

# Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

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## Introduction

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Iran's elite military unit designated by the U.S. State Department as one of the "proliferators of weapons of mass destruction," plays a central role in all aspects of Iran's political structure.

The IRGC was formed in 1979 to protect Iran's new revolutionary government against both international and domestic threats, and has played a vital role in Iran's domestic economy and politics. Many Iranian politicians, including cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, mayors, governors and ambassadors are drawn from the IRGC's ranks. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has repeatedly threatened Israel's existence, is a former IRGC member.

As tensions between Iran and Israel, America and other Western countries continue to escalate, in particular over Iran's nuclear program, IRGC leaders have continued to threaten their "enemies" and boast of their military preparedness. For example, in late 2011 in response to increased international sanctions, Iran threatened to close the Straits of Hormuz, a shipping route vital to the global oil markets at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Amid war games near the Gulf less than two month later, the IRGC ground forces commander said that the "Sepah [IRGC] ground troops are able to carry out deterrent operations and our reaction will be quick and enemy targets will come under heavy fire."

In addition to defending the regime, the IRGC appears to be pursuing an offensive against its "enemies" abroad. Several recent attacks and planned [attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets in Asia and the Caucasus](#) have been tied to the IRGC according to various governments.

IRGC's leadership has also sought to take credit for the uprisings throughout the Arab world, describing them as an "Islamic Awakening" directly resulting from Iran's revolution. IRGC General Yadollah Javani described "Islamic Iran" as "the source of this great change and awakening" throughout the Middle East. In Syria, however, the IRGC has been supplying weapons to help Bashar al-Assad's regime suppress dissent, according to U.S. government officials.



### IRGC Background

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), or Sepah-e Pasdaran in Farsi, was founded in May 1979 following the Iranian Revolution that replaced Iran's monarchy with an Islamic republic under the auspices of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The IRGC, tasked with guarding Ayatollah Khomeini and his revolutionary government, was established as a parallel force to the existing Iranian army, whose duty, according to the Iranian Constitution, is to defend the country.

A November 2011 statement signed by 240 Iranian parliamentarians express their "all-out support for the IRGC, specifically its Quds Force," the IRGC's special operations unit and primary mechanism for supporting terrorist activity outside of Iran, "which has been able to safeguard the achievements of the Islamic Revolution."

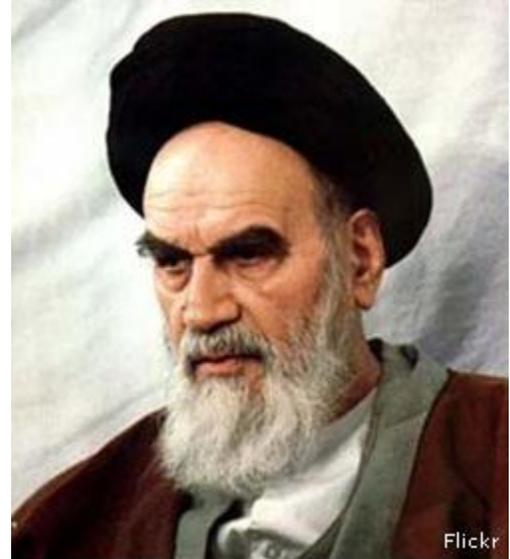
In order to evade the weapons embargo the U.S. imposed on Iran in 1979, the IRGC reportedly built its own weapons infrastructure by acquiring arms from China, North Korea and the Soviet Union. During Iran's war with Iraq in the 1980s, the IRGC embraced a more conventional role as a military force and became capable of deploying troops alongside Iran's regular army. While the IRGC's primary role today is to ensure internal security, it also reportedly assists Iran's regular army with external defense, particularly in the strategic Persian Gulf, and enforces the government's Islamic code of morality.

The IRGC has history of deploying troops abroad, headed by the Quds Force. In addition to sending fighters to combat Israel in Lebanon in the 1980s, the Quds Force sent fighters to back the Bosnian Muslims' fight against the Serbs during the Bosnian civil war in the 1990s.

