

Guarding History

**The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
and the Memory of the Iran-Iraq War**

Brandon A. Pinkley



Special Historical Study 12

**Joint History Office
Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Washington, DC • 2018**

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Foreword

This study focuses on the official history collection program by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) during the Iran-Iraq War. From the beginning, the IRGC understood that this conflict would be a significant event in the life of the new Islamic Republic. Senior commanders emphasized the need to record the history of the “sacred defense” both to memorialize the sacrifices of the guard and to preserve enthusiasm for the revolution with future generations. It examines Iran’s war history as a form of propaganda that acts as a framework for the IRGC and recounts how the war with Iraq has been remembered, retold, and utilized.

Brandon A. Pinkley researched and wrote this publication while detailed for nine months in the Joint History Office. He reviewed and translated numerous IRGC documents from Persian Farsi for this study, and many of these are published here for the first time. Shawn H. Vreeland, staff editor, prepared the manuscript for publication. This study would not have been possible without research materials made available through the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center’s Aiso Library, the Library of Congress, Stanford University Libraries, and the Hoover Institution’s Library and Archives at Stanford University.

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INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS CORPS THROUGH THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR'S HISTORY

Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Iraq's Saddam Hussein had been consolidating their power for years prior to the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). It was during the first six months of 1979, however, that each formally ascended to their national leadership roles as the first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the fifth president of Iraq, respectively. These two men came to symbolize competing and conflicting ideologies, and each was vying to emerge as a regional leader, seeking to carve out a third way between the patronage of “Western” capitalism or “Eastern” communism. Domestically, both men developed pervasive cults of personality in nations suffering from fragile state institutions; they consolidated power by challenging the legitimacy of the previous leadership and maintained their authority by employing military force against political opponents. Both Khomeini and Saddam employed their lands' histories to craft new national narratives capable of uniting diverse populations.¹ Such revisions to pre- and post-Islamic narratives proved powerful not only for constructing national identities, but also for identifying each nation's villains and mobilizing the populace.

But the history of the Iran-Iraq War was much more complicated than the stories of two leading figures, or even of two nations. It involved competing visions of history; conflicting ideologies and theological traditions; contending layers of national identities; ethnic struggles for autonomy; and battles for natural resources, transport routes, alliances, credit, arms, and regional domination. It reignited ancient rivalries and was, at the same time, a war that could only have played out in the late-Cold War era. More importantly, it created challenges with clear links to more recent wars (most obviously the First Gulf War) and established entirely new tensions that will almost certainly plague the region for the foreseeable future, particularly regarding the incorporation of Shia militias into national institutions.

¹ Williamson Murray and Kevin M. Woods, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military Strategic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5. See footnote 14 regarding Saddam's use of “Mesopotamian Culture.”

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What can Iran analysts learn from this conflict? While Iraq has seen near perpetual war since Saddam invaded Iran in September 1980, the conflict was the last conventional war that Iran has fought. Apart from studying the Iran-Iraq War, Iran analysts are left with little basis upon which to develop theories on how Iran's current behaviors relate to its past. In trying to identify "an Iranian way of war," it can be tempting to look either to Iran's revolutionary ideology as a determinative force or to Iran's fragile security environment as determining its pragmatic self-defense. The perspectives that emerge from this false dichotomy often depict either an Iran that is ideologically driven to export Khomeini's revolution by promoting sectarian proxy influence or an Iran that is merely seeking to ensure its survival. Whichever Iran is seen through the analyst's framework often determines how Iran's actions are interpreted.

There is also a danger of Iran's doctrine and intentions getting lost in translation. In seeking to understand Iran, American analysts necessarily apply their own conceptual frameworks to describe Iran's political and military structure and behavior. Some of these analyses are translated into Persian and reprinted in Iranian newspapers and journals where such concepts as "soft power," "asymmetric warfare," "proxies," or "people's war" can be lifted from their contexts and appropriated in new ways. Sometimes these Persian translations are published without citing their original source and then retranslated back into English to be cited as evidence that confirms preexisting notions. At the same time, the language of the "War on Terror" has itself been globalized in such a way that Iranians—like many others—apply terms like "terrorists" to any individual or group that stands in opposition to them and their sectarian allies.² So while one arm of the Iranian state condemns sectarian violence to the international community, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) can send military advisors to Iraq and Syria to support Shia militias using appropriated language that obscures the relationships between sectarian ideologies and military doctrine.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC tried to develop and articulate its own ways of fighting and to identify what distinguished these methods from those of its counterparts in the Artesh (Iran's regular armed forces), as well as from those of their Iraqi adversaries. The IRGC developed an extensive network of field historians during the war and have since pursued an aggressive research and publication agenda. These publications have largely gone unexamined by English-speaking academia because of their obvious bias toward the IRGC. While these works are narrow representations of history, they may also provide unique insight into how elite members of the IRGC perceive their own doctrine.

² Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi has called this phenomenon "the post-911 *lingua franca* of the 'War on Terror.'" See his "Strategic Depth, Counterinsurgency, and the Logic of Sectarianization: The Islamic Republic of Iran's Security Doctrine and its Regional Implications," in *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, ed. Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 163.

To the extent that IRGC histories and published analyses are organizationally controlled narratives representative of their preferred framework, propaganda and state-funded histories may provide a beneficial lens into the IRGC's perception of itself and its past. By examining the terminology and comparisons used in IRGC publications to articulate what were and what were not legitimate, authentic, or effective ways of fighting, analysts can rethink the familiar models and terms that are typically applied to the IRGC. And by examining IRGC commanders' public statements or IRGC publications from different periods, one can trace how the IRGC's normative frameworks change over time or are appropriated to new challenges in order to better understand the dynamic relationship (or lack of relationship) between ideology and pragmatism.

This study focuses on the development and histories published by the IRGC regarding the Iran-Iraq War, as well as its commanders' public statements about the conflict. It examines Iran's war history as a form of propaganda in its most general sense as "organized persuasion" that acts as a normative framework for the IRGC.³ By studying how the IRGC has remembered, retold, and used the memories of this war, this research project aims to explore how the war was fought, how it has been remembered, what lessons have been learned, and how these narratives have changed over time to meet Iran's challenges since the Islamic Revolution.

BASIC INTRODUCTION TO THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Perhaps the best explanation for the war's character was that it was about quarrels ancient and modern, political and religious.⁴

Throughout the 1960s and especially during the 1970s, Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi took advantage of increased revenues from rising oil prices to greatly expand the Iranian military arsenal. Iran's arms buildup corresponded, in part, with the Baath Party coming to power in Iraq in 1968. Baghdad also greatly expanded its military—primarily its ground forces—in the 1970s in response to Iran's growing stockpiles but also to consolidate its domestic political power and maintain control over the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. During the early 1970s, Iran had been providing military and economic support to Iraqi Kurdish rebels and used this support as a bargaining chip during the 1975 Algiers Agreement, which resulted in territorial concessions to Iran's benefit, including the agreement to demarcate the Shatt al-Arab waterway (known as Arvand Rud in Persian) at its deep waterline. As Iraq's sole access to international waters, this crucial waterway links the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to the Persian Gulf and has historically been a point of conflict in the region between Arabs and Persians. For instance,

³ Hugh Rank, *The Pep Talk: How to Analyze Political Language* (Park Forest, IL: Counterpropaganda Press, 1984).

⁴ Murray and Woods, *Iran-Iraq War*, 2.

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in April 1969 an Iranian naval and air forces escorted a merchant vessel through the waterway, disregarding Iraq's required tolls in a blatant abrogation of the previous 1937 agreement.⁵ With the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran and Saddam's ascension to the presidency in Iraq, new layers of conflict were added to the already dangerous combination of arms stockpiling, historic territorial disputes, and ethnic conflicts.

During the postrevolution purges of Iran's military officers, and especially following a July 1980 attempted coup d'état involving officers from the Artesh, Iran's new regime executed, imprisoned, or forcibly retired approximately 12,000 high-ranking officers, leaving its military with a leadership vacuum and throwing the organization's future into question among Iran's untrusting clerical elite.⁶ Iran's precarious domestic circumstances provided Saddam with a unique opportunity to go after a number of disputed—or just desired—resources. Particularly, Saddam thought this could afford him the opportunity to “liberate” the oil-rich and Arab-majority Khuzestan Province and gain full control of the Shatt al-Arab. The Islamic Republic now faced its own challenge with its Kurdish population: more than any other minority group, Iranian Kurds sought to institutionalize and expand the autonomy they had achieved during the turbulent years of Iran's revolution, especially from 1978 to 1980.⁷ Meanwhile, the new Iranian regime resumed its support for Kurdish dissidents in Iraq as a part of a much larger anti-Baathist propaganda initiative that included efforts within Iran to paint Baathists as enemies of the Islamic Revolution as well as influence Shiite groups and ethnic dissident groups in Iraq to overthrow the Baathists.⁸

When Saddam's forces invaded Khuzestan Province in southwestern Iran on September 22, 1980, the majority of Iran's Artesh were still deployed along the Iran-Soviet borderlands, in accordance with the Shah's policy.⁹ Most of the newly formed IRGC were focused on Kurdish rebellions in the northwestern borderlands and on urban skirmishes against groups opposing the new Islamic government.¹⁰ As a result, Iraqi forces swept through the border regions of Khuzestan quickly; however, their advance stagnated almost immediately, as

⁵ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military Analysis* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1987), 5–10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ Haggay Ram, *Myth and Mobilization in Revolutionary Iran: The Use of the Friday Congregational Sermon* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1994), 71.

⁸ Karsh, *Iran-Iraq War: A Military Analysis*, 11–12.

⁹ Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of the Imam: Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; and Muhammad Durudiyani, ed., *Khuninshahr ta Kurramshahr: Barrasi-i Vaqayi-i Siyasi-Nizami-i Jang az Zaminahsazi-i Tahajom-i 'Iraq ta Azadsazi-yi Khurramshahr* [City of Blood to Khorramshahr: A Political-Military Study of the War from the Preparation of Iraq's Invasion to the Liberation of Khorramshahr] (Tehran: Center for War Studies and Research, 1998), 59–62.

the Iraqis failed to overcome the strong popular resistance movements that kept them from controlling Khuzestan's urban centers.

In an effort to use Iran's population advantage over Iraq, the IRGC began to rely on the Basij-e Mostaz'afin (Mobilization of the Oppressed) volunteer organization to bring often very young recruits into its ranks. In May 1981, Iran began a series of successful campaigns that ultimately regained these border regions from Iraq. By July 1982, Iranian forces had regained most of their occupied areas and made the controversial decision to continue the war onto Iraqi soil, despite heavy domestic opposition. However, it would not be until February 1986 with the capture of the Fao Peninsula that Iranian forces would gain their first substantial foothold on Iraqi soil. From Fao, Iran could cut off supply lines from Kuwait to the south and threaten the city of Basra to the north. Saddam offered to trade Fao for the Iranian city of Mehran, which was then being occupied by Iraqi forces, but Iran refused.¹¹ Despite repeated efforts to take Basra, the war effort stagnated until the spring of 1988 when, over the course of three months, Iraq—with much help from its allies, including both the United States and the Soviet Union—regained all of the territory Iran's forces had taken on the southern front over the course of three years.¹² On August 8, 1988, United Nations (UN) Resolution 598 went into effect, ending one of the longest conventional wars of the twentieth century—and the most deadly war in modern Middle Eastern history—a conflict that altered the trajectories of both Iran and Iraq.

¹¹ Saskia Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 26.

¹² Ostovar, *Vanguard*, 98.

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1 GUARDIANS OF HISTORY: A HISTORY OF IRGC HISTORIANS

When you tell the story of the war, you are telling the story of an institution.¹

—Ali Shamkhani

THE “NARRATORS”: IRGC FIELD HISTORIANS

The largest IRGC affiliate to focus on publishing the history of the Iran-Iraq War (often referred to as either the “Imposed War” or the “Sacred Defense” by Iranians) is most recently named the Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research. The center focuses on compiling, studying, and publishing materials about the Iran-Iraq War, its causes, and its implications. In mid-July 1981, barely two years into its existence and not even a year into its war with Iraq, the IRGC founded a War History Department or War Section within the IRGC Political Affairs Office (IRGC PAO).² The commander of the IRGC PAO, Ibrahim Haji Mohammadzadeh, believed that the IRGC should think about documenting the Iran-Iraq War based on a model provided by the history of Ashura and the Battle of Karbala, a series of events leading up to the martyrdom of Imam Husseyn that marked a pivotal moment in the history of Shia Islam:

Had the message of Ashura (the tenth day of Muharram and anniversary of Imam Husseyn’s martyrdom) not been passed on in the history of Islam, its glory for displaying the true understanding of Islam would have been lost to the Islamic world. For the same reason, because [the Iran-Iraq] war was also waged between Islam and non-Islam, it also had to be preserved for future generations, especially as the war was modeled after Ashura and Karbala. That was why the [IRGC PAO’s] War Section was

¹ Ehsan Hoseyni-Nasb, “Gozaresh-i Avalin Gerdhamai-i Ravian-i Markaz Asnad va Tahghihat-i Defa’-i Moghaddas” [Report on the First Conference of Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research War Correspondents], *Negin-i Iran* 11, no. 4 (Spring 1391 [2012]): 140.

² Rahim Mohammadi, “The Sacred Defense Has Received Little Attention: An Interview with Husseyn Ardestani,” *Sobh-e Sadeq Online*, no. 563 (Mordad 2, 1391 [July 23, 2012]): 5.

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formed, and why the Commander of the IRGC agreed that it should be stood up.³

To a group of IRGC historians and war correspondents, Mohammadzadeh repeated this story of how the organization began with the support of the IRGC's top commander:

When the Imposed War began, I realized that we had to understand the magnitude of this war. During the war, I went to [Mohsen] Rezaei's office (the commander of the IRGC) and told him that I want[ed] to chronicle the events of the war and that the way I saw it was that this war had characteristics which we had to record just like during the wars of early Islam. If it were not for Rezaei, this Center would never have been established.⁴

The IRGC PAO set up subordinate history offices in Kermanshah and Ahvaz to coordinate an effort to embed war correspondents known as "narrators" (*ravian*) throughout the areas of the conflict. Their early missions consisted of collecting documents, chronicling events of the war as they occurred, and conducting interviews with fighters who engaged in the war's earliest battles.⁵ Early in the war some leading field historians began meeting monthly to discuss their efforts and how they could develop more systematic methods for collecting records and documenting operations and political events.⁶ As the IRGC developed organizational processes for its field historians, work was already being done by volunteer revolutionaries and commanders who simply thought the war was worth chronicling and realized that this would require equipment and devoted personnel. Speaking to a group of narrators, the former minister of the IRGC, Ali Shamkhani, recalled a source of inspiration for the project:

When the war began, a group came to Khuzestan . . . and they wanted to make a film. Around the same time, I had been watching films of the Vietnam War, and I realized that there were war correspondents there at the [Vietnam] war who had recorded video footage. This was the reason that I was fascinated with [the idea] that we should do this same thing.⁷

At least in the IRGC narratives, Iran's regular armed forces (Artesh) led the war effort in its very earliest attempt to retake the areas occupied by Iraq in Khuzestan. From October 1980 to early January 1981, the Artesh conducted a series of operations that failed to break Iraq's sieges on the urban centers of Khuzestan Province. In response, the IRGC began to expand its role in the war effort. As the IRGC grew in numbers and expanded its influence in the war, its

³ Ibid.

⁴ Hoseyni-Nasb, "Gozaresh," 134–35.

⁵ "Tarikhche-I Markaz [A Short History of the Center]," Center for Sacred Defense Records and Research, accessed January 31, 2017, <http://defamoghaddas.ir/fa/node/153>.

⁶ Hoseyni-Nasb, "Gozaresh," 136–37.

⁷ Ali Shamkhani in Hoseyni-Nasb, "Gozaresh," 140.

field historians became institutionalized within the war effort at various echelons, which changed their approach to documenting the war. According to Mohammad Durudiyān, a prolific author and leading figure among IRGC historians, when the war correspondents first began their work, their “process—which was based upon our political-social approach to documenting the war as acts of resistance against an aggressor—was altered toward an operational structure.”⁸ In fact, these narrators’ efforts became so integrated into the IRGC’s command structures at the front lines that by late 1984 it had become common practice for them to conduct interviews with commanders and fighters following each operation and they were often informed of operational plans before they were even approved.⁹ Between late 1984 and early 1985, the IRGC separated the War History Department from the Political Affairs Office, renamed the organization the IRGC Center for War Studies and Research, and made it subordinate to the IRGC General Command Staff, with Offices of War Research set up at each of the newly established IRGC-Air Force, IRGC-Navy, and IRGC-Ground Forces Headquarters.¹⁰ With this new direct access at IRGC headquarters, along with an expanded reach into the front lines, the center’s 206-person network sought to document the events of the war at all echelons.¹¹

NARRATING THE WAR: IRGC PUBLICATIONS

The IRGC had actually begun publishing books before the war broke out, but these works were mostly political in nature and were distributed by the IRGC PAO. After the war began, these early publications remained focused on political or theological topics such as the justifications of the war, examining either the theological basis of the war in Koranic teachings or its political basis as necessitated by the imperialist threat facing the Islamic Republic.¹² Two years into the eight-year war, the IRGC PAO wrote its first history of the conflict, titled *Guzari bar du Sal-i Jang*, or “A Glance at Two Years of War.” No author was attributed to the work, but it was translated by the IRGC’s propaganda arm into both Arabic and English for wider distribution. The book had two explicitly stated aims. First, the IRGC wanted to record the war’s early days as a guide for future historians who would one day write a more definitive history: “the following outline is presented in the hope that [this book] may serve as a clue to a definitive chronicling of this war.”¹³ The book’s second aim gives insight into how the author(s) saw the IRGC’s role in the world as

⁸ Hoseyni-Nasb, “Gozaresh,” 137.

⁹ Mohammadi, “Sacred Defense,” 5.

¹⁰ “Tarikhche.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See *Jang va Tajavuz: Jibhih-yi Ampiryalisti ‘Alayh-i Inqilab-i Islami* [War and Aggression: The Imperialist Front Against the Islamic Revolution] (Tehran: Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami [IRGC]), 1360 [1981]; and *Jang va Jihad dar Qur’an* [War and Jihad in the Qur’an] (Tehran: Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami [IRGC]), 1360 [1981]).

¹³ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang* [A Glance at Two Years of War] (Tehran: Daftar-i Siyasi-i Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilabi-i Islami [IRGC Political Affairs Office], 1982), 31.

guardians of the Islamic Revolution and as Islamic revolutionaries facing global oppressors on behalf of the oppressed Third World, which could follow the Iranian model to liberation:

In order to preserve a faithful account of the multiple aspects of the Iraqi imposed war on Iran, the [IRGC Political Affairs Office] has undertaken this study . . . hoping that this war . . . would serve as a model for the salvation of all deprived people of the world from the yoke of the superpowers, and would herald an age of the revival and proliferation of the undying Islamic ideals.¹⁴

After the war, the IRGC changed the center's name again, this time to the Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, and since then it has focused its efforts on organizing documents from the war, preserving and digitizing records, hosting roundtable meetings with commanders and scholars in commemoration of key events of the war, and conducting ambitious research and publication agendas to preserve and promote the memories and messages of the war.¹⁵ The center's website lists a number of book series it has published: a 60-volume chronology from the Islamic Revolution to the end of the war; a series of annotated maps analyzing specific battles by geographical regions; thematic analytic studies; a compilation and analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's statements about the war; a compilation of UN documents about the Iran-Iraq conflict; Persian translations of books originally in English and Arabic written about the war; biographies of martyred commanders, their families, and martyred field historians; and war-themed literary works and poetry. Some of these texts are assigned in courses at several of Iran's most prestigious universities, such as Sharif University of Technology and Shahid Beheshti University.¹⁶ In addition to these unclassified publications, the center's website also claims that it maintains a classified collection of publications that are inaccessible to the general public.¹⁷

In the years following the war, the Islamic Republic of Iran established a number of other research centers and think tanks devoted to extracting lessons from the conflict. The IRGC Command and Staff College, the Artesh Command and Staff College, the Expediency Council, the Armed Forces General Staff, Basij Resistance Force Affairs, and Defense Culture Directorate's Supreme National Defense University all have such think tanks and/or publish scholarly journals for academic audiences and policymakers.¹⁸ For example, the *Journal of Defense Policy* is published by an IRGC affiliate, Imam Huseyn University,

¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵ "Tarikhche."

¹⁶ Muhammad Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan: Salnama-yi Tahlili* [Beginning to End: A Year-by-Year Analysis] (Tehran: Sepah Center for War Studies and Research), 7.

