

**SHIISM AND MARTYRDOM:
A STUDY OF ISTISHHADI PHENOMENON IN
IRAN DURING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR, 1980-1988**

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During The Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988

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**SHIISM AND MARTYRDOM:
A STUDY OF ISTISHHADI PHENOMENON IN
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MEHDI SOLTANZADEH

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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2013

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan menganalisis kejadian perang Iran-Iraq dalam tempoh lapan tahun yang mana ramai sarjana menyatakan ia sebagai perang Negara Dunia ke Tiga terbesar dan konflik antara negara yang paling lama pada abad ke-20. Pada peringkat pertama perang pada bulan September tahun 1980, tentera Iraq yang dilengkapi dengan peralatan yang sangat lengkap seperti perisai, meriam dan lain-lain peralatan telah berjaya dengan baik pada peringkat tersebut. Mereka telah menghalau tentera Iran pulang dan berjaya menakluki wilayah yang besar, termasuk beberapa wilayah Khuzestan. Namun kejayaan mereka tidak lama. Iran dengan pantas telah menghalang kemenangan tersebut dengan menambah bilangan sukarelawan tentera yang juga dikenali sebagai “Pasdaran” (tentera untuk revolusi) ke hadapan medan peperangan. Ayatollah Khomeini menggelarkan Pasdaran dan Basjit sebagai “tentera 20 juta” kerana telah mengambil beratus ribu orang dalam kalangan rakyat biasa. Kumpulan ini berpegang kepada ideologi yang mana mereka tidak gentar menghadapi hujan peluru dan sanggup melaksanakan misi bunuh diri dengan berjalan ke medan periuk api. Dalam syiah islam, mati syahid merupakan titik tertinggi untuk manusia. Dalam budaya islam terutamanya dalam budaya syiah Iran mati syahid adalah tindakan yang paling dihargai dan bernilai. Syahid menjamin ketahanan dan kegembiraan masyarakat dan secara tidak langsung dapat meningkatkan keupayaan rohani masyarakat.

Dengan tindakan sedemikian, mati syahid mampu menghapuskan kelemahan dan kekejaman dalam masyarakat. Ayatollah Khomeini percaya bahawa islam di Iran berkembang dengan adanya darah perjuang mati syahid. Kajian ini menekankan kepada sosio-sejarah iaitu fenomena (istishhad) dalam masyarakat Iran semasa perang Iran-Iraq dari tahun 1980 hingga 1988. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan menggunakan kaedah kualitatif bagi memahami fenomena istishhadi yang berlaku semasa perang Iran-Iraq. Kaedah kualitatif bersesuaian dengan disiplin kajian sejarah. Kajian ini membincangkan revolusi idea sebagai pegangan syia Islam yang telah diajar oleh Ayatollah Khomeini, ahli politik serta golongan elit Islam yang mana telah di praktikan semula di dalam peperangan. Secara umumnya, Ideolgi politik Ayatollah Khomeini dan Para ulama Iran yang lain mempunyai impak yang besar kepada pembangunan fenomena Istishhadi dalam masyarakat Iran Semasa perang Iran-Iraq. Dari pandangan Ayatollah Khomeini, dengan adanya para ulama Islam dapat melahirkan perjuang mati syahid. Beliau percaya mati syahid ibarat sekuntum bunga yang indah dalam Islam dan merupakan kedudukan yang paling besar bagi pencapaian seseorang manusia.

ABSTRACT

This study examines and analyses the eight year of Iran-Iraq war which has been described by many scholars as the Third World's first great war and the longest interstate conflicts of the twentieth century. At the first stage of the war in September 1980, Iraqis, who were very well-equipped with armor, artillery, and other equipment, were highly successful. They pushed Iranian forces back and gained substantial territory, including some parts of Khuzestan province, but their progress soon began to slow. Iran has prevented a quick Iraqi victory by a rapid mobilization of volunteers and deployment of loyal Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) forces to the front. The Pasdaran and Basij -what Ayatollah Khomeini called the "Army of Twenty Million" or People's Militia- recruited hundreds of thousands of people. They were ideologically committed troops facing the rain of bullets and undertaking effective suicide missions by running into minefields. In Iranian Shia Islam, martyrdom is the highest point of ascendance for the human beings. In the Islamic culture and especially in Iranian Shia culture the most valuable and the worthiest action is martyrdom. From Islamic Viewpoint, the martyrs guarantee the resistance and the liveliness of the society and they would increase the spiritual capabilities of the society.

By such an action, they destroy weakness and corruption in the society. Ayatollah Khomeini believed that if there were not the blood of the martyrs to water the pure trees of this land there was no such thing as Islam. This research, studies the historical roots of this phenomenon (Istishhad) in Iranian Society during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). To carry out this research, qualitative method has been adapted for trying to understand the Istishhadi phenomenon, which consistent with the discipline of historical studies. It addresses the revolutionary idea of Shia theology taught by Ayatollah Khomeini and other political and Islamic elites of Iran, which were practiced in war fronts. The political doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini and other Iranian Scholars had a great Impact on development of Istishhadi phenomenon in Iranian Society during the Iran-Iraq war. From Ayatollah Khomeini's view, it is because of the Muslim scholars that martyrs are borned and it is because of the martyrs' blood that the pens of the scholars are satisfied. He believed that the martyr is the lovely flower of Islam and it is the greatest position that a human being might achieve. For him this war is the victory of blood over the sword.

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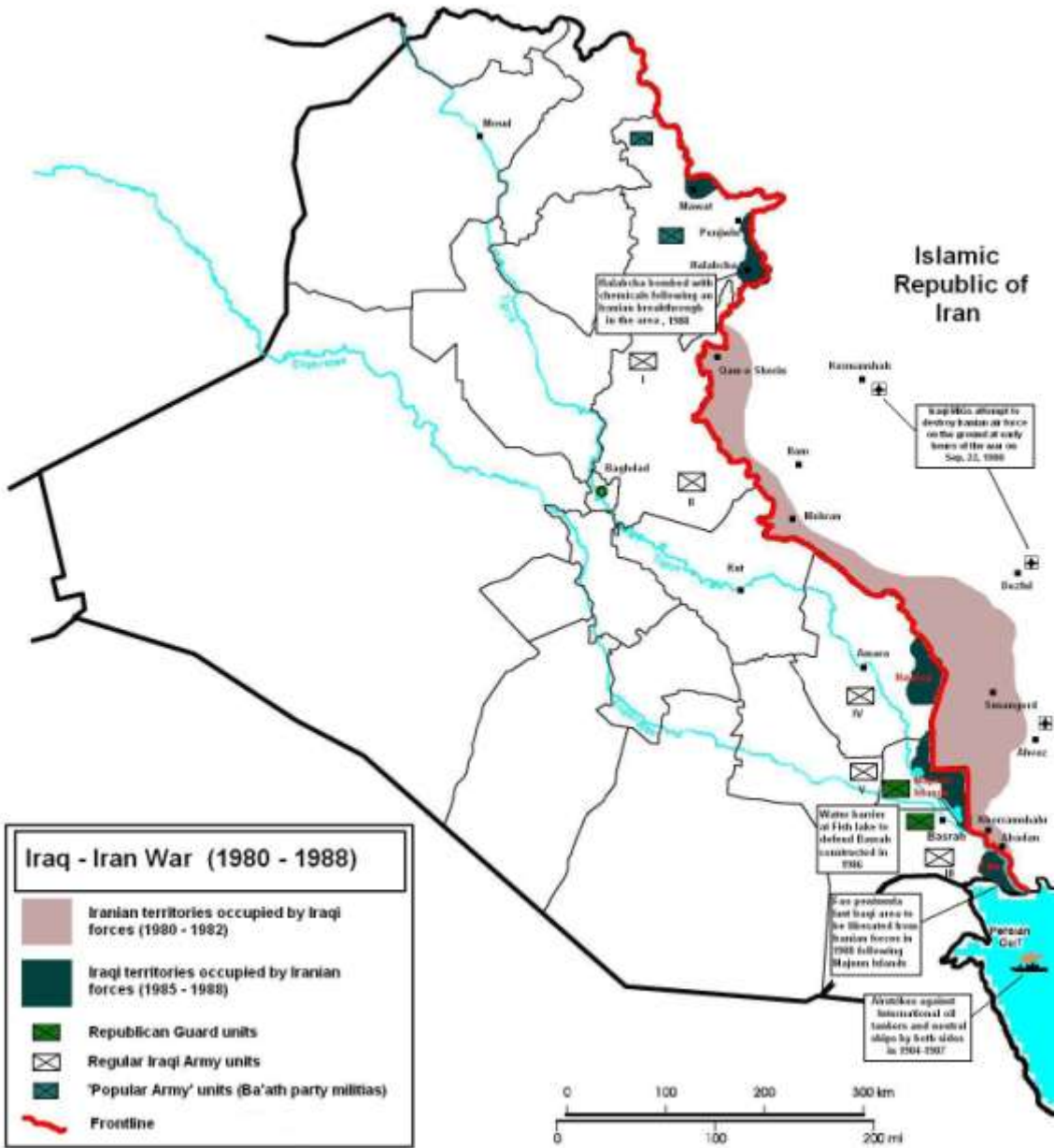
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Kuala Lumpur,

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2013

IRAN-IRAQ WAR 1980-1988



Abbreviations

Artesh: Iranian Army

Arvandrood: The name of the river in the south west of Iran which separates Iran and Iraq. This river called Shatt al-Arab in Iraq.

Ashura: The story of martyrdom of Imam Hosein -the Shia 3rd Imam and the son of Imam Ali- at 10th of Muharram of each lunar year.

Ayatollah: The high ranking Shia Islamic Jurisprudence expert

Basij: Militia system trained by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Basiji: Member of dedicated militia

Ghaybah: occultation of shia 12th Imam

Imam: Islamic jurisprudence leader

IRGC: Islamic Republic Guardian Corps

Istishhad: Seeking a witness. The synonym word for Shahadat

Jihad: Holy War

Karbala: The name of a place where Imam Hossein has been martyred. It's now located in Iraq.

MKO: Mojahedine Khalghe Iran (Iran's Current militarized opposition)

Pasdar: Revolutionary Guard

Pasdaran: Plural form of Pasdar

Savak: The Iranian organization of Intelligence and Security during Shah of Iran

Sepahi: Member of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Shahadat: Martyrdom

Shahid: Martyr

Vali Faghih: The Supreme Jurist

INTRODUCTION

The name of "Iran", which in Persian literature means "Land of the Aryans", has been in used before Islam enters to Iran during the Sassanid Empire. It came into use internationally in 1935, before which the country was known to the Western world as Persia. Both "Persia" and "Iran" are used interchangeably in cultural contexts; however, the name of "Iran" is the name used officially in political contexts after 1935 during the Reza shah Pahlavi who took the power in 1925.

In 1979, Iran has changed his government and political style. It was a revolutionary one but it became more deep and fundamental when it started to fight back with Iraq. The Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, a modernizing, pro-Western monarch, was overthrown by a coalition of opponents who ranged across the ideological spectrum made of Communists, Islamist radicals, nationalists and others all worked to overthrow the Shah's government. After some months of scuffling over power, however, Islamists led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to control Iran. This had an enormous impact on the politics of the Middle East, as Iran, which under the Shah had been a close ally of both the United States and Israel, became a bitter enemy of these two countries.

Almost two years after the Islamic revolution, Iran-Iraq war happened. The Ottoman Empire rule ended with World War I, and Iraq became Kingdom of Iraq in 1932. Later on, The Republic of Iraq was established in 1958 by a military coup d'état. The eight year of Iran-Iraq war has been described by many scholars as the

Third World's first Great War and the longest interstate conflicts of the twentieth century. In September 22nd, 1980, the Iraqis' first declared the Arvandrood (shat al-arab) in waterway to be Iraqi territory and then invaded Iran. At first, the invading Iraqis, who were very well-equipped with armor, artillery, and other equipment, were highly successful. They pushed Iranian forces back and gained substantial territory, including some parts of Khuzestan province, but their progress soon began to slow.

Iran has prevented a quick Iraqi victory by a rapid mobilization of volunteers and deployment of loyal Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) forces to the front. The Pasdaran and Basij (what Ayatollah Khomeini called the "Army of Twenty Million" or People's Militia) recruited hundreds of thousands of people. They were ideologically committed troops undertaking effective suicide missions by running into minefields. Some members even carried their own shrouds to the front in the expectation of martyrdom.

During this devastating war, over one million Lives were lost in, with a further two million wounded. At least 157 Iranian towns with populations of more than 5,000 were damaged or wholly destroyed during the war, and some 1,800 border villages were virtually wiped off the map. The cost of this war for Iranian side was up to 1000 billion Dollars including the cost of war and damages to economical and industrial infrastructures.

Statement of the Problem

The aim of the Iranian revolution in 1979 was summarized by a slogan chanted in the streets of the main cities by the demonstrators, which were Independence, Liberty, and Islamic Republic. but two years later, during the war a new kind of revolutionary actor emerged who would have a very significant role in the future within Islamic societies in their crisis time, which is the seminal figure of the martyrdom. In the Islamic world in general and most particularly in the Shia Islam, martyrdom (istishhad) played a very important role in Islam, often in close connection with the notion of holy war or what is called jihad in Islam.

In the contemporary Muslim world, the martyrdom phenomenon was, up to the 19th century, an exceptional figure, a role almost entirely reserved for revered people as holy man which is so-called Imam in the Shia tradition, the descendants of the Prophet via his son-in-law and cousin Ali and his son Hosein or those who accepted martyrdom in their service. Fresh after revolution, the Iranian army was not strong and Iraqis were facilitated by the westerns. For Iranian soldiers, the only way to confront the war is to apply Istishadi and martyrdom approach to stop the Iraqis soldiers' invasion. In this research, we will study the historical roots of this phenomenon (martyrdom) in Iranian Society during the Iran-Iraq war and its development in Iranian Society.

Research Questions

With the advent of Western imperialism, the ideas of jihad and martyrdom were revived against the invaders, but until the Iranian revolution of 1979 and especially the war with Iraq in 1980, martyrdom had never been such a widespread social and symbolic phenomenon in the Muslim world. During most of the war against Iraq, the Basij martyrs – inspired by devotion to the charismatic figure of Khomeini- killed themselves to save their land and Ideology.

The Iranian shia Islam and the role of intellectuals are the main part of the research questions addressing the istishhadi phenomenon. The war against Iraq was led mainly by the Basiji -the young volunteers who fought in the revolutionary guards- who carried their own shrouds to the front bought an important consequent in the 1990s and later in many regions of the Islamic world. Generally, the question of this research is how the Istishhadi and martyrdom phenomenon helped the Iranian soldiers to face the war for eight years.

Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate and analyze the Istishhad phenomenon in Iran, during the Iran-Iraq war. In order to achieve this aim the following steps have been identified as objectives to this research: first, to study The Origin of Shia Islam in Iran and the historical development of istishhadi phenomenon in Islam and Shia teachings as a belief for majority of Iranians. Second, to study the Iran's Revolution and the Role of Scholars in Teaching of Istishhad phenomenon in Iran during the

Iran- Iraq war and third to study The Iran-Iraq War and the Practice of Istishadi phenomenon. Fourth, to know the Istishadi Commanders during the Iran-Iraq War and review their testimonies and motives in this regard. finally to study the Impact of Istishhadi phenomenon on Iranian soldier during the war.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this research is to study the istishhadi phenomenon in Iran during the eight years, from 1980 until 1988. During this eight year of war, the istishhadi and martyrdom phenomenon was a subject of encouragement for many Iranian young soldiers and volunteers who attended the war front. However, Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic speech was an influential discourse during the 1980s'. Dr. Shariati and Ayatollah motahari's books and speeches were the source of ideological motivations for the young Iranians before the 1979 revolution. This research will examine thoroughly the istishhadi phenomenon and its impact on Iranian society during the 1980-1988 by reviewing the books and speeches and documents regarding this issue.

Method of Research

For conducting this qualitative research and obtaining our objectives, we need primary sources as well as Quran, Islamic texts and historical and contemporary pertinent books of Iran-Iraq war, and the secondary sources, which have been gathered by the following methods. Therefore, for this research qualitative method has been adapted for trying to understand this phenomenon. In this research, we will

follow a Chronological model too, which essentially let a historical sequence structure at the beginning of the war and going on until they come to the end. This pattern is prevalent in historical studies and related fields. For instance, we would start to study the Iran-Iraq war at the very beginning stage of the tension until to the end with special regard of our proposed topic.

This will be a qualitative study consistent with the discipline of historical studies. It will address the revolutionary idea of Shia theology taught by ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's political and Islamic elites which were practiced then in war fronts. Our main source of collecting data is holy defense foundation of Iran-Iraq war, which is located in Tehran. In this research we will Study Islamic historical related books, Iranian and Shia Scholars' idea and thought concerning the term "martyrdom" as a primary source. Besides books, journals and news papers, archival data of Iran-Iraq war are yet existed in the holy defense foundation and martyrs foundation in Tehran, Iran.

The researcher examines or selects the specific pertinent data for analysis of this Phenomenon. For example, the istishhadi practitioners' documents during the Iran-Iraq war -like their letters and their will- can be found in these archives. Having Interviews with their friends, family members and specially with their military leaders and commanders, will surely shed light on this research. Their addresses can be also found in the above named foundations as well.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of istishhad, and specifically its strong association with Islam, generates many questions worth studying. At the moment, many books have been written trying to understand and explain istishhads. Broadly speaking, the scholarship on the subject can be broken into historical, rational, cultural and psychological approaches. Among the cultural school of thought is the argument that istishhad is merely religious fanaticism, citing religious figures that influence followers with promises of rewards in heaven. The charismatic leaders will selectively find passages from the Quran and religious texts to suit their goals, framing istishhads as a way to execute God's will. This argument seems to be supported by many of the recent martyrs in palestine, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and many in the worldwide, as many of these bombers will use religious passages to justify their actions as jihad and martyrdom.¹

However, this is somewhat limited view that does not take into account the full range of factors that contribute to the phenomenon of istishhad, nor can it account for the large number of istishhads committed by secular groups such as the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, the PKK in Turkey, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Examples of the literature that shows

¹ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Martyrs* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006), p. 4.

istishhad as religious fanaticism can be found in the works of Harvey W. Kushner and Raphael Israeli.²

Rationalist theories argue that there is tactical or strategic logic to suicide bombings and, therefore, they are the work of rational actors. Ehud Sprinzak and Scott Atran highlight the tactical logic of using martyrs as “smart bombs” that are highly accurate, and able to hit difficult target sets, and can make operational adjustments during an attack.³ Generally, martyrs are less likely to be captured and able to inform on the organization. By using a single individual, economy of force saves an organization from losing multiple members for a single attack.

However, istishhads are also frequently used in bombings against soft targets where a smart bomb is not required, and the loss of a dedicated member of the organization does not seem warranted. These two examples highlight where there is a failure of tactical logic in conducting a istishhad. Robert Pape argues that not only is istishhadi action strategically logical, but that it is particularly effective against democracies that may be sensitive to high casualty rates.⁴

Pape also confirms that istishhads can show a population about the high level of commitment of an organization, delivering the message that it cannot be deterred.

² Harvey W. Kushner, "Martyrs: Business as Usual," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19, no. 4 (1996) pp. 329–337. Raphael Israeli, *Islamikaze: Manifestations of Islamic Martyrology* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 49–53.

³ Ehud Sprinzak, "Rational Fanatics," *Foreign Policy*, no. 120 (Sep.–Oct. 2000), 66–73. Scott Atran, "Genesis of Suicide Terrorism," *Science* 299, no. 5612 (7 Mar. 2003), pp. 152–153.

⁴ Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *The American Political Science Review* 97, no. 3 (Aug. 2003), pp. 343–361.

The devastatingly successful istishhadi actions against U.S. and French targets in Lebanon in 1983 that caused the multinational forces to withdraw from Lebanon form the basis of his theory, and he expands his study to include the suicide campaigns carried out since, including the Second Intifada.

Unfortunately, Pape's strategic logic begins to break down when analyzing istishhadi action campaigns that are not targeting democracies, such as the extended campaign Al Qaeda in Iraq has waged since 2003. In trying to apply his theory there, it is not clear exactly who the target democracy is in Iraq, nor who is supposed to be receiving what signal. The notion of this significance is expanded upon in work by Mia Bloom. She also focuses on the efforts of Palestinian organizations during the Second Intifada to increase their popularity and "market share" among their constituencies by "outbidding" their rivals.⁵

However, Bloom's theory may only hold explanatory value in situations where the constituent audience is strongly supporting of istishhad as was the case among the Palestinians during the Second Intifada. Additionally, while her theory may attempt to explain the organizational motives, it does little to explain why there was such a huge increase in public support for istishhad in Palestine, a necessary precursor for her theory to apply; organizations cannot increase their patronage and influence by engaging in activities that are unpopular with their target audience. One shortcoming of all these rational actor approaches is that they tend to focus on the actions of the organization, at the expense of understanding the motivations of the

⁵ Mia M. Bloom, "Palestinian Istishhad: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 1 (Spring 2004), pp. 61–88.

martyrs themselves. In the case of the Palestinian martyrs, statements from the bombers indicate a mixture of religious and national inspiration, not tactical or strategic considerations.⁶

Also, if istishhad is obviously rational, why do organizations exert so much effort generating martyrdom mythologies to venerate their “heroes” to justify and explain their actions to their target populations? Additionally, the logic of individual motivations is difficult to understand, as the martyr is necessarily dead, and unable to enjoy any benefits from their actions, at least in this life.⁷ At this point, the individual motivations are understood as a product of rewards sought either for themselves or loved ones in the afterlife, strategic and tactical logic becomes immersed in religious explanations.

The istishhad definition as a result of psychological trauma and societal repression is made by individuals such as Eyad El-Sarraj. As a psychologist in Palestine, El-Sarraj drew on first-hand knowledge gleaned from interviews of aspiring martyrs and surviving family members in formulating his theories. He contends that, at least in the case of the Palestinians during the Second Intifada, Palestinian youth were acclimated to violence by growing up during the First

⁶ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Martyrs* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006) P. 52. See also Notes from International Institute for Counter-Terrorism seminar on “The Global Jihad,” given by Reuven Paz, Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, revised and expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 151.

⁷ See Brooks, David. “The Culture of Martyrdom: How Suicide Bombing Became not Just a Means But an End.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, June Vol. 289, No. 6, 2002, pp. 24-34.

Intifada, and motivated to commit violence by the shock of watching their parents and loved ones humiliated by Israeli Defense Forces.⁸

Assaf Moghadam and Mohammed Hafez have written extensively applying their more complex theoretical models, which even include social movement theory, to both the Palestinian martyrs, and more recently the martyrs in Iraq. These authors delve into how organizations that commit istishhad have successfully mobilized target populations, how organizations during the Second Intifada successfully framed istishhad as “martyrdom operations,” and how that methodology has been copied and even enhanced by other extremist organizations.⁹

These theories make a point of drawing distinctions between different societal conflicts, understanding that different structural, cultural and strategic factors come into play based on situational realities. To gain a greater understanding of cultural factors pertaining to martyrdom in Islam, the speeches and lectures by Dr. Ali Shariati, Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahhari, and Ayatullah Mahmud Taleqani are instrumental in understanding the basic concepts, especially the long tradition of venerating martyrs in Shia Islam.

These three Shia scholars were not only instrumental in modernizing the concept of jihad among Shia Islam in the 20th Century, the case can be made that

⁸ Eyad El Sarraj and Linda Butler, "Martyrs: Dignity, Despair, and the Need for Hope: An Interview with Eyad El Sarraj," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31, no. 4 (Summer 2002) pp. 71–76. For more information see Mohammed M. Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Suicide Bombers* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute for Peace Press, 2006), p. 70.

⁹ Assaf Moghadam, "Palestinian Suicide Terrorism in the Second Intifada: Motivations and Organizational Aspects," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 2003), 65; Hafez, *Manufacturing Human Bombs: The Making of Palestinian Martyrs*. p. 120.

they provided the modern foundation for the legal justifications for martyrdom operations currently used by both Shia and Sunni extremists.¹⁰ However, while their work is instrumental in understanding the basic premise of how jihad and martyrdom is viewed in Islam, and how that view was modernized and helped inspire the Islamic Revolution in Iran, because their speeches and lectures predate the development of istishhad as “martyrdom operations,” and especially because they are all Shia scholars, additional research is needed to properly gauge their contribution to the present phenomenon of istishhad, especially among Sunni organizations.

An example of scholarship that tries to link the historical traditions within Shia and Sunni Islam to modern day istishhad has been published by David Cook and Bernard Freamon. Cook highlights how in Sunni Islam, most martyrs were participants in jihad or sectarian warfare, in contrast to Shia martyrs who were normally the victims of Sunni Muslims. Cook also asserts that the relatively recent development of martyrdom operations was aided by the approval of the ulama trying to reassert their authority as radical Islam became more popular, although most establishment ulama tried to limit the application of the practice, usually to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Radical Islamists have continually tried to broaden the scope when martyrdom operations may be employed, to the point where global jihadist organizations are killing women, children, non-combatants and Muslims.¹¹

¹⁰ Mehdi Abedi and Gary Legenhausen, eds., *Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 1986). See Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, “The Changing Nature of Istishhads: A Social Network Perspective,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2006).

¹¹ David Cook, “Comparative Martyrdom in the Sunni and Shi’ite Traditions” *Suicide Terrorism Project*, (20 August 2007), p. 86.

Regarding the background of the term "martyrdom" David Cook, the author of the book *Martyrdom in Islam*, has also contributed researches about relating themes before and after September 11, 2001, which Islamic studies has received more attention from many scholars throughout the world. Cook studied the chronological development of martyrdom in the Muslim world, analyzing the different aspects of sacrificing the self. First, it defines martyrdom, then demonstrates its various types and follows their occurrences from the past until the present. The first chapter opens with a short review of Jewish and Christian martyrdoms. He starts with the terminology of the word "martyrdom" which means witness. Other meaning is "becomes a living definition of the intrinsic nature of the belief system for which he or she is willing to die".¹²

In the second chapter he elaborates martyrdom experiences in the formative period of Islam, giving examples for a range of martyr groups. In the third chapter he examines the definitions and generous rewards of the martyr in the Qur'anic martyrological doctrine as well as in the Hadith traditions and classical jihad literature then he demonstrates the broadening categories of martyrdom from the basic sense of dying in the battle to wide-ranging occurrences that do not always necessarily lead to death. He defines martyrdom as follows:

"Dying from fever, being eaten by wild animals, being killed by an unjust ruler, or being bitten by a toxic creature. Martyrs can include those who treat their wives and children correctly, or women who go on a righteous hajj".¹³

¹² David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam, Themes in Islamic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 14.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

Bernard Freamon agrees with David Cook that istishhadi action is only weakly supported by classical sources of Islamic law and jurisprudence. However, he contends that the current justifications for martyrdom operations can mostly be attributed to a major reinterpretation of religious law and military jihad by Shia theologians and jurists in Iraq and Iran during the 1960s and 1970s. He goes on to show the connections illustrating how Sunni extremists such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian territories first appropriated the Shia reinterpretations, and then expanded their justifications to fit their organizational goals.¹⁴

In his article, Ali Farhana studied the development of martyrdom phenomenon in the history of Islam. They believe that the murder of Hosein is viewed as one of the most important martyrdoms in Islamic history. Unlike his brother Hassan, Hosein refused to accept the rule of the new Muslim leader based in Syria. His refusal to give him allegiance resulted in Hosein's murder. Enraged over the martyrdom of Hosein, Muslims in Kufa, Iraq formed their own party, which became the "Partisans of Ali" or Shia. Today, Shias reenact the martyrdom of Hosein on the day when he was killed, known as the Day of Ashura (the tenth day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, Muharram). Thus, for Shias, the meaning of shahadat (martyrdom) is understood in the context of the school of thought that embodies the struggle and death which is martyrdom of Hosein.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bernard K. Freaman, "Martyrdom, Suicide, and the Islamic Law of War: A Short Legal History," *Fordham International Law Journal* 299, no. 27 (2004) pp. 299–369. See Hamas charter in Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 189-190.

¹⁵ See Ali Farhana, "The History and Evolution of Martyrdom in the Service of Defensive Jihad: an analysis of suicide bombers in current conflicts", *Journal of Social Research*, Vol.75, No.2, 2008.

The incident that proved most formative for the emergence of Shi'ism, however, was the martyrdom of Ali's son Hosein on a desolate plain in Karbala in today's Iraq in 680. The incident was sparked when Muslims based around Kufah, a stronghold of loyalists of Ali and his descendents, had urged Hosein to contend the accession to the caliphate of the new Umayyad leader, Yazid I, by virtue of Hosein's descent from the Prophet. Hosein heeded the request, and set out from Medina to Kufah to organize a revolt. Near Karbala, Hosein, a small band of followers, and the women and children from his household who had accompanied him, were confronted by Umayyad troops, besieged, and finally massacred on Ashura, the tenth day of the month of Muharram. Hosein is said to have died while carrying his son in his arms.¹⁶

Ever since that fateful Ashura, the martyrdom of Hosein at Karbala has become a central component of Shia identity, and has bestowed an emotive notion of martyrdom upon Shia awareness. Hosein is said to have died while carrying his son in his arms. Ever since that fateful Ashura, the martyrdom of Hosein at Karbala has become a central component of Shia identity, and has bestowed an emotive notion of martyrdom upon Shia awareness.¹⁷

Yann Richard remarked that the martyrdom of Hosein—the only living grandson of the Prophet—“has become the prototype of every struggle for justice, every suffering. In the actual course of Iranian history, however, Shia Islam has been

¹⁶ Hosein is the third Imam of shia muslims who has been martyred in battle of karbal which is now a place in modern Iraq. See Aghaie, Kamran Scott. *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 18-33.

¹⁷ Karen Armstrong, *Islam: A Short History* (New York: Random House, 2002), p. 35.

used at times (especially during the Savafid Dynasty) to justify the ulama's alliance with monarchs, and at other times to justify pious clerical withdrawal from the tainted secular world of politics.¹⁸

Shia Islam is a major but nondominant branch of Islam, and Iran is the only nation-state where Shia rather than Sunni believers are in the majority. As a religious world-view, Shia Islam arguably has especially salient symbolic resources to justify resistance against unjust authority, and to legitimate religious leaders as competitors to the state. The founding myth is the story of Hosseinn's willing martyrdom in the just cause of resisting the usurper caliph, Yazid.¹⁹

The martyrdom of Hosein has played a profound role not only in shaping Shia identity at large, but also Shi'a perceptions of jihad. Another element in Shia doctrine that had a direct bearing on how Shias understand jihad is the occultation (ghayba) of the Twelfth Imam.²⁰ According to the dominant Twelver (Ithna-Ashari) denomination within Shi'ism, there have been twelve Imams since Muhammad's death—descendants of the prophet's family who were the rightful worldly and spiritual heirs of Muhammad's authority, and hence the true leaders of the Islamic nations.

¹⁸ Amir Arjomand, *Religion, Political Action and Legitimate Domination in Shi'ite Iran: Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries A.D.* (Paris: Archives Europennes de Sociologie, 1995), pp. 59-109.

¹⁹ Mahmoud Diani, *Negahi Be Farhange Shahadat* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2000), p. 8.

²⁰ Yann, Richard. *Shi'ite Islam: Polity, Ideology, and Creed* (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), p. 29.

The Shia emphasizes the persecution and eventual murder of these rightful Imams by the reigning caliphs, who thus deprived the Imams of their right to assume the caliphate. In recent decades, Shi'a and Sunni notions of jihad have become more closely aligned, as Salafi-Jihadists, who increasingly monopolize the Sunni discourse on jihad, persistently frame jihad as a response to the oppression by Western “infidel” regimes and tyrannical “apostate” regimes in the Arab and Muslim world.²¹

From practical point of view, throughout the centuries it also helped the Shia to maintain a common historical bond and a communal unity that defied persecution by Sunni rule. “martyrdom” however, also serves the function of humiliating the enemy, as Shariati’s speech makes abundantly clear. Shariati writes that through his martyrdom, the shahid “cannot defeat the enemy, but he can humiliate him”.²²

Navid Kermani in his research on "Roots of terror: suicide, martyrdom, self redemption and Islam" bring forth the current definition of martyrdom as revival of historical issue of Islamic ideas in Iranian revolution in 1979. He believes that no

²¹ For more detail about concept of jihad see Assaf Moghadam, *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Volume 19, Issue 1, March 2007, pp. 125-143.

²² Dr. Ali Shariati was born in Mazinan, a suburb of Mashhad, Iran. He completed his elementary and high school in Mashhad. At the age of eighteen, he started as a teacher and ever since had been a student as well as a teacher. After graduating from college in 1960, on a scholarship he pursued graduate studies in France. Dr. Shariati, an honor student, received his doctorate in sociology in 1964 from Sorbonne University. When he returned to Iran he was arrested at the border and imprisoned on the pretext that he had participated in political activities while studying in France. Released in 1965, he began teaching again at Mashhad University. As a Muslim sociologist, he sought to explain the problems of Muslim societies in the light of Islamic principles-explaining them and discussing them with his students. For the second time, he underwent an eighteen month prison term under extremely harsh conditions. Popular pressure and international protests obliged the Iranian regime to release Dr. Shariati on March 20, 1975. However, he remained under close surveillance by the security agents of Iran. This was no freedom at all since he could neither publish his thoughts nor contact his students. Under such stifling conditions according to the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), he realized that he should migrate out of the country. Successful in his attempt, he went to England but was martyred three weeks later on June 19, 1977 by the ubiquitous SAVAK (shah’s intelligence agency). <http://www.shariati.com/jihadand.html>

historical event has ever moved the Shias as deeply as the Battle of Karbala. Even today, you can sometimes see Iranians – grown men and women, including members of the worldly middle and upper classes – breaking into violent weeping when someone mentions the death of Hosein. In Hosein's agony, the suffering of the entire human race is expressed. His death became a synonym for the betrayal of humanity's hope of a better future. No episode in Shia history can be understood without reference to the Battle of Karbala – certainly not the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that saw itself as a revolt against the Yazid of its own time.²³

Ahmed M. Abdel-Khalek in his article "Neither Altruistic Suicide, nor Terrorism but Martyrdom: A Muslim Perspective" believes that the contemporary istishhadi phenomenon is rooted in Israel-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, the soil has become fertile ground for the growing phenomenon of martyrdom and has given rise to a culture of resistance, based on the Islamic principles of Jihad (holy war) and the right to resist the Israeli colonizer. Several specialists in Islamic law (Shari'a) consider that martyrdom is legitimate and does not count as suicide of any kind.²⁴

The clerics' writings and sermons on jihad, resistance, and martyrdom established the intellectual understanding of Hezbollah's approach to these issues. Hezbollah borrowed the tactic of suicide bombings from secular leftist groups and

²³ Kermani, Navid. *"Roots of terror: suicide, martyrdom, self redemption and Islam"*. <http://www.opendemocracy.net>

²⁴ Abdel-Khalek, Ahmed. "Neither Altruistic Suicide, nor Terrorism but Martyrdom: A Muslim Perspective", *Archives of Suicide Research*, Volume 8, No.1, January 2004, pp. 99-113.

endowed it with an Islamic character derived from the Iranian model of the Basijis.²⁵ Throughout the Iran-Iraq war, the main motive for the martyrdom of the Basijis was a desire to protect the threatened Islamic land and to fight an Iraqi enemy supported and aided by Western countries.

The use of istishhads was first adopted by the Basijis during the Iraq-Iran War of 1980-1988; they would run into areas covered by land mines, triggering them in preparation for the advance of more conventional troops. The suicide missions assigned to the young Basijis were given religious sanction. Regarding this point, Khosrokhavar said:

“The young men would be following in the steps of Hosein. The utility of the martyr motive to the revolution was later demonstrated by the myriads of idealistic young Iranians who found their death on the killing fields of the Iraq-Iran war when volunteering for duty as human assault waves or living land-mine detonators, as well as by Hezbollah activists in Southern Lebanon. These suicide missions, sanctioned by higher authorities, served as a foundation for the istishhads later conducted in Lebanon”.²⁶

Nasrin Rahimieh in her article *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity* explains the martyrdom from Sufism viewpoint in Islamic literature. She finds interesting instances of adaptation such as drawing on religious tradition which

²⁵ Saidi, Mehdi. *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhelal*. Vol. 1. (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2007), pp. 32-35.

²⁶ Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 146.

produced a saying of the Prophet Mohammad, investing those who die from love with the title of martyrdom: “Who loves ardently, abstains and dies, dies a martyr”.²⁷

In contemporary Iranian society martyrdom began to have an important role in Iranian revolution 1979. Janet Afary in her research *"Shia Narratives of Karbalâ and Christian Rites of Penance: Michel Foucault and the Culture of the Iranian Revolution, 1978–1979"* believes that by late 1978, the Islamist faction had come to dominate the anti-shah protests, in which secular nationalists and leftists also participated. The struggle against the shah was now cast as a reenactment of the historic battle between Hosein (grandson of the prophet Muhammad) and his opponent Yazid in the month of Muharram in 680 C.E. in the desert of Karbala in Iraq.²⁸

The importance of the paradigm of Karbala can be seen in the central role that the pilgrimage to the tombs of its martyrs had for the historical development and organization of Shiism. Also, most Shia institutions of religious education were concentrated in cities with pilgrimage shrines, such as Najaf, Karbala, and Qom.²⁹ Asma Afsaruddin in her research *Views of jihad throughout history* studies the differences of jihad and martyrdom from historical viewpoint.

²⁷ Rahimieh, nasrin. *Middle Eastern Literatures*, Volume 10, No.2, 2007, pp. 198-201.

²⁸ Afary, Janet. “Shi‘i Narratives of Karbalâ and Christian Rites of Penance: Michel Foucault and the Culture of the Iranian Revolution, 1978–1979”, *Radical History Review*, Issue 86, 2003, pp. 7-35.

²⁹ Mottahedeh, Roy. *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (London: One world, 2000), pp. 69-109.

She believes that the Arabic term jihad has primarily come to mean “armed struggle/combat” and is frequently translated into English as “holy war.” But a close scrutiny of the occurrence of this term in the Quran and in early hadith literature demonstrates that this exclusive understanding of the term cannot be supported for the earliest period of Islam (roughly mid-seventh through the late eighth centuries). The essay traces the transformations in the meanings of jihad – and the related concepts of martyr and martyrdom – from the earliest period of Islam through the late medieval period and down to our present time.³⁰

Wagdy Loza, brings psychological reasons of why martyrs do kill themselves while can keep it valuably. In her article *"The psychology of extremism and terrorism: A Middle-Eastern perspective"* she explains martyrs acts are a religious and a cultural duty and that it is an honor to sacrifice their lives for God besides they would receive extraordinarily great rewards for their fight and sacrifices. Martyrdom is the highest religious fervor and devotion in Islam and martyrs are promised elevated position in Allah's eyes.³¹

The death of the martyr for God is the most honorable and happiest of deaths. The martyr immediately goes to the Garden of Eden as soon as he is martyred where he will have images of prophets and saints welcoming them to the Garden of Eden

³⁰ Afsaruddin, Asma. “Views of Jihad throughout History”, *Religion Compass*. 1, 1, 2007, pp. 165-169.

³¹ See Afary, Janet. “Shi‘i Narratives of Karbalâ and Christian Rites of Penance: Michel Foucault and the Culture of the Iranian Revolution, 1978–1979”, *Radical History Review*, Issue 86, 2003, pp. 9-38.

after their martyrdom.³² Banna claims the jihad of the spirit is the greater jihad, and the jihad of the sword the lesser jihad, and he glorifies active defensive jihad:

“The supreme martyrdom is only conferred on those who slay or are slain in the way of God. As death is inevitable and can happen only once, partaking in jihad is profitable in this world and the next.”³³

The martyrdom ethic is further continues by the events that took place as a result. Shortly after the death of Imam Ali, his son, Hosein, found himself competing with the Umayyads. Ultimately, Hosein led a largely symbolic attack on Umayyad forces at modern day Karbala, Iraq. With approximately 72 soldiers, Hosein attacked 5,000 Umayyad troops. Hosein was killed in battle in October 680 CE; and became another example of the noble martyr.³⁴

In this part, we will have some look at the martyrdom phenomenon in Iran-Iraq war. The eight years of fighting that followed the revolution and the geopolitical changes that occurred in its wake merely underlined the depth of animosity between the revolutionary government in Iran and Saddam's government. Geopolitical rivalries, regime types, and deep suspicion at the leadership level combined to

³² Wagdy, Loza. “The Psychology of Extremism and Terrorism: A Middle-Eastern Perspective” *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Issue 12, 2007, pp. 141-155.

³³ Al-Banna. *Five Tracts of Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949)*, pp. 155-156.

³⁴ Umayyads: a Syrian based military Islamic dynasty. The Umayyads challenged Ali's claim to the Islamic leadership after Mohammad's death and responsible for the death of his son Imam hossein. For more information see Abedi, Mehdi; Legenhusen, Gary. *Jihad and Shahadat* (Houston: Texas, 1986), P. 280.

escalate a manageable border dispute into a more general conflict, which resulted in all-encompassing interstate war.³⁵

The war between these two major oil producers created a host of policy dilemmas for the energy-hungry United States, which had just lost its most reliable regional partner to Islamist revolutionaries in Iran and was concerned that the revolutionary storm from Iran might shake the foundations of the House of Saud (the other important U.S. ally) as well as the smaller and more vulnerable Persian Gulf Arab states.³⁶

It was not until the 1980s when Khomeini reintroduced the possibility of reestablishing the universal Islamic state, which is, uniting now segregated religious and political realms, that the Arab versus non-Arab controversy again assumed acute significance. Throughout Islamic history, this controversy has referred foremost to Arab-Persian rivalries.³⁷ It first erupted in hostilities as early as the eighth century on the Abbasid-Persian frontier, exactly where some 1000 years later the modern Iran-Iraq war would reopen the same wounds, Arab Sunni versus Persian Shia antagonisms.³⁸ In the minds of Iranians and many Iraqi Shias, the Iran-Iraq war

³⁵ See Safavi, Yahya Rahim. *Az jonub-e lobnan ta jonub-e iran: khaterat-e Sardar-e Sayyed Rahim Safavi*. Edited by M. Najafpour (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2006), pp. 12-14.

³⁶ Ehteshami, Anoushiravan. *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:4. pp. 115-129.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

³⁸ IRGC, *Jang va tajavoz: jebhe-ye impirialisti 'alayh-e enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Daftar-e Siyasi- e Sepah-e Pasharan-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 1981), P. 8.

became the Iran-Saddam war. Shia soldiers on both sides fought for faith and country, but they were wrapped into a saddam's war of ambition and fear.³⁹

The difference between the above mentioned review and this research can be categorized to many issues. First, the previous researches were focus on Islam and martyrdom as a whole perspective but this research will narrow its geography to Iran and its chronology to eight years of war from 1980 to 1988. Second, other scholar's works were mostly written by westerns or to some extent in critical way, which makes the reader somehow far from the reality. But this work has been carried out by the author's own experience of living in such environment.

Organization of Chapters

This study will be organized in five chapters in which each chapter would discuss the topic as it has mentioned in the table of contents. Base on the title of the research, it has been decided to organize firstly by examining the origin of shia Islam in Iran followed by the second part which will be studying the important advent of 20th century in Muslim worlds which is Iran's revolution and ideologues of istishhad during and after the revolution.

In the third chapter, it will discuss about the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), a practice for istishhad. Studying and discussing the pioneer istishadi commanders of Iran during the war will be the forth chapter, Continued by the inspiration of karbala

³⁹ Nasr, Vali. *Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 222-266.

on Iranian soldiers during the Iran-Iraq war as a fifth chapter. At the end of this research, will the impact of istishhadi teachings on Iranian society since 1988 to find out the impact on Iranian contemporary society.

CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGIN OF SHIA ISLAM IN IRAN

Introduction

Islam emphasizes the oneness of God, or *tawhid*, and the role of the Prophet Muhammad in delivering God's message. This belief, which is called the *shahaddah* or the proclamation of faith, forms the first of five pillars of Islam; one who proclaims the *shahaddah* is a Muslim. The other four pillars include ritual prayer such as five times a day facing towards Mecca (*salat*); fasting (*sawm*); during the holy month of Ramadan, the month the Prophet first received revelations from God, donating to the poor (*zakat*); and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), which should be taken by every Muslims at least once in his or her life if finances and health permitting are the main practice of Islam.

After the demise of Prophet Muhammad in the year 632, in the Muslim community, there was disagreement on who would succeed the Prophet and leading the Society. This issue split the Muslim community into two main factions: those who supported Abu Bakr and his successors Umar and Uthman, and those who supported Ali ibn Abi Talib—the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law—and later his descendents. Those who supported Ali came to be known as the Shia Ali or the “followers or partisans of Ali (the Shia).” Although this was a political distinction, it was from Ali's supporters that the Shia religion gradually emerged as a separate and distinct

variant of Islam. As the dispute over the succession of Prophet Muhammad is at the root of Shia Islam.

The Formation of Shia Islam

Along with the pillars, Islam emphasizes the unity of the worldwide Muslim community, the ummah, which, in principle, is not divided by gender, race, class or any other human distinction.¹ However, For Shias, numerous quotations and sayings –hadith- recognized by Muslim scholars addressed the Prophet Prophet Muhammad’s favoring of Ali. For Sunnis, these traditions simply reinforce the notion that Ali was a central figure in early Islam and should be respected as such. Shias, however, point to these traditions as evidence that the Prophet had intended for Ali, and later Ali’s sons, to succeed him in leading the Muslim community. Perhaps the most important tradition supporting the Shias’ claim is an account from the last year of the Prophet’s life. This account, recorded in a Sunni collection of traditions, states:

“We preformed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. Then He took Ali by the hand and said to the people: “Do you acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?” And they replied: “Yes!” And he took Ali’s hand and said: “Of whomsoever I am Lord, then Ali is also Lord. God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him. And Umar met Ali after this and said to him: forever you are the master of every believing man and woman.”²

¹ For more details on key beliefs in Islam, see Chapter Three: “Religious Life and Belief” in John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 69-113.

² For an overview of these traditions, see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi’ism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), pp. 12-17.

To Shias, the implication of this event is clear. It shows that Prophet Muhammad appointed Ali as his successor and indicates Umar (the future second Caliph) understood and acknowledged this fact. This is important to note because to Shias it suggests that Umar's later nomination of Abu Bakr as Caliph of muslims and the first successor to the Prophet not only betrayed the Prophet's wishes but also went against Umar's understanding of those wishes.³

Another important part involving the Prophet and Umar, known as the story of Pen and Paper, casts further doubt in the eyes of Shias on Umar's faithfulness and on his role in usurping Ali's rightful successorship. This tradition, which is recognized but also understood differently by Sunnis and Shias, recounts a conversation between the Prophet and his followers, as he lay bed-ridden during the last days of his life. The tradition states:

“When the Prophet's illness became serious, he said: Bring me writing materials that I may write for you something, after which you will not be led into error. Umar said: The illness has overwhelmed the Prophet. We have the Book of Quran and that is enough for us. Then the people differed about this and spoke many words. Then the Prophet said: Leave me. There ought not to be quarrelling in my presence.”⁴

Shias understand this event as Prophet Muhammad's attempt to write a will and testament that would have confirmed Ali's role as successor. Second caliph Umar's interference in this matter is yet another reason why Shias came to consider

³ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, published in 6 volumes by Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah, vol. 4, pp. 164-165, 1st edition, Egypt, 1313 AH, p. 281, Translation provided in Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p. 15.

⁴ Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Kitab al-Ilm, Bab 40, Vol. 1 (same with above), p. 41, Translation provided in Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 15-16.

him a chief conspirator against Ali.⁵ Without a prophet's will, Muslims were forced to choose a leader themselves. Soon after the Prophet's death, Umar met with a group of Muslim notables in Medina to discuss matters of succession. It is important to understand how Shias understand this dispute and how it has influenced Shia religion and culture.⁶

It was during this meeting that Umar nominated and shown his allegiance to Abu Bakr who was in turn elected by those present as the Prophet's successor and the Caliph of the Muslims. This election, however, had taken place in the absence of Ali, who along with his wife Fatima -the Prophet's daughter- and much of Prophet Muhammad's family was preparing the Prophet's body for burial. Even though angered at the nomination of Abu Bakr, Shias believe that Ali held back formal protest for the sake of Muslim unity.⁷

Though Ali continued to have his own supporters and companions, there were two more successors (Umar and Uthman) as Muslims Caliphs before he held that position. Ali's ascension to the Caliphate came on the heels of the controversial reign and murder of the third Caliph, Uthman, in 656 C.E. Uthman's rule had brought the

⁵ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 51-59.

⁶ For useful scholarly overviews of Shiism, Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, and Heinz Halm, *Shi'ism*. Trans. Janet Watson and Marian Hill (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Also, for a sociological history of Shiism in Iran, see Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from The Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 67.

⁷ For a traditional Shia understanding of this and other foundational events in Shia history, see S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 30-48.

formidable Bani Umayyad clan to power.⁸ Under Uthman, the Umayyads, a native Meccan clan, had become entrenched in leadership roles throughout Muslim territory, including important governorships.⁹

This gave the Umayyad clan a privileged and strong position in the Muslim community, but also caused a sense of dissatisfaction among many Muslim tribes, which eventually led to Uthman's murder. After Uthman's death, Ali's supporters urged him to accept the Caliphate. Although reluctant, Ali ultimately accepted the role and became the fourth and last "rightly guided" Caliph.¹⁰ For Shias, this was the first and only time in the history of Islam that the Muslim community was led by a faithful and true successor of the Prophet.¹¹

The huge political climate that led to Uthman's murder also continued after Ali came to power. The Umayyad clan and their supporters disputed Ali's election to the Caliphate and blamed his followers for Uthman's murder. Many of the Umayyad clan and companions relocated to Damascus to support their own candidate for Caliph, Muawiya Ibn Abi Sufyan, whom caliph Uthman chose him for the military

⁸ Bani Umayyad clan later take the leadership of Muslims but after the event of Ashura, their power decreased and later on have been defeated by Abbasiyad caliph. For more information see Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam: Abu-Ja'far Ibn Qiba Al-Razi and His Contribution to Imamite Shi'ite Thought* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993), pp. 83-85.

⁹ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p. 48.

¹⁰ Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali are called rightly guided caliphs among many Muslims factions. See Mohammad-Dja'far Mahdjoub, *The Evolution of Popular Eulogy of the Imams among the Shi'a* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p.121.

¹¹ For an interpretive history on succession and early Shiism, see Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.37.

governor of Syria. After Muawiya refused to swear allegiance to Ali, a conflict erupted between the armies of the two Muslim leaders.¹²

A court of arbitration was called to settle the conflict between Ali and Muawiya, though little progress was made. Instead, some of Ali's supporters, who thought his agreeing to arbitration compromised his position as a Caliph, turned against him. This group, known as the Kharajites or khawarej. They claimed that Ali's choice of arbitration was against God's will, and therefore for having gone against God, Ali was no longer a faithful Muslim. This act of declaring Ali a non-Muslim or "kafir" was the philosophical basis for the khawarej rebellion against Ali and their murder of him in the year 661.¹³

The murder of Ali ended the only period in Muslim history where a Shia Imam led the Islamic community. After Ali's death, the Umayyad's extended their control over Muslim lands and Muawiya was declared Caliph. Support for Ali and his descendents continued, though most of his supporters were isolated to the frontiers of Muslim territory, including a strong presence in the garrison town of Kufa (modern-day southern Iraq). Many of these supporters turned to Ali's sons Hasan and Hosein to continue their father's rightful struggle for leadership of the Muslim community.¹⁴

¹² See Vali Nasr, *Maududi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 149-160.

¹³ Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 19-34.

¹⁴ Ayatollah Jafar Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), p. 17.

However, shortly after his father's murder, Hasan -the elder of the two and the second Imam in the Shia tradition- renounced his claim to the Caliphate in order to avoid more bloodshed and disharmony among Muslims. Shias believe that, eight years after his abdication Hasan was poisoned to death by his wife on Muawiya's behalf and order. After the death of Muawiya and the ascension of his son Yazid to the Caliphate in 680, Hosein-Ali's second son and the third Shia Imam- claimed his leadership to the Muslim community.¹⁵

Yazid's reputation as a morally weak drunkard made his successorship infuriating to many Muslims. Hosein decided to make a bid for his rightful claim to the Caliphate due to request of his supporters in Kufa. He led a small group of companions and family members toward the Umayyad ruled town of Kufa where he planned to join up with a few thousand of his supporters and lead a campaign against Yazid in Damascus. When the Umayyad governor of Iraq Ubaydallah Ibn Ziyad discovered news of this plot he executed some of Hosein's leading supporters in Kufa and dispatched an army to block the Imam's access to that city.¹⁶

Despite being informed of this, Hosein continued toward Kufa only to be forced north of the city by Umayyad troops. Ibn Ziyad's army surrounded Hosein and his companions, making them decamp in the barren desert plains of Karbala. For the next several days, the Umayyad's tried to urge Hosein into renouncing his claim of leadership by cutting off the supply of fresh water to his camp. Finally, on the tenth

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁶ Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), pp. 167-174.

day of the Muslim month of Muharram 680, after failed negotiations and Hosein's refusal to pay tribute to Yazid, nearly 4000 Umayyad troops stormed Hosein's camp and slaughtered his companions.¹⁷

The Shias stories and recollections of this event which is known as Ashura (literally the "tenth of muharram in Arabic month") are tragic. Hosein and about seventy of his supporters were killed with brutality. His eldest son, Ali Akbar, died bravely while fighting the Umayyad forces. Hosein's brother, Abbas, was killed after both his arms were cut off as he attempted to deliver drinking water to the women and children of the camp.¹⁸

Hosein's nephew, Qasim, was killed on what was to be his wedding day in front of his bride. There is also the story of Hosein's infant son Ali Asghar, who was killed in his father's arms when an Umayyad archer shot the small child in the throat. In one popular Shia oral tradition, Hosein is imagined to have predicted the deaths of his family and the tragedy that was suppose to happen on him and his family:

"The infidels -the Umayyads- are in one side, and my sorrowful self on the other. Oppression and tyranny are exercised towards my family and me by a cruel unbelieving army. All the sorrows and troubles of this world have overwhelmed me. I am become a butt for the arrow of trouble. friends, like a bird I am utterly disabled, and unable to fly to my sacred nest. They are going to kill me prophet's grandson." ¹⁹

¹⁷ See David Thurffjell, *Living Shi'ism: Instances of Ritualisation among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 39-52.