In recent years, the Quds Force has conducted underground operations and training and exported weapons to foreign terrorist groups, including, Hezbollah,  [Hamas](#), [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#) and the [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command](#). The Quds Force—whose personnel ranges from 1,000-15,000 men and women—also provides material support to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Shiite militias in Iraq, according to the State Department and other government sources.

In addition to the Quds Force, the IRGC is made up of four additional branches: Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy and Basij militia. The traditional military forces consist of an estimated 125,000 personnel who are also responsible for Iran's missile forces. The IRGC is also comprised of a counterintelligence directorate that scrutinizes IRGC adversaries in the region and participates in their subsequent arrests and trials.

In September 2007, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei named Mohammed Ali Jafari the new IRGC commander, replacing Yahya Rahim-Safavi. Jafari, who had commanded the IRGC land forces for 15 years, brought the



Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini



Basij Militia, June 2009

Basij under the direct command of the IRGC in 2007. Today, the 90,000 active Basij, who can be supplemented with nearly one million volunteers, enable the IRGC to control Iranian governmental and non-governmental institutions, ministries, public and private businesses, banks and universities. Basij volunteers have also crushed riots in Iranian cities and were responsible for the crackdown against those protesting the disputed June 2009 presidential election.

Since its inception, the IRGC has been deeply involved in Iran's political affairs as well. IRGC members have occupied government positions, such as municipal councilors, mayors, governors and ambassadors to the U.N. and several other embassies in Western capitals. Brigadier General Hosein Salimi, the deputy commander of the IRGC described it as an "amalgamation of all kinds of powers."

Half of the cabinet members during President Ahmadinejad's first term in office were members of the IRGC, as is the president himself. In addition, one third of the seats in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Iran's parliament, were IRGC members.

The IRGC has played a commanding role in the Iranian economy since it helped rebuild Iran's financial infrastructure following the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. "IRGC is so deeply entrenched in Iran's economy and commercial enterprises," former U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson said. "It is increasingly likely that if you are doing business with Iran, you are somehow doing business with the IRGC."

Today, the IRGC is reportedly Iran's third-largest corporation and is linked to more than 500 companies, covering everything from nuclear power plants to banks to holiday resorts and is actively consolidating "broad swathes of the Iranian economy," according to Department of the Treasury officials.

In addition, the IRGC reportedly controls more than half of Iran's imports and one-third of the country's non-oil exports, enabling the IRGC to generate a profit of approximately \$5 billion annually. At the same time, an IRGC general is Minister of Petroleum, giving the IRGC broad influence over Iran's vitally important oil industry.

### **Terrorism**

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has provided intelligence and supplied weapons and funds to terrorist organizations since shortly after its founding in 1979. United States government reports indicate that the IRGC's activity over more than 30 years has enabled Iran to become "the most active state sponsor of terrorism."

Senior IRGC and Quds Force officials have been indicted by the Argentine government for their alleged roles in the [1994 bombing of an Argentina Jewish Center](#), which killed 85 people and injured approximately 300 others. Ahmad Vahidi, one of the IRGC members charged in the attack, was [named by President Ahmadinejad in August 2009 as Iran's defense minister](#).

The IRGC and some of its members have been slapped with multiple rounds of sanctions by the United States and Europe over their involvement in terrorism, and more recently for participating Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program.

### *Terror Against Israel*

The growth of the Lebanese-based terrorist group [Hezbollah](#), for example, is directly linked to the guidance, training and material support it receives from the IRGC. Hezbollah emerged during Israel's first war with Lebanon in 1982 with the help of members of the Quds Force, the IRGC's special operations branch, who traveled to Lebanon's Bekka Valley to fight against Israel. The IRGC has since supported Hezbollah's military, paramilitary and terrorist activities by providing the Lebanese terrorist organization with weapons, intelligence and logistical support.



Hezbollah and IRGC Logos

The Quds Force has allegedly trained Hezbollah fighters in both Lebanon and in Iran and reportedly provides Hezbollah with \$100-\$200 million in funding every year. In June 2009, an airplane reportedly carrying explosives and electrical instruments from Iran to be delivered to Hezbollah crashed north of Tehran. This transfer of arms was purportedly a special operation of the IRGC, and some of its members were among the 168 people killed in the crash.

