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Military Institutions between Trust and marginalization

A comparison between the position of IRGCs and Army in the Iranian regime's infrastructure

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INTRODUCTION

The Iranian revolution erupted in 1979 to overthrow the Pahlavi Dynasty and form a new government. The commanders of the Iranian regular army stood by the Shah and supported his ultimately unsuccessful efforts to crush the revolution and preserve his reign. After deposing the Shah and taking over the country, the leaders of the new regime bore the army's stance in mind and have, ever since, excluded it from political life and development.

As a result of their loss of trust in the army due to its neutral stance during the revolution and the allegiance of some of its commanders to the Shah, the regime sought to create a significant new forcefully committed to the principles and values of the revolution, to protect its gains, and strike a balance with the regular army which Khomeini had never trusted. All this led to the formation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), which has been responsible for crushing various insurgencies domestically, as well as exporting the concepts of the Iranian revolution. Since then, the IRGC has become Iran's premier military force and defender of the revolution and the nation. Over time, the Guards have been transformed into a leading economic and security actor in Iran. The IRGC's central role has contributed massively to the decline of the regular army and its exclusion from the economic and political scenes in Iran since the revolution of 1979.

This study aims to analyze the goals of the IRGC at its foundation, its components, budget, economic potential, role in external intervention, and its role in the suppression of domestic anti-regime movements. It also examines the connotations of the IRGC's major influence in Iran in light of the decline of the regular army, which represents the real military institution - being more sizeable in number and more deeply embedded in history.

This study focuses on two questions related to the IRGC:

Are the excessive attention paid by the Iranian leadership to the IRGC, and its penetration of the state structure deliberate or is the relationship between them a complimentary one?

The study suggests that there is an intentional marginalization of the regular army by the regime and an undeclared policy to exclude it from the political decision-making process. In fact, the regime aims to keep the regular army in its garrisons and limit its role to defending the country and implementing some other minor tasks required by the regime.

The importance of this study lies in analyzing the reasons behind the strong influence of the IRGC on most of the state bodies in Iran and the position of the military institution toward this influence. It also analyzes the future of the Iranian regular army under this regimen of deliberate negligence and the attempts to subdue most of its commanders to follow in the footsteps of the IRGC by devoting the institution to protecting the revolution and ensuring the survival of the theocratic regime and the Jurist Leadership.

Emergence of the IRGC

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was created in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. After Khomeini returned from his exile in France, he issued a decree to create a parallel force to the regular army – which had adopted a policy of neutrality during the revolution - to defend the gains of the revolution and crush any anti-revolutionary movements ⁽¹⁾.

Iran's new leaders lost trust in the Iranian regular Army due to its neutrality and allegiance of some of its commanders to the Shah; consequently, they sought to create a major military force committed to the principles and values of the revolution, under a custodian charged with defending and protecting its gains ⁽²⁾. On that basis, the new regime passed a new law in 1981 that distinguished the IRGC from the regular army through commissioning the army with protecting the country

and preserving internal security, while assigning the IRGC as guardian and protector of the regime. Over time, the IRGC has expanded its influence and gone far beyond its original mandate. Today, the IRGC presides over a vast power structure with influence over almost every aspect of Iranian life. The Iranian regime's expansion and interference in other countries, or maintaining its domestic security depend primarily on the situation and capabilities of this organization ⁽³⁾.

In essence, the IRGC is much like any regular army but distinguished by its ideological nature, vast capabilities, and slavish loyalty to the Jurist Leadership doctrine. The role of the IRGC has expanded far beyond its original mandate - to protect the country against external threats – turning the organization into a protector of the regime, exporter of its concepts and ideas, and oppressor of its opponents ⁽⁴⁾. The distinguished analyst Dr. Kenneth Katzman of the U.S. Congressional Research Service has noted that the IRGC differs from the army in its ideological nature, evolution and development, and its approach to running its economic and political activities, which makes it difficult to analyze it from the traditional perspective of politico-military science ⁽⁵⁾. The regular army is banned from involvement in politics, which means that it has no allegiance to the regime due to its national obligations, which contributed to its survival despite Khomeini's attempts to thwart it and massively restrict its capabilities. Conversely, the political role of IRGC is now taken for granted and indeed is viewed as part of its strategy to protect the Revolution as stated by the principles of the Iranian Republic ⁽⁶⁾.

