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Iran's Ground Forces: Morale and Manpower Problems

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An Intelligence Assessment

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Iran's Ground Forces: Morale and Manpower Problems




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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by  Office of
Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations 

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directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESA,


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April 1988*

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**Iran's Ground Forces:
Morale and Manpower
Problems** [Redacted]

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 15 February 1988
was used in this report.*

In recent years Iran has experienced increasing military morale and manpower problems that have weakened its combat effectiveness. These problems probably will continue through 1988, especially if casualties remain high and Tehran shows little progress in the ground war. Morale and manpower difficulties will not stop Tehran from launching offensives, but they will make increasingly difficult Iranian victories that might be decisive in the war. Among the factors that have weakened morale:

- Iran has suffered at least 590,000 military casualties in the war.

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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- Tehran has failed to fulfill its promises of a decisive "final offensive" or to make significant military progress to win the ground war.
- Harsh living conditions at the front and supply shortages during offensives have demoralized troops.
- Interservice rivalry between the Iranian army and both the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij has caused conflict and a lack of cooperation in combat operations. Tehran's favoritism toward the Guard and Basij has also hurt army morale. [Redacted]

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War weariness and the decline in morale have reduced the number of dedicated Iranians volunteering to fight:

- Despite Tehran's efforts to boost enlistments, the number of volunteers has declined probably by at least 10 percent each year since 1985. Major mobilization campaigns in the spring and winter of 1987 failed to achieve their goals.
- The decline in dedicated volunteers has weakened the effectiveness of the Basij forces on which Tehran has relied heavily for its past military successes. [Redacted]

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Tehran's efforts to rectify these problems have not reversed the gradual decline in military morale and manpower. Iran's heavy reliance on conscription and coercion in recent years suggests that Tehran's motivational appeals and material incentives have failed to attract sufficient dedicated volunteers. Although religion and patriotism retain their powerful appeal, they are less effective motivators than in the earlier years of the war. Offensives that gain some territory—but fail to show real progress toward defeating Iraq—will only temporarily boost morale. [Redacted]

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Over the long term, the decline in the number of dedicated volunteers and the inability to meet mobilization goals probably will significantly weaken Iran's capability to fight Iraq. To offset the shortage of such volunteers, Tehran probably will rely more heavily on the draft and the use of press-gangs. Conscription and coercion, however, will yield unenthusiastic draftees and will further reduce Iranian combat effectiveness. 

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In the short term, tension between the United States and Iran in the Persian Gulf will help the clerical regime bolster morale and enlistments. If the United States launches attacks against the Iranian mainland, Iranian willingness to fight both Iraq and the United States will significantly increase. Renewed patriotism in Iran would enable Tehran to mobilize large numbers of men and rekindle the fervor of the Iranian people to fight the country's enemies. Iranian morale will decline, however, if Tehran's blustering does not lead to a reduction in US forces in the Gulf. US defeat of Iranian forces in limited clashes in the Persian Gulf also would hurt Iranian morale. 

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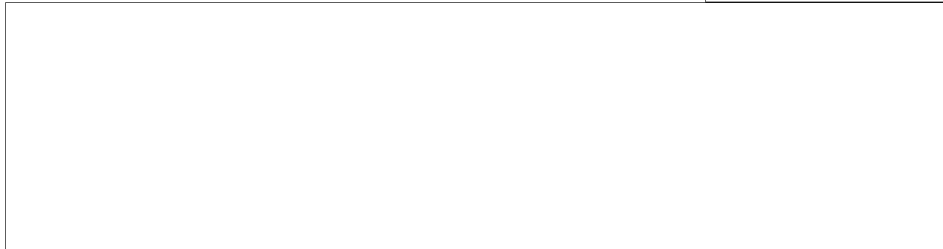
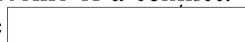


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Scope Note

Military morale is perhaps the most important factor in war, but it is difficult to assess accurately or to use to predict the outcome of a conflict.

