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Islamic Nationalism: Tracing Paradoxes in the Evolution of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**Islamic Nationalism: Tracing Paradoxes in the Evolution of the Islamic
Revolutionary Guard Corps**

SUBMITTED TO

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AND

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BY

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for

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a narrative history of Iranian revolutionary ideology and its evolving impact on foreign policy. It looks at this history primarily through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, an institution established after the revolution and designed to defend the Islamic political order in Iran as well as oppressed Muslims abroad. The Revolutionary Guard, or Guard for short, became a focal point in the efforts of Iranian revolutionaries to export their ideology and has evolved overtime into a politicized and unconventional military force, often associated in the media with supporting foreign terrorists and militants. This paper argues that the Guard has implemented revolutionary ideology in an arc from radical to pragmatic. Unlike past literature on the Guard, this paper situates the organization's institutional history in Iran's broader political context and concentrates on its relationships to and differences with other factions. A persistent aim is also to analyze terminology such as radical and pragmatic and provide theoretical foundations for the use of such terms.

Introduction

Discussions of the Iranian nuclear program dominate the current discourse on US-Iran relations. While this nuclear program remains an important security concern for the US, overlaid attention to it has obscured the intricate historical reasons behind both the program itself and the US obsession with its evolution. Studying Iran's development of enrichment capabilities without reference to the country's complicated post-1979 history puts analysts at the risk of drawing conclusions about its purpose and possible effects based on specious premises. Defective analysis could have disastrous consequences, in terms of leading the US and Israel into a potentially avoidable military confrontation with Iran. This thesis does not provide a direct answer for why Iran has developed nuclear power nor even address its nuclear program. Instead, it seeks to explain how the history and influence of revolutionary ideology shapes Iranian foreign policy. It distills the premises of Iranian politics and foreign policy and explicates a set of terms descriptive of a range of political actors and operatives. Its final analysis will hopefully help those interested to better grasp Iran's geopolitical insecurities and the significance of ideology to its policies.

Following the revolution in 1979, in which the Iranian people deposed the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and set in motion events with global consequences, Iran entered a period of vast political opportunity. The prominent clerical faction of the revolutionary coalition advocated a drastic departure from the Shah's monarchical political order. Their leader, the charismatic and popular Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, had crafted a theory of Islamic government which he aspired to implement in Iran. He

promoted Islamic government as a panacea to the problems of not only Iran, but also of all oppressed Muslims. The clerical faction fastened the rise of its own political star to a new militarized vision, establishing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which consolidated various anti-Shah militias supportive of Khomeini's ideology. The clerics intended for the nascent organization to defeat internal political challengers and to furnish Islamic Revolutions abroad. The Khomeinist faction, in tandem with the Guard, succeeded in asserting control over the chaotic post-revolution political process after undermining more moderate contenders. They deemed the first two post-revolution governments, those of Mehdi Bazargan and Seyyad Abolhassan Banisadr, as insufficiently radical and exploited the 1979 hostage crisis, as well as Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran in 1980, to maneuver their demise. The Khomeinist faction enshrined their leader's ideology in the new constitution, although not to the exclusion of all other ideas, enough to provide a legal mandate for executing revolutionary policy. With an ideological foothold in the constitution and moderate factions sidelined, the Guard conducted revolutionary policies in the Arab peninsula and Iraq. Once Banisadr retreated from an overwhelming political scene, the Guard took control of the war effort against Hussein and escalated it with a revolutionary design.

Iran's revolutionary policies abroad did not, for the most part, elicit the grand reaction among the oppressed masses anticipated by revolutionaries in Khomeini's party and the Guard. At a certain point in the early to mid-1980s, the revolutionary state stopped exerting itself to export Islamic Revolution. This trend accelerated after the lackluster end to the Iran-Iraq war in 1988. After expending thousands of lives in Iraqi battlefields and cloistering the country in economic and diplomatic isolation, Khomeini

decided to stop pressing for victory over Hussein and finally sued for peace. These less-than auspicious outcomes of revolutionary policy precipitated a shift in favor of national self-interest. The Guard predicated foreign policies upon national, as opposed to revolutionary, interests, but still focused on aligning Iran's foreign policy with revolutionary principles. An ideological prism colored their pursuit of national interests. The Guard viewed Iran's regional adversaries as imperialist collaborators, lacking independence or self-identity, and denying Iran a role in regional security despite its undeniable geopolitical importance. It connected these states' collective disdain for Iran to their dependency upon the US. Iranians perceived the US as building an exclusionary regional system of security to contain the appeal of an ideology that stressed true independence from outside powers. The suspicion that the US sought to kill authentic political ideologies and dominate regional security affairs has locked the two countries into a strategic and ideological struggle.

The transition from fomenting revolutions to pursuing national interests did not necessarily mean Iran extricated ideology from its policies. A state that attaches national interests to an ideologically-constructed notion of the nation cannot truly separate the two. If the object of national interests is to preserve the state, and the state embodies an ideological concept, then the object of national interests is to preserve an idea, or at least a particular embodiment of that idea. This sort of tautology means the national-ideological tension concerns the nation-state and the ideology itself. A state founded on an idea expresses ideological qualities, but is not and cannot be that idea in and of itself. As a brief example, the US was founded in a revolutionary insistence on the idea of the equality and freedom of the individual, but, initially excluded everyone but white,

propertied men from this definition. As the ancient Greek philosopher Plato argued, the completeness of ideas is limited to their theoretical and intelligible dimension and not transferrable to sensory reality. In Iran's case, the Islamic Republic was formed as a revolutionary state based on ideological principles expounded by Ayatollah Khomeini. The ideology, in and of itself, is a universalist call for Muslims to untether themselves from secular political theories and cultural customs and to erect Islamic sovereignties. It conceptualizes the nation-state as a vessel for realizing a future utopia of a unified and singular Islamic government with sovereignty over all Muslims. The nation-state becomes an instrument in the overall process of Islamic Revolution and is not its ultimate political order. Ideological principles treat the state in this manner. They pressure it to sacrifice itself for its ideals, and therein lies the central contradiction of the Islamic Revolution. If the revolutionary state tends to itself without striving for the grander transnational cause, it fails its own ideology. But how can the revolutionary state guarantee its survival without ending abrasive pro-revolution foreign policies that threaten to destroy it? This state, then, is saddled with a dilemma between preserving itself and preserving the revolution. The law of self-preservation, perhaps the single most irreducible law of nature and certainly of state-making practices, prevents the revolutionary state from self-immolation. The state navigates this contradiction by positing that it cannot preserve the revolution without preserving itself. It no longer foments revolution, but rather models the government conceived by the revolutionary ideology. The revolutionary state can never completely abandon these principles without negating its own political logic. These revolutionary principles, while not dictating the state's external policies, contextualize its actions, imparting them meaning or legitimacy.

They shroud the pragmatic pursuit of national interests in a revolutionary mystique, and cloak them in a revolutionary terminology.

Pragmatists inside the government aim at preserving the state, at protecting it from foreign diplomatic, economic, or military warfare and from popular uprisings. They take a deliberate and considerate approach to making policy, gauging it in comparison with domestic and international opinions to maximize their chances of survival. Radicals, in the pure sense of the term, aim at preserving the revolution. They orient the state in relation to its ideals and prioritize the advance of revolution over the state's survival. These true radicals were always on the fringe even during Iran's own revolution and, while determining some of the state's policies in the early 1980s, were eventually expelled from the government. However, the tension between national interests and revolutionary principles did not simply dissipate. The question as to what extent Iran could pursue revolutionary principles without sacrificing national interests lent itself to a wide variety of interpretations as applied to different policy areas. A radical, but not a pragmatist, might think of attacking US forces in Afghanistan as advancing both Iran's national interests and its revolutionary principle of confronting US military power. Even more frustrating was the lack of consensus among revolutionaries over which principles to follow. Pragmatists emphasized revolutionary principles that favored the state's survival, ones which stimulated good relations between the state and the people and between the state and the outside world. More radical revolutionaries, on the other hand, invoked a militarized revolutionary vision, burdensome for the Iranian people.

Chapter 1: Friction With Bazargan and Banisadr

The Iranian revolution culminated from a history of popular resentment against obtrusive foreign powers and, for many participants, was independent of an overriding Islamic ideology. An Islamic discourse, however, permeated the slogans and arguments of an otherwise diverse opposition. Islam represented an authentic, organic, and dialectical form of resistance to the Shah's tyranny. With the Shah gone, the patina of Islamic unity soon vanished, slowly but surely exposing the opposition's ideological fault lines. Conflicting appraisals of socialism, communism, theocracy, liberal-democracy, or some combination of each, splintered the opposition. The power to determine the structure of the new state sundered the formerly united factions. The course of these internal struggles followed Crane Brinton's model of revolutionary politics. Brinton deduced a tendency in revolutions for "power to go from...the conservatives of the old regime to the moderates to the radicals or extremists. As power moves along this line, it gets more and more concentrated, more and more narrows its base in the country and among the people, since at each important crisis the defeated group has to drop out of politics...after each crisis the victors tend to split."¹

His theoretical continuum applied in Iran: the first revolutionary civilian leader, Mehdi Bazargan, was most closely identified with the ancien régime as he argued for a gradual and partial transformation of the Shah's state apparatus. His successor, Seyyed Abolhassan Banisadr, was more "Islamic" and was open to partnering with the radical left, but he firmly placed the interest of the nation above that of an Islamic Revolution.

¹ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 123.

After his impeachment, revolutionary radicals from the right consolidated power and installed the first fully theocratic government of the modern world, based on Khomeini's doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih*, or guardianship of the Islamic jurists. This transition of power from moderate leaders of the laity to more radical clerics paralleled developments in framing Iran's new constitution. Sovereignty moved from a point of duality to singularity, after the radical power subsumed the moderate. As Brinton described it, this conflict takes place "between two governments within the same state, an irregular civil war."² In Iran, power was initially divided between a provisional government, led by Bazargan, and a Council of Islamic Revolution, led by Khomeini. The former wielded formal authority over the extant state apparatus while the latter, enjoying unofficial sovereignty, held sway over the people. The radical "populist clerics" under Khomeini's tutelage constantly chipped away at the legitimacy of this provisional government and used the Guard instrumentally toward this end. Bazargan and the provisional government disbanded in response to the US hostage crisis on November 4, 1979, ceding formal control of the state to the Revolutionary Council. The political transition would have finished then if not for Banisadr's unexpected challenge, backed by a majority of the people, to clerical domination.

The election of the liberal democratic Mehdi Bazargan to prime minister was the first test of the radical revolutionaries' ability to overcome opponents. Khomeini's de facto party, the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), represented those interested in empowering the *faqih* (supreme leader) and other tenets of Islamic Revolution. The Party was led by Khomeini's former students, namely Ayatollah Beheshti, Ayatollah Mohtahhari, Hojjat

² Ibid., 161.

al-Islam Rafsanjani, and Hojjat al-Islam Khamenei. Most of the group were middle-ranking clerics that came from middle-class clerical and bazaari backgrounds.³ They had been in prison briefly either in 1963-4 or in 1975 and were devoted to establishing Khomeini's Islamic government.⁴ The Party's launching slogan was, "One community, one religion, one order, one leader," and its newspaper mouthpiece accused anyone in disagreement with the Party's version of Islam of being "anti-Islamic," "tie-wearer," "weak-minded," "liberal," and "Westoxicated."⁵ Bazargan's party, the Liberation Movement, advocated an opposing, mainly nationalist vision of the revolution. He and the lay-religious liberals who followed him believed in replacing the Pahlavi monarchy with a pluralistic and secular democratic republic. They envisaged themselves finishing what the liberal-democratic Prime Minister Mossadegh had started in 1951. Unlike Mossadegh, who refused to appeal to the religious sentiments of the masses, the Liberation Movement employed patriotic as well as religious symbols. Bazargan described his movement as bridging the ideologies of Mossadegh's secular National Front and Khomeini's religious movement. Nonetheless, the Liberation Movement's nationalistic and democratic ideas substantively crossed the IRP's Islamic agenda.

The Islamic revolutionaries removed Bazargan in order to bolster their influence over the future of Iran's political order and foreign policy. They delivered a fateful masterstroke against him on November 4, 1979, when militant students overran the US embassy in Tehran, forcing the prime minister to resign. The ensuing hostage crisis heralded fundamental shifts in the revolutionary state's constitution and foreign policy.

³ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 44.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 45.

Commensurate with the radicals' ascendancy in domestic politics between November 1979 and the summer of 1981, their share of influence over foreign policy grew. The clerics named the deep changes produced during this tumultuous period a "second revolution." The central questions involved in this second revolution dealt with the relationship between anti-imperialism, Islam, and nationalism. The entire opposition opposed imperialism, but each faction interpreted the extent of this struggle differently. Nationalists were content to oppose imperialism insofar as it affected Iran whereas radicals aimed at broadening Iran's struggle to emancipate all Muslims from the clutches of imperialism. Banisadr and Bazargan, owing loyalty principally to Iran, balanced anti-imperialist stances with conflicting national interests. For them, normal diplomatic relations and the nation's economic well-being took precedence over an obstreperous and unduly ambitious foreign policy. The IRP, on the other hand, were anti-imperialist and Islamic. They attributed imperialism with uprooting the region's Islamic political and social mores, and thus made resistance of it an Islamic cause. They believed a rigidly principled conduct of Iranian foreign affairs could have vast implications for all Muslims. The IRP fought for Iranians only in coincidence with the broader Islamic struggle, which trumped national interests, as nationalism itself was an illegitimate form. If revolutionary policies exacted costs on the Iranian people, the IRP would have to accept them. Bazargan elucidated this difference in an interview: "I believe in the service of Iran by means of Islam," while Khomeini "believes in the service of Islam by means of Iran."⁶ During the 444-day crisis, the clergy usurped the right to define the loose concept of anti-imperialism and its configuration in the state.

⁶ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 113.

The Bazargan administration pursued a conservative foreign policy, striving to refurbish ties to the US and attempting to marginalize the Guard's role. The prime minister wished to terminate US domination by undoing the alliance system between the Shah's regime and the US. He aimed to defend Iran's integrity and independence by refusing alignment with either the Soviet or US blocs while simultaneously respecting the status quo of international politics. His policy, largely inspired by Mosaddegh, was based on four pillars: "history, the country's geographic position, the spiritual and humanist ideals of Islam, and the complete reciprocity in relations with other countries."⁷ Vestiges of this doctrine, summarized as "negative equilibrium," still inspire the Iranian diplomats whom predicate negotiations over Iran's nuclear program on reciprocal steps and proportional concessions.⁸ Bazargan sought to ease US hostility to the Iranian revolution and to gain access to US intelligence on internal and Soviet threats to the new government. Beginning in the summer of 1979, intermediaries and then top Iranian officials entered into contact with US officials.⁹ President Carter then granted the Shah asylum for cancer treatment. Negotiating with the US became much more dangerous. Bazargan foolishly went ahead with a meeting on November 1, 1979, in Algiers, between himself, two of his cabinet members, and US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.¹⁰

Students who perceived Bazargan's government as an organ for pro-Western liberals mistook his policy of non-alignment for a plot to resubmit Iranian independence

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mohammad Ali Shabani, "Iran Seeks Reciprocity in Nuclear Negotiations," *Lobellog*, February 18, 2013, www.lobellog.com (accessed December 14, 2013).

⁹ Charles Kurzman, "Soft on Satan," *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 1 (June 1998): 63-72, 66.

¹⁰ Ibid.

to imperialist powers. It was three days after the meeting in Algiers that a group of them stormed and occupied the US embassy. The student group proclaimed, “recent events in our society have caused us to feel that the main direction of the revolution is being lost and the movement is being diverted...”¹¹ With the IRP’s blessing, they refused Bazargan’s order to immediately evacuate the embassy, and the prime minister and his cabinet resigned that same day. For those distrustful of Bazargan, the seizure confirmed a paradigm that Iran should to adopt combative policies, more extreme than the negative equilibrium espoused by Bazargan, to inure Iran to US imperialism. This “second revolution” substituted hostility for equality as the touchstone of Iran’s foreign affairs. Bazargan described Iran’s outward behavior as changing from “defensive” to “confrontational.”¹² The embassy seizure dislodged Iran from the bipolar international structure. The Guard, which has since converted the US embassy into a base, painted on its walls in bold blue letters, “The superpowers’ veto right is worse than the law of the jungle.”¹³ The message conveyed the Guard’s acceptance of anarchy before the will of either superpower. The diplomatic crisis transformed Iran into a vehicle for the uninhibited exercise of revolutionary policy.

Bazargan’s resignation also propelled what he termed a “revolution within a revolution.”¹⁴ In other words, the Khomeinists had ousted Bazargan and the Liberation Movement from the political scene. During the embassy occupation, students reassembled hundreds of sensitive diplomatic documents that US personnel had shredded

¹¹ Ibid., 67.

¹² Ramazani, *Independence without Freedom*, 113.

¹³ Edward Cody, “Iran Rewrites the Rules of Diplomatic Behavior,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 1987.

¹⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 56.

shortly before the impending crisis. They published facsimiles of the material in a series of 70 volumes, most of it consisting of CIA cables related to clandestine Iranian contacts. Some of the cables showed senior members in Bazargan's government colluding with the US.¹⁵ The clerical populists discredited Bazargan and the other liberals by selectively publishing these documents. They imprisoned a number of liberals and Bazargan's top aid.¹⁶ Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari, who had supported Bazargan and denounced the embassy occupation, was placed under house arrest and stripped of the pinnacle of clerical titles, *marja'-e taqlid*, on the grounds that he had plotted to overthrow the government. Shariatmadari's pro-democracy Islamic People's Republican Party was also dissolved. The Guard triumphantly declared that the affair "cleansed the revolution from impure elements."¹⁷ This political maneuvering cleared the way for the populist clerics to ratify a theocratic constitution.

Khomeini finessed the state-making process by manipulating the anti-imperialist cause. In response to alleged US conspiracies of counterrevolution, Khomeini proposed an Islamic sovereignty, which would better resist foreign plots. In effect, he greatly expanded the *faqih's* power. Under Bazargan's premiership, the original Assembly of Experts had passed only one general clause (Article 5) on the mandate of the jurist. After his dismissal, the Assembly passed the substantive articles 107 and 110, which enumerated the *faqih's* extensive duties and powers. Bazargan and other groups representing the laity or the left declared themselves constrained to support the

¹⁵ The Internet Archive, "Documents from the U.S. Espionage Den," *The Internet Archive*. n.d. www.archive.org (accessed December 3, 2013).

¹⁶ Abrahamian, *Mojahedin*, 58.

¹⁷ Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards is Turning Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (Washington: The AEI Press, 2013), 42.

“improved” draft of the constitution in order not to jeopardize the “ongoing anti-imperialist struggle and the political line of the Imam.”¹⁸ When Bazargan had earlier proposed holding a plebiscite between an Islamic Republic or a Democratic Islamic Republic, Khomeini responded acerbically: “What the nation needs is an Islamic Republic—not a Democratic Republic, not a Democratic Islamic Republic. Don’t use the Western term ‘democratic.’ Those who call for a Democratic Republic know nothing about Islam.”¹⁹ Khomeini twisted the anti-imperialist discourse to suit his Islamic political vision. Any ideology originating from the West was ipso facto derivative of imperialism and therefore illegitimate. He argued that no political ideology could possibly be authentic to a Muslim people except an Islamic one. The centrality of anti-imperialism to political legitimacy during this critical moment has had lasting effects on the state’s self-representation. Even after the Islamic Republic stopped exporting revolution, the intertwining of anti-imperialism with the Islamic basis of the state has greatly slowed the process of normalizing relations with the West. For the sake of maintaining its Islamic identity as construed from these early years, conservative elements of the Islamic Republic continue to ridicule the West, even when such rhetoric has become perfunctory.

Bazargan hoped to decouple the Guard from the IRP, which he suspected, correctly, of plotting to monopolize power in large part through its agency. He in fact begged Khomeini to bar the Guard from opining on political matters and affiliating itself with parties.²⁰ In an interview, the former commander of the political bureau of the Guard

¹⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 139.

¹⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 46.

²⁰ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 19.

Ebrahim Hajj-Mohammad-Zadeh argued that Bazargan's transitional government planned on disbanding the Guard: "The transitional government was of the belief that we have the Army, the Police and Gendarmie. Therefore, the Guards... should only operate for a short period until those forces could reorganize and after that leave the arena."²¹ At one point, Bazargan announced the Guard would be dissolved after the establishment of a formally elected government, arguing that its duties duplicated those of the regular army.²² Khomeini had long before understood the value of a loyal militia; he contradicted Bazargan's announcement a week later by officially establishing the Guard. As tension mounted, the Guards' mouthpiece *Payam-e Enqelab* reduced the Bazargan government to "groups opposed to Islam, the leadership and the Guardianship of the Jurist who in various ways opposed revolutionary institutions such as the Guards."²³ The unfolding of the hostage crisis hammered the nail in its coffin. It is hard to ascertain if the clerics deliberately planned the crisis, but the Guards responsible for the security of the US embassy at least made no effort to stop the attack.²⁴ Bazargan also called the hostage taking "nothing but a plot to get rid of me."²⁵ With or without this particular crisis, some form of collision between the two was well on the horizon.

The next civilian authority to replace Bazargan opposed the Guard even more vehemently than his predecessor. Banisadr, elected the first president of the Islamic Republic, hoped to diminish the Guard's responsibilities and independence. He was an

²¹ Ibid., 20.

²² Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 51.

²³ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 20.

²⁴ *Reuters*, "Teheran Students Seize U.S. Embassy and Hold Hostages," November 4, 1979.

²⁵ Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution & Secret Deals with the U.S.*, Translated by William Ford (McLean: Brassey's, Inc., 1991), 22.

unlikely opponent; in Paris he had developed a reputation as a radical, religious theoretician molding an “Islamic concept of economic” and in close contact with Khomeini. In 1978, when Khomeini arrived in Paris, he became one of Khomeini’s trusted advisers—especially when he, unlike Bazargan, opposed a compromise offered by the Shah.²⁶ In 1979, Khomeini placed him as one of few non-clerics in the Revolutionary Council and Assembly of Experts.²⁷ In the Revolutionary Council, he antagonized the Bazargan government by espousing radical policies such as the nationalization of all foreign companies and supporting the clerical constitution.²⁸ As his political clout grew though, he drifted away from Khomeini’s camp. A number of prominent clerics who had actively opposed the Shah and had now grown suspicious of the IRP endorsed his candidacy. He campaigned on the theme “Islam represents social justice and political pluralism,” and won 76 percent of the vote.²⁹ In June 1980, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an anticlerical organization, leaked tapes of a damning secret conversation between an IRP leader and his entourage immediately after the presidential election. Banisadr was accused of being a “Bazargan with a different face:” of opposing the IRP and sympathizing with the National Front and the Liberation Movement; and of being a “nationalist-monger” rather than a true Muslim.³⁰ The tape argued for abasing “him to a ceremonial role” and eliminating his supporters from high office and the military.³¹ Upon taking office, Banisadr aggravated these fears. He criticized the hostage takers for creating “a state within a state,” in reference to the blatant lack of civilian control over

²⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 59.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 60.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the increasingly expensive ordeal; the U.S. had retaliated by withholding highly important spare parts from the army and impounding Iranian assets totaling \$13 billion.³² His stance on the crisis tied into his approach to the war. He demanded that the war should be entrusted to the army; that purged officers should be reinstated, and that the country should buy essential spare parts from the West, which would have entailed the hasty release of American hostages.³³ Banisadr indeed produced a US-backed plan for a UN commission to investigate Iran's grievances against the Shah in return for the release of the hostages. Although shortly thereafter, Khomeini declared that only the IRP-controlled *majles* could settle the crisis.³⁴

The IRP fought him hard on war issues, preferring the ideological purity of the Guard to the professional competence of the army. Khomeini, intending to embarrass Banisadr, appointed him commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces.³⁵ The army lay in ruin when Banisadr became commander and Khomeini wanted to prove that he was incapable of rectifying the situation. The Sisyphean task of reorganizing the army included a silver lining: formal control and appointment powers over the regular military as well as the Guard.³⁶ Banisadr relayed Khomeini his dissatisfaction with the Guard's desultory counterinsurgency operations in the Arab-populated province of Khuzestan in a letter from May 22, 1980. He wrote, "I'm sure that elements in the Guards...will once again do away with the cooperation between [the Army and the Gendarmie] and will

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 63.

³⁴ Nikkie Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 251.

³⁵ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 69.

³⁶ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 53.

promote disorder and insecurity.”³⁷ His anxious tone persisted in a letter dated later that June, in which Banisadr warned of the Guards’ designs to “start an all-out general assault and subject the people to a series of great dangers.” As an armed and ideological group, he argued, it was disposed to “cleanse Iran of the counterrevolution in a swift move and a general war.”³⁸ The talk of “an all-out general assault” referred to the Guard’s aggressive operations to quell Kurdish, Turcoman, and Sunni uprisings in the months after the revolution. The Guard later defied Banisadr’s declaration of a ceasefire with Kurdish rebels following the Iraqi invasion and continued the counterinsurgency campaign against them.³⁹ The IRP had struck a bargain with the Guard—the former trading influence and autonomy in return for complete loyalty from the latter—that chartered their path to power. Together, they helped Khomeini do whatever it took to ordain an Islamic government, including the execution of dissidents. Khomeini reportedly said, “If we have to execute 50,000 people to establish the mullahs’ regime, we will do it.”⁴⁰ He left Banisadr up to his own meager devices to deal with the Guard’s anti-democratic and illiberal flairs.

The president attempted to control the organization by placing trusted civilian supervisors at its head. In the same June 1980 letter, Banisadr expressed his frustration with the Guards’ rejection of his personal selection of Abou-Sharif for guard commander: “Instead of proceeding the plans they made it be known that one can’t work with Abou-

³⁷ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 22.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Steven Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 233.

⁴⁰ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 138.

Sharif.”⁴¹ In another instance, Banisadr named his ally Abbas Zamani, who already served as a senior officer in the organization, as Guard commander. Banisadr’s opponents in the Guard branded Zamani one of the president’s pawns, ousting him a month after his appointment.⁴² The successive attempts by Banisadr to infiltrate the Guard decreased its trust of civilian leaders and, inversely, increased its loyalty to Khomeini. The Guard’s first unofficial Commander Javad Mansuri remarked in a 1982 press interview, “Banisadr’s being made Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces was the hardest blow struck on the Corps during its existence, but it was able to escape the danger... This danger even brought the Corps more solidity.”⁴³ Ultimately, the Guard elected Morteza Rezaei, one of its own, as Guard commander and has protected ever since its prerogative in deciding the question of leadership.

Rebuffed in his initial efforts, Banisadr later tried curbing the Guard’s power once the Iraq war broke out by constricting its supply of heavy arms. In his memoirs, Rafsanjani blamed a period of stalemate during the Iran-Iraq war on Banisadr’s denial of arms to the Guard.⁴⁴ Javad Mansuri shared this assessment. He recalled asking Banisadr during the Iraq War to give the Guard “the necessary equipment in proportion to the operations it is commissioned to make, and he used to answer frankly that they gave no arms to the Corps, and the Guards had to arm themselves by disarming the enemy only.”⁴⁵ According to Khomeini’s son Ahmad, Banisadr opposed “pious and ideological elements” and “wanted to gain absolute power in Iran and considered the Guards the

⁴¹ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 23.

⁴² Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 54.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 23.

⁴⁵ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 54.

primary and most powerful group resisting him.”⁴⁶ The Guard’s allies in the IRP, Ahmad among them, played an instrumental role in repelling Banisadr’s efforts to constrict the Guard. The IRP-aligned prime minister and IRP members of parliament opposed Banisadr’s injunction against arming the Guard with heavy weapons.⁴⁷ In the late spring of 1981, they passed a war-oriented budget allocating to the Guard and other revolutionary organizations funds and supplies four times greater than what the regular army received.⁴⁸ The IRP and the Guard arrogated the Iranian revolution from its multivalent meaning. They commandeered it from its constituent liberal democratic currents and affixed it to a revolutionary view of Islam. As Bandisadr put it:

Everything was changing. The mullahs—more and more detested—made the people wonder. Many of the Guards responded unequivocally, ‘Yes, the power of the clerics must be obeyed. The people must obey Behesthi, not vice versa’ ... To correct this, I explained everyday that the army is responsible to the nation, that power comes from the people, that an army that betrays the people serves strangers. I also tried to explain these concepts to the Guards, for whom obeying any power other than that of the people should have signified a departure from the principles of the revolution.⁴⁹

Banisadr rebuked the radicals for alienating the revolution from its popular sovereignty-based, democratic foundations.

The nature of revolutions perhaps predetermined the ascendance of an anti-democratic, radical faction. A small, disciplined, principled, and fanatical group generally accedes power in the aftermath of revolution. Their focus on power follows from an unimpeachable conviction that they alone understand where the revolution needs to go. Instead of answering to the people, the Guard set about making the people answerable to

⁴⁶ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 23.