¹⁷ Open Source Center, FTS19970724000799, no author, Tehran: Imam Huseyn University, *Journal of Defense Policy* (Summer–Fall 1996): 213–17.

¹⁸ J. Matthew McInnis, *The Future of Iran's Security Policy: Inside Tehran's Strategic Thinking* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2017), 93–94.

and has published articles by IRGC commanders, graduate students, doctoral candidates, and faculty from universities throughout Iran on topics related to national defense, international relations, Middle Eastern affairs, and military strategy. It also includes academic book reviews of foreign works related to Iran's military. Early issues of the *Journal of Defense Policy* focused primarily on analyzing key military operations and political developments during the Iran-Iraq War. Following increased American involvement in the region after September 11, 2001, and especially after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the journal significantly broadened its geographical scope to analyze the region's new strategic environment.

The IRGC Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research has published a number of academic periodicals focused on the Iran-Iraq War, including *Negin-i Iran*, *Negah*, *Tarikh-i Jang*, and *Pazhuheshnameh-yeh Defa'-i Moghaddas*, that have editorial boards staffed by graduates of the IRGC's war college, university professors, and IRGC commanders. These journals have routinely featured articles or interviews with IRGC commanders and leading political figures who participated in the war. The majority of articles published by the center are military topics based on events of the war, but they also include international political issues Iran faced during the 1980s; theoretical issues on how to understand the war, its causes, and its consequences; cultural and social analyses of the war's implications; analyses of the role of the Baath Party and Iranian opposition groups; oral histories of commanders and martyrs; and translations of relevant English articles or book reviews.¹⁹

Although Iran's Artesh also engaged in some efforts to chronicle the war and has published materials and papers in its service publications, it never developed comparable organizations devoted to preserving war records, nor has it produced nearly as many publications as the IRGC.²⁰ The IRGC's center actually attempted to work with a professor of history at Shahid Beheshti University named Dr. Radmanesh, whom the Artesh had hired to write a history of the war.²¹ This joint collaborative effort between the IRGC and the Artesh did not succeed, however, and the Artesh failed to produce any centralized, comprehensive collection effort analogous to IRGC's center.²² This disproportion of intentional fieldwork conducted by the IRGC compared to the Artesh has been mentioned explicitly in a number of interviews with both IRGC and Artesh commanders. This disparity may also be reflected in the literature of the war, which disproportionately favors IRGC actions in the war effort. However, a future comparative analysis between the Artesh's five-volume work, *Artish-i Jumhuri-i Islami-i Iran dar Hasht Sal-i Difa'-i Muqaddas*, could

¹⁹ Morteza Shahriari, "Tahlil-i Mohtavai-yi Kami-yi Fasnameh-yi Takhasosi-yi Negin-I Iran: Shomareha-yi 1 ta 50 [A Quantitative Content Analysis of *Negin-I Iran* Special Quarterly: 1-50]," *Negin-i Iran* 14, no. 54 (Autumn 2016): 71–86.

²⁰ Commander Dowlatabadi, "Military Commanders and Compiling War History: Capabilities and Limitation," *Negin-i Iran* (Spring 2008), 73–74.

²¹ Hoseyni-Nasb, "Gozaresh," 138.

²² *Ibid.*

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potentially provide unique insights into how the IRGC's relationship with the Artesh has developed over time.²³

While the center is the main institution for the IRGC's classified and unclassified historical records, the organization has been unable to obtain full access to war records belonging to other institutions. In a 2012 interview with an IRGC weekly publication, a former head of the center noted that despite the IRGC's efforts, it had not yet obtained access to war records belonging to the Supreme National Security Council, Ministry of Defense, Agricultural Jihad, or the Ministry of Intelligence.²⁴ This insularity is evident in their publications, particularly in regard to the absence of detailed information related to operations unilaterally carried out by the Artesh.

KEY OBJECTIVES OF IRGC HISTORIES

“Prevent Distortion” of the War’s History

Because of Iran's domestic political turmoil in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution, there were concerns from the center's earliest days that the war's history would be vulnerable to distortion. In fact, “preventing distortion” of the war was a stated goal of IRGC's War History Department at its founding.²⁵ Repeatedly in the IRGC's histories it is Iran's turbulent domestic political environment that shaped the war, particularly in the first two years. One of the key components that contributed to Ayatollah Khomeini's success during the revolution was his ability to galvanize a wide swath of political groups opposed to the Shah. Once the Shah was gone, however, these factions still disagreed on a single vision for Iran's future. The IRGC was concerned that the liberals led by Bani Sadr, secular leftist and Islamic-Marxist groups and guerilla movements, and those still loyal to the Shah would seek opportunities to delegitimize the Islamic revolutionaries to consolidate power for themselves. The concern with political factions seeking to distort the history of the revolution and/or the war is a theme repeated frequently in introductions to IRGC works. It was mentioned explicitly at a conference of IRGC historians, where one historian reminisced that “the general atmosphere when they began writing the war's history was one in which there was worry that fights between Bani Sadr, the Artesh (which many saw as still loyal to the Shah), et cetera, would cause a distortion of history.”²⁶

²³ Muhammad Javadi'pur, *Artish-i Jumhuri-i Islami-i Iran dar Hasht Sal-i Difa'-i Muqaddas*, (Tehran: Sazman-i 'Aqidati Siyasi-i Artish-i Jumhuri-i Islami-i Iran, Daftar-i Siyasi, 1373 [1994/1995]). According to WorldCat, the only library in the United States that has all five volumes of this history is the New York Public Library.

²⁴ Mohammadi, “Sacred Defense,” 5.

²⁵ “Tarikhche.”

²⁶ Hoseyni-Nasb, “Gozaresh,” 136.

The IRGC had to compete not only for political control but also for control of the war's images and messages. By the 1980s, high quality cameras and camcorders were readily available in Iran, and the IRGC was not the only group of Iranians recording footage at the warfront. There were numerous groups of amateur Iranian cameramen and aspiring filmmakers in the trenches, many of whom went to the front lines because of their own ideological zeal. They were invested in a concept of Sacred Defense that may or may not have aligned with the IRGC's conception. Such popular religious narratives have proven difficult to control from the top-down, such that one historian of the genre of Sacred Defense cinema noted that "there clearly exist two separate categories in this field, the Governmental Sacred Defense (*defa'i moghaddas-i dolati*) and the Popular Sacred Defense (*defa'i moghaddas-i mardomi*)." ²⁷

Iran's new government understood this challenge and the Office of Propaganda and Guidance undertook an elaborate effort to guide and control revolutionary narratives and war images. Posters impressed upon filmmakers their responsibility to show footage of the revolution "as it is." By June 1981, not even a year into the war, the Islamic Republic inaugurated its first Iranian National Film Festival, which celebrated the war's revolutionary themes through a curated selection of films in line with official narratives. ²⁸ State propaganda produced stamps, public murals, and posters depicting Saddam Hussein as a puppet or leashed attack dog for the United States, Soviet Union, and Israel. ²⁹ Iran's Supreme Defense Council began to publish annual commemorative collections of photography from the war's front, along with introductions in Persian, Arabic, and English that summarized Iran's grievances. ³⁰ Such efforts can be seen as state-sanctioned attempts to guide and control revolutionary and war narratives and images.

Within the IRGC, efforts to "prevent distortions" of the war's history have taken at least three forms. First, the IRGC has actively engaged and challenged conflicting narratives by constructing and publishing coherent narratives to counter dissenters. One scholar of Iranian war cinema pointed out the importance of maintaining cohesion in Iran's official narratives:

Governmental Sacred Defence narratives are strongly attached to the *State* and follow courses that benefit the regime and its leaders. Consequently, the governmental Sacred Defence can always be the target of accusations that it protects its narrators and its producers; in short,

²⁷ Pedram Khosronejad, ed., *Unburied Memories: The Politics of Bodies of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2013), 8.

²⁸ Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 185.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁰ Islamic Republic of Iran Supreme Defence Council, *Imposed War: Defence vs. Aggression*, 6 vols. (Tehran: War Information Headquarters, 1983–89).

the regime. Even a small mistake in these narrative[s] can cause great trouble for the owners of the narratives and endanger their situation.³¹

The IRGC began developing a revolutionary print culture by publishing monthly magazines such as *Payam-i Inqilab* (Message of the Revolution) to propagate the IRGC's strategic messaging to a popular audience, especially for those serving in the IRGC or those most likely to join the Basij, a volunteer organization that was incorporated into the IRGC early in the war (February 17, 1981) and was utilized as an important tool for IRGC recruitment throughout the conflict.³² Typically, *Payam-i Inqilab* featured editorials from religious leaders and articles on domestic politics, foreign affairs, theological interpretations of issues relevant to the IRGC, analyses of issues facing the IRGC, and a history section. The magazine also featured epic tales from the battlefield, decorative banners featuring popular revolutionary and war slogans, martyrs of the revolution and the war, photography with revolutionary themes, and political cartoons.

A second way the IRGC has tried to “prevent distortion” of history has been through restricting access to the organization's information by classifying documents. According to the IRGC center's website, the organization has restricted access to many of the archives stored by the center, records which may or may not support the official narratives.³³ Limiting access to war records is not unique to the IRGC, as the center's leadership has publicly expressed frustration with obtaining access to documents belonging to other Iranian institutions, including the Ministry of Defense and the Supreme National Security Council, each of which determine defense and national security policies for both the Artesh and the IRGC.³⁴

Third, the IRGC also established or sought influence in existing organizations that could assist in creating barriers to prevent so-called distorted narratives from spreading. During the war, organizations such as the War News Council—comprised of deputies from the IRGC, Artesh, and the War Propaganda Office—censored or created administrative obstacles for releasing films and documentaries that deviated from the official narratives.³⁵ The IRGC's most dramatic institutional influence to enforce cultural norms is seen in its longstanding use of Basij volunteers to police moral standards and suppress dissident activities.³⁶ Following the war, the Basij's name was changed to the

³¹ Pedram Khosronejad, ed., *Iranian Sacred Defence Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity* (Canon Pyon, UK: Sean Kingston, 2013), 25.

³² Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Transforming Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2013), 49.

³³ “Tarikhche.”

³⁴ Mohammadi, “Sacred Defense,” 5.

³⁵ Khosronejad, *Iranian Sacred Defence Cinema*, 25–26.

³⁶ For the most comprehensive study of the Basij in English, especially its role in Iranian society, see Saeid Golkar, *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). Golkar is primarily concerned with developing a sociological framework for understanding the Basij; however, chapter 2 documents the organization's historical development.

Basij Resistance Forces; it remained under the authority of the IRGC as a military reserve but also took on a more domestic role.³⁷ In this role, the Basij has provided the IRGC with a vast network of deeply entrenched influence throughout Iranian society that has been employed to reinforce the IRGC's official narratives. By replacing traditional labor unions and student organizations with the Basij's own professional and student organizations, the Basij has successfully recruited many Iranians through opportunities for social mobility in order to promote its political and ideological objectives.³⁸ The Basij also offers low-cost trips to students to tour battlefields. These are led by public historians and volunteers trained by IRGC historians, and students can even receive certifications as official battlefield tour guides.

The Production of Soft Power through History

*The religion of the Prophet of Islam is a religion of soft power, and the factory that produces soft power is ours. Imam Husseyn's movement is a movement that produces soft power. . . . Our Revolution is analogous to the victory of blood over the sword; it is the victory of soft power over hard power. . . . Today, our enemy . . . is more dangerous than Saddam. . . . For this very reason, your war narrators must tell society of the soft power that was produced during the war.*³⁹

—Ali Shamkhani

The IRGC has not only aimed to “prevent distortion” of the war but to “honestly narrate” the war's history.⁴⁰ The IRGC's idea of honest narration is more complex than merely listing and chronicling events. The IRGC's center has articulated its role in narrating the war as one in need of constant innovation because of how history has been—and still can be—distorted by its adversaries to be used against Iran. An example cited by the center is the history of Saddam's invasion of Iran. During the Iran-Iraq War, when both superpowers and the majority of the international community were supporting Iraq, histories in the West focused on the role of the Islamic Revolution in provoking Saddam into invading as a way to legitimize his actions. Later, when the international community sought to justify military action against Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, historians and military analysts rewrote history to paint Saddam as the aggressor in a territorial dispute—the very thing Iran tried to get the UN to do during early peace talks.⁴¹ For the IRGC, the process of rewriting of history—whether intentional or due to historical amnesia—necessitates that the IRGC must engage and react with counternarratives of the war:

In the process of historicizing the war [*tarikhi shodan-i jang*], there are theories which continually change the reason for the war's outbreak.

³⁷ Ostovar, *Vanguard*, 146.

³⁸ Golkar, *Captive Society*.

³⁹ Hoseyni-Nasb, “Gozaresh,” 141–42.

⁴⁰ “Tarikhche.”

⁴¹ Hoseyni-Nasb, “Gozaresh,” 138–39.

Guardians of History

Therefore, we as a Center must also change. We must consider new methods and foundations, and we must produce new information.⁴²

In 2012, Ali Shamkhani, former minister of the IRGC and former minister of defense, encouraged IRGC historians to think about their role as similar to the original propaganda role for which the center was conceived. As the epigraph to this section illustrates, Shamkhani used the analogy of the IRGC center being a “factory that produces soft power” and went further to claim that the Islamic Revolution itself is “the victory of soft power over hard power.”⁴³ This intriguing analogy of the IRGC’s main institution for historical preservation and the publication of histories as a “soft power factory” for the Islamic Revolution places history, historians, the retelling of history, and the remembrance of history at the core of its efforts to maintain support for the regime and even to export Iran’s revolutionary ideology among Shia communities abroad.

The use of history as a form of soft power— however broadly conceived— is certainly not unique to Iran, nor is it unique to the IRGC. There is value, however, in contextualizing the IRGC’s use of history as soft power to better understand how the Islamic Revolution’s message relates to history. Following progressively humiliating defeats in the Russo-Persian wars from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, Persian intellectuals—many of whom were educated in Europe—became somewhat obsessed with understanding why Iran had been “left behind” by Europe and Russia. By the early twentieth century, many of the leading Iranian historians had been heavily influenced by European Orientalist interpretations of history and by German racialized interpretations of historical linguistics. During the Pahlavi reign, official histories concluded that Iran was at odds with both the Arabs in the region and the Islamic religion brought by the Semites to the Iranian Plateau that kept Iranians from modernizing like their European cousins. Iran was in stasis, according to these histories, held back by Islamic religious traditions from both its glorious pre-Islamic past and its modern post-Islamic future. In fact, both Reza Shah Pahlavi, and his son, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, spent extravagant sums glorifying Iran’s pre-Islamic “Aryan” and Persian history in order to marginalize the clerical establishment, justify monarchical legitimacy, villainize regional Arabs, and promote European-styled modernization projects.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 141–42.

⁴⁴ Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

During the 1960s and 1970s, thinkers such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad⁴⁵ and Ali Shariati (figure 1) wrote popular critiques of alienating Orientalist histories and encouraged Iranians to seek a more authentic modernity within their Islamic heritage. While Khomeini was in exile, Shariati's transformative interpretation of Shiism as an Islamic revolutionary ideology had tremendous influence among Iranian youth and religious leftists. Often referred to as "the



Figure 1. Ali Shariati.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dr_Ali_Shariati.jpg

ideologue of the Islamic Revolution," Shariati synthesized Shia Islam, Western Marxism, Franz Fanon's Third World anticolonialism, and French Existentialism to create an anti-imperial, anticapitalist, and anticlerical Islamic ideology of resistance. In his vision of history, Shariati recast Marx's history of class struggle in terms of a struggle between "the Oppressed" (*mostaz'afin*) and "the Oppressors" (*mostakbarin*). Shariati also distinguished between the false, passive institutionalized Shiism exemplified in Iran's clerical hierarchy with a true, active, revolutionary Shiism that had been lost over time. These true Shiites took the place of Marx's proletariat as the main agents of revolutionary change who could prepare the way for the return of Shia Islam's messianic figure, the hidden Imam Mahdi, and usher in a new period of justice, as opposed to Marx's future age of utopian communism.⁴⁶ Further, Shariati transformed the traditional interpretation of the Shia primordial myth—the Battle of Karbala—from one of quietist perseverance for otherworldly justice to a revolutionary model of resistance in the here and now, and Imam Husseyn was transformed into the original Third World revolutionary par excellence.⁴⁷ Rather than holding Iran hostage between tradition and modernity, true Shiism to Shariati was an authenticating and mobilizing force for resistance against the superpowers' oppression over the Third World.

⁴⁵ Ahmad is the author of the famous book, *Gharbzadegi*, which has been translated into English as "Westoxification," "Westernstrickeness," or "Euromania," and refers to the cultural critique of Ahmad Fardid and, most famously, Jalal Al-e Ahmad that Iran's adoption of Western conceptions of modernity has subjugated Iran to Western power.

⁴⁶ Yadullah Shahibzadeh, *Islamism and Post-Islamism in Iran: An Intellectual History in Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 56–62; and Haggay Ram, *Myth and Mobilization in Revolutionary Iran: The Use of the Friday Congregational Sermon* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1994), 233.

⁴⁷ Ram, *Myth and Mobilization*, 61–92.

When Khomeini returned from exile on February 1, 1979, Shariati had been dead for over a year. Khomeini articulated a similar but more self-serving, pro-clerical version of Shariati's revolutionary vision to life. Incorporating the Islamic revolutionary language of Shariati's followers, Khomeini transformed Iran's street protests into a nationwide reenactment of the Karbala battlefield



Figure 2. Signs of Ali Shariati, the "ideologue of the revolution," were often carried by revolutionaries along with signs of Khomeini.

<http://iranian.com/Times/Subs/Revolution/Feb99/Images/iconns.jpg>

and the people of Iran into followers of Imam Husseyn fighting against their oppressor, the Shah. Those who lost their lives in opposition to the Shah's authoritarian regime were celebrated as martyrs who followed Husseyn's divine model as an agent of historical change. Khomeini also appropriated Shariati's revolutionary language into his own vision for clerical guardianship over the state (figure 2), known as Velayat-i Faqih (literally, "guardianship of the jurist"). As the Islamic Republican Party's clerical elite consolidated power from the other factions opposed to the Shah, they continued to refashion Shariati's original anticlerical vision into its opposite: an authoritarian state based on the Shia clerical hierarchy. Under Khomeini's Velayat-i Faqih, the authority of the Supreme Leader is itself legitimated upon

a uniquely Shia interpretation of history, whereby a head jurist should guard over the state on behalf of its true authority, the Hidden Imam Mahdi, who will return at the end of history.

All of these revolutionary visions of history—from Marx through Shariati to Khomeini—need an exploitative or oppressing adversary. With the Shah gone, Saddam's invasion was a godsend to Khomeini, who could do with Saddam what he had done with the Shah: use him as a common enemy to consolidate the support of Iran's domestic political factions.⁴⁸ When Saddam invaded Iran, the clerical regime's historical frameworks were already well established for redeployment: an "Oppressed" Iranian nation of true Muslims fighting against an authoritarian "Oppressor" (whether the Shah or Saddam) within a larger oppressive bipolar international order. Saddam did not merely invade a nation; he invaded a cause, a religious tradition, and a history.

⁴⁸ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: New Press, 2007), 167. Dabashi makes the argument that "throughout his revolutionary career, Khomeini's intuitive strategy, or perhaps innate political disposition, was to pick a fight with a more powerful external enemy so his less powerful domestic opponents would be intimidated."

In Tehran’s first Friday prayer sermon following the Iraqi invasion, Khomeini’s protégé and future successor, Ali Khamenei, called Saddam’s invasion a “reenactment” of the Battle of the Trench. In 627 AD, Medina—then defended by the prophet Muhammad and his early followers—was in the same position as Iran in 1980. The larger confederation of Arab and Jewish tribes opposed to the prophet now represented Saddam’s Baathist forces, while the early warriors of Islam were just like Iranian revolutionaries. By extension, the Muslim conquests of early Islam would be relived in Iran’s export of Khomeini’s revolution.⁴⁹ These sorts of direct, timeless analogies to Islamic history became commonplace throughout the war, whether from the pulpit or in slogans at the front lines. History gave a divine context to the Islamic revolutionaries’ fight, transporting fighters across time to rectify the injustices suffered by the followers of Ali. As the popular slogan went, “Every day is Ashura, and every place is Karbala.”



Figure 3. *Young Boy Cradling Dead Soldier* (ca. 1980).

