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Iran's Revolutionary Guard: Armed Pillar of the Islamic Republic

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A Research Paper

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*NESA 87-10004
January 1987*

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Iran's Revolutionary Guard: Armed Pillar of the Islamic Republic

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A Research Paper

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This paper was prepared by
 Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis.
It was coordinated with the Directorate of
Operations. Comments and queries are welcome and
may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf
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**Iran's Revolutionary Guard:
Armed Pillar of the
Islamic Republic** [Redacted]

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Summary

*Information available
as of 2 January 1987
was used in this paper.*

Iran's Revolutionary Guard has evolved from a dedicated, but loosely knit, ill-trained, and ineffectively controlled organization into a multifaceted formal government institution with a pervasive influence throughout Iranian society. The Revolutionary Guard's military assets and political clout virtually guarantee it an important and powerful role in Iran after Khomeini's death. [Redacted]

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Like other institutions in Iran, the Guard is beset by factionalism, and the regime's efforts to impose order on its organizational structure and to tighten control of the Guard's activities have not been completely successful. The Guard's civilian components continue to exceed the authority granted them by the government. Recurrent, often deadly, clashes still occur between regular army and Guard units on the war front. Factional rivalries and disputes appear to be intensifying. [Redacted]

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Revolutionary Guard leaders have used the authority granted under the 1979 Islamic Constitution to develop a major domestic security role. The Guard has succeeded in molding various religious and revolutionary law enforcement groups into a powerful security network backed by a formidable intelligence capability. Concerns about the Guard's abuse of authority and fear of the threat its power and influence could pose to the regime have prompted the clerical leadership to cut back the Guard's role as an internal security and police force. [Redacted]

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The regime intends the Revolutionary Guard to become the core of a new "army of the revolution" that will eventually replace the regular armed forces. The Guard's experience in the war with Iraq has made it a more effective military force. It has learned from its defeats, improved its operational skills, tightened its discipline and control, and assumed an increasingly significant role in planning war strategy. Despite numerous purges of the military and the creation of a political control apparatus attached to all regular armed forces units, the clerical leadership remains suspicious of the loyalty of the country's Ground Forces, Navy, and Air Force. [Redacted]

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The Guard's domestic intelligence network and military capabilities will make it a major factor in the transition of power once Khomeini is gone. Nonetheless, factionalism and political infighting will significantly test the

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Guard's ability to maintain order during the transition. The Guard's institutional cohesion will be challenged and could break down as those vying for power and control seek support from elements within the Guard.

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The Revolutionary Guard is not an ideologically monolithic organization. Although generally characterized by a fanatical loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini and the zealous propagation of the ideals of the Islamic revolution, the Guard has a diverse membership and is split along both factional and "generational" lines. Coalitions and loyalties within the Guard are highly fluid.

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The dominant elements within the Guard, however, maintain a strong, anti-US position and will be a major obstacle to any renewal of US-Iranian relations in the post-Khomeini era. This deep-seated animosity toward the United States could lead the Guard, as a way to preserve the regime or its own position, to support improved relations with the Soviet Union. Such support would present Moscow with significant opportunities to expand its influence in Iran.

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**Iran's Revolutionary Guard:
Armed Pillar of the
Islamic Republic** [Redacted]

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The fundamental role of the Revolutionary Guard is to protect and promote the interests of the Islamic republic. It is one of the key institutions through which the clerical regime has consolidated its control over Iranian society, countered internal and external threats to the republic, and exported fundamentalist Islamic ideology. [Redacted]

As the regime in Tehran solidified its power, it focused on transforming the Guard from a loosely knit collection of ragtag propaganda groups and private armies into a structured, tightly disciplined force. The Guard's civilian component is organized primarily to operate in population centers—where they are closely associated with the local mosque—rather than in rural areas. Its military arm has evolved under the pressure of the war with Iraq into a more conventional armed force. Most observers believe that the Revolutionary Guard will be a key factor in any future power struggle in Iran. [Redacted]

Early Evolution of the Revolutionary Guard

The Revolutionary Guard (Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enge-lab) was an important force in establishing the Islamic republic. The concept of a Revolutionary Guard appears to have originated among members of Ayatollah Khomeini's entourage long before the ouster of the Shah. Clerics and secular figures alike saw the value of an armed force loyal to Khomeini and his ideals. They believed such an organization would not only help bring about the Shah's downfall, but would be useful in creating a revolutionary government and in propagating the values of the new Islamic order,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

The Revolutionary Guard was formally established in May 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini under the auspices of the then governing Revolutionary Council to restore and maintain order. Concern over the multitude of "revolutionary" committees that had sprung up after the Shah's downfall prompted the new regime to give the Guard considerable autonomy and encourage its rapid expansion. Hastily pulled together from trusted anti-Shah groups, clerics' militias, and ex-servicemen, the Guard was immediately called upon to sustain the new government by intimidating opposition elements and absorbing or co-opting a variety of independent armed groups throughout Iran. It served as one of the principal and most trusted means available to the new regime for consolidating its control. As a result of the hectic circumstances surrounding its birth, however, the Guard had little time to develop effective control over its units. [Redacted]

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The Guard took on a wide variety of functions and responsibilities to support the new republic. It bore the brunt of clashes with dissident ethnic minorities, took over many routine law enforcement activities, and performed special security duties at key installations. The Guard was also charged, early on, with political organization and propagandizing on behalf of the Islamic revolution. [Redacted]