¹⁸ This story did not begin to appear in descriptions of the battle of Karbala until several centuries after the fact. See for instance, Heniz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1999), pp. 15-16.

¹⁹ Sir Lewis Pelly, *The Miracle Play of Hasan and Husain*, Collected from oral tradition, Vol. 1 (London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1879), pp. 66-88.

Ultimately, Hosein and his friends were killed and decapitated by Umayyad soldiers. A few women and children -among them Hosein's son Ali Zayn al-Abidin- (the fourth Shia Imam) and his sister Zaynab were spared, and along with Hosein's head, taken to Yazid palace in Damascus. After the slaughtering, the camp was put to fire. The tragedy of Karbala is perhaps the single most important event in the early formation of the Shia religion.²⁰ The martyrdom of Hosein and his companions at Karbala was one of the defining turning points in Islamic history in shaping Shia identity and communal sense.²¹

The events in Karbala marked a moment of increased dissatisfaction in the Muslim community, often pointed by Shia Muslims today as the decisive root of Shia-Sunni separate identity.²² It was through the mournful commemoration of Ashura that the Shia began to develop a separate religious identity.²³ Before the martyrdom of Hosein, the supporters of Ali and his sons practiced the same form of Islam as their non-Shia rivals. Indeed, historian Heinz Helm suggests that the tragedy of Karbala "marked the 'big bang' that created the cosmos of Shiism and brought it into motion."²⁴

²⁰ Also see, Marshall G.S. Hodgson, "How Did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (1955), pp. 1-13.

²¹ Karbala is a city in Iraq, located about 100 km southwest of Baghdad.

²² Kamran Aghaie, *The Origins of the Sunnite-Shi'ite Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'ziyeh Tradition: The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 61-77.

²³ On the Ashura commemoration see, Yitzhak Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace the Origin of the Rituals of Ashura", *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 33 (1993), pp. 161-181.

²⁴ Heniz Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, pp. 8-16.

The Kufian Shia began the tradition of commemorating Ashura soon after the events at Karbala. Members of this community were burdened with an intense shame due to their failure to aid Hosein and his companions against Umayyad aggression. Instead, out of fear of the Umayyad authorities, the Kufian Shia—who had encouraged Hosein to come to Kufa with the promise of joining his struggle—did not rebel and were left with a guilt, that for many, was worse than death.²⁵

In remorse, these Shia began commemorating Ashura in informal gatherings during which they would pray for Hosein and his companions and beseech God for forgiveness. A subset of this community, led by Sulayman Ibn Surad, looked for a more emphatic solution to their suffering. This group, known as the Penitents (tawwabun), wanted to die as Hosein had died in an attempt to absolve their sins for failing to come to the Imam's assistance.²⁶

Therefore, they decided to lead a campaign against Umayyad forces that they intended lose. In early 685 they engaged a much larger Umayyad military contingent and most—as they had hoped— were killed. Halm has argued that the movement of the Kufan Penitents marked the true beginning of the Shia religion, as it “expressed all the essential elements and concepts of Shi'i piety. The willingness for self-sacrifice is the most outstanding feature, and it has remained unchanged to the present day.”²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20. See also Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 61-79.

²⁶ See Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, pp. 37-59.

²⁷ Heniz Halm, *Shi'a Islam*, p. 20.

Such thinking often links the campaign of the Penitents and their religious quest for martyrdom to the modern self-sacrifice (or “suicide”) operations undertaken by Shia militants in such places as Iran and Lebanon, but I would not suggest such a direct correlation. Instead, it is preferable to understand the sacrifice of the Penitents as part of the growing symbolism of Shia piety and religious culture. As Halm suggests, the Penitents are part of the larger development of Shia identity begun by the mourning faithful of Kufa.²⁸

The ritualized practices of this group gradually increased in popularity and spread throughout the greater Shia community. In this way, what originated as localized redemptive acts among the Shia of Kufa wherein the stories of the martyrs of Karbala, especially that of Hosein, were recounted, slowly emerged as the central tradition of Shia Islam.²⁹

The battle on the plain of Karbala was much more than the slaughter of a small band of pious loyalists who were faithful to the family of the Prophet by an overwhelming military force; it was also an ideological battle between a group of religiously devoted individuals and a militarily powerful political establishment, making Hosein the ultimate tragic-hero figure. The martyrdom of Hosein cannot be

²⁸ See Said Amir Arjomand, “Introduction: Shi’ism, Authority, and Political Culture”, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, edited by Said Amir Arjomand (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 15-42.

²⁹ See Andrew Newman, *The Formative Period of Twelver Shi’ism* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 49-60.

properly understood if considered merely as an isolated event in the early history of the Muslim community.³⁰

It must be placed, at least for the Shia community, as a powerful religious awakening rather than a mere historical event. This background chapter will provide a brief description of the schism between Shia and Sunni with particular emphasis on the political and legal systems, ritual practices, and theological doctrines. More importantly, this chapter will also depict the battle of Karbala from the historical and spiritual perspectives as seen by Shia historians and Shia piety³¹.

Islam, like most other religions, has always been characterized by a number of internal divisions. The major division in Islam is between the Sunni and the Shia. Islam is the second largest religion in the world and among them Shia make up about 10-20 per cent of the Muslim population.³² The majority of these Shia are called Twelver (Ithna Asharis, or Ja'farais), whose name derives from their belief that there were 12 imams, the last of whom has existed in a supernatural state of occultation from 874 AD to the present. Due to their predominance, they will be the primary concern of this research.

Twelver Shia are concentrated mostly in Iran (89 per cent), the Republic of Azerbaijan (75 per cent), Iraq (60-65 per cent), and also in Bahrain (70 per cent).

³⁰ See Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 92-134.

³¹ Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, p. 109.

³² Linda Walbridge, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 73.

Although in Bahrain, the state is under Sunnite rule. In Lebanon, the Twelver constitutes more than 40 per cent, the largest single religious group in that country. There are also large minorities in Kuwait (20 per cent), Qatar (20 per cent), Afghanistan (19 per cent), Pakistan (20 per cent of the total population, especially around Lahore), Tajikistan (5per cent), and India. Twelver Shia are also found in large numbers in Kashmir and the eastern oil producing Persian Gulf regions of Saudi Arabia, where they are the majority (11per cent of the Kingdom's total population).³³ The term "Shia" conveys the meaning of followers, party, group, associates, partisans, or in a rather loose sense, "supporters." In this rather neutral sense, the word "Shia" occurs a number of times in the Quran. A few verses are cited below:

"As for those who divide their religion and break up into sects (shia'yan), you have no part in them in the least: their affair is with Allah: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did (Al-An'am 6:159) Turn you back in repentance to Him, and fear Him: establish regular prayers, and be not you among those who join gods with Allah. Those who split up their religion, and become (mere) sects (Shiya'an), each party (hisbi) rejoicing in that which is with itself (Ar-rum 30:31-32). And most surely Abraham was among the Shia of him (i.e., Noah) (Quran 37:83). And he (Moses) went into the city at a time when people (of the city) were not watching, so he found therein two men fighting, one being of his Shia and the other being his enemy, and the one who was of his Shia cried out to him for help against the one who was of his enemy (Quran 28:15)."³⁴

The term "Shia" was a later usage as a particular designation for the followers of Ali, and thereby a distinct denomination within Islam. In the infant years of Islamic history, one could hardly speak of a Shia community in the strict sense. There were, at best, partisans for one or the other of the leading personalities: the party of

³³ Werner Ende, "Shi'ites in Arabia," *Encyclopedia Iranica* (June 2004), Vol.? No.?, Year?, p.?

³⁴ The Holy Qur'an, Text and Translation, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali (Kuala Lumpur: publisher?, 2005), p.?. See also Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project website: <http://www.alislam.org/encyclopedia/chapter1b/12.html> (accessed March 1, 2009).

Ali, as well as that of Uthman, the third “caliph” or “successor,” and the Umayyad rulers after him. At this early time of Islam, there was very little that religiously separated the Shia and Sunni.

Their separation was merely political; however, once the Shia political aspirations were more or less denied and the Muslim community transformed into an empire, a distinctly Arab empire, the Shia slowly began to withdraw from the larger political implications of their movement. It was at that point, particularly after the martyrdom of Hosein in the battle of Karbala in 680 AD, that Shia began to withdraw from society, particularly politically.³⁵ They also began to become a distinct religious sect, and the schism began to widen.

The Sunni-Shia Historical Difference

The roots of the Sunni-Shia schism are found in the crisis of succession that occurred after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. When the Prophet died in 632 AD, the community was relatively unprepared to deal with the consequences of who should be rightfully named the successor to Muhammad’s leadership of the Islamic faithful. The Shia believe the rightful successor was Ali, and the succession should have continued through the family line of Muhammad.

³⁵ Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, p. 119.

The Sunnis believe that the Prophet's successor should be chosen through Ijma³⁶ and among the Companions of the Prophet and the succession should not be limited to Ahl al-Bayt.³⁷ During this time of crisis three of the Prophet's closest companions, Umar, Abu Bakr, and Abu Ubaydah, who were from the Prophet's tribe Quraysh and who had migrated with him to Yathrib (Medina) during his migration (hijra) from Mecca in 622 AD, stated that the successor should be from Quraysh. Umar raised Abu Bakr's hand in a public gathering and declared him Muhammad's successor.³⁸

Those present who were mostly from Medina accepted this and thus the institution of the caliphate came into being. Some wanted Ali, but Ali was not as popular as Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr ruled only for three years and shortly before he passed away, he appointed Umar as the second caliph in 634 AD. Umar ruled for ten years before he was assassinated. He left a process of how to choose the next caliph based on a previously appointed committee of notables to select the third caliph. They selected Uthman, who was killed in 656 AD by a disgruntled mob unhappy with his policies.³⁹

Following Uthman's death, Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, assumed the position of caliph. Many of Ali's supporters believed that the Prophet before his

³⁶ *Ijma'* is an Arabic term referring ideally to the consensus of the *ummah* (the community of Muslims, or followers of Islam). Technically, it is "the unanimous doctrine and opinion of the recognized religious authorities at any given time."

³⁷ Ahl al-Bayt is a phrase meaning People of the House, or family. In the Islamic tradition, it refers to the household of Muhammad.

³⁸ See Kamran Scott Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran: The Origins of the Sunnite-Shi'ite Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'ziyeh Tradition* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 192-196.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 197.

death, selected Ali as his successor on more than one occasion. For example, they believed that shortly before his death and following his final pilgrimage to Mecca, the Prophet gave a speech, at a place called Ghadir Khum, in which he raised Ali's hand and said to the people as follows:

“Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?” and they replied: “Yes!” And he took Ali's hand and said: “Of whomsoever I am Lord (Mawla), then Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be thou the supporter of whoever supports Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.”⁴⁰

Within the few short years of Ali's rule, the caliphate was racked by two civil wars emanating from two opposition movements. Ali was first challenged by a coalition headed by Muhammad's widow, Aisha (the daughter of Abu Bakr), and later on he was challenged by the forces of Muawiyah, the governor of Syria and a relative of Uthman. As the head of the state, Ali insisted that prosecuting the killers of Uthman was his prerogative. His opponents insisted that he should deliver the killers to them. First, Ali crushed a triumvirate led by Aisha, the youngest wife of the Prophet. The “Battle of the Camel,” so named because it took place around the camel on which Aisha was mounted, marked the first time a caliph had led his army against another Muslim army.⁴¹

No sooner had Ali put down this rebellion, he was faced with another military challenge that had more long-range significance from the powerful general Muawiyah, governor of Syria. Securely established in Damascus with a strong army,

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴¹ Barnaby Rogerson, *The Heirs of Muhammad: Islam's First Century and the Origins of the Sunni-Shia Split* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2007), p. 297.

Muawiyah, the nephew of Uthman, had refused to step down and accept Ali's appointment of a replacement. In 657 AD, at Siffin (in modern-day Syria), Ali led his army against his rebellious governor. The conflict resulted in a stalemate, and eventually, an arbitrated settlement.⁴²

This unsatisfactory outcome yielded two results that would have lasting effects. A splinter group of Alids (Shia of Ali), the Kharijites or “seceders,” broke with Ali for having failed to subdue Muawiyah; Muawiyah walked away from Siffin and continued to govern Syria, extending his rule to Egypt as well. When Kharijites murdered Ali in 661 AD, Muawiyah (reigned 661-680 AD) laid claim to the caliphate and ushered in the Umayyad era (661- 750 AD).⁴³

Muawiyah and his successors were particularly hostile toward Ali's descendants and their supporters. It was in this environment of tension, distrust, and conflict along with the crisis resulting from the death of Muawiyah and the accession to the throne of his unpopular son, Yazid, that the Battle of Karbala took place in 680 AD. Prior to the battle of Karbala, there was very little religiously that separated Shia and Sunni. The separation was merely political and focused on the question of leadership. However, after the Battle of Karbala and throughout centuries, further

⁴² Ibid., pp. 306-309.

⁴³ Hamid Algar, Shi'ism and Iran in the Eighteenth Century: In *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), pp. 45-62.

divergence in political and legal systems, ritual practices, and theological doctrines began to crystallize.⁴⁴

In regards to the political and legal systems, the fundamental difference between the two factions is the Sunni belief in the caliphate, as opposed to the Shia belief in the Imamate. The caliph was the selected and elected successor of the Prophet. He succeeded to political and military leadership but not to Muhammad's religious authority. By contrast, for the Shia, leadership of the Muslim community is vested in the Imam who though not a Prophet, is the divinely inspired, sinless, infallible, religio-political leader of the community.⁴⁵

Shia believes that devotion to the Imams brings them closer to God. The Imam must be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali, the first Imam. He is both political leader and religious guide, the final authoritative interpreter of God's will as formulated in Islamic law. Sunni Islam on the other hand, came to place final religious authority in interpreting Islam in the consensus (ijma') or collective judgment of the community (the consensus of the ulama), the Shia believe in continued divine guidance through their divinely inspired guide, the Imam and consider the caliphs to be usurpers of the authority of the Imams.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ali Shariati, *Jehat-giri-e tabaqati-e eslam, [class orientations in Islam]* (Tehran: Hoseiniye Ershad, 1980) p. 139.

⁴⁵ David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 7-8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

In present prevailing Twelver Shia thought, a Shia scholar, who is recognized by his peers as sufficiently learned in the law, bears the title of Mujtahid, one qualified to engage in Ijtihad, or the exercise of independent reasoning in applying the law to specific issues at hand, whether personal or public. Few Shia are considered educated enough in the legal and spiritual tradition to attempt Ijtihad; anyone lacking such expertise is required to follow the rulings of a living jurist, a Mujtahid, as his marja al-taqlid or “Source or reference of Emulation.”⁴⁷

In Twelver Shia, Marja is in practice the third highest authority on religion and law, right after the Prophet and the Imams. On the ritual realm, one of the aspects of devotional practice that continues to cause rupture between Sunni and Shia up to the present day is the Shia Ashura ritual. The tragic death of Hosein and his relatives and companions in the battle of Karbala on the tenth day (Ashura) of the Islamic lunar month of Muharram is, until this day, commemorated annually throughout the Shia world.⁴⁸

Since the Battle of Karbala, there developed five major rituals including the memorial services (majalis al-ta'ziya), the visitation of Hosein's tomb in Karbala particularly on the occasion of the 10th day of the month of Muharram (Ashura) and the 40th day after the battle (ziyarat Ashura and ziyarat arba'in), the public mourning processions (al-mawakib al-hoseiniyya), the representation of the battle of Karbala in the form of a play (tashabih), and the self-flagellation (zangeel and tatbir). Ingrained

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁸ Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 31.

within these major rituals are other rituals such as, chest beating (latm), recitation of Karbala narratives (qira'ah) by a reciter (qari or khateeb), and niyahah (recitation of rhythmic lamentation poetry).⁴⁹

The Sunnis take offense to these rituals because in some localities they are used to debase the first three caliphs, Abu Bakr, Omar, and Uthman whom the Shia consider not the legitimate successors of the Prophet. For Sunni, however, all four caliphs including Ali are considered the Rightly- Guided Caliphs (Al-Khulafa-ur-Rashidun). Furthermore, Wahhabi branch of Sunni consider the visitation of Hosein's tomb and other Imams as shirk or idolatry and view those who practice such rituals as heretics.

Regarding the theological doctrines, Twelver Shia do not differ significantly in the tenets and prescriptions that are part of the Sunni "five pillars of Islam," such as daily ritual prayer and fasting. However, they do categorize them by dividing them into Usul al-Din, "Roots of Religion" or matters of belief, and Furu al-Din, "Branches of Religion" or "legal".⁵⁰ All these important and key distinctions between Sunni and Shia began to crystallize after the battle of Karbala. The battle is considered by Shia theology as the key event shaping all subsequent Shia history.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Yitzhak Nakash, "An Attempt to Trace", pp. 151-153.

⁵⁰ Christoph Marcinkowski, *Twelver Shi'ite Islam: Conceptual and Practical Aspects* (Singapore: Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, 2006), pp. 81-83.

⁵¹ Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Āshūrā in Twelver Shī'ism* (New York: Mouton, 1979), p. 141.

The Shia Islam, and the Event of Karbala

The martyrdom of Hosein has been regarded by the Shia community as a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves. In many ways, it is the most important symbolic event for Shia, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad because it is the ultimate exemplar of the Sunnite-Shia conflict and it is the decisive root of their separate identity. Although historians have treated Hosein's martyrdom with varying degrees of objectivity, this event has never been regarded by Muslims, especially Shia as a mere historical event. The events of Karbala will be depicted from both the historical and spiritual angle.⁵²

Shias look to the history of their Imams, all of whom died violently except for the twelfth Imam, who has gone into hiding and is not dead. In particular the death of Husayn in the Battle of Karbala—son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet, and entitled *sayyid al-shuhada*, prince of martyrs—is exemplified in Shia Islam. It is generally believed throughout Islam that those who die in defense of the faith will be free of sin and thus pardoned from judgment in the final days, that they will go straight to paradise where they will occupy a special place, and even that they are allowed to return to earth to fight on behalf of the faith.⁵³

Prominent historians have written many different accounts of the events of Karbala. The concern here is not with the historical accuracy of the narratives that profess to recount the details of this battle. The purpose of retelling the historical

⁵² Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation*, pp. 118-130.

⁵³ See Said Amir Arjomand, Introduction: Shi'ism, Authority, and Political Culture, *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 63-65.

point of view is to depict what the Shia has considered the “correct” representations of this event.⁵⁴

The most commonly accepted narratives of the Battle of Karbala begin with the Prophet’s grandson Hosein receiving various letters from Muslims living in southern Iraq asking him to come to their assistance and rid them of the tyrannical rule of the caliph Yazid. The Prophet’s grandson Hosein, who at the time lived in Mecca after his flight from Medina, received various letters from Muslims living in Kufa. These letters urged him to lead the Kufans into revolt against Yazid and assured him of their loyalty and allegiance.⁵⁵

Kufa was a unique place, and the Kufans a peculiar people. When Ali became the forth caliph he shifted his capital from Medina to Kufa, and ever since that city became the home of those who claimed partisanship of the Ahl al-Bayt. At the time of Muawiyah’s death, Kufa was still very strongly pro Alid. Thus, when the opportunity arose to battle Yazid, the Kufans, who still regarded themselves as the Shia (supporters) of the Ahl al-Bayt, turned to Hosein to lead them. Just as Yazid’s father, Muawiyah, faced Hosein’s father, Ali, in battle two decades earlier, Hosein and Yazid were rival contenders for leadership of the Muslim community.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, p. 56.

⁵⁵ S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development*, pp. 177-180.

⁵⁶ Kamran Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 11.

Hosein left Mecca for Kufa with all his family including his little children counting on the support of the Kufans. According to most sources, his entourage had a small group of relatives and followers capable of fighting. His fighting men consisted of thirty-two horsemen and forty-foot soldiers. Other authorities fix the number at forty-five horsemen and one hundred foot soldiers.⁵⁷

Hosein arrived in an empty desert named Karbala, located near the Euphrates River in Southern Iraq on Thursday the second of Muharram in the year of 680 AD. The Governor of Kufa, Ibn Zayd, under the orders of Yazid sent four thousand men to intercept Hosein and his followers. Ibn Zayd's men arrived on the third of Muharram under the command of Umar Ibn Saad and prevented Hosein and his followers from reaching the river. Ibn Saad, who was a Qurayshi, the son of one of the Prophet's companion, Saad b. Abi Waqqas, was trying to persuade the governor of Kufa to find some peaceful means to avoid shedding the blood of the grandson of the Prophet, but his requests were all in vain.⁵⁸

Yazid was getting impatient with this delay. He kept pressuring Ibn Zayd to bring the matter to a quick conclusion. Umar Ibn Saad stationed a force of five hundred cavalry on the road to the river, and for three days before the massacre on the

⁵⁷ See Jafri Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, p. 105; S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development*, p. 189.

⁵⁸ Mahmoud Diani, *Negahi Be Farhange Shahadat*, [A look on Culture of Martyrdom] (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2000), p. 18.

tenth of Muharram, Hosein and his companions suffered terribly from thirst. Even under such brutal conditions, Hosein refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid.⁵⁹

Fear of being let down by Ibn Saad, Ibn Zayd decided to prod him to finish the job by sending another commander named Shamir Ibn Dhul Jawshan (commonly written as Shimr) with the orders that if Ibn Saad feels any restraint in dealing with Hosein, Shamir should depose him and take charge to end the matter quickly and effectively. Ibn Saad got the message. He did not want to lose his command neither the accompanying awards.⁶⁰

Soon after receiving these new orders on the evening of the ninth of Muharram, Ibn Saad delivered a final ultimatum to Hosein. Hosein asked for a day's respite, which was granted. At this point Hosein assembled his relatives and supporters and delivered a speech. This speech is unanimously reported in the events of the night of Ashura by the sources through different authorities, and it proves a useful tool in understanding Hosein's thinking. He said:

“Tomorrow our end will come. I ask you all to leave me alone and to go away to safety. I free you from your responsibilities for me, and I do not hold you back. Night will provide you a cover; use it as a steed. You may take my children with you to save their lives.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development*, p. 110.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 188.

⁶¹ See Jafri Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, p.17; S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development*, p. 189.

The Hosein supporters refused to leave their beloved leader behind. They showed an unshakable loyalty and supported him wholeheartedly and enthusiastically despite the crippling thirst and their looming death. They spent their last night praying, reciting the Quran, and worshipping God.⁶² On the morning of Ashura, the day of the massacre, Hosein went out of the camp and saw Umar Ibn Saad mobilizing his troops to start the hostility. He stared at the intimidating army, and as large as it was Hosein showed no signs of compromise. Hosein raised his hands in prayer:⁶³

“The decisive battle finally took place in which each and every male member in Hosein’s small entourage was martyred fighting in the battlefield with the exception of one of Hosein sons, Ali (Zin Al-Abidin) who was seriously ill and did not take part in the fighting. He was spared when Zaynab, Hosein’s sister covered him under her arms and Ibn Saad protected him from Shemr’s sword.”⁶⁴

Hosein was left alone, one man against thousands. He took them on, fighting them bravely, and kept fighting, receiving many wounds in the process. Thousands of enemy fighters were surrounding him but none dared to move toward him to deliver the final blow. Finally, it was Shamir who advanced with a small group of soldiers, but even he did not dare to deliver the final blow on Hosein. At last, the son of Ali rose and threw himself on the Umayyads. Attacked from every side, Hosein finally fell face down on the ground just in front of his tent and was beheaded while the women and children watched the dreadful scene.⁶⁵

⁶², Mohammad-ja'far Mahdjoub, *The Evolution of Popular Eulogy of the Imams among the Shi'a* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 44.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 189.

⁶⁴ S. Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development*, p. 192.

⁶⁵ Jafri Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, p. 119.

The tragic day has since been known as Ashura, the tenth of the month of Muharram. After the battle of Karbala, all the male members of Hosein were beheaded and all their heads, including Hosein's, were taken as trophies to Yazid in Damascus, while the female members of the party were taken captive along with Hosein's son, Ali. As the women were carried away to Kufa, they passed the corpses of the dead, still lying on the sand. Zaynab cried out in lamentation:

“my Muhammad, on you the angels of heaven prayed. Behold Hosein naked under the sky, soiled with his blood and dismembered. O my Muhammad, your daughters are captives, and your male descendants lying dead blown about by the wind.”⁶⁶

The above historical events surrounding the battle of Karbala are clear and well documented; however, their pietistic interpretation may not always be as clear. The battle of Karbala soon became the event of central significance to the entire Shia theology. Its details became highly elaborated upon and surrounded with numerous non-historical embellishments. While any academic historian of Shia will present the details of this history, it is only the event as seen through the eye of the believer or Shia piety that can give it the spiritual dimension felt by the Shia. The battle of Karbala is considered by Shia piety to be as important in the religion's history of Muslims as the battle of Badr.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

⁶⁷ The Battle of Badr was fought in 624 CE in the Hejaz of western Arabia, was a key battle in the early days of Islam and a turning point in Muhammad's struggle with his opponents among the Quraysh in Mecca. It is one of the few battles specifically mentioned in the Muslim holy book, the Quran.

It is believed that the martyrs of Badr are favored by God and were supported by host of angels. Those same angels came to Hosein on his way from Medina to Mecca and offered to lend him supports, as God had commanded them. However, he told them to witness his death and guard his tomb until the coming of the Mahdi (the Twelve Imam).⁶⁸ Shia piety also believes that God is supposed to have chosen one thousand men who would protect His religion from the beginning of the world until its end. Three hundred and thirteen men accompanied and defended Talut,⁶⁹

Three hundred and thirteen men fought in Badr, and at the end of time, it is believed that three hundred and thirteen men will support the Mahdi. That leaves only sixty-one men; these were the companions of Hosein. Thus, God chose the men who fought and died with Hosein for this honor before the creation of the world. They faced death but God protected them against pain as he did the martyrs of Badr.⁷⁰

Shia piety has viewed the Battle of Karbala as a divinely preordained event. It believes that Hosein knew beforehand that his opposition would be futile. It also believes that Hosein's defeat in Karbala was not the result of a fluke or some lapse on his part as a military leader, had he wanted, he could have avoided entrapment outside Kufa. If Hosein's foreknowledge is preordained, the entire meaning of the event changes. Instead of being a failed military coup inspired by a desire to seize power and rectify political wrongs, the event becomes a moral play whose primary

⁶⁸ Jafri Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, p. 124.

⁶⁹ Talut marched with his soldiers to confront Jalut (Goliath), the small force of Talut including Dawud. Jalut's army was larger than Talut's but was able to win as mentioned in the Quran (Al-Baqarah 2:251).

⁷⁰ Jafri Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, p. 125.

intent is to demonstrate a higher truth. By advancing to certain defeat, Hosein was testifying to his followers that their cause was one so important and vital to merit their dying for it.⁷¹

Furthermore, his voluntary death was not simply a demonstration for the benefit of his contemporaries, but rather presented further proof for all future generations of what exactly the Prophet Muhammad's teachings meant for Muslims: piety is more important than temporal power, and only a just ruler is a Muslim one. Karbala casts a shadow forward in time: those today that choose to come together as a Shia to honor the Imams will be tested and suffer prosecution for their loyalty just as were the companions of Hosein. Thus God underscores the pivotal importance of Karbala by patterning world events in every age, past, present, and future, so as to conform with events of the seventh century.⁷²

The tragedy of Karbala, which was in the words of Ayatollah Khomeini the symbol of blood's triumph-the blood of the martyrs-over the sword, transformed not only the history of Shia but also human history forever. Khomeini viewed the battle of Karbala not as limited to any particular period of time but a continuing struggle in the "Eternal Now." In one of Khomeini's statements delivered in Qom on the first night of Muharram, he stated:

⁷¹ Jafri Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām*, pp. 121-123.

⁷² Sayid Wahid Akhtar, "Karbala: An Enduring Paradigm of Islamic Revivalism", *Al-Tawhid*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Spring 1996), p 26.

“The uprising and the movement that Hosein initiated and the battle in which he himself was martyred but overthrew Umayyad concepts, the protection of this battle, movement and uprising is necessary. If we want to make our state and its freedom permanent then we have to protect this secret”⁷³

Shia believes that freedom is at the core of Hosein’s message. The Imam fought for freedom of all humanity. He fought against hunger, poverty, tyranny, exploitation and injustice. He knowingly chose death because it was the Will of God. In his speech delivered before his journey to Iraq, he spoke of his choice in the following words:⁷⁴

“O God, You know that we did not seek, in what we have done, acquisition of power, or ephemeral possessions. Rather, we seek to manifest the truths of Your religion and establish righteousness in Your lands, so that the wronged among Your servants may be vindicated, and that men may abide by the duties (fara'id), laws (sunan) and Your ordinances (ahkam).”⁷⁵

⁷³ Epic of Karbala, Jafariyanews website, http://www.jafariyanews.com/oct2k2/4_marajeazadari.htm (accessed May 10, 2008).

⁷⁴ See Sayid Wahid Akhtar, “Karbala”, p. 19.

⁷⁵ For discussions of Shi'i Islam, see for example Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p.60; David Pinault, *The Shiites*, p.92; Roger M. Savory, “The Export of Ithna Ashari Shi'ism: Historical and Ideological Background”, in *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim The Shi'a Conception of Jihad 141 World*, edited by Menashri David (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 13–39; and Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani, “Doctrines of Shi'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices”, in (name of book?), edited by Shah-Kazemi Reza (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), p.38. As regards particular Shi'i practices, particularly prior to the Iranian Revolution, prayer for example assumed a less significant role than in Sunnism due to the Occultation of the 12th Imam. In addition, some prayers (known as du'a or munajat) are designed specifically for Shi'a believers, and are used on special occasions or devotional reasons. See, Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, p. 181. Other general differences in practice include the importance in Shi'ism of visiting holy Shi'i shrines; the existence of temporary marriages (muta, or sigha in Farsi); religious dissimulation (taqiyya); stricter laws of divorce when compared to Sunnis; and a more accommodating attitude toward women, e.g. in regard to inheritance. See *ibid.*, pp. 181–183.

The Development of Islam in Iran

Most scholars date the origins of Persian identity back to the Achaemenid Persian Empire of the sixth century BCE, which, at its zenith, established a polity from the Aegean Sea to the Indus River.⁷⁶ One of the unifying elements of the Achaemenid Empire was the Zoroastrian faith—based on the prophetic revelations of Zoraster—a monotheistic tradition that espoused ethical conduct and the moral needs of the populous.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the empire promoted agricultural, free trade, and encouraged tolerance among its subjects. The empire fell to Alexander in 331 BCE but, despite this, the Zoroastrian faith and other aspects of Persian identity continued to develop under Hellenistic influences.⁷⁸

For over 2,500 years, Iran has appealed to many of the great empires of East and the West. Throughout its turbulent history, Iran served as an ideal ground for various settlers and invaders such as: Alexander the Great, as well as Arabs, Ottomans, Mongols, Turks and Tatars. Although the nation experienced several invasions, Iran has never been directly colonized and has struggled to preserve its identity because Iranians take pride in their “national spirit” and throughout the centuries, they strove to maintain their common identity. Jamshid Amuzegar former Prime Minister of the late Shah wrote: “We were invaded by Greeks, Arabs,

⁷⁶ Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam: The Classic Age of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 118.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 126-130.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.119.

Mongols, and Turks, but we did not lose our originality, because foreign invaders would find a richer culture in Persians than that of their own.”⁷⁹

Iran known to the world under Cyrus the Great (559-30 BCE), who established the Achaemenid Empire and set a big imperial army dominancy for protecting the security and the religious freedom of the people he conquered. During his time Zoroastrianism spread through Iran and became the official state religion by the late 6th century BCE, disseminating Zoroastrian concepts, such as free will, across the Empire and influencing the development of other religions such as Judaism and Christianity.⁸⁰

During the Sassanid period Arab Muslims invaded Iran in the time of Umar, the second caliph (637) and conquered it after several great battles. The last Sassanid ruler, Yazdegerd III, fled from one district of Persia to another until a local miller killed him for his money at -Marv a northeast state- in 651. In the reign of Yazdgerd III, the last Sassanid ruler of the Persian Empire, a Muslim army secured the conquest of Persia after their decisive defeats of the Sassanid army at the Battle of Walaja in 633 and Battle of al-Qādisiyyah in 636, but the final military victory didn't come until 642 when the Persian army was defeated at the Battle of Nahāvand. Then, in 651,

⁷⁹ H. William Forbis, *Fall of the Peacock Throne: The Story of Iran* (New York, Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 40-45.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-30.

Yazdgerd III was murdered at Marv, ending the dynasty. His son Peroz II escaped through the Pamir Mountains in what is now Tajikistan and arrived in Tang China.⁸¹ By 674, Muslims had conquered Greater Khorasan (which included modern Iranian Khorasan province and modern Afghanistan and parts of central Asia). The Islamic conquest of Persia ended the Sassanid Empire and led to the eventual decline of the Zoroastrian religion in Persia. Over time, the majority of Iranians converted to Islam. However, most of the achievements of the previous Persian civilizations were not lost, but were absorbed by the new Islamic polity. Arab invaders brought Islam to Iran in the mid-7th century CE, and nearly all of Iran had converted by the end of the 11th century.⁸²

At the time of Islam's introduction in the seventh century CE, the Persian Gulf region was in a state of political and social turmoil. The two main empires, the Persian Sasanian Empire and the Byzantine Empire, were engaged in a protracted conflict, which weakened both polities to advancing Muslim forces. In 633CE, the year of the Prophet Muhammad's death, Muslim forces captured Hira, a Sasanian town near the Euphrates River.⁸³

This was followed by a second offensive in 637CE, in which the Sasanian capital Ctesiphon was captured. In less than thirty years after its introduction, Islam spread throughout the Gulf region, uniting the former subjects of the Byzantine and

⁸¹ Said Amir Arjomand, *Introduction: Shi'ism, Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 1-24.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 22-24.

⁸³ See Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 50.

Sasanian Empires into the first Muslim dynasty of the Umayyads, which lasted from 661 to 750CE. The faith introduced a new social and political system to the region, one unified by the equality of its adherents.⁸⁴

The Development of Shia Islam in Iran

After the sudden death of the Prophet in 632 CE, a debate broke out within the Muslim community regarding leadership and succession. The majority within the community believed that a new leader, called the *khalifa* or Caliph, should be elected from within the community. A minority believed that the Prophet had designated a successor, his cousin and son-in-law Ali, and that leadership should come from the bloodline of the Prophet and be determined through inheritance.⁸⁵

This division in the understanding of leadership ultimately evolved into the Sunni and Shii factions, respectively. Shii Islam underwent an additional schism over succession of leadership, creating the Ismaili Shii faction, which exist primarily in South Asia today, and the Twelver Shiis, which predominate in Iran but also have substantial numbers in Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon. In 874 CE, the Twelver Shiis' Imam disappeared. In addition to the split between Sunni and Shii Muslims, political authority of the *ummah* has undergone several changes since the time of the Prophet.

⁸⁴ See John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 35.

⁸⁵ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 69-113.

Ideally, the community should be united and governed by one “rightly guided leader,” the *Imam* or *Khalifa*.⁸⁶

Shia Muslims believe in hiding and returning of Imamam *Mahdi*, the “expected one” to restore justice to the world at the end of the ages.⁸⁷ Within this structure of religious and political authority, Iran has developed its own particular forms of leadership. Under the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722), the Twelver Shia Ulama became closely aligned with the royal court, which embraced Twelver Shiism as its official religion. Under the Safavids and later the Qajars, the Ulama developed a hierarchy structured according to knowledge and tasks they perform for society and the crown. The highest level of Ulama in Iran is the *Mujtahid* or *Marja’i taqlid*, who is qualified to practice *ijtihad*, discernment of the law, and issue legal edicts, or *fatvas*.⁸⁸

Twelver Shiism and Persian identity did not formally unite until the creation of the Safavid Dynasty in 1501CE. Its founder, Isma’il, called on the legacy of the Twelve Imams, particularly of Ali, to justify conquest of its Sunni Ottoman neighbors to the West and Sunni Uzbeks to the North.⁸⁹ In addition to military conquest, Isma’il and his successors spread Persian art, literature and language to its new territories,

⁸⁶ *Imam*, has come to mean several thing in Islam. It still refers to the one “rightly guided” leader in Shii Islam. It also refers to the one who leads a mosque in Sunni Islam.

⁸⁷ Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shi’ism and Constitutionalism in Iran* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1977), pp. 57-61.

⁸⁸ Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London: IB Tauris &Co., 1989), p. 12. *Fatva* is the Persian transliteration of the Arabic *Fatwa*.

⁸⁹ Abdolala Soudavar, “The Early Safavids and Their Cultural Interactions with Surrounding States”, in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, edited by Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), p. 90.

particularly in the form of Persian manuscripts, which left their artistic mark from Constantinople to Calcutta. The Safavid Dynasty collapsed in 1722 after an Afghani invasion, leaving the region in a state of political chaos.⁹⁰

The Safavid and Qajar Dynasties called on the Ulama to legitimate their authority; in return, the monarchy acted as the ideal Muslim ruler by upholding Shari'a law and protecting the faith. These dynastic rulers asserted their right to rule not on lineage to the Prophet but, rather, on behalf of the Hidden Imam; they described their leadership as *zilla allah*, the shadow of God.⁹¹ This claim to rule sparked considerable debate within the ranks of the Ulama over the limits of temporal authority in the absence of the Hidden Imam but, ultimately, the majority of Ulama backed the new leaders.

Later on during the The Safavid Empire, they declared Shi'a Islam the official state religion in 1501, employing a ruthless campaign of forced conversions and inviting Arab Shi'a theologians into the country to convert the mostly Sunni population. By the late 17th century, Shi'ism had dominated Iran, setting it apart from and creating antagonism with its Sunni neighbors. The Safavid Empire collapsed in 1722, and, in 1796, the Qajars reunified Iran after a brutal tribal civil war.⁹²

⁹⁰ Abdolala Soudavar, *The Early Safavids and their Cultural Interactions with Surrounding States* (Washington: University of Washington press, 2002), pp. 92-106.

⁹¹ Said Amir Arjomand, *Introduction: Shi'ism, Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 1-24.

⁹² Abdul-Hadi Hairi, *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism* (Netherland: Leiden, 1977), pp. 61-65.

Under the Qajars, a *Mujtahid* was appointed to officiate over religious affairs and to maintain religious property and endowments, the *vaqf*.⁹³ Also under the Qajars, the rule of law was divided between *Shari'a* courts, which administered civil law based on *Shari'a* and applied by *Mujtahids*, and '*Urf*' law, which governed over criminal and some commercial cases.⁹⁴ By the 20th century, therefore, the Ulama and the monarchy had a mutually reinforcing relationship with both shared and separate spheres of influence.⁹⁵

Throughout the Qajar Dynasty, Shi'a ulema enjoyed increased autonomy from the state. Under the reign of Fat'h Ali Shah (1797-1834), the Shi'a ulema took responsibility for religious, judicial, and educational institutions. By the late 1800s, the Iranian public was dissatisfied with the Qajar Dynasty, leading to the 1905 Constitutional Revolution. The constitutional movement granted political authority to the ulama by creating an assembly of five mujtahids to review all legislation and ensure its compatibility with Sharia. However, the Iranian constitutional monarchy was short-lived, and the reza shah soon resumed political predominance, backed by Russian and British intervention.⁹⁶

⁹³ *Vaqf* is the Persian transliteration of the Arabic *waqf*.

⁹⁴ Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London: IB Tauris & Co., 1989), p. 8.

⁹⁵ Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 39.

⁹⁶ See Davud Amini, *Jam'iyat-e Fada'iyān-i Eslām va naqsh-e ān dar tahavvulat-e siyāsī-e ejtemā'i-e Irān*, [The Fadayān association and their role in Islamic Revolution of Iran] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslāmī-e Irān, 2002), p. 137. See also Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 64.

Conclusion

After the demise of Prophet Muhammad, there was a disagreement in the Muslim community about who can succeed the Prophet. This issue split the Muslim community into two main factions: those who supported Abu Bakr and his successors Umar and Uthman, whom are called Sunni and those who supported Ali -the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law— and later his descendents whom are called Shia. Both Shias and Sunni brings numerous quotations and sayings –hadith- recognized by Muslim scholars addressed the Prophet Prophet Muhammad's favoring of Ali or Abu Bakar, Umar and Othman.

The assasination of Ali ended the only period in Muslim history where a Shia Imam led the Islamic community. Support for Ali and his descendents continued, though most of his supporters were isolated to the frontiers of Muslim territory, including a strong presence in the garrison town of Kufa. Many of these supporters turned to Ali's sons for leadership of the Muslim community.

Today, Shia Islam underwent an additional schism over succession of leadership, creating the Ismaili Shia faction, and the Twelver Shias, which predominate in Iran but also have substantial numbers in Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon. In 874 CE, the Twelver Shias' Imam disappeared. In Iran, under the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722), the Twelver Shia Ulama became closely aligned with the royal court, which embraced Twelver Shiism as its official religion.

The Safavid and then the Qajar Dynasties called on the Ulama to legitimate their authority. The monarchy system in Iran, acted as the ideal Muslim ruler by upholding Shari'a law and protecting the faith. These dynastic rulers asserted their right to rule on behalf of the Hidden Imam or Imam Mahdi. By the 1979, Islamic revolution in Iran, ultimately, the Shia Ulama decided to rule on Iran without the old monarchy system of the Shah of Iran.

CHAPTER 2

IRAN'S REVOLUTION AND THE ROLE OF SCHOLARS IN TEACHING OF ISTISHHAD

Introduction

Summer of 1953 was an important day in Iranian history. Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq was a major figure in modern Iranian history who served as the Prime Minister of Iran from 1951 to 1953 when he was removed from power by a coup d'état supported by USA and Britain. Dr. Mosaddeq was passionately opposed to foreign intervention in Iran. As a lawyer and a parliament member, he is most famous as the Founder of the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, which had been under British control through the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), today known as British Petroleum (BP). In the aftermath of the Mossadeq downfall in 1953 the Shah consolidated power with considerable assistance from SAVAK.

Mohammad Mosaddeq was ousted from power on August 19, 1953, in a coup d'état, totally supported and funded by the British and U.S. governments and led by General Fazlollah Zahedi as military commander of the army. The American operation came to be known as Operation Ajax in America, happened on "28 Mordad 1332 (1953) coup in Iran, after its date on the Iranian calendar. Dr. Mosaddeq was imprisoned for three years and subsequently put under house arrest until the end of his life. This affected the soul of Iranian Shia society and became a reason of revolution.

The 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran

After the pro-Western 1953 coup d'état, Tudeh¹ was banned but maintained a prominent and efficient after that date. Even though later Ayatollah Khomeini ranted against Marxism and materialism, he allowed and encouraged his supporters to ally and cooperate with Tudeh before revolution. In turn, the latter sycophantically supported the Ayatollah. All the way into the 1979 Islamic Revolution and thereafter, this was true of Ayatollah Khomeini's trusted faithful who ran the mass organizing; The Tudeh ideologues, from whom the IRP [Islamic Revolutionary Party] cadre took many of their cues," were in a partial symbiosis with the Communists. Tudeh's ideological impact on the clerics while they were novices in Iranian politics.

In fact, the militant clerics learned many of their political and journalistic tricks and tactics – first used during the anti-liberal, anti-nationalist smear campaign following the occupation of the American Embassy, their coining of political slogans and their models for political analysis from the Tudeh party. August 19, 1953 the wave of political dissidents brought the society in a revolutionary stage which finally happened in 1979.² In this chapter, we will discuss about the role of main Islamic revolutionary figures of Iran whom had discussed about jihad or martyrdom in their works or their speeches.

To gain a greater understanding of historical factors and process leading to Jihad, martyrdom and revolution in Islamic Iran, the speeches and lectures by Dr. Ali

¹ Iranian communist party which was active from 1950s to the 1970s.

² Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 157–159.

Shariati, Ayatullah Murtaza Mutahari, and Ayatullah Mahmud Taleqani are instrumental in understanding the basic concepts, especially the long tradition of venerating martyrs in Shia Islam. Such Shia scholars were playing an important role in modernizing the concept of *jihad* amongst Shia Islam in the 20th Century in Iran.³

The Clergies and Istishhadi Teachings

Jihad is one component of Islamic law, or shari'a, along with all other matters governing the familial, social, and political dimensions of Muslim life. Therefore, in order to understand jihad as a legal concept, it is important to outline the sources and development of Islamic law, who interprets the law, and how the law has changed over time. Generally, Islamic law is based on two primary texts: the Qur'an, which is the literal word of God; and the *Sunna*, which are sayings of the Prophet recorded in the *Hadith* and the customs of the Prophet and his companions.⁴

It is important to note that, despite this bifurcation of the world and the classification of all non-Muslim territory as the land of war, this does not mean that jihad against non-believers is perpetual or even inevitable. Along with offensive jihad to spread the *dar al Islam*, there is the obligation for all Muslims to defend the faith if

³ Mehdi Abedi and Gary Legenhausen, *Jihad and Shahadat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 1986), p.38. See also Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, "The Changing Nature of Suicide Attacks: A Social Network Perspective", *Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (2006), p.81.

⁴ David S. Pearl, *A Textbook on Muslim Law* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 4. Pearl cites the definitions of scholars like Ignac Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, translated by Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.101, and Joseph Schacht, *Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 160-169, which are the foundational western works on Islamic jurisprudence.

attacked; this is “defensive” jihad. Defensive Jihad is discussed much less in the classical texts.⁵

All schools agree that if Muslim land and people are attacked, all must fight to defend the faith including those exempt under offensive Jihad. The imperative for all to fight is not only for the defense of land held by Muslims and their inhabitants but also for the very survival of the faith. The classical texts suggest that, unlike the organized nature of offensive jihad, the response to attack is a spontaneous reaction, not one issued or organized by the community’s leader.⁶

In addition to classical law—and more important for understanding modern examples of jihad—are scholarly interpretations of jihad in the post-classical period. In particular, the writings of Ibn Taymiyya (1268-1328) have contributed to radical Islamic groups in the modern era including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Bin Laden.⁷ Ibn Taymiyya was a member of the Ulama and adhered to the Hanbali school of law in addition to practicing Islamic mysticism, *Sufism*. Taymiyya argued that faith and action were intrinsically bound in Islam as were religious, social and political power. He called for the faith to return to its foundations—the Qur’an, the

⁵ Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), pp. 59-63.

⁶ Rudolph Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: The Doctrine of Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), p. 15; quoting Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Islamic Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.56; and Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shiite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the Jurist in Imamite Jurisprudence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 62-64.

⁷ In Bin Laden’s 1996 Fatwa in particular, quoted in Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Islam*, translated by Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 317. For Taymiyya’s influence on radical Islamic groups in Egypt, see Peters, *Jihad in Modern History* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1979), (Chapter 5: The Religious and Moral Doctrine of Jihad: Ibn Taymiyya on Jihad), pp. 43-54 and (Chapter 9: The Relevance of the Jihad Doctrine in Sadat’s Egypt), pp. 149-170.

Sunna, and the examples of the Prophet and his companions in the “golden age” of Islam.⁸

These radicals, building on the ideas of Taymiyya and Wahhab, have called for a return of Islam to its pristine state at the time of the Prophet and his companions: stressing the oneness of God, and teaching from the Qur’an and the Sunna. They, therefore, often identify themselves as *Salafiyya*, referring to the pious ancestors and the Prophet. Unlike their predecessors, these thinkers—although highly educated—have not had formal theological training and are not members of the *ulama*. Hasan al Banna studied at Cairo’s Dar al-Ulum, a school designed to train teachers in “modern” (meaning western) thinking.⁹

In bringing about a fusion of Marxism and the religious tradition of Shia Islam, Ali Shariati and Muhammad Navab Safavi. Safavi did a great effort.¹⁰ showed them how to make terror a principal instrument of politics, much of which he had learned from Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. Ayatollah Motahhari merged the lessons learned from his friend Shariati and from his other friend Navab Safavi. With spectacular cunning, Ayatollah Khomeini used them all to develop his revolutionary

⁸ John L. Esposito, *Unholy War* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 45-46.

⁹ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 126-127.

¹⁰ Iranian Shiites are often referred to as Esna Ashari, or twelvers; they believe that there have been twelve Imams, all male descendants of the first Imam, Ali, and that the twelfth, the Mahdi has gone into hiding. There are some Shiites who believe only in one Imam, and are called the Alavites, powerful in Syria; those who limit the number to about four are called the Zeydis, and they are an emergent Shiite group in Yemen; the Ismailis, spread around the world believe that the line of Imams died with the death of Ismail, destined to be the seventh Imam who died before he could claim his mantle. See Said Arjomand, *Authority in Shiism and Constitutional Developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p.120.

Mahdism¹¹, a doctrine he had in part learned from his correspondent Abul Ala Maududi.¹²

The militant clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini were avid readers of the writings of Sayyid Qutb and of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi. “Their influence is unmistakable in the revolutionary slogans and pamphleteering” in Iran.¹³ In his preface to *Social Justice in Islam*, Qutb’s clerical translator praised the author for having established “a living and invaluable ideology.”¹⁴

The Iranian Islamists readily acknowledged their intellectual debt to the Sunni revolutionaries. Navab Safavi, Ayatollah Khomeini’s follower, not consorted with the Muslim Brothers in Cairo as early as the 1940s. The Iranian fedaiyan-e Islam had serious relations with the Muslim Brothers of Egypt. Ayatollah Khomeini’s ‘Islamic Revolution’ is a resurgence of that of the defunct fedaiyan movement. Muhammad Navvab Safavi, nee Sayyid Mujtaba Mir-Lowhi (born in Tehran 1924), was the purveyor of al-Banna’s brand of Islam understanding to Iran.¹⁵

This “young and not very well educated cleric,” who had spent two years at the Najaf Seminary, established the Jamiyat-e Fedaiyan-e Eslam (“those who sacrifice their

¹¹ Imam Mahdi is the twelfth and the last hidden Imam in Shia section of Islam.

¹² See Vali Nasr, *Maududi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 40-65.

¹³ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 97.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 94.

¹⁵ See Davud Amini, *Jam'iyat-e Fada'iyān-i Eslām va naqsh-e ān dar tahavvulat-e siyasi-e ejtema'i-e Iran*, [The Fadayān Association and their role in Islamic Revolution of Iran] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami-e Iran, 2002), pp. 11- 41.

lives for Islam”) in 1945.¹⁶ The movement rapidly attracted a large membership of lower class and urban poor, and the religious middle class, and acquired powerful protectors among wealthy bazaar merchants and influential clerics. At its peak, the organization of the charismatic Navvab Safavi boasted 7,000 members. It quickly emulated the Muslim Brotherhood’s terror campaigns and murders of “corrupt,” pro-Western political figures.¹⁷

All the atrocities perpetrated by his group were blessed by prominent clerics. Ayatollah Murtaza Motahhari, a student, disciple, and trusted lieutenant of Ruhollah Khomeini, was a close friend and associate. The first killing was that of the modernizer Ahmad Kasravi, an author whose 1946 assassination was signed off on by Ayatollah Khomeini himself; by Ayatollah Abdol Hoseyn Amini, who issued a fatwa calling for the elimination of the “Satanic” writer; by cleric Mohammad-Hasan Taleqani, who provided the money; and by the most prominent political leader of the Iranian clergy of the time, Ayatollah Kashani, speaker of the parliament, the Iranian Parliament, who was to make extensive use of Navvab Safavi’s murderous services in years to come. Clerical pressure forced the government to free the killer without punishment.¹⁸

Ayatollah Kashani gave the Navab, a serious religious cover and in return acquired the support of an organization able to mobilize activists. After a failed assassination

¹⁶ fedaiyan-e Islam refers those who sacrifice their lives for Islam which was led by Navab Safavi’s group.

¹⁷ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought of Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari: An Iranian Theoretician of the Islamic State* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), p. 20.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

of the shah, the top clerics again protected the fugitive Navvab Safavi, who hid at the house of Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, while the young killer of Kasravi now killed the minister of the court. The *fedaiyan*'s rampage went on undisturbed.¹⁹

The Prime Minister, the tough General Ali Razmara, fell victim to one of their assassins, who again was protected by Kashani. The organizer of the targeted assassinations, Navvab Safavi was now a celebrity, granting menacing interviews and meeting Arab heads of states in the course of a late 1953–early 1954 tour of the Middle East. He was feted in Cairo by the Muslim Brothers and treated as a guest of honor by the Egyptian government. When he returned to Iran, the Shah tried to co-opt him, even as the *fedaiyan* openly called for the shah's death:

“..The Shah was a usurper of Islamic rule and the government was illegitimate; the usurper of Islamic rule must be killed and the illegitimate government banished.”²⁰

Navvab Safavi since then published a manifesto that foreshadowed the Islamic state that arose in Iran after 1979. Society was to be placed under “the University of the Quran” and “the barracks of Islam.” The manifesto described an idyllic Islamic state, “where the government would be the father of the people, where nobody would fear the state's representative nor the thieves, where stores and houses had no more locks and keys. There is no more unreason, no alcohol, no corruption.”²¹

¹⁹ See Vali Nasr. *Maududi*, pp. 19-38.