Iranian military morale is especially difficult to analyze

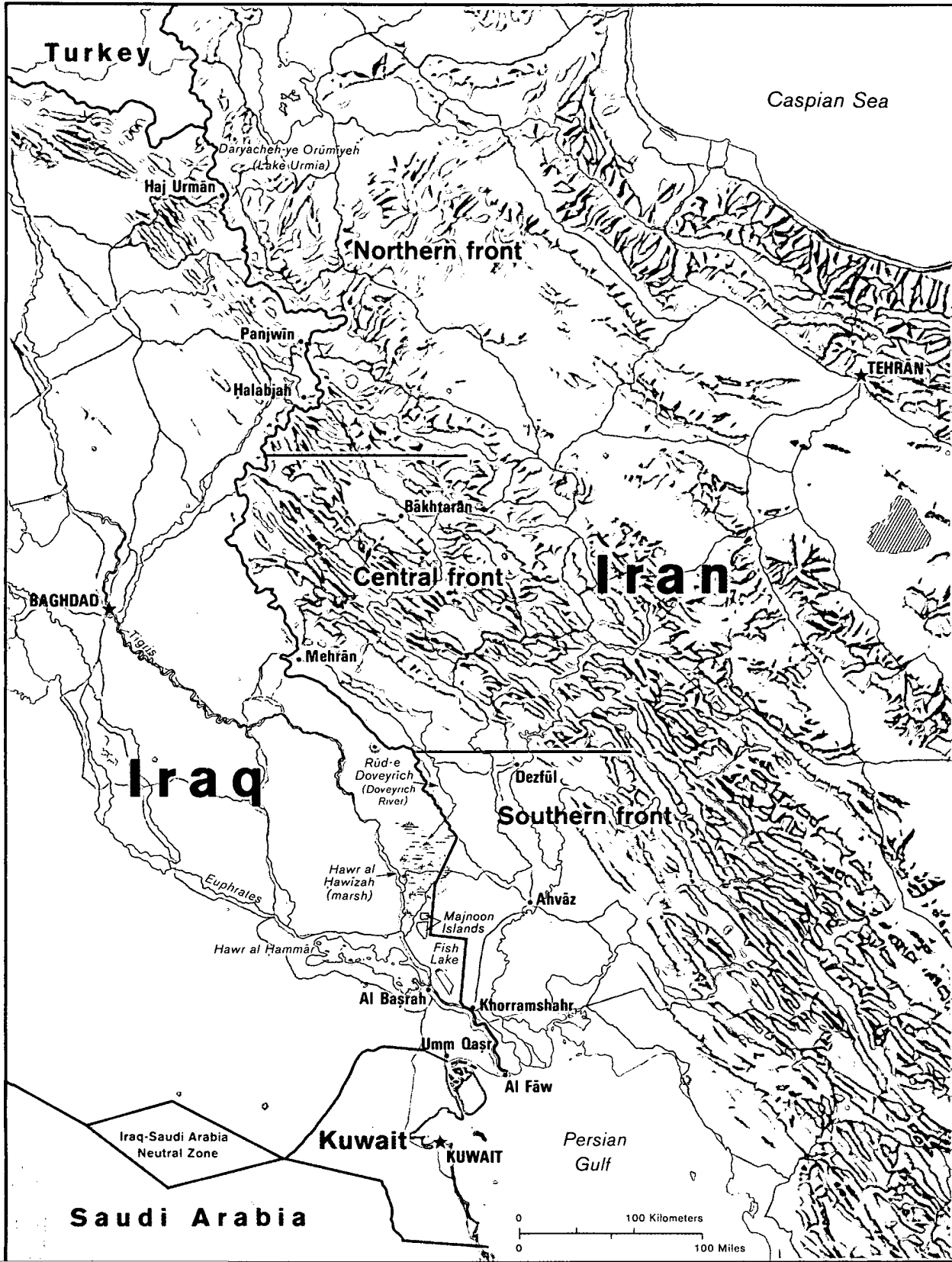


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**Iran's Ground Forces:
Morale and Manpower
Problems** [Redacted]

