rather suggested that the abuses of power had come from “irresponsible people” who had “penetrated the committees and made trouble in the name of revolutionary guards,” but who were not themselves “the real revolutionary guards.”³⁸

Khomeini soon altered his pledge in a meeting with the heads of Tehran’s fourteen revolutionary committees. Instead of “purging” or “abolishing” the committees, Khomeini suggested the committees should be “reformed” and “seditious” members removed. He blamed the abuses on agents of foreign powers—“most likely Americans”—and argued that they emboldened the opposition. Khomeini assured the committees that they would “remain in force until the authority of the Government is established,” which would be manifested by the “achievement of disarming.” Likewise, he added: “[w]e shall not remove the guardians [of the revolution], so that the way will not be free for our enemies. We shall strengthen the guardians and the committees until the day when the Government will be able to maintain a firm conduct of affairs . . .”³⁹

³⁶ Abrahamian refers to this incident as “the first skirmish” between leftist organizations (especially the MKO) and the Khomeinist wing of the post-revolutionary regime. See, Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, 190.

³⁷ “Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Council’s Call for Taleqani’s Return,” *BBCSWB*, 16 April 1979.

³⁸ “Khomeini Orders Revolutionary Committees Purged,” *The Washington Post*, 20 April 1979 (Final Edition).

³⁹ “Remarks by Khomeyni on the Future of Revolutionary Committees,” *BBCSWB*, 21 April 1979.

The government's response was also mixed, but appeared more critical of the IRGC. The Chief Public Prosecutor's office curtailed the authority of the committees and the Guards by invalidating all official warrants for the "detention of persons or property, or for the search of houses" previously issued to both groups, thereby suspending them from such activity.⁴⁰ In a press conference Amir Entezam denied that either Khomeini's committees or the revolutionary courts had been involved in the matter. "Rather," he asserted, it was "the guardians [of the revolution] [who] had arbitrarily got themselves involved in the incident."⁴¹ A few days later, Prime Minister Bazargan partially contradicted his deputy by placing indirect blame on elements of both the committees and the Guards.⁴² Although he maintained the abuses were committed by rogue elements, he argued that vigilante tactics associated with these groups were undermining the goals of the revolution. Citing the Taleqani incident and numerous accounts of similar abuse, Bazargan continued:

The Iranian nation has now acquired a state of instability. Everyone is asking about and is fearful that if the committees, the guards and those individuals who are acting in the names of the committees, guards and - most shamelessly and in a most cowardly way - in the name of the Imam - and have arms in their possession - continue to act in a similar vein, and should the current state of affairs continue as it is, what would ultimately happen to this realm, nation, people and our republic? When guilty and innocent people continue to be arrested for reasons of personal enmity and personal motives, life itself can no longer exist let alone progress . . .⁴³

The IRGC also publically addressed the issue. Concurrent with the announcements of their establishment and areas of responsibility (mentioned at the top of the chapter), the Guards released an additional statement blaming "opportunistic elements" for the recent abuses. They acknowledged that "for some time now a number of people, in the guise of members of [revolutionary] committees and officials of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, have been looting the people's property and households by threat and intimidation, entering houses in Tehran and the provinces." They "condemned" these "ugly actions," and reminded the public that "no official has the

⁴⁰ "Iran: In Brief; Chief Public Prosecutor's announcement (text)," *BBCSWB*, 17 April 1979.

⁴¹ "Amir Entezam's 19th April Press Conference," *BBCSWB*, 21 April 1979.

⁴² "Bazargan's 24th April Address to the Iranian People," *BBCSWB*, 26 April 1979.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

right to enter houses on the authority of the Islamic Public Prosecutor without presenting his identity card and written orders from the Revolutionary Guards and the committee.” Finally, the Guards asked for the public’s help in identifying and turning in these rogue elements.⁴⁴ In this way, the IRGC confirmed what had already been suggested by the post-revolutionary regime and blamed not its own cadre, but rather those who operated inappropriately in the *guise* of its organization. This admission could not have been very reassuring to the public.

Early Leadership and Factions

The Taleqani incident illustrated a growing division between the Khomeinist camp on the one hand, and the government, democratic organizations, and leftist groups on the other. It was a harbinger of things to come and an outgrowth of the Khomeinist camp’s push for power. However, it also demonstrated the confusion surrounding the IRGC. Who exactly were the “Revolutionary Guards” and how were they distinct from the other Khomeinist committees and militias? Neither the government nor the Revolutionary Council appeared to have a firm grasp of the organization and the dynamics of its membership. Part of the problem undermining the Corps, its functionality, and its position in the post-revolutionary regime was the fluidity of its membership and lack of effective centralized control. Since its inception the ranks of the IRGC had been occupied by activists generally operating within more than one organization—such as the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, hezbollah, committees, or even local gangs—simultaneously.⁴⁵ The abundance of willing participants was as much a blessing as it was a detriment to the Guards. The lack of structure allowed individual units to act with impunity, sometimes in the interest of other parties, while the multiple responsibilities of the Corps were too many and too broadly defined to be successful in the short term.⁴⁶ Lack of funding was also a problem. In the six months following its establishment, the IRGC received little support from the government despite its official mandate and was forced to rely on individual benefactors and confiscated property, arms, and vehicles to run its

⁴⁴ “The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps,” *BBCSWB*, 9 May 1979.

⁴⁵ For instance, numerous MIR activists, such as Mortaza Alviri and Hasan Hamidzadeh, simultaneously held positions of responsibility in the IRGC, the committees, and in MIR. See, Saidi, *Sazman*, 89.

⁴⁶ Schahgaldian, *Iranian*, 65-67.

operations.⁴⁷ These issues highlighted the fact that the IRGC was still a new, struggling institution, which acted more like the hodge-podge collection of individual militias that it was and less like the official organ it was portrayed to be. Thus at the time of its first announcement on 5 May, the IRGC was still a poorly-funded, loosely bound meta-militia, whose identity and politics were derived as much from the interests of individual Corps members as from Khomeini and the post-revolutionary regime.

Many of the challenges facing the IRGC were rooted in the provenance of the organization. According to a founding member of the Guards, Mohsen Rafiqdust, the concept behind the establishment of a post-revolutionary armed force composed of Islamist militants was first introduced by Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Montazeri. In a meeting held during the build up to the February revolution, Montazeri—an influential guerilla leader and the son of senior cleric Ayatollah Hosayn-Ali Montazeri—is said to have opined “Now that the revolution will be victorious, an armed force must be formed to safeguard the revolution.”⁴⁸ Although no steps were taken at the time to create such a force, Montazeri suggested the idea to Khomeini. Shortly after the February victory, Montazeri approached Rafiqdust with the news that Khomeini had ordered the establishment of the Revolutionary Guards.⁴⁹

Overseeing the formation of the Guards, which was initially to be under the jurisdiction of the Provisional Government, were Montazeri himself and senior cleric Ayatollah Beheshti, leader of the clerically-dominated Islamic Republic Party (IRP). A mid-level cleric, Hojjat al-Islam Hasan Lahuti, was appointed Khomeini’s representative to the organization and the task of organizing the Guards’ leadership was given to Rafiqdust.⁵⁰ Through meetings with the clerical leaders of the IRP (including Beheshti, Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, and Ali Khamenei) and the representatives of several militant organizations, Rafiqdust and his associates established the IRGC, chose its official name, and appointed its first commanders. Ali Danesh Monfared became the first commander of the Corps; Gholam-Ali Afruz headed personnel; Engineer Zarami became

⁴⁷ Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen Rafiqdust*. Vol. 1, ed. Davud Qasempur. Tehran: Markaz-e esnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 2004, 174-182. Rafiqdust singles out Hajj Aqa Jaber-Ansari as a key individual helped financially support the IRGC during this period. Also see Monfared, *Khaterat*, 87-88.

⁴⁸ Rafiqdust, *Khaterat*, 174.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

the head of training; a Mr. Mahmudzadeh led additional units; and Rafiqdust himself was charged with logistics. Shortly afterward, these individuals formed the Central Office (*daftar-e markazi*) of the IRGC, which held its meetings in a former SAVAK headquarters.⁵¹

Although Rafiqdust had consulted various revolutionary leaders before establishing the IRGC, all were reticent to assimilate their forces into this burgeoning enterprise.⁵² Their main objection, typified by the position held by Montazeri, was the Guards' lack of autonomy.⁵³ These revolutionaries had built a career on resisting state control, and even though their revolution had been victorious the new regime was still too young to inspire much trust. Further, militants such as Montazeri and Abbas Aqa-Zamani (more commonly known by his nom de guerre "Abu Sharif"), were internationalists who were as (if not more, in Montazeri's case) committed to assisting liberation movements outside Iran as they were to creating a new society within it. Losing the independence and freedom they had fought so long for in order to join a state-controlled, national army may not have been very appealing.

Despite a refusal to absorb their forces into the IRGC, Montazeri and Abu Sharif (who also had strong ties to hezbollahi groups) were closely aligned with the organization from its inception.⁵⁴ They represented two of the four factions that made up the heart of the early IRGC.⁵⁵ The leaders of these factions—which also included Mohammad Borujerdi (representing the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution organization) and Rafiqdust and his associates Monfarad and Zarami—formed the core of the Revolutionary Guards and elected the organization's first Central Council (*shura-ye markazi*) from among their ranks. Further elections created the Command Council, which included members of each faction: Javad Mansuri and Mohsen Kolahduz from Pasa became the chief IRGC commander and head of training, respectively; Abu Sharif was charged with operations; Yusef Forutan of MIR headed public relations; and Rafiqdust

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 176.

⁵⁴ Abu Sharif and Ali Duzdudani were both early leaders of the Hezbollah movement in Iran.

⁵⁵ Katzman identifies three factions (MIR, and those led by Zamani and Montazeri) as playing a role in the early IRGC, but does not consider Rafiqdust and his associates. See Katzman, *Warriors*, 148-50.

remained the head of logistics.⁵⁶ The establishment of these leadership councils and the involvement of each major faction paved the way for additional members from these factions and other groups to participate in the IRGC.⁵⁷

Although each faction influenced the makeup and direction of the Corps, the individuals who had perhaps the greatest impact on the organization came from the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (MIR).⁵⁸ Much of MIR's success in post-revolutionary politics was due to the patronage they received from Khomeini and other revolutionary leaders. With Khomeini's support, MIR activists were placed into high-ranking positions throughout the post-revolutionary regime, including key leadership posts in the IRGC and the revolutionary committees.⁵⁹ Although MIR activists made up only a small fraction of the overall Corps ranks, they were entrusted with many of the organization's top leadership positions.⁶⁰ Some of these initial appointments included Borujerdi, who helped in the establishment of the IRGC and later became its western regional commander, and Mohsen Rezai—a founding member of MIR and part of its central committee—who served as MIR's second representative to the Corps. Other senior MIR members, such as the aforementioned Yusef Forutan and Morteza Alviri also became influential in the organization. Alviri, who was appointed to the Command Council, also served on the central council of the revolutionary committees.⁶¹

The involvement of MIR members in the new regime made the status of MIR as an independent and active organization unclear. The confusion surrounding MIR's status permeated the highest levels of the government, which at one point erroneously stated the organization had been absorbed into the IRGC.⁶² Any official relationship between the two was denied by MIR, however, which declared that the organization was “in no way connected with any Government organ.”⁶³ Although MIR remained independent, its

⁵⁶ Rafiqdust, *Khaterat*, 181.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Katzman makes a similar argument, suggesting MIR played a “crucial role” in the formation of the IRGC. See, Katzman, *Warriors*, 32-34.

⁵⁹ Saidi, *Sazman*, 89.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*; Makhmalbaf interview, 179-182.

⁶¹ Saidi, *Sazman*, 89.

⁶² “Amir Entezam's 8th April News Conference,” *BBCSWB*, 10 April 1979. In this press conference, Entezam states ““The Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution is part of the organization of the revolutionary guards”

⁶³ “Iran: In Brief; The aims of the Mojahedin,” *BBCSWB*, 10 April 1979.

influence on post-revolutionary institutions, particularly the IRGC, was pronounced. Indeed, the MIR faction eventually became the dominant faction in the Revolutionary Guards leading to the appointment of Mohsen Rezai as the head Corps commander in 1981—a post he held until 1997.

Despite its importance in post-revolutionary politics, MIR itself was a recently-branded organization. It was established in the wake of the February 1979 revolution as an umbrella organization for seven regional revolutionary groups: *Mansuran* (the Victorious, led by Mohsen Rezai), *Movahhedin* (the Monotheists), *Towhidi Saf* (the Monotheistic Group, led by Mohammad Borujerdi), *Fallah* (the Peasant group, led by Alviri), *Towhidi Badr* (the Monotheistic Badr group),⁶⁴ *Falaq* (the Dawn group), and *Ommat-e Vahedeh* (Unified Nation, led by Behzad Nabavi). Some of these groups (such as Towhidi Saf and Mansuran) had been in existence prior to the revolutionary upheaval of 1978-79; however, others (such as Ommat-e Vahedeh) were established in the midst of it. The key commonalities shared by each of these groups were their involvement in anti-Shah activism and their disillusionment with the revolutionary left.

MIR's disdain for the left stemmed as much from its members' specific religious leanings as it did from their collective experience with leftist organizations, particularly the Islamist-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO).⁶⁵ The fallout between Islamists and the MKO took place on a number of fronts, but its epicenter was Evin prison in Tehran. The prison experience during the 1970s, as described by numerous accounts of former political prisoners, was a combative arena of ideological contestation.⁶⁶ Every group struggled to spread its ideological message among the inmates and increase adherents to its cause. The clash of ideas and politics resulted in a general divide between the secular left and the Islamist-minded prisoners. However, the Islamist-minded sector also began to split as more and more individuals became

⁶⁴ *Badr* means "full moon," but in this instance it is likely a reference to the first major battle between the Muslims and the Meccans at Badr (north of Mecca) in 624 C.E.

⁶⁵ For a social and intellectual history of the MKO see, Ervand Abrahamian's *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1989. On the group's post-revolutionary development see, Kenneth Katzman "The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran." In *Iran: Outlaw, Outcast, or Normal Country?*, ed. Albert V. Benliot: Huntington: Nova Science Publishers, 2001. Also, on the group's connection to Ali Shariati see, Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

⁶⁶ See for example, the reflections of Makhmalbaf in Hamid Dabashi's *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*. London and New York: Verso, 2001, pp. 164-181.

disenchanted with the Marxist leanings and autocratic culture of the MKO (then the largest of the Islamist-minded organizations).⁶⁷ This split reflected a more general deterioration of support for the MKO—and the Islamic left in general—outside of prison, particularly within the clergy, throughout the 1970s.⁶⁸ Within the prison system, the MKO utilized rumors and accusations to undermine their opponents and cast suspicion on dissenters. As one former jailed activist recalls, “they [the MKO] ... began spreading [false] rumors ... any person who wasn’t a part of their organization was automatically considered to be associated with SAVAK.”⁶⁹ The fallout of this experience split the Islamists into two opposing factions: those who supported the MKO and those who did not.⁷⁰ This emergent Islamist camp was motivated not only by its opposition to the Pahlavi regime, but increasingly by its opposition to the leftists and the MKO, which they considered equally dubious. Yet, even as these Islamists moved to oppose the Islamic left, their new organizations profited from the experience and knowledge they had gained as members of the MKO.

It was within this charged, divisive atmosphere that the components of MIR began to take shape. For instance, one of the seven founding organizations of MIR, Ommat-e Vahedeh (the Unified Nation group), was established in 1978 by newly-released political prisoners opposed to the MKO. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, noted contemporary filmmaker and original member of Ommat-e Vahedeh, discusses the impetus behind that group’s establishment and MIR’s initial *raison d’etre*:

[I]n 1977 I separated myself from the [MKO]. Earlier, I had a very close relationship with them, but I didn’t say anything for fear of SAVAK’s taking advantage of the situation. But they themselves began spreading rumors about me, so I was forced to speak out against them . . . And when I decided to break with the organization, at first I tried to simply remain silent, but that became impossible. And when I began speaking out against them, of the fifty-six people who were in our section, about twenty-eight broke off from them in sympathy with me . . . [and] they just made their own group. A group which was solely in opposition to the [MKO]. This

⁶⁷ Maziar Behrooz, “The Revolution and the Guerilla Movement” in Stephanie Cronin, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*. London: Routledge, 2004. and Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, 201.

⁶⁸ Behrooz, “Guerilla Movement,” pp.201-02.

⁶⁹ Makhmalbaf interview, p.173.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.173-78.

group later evolved into Ommat-e Vahedeh . . .⁷¹ So when I was released, I was worried about the oppression I had experienced from the [MKO] in prison would be unleashed on the entire populace should they come to power. You might not believe it, but even with the worst conditions that I've observed under the ruling clerics, I'd still prefer their rule a thousand times to that of the Mojahedin. They're Stalinists! The Mojahedin are a catastrophe waiting to happen . . . When I left prison, I joined [MIR]. You see, to prevent the leftists and the [MKO] from imposing their program upon the people, in order to oppose them, all of us grassroots groups began to build organizations that would stand up against them.⁷²

Makhmalbaf's recounting of his falling out with and subsequent rivalry to the MKO is illustrative of the experiences of other top MIR and IRGC activists such as Behzad Nabavi (leader of Ommat-e Vahedeh), Morteza Alviri, and Mohsen Rezaei.⁷³ Other prominent members of the post-revolutionary regime, including IRGC commander Monfared, Abbas Duzduzani (who attended early IRGC leadership meetings), and the future Prime Minister and President of the Islamic Republic, Mohammad Ali Rajai, were also former MKO members who had turned against the left.⁷⁴ Those who moved away from the MKO tended to turn toward the clergy in general and Khomeini in particular for guidance. The split pitted the largely anti-clerical MKO against the more pro-clerical Islamists and created a divide along political, ideological, and religious lines.

In an effort to undermine the left and prevent it from gaining influence in post-revolutionary Iran, MIR self-consciously formed an ideology and identity that were in direct opposition to the MKO. MIR constructed a veneer that appeared more authentically Islamic than the Islamist-Marxist MKO, but retained fixtures—such as the term “Mojahedin”—to challenge the latter's near trademark association with the revolutionary movement.⁷⁵ This type of outward or symbolic challenge to the MKO is perhaps best represented in MIR's official emblem. MIR's emblem can be seen as a visualization of its ideological and political bases. It simultaneously affirms the organization's motivating principles while denouncing those held by the MKO. From the images below (Fig. 3.1), we can see the emblems of both the MKO and MIR,

⁷¹ Ibid., p.173-174.

⁷² Ibid., p.178.

⁷³ Katzman, *Warriors*, pp.31-32. Also, see Mohsen Rezaei's official biography, *Zendegi-e doktor-e Mohsen Reza'i dar yek negah*. www.rezaee.ir (accessed 12 February 2008).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Saidi, *Sazman*, p.79-80. Also, Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, p.211

respectively. Both share graphic similarities. Each includes a quote from the Quran, a clenched fist holding a rifle, a geographical reference, the name of the organization, and the year of its founding. The MKO's emblem, however, includes additional Marxist symbols—the five-pointed star, the anvil (representing the working class), and the sickle (representing the peasantry); an outline of Iran (representing the group's nationalistic agenda); leaves (suggesting a desire for world peace); and a graphical representation of the globe (symbolizing the internationalist struggle).⁷⁶

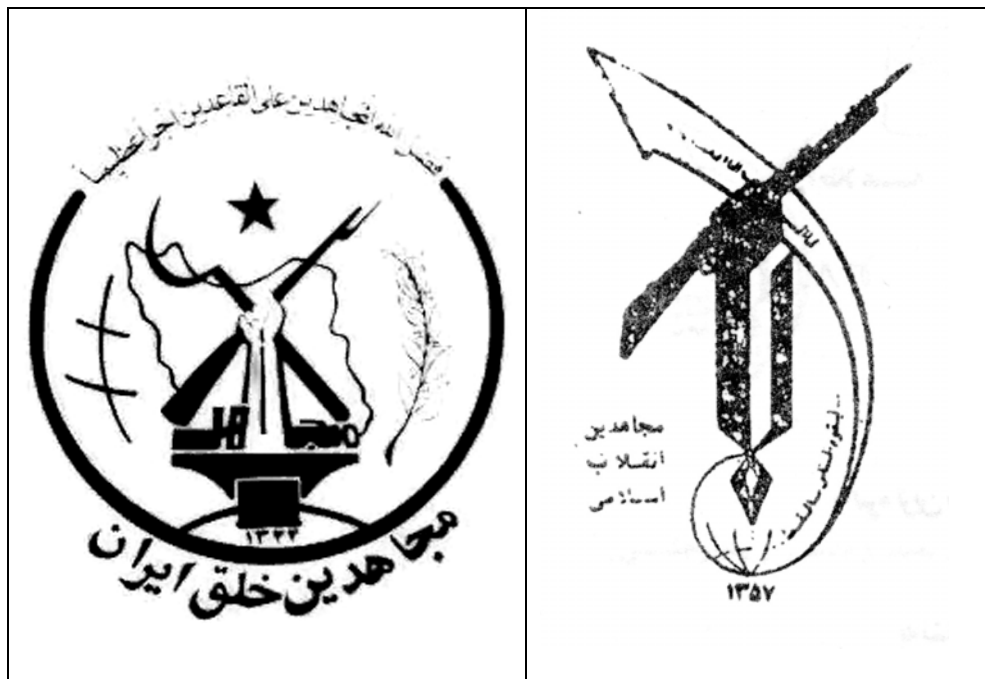


Figure 3.1. MKO and MIR emblems

Most of these symbols are excised from MIR's emblem and are replaced with more explicit Islamic motifs. At the center of the design sits a prominent representation of the Arabic negative article "la," out of which grows a clenched fist holding a rifle.⁷⁷ The Arabic "la" stands for the Muslim proclamation of faith "la ilaha ilallah . . ." ("There is no God but God . . ."), which is also written on the banner in the upper right

⁷⁶ For more on the graphic elements and meanings of the MKO's emblem, see Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, pp.102-103.

⁷⁷ Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi suggest that the usage of the "la" negative article in this form is influenced by Ali Shariati and his publications, which bore the negative article "on the cover of all of his books and published lectures." See, Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, 344.

hand of the emblem. These elements, combined with the Quranic verse at the bottom right hand of the design, are overt testaments to the religiosity of the organization and are employed to counter the MKO's Marxist imagery.⁷⁸ Likewise, MIR replaces an image of Iran with an image of the globe as a way of distancing itself from the nationalistic sentiments of the left, while retaining a similar commitment to internationalism. In a sense, MIR's emblem stripped away what its members found objectionable in the MKO to reveal the religious core of a new brand of Islamic revolutionism. This visual turn not only symbolizes the shifting ideological and religious sentiments of the Islamist revolutionary bloc, but it also forms the graphic template adopted by the IRGC (and later by Lebanese Hizballah).⁷⁹ MIR's emblem can thus be seen as the branding of an emergent anti-leftist, pro-Khomeini faction, which helped form the foundational ideology and religiosity of the IRGC and shape post-revolutionary politics.

Through their rivalry with the MKO and general enmity of the left, MIR members in the IRGC, committees, and elsewhere in the post-revolutionary regime increasingly used their positions to subvert their rivals. The campaign against the left took different forms. Islamist propaganda accused the left of being a front for Western powers, fomenting counterrevolutionary sentiment among ethnic minorities, and of undermining the position of the clergy. The left's vocal support for ethnic minorities and their embrace of "foreign" ideologies provoked much of this sentiment, but it was their advocacy of secularism, or in the case of the MKO, a Shariati-style anti-clerical Islam that threatened much of the clerical establishment. Khomeini continuously attacked the left on this point, even though many of the leftist organizations had publicly voiced their support for him and other senior clerics.

Countering the (New) Opposition

The Khomeinist movement against the left gained momentum after a shadowy terrorist organization began assassinating rumored members of the Revolutionary Council.⁸⁰ The group, known as Forqan, came to the fore after they claimed responsibility for the

⁷⁸ Q: 25:57 "... so that men may stand by justice . . ."

⁷⁹ The IRGC's emblem will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁸⁰ "Le Monde: Antileft Feeling Heightens in Iran," Paris, *Le Monde* in French, 5 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 11 May 1979.

assassination of Maj. Gen. Mohammad Qarani on 20 April 1979;⁸¹ however, it was their assassination of the prominent Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, on 1 May that gained them lasting infamy. Ayatollah Motahhari was a leading ideologue of the revolution, a close ally of Khomeini, and an ardent critic of the left. His writings articulated Islam as a political “ideology” opposed to capitalist materialism and socialist atheism. After Motahhari was assassinated, reports began to emerge linking the murder to Forqan and its motives to be anti-clerical in nature. One report cited an anonymous phone call to an Iranian media organization that claimed Forqan had killed Motahhari for being the suspected “head of the Revolutionary Council” and as part of the group’s greater “struggle against mullahism.”⁸² In response, Khomeini publicly lambasted the left, critics of his clerical camp, and the press for being “traitors” to the revolution and for acting against the will of the people.⁸³ His outspoken criticism of the press, which had already caused the closing of one major Iranian newspaper,⁸⁴ caused another major newspaper (*Kayhan*) to purge its staff of suspected anti-Khomeinists and leftist sympathizers.⁸⁵

A month later, Forqan claimed responsibility for the shooting of another prominent ally of Khomeini, mid-level cleric Hojjat al-Islam Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. This attack, which failed to kill Rafsanjani despite two bullet wounds to the torso, added more vitriol to the wave of anti-leftist activism. The left was again blamed for being behind a plot against the clergy and for being assisted by the U.S. in that effort. Khomeini directly accused the U.S. for being behind the plot, stating “from among the webs of these terrors one [can] see the footsteps of superpowers and international criminals . . . America and the other superpowers must know that they cannot assassinate our revolution.”⁸⁶ However, he also implicated the left in a statement released around the same time, “[n]o individual and no group is allowed to insult the clergy, and if it happens the offenders should be prosecuted and punished by the local revolutionary court.”⁸⁷ The

⁸¹ “Iran: In Brief; Those Responsible for Gharani’s Murder,” *BBCSWB*, 26 April 1979.

⁸² “Khomeini vows deaths will not hold Iran back,” *The Washington Post*, 3 May 1979.

⁸³ “Iranian Rightists Break up Play; Attack Playwright and Audience,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1979.

⁸⁴ “Leading Iranian Newspaper Shuts After Attack by Khomeini,” *The Washington Post*, 13 May 1979

⁸⁵ “Iranian Rightists Break up Play; Attack Playwright and Audience,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1979.

⁸⁶ “Khomeini Blames U.S. for Assault on Aid,” *The Washington Post*, 27 May 1979.

⁸⁷ “Ayatollah, Aid of Khomeini, Shot in Tehran; Moslems, Leftists, Clash at U.S. Embassy,” *The Washington Post*, 26 May 1979.

subtext of this message was not lost on Khomeini's supporters who read it as a condemnation of the left and a religious sanctioning for anti-leftist activism.⁸⁸

The Forqan assassinations lent credence to Khomeini's campaign against the left and gave his forces the legitimacy and sympathy needed to engage in the overt suppression of leftist and democratic organizations. The Guards, the committees, and other unofficial Khomeinist groups led the ground war against these organizations and began to operate more openly and more aggressively against them. Some of the pressure exerted on leftist organizations by Khomeinist forces seemed to have its desired effect. While both the MKO and People's Fada'i had earlier acknowledged Khomeini's position of authority, the latter announced that it had gone so far as to propose changes to its constitution to bring it in line with Khomeini and his faction.⁸⁹ These changes, most of which contradicted the group's Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation, included articles that claimed: the Fada'i would act according to "divine Islamic law, the Koran, and the exalted commandments of Islam"; the Fada'i would support the establishment of an Islamic Republic; the Fada'i would "perform its mission according to the instructions and orders of Imam Khomeyni and his policy"; the Fada'i would "conduct its activities publically and openly and avoid any kind of clandestine actions"; and the Fada'i would "recognize and not dispute the orders of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution."⁹⁰ These were dramatic (if politically motivated and superficial) concessions on the part of the Fada'i. They are not only evidence of Khomeini's political authority, but also speak to the growing influence and status of the Revolutionary Guards as an official arm of that authority.

The move against the left also brought the IRGC to the ethnic (non-Persian) regions of Iran, where leftist influence was strong and where some leftist groups had been active in the organizing of pro-autonomy movements within regional minority

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ In a 4 June interview, MKO leaders Masud Rajavi and Mansur Mansuri articulated their support for Khomeini: "Ayatollah Khomeini is the guide of the revolution and we have a good relationship with him . . . [He is] a guide and a strong uncompromising leader against imperialism." See, "Mujahidin Khalq Leaders on Relations with Authorities, U.S." *An-Nahar al-'Arabi wa ad-Duwali* in Arabic, 4 June 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 8 June 1979.

⁹⁰ "Constitution for Cherkha-ye Feda'i-ye Khalq Proposed," *Kayhan* in Persian, in *FBIS-MEA*, 27 May 1979.

communities.⁹¹ Instead of quelling unrest, the presence of the Guards in these areas and their heavy-handed tactics sparked violent protests from local communities. For example, in early and mid May the IRGC began establishing local units in Khuzestan and Kermanshahan,⁹² provoking a backlash from the local population in both regions.⁹³ In Khuzestan, a leader of the local Arab community specifically blamed the Revolutionary Guards for inciting conflict between local activists and a Guards detachment.⁹⁴

The fighting in Khuzestan mirrored the ethnic unrest that had already erupted between the Guards, regime forces, and the ethnic Turkmen, Baluchi, and Kurdish populations in the northeast, southeast, and western regions of Iran, respectively. While the local populations in these areas blamed the Guards and other Khomeinist elements for initiating the violence, the regime blamed foreign influence and “counterrevolutionaries” for stirring up ethnic and religious tensions that did not previously exist.⁹⁵ The government blamed the left, and singled out the Marxist-Leninist People’s Fadaï for fueling the violence. Prime Minister Bazargan, in a speech to the Revolutionary Guards, denounced the Fadaï for its “treachery” against the revolution and for having a “hand” in all of the incidents of ethnic unrest throughout the country.⁹⁶

Although they had the support of Khomeini and the government to crackdown on leftist organizations, the Revolutionary Guards’ official grounds for doing so was rooted in the government’s efforts of disarming the public and unofficial militias.⁹⁷ As the head

⁹¹ Mahfoozi acknowledges that the Fadaï worked with Turkmen farmers on these issues and helped establish councils to push for land reform. However, he denies that the Fadaï armed the Turkmen. See, Alireza Mahfoozi interview, 8-9.

⁹² “Khomeyni Representatives to Form Guards Corps in Ahvaz,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 10 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 11 May 1979.; “Khuzestan Revolutionary Guardians Corps to be Established,” Tehran, *Keyhan* in Persian, 17 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 5 June 1979.; “Kermanshahan Guards Corps Being Formed,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 17 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 23 May 1979.

⁹³ “Iran Arabs, Khomeini Forces Clash Violently; Arabs Seeking Autonomy Clash Violently with Khomeini Forces,” *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1979.; “Armed Men Attack Kermanshah Revolutionary Court,” Baghdad INA in Arabic, in *FBIS-MEA*, 8 June 1979.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ “Criticism of Baghdad Radio,” Tehran in Arabic for abroad, 2 June 1979, *BBCSWB*, 4 June 1979.

⁹⁶ “Iran Premier Calls Leftists Traitors to Islamic Regime,” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 July 1979.

⁹⁷ The Guards began releasing statements during this period calling on the public to disarm and for citizens to inform the local IRGC of those who refused to turn in their weapons. For example, the newly-established Guards unit of Qazvin released this statement in early July 1979: “It [the IRGC of Qazvin] thereby wishes to inform all those who bear arms, whether they be ordinary individuals or the former city guards, that in the next 48 hours they should hand over their weapons to the staff of the Islamic Revolutionary guards of the city of Qazvin, on Sa’di Avenue, next to Dispensary No.1; otherwise they will be dealt with in

of the disarmament campaign the IRGC continually clashed with organizations and groups that refused to give up their weapons. This included the Islamist-Marxist MKO, whose leadership, in a 4 June interview, proclaimed that so long as “the imperialist interests have not been touched, we will not give up our arms.”⁹⁸ The dispute between the MKO and the post-revolutionary regime over arms led to direct conflict between the Mojahedin and the IRGC. In early July, the Guards training facility in Qom was attacked by armed assailants. While the attackers were not initially known, the MKO was accused of the plot and its local headquarters was raided by the IRGC and its supporters.⁹⁹ The Revolutionary Guards legitimated this raid by claiming they had seized a large stash of weapons belonging to the Mojahedin. Although the MKO protested the actual number of weapons confiscated—suggesting the IRGC had inflated the number for political purposes—it argued that Mojahedin members “only carry weapons to protect [themselves] against plots of imperialism and SAVAK . . .”¹⁰⁰ The MKO also called for talks with the government to discuss the issue of disarmament, suggesting they would abide by Khomeini’s decision on the matter (so long as it was in their favor).¹⁰¹ The public seizure of arms from the MKO’s Qom headquarters emboldened the disarmament efforts of the IRGC. The incident led to a further declaration against armed groups by the regional prosecutor’s office and charged the Revolutionary Guards to “use all of their ability and Islamic decisiveness to disarm, arrest, and detain any person or persons found carrying arms.” The order continued, “[t]he formation of armed groups, except with respect to the aforementioned officials [IRGC, security officials, and the military], is

accordance with the regulations.” See, “Qazvin City Guards Replaced by Revolutionary Guards,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 11 July 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 12 July 1979.

⁹⁸ “Mujahidin Khalq Leaders on Relations with Authorities, U.S.,” Paris *An-Nahar al-Arabi wa ad-Duwali* in Arabic, in *FBIS-MEA*, 8 June 1979.

⁹⁹ “Measures Reported Following Attack on Qom Guards Center,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 7 July 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 12 July 1979.

¹⁰⁰ “Mojahedin-e Khalq Wants Open Talks on Arms-Carrying,” *E’ttelat* in Persian, 27 August 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 6 September 1979.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* Even though the MKO suggested they would abide by Khomeini’s decision, they clearly intended to remain armed. The MKO state “the decision of the imam [sic] and the government is the one by which our organization will ultimately abide especially as we are confident that they will never allow us to remain undefended against the threats of the people’s enemies, imperialism’s helpers, and SAVAK, who have pursued us for years.”

forbidden anywhere and those contravening this order will be regarded as enemies of the revolution and plotters against the Islamic Republic.”¹⁰²

The illegalization of arms gave the IRGC and other official security organizations the legal mandate to pursue the armed militias that were antagonistic (or at least not sufficiently obedient) to Khomeini. Effectively, this meant that the major leftist militias, including the MKO, People’s Fadai, and Tudeh, had become legal targets of the post-revolutionary regime. The government added to the anti-leftist climate by publicly denouncing that camp as “anti-Islamic” and questioning the true intentions of its associated organizations. In his 1 August message to the nation, Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan stated:

Those familiar anti-national and anti-Islamic groups who claim to defend freedom, democracy and support the interests of the masses and security, let us assume that they have good intentions, and they really do support freedom and democracy at the same time as being socialist or Marxist, and that they are not the mercenaries and agents trained and under the command of the foreign enemies of Iran. They too, with the disturbances, problems and anxieties they create and the confusion, sabotage and subversion which takes place, if it were anything like the opposition demonstrated by the Leftist parties or the opposition party against the government of the time in democratic countries, with publicity campaigns, presentation of candidates towards their coming to power, it would be acceptable. They could come and take over the government and if they enjoyed the support of the majority of the people they could act on their plans which would inevitably follow their own principles. But they are not doing that here; they are committing acts of sabotage and subversion, here they are trying to create confusion and shake the foundations of the Government.¹⁰³

Through such public denunciations of the left by Khomeini and the government, the movement against dissent gained increasing public support. The embattled leftist organizations, while still popular among students and the intelligentsia, were losing the ground war to Khomeini. The flowing tide of anti-leftist sentiment and support for Khomeini’s campaign became evident in the wake of a crackdown on the press. A new law passed by the government enabled the shutting down of newspapers critical of the post-revolutionary regime. Soon the offices of Iran’s leading newspaper, *Ayandegan*,

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “Bazargan’s 1st August Message to the Nation,” Tehran Home Service in Persian, 1 August 1979, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 3 August 1979.

were occupied by the Revolutionary Guards and its operations shut down. Foreign correspondents, notably Americans from the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and NBC were also ordered to leave the country.¹⁰⁴ In response, major leftist and democratic organizations—save the MKO which did not participate—organized mass protests in Tehran calling for an end to “censorship.”¹⁰⁵ The protests, which swelled to an estimated 100,000, were met by smaller, but more violent counter-protests led by the pro-Khomeini Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution and overseen by the Revolutionary Guards.¹⁰⁶ The following day, the official offices of the MKO and the People’s Fadaei were attacked by armed Khomeinist gangs chanting “Communism is destroyed! Islam is victorious!”¹⁰⁷ Although the left and democratic opposition were able to display the immense size and passion of their support base, the Khomeinist faction was able to enunciate its political superiority through intimidation and violence.

The Clergy and a New Constitution

The mass protests following the closing of *Ayandegan*, as well as the continuing fighting in the Kurdish regions of western Iran, were an outgrowth of a larger conflict between the Khomeinist camp and the leftist and democratic opposition over the drafting of a constitution for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Beyond the street activism of the Khomeinist militias, committees, and IRGC, the clerically-dominated Islamic Republic Party (IRP) was another front in the post-revolutionary power struggle. As it gained strength, the Khomeinist faction succeeded in pressuring the Provisional Government to include members of the IRP in the cabinet. In late July, Prime Minister Bazargan invited four IRP members into his administration: Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani as Interior Minister, Hashemi Rafsanjani as Deputy Interior Minister, Ali Khamenei as Defense Minister, and Mohammad Javad Bahonar as Minister of Education. This placed clergy in leading positions in both the Revolutionary Council and the Provisional Government, gave Khomeini greater political leverage, and put his supporters in the position to allot more funding for the IRGC and other revolutionary organs (*nehads*). This allowed the IRP—as

¹⁰⁴ *The Associated Press*, 7 August 1979, PM Cycle.

¹⁰⁵ Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, 195.

¹⁰⁶ *The Associated Press*, 13 August 1979, AM Cycle.

¹⁰⁷ *The Associated Press*, 14 August 1979, AM Cycle.

the chief proponent of Khomeini's doctrine of the "guardianship of the jurist"—the wherewithal to push its agenda in all avenues open to the post-revolutionary regime. IRP members also dominated the 11 August election of the "Assembly of Experts"—a publically elected council that would oversee the drafting of the Islamic Republic's constitution—which gave Khomeinists the strongest voice in the ensuing constitutional debates.