²⁰ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, p. 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Of course, the pathway to paradise was brutal: “Reform can only be achieved under the shadow of force; force is sacrifice, and sacrifice is but under the shadow of Islamic education. Hence, we, children of Islam, with God’s help, we can achieve these reforms through our own sacrifice.” War was necessary and beautiful: “Human wars come from ignorance, and Islam’s wars come from God’s command.” With this creed, Safavi recruited very young men – was Ayatollah Khomeini later not to say that “people over 20 were already contaminated by Satanic civilization”²²

These candidates for martyrdom were “processed” by Navvab Safavi himself, in a functional equivalent of brainwashing, a technique that was later refined for mass use by the government during the Iran-Iraq War. The charismatic Revolutionary, Navvab Safavi was finally executed in 1956. He left a deep imprint on the religious opposition to the shah regime and a start for the Islamic revolution in Iran.²³

He was the first incarnation of the Gnostic propheta in contemporary Iran, but he was by no means the last. In 1963, barely seven years after his death, three activist religious groups, which he had deeply influenced, coalesced to form the Heyat-e Motafelehaye Eslami. Composed of bazaar people and youngsters, it was led by a four- or five-man clerical committee appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini, including Ayatollahs Beheshti and Motahhari, and able to deploy about 500 activists.²⁴

²² See Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York: Touchstone Books, 2000), pp. 37-65.

²³ See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas, 1982), pp. 160-166.

²⁴ See Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'ite Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 150-160.

The clerics issued guidelines to propagate Islam, to extend Islamic “ideology,” to establish classes to that effect, and to establish groups for training speakers and teachers. They started to organize members into semisecret ten-person groups. By November 1964, the leadership had decided to establish a military branch for targeting the regime’s anti-Islamic figures. The following year they succeeded in killing Prime Minister Hasan Ali Mansur after the clerical committee issued a fatwa to that effect.²⁵

Revolutionary Navab Safavi’s fellow Fedaiyan-e Eslam Sayyid Mahmud Taleqani (1910–79), a genuine scholar of Islam, has been called “The Father of the Revolution.” He proposed that “the East” was virtually exempt from “Western” class struggle. His famous 1963 speech on holy war and martyrdom was seminal to much elaboration of the matter in later years and seeking guidance from the [Quranic verses] to his followers.²⁶

The Intellectuals and Istishhadi Teachings

The revolutionizing of radical Islam in Iran did not follow one line of communication only. We have already explored the cult of blood and redemptive violence that is a hallmark of Shariati’s “Islam-Marxism,” the doctrine he called tashayyo-e sorkh or “Red Shiism”.²⁷ We will now examine his doctrine and actions from the vantage

²⁵ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 95.

²⁶ See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 170-180.

²⁷ Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht be khishtan* [Return to our own] (Tehran: Hoseiniye Ershad, 1978), p. 19.

point of their contribution to the transfer of Marxism and Marxian existentialism into radical Islam.

Dr. Shariati is one of the most significant of Islamic scholar of the contemporary era. This “most furious revolutionary among the ideologues of the Islamic revolution” managed “to capture the revolutionary imagination of an entire generation” and extended far and wide into the entire spectrum of radical Islam, Shiite and Sunni alike.²⁸ His belief-structure was the perfect foundation on which to generate expectations, in short, Mahdism.

In turn, the great renovator of Mahdism in the modern age – its prophet, the man who turned it into a political religion – Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, was a far-reaching influence on Shariati.²⁹ His supposed familiarity with Western intellectual currents is shallow, his sociology is sophomoric, and his scholarship is embarrassingly feeble: He is an ideologue who nibbles on bits and pieces of history, philosophy, and sociology.

Shortly before his premature death, he entrusted his (still unpublished) testament to Mohamad Reza Hakimi, a noted follower of Ayatollah Khomeini’s, who in turn reported: “Of Shariati, let us first and foremost retain his potent and delicate gift as a communicator; with just a few words, simple slogans, he succeeded in

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 129-133.

²⁹ Ali Shariati. *Bazgasht be khishtan*, pp. 46-49.

radicalizing the mass of the people, which the clergy had been trying to do for a thousand years.”³⁰

He cites one such slogan coined by Shariati at the time, “The martyr is the heart of history.” The homology of Shariati’s role and self-conception with that of Europe’s medieval prophetae could not be more striking. He is “the intellectual who knows the formula for salvation from the misfortunes of the world and can predict how world history will take its course in the future,”³¹

In the 1950s, Shariati was a member first of the “Movement for the Islamic Renewal,” and then the Nezhat-e Khoda parastan-e Sosalist, the “Movement of the Socialist Worshippers of God.”³² Like the Russian he emulated, Shariati loathed Christianity as a “religious individualist” faith and praised Islam as “religious collectivism.” To him, “monotheism” (Islam) and “polytheism” (including Judaism and Christianity) were expressions of class struggle, and congruent with his invented polarity of disinherited and oppressors.³³

³⁰ Ibid., p. 51.

³¹ Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics & Gnosticism* (Washington DC: Regnery, 1977), p. 67.

³² Ibid., p. 68.

³³ For discussions of Shi’i Islam, see for example Roger M. Savory, “The Export of Ithna Ashari Shi’ism: Historical and Ideological Background”, in *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim: The Shi’a Conception of Jihad World*, edited by Menashri David (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), p. 13–39; and Ayatollah Ja’far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi’i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*, translated by Shah-Kazemi Reza (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), p.?. As regards particular Shi’i practices, particularly prior to the Iranian Revolution, prayer for example assumed a less significant role than in Sunnism due to the Occultation of the 12th Imam. In addition, some prayers (known as du’a or munajat) are designed specifically for Shi’a believers, and are used on special occasions or devotional reasons. See Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi’i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi’ism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), p. 181. Other general differences in practice include the importance in Shi’ism of visiting holy Shi’i shrines; the existence of temporary marriages (muta, or sigha in Farsi); religious dissimulation (taqiyya); stricter laws of

Shariati's children Ehsan and Sarah Shariati, both professors in France today, report their father's fondness for his correspondent, the revolutionary Frantz Fanon, and his conception of "creating a new man." The raw material of the dream was to be "the oppressed masses." To convey that imitation of Marxian class struggle, Shariati borrowed Fanon's expression of "les damnés de la Terre," "the wretched of the earth," and translated it into Persian by reviving the Quranic term of *mostazafin* ("the disinherited") – "a term that was to occupy a central position in the Islamic revolutionary rhetoric."³⁴

Shariati also borrowed from the Quran and the stories of Prophet Muhammad's companions. In his fictionalized biography *Abuzar Qaffari the Socialist Worshipper of God*, he fished out this figure from relative obscurity to embody his theology of "liberation:" "I am the disciple of Abuzar, my doctrine, my Islam, my Shiism, my yearnings, my anger and my ideals are his. My purpose begins like his: in the name of God, God of the oppressed (*mostazafin*)."³⁵ Elsewhere, Shariati develops the Story:

"Abuzar, Companion of the Prophet, disciple of Ali. . . . He is a great revolutionary who fights against aristocracy, authoritarianism, capitalism, misery, and segregation. His word is higher than that of Proudhon."³⁶

A poor Bedouin, illiterate and rebellious to the idolatry of his time, His material misery has endowed him with a keen sense of social justice; a man from the

divorce when compared to Sunnis; and a more accommodating attitude toward women, e.g. in regard to inheritance. See Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, pp. 181–183.

³⁴ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 94.

³⁵ Ali Shariati. *Che bayaad kard?* [What it should be done?] (Tehran: Hoseiniye Ershad, 1982), p. 249.

³⁶ Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht be khishtan*, p. 308.

desert, remote from the depravation of the city, his illiteracy sheltered him from any reference other than Islam; his 'primitive' revolt against idolatry made him a proto-Monotheist, a hanif; his Islam is pure and coarse.³⁷

Abuzar, in other words, was a good savage, the degree zero of humanity: he was nothing, a man without attribute; therefore, he was dispossessed and ready to become the apotheosis of super-humanity, the martyr. Of course, the Westernization, or modernization, of Iran, was a grievous attempt at further dispossessing the good savage of his authentic identity, culture, and religion. Taking all the leaves from Fanon's book, Shariati disliked the modernism. He hated as well its effect on Iran, *gharbzadegi* ("plagued by the West"), or in Jalal Al-e Ahmad's word, "Westoxication."³⁸

The later, an early communist leader, was a born-again Muslim who rediscovered the might of religious myth and guidance. Shariati burdened his imaginary "West" with all the sins and flaws, social and moral, marital and political, economic and religious. In contrast with this "satan" stood his demigods, Muhammad, Ali, Husayn. Prophet Muhammad himself was a revolutionary, but a perfect one who intended to establish God's perfect order on earth:

"The Prophet does not talk of a 'virtuous city,' of a 'divine city,' or of a 'promised land,' he implements it. It is not a theoretical construct but an objective one. The virtuous city of Islam is a real community (Umma). It is the city of the Prophet."³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., p. 308.

³⁸ Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht be khishtan*, p. 186.

To him, the Quran was the blueprint for the perfect social life. Prophet Muhammad was “this revolutionary shepherd of the people.”⁴⁰ He equated God and the People, Shariati divinized the People: “Jihad in the way of God is jihad in the way of the People.”⁴¹ It was a “radically populist theory of revolution.”⁴² His “man” is Godlike; his ethics are those of The Perfect Man.

Shariati’s ideas contributed directly to the revolutionary outbreak through his influence on Iranian students and young intellectuals, especially the highly organized and motivated Mojahedin-e Khalq, who did some of the decisive fighting in the fateful days of February 1979. His ideas also had an important influence on the writings of the clerical pamphleteers and preachers, who were quick to take up the rhetoric of social justice and the cause of the disinherited.⁴³

Furthermore, Dr. Shariati’s writings won over a substantial part of the lay intelligentsia to Khomeini’s side by leading them to believe the Islamic Revolution would be “progressive.” Presumably, as a reformer Shariat was a model to be followed; he had written that Prophet Muhammad had preserved the form of traditional norms but had changed their contents in a revolutionary manner.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ali Shariati, *Che bayaad kard?*, p. 240.

⁴⁰ Ali Shariati, *jehat-giri-e tabaqati-e islam* [Class orientations in Islam] (Tehran: Hoseiniye Ershad, 1980), p. 83.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.84.

⁴² Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 93.

⁴³ See Davud Amini, *Jam'iyat-e Fada'iyān-i Eslām*, p.41. See also Said Amir Arjomand, “Introduction: Shi’ism, Authority, and Political Culture,” *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, edited by Said Amir Arjomand (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 13-14.

⁴⁴ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 94.

Shariati's concept of the party where belief (faith: iman) connects with revolutionary action (martyrdom: jihad). Shariati succeeded to re-Islamicize a youth to which the religious leaders had lost access. He transmogrified the Westernized youth into Islamic fighters. This psychological and behavioral transformation expressed itself as an increasing rejection of the Western model. Shariati made himself the "bridge" connecting the dynamic element of the Islamist middle class, the educated youth, and the people traditionally led by the clergy. This "triangle" carried out the revolution.⁴⁵

Now, Shariati – the young Islamist student of semi-Marxists Jean-Paul Sartre, and Frantz Fanon – was a darling of the radical Shiite clergy. "Very early on, the revolutionary clerics are in contact with him and throughout his life bestowed him with marks of respect and protection. The best-known mujtahids . Ayatollahs Taleqani, Beheshti, Mofatteh and especially Ayatollah Motahhari collaborated closely with him."⁴⁶

When clerical agents of the regime asked him to condemn Shariati, Ayatollah Khomeini pointedly refused. Ayatollah Khomeini's trusted man Motahhari maintained a close friendship and collaboration with Shariati. In 1965, Motahhari cofounded the Huseiniyeh-ye Ershad institute for research and education which later "played a major role in the religious movement of young activists before the Islamic Revolution." In November 1967, Motahhari sent a letter to Shariati asking him to

⁴⁵ Said Amir Arjomand, "Introduction: Shi'ism, Authority, and Political Culture," *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 19.

⁴⁶ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini's Search for Perfection: Theory and Reality in Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1994), pp. 44-86.

contribute to a book about the life of the Prophet the institute was going to publish, and soon afterward, he invited Shariati to come lecture there.⁴⁷

His lectures were livered with emotion, firing his audience with enthusiasm and were warmly welcomed by the young students, His teachings, too, had a major influence among the older men and women students. This essentially turned the Ershad Institute into the most attractive religious center in the country. In a letter Motahhari wrote to the trustees, he depicted Shariati's lectures as "so popular during the four years that it exerted an influence on all groups of the country from the Grand Ayatollahs to the government officials."⁴⁸

Only Dr. Shariati's early death – probably at the hands of agents of SAVAK⁴⁹, the Shah's secret police – prevented a continuation of his collaboration with Motahhari: "In his late texts and lectures, Shariati sought to modify his views and present an affirmative view of the ulama by mentioning their revolutionary and anti-imperialist role in contemporary Islam." Shariati had journeyed to the West and brought back the worst he could find, which he then placed in the service of the

⁴⁷ See Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, pp- 93-111.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 42–44.

⁴⁹ SAVAK stands for "sazmane etelaat va amniate keshvar", [The state's intelligence and security organization) savak has been founded by shah of Iran during the late 1950's]. This brief analysis of the Iranian Revolution draws upon: Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 139; Assef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran* (London: Zed Books, 1987), p. 92; Patrick Clawson, 'The Internationalization of Capital and Capital Accumulation in Iran,' in *Oil and Class Struggle*, edited by Petter Nore and Terisa Turner (London: Zed Books, 1980), p.?.; Farideh Farhi, "Class Struggles, the State, and Revolution in Iran", in *Power and Stability in the Middle East*, edited by Berch Berberoglu (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 70; Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (New York: Westview Press, 1988), p. 98; Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 161.

Islamists' spirit of destruction Shariati's heirs were many, although in the end the legacy was channeled exclusively in the direction approved by the mullahs.⁵⁰

Established at the beginning of the 1970s, the "Iranian People's Guerrilla," Fada'i-ye Khalq-e Iran, which took its name from Navvab Safavi's old group, had started as a student group at Tehran University a half a dozen years before. Members became Marxists, read and discussed Che Guevara and the Brazilian theorist of urban guerrilla Carlos Marighela. Their theoretical pamphlets extolled guerrilla warfare, mass spontaneity, and heroic activities; they added Castro, Mao to their repertoire. Another group, the Guruh-e Furqan, also established by Tehran University students, was the origin of the later Mujahideen.⁵¹

They read the Quran, Bazargan, and Taleqani but also literature on modern revolutions – Russia, China, Cuba, Algeria. A favorite was Algerian FLN (Front de libération nationale). After years of study and debate, the Mujahideen assembled a team to provide its membership with their own theoretical handbook. They wrote a series of pamphlets, which included very primitive discussions of the theory of

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵¹ Mujahid comes from the same root as *mujtahid*, one who discerns (*ijtihad*) shari'a law based on his interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunna. Therefore a mujahid is one who struggles in the faith, expressly by force. Unlike Ghazi, the term Mujahid corresponds more with defensive jihad. It emerged after the fractioning of leadership within Sunni Islam and the disappearance of the Imam in Shia Islam. The term came into common usage first in India, during the 19th century jihads of resistance against British occupation. In modern times, Muslim fighters from around the world used the term to describe participants in the Soviet-Afghan War. The term was also used in connection with the Iran-Iraq war. See Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906* (London: IB Tauris & Co., 1989), p. 37; J. van Lent and H. U. Qureshi. *The Encyclopedia of Islam: Glossary and Index of Technical Terms* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 224-225; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. VII, edited by C.E. Bosworth, E. Van Dumzel, W.B Heinrichs, and Ch. Pellat (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1965), pp. 290-292; John Kelsay, *Islam and War: The Gulf War and Beyond* (Louisville, John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 48-52, 93-94.

evolution, Marx's theory of value, and "historical materialism," as well as a two-volume introduction to Quranic studies (*The Principle of Quranic Thinking*).⁵²

Here they wrote that God is absolute evolution, not perfection; prayer is the connection between party members; the visible and invisible worlds are two hidden and overt stages of struggle and revolution; and the afterworld is a socioeconomic system of a higher world. They interpreted Quranic verses according to class struggle and concluded that property was nothing more than a colonial phenomenon.⁵³

This was very much in keeping with the pseudohistory that is always to be heard from the Gnostic revolutionaries from wherever they hark, and which Shariati, Maududi, and Qutb had refined to a great art. The Mujahideen also issued two large booklets on the history of the prophets and on Imam Husayn. The interpretation was that of class struggle between rich and poor, ruled and rulers.⁵⁴ The Mujahideen represented the inherent radicalism of Shiism, a form of socialism, a Muslim renaissance and reformation. They advocated an alliance with the Soviet Union. They were Shariati's "third way" to development. The Mujahideen courted Ayatollah Khomeini. The story of their dealings sheds a fascinating light on the Islamic Revolution. The Mujahideen sent two members of their ideological team to Najaf in 1972 to ask Khomeini to give them his public support.⁵⁵

⁵² Vali Nasr, *Maududi*, pp. 118-137.

⁵³ See R.K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 81-112.

⁵⁴ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Said Amir Arjomand, "Introduction", pp. 19-22.

With them they had letters of introduction from Ayatollahs Taleqani and Montazeri, and from Ayatollah Motahhari, who was in effect Khomeini's operational chief in Iran. The pair held twenty-four secret audiences with Khomeini, who urged them to de-Marxify themselves. He failed to grant his support, but he wrote letters to some of his followers in Iran urging them to support the families of Mujahideen who had been hurt by the shah's repression. The Mujahideen and Khomeini were now in a unitedfront relationship.⁵⁶

The Mujahideen had created an aura of organizational efficiency, of revolutionary fervor, of religious martyrdom around themselves. They made headways into the religious seminaries at Khunsar, Qom, and Tehran; they debated with Taleqani and Shariati. One of their bestknown slogans was "Bi nam-e Khuda va be Nam-e Khalq-e Qahraman-e Iran" ("In the name of God and in the name of the People of Iran"). This infuriated the orthodox Gnostics, as it "gave God an associate" – the people – the very definition of the sin of polytheism in Islam.⁵⁷

Ayatollah Motahhari, both as an intellectual and a modern clergy, was not less popular than his friend and rival Shariati. Although human history externally consisted of wars and contradictions between the poor and the rich, or between the ruling and the ruled classes, internally these were wars between right and wrong,

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 19-22.

⁵⁷ See E. Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London, Tauris, 1988), pp. 92-95.

good and evil. Outwardly Motahhari was a semi-Leftist cleric, but inwardly he was a reformist clergy.⁵⁸ Motahhari wrote in his discussion of martyrdom:

“A martyr’s motivation is different from that of ordinary people. His logic is the blind logic of a reformer, and the logic of a Gnostic lover. A martyr’s logic is unique. It is beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. This is why the word martyr is surrounded by a halo of sanctity.”⁵⁹

As a thinker, Motahhari also was in a form of constant dialogue with Marxism, as if no clerical doctrine could be developed which did not, point by point, face and answer Marxism. The importance of Motahhari’s works is based, first, on their comprehensiveness and complexity. While similar to Marxist totalism, they challenge it, since he presents an alternative total Islamic system, Islamic world-view and social-political ideology.⁶⁰

How much he felt the urge to meet Marxism, rival but not enemy as Shariati had put it, emerges from his anguished interrogation regarding the attractiveness of Marxism for the young. Today, it is more or less established in the minds of youth that one must either be a theist – a peacemaker, complacent, calm, motionless, neutral – or a materialist – active, rebellious, opposed to colonialism, exploitation and despotism. Motahhari asked:

Why has such an idea infiltrated the minds of young people? They observe that it is just the supporters of materialism who lead uprisings, revolutions,

⁵⁸ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Murtaza Mutahhari, *The Martyr* (Houston: Free Islamic Libraries, 1980), p. 14.

⁶⁰ See Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab* [Message of Revolution] (Tehran: Entesharate Sepah, 1981), p. 86.

battles and struggles, while theists are mostly static and neutral. At present, the majority of heroic struggles against exploitation are guided by persons with more or less materialistic feelings. Undoubtedly, to a high extent, they have occupied the heroic trench.⁶¹

To Iranian Islamic scholars, In order to reoccupy the heroic trench and regain the youth in it from Marxism, Islam had to be close to it. While it may be doubted whether Motahhari and his fellow clerics would have seen the matter in this light, the wholesale adoption of Marxian categories to analyze the world and of Marxist–Leninist rhetoric to transform it, encapsulated in slogans a thousand times repeated, created an Islamo–Marxist, a laboratory experiment that was unleashed on the body of Iran and then happened to the rest of the Islamic world.⁶²

The clerical agents of that innovation thought their immutable Islam immune to the loan-ideas, and probably saw themselves as both responding to urgent tactical requirements and cunningly borrowing effective devices from their rivals. The issues caused “a considerable division between the militant ulama.” A delegation was sent to Najaf to ask Khomeini’s ruling. “Although Khomeini took a cautious position and did not issue a statement, he privately supported Motahhari.”⁶³

Motahhari’s project was to create an Islamic ideology, every Just as Afghani before him, and Maududi, and Qutb, he sought an “ideologization” of Islam, to turn Islam into a political ideology similar to the secular religions of twentieth-century

⁶¹ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, pp. 64–65.

⁶² Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhelal* [The Islamic Revolution Organization from the beginning until dissolving], Vol. 1 (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2007), p. 41.

⁶³ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, p. 63.

totalitarianism, though couched in the Islamic cultural idiom. The new Islamist ideology meant the arrangement of readily available maxims constituting the sources of the Islamic tradition, the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet and the [Shiite] Imams, in accordance with a new pattern suggested by the Western total ideologies such as Communism and Fascism.⁶⁴

Ayatollah Motahhari was a leading ideologue of the revolution, a close ally of Ayatollah khomeini, and an ardent critic of the left. His writings articulated Islam as a political “ideology” opposed to capitalist materialism and socialist atheism. After Motahhari was assassinated, reports began to emerge linking the murder to Forqan and its motives to be anti-clerical in nature. One report cited an anonymous phone call to an Iranian media organization that claimed Forqan had killed Motahhari for being the suspected “head of the Revolutionary Council” and as part of the group’s greater “struggle against mullahism.”⁶⁵

A number of clerics took up the challenge of constructing the requisite Islamic total ideology. They were quick to learn the art of constructing an ideology from the lay intellectuals. They learned this art both from their opponents – most notably the ideologues of the Tudeh party – and their allies lay Islamist reformers such as Mehdi Bazargan and Shariati. Here, the importance of intense ideological debate between

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁵ “Ayatollah khomeini vows deaths will not hold Iran back”, *The Washington Post*, 3 May 1979, p. 2.

the Tudeh ideologues and the militant clerics in the Shah's prisons in the 1960s should be noted.⁶⁶

In the economic and social planks of his total Islamic ideology, Motahhari was a corporatist socialist, keen on limiting economic freedom and eager to confiscate and nationalize wealth. The ambit of cases justifying state takeover was so huge and its terms so vague that it amounted to confiscating everything but the bazaar and peasants' lands.⁶⁷

Rarely did Motahhari, and most others, bother reading the original Western sources that they knew only from bowdlerized versions. His judgments on the West are thunderous, but slipshod, his knowledge vague and superficial; his contempt for such a thinker as Aquinas is based on an utterly trivial detail. He taught classes on Marxism, culled from the Farsi translations of third-hand and third-rate Western authors.⁶⁸

Due to Marxism idea appeared to be the main alternative, Shia writers developed a dual attitude toward it: on the one hand, they tended to argue their own case through refutation of Marxism while, on the other, they tried to interpret Islamic laws and traditions as being no less revolutionary than Marxist ideals. Motahhari's Marxian graft took to the Islamic stem. His aims and The major achievement of the

⁶⁶ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 97.

⁶⁷ Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, pp. 103–106.

⁶⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, "Introduction", pp. 30- 42; Mahmood Davari, *The Political Thought*, p. 87.

clerical activists was to suggest an ideology attractive to the intelligentsia and of maintaining their intellectual authority and leadership over the latter.⁶⁹

Tudeh party and others had been the laboratory experiment, but the corporate interest reaping the fruit of their labor was the Islamic Revolution. The new jihad would be the result. Motahhari's "three sacred concepts" of "faith [iman], hijrat [migration] and jihad" were now applied to political struggles through their Marxist repatterning. Materialism and monism were tawhid "the unity of God"; together they meant fighting against oppressors, the taghut "idolaters"; the Marxist proletariat was the Islamic mostazafin "the disinherited"; the shah was the anti-Christ, ad-Dajjal in the Muslim apocalyptic tradition; and Khomeini his savior counterimage.⁷⁰

All the facile dichotomies of a Gnostic worldview that erases differences and rubs out complexities were mobilized. Bevy of useful idiots from the Left, the intelligentsia, and the good society enthusiastically joined the Islamic Revolution, typified perhaps by the first president of the Islamic Republic Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, one of the muddled ideologues of Islamo-Marxism. In the end, another slogan expressed the reality of the situation: Shah raft Imam amad "The Shah has gone, the Imam has come".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ Murtaza Mutahhari, *The Martyr*, p. 78.

⁷¹ Saied Reza Hashemi Najaf Abadi, *The Culture of Martyrdom* (Tehran: Veteran's Association Publication, 1983), p. 81.

Among the illiterate and the young urban professionals oscillating between past and present, between Islamic identity and modernization, Motahhari was an immense influence, notably through his popular 1960 collection of stories and anecdotes from the Muslim prophetic tradition, canonical sources, and ethical vignettes. After he aired the stories on national radio, starting in the month of Ramadan in 1963, “millions” were reportedly “glued to the radios.”⁷²

Ayatollah Motahhari was thus doing in practice what the left-wing intelligentsia was clamoring for, the reinjection of Islam into society. Motahhari systematically plied the meetings and sessions of the “Islamic societies” that attracted young urban professionals; his reengineering of the Shiite doctrine was a critical element in putting Iran’s Shiite body on a war footing against the regime of the shah.⁷³

He was instrumental in developing the revolutionary image of “Karbala,” the venue of the martyrdom of Ali’s grandson Husayn – “Karbala is not only in one day, it always is,” summed up the doctrine that abolished time and space and helped transfer the minds of millions from the real world into the “second reality” of myth. This radical reinvention of tradition opened the way to revolution.⁷⁴

⁷² Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen-e Rafiqdust*, edited by D. Qasempur (Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2004), p. 104.

⁷³ Ali Akbar Rezvani, *The Philosophy of Martyrdom* (Tehran: Hejrat Publication, 1983), p. 69.

⁷⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, pp. 81-85.

As early as 1968, Qom religious scholar Salehi Najaf-Abadi's book *The Immortal Martyr* had triggered a major debate among religious circles. Prefaced by Ayatollah Montazeri, the 500-page tome was "the first serious, daring and semi-scholarly attempt to transform the quiescent character of the Karbala paradigm into an active, worldly oriented drama," and to politicize what had been a "mystical, lyrical and emotional" interpretation.⁷⁵

Ayatollah Khomeini an Istishhadi Ideologue

The Islamic Revolution was the Shiite millennium, the Imam-Mahdi reappearing in the shape of Ayatollah Khomeini. Ayatollah Khomeini is considered as Mujtahid.⁷⁶ The violation of the "Algiers Agreement" by Iran was merely a minor reason. Ayatollah Khomeini hoped that the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran would bring about a similar scenario in neighboring Iraq.

However, despite the period of time Ayatollah Khomeini was based in Iraq, he did not succeed to grasp the reality of the Shi'ites there in terms of the local hierarchy, the regime's view of him, and his social weakness. This situation could not foster a religious uprising to "sweep away" the majority of Shi'ites in Iraq. The

⁷⁵ Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas, 1982), p. 184.

⁷⁶ Mujtahids specialize in particular areas of the law and certain *Mujtahids* have higher status based on their skill and location. At the city level, one *Mujtahid* is appointed the *Imam Jum'a*, who acts as the link between the government and the Ulama.⁷⁶ Within the *Mujtahids* is one who is considered especially gifted in discerning the law. This individual receives the title *Ayatallah*, which literally means miraculous signs.⁷⁶ After the formation of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the *Ayatallah* became the supreme authority on the interpretation of the law. In addition to the *Mujtahid*, lesser authorities within the Ulama include *Mullas*, which are graduates of seminaries, *tullabi*, seminary students, and *Sayyids*, individuals who can trace their lineage back to the Prophet. See Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: The Iranian Revolution of 1906*, (London: IB Tauris & Co., 1989), p. 37; *The Encyclopedia of Islam: New Edition Glossary and Index*, compiled by J. Van Lend and H.U. Qureshi, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 30.

freedom of religious practice in Iraq was decreased to the minimum possible by the time the Islamic Revolution took place, and the Iraqi regime began to closely monitor Shi'ite institutions and subversive groups within this minority.⁷⁷

His speeches were also directed to other Arab states in hope that they would fall upon attentive ears. Aside from justifying the war against Saddam Hussein the tyrant, Ayatollah Khomeini called to direct the war against Israel, since it was a direct commandment from the Qur'an. According to his interpretation, the rift among Muslims was a serious problem and that Allah commanded the Islamic community to be complete and united in order to protect itself from heretics, referring to the USA and Zionists. He claimed that the Muslim world was separated and suffered from internal fighting because it had abandoned Allah's commandment.⁷⁸

Being exiled to Paris in the mid- 1960s, Khomeini successfully cultivated the Islamist opposition into an open rebellion through the 1970s, and in 1978 into a full-scale revolution that forced the Shah to flee Iran. In early 1979, Grand Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini returned from exile and established the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁷⁹ In the aftermath of the 1979 revolution, the religious stature of Grand Ayatollah Khomeini permitted him to fill the office of the Supreme Leader as the sole source of guidance for all religious and political matters (vali-ye faqih) for the state.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.32.

⁷⁸ Imam Khomeini Message, Sahifeh Noor, Vol. 16, February 10, 1982, p. 39. www.ghadeer.org/english/imam/imam-books/palestine/pale1.html (accessed on 2009).

⁷⁹ Baqer Moin, *Khomeini's Search for Perfection: In Pioneers of Islamic Revival* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1994), pp. 87-95.

From his viewpoint, Islam does not constitute just praying and making pilgrimage, the laws of Islam are not concerned merely with performing the mandatory ritual prayer [namaz], supplicatory prayer and pilgrimage; these form just one section of the laws of Islam. Praying and making pilgrimage are just one concern among a number covered by Islam. Islam deals with politics, with administering a country. Islamic laws can administer large countries. It is the responsibility of the presidents of Islamic countries, the kings of Islamic countries, the governments of Islamic countries to introduce Islam to the world.⁸⁰

For Ayatollah, Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice. It is the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism. But the servants of imperialism have presented Islam in a totally different light. They have created in men's minds a false notion of Islam. The defective version of Islam, which they have presented in the religious teaching institution, is intended to deprive Islam of its vital, revolutionary aspect and to prevent Muslims from arousing themselves in order to gain their freedom, fulfill the ordinances of Islam, and create a government that will insure their happiness and allow them to live lives worthy of human beings.⁸¹

There are interpretations of the doctrine that call for "spiritual" martyrization; it argues that Muslims who keep the tenets of the faith and strive in the greater jihad

⁸⁰ Imam Khomeini, "17th speech in exile, Najaf, Iraq", <http://www.irib.ir/worldservice/imam/speech/17.htm> (accessed on 2009)

⁸¹ Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declaration of Imam Khomeini and Islamic Government: A compellation of lectures given between 21 January and 8 February 1980*, translated by Hamid Algar (New York: Mizan Publishing, 1980), pp. 72-81.

are the true martyrs, not those that die in battle. It is also argued that the true martyrs are those who suffer in daily physical struggles, such as starvation, poverty, and even women who die while giving birth. Imam Khomeini has said in this regard:

"The martyrdom of the Commander of the Ali and also of Hussein, and the imprisonment, torture, expulsion and poisoning of the Shiite Imams, have all been part of the political struggles of the Shiites against the oppressors. Struggle and political activity are an important part of the religious responsibilities."⁸²

Ayatollah Khomeini's doctrine of guardianship of the jurist—*velayat-e faqih* which implied Ayatollah Khomeini was their Supreme Leader. Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration that if the enemy assaults the lands of the Muslims and its frontiers, it is mandatory for all Muslims to defend it by all means possible by offering life or property,"⁸³ "A Muslim state should be all military and have military training."⁸⁴

As a by-product of the Iran-Iraq Shi'a-Muslim world catapulted the concept of the shahid (martyr) to the forefront of militants' imaginations. Ayatollah Khomeini's framing invoked many Iranians to seek death on the modern battlefield, so they too might reap the benefits of martyrdom as articulated in Shi'a tradition. Indeed, in 1980, amid a fire fight with Iraqi troops, a 13-year old Iranian named Hussein Fahmideh gathered explosives, attached them to himself, charged an Iraqi tank and detonated the explosives—disabling the tank while killing himself. Like that of his namesake,

⁸² *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 3, pp. 57-58.

⁸³ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Tawzih al-Masa'il* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Iran, 1999), pp. 454-455.

⁸⁴ Imam Khomeini, *Defense Readiness*, Grade 8 [Persian School Books] (Tehran: Ministry of Education, 2004) p. 1; Imam Khomeini, *Defense Readiness 1*, High School Grades [Teacher's Guide], (Tehran: Ministry of Education, 2002), front cover; Imam Khomeini, *Defense Readiness 2*, High School Grades [Teacher's Guide], (Tehran: Ministry of Education, 2003), front cover.

Hussein's act of self-sacrifice found widespread praise among Shia Muslims. Soon after, the Iranian government plastered his picture on billboards across Tehran; Hussein's martyrdom, like that of the Shi'a patriarch's, inspired countless others.⁸⁵

By 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini harnessed the power of the Shi'a narrative of martyrdom, and began employing "human wave attacks," which regularly consisted of thousands of Iranian youth simultaneously rushing Iraqi positions, oftentimes protected by surrounding minefields.⁸⁶ Armed usually with nothing more than clinched fists and a plastic key around their necks, which ensured their post-martyrdom entrance through the gates of paradise, Ayatollah Khomeini's martyrdom seekers helped turn the tide of the war.⁸⁷

The first occurrence of an assailant strapping explosives to his chest and killing himself to kill others happened in 1980 during the Iran-Iraq War, when a 13-year old Iranian named Hussein Fahmideh strapped explosives to himself and detonated them while charging an Iraqi tank. Ayatollah Khomeini went on to use

⁸⁵ Ali Akbar Rezvani. *The Philosophy of Martyrdom*, p. 71.

⁸⁶ After the victory of the Revolution, the late leader of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini, issued the order for establishing the Mobilization [Forces] of the Oppressed [Basij-e Mostaz'afan]... This is what he said about the Basij: "Equip your forces and acquire military training and teach your friends [as well]. A Muslim state should be all military and have military training... All should learn to shoot, learn war techniques... It should not happen that a rifle comes into one's hands and one does not know what to do with it. One should learn and teach. Teach the youth. It should happen that a state with 20 million youths will have 20 million riflemen. It will have a 20 million-men army. Such a state is invulnerable." See writer?, *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Grade 7 [Persian School Books] (Tehran: Ministry of Education, 2004), pp. 60-61.

⁸⁷ Christoph Reuter, *My Life Is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 33-51.

“martyrs” to clear Iraqi minefields and the Iranian Pasdaran subsequently exported the shahid concept to Lebanon in 1982.⁸⁸

Prior to the twentieth century, the term revolution had never been applied to Islam or things Islamic. The juridical and theological framework of Islam radically preclude any notion of “revolution.” Islam conceives of itself as the perfect political system, since it flows from a perfect revelation. It derives its entire body of law from God’s expressis verbis prescription. There is no conceivable change in a system of that kind. As Ayatollah Khomeini famously said:

“You have no need for new legislation; simply put into effect that which has already been legislated for you. This will save you a good deal of time and effort, praise be to God, is ready-made for use.”⁸⁹

Still, the Shiite Islamists who triumphed in Tehran in 1979 spoke of it as their “Islamic Revolution.” In a far-reaching statement of intent, the Ayatollah Khomeini had written: “Both the Shariah and common sense dictate that we do not let the existing governments persist in their ways. They have suspended the Shariah of God. For this reason it is the duty of all Muslims of the world, wherever they may happen to be, to rise up for the Islamic Revolution.”⁹⁰

Ayatollah Khomeini and the militant clerics aimed at establishing an Islamic state by means of an Islamic revolution. The proponents of Islamic traditionalism had

⁸⁸ Sepah Pasdaran, *Jangha-ye Payambar* [The Prophet’s wars] (Tehran: Vahed-e Amuzeshi-e `Aqidati-e Siyasi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqilab-e Eslami, 1984), p. 16.

⁸⁹ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya* (Qum: The Islamic State, year 1960), p. 134.

⁹⁰ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 7.

appropriated the most potent myth of modern politics, the myth of the revolution. But Ayatollah Khomeini went further. By 1980, he launched an “Islamic Cultural Revolution” aimed at re-Islamicizing society, reshaping the people and the state, desecularizing the educational system, and fully establishing the Islamic Republic as an ideological state.⁹¹

The Cultural Revolution, “an interesting extension of the modern myth of revolution due to Mao Zedong and the repercussions of the Chinese Revolution,” was designed to eradicate all traces of Western cultural influence from high schools and universities. “It was natural for the Islamic Government to look at the latest model of revolution, with added features. Ayatollah Khomeini therefore ordered the creation of the Committee for Cultural Revolution to take charge of the Islamicization of the universities.”⁹²

The relationship between Islam and Marxism, between Islamists and communists, Marxists and sundry ideologues, was never free of tensions, but ever an unstable coalition of Gnostics whose ideologies were convergent enough to permit cooperation and interchange but divergent enough to cause strain and conflict. As long as they all fought uphill to oust the shah, Ayatollah Khomeini cunningly kept silent or even encouraged the Leftist revolutionaries and gave his clerics a wide mandate to work with them.⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹² Said Arjomand, *Authority in Shiism and Constitutional Developments in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 60.

The intense personalization of the cosmic drama in Shiism – around the doomed figures of Ali, Husayn, and Hasan was a powerful, inherent booster to millenarian eschatology. The orthodox interpretation given over the ages by the clerics kept the millenarianism within bounds: The last Imam, the Mahdi, had gone into hiding and would return at some unspecified time in the remote future; societies cannot exist in a permanent state of eschatological expectation, everlastingly suspended to a hypothetical. The millennium was a hope, not a daily matter.⁹⁴

It was thus contained but not eradicated: The chiliastic belief lay now dormant, now fully reawakened. “As part of the general revival of religion in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a marked increase in the popularity of *duaye nodbeh*, the supplication for the return of the Hidden Imam as the Mahdi, and special sessions were being arranged for its recital.”⁹⁵

Ayatollah Khomeini’s Influenced by those examples, by 1970 Khomeini’s militant followers were calling him Imam. The acclamation Ayatollah of Khomeini as Imam by his followers was a startling event in Shiite history in Iran. Never since the majority of Iranians had become Shiite in the 16th century had they called a living person Imam. The term had hitherto only been used in reference to one of the twelve holy imams and its connotations in the minds of the Shiite believers as divinely-

⁹³ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri. *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Hosayn-Ali Montazeri* [Past Memorials of Ayatollah Montazeri] (Los Angeles: Ketab Corp, 2001), p. 311.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 262.

⁹⁵ See Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (London and New York: Norton & Company, 2006), pp. 170-175.

guided, infallible leaders undoubtedly worked to build up Ayatollah Khomeini's charisma.⁹⁶

It was now suggested that the Ayatollah was linked to the Hidden Imam of the Age, the Lord of Time. "An unmistakably apocalyptic mood was observable during the religious month of Moharram 1399 (December 1978) among the masses of Tehran. Intense discussions were raging as to whether or not Khomeini was the Imam of the Age and the Lord of Time."⁹⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini's face was allegedly seen on the moon in provincial cities. Without claiming to be the returning Mahdi, Khomeini ingeniously exploited the messianic yearning by encouraging his acclamation as the Imam. He suggested that he was the forerunner of the Mahdi. The slogan most frequently chanted by the "Followers of the Line of the Imam" was: "O God, O God, keep Khomeini until the Revolution of the Mahdi."⁹⁸

In September 1982, a clerical member of the Majlis, the parliament, predicted the imminent Advent of the Mahdi. A soldier wounded at the front during the war between Iran and Iraq reported that he had seen the Mahdi who had spoken to him thus: "Your prayer has expedited my Advent by a few hundred years." The story was printed in Soroush, the intellectual journal of the Islamic militants in November 1982.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 101.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 152.

⁹⁹ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri. *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, p. 158.

The influential Ayatollah Saduqi of Yazd reported a miracle performed by Ayatollah Khomeini many years earlier: The Imam had created a spring in the middle of the desert under a scorching sun. Ayatollah Khomeini's self-appointment as quasi-Mahdi was rooted in the revolutionary doctrine he had developed, that of the "government of the jurist," velayat-e faqih. In Islam, the law is fiqh and the jurist is the faqih. This covers a much wider ambit than is connoted by the English words, since "in Islam, theology is law and law is theology," a conception that derives seamlessly from the undivision of the religious and the political sphere.¹⁰⁰

Ayatollah Khomeini now claimed absolute political power for the faqih, that is, himself. His theory overthrew centuries of accepted Shiite doctrine: During the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam – that is, until his Advent – the ulama's mandate does not extend to the political sphere, and their mandate is a collective mandate, not one vested with any one individual. Ayatollah Khomeini rode roughshod over traditions and objections.¹⁰¹

From the 1963 riots onward, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers stirred up the masses with the perspective of a political revolution to secure the leadership of this political revolution for themselves, they revolutionized the Shiite political ethos.¹⁰² In January 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini asserted his God-given, absolute mandate to rule and govern as "the most important of the divine commandments with

¹⁰⁰ See Ayatollah Khomeini, "An Islamic State Point of View", in *Concept of the Islamic State*, edited by Laurent Murawiec (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1979), pp. 61-69.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁰² Said Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 181.

priority over all derivative divine commandments, even over prayer, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca.”¹⁰³

This was an extraordinary innovation in Islam, since the derivative commandments have always been considered the “Pillars of Islam.” This clerical absolutism (hierocracy) exercised by one man, the quasi-Mahdi, became, as it were, Gospel truth in the Islamic Republic. Then-President Khamenei, now Supreme Guide himself – though lower in the scale of Mahdihood – asserted that the commandments of the ruling jurist, *valiye faqih*, “are like the commandments of God.” He added:

“It is the ruling jurist who creates the order of the Islamic Republic and requires obedience to it. Opposing this order has become forbidden as one of the cardinal sins, and combating the opponents of this order have become a religious duty.”¹⁰⁴

After the revolution, The Ayatollah khomeinist movement against the left gained momentum after a shadowy terrorist organization began assassinating rumored members of the Revolutionary Council.¹⁰⁵ The group, known as Forqan, came to the fore after they claimed responsibility for the assassination of Maj. Gen. Mohammad Qarani on 20 April 1979; however, it was their assassination of the prominent Shia cleric, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, on 1 May that gained them lasting infamy.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁰⁵ *Le Monde*, *Antileft Feeling Heightens in Iran*, *Le Monde*, 5 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 11 May 1979, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 40-44.

In response, Ayatollah Khomeini publicly lambasted the left, critics of his clerical camp, and the press for being “traitors” to the revolution and for acting against the will of the people.¹⁰⁷ His outspoken criticism of the press, which had already caused the closing of one major Iranian newspaper,¹⁰⁸ caused another major newspaper (Kayhan) to purge its staff of suspected anti-Ayatollah Khomeinists and leftist sympathizers.¹⁰⁹

A month later, Forqan claimed responsibility for the shooting of another prominent ally of Ayatollah Khomeini, mid-level cleric Hojjat al-Islam Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. This attack, which failed to kill Rafsanjani despite two bullet wounds to the torso, added more vitriol to the wave of anti-leftist activism. The left was again blamed for being behind a plot against the clergy and for being assisted by the U.S. in that effort.¹¹⁰

Ayatollah Khomeini directly accused the U.S. for being behind the plot, stating “from among the webs of these terrors one [can] see the footsteps of superpowers and international criminals. America and the other superpowers must know that they cannot assassinate our revolution.”¹¹¹ However, he also implicated the left in a statement released around the same time, “no individual and no group is

¹⁰⁷ “Iranian Rightists Break up Play; Attack Playwright and Audience,” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1979, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ “Leading Iranian Newspaper Shuts After Attack by Ayatollah Khomeini,” *The Washington Post*, 13 May 1979, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ *The Globe and Mail*, 17 May 1979, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri. *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, p. 88.

¹¹¹ “Ayatollah Khomeini Blames U.S. for Assault on Aid,” *The Washington Post*, 27 May 1979, p.5.

allowed to insult the clergy, and if it happens the offenders should be prosecuted and punished by the local revolutionary court."¹¹²

The subtext of this message was not lost on Ayatollah khomeini's supporters who read it as a condemnation of the left and a religious sanctioning for anti-leftist activism.¹¹³ The Forqan assassinations lent credence to Ayatollah khomeini's campaign against the left and gave his forces the legitimacy and sympathy needed to engage in the overt suppression of leftist and democratic organizations.

The Guards, the committees, and other unofficial Ayatollah khomeinist groups led the ground war against these organizations and began to operate more openly and more aggressively against them. Some of the pressure exerted on leftist organizations by Ayatollah khomeinist forces seemed to have its desired effect. While both the MKO and People's Fada'i had earlier acknowledged Ayatollah khomeini's position of authority, the latter announced that it had gone so far as to propose changes to its constitution to bring it in line with Ayatollah khomeini and his faction.¹¹⁴

These changes, most of which contradicted the group's Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation, included articles that claimed: the Fada'i would act according

¹¹² "Ayatollah, Aid of Ayatollah Khomeini, Shot in Tehran; Moslems, Leftists, Clash at U.S. Embassy," *The Washington Post*, 26 May 1979, p 7.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ MKO leaders Masud Rajavi and Mansur Mansuri articulated their support for Ayatollah khomeini: "Ayatollah Ayatollah khomeini is the guide of the revolution and we have a good relationship with him. [He is] a guide and a strong uncompromising leader against imperialism." See "Mujahidin Khalq Leaders on Relations with Authorities, U.S.," *An-Nahar al-'Arabi wa ad-Duwali*, 4 June 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 8 June 1979, p. 4.

to “divine Islamic law, the Koran, and the exalted commandments of Islam”; the Fadai would support the establishment of an Islamic Republic; the Fadai would “perform its mission according to the instructions and orders of Imam Khomeyni and his policy”; the Fadai would “conduct its activities publically and openly and avoid any kind of clandestine actions”; and the Fadai would “recognize and not dispute the orders of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution.”¹¹⁵

These were dramatic (if politically motivated and superficial) concessions on the part of the Fadai. They are not only evidence of Ayatollah Khomeini’s political authority, but also speak to the growing influence and status of the Revolutionary Guards as an official arm of that authority. The move against the left also brought the IRGC to the ethnic (non-Persian) regions of Iran, where leftist influence was strong and where some leftist groups had been active in the organizing of pro-autonomy movements within regional minority communities.¹¹⁶

Instead of quelling unrest, the presence of the Guards in these areas and their heavy-handed tactics sparked violent protests from local communities. For example, in early and mid May the IRGC began establishing local units in Khuzestan and Kermanshahan,¹¹⁷ provoking a backlash from the local population in both regions.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ “Constitution for Cherikha-ye Feda’i-ye Khalq Proposed,” *Kayhan*, 27 May 1979, p. 6.

¹¹⁶ Mahfoozi acknowledges that the Fadai worked with Turkmen farmers on these issues and helped establish councils to push for land reform. However, he denies that the Fadai armed the Turkmen. See, Alireza Mahfoozi interview, Tehran newspapers, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁷ “Khomeyni Representatives to Form Guards Corps in Ahvaz,” *Tehrans’ Newspapers in Persian*, p. 10, *Keyhan*, 17 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 5 June 1979, p. 7; “Kermanshahan Guards Corps Being Formed,” *Tehran Domestic Service in Persian*, 17 May 1979, *FBIS-MEA*, 11 May 1979, “Khuzestan Revolutionary Guardians Corps to be Established,” *Tehrans’ Newspapers in Persian*, p. 5.

In Khuzestan, a leader of the local Arab community specifically blamed the Revolutionary Guards for inciting conflict between local activists and a Guards detachment.¹¹⁹

The fighting in Khuzestan mirrored the ethnic unrest that had already erupted between the Guards, regime forces, and the ethnic Turkmen, Baluchi, and Kurdish populations in the northeast, southeast, and western regions of Iran, respectively. While the local populations in these areas blamed the Guards and other Ayatollah khomeinist elements for initiating the violence, the regime blamed foreign influence and “counterrevolutionaries” for stirring up ethnic and religious tensions that did not previously exist.¹²⁰

The government blamed the left, and singled out the Marxist-Leninist People’s Fadaï for fueling the violence. Prime Minister Bazargan, in a speech to the Revolutionary Guards, denounced the Fadaï for its “treachery” against the revolution and for having a “hand” in all of the incidents of ethnic unrest throughout the country.¹²¹ Although they had the support of Ayatollah khomeini and the government to crackdown on leftist organizations, the Revolutionary Guards’ official grounds for

¹¹⁸ “Iran Arabs, Ayatollah Khomeini Forces Clash Violently; Arabs Seeking Autonomy Clash Violently with Ayatollah Khomeini Forces,” *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1979, p. 9.; “Armed Men Attack Kermanshah Revolutionary Court,” in *FBIS-MEA*, 8 June 1979, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ “Criticism of Baghdad, Radio” Tehran in Arabic for abroad, 2 June 1979.

¹²¹ “Iran Premier Calls Leftists Traitors to Islamic Regime,” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 July 1979, p. 11.

doing so was rooted in the government's efforts of disarming the public and unofficial militias.¹²²

As the head of the disarmament campaign the IRGC continually clashed with organizations and groups that refused to give up their weapons. This included the Islamist-Marxist MKO, whose leadership, in a 4 June interview, proclaimed that so long as “the imperialist interests have not been touched, we will not give up our arms.”¹²³ The dispute between the MKO and the post-revolutionary regime over arms led to direct conflict between the Mojahedin and the IRGC. In early July, the Guards training facility in Qom was attacked by armed assailants. While the attackers were not initially known, the MKO was accused of the plot and its local headquarters was raided by the IRGC and its supporters.¹²⁴

The Revolutionary Guards legitimated this raid by claiming they had seized a large stash of weapons belonging to the Mojahedin. Although the MKO protested the actual number of weapons confiscated—suggesting the IRGC had inflated the number for political purposes—it argued that Mojahedin members “only carry

¹²² The Guards began releasing statements during this period calling on the public to disarm and for citizens to inform the local IRGC of those who refused to turn in their weapons. For example, the newly-established Guards unit of Qazvin released this statement in early July 1979: “It [the IRGC of Qazvin] thereby wishes to inform all those who bear arms, whether they be ordinary individuals or the former city guards, that in the next 48 hours they should hand over their weapons to the staff of the Islamic Revolutionary guards of the city of Qazvin, on Sa’di Avenue, next to Dispensary No.1; otherwise they will be dealt with in accordance with the regulations.” See “Qazvin City Guards Replaced by Revolutionary Guards,” *Tehrans’ Newspapers in Persian*, 11 July 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 12 July 1979, p.8.

¹²³ “Mujahidin Khalq Leaders on Relations with Authorities, U.S.,” *An-Nahar al-Arabi wa ad-Duwali* in Arabic, in *FBIS-MEA*, 8 June 1979, p. 4.

¹²⁴ “Measures Reported Following Attack on Qom Guards Center,” *Tehrans’ Newspapers in Persian*, 7 July 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 12 July 1979, p. 7.

weapons to protect [themselves] against plots of imperialism and SAVAK .”¹²⁵ The MKO also called for talks with the government to discuss the issue of disarmament, suggesting they would abide by Ayatollah khomeini’s decision on the matter (so long as it was in their favor).¹²⁶

The public seizure of arms from the MKO’s Qom headquarters emboldened the disarmament efforts of the IRGC. The incident led to a further declaration against armed groups by the regional prosecutor’s office and charged the Revolutionary Guards to “use all of their ability and Islamic decisiveness to disarm, arrest, and detain any person or persons found carrying arms.” The order continued, “the formation of armed groups, except with respect to the aforementioned officials [IRGC, security officials, and the military], is forbidden anywhere and those contravening this order will be regarded as enemies of the revolution and plotters against the Islamic Republic.”¹²⁷

The illegalization of arms gave the IRGC and other official security organizations the legal mandate to pursue the armed militias that were antagonistic (or at least not sufficiently obedient) to Ayatollah khomeini. Effectively, this meant that the major leftist militias, including the MKO, People’s Fadai, and Tudeh, had

¹²⁵ “Mojahedin-e Khalq Wants Open Talks on Arms-Carrying,” *E’ttebat*, 27 August 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 6 September 1979, p. 8.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Even though the MKO suggested they would abide by Ayatollah Khomeini’s decision, they clearly intended to remain armed. The MKO state “the decision of the imam [sic] and the government is the one by which our organization will ultimately abide especially as we are confident that they will never allow us to remain undefended against the threats of the people’s enemies, imperialism’s helpers, and SAVAK, who have pursued us for years.”