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Iran's ability to sustain its war against Iraq for seven and a half years has stemmed largely from Tehran's success in mobilizing and inspiring a large number of men to fight fanatically. With its large force of highly motivated soldiers, Iran halted Iraq's invasion in 1980, forced Iraqi troops to retreat in 1982, and launched offensives against Iraq each year since 1983. Tehran's ability to meet its manpower needs despite the war's human and material costs will help determine the outcome of the conflict and Iran's future military operations in the region. [Redacted]

Morale and Manpower Problems

Like other countries engaged in protracted combat, Iran has had problems maintaining military morale and manpower. We assess that such problems have increased for Tehran since late 1983 or early 1984. Although the decline in morale and manpower is not crippling, it has affected Iranian military capabilities, planning, and operations. The problems are most apparent in the Iranian army, but we believe they also have affected the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij. [Redacted]

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Large numbers of fighting men have been essential to Iran's efforts to overcome its shortage of modern weaponry and military expertise. After the fall of the Shah, the Iranian army was severely weakened by purges and the clerical regime's distrust of a military establishment trained by the United States. Moreover, the cutoff of foreign arms and spare parts crippled Iran's ability to acquire and use modern weaponry. After the Iraqi invasion, Tehran turned to masses of lightly armed, poorly trained volunteers—the Revolutionary Guard and later the Basij—to overcome with manpower what it lacked in guns and expertise. The success of Iranian "human wave" attacks seemed to validate Tehran's infantry-intensive strategy and its claim that human will is more important than modern weapons. [Redacted]

Factors Weakening Morale

Despite the clerical regime's propaganda claims that Iran is willing to continue to suffer high losses, we believe that *heavy casualties* have eroded military morale in recent years. [Redacted] we estimate that Iran has suffered at least 590,000 military casualties in seven years—equivalent to 2.8 million for a country with the population of the United States.¹ [Redacted]

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[Redacted] 50 percent of troops and equipment are sometimes lost in ground attacks. [Redacted]

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Without high troop morale and religious fanaticism, Tehran's reliance on manpower probably would not have been effective. Iran's highly motivated volunteers—despite inadequate training and weaponry—have attacked aggressively and have often overcome heavily fortified Iraqi defenses. High morale also has helped Iran reduce some of the psychological advantage Iraq gains from its superiority in firepower and modern weaponry. A strong fighting spirit has been essential in Tehran's long-term strategy to win by attrition. [Redacted]

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¹ In comparison, the United States has suffered only 2.3 million casualties in all its conflicts, including the Civil War. [Redacted]

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Iran's Ground Forces



Revolutionary Guard troops. [redacted]



Basij volunteers. [redacted]

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Revolutionary Guard (Sepah-e Pasdaran)

- Organized in 1979 by the clerical regime to ensure order following the revolution and to discredit the army and police forces of the Shah.
- 150,000 to 200,000 men in 19 divisions and 40 independent brigades deployed at the front. An additional 50,000 men provide internal security in Iran.
- Volunteers are carefully screened for correct political and religious background and serve for life.
- One to three months of basic training.
- Units are primarily infantry, although some may have tanks and armored personnel carriers.
- Played a major role in stopping the Iraqi invasion in 1980 and along with Basij troops captured Iraqi territory at Al Faw in 1986 and Fish Lake in 1987.

Basij (Mobilization of the Oppressed)

- Created in 1979 in response to Khomeini's call for a 20-million-man army to oppose Iraq and the United States.
- 100,000 to 200,000 men normally at the front. Numbers increase during mobilization campaigns.
- Volunteers enlist for three to six months. Enlistees range in age from 13 to 60 or more. Basij veterans can later be drafted into the army.
- Ten to 15 days of basic military instruction. Revolutionary Guard officers train and lead Basij units.
- Primarily involved in major operations. In offense, large numbers of Basij overwhelm enemy positions, while in defense they offer stubborn resistance and stop enemy advances.