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Working closely with the clerical leadership and implementing its orders, the Revolutionary Guard quickly became the point of daily contact between many citizens and the new regime. Contrary to Khomeini's design, however, the Guard—poorly trained and ineffectively controlled—generally did not make a good impression. As a result, the Guard's activities and the attitudes of its members often conflicted with the authority of religious and secular leaders and local security forces. Moreover, despite its close ties to the regime, the Guard's zeal in promoting the revolution sometimes ran counter to the government's wishes or resulted in local challenges to the

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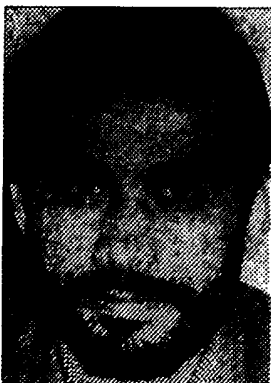


Figure 1. Mohsen Rafiq-Dust, Minister of the Revolutionary Guard [redacted]

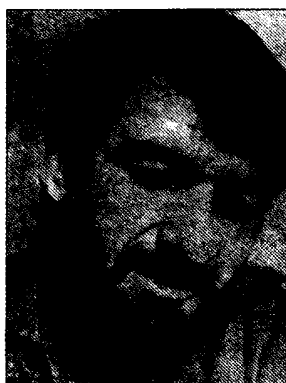


Figure 2. Mohsen Rezai, Revolutionary Guard Corps Commander [redacted]

regime's authority. To control extremists within the Guard, repeated local and national campaigns were conducted to purge undesirable Guards and control Guard activities. [redacted]

The Ministry of the Revolutionary Guard, headed by Mohsen Rafiq-Dust, was established in late 1982. It is responsible for supporting Revolutionary Guard combat units on the war front and has administrative authority over the "civilian" programs and units of the Guard. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the military arm of the Revolutionary Guard. Although nominally equal to the Ministry, the IRGC apparently enjoys a higher status within the regime because of its importance in the war, the stature of its commander Mohsen Rezai, and the prospect that it will eventually replace the regular military. [redacted]

Administering the Guard's Civilian Components

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[redacted] each subordinate command within the Guard's civilian organizational structure is administered by a revolutionary council or committee. In most cases these are led by a mullah who is assisted by a cadre of Revolutionary Guards. They serve as the focal point for communications between higher Guard authority and local Guard units. We believe the size of these committees and their supporting cadre varies in relation to the population density of the region.

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Typically, a committee consists of seven to 12 men and is backed by a force of 400 to 500 Guards with responsibility for several villages, towns, or other cities. Tehran, however, is administered by 15 such committees, [redacted]

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Information on the internal structure of the area commands is sketchy, but it is probably broken down into major staff elements that have specific—but probably overlapping—responsibility and authority.

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while at least four focus on manpower, recruitment, and training for Revolutionary Guard and Basij units. Coordination of these functions is the responsibility of the area commander, aided by his deputy and chief of staff. [redacted]

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The "Civilian" Side of the Revolutionary Guard

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[redacted] Civilian elements of the Revolutionary Guard are organized in a hierarchical structure based on geographical areas and population centers from cities to small villages. The basic unit within the Guard's civilian organization appears to be the "post" or "base"—normally a group of about 20

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Figure 3
Iran: Old and New Revolutionary Guard Area Commands



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Revolutionary Guards—located in a town or village. In larger cities these units are located within 1 or 2 kilometers of each other or in each city precinct. [redacted]

Posts or bases are under the jurisdiction of city subordinate commands located in larger towns and cities. District central commands are based in the largest provincial cities and are responsible for overseeing and directing Guard activities within their region. [redacted]

Revolutionary Guard area commands oversee the provinces and report directly to central Guard authorities in Tehran. In late 1985 the regime combined several of the original 10 commands, reducing the number of Revolutionary Guard area commands. All the lower echelon elements probably were kept intact and resubordinated to the new area commands. We believe this reorganization was part of a continuing process designed to strengthen the central government's control over Guard elements, reduce the Guard's nonmilitary role, and improve the logistic and administrative support each area provides combat units. [redacted]

At the apex of the civilian structure is the Ministry of the Revolutionary Guard. The Ministry is nominally the main executor of the regime's domestic policies and ensures logistic and administrative support for IRGC combat units. Although supervision and control of the civilian organizational structure are primarily the responsibility of the Ministry, we believe actual authority is shared with the IRGC. Mobilization and training of the Basij—Iran's irregular militia forces—for example, appear to be jointly controlled by the Ministry and the IRGC. [redacted]

We believe that the acquisition of arms and equipment is another area in which the Ministry "shares" authority and responsibility with the IRGC. [redacted]
[redacted] Nonetheless, the Ministry appears to be acting, in most cases, as an agent. Its procurement of arms is geared to requests by the IRGC. [redacted]



Figure 4. Revolutionary Guard religious and revolutionary law enforcement patrol [redacted]

Guarding the Revolution Within. The principal mission of the Revolutionary Guard—defined by Ayatollah Khomeini to “keep the Revolution alive and strong”—has been subject to various interpretations. Within six months of the Guard's formal creation, Khomeini indicated that its focus on internal security in response to local disturbances was only temporary, [redacted] Nonetheless, Revolutionary Guard leaders continued to use the responsibilities given to the Guard in the 1979 Islamic Constitution to maintain a major domestic security role. [redacted]

[redacted] over time the Guard's major internal security functions have evolved into a broad range of duties, including:

- Training its members in Islamic ideology and politics as well as in military skills.
- Ideological and political proselytizing.
- Helping implement revolutionary and religious judicial orders and enforcing law and order, especially with regard to counterrevolutionaries, leftists, and ethnic minorities.
- Defending against attack by foreign military forces or infiltrators.
- Cooperating with the regular armed forces, but maintaining the capability to prevent a military coup. [redacted]