Middle East Posters Collection, Box 3, Poster 74
(<https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/webexhibits/iranianposters/holydefense.html>)

The IRGC readily grasped the power of history to justify authority, allegiance, revolution, or resistance. Nowhere else can the full power of the Islamic Revolution’s historical vision be seen than during the Iran-Iraq War. The IRGC weaponized history by turning the battlefield into a stage of remembrance. Fighters wore verses of the Koran on bandanas tied around their heads and ran straight into minefields, passing signs pointing “this way to Karbala.” The IRGC also sent journalists to the frontlines to write heroic stories connecting Shia history to the hardships of young revolutionaries sitting in trenches:

The desert was hot. The warm wind blew causing everyone’s face to dry out. Warm air, parched earth, with green flags flying above the trenches. It is here where the prayer of ‘the best of deeds’ (a verse only used by Shi’ites in the call to prayer) took place and where Husayn’s Karbala was remembered. Indeed, this *was* Karbala. The front. Husayn’s front. Each frontline trench was the locus of purity and faithfulness. The soldiers’

⁴⁹ Ali Khamenei, address on September 26, 1982, in *Dar Maktab-i Jum’ah: Majmu’ah-yi Khutbah-yi Namaz-i Jum’ah-yi Tihran*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Intrisharat-i Chapkhanah-i Vizarat-i Irshad-i Islami, 1364 [1988–89]), 316; and Ram, *Myth and Mobilization*, 207–9.

weapons were devotion and fidelity. Their bullets, the ambassadors of monotheism and God's message.⁵⁰

This theme of revolutionary remembrance—whereby revolutionaries' actions on the battlefield forge past, present, and future—is a pervasive theme of the Islamic Republic's war posters and imagery in IRGC service publications. Recurring visual elements suggest there was an effort to literally paint the Iran-Iraq War as a New Karbala (figures 3 and 4), a reenactment of the 680 CE Battle of Karbala that marks the not only a definitive break between Shia and Sunni traditions, but serves as the ultimate model of martyrdom. It was at Karbala that the Umayyad ruler, Yazid, assassinated and beheaded Muhammad's grandson, Husseyn, who Shias believe to be the Prophet's rightful successor. Wartime images of Iranian soldiers were depicted using visual elements that directly connected them to Husseyn's own death: unnamed Iranian soldiers lie on the bloodied, dry earth at the hands of Iraqi oppressors; a veiled Imam Husseyn intercedes in the background; ancient martyrs' hands reach up from the earth in solidarity around the fighter's corpse; fallen fighters in IRGC uniforms are guided or carried to their redemptive paradise by Imam Husseyn or headless martyrs; soldiers run through the gates of Karbala to reach Jerusalem; Iraqis are portrayed as the Yazid "Other," Iranian child soldiers as the innocent party of Husseyn.⁵¹ "Remembering Karbala," said one historian of Iran's visual culture, "is thus not only about recollecting what happened but also emulating it."⁵² There was a redemption of the past in Iran's present suffering in the trenches: Husseyn's martyrdom could be vindicated and Islam—and the world—could be liberated from injustice and corruption, and so prepare the

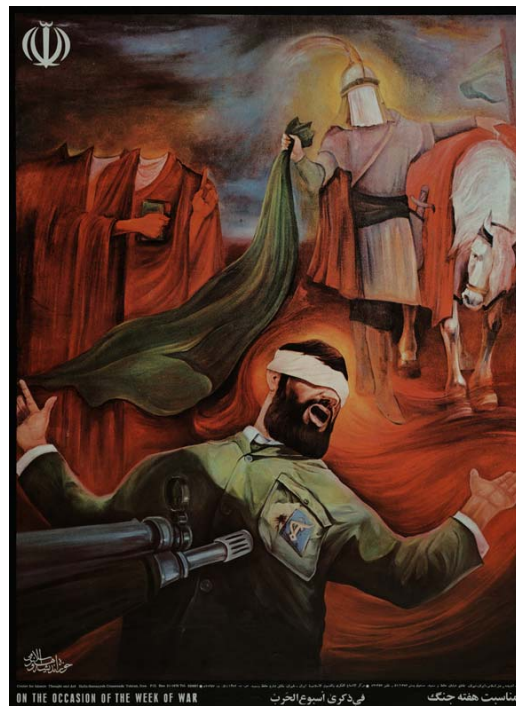


Figure 4. *The New Karbala* (ca. 1981).

Middle Eastern Posters Collection, Box 4, Poster 197, Special Collections Research Center, The University of Chicago Library (<https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/webexhibits/iranianposters/newkarbala.html>)

⁵⁰ *Payam-i Inqilab*, no. 59, (May 29, 1982): 28, quoted in Ostovar, *Vanguard*, 77.

⁵¹ Christiane Gruber, "Media/ting Conflict: Iranian Posters of the Iran-Iraq War," in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Carlton, Australia: Miegunyah Press, 2009), 684–89. Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress of the History of Art. Accessed May 16, 2017 at www.academia.edu/.../Media_ting_Conflict_Iranian_Posters_of_the_Iran-Iraq_War.

⁵² Ingvild Flakerud, "Redemptive Memories: Portraiture in the Cult of Commemoration," in Khosronejad, *Unburied Memories*, 26.

way for the end of days.⁵³ It was this redemptive suffering that was referred to in the popular war slogan, “Victory of blood over the sword.”

Beyond the IRGC, the Iranian state more broadly also seeks to “prevent the distortions” that come as direct memories of the 1979 revolution and the war of the 1980s are becoming indirect cultural memories. Intergenerational conflicts over Iran’s past have shown how flexible postrevolutionary cultural representations of martyrdom can become and therefore how crucial it is for the state to define the terms of religious narratives and to control the spaces where images of martyrdom proliferate. As a result, state-backed institutions such as the massive Martyrs’ Foundation are committed to memorializing the war through educational initiatives, publications, films, museums, and public visual art projects.⁵⁴

Historical Scholarship as a Means of IRGC Propaganda: Characteristics

While the IRGC’s publication agenda can certainly be viewed as propaganda in the sense of “organized persuasion,” there are four notable features of the center’s publications that set them apart from conventional forms of propaganda.⁵⁵ First, there is an intentional effort to publish—both online and in print—copies of primary source documents from the war, even decorating some of the IRGC center’s quarterlies with scanned images of orders signed by high-ranking military commanders.

Second, with the exception of the literary genre and the graphic compilations, the citations provided in the majority of the center’s works are extensive, sometimes numbering in the hundreds per chapter. More interestingly, the center’s authors do not merely cite from material published internal to the IRGC or even Iran; they also cite Western media and Western scholarship throughout their narratives alongside their own sources. The center’s narratives clearly favor Iran in general, and the IRGC in particular, but rather than wholly ignoring outsider views, their publications often opt to directly engage foreign media and scholarship. The most common example of engaging Western sources is the extensive citation of Western media sources incorporated into their narratives. IRGC historians will often raise a disparaging viewpoint or theory for the purpose of direct critique, such as one IRGC history that devotes an entire seventy-page chapter to articulating interpretations of prominent Western academics and political leaders.⁵⁶ Another

⁵³ Gruber, “Media/ting Conflict.”

⁵⁴ Christiane Gruber, “The Martyrs’ Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” in Khosronejad, *Unburied Memories*, 70–72.

⁵⁵ For more on “organized persuasion,” see Randal Marlin, *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2002).

⁵⁶ Muhammad Durudiyan, *Naghd va Barrasi-yi Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq: Ijtinab-i Napaziri-yi Jang* [Critical Study of the Iran-Iraq War: The Inevitability of the War], Sipah-i Markaz-i Mutala’at va Tahqiqat-I Jang IRGC Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research], 1382 [2003/2004], 61–130.

example of the IRGC's use of outside scholarship is practice of publishing translations of articles by Western scholars, journalists, US military strategists, or political leaders in journals such as *Negin*.

Third, there appears to be an intentional effort to engage conflicting views of the war and to facilitate debates over competing opinions about the war, both within Iran's elite and by engaging foreign perspectives. For example, *Negin's* placement of interviews with Hashemi Rafsanjani next to interviews Mohsen Rezaei—two power players known for their disagreement over when to continue and when to end the war—does not suggest an attempt to orchestrate an artificial, unified opinion within the regime, as one might expect from a propaganda effort to retell why and how hundreds of thousands of Iranians lost their lives. Still, the official historical narratives appear to be tightly controlled. Even within IRGC publications, commanders have raised concerns that both censorship and retaliation over dissenting opinions are problems within the armed forces and the IRGC. In a 2008 interview, Brigadier General Nasrollah Ezzati mentioned that even at military academies or military headquarters “security agencies . . . implement serious restrictions not just in writing the history of the war, but even in speeches.”⁵⁷

The extent to which the IRGC center is directly engaging foreign scholarship and outside critiques is surprising. For example, the center published an entire series of critical analyses of the war seeking to ask the following: “Was the war inevitable?” “Should the war have continued following Iran's victory at Khorramshahr?” and “Should the war have ended as it did with Resolution 598?” The first book in this series lists and explains the main critiques of authors and critics—many of them foreign or even dissident groups—who have written about the Iran-Iraq War.⁵⁸ Another example is a series titled *Jang az Negah-i Digaran* [The War from the Perspective of Others], which is a compilation of translations from foreign authors writing about the war. The translator's introduction to a history of the war written by Egypt's Minister of Defense during the conflict, Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala, mentions that the book was important for Iranians to read precisely because they considered Abu Ghazala's perspective to be representative “of the opposing camp.”⁵⁹ While it should be mentioned that Abd al-Halim's overall analysis actually favored Iran,⁶⁰ the center nonetheless used this publication as an

⁵⁷ Nasrollah Ezzati interview, in “Military Commanders and Compiling War History: Capabilities and Limitation,” *Negin-i Iran* (Spring 2008), 71.

⁵⁸ Muhammad Durudiyan, ed., *Pursish'ha-yi Asasi-i Jang* [Fundamental Questions of the War] (Tehran: Markaz-i Mutala'at va Taghqiqat-i Jang, 2004).

⁵⁹ Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazalah, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, trans. Nader Noroozshad (Tehran: Markaz-i Mutala'at va Taghqiqat-i Jang, 2001), 8, 11–12.

⁶⁰ Kevin M. Woods et al., *Saddam's Generals: Perspectives of the Iran-Iraq War* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2011), 209.

example of its attempt to provide an alternative analyses of the war for Iranians who lived through it and wanted to achieve a more holistic perspective.⁶¹

Fourth, the center's publications display a creative effort to analyze the war in multiple temporal and spatial scales, as well as through a variety of narrative forms and theoretical frameworks. In terms of varying temporal scales, the IRGC center has published histories contextualizing the Iran-Iraq War with regard to the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia, the reordering of the Middle East after the Sykes-Picot Agreement following the First World War,⁶² and even a study looking at causes of war in the region over millennia.⁶³ In the six-volume series titled *Sayri dar Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq* [An Overview of the Iran-Iraq War], the first five volumes analyze the war by breaking it into five periods of time, separated by major battles as turning points that drive the narrative. The last book in this series analyzes the war by looking at eight twelve-month periods of time, whereby each period received a chapter designed around answering the most crucial question that Iran faced during that time.⁶⁴

Though unstated explicitly, it is reasonable that the IRGC's innovative methodology of using multiple temporal scales of analysis is related to how it understand the reasons for the war itself. On the one hand, the IRGC is clear that the fundamental catalyst for the war was the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and not Iran's border disputes with Iraq. On the other hand, their publications also acknowledge that the war had deeply entrenched historical antecedents that were shaped on multiple layers of power projection: tribal/ethnic, sectarian, Ottoman-Persian Empires, Anglo-Russian imperialism, US-Soviet Cold War competition, the Iran-Iraq nation-states.⁶⁵

The center has also published histories structured around varying spatial scales, looking at the war through the unique perspectives of single cities, single provinces, and particular foreign countries through a regional perspective⁶⁶ and in the global context of the two Cold War superpowers.⁶⁷ The variety of geographical scope should not merely be interpreted as a creative way of analyzing war. Rather, there is a relationship between the IRGC's spatial

⁶¹ Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazalah, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, trans. Nader Noroozshad (Tehran: Markaz-i Mutala'at va Taghqiqat-i Jang, 2001), 8–9.

⁶² Hoseyn Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq, Ruyiarui-yi Istratizhi-ha* [Confrontation of Strategies in the Iran-Iraq War] (Tehran: Sepah Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, 1388 [2009/2010]), chapter 2.

⁶³ Muhammad Durudiyani, *Ijtinab Napaziri-yi Jang* [The Inevitability of War] (Tehran: Sepah Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, 1391 [2012]), 283–86.

⁶⁴ Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 9–12.

⁶⁵ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 175.

⁶⁶ Mahmoud Yazdan-Fam, *Khavar-i Mianeh va Jang-i 'Iraq va Iran: Majmu'ih-yi Maghalat* [The Middle East and the Iraq-Iran War: A Collection of Articles] (Tehran: Sepah Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, 1388 [2009/2010]).

⁶⁷ Ibrahim Mottaghi, *Nizam-i Doqotbi va Jang-i Iran va Iraq* [The Iran-Iraq War and the Bipolar System] (Tehran: Sepah Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, 1388 [2009/2010]).

scale of analysis; the IRGC's interpretation of local, regional, and global aggressions; and the unique objectives that Iran's adversaries had in carrying out those aggressions. A former head of the center made the relationship between spatial scales of analysis and the revolution itself: "Because the Islamic Revolution had repercussions at the national level (Iraq), the regional level (Gulf States), and the international levels (United States, Europe, and Russia), the causes and objectives for attacking Iran should be studied in relation to the objectives at each of these levels."⁶⁸

In terms of theory, nearly every issue of the IRGC center's main quarterly publication, *Negin*, has a section discussing the advantages and disadvantages of theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the center has published stand-alone works that apply such methodological approaches to the Iran-Iraq War as various international relations theories,⁶⁹ game theory,⁷⁰ and just war theory.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 175.

⁶⁹ Amir-Muhammad Haji-Yusefi, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq az Negah-i Nazriyeh-hayi Ravabat bin ol-Malali* [The Iran-Iraq War from the Perspective of International Relations Theories] (Tehran: Safheh-i Jadid Publishers, 1392 [Spring 2013–14]).

⁷⁰ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 9–24.

⁷¹ Mostafa Tork Zahrani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq va Nazriyeh-i Jang-i 'Adelaneh* [The Iran-Iraq War and Just War Theory] (Safheh-i Jadid Publishers, 1393 [Spring 2014–15]).

2 IMPOSED WAR

*Iraq's Imposed War, by the command of the global leader in blasphemy and international arrogance, America, against Islamic Iran.*¹

—Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, 1981

One of the most common ways that the Islamic Republic refers to the Iran-Iraq War is with the term *Jang-i Tahmili*, or the “Imposed War.” Typically, the term “Imposed War” is interpreted as a war that was imposed onto Iran when Iraq invaded it on September 22, 1980. While this interpretation is true, it is too simplistic and cannot account for the multidimensional ways that IRGC historians have written about the conflict. IRGC historians use the theme of imposition in a variety of ways, depending on which of Iran’s various opponents is viewed as the imposer.

It should not be surprising that Iranians would demand explanations and scapegoats for why their government waged an eight-year war, why it cost hundreds of thousands of lives and billions of dollars, and why it yielded no gains in territory or resources. On the surface, there is nothing unique about framing a war that took place along a national border in terms of an “imposing aggressor” and an “imposed defender.” But when the war began in September 1980, no one had any idea that it would last eight years or demand so much from the Iranian people. Even after Iran continued the war onto Iraqi soil in 1982, the IRGC has continued to push the theme that the war was imposed upon them by outside aggressors. While Iran is always cast as the “defender” in the narrative, the role of the “aggressor” is more complicated: Saddam’s Iraq was not the only aggressor in the war, and not always the most relevant one. Even as Iran seeks to influence current events in Iraq today, Iranian news sites continue to publish dozens of articles every day that employ the term “Imposed War” as one of the war’s two main naming conventions (the other being the “Sacred Defense”). Iranian military commanders regularly employ this phrase even today. Why did this name, Imposed War, take hold during its earliest days? How has it changed over time? And how is it used in the press today?

¹ Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), *Artish-i Maktabi* (Tehran: Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami [Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps], 1981), 2.

A HISTORY OF IMPOSITION, THE COLD WAR, AND REVOLUTION

Probably the clearest theme of the IRGC's histories is that the Iran-Iraq War was not merely "imposed" upon Iran by Saddam Hussein, but also by both Cold War superpowers—especially the United States—and even by the international community as a whole. This framing is a product of the historical context into which the Islamic Republic was created, and it is rooted in the ideological context of the Islamic Revolution. The story of the Iran-Iraq War is the story of a Third World nation that dared to challenge the Cold War order and how the two superpowers tried and failed to regain that exploitative order when Iran thwarted their schemes—whether in the form of coup attempts, foreign-backed domestic dissidents, economic sanctions, trade embargoes, or even proxy militaries.

The IRGC's histories, particularly in its earliest publications, use the language of Cold War binaries between Eastern communism and Western capitalist imperialism. Groups opposed to the consolidation of clerical rule following the revolution are spoken of as "lackeys," as either US-backed liberals or Soviet-backed leftists seeking to manipulate Iran from the inside.² Over time, corresponding with the drawdown of the Cold War, IRGC narratives focus less on finding a third way between the superpowers and become increasingly anti-American, though much of the language of "the West" and "the East" is still reflected in public discourse today.

When dealing with the war's outbreak, almost none of the IRGC histories begin with Iraq as their starting point, as one might imagine in a war over territorial rights. Rather, these histories consistently frame the conflict in terms of how the Islamic Revolution of 1979 upset the global balance of powers in the region and the US and Soviet incentives to reestablish the prerevolutionary order, or at least to limit the revolution from spreading beyond Iran.³ "The main issue," to quote former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, "is not the concept of war, nor of conflict. The main and most urgent objective was to overturn the revolutionary government ruling Iran, or to constrain [the revolution], in order to restore the old order."⁴ With the loss of the Shah, the United States lost a number of strategic advantages in the region in terms of both access to resources and as a buffer state against the spread of communism. The Soviets, on the other hand, while benefiting geopolitically from the collapse of the American-backed Shah, were threatened by the possibility of the Islamic Revolution spreading to its Muslim-majority states to

² IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 15–19.

³ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 14–16; Hossein Hosseini, in *Risheh-hayi Tajavom: Tajzieh va Tahlil-i Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq* [Origins of the Invasion: Analysis of the Iran-Iraq War, vol. 1] (Tehran: Sepah Center for War Studies and Research), 23–27; Mohsen Rezaei, *Jang bih Rivayat-i Farmandeh* [The War as Told by the Commander] (Tehran: Institution for the Preservation and Propagation of Sacred Defense Values, 1390 [Spring 2011–12]), 24–38; and IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 15–27.

⁴ Hashemi Rafsanjani in Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 15–16.

its south.⁵ IRGC histories have argued that it was the potential threat of Iran's religious ideology that necessitated the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁶ This analysis actually corresponds to the Soviet archival material, which revealed the Soviet assessment that Iran's "spark of religious fanaticism all around the Muslim East was the underlying cause of the activation of the struggle against the government of Afghanistan."⁷

This global framing extends beyond the fact that the Iran-Iraq War occurred toward the end of the Cold War. According to IRGC histories, the Imposed War that broke out in the 1980s was in fact preceded by layers of impositions that never fully healed. Particularly important to the IRGC's historical framework is the relationship between the Imposed War of the 1980s (as framed within the larger American-Soviet Cold War) and the Anglo-Russian "Great Game" that shaped Persia's nineteenth century.

The late Hosseyn Ardestani, former director of the IRGC's premier history office, contextualized the Iran-Iraq border conflict into the longer story of the Anglo-Russian imposition for access to extract resources and penetrate markets. For Ardestani, Iraq's Imposed War against Iran could not be understood fully apart from the larger imposition of Anglo-Russian imperialism that shaped the legacy of Ottoman conflicts left for the nation of Iraq.⁸ The logic of Ardestani's argument is as follows: because of border disputes between the Persian and Ottoman Empires, the Russian and British Empires could not take full advantage of the concessions they were obtaining for the region's natural resources nor could their merchants sell British or Russian goods in the region freely. For this reason, in 1847, the Russians and British pressured the Ottomans and Persians to the bargaining table in the Second Treaty of Erzurum, which would become the basis for twentieth-century Ottoman-Persian and Iraq-Iran treaties dealing with water and land rights along the Shatt al-Arab and the Iran-Iraq border region. When the treaty proved insufficient to resolve border disputes, the Russians and British again

⁵ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq, Ruyiarui-yi Istratizhi-ha* [Confrontation of Strategies in the Iran-Iraq War] (Tehran: Sepah Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, 1388 [2009/2010]), 69.