We believe a lack of significant military progress has weakened the fighting spirit of Iranian troops. Tehran's frequent promises of a "final offensive" and an end to the war probably have led some troops to become skeptical about eventual Iranian victory. [redacted]

[redacted] the seemingly endless nature of the war has disheartened some units. Army personnel, for example, were described as mentally fatigued and worried about the future as the war with Iraq drags on. [redacted] some soldiers are disillusioned with Tehran's war policy and blame clerical leaders for not ending the conflict.

[redacted]

[redacted] logistic problems, especially weapon and supply shortages, have led to a sense of hopelessness and missed opportunity among

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Iranian army soldiers. [redacted]

Army (Artesh)

- 300,000 men in four armored and 11 infantry divisions deployed along the front.
- Conscripts drafted for two years, although some men are involuntarily held in service for longer periods.
- Troops receive two to three months of basic training.
- Distrusted by clerical leaders because of its association with the Shah.
- Since 1984 army units have played a smaller role in offensives and now primarily provide logistic and fire support.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] enemy air attacks especially weakened the morale of some Iranian troops who felt helpless because they lacked effective air defenses. [redacted]

[redacted]

Harsh living conditions at the front and the poor treatment of soldiers have hurt Iranian military morale, especially in the army. [redacted]

[redacted] troops often go unpaid for six months or longer. They complain of water and food shortages and report that meat is sometimes not served for months. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

We believe interservice rivalry and Tehran's favoritism toward the Basij and Revolutionary Guard have caused tension and morale problems among Iran's

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Basij: Iran's Fanatical Volunteers



Grade school Iranian boys joining the Basij. [redacted]



Old and young Basij volunteers. [redacted]

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The Basij, or "Mobilization of the Oppressed," probably has been Iran's most important military force in the ground war against Iraq. Most of the volunteers in the Basij—including many boys and old men—are highly religious and committed to the fundamentalist revolution in Iran. Normally 100,000 to 200,000 Basij troops are at the front, but mass mobilization drives have increased their numbers to 300,000 or

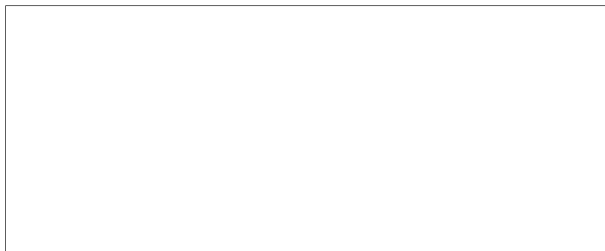
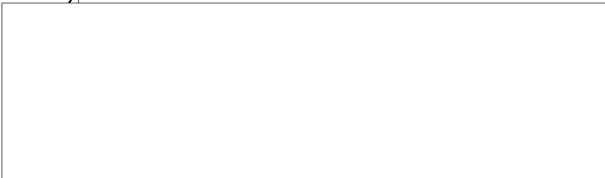
more in preparation for a major offensive. To shame others into volunteering, Basij recruiters sometimes appear at rallies wearing martyr's shrouds to show their willingness to die for Islam. Because of their fanaticism and desire for martyrdom, Basij units are usually given the most difficult objectives in Iranian offensives. They have suffered higher casualties than Revolutionary Guard or army units. [redacted]

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ground forces. Clerical leaders have given the Guard and Basij credit for victories while charging that the army's disloyalty and incompetence have caused defeats, [redacted]



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Figure 2. Iranians achieve martyrdom in Hawizah marshes. [redacted]



Figure 3. Iranian martyrs after attack near Al Basrah. [redacted]

[redacted] clerical control and distrust of the army and interference in its operations severely damage army morale, especially among officers. [redacted] clerics have forced officers to attend religious classes and participate in political demonstrations. Tehran undermines respect for army officers by urging soldiers to spy on their superiors and report disloyalty to clerical officials. As a result, soldiers often are disobedient and insubordinate, or challenge officers' authority by asking clerics to override orders. Clerics sent to supervise army commanders have interfered in operations and have countermanded the orders of officers during battles. They have promoted religious or subservient officers but have failed to reward competent nonreligious commanders, [redacted] such conditions have caused a large number of career army personnel to try to resign or to feign medical problems in order to be sent to the rear. [redacted]