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Initially, the Guard's small size, its lack of training and discipline, and a chronic shortage of funds and equipment hampered its ability to perform its domestic security mission. The force included lower-class criminals, extortionists, and bullies whose strong-arm tactics and brutality created or worsened local disturbances. In some cases Guard excesses forced local authorities to demand the withdrawal or reorganization of Guard forces. [redacted]

The regime's first attempts to remedy these deficiencies were only marginally successful. Despite repeated national and local campaigns to weed undesirable elements out of Guard units, clashes with local authorities and charges of brutality, corruption, and abuse of power continued in 1982, [redacted]

In our judgment, these problems led to the formal incorporation of the Revolutionary Guard into the government in 1982. The creation of the Ministry of the Revolutionary Guard was intended to:

- Bring order to the rapidly expanding Guard organization.
- Establish an effective chain of command for controlling Guard activities.
- Centralize control over Guard financial, logistic, and legal affairs. [redacted]

Although the Ministry proved to be no panacea for the Guard's problems, Minister Rafiq-Dust imposed some order on the Guard's civilian organization. A formal chain of command was established through which local Guard elements would—at least in theory—be under tighter central control. More important, the Ministry focused on improving its internal security apparatus and increasing support for the regime. [redacted]

[redacted] the Ministry succeeded in molding Guard units and various religious and revolutionary law enforcement groups into a pervasive and powerful security network backed by a formidable internal intelligence capability. Moreover, the Guard's reputation for ruthlessness was not diminished. It continued to cow the populace and destroyed the ability of dissident groups to affect the course of events in Iran. [redacted]

Through the Ministry the clerical leadership sought to bring order to the Guard's financial, logistic, and legal affairs. We believe that Minister Rafiq-Dust interpreted this as a broad mandate to expand significantly his control over arms purchases abroad as well as over Iran's indigenous arms production. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

In our judgment, the Ministry's arms purchasing authority and its near total control over Iran's indigenous arms industries are the source of much of its political power. [redacted] however, Iran's deteriorating economy, combined with charges of fraud and corruption in the upper echelons of the Guard Ministry, may have prompted the regime to transfer at least some of the authority for weapons procurement back to the Ministry of Defense in mid-1986. [redacted]

Regime Concerns. The Ministry's growing internal security role, combined with the IRGC's greater part in the war, made many regime leaders fear that the Guard was becoming too powerful and a potential threat to clerical rule, [redacted] This fear was partly responsible for the formation of the Intelligence Ministry in 1984. By early 1985 the

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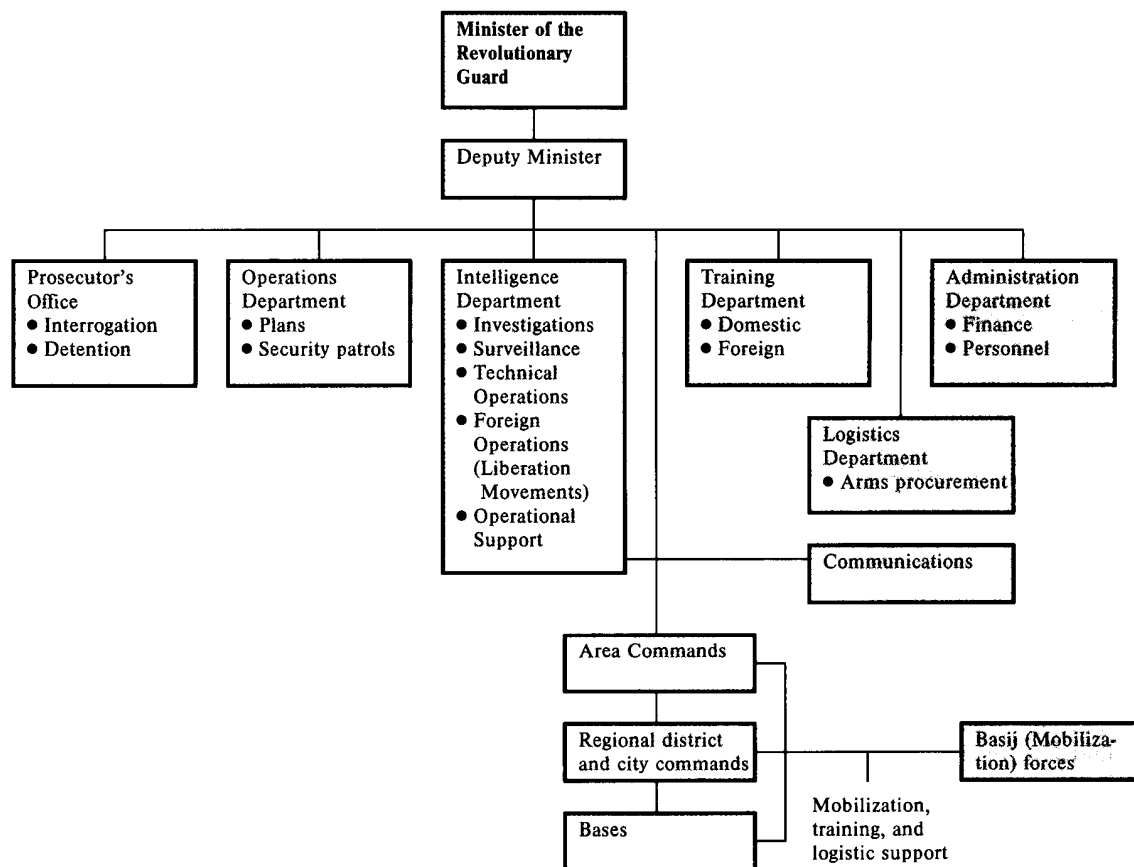
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Figure 5
Iran: Organization of the Ministry of the Revolutionary Guard



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Guard's internal intelligence and security responsibilities had been handed over to the Intelligence Ministry. The autonomous, national, mosque-centered network of komitahs (local

committees whose main function was to ensure public conformity to religious laws and revolutionary mores) was put under the control of the Interior Ministry, and its ties to the Revolutionary Guard were cut.