⁴⁷ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 55.

⁴⁸ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 150.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

Islam. They scorned democracy, like radicals in other revolutions who necessarily “cannot risk anything like a free election.”⁵⁰ Although more limited in number and broad appeal, they surmount opposing groups by virtue of their willingness to work hard and sacrifice and meld their individual personalities to a group identity.⁵¹ They maintain an *esprit de corps*—an active moral union—far beyond the powers of ordinary men.⁵² The enmity between Banisadr and the Guard revealed a final, most important quality about the organization—single-minded loyalty. Like extremists in other revolutions, the Guards followed their leader with a devotion and unanimity not to be found among the moderates.⁵³ In a way, the Guard approximated the guardian class in Socrates’ schema of the ideal city. Khomeini represented their version of the philosopher-king, who, in possession of near divine knowledge, alone could drive the illusory shadows cast by imperialism out of the allegorical cave, leading Muslims to freedom and truth. The Guard itself would contribute justice to this ideal Muslim society by providing the ruling, wisest part with unbounded courage and faith. Radicals would sacrifice peace and blood to protect and promote Khomeini and his ideas. Brinton characterized them as combining, “in varying degrees, very high ideals and a complete contempt for the inhibitions and principles which serve most other men as ideals.”⁵⁴ The contempt of Iranian radicals for moderates stemmed from their construction of a binary between ignorance and knowledge—they would gladly purge society of men who did not recognize the supreme

⁵⁰ Brinton, *Anatomy*, 155.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

goodness of the *faqih*. In pursuit of the ideal society, Khomeini's loyal adherents would eliminate the openly resistant and indoctrinate the others.

By early 1981, the populist clerics and the Guard were winning the battle. Banisadr was soon rendered powerless in the wartime decisions of the Supreme Defense Council; revolutionaries stepped up purges and executions in the army and imposed on it a new Department of Ideology, which assigned religious advisers to frontline infantry battalions.⁵⁵ To further diminish the large pro-Banisadr faction in the army, the IRP lavished the Guard with arms and recruits. Within a year, it had grown from a force of 30,000 to over 100,000 and quickly rising.⁵⁶ The fissures steadily widened, with Banisadr alleging IRP complicity in human rights violations, torture, and censorship. In June 1981, Banisadr recognized the impossibility of reconciliation with the clerics. He challenged them directly by demanding a referendum between his and their governments. The IRP of course rejected his proposal and mass demonstrations soon swept the country into pandemonium. The Guard began shuttering pro-Banisadr Mojahedin offices and rallies and obliterating Mojahedin cells. The Guard shot indiscriminately into the crowds of protestors and had been given the legal right to summarily execute rioters.⁵⁷ Banisadr absconded into hiding with the Mojahedin leaders on June 12 and dissidents lashed out at the IRP and Guard with a string of deadly terrorist attacks. The most notable of them occurred on June 28, when unknown assassins detonated a large bomb in the IRP headquarters, killing IRP leader Mohammad Beheshti, four cabinet ministers, seven

⁵⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (Wiltshire: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd., 1989), 64.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

assistant ministers, and twenty-seven parliamentary deputies.⁵⁸ As the opposition grew increasingly violent—the Mojahedin even defected sides during the war—the pretexts of a repressive security state grew more plausible. In 1987, Guard Commander Rezaei exclaimed, "We create a solid nationwide terror, which controls the counterrevolutionaries. When this terror is lifted, the counterrevolutionaries come to life and spread."⁵⁹ In this atmosphere of insecurity, the most militaristic revolutionaries grabbed power and steered Iran toward exporting the revolution through subversive means in the Gulf, and, by means of war in Iraq.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁹ Mary McGrory, "An Immoderate Approach," *The Washington Post*, January 6, 1987.

Chapter Two: War of Revolutionary Self-Defense

What began as Iraq's limited invasion of Iran in September 1980 had transformed into a protracted, total war by the mid-1980s, with little end in sight. The Guard fought with unswerving dedication to topple Saddam Hussein's regime, even as the war broke the country's economy and agonized its people. The accepted estimate of the war's toll on Iran's economy puts the number at \$627 billion in indirect and direct costs, in addition to \$644 billion in reconstruction costs.⁶⁰ Even more staggering is Iran's loss in human life. Conservative Western estimates tally the war's total number of deaths at 367,000—with Iran accounting for 262,000 and Iraq, 105,000—and of total non-fatal casualties at 700,000.⁶¹ The sheer size of these costs begs the question of why Iran insisted on turning a fairly straightforward war of self-defense into a tortuous offensive war against Hussein. For at least two years following the revolution, the power of liberal, moderate, and leftist revolutionary factions collectively checked that of the truly radical. A sequence of disparate events, along with the unsurpassed ability of radical clerics to exploit them politically, led to a shift in the arrangement of power that left radicals in control of Iran's foreign and war policy. The new elite transformed a war of national self-defense into the locus of a universal struggle against anti-Islamic imperialist forces. They set offensive goals against Baghdad and mapped worldwide Islamic struggle onto a war between two nations. The Guard and Khomeini viewed the Iranian nation-state as a tool at the disposal

⁶⁰ Farhang Rajaei, "Views from Within," In *Iranian Perspectives on the Iran-Iraq War*, by Farhang Rajaei (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

of Islamic Revolution. They endangered the nation for the sake of destroying the pillars of imperialism and creating space for the growth of authentic and Islamic forms of government.

Khomeini evaluated international politics through the lens of *Umma*. The *Umma* refers to the community of believers, bound together by shared faith and nothing else. Its meaning cannot be rigidly defined, but it always refers to ethical, linguistic or religious bodies of people who are the objects of the divine plan of salvation.⁶² Ties of kin, race, and ethnicity dissolve before the primacy of belief. As Khomeini said in 1964, “Islam has dismissed racism. There is no difference between blacks, whites, Turks or non-Turks. The only point of reference and the source of loyalty is Islam, in which righteousness is the only standard.”⁶³ The *Umma* transcends territorial demarcation, as people across geographic borders join it by token of their faith. Things that threaten the *Umma* threaten faith; thus, territorial threats elicit a response because they may destroy the political organization of the *Umma*, or believers themselves, but not on the basis of state territory. Any state that oppresses the *Umma* deserves to be destroyed. When Iraq invaded Iran, Khomeini railed against the threat to Islam rather than the Iranian nation-state. Khomeini encouraged patriotism and defense of the homeland because these mottos overlapped with Islamic causes. Khomeini premised the defense of Iran on the defense of Islam: “All these martyrs, invalids and homeless ones were for the cause of Islam. We suffered all these calamities for Iran only because it is an Islamic country.”⁶⁴ Khomeini exalted the

⁶² Farhang Rajaei, *Islamic Values and World View: Khomeyni on Man, the State and International Politics, Volume XIII* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 68.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

war to a conflict between Islam and blasphemy with Iran and Iraq treated as mediums in the grander struggle of good and evil.

The Iran-Iraq struggle was the first step in reviving the *Umma* and destroying the impediments to its prosperity. Again, Khomeini described Iran as a cog in bigger machinery: “Iran...is determined to propagate Islam to the whole world. She takes pride in being the springboard for the advancement of Islam. From Iran the divine revelation and the message of the Exalted Prophet will travel everywhere.”⁶⁵ He burdened Iran with leadership of the Islamic world, framing its purpose and obligations in terms of ideology rather than nationality or territory. The identification of Iraq with the dominant force of oppression against the *Umma*—imperialism—shaded the morality of the war in black and white. This religious explanation immediately foreclosed any diplomatic solutions as compromising with the face of evil becomes impossible. In an address to the nation from September 1980, Khomeini proclaimed:

You are fighting to protect Islam and he is fighting to destroy Islam... There is absolutely no question of peace or compromise and we shall never have any discussions with them; because they are corrupt and perpetrators of corruption.

The damage caused by this criminal is irreparable unless he withdraws his forces, leaves Iraq and then abandons his corrupt government; he must leave the Iraqi people to decide their own fate. It is not a question of a fight between one government and another; it is a question of an invasion by an Iraqi non-Muslim Ba’thist regime against an Islamic country; and this is a rebellion by blasphemy against Islam.⁶⁶

According to Khomeini’s logic, Hussein hated Islam and Iran is an Islamic country, therefore, Hussein hates Iran. If Iran compromised with Hussein, he would fight against

⁶⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁶⁶ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 38.

Islam on other fronts and battlefields. The conflict was essentially ideological and not a question of fighting between two nations. Compromise would also have signified the weakness of a supposedly divine and unstoppable movement vis-à-vis the decaying and false regime in Baghdad. Such an action would admit the failure of Iran's revolutionary ideology to dawn a new order. This ideological interpretation of the conflict, driving senior Guard leaders to cling onto the hope of victory till a bitter end, precluded compromise.

When Iran began attacking Iraq in 1982 with the stated goal of taking Baghdad, it appeared to contravene a major Shi'i belief on war and peace. Khomeini adamantly maintained that Iran's war was defensive for only in the presence of the Imam may Shi'is wage aggressive war. According to him,

There are two types of wars in Islam: one is *Jihad*; that is, the war of expansion...and the other is *Defa*, struggle to preserve one's independence.

Jihad means expansion and the taking over of other countries, which will be carried on by the Imam himself or under his command. In that case it will become everyone's duty...to fight and to spread the Islamic laws throughout the world...

The second type, what we call *Defa*, is a war to defend one's independence, which does not require the Imam nor his command.

Following the occultation of the twelfth Imam in 940, Shi'is generally accepted that initiating any type of war was the prerogative of the Imams. Shaykh Tusi, a Shi'i cleric, formulated a theory which made defensive war permissible in the absence of the Imam.⁶⁷ The doctrinal bias against aggressive war led Khomeini to paint Iran's offensive attack on Iraq on July 13, 1982 with pure defensive hues:

⁶⁷ Rajaei, *Khomeini on Man*, 90.

We have no intention of fighting against any country, Islamic or non-Islamic. We desire peace and amity among nations. Up to date we are engaged only in self defense which is both a God-given and a human right. We never intend to commit aggression against other countries.⁶⁸

Khomeini did not lend weight in his speeches to the historical or legal roots of the conflict. He portrayed it as a clear case of aggression against Islam itself in which the aggressor should be punished and eliminated out of self-defense.

Khomeini treaded a fine line between rightfully defending an Islamic country and waging the impermissible war of offensive *jihad*. Iran's war strategy seemed to aim at spreading revolution through military means rather than at defending Islam. In 1982 he outlined how victory in Iraq would expand the revolution:

If the war continues and if in the war Iran defeats Iraq, Iraq will be annexed to Iran; that is, the nation of Iraq, the oppressed people of Iraq, will free themselves with the Iranian nation. They will set up their own government according to their wishes—an Islamic one. If Iran and Iraq can merge and be amalgamated, all the diminutive nations of the region will join them.⁶⁹

He clearly conflated defeating Iraq with overthrowing Hussein. This presents a highly aggressive understanding of defense, where states cannot be secure until they demolish their aggressors. Khomeini perhaps hoped that overthrowing Hussein would help resurrect the *Umma* by inspiring “all the diminutive nations” to follow the revolutionary cues of Iran and Iraq. In his memoir, Banisadr referenced an influential article written by former US ambassador to Tehran William Sullivan in which he anticipated the aftermath of an Iranian victory in war. Sullivan described the emergence of an alliance between Syria, southern Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran to menace Israel. Sullivan's idea of a Shi'i belt

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 164.

captivated Khomeini, who circulated the article among top government officials.⁷⁰ Iraq was the preparatory stage of the “20 million-strong march to free the Al-Aqsa Mosque,” as Ayatollah Montazeri put it.⁷¹

The revolutionary concentrated their efforts on Iraq for two main reasons. First, they expected their revolutionary message to lead Iraq’s semi-discriminated against Shi’is, who accounted for 60 percent of the total population, into revolt. Iraq’s unique position as the only Arab country with a majority Shi’i population certainly made revolution there seem most likely. Khomeini illustrated this point in a December 1978 interview: “Sunni-populated countries believe in obeying their rulers, whereas the Shi’is have always believed in rebellion—sometimes they were able to rebellion, and at other times they were compelled to keep silent.” Khomeini went on to remark that specifically in Iraq, “The likelihood [of revolt] is greater in areas of Shi’i population.”⁷² However, the Iranians overestimated the allure of their revolution; when they went on the offensive in 1982, Iraqis perceived Iran as intent on occupying their country and did not perceive an avenue for alliance based on religious sectarianism. Few if any soldiers of Iraq’s army defected to the Iranian camp and Shi’i solidarity did not operate as the motor for a genuine revolution in Iraq.⁷³ Second, Iraq, as the largest and most powerful Arab state in the Gulf, appeared to impede, more so than other states, the spread of the Islamic Revolution. In the words of Hojjat al-Islam Sadeq Khalkhali, a leading revolutionary

⁷⁰ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 184.

⁷¹ Terry Povey, “Pressure grows in Iran for invasion of Iraq,” *Financial Times*, July 10, 1982.

⁷² Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 327-328.

⁷³ Laurence Louer, *Transnational Shia Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 190.

cleric, “We have taken the path of true Islam and our aim in defeating Hussein lies in that we consider him the main obstacle to the advance of Islam in the region.”⁷⁴

The war’s religious aura affected the Guard’s strategy, as it precluded compromise, and the Guard’s tactics, as it led them to appreciate death as martyrdom. Khomeini braced the nation to die in defense of Islam, in defiance of America; as he declared, “it prefers a bloody death to a life of shame.”⁷⁵ He mobilized the concept of martyrdom to rationalize high-casualty tactics. At the reductive level, martyrdom means dying for the sake of Islam—death in service of and rewarded by God. Clerics often elevated it to a heroic act. The influential Ayatollah Motahhari called it “the only type of death which is higher, greater and holier than life itself.”⁷⁶ As shown, Khomeini insisted upon portraying the war as an Islamic defense. Iranian soldiers, then, died for the sake of Islam and thus deserved martyrdom status. In a speech shortly after the Iraqi invasion, Khomeini explained:

Our goal is to fulfill our responsibility, which is the preservation of Islam. Even if we get killed, or kill someone in the process, we do so in order to fulfill that responsibility...Indeed, it is of no importance if we get killed, because if we kill [on the path of God] and succeed we have God’s blessing as well as worldly success, and if we get killed we will be taken to heaven.⁷⁷

The revolutionary undertones of the war, moreover, reinforced the willingness of radical commanders to “martyr” their soldiers. The religious argument that Iran attacked Iraq to defend Islam coincided with the implied revolutionary argument that Iran attacked Iraq to extend the Islamic Revolution into the Arab world. This latter argument translated into a

⁷⁴ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1988), 11.

⁷⁵ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 305.

⁷⁶ Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 258.

⁷⁷ Rajaei, *Khomeyni on Man*, 61.

revolutionary zeal as adherents would view themselves as pushing the limits of history, leading humanity down the true path set by God. The grandiose dimensions of such a vision justified extraordinary means. Since revolutionary ideals by definition reject current geopolitical conditions, then revolutionary action may challenge the existing order only with upheaval, often with violence. This seeming necessity for violence can lead to contradictions between methods employed and ends sought. As Crane Brinton wrote, “a sincere extremist in a revolution can kill men because he loves man, attain peace through violence, and free men by enslaving them. Such contrasts in action would paralyze a conventionally practical leader, but the extremist seems quite undisturbed by it.”⁷⁸

Iranian forces encompassed a plethora of ideological standpoints. The most pronounced differences arose between the regular army and the Guard. Their tactical and strategic differences resulted from a variable commitment to national interests. In the purest sense of radical Islam, this outlook would entail completely subscribing to the transnational and pan-Islamic tenets of Khomeini’s ideology and casting off national concerns. Milder revolutionaries would accept the nation as a legitimate entity, necessary for nourishing and promoting the Islamic Revolution. Many of the more pragmatic type blended patriotism with Islamic ideology as they saw the two as mutually reinforcing. A long spectrum stretched between pure Islamic radicalism and extreme nationalism. Between the Guard and the army, the latter would have called the former radical because the Guard deemed the revolutionary reasons for war superior to national ones. However, in contrast to Guards in the Office of Liberation Movements, who participated in a

⁷⁸ Brinton, *Anatomy*, 159-60.

strictly Islamic cause, without much regard for the Iranian nation, one might call Guards in the war pragmatic due to their mixing of nationalism with Islam. The tension between nationalism and Islamic radicalism also pervaded what it meant to be a revolutionary. The Guard perceived the revolution as primarily Islamic whereas the army perceived it as primarily national. Furthering the revolution could mean either spreading an Islamic ideology by means of the nation or strengthening the nation by means of Islam.

Another way to separate radical from pragmatic is to assess the relationship between revolutionaries and Islamic principles. Those who accepted the nation-state would necessarily balance Islamic goals with the practical affairs of running a state. This often meant dealing with pragmatic economic and strategic interests first, in order to assure the functioning of the regime, and revolutionary ones second. For example, when war broke out in Russia's province of Chechnya, Iran abstained from giving Muslim rebels material or moral support for fear of straining its relations with Russia. The logic of the state, that is, not alienating powerful neighbors, trumped the logic of revolution. Pragmatic revolutionaries commonly advocate that Iran focus on national survival and prosperity first, and propagate the revolution passively by modeling its political and spiritual genius. Radicals, on the other hand, viewed the nation-state as a vehicle for the achievement of *Umma*, to be used up and squeezed dry in pursuit of Islamic utopia. Mehdi Hashemi, who directed the radical organization charged with exporting Islamic Revolution, the Office of Liberation Movements, was at the center of a political struggle against the pragmatists. As a representative of the radical set in Iranian foreign policy, he admitted his disinterest in ensuring the survival of the state:

this office is under my patronage. Its philosophy is different from yours. You are a state with relations that you must preserve. The Office is a revolution and it has relations of its own that it must preserve... Whatever the outcome, there are now two opposing logics in Tehran: the logic of the State and the logic of the revolution. If it is difficult for either of them to back away from their ideas, it is still more difficult for either of them to stop leveling the worst accusations against the other to make their logic prevail.”⁷⁹

The clash between these “two logics,” though in an attenuated form, percolates into debates among Iranian elites today, namely, whether or not to improve ties with the US. The Western media often uses the terms moderate and extremist to describe the two currents in Iranian politics, but this usage simplifies the actual situation. An “extremist” such as Ayatollah Montazeri, may have directed many of Iran’s most radical foreign policies, but he also became an early and leading critic of the regime’s denial of human rights and its “disregard for the revolution’s true values.”⁸⁰ Thus, a radical can appear to a Western audience “extreme” in one regard and paradoxically “moderate” in another.

The tension between radicals and pragmatists constantly pushes and pulls government policy in different directions, often at the same time. As sovereign of the system, the *faqih* can tip the balance between these two groups. He typically vacillates from one to the other in order to prevent either one from monopolizing power. This crudely triangular arrangement breeds highly fluid policy, which embraces revolutionary dogma as well as pragmatism and couches all of it in orthodox convictions. Factions from across the pragmatic-radical spectrum and the reformist-conservative spectrum all use Khomeini’s legacy as a reference point. Divergent political positions reflect ongoing and deeply different interpretations of Khomeini’s worldview. Policy-making and the broader

⁷⁹ David Menashri, *Iran*, Vol. 10, in *Middle East Contemporary Survey 1986*, by Itamar Rabinovich and Haim Shaked (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1988), 330.

⁸⁰ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2000), 279.

power struggle rotate around the process of defining the lasting meaning of the Iranian revolution. This dynamic favors the radicals due to the radical beginnings of the government. As they consolidated power, the IRP, the Guard, and other revolutionary organs, legitimated a radical, Islamic discourse that set the tone for the following decades. Pragmatism has to be heavily defended whereas revolutionary action does not. The burden of proof rests squarely with the party proposing change. The resistance of the radical establishment to President Rouhani's pragmatic outreach to President Obama exemplifies the difficulty of changing course. The Guard's internal pragmatic-radical division should not belie its overall identity as a radical institution. Revolutionary pragmatic and radical factions both subscribed to Khomeini's Islamic ideology and disagreed not so much over whether to spread revolution as over how to. This line of division was best highlighted within the Guard through the Iran-Contra affair, which affirmed the underlying similarity in revolutionary agents while also spotlighting their differences. The scandal much strengthened the position of revolutionary pragmatists in the Guard, but it neither ended all revolutionary provocations in the Gulf nor eliminated idealism.

The scandal turned on the question of whether violating principles justified a greater revolutionary end. In 1986, Rafsanjani and other "moderates" agreed to release American hostages held by Iranian proxies in Lebanon in return for indirect shipments of US anti-tank missiles. In February, the US sent 1,000 TOW missiles from American stocks to Israel, which immediately delivered the arms to Iran.⁸¹ An additional 1,000 anti-

⁸¹ *The New York Times*, "IRAN-CONTRA REPORT; Arms, Hostages and Contras: How a Secret Foreign Policy Unraveled," November 19, 1987.

tank missiles plus spare parts made their way from the US to Iran through this process over the course of the remaining year.⁸² After the February shipments, Rafsanjani sought to strike a covert deal with the US. He invited a US delegation of backchannel contacts headed by President Reagan's former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane to discuss the plan for direct and bigger shipments. Rafsanjani's representatives promised a cessation of Iran-sponsored terrorism in Lebanon, to release four American hostages held by Hizbullah, and the possibility of eventual rapprochement.⁸³ These promises would have abandoned the Guard faction operating in Lebanon. The meetings, which took place in Tehran between May 25 and 29, ultimately failed, but both sides agreed to keep back channels open in the future.⁸⁴ Guard Commander Rezai, as well as Khomeini supported Rafsanjani's push for US arms. Rezai's men took possession of consecutive US arms shipments and reportedly negotiated directly with some American officials.⁸⁵ Rafsanjani's dealings with US officials—and presumably Rezai's complicity—incensed revolutionary radicals. Flyers appeared around the Tehran University campus announcing and simultaneously denouncing the US visit by highlighting its violation of an anti-imperialism stance.⁸⁶ Mehdi Hashemi, a leading radical and head of the Guard's Office of Liberation Movements, exposed the backchannel contacts and arms deals, intending to hold Rafsanjani accountable for betraying the Islamic Revolution. Hashemi, however, gravely miscalculated. Khomeini stood by his support for the revolutionary pragmatists, consenting to Hashemi's imprisonment and execution the year after.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Afshon Ostovar, *Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979–2009)*, (PhD Thesis): The University of Michigan, 2009, 98.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 137.

⁸⁶ Kurzman, "Soft on Satan," 68.

The Guard's apparently heavy involvement in the Iran-Contra affair did not suggest a deterioration of ideology. On the contrary, its participation won the Guard heavy weapons desperately needed for achieving a revolutionary end in Iraq. Rezai tolerated secret relations with the Americans only insofar as they advanced the Islamic cause of destroying Hussein's *taghut* (a blasphemous kind of despotism) regime. The receipt of these weapons no doubt helped the Guard persuade its civilian superiors to approve its end-game military strategy over the far more restrained one advocated by the regular army. The Guard also appeared well capable of disrupting real US-Iran rapprochement by instigating the seizure of more hostages in obvious contradiction with US interests. In September and October 1986, a group synonymous with Hizbullah⁸⁷ abducted two American citizens in Beirut, with an unknown group abducting a third US citizen around the same time.⁸⁸ This spate of kidnappings replaced the hostages Iran had released to obtain US arms, thereby retaining Iran's leverage over the US. The new round of hostage-takings also revealed the unwillingness of the Guard to make substantive ideological compromise. The arms deals further benefited Rezai's faction by sidestepping Hashemi's camp and demonstrating the plight of its influence over key decisions. Rezai believed the meddling of Iranian revolutionary radicals in Lebanon and the Gulf harmed Iran's international standing, and thus its access to international arms supplies, and diverted resources and men from the more important and feasible mission in Iraq.

⁸⁷ Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Background Information on Foreign Terrorist Organizations" (Washington: U.S. Department of State, 1999).

⁸⁸ Nora Boustany, "U.S. Was Preoccupied with Secret Arms Deals at Time of '86 Kidnappings," *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1990.

Hashemi had stuck to the principle of anti-Imperialism at too great of a sacrifice to both national and Islamic interests, as the Iraq war involved both. His radicalism veered on the self-destructive and in light of this, his execution should not come as a surprise. The excessive and unbridled support for Gulf revolutionaries could have endangered the Iranian state existentially. It provoked the Gulf countries into forming the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Saudis and Kuwaitis into strongly supporting the Iraqi side. If Rafsanjani and others had allowed Hashemi to fully unleash his radicalism, Iran could have expected much fiercer, possibly fatal economic and military pressure from its enemies. Ideological commitments become untenable when they threaten the ideological system itself. Rezai and Rafsanjani must have disdained Hashemi's then delusional obsession with fanning revolution in the Gulf—his activities not only negatively affected the war, but also aimed at, by then, an evidently chimerical end.

After Banisadr fell, the Guard took leadership of the war. Banisadr had in fact convinced Hussein to agree to his proposal for peace in May 1981. His accord, however, was sabotaged by the populist clerics, “who preferred an Iranian defeat to a Bani-al-Sadr victory.”⁸⁹ Around this time, Banisadr's opponents first introduced the slogan, “War! War until victory!” and decisively changed the objectives and conduct of the war to derail his peace plan.⁹⁰ After 1981, they passed the mantle of military leadership to the Guard. As early as October 1980, the Guard had shaped their understanding of the conflict in terms of expanding the Islamic revolution. In a military communiqué, the Guard announced its acceptance of the “mission of expanding the Islamic revolution throughout

⁸⁹ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 148.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

the world to free the world oppressed from the claws of the arrogant ones,” in relation to war against Hussein.⁹¹ After 1982, it pressed indefatigably into Iraqi territory with a view toward Baghdad. After it floundered militarily for two years, the professional military prevailed upon the authorities to reconsider which armed force should conduct the war. The military shifted to a strategy of limited mobile attacks, attrition, and “defense jihad.”⁹² With an intervening two years of conservative policy by the regular military, the Guard eclipsed their conventional counterparts again in 1986 and redoubled Iran’s frontal offensives on Iraq.⁹³ The clerical leadership moved the professional army in as an ersatz substitute whenever the Guard’s strategy became prohibitively costly. It had always identified the Guard as the ideal military representation of the revolution. A ceasefire or even victory led by the army would erode if not discredit the Islamic component of the Iranian revolution.

A debate over how to capture Basra in 1986 epitomized the broader competition between the two forces. Mohsen Rezai led the “maximalist” position, which favored a decisive, all-out frontal assault on the city. Most regular army commanders, including army chief of staff Ali Shirazi, strongly disagreed. They believed that any direct offensive on Basra was fraught with risk; they favored the continuation of a slow war of attrition.⁹⁴ The regular army commanders feared the Guard would repeat its disastrous attempt to take and hold territory near Basra in February 1984, in which Iran suffered

⁹¹ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, “Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Military Communique,” November 1, 1980.

⁹² Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 48.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁹⁴ Kaveh Farrokh, *Iran at War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 392.

27,000 fatalities compared with 7,000 Iraqi fatalities.⁹⁵ The disagreements over how to take Basra culminated in Shirazi's dismissal from command and the Guard's resumed control over Iranian strategy for much of the last two years of the war. The tension over Basra accrued from stark ideological differences. The Guard believed in Khomeini's quixotic ideas of Islamic Revolution; the army fell for no such illusions, its end was the protection of Iranians and their national borders. If the army did not grasp the beautiful, utopic visage of the Islamic Revolution as the Guard did, it could never support such high-risk operations as Basra that sacrificed Iran's national interests for the sake of revolutionary ones. Taking Baghdad promised to display the inherent power of a universalist Islamic Revolution, and hopefully shock the region's oppressed masses into an Islamic awakening.

The regular army counterpoised the Guard's reliance on faith and zeal. It advocated careful preparation and training, the development of adequate logistical support, and deliberate planning to minimize casualties and the risk of defeat.⁹⁶ The first civilian defense minister, Mostafa Chamran, laid out these differences: "My view is that the army possesses technical power...that is, military science, a technology which the guards corps lack, while the guardsmen are endowed with a stronger spirit of faith and revolution."⁹⁷ This difference led to a bifurcated Iranian strategy. The more radical institution coveted Baghdad at all costs, attempting to neutralize Iraq's superior armaments with Iran's greater numbers and zeal, whereas the regular army prioritized national security over the Islamic Revolution, accepting Iraq's astounding objective

⁹⁵ Ibid., 379.

⁹⁶ Gary Sick, "Iran's Quest for Superpower Status," *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 1987.

⁹⁷ Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 44.

advantages. According to a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee report from September 1984, Iraq had 2600 tanks to Iran's 1040; about 3000 armored personnel carriers to Iran's 800; and more than 400 airworthy combat aircraft to Iran's 90.⁹⁸ By 1988, the margins had widened; Iraqi tanks outnumbered Iranian tanks by more than five to one and Iraqi fighter aircraft outnumbered Iranian jets 10 to 1.⁹⁹ In protest of what they saw as futile aggression, sections of the army refused to cross the border at the outset of the Iranian invasion.¹⁰⁰ The regular army believed Iran's independence from imperialist powers had made it weak militarily and a successful conquest of Iraq seemed out of the question.¹⁰¹ In contrast to the army's timidity, the Guard set out to show how the independence won by Islamic Revolution made Iran stronger against the odds.

