

Report – IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps  
aka Sepah or Pasdaran)



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## General Introduction



The development and evolution processes that The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has gone through, since its establishment in 1979, have reached the point where they are one of the strongest and most influential organizations in Iran today. This power buildup has placed the IRGC in a significant influential position in all of the country's centers of power and established itself as one of the main elements the regime relies on to ensure its stability. Furthermore, these processes have also made the IRGC a key factor in the design and implementation of Iran's foreign policy and its efforts to increase regional influence.

As part of the aforementioned processes, the IRGC's military power was also strengthened and today it is an army in every respect, operating in parallel with and separately from Iran's regular army (known as Artesh).

The main branches operated by the IRGC are the Navy, Aerospace force, Ground forces, Basij forces and Quds force. Each of these branches operates independently, with a command foundation and an orderly structure, divided into units, bases, geographical sectors, etc.

Despite the fact that both the Artesh and the IRGC are officially subordinate to one commander, due to its status and special role, the IRGC receives a considerably larger budget and investments than the Artesh. In addition, IRGC commanders also have close and direct connections to the Supreme Leader's office, and they often operate in full compartmentalization from the rest of the country's security branches. The same is true for the IRGC's intelligence and security branches.

In fact, one can say the Iranian regime uses a command structure which contains a built-in "by-pass" mechanism. In this system, there is a formal chain of command which consists of military and security organizations as well as supervisory institutes, but there is also an official by-pass in which the Supreme Leader can directly command and oversee the IRGC.

This structure stems from the IRGC's status and significance for the regime but also due to the ever-present fear from the formation of new centers of power within the security establishment, that can endanger the regime.

This report, which is based on open sources, is an introduction to future reviews that we will publish regarding the IRGC's military branches mentioned above.

In this report, we will review Iran's security and foreign policy concepts, the IRGC's role in implementing them, the command-and-control structure, the main institutions in Iran's security establishment, as well as the main security organizations operating within the IRGC.

## **General background - Establishment and Development of the IRGC**

The IRGC was established in 1979, a few months after Iran's Islamic Revolution. It was established by order of the Islamic Republic's founder, Khomeini, as an independent force loyal to the Supreme Leader, with the goal of defending the regime and the revolution's values and serving as a counterweight to the army, which was perceived at the time as loyal to the Shah. Another purpose assigned to the group was to promote the philosophy, values, and concepts of the Islamic Revolution outside of Iran.

In other words, internally the IRGC is a kind of Republican Guard whose assignment is to suppress all internal and external opposition, while externally the organization acts as a tool for carrying out covert operations designed to advance the interests of the regime. These include espionage, terrorism and subversion, military operations, arming and training proxy militias, and more.

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), and in light of the significant threat, the Iranian leadership realized that it was necessary to expand and strengthen the IRGC. During the war, they developed and grew considerably both in terms of manpower and operational capabilities. First, in 1981, the Basij was annexed to their control, and later, in 1985, air, sea, and ground forces were officially established, operating separately and parallel to those of the Iranian army. In 1988, the Quds Force was established to promote Iran's foreign policy, protect its regional interests, and spread the ideology and values of the Islamic Revolution outside Iran.

According to various estimates, 140,000-200,000 people currently serve in the IRGC, not including the Basij forces. The Basij, which is a paramilitary force annexed to the IRGC, consists of a large number of independent popular militias mobilized as needed. The number of potential members of these forces throughout Iran is estimated at hundreds of thousands.

These force buildup processes have led to the creation of two separate and parallel military forces in Iran: The Iranian Army and the Revolutionary Guards. Although officially the two armies were subordinated to the commander of Iran's armed forces, in practice the IRGC maintains direct ties with key power centers in the Iranian regime and wields much stronger influence. This closeness also stems, among other things, from one of the articles of Iran's constitution, which states that the IRGC is directly subordinate to the Supreme Leader and to him alone. since 2005 the IRGC's capabilities and status were further strengthened when the organization was tasked with supervising the Iranian nuclear project and securing its activities.

The status and role of the IRGC led to significant differences between them and the Iranian army (known as Artesh). While the army's main role is to defend Iran's borders, it is equipped with relatively outdated equipment and does not receive significant investments, as opposed to the IRGC, which receives huge budgets. These are expressed in the level of equipment and weapon systems, the level of training and command, as well as the general attention that the organization and its personnel receive.

This budgetary allocation has led to the fact that over the past three decades, the IRGC has been able to invest most of its efforts in developing cyber capabilities, developing, and improving missile and UAV capabilities, developing various asymmetric warfare methods, and establishing, training and financing various proxy forces.