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Exporting the Revolution

The Constitution gives the Revolutionary Guard responsibility for exporting the revolution in addition to its security functions. [redacted]

[redacted] the International Relations Unit oversees the Guard's revolutionary duties and is responsible for contacts with liberation movements worldwide. Members of this unit receive specialized training and are posted to Iranian diplomatic missions abroad. They are charged with propagandizing on behalf of the Islamic revolution and with recruiting sympathetic Muslims. Those judged most dedicated are brought to Iran for religious and ideological indoctrination and paramilitary training. [redacted]

Lebanon is the primary target of Iran's attempt to export its Islamic revolution, and the Revolutionary Guard has been at the forefront of that effort. Besides the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, the 300 to 500 Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon are the principal means by which Iran has sought to unify rival Shia factions—particularly the Hizballah—under its control:

- *Since 1982 the Guard has trained thousands of Lebanese Shias,* [redacted]
- *Deliveries of small arms, ammunition, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades are made under Guard auspices.*
- *In addition to its military training mission, the Guard contingent in Lebanon has engaged in religious and ideological proselytizing and indoctrination to gain new converts to the fundamentalist cause.*
- *The Guard also plays an important role in social welfare and community health projects.*
- *The exact nature of the Guard's involvement in terrorist activity in Lebanon is unclear;* [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] at the same time, responsibility for the Guard's religious morality patrols (Gasht-e Sarollah) was transferred to the komitehs. [redacted]

Guard leaders and some influential clerics have opposed the loss of the Guard's domestic security responsibilities. [redacted]

[redacted] Guard leaders assert that they cannot fulfill their mandate to preserve the Islamic republic unless they can control domestic security operations.

We believe the reduction of the Guard's domestic security responsibilities indicates that Iranian leaders are wary of the consequences of investing too much power in any one element of the government. Ironically, the result is to perpetuate the conflict between Revolutionary Guard leaders and the Intelligence Ministry over control of the internal security apparatus. Competition among and within security and intelligence groups is likely to contribute to factional rivalries that risk undermining the chances of a smooth succession when Khomeini dies. [redacted]

The Revolutionary Guard as a Military Force

Iran's goal to create a revolutionary Islamic army built around the IRGC has been tempered by the exigencies of the war with Iraq. After the ouster of the Shah, the revolutionary leadership announced plans to create a mass militia to replace the regular army. Domestic unrest and the outbreak of the war with Iraq forced the new regime to abandon this course and bring the army back to full strength. Still suspicious of the armed forces' loyalty, the regime expanded the military role of the Revolutionary Guard, forming combat units that would both augment and rival the regular military. [redacted]

Guard combat units initially suffered the same deficiencies as the Guard's civilian components. Inadequate organization, lack of training and discipline,

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Profile of a Revolutionary GuardA Revolutionary Guardsman

The majority of the Guard's rank and file is drawn from the younger, uneducated lower class—specifically the urban poor. It is the Guard's "permanent cadre"—those who choose service with the Guard as a career—however, who provide the basis for its considerable power and influence in Iran. Members of the permanent cadre are generally better educated and come from all segments of Iranian society. For both groups, the Islamic revolution and, more particularly, membership in the Revolutionary Guard have a powerful attraction and offer significant political and personal opportunities. We believe that, in most cases, an individual joins the Guard for a variety of reasons. The following profile is a composite, intended to portray the more "typical" characteristics of a Revolutionary Guard:

- **Age:** Mid-twenties to early thirties.
- **Family background:** Comes from a Shia family that has been found to be ideologically and politically "acceptable" as a result of a Revolutionary Guard background investigation. A family member or close relative has been "martyred"—killed in the war with Iraq or died under other suitably "revolutionary" circumstances. Was recruited from among Hezbollahis (Party of God)—loosely organized street gangs acting as self-appointed religious and revolutionary law enforcers.
- **Social and economic status:** Belongs to the lower class or lower middle class. Saw little evidence of, or few prospects for, upward mobility under the Shah. Believes the clerical regime will eventually lead to a more equitable social order, but is prepared to take advantage of opportunities for personal gain in the meantime.
- **Education:** Secondary level formal education, supplemented by extensive religious and political indoctrination by mullahs and Revolutionary Guard cadre.
- **Military training:** One to three months of initial military training focusing on light weapons, basic infantry tactics. More specialized training available to brighter, better educated Guards include artillery, armor, air defense, naval warfare, or flight courses.
- **Military experience:** Has had several tours at the front and has participated in a variety of operations from counterinsurgency campaigns against the Kurds to large-scale offensives against Iraq. Reputation as a zealous, aggressive fighter is well deserved, as is reputation for lack of discipline in combat.
- **Other characteristics:** Advocates radical positions on most issues affecting the Islamic republic, especially aggressive prosecution of the war with Iraq, virulent opposition to the United States, and continued export of the revolution. Idealistic zeal is mixed with opportunism.