With the death of Ayatollah Taleqani in early September the democratic and leftist opposition lost its leading clerical supporter and a chief bulwark to Khomeinist aspirations. Taleqani's absence emboldened Khomeini's political project. Khomeini appointed his trusted ally Ayatollah Montazeri as the new Friday congregational prayer leader for Tehran—an influential position previously held by Taleqani—and charged the Revolutionary Guards with the security detail for these massive ceremonies.¹⁰⁸ Montazeri used the pulpit to articulate both the Khomeinist line and his own revolutionary agenda. Montazeri, like his son Mohammad, represented the radical-internationalist segment of the Khomeinist camp, which strove to bring Iran's revolution to other parts of the Muslim world to combat "global" Zionism and imperialism. In an October interview, Montazeri mentions using his new position as prayer leader to promote these ideas and argues: "[W]e, as Muslims, must be interested in each other's affairs and support one another whenever we can. This is the duty of every Muslim. I would like to assert that we in the Muslim revolution [in Iran] cannot remain calm or sleep on silk while the rest of the Muslim peoples and countries are encountering danger, injustice and oppression—oppression by dictatorships and imperialism."¹⁰⁹

The notion of combating imperialism, in all its forms, was central to the operations of the IRGC. For instance, the local IRGC unit of Abadan declared a day of fasting in solidarity with a hunger strike undertaken by Palestinian prisoners in Israel. In their message to the Palestinians, the Abadan Guards "promise" the destruction of the "illegitimate offspring of world imperialism-zionism [sic]" (Israel) and the "liberation" of

¹⁰⁸ "Revolution Guards to Insure Security at Friday Prayers," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 13 September 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 14 September 1979.

¹⁰⁹ "Montazeri Interviewed on Muslim Solidarity, Gulf ties," Paris *An-Nahar al-'Arabi wa ad-Duwali* in Arabic, 22-28 October 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 29 October 1979.

the Palestinians.¹¹⁰ Fighting imperialist and Zionist “plots” was at the heart of the IRGC’s (unofficial) campaign against leftist organizations and its (official) operations against “counterrevolutionaries” associated with the left. This is especially true for the ongoing conflict between the government’s forces (led by the IRGC) and the forces associated with the leftist Kurdish Democratic Party and the Marxist-Leninist Komala organization. The language used by Iran’s leaders to describe the ethnic unrest led by these leftist groups in Iran’s western Kurdish regions made the terms “imperialist” and “counterrevolutionary” nearly synonymous. While the army described its role in the fighting as “cleansing” the “cities in the west of the country . . . from alien elements and the stooges of imperialism,”¹¹¹ the IRGC assured its readiness “to eradicate all the counterrevolutionary elements . . . in the country—or even outside the country.”¹¹²

The growing voice of the radical-internationalist sector of the Khomeinist faction emphasized the issue of anti-imperialism (and everything it conjured up) along side the idea of the “guardianship” and Islamic government. Anti-imperialist forces across the ideological spectrum were further radicalized when a 1 November meeting between Bazargan and US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brezinski in Algiers became public. The public protests against this meeting, which many feared was a prelude to the return of American influence in Iran, disgraced the Bazargan government. Leftists and Khomeinists were equally outraged by the revelation, but only the latter managed to take full advantage of the situation. Ownership of the anti-imperialism issue—which had been championed by the left—was emphatically placed within the grasp of Khomeini by the 4 November storming of the US embassy. Even though the IRGC had been protecting the US embassy and had resisted previous attacks, its members did not intervene in this attempt and may have helped facilitate it.¹¹³ The Khomeinist student group “Students in the Line of the Imam,” who had planned the attack and succeeded in sacking the building and capturing its employees, may have had contacts with the Guards through the MIR

¹¹⁰ “Abadan Guards Fast in Support of Palestinians,” Abadan Domestic Service in Persian, 15 October 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 17 October 1979.

¹¹¹ “Army Chief Comments,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 3 September 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 4 September 1979.

¹¹² “Guards Commander Outlines Plan for Taking Mahabad,” Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 25 October 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 26 October 1979.

¹¹³ “U.S. Embassy held by Iranian student in bid to get Shah,” *The Globe and Mail*, 5 November 1979.

and Montazeri factions.¹¹⁴ The US embassy takeover and hostage-taking began what sociologist Said Arjomand has called, “Khomeini’s phantasmagorical struggle with the imperialist Satan,” and made fear of a US-led counterrevolution an animating facet of Khomeinist political discourse.¹¹⁵

The embassy takeover, which was partly organized to protest the 1 November Algiers meeting and the Shah’s protection by the US (where he was being allowed to pursue cancer treatment), proved to be the death knell for the Provisional Government. Humiliated and defeated, Bazargan resigned in protest on 6 November and the government fell with him. This left the regime in the hands of the clerically-dominated Revolutionary Council. With the political tide rising in their favor, the Khomeinist faction in the Assembly of Experts succeeded in including the “guardianship” in the draft constitution (article 105) and was able to pass the most controversial articles (107-110) associated with that office.¹¹⁶ The new constitution, which was ratified in a popular referendum on 2-3 December, gave the ruling jurist (now Khomeini) “absolute power without the slightest responsibility.”¹¹⁷ It also made Khomeini the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and IRGC, and gave him the authority to appoint and dismiss the head commanders of each. The democratic opposition looked to senior cleric Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, who had been a leading critic of the constitution and the “guardianship,” to articulate its discontent.¹¹⁸ Despite a short-lived uprising in Shariatmadari’s home province of Azerbaijan by his allied Islamic People’s Republican Party (IPRP)—which was quickly crushed by Khomeinist militants led by the IRGC—leftist and democratic organizations were too weak and divided to challenge the new constitution.¹¹⁹

The events of November and December 1979 have been referred to as the “second Islamic revolution” and a “clerical coup d’etat.”¹²⁰ By exploiting the issue of imperialism and the fear of an American-sponsored counterrevolution, the Khomeinist forces—led by

¹¹⁴ Katzman, *Warriors*, 36-37. Katzman specifically mentions MIR’s Behzad Nabavi and IRGC commander Javad Mansuri as having possible links with this student group.

¹¹⁵ Arjomand, *Turban*, 139.

¹¹⁶ On the constitutional debates and the role played by Khomeinist-aligned clergy during this process, see Bakhsh, *Ayatollahs*, 75-88.

¹¹⁷ Arjomand, *Turban*, 139.

¹¹⁸ Bakhsh, *Ayatollahs*, 89.

¹¹⁹ Arjomand, *Turban*, 139-141.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

Khomeini and his clerical lieutenants in the IRP—became the dominant political force in post-revolutionary Iran. Through their dominance of the Assembly of Experts, the exploitation of the anti-imperialist climate following the US embassy takeover, the fall of the Provisional Government, and the passing of the theocratic constitution, the Khomeinist clergy were now in the position to rewrite the revolution in their own name. If clerics were the leaders of the new state, the Revolutionary Guards were their enforcers. The IRGC led the violent campaigns against dissenting and oppositional forces, and through official patronage by the state, made Khomeini's will the law of the land. The IRGC laid the groundwork for the clerical enterprise of the Islamic Republic and was now in the position to truly guard an *Islamic* revolution.

Conclusion

I argue that the success of the Khomeinist faction in this period was primarily achieved through a social network that combined religious authority with military force. This network had three main components: 1) Ayatollah Khomeini as leader and moral authority of the revolution; 2) the clerical leaders of the Islamic Republic Party; 3) the IRGC and other pro-Khomeini militias. Khomeini's popular standing provided the legitimacy needed for the clerical leaders of the IRP to speak and act on behalf of the broader Islamic movement. This enabled clerics to advance the Khomeinist ideological line within both state institutions (i.e., the Provisional Government and Assembly of Experts) and within revolutionary organs (i.e., the Revolutionary Council, Guards, Committees, and Courts). The ability of Khomeinist clergy to influence all major sectors of the state also helped stymie the work of their democratic rivals who dominated the ranks of the Provisional Government. By working against the moderate forces in government and the leftist militias outside of it, the Khomeinist clergy limited the viability of political power in the early post-revolutionary period.

With the government's political influence made ineffectual by the violent coercion of the Khomeinist revolutionary organizations, the economic resources available to the government were also marginalized. This is especially evident in regard to military power. While the Provisional Government directed the majority of its defense funds toward the state military and security forces, Khomeinist leaders were able to undermine

these institutions by effectively mobilizing alternative martial resources on ideological grounds. This enabled the poorly-funded and ill-equipped IRGC and committees, and other allied militias to counter state military institutions both directly (through the violent purging of these institutions) and indirectly (by fostering public mistrust of these institutions based on their ties to the previous regime). In this way, clerical leaders were instrumental in the mobilization and deployment of coercive violence against their ideological rivals. The IRGC, as a nexus between Khomeinist clergy and military power, were most effective in translating the end-game of Khomeinist ideology into acts of coercion and violence. Without the organization of coercion by military organizations, the political project of the Khomeinist clergy would not have succeeded. And without the mobilization of ideological authority, the revolutionary forces would not have had the *legitimacy* to act coercively against democratic and leftist influence. Thus, although the Khomeinist faction profited from the infighting of their rivals and the political missteps of the government, it was primarily an ideological-military network, and the exercise of legitimated violent coercion, that facilitated its rise in the early post-revolution.

CHAPTER IV

Exporting the Revolution: The Rise and Decline of the Khomeinist Left (1980–1989)

If our revolution does not have an internationalist and aggressive viewpoint the enemies of Islam will once again enslave us culturally and politically.¹

—Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (1980)

It is not that a revolution is nothing if it is not international, but it is certainly bound to be a lot less than the makers of the revolution intended. Revolutionaries are therefore forced to be internationalist as well as cautious because of the external pressures that post-revolutionary transformation invites.²

—Fred Halliday

Like those who preceded them, whether in France in the late eighteenth century or in Cuba in the mid-twentieth, Iran's revolutionaries shared a belief that their victory would lead to the success of other likeminded movements across the globe. This belief stemmed as much from the hope produced by their triumph as from the thought that inspired their activism. Drawing from the Third Worldism of Ali Shariati to the pan-Islamic sentiments of Ayatollah Khomeini, a wide spectrum of Iranian revolutionaries accepted (at least in spirit) the notion that Iran bore some responsibility to assist its oppressed brethren in the Islamic and Third Worlds. Moreover, Iranian activists recognized that Iran's lot under the Pahlavi regime was the result of larger international forces (e.g., imperialism, Zionism, or capitalism), the destruction of which would require a more robust and successful global revolutionary movement. To this end, some of the Islamic Republic's leaders adopted a

¹ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, 19 March 1980, p. 32.

² Fred Halliday, "Three Concepts of Internationalism," *International Affairs*, vol. 64, no.2 (Spring 1988), pp. 187-198.

radical or revolutionary approach to internationalism, which primarily understood foreign relations as the management of conflict rather than cooperation.

Although there are varying definitions of internationalism, political scientist Fred Halliday offers a typology that divides this concept into three categories: liberal, hegemonic, and revolutionary. Liberal internationalism (e.g., international commerce, or the United Nations), Halliday suggests, is a “belief that independent societies and autonomous individuals” can, through interaction and cooperation, “evolve toward common purposes” such as “peace and prosperity.” Hegemonic internationalism (e.g., European imperialism) sees this integration taking place through “asymmetrical” and “unequal terms,” though still considers such integration desirable and “good.” Revolutionary internationalism, on the other hand, views international relations through the lens of *conflict*.³ A common characteristic of this type of revolutionary or “radical” internationalism is militaristic intervention, or the collaboration between revolutionary states and like-minded militant groups as a means of impacting the domestic affairs of foreign states. This conception of intervention is rooted in both the ideology and the acknowledgement of revolutionary states that international factors shape and to a large degree determine the success of a revolution. Militaristic intervention is seen as a way of preserving a revolution, if not expanding it. Yet the survival of revolutionary states is equally dependent on a cautious navigation of international relations such that a revolutionary state will not offer assistance to such a degree as to prejudice its own existence. Thus, while revolutionary states may be animated by an interventionist spirit, their ultimate need for international cooperation and support leads to the tempering of interventionist ambition.⁴

In this chapter I link the idea of interventionism with the concept of “exporting the revolution” promoted by Iranian leaders and the IRGC through the 1980s. This concept provided to a considerable degree the ideological and moral bases for Iranian involvement in foreign countries—particularly in Lebanon, which will serve as this chapter’s primary example. However, the experiences of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) gradually changed how this concept was understood, and by the end of the war

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

internationalist rhetoric no longer mandated militaristic intervention. This change in thinking coincided with growing factionalism within the Khomeinist movement. Although internal division stemmed from a number of issues, including disagreements on economic and social policy, the issue of foreign intervention played a central role in dividing Iran's post-revolutionary leadership. This led to an internal shift in the IRGC, with the top commanders moving closer to Iran's more pragmatic and conservative leaders (Rafsanjani and Khamenei) and distancing the organization from its left-leaning revolutionary base. As the IRGC was the main instrument for both promoting and conducting interventionist policies, the disinclination of its head commanders toward military interventionism limited (but did not eliminate) foreign involvement. To this end, IRGC leaders supported the Islamic Republic's crackdown on pro-intervention radicals near the end of the war and helped undermine this faction by supporting the state's moves against prominent radical activists and by purging their supporters from IRGC ranks. By the end of the war, the growing conservatism of IRGC leadership and the consequent marginalization of its left-leaning, interventionist-minded membership led to the organization's increasingly close association with conservative politics and policies.

Roots and Early Expressions of Revolutionary Internationalism

Outside of the Marxist and Maoist organizations, which shared a strong commitment to the socialism-imbued Third Worldist movement, left-leaning elements within Iran's Khomeinist movement were perhaps the most vocal proponents of revolutionary internationalism.⁵ Much of this sentiment focused on the plight of the Palestinians, whether in the Occupied Territories or in Lebanon, and that of Muslim communities elsewhere (such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, or the Philippines). Outside of the Bazargan cabinet, which publically rejected the idea of foreign intervention,⁶ many Iranian leaders issued general calls to "export the revolution."⁷ However, specific calls for foreign

⁵ On the ideological and political contours of Third Worldism, and its relationship to socialism, see: Mark T. Berger, "After the Third World? History, destiny and the fate of Third Worldism," *Third World Quarterly*. Vol.25, no.1, 2004.

⁶ "Foreign Minister Denies Iran Seeks to Export Revolution," *The Washington Post*, 4 October 1979.

⁷ For instance, after taking office as president, Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr proclaimed: "Our revolution will not win if it is not exported . . . We are going to create a new order in which deprived people will not always be

intervention generally followed the particular political agendas of the individuals making them. For instance, Ayatollah Sadeq Rohani, who was close to Bahrain's Shiite resistance, called for Iran to annex Bahrain if the ruling Sunni Al-Khalifa family did not become an Islamic republic in the Iran model or if the Shiite majority could not topple the regime (presumably after whichever one failed to materialize first).⁸ Despite Rohani's staunch support for Iran's coreligionists in Bahrain, his comments elicited harsh rebukes from both Iranian government officials and leading radicals like Mohammad Montazeri, who told the Kuwaiti state press that Rohani did not represent the regime and was actually a CIA agent.⁹

The reasons for Montazeri's complete rejection of Rohani's politics were perhaps many, yet they were at least partially rooted in Montazeri's own pet project: mobilizing support for the Palestinians in Lebanon. Like many leaders and officials of the Islamic Republic, Montazeri had spent considerable time in Lebanon working and fighting with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and other Palestinian and Shiite factions before the revolution.¹⁰ Montazeri had established a strong network in Lebanon and actively lobbied for Iran to take a leading role in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this way, Montazeri's disagreement with Rohani had more to do with the placement of priorities than ideology, and was connected to the former's efforts in marshalling support for the Palestinian resistance among key Arab regimes—regimes such as Kuwait that were alarmed by Rohani's expansionist rhetoric. Like Rohani, however, Montazeri's activism brought him into conflict with Iranian officials. At one point, for instance, Montazeri and a group of several hundred supporters occupied an airport for fifteen days and eventually staged a sit-in at the Foreign Ministry building in protest over the government's refusal to let them fly to Lebanon to fight alongside the Palestinians.¹¹

deprived and oppressors will not always be oppressors." See, "Export revolution, Iran president urges," *The Globe and Mail*, 5 February 1980.

⁸ "Ambassador to Kuwait on Bahrain, Rohani, PLO," Kuwait KUNA in Arabic, 3 October 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, 4 October 1979.

⁹ "Montazeri son accuses Rohani of being CIA agent," Kuwait KUNA in Arabic, 18 July 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, 19 July 1979

¹⁰ Much of Montazeri's pre-revolutionary career in Lebanon was followed by Iranian intelligence and preserved in numerous SAVAK documents. See, *Shahid Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Montazeri*. Tehran: Markaz-e Barresi-e Asnad-e Tarikhi-e Vezarat-e Ettela'at, 2006/2007.

¹¹ "Foreign Ministry protest by would be Lebanon fighters reported," Tehran *Ettela'at* in Persian, 15 December 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, December 1979. Prior to this incident, Iranian authorities issued a warrant for

Though Montazeri ultimately succeeded in transporting some of these volunteers to Lebanon,¹² his approach to foreign intervention was considered extreme and uncompromising by revolutionary officials. Montazeri's father, Ayatollah Hosayn-Ali Montazeri, famously apologized for his son in a public letter blaming the latter's actions on a psychological disorder he developed due to the torture he suffered while imprisoned under the Pahlavi regime.¹³ The Ayatollah's apology and criticism of his "extremely revolutionary-minded" son (*khayli enqelabi fekr mi-kard*) was seen as significant due to the elder's own outspoken support for "exporting the revolution."¹⁴ Indeed, along with his son, Ayatollah Montazeri was seen as a leading proponent of revolutionary internationalism within the Khomeinist faction. Unlike other activists, Ayatollah Montazeri's statements on the subject also carried the weight of a senior religious authority. Thus, his status and credentials enabled the Ayatollah to become the chief ideologue for interventionism in the Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Montazeri's views on interventionism are rooted in his conception of fundamental Muslim ethics. For Montazeri, Muslims above all have a duty to help one another. He suggests that just as Islam is imbued with a political nature, the responsibility Muslims have for one another's welfare likewise extends into the arena of global politics.¹⁵ It is here that Montazeri locates Iran's duty to assist foreign Muslims. Speaking to a Jerusalem Day celebration in Tehran, Montazeri outlines his conception of foreign assistance:

Assistance is not only verbal. One day at the orders of our great leader (Khomeini) we declared a day as Jerusalem Day. It meant that all Muslims should stand up with their thoughts directed at Jerusalem. But it is not sufficient that we merely come out with some slogans on that particular day in favor of Jerusalem. Words are the prerequisites of deeds. Do you know what is happening to the Muslims in the south of Lebanon? Do you

Montazeri's arrest after he and 500 supporters attempted to seize an aircraft to fly to Libya for that country's anniversary celebration. See, "Montazeri interviewed on Muslim solidarity, Gulf ties," *Paris An-Nahar wa Ad-Duwalli* in Arabic, 22-28 October 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, 29 October 1979; and, "'Volunteer' force eyeing Lebanon," *The Globe and Mail*, 5 December 1979.

¹² "Iranian volunteers seen in Lebanon," *The Globe and Mail*, 5 January 1980.

¹³ "Ayatollah Montazeri's Statement on his Son," Tehran Home Service in Persian, 18 September 1979, *BBCSWB*, 20 September 1979.

¹⁴ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Hosayn-Ali Montazeri*. Los Angeles: Ketab Corp, 2001, p. 249.

¹⁵ "Ayatollah Montazeri notes political nature of Islam," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 28 September 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, 1 October 1979.

know what is happening to the Palestinian refugees? Do you know what problems are being faced by your Muslim brothers in Afghanistan? Are you aware of the condition of 6 million Muslims in the Philippines? Are we going to their assistance? Or are we going to jeopardize their interests instead of assisting them? These are our duties. Jerusalem Day [is] only a slogan which [is] to be followed by deeds.¹⁶

Statements such as this did little to distinguish Ayatollah Montazeri's form of internationalism from the interventionist activism of his son or Ayatollah Rohani. Further, government officials, and later Ayatollah Khomeini, made clear that Iran's calls for "exporting the revolution" did not suggest any intentions of physical or martial intervention in foreign countries.¹⁷ Montazeri was thus forced to qualify his thoughts. An example of this is found in an exchange between Montazeri and an Arab journalist. When asked by the journalist how support for foreign liberation movements was possible "without constituting interference in the affairs of other states," Montazeri replied that support for liberation movements was an "Islamic task" and "the duty of all Muslims," adding:

Take our brother Muslim Lebanese and Palestinian peoples, for example; we must support them with everything we have and not be content with mere slogans. The funds and weapons we have must be made available to our sons and brothers there. . . I would like to reassert that we in the Muslim revolution cannot remain calm or sleep on silk while the rest of the Muslim peoples and countries are encouraging danger, injustice, and oppression . . . by dictatorships and imperialism. What we seek to do does not constitute interference in other countries' internal affairs. We are acting in accordance with the Koranic verse: 'The believers, men and women, are protectors of one another; they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil.' Geography does not exist here, as you can see. You Muslims should not ask us to read the verse thus: 'The believers, men and women, in *Iran* . . .'¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ On this point, Khomeini said: "When we say we want to export our revolution, this is what we have in mind, this is what we want to export: we want to export the same spirituality which has emerged in Iran . . . We do not want to draw our swords and take our guns and attack . . . We want to export our revolution, our cultural revolution and our Islamic revolution to all Islamic countries. Once this revolution is exported, wherever it is exported, it will solve problems. What you must first do is to awaken your peoples [as Iran has done in] its revolution." See, "Khomeyni addresses representatives of liberation movements," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 9 August 1980, *FBIS-MEA*, 11 August 1980.

¹⁸ Emphasis added. "Montazeri interviewed on Muslim solidarity, Gulf ties," Paris *An-Nahar wa Ad-Duwali* in Arabic, 22-28 October 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, 29 October 1979.

Although Montazeri does not call for outright military involvement in foreign countries—at least not to the effect of either his son or Rohani—his conception of “exporting the revolution” certainly envisions an interventionist role for Iran. The distinction between material intervention and non-material (e.g., moral or spiritual) intervention, however, would continue to be made by Iranian officials throughout the decade. While Montazeri’s stated views changed near the end of the Iraq war, his calls for intervention were what drove the internationalist efforts of the IRGC and Iran’s Foreign Ministry through much of the 1980s.

The Iraq Conflict and an Emergent Conservatism

On 22 September 1980, Iraqi forces began a full-scale invasion of Iran.¹⁹ The main thrust of the invasion aimed at capturing Iraqi-claimed land on Iran’s side of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and parts of Iran’s oil-rich southwest province of Khuzestan. Iraq’s superior military technology and coordination proved disastrous to Iranian defenses, which were already in the midst of the Khomeinist-led purges that had decimated the regular military’s officer corps and destroyed its institutional cohesion. Despite stalwart Iranian resistance, the Iraqi military was able to capture key positions inside Iranian territory, including the strategically important city of Khorramshahr. Through the next several months, Iraqi forces continued to lay siege to southern Iranian cities, especially Abadan and Dezful, and were able to strengthen their positions on the Iranian side of the Shatt al-Arab.

The defeats suffered by Iranian forces exasperated the domestic political crisis in Iran. As commander-in-chief, President Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr was held responsible for a failed military strategy.²⁰ This, combined with his already antagonistic relationship with

¹⁹ A sizeable body of literature has been produced on the Iran-Iraq war. For a detailed narrative of the conflict, see Dilip Hiro *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*. New York: Routledge, 1991. For more analytic and comparative studies of the war, see Majid Khadduri, *The Gulf War: The Origins and Implications of the Iraq-Iran Conflict*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988; Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman, *War and Peace in the Gulf*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991; and Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1988. For a brief examination of the Iran-Iraq conflict in the context of modern warfare in the Middle East see, Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993.

²⁰ President Bani-Sadr adopted a mostly conventional strategy in confronting Iraqi belligerents. His influence was strong in the regular armed forces but did not penetrate the command of the Revolutionary Guards, which remained closely aligned with the clerical leaders of the IRP and Prime Minister

the IRP and Khomeinist bloc, led to his impeachment in June 1981. The fall of Bani-Sadr paralleled a period of open resistance to the Khomeinist government by leftist organizations. The fighting between the IRP-aligned forces led by the IRGC and the oppositionists resulted in thousands of casualties. As opposition forces suffered severe losses in the fighting, the MKO initiated a series of suicide bombings and assassinations that targeted the clerical leadership—a vigorous campaign that continued through 1982.²¹ The MKO, which had suffered the greatest losses of the opposition, was accused of (though denied) bombing the IRP headquarters on 28 June, which resulted in 73 dead, including party secretary Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and the leading advocate for revolutionary internationalism, Mohammad Montazeri. Less than two months later, another bombing killed IRP leaders Ali Rajai and Hojjat al-Islam Javad Bahonar—then the acting President and Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic, respectively.

With the impeachment of Bani-Sadr, the IRP and its associates took power of the three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial. This enabled clerical leaders the control and cooperation needed to establish a coherent defense strategy, which included a more central role for the IRGC and its commanders. In four major offenses from September 1981 through May 1982, the combined Iranian armed forces were able to gradually break Iraqi lines, retake Iranian territory (including Khorramshahr), and force an Iraqi retreat. With Saddam's aspirations of taking the oil-rich sectors of Khuzestan no longer feasible, he returned to his original stated objective of reclaiming Iraqi rights over the Shatt al-Arab and reconfiguring the southern border with Iran. This turn of fortunes, however, emboldened Iranian leaders and the Iranian military who now felt they had the upper-hand in the war with Iraq.²²

The Iraq conflict caused an internal struggle within the Khomeinist faction. While the war engendered a sense of patriotism in Iranian society that lent support to the regime and its clerical leaders, differing political values within the broad ruling coalition began to surface. Such diverging trends had an impact on the IRGC, whose leadership began to forge an even firmer relationship with the IRP and more explicitly identified their

Mohammad Ali Rajai. Bani-Sadr charged the regular military with battling Iraqi forces in the countryside, which left the IRGC to defend Iranian cities. See, Chubin and Tripp, *Iran and Iraq*, 26-30; and Hiro, *Longest War*, 47-52.

²¹ Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, 220-22.

²² Hiro, *Longest War*, 68-69.

organization with clerical rule.²³ A political alliance with the clergy and a more conservative approach toward policy were largely behind IRGC head commander Mohsen Rezai's resignation from the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution organization (of which he was a founding member). Although MIR members continued to hold prominent roles in government, some MIR leaders began to slowly distance themselves from the growing conservatism of the IRP and its clerical cadre. MIR and other activist factions, including those aligned with Ayatollah Montazeri, continued to advocate revolutionary ideals in the areas of social, economic, and foreign policy; however, the IRP (now under the guidance of President Ali Khamenei and Majles Speaker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani) had begun moving away from these areas of revolutionary change in order to focus on Iran's immediate domestic concerns and the war with Iraq.²⁴

The factors that contributed to Rezai's departure from MIR are detailed in a September 1981 letter of resignation.²⁵ Although Rezai claims that his responsibilities as IRGC commander and his role in the war effort are partly behind his resignation, he also expresses dissatisfaction with MIR's leadership and politics. Rezai considers MIR's political independence to be contrary to the needs of the regime. "Government organs" (such as the IRGC, committees, or Construction Jihad), Rezai suggests, are committed to serving the needs of the state, whereas "independent" groups (such as MIR) are more guided by self-interest. In this way, Rezai accuses MIR of promoting its own interests over those of the government and blames its political activism for causing "discord in the line of the Imam." Rezai also questions MIR's commitment to religious leadership, suggesting that its politics and "organizational zeal" (*ta'assob-e sazmani*) are tantamount to a disregard for the will of the clergy. This, he emphasizes, is the organization's major failing, insisting: "leadership of the revolution must be in the hands of the clergy [*rohaniyyat*] and religious authorities [*marja'iyat*]." ²⁶

In order to bring MIR back in line, Rezai offers a number of suggestions. First, MIR should "discontinue its political activities and distribute its members among

²³ For instance, at an IRGC seminar in Shiraz a resolution was passed that proclaimed "unquestioning support for the velayat-e faqih," the clergy, and Ayatollah Khomeini. "Resolution passed by Shiraz Revolution Guards," Shiraz regional in Persian, 21 February 1981, in *BBCSWB*, 25 February 1981.

²⁴ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 47-50.

²⁵ The Persian text of Mohsen Rezai's resignation letter as well as a facsimile of the hand-written letter can be found in Saidi, *Sazman*, 137-40, and 294-96 for the facsimile.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 137-40.

governmental organs.” It should “promptly form a united Islamic front with the Islamic Republic Party” and resolve any ideological (i.e. political) contradiction with the clergy. MIR should also provide a “greater role for the Imam’s representative” to the organization and allow the clergy (through its representative) to “determine the political line of the organization.” Finally, MIR should recognize the “proper stance toward . . . the clergy” and strengthen the “political and social role” of these religious leaders.²⁷

Through his resignation letter, Rezai is advocating Khomeinist unity for the sake of domestic stability in a time of war and is arguing against any political activism that runs contrary to the policies laid down by Khomeini and the IRP. As the leader of the Revolutionary Guards, Rezai is most concerned with fighting the war against Iraq, and sees this conflict—and not domestic or unrelated foreign issues—as the nation’s paramount concern. He sees independent political action and the promotion of policies that run counter to the increasingly conservative positions of government-aligned clergy to be a threat to the regime’s existence. In this way, Rezai signals a clear break between the IRGC and MIR along political lines and on the role of clerical political authority. His letter represents the growing conservatism of Iran’s leadership and its revolutionary institutions, which sought to dampen revolutionary zeal (*ta’assob*)—a zeal that called for social justice and an uncompromising internationalist foreign policy—and focus domestic resources toward combating Iraqi aggression.²⁸

Battling Baathists All the Way to Jerusalem

The success of the spring 1982 offensives filled Iran’s political and military sectors with confidence. The victories served to simultaneously justify the moral superiority of the Islamic revolution, the ideological strength of its forces, and the asymmetrical tactics of the Revolutionary Guards. Iran’s Supreme Defense Council—a seven member board appointed by Khomeini consisting of political and military leaders charged with directing war policy—and commanders of its armed forces became not only convinced of their capacity to defend Iranian territory, but also in their ability to wage war. A loose

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ For the political divide between the conservative and radical-revolutionary factions during this period, see Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 50-67.

alignment of these hawkish leaders argued that Iran should parlay its successful military operations into a counter-invasion of Iraq.²⁹ The result, Iran's counter-invasion of Iraq, ushered in a new stage in the war. Through the next six years, Iran's offensives were met with occasional but limited success. Despite some victories inside Iraq, the realities of occupying and holding territory against the galvanized and better equipped Iraqi defenses proved too formidable for Iran's armed forces to overcome. Iraqi forces (backed in part by the US, France, and Arab Gulf states), now in the position of defending their cities and territory, effectively prevented Iran from realizing its stated goals of igniting an Islamic revolution in Iraq and overthrowing the Baathist regime.

The self-assurance that drove Iran's war policy in Iraq also inspired extraterritorial ambitions. Iran's leaders framed the Iraq war as one front in the Islamic world's larger struggle against imperialist and Zionist influence. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982—and the ongoing Soviet conflict in Afghanistan—supported this line of thinking. Although it had long been part of Khomeinist rhetoric, support for the Palestinian cause became a central theme in the wartime mission promoted by the Revolutionary Guards. Before Iran's counter-invasion in 1982, the Revolutionary Guards called for the establishment of a multi-national Muslim force to liberate the holy city. The idea for this force, called the "Jerusalem Army" (*sepah-e qods*), arose from a meeting of foreign Islamic organizations in Iran in 1981.³⁰ Regarding this force, the IRGC announced:

Now, the Iranian nation eagerly awaits the establishment of the Jerusalem Army. The authorities of the revolution and especially the Foreign Ministry desire that this problem will be placed at the front of our problems so that, as Ayatollah Montazeri once said, we are going to dear Jerusalem and from there we will liberate the forests [*jangal*] from the arrogant criminals. And if the Islamic Republic through radio and television propagates the [the idea of] establishing the Jerusalem Army throughout the Islamic world—in spite of Zionist plots—millions of Muslims will be ready to liberate Jerusalem.³¹

²⁹ Hiro, *Longest War*, 86-87.

³⁰ This commitment appears in the IRGC's first official charter. *Payam-e Enqelab*. no. 47, 12 December 1981, p.2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Referencing Ayatollah Montazeri's calls for exporting the Islamic revolution, the IRGC claimed that the liberation of Jerusalem was its "task before all tasks," but argued that Saddam Hussein's invasion had blocked its "assault" (*hamleh*) on the holy city. The IRGC further suggested that the "greater victory" of delivering Jerusalem from Israeli occupation could only be achieved after the "lesser victory" of defeating Saddam Hussein.³² Thus, Iraq became seen as both the literal and figurative gateway to Jerusalem and the first step towards the ultimate emancipation of Muslim societies. The IRGC employed the idea of liberating Jerusalem in an effort to inspire (and perhaps appease) its rank-and-file, who embraced interventionist ambitions more wholeheartedly than the organization's conservative top command. In this manner, the underlying conservatism of Mohsen Rezai and Iran's Supreme Defense Council is evident in the priority given to the Iraq war in the "greater" quest for Jerusalem. For, only after the war with Iraq is won can Iran begin its "assault" on Israel. The longer the war went on, however, the more distant the prospect of liberating Jerusalem grew and the more hollow the cheering of such slogans became.

Exporting the Revolution: the Case of Lebanon

Despite the IRGC's implicit Iraq-first policy, factions within the organization were heavily involved in the political push to expand the revolution abroad. Since its inception, the IRGC had been a vocal proponent of revolutionary internationalism. As the organization claimed before the war: "We will export our revolution throughout the world. As our revolution is Islamic, the struggle will continue until the call of *'There is no God but God . . .'*' echoes around the globe."³³ The organization initially conceived its role in this effort as protecting foreign "liberation movements and the pursuit of the rights of the oppressed," and held this charge as one its official responsibilities (*vazayef*) contained in its organizational charter.³⁴ At the heart of the Guards' foreign efforts was Ayatollah Montazeri, whose religious authority afforded legitimacy to those who supported a more aggressive foreign policy. Montazeri also had a strong support base

³² Ibid.

³³ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 5, April 1980, p.39.

³⁴ This duty is listed in the IRGC's first official charter, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, March 1980, p.37.

within the IRGC and helped foster clerical oversight and collaboration in the organization.³⁵ His patronage led to the creation of the IRGC's Office of Liberation Movements (OLM), which was to translate the Ayatollah's vision into political, religious, and military operations outside of Iran. To this end, the OLM—initially led by Mohammad Montazeri until his death in June 1981 and later by Mehdi Hashemi—announced that its primary mission was to develop contacts between the Guards and outside Muslim organizations that were “fighting for freedom from the servitude and fetters of Western and Eastern imperialism and global Zionism.”³⁶ The office's scope of operations was conceptually wide; however, the majority of its efforts were devoted to expanding Iranian influence in Lebanon, and to a lesser extent, Afghanistan.³⁷

The establishment of OLM made foreign operations an actual (and not simply rhetorical) part of the IRGC's mandate. More so than any other conflict, the ongoing civil war in Lebanon and the Israeli occupation of that country provided the IRGC with an opportunity to directly work toward its strategic and moral goal of liberating Jerusalem. Israel's aggression not only further motivated the internationalist-minded cadre into action, it also served to temporarily mobilize support for foreign intervention among Iran's more conservative civilian and military leaders. Indeed, a day after the Israeli invasion the IRGC Central Headquarters and the Joint Staff of the armed forces issued a statement stating that Iran would send soldiers to Lebanon to “engage in [a] face-to-face battle against Israel, the primary enemy of Islam and of the Muslims.” The statement added:

The self-sacrificing members of the Islamic revolution guards corps, the mobilization [units] of the guards crops and the brave fighters of the

³⁵ After a meeting with Ayatollah Montazeri in Qom, IRGC Commander Mohsen Rezai said: “it has been arranged that the ideological section of the corps be supervised by a canonist [Shiite cleric], who in addition to having the ideal religious qualifications should have perfect knowledge of current political and revolutionary issues.” “The Revolution Guards in Iran,” Tehran Home Service, 29 October 1981, *BBCSWB*, 31 October 1981.

³⁶ “Iran revolution guards’ ‘liberation movements unit,’” *BBCSWB*, 6 February 1981.

³⁷ The IRGC developed extensive ties with several different Shiite militant groups in Afghanistan. However, factionalism and a lack of organization within the Afghani groups limited Iran's impact in that country. For Iran's involvement in this regard, see Nimatullah Ibrahim, “The Failure of a Clerical Proto-State: Hazarajat, 1979-1984,” Working Paper Series Number 2, Crisis States Research Center, London: Destin LSE, 2006. Also, Montazeri's and the IRGC's roles in assisting Afghan Mojahedin organizations are discussed in the confessions of Sayed Ebrahim, a member of the Afghani Sazman-e Fedayan-e Islam, see “Confession by Captured Insurgent Trained in Iran,” Kabul home service, 17 March 1985, *BBCSWB*, 30 March 1985.

armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran who are engaged in unceasing battle against the criminal Ba'thist regime, will, by expanding these fronts, fight against that regime's collaborator, the primary enemy of the Muslims, thereby engaging in unceasing face-to-face battle with world imperialism.³⁸

Soon after, Iranian president Ali Khamenei announced that the IRGC had begun to train fighters to send to Lebanon, arguing:

To us, there is no difference between the fronts in the south of Iran and in south Lebanon . . . We are prepared to put our facilities and necessary training at the disposal of all the Muslims who are prepared to fight against the Zionist regime. We believe that victory will belong to the Muslims, and to those who are on the side of truth.³⁹

By the end of June, over 1000 Revolutionary Guards were reported to have landed in Syria for operations in Lebanon.⁴⁰

As mentioned earlier, Iranian activists had had a long relationship with their Palestinian and Shiite counterparts in Lebanon.⁴¹ Although many of Iran's top leaders had spent time in Lebanon prior to the revolution, two main networks of Iranian activism in that country can be indentified.⁴² The first centered on Mustafa Chamran and the Amal militia he helped organize among the followers of the Iranian cleric Musa al-Sadr in southern Lebanon.⁴³ Musa al-Sadr and Chamran began Amal in an effort to give a greater political voice to the historically disenfranchised Lebanese Shiite community. Through the 1960s, Shiites in Lebanon were the poorest and least powerful religious community in Lebanon. Owing to the confessional system of government designed for Lebanon by French imperial powers after WWI, political, economic, and military power was divided along confessional lines. The disputed 1932 census found that Shiites were Lebanon's

³⁸ "Iranian Military to Fight for Lebanon," Tehran home service, 7 June 1982, *BBCSWB*, 9 June 1982.