⁶ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 69.

⁷ Andrei Gromyko, Dmitrii Ustinov, Yurii Andropov, and Boris Ponomarev, "Soviet Policy in Afghanistan, 1979: A Grim Assessment," trans. Loren Utkin, in *Documents on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: e-Dossier No. 4*, (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars—Cold War International History Project, November 2001), 68, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/e-dossier_4.pdf; and Mohiaddin Mesbahi, "The USSR and the Iran-Iraq War: From Brezhnev to Gorbachev," in *The Iran-Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression*, ed. Farhand Rajaei (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 69–102. Mesbahi argues that there were three overlapping periods in Soviet policy toward Iran during the war: "strict neutrality" from 1980 to 1982, "active neutrality" from 1982 to early 1986, and "active containment" from mid-1986 to the August 1988 cease-fire. Mesbahi also interpreted Soviet policy as being shaped by Iran's revolutionary ideology and its capacity to mobilize as a sociopolitical force (71).

⁸ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 27.

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pressured the Ottomans and Persia into signing more detailed agreements (in 1911, 1912, 1914, and 1937) that eventually gave full control of the Shatt al-Arab to the Ottomans. With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, these territorial rights—and their contested bases—were in turn granted to the British mandate of Iraq, and later the British granted full control of the Shatt al-Arab to the nation of Iraq in 1937.⁹ But according to Ardestani, the history of these border conflicts followed a particular pattern in which imposed treaties begot imposed wars:

The sheer number of treaties and the amount of time these disputes have continued are indicative of how deeply rooted Iran's border disputes are with its western neighbor. And this is evidenced by the fact that not one of the treaties ever addressed all aspects of the two sides' views. [Rather], generally unequal conditions *have been imposed (tahmil shodeh ast)* on one side or the other. And for this reason, the aggrieved side *has imposed (tahmil kardeh ast)* war at the first available chance, whether by acquiring more power or whenever the other side became weak or dysfunctional."¹⁰ (emphasis added)

At a more local level, despite the fact that both the Ottoman and Persian Empires consistently claimed ownership of the region surrounding the Shatt al-Arab since the early sixteenth century, the area's Arab tribal leaders had long disregarded either empire's authority. In fact, the Port of Khorramshahr on the Iranian side of the river had functioned as an autonomous state for over a hundred years before Reza Shah Pahlavi claimed it as part of the Iranian province of Khuzestan in 1936.¹¹ Beyond the Ottomans, Persians, and British oil companies imposing power onto the tribespeople of the region, imposition took a new Westphalian form in 1920 with the British Mandate of Iraq and later the independent nation of Iraq in 1932. For the first five years following Iraq's independence, the young nation fought with Iran over their national boundaries until they signed a 1937 agreement along the Shatt al-Arab's deep waterline.¹²

This history of imposition forms the backdrop for not only the IRGC's early explanations of the territorial disputes and national sovereignty, but also for Iran's domestic political struggles. The introduction to a 1982 IRGC history published on the second anniversary of the war's outbreak picks up the history of imposition by tying the 1953 US-backed coup of Iranian Prime Minister

⁹ Ibid., 38–49.

¹⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹¹ Saskia Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 13–14; and Peter Hunseler, "The Historical Antecedents of the Shatt al-'Arab Dispute," in *The Iran-Iraq War: An Historical, Economic and Political Analysis*, ed. M. S. el-Azhary (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 20–37.

¹² Gieling, *Religion and War*, 13–14; and Hunseler, "Historical Antecedents," 20–37.

Mohammad Mossadegh to the IRGC's ongoing domestic political struggles with then-President Abol Hassan Bani Sadr's liberal faction:

Liberals were those who, in 1953, paved the way for the victory of the U.S. in a sinister coup. In 1953, the legal government of Prime Minister Mossadegh (who nationalized the oil company and took away most of the Shah's power) was toppled by a gang of thugs who were paid by the U.S. Embassy in Tehran to return the defunct Shah to power.¹³

Through this framework of imposition, it was the West that put Mohammad Reza Shah into power during World War II when his father (Reza Shah) allegedly showed German sympathies, and it was the West that secured his power when Mossadegh threatened to give Iran's wealth and autonomy back to the Iranian people. Now that the Islamic Revolution had liberated Iran from foreign domination under the authoritarian Shah, the United States was back to its old efforts for regime change. In multiple works, IRGC historians refer to the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran as "the Second Revolution," noting that the "First Revolution" removing the Shah would merely lead to a repeat of Mossadegh's coup in 1953.¹⁴ When the US government allowed the Shah to enter America for cancer treatment, the revolution took on a new phase against the United States directly. According to the IRGC PAO, it was out of the fear that the history of imposition would repeat itself—with another American-led coup attempt—that Iranian revolutionaries stormed the US embassy in November 1979.¹⁵

THE THIRD REVOLUTION: IMPOSING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

A look at the early IRGC literature shows that this framework of imposition was applied to all kinds of challenges facing the early Islamic Republic. In the summer of 1980, the IRGC PAO published a collection of communiqués, including one dated May 31, 1980, titled "The US Conspiracies Against Iran's Islamic Revolution." Issued one month following Operation Eagle Claw (President Jimmy Carter's failed attempt to rescue the hostages at the Tehran embassy), the article uses the timing of counterrevolutionary events in the Islamic Republic to suggest that "the U.S. military invasion of Iran" was not merely attempting to rescue the embassy hostages, but was rather an attempt to bring about regime change through military force. A key component of this argument focuses on the timing of counterrevolutionary events in Iran and their escalation toward violent uses of force, including efforts to influence universities to create ideological clashes; threatening economic sanctions;

¹³ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 18.

¹⁴ Daftar-i Siyasi-yi Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami-yi Iran [IRGC Political Affairs Office], "The US Conspiracies Against Iran's Islamic Revolution," in *Majmu'ah-i Bayaniyah'ha-yi Daftar-i Siyasi-i Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilabi-i Islami* [Collection Communiqués from the IRGC Office for Political Affairs] (Tehran[?]: IRGC Political Affairs Office, Summer 1359 [1980]), 179–96.

¹⁵ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 22; and Durudiyan, *Naqd va Barrasi-yi*, 200–1.

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Western propaganda efforts against Iran's new leaders or their Islamic themes; bombings in Khuzestan and Tehran; reorganizing Iranian dissidents and old SAVAK (Iranian secret police) members; and US Navy maneuvers around the Strait of Hormuz and in the Persian Gulf.¹⁶ A later 1982 IRGC publication built upon this theme and argued that a number of developments proved that the superpowers were conspiring to reimpose the prerevolutionary order: Operation Eagle Claw (April 1980), the Nojeh coup attempt of Iranian military officers (July 1980), confidential negotiations between Iraq and the superpowers, and domestic political struggles between Soviet-backed leftists and US-backed liberals.¹⁷

In the latest installment of this Great Game for control of Iran between the Anglo-Americans and Russians/Soviets, the superpowers saw an opportunity in Saddam Hussein. By 1982, the idea of Saddam as a proxy was explicit in IRGC publications: "World imperialism forced its mercenary, Saddam, into the war fields, dreaming it could create another Israel here."¹⁸ Later IRGC histories articulated the US-Iraq relationship as an alignment of interests:

The removal of Hassan al-Bakr and the rise of Saddam Hussein was the turning point in Iraq's domestic developments which put it on the path toward war. Because of the changing internal developments of both countries (ie., Iran and Iraq), and because of America's fading hopes for moderates to rule in the region after the seizure of the American embassy on [November 4, 1979], Iran-Iraq relations became the victim, and America changed its policy from one of 'wait and see,' to one of 'antagonize and intervene.' . . . The emergence of a new situation intensified and facilitated the alignment of American and Iraqi interests: [During summer/fall 1980], the effects of this alignment were made manifest. After the failure of the Nojeh coup d'état (during [July 1980]), when America gave up hope of changing the government via coup d'état, it was only a matter of time until military power was used against Iran and Iraq would attack. And so it happened that on [September 22, 1980], Iraq invaded Iran by land, air, and sea.¹⁹

However, the IRGC claims that this latest turn in the history of imposition against Iran signified something new and more sinister than a political move to protect the superpowers' interests. More than a war over mere territory or material resources, this was a war against the Islamic Revolution and Iran's new Islamic national identity. In the Anglo-Russian imposition, treaties were forced upon Iran in order to obtain resources and open markets. In the era of the American-Soviet imposition, the imposition had become

¹⁶ IRGC Political Affairs Office, "US Conspiracies," 176–96.

¹⁷ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 17–19; and Durudiyan, *Naqd va Barrasi-yi*, 200.

¹⁸ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 16.

¹⁹ Durudiyan, *Ijtinab Napaziri-yi Jang*, 285.

spiritualized: destroy Islamic national identity, prevent the spread of the Islamic Revolution, and restore as much exploitative hegemony as possible. This sentiment is reflected in the dedication of one of the IRGC's earliest publications, a 1981 doctrinal training text for its new recruits that introduces the war as "Iraq's Imposed War, by the command of the global leader in blasphemy and international arrogance, America, against Islamic Iran."²⁰ This was a war that had been "organized for the purpose of overturning Iran's revolutionary government and destroying the Islamic Revolution" and thus was meant to restore the global order advantageous to the superpowers.²¹ In order to prevent the spread of the Islamic revolutionary message, the superpowers sought to "create a situation whereby the revolution . . . would remain dependent and subordinate to Western and Eastern power interests."²² The IRGC cites a host of developments as part of "a campaign to stifle the fledgling Islamic Revolution of Iran and prevent the establishment of an Islamic system of government and the spread of Islamic Revolution to other countries." Such conspiratorial efforts included US espionage operations following the revolution, the December 1979 economic sanctions, the April 1980 Operation Eagle Claw, the July 1980 Nojeh coup attempt, and ethnic counterrevolution protests in Kurdistan and Gonbad. When all of these failed, only then did Iraq invade Iran.²³ The IRGC wrote an entire book—which in turn formed the basis of an entire series of books—articulating a theoretical framework that connected the revolution to the war in order to understand "Iran-Iraq relations in the context of the Superpowers' policies."²⁴

By framing the war with Iraq as a conspiratorial plot against the Islamic Revolution that was designed and supported by the secular superpowers (especially the United States), the IRGC's narratives transform the war into a global and spiritual war against Iran and its sacred revolution. From this perspective, the Iran-Iraq War was not only a war imposed upon Iran by Iraq, but it was a war to *reimpose* the exploitative conditions overturned by Iran's "First Revolution" to oust the US-backed Shah and its "Second Revolution" to close the US embassy. For this reason, IRGC's publications have often referred to the Iran-Iraq War as the "Third Revolution."²⁵ In a sense, the Islamic Revolution had gone global: it was now Iran against nearly the entire world. All subsequent support for Iraq would be viewed through—and confirm—this conspiratorial perspective that the war with Iraq was imposed upon Iran by the superpowers in order to stop the Islamic Revolution.

²⁰ IRGC, *Artish-i Maktabi*, 2.

²¹ Ayatollah Khamenei in Muhammad Durudiyani, *Sayri dar Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, Jild-i 6: *Aghaz ta Payan* [Survey of the Iran-Iraq War, vol. 6: Beginning to End] (Tehran: Markaz-i Mutala'at va Taghqiqat-i Jang, 1376 [1997–98]), 15–16.

²² Durudiyani, *Sayri dar Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 18.

²³ IRGC, introduction to *The Imposed War: Defence vs Aggression* (Tehran: Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami, 1983); and Durudiyani, *Ijtinab Napaziri-yi Jang*, 285.

²⁴ Durudiyani, *Naqd va Barrasi-yi*, 283–84.

²⁵ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 22.

IMPOSING THE WAR'S CONTINUATION: UN RESOLUTION 514 AND OPERATION RAMAZAN

In addition to seeing Saddam's invasion of Iran as an American-Soviet imposition, the IRGC also frames the war's continuation during the summer of 1982 as an imposition of the UN and the international community. According to a former director of the IRGC Center, the ratification of UN Resolution 514 on July 14, 1982, called for Iran to participate in unconditional negotiations toward a cease-fire, which intentionally disregarded Iran's conditions to label Iraq as the aggressor in the conflict and to require Iraq to pay reparations. Had the UN recognized these demands, the IRGC claims that the war would have ended during the summer of 1982.²⁶ Because of US influence on the UN Security Council, according to Ardestani, this resolution was intended to keep the war from ending in any way that would be advantageous to the Iranians:

From the Americans' perspective, any end to the war which gave Iran a military or political advantage would be submitting to the Islamic Revolution . . . [and] the whole aim of the Imposed War was to prevent the Islamic Revolution from spreading. So ending the war when Iran was ahead would be contrary to this goal.²⁷

According to IRGC historians, UN Resolution 514 was not concerned with achieving peace or else it would have been ratified during the previous twenty months of fighting.²⁸ Rather, this resolution was passed in response to a series of sweeping victories from September 1981 to May 1982, during which Iran drove the majority of Iraqi forces out of the war's southern sector and regained control of Iraq's two main points of leverage for negotiations: Abadan and Khorramshahr.²⁹ Therefore, UN Resolution 514 "was more concerned with rescuing Iraq's regime and buying time until Iraq could regroup and rebuild its military to counter Iran."³⁰

In response to what the IRGC interpreted as an international imposition of violence against Iran, on July 14, 1982—two days after Resolution 514 was ratified—it launched Operation Ramazan on Iraqi soil: "By carrying out [Operation Ramazan], Iran not only officially rejected the [UN Security] Council's new resolution, it defied its injustice."³¹

IRGC historians articulated the continuation of the war as "inevitable," in the sense that Iran was left with no choice but to take offensive action onto Iraqi territory in order to defend itself. Saddam was not to be trusted, and any

²⁶ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 68.

²⁷ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 129.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 129–30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 101. In fact, UN Resolution 479 had aimed to negotiate a cease-fire on September 28, 1980, but was essentially a formal request to resolve differences through peaceful means and included no acknowledgement of Iraq's invasion.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

³¹ *Ibid.*

cease-fire would be designed by the US-led international community to allow Iraq to regroup its forces and strike again in the future after it had amassed even more foreign weapons. This idea that Iran was forced into offensive action as a means of defense is reflected in some of the phrases used to describe this turning point: invading Iraq as “punishing the aggressors . . . [as] an act of self-preservation,” or “aggressive action against the aggressors.”³² Rather than taking on the role of the aggressor, IRGC historians wrote about Iran’s invasion of Iraq as a “Punishment of the Aggressors,” which is also a title of one of its books on this turning point in the war.³³

IRGC histories acknowledge that when Iran invaded Iraq in July 1982, there was no clear vision for how the conflict would end.³⁴ Some of these works also acknowledge the often dramatic differences of opinions that emerged concerning whether Iran should take the fight onto Iraqi soil and how such operations should proceed.³⁵ However, IRGC histories contend that a consensus gradually emerged between military and political leaders: the only option for peace would be to carry out an operation so successful that Iran could use it as leverage in negotiations with Iraq.³⁶ The IRGC would have to go on the offensive to fight for peace, and Operation Ramadan was referred to as the first attack under such an “honorable peace strategy.”³⁷ In effect, IRGC historians wrote about the war after the summer of 1982 as a conflict to transform a war imposed upon Iran into an advantageous peace deal it could impose upon Iraq.

IMPOSING CHALLENGES ON IRAN’S WAR EFFORT

IRGC historians not only used a framework of imposition to explain when the war began and ended but also to explain the challenges that Iran faced while fighting Iraq. As early as September 1982, IRGC historians were contextualizing Iran’s challenges with Iraq within a framework of “global” imposition led by the United States and, to a lesser extent, the Soviet Union and Israel.³⁸ This global imposition consists of at least four key components: restricting Iran’s military and economy, supporting Iraq’s military and economy, providing Iraq with intelligence, and ultimately, directing US action against Iran in the Persian Gulf to pressure Iran into a disadvantageous peace deal.

³² Ibid., 130–31.

³³ Hoseyn Ardestani, ed., *Tanbih-i Mutijaviz: Tajziyah va Tahlil-i Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq* [Punishing the Aggressor: Analysis of the Iran-Iraq War], vol. 3 (Tehran: Center for War Studies and Research, 2005/2006).

³⁴ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 70.

³⁵ Ibid., 75–76.

³⁶ Ibid., 70–71.

³⁷ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 132.

³⁸ See part 3, “Global Dimensions of the Imposed War,” in *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 103–74.

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First, the United States and its allies restricted Iran's warfighting options by imposing economic sanctions and by placing embargoes on the weapons and spare parts Iran needed. The efforts by the United States to constrain Iran's military capabilities have been well documented in English-language histories and in the news media, and IRGC historians often cite mainstream American newspapers and US congressional testimonies regarding the arms sales, embargoes, and their relations to US foreign policy.³⁹ IRGC historians interpreted US economic policies through the lens of the Imposed War narrative—e.g., manipulating oil prices to put Iran at a disadvantage⁴⁰—or through efforts taken under Operation Staunch, a US led diplomatic effort beginning in 1983 to prevent, delay, degrade, or raise the cost of arms that Iran tried to purchase from abroad.⁴¹ Another key challenge in IRGC narratives is that, before leaving Iran, US military advisors destroyed the digital inventory data that documented Iran's armaments and spare parts, which made it difficult to locate the parts Iran had available and nearly impossible to obtain technical information for purchasing spare parts.⁴² The challenges associated with obtaining and maintaining technical weapons contributed to the conflict between the IRGC and Artesh regarding how to fight the war most effectively, as the "classic" warfighting doctrine advocated by the Artesh made Iranian forces more dependent upon reliable supply chains than did the IRGC's tactics.

Second, the international community imposed war onto Iran by aiding Iraq's economy and military. While Iran faced challenges obtaining the weapons that it needed, nearly the entire international community supported Iraq through arms sales, financing, and political support (especially in the UN Security Council). IRGC historians detail the many international arms purchases granted to Iraq, as well as actions taken to free up Iraq's economy for the war effort, such as removing Iraq from the US terrorism list so that lines of credit for grain could be issued.⁴³ In this regard, IRGC narratives are largely in line with those of English-language histories of the war. One point of consensus by most historians outside Iran is that the outcomes of the Iran-Iraq War—especially following July 1982—were largely determined by arms sales

³⁹ For the most detailed study of global arms sales during the war, see Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, trans. Nicholas Elliott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015). For US efforts to manage arms sales and embargoes, see David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran* (New York: Penguin, 2012). The most commonly cited source in IRGC histories for US efforts to arm Iraq is Kenneth R. Timmerman, *The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1991).

⁴⁰ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 141. Ardestani argues that the United States pressured Saudi Arabia to overproduce its oil in order to low the global price of oil as an effort to diminish Iran's purchasing power

⁴¹ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 86.

⁴² Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 88; Daftar-i hoquqi-yi Vezarat-i 'Omur-i Kharejeh [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Legal Office], *Tahlili bar Jang-i Tahmili-i Rezhim-i 'Iraq 'Alihi Iran* [Analysis of the War Iraq Imposed Upon Iran] (Bahman 1361 [Jan/Feb 1983]), 51–52; and Ali Khamenei in Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 30.

⁴³ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 72.

and supply logistics that were beyond the control of Iraq and Iran.⁴⁴ Where IRGC histories are unique are in their efforts to connect the arms trade and economic policies with the United States' and Soviet Union's refusal to allow Iran to emerge from the conflict victorious, and how those very attempts worked to undercut the superpowers' own long-term objectives in the region and create instability. IRGC narratives connect the timing of Iran's successes with efforts by the international community to financially support and arm Iraq, especially following the liberation of Khorramshahr (May 24, 1982) and Iran's occupation of the Faw Peninsula (February–March 1986).⁴⁵ In doing so, they also point to the conundrum that the superpowers and Gulf States created for their long-term regional objectives: in arming Saddam to defeat Iran, "Iraq became a threat to the region, especially to Saudi Arabia and Israel."⁴⁶

Third, an important theme in IRGC histories is the role of Western and US intelligence sharing that gave the Iraqis an advantage throughout the conflict, particularly in anticipating mass ground assaults. By September 1982, IRGC publications were citing arms agreements for the delivery of AWACS to Saudi Arabia and the provision of US pilots and technical support personnel in support of Iraq.⁴⁷ Later publications assert that intelligence provided by "counterrevolutionary groups which had fled Iran," "the West," and particularly the United States actually formed the basis of Iraqi leaders' decision to invade Iran in September 1980.⁴⁸ Similarly, IRGC historians point to "the help of senior Soviet military advisors and . . . U.S. military and intelligence assistance" as key factors that allowed Iraq to come back from near defeat during the last months of the war.⁴⁹ In general, information dominance is interwoven into the narrative of the United States and the Soviet Union working to impose their conditions upon Iran.