The IRGC's military buildup was also accompanied by a process in which the organization became highly influential within Iran. This process, in which IRGC members established themselves and assimilated into state institutions and various circles of government, led to the organization becoming the strongest and most influential economic, political, legal, and social element within Iran. In addition, the IRGC is the most influential body determining Iran's foreign policy and its implementation, including through the use of the Quds Force. A glimpse of this balance of power can be found in an interview given by former Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif in 2021, in which he stated that the Quds Force has more influence than his own, regarding his country's foreign and nuclear policy.

This enormous impact has been achieved in two main ways. First, over the years, the organization's operatives and commanders became entrenched in the various state systems, advancing to senior positions, ensuring to assign colleagues and former IRGC operatives in key positions at all levels and systems of government. This trend was also supported by the conservative senior echelons of the Iranian regime, who preferred to promote people with a worldview and values identical to their own and to revolutionary ideas.

Another way in which they gained power and influence was through the Khatam al-Anbiya company. This company is, in fact, an umbrella organization for an extensive network of civilian companies ostensibly engaged in a wide range of fields, but in practice serves as a civilian cover for IRGC activities in Iran and abroad. The fields in which the various companies operate include; transportation, energy and communications infrastructure, banking, natural resources and mines, construction and real estate, electronics, industrial plants, food production, education and more.

In addition to their control over various sectors of the Iranian economy, the IRGC also controls a large number of various foundations, associations, institutions, and organizations. These associations and organizations, which employ tens of thousands of people, control religious and educational institutions, factories, banks, economic institutions, and more. These provide the IRGC with significant influence and maintain the organization's continuous control over what happens in Iran, as well as its economic and political stability.

This complex network enables control and supervision over significant economic and industrial sectors within Iran and is a main source of enormous revenue for the IRGC while circumventing sanctions. In addition, it enables close and continuous contact with the population, which helps promote indoctrination while also supervising it.

This combination of great military power and economic, political, and social influence has made the IRGC the strongest force in Iran, which is one of the regime's bases.

## **Iran's Security and Foreign Policy Concepts and the IRGC's Role in Implementing Them**

Like many other countries, Iran's security concepts and foreign policy are complex and influenced by many elements. Some of these elements transform over time, depending on current and future Iranian circumstances and needs. On the other hand, there are elements of foreign policy that remain relatively constant and are influenced by worldviews, values, and different historical events.

In general, it can be said that Iran sees itself as a regional power with a long and glorious military and cultural history, and therefore aspires to return to the hegemonic status it deserves. This view is also backed by religious motives, since Iran aspires to spread the messages of the Islamic Revolution in the Middle East and around the world, and because it sees itself as the protector of Shi'ites in the world.

Another aspect is Iran's view of the countries of the region, created after the world wars, as an artificial imperialist product that lacks stability. This perception presents a kind of condescension towards the Arab states and Arabs, who are perceived as having artificial nationalism and an inferior tribal culture.

On the other hand, corresponding to these views, Iran perceives a constant fear of foreign interference in its internal affairs and threats to its borders and regime. These concerns are based on historical memory, which includes, inter alia, struggles and wars in recent decades against Britain, Russia and Iraq, alongside the fear from the Sunni states surrounding it in the region. Thus, for example, there is a rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, based on Sunni-Shi'ite and Arab-Persian rivalry, alongside the desire to lead the Muslim world. Another example is the rivalry between Turkey and Iran over their aspirations to become regional powers. This rivalry is expressed, for example, in the countries' support for the opposing sides in the war in Syria and in the struggle over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

However, statements by senior Iranian regime officials and the actions taken by Iran in recent decades leave no doubt that the main elements it perceives as the biggest threat to its regime are the United States ("the Great Satan") and Israel (the "Little Satan").

Apart from the ideological abyss underlying hostility towards the United States, it should also be noted that the basic Iranian fear has been greatly intensified by the American presence in the Middle East over the past two decades (and even earlier during the first Gulf War). This American presence surrounded Iran from a number of directions – Iraq, Afghanistan, the Gulf states, and others. This presence demonstrated the power differences between the parties and was seen as a potentially imminent threat.



Alongside its hatred of the United States, Iran, in its perception of the region, designates a central place for Israel. Politically, Israel is perceived as a foreign and occupying colonial entity, an extension of the United States and Britain's Western imperialism. This is added to Israel's military strength, which poses a direct threat to Iran and its ambitions in the region. Hostility toward Israel is also backed by religious motives. These stem from, among other things, Israeli control of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Khomeini's negative attitude toward Jews. All these reasons led Iran to view Israel as a significant adversary, a threat to the ayatollah's regime and the Iranian people, and one that must be destroyed.