³⁹ "Iran: In Brief; Khameneh'i on training and help for Lebanon," Tehran home service, 17 June 1982 *BBCSWB*, 19 June 1982.

⁴⁰ Other reports put this number at around 1500. "Iran's Guards Rally to Beirut." *Newsweek*, 28 June 1982.

⁴¹ For an overview of Iranian-Lebanese interaction during this period see, H.E. Chehabi ed., *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the last 500 years*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006, pp. 180-230. Also see, Haleh Vazeri, "Iran's Involvement in Lebanon: Polarization and Radicalization of Militant Islamic Movements," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 16, no. 2, Winter 1992.

⁴² Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 94-99.

⁴³ Much of Chamran's experience in Lebanon (including his relationship to Musa al-Sadr and the establishment of Amal) has been posthumously compiled from his writings, interviews, and speeches. See, for instance, Mostafa Chamran, *Lobnan*. [Tehran?]: Bonyad-e Shahid-e Chamran, 1983. On Chamran's impact on the Shiite community of southern Lebanon, see: Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, 89-118.

third largest religious community, following the Sunnis and Maronite Christians, who were second and first respectively. With Maronites and Sunnis at the top of power and influence in the new nation, the Shiite community was left to languish. By the time the Iranian-born cleric Musa al-Sadr arrived in 1960 to his ancestral home of southern Lebanon as the new religious judge of the southern city of Tyre, he found a largely impoverished rural community of village farmers and share croppers. In time, Sadr's project became one of uniting the Shiite masses into a viable political movement. With the help Chamran—a devoted revolutionary and American-trained scientist—Sadr succeeded in awakening the political spirit of Lebanese Shiites, which enabled the southern Lebanese community to confront political injustices imposed on them by both the Lebanese central government and the Palestinian resistance fighters who had come to southern Lebanon following the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan in 1970.⁴⁴ Though the Shiite movement in Lebanon struggled in the mid-1970s due to the outbreak of civil war in 1975-76, it was reignited by al-Sadr's disappearance in 1978 and by the Iranian revolution in 1979.⁴⁵ After the revolution, Chamran retained close ties with Amal leaders, and as an early associate of the IRGC and later as Iran's Defense Minister, he had short-lived success in bringing the interests of that organization inline with the Islamic Republic. Chamran's efforts in this regard—including the inclusion of roughly 600 Lebanese Amal volunteers into Iranian military ranks to combat Iraqi aggression—were temporary and dissipated after his death on the warfront in June 1981.⁴⁶

The other major Iran-Lebanon network, which comprises the foundation of Iran's current involvement in Lebanon, was established by the Iranian activists who largely opposed Musa al-Sadr, Chamran, and Amal due to their insufficient support for the

⁴⁴ On the politicization of the Lebanese Shiite community see, Augustus R. Norton, "Changing Actors and Leadership among the Shiites of Lebanon." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 482, (Nov. 1985), pp. 109-121. Also, for a history on Amal see, Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*.

⁴⁵ Musa al-Sadr disappeared on a trip to Libya in 1978. Although many of his followers believed that he had gone into a spiritual occultation similar to the 12th Imam in Shiite lore, over time it became widely assumed that al-Sadr had been the target of a political assassination orchestrated by the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and the PLO in retaliation for al-Sadr's opposition to the PLO's presence and military activities in southern Lebanon.

⁴⁶ Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, 101-03.

Palestinian resistance.⁴⁷ This faction, headed in part by Mohammad Montazeri, Ali Akbar Mohtashami, and Jalal al-Din Farsi, had established strong ties with Shiite clerical activists in Beirut and the Bekaa (Biq'a) valley. Mohtashami, for instance, had taken several trips to Lebanon beginning in 1970 and helped establish strong relationships with Lebanese clerics in the Bekaa region. From his first visit to the area, Mohtashami had grown especially fond of the Shiites of the Bekaa. He found them more religious than their counterparts in Beirut, brave, and particularly "disposed toward the clergy" (*beh rohaniyyat 'alaqehmand hastand*).⁴⁸

Montazeri, Mohtashami, and others like Abu Sharif also established strong ties with the PLO and were part of a loose transnational network in the 1970s that helped bring Iranian anti-shah activists to Lebanon for guerrilla warfare training in Palestinian camps. Yahya Rahim Safavi, an early IRGC commander and later commander-in-chief from 1997 to 2007, was just one of the young Iranian activists that trained and fought with the PLO during this time.⁴⁹ Through a network that involved Mohammad Montazeri and Ali Jannati (the son of prominent Shiite jurist Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati), Safavi travelled from Damascus (where he had come to evade arrest in Iran for anti-shah activities) to Beirut and trained in small arms and explosives in a PLO camp. Safavi later served as a scout and night guard for the Fatah organization in southern Lebanon, and although he vigorously supported the Palestinian resistance, he was disappointed by the lack of piety within PLO ranks. On this point he writes:

None of the members of Fatah said their obligatory prayers [*namaz*]. When I asked them 'Why don't you say your prayers?' They replied: 'God willing, in Jerusalem.' In other words, 'When we liberate Jerusalem we'll say our prayers.'⁵⁰

Commenting on the Palestinians' ignorance of Islamic law, Safavi expresses shock when one Fatah member tells him that not all dogs are ritually impure (*najes*), but rather:

⁴⁷ Amal had partially been established to protect the interests of the southern Lebanese Shiites from the Palestinian organizations that had taken control of that area. This led to an ongoing violent conflict between the two sides during the Lebanon's civil war. See, *Shiite Lebanon*, 96.

⁴⁸ Sayyed Ali Akbar Mohtashami, *Khaterat-e siyasi-e Sayyed Ali Akbar Mohtashami*. Vol. 2. Tehran: Khaneh-ye Andisheh-ye Javan, 2000, p. 108.

⁴⁹ Safavi discusses his experiences in Lebanon in his memoirs, see: Yahya Rahim Safavi, *Az jonub-e lobnan ta jonub-e iran: khaterat-e sardar-e Sayyed Rahim Safavi*. Ed. Majid Najafpour. Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2004, pp.95-107.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

“black dogs are impure and white dogs are pure.” Safavi was also troubled by the perceived loose sexual morality of Fatah members, particularly that the outward display of physical affection between men and women was tolerated and that genders were not segregated in instances of travel or military deployments.⁵¹

Due in part to this ideological and cultural divide, the ties developed between Iranian activists and secular Palestinian resistance organizations proved less durable than those forged between Khomeinists like Mohtashami and activist clergy in the Bekaa.⁵² (This is particularly true concerning the PLO, which fell out of favor with Khomeini and ultimately sided with Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war.) Indeed, after the revolution Mohtashami was able to bring substantial state support to his Shiite network in Lebanon through his office as Iranian ambassador to Syria. In this capacity, Mohtashami was instrumental in bringing together a collection of like-minded militants and low-level clergy in the establishment of a new type of Lebanese Shiite resistance—a movement that later coalesced into the Hizbullah organization.⁵³ Hizbullah was unique in that it was among the first (and ultimately one of the few) non-Iranian entities to adopt central Khomeinist concepts such as the “guardianship of the jurist” (*velayat-e faqih*). The organization’s leaders fully embraced this concept and turned to Ayatollah Khomeini as their supreme political and religious authority.⁵⁴ This gave Khomeini and his intermediaries (such as Mohtashami and the IRGC) tremendous influence within Hizbullah and, by extension, Lebanese politics. Apart from the adoption of Khomeinist ideology, Hizbullah’s name (which was in part suggested by Khomeini) and its official emblem (which is based on the IRGC emblem, see Figure 4.1 below) serve as lasting manifestations of Iranian influence.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., 106.

⁵² A notable exception is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) which, under Ahmad Jibril, received limited Iranian support through the 1990s.

⁵³ A sizeable literature on Lebanese Hizbullah in English has already been produced. Of the key monographs on the subject, see: Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997; Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004; Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004; Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006; and Augustus Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁵⁴ Hamzeh, *Path of Hizbullah*, 24-26.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 25.



Figure 4.1. Lebanese Hizballah and IRGC emblems.⁵⁶

From the beginning of its introduction to Lebanon, the IRGC helped organize and train the new Shiite resistance.⁵⁷ The IRGC served as a conduit for Iranian support and helped bring military expertise to Hizballah. Guardsmen worked hand in hand with their Lebanese counterparts and became inextricably linked to the violent activism that became an early hallmark of the Shiite resistance. Although the IRGC did not overtly engage in military operations, through its coordination with Hizballah and associated Shiite militants, it became implicated in various terrorist attacks against Israeli and western targets, including the simultaneous bombings of the US and French barracks in 1983, the bombing of the US embassy in 1984, and a number of killings and kidnappings from 1985–1988.⁵⁸

Combined with the Iranian counter-invasion of Iraq, the involvement of the IRGC in domestic Lebanese terrorism became seen as proof of the Islamic Republic's desire to

⁵⁶ The IRGC emblem will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ Hamzeh, *Path of Hizballah*, 25.

⁵⁸ On Iran's connection to terrorism and hostage-taking in Lebanon during this period, see Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, New York, St. Martins Press, 1997. For the CIA's investigation into the US Embassy bombing, see Robert Baer, *See No Evil: the True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002.

export its revolution through military means. While Mohsen Rezai publically downplayed the Guards presence in Lebanon, and rejected the idea that it was part of a broader war against “anti-Islamic conspiracies,” the organization did at times describe its involvement in Lebanon as “exporting the revolution.”⁵⁹ Overall, the IRGC divided its work in Lebanon into four different categories. The first, which is the only category explicitly identified as “exporting the revolution” (*sodur-e enqelab-e eslami*), concerns “cultural activism” and the propagation (*tabligh*) of religious, cultural, and ideological thought. In this arena, the Guards describe their efforts as distributing revolutionary literature (including the speeches of Khomeini and Montazeri), and bringing in religious scholars from Iran to promote religious instruction and spread revolutionary values in Lebanese towns and villages.⁶⁰ The second area of IRGC involvement was the martial and ideological training of the Shiite resistance. The former, which the IRGC says compromised 60% of this effort, was undertaken by guardsmen, while the latter (ideological training) was headed by Iranian clergy. The third and fourth areas were respectively described as the funding of and recruitment for the Lebanese resistance.⁶¹

The IRGC considered its experience in Lebanon an extension of the Islamic Republic’s general efforts to spread its ideology and religious fervor outside of Iran. To Brother Mosleh, commander of IRGC forces in Lebanon, Iran’s influence in Lebanon was successfully reshaping the latter’s Shiite population along the lines of the Islamic Republic:

The Muslims of Lebanon, especially the Shiites of Lebanese Hizbullah, consider themselves the offspring of the Islamic Revolution and therefore know that they have a duty to imitate [*taba’iyyat kardan*] the Islamic Revolution.⁶²

He further suggests that Iran’s positive impact in Lebanon is evinced by the proliferation of images of Khomeini throughout the country and by the popularity of Iranian flags (which were sold together with Lebanese flags in Shiite areas). To illustrate this point, Mosleh shares an anecdote of a Guards patrol unit in the Bekaa:

⁵⁹ “Iranians fighting in Lebanon” (interview with Mohsen Rezai), *BBCSWB*, 24 November 1983.

⁶⁰ Interview with Brother Mosleh, IRGC commander in Lebanon, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 138, 8 June 1985, p. 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 73.

One day [as we were driving through a village] a little girl approached our vehicle and said: ‘Brother, I would like a picture of the Imam [Khomeini].’ At the time I said that we didn’t have any pictures of the Imam in the car, but then I noticed we had one in the windshield. I gave this picture to the little girl. She took the picture and kissed it. This is evidence of the people’s love for the Imam.⁶³

Thus, as Mosleh suggests, the net effect of Iran’s presence in Lebanon is the transformation of the Shiite laity into a revolutionary population and increased goodwill toward the Islamic Republic. It is these results—i.e., the expansion of Iran’s ideological and political influence abroad—that the IRGC identifies as the primary goal of exporting the revolution to Lebanon. The militarization of Shiite activism and the direct confrontation with Israeli forces in that country are expressed as secondary.

Waning Interventionism, Rising Conservatism

Even though a small presence of IRGC officials remains in Lebanon to this day, many of its troops began to pullout in 1985 as resistance to Iran’s extraterritorial efforts in general, and in Lebanon in particular, became a charged subject in Iranian politics.⁶⁴ This shift in policy was a consequence of the growing international pressure against Iran’s involvement in Lebanon (i.e., terrorism and hostage-taking) and simmering political divergence within Iran’s leadership. By 1984, President Khamenei and Majles speaker Rafsanjani publically acknowledged that there was an internal ideological dispute between conservatives and left-leaning radicals within the Khomeinist bloc. Although this split had been apparent years before (e.g., as evinced by Mohsen Rezai’s resignation from MIR in 1982), the intensification of the Iraq war and its impact on Iranian society brought factionalism to the political fore. Each faction included prominent members of the regime, including Khamenei and Rafsanjani for the conservatives (who Khomeini tended to support on foreign policy), and Mohtashami, Behzad Nabavi (the leader of MIR), Mir-Hosayn Musavi (the Prime Minister), and Ayatollah Montazeri for the more

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “Leaflets and songs show Iranian link to Beirut's 'Party of God'”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 April 1985. This process continued through the early 1990s, by which time the vast majority of IRGC troops had been removed from Lebanon. See, Hamzeh, *Path of Hizballah*, 69-71.

revolutionary-minded left.⁶⁵ This ideological conflict and related political infighting permeated major political parties and led the dissolution of MIR (1986) and the IRP (1987) thereby undoing the alliances that had laid the foundation for Khomeinist dominance in post-revolutionary Iran.

While disagreements over social and economic policy were significant contributors to the factionalism within the Khomeinist movement, the area of foreign policy, and more specifically the issue of foreign involvement, proved central to the political divide.⁶⁶ More conservative elements led by Rafsanjani regarded foreign involvement to be a waste of resources, harmful to Iran's international standing, and a distraction from the conflict with Iraq.⁶⁷ On the latter issue, Rafsanjani was supported by Khomeini and the leading architects of the Iraq war, including IRGC commander Mohsen Rezaei, who wanted to concentrate Iran's military resources on victory in Iraq. To bolster Iran's lagging war effort, Rafsanjani opened up unofficial contacts with the US and Israel to explore arms purchases.⁶⁸ Although Iran had been secretly purchasing American arms through Israel with Khomeini's assent since the beginning of the war, a need to replenish its stockpiles pushed Rafsanjani to seek a direct covert deal with the US.⁶⁹ Through intermediaries in his cabinet and abroad, Rafsanjani sought shipments of US anti-tank TOW missiles in return for a cessation of Iran-sponsored terrorism in Lebanon, a promise to release four American hostages held captive by Hizbullah, and a suggestion of an eventual rapprochement with the US. To help seal the deal with the Americans, Rafsanjani invited an US and Israeli delegation to Tehran to discuss the plan. While the secret meeting failed to produce an agreement, a commitment was made between the US delegation (headed by Robert McFarlane, former National Security Advisor to Ronald

⁶⁵ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 47-70.

⁶⁶ For a detailed discussion of the form and content of the debates that fostered the factionalism of this period, see Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 47-81.

⁶⁷ David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*. New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1990, pp. 374-78.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ On Iran's covert arms purchases from the US and Israel, See Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007; Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*. New York: Times Books, 2006, pp. 103-10; and, Gary Sick, *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan*. New York: Times Books, 1991.

Regan) and Rafsanjani's representatives to keep back channels open for future discussions.⁷⁰

The radical-left faction associated with Ayatollah Montazeri, Mehdi Hashemi (former member of the IRGC Central Council and head of OLM), and Mohtashami, largely opposed Rafsanjani's overtures.⁷¹ Montazeri, for instance, personally criticized Rafsanjani for the secret meeting in Tehran.⁷² For this faction, which had broad support within IRGC ranks, it was Iran's moral and political responsibility to assist Muslim resistance movements and propagate the values of the Islamic revolution across the region. Further, as combating the influence of imperialism and liberating Jerusalem remained at the forefront of their idealistic agenda, the internationalist faction rejected any warming of relations between the US and Israel. Lebanon, for this group, was seen as a successful example of what exporting the revolution could achieve and as a crucial front in the war against imperialism and Zionism that required continued support.⁷³ Thus, any negotiations with the US, particularly any involving a deal promising a scaling-back of Iran's Lebanese presence, were anathema to the radicals and would provoke a reaction.

The conservatives, however, proved the more formidable coalition. Simultaneous with seeking a US arms deal, Rafsanjani sought to weaken his rival Montazeri by undermining the influence of the latter's leftist base. With the crucial support of Khomeini, Rafsanjani was able to remove the Office of Liberation Movements from the IRGC and merge it with the Foreign Ministry thereby bringing the office's operations under the direct control of the government and curtailing its semi-autonomy. While this was a blow to radical-interventionists, Mehdi Hashemi (Montazeri's relative through marriage) and his supporters were able to continue their foreign operations with the financial and political support of Montazeri. However, after Hashemi was arrested by Saudi security agents for attempting to smuggle explosives into that country for a purported attack during the annual Hajj in Mecca, the interventionist faction began to fall apart.⁷⁴ Hashemi returned to Iran where he was detained and an investigation into his activities commenced. While Montazeri vigorously protested the arrest in letters to

⁷⁰ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 113-123.

⁷¹ Katzman, *Warriors*, 150-52.

⁷² Montazeri, *Khaterat*, 339.

⁷³ Menashri, *Decade of War*, 379-82.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Khomeini,⁷⁵ some of Hashemi's associates leaked information to a Lebanese newspaper exposing the covert negotiations and attempted arms purchases between Rafsanjani, the US, and Israel, setting off what came to be known as the Iran-Contra affair.⁷⁶

The attempt to undermine Rafsanjani backfired. Despite political pressure from the leftist factions, Khomeini intervened on Rafsanjani's behalf and blocked attempts for an official investigation into the matter. With Khomeini's backing, Rafsanjani led a crackdown on radical activists resulting in the mass arrests of Hashemi and Montazeri's supporters, including "hundreds" from the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards.⁷⁷ By 1987, the radical-left faction, which had become tainted by its association with Hashemi (who was forced to publically confess to crimes against the Islamic revolution and subsequently executed that year), had lost much of its influence within both the IRGC and the government.⁷⁸ In 1988, Rafsanjani further constrained this bloc by removing Mohtashami from the Lebanon desk at the Foreign Ministry and replacing him with the former's brother. With this act, Rafsanjani sent a clear signal that Iran's foreign policy would no longer follow an interventionist path and would instead conform to the policies of the conservative-led administration.

In August 1988, Iran and Iraq agreed to a ceasefire, effectively ending the eight-year war. The end of the war also marked the political decline of the radical left. This faction lost its main patron when Ayatollah Montazeri resigned from his position as Khomeini's successor in March 1989 after the former's sharp criticism of the state's violent suppression of political dissidents caused a fallout between the two clerics.⁷⁹ Although the Islamic Republic and the IRGC would continue limited foreign involvement after the war, the style of interventionism promoted by Montazeri, Mohtashami, and Hashemi—i.e., the militaristic exportation of the revolution abroad—would not return to the political mainstream. Indeed, in the months leading up to his

⁷⁵ Montazeri discusses these events in his memoirs. See, Montazeri, *Khaterat*, 335-46. Also, for exchanges between Khomeini and Montazeri regarding the arrest of Mehdi Hashemi, see Baqer Moin, *Khomeini*, 277-93.

⁷⁶ Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 123-126; also, Menashri, *Decade of War*, 379-380.

⁷⁷ "Hundreds of Montazeri supporters arrested," *BBCSWB*, 14 November 1986.

⁷⁸ Katzman, *Warriors*, 147-160.

⁷⁹ Montazeri had been elected in 1985 by the Assembly of Experts to be Khomeini's successor. His vocal criticism of the violent political suppression under the Khomeini regime led to a fallout between the two senior clerics. For exchanges between the two see, Moin, *Khomeini*, 262-98.

resignation, Montazeri himself had begun to move away from this position. His emergent attitude, which he began to articulate around this time, encapsulates the Islamic Republic's general postwar line on exporting the revolution:

The question of exporting revolution . . . is not a matter of armed intervention. The aim was, rather, by building our country on the basis of Islam's command and making the customs of the Prophet and the immaculate Imams our model; by implementing the aims, ideas and values which have been stressed and cherished by Islam, to have our country and our revolution become a model for other deprived countries and countries oppressed by and subject to cruelty from the superpowers. They would [then] choose our way to liberate themselves from the yoke of arrogance.⁸⁰

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the rise and decline of radical-interventionism and its proponents in Iran. Associated with the Khomeinist left, this project promoted direct involvement in foreign conflicts through military means. Interventionists argued that foreign involvement was both Iran's duty as an Islamic and revolutionary state and key to furthering its geo-strategic interests. Under the rubric of "exporting the revolution," interventionists sought to establish like-minded entities abroad and support liberation movements already engaged in resistance. For these activists, foreign involvement required a sustained commitment on the part of the state in order to succeed and was thus considered on par with or even more important than Iran's domestic concerns. Internal factionalism, however, constrained Iran's foreign involvement. The conservative faction became increasingly at odds with the political and economic costs of foreign engagements, and ultimately forced radical activists from positions of influence.

Beyond serving as an example of interventionism, this chapter has focused on Iranian involvement in Lebanon for two reasons: 1) as Lebanon is not contiguous with Iran (unlike Iraq and Afghanistan), the process that led to Iranian involvement in that country was more clearly inspired by a radical approach to foreign affairs; 2) Lebanon was (and remains) Iran's most successful foreign engagement and can arguably be seen as a model for its later foreign involvement in post-2003 occupied Iraq (discussed in

⁸⁰ "Montazeri statement on Muslim unity and export of the revolution," *BBCSWB*, 1 November 1988.

Chapter VII). Iran's success in Lebanon relied on pre-existing transnational social networks that were maintained after the revolution by a loose coalition of activists, military leaders, government officials, and religious authorities who all shared a personal commitment to the Lebanese Shiite community and Palestinian resistance. Without this network of like minded individuals, and without the power and influence their positions afforded them, Iran's relationship toward Lebanon during this period likely would have not involved military intervention. Lebanon is also an interesting case because although it took radicals to bring Iranian involvement to Lebanon, it has been conservatives who have sustained it.

The case of Lebanon also provides a good example for examining approaches to internationalism during the first decade of the Islamic Republic. As mentioned in the introduction, a revolutionary state can employ intervention as a means of securing its regime at home by expanding its influence abroad. Yet external pressures may make foreign intervention difficult or even counterproductive to pursue. Thus, in order to sustain its revolution at home, a revolutionary state may be forced to refrain from foreign involvement in order to bolster its international standing and goodwill. This is precisely the route traveled by the Islamic Republic. Although some revolutionary factions considered foreign intervention necessary, the immense economic toll of the Iraq war and outside political pressures made it an unsustainable path for the Iranian state to pursue. From Khomeini to Rezai, conservative leadership felt compelled to constrain foreign engagements in order to focus military, economic, and human resources on the Iraq war. The conservatives' suppression of pro-intervention activists, however, did not end Iran's foreign involvement. On the contrary, Iran's conservative leadership realized the value of foreign military engagements. To this end, future conservative leaders Khamenei and Rafsanjani continued to work with Rezai and the IRGC to protect and sustain Iran's strategic investments (such as Hizbullah) abroad. And while Iranian conservatives abandoned an interventionist ethos, they continued (and continue) to embrace a foreign policy grounded in revolutionary internationalism, albeit of a more cautious stripe. In this manner, the implications of intervention expanded the reach and scope of military influence in governmental decision-making. Even as Rezai partly constrained military involvement in Lebanon, he oversaw its continuation. This afforded his organization

significant influence in the realm of regional affairs and made military power an inseparable facet of Iran's regional role.

Finally, this chapter has been about the political disintegration of the Khomeinist movement during the war. This process was marked by the expansion of conservative influence at the top of state leadership and the consequent decline of the radical left in positions of power. The political trajectory of the IRGC was shaped by this larger process. Although it began as a militia allied with the broader Khomeinist movement, the IRGC included several factions that had differing expectations of the revolution. Under the leadership of Mohsen Rezai the IRGC moved increasingly toward the conservative wing of the Khomeinist movement. Rezai firmly aligned the IRGC with conservative clerical authority and encouraged clerical oversight of the Guards. He also marginalized the more leftist factions of the Guards and helped push out radicals like Mehdi Hashemi from command positions. This was a precursor to the outright purging of Hashemi and Montazeri's supporters from Corps ranks. In this manner, Rezai was able to slowly move the IRGC away from the revolutionary-minded factions and draw it closer to the conservative establishment. Even though Ayatollah Montazeri continued to have significant support among the lower-ranks of the IRGC through the 1990s, Rezai initiated a close political alliance with Khamenei and his conservative clerical constituency that continues through the present.

CHAPTER V

Image and Identity: Visualizing the Revolutionary Guards (1979–88)

I am a Guard. A seeker on the path of the heroic men of Ashura. I have raised my head to shield the sapling revolution. I am the gardener of its cinquefoils . . .

With no gratitude and no expectations, I am a Guard.¹

—Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

Revolutionary images are not spontaneous. They are premeditated in the deepest and most enduring layers of a people's collective imagination. The revolutionary semiotics teaches its mobilized participants what to believe by telling them, in sign language, what signifies what.²

—Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi

Armed forces do much more than make war.³

—Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira

The utilization of symbols rooted in Shiite tradition and culture helped portray the Revolutionary Guards as an ideal Islamic military force. Achieving that, the organization's architects believed, would require its members to possess the religiosity and faith-driven fervor of Islam's earliest heroes and embrace or be taught the ideological and political commitments of the revolution's founders.⁴ To this end, the IRGC set stringent (though sometimes vague) religious requirements for its soldiers and policed its ranks for

¹ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, 19 March 1980, p. 38.

² Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: the Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. New York: New York University Press, 1999, p. 305.

³ Davis and Pereira, *Irregular Armed Forces*, (passim).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

ideological and political dissent—leading, for example, to the purge of leftists, Bani-Sadr supporters, and allies of Mehdi Hashemi at different points in the 1980s.⁵ However, constructing an Islamic military was also the work of imagination. For instance, when debating the color of its uniforms, the Guards’ Central Council decided upon plain green—the color most associated with the Prophet.⁶ Likewise, the birthday of Imam Husayn was approved by Khomeini as the day an annual celebration of the IRGC called “Guard’s Day” would take place. This move not only aligned the Guards with Islam and Shiite history, it symbolized the belief that the IRGC (and the Islamic Revolution more broadly) was a continuation of Imam Husayn’s epic struggle against injustice. By donning the color of the Prophet and marking its establishment on the same day as the birth of the Prophet’s grandson and Shiism’s greatest hero, the IRGC inserted itself into the pantheon of Shiite history as the symbolic and literal standard-bearer of a new form of Islamic militancy. The Guards became, in effect, the new warriors of Karbala.

Thus, seemingly as important as the orthodoxy of its ranks was the manner in which the organization conceived of itself and conveyed this conception to its members and the public. Events such as Guard’s Day—which presented IRGC soldiers to Iranian authorities and the general public in a grand display of military potential, religious virtue, revolutionary dedication, and an unwavering willingness to die in the path of Khomeini—were part of this effort. However, the Guards also employed less grandiose methods to help shape self and public perception. To this end, the IRGC produced various types of textual and visual materials that helped communicate its values to rank-and-file members and those outside the organization. Although much of the Guards’ work reflected the government’s broader propaganda (*tablighat*) and cultural (*farhangi*) campaigns, particularly during the Iran-Iraq war, the materials produced by the

⁵ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, 19 March 1980, p.37-38. On the general religious requirements of serving in the IRGC and Basij, see *Qanun-e Moqararat-e Estekhdami-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami*. [Tehran?]: Edareh-ye Koll-e Qavanin va Moqararat-e Keshvar, 1995/1996, pp. 5-8.

⁶ Rafiqdust, *Khaterat*, 184. While it could be argued that green is the default color for most militaries around the globe, Mohsen Rafiqdust stresses that the color green was specifically chosen for its Islamic symbolism.

organization played an important role in forging an outward identity for the organization.⁷

This chapter discusses how the IRGC conceptualized its organization and membership visually. From its official emblem to the graphic artwork in its publications, the IRGC employed visuality to transmit various messages concerning the organization, its membership, and its role during the war. Like Iran's government, the Guards favored the visual medium because it could effectively convey political, religious, and ideological notions to the public through culturally familiar metaphors and symbols.⁸ Unlike textual publications, which required literacy, a basic education, and *time* to read, visuals could be grasped quickly and effortlessly by the general Iranian viewer. However, I acknowledge that beyond the outward or “frank” reading of images, lie other shades of meaning. Roland Barthes, for instance, speaks of an “obtuse” meaning of images; a meaning not necessarily intended by the artist (what he calls the “obvious” meaning), but one perceived or felt by the viewer.⁹ Thus, based on my own personal reading, I will also explore the less overt, more emotive aspects of IRGC images.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. Part one, “contexts,” gives an overview of the materials (such as books, posters, and audio-visuals) produced and distributed by the IRGC during the war. As visuality plays a prominent role in these materials—and is meant to perform a similar ideological and cultural function—this section offers a certain perspective, or context, for the images at the heart of the chapter. Part two, “texts,” presents a sampling of images through which some of the prominent modes and themes of IRGC visuality are explored. Here I begin with a discussion on the IRGC's official emblem, the most significant, ubiquitous, and familiar visual representation of the organization. I then move on to discuss some specific images from the IRGC's chief publication—the journal *Payam-e Enqelab*—produced during the war.

⁷ On the use of visual propaganda during the revolution and under the Islamic Republic, see Chelkowski and Dabashi's *Staging a Revolution*; and, Lynn Gumpert and Shiva Balaghi eds., *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

⁸ On the Islamic Republic's use of graphic arts during the revolution and first years of the war, see Abulfazl A'li ed., *Honar-e Grafik dar Enqelab-e Eslami*. [Tehran?]: Vahed-e Entesharat-e Hawzah-ye Hunari-e Sazman-e Tablighat-e Eslami, 1985.

⁹ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1985, p.41-62.

In discussing these images I show some of the ways in which the IRGC developed and maintained a sense of identity during this period. By identity, I do not mean to suggest the self-conceptions held by individual guardsmen and guardswomen. To understand how these soldiers and volunteers understood the organization or their place within it would require a completely different approach and data set. Rather, the notion of identity discussed in this chapter belongs to and is produced by the organization. Identity here is as much an idea expressed as a performance of symbols, moods, and themes. Thus, by interrogating these categories through examples of photography and graphic art, I explore how the IRGC used visual mediums to form an understanding of itself, its members, and the Iraq conflict.

PART ONE: CONTEXTS

An Overview of IRGC Publications

Corps membership swelled in the organization's first years of operation, increasing from an estimated 10,000 guardsmen by the end of 1979 to 25,000 in mid 1980, 50,000 by the end of 1981, and up to 350,000 by 1986.¹⁰ In addition, the IRGC took over command of the *Basij-e mostaz'afin* (Mobilization of the Oppressed) popular militia, and was charged with the martial and ideological training of its ranks (which grew to over 600,000 by 1986).¹¹ The majority of these new guardsmen and basijis (which is how I will refer to members of the Basij militia), mostly young men drawn from the poor urban classes, differed from their commanders in both experience and ideological sophistication. Though they lacked the years of activism and ideological commitment of the leadership, new recruits shared a deep-rooted faith in Shia Islam and a zealous commitment to the revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini.¹² IRGC publications thus became a tool used by the organization to help build on these commonalities and educate its expanding ranks.

¹⁰ Schahgaldian, *Iranian*, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 69. This is the estimated number of basijis that had been trained and sent to the front by this time. The total number of members of the Basij, however, may have been significantly higher. In a statement to the press, for instance, President Ali Khamenei mentioned that there were over a million individuals in Basij ranks at this point.

¹² Katzman argues that it is in part due to the Guards' ability to assimilate 'non-ideological groups' such as conscripts that demonstrates the organization's political resiliency. See Katzman, *Warriors*, 8-9.

Central to this effort was *Payam-e Enqelab* (*Message of the Revolution*), a bi-weekly political journal that served as the organization's official newsletter (*organ*).¹³ Though it was similar in both form and content to other political journals that emerged after the revolution, *Payam* was unique in that it was primarily aimed at the IRGC's rank-and-file. Like its sister publication *Omid-e Enqelab* (*Hope of the Revolution*), which was geared toward the Basij, *Payam* used articles, posters, interviews, and other content to express the spiritual, ideological, and political values of the organization. After the Iraqi invasion, the journal focused on the organization's role in the war effort, offered narratives of particular campaigns, and celebrated those killed in action through countless articles and artwork devoted to its "war martyrs." IRGC editors also reserved space in each issue for international news and coverage on resistance movements throughout the third and Islamic worlds. In this way, *Payam-e Enqelab* created a space in which a sense of identity and purpose could be fostered among IRGC members and among interested civilians.

Beyond its political journals, the IRGC produced various books, booklets, and pamphlets aimed at both its rank-and-file and the general public. After the Iraqi invasion, these publications began to focus on the geo-political context of the war and its deeper connections to Islam and Shiite history. An example is the series *Let's Learn from the Quran*, which began publication in 1981. The first volume of this series, *War and Jihad in the Quran*, coupled Arabic Quranic passages related to the subjects of warfare and jihad with translations and explanations in Persian. The anonymous authors—presumably low-level clergy—argue that they compiled this booklet because "the enemies have [waged war] on the Quran and *hadith*." By providing an entryway to the Arabic Quran through Persian translations, the authors claim that guardsmen will be armed with the "fist of the Islam" in their battle with the "infidels of the world" and the "infidel Iraqi Baathists."¹⁴ The Persian translations also suggest the IRGC's awareness of their rank-and-file's general illiteracy of Arabic.

¹³ *Payam-e Enqelab* began publication in March 1980 and has continued with intermittent breaks through the present.

¹⁴ *Jang va Jihad dar Quran*. Tehran: Vahed-e Amuzesh: Setad-e Markazi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 1981, (Preface).

Other publications, such as those produced by the IRGC Political Office, more directly dealt with the war. An example is *War and Transgression: the Imperialist Front against the Islamic Revolution*, which, with chapters like “Imperialist France, a colluder with Saddam?” and “Will America protect Saddam?” situates the early Iraq war into a larger context of imperialist and Western threats to the Islamic Republic.¹⁵ The Political Office also produced materials aimed at outside audiences, such as English and Arabic versions of *Payam-e Enqelab*, which instead of being translations of the journal’s Persian edition were part of the Islamic Republic’s coordinated white propaganda (*tablighat*) campaign aimed at influencing non-Iranian publics.¹⁶ Similar publications by the Political Office include *A Glance at Two Years of War*, an English translation of a Persian IRGC report that summarizes the organization’s operations, strategy, and victories through mid 1982.¹⁷

In addition to the Political Office, the IRGC’s Public Relations and Educational units supervised the production of materials aimed at fostering ideological awareness among the ranks.¹⁸ Later in the war, the IRGC established research centers and universities devoted to training guardsmen in and producing materials on Islamic ideology, politics, and military science. For instance, in 1984 the Guards opened the Center for Investigation and Research in Qom, which produced “ideological and political” materials specifically geared for IRGC and Basij soldiers at the front.¹⁹ As a collaboration between lay guardsmen and clergy from the Qom seminary, this center produced books such as *Wars of the Prophet*, which presents the battles fought by the Prophet Muhammad as parables for the war with Iraq in order to imbue the latter with a parallel sense of spiritual significance. Beyond this, the most important training initiative undertaken by Guards during the war was the founding of Imam Husayn University and

¹⁵ *Jang va Tajavoz: jebhe-ye impirialisti ‘alayh-e enqelab-e eslami*. Tehran: Daftar-e Siyasi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 1981.

¹⁶ The Propaganda Staff of the newly-established Supreme Defense Council of Iran issued an order soon after the invasion which required all government organs to pursue a coordinated propaganda effort. See, “Directive issued by Iranian Propaganda Office,” Tehran home service, 16 October 1980, *BBCSWB*, 18 October 1980.

¹⁷ *A Glance at Two Years of War*. [Tehran?]: Political Office: Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (Tarjomeh: Setad-e Tablighat-e Jang-e Sepah), 1982.

¹⁸ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, 19 March 1980, 37.

¹⁹ *Jang-ha-ye Payambar*. Tehran: Vahed-e Amuzeshi-e `Aqidati-e Siyasi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqilab-e Eslami, 1984, p. 3-4.

its Institute of Military Sciences and Technology in Tehran, which opened in May 1986.²⁰

Cultural Activism in a Time of War

IRGC publications are an outgrowth of the organization's commitment to ideological and cultural activism. Indeed, just six-months into the Iraq war, the organization claimed that "ninety-percent" of its non-combat operations were devoted to promoting ideology. This work, which the IRGC defined as "cultural activities" (*fa'aliyyat-ha-ye farhangi*), was a broad-based effort of promoting the religious and political values championed by the organization, the IRP, and esteemed clergy like ayatollahs Montazeri and Motahhari.²¹ As cultural activism was a central duty of the IRGC throughout the war—and remains as such through the present—it is valuable to consider how the IRGC conceived of this effort. An example of this is provided in a February 1981 organizational review published in *Payam-e Enqelab*. This report, briefly discussed below, sheds light on how the Guards aimed to promote their political and ideological commitments, the mediums they found most valuable, and the material they found most convincing.

The IRGC divides this report into two sections specifying the work of its units in producing and distributing textual publications and audio-visual materials in provinces throughout Iran. Concerning the former, the IRGC report claims that its units established over 2400 libraries throughout Iran's major provinces in this period. In these and already existing libraries, the Guards donated 629,102 books and further distributed approximately 482,000 booklets throughout the country. In addition, Guards units produced approximately 440,000 publications not including the organization's political journals. These publications were not only donated *pro bono publico*; many were also sold for profit resulting in 9.75 million *rials* in revenue for IRGC units,²² including 3 million in sales from the strategically important southwestern provinces.²³ Although the

²⁰ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.162, 10 May 1986, p. 48.

²¹ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.26, 16 February 1981, p. 46.

²² Because of the fluctuating value of Iranian currency during this period, it is difficult to come to a precise rate of exchange with the US dollar; however, 9.75 million *rials* in 1981 was probably around 10,000 USD.