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and a chronic shortage of funds and equipment hampered their performance. To improve the Guard's combat capability the regime ordered the army to provide training and logistic support. [redacted]

[redacted]

We estimate the Revolutionary Guard has between 125,000 to 175,000 combat personnel. [redacted]

[redacted] each IRGC division has from 6,000 to 8,000 men, and a typical brigade is manned by 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers. With few exceptions, these forces are deployed along the front and include the IRGC's most experienced and best equipped troops. [redacted]

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As the Guard gained experience in the war against Iraq, it improved its capabilities as well as its prestige within the regime. Equipped primarily for guerrilla and light infantry operations, Guard forces often bore the brunt of the fighting and acquired a reputation for aggressiveness. The Guard emerged as a serious combat force in 1981, regaining occupied Iranian territory when the regular army's conventional armored counterattacks failed. As a consequence, the Guard was given additional military responsibilities and assumed an increasingly influential role in decisionmaking on the war. It increased its abilities to counter the army in the event of an internal struggle as well. [redacted]

IRGC combat units are augmented by Basij—"Mobilization of the Oppressed"—forces. Recruited, trained, and led by the Revolutionary Guard, the Basij is a mass militia that was created in 1979 in response to Ayatollah Khomeini's call for a 20-million-man army to defend against a possible US invasion and later to fight Iraq. The number of Basij combat personnel on active duty fluctuates with operational needs at the front, and masses of volunteers are called up and sent to the front in preparation for major offensives, according to Iranian press reports. We estimate that there are at least 100,000 Basij on frontline combat duty at any given time and probably more than 400,000 available for mobilization. [redacted]

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Organization and Manpower. The demands of the war have led Tehran to expand the Guard's combat role and gradually to shape it along more conventional military lines. [redacted]

Guard combat units are arranged in a fairly standard organizational structure—divisions, brigades, battalions, and companies. There are at least 19 Guard divisions and probably more than 46 brigades, most of which are subordinate to the divisions. At times, several divisions have been noted under the operational control of one of several Revolutionary Guard corps-level headquarters, but we believe this subordination is temporary and changes with operational needs at the front. More often, command and control is exercised by joint Revolutionary Guard/army headquarters activated to provide coordination during larger offensive operations. [redacted]

Until recently, nearly all Revolutionary Guard personnel were strongly motivated volunteers who chose the Guard as a career. Individual motives differed considerably, however, [redacted]

[redacted] Some would enlist out of revolutionary fervor or ideological commitment to the Islamic revolution. Others sought to take advantage of the special benefits—higher pay than the regular military, status, political or economic advantages—associated with membership in the Guard. [redacted]

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Career or "permanent" Guards—the core of the IRGC—are generally recruited through the families of "martyrs" and among the radical street gangs, [redacted]

[redacted]

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Although IRGC forces are primarily light infantry, there are possibly as many as three armored or mechanized infantry divisions. In addition, some divisions have their own artillery, commando, and air defense units, [redacted]

[redacted]

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Figure 6. Basij recruits leaving for the front [redacted]



Figure 7. Recruits at prayers before leaving for the front [redacted]

The larger combat role of the IRGC and the growing war weariness of the Iranian populace are causing problems for the Guard's voluntary enlistment programs. Apparently starting in 1984, conscripts have been assigned to fill rank-and-file positions in the IRGC, [redacted]. An Iranian press report in June 1986 indicated that government agencies and employees were "duty-bound" to comply with IRGC "requests" for personnel required to fill key positions. [redacted]

The Revolutionary Guard and Basij in Combat. During the first two years of the war, the Revolutionary Guard and Basij acquired a well-deserved reputation as a fanatic, aggressive, but ill-trained and undisciplined combat force. In contrast to the Guard's early successes are some notable failures caused by lack of training, inadequate weapons and supplies, and poor coordination with regular military forces:

- In March 1984, Revolutionary Guard and Basij units involved in the spring offensive to capture the Majnoon Islands suffered high casualties—including the near total loss of a 12,000-man combined Guard/Basij force that spearheaded the attack. An investigative commission tentatively concluded that the regular army commander had failed to provide adequate support and termed his conduct "deliberate sabotage."
- During the "Badr" offensive to cut the Baghdad–Al Basrah road on the west bank of the Hawr al Hawzah in 1985, at least 30,000 Iranian soldiers—

mostly Basij and Revolutionary Guards—were killed. Many of these deaths were attributable to poor planning, logistic problems, and poor coordination between regular and irregular forces, [redacted]

Improving Performance. The regime has tried various measures to bring Revolutionary Guard training more in line with that of the regular military. [redacted] armor, artillery, and pilot training have expanded since the war began. In 1984, Tehran created a joint military organization composed of senior Ground Forces, Navy, and Air Force officers to formalize and coordinate Guard training. The IRGC has established its own advanced officer training course, [redacted]

[redacted] Army technicians also are occasionally attached to Revolutionary Guard units for up to six months as instructors in communications, electronics, and advanced weapon systems. [redacted]

Tehran has attempted to remedy the Guard's shortage of weapons and supplies by giving it priority in weapons procurement. Although the Guard is still primarily a light infantry force, [redacted] it is receiving much, probably most, of the Soviet-designed tanks, artillery, and other

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military equipment captured from Iraq or supplied by North Korea, China, Libya, and Eastern Europe. The Guard has also conducted an aggressive effort to purchase arms and equipment abroad since at least 1982. [redacted]

Finally, the clerical leadership has attempted to improve coordination between the Revolutionary Guard and Basij units and the regular armed forces. Joint operational headquarters, low-level joint training of battalion-size units, and closer cooperation between regular and irregular forces in planning as well as executing operations are among the specific steps taken. [redacted]