⁴⁴ Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, 481. "Without a reactive and well-developed supply chain and colossal stockpiles of ammunition, the Iraqi army would probably not have held the front throughout the war. Iranian offensives failed because the Pasdaran ran out of ammunition at the decisive moment, just as their adversary was weakening."

⁴⁵ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 119–20; and Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 53–58.

⁴⁶ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 182–83; and Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 195.

⁴⁷ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 127.

⁴⁸ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 31–32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 173–74.

IMPOSING PEACE: DIRECT MILITARY ACTION AND UN RESOLUTION 598

*An imposed peace is worse than an imposed war.*⁵⁰

—attributed to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

The theme of imposition reaches its apex in how IRGC historians recount the period between the “heroic” Karbala-5 Operation (January–February 1987), when Iranians nearly took Basra, and July 1987, when the Baathists were “on the verge of collapse.” It was during this period that the United States decided to impose direct military action against Iran in the Persian Gulf to pressure the Iranians into accepting UN Resolution 598. Within its overall “strategy of imposing war” (*istratizhi-yi tahmil-i jang*), the United States realized that the behind-the-scenes approach of its “crisis management” strategy was insufficient and decided it was necessary to directly involve itself in ending the war.⁵¹ As one former IRGC Center director phrased it, “From that point on, [the United States] would be involved, not merely as a supporter of Iraq, but as Iraq’s military partner.”⁵²

The narrative of the Tanker Wars of 1987 is told in terms of the United States using direct military force to impose peace upon Iran under conditions that would deny them from gaining any advantage: “On the same day that UN Resolution 598 was passed, the United States reflagged Kuwaiti oil tankers and entered the Persian Gulf with U.S. warships.”⁵³ In the event that Iran would not sign the resolution, the US military was prepared to dramatically escalate conflicts in the Persian Gulf.⁵⁴ Even though it occurred two weeks before Iran agreed to accept the terms of UN Resolution 598, one IRGC history uses similar logic to explain why the USS *Vincennes* shot down Iran Air Flight 655, an Iranian passenger plane carrying 290 people: “During this time, the Americans shot down Iran’s passenger flight with two missiles shot from the [USS] *Vincennes*, a U.S. navy [cruiser] stationed in the Persian Gulf. This incident was a clear and decisive message that if Iran did not take steps to end the war, America would intensify the war.”⁵⁵

Noticeably absent from the IRGC narratives examined in this study were references to Iran’s tactics, strategies, or even responsibility for countering US military aggression in the Persian Gulf. It was due to “bad luck” that a Kuwaiti oil tanker (reflagged as SS *Bridgeton* during Operation Earnest Will) struck a mine near Farsi Island, with no note of how these mines got there.⁵⁶ Iran is

⁵⁰ “The Immortal Saga of Khorramshahr,” *Kayhan*, May 23, 2016, <http://kayhan.ir/en/news/26996>.

⁵¹ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 167.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 181–82.

⁵⁵ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 188.

⁵⁶ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 169.

depicted as reacting against American aggression in the Gulf and as being forced to move its initiative away from the warfronts in the borderlands to defend itself in the Persian Gulf. There is also an interesting use of active and passive language that elevates US aggression and diminishes Iranian attribution: Americans attacked Iran's oil platforms, as opposed to when "a U.S. oil tanker was hit by a Silkworm missile."⁵⁷

After eight years of war, the Islamic Republic was again presented with an opportunity to end the war through negotiations, and this time UN Resolution 598 included some of the preconditions that prevented Iran from negotiating previously. Considering the spiritualized rhetoric used to elevate the IRGC's revolutionary fervor and legitimize the war, coupled with the costs Iranians had suffered, it is understandable that there were conflicting reactions to the opportunity that Resolution 598 presented for peace. On one hand, the UN Security Council was potentially offering what Iran had from the beginning of the war: to name Iraq as the aggressor and provide reparations.⁵⁸ Within Iran, public support for the war was waning, prices were rising, and revolutionary rhetoric was losing its appeal to urban dwellers suffering missile attacks during the so-called War of the Cities.⁵⁹ On the other hand, this was perceived by many in the IRGC as the latest imposition orchestrated by the US-led Security Council: "Resolution [598] was a cover to make up for a decade of the United States' failures to effectively counter the Islamic Revolution and its leaders."⁶⁰ Like previous attempts to pressure Iran to the negotiation table, Resolution 598 was repeatedly referred to as America's desire for an "imposed peace" (*solh-i tahmili*) when the Imposed War failed to reestablish an order favorable to the superpowers.

Khomeini summoned the assessments of the leading political, economic, and military officials. IRGC Commander Mohsen Rezaei detailed what would be required to win the war: an additional three to seven years, up to five times as many IRGC members, twice as many Artesh troops, 300 planes, and some 3,000 tanks. Despite these staggering requirements, Rezaei still argued that the IRGC was prepared to fight until victory—a confidence that Khomeini

⁵⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁸ In fact, UN Resolution 598 only acknowledged that there was a violation of peace and that sanctions would be imposed. Rather than naming Iraq as the aggressor in the resolution itself, it established a committee to determine fault.

⁵⁹ Ram analyzed the theme of martyrdom seeking in Friday prayer sermons given during the war in Tehran and argued that as early as late 1983 prayer leaders were diminishing their use of explicitly extolling martyrdom and martyrdom-seeking. Rather, in order to revive revolutionary zeal from the fatigue of Iran's war rhetoric, prayer leaders elaborated on direct analogies of the Karbala paradigm for mobilization and support. See Ram, *Myth and Mobilization in Revolutionary Iran*, 76–78.

⁶⁰ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 169.

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rebuked as representing nothing more than one of the IRGC's slogans.⁶¹ After eight years of such slogans, Khomeini decided to accept Resolution 598.

IRGC histories do not shy away from dealing with the tensions, contradictions, and feelings of disillusionment that the acceptance of Resolution 598 caused among the IRGC. Their publications cite both foreign and internal interpretations of factors contributing to Khomeini's decision to give up on his vow to "fight to the last drop of blood and to the last breath" and to "drink the poison chalice" that God had prepared for him and end the war.⁶² These histories also deal with the more intimate effects that this decision had on the IRGC's morale: "People were amazed; and at the same time, their sorrow caused a wave of grief, as well as a kind of confusion and perplexity."⁶³ There was an enormous chasm between the celebratory revolutionary myth propagated by the regime and the stark realities of waging war against a far better equipped adversary. This gap was "the most important factor for understanding the people's spiritual and psychological state" when Iran's imagined narrative and Iran's actual situation met in UN Resolution 598.⁶⁴

In an effort to gain the upper hand in negotiations, Iraqis carried out attacks three days after Iran's acceptance of UN Resolution 598 and successfully regained lands north of Khorramshahr.⁶⁵ In response many Basij volunteers begged Khomeini to reopen the battlefronts so they could stand up to the Iraqis, while some IRGC fighters actually fought Iraqi occupiers on their own, apart from any official combat organizations.⁶⁶ After nearly a decade of using ideology to mobilize Iranians for war, acceptance of Resolution 598 presented a new challenge to the regime: demobilizing its revolutionaries for war and remobilizing them for reconstruction.

⁶¹ Ray Takeyh, "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment," *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2010), 382; Ali Akbar Natiq-Nuri, *Khatirat-i Hujjat al-Islam va al-Muslimin Ali Akbar Natiq Nuri*, vol. 2 [Memoirs of Ali Akbar Natiq-Nuri] (Tehran, 2005), 68; Mohsen Rezaei, *Fars News*, September 29, 2006, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8412240198>; Ostovar, *Vanguard*, 98–99; and Mohsen Rezaei and Pazhman Purjabbari, *Jang bih rivāyat-i farmandah: dars-i guftār'hā-yi jang-i Duktur Muhsin Rizāyī Mīr Qa'id* [The War According to the Commander: Lessons in War from Dr. Mohsen Rezaei Mir-Qa'id] (Tehran: Bunyad-i Hefz-i Asar va Nashr-i Arzishha-yi Difa'-i Muqaddas, 2011), 217–18. There are some discrepancies in the sources regarding the details leading up to Khomeini's decision. What is clear is that Rezaei and senior IRGC commanders sought to continue the war, despite acknowledging that to do so would require years more fighting and billions more dollars.

⁶² Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 190.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 190–92.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

3 FROM CLASSIC TO REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

After it was clear that we could achieve nothing in classic warfare, the IRGC . . . could rise to the occasion only if it negated definitively the dependence-oriented classic war, and also demonstrated the efficacy of its propounded alternative strategy.¹

—IRGC Political Affairs Office, 1982

As discussed in previous chapters, the IRGC's actions during the Iran-Iraq War were shaped primarily by the international arms embargo and the domestic political turmoil of the postrevolutionary period. The IRGC effectively used ideology as a tool for mobilizing popular forces to make use of its greatest advantage: a much larger populace. So while the IRGC's doctrine was the product of its historical context in which pragmatism and survival ultimately determined policy, ideology was not inconsequential to the formation and development of IRGC doctrine.

In trying to identify an Iranian way of war, Iran analysts often struggle to articulate the influence of ideology on Iranian military doctrine and how that influence compares to the material, economic, or technological constraints. What are the relationships between the IRGC's doctrine and the IRGC's ideology, if there are any? Was ideology merely a means of capitalizing upon the residual fervor of the 1979 revolution by fusing it with nationalism, or did it play a more integral role in the development of IRGC doctrine? Examining the IRGC's controlled official narratives in open source publications and public speeches may offer ways of answering these questions.

This chapter examines the relationships between two distinct ways of warfighting ("classic" and "nonclassic") that have been juxtaposed in IRGC publications, IRGC-affiliated websites like *Fars News Agency* and *Defa Press*, and IRGC commanders' public speeches literally hundreds of times by a variety of authors and speakers. By examining the terms and contexts used in IRGC publications to articulate what methods of fighting were and were not legitimate, authentic, or effective, this chapter aims to reconsider the familiar concepts that are typically applied to the IRGC. By comparing the IRGC's juxtapositions of these ways of war over time, the chapter examines how the

¹ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 47–48.

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IRGC's self-perception as a revolutionary institution has changed in response to new challenges and opportunities, as well as in relation to different actors.

CLASSIC WARFARE

One of the most consistent features of IRGC publications and IRGC commanders' statements is the distinction between so-called classic war (*jang-e kelasik*) and the new way of war that Iranians developed during the conflict. Often, the term "classic warfare" is used to merely refer to "conventional war" between two nation-states, as opposed to unconventional warfare (*jang-e gheir-e kelasik*, literally "nonclassic war"). Sometimes classic warfare is used by IRGC commanders to describe parity, as opposed to asymmetric warfare, as in IRGC Commander Mohsen Rezaei's description of classic warfare: "one tank against one of the enemy's tanks, one individual against an adversarial individual, and the same for other equipment and weapons."² Often, as demonstrated below, IRGC narratives juxtapose classic warfare in opposition to a number of ideas and groups (especially the Artesh, the Iraqi military, and Western military traditions) in ways that serve to distinguish the IRGC's "nonclassic warfare" as something new and revolutionary.

In the IRGC's war literature, classic warfare most often refers to the conventional military doctrine that the Artesh inherited from the days of the Shah. These histories consistently refer to classic warfare as the "old" way of war, as fought by professional service members in a "military aristocracy."³ This type of warfare refers to the way of fighting advocated by President Bani Sadr, who forged political alliances with the Artesh in order to sideline the IRGC from ascending in influence and hoped to eliminate the IRGC following the conflict.⁴ In classic warfare, combatants went on the offensive after defeating an adversary's defensive positions through firepower and armor.⁵ Classic warfare was dependent upon heavy armor, artillery, and technology. As such, it required steady supplies of arms and replacement parts—something that Iran did not have—and was thus called "dependence-oriented."⁶ Classic warfare was referred to as a "defeated strategy" because it failed to liberate Iran's occupied areas early in the war and destroyed the morale of the armed forces.⁷ Classic doctrine was too rigid and formalized, could not quickly adapt to new developments in the war, could not incorporate innovative ideas, and failed to apply lessons learned in battle.⁸ The IRGC sometimes wrote about

² Mohsen Rezaei, "Mohsen Rezaei Interview on Maneuvers and the IRGC," *Iran*, May 4, 1997.

³ Khodadad Shurab, "The Lessons that We Learn[ed] from the War: The Power of the People," *Tehran Emruz*, October 2, 1999.

⁴ Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 45.

⁷ Gholam-Ali Rashid, "Study of Policy Formed to Liberate Occupied Areas," *Journal of Defense Policy* (Summer-Fall 1996), 23-34; Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 44, 46; IRGC Political Affairs Office, 47.

⁸ Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 29, 112.

classic warfare as an inauthentic way of fighting: “the classic methods . . . were basically a translation of the U.S. military’s regulations.”⁹ It was an outside model imported to Iran: a “Western management of military forces.”¹⁰ In IRGC narratives, classic doctrine and conventional ways of thinking are repeatedly identified as a source of conflict between IRGC and Artesh commanders throughout the Iran-Iraq War.¹¹

DISTINCTION BETWEEN CLASSIC AND NONCLASSIC, REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

In opposition to the Artesh’s classic way of war, IRGC histories make references to the “new,” “non-classic,” “revolutionary,” “popular,” “irregular,” “guerrilla,” “innovative,” and “asymmetric” ways of war. Whereas classic warfighting was embodied in the Artesh’s four big failures during the first year of the war, this new revolutionary way of war was embodied in Iran’s four big successes during the second year.¹² Rather than being carried out by a professional cadre of soldiers, these successful liberation operations were led by the IRGC and the popular resistance forces.¹³ Where Bani Sadr’s classic warfare failed, Khomeini’s popular approach succeeded.¹⁴ Citing IRGC commander Mohsen Rezaei, one history claimed that it was only when the IRGC was released from the confines of the Artesh’s “classic tables” of doctrinal procedures that the revolutionary forces were able to succeed in their popular war.¹⁵ While the classic approach destroyed the military’s morale, this new warfare placed “revolutionary fervor” and “the spirit of martyrdom-seeking” at the center of the approach.¹⁶ Classic warfare focused on destroying the enemy’s defensive lines through artillery and the infantry played a secondary role, but this pattern was reversed in the new way of war: infantrymen were sent in successive operations, while the Artesh’s heavy armor would serve a supportive role.¹⁷ Where classic warfare was developed for an army of professional soldiers in a foreign aristocratic hierarchy, the new warfare employed rankless

⁹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁰ Rezaei, “Interview on Maneuvers and IRGC.”

¹¹ Muhammad Durudiyani, ed., *Khuninshahr ta Kurramshahr: Barrasi-i Vaqayi-i Siyasi-Nizami-i Jang az Zaminahsazi-i Tahajom-i ‘Iraq ta Azadsazi-yi Khurramshahr* [City of Blood to Khorramshahr: A Political-Military Study of the War from the Preparation of Iraq’s Invasion to the Liberation of Khorramshahr] (Tehran: Center for War Studies and Research, 1998), 97–98.

¹² Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 97–98, 101–2; Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 44. To make this point, sometimes IRGC historians compare the four sequential failures of the Artesh (Dezful/Karkheh, Abadan, Operation Nasr at Hoveizeh, and Operation Tavakol over the Mahshahr-Abadan road) with four sequential successes of the IRGC (Samen al-Aemmeh, Tareq ol-Qods, Fath ol-Mobin, and Beit ol-Moghaddas).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Shurab, “Lessons that We Learn[ed].”

¹⁵ Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 72, 135.

¹⁶ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 179; IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 65; Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 46.

¹⁷ Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 45–46.

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revolutionaries of all ages and from all strata of society.¹⁸ Classic warfare relied on technology and advanced weapons systems, but nonclassic warfare relied on military strategy and innovation.¹⁹ Classic war glorified the leaders at the top of the chain of command, especially Bani Sadr; nonclassic war glorified popular participation. This was “a people’s war,” and the institutions responsible for leading this popular resistance were the IRGC and the Basij.

The assessment of classic doctrine as negative and foreign has remained in use over time, though it has become more sophisticated. In a January 2017 address, Major General Mohammad Ali Ja’fari, commander of the IRGC, identified classic warfare as the reason that Iran failed to defend itself from Iraq’s invasion during the first months of the war, noting that “classical military sciences were based on non-revolutionary principles.” However, when “Iran used military tactics based on revolutionary principles, Iran’s military was able to defend the country against the Iraqi military and emerge victorious.”²⁰ Similarly, during a May 2017 speech at Imam Ali Officer’s College, Major General Yahya Safavi, the Supreme Leader’s special advisor on military affairs, pointed to “the adoption of a revolutionary war strategy to counter the Iraqi military’s classic war strategy” as a determining factor of Iran’s wartime successes.²¹

VULNERABILITIES OF IRAQ’S CLASSIC DOCTRINE AND MINDSET

Classic warfare was not only the Artesh’s preferred method, it was also the way that the Iraqi military fought. Whether used by the Artesh or the Iraqi forces, this method of warfare is consistently blamed for failures on both sides of the battlefield. Likewise, the IRGC’s nonclassic attacks and methods were explicitly identified as the main factor in Iraq’s defeat during its successive operations that liberated the occupied areas.²²

Perhaps more importantly, classic warfare was the way the Iraqi military anticipated that Iran would fight. The IRGC sought to identify and exploit the assumptions that made Iraq’s classic framework vulnerable. IRGC operational histories, such as Durudiyani’s *From Khorramshahr to Fao*, detail the many innovative ways they tried to take advantage of the element of surprise:

¹⁸ IRGC Political Affairs Office, *Guzari bar Du Sal-i Jang*, 74. The IRGC describes the mass assaults of the Southern Sector in this way: “the active presence of the people in all fields resembled a seething river which engulfed you and swept you along its course. This was a community in which people were trying to serve and make sacrifices.”

¹⁹ Shurab, “Lessons that We Learn[ed].”

²⁰ Mohammad Ali Ja’fari, “The IRGC is a Popular, Knowledge-Based, and Revolutionary Institution,” *Iran Front Page*, January 29, 2017, <http://ifpnews.com/news/politics/security/irgc-is-a-popular-knowledge-based-and-revolutionary-institution-commander>.

²¹ Major General Seyyed Yahya Safavi, “Revolutionary War’ Strategy as Opposed to Iraq’s ‘Classic War’ Strategy Accounts for the Success of Iran’s Fighters,” *Defa’ Press*, May 3, 2017, <http://www.defapress.ir/fa/print/238088>.

²² Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 101.

conducting extensive nighttime operations, nighttime reconnaissance missions, and nighttime minesweeping operations to make Iraqi forces believe an operation was underway and to keep Iraqi forces from sleeping prior to ambushes planned for the following day; taking advantage of both Iranian and Iraqi routines in operations planning; using terrain and camouflage; choosing intentionally risky objectives over more obvious ones; and employing denial and deception tactics to counter intelligence operations that the United States was conducting on behalf of Iraq.²³ In this history, IRGC operations were successful because “the enemy was trapped by classic thinking.”²⁴ By contrast, the author sees constant innovation as a key aspect of the IRGC’s defense: “Because of our experience and our mindset of nonclassic warfare, it took the Iraqis some time to adjust to the new situation, which gave our forces the time and opportunity to inflict damage upon the enemy.”²⁵

CLASSIC AND ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

In the IRGC’s publications and in public statements made by IRGC commanders, there has never been a consensus on what the opposite of classic warfare actually is. Over time, however, classic warfare has increasingly been used in contrast to asymmetric warfare. There are a variety of opinions within the IRGC as to what the war’s asymmetric lessons should be and how Iran should apply asymmetric principles. Though beyond the scope of this study, a future comparative analysis of how IRGC and Artesh commanders define classic warfare, or distinguish it from other doctrinal frameworks, may offer unique insight into Iran’s way—or ways—of fighting war. In fact, the IRGC’s top commander has publicly stated that Iran’s forces themselves need this sort of joint study to be conducted by the IRGC and Artesh to compile lessons of the war.²⁶

Since the war, the IRGC has developed and articulated at least three dimensions to its conceptualization of asymmetric warfare and how it contrasts with classic warfare. In various media statements, Hamid-Reza Moqaddamfar, a former deputy commander for IRGC Culture, media advisor to the IRGC commander, and former managing director of the IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency, has articulated a noteworthy framework to describe the IRGC’s transition since the 1980s from a “classic” strategy to an “asymmetric” strategy. Moqaddamfar has claimed that Iran’s military doctrine has evolved since the Iran-Iraq War from a “defensive deterrence” to “offensive and

²³ Mohammad Durudiyan, *Khorramshahr ta Fao* (Tehran: Sepah Center for War Studies and Research, 1988). The element of surprise is a theme throughout this text; it is listed in nearly every military operation as a key objective and is the first reason listed as to why Iran was successful in taking the Fao Peninsula in Operational Val-Fajr-8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁶ Mohammad Durudiyan, Gholam-Ali Rashid, and Mohammad Ali Ja’fari, “Az Jang-i Gozashteh, Cheh Bahreh-ei Mitavan Bara-ye Ayandeh Gereft?” February 2, 2015, <http://defamoghaddas.ir/fa/node/5370>.