The world has witnessed various revolutions throughout history. When we compare the Iranian revolution with others in countries like France and Russia, we find that the armies in these countries played major roles in forming the revolutionary armies in the aftermath of the revolutions there. In Iran's case, however, there is a major difference, with the army losing most of the influence it had previously enjoyed following the revolution due to the Khomeinist policy of eradicating all vestiges of the Shahs' rule.

In the first couple of years following the IRGC's establishment, there were frequent changes of leadership until Muhsin Riza'i was assigned as commander of the organization on September 1, 1981. Since 1988 until today, the IRGC has remained under a relatively stable leadership with one exception represented by the replacement of the Revolutionary Guards Minister Muhsin Rafeeq Dost by his deputy Ali Shamkhani in 1988.

The Revolutionary Guards Ministry was established in 1982. It was frequently accused of corruption due to its involvement in many weapons deals during the Iraqi-Iranian war, which led the parliament elected after Khomeini's death to pass a law combining the Revolutionary Guards Ministry with the Defense Ministry to form a new body called the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL) ⁽⁷⁾.

At the outset, the IRGC began with a small number of soldiers and equipment, but during the Iraqi-Iranian war, the organization acquired far greater power and renown due to the significant support it received from the Iranian regime's leaders. Today, the IRGC is Iran's most powerful security and military organization and strike force with major influence on the decision-making process in Tehran and on governmental and civil society organizations. In fact, the IRGC receives its powers from the powers of the Supreme Leader, who enjoys absolute influence and full control of this organization.

According to the IRGC's worldview, its members believe they are the protectors of the current Iranian regime and the primary source of domestic security and stability. They do not recognize any other partner in enforcing domestic stability and protecting the country from enemies. Indeed, they attribute all military and security victories and achievements to themselves and do not allow any other competitor or partner to share this triumph with them ⁽⁸⁾.

IRGC Financial and Military Capabilities

The IRGC has been transformed into a leading economic actor heavily involved in many sectors of Iran's economy. It is responsible for and profits from massive social and health projects, as well as lucrative interests in other sectors such as tourism, transportation, and energy.

Militarily, the IRGC has a massive arsenal, including airplanes, tanks, and missiles. Most of these weapons are of Russian origin, although some are domestically manufactured ⁽⁹⁾. The Guards also dominate the construction industry through their company Khatam Alanbia, as well as having controlling interests in Iran's gas and oil fields, and stocks in the country's telecommunications provider.

The International Institution for Strategic Studies in London estimates the total number of IRGC forces at 350,000, divided into land, navy and air forces, although there is some dispute over the real figure, with the Institute for Strategic and International Studies in Washington putting it at no more than 120 thousand members ⁽¹⁰⁾. Whatever the real numbers, the IRGC is beyond doubt Iran's most

powerful force and the primary protector of the Jurist Leadership doctrine, reporting directly to the Iranian Supreme Leader.

Over the past ten years, the Revolutionary Guards has accelerated its effort to develop its military capabilities, conducting several exercises to test its readiness and its military industries such as the Shihab 1, 2, 3 missiles, air defense systems, and electronic warfare. ⁽¹¹⁾

IRGC Duties:

1. Assisting Iran's security agencies in eliminating anti-regime opposition
2. Fighting counter-revolutionary elements
3. Defending Iran against any external attack
4. Cooperating with the Iranian armed forces
5. Training the IRGC members on moral, ideological and political issues
6. Supporting 'liberation' movements across the world
7. Utilizing all of its human resources and experiences in dealing with crises and disasters, and supporting the improvement plans of the Iranian regime ⁽¹²⁾

The IRGC Components

1- Basij Forces (Mobilization)

The Basiji forces were established in 1980. They consist of volunteers and are supported by the IRGC. While initially formed for security purposes, they were later tasked with confronting any kind of domestic opposition movements and supporting Iran's allies in war.