¹²⁷ Kamran Scott Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi’i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 113.

become legal targets of the post- revolutionary regime. The government added to the anti-leftist climate by publicly denouncing that camp as “anti-Islamic” and questioning the true intentions of its associated organizations. In his 1 August message to the nation, Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan stated.¹²⁸

Through such public denunciations of the left by Ayatollah khomeini and the government, the movement against dissent gained increasing public support. The embattled leftist organizations, while still popular among students and the intelligentsia, were losing the ground war to Ayatollah khomeini. The flowing tide of anti-leftist sentiment and support for Ayatollah khomeini’s campaign became evident in the wake of a crackdown on the press.¹²⁹

A new law passed by the government enabled the shutting down of newspapers critical of the post-revolutionary regime. Soon the offices of Iran’s leading newspaper, Ayandegan, were occupied by the Revolutionary Guards and its operations shut down. Foreign correspondents, notably Americans from the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and NBC were also ordered to leave the country.¹³⁰ In response, major leftist and democratic organizations—save the MKO which did not participate—organized mass protests in Tehran calling for an end to “censorship.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

¹²⁹ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri. *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, p. 402.

¹³⁰ *The Associated Press*, 7 August 1979, p. 10.

¹³¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 195.

The protests, which swelled to an estimated 100,000, were met by smaller, but more violent counter-protests led by the pro-Ayatollah khomeini Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution and overseen by the Revolutionary Guards.¹³² The following day, the official offices of the MKO and the People's Fada'i were attacked by armed Ayatollah khomeinist gangs chanting "Communism is destroyed! Islam is victorious!"¹³³ Although the left and democratic opposition were able to display the immense size and passion of their support base, the Ayatollah khomeinist faction was able to enunciate its political superiority through intimidation and violence.

The mass protests following the closing of Ayandegan, as well as the continuing fighting in the Kurdish regions of western Iran, were an outgrowth of a larger conflict between the Ayatollah khomeinist camp and the leftist and democratic opposition over the drafting of a constitution for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Beyond the street activism of the Ayatollah khomeinist militias, committees, and IRGC, the clerically-dominated Islamic Republic Party (IRP) was another front in the post-revolutionary power struggle.¹³⁴

As it gained strength, the Ayatollah khomeinist faction succeeded in pressuring the Provisional Government to include members of the IRP in the cabinet. In late July, Prime Minister Bazargan invited four IRP members into his administration: Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani as Interior Minister, Hashemi Rafsanjani as

¹³² Saidi, Mehdi. *Sazman-e mojahedin-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhelal*. Vol. 1. (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2007), p. 36.

¹³³ *The Associated Press*, 14 August 1979, p. 14.

¹³⁴ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri. *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, pp. 89-91.

Deputy Interior Minister, Ali Khamenei as Defense Minister, and Mohammad Javad Bahonar as Minister of Education.¹³⁵

This placed clergy in leading positions in both the Revolutionary Council and the Provisional Government, gave Ayatollah khomeini greater political leverage, and put his supporters in the position to allot more funding for the IRGC and other revolutionary organs (*nahad* in persian). This allowed the IRP—as the chief proponent of Ayatollah khomeini’s doctrine of the “guardianship of the jurisprudent”—the wherewithal to push its agenda in all avenues open to the post-revolutionary regime.¹³⁶

Islamic Republic Party members also dominated the 11 August election of the “Assembly of Experts”—a publically elected council that would oversee the drafting of the Islamic Republic’s constitution—which gave Ayatollah khomeinists the strongest voice in the ensuing constitutional debates. With the death of Ayatollah Taleqani in early September the democratic and leftist opposition lost its leading clerical supporter and a chief bulwark to Ayatollah khomeinist aspirations.¹³⁷

Ayatollah Taleqani’s absence emboldened Ayatollah khomeini’s political project. Ayatollah Khomeini appointed his trusted ally Ayatollah Montazeri as the new Friday congregational prayer leader for Tehran—an influential position

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

¹³⁶ Sepah Pasdaran, *Qanun-e moqararat-e estekhdami-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami* (Tehran: Edareh-ye Koll-e Qavanin va Moqararat-e Keshvar, 1995), p. 31.

¹³⁷ Sepah Pasdaran. *Jang va tajavoz: jebhe-ye impirialisti 'alayh-e enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Daftar-e Siyasi- e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 1981), p.10.

previously held by Taleqani—and charged the Revolutionary Guards with the security detail for these massive ceremonies.¹³⁸

Montazeri used the pulpit to articulate both the Ayatollah khomeinist line and his own revolutionary agenda. Montazeri, like his son Mohammad, represented the radical internationalist segment of the Ayatollah khomeinist camp, which strove to bring Iran's revolution to other parts of the Muslim world to combat "global" Zionism and imperialism. In an October interview, Montazeri mentions using his new position as prayer leader to promote these ideas and argues:

"[We], as Muslims, must be interested in each other's affairs and support one another whenever we can. This is the duty of every Muslim. I would like to assert that we in the Muslim revolution [in Iran] cannot remain calm or sleep on silk while the rest of the Muslim peoples and countries are encountering danger, injustice and oppression by dictatorships and imperialism."¹³⁹

The notion of combating imperialism, in all its forms, was central to the operations of the IRGC. For instance, the local IRGC unit of Abadan declared a day of fasting in solidarity with a hunger strike undertaken by Palestinian prisoners in Israel. In their message to the Palestinians, the Abadan Guards "promise" the destruction of the "illegitimate offspring of world imperialism-zionism [sic]" (Israel) and the "liberation" of the Palestinians.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ "Revolution Guards to Insure Security at Friday Prayers," Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 13 September 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 14 September 1979, p. 8.

¹³⁹ "Montazeri Interviewed on Muslim Solidarity, Gulf ties", *An-Nahar al-'Arabi wa ad-Duwali*, 22-28 October 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 29 October 1979, p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ "Abadan Guards Fast in Support of Palestinians," Tehran's Newspapers in Persian, 15 October 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 17 October 1979, p. 7.

Fighting imperialist and Zionist “plots” was at the heart of the IRGC’s (unofficial) campaign against leftist organizations and its (official) operations against “counterrevolutionaries” associated with the left. This is especially true for the ongoing conflict between the government’s forces (led by the IRGC) and the forces associated with the leftist Kurdish Democratic Party and the Marxist-Leninist Komala organization.¹⁴¹

The language used by Iran’s leaders to describe the ethnic unrest led by these leftist groups in Iran’s western Kurdish regions made the terms “imperialist” and “counterrevolutionary” nearly synonymous. While the army described its role in the fighting as “cleansing” the “cities in the west of the country . from alien elements and the stooges of imperialism,”¹⁴²

The IRGC assured its readiness “to eradicate all the counterrevolutionary elements in the country—or even outside the country.” The growing voice of the radical-internationalist sector of the Ayatollah khomeinist faction emphasized the issue of anti-imperialism (and everything it conjured up) along side the idea of the “guardianship” and Islamic government. Anti-imperialist forces across the ideological spectrum were further radicalized when a 1 November meeting between Bazargan and US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brezinski in Algiers became public. The

¹⁴¹ Anthony Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War: The First Round* (Washington: Armed Forces Journal International, 1982) p. 148.

¹⁴² “Army Chief Comments,” Tehran’s Newspapers in Persian, 3 September 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 4 September 1979, p. 8.

public protests against this meeting, which many feared was a prelude to the return of American influence in Iran, disgraced the Bazargan government.¹⁴³

Leftists and Ayatollah khomeini were equally outraged by the revelation, but only the latter managed to take full advantage of the situation. Ownership of the anti-imperialism issue—which had been championed by the left—was emphatically placed within the grasp of Ayatollah khomeini by the 4 November storming of the US embassy. Even though the IRGC had been protecting the US embassy and had resisted previous attacks, its members did not intervene in this attempt and may have helped facilitate it.¹⁴⁴

Ayatollah Khomeinist student group “Students in the Line of the Imam,” who had planned the attack and succeeded in sacking the building and capturing its employees, may have had contacts with the Guards through the MIR and Montazeri factions. The US embassy takeover and hostage-taking began what sociologist Said Arjomand has called, “Ayatollah khomeini’s phantasmagorical struggle with the imperialist Satan,” and made fear of a US-led counterrevolution an animating facet of Ayatollah khomeini political discourse.¹⁴⁵

The embassy takeover, which was partly organized to protest the 1 November Algiers meeting and the Shah’s protection by the US (where he was being allowed to

¹⁴³ “Guards Commander Outlines Plan for Taking Mahabad,” Tehran’s Newspapers in Persian, 25 October 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 26 October 1979, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ “U.S. Embassy held by Iranian student in bid to get Shah”, *The Globe and Mail*, 5 November 1979, p. 56.

¹⁴⁵ Said Amir Arjomand, “Introduction”, p. 137.

pursue cancer treatment), proved to be the death knell for the Provisional Government. Humiliated and defeated, Bazargan resigned in protest on 6 November and the government fell with him.¹⁴⁶

This left the regime in the hands of the clerically-dominated Revolutionary Council. With the political tide rising in their favor, the Ayatollah khomeinist faction in the Assembly of Experts succeeded in including the “guardianship” in the draft constitution (article 105) and was able to pass the most controversial articles (107-110) associated with that office.¹⁴⁷

The new constitution, which was ratified in a popular referendum on 2-3 December, gave the ruling jurist (now Ayatollah khomeini) “absolute power without the slightest responsibility.”¹⁴⁸ It also made Ayatollah khomeini the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and IRGC, and gave him the authority to appoint and dismiss the head commanders of each. The democratic opposition looked to senior cleric Ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, who had been a leading critic of the constitution and the “guardianship,” to articulate its discontent.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Katzman, *Warriors*, Katzman, *The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran: Outlaw, Outcast, or Normal Country?* (Benliot, Huntington: Nova Science Publishers, 2001), pp. 36-37. Katzman specifically mentions MIR's Behzad Nabavi and IRGC commander Javad Mansuri as having possible links with this student group.

¹⁴⁷ On the constitutional debates and the role played by Ayatollah khomeinist-aligned clergy during this process, see Bakhsh, *Ayatollahs*, p. 75-88.

¹⁴⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, “Introduction”, p. 139.

¹⁴⁹ Shaul Bakhsh, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 89.

Despite a short-lived uprising in Ayatollah Shariatmadari's home province of Azerbaijan by his allied Islamic People's Republican Party (IPRP)—which was quickly crushed by Ayatollah khomeinist militants led by the IRGC—leftist and democratic organizations were too weak and divided to challenge the new constitution.¹⁵⁰ The events of November and December 1979 have been referred to as the “second Islamic revolution” and a “clerical coup d’etat.”¹⁵¹

By exploiting the issue of imperialism and the fear of an American-sponsored counterrevolution, the Ayatollah khomeinist forces—led by Ayatollah khomeini and his clerical lieutenants in the IRP—became the dominant political force in post-revolutionary Iran. Through their dominance of the Assembly of Experts, the exploitation of the anti-imperialist climate following the US embassy takeover, the fall of the Provisional Government, and the passing of the theocratic constitution, the Ayatollah khomeinist clergy were now in the position to rewrite the revolution in their own name.¹⁵²

If clerics were the leaders of the new state, the Revolutionary Guards were their enforcers. The IRGC led the violent campaigns against dissenting and oppositional forces, and through official patronage by the state, made Ayatollah khomeini's will the law of the land. The IRGC laid the groundwork for the clerical

¹⁵⁰ Said Amir Arjomand, “Introduction”, pp. 139-141.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁵² See Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, p. 43.

enterprise of the Islamic Republic and was now in the position to truly guard an Islamic revolution.¹⁵³

Ayatollah Khomeini's followers set himself up on a par with Prophet Muhammad and Caliph Ali, "the Perfect Man," if not religiously, which would have been strange, but politically, also arguing that the Islamic Republic was a community superior to the Prophet's own in Medina and later Mecca: "Our people are better than the community of the Apostle,"¹⁵⁴ When in 1982 Ayatollah Khomeini ordered twenty-five Islamic organizations to merge into one "party of Allah," HezboAllah, it stood to reason, or unreason, that the slogan should be "Only one party, the party of Allah! Only one leader, Ruhollah!" It rhymes in Persian, with a ring similar to Ayatollah Khomeini "represented Allah's will on earth," just as Hitler was the Will of the Race and Stalin the Will of History and The People.

The results have been of the same order. The severe jihad that has radiated from Tehran since 1979 has been one of the principal causes political changes in the region since; it has fanned the flames not only of Shiite jihad but also of Sunni jihad. Indeed, Sunni-Shiite revolutionary and jihadi collaboration started the minute Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran in 1979.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ See the discussion on Ayatollah Khomeini's status in Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (London: Chatham House, 2006), pp. 72-92.

¹⁵⁴ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *al-Hukuma al-Islamiyya*, pp. 130-140.

¹⁵⁵ Ayatollah Khomeini, *An Islamic State Point of View in Concept of the Islamic State* (London: Islamic Council of Europe, 1979), pp. 61-69.

It is worth noting that there is no authority outside of God in Islam that can declare someone a martyr, even if individuals are referred to that way because of their actions and the circumstances of their deaths. Since only God can know what was in their minds at the time of their deaths, others will often reference those who die as “martyrs, God willing.”¹⁵⁶ The lack of a formal, accepted process for granting martyrdom in either Sunni or Shia Islam generates a couple of effects.

First, it means that despite the declaration of martyrdom by an organization or government, that individual may not be accepted as a martyr by the greater Muslim community. Second, and most importantly, it allowed modern Shia scholars to reinterpret the concept of martyrdom, and justify mass suicidal attacks by young Iranian children, and eventually istishhad. The Shia ulama revival and revision of martyrdom and jihad was firmly solidified by the spectacular success of the Iranian revolution.¹⁵⁷

It was such a martyrdom ideology that helps explain how and why the religious scholars of the Iranian government sent thousands of Iranian children on suicidal missions to clear mine fields or overrun fortified positions during the Iran-Iraq war as Basij martyrs. In one assault, the Iranian government called “Karbala,” more than 23,000 Iranian boys aged twelve to thirteen swarmed across minefields towards Iraqi machine gun emplacements. They rushed forward with keys to unlock the doors to paradise dangling from their necks and cries of “Ya Karbala, Ya Hosein,

¹⁵⁶ See David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam Traditions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 118.

¹⁵⁷ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, pp. 14-21.

Ya Khomeini!” spouting from their mouths, but all of them were slaughtered in less than a day.¹⁵⁸

Like those who preceded them, whether in France in the late eighteenth century or in Cuba in the mid-twentieth, Iran’s revolutionaries shared a belief that their victory would lead to the success of other likeminded movements across the globe.¹⁵⁹ This belief stemmed as much from the hope produced by their triumph as from the thought that inspired their activism¹⁶⁰.

Drawing from the Third Worldism of Ali Shariati to the pan-Islamic sentiments of Ayatollah Khomeini, a wide spectrum of Iranian revolutionaries accepted (at least in spirit) the notion that Iran bore some responsibility to assist its oppressed brethren in the Islamic and Third Worlds. Moreover, Iranian activists recognized that Iran’s lot under the Pahlavi regime was the result of larger international forces (e.g., imperialism, Zionism, or capitalism), the destruction of which would require a more robust and successful global revolutionary movement.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Bernard Freamon, *Martyrdom, Suicide, and the Islamic Law of War: A Short Legal History*, Fordham International Law Journal, Volume 27, Issue 1, (2003), p. 348; See A. Ezzati, “The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam”, *Al-Serat*, Vol. 12 (1986); available from <http://www.al-islam.org/al-serat/Concept-Ezzati.htm>; (accessed on 27 September 2001).

¹⁵⁹ Hilal Khashan asserts that these groups were united only by their hatred towards Israel. Hilal Khashan, “The New World Order and the Tempo of Militant Islam”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1997), p. 15.

¹⁶⁰ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 6-7; Guila in Denoeux, “The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (June 2002), p. 61.

¹⁶¹ Sepahe Pasharane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enghelab*, p. 32.

To this end, some of the Islamic Republic's leaders adopted a radical or revolutionary approach to internationalism, which primarily understood foreign relations as the management of conflict rather than cooperation. Although there are varying definitions of internationalism, political scientist Fred Halliday offers a typology that divides this concept into three categories: liberal, hegemonic, and revolutionary.¹⁶²

Liberal internationalism (e.g., international commerce, or the United Nations), Halliday suggests, is a "belief that independent societies and autonomous individuals" can, through interaction and cooperation, "evolve toward common purposes" such as "peace and prosperity." Hegemonic internationalism (e.g., European imperialism) sees this integration taking place through "asymmetrical" and "unequal terms," though still considers such integration desirable and "good." Revolutionary internationalism, on the other hand, views international relations through the lens of conflict.¹⁶³

Conclusion

In addition, Iran—emblazoned with religious zeal—has sought to export its own brand of Islamic revivalism abroad. This has included sending aid—money, military equipment and training—to Shia and Sunnis alike outside its borders. Iran's attempt to export its particular interpretation of Islam has been countered and possibly checked by Saudi Arabia's efforts to spread its own interpretation of Islam abroad through schools, hospitals, and other social services.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. See also Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran: 1785-1906: The Role of the Ulama in The Qajar Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 31-45.

A common characteristic of this type of revolutionary or “radical” internationalism is militaristic intervention, or the collaboration between revolutionary states and like-minded militant groups as a means of impacting the domestic affairs of foreign states. This conception of intervention is rooted in both the ideology and the acknowledgement of revolutionary states that international factors shape and to a large degree determine the success of a revolution.

Militaristic intervention is seen as a way of preserving a revolution, if not expanding it. Yet the survival of revolutionary states is equally dependent on a cautious navigation of international relations such that a revolutionary state will not offer assistance to such a degree as to prejudice its own existence. Therefore, while revolutionary states may be animated by an interventionist spirit, their ultimate need for international cooperation and support leads to the tempering of interventionist ambition.

CHAPTER 3

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR AND THE PRACTICE OF ISTISHHAD

Introduction

On 22 September 1980, Iraqi forces began a full-scale invasion of Iran. The main thrust of the invasion aimed at capturing Iraqi-claimed land on Iran's side of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and parts of Iran's oil-rich southwest province of Khuzestan. Iraq's superior military technology and coordination proved disastrous to Iranian defenses, which were already in the midst of the Ayatollah khomeinist-led purges that had decimated the regular military's officer corps and destroyed its institutional cohesion. Despite stalwart Iranian resistance, the Iraqi military was able to capture key positions inside Iranian territory, including the strategically important city of Khorramshahr.

The Iran-Iraq War started on 22 September 1980. At first, most countries treated this war as nothing more than border skirmishes between two neighboring countries but surprisingly it became a deep challenge and lasted for eight years. After eight long years of fighting, the war finally ended when both Iraq and Iran accepted UN Resolution 598 in August 1988. This ended the eight-year Persian Gulf War, the longest and bloodiest conflict between two Third World states after the Second World War. In the afternoon of September 23, 1980, following a series of air strikes on Iranian airfields, the Iraqi army crossed the border into

neighboring Iran, igniting a war that was to last nearly eight years.¹ In this chapter, we discuss about the Iran-Iraq war itself which was a place that the Istishhad and Martyrdom phenomenon took place for many Iranians.

The Roots of the Iran-Iraq War

The Iran – Iraq border had witnessed multiple border skirmishes in the months leading up to the war. Additionally, insurgent groups conducted guerilla operations within Iran and Iraq with the full support and approval of Baghdad and Tehran.² This war is known to be a bloody and an expensive conflict. Towards the end of the war, both Iran and Iraq were feeling the effects of this prolonged war. When the war eventually ended in August 1988, both countries had suffered the following. On the number of casualties, it was estimated that the total war dead was 262 000 Iranians and 105 000 Iraqis.³ With another 700 000 injured, this summed up to a total of over one million casualties for the two countries. The Iran-Iraq war has aptly been described as the Third World's first Great War.⁴

At least 157 Iranian towns with populations of more than 5,000 were damaged or wholly destroyed during the war, and some 1,800 border villages

¹ A sizeable body of literature has been produced on the Iran-Iraq war. For a detailed narrative of the conflict, see Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991). For more analytic and comparative studies of the war, see Majid Khadduri, *The Gulf War: The Origins and Implications of the Iraq-Iran Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman, *War and Peace in the Gulf* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991); Shahrām Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988). For a brief examination of the Iran-Iraq conflict in the context of modern warfare in the Middle East, see Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

² Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War: The First Round* (Armed Forces Journal International, 1982), p. 29.

³ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War*, p. 250.

⁴ See discussion, for example, in Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 1989), p. 261.

were virtually wiped off the map.⁵ Iran and Iraq had suffered enormously in terms of casualties and monetarily during their eight years of war. This war was known to be a most bloody and expensive war. Both countries had a total of over one million casualties and monetary wise, the eight-year war had cost both Iraq and Iran in excess of US\$700 billion each. It was definitely a very high price to pay in trying to achieve one's war aim.⁶

Conventional assessments of the costs of the war tend to focus upon lost oil revenues, declining GNPs, material destruction and even body counts.⁷ Both countries suffered millions of casualties and billions of dollars in damage. The collateral damage to the economies of other nations was also immense. The war was one of the most strategically important conflicts of modern times because it involved two major oil producers and the region where more than half the world's reserves are located. The War between Iran two countries lasted from September 1980 to August 1988. According to UN resolution, Iraq was eventually criticized for breaching international security and peace and was also accused of aggression against Iran.⁸

Neither Iran nor Iraq achieves their war aims during the eight-year war. Iraq's war aim was simply to destabilize and overthrow the Iranian regime through

⁵ Statistics on human and village loses extracted from Amir Taheri, *The Cauldron: The Middle East behind the Headlines* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 198-199. On refugees, see Martha Wenger and Dick Anderson, "The Gulf War", *MERIP Middle East Report*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (September-October 1987), p. 25.

⁶ Farhang Rajee, *Iranian Perspectives on the Iran-Iraq War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997) p. 14.

⁷ See Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani, "Economic Implications for Iran and Iraq", in *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts*, edited by Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp. 138-140.

⁸ Farhang Rajee, *Iranian Perspectives*, p. 3.

the invasion.⁹ While Iran's war aims were to destroy the Iraqi war machine and the removal of the Ba'th regime in Baghdad and paving the way for Shiite there to rule the country with the hope that this war would become a prime instrument for exporting the Islamic revolution.¹⁰ Destroying the Iraqi war machine, removing of the Ba'th regime and exporting the revolution were the main priority for Iran during the war.¹¹ Once Anthony Cordesman, in his comprehensive article about Iran-Iraq war in *Armed Forces Journal* deduced that:

“there were several reasons or objectives behind Iraq's decision to move when it did. First, the Iraqis attacked to secure the secular Ba'ath regime in Iraq from the Ayatollah's declared intent to overthrow it and to prevent the Iranians from resurrecting the Kurdish Insurgency”.¹²

An excuse of territorial disputes between the two states, especially those arising over the *Shatt al-Arab* waterway said to be the main cause of the war. The basic cut of this argument draws attention to Iraq's dislike of the 1975 Algiers Agreement which established the boundary of the *Shatt al-Arab* according to the *thalweg* (midchannel) principle rather than the eastern shoreline:

“Even if Iraq and Iran were homogeneous, even if Iraq had no Shi'i problem, the Shatt al-Arab issue would have sufficed to cause war to break out in 1980”.¹³

⁹ See Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989), p. 2.

¹⁰ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War*, pp. 264-265.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹² Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 32.

¹³ Daniel Pipes, “A Border Adrift: Origins of the Conflict”, in *The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts*, edited by Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi, (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. 121.

After an escalation in border skirmishes between the two countries through the summer of 1980, Iraq launched a full-scale invasion of Khuzistan on September 22, 1980. All indications suggest that Hussein thought the war would be very short. Within a month the Iraqis had seized Khorramshahr and by the end of 1980 they had penetrated up 20 miles of the entire Iranian front.¹⁴

Within six months of the start of the war, however, Iranian counter-offensives were beginning to take their toll upon the Iraqi army. Two years after the initial invasion the war had for the most part shifted onto Iraqi soil. As the war passed through its third and fourth years it displayed all the features of a deadlocked, attrited and drawn out affair.¹⁵

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¹⁴ Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman, *War and Peace in the Gulf* and Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), pp. 40-52.

¹⁵ For two accounts of the first half of the war, see Dilip Hiro, *Chronicle of the Gulf War*, (Merrip Reports: July/September), pp. 3-14; Ghassan Salameh, "Checkmate in the Gulf War", *MERIP Reports*, Vol. 14, No. 6/7 (July - September, 1984), p. 82. See also Efraim Karsh, "The Iran- Iraq War: A Military Analysis", in *Adelphi Papers*, No. 220 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1987), p. 119.

¹⁶ Abbass Ali Akbari, *Nabarde Jango Zendegi Nojavanan Dar Jebhe* [Struggle for Life and Death] (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 2003), p. 34.

the initial invasion the war had for the most part shifted onto Iraqi soil. As the war passed through its third and fourth years it displayed all the features of a deadlocked, attrited and drawn out affair.¹⁷

By the autumn of 1981, the ground war had started to turn against Iraq. Iranian offensives pushed the Iraqi army out of many of the areas conquered in the 1980 invasion, prompting Saddam Hussein to announce on April 22, 1982, that he would withdraw his forces from Iranian territory if Tehran would agree to a ceasefire. In April 1982 the Syrians performed a series of diplomatic, economic and military maneuvers that weakened the Iraqi fighting posture while strengthening that of the Iranians. The Syrians had chosen to back the Iranians for several reasons.¹⁸

First, the Syrian government is drawn from the Alawite faction which is Shiite in its orientation and, therefore, is inclined towards Iran and away from Iraq. More importantly, President Assad of Syria had long spoken of a "Greater Syria." Were Iraq to be victorious, it would strengthen the Riyadh-Amman-Baghdad axis that President Hussein was attempting to maintain. This axis would effectively reduce Syria's ability to influence the Arab world and undermine Syria's claim to be the true leader of the Ba'ath movement.¹⁹

Saddam repeatedly asked for ceasefire in June 1982, following the successful Iranian recapture of Khuzestan. All calls for a ceasefire where

¹⁷ See Majid Khadduri, *The Gulf War*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹ See Hooshang Amirahmadi and Manoucher Parvin, *Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), p. 49; Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War: Islam Embattled* (New York: Praeger, 1982), p. 46.

dismissed by Tehran. By July, the Iranian army had commenced offensive operations aimed at Basra. Iran would remain on the offensive throughout 1983, embarking on many operations, largely unsuccessful, aimed at seizing Iraqi territory.²⁰

While Iraq was recovering from the losses received near Shush and Dezful in March, the Iranians launched their most serious offensive up to that time. On April 30, 1981 "Operation Jerusalem" –amaliat-e beito-lmoghadas- commenced along three axes in the Khuzistan Province. The first axis was in the vicinity of Susangerd which the Iranians had failed to recover in January 1981. The second axis was directed toward the railline and roads which ran from Khorramshahr to Ahvaz and the Iraqi garrison at Hoveyze. The third axis was designed to recover Khorramshahr, itself. The Iranian attack was a well-coordinated effort making effective use of the various combat arms.²¹

Infantry night attacks were followed by armor thrusts and fighter aircraft and helicopter support. Initial success was good but stiff resistance was met in the northern area and in front of Khorramshahr, where the Iraqis adopted a more flexible defense. Advice from French and Jordanian advisors apparently assisted the Iraqi regulars in performing better but the Iraqi volunteer units did not fare as well.²²

²⁰ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 10.

²¹ Ibid., p. 11.

²² Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 74.

The conflicting and erratic nature of Iran's foreign policy in the immediate aftermath of the revolution reflected the intense internal power struggle.²³ The Iranian plateau is considered the core of Persian civilization. To the west lies Iraq, encompassing the Tigris-Euphrates river basin. The basin has been governed predominantly by both Arab and Turkish rulers.²⁴ The two countries conflicts in the region date back to the third century when Sassanid rulers attempted to reestablish a centralized government.²⁵

A cultural divide has separated Arabs and Persians since the seventh century when Arab armies conquered Persians east of the Zagros Mountains in western Iran.²⁶ The first account draws attention to the deeply rooted cultural enmity between Iran and Iraq and is premised upon a sense of incompatible and immanently hostile societies characterized in racial (Aryan and Semite), sectarian (Shia and Sunni), ethnic (Arab and Persian) or religious (secular and fundamentalist) terms.²⁷

A final explanation focuses upon territorial disputes between the two states, especially those arising over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The basic cut of this argument draws attention to Iraq's dislike of the 1975 Algiers Agreement

²³ See discussion in John W. Limbert, *Iran: At War with History* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 135-142.

²⁴ See Kamran Scott Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 106; Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 1-3.

²⁵ Richard A. Gabriel, *Fighting Armies, Antagonists in the Middle East: A Combat Assessment* (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 86.

²⁶ William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis of the Gulf War* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 1982), p. 2.

²⁷ See discussion in Mansour Farhang, "The Iran-Iraq War: The Feud, the Tragedy, the Spoils". *World Policy Journal*, Fall 1985, pp. 663-664. See also discussion in Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, pp. 262-264.

which established the boundary of the Shatt al-Arab according to the midchannel principle rather than the eastern shoreline:

“Even if Iraq and Iran were homogeneous, even if Iraq had no Shi'i problem, the Shatt al-Arab issue would have sufficed to cause war to break out in 1980”.²⁸

In the broadest possible terms we begin to detect the origins of the Iran-Iraq war by understanding the interaction between 'forces from the international environment and specific local processes and structures with their own specific logic' throughout the Twentieth Century. Before 1847, the Shatt-al-Arab was an inland river under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. In 1847, the weakening Ottoman Empire, under the Treaty of Ezerum, formally ceded to the Persian Empire the city of Khorramshahr, the island of Abadan and the anchorage and land on the eastern shore of the Shatt.²⁹

The freedom of navigation throughout the Shatt al-Arab was guaranteed to Persian vessels. The resultant agreement, the Algiers Accord of March 6, 1975 benefitted both parties. Iran received Iraq's acceptance that the common boundary was at the middle of the river and that Iraq would no longer support Iranian dissidents and Arab and Baluch secessionists.³⁰

Iraq received Iranian agreement to withdraw support of the Iraqi Kurds and agreement by Iran to uphold the status quo of the frontier lands. Iran has

²⁸ Daniel Pipes, “A Border Adrift”, p. 21. Pipes is particularly critical of those accounts of the war which over-emphasize the cultural dimensions of the war.

²⁹ See introductory discussion in Talal Asad and Roger Owen, *Sociology of Developing Societies: The Middle East* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), pp. 7-8.

³⁰ American Foreign Policy Institute, *The Impact of the Iranian Events upon Persian Gulf and U.S. Security* (Washington D.C.: Foreign Policy Institute, 1979), pp. 39-64.

historically been the bastion of the Shiites while Iraq has been predominantly oriented to the Sunni branch.³¹ Sunni Moslems believe that the line from Mohammed passed to his daughter Fatima, wife of Ali. The Sunnis discount the Imams, choosing instead to honor a caliph, or successor, their ruler.³²

Before Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran was an allied but after the revolution became a hostile. For the United States, apart from its main reason being its hostility towards the Islamic Revolution in Iran; supporting Iraq in the war meant that the United States and its Persian Gulf Arab allies had also succeeded in breaching the special relationship between Baghdad and Moscow which had a good relationship.³³

Excluding Iran and Iraq, Sunni Muslims are in the majority in the Persian Gulf states. The Shiites predominate in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain.³⁴ Cultural enmity between Iran and Iraq and is premised upon a sense of incompatible and immanently hostile societies characterized in racial (Aryan Iran and Semite Iraq), sectarian (Shi'i Iran and Sunni Iraq), ethnic (Persian Iran and Arab) or religious (fundamentalist Iran and secular Iraq) terms.³⁵

Large communities of Persians or their descendants live in Iraq. Between forty and seventy thousand of these Persians were expelled in 1980 by Saddam

³¹ Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 2.

³² Thomas M. Daly, "The Not Too Forgotten War," *Naval Institute Proceedings*, June 1984, p. 39.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³⁴ See Hamid Algar, "Shi'ism and Iran in the Eighteenth Century", in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1977), pp. 92-119. "Shi'ites: A Feared Minority", *Time*, July 26, 1982, p. 24.

³⁵ See discussion in Mansour Farhang, *The Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 663-664; Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, pp. 262-264.

Hussein. There are three strategic areas in each of the two countries. In Iran, these are Tehran, the oil-rich coastal province of Khuzistan, and the Bandar Abbas area which guards the Straits of Hormuz.³⁶

In Iraq the areas of major importance are Baghdad a strategic, political and economic target; the rich oil field of Kiruk, in the north; and the Basra area on the Shatt-al-Arab.³⁷ Saddam Hussein's confidence at the outset of the war led him to attach impossible conditions to the first United Nations ceasefire resolution of September 28, 1980. With the turning tides of the war in the next two years, however, Hussein became more and more inclined to end it. By the end of 1982 Iraq was clearly prepared to search for a compromise solution to end the war.³⁸

The Arab/Persian dimension to the war was trumpeted loudly by the regime, as clearly evident in the name given by Iraq to the war - Quadisiyyat Saddam - which harkens back to the Arab/Persian struggles of the seventh century. In short, the Ba'th regime skilfully held the war out in the cause of the Arab nation.³⁹ By the late 1980s, almost a decade after the war had erupted, a few crucial points cannot be overlooked. In Iran, the process of revolutionary

³⁶ Robert Bernard O'Donnell, *A New Arab Alliance System: Causes of the Iran-Iraq War and the Reaction of Various Arab States*, (M.A. Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, California, 1981), p. 34.

³⁷ William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis*, pp. 8-9. See also Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 60-62.

³⁸ See discussion in Glen Balfour-Paul, *The Prospects for Peace in the Iran-Iraq War*, edited by M.S. El-Azhary (Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 69-99.

³⁹ See discussion in Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 38.

consolidation was essentially completed. By 1988, the regime faced `no internal threat to its power.⁴⁰

The eight-year war with Iraq also weighs heavily on Iran's strategic culture. The military, political, and psychological damage suffered manifests itself in several post-war programs and almost all rhetoric. After impressively winning early battles and repelling Iraq, the Iranians foolishly pushed-on in an effort to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein in what Shahram Chubin suggests was the first step in exporting revolution outside their borders.⁴¹

The Iran–Iraq war divided the region between Shia Iranians and the Arabs, as Iraq claimed to be defending Arab integrity against the Persian threat. This fear was one of the main reasons behind the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981.⁴² During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), both belligerents targeted each others' oil industry in the hope that economic warfare might bring their adversary to its knees. Oil facilities, tankers, and tanker terminals were hit, and though these attacks succeeded in reducing overall oil exports of both sides, these attacks were not pressed home in a sustained fashion, and therefore did not have a decisive impact on the outcome of the war.⁴³

There were numerous uses of chemical weapons by Iraq against Iranians; apparently, the first Iraqi attacks were conducted in 1982 and used non-lethal “tear

⁴⁰ Fred Halliday, “Iran's New Grand Strategy”, *MERIP Middle East Report*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (January-February 1987), p. 7.

⁴¹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War: The Iran-Iraq War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), p. 484.

⁴² See Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Gerd Nonneman, *War and Peace*, p. 92.

⁴³ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, pp. 485-489.

gas,” but by mid-1983 Iraq was using lethal chemical agents against Iranian troops.⁴⁴ By taking the war to Iran, Iraq terrorized the civilian population, which began to clamor for shelters and to desert the cities in large numbers. Iraq thus imposed a political cost on Iran’s leadership for continuing the conflict. The Iranian government’s conduct of the war became politically damaging, especially as it was unable to offer the population any defense or to riposte in kind.⁴⁵

This practice wastes ammunition, and is not effective against trained conventional forces. It is more effective, however, against light infantry and insurgents. Iraqi artillery reportedly killed over 200,000 Iranians in the Iran-Iraq War.⁴⁶ After the disastrous Iranian attack on Faw in 1986, Iraq spent hundreds of millions of dollars purchasing ammunition on an emergency basis. Egyptian defense officials said Iraq was firing one million shells per day.⁴⁷ Baghdad and Tehran are about 450 miles apart, but Baghdad is about 100 miles from the border while Tehran is about 350 miles from the same boundary.

Based on just the distance and air defense assets between the border and the capitals, the Iranians would have an easier time reaching their targets. One final comparison of the two air forces can be made in the area of operational readiness. The Iranian Air Force was estimated to be about fifty percent

⁴⁴ Javid Ali, “Chemical Weapons and the Iran-Iraq War: A Case Study in Noncompliance”, *Nonproliferation Review* (Spring 2001), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁵ Shahram Chubin, *Iran’s National Security Policy: Capabilities, Intentions and Impact* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), p.21

⁴⁶ William Scott Malone, David Halevy and Sam Hemingway, “The Guns of Saddam”, *Washington Post*, 10 February 1991, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, pp. 222, 262.

operational while the Iraqis, knowing that they were about to attack were at maximum operational readiness.⁴⁸

There are three strategic areas in each of the two countries. In Iran, these are Tehran, the oil-rich coastal plain of Khuzistan, and the Bandar Abbas area which guards the Straits of Hormuz. In Iraq the areas of major importance are Baghdad a strategic, political and economic target; the rich oil field of Kiruk, in the north; and the Basra area on the Shatt-al-Arab.⁴⁹

As the offensive force, Iraq had little chance of seriously affecting either Tehran or the Bandar Abbas areas, because of the distances from Iraq. Rather, the Iraqis chose to concentrate on securing the Iranian oil fields in Khuzistan and Abadan Island. There were several very lucrative targets in Khuzistan. Khorramshahr, Iran's main port, and Abadan, the world's largest oil refinery with a 1978-estimated capacity of 600,000 barrels per day, were both located in the province. Furthermore, Dezful and Ahvaz are key points on the Iranian pipeline and both were important military bases.⁵⁰

In the south, any chances of securing the Iranian oil fields, protecting the Shatt-al-Arab, and creating the Arabestan province rested on seizing Dezful, Ahvaz, Khorramshahr and the Island of Abadan. This was where the main attack would occur. The northern and central fronts were to be economy-of-force

⁴⁸ William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ See Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media*, p. 53.; William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰ Alvin Cottrell, *The Persian Gulf States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 631.

defensive operations. Five divisions were committed to the northern highlands; two divisions were sent against the center to protect Baghdad; and five divisions (three armored and two mechanized) were poised opposite the Khuzistan Province.⁵¹

Iran's remaining four understrength divisions were deployed as follows: one infantry division near Urumiyeh, in the far north; one infantry division at Sanadaj to keep an eye on the Iranian Kurds; an armored division at Kermanshah and a brigade at Qasr-e-Shirin; and an armored division at Ahvaz which protected the air base at Dezful.⁵² Khorramshahr and Abadan had been isolated but not secured because of the unexpectedly tenacious Iranian defense.

The Iraqis had diluted their forces in the south by attacking several objectives simultaneously rather than capturing Ahvaz or neutralizing the airbase at Dezful. The Iraqis had been able to maintain an advantage of about 5 or 6:1 in the south but did not achieve the tactical or strategic results that were necessary to throw Iran into turmoil. The second phase of the war began with Bani Sadr's unsuccessful attempt at retaking Susangerd in January 1981. The fact that the attack was unsuccessful can be misleading because it was the last major defeat for the Iranians thus far.⁵³

In addition to the armor regiments (about 300 Chieftains and M-60's) that were committed by the Iranians, a parachute regiment was also used as a

⁵¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 44.

⁵² William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis*, p. 10.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

conventional ground force. However, the Iraqis foresaw the attack and prepared their defensive positions. Accordingly, as the Iranians attacked, the Iraqis pulled back a few kilometers toward the Kharek river and set up a three-sided ambush.⁵⁴

The Iranians, thinking that the Iraq is retreating, rushed in with their armor forces. Over the course of the next four days the two divisions fought each other by employing their helicopter gunships and tanks. The Iranians were caught in untrafficable terrain and had to leave about 100 to 150 tanks on the battlefield; the Iraqis then pursued the fleeing Iranians about sixty more kilometers into Iranian territory before halting.⁵⁵

The Iraq is lost about 100 tanks themselves as well as many of their attack helo's. Moreover, the captured Iranian tanks were of little value to the Iraqis because they had no training on the American and British equipment. The Jordanians did have Western equipment, however, and became the real winners of this battle because they received the captured Iranian tanks without having participated in the fighting.⁵⁶

Although the Iraqis had had a year to prepare their positions they found themselves being pushed back by the Iranians through December 2, 1981. American analysts doubt the veracity of either report. The second point is that the Iraqis were unable to hold their positions. The December 9th New York Times reported that after a long-term Iranian offensive, President Hussein told Iraqi

⁵⁴ William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis*, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 60-80.

⁵⁶ Gary C. Demack, "Perception and Misperception in the Persian Gulf: The Iran-Iraq War", *Parameters*, June 1983, p. 26.

troops "it is very important that you not lose any more positions."⁵⁷ At about 0300 on March 22, the Iranians surprised the Iraqis by attacking at an unexpected time, from an unexpected direction and with an extra division.⁵⁸

The Iranians had been successful at combining the "eyes" of the infantry with the strength of their armor and were able to outflank the Iraqi positions and to attack the weak points. Iraqi losses, as at Abadan in September 1981, were tremendous. Western observers estimate that over 600 tanks and armored vehicles, 10,000 casualties and 15,000 POW's were lost. The 3rd and 10th Armored Divisions, the 1st Mechanized Division and three brigades were destroyed! Iranian casualties were placed at about 10,000 including 3,000 to 4,000 killed.⁵⁹

In April 1982 the Syrians performed a series of diplomatic, economic and military maneuvers that weakened the Iraqi fighting posture while strengthening that of the Iranians. The Syrians had chosen to back the Iranians for several reasons. First, the Syrian government is drawn from the Alawite faction which is Shiite in its orientation and, therefore, is inclined towards Iran and away from Iraq.⁶⁰

More importantly, President Assad of Syria had long spoken of a "Greater Syria." Were Iraq to be victorious, it would strengthen the Riyadh-Amman-

⁵⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 73.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 73-74.

⁵⁹ "Iran, Iraq Report Victories along the Southern Front", *Washington Post*, 23 March 1982, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Davood Amirian, *Shemr va Saddam va Hamrahanash* [Shemr, Sadam and his Companions] (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), pp. 13-14.

Baghdad axis that President Hussein was attempting to maintain. This axis would effectively reduce Syria's ability to influence the Arab world and undermine Syria's claim to be the true leader of the Ba'ath movement.⁶¹

To ensure that the Syrians attain the position of prominence in the Arab World, President Assad has taken strong measures to weaken his rival claimant in Iraq. In addition to providing moral support to Iran, the Syrians have cut-off the Iraqi oil pipeline that runs through Syria. It is also suggested that the Syrians provided fuel for Iranian fighters after a mission over Iraq. The Iranian aircraft flew over Iraq and disappeared from Iraqi radar over Syrian territory. Sometime later, the aircraft reappeared over Syria and made the return flight to Iran.⁶²

The Iranian attack was a well-coordinated effort making effective use of the various combat arms. Infantry night attacks were followed by armor thrusts and fighter aircraft and helicopter support. Initial success was good but stiff resistance was met in the northern area and in front of Khorramshahr, where the Iraqis adopted a more flexible defense. Advice from French and Jordanian advisors apparently assisted the Iraqi regulars in performing better but the Iraqi volunteer units did not fare as well.⁶³

The casualties sustained by both sides were again high, with the Iraqis losing about 7,500 and the Iranians losing about 2,500. Of the three axes, the two more successful ones were at Abadan and around Khorramshahr while the effort

⁶¹ Stephen Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 46.

⁶² William O. Staudenmaier, *A Strategic Analysis*, p. 21.

⁶³ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War*, p. 74.

in the north was less than fruitful.⁶⁴ Iraq ended November 1982 with again seeking unity among the Arabs and making more peace proposals. Iran could not be appeased even by Iraqi declarations of unilateral truce. Iran's preconditions for negotiations were impossible to meet.

These preconditions were: the fall of the government of Saddam Hussein; Iraq's admission of its responsibility for starting the war; the withdrawal of all Iraqi troops from and the return of all Iranian territory; the payment of from \$50 to \$150 billion in war reparations; and the return to Iraq of the Persian Shiites who had been expelled by President Hussein in 1980.⁶⁵

The war is believed to be costing Iraq about \$1 billion a month. To meet these costs, Baghdad is being subsidized by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to buy weapons.⁶⁶ With the purchase of French Super Etendard fighter-bombers the Iraqis may be able to interdict the Iranian Sea Lines of Communication. The Super Etendard, with a speed of 730 m.p.h., an unrefueled range of 530 miles and equipped with the Exocet missile, is felt to be a serious threat by the Iranians.⁶⁷

Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iran-Iraq War

The Ayatollah Khomeini was exiled to Iraq for anti-Shah activities during a period of rapprochement between the two countries. To placate the Shah, Saddam Hussein placed Ayatollah Khomeini under house arrest in 1975. Three

⁶⁴ "Iran Launches New Offensive against Iraqis", *Washington Post*, 1 May 1982, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Christine Moss Helms, *The Iraqi Dilemma: Political Objectives versus Military Strategy* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), p. 84.

⁶⁶ James Kelly, "Battling for the Advantage", *Time*, 24 October 1983, p. 35. See also Christine Moss Helms, *The Iraqi Dilemma*, p. 82.

⁶⁷ James Kelly, "Battling for the Advantage", *Time*, 24 October 1983, p. 34.

years later, Saddam Hussein expelled the Ayatollah, who fled to France.⁶⁸ In 1977, one of the Ayatollah's sons was mysteriously murdered in Iraq. One of Iraq's leading Shia clerics was executed to quell the Islamic fundamentalist movement that was brewing. The execution was personally ordered by Saddam Hussein.⁶⁹ When Khomeini came to power in 1979, he immediately declared that Iraq "belongs in the dustbin of history."⁷⁰

A reporter Asked who his enemies were, the Ayatollah replied, "First the Shah, then the American Satan, then Saddam Hussein and his infidel Baath Party."⁷¹ The feeling between the leaders of the two warring nations was, and is, quite bitter. During the Ayatollah Khomeini's exile period, The Shah of Iran had counted on the military, with his handpicked loyal generals, to maintain him in power. But the generals were unable to cope with the situation because the Shah was not around to issue the customary detailed, written orders to which they were accustomed.⁷²

In the wake of the Iranian revolution, decimation of the Iranian army seemed natural. The Shah's army was considered counterrevolutionary and purges could be expected. By the fall of 1980, 10,000 military personnel had been

⁶⁸ "Personal Power, Personal Hate", *Time*, 26 July 1982, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Evans. D, *Iran-Iraq: Bloody Tomorrows* (US: Naval Proceedings, 1985), p. 33. See also Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Rule of the Religious Jurist in Iran: In Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 70-73.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 93. See also Barnett Rubin, *Armed Forces in the Middle East Politics and Strategy* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 10-14.

⁷¹ "Personal Power, Personal Hate", *Time*, 26 July 1982, p. 25.

⁷² William F. Hickman, *Ravaged and Reborn: The Iranian Army* (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1982), p. 6.

dismissed, imprisoned, or executed.⁷³ In 1979, the Revolutionary Council decreed that the entire Iranian nation would become soldiers of the revolution. During the hostage crisis, Khomeini emphasized this theme and called for the creation of an "Army of Twenty Million".⁷⁴

The lower ranks of the army, mostly conscripts, turned to the religious revolution when it became apparent that they had no leadership. Besides, the revolutionaries were from the same class of society as the soldiers, the lower and middle classes, and they had no strong bonds with upper class leaders.⁷⁵ Western-trained Iranian army officers were eliminated during the revolution conflicts and Shiite clergy were installed at each base and at each level of command. One method of countering the armed forces potential threat was to create a separate paramilitary force (the 'elite' guard) loyal to the regime.

A loose alignment of these hawkish leaders argued that Iran should parlay its successful military operations into a counter-invasion of Iraq.⁷⁶ The result, Iran's counter-invasion of Iraq, ushered in a new stage in the war. Through the next six years, Iran's offensives were met with occasional but limited success. Despite some victories inside Iraq, the realities of occupying and holding territory against the galvanized and better equipped Iraqi defenses proved too formidable for Iran's armed forces to overcome. Iraqi forces (backed in part by the US, France, and Arab Gulf states), now in the position of defending their cities and

⁷³ William F. Hickman, *Ravaged and Reborn: The Iranian Army* (Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1982), pp. 6-16.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁶ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War*, pp. 86-87.

territory, effectively prevented Iran from realizing its stated goals of igniting an Islamic revolution in Iraq and overthrowing the Baathist regime.⁷⁷

The self-assurance that drove Iran's war policy in Iraq also inspired extraterritorial ambitions. Iran's leaders framed the Iraq war as one front in the Islamic world's larger struggle against imperialist and Zionist influence. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon on 6 June 1982—and the ongoing Soviet conflict in Afghanistan—supported this line of thinking.⁷⁸

Although it had long been part of Ayatollah khomeinist rhetoric, support for the Palestinian cause became a central theme in the wartime mission promoted by the Revolutionary Guards. Before Iran's counter-invasion in 1982, the Revolutionary Guards called for the establishment of a multi-national Muslim force to liberate the holy city. The idea for this force, called the "Jerusalem Army" (*sepah-e qods*), arose from a meeting of foreign Islamic organizations in Iran in 1981.⁷⁹ Regarding this force, the IRGC announced:

"Referencing Ayatollah Montazeri's calls for exporting the Islami revolution, the IRGC claimed that the liberation of Jerusalem was its "task before all tasks," but argued that Saddam Hosein's invasion had blocked its "assault" on the holy city."⁸⁰

The IRGC further suggested that the "greater victory" of delivering Jerusalem from Israeli occupation could only be achieved after the "lesser

⁷⁷ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan va Sardarane Shahid* [For the Memory of Martyred Commanders] (Tehran: Martyrs Foundation of Islamic Revolution, 1998), p. 30.

⁷⁸ Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mojahedin-e Enghelab-e Esalmi*, p. 51.

⁷⁹ This commitment appears in the IRGC's first official charter. See *Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami*, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 47, 12 December 1981, p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami*, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 47, 12 December 1981, p. 12.

victory” of defeating Saddam Hosein. Therefore, Iraq became seen as both the literal and figurative gateway to Jerusalem and the first step towards the ultimate emancipation of Muslim societies. The IRGC employed the idea of liberating Jerusalem in an effort to inspire (and perhaps appease) its rank-and-file, who embraced interventionist ambitions more wholeheartedly than the organization’s conservative top command.⁸¹

In this manner, the underlying conservatism of Mohsen Rezai and Iran’s Supreme Defense Council is evident in the priority given to the Iraq war in the “greater” quest for Jerusalem. For, only after the war with Iraq is won can Iran begin its “assault” on Israel. The longer the war went on, however, the more distant the prospect of liberating Jerusalem grew and the more hollow the cheering of such slogans became.⁸²

Even though a small presence of IRGC officials remains in Lebanon to this day, many of its troops began to pullout in 1985 as resistance to Iran’s extraterritorial efforts in general, and in Lebanon in particular, became a charged subject in Iranian politics.⁸³ This shift in policy was a consequence of the growing international pressure against Iran’s involvement in Lebanon (i.e., terrorism and hostage-taking) and simmering political divergence within Iran’s leadership.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁸² Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, pp. 93-94.

⁸³ “Leaflets and songs show Iranian link to Beirut's Party of God”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 April 1985, p. 11. This process continued through the early 1990s, by which time the vast majority of IRGC troops had been removed from Lebanon. See Hamzeh Nizar, *In the Path of Hizballah*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), pp. 69-71.

By 1984, President Khamenei and Majles speaker Rafsanjani publically acknowledged that there was an internal ideological dispute between conservatives and left-leaning radicals within the Ayatollah khomeinist bloc. Although this split had been apparent years before (e.g., as evinced by Mohsen Rezai's resignation from MIR in 1982), the intensification of the Iraq war and its impact on Iranian society brought factionalism to the political force. Each faction included prominent members of the regime, including Khamenei and Rafsanjani for the conservatives (who Ayatollah Khomeini tended to support on foreign policy), and Mohtashami, Behzad Nabavi (the leader of MIR), Mir-Hosayn Musavi (the Prime Minister), and Ayatollah Montazeri for the more revolutionary-minded left.⁸⁴

This ideological conflict and related political infighting permeated major political parties and led the dissolution of MIR (1986) and the IRP (1987) thereby undoing the alliances that had laid the foundation for Ayatollah khomeinist dominance in post-revolutionary Iran. While disagreements over social and economic policy were important contributors to the factionalism within the Ayatollah khomeinist movement, the area of foreign policy, and more specifically the issue of foreign involvement, proved central to the political divide.⁸⁵

More conservative elements led by Rafsanjani regarded foreign involvement to be a waste of resources, harmful to Iran's international standing,

⁸⁴ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004), pp. 47-70.