The head of the Basij, Hojjat al-Islam Salek, made the sanguine observation that his volunteers had succeeded "in doing away with conventional warfare methods and had introduced a new method called 'Islamic warfare.'"¹⁰² Guard Commander Rezaei affirmed the military value of this so-called Islamic warfare; "It is sufficient for us to bring into the battlefield four times more infantry forces with light weapons than the Iraqis."¹⁰³ Rezaei's belief turned out to be wrong; no manner of zeal paired with manpower could overcome the disparities in munitions. One author has argued that the Guard was less concerned with outcomes than processes, less with gaining victory than affirming certain values and

⁹⁸ Dilip Hiro, "The Iran-Iraq War," In *Iran and the Arab World*, by Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 53.

⁹⁹ Farrokh, *Iran at War*, 400.

¹⁰⁰ (Povey 1982)

¹⁰¹ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 111.

¹⁰² Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 43.

¹⁰³ Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 44.

commitments.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, this would explain why the Guard rejected the manifold benefits of even slight integration with the professional army. Banisadr recounted how the Guard opposed the army enough to actively undermine its operations by attacking the enemy unexpectedly and without warning or else appropriating weapons delivered to the front.¹⁰⁵ In this respect, the Guard feared integration would extricate religious values from Iranian military operations and taint the process of victory despite making its eventuality more likely. In the Guard's defense, one politician coined the oft-repeated assertion that "a *maktab* [ideologically pure] army is better than a victorious one."¹⁰⁶ The concern with values would also explain the ease with which the Guard expended Basij fighters. In truth though, the Guard cared about process and victory in equal measure. They understood the two as codependent; only through a revolutionary process could Iran accomplish an Islamic victory and only by attaining an Islamic victory could it guarantee the march of revolution.

The debates over how Iran should fight the war tactically became a synecdoche for why Iran was fighting at all. An Islamic victory incorporated Islamic values into tactics. Khomeini alluded to this in a comment to the Guard, "Victory is not achieved by swords, it can only be achieved by blood...it is achieved by strength of faith."¹⁰⁷ Conversely, a national victory rested on a restrained, professional approach to expelling the Iraqis from Iran. Martyrdom became the central means to proving the thesis of Islamic Revolution. In the words of Khomeini, "We regard martyrdom as a great blessing

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰⁵ Bani-Sadr, *My Turn*, 89.

¹⁰⁶ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 55.

¹⁰⁷ Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 4.

and our nation also welcomes martyrdom with open arms.”¹⁰⁸ Guard Commanders mobilized Basij volunteers, whom constituted the majority of actual infantry soldiers, in unprotected, densely concentrated infantry formations aptly named “Carvans of Karbala,” but better known in the West as human waves, to frontally assault Iraqi positions.¹⁰⁹ Basij volunteers bore the brunt of Iranian casualties, and doubled the nearest Iranian armed force in deaths.¹¹⁰ Such human wave attacks were frequently (and pointlessly) used in the trench warfare of World War I; their goal was to overcome enemy fire with greater numbers and then overrun the enemy line with the soldiers still standing. The emphasis on melee and the extreme likelihood or certainty of death required a great deal of physical courage.

To this end, regime apparatchiks inundated Iranian youth with martyrdom propaganda. One former Basij member recalled,

On the television they would show a young boy dressed as a soldier, carrying a gun and wearing the red headband of the basij. He would say how wonderful it was to be a soldier for Islam, fighting for freedom against the Iraqis. Then he would curse the Iraqis and all Arabs, saying they were not good Muslims...At school there were always mullahs coming to speak to us and interrupting our lessons...They talked about the glorious Islamic Revolution and the Ayatollah who had rescued us from the hands of the Americans...The mullahs said it was an honor to go and fight for Islam and to be martyred for Islam, just like Imam Hussein.¹¹¹

Guard commanders built on the initial indoctrination with material symbols designed to consummate a readiness to die. They adorned Basij volunteers with red headbands inscribed with Khomeini’s or Allah’s greatness, pinned to their uniforms strips of

¹⁰⁸ Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 87.

¹¹⁰ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Iran Report,” October 2, 2000.

¹¹¹ Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 63.

funerary white cloth, and hung around their necks plastic keys symbolizing their assured entry into paradise upon martyrdom.¹¹² These tropes mostly exploited the common infatuation of fourteen and fifteen year old boys with guns and adventure. An Iraqi officer described the jarring effect of the Basij on his men,

They chant ‘Allahu Akbar’ and they keep coming, and we keep shooting, sweeping our 50 millimeter machine guns around like sickles. My men are eighteen, nineteen, just a few years older than these kids. I’ve seen them crying, at times the officers have had to kick them back to their guns. Once we had Iranian kids on bikes cycling toward us, and my men all started laughing, and then these kids started lobbing their hand grenades and we stopped laughing and started shooting.¹¹³

In other instances, the Guard dispatched waves of Basij volunteers to clear Iraqi minefields. The overall project of revolution subsumed ethical questions raised by these tactics. Basked in the sanctity of their mission, Guard commanders put moral scruples aside.

Iraq’s invasion of Iran stemmed from its desire to expand territorially and crush its traditionally stronger neighbor. In September 1980, Iraqi forces glided into the southern province of Khuzestan after a series of border skirmishes with the Guard earlier that summer. Not meeting any coordinated resistance, Hussein easily took control of the Shatt al-Arab (known as the Arvand in Persian), a strategic river, and a small portion of Khuzestan, before halting his victorious army. The Iranian Arab population is concentrated in Khuzestan (persistently called “Arabistan” outside of Iran) and Hussein incorrectly expected strong cooperation from the local population there. In Iraq, the war was known simply as “Saddam's Qadisiyyah,” in reference to an ancient battle at the

¹¹² Chubin and Tripp, *War*, 60.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

town of that name in 636, when the Arab Muslim army first pushed the Sassanid Persian Empire out of what is today modern Iraq.¹¹⁴ The Arab majority in this “liberated” zone of “Arabistan,” however, greeted the Iraqis with indifference.¹¹⁵ Hussein inflamed anti-Persian sentiments to legitimate his attack. He triumphantly called Iraq’s invasion a “historic defense of Arab sovereignty and rights against the marauding Persians.”¹¹⁶ He focused on placing the Shatt al-Arab, Iraq’s only outlet into the Gulf, and hence its only port for oil tankers, under his full control. His act of war abrogated an unfavorable 1975 truce with the Shah that had evenly split sovereignty over the waterway.¹¹⁷ He hoped a quick, limited, yet decisive campaign would swiftly convince the volatile revolutionary state to capitulate these territories, which would cement Iraq’s position as regional heavyweight, and leader of the Arab world.

Iraq attacked Iran at its weakest moment in decades. Revolutionaries had crippled Iran’s military by purging its highest echelons and expelling American technicians and arms suppliers, whose departure left Iran’s arsenal in disrepair or obsolescence. Between 1955 and 1979, Iran agreed to purchase military equipment from the US worth about \$21 billion, of which it received about \$9 billion in actual material.¹¹⁸ These prodigious sales helped give the Shah, by 1975, the largest blue water navy in the Persian Gulf, the largest Air Force in Western Asia, and the fifth largest army in the world.¹¹⁹ But the revolution

¹¹⁴ Loren Jenkins, “Iraq’s Saddam Hussein Fights a Long-Nurtured War of Vengeance,” *The Washington Post*, November 9, 1980

¹¹⁵ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2008), 25.

¹¹⁶ Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar, *Iran and the Arab World*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 4.

¹¹⁷ Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 6.

¹¹⁸ Moaddel, *Class, Politics, and Ideology*, 57.

¹¹⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 157.

wrecked Iran's military prowess. Between February and September 1979, some 85 senior officers in the Shah's army were executed and hundreds more (including all major-generals and most brigadier-generals) were imprisoned or fired. By the war's onset, some 12,000 officers had been purged.¹²⁰ These purges eviscerated the army's higher ranks, while the air force lost half of its pilots and 15-20 percent of its officers, non-commissioned officers, and technicians. By the outbreak of the war, the Iranian army dwindled from 285,000 to approximately 150,000, whereas the Iraqi army stood at 200,000. The flight of American avionics advisors combined with a reduced pool of pilots denied the Iranian air force the ability to fly half its aircraft. Iran also lacked critical access to the international arms market, whereas Iraq received support from both Russia and the West. As Rafsanjani noted, "...it became completely evident that the West and even Russia were determined not to let us win the war militarily in the region..."¹²¹ Notwithstanding the Iran-Contra fiasco, an effective international arms embargo took place to deny Iran advanced weapons. The US spearheaded the project, which it called "Operation Staunch." In 1987, for example, the US scuttled the proposed \$170 million sale of 16 aging F5 fighter jets to Iran even amid the suggestion that Iran would return nine US citizens held hostage by Hizbullah.¹²² The US role in the notorious tanker war also illustrated its pro-Iraqi stance. In the last two years of the war, the US sent a large naval force to protect international shipping lanes allegedly threatened by Iran and the US destroyed many of its oil platforms and ships. State department officials acknowledged during Congressional testimony that less than one percent of all tankers transiting the

¹²⁰ Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 17.

¹²¹ Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, interview by Aftab News, *Rafsanjani on Iran's Conduct of the War* (June 21, 2008).

¹²² David Ottaway, "U.S. Rejected Proposed Sale of F5s to Iran," *Washington Post*, October 20, 1988.

Gulf had been attacked before the US provided protection, and 70 percent of those attacked were hit by Iraq.¹²³ Nonetheless, by February 1988, the US had deployed 29 warships and approximately 20,000 men to the Persian Gulf.¹²⁴

Beyond the balance of power dimensions of the Iraqi invasion, Hussein also meant to end the Iranian revolutionaries' increasing support for Iraqi Shi'i dissidents. In June 1979, Tehran began publicly urging the Iraqi people to overthrow the secular Baath regime.¹²⁵ A few months later, Tehran resumed the Shah's support for insurgent Iraqi Kurds and provided aid and impetus to Iraq's underground Shi'i movements, mostly al-Da'wa, which began terrorizing the Iraqi government.¹²⁶ Around the same time, the Guard began harassing and attacking Iraqi interests in Iran, including schools, consulate generals, and other institutions in Tehran and especially in the border city of Khorramshahr.¹²⁷ Its actions overtly defied the Bazargan administration's official policy of neutrality. By the end of 1979, the Iraqi regime moved to contain the insurgency threat by expelling some 100,000 Iraqi Shi'is from the country and retaliating with support of separatist Kurdish and Arab elements within Iran.¹²⁸ By the end of the war, Hussein pressured or deported an additional 250,000 Iraqi Shi'is into Iran.¹²⁹ In the spring of 1980, Iran severed diplomatic relations with Iraq. On April 9, the day that Hussein executed Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, the leader of al-Da'wa, Khomeini, in a broadcast

¹²³ Bahman Baktiari, "Revolutionary Iran's Persian Gulf Policy: The Quest for Regional Supremacy," in *Iran and the Arab World*, by Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 79.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹²⁵ Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 11.

¹²⁶ *Idlib*.

¹²⁷ Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 59.

¹²⁸ Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 11.

¹²⁹ Ramazani, *Independence without Freedom*, 274.

speech, attacked Saddam Hussein and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who had given refuge to the deposed Shah. He urged "noble Islamic nations" to attack both leaders, while calling Hussein a "treacherous parasite" and urging the Iraqi Army and people to "wake up and topple this corrupt regime in your Islamic country before it is too late."¹³⁰ That month, Khomeini called on Iraqi law enforcement forces "to rise up heroically and to destroy the foundations of oppression just as happened in Iran."¹³¹ A leading radical and patron of the Guard, Ayatollah Montazeri, advocated armed conflict until "Hussein's regime is completely overthrown and until the Islamic republic is established."¹³² Iranian support for lethal subversion reached its zenith around the same time, when Iraq's deputy premier and minister of information narrowly escaped two separate assassination attempts and 20 Iraqi officials were killed in bomb attacks by al-Da'wa militants who were almost surely in contact with the Guard.¹³³ In his memoir *Hashemi Uncensored*, Rafsanjani obliquely censured Iran's revolutionaries. "You must keep in mind the point about how we could have controlled the factors which led to war...Maybe if in our foreign relations...we had arrived at a different set of imperatives, then perhaps it would have been possible to avoid war."¹³⁴ The invasion aimed to disable a perennially problematic neighbor. Suspicion of an Iranian fifth column reached as far back as the modern Iraqi state itself. A 1924 law establishing Iraqi citizenship carved out a special category for "Iraqis of Iranian nationality," requiring them to display this information on

¹³⁰ Richard Horman, "Iran, Iraq on War Footing; Khomeini Urges Coup," *The Washington Post*, April 9, 1980.

¹³¹ Amirahmadi and Entessar, *Iran and the Arab World*, 220.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 11.

¹³⁴ Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, interview by Tabnak Newsmagazine, *The Americans Were Not Behind the War with Iraq* (September 14, 2008).

identity cards. Hundreds of thousands of Iranian-Iraqis had previously held Iranian citizenship under three former Ottoman provinces before the Iraqi state acquired their land.¹³⁵

As the war escalated, and the size of the Guard mushroomed, the Guard reorganized itself under a conventional structure. The structural changes were limited to form, however, and not substance. As former Guard Minister Rafighdoost recounted in a 1985 interview,

When we wanted to send the IRGC to the battlefronts, this force did not have the necessary military formation or organization. The IRGC was not created defend the country's borders but rather the main aim for the creation of the IRGC was to defend the Islamic revolution. It was at this time that we realized the imposed war was not against our borders but rather that it was aimed against the Islamic revolution and was bent on its destruction. Therefore, we felt the need to mobilize the IRGC.¹³⁶

Rafighdoost's comments attested to the Guard's loyalty to the Islamic Revolution, which meant, theoretically, that the security of the country's borders was secondary to the revolution. With the revolution in peril, the Guard acquired the necessary military organization to defend it. Border security was important only insofar as it overlapped with the safety of revolution, a point that underscores the Guard's revolutionary, not nationalist roots. In the same interview, Rafighdoost described how the battle for the Khuzestan city of Abadan spurred the Guard's development into a conventional form:

When the Iranian forces started widespread operations, it was felt that the IRGC had to be present on the fronts in an organized formation. The organization and reshaping of the IRGC started with the establishment of border companies which

¹³⁵ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 87.

¹³⁶ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 85.

took part in the breaking of the Abadan siege. The companies were later expanded into brigades and then armies.¹³⁷

This reorganization gradually rationalized the Guard's tactics, but the onerous goal of total victory remained the same. Guard commanders continued to inefficiently counteract Iraq's advantages in firepower with human-wave formations until late 1986. Even when the Guard and the regular military achieved their highest degree of cooperation and limited battlefield integration during the 1986 Al-Faw offensive, the Guard would not forfeit unconventional tactics.¹³⁸

The adoption of a rank system, hierarchy, and salary by the end of the war did not spur a decline in revolutionary fervor or radical decision-making. On April 18, 1988, for example, Iranian naval vessels commanded by the Guard counterattacked against the overwhelmingly more powerful US Navy, which was conducting a retaliatory strike off the Iranian coast.¹³⁹ The Iranian assault resulted in the loss of about 20 percent of Iran's major naval warships.¹⁴⁰ A change in tactics did accompany the Guard's reorganization, but as part of a separate process. By 1988, Rafsanjani went from intoning, "The faith of the Islamic troops is stronger than Iraq's superior firepower," to demanding that the Guard "must not think that when it is attacked it can fight with Molotov cocktails."¹⁴¹ And the Guard indeed dropped the use of human waves by 1987. However, the deepened organizational and military capabilities alluded to by Rafsanjani did not correspond with diminishing commitment to ideology. On the contrary, these formal changes better

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 66.

¹³⁹ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 172.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Shahram Chubin, *Iran's national security policy: intentions, capabilities, and impact* (Washington: The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), 17-18.

operationalized the Guard's support for Khomeini's ideology. Guard leaders have consistently affirmed their faith in and loyalty to the *faqih*, and have expressed ideological sentiments with respect to the US, Israel, and imperialist domination. They turned away from exporting the revolution in the post-war period largely because of the dismal outcome of the war, rather than organizational reform. The Guard developed a sophisticated force structure in response to the challenges of winning the war. With the regular army reluctant to prosecute the war until victory, it seized any opportunities to enhance its war effort.

The Guard's radicalism, though diminishing after the war, did not disappear. Elements in and supportive of the Guard continued to sanction terrorist attacks in order to prevent a US-Iran rapprochement. An unclassified Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report links Ayatollah Mohtashemi to the December 1988 bombing of American commercial jet Pan Am Flight 103. Mohtashemi worked intimately with the Guards, especially in the Office of Liberation Movements and had established Hizbullah when he served as ambassador to Syria. He was removed from his diplomatic post in conjunction with the closure of the Office. The report alleges that he paid the Palestinian groups responsible for the attack \$10 million, in retaliation for the US shooting of an Iranian airbus.¹⁴² A CIA double agent in the Guard claimed Guard agents coordinated the bombing, although a special agent who headed the FBI's investigation into the incident refuted this, underscoring the lack of credible evidence.¹⁴³ An Iranian intelligence officer

¹⁴² Defense Intelligence Agency, *PAN AM Flight 103, DOI 910200*, Intelligence Report, Defense Intelligence Agency, n.d., 8.

¹⁴³ Kahlili, Reza, interview by Roger Simon, *CIA Agent in Iran Comes In from the Heat*, PJ Media, (July 8, 2008).

who defected to Germany in the 1990s also alleged that Iran had commissioned the bombing, with the confirmation of Khomeini.¹⁴⁴ The same DIA report also claims that Mohtashemi urged the government to agree to Hussein's plan to use Iraqi aircraft stationed in Iran during the Gulf War against US bases in the Gulf and Turkey.¹⁴⁵ In a separate incident, Argentina charged Mohsen Rezai and Quds Commander Ahmad Vahidi, along with a number of other high-ranking Iranians, with organizing the 1994 bombing of a domestic Israeli cultural center. Interpol concurred with the judgment and Rezai's disaffected son Ahmad confirmed it.¹⁴⁶ The restructuring of the Guard into formal branches did not evidently end radical, although increasingly sporadic, decision-making that was anathema to the regular military.

In another indication of its radicalness, it appears the Guard would not have ceased warfare without Khomeini's personal intervention. The hardships of war had steadily eroded civilian support for it. Hussein was bombing Iran's cities, destroying its economy, and burying a generation of its youth. Yet the Guard refused to give up. As Rafighdoost declared in spring 1987, "To avoid any misunderstanding that we are setting a date for finishing the war, I reiterate that we shall fight to the last man, to the last house and to the last drop of blood, and for this very reason we are bound to win."¹⁴⁷ For all his bravado, Iranian diplomats characterized Rafighdoost as a restraint on the more pugnacious Rezai.¹⁴⁸ In the last years, the Guard dominated the Supreme Military

¹⁴⁴ Times of Israel Staff, "'Bomb-maker' brags about El Al blast, posts Lockerbie photos," *The Times of Israel*, March 19, 2014.

¹⁴⁵ Defense Intelligence Agency, *PAN AM*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Rubin, "Iran's Global Ambition," *Middle East Forum*, March 17, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Patrick E Tyler, "Iran Mobilizes for War Escalation," *The Washington Post*, March 22, 1987.

¹⁴⁸ Edward Cody, "Iran Toughens Stance Toward West," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1987.

Council, allowing it to largely control war policy.¹⁴⁹ In light of this, it was highly possible that no authority lower than Khomeini could have overridden its opposition to a cease-fire. As late as June 1988, the Guard's spokesperson Majid Ali Reza dismissed compromise: "The war will be decided on the battlefield and not on the conference table."¹⁵⁰ The Guard's uncompromising militancy abraded the Iranian people, who no doubt greatly desired peace by 1988. Instead of placing the onus for ending the war on more vulnerable civilian leaders, Khomeini took it upon himself to bear the burden of compromise. The Guard had no choice but to accept his decision. In an open letter announcing his ceasefire decision, Khomeini related the contents of an epistolary exchange with Rezai. Khomeini wrote,

The IRGC Commander is one of the few commanders who believes in the continuation of the war providing that the needed equipment can be procured...In his letter the IRGC commander has written that there will be no victory in the next five years and he may be able to embark on destructive operations or retaliate if he obtains the necessary equipment during the same period...He adds that the strength of the IRGC must be increased seven times and the Military by two-and-half times. He also said that America should be evicted from the Persian Gulf, otherwise he would not succeed...In spite of stating this, he said the Islamic republic must continue fighting which is now no more than a slogan.¹⁵¹

Khomeini sketched a picture of Rezai as reserved over the chances of victory barring a propitious change in tides, but still adamant in pressing the war.

Khomeini's assumption of responsibility avoided a potentially violent confrontation between the Guard and its opponents over the course of the war. Many of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104.

¹⁵¹ Ruhollah Khomeini, "Letter regarding weapons during the Iran-Iraq War," *Iranian Labour News Agency*, Compiled by Council on Foreign Relations, Tehran: Iranian Labour News Agency, September 29, 2006.

the same politicians who allied with the Guard from an early stage withdrew their support as Iraq increasingly targeted civilians and economically strategic infrastructure.

Rafsanjani and other influential clerics had moved in a moderate direction, but worried their advocacy for peace would elicit punishment from the Guard. Khomeini intended for his official statement on the ceasefire to blunt an anticipated backlash from the Guard and political hardliners.¹⁵² Rafsanjani praised his decision since it averted the acrimony that would have arisen otherwise inevitably. “Afterwards, Haj Ahmad Khomeini told us that the Imam had decided to announce it himself, because differences could have risen among ‘you’ if ‘you’ announced it.”¹⁵³ Khomeini forced the Guard to end its revolutionary war against Hussein, and, more generally, reevaluate its feasibility and costs. As the final blow to idealism, Iran’s brutal war experience extinguished the idea of exporting Islamic Revolution through force of arms.

¹⁵² Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 58.

¹⁵³ Rafsanjani, *on Iran’s Conduct of the War*.

Chapter Three: Exporting the Revolution

The Islamic Revolution focused on supplanting imperialism with Islam. Khomeini's pre-revolution diatribes characteristically linked the iniquity of the Shah with US foreign policy and, indeed, the very system of international order. Although concentrated on liberating Iran, Khomeini harbored international ambitions. He hoped Iran's revolution would launch worldwide revolutions against imperialists, which would then pave the way for Islam to reach its full political and social potential. He advocated overthrowing the pro-Western regimes in power throughout most of the Middle East. In his seminal lecture series on Islamic Government, circa 1970, Khomeini characterized Arab regimes as fulfilling the imperialist designs of dividing and conquering the Middle East. "We see, too, that together, the imperialists and the tyrannical self-seeking rulers have divided the Islamic homeland. They have separated the various segments of the Islamic *umma* from each other and artificially created separate nations...the imperialists at the end of World War I divided the Ottoman State, creating in its territories about ten or fifteen petty states."¹⁵⁴ To consolidate their control, the imperialists installed "one of their servants or a group of their servants, although certain countries were later able to escape the grasp of the agents of imperialism."¹⁵⁵ The dictators sowed even greater dissension among the *umma* by virtue of their *taghut*, the form of despotism that encourages rebellion against Allah. Consequently, Khomeini pronounced, "We have in

¹⁵⁴ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 48.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

reality, then, no choice but to destroy those systems of government that are corrupt in themselves and also entail the corruption of others.”¹⁵⁶

Khomeini denigrated any un-Islamic form of government as imperialistic because he believed in the exclusive power of an Islamic governmental framework to lift man from a natural state of corruption. Khomeini reasoned that God appointed Islamic sovereigns in order to set man on the right path; any sovereign drawing power from a different source would necessarily fail to do so.

Men have been set upon a certain well-defined path and commanded not to stray from it, nor to transgress against the established limits and norms, for if they were to stray, they would fall prey to corruption. Now men would not be able to keep to their ordained path and to enact God’s laws unless a trustworthy and protective individual (or power) were appointed over them with responsibility for this matter, to prevent them from stepping outside the sphere of the licit and transgressing against the rights of others. If no such restraining individual or power were appointed...everybody would engage in oppressing and harming others for the sake of their own pleasures and interests.¹⁵⁷

This premise creates the need for “a ruler who acts as trustee and maintains the institutions and laws of Islam.”¹⁵⁸ Although Khomeini blames Muslims for not erecting such a system of Islamic sovereignty in the first place, which through its wisdom would have protected them from rapacious foreign powers, he still castigated imperialism for misleading Muslims from God’s political plan for their salvation: “the nation of Islam has fallen victim to division and weakness...the imperialists have propagated foreign laws and alien culture among the Muslims through their agents for the sake of their evil purposes, causing people to be infatuated with the West.”¹⁵⁹ Saudi authorities in fact found this message sufficiently dangerous to arrest and imprison the partisans of

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 53.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 54.

Khomeini who were promulgating it amongst pilgrims in Mecca.¹⁶⁰ Khomeini was dealing with a political problem with religious means because all politics were problematic when they lacked an Islamic foundation. He expanded on this in a speech from 1981,

The problem of the Muslims is that despite enormous natural resources, land and population, they have to comply with the major powers because of incompetent elite groups...We need to analyze what are the roots of the problems among Muslims and how they can be resolved...The problem of the Muslims is their governments and political systems. It is the political systems that have created the current problems for the Muslims. These regimes have nothing to do with Islam...And unless we return to Islam, our problems will remain...Nations as well as governments need to return to Islam in order to resolve their difficulties.¹⁶¹

Thus, the basic function of revolution was to spread this message and boost the confidence of Muslims in the ability of their faith to return man to the right path as laid out by the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali.

Khomeini's ultimate vision may best be conceptualized as a "pan-Islamic revolution" resulting in an Islamic order, or front, that could resist domination by the world's superpowers. He dreamed of an Islamic front coalescing in pursuit of a politicized religious awakening kindled by Iran's struggle. The Islamic front would defend Islam and the dignity of its people, "If the 700 million Muslims, with the vast countries that they inhabit, had the political maturity to unite and organize themselves in a single front, it would not be possible for the big imperialist powers to penetrate their countries, let alone a handful of Jews who are the servants of imperialism."¹⁶² The Islamic front would also rely on revolutionary means to achieve its end of a single

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁶¹ Andrew Parasiliti, "Iran and Iraq: Changing Relations and Future Prospects," In *Iran and the Arab World*, by Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 24.

¹⁶² Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 196.

Islamic government, “It is the duty of Islamic scholars and all Muslims to put an end to this system of oppression and...to overthrow these oppressive governments and form an Islamic government.”¹⁶³ *Umma*, or a front in close approximation to it, then, represented the ideal end point of Islamic Revolution. In this utopic stage, Muslims would comport themselves solely in accordance with Islam. Successive Islamic Revolutions would have purged all secular constructs such as nationalism and ethnicity from the body politic. The unity of this purely Islamic system would demand their eradication. Khomeini illustrated this point in a speech from 1980, “Nationalism that results in the creation of enmity between Muslims and splits the ranks of the believers is against Islam and the interests of the Muslims. It is a stratagem concocted by the foreigners who are disturbed by the spread of Islam.”¹⁶⁴ To be sure, he did not give a detailed explication of its qualities, but such a state logically concluded from his interpretations of the state of nature, of the political role of Islam, and of the *umma*.

Khomeini also distinguished worthy governments from the worthless based on their affiliation with an Islam of the oppressed versus an Islam of imperialism. His dichotomy turned on the notion that subservience to imperialism contaminated Islam. In a speech directed against Saddam Hussein on the eve of the Iran-Iraq war, Khomeini illustrated this paradigm:

The Great Satan gives its orders to one of its pawns in the region, one of the dead Shah’s friends, to obtain decrees from Sunni *fuqaha* and *muftis* to the effect that the Iranians are unbelievers...Certainly the Islam of Iran is different from the Islam of those who support the pawns of America, like Sadat and Begin, who extend the hand of friendship to the enemies of Islam and flaunt the commands of

¹⁶³ Ibid., 50-51.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 302.