²³ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

precise numbers are not mentioned, “ideological and political” publications were also given to “liberation fronts” outside of Iran.²⁴

The audio-visual and “artistic” (*honari*) materials produced by the IRGC during this period includes several media types. Part of this initiative organized 4049 film showings around the country and the production of 85 theatrical presentations. Provincial units also distributed nearly 60,000 audio cassettes. These cassettes focused on various religious topics, such as excerpts from the Quran (6000) and Ayatollah Khomeini’s *Guardianship of the Jurisprudent* (3000), but the most widely distributed cassette (21,000) included sermons of the martyred revolutionary ideologue, Ayatollah Motahhari, whose work was becoming increasingly popular among more conservative Khomeinists. The IRGC distributed these items directly throughout its local bases and through organized “art exhibitions,” which showcased and sold books, cassettes, and slideshow presentations to the public (the Guards held 1620 such exhibitions during this period).²⁵

The most utilized artistic medium by the IRGC was the political poster.²⁶ Guards units produced and distributed roughly 9 million sets of posters both within Iran and abroad. These posters—like the political posters produced by other official agencies and parties during the war—were often resized and altered to become the artwork for pamphlets, billboards, or even postage stamps.²⁷ In this way, IRGC posters (examples of which will be discussed later on) were commonly reproduced in issues of its official journals, particularly as inside and outside covers. Although they ranged in content and

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁵ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.26, pp. 48-51.

²⁶ On the role of political posters and visuality more broadly during the revolution and Iraqi conflict, see Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*; Gumpert and Balaghi, eds., *Picturing Iran*; Hanaway, William. “The Symbolism of the Persian Revolutionary Posters” in Barry Rosen, Ed. *Iran Since the Revolution: Internal Dynamics, Regional Conflicts, and the Superpowers*. New York: Columbia University, 1985; Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Adeb, *Debating Muslims*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990; and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. For a discussion on the influence of Iranian political posters on those produced by Shiite organizations in Lebanon during that country’s civil war, see Zeina Maasri’s *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War*. Foreword by Fawwaz Traboulsi. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009. And for discussions of the political poster as a genre, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides: the Art of the Political Poster 1914-1989*. Milan: Skira, 2005; and, Margaret Timmers, ed., *The Power of the Poster*. London: V&A Publications, 1998.

²⁷ Chelkowski, “The Art of Revolution and War: the Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran,” in *Picturing Iran*, 128-129.

composition, the posters produced by the Guards generally depicted issues related to the political, religious, and martial dimensions of the war.

PART TWO: TEXTS

Branding a New Resistance

Similar to other revolutionary groups, such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, the IRGC emblem is the primary enunciation of its organizational identity.²⁸ As mentioned earlier, the IRGC based its emblem on that of MIR and in so doing assumed a similar antagonistic stance vis-à-vis the Islamic left.²⁹ Like the MIR emblem, the IRGC emblem (Figure 5.1 below) depicts the Arabic negative article “*la*” in the center of the design out of which extends a clenched fist holding a rifle.³⁰ The “*la*” stands for the Muslim proclamation of faith “*la ilaha ilallah . . .*” (“There is no God but God . . .”) and the clenched fist holding the rifle stands for armed resistance. Above the rifle sits a verse from the Quran—“Prepare against them whatever arms and cavalry you can muster . . .”—which is used as a rallying cry for righteous militancy.³¹ To the right of the “*la*” is the representation of a book, symbolizing the Quran, and to the right of that is the organization’s name in Persian (i.e., Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps). Out of the Quran extends a branch with leaves, suggesting both the desire for peace and the garden of heavenly paradise (*ferdows* or *jannat*). This is superimposed on a representation of the globe, evoking notions of internationalism while downplaying the organization’s national focus. At the bottom of the image rests the Persian year of the organization’s establishment (1357, or 1979).

Like the literary *emblemata* of early modern Europe, the emblems of modern political organizations are products of their time. Concerning the former, literary and visual scholar John Manning argues, “Grounded in a historical moment, emblems can be

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of MIR’s emblem see Saidi, *Sazman*, 78-79.

²⁹ This is especially true in regard to the IRGC’s antagonism towards the Mojahedin-e Khalq.

³⁰ Fischer and Abedi suggest that the usage of the “*la*” negative article in this form is influenced by Ali Shariati and his publications, which bore the negative article “on the cover of all of his books and published lectures.” See, Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990, 344.

³¹ Q:8:20

misunderstood, or be totally incomprehensible, unless there is an awareness of the immediate temporal context. Chronology, the moment of utterance, is a clue to meaning.”³² Although the designs created by Iranian revolutionary organizations are not as obtuse as the subject matter Manning is referring to, they are nonetheless steeped in the political and cultural moment from which they emerge. Their visual components are designed to be overt political statements. Yet, while emblems are static, the groups they represent can be dynamic. As time passes an organization may be forced, or simply choose to alter its initial ideological platform to adapt to larger changes occurring within the socio-political context. Even though the political platform of an organization can be altered, emblems often remain unchanged. So, while an emblem reflects specific (historical) aspects of an organization, it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the organization.

Such is true for the Revolutionary Guards. The IRGC’s emblem was designed shortly after the establishment of the organization in 1979. Its designer, Mohsen Kolahdust, an original member of the Guards Corps Command Council, also designed MIR’s emblem.³³ The two emblems are not only products of the same historical moment, they stem from the aesthetics and abilities of a single individual. Further, both emblems were designed contemporaneously with the establishment of their respective organizations in early 1979. For the IRGC, this means that the chief fixture of its corporate identity was created before the organization had a clear function or place in post-revolutionary society. The emblem was designed to represent a militant, Islamic, and anti-leftist revolutionary organization, which is why it more closely resembles the standard of a resistance movement (out of which the IRGC in fact emerged) than a national military (which is what the organization ultimately became). A sense of revolutionism and resistance is also expressed in the political message of the emblem; themes increasingly at odds with the organization’s growing political conservatism during this period.

³² John Manning, *The Emblem*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004, p.10.

³³ Rafiqdust, *Khaterat*, 184.



Figure 5.1. IRGC emblem

Thus, as the IRGC became an official organ of the Islamic Republic and transformed into its leading military force during the war, it retained the *guise* of a resistance movement outside the system of state power. The emblem, in this manner, evokes the organization’s political reality. That is, unlike other resistance organizations, the IRGC was not established to oppose a system; rather (as its name suggests) it was formed to *resist opposition* to a revolution. Its resistance, then, can be seen as a perpetual state of being; an inseparable component of establishing or maintaining an idealistic Islamic society. Pro-regime militancy, in this scheme, is therefore framed as the expression of the Guards’ resistance: resistance to actual, perceived, and existential threats to the Islamic Republic and the values that brought it forth.

A Militant Iconology

As explained in the preceding chapters, the IRGC’s roots extend deep into the revolutionary movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, most of the early Revolutionary Guards and senior Corps commanders had been participants in that movement. It is not surprising then that before the Guards developed a visual identity specific to the organization its imagery retained some of the aesthetics of the guerrilla movement. Its emblem is one example of this; however, many portrayals of guardsmen in

IRGC publications highlight this practice as well. I have chosen two related images that illustrate this point. These images, shown in Figure 5.2 below, were published in the IRGC journal *Payam-e Enqelab* throughout the 1980s. Although they appear in different versions (two of which I show as examples) they were consistently used as signifiers for the IRGC or the individual guardsman. In this way, they embody both aspects of IRGC identity and self-conception.

In these images, which seem to be based on a photograph, we see the same bearded individual holding a Kalashnikov rifle. He wears a non-descript military-style uniform, but lacks the insignia, accoutrements, and stance of a government soldier. The man holds a Kalashnikov rifle at his hip, appearing to be either discharging or ready to discharge the weapon. By aiming or firing the rifle in such a manner, the individual demonstrates a lack of proper martial training, and thus assumes the posture of a guerrilla militant. This does not discredit the individual. On the contrary, the man (like his Kalashnikov) evokes a revolutionary spirit. He is, in a sense, a prototypical Muslim resistance fighter.

Yet this individual is not used to denote the general militant or even the Muslim revolutionary; he is employed as a specific and direct marker for the Revolutionary Guard. This is suggested by his uniform (which closely resembles that worn by members of the IRGC) and is made clear from the contexts in which these images appear. For instance, in one of the earliest printings of this image in *Payam-e Enqelab* it is placed directly next to a poem entitled “Guard” (*pasdar*).³⁴ The poem, an ode to the guardsman by the prominent revolutionary poet Hosayn Esrafilī, in part reads:

O who is proud to sacrifice himself
A scion of the *Sarbadaran*
Within the clamor of machinegun fire,
You are found

Through extolling the virtues of the guardsmen, this poem highlights the same notions of militancy and resistance captured in the image. The author connects the militant activism of the guardsmen (“found in the clamor of machinegun fire”) with the notion of an Iranian-Shiite tradition of resistance (“scion of the *Sarbadaran*”)—a reference to an

³⁴ The image and poem are published in *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 24, 17 June 1981, p.81.

uprising of mostly Persian Shiites against Turko-Mongol rule in 14th Century northeastern Iran.³⁵ In this way, the image stands for a visualization of the poem's subject (the guardsmen) if not an illustration. This is made obvious by the image's placement within the same text box as the poem and its blatant title. Thus, the editors make the connection for the reader unequivocal: the image in the box is a guardsman.



Figure 5.2. Guard icons from 1981 and 1985

Just as this version of the image is meant to signify a guardsman, when multiplied, the image stands for the entire organization. The second example above illustrates this point. Here, *Payam*'s graphic designers inverted and triplicated the original image to make it appear to represent a broader force or even an armed brotherhood. In the example provided, the triplicated image—which is the more common of the two—is included in a section on poetry by rank-and-file guardsmen submitted to the journal for publication. If the meaning of the image was not plain enough to the reader, the editors include a text box below it stating: “Gifted to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.” Thus, the editors indicate that the image signifies the IRGC.³⁶

So what can these two images, which are akin to clip-art, tell us about the organization? These images, after all, played a minor role in the pages of *Payam-e*

³⁵ The Sarbadaran uprising was one of the many historical events re-imagined as proto-revolutionary after the Islamic revolution. On the Sarbadaran period, see John Masson Smith, Jr., *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty: 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources*. Paris: Mouton, 1970. Also see, “The Jalayirids, Muzaffarids, and Sarbadars,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, volume 6, *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986.

³⁶ This image is published in *Payam-e Enqelab*, no.139, 22 June 1985, p.73.

Enqelab. They were not to my knowledge widely used in other materials and certainly did not gain the type of public attention that photographs of guardsmen did during (or even before) the war. Nevertheless, I have chosen to discuss these particular images because they embody a certain militant-revolutionary aesthetic that lies at the center of IRGC identity. They do not overly express the sacred or the righteous. These guards are not the same type of religious warriors the guardsmen became synonymous with; rather they resemble the politically-driven Muslim activists that founded the organization in the midst of revolution. In other words, these images emphasize one facet of the guardsman which has also helped define the organization: militancy. The fact that these images were printed multiple times over several years indicates that they continued to hold meaning for the editors and designers who employed them. They continued to signify the guards *to* the organization, even as the latter began to favor more overt religious motifs and symbols to describe its soldiers.

Imagining Karbala and its Warriors

As the above visual examples have shown, the IRGC partly defined itself with a militant aesthetic. However, with the onset of the Iraq conflict, guardsmen increasingly took on more of a sacred guise. For instance, photographs of rag-tag Iranian soldiers with headbands displaying religious slogans were ubiquitous in Iranian and international media during this period. Such photographs and similar artwork were used extensively in Guards' publications to capture the multitude of experiences and emotions related to fighting (living, praying, and dying) on the frontlines. Graphic designers also frequently altered photographs, transforming them into new compositions that could more directly communicate the values of the organization and spirit of the war effort. An expressive, and overlooked, body of imagery adorns the pages of *Payam-e Enqelab*. These visuals are important in that they, perhaps more so than any other medium, epitomize how the IRGC conceived of itself and the war during this period.

Following the rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's clerical leadership, IRGC productions framed the Iraq conflict as a war between Islam and its chief

antagonists (i.e., America, Western imperialism, and Zionism).³⁷ Though many Islamic metaphors were used to describe the conflict, the most salient and powerful metaphor used was that of Imam Husayn and his final stand against the Umayyads at Karbala. This metaphor allowed for the war to be re-imagined as a modern Karbala, wherein Iran's forces were both reliving and redressing the Imam Husayn's heroic struggle against oppressive forces. As Hojjat al-Islam Mahallati, Khomeini's representative to the IRGC, explained:

Our revolution emanates from Husayn's Karbala . . . and our dear Imam is the Husayn of our time . . . [When] we gaze upon our war fronts and upon the areas that the Corps controls, [we see that] these are [manifestations of] love for the Imam Husayn and that our path is the same path as the Imam Husayn.³⁸

In this way, depictions of the Guards and rhetoric surrounding their wartime mission became increasingly framed by the Karbala metaphor.

Entwined with the radical-internationalist calls for the liberation of Jerusalem, the Karbala metaphor infused even more religious symbolism into the discourse fueling the Iraq conflict. In this scheme, Saddam Hussein's secular Baathist regime became seen as an obstacle in Iran's *Islamic* quest for emancipating Palestine from Zionist control. While Karbala was employed as a metaphor for the larger engagement with Iraq, the militaristic liberation of Karbala also became a symbolic (and at times literal) wartime goal.³⁹ Thus, as the popular wartime slogan "the path to Jerusalem runs through Karbala" expressed: Karbala was considered both a destination and a way station in the Islamic revolution's cosmic struggle against imperialism and Zionism.

IRGC visual imagery played an important role in conveying these themes to rank-and-file guardsmen. For example, the cover of a December 1981 issue of *Payam-e Enqelab* depicts the quest for Jerusalem and the slogan "the path to Jerusalem runs through Karbala" (Figure 5.3).⁴⁰ The image shows a political map of the Middle East

³⁷ On Khomeini's wartime rhetoric and its relationship to the images produced during the war, see Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging*, 272-91.

³⁸ Interview with Hojjat al-Islam Mahallati, *Payam-e Enqelab*. no.135, 27 April 1985, p. 31.

³⁹ Hiro, *Longest War*, 177.

⁴⁰ This slogan was a popular theme in IRGC wartime imagery. For instance, an IRGC billboard displayed at the warfront during this period shows a guardsman carrying the Islamic standard toward a depiction of Imam Husayn's shrine in Karbala, and behind or *through* that shrine is the Dome of the rock. Above this

with Iran on the right side, Iraq in the middle, and Israel on the left.⁴¹ Within Iran is a small photograph of a convoy of Toyota pickups transporting groups of guardsmen. Emanating from the guardsmen is a bold, rainbow-colored arrow that stretches through Karbala (a point on the arrow difficult to discern in the copy below) and across Iraq and Jordan to Israel. The point terminates at a Star of David within which sits a picture of Jerusalem’s Dome of the Rock. Beneath the point in the arrow designating Karbala, and upon Iraq, is the phrase “the path of Jerusalem” (*tariq al-quds*) in Arabic.

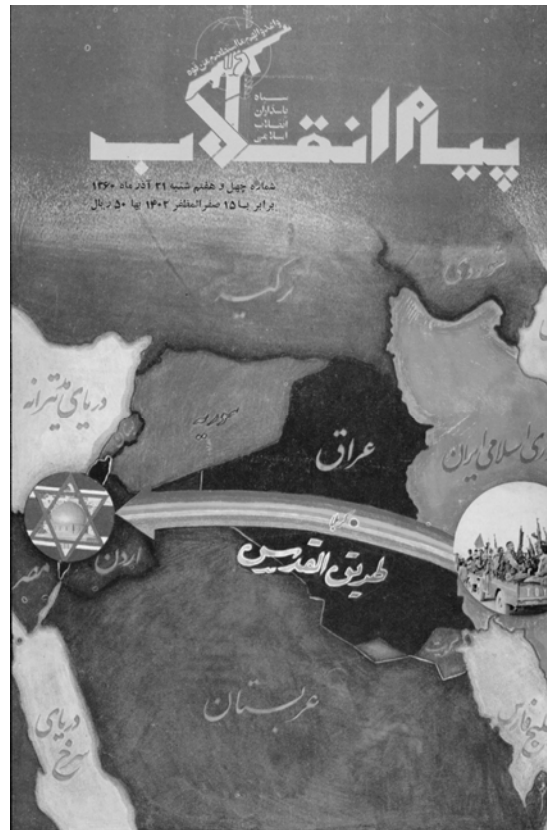


Figure 5.3. “Path of Jerusalem . . .”

The simple mechanics of this image allow for a clear communication of the slogan it visualizes. With the country of Jordan obfuscated and nearly consumed by the Star of David and the arrow, Iraq (or Karbala) is seen as *the* literal and figurative obstacle standing between the Muslim warriors of Iran (represented by the truckloads of

scene is the phrase “the path to Jerusalem passes through Karbala” in Persian. A photograph of this billboard is published in Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging*, 286.

⁴¹ *Payam-e Enqelab*. no. 47, 12 December 1981, (cover).

guardsmen) and the liberation of Jerusalem (represented by the Dome of the Rock). The rainbow coloring of the arrow also suggests that the ultimate objective in this effort is peace and justice in the region.

A similar photograph from *Payam-e Enqelab* (Figure 5.4 below) approaches this idea from another perspective. In this image we see a familiar scene: a Toyota pick-up transporting a group of guardsmen seemingly to the warfront. Most of the guardsmen point their Kalashnikov rifles in the air in an almost victorious manner. The guardsmen appear to range in age; some have full beards while others lack facial hair. True to the supply and equipment shortages that plagued the Iranian armed forces, each of the guardsmen wears a slightly different uniform. Some are wearing wool hats, some steel helmets, while some lack headgear altogether. Most of the men look in the direction from which they came, while another, who appears to be the youngest soldier, seems to gaze directly at the photographer (or viewer). The driver of the pickup, who is leaning out of his window and appears to be gesticulating with his left hand, appears to be looking at or past a road sign.



Figure 5.4. “Road to Karbala”

As novelist and cultural critic Susan Sontag suggests, photographs “are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible; of making it stand still.” But

they can also “enlarge a reality that is felt to be . . . perishable, remote.”⁴² By itself, there is little remarkable about this photograph. It is similar to countless other wartime photographs that depict guardsmen on their way to the front, posing for cameras, exuding a sense of confidence and certainty in their mission. What makes this image more interesting is how the designers chose to “enlarge” the reality it captures by inscribing a deeper meaning to an otherwise familiar scenario. That is, the information on the road sign that the driver seems to be acknowledging has been altered. Although the original text on this sign is unknown, superimposed next to the IRGC emblem (an original part of the sign) is the phrase “the road to Karbala” written in red—the color most associated with martyrdom and sacrifice.⁴³ This simple yet evocative alteration adds a religious dimension to the image that would not otherwise be apparent. While this photograph captures these guardsmen “accurately” as soldiers in a modern war, by modifying the text on the sign the image also presents these soldiers as warriors travelling toward a destination that is as much spiritual as material. Here, Karbala is more than just a metaphor for the war or a symbolic gateway to Jerusalem; rather, it is a spiritual condition, an aspiration of martyrdom, a victory in and of itself. In a sense, these soldiers can be seen as the reinforcements the Imam Husayn never received, given a chance to rewrite or redress history by retaking, refighting, or simply re-experiencing Karbala through fighting on the frontlines of the Iraq war.

As the war dragged on, Iran’s initial enthusiasm for aggression and its confidence in a quick victory over Iraq had all but evaporated. While Iranian forces had some successes, such as the 1984 capture of Iraq’s oil-rich Majnun islands, the heavy cost of Iranian lives and Iraq’s broad retaliation campaign—which targeted Iranian tankers in the Persian Gulf, launched surface-to-surface missiles against Iranian population centers, and used chemical weapons against Iranian troops—injured Iranian moral. The breadth and severity of Iraq’s aggression, which threatened to cripple the Iranian economy, also dampened hopes for victory.⁴⁴ By 1986, however, Iran’s fortunes seemed to be improving. In February, the Iranian military launched a major offensive against Iraq that resulted in the capturing of Iraq’s strategic Faw peninsula—a marshland that rests

⁴² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. New York: Picador USA; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001, p.163.

⁴³ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 50, 23 January 1982, (inside back cover).

⁴⁴ Hiro, *Longest War*, 129-52.

between the Shatt al-Arab and Kuwait's Bubiyan Island in the Persian Gulf. Although a modest gain considering Iran's overall objectives, the capture of Faw rekindled hopes for a victorious conclusion to the war.⁴⁵ The victory in Faw was also framed as a key step towards liberating Karbala and Jerusalem. As one popular slogan put it: "God willing, as the victory of Khorramshahr has led to the liberation of Faw, a victory in Karbala will lead to an advance on Jerusalem."⁴⁶

This renewed hope, and the melancholy that preceded it, is captured in an IRGC poster published in an April 1986 issue of *Payam-e Enqelab*.⁴⁷ This image (Figure 5.5 below), a photographic collage, shows a group of guardsmen seated on the ground, most of whom are gazing slightly to their right. It is unknown what seems to have captured their collective consideration, but one may assume that they are perhaps listening to a speech or being addressed by one of their commanders. The background of the image is abstracted and made to contrast with the center, which is an untouched rectangular section of the original photograph. This section, which is posited as a "clear" view into the photographed scene, invites the viewer to focus on a single soldier, a communications specialist, who rests his chin on his hand appearing to be engaged with what lays before him. Below this soldier is a Persian phrase that reads: "Karbala is waiting . . ."

Outwardly, this poster uses a photographic composition to evoke the sentiment and expectations spelled out in the phrase "Karbala is waiting . . ." That is, the object of the guardsmen's collective gaze and imagination, the image tells us, is Karbala. The guardsmen seem to be aware that Karbala is in their future; it is, as the ellipses suggest, waiting . . . *for them*. If we look at this image in another way, and consider what Barthes calls the "obtuse" meaning of images, it begins to suggest other possibilities.⁴⁸ The text tells us that *Karbala* is waiting. Waiting, we assume, for guardsmen to liberate that consecrated land from secular Baathist control. However, if you look at their faces, it seems obvious that the guardsmen are waiting *too*. They are, perhaps, waiting to take their revolution and the divine justice it embodies to Karbala, to Jerusalem, and to the rest of the Muslim world. In other words, they are waiting to fulfill what has been promised

⁴⁵ Ibid., 167-80.

⁴⁶ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.162, 24 May 1986, (back cover).

⁴⁷ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.159, 12 April 1986, (back cover).

⁴⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*. Trans. Richard Howard. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p.54-59.

them by their religious, political, and military leaders. They are waiting for victory; a victory that has so far eluded them; a victory that perhaps seems no closer now than four years prior.

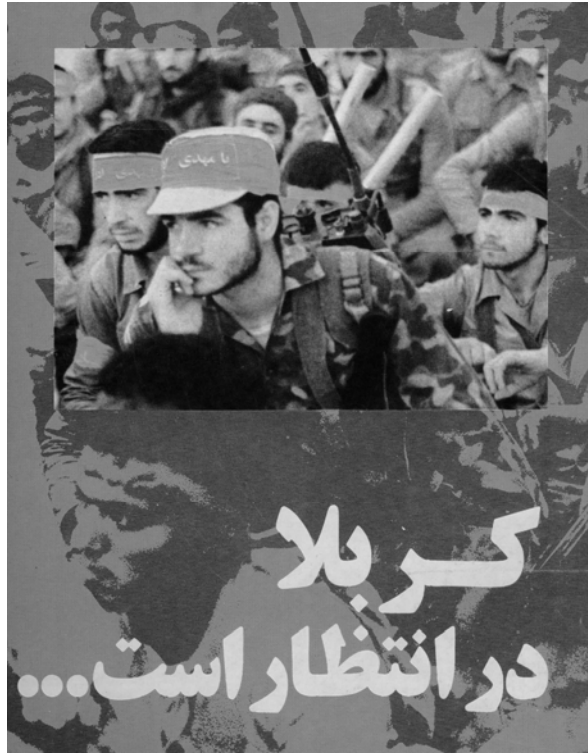


Figure 5.5. “Karbala is waiting . . .”

While the recent successes at Faw encouraged Iran’s military leaders, the faces of these soldiers do not seem to exude confidence or hope. Rather they seem to express a sense of concern, melancholy, or even pessimism. Karbala, after all, is not only a destination, it is a spiritual reality; a condition that centuries of Shiite literature, poetry, and imagery suggest is one of divine intoxication.⁴⁹ If Karbala is still waiting, it is because these guardsmen have not reached (or attained) *it* yet. Although such a reading likely conflicts with the graphic designer’s original intentions, it nonetheless speaks to the general mood and tenor of this composition—a mood more reflective of Iranian society during the final years of the war.

⁴⁹ On the development of the Karbala metaphor and associated rituals in Shiite Islam, see Kamran Scott Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004, p.3-14. Also see, Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

The feeling of pessimism, doubt, or melancholy evoked by this image was in some sense prophetic. The war, of course, ended in stalemate, leaving the economies and cities of both countries in ruin. The near-goal of liberating Karbala was not achieved, and the far-goal of emancipating the Palestinians and the holy city of Jerusalem was put off indefinitely.⁵⁰ While Iran eventually succeeded in regaining its territory, it failed to topple the Baathist regime and ignite an Islamic revolution among its coreligionists in that country. Thus, the metaphors that inspired the war effort and the rhetoric that mobilized millions of soldiers and activists fell hollow. Yet, as the war failed to live up to the expectations of those fighting it, it succeeded in developing a new class of national and spiritual hero. That is, by the end of the war, the IRGC soldier and the Basij militiaman had come to assume a strong and powerful new identity. No longer urban militants, but not yet purely professional soldiers, guardsmen and basijis emerged from the devastation of war as a new caste of warrior; a new breed of Islamic fighter.

Although there are numerous visualizations of guardsmen and basijis from this period, the example below (Figure 5.6) vividly articulates how these soldiers came to be portrayed during and after the war.⁵¹ This image, published soon after the Iran-Iraq conflict, encapsulates some of the key sentiments that have defined guardsmen in postwar government-sponsored memorials, tributes, and literature. In this image, which appears to be either a painting or drawing—and may be based on a photograph—we see the profile of a guardsman. We know he is a guardsman or basiji by his uniform and headband, which bears an invocation to Imam Husayn in Arabic. The man holds his right hand over his heart in a sign of humility, devotion, and piety. The notion of spiritual piety is further reinforced with the depiction of the Shrine of Imam Husayn in Karbala in the background of the image.

⁵⁰ By this I mean any notion of a direct military confrontation with Israel was shelved by Iranian leaders after the war. However, Iran has continued to support organizations such as Hizballah and Hamas, which do engage in direct armed conflict and terrorism against Israel.

⁵¹ This image is published in *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 220, 27 August 1988, p. 32.



Figure 5.6. Warrior of Karbala

The obvious theme of this image is the commemoration of Ashura, but the symbolism employed also conjures up impressions of martyrdom and sacrifice.⁵² This is denoted by the association to Imam Husayn and his martyrdom at Karbala, and suggested by the stylized clouds encircling both the shrine and the guardsman. Although these clouds are inspired by a style popularized through the miniatures of early modern Iran—and are thus a particularly Iranian marker—clouds in general are a common motif in artistic depictions of martyrs.⁵³ Similar to how the Karbala metaphor was employed in wartime rhetoric and propaganda, this image portrays the guardsman as a modern incarnation of the Karbala hero. In a sense, he represents the vast multitude of guardsmen and basijis killed during the Iraq conflict and serves as a bridge between these individuals and their spiritual ancestors. That is, just as Imam Husayn and his companions suffered martyrdom in the path of a cause deemed righteous, so too had the soldiers of Iran. Yet, taken a step further, this parallel plays out in a perhaps unintentional irony: both the past and present Karbala narratives are essentially tragedies. Although Imam Husayn achieved a moral victory with his stand at Karbala, he lost both politically and militarily. Similarly,

⁵² On the visuality of Muharram and Ashura, see Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging*, 70-85.

⁵³ For instance, see the collection of martyrdom posters in Abulfazl A'li's *Honar-e Grafik dar Enqelab-e Eslami*, pp. 69-83.

while Iran could claim a moral victory by at least regaining its territory and forcing Iraq to sue for peace, it failed to accomplish its broader strategic goals, and was unable to fulfill the many promises it had made to its soldiers and citizens from the outset of its 1982 counter-invasion of Iraq (e.g., liberating Karbala, emancipating Jerusalem, igniting an Islamic revolution in Iraq, toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein, etc.).

While this image may engender such a reading, particularly from a viewer far removed from the conflict and its horrors, it is at its heart a deeply spiritual composition. Released from the context of warfare, and with depictions of militancy notably absent, the guardsman takes on a purely spiritual guise. Although we still conceive him as a military soldier, he is lionized for his religious devotion. In this manner, he represents the hope and fidelity of those who were inspired to fight in a war for reasons both religious and patriotic. Like the heroes of Karbala, he is a willing martyr for whom the ultimate sacrifice is also the ultimate reward. The guardsman thus becomes a pillar of faith. No longer does homage to revolutionary militancy befit him; rather, within the reflection of his figure, the notions of spirituality, Shiite tradition, and Iranian patriotism assume primacy.

Conclusion

I began this chapter with a discussion on Guards' publications partly due to their role in articulating IRGC thought. By providing context and arguments for the organization's ideological commitments, these publications helped enunciate what the IRGC stood for and what it meant to be a part of. Yet, as the effectiveness of books and journals relies on various social and individual conditions (such as literacy, education, or even the desire to read), they can be inadequate or at least ineffective vehicles for the mass communication of ideological and political messages. Further, IRGC literature often mirrored the content of texts produced by other governmental offices and clerical institutions. Thus, while text may have helped articulate ideas important to the organization, it did not necessarily help distinguish the organization from other official and semi-official sectors of the Islamic Republic.

Visuality, on other hand, did. While only a limited amount of guardsmen and the public may have read a particular book produced by the IRGC, numerous Iranians (and

non-Iranians) became familiar with visual representations of the organization. In this way, visual imagery—whether produced by the organization or simply depicting its members—has come to partly define perceptions of the IRGC. The visual medium, in this sense, provides a “clear” view of the Revolutionary Guards. Photographs, for instance, help identify guardsmen, and the emblem proclaims the organization’s commitment to the revolution. Visuality in these examples is a site in which perspectives of the IRGC can be easily located. However, these images are also obscured by what is *not* denoted by their signs or text. In this way, IRGC visuality both defines and confuses conceptions of the organization.

My discussion on visuality began with an analysis of the IRGC emblem, which I argue essentializes the organization more than any other visual graphic. But the emblem is not simply a logo for the IRGC brand; rather it is a story of the organization through which information on its history, birth, and values is expressed. The emblem’s mix of sacred and secular symbols also presents a tension that is common to Guards visuality. Early IRGC iconography, for instance, primarily envisions both the individual guardsman and the organization through a lens of the militant (or militancy). This contrasts with wartime imagery, which often emphasizes the sacredness of the guardsman through castings of metaphor. Here the guardsman is no longer just a militant activist; rather he has become a pious soldier in a religiously-imbued war. The Karbala narrative employed to describe the Iraq conflict continues the analogy comparing the Guards to the Imam Husayn and his companions. Thus, what began with the shared commemoration of Guard’s Day and the birth of Imam Husayn played out to dramatic effect on the battlefields of Iran and Iraq. The Iraq war provided the IRGC (and the Islamic Republic more broadly) the conflict it needed to legitimize its appropriation of the memory of Imam Husayn, and to complete the symbolic transformation of guardsmen into the warriors of a new Karbala drama. By the end of the war, the sacred guise of the guardsman had come to eclipse his role as a soldier of the regime.

However, the omnipresent tension between the sacred and the secular is also what animates IRGC visuality. For example, there is nothing inherently sacred about a Kalashnikov rifle, a steel helmet, or a Toyota pickup. But if that Kalashnikov is seen as a tool of divine justice; if that helmet is adorned with a prayer; and if that Toyota is

transporting devout warriors to liberate a hallowed site, then each of these items transforms into a symbol of the sacred. The opposite can also be true. Just as symbolism can add religious sentiment, it can also be seen as superficial, inaccurate, or cynical. One viewer may recognize guardsmen at the warfront as actors in a religious struggle; another may view that struggle as political, economic, or even social, thereby removing any semblance of religiosity or sacredness from the conflict and its participants. While I have suggested interpretations of IRGC visuality that follow what may have been the designers' original or "obvious" intent (i.e., I tend to lean towards readings of the "sacred"), I have also suggested the possibilities of more skeptical or desacralized understandings. Taken holistically, IRGC images present the organization's many contradictions. Yet, it is within these contradictions, or within the blurring of the sacred and secular, that the shades of IRGC identity are best located.

It should be emphasized that IRGC visuality during this period was more than an articulation of organizational identity; it was the product of a profound ideological and religious movement. As such, IRGC visuality embodied the central characteristics of military power in Iran. First and foremost, it should be clear that while military power was employed toward political ends (both in terms of repressing internal dissent and in terms of conducting warfare) it was rooted in the notion that it served a far greater spiritual purpose. Religion not only gave meaning to the brutality and horror of war, it legitimized the government's costly quest for victory. To this end, the intertwining of governmental interests and religious legitimacy allowed the IRGC to flourish in the post-revolution and act seamlessly across social, cultural, religious, and political arenas. The perceived proximity of the IRGC and its associated forces to religious authority and their abiding spiritual devotion distinguished these organizations from the state's conventional military. Finally, the mass sacrifices made by the soldiers of these revolutionary armed forces during the war further enhanced the perception that these organizations not only acted with a religious mindset but also defined what it meant to be faithful devotees of the Imam. In this way, identity formation was more than a wartime phenomena; it was the genesis of a new politics in Iran.

CHAPTER VI

Politics of Demobilization: Veterans and Militarism in the Postwar Decade (1989–1999)

[O]n the one side stands a generation born during the eight-year war that declares with confidence that Iranian society can no longer be controlled or cowed by cannons, tanks, and reference to the vestiges and values of the people's militia [the Basij] that helped to 'win' the war. On the other side stands a generation that sacrificed its life and livelihood in order to save the nation from Iraqi aggression. As such, in the official ideology, it is represented as the austere and yet benign guardian of values that helped Iran survive in spite of international aggression and collusion. It watches with distressed, and at times angry, eyes those whose memory of the war is either amnesiac or, even worse, blemished. Furthermore, it sometimes has to act violently, but only because no one else does and because essential values are violated. Its dilemma remains one of figuring out a way to pass on the memories, experiences of, and lessons learned during the war to the next generations.¹

—Farideh Farhi

The Guards Corps sacrificed their lives so as to defend the boundaries of religion, honour and the country. It stood firm in the face of the entire forces of arrogance. The services rendered by the Guards Corps were so great that the Imam graciously said "I wish I were a revolutionary guard". . . Today, you and I should follow the same line. We should sincerely and virtuously support our great leader, His Eminence Ayatollah Khamene'i . . . Turning our back on the Velayat will lead to the collapse of the system. . . If the two trends of our revolution . . . join forces, they would surmount every counter-revolutionary movement, inside and outside the country. Otherwise, whichever group assumes power would be thirsty for the blood of both revolutionary trends and would crush both trends.²

—Ahmad Khomeini, January 1990

Demobilization is a moment of potential crisis . . . veterans are the unique element in this moment of crisis and [their] actions often determine its outcome.³

—Alec Campbell

¹ Farideh Farhi, "The Antinomies of Iran's War Generation," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick, eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 102.

² "Khamenei and Ahmed Khomeini on importance of Revolutionary Guards' role," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 28 January 1990, *BBCSWB*, 30 January 1990.

³ Alec Campbell, "Where Do All the Soldiers Go? Veterans and the Politics of Demobilization," in *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in State Formation*. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 97.

The end of the Iraq war ushered in a period of uncertainty in Iran. While the war had been a scourge to the Iranian economy, it had also provided the country's various factions a unifying priority. The death of Ayatollah Khomeini on 3 June 1989 dealt another significant blow to the revolutionary state. With the war over, and Khomeini's incontestable authority no longer available to quell factional differences or suppress dissenting opinions, the central stabilizing factors in the Islamic revolution were lost. In the midst of this, Iran was faced with the challenge of transitioning from a nation at war to a nation at peace.⁴ For eight years the war had been the central "revolutionary" cause of the Islamic Republic. To be a revolutionary and to be a true devotee of the Imam was to be a volunteer guard or *basiji* on the frontlines. The war not only forged the identities of the IRGC, *Basij*, and other associated organizations, it had come to define the values of an entire generation of combatants.

Now, with the war over, the futures of both these revolutionary armed forces and their members were in limbo. As neither the Guards nor *Basij* had a clear peacetime role, there were rumors that they would be either dissolved or absorbed into the regular military which remained mobilized to protect Iran's borders. This would have been the most direct and dramatic solution to demobilization. However, realizing the value of these ideologically-committed institutions and the vast human-resources they contained, Iran's leaders created new areas of extra-military involvement for these organizations and expanded their domestic responsibilities. In this way, Iranian leaders partially addressed the problem of demobilization by providing the IRGC, its forces, and veterans more broadly new outlets of religiously and nationally-imbued service. Yet, as these policies gave these organizations and veterans a stake in non-military affairs, they also further entwined their interests to the politics of the conservative faction.

The promotion of Ali Khamenei to office of Supreme Leader was part of the growing disintegration of the Khomeinist movement. No longer united around Khomeini, and no longer fighting a war, the ideological differences among Iran's post-revolutionary

⁴ On the problems of demobilization see, Alec Campbell, "Where Do All the Soldiers Go? Veterans and the Politics of Demobilization," in *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in State Formation*. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 96-117. For the role of demobilization in state formation see, Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990; and, Michael Mann, *States, War, and Capitalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.

leaders increasingly became the source of political disputes. Khamenei's promotion—for which he lacked the proper religious credentials—also signaled which political faction held the upper hand: conservatives. The conservative-right faction is a loose coalition of bazaar (traditional petite-bourgeoisie) associations, clerical organizations, religious groups, veterans groups, and governmental bodies that largely support the “absolute” (*motlaqeh*) rule of the guardian jurist, favor traditional commercial practices, and oppose social liberalization. This faction, whose members dominate the clerical ranks of the Assembly of Experts and the Guardian Council, were responsible for engineering the appointment of the like-minded Khamenei to the office of Supreme Leader. Under Khamenei, and in an alliance with newly-elected president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and his modern-right faction, the right took the lead in forming Iran's postwar reconstruction policies; policies which often brought the rightist factions into conflict with the more populist-oriented left. While the latter faction retained many of the radical and populist commitments that were promoted in the early days of the revolution, it also became increasingly interested in social progress and democratic development. By the late 1990s this leftist faction took on the “reformist” (*eslahgara'i*) label and sought to open up Iranian society both socially and politically.

Disputes between these amorphous political currents intensified through the 1990s. With the election of the reformist cleric Mohammad Khatami as president in 1997, the fear of a less religious and more democratic Islamic Republic provoked widespread unrest among conservatives and far-right hardliners. Some of the most outspoken critics of reformism were current and former members of the Revolutionary Guards and Basij. Although many of the rank-and-file members of these organizations actually supported Khatami's presidency and the reformist agenda, the organizations themselves and their senior commanders were uncompromisingly aligned with Khamenei and his conservative constituency. Following their commanders and the conservative clergy, IRGC and Basij war veterans considered social and cultural reform to be a direct challenge to the Islamic values they had fought and sacrificed to protect. The ideas of social liberalization, democracy, civil society, and a more conciliatory approach to foreign affairs were seen as foreign intrusions that threatened Islam and the guardianship. In this way, these organizations, their members, and associated veterans' groups like

Ansar-e Hezbollah (Helpers of the Party of God), viewed reformism (and the social liberalization efforts that preceded it) as a dangerous new enemy and worked to combat it and its proponents both rhetorically and physically.