Manpower Problems

Tehran's manpower problems have been most evident in the poor results of mobilization campaigns in recent years. [redacted] Iranian officials have admitted that the number of volunteers for military service has fallen 10 to 20 percent each year since at least 1985. To compensate for the decline, Tehran ordered a sharp increase in the quotas of volunteers during recent mobilization campaigns. Nevertheless, [redacted] a massive recruitment drive in early 1987 fell 70,000

short of the needed 200,000 men. Although the deadline for the drive was extended, the campaign failed to meet its goal. [redacted]

We believe that enlistment difficulties may be increasing among Iran's rural population, which has provided much of the manpower for the Basij. [redacted] a Revolutionary Guard official admitted that the percentage of the rural population that strongly supported the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij declined sharply from 1983 to 1985. Growing concern over high casualties has caused some villagers to hide children from Basij recruiters. A Basij veteran admitted in 1986 that the appeal of martyrdom was weakening in some rural areas [redacted]

Conditions at the front and the poor treatment of soldiers have caused a growing number of Iranians to avoid service in the army. [redacted]

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Tehran's Efforts To Improve Morale and Manpower

We believe Iran has tried to ease morale and manpower problems by intensifying motivational appeals, modifying military operations, and creating new laws and bureaucratic procedures. To improve fighting spirit and encourage enlistments, Tehran has re-emphasized the religious and patriotic appeals it has used throughout the war. It also has continued to offer material incentives to attract recruits. As morale and manpower problems have multiplied, Iranian leaders have increasingly adopted coercive measures to gain needed manpower and apparently have altered their tactics in the ground war. [redacted]

Motivational Efforts

Iran depends primarily on the *appeal of Islam*—specifically Shia fundamentalism—to maintain or improve military morale and encourage Iranians to enlist. [redacted]

[redacted] religion is used to boost morale in all of Iran's services, although it is most successful in the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij. Iranian leaders emphasize that true followers of Allah have a religious obligation to fight against the "nonbelievers and heretics" who lead the secular Ba'hist regime in Baghdad. Clerics stress the dogma that soldiers who die in wars on behalf of Islam go immediately to paradise. The martyrdom and fatalism of Islam seem to appeal strongly to the uneducated but highly religious youths who make up most of the Basij units. [redacted]

Tehran has tried to ease the effects of heavy casualties on morale by assuring soldiers that their sacrifices are worthwhile and that God will eventually give Iran victory. All Iranian attacks—no matter how small or unsuccessful—are portrayed as great victories with exaggerated enemy human, materiel, and territorial losses. To counter the harmful effects on morale of its losses, Tehran never gives Iranian casualty figures after major battles. Iranian soldiers are not killed but are "martyred" or "achieve martyrdom in the service of Allah," according to Iranian press reports. [redacted]

Iran apparently has increased the number of clerics at the front to try to maintain or improve morale and increase the fanaticism of volunteers. In late 1987, Ayatollah Khomeini and other Iranian leaders publicly thanked the clerics for their combat activities and

Demoralization and Combat Performance

We believe poor morale among some units contributed to Iranian military setbacks or limited the success of some Iranian operations in recent years [redacted]



said that more mullahs were needed on the battlefield. [redacted] clerics attached to volunteer units instill or reinforce the powerful religious faith that reduces the Iranian soldier's fear of death and inspires him to prove his devotion to Islam. By participating in combat, the clerics become models for other men to imitate. The mullahs help keep the volunteers acting as a cohesive unit and encourage them to achieve their military objective. Iranian press reports indicate that 40,000 clerics have served at the front since the war began, and 8,000 have been killed or wounded in combat. [redacted]