God Almighty, and who leave no lie and calumny unuttered in their efforts to create disunity among the Muslims.¹⁶⁵

Any country dependent on superpowers necessarily opened itself to the penetration of alien and foreign political theory and custom. These foreign influences waylaid Muslim countries from the straight path of Islam, directing them instead to focus on the self-interests of the nation. Iran, by contrast, was “waging a determined struggle to ensure the unity of all Muslims in the world on the basis of *tawhid* [oneness of God] and true Islam.”¹⁶⁶ The Islam of the oppressed would found a truly independent Islamic sovereignty in place of “shameful and reactionary” monarchies. The urgent need for true Islamic government led him to condemn Gulf leaders enthralled by the Islam of imperialism. On one occasion, he expressed hope “that the heads of these governments, some of whom are indulged in sensuality, some preoccupied with their debaucheries, some embroiled in clashes with their brethren, and some emasculated by their fear of the United States, will be awakened into an Islamic humanitarian consciousness, thus putting an end to their sordid governments and rejecting all superpowers, just as our heroic nation has done.”¹⁶⁷

Khomeini and his faction incorporated many of the salient elements of this worldview into the constitution. One of its opening sections on “Structure of Government in Islam” provides “a basis for the continuation of that [Islamic] revolution both inside and outside the country. It particularly tries to do this in developing international relations with other Islamic movements and peoples, so as to prepare the way toward a united single world community.” Article eleven also enjoins the government to “constantly

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 301.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ramazani, *Independence without Freedom*, 247.

strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world.” These clauses in fact obligate Iran to pursue Khomeini’s ambition of internationalizing the Islamic Revolution. This point is further explained in article three, section sixteen, which commands the Islamic Republic to frame its foreign policy “on the basis of Islamic criteria, fraternal commitment to all Muslims, and unsparing support to the freedom fighters of the world.” While the constitution conferred the responsibility for “fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad in God's way” to the Guard and the Army, the real burden rested squarely with the former. It would be absurd to think that the Shah’s military, designed to mimic Western armies in its composition, could operate as standard-bearers of the Islamic Revolution without rebuilding itself from the ground up. If the regular army were to be purged, yet left intact, the Islamic Republic would need to raise a new force, revolutionary in both its nature and activities.

Thus, Khomeini envisioned a region-wide liberation movement with Iran at its center and the Guard at its helm. Khomeini went into further detail of the Guard’s role when he formally established the organization on May 6, 1979. The decree instructed the Guard to “protect the revolution in Iran and spread it in the world on the basis of genuine Islamic ideology.” The Guard would also “support just liberation movements of the impoverished masses of the world under the leadership of the revolution and in consultation with the government...” and, “wage armed struggles against those who attempt armed struggles against Islam.”¹⁶⁸ This principle of waging war against those waging armed struggle against Islam coheres with the classical Shi’i doctrine on *jihad*, which proscribes offensive holy war but not defensive holy war in the absence of the

¹⁶⁸ William Branigin, “Khomeini Militia Vows to Spread Iran’s Revolution,” *The Washington Post*, May 7, 1979.

infallible Imam. This same meaning of *jihad* applies to the constitutional decree of “fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad.” This defensive limitation to the term means that Iran could not export its revolution by force of arms, unless doing so also constituted self-defense. Khomeini may have exhorted Muslims “to export Islam to other places, and the same version of Islam which is currently in power in our country,” but he also categorically declared that violence should not be employed as the means, “It does not take swords to export this ideology. The export of ideas by force is not export... When we say we want to export our revolution, we do not want to do it with swords.”¹⁶⁹ In light of this prohibition against using “swords,” Iran could legitimately export its revolution through armed struggle only in conjunction with a war of self-defense.

The Iraqi invasion of Iran and Israeli invasion of Lebanon both provided fairly clear pretexts for Iran to wage wars in defense of Islam in which they could simultaneously export the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. Unless Khomeini declared the Gulf States as also at war with Islam (he did not), he was theoretically precluded from militarily forcing Islamic Revolution upon them. He confirmed this, “We have neither ambition in, nor right to, any country, and God Almighty has granted us no permission to interfere in any country, unless it is solely a matter of self-defense.”¹⁷⁰ Again, however, Khomeini enwrapped his statement in titillating ambiguity. Self-defense justified interference in other countries and also armed conflict against them, but these two outcomes respectively represent less and more extreme reactions to aggression. This indicates a differentiation in the severity of attacks against Islam, with some deserving a reaction of armed struggle and others, interference. Khomeini’s May 1979 decree about

¹⁶⁹ Ramazani, *Independence without Freedom*, 244-245.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

the Guard also separated supporting “just liberation movements of the impoverished masses of the world under the leadership of the revolution” from waging defensive armed struggle. How much could Iran support revolutionary forces without transgressing the line of offensive *jihad*? If Iranians supplied Bahraini revolutionaries with arms, but did not fire the weapons themselves, were the Iranians waging an offensive armed struggle against the House of al-Khalifa?

The Guard exploited these ambiguities. The space of possibility for employing violent means indeed increased after the governments of Banisadr and Bazargan fell. These moderate leaders had curtailed the Guard’s militancy in different ways. The first, Bazargan, firmly supported a doctrine of “negative equilibrium,” that sought to make Iran a strong, independent, yet accommodating actor in international politics. In effect, he avoided the revolutionary posture that would soon alarm Iran’s neighbors and the US. The second leader, Banisadr, saw the Guard as a destabilizing political rival and sought to subordinate it to civilian control. The relevancy of these moderate political forces to the revolution explains the somewhat anomalous parts of the constitution that downplay its overall revolutionary tenor. For example, articles 152 and 154 declare that Iran’s constitution, while in part based on “unsparing support” to freedom fighters worldwide, is also based on “scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs of other nations” and “the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States.” Once the clerical faction unseated the moderates, the Guard could flout the constitution’s limitations on the use of force. In his memoir, Ahmad Khomeini recalled the urgency with which the Office of Liberation Movements wanted to export the country. He recalled the revolutionary sentiments, tinged with a pretense of

self-defense, of Mohammad Montazeri, who led the Office until his death in 1981, to “raise a revolutionary mayhem in the region, which would also clarify the role of the Guards in export of the revolution...he would say: ‘We should not wait for them to come and invade and occupy Iran and begin when it is all over. It is a waste of time to be here.’”¹⁷¹ Montazeri also suggested that Ayatollah Khomeini go elsewhere since “he has liberated Iran and the work is over. It would be better if you [Ahmad] and the Imam and some other friends go to another retrograde country and begin the work anew.”¹⁷² Ahmad recalled a differing viewpoint that discouraged intervention, but concluded “the only difference is with regard to practicalities and methodology. We all desire the establishment of Islamic republics controlled by a central government and there is no one who does not desire this, but in the way of achieving the goals there are differences.”¹⁷³

The Guard principally exported the revolution by conjoining it with transnational Shi'i networks. As the advent of the Islamic Revolution captivated a Shi'i audience, the Guard built inroads into extant transnational parties of Islamic activists and militants. It bonded primarily with the Shirazists, the most extreme of these, which was under the tutelage of the cleric Mohammed al-Shirazi. This network, and others sympathetic to the revolution, namely the Najafi-based al-Da'wa party, circulated Khomeini's ideology and challenged the allegedly faux-Islamic regimes in the Gulf on his behalf. The Iranians and their co-revolutionaries used foreign policy to express the general appeal and inherent dynamism of the Islamic Revolution; accordingly, Khomeini's revolutionary acolytes banded together in the Guard. The revolution indeed gained a global or at least regional

¹⁷¹ (Alfoneh 2013)344

¹⁷² (Alfoneh 2013)345

¹⁷³ (Alfoneh 2013)346

conceit as its success reverberated through much of the Arab Shi'i world. However, the devotion of resources and political capital to genuine attempts at exporting the revolution largely subsided during the late 1980s amid internal power shifts. These conflicts came to a head in 1986, when a revolutionary radical exposed the Iran-Contra affair. As the dust of this struggle settled, the farthest left wing of the Guard was purged, and the top brass of commanders from the Iran-Iraq war was poised to capture the organization. This change-up roughly preceded with the end of the war, during which the vagaries of demilitarization added additional pressure on the Guard to revise its *raison d'être*. Subsequently, the Guard used foreign Shi'i parties as tools to pressure Iran's enemies rather than as catalysts of Islamic Revolution. In addition to these internal shifts, the major transnational Shi'i networks underwent a process of "autonomization," driving a wedge between them and Tehran. As a result, the Guard lost any chance to muster mass revolutionary élan in the Arab states; instead, it was left with a small pool of compatible, yet socially marginalized ideologues. Nevertheless, the Guard still displayed acumen for co-opting pro-Tehran zealots. These external factors, coupled with the ousting of the Guard's most idealistic component, ended the era of active revolutionary export. The Guard's rotated away from genuine revolutionary exporting because foreign Shi'i populations rejected it. Once this became clear, the idealistic echelons in the Guard amounted to little more than entropy within Iran's ideological system.

These transnational clerical networks, already steeped in political conceptions similar to Khomeini's, dispersed Iran's revolutionary spirit to the Shi'i populations of Arab countries in which they had taken root; in some cases, they acted violently as proxy actors for the Guard. This moment—around late 1979, early 1980—sparkled with the

prospect of revolution and the organizations subcontracted by the Guard played crucial roles in mobilizing or inciting Shi'i communities. One should not overstate the contribution of Iran's actual policies, as opposed to the sheer accomplishment of its revolution, to this scintillating moment in Middle Eastern history. For one, the Guard did not introduce a new mode of diffusing ideology. Moreover, the impact of the Islamic Revolution on various countries depended upon the varying social and political circumstances of respective Shi'i populations.¹⁷⁴ In other words, national political structures trumped Iranian efforts in determining the revolution's course. For example, the revolution lent itself to political violence in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, but beyond this apparent similarity, the violence widely varied in its meaning as well as purpose.¹⁷⁵ The Guard usually attains plausible deniability by denying any role in arming, funding, and directing foreign militias or cells, which complicates any attempt at ascertaining the extent of its leadership in foreign operations. Conversely, the proclivity of Gulf monarchies to pin domestic unrest on the Guard consistently stretches the extent of its power and the dialectic between denial and blame muddles the truth.

Mohammed al-Shirazi and his followers, the Shirazists, extended their influence through clerical networks into Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia over the course of the 1970s. Their groundwork provided the revolution with a line of transmission into the Arab world. This network originated in the 1960s, when Mohammed al-Shirazi anointed himself *marja'iyya* from the *hawza*, or institution of higher Islamic learning, of Karbala. The *marja'* is a figure of utmost authority to Shi'i believers and stands at the top of the clerical hierarchy. He is not designated or elected by an institution or organ; instead, the

¹⁷⁴ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 155.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 155-156.

marja' must demonstrate sagacity and earn the unanimous respect of the masters and advanced students of the *hawza* at which he studies.¹⁷⁶ The *marja'* then promulgates religious precepts for Muslims to follow, at which point he becomes a source of *taqlid*, or emulation, and assumes a role of religious leadership.¹⁷⁷ The *marja'iyya* is a plural institution, mainly divided between *hawzas* in Qum and Najaf, but possibly between other poles like Karbala, Mashhad, or Beirut.¹⁷⁸ The Iranian Supreme Leaders have tried monopolizing the institution of *marja'iyya* to widen Iran's influence over the Shi'i world and gain control of its financial streams. Khomeini's ambition in this respect nettled al-Shirazi early on; he always demanded to be respected by Khomeini as an equal, not as a subordinate *marja'iyya*. This tension later killed their friendship. In 1989, sensing the imminence of his death and grappling with a paucity of eligible successors, Khomeini proposed to amend the constitution to lower the religious qualifications of the Supreme Leader from *marja'* to *mujtahid*. The amendment allowed Khomeini to designate the previously unqualified Ali Khamenei as his successor. Even then, most religious scholars deemed Khamenei's religious knowledge insufficient for the practice of *ijtihad*, a prerequisite aptitude in legal reasoning for *mujtahids*.¹⁷⁹ In 1995, Khamenei made the somewhat egregious decision to present himself as a candidate for the supreme *marja'iyya* in Iran.¹⁸⁰ Later, he attempted to assert his political and religious authority over Shi'is outside of Iran by claiming the status of *wali amr al-muslimin*, or "head of the

¹⁷⁶ Sabrina Mervin, "Introduction," In *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran*, by Sabrina Mervin (London: Saqi, 2010), 18.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Laurence Louer, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 74.

¹⁸⁰ Louer, *Shiism and Politics*, 75.

Muslims.”¹⁸¹ Khamenei’s audacious claims polarized the Shi’i world into pro and anti-Iranian factions and nearly led to a split in Hizbullah (the organization ultimately accepted Khamenei’s *marja’iyya*).¹⁸² The reception of Khamenei’s claims also became a litmus test for Shi’i militias working with the Guard. The groups that questioned Khamenei’s religious legitimacy for all intents and purposes signaled their unwillingness to further Iranian interests. As a result, the groups that did accept his *marja’iyya* also defined themselves as dedicated proponents of Iranian power.

Al-Shirazi’s movement offered a more radical alternative to the competing Shi’i network, al-Da’wa, which promulgated a less extreme message and espoused a different interpretation of religion’s role in politics. Al-Da’wa also began and anchored itself in Iraq’s premier Shi’i religious establishment, Najaf, and resented the emergence of a rival movement from Iraq’s lesser holy city. Al-Shirazi’s claim to *marja’iyya* in fact openly challenged the *mujtahid* of Najaf. For one, al-Shirazi held the Najafi *hawza* in disdain and made his claim without its consultation.¹⁸³ Secondly, according to the *marja’iyya*’s gerontocratic standards, he was forty years too young to declare the title.¹⁸⁴ Al-Shirazi further aggravated the Najafi clerical activists by proposing to endow the *marja’iyya* with full power over the state.¹⁸⁵ Al-Da’wa’s spiritual leader Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr argued for the creation of a supervisory body of senior *mujtahid* who would veto un-Islamic laws passed by the democratic executive and legislative branches of government.¹⁸⁶ The Shirazists, therefore, rejected this dual source of authority endorsed by al-Da’wa’s

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 91.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 91.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 96.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 86.

statutes.¹⁸⁷ Al-Shirazi actually formulated his doctrine of “the government of the jurists” in a 1963 book. Like Khomeini, his doctrine affirmed that in the absence of the Imam, the *marja'* were invested with his political temporal power.¹⁸⁸ Al-Shirazi indeed became Khomeini’s closest clerical ally during the prerevolutionary years. When Khomeini took refuge in Najaf in 1964, al-Shirazi was the only cleric to welcome him and join his outspoken criticism of the Shah.¹⁸⁹ Al-Da’wa functioned mostly as a propaganda machine for Iranian soft power.¹⁹⁰ Their sense of pragmatism aligned al-Da’wa with the central state institutions, foremost among them the office of the prime minister (until its disbandment in 1989).¹⁹¹

The Shirazists’ position that Iran’s Islamic revolution could be spread only through force of arms allied them with a radical faction in the Guard led by Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri. This faction represented itself in the Guard’s now defunct Office of Liberation Movements. This office, initially led by Ayatollah Montazeri’s son Mohammad, coordinated the activity of foreign revolutionary movements and quickly became the point organ for exporting the revolution. Its ethos prized the pan-Islamic struggle above all else, including the process of rebuilding the Iranian state. Ayatollah Montazeri expressed this sentiment in an interview from October, 1979: “I would like to assert that we in the Muslim revolution cannot remain calm or sleep on silk while the rest of the Muslim peoples and countries are encountering danger, injustice and oppression—

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 96.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 97.

¹⁸⁹ Louer, *Shiism and Politics*, 20-21.

¹⁹⁰ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 201.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

oppression by dictatorships and imperialism.”¹⁹² After Mohammed Montazeri’s death in an armed attack in 1981, his brother-in-law Mehdi Hashemi took charge of the office. For the Montazeri faction, the Shah’s overthrow opened the floodgates of a worldwide Islamic revolution. The Guard provided the Shirazists with asylum, offices in Tehran, administrative facilities, and arms to carry out their operations in Iraq and the Gulf.¹⁹³ The Guard underwrote the Shirazists’ establishment of a radio station in Abadan, an Iranian city on the Gulf a few miles from the Iraqi frontier and close to the Gulf monarchies.¹⁹⁴ From there they broadcasted polemics against Saddam Hussein, but soon graduated to calling for the removal of the Al Khalifa of Bahrain and the Al Saud of Saudi Arabia.¹⁹⁵ Shirazist members actually contend that they had imposed their agenda of armed conflict with Saddam Hussein on the Iranian leadership.¹⁹⁶ Khomeini’s supporters also arranged for Shirazist cadres to train in guerilla warfare camps in Lebanon run by the Palestine Liberation Organization.¹⁹⁷ Prior to the revolution, the Iraqi Shirazists fought the Shah in the Arab province of Khuzestan, where they passed themselves off as Iranians of Arab ethnicity. Then, during the years of turmoil in Khuzestan following the revolution, Shirazists, using their native Arabic, took on the role of propagandists for Khomeini’s ideology.¹⁹⁸ The Shirazists also played a central role in organizing the first of a series of annual Conferences of the Liberation Movements,

¹⁹² Ostovar, *Guardians*, 73.

¹⁹³ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 182.

¹⁹⁴ Louer, *Shiism and Politics*, 54.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 180.

¹⁹⁷ Louer, *Shiism and Politics*, 22.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

which gathered cadres of revolutionary movements worldwide in Tehran, starting in 1982.¹⁹⁹

Beyond their strong support for the revolution in Iran, the Shirazists also acted as the main brokers, working in tandem with the Guard, for exporting it outside of Iran. One prominent Shirazist activist, Hadi al-Mudarrisi, announced he was Khomeini's official representative in Bahrain as he attempted to marshal a mass uprising there. After Bahraini authorities expelled him, he relocated to Tehran, where he subsequently masterminded a thwarted coup in Bahrain.²⁰⁰ Al-Mudarrisi's revolutionary projects exemplified the broader approach of the Shirazists, which centered on mass mobilization and political violence.²⁰¹ Elsewhere, Shirazist branches conducted assassinations and insurrections in Iraq and Saudi Arabia. While no evidence exists to link the Guard directly to Shirazist plots, the shared goal of spreading an Islamic Revolution to Shi'i communities and the organizational association between the two suggest an intimate partnership in which the Guard played an influential role. Without a network of its own to export the Iranian revolution, the Guard relied on those enamored of Khomeini's vision of a region revolutionized along the principles of true Islam. However, the symbiosis abruptly ended in the late 1980s due to the rising popularity of moderate leaders, chiefly Rafsanjani, and a falling out between Khomeini and al-Shirazi.²⁰² Toward the end of the Iraq war, Rafsanjani formed a pact of sorts with Khamenei and Khomeini. The triumvirate ousted Ayatollah Montazeri, whom had been Khomeini's heir apparent as the supreme leader and the Shirazists' lifeline to the regime, and dissolved the Office of Liberation

¹⁹⁹ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 181.

²⁰⁰ Louer, *Shiism and Politics*, 53-54.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 188-189.

Movements. In response to Rafsanjani's gestures of goodwill toward Iran's neighbors, the Gulf countries, and Bahrain in particular, made it a condition that Iran close Shirazist fronts.²⁰³ Rafsanjani obliged them and the activists' personal facilities, including their houses, cars, offices, etc. were confiscated.²⁰⁴ The Shirazist-Guard partnership, though, had caused lasting damage to the reputation of the central government.

The power shift in Iran complemented a process of "autonomization," by which transnational networks of Shi'i activists turned away from Tehran in the prudent pursuit of strengthening their legitimacy in Arab states. The more transnational Shi'i networks established branches and accrued local audiences, the less likely they were to respond to an Iranian solicitation that would contradict their domestic interests, and the more likely they were to use Iran than be used by it.²⁰⁵ The transnational nature of clerical networks has not prevented constituents from developing national identities and platforms. For example, the Shirazists in contemporary Saudi Arabia now systematically downplay the scope of their past relationship with Tehran in order to appear as a legitimate political actor to the Saudi regime and people.²⁰⁶ They have rewritten the history of their role in Saudi uprisings in November 1979 so as to decouple their decision-making from that of their supporters in Iran.²⁰⁷ The failure of uprisings and subversive and terrorist acts to embolden the revolutionary spirit of the oppressed changed expectations of whether the Islamic Republic could engender an anti-imperialism, transnational movement. The clerical networks recognized a higher likelihood of success in working within national

²⁰³ Ibid., 186.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 213.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 165.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

limits and addressing national problems via Islam. The Iranians likewise stopped exporting the revolution in the genuine sense of the word. Their policies still derived from revolutionary principles but did not in and of themselves pursue those principles. Iranian policy became aimed at concrete strategic and political goals but was legitimated by revolutionary ideology and often couched in its terms.

Iran still selectively roused revolutionary feelings abroad after the demise of extreme radicals and the Office of Liberation Movements. One of the more salient examples concerned armed Iranian pilgrims rioting in Mecca during the 1987 *Hajj* season. By the Saudi estimate, the clashes led to the death of 275 Iranians, 42 pilgrims from other countries, and 85 Saudi policemen and the injury of over 600; Iran claimed 600 of its pilgrims killed and 4500 injured.²⁰⁸ A contingent of several thousand Revolutionary Guards spearheaded the disturbance, according to non-Iranian eyewitnesses and Saudi officials.²⁰⁹ They aimed to take control of the entrances to the Grand Mosque to hoist portraits of Khomeini and distribute leaflets condemning America, the Eastern bloc, and Iraq. Witnesses recounted in horror how thousands of Iranians blocked pilgrims from leaving or entering the mosque and beat, stabbed, or clubbed anyone who objected to their demonstration.²¹⁰ Khomeini had addressed the Iranian pilgrims days before their departure and blessed their agitations, "Expressing hatred for blasphemers, which is one of the requirements of the Haj, must be carried out through demonstrations and marches."²¹¹ The speech was then repeatedly broadcast to the Mecca compound housing the Iranians up until the disturbance. In conjunction with

²⁰⁸ Associated Press, "Mecca riot bodies leave for Iran," August 6, 1987.

²⁰⁹ *The Sunday Times*, "Mecca - The aftermath," August 9, 1987.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

the rioting, Saudi Arabia arrested scores of Guards posing as pilgrims and trying to smuggle weapons and explosives into Mecca. As a result of the conflagration, Iran boycotted the *Hajj* season in Saudi Arabia for two years and severed diplomatic ties.

The Guard incited the pilgrims and escalated tensions in support of Khomeini's principle of hostility to the Islam of imperialism. From a policy perspective, however, the incident sent a shockwave against the center of Saddam Hussein's chief economic supporter of the war. Iran demonstrated its power to impose instability on Hussein's supporters. Speaking on the officially designated "day of hatred" against the US, Rafsanjani told demonstrators, "We have no doubt that this massacre was undertaken at America's behest in response to its repeated humiliations in the gulf... We, as soldiers of God and implementers of divine principles, oblige ourselves to avenge these martyrs by uprooting Saudi rulers from the region."²¹² In the corridors of a hospital treating victims of the Hajj violence, the Guard conveyed a more revealing message. Its consolatory banners read, "Iranian pilgrims this year have gained the respect of the revolution through giving their blood and their lives on their Muslim fellows all over the world."²¹³ In this sentence revolution takes on a transnational meaning, transcending the vicissitudes of the Iranian national experience. Revolutionary martyrdom is an undertaking conceived for the sake of all Muslims and the sacrifice of Iranians is a means to the grander, pan-Islamic end. The zeal to enact this revolution, however, was limited mostly to Iranians. The cause may have purported to be universal, but in reality, it asserted through violence a peculiarly Iranian interpretation of Islam.

²¹² Presse-Agentur, Deutsche, "Iran Vows to Avenge Pilgrim Deaths in Mecca," *The Washington Post*, August 3, 1987.

²¹³ Paul Keel, "Tehran "heroes" tell of massacre in Mecca," *The Guardian*, August 14, 1987.

In orchestrating a violent response to the “unprovoked” bloodshed in Mecca, the Guard showed a remarkable level of independent control over Iran’s foreign affairs. According to one Iranian diplomat, Iranian Foreign Ministry officials called in Kuwaiti and Saudi diplomats immediately after the Mecca violence and warned that something was about to happen to their embassies in Tehran the next day, but that the ministry was powerless to stop it.²¹⁴ As forecasted by the diplomat, mobs sacked both embassies, killing one Saudi diplomatic official and sowing doubt among foreign diplomats about who sets foreign policy for the government.²¹⁵ A witness said he saw a few of those ransacking the Kuwaiti Embassy give orders to uniformed Guard officers directing the crowds.²¹⁶ This can be interpreted as a sign that those doing the ransacking were themselves higher-ranking Guards, meaning the decision to sack the embassies was, like the *Hajj* episode, premeditated, hence the warning from the Foreign Ministry, and came from high up the Guard’s chain of command. The warning displayed the Foreign Ministry’s opposition to the Guard, which probably instigated the anti-Saudi violence under the aegis of Khamenei, or perhaps unilaterally. Informants told the *Washington Post* around the time of the rioting that Guard units could decide on actions to provoke conflict in the Persian Gulf without a deliberate decision at the top in Tehran, where, according to diplomats, the desire is to avoid hostilities if possible.²¹⁷

The top decision-makers in Tehran, however, typically do not agree or cooperate on policies any better than the Foreign Ministry and the Guard did in 1987. To the

²¹⁴ Cody, “Iran Toughens.”

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Edward Cody, “Iran Toughens Stance Toward West,” *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1987.

surprise of the nation, Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi suddenly resigned from office September 6, 1988. In an exchange of letters between himself and then-president Khamenei, former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi explained his reasons for resigning.²¹⁸ The private letters were obtained in Tehran and released to the British Broadcasting Company—Mousavi subsequently denied their authenticity while Khamenei did not comment. Under the heading of “making the government powerless in foreign policy,” Mousavi bemoaned the large volume of foreign policies deliberated and executed in disregard to his personage. In reference to the Guard’s involvement in Lebanon, he wrote, “When a machine gun goes off in the streets of Beirut and there is news of it everywhere, then I hear about it.” With respect to the Hajj disturbance, he wrote “After explosives are found in the luggage of our pilgrims, I get to know about it...Unfortunately, with all its harmful effects, such operations are being continued every hour and minute in the name of the government.” Mousavi painted a shadowy picture of the decision-making behind Iranian foreign policy. The mentioned anecdotes all involved the Guard. Mousavi insinuated that Rafsanjani and Khamenei together steered these covert policies. He wrote, “Today, the affairs of Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan are in your hands.” To speak of “Iranian goals,” such as Lebanon or now Syria, one runs the risk of wrongly imputing the Iranian government with consensus. More often than not, it appears that certain institutions aligned with individual politicians define Iranian aims at variance with other institutions under other political patronage.

²¹⁸ Patrick E Tyler, “Correspondence Indicates High-Level Rift in Iran,” *The Washington Post*, November 11, 1988.

Lebanon appealed to Iranian revolutionaries before and after 1979 as a place to transplant Islamic Revolution. Many Guard leaders were, in fact, shaped by the milieu of Lebanese militants and Palestinian guerillas in Lebanon prior to the revolution. A slew of the Guard's founders spent time fighting, training, or doing both in Lebanon before the revolution. For example, in his memoirs, Rahim Safavi recounts having trained at a Palestinian camp in Syria in the winter of 1978, where he learned "partisan warfare techniques" that included demolition techniques and the use of chemicals.²¹⁹ After a month of training, Safavi traveled to Lebanon to the Fatah camp in Nabatia and fought Israeli forces at the Litani frontlines.²²⁰ Mohsen Rafighdoost, who served as minister of the Guard throughout the 1980s and played a crucial role in its founding, trained in the Beqaa valley of Lebanon with the PLO.²²¹ The two heads of the Office of Liberation Movements, Mohammed Montazeri and Mehdi Hashemi, also trained in the PLO camps.²²² The Office administered Iranian support to guerillas and revolutionaries throughout the region; as early as December 1979, Mohammed Montazeri led two to three hundred "volunteers" to southern Lebanon to meet up with the PLO and fight against the Israelis.²²³ According to Mohsen Rafighdoost, Montazeri was the first person to propose the creation of the Guard.²²⁴ With the ascendance of these Iranian revolutionaries to a state apparatus, the Guard found fertile ground in Lebanon's unremitting turmoil to cultivate a proxy actor at once responsive to Lebanon's unique crises and loyal to Tehran. The country was a logical destination for a revolutionary

²¹⁹ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 343.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: a short history* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 32.

²²² Lauer, *Transnational Shia*, 179.

²²³ Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, 156.

²²⁴ Meir Javandanfar, "Filling Montazeri's Shoes in Iran," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2009.

expedition. Lebanon is home to a sizable and historically “dispossessed” Shi’i population, fragile or failed governments, adjacent to a friendly state in Syria, and it abuts the borders of Palestine and Israel. This last consideration particularly lured the Guard, since fighting against Israel struck at the foundation of an anti-Islamic, imperialist plot. Khomeini expressed this opinion in a 1978 speech,

The imperialist states, like America and Britain, brought Israel into existence, and we have seen what misery they have inflicted on the Muslim peoples by means of Israel, and what crimes they are now committing against the Muslims, particularly the Shi’a. In Lebanon they install one agent and reduce the country to its present miserable state, and in Egypt they install another, by the name of Sadat, whose every act is devoted to serve imperialism. A short time ago he went to Israel and gave Israel official recognition...The Shah of Iran also says it is necessary to make peace with Israel. In fact, this wretch recognized Israel twenty years ago”²²⁵

Khomeini’s invectives tied the mere act of recognizing Israel to imperialism, a principle which has bound future Iranian leaders to a rejectionist position. Building a military presence on the border with Israel was also expedient geopolitically, as it enabled Iran to menace a key enemy and US client.