As Iran's leading military body, the IRGC provided the conservative faction considerable resources, particularly in the usage of physical coercion in combating perceived threats, such as social liberalization and Islamic modernism. While the IRGC and conservative elements utilized vast economic and political resources in expanding their interests as well, these resources, unlike clerical bodies, the military, and security services, were not dominated by conservative leadership; indeed, with the election of Khatami the executive branch of government came under reformist control during the latter part of this period. In this way, the right's postwar push for influence, which relied on the alignment of religious leadership and military-backed coercive force, was linked to and benefitted from Iran's approach to demobilization. The result, witnessed in the conservative campaign against Khatami and reformism, was the near-monopolization of coercive power by the IRGC and its conservative patrons, and the empowerment of militarism in Iran.

Extra-Military Deployments: Postwar Reconstruction under Rafsanjani

Ayatollah Khomeini's absence opened up the door to a new order of leadership in the Islamic Republic. Although Ali Khamenei now bore the titles of Supreme Leader and Guardian Jurist, he was still generally considered a middle-ranking cleric, and despite his powerful allies he lacked a natural support base.⁵ This differentiated the nature of his religious authority from Iran's high-ranking and influential clergy, who attained their

⁵ The lack of an appointed successor—and with the previous successor Ayatollah Montazeri disgraced and marginalized—presented the regime with its most serious threat since the invasion of Saddam Hussein's forces. The Assembly of Experts, the clerical body charged with selecting the next Supreme Leader, recognized that no suitable candidate existed who was both politically untarnished and possessed the necessary religious standing (*marja' al-taqlid*) mandated by the constitution. The Assembly ultimately promoted Iran's president Ali Khamenei, a mid-level cleric, to the role of Supreme Leader. Although Khamenei was considered politically viable for the position he lacked the proper religious credentials for the office. This forced the Assembly to alter the constitution to enable Khamenei's succession, thus reshaping one of the fundamental principles of Khomeini's concept of the "Guardianship of the Jurisprudent." On Khomeini's succession, see David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power*. London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2001, pp.13-32. Also see, Maziar Behrooz, "The Islamic State and the Crisis of Marja'iyat in Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol 16, No. 2, 1996.

stations through the support of seminary students and lay constituencies. Khamenei's lack of standing within both the clerical and lay communities limited the scope and influence of his authority, particularly during the first few years of his tenure. This empowered President Rafsanjani, who—with the office of the Prime Minister abolished in 1989—strengthened the role of the presidency and exercised a greater measure of influence than his predecessors. Khamenei firmly backed Rafsanjani and allowed him to take the lead in shaping postwar policies. Khamenei's support was influential in the implementation of Rafsanjani's ambitious national reconstruction campaign (*towse'eh*) and first Five Year Plan. In this way, the alliance between the two leaders, which lasted through Rafsanjani's first term, created a form of “dual leadership” at the top of Iranian society.⁶ However, as Khamenei began to establish his own alliances with the traditional right factions—including conservative clergy, bazaari merchants, and IRGC leadership—he took a more critical stance toward Rafsanjani and publicly criticized much of the policies of the latter's second term.

Cooperation between the two clerics brought together the major wings of the right: the traditional or conservative right (represented by Khamenei) and the modern right (led by Rafsanjani). Rafsanjani and the modern right promoted policies aimed at modernizing Iran's economic and industrial sectors, while tempering its radical-revolutionism in the areas of social and foreign affairs. This involved a move toward the privatization of state-owned industries, promotion of domestic manufacturing, strengthening and stabilization of the *rial*, and favoring expertise over ideological orthodoxy in managerial positions. In most of these areas, Rafsanjani and his cadre of technocrats were supported by the conservative clergy and the bazaari merchant class of the traditional right. However, the modern right also pushed for higher taxation, increased regulation of commercial markets, and a softening of austere Islamic social regulations. This brought Rafsanjani a fair amount of support from the left-leaning factions, but also brought him into conflict with the traditional right and hardline (far-right) factions—a conflict that ultimately ended the alliance of the two rights by 1995.

⁶ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. 151.

The rightist coalition strengthened the conservative faction and enabled it to seize control of many governmental institutions and newly privatized bodies during this period. Concerning the former, the most significant developments occurred in the areas of elections. Reacting to conservative lobbying efforts, the Guardian Council (GC) clarified its reading of Article 99 of the constitution which regarded its role in overseeing elections. The GC's new reading, reached in December 1991, afforded the conservative-dominated body "approval supervision" of elections (a role that had been the mandate of the left-dominated Interior Ministry), a significant alteration from the GC's previous role as "observer". Conservatives also sponsored laws in the summer of 1990 that changed election procedures to the Assembly of Experts (AE) in their favor. The new law gave the GC similar approval status over candidates to the clerical body, in that the religious qualifications (*ejtehad*) of the candidates had to be approved by either the conservative clerics of the GC or Khamenei. These two laws gave the GC unprecedented power in disqualifying candidates—based on ill-defined and unappealable accusations of an insufficient commitment to Islam, the Guardian, or personal moral failings—to all elected bodies and the Majles (parliament), which came under rightist dominance after the barring of hundreds of leftwing candidates in the 1992 and 1994 elections.⁷ Khamenei took advantage of his position by appointing conservative allies to the GC and other prominent positions, such as the appointment of former IRGC Minister Mohsen Rafiqdust to head the powerful Foundation for the Oppressed and Wounded Veterans (*bonyad-e mostaz'afin va janbazan*) in 1989.⁸ By appointing Rafiqdust, a member of the conservative-bazaari Allied Islamic Society (*jam'iyat-e mo'talefeh-ye eslami*) and Rafsanjani's brother-in-law, Khamenei removed yet another prominent left-leaning activist (former Prime Minister Mir-Hosayn Musavi) from a position of influence.⁹

⁷ Moslem, *Factional*, 157-160. Also, on the third and fourth Majles, see Bahman Baktiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional Politics*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, pp. 145-234.

⁸ On the role and function of the bonyads in post-revolutionary Iran in general and Rafiqdust's tenure as head of the *Bonyad-e mostaz'afin va janbazan*, see Suzanne Maloney, "Islamism in Iran's Postrevolutionary Economy: The Case of the *Bonyads*," in Mary Ann Tétrault and Robert A. Denmark eds., *Gods, Guns, and Globalization: Religious Radicalism and International Political Economy*. International Political Economy Yearbook Vol. 13, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, pp. 191-217. Also see, Moslem, *Factional*, 42-46.

⁹ "Rafiqdust replaces Musavi at Foundation for the Oppressed," Tehran Home Service, 6 September 1989, *BBCSWB*, 7 September 1989.

Part of Rafsanjani's reconstruction (*towse'eh*) campaign was the streamlining of the military and security apparatuses. Regarding the latter, the three major domestic security organizations—the police, gendarmerie, and revolutionary committees (*komitehs*)—were merged to form the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF, *niruha-ye entezami*).¹⁰ While this measure was aimed at reducing redundancy, it was also part of Rafsanjani's de-revolutionization plan. By bringing the security forces under the direct influence of the Ministry of Justice, and thus centralizing its command and bringing it under direct governmental control, the internal conflicts that arose from factionalism endemic to these organizations were reduced. The elimination of the revolutionary committees was also a blow to the radical-left, which had considerable influence within them. The merger met stiff resistance from the left, such as the protest of former Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashami, who lambasted the decision to dissolve the revolutionary committees in a Majles session, saying “if we lose the revolutionary committees, we will lose our revolutionary identity.”¹¹

Changes to the military sector had a similar cause and effect. In 1989, the IRGC lost its ministry and was forced to merge with the regular armed forces to form the new Ministry of Defense and Armed Force Logistics (MDAFL). Further, the Supreme National Defense Council was established to take over military, security, and foreign policy decision making—areas that the Guards had great influence in during the war. Although the IRGC remained separate from the regular forces and retained a leading position in military matters, the loss of an independent ministry caused many Corps members and supporters to fear that the move presaged the dissolution of the organization itself.¹² Like the establishment of LEF, the IRGC ministry merger was part of a larger process instigated by Rafsanjani aimed at reducing redundancy, increasing professionalization, and asserting centralized state control over governmental institutions.¹³ This meant centralizing the command structure—achieved through the new ministry—and mitigating the radical tendencies of the IRGC. In confronting the latter,

¹⁰ “Karrubi re-elected Majlis speaker; security forces to merge,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 12 June 1990, *BBCSWB*, 13 June 1990.

¹¹ Majles debates, 19 June 1990, cited in Moslem, *Factional*, 192.

¹² “Khamenei denies rumours of dissolution of guards corps or armed forces,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 20 November 1989, *BBCSWB*, 22 November 1989.

¹³ “Iran Guards Corps official discusses planned restructuring,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 16 January 1990, *BBCSWB*, 18 January 1990.

Rafsanjani, backed by Khamenei, imposed a system of ranks on the IRGC parallel to those used by the regular armed forces.¹⁴ While this move was publically supported by IRGC commander-in-chief Mohsen Rezai and other conservative commanders, it went against the founding revolutionary principles of the organization, which considered ranks and rigid hierarchical structure to be one of the most corrosive features of secular and imperialist militaries. By rejecting ranks at the outset of its establishment, the IRGC claimed to be creating an organizational culture that reflected its Islamic and revolutionary values.¹⁵ Although the imposition of ranks was an unpopular development for guardsmen and basijis, Guards commanders emphasized that ranks were necessary for the IRGC's development as a proper military organization. As Mohsen Rezai explained, "If we want to make the IRGC a military force, then we must have grading [i.e., ranks]." ¹⁶

While seeking to contain radicalism, the postwar reorganization of the military sector also served to extend the IRGC's overall reach and domestic influence. Part of this was a result of the actual expansion of the IRGC, which brought two new forces under its command: the Basij Resistance Forces (*niru-ye basij-e moqavemat*, formerly the *Basij-e mostaz'afin*) and the Qods Force (Jerusalem Force, *niru-ye qods*).¹⁷ While these units gave the organization important footholds into both domestic affairs (Basij) and foreign military engagements (Qods Force), it was outside of military matters where the IRGC's

¹⁴ "Military ranks for Guards and Basij personnel," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 6 May 1990, *BBCSWB*, 8 May 1990.

¹⁵ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, March 1980, p. 33. In this March 1980 article on the tenets of IRGC ideology, the Guards distinguish their organization from traditional (secular) militaries by lambasting the corrosive nature of hierarchy and ranking systems. "Ungodly and autocratic" armies are criticized for stressing "rigid discipline and blind obedience" among their ranks. These characteristics, they authors, lead to the "ignorance," "moral corruption," and "low self-esteem" (*khod kam bini*) of soldiers, which in turn pacifies the ranks into obeying the corrupt policies of imperialist nations. "Were not the massacres in Vietnam, Algeria, Palestine, Eritrea, etc., committed by these very same ignorant and weak-kneed people?", the authors asks. They also argue that the hierarchical structure of armies encourages the "privilege and snobbery of commanders," prevents brotherhood and camaraderie, and fuels "hostility and rancor" among subordinates. The authors continue that these characteristics are not only descriptive of modern (imperialistic, autocratic, socialist, and revolutionary) armies and militias, but that they were at the root of the collapse of historical empires, particularly that of the ancient Sasanids. Thus, the Guards argued that a rank-free organization would be able to avoid these pitfalls. Further, by following Islamic principles, fraternal bonds between commanders and regular soldiers would be fostered.

¹⁶ "Guards Commander on grading and on the new Basij and Qods Forces," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 17 April 1990, *BBCSWB*, 20 April 1990.

¹⁷ While the official name of the Qods Force is *Niru-ye Qods*, it is sometimes referred to in the Persian press as *Sepah-e Qods* (Qods Corps).

most important postwar expansion took place.¹⁸ Rafsanjani encouraged the IRGC to utilize its unique resources and vast membership (especially war veterans from the Basij) in the postwar reconstruction campaign to help develop Iran's industrial capacity.¹⁹ Rafsanjani's encouragement, as well as a possible understanding that the IRGC would be responsible for much of its own funding, brought the Guards into the center of Iran's industrial and economic arenas.²⁰ The IRGC had been involved in construction and commercial activities since early in its career, but postwar opportunities, particularly in the area of industrial development, opened up avenues for the organization to take a leading role in the country's reconstruction. Through the 1990s and into the present, the IRGC became the chief recipient of lucrative state contracts and formed a multi-billion dollar industrial and commercial empire.²¹ The organization's focus on development during this period was articulated as an evolution of the IRGC's militaristic mandate: "At this time when the frontlines against imperialism have become the trenches of economics and the spreading of development, [the Guards] are actively involved in this blessed arena and [their work] is markedly pronounced."²²

The most important IRGC enterprise that began in this period is the Khatam al-Anbia engineering firm (Seal of the Prophets, *Qaragah-ye sazandegi-ye khatam al-anbia*). Established in 1990, Khatam (as it is often referred in English) brought together

¹⁸ The establishment of the Qods Force centralized the IRGC's foreign operations under a single command. While the Iran took a more pragmatic approach toward foreign affairs in the postwar period, it continued to develop and deepen contacts abroad. The military side of these endeavors was largely under the IRGC's command, and after 1990, was part of the Qods portfolio. In a April 1990 interview, Mohsen Rezai explains the reasoning behind the Qods Force's establishment and its areas of responsibilities: "[T]he Qods Force, which is for assisting Muslims, Islamic states or Islamic governments, should they ask for help in training or advice. That is now a global custom. If an Islamic state, government or people need to be put through some training, well, the corps will go there and give them training; it will take measures to provide training support for world Muslims or Islamic states. There was a need for a force to perform this task, and the Eminent Leader commanded the corps to set it up. This force is now being set up and is mainly for helping Islamic governments and Islamic nations when there is a need to train them and transfer experience to them." See, Rezai's interview with *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 17 April 1990.

¹⁹ "Rafsanjani urges IRGC to play a role in Iran's reconstruction and development," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 7 January 1992, *BBCSWB*, 9 January 1992.

²⁰ Mohsen Sazegara, a founding member of the IRGC and critic of the present Islamic Republic regime, argues that the IRGC was asked by Rafsanjani to produce much of its funding in the postwar period. See, Sazegara, "Sepah va seh enheraf," http://www.sazegara.net/persian/archives/2006/07/060723_154435.html (Accessed 27 October 2008).

²¹ For an overview of the IRGC's commercial endeavors, see Frederic Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Accessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*. RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009, pp. 55-75.

²² *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 349, November/December 1996, pp. 23.

many of the IRGC's engineering and construction units into a single company to focus on national industrial and agricultural construction projects.²³ It had undertaken 367 state-funded projects by 1995, including major industrial projects like the Mashhad-Sarakhs railway in northeastern Iran and the Kharkheh dam (Iran's largest dam and hydro-electric facility) in Khuzestan (southwest Iran), and lesser projects in construction (e.g., it repaired the roof of the Friday mosque in Tehran) and agriculture (e.g., it designed several different types of tractors).²⁴ Khatam and other IRGC affiliated firms became the leading contractors in the oil sector, undertaking significant projects like the Hamedan-Sanandaj pipeline.²⁵ By 2007, Khatam had completed 1220 governmental projects and had 247 projects ongoing²⁶—such as the development of the South Pars gas field.²⁷ The IRGC also grew increasingly involved in public works during this period through its affiliation with several charitable foundations (*bonyads*). Although the IRGC is best known for its connections to the powerful Foundation for the Oppressed and Wounded Veterans (Iran's largest financial institution) and Martyrs Foundation, it also worked with smaller organizations on public works projects—such as the Foundation for Mutual Assistance (*bonyad-e ta'avom*), which, for instance, the IRGC helped build a regional fishery complex.²⁸ Finally, through its control of various shipping companies, the IRGC became a major importer of legal (and arguably illicit) commercial goods.²⁹

Through all of these endeavors, the IRGC became inexorably tied to Iran's economy. For this reason, the organization and its leaders—who profited from the lucrative government contracts and commercial importing—became involved in protecting their financial interests. Initially, this meant supporting Rafsanjani (who encouraged and enabled the Guards' economic role) and most of his policies; however, as

²³ A short history of the engineering firm can be found on its website, http://www.khatam.com/default_farsi.asp (Accessed 12 August 2008).

²⁴ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 336, 19 April 1995, pp. 12-17. The Kharkheh dam was completed in 2002 and is said to be the sixth-largest earthen dam in the world. See, <http://www.payvand.com/news/01/apr/1077.html> (Accessed 17 February 2009).

²⁵ "Development projects implemented by IRGC," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 15 January 1994, *BBCSWB*, 25 January 1994.

²⁶ Wehrey et al., *Pasdaran*, 61.

²⁷ "Qaragah-ye sazandegi-e khatam al-anbia dar towse'eh-ye maydan-e pars-e jonubi sherkat kardeh ast," <http://www.aftab.ir/news/2004/jul/11/c2c1089539101.php> (Accessed 15 July 2008).

²⁸ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 336, p. 13.

²⁹ "New shipping company to operate in the Gulf," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 25 January 1993, *BBCSWB*, 2 February 1993. Also, on the Guards illicit and black market activities, see Wehrey et al., *Pasdaran*, 64-66.

Rafsanjani took measures in his second term aimed at undermining the bazaari merchant's monopoly on commercial pricing, the IRGC joined the traditional right (to which many of its commercial interests were linked) in opposition.³⁰ Opposition to increased governmental oversight of the commercial sector, as well as resistance to the relaxation of Islamic social policies (also initiated by Rafsanjani with support from the left), moved the IRGC into a firm alliance with the traditional right and their patron, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. By the mid-1990s, the IRGC actively worked against proponents of these issues, and became dramatically antagonistic toward the left under Rafsanjani's successor, the reformist Mohammad Khatami, after his election in 1997.

Commanding “Right”: Legal and Religious Justifications for Coercive Activism

Entrance into the various areas of development gave the IRGC a significant national role outside of its militaristic *raison d'être*. To this extent, extra-military enterprises helped legitimize the organization's continued existence in the early years after the war when questions regarding the future role of the organization and its possible dissolution were rife. Development work also provided the organization a partial solution to the question of demobilization. As has already been mentioned, the issue of how to deal with massive amounts of war veterans is a recurring problem that has plagued postwar societies throughout history.³¹ For Iran and the IRGC, this problem was compounded by a shattered national economy and an exorbitant number of partially and/or untrained soldiers, who had little opportunity for employment at home. Further, with military funding scarce, it would have been difficult to attempt to train, arm, and absorb the massive ranks of the basijis (many of whom were either too young, too old, or otherwise unfit to serve as proper military soldiers) into the IRGC or regular forces. On one hand,

³⁰ On the relationship between Rafsanjani and the bazaari merchant class during his presidency, see Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam, and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change*. London: Chatham House, 2006, pp. 52-79. Also, on the history and place of the bazaari merchant class in Iran, see Arang Keshavarzian, *Bazaar and state in Iran: the Politics of the Tehran marketplace*. Cambridge: and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

³¹ Alec Campbell, “Where Do All the Soldiers Go? Veterans and the Politics of Demobilization,” in *Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in State Formation*. Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 96-117. Also, for an interesting comparison to the Iranian case on the issue of demobilization and the role of veterans in a postwar period, see Norma Kriger, *Guerilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

the prospect of a couple hundred thousand unemployed war veterans presented an obvious problem for the IRGC and Iran's leaders. On the other, the IRGC and the Basij had cultivated an extensive community of patriotic, religious, and loyal adherents to the revolution and the Supreme Leader. This network, and the vast human resources it contained, was seen as too valuable to simply demobilize.³²

For this reason, IRGC commanders, with the support of Rafsanjani and Khamenei, created new avenues of service for war veterans. Development initiatives were important in this regard, with guardsmen and basijis working in all areas (from engineers and architects to mechanics and laborers) of IRGC operations. However, this was only a partial solution, and one that did not address the unique blend of military training and ideological zeal possessed by these soldiers. To this end, the IRGC and Basij also focused on increasing their institutional presence in national and local security.³³ For instance, thousands of guardsmen were moved into the LEF, including both rank-and-file soldiers and the officers who were appointed to top command positions.³⁴ While this endeavor and those below were instigated jointly by IRGC commanders and Rafsanjani most of the new policies initiated were geared toward strengthening the Basij and giving it an expanded role in domestic affairs. The Basij was seen as an important institutional vehicle for the defense of revolutionary values and the promotion of the "culture of the defense"—a term used to denote the ethos of religious and nationally-motivated militancy and sacrifice fostered during the Iraq war.³⁵ The postwar program of the Basij emphasized the organization's responsibilities in defending local infrastructure (e.g., airports and public buildings), serving as security for governmental officials and clergy, and helping train all sectors of society in military matters.³⁶ Instead of being full-time soldiers living in and operating from military barracks, basijis were integrated into Iran's

³² For instance, see "Khamenei and Ahmed Khomeini on importance of Revolutionary Guards' role," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 28 January 1990, *BBCSWB*, 30 January 1990.

³³ *Omid-e Enqelab*. No. 243, October/November 1991, pp. 18-19; also, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 334, January 1995, pp. 12-14.

³⁴ "Some 5,000 revolution guards to be transferred to Law Enforcement Forces," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 6 February 1992, *BBCSWB*, 8 February 1992.

³⁵ On the state's efforts to promote these sentiments through various government organs and media, see Farideh Farhi's "The Antinomies of Iran's War Generation," in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*. Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick, eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 101-120.

³⁶ The latter is in connection with the formation of a "20 million man army," the goal of a massive popular defense force called for by Khomeini in 1979.

social fabric. Though some basijis served fulltime, many others had a limited commitment or served the organization while simultaneously pursuing their education or employment.³⁷ Through these members the organization established a basiji presence in places like schools, guilds, professional organizations, factories, mosques, and farms.³⁸ Universities were of particular importance to the organization, which established Basij student organizations as a way to promote the organization and its values on campus.³⁹

Despite its foray into non-military areas, the Basij remained a martial force. As Basij commander, Brig-Gen. Ali-Reza Afshar, explained:

The Basij can primarily be summed up in this way: it is an *armed* guardian and an *armed* defender of the dignity of the revolution. Wherever the enemy threatens, an *armed* basiji is present. In truth, the Basij is a military force. By military it is not meant that the Basij should only involve a small portion of society. Why? Because defense and jihad are essential parts of religion [*foru'-e din*] and the lawful charge of all the faithful . . . This is the culture of the defense. In terms of logic, if a person is threatened he must act to defend himself. Even animals do this.⁴⁰

In this statement, Commander Afshar stresses the militaristic (or “armed,” *mosallah*) nature of the Basiji’s activities and its position as a defender of the revolution. Concerning the latter, Afshar is speaking to both the material and existential (i.e., cultural or ideological) threats to the regime and the values cultivated during the war (“culture of the defense,” *farhang-e defa’*). While the Basij continued to have a military role—it is an official branch of the land forces—it became the IRGC’s frontline force in defending the organization’s interests (and those of its conservative patrons) at the local level. As Afshar explains, the Basij is to confront threats reflexively and with armed intervention. This does not suggest that the Basij is to employ lethal force against threats indiscriminately, but rather that its capacity to use lethal force exists as both a deterrent and as a tool when required. The underlining implication is that physical coercion (whether implied or actual) is the backbone of the Basij’s defense strategy.

³⁷ “IRGC commander on Basij grading system,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 26 November 1991, *BBCSWB*, 28 November 1991.

³⁸ For a valuable ethnographic study of a conservative mosque’s congregation, including the role the Basij play within it, David Thurfjell, *Living Shi’ism: Instances of Ritualisation Among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006.

³⁹ “Iran commanders on duties and organization and Guards Corps and Basij forces,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 29 December 1990, *BBCSWB*, 4 January 1991.

⁴⁰ *Omid-e Enqelab*, no. 240, 6 September 1991, p. 20. (Emphasis added).

In order for the Basij's defense-minded domestic activities to be successful, the organization's legal mandate had to be expanded to include law enforcement responsibilities.⁴¹ Although the organization (like the IRGC) was involved in aspects of law enforcement since its inception, it was not until November 1993 that the Basij was granted the credentials to legally perform arrests in this domain.⁴² The basis of the Basij's law enforcement role was articulated as implementing the Islamic injunctions "the propagation of virtue and the prohibition of vice" (Persian: *amr be ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*). This phrase, also known as "commanding right and forbidding wrong," embodies two important Muslim duties derived from the Quran.⁴³ Its simple yet powerful message—that an individual Muslim has the responsibility to not only encourage moral actions within his community but also to take a role in preventing immorality—has made it a recurrent theme in classical and modern Islamic philosophical debates. Early Shiite scholars for instance debated whether the injunction was even applicable in the absence of the Imam (the argument being that only the infallible Imam had the authority to implement the injunction with perfect justice). The majority of later Shiite jurists, however, accepted its implementation with limitations regarding who could rightfully give permission to punish an amoral act, particularly if lethal force was required. After the revolution, most senior clerics followed Ayatollah Khomeini's thinking on the subject, which considered the granting of permission for physical or lethal punishment to be the exclusive domain of a qualified jurist. The establishment of the Islamic Republic however, made such permission and the implementation of the injunction more broadly the domain of the state.⁴⁴

The doctrine of "the propagation of virtue and the prohibition of vice" (or PVPV, as I will abbreviate it) became a significant political tool in the post-revolutionary

⁴¹ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 301, 3 February 1993, p. 51.

⁴² "Basijis to begin judicial activities," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 21 November 1993, *BBCSWB*, 22 November 1993.

⁴³ For an exhaustive study of this injunction in Islamic thought, see Cook's, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. For a more general discussion, see Cook's *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁴⁴ On classical Shiite debates on PVPV see Cook's *Commanding Right*, pp. 252-301; for contemporary debates, see pp. 530-549.

period.⁴⁵ This is particularly true with regards to the IRGC, who adopted these twin duties as one of its founding tenets:

Propagating virtue and prohibiting vice are revolutionary principles that have become permanent elements of the doctrine [*maktab*] of the Islamic Revolution. The *mojahed* and guardian [*pasdar*] of Islam must always oversee the carrying out of these Islamic commands and not allow the people, the state, or the powers to deviate from the Islamic line and principles. . . Propagating virtue and prohibiting vice are two principles that give Muslims—especially the faithful and *mojahedin* guardsmen—not only the right but also the duty of authority to carry out laws.⁴⁶

Following the logic that Islamic organizations had the duty and authority to enforce legal codes, PVPV, or morals policing, became a key justification for the IRGC and the Basij's domestic enforcement efforts. In 1992, the government expanded its role in morals policing by establishing the Office for the Vivification of the Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice (*setad-e ehya-ye amr be ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*)—an official organ charged with leading the state's morals policing campaign.⁴⁷ Headed by senior cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati and staffed by basijis, this committee worked in conjunction with security forces, judicial authorities, and non-governmental veterans' groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah to implement this doctrine at the local level.⁴⁸ As an ideologically committed organization with hundreds of thousands of members, “the Basij”, in the words of Hojjat al-Islam Ebrahim Ra'isi, Tehran's Revolutionary Court prosecutor, was considered “the most suitable revolutionary apparatus for the organization, coordination, and carrying out of PVPV.”⁴⁹ In inaugurating the

⁴⁵ Most of the contemporary discussions in Iran are based on the views of Ayatollah Khomeini. For a prime example of how Khomeini's thoughts on the subject are presented in the postwar period, see: *Amr beh ma'ruf va nahy az monkar az didgah-ye Imam Khomeini*. [Tehran?]: Mo'asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1998. For works on PVPV that are either influential and or directly related to the IRGC and Basij, see: Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, *Rahbari-e nasl-e javan*. [Tehran?]: Kanun-e khedamat-e farhangi-e alast, 1982, pp. 90-115; The Center of Islamic Research of the IRGC, *Amr beh ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*. [Tehran?]: Namayandegi-e vali-e faqih dar sepah, 1997; and Mohammad Eshaq Mas'udi, *Pazhuheshi dar amr beh ma'ruf va nahy az monkar: az didgah-ye qor'an va ravayat*. Tehran: Sazman-e tablighat-e eslami, 1999/2000; and The Office for the Vivification of PVPV, *Amr beh ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*. http://www.ehya.ir/book_show.asp?gid=/0/8/35/&id=67 (Accessed 20 February 2009).

⁴⁶ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 4, March 1980, p. 33-34.

⁴⁷ “New committee formed for ‘propagation of virtue and prohibition of vice,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 19 July 1992, *BBCSWB*, 22 July 1992.

⁴⁸ On the office's current work and approach toward PVPV, see its official websites: <http://www.kh-setadehya.ir/> (Accessed 31 March 2009); <http://www.ehya.ir/> (Accessed 31 March 2009).

⁴⁹ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 301, 3 February 1993, p. 51.

establishment of the new office, Brig-Gen. Afshar similarly proclaimed to Basij members: “You are the agents who will reform society and eradicate its vices.”⁵⁰

As PVPV was commonly upheld as the duty of each individual Muslim, its implementation by the state required some degree of professionalization.⁵¹ In addressing a crowd of basiji PVPV agents, or morals police, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahedi-Kermani, Khamenei’s representative to the IRGC, explained that the inherent “shades of transgression” made implementing the doctrine a delicate matter. Hence he argued the individuals who worked as morals police “must have a good track record. Must have outstanding Islamic morals and be admirable. Must be well-informed of PVPV, sociology, [and] must know which type of people to strike against.”⁵² An IRGC textbook on PVPV published by Movahedi-Kermani’s office further explains that the basiji agents involved in its implementation should receive “precise and exact training” in religious jurisprudence (*fiqh*) from clerical authorities and be versed in the protocols of PVPV before engaging in its implementation.⁵³ Despite the militaristic overtones of the Basij’s morals policing mandate, Movahedi-Kermani reminded the organization that carrying out the doctrine was not akin to war; rather “the spirit of PVPV is similar to the work of a compassionate doctor, such as the Prophet of God who was like a roaming physician searching for spiritual illnesses [to treat].”⁵⁴ In total, however, basijis only needed to undergo a two-week training course to qualify as morals police.⁵⁵

Despite the establishment of a governmental organ in charge of morals policing, and official guidelines for the training of its agents, the actual implementation of the doctrine remained loosely-defined. This is due in part to the implicit vagueness of the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ For instance, on PVPV as a duty of all Muslims, Ayatollah Jannati explains in a Friday prayer sermon: “It is the duty of every individual Muslim to propagate virtue and prohibit vice - wife with regard to her husband and husband to wife; children towards father and father to children. In organisations, subordinates should exercise it towards superiors and superiors towards subordinates. There is no distinction here. If a catering servant sees that a boss is doing something which is prohibited, he must - provided he is observing the necessary conditions - engage in prohibiting vice. One cannot say [to the servant] ‘What has it got to do with you?’” See, “Jannati warns against allowing too many foreign specialists,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 24 July 1992, *BBCSWB*, 27 July 1992.

⁵² Speech on PVPV to the Basij by Ayatollah Movahedi-Kermani, *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 301, 3 February 1993, p. 50.

⁵³ The Center of Islamic Research of the IRGC, *Amr beh ma’ruf va nahy az monkar*. [Tehran?]: Namayandegi-e vali-e faqih dar sepah, 1997, p. 7-8.

⁵⁴ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 301, p. 50.

⁵⁵ “Basijis will receive training on propagating virtue and prohibiting vice,” *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 18 November 1992, *BBCSWB*, 20 November 1992.

injunction, which in contemporary society can encompass aspects of civil law, Islamic law (*shari'at*), and cultural politics. Examples of how the IRGC conceived of and conducted its morals policing operations elucidate some of these points. For instance, a report from the Political Office of the IRGC of the Gilan region (northern Iran) discusses how a morals policing campaign was initiated in its district. Here, local “basiji brothers and sisters” were split into two groups of five to six individuals and sent to places throughout the region to carry out PVPV. After two weeks, they reported the following successes: 1100 immorally-dressed (*bad-hejab*) individuals were given verbal warnings (a prerequisite to physical coercion); 120 individuals were detained and “guided” (*hedayat*) toward submitting confessions to untold offenses (all were later freed after posting bail); 10 cases of irreligious figurines were confiscated and prevented from being sold; and 32 seditious (*mofsad*) individuals were arrested for insulting and provoking the basijis. The IRGC of Western Tehran presented a similar report. These basijis split into 17 teams and coordinated their operations with the LEF and judicial authorities (*maraja' - e qaza'i*). After a two-month campaign they discovered and confiscated five illicit video caches, 251 illicit video tapes, three illicit cassette tape reproduction facilities, 465 illicit cassette tapes, 332 irreligious pictures, 32 bottles of liquor, 21 vials of opium, one cache of side-arms, and 135 bullets. In addition, the basiji teams arrested 91 individuals (apparently in connection to the above crimes), all of whom were later released after receiving religious guidance (*ershah*) from the basijis and posting bail.⁵⁶

Through operations such as the aforementioned, the IRGC and Basij became interwoven in the enforcement of civil laws and religious morality at the local level. Although these organizations had been involved in similar activities since their inception, favorable postwar governmental policies enabled these organizations to greatly extend their domestic presence and reach. This was also achieved through initiatives such as the formation of Basij chapters in schools and universities. For instance, by the end of 1993 the Basij announced that it was active in “68% of all high-schools, technical-schools and teacher-training colleges and in more than 44% of boys' and girls' schools” (“more than 10,000 schools” altogether). The organization further claimed that the formation of these

⁵⁶ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 299, 1 December 1992, pp. 32-33.

school chapters involved the recruitment of over a million new student members.⁵⁷ On the military and security side, Brig-Gen. Mohammad Zolqadr, the Chief of the Joint Staff of the IRGC, claimed in 1994 that 1000 Basij brigades had been formed throughout Iran.⁵⁸ A year later, Brig-Gen. Afshar announced that in Tehran alone, the Basij had expanded to 186 Ashura (male) battalions, 17 Zahra (female) battalions, and 50 student battalions.⁵⁹ The intended result of this growth was the transformation of the Basij from a popular volunteer militia to an extensive paramilitary organization with a strong social movement base. The main architects behind this expansion—IRGC commanders, conservative clerics, and initially Rafsanjani—positioned the Basij as a bulwark to the spread of social liberalization and frontline defense against a swelling movement for change in Iran.

Militarism and Politics: Coercive Activism against Islamic Modernism and Reform

While the IRGC, Basij, and non-governmental groups employed the doctrine of PVPV for a wide spectrum of law enforcement-type operations, combating immorality was the dominant theme. This was not simply due to the nature of the PVPV doctrine, which concerns encouraging proper Islamic behavior; rather, the morals policing operations undertaken by the Basij were part of a concerted conservative political project aimed at eliminating manifestations of social liberalization. The IRGC and its related organizations had promoted social conservatism since their formations, but in the postwar climate the movement to retain or amplify austere Islamic social mores became increasingly the province of the conservative right (and thus a political position). Although Rafsanjani's first-term economic policies were largely supported by conservatives, his efforts to relax social restrictions were not.⁶⁰ An early example of this was the conservatives' vociferous protests to the High Council for Cultural Revolution's (a governmental council headed by Rafsanjani) 1992 platform, which aimed at instituting

⁵⁷ "Basij Resistance Force official says one million students recruited," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 5 December 1993, *BBCSWB*, 7 December 1993.

⁵⁸ "IRGC commander says 1,000 Basij brigades formed in the country," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 16 July 1994, *BBCSWB*, 18 July 1994.

⁵⁹ "New commander of Tehran's Basij Resistance Forces will have over 250 battalions," *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Tehran), 29 July 1995, *BBCSWB*, 31 July 1995.

⁶⁰ Moselm, *Factional*, 187-88.

broad social reforms that also minimized clerical influence in cultural affairs. Early casualties of conservative outrage were Mohammad Khatami and Mohammad Hashemi (Rafsanjani's brother), widely considered the architects of the government's social liberalization measures. Khatami and Hashemi were respectively replaced as cultural minister and head of television and radio by Mostafa Mir-Salim and Ali Larijani—both former guardsmen and members of the powerful conservative-bazaar coalition, the Allied Islamic Society (*jam'iyat-e mo'talefeh-ye eslami*). Under Larijani, Mir-Salim, and other officials appointed by Khamenei (such as Ayatollah Jannati as the head of the PVPV office, Guardian Council member, and Tehran's Friday prayer leader), conservatives developed methods to confront social liberalization in all its forms. Central to this was the empowerment of hardline veteran activists—such as basijis and hezbollahis (a general term for unaffiliated far-right activists)—through morals policing endeavors. In this way, the Basij and IRGC worked in concert with the conservative right to combat leftist and modern-rightist influence in the postwar era. Through a confluence of shared values and interests, these organizations became a fixed element of the conservative camp and the leading forces against social and religious reform.⁶¹

The clashes over policy intensified in Rafsanjani's second term when Rafsanjani's new economic agenda, which included increased taxation and other measures aimed at weakening the bazaar's traditional monopoly of the commercial sector, split the alliance of the two rights. Now at odds with conservatives, Rafsanjani was forced to rely on the support of the left which helped the latter promote its social and democratic reform agenda. In a political partnership, the modern-right and left worked together to curb the growing power of the conservatives. Despite conservative efforts, which included the barring of numerous left-leaning candidates by the Guardian Council, the modern-right and leftist axis made significant gains in the 1996 Majles elections. Although the conservatives retained a majority in the Majles, and dominated most government and security institutions, they were unable to stem a popular movement for change that led to the election of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997. Khatami's election came as a shock to conservatives and moderates alike. With the backing of the Supreme Leader, the

⁶¹ Anoushirvan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 16-20.

Guardian Council, prominent clergy, powerful bazaari leaders, and the commanders of the IRGC and Basij, many observers had assumed that the conservative candidate, Majles speaker Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, was all but assured victory.⁶² Khatami's election and the popular social forces that brought him to power—dubbed the 2nd of Khordad movement after the date of the election on the Iranian calendar—simultaneously announced hope for his supporters and confirmed the conservatives' worst fear: the modernist Islamic ideologies of the modern-right and left were succeeding.⁶³

Leading up to and after Khatami's election, conservatives vigorously attacked what they deemed to be the ideological tenants of an emergent (or returning) liberal movement.⁶⁴ Though primarily concerned about center-left policies that weakened bazaari and clerical influence, conservatives charged "liberals" (or the modern-right and leftist axis) with leading a Western-backed conspiracy to destroy the revolution. Liberals, conservatives argued, were actively working to discredit Islam by openly questioning the validity of guardianship and by promoting Western social mores and political practices such as democracy.⁶⁵ Further, conservatives contended, liberals were striving toward a détente with the US and were thus leading Iran back toward foreign control. All of these themes were summed up in the central conservative claim that liberals were at the head of a Western "cultural invasion" (*tahajom-e farhangi*) that was undermining the revolution's Islamic character. Calls against the "cultural invasion" of non-Islamic, Western values became a rallying cry and the basis for anti-liberal activism.⁶⁶

⁶² Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary*, 85-89; Ansari, *Iran and Democracy*, 108-109; Moslem, *Factional*, 240-251.