The Mobilization Forces played the major role in eliminating the uprising that erupted in the late 1990s in Iran asking for political freedom, and supervised the brutal crushing of the mass protests that flared up following the disputed election of 2009, during which leaders of the green movement, Hussein Mousavi, and Mahdi Karroubi, accused the regime of rigging the elections in favor of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Some reports from insiders suggest that the Basij Forces consists of 2,500 battalions, each with 300 members, although the confidential policies and voluntary nature of these forces and their spread in schools and governmental and private organizations prevent the collation of accurate statistics on their numbers.

2. Al-Quds Division

The regime's elite Al-Quds force, which works as the spearhead of the regime's efforts to "export the revolution" overseas, is the cream of the

IRGC and the strongest military and security force in Iran. The Al-Quds force, created to implement the ideology of exporting the revolution, has become a central pillar of the Iranian regime. Over time, Al-Quds force has also become the clandestine wing of Iran deployed outside its borders. It is in charge of confronting Iran's enemies headed by the United States, its Arab allies, and Israel. This unit runs a war against those viewed as Iran's enemies via its proxies to cover up the Iranian regime's role outside the country. The most prominent activities of Al-Quds division in the region are training Hezbollah's forces and supporting Shiite Militias in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan.

Al-Quds Division Activities

Al-Quds division undertakes a variety of secret missions and operations outside Iran's borders as follows:

- 1.** Monitoring any hostile movements by other countries against the Iranian regime and collecting intelligence information in the Middle East and worldwide
- 2.** Enhancing the military power of the 'Resistance Axis' in the Middle East, consisting of Iran's major ally Syria, in addition to Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen.
- 3.** Establishing sleeper cells all over the world in accordance with the strategic and intelligence considerations to gather intelligence on any potential military attack or hostile activity against Iran.
- 4.** Assisting armed militias and political figures to undertake activities in countries and territories where Iran seeks to expand and to minimize Western influence there, especially in countries with a Shiite population, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Yemen.
- 5.** Pursuing the Iranian anti-regime opposition outside the country⁽¹⁴⁾

IRGC Accusations of Corruption

As a leading economic actor which dominates most of Iran's economic sectors, the IRGC owns several companies and major projects that generate massive sums of money outside the financial system of the state; despite its efforts to silence condemnation, there has been continuous criticism of its financial policies, with a number of press reports about the endemic corruption within the organization and the inflated salaries of the IRGC commanders. Meanwhile, Iranian president

Hassan Rouhani obliquely condemned the IRGC without daring to openly name it a few months ago, saying – clearly in reference to the Revolutionary Guards - “There is a corrupt organization standing behind smuggling; we have to confront this corruption.” This statement reopened longstanding resentment over the massive corruption, which pervades all the IRGC’s operations, amid increasing calls in recent years to limit its influence. The Supreme Leader’s absolute and uncritical support for the IRGC and its deep permeation of all the state’s apparatuses, along with its brutal repression of all dissent, mean that its influence remains strong and prevents it from being harmed by criticism.

The IRGC external interventions

The IRGC has absolute power over the running of complex external operations such as the regime’s intervention in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Lebanon. It provides unlimited support to Iran’s proxies in these countries, which have fueled the current catastrophic situation in the ill-fated region.

1. Iraq:

The Iranian regime is a major player in Iraq on all levels, with massive influence in the neighboring country where it is throwing all its weight behind efforts to preserve its pivotal role due to its understanding of the vital strategic location of Iraq as a gateway to the Arab countries, especially its allies in the region. This role has political, security, economic, and ideological dimensions that could not have been achieved without the turbulent situation and crises resulting from the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Iran’s success in gaining control over Iraq can be attributed to the IRGC’s early awareness of the golden opportunity offered to Iran by the 2003 US invasion to expand in the country, which was evident in the statement of Muhsin Sazgara, one of the IRGC’s founders and now a staunch opponent of the Iranian regime living in the United States, who said, “The IRGC’s evaluation of the Western invasion of Iraq was: We have a golden opportunity. We can use the American involvement in Iraq and create chaos and tension in this country.” ⁽¹⁶⁾

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, a number of Shiite militias were established through direct financial support and supervision by the Tehran regime.