The strategic and ideological opportunity at hand in Lebanon precipitated the coming of a highly driven attaché of Guardsmen. Before their entrance into Lebanon though, the Guard had dispatched some five thousand soldiers to Syria in anticipation of a confrontation with the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).²²⁶ Dozens of Guard commanders affirmed their readiness to fight Israel in a communiqué to the Syrian president,

Despite the war which Zionism and the United States have imposed on us through their confidant, Saddam the infidel, who is daily shelling and bombarding our towns and villages killing our innocent men, women and children, we ask our

²²⁵ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, Translated by Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 214.

²²⁶ Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God* (New York: Random House, 2011), 45.

brother Hafiz al-Asad who is a believer and a head of a Muslim nation to permit us to travel to the Golan in order to fight the Zionist enemy at the side of Syrian brothers.²²⁷

Notably, the willingness to open a completely new and unpromising front parallel with the war then engulfing Iran signaled the Guard's dedication to transnational Islam at the grave and admitted expense of national security. Despite this intention, by the time the Guardsmen arrived, the fighting between Assad and Israel had ended.²²⁸ The cessation of Syria-Israeli fighting did not, however, deter 1,500 Guardsmen, drawn mainly from the Office of Liberation Movements, from spreading their doctrine of revolutionary resistance to Lebanon. The residual contingent established a base of operations on the outskirts of Zabadani, a Syrian town also bordering Lebanon.²²⁹ Guard cadres trickled discreetly from Syria into Baalbek, in the Beqaa Valley, to germinate the core group that formed Hizbullah.

The Guard's presence seemed to transform the town into an Iranian satellite almost overnight. Huge, eye-catching murals appeared on walls depicting Shi'i motifs like Imam Hussein in the blood-splattered sands of Karbala, or Khomeini gazing intently at the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and Iranian flags fluttered alongside banners touting "Death to America."²³⁰ The Guard assisted, if not commissioned entirely, the public outreach as it plastered Khomeini's revolutionary slogans around town and put up posters

²²⁷ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, "Iran's Revolution Guards Offer to Fight in the Golan," January 4, 1982.

²²⁸ Blanford, *Warriors*, 44.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Blanford, *Warriors*, 45.

of veiled women to exhibit conservative Shi'i social tenets.²³¹ Clerics employed by the Guard taught classes on the Qur'an and Khomeini's theories of Islam.²³² The town quickly embraced these messages; its main square was renamed after Khomeini and women began to wear the Iranian style black chador.²³³ Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah attested to the intensity of this campaigning, noting that he and his compatriots spent all their energies that first year—instead of fighting—recruiting young men, adding about two thousand to its ranks, and educating the public about the holy struggle against Israel and the West.²³⁴ The Guard set up its first training camp in a valley near Janta. Guard instructors taught weapons handling, delivered religious instruction, and oversaw fitness regimens.²³⁵ In the military portion of training, recruits learned how to operate basic weapons such as the AK-47 rifle, light machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades, and how to plant land mines and move stealthily through rugged terrain.²³⁶ By the third wave of recruits, the Guard delegated basic fitness training to the Lebanese, but still supervised the other courses.²³⁷ Promising recruits were sent to Iran for three-month advanced courses—a training tactic faithfully repeated with Shi'i militants from the fray of the Syrian civil war.²³⁸ Iran offered safe, surveillance-free grounds for training in larger-scale weapons systems such as artillery rockets or anti-aircraft weapons. Advanced recruits usually travelled to Damascus, and then flew to Tehran before being bussed to one of several training camps run by the Guard's Quds Force near Karaj, Isfahan, Qom, or

²³¹ David Ottaway, "Shiites Protest on Eve of Independence Day," *The Washington Post*, November 22, 1982.

²³² Blanford, *Warriors*, 45.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Thanassis Cambanis, *A Privilege to Die* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 105.

²³⁵ Blanford, *Warriors*, 55.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

Tehran. Once Hizbullah acquired the requisite expertise, it could appoint as trainers its own men, who shared the same cultural background and language as the recruits.

Iran's ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, played a principal role in assisting the Guard's creation of Hizbullah. In later years, Mohtashemi would voice the contentious positions shared by that eminently ideological faction of the Guard associated with Hizbullah. In 1983, he allegedly conducted suicide truck bombings against the US marine barracks at Beirut airport and the French paratroop headquarters in southern Beirut on October 23, which killed 241 American servicemen and 58 French soldiers. US military officer Admiral James Lyons later provided testimony that incriminated Iran. He claimed to have intercepted a message between Tehran and Damascus, in which Iran's Ministry of Intelligence Services had directed Mohtashemi to instruct Iranian proxies to attack multinational forces in Lebanon, and "to take spectacular action against the US Marines."²³⁹ At the same trial, evidence was presented that Mohtashemi contacted the Guard's commander in Lebanon, Ahmad Kanani, instructing him to instigate the Marine barracks bombing. According to the testimony of a ranking Hizbullah member, Iranian personnel assisted in manufacturing a truck in an underground warehouse that looked identical to the red dodge truck then delivering water to the barracks. During the attack, the operatives ambushed the real truck and drove their dummy one, laden with specialized, military-grade explosives, equivalent to 15-21,000 pounds of TNT, into the center of the US barracks.²⁴⁰ One of Hizbullah's now-disaffected founders, Sobhi al-

²³⁹ *Peterson v. Islamic Republic of Iran*, 264 F.Supp.2d 46 (2002) (United States District Court, District of Columbia, May 30, 2003).

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Tufayli, later confessed that Hizbullah had planned the attack.²⁴¹ The technical and material sophistication of this attack, as well as Hizbullah's nearly absolute dependency on Iran in 1983 suggest Iranian involvement. When the US declined to retaliate for the attack on the marines, Israel bombed the Guard's camp at Janta on November 16, killing twenty-three Revolutionary Guards and a dozen Lebanese recruits.²⁴²

Hizbullah codified its allegiance to revolutionary Iran in a manifesto explaining its program from 1985. In the opening paragraph, Hizbullah's leaders professed, "We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and *faqih* who fulfills all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini... Our behavior is dictated to us by legal principles laid down by the light of an overall political conception defined by the leading jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*)."²⁴³ The document praised the Iranian revolution, "the Muslims' experience in Islamic Iran left no one any excuse since it proved beyond all doubt that bare chests motivated by faith are capable, with God's help to break the iron and oppression of tyrannical regimes."²⁴⁴ Hizbullah hewed to Khomeini's revolutionary vision. It stressed the need for all the oppressed to "form an international front that encompasses all their liberation movements," and proclaimed "Islam alone is capable of being the idea to resist aggression."²⁴⁵ Hizbullah's objectives reiterated the chief objective of Islamic Revolution, that is, the eradication of imperialism. Hizbullah declared itself in "a state of ever-escalating confrontation" until it achieved the objectives

²⁴¹ Blanford, *Warriors*, 59.

²⁴² Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*, 157.

²⁴³ Hizbullah, "An Open Letter: The Hizballah Program," *cfr.org*, February 16, 1985, (accessed January 12, 2013).

²⁴⁴ Hizballah, "Lebanon: Hizballah Issues 'Open Letter' on Goals, Principles," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, April 19, 1985, 16.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of “Israel’s final departure from Lebanon,” as a “prelude” to its obliteration, and of “The final departure of America, France and their allies in Lebanon and the termination of the influence of any imperialist power in the country.”²⁴⁶

The Islamic Republic had created a satellite revolution that mirrored the agenda of the Islamic Revolution. Hizbullah founder Sobhi al-Tufayli recalled the distinctly transnational flavor of Hizbullah’s early period, “We wanted to...be independent and not have specific influences on the Lebanese scene. We wanted it to be completely dependent on Islamic law and not influenced by nationalist ideologies.”²⁴⁷ Hizbullah’s unreserved commitment to Khomeini separated it from most other Shi’i militant or activist groups, who supported Islamic Revolution, but followed an independent *marja’iyya*. The use of Hizbullah in future years to designate pro-Iranian Shi’i political currents in the Arab peninsula encapsulated this distinction. Hizbullah has become a catchall label for groups of foreign Shi’i militants obsequious to Iran’s supreme leader. The usage does not always refer to a structured organization and may simply encompass individuals who view the Islamic Republic as an ideal model of government and follow the *marja’iyya* of the supreme leader. In the words of a “Hizbullah” figure in Bahrain, “Hizbullah is a concept in Bahrain and an organization in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.”²⁴⁸ Shi’i dissidents in Bahrain accuse their government of promoting the myth of a cohesive Bahraini Hizbullah organization in order to traduce popular and legitimate uprisings.²⁴⁹ As one Gulf Hizbullah member noted, “Hizbullah does not follow the Islamic Republic, it follows the

²⁴⁶ Hizbullah, “Goals, Principles,” 6.

²⁴⁷ Blanford, *Warriors*, 47.

²⁴⁸ Louer, *Transnational Shia*, 205.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 205-206.

wali al-Faqih. It does not follow the President, it follows the Supreme Guide.”²⁵⁰ The identification of the Guard with the supreme leader imparts it legitimacy with which it can lead Lebanese Hizbullah and Gulf Hizbullah cells in operations independent from other branches of government.

In light of Hizbullah’s ideological and material dependence on Iran, its extraterritorial forays into Iraq and Syria are likely coordinated and directed by the Guard. In Syria, for example, Hizbullah has justified its intervention in terms of preventing the nearby violence from spilling over into Lebanon. In September 2013, Reuters cited “regional security officials” who estimated that Lebanese Hizbullah was committing some 2,000-4,000 fighters to Syria.²⁵¹ The types of units have included “elite and special forces” and “reservists” and have engaged in a range of missions, from training for regime regular and irregular forces to directing and advising combat operations. They, along with Guard and Quds agents, have prevented al-Assad’s collapse. Hizbullah’s actions have also invited sectarian bloodletting and political retributions into Lebanon and stretched the country’s social fabric. Hizbullah’s intensive assistance to the Assad government reflects its narrow tactical dependency on the Iran-Syria axis for missiles and supplies. The Syrian war has highlighted its tactical insecurities and forced the party to reaffirm a pro-Tehran stance. During the 2000s, Hizbullah’s political wing toned down its ideological links to Iran. In its 2006 memorandum of understanding with Michel Aoun, the organization stated that “consensual democracy” remains the

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 212.

²⁵¹ Jeffrey White, “Hizb Allah at War in Syria: Forces, Operations, Effects and Implications,” *CTC Sentinel*, January 15, 2014.

“fundamental basis for governance.”²⁵² Paying more homage to nationalist ideas (democracy) improved Hizbullah’s working relationships with other sects, particularly the Christians, but also distanced it from Tehran’s orbit. Hizbullah’s controversial decision to intervene in the Syrian war has reversed this gradual integration into the Lebanese political scene and repolarized Lebanon’s sects.

²⁵² Blanford, *Warriors*, 481.

Chapter Four: The Rise of Pragmatism

The split between Rafsanjani and the Guard over whether to end the war foreshadowed future discord. Rafsanjani, who defined his presidency on the basis of pragmatism, recognized that Iran's economic straits and hefty geopolitical challenges after the war necessitated a change in strategy. He sought to reduce surrounding states' economic and strategic hostility toward Iran in order to facilitate the country's postwar reconstruction. The rhetoric and policy of revolutionary posturing only exacerbated the sense of insecurity of the US and its allies. States that actively opposed the US vision of order found themselves with less leverage than ever and less ability to organize in nonaligned alliances. Opposition to the US now branded a state as rogue more likely than nonaligned. Without the Soviet Union to counterbalance against it, the US could more easily ordain security in the Middle East as it saw fit. Unfortunately for Iran, the US still deeply mistrusted the Islamic Republic. Rather than contract the responsibility for security to it, the US designed a system to contain it. President Bill Clinton initiated a policy of "dual containment" to isolate and sanction Iran and Iraq. US Presidents also invested heavily in the military capabilities of the conservative Gulf States to balance them against Iran and Iraq. As these states received ballooning sums of US military support, Iran's security situation would increasingly deteriorate. The Soviet collapse also vindicated the American ideology of free-markets and liberal democracy and left the US unchallenged to spread it. The fall of the "iron curtain" suddenly imparted a worldwide reach to the liberal order led by the US and formerly confined mostly to Western Europe and Japan. The greater potential for US values to diffuse across the world amplified the

fear among conservatives that Iran would fall victim to cultural onslaught from the West. These structural changes, though slow, uneven, and ongoing, coincided with a new era in the history of the Islamic Republic. The ceasefire with Iraq, and the ambiguous legacy imparted by Khomeini's death in 1989, prompted the regime to question how it could best preserve itself and its principles.

Revolutionary pragmatists such as Rafsanjani and Khatami clashed with radicals over how to adapt Iran to post-Iraq and post-Cold War realities. Pragmatists put national interests far ahead of revolutionary ones. Rafsanjani sought to subjugate Iran's radical aspirations to the "normal" functions of the state. Pragmatists believed in strengthening Iran's geopolitical position by combatting its reputation as a pariah state. A normalized image of the country would hopefully stimulate trade opportunities with the outside world and reduce military tensions with Gulf States and the US. Rafsanjani toned down Iranian rhetoric and soon declared, "Iran must stop making enemies" and refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of others.²⁵³ Rafsanjani ended the practices, such as calling upon oppressed Muslim populations to revolt, which deleteriously affected Iran state-to-state relations. In November 1989, his government organized a major international conference entitled "The Persian Gulf" and announced a new foreign policy toward the Gulf of solidarity and peaceful coexistence.²⁵⁴ He and Khatami, loosely following a policy of *détente*, ceased actions that agitated the regional order and expressed an interest in cooperating with the US as equals. Their policy tacitly accepted

²⁵³Mohsen Milani, "Iran's Gulf Policy: From Idealism and Confrontation to Pragmatism and Moderation," In *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability*, by Jamal Suwaidi (Abu Dhabi: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 91.

²⁵⁴ James Bill, "The Geometry of Instability in the Gulf: The Rectangle of Tension," In *Iran and the Gulf: A Search for Stability*, by Jamal Suwaidi (Abu Dhabi: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 115.

the impotency of the Islamic Revolution to redraw the political order of the Middle East. If anything, they hoped to manifest the ideals of the revolution in the state and prove the success of an Islamic model of government, rather than actively export it. Khamenei backed this shift as well, proclaiming in 1993 that Iran's struggle against oppression "has turned the Islamic Republic into a role model for which the world has respect."²⁵⁵ This shift drew the ire of old guard radicals.

The most hardened radicals, like the cleric Ali Akbar Mohtashami, stayed virulently suspicious of US policy and highly doubted the efficacy of détente to ease tensions with the outside world. In Iran, two arguments permeate the discourse on national security. One posits that greater neutrality toward regional and world adversaries will eventually cause outside powers to stop viewing Iran as a threat. The other posits the opposite conclusion to such a policy. This latter argument assumes the enemies of the Islamic Republic oppose Islam and therefore will not stop opposing Iran until its regime changes. They fear that America and Israel will not stop containing Iran until they reduce it back to the despicable patron-client relationship of the Shah's era. In this sense, if Iran does anything short of projecting and demonstrating formidable strength against its enemies, it might as well auction off its hard-earned independence. The argument equates détente with weakness and stresses the ideological conflict between the US and Iran over the geopolitical one. The US policy of containment, already fraught with illogic, handicapped the rise of pragmatists.²⁵⁶ It confirmed the antithesis of the argument put forward by the pragmatists; namely, that the US would oppose Iran irrespective of

²⁵⁵ Chubin, *Iran's national security policy*, 83.

²⁵⁶ F. Gregory Gause, "The Illogic of Dual Containment," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1994.

changes to its external behavior, and perhaps even oppose it more vehemently. The Guard leadership seemed to waver between these two arguments. Certain leaders endorsed the pragmatic agenda, while others did at first and then did not after it failed to bear fruit. By the end of Khatami's first term, the Guard evinced its opposition to the reformist bloc, which had more or less allied with the pragmatists. The pragmatist approach had failed in foreign affairs and appeared uncomfortably close to the reform movement. These associations ruined its image in the Guard leadership and the Guard proceeded to counter the progressive forces in Iranian society.

Rafsanjani attempted to control the Guard's radical impulses after Khomeini's passing by integrating it with the army. During the war, the Guard had exercised fully independent command and control and established its own network of military workshops, research facilities, and factories, distinct from the regular army.²⁵⁷ President Rafsanjani and his cohort of technocrats rationalized the sprawling system of weapons development and manufacture in 1989 by abolishing the Guard's independent ministry and replacing it with the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL).²⁵⁸ MODAFL coordinates Iran's military-industrial complex and plans the budgets of the two armed forces. The Guard circumvented Rafsanjani's reform by gaining control of an important charitable foundation and by dominating the new ministry. Mohsen Rafighdoost, who led the Guard Ministry from its inception to dissolution, became head of the Oppressed and Disabled Foundation in 1989, which is

²⁵⁷ John Shields, *Military Industries in the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Assessment of the Defense Industries Organization (DIO)*, Monterey: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 1996, 5.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

now the second largest company in Iran, behind only the state-owned National Iranian Oil Company. The foundation continued to fund Guard enterprises in place of the Guard Ministry and its overseas franchises served as fronts for Guard operations.²⁵⁹ However, in order to safeguard his integration effort, Rafsanjani appointed Akbar Torkan head of MODAFL. Torkan was seen as a pragmatic, he had formerly held a significant position in the army's Defense Industries Organization (DIO) and was an engineer by training.²⁶⁰ One of Torkan's first actions was to centralize weapons procurement and logistical command.²⁶¹ 1995 legislation supportive of Rafsanjani's policies clarified that military equipment impossible to produce domestically must be purchased from abroad exclusively through MODAFL, a direct challenge to the Guard's practice of cultivating foreign military-to-military relations independent of the army.²⁶² The centralization of supply, logistics, and command in the Iranian military hypothetically reduced the Guard's freedom to formulate its own strategy significantly.

The Guard asserted control of MODAFL when Rafsanjani's presidency ended and has retained it more or less since then. Every head of MODAFL since Akbar Torkan has made his career through the Guard.²⁶³ From 2009-2013, former Quds Commander Ahmad Vahidi, who incidentally was implicated in the 1994 bombing of a Buenos Aires Jewish center, led the organization. Brigadier General Mostafa Mohammad, who managed MODAFL from 2005-2009, served in Lebanon among other positions. Major General Ali Shamkhani led MODAFL from 1997-2005 and rose to prominence as a

²⁵⁹ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, "Iran Report," June 21, 1999.

²⁶⁰ Shields, *Military Industries*, 7.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁶³ Will Fulton, "Rouhani's Cautious Pick for Defense Minister," *Al Monitor*, August 13, 2013.

Guard commander in the Iran-Iraq war and later concurrently led the Guard and army navies. The current head of MODAFL is Brigadier General Hossein Dehghan, whom Rouhani selected after reportedly having his initial pick, a pragmatist named Hossein Alaei, rejected by Khamenei. Like all his predecessors, Dehghan joined the Guard shortly after the revolution and served in various distinguished leadership roles. In 1982, for example, he deployed to the Levant to command the Guard's Lebanon and Syria contingents for two years.²⁶⁴ Dehghan later served as Shamkhani's deputy in MODAFL for six years under the Khatami administration.²⁶⁵ Analysts see him as more pragmatic than his predecessor, Vahidi, and as representing a conservative compromise between pragmatic-minded elements of the Rouhani administration and regime stalwarts. The Guard has monopolized control of MODAFL in order to support its foreign policy aims. In 2007, the US sanctioned MODAFL for its role in procuring centrifuges and leading ballistic missile research, development, and production.²⁶⁶ The Treasury Department more recently charged a chain of companies linked to MODAFL with providing the Syrian government fuel, fuses, charges, aluminum, and other goods necessary for the production of mortar projectiles, rockets, and missiles—weapons which have been used on Syrian civilians.²⁶⁷

Rafsanjani attempted to further mesh the Guard and army in 1992 when he merged them under the Armed Forces Joint Staff (also known as the General Staff of the

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Treasury Department, "Fact Sheet: Designation of Iranian Entities and Individuals for Proliferation Activities and Support for Terrorism," *www.treasury.gov*. October 25, 2007 (accessed April 7, 2014).

²⁶⁷ Treasury Department, "Treasury Designates Entities Linked to Iran's Weapons Program," *www.treasury.gov*, December 12, 2012 (accessed April 7, 2014).

Combined Armed Forces), which made the Guard commander hypothetically subordinate to the joint staff chief. Decision-making in Iran, however, rarely adheres to the form it takes in legislation. Personal connections and reputations influence policymaking much more than do formal chains of command. Major decisions require consensus and, most importantly, the approval of the *faqih*. The Guard needs only to brandish its ideological credentials to bypass figures such as Akbar Torkan who have nominal control over organizational facets of the Guard. Iranian political analyst Wilfried Buchta argued that although the Guard commander is theoretically subordinate to the Joint Staff, he has always functioned independently of it.²⁶⁸ He understood the creation of the Joint Staff as primarily a way to control the regular army, whose highest-ranking officer had been under the command of the Joint Staff Chief Hassan Firouzabadi since 1995. Firouzabadi, who fought as a Guard commander during the war, is still the joint staff chief. Firouzabadi maintains a radical tenor, in harmony with the Guard's ideological principles. As recently as May 2012, he publicly insisted that "The Iranian nation is standing for its cause that is the full annihilation of Israel" and that threats and sanctions would not deter the Islamic Republic from "its revolutionary causes and ideals."²⁶⁹ Firouzabadi does not appear interested in denaturing the Guard or in acting out of step with the wider Guard leadership. The May 2000 resignation of commander-in-chief of the regular army Ali Shahbazi-Zolqadr illuminated the extent of Firouzabadi's slant toward the Guard. Shahbazi disagreed with Firouzabadi's hawkish anticipation of escalating border clashes with Iraq and his tolerance of the Guard's encroachment into

²⁶⁸ Wilfried Buchta, *Who rules Iran? : the structure of power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), 147.

²⁶⁹ Rachel Hirshfeld, "Iranian Commander Reiterates Need to Annihilate 'Zionist Regime'," *Israel National News*, May 21, 2012.

duties designated to the army.²⁷⁰ The London daily added that Shahbazi disagreed with MODAFL Minister Ali Shamkhani about favoritism for the Guard, and he demanded that a greater proportion of the defense budget be allocated to the regular military.²⁷¹ The Guard appeared in tight control of positions that Rafsanjani intended to be impartial and professional.

To complement the creation of the Joint Staff in 1992, Iran passed the “Complete Regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran Armed Forces,” which codified the principles of Iran’s military doctrine. The regulations defined the goals of Iran’s postwar security doctrine as protecting the independence, territorial integrity, and regional interests of the regime, the regime itself, and “Muslim or oppressed nations that are not hostile to Islam.”²⁷² The regulations enumerated the general conditions of military employment, which apply to both the regular army and the Guard. The first three conditions of employment are, in descending order of importance, “belief in the religion of Islam;” citizenship; and, “Faith in the Islamic revolution and the regime of the Islamic Republic and readiness to self-sacrifice to achieve their goals.”²⁷³ The first condition makes clear that religion serves as the unit of loyalty in the Iranian armed forces, above citizenship. The third condition reinforces that point and the list does not explicitly include loyalty to the Iranian nation-state, although having faith in the Islamic regime implies this. The overall point of these conditions is to elevate the Islamic qualities of Iran above its national qualities, so that its soldiers love Iran for its dedication to Islam, rather loving

²⁷⁰ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Iran Report,” August 14, 2000.

²⁷¹ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Iran Report,” August 14, 2000.

²⁷² *US Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, “Iran: Complete Regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran Armed Forces,” Near East and South Asia Supplement, October 27, 1994, 15.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 20.

Iran in and of itself. The effect of these conditions presumably helps preserve the state. Loving Islam necessarily means placing loyalty in the Islamic Republic, because according to its idealized image, the Islamic Republic embodies the will of God. Military competency was also linked with “spiritual discipline stemming from the belief and faith of the personnel,” a theme expanded on in the regulations for the Guard.²⁷⁴

Employment conditions for the Guard exceed the general conditions in their religious stringency. The employment regulation for the Guard declares as its first three conditions “Belief in the principles of pure Mohammadan Islam, the Islamic revolution, and the regime of the Islamic Republic;” “Belief in and practical obligation to religious guardianship;” and, “Practical obligation to observe Islamic laws and the laws of the Islamic Republic and observance of Islamic moral standards.”²⁷⁵ This set of conditions requires Guard cadres to follow Islamic laws more seriously than their army counterparts and strives to distinguish them by testing them against higher moral and religious standards. If higher religious devotion logically equals higher loyalty to the state, then the Guard outstrips the army in regime fealty. These regulations conferred on the Guard a special religious and revolutionary status; “Official guards refers to the personnel who are employed by the Guard Corps to fight on the path of God and for the guarding and armed defense of the Islamic revolution, its gains, and the regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”²⁷⁶ Later in the regulations, the Guard is made responsible for publishing (hardline) journals, holding training camps, field trips, and short instructional courses “in order to

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 77.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 76.

strengthen the ideological-political training perspective” of its members.²⁷⁷ The process of demilitarization after the war clearly preserved the duality in Iran’s armed forces, imbuing the Guard with a heavily ideological quality and upholding the army’s professional characteristics. This most basic ideological-professional difference was also reflected in the division of labor between the two.

The regulations revealed the principles undergirding the armed forces as a whole and the duties that differentiate the Guard and army. In defining the “principles and basic characteristics of the Armed Forces,” the regulations enumerate “Being Islamic” first.

They then expound this:

In organizing and equipping the Armed Forces, the precept is Islamic ideology. All aspects and dimensions are governed by religious rules and regulations. The Armed Forces have as their duty the ideological mission of holy war [jihad] in the path of God, following the moral principles of Islam, and respect for the human dignity of individuals.²⁷⁸

The list ends with the principle of defense, which is defined as defending against any sort of aggression against the country, punishing and suppressing the aggressor, and “while believing in the principle of nonaggression help Muslim nations or the oppressed nations that are not hostile to Islam in self defense.”²⁷⁹ This principle accords with the Shi’i doctrine of *jihad*, which legitimizes military means for the defense, not offense, of Islam. As it was during the Iran-Iraq war, self-defense is yet again defined religiously rather than territorially. Affronts to Islam as much as national threats warrant Iranian military action that to the Western observer looks more like an act of intervention given its extra-territorial dimensions. The regulations define the central mission of the army as

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 82.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 15.

confronting any military aggression against the “independence, territorial integrity, and regime...or the interests of the country,” but also includes as its tertiary mission “Readiness to cooperate with the Guard Corps in helping Muslim nations and oppressed nations who are not hostile to Islam in the world to defend themselves against military threat and aggression.”²⁸⁰ This presents a dichotomy assigning the duty of national defense to the army and the duty of Islamic “defense” to the Guard. The regulations demonstrate that despite Rafsanjani’s reforms, the Guard managed to remain an ideological organization with legal authority to pursue an Islamic foreign policy agenda, whereby it could defend oppressed Muslims or peoples outside of Iran’s border.

The substantively weak outcome of Rafsanjani’s reform means the Guard probably put up a significant fight against the president. The Kuwaiti press reported two assassination attempts by the Guard against Rafsanjani in January and June of 1990—these reports can be neither confirmed nor refuted.²⁸¹ They appear plausible at least in the context of the Guard’s other designs against Rafsanjani. In the years following the war, the Guard supported his internal political opponents, rejected his push for integration, and exported the revolution in contradiction with his efforts to normalize the Islamic Republic’s foreign relations. It stayed stubbornly active in Lebanon and branched off to a lesser extent in Sudan in 1990.²⁸² Two years after the ceasefire, the Guard and regular Navy Commander, Ali Shamkhani, nearly embroiled Iran in another conflict when he threatened to prevent Iraqi warships from sailing in the Persian Gulf.²⁸³ The threat came

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

²⁸¹ Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 170.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, 173.

amid Rafsanjani's concerted effort to advance a final peace settlement with Iraq. Notwithstanding these radical positions, the Guard demonstrated increased pragmatism more generally.