⁶³ On a critical survey of the reformist thought, see Ansari, *Iran and Democracy*, 141-168.

⁶⁴ "Liberalism" as a term employed by the conservatives in the postwar era was seen by some as a reawakening of the "liberal" ideologies of the Bazargan provisional government.

⁶⁵ The election of Khatami was seen as a direct challenge to the leadership of Khamenei who had openly endorsed Nateq-Nuri. This symbolic challenge to Khamenei was compounded by the views of reformist leaders, such as Mohsen Kadivar, who openly questioned the "absolute" (*motlaqeh*) authority of the guardian and suggested that the latter's authority should stem from the will of the people. Other Islamic intellectuals, such as Abdolkarim Soroush, argued for new understandings of Islam's relationship to democracy and civil society, which provided little room for the unchecked authority of the Supreme Leader. After his election, Mohammad Khatami made similar, though less overt claims, such as suggesting the guardian jurist should play more of a supervisory role in society and be held accountable to the laws and mandates of the constitution. Reformist positions were also taken up by Khamenei's chief rival, Ayatollah Montazeri, who spoke out against the "absolute" reading of the guardianship and supported Khatami's reformist initiatives.

⁶⁶ Farhang Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism: The Changing Discourse in Iran*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007, pp. 166-171.

Conservative leaders positioned faithful guardsmen and basijis as the frontline defense against this foreign intrusion and its backers.⁶⁷ For instance, after the left and modern right made gains in the 1996 Majles elections, the conservative Majles speaker, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, announced that “liberals” posed a “serious threat to the revolution,” adding:

If liberal ideology becomes dominant in the country, Islamic laws will not be implemented and we shall return to the helplessness and dependency of former times. . . This is not a superficial danger. Nor has it ended. Because of this, it is necessary for basiji volunteer(s) and hezbollahi forces to eradicate this ideology by being vigilant and continuously present in different arenas . . . Any ideology that prevails over the next Majlis will also prevail over the next government. The Majlis with a liberal government would prepare the way for [trampling] the values and principles of the revolution.⁶⁸

As Nateq-Nuri and others charged the IRGC and Basij with combating liberalism, these organizations worked to form their own understandings of this ideology and the cultural invasion that lay behind it. An article published in a Basij research journal argues that the foundation of cultural invasion is the spread of Western thought in Islamic societies. The author, Mohammad Hosayn Jamshidi, identifies the ideologies and “principles” (*osul*) that form the intellectual basis for anti-Islamic, liberal policies as humanism, rationalism (*'aql-gara'i*), scientism, secularism, materialism (*binesh-e maddi*), naturalism (*tabiyyat-gara'i*), individualism (*fard-gara'i, esalat-e fard*), and utilitarianism (*esalat-e sud*). By outlining and discussing the intellectual elements of liberalism, this article presents a scientific view of the Western cultural threat to Islam in Iran. Yet, past this academic veneer, Jamshidi's conclusion is unequivocal: “Cultural invasion is a type of culture war.”⁶⁹

Working within similar logic, Mohsen Rezai made numerous speeches to the IRGC and Basij telling them to be vigilant in their defense against liberalism. Rezai described liberalism as a cancerous disease that would eat away at the revolution from

⁶⁷ See for instance, *Amr be ma'aruf va nahy az moker*. [Tehran?]: Nemayandegi-e Vali-ye Faqih dar Sepah, 1997, pp. 5-8.

⁶⁸ “Majlis Speaker says liberal Majlis a ‘serious threat’ to revolution,” *IRNA* (Tehran) in Persian, 30 April 1996, *BBC WM*, 1 May 1996.

⁶⁹ Mohammad Hosayn Jamshidi, “Tahajom-e farhangi,” *Basij: Majallah-ye elmi-e pazhuheshi*, no. 7/8, Summer/Fall 1995, pp. 21-40.

within. He referred to the positions of the left and modern right as a form of “American Islam,” which aimed to spread Western values under the guise of Islamic modernism. In contradistinction to liberals, true revolutionaries, Rezai argues, were those who were faithful to Islam, the institution of the guardianship (*velayat-e faqih*), and the revolutionary forces (i.e., IRGC and Basij).⁷⁰ After Khatami’s election, Rezai continued to emphasize the importance of the guardianship and Khamenei’s leadership to the revolutionary system: “If the policies of the leader are implemented by the whole country, there will be no reason for enemy cultural combatants [i.e., liberal-reformists] to profit from a cultural vacuum and permeate [*vared shodan*] our society.”⁷¹ Thus, in Rezai’s view, the only remedy for the disease of liberalism was total obedience to the institution and views of the (conservative) Supreme Leader.

As their PVPV and law enforcement responsibilities attest, the IRGC and Basij’s role in defending revolutionary culture was more than an ideological or cultural endeavor. Yet commanders were careful not to explicitly call for these organizations to employ militaristic means in combating liberalism. Instead, they issued general statements that spoke to the organizations’ responsibilities to protect Islam, the guardianship, and revolutionary values. The tone and context of these statements, however, did not hide the notion that preventing the spread of liberalism would require physical coercion. For instance, Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, IRGC joint chief of staff, argued:

The Guards Corps is not merely a military force which sits in its barracks waiting for the enemy's military attack; the status of the Guards Corps in the constitution is to safeguard and protect the values of the revolution. Therefore, it cannot look indifferently at [the Western] cultural onslaught and the sinister influence of the lackeys of the West and of the liberals in the ranks of this sacred system. . . In the name of [reform], some people want to . . . weaken all the fundamentals and values of this revolution, for the preservation of which so many martyrs and war disabled have sacrificed their lives; and they want to please [imperialist] arrogance by turning their backs on the sacred aspirations of the revolution.⁷²

⁷⁰ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 344, July 1996, pp. 22-25.

⁷¹ *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 356, August/September 1997, p. 16.

⁷² “Official says Guards Corps will act to protect revolutionary values,” *Kayhan* (Tehran) in Persian, 21 May 1996, *BBCWM*, 29 May 1996.

Mohsen Rezaei made similar arguments and pledged that the IRGC and Basij should not allow liberals to undermine the Islamic tenants of the revolution. In a July 1996 speech to the Basij, Rezaei warned: “The liberals have no right to take advantage of the political nobility and tolerance of the revolutionary forces.” He continued:

The basijis are duty-bound to defend the values of the revolution, the leadership and the clergy, and there is no doubt that they will perform this duty under any condition whatsoever. . . While maintaining their serious presence on the arenas of the revolution, the basiji and revolutionary forces should not allow themselves to be drawn into violence. . . The activities of the basij forces should be within the framework of the law.⁷³

Both Zolqadr and Rezaei emphasize the IRGC and Basij’s obligation in combating all manifestations of liberalism. As military organizations, armed coercion is certainly understood as a component of such work. Rezaei reminds basijis that violence in and of itself is not what is asked of them and that their activism should be firmly bound by the law. However, as a security force, the law supported basiji violence and physical coercion in the policing of certain civil laws and Islamic social morality through PVPV. In this way, Rezaei’s call for legal and non-violent action is more a call for the institutionalization of activism rather than an argument against coercive violence. That is, Rezaei is reminding his audience to not act outside the legal bounds of their organization to combat liberalism—something basijis had been accused of doing—but to do so through available institutional mechanisms.⁷⁴

As this policy aimed to constrain vigilante activism on the part of the Basij, it allowed space for non-governmental groups less encumbered by issues of legality and the facade of impartiality to employ more severe tactics against social liberalization. The result on the ground (preceding and following the election) was a surge of violence involving groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah and other fundamentalist hezbollahi gangs. Ansar-e Hezbollah (Ansar, hereafter) began as a veterans’ association devoted to

⁷³ “Basij will not let ‘liberals’ weaken government, says Iranian guards commander,” *IRNA* (Tehran) in Persian, 9 July 1996, *BBCWM*, 10 July 1996.

⁷⁴ Basijis were involved in numerous incidents involving undue violence against moral-offenders in the name of PVPV. See for instance, “Militants in Iran Renew Their Attacks on Western Influences,” *The New York Times*, 9 May 1996.

advancing veterans' rights and social conservatism in the postwar period.⁷⁵ The group has often been mischaracterized as an IRGC apparatus due to its veteran membership and close association with local Basij units,⁷⁶ but instead of taking direction from IRGC or Basij commanders, the group's activities were coordinated by its civilian and clerical patrons—including the group's co-founder, former IRGC commander Hosayn Allahkaram and its chief clerical overseer, Guardian Council secretary Ayatollah Jannati.⁷⁷ In this way, the group serves as an example of how non-state organizations became important avenues for the political expression of ideologically-motivated veterans. With the backing of powerful clerics, and with the assent of Khamenei, Ansar not only gave hardline veterans an outlet for political activism, it also served the interests of the conservative establishment.⁷⁸ Employed as “pressure groups,” Ansar and other hezbollahi gangs were organized by powerful bazaari leaders and influential clergy to harass the conservative-right's political opponents and their constituencies.⁷⁹ Of the numerous incidents involving Ansar activists, including several clashes with student groups on university campuses, the torching of Tehran's Qods cinema for screening an “un-Islamic” film in May 1996 is an illustration of the group's use of violence in political protest.⁸⁰

Khatami's landslide victory—he received nearly 70% of the vote—brought conservative forces to the realization that the modernist discourse promoted by the reformists had not only garnered mass appeal, it had also penetrated the revolutionary forces. Indeed, reports have suggested that large numbers of guardsmen and basijis

⁷⁵ For Ansar-e Hezbollah's political platform, see “Ansar-e Hezbollah dar yek negah,” <http://ansarehezbollah.org/UI/View/AboutUs.aspx> (Accessed 10 March 2009).

⁷⁶ For instance, in this otherwise excellent article Ansar is referred to as a “unit” of the IRGC. See, Matthew C. Wells, “Thermidor in the Islamic Republic of Iran: The Rise of Muhammad Khatami,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (May, 1999), p. 36.

⁷⁷ A valuable narrative of Ansar's formation and its anti-reformist activities is provided by the legal statement (or “confessions,” *e'tarafat*) of Amir Farshad Ebrahimi—a former Basiji and early Ansar member. See, “Matn-e e'tarafat-e Amir Farshad Ebrahimi,” *Mihan*, no. 59, January 2003.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of Khamenei's support for Ansar's activism, see “Ali Khamenei, Ansar-e Hezbollah, va eteqad beh r'ab,” *Mihan*, no. 57, October 2002.

⁷⁹ Ebrahimi claims that senior clerics paid Ansar members to violently disrupt reformist events. See, “Matn-e e'tarafat-e Amir Farshad Ebrahimi.”

⁸⁰ Although the group apologized for its involvement in the Qods cinema attack in a statement released two days after the event, it claimed that it had acted in defense of revolutionary values and recommitted itself to the protection of hezbollahi culture. See, *Resalat* (8 May 1996).

openly supported Khatami in the election.⁸¹ Even though the IRGC and Basij retained a core of veterans committed to conservative social values, other veterans and a new postwar generation had largely become supportive of Khatami's message of change.⁸² Such evidence seems to have convinced Khamenei and conservative leaders that they had failed to act decisively enough to combat liberalism. As a result of the conservative failure in the presidential election, the door was opened for hardliners—who advocated the implementation of more extreme measures against liberalization—to take a leading role in rightist political activism. In the case of the IRGC, Mohsen Rezai, the architect of the organization's conservatism, was asked by Khamenei to step-down from his role as commander-in-chief to take an appointment to the Expediency Discernment Council (a governmental body that serves as an intermediary between the Majles and the Guardian Council). Although Rezai officially retired to take this appointment and to pursue personal efforts in the “cultural struggle [*mobarezeh-ye farhangi*] of the country,” his replacement by Yahya Rahim Safavi, a more hardline IRGC deputy-commander, was seen as an endorsement by Khamenei of the far-right and its uncompromising politics.⁸³ This change of leadership suggested the start of a new direction in IRGC policy and served notice that Rezai's more cautious approach to political activism was no longer favored by the Supreme Leader.

With the support of Khamenei and other powerful conservatives, Safavi and a new cadre of hardline staff commanders led their troops—as part of a larger conservative campaign—into direct opposition of Khatami. Through 1998 and 1999, hardline forces from Ansar and the Basij to the judiciary, Majles, and intelligence agencies worked to intimidate and destroy the reformist project. This included politically-motivated imprisonments of key Khatami allies like Gholam-Hosayn Karbaschi (Tehran's mayor) and Abdollah Nuri (Khatami's Interior Minister); the closings of several reformist newspapers;⁸⁴ and a series of physical attacks and murders against journalists and

⁸¹ See for instance, Ansari, *Iran and Democracy*, 108.

⁸² Farhi, “War Generation.”

⁸³ Mohsen Rezai's farewell speech to the IRGC, *Payam-e Enqelab*, no. 356, August/September 1997, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁴ On the attacks against the pro-Khatami press, see Adam Tarock, “The Muzzling of the Liberal Press in Iran,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4, (August 2001, pp. 585-602.

intellectuals.⁸⁵ These acts provoked vigorous denunciations from reformist leaders and the reformist press. These verbal protests were in turn countered by conservatives, who accused their opponents of serving the interests of Iran's enemies by unleashing dissension in society. The IRGC responded to this dissent with a more threatening tone. For instance, in a February 1999 speech to Basij battalions in Yazd (central Iran), IRGC commander-in-chief Safavi told his subordinates:

The enemy declares that there are power and political struggles in Iran, while no such thing exist(s) in the country. Using your political-revolutionary vigilance, be wary of the internal and external sedition and await orders from the leader [Khamenei]. Once an order is given by the leader, the seditious individuals will not be able to survive.⁸⁶

Political turmoil erupted in July 1999 following the closing of *Salam*, a reformist newspaper that had published a document suggesting the existence of a conservative conspiracy to censor the pro-Khatami press. Outrage over the closing and the suspicion of an anti-reformist cabal led to a July 8 protest by student activists on the campus of Tehran University. In response, hezbollahi assailants stormed a student dormitory on the university's campus and indiscriminately attacked students, throwing some out of windows. Though Khamenei criticized the assailants and called for justice, news of the incident sparked a series of anti-conservative and anti-Khamenei student protests throughout the country.⁸⁷ Each protest was met with a counter-protest of student basijis and hezbollahi activists. As the protests and counter-protests intensified, so too did the rhetoric of conservative leaders, who criticized the protestors for spreading disunity and for undermining Islam and the position of the guardianship. By July 12, the IRGC and Basij had moved into cities and campuses throughout Iran to provide security and prevent more uprisings.⁸⁸ This show of force came on the same day that a letter signed by twenty-four senior IRGC and Basij commanders was delivered to President Khatami threatening aggressive action if the disturbances were not stopped. The letter, which was later sent to

⁸⁵ For a detailed narrative of these events, see Kaveh Basmenji, *Tehran Blues: Youth Culture in Iran*. London: Saqi, pp. 221-261.

⁸⁶ "Islamic Guards ready to cut 'sedition' on Khamenei's order," *IRNA* (Tehran) in Persian, 11 February 1999, *BBC WM*, 12 February 1999.

⁸⁷ Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary*, 146-147.

⁸⁸ For narratives of the July 1999 protests, see Basmenji, *Tehran*, 250-258; also, Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary*, 142-150.

the conservative *Jomhuri-e Eslami* newspaper and published, criticized Khatami for allowing his supporters to run amok and freely criticize the Supreme Leader. Arguing the protests would lead to the destruction of the guardianship and Iran's Islamic culture, the commanders emphasized Khatami's duty to veterans and the families of war-martyrs to protect these revolutionary values. The commanders argued, "You know full well that despite our capabilities, we are impotent because of [the] concern with expediency." They continued with an ultimatum:

How long should we observe the situation with tears in our eyes? How long should we suffer in silence and practice democracy through creating chaos and insulting each other? How long should we have revolutionary patience while the system is being destroyed? . . .

Mr. President: If you do not make a revolutionary decision and if you do not fulfill your Islamic and national mission today, tomorrow will be far too late. It is unimaginable how irretrievable the situation will become.

In the end, we would like to express our utmost respect for your Excellency and *to declare that our patience has run out*. We cannot tolerate this situation any longer if it is not dealt with.⁸⁹

The implication was clear: further unrest would result in an IRGC-led *coup d'état*.

Conclusion

The IRGC's ultimatum to Khatami signaled that the various policies that had encouraged the organization's broad participation in postwar society had also emboldened its position as a political actor. Through the intervention of Rafsanjani, Khamenei, and other prominent leaders the IRGC was spared the inglorious proposition of either having a dramatically reduced role in postwar affairs or being dissolved altogether. Instead, in acknowledgement of the organization's potential to mobilize and sustain a mass of ideologically-committed troops, Iran's leaders chose to strengthen the organization by providing it access to government contracts and by facilitating its presence in public institutions. In the industrial sector, Rafsanjani's policies helped establish the IRGC as the state's leading contractor. Through firms like Khatam al-Anbia, the IRGC was

⁸⁹ "Military commanders give an ultimatum to President Khatami," *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Tehran) in Persian, 19 July 1999, *BBCWM*, 20 July 1999. (Emphasis added.)

entrusted with some of the largest and most lucrative projects in the postwar period. Similarly, through its involvement with powerful charitable-cum-commercial enterprises (such as the Foundation for the Oppressed and Wounded Veterans), and through its own shipping and importing companies, the IRGC became heavily invested in economic production and policy. This not only enriched its commanders, it also tethered them and their organization to the economic interests of the conservative-bazaari mercantile class, which already shared many of the same religious and social concerns.

Postwar policies also gave the IRGC and its associates a wide-spectrum of operational activity in the social arena. A key development in this regard was the organization's new law enforcement duties connected to the establishment of the Office for the Vivification of PVPV. With license to make arrests and detain individuals in the name of religious virtue, the IRGC, Basij, and war veterans' groups were given a unique mandate in socio-cultural affairs. The role of the Basij was particularly significant as it was the institution most encouraged by Rafsanjani and Khamenei to propagate Islamic cultural values. With its expansion into schools, universities, and other public institutions, the Basij became the leading proponent and enforcer of PVPV at the local level. Likewise, veterans groups were aided by the patronage of Khamenei and other conservative clerics, who positioned themselves as the leading advocates for the veteran community. The conservatives fostered this relationship through various avenues of support, such as by consistently pushing for the expansion of the IRGC and Basij's operational purview and by sponsoring activities of veterans' groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah. Even though Rafsanjani's policies facilitated the IRGC and Basij's permeation of Iranian society, as he and the modern right broke with the conservatives over economic and social policies it was the latter who benefited from the domestic expansion of these organizations.

The close and active relationship between conservative leaders, clergy, revolutionary forces, and veterans groups formed an influential network that combined massive ideological resources (such as the office of the Supreme Leader, clerical bodies like the Guardian Council, and pulpits throughout Iran) with the vast human and military resources of the IRGC and its associates. While conservative leaders utilized institutional resources to strengthen the revolutionary forces and extend their domestic reach, these

organizations afforded the conservatives privileged access to state and non-state mechanisms of armed coercion. The near-monopolization of coercion by these forces enabled the conservatives to effectively challenge popular democratic will, a fact evident in the IRGC's ultimatum to Khatami in July 1999. By interfering in the political system through a threat of force, this episode promulgated new political roles for the IRGC and militarism in Iran.

To conclude, how does the above relate to the question of demobilization in the postwar period? First, it should be clear that instead of demobilizing and disarming the ranks of the IRGC and Basij, Iranian leaders chose to maintain and even expand their mobilization, particularly in extra-military sectors. That is, Iranian leaders partially addressed the problem of demobilization by creating new areas of operation for the IRGC, its forces, and veterans in general. Yet, in expanding the operational mandates of the IRGC and by giving it important footholds into industrial, commercial, and law enforcement sectors, the domestic standing and political influence of the IRGC was dramatically enhanced. Further, the same postwar policies that provided extra-military roles for the IRGC and Basij also gave them an added stake in non-military affairs and caused a political rigidity that tied these organizations to conservative interests. Thus, by approaching the issue of demobilization in this way, Iranian leaders created additional problems for the state, namely the growth of military power in society and politics.

CHAPTER VII

Gifts for the Enemy: The War on Terror and its Beneficiaries in Iran (2001–2009)

We've seen really since 9/11 that the chief beneficiary of America's global war on terror in the Middle East has been the very country that it considers to be a major part or a founding member of the axis of evil. And that basically tells us that there's an enormous incoherence in American approach to the Middle East. . . They simply haven't managed to work out a strategy and a policy that will work and will achieve results.¹

—Ali M. Ansari

What war is lies partly in the eye of the beholder [and] what armed forces do goes well beyond most people's definitions of war-making.²

—Anthony W. Pereira

The attacks of September 11 changed the course of US foreign policy in the Middle East. The Bush administration's slow and cautious assessment of the region quickly transformed into a hurried effort to identify and confront terrorists and terrorist-supporting states. As the architects of Bush's Middle East policy, neoconservatives inside and outside the administration recognized the opportunity 9/11 afforded them to implement their vision of a secularized and benign Middle East more favorable to Israel and its place in the region.³ The Bush administration's blueprint for its post-9/11 foreign policy was laid out in the president's 29 January 2002 State of the Union address. Closely

¹Ali Ansari interview with BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5277362.stm (Accessed 10 April 2009).

²*Irregular Armed Forces and Their Role in State Formation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 394.

³See for instance, Adib Moghaddam, *Iran and Global Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 123-154; also see, Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The United States and Iran: Sanctions, Wars, and the Policy of Dual Containment*. New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 96-119.

following the aggressive agenda initiated by his advisors, President Bush emphasized the need to combat “terror” around the world and made clear that the US strategy in the “Global War on Terror” would be to target states that harbored and supported terrorists. He announced that the chief foes in the war on terror (outside of Al Qaeda and its associates) were Iraq, Iran, and North Korea: the so-called “axis of evil.” These states not only supported terrorism, Bush claimed, but they were hostile actors on the world stage whose attempts to develop weapons of mass destruction threatened democracy and freedom around the globe. Bush’s admonitions to the axis states soon translated into political and military action against Iraq, culminating in the invasion of that country in March 2003. The quick collapse of the Baathist regime served notice to the remaining members of the axis that the Bush administration was willing to use military force—and risk America’s international standing—to advance its geo-political agenda.

Although the Bush administration succeeded in driving the Taliban from power in Afghanistan and overthrowing Saddam Hussein in Iraq, its war on terror inadvertently strengthened many of the states and actors it had aimed to weaken and contain. In the Middle East, Iran has been a clear beneficiary of US foreign policy. This point has already been argued by several authors and acknowledged by the current US administration;⁴ however what has not been adequately examined is how US foreign policy post-9/11 has benefitted the IRGC. After the fall of Baathist Iraq, no state was seen as more antagonistic to the US and its interests than Iran, and no element inside Iran was considered a more direct threat to US influence in the region than the IRGC. From its central role in Iran’s nuclear industry and its development of long-range missile technology to its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, the IRGC and its subsidiaries have been considered the main vehicles for Iranian aggression and fanaticism. Yet, as I argue in this chapter, the war on terror not only failed to contain the IRGC it was a boon to the organization and both directly and indirectly encouraged its political involvement, contributed to its domestic expansion, and facilitated its influence in foreign conflicts. As US policies provided the space and means for the expansion of

⁴ See for example, Seymour Hersh, “The Redirection: Is the Administration’s new policy benefitting our enemies in the war on terrorism?,” *The New Yorker*, 5 March 2007. Also see, Robert Lowe and Claire Spencer, eds. *Iran, its Neighbours and the Regional Crises*. London: Chatham House, 2006. Finally, then Sen. Barack Obama made this point repeatedly during his election campaign in 2007 and 2008.

IRGC influence abroad (such as empowering Shiites in Iraq and toppling the Taliban in Afghanistan), the Bush administration's hostile rhetoric and threats of military confrontation created the perception in Iran that a US (or Israeli) attack was imminent. Further, suspected US covert operations in Iran, seemingly confirmed by US journalists, gave credence to the notion that the US was actively trying to topple the Islamic regime. This not only aided hawkish-conservatives in Iran—and in part facilitated the election of Ahmadinejad—it legitimized the regime's paranoid politics and the domestic expansion of the IRGC.

I view the Bush administration's mishandling of its Iran strategy as linked to its misperceptions of Iran as a political actor. While religious zeal and ideological perceptions certainly influence aspects of Iran's domestic and foreign policies, scholars have convincingly shown that Tehran's postwar approach to regional affairs has been pragmatic and generally free from religious and/or ideological considerations.⁵ An oft-cited example is Iran's close relationship with "Christian" Armenia and its rivalry with "Shiite" Azerbaijan. One can also point to Iran's selective support for Muslims and Muslim resistance movements—such as Iran's active support for Bosnian Muslims during the Balkan wars of the mid-1990s but its lack of support for Chechen rebels during the same period—as evidence of its pragmatic approach to religiously-imbued foreign affairs. By viewing Iran's foreign policy as the consequence of irrational fanaticism, the Bush administration relied on uncompromising policies and the threat of military force to contain Iranian ambitions instead of seeking diplomatic (i.e., rational) compromise on the basis of common strategic interests (such as a stable, Taliban-free Afghanistan or a "debaathificated" Iraq). Consequently, instead of encouraging Iranian compliance with Western demands, US policies and aggressive tactics served to embolden Iran's hawkish leaders, expand IRGC influence, and constrain attempts to halt Iran's nuclear development.

⁵ See the articles by in Shaffer and Ansari in Brenda Shaffer, ed., *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006. Also see, Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Takeyh's book did not become available until after my dissertation was written, so I was not able to include his findings and arguments in my study.

War, Fear, and a Nuclear Iran

The 9/11 attacks inspired a rare display of sympathy for the United States across Iran. Spontaneous candlelight vigils in Iranian cities accompanied statements from President Mohammad Khatami condemning terrorism and the attacks.⁶ This goodwill was short lived. As the US began building up a campaign against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, Iranian politicians and pundits publically warned against any US military action in the Muslim world. For instance, a news site connected to the conservative Islamic Propagation Organization stated: “Any unilateral military action against innocent Afghans may help to boost the image of Uncle Sam at home, but it will surely tarnish the U.S. image on the international arena for its flagrant violation of international law.”⁷ Likewise, while condemning the 9/11 attacks, the reformist *Aftab-e Yazd* newspaper argued that 9/11 “should not become an excuse to make the world insecure, and create warlike events.”⁸ Yet, as Iran was condemning US aggression, Khatami’s administration was quietly exploring ways in which Iran could assist the effort against the Sunni fundamentalist Taliban. Iran had been actively supporting Afghanistan’s Northern Alliance for years, and had almost gone to war with the Taliban after the murder of several Iranian diplomats in Kabul in 1998. Iran thus had a vested interest in seeing the Taliban overthrown in favor of their allies in the Northern Alliance. Although Iran had offered the US limited support in its invasion, the shared Iranian and American interests in Afghanistan provided the Bush administration an opening into improving US-Iranian relations. Despite indirect Iranian overtures to US officials about finding common ground on Afghanistan, and despite US intelligence reports that encouraged fostering Iranian support in Afghanistan and providing a role for Iran in any engagement with Iraq, Bush decided to rebuff the offers emanating from Tehran and take an uncompromising line against the Khatami government.⁹

⁶ See for example, “Khatami condemns terrorism, calls for global fight against it,” *Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1* (Tehran) in Persian, 22 September 2001, *BBCWM*, 22 September 2001.

⁷ *Tehran Times*, 18 September 2001. http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=71850 (Accessed 15 April 2009).

⁸ “Paper fears terror response will create further violence,” *Aftab-e Yazd* (Tehran) in Persian, 15 September 2001, *BBCWM*, 3 October 2001.

⁹ See the National Intelligence Council’s January 2003 report “Regional Consequences of Regime Change in Iraq,” included in the Select Committee on Intelligence’s report “Prewar Intelligence Assessments about

Bush's labeling Iran a member of the axis of evil provoked a backlash from across the political spectrum in Iran. However, it also provided conservatives and hardliners added fodder with which to criticize Khatami's pro-Western policies. In a speech, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei castigated American foreign policy as "the greatest evil" and claimed that he was "proud" that "the most cursed of the world's satans" accused the Islamic Republic of being a part of the axis of evil.¹⁰ An editorial in *Kayhan*, the leading hardline newspaper, argued that Bush's recent statements were evidence of America's ingrained antagonism toward the Islamic Republic and proof that the reformists' attempts to improve relations with the US were not only misguided, but detrimental to Iran's national security. The editorial further argued that since the reformists had also criticized Bush's statements they implicitly admitted to their naiveté and strategic failings. Hosayn Saffar-Harandi, the editorial's author, claimed that Bush's comments vindicated the conservative and hardliner position vis-à-vis the West, stating:

After five years of misrepresentation and enduring all kinds of insults and accusations, the critics of 2nd Khordad Front now feel vindicated. It has now become clear that as the result of unilateral efforts to make friends with the foreigners and to open a dialogue with them, one cannot close one's eyes to international realities and to have vain hopes that the satanic nature of America and her allies would change.¹¹

By contending that Khatami had misjudged the nature of America's foreign policy, hardliners and conservative pundits were able to paint themselves as the more realist political camp. Their vocal declarations against a détente with the US, once seen as ignorant and alarmist by reformists, were now trumpeted as reasonable and informed.

In this way, hardliners and conservatives used Bush's comments and the prospect of an American attack as added justification to undercut Khatami and his already weak reformist administration. Despite being reelected by an overwhelming majority in the summer of 2001, Khatami was a near-powerless leader. Conservatives continued to control the most important state institutions and used their influence to block all

Postwar Iraq together with Additional Views," 25 May 2007. <http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/11076.pdf> (Accessed 12 April 2009)

¹⁰ "Iranian supreme leader says US president 'thirsty for human blood,'" *Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1* (Tehran) in Persian, 31 January 2002, *BBCWM*, 1 February 2002.

¹¹ "Daily accuses reformers of helping the enemies," *Kayhan* (website) in Persian, 5 February 2002, *BBCMME*, 6 February 2002.

significant attempts of political and social reform initiated by the president.¹² An example of Khatami's powerlessness came the day after his election when Ansar-e Hezbollah activists violently attacked a pro-Khatami celebration arresting many of the president's supporters and injuring numerous by-standers including BBC journalist John Simpson.¹³ Khatami's inability to have any influence within the police (who either participated in these attacks or stood aside as they took place) was evidence of his broader ineffectuality and basic lack of support within the military and security services. As the war on terror began to take shape, the growing fear of American aggression spawned additional attacks on pro-Khatami elements and other forms of perceived western influence. For instance, prominent critics of the conservative establishment—such as academics Hashem Aghajari in 2004 and Ramin Jahanbegloo in 2006—were jailed for criticizing Islam and accused of spying for the West to undermine the regime.¹⁴

More dramatic was a string of murders in Kerman committed by a small group of basiji activists in 2002. The six basijis, who were also members of the Office for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prohibition of Vice, had admitted to killing five individuals but were also suspected in thirteen additional murders. Each of their victims was killed on the basis of prohibiting vice and in an attempt to stomp out the “cultural invasion” of Western immorality. Two of the victims, a young couple engaged to be married, were killed because they had been suspected of routinely engaging in premarital sex. Another victim, a married woman, was buried up to her chest and stoned to death for suspected adultery and other immoral acts.¹⁵ In the subsequent trial the accused justified their killings by claiming the victims were sinners whose immorality was punishable by death under Islamic law (*mahdur al-dam*). They specifically identified prominent hardline cleric Ayatollah Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi as the religious authority whose guidance on the matter they had followed. Although the six basijis were found guilty and sentenced to death, the Supreme Court in Tehran refused to accept the ruling and sent the case back to

¹² On the constraints on Khatami's presidency see, Ali Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: the Politics of Managing Change*. London: Chatham House, 2006, pp. 218-239; also see, Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Neoconservatives*, 1-29.

¹³ For John Simpson's account of the incident see, “Khatami election soured by vigilantes,” *BBC*, 10 June 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1381859.stm (Accessed 1 May 2009).

¹⁴ See for instance, Basmenji, *Tehran Blues*, 270-79.

¹⁵ On these murders see, Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: the Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2008, pp. 102-106.

another regional court in Kerman to be retried. After two more trials and two more guilty verdicts, a fourth trial in 2007 finally found the basijis not guilty and acquitted the defendants of their crimes (a ruling accepted by the Supreme Court). In the end, the court agreed with the defendants that the victims had indeed been immoral Muslims whose actions were justifiably punished by death.¹⁶ As the basijis were licensed members of the Office of PVPV they had in essence carried out their civic duty.

The judiciary's role in acquitting these activists signaled that rightwing vigilante activism had the tacit support of both state institutions and the Supreme Leader (whose silence on the rulings was seen as implied support for the basijis). In this way, conservative clergy from the judiciary and Guardian Council to the Supreme Leader actively supported anti-reform activism at the local level and in the political realm. This activism and related criticism of Khatami took on new urgency after Iran's secret nuclear enrichment program was made public in the fall of 2002. Although information on Iran's enrichment facility in Natanz and a heavy water plant in Arak was disclosed to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in August of that year by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (the political front for the Mojehedin-e Khalq Organization), US government officials did not seize upon the issue until December.¹⁷ As a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran's failure to disclose its secret facilities (themselves legal under the NPT) put Iran in violation of its international agreements. Consequently, Iran was pressured by the US, the so-called EU-3 of Britain, France, and Germany, and the IAEA to make additional concessions on its nuclear program, including suspension of its enrichment program and allowing for snap inspections of each of its facilities by IAEA monitors.¹⁸ These additional demands were made alongside the Bush administration's aggressive rhetoric toward Iraq, accusing the

¹⁶ On the trials see, *Baztab*, 15 April 2007, <http://www.baztab.info/news/64756.php> (Accessed 13 February 2009); *Rooz Online* (in Persian), 5 May 2008, http://www.roozonline.com/archives/2008/05/post_7233.php (Accessed 13 February 2009); *Gooya* (in Persian), 20 December 2004, <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/020687.php> (Accessed 20 February 2009); and *BBC Persian*, 19 November 2004, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2004/11/041119_mf_mb_kerman.shtml (Accessed 18 February 2009).

¹⁷ The MKO is often credited with discovering Iran's nuclear facilities through its own intelligence network; however, others have argued that the intelligence was given to the MKO to disclose by Israel's Mossad. See Fayazmanesh, *United States and Iran*, 120-161.

¹⁸ On Iran's nuclear program see, Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.

fellow axis of evil state of a secret WMD program and of supporting terrorism. Even though both Khamenei and Khatami denied Iran had any intention of developing nuclear weapons and argued that such weapons were against Islamic law, Iran knew that US intelligence had evidence suggesting Iranian scientists possessed designs for a suspected nuclear device.¹⁹

The Khatami administration found itself in an impossible situation. Any apparent compromise with the West over Iran's nuclear program would be vociferously opposed by the conservatives and much of the Iranian public. Further, the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq on the grounds of a similar secret WMD program made the continuation of nuclear enrichment a risky proposition. Europe's clear objection to Iran's enrichment activities, backed by the implied military threats of both the US and Israel, gave Iranian leaders few options at resolving the crisis outside of succumbing to Western demands. While Iranian diplomats engaged the IAEA and the West at negotiating tables in Europe, Khatami's cabinet began to pursue a covert deal with the US. This effort culminated in a proposal faxed to the US State Department by the Swiss ambassador to Iran, Tim Guldemann, who was in charge of American affairs in Tehran.²⁰ The contents of the fax contained the outline of a proposed resolution to Iran's nuclear situation—a text purportedly approved by both Khatami and Khamenei.²¹ In it Iran demanded a non-aggression pact with the US, “rectification” of Iran's status with the US (e.g., removal from the axis of evil and an end to hostile rhetoric), abolishment of all sanctions against Iran, “full access to peaceful nuclear technology, biotechnology, and chemical technology,” recognition of Iran's special relationship to the Shiite shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq, recognition of Iran's “legitimate” regional security interests, and repatriation of MKO terrorists to Iran from Iraq. In exchange, Iran would fully cooperate with the IAEA, accept additional protocols and effectively prove that it did not have an

¹⁹ The November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate claims that Iran's nuclear weapons program was “halted” in fall 2003 due to international pressure. See, NIE “Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities.” http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf (Accessed 23 March 2009). Also see, David Sanger, *The Inheritance: the World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power*. New York: Harmony Books, 2009, pp. 1-26.

²⁰ For details on this letter and the Bush administration's response to it see, Sanger, *Inheritance*, 47-50.

²¹ Citing unnamed sources investigative journalist Nicholas Kristof claims that both Khatami and Khamenei approved the proposal. See, <http://kristof.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/04/28/irans-proposal-for-a-grand-bargain/> (Accessed 26 April 2009).

active WMD program or have any intention to start one, take action against any Al Qaeda members in Iran, coordinate with the US to ensure a stable, secular, and democratic Iraq, cease material support for Palestinian militant organizations including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, encourage Hizbullah to become a solely political organization in Lebanon, and accept the Saudi Arabian initiative for a two-state solution in Israel and the Palestinian territories.²²

Reaction to the missive in the Bush administration was mixed. The hawks, including Dick Cheney and John Bolton, rejected the offer immediately, considering it a weak attempt from a nation obviously frightened by American's recent military success in Iraq. To them, the offer was proof that their strategy to reshape the Middle East through the use of force was working.²³ Others in the State Department, particularly Richard Haass, the director of policy planning, advised state secretary Colin Powell that the offer may be worth pursuing. While not convinced of the proposal's provenance, Haass felt that the only way to find out if it had merit would be to pursue it through diplomatic channels. Secret talks were already taking place between Iranian diplomat Mohammad Javad Zarif and US ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad on possible ways to exchange intelligence on terrorist organizations. Zarif wanted to exchange MKO members in Iraq, who had been disarmed by US forces shortly after the defeat of the Baathist regime, for Al Qaeda suspects who were detained and under house arrest in Iran after fleeing US forces in Afghanistan. At the time the US was not willing to exchange terrorist suspects with Iran, but it asked Iran to interrogate its Al Qaeda suspects for information about a possible attack in the Persian Gulf. If Iran had any intelligence on such an attack it did not share it with the US, but after four bombs exploded in an American housing complex in Riyadh on 12 May 2003 the US was convinced that the Al Qaeda suspects in Iran had had foreknowledge of the operation. The US blamed Iran for not investigating the matter and the Bush administration promptly called off all talks, thus killing the proposal. What may have been a significant

²² For a facsimile of the purported proposal see, http://www.mideastweb.org/iranian_letter_of_2003.htm (Accessed 25 April 2009).