In light of the various threats, Iran has developed a mostly defensive security doctrine, based mainly on a deterrence strategy. It rests on several layers and its main goal is to prevent war on Iranian soil.

First, Iran places great emphasis on developing diverse military capabilities. These include the construction of an array of self-produced ballistic missiles and UAVs, the use of asymmetric naval warfare, and the development of a military nuclear program. Each of these capabilities is intended to enable Iran to attack its neighbors and enemy forces surrounding it, as well as main shipping lanes and oil and gas production centers, which are critical to the global economy.

Another layer is the use of soft power. As part of these efforts, Iran intervened in a number of countries in an attempt to win the support of the local population. This intervention is carried out by establishing civilian consolidation through economic aid, building civilian infrastructure, providing religious services, education, welfare, etc. The main objective of these activities is to create indoctrination and sympathizing with Iranian-Shi'ite values, out of a desire to establish civil and political support for Iran. This with the intention to enable freedom of action and military entrenchment in the future.

Another very important element of Iran's strategy is the use of proxy forces. These forces operate in various arenas far from Iran's borders, while receiving full Iranian support and funding. This serves several purposes. First, the use of proxy forces helps increase Iran's military power and influence while creating a deterrent buffer zone. The proxy forces shift the fighting to the enemy's borders, effectively distancing the threats from Iran's borders. In addition, the use of proxy forces enables Iran to maintain ambiguity and denial, as well as avoid the loss of Iranian human life.

In fact, by intervening in various arenas in the Middle East and beyond, Iran seeks to create a strategic depth, in which there are forces or countries under its influence or, at the very least, identify with its values. The conflicts and wars in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon are clear examples of Iranian intervention and the use of all these means.

The IRGC's role in all of the above is critical. In fact, it can be said that they are the executive arm of the leadership in Tehran. This is true of all matters related to the execution of Iran's foreign policy, especially with regard to its subversive activities, as well as with regard to strengthening its internal capabilities, namely its missile system, UAVs, and its military nuclear program. The IRGC built Iran's missile programs and the UAV industry, and they are responsible for their continuous progress over the years. In addition, the implementation and development of Iran's military nuclear program – with all its complexities – was and still is the responsibility of the IRGC.

The IRGC also played a central role in Iran's intervention in regional conflicts and wars throughout the Middle East. Iranian intervention in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Sudan, was led by the IRGC, especially by the Quds Force and its leaders.

However, it is important to note that the IRGC did not limit its activities to the regional arena alone. Quds Force operatives and other units are working to strengthen Iran's hold on other parts of the world, including Africa, Asia, and South America. Iran's modus operandi varies and includes, inter alia, the establishment and support of local militias, the establishment of criminal enterprises, activity in the civilian sphere through the establishment of educational institutions and NGOs, construction of infrastructure, and mainly funneling considerable amounts of money into these arenas.

## **The Armed Forces Command and Control Structure, As Well As the IRGC's Position Within it**

Iran's command and control structure presents an unusual model compared to what we are familiar with in Western countries. This structure stems from the fact that Iran is a country with an authoritarian-theocratic regime with limited representation characteristics. In contrast to the structure we are familiar with, which contains an elected body, executive branches, and the judiciary, Iran has other institutions and bodies appointed and acting on behalf of the Supreme Leader. In fact, it can be said that Iran has two "wings" of government – one elected republican and the other revolutionary unelected.

Alongside institutions such as the presidency and parliament (Majles), which represent the elected representative aspect, there are institutions and officials appointed by the Supreme Leader. These include, among others, the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council, the heads of the judiciary and, of course, all the heads of the security establishment.

In addition, it is important to remember that the structure of government in Iran is headed by the Supreme Leader, who is the final and determining authority on all matters.

This special governmental structure also affects the control and command of the country's armed forces. While there is an official and direct chain of command, as in most countries, the supreme authority of the Supreme Leader allows for a "bypass bureaucracy" mechanism, in which he can directly command any person, body, or organization in Iran. In addition, due to the constant concern for its stability, the regime made sure to strengthen and develop the IRGC so that it would serve as its main support.

Thus, for example, and although the Revolutionary Guards are officially subordinate to the commander of the armed forces, in practice its activities are often carried out in a compartmentalized manner, while receiving orders directly from the office of the Supreme Leader. These factors create a complex control mechanism in which there is ostensibly a built-in situation of circumvention of authority on the one hand, alongside reporting and subordination to several factors simultaneously, on the other.