⁸⁵ For a detailed discussion of the form and content of the debates that fostered the factionalism of this period, see Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics*, pp. 47-81.

and a distraction from the conflict with Iraq.⁸⁶ On the latter issue, Rafsanjani was supported by Ayatollah Khomeini and the leading architects of the Iraq war, including IRGC commander Mohsen Rezai, who wanted to concentrate Iran's military resources on victory in Iraq. To bolster Iran's lagging war effort, Rafsanjani opened up unofficial contacts with the US and Israel to explore arms purchases.⁸⁷

Although Iran had been secretly purchasing American arms through Israel with Ayatollah Khomeini's assent since the beginning of the war, a need to replenish its stockpiles pushed Rafsanjani to seek a direct covert deal with the US.⁸⁸ Through intermediaries in his cabinet and abroad, Rafsanjani sought shipments of US anti-tank TOW missiles in return for a cessation of Iran-sponsored terrorism in Lebanon, a promise to release four American hostages held captive by Hizbullah, and a suggestion of an eventual rapprochement with the US.⁸⁹

To help seal the deal with the Americans, Rafsanjani invited an US and Israeli delegation to Tehran to discuss the plan. While the secret meeting failed to produce an agreement, a commitment was made between the US delegation (headed by Robert McFarlane, former National Security Advisor to Ronald

⁸⁶ David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990), pp. 374-378.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 378.

⁸⁸ On Iran's covert arms purchases from the US and Israel, See Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 96; Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Times Books, 2006), pp. 103-10; Gary Sick, *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Times Books, 1991), p. 13.

⁸⁹ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri. *Khaterat-e Ayatollah [The Memorials of Ayatollah Montazeri]*, p. 212.

Regan) and Rafsanjani's representatives to keep back channels open for future discussions.⁹⁰

The radical-left faction associated with Ayatollah Montazeri, Mehdi Hashemi (former member of the IRGC Central Council and head of OLM), and Mohtashami, largely opposed Rafsanjani's overtures. Montazeri, for instance, personally criticized Rafsanjani for the secret meeting in Tehran.⁹¹ For this faction, which had broad support within IRGC ranks, it was Iran's moral and political responsibility to assist Muslim resistance movements and propagate the values of the Islamic revolution across the region.⁹²

Further, as combating the influence of imperialism and liberating Jerusalem remained at the forefront of their idealistic agenda, the internationalist faction rejected any warming of relations between the US and Israel. Lebanon, for this group, was seen as a successful example of what exporting the revolution could achieve and as a crucial front in the war against imperialism and Zionism that required continued support.⁹³

Therefore, any negotiations with the US, particularly any involving a deal promising a scaling-back of Iran's Lebanese presence, were anathema to the radicals and would provoke a reaction. The conservatives, however, proved the more formidable coalition. Simultaneous with seeking a US arms deal, Rafsanjani

⁹⁰ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, pp. 113-123.

⁹¹ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, p. 339.

⁹² Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 150-52.

⁹³ David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War*, pp. 379-82.

sought to weaken his rival Montazeri by undermining the influence of the latter's leftist base. With the crucial support of Ayatollah khomeini, Rafsanjani was able to remove the Office of Liberation Movements from the IRGC and mix it with the Foreign Ministry thereby bringing the office's operations under the direct control of the government and curtailing its semi-autonomy.⁹⁴

While this was a blow to radical-interventionists, Mehdi Hashemi (Montazeri's relative through marriage) and his supporters were able to continue their foreign operations with the financial and political support of Montazeri. However, after Hashemi was arrested by Saudi security agents for attempting to smuggle explosives into that country for a purported attack during the annual Hajj in Mecca, the interventionist faction began to fall apart.⁹⁵ Hashemi returned to Iran where he was detained and an investigation into his activities commenced. While Montazeri vigorously protested the arrest in letters to Ayatollah khomeini,⁹⁶

Some of Hashemi's associates leaked information to a Lebanese newspaper exposing the covert negotiations and attempted arms purchases between Rafsanjani, the US, and Israel, setting off what came to be known as the Iran-Contra affair.⁹⁷ The attempt to undermine Rafsanjani backfired. Despite political pressure from the leftist factions, Ayatollah khomeini intervened on

⁹⁴ Hosayn-Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, p. 156.

⁹⁵ David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War*, pp. 379-380.

⁹⁶ Montazeri discusses these events in his memoirs. See Hosayn-Ali Montazeri, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah*, pp. 335-46. Also, for exchanges between Ayatollah Khomeini and Montazeri regarding the arrest of Mehdi Hashemi, see Baqer Moin, *Life of the Ayatollah Khomeini* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), pp. 277-93.

⁹⁷ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, pp. 123-126; David Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War*, pp. 379-380.

Rafsanjani's behalf and blocked attempts for an official investigation into the matter. With Ayatollah Khomeini's backing, Rafsanjani led a crackdown on radical activists resulting in the mass arrests of Hashemi and Montazeri's supporters, including "hundreds" from the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards.⁹⁸

By 1987, the radical-left faction, which had become tainted by its association with Hashemi (who was forced to publically confess to crimes against the Islamic revolution and subsequently executed that year), had lost much of its influence within both the IRGC and the government. In 1988, Rafsanjani further constrained this bloc by removing Mohtashami from the Lebanon desk at the Foreign Ministry and replacing him with the former's brother.⁹⁹

With this act, Rafsanjani sent a clear signal that Iran's foreign policy would no longer follow an interventionist path and would instead conform to the policies of the conservative-led administration. In August 1988, Iran and Iraq agreed to a ceasefire, effectively ending the eight-year war. The end of the war also marked the political decline of the radical left. This faction lost its main patron when Ayatollah Montazeri resigned from his position as Ayatollah Khomeini's successor in March 1989 after the former's sharp criticism of the state's violent suppression of political dissidents caused a fallout between the two clerics.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ "Hundreds of Montazeri supporters arrested," *Tehran Newspaper*, 14 November 1986, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, pp. 147-160.

¹⁰⁰ Montazeri had been elected in 1985 by the Assembly of Experts to be Ayatollah Khomeini's successor. His vocal criticism of the violent political suppression under the Ayatollah Khomeini regime led to a fallout between the two senior clerics. For exchanges between the two, see Baqer Moin, *Ayatollah Khomeini*, pp. 262-98.

Although the Islamic Republic and the IRGC would continue limited foreign involvement after the war, the style of interventionism promoted by Montazeri, Mohtashami, and Hashemi—i.e., the militaristic exportation of the revolution abroad— would not return to the political mainstream. Indeed, in the months leading up to his resignation, Montazeri himself had begun to move away from this position. His emixnt attitude, which he began to articulate around this time, encapsulates the Islamic Republic’s general postwar line on exporting the revolution:

“The question of exporting revolution..is not a matter of armed intervention. The aim was, rather, by building our country on the basis of Islam's command and making the customs of the Prophet and the immaculate Imams our model; by implementing the aims, ideas and values which have been stressed and cherished by Islam, to have our country and our revolution become a model for other deprived countries and countries oppressed by and subject to cruelty from the superpowers. They would choose our way to liberate themselves from the yoke of imperialism”¹⁰¹

This chapter has traced the rise and decline of radical-interventionism and its proponents in Iran. Associated with the Ayatollah khomeinist left, this project promoted direct involvement in foreign conflicts through military means. Interventionists argued that foreign involvement was both Iran’s duty as an Islamic and revolutionary state and key to furthering its geo- strategic interests.¹⁰²

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards were fanatically loyal to the Ayatollah and his revolution. Though they lacked military training, they assumed the duties

¹⁰¹ See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 36- 41.

¹⁰² “Montazeri Statement on Muslim Unity and Export of the Revolution”, *Khaterate Ayatollah Montazeri*, p. 212.

of the regular armed forces.¹⁰³ In the January 1981 attack, the Iranians went against prepared positions through open wetlands that restricted their movement and limited their cover. In addition, over 200 sorties a day were flown by the improving Iraqi Air Force, which could take credit for some of the nearly 6,000 Iranians who were killed.¹⁰⁴

When Seyed Ali Khamenei -current Islamic revolution leader of Iran- took over the Iranian Presidency in August 1981, the change in leadership did not end the war there and then. On the contrary, the Iranians were even more determined to fight in view of Ayatollah Khomeini's perceived spiritual leadership. The specific character of Ayatollah Khomeini's constituted a powerful moral asset in repelling the Iraqi attack by young Iranian soldiers.¹⁰⁵ Recruiting young Iranian soldiers was because of Iran has developed simple plans for a different reason during the war. Simply, the Iranians no longer possess the military resources that allow them to develop and execute complex plans.

By early 1981, the Iranians had very little armor, air or artillery. However, they did have an abundance of men who were willing to die for their Revolution. Realizing this, the Iranian military developed plans that were by Western standards simply. Fifty to one hundred thousand troops were involved in this most bitter struggle which raged until October 10th 1988. Without the benefit of air or armor, the Iranians resorted to human wave assaults against the well-prepared

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Panossian, "Iran Starts Offensive, Claims Major Gains", *Washington Post*, 8 February 1983, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ See Hanns Maull, *The Gulf War: Regional and International Dimensions* (London: Pinter, 1989), p. 67.

Iraqi positions. Losses in one engagement alone were over 4,000 Iranians and 300 Iraqis killed.¹⁰⁶

For Iran, its ground forces growth was caught up by the Iraqis, despite its superior manpower mass. Although Iran had an eventual strength of one million in 1988 as compared to 240000 in 1980, it had suffered heavy losses of tanks and combat aircraft. During the war, it lost 600 tanks and 320 aircraft. Iran's final figures stood at 1150 tanks and 118 aircraft accordingly by the late 1980s.¹⁰⁷ Beside the above-mentioned artilleries, Aviation Week and Space Technology reported further that, in addition to the Syrians and Libyans providing support to Iran, the North Koreans are providing Chinese-built F-6's. Iranian pilots are apparently receiving their training on the new aircraft in East Germany.¹⁰⁸

There were the battles at Iraq's Fao Peninsula. The surprise attack on Fao by Iranian troops in February 1986 and the successful repulsion of Iraqi counter-attacks marked one of the major turning points in the war. Fao raised serious doubts in the region, as well as in Moscow and Washington, about Iraq's ability to use its qualitative military superiority effectively. Besides having a population three times more than Iraq, the less well-equipped Iranian forces also appeared to be much more highly motivated than those of Iraq.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iran-Iraq War: Attrition Now, Chaos Later* (Armed Forces Journal International, 1983), p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ Hanns Maull, *The Gulf War*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ Charles Robinson, *Iran, Iraq Acquiring Chinese-Built Fighter* (Washington: Aviation Week, 1983), p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ervand Abrahamian. "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran", *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 10, No.3 (1979), pp. 381-414.

The breakthrough at Fao only seemed to confirm that an Iranian victory was possible and was a matter of time. However, Iran's subsequent attacks did not make much headway after Fao, and in April 1988, the Iranian forces were in turn driven out of Fao. Until then, Iraq had always deliberately sought to avoid high casualty rates for fear of undermining the already tepid popular support for the war.¹¹⁰

In mid-1987, there were several indications that the Iranian leaders were at least reassessing their approach to the war. First, Iran's willingness to tolerate the superpowers' decision to escort Kuwaiti shipping suggested that Iran somehow welcomed the diversion in a sideshow of the war rather than concentrate on the serious prosecution of the war on land. Second, Iran's unwillingness to reject the Security Council Resolution of July 1987 outright but sought modifications was also indicative of a change in attitude.¹¹¹

Third, Iran's still ambiguous war aims had nonetheless been modified over previous months; the demand for the removal of Saddam Hussein still stood, but the insistence on the removal of the Ba'th regime, reparations, and the installation of an Islamic republic had disappeared. And finally, the stream of volunteers for the front had dwindled and Iran's leaders, notably Rafsanjani, had begun to talk publicly in mid-1987 of terminating the war unless it began to interfere with the political administration of its society.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 16.

¹¹¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran*, pp. 381-414.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

Ayatollah Khomeini defined the war as a battle between good and evil: “You are fighting to protect Islam and he is fighting to destroy Islam. There is absolutely no question of peace or compromise.”¹¹³ Ayatollah Khomeini urged The Iranians to viewed their participation in the conflict as a defense of Islam; thus, compromise with the Iraqi “usurpers” was out of the question. Viewing the conflict as the “Imposed War,” Tehran considered the conflict from a vastly different perspective than Saddam Hussein. For Iran, the conflict was less a war over territory and control of the Shatt al Arab waterway than a standoff between “absolute good and absolute evil.”¹¹⁴

Saddam Hosein and the Iran-Iraq War

Iraq is essentially land-locked except for a 40 mile coastline on the Persian Gulf.¹¹⁵ A total of 55 miles of the Shatt forms a common border between Iran and Iraq. Iran was given freedom of navigation of the river by this second treaty.¹¹⁶ When President Bakr stepped down for health reasons, Hussein had considered it prudent to accept an honorary appointment to lieutenant general in 1976. Nonetheless, in 1979, for the first time in twenty years, Iraq was ruled by a true civilian, Saddam Hussein.¹¹⁷

On September 28, 1980, six days after the heavy fighting started, President Hussein outlined Iraq's initial war aims. He demanded that Iran:

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 21.

¹¹⁴ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival* (New York: Norton and Company, 2006), p. 131.

¹¹⁵ David Evans and Richard Campany, *Iran-Iraq: Bloody Tomorrows* (US: Naval Proceedings, 1985), p. 34.

¹¹⁶ Thomas M. Daly, *The Not Too Forgotten War*, pp. 41-42.

¹¹⁷ Richard A. Gabriel, *Fighting Armies*, pp. 63-67.

"recognize Iraq's legitimate and sovereign rights over its land and waters" (the Shatt-al-Arab); "refrain from interfering in Iraq's internal affairs" (as well as those of other Arab states); "adhere to the principle of good neighborly relations, and return to the United Arab Emirates the Iranian-occupied islands in the Persian Gulf."¹¹⁸

Saddam Hussein had to justify the invasion of Iran in September 1980. He outlined his initial aims by demanding that Iran should recognize Iraq's legitimate and sovereign rights over its land and waters in general and Shatt al-Arab in particular. Iran should refrain from interfering in Iraq's internal affairs. Iran must adhere to the principle of good neighborly relations and Iran has to return the Iranian occupied islands in the Persian Gulf to the United Arab Emirates.¹¹⁹

However, there were other objectives that were not so clearly and officially stated. Iraq wanted to secure its Ba'thist government from Ayatollah Khomeini's intent to overthrow it. Iraq wants to secure its borders, especially near Qasr e-Shirin and Mehran, which cover the main Iranian approach to Baghdad. At the same time it wanted to destroy Iranian military power while Iran was weakened by its revolution and cut off from U.S. supplies and support.¹²⁰

Iraq also wanted to create conditions to facilitate the overthrow of Ayatollah Khomeini. Iraq wanted to annex Arab speaking Khuzistan province in south west of Iran which leads to Iraq's better access to the Persian Gulf. Iraq

¹¹⁸ Stephen R. Grummon, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 15.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁰ Davood Amirian, *Shemr va Saddam*, p. 10.

wants to demonstrate that Iraq, not Iran is the dominant power in the Persian Gulf, and to enhance its status in the Arab world and also lead the Arab world.¹²¹

Almost majority of Iran's oil production and reserves are located in the province of Khuzistan. The inhabitants of Khuzistan are Arabs, although they are of Iranian citizenship. As an excuse to move into Khuzistan and seize the Iranian oil reserves which he needed badly, Saddam Hussein was to claim that he was attempting to reunite these Iranian-controlled Arabs under an Arab nation.¹²²

Saddam has enjoyed the support of west in attacking Iran. For example, France is not the only country supplying aircraft to the Iraq but also other western countries. Aviation Week and Space Technology reported in April 1983 that the Chinese were providing Chinese-built, Soviet MiG-19's and 21's to the Iraqis. These aircraft, designated F-6 and F-7, respectively, by the Chinese were being assembled in Egypt and staged in Egypt and Jordan. Egypt was also providing instructor pilots to Iraq and some Egyptians have flown combat missions, accompanying Soviet reconnaissance pilots.¹²³

Iraq's war aim was simply to destabilize and overthrow the Iranian regime through the invasion.¹²⁴ There were numerous uses of chemical weapons by Iraq against Iranians; apparently, the first Iraqi attacks were conducted in 1982 and used non-lethal "tear gas," but by mid-1983 Iraq was using lethal chemical agents

¹²¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War", p. 33.

¹²² David Rosser-Owen, "Lessons of the Iran-Iraq War," *Armada International*, March 1982, pp. 40-47.

¹²³ Charles A. Robinson, "Iran, Iraq Acquiring Chinese- Built Fighters", *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 11 April 1983, p. 16.

¹²⁴ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 2.

against Iranian troops. Finally, in 1988, Iraq hoped that through escalation of its war effort, it could force Iran to negotiate an end to the war.¹²⁵

This war not only weaken the Iraq military but it brings more strength to Iraq which two years after the war with Iran it started another war with Kuwait in 1990. Iraq had in fact emerged from the eight-year conflict a far stronger power: its ground forces grew from 200 000 troops (12 divisions employing 2 750 tanks) in 1980 to some 955 000 troops (50 divisions and 6 000 tanks) in 1988. The Iraqi Air Force had also been increased during the same period from 322 fighting aircraft to 500. This formidable force was far better equipped than in 1980 and had also acquired substantial operational experience.¹²⁶

Saddam likely viewed the Iran – Iraq conflict as a “limited war.” Saddam Hussein did not intend to conquer the entire Iran. Iraq embarked on the war in order to secure limited territorial and political objectives. Saddam feared the spread of the Iranian Revolution into Iraq and was suspicious of Tehran’s support of subversive elements directed at the overthrow of the Baathist regime.¹²⁷

A successful invasion of Iran offered the potential of removing this threat to the Iraqi government. Saddam also coveted the oil-rich Iranian province of Khuzestan, and falsely hoped an invasion would result in a rebellion against Tehran by the province arab minority.¹²⁸ moreover, Saddam sought to reestablish

¹²⁵ Javid Ali, *Chemical Weapons*, pp. 47-48.

¹²⁶ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 10.

¹²⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p. 31.

¹²⁸ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 27.

Iraqi control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway and secure areas in the vicinity of Qasr e-Sharin that the 1975 Algiers Accord had ceded to Iraq.¹²⁹

Saddam Husain has survived numerous assassination and coup attempts, often encouraged or supported by foreign powers. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini called upon the Iraqi military to rid itself of its leader.¹³⁰ Saddam Hussein's confidence at the outset of the war led him to attach impossible conditions to the first United Nations ceasefire resolution of September 28, 1980. With the turning tides of the war in the next two years, however, Hussein became more and more inclined to end it. By the end of 1982 Iraq was clearly prepared to search for a compromise solution to end the war.¹³¹

By taking the war to Iran, Iraq terrorized the civilian population, which began to clamor for shelters and to desert the cities in large numbers. Iraq thus imposed a political cost on Iran's leadership for continuing the conflict. The Iranian government's conduct of the war became politically damaging, especially as it was unable to offer the population any defense.¹³²

The Main Events of the War

By the beginning of 1984, the ground war had devolved into a bloody stalemate that appeared endless. In an attempt to break the stalemate Iraq drastically expanded its anti-shipping campaign in the Persian Gulf. In 1984, Iraqi aircraft

¹²⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons*, p.31.

¹³⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 36-37.

¹³¹ See discussion in Glen Balfour-Paul, *The Prospects for Peace* (Croom Helm, 1984), p.61.

¹³² Shahram Chubin, *Iran's National Security Policy*, pp. 19-23.

struck 58 merchant vessels resulting in six sinkings and 28 ships being declared CTLs, a fourfold increase in attacks from the previous year.¹³³

In late April, Iraqi anti-ship capabilities were enhanced with the introduction of the Dassault Super Entendard attack aircraft, five of which were on loan from France.¹³⁴ Armed with the French-built Exocet missile, the Super Entendard improved Iraqi capability to strike targets at greater ranges. Iraqi objectives in intensifying its anti-shipping campaign centered on severing Iran's primary war- supporting economic lifeline: the Gulf oil trade. A secondary objective was to use the attacks to goad Iran into expanding the war by deciding to attack shipping trading with neutral Gulf states. Such a scenario offered the possibility of western intervention against Iran.¹³⁵

Iran commenced its campaign against Persian Gulf shipping with an attack on the Kuwaiti Tanker *Umm Casbah* on May 13, 1984. The severing of Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf at the start of the war coupled with the relative invulnerability of oil pipelines transporting Iraqi oil to ports in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Jordan forced Iran to target vessels calling on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. During 1984, Iran conducted 19 attacks resulting in one vessel being sunk and two declared CTLs.¹³⁶

¹³³ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 74 – 75.

¹³⁴ John William Ransom Taylor, *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1982–83* (London: Jane's Publishing Co. Ltd, 1982), p. 53. The Dassault Super Entendard had a maximum speed of Mach 1.3 and a combat radius of 270 nautical miles. It could carry one AM-39 Exocet missile. The Exocet missile had a range of 26 to 37 nautical miles.

¹³⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, pp. 170 – 171.

¹³⁶ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 83. These attacks resulted in one vessel being sunk and two being declared CTLs. Four of these attacks targeted Kuwaiti-flagged vessels, none of which were sunk or declared CTL. One attack damaged a Saudi-flagged vessel.

Nearly all the attacks were directed against vessels trading with Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, Kuwaiti- owned vessels being victimized four times. Additionally, the Iranian navy stepped up its boardings of neutral vessels in the Strait of Hormuz in search of contraband cargos destined for Iraq. By targeting Iraq's allies, Iran hoped to impose a price on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the other GCC countries that would punish them for their support of Iraq and persuade them to pressure Saddam Hussein to curtail Iraqi attacks on Iranian shipping.¹³⁷

The Gulf Cooperation Council, alarmed by the implementation of the Iranian tanker war strategy, appealed to the United Nations Security Council. UN Security Council Resolution 552, passed on June 1, 1984, condemned "the recent attacks on commercial shipping to and from Saudi Arabia" and demanded that "such attacks should cease forthwith."¹³⁸

By the end of 1986, Iran and Iraq had combined to strike 269 vessels resulting in 21 vessels being sunk.¹³⁹ This number, while substantial, represented less than one percent of all shipping transiting the Persian Gulf.¹⁴⁰ Western access to Persian Gulf oil had not been seriously threatened and the price of a barrel of crude oil remained remarkably constant during this period.¹⁴¹ Iraqi anti-shipping efforts cooled somewhat in 1983, conducting 13 attacks, all by helicopters.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

¹³⁸ UNSCR of June 1, 1984. Available at <http://www.un.org/documents> (accessed May 16, 2006).

¹³⁹ Iraqi attacks resulted in 20 vessels being sunk and 69 being declared CTLs. Iranian attacks resulted in one vessel being sunk and nine being declared CTLs. No Kuwaiti-flagged vessels were sunk during this period.

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Armed Services, *U.S. Military To Protect "Re-Flagged" Kuwaiti Oil Tankers* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government printing Office, 1987) p. 87.

¹⁴¹ U.S. Department of Energy, "Crude Oil Prices By Selected Type, 1970–2006," <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/aer/txt/ptb1107.html> (accessed April 12, 2007). Prices for Saudi

The Iraqi attacks sunk three vessels and resulted in six being declared CTLs. The low numbers of Iraqi attacks, possibly the result of shortages in missiles or available aircraft, were reinforced by false claims of vessels damaged to dissuade shippers from transporting Iranian oil. Iranian oil exports did not suffer greatly from the Iraqi attacks. Iranian oil exports during the period actually expanded from .715 million barrels per day (MPD) in 1981 to 1.72 million MPD in 1983.¹⁴³

The United States supported resolution 552 and condemned the Iranian escalation. Simultaneously, the United States was becoming increasingly concerned with the war's threat to Western oil supplies and to the stability of moderate Arab regimes.¹⁴⁴ The war in the Persian Gulf remained a rather small, one sided affair throughout the first 30 months of hostilities. In 1981, Iraq conducted five attacks against shipping, resulting in three vessels being sunk and one declared a constructive total loss.¹⁴⁵ These initial Iraqi efforts were primarily directed against vessels in the port of Bandar-e Imam Khomeini in southwest Iran. In 1982, Iraq conducted 21 attacks resulting in five vessels being sunk.¹⁴⁶

Diplomatic relations had already been severed the previous June. Tensions along the Iran – Iraq border increased throughout the summer, culminating in a

Light Crude actually dropped from \$34 USD to \$28 USD between 1983 and 1986, the period during which the tanker heated up.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁴³ OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2004, <http://www.opec.org/library/Annual%20Statistical%20Bulletin/pdf/ASB2004.pdf> (accessed April 11, 2007).

¹⁴⁴ Michael Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf* (New York: Rockefeller Center, 1992), pp. 52-82.

¹⁴⁵ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

major clash at Qasr e-Sharin in early September. Saddam Hussein reacted to the border skirmishes on September 17 declaring that “the frequent Iranian violations of Iraqi sovereignty have rendered the 1975 Algiers agreement null and void.”¹⁴⁷ The agreement to which Saddam referred was merely the most recent in a series of diplomatic efforts to regulate control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway. Its governance had been a major source of friction between the two countries for generations, and was a major factor motivating the Iraqi decision to strike Iran. A treaty concluded between the two nations in 1937 identified the low water mark on the eastern (Iranian) side of the waterway as the international border, effectively ceding control of the Shatt al-Arab to Iraq.¹⁴⁸

Henceforth, vessels transiting the Shatt al-Arab were required to embark Iraqi pilots and fly the Iraqi flag. In April 1969, however, Mohammed Reza Shah had abrogated the 1937 treaty and refused to pay the toll required for vessels transiting the waterway. Iraq responded by threatening to block Iranian access to the Shatt al-Arab. Tensions increased on April 24, 1969, when Tehran provided naval escort to an Iranian merchant vessel navigating the disputed waterway. Iranian support for Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq exacerbated the delicate situation. Open combat erupted during the winter of 1973 – 1974.¹⁴⁹

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), both belligerents targeted each others’ oil industry in the hope that economic warfare might bring their adversary to its knees. Oil facilities, tankers, and tanker terminals were hit, and though these

¹⁴⁷ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran–Iraq War*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 8-9. See also Francis V. Xavier, *Iran-Iraq War: A Prediction for Future Conflict* (Washington. D.C.: The Research Department Air Command and Staff College, 1997), p. 57.

attacks succeeded in reducing overall oil exports of both sides, these attacks were not pressed home in a sustained fashion, and therefore did not have a decisive impact on the outcome of the war.¹⁵⁰ The Tanker War was fought somewhat sporadically in 1985. Iraq conducted 33 attacks resulting in two sinkings and 11 vessels being declared CTLs.¹⁵¹ The Iranian air force conducted 17 attacks, two of which targeted Kuwaiti-flagged vessels, resulting in a Panamanian container ship being declared a CTL.¹⁵²

As was the case in 1984, the majority of Iranian attacks were directed against vessels trading with Kuwaiti ports. These attacks were supplemented by increased Iranian search and seizure activity in the Strait of Hormuz, primarily targeted against vessels trading with Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. Several cargos were confiscated by the Iranians and a 23,618 DWT Kuwaiti dry cargo vessel, the *Ibn al Beitar*, was actually seized by the Iranian navy.¹⁵³

The war in the Persian Gulf exploded in 1986, chiefly owing to events in the land war, in which Iran's natural superiority, if only in the production of cannon fodder, was beginning to tell. In late February Iranian army units concluded the successful capture of the Fao peninsula, and in mid-March commenced operations, ultimately unsuccessful, aimed at the capture of Basra. Faced with a deteriorating situation on the ground, Iraq reinvigorated its efforts

¹⁵⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, pp. 485-489.

¹⁵¹ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 107.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁵³ See Davood Amirian, *Shemr va Saddam*, p. 40. See also Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 111.

against Persian Gulf shipping, conducting 62 successful attacks resulting in four sinkings and 18 vessels being damaged.¹⁵⁴

Iraq depended almost entirely on aircraft to conduct its attacks against merchant shipping throughout the Tanker War.¹⁵⁵ Initially, Iraq's weapons of choice were helicopters firing Exocet missiles. This combination was responsible for 82 percent of all attacks between 1981 and 1983. The delivery of five French-built Super Entendard aircraft allowed Iraq to strike deeper into the Gulf. The Super Entendards drew first blood on March 27, 1984, sinking the South Korean tug *Heyang Ilho* and damaging the Saudi-flagged tanker *Safina al Arab*.¹⁵⁶

Super Entendards conducted the majority of Iraqi shipping attacks until they were supplanted by another French-built strike aircraft, the Mirage F-1EQ, in July, 1985.¹⁵⁷ Between the introduction of the Super Entendard in March 1984, and the end of the war in July 1988, fixed wing aircraft were responsible for 89 percent of Iraqi anti-ship attacks. Iraq declared the area north of 29 degrees 30 minutes north latitude a "prohibited war zone" on October 1980.

Additionally, a maritime exclusion zone around the main Iranian oil export terminal at Kharg Island was declared in August 1982. While Baghdad insisted that these exclusion zones were designed to "cope with the difficulties in

¹⁵⁴ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 112.

¹⁵⁵ The Iraqi air force was responsible for 94% of all Iraqi attacks on merchant shipping between 1981 and 1983.

¹⁵⁶ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 106. The Mirage F-1EQ was capable of Mach 2.2, had a combat radius of 750 nautical miles, and could carry one AM-39 Exocet. See John William Ransom Taylor, *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1986*, p. 65.

distinguishing between the nationalities of vessels in the Persian Gulf,” in reality no effort was made to accurately determine the nationality of the vessels which were attacked.¹⁵⁸

In reality, the Iraqi exclusion zones acquired the character of a free-fire zone, in which any and all vessels were potential targets, an environment that was well suited to the Exocet missile, with its long range and fire-and-forget capability. The dangers of Iraqi carelessness in identifying targets coupled with the long-range capability of the Mirage F-1EQ/Exocet missile system were made clear to the United States with the May 17, 1987, attack on USS *Stark* (FFG-31). Iraqi efforts to undermine Iranian oil exports were only marginally effective.¹⁵⁹

The Iranian oil industry had been crippled by the Iranian Revolution, but by 1983, the year before the Iraqis commenced the Tanker War, Iranian crude oil exports had recovered to approximately 1.71 million barrels of crude oil a day (MPD).¹⁶⁰ The level of exports dropped to 1.45 MPD by 1986, but in 1987, when Iraqi attacks reached their highest total (90), Iranian oil exports rebounded to 1.71 MPD. More damaging to Iran was the 42% drop in crude oil prices between 1986 and 1987.¹⁶¹ The Iraqis simply lacked the capability to substantially reduce

¹⁵⁸ Andrea De Guttry, *Law of Naval Warfare* (Grotius Publications: 1993), p. 73.

¹⁵⁹ George Politakis, *Maritime Neutrality* (Kegan Paul International: 1998), p. 92.

¹⁶⁰ OPEC, Annual Statistical Bulletin 2004, <http://www.opec.org/library/Annual%20Statistical%20Bulletin/pdf/ASB2004.pdf> (accessed April 11, 2007) . See also *Annual Statistical Bulletin 2004*, p. 32.

¹⁶¹ U.S. Department of Energy, “Crude Oil Prices By Selected Type, 1970–2006,” <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/aer/txt/ptb1107.html> (accessed April 12, 2007). Prices for Iranian Light Crude dropped from \$28.05 dollars per barrel in 1986 to \$16.14 dollars per barrel in 1987.

Iranian oil exports. The best Saddam Hussein could hope for was mere harassment.¹⁶²

Iran depended almost entirely on fixed wing aircraft to carry out its initial strikes on shipping in 1984 and 1985; Iranian jets were responsible for 31 of 36 attacks during this period. Iranian helicopters spearheaded an energized Iranian anti-shipping campaign in 1986, conducting 28 of 41 attacks. Hampered by a lack of spare parts, and vitally needed for operations ashore, Iranian air attacks on neutral shipping slowed and the Iranian navy shouldered more of the anti-ship load in September 1986.¹⁶³

Between September 1986 and March 1987, Iranian Vosper class frigates firing Sea Killer anti-ship missiles conducted 12 of 20 attacks, sinking a Singapore-flagged tug on March 28, 1987.¹⁶⁴ Iranian attacks on neutral shipping were supplemented by increased boardings of merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. The Kuwaiti-flagged containerships *Al Muharraq* and *Al Wattyah* were seized by Iran in June and September 1985, respectively.¹⁶⁵

In January 1986, West German and British vessels were boarded and searched by the Iranian navy. On January 12, 1986, the American-flagged cargo vessel *President Taylor* was stopped and boarded while in the Gulf of Oman en

¹⁶² Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, p. 173.

¹⁶³ Francis V. Xavier, *Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 71-81.

¹⁶⁴ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, pp. 48, 55, 57, 74 – 75, 107, 116 – 117, 133 – 135, 166- 167.

¹³⁶ The Sea Killer missile had a range of 13.5 nautical miles. See John William Ransom Taylor, *Jane's All the World's Aircraft 1986*, p. 53.

route to Al Fujayrah, UAE with a load of cotton. While the vessel was released by Iran, the United States expressed concern that these incidents carried the danger of “misunderstandings, overstepping of rights and norms, and even violence.”¹⁶⁶

A similar event was averted in May, when the destroyer *David R. Ray* prevented an Iranian frigate from boarding the American merchant vessel *President McKinley*.¹⁶⁷ In April 1987, responsibility for Iranian anti-ship attacks shifted from the regular Iranian navy to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard, also known as the Pasdaran, formally inaugurated its Navy in 1987, although it had been operating surreptitiously in the Gulf since 1982. Motivated by religious zeal and anti-U.S. rhetoric, the Pasdaran utilized Boghammer speedboats armed with machine guns and rocket propelled grenades (RPG) to harass merchant shipping.¹⁶⁸

While insufficient to sink a large ship, these weapons were more than capable of killing and injuring merchant seamen. The first attack credited to the Pasdaran occurred on October 22, 1986, against the Kuwaiti tanker *Al Faiha*. Between April 1987 and the Iranian acceptance of a ceasefire in July 1988, the Pasdaran were responsible for 82 percent of Iranian attacks on shipping.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Andrea DeGuttry, *Law of Naval Warfare*, p. 146.

¹⁶⁷ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, p. 123.

¹⁶⁸ Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁹ Martin Navias and R. Hooton, *Tanker Wars*, pp. 136-138, 172 - 173. The Pasdaran conducted 108 of 131 total attacks during this period.

The 1988 Ceasefire

Attempts to end the war by the Islamic Conference Organization, the Organization of Non-aligned countries, the UN Secretariat General and the Warsaw Pact countries all failed. Unilateral initiatives, notably by Algeria, met with similar success. These failures prompted one commentator to sum up the efforts of the international community as 'routine and in the main futile.' Since June 1982, Iraq had declared truces and ceasefires a few times, and on occasions unilaterally, hoping to end the war early.¹⁷⁰

These happened mainly after realizing that they were not going to achieve the expected swift victory, and Iraq would face serious economic problems should the war prolong, something which they had not anticipated.¹⁷¹ But finally, in early 1988, Iraq sought to end the war through an escalation of war effort. To achieve this, the Iraqi used chemical weapons on Halabja, recaptured the Fao peninsula and drove the Iranian forces out of Majnoon islands. Suddenly the Iraqis seemed "alive and rejuvenated" to continue the war effort when the Iranians seemed to have lost their initial zest.¹⁷²

And when Iran accepted the UN Resolution 598 in July 1988, Iraq readily agreed to the ceasefire and abided to the resolution accordingly. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the UN Security Council (UNSC) had always wanted this war to terminate. In particular the GCC, if it had its way, would never

¹⁷⁰ Uriel Dann, "The Iraqi-Iranian War", *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, Vol. 8 (1983-1984), p. 186.

¹⁷¹ See John Bulloch, *The Gulf War: Its Origins, History and Consequences* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 169.

¹⁷² Francis V. Xavier, *Iran-Iraq War*, p. 69.

have allowed this war to happen in the first place. Oil exportation through the Gulf faced too much risk when the two "superpowers" of Middle East locked horns.¹⁷³

The answer of the GCC states seemed to be that Iraq must be pressed towards compromise while Iran must be reintegrated into the region. To achieve this, GCC would use all means including financing any war damage claims by both Iran and Iraq, in order to ensure termination of the war. This offer provided both Iran and Iraq good "excuses" to end the war without having to admit defeat and yet have the money to reconstruct their countries.¹⁷⁴

Ayatollah khomeini accepted a truce in 1986. However, the truce did not last long and the "elusive" termination of this war never had a chance at all. Having emerged from the war more united and cohesive than before, Iraq raided Khark Island again in October 1986 and attacked Iran's oil terminal in November 1986 to temporarily cut Iran's oil export again. Now, despite the further economic setback, Iran was determined to fight back, and before long, the "war of cities" resumed. The Iranians, however, still had masses of men who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the Islamic Revolution.¹⁷⁵

The Iranian Navy still had a strangle-hold on the Straits of Hormuz and Iran still had its oil reserves. November 1982 ended with Iraq again seeking unity among the Arabs and making more peace proposals. Iran could not be appeased

¹⁷³ Anthony H.Cordesman, *The Iraq-Iran War*, pp. 40-41.

¹⁷⁴ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, pp. 130-132.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265.

even by Iraqi declarations of unilateral truce. Iran's preconditions for negotiations were impossible to meet.¹⁷⁶

These preconditions were: the fall of the government of Saddam Hussein; Iraq's admission of its responsibility for starting the war; the withdrawal of all Iraqi troops from and the return of all Iranian territory; the payment of from \$50 to \$150 BILLION in war reparations; and the return to Iraq of the Persian Shiites who had been expelled by President Hussein in 1980.¹⁷⁷

The drop of oil prices in late 1980s' severely limited the cash which Iran required for essential military and civilian needs in the winter of 1985-86. The situation was so severe that the Islamic Republic of Iran considered it prudent to cease fighting. At this time, it was generally believed that the new Iranian system had become so established that it could absorb a dramatic reversal of war policy.¹⁷⁸

Overall, the conflict had provided Ayatollah Khomeini with an opportunity to consolidate the Islamic Revolution, but he also was quick to realize that ordinary Iranians were becoming war-weary. He realized that imposing further economic austerity on the people, combined with a measure of coercion to prosecute the war effectively would erode the mass base that his regime enjoyed. With this, he reckoned that a stage had been reached when continuing hostilities would damage the revolution rather than strengthen it.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Hanns Maull, *The Gulf War*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁷ Christine Moss Helms, *The Iraqi Dilemma*, p. 84.

¹⁷⁸ Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 23.

The prolonged and painful process of disillusionment undergone by the Iranian society and its political system during these demanding years eventually culminated in the ceasefire in the summer of 1988.¹⁸⁰ However Iran accepted the ceasefire in the war, Ayatollah Khomeini had warned the regions' governments whom were supporting Iraq.

"All of you are partners in the adventurism and crimes created by the USA and Saddam. We have not yet engaged in any action that would engulf the entire region in blood and fire, making it unstable. You can be sure that you will be the losers in this new chapter."¹⁸¹

Conclusion

In the last years of the war, there were indicators that Iran's soldiers were unwilling and unable to continue the fight because the war aims were not achieved and had lost a string of military battles in Fao, Shalamcheh, Mehran and Majnoon. Coupled with a sense of isolation and confrontation not only with Iraq but also with the whole world, this only hastened Iran's decision to end the war. At the end of the war, on July 3rd 1988, a fortnight before accepting a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War, the powerful speaker of parliament and military Commander-in-Chief (since July 1980) Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that Iran's new priority was to break out of international isolation.

He had long believed that the major casualty of this war had been the creditability of the Islamic Republic among its own rank and file. He believed that the longer the war prolonged, the more Iran could no longer effectively call upon

¹⁷⁹ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War*, p. 259.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁸¹ A Quote from Ayatollah Khomeini. See Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 130.

its populace for crusades and sacrifices. It was for this reason that Rafsanjani had indulged in pre-emptive self-criticism of past policies long before the final ceasefire call in 1988. Therefore, Rafsanjani had taken a risk in persuading the Ayatollah Khomeini to accept the ceasefire.

CHAPTER 4

ISTISHADI COMMANDERS DURING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

“Our nation gave its blood to create an Islamic Republic, not a democratic republic.”¹

Ayatollah Khomeini

Introduction

After the Islamic revolution, the IRGC set religious requirements for its soldiers and banned them for ideological and political dissent. -like, to the purge of leftists, Bani-Sadr supporters, and allies of Mehdi Hashemi at different points in the 1980s-, However, constructing an Islamic military was also the work of art. For instance, when debating the color of its uniforms, the Guards’ Central Council decided upon plain green, which is the color most, associated with the Prophet Mohammad.

The death of Ayatollah Taleqani illustrated a growing division between the Ayatollah khomeinist camp on the one hand, and the government, democratic organizations, and leftist groups on the other. It was a harbinger of things to come and an outgrowth of the Ayatollah khomeinist camp’s push for power. However, it also demonstrated the confusion surrounding the IRGC. Who exactly were the “Revolutionary Guards” and how were they distinct from the other Ayatollah Khomeini’s committees and militias? Neither the government nor the Revolutionary

¹ Ayatollah Khomeini’s 9 March 1979 speech in Qom, see “Khomeyni Speech at Qom Cemetery,” *Tehran Domestic Service in Persian*, in *FBIS-MEA*, 9 March 1979, p. 13.

Council appeared to have a firm grasp of the organization and the dynamics of its membership.

The Formation of Guardians of Islamic Republic of Iran

This chapter discusses how the IRGC² formed its organization and membership from its early stage and from its official emblem to the graphic artwork in its publications. The IRGC employed the teaching of Ayatollah Khomeini for various messages concerning the organization, its membership, and its role during the war. Like Iran's government, the Guards favored the visual medium because it could effectively convey political, religious, and ideological notions to the public through culturally familiar metaphors and symbols.³ On 5 May 1979, after three months of post-revolutionary confusion and turmoil, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami) announced its establishment as an organ of the Provisional Government:

“In his exalted name: By the command of the illustrious leader of the Islamic Revolution, the Imam Khomeyni, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps has been established under the auspices of the Revolutionary Council. The Corps Command Council has been approved and sanctioned by the Revolutionary Council. It is hoped that the chosen responsible officials and the competent persons involved, with the support of Almighty God and in accordance with the approved rules, will strive to fulfill the momentous task of the Islamic revolution and will be successful in carrying out the duties entrusted to them.”⁴

² IRGC is abbreviation of Islamic Guards Corps, which refers to Basij and Sepah Organization in Iran.

³ On the Islamic Republic's use of graphic arts during the revolution and first years of the war, see Abulfazl A'li, *Honar-e Grafik dar Enqelab-e Eslami [The Art of Graphic in Islamic Revolution]* (Tehran: Vahed-e Entesharat-e Hawzah-ye Hunari-e Sazman-e Tablighat-e Eslami, 1985), p. 63.

⁴ IRGC, “Revolutionary Guards Corps Established in Iran,” *Tehran Newspapers*, 5 May 1979, in *FBIS-MEA*, 7 May 1979, p.3. This announcement followed a similar declaration by Ayatollah Ayatollah Khomeini, which was published in the revolutionary newspaper *Enqelab-e Eslami* (Tehran) on 6 May

Part of the problem undermining the Corps, its functionality, and its position in the post- revolutionary regime was the fluidity of its membership and lack of effective centralized control. Since its inception the ranks of the IRGC had been occupied by activists generally operating within more than one organization—such as the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, hezbollah, committees, or even local gangs—simultaneously.⁵

The abundance of willing participants was as much a blessing as it was a detriment to the Guards. The lack of structure allowed individual units to act with impunity, sometimes in the interest of other parties, while the multiple responsibilities of the Corps were too many and too broadly defined to be successful in the short term.⁶ Lack of funding was also a problem. In the six months following its establishment, the IRGC received little support from the government despite its official mandate and was forced to rely on individual benefactors and confiscated property, arms, and vehicles to run its operations.⁷

1979. See Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 225.

⁵ For instance, numerous MIR activists, such as Mortaza Alviri and Hasan Hamidzadeh, simultaneous held positions of responsibility in the IRGC, the committees, and in MIR. See Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mohjadein-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhellal [MIR from founding to dissolving from 1979 to 1987]* (Tehran: Markaze Asnad-e Eslami, 2007), pp. 85-89.

⁶ Nikola B. Schahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1987), pp. 65-67.

⁷ Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen Rafiqdust*, Vol. 1, edited by Davud Qasempur (Tehran: Markaz-e esnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 2004), pp. 174-182. Rafiqdust singles out Hajj Aqa Jaber-Ansari as a key individual helped financially support the IRGC during this period. See also Ali Danesh Monfared, *Khaterat-e Ali Danesh Monfared. [The Memorials of Ali Danesh Monfared]*, Edited by Reza Bastami (Tehran: Markaz-e esnad-e enqelab-e eslami, 2005), pp. 87-88.

These issues highlighted the fact that the IRGC was still a new, struggling institution, which acted more like the hodge-podge collection of individual militias that it was and less like the official organ it was portrayed to be. Therefore at the time of its first announcement on 5 May, the IRGC was still a poorly-funded, loosely bound semi-militia, whose identity and politics were derived as much from the interests of individual Corps members as from Ayatollah khomeini and the post-revolutionary regime.⁸

Many of the challenges facing the IRGC were rooted in the provenance of the organization. According to a founding member of the Guards, Mohsen Rafiqdust, the concept behind the establishment of a post-revolutionary armed force composed of Islamist militants was first introduced by Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Montazeri. In a meeting held during the build up to the February revolution, Montazeri—an influential guerilla leader and the son of senior cleric Ayatollah Hosayn-Ali Montazeri—is said to have opined “Now that the revolution will be victorious, an armed force must be formed to safeguard the revolution.”⁹

Although no steps were taken at the time to create such a force, Montazeri suggested the idea to Ayatollah khomeini. Shortly after the February victory, Montazeri approached Rafiqdust with the news that Ayatollah khomeini had ordered the establishment of the Revolutionary Guards. Overseeing the formation of the Guards, which was initially to be under the jurisdiction of the Provisional

⁸ Yahya Rahim Safavi, *Az jonub-e Lobnan ta jonub-e Iran: khaterat-e Sardar-e Sayyed Rahim Safavi*. Edited by M. Najafpour (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2006), p. 41.

⁹ Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen Rafiqdust*, p. 174.

Government, were Montazeri himself and senior cleric Ayatollah Beheshti, leader of the clerically-dominated Islamic Republic Party (IRP). A mid-level cleric, Hojjat al-Islam Hasan Lahuti, was appointed Ayatollah khomeini's representative to the organization and the task of organizing the Guards' leadership was given to Rafiqdust.¹⁰

Through meetings with the clerical leaders of the IRP (including Beheshti, Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, and Ali Khamenei) and the representatives of several militant organizations, Rafiqdust and his associates established the IRGC, chose its official name, and appointed its first commanders. Ali Danesh Monfared became the first commander of the Corps; Gholam-Ali Afruz headed personnel; Engineer Zarami became the head of training; a Mr. Mahmudzadeh led additional units; and Rafiqdust himself was charged with logistics.¹¹

Shortly afterward, these individuals formed the Central Office (daftar-e markazi) of the IRGC, which held its meetings in a former SAVAK headquarters. Although Rafiqdust had consulted various revolutionary leaders before establishing the IRGC, all were reticent to assimilate their forces into this burgeoning enterprise.¹² Their main objection, typified by the position held by Montazeri, was the Guards' lack of autonomy. These revolutionaries had built a career on resisting state control,

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Asadi Qafour, *Ahmad Seh Fasle Moghavemat* [Three chapters of resistance] (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 19; See also Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen Rafiqdust*, p.175.

and even though their revolution had been victorious the new regime was still too young to inspire much trust.¹³

Further, militants such as Montazeri and Abbas Aqa-Zamani (more commonly known by his nom de guerre “Abu Sharif”), were internationalists who were as (if not more, in Montazeri’s case) committed to assisting liberation movements outside Iran as they were to creating a new society within it. Losing the independence and freedom they had fought so long for in order to join a state-controlled, national army may not have been very appealing. Despite a refusal to absorb their forces into the IRGC, Montazeri and Abu Sharif (who also had strong ties to hezbollahi groups) were closely aligned with the organization from its inception.¹⁴

They represented two of the four factions that made up the heart of the early IRGC. The leaders of these factions—which also included Mohammad Borujerdi (representing the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution organization) and Rafiqdust and his associates Monfarad and Zarami—formed the core of the Revolutionary Guards and elected the organization’s first Central Council (shura-ye markazi) from among their ranks.¹⁵

Further elections created the Command Council, which included members of each faction: Javad Mansuri and Mohsen Kolehduz from Pasa became the chief

¹³ Ibid., p. 176.

¹⁴ Abu Sharif and Ali Duzdudzani were both early leaders of the Hezbollah movement in Iran.

¹⁵ Katzman identifies three factions (MIR, and those led by Zamani and Montazeri) as playing a role in the early IRGC, but does not consider Rafiqdust and his associates. See Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam Iran’s Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), p. 148-150.

IRGC commander and head of training, respectively; Abu Sharif was charged with operations; Yusef Forutan of MIR headed public relations; and Rafiqdust remained the head of logistics.¹⁶

The establishment of these leadership councils and the involvement of each major faction paved the way for additional members from these factions and other groups to participate in the IRGC.¹⁷ Although each faction influenced the makeup and direction of the Corps, the individuals who had perhaps the greatest impact on the organization came from the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (MIR).¹⁸

Much of MIR's success in post- revolutionary politics was due to the patronage they received from Ayatollah khomeini and other revolutionary leaders. With Ayatollah khomeini's support, MIR activists were placed into high- ranking positions throughout the post-revolutionary regime, including key leadership posts in the IRGC and the revolutionary committees.¹⁹ Although MIR activists made up only a small fraction of the overall Corps ranks, they were entrusted with many of the organization's top leadership positions.²⁰

¹⁶ Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen Rafiqdust*, p. 181.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁸ Katzman makes a similar argument, suggesting MIR played a "crucial role" in the formation of the IRGC. See Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, pp. 32-34.

¹⁹ Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mohjadein-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhellal [MIR from founding to dissolving from 1979 to 1987]* (Tehran: Markaze Asnad-e Eslami, 2007), p. 91.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 92

Some of these initial appointments included Borujerdi, who helped in the establishment of the IRGC and later became its western regional commander, and Mohsen Rezai—a founding member of MIR and part of its central committee—who served as MIR’s second representative to the Corps. Other senior MIR members, such as the aforementioned Yusef Forutan and Morteza Alviri also became influential in the organization. Alviri, who was appointed to the Command Council, also served on the central council of the revolutionary committees.²¹

The involvement of MIR members in the new regime made the status of MIR as an independent and active organization unclear. The confusion surrounding MIR’s status permeated the highest levels of the government, which at one point erroneously stated the organization had been absorbed into the IRGC. Any official relationship between the two was denied by MIR, however, which declared that the organization was “in no way connected with any Government organ.”²²

Although MIR remained independent, its influence on post-revolutionary institutions, particularly the IRGC, was pronounced. Indeed, the MIR faction eventually became the dominant faction in the Revolutionary Guards leading to the appointment of Mohsen Rezai as the head Corps commander in 1981—a post he held

²¹ Ahad Goodarziani, *Nimeye Asrar, Goftego ba Hamsare Shahid Hemmat* [The secret half of a myth: an interview with the wife of Martyr Hemmat] (Tehran: Kaman Publication, 1999), p. 13.

²² Morteza Motahhari, *Rahbari-e Nasl-e Javan* (Tehran: Kanun-e Khedamat-e Farhangi-e Alast, 1982), pp. 17-289

until 1997. Despite its importance in post-revolutionary politics, MIR itself was a recently- branded organization.²³

It was established in the wake of the February 1979 revolution as an umbrella organization for seven regional revolutionary groups: Mansuran (the Victorious, led by Mohsen Rezai), Movahhedin (the Monotheists), Towhidi Saf (the Monotheistic Group, led by Mohammad Borujerdi), Fallah (the Peasant group, led by Alviri), Towhidi Badr (the Monotheistic Badr group), Falaq (the Dawn group), and Ommat-e Vahedeh (Unified Nation, led by Behzad Nabavi).²⁴

Some of these groups (such as Towhidi Saf and Mansuran) had been in existence prior to the revolutionary upheaval of 1978-79; however, others (such as Ommat-e Vahedeh) were established in the midst of it. The key commonalities shared by each of these groups were their involvement in anti- Shah activism and their disillusionment with the revolutionary left. MIR's disdain for the left stemmed as much from its members' specific religious leanings as it did from their collective experience with leftist organizations, particularly the Islamist-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO).²⁵

²³ "Amir Entezam's 8th April News Conference", 10 April 1979, in this press conference, Entezam states "The Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution is part of the organization of the revolutionary guards".

²⁴ *Badr* means "full moon," but in this instance it is likely a reference to the first major battle between the Muslims and the Meccans at Badr (north of Mecca) in 624 C.E.