[redacted] the regime has ordered a wider integration of regular and irregular forces, including the transfer of large numbers of army personnel to Revolutionary Guard units. [redacted]

In our judgment, these changes have made the Revolutionary Guard a more effective military force. It has learned from its defeats, improved its operational skills, tightened discipline and control among its own combat units and attached Basij troops, and increased its cooperation with regular army forces. [redacted]

[redacted]

Creating an "Army of the Revolution." In our judgment, the regime intends the Revolutionary Guard to become the core of a new "army of the revolution" that will eventually replace the regular armed forces. Khomeini has long given at least tacit endorsement to such a proposal, in part because he and other Iranian leaders continue to doubt the loyalty of the military. Tehran's original plans to replace the regular military with Guard forces were disrupted by Kurdish rebellions and the war with Iraq, but considerable progress has been made toward that objective in recent years. [redacted]

In September 1985, Ayatollah Khomeini announced publicly that ground, naval, and air branches would be formally established within the IRGC and ordered the Ground Forces, Navy, and Air Force to assist in organizing and equipping these units. [redacted]

[redacted] headquarters and training areas for the new Guard branches were established at facilities near Tehran, and arrangements were made to transfer Guard personnel to sections of all major Air Force units. [redacted]

The Guard's senior headquarters has also been reorganized, probably to improve its ability to oversee and direct the IRGC's expanded military duties. [redacted] a Joint Staff (Sepah-e Keshvari) has been established to take over the duties of the Central Staff and facilitate the expansion of IRGC military units, including the new air and naval branches. [redacted]

We believe the Revolutionary Guard's role in planning war strategy has increased significantly in the past year. [redacted]

[redacted]

Factionalism and the Guard. In our judgment, the Revolutionary Guard's future cohesiveness and viability as the primary military force of the Islamic republic will be undermined by political factionalism. Despite the Guard's institutionalization, the clerical

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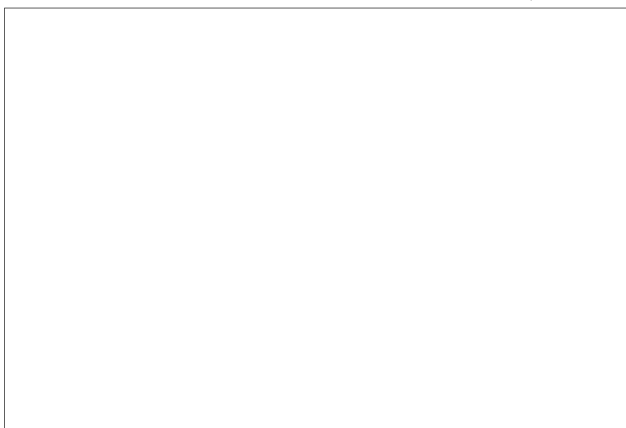
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[redacted] factional alliances and infighting have undermined the fierce loyalty to Khomeini that used to be the Guard's principal unifying force.

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In our judgment, factionalism within the Guard will gain momentum as the clerical leadership continues its efforts to redefine the Guard's internal security role and expand its military responsibilities. This, along with the decline—or absence—of Khomeini's influence, suggests that infighting will become more intense and disputes more difficult to resolve. If more open political infighting among other groups and factions within the regime occurs, the likelihood of armed clashes in the Guard will increase. [redacted]

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leadership's tightened control over its activities, and the apparent unity of purpose within the Revolutionary Guard, we believe it is highly susceptible to infighting and external factional pressures. [redacted]

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[redacted] internal infighting and factionalism within the Guard are growing. A wide variety of issues, ranging from broad ideological disputes to more narrow political or even personal disagreements, is involved:

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- Veterans who have been with the Guard since 1979 are increasingly disillusioned with the progress of the revolution. The more idealistic deplore Iran's ineffective war strategy and what they see as "un-Islamic" power plays and government corruption in Tehran. Others resent being forced to serve multiple tours on the front while giving up the economic and political benefits of nonmilitary service with the Guard.

Outlook—The Guard in Post-Khomeini Iran

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In our judgment, the Revolutionary Guard will remain an important factor in Iranian politics after Khomeini's death. Despite the reduction of its internal security duties, the Ministry of the Revolutionary Guard will continue to serve as a primary guardian of the ideals of the Islamic revolution, and it is likely to maintain, or even try to expand, its domestic intelligence network. With its expanded military role and improved combat capabilities, the IRGC is likely to play a major role in the transition of power once Khomeini is gone. [redacted]

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We believe there are cracks in this "pillar" of the Islamic republic that may contribute to another upheaval in Iran. Factionalism and political infighting would significantly reduce the Guard's ability to maintain order during the post-Khomeini transition. The Guard's institutional cohesion would be strained and could break down as those vying for power in the government seek the support of elements within the Guard. [redacted]

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We believe that Ayatollah Khomeini's ability to resolve such disputes and dampen factionalism within the Guard has declined because of his deteriorating health. [redacted]