In addition, the IRGC's development, along with its unique role in preserving the regime, has led to the extent of their control going far beyond the military aspect. The IRGC currently controls an extensive network of arms, organizations, and institutions that operate under the organization's auspices, and are not necessarily military. These include, for example, universities, religious institutions, research centers, companies, associations and civil organizations, etc., whose role is to support the achievement of the organization's goals and its strengthening.

## Office of the Supreme Leader

The Supreme Commander of Iran's armed forces, including the Revolutionary Guards, is the Supreme Leader of Iran. He has the authority to appoint the IRGC commander and other senior officials in Iran, and is the formal, final authority on all matters.

Under the office of the Supreme Leader, there are various ministries and organizations whose role is to supervise all government apparatuses, including the IRGC. In fact, this is a large and complex mechanism in itself, which includes, inter alia, a military coordination apparatus, a ministry of political and ideological affairs, intelligence ministries, research and planning ministries, religious institutions, education, and more.

## Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)

The Supreme National Security Council is Iran's most senior policy-making body in the fields of security, intelligence, and foreign relations, and its authority is second only to that of the Supreme Leader. The chairman of the council is the president of Iran, and its decisions are submitted for official approval by the Supreme Leader. However, officially it is considered an advisory body and lacks command and control capabilities.



The 22 permanent members of the Council are, in fact, the heads of the regime, including the vice president, the commander of the armed forces, the commanders of the army and the IRGC, the head of the Atomic Energy Commission, the heads of the judiciary, the ministers of foreign affairs, energy, finance, interior, intelligence, and more.

In addition to these officials, there are two council members appointed by the Supreme Leader, one of whom usually serves as the council's secretary and official president. The current secretary of the Supreme Council is Ali Akbar Ahmadian, who was appointed to his position in 2023 and previously served in a variety of positions in the IRGC.



Above: Ali Akbar Ahmadian

Alongside the Supreme National Security Council, a coordination body called the National Intelligence Coordination Council was established. This council, which is under the responsibility of the minister of intelligence and security affairs, is intended to serve as a coordination body between the Supreme National Security Council and the country's intelligence agencies. This council is in effect an umbrella organization for the 16 intelligence and security organizations operating in Iran. Thus, for example, at least four intelligence and security organizations operate under the IRGC, apart from the intelligence apparatuses operating in each of the military branches. The chairman of the council in recent years has been Ismail Khatib.



Above: Emblem of the Intelligence Coordination Council

### **Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS)**

The Armed Forces Command is Iran's highest military body. It officially oversees the activities of the army, IRGC, police, and other law enforcement agencies and advises the Supreme Leader on military matters. This body receives its instructions from the Supreme Leader and translates them into the policy and strategy of the armed forces. In addition, it is responsible for coordinating between the entities at the strategic level, as well as their equipment, operational capability, and ideological education. However, it is important to note that this body is not part of the official chain of command and does not engage in planning or coordination at the operational level.

The commander of Iran's armed forces since 2016 is Mohammad Bagheri, who previously held a number of senior positions within the IRGC.



Above: On the right - the insignia of the Armed Forces Command (AFGS), on the left - Mohammad Hussein Bagheri.

## **Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters**

This headquarters is the organization responsible for all matters of planning and operational coordination between the Iranian armed forces and their operational activation. Until 2016, the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters was part of the Armed Forces Command, but due to structural changes it was separated from it and became an independent body, operationally responsible for the armed forces. Since 2016, this headquarters has been headed by Gholam Ali Rashid, who previously served as deputy commander of the armed forces.

Coordination between the various forces is carried out through regional and thematic headquarters, which report to the main headquarters. For example, in the area of the Strait of Hormuz, there is a headquarters of Khatam al-Anbiya which operates vis-à-vis all IRGC naval forces in the Persian Gulf, and alongside it is the headquarters of Khatam al-Anbiya which operates vis-à-vis the army naval forces, which usually operate in the Gulf of Oman.

In addition, under Khatam al-Anbiya there are also independent research, development, and procurement bodies, as well as factories, universities, etc.

## **IRGC Command**

Despite the fact that the IRGC started off as an organization of a military nature, its organizational structure today is very complex and branched, and its organizational structure is not a classic hierarchical. This situation has a number of factors mentioned earlier, including its development, its importance for maintaining the regime, and the scope of its broad control, which includes many civilian branches.

The IRGC commander today is Hossein Salami. Salami was appointed to his position in 2019, after serving as deputy IRGC commander since 2009. Like many senior regime officials in Tehran, Western sanctions have been imposed on him.