Iran’s major military arm in Iraq is the Public Mobilization Forces, which was recognized by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, who has acknowledged the significant Iranian military support to the militia group. In addition to these

militias, Iran also announced its dispatching of military advisors to Iraq under the leadership of Al-Quds division commander, Major General Qassem Suleimani at the request of the Iraqi government. The Public Mobilization Forces consist of hundreds of IRGC-backed Shiite militias fighting side by side with the Iraqi regular army. ⁽¹⁷⁾

In fact, the level of interference by the IRGC in Iraq is now so total that Iranian MP Mohammad Saleh Jokar has called for establishing an Iraqi Revolutionary Guards Force modeled on the Iranian prototype via the consolidation of the existing Shiite factions and making Saraya Al Khorasani its core militia ⁽¹⁸⁾.

2.Syria:

Iran's role in Syria is clear. Iran has deployed and continues to use all of its political, security, economic, and sectarian weight to prevent the fall of the Syrian regime. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, Iran has provided massive military, financial, and technical support to Bashar Assad. It dispatched experts from the IRGC to train the Syrian regime's own Iranian-backed militias, as well as the Lebanese Hezbollah militias. The IRGC also recruited and trained mercenaries, many of them refugees, from Afghanistan and Pakistan and dispatched them to fight in Syria to preserve the regime of Bashar Assad ⁽¹⁹⁾.

3.Yemen

Iran could not have expanded in Yemen without certain factors, the most important of which was the Houthi rebels who played the key role in Iran's expansion there. Moreover, the Iranian influence in Yemen could not have been achieved in a unified society, and stable and powerful state.

Iran used the chaotic situation in Yemen following the revolution and the establishment of a new government to support and strengthen its proxies in the country through military escalation and creating a state of confusion to tip the balance of power and expand its regional influence. As a result, Iran has dedicated its efforts since the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions to strengthening the Houthi movement in Yemen in the media and through military support. In fact, Iran provides weaponry to Houthis by either smuggling these weapons to Sa'dah or by providing financial support to buy weapons from the domestic market in Yemen ⁽²⁰⁾.

The UN and Yemeni government have both issued reports confirming Iran's military support to Houthi rebels since 2009, although, the Iranian officials have, typically, denied these reports and asserted that the regime's activities in Yemen are limited to political support and humanitarian aid. In reality, the Revolutionary Guards oversee

training, prepare military plans against government forces, and provide weaponry to the Houthi rebels. The United Nations experts relied on the report of the Special Committee for Iran in the International Security Council to investigate an incident when a shipment of weapons aboard the Iranian vessel 'Jayhan' was found and confiscated in 2013.

Yet more clear evidence of the level of the IRGC's intervention in Yemen came from a statement by the General Commander of the IRGC, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, who spoke about his country's role in creating the Houthi rebel military force in Yemen, which he said he considered another achievement of the Iranian revolution⁽²¹⁾. Another example showing the Iranian role in Yemen is a statement by Iranian MP Ali Riza Zakani, who said in a statement to the Iranian parliament that Sana'a had become the fourth Arab capital under Tehran's control after Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad. He also asserted that Houthi rebellion is an extension of the Khomeinist revolution, adding that 14 Yemeni provinces out of 20 are under the domination of this movement which he asserted would expand further to enter Saudi Arabia. On the same subject, Ali Akbar Velayati, the engineer of Iranian foreign policy, has officially admitted the Iranian support of Houthis in Yemen, asserting that his country is supporting what he described as "the Houthis' just and legitimate struggle"⁽²²⁾.

4. Argentina

On July 18, 1994, a suicide bomber blew up a Jewish center in Buenos Aires killing 85 people and injuring 300 more; fingers were immediately pointed at Hezbollah and Iran.

In 2007, the Argentinean Attorney General accused some Iranian suspects of being behind the 1994 attack, including the then-Minister of Defense, General Ahmad Wahidi, who was the Commander of a Revolutionary Guards unit at the time of the explosion⁽²³⁾.

In May 2013 an Argentinean prosecutor issued a 500-page indictment concerning the case at which he accused Iran of establishing terrorist groups in Argentina and in other South American countries to launch terrorist attacks in these nations⁽²⁴⁾.

5. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

On June 25, 1996, a suicide tank bomber killed 19 American Air Force personnel, injuring 372 other people, and causing tens of casualties amongst people of other nationalities, in an attack in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. Despite the massive evidence tying them to the terror attack, the Iranian authorities, of course, denied any relation to

it. Some reports circulated about efforts by former president Hashemi Rafsanjani and the current president Hassan Rouhani who was then a member of the Iranian National Security Council, to contain tension between the two countries, which was reduced by the victory of the moderate Mohammad Khatami president of the Iranian Republic. Riyadh did not officially accuse Tehran of being behind this attack, while Americans did suggest that the IRGC's Al-Quds force bore responsibility for enlisting and training those suspected of carrying it out ⁽²⁵⁾.

6. Afghanistan

The American Department of Defense and the Iranian regime were accused of providing support to extremist individuals and groups in Afghanistan, including Qalboddin Hekmatyar, Ahmad and Ismail Khan, and Ahmad Shah Masud via the Al-Quds force that works with NGOs in the country.

In 2010, the Pentagon reported that 107 missiles were delivered by the IRGC to Afghani extremists, and some arsenals of Iranian-made weapons were unveiled in Afghanistan ⁽²⁶⁾.

The US Department of State also accused Iran of providing training, weaponry, rockets, mortar rocket launchers, missiles, and explosives to the Taliban ⁽²⁷⁾. In addition to that, other regional countries, including Kuwait and Bahrain, have accused the IRGC of interfering in their internal affairs.

The IRGC Budget

In recent years, the annual budget of both the IRGC and the Iranian army were significantly different. For example, in the 2013-2014 budget - the last year of former president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad reign - the Iranian military budget for all sectors (army, IRGC, Mobilization Forces, Joint General Staff of the army, and Joint General Staff of the IRGC) totaled \$6 billion and 240 million. In the next year 2014-2015, the budget amounted to more than \$8 billion with added amount of \$1 billion and 850 million. In 2013-2014, the IRGC received \$3 billion and 305 million of the total, while in 2014-2015 the portion of the budget allocated to the IRGC jumped to \$5 billion. This year, 2016, the IRGC's budget decreased to \$4 billion and 200 million. In addition to the annual allowance the IRGC receives from the government, it also makes massive amounts of money from its economic projects in the country.

As for the regular army, its budgets for 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 did not exceed \$2 billion and 500 million. Although President Hassan Rouhani declared a 15 percent,

an increase in the army's budget for the current year 2016, the gap is still huge between the two wings of the Iranian military.

The Iranian Army and IRGC Budgets for the Years 2014, 2105, 2016

Year	2014	2015	2016
IRGC	\$3.305 Billion	\$5 Billion	\$4.100 Billion
Army	\$1.5 Billion	\$1.5 Billion	\$1.750 Billion

The Iranian Army: Its Components and Capabilities

The Iranian army consists of a Joint General Staff and four major divisions - Land, Navy, Air Force, and the 'Khatam Alanbia Base for Air Defense'. The Supreme Leader is the Commander-in-Chief of these armed forces.

The Iranian army consists of a large number of soldiers and military installations Although its capabilities exceed those of the Revolutionary Guards, the Revolutionary Guards' budget is three times more than that of the army.

During the reign of the Shah, the army reported directly to him. Its commanders were subsequently accused by the incoming theocratic regime of being loyal to the Shah due to the financial rewards and promotion they had received. During the revolution, many of these officers were either imprisoned or killed due to their attempts to defend the Shah and prevent his fall. Others acquired the faith and respect of the new regime due to their cooperation and refusal to challenge the revolution⁽²⁹⁾; despite this, the new regime placed severe restrictions on them for a long time because of the belief that "Too many officers and soldiers claimed they supported the revolution but were looking for the opportunity to bring it down." This theory was the primary motive for the 'cleansing' of the Iranian military from the remnants of the Shah's army, which meant in effect creating a new military organization which reports directly to the Supreme Leader of the 'revolutionary' "Islamic Republic", enjoying a respectful status and acceptance so long as it values the goals and ideologies of the revolution, and protects the regime while maintaining its survival.

Over the first fifteen months of the revolution until the end of the eight-year Iraqi-Iranian war in 1988, Iran's army witnessed the expulsion and replacement of

a large number of its commanders and chiefs of staff. Among the 13 commanders of the army, eight were imprisoned, executed or expelled, while others escaped to exile outside the country ⁽³⁰⁾.