²³ Glenn Kessler, "In 2003, U.S. Spurned Iran's Offer of Dialogue," *The Washington Post*, 18 June 2006. Also see the interview with John Bolton in the PBS *Frontline* episode, "Showdown with Iran," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/themes/grandbargain.html#bolton> (Accessed 12 May 2009).

opportunity for a fundamental shift in the relationship between the US and Iran died before it even began.²⁴

With a direct deal with the US no longer possible, the EU-3 and the IAEA were left to work out a resolution with the Iranians. Khatami's position, however, had grown more tenuous. While attempting to placate the conservative opposition and the Iranian public with bold refusals to compromise Iran's nuclear ambitions, Khatami was also navigating negotiations with the West in search of such a compromise.²⁵ As could be expected, when Khatami agreed in November 2004 to temporarily halt enrichment as a goodwill gesture during talks with the EU-3 and the IAEA, he was immediately slammed by conservatives and hardliners. Mohsen Rezai, Expediency Council secretary and former IRGC commander-in-chief argued that Khatami's diplomats had given Europe too much "top secret" information on Iran's nuclear program and had thereby undermined Iran's "deterrence" capabilities.²⁶ In a speech to Revolutionary Guards commanders, senior cleric Ayatollah Nuri-Hamadani claimed that by agreeing to cease uranium enrichment Khatami's administration had helped advance America's plot against Iran.²⁷ Similarly, prominent hardline cleric Hojjat al-Islam Mohsen Doagu called the agreement the "worst in the history of the Islamic Republic" in a Friday prayer sermon.²⁸ The hardliner onslaught against Khatami not only undermined his attempts to reach compromise with the West, it also played a role in their overall political revival. To this extent, American and Western pressure on Khatami contributed to the downfall of reformist influence in Iran to the benefit of conservative and hardline forces.

Electing Ahmadinejad

By politically marginalizing Khatami and the reformists, conservatives were paving the way for their own return to dominance in the electoral realm. Aided by mass disqualifications of reformist candidates and low voter turnout, conservative and

²⁴ Sanger, *Inheritance*, 47-51.

²⁵ Chubin, *Nuclear*, 63-80.

²⁶ Interview with Mohsen Rezai, *ISNA* (in Persian), 24 November 2008, <http://isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-460160> (Accessed 29 April 2009).

²⁷ *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 25 November 2004, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8309050056> (Accessed 29 April 2009).

²⁸ *ILNA* Tehran (in Persian), 19 November 2004, *BBCMME*, 19 November 2004.

hardliner politicians took the majority of seats in the 2003 Municipal Council elections and in the 2004 Majles elections. Yet it was the upcoming presidential election that conservative and hardline leaders most wanted to capture.²⁹ The election of June 2005 was the first since 1997 that would not include Mohammad Khatami as the reformist candidate.³⁰ Without Khatami the reformists lacked a consensus leader which consequently divided the movement. The bulk of reformists threw their support behind two political veterans: former Majles Speaker Mehdi Karrubi and cabinet minister Mostafa Moin. While both of these individuals had strong reformist credentials, neither possessed the popularity, charisma, or public recognition of Khatami. The weak field of candidates opened up the door for the return to politics by former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who soon became the leading candidate in the election. Despite his public rivalry with reformists and hardliners, Rafsanjani presented himself as a moderate candidate who could bring balance to Iran's ideological divide. Armed with a pragmatic platform, and already one of Iran's most powerful and well known figures, Rafsanjani was considered by most political analysts and pre-election polls to be the likely winner of the 2005 presidential race.

For their part, conservatives and hardliners saw the presidential campaign as a way for the fundamentalist or "principlist" (*osulgara*) coalition to capture the executive branch. They too, however, lacked a candidate with the sufficient credentials and popularity to challenge Rafsanjani. The hardline candidates included former IRGC commander-in-chief Mohsen Rezai, secretary of the National Security Council and former guardsman Ali Larijani, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran's little-known mayor of two years and a former guardsman and *basiji*. The leading principlist candidate, however, was Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf—a former IRGC commander, Tehran's police chief, and the rumored preference of Khamenei. Qalibaf had gained public notoriety (and reformist scorn) for leading the crackdown on student protestors of the University of Tehran in 1998, but presented himself as a principlist candidate with modern and youthful sensibilities.

²⁹ On the conservatives return to electoral power see, Eheteshami and Zweiri, *Neoconservatives*, 33-45.

³⁰ For a detailed analytical narrative of the 2005 presidential elections, see Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 57-90; also see, Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Neoconservatives*, 41-45.

Qalibaf's use of "nationalist" (i.e., non-Islamic) symbols and modern attire in courting the youth vote gained him detractors among hardline leaders. Suspicions surrounding Qalibaf and the type of president he would become seem to have been behind a quiet but substantial shift of principlist support for the unheralded Ahmadinejad.³¹ As a former IRGC member and avid supporter of war veterans, Ahmadinejad had already formed a staunch support base among Basij members. A pre-election poll conducted by the Basij student association of the University of Tehran, for instance, found more basijis favored Ahmadinejad than other candidates (the reformist Moin came in second).³² Despite the support of many individual basijis across Iran, however, Ahmadinejad did not have the explicit endorsement of either the Basij or the IRGC. This was due to the IRGC's official neutrality in political matters and because the organization was likely split between the four candidates that came from its ranks: Qalibaf, Rezai, Larijani, and Ahmadinejad. Instead of endorsing a specific candidate, IRGC leaders sought to influence the votes of its members by articulating the qualities and characteristics that the preferred candidate should possess. Khamenei's representative to the Guards, Ayatollah Mohammad-Ali Movahedi-Kermani, highlighted six key attributes of the type of presidential candidate one should vote for: 1) someone who above all else heeds the religious demands of the people and is accountable to them; 2) someone who is obedient to the Supreme Leader and serves at his pleasure; 3) someone who lives a modest life and understands the suffering of the poor and dispossessed; 4) someone who will lessen the gap between the wealthy and impoverished; 5) someone who speaks on welfare and the economy at least as much as piety, attainment, chastity, and truth; and 6) someone who does not seek to attract votes with empty slogans.³³ Beyond these characteristics—all of which evoked Ahmadinejad's candidacy—guardsmen and basijis were to vote their conscience.

Fears that the Revolutionary Guards would somehow interfere with the election process were abundant. Part of this fear stemmed from comments made by the Guardian Council that volunteers from the Basij would be in charge of guarding polling stations on

³¹ Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 75.

³² "Tehran University's Basij Students Favor Tehran Mayor in Pre-Election Poll," *IRNA, FBIS*, 13 June 2005.

³³ *Sobh-e Sadeq*, 13 June 2005, p. 1.

election day.³⁴ This was a worrisome notion to reformist leaders, who publicized the issue with the hopes of discouraging possible machinations. Interior Minister Abdol-Vahed Musavi Lari publically confronted the Guardian Council on this point and warned of possible interference by state “military” organs (a clear reference to the IRGC and Basij).³⁵ IRGC leaders countered these accusations with a calculated media effort. Ayatollah Movahedi-Kermani assured the public that the IRGC was a non-political institution that did not harbor bias for any presidential candidate.³⁶ The Basij Public Relation’s office took this a step further and promised the Basij would personally lead investigations into any suspected election fraud should any take place.³⁷ Yet these statements did not mean the members of these institutions would not vote or campaign for the candidate of their choice. On the contrary, an IRGC spokesman promised that members of both organizations would participate in the elections en masse as voting was both their right and civil duty.³⁸ The principlists’ contention that high election turnout would be a powerful counter to US aggression also made voting a particularly patriotic endeavor for members of these organizations.³⁹

The first round of voting ended on 17 June 2005 with Rafsanjani leading with 6.1 million votes (just over 20% of votes cast), Ahmadinejad in second with 5.7 million, and Karrubi in third with 5 million. While Rafsanjani and Karrubi’s numbers generally followed those suggested by pre-election polling data, Ahmadinejad’s strong showing came as a surprise. Questions regarding Ahmadinejad’s numbers began to arise on election night as a discrepancy of 6 million votes between the results given by the Guardian Council (which claimed 21 million votes had been cast) and the Interior Ministry (which claimed 15 million votes had been cast) had been announced on state television.⁴⁰ Why the Guardian Council was even involved in election results, which had

³⁴ “Guardian Council Spokesman Denies Military Involvement in Election,” *Tehran Sharq*, 2 June 2005, *FBIS*, 2005.

³⁵ “Daily Cites Interior Minister On Military Forces’ Presence In Election,” *Aftab-e Yazd*, 1 June 2005, *FBIS*, 1 June 2005.

³⁶ *ISNA* (in Persian), 6 June 2005, <http://isna.ir/ISNA/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-537385> (Accessed 3 January 2009).

³⁷ *Baztab*, 14 June 2005, <http://www.baztab.com/news/25322.php> (Accessed 4 January 2009).

³⁸ *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 13 June 2005, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8403230300> (Accessed 5 January 2009).

³⁹ See, *Baztab*, 14 June 2005.

⁴⁰ Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 72.

previously been the purview of the Interior Ministry, was not clear. That the conservative Guardian Council's numbers seemed to favor Ahmadinejad further cast suspicion on the results. Karrubi instantly claimed that the Basij and IRGC had committed fraud in the elections (a claim that an IRGC spokesman vigorously denied).⁴¹ He pointed to the province of South Khorasan as a "most peculiar" (*'ajibtar*) example, which with 270,127 eligible voters had registered 298,000 votes.⁴² Rafsanjani also registered a protest with Khamenei and told the Supreme Leader of his intentions to withdraw from the election. Khamenei, who publically praised the election and condemned Karrubi's accusations, convinced Rafsanjani to stay in the running as his withdrawal would be fodder for the Bush administration's political pressure against Iran.⁴³

The second round of voting on 23 June produced equally surprising results with Ahmadinejad trouncing Rafsanjani by nearly 6 million votes. Although turnout was less than the first round (60% versus 63%), somehow Ahmadinejad had managed to capture nearly all of the votes that had gone toward hardliner candidates in the first round while also managing to seemingly receive many of the votes that had previously gone to reformist candidates.⁴⁴ Rafsanjani on the other hand, despite being endorsed by leading reformist organizations and first-round candidate Mostafa Moin, did only marginally better in the second round. While Ahmadinejad had certainly developed a much larger support base between the first and second rounds by playing to populist sentiment (a remarkable feat for less than a week of campaigning), accusations of widespread voter fraud continued. Rafsanjani himself issued a statement protesting the results and warned that "divine retribution" (*enteqam-e elahi*) awaited those responsible for the election fraud.⁴⁵

After the elections, suspicions that the Basij and IRGC were somehow responsible for Ahmadinejad's success were rife. With fears of these organizations tampering with

⁴¹ *Baztab*, 19 June 2005, <http://www.baztab.com/news/25542.php> (Accessed 8 January 2009).

⁴² *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 22 June 2005, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8404010269> (Accessed 8 January 2009).

⁴³ Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 73-74.

⁴⁴ For an analysis on the questionable math of the second round election results see, Bill Samii, "Iran: A New Paradigm and New Math," 26 June 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/Content/Article/1059502.html> (Accessed 14 January 2009).

⁴⁵ *ISNA* (in Persian), 25 June 2006, <http://isna.ir/Isna/NewsView.aspx?ID=News-546231> (Accessed 6 January 2009).

the voting process expressed by the Interior Minister even before the elections took place, and with the Basij in charge of guarding voting facilities and encouraged to fully participate in the voting process, such suspicion was not surprising. However, with the curious role of the Guardian Council in the election process and public praise for the results by Khamenei and other conservative clergy (despite the public protests of the reformist candidates, Interior Minister, and Rafsanjani),⁴⁶ the notion that a cabal had brought Ahmadinejad to power was not unreasonable. Indeed the existence of such a plot for a “white revolution” (as Ahmadinejad’s election was sometimes called) may have merit. Citing well-placed sources, prominent Iranian journalist Kasra Naji argues that conservative and hardline politicians met with the Supreme Leader at his residence a few nights before the first round and decided on supporting Ahmadinejad over Qalibaf due to the latter’s questionable commitment to hardline positions. Basijis, most of whom did not become aware of the plan to support Ahmadinejad till the morning of the first round election, were enlisted to see to it that he got a substantial number of votes. Naji cites one basiji as admitting to voting numerous times in the first round using the birth certificates of deceased citizens.⁴⁷ While the existence and dimensions of such a plot are impossible to determine, what is clear is that the IRGC and Basij actively worked toward the election of Ahmadinejad in both rounds (something all but admitted by IRGC commanders).⁴⁸ To express its joy at Ahmadinejad’s election and the view that this occurrence was a direct blow to US aggression, the IRGC issued an official congratulatory statement:

Undoubtedly, the winners of this great and historic test are each and every proud and pious Iranian who, despite propaganda attacks and the psychological operations of the American and Zionist media and broadcasting organizations, accepted the invitation of the wise and learned leader of the Islamic Revolution, Grand Ayatollah Khamene'i (blessed be his excellency), and in an unprecedented act of public participation, suitably determined the destiny of the country and themselves. . . The hegemon[ic] powers of the world will try to use different methods to

⁴⁶ See for instance, *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 2 July 2005, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8404110095> (Accessed 12 January 2009).

⁴⁷ On the so-called plot to elect Ahmadinejad see, Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 75-90.

⁴⁸ See for instance the IRGC Public Relations Office’s statement on the organization’s efforts to maximize voter participation, *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 25 June 2005, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8404040320> (Accessed 5 May 2009).

portray this everlasting epic as colorless, but this will not be forgotten in the historical memory of this nation and other free and great nations.⁴⁹

With Ahmadinejad's election, the IRGC and Basij witnessed one of their own rise to power and gained an outspoken and uncritical supporter in the presidency. Ahmadinejad demonstrated his gratitude to his allies by giving ten out of twenty-five of his cabinet seats to IRGC and Basij members and several more to war veterans.⁵⁰

Iran's Rise as a Regional Power

As aggressive US policy encouraged a revival of hardline power in Iran, US policies toward other states in the region and more globally helped facilitate the expansion of Iranian influence outside its borders. For instance, the antagonistic relationship between the Bush administration and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela decreased US influence within the South American state and opened up the door for Chavez to seek closer ties with other international partners. While Iran's relationship with Chavez's Venezuela had grown stronger during Khatami's presidency, Ahmadinejad publicized Iranian-Venezuelan relations as a new anti-imperialist front. Strengthening Iranian-Venezuelan relations was more than simple political showmanship, however, as both oil-rich countries increased investment in each other's infrastructure and commercial enterprises. Indeed, in 2007 the Chavez regime listed Iran as its second largest investor after the US with \$9.1 billion invested annually.⁵¹ Also, in 2006 the semi-official Petropars firm was awarded a lucrative contract by Chavez to develop drilling operations in an off-shore Venezuelan oil field.⁵² Another significant development has been the growing military cooperation between these countries which has led to a burgeoning IRGC presence in South America.⁵³

⁴⁹ "Iranian Guards Corps Says New President Must Remain 'Loyal' to Campaign Promises," *ILNA*, 25 June 2005, *FBIS*, 25 June 2005.

⁵⁰ On Ahmadinejad's first cabinet see, Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Neoconservatives*, 67-69.

⁵¹ "Venezuelan investment authority ranks USA, Iran top investors in 2006," *El Nacional* (Caracas), 18 January 2007, *BBCWM*, 26 January 2007.

⁵² *Mehr News*, 16 January 2006, <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=278772> (Accessed 12 May 2009).

⁵³ For instance, Mohsen Rezai's news organ *Tabnak* confirmed that four IRGC officers were killed on 3 May 2009 in a helicopter crash along the Venezuelan-Columbian border. *Tabnak*, 24 May 2009, <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=49107> (Accessed 25 May 2009).

Even though Iranian influence has grown in places like South America it has been in the Middle East where the expansion of Iranian power has been most pronounced. For instance, in Lebanon, where the Iranian regime and IRGC have a long history, Bush administration policies under the war on terror bolstered Iran's role in that country. Following the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 by suspected Syrian agents, the Bush administration joined a popular movement in Lebanon composed of mostly Christian and Sunni activists in calling for Syria to end its nearly thirty-year occupation of Lebanon.⁵⁴ The so-called Cedar Revolution that led to the removal of Syrian forces from Lebanon was hailed by the Bush administration as a sign of the global spread of "freedom."⁵⁵ The Bush administration considered the removal of Syrian troops a serious blow to Hizbullah.⁵⁶ However, while the Syrian presence enabled certain Hizbullah operations against Israel, it was also the main bulwark to the spread of Hizbullah's power. This fact was made clear in the aftermath of the July 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah. Even though Israel was able to inflict significant damage on Lebanese targets, it was unable to achieve its stated aim for the Lebanon campaign which was the destruction of Hizbullah. By simply outlasting its enemy on the battlefield, Hizbullah now claimed to have defeated Israel twice—once in forcing Israel to quit its 18 year occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000 and secondly in Hizbullah's moral victory in the 2006 war—something Arab state militaries had not been able to do. With Syrian power no longer able to curb Hizbullah ambition, the organization translated the political capital it had gained after the 2006 war into an aggressive push for power in Lebanon.⁵⁷ In May 2008, after a nearly 18 month boycott of the government Hizbullah was able to win a concession from the Lebanese government which gave the organization a veto over executive decisions.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ On Hariri's assassination and its impact on Lebanon see, Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon: the assassination of Rafik Hariri and its impact on the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

⁵⁵ "The Branding of Lebanon's 'Revolution,'" *The Washington Post*, 3 March 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A1911-2005Mar2.html> (Accessed 13 April 2009).

⁵⁶ "Allies Resisting As U.S. Pushes On Hezbollah," *The New York Times*, 17 February 2005, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A00EFD103AF934A25751C0A9639C8B63&sec=&spone=&emc=eta1> (Accessed 15 May 2009).

⁵⁷ On Hizbullah's postwar push for power see, Augustus Norton, "The Role of Hezbollah in Domestic Politics," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 42, no. 4, December 2007, pp. 475-491. Also see the chapter on Lebanon in Juan R. Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

⁵⁸ "Deal for Lebanese Factions Leaves Hezbollah Stronger," *The New York Times*, 22 May 2008,

As a close client of the Iranian regime, Hizbullah's ascent in Lebanon has given Iran and the IRGC greater influence in that country and in the politics of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Bush administration's policies regarding the latter also facilitated another expansion of Iranian influence. That is, in 2005 the US began pushing for democratic elections in the Occupied Territories. The elections of 25 January 2006, however, did not produce the result Bush had hoped for. In a rejection of perceived corruption by the secular Fatah organization, Palestinians gave the Sunni-fundamentalist Hamas organization a resounding victory.⁵⁹ Hamas, like Hizbullah, describes itself as a militant resistance organization and is listed by the US State Department as a proscribed terrorist group. Instead of recognizing the results and supporting the Palestinian democratic process it had advocated, the Bush administration quickly called for a boycott of Hamas and more importantly cut off all funding to its government. While the Bush administration continued to support Fatah, the vacuum created by its abandonment of financial support for the Hamas-led administration opened the way for Iran to step in once again. Buoyed by a steep rise in oil prices through 2008, Iran was able to become the leading financial supporter of the Hamas-led government and gained yet another significant foothold in the Palestinian-Israel conflict.⁶⁰

While these are examples of how specific US policies toward the Middle East directly benefitted Iran and expanded the reach and breadth of its foreign influence, the US occupation of Iraq has had the most significant impact on Iran and the IRGC's regional roles. Though the Bush administration counted on America's military involvement in the region to frighten Iranian leaders into complying with Western demands on the nuclear issue, the presence of US troops in Iraq (and to a lesser extent Afghanistan) made the US vulnerable to Iranian forces. That Iran would respond to any US aggression by targeting the latter's interests in the region was highlighted by Iran's military leaders well before the US invasion of Iraq. For instance, in response to Bush's axis of evil speech, IRGC Brig-Gen. Mohammad Zolqadr warned:

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/world/middleeast/22lebanon.html?_r=1 (Accessed 13 May 2009).

⁵⁹ For the Hamas election victory and reaction inside the Bush administration see, Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: the Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007, pp. 1-14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 134-172.

If the Americans show madness and attack us, we will not defend ourselves only within our borders. We have a long and powerful arm, and we can threaten American interests anywhere. There is no need for us to go very far. There are many American assets in the Persian Gulf. Sixty to 70 per cent of world energy is produced here. Well, this place is under our observation and within our reach. Of course, we do not wish to threaten anyone, but if our security is violated, no other place will have security either. We have the ability to respond with force to such threats. Afghanistan lacks an army, it lacks naval borders, and it lacks the ability to hit a strategic target. It is natural that such a country can be easily eliminated. Iraq also shares some of the same characteristics. We must stress that through immaturity and naivety, the Americans are in danger of creating a major incident in the world. We think that they are mainly engaged in a political bluff, but if they wish to act they will involve the world in a serious crisis. They may be able to start an incident in Iran, but its continuation will in no way be under their control.⁶¹

Here Zolqadr intimates Iran's ability to strike at Western targets outside of its borders. In part he is suggesting that if attacked Iran would turn toward the same instruments of terrorism—perhaps including Hizbullah or Hamas—that the Bush administration had accused Iran of sponsoring. However, with the addition of US forces in Iraq, added implications of such a strategy became evident. In Iraq, Iran was able to utilize its close ties to expatriate organizations such as the Islamic Dawa Party (Dawa hereafter), Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution in Iraq (after 2006 known as the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq or SICI) and associated militias like the Badr Organization to promote its interests in Iraq and keep pressure on American forces. In this manner, Iran's stated threat of retaliation against American targets became a key element in its approach to deterrence. And by proving US forces in Iraq were susceptible to Iranian sponsored attacks, Iran was able to use the threat of escalating violence in Iraq as a substantial deterrent to an American attack against Iran's nuclear facilities.

While Iran began significant activities in Iraq shortly after the March 2003 invasion, it was not until the hardline Ahmadinejad government came to power that Iran

⁶¹ "Hardline daily condemns MPs for criticizing IRGC deputy commander," *Kayhan* (website) in Persian, 16 February 2002, *BBCMME*, 17 February 2002.

took a more aggressive approach to securing its interests in that country.⁶² First news of possible Iranian involvement came from British commanders in southern Iraq who began to notice that Iranian-manufactured explosives were being used by the Shiite insurgents they were encountering. By March 2006, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accused the IRGC's Qods Force—the IRGC special forces wing in charge of Iran's extra-territorial military engagements—of fomenting violence in Iraq through its support of Shiite militias.⁶³ Soon Iranian involvement was suspected to be behind various attacks against coalition forces. In response, US forces were given the green light by the Bush administration to arrest and detain any Iranian operatives found in Iraq, and after January 2007 were authorized to kill or capture suspected Iranian agents.⁶⁴ While several Iranians had been arrested under the suspicion of providing aid to Iraqi insurgents in cross-boarder smuggling operations through 2006, the most publicized incident concerning suspected Iranian agents were the raids on two Iranian offices in Irbil (northern Iraq) on 11 January 2007. After the raids, US officials claimed to have detained five Qods Force commanders on the suspicion of aiding the Iraqi insurgency.⁶⁵ Although Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari protested the arrests, and claimed that the Iranians detained were diplomats, US officials countered that the detainees had been in charge of mediating IRGC support to Iraqi militant groups.⁶⁶

Tehran responded with a series of denunciations of the arrests and a consistent proclamation that the Iranians detained were in Irbil as part of Iran's diplomatic mission to Iraq. Yet several high-profile incidents that soon followed suggested that Iran was willing to back up its verbal protests with an intensification of its operations against coalition forces. Less than two weeks after the Irbil raids, five US soldiers were captured by a group of militants who had stormed an SICI office in Karbala. The militants, in the

⁶² On an early assessment of Iran's involvement in Iraq see, International Crisis Group, "Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence?," 21 March 2005; also see, Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Iranian Influence in Iraq: Politics and 'Other Means,'" West Point: Combating Terrorism Center, 1 October 2008.

⁶³ *CNN*, 7 March 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/03/07/rumsfeld.iraq/index.html> (Accessed 5 May 2009).

⁶⁴ "Troops Authorized to Kill Iranian Operatives in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 26 January 2007.

⁶⁵ The five Iranian detainees were ultimately released by the Obama administration in July 2009. See, "U.S. releases five Iranians in Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-iranians-freed10-2009jul10,0,6013374.story> (Accessed 10 July 2009).

⁶⁶ *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 12 January 2007, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8510220162> (Accessed 11 April 2009).

guise of Iraqi police, seemed to have slipped past security unnoticed—suggesting possible complicity by the SICI guards—and after a brief exchange of gunfire captured five US soldiers who had been on official duty at the SICI office. After a brief search, all five of the US soldiers were found dead of gun shot wounds on a road 30 miles outside of town (the crime scene suggested the US soldiers had been killed during a failed escape attempt).⁶⁷ US forces suspected that the soldiers had been the target of an inside job and fingers were ultimately pointed at Iran.⁶⁸ The fact that the number of US soldiers captured matched that of the Iranians detained in Irbil added weight to the theory that Iran had hoped to kidnap the soldiers in order to exchange them for their own (a tactic honed by Iran and Hizbullah during the Lebanese civil war).⁶⁹ Tehran officially declared to have had no knowledge of the attack; however, in a 12 February editorial in the IRGC weekly news organ *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Ali Rahimi, a senior member of the IRGC's Political Office, suggested that the Karbala raid had been in response to the arrest of Iran's diplomats in Irbil.⁷⁰ In another incident on 24 March the IRGC arrested 15 British sailors for purportedly entering Iranian territory while on patrol in the Shatt al-Arab. Though the soldiers were only detained two weeks, outside observers suspected that the arrests were in part aimed at pressuring coalition forces to release the five detained Iranians. However, as the arrests took place just a day before the UN Security Council voted to further sanctions against Iran due to its nuclear enrichment program, it is more likely that the detained British soldiers were in some way meant to influence (or protest) this matter.⁷¹ The suspected kidnapping of former FBI agent Robert Levinson—who disappeared from Iran's Kish Island on 8 March—may also be related to the Irbil arrests.⁷²

Outside of these events, the IRGC's overall strategy in Iraq has aimed at advancing Iran's interests through the subversion of US influence and control in Iraq's

⁶⁷ "Military Admits G.I.s Kidnapped and Killed," *Daily News* (New York), 27 January 2007.

⁶⁸ "U.S. Says Iran Helped Iraqis Kill 5 G.I.s," *The New York Times*, 3 July 2007.

⁶⁹ On Iranian involvement in hostage-taking during the Lebanese civil war see, Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, New York, St. Martins Press, 1997.

⁷⁰ *Sobh-e Sadeq*, 12 February 2007, p. 2.

⁷¹ On the sanctions see, Fayazmanesh, *United States and Iran*, 202-228.

⁷² On the suspected kidnapping of Robert Levinson see, Jeff Stein, "Mystery of Ex-FBI Agent Missing in Iran gets Close House Attention," 31 March 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-stein/mystery-of-ex-fbi-agent-m_b_181041.html (Accessed 29 May 2009); Also, "New Bid to Find Missing Ex-F.B.I. Agent," *The New York Times*, 11 April 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/12/world/middleeast/12levinson.html> (Accessed 29 May 2009).

Shiite districts. To this end, Iran actively supported allied militant groups against US and coalition forces. On one hand, the IRGC's close relationship with SICI and Badr—the IRGC helped establish the latter and train its militants during the Iran-Iraq war—and the permeation of the members of these organizations into the Iraqi government and security forces enabled Iran to have a significant voice in domestic Iraqi affairs.⁷³ On the other hand, the IRGC forged relationships with elements of the Sadrist movement in Iraq, which unlike SICI and Badr, largely did not participate in the government, were vigorously opposed the US occupation, and were also at times in a violent rivalry with SICI and Dawa. To this end, Tehran aimed to maximize its influence in Iraq by supporting both governmental forces and anti-governmental groups. The utility of such a strategy became evident in March and April 2008 as Iraqi state forces under the direction of Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki began a campaign to root out anti-governmental militant groups in Basra that had amassed considerable influence in the region to the detriment of the Iraqi government. Al-Maliki's ambitious plan initially floundered due to the inexperience of his troops, their unwillingness to engage fellow Iraqi Shiites in battle, and the tenacity of the local Basra militants.⁷⁴ Unable to achieve his goals militarily, Al-Maliki, in an unprecedented move, was forced to send a team to negotiate a ceasefire with the Basra groups in Qom. The powerbroker behind the deal, as first reported by McClatchy's Leila Fadel, was Qassem Soleymani, the head of the IRGC's Qods Force.⁷⁵ Part of this deal also seems to have included an agreement by Maliki to absorb Badr Organization militants into the Iraqi state forces—a move that further entwined pro-Iranian and IRGC-linked elements with the Iraqi government.⁷⁶

⁷³ On SICI and Badr see, Juan R. Cole, "Shia Militias in Iraqi Politics," in M.E. Bouillon, et al., eds. *Iraq: Preventing a New Generation of Conflict*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007, pp.109-123; Juan R. Cole, "The United States and Shi'ite Religious Factions in Post-Ba'thist Iraq," in *The Middle East Journal*, Volume 57, Number 4, Autumn 2003; and International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council," 15 November 2007.

⁷⁴ See, Reidar Visser, "Basra, the reluctant seat of Shiastan," *Middle East Reports*, http://www.merip.org/mer/mer242/visser.html#_edn11 (Accessed 15 August 2008); also, Michael Gordon, "The Last Battle," *New York Times*, 3 August 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/03/magazine/03IRAQ-t.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin (Accessed 3 August 2008).

⁷⁵ "Iranian General Played Key Role in Iraq Cease-Fire," *McClatchy*, 30 March 2008, <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/homepage/story/32055.html> (Accessed 17 May 2009).

⁷⁶ *Al-Zaman* (in Arabic), 1 April 2008, <http://www.azzaman.com/index.asp?fname=2008\04\04-01\999.htm&storytitle=> (Accessed 15 June 2009).

Soleymani's role in the Basra ceasefire agreement was a powerful symbol of Iran's growing influence in Iraq. Soleymani recognized his own rising stock and after meeting with a subsequent Iraqi delegation in May 2008 asked an Iraqi official to take a letter to his "counterpart" in Iraq, General David Petraeus—commander of coalition forces in Iraq and chief architect of the US-led surge—suggesting that the two meet to discuss Iraqi security.⁷⁷ Petraeus dismissed Soleymani's letter and offer to discuss matters concerning Iraq; however, the message was clear: Iran had amassed considerable power in Iraq and would have to be engaged for stability in that country to be achieved. This occurrence in a sense was the high watermark of Iranian influence in Iraq during the first half-decade of the US occupation. It came on the heels of a partial reversal of Bush administration policy which had renewed limited contacts with Iranian diplomats over Iraqi security. Through 2007 and 2008 US ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker held three meetings with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Kazemi Qomi in Baghdad. Though these discussions were confined to issues of Iraqi security and did not lead to a renewal of more formalized diplomatic ties between the US and Iran (something Iran has repeatedly pressed for), their occurrence was in sharp contrast to Bush's aggressive rhetoric and refusals to engage in unilateral talks with Ahmadinejad's government. They further marked a success for Iran's strategy in Iraq. By making itself inextricably connected to stability in Iraq through the support and training of militant groups, Iran had forced the US (and the Iraqi government) to the negotiating table.

New Approaches to a New Threat

With Iranian proxies gaining power throughout the Middle East, Rahim Safavi announced that in "geo-political" and military terms Iran had become an "extra-regional power."⁷⁸ This rise, as partly acknowledge by the IRGC, was due in large measure to US missteps in the region.⁷⁹ Yet, while Iranian influence in Iraq and the threat of escalating

⁷⁷ "Iran's Role Rises as Iraq Peace Broker," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 May 2008.

⁷⁸ *Mehr News Agency* (in Persian), 23 September 2007,

<http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?pr=a&NewsID=556030> (Accessed 21 April 2009).

⁷⁹ See Interview with IRGC commander-in-chief Mohammad Ali Jafari, *Jam-e Jam* (in Persian), 28 June 2008,

<http://www.jamejamonline.ir/archnewstext.aspx?year=1387&month=4&day=8&newsnum=100942312993> (Accessed 28 May 2009).

violence in that country gave Iran a certain amount of leverage over the US, the IRGC's active support for militant groups also strengthened the Bush administration's case that Iran was a state sponsor of terrorism. In this way, even despite the findings of the November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that Iran no longer had an active nuclear weapons program, the Bush administration continued to suggest that military action against Iran remained a possibility.⁸⁰ This made the notion of a coming war not only perceptible to the Islamic Republic, which has always considered the US a military threat, but also to sectors of the American public which became actively engaged in preventing another conflict in the Middle East. A good example of this is the number of books written by academics, intellectuals, and ex-officials from 2005 through 2007 that warned of and argued against the Bush administration's designs for military confrontation with Iran.⁸¹ These books paralleled the articles written by prominent US journalists like David Sanger, Nicholas Kristof, David Ignatius, and Seymour Hersh, which indicated that military action against Iran was a growing inevitability. Hersh's articles in particular, published in *The New Yorker* from early 2005 through summer 2008, described US plans for an attack against Iran in great detail.⁸²

With opposition to Middle East wars mounting within the American public, an attack on Iran and the start of perhaps another protracted conflict in the region would likely have required an act of congress. The US Senate nearly offered the Bush administration such consent in the form of amendment 3017 of House Resolution 1585. In its submitted form, amendment 3017—co-sponsored by Senators John Kyl (R., Arizona) and Joseph Lieberman (I., Connecticut)—made a clear case for military action

⁸⁰ David Sanger argues that the intelligence officials who produced the 2007 NIE report intentionally sought to mitigate the Iranian threat so that if a war with Iran was to occur it could not be blamed on faulty intelligence as had been the case with Iraq. See Sanger, *The Inheritance*, 16-26.

⁸¹ For instance see, Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran: the Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2006; Scott Ritter, *Target Iran: the Truth about the White House's Plans for Regime Change*. New York: Nation Books, 2006; and, David Barsamian, with Noam Chomsky, Ervand Abrahamian, and Nahid Mozaffari, *Targeting Iran*. San Francisco: Open Lights Books, 2007.

⁸² Seymour Hersh's chief articles on Iran during this period were: "The Coming Wars: What the Pentagon can now do in secret," *The New Yorker*, 24 January 2005; "The Iran Plans: Would President Bush go to war to stop Tehran from getting the bomb?," *The New Yorker*, 17 April 2006; "Last Stand: The military's dissent on Iran policy," *The New Yorker*, 10 July 2006; "The Redirection: Is the Administration's new policy benefitting our enemies in the war on terrorism?," *The New Yorker*, 5 March 2007; "Shifting Targets: The Administration's plan for Iran," *The New Yorker*, 8 October 2007; "Preparing the Battlefield: The Bush Administration steps up its secret moves against Iran," *The New Yorker*, 7 July 2008.

against Iran.⁸³ Quoting the congressional testimonies of Gen. Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, the amendment produced “evidence” of Iran’s support for anti-coalition insurgent groups in Iraq and claimed that Iran—through the IRGC’s Qods Force—was turning “Shia militia extremists in Iraq into a Hezbollah-like force that could serve [Iranian] interests” in that country. The amendment argued that it was “vital” to US national security to “prevent” Iran from achieving its objectives in Iraq. To this end, the amendment suggested “that it should be the policy” of the US government “to combat, contain, and roll back the violent activities and destabilizing influence” of Iran and its “proxies” in Iraq (paragraph three). It further called for the “prudent and calibrated use of all instruments of United States national power in Iraq, including diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military instruments, in support of the [above] policy . . . with respect to [Iran] and its proxies” (paragraph four). Equally significant, the amendment argued that on the basis of its training of and support for Shiite insurgents in Iraq, the IRGC should be designated “as a foreign terrorist organization under section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act” and placed on the list of “Specially Designated Global Terrorists, as established under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and initiated under Executive Order 13224” (paragraph five).⁸⁴ The implications of these sections—paragraphs three through five in the amendment—caused a vigorous debate on the Senate floor including a denunciation by Sen. Jim Webb (D., Virginia) who asked for the amendment to be withdrawn on the grounds that its wording and the listing of the IRGC as a terrorist organization could be used by the Bush administration as de facto congressional support for military action against Iran.⁸⁵

In order to get the amendment passed on 26 September 2007 last minute revisions were made which deleted paragraphs three and four; however, paragraph five, which designated the IRGC as a terrorist organization, remained.⁸⁶ Although the amendment

⁸³ The text of amendment 3017 can be found at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?r110:1:./temp/~r110MmrjkF:e531061:> (Accessed 15 May 2009).

⁸⁴ On the establishment and use of Executive Order 13224 see, Yonah Alexander and Michael Kraft, *Evolution of U.S. Counterterrorism Policy*. Praeger and Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008, pp. 992-994; also see, Thomas J. Biersteke, et al., *Countering the Financing of Terrorism*. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2007, pp. 214-16.

⁸⁵ “Senate urges Bush to declare Iran Guard a terrorist group,” *The New York Times*, 27 September, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/washington/27cong.html> (Accessed 12 May 2009).

⁸⁶ A facsimile of the handwritten final revisions to amendment 3017 can be found at: <http://thinkprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/kyl-lieberman.pdf> (Accessed 14 April 2009).

stopped short of adding the IRGC to the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations (which would have had more extensive ramifications), it enabled the US Treasury Department to target the Guards' financial holdings outside of Iran. As such Iranian officials and the IRGC considered the move another step toward a coming US-led military engagement with Iran.⁸⁷

Iranian officials already contended that a US campaign to undermine the Islamic Republic was underway. While Tehran claimed that pro-democratic activism within Iran was part of a Western effort to encourage a "velvet revolution"—leading to the arrests of several academics and journalists through 2009—officials pointed to the uptick in terrorist attacks and violence arising from Iran's minority ethnic populations as clear evidence of US black operations within its borders. Iranian forces had sporadically done battle with ethnic insurgent groups and criminal smuggling networks in the border areas of the country for years, however since 2005 there had been a steep increase in the frequency and boldness of attacks.⁸⁸ The most serious terrorist attacks were linked to Sunni organizations operating within the minority ethnic Balochi community in southeastern Iran and across the border in Pakistan. Most significantly, the People's Resistance Movement of Iran (*jonbesh-e moqavemat-e mardomi-e iran*)—better known as Jondollah (Army of God)—claimed responsibility for numerous attacks against the Iranian government, including the February 2007 bombing of an IRGC transport vehicle, the June 2008 assassination of a district prosecutor in Saravan near the Iranian-Pakistani border, the kidnapping and eventual executions of sixteen guardsmen in summer and fall 2008, the kidnapping of Qods Force commander Zarif Shaybani in March 2009,⁸⁹ and the bombing of a Shiite mosque in Zahedan in May 2009.⁹⁰ The April 2008 bombing of a

⁸⁷ See for instance the Friday sermon delivered in Tehran by conservative cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami before the amendment passed, *Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran Tehran* (in Persian), 10 August 2007, *BBCMME*, 17 August 2007.