In matters that elicited an ideological response, but at the immense peril of national security, the Guard sided with the interests of the state. When the US targeted Iraq for its invasion of Kuwait in the Gulf War, the Guard agreed with Rafsanjani's pragmatic approach, as it had during the Iran-Contra affair. The revolutionary principle of anti-Americanism dictated a violent reaction to the entry of US forces into the Persian Gulf. Iran and Iraq could have coordinated a punishing counterattack to the US invasion; indeed, Hussein implored his former enemies to do so. Either country possessed the military resources to close the Strait of Hormuz, which would have hindered the deployment of an expeditionary army to the Arabian Peninsula, and wreak havoc on GCC ports and merchant ships. A stinging attack on US forces and economic interests may have deterred the US from establishing beachheads in the Persian Gulf and accomplished the goal of expelling US forces from Iran's vicinity. Ayatollah Mohtashami voiced this perspective. He demanded a vigorous anti-American response, calling for attacks by Muslim forces on foreign ships in the Gulf as well as on the palaces of the ruling royal families in the region.²⁸⁴ He suggested "we must take advantage of Muslim animosity to the US" to execute plans "for violent confrontation," and declared, "From this moment, we must begin to prepare for holy war against the United States." Mohtashemi blamed the US for aspiring "to expand and consolidate" its hold on the region and "to gain

²⁸⁴ David Menashri, *Iran*, Vol. 14, in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, by Ami Ayalon (Tel Aviv: West View Press, 1990), 374.

complete political, economic, and cultural sway over the Islamic countries of the Middle East.”²⁸⁵ Mohtashami did not spare Hussein his vitriol either, but he emphasized that preventing the US from physically establishing itself “in the wake of the crushing of Iraq” mattered most. Majles Speaker Mehdi Karrubi added that the deployment of forces in the Gulf “aimed to confront the smashing waves of the Islamic revolution, weaken resistance of Hizbullah forces in the world, and stabilize the balance of power in the interest of the Zionist[s].”²⁸⁶

The ideological soundness of this anti-US position certainly appealed to the most radical currents in the Guard and even impelled some to undertake rogue action. As Washington deployed troops to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in preparation for conflict, mutinous units of the Guard, allegedly with the blessing of Ahmad Khomeini, attempted to launch missile attacks against coalition forces to embroil Iran into the war. Rezai ordered other loyal Guards to rush to the missile battery at Khorramshahr to prevent the firing of the missiles.²⁸⁷ While this action would have satisfied radical principles, it could well have spelled out doom for the Iranian state. The US was at the height of its power in 1991, and could easily and perhaps gladly have dealt the Islamic Republic a lethal blow. In this case, pragmatism ensured the survival of the state. Only the most radical revolutionaries could endorse decisions that jeopardized the state, and, by extension, the basis of their revolution. This faction has never been powerful enough to influence decision-making in matters of crucial national security. Years later, however, Rafsanjani fell out of favor with Khamenei and Guard leaders. In the summer of 1994, a blistering

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 49.

power struggle roiled underneath the surface. Rafsanjani's initiatives to soften the radical image of the Islamic Republic had over-extended into the Guard. Guard leaders reportedly purged some 4,000 officers who composed a pro-Rafsanjani faction.²⁸⁸ The unprecedented decision followed months of unrest and strengthened the relationship between Khamenei and senior Guard leaders, unified by ideology, outlook, and mutual suspicion of the self-aggrandizing Rafsanjani.

Rafsanjani lost favor among the political elite because his shift in policy did not manifest any marked improvements in Iran's international standing. Khamenei allowed Rafsanjani to test the first hypothesis. US policies, however, seemed to discredit it. A declassified CIA report explaining an uptick in Iranian surveillance of US diplomatic and military facilities in 1995 cited several US policies that prompted Iran to distrust the policy of *détente*. These included a US military buildup in the Gulf in October 1994, which was intended to counter Iraqi moves, but was misinterpreted by Tehran as a signal of US opposition to Iran's stance on the disputed islands of Abu Musa, and Greater and Lesser Tunb, public statements by the speaker of the house in February 1995 that US policy should aim at overthrowing the Iranian government together with the introduction of legislation to tighten sanctions on Iran, the decision in May 1995 to base the US 5th fleet in Bahrain, and press reports that the US Congress had allocated \$20 million for covert action against Iran.²⁸⁹ These US policies accelerated the Guard's opposition to Rafsanjani's agenda.

²⁸⁸ Safa Haeri, "Tehran 'purges 4,000 guards'," *The Independent*, July 18, 1994.

²⁸⁹ CIA, "Iranian Surveillance of US Persons and Facilities in 1995," *www.foia.cia.gov*, (accessed March 13, 2014).

Near the end of Rafsanjani's presidency, the Guard initiated a lethal attack against a high-rise apartment complex housing hundreds of US airmen. In June 1996, Saudi terrorists loaded 5,000 tons of plastic explosives into a sewage tanker truck and parked the vehicle outside of the apartment complex. The bomb blast tore a crater 85 feet wide into the ground and blew out the entire side of the nearest apartment building. The blast left 19 US airmen dead; the same day, the US blamed Saudi Hizbullah, a pro-Khomeini terrorist organization with links to the Guard. After a three-year investigation, the US concluded that the Guard played a direct role in the bombing. The attack reversed the progress made by Rafsanjani in deconstructing Iran's reputation in the Gulf as revolutionary saboteur. Although the attack was obviously aimed at the US and not at triggering a wave of Shi'i unrest, it signified that Iran, or at least powerful parts of it, still identified with a radical, violent, anti-US program. Terrorist attacks periodically backed by Iran have been intended to symbolize the nation's persistent dedication to revolutionary principle, even if those responsible represent only a fraction of the overall state and population. These revolutionary outbursts often disrupt long periods of pragmatic behavior to prevent the latter from completely enveloping the state, and, as seen by radicals, from eclipsing the revolution. Neighboring states have mistaken this strategic incoherence for revolutionary, expansionist designs to control the whole region. From this perspective, diplomatic overtures look like duplicitous initiatives meant to disguise the regime's inextricable goal of revolution.

The court indictment of the defendants in the Khobar Towers bombing implied an Iranian role but found insufficient evidence to make a direct accusation. Among the 13 indicted, 12 were members of Saudi Hizbullah and one was an unidentified Lebanese

national. The court document associated two of the Saudis in particular with the Iranian government. Ali Al-Houri, a major recruiter for Saudi Hizbullah who spoke fluent Persian, “acted as a liaison for the party with the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria, which was an important source of logistics and support for Saudi Hizbullah members traveling to and from Lebanon.”²⁹⁰ Another defendant, Hani Al-Sayegh also actively recruited young Saudi men and arranged military training in Lebanon and Iran, in addition to a role in carrying out terrorist attacks. Also fluent in Persian, Al-Sayegh “enjoyed an unusually close association with certain military elements of the Iranian government.”²⁹¹ The indictment noted that recruiters measured loyalty to Iran and dislike for the Saudi government as key criteria and used the Sayyeda Zeinab shrine as a place to meet malcontent Saudi Shi’is.²⁹²

Noticeably, the indictment did not bring any charges against Guard personnel. It did, however, accuse it of directing Saudi Hizbullah’s surveillance in 1995 of American sites in eastern Saudi Arabia.²⁹³ In late 1994, a Saudi Hizbullah cell “recognized and confirmed Khobar Towers as an important American military location.”²⁹⁴ Soon thereafter, one of the defendants reported having received a phone call “from a high Iranian government official inquiring about the progress of their surveillance activity.”²⁹⁵ The indictment alleges a close level of cooperation between the Iranian government and Saudi Hizbullah up until the final months leading to the bombing. At that point, the

²⁹⁰ The National Security Archive, “Document 5: Indictment of Defendants in the Khobar Towers Bombing, US District Court, Eastern District of Virginia,” *www2.gwu.edu*, June 21, 2001 (accessed April 12, 2014), 3.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Guard effectively obscured yet maintained command of the cell or distanced itself from the operation without forestalling the attack. Either way, the Guard prepared the Saudi militants to conduct the attack, providing them resources, training, and intelligence, and may or may not have actually commissioned it. Around June 1999, President Clinton wrote a confidential letter to President Khatami in which he professed to have “credible evidence that members of the [Guard], along with members of Lebanese and Saudi Hezbollah, were directly involved in the planning and execution of the terrorist bombing...of the Khobar Towers.”²⁹⁶ An Iranian source trusted by the White House divulged that Clinton enclosed with the letter documents and satellite photographs of terrorists living in Iran, including two leaders of Saudi Hezbollah.²⁹⁷ The evidence, however, did not bear out any legal charges against Iranian officials or retaliation.

In the Khobar incidence, the Guard showed internal and external adversaries its ability to counter the swelling tide of pragmatism inside Iran. Such provocations come few and far between because of the considerable risk and political costs they incur. Khamenei and other political patrons support such operations on a strictly limited scale. Given the likelihood of unacceptable economic and military punishments, Tehran simply cannot afford to endorse sustained revolutionary behavior. Actions like Khobar are permitted, especially at moments of acute vulnerability, because they show Iran’s power to hit at the heart of the sovereign territory of its adversaries. Iran’s reputation for executing well-planned, dangerous terrorist attacks complements its overall military doctrine of asymmetric warfare. It wants Israel and the US to know, for example, that a

²⁹⁶ The National Security Archive, “Document 2: Message to President Khatami from President Clinton,” www2.gwu.edu, undated, circa June 1999 (accessed April 12, 2014).

²⁹⁷ The National Security Archive, “Document 4: White House E-mail, “Clinton Urges Iran to Detain Hamas Leaders”,” www2.gwu.edu, September 10, 1999 (accessed April 12, 2014).

strike on its nuclear facilities will be reciprocated by possible terrorist attacks against US and Israeli targets in the region. Iran's terrorist operations rely on ideology for purposes of recruitment and loyalty. But their aim is undoubtedly to pressure or deter enemies—not to incite revolution. Still, such attacks are ideological insofar as they confront enemies of the revolution. Anti-US terrorism like the bombings of Khobar and the Beirut Marine Barracks obviously raise the costs to the US of maintaining a heavy military presence in the Persian Gulf and often do so without immediately severe consequences. The revolutionaries responsible for their coordination can understand them as part of a plan to expel US military forces from the region. Indeed, President Reagan withdrew US forces from Lebanon a year after the attack, under Congressional pressure directly attributable to the barracks bombing. Outcomes like this create security voids for Iran to fill and propagate its revolutionary ideology within.

The leadership of the Guard clarified its political loyalties in reaction to the election of reformist president Mohammad Khatami. Defining Iran's revolutionary values is a fluid and perennially inconclusive process because, after all, the revolutionaries themselves represented an array of ideologies. The victorious clerical faction founded the new state according as much as possible, though not completely, to its idiosyncratic beliefs, which did not necessarily enjoy broad popularity. They hoped to rekindle the relevance of the *umma* in the modern political context by using the state to serve transnational interests of the Muslim community. God intended for Islamic countries to follow this path all along, but oppressive rulers and wicked *akhunds* (Muslim clergymen) have distorted the Prophet Muhammad's message "to justify acts of tyranny by the

enemies of God.”²⁹⁸ In his last will, Khomeini asserted that God sent the Qur’an to the Prophet Muhammad “to institute the rule of justice and equity and to confer sovereignty to the Infallible and divine authorities...that they in turn hand over such divine sovereignty to qualified worthy persons.”²⁹⁹ In his theoretical tract on Islamic government, Khomeini explicated the ideal Islamic form of the legislative branch. “In Islam the legislative power and competence to establish laws belongs exclusively to God Almighty...It is for this reason that in an Islamic government, a simple planning body takes the places of the legislative assembly.”³⁰⁰

The constitution synthesized two divergent lines of thought about the future of Iran’s political order. The country seemed to waffle between placing sovereignty with popularly elected legislative and executive bodies, on the one hand, and, on the other, a single religious authority. The new political order embodied this indecision. The constitution itself obfuscates the exact locus of Iran’s national sovereignty. Article six, for example, requires that the affairs of the country be “administered on the basis of public opinion expressed by the means of election” yet article three establishes “continuous leadership of the holy persons, possessing the necessary qualifications...upon all...” The constitution tied legal authority to religion, but also made democratic participation an indivisible part of the government’s legitimacy. In other words, the *faqih*’s authority to supervise all major facets of state power was worthless without mass participation. The pro-popular consent faction incorporated enough ambiguity into the constitution to question its emphasis on Islamic order and divine, as

²⁹⁸ Khomeini, “The Last Message,” 5.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 55-56.

opposed to popular, sovereignty. The possibility of reform has always exuded significant appeal, because of these ingrained contradictions, to all strata in Iran. During the late 1990s, the Guard decisively threw its weight behind the conservative clerical order in spite of President Khatami's popular mandate to introduce reforms. Its role in social and political repression virtually ended the reform movement and has severely stunted its growth since then.

The Guard high command opposed strengthening party politics and the electoral process. During the 1996 election season, Guard Commander Mohsen Rezai emphatically supported Khatami's opponent Nateq-Nuri. After being elected, Khatami refused to cooperate and officially meet with him and pressuring Khamenei to replace him.³⁰¹ Khamenei obliged and replaced Rezai with his reportedly less antagonistic deputy, Yahya Rahim-Safavi.³⁰² To Khatami's disappointment, Safavi took an equally reactionary stance against reform. Several weeks before his dismissal, Rezai expressed the gravity with which the Guard leadership, unlike the public, opposed US-Iran relations. He published a passionate appeal—apparently not approved by Khamenei or Rafsanjani—arguing for the creation of an anti-American front comprised of Syria and Iraq.³⁰³ His proposal illustrated the extremity of his anti-US attitude. His rationale for prosecuting the war against Iraq presumably followed a similar logic; if revolutionary Iran could sweep a US puppet out of power, then it could install a similarly anti-US ruler in his place. Once the Gulf War irreversibly wrinkled relations between the two nations, he surely recognized a partner in Hussein. Creating an Islamic Republic in Iraq was secondary to

³⁰¹ Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 124.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

the goal of spreading anti-US policy across the region. Perhaps he believed no Islamic Revolution could take place without the expulsion of US influence. His glib readiness to embrace a sworn enemy of the revolution, to say nothing of Hussein's record of cruelty and devastation against the Iranian people, startled many. His proposal of Iran-Iraq cooperation only further alienated the Guard leadership from the rank-and-file.

In the summer of 1999 the Guard exemplified loyalty to the clerical order. In July, the regime closed a popular liberal newspaper, which triggered a minor demonstration at Tehran University. In reaction, members of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF), a constabulary police force closely connected to the Guard, and Ansar-e Hizbullah, a paramilitary outfit also associated with the Guard, stormed the dormitory. The hardliners killed an undetermined number of students and arrested several hundred others.³⁰⁴ Afterward, as many as ten thousand students protested in the streets and inspired student associations to act in kind in other major cities. The LEF and Basij violently dispersed the protestors and organized counterdemonstrations across Iran's urban landscape. Armed units of the Guard, Basij, and LEF soon imposed order by aggressively patrolling university quarters and central areas of Tehran.³⁰⁵ The protests sufficiently scared the Guard leadership into sending Khatami a letter raising the possibility of a military coup in July 1999. A week later, the letter was leaked, probably by the Guard, to the press. The signatories attacked the president for his laxity against those who "disrupt security and order" and warned that "if you do not make a Revolutionary decision today and do not fulfill your Islamic and national mission, tomorrow will be so late, and the problems so

³⁰⁴ Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 188.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

unsolvable, that it will be unimaginable.” They threatened, “our patience has come to an end, and we will not permit ourselves any more tolerance in the face of your inaction.”³⁰⁶ The Guard’s letter silenced the president and almost led to his resignation. The same day that Khatami received the Guard’s letter, his own defense minister and former Guard commander Ali Shamkhani abandoned him. At this critical juncture, he said on state television on July 13, 1999, “forces loyal to the values of the revolution...will restore full security...at any cost.”³⁰⁷

Safavi denigrated Khatami’s efforts to furnish dialogue and mutual understanding with former regional adversaries and the US. Speaking to senior Guard navy commanders in April 1998, he asked, “Can we withstand American threats and [America’s] domineering attitude with a policy of détente? Can we foil dangers coming from [America] through dialogue between civilizations?”³⁰⁸ In the same speech, Safavi castigated the president’s liberal inclinations. An opposition newspaper published by Banisadr quoted Safavi as saying, “I have made Supreme Leader Khamenei aware that there is a new form of hypocrisy disguised by the clergy. They are pure hypocrites, who claim to be implementing the law, but in truth are doing the opposite. Some of them should be beheaded or have their tongues torn out.”³⁰⁹ In the summer of 1998, the MEK took credit for a destabilizing series of assassinations and bombings against the Guard.³¹⁰ Using them as a pretext, the Guard’s intelligence department in the following weeks

³⁰⁶ *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps*, “IRGC Commanders’ Letter to Khatami,” *Princeton University*, May 24, 2010, www.princeton.edu (accessed April 15, 2014).

³⁰⁷ Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2007), 25.

³⁰⁸ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 27

³⁰⁹ Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 143.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

apprehended four renowned Iranian literary figures and journalists while other officials arrested a group of Baha'is and executed one for proselytizing.³¹¹ The Guard deliberately targeted Baha'is in order to radicalize Iran's international image, which Khatami had struggled to improve. Regime-sanctioned violence abounded. On January 15, 1999, for example, a group of one hundred members of Ansar-e Hizbullah cried "death to the enemies of the *velayat-e faqih*" as they stormed the Friday prayer session of a liberal cleric and beat his supporters with iron bars.³¹² The Guard also appears to have commissioned a slew of assassinations against the opposition.³¹³

Notwithstanding Safavi's disavowal of *détente*, other less radical Guard leaders defended the utility of neutrality in improving Iran's foreign affairs. Although he sympathized with the Guard position against Khatami in the summer of 1999, Shamkhani supported his vision for Iran's overall military doctrine. Khatami appointed Shamkhani head of MODAFL in 1997, an act which curbed his earlier proclivity for radicalism. In an interview from 2000, Shamkhani stated,

Although we are not necessarily hostile toward the West, we have never had a conciliatory approach and we have never defined our relations with the West on the basis of ties of dependency... We can have [relationships of] mutual interdependence with other countries, such as Russia, China or regional countries...this type of relationship is based on safeguarding the national interests of the two countries involved without any interference from a third party and within the framework of international norms and conventions...Our defence policy, our military doctrine, our training and education, our structural organization and defence industry are dependent on our policy of *detente*.³¹⁴

³¹¹ Ibid., 145.

³¹² Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 177.

³¹³ Ibid., 169.

³¹⁴ *BBC Monitoring Service*, "Iran: Defence minister interviewed on Iran's defence policy," *Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network*. December 30, 2000.

Shamkhani's arc from radical to more pragmatic reflected a process of limiting actionable revolutionary principles. Commanders typically moved from an expansive, ambitious, optimistic faith in the ability of the Islamic Republic to realize its revolutionary principles to a more modest outlook. Shamkhani pared his obligations to protecting the power of *velayat-e faqih*, preserving Iran's independence, and probably some form of defensive *jihad*. Shamkhani represents somewhat of an exception, however, given his dependency on Khatami's political patronage. Bound by Khatami's power of appointment and dismissal, he had little choice but to agree with the president.

The Guard's heavy-handed treatment of the reform movement failed to yield results as reformists swept the February 2000 parliamentary elections. The Guard ratcheted up its opposition and began to act upon the threat it made in the July 1999 open letter. It realized that nothing short of intervention into the political arena would stave off reform. After the Guardian Council annulled most of the results from the parliamentary elections, a confidential source spread a rumor that the Guard's intelligence branch in conjunction with Quds were collaborating with arch-conservative clerics to oust Khatami. Credence for this rumor grew after the April 16 publication of a Guard statement that, "if necessary, our enemies, be they small or large, will feel the reverberating impact of the hammer of the Islamic revolution on their skulls and the impact will be so strong that they will never be able to engage in hatching plots or committing crimes."³¹⁵ The statement connected reform with imperialism and with apostasy. It described the

³¹⁵ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, "Iran Report," October 2, 2000.

“champions of American-style reforms in Iran” as “atheists fighting God.”³¹⁶ A week or so later, an unnamed reformist provided Reuters a recording of a Guard meeting in which plans for the coup was made. Preliminary steps included jailing reformists and slandering them as foreign agents, closing reformist publications to interrupt the flow of information, and convincing Khamenei of the danger to the system. Other steps included disrupting the Tehran bazaar and the seminaries to gain the support of senior clerics, harassing intellectuals, and using terror against Khatami supporters.³¹⁷ These threats cowed Khatami into freezing his support for the reform movement, which killed its momentum. To expand its role in the political realm, the Basij command announced its intention to recruit 15 million new members and to arm all full-time Basij members. Basij commanders encouraged “ordinary” Basij members to be politically active, code for acting like anti-reform vigilantes. The Guard was also slated to grow from 1,000 to 1,500 battalions by the end of 2000.³¹⁸

For Safavi and other Guard leaders, a slide in the direction of reform was a slippery slope to Western-style democracy. They associated corruption and immorality with any forms based on national, popular sovereignty, unfettered by the supreme guidance of a religious leader. The people would tragically forfeit Iran’s authentic, Muslim identity and revert back to depending as the Shah did on slightly different but still Western models. Western themes such as free speech and liberty were the first needles to unwind the fabric of Iran’s Islamic Revolution. A reformist who writes an

³¹⁶ Meir Litvak, *Iran*. Vol. 24, in *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, by Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2000), 215.

³¹⁷ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Iran Report,” April 17, 2000.

³¹⁸ Litvak, *Iran*, 220.

exposition of civil liberties may wind up in short time condemning of the institutions that may circumscribe them with impunity. After Khatami's first election, Rezai defended his activism against the president:

It is very difficult for the IRGC men who obey the instructions of the Vali to see that there are persons among the associates of the president-elect who question the concept of absolute guardianship of the Valiy-e Faqih and even dare to consider the vote of the people above that of the Leader. In the meantime, Iran is the land of the "Imam of the Time" and speaking about national sovereignty and man-made laws vis-à-vis the Divine laws, had made the dear Islamic Guards seriously concerned.³¹⁹

An underlying assumption in the constitution of the Islamic Republic is that there exists a higher principle derived from God's will against which man-made laws can be compared. To believers, God is eternally good and so a principle that expresses his nature will qualify human laws as good. Khomeini asserted that only the most eminent religious scholars, e.g. the *faqih*, have the ability to discern divine laws and then apply them to particular human laws. Removing that fulcrum of religious interpretation from the legislative process would isolate human laws from their reference to the divine. It logically follows that the absolute guardianship of the *faqih* forms the truest basis of justice on earth. In addition to the deep ideological implications of reform, Safavi and other commanders fear its consequences for their own power. The Guard's authority rests almost solely upon the good graces and trust of the *faqih*. A reformist victory would weaken the Guard's clerical benefactors and therefore contract its power.

Reformists threatened to eviscerate the Islamic Republic of its Islamic character by proposing to transfer authority to the hands of the people. To Khomeini's adherents,

³¹⁹ Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Neoconservatives*, 20.

the crowning achievement of the Islamic Revolution was not the creation of a republic, but the imposition of a religious framework upon it. As long as the government operated within the bounds of the *shari'a* and under supervision by the *faqih*, the Islamic essence of the revolution remained intact. Khomeini explained the government schema in a 1978 interview: “By ‘republic’ it is meant the same types of republicanism as they are at work in other countries. However, this Republic is based on a constitution which is Islamic. The reason we call it the Islamic Republic is that all conditions for the candidates as well as all rules, are based on Islam...The regime will be a Republic just like one anywhere else.”³²⁰ The authority of a clerical body to vet candidates and veto irreligious laws composed the bedrock of the state’s Islamic structure. The constitution of the Islamic Republic endowed clerics with the ultimate and final say over Iranian politics—with a primary, although not complete degree of sovereignty. The schismatic convulsions of the reform period grappled with the question of sovereignty. Did final legal power rest with and come from the people or the clergy? The issue of reform ultimately reduced to a yes or no vote of confidence in the ability of the Islamic Republic—and Islam in general—to enact its ideals in the political arena.

The Guard crushed the reform movement because it threatened to compromise non-negotiable principles of the Islamic Republic. Safavi addressed this problem head on in May 2002, when he accused reformists of separating the government from its religious and revolutionary aspect and creating doubts and hesitation in the principles of the order of the Islamic Republic and the government’s ability to overcome the country’s

³²⁰ Rajaei, *Khomeyni on Man*, 58.

difficulties.³²¹ The reformist sense of doubt in the adequacy of the Islamic Republic seeped into the Guard. Newer generations of recruits and conscripts lacked the memories of the Shah's repression and revolutionary euphoria that animated older cadres. They seemed to lose faith in the conservative religious establishment. According to a statistical evaluation of the presidential elections conducted by the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture, 73 percent of the Guard voted for Khatami in 1996.³²² The turnout for Khatami was even higher among soldiers of the regular army.³²³ The show of disobedience was not an isolated event. During an episode of civil unrest in Qazvin in August 1994, the commanders of the local Guard garrison refused to shoot at the civilian population and forced Tehran to call in units from the Ashura battalions, a special corps trained specifically in suppressing such unrest.³²⁴ The growing stretch between core revolutionary principles and popular opinion created a need for the conservative political establishment to abridge public liberties like freedom of speech and other instruments of reform. The battle over Iran's political order contests the meaning of the revolution. The Guard will not alter its behavior of radical foreign and domestic intervention until it reframes its relationship to progressive principles of the revolution touted by reformists.

The conservative political establishment addressed the threat of reform by tackling it at its cultural roots. It trounced provocative Western ideas and banned the import of cultural objects loaded with political meanings. The Guard employed the Basij to police the new regulations against dangerous items of Western origin. Deputy Guard

³²¹ Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled*, 52.

³²² Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 125.

³²³ Robert Fisk, "Clerics start to lose their grip in Iran," *The Independent*, September 24, 1998.

³²⁴ Buchta, *Who rules Iran?*, 125.

Commander General Hassanzadeh, speaking in late 2001, commented on cultural issues in front a crowd of Basijis, saying, “[The] Enemy infiltrates from cultural ways and through writing, film, quarterly magazine, plays, festivals, consumption culture, insulting people's sacred values, propaganda and disseminating lies.” Hassanzadeh told the Basijis that Western society is Godless and warned that Western states “try to dominate all countries in a liberal democratic system.” An example of this, according to Hassanzadeh, was President George W. Bush’s statement that “the world is either with us or against us and anyone who is against us must be destroyed.” Hassanzadeh slammed “slogans of democracy, people's rule, and human rights” for destroying authentic ideologies.³²⁵ Earlier that year, the Guard commander of Qazvin affirmed the Basij’s role in saving the Islamic Republic, “in the next decade our problem will be the cultural onslaught and the Basij must block its progress.” He added: “Instead of creating military bases, our policy today is to create cultural societies.”³²⁶ The Guard associated reform with the ideology of liberal democracy exported by the US. This inferred that reform was an insidious plot hatched by the US, and thus tantamount to counterrevolution. The Guard’s argument displayed how American avowals of support for Iranian reform movements ultimately damages their credibility, or authenticity, despite their grounding in political contradictions specific to Iran’s revolutionary history and constitution.

The Guard’s overt and ideologically motivated involvement in politics violated the final will of the very *faqih* whose legacy they claimed to be saving. In his last will and testament, Ayatollah Khomeini drew a line against the trespassing of the military into

³²⁵ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Iran Report,” December 3, 2001.

³²⁶ *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, “Iran Report,” February 2, 2001.

politics. Giving his “brotherly advice to the armed forces who love Islam, who give their lives at the war fronts for the love of leqa-ullah [union with God] and who carry out their devotional work everywhere in the country,” Khomeini counseled them to,

not join any political party, group or faction. No military man, security policeman, no Revolutionary Guard or Basij may enter into politics. Stay away from politics and you'll be able to preserve and maintain your military prowess and be immune to internal division and dispute. Military commanders must forbid entrance into political ties by the men under their command...Therefore, the government [is]...charged with the religious and national responsibility to oppose, from the very beginning, any interference in politics...by the armed forces, regardless of category...³²⁷

Khomeini’s injunction pressured the Guard to inflate the radicalness of the reform movement. Safavi may have accepted a prohibition on political campaigning, but refused to see Khomeini as denying the Guard its constitutional duty to protect the revolution, which by now had obviously ossified into a political order. The Guard painted the reformists as challenging the revolution. Safavi separated his intimidations against Khatami from the types of behavior proscribed by Khomeini’s last will.

[W]e do not interfere in politics but if we see that the foundations of our system of government and our revolution is threatened...we get involved. When I see that a [political] current has hatched a cultural plot, I consider it my right to defend the revolution against this current. My commander is the exalted leader and he has not banned me [from doing this].³²⁸

In their July 1999 letter to Khatami, the Guard commanders exaggerated the scope of the aims of the reform movement far beyond its intentions. Yet again, they posed the movement as inimical to the revolution. Allowed by Khatami, the Guard accused reformists of desecrating “the foundations of the System” and the “sanctity of the

³²⁷ Ruhollah Khomeini, “The Last Message: the will of Imam Khomeini,” *Imam Khomeini Cultural Institute*, January 1, 1989, 32-33.

³²⁸ Ehteshami and Zweiri, *Neoconservatives*, 22.

Velayat-e Faqih.” The commanders poignantly lamented “the withering away of the product of fourteen centuries of the torment and persecution of Shi’ism and Islam.”³²⁹

They depicted the reform movement as undercutting the one political form impervious to the external forces of blasphemy and imperialism. Anything else would return Iran and Islam to its historically exploited and abused state.