We believe Tehran has skillfully used *patriotic appeals* to try to maintain Iranian morale and enlistment. [redacted] patriotism ranks second only to religion as a reason Iranian troops volunteer and fight [redacted] patriotism appeals more to those who are not religious zealots or who dislike the clerical regime. [redacted]

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60,000 men compared with over 100,000 usually involved in offensives between 1980 and 1983. This change probably was also intended to reduce Iranian losses and the morale problems that resulted from high casualties. Smaller attacks, in turn, led Iran to alter tactics and use surprise and deception more often and more effectively. To offset declining morale in the army, Tehran began to rely increasingly on Revolutionary Guard and Basij units in offensives after 1984. Limiting the army's primary role to firepower and logistic support reduced the impact of its poor morale and reluctance to cooperate with other services during major operations. [redacted]

During the lulls between major offensives, the Iranians have launched small-scale attacks and limited the time men are at the front in order to reduce the exposure of troops to demoralizing living conditions. Small-scale attacks on Iraqi positions have been designed not only to build troops' aggressiveness and confidence but also to distract them from the boredom and squalor of life in the trenches. In late 1985 the commander of the Revolutionary Guard publicly called for more raids on Iraqi positions to keep Iranian soldiers active and raise their morale. To reduce the numbing effects of major battles, large numbers of Iranian troops have sometimes been rewarded with leave, especially after victories. [redacted]

[redacted]
[redacted] The regime also has limited the Basij volunteers' service to three to six months to minimize their time at the front.
[redacted]

Recruitment

Since 1984, Tehran has reacted to declining enlistments by strengthening draft laws for the army and enacting conscription or manpower quotas for the Basij:

- In anticipation of conscription, Tehran passed a law in late 1984 to try to stop 15- to 17-year-old males from leaving the country. [redacted]
[redacted] a government proclamation ended all draft deferments for the army.

Iranian Religious Fanaticism in Combat

The clerics' ability to use religion to inspire Iranians has been evident in the fanaticism of some Iranian volunteers in combat. An Iraqi veteran states that he saw fanatical Iranian soldiers armed only with knives attack Iraqi tanks. [redacted] Basij troops have been given letters signed by Khomeini confirming the bearer's piety and requesting that Allah allow him to enter paradise immediately. Other volunteers have been given magic paper "keys to heaven," which the clerics claim will assure the bearer's entry into paradise. After mass infantry attacks, the Iraqis have found hundreds of Iranian corpses clutching such keys or the Koran. A Basij veteran stated that, unlike Iranian army soldiers, Basij troops remain in positions being overrun because they welcome the opportunity to die as religious martyrs. [redacted]

-
- In January 1986, Tehran ordered that 10 percent of the civilians in government jobs be sent to serve with the Basij. In the spring, factories making goods for the government were required to send 20 percent of their workers to Basij units. [redacted]
 - [redacted] in January 1987 Tehran began unofficially to conscript men into the Basij for the first time. Six months later, Iran's parliament passed a law formally allowing the government to draft men into the Basij and the Revolutionary Guard. In late 1987, Tehran extended the army term of service by four months, according to a generally reliable source. [redacted]

Continued resistance to the draft has caused Iranian officials to employ coercive measures to gain needed manpower. In the spring of 1986 schools were ordered to give Basij offices the names of 13-year-old students to help recruiters locate boys and urge them to volunteer. [redacted] conscription squads have raided colleges to find

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recruits. Press-gangs also have surrounded villages and conducted house-to-house searches for draft dodgers. People forced to attend government rallies supporting the war have sometimes been detained afterward and sent immediately to the front. [redacted]

[redacted] in May 1986 recruiters began to wait outside some stadiums after soccer games to catch men who lacked proof that they had served at the front [redacted]

The clerical regime also has used more subtle measures to encourage enlistment. An Iranian defector reported in 1986 that applicants to universities must provide proof of military service before they can enter. Moreover, Iranians cannot get government jobs unless they have served in the war. If sons of farmers evade the draft, Tehran cuts off fertilizer allotments to the farms of the person's family or of his relatives, [redacted]