Above: Gholam Ali Rashid – head of Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters.



Salami was born in 1960 in the village of Vaneshan, near Isfahan. He joined the IRGC in 1980, shortly after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War and fought in the ranks of the organization. Over the years, he held a number of positions, including serving as commander of the 25th and 14th divisions in the ground forces, as a commander in the navy, and as commander of the air force from 2006-2009.



Above: Hossein Salami – commander of the IRGC

Salami, who is considered close to Iran's conservative faction, is known for his extremist positions vis-à-vis the United States and Israel, and for his loyalty to the values of the Islamic Revolution and its leader. In addition, he supports Iran's actions to increase its power and promote its interests in the Middle East through proxy forces and its right to continue the development of its nuclear program and missile capabilities.

Salami's deputy commander is Ali Fadavi, who was appointed to his position in May 2019. Fadavi was born in 1961 in the city of Ardestan, near Isfahan, and like Salami enlisted in the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War. Throughout his career, Fadavi served in various positions in the IRGC navy, including commander of its intelligence division and commander of the 1st naval district, responsible for the Strait of Hormuz. In 2010, he was appointed commander of the navy. Under his command, in 2016, IRGC forces captured ten American sailors.

Like other senior IRGC officials, Fadavi also advocates taking a hard line against the West in all matters related to negotiations over the development of Iran's military and nuclear capabilities. In this context, he has often criticized Iranian politicians who supported talks with the United States and the West on these issues.

In addition to the position of deputy commander of the IRGC, there is also the position of deputy coordinator. This position, which was first filled in 2007, is currently held by Mohammad Reza Naqdi /Naghdi. His responsibilities include inter alia, the areas of training, intelligence, political and religious indoctrination, public relations, planning, and more.



Above: (left) Ali Fadavi and (right) Mohammad Reza Naqdi /Naghdi.

## **The Supreme Leader's Representative in the IRGC**

The office of the Supreme Leader's representative is one of the official arms of the IRGC and has great influence on decision-making in the organization. However, although its personnel operate alongside the IRGC's regular chain of command, they are not directly subordinate to it. Representatives of this branch operate as POCs in all IRGC units, and their reports are forwarded to the Supreme Leader's office, from which they receive instructions.

The official role of this ministry is to supervise and accompany IRGC activity in routine and emergency situations in order to ensure that it is carried out in accordance with religious law and the policy of the Supreme Leader. Among other things, its representatives supervise the appointment and dismissal of officials and have authority over all matters pertaining to the religious and ideological training of IRGC personnel. In addition, the commander of this division is responsible for the political and public relations departments and serves as one of the representatives in the IRGC's Supreme Military Council.

Like other branches of the IRGC, this branch also has a central headquarters under which various departments operate. Among them are the Department of Ideological Training, the Department of Coordination, Human Resources, Planning and Budgeting, the Religious Research Department, a Religious Training Center, and more.

## **Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters**

Hatem al-Anbiyah Reconstruction and Construction Company (also known as GHORB) is a huge holding company controlled by the Revolutionary Guards. This company is, in fact, an umbrella organization under which hundreds of companies operate, which serves as the engineering and execution arm of the regime and is considered an important and central economic wing for it. The companies operate in the fields of planning, construction and engineering, both in military and civilian projects.



From a military perspective, the company is involved, inter alia, in the nuclear project, the missile program, weapons factories, the construction of military bases and infrastructure, as well as research institutes. From a civilian point of view, the company is engaged in the construction of road infrastructure, aviation, ports, energy, mine operations, development of oil and gas fields, construction of industrial plants and communication networks, education and agricultural projects, and more.



Over the past decades, Hatem al-Anbiyah has become the regime's main planning, construction, and execution wing, employing an estimated 30,000-40,000 people.

Officially, Khatam al-Anbiyah is subordinate to the IRGC commander, who appoints a deputy who serves as acting commander responsible for the company's activities and control. The person who heads Khatam al-Anbiyah's economic empire is Abdulreza Abed, who until his appointment to the post in May 2023 served as a general in the IRGC.



Above: Abdulreza Abed Head of Hatem al-Anbiyah Reconstruction and Construction Company.

The control structure of Hatem al-Anbiyah and the companies operating under it is complex and intricate, and it is difficult to map the ownership and relationships between the companies. This situation is not coincidental and its purpose is to make it difficult for external intelligence and enforcement agencies to identify the control system and key functionaries in the companies and impose sanctions on them. Numerous businesses affiliated with Hatem al-Anbiyah run their own intricate web of front firms and subsidiaries, over which there is sometimes ambiguous ownership. In addition, some of the companies are based outside Iran and are not directly linked to the umbrella organization or prominent IRGC figures.