In addition to Hezbollah, Palestinian terrorist organizations such as  [Hamas](#) and [Palestinian Islamic Jihad](#) are also supported by the IRGC. In 2009, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal praised Iran for helping Hamas achieve "victory" over Israel during Operation Cast Lead. According to the State Department, Iran's provision of training, weapons and funds to Hamas since the 2006 Palestinian elections has bolstered the terrorist organization's ability to attack Israel. The State Department reported in 2010 that Hamas "receives the majority of its funding, weapons, and training from Iran." Israel has intercepted shipments of weapons from Iran it says are designated for Hamas, including advanced cruise missiles.

The IRGC has also been linked to series [of planned attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets](#) since the beginning of 2012. In January, Azerbaijani authorities announced that they arrested at least two local men for plotting to attack the Israeli ambassador to Azerbaijan and a local rabbi. Azerbaijan's National Security Ministry indicated that the men are linked to Iranian intelligence agencies. An earlier bomb plot in Thailand was linked to IRGC-supported Hezbollah by Thai authorities.

A February 2012 bombing of an Israeli embassy vehicle injured the wife of the Israeli Defense Attaché to India and three others as she drove to pick up her children at school. The same day, another bomb targeting an embassy car in Tbilisi, Georgia, was found and defused before it could explode after a Georgian employee of the embassy notified police of a suspicious object attached to the car. Israeli officials have blamed Iran for orchestrating the attacks and Indian authorities have linked the New Delhi bombing to Iranian intelligence. A week later, Azerbaijani authorities announced the arrest of another cell with links to the IRGC and Hezbollah in a plot to attack the Israeli Embassy and a Jewish cultural center. Another explosion in Bangkok at the end of February led to the arrest of three Iranians, with Thai authorities seeking another two who are suspected of fleeing to Iran.

Additionally, on March 14, 2012, Azerbaijani authorities announced the breakup of a third cell in their country. Twenty-two Azerbaijani citizens were arrested in a plot to target the American and Israeli embassies and diplomatic personnel at the direction of the IRGC, according to an official statement.

### *Targeting the U.S.*

The U.S. government has alleged that elements of the Iranian government inspired, supported and directed Hezbollah to carry out a 1996 truck bombing in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 American servicemen. In December 2006, a U.S. federal judge ruled that the truck bomb had been assembled at a base operated by the IRGC and ordered the government of Iran to pay more than \$253 million to the families of those killed.

Similarly, the U.S. government has indicted members of Hezbollah for the 1983 attack on the U.S. Marine Barracks in Beirut that killed 241 Marines. In 2007, a U.S. federal judge ruled that Iran, which provided Hezbollah with financial and logistical support to carry out the attack, was legally responsible for the bombing.



IRGC Members, 2007

That same year, the State Department designated the IRGC pursuant to Executive Order 13382, freezing their assets as proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and financially isolating them. In order to "counter Iran's bid for nuclear capabilities and support for terrorism," the U.S. Treasury Department also designated the Quds Force as a terrorism supporting entity under Executive Order 13224, which also freezes the assets of terrorists and their supporters, and cut off more than a dozen IRGC affiliates from the U.S. financial and commercial systems. These designations mark the first time the U.S. has issued sanctions against the armed forces of a sovereign government.

In response to the designation, IRGC leader Mohammad Ali Jafari warned that Western nations will face "tsunamis" of resistance if they continue to conspire against Iran. In addition, President Ahmadinejad responded to the designation by declaring that "millions of Iranians would be ready to sacrifice themselves fighting the country's enemies."

The U.S. State Department has also alleged that the IRGC provides training and funding, as well as weapons—including rockets, rifles, automatic weapons and mortars—to Shiite militias in Iraq who target American forces. In July 2009, the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on an advisor to the Quds Force who allegedly provided "lethal support" to Iraqi Shiite militia groups that target and kill U.S. troops and Iraqi security forces.