The Effectiveness of Iran's Efforts

We believe Tehran's attempts to halt the slow decline both in military morale and in the quality and quantity of its new troops have had little success. Iran's increasing reliance on conscription and coercion in 1986 and 1987 suggests a continued lack of effectiveness in its efforts to gain enough volunteers. [redacted]

[redacted] despite intense religious and patriotic appeals, Iran's mass mobilization effort in November 1987 failed to raise the expected number of volunteers [redacted]

Continued high casualties probably have helped undermine Iran's religious and patriotic appeals. We believe that, despite attempts to reduce casualties, Iranian losses in 1987 exceeded those of 1986 and perhaps even 1985. Casualties from the largely inconclusive Karbala 5 and Karbala 8 attacks near Al Basrah were particularly heavy and accounted for over half of Iranian losses in 1987. In a statement probably inspired by the heavy Karbala casualties, Iranian Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani expressed growing concern about high losses. He stressed the need to limit casualties and warned commanders that they should be careful because enemy firepower could inflict excessive losses on Iranian infantry. [redacted]

Estimated Iranian Manpower in Major Battles in the Iran-Iraq War^a

1982		
March	Dezful	130,000
May	Khorramshahr	130,000
July	Al Basrah	150,000
1983		
February	Rud-e Doveyrich	85,000
October	Panjwin	60,000
1984		
February	Majnoon Islands	80,000
1985		
March	Hawizah Marshes	60,000
1986		
February	Al Faw Peninsula	60,000
1987		
January	Fish Lake	60,000 to 80,000

^a Numbers are approximate. Estimates are based on a variety of sources and our assessment of the size of Iranian units.

[redacted]

Material incentives—primarily monetary rewards or the prospect of privileges—have attracted some men to the Revolutionary Guard and Basij. In recent years, however, Iran's increasingly weak economy most likely has undercut the effectiveness of this incentive. [redacted] death benefits paid to martyrs' families did not increase between 1984 and late 1987. During the same period, inflation cut the purchasing power of Iranian money by 20 to 30 percent a year, severely reducing the value of monetary incentives as a reason to volunteer for service. [redacted]

Iran's efforts to reduce interservice rivalry appear to have failed. Despite Tehran's calls for more cooperation, relations between the army and Revolutionary Guard have not improved. [redacted]

[redacted]

regime's increasing use of Guard and Basij units in

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Victory Over Iraq and the Iranian Threat to the Region

Although the defeat of Iraq would significantly increase Iranian military morale, we believe other factors would limit the willingness of many Iranian troops to fight in new, large-scale operations in the region. After an Iranian victory over Iraq, Tehran probably would need at least a year to reorganize and refit its troops. Moreover, longstanding tensions between the army and both the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij over the development and control of the postwar armed forces probably would increase and could cause armed conflict between the services. War weariness would lead many servicemen to demand demobilization. We believe that morale would decline significantly if Tehran tried to retain large numbers of draftees and continued conscription to fight new wars.

To counter this deterioration, Iran probably would use religious arguments to raise morale and gain support for military activities abroad. Clerical leaders, for example, might put additional emphasis on the need to be ready to liberate Jerusalem from the Israelis or to free the holy cities of Mecca and Medina from the Saudi monarchy.

major offensives since 1984 probably has lessened the damage interservice rivalry has caused to major Iranian operations. Reducing army participation in such operations, however, has weakened Iran's offensive capability. Moreover, the downgrading of the army's role and Tehran's continued favoritism toward the Revolutionary Guard probably are the principal reasons army morale has remained poor.

We believe that increased Iranian domestic defense production and larger imports of weapons in 1986 and 1987 have eased some of the materiel problems that have demoralized troops at the front. Tehran has obtained new air defense guns and missiles, artillery, and armored vehicles from China, North Korea, and Eastern Europe. To reduce shortages, Tehran also has attempted

to increase domestic production of weapons and ammunition. We have no evidence that Iran, despite the increased availability of arms, is obtaining the supplies that would significantly improve harsh living conditions at the front.