²⁵ For a social and intellectual history of the MKO, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989). On the group's post-revolutionary development see, Kenneth Katzman "The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran", in *Iran: Outlaw, Outcast, or Normal Country?*, edited by Albert V. Benliot (Huntington: Nova Science Publishers, 2001). Also, on the group's connection to Ali Shariati see, Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

The fallout between Islamists and the MKO took place on a number of fronts, but its epicenter was Evin prison in north of Tehran. The prison experience during the 1970s, as described by numerous accounts of former political prisoners, was a combative arena of ideological contestation. Every group struggled to spread its ideological message among the inmates and increase adherents to its cause.²⁶ Such clash of ideas and politics resulted in a general divide between the secular left and the Islamist-minded prisoners. However, the Islamist-minded sector also began to split as more and more individuals became disenchanted with the Marxist leanings and autocratic culture of the MKO (then the largest of the Islamist-minded organizations).²⁷

This split reflected a more general deterioration of support for the MKO—and the Islamic left in general—outside of prison, particularly within the clergy, throughout the 1970s.²⁸ Within the prison system, the MKO utilized rumors and accusations to undermine their opponents and cast suspicion on dissenters. As one former jailed activist recalls, “they [the MKO] ... began spreading baseless rumors ... any person who wasn’t a part of their organization was automatically considered to be associated with SAVAK.”²⁹

²⁶ See for example, the reflections of Makhmalbaf in Hamid Dabashi’s *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), pp. 164-181.

²⁷ Maziar Behrooz, “The Revolution and the Guerilla Movement”, in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, edited by Stephanie Cronin (London: Routledge, 2004), p.?. See also Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 201.

²⁸ Maziar Behrooz, “The Revolution”, pp. 201-02.

²⁹ Sayyed Ali Akbar Mohtashami, *Khaterat-e Siyasi-e Sayyed Ali Akbar Mohtashami*. Vol. 2. (Tehran: Khaneh-ye Andisheh-ye Javan, 2000), p. 55.

The fallout of this experience split the Islamists into two opposing factions: those who supported the MKO and those who did not. This emergent Islamist camp was motivated not only by its opposition to the Pahlavi regime, but increasingly by its opposition to the leftists and the MKO, which they considered equally dubious. Yet, even as these Islamists moved to oppose the Islamic left, their new organizations profited from the experience and knowledge they had gained as members of the MKO.³⁰

It was within this charged, divisive atmosphere that the components of MIR began to take shape. For instance, one of the seven founding organizations of MIR, Ommat-e Vahedeh (the Unified Nation group), was established in 1978 by newly-released political prisoners opposed to the MKO. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, noted contemporary filmmaker and original member of Ommat-e Vahedeh, discusses the impetus behind that group's establishment and MIR's initial *raison d'être*.³¹

In 1977, I separated myself from the MKO. Earlier, I had a very close relationship with them, but I didn't say anything for fear of SAVAK's taking advantage of the situation. When I decided to break with the organization, at first, I tried to simply remain silent, but that became impossible. And when I began speaking out against them, of the fifty-six people who were in our section, about twenty-eight broke off from them in sympathy with me. This group later evolved into Ommat-e Vahedeh. You might not believe it, but even with the worst conditions that I've observed under the ruling clerics, I'd still prefer their rule a thousand times to that of the Mojahedin. They're Stalinists! When I left prison, I joined MIR.³²

Makhmalbaf's recounting of his falling out with and subsequent rivalry to the MKO is illustrative of the experiences of other top MIR and IRGC activists such as

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 73-78.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 72-73.

³² Ibid., p. 78.

Behzad Nabavi (leader of Ommat-e Vahedeh), Morteza Alviri, and Mohsen Rezai. Other prominent members of the post-revolutionary regime, including IRGC commander Monfared, Abbas Duzdüzani (who attended early IRGC leadership meetings), and the future Prime Minister and President of the Islamic Republic, Mohammad Ali Rajai, were also former MKO members who had turned against the left.³³

Those who moved away from the MKO tended to turn toward the clergy in general and Ayatollah Khomeini in particular for guidance. The split pitted the largely anti-clerical MKO against the more pro-clerical Islamists and created a divide along political, ideological, and religious lines. In an effort to undermine the left and prevent it from gaining influence in post-revolutionary Iran, MIR self-consciously formed an ideology and identity that were in direct opposition to the MKO.³⁴

MIR constructed a veneer that appeared more authentically Islamic than the Islamist-Marxist MKO, but retained fixtures—such as the term “Mojahedin”—to challenge the latter’s near trademark association with the revolutionary movement. This type of outward or symbolic challenge to the MKO is perhaps best represented in MIR’s official emblem. MIR’s emblem can be seen as a visualization of its

³³ Ibid. p. 79.

³⁴ Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, pp.31-32. See also Mohsen Rezai’s official biography, *Zendegi-e doktor-e Mohsen Reza’i dar yek negah* at www.rezaee.ir (accessed 12 February 2008).

ideological and political bases. It simultaneously affirms the organization's motivating principles while denouncing those held by the MKO.³⁵

Each includes a quote from the Quran, a clenched fist holding a rifle, a geographical reference, the name of the organization, and the year of its founding. The MKO's emblem, however, includes additional Marxist symbols—the five-pointed star, the anvil (representing the working class), and the sickle (representing the peasantry); an outline of Iran (representing the group's nationalistic agenda); leaves (suggesting a desire for world peace); and a graphical representation of the globe (symbolizing the internationalist struggle).³⁶

Most of these symbols are excised from MIR's emblem and are replaced with more explicit Islamic motifs. At the center of the design sits a prominent representation of the Arabic negative article “la,” out of which grows a clenched fist holding a rifle. The Arabic “la” stands for the Muslim proclamation of faith “la ilaha ilallah” (“There is no God but God”), which is also written on the banner in the upper right hand of the emblem.³⁷

³⁵ Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mohjadein-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhellal [MIR from founding to dissolving from 1979 to 1987]* (Tehran: Markaze Asnad-e Eslami, 2007), pp.79-80; Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 211.

³⁶ For more on the graphic elements and meanings of the MKO's emblem, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, pp. 102-103.

³⁷ Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi suggest that the usage of the “la” negative article in this form is influenced by Ali Shariati and his publications, which bore the negative article “on the cover of all of his books and published lectures”. See Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 344.

These elements, combined with the Quranic verse at the bottom right hand of the design, are overt testaments to the religiosity of the organization and are employed to counter the MKO's Marxist imagery. Likewise, MIR replaces an image of Iran with an image of the globe as a way of distancing itself from the nationalistic sentiments of the left, while retaining a similar commitment to internationalism.³⁸

In a sense, MIR's emblem stripped away what its members found objectionable in the MKO to reveal the religious core of a new brand of Islamic revolutionism. This visual turn not only symbolizes the shifting ideological and religious sentiments of the Islamist revolutionary bloc, but it also forms the graphic template adopted by the IRGC (and later by Lebanese Hizballah).³⁹

MIR's emblem can therefore be seen as the branding of an eminent anti-leftist, pro-Ayatollah khomeini faction, which helped form the foundational ideology and religiosity of the IRGC and shape post-revolutionary politics. Through their rivalry with the MKO and general enmity of the left, MIR members in the IRGC, committees, and elsewhere in the post-revolutionary regime increasingly used their positions to subvert their rivals.⁴⁰

The campaign against the left took different forms. Islamist propaganda accused the left of being a front for Western powers, fomenting counter revolutionary

³⁸ Al-Quran (25:57), "so that men may stand by justice"

³⁹ The IRGC's emblem will be discussed in chapter 5. The emblem can be found in the Annex as well.

⁴⁰ Davud Amini, *Jam'iyat-e Fada'iyān-i Eslām va naqsh-e ān dar tahavvulat-e siyāsī-e ejtemā'i-e Irān*, [The Fadayān association and their role in Islamic Revolution of Iran] (Tehran: Entesharat-e Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslāmī-e Irān, 2002), p. 43.

sentiment among ethnic minorities, and of undermining the position of the clergy. The left's vocal support for ethnic minorities and their embrace of "foreign" ideologies provoked much of this sentiment, but it was their advocacy of secularism, or in the case of the MKO, a Shariati-style anti-clerical Islam that threatened much of the clerical establishment. Ayatollah khomeini continuously attacked the left on this point, even though many of the leftist organizations had publicly voiced their support for him and other senior clerics.⁴¹

The Revolutionary Guards' primary responsibilities, as articulated by this and another statement released the next day, concern internal security and the combating of counterrevolutionary elements. The Guards Corps is to assist in the arrest, prosecution, and at times, punishment of suspected individuals. The organization is also tasked with supporting foreign liberation movements in their struggles outside of Iran. The organization makes clear that its existence is at the behest of Ayatollah Ayatollah khomeini and that its senior leadership has been vetted and approved by the Revolutionary Council.⁴²

By claiming to act in "consultation" with the Provisional Government, the IRGC is careful to place itself alongside the government but not beneath it. This is indicative of the organization's close allegiance to certain radical clerics and its distrust of the more moderate civilian government. By the time the Revolutionary Guards made these announcements, their organization needed little introduction to the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴² Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*. (Tehran: Entesharate Sepah, 1981), pp. 16-19.

Iranian public. Elements operating under the banner of the “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution” (pasdaran-e enqelab-e eslami) had been active throughout Iranian cities within days of Ayatollah khomeini’s return on 1 February 1979.⁴³

The violent activism of these militants, often fighting alongside local revolutionary committees (komitehs) and fundamentalist gangs (hezbollahis), quickly became a fixture of post-revolutionary turmoil. With Iran’s armed forces in disarray due to the purges, forced retirements, arrests, and murders of its officer corps, the Guards were also entrusted with matters formerly reserved for the military, including suppression of the ethnic uprisings and civil unrest that had erupted throughout the country.⁴⁴

By the time the formation of the Revolutionary Guards was announced, only a few months after emerging as a Ayatollah khomeinist militia, they had already become one of the most active and controversial institutions of the post-revolution. This chapter discusses the establishment and early activities of the Revolutionary Guards from February 1979 to the ratification of the Islamic Republic’s first constitution in December 1979.⁴⁵ It explores the motives of the Guards in the midst of revolutionary violence and the early role of the IRGC as an official apparatus of the government. It highlights the roots and founding leaders of the organization, and

⁴³ Shahgaldian suggests that some elements operating as “guards” at this time included militants associated with socialist and communist organizations. However, he conflates these “guards” with the “Guardians of the Islamic Revolution” who were aligned with individuals and organizations supportive of Ayatollah khomeini. See Nikola B. Shahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military*, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁴ On the scope and nature of the purges see, Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military*, pp. 136-161.

⁴⁵ Hossein Bashiriye, *Dibachei bar jamee shenasii-e Iran* [An introduction to the sociology of politics in Iran] (Tehran: Nashr-e Negah-e Moaser, 2002), pp. 109-110.

discusses how the commitments of these individuals and the factions they represented influenced the IRGC's martial and ideological roles in post-revolutionary Iran.

During this period, the IRGC operated as the leading coercive element of Ayatollah khomeini's ideological and political campaign. Motivated by a commitment to Ayatollah khomeini, revolutionary Islam, and a zealous distrust of the left, the Guards served as the spearhead for the post-revolutionary regime's crackdown on leftist organizations and democratic influence. In this short but crucial period in Iran's history, the IRGC was transformed from a poorly-funded, loose coalition of Islamist guerilla factions into a formidable armed force with a national reach.⁴⁶

Being allied with the clerical leadership of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), the IRGC helped suppress and combat the ideologies and organizations considered to be in competition with or dissenting from Ayatollah khomeini's own vision of an Islamic state under the "Guardianship of the Jurisprudent" (velayat-e faqih). With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the IRGC assisted Ayatollah khomeini and his clerical supporters in commuting the diverse 1979 revolution into a distinctly Ayatollah khomeinist enterprise.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A martyr embraces all of these. Each revolution has two visages: blood and a message. Anyone who has chosen the responsibility of accepting truth, anyone who knows what a Shi'ite's responsibility means, anyone who understands the responsibility of the freedom of humanity, must know that in the permanent battle of history -,everywhere and everyplace, all fields - are Karbala, all months are Muharram, all days are Ashura and thus one must choose: either blood or bearing the message, to be either Hosein or Zainab, to die like Hosein or remain like Zainab, if he does not want to be absent and always wants to have presence. See Ali Shariati, *Pas az Shahadat* (Tehran: Majmoe Asar, 1979), pp. 88-89.

⁴⁷ Navid Kermani, "Roots of terror: suicide, martyrdom, self redemption and Islam", <http://www.opendemocracy.net> (Accessed on 18 June 2009).

In this way, IRGC activism fused together the ideological and religious authority of the clerical leadership with the effective organization of physical coercion. Though the Guards began as a loose coalition of like-minded militant groups and guerrilla leaders, its affect on the post-revolution was pronounced. Indeed, as I suggest in this chapter, it was primarily the combined influences of clerical authority and armed coercion that enabled the success of the Ayatollah khomeinist faction. This religious-military network proved more formidable than political and economic forces during this period and helped secure Ayatollah khomeinist dominance of the post-revolutionary state.⁴⁸

Ayatollah Ayatollah khomeini's return to Iran on 1 February 1979 after fifteen years of exile symbolized the end of monarchical rule in Iran. Arriving on the heels of the mass strikes and demonstrations that had crippled the Pahlavi regime and led to the flight of Mohammad Reza Shah on 16 January 1978, Ayatollah khomeini's return further emboldened the revolutionary forces. For the next several days armed revolutionaries clashed with the remaining state entities loyal to the Pahlavi regime. The most important confrontation occurred between the revolutionaries and the military. Although numerous military defections had already occurred in the build up to the "three glorious days" of February 9 to 11, the military remained the last bulwark against the revolutionary movement.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Morteza Motahhari, *Ensan – e – Kamel [A Complete Man]* (Tehran: Sadra, 1980), p. 17.

⁴⁹ Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military*, pp. 69-78.

The turning point came on 9 February when a group of 800 Air Force technicians and mechanics, known as the Homafaran joined the revolutionary struggle. After watching a replay of Ayatollah khomeini's return on state television, Homafaran stationed at Dowshan Tappeh airbase in Tehran demonstrated in support of Ayatollah khomeini, provoking a violent reaction by loyalist Imperial Guards.⁵⁰

The confrontation soon turned into an armed conflict between the Imperial Guards and the rebelling Homafaran, who were later joined by militants from major revolutionary groups—the Marxist-Leninist People's Fada'i and the Islamist-Marxist Mojahedin-e Khalq organization (MKO)—in an effort to overtake the airbase. Fighting continued through the following morning when the fighters finally succeeded in overtaking the airbase's barracks and looted the armory. The weapons from the armory were sent to mosques and other community centers to be distributed among revolutionary elements.⁵¹

The repercussions of the Dowshan Tappeh takeover were massive. Revolutionary organizations, especially the People's Fada'i, used the event to bring their members and supporters together in a centralized manner, instilling a sense of group solidarity that helped in the effective coordination of further attacks. Revolutionary elements began attacking police stations throughout the city, leading to

⁵⁰ Nikki Keddie argues that the Homafaran and leftist guerilla groups were the chief elements in the military victory of the revolution. See Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 238. See also S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 124-127.

⁵¹ S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban*, pp. 124-127.

the capturing of additional armories and weapons-stores, which provided the militants with a flush of arms.⁵²

The once proud military began to collapse from within. Mass defections of all ranks took place, including the top commanders of the Imperial Guards, Generals Neshat and Biglari, who ordered the complete surrender of their units. By the morning of 11 February, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces convened a meeting during which a declaration of neutrality was drafted. The announcement of this declaration on state radio that afternoon sealed the fate of the Pahlavi regime and signaled victory for the revolutionary movement.⁵³

The victory of the revolutionary movement ushered in a period of transition and consolidation. Although Ayatollah khomeini was the clear charismatic authority and the so-called leader of the revolution, political power in the post-revolutionary regime was divided into two main camps: first, the Provisional Government under Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan—a prominent Muslim intellectual and leader of the pro-democratic Freedom Movement party—which was appointed by Ayatollah khomeini but composed mostly of technocrats from the Freedom Movement and National Front; second, the Revolutionary Council, led by Ayatollah khomeini and dominated by anonymous members of the clergy.⁵⁴

⁵² Alireza Mahfoozi, interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 7 April 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, p. 19.

⁵³ Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military*, p. 73.

⁵⁴ In a February 2008 interview with the Persian daily *Hamshahri* in Tehran, Ayat. Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani states that Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the establishment of the Revolutionary Council in the months leading up to the revolution, and that its original members were Ayat. Motahhari, Ayat. Beheshti, Ayat. Musavi-Ardebili, Hojjat al-Islam Bahrani, and Rafsanjani himself. He also mentions

The Provisional Government took charge of the fractured institutions of the police, gendarmerie, and military, and held responsibility for general administration. It played a subordinate role to the Revolutionary Council, however, which had influence over the vast network of revolutionary committees, mosque-oriented gangs (hezbollahi), the revolutionary courts, and the Revolutionary Guards. Beyond these official centers of power, the post-revolutionary regime also had to contend with the numerous guerilla organizations, political parties, independent clergy, and localized militias that did not fall under the control of either the Provisional Government or the Revolutionary Council.⁵⁵

Although the government controlled the police and military, both of these institutions were near-paralyzed by the damage they incurred during the revolution. The regular military, for instance, endured violent purges that decimated its officer corps. Both also suffered from an association with the previous regime, which gained them little favor in revolutionary circles. The vacuum created by the absence of these security forces at the local level was quickly filled by the numerous armed militias and neighborhood gangs that thrived in the resulting anarchy.⁵⁶

that Ayatollah khomeini intended that additional members should be added to these five, but does not mention any names. Shaul Bakhash lists these individuals as: Abolfazl Zanjani, Mehdi Bazargan, Ibrahim Yazdi, Yadollah Sahabi, Ahmad Sadr Hajj Seyyed Javadi, Kazem Sami, Ezzatollah Sahabi, Mostafa Katiriai, Naser Minachi, Aali Nasab, Hajj Kazem Hajji Tarkhani, Lieutenant General Ali-Asghar Mas'ud, and Lieutenant General Valiollah Qarani. Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani was also said to have been a member. See interview with Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Hamshahri*, February 2008, p. 3.

⁵⁵ S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban*, pp. 134-36; Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p.51.

⁵⁶ The army in particular suffered great losses. Major General Qarani, the army's Chief of Staff under the Provisional Government, commented on this point on 20 February, "I inherited an army which in Tehran did not contain even one soldier, and which, because of treachery by some of the former military leaders, had its barracks emptied of arms and in most cases destroyed by fire". See "Qarani on Army's Disintegration", *Tehran Newspaper*, 20 & 21 February 1979, p. 2.

Law and order took a back seat to vigilante justice and the extra-judicial settling of vendettas. The entire infrastructure of Iranian society, from basic governmental services to the rule of law, had been crippled by the revolution. In response, the Ayatollah khomeinist aligned militias became increasingly active in all aspects of society across the country, partially filling the void left by the shattered security forces. It was in this context that the Revolutionary Guards first appear. Initially, they were associated with the command staff (setad) of the Ayatollah khomeini-appointed revolutionary committees (komitehs) and worked in conjunction with them and other Ayatollah khomeinist militias.⁵⁷

The Guards functioned similarly to other militias in that they primarily fought loyalist elements and were utilized to help secure important positions and telecommunications centers.⁵⁸ At times, their areas of responsibility also included more mundane matters, such as directing traffic and trash removal. What separated the Guards from other militias, however, was the suggestion that they served in an official capacity under the post-revolutionary regime. This was partly due to Ayatollah khomeini's inclusion of the Guards in some of his early messages concerning Iran's military.⁵⁹

For instance, on 14 February Ayatollah khomeini released a message to the "struggling soldiers" who had defected from the military in solidarity with the Islamic

⁵⁷ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*. (Tehran: Entesharate Sepah, 1981), pp. 12-13

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁹ Hossein Bashiriyeh, *Dibachei bar Jamee Shenasiy-e Iran [An introduction to the sociology of politics in Iran]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Negah-e Moaser, 2002), pp. 18-22.

revolution. In this message, Ayatollah khomeini commands these soldiers to “return to their relevant garrisons and units at the earliest opportunity and continue their sacred military service as the struggling soldiers of Islam.” He adds, “It is necessary that the soldiers in service—the guardians of the revolution and the fighting sons of Islam—report to their relevant garrisons as soon as this message reaches them”.⁶⁰

In this way, Ayatollah khomeini hinted at a more official role for the Guards, which, unlike the committees and unofficial militias, placed them in the arena of Iran’s national armed forces. The Provisional Government’s first official statement on the Revolutionary Guards implied something similar. During a 21 February press interview with the Deputy Prime Minister, Amir Entezam, the government announced that the Revolutionary Guards “Corps” would be formed and that the rules and regulations of its formation had already been established.⁶¹

Entezam suggested that the “decision” to establish the Guards Corps was made by the government, insinuating that the new Guards Corps was to be an organ of the Provisional Government. This interview is the first time that the government referred to the Revolutionary Guards as a “Corps” (*sepah*).⁶² This distinction elevated the Guards—at least in name—from a disparate band of militants into an army (or corps) associated with the state and its national armed forces.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 25

⁶¹ Ibid., p.26.

⁶² Ibid., p. 14.

⁶³ “Guardian Corps To Be Established”, *Tehran Newspaper*, 21 February 1979, p. 4.

This was an important (if superficial) transition for the Revolutionary Guards that publicly strengthened their organizational legitimacy. Despite this announcement, however, neither the government nor its Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, seemed to have much confidence in the Corps as an effective military institution.⁶⁴ In his 28 February address, Bazargan highlighted the immense damage that the Iranian military had suffered as a result of the revolution.

While he stressed the need for the public's cooperation in achieving stability, he also lambasted the revolutionary militias that called for the complete disbandment of the "imperialist" army and its replacement by a people's army composed of the revolutionary militias themselves.⁶⁵ Bazargan's speech highlighted a tension between the radical revolutionary camp and the government. Like Ayatollah Khomeini, Bazargan stressed the importance of the military to Iran's national sovereignty, an idea criticized by the left and certain segments of the Islamist bloc (including IRGC leadership) that considered the military a bastion of Pahlavi influence and a tool of Western imperialism.⁶⁶

Ayatollah Khomeini and the government argued that the revolutionary militias (including the Guards) lacked the training, expertise, and discipline needed to

⁶⁴ Hussein Haddad, *Bibliography of the war Fiction and Novel in Iran* (Tehran: The Ministry of Islamic Guidance Publication, 1993), p. 55.

⁶⁵ "Bazargan Addresses Nation on Government Problems", *Tehran Newspaper*, 28 February 1979, p.4.

⁶⁶ Yahya Rahim Safavi, *Az jonub-e Lobnan ta jonub-e Iran: khaterat-e Sardar-e Sayyed Rahim Safavi [From South of Lebanon to South of Iran]* Edited by M. Najafpour (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2006), pp. 41-46.

effectively protect the vulnerable post-revolutionary regime from outside forces.⁶⁷

Both Ayatollah Khomeini and the government seemed to question the loyalty of the major leftist militias—the Fadai, MKO, and the Tudeh—and, while both the Revolutionary Council and the government appeared to be backing the Revolutionary Guards, neither seemed ready to trust them with the military's arsenal. The government, however, continued to stress the Corps as a “national army” that would, in time, “operate as an army alongside” the other national armed forces.⁶⁸

The government suggested that before the Guards could reach the stage of a martial institution complementary to Iran's other national forces a national recruitment effort would have to begin and the new (and existing) troops would need professional military training.⁶⁹ Such public statements by the government portrayed the Guards as an institution that was in the initial stages of formation and had yet to begin its official duties.⁷⁰

The reality, however, was that militants operating under the name of the Revolutionary Guards had been continuously active since early February. By late March, Guards had been involved in security details, arrests, arms collection, and armed conflict throughout Iran, most notably in the cities of Tehran, Shiraz, Abadan,

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁰ For instance, in Entezam's 8 April press conference he says: “As long as the army of the revolutionary guards has not been properly formed and has not started its activities, the weapons will not be collected up. The revolutionary guards have been recruited under regulations similar to those used in the armed forces, and are at the moment being trained”. See “Amir Entezam's 8th April News Conference”, Tehran Newspaper, 10 April 1979, p. 3.

Qom, Mashhad, Sari, Tabriz, and Gonbad-e Kavus. In each location, IRGC units seemed to operate independently and in different capacities.⁷¹

The Guards of Mashhad, for example, underwent military training with advisors from the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Guards in Abadan established a “naval unit” to patrol the area waterways and prevent political dissidents from leaving the country.⁷² In Gonbad-e Kavus, a contingent of Guards clashed with demonstrating Turkmen residents, setting a precedent for the IRGC in the suppression of the similar ethnic uprisings that began to erupt around Iran’s periphery.⁷³

The Guards in Tehran were involved in numerous operations aimed at securing key positions and combating dissent, while the Guards in Qom and Sari were largely involved in security details and weapons collection. Although its units were highly localized, the Corps also developed a more national, centralized presence in the form of a Command Headquarters (setad-e farmandehi), which released its first public announcement on 24 March.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Shahgaldian lists several individuals (including civilian leaders and clergy) who controlled personal armed contingents associated with the Revolutionary Guards. See Nikola B. Shahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military*, p. 65-67.

⁷² Ibid., p. 67.

⁷³ “PLO Delegation to Mashhad”, 23 March 1979, Tehran Newspaper, p. 4. Rezai, Mohsen. *Zendegi-e doktor-e Mohsen Reza'i dar yek negah*. www.rezaee.ir (Accessed 12 February 2008).

⁷⁴ “Revolutionary Guards’ Announcement,” Tehran newspaper, 27 March 1979, p. 2. The coverage of this story by the BBC includes a transliteration of the term “Command Headquarters,” however I altered their rendering to conform to the style used in the present study. See “Iran: In Brief; “Appeal to inform on ‘counter-revolutionary elements’”, *BBC*, 21 March 1979.

The highly individual character of local IRGC units and the relative autonomy with which they operated led to numerous reports of abuses committed by the Guards. Most of the incidents arose as a result of the Guards' broad effort of disarming the populace and its arrests and detentions of suspected counterrevolutionaries as an arm of the shadowy revolutionary courts—areas in which the committees were also involved.⁷⁵ These abuses gained national and international attention after the press reported that two sons and a “non-Iranian” daughter-in-law of Iran's second most popular cleric, Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, had been arrested, beaten, and detained for sixteen hours by elements of the IRGC.⁷⁶

The main target of the arrest was Mojtaba Taleqani, a member of the Marxist-Leninist Paykar Organization,⁷⁷ who was suspected of illegally possessing firearms.⁷⁸ As a sign of protest, Ayatollah Taleqani, a key supporter of the government and co founder of the Freedom Movement, went into hiding causing public outcry against the arrests and similar abuses linked to the Guards and committees.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ See Ali Danesh Monfared, *Khaterat-e Ali*, p. 91. Monfared, the Guards' lead commander at the time, specifically mentions that Taleqani's wife was a “non-Iranian,” which apparently added to the suspicions surrounding the Marxist activist. See Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen Rafiqdust*, p. 174.

⁷⁷ Mojtaba Taleqani began his activist career as a member of the MKO, but later (in 1975) split from the organization on ideological grounds. He discusses his embrace of Marxist ideology and the inadequacy of Islam as a revolutionary doctrine in a letter to his father (c.1975). For the text of the letter, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, pp. 157-62.

⁷⁸ Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mohjadein-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhellal (1357-1365)* [Translation Title?] (Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Eslami, 2007), p. 85.

⁷⁹ “Protest leader marks open split on Iran's policies”, *The Globe and Mail*, 16 April 1979, p. 18.

Ayatollah Taleqani's widespread support among democratic and leftist organizations, as well as his allies in the Provisional Government (e.g., his protégé Mehdi Bazargan and other members of the Freedom Movement), led to numerous demonstrations calling for his return. These protests, especially those organized by the MKO and Fadai, exposed a growing rift between the parties and organizations that looked toward Taleqani for moral legitimacy and those forces loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini.⁸⁰

Faced with building public pressure and mounting discontentment both the government and Revolutionary Council were forced to address the incident. Through its own investigation, the Revolutionary Council concluded that neither the "official committees of the Imam nor the leadership of the corps of the Revolutionary Guards" were involved in the incident. However, they conceded that "not all the branches of the corps of the Revolutionary Guards" had "been brought completely under the control of the Revolutionary Council," thereby suggesting some complicity on the part of the local Guards.⁸¹

Ayatollah Khomeini met Ayatollah Taleqani in Qom to help resolve the issue, which led to some assurances by the former that committees would be purged of "seditious elements." Ayatollah Taleqani, for his part, blamed neither the committees nor the Guards directly, but rather suggested that the abuses of power had come from "irresponsible people" who had "penetrated the committees and made trouble in the

⁸⁰ Abrahamian refers to this incident as "the first skirmish" between leftist organizations (especially the MKO) and the Ayatollah Khomeinist wing of the post-revolutionary regime. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, p. 190.

⁸¹ "Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Council's Call for Taleqani's Return", *Tehran Newspaper*, 16 April 1979, p. 4.

name of revolutionary guards,” but who were not themselves “the real revolutionary guards.”⁸²

Ayatollah khomeini soon altered his pledge in a meeting with the heads of Tehran’s fourteen revolutionary committees. Instead of “purging” or “abolishing” the committees, Ayatollah khomeini suggested the committees should be “reformed” and “seditious” members removed. He blamed the abuses on agents of foreign powers—“most likely Americans”—and argued that they emboldened the opposition. Ayatollah khomeini assured the committees that they would “remain in force until the authority of the Government is established,” which would be manifested by the “achievement of disarming.” Likewise, he added:

“[we] shall not remove the guardians [of the revolution], so that the way will not be free for our enemies. We shall strengthen the guardians and the committees until the day when the Government will be able to maintain a firm conduct of affairs.”⁸³

The government’s response was also mixed, but appeared more critical of the IRGC. The Chief Public Prosecutor’s office curtailed the authority of the committees and the Guards by invalidating all official warrants for the “detention of persons or property, or for the search of houses” previously issued to both groups, thereby suspending them from such activity. In a press conference Amir Entezam denied that either Ayatollah khomeini’s committees or the revolutionary courts had been

⁸² “Ayatollah Khomeini Orders Revolutionary Committees Purged”, *The Washington Post*, 20 April 1979 (Final Edition), p. 11.

⁸³ “Remarks by Khomeyni on the Future of Revolutionary Committees”, *Tehran Newspaper*, 21 April 1979, p. 2.

involved in the matter. “Rather,” he asserted, it was “the guardians [of the revolution] [who] had arbitrarily got themselves involved in the incident.”⁸⁴

A few days later, Prime Minister Bazargan partially contradicted his deputy by placing indirect blame on elements of both the committees and the Guards. Although he maintained the abuses were committed by rogue elements, he argued that vigilante tactics associated with these groups were undermining the goals of the revolution. Citing the Taleqani incident and numerous accounts of similar abuse, Bazargan continued:

“The Iranian nation has now acquired a state of instability. Everyone is asking about and is fearful that if the committees, the guards and those individuals who are acting in the names of the committees, guards and - most shamelessly and in a most cowardly way - in the name of the Imam - and have arms in their possession - continue to act in a similar vein, and should the current state of affairs continue as it is, what would ultimately happen to this realm, nation, people and our republic? When guilty and personal motives, life itself can no longer exist let alone progress.”⁸⁵

Regarding this, the IRGC also publically addressed the issue. Concurrent with the announcements of their establishment and areas of responsibility (mentioned at the top of the chapter), the Guards released an additional statement blaming “opportunistic elements” for the recent abuses. They acknowledged that “for some time now a number of people, in the guise of members of [revolutionary] committees and officials of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, have been looting the

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

people's property and households by threat and intimidation, entering houses in Tehran and the provinces.”⁸⁶

They “condemned” these “ugly actions,” and reminded the public that “no official has the right to enter houses on the authority of the Islamic Public Prosecutor without presenting his identity card and written orders from the Revolutionary Guards and the committee.” Finally, the Guards asked for the public’s help in identifying and turning in these rogue elements. In this way, the IRGC confirmed what had already been suggested by the post revolutionary regime and blamed not its own cadre, but rather those who operated inappropriately in the guise of its organization. This admission could not have been very reassuring to the public.⁸⁷

The Guardians of the Islamic Revolution and the War with Iraq

Guardian’s Corps membership has increased from an estimated 10,000 soldiers by the end of 1979 to 25,000 in mid 1980, 50,000 by the end of 1981, and up to 350,000 by 1986.⁸⁸ In addition, the IRGC took over command of the Basij-e mostaz’afin (Mobilization of the Oppressed people) popular militia, and was charged with the martial and ideological training of its ranks (which grew to over 600,000 by 1986). The majority of these new sepahis and basijis are mostly young men drawn from the

⁸⁶ Hussein Haddad, *Bibliography of the war*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ “The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps”, *Tehran Newspaper*, 9 May 1979, p.6.

⁸⁸ Nikola B. Schahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military*, p. 94.

poor urban or rural classes, differed from their commanders in both experience and ideological sophistication.⁸⁹

However, they lacked the years of activism and ideological commitment of the leadership but they shared a deep-rooted faith in Shia Islam and a zealous commitment to the revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini.⁹⁰ For motivating these people, IRGC publications therefore became a tool used by the organization to help and educate its expanding ranks among these *sepahis* and *basijis*. Central to this effort was *Payam-e Enqelab* (Message of the Revolution), a bi-weekly political journal that served as the organization's official newsletter.⁹¹

IRGC's publications are an outgrowth of the organization's commitment to ideological and cultural activism. As we can see just six-months into the Iraq war, the organization claimed that "ninety-percent" of its non-combat operations were devoted to promoting ideology. This work, which the IRGC defined as cultural activities (*fa'aliyyat-ha-ye farhangi*), was a broad-based effort of promoting the religious and political values of Shia Islam by the organization, the IRP⁹², and esteemed clergy like ayatollahs Montazeri and Motahhari.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 69. This is the estimated number of *basijis* that had been trained and sent to the front by this time. The total number of members of the *Basij*, however, may have been importantly higher. In a statement to the press, for instance, President Ali Khamenei mentioned that there were over a million individuals in *Basij* ranks at this point.

⁹⁰ Katzman argues that it is in part due to the Guards' ability to assimilate 'non-ideological groups' such as conscripts that demonstrates the organization's political resiliency. See Kenneth Katzman, *Warriors of Islam*, pp. 8-9.

⁹¹ *Payam-e Enqelab* began publication in March 1980 and has continued with intermittent breaks through the present by *Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran*.

⁹² IRP stands for Islamic Republic Party, which was the first party after the triumph of Islamic revolution in Iran. See Sayyed Ali Akbar Mohtashami, *Khaterat-e siyasi-e Sayyed Ali Akbar*

As cultural activism was a central duty of the IRGC throughout the war—and remains assuch through the present—it is valuable to consider how the IRGC conceived of this effort. An example of this is provided in a February 1981 organizational review published in *Payam-e Enqelab*. This report, briefly discussed below, sheds light on how the Guards aimed to promote their political and ideological commitments, the mediums they found most valuable, and the material they found most convincing. The IRGC divides this report into two sections specifying the work of its units in producing and distributing textual publications and audio-visual materials in provinces throughout Iran.⁹⁴

Though it was similar in both form and content to other political journals that emerged after the revolution, *Payam-e Enqelab* was unique in that it was primarily aimed at the IRGC's rank- and-file. Like its sister publication *Omid-e Enqelab* (Hope of the Revolution) which used articles, posters, interviews, and other content to express the spiritual, ideological, and political values of the organization formed after revolution.⁹⁵

After the Iraqi invasion, the journal focused on the organization's role in the war effort, offered narratives of particular campaigns, and celebrated those *sepahis* and *basijis* through countless articles and artwork devoted to its war martyrs. IRGC

Mohtashami [The Political Memorials of Ali Akbar Mohtashami], Vol. 2 (Tehran: Khaneh-ye Andisheh-ye Javan, 2000), p. 71.

⁹³ *Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, Payam-e Enqelab*, No.26, 16 February 1981, p. 46.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-51.

editors also reserved space in each issue for international news and coverage on resistance movements throughout the third and Islamic worlds.⁹⁶

In this way, Payam-e Enqelab created a space in which a sense of identity and purpose could be fostered among IRGC members and among interested civilians. Beyond its political journals, the IRGC produced various books, booklets, and pamphlets aimed at the public sphere. After the Iraqi invasion, these publications began to focus on the geo-political context of the war and its deeper connections to Islam and Shia history.⁹⁷

By providing the Arabic Quran through Persian translations (example is the series Let's Learn from the Quran) which began publication in 1981, the first volume of this series, War and Jihad in the Quran, coupled Arabic Quranic passages related to the subjects of warfare and jihad with translations and explanations in Persian. The anonymous authors and clergies argue that they compiled this booklet because the enemies have waged war on the Quran and hadith. The authors claim that guardsmen will be armed with the fist of the Islam in their battle with the "infidels of the world and the infidel Iraqi Bathists."⁹⁸

Other publications, such as those produced by the IRGC Political Office, more directly dealt with the war. An example is War and Transgression explains the

⁹⁶ Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC), *A Glance at Two Years of War* (Tehran: Political Office: (Tarjomeh: Setad-e Tablighat-e Jang-e Sepah, 1982), p. 93.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

⁹⁸ Sepah Pasdaran Enghelabe Eslami, *Jang va Jihad dar Quran [Jihad In Quran]* (Tehran: Vahed-e Amuzesh: Setad-e Markazi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 1981), p. 5.

Imperialist Front against the Islamic Revolution, like “Imperialist France, weapon provider of Iraq” and “Will America protect Saddam?” made the early period of war into a larger context of imperialist and Western threats to the Islamic Republic.⁹⁹

The Political Office also produced materials aimed at outside audiences, such as English and Arabic versions of *Payam-e Enqelab*, which instead of being translations of the journal’s Persian edition were part of the Islamic Republic’s coordinated propaganda (*tablighat*) campaign aimed at influencing non-Iranian publics.¹⁰⁰ Similar publications by the Political Office include *A Glance at Two Years of War*, an English translation of a Persian IRGC report that summarizes the organization’s operations, strategy, and victories through mid 1982. In addition to the Political Office, the IRGC’s Public Relations and Educational units supervised the production of materials aimed at fostering ideological awareness among the society.¹⁰¹

Later in the war, the IRGC established research centers and universities devoted to training guardsmen in and producing materials on Islamic ideology, politics, and military science. For instance, in 1984 the Guards opened the Center for Investigation and Research in Qom, which produced “ideological and political”

⁹⁹ Sepah Pasdaran Enghelabe Eslami, *Jang va Tajavoz: jebhe-ye impirialisti ‘alayh-e enqelab-e eslami* [*The Imperialist War Against Islamic Revolution*] (Tehran: Daftar-e Siyasi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 1981), p. 13.

¹⁰⁰ The Propaganda Staff of the newly established Supreme Defense Council of Iran issued an order soon after the invasion, which required all government organs to pursue a coordinated propaganda effort. See Sazmane Tablighate Eslami, *Directive issued by Iranian Propaganda Office* (Tehran: Sazmane Tablighate Eslami, 16 October 1980), p. 30.

¹⁰¹ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 4, 19 March 1980, p. 37.

materials specifically purposed for IRGC and Basij soldiers at the front and the public as well.¹⁰²

As a collaboration between lay guardsmen and clergies from the Qom, this research centers produced books such as Wars of the Prophet, which presents the battles fought by the Prophet Muhammad as similar for the war with Iraq in order to shape the Iran-Iraq war with a parallel sense of spiritual significance. Beyond this, the most important training initiative undertaken by Guards during the war was the founding of Imam Hosein University and its Institute of Military Sciences and Technology in Tehran, which opened in May 1986.¹⁰³

Based on the IRGC report, its units established over 2400 libraries throughout Iran's major provinces. The IRGC donated 629,102 books and further distributed approximately 482,000 booklets throughout the country. In addition, IRGC produced approximately 440,000 publications not including the organization's political journals.¹⁰⁴ These publications were not only donated but many were also sold for profit resulting in 9.75 million rials in revenue for IRGC units, including 3 million in sales from the strategically important southwestern provinces.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² IRGC, *Jang-ha-ye Payambar* (Tehran: Vahed-e Amuzeshi-e `Aqidati-e Siyasi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqilab-e Eslami, 1984), pp. 3-4.

¹⁰³ Imam Hosein University is recruiting students for military purpose of IRGC. For more information, see Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 162, 10 May 1986, p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ Because of the fluctuating value of Iranian currency during this period, it is difficult to come to a precise rate of exchange with the US dollar; however, 9.75 million rials in 1981 was probably around 10,000 USD.

¹⁰⁵ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 162, 10 May 1986, pp. 47-48.

Some of ideological and political publications were also given to liberation fronts in Lebanon and Palestine outside of Iran. The audio-visual and “artistic” (honari) materials produced by the IRGC during this period includes several media types. Part of this initiative organized 4049 film showings around the country and the production of 85 theatrical presentations. Provincial units also distributed nearly 60,000 audio cassettes.¹⁰⁶

These cassettes focused on various religious topics, such as excerpts from the Quran (6000) and Ayatollah khomeini’s Guardianship of the Jurisprudent (3000), but the most widely distributed cassette (21,000) included sermons of the martyred revolutionary ideologue, Ayatollah Motahhari, whose work was becoming increasingly popular among more conservative Ayatollah khomeini’s supporter.¹⁰⁷

The IRGC distributed these items directly throughout its local bases and through organized “art exhibitions,” which displayed the books, cassettes, and slideshow presentations to the public (the IRGC held 1620 such exhibitions during Iran-Iraq war).¹⁰⁸ The most utilized artistic medium by the IRGC was the political poster.¹⁰⁹ Guards units produced and distributed roughly 9 million sets of posters both

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁰⁸ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 26, (date?), pp. 48-51.

¹⁰⁹ On the role of political posters and visuality more broadly during the revolution and Iraqi conflict, see Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, “Staging a Revolution; Gumpert and Balaghi”, in *Picturing Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); William Hanaway, “The Symbolism of the Persian Revolutionary Posters” in *Iran Since the Revolution: Internal Dynamics, Regional Conflicts, and the Superpowers*, edited by Barry Rosen (New York: Columbia University, 1985); Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Adeb, *Debating Muslims* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). For a discussion on

within Iran and abroad. These posters—like the political posters produced by other official agencies and parties during the war—were often resized and altered to become the artwork for pamphlets, billboards, or even postage stamps.¹¹⁰

The development of Istishhadi phenomenon among the Commanders

Shias look to the history of their Imams, all of whom died violently except for the twelfth Imam, who has gone into hiding and is not dead. In particular the death of Husayn in the Battle of Karbala—son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet, and entitled *sayyid al-shuhada* which refer to imam Hosein –the thirs shia Imam-, prince of martyrs—is exemplified in Shia Islam.¹¹¹

It is generally believed throughout Islam that those who die in defense of the faith will be free of sin and thus pardoned from judgment in the final days, that they will go straight to paradise where they will occupy a special place, and even that they are allowed to return to earth to fight on behalf of the faith.¹¹² There are also popular beliefs that young men who die in battle will be greeted by 70 virgins and 70 wives upon their arrival in Paradise.¹¹³

the influence of Iranian political posters on those produced by Shia organizations in Lebanon during that countries civil war, see Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009). And for discussions of the political poster as a genre, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Revolutionary Tides: the Art of the Political Poster 1914-1989* (Milan: Skira, 2005); Margaret Timmers, ed., *The Power of the Poster*. London: V&A Publications, 1998.

¹¹⁰ Peter Chelkowski, *The Art of Revolution and War: the Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 127-140.

¹¹¹ John Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 56.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

¹¹³ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 78.

There are interpretations of the doctrine that call for “spiritual” martyrization; it argues that Muslims who keep the tenets of the faith and strive in the greater jihad are the true martyrs, not those that die in battle. It is also argued that the true martyrs are those who suffer in daily physical struggles, such as starvation, poverty, and even women who die while giving birth.¹¹⁴

In this part we talk about the concept of “exporting the revolution” promoted by Iranian leaders and the IRGC through the 1980s. This concept provided to a considerable degree the ideological and moral bases for Iranian involvement in foreign countries—particularly in Lebanon, which will serve as this chapter’s primary example. However, the experiences of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) gradually changed how this concept was understood, and by the end of the war internationalist rhetoric no longer mandated militaristic intervention. This change in thinking coincided with growing factionalism within the Ayatollah khomeinist movement. Although internal division stemmed from a number of issues, including disagreements on economic and social policy, the issue of foreign intervention played a central role in dividing Iran’s post revolutionary leadership.¹¹⁵

This led to an internal shift in the IRGC, with the top commanders moving closer to Iran’s more pragmatic and conservative leaders (Rafsanjani and Khamenei) and distancing the organization from its left-leaning revolutionary base. As the IRGC was the main instrument for both promoting and conducting interventionist policies,

¹¹⁴ *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 3, pp. 57-58.

¹¹⁵ Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen-e Rafiqdust [Memorials of Mohsen Rafiqdust]*, pp. 190-192.

the disinclination of its head commanders toward military interventionism limited (but did not eliminate) foreign involvement.¹¹⁶

To this end, IRGC leaders supported the Islamic Republic's crackdown on pro-intervention radicals near the end of the war and helped undermine this faction by supporting the state's moves against prominent radical activists and by purging their supporters from IRGC ranks. By the end of the war, the growing conservatism of IRGC leadership and the consequent marginalization of its left-leaning, interventionist-minded membership led to the organization's increasingly close association with conservative politics and policies.¹¹⁷

Despite the IRGC's implicit Iraq-first policy, factions within the organization were heavily involved in the political push to expand the revolution abroad. Since its inception, the IRGC had been a vocal proponent of revolutionary internationalism. As the organization claimed before the war: "We will export our revolution throughout the world. As our revolution is Islamic, the struggle will continue until the call of 'There is no God but God.' echoes around the globe."¹¹⁸

The organization initially conceived its role in this effort as protecting foreign "liberation movements and the pursuit of the rights of the oppressed," and held this charge as one its official responsibilities (*vazayef*) contained in its organizational

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 192.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 193.

¹¹⁸ *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 5, April 1980, p. 39.

charter.¹¹⁹ At the heart of the Guards' foreign efforts was Ayatollah Montazeri, whose religious authority afforded legitimacy to those who supported a more aggressive foreign policy. Montazeri also had a strong support base within the IRGC and helped foster clerical oversight and collaboration in the organization.¹²⁰

His patronage led to the creation of the IRGC's Office of Liberation Movements (OLM), which was to translate the Ayatollah's vision into political, religious, and military operations outside of Iran. To this end, the OLM—initially led by Mohammad Montazeri until his death in June 1981 and later by Mehdi Hashemi—announced that its primary mission was to develop contacts between the Guards and outside Muslim organizations that were “fighting for freedom from the servitude and fetters of Western and Eastern imperialism and global Zionism.”¹²¹

The office's scope of operations was conceptually wide; however, the majority of its efforts were devoted to expanding Iranian influence in Lebanon, and to a lesser extent, Afghanistan. The establishment of OLM made foreign operations an actual (and not simply rhetorical) part of the IRGC's mandate. More so than any other conflict, the ongoing civil war in Lebanon and the Israeli occupation of that country

¹¹⁹ This duty is listed in the IRGC's first official charter. See *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 4, March 1980, p. 37.

¹²⁰ After a meeting with Ayatollah Montazeri in Qom, IRGC Commander Mohsen Rezai said: “it has been arranged that the ideological section of the corps be supervised by a canonist [Shia cleric], who in addition to having the ideal religious qualifications should have perfect knowledge of current political and revolutionary issues”. See “The Revolution Guards in Iran”, *Tehran Newspaper*, 29 October 1981 & 31 October 1981, p. 7.

¹²¹ “Iran Revolution Guards' ‘Liberation Movements Unit’”, 6 February 1981, p. 19.

provided the IRGC with an opportunity to directly work toward its strategic and moral goal of liberating Jerusalem.¹²²

Israel's aggression not only further motivated the internationalist-minded cadre into action, it also served to temporarily mobilize support for foreign intervention among Iran's more conservative civilian and military leaders. Indeed, a day after the Israeli invasion the IRGC Central Headquarters and the Joint Staff of the armed forces issued a statement stating that Iran would send soldiers to Lebanon to "engage in [a] face-to-face battle against Israel, the primary enemy of Islam and of the Muslims." The statement added:

The self-sacrificing members of the Islamic revolution guards corps, the mobilization [units] of the guards crops and the brave fighters of the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran who are engaged in unceasing battle against the criminal Ba'thist regime, will, by expanding these fronts, fight against that regime's collaborator, the primary enemy of imperialism.¹²³

Soon after, Iranian president Ali Khamenei announced that the IRGC had begun to train fighters to send to Lebanon, arguing:

To us, there is no difference between the fronts in the south of Iran and in south Lebanon. We are prepared to put our facilities and necessary training

¹²² The IRGC developed extensive ties with several different Shia militant groups in Afghanistan. However, factionalism and a lack of organization within the Afghani groups limited Iran's impact in that country. For Iran's involvement in this regard, see Nimatullah Ibrahimi, "The Failure of a Clerical Proto- State: Hazarajat, 1979-1984", Working Paper Series No.2, Crisis States Research Center, London: Destin LSE, 2006. See also Montazeri's and the IRGC's roles in assisting Afghan Mojahedin organizations are discussed in the confessions of Sayed Ebrahim, a member of the Afghani Sazman-e Fedayan-e Islam. See "Confession by Captured Insurgent". Tehran Newspaper 17 March 1985 & 30 March 1985.

¹²³ "Iranian Military to Fight for Lebanon", *Tehran Newspaper*, 7 June 1982, p. 4.

at the disposal of all the Muslims who are prepared to fight Muslims, and to those who are on the side of truth.¹²⁴

By the end of June, over 1000 Revolutionary Guards were reported to have landed in Syria for operations in Lebanon.¹²⁵ As mentioned earlier, Iranian activists had had a long relationship with their Palestinian and Shia counterparts in Lebanon.¹²⁶ Although many of Iran's top leaders had spent time in Lebanon prior to the revolution, two main networks of Iranian activism in that country can be identified. The first centered on Mustafa Chamran and the Amal militia he helped organize among the followers of the Iranian cleric Musa al-Sadr in southern Lebanon.¹²⁷

Musa al-Sadr and Chamran began Amal in an effort to give a greater political voice to the historically disenfranchised Lebanese Shia community. Through the 1960s, Shias in Lebanon were the poorest and least strong religious community in Lebanon. Owing to the confessional system of government designed for Lebanon by

¹²⁴ "Iran: In Brief, Khameneh'i on training and help for Lebanon", *Tehran Newspaper*, 19 June 1982, p. 3

¹²⁵ Other reports put this number at around 1500. See "Iran's Guards Rally to Beirut", *Newsweek*, 28 June 1982, p. 26.

¹²⁶ For an overview of Iranian-Lebanese interaction during this period, see H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), pp. 180-230. See also Haleh Vazeri, "Iran's Involvement in Lebanon: Polarization and Radicalization of Militant Islamic Movements", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Winter 1992), pp. 73-92.

¹²⁷ Much of Chamran's experience in Lebanon (including his relationship to Musa al-Sadr and the establishment of Amal) has been posthumously compiled from his writings, interviews, and speeches. See, for instance, Mostafa Chamran, *Lobnan* (Tehran: Bonyad-e Shahid-e Chamran, 1983), p. 40. On Chamran's impact on the Shia community of southern Lebanon, see Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 89-118.

French imperial powers after WWI, political, economic, and military power was divided along confessional lines.¹²⁸

The disputed 1932 census found that Shias were Lebanon's third largest religious community, following the Sunnis and Maronite Christians, who were second and first respectively. With Maronites and Sunnis at the top of power and influence in the new nation, the Shia community was left to languish. By the time the Iranian-born cleric Musa al-Sadr arrived in 1960 to his ancestral home of southern Lebanon as the new religious judge of the southern city of Tyre, he found a largely impoverished rural community of village farmers and share croppers.¹²⁹

In time, Sadr's project became one of uniting the Shia masses into a viable political movement. With the help Chamran—a devoted revolutionary and American-trained scientist—Sadr succeeded in awakening the political spirit of Lebanese Shias, which enabled the southern Lebanese community to confront political injustices imposed on them by both the Lebanese central government and the Palestinian resistance fighters who had come to southern Lebanon following the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan in 1970.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, pp. 94-99.

¹²⁹ Musa al-Sadr disappeared on a trip to Libya in 1978. Although many of his followers believed that he had been assassinated by that time Libyan leader "Muammar Ghadadi".

¹³⁰ On the politicization of the Lebanese Shia community, see Augustus R. Norton, "Changing Actors and Leadership among the Shias of Lebanon", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 482 (November 1985), pp. 109-121. Also, for a history on Amal, see Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, p. 84.

Though the Shia movement in Lebanon struggled in the mid-1970s due to the outbreak of civil war in 1975-76, it was reignited by al-Sadr's disappearance in 1978 and by the Iranian revolution in 1979. After the revolution, Chamran retained close ties with Amal leaders, and as an early associate of the IRGC and later as Iran's Defense Minister, he had short-lived success in bringing the interests of that organization inline with the Islamic Republic. Chamran's efforts in this regard—including the inclusion of roughly 600 Lebanese Amal volunteers into Iranian military ranks to combat Iraqi aggression—were temporary and dissipated after his death on the warfront in June 1981.¹³¹

The other major Iran-Lebanon network, which comprises the foundation of Iran's current involvement in Lebanon, was established by the Iranian activists who largely opposed Musa al-Sadr, Chamran, and Amal due to their insufficient support for the Palestinian resistance. This faction, headed in part by Mohammad Montazeri, Ali Akbar Mohtashami, and Jalal al-Din Farsi, had established strong ties with Shia clerical activists in Beirut and the Bekaa (Biq'a) valley.¹³²

Mohtashami, for instance, had taken several trips to Lebanon beginning in 1970 and helped establish strong relationships with Lebanese clerics in the Bekaa region. From his first visit to the area, Mohtashami had grown especially fond of the Shias of the Bekaa. He found them more religious than their counterparts in Beirut,

¹³¹ Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon*, pp. 101-103.