The army had reached a stage of near-dissolution after the execution of some of its commanders and escape of others in addition to the expulsion of the chiefs of staff one after another in less than two years such as Major General Farbad, Major General Shadmehr, Colonel Shad, and Colonel Falahi ⁽³¹⁾.

After the outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian war, Abu Alhassan Bani Sadr (the first Chief of Staff after the revolution from 1980 to 1981) dedicated his efforts to restructuring the army and equipping it with American-made weaponry. He also assigned previous military commanders and experts who had been expelled during the revolution because of the army's need for their expertise, although the new regime leaders rejected these reassignments under the pretext of "Jihad against Iraqi lies about the Revolutionary Guards only," and "Ethics are a priority in Jihad and defending Islam." Despite its participation in wars and continuous military improvement, the clerics always pointed fingers at the regular army, which, in the words of one of its commanders, preferred Iraqi bombs over the clerics' stabs in the back ⁽³²⁾.

Despite the regime's attempts to strangle the army and its engagement in war with Iraq, some of its commanders launched a number of attempted military coups to overthrow the regime in the first three years after the revolution. The most important of these coups was 1982 one. The coup failed and 160 of the army commanders were killed. Former Foreign Minister, Sadiq Qutob Zadeh was executed on charges of being behind the coup with the help of the Chief of Staff of the Army and Special Forces. In 1983, Iran witnessed another coup attempt announced by Rafsanjani, leading to the execution of another large number of army commanders, who were charged with conspiring against the regime and contacting with the Soviet Union ⁽³³⁾.

At the height of the 1980-88 war, the regime lessened its attempts to stifle the army because of its urgent military needs for its services. The army worked side by side with the IRGC to liberate Iranian cities occupied by the Iraqi forces through significant coordination between the two wings of the Iranian military.

After the end of war, the two ministries of defense and IRGC were consolidated in one ministry. This combination allowed the regime closer monitoring over the regular army and over the movements of its commanders. Since that period, the role of the army has deteriorated and the influence of the Guards increased in most of the state organizations. After the Iranian-Iraqi war, the regular army was excluded from Iranian political life because of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei assumed the responsibility of the Iranian Armed Forces, allowing him to practice closer supervision and censorship of the army through assigning the most loyal of its commanders and excluding the others.

Army and IRGC Disagreement

Since the revolution in 1979, Iran's regular army has been mistreated and neglected. The army commanders and troops have never publicly responded to the state of marginalization and neglect they have experienced over the past years due to the absolute allegiance of some of the army's senior officers to the brutally oppressive Iranian regime, fears of expulsion, or losing the privileges and financial incentives they had gained.

The nature of complaints sent by army officers and soldiers to President Rouhani on his web page, however, shows the significant level of their disappointment. A lot of them complain about their bad economic situation, low wages, and not receiving any education. Others complain about being excluded from promotion despite being more highly qualified than their Revolutionary Guards peers who are promoted. Another point of dispute is that IRGC members are promoted every three years while army members are only eligible every four years, which adds to the frustration and dissatisfaction of most Iranian army personnel ⁽³⁴⁾.

The IRGC, meanwhile, is in control of almost all the available resources in the country. It enjoys major influence and receives most of the regime's political attention. This has led to a state of resentment among regular army personnel, which has risen over the years. The belief among army personnel that the IRGC has exceeded its limits and is behaving as an independent organization separate to Iran's other armed forces led the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani to call for granting more support to the defense ministry and restructuring of the army through improving the quality of its training, weaponry, and equipment.

Recently, some component parts of the Iranian regime, including the IRGC, have been sharply critical of the regular army, accusing it of weakness and failure. These accusations were broadcast in a documentary shown on Iranian TV about the role of the Iranian army and the IRGC in the Iraqi-Iranian war. In fact, this documentary massively underestimated the role of the army during the first year of the war and its failure in four battles with the Iraqi army.

The commanders of the Iranian army responded angrily to the documentary, strongly condemning the regime's radio and TV media division for underestimating the military institution and its central role. The commander of the army's land forces, General Ahmad Riza Bordistan, said that the army was not easily broken during the Iraqi-Iranian war as some had erroneously suggested, adding that on the contrary some parties, which he did not name, had attempted to dissolve it when they noticed its powerful position in the war.