Khatam al-Anbiyah began to develop during the Iran-Iraq War, and most of its activity was concentrated in the military aspect. After the war, and due to the need to rebuild Iran, its activity expanded to civilian areas, relying on the need for reconstruction on the one hand and the strengthening of the IRGC during this period on the other. The company received another significant boost during the term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president of Iran (2005-2013), who awarded them many government tenders. These deepened the IRGC's grip on the Iranian economy and increased their political power.

Although Hatem al-Anbiyah is based in Iran, it operates all over the world in many projects, including in the Middle East, Africa, Central and South America and Asia.

In the Middle East, and especially in countries where Iranian involvement is great, such as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, the company is involved in establishing military infrastructure, building railways, roads, factories, agricultural projects, and residential buildings, etc. Thus, for example, a significant part of the military bases established in eastern Syria were built with the help of the Khatam al-Anbiyah company. In Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Syria's coastal region, the company is heavily involved in the restoration of infrastructure, buildings and factories, especially after the earthquake that occurred in northwestern Syria in early 2023. Other projects in the Middle East include the rehabilitation and preservation of religious sites, the construction of schools, sewage treatment plants and drinking water infrastructure.

In other regions, where Iran wants to consolidate its activities, Tehran uses the company's capabilities to promote and develop various infrastructure projects. These include the construction of dams, access to drinking sources, paving roads, building ports, and more. This was done out of a desire to gain support from the population and the authorities in order to assist Iranian entrenchment in the future. In recent years, Iran has built dams and hydroelectric power plants in Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan, and has helped finance, plan, and advise on similar projects in Nicaragua and Ecuador. Another example is the company's involvement in the production of cargo ships and oil tankers for Venezuela (a key ally of Iran in Central America).

Another aspect of these activities is Iran's use of them as a cover for IRGC activity. These activities are used for infiltrating IRGC personnel to establish espionage and terrorist infrastructures, or as a means of acquiring technologies and components critical to its nuclear and missile programs. [Examples of these activities can be found in an article we published on Iran's penetration of the Syrian communications market.](#)

Khatam al-Anbiyah's total fortune is estimated at \$250 billion, and according to various estimates, it controls about 30% of Iran's economy. This huge organization is a very important source of income for the IRGC and the Iranian regime, partly because it allows the independent flow of foreign currency, bypassing the sanctions imposed on Iran, and using ostensibly civilian companies. However, it should be emphasized that alongside the clear economic advantage, control of Khatam al-Anbiyah also serves as a central tool in strengthening the IRGC's control over the Iranian economy, politics, and society, thereby positioning and strengthening their internal status vis-à-vis the regime.

## **IRGC Intelligence and Security Services**

The regime's constant fear for its stability, along with many rivalries and internal power struggles, have led to the creation of an extensive network of intelligence and security organizations in Iran. This system is often characterized by duplications, rivalries and overlapping areas of responsibility. Thus, for example, while the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) is subordinate to the minister of intelligence and the president, the IRGC intelligence organization, which operates in parallel with it, is subordinate to the office of the Supreme Leader. This mechanism was deliberately built out of a desire to prevent the development of centers of power that could threaten the regime under the principle of divide and rule.

Currently, four main intelligence organizations operate under the IRGC, along with a number of security organizations. Their activities are spread over a wide range of fields and their control and influence are very broad.

### **The IRGC Intelligence Organization, IRGC-IO**

The IRGC intelligence organization, which has been operating in its current form, since 2009, has become the main and most important intelligence apparatus serving the Iranian regime. The organization is subordinate to the Office of the Supreme Leader and its activities are not subject to government and presidential supervision. [Since June 2022, the organization has been headed by Muhammad Kazemi](#) and his deputy is apparently Mohammad Mehdi Sayyari.

The strengthening of the IRGC intelligence organization came at the expense of the Ministry of Intelligence, (MOIS) Iran's other central intelligence organization, which reports to the minister of intelligence and the president. The two organizations compete over influence, prestige, resources, and responsibilities, but a series of failures and political power struggles have led to the strengthening of the IRGC's intelligence organization.