¹³² Amal had partially been established to protect the interests of the southern Lebanese Shias from the Palestinian organizations that had taken control of that area. This led to an ongoing violent conflict between the two sides during the Lebanon's civil war. See *ibid.*, p. 96.

brave, and particularly “disposed toward the clergy” (beh rohaniyyat ‘alaqehmand hastand).¹³³

Montazeri, Mohtashami, and others like Abu Sharif also established strong ties with the PLO and were part of a loose transnational network in the 1970s that helped bring Iranian anti-shah activists to Lebanon for guerrilla warfare training in Palestinian camps. Yahya Rahim Safavi, an early IRGC commander and later commander-in-chief from 1997 to 2007, was just one of the young Iranian activists that trained and fought with the PLO during this time.¹³⁴

Through a network that involved Mohammad Montazeri and Ali Jannati (the son of prominent Shia jurist Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati), Safavi travelled from Damascus (where he had come to evade arrest in Iran for anti-shah activities) to Beirut and trained in small arms and explosives in a PLO camp. Safavi later served as a scout and night guard for the Fatah organization in southern Lebanon, and although he vigorously supported the Palestinian resistance, he was disappointed by the lack of piety within PLO ranks. On this point he writes:

“None of the members of Fatah said their obligatory prayers [namaz]. When I asked them ‘Why don’t you say your prayers?’ They replied: ‘God say our prayers.’”¹³⁵

¹³³ Sayyed Ali Akbar Mohtashami, *Khaterat-e siyasi-e*, p. 108.

¹³⁴ Safavi discusses his experiences in Lebanon in his memoirs, see Yahya Rahim Safavi, *Az jonub-e lobnan ta jonub-e iran: khaterat-e sardar-e Sayyed Rahim Safavi [From the South of Lebanon to South of Iran]* (Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2004), pp. 95-107.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105

Commenting on the Palestinians' ignorance of Islamic law, Safavi expresses shock when one Fatah member tells him that not all dogs are ritually impure (najes), but rather: "black dogs are impure and white dogs are pure." Safavi was also troubled by the perceived loose sexual morality of Fatah members, particularly that the outward display of physical affection between men and women was tolerated and that genders were not segregated in instances of travel or military deployments.¹³⁶

Due in part to this ideological and cultural divide, the ties developed between Iranian activists and secular Palestinian resistance organizations proved less durable than those forged between Ayatollah khomeinists like Mohtashami and activist clergy in the Bekaa.¹³⁷ Indeed, after the revolution Mohtashami was able to bring substantial state support to his Shia network in Lebanon through his office as Iranian ambassador to Syria. In this capacity, Mohtashami was instrumental in bringing together a collection of like-minded militants and low-level clergy in the establishment of a new type of Lebanese Shia resistance—a movement that later coalesced into the Hizbullah organization.¹³⁸

Hizbullah was unique in that it was among the first and most non-Iranian entities to adopt central Ayatollah khomeinist concepts such as the "guardianship of

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 106.

¹³⁷ A notable exception is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) which, under Ahmad Jibril, received limited Iranian support through the 1990s.

¹³⁸ A sizeable literature on Lebanese Hizbullah in English has already been produced. Of the key monographs on the subject, see Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); and Augustus Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

the jurist” (velayat-e faqih). The organization’s leaders fully embraced this concept and turned to Ayatollah Ayatollah khomeini as their supreme political and religious authority.¹³⁹

This gave Ayatollah khomeini and his intermediaries (such as Mohtashami and the IRGC) tremendous influence within Hizbullah and, by extension, Lebanese politics. Apart from the adoption of Ayatollah khomeinist ideology, Hizbullah’s name (which was in part suggested by Ayatollah khomeini) and its official emblem (which is based on the IRGC emblem) serve as lasting manifestations of Iranian influence.¹⁴⁰

From the beginning of its introduction to Lebanon, the IRGC helped organize and train the new Shia resistance. The IRGC served as a conduit for Iranian support and helped bring military expertise to Hizbullah. Guardsmen worked hand in hand with their Lebanese counterparts and became inextricably linked to the violent activism that became an early hallmark of the Shia resistance.¹⁴¹

Although the IRGC did not overtly engage in military operations, through its coordination with Hizbullah and associated Shia militants, it became implicated in various terrorist attacks against Israeli and western targets, including the simultaneous

¹³⁹ Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, pp. 24-26.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

bombings of the US and French barracks in 1983, the bombing of the US embassy in 1984, and a number of killings and kidnappings from 1985–1988.¹⁴²

Combined with the Iranian counter-invasion of Iraq, the involvement of the IRGC in domestic Lebanese terrorism became seen as proof of the Islamic Republic's desire to export its revolution through military means. While Mohsen Rezai publically downplayed the Guards presence in Lebanon, and rejected the idea that it was part of a broader war against "anti-Islamic conspiracies," the organization did at times describe its involvement in Lebanon as "exporting the revolution."¹⁴³

Overall, the IRGC divided its work in Lebanon into four different categories. The first, which is the only category explicitly identified as "exporting the revolution" (sodur-e engelab-e eslami), concerns "cultural activism" and the propagation (tabligh) of religious, cultural, and ideological thought. In this arena, the Guards describe their efforts as distributing revolutionary literature (including the speeches of Ayatollah khomeini and Montazeri), and bringing in religious scholars from Iran to promote religious instruction and spread revolutionary values in Lebanese towns and villages.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² On Iran's connection to terrorism and hostage-taking in Lebanon during this period, see Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (New York, St. Martins Press, 1997). For the CIA's investigation into the US Embassy bombing, see Robert Baer, *See No Evil: the True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002).

¹⁴³ "Iranians fighting in Lebanon", (interview with Mohsen Rezai), 24 November 1983, Rezai, Mohsen. *Zendegi-e doktor-e Mohsen Reza'i dar yek negah [Biography of Mohsin Rezai]*. www.rezaee.ir (Accessed 12 February 2008).

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Brother Mosleh, IRGC commander in Lebanon in *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 138, 8 June 1985, p. 70.

The second area of IRGC involvement was the martial and ideological training of the Shia resistance. The former, which the IRGC says compromised 60% of this effort, was undertaken by guardsmen, while the latter (ideological training) was headed by Iranian clergy. The third and fourth areas were respectively described as the funding of and recruitment for the Lebanese resistance.¹⁴⁵

The IRGC considered its experience in Lebanon an extension of the Islamic Republic's general efforts to spread its ideology and religious fervor outside of Iran. To Brother Mosleh, commander of IRGC forces in Lebanon, Iran's influence in Lebanon was successfully reshaping the latter's Shia population along the lines of the Islamic Republic:

“The Muslims of Lebanon, especially the Shias of Lebanese Hizbullah, consider themselves the offspring of the Islamic Revolution and therefore Revolution.”¹⁴⁶

He further suggests that Iran's positive impact in Lebanon is evinced by the proliferation of images of Ayatollah khomeini throughout the country and by the popularity of Iranian flags (which were sold together with Lebanese flags in Shia areas. Therefore, as Mosleh suggests, the net effect of Iran's presence in Lebanon is the transformation of the Shia laity into a revolutionary population and increased goodwill toward the Islamic Republic. It is these results—i.e., the expansion of Iran's ideological and political influence abroad—that the IRGC identifies as the primary goal of exporting the revolution to Lebanon. The militarization of Shia activism and

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 73.

the direct confrontation with Israeli forces in that country are expressed as secondary.¹⁴⁷

The Pioneer of Istishhadi Commanders of Iran during the War

The success of the spring 1982 offensives filled Iran's political and military sectors with confidence. The victories served to simultaneously justify the moral superiority of the Islamic revolution, the ideological strength of its forces, and the asymmetrical tactics of the Revolutionary Guards. Iran's Supreme Defense Council—a seven member board appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini consisting of political and military leaders charged with directing war policy—and commanders of its armed forces became not only convinced of their capacity to defend Iranian territory, but also in their ability to wage war.¹⁴⁸

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) –Sepahe Pasdaran—is a product of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini established the force to protect the Islamic revolution from any outside or inside plot. The IRGC has since developed to be a major political and military force in Iran. During the war Sepahe Pasdaran played a major role in Iran-Iraq war.¹⁴⁹

In this part, the research will examine the popular Martyrs' testaments regarding martyrdom. Such testaments had great influence on Iranian youths to join

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Davood Amirian, *Shemr va Saddam [Shemr & Saddam]*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan va Sardarane Shahid [The Martyred Soldiers and Commanders]* (Tehran: Martyrs Foundation of Islamic Revolution, 1998), p. 24.

the military and fight against Saddam. Some of the martyrs describes the philosophy of their life as being in war and choose their lives as a gift to Islam and Ayatollah Khomeini. For instance:

My dear father and mother! My dear brother and sister! I have found myself after 18 years of futile life and now I have chosen the paths of Imam Hussein (A. S.), because martyrdom is from my point of view the beginning of a new life.¹⁵⁰ Dear God! If you did not call on me to the land of martyrdom and if you would cut my hope from coming to the land of the lovers, and if you did not bestow upon me such a great happiness, I would never be able to cry for the death of Imam Hussein (A. S.) and mourn for him.¹⁵¹

Mehdi Bakeri (1954-1985)

Mehdi Bakeri was born in North West of Iran in Miandoab. He was a famous patriot Iranian hero of the Iran–Iraq War.¹⁵² He was graduated in Bsc. in civil engineering from University of Tabriz. During the Islamic revolution on 1979, he supports and joined to the revolution and after the victory of revolution he was chosen as the mayor of Urmia city in West Azerbaijan, Iran. By the time of starting of the Iran–Iraq war he joined to the Sepahe Pasdaran –revolutionary guard- and became the commander of the Ashoura Corps, unit 31, which was belonged to the Sepah of Azerbaijan provinces. He was martyred in a fight by Iraqi troops in Khuzestan province in south west of Iran. He was a popular figure in his hometown because of his great Islamic faith and attitude.¹⁵³ He wrote in His will:

¹⁵⁰ Reza Borji, *Gololeye Rahashode [The Free Bullet]* (Tehran: Kaman Publishing, 2000), p. 60.

¹⁵¹ Mehdi Fahimi, *Farhange Jebhe [Culture of Warfront]* (Tehran, Soroush Publishing, 1998), p. 54.

¹⁵² Ali Bani Loha, *Dostie Eshgh [The Friendship of Love of Martyrs]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 1998), p. 11.

¹⁵³ Mahmoud Diani, *Negahi Be Farhange Shahadat [Culture of Martyrdom]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2000), p. 135.

“Imam Hossein said;" Surely the life is belief and jihad. God's praising to all who struggle against evil and to my dear Imam Khomeini who informed us and tried to keep us away from selfishness in order to be just for God and God's mercy to martyrs who taught us how to live better.”¹⁵⁴

Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh (1967-1980)

Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh, is hero of martyrdom in Iran and an symbol of patriotism and deep Islamic faith in the Iran-Iraq war.¹⁵⁵ According to his official biography which was published by the Iranian government, he was a 13 year old boy on the time of martyrdom and was borne in the city of Qom. In the beginning of the war in 1980, he made his decision to leave his home without his parents' permission to go to the war front to help stopping the invasion. In the besieged city of Khorramshahr near to the border, he fought side by side with older Iranian soldiers. At one point, Iraqi soldiers pushed the Iranian troops back as they were passing through a narrow canal.¹⁵⁶

Many of the Iranian troops present there were either dead or wounded by the heavy Iraqi attacks. Having seen this, Mohammed Hossein, took a grenade from a dead body near to him, pulled the pin out, and jumped underneath an Iraqi tank, killing himself and disabling and destroying the tank. His action stopped the Iraqi tank division's to move further.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Moosaei Meisam, *Zendegie Shohada [Lives of Martyrs]* (Tehran: The Center of Islamic Guidance Organization Publication, 1990), p. 61.

¹⁵⁵ Kamal Seyed, *Jebheye Jange Khonin [The Bloody War Front]* (Qom: Habib Publication, 1999), p. 10.

¹⁵⁶ Abbass Ali Akbari, *Nabarde Jango Zendegi Nojavanan Dar Jebhe [The youths' Lives in War Front]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 2003), p. 22.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

After this, Ayatollah Khomeini called Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh an Iranian national hero and a monument to Mohammed Hossein has been built on the outskirts of Tehran, a place of pilgrimage of Iranians soldiers. In the years following of Mohammed Hossein's martyrdom, his devotion brought a lot of popularity among Iranians, like books or bags displaying Mohammed Hossein, were sold to children and a postage stamp was issued for his memory in 1986.¹⁵⁸

Mostafa Chamran (1932–1981)

Mostafa Chamran Savei Born in 1932 in Tehran was an Iranian scientist in physics who served as ministry of defense and a Member of Parliament and commander of paramilitary volunteers in Iran–Iraq War as well. He was killed in Khuzestan Province in an action during the early stage of the war. Before Islamic revolution He was a young student of Ayatollah Taleqani and Ayatollah Morteza Motahari. He graduated from Tehran University. In the late 1960s, he moved to the United States for higher education, obtaining an M.S. degree from the Texas A&M University.¹⁵⁹

He furthers his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering and Physics in Plasma in 1963 from the University of California, Berkeley. He was then hired as a senior research staff scientist at Bell Laboratories and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He was fluent in Persian, English, Arabic, French, and German. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chamran became politically active, and became a leading and founding member of the Islamic revolutionary movement in the Middle East, organizing and

¹⁵⁸ Hossein Fattahi, *Tekeyi Az Aseman [A Piece of Heaven]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 61.

¹⁵⁹ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan [In Memory of Commanders]*, p. 32.

training guerrillas and revolutionary forces in Algeria, Egypt, Syria, especially Amal Movement in southern Lebanon which is prior to the current movement of Hezbollah.¹⁶⁰

By emerging the Islamic Revolution taking place in Iran, Chamran's career has changed. He was appointed commander of Iran's Pasdaran or revolutionary guard, as well as Iran's Minister of Defense, personal military aide to Ayatollah Khomeini, and the latter's representative to the Iranian Supreme Council of Defense. In March 1980, he was elected into the Majlis of Iran (the Iranian Parliament) as a representative from the city of Tehran.¹⁶¹

During the war He was killed by an Iraqi mortar in combat in Khuzestan Province -a region in Southwestern Iran, bordering Iraq-, on June 21, 1981. He was called a hero and many buildings and streets in Iran and Lebanon and a major expressway in heart of tehran were named after him. It is said that he intentionally went to the dangerous zone of war which was full of Iraqi mortar.¹⁶² He wrote in his will:

“The revolution has two faces: Blood and Massage. Our Islamic revolution has also martyrdom and massage. During the Islamic revolution and after it up to now, it is proved by the children of Islam, in front line and back of the war. They heard the martyr's massage and hurried to the rendezvous of God's lovers. Your children's blood perfumes Khozistan and affects each newcomer.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Davood Amirian, *Shemr va Saddam [Shemr & Saddam]*, p. 19.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁶² Hossein Nouvin, *Barrasie Vasiatnamehaye Shohada [Study of Martyrs' Testaments]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), pp. 166-170.

¹⁶³ Hedayotallah Sarhangi, *Khaterate Zolal [Memory of the War]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 1996), p. 17.

Conclusion

No episode in Shia history can be understood without reference to the Battle of Karbala – certainly not the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that saw itself as a revolt against the Yazid of its own time. During the Iranian revolution in general and particularly in Iran-Iraq war, the martyrdom phenomenon played a key role in the dominant Iranian Shia ideology. Since the casualties were so high in the number and the magnitude of loss were so great, the exultation of martyrdom provided desperately needed moral and ethical justification, urging the young Iranians onward and offering consolation for their staggering losses of the numbers and powers. Numerous papers and pamphlets encouraged Iranians to sacrifice themselves for their country and ideology, including popular books written by Dr. Ali Shariati and Ayatollah, Morteza Motahari.

In this chapter we read that the Dr. Ali Shariati, the authors of “Awaited Savior” and “After Martyrdom” had attended lectures during the Revolution that featured recitations of the teachings of Imam Hussein and his philosophy. Dr. Shariati died in dubious condition a year before the revolution but Ayatollah Motahari was a key important religious figure during the Islamic Revolution, a loyal disciple and follower of Ayatollah Khomeini. The book - Awaited Savior- starts by quoting Imam Ali and features numerous references to the sayings of both Imam Ali and Imam Hussein, the great figures of Shia Islam.

CHAPTER 5

THE IMPACT OF ISTISHHADI PHENOMENON ON IRANIAN SOLDIERS DURING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

“I am a Guard. A seeker on the path of the heroic men of Ashura.”¹

“Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps slogan”

Introduction

The phenomenon of Istishhad has been practiced in the Muslim society and accepted as a form of martyrdom. Whether it was the thousands of young Iranian boys in the Basij organization who sacrificed themselves during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, or the Shia militants in Islamic Jihad that bombed the U.S. embassy and French barracks in Beirut in 1983, or the Hezbollah attacks against Israeli targets in southern Lebanon, istishhad phenomenon played an important role.

Istishhad is used to establish some type of meaning and dignity in death. Stories of martyrs help assuage the fear that arises from the certainty that everyone will eventually die, but the uncertainty of when or how that may happen. A martyr does not seek to avoid death, but instead take control of his fate, and give his life for a cause worth dying for. Once the martyr's story is captured in the imaginations of others, death becomes a little less scary for those that subscribe to the martyrology.

¹ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Islamie Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab [Message of Revolution]*. No. 4, 19 March 1980, p. 38. See also 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), p. 305.

The Inspiration of Karbala as the source of Istishhad

As significant as the martyrdom of ‘Ali is, in Shia mythology it pales in comparison to the martyrdom of his younger son, al-Husayn in Karbala, in Iraq in 680. After ‘Ali’s death in 661, ‘Ali’s elder son, al-Hasan, agreed to let the governor of Syria, Mu’awiya bin Abi Sufyan, take the caliphate and the unchallenged political rule of the Muslim world, although those who would later become Shia considered Hasan to be their true Imam.²

Hasan died a short time later and the Shia recognized his younger brother, Husein, as their new Imam. Husein remained mostly quiet in Medina, biding his time until Mu’awiya’s death in 680. Before his death, Mu’awiya proclaimed his son, Yazid, to be the new Caliph, but Yazid had many problems including being a womanizer, prone to corruption, and publicly drinking alcohol.³

Accepting an invitation from the citizens of Kufa to relocate there, possibly to organize forces to overthrow the problematic Yazid, al-Husayn left Medina with his family and only a small band of supporters despite warnings of the extreme danger from many, including surviving Companions of the Prophet. Husein was very aware of the dangers as he publicly stated to the Muslims in Mecca that he knew he would be martyred and that they should also offer their lives in “the path of God.”⁴

² See David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam Traditions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 90.

³ Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i, *Shi’ite Islam*, edited by Seyyid Hossein Nasr (State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 197–200 as quoted by Bernard Freamon, *Martyrdom, Suicide, and the Islamic Law of War: A Short Legal History*, *Fordham International Law Journal* 299, no. 27 (2004), p. 329.

⁴ Allamah Seyed Muhammad Husain Tabatabai, *Shi’ite Islam*, pp.197-200.

Similar to Karbala concept, the Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran and the Mojahedin-e Enghelab-e Eslami⁵, the IRGC emblem is the primary enunciation of its organizational identity. As mentioned earlier, the IRGC based its emblem on that of MIR and by doing so assumed a similar antagonistic stance vis-à-vis the Islamic left whom were called Marxist Muslims.⁶

The IRGC emblem depicts the Arabic negative article “la” in the center of the design out of which extends a clenched fist holding a gun.⁷ The “la” stands for the Muslim proclamation of faith “la ilaha ilallah” (There is no God but Great God) and the clenched fist holding the gun stands for armed resistance. Above the gun sits a verse from the Quran- “Prepare against them whatever arms and cavalry you can muster.”- which is used as a rallying slogan for righteous militancy of Islamic Republic.⁸

To the right of the “la” is the representation of a book, symbolizing the Quran, and to the right of that is the organization’s name in Persian (i.e., Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps). Out of the Quran extends a branch with leaves, suggesting both the desire for peace and the garden of heavenly paradise. This is a

⁵ Mojahedin-e Enghelab-e Eslami is Persian translation of MIR and Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran is Persian translation of MKO. See Kenneth Katzman, *The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran: Outlaw, Outcast, or Normal Country* (Benliot, Huntington: Nova Science Publishers, 2001), pp. 27-59.

⁶ This is especially true concerning the IRGC’s antagonism towards the Mojahedin-e Khalq.

⁷ Fischer and Abedi suggest that the usage of the “la” negative article in this form is influenced by Ali Shariati and his publications, which bore the negative article “on the cover of all of his books and published lectures”. See Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p. 344.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), pp. 41-62.

symbol of a representation of the globe, evoking notions of internationalism while downplaying the organization's national focus. At the bottom of the image rests the Persian year of the organization's establishment in 1357, or (1979).⁹

However, the designs created by Iranian revolutionary organizations are not the subject of the matter they are referring to but also steeped in the political and cultural moment from which they emerged. Their visual components are designed to express political statements. Yet, while emblems are static, the groups they represent can be dynamic. As time passes an organization may be forced, or simply choose to alter its initial ideological platform to adapt to larger changes occurring within the socio-political context.¹⁰

Even though the political platform of an organization can be altered, emblems often remain unchanged. Usually an emblem reflects specific aspects of an organization which necessarily not an accurate reflection of the organization. Such is true for the Revolutionary Guards. The IRGC's emblem was designed shortly after the establishment of the organization in 1979 after the revolution. Its designer, Mohsen Kolahdüz, an original member of the Guards Corps Command Council, also designed MIR's emblem.¹¹

⁹ For a detailed discussion of MIR's emblem see Mehdi Saidi, *Sazman-e mohjadein-e enqelab-e eslami: az tasis ta enhellal [MIR from founding to dissolving from 1979 to 1987]* (Tehran: Markaze Asnad-e Eslami, 2007), pp. 84-88.

¹⁰ Mohsen Rafiqdust, *Khaterat-e Mohsen-e Rafiqdust*, Vol. I, edited by D. Qasempur (Tehran: Markaz-e Esnad-e Enqelab-e Eslami, 2004), p. 184.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 185.

The two emblems are not only products of the same historical moment but both emblems were designed contemporaneously with the establishment of their respective organizations in early 1979. For the IRGC, this means that the chief fixture of its corporate identity was created before the organization had a clear function or place in post-revolutionary society.¹²

The IRGC emblem was designed to represent a militant, Islamic, and anti-leftist revolutionary organization, which is why it more closely resembles the standard of a resistance movement (out of which the IRGC in fact emerged) than a national military. A sense of revolutionism and resistance is also expressed in the political message of the IRGC emblem.¹³

Therefore, as the IRGC became an official organ of the Islamic Republic and transformed into its leading military force during the war, it retained the guise of a resistance movement outside the system of state power. The emblem, in this manner, evokes the organization's political reality. That is, unlike other resistance organizations, the IRGC was not established to oppose a system; rather (as its name suggests) it was formed to resist opposition to Islamic revolution.¹⁴

Its resistance, then, can be seen as a perpetual state of being; an inseparable component of establishing or maintaining an idealistic Islamic society. Therefore,

¹² Kamran Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), p. 27.

¹³ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴ Mahmoud Diani, *Negahi Be Farhange Shahadat* [A Look on Culture of Martyrdom] (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2000), p. 71.

IRGC as framed Pro-regime militancy, in this scheme, the IRGC is expression of the Guards' resistance: resistance to actual, perceived, and existential threats to the Islamic Republic and the values that brought it forth.¹⁵

As explained in the preceding chapters, the IRGC's rooted deep into the revolutionary movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, most of the early Revolutionary Guards and senior Corps commanders had been participants in that movement before like mohsen rezaie the IRGC commander during the war. Then it is not surprising that before the Guards developed a visual identity specific to the organization they had some military movement before. however, many portrayals of guardsmen in IRGC publications highlight this fact as well.¹⁶

These images in the annex part, were published in the IRGC journal Payam-e Enqelab throughout the 1980s. Although they appear in different versions but they were consistently used as signifiers for the IRGC or the individual guardsman. In this way, they embody both aspects of IRGC identity and self-conception. In these images, which seem to be based on a photograph, we see the same bearded individual holding a Kalashnikov rifle.¹⁷

The images in the annex chapter, soldiers wears a non-descript military-style uniform, and stance of a government soldiers. The men hold Kalashnikov gun,

¹⁵ Sepah Pasdaran, *Jangha-ye Payambar* (Tehran: Vahed-e Amuzeshi-e `Aqidati-e Siyasi-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqilab-e Eslami, 1984), p. 33.

¹⁶ Mohsen Rezai, *Zendegi-e doktor-e Mohsen Reza'i dar yek negah*, pp. 40-43, www.rezaee.ir (accessed 12 February 2008).

¹⁷ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Islami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.26, 16 February 1981, p. 18.

appearing to be either discharging or ready to discharge the weapons. On the contrary, the man (like his Kalashnikov) evokes a revolutionary spirit. He is, in a sense, a typical Muslim resistance fighter. Yet this individual is not used to denote the general militant or even the Muslim revolutionary; he is employed as a specific and direct marker for the Revolutionary Guard.¹⁸ This is suggested by his uniform (which closely resembles that worn by members of the IRGC) and is made clear from the contexts in which these images appear. For instance, in one of the earliest printings of this image in *Payam-e Enqelab* it is placed directly next to a poem entitled “Guard” or *pasdar* in Persian:

“who is proud to sacrifice himself A scion of the Sarbedaran¹⁹ Within
the clamor of machinegun fire, Now, You (*pasdar*) are found”²⁰

In this way, the image stands for a visualization of the poem’s subject (the guardsmen) if not an illustration. This poem highlights the same notions of militancy and resistance captured in the images. The author connects the militant activism of the guardsmen (“found in the clamor of machinegun fire”) with the notion of an Iranian-Shia tradition of resistance (“Sarbedaran”) which is a reference to an uprising of mostly Persian Shias against Turko-Mongol rule in 14th Century northeastern Iran.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid., p.19.

¹⁹ Sarbedaran is a reference to an uprising of mostly Persian Shias against Turko-Mongol rule in 14th Century northeastern Iran. See John Masson Smith Jr., *The History of the Sarbadar Dynasty: 1336-1381 A.D. and Its Sources* (Paris: Mouton, 1970), pp. 69-75.

²⁰ The image and poem (shown in annex chapter) are published in *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 24, 17 June 1981, p. 81.

²¹ The Sarbardaran uprising was one of the many historical events re-imagined as proto-revolutionary after the Islamic revolution. On the Sarbardaran period, see John Masson Smith Jr., *The History of the*

This is made obvious by the image's placement within the same text box as the poem and its blatant title. Therefore, the editors make the connection for the reader unequivocal: the image in the box is a guardsman. Just as this version of the image is meant to signify a guardsman, when multiplied, the image stands for the entire organization. The second example above illustrates this point.²²

The Payam enghelab's graphic designers portrayed the original image to make it appear to represent a broader force or even an armed brotherhood. The meaning of the image was not plain enough to the reader but the editors include a text box below it stating: "Gifted to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps."²³ Therefore, the editors indicate that the image signifies the IRGC message. These images, after all, played a minor role in the pages of Payam-e Enqelab.²⁴

In the images, these soldiers are not the same type of religious warriors rather they resemble the politically driven Muslim activists that founded the organization in the midst of revolution. In other words, these images emphasize one facet of the basijis and sepahis which has also helped to define the organization's militancy. The fact that these images were printed multiple times over several years indicates that they continued to hold meaning for the editors and designers who employed them.

Sarbadar, p. 19. See also Roemer, H. R, "The Jalayirids, Muzaffarids, and Sarbadars," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 6, edited by Peter Jackson (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), p. 49.

²² Ali Abulfazl, *Honar-e grafik dar enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Vahed-e Entesharat-e Hawzah-ye Hunari-e Sazman-e Tablighat-e Eslami, 1985), p. 26.

²³ This image (shown in annex chapter) is published in *Payam-e Enqelab*, No.139, 22 June 1985, p.73.

²⁴ Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, p. 307.

They continued to signify the role of basijis and sepahis to the organization, even began to favor more overt religious motifs and symbols to describe these soldiers.²⁵

The Impact of Karbala on Iranian Soldiers

The utilization of symbols rooted in Shia tradition and culture helped portray the Revolutionary Guards as an ideal Islamic military force in Iran. Achieving that, the organization required its members to possess the religiosity and faith-driven understanding of Shia Islam's earliest heroes and embrace or be taught the ideological and political commitments of the revolution's founders.²⁶

Imam Hosein is one of the Shia Islam great heroes. The birthday of Imam Hosein was approved by Ayatollah Khomeini as the day of annual celebration of the IRGC called "Guard's Day". This move not only aligned the Guards with Islam and Shia history, but also it symbolized the belief that the IRGC (and the Islamic Revolution more broadly) was a continuation of Imam Hosein's epic which was "struggle against injustice." Following the color of the Prophet of Islam and marking its establishment on the same day as the birth of the Prophet's grandson and Shiism's greatest hero, the IRGC inserted itself into the era of Shia history as the symbolic and literal standard of a new form of Islamic militancy. The sepahis and basijis became, in fact, the new warriors of Karbala.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 307-308.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 32-34.

²⁷ Said Amir Arjomand, *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 40.

Events such as Guard's Day which presented IRGC soldiers to the public in a grand display of military potential, religious virtue, revolutionary dedication, and willingness to die in the path of Ayatollah khomeini—were part of IRGC spiritualization. The Guards have employed such methods to shape self and public perception.²⁸ By this, the IRGC produced various types of textual and visual materials to share its values to its members and those outside the organization. Although much of the Guards' work reflected the government's broader propaganda (tablighat) and cultural (farhangi) campaigns, particularly during the Iran-Iraq war. The materials produced by the organization played an important role in forging an outward identity for the IRGC organization.²⁹

The martyrdom of Hussein and his companions in Karbala was one of the influential turning points in Islamic history in Middle East in shaping Shia identity through the path of Islamic history. It is often mentioned by Shia Muslims today as the decisive root of Shia-Sunni separate identity.³⁰ The battle of Karbala was more than the killing of a small band of pious loyalists who were faithful to the family of the Prophet by large military force; it was also an ideological war between a group of religiously devoted individuals and a militarily powerful political establishment which at the end making Hussein the ultimate tragic-hero figure for most of Iranians specially those soldiers who attended the war.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁹ On the use of visual propaganda during the revolution and under the Islamic Republic, see Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*; Lynn Gumpert and Shiva Balaghi, *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

³⁰ Karbala is a city in Iraq, located about 100 km southwest of Baghdad.

³¹ Morteza Motahari, *The Martyr* (Tehran: Great Islamic Library, 1980), p. 5.

Even Though many Islamic metaphors were used to describe the conflict, the most salient and strong metaphor used was that of Imam Hosein and his final stand against the Umayyads at Karbala. This metaphor allowed the war to be re-imagined as a modern Karbala, wherein Iran's forces were both reliving and redressing the Imam Hosein's heroic struggle against oppressive forces. As Hojjat al-Islam Mahallati, Ayatollah khomeini's representative to the IRGC, explained:

“In this way, depictions of the Guards and rhetoric surrounding their wartime mission became increasingly raised by the Karbala metaphor”³²

With the radical-internationalist calls for the liberation of Jerusalem among Muslims, the Karbala metaphor infused even more religious symbolism into the discourse fueling the Iran-Iraq conflict among Iranian soldiers. In this scheme, Saddam Hussein's secular Baathist³³ regime became as an obstacle in Iran's Islamic quest for emancipating Palestine from Zionist control. While Karbala was employed as a metaphor for the larger engagement with Iraq, the militaristic liberation of Karbala also became a symbolic wartime goal. Therefore, as the popular wartime slogan “the path to Jerusalem runs through Karbala.”³⁴

Karbala was considered both a destination and a way of resistance in the Islamic revolution's cosmic struggle against imperialism and Zionism. IRGC visual imagery played an important role in conveying these themes to its guardsmen. For example, the cover of a December 1981 issue of *Payam-e Enqelab* depicts the quest

³² Interview with Hojjat al-Islam Mahallati, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.135, 27 April 1985, p. 31.

³³ Baath is the name of the ruling party in Iraq during the time of Saddam Hussein.

³⁴ Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 177.

for Jerusalem and the slogan “the path to Jerusalem runs through Karbala” (in the annex chapter).³⁵

Graphic designers also frequently altered photographs, transforming them into new compositions that could more directly communicate the values of the organization and spirit of the war effort. An expressive, and overlooked, body of imagery adorns the pages of Payam-e Enqelab (in the annex chapter). These visuals are important in that they, perhaps more so than any other medium, and shows how the IRGC looks at itself and the war during this period. Following the rhetoric of Ayatollah khomeini and Iran’s clerical leadership, IRGC productions framed the Iraq conflict as a war between Islam and its chief antagonists like America, Western imperialism.³⁶

As the images have shown in the annex chapter of this thesis, the IRGC partly defined itself with a militant figure. However, with the continuation of the Iraq conflict, basij and sepah increasingly took on more of a sacred figure. For instance, photographs of an Iranian soldiers with headbands displaying religious slogans were ubiquitous in Iranian and international media during this period. Such photographs and similar artwork were used extensively in Guards’ publications to capture the

³⁵ This slogan was a popular theme in IRGC wartime imagery. For instance, an IRGC billboard displayed at the warfront during this period shows a guardsman carrying the Islamic standard toward a depiction of Imam Hosein’s shrine in Karbala, and behind or *through* that shrine is the Dome of the rock. Above this scene is the phrase “the path to Jerusalem passes through Karbala” in Persian. A photograph of this billboard is published in Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, p. 286.

³⁶ On Ayatollah Khomeini’s wartime rhetoric and its relationship to the images produced during the war, see *ibid*, pp. 272-291.

multitude of experiences and emotions related to fighting , living, praying, and dying on the frontlines for Imam Khomeini and Imam Hosein.³⁷

Another image shows a political map of the Middle East with Iran on the right side, Iraq in the middle, and Israel on the left (in the annex chapter) The point terminates at a Star of David within which sits a picture of Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock. Beneath the point in the arrow designating Karbala, and upon Iraq, is the phrase "the path of Jerusalem" (tariq al-quds) in Arabic. The simple mechanics of this image shows a clear communication of the slogan it visualizes.³⁸

With the country of Jordan nearly consumed by the Star of David and the arrow, Iraq (or Karbala) is seen as the literal and figurative obstacle standing between the Muslim warriors of Iran (represented by the truckloads of guardsmen) and the liberation of Jerusalem. The rainbow coloring of the arrow also suggests that the ultimate objective in this effort is peace and justice in the middle east region. A similar photograph from Payam-e Enqelab approaches this idea from another perspective.³⁹

In this image, we see a Toyota pick-up transporting a group of guardsmen seemingly to the warfront. Most of the guardsmen point their Kalashnikov guns in the air in an almost victorious manner. The guardsmen appear in different age. Each of

³⁷ Ali Abulfazl, *Honar-e grafik dar enqelab-e eslami [Graphical Art in Islamic Revolution]* (Tehran: Vahed-e Entesharat-e Hawzah-ye Hunari-e Sazman-e Tablighat-e Eslami, 1985), p. 14.

³⁸ Tariq al-Quds is a name of Iranian military operation against Iraq in the mile of the war. See Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Islami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 47, 12 December 1981, p. 7.

³⁹ Ali Abulfazl, *Honar-e grafik*, p. 20.

the guardsmen wears a slightly different uniform. Some are wearing wool hats, some steel helmets, while some lack headgear altogether.⁴⁰

Depict guardsmen Images on their way to the front, posing for cameras, showing a sense of confidence and certainty in their mission. To enlarge the reality it captures by inscribing a deeper meaning to an otherwise familiar scenario. That is, the information on the road sign. The phrase “the road to Karbala” written in red which is the color most associated with martyrdom and sacrifice.⁴¹

This simple image adds a religious dimension to the image that would not otherwise be apparent. While this photograph captures these guardsmen “accurately” as soldiers in a modern war, by modifying the text on the sign the image also presents these soldiers as warriors travelling toward a destination that is as much spiritual as material. Here, Karbala is more than just a metaphor for the war or a symbolic gateway to Jerusalem; rather, it is a spiritual condition, an aspiration of martyrdom, a victory itself.⁴²

In a sense, these soldiers can be seen as the forces that Imam Hosein never received, given a chance to rewrite or redress history by retaking, refighting, or simply reexperiencing Karbala through fighting on the frontlines of the Iraq war. During the war, the capture of Faw⁴³ by Iranians emerged hopes for a victorious

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.21.

⁴¹ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 50, 23 January 1982, p. 5.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 8-11.

⁴³ Faw is a city in Iraq which is the most closest on near the border.

conclusion to the war. The victory in Faw was also framed as a key step towards liberating Karbala and Jerusalem. As one popular slogan put it “God willing, as the victory of Khorramshahr has led to the liberation of Faw, a victory in Karbala will lead to an advance on Jerusalem.”⁴⁴

The capture of Faw renewed hope in an IRGC poster published in an April 1986 issue of *Payam-e Enqelab*. This image a photographic collage, shows a group of guardsmen seated on the ground, most of whom are gazing slightly to their right. It is unknown what seems to have captured their collective consideration, but one may assume that they are perhaps listening to a speech or being addressed in a sport complex by one of their commanders.⁴⁵

Another image shows a soldier with a Persian phrase that reads: “Karbala is waiting” Outwardly, this poster uses a photographic composition to evoke the sentiment and expectations spelled out in the phrase “Karbala is waiting.” That is, the object of the guardsmen’s collective perception, the image tells us, is Karbala. The guardsmen seem to be aware that Karbala is in their future; as it is waiting for them. If we look at this image in another way, and consider what Barthes calls the “obtuse” meaning of images, it begins to suggest other possibilities.⁴⁶

The text tells us that Karbala is waiting. Waiting for guardsmen to liberate that occupied land from Iraqi bathist control. However, if we look at their faces, it

⁴⁴ Ali Abulfazl, *Honar-e grafik*, p. 26. See also *Payam-e Enqelab*, No.162, 24 May 1986, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Sepahe Pasdarane Enghelabe Islami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No.159, 12 April 1986, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, pp. 54-59.

seems obvious that the guardsmen are waiting too. They are, perhaps, waiting to take their revolution and the divine justice it embodies to Karbala, to Jerusalem, and to the rest of the Muslim world. In other words, they are waiting to fulfill what has been promised to them by their religious, political, and military leaders.⁴⁷

They are waiting for victory; a victory that was far for them. A victory that perhaps seems no closer now than four years prior. While the recent successes at Faw operation encouraged Iran's military leaders but for soldiers Karbala is not only a destination, it is a spiritual reality; a condition that centuries of Shia literature, poetry, and imagery suggest is one of divine places.⁴⁸

For Iranian Soldiers, If Karbala is still waiting, it is because these guardsmen have not reached it yet. It was a mood more reflective of Iranian society during the final years of the war. The feeling of pessimism, doubt evoked by this image was in some sense tells us about the future. The war, of course, ended in stalemate, leaving the economies and cities of both countries in ruin. The near-goal of liberating Karbala was not achieved, and the far-goal of emancipating the Palestinians and the holy city of Jerusalem was put off indefinitely.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁴⁸ On the development of the Karbala metaphor and associated rituals in Shia Islam, see Kamran Scott Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 3-14. See also Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 77-86.

⁴⁹ By this, I mean any notion of a direct military confrontation with Israel was shelved by Iranian leaders after the war. However, Iran has continued to support organizations such as Hizballah and Hamas, which do engage in direct armed conflict and against Israel.

While Iran eventually succeeded in regaining its territory, it failed to topple the Bathist regime and ignite an Islamic revolution among its people in that country. Therefore, the metaphors that inspired the war effort and mobilized millions of soldiers and activists fell hollow. Yet, as the war failed to live up to the expectations of those soldiers, it succeeded in developing a new class of national and spiritual hero. By the end of the war, the IRGC soldier and the Basij militiaman had come to assume a strong new identity. The guardsmen and basijis emerged from the devastation of war as a new caste of warrior; a new breed of Islamic fighter.⁵⁰

The Iranian Soldiers and Preparation for the Istishhad

One of the most common teachings of present day Iranian education system in schools is the tremendous emphasis on the issue of martyrdom, to the extent that Iranian school students are brought up in a value of sacrifice and martyrdom environment. Martyrdom is dealt with in the Iranian school textbooks in two main contexts. First, it exists the historical and traditional context of the martyred Shiite Imams, second, it exist in present national context of the Islamic revolution and the consequent of eight-year war with Iraq (1980-88).

In the book of history of Islam in Iranian secondary school level talk about Yasser and Sumayyah –the first couple of muslim martyrs During the time of Prophet Muhammad. The infidels asked Yasser and Sumayyah -who accepted Islam- to talk abusively about prophet Muhammad. And when Sumayyah refused, they killed her.

⁵⁰ This image (shown in annex chapter) is published in *Payam-e Enqelab*, No. 220, 27 August 1988, p. 32.

Sumayyah was the first brave lady who attained the grace of martyrdom in the cause of Islam.⁵¹

Martyrdom teaching is presented to the Iranian school students as an Islamic ideal to be followed by the Muslim believers. Based on the schools books, Great God orders the Muslim Believers in many verses in the Holy Koran to fight and Jihad in the cause of God and kill the oppressors. He gives the eternal Paradise to anyone who becomes a martyr in the cause of God. He considers martyrdom a great victory.⁵² In the Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction, there is a Suggestion to the teachers. This suggestion is intended to show the influence of Paradise on the creation of a martyrdom-seeking spirit and spiritual courage. It says:

“It would be good for the teacher to stress the necessity of this suggestion and encourage the students as well, and to set up in class the assembled collection of martyrs' wills.”⁵³

In Islamic Viewpoint book, another important effect left on man's life by the acceptance of the martyrdom is welcoming death in God's way. Of course the welcoming of martyrdom, never means that the Believers do not value their own lives⁵⁴ but For those who believe in the Eternal World, life in this world has no value in itself. Therefore, if a day arrives, on which the preservation of this life is nothing but disgrace, then they

⁵¹ She fell on the ground, and, while saying "God is greatest" and "there is no god except Allah", she surrendered her soul to the Creator of Souls and attained the high rank of martyrdom. See Ministry of Education, *History of Iran and the World*, Iranian school book, Grade 10 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 101.

⁵² Ministry of Education, *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction*, Iranian School Book, Grade 8 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 72.

⁵³ Ministry of Education, *Religion and Life – Teacher's Guide*, Iranian School Book, Grade 10, Part 1 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 162.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Education, *Islamic Viewpoint*, Iranian School Book, Grade 11 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 48.

perform their duty in front of God.⁵⁵ In *Islamic Culture and Religious Instruction* book there is a page talking about martyr khadem. The martyr Ahmad Reza Khadem, wrote in a part of his esteemed will:

"A man is born into the world one day, and goes out of the world one day, and only his deeds remain. Therefore, death is our fate, and it is better that a man be killed in the cause of his goal. Do not be sad at my death, because I live with Great God. Only my body has remained amongst you. Do not be sad at my death, and do not wear black for me. Dear mother, I know that you will be sad at my death, but you know that the people who are killed in the cause of God live and have joy near God."

This courageous martyr, like other martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war embraced the death easily. Death is not the end of life, but, rather, a crossing for the eternal life of him. For him A man does not disappear with death. Rather, he goes from this world to the other world. Death is a natural phenomenon and one should not fear it.⁵⁶ In the *Islamic Viewpoint* book explains the Imam hossein's martyrdom. On the Day of Ashura', in the midst of the battle, the narrower the field became for the hussein and some of his close companions, he spoke to his companions:

"Death is nothing but a bridge which lets you pass from the bank of difficulties to the bank of happiness, greatness, eternal Paradise and eternal affluence. My father [Ali] quoted the great Messenger [Muhammad, who said] that 'this world is the Believer's prison and the infidel's Paradise. Death is for the Believers a bridge for reaching Paradise and for the infidels it is a bridge to reach Hell and torment.'" ⁵⁷

⁵⁵ "Hurry towards the battlefields, welcome death, and embrace it, because the martyrs in God's cause have a high position near God". See *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Education, *Islamic Culture and Religious*, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Education, *Islamic Viewpoint*, pp. 47-48.

After the Kharijites defeat in the battle of Nahrawan, one of them has planned to kill Ali. This man, whose name was Ibn Muljam, hit Ali's head with his poisoned sword in the mosque of Kufa⁵⁸ at sunrise of the 19 of the month⁵⁹ in the year 40 AH [661 CE], when Ali was busy performing the morning prayer. Two days later, on the twenty-first of Ramadan, Ali has died.⁶⁰ Ali's son hasan appointed as a new caliph. But Like his father [Ali], Imam Hasan used to fight those who were unjust, and oppressors. For that, he eventually attained martyrdom.⁶¹ After a while, Mu'awiyah, who had always regarded Imam Hasan as a barrier on the road to realizing his own goals, poisoned him and made him a martyr.⁶²

On the tenth day of [the Muslim month of] Muharram (Ashura), in the lunar year 61 AH, 681 CE, the Imam Hussein stood in the field of Karbala with his few but faithful companions against the numberless enemy army. The battle started in the morning and lasted until the afternoon. On that day, Imam Hussein and his companions fought bravely to their last breath, and became martyrs to the last one.⁶³ Imam Hussein and his seventy-two loyal companions fought bravely, but, in the end they attained martyrdom at the hands of ignorant and oppressive people.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ The City is located in Iraq.

⁵⁹ Muslims fasting month.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Education, *Social Studies*, Iranian School Book, Grade 5 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 92.

⁶¹ Ministry of Education, *Gifts of Heaven*, Iranian School Book, Grade 2 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 41.

⁶² Ministry of Education, *History*, Iranian School Book, Grade 7 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 11.

⁶³ Ministry of Education, *Social Studies*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Education, *Gifts of Heaven*, p. 45.

In Iran, the culture of Ta'ziyeh started after the martyrdom of hossein. Ta'ziyeh is a kind of religious art and religious show, is an example of dramatic literature in the Iranian style, which has long been performed in lamentation of the martyrs of karbala. Following are excerpts from such a Ta'ziyeh traditional show, which praise martyrdom.

“Brother, the time has come for us two to be immersed in blood, To make the journey to eternal Paradise from this desert and plain field of Karbala”.⁶⁵

After the event of karba, the message of martyrdom of hossein has been presented by his son, Ali Zein al-Abedin. Zein al-Abedin was born in Medina thirty-eight years after the emigration of prophet Muhammad to this city of medina from his native city of Mecca in 622 CE. After fifty-seven years of fighting with God's enemies, he attained martyrdom.⁶⁶

In social science school books it talks about Iranian soldiers altruism. Altruism means not being concerned for oneself and attaching showing more importance to others than to oneself. Altruism has different meanings. The one who gives his own life in the cause of God and for the reform of society also practices altruism. Giving one's life, or martyrdom, is the highest degree of altruism in Islam. Examples of the people's altruism and self sacrifice in the war with Iraq shows Many brave and faithful muslim Iranian youths have become martyrs in this cause.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ministry of Education, *Religious Instruction*, Iranian School Book, Grade 5 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 35.

⁶⁶ Ministry of Education, *Gifts of Heaven*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Education, *Social Studies*, pp. 156-158.

The Basij Mobilization was first formed in 1358 [1980] by the order of Ayatollah Khomeini. Many people from different class of the population, such as students, school children, physicians, workers, engineers, employees, were members of the Basij. Throughout the eight years of war, school students practiced altruism and self sacrifice, whether at the front war line or in supportive and preparatory tasks.⁶⁸

To glorify and honor the courageous men and women who sacrifice themselves during the war or lovingly and generously brought their property, life and sons to the battlefield of Jihad. It is asked from students As part of their homework, to draft a letter to their municipal authorities with various requests and suggestions to remember those great people. One of the guiding examples indicates the importance of martyrs in Iranian public life.

“We belong to God and to Him we are bound to return, My dear teacher, With a grieving heart I congratulate you and offer you my condolences on the occasion of the martyrdom of your heroic brother. we always remember him and follow his way.”⁶⁹

The Influence of Istishhadi Soldiers on Iranian Society

No episode in Shia history can be understood without reference to the Battle of Karbala – certainly not the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that saw itself as a revolt against the Yazid of its own time.⁷⁰ During the Iranian revolution in general and

⁶⁸ Ministry of Education, *Persian*, Iranian School Book, Grade 5 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 76.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Education, *Persian Language*, Iranian School Book, Grade 9 (Tehran: MOE, 2004), p. 113.

⁷⁰ Navid Kermani, “Roots of Terror: Suicide, Martyrdom, Self Redemption and Islam”, <http://www.opendemocracy.net> (accessed 22 June 2009).

particularly in Iran-Iraq war, the martyrdom phenomenon played a key role in the dominant Iranian Shia ideology.

Dear God! If you did not call on me to the land of martyrdom and if you would cut my hope from coming to the land of the lovers, and if you did not bestow upon me such a great happiness, I would never be able to cry for the death of Imam Hussein (A. S.) and mourn for him.⁷¹

Since the casualties were so high in the number and the magnitude of loss were so great, the exultation of martyrdom provided desperately needed moral and ethical justification, urging the young Iranians onward and offering consolation for their staggering losses of the numbers and powers. Numerous papers and pamphlets encouraged Iranians to sacrifice themselves for their country and ideology, including popular books written by Dr. Ali Shariati⁷² and Ayatollah, Morteza Motahari. The authors of “Awaited Savior” and “After Martyrdom” had attended lectures during the Revolution that featured recitations of the teachings of Imam Hussein and his philosophy.⁷³

Dr. Shariati died in dubious condition a year before the revolution but Ayatollah Motahari was a key important religious figure during the Islamic Revolution, a loyal disciple and follower of Ayatollah Khomeini. The book - Awaited

⁷¹ Mehdi Fahimi, *Farhange Jebhe [The Culture of War Front]* (Tehran: Soroush Publishing, 1998), p. 54.

⁷² A martyr embraces all of these. Each revolution has two visages: blood and a message. Anyone who has chosen the responsibility of accepting truth, anyone who knows what a Shi'ite's responsibility means, anyone who understands the responsibility of the freedom of humanity, must know that in the permanent battle of history -,everywhere and everyplace, all fields - are Karbala, all months are Muharram, all days are Ashura and thus one must choose: either blood or bearing the message, to be either Hosein or Zainab, to die like Hosein or remain like Zainab, if he does not want to be absent and always wants to have presence. See Ali Shariati, *Pas az Shahadat [After Martyrdom]* (Tehran: Majmoe Asar, 1979), pp. 88-89.

⁷³ Morteza Motahhari, *Ensan – e – Kamel [A Complete Man]* (Tehran: Sadra, 1980), p. 17.

Savior- starts by quoting Imam Ali and features numerous references to the sayings of both Ali and Hussein. Ayatollah Motahari wrote:

“..Martyrs are like a candle, whose job is it to burn out and get extinguished, in order to shed light for the benefit of others”.⁷⁴

In this part, we tried to interview with the family of the main istishhadi commanders during the war with Iraq. All of these commanders were the IRGC members. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) –Sepahe Pasdaran-is a product of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini established the force to protect the Islamic revolution from any outside or inside plot. The IRGC has since developed to be a major political and military force in Iran. During the war Sepahe Pasdaran played a major role in Iran-Iraq war.⁷⁵

In this part, the research will examine the popular Martyrs’ testaments regarding martyrdom by studying and interviewing their friends and family. Such testaments had great influence on Iranian youths to join the military and fight against saddam. Some of the martyrs describes the philosophy of their life as being in war and choose their lives as a gift to Islam and Ayatollah Khomeini. For instance:

My dear father and mother! My dear brother and sister! I have found myself after 18 years of futile life and now I have chosen the paths of Imam Hussein (A. S.), because martyrdom is from my point of view the beginning of a new life.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Morteza Motahari, *The Martyr*, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan va Sardarane Shahid [In Memory of Martyred Soldiers and Commanders]* (Tehran: Martyrs Foundation of Islamic Revolution, 1998), p. 24.

⁷⁶ Reza Borji, *Gololeye Rahashode [The Free Bullet]* (Tehran: Kaman Publishing, 2000), p. 60.

Mehdi Bakeri (1954-1985)

Mehdi Bakeri was born in North West of Iran in Miandoab. He was a famous patriot Iranian hero of the Iran–Iraq War.⁷⁷ He was graduated in Bsc. in civil engineering from University of Tabriz. During the Islamic revolution on 1979, he supports and joined to the revolution and after the victory of revolution he was chosen as the mayor of Uromia city in West Azerbaijan, Iran. By the time of starting of the Iran-Iraq war he joined to the Sepahe Pasdaran –revolutionary guard- and became the commander of the Ashoura Corps, unit 31, which was belonged to the Sepah of Azerbaijan provinces. He was martyred in a fight by Iraqi troops in Khuzestan province in south west of Iran. He was a popular figure in his hometown because of his great Islamic faith and attitude.⁷⁸ He wrote in His will:

“Imam Hossein said;" Surely the life is belief and jihad. God's praising to all who struggle against evil and to my dear Imam Khomeini who informed us and tried to keep us away from selfishness in order to be just for God and God's mercy to martyrs who taught us how to live better.”⁷⁹

Mohammad Boroujerdi (1955-1983)

Major General Mohammad Boroujerdi was born in Darreh Gorg a village of Boroujerdi in west of Iran . His family lived in Tehran several years after the death of his father. During his young age, He worked as a tailor and studied at nightly schools. Mohammad Boroujerdi began to attend Quranic and Islamic courses at 14 years old. He married young at 17. He was one of the founders of Army of the Guardians of the

⁷⁷ Ali Bani Loha, *Dostie Eshgh [The Friendship of Loved Martyrs]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 1998), p. 11.