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defensive deterrence.” In the earlier “defensive deterrence,” Iran focused on increasing readiness and developing defensive capabilities. Additionally, in the new, more aggressive “offensive and defensive deterrence,” Iran also aims to develop capabilities to threaten its adversaries. For Moqaddamfar, this evolution in deterrence required a transition from classic to asymmetric warfare on three fundamental levels: equipment, combatants, and geography.²⁷

At the equipment level, seeking defense through the latest technological advances in naval vessels or intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) would be the old, classic way of deterrence. For Moqaddamfar, fighting asymmetrically means that Iran’s agenda should pair its deterrents to threats against an adversary’s interests and/or personnel in the region. In this sense, asymmetric warfare would mean prioritizing the development of fast-boat capabilities to exploit US Navy vulnerabilities or prioritizing the mass production of medium- and long-range missiles over ICBMs to target American and Israeli bases in the region.²⁸

At Moqaddamfar’s combatant level, this transition means moving away from the old way of war via “classic armies” and toward training and organizing “proxy groups.” Moqaddamfar identifies both Western support for jihadi groups and Iranian support within an “axis of resistance” within this general trend.²⁹ The IRGC’s earlier histories of the Iran-Iraq War typically referred to asymmetric and nonclassic warfare at such a combatant level in terms of using new revolutionary institutions or popular resistance (i.e., IRGC and Basij) instead of the conventional Artesh. However, the idea of incorporating proxy groups into IRGC strategy—or at least seeking proxy influence by aligning with and equipping non-Iranian actors—is included in IRGC histories as well. IRGC histories, articles in IRGC weeklies, oral history interviews with Mohsen Rezaei and Mohammad Nazeri, and articles hosted on the IRGC Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research website have included accounts and even photos of the IRGC’s Ramazan Headquarters conducting influence and reconnaissance operations inside Iraq during the war by working with Iraqi Kurdish separatists and anti-Baathist dissident organizations.³⁰

²⁷ Hamid-Reza Moqaddamfar, *Tasnim News Agency*, October 1, 2016, <http://tn.ai/1198210>.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Farhad Darvishi, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq: Porsesh-ha va Pasokh-ha* [The Iran-Iraq War: Questions and Answers] (Tehran: Sepah Center for War Studies and Research, 1391 [2011/2012]); Mohammad Hassan Ja’fari, “From Guerrilla Operations to Coordination with Iraqi Dissidents at the Ramazan Headquarters beyond the Border” [in Persian], *Defa’-i Moghaddas*, June 8, 2016, <http://defamoghaddas.ir/fa/node/9233>; Mohsen Rezaei, Gholam-Ali Rashid, and Pezhman Porjabari, *Jang: Bih Rivayat-i Farmandah: Dars-i Guftar’hat-yi Jang-i Duktur Muhsin Rizayi Mir Qa’id* (Tehran: Foundation for the Preservation of Sacred Defense Heritage and Values, 2011/2012), 181–86; “Special Interview with Commander Mohammad Nazeri, Part One,” *Farmandeh TV*, July 21, 2015, <http://farmande.tv/?p=22977>; Hossein Ardestani, “The Role of Construction in Limited Operations,” *Negin-i Iran* 10, no. 37 (Summer 1390 [2011]), 10–

At the geographic level of asymmetric warfare, Moqaddamfar connects the instability of Iraq and Syria to Iran's strategic depth: "Today, our strategic depth has shifted far away from our borders. . . . The geographic level of defense . . . means that the area of conflict is pushed to places away from our borders so that our territory remains more secure. It means facing the enemies of Islam in Iraq and Syria so that [we] do not have to fight them in Tehran, Kermanshah, and Esfahan."³¹

ORIGIN, CONFLICTS, AND POLITICS OF IRGC DOCTRINE

In some ways, the story of the IRGC itself mirrors the trajectory of the relationship between classic and nonclassic—conventional and unconventional—warfare in Iran's military forces. After the revolution and a number of coup attempts, the future and leadership of the Western-trained Artesh were unclear, as many of Khomeini's supporters doubted the military's allegiance. Realizing the weak state of the Artesh when many of Iran's highest-ranking officers were purged, Saddam seized the opportunity and Iraqi forces invaded Khuzestan Province in September 1980. The Artesh's defenses were so ineffective that one of the greatest challenges for Iraqi forces was that they did not know where they were supposed to stop advancing. However, contrary to Saddam's hopes that the large numbers of Iranian Arabs in Khuzestan would offer Iraqi forces their support, it was the popular resistance—not the Artesh—that kept Iraq from taking full control of Khuzestan's urban centers. For the first year of the war, the Artesh continuously tried and failed to make any substantial progress in liberating these areas.

Meanwhile, the developing networks of religious militias that were eventually consolidated under the umbrella of the IRGC were defending the revolution against ethnic separatists and counterrevolutionaries. Islamist intellectuals-turned-revolutionaries, most notably the Berkeley-trained physicist and engineer Mostafa Chamran, began consolidating and applying tactical concepts from guerrilla raids by Palestinians in southern Lebanon and the guerrilla wars of South America to the mountains of Kurdistan and Iraqi-occupied regions of Khuzestan.³² As such, IRGC fighters were developing tactics and gaining fighting expertise against rebels and urban skirmishes, but these tactics that were not congruent with those used by the Artesh.³³

Iraq launched another invasion north of Khuzestan in order to prevent a counterattack that could threaten its oil resources in Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. This time, Iraqis attacked Iran's Kurdish regions, where the IRGC had been fighting to suppress ethnic rebellions. In this northern front, the IRGC

11; Alireza Jalalian, "Defensive and Extending Threats Against the Revolution," *Sobh-e Sadegh Weekly*, May 18, 2015.

³¹ Moqaddamfar, *Tasnim News Agency*.

³² Mohsen Rezaei, Gholam-Ali Rashid, and Pezhman Porjabari, *Jang*, 245–46.

³³ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 19–20.

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continued their asymmetric and guerrilla fighting until the end of the war because the mountainous terrain made mass wave assaults unfeasible and heavy armor difficult to maneuver.³⁴

By the summer of 1981, the Artesh had attempted and failed in four large “classic operations” in the areas surrounding Dezful, Hoveizeh, and Abadan. During these operations, and until September 1981, the IRGC and popular resistance forces were largely kept uninformed of the Artesh’s strategies and objectives.³⁵ IRGC leaders, led by Mohsen Rezaei, demanded that the IRGC be allowed to lead a strategic change in the war: “A new strategy of Hezbollah forces . . . a revolutionary war [through] a series of limited operations.”³⁶ Between March and September 1981, the IRGC planned and conducted twenty limited operations that saw tremendous success. In this new way of nonclassic warfare, infantrymen served the primary role, while the Artesh’s heavy artillery and armor served as fire support.³⁷ Typically under the cover of night, teams would ambush Iraq’s defensive position, tanks, or small towns controlled by Iraqis in successive limited operations and then return to their positions. Rather than relying on the Artesh’s professional soldiers, the IRGC began utilizing the popular resistance in September 1981 and incorporated them into their operational plans on a larger scale later that autumn.³⁸

As the IRGC expanded, and as the war effort began to rely on the IRGC’s innovations, the scale of their unconventional tactics began to necessitate the very conventional structures against which the IRGC had distinguished themselves.³⁹ IRGC historian Muhammad Durudiyan noted that the IRGC’s numbers and capabilities increased nearly ten times between September 1981 (Operation Samen al-Aemmeh) and May 1982 (Operation Beit ol-Moghaddas).⁴⁰ As these numbers increased, Durudiyan begins to incorporate attempts by the IRGC to bring structure to the combat organization of this popular war. By March 1982’s Operation Fath ol-Mobin, the IRGC established a brigade and a headquarters to better incorporate popular forces into its command and control, a development that Durudiyan saw as “the most significant feature and outcome of the operation.”⁴¹ During Operation Fath ol-Mobin, the IRGC formed conventional infantry units made up of the popular resistance forces they had recruited through the Basij.⁴² Following the operation, the IRGC also began to stand up artillery units. Some accounts differ slightly, but the trend remains consistent toward a more developed force structure to account for

³⁴ “Special Interview with Commander Mohammad Nazeri.”

³⁵ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 47, 50. In Operational Samen al-Aemmeh and Operation Tariq ol-Qods.

³⁹ “Special Interview with Commander Mohammad Nazeri.”

⁴⁰ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴² “Special Interview with Commander Mohammad Nazeri”; Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 48.

rapid expansion.⁴³ Conventional units and chains of command became all the more important as the IRGC began the tumultuous task of coordinating with the Artesh for joint operations.⁴⁴

NONCLASSIC WARFARE AND PROXY INFLUENCE

While the IRGC's nonclassic innovations were effective in liberating Iran's occupied areas in the Southern Sector, Iranian forces in other regions fell into the same trap that Iraqi forces had: the assumption of local support. As it turned out, Iranians were no more effective in convincing Iraqi Shiites to mobilize against Iraqi forces as Iraqi forces had been in convincing Arab Iranians to support them. However, the failure to mobilize Iraq's Shia populace was a bigger challenge for the Iranian forces for two main reasons. First, it discredited the appeal of Khomeini's call to export Iran's revolution abroad. Second, the IRGC's nonclassic liberation operations on Iran's side of the border had in part relied on popular resistance forces to infiltrate Baathist positions and to secure positions following their limited operations.⁴⁵ Between July 1982 and mid-1983, IRGC leaders attempted to apply their nonclassic strategies to offensive operations on Iraqi soil. Without local popular support from Iraqis, however, this strategy essentially took the form of extremely costly human wave attacks that gained very little ground.

The failure to recruit a large-scale movement of Iraqi sympathizers was not from a lack of effort. Iran has a long history of exploiting Iraq's ethnic diversity to achieve its goals. Under the Shah, Iran supported Kurdish dissidents and used this support as a bargaining chip in negotiations for the most recent border treaty, the Algiers Accord of 1975. But while proxy influence was not new, it was more crucial to the IRGC's preferred style of warfare than it had been for the Artesh. Khomeini continued support for Iraqi Kurds, and the IRGC's publications have explicitly pointed to the IRGC's Ramazan Headquarters (HQ) as the focal point for the effort to influence Kurdish dissidents in Iraq and other anti-Baathist groups, such as the Badr Brigades.⁴⁶ Under the command of Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, one of the missions of the Ramazan HQ was "to conduct guerrilla operations on Iraqi soil and coordinate with Iraqi Kurdish dissident forces."⁴⁷ The IRGC's relationships with Kurdish dissidents became particularly important during the first half of

⁴³ Safavi, "Revolutionary War' Strategy." In a speech commemorating Operation Beit ol-Moghaddas, Safavi said that "the IRGC went into Operation Samen al-Aemmeh with 15 battalions. It went into Operation Tariq al-Qods with three brigades. And it went into Operation Beit ol-Moghaddas with 15 brigades."

⁴⁴ "Special Interview with Commander Mohammad Nazeri."

⁴⁵ Stephen C. Pelletiere and Douglas V. Johnson, *Lessons Learned: The Iran-Iraq War*, vol. 1, FMFRP 3-203 (Quantico, VA: US Marine Corps, 1990), 32-33, 74-75.

⁴⁶ For a short history of the Ramazad HQ, see Ja'fari, "From Guerrilla Operations to Coordination"; Hossein Ardestani, "Taghir-i Rahbord-i Iran dar Sal-i 1366" [Iran's Change of Strategy in 1366], *Negin-i Iran* 11, no. 40 (Spring 1391 [2012]).

⁴⁷ Ja'fari, "From Guerrilla Operations to Coordination."

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1987, after Iranian fighters suffered heavy losses in their failed attempts to capture Basra. The Ramazan HQ allowed the IRGC to shift the fighting northward so that the Southern Sector could regroup. By late March 1987, the IRGC's top commander, Mohsen Rezaei, wanted to use the Ramazan HQ as a launching point to move the war into northern Iraq by mobilizing and enabling Iraqi dissident groups to threaten Kirkuk's oil economy.⁴⁸ This new strategy included sending arms to the Ramazan HQ by way of "another brigade like the Badr Brigade of Iraqi *mujahedin*" with the aim of developing and consolidating Iran's influence among these groups so that Iran could conduct its "military operations in the region within the framework of a civil war conducted by outside-connected groups."⁴⁹ The IRGC also sent many of the commanders who had fought counterrevolutionaries in Kurdish areas of Iran to the Ramazan HQ because they had experience with "irregular wars."⁵⁰

As referenced above, the IRGC also developed its influence among Shia dissident groups, as Khomeini sought to influence Iraq's Shia clerical establishment to oppose the Baathists, despite Najaf's historically more quietist stance. According to the IRGC-affiliated *Defa' Press*, which published an interview with a former intelligence official at Ramazan HQ named Mohammad Ali Rahmani, the IRGC developed relationships with leaders in the Dawa Party, the Islamic Action Organization, Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and the Badr Brigade. At the same time, the IRGC made use of both Shia refugees fleeing Saddam in Iran, as well as Iraqi troops who were captured by Iranian forces but would agree to fight against the Baathists in an organization like the Badr Brigade. Probably referring to Karbala-2, Rahmani claimed that some sixty former Iraqi prisoners of war were martyred in a single operation against the Iraqi forces near Hajj Omran.⁵¹

CONCLUSION: AN IDEOLOGICAL AND PRAGMATIC INSTITUTION

The IRGC's new way of war was both reactionary and innovative. Logistically, the IRGC's new methods of warfighting were born out of the necessity for self-sufficient strategies to counter Iraq's "classic" military forces within the confines of Iran's material constraints: lack of steady supplies and arms, a struggling economy under sanctions, intense domestic turmoil, and technological inferiority. In the ideological sense, the IRGC's methods were also developed in reaction to the Artesh's "classic" military strategies, which were interpreted as imports of Western management techniques and incompatible with Iran's new revolutionary identity. Despite their initial lack of coordination, supplies, and arms during Iraq's invasion, popular resistance forces were more

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Mohammad Ali Rahmani, "Formation of the Badr Brigade: Integration of Military Operations against the Ba'athist Regime," *Defa' Press*, August 30, 2014, <http://www.defapress.ir/fa/print/26472>.

successful in fending off advancing Iraqis than the Artesh.⁵² The IRGC's inclusion of these popular forces allowed them to leverage Iran's numerical advantage over the technologically superior and better-resourced Iraqi military. But it also allowed the IRGC to establish itself as champion of the Iranian people and the most legitimate institutional expression of the revolution. Toward the end of the war, the IRGC's Ramadan HQ was able to apply popular mobilization tactics to the Iraqi context, despite ideological differences.

During the postwar years, both the IRGC and the Artesh sought to identify and apply lessons from the war. The IRGC, Artesh, and the Armed Forces General Staff (AFGS) each established think tanks and journals, and they often publish selected graduate and doctoral theses from Iran's public and military university system.⁵³ In 2015, top commanders within the IRGC and AFGS stressed the need to develop joint studies to consolidate lessons from the war and translate those lessons into defense policies and practical training material.⁵⁴ Perhaps American analysts are not the only ones seeking to articulate the specificities of Iran's way of war.

For all of the IRGC's narratives touting the superiority of its nonclassic warfare over Western-derived classic warfare, the reality was much more complicated. Some Artesh units fought against ethnic resistance movements alongside the IRGC in the northwest.⁵⁵ Many of the IRGC members actually learned their tactics from Artesh commando forces, some of whom had themselves received training in London or the United States.⁵⁶ Similarly, the IRGC engaged in conventional operations alongside the Artesh early in the war when Artesh commanders were still leading the effort to liberate Iran's Southern Sector. Despite the IRGC's original anti-hierarchical sentiments, the IRGC has steadily professionalized its force since the 1980s and has transformed into a conventional military force in its own right. So much so, that the commander of the IRGC has warned that the IRGC is "facing the threat of bureaucratization."⁵⁷

The distinction between classic and other—more revolutionary—ways of warfare remains in common use today. Classic warfare is still identified by IRGC commanders as a key weakness during the war's early years. That does not mean that the IRGC will refrain from future development and use of conventional warfare if IRGC leaders consider it within their interest to do so. In fact, top IRGC commanders have claimed that the IRGC has the ability to

⁵² Sipah Center for War Studies and Research, "Jangha-yi Namonzam: Zamineh Saz-i Tahavolat-i Asasi Dar Jang [Irregular Wars: Foundations of the Fundamental Developments in the War]," *Faslinamih-i Tarikh-i Jang* [War History Quarterly] vol. 6, 145–46.

⁵³ J. Matthew McInnis, *The Future of Iran's Security Policy: Inside Tehran's Strategic Thinking*, (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, May 2017), 91–94.

⁵⁴ Gholam-Ali Rashid's comments in Durudiyan, Rashid, and Ja'fari, "Az Jang-i Gozashteh, Cheh Bahreh-ei Mitavan Bara-ye Ayandeh Gereft?"

⁵⁵ "Special Interview with Commander Mohammad Nazeri."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ja'fari, "IRGC."

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fight classic wars in addition to asymmetric wars.⁵⁸ At the same time, these commanders often point to the distinction between classic warfare and nonclassic warfare to deflect questions regarding overlapping responsibilities or conflicts between the IRGC and Artesh. For example, when asked about whether conflicts of interest exist between the IRGC and the Artesh regarding budget priorities and mission responsibilities, IRGC commander Major General Ja'fari claimed, "The IRGC's warfare is not classic warfare; we fight asymmetrically."⁵⁹

For nearly four decades, political and economic struggles—foreign and domestic—have pressured the IRGC to make pragmatic decisions and to take better advantage of whatever opportunities presented themselves. The IRGC's military doctrine itself has not been immune from these challenges, as is reflected in the politicization of classic and nonclassic warfare. If the IRGC has developed a uniquely revolutionary way of war, it is certainly marked by resourcefulness and pragmatism.

⁵⁸ Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, "IRGC Commander Underlines Iran's Full Control over PJAK" [in Persian], *Fars News Agency*, October 8, 2011,

<http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13900715000318>.

⁵⁹ Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, "Training the Oppressed of the Region through the IRGC Quds Force" [in Persian], *Fars News Agency*, September 16, 2014,

<http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13930624001533>.

4 PERCEIVED LESSONS FROM THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Outside of Iran, almost none of the IRGC's history publications have been used as source material when considering what lessons Iranian military leaders learned from the Iran-Iraq War.¹ This is not entirely surprising, given that even within Iran there is debate as to what Iranians should take away from the war period, whether in terms of national security doctrine, military strategy, management, or cultural outcomes. Iran is no monolith, and neither are its military forces. Nevertheless, postwar struggles among Iran's political factions have often used the war to suggest "lessons" that fit their respective agendas.

According to a 2015 interview with the IRGC commander, Major General Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, and the deputy chief of Iran's AFGS and the current commander of Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, Major General Gholam-Ali Rashid, no joint doctrinal study between the IRGC and the Artesh has been conducted on the war period that definitively identifies the lessons that should be learned from the conflict. While the IRGC has developed some tactical trainings based on its experiences fighting Iraq, both of the aforementioned leaders want the IRGC and Artesh to develop standard operating procedures and training materials based on joint analysis of the war.²

Although this area necessitates additional research by both Iranians and non-Iranians, the IRGC's narratives of the Iran-Iraq War still provide helpful context for some general trends seen in the IRGC's postwar behavior and rhetoric. The IRGC's publications and commanders articulate a wide variety of lessons but tend to be more reflective of their author's opinion than an official stance. Muhammad Durudiyani, a former director of the IRGC Center and a prolific author whose work tends to focus on theoretical observations from an

¹ A notable exception is Annie Tracy Samuel, "Guarding the Nation: The Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Nationalism and the Iran-Iraq War," in *Constructing Nationalism in Iran: From the Qajars to the Islamic Republic* ed. Meir Litvak (London: Routledge, 2017), 248–62; and *Perceptions and Narratives of Security: The Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the Iran-Iraq War*, International Discussion Paper #2012-06 (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2012), http://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/samuel_perceptions.pdf.