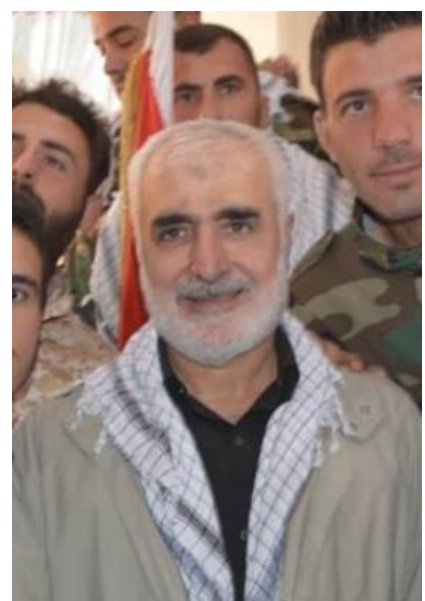


Above: Mohammad Mehdi Sayyari

Although the organization's activities are carried out outside Iran as well, a significant part of its activities are implemented inside the country, in order to ensure the stability of the regime. The activity inside Iran is carried out through regional centers scattered in 31 provinces, which report their activity to the central headquarters in Tehran. Over the years, the organization's responsibilities have multiplied, and this is reflected in its missions:

- Thwarting terrorist attacks on Iranian soil by foreign terrorist organizations, opposition organizations, and intelligence organizations, along with preventing espionage and attacks on Iranian targets abroad.
- Suppression of protests and demonstrations, thwarting political subversion and suppression of dissidents at home and abroad. In this context, the organization operates against Iranian exiles in the West and against organizations operating inside Iran, such as the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq. In this context, it should be noted that the intelligence organization controls a number of wings in Evin Prison, as well as other detention facilities and prisons throughout Iran, where dissidents, political prisoners, suspected spies, dual nationals, foreign citizens, etc. are held and interrogated.
- Gathering military intelligence to support IRGC activities in various arenas of operation. This activity is carried out through a variety of means, including various proxy forces linked to Iran.
- Combating the penetration of Western influence and values, acting against separatist minorities and against harm to religious and moral values. In this case, too, the organization uses its network monitoring capabilities to identify "problematic" sites and inciting elements.
- Combating public corruption, money laundering, smuggling and criminal organizations.

Alongside all these activities, in recent years the organization has stepped up its activity outside the country, and it operates in parallel with the Quds Force and the Ministry of Intelligence. The organization's activities outside the borders of Iran are carried out through designated units operating undercover, often from embassies and cultural centers or under the guise of business activity. One of the most prominent units in this context is Unit 4000, apparently headed by Javad Ghafari, previously the commander of the Quds Force in Syria.



In the picture: Javad Ghafari

This unit is responsible for carrying out special operations such as terrorist attacks, assassinations, and kidnappings outside the borders of Iran, and its operatives were involved, inter alia, in attempts to harm Israelis in Greece, Cyprus, Thailand, Georgia, and more. Another central unit is Unit 800, which is responsible for gathering intelligence outside Iran's borders, and its role is to support and enable the activity of the operational units.

The organization's strengthening over the past two decades, which was part of the IRGC's overall buildup within Iran, stemmed partly from struggles at the top of Iran's political system, but it is also the result of its special role in maintaining the stability of the regime. This is particularly evident in light of the pressure exerted on the regime by the West, as well as in the face of domestic pressure and protests.

Among other things, the organization played a central role in suppressing student protests in the country in 1997, in suppressing the Green Movement protests in 2009, in halting the wave of demonstrations in 2017-2019, and in dealing with the recent "hijab protests."

### **IRGC Counterintelligence Organization - Unit 1500**

The unit, founded in 1997, is in charge of a number of main areas, the principal among them is information security and counterespionage within the IRGC ranks. As part of its activity, the unit is responsible for thwarting the infiltration of intelligence organizations and dissidents into the ranks of the IRGC and preventing the leakage of confidential information. Another important role is the political, moral, and ideological supervision of IRGC members and ensuring their loyalty.

During the second decade of the 2000s, additional responsibilities were added to the unit, following reorganization measures carried out in the IRGC's intelligence systems. Among other things, the unit is responsible for securing planes, airports and sensitive facilities, as well as securing IRGC and regime officials.

The unit is headed by Majid Khademi, who took office in mid-2022, replacing Mohammad Kazem. His deputy is Rouhollah Bazaqandi. It is important to note that although the unit operates within the framework of the IRGC, due to its sensitive areas of activity, its commanders often report directly to the Supreme Leader's office.



In the picture: Majid Khademi

## **Cyber Defense Command**

The role of the Cyber Defense Command is to monitor the network traffic in Iran and protect information and computer systems from cyberattacks. Among other things, it is responsible for detecting the activity of dissidents on the Internet, censoring content that contradicts religious and moral values, and functions to thwart terrorism, subversion, espionage and organized crime carried out via the Internet.