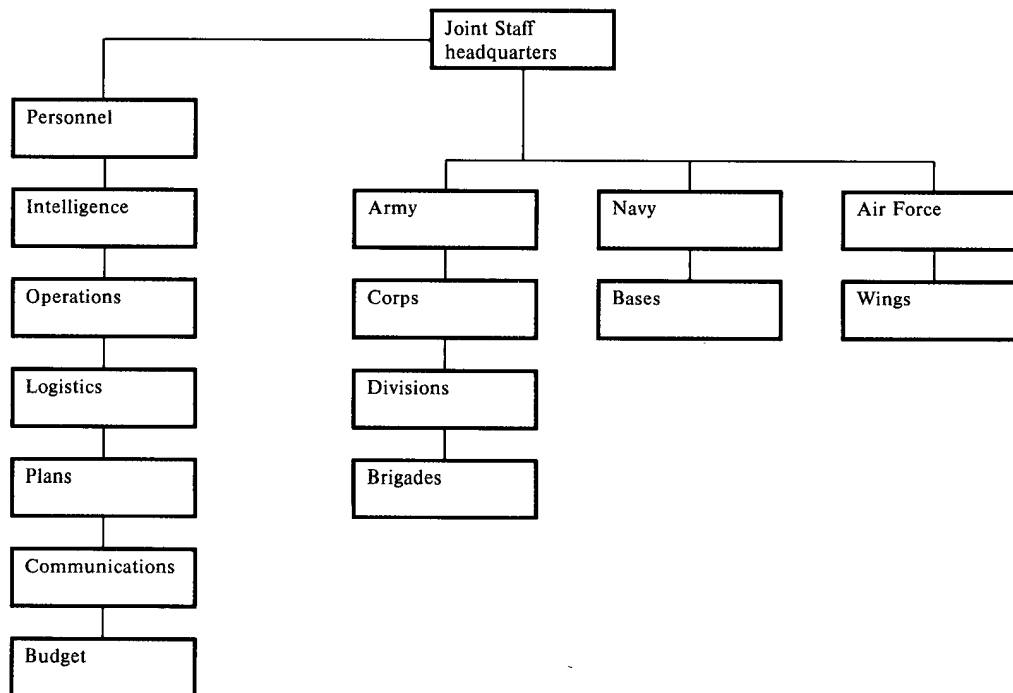
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Figure 9
Iran: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
Joint Staff Organization



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Ironically, the regime's efforts to avoid giving one organization full control of Iran's domestic security and intelligence apparatus could seriously undermine the government's ability to ensure a smooth succession. So far the clerical leadership has managed to check opposition to its restructuring of these services, but this is probably because of Khomeini's extraordinary ability to command loyalty and compliance from his subordinates. Revolutionary Guard Minister Rafiq-Dust and Intelligence Minister Reyshahri, for example, both owe their positions to Khomeini and

derive their power directly from him as well as from their strong connections to other prominent clergy and government leaders. When Khomeini dies, loyalty to his memory probably will not be enough to prevent various factions from attempting to suborn the country's security apparatus. [redacted]

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Factions Within the Revolutionary Guard

The Revolutionary Guard, like most large national institutions with a diverse membership, is not an ideologically monolithic organization. Although fanatical loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini and zealous propagation of the ideals of the Islamic revolution are characteristics that apply to the Guard generally, within the Guard there are several different factions. Each of these groups has its own interpretation of the fundamental role and purpose of the Guard, and competition among them for control of the Guard's direction is growing. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

We believe there are three or four major groups, but factional coalitions and loyalties are highly fluid:

- **Conservatives and Moderates:** Revolutionary Guards who generally favor a far less aggressive prosecution of—if not a negotiated end to—the war with Iraq. They seek to limit government involvement in the economy and oppose violent export of the revolution. This group is probably the most anti-Soviet, but it is also suspicious of the United States. It is aligned with President Khamenei. [redacted] this faction also includes Revolutionary Guards who secretly belong

to the ultraconservative Hojatieh Society, suggesting important links to upper and middle ranks of the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and the security forces as well as technocrats and bazaar merchants.

- **Radicals:** We believe this is the dominant faction within the Revolutionary Guard. It is composed of those who support a hardline policy on the war, aggressive export of the revolution, and greater government control over the economy. This faction is fiercely loyal to Khomeini, and in a post-Khomeini power struggle it would probably align itself with radical religious and secular leaders.
- **Pragmatists:** Members of this group maneuver between the two other factions, for the most part choosing policies they believe advance the Guard's interests—and their own careers. [redacted]

The Guard is split along "generational" lines as well, [redacted] The "old Guards" who have worked in the organization for six or seven years have gained experience and expertise and are now prone to question regime policies. The "new Guards" who have been brought in within the last two or three years tend to carry out their orders unquestioningly. [redacted]

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Similarly, the emergence of the IRGC as a serious military force could prove a double-edged sword for the regime. By its nature the Guard is far from being a "professional," nonpolitical military organization, and after Khomeini's death it will be increasingly vulnerable to factional pressures and political infighting. Should the succession struggle in Tehran turn violent, we believe those vying for power will look to their allies in Guard combat units for armed support and order them back from the front. Such a move would significantly escalate the political conflict and raise the chances of all-out civil war. [redacted]

There is a better than even chance that the regime will face serious instability after Khomeini is gone. Although the point at which such instability would become a threat to the regime's existence cannot be precisely predicted, we believe that the Guard's vulnerability to factional infighting will quickly reduce its ability to maintain order or keep the regime intact. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

On the basis of our analysis, we believe the Revolutionary Guard has been—and remains—a source of virulent anti-US sentiment in Iran. Its anti-US rhetoric reflects deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs that are not likely to change. We believe the Guard will be a major obstacle to the renewal of US-Iranian relations in the post-Khomeini era as long as it retains significant influence in the government:

- Any efforts by Khomeini's successor to improve relations with the United States would alienate major elements of the Guard and would increase the prospect of the Guard joining in a major power struggle.
- In the event a post-Khomeini power struggle leads to serious upheaval in Iran, the Guard is likely to back the more radical factions vying for power.
- Although opportunism among some Guard leaders may eventually lead them to expand ties to Western nations other than the United States—primarily to replenish arms and acquire needed spare parts—we believe these contacts will be closely monitored and limited to protect the Guard's political and ideological integrity as a pillar and agent of the Islamic revolution.