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Troop rotations and liberal leave policies in Iran's Ground Forces may raise morale temporarily, but it probably resumes its decline soon after troops return to the harsh conditions and military stalemate at the front. The extension of army service in late 1987, for example, caused some soldiers to demonstrate or attempt suicide to protest the long terms servicemen are forced to serve at the front.

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Outlook

We believe morale and manpower problems will not prevent Iran from launching further offensives that might be decisive in the war. Iran's 17 major and minor attacks against Iraq in 1987 indicate that Tehran still has sufficient troops to pose a serious threat to Iraq. A major Iranian success—the capture of Al Basrah—or a series of victories along the border might cause Iraq to collapse.

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Nonetheless, we believe that Iran's morale and manpower problems will make it increasingly difficult for Tehran to gain decisive victories. Iranian military morale and manpower difficulties will worsen, although the decline is likely to remain slow. Tehran's motivational appeals, increased indoctrination, and new weaponry may retard the decline, but they are unlikely to reverse it. In the near term, we believe Tehran will not lower casualties sufficiently and make enough progress on the battlefield to reverse the deterioration in morale. Large-scale offensives that gain some territory—but fail to show real progress toward defeating Iraq—will only temporarily boost morale.

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New factors could accelerate the decline in the morale of the Iranian soldier. We believe that after Khomeini dies factionalism may lead to increased conflict in the regime that could weaken the war effort. Infighting

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among clerical leaders over religious questions or war policy would undermine the government's moral authority and, thus, the effectiveness of mullahs in combat units. Moreover, a succession of small defeats or a costly major setback would belie claims of Iranian military successes and reduce the soldiers' confidence in the clerics' leadership. [redacted]

Over the long term, the decline in the number of dedicated volunteers will significantly weaken Iran's capability to fight Iraq. Future mobilization campaigns probably will not meet the goals of the regime, despite Tehran's repeated calls for enlistees. In response, clerical leaders are likely to use the draft to help fill Basij and perhaps Revolutionary Guard units. Draft evasion will force Tehran to resort increasingly to press-gangs and coercion to meet manpower needs. [redacted]

We believe that coercion and conscription will further erode the morale and combat effectiveness of the armed forces. Iranians forced to serve will not fight as well as the fanatical volunteers who have been primarily responsible for Tehran's military successes. Increasing material incentives may encourage more men to enlist, but such soldiers are unlikely to fight as aggressively as those who volunteer for religious or patriotic reasons. Moreover, logistic problems, poor living conditions, and casualties are likely to weaken the morale of unwilling conscripts far more than that of dedicated volunteers. [redacted]

Implications for the United States

Increased tension between the United States and Iran in the Persian Gulf will help the clerical regime boost morale and encourage enlistment, at least in the short

term. The clerical leaders, for example, used the redeployment of US forces from the Gulf in mid-February to claim that Iranian resolve was forcing the United States to retreat. Conversely, Tehran would probably react to an increased US military presence by claiming that the danger of US attack had risen and would use this argument to bolster Iranian recruiting efforts. Over the long term, the failure of the clerical regime to carry out its threats to compel the United States to reduce its military presence in the Gulf would weaken Iranian morale. US defeat of Iranian forces in limited clashes in the Gulf also would lower Iranian morale. [redacted]

Direct US attacks against the Iranian mainland would significantly increase the Iranian people's will to fight the United States and Iraq. Such attacks would validate the clerics' claim that Iran faces a serious threat and bolster their calls for the Iranian people to make more human and material sacrifices. US attacks also might reduce interservice rivalry and cause the army, the Revolutionary Guard, and the Basij to cooperate more in defending against the common threat. Renewed patriotism and fanaticism, particularly if there were repeated US attacks on Iran, probably would cause Iranians to volunteer on a scale that would exceed the flood of volunteers who enlisted after the Iraqi invasion in 1980. [redacted]

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