



Overview of TRGC

Brian P. Sheets

Background Information on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu discussed the threat of the Iranian regime in an interview with Fox News. Netanyahu said that Iran represents the biggest threat "because it would couple a radical Islamic regime with nuclear weapons. There could be evil that is not threatening because it doesn't have the powers of mass murder. But when you couple a radical Islamic regime that says 'Death to America' with the weapons of mass death, then you have a much, much bigger problem."

He accused the Iranian regime of seeking to bring down the US as part of its goal of global domination. "They believe that they're destined to govern the world. Anybody that doesn't agree with them, they'll be able to subjugate or kill, and they're working on the means to achieve that."¹

The IRGC is a branch of Iran's Armed Forces that is tasked with protecting the country's Islamic nature, and say its role is to prevent foreign interference and coups.²

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is a branch of Iran's Armed Forces founded after the Iranian Revolution on 5 May 1979. Whereas the regular military (or Artesh) was constitutionally mandated to defend Iran's borders and maintain internal order, the IRGC was mandated to protect the country's Islamic nature. The Revolutionary Guards state that their role in protecting the Islamic system is preventing foreign interference as well as coups by the military or "deviant movements".

The Revolutionary Guards have roughly 125,000 military personnel including ground, aerospace and naval forces. Its naval forces are now the primary forces tasked with operational control of the Persian Gulf. It also controls the paramilitary Basij militia which has about 90,000 active personnel. Its media arm is Sepah News.

Since its origin as an ideologically driven militia, the IRGC has taken an ever more assertive role in virtually every aspect of Iranian society. Its expanded social, political, military, and economic role under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's administration—especially during the 2009 presidential election and post-election suppression of protest—has led many analysts to argue that its political power has surpassed even that of the Shia clerical system.

The force's main role is in national security. It is responsible for internal and border security, law enforcement, and also Iran's missile forces. IRGC operations are geared towards asymmetric warfare and less traditional duties. These include the control of smuggling, control of the Strait of Hormuz, and resistance operations. The IRGC is intended to complement the more traditional role of the regular Iranian military, with the two forces operating separately and focusing on different operational roles.

The IRGC is a combined arms force with its own ground forces, navy, air force, intelligence, and Special Forces. It also controls the Basij militia. The Basij is a volunteer-based force, with 90,000 regular

soldiers and 300,000 reservists. The IRGC is officially recognized as a component of the Iranian military under Article 150 of the Iranian Constitution. It is separate from, and parallel to, the other arm of Iran's military, which is called Artesh (another Persian word for army). Especially in the waters of the Persian Gulf, the IRGC is expected to assume control of any Iranian response to attacks on its nuclear facilities.

The IRGC was formed on 5 May 1979 following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in an effort to consolidate several paramilitary forces into a single force loyal to the new government and to function as a counter to the influence and power of the regular military, initially seen as a potential source of opposition because of its traditional loyalty to the Shah. From the beginning of the new Islamic government, the Pasdaran (Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami) functioned as a corps of the faithful. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic entrusted the defense of Iran's territorial integrity and political independence to the regular military (artesh), while it gave the Pasdaran the responsibility of preserving the Revolution itself.

Days after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's return to Tehran on 1 February 1979, the Bazargan interim administration established the Pasdaran under a decree issued by Khomeini on 5 May. The Pasdaran was intended to protect the Revolution and to assist the ruling clerics in the day-to-day enforcement of the new government's Islamic codes and morality. There were other, perhaps more important, reasons for establishing the Pasdaran. The Revolution needed to rely on a force of its own rather than borrowing the previous regime's tainted units. As one of the first revolutionary institutions, the Pasdaran helped legitimize the Revolution and gave the new government an armed basis of support. Moreover, the establishment of the Pasdaran served notice to both the population and the regular armed forces that the Khomeini government was quickly developing its own enforcement body. Thus, the Pasdaran, along with its political counterpart, Crusade for Reconstruction, brought a new order to Iran. In time, the Pasdaran would rival the police and the judiciary in terms of its functions. It would even challenge the performance of the regular armed forces on the battlefield.

IRGC's Naval Special Forces, S.N.S.F.

Although the IRGC operated independently of the regular armed forces, it was often considered to be a military force in its own right due to its important role in Iranian defense. The IRGC consists of ground, naval, and aviation troops, which parallel the structure of the regular military. Unique to the Pasdaran, however, has been control of Iran's strategic missile and rocket forces.

Also contained under the umbrella of the more conventional Pasdaran, were the Basij Forces (Mobilization Resistance Force), a network of potentially up to a million active individuals who could be called upon in times of need. The Basij could be committed to assist in the defense of the country against internal or external threats, but by 2008 had also been deployed in mobilizing voters in elections and alleged tampering during such activities. Another element was the Quds Force, a Special Forces element tasked with unconventional warfare roles and known to be involved providing assistance and training to various militant organizations around the world.

Yahya Rahim Safavi, head of the IRGC since 1997, was dismissed as commander in chief of the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdarans) in August 2007. The dismissal of General Yahya Rahim Safavi disrupted the balance of power in Iran to the advantage of conservatives. Analysis in the international press considered the removal of Yahya Rahim Safavi to be a sign of change in the defense strategies of Iran, but the general policies of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps are not personally determined by its commander.

Military structure

In late July 2008, reports originating that the IRGC was in the process of dramatically changing its structure. In a shake-up, in September 2008 Iran's Revolutionary Guards (Pasdarans) established 31 divisions and an autonomous missile command. The new structure changes the IRGC from a centralized to a decentralized force, with 31 provincial corps whose commanders wield extensive authority and power. According to the plan, each of Iran's thirty provinces will have a provincial corps, except Tehran Province, which will have two.³

¹ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/225179>

² <http://americanmilitarynews.com/2017/07/iranian-general-threatens-us-troops-in-iran-while-defending-islamic-revolution-guards-corps/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Revolutionary_Guard_Corps