The Deputy General Commander of the Khatam Alanbia base, Major General Mohammad Hassan Husni Sadi, also strongly condemned the regime's radio and TV media division over the documentary, accusing it of underestimating the capabilities and efficiency of the Iranian army⁽³⁵⁾. A number of other senior army commanders further accused the IRGC of being behind the documentary and giving the green light to the regime media authority to broadcast it specifically in order to present a false image of the army⁽³⁶⁾.

Another indicators of disharmony between the army and the IRGC is a speech by former IRGC naval commander and prominent regime loyalist and fundamentalist ideologue General Hassan Abbasi, who directed his criticism nominally to the United States, saying, "In case the country is exposed to flooding and erosion, the army would never respond or take any action", a clear reference to the army's weakness. He added that the IRGC and Basij forces had confronted the unrest following the 2009 elections while the army did not. He also implicitly accused the army of carelessness concerning the current crises and turbulent period in Iran's history. These claims and allegations were in turn sharply criticized by the commander of the army's land forces, Ahmad Riza Bordistan, who called Abbasi's statements unbalanced and illogical, going so far as to threaten taking legal action against Abbasi if he did not issue an apology to the army. On the same subject, the chief of the army's marine forces, Habibollah Siari, also criticized Abbasi, asserting that

his statements did not help either the regime or Iran's national security ⁽³⁷⁾.

The aforementioned events- Abbasi's statements and the TV documentary- provide a demonstration of the seriousness of the disagreement between the army and the Guards. One senior military official, responsible for running the regime's Tabnak website, which catalogues the orders and directives of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei and has close ties to the Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council General Muhsin Riza'i, revealed that Major General Hassan Fairoz Abadi was dismissed as Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces due to his support for the nuclear deal and for President Hassan Rouhani.

Although the regime has so far been able to defuse the mounting tensions to some degree or to quickly resolve these incidents through placating the commanders of both wings of the Iranian military, the regime has continued its clearly preferential treatment of the IRGC over the army in every way. This was evident through the dismissal of Major General Abadi, a confidante of Rouhani's, who was replaced by an IRGC official, demonstrating Khamenei's fears about the impact of the current tensions on Iran's domestic and overseas military policies ⁽³⁸⁾.

In an attempt by the regime to reform the military organization, the new Chief of Staff of the Army, Mohammad Baqiri said that his mission consists of four stages designed by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as follows: improve all Iranian armed forces divisions over the next five years, strengthen the Public Mobilization Forces and boost their role in defense and security issues; strengthen Iran's defense capabilities; and combine the IRGC and the Iranian regular army into one force ⁽³⁹⁾.

The rationale behind this plan seems to be an attempt by the regime to eliminate the major gap in capabilities and privileges between the two wings of the Iranian military resulting from the regime's negligence towards the regular army, its expansion of the IRGC and its involvement in several conflicts in the Middle East. The plan also aims to strengthen the army and enhance its role to meet any domestic deficit and pave the way for the Guards to achieve their objectives both inside and outside Iran.

Conclusion:

Based on all the aforementioned information, it is clear that the IRGC represents the military, intelligence, and economic arm of the Iranian regime.

This organization has come to dominate the regime from the inside and succeeded to a great extent in carrying out its projects and overseas interventions through exporting the “Islamic Revolution” and its doctrines; this position of privilege given to the IRGC by the Iranian regime contrasts with the regime’s deliberate negligence towards the army which has been calculatingly excluded from Iran’s political and economic life. The most important reasons for the Iranian regime’s negligence towards the army and its support of the idea of creating a parallel military organization to the regular army tasked with protecting the revolution and implementing its plans were the fears of the Jurist Leadership regime of a military coup that could bring it down; the neutrality of the army during the revolution, and support of some of its commanders for Shah Mohammad Riza Pahlavi to prevent his fall and preserve his reign, and the failed coups by some army commanders during the first years of the revolution. The consolidation of the IRGC and the Army into one Ministry, with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei assuming responsibility as the Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces that comprises the army, IRGC, and the Iranian internal security agencies, has led to heavier control and more significant censorship of the regular army and its commanders, and tipping the balance of power in favor of the IRGC.

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