The command, which was established and shaped over the past 15 years, cooperates with other intelligence organizations, especially the IRGC-IO and the judicial authorities. For example, during the waves of protests in 2009, as well as the 2017-2019 protests and the hijab protests, the command slowed down the internet in parts of the country, censored websites, and tracked down key figures who led the demonstrations.

In another case, in 2016, the command conducted an operation in which several hundred social network users were arrested for distributing "vulgar," "inappropriate," "corrupt," and "insulting to religion" content.

Alongside these capabilities, the command also possesses offensive cyber capabilities. These include hacking into networks and computers, implanting malware and spyware, disruption capabilities, and more. These are used against the regime's enemies and as part of intelligence-gathering operations.

## **Oghab 2/Eagle 2**

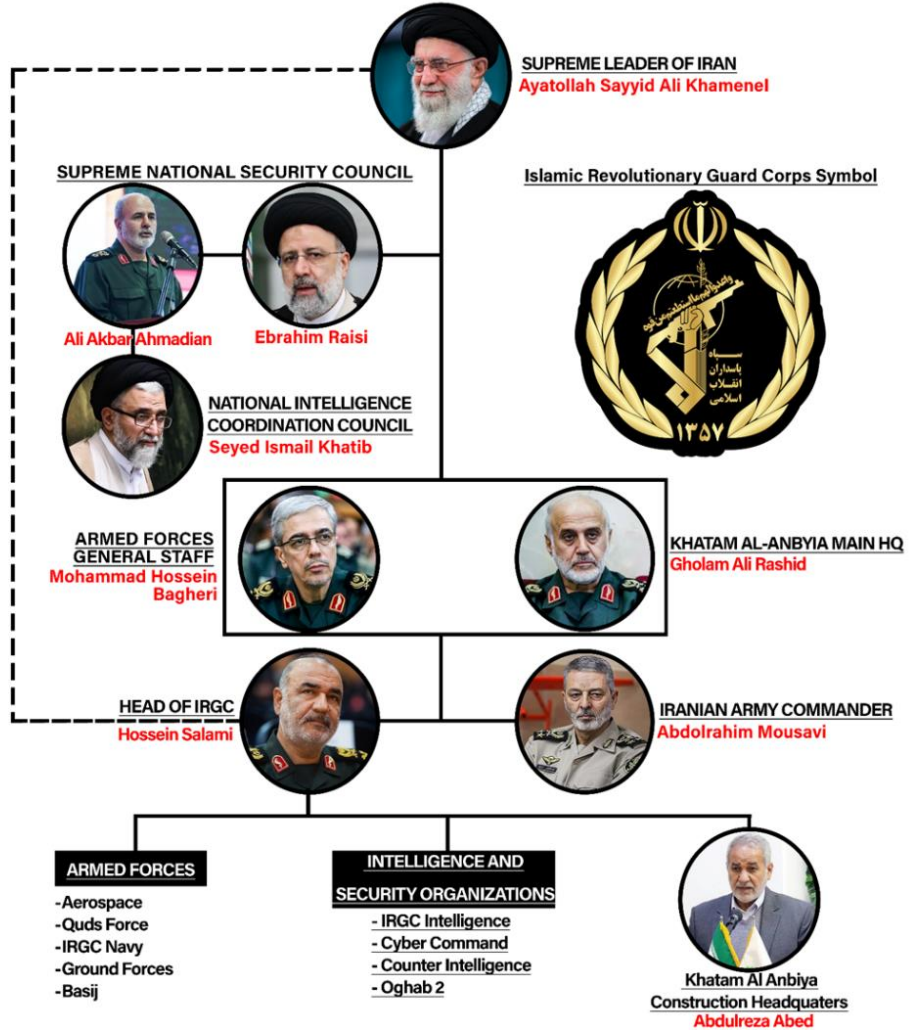
This unit was established in 2005 to protect the Iranian nuclear project. Among its tasks are preventing sabotage of the project's facilities and harm to its officials, securing the supply chain, and thwarting espionage operations and cyberattacks. In addition, the unit deals with concealing websites and officials, inter alia through the use of fraud, compartmentalization and information warfare. Although this unit is subordinate to the IRGC, it apparently also reports its activities to the Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS), which is subordinate to the president of Iran.

Acts of sabotage of nuclear facilities and assassinations of scientists and senior officials have led to an increase in the unit's manpower over the years, and according to various estimates, more than 10,000 people currently serve in the unit. However, these are only estimates as there is not much information available about this unit.



# The Iranian Armed Forces Organizational Chart

## IRANIAN ARMED FORCES CHAIN OF COMMAND



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