The IRGC also provides the Taliban in Afghanistan with weapons and arms training, according to the U.S. State Department. Since 2006, the Quds Force has coordinated shipments of small arms and ammunition, rocket propelled grenades and plastic explosives to Taliban members in Afghanistan. According to a statement released by the U.S. Treasury, "through Quds Force material support to the Taliban, we believe Iran is seeking to inflict casualties on U.S. and NATO forces."

Several American court cases have linked Iran to Al Qaeda. A November 2011 ruling found that Iran and the IRGC could be held liable for Al Qaeda's 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. A default judgment in a civil suit related to the 9/11 attacks was entered against Iran, senior Iranian leadership, and the IRGC later that year. Furthermore, several Al Qaeda leaders who fled to Iran after the downfall of the Taliban have reportedly been allowed increased freedom of movement and action by the regime and Al Qaeda-linked money transfers have gone through Iran, according to the Department of the Treasury.

More recently, authorities linked the IRGC to an October 2011 [plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador](#) to the United States. Federal prosecutors allege that Mansour Arbabsiar, a naturalized American citizen from Iran, was tasked by his cousin, a member of the Quds Force who is under U.S. sanctions, with orchestrating the assassination. Following the announcement of the arrest and charges, the administration announced new sanctions against members of the Quds Force for its pursuit of "international terrorism." The IRGC has rejected the accusations as "unfounded and false" and called for an investigation of the American government's actions in Iran and abroad.

### **Anti-Semitic and Anti-Israel Ideology**

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) long record of support for terrorist organizations that have waged violent campaigns against Israel and Jews around the world is rooted in part in the anti-Israel and anti-Semitic ideology of its leadership.

Ahmad Fardid, a philosophy professor at the University of Tehran who claimed that the Zionists were leading a global conspiracy to remove both religion and morality from Iran, reportedly gave several lectures to members of the IRGC's political bureau before his death in 1994.

Since the 2005 election of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who himself is a former member of the IRGC and has repeatedly denied the Holocaust and threatened Israel's existence, IRGC officials have increased their rhetoric against Israel and the Jews. Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-e Yazdi, a cleric who perpetuates anti-Semitic rhetoric and reportedly views the Zionists as the fundamental source of evil on earth, has provided President Ahmadinejad with religious and ideological guidance.

In recent years, slogans that Israel should be "wiped off the pages of history" have adorned Iranian missiles and buses. In 2007, the front of a Tehran building that housed offices of the IRGC's Basij paramilitary force displayed a sign which read, in both Farsi and English, "Israel should be wiped off the face of the world."

IRGC officials have issued similar warnings predicting the destruction of Israel. In a February 2008 letter to Hezbollah Secretary General [Hassan Nasrallah](#), IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Jafari wrote, "In the near future, we will see the destruction of the cancerous tumor Israel by the powerful and competent hands of Hezbollah fighters." That same month, Yahya Rahim Safavi, Jafari's predecessor and an IRGC founder who previously called for the "death of this unclean regime [Israel]," declared that, "With God's, help the time has come for the Zionist regime's death sentence."

Manouchehr Mottaki, a former Foreign Minister who previously served as a liaison officer between the IRGC and the Iranian Foreign Ministry, has also rejected the legitimacy of Israel. In a speech given in Iran that same February, Mottaki said "the West has tried to impose a fabricated regime on the Middle East, but even after sixty years, the Zionist regime has neither gained any legitimacy nor played any role in this region."

In October 2009, Mojtaba Zolnour, Ayatollah Khamenei's representative in the IRGC, threatened to "blow up the heart of Israel" if the West, in an effort to halt the Islamic Republic's apparent nuclear ambitions, attacks Iran. "Even if one American or Zionist missile hits our country, before the dust settles, Iranian missiles will blow up the heart of Israel."



This rhetoric has resulted in direct action. In addition to supporting terrorist organizations with decades-long histories of attacks on Israel and Jews, since the beginning of 2012 the IRGC itself has been linked to a [number of attacks targeting Jewish and Israeli institutions throughout the world](#). Israeli diplomats were targeted in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and India. Jewish institutions were also repeatedly targeted in Azerbaijan, which borders Iran, according to authorities.