During the presidencies of Rafsanjani and Khatami, the Guard showed itself willing to make radical interventions in politics both at home and abroad, but Khomeini also expressed a premonitory warning against such behavior. Khomeini conceded an open-ended shape to Iran’s political order. He recognized the possibility for positive, internal change that did not abandon the first principles of Islamic government. He advised the nation and the armed forces to remain faithful to a progressive conception of Islam. Khomeini defended his original idea of divine sovereignty, but added progressive connotations to it. He wrote, “Islam is the only true ideology of liberty and independence,” and elsewhere, “The enforcement of law is based on equity and justice; on prevention of cruelty and dictatorship...on liberty, reason, independence, and self-sufficiency.”³³⁰ Khomeini hinted that the Islamic Republic could adapt to changing circumstances without departing from fundamental ideological principles like independence, self-sufficiency, and Islamic government. Khomeini also separated this process of internal change from the armed forces to strengthen the position of popularly elected officials to affect change. The generational shift in Iranian politics, away from

³²⁹ *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps*, “IRGC Commanders’ Letter to Khatami,” *Princeton University*, May 24, 2010, www.princeton.edu (accessed April 15, 2014).

³³⁰ Ruhollah Khomeini, “The Last Message: the will of Imam Khomeini,” *Imam Khomeini Cultural Institute*, January 1, 1989, 11, 33.

revolutionary structures and toward popular consent, has put additional pressure on the Guard to integrate better with the general public. Iran's government, though containing authoritarian elements, exists in an atmosphere of ambiguity and potential for change, which even Khomeini recognized. The Guard stands on the same feeble pillars and popular opinion against the conservative order may overcome its resistance to change. In a best-case scenario, the Guard would submit to moderating civilian influences by a process of osmosis, wherein its strategies reflect progressive interpretations of the principles of Islamic Revolution, rather than the static ones that they do now. In a worst-case scenario, the Guard would reject change at all costs, including violent repression at the risk of civil war as has happened in Syria. Such an event would occur much less likely in Iran than in Syria because of Iran's basic sectarian unity. As noted, the idea of reform appeals to portions of nearly all strata of Iranian society, since it will potentially benefit all, rather than a single sect.

Chapter Five: Revolution and Strategy

Shortly after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Khamenei consolidated the various government branches involved in covert foreign operations. He envisioned this new institution, named Quds Force, as an efficient tool to spread and utilize the ideology of Islamic Revolution. Foreign Shi'is indoctrinated with this ideology owe complete allegiance to the supreme leader and Quds commanders and conduct terrorist and insurgent attacks at their behest. In a speech in 1990, the year in which Khamenei formed Quds, the supreme leader said that its mission is to “establish popular Hizbullah cells all over the world.”³³¹ The organization embodies the state's mandate to interact with and shape the Islamic world. Its most dedicated partners believe in the religious enterprise of Iran and postulate the fates of the Islamic Republic and Shi'is as coterminous. At best, Quds expands the reach of the supreme leader and organizes the Shi'i diaspora for its common defense against *takfiri* terrorists and imperialist aggressors. Quds itself has merged national and religious interests. Since the Islamic Republic is a religiously-defined sovereignty, operations which benefit its power necessarily aim at ideological ends of strengthening the embattled Muslim, though more typically the Shi'i Muslim, position in an inhospitable world. The intervention of Quds in Syria serves the very realpolitik objective of preserving Assad's power, but on a more superficial level, it has also protected Shi'i heritage and holy sites. Political factors generally spur Quds to action, but the outcomes suit the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, whether it be weakening *taghut* rulers in the Gulf or enacting defensive jihad for victimized Muslims.

³³¹ Dexter Filkins, “The Shadow Commander,” *The New Yorker*, September 30, 2013.

Terrorist actions against Saudi Arabia, Israel, or US military forces, may spring from Iran's geopolitical tensions with these states, but they adhere to the Islamic Revolution's parameters of acceptable and commendable behavior. The term Islamic Revolution itself denotes the ideological superstructure that tempers Iran's nationalist aspirations and produces hybrid policies combining national interests with ideological principles. The Islamic Revolution, depending on context, refers to either this ideological framework or the process of Islamic resistance against tyrannical and irreligious forms of government.

The ideological framework defining the boundaries of Iranian policy does not itself postulate violent confrontations with unbelieving superpowers. The orientation of foreign powers to the principles of the Islamic Revolution determines how Iran implements the strategic goals shaped by its ideology. The temperament of outside powers leads Iran into binary modes of policy formation, which could be either violent and oppositional, or diplomatic and accommodating. A non-threatening and inclusive US position vis-à-vis Iran reciprocates similar behavior from even Quds. Conversely, belligerent US positions will lead Iran into covert and corrosive actions. Either way, Iran seeks to exercise national interests in harmony with its revolutionary principles. Its behavior turns violent only once external forces categorically reject the foundations or premises of Islamic Revolution. The US invasion of Iraq and President Bush's vilification of Iran elicited this confrontational impulse. The cataclysmic terrorist attack on September 11, 2001 precipitated an enormously larger role for the US military in the Middle East. President Bush's new military doctrine, which aimed at a compound goal of implanting democracy in the Middle East as a way of eradicating terrorism, initially targeted two major sources of Iranian insecurity—the Taliban in Afghanistan and

Saddam Hussein. These campaigns eliminated much of Iran's competition for regional dominance. They also, however, magnified the friction between the US and Iran. Despite an early, albeit slim possibility of cooperation between the two, President Bush's verbal attacks against the Islamic Republic soured any chances for Iran to peacefully assert its interests in Iraq. As a counterfactual, if the US had mollified its antipathy toward the Islamic Revolution and continued to solicit Iranian input, Iran might have reciprocated the good will. On the contrary, US force projection into Iraq and Afghanistan laid an imposing concentric circle of US military forces with the intention of containing Iran.

In response to the US invasion of Iraq, Quds took a flexible and multifaceted approach to shaping the situation in favor of Iran's strategic interests, which were to preserve the state and mitigate the US presence. In order of urgency, its objectives were to prevent a US invasion of Iran, construct a Shi'i-led government, push the US military out of Iraq, and maintain influence over Iraq without destabilizing it. Iran pursued these goals in proportion to its security from a US invasion. As long as war was an imminent possibility, Quds would not promote policies that ran counter to US goals. Quds commander Qassem Suleimani adopted a policy of accommodation to skirt the American warpath. For a short time, Suleimani shared intelligence on the Taliban and Al-Qaeda with the US, and in the summer of 2003, participated in the US project to build democracy in Iraq. Suleimani quietly endorsed the US-led organization of a fledgling government in Baghdad. US Ambassador Crocker passed him the names of prospective Shi'i candidates and the two men traded preferences. Crocker did not offer veto power, but he discarded candidates whom Suleimani found especially objectionable, "The formation of the governing council was in its essence a negotiation between Tehran and

Washington,” he said.³³² Suleimani’s flexibility in dealing with the Americans hewed to the Guard’s habit of making tactical compromises in the interest of self-preservation, while persevering in its commitment to strategic goals derived from ideological principles. For example, opposing US interests in Iraq derived from Khomeini’s criticism of the US as an imperialistic and anti-Islamic power. Straying from the goal would increase Iran’s insecurity, whereas straying from the principle would negate the Guard’s legitimacy and identity. The Guard simply cannot divorce foreign policy objectives from the ideological framework of Islamic Revolution without undergoing crisis. Nonetheless, national interests substantiate if not dominate most Iranian policies. This seeming paradox leads many to simplify Iranian policy as either nationalist or revolutionary, without recognizing the comingling of the two. During the Iraq War, the American Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, asked an Iraqi intermediary if Suleimani was especially religious. The answer was “Not really...he attends mosque periodically. Religion doesn’t drive him. Nationalism drives him, and the love of the fight.”³³³

President Bush’s animus against Iran quickly disillusioned Quds from the possibility of cooperating and Iran began pursuing its strategic interests more aggressively. Political blowback from the war constrained President Bush from pushing for a subsequent invasion against Iran. As that fear receded in Tehran, Suleimani betrayed his intentions of disrupting a US-dependent Iraqi government and long-term military presence. Quds extended its influence to an incredibly diverse array of political and military actors in order to generate leverage out of the tensions between them. According to American and Iraqi former officials, Suleimani exerted control over Iraqi

³³² Filkins, “The Shadow Commander.”

³³³ Ibid.

politics by paying officials, subsidizing newspapers and television stations, and when, necessary, by intimidation.³³⁴ One former senior Iraqi official exclaimed, “I have yet to see one Shia political party not taking money from Qassem Suleimani...He’s the most powerful man in Iraq, without question.”³³⁵ A prominent Iraqi Shi’i also noted, “it is impossible to oppose Iran because they are paying all the pro-Iranian parties—and they are paying all the anti-Iranian parties as well.”³³⁶ Flooding the country with funds made it quite impossible for even those groups opposed to Iran to resist its enticements, since doing so would put them at a steep competitive disadvantage. Iran complemented its policy of buying political influence by supporting Iraqi militants opposed to the political process altogether. If Iran could mobilize its proxy militias to attack the Iraqi government, it could also halt them. Iran used violence to regulate Iraq’s domestic politics; the power to broker peace in times of instability would induce the central government to concede paramount issues to the Iranians, such as whether to lease long-term basing rights to the US military. Iran also angled its militias against the US to prevent it from taking military control of the country. Funding the insurgency would ensure that US forces were tied down. The US would worry about Iraqi insurgents before it did their Quds handlers. Likewise, it would worry about retaliations by Iraqi militants if it chose to conduct military strikes against Iran’s nuclear program. Frustrating both the military and political goals of the US occupation served an ultimate purpose of quashing the American public’s enthusiasm for making military commitments in the Middle East.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 133.

The near complete control by Quds over Iran's policies in Iraq is due to its honorable mission to use and expand the Islamic Revolution. Quds was conceived to unite all the military forces and intelligence apparatuses within the Guard that were operating outside of Iranian borders. It enjoys the unconditional support of the supreme leader and is generally charged with executing and shaping Iran's most radical policies. The force has between 10,000 and 20,000 members, divided between combatants and those who train and oversee foreign assets.³³⁷ Iraqi intelligence captured and unclassified by US forces provided the Iraqi perspective on the purpose and activities of Quds. Iraq remained anxiously preoccupied with Iran's support for dissident groups inside and outside the country and thus concentrated on gathering as thorough and reliable intelligence on Quds as possible, although the documents may risk exaggerating the threat posed by Quds. The Iraqis describe the overall duties of the force as including military and strategic data collection of neighboring countries, assassinations within Iran and without, coordinating terrorism abroad, and training and indoctrinating foreign citizens of Islamic countries to overthrow their governments and install a regime founded on the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. A report from 2000 document described the assignments of the force as passing through the Guard's general command and under direct supervision of a delegate from the Office of the Supreme Leader.³³⁸ The report attributed Quds with offices in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, former Soviet Republics, Sudan and Egypt, and Iraq. These offices study the political and economic issues of these Arab and Muslim-majority countries, collect intelligence, and

³³⁷ Filkins, "The Shadow Commander."

³³⁸ Combating Terrorism Center, "Al-Quds Forces Associated with the Guards of the Islamic Revolution," Translated by Combating Terrorism Center. West Point, October 2000, 1.

establish political communications with “fundamentalist forces” in those countries.³³⁹

Apart from communications and intelligence, Quds directs and forms radical movements in the aforementioned countries.

It organizes, trains, recruits, and provides administrative support to loyalists of the Islamic Revolution as well as to foreign militants who merely share Iran’s tactical goals. It has formed Corps of the Islamic Revolution in countries such as Bosnia, Turkey, Lebanon, Africa, and the Badr corps in Iraq.³⁴⁰ The report describes the “Third Corps” as supporting anti-Turkish Kurdish groups, suppressing Iranian Kurds, and carrying out terrorist operations against Iranian Kurdish groups in Iraq; the “Fourth Corps” as organizing Afghan groups inside Iran and conducting intelligence activities in the borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan; the “Sixth Corps” as exporting terrorism to the Gulf countries, primarily through groups under the Hizbullah umbrella; and the “Seventh Corps,” consisting of 2000 Guards and command centers in Balbak and Beqaa, as interfacing with Lebanese Hizbullah, the Islamic Jihad, and Al-Amal Islamic Organization and supplying them with arms; the “Eighth Corps” as operating in North African countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt and having established command centers in Sudan; and, the “Ninth Corps” as recruiting Turkish and Arab Muslims in Germany and Austria—in addition to Corps assigned to internal security and the arrangement of training programs.³⁴¹ The Guard typically uses front companies to obscure its involvement in foreign operations. In March 1996, for example, a food production company linked to the Guard was intercepted transporting a 320mm gun to

³³⁹ Combating Terrorism Center, “The Iranian Intelligence Services of Khomeini Regime,” Translated by Combating Terrorism Center, West Point, June 1993, 4.

³⁴⁰ Combating Terrorism Center, “Al-Quds,” 3.

³⁴¹ Combating Terrorism Center, “Al-Quds,” 2-4.

Belgium on a commercial ship to target the Paris residence of Banisadr.³⁴² The report also discussed a Quds training camp near Karaj Dam that rendered services to groups of ten to twenty individuals from Pakistan, Algeria, Palestine, Bahrain, and Lebanon. In October 1994, two larger groups of 40-45 Bosnian Muslims were trained at the camp.³⁴³ The document was sent to MEK representatives to assist their organization's insurgency operation against Iran as well as to Jordanian intelligence. The document notes that Quds has focused on building a relationship with Sudan. In 1993, Quds allocated \$20 million to build camps there. US intelligence officials corroborated this number, and one official warned, "The target is not just the north—Egypt and North Africa—but also the south, into [sub-Saharan] Africa, with the creation of Islamic states being the goal."³⁴⁴ According to the Iraqi intelligence, The camps hosted militants from Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Algeria. In addition to general education and religious seminars, the militants received military training from Sudanese government soldiers.³⁴⁵

The creation of these country-specific corps prepared the Guard to take advantage of major regional developments, especially in Iraq. Iran had hosted, paid, supplied, and sustained the largest Iraqi Islamic opposition group, the Badr Brigade. Badr was the armed wing of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a splinter group of the Islamic al-Da'wa Party. As the Iranian revolution sparked a wave of anti-Shi'i repression in Iraq, scores of prominent Shi'i activists fled to Iran or otherwise faced the possibility of execution. In April 1980, Hussein executed al-Da'wa's founder,

³⁴² Combating Terrorism Center, "Al-Quds," 5-6.

³⁴³ Combating Terrorism Center, "Al-Quds," 7-8.

³⁴⁴ David Ignatius, "U.S. Fears Sudan Becoming Terrorists' 'New Lebanon'," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 1992.

³⁴⁵ Combating Terrorism Center, "Intelligence Services of Khomeini Regime," 25.

Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, shortly after al-Sadr wrote in defense of Islamic Revolution. The loss of this leader led to fracture in al-Da'wa. To its lay supporters, al-Da'wa advocated the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime and its replacement by an Islamic, though Iraqi state. The clerics in al-Da'wa valued political action only in relation to the wider community of believers. They intended for the scope of al-Da'wa to surpass the overthrow of a single regime. Rather, Saddam Hussein's fall should follow Iran's Islamic Revolution and precede a chain of Islamic Revolutions across other oppressed Muslim countries. Al-Da'wa's cofounder Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim fit in this latter category and eventually split from the mainstream party because of its reluctance to embrace Khomeini's doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. This national-revolutionary tension within al-Da'wa—one group caring foremost about the nation's future and the other more about the agency of the nation on the future of the *umma*—mirrored the struggle between Iran's revolutionary pragmatists and radicals. Tehran curried favor with al-Hakim and helped him officially establish a vessel of Islamic Revolution, SCIRI, in 1982, which it also recognized as the sole legitimate political representative of the Iraqi Shi'i opposition.³⁴⁶ Hussein dealt ruthlessly with SCIRI, killing 80 members of Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim's family, and Da'wa, both of which rebelled, but with only one of them under Tehran's payroll. Without Iranian funding and supplies, Da'wa more or less buckled under the weight of the Iraqi security services.

A 2002 Iraqi intelligence report, based largely on the interrogation of two Badr members, underscored the intimacy of the Quds-Badr relationship. Obviously information extracted by interrogation techniques is not an ideal form of knowledge

³⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council," Vol. 70, November 15, 2007, 3.

about a secretive organization, but since the organization itself will not divulge the details of its relationship with Iran, not many other methods of learning about Badr or most other Iranian proxies are available. Membership in Badr consisted of fugitive and dissident Iraqis, Iranian-Iraqis, and Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs). As a moral incentive, SCIRI recruiters regaled Shi'i Iraqi POWs who turned coats with the concept of *tawwabin*, a historical label for those who fought against Imam Hussein at the battle of Karbala only to switch sides afterwards and pursue his killers.³⁴⁷ These modern-day *tawwabin* formed the backbone of the force and introduced a strong element of military professionalism, as many were senior officers.³⁴⁸ Initially, they voluntarily accompanied the Iranian army as guides during the war, but in 1983 the Guard took over the Badr portfolio with plans to reshape it into an auxiliary force. Afterwards, Badr fought against Iraqi forces under the Guard's command and effectively became an Iranian proxy.³⁴⁹ By 1988, Badr's general force was estimated at 6000.³⁵⁰ After the war, the Guard renewed asylum and support for Badr in order to reserve a viable option to exploit any instability in Iraq with a friendly force. Iran, however, was unwilling to restart a war with Iraq and Badr was too weak to mount a serious challenge against the Iraqi regime by itself, a situation which suspended the organization in limbo. Quds trained Badr corpsmen in camps in Qom and Tehran. It provided specialized training to different regiments of the brigade, trained Badr commandos in physical fitness, swimming, mountain climbing, and light personal weapons, providing sessions in intelligence, espionage, and monitoring, and in military

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 5.

³⁴⁹ Combating Terrorism Center, "Re.: Study of Badr Corps 9," *Harmony Program*, October 7, 2002, 1-2.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

engineering, in anti-tank warfare, and targeting.³⁵¹ The Guard also accustomed the brigade to working with Iranians in joint operations. For example, the Guard anti-air battalion participated in the brigade's last triennial combined arms exercise before the US invasion. As interpreted by Iraqi intelligence, Iran's participation in the exercise signaled its intention to assist the brigade in the event of an Iraqi uprising.³⁵²

Iran exerted strategic control of Badr and close oversight of its cross-border excursions. The Joint Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces allocated about \$20 million for the annual budget of Badr, which paid entirely for salaries. Weapons distributed to Badr before 1990 were given free of charge but afterwards were sold by the Guard in addition to foodstuffs, vehicles, and equipment.³⁵³ Evidence indicates that the Guard had full authority in determining the legal status and conditions of employment of Badr members.³⁵⁴ An Iraqi census in 2001 estimated the number of Iraqis living in Iranian refugee camps at 53,000, 12,000 of whom were in the brigade.³⁵⁵ The brigade set its own goals, but it had to request financial and technical capabilities from Quds Operations through its Iranian official. Quds Operations then issued the approval and informed the Badr divisions how to implement their goals.³⁵⁶ Before 1999, Badr conducted some operations inside Iraq independently of Iranian supervision.³⁵⁷ After reorganizing itself, Badr reverted to consistently coordinating with Quds and Iranian military units and border precincts. The report referenced some limits to the ability of Tehran to use the brigade if and when Hussein's regime fell. Badr appeared convinced that "any

³⁵¹ Ibid., 37-38

³⁵² Ibid., 39.

³⁵³ Ibid., 42.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 53.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

exceptional circumstance inside Iraq” would lead the US to prohibit Iran from interfering in the upheaval. With Iranian borders closed to the brigade in such a scenario, it would have to move in with Tehran’s tacit support through the mountainous northern region of Iran.³⁵⁸

With Tehran’s backing, Badr attempted to fulfill its mission of overthrowing Hussein’s regime and replacing it with an Iraqi Islamic Republic. In early 1991, after being routed by US forces liberating Kuwait, demoralized Iraqi troops rebelled against Saddam Hussein. Often mischaracterized as originally a Shi’i revolt, the non-sectarian army mutiny soon catalyzed a full-scale popular uprising. Badr fighters quickly streamed into Iraq, in crossings recorded by US reconnaissance planes and satellites, to stir the pot; they vandalized portraits of Hussein and attacked regime symbols such as Ba’ath party offices and police stations.³⁵⁹ The fighters put up posters of Ayatollah Khomeini and Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim and converted mosques and hospitals into militia headquarters.³⁶⁰ Their insertion of religious themes into the uprising imbued it with pungent sectarian overtones and a distasteful Iranian-inspired political agenda. According to a top ranking Iranian intelligence officer, some 150 Guards slipped across the border as well to foment disorder, and probably to supervise the Badr fighters, in Najaf, Karbala, and Basra.³⁶¹ The US withdrew its support of the rebels partly due to the overshadowing by Iranian agents and Hussein proceeded to slaughter the offenders. Residents of Basra and other southern towns blame SCIRI for having bastardized an army-based anti-regime revolt into an Iran-sponsored Shi’i rebellion and then having abandoned rebellious Iraqi

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 75-76.

³⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, “Shiite Politics in Iraq,” 6.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ David Halevy, “Tehran’s New World Order,” *The Washington Post*, March 24, 1991.

denizens to Hussein's reprisal once the prospect of success slipped away.³⁶² This version of the uprising does not enjoy total consensus; Iraqis from Da'wa, for example, vindictively recalled an absent Iranian role.³⁶³ Iran's tentative response conveyed its hesitancy to reignite an ideological war with Hussein. To achieve its political dreams, SCIRI would have to depend on either the internal combustion of the regime or a US invasion of Iraq.

The party gradually pivoted away from Tehran as all parties rooted in the Islamic Revolution but eager for national cachet eventually do. The organization appropriated a staunchly independent and national image. A senior SCIRI official explained: "Badr's reputation has always been distorted because of the fact that Badr was founded in Iran... This does not mean Badr is an Iranian organization or loyal to Iran."³⁶⁴ Its self-redefinition only accelerated as SCIRI prepared to fill the political vacuum following the US invasion. In August 2002, for example, SCIRI traveled to Washington to attend an opposition gathering organized by the Bush Administration in anticipation of the invasion. SCIRI quietly downplayed its affiliation with Khomeini's ideology and burnished its capability to govern Iraq under US terms. SCIRI, as well as Da'wa, however, struggled to make the full transition from Islamist organization to a national democratic party. Both parties realized that the different notions of Islam embedded between Iraq's sects disqualified the possibility of installing an Islamic government steeped in Shi'i doctrines. Hence, they could pursue the US proposal of secularized democracy, or meld their Islamist bearings with the democratic institutions insisted upon

³⁶² International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq," 6.

³⁶³ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 55.

³⁶⁴ International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq," 9.

by the Americans, with the result of sectarian democracy. An old friend and former ally of Maliki explained the dilemma:

Before 2003, certain ideas were haram to the Islamists: ideas like democracy, nationalism, and citizenship. These people could not embark on a national project. They didn't know how. The Islamists were left with only one option that would keep them as Iraq's leaders: to step away from the Islamist project, and go for the sectarian project. For Sunni leaders, their job is to frighten people about the Shiites. And, for the Shiite leaders, it is to do the opposite. In this way, the existence of one justifies the existence of the other.³⁶⁵

SCIRI succeeded in penetrating many of the state institutions established by the US, while publicly decrying the occupation. The party participated in the US-founded Interim Governing Council (IGC), along with Da'wa and secular Iraqi leaders, and nearly all of the Badr fighters fused with Iraqi security forces. This reshuffling ruffled Iran's radicals but pragmatists assessed the change as beneficial. SCIRI now served as a conduit for Iran to communicate with the West and shape a post-Hussein Iraq. By 2007, the organization rebranded itself as "The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq" (ISCI) to confirm its departure from an earlier era of dependency on Iranian ideology and aid. In 2003, the Khatami administration sought influence in Iraq via SCIRI while the Guard opted to work with a more radical, though as yet less pro-Iranian, competing Shi'i party, known as the Sadrist Movement.

The attitude of hostility to the US occupation taken by the Sadrists differed sharply from the opportunistic one taken by SCIRI. The extent to which Iraqi leaders participated in and represented US-designed institutions polarized Iraq's Shi'i communities depending on how they interpreted US intentions. The leader of the Sadrist Movement, Muqtada al-Sadr, situated his movement distinctly outside the US

³⁶⁵ Dexter Filkins, "What We Left Behind," *The New Yorker*, April 28, 2014, 9-10.

experiment. He denounced the IGC: “The government is the result of an illegitimate order by the IGC, which in itself is illegitimate because it was appointed by an illegitimate occupation... We do not recognize it, directly or indirectly, since it exists contrary to the wishes of the Iraqis.”³⁶⁶ The Sadrists immediately took a militant position against the US occupation, and their armed wing, the Mahdi Army, spearheaded the first major armed resistance against US forces. Most Iraqis also met perceptions of Iranian meddling with extreme revulsion. Al-Sadr denigrated SCIRI for both its cooperation with the US and its historical association with Tehran. One of his representatives proclaimed, SCIRI “does not represent Iraq, [it] represents outside forces and works with Iran, the U.S., and Israel. We need someone from inside who suffered with Iraqis and represents the people’s voice. We don’t want an Iranian state.”³⁶⁷ Al-Sadr’s opposition to all foreign influence presented an obstacle to the Guard, but the universal importance of outside aid for every key player in Iraq eventually overpowered his doctrinal stance. The Sadrist Movement skyrocketed in popularity immediately after the US invasion. Its rejection of the US and Iran and track record of resistance to Hussein all resonated with the Shi’i Iraqi masses, but its fierce independence also won it powerful enemies—the US, the *hawzas*, SCIRI, and Da’wa.³⁶⁸ Al-Sadr risked losing the battle if he continued to refuse Iranian military supplies and training in a country awash with armed groups tied to powerful outside benefactors. Al-Sadr’s readiness to spoil the nation-building effort, and therefore prevent the US from accomplishing its goals, enticed the Guard.

³⁶⁶ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 135.

³⁶⁷ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 132.

³⁶⁸ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 133.

In the chaotic days following Hussein's downfall, Tehran divided by receiving discrete delegations from the rival Shi'i Iraqi groups. SCIRI's calculated approach to taking advantage of the US invasion mirrored the pragmatism of President Khatami, whereas the Sadrists' strong-willed, anti-US response converged with that of the Guard. Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, who led SCIRI before his assassination in August 2003, visited Iran at the request of Khatami and Parliament Speaker Mehdi Karrubi.³⁶⁹ Hakim's openness to working with the Americans and his pivot from Tehran deeply perturbed the Guard. The Guard retaliated by inviting the truculent Al-Sadr to Tehran, where he met with Quds Commander Suleimani and Khamenei, but was refused meetings by Khatami, his aides, and his allies in parliament. It is unclear how much aid Al-Sadr himself accepted, if any at all, but these meetings paved invaluable inroads into his militia. Evolving political circumstances in Iraq obliged the Guard to push harder for leverage among Mahdi Army militants, with or without Al-Sadr's direct approval. In 2005, after suffering crushing military defeats against the US in Al-Sadr City and Najaf, Al-Sadr discarded the approach of armed confrontation. He explained the arc of his movement as going from "peaceful resistance, then to armed resistance, and finally to political resistance."³⁷⁰ After publicly forswearing armed resistance, he joined the Shi'i-based electoral coalition United Iraqi Alliance and cinched its victory at the polls in 2005.³⁷¹ Many Sadrist militiamen, still buoyed by hatred for the US and skeptical of the government's independence, balked at Al-Sadr's redirection and left his fold.

³⁶⁹ *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Online*, "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat Views Differences Among Iranian Officials on SCIRI" (October 8, 2003).

³⁷⁰ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 165.

³⁷¹ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 165.

Mahdi Army factions that rejected their leader's call against violence tightened relationships with the Guard interlocutors. Al-Sadr never fully controlled his followers; many of his fighters consisted of uneducated and more or less destitute gunmen in search of a bellicose leader, like lightning attracted to a lightning rod. Al-Sadr's decision in 2005 also precipitated an unprecedented level of sectarian fighting that bolstered the Iranian argument that its offers of aid reflected its role as Shi'ism protector. Moreover, many Mahdi Army factions acquired local revenue sources, mostly criminal in nature, which freed them to ignore Al-Sadr.³⁷² These men looked for a new leader as Al-Sadr recanted violence. As one police commander put it, "If Muqtada al-Sadr goes on TV now and asks JAM [Mahdi Army] to lay down their weapons, do you think that all the fighters would obey? Of course not. Maybe 70 percent would."³⁷³ The Guard filled this void; its intelligence units easily wove their way into the loose-knit collection of armed groups nominally belonging to the Sadrist Movement. According to a leading Sadrist militant, the situation changed in 2005, "as the Iranians became more involved with the help of important advisers to Muqtada. Iranian policy was to offer aid in the shape of financial support, modern weapons, and a good communications system. Once lured into accepting them the recipient cannot do without them." The Supreme Leader in fact instructed the Guard to keep its networks in the Mahdi Army underground until after the December 2005 elections. A letter written by him to Suleimani asserted that representatives of SCIRI, Islamic Jihad, and Ansar al-Islam agreed that "Quds personnel...which have been established in Iraq will not carry out any operations whatsoever which might identify

³⁷² Marisa Cochrane, *The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement* (Washington: Institute for the Study of War, 2009), 27.