² Durudiyani, Rashid, and Ja'fari, "Az Jang-i Gozashteh, Cheh Bahreh-ei Mitavan Bara-ye Ayandeh Gereft?" In the interview, Ja'fari mentions that the IRGC has developed tactical trainings based on lessons learned during the war.

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international relations perspective, argued that the war provides a host of lessons for “revolutionary countries.”³ Other IRGC historians have focused on political, institutional, sociological, or cultural outcomes of the conflict.⁴ Many IRGC publications point out the “blessings” or outcomes of the war that ultimately strengthened Iran in the long term, such as legitimization of IRGC and Basij; reorganization under AFGS and establishment of Khatemolania Headquarters to coordinate the Artesh and IRGC; elimination of the Mujahedin-e Khalq as a threat to the regime; and, ultimately, setting Saddam on a path that would end in his removal by the United States decades later.⁵

This chapter identifies some of the commonly agreed upon “lessons” of the war, as well as some general trends suggesting Iran’s ability to learn and adapt during and after the war. A comprehensive list would be impossible, as even IRGC commanders admit that there are many lessons yet to be identified and implemented. Rather, the aim of this chapter is to show how the IRGC’s memories of the Iran-Iraq War influence current doctrine and policy.

REINFORCING FRAMEWORK OF HISTORY REPEATING ITSELF

One of the clearest “lessons” from the IRGC’s narrative is that the Iran-Iraq War is proof of America’s and the West’s determination to destroy Iran and the Islamic Revolution, and that the international community will do nothing to prevent unlawful aggression—or even war crimes—when Iran is threatened. Muhammad Durudiyan, one of the IRGC’s most prolific authors and a former director of the Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, argued extensively that the war’s inevitability rested upon the determination of the superpowers—especially America—to not allow the Islamic Revolution to spread. Therefore, so long as Iran’s revolutionary regime exists, America will seek to constrain and destroy it. According to this narrative, the war was never merely a territorial dispute between nations; instead, it was a proxy war against Iran and her revolution.⁶ Moreover, the Center has published numerous books of legal history documenting the perceived injustices of the UN, which failed to respond to Iraq’s verified use of chemical weapons or to recognize Iraq as the aggressor in the conflict.

This reinforcing framework that the Imposed War was proof of America’s maleficence is reflected in IRGC commanders’ statements, which often draw

³ Muhammad Durudiyan, “Strategic Lessons of the War,” from *Tajzieh va Tahlil-i Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq Pish Dar Amadi Bar Yek Nazariyeh* [Analysis of the Iran-Iraq War: Toward Establishment of a Theory], June 25, 2016, <http://defamoghaddas.ir/fa/node/9279>.

⁴ Hosseyn Ardestani, “Takeaways of the War: Some of the Blessings of the Imposed War” [in Persian], <http://iranhdm.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=1&pageid=709&siteid=1>.

⁵ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 189, 195.

⁶ This is a theme throughout Durudiyan’s work, but for the most explicit theoretical argument, see his *Naghd va Barrasi Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq: Ijtinab-i Napaziri-i Jang* [Critical Study of the Iran-Iraq War: The Inevitability of the War], (Tehran: Sipah-i Markaz-i Mutala’at va Tahghighat-i Jang, 2003–4), 198–201, 255–56, 283–85.

direct comparisons between the Iran-Iraq War and the Islamic Republic's present-day threats. The idea of history repeating itself and the necessity of remembrance are common themes in IRGC commemoration speeches. By naming Iran's battles of the 1980s after those fought in early Islamic history, such speeches feature powerful rhetoric that transforms Iran's national conflicts into timeless conflicts against Islam itself.

In a speech commemorating Operation Karbala-5, one IRGC commander blended seventh-century Islamic history and twentieth-century Iranian history in his accusation of America as being "behind all of the world's crimes" and used America's support of Saddam in the 1980s to suggest its support of Sunni extremist groups today. Intentionally vague about whether he was referring to the 1980s or the battles of early Islam, the commander argued that remembrance of the Iran-Iraq War (or Sacred Defense) is an existential issue:

We must retell the epics of the Sacred Defense so that it is preserved in history, so that all will know that if the enemy imposes war upon us, we will impose peace upon them. . . . Although the eight-year Imposed War has ended, defense of this [country] remains, and there are more Khorramshahrs before us. . . . Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is again in the situation of Badr and Kheybar, and the great nation of Iran is heir to Ashura and the 230,000 martyrs [of the Iran-Iraq War].⁷

In a similar speech that blurred the line between the 1980s and Iran's current-day involvement in the region, Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi, a senior defense advisor to the Supreme Leader, used the theme of "history repeating itself" to argue that Iran's existential threats demand "the urgency of preserving the history and memories of the Sacred Defense" among Iranian youth. "If Iran's 52 percent of the population under the age of 30 forget[s] this history," he claimed, "then it is possible that history will repeat itself." In the speech, Safavi weaves between recounting the stories of combat engineers setting up pontoon bridges during the Iran-Iraq War and Iraq's current-day Popular Mobilization Forces fighting over Mosul's bridges against the Islamic State. The blood of Iran's engineers "laid the foundation for the school of resistance" that spread to Lebanese Hezbollah, to fighters in Syria, to Yemen, and to Iraq. As in the 1980s, it is America and the West who are the powers working to destroy Iran and limit her sacred role in the region: America "has organized the 90,000 terrorists from Da'esh [the Islamic State], al-Nusra Front, and the other Takfiri⁸ groups in opposition to Islamic Iran. . . . If the [Supreme Leader] and Iran's military advisors had not wisely led the countries of the Islamic world, Baghdad and Damascus would have already fallen." Just as Iran had persisted during most of the 1980s, it was this "school of resistance in

⁷ Jahanbakhsh Kerami, in "America is the Leader of All the World's Crimes," [in Persian] *Islamic Republic News Agency*, January 20, 2017, <http://www.sarkhat.com/fa/>.

⁸ "Takfiri" is used to refer to Muslims who declare other Muslims to be non-Muslim. It is a common way that the IRGC refers to ISIS and Sunni extremists.

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Syria [that] taught [Syrian fighters] how to resist the infidel's terrorists for 68 months."⁹

LOGISTICS, MANAGEMENT, AND OPERATIONS PLANNING

The war forced the IRGC to develop the basic warfighting skills for planning and conducting ground-based warfare, especially in terms of organization, logistics, and planning operations. Logistical challenges are an important theme in the IRGC's histories, particularly the need to secure inventory data for spare parts and armaments.¹⁰ According to one IRGC publication, "The war provided the conditions necessary for the IRGC to develop the appropriate structures and combat organizations necessary for warfighting, while at the same time, learning from the Artesh, and merging [the IRGC's] logistical and procurement capabilities with aspects of the Artesh which worked well."¹¹

The IRGC also learned to design and manage operations with increasing complexity and in response to new environments, challenges, and lessons learned.¹² IRGC histories often show how lessons from previous battles were implemented into particular operations. For example, before Operation Badr, the IRGC incorporated three lessons from Operation Kheybar: they set up signs and markers that could be seen during nighttime operations; they established chemical weapon response teams to identify, cordon, analyze, and clean areas following an attack; and they developed new specialized trainings to teach amphibious operations.¹³ IRGC histories also indicate that operations were—at least in part—planned around their ability to incorporate lessons from prior operations: "Making use of all the lessons [from Operation] Badr required time. During this time, the IRGC planned a series of consecutive limited operations with the aim to both destroy the enemy and buy time."¹⁴

⁹ Yahya Safavi in "The Popular Mobilization Forces Have 20 Military Brigades; The Overnight Crossing of 20 Thousand Combatants and Their Equipment" [in Persian], *Tasnim News Agency*, January 29, 2017, www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1395/1109/1310129; Yahya Safavi in "The Blood of the Sacred Defense Martyrs Has Created a 'School of Resistance' in the Islamic World" [in Persian], *Hamshahri Online*, January 29, 2017, <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/360033/Defence/security>.

¹⁰ Hoseyn Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 88; Daftar-i hoquqi-yi Vezarat-i 'Omur-i Kharejeh [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Legal Office], *Tahlili bar Jang-i Tahmili-i Rezhim-i 'Iraq 'Alihi Iran* [Analysis of the War Iraq Imposed Upon Iran] (Bahman 1361 [Jan/Feb 1983]), 51–52; Ali Khamenei in Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 30.

¹¹ Hossein Allaei, "Strategic Lessons of the War" [in Persian], *Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research*, <http://defamoghaddas.ir/fa/node/4257>. This quote was taken from a selection of Allaei's larger book *Ravand-I Jang-I Iran va 'Iraq*, 559–66.

¹² Michael Connell, *Iranian Operational Decision Making: Case Studies from the Iran-Iraq War* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2013). Connell's comparative analysis of four case studies demonstrate Iranians' ability to learn and adapt over a four-year period of the war. It is worth mentioning that Connell's study was translated and republished in *Negin-i Iran* by the IRGC's Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research in 2015.

¹³ Durudiyan, *Khorramshahr ta Fao*, 105–6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

One oft-repeated theme in IRGC narratives is the need to diminish the enemy's technological advantages by conducting simultaneous operations to decentralize the adversary's defenses, as was explicitly stated as one of the lessons of Operation Val-Fajr 8, when Iran captured much of the Fao Peninsula during February–March 1986. According to the IRGC's account, this lesson led the IRGC to restructure the forces into smaller units in order to leverage greater flexibility of their forces, doubling the number of combat battalions from 500 to 1,000.¹⁵ Although the IRGC's documentation efforts focused primarily on ground warfare, the same principle of diminishing the enemy's technological defense capabilities by increasing the number of simultaneous offenses seems analogous to its strategy of using many low-cost fast boats to overwhelm superior naval forces in the Persian Gulf.

Despite the IRGC's extensive publications about the Iran-Iraq War, senior military commanders in both the IRGC and AFGS have expressed that more studies need to be conducted to extract tactical, operational, and strategic lessons of the war, including joint studies between the IRGC and the Artesh.¹⁶ In a 2015 interview with a senior IRGC historian, the commander of the IRGC expressed his frustration with the perceived disconnect between policy and the past:

Previous efforts have been taken by the [IRGC] Center for War Studies and Research related to recording the war's events, and/or analyzing the conditions [which contributed to] the outbreak of the war. . . . However, less attention has been paid to the war's operational dimensions and strategy. . . . A center should be formed solely dedicated to analyzing the different phases of the war. These experiences and lessons should be categorized into tactical, operational, and strategic categories . . . and then turned into standard operating procedures. This should have been done 12 or 15 years ago.¹⁷

In the same setting, then–AFGS deputy chief, Major General Gholam Ali Rashid, expressed similar frustrations and suggested that lessons of the war should be converted into practical training curriculum in the form of computer software.¹⁸

COORDINATION AND SPECIALIZATION IN LIEU OF DEMOBILIZATION

Despite their occasional successes, the war forced Iran's military leadership to realize that faith and ideology could not make up for the lack of competent

¹⁵ Ibid., 229–30.

¹⁶ Durudiyan, Rashid, and Ja'fari, "Az Jang-i Gozashteh, Cheh Bahreh-ei Mitavan Bara-ye Ayandeh Gereft?"

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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professionalized military forces.¹⁹ Here the IRGC's assessment aligns with the majority of the English-language literature on the war, citing the lack of sustained coordination between the Artesh and the IRGC as one of Iran's greatest tactical failures.

In the IRGC's recounting, this failure was born out of Iran's domestic political struggles and how military doctrine became politicized from the top echelons of the government down to the battlefield. As IRGC commander Ja'fari stated, "There was a problem with coordination between the Artesh and the IRGC so long as [President] Bani Sadr was there. Bani Sadr was a proponent of the classic concept [of war], meaning that he would not accept the popular revolutionary mindset in the war."²⁰ Such politics related to whether, or to what extent, the IRGC should be included in the war effort is a common theme in IRGC publications and in IRGC commanders' public recollections.

Coordination did eventually improve, though never adequately or consistently. The first improvement came following Bani Sadr's impeachment and the IRGC's subsequent leadership in the war effort in late 1981. But interservice rivalries and poor communication remained key weaknesses throughout the conflict. According to Major General Ja'fari, it was "the differences in tactical—and even strategic—perspectives" that caused the Artesh and IRGC to conduct operations separately following Operation Val-Fajr-1 in April 1983, when the IRGC insisted on employing mass wave assaults.²¹ Another key component to this conflict was that it was never clear during the war that both the Artesh and IRGC would exist in the postwar environment, as each service considered the possibility that it could be replaced by their counterpart.

Following the war, rather than demobilizing either the IRGC or the Artesh, or integrating one into the other, Iran's postwar strategy opted to maintain both. The IRGC Ministry and the conventional Ministry of Defense merged to create the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), which supports the entire armed forces.²² Operational chains of command for both the IRGC and Artesh remained separate, though both were placed under the AFGS for coordination. Under this parallel arrangement, the Artesh would remain Iran's conventional defensive military force, while the IRGC rebranded itself as a publicly and privately funded military and security force with a diverse array of both domestic and foreign missions.

According to an article published by the IRGC-affiliated journal *Negin-e Iran*, one of Iran's main postwar strategic defense objectives was to "equip,

¹⁹ Mokhtar Hosseini, "The Iran-Iraq War: A Study of the War's Effect on Iran's Defense-Military Strategy," *Negin-i Iran* 8 (Spring 2004): 34.

²⁰ Durudiyan, Rashid, and Ja'fari, "Az Jang-i Gozashteh, Cheh Bahreh-ei Mitavan Bara-ye Ayandeh Gereft?"

²¹ Ibid.

²² Hosseini, "Iran-Iraq War," 39.

modernize, and professionalize the armed services as much as possible.”²³ In terms of equipping and modernizing Iran’s military in the short term, this meant that Iran needed to negotiate with foreign countries to obtain more advanced weapons systems, aircraft, and naval vessels. After obtaining such systems, Iran’s MODAFL and its subordinate defense industries would, in turn, reverse engineer these technologies and optimize their legacy systems where possible.²⁴

Iran’s military leadership also set out to professionalize its military as “an essential [component of] Iran’s post war defense strategy” by “emphasizing specialization, training, military exercises, and military discipline.”²⁵ Before winning the presidential election in 1989, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani began pushing for military professionalization and specialization as the war drew down. In the summer of 1988, the IRGC ground forces stood up twenty-one infantry divisions; fifteen independent infantry brigades; twenty-one air defense brigades; three combat engineering divisions; and forty-two armored, artillery, and chemical defense brigades.²⁶ Two years later, the IRGC implemented a four-tiered rank system, comprising twenty-one military ranks on newly designed service uniforms—an enormous step for a revolutionary organization that had long spurned the Artesh’s aristocratic hierarchy as a Western model incompatible with the IRGC’s revolutionary and egalitarian ideals.²⁷

POPULAR MOBILIZATION AND POPULAR SUPPORT

The war taught the IRGC how important popular mobilization could be and how to secure manpower for a “people’s war.”²⁸ Before dealing with the IRGC’s efforts to mobilize recruits for the war, it is important to note that the early IRGC’s narratives and publications are indicative of the intense postrevolution competition within the government between Khomeini’s Islamist factions and secular leftist factions, who were also attempting to mobilize the masses. IRGC magazines, especially *Payam-i Inqilab* (Message of the Revolution), quickly became and remained tools for propagating a reformulated Islamist rhetoric that incorporated language and images from leftist and Third World movements to champion the poor and “dispossessed,” the same loyalties that secularists were attempting to mobilize for their own purposes.²⁹ As a result, one of the most consistent themes in IRGC publications is the celebration of the Iranian

²³ Ibid., 34.

²⁴ Ibid., 37–38.

²⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁶ Ibid., 38–39.

²⁷ Ibid., 39.

²⁸ Allaei, “Strategic Lessons.” This article is taken from a selection of Allaei’s larger book *Ravand-I Jang-I Iran va ‘Iraq*, pages 537–43, 559–66.

²⁹ By 2004, the IRGC was reportedly running nineteen political publications, including newspapers, weeklies, biweeklies, monthlies, and quarterlies that were all overseen by the Supreme Leader’s representative to the IRGC. See Bayram Sinkaya, ed., *Revolutionary Guards in Iranian Politics: Elites and Shifting Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016) 12–14.

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people—the masses—as the true heroes of the war, the ones who fought Iraqis in order to defend the revolution. IRGC narratives repeatedly connect the revolution to the war and, in doing so, identify popular participation in the war and support for the IRGC’s fighters as the most legitimate expressions of revolutionary fervor. Following Khomeini’s consolidation of power, this celebratory theme of popular participation continued as a means to legitimize Iran’s leadership, just as the IRGC narratives employ popular heroism as a means to put itself forward as the institutional expression of revolution.

One of Iran’s few advantages over Iraq was its larger population, which outnumbered Iraq’s by nearly three to one. To make use of its numbers, though, the IRGC needed to learn how to recruit and train on a mass scale. Soon after the invasion, the Basij began recruiting for the IRGC, though Basij members themselves were not permitted to participate in the war during its first year. By 1985, the Basij had stood up 10,000 recruitment offices strategically placed to pull recruits from all strata of Iranian society.³⁰ Using ideological indoctrination, the Basij recruited up to two million Iranians over eight years—more than 75 percent of Iran’s estimated total force—provided them with minimal training, and deployed them to the battlefield to serve between forty-five and ninety days.³¹

The theme of “the people’s revolutionary spirit” as “Iran’s hidden power” is consistent throughout the IRGC’s histories.³² This hidden power is typically revealed in two ways: popular mobilization to fight war and popular support for fighters and the regime. When the Artesh proved incapable of defending against Iraq’s advances, “the popular and revolutionary resistance forces, especially those in the cities, compensated for many of the military’s shortcomings” and prevented the Iraqis from capturing key urban centers.³³ Following a year of Iraqi occupation in Khuzestan, the turning point that turned the war in Iran’s favor came during Operations Samen al-Aemeh and Tariq al-Qods, when popular forces were included as an integral part of Iran’s operations.³⁴ As the IRGC began to lead the war effort, the popular mobilization of fighters enabled Iran’s unconventional human wave attacks.³⁵

³⁰ Another recurring theme of the IRGC’s literature is the classless nature of the “fighters of Islam.” Both narratively in its publications and structurally in its recruiting, the IRGC appears to focus on emphasizing itself as a movement “from all strata of Iranian society.” Again, this theme is consistent with IRGC narratives in direct competition with leftist propaganda.

³¹ Saeid Golkar, *Captive Society: The Basij Militia and Social Control in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 13–16; Allaei, “Strategic Lessons.” Golkar states that Basijis received fifteen days of training maximum.

³² Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 31–32.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30–31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47, 50.

³⁵ It should be noted that the term “human wave” attacks was only seen in IRGC publications in reference to how Western writers referred to these mass ground offenses, see Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 15, 51.

The second form of the hidden power of the Iranian masses connects popular support for Iranian fighters to popular legitimization of the regime. IRGC commander Hossein Allaei ends his history of the war, noting that “without a doubt, the unconditional support of the people for combatants at the warfront and also for the nation’s decision-makers should be considered among the most basic components of Iran’s success in the Imposed War.”³⁶ Similar assessments of the war’s strategic outcomes typically mention that the war brought about a stabilization of domestic politics.

Following the war, instead of attempting to demobilize warfighters back into society, Iran has worked to institutionalize popular mobilization through the Basij, which now has an estimated total membership of at least three million members.³⁷ According to a doctoral thesis republished in one of the IRGC-affiliated journals, Iran’s postwar defense strategy was based in part upon the principle that “special attention should be paid to the presence and participation of popular forces in establishing the country’s security and defense by raising the popular mobilization’s quantitative and qualitative capabilities.”³⁸ Instead of charging the front lines of mass ground assaults, Basij members today have well-entrenched domestic functions. One former University of Tehran professor who has written the first English-language history of the organization referred to the Basij as a “parallel society” of insiders, informers, and propagandists that can be deployed as riot control for the regime. Since the 1980s, Basij bases have established student, professional, and community networks in nearly every sector of Iranian society: in high schools and universities, the manufacturing sector, women’s groups, professional organizations, and local neighborhood organizations, to name a few.³⁹

As revolutionary slogans have aged and ideological fervor has waned, the Basij used “material dependency and social mobility as a lure” to mobilize popular support.⁴⁰ While the Basij still uses ideological indoctrination, many join for the material benefits and opportunities for social mobility. The Basij’s professional organizations have increasingly replaced typical labor unions, making it more difficult to fire Basij members and easier to sideline political dissidents. Student Basijis receive assistance for college preparatory examinations, obtain reductions in mandatory military service, and take

³⁶ Allaei, “Strategic Lessons” A selection of Allaei’s larger book *Ravand-I Jang-I Iran va ‘Iraq*, 559–66.