We believe the Guard's intense animosity toward the United States also makes it more prone to supporting improved relations with the Soviet Union and its allies, especially if the Guard believes the regime or its own position are seriously threatened. Such a move would be a pragmatic effort to expand and improve the Guard's arms inventory by adding to the Soviet-designed weapons it has captured from Iraq or purchased from China, North Korea, Libya, and Syria:

- The emergence of a radical successor regime with Guard support would provide an opportunity for significantly expanded Soviet influence in Iran, possibly prompting Moscow to consider relaxing its embargo on the sale of major weapon systems to Iran.

- Serious instability resulting from a post-Khomeini power struggle also would increase Soviet opportunities to expand contacts with radicals in the Revolutionary Guard who would view this connection as a way to protect both the revolution and their own power.

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Appendix

Protectors of the Revolution: A Sampler of Enforcement Groups

Official Agencies

In addition to the Revolutionary Guard, the komitehs and the Qazi (Judicial) Police stand out among the multitude of revolutionary and religious law enforcement groups that sprang up during the revolution. Both have been recognized by the central government and given a nationwide mandate through a formal charter. They complement and monitor the police and Gendarmerie—the traditional civil law enforcement agencies in Iran—which are controlled by the Interior Ministry:

- **Komitehs:** An autonomous, national, mosque-centered network that was put under the control of the Interior Ministry in 1984. The komitehs' 30,000-man paramilitary force—the Komiteh Guards—is considered a law, order, and security enforcement agency alongside the police. Komitehs are responsible for many of the so-called special-purpose patrols designed to ensure public conformity to Islamic and revolutionary mores.
- **Qazi (Judicial) Police:** A group of highly select and specially trained individuals, this agency was formed in 1982 to ensure correct implementation of religious law. The Qazi Police operate under the Justice Ministry and closely monitor the entire judicial system to prevent incompetence and impiety. We estimate they number fewer than 5,000, are generally well educated, and have records of reliable service in other law enforcement agencies.

Unofficial Organizations

The revolution also spawned a wide variety of groups that have not received the central government's seal of approval through formal inclusion in the bureaucracy, but which have become part of Iran's ubiquitous domestic security network. The Iranian press has accurately noted that at any given time there are too many independent street patrols and watchdog units to be counted. Among the more notorious are:

- **Hezbollahi (Party of God):** Ill-defined bands that exist throughout Iran but have no known national leadership or organized structure. They seem to be

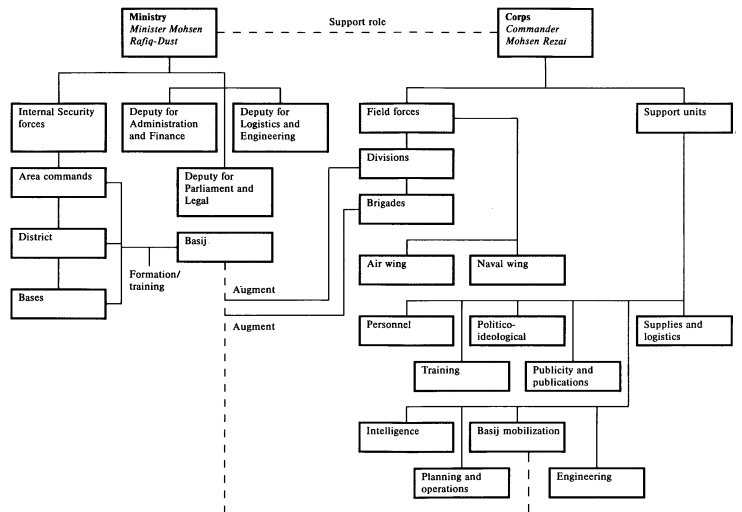
private gangs attached to influential bazaaris and clerics. They are used by individuals trying to influence government policies and by government figures to intimidate the populace.

- **Anjoman-e Islami (Islamic Societies):** Organized within almost every segment of society to urge individual Iranians to observe and report on those around them.
- **Jondollah (Army of God) Forces:** Composed of army, Gendarmerie, Revolutionary Guard, and Basij personnel, these groups were formed in 1983 to seek out draft dodgers and monitor the loyalty of personnel within the military and law enforcement agencies. We believe Jondallah units are loosely organized along military lines and probably number between 4,000 and 5,000 men.
- **Sarollah (Revenge of God):** An all-male religious morality police that used to be controlled by the Revolutionary Guard, but whose functions have ostensibly been the responsibility of the komitehs and the police since 1985. Sarollah patrols quickly developed a reputation for brutality, which probably led to the regime's efforts to curtail their activity.
- **Khahari-ye Zahra (Sisters of Zahra):** Religious morality squads composed of armed females who patrol cities in vehicles. Zahra was probably formed because of protests against the Sarollah and may have been absorbed into the Ershad patrols in 1985. 25X1
- **Khahari-ye Zaineb (Sisters of Zaineb):** Mixed male-female religious morality patrols that may also have been formed in response to complaints of misconduct by Sarollah units; also may have been absorbed into the Ershad patrols.
- **Ershad (Guidance) Patrols:** Mixed male-female religious morality patrols, some of which use vehicles marked with the insignia of the Islamic courts. 25X1

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Figure 10
Iran: Revolutionary Guard Organizational Structure

-- Corps and Ministry believed to have dual responsibility for Basij



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