³⁷³ Lauren Frayer, "U.S. Seeks Gains in Shiite Militia Rifts," *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2007.

themselves until the elections, and that these actions be entrusted to other supporters of the Islamic Revolution. Let that force prepare itself for coup d'etat operations and carry out the necessary planning, so that if the elections are against the policy of Islam, they can enter the scene in a serious way.”³⁷⁴ One can deduce that Quds held sway with Shi'i militants throughout 2005, but waited to mobilize them against coalition and government forces until after the Iraqis constituted a Shi'i-dominated government.

After a Shi'i coalition won the 2005 election, Tehran intensified support for its networks and primed individual leaders to break off from Al-Sadr because of his newfound inclination for nonviolence. After the elections, the Sadrist Movement participated as an important faction in Prime Minister Maliki's coalition government. Maliki rewarded the Sadrists with a degree of autonomy, as evidenced by the prohibition of Coalition Forces operating in Al-Sadr City, a suburb of Baghdad and the geographic bastion of the movement.³⁷⁵ In 2006, Quds attempted to fashion the collection of disparate yet conciliatory groups into a unified militia resembling Hizbullah. Iran predicated its support for these groups on their opposition to the central government and hostility to Coalition Forces. Quds recruiters began arranging for classes of 30 individuals to attend paramilitary training in Iran. Recruits received instruction in one of four areas of expertise, either IEDs and explosives, light weapons, mortars, or movements and tactics.³⁷⁶ Training occurred in three installments of approximately 35 days each (including travel time) and cadets generally trained in teams of four. In May, Suleimani

³⁷⁴ Office of the Supreme Leader, “Letter,” *Combating Terrorism Center*, January 5, 2005.

³⁷⁵ Cochrane, *Sadrist Movement*, 6.

³⁷⁶ Combating Terrorism Center, “Redacted Intelligence Report 006,” *Harmony Program*. n.d.

appointed Qais Khazali to lead this burgeoning network of better trained militants.³⁷⁷ Khazali adopted the name Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), which means League of the Righteous, and led attacks against Coalition and Iraqi forces throughout 2006.³⁷⁸ AAH claimed more than 6,000 attacks on US forces, including multiple mortar and rocket attacks on US facilities, and after al-Qaeda's power plummeted in 2008, US officials named AAH the biggest single threat to US forces.³⁷⁹ Coalition Forces designated AAH and smaller splinter groups as "special groups" because of their specialized combat education and cellular organization. Khazali did not abnegate his loyalty to Al-Sadr, but was receiving supplies, training, and funding and making decisions independent of him. The growing power of rogue factions such as AAH in the Mahdi Army strained the relationship between Al-Sadr and Maliki, who held the former responsible for them. In late 2006, Maliki decided to engage his security services with the increasingly unruly Shi'i militias. From January 2007 to mid-2008, Coalition and Iraqi offensive operations targeted the Mahdi Army's military strength in Baghdad and southern Iraq, which decimated the already tenuous unity of the militia. Violence spiked across Iraq; explosively Formed Projectile (EFP) usage rose to an average of 120 incidents a month across Iraq in the second quarter of 2008, while 1,100 rockets were fired in Baghdad between March and May 2008.³⁸⁰ In the second half of 2008, Coalition Forces unearthed 98 special group munitions caches.³⁸¹

³⁷⁷ Cochrane, *Sadrism Movement*, 19.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ (Sly 2013)

³⁸⁰ Michael Knights, "Shia strength-Iraqi militants adapt to the US drawdown," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 30, 2011, 3.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Suleimani intermittently stopped the bloodshed by utilizing his widespread influence, and inviting the warring sides to Tehran where he could mediate their differences. Ambassador Crocker conveyed the power of Suleimani's strategy to dictate Iraqi politics in a diplomatic cable uncovered by WikiLeaks. Writing about a ceasefire in 2008 that ended the fighting between the Iraqi government and the Mahdi Army, Crocker incisively explained the situation.

Indeed, the May 12 agreement marked the second time in the last seven weeks that Tehran has brokered a face-saving way for Iraq's largest competing Shia factions—the UIA (representing the GOI[Government of Iraq]) and the Sadrist Trend—to disengage at least temporarily from a protracted GOI-led security operation that could have been extremely bloody for both sides. What the agreement does not do—or even try to do—is address the underlying economic and political factors that have led to intra-Shia conflict: widespread unemployment and resentment among the urban Shia underclass; a perception that the ISF[Iraqi Security Forces] is a uniformed militia of the Shia establishment; an embattled government that is reluctant to grant its opponents any measure of legitimacy; and an abundance of armed groups who consistently demonstrate a casual willingness to resort to violence...The apparent unwillingness or inability of the competing groups to address those issues ensures that further internecine Shia bloodshed is all but inevitable. When such violence occurs, it seems likely that the parties will again trudge to Tehran and ask Qassim Soleimani to sort out the chaos that he has been instrumental in creating and perpetuating.³⁸²

The genius of Iran's strategy lay in its ability to essentially divide and conquer the Iraqis. Its offers of aid caused internal alienations between those who accepted them and those who resisted the temptation. Quds' constant prodding into the powerful Shi'i groups inevitably persuaded factions within them to make Faustian bargains with Iran. Iran's support fragmented these groups internally and prevented any one and all of them from coalescing into an independent front.

³⁸² *The New York Times*, "Commander of Iran's Quds Force Seeks to Magnify His Influence," October 2, 2012, 12.

The Mahdi Army atomized under pressure from Iranian overtures. Factions that accepted aid were Iranian proxies by fait accompli. The Iranians capitalized on the poverty of Al-Sadr's militants to wedge them from their leader:

[Iranians] started giving \$800 to anyone who would attack the Americans or assassinate some Iraqi figures. People were given lists of names of former Baathists, present-day political figures, or ordinary people to be killed because they were meant to be working against society... They give volunteers \$300 to \$400 a month, train them to use weapons and to fight the Americans. Of course this is an indirect way of controlling Iraq. It is easy enough for Iranian intelligence to persuade a man to join the groups it controls through money and good weapons if he is unemployed and the Mehdi Army pays no wages.³⁸³

For a party that billed itself as immune to outside manipulation, the growing Iranian influence upset many Sadrists, who connected the Guard's activities in Iraq with the country's unremitting sectarian and intra-sectarian conflicts. They attributed unabated chaos and disunity even within Shi'i communities to the Guard's policy. Sadrists who opposed Iran even cooperated with the Americans to root out their common enemy. Those willing to cooperate were part of a larger group that called itself the "noble Mahdi Army" and accused others in the militia of sedition and killing innocent Sunnis. One Iraqi commented, "The true Mahdi Army believes in loyalty to Iraq, but there are thieves and gangsters among them now."³⁸⁴ This group still followed the political leadership in Baghdad and the clerical leadership in Najaf, and believed the movement had been infiltrated by Iranians and corrupted by criminal behavior.³⁸⁵ The "noble" militiamen informed on the "criminal elements" of the organization to the US military. One informant said he was especially worried about the Mahdi Army leaders who had received training in Iran, "I know these men well, we went through our religious training

³⁸³ Cockburn, *al-Sadr*, 167.

³⁸⁴ Frayer, "Shiite Militia Rifts."

³⁸⁵ Cochrane, *Sadrism Movement*, 25.

together, but they are no longer honest. They pretend to be following al-Sadr's orders, but they are really following Iran."³⁸⁶ These men either stopped responding to Al-Sadr or formed completely new militias. This division became readily evident following a January 2007 statement by Al-Sadr to the Mahdi Army. He urged his fighters to comply with a security sweep in mid-January by not targeting coalition or government forces and declared the higher command, or "noble Mahdi Army," would purge all rogue factions and regroup.³⁸⁷ Loyal elements assented, at least at first, while an assortment of new Iranian-backed militias kept fighting. Iran unraveled whatever acquiescence remained between volatile Mahdi Army factions and Al-Sadr.

The lethal consequences of Quds' meddling jarred US policymakers in 2007, when an AAH special group organized by Qais Khazali conducted a brazen attack against a US command center in Karbala. On January 20, 2007, gunmen, some of who reportedly spoke English, snuck past three checkpoints manned by Iraqi security, wearing new US combat fatigues and travelling in US military-type black sport utility vehicles, and used small arms fire and hand grenades to surprise attack US soldiers.³⁸⁸ They kidnapped four US soldiers and executed them all as US forces honed in on their location. This attack came a week after US soldiers raided the Iranian Liaison Office in Irbil in Iraqi Kurdistan and detained five Iranian diplomats.³⁸⁹ The US accused the diplomatic office of providing cover for Quds operatives engaged in covert actions against Coalition Forces. On March 20, 2007, the US captured Qais Khazali and Ali Musa Daqduq, the top

³⁸⁶ Frayer, "Shiite Militia Rifts."

³⁸⁷ Cochrane, *Sadrism Movement*, 25.

³⁸⁸ Bill Roggio, "The Karbala attack and the IRGC," *The Long War Journal* (Foundation for Defense of Democracy), January 2007.

³⁸⁹ James Glanz, "G.I.'s in Iraq Raid Iranians' Offices," *New York Times*, January 12, 2007.

Hizbullah lieutenant in charge of monitoring Iraqi special groups. In a press statement on the raid, a US general estimated Quds' funding for special groups between \$750,000 and \$3 million a month. Both Khazali and Daqduq confessed the Quds Force "knew of and supported planning for the eventual Karbala attack that killed five coalition soldiers...Ali Musa Daqduq contends the Iraqi special groups could not have conducted this complex operation without the support and direction of the Quds Force."³⁹⁰ Three days later, the Guard Navy captured 15 British soldiers and held them for several days, no doubt in response to the capture of Khazali and Daqduq. In August 2007, Suleimani promised General Petraeus to dramatically decrease Iranian activity in Iraq if the US released Khazali. Petraeus responded that Iran needed to immediately cease its actions, which he called tantamount to a war by proxy against the US and that it made no sense to release Khazali since he was a centripetal force in campaigns against the Iraqi government and the Coalition.³⁹¹

Quds' manipulation of these special groups should not belie the underlying limits of its ideological appeal to most Iraqis. Declassified summaries of US interrogations of captured members of special groups illustrate the tactical rather than strategic alignment of Iraqi militants with Iran. One such hapless detainee and his fellow students complained about the training they received in Iran. He did not trust the Iranians, but respected his Lebanese trainers, who taught the bulk of the courses. The detainee characterized Iraqi Shi'i as only reluctantly accepting training from the Iranians. He described Iraqi Shi'i as moral, good, compassionate, and emotionally sensitive, and Iranian Shi'i, by contrast, as

³⁹⁰ Jim Garamone, "Iran Arming, Training, Directing Terror Groups in Iraq, U.S. Official Says," *American Forces Press Service*, July 2, 2007.

³⁹¹ *The New York Times*, "Commander of Iran's Quds Force Seeks to Magnify His Influence," October 2, 2012, 5.

negating those qualities while simultaneously believing themselves to be superior.³⁹² The detainee firmly believed in having an Iraqi leader (Muqtada al-Sadr) and that even a bad Iraqi leader is better than an Iranian one.³⁹³ Another detainee recalled the excessive rudeness of his Iranian instructor and a general mistreatment of the Iraqi recruits.³⁹⁴ A different detainee derided the Badr Organization for wanting to give Iraq to Iran. He explained the problematic relationship between al-Sadr and the Iraqi government as an outcome of the fact that Badr owned approximately 60 percent of the government.³⁹⁵ These Iraqis, though marginalized by the mainstream Mahdi Army for their association to Iran, accepted Iranian training only so far as exigent political and sectarian reasons demanded it. The ineffectiveness of the ideology of Islamic Revolution with Iraqis explains why Quds' training program, while successful tactically, never spawned a wider movement or more powerful militia as it had in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, Iran outmaneuvered the US in determining Iraq's future. In 2010, when a newly-elected parliament failed for a total of nine months to agree on whom to appoint to the executive branch, Suleimani met with his multiplicity of contacts to hammer out a deal and catalyze the formation of a new government. According to Iraqi and Western officials, Suleimani invited senior Kurdish and Shi'i leaders to meet with him in Tehran and Qom to coax them into supporting Maliki's candidacy for prime minister. Suleimani won al-Sadr's support by promising to place his men in the Iraqi service ministries.³⁹⁶ His skills as arbitrator came at a price. Maliki returned at least three

³⁹² Combating Terrorism Center, "Redacted Intelligence Report 012," *Harmony Program*. n.d.

³⁹³ Combating Terrorism Center, "Redacted Intelligence Report 010," *Harmony Program*. n.d.

³⁹⁴ Combating Terrorism Center, "Redacted Intelligence Report 001," *Harmony Program*. n.d.

³⁹⁵ Combating Terrorism Center, "Redacted Intelligence Report 022," *Harmony Program*. n.d.

³⁹⁶ Filkins, "The Shadow Commander."

favors to the Iranians. He appointed the pro-Iranian Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani president, neutralized the CIA-backed Iraqi National Intelligence Service, and, most importantly, he agreed to evict all American forces from country by the end of 2011.³⁹⁷ The White House knew the exact terms of agreement between Suleimani and Maliki and, without fighting them, put its stamp of approval on the new government. Obama's decision frustrated many; one former American diplomat decried it, "We lost four thousand five hundred Americans only to let the Iranians dictate the outcome of the way? To result in strategic result?"³⁹⁸ The opposition leader Ayad Allawi told reporter Dexter Filkins, "I needed American support...But they wanted to leave, and they handed the country to the Iranians. Iraq is a failed state now, an Iranian colony."³⁹⁹ The US retrenched its military commitment in Iraq, knowing full well that Iran would fulfill the security vacuum left by its withdrawal. The Obama Administration set in motion a piecemeal and uncertain process of transferring responsibility for regional security to Iran. It has further signaled its intention to do so by revitalizing the diplomatic approach to limiting Iran's nuclear program and dropping its untenable precondition of zero-enrichment capability. In the horrific Syrian civil war, the administration has vacillated between involvement, which would necessarily mean confronting Iran, and neutrality.

Suleimani has consolidated Iranian influence in Iraq by remolding previously hostile special groups into buttresses for the Maliki government. The two special group networks that accepted full Iranian aid and direction, AAH and another small but potent group, Kataib Hizbullah, now augment the security forces against the waves of sectarian

³⁹⁷ Filkins, "What We Left Behind," 7.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

terrorism. US and Iraqi military intelligence officials have evaluated Kataib Hizbullah as the most advanced and pro-Iranian special group. Unlike AAH, which sprung from the Mahdi Army, most of Kataib Hizbullah's personnel served with the Badr Corps before 2003.⁴⁰⁰ In Badr, they would have adopted the ideology of Islamic Revolution and built deep relationships with Quds operatives. In 2010, a US intelligence officer numbered the group somewhere between 500 and 1,000.⁴⁰¹ One US intelligence analyst described them as often armed similarly to Guard and Hizbullah commando units, replete with assault rifles, body armor, and night vision goggles. The group has used advanced anti-material weapons as well and, according to the Wall Street Journal, intercepted the data feed from US drones.⁴⁰² According to a Treasury Department designation, Kataib Hizbullah played a role disproportionately significant to its small force size. Its leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, allegedly smuggled sniper rifles, explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), mortars, rockets, and ammunition from Iran to Iraq for distribution among special groups and subsequent targeting of Coalition Forces, as well as facilitated the movement and training of Iraq-based Shi'i militants.⁴⁰³ Muhandis, before joining Badr's campaigns against Iraq during the war, participated as an operative of Da'wa in the bombing of Western embassies in Kuwait and the attempted assassination of the Emir of Kuwait in the early 1980s.⁴⁰⁴ He is a clear US enemy. Ambassador Crocker recalled telling Maliki "that if Muhandis wanted to stay healthy, he needed to stay in Iran."⁴⁰⁵ The Treasury

⁴⁰⁰ Knights, "Shia strength," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 30, 2011, 4.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰³ Treasury Department, "Treasury Designates Individual, Entity Posing Threat to Stability in Iraq," *Press Center*, July 2, 2009.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Filkins, "What We Left Behind," 7.

Department had designated him as an advisor to Suleimani and several American and Iraqi officials have named him Suleimani's personal representative to Prime Minister Maliki.⁴⁰⁶ After the US withdrawal, Muhandis was given a guesthouse on the property of Maliki's national-security adviser in the vaunted Green Zone. A block away from Muhandis lives AAH leader, Qais al-Khazali. Iraqi and American officials have accredited Maliki with deploying both militias against his opponents.⁴⁰⁷

The lynchpin of Iran's control of these special groups is the authority impressed by the supreme leader upon militia commanders. They accept the central supposition of the Islamic Revolution, admitting that the supreme leader represents the best of the *marja'iyya*, and following his orders. Their loyalty to the Islamic Republic supersedes any other affinities for nationally-based sources of power, whether political or clerical. Battat, for example, places loyalty in the supreme leader above rival *marja'iyya* and Iraqi political leaders. Theoretically, the leaders of Hizbullah, due to their party's official belief in the supreme leader, would also follow the command of Khamenei unequivocally. However, for an organization of its size and ambition, with its many different identities, Hizbullah balances its allegiance to Tehran with competing national obligations. This mechanism of loyalty works best in small groups with narrow interests. The secretary-general of Kataib Hizbullah, Wathiq al-Battat, announced the formation of an offshoot called "Mukhtar Army" in February 2013. Later that month, the new militia shelled an encampment of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, killing eight and wounding nearly

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

100.⁴⁰⁸ Battat tactlessly admitted to the press that his group receives weapons and other support from Iran and had previously said that he is advised by Quds.⁴⁰⁹ In an interview from early 2013, Battat aired the ideological line of Kataib Hizbullah and Mukhtar Army.⁴¹⁰ “Ideologically speaking, the Shia knows no borders. All horizons are open to it. A Shiite authority, whether in India, Iraq, or anywhere else, has influence upon all the Shiites...I represent the Shiite enterprise, and the Iranians are part of the Shia. I am proud to be a foot soldier in the army of the leader, Sayyed Khamenei.” His faith in the supreme leader necessarily aligns him with Iranian policy, even if it threatens his country of birth. Asked if he would support Iran if war were to break out between Iraq and Iran, Battat answered in the affirmative:

All I know is that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ruled by a just Imam, who is connected to the Infallible Imam...Iraq, on the other hand, is ruled by a democratic government of technocrats, which is not connected to the Rule of the Jurisprudent or to any authority. If our government decides to fight...I'm giving you a frank answer... If it decides to fight the Infallible Imam, I will stand alongside the Infallible Imam against Iraq. If the Infallible Imam is in India and decides to fight Iraq, I will stand alongside India. If the Infallible Imam is in the U.S. and decides to fight Iraq, I will stand alongside the U.S....My rule is to stand alongside the Infallible Imam, because I know that justice is with him.

His total loyalty to the supreme leader, and idea of the revolution as a purely Islamic success story, suggests that he has deprived the Islamic Revolution of its necessary national context. He egregiously overestimated the power of the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*. According to his vision, Khamenei dictates policy single-handedly—in accordance with divine law and unimpeded by the democratic inputs that actually do influence his

⁴⁰⁸ Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Adam Schreck, “Shiite militant threatens Iranian exiles in Iraq.” Associated Press, February 26, 2013.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Watheq Al-Battat, interview by Sumaria TV, *Iraqi Shiite Militia Leader Watheq Al-Battat: I Would Support Iran in a War against Iran* (October 23, 2013).

decisions. In the interview, Battat describes Khamenei as a “just dictator” and ignores the interviewer’s counterargument that “Khamenei is not a dictator. Iran holds elections every four years...Khamenei is a religious ruler.” On the topic of Syria, Battat stated his group will fight “wherever our holy places are attacked” and gave Bashar al-Assad “credit for standing honorably alongside the resistance...What is important is the common enemies—the Americans and the Israelis. We must confront them with all our force. After we annihilate the Jews, we can deal with domestic matters.”

Iran stopped marshaling its proxies against the central government in Baghdad once a US withdrawal was assured. Without US forces to protect it from Sunni terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Maliki’s increasingly sectarian government has required paramilitary supplements to its security services. Iran positioned its proxies to fulfill this role, and to replace the US as security provider. The fusion of Iranian-backed militias with Maliki’s government may consummate Iran’s influence in Iraqi affairs. Since 2013, AAH has been rapidly expanding its presence across Iraq after forming a political party following the US withdrawal.⁴¹¹ The party has established a social services program to aid widows and orphans and launched a network of religious schools. One of the clerics leading the party said he would like to see the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* implemented in Iraq by a majority vote, and portraits of Khamenei and Khomeini hang in its Baghdad offices. This shift to politics and social services mirrors the growth of Hizbullah into a national party. Iran has also deployed these militias to

⁴¹¹ Liz Sly, “Iranian-backed militant group in Iraq is recasting itself as a political player,” *The Washington Post*, February 18, 2013.

Syria, with Maliki's consent.⁴¹² July 2013, AAH announced the presence of a sub-group fighting in Syria, named Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq-Liwa'a Kafeel Zaynab (AAH-LKZ), or League of the Righteous-Supporters of Zaynab. AAH-LKZ has released combat footage on its main Facebook page, which has over 33,000 members, showing military maneuvers featuring snipers and machine-gun teams and the use of mortars, rockets, and possibly armored vehicles.⁴¹³

Quds' policy in Afghanistan bore a close resemblance to its multifaceted policy in Iraq. As in Iraq, Iran dealt with a diverse array of factions, some of them inimical toward one another. The US government levied a surprising claim against this policy, alleging that Quds furnished supplies and intelligence to the Taliban. The allegation is inconsistent with the history of Guard-Taliban relations, yet within the scope of the Guard's willingness to make tactical compromises. In 1998, the Taliban, after seizing much of Afghanistan, killed eleven Iranian diplomats and journalists. Soon after, Guard and regular army units amassed on the border and prepared for a possible war against the Taliban, which had also earned infamy for butchering Afghan Shi'is and was aligned closely with Saudi Arabia. Iran gladly welcomed the removal of the Taliban regime. Once the US invasion diminished the political and military power of the Taliban, however, Iran's calculus apparently shifted. A weak and marginal Taliban was an asset; a powerful and connected one, a liability. In 2007, the US Treasury Department designated Quds Force as an agency for terrorism under Executive Order 13224.⁴¹⁴ Quds was the

⁴¹² For more information, see: Phillip Smyth, "From Karbala to Sayyida Zaynab: Iraqi Fighters in Syria's Shi'a Militias," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, August 27, 2013.

⁴¹³ Phillip Smyth, "Hizballah Cavalcade: Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq's Liwa'a Kafeel Zaynab," *Jihadology*, August 14, 2013, jihadology.net.

⁴¹⁴ Treasury, "Fact Sheet."

first national military branch included on the list.⁴¹⁵ Quds supported and ordered armed groups to target Coalition Forces and did not have an interest in providing any materials, logistics, or orders for acts of terror that these groups may have incidentally committed. Quds was neither a cause nor a prime enabler for terrorist actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. The designation misrepresented its aims as evil, rather than oppositional. Regardless, the department's press statement alleged that Quds provided weapons and financing to the Taliban to support its anti-US activity in Afghanistan. It accused Quds of, since at least 2006, arranging "frequent" shipments of small arms and ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107mm rockets, plastic explosives, and "probably" man-portable defense systems to the Taliban. In 2010, the Taliban reportedly approached the Guard to request full support, as opposed to selected commanders on the field.⁴¹⁶ According to Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair, Taliban commanders had publicly credited Iranian support for their successful anti-Coalition operations.⁴¹⁷

Iran courts groups from across the ideological spectrum in order to maintain at any given moment at least one viable link in demonstrably chaotic and volatile situations abroad. This process involves economic, diplomatic, cultural, political, and military investments in a broad set of actors and depends on many government organizations other than the Guard.⁴¹⁸ The wide spread gives Iran significant leverage over any single actor in conflict with another actor also under its influence. Ideally, this strategy allows

⁴¹⁵ Robin Wright, "Iranian Unit to Be Labeled 'Terrorist'," *The Washington Post*, August 15, 2007.

⁴¹⁶ Antonio Giustozzi, "Taliban Networks in Afghanistan." Edited by Marc Genest and Andrea Dew, *CIWAG Case Study Series 2011-2012* (US Naval War College), 2012, 69.

⁴¹⁷ Maseh Zarif and Ahmad Majidiyar, "Iranian Influence in Afghanistan: Recent Developments," *AEI IranTracker*, August 21, 2009.

⁴¹⁸ For more information, see: *Ibid.*

Iran to mediate between opposing parties in either Iraq or Afghanistan, as well as stoke the violence that necessitates such mediation in the first place. The upshot of this makes Iran arbitrator of regional affairs. Calibrated military support for the Taliban is in no way an implausible scenario. Iranian support for politically counterproductive, violent factions in either Iraq or Afghanistan also achieves its other objective of harming US forces and extending their stay in costly and inhospitable military engagements. In the long run, this policy destroyed US morale necessary to make active security commitments in the Middle East—a fundamental and ongoing goal of the Islamic Revolution. These violent groups form a cornerstone of Iran's dual strategy of, one, expanding its influence in its neighboring countries and, two, pushing the US away from the Middle East.

Conclusion

The terms radical revolutionary and pragmatic revolutionary do not suffice as categories for aptly explaining contemporary Iranian politics. The contradiction between Khomeini's transnational ideology and the revolutionary yet national state that it yielded resolved decidedly in favor of the forces of self-preservation and national interest. This led the Guard to purge its truly radical wing, symbolized by its abandonment of the Office of Liberation Movements. The elimination of true radicals signified that every other revolutionary realized the necessity of preserving the state. The main contest between revolutionaries shifted to the interpretation of Khomeini's principles. Conservative, or "radical," interpretations, for example, sanctified the office of the supreme leader and dictated a cynical and rigid opposition to détente, especially with the US. Progressive, or "pragmatic," interpretations, on the other hand, looked for ways to expand popular sovereignty and improve Iran's relations with the world. A dichotomy between conservative pragmatist and progressive pragmatist more truthfully captures the actual political situation in Iran today. Indeed, Suleimani has shown incredibly pragmatic behavior in his willingness to cooperate with strategic enemies like the US and the Taliban. At the same time, he and other senior Guard leaders have evinced their commitment to certain conservative principles, like the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* and general opposition to the US security architecture in the Middle East. The conservatives, however, fight an increasingly uphill battle to retain social relevancy and political power at high levels. One hopes that their considerable pragmatism will translate into a willingness to negotiate with reformists and eventually compromise on core anti-US and

anti-Israel principles. If pressures for reform mount into a domestic political crisis, conservatives may have no choice but to shift to a moderate perspective, especially if in order to preserve themselves.

The current crisis in Syria has demonstrated the futility of repression as an instrument for preserving the power of the unpopular and privileged few. Despite the Guard's heavy support for the al-Assad regime, its commanders have surely gleaned a few potent lessons from the tragic failure of al-Assad's repression techniques against initially peaceful popular demonstrations. In captured documentary footage of the Guard's combat advisory role in Syria, Quds commander Ismail Heydari told the filmmaker: "unfortunately in the early days—when dealing with the demonstrations—the Syrian government made mistakes and its led to all this. It's not like that in the IRI, fortunately Islam has taught us to be kind." In the same video, Heydari expressed an ideological understanding of the conflict,

You can't call this a civil war between the Syrian government and Syrian people. Not at all. And many people agree with me on this, the current conflict in Syria is in fact one of Islam against the infidels. A war of good against evil. We're in the right because we're backed by the Supreme Leader and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah....Who is on the other side? Israel, who else? Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar, and they get money from the UAE too. The USA, Britain, France, and other Europeans help them too. This all shows that our side is the side of "right."

Heydari's blending of criticism of the al-Assad regime—he also critiqued the Syrian Arab Army for its flagrant mistreatment of civilians—with strong belief in the ideological correctness of Iran's intervention in the war indicates the complexity of the relationship between principles and a straightforward understanding of the facts. Guard commanders seem to display acumen for reading factual situations incisively while placing them in a

framework consistent with their official ideological standpoint. They match their actions to fluid and nebulous principles. Indeed, in addressing the conservative backlash to the signing of a preliminary deal over Iran's nuclear program, Khamenei said he supported "heroic flexibility" in bending Iran's ideological framework to permit diplomacy. The flexibility of such principles may ultimately allow the Guard to accept domestic political change clear of conscience.

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