³⁷ Official estimates grossly inflate Basij membership to 23.8 million, see “IRGC Commander Naqdi in ‘Matn – Hashiyeh’ Television Program: 23.8 Million People are Basij Members,” *Fars News Agency*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940902000053>.

³⁸ Seyyed Mas’oud Mousavi, “Military Lessons of the Sacred Defense and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Modern Defense Strategy” [in Persian], *Pazhuheshnameh-ye Defa’-e Moghaddas* 2, no. 8 (Winter 2014), 36.

³⁹ Golkar, *Captive Society*, 37, 46.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

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advantage of quotas reserved for Basij members. The Basij provides job training to students and the unemployed, and some women join seeking a chance at social mobility in a competitive male-dominated job market.⁴¹

As the Islamic Republic of Iran has institutionalized popular mobilization through the Basij, the IRGC has incorporated the organization into its military and security doctrines. Soon after his appointment as commander of the IRGC, Major General Ja'fari expanded the role of the Basij and placed the Basij directly under his command.⁴² Developed during his time at the Center for Strategic Studies, Ja'fari instituted the Mosaic Doctrine, or the "Defensive Mosaic Plan," which strengthened IRGC-Basij relations and decentralized command to provincial levels in the event of either an attack by a foreign power or a coup attempt from within.⁴³ According to Ja'fari, the idea is to "counter threats from within and from without" by "divid[ing] the country into defensive mosaics," so that "anywhere throughout the country where a threat occurs, the same [type of] defensive mosaic can be used to counter it."⁴⁴

This strategy proved beneficial following the 2009 protests sparked by the reelection of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, when the Basij proved to be instrumental agents for riot control. Following suppression of the popular protests, the commander of the Basij, Hossein Ta'eb, was reassigned as deputy commander of IRGC Intelligence Organization, potentially positioning the Basij for even further utilization.⁴⁵ Such developments indicate that the IRGC has learned that popular mobilization is not only crucial against technologically superior foreign armies but can be tailored to address many of the Islamic Republic's defense and security challenges.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The IRGC's call for self-sufficient and self-reliant military capabilities began long before the war ended. In IRGC narratives, the Artesh's reliance upon foreign equipment and methods is often blamed for Iran's failures during the first year of the war.⁴⁶ The IRGC's new way of war was posed as the antidote for this dependency: faith over firepower, tactics over dependence upon

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ostovar, *Vanguard*.

⁴³ For more on the Mosaic Doctrine, see Ali Alfoneh, *What Do Structural Changes in the Revolutionary Guards Mean?*, Middle Eastern Outlook no. 7 (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2008), <http://www.aei.org/publication/what-do-structural-changes-in-the-revolutionary-guards-mean/>; Michael Connell, "Iran's Military Doctrine," *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and US Policy*, United States Institute of Peace, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-military-doctrine>.

⁴⁴ Mohammad 'Ali Ja'fari in Bahram Rafi'i, "Update on the IRGC's Structural Developments, Youth Forces, Sidelining Dissident," in *Ettela'at*, April 2011, <http://www.ettelaat.net/11-april/print.asp?id=55214>.

⁴⁵ Bahram Rafi'i, "What Is the IRGC Preparing For?" [in Persian], *Roos Online*, November 9, 2011, <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-9bcdfd76ad.html>.

⁴⁶ Durudiyani, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 37.

technology, and creativity over “reliance upon classic tables of how to wage war.”⁴⁷ As the IRGC developed as an organization and learned from its mistakes, its narratives show increased planning, specialization, and more technological innovations, and the commitment to self-sufficiency strengthened as well.

However, the war convinced the IRGC of the need to develop indigenous defense capabilities, equipment, and spare parts. US and Western arms embargoes prevented the availability of advanced weaponry and key spare parts at the same time that Iran’s regional competitors were spending “hundreds of billions of dollars” to access advanced military technologies during and following the war.⁴⁸ In an international arms market that could be manipulated by Iran’s opponents, Iran made self-sufficiency one of the top three priorities within its postwar defense strategy: “self-reliance and self-sufficiency in the military sector; equipping, modernizing, and professionalizing the armed forces as much as possible while instilling faith and motivation in the military; and attaining deterrent capabilities.”⁴⁹

During the last year of the war, Khomeini directed Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was serving as the acting commander in chief for the war effort, to focus upon Iran’s military industrial and procurement capabilities.⁵⁰ Following the war, the IRGC commander, Mohsen Rezaei, remained in command but recast himself as a technocrat, writing public editorials championing technical expertise, entrepreneurship, and innovation. The emphasis upon specialization during President Rafsanjani’s postwar reconstruction efforts coincided with the IRGC’s permeation of the Iranian economy.

Within the first year of his new position as Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei decreed that the IRGC could be used to implement Rafsanjani’s postwar redevelopment efforts. Under Iran’s first Five-Year Development Plan, the IRGC was permitted to receive funding in two ways: through the regular budget and through government and private contracts for goods and services. Rather than fully privatizing the war economy, the postwar environment created a pseudo-privatized, or “public nongovernmental” sector, where firms aligned with the IRGC could often evade taxation and auditing, receive subsidies, and accumulate private gains from massive no-bid public contracts.⁵¹ So while some IRGC members traded their rankless guerilla-styled

⁴⁷ Ibid., 75–76; Samuel, “Perceptions and Narratives.” Samuel coined the phrase “faith over firepower” to describe this theme in the IRGC’s work.

⁴⁸ Mousavi, “Military Lessons,” 35.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁰ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 189.

⁵¹ Kevan Harris, “All the Sepah’s Men: Iran’s Revolutionary Guards in Theory and Practice,” in *Businessmen in Arms: How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA Region*, eds. Elke Grawert and Zeinab Abul-Magd (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 108–17; Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution: Politics and the Welfare State in Iran* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 46–79; Ostovar, *Vanguard*, 6–7, 141–47; Frederic Wehrey et al., *The*

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fatigues for newly styled uniforms, others exchanged them for business suits and established firms tailor-made for postwar reconstruction. Both groups found that self-sufficiency initiatives could present lucrative opportunities for personal and organizational gain.

To help finance these projects, the IRGC established credit unions and cooperatives that eventually grew into large banks and even converted its Cooperative Foundation—originally designed to support veteran housing projects—into a financier for the IRGC’s hundreds of no-bid government reconstruction and development contracts. By 1990, the Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters—a conglomerate of IRGC-owned or -affiliated engineering, manufacturing, mining, communications, and construction companies—was a dominant player in both the public and private sectors.⁵²

During and since President Rouhani’s reelection campaign during the summer of 2017, Rouhani has criticized the IRGC’s outsized role in Iran’s economy. Rouhani has argued that companies affiliated with the IRGC have taken advantage of Iran’s privatization efforts that began during the postwar reconstruction era, to the detriment of the private sector. In a highly contentious speech in June 2017, Rouhani publicly stated that his administration “has been committed to the real transfer of the economy to the private sector,” as opposed to the “part of the economy that was . . . given to the armed government, which is not [true] privatization.”⁵³

In response, top IRGC officers have responded with justifications of the IRGC’s economic initiatives, as well as criticisms of Rouhani. In July 2017, the IRGC commander of Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters, Ebdollah Abdollahi, specifically criticized the Rouhani administration when the South Pars Phase 11 Contract was awarded to France’s Total S.A. without allowing the IRGC to bid on the project. In Abdollahi’s critique—as with other top IRGC leaders’ comments—self-sufficiency was cited as a key justification for IRGC participation in the private sector, including the oil sector.⁵⁴ It appears that to many leaders within the IRGC, “self-sufficiency” is now both a cause that transcends arms acquisition and defense industries and a cause that the IRGC claims some degree of exclusivity.

Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009), 55–75.

⁵² Harris, “All the Sepah’s Men,” 108–17; Harris, *Social Revolution*, 46–79; Wehrey et al., *Rise of the Pasdaran*, 55–75. It should be noted that public sector competition is a distinguishing feature of Iran’s government and parastatal apparatus that is not limited to the IRGC, nor to Iran’s redevelopment efforts.

⁵³ Hassan Rouhani, “President in an Iftar Ceremony with Business Community,” *Paigah-e Etela’at-e Riyasat-e Jomhuri*, June 22, 2017, www.president.ir/en/99537.

⁵⁴ Ebadollah Abdollahi in “Iran: IRGC Construction Chief Rejects Ruhani’s Criticism” [in Persian], *Central News Bureau*, July 6, 2017, www.iribnews.ir/; Nezameddin Musavi, “Iran Commander Defends IRGC Involvement in Development Projects” [in Persian], *Fars News Agency*, July 7, 2017, www.farsnews.com.

MULTILAYERED DETERRENCE

The war taught the IRGC that Iran must not be left without a deterrent capability ever again, both to prevent future wars and to elevate the cost of attacking Iran. According to IRGC narratives, there probably never would have been a war with Iraq had Iran not temporarily lost its deterrence capability during the transition from the Pahlavi monarchy to the Islamic Republic. In the aftermath of the revolution, “the disappearance of Iran’s deterrence power against Iraq . . . had a very fundamental role in Iraq’s decision to invade Iran.”⁵⁵ One IRGC publication compared the conflict between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s to the centuries-long border disputes between the Arabs and Persians and the Ottomans and Safavids to make the point that Iran must be prepared to prevent future border conflicts from escalating into war.⁵⁶ More immediately, the IRGC argued that deterrence capabilities were necessary in the postwar period because “even though the Iran-Iraq War had ended, none of the factors that had contributed to its outbreak [had] been removed.”⁵⁷

Iraq’s use of chemical weapons and ballistic missiles targeted at civilian population centers, known as the War of the Cities, convinced Iranian military leaders that only an indigenous missile development program could ensure its defense.⁵⁸ Memories of the war are often intertwined with IRGC commanders’ statements regarding both deterrence in general and Iran’s missile program in particular. Domestically produced missiles are commonly featured for the first time in military parades commemorating important battles from the Iran-Iraq War or are delivered to the armed forces on anniversaries of decisive victories.

The war taught the IRGC how dependent Iran’s air forces were on foreign technology. So long as Iran was reliant upon foreign aircraft and spare parts, airpower would never become a reliable deterrent. “Obtaining technology to design and produce missiles,” on the other hand, would be “less expensive and easier than aircraft” and could potentially cause more destruction.⁵⁹ Further, missiles would not require a trained cadre of loyal pilots, which was another vulnerability Iran had to address following the purges resulting from the Nozheh coup attempt two months before Saddam invaded.

In fact, Iran’s missile program has become more than merely a means of self-sufficient deterrence. In much of the regime’s rhetoric more broadly, Iran’s missile program functions as a national cause devoted to the collective remembrance of wrongs. In July 2017, when asked about Iran’s missile

⁵⁵ See use of Iraqi Colonel Ahmad Zabeydi in Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 20. This is not to say that there would not have been a war, but Durudiyan makes the point that the war broke out the way that it did because of an alignment of interests between Iraq, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

⁵⁶ Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va ‘Iraq*, 25–61.

⁵⁷ Muhammad Durudiyan, “Assessing the Inevitable Reason for the Iran-Iraq War” [in Persian], *Journal of Defense Policy* 5, no. 3 (Summer 1997), 60.

⁵⁸ Hosseini, 29–31.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

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program, Prime Minister Javad Zarif made the same connection between the missile program and memories of the Iran-Iraq War:

Missiles are our defense. Missiles are the means of our defense. . . . We will never use them, except in self-defense—never. And that is a commitment we make. . . . You see, we went through a war. Eight years. Our cities were showered with missiles, some carrying chemical weapons. And nobody—believe me—nobody gave a damn. . . . And now people are asking us to give up our means of defense. . . . We need [missiles] so that another Saddam Hussein around the corner... would not come and hit us again, with the international community going through a deafening silence.⁶⁰

The prime minister's equating of Iran's missile program to its deterrence capability may serve as effective rhetoric, but it is more simplistic than typical IRGC frameworks for deterrence, or even the military more broadly. Soon after President Rouhani's appointment of the first Artesh commander as defense minister in August 2017, Brigadier General Amir Hatami noted publicly that the missile program was only one component of Iran's larger deterrence capability, albeit a crucial one. According to Hatami, in the new threat environment created by terrorism and proxy wars, the capabilities of Iran's entire armed forces have a role to play in Iran's deterrence.⁶¹

Within the IRGC more particularly, the concept of deterrence is neither singular nor static. In IRGC histories, one of the lessons learned during the war was that defense must be active and not merely passive. The Artesh is consistently portrayed as passive and reactionary, compared to the IRGC's depictions as active and innovative. In *Aghaz ta Payan*, an overview of the war used as a textbook in some Iranian universities, Iraq invaded largely due to the Artesh's weakened "deterrence power," weakened state military following the postrevolution purges of top officers, and Bani Sadr's poor leadership of the military.⁶²

Iran's invasion of Iraq is justified in IRGC narratives as "punishing the aggressor" to teach Iraq a lesson in pursuit of peace. When Operation Ramadan largely failed to achieve its objectives, Iran's leaders adjusted the strategy to one of achieving an "honorable peace," or "to obtain peace by achieving a victory," whereby Iran could end the war with a battle victory sufficient to force Iraq to the negotiation table on terms favorable to Iran.⁶³ During the last year of the war, as domestic pressure was mounting to end the fighting, the IRGC's top

⁶⁰ Mohammad Javad Zarif, "A Conversation with Mohammad Javad Zarif," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 17, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-mohammad-javad-zarif>.

⁶¹ Amir Hatami in "Minister of Defense: The Bavar-373 is More Up-to-Date than the S-300/We Are Increasing Missile Capability" [in Persian], *Iran Students' News Agency* August 29, 2017, www.isna.ir/news/96060703730/.

⁶² Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 20.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 70–71; Ardestani, *Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq*, 128–34.

commander, Mohsen Rezaei, argued for continuing the war based on the claim that if Iran did not actively engage the war, then Iraq would begin renewed attacks on Iran after it had regrouped and rearmed. In order to deter future attacks from Iraq, Iran needed to engage.⁶⁴

At the same time, contrary to the IRGC leadership, when faced with the perceived risk of increased American engagement in the Persian Gulf during the war, Iran sought to de-escalate the conflict. IRGC narratives interpreted the USS *Vincennes*'s downing of Iran Air Flight 655 as proof that America would involve itself directly in the conflict if Iran rejected peace talks.⁶⁵ Unlike Rezaei's argument for continuing the war in order to deter future attacks from Iraq, when facing perceived American escalation in the Persian Gulf, de-escalation was seen as the best means of preventing war.

While there is no singular static concept of deterrence that the IRGC uses to frame all perceived threats, it is clear that the IRGC's approach to deterrence must include more than merely increased weapons and missile capabilities. Specifically, there is a relationship between deterrence and information warfare. One senior IRGC media advisor and former managing director of the IRGC-affiliated Fars News Agency framed the evolution of Iran's deterrence in relation to the region's new security environment, strategic messaging, and deterrence: "Nowadays, deterrence is more evolved than in the past. . . . If a country can manage perceptions and preconceived notions, then deterrence is equivalent to changing the opposing side's perceptions."⁶⁶

There also seems to be a trend toward incorporating asymmetric warfare into how the IRGC thinks about deterrence. The superpowers' backing of Iraq meant that Iran's postwar deterrence strategy would have to incorporate unconventional and asymmetric strategies because Iran could not compete in a technological arms race. It could, however, capitalize upon its adversary's weaknesses. For the IRGC, seeking parity in regard to conventional weapons was not only unfeasible in a global arms trade dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union, it was also viewed a poor investment. According to one IRGC publication, this lesson should be applied to Iran's deterrence: "Rather than spend all of ones' [resources] on increasing classic military capabilities to create defensive depth, by identifying the regional and global adversaries' weaknesses, all resources have been allocated toward striking the enemy's weaknesses."⁶⁷ In line with this idea, one 2008 edition of the IRGC's weekly publication *Sobh-e Sadegh* featured an interview with Brigadier General Ahmad Mohammadzadeh, who argued that Iran's deterrence strategies and priorities should be paired with three specific American weaknesses: energy and oil

⁶⁴ Durudiyan, *Aghaz ta Payan*, 177.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶⁶ Hamid-Reza Moqaddamfar, *Tasnim News Agency*, October 1, 2016, <http://tn.ai/1198210>.

⁶⁷ Mousavi, "Military Lessons," 36.

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security, the presence of American personnel in the region, and the presence of Israel in the region.⁶⁸

Others within the IRGC have viewed deterrence as comprising two different types: “defensive deterrence,” which coincides with “classic warfare,” and “offensive deterrence,” which coincides with “non-classic warfare.” The difference is that in offensive deterrence, adversaries are threatened on three different levels: equipment level (what is used to fight), combatant level (who is doing the fighting), and geographic level (where the fighting occurs). In contrast to earlier glorification of “non-classic warfare” featured in earlier IRGC narratives of the war, more recent IRGC commanders have commented that both classic and nonclassic ways of war have their place within Iran’s deterrence framework because the use of deterrents should depend upon the capabilities of Iran’s adversaries.⁶⁹ This more aggressive concept of deterrence includes developing capabilities to threaten foreign forces located in the region, using proxy actors, and developing Iran’s strategic depth by pushing conflict away from its borders (i.e., “facing the enemies of Islam in Iraq and Syria so that there is no fighting in Tehran, Kermanshah, Esfahan, et cetera”).⁷⁰

FUTURE QUESTIONS AND RELEVANCE

This chapter reviewed some of the lessons learned based upon publications from the IRGC’s Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research, the main institutional guardian of the Islamic Republic’s official narrative of the Iran-Iraq War. A larger question that remains unanswered is how the IRGC’s historical narratives relate to the Artesh’s analyses of the war. Larger still are questions concerning how IRGC narratives relate to the political elite, Iranian society more broadly, and the popular literature and art forms that creatively critique official narratives within the confines of Iran’s censorship laws. Each of these groups house their own layers of resentment concerning not only the war, but also how others have retold, forgotten, and used the conflict to advance their interests. Even IRGC historians have expressed frustration regarding both an increasingly apathetic public and the opportunistic hijacking of the war’s history by political elites.⁷¹

The Iran-Iraq War facilitated the IRGC’s institutionalization and shaped its doctrine. For all the tales of unified masses of revolutionaries fighting for a cause that transcends class and blurs distinctions between Islam and nation,

⁶⁸ Ahmad Mohammadzadeh, *Sobh-e Sadeq*, July 21, 2008, www.sweekly.ir.

⁶⁹ Durudiyan, Rashid, and Ja’fari, “Az Jang-i Gozashteh, Cheh Bahreh-ei Mitavan Bara-ye Ayandeh Gereft?”

⁷⁰ Moqaddamfar, *Tasnim News Agency*.

⁷¹ Kaveh Ehsani, “War and Resentment: Critical Reflections on the Legacies of the Iran-Iraq War,” *Middle East Critique* 26, no. 1 (Fall 2016), 5–24; Ehsan Hoseyni-Nasb, “Gozaresh-i Avalin Gerdhamai-i Ravian-i Markaz Asnad va Tahghighat-i Defa’-i Moghaddas” [Report on the First Conference of Center for Sacred Defense Documents and Research War Correspondents], *Negin-i Iran* 11, no. 4 (Spring 1391).

Iranian society is much more diverse and divided than one sees reflected in the IRGC's Sacred Defense myth. These histories may only show narrow and biased perspectives, but because they place the IRGC at the center of the story and justify their actions, they serve as a largely untapped resource for understanding the organization. The IRGC's Sacred Defense narratives still possess the potential to mobilize, as seen in Iran's recruitment of even non-Iranian Shiites against Sunni extremists under the banner of defending Shia shrines, often using precisely the same language and historical comparisons. These histories have relevance today because they inform and frame how the IRGC prefers to view itself as an organization, its adversaries, and its roles in the region. If there is such a thing as an "Iranian way of war," it is one that is indelibly marked by experiences of the Iran-Iraq War and how those experiences are told and retold.

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Abbreviations and Farsi Terms

AFGS	Iranian Armed Forces General Staff
Artesh	Iran's regular armed forces
Basij	Basij Resistance Force
HQ	Headquarters
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
IRGC PAO	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Political Affairs Office
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
MODAFL	Iranian Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics
takfiri	term used to refer to Muslims who declare other Muslims to be non-Muslims; a common way the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps refers to the Islamic State (ISIS)
UN	United Nations

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