⁸⁸ Iranian forces regularly clash with the Kurdish separatist Pjak organization along the border with Iraq and Azeri criminal networks along its northern border. For instance see, "Kurdish rebels said to have killed 15 Iranian Revolution Guards," Sbay Media Website (in Sorani Kurdish), 29 May 2008, *BBCMME*, 29 May 2008.

⁸⁹ http://junbish.blogspot.com/2009/05/blog-post_18.html

⁹⁰ On these attacks see Jondollah's official website: <http://junbish.blogspot.com>. In this website, the group's official mouthpiece, Jondollah claims responsibility for its operations (including those listed above) and discusses the reasons behind them. While Jondollah takes on the guise and employs the anti-Shiite rhetoric of a Salafi-Jihadi organization in the vein of Al Qaeda, its overall stated objective is to gain greater autonomy and political representation for Iran's minority Sunni Balochi community. Also, since the

religious center (*hosayniyyeh*) in Shiraz used by the Basij and a local hardline Mahdist organization (Rahpuyan) was also linked to Balochi militants.⁹¹

Iranian authorities saw the hand of foreign powers in all of these attacks.⁹² Government officials directly blamed US intelligence for supporting Jondollah and for participating in its operations.⁹³ Even though such accusations were a near-reflexive response to anti-state activism by Iranian authorities, an article published in *The New Yorker* on 30 June 2008 by Seymour Hersh lent credence to Iranian suspicions. In the article, which describes US plans for military action against Iran, Hersh suggests that the US was supporting groups like the Kurdish Pjak organization, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, and Jondollah in a similar way as it had the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁹⁴ In other words, US support for ethnic insurgencies was a prelude to more substantial military engagement with Iran. While Hersh argued that military action would focus on air strikes against Iran's nuclear facilities, Iranian leaders anticipated that the US also planned for land and sea-based attacks.

To prepare its forces, Iranian military leaders were forced to rethink their approach to strategic defense. While part of this process began under commander-in-chief Yahya Rahim Safavi in late 2005,⁹⁵ it took on more substantial dimensions under his successor, Brig-Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari. Ayatollah Khamenei's appointment of Jafari in September 2007 caused speculation that Safavi had fallen out of favor with the Supreme Leader; however, Safavi's subsequent appointment as senior military advisor to Khamenei suggested that he retained some measure of the latter's confidence. A signal that Jafari's star was on the rise had already come in 2005 when Khamenei entrusted the

incarceration of Abd al-Hamid Rigi, the brother of Jondollah's leader Abd al-Malek Rigi by Iranian authorities in June 2008, Jondollah operations (including the hostage-taking of IRGC soldiers the same month) have been in an effort to secure Abd al-Hamid's release.

⁹¹ "Sunni group claims bombing of Iran mosque," *Reuters*, 18 June 2008,

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKL1840003220080618> (Accessed 20 June 2008).

⁹² Indeed, despite the claims by a Balochi terrorist group, Iranian officials tried to place blame of the April Shiraz bombing on "Israeli agents" from within the local Bahai religious minority community—an erroneous claim that lacked both credibility and supporting evidence. See for instance, *Qods* (in Persian), 18 June 2008, <http://www.qodsdaily.com/news/politics/990.html> (Accessed 18 June 2008).

⁹³ For instance see, *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 25 May 2008,

<http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8703050116> (Accessed 20 June 2008).

⁹⁴ Seymour Hersh, "Preparing the Battlefield: the Bush administration steps up its secret moves against Iran," *The New Yorker*, June 2008. The article can also be found online:

http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/07/07/080707fa_fact_hersh?currentPage=all

⁹⁵ *Fars News Agency* (in Persian), 24 October 2005,

<http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8408020316> (Accessed 18 May 2009).

then IRGC ground forces commander to head the newly-established Center for Strategic Studies (*markaz-e motale'at-e rahbordi-e sepah*)—a think tank tasked with updating IRGC military doctrine. Jafari was promoted to this position based on the unique expertise in insurgent tactical warfare he had gained by leading asymmetrical ground operations during the Iran-Iraq war.⁹⁶ Jafari's appointment to commander-in-chief is thus more likely due to his extensive background in guerrilla tactics and strategic affairs—valuable qualities with prospects of war on the horizon—than organizational politics and factionalism (which has also been suggested).⁹⁷

Since taking office Jafari has used his background as a strategic specialist to restructure the IRGC and Basij into more mobile, more decentralized, and more “asymmetrical” (*na-motaqaren / na-hamtaraz*) military forces. A key element of this restructuring campaign has been the expansion of the IRGC's command structure, strategic centers, and areas of responsibility.⁹⁸ For instance, in July 2008 Jafari announced that new individual commands would be established for each of Iran's 31 provinces to enable each province the capability to organize and execute its own specific defensive strategy without having to depend on orders and planning from IRGC central command in Tehran.⁹⁹ Jafari took a similar approach to IRGC naval operations and expanded the organization's purview over Iran's naval defenses by bringing the entire Persian Gulf region and the Hormuz Strait under direct IRGC command—areas of operations that had previously been split between the IRGC and regular navies.¹⁰⁰ He also established a new strategic studies center and operational training facility for IRGC

⁹⁶ For a biography of Jafari see, *BBC Persian*, 1 September 2007, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2007/09/070901_mv-sepah-jafari.shtml (Accessed 19 May 2009).

⁹⁷ This conclusion was also suggested by some IRGC officials. See for instance *E'temad-e Melli's* interview with retired IRGC commander Mohammad Nabi-Rudaki, “Former commander speaks on paramilitary reforms,” *E'temad-e Melli* (in Persian), 7 July 2008, *OSC*, 9 July 2008. However, alternative theories regarding the dismissal of Safavi and the promotion of Jafari have suggested a more political angle in the Supreme Leader's decision. See for instance Naji, *Ahmadinejad*, 271.

⁹⁸ Babak Rahimi has argued that Jafari's expansion of the IRGC and Basij has also given these organizations a greater political role. See “IRGC reshuffling aimed at boosting political role,” *Payvand News* (in English), 28 July 2008, <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/jul/1264.html> (Accessed 1 August 2008). Also see, Ali Alfoneh, “What do structural changes in the Revolutionary Guards mean?” *AEI Outlook Series*, no. 7, September 2008. <http://www.aei.org/outlook/28666> (Accessed 10 October 2008).

⁹⁹ *Fars News Agency*, 8 July 2008, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8704180833> (Accessed 12 July 2008).

¹⁰⁰ *Aftab-e Yazd*, 29 September 2008, <http://www.aftab-yazd.com/textdetalis.asp?at=9/29/2008&aftab=8&TextID=62701> (Accessed 2 October 2008).

special naval forces in Bandar-e Anzali (on the southwestern Caspian Sea coast) to formulate “asymmetrical” tactics to defend against the US naval threat in the Gulf.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Jafari announced the formation of a separate IRGC missile command unit to help facilitate the effective utilization of Iran’s missile capacity in the case of war—a capacity Jafari considered central to Iran’s overall strategic defenses.¹⁰²

Though these changes have constituted a considerable expansion and restructuring of the IRGC, it is the expansion of the Basij’s role and influence that lies at the heart of Jafari’s reforms. Perhaps the most significant change to the Basij was Jafari’s decision to bring the force directly under his command. Although the Basij already operated as a branch of the IRGC, its focus had been on ideological and cultural affairs. By bringing the Basij into his portfolio Jafari elevated the force in *military* matters to be on par with that of the IRGC and regular ground forces.¹⁰³ To this end, 600 new Imam Hosayn battalions (Basij ground force units) were established and integrated into each of the 31 new provincial commands, thereby expanding the Basij’s role in regional and local defense and security.¹⁰⁴ This move was partly aimed at increasing the professionalization of the Basij by merging its military operations and training with IRGC ground forces; however, it was also aimed at bringing a greater measure of the Basij’s cultural and ideological strengths into the IRGC.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, even though Jafari has greatly increased the Basij’s role as a military force he has simultaneously repositioned the Basij as the cultural core of Iran’s armed forces. Examples of the latter can be seen in the Basij’s continued expansion in cultural and ideological areas. For instance, Jafari appointed Hosayn Ta’eb—a former seminary student of Ayatollah Khamenei and the commander of the cultural faculty of Imam Hosayn University—to head the Basij partly on the basis of

¹⁰¹ *Mehr News* (in Persian), 12 August 2008, <http://www.mehrnews.com/error.htm?aspxerrorpath=/fa/NewsDetail.aspx> (Accessed 13 August 2008).

¹⁰² Interview with Mohammad Ali Jafari, *Jam-e Jam* (in Persian), 28 June 2008, <http://www.jamejamonline.ir/archnewstext.aspx?year=1387&month=4&day=8&newsnum=100942312993> (Accessed 28 May 2009).

¹⁰³ *Aftab-e Yazd*, 29 September 2008.

¹⁰⁴ *Fars News Agency*, 2 July 2008, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8704120626> (Accessed 4 July 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Interview with retired IRGC commander Mohammad Nabi-Rudaki, “Former commander speaks on paramilitary reforms,” *E’temad-e Melli* (in Persian), 7 July 2008, *OSC*, 9 July 2008.

his long history with ideological work.¹⁰⁶ Further, the establishment of a new “specialized” headquarters under the Basij Student Organization aimed to bridge the expanded military capacities of the Basij with its on-going ideological activism in civil society.¹⁰⁷ These developments are a clear indication that Jafari does not intend to dilute the Basij’s ideological base in favor of greater military professionalization. If anything, the new structure under Jafari has placed the Basij in the position to better animate the ideological resolve of other associated forces.

Conclusion

I have argued that US policies toward the Middle East facilitated the expansion of Iranian influence in the region and inspired an expansion of the IRGC at home. By viewing Iran as an irrational political actor that could not be engaged diplomatically, the Bush administration chose to approach the problem of Iran’s nuclear program through coercive measures backed by the threat of military force. US sponsored sanctions and aggressive rhetoric provoked three key successive responses by Iran’s conservative leaders: 1) the intensification of conservative and hardliner activism culminating in the “election” of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; 2) the aggressive support for various Iraqi militant groups and operations aimed at subverting US and Coalition influence in occupied Iraq; 3) the expansion of the IRGC and Basij at home in preparation for a possible military conflict with the US. Collectively these responses subverted the Bush administration’s attempts to pressure Iran into accepting Western demands. With US forces bogged down in Iraq and vulnerable to Iranian-supported insurgents, the Bush administration was forced to forestall and ultimately abandon any military action against Iran. The net result was an empowered hardline regime that could rightfully boast that its tactics of supporting militancy abroad, suppressing dissent at home, and expanding military power in society were effective and legitimate countermeasures to Western aggression.

The chief beneficiaries of the Bush administration’s miscalculations in Iran have been the hardline forces surrounding Ayatollah Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards.

¹⁰⁶ *Fars News Agency*, 13 July 2008, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8704230228> (Accessed 15 July 2008).

¹⁰⁷ See interview with Reza Saraj president of the Basij Student Organization, *Fars News Agency*, 20 July 2008, <http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8704301045> (Accessed 22 July 2008).

Indeed, the rise of the former has led to the expansion of the latter. The 2005 election saw only former guardsmen stand as the candidates for the hardline principlist camp. Ahmadinejad's victory not only promoted a former guard and basiji to Iran's highest elected office, it marked the ascent of war veterans and former guardsmen to political prominence. In a sense, the victory of Ahmadinejad can be seen as the culmination of the IRGC and Basij's gradual permeation of all sectors in postwar Iran. During the 1990s these military organizations expanded into numerous extra-military roles and activities. This laid the groundwork for their post-2001 achievements in politics and their recent concentration on military development. To be sure, the restructuring of the IRGC and Basij that has taken place since late 2007 has both expanded their influence over military affairs and broadened the scope of their work in general. The strengthening of the Basij is particularly significant in that it signals a clear commitment on the part of the Supreme Leader and his military advisors to the continued integration of militarism, ideology, and culture in Iranian society.

By the close of 2008, military power had come to dominate key areas of policy and decision-making. While this process was in no small measure encouraged by outside forces, particularly US foreign policy and regional conflicts, it cannot be severed from domestic Iranian political dynamics. As hardliners have taken hold of governmental institutions and positions of power, it has been protecting their place in the Islamic Republic that is at the root of most domestic and foreign policy decisions in Iran. Even as foreign threats remain at the forefront of governmental rhetoric, it is the internal opposition that poses the greatest challenge to hardliner hegemony. With this in mind, Iranian politics should not be simply understood as the result of misguided outside pressures. Such pressures have aided the rise of the right in Iran insofar as they have afforded Iranian politicians a semblance of legitimacy for repressive policies at home and adventurism abroad, and have encouraged a near-perpetual state of reactionaryism by the government. Yet, to see the condition of Iranian politics as the product of non-Iranian influence would be both reductive and incorrect. What Iranian politics in the twenty-first century have shown is that the power struggle that began in the post-revolution continues to unfold. Although it has exposed fractures in Iranian society, this process has nonetheless managed to maintain some of the central goals of the Iranian revolution in

that Iran's government has effectively kept its regime free from the sort of foreign control that marked the Pahlavi Dynasty that it replaced. To this end, the state of the Islamic Republic should be seen as the product of its architects and current leadership. For good or for ill, the revolution remains as its leaders had intended: an Iranian-Islamic enterprise.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

As we shift our focus beyond regime type, the military elite, and the major military institutions, and examine conditions internal as much as external to the nation-state, we are able to identify several social, cultural, and economic articulations that affect positively or negatively the likelihood that the military or other equally significant armed forces will be actively involved in politics, even as they influence the form of character of the state as well as vice versa.¹

—Diane E. Davis

The development of military power in Iran has been a multifaceted process with important political, cultural, ideological, and religious dimensions. The preceding chapters have traced the unfoldment of this process, from the roots of military power in pre-revolutionary militancy to the geo-political forces that impact its current articulation. While each chapter has focused on a specific theme and time period, together they provide a chronological view of post-revolutionary Iran. The complex relationship between military power and politics forms the backbone of each of these chapters but has only at times been their overt focus. In this chapter, I return to the arguments put forward in Chapter I and address the overarching questions of this study. Here I reconsider the theoretical framework established by Diane E. Davis and Anthony W. Pereira in their book *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation*. Davis and Pereira argue for a new understanding of the relationship between military power, coercion, and political development. They emphasize that past scholarship has overlooked the roles of armed forces in state development outside of the war-making/state-making nexus. They are particularly concerned with re-examining the place of unconventional or irregular armed forces in politics. As military power has been a

¹ *Irregular Armed Forces*, 14.

crucial factor in the making of the Islamic Republic, and as the revolutionary institutions that comprise the core of military power in Iran do not fit the conventional mold, I have found Davis and Pereira's thinking on irregular armed forces valuable for understanding the various implications of military influence on the Iranian state. To this end, I return to the questions put forward earlier in this study's introduction and offer my assessment of how the Iranian case fits or conflicts with some of the key arguments made by Davis and Pereira. The answers provided are intended to bring together the material presented heretofore and make overt the arguments that have been thus far only implied. As both an analytical and theoretical summation, the discussion below presents the core claims of this dissertation as well as its concluding remarks.

The first question I posed asks: Why is there a blurring of military and police forces in post-revolutionary Iran? An aspect of political development associated with democratic regimes is the division of coercive forces into institutions of national defense (the military) and internal control (the police). Past scholarship has emphasized that a clear division between military and police forces is an important outcome of the professionalization and institutionalization of a state's armed forces. These processes are considered necessary for a state's transition to democracy, and as such, the development of separate military and police forces is often recognized as evidence of pro-democratic progression. Davis and Pereira take issue with this assessment and suggest that a closer examination of the development of some Western democracies complicates this connection. For instance, Lizabeth Zack's contribution to their volume shows that the French state was slow to develop a national police force and that such a force was only established under the Fascist Vichy government. Although this helped assert state control over various police forces, Zack argues that the recent trend of local municipal governments establishing their own police forces shows that centralized authority is not consistent across democratic societies and can even be reversible.²

Post-revolutionary Iran presents another interesting case for how coercive force has been organized by the state. The vague task of "safeguarding the revolution" given to organizations like the IRGC and the Basij encouraged their involvement in all areas of

² See Lizabeth Zack, "The *Police Municipale* and the Formation of the French State," in *Irregular Armed Forces*, 281-302.

Iranian society. Although the post-revolutionary government retained some distinction between forces responsible for external threats and those responsible for local law enforcement, the purview of the revolutionary forces encompassed both of these areas. In the postwar, then President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani sought to centralize state control and clarify military and police-type forces by merging the IRGC's ministry with that of the regular military and consolidating the revolutionary committees with the gendarmerie to form the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF). While this led to a greater specialization of Iran's coercive forces into institutions of national defense and domestic law enforcement, and led to greater governmental control over coercive forces—at least with regards to the regular military and the LEF—it failed to address the broad operational purview of the revolutionary forces. Indeed, instead of narrowing the roles of the IRGC and Basij, postwar policies expanded their involvement in extra-military and security sectors. Further, the establishment of the Office for Vivification of the Propagation of Vice and Prohibition of Virtue and the licensing of its members and basijis to make arrests and detain individuals for religious infractions increased the authority of the Basij in the area of law enforcement. Also the utilization of mosque-oriented hezbollahi gangs and war veterans groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah for the suppression of civil dissent shows that there remains a place for non-governmental agents of violent coercion within the Iranian state. These non-governmental groups often act with impunity even though they have been the source of much anti-governmental violence.

Although the Iranian state possesses institutions like the regular military and the LEF that do respect central governmental authority and represent a division of coercive force, the broad operational purview of the IRGC and Basij, their significant roles in law enforcement and internal security, and the continual employment of semi- and non-governmental groups in law enforcement-type activities, are persuasive examples of why a clear demarcation of military and police-type forces has not been achieved by the Iranian state. Indeed, as the IRGC has recently begun a process of restructuring that includes an expansion of the Basij's provincial and local activities, it seems clear that the Iranian government is committed to strengthening the capacities of its revolutionary armed forces as apparatuses of both external defense and internal control. Thus, even though Iran has developed separate military and police-type institutions, and asserted

state control over both, it has not been toward a greater democratization of the state. This is due to the significant influence of the revolutionary forces in the areas of both military and law enforcement, and to the tolerated political violence of non-governmental groups.

My second question asks: In what ways have war veterans most impacted postwar political development? As Davis and Pereira note, the role of veterans in politics has been underappreciated in past scholarship. Alec Campbell's contribution to their volume explores the theme of war veterans and the process of demobilization and concludes that war veterans have had an important place at various times and places in history. In the United States, for instance, Campbell points to organizations like the American Legion, which helped lobby the state for greater social services for veterans while simultaneously being a vocal proponent of rightwing politics and anti-communist policies. Veterans were instrumental in establishing the G.I. Bill, which enabled a whole generation of soldiers to seek university education and helped expand the American middle class. In this way, war veterans not only became a formidable political force, their actions had a powerful impact on America's social fabric.

War veterans have played a similar socio-political role in postwar Iran. As I have discussed, the experiences of war helped shape Iranian society, its culture, and politics in different ways. For the revolutionary forces, the war established a symbolic vernacular that became increasingly used in expressions of organizational identity. This identity was more than a visual product; it was the culmination and articulation of the various ideological, religious, and cultural values forged by many soldiers who fought during the war. After the war, these values were at the heart of a new political movement led primarily by war veterans associated with the conservative right, which flourished under governmental policies aimed at avoiding mass demobilization. During this period, the Iranian government strengthened the revolutionary forces and involved their veteran ranks in various military and extra-military activities. While such policies emboldened the influence of war veterans and their supporters within state institutions, veterans also exercised influence through semi and non-state organizations. For instance, the charitable foundations like the Foundation for the Oppressed and Injured War Veterans and the Foundation for Martyrs and Veterans Affairs, which provide generous social benefits to war veterans and their families, have become massive financial conglomerates that act

with near autonomy from the government. Further, organizations like Ansar-e Hezbollah have become important advocates for veterans' issues while simultaneously engaging in violence in support of conservative and hardline political interests.

Although such developments have established war veterans as a significant socio-political force, it is in their permeation of the governmental sector that has afforded them a powerful voice in the Iranian state. Outside of top-ranking positions in all military and security organizations, including the IRGC, Basij, LEF, and regular military, war veterans can be seen to have captured the executive branch of government with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad's election, while problematic, was nonetheless supported by hardline veterans and their clerical patrons. After achieving the presidency, Ahmadinejad appointed war veterans to over a third of his cabinet positions, giving them a leading voice in the policies of his administration. In this way, the politics of the Ahmadinejad administration both play to and originate from a broader war veterans movement. This can be seen in Ahmadinejad's lop-sided social policies and in his uncompromising, at times aggressive approach to foreign affairs. There is thus little doubt that war veterans have played a significant role in the politics and conflicts that have shaped the postwar Iranian state. Indeed, the present condition of the Islamic Republic is to a considerable extent due to the rise of war veterans to positions of power and influence.

This leads us to a third question: Has the increased professionalization of the revolutionary armed forces led to increased civilian control over these military organizations? A major argument in civil-military relations suggests that the professionalization of military institutions makes them more likely to submit to civilian leadership. Such a transformation, most often seen in northwestern European states, is generally considered necessary for states to mature and develop into democracies. Without a professional military under civilian control the likelihood of states to use military power to control their population increases. Davis and Pereira have shown that this line of thinking can be misleading if not inaccurate. They use the historical example of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War to show that professional armies can be less bound to civilian leadership than non-professional militias (an argument

explored by Susan Browne in their volume).³ Though their argument is persuasive, I would suggest that Iran's revolutionary forces provide a more compelling case for the contemporary period.

During the first year and a half of operation the IRGC worked to undermine the civilian government as an adjunct of pro-Khomeini clerical interests. As Khomeinists came to dominate the government early into the war with Iraq, the IRGC gradually came under governmental control and by the end of the war its leaders worked closely with civilian leadership. The intense factionalism of the postwar period strained the relationship between IRGC commanders and governmental leaders. The election of the reformist Mohammad Khatami in 1997 prompted a stern response from IRGC and Basij commanders, who began to openly work against the government and even threatened its existence during the height of the 1999 student protests. The severe antipathy of these organizations toward reformist-minded politics was part of their involvement in the suspected anti-democratic cabal that secured Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election in 2005. Though the IRGC and the Basij have been loyal to Ahmadinejad's hardline government, this relationship is based more on shared political and ideological interests than on a belief in civilian authority.

From this glance, it is clear that the allegiance of the revolutionary forces to civilian governmental control has occurred only at times of shared or overlapping political interests. What is not clear is what affect increased professionalization has had on this relationship. Little effort was made in the first decade of the Islamic Republic to professionalize the revolutionary armed forces. Such an effort did not begin in earnest until after the Iraq war when the government merged the IRGC ministry with the regular military and imposed ranks on the revolutionary forces to encourage greater governmental control over these organizations and develop them into more professional military bodies. From this point to the present, the IRGC and Basij have slowly moved in the direction of greater institutional professionalization. Although this process has not diluted the ideological nature of these organizations, it has made them more conventional military forces in terms of both martial capacity and structure. To this extent,

³ See Susan Browne, "War-Making and U.S. State Formation: Mobilization, Demobilization, and the Inherent Ambiguities of Federalism," in *Irregular Armed Forces*, 232-252.

professionalization has no doubt increased in Iran's revolutionary armed forces; however, I would argue that increased professionalization has had little to no bearing on the relationship of these organizations to the civilian government. Not only have these organizations become more politicized during this period they have become more powerful and have regularly used this power to undermine or oppose civilian governments. While the IRGC and Basij are now allied with the present government, this alliance is based more so on politics than on a respect for civilian governmental authority.

Further complicating the matter is the place of the Supreme Leader as commander-in-chief and Ali Khamenei's close relationship with specific factional interests. So far during Ali Khamenei's tenure, the revolutionary forces have remained firmly in his camp and have received his unequivocal backing in return. As the symbol of divine (as opposed to civilian) authority, Khamenei lends a certain legitimacy to these organizations which has allowed them to skirt civilian control. I would suggest, however, that the relationship between the revolutionary forces and Khamenei—and to clerical influence more broadly—is also contingent on shared interests. While these interests are outwardly connected to mutual political and ideological concerns, it has been Khamenei's uncritical support of the IRGC and Basij that I believe has most directly contributed to their lasting political alliance with the *institution* of the Supreme Leader. This is to say that the present relationships between the revolutionary forces, the civilian government, and the office of the Supreme Leader are not set in stone and will be malleable under changing political circumstances.

The fourth question asks: Have the revolutionary armed forces helped the Iranian state develop a monopoly of coercive violence? A central component of state formation is a state's ability to organize coercion within its borders. Charles Tilly, for instance, argues that the near monopolization of coercion was crucial in the formation of northern European states, and that the particular approaches that these states took toward organizing coercion directly impacted their political development.⁴ Responding to Tilly and others, Davis and Pereira suggest that the near monopolies of coercion attained in northern Europe have not necessarily been attained elsewhere. They further argue that

⁴ See Charles Tilly, "Armed Force, Regimes, and Contention in Europe since 1650," in *Irregular Armed Forces*, 37-81.

while the near monopolies in northern Europe were achieved through war-making and the establishment of conventional militaries, circumstances outside of war and the roles of unconventional armed forces in helping states organize or monopolize coercion has been generally overlooked and underappreciated in past scholarship. As the organization of coercion has been crucial in the making of the Islamic Republic, it is important to understand how this process has unfolded and to what degree the Iranian state has been able to monopolize coercion.

From the surface it is difficult to dispute the notion the Islamic Republic has developed a monopoly of coercive violence within its boundaries. Achieving this, after all, was one of the original aims of the Revolutionary Guards and their associates in the early post-revolution. In this period, the ability to wage violence was shared by a multitude of armed militias and the remnants of the conventional military forces. To weaken their adversaries and consolidate power under Khomeini, Khomeinist forces including the IRGC, revolutionary committees, and other gangs were employed by clerical overseers to disarm rival militants, confiscate weaponry from the populace, and disrupt arms smuggling networks. Parallel to this, revolutionary authorities subdued and weakened the regular military but stopped short of its outright dissolution. The war convinced Khomeini and his trusted lieutenants like Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani that the regular forces were integral to national defense and should be kept separate from the revolutionary forces and retain a conventional organizational structure. To this end, the regular military continued as an institution focused on national defense after the war whereas the revolutionary forces saw their portfolios continue to expand, including in areas of law enforcement and domestic security. This process facilitated the IRGC and Basij's penetration of the social sphere and afforded these organizations broad-ranging operational authority in law enforcement activities. Up to the present, the effective utilization of the Basij in repressing internal dissent has been the clearest sign of the state's ability to organize coercive violence throughout the country. Added to this, the roles of the IRGC and LEF in combating various forms of insurgency within the ethno-religious minority communities of Iran's border regions gives a further indication that the state's ability to exercise coercive control over its populations is formidable in all areas of society.

From such a perspective it is reasonable to conclude that the Iranian state has succeeded in monopolizing coercive violence primarily through its revolutionary armed forces. However, this line of thinking also presumes a more unitary state structure than is seen in the Islamic Republic. That is, though the revolutionary armed forces have certainly become the most important state institutions of coercion, their loyalty is only partially to the government. While the IRGC and its associated forces seem to work in concert with the government in areas of foreign affairs and national defense, their domestic activities serve markedly more factionalized interests. This can be seen in the Basij's PVPV activities, anti-liberalization activism, and efforts to suppress reformism. The IRGC's ultimatum to then President Khatami during the student protests of 1999 and the suspected involvement of IRGC and Basij forces in the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 are also vivid examples of the factionalism of the revolutionary forces. What is more, state institutions like the Basij have close associations with non-state groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah which has engaged in violent activism against Iranian government supporters and officials. Groups like Ansar are examples of unofficial organizations that are able to exercise coercive violence for political purposes despite the illegality of their actions. Contrast the sometimes anti-governmental violence of a group like Ansar with the anti-regime violence of an organization like Jondallah—which unlike the former has been met with severe responses by the state—and the politics of tolerated illegal violence and untolerated illegal violence becomes clearer.

With this in mind, it is difficult if not incorrect to assume that the Iranian state has achieved a monopoly of coercive violence. First and foremost, pockets of resistance continue in Iran's border regions despite three decades of stiff government control of those areas. These insurgencies are no doubt fueled and facilitated by actors and forces outside of Iran's borders, and while their actions are limited and have generally not succeeded in realizing political agendas, they nonetheless remain active. Second, non-governmental groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah are able to routinely and openly engage in violence against the civilian population without fear of legal consequences. Third, while governmental forces do possess the means and ability to exercise coercion on behalf of the state, their factional loyalties are often at variance with their responsibilities to the government. Even though "safeguarding the revolution" continues to be the primary

objective of the IRGC and its associated forces, problems arise when “the revolution” is understood differently by Iran’s political factions. Therefore, while the revolutionary forces have certainly come to dominate the government’s means of coercive violence, they have also acted on behalf of powerful anti-governmental interests. For these reasons, I would suggest that the revolutionary armed forces have helped the Iranian state achieve a near monopoly of coercion, but that rampant factionalism and the ability of non-governmental groups to partake in coercive violence against the civilian population without being held accountable have limited the Iranian state from developing a true monopoly of coercive violence.

This brings us to the fifth and final question, which asks: What factors led to the proliferation of military power in post-revolutionary Iran and what does the current place of military power tell us about the nature of politics in the Iranian state? The processes and conditions that underlie the development of military power in a society have a direct impact on how a state is formed. For instance, past scholarship has shown that war-making has played a crucial role in the development of conventional militaries in Europe which in turn have helped engender the various social conditions and political institutions necessary for state formation and democratic politics. While Davis and Pereira acknowledge the importance of this war-making/state-making scenario in the history of northern European states, they suggest that in other parts of the world different conditions have often played an equally significant role in the formation and political development of states. Their central thesis is that armed forces do much more than make war and that these underappreciated areas of military power have figured large in the development of states. To this extent, they emphasize the role of irregular armed forces in politics and the affect this relationship has had on the political development of states at various times and places in modern history. As unconventional armed forces have been at the forefront of politics in post-revolutionary Iran, it is important to consider how they have contributed to the political reality of the Islamic Republic.

Before discussing what political factors led to the proliferation of military power in the post-revolution, it is important to first note how and to what extent military power in Iran is rooted in ideology or religious belief. To begin with, there is clearly a strand of traditional Shiism which embraces the notion that coercive violence can legitimately

serve the advancement of God's will on Earth. Such a relationship is not unique to Islam, but the way it is articulated within Shiite culture is specific and related to foundational episodes in the religion's history. Narratives like Ali's struggle for leadership, the martyrdom of Husayn at the plains of Karbala, the self-sacrificial campaign of the Penitents, and the visions of apocalyptic battles surrounding the Hidden Imam's return, have secured a place for legitimate and righteous violence in the Shiite tradition and have been a source for religious expressions of violence throughout Iranian history. In the modern period, plays to Shiite history have helped legitimate the violent activism of various militant groups and movements in Iran, but to different ends. For instance, the Fada'iyan-e Islam invoked Islamic justice to justify the murders of political leaders in an attempt to expunge Western influence from Iranian society and restore religious traditionalism to the heart of the Iranian state. The anti-American and anti-regime violence generated by the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization, on the other hand, was as inspired by socialist revolutionary politics as it was by Ali Shariati's radical reinterpretation of Shiism as a revolutionary movement diametrically opposed to the trenchant traditionalism of clerical authority. Although both of these groups invoked the Shiite tradition to legitimize political violence, they had widely divergent understandings of the tradition and advocated very different political platforms.

Ayatollah Khomeini fused together aspects of both of these currents in his political thought. While his theory of the "guardianship of the jurispudent" advocated a form of theocratic government under clerical rule, his political statements often reflected a type of socially-imbued populism. In this way, his thinking appealed at some level to more traditionally-minded clerics and more socially-minded political activists. Khomeini also saw a place for legitimate violence in establishing a true Islamic society, and his supporters actively engaged in violence in the post-revolution toward this end. Even though violence in the post-revolution often had overt political causes it was exercised through a system that purported to be in line with the divine. Although states do not necessarily need religion to justify violent coercion, the Islamic Republic, as a theocracy, could not but employ religion as the primary justification for the coercive acts of state institutions. The experience of war only intensified the relationship between religion and violence. An example of this can be seen in how the IRGC shifted its organizational

identity during this period from primarily that of a *revolutionary* armed force to one that more closely personified a righteous Islamic military. The countless martyrs and sacrifices made by soldiers during the war strengthened the perception that Iran's warriors were as inexorably tied to the unfoldment of God's will as the early heroes of Shiism's formative period. Thus, in the postwar, the revolutionary forces had little difficulty in claiming that they operated on the side of God. This put their opponents, regardless of who they were, on the wrong side of a good-versus-evil or right-versus-wrong contest. In this manner, no matter how political or politicized the revolutionary armed forces may be, in their estimation they have and will always operate as forces of Islamic justice, which in and of itself frames violent coercion as a religiously (if not politically) legitimate act.

The religious politics of coercive violence have also helped shape post-revolutionary conflicts. Early post-revolutionary political disputes revealed the deep divisions of the Iranian revolutionary movement. While the various groups that helped overthrow the Pahlavi regime showed some semblance of unity in the immediate aftermath, their divergent views of what type of state should replace monarchical rule led to intense infighting. Many of these groups engaged in political violence to advance their interests. As the groups loyal to the Provisional Government concentrated on reviving the near-crippled state institutions like the police and military, those loyal to Khomeini and the clerically-dominated Revolutionary Council focused on consolidating militant groups into the burgeoning revolutionary armed forces. The authority of Khomeini enabled these forces to act outside the confines of governmental control and justified their coercive suppression of non-Khomeinist elements. With eventual Khomeinist dominance over the government of the Islamic Republic, revolutionary armed forces like the IRGC, Basij, and committees transformed into state institutions of coercion whose violence was simultaneously justified by religious pretensions, official legal statuses, and correct political loyalties. Yet, even as these forces were united under Khomeini, as the war progressed and divisions within the Khomeinist movement began to arise, the leadership of these organizations also began to take sides. This caused the growing conservatism of IRGC and Basij leadership through the war and their close associations with conservative political interests after the war. The committees were more strongly aligned with the

Khomeinist-left, and thus their dissolution in the postwar removed a significant counterweight to rightist coercive power within the Iranian state.

The lop-sided loyalties of the IRGC and Basij to conservative factions and the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei put the leftist factions at a severe disadvantage in the postwar. Without effective influence in state and non-state institutions of coercion, the factions of the left failed to benefit politically from the postwar rise and expansion of the IRGC and Basij. Even as the pro-democratic values of the left gained widespread popularity under the reformist Mohammad Khatami, the ability of reformists to enact any significant or lasting change was prevented by the powerful state institutions that had become dominated by the conservative right. This included the revolutionary armed forces whose top commanders were appointees of the Supreme Leader and proved loyal to his conservative political agenda. The increasing lack of popular support for rightist political factions made them increasingly reliant on coercive force to maintain their hold over the state. This can be seen in the IRGC and Basij's open opposition to reformism and the Khatami government, their continued involvement in social repression, and their roles in the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Thus, the rise of conservative and hardline elements to power in the Iranian state has not only paralleled the influential rise of the revolutionary forces, it has been backed by the ability of these organizations to organize coercive violence and their willingness to exercise that coercion for political purposes.

From the early disputes between Khomeinists and their political adversaries in the early post-revolution to the cultural and political conflicts of the postwar period, the coercive violence of military institutions has had a crucial impact on the nature of conflict in the Islamic Republic. Just as Khomeinists succeeded in consolidating power in the post-revolution through their ability to organize and wage coercive violence, the success of conservative factions has likewise relied on their influence over the institutions of military power. The close relationship between political power and military power, which began in the immediate post-revolution and continues to unfold at present, has thus been central to the political development of the Islamic Republic. The use of revolutionary organs to exercise violent coercion in the quest for political consolidation in the early post-revolution set a precedent for the involvement of military institutions in society and

politics that has yet to be reversed. This has not only ensured the continued reliance on military power by conservative political factions, it has helped propel these factions to dominance over the Iranian state.

To this end, military power in the Islamic Republic continues to be a defining factor in state politics. The question remains, however, what does the permeation of military power reveal about politics in the Iranian state? First, as I have suggested, military power has been key to the unfoldment of political disputes since the immediate aftermath of the revolution. Just as it was the effective organization of coercion by the Khomeinist bloc that facilitated their dominance in the post-revolution, it has been the effective control of military power by conservative factions that has enabled their lasting control of the postwar state. In this way, it has been access to and control over institutions of coercion that has often made the difference in post-revolutionary political disputes. These disputes and conflict more broadly have engendered a process of exclusion that continues to shape power in the Iranian state. That is, Khomeinists gained control over the state after the fall of the Pahlavi regime by effectively excluding their opponents from access to state institutions, positions of influence, and from any claims to religious, ideological, or political legitimacy. This process did not end with Khomeinist dominance over the state, rather it served to divide the Khomeinist movement into contending factions. Armed with the unmitigated backing of Ali Khamenei's supreme authority, conservative and hardline forces have managed to gain control over all major state institutions. Control over these institutions has enabled the continued exclusion of the reformist and more moderate factions from nearly all areas of power. This has resulted in the consolidation of state power by an increasingly small collection of allied political, military, social, and clerical forces.

In this sense, power in post-revolutionary Iran is like a matryoshka doll. What began as an enterprise of the Khomeinist movement has gradually become the domain of a continually shrinking political elite. As state power in Iran continues to be concentrated into the hands of minority interests, the reliance of this political minority on military power has increased. Even though Khamenei has ensured the dominance of his allies in all major state institutions, and even as those institutions encompass nearly all mechanisms of state control, the increasing disparity between the interests of this political

minority and that of the majority of Iranian society has necessitated the continued political involvement of military power. This process reveals why democratic development has been stymied by the expansion of military power in the social and political realms. As the politics of those in control of the state moves further and further away from that of Iranian society, the elite will rely more and more on institutions of coercion to perpetuate their hold over the Islamic Republic. Conversely, as the political elite grows smaller, those excluded will increasingly turn toward the promotion of democratic development to regain fading or lost influence. With these considerations in mind, it is clear that the far-right elements that currently hold power in Iran can only lose influence by allowing the exercise of popular democracy in Iran. It is for this reason that military power will not only remain a crucial factor in Iranian politics, it will continue to be a major impediment to democratic development as well.

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