⁷⁸ Mahmoud Diani, *Negahi Be Farhange*, p. 135.

⁷⁹ Moosaei Meisam, *Zendegie Shohada [The Martyrs' Lives]* (Tehran: The center of Islamic Guidance Organization Publication, 1990), p. 61.

Islamic Revolution (AGIR) and a commander during the Iran-Iraq War. He played a key role in regaining control over some territories of Kurdistan province in west of Iran by His soldiers.⁸⁰

As one of the commanders, he resisted to stop falling of "Sar Pol-e Zahab", planned by Saddam's troops in October 1980. However, he served mostly in the west of Iran, but he was also participated in some military confrontations in the south of Iran like Operation of Tarigh ol-Qods for regaining Bostan and Operation of Fath-ol-Mobin⁸¹. Then, he was appointed as the commander of its seventh zone which included Ilam, Hamedan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah provinces.

He was also served as the deputy of "Hamzeh Seyedo-Shohaha" commanding center. His major companions were "Ahmad motavaselian", "Naser Kazemi" and "Mohammad Ebrahim Hemmat" whom all of them have been martyred. Boroujerdi was also martyred by a land mine on Mahabad-Naqadeh road in west of Iran. His soldiers have talked about his strong believe and kind attitude toward the people.⁸² He wrote in his will:

“The children should follow Imam Khomeini up to martyrdom for he obeys Quran and Imam Hossein. I ask all of you to choose pious girls to marry my sons. And also for Fatima and Zahra, choose religious men to marry them. In marrying them, do not think of wealth but God and believe in Him. My dear wife, If you did what I've written and if I suffered

⁸⁰ Hoshang Faraji, *Yek Mard Va Sad Jang [A Man and Hundred War]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 2002), p. 88.

⁸¹ Tayebeh Jafari, *Bedone Pedaram Dar Sofreye Haft Sin [Without my Martyred Father]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), p. 41.

⁸² Fatemeh Jahan Gashte, *Ghalamhaye Beheshti [The Pen of Heaven]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), p. 119.

martyrdom, I would never go to paradise unless take you there I ask all of you to forgive me and I beg my kind parents to do so.”⁸³

Hossein Kharrazi (1957–1986)

Major General Hosein Kharrazi born in Esfahan was an Iranian commander of "Imam Hosein 14th Division" during the Iran-Iraq War. He was Islamic revolutionary supporter and after the victory of revolution, helped safeguarding it. He was involved in many operations during the eight years of war, especially Dawn 8 in which he captured troops of Saddam Republican Guard in Al-Faw Peninsula within the border of Iraq; and in other Operation like Karbala-5 as the commander of the vanguard forces. He was martyred by shrapnel from a mortar bomb in Operation Karbala-5. In his will he wrote to his father:⁸⁴

“Father and mother please do not be worried about me because I have chosen my way (martyrdom) consciously and there is no more ways except for the paths of God.”⁸⁵ If martyrdom is placed in the mouth of the lion I would reach it and get it.⁸⁶ Martyrdom is sweet syrup that everybody can not drink it unless he or she has freed himself from every superficial boundaries and limitations such as property and life and . . . Such a person wants to get rid of everything in the way of God and to fight against the wrong.⁸⁷

When he was young he was interested in religious publications and books.

Kharrazi participated in religious gathering and learning theological subjects. His

⁸³ Ibid., p. 94.

⁸⁴ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan*, p. 39.

⁸⁵ Mohammad Jahan Tigh, *Ma va Mah* [The Man and the Heaven] (Shiraz: Sacred Defense Publication, 2001), p. 13.

⁸⁶ Abbass Ali Akbari, *Nabarde Jango Zendegi Nojavanan Dar Jebhe* [The Iranian Youths Fight in War Front] (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 2003), p. 27.

⁸⁷ Kamal Seyed, *Jebheye Jange Khonin* [The Bloody War Front] (Qom: Habib Publication, 1999), p. 16.

curiosity and interest toward religious matters increased during the campaigns and struggle against the Shah regime and mad him more aware of contemporary political circumstances. during his military service, Kharrazi was sent to Dhofar –region in Oman which once captured by communist rebels and was freed by Iranian troops- finally He deserted the armed forces in 1978, according to the recommendation of Ayatollah Khomeini, and joined the revolutionaries.⁸⁸

His first considerable role as a commander was in Darkhovin region close to Abadan-Ahvaz road, known as "The Lion Frontier".⁸⁹ In that battle, the Iranian soldiers resisted Saddam's army for almost a year. He became the commander of Darkhovin front. He also served actively in freeing Bostan region. After the Operation of Tarigh ol-Qods, "Imam Hossein brigade" was established which soon was reorganized to a division with Kharrazi whom appointed as the Major General. His soldiers participated in the following operations like Fath-ol-Mobin and Beit ol-Moqaddas for the Liberation of Khorramshahr.⁹⁰

In the later operation, his troops were among the first whom passed Karun river and reached Ahvaz-Khorramshahr strategic road. As a commander he was also participated in other operations like Ramazan, "Preliminary Dawn", Dawn 4; and Khaibar during which he lost one of his hands. In Operation Dawn 8 his division

⁸⁸ The Cultural Deputy of Martyr Foundation, *Saghfhaye Firozeyi* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), p. 112.

⁸⁹ Abbass Ali Akbari, *Nabarde Jango*, p. 61.

⁹⁰ See Parvaneh Qobadi Kia, *In Rahe Binahayat [This Endless Road of War]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), p. 32.

managed to defeat Saddam's Republican Guard and had victories in Al-Faw Peninsula and around "Salt Factory".⁹¹

During the Operation of Karbala-5 Kharrazi's division was the spearhead and succeeded to pass the highly sophisticated combatant army. The operation of "Karbala-5" was the last one for him. Under the heavy artillery bombardment of Saddam's troops, the shortage of food supplies became critical. He took the responsibility for providing food for soldiers and during this effort; a mortar bomb exploded and killed him in Shalamcheh region in Khuzestan province. His martyrdom influenced his troops and other commanders.⁹² He wrote in his will:

The message of these martyrs and the witnesses of the history of the war are addressed to you to help dear Islam and support the great and dear Imam Khomeini. Every enemy's bullet which shoots the heart of the children of Islam causes them to whisper "Allah, the great, Khomeini the leader ". I advise Ali, Ameneh and Asieh to follow guardianship of the Islamic revolution. Those, who go to the war must consider two matters, Being resolute in jihad and practice God remembrance all the time in every work and every moment of your life".⁹³

Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh (1967-1980)

Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh, is hero of martyrdom in Iran and an symbol of patriotism and deep Islamic faith in the Iran-Iraq war.⁹⁴ According to his official biography which was published by the Iranian government, he was a 13 year old boy

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁹² Ghasem Yahosseini, *Mehmane Jange Feshangha [The Guest of Bullets]* (Tehran: Soreh Mehr Publication, 2009), p. 55.

⁹³ Hedayotallah Sarhangi, *Khaterate Zolal [Clear Memory of War]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 1996), p. 18.

⁹⁴ Kamal Seyed, *Jebheye Jange*, p. 10.

on the time of martyrdom and was borne in the city of Qom. In the beginning of the war in 1980, he made his decision to leave his home without his parents' permission to go to the war front to help stopping the invasion. In the besieged city of Khorramshahr near to the border, he fought side by side with older Iranian soldiers. At one point, Iraqi soldiers pushed the Iranian troops back as they were passing through a narrow canal.⁹⁵

Many of the Iranian troops present there were either dead or wounded by the heavy Iraqi attacks. Having seen this, Mohammed Hossein, took a grenade from a dead body near to him, pulled the pin out, and jumped underneath an Iraqi tank, killing himself and disabling and destroying the tank. His action stopped the Iraqi tank division's to move further.⁹⁶

After this, Ayatollah Khomeini called Mohammed Hossein Fahmideh an Iranian national hero and a monument to Mohammed Hossein has been built on the outskirts of Tehran, a place of pilgrimage of Iranians soldiers. In the years following of Mohammed Hossein's martyrdom, his devotion brought a lot of popularity among Iranians, like books or bags displaying Mohammed Hossein, were sold to children and a postage stamp was issued for his memory in 1986.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Abbass Ali Akbari, *Nabarde Jango*, p. 22.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁷ Hossein Fattahi, *Tekeyi Az Aseman [a Piece of Heaven]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 61.

Mostafa Ardestani (1948-1995)

Martyr General Ardestani Mostafa Ardestani was born in Varamin town, -near to Tehran- in 1948. He studied both his elementary school and high school in the same town. In 1971, after two years of military service, he joined the air force pilot training center. He studied the basic flying courses in Tehran and to complete his pilot training, he was sent to the U.S.A. There, he received his flying certificate and returned home to serve as an f-5 pilot in the 4th fighter base. Ardestani worked in this base for three years and then he was transferred to the 2nd fighter base. By resuming the Islamic revolution, he was amongst the first group of religiously devoted pilots who had a great role in the victory of the revolution.⁹⁸

Martyr Ardestani was always the first to bomb the predetermined targets in Iraq with 400 attacks on 143 Iraqi positions outside Iranian territory and 1724 sorties of flight during the war.⁹⁹ He truly deserves to be called a hero of the war. He was martyred in one of his mission while he was informed about the possible death.¹⁰⁰ He wrote in his will:

⁹⁸ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ On 22, September, 1980, in the time of the Iraqi invasion on the first day of the war, in his diary he writes: I was on leave, sitting in a garden in Varamin town. I received the news of Mehrabad airport bombardment by Iraqi war planes. I immediately took a taxi and reached Azadi Square in the shortest possible time. I went to the bus terminal on the west of Tehran, and found no bus to Tabriz, again. I took a shuttle taxi and raced towards Tabriz, the base on which I was supposed to serve. A few passengers in the taxi were talking about the enemy's attack in a bombastic manner. Many cars had lined up to the petrol stations. The city was all rumor and the people were in a state of unexpected confusion. The speedy car was leaving the road curves behind one by one, while I was in my deep thought. Finally, we arrived in Tabriz. I asked the driver to give me another ride to the base, and he told me that all roads ending to the base were blocked. I told the driver that I was a pilot and asked him to drop me off at the nearest point to the base and he accepted. Understanding that I was a pilot, other passengers kept quiet, while watching me with their meaningful looks. I reached the base in a short time, and showing my ID card, I entered the base, soon after the first Iraqi attack on our based, 140 Iranian fighters gave Iraqis the most proper and backbreaking response. See Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan*, p. 44.

“my wife, you are the mother for my children and also be like a father as what Islam has introduced. I repeat my words again: if someone said that he doesn't care the orphans, you should oppose him. My dear wife, you have seven children and you should make them familiar with Islam so that they could serve our purpose for both us and the Judgment Day.”¹⁰¹

Mostafa Chamran (1932–1981)

Mostafa Chamran Savei Born in 1932 in Tehran was an Iranian scientist in physics who served as ministry of defense and a Member of Parliament and commander of paramilitary volunteers in Iran–Iraq War as well. He was killed in Khuzestan Province in an action during the early stage of the war. Before Islamic revolution He was a young student of Ayatollah Taleqani and Ayatollah Morteza Motahari.¹⁰²

He graduated from Tehran University. In the late 1960s, he moved to the United States for higher education, obtaining an M.S. degree from the Texas A&M University. He furthers his Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering and Physics in Plasma in 1963 from the University of California, Berkeley. He was then hired as a senior research staff scientist at Bell Laboratories and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He was fluent in Persian, English, Arabic, French, and German.¹⁰³

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Chamran became politically active, and became a leading and founding member of the Islamic revolutionary movement in the

¹⁰⁰ See Abasoulat Rasouli, *Meyarhaye Abadi* [Translation Title?] (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), p. 37.

¹⁰¹ Hoshang Faraji, *Yek Mard*, p. 93.

¹⁰² Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan*, p. 32.

¹⁰³ Sepahe pasdarane enghelabe eslami Iran, *Payam-e Enqelab*. No. 4, 19 March 1980, p. 37-38. On the general religious requirements of serving in the IRGC and Basij, see *Qanun-e Moqararat-e Estekhdami-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami* (Tehran: Edareh-ye Koll-e Qavanin va Moqararat-e Keshvar, 1995/1996), pp. 5-19.

Middle East, organizing and training guerrillas and revolutionary forces in Algeria, Egypt, Syria, especially Amal Movement in southern Lebanon which is prior to the current movement of Hezbollah.¹⁰⁴

By emerging the Islamic Revolution taking place in Iran, Chamran's career has changed. He was appointed commander of Iran's Pasdaran or revolutionary guard, as well as Iran's Minister of Defense, personal military aide to Ayatollah Khomeini, and the latter's representative to the Iranian Supreme Council of Defense. In March 1980, he was elected into the Majlis of Iran (the Iranian Parliament) as a representative from the city of Tehran.¹⁰⁵

During the war He was killed by an Iraqi mortar in combat in Khuzestan Province -a region in Southwestern Iran, bordering Iraq-, on June 21, 1981. He was called a hero and many buildings and streets in Iran and Lebanon and a major expressway in heart of tehran were named after him. It is said that he intentionally went to the dangerous zone of war which was full of Iraqi mortar.¹⁰⁶ He wrote in his will:

“The revolution has two faces: Blood and Massage. Our Islamic revolution has also martyrdom and massage. During the Islamic revolution and after it up to now, it is proved by the children of Islam, in front line and back of the war. They heard the martyr's massage and hurried to the rendezvous of

¹⁰⁴ Davood Amirian, *Shemr va Saddam va Hamrahanash [Shemr & SaddAm & his Friends]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Hossein Nouvin, *Barrasie Vasiatnamehaye Shohada [The Martyrs' Testaments]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2009), pp. 166-170.

God's lovers. Your children's blood perfumes Khozistan and affects each newcomer.¹⁰⁷

Mahmood Kaveh

Mahmood Kaveh was born in May, 1961 in Mashhad. He studied in the same city. His attendance in the discussions and meetings of religious authorities such as martyr Hashemi Nejad and martyr Kamyab developed Jihad viewpoints in his mind.¹⁰⁸

“If there were problems for our revolution, it certainly would be for Moslems all around the world and if there were briskness it would cause victory for all of them”.¹⁰⁹

By the beginning of revolution in 1979, he attended Sepah Pasdaran of Islamic Revolution membership program and joined this organization. Then he passed a training course and was chosen as a tactic instructor of Imam Reza garrison division. when Ayatollah Khomeini went to Jamaran, Mahmood become the chief of a twenty-guardian group to guard Imam's family. By the beginning of the war, he commanded the military operation of Sepah Pasdaran in Saqqez, west of Iran. Mahmood Kaveh was twenty-five years old when he was walking on the heights of the mountainous area of the western war front of Iran as the a mortar-shell brought him martyrdom.¹¹⁰ He wrote in his will:

¹⁰⁷ Hedayotallah Sarhangi, *Khaterate Zolal*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ Moosaei Meisam, *Zendegie Shohada*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ Zahra Amani, *Sad Zoje Eshgh [The War of Couple of Loves]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publication, 2002), p. 50.

¹¹⁰ Nesa Hashemian, *Sigaroudi, Entezar Baraye Yousef [Expecting Yousef]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 150.

“Thanks a lot to God and praise to the Exalted Lord and the creator of the Worlds who creates us upon His destiny and grants us blessing of life in the world... I was the witness of the braveries, scarifications and devotions of the sincere teens and I learnt how to show my love to God. I was also satisfied with association to Basij force, Pasdaran and their commanders. My brothers! Respect our parents more for everything belongs to this philosophy. I ask all relatives and friends to licit me.”¹¹¹

Mahdi Mirzaee

Mahdi Mirzaee was born in a religious family in Mashhad in 1962. He was so active in demonstration in mashahd during the revolution. After the victory of the Islamic revolution, he joined the sepahe- pasdaran and was sent to the war front. In Chazzabeh warfront, he did much bravery. He was in Fatholmobin military operation and became the chief of the demolition group. His right shoulder was injured in Beitolmoghaddas military operation. He attended the military operation to set Khorramshahr free from occupation of Iraq.¹¹²

His brother also martyred during the Ramadan military operation in Shalamchah area in Khuzestan province. He was the chief of the demolition group in "Moslem-Ebn-Aghil" military operation as well as in "Valfajr 1" Operation in. He, with his soldiers, did crucial commanding to destroy the enemy's pumps in Iraq's territorial. Due to his merit, efficiency, bravery and skillfulness; he attended in "Valfajr 4" in Panjvin area as well as "Kheibar" victorious military operation.¹¹³ He

¹¹¹ Collection and Arrangement Office of War Documents, *Bagozidegh* (Tehran: Raja Publishing, 1996), p. 25.

¹¹² Mohammad Hassan Rahimiyan, *Ba Hamrahan [With Companions]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 91.

¹¹³ Ahmad Asadi Qafour, *Seh Fasle Moghavemat [Three Parts of Resistance]* (Tehran: Shahed Publication, 2008), p. 66.

martyred after much bravery in October 1984 in Meimak military operation. He wrote in his will:

I tell the government of the Islamic revolution to consider serving the oppressed people as their vital duty for they are the ones who attended the war and are martyred to keep the revolution save During the war, I met these honorable men whom without seeing their actions, no one could imagine their characters. I learnt so many things that no one can compare even a part of it to all his own life. I 'm glad to be with Imam Hossein's partners. I hope to meet them on the Judgment Day , God's willing”.¹¹⁴

Mohammad Taghi Razavi

Mohammad Taghi Razavi, was born in 1955 in Mashhad. After finishing high school, he was accepted in Mashhad Institute Civil Engineering. After the victory of Islamic Revolution, he finished his military service and started working in "Jihad Sazandegy"¹¹⁵ (jihad of construction). Twenty days after days after the war started, he went there and worked in doctor Chamran's organization Building "Andimeshk" to "Hamidiyyeh" military path under the rifle-shot of the enemy. The climax of war engineering was due to "Tarighol Ghods" military operation which he was cooperating there. He went to the region of Karbala 10 military operation in West Mountains and the explosion of canon-ball caused him to be martyred.¹¹⁶

“First of all, I request the Exalted God to forgive me as a disobedient servant by his greatness and glory for I cannot tolerate the chastisement of the hell. I tell all Islamic nations to worth Islam and the revolution, Imam and the government. In order to prove their appreciation, they should serve

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 37.

¹¹⁵ Jihad Sazandegy is an organization founded after revolution in 1979 to develop rural area.

¹¹⁶ Ahmad Ali Moghrizi, *Jango Doshmani Mian Bani Umayeh va Bani Hashem [Atrocity between Umayyad and bani Hashim]* (Qom: Sharif Al Razi, 2000), p. 47.

the most. They also should tolerate the problems and try to extend the Islamic revolution.¹¹⁷

Seyyed Hashem Sajedi

Seyyed Hashem Sajedy was born in Damghan in 1947. His father died after one year of his birthday. Then he was brought up by his mother. He studied until diploma and join the political activities. After the victory of Islamic revolution he joined the mashhad jihad sazandegi (construction jihad) and went to war front. He attended "Valfajr 2" military operation. During the operation, his stomach, shoulder and legs were injured seriously. Despite of it, he went to west part of the war and became the commander of Supporting Organization of Najaf base. He was martyred in October 1984 in the war front.¹¹⁸

"A sincere greeting to you, my parents, who trained such a child who can satisfy the Islamic Revolution and its martyrs. Also he can say" at Thy service" to his great leader, Imam Khomeini, to fight with the enemy".¹¹⁹

Hassan Aghasizadeh

Hassan Aghasizadeh was born in Mashhad in 1959. He was trained in a religious manner since his childhood.¹²⁰ He passed primary and high school successfully and because of this the Ministry of Education suggested him to continue his study in Canada. He finished the MSC in civil engineering and came back to country to join

¹¹⁷ Abdolrahim Fahimi, *Barfcooch [Snowy Road to War]* (Tehran: Soreh Mehr Publishing, 1999), p. 36.

¹¹⁸ Sepahe Pasdaran, *Obor Az Bohran [Passing by Crisis]* (Tehran: Research\political Publishing, 2000), p. 76.

¹¹⁹ Aboufazel Razavi Ardakani, *Shahide Fakeh [The Martyre of Fakeh]* (Qom: Islamic Propaganda, 1996), p. 73.

¹²⁰ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan*, p. 71.

the Sepahe Pasdaran in war front. He was martyred in an operation in October 1987.¹²¹

“God! You be witness that we have come at your decree to this warfare and we have drown in blood and martyred for your sake. Martyrdom is not an aim in itself. Victory is not also an aim in itself. Rather it is the propagation of the religion that is our goal.¹²² Great God, please lead us to the right path so that we give our life for your sake. Please bestow martyrdom on us so as to be martyred. Please bestow martyrdom on us so as to be an observer.¹²³

Abdolhossein Boronsy

Abdolhossein Boronsy was born in Torbat Heidarieh in Khorasan province in 1942. He was a simple worker until the Islamic Revolution stablished. By the beginning of the war he went there and attended in different operations. He was very famous for his valiant and self-scarification so that the enemy announced a reward for a man who could kill him. Finally, he was martyred in 1985 in Khandagh crossroad in Badr military operation.¹²⁴

“I have chosen this way consciously and with love and now that I am in the war fronts where blood is tied with idea and it is there that martyrdom would become possible. Martyrdom is a bridge that leads us to the final destination and our final goal.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Omid Azadeghan, *Neyrang Dar Jang [Fraud In war]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 2000), p. 55.

¹²² Hossein Noori Hamadani, *Nabard [Jihad]* (Tehran: Islamic Culture Publication, 1998), p.72.

¹²³ The Cultural Committee of Martyr Foundation, *Sarbazane Shahid [The Martyred Soldiers]* (Tehran: Martyrs Foundation of Islamic Revolution, 2000), p. 69.

¹²⁴ Hamid Davoud Abadi, *Dejleh Montazere Abbas Ast [Tigris is expecting Abas]* (Tehran: Sacred Defense Publishing, 1998), p. 90.

¹²⁵ Hasan Jalali, *Be Yade Farmandehan [In Memory of Martyred Commanders]*, p. 44.

Valiollah Cheraghchi

Valiollah Cheraghchi was born in fall 1958 in Mashhad. He registered in one of the religious schools in Mashhad called Naghavihe and passed the secondary school successfully. His familiarity with Mahmood Kaveh helped him to join the Sepahe Pasdaran. He was also one of the best tactic tutors for revolutionary teenagers in Mashhad. He avoided to go university and preferred to go to the war front. His Sincerity, bravery, courage made him a real commander. Finally, a shell hit his head in Badr military operation and after twenty days, he was martyred.¹²⁶

“Oh God! If you did not call on me to the land of martyrdom and if you would cut my hope from coming to the land of the lovers, and if you did not bestow upon me such a great happiness, I would never be able to cry for the death of Imam Hussein (A. S.) and mourn for him.”¹²⁷

Conclusion

Similar to how the Karbala metaphor was employed in wartime rhetoric and propaganda, the images portray the guardsmen as a modern Karbala hero. For them both the past and present Karbala narratives are essentially tragedies. Although Imam Hosein achieved a moral victory with his stand at Karbala these soldiers lost militarily. Iran could claim a moral victory by at least regaining its territory and forcing Iraq to sue for peace, but it failed to accomplish its broader strategic goals. It was unable to fulfill the many promises it had made to its soldiers and citizens from the counter-invasion of Iraq (liberating Karbala, emancipating Jerusalem, igniting an Islamic revolution in Iraq, toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein).

¹²⁶ Ali Bani Loha, *Dostie Eshgh [friendship of loved martyrs]*, p. 16.

¹²⁷ Mehdi Fahimi, *Farhange Jebhe[culture of warfront]*, p. 54.

While this image may engender such a reading, particularly from a viewer far removed from the conflict and its horrors, it is at its heart a deeply spiritual composition. Released from the context of warfare, and with depictions of militancy notably absent, the guardsman takes on a purely spiritual guise. For Iranian soldiers Imam Hosein is lionized for his religious devotion.

He represents the hope and an inspiration to fight in a war for reasons for the sake of God. Like the heroes of Karbala, guardsman is a willing martyr for whom the ultimate sacrifice is also the ultimate reward. The guardsman therefore becomes a pillar of faith. No longer revolutionary militancy befits him; rather, within the reflection of his figure, the notions of spirituality, Shia tradition motivates him. Below we will see the two different interpretation of Karbala among Iranian martyred soldiers.

CONCLUSION

“Never suspect of people who died for God as mortals, but they are alive and God will bless them and feed them. Chapter Ale Emran / verse 169”

Martyrdom (Istishhad) and martyr (Shahid) are taken from the word "Shahd" in Arabic which has different meanings and applications. Martyrdom means presence, being aware of, witnessing some things, and observing it. The plural form of Martyr, which is Martyrs in Arabic, is a subject. In the Islamic texts and vocabulary, the martyr is a person who is killed for the sake of God or he is a fighter and warrior, who is killed and who gives his / her life for the sake of the truth and right of Islam.

Generally, Muslim scholars interpret martyr as this; The martyr is an adult and pure Muslim who has given his life to fight with cruels and with infidels, without expecting to gain any materialistic privileges purely for the sake of God. In Islam, such a person is called a martyr that he would go directly to paradise and he is alive and not dead for the God. Martyrdom for the sake of God includes being killed in the war zone by the enemies, being killed in defending one's life, honor or property at any time or in any place.

In some points of history of Islam, people know their lives were less important than these Islamic values and would be prepare to devote their life for preserving and survival of society and its values. The Shias and the other Muslims believe that homeland is one of the most important and sacred values, so by resorting to martyrdom phenomenon

they can preserve their lands and identity. Because the faithful Muslim cannot tolerate aliens invasion on his or her lands or properties. This spirit overwhelmed the Iranians during the war with Iraq.

In Shia Islam, martyrdom is the highest point of ascendance for the human beings. In the Islamic culture and especially in Iranian Shia culture the most valuable and the worthiest action is martyrdom. From Shia Clerics view like Ayatollah Khomeini and Navab Safavi, martyr is a person who has watered the tree of Islam with his offering of his life and thereby he has eradicated the roots of corruption. The martyrs guarantee the resistance and the liveliness of the society and they would increase the spiritual capabilities of the society. By such an action, they destroy weakness and corruption in the society. Ayatollah Khomeini believed that if there were not the blood of the martyrs to water the pure trees of this land there was no such thing as Islam.

Shia scholars believe that Conscious selection of martyrdom under the correct thinking of Islam plays an important role in the society. Martyrdom creates such an enthusiasm and creates such a movement and such a shake that it easily differentiates and distinguishes its own adherents and followers from the nonfollowers. Ayatollah Motahari believes the end of everybody's life is marked with his or her death except for the real followers of God for whom death is the beginning of life. Therefore, it is not possible to examine the logic of the common people with that of the martyrs. In his viewpoint, it is not possible to put the martyrdom in the mind of the common people since the martyr's logic and wisdom is greater than theirs. It is a wisdom mixed with love.

In Shia Islam, martyrdom is regarded to be a very valuable success and it is also regarded to be a great ascendance. Martyr is alive in Islam because he has risen to defend the right and he is fed and blessed by God because he has attached himself to God and this thinking is based on the religious and theosophical thought particularly in Iranian understanding of Shia Islam. The martyr rises consciously and he has risen to settle justice and equality while he is ready to give his life while he is burnt and he is about to become ashes. He gives such a real grandeur, both with his life and soul.

For Istishhadi Practitioners of Iran during the war, setting paradigms for the society through creating epical deeds and encouraging the sensation of the society to propagate the spirit of bravery by injecting fresh blood in to the body of the society and strengthening the revolutionary spirits among the people were the main aims. That is the main stream of seeking martyrdom among the Iranian soldiers. For Iranian Soldiers, Martyrdom is one of the glorious appearances of self sacrifice which has a high position in Islamic culture and Shia Islam in particular. For them martyrdom has always paved grounds for growth and moral improvement of great men during the history of humanity.

Martyrdom, this glorious death has been the old wish of true believers of Islam. It is considered as the steps of spiritual insight in any sincere mysticism. In Shia Islam, Istishhad and martyrdom is the highest status for the human beings, therefore in Shia culture by learning from the event of Karbala and Imam Hosein, the most valuable and the worthiest action is martyrdom for any Muslims for his belief and his country. For Shia Muslims of Iran the day of Ashura is the day of heroism, bravery, commitment and great

test as well as the day of generosity, honor and respect. It is the day of devoting one's life for Islam. It is the day in which blood is victorious over the sword.

For Iranian Soldier of the war, Imam Hosein is the symbol of martyrdom. He is regarded as the great sources of honor and bravery of the human being. A soldier who gives his life for the great Islamic values considered to be the valuable and real soldier of Islam. Therefore, he is very brave and he has the spirit of martyrdom. He is ready to give his life in order to achieve God satisfaction. He has prioritized soul over the body. When the culture of martyrdom became prevalent in such a society there would be a very special enthusiasm in the heart of people, which causes some competition over this position. That is why, there were many Iranian people who were called Istishahdi volunteers searching for martyrdom during the war.

During the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian Shia Clerics emphasized that the martyr is a person who has watered the tree of Islam with his offering of his life and thereby he has eradicated the roots of corruption. The martyrs guarantee the resistance and the liveliness of the society and they would increase the spiritual capabilities of the society. By such an action, they destroy weakness and lack of strength in the society. As Ayatollah Khomeini once said If, there were not the blood of the martyrs to water the pure trees of this land there was no such thing as Islam.

While preaching his idea, Ayatollah Khomeini, began his movement in the month of Muharram (The month in which the Ashura and Karbala event happened) in 1963 with this sentence that “It is the Ashura era”, and the day June 15 of that year that was the

strength spot of the Islamic revolution resulted from that lecture. Ayatollah Khomeini mentioned the validating secret of the day June 15 (day of ashura on 1963) by a historical and eternal lecture and said: The day June 15 must be alive along with the big event of Ashura “it is the great production of martyrdom and sacrifice culture.” So we must name the martyrs of the day June 15 and the martyrs of the 8-years war as the fellow bunker – men of Karbala martyrs. That is not excessive since their word, aim and destination were all the same and they were to fortifying the pillars of religious honor and to defend the Islam.

The political doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini was based on Shia Islam. This was the political doctrine that according to the westerners’ politicians, the west was unable to understanding it specially during the Iran-Iraq war. In a more clear and precise word, the political thoughts of Ayatollah Khomeini was the major basis and the essence as well as the vital factor for the start and continuation of the Islamic revolution and later on in managing the war with Iraq. By divine interpretation of the universe and the human beings from Shia Islam viewpoint, Ayatollah Khomeini not only was successful in decapitating the Pahlavi regime but also he tried to lead the world movement of the Islamic Revolution through presenting a new, cultural, completely religious and divine method of istishhadi teachings which has been practiced by many Iranian soldiers during the Iran-Iraq war. Later on, this became a paradigm for some other Islamic movements in contemporary Muslim world.

From Ayatollah Khomeini’s view, it is because of the Muslim scholars that martyrs are borned and it is because of the martyrs' blood that the pens of the scholars are

satisfied. He believed that the martyr is the lovely flower of Islam and it is the greatest position that a human being might achieve. God is very benevolent and martyrdom is the real vessel of this blessing. The body of the martyr is heavy for him to carry and it is an obstacle which prevents him from achieving God. For him Martyr has a great outlook, it is a running blood and fresh wind for the desperate society.

For this reason, Ayatollah Khomeini has a high regard for the Ashura event. He considered it as a very good and practical paradigm for all the religious revolutions of the world. The day of Ashura and the land of Karbala are pillars of Ayatollah Khomeini's idea. For him martyrdom or *istishhad* has a great status. According to Ayatollah Khomeini's thought these are the basis for the formation of the Islamic Revolution as well as the motivating engine of the revolution to control the government and ruling of Justice.

According to Ayatollah Khomeini's viewpoint, the history of martyrdom is the history of ideas and Jihad as well as the history of attachment to the religious principles and ideas. He believed, if there was not the martyrdom in the Karbala and love of the household of Prophet Mohammad, there would be no such things as Islam and Shia, though it was the martyr's blood that has watered the tree Islam. From Ayatollah Khomeini's viewpoint, the martyrs in the war zone, the war front became his cottage; he has performed his ablutions with his red blood; he has been busy praying his beloved God under the shower of the bullet of the enemy.

Ayatollah Khomeini has presented a new approach to studying the movement of Imam Hosein who has taken his honor and his life as well as the lives of his children while

he knew that this will be the last moments. He said; if a person listen carefully to his speeches and his words since the time that he came out of Medina and came to Mecca and then since the time that he came out of Mecca, then he / she would understood that he was aware of what he was doing. It is not true to say he came to see what might happen rather he came and he was destined to take the government. In fact, he came to fulfill this mission and it was an honor for him. The supposition of those who think he came not to take the government is wrong. He came to take the government; because the government should be under the control of people such as Imam Hosein or it should be under the control of Imam Hosein's followers".

Therefore, for Ayatollah Khomeini the story of Imam Hosein has a high position. He considered it as a very good paradigm for all the religious revolutions of the world. He said : “ from the time that Imam hosein came to Mecca and went out of it, it was a great political movement at a time when all people are moving towards Mecca he was going out of Mecca. It was a political movement; in fact all his movements were political movements. It was his Islamic – political movement that he destroyed Bani Omayah and if there was not this movement, then Islam was faded away.”

Generally, The Ayatollah Khomeini's view on martyrdom is, to take steps in God way and aware that death is necessary, makes a common goal and identity for a society and individuals and can be as model and strategy for the generations and nations under oppression and cruelty. The beginning of Ayatollah Khomeini's protest against Shah's regime dated Ashura 1963. Ayatollah Khomeini's critical message on the date of

Moharram in that year was “the victory of blood over the sword”; he set this slogan as the logic of the Islamic Revolution in facing with the modern contemporary world.

The demonstration of thousands of people in Tehran and all over the country in Tasoo and Ashura days of the year 1978, broke the waste of Shah and the United States in defending Shah. After that year, Moharram and Ashura became the arena for the activity of the faithful men to the Islamic Revolution and the growth of the spirit of cavalierly in the supporters of the Revolution; during the 8 years of the imposed war the Iranian nation, like Imam Hosein’s move, have made use of Ashura, Moharram and the holy name of the Imam Hosein and his fellow companions as the Operational codes, the name of the armies and battalions as well as the successful operations of the Islamic Army. It was also considered as the most important paradigm as well as the motivation of the most of the soldiers; it had a very important and miracle like effect on the revolution.

In the analysis of the Iran-Iraq war issues, if we take the culture of seeking sacrifice and martyrdom, the lesson of Ashura, the slogan of the victory of blood over the sword, the language of Ashura, the love of Imam Hosein and Karbala for granted and different from the 8 year of martyrdom phenomenon, then the Iran-Iraq war will remain nothing and no presentable word to learn. It is not just during the war that the miracle of the name of Imam Hosein and the effects of the Ashura made its messages come to the war front, rather, the victory of the Islamic revolution over the armed regime of Shah, while he benefited by the world powers, had its origins in the deep logic and message of Ashura which led to the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

It is clear for those who are aware of the history of Islam and especially in contemporary Muslim world that the spirit of Ashura and the revolting concept of it such as “freedom seeking, martyrdom seeking, fighting and revolting as well as resistance for the sake of God and self – sacrifice for the fulfillment of the divine goals all are indebted to the acts, thoughts and the works of Ayatollah Khomeini. As the spirit of Ashura and the message of Ashura as well as the lessons of Ashura, as well as role of other scholars have a great share in the advent and victory of the Islamic Revolution. In fact, Ayatollah Khomeini had also a great role and a huge share in the revitalization of the Ashura culture as well as cleansing of the superstition unreasonable ideas around this issue.

Generally martyrdom in Islam means; the death that human choose because of possible, certain or suspicious dangers only for a holy aim (goal) that the great Qur'an considered that as dying for God. Martyr has the specialties, characteristics and tempers that able them to die for God and their actions will influence the society and will be reminded and if the others make them as their own behavioral models, will be fortunate, that this behavioral model symbolize the martyrdom culture in any society. Therefore, the martyrdom culture is the martyr's characters, the way that their characters affect the society. This was the process that happened in Iran during the years of war with Iraq.

From the social and historical view points, the martyrdom phenomenon is also known not only just as a affection or an emotional item, but also as a wise manner in Islam. In Islamic culture specially the Shia, the Islamic history , Qur'an , Islamic texts, the event of karballa , the immaculate Imams and the other sunjects were so vital to study the Istishhadi phenomenon in Iran. Certainly, we can say that the Islamic system founded by

Ayatollah Khomeini will remain stable with the culture of martyrdom. Martyrdom is now playing an important role as a social phenomena in Iranian Society.

The Iranian 1979 Islamic revolution and later its eight year of war with Iraq were the events that martyrdom either in theory and practice has performed an enormous impact on the mind of Iranian society. The subject of martyrdom has entered to social arenas of the public spirit. By using its own meaning with Shia bases, now the martyrdom culture acting beyond time, place and happening in a special way in the Islamic culture and specially in Iran that attracts many researchers and scholars' attention to this issue. Explaining and studying the martyrdom and Istishhadi culture in Iran during the eight years of war was the main aim of this thesis.

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Chronology of Iran-Iraq War 1980- 1988

1980

3 February, Bani Sadr takes office as Iran's first president.

8 March, Iran withdraws its ambassador from Iraq.

1 April, Iraq's Deputy Premier, Tariq Aziz, escapes an Iranian attempt on his life.

15 April, Abortive attempt on the life of Iraq's Minister of Information.

May-August, Clashes along the Iran-Iraq border intensify.

4 September, Iran shells two Iraqi cities of Khanaghain and Mandali.

10 September, Iraq claims to have “liberated” some disputed territory.

17 September, Iraq abrogates the 1975 Algiers Agreement and declares it will exercise full sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab river.

23 September, Iraqi forces invade Iran.

28 September, Iraq halts at the outskirts of Ahvaz and-Susangerd; ready to accept a ceasefire.

5 October, Iraq seeks ceasefire; rejected by Iran.

6 October, Khorramshahr surrounded. Street fighting begins.

22 October, Abadan besieged by the Iraqis.

24 October, Khorramshahr falls.

25-26 October, Iraq fires missiles at Dezful.

30 November, Iranian aircraft attack Iraq's nuclear research centre at Tuwaitha.

7 December, Saddam Hussein announces that Iraq will hold the occupied territories but not advance further, and will resort to a defensive strategy.

24 December, First Iraqi air raid on Iran's main oil terminal at Khark Island in Persian Gulf.

1981

5-11 January, Major Iranian counteroffensives around Susangerd failed.

19-20 March, Unsuccessful Iraqi attempt to take Susangerd.

31 May, Iranian attack near Qasr-e-Shirin and Dehloran.

7 June, Israel destroys Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor.

20 June, President Bani Sadr removed from power by the Iranian Parliament.

28 June, Iraqi offer of a Ramadan ceasefire rejected.

27-29 September, Operation Thamenol-Aemme: Iran breaks siege of Abadan.

5 November, Iraq offers Muharram ceasefire. Rejected by the Iranians.

29 November - 7 December, Operation Jerusalem Way (Tarighol ghods); Iran retakes back Bostan, threatening to cut off f Iraqi forces in Susangerd.

12-16 December, Iranian offensive in the Qasr-e-Shirin area.

1982

22-30 March, Operation Undeniable Victory (fathol fotoh): Iranian offensive in Dezful and Shush area. Iraqi forces driven back.

10 April, Syria closes its oil pipeline to Iraqi oil.

12 April, Saddam Hussein announces Iraq will withdraw from Iran if it receives guarantees that this would end the war.

24 April - 25 May, Operation Jerusalem (beitol moghaddas) : Iran takes back most of Khuzestan province.

22 May, Khorramshahr liberated after two years.

10 June, Iraq announces a ceasefire; rejected by Iran.

12 June, UN resolution calls for a ceasefire.

20 June, Saddam announces that Iraqi troops will be withdrawn from all Iranian territories within ten days.

13 July - 2 August, Operation Ramadan: five Iranian offensives to capture Basra. Very small gains but large losses.

9 August, Separate ministry for the Revolutionary Guards Corps (Pasdaran) established.

1-10 October, Operation Muslim Ibn Aqil: directed against Baghdad and Mandali. Repulsed.

1-11 November, Operation Muharram: four Iranian offensives in the Amara area.
Made small gains but failed to penetrate deep into Iraq.

1983

6-16 February, Operation Before Dawn (valfajr): Iranian offensive in the southern sector in the Musian area. Failed.

10-17 April, Operation Dawn (valfajr): Iranian offensive in the southern sector near Amara. Failed.

7 June, Iraq proposes a ceasefire. Rejected by Iran.

27 July, Tariq Aziz announces Iraq will escalate attacks on oil installations in Iran.

22-30 July, Operation Dawn 2 (valfajr 2): Iranian offensive in Kurdistan. Advanced nine miles (14.5 km) inside Iraq and captured the garrison of Hajj Omran.

30 July - 9 August, Operation Dawn 3 (valfajr 3): Iranian offensive in the central front in the region of Mehran. Repulsed.

20 October - 21 November Operation Dawn 4 (valfajr 4): Iranian offensive in the northern sector aimed at taking Penjwin. Pushed a few miles into Iraq.

2 November, Iraq warns merchant vessels to avoid the 'war zone' at the northern end of the Gulf.

1984

Mid-February 'Oil Tanker war' begins.

7-22 February, First 'war of the cities'

15-24 February, Operations Dawn 5 and 6 (valfajr 5, 6): largest Iranian offensive in the war to date done within 150-mile (240 km) front between Mehran and Bostan area.

24 February - 19 March, Operation Khaibar: series of Iranian thrusts in the direction of Basra. Failed but capturing Majnun Island.

18-25 October, Operation Dawn 7 (valfajr 7): limited Iranian offensive on the central front (Mehran).

1985

28 January - early February, First Iraqi offensive since 1980 on the central front (Qasr-e-Shirin). Failed.

11-23 March, Operation Badr: Iranian offensive in the direction of Basra failed.

22 March - 8 April, Second war of the cities June Fighting on Majnun Island.

Mid-July, long Iranian operation in Kurdistan.

Mid-August-December, Iraqi aerial campaign against Khark Island. Approximately 60 raids.

1986

6-10 January, Iraqi attack on Majnun Island.

9-25 February, Operation Dawn 8 (valfajr 8): Iranian offensive on the southern front. Fao Peninsula captured.

14 February - 3 March Operation Dawn 9 (valfajr 9): Iranian offensive in Kurdistan.

Drove a few miles from Suleimaniya then pushed back.

25 February, UN resolution on a ceasefire.

12-14 May, Iraq captures Mehran. Offer to trade it for Fao dismissed by Iran.

30 June - 9 July, Operation Karbala 1: Iran recaptures Mehran.

3 August, Saddam announces a four-point peace plan.

12 August, Successful long-range air raid on Iran's oil terminal on Sirri Island (150 miles [240 km] north of the Strait of Hormuz).

31 August, Operation Karbala 2: Iranian offensive in Kurdistan.

1-23 September, Operation Karbala 3: Iranian offensive around the Fao Peninsula and Majnun Island.

25 November, Air raid on Iran's Larak Island oil terminal.

24-26 December, Operation Karbala 4: Iranian offensive in the direction of Basra.

1987

9 January - 25 February, Operation Karbala 5: a large Iranian offensive in the direction of Basra. It Failed with heavy casualties.

14-18 January, Operation Karbala 6: Iranian offensive in the Sumar area.

17-25 January, Third war of the cities February-April Fourth war of the cities.

12 February, Iranian Operation Fatah 4 begins in Kurdistan.

7 March, Operation Karbala 7: Iranian offensive in the Hajj Omran area in Kurdistan.

23 March, US offers to protect Kuwaiti tankers in the Gulf.

6 April, Kuwait suggests re-registration of some tankers to US ownership for protection, and seeks transfer of others to Soviet registry.

6-9 April, Operation Karbala 8: Iranian offensive in the direction of Basra.

9 April, Operation Karbala 9: Iranian offensive in the Qasr-e-Shirin area.

14 April, USSR announces it will lease three tankers to Kuwait so as to reduce Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti shipping.

15 April, Iran warns Kuwait against leasing tankers to outside powers.

6 May US, agrees in principle to re-register.

11 Kuwaiti, tankers under US flag.

20 July, UN Security Council passes Resolution 598 calling for ceasefire and withdrawal of Iranian and Iraqi forces to internationally recognized boundaries. Welcomed by Iraq and rejected by Iran for not naming Iraq as aggressor.

22 July, US Navy starts convoying Kuwaiti tankers flying US flag.

4 September, Iran fires missile at Kuwait; Kuwait expels 15 Iranian diplomats.

22 September, US ship attacks and captures Iranian mine-laying vessel with mines on board.

8-22 October, US sinks three Iranian patrol boats in the Gulf; Iran fires missiles at unprotected US-owned tankers; US destroys disused Iranian oil platform; Iraq attacks Kuwaiti oil terminal with Silkworm sea-to-sea missile.

1988

14-15 January, Iran attacks three tankers in two days.

29 February - 30 April, Fifth war of the cities.

15-16 March, Iraqi forces gas the Kurdish town of Halabja, killing thousands of civilians.

19 March, First Iranian-Kuwaiti military encounter as Iran attacks Bubiyan Island.

18 April, Iraq recaptures the Fao Peninsula after two days of heavy fighting; American warships sink six Iranian vessels.

25 May, Iraq recaptures territory around Salamcheh, held by Iran since January 1987.

25 June, Iraq drives Iranian forces from Majnun Island.

3 July, USS Vincennes shoots down Iranian airliner in the Gulf, mistaking it for a fighter.

13-17 July, Iraq pushes into Iranian territory for the first time since 1982, then withdraws its forces and offers peace.

17 July, Iran implicitly accepts a ceasefire by unconditionally accepting UN Resolution 598.

20 July, Ayatollah Khomeini's acceptance of a ceasefire broadcast on Tehran Radio.

Iraq continues the conflicts along the border.

20 August, Ceasefire begins.

24 August, Iranian and Iraqi foreign ministers open peace talks in Geneva.

Slogans among Iranian Soldiers in the war front.

- Ablution in Euphrates, pray in karbala.
- The last stage of faith is martyrdom.
- The last station of body is grave.
- Everlast the warriors whom brought nice scent to the fronts by their blood.
- Everlast the death in the way of GOD.
- Those who are martyred became like Hussein. Those who are remained should be like zeinab otherwise become like yazid.
- Those who came to know you (Allah) will devote themselves.
- The reward of jihad is martyrdom.
- When you are here, forget this world and remember the next world.
- Islam needs our blood.
- The most valuable death is martyrdom.
- If you want to be dearest, either be martyred or go far from your house.
- If the bullets tear my chest, it's Hussein inside.
- Either we kill them or they kill us we are the winners as we become martyrs.
- If the religion of Muhammad cannot be save but by my blood, so take my blood.
- You Imam (Khomeini), my heart is belong to you.

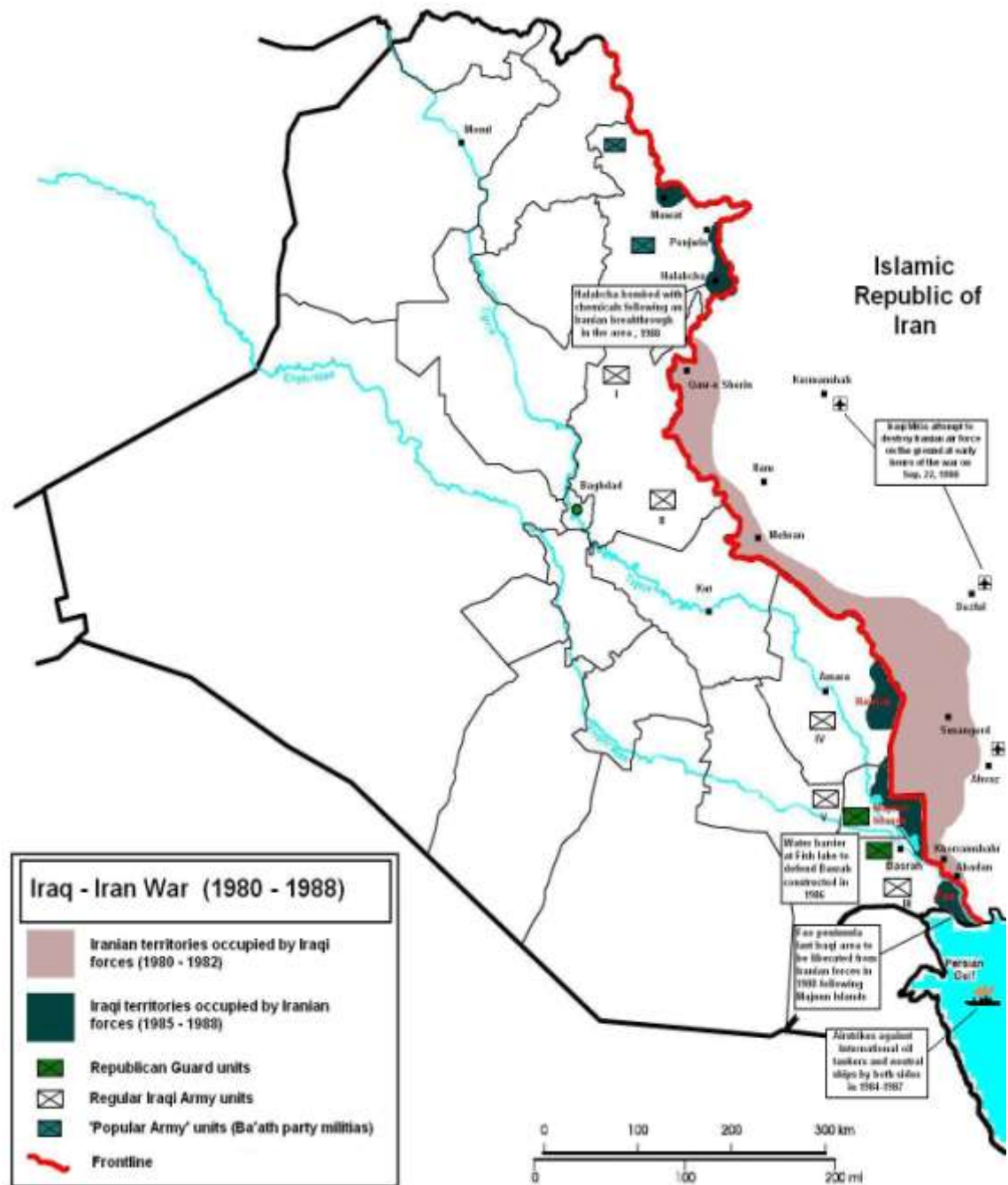
- Today, going to the front, is the religious duty.
- Jihad is one of the doors of heaven.
- Those who come to this banker come to the world of martyrs.
- God like those who kill (enemy) because of God (in the way of God).
- You, martyrs read al- hamd (verse of Quran) for us since you are ever last and we are the dead.
- Yes with you martyrs but not without you our dears.
- Where does this tore flower come? Back from the war of karbala.
- This is war is a blessing of God to us.
- Hey , You who found me, bury me the same place you found me and don't tell to anybody, where did you find me and how did you find me because I want to be unanimous and sincere in my action. (written on the shirt of a martyred soldier after the war operation)
- The market of this world does not have any value without the good of jihad and martyrdom.
- Fight and let us fight.
- If you keep ashura alive in your country, no one can damage your country. Imam Khomeini.
- Take ablution before coming to this holy banker because of previous martyrs live there before.

- You are close to heaven (war front).
- If you kill us we will be more conscious.
- Basiji is a bloody pigeons where this world is not a place for him.
- War is a responsibility not shooting bullets.
- Welcome to the banker makers of no banker.
- Sword does not bring the victory but the blood.
- Follow the martyrs and let others follow you.
- I put your picture on my above, means my head is nothing for you. (written on some bankers of martyrs. The picture refers to Imam Khomeini.
- The (war) front is the University of making people which martyrdom is its highest certificate.
- Not any drop is more valuable than a drop of a blood which pours on the way of God.
- Every breath of a man is one step closer to death.
- Left, the way to home. Right the way to martyrdom (signboard of war front)
- The sign of hosein is within our heart but the signature is out blood.
- The dowery of heaven is the divorce of earthy life.
- The lovers and waiters' of martyrdom.
- Death afraid of us.

- Our nation considers the martyrdom a great blessing. (Imam Khomeini)
- Ideology has martyrs cannot be defeated. (Imam Khomeini)
- Martyrdom is the most profitable deal with God. (Imam Khomeini)
- Martyrdom on the way of God is more beautiful than a golden necklace in the neck of pretty girls.
- The flowers of our city smell the beauty of our martyrs.
- Karbala, we are coming to you.
- Our culture is the culture of martyrdom. (Imam Khomeini)
- The sound of bullets and shells are everywhere in town, we will be martyred soon. Say al-hamd for anonymous martyrs of town. sign on the wall of howaizeh (city in war front)
- Wait for martyrdom but not compete for it. In warfront sign.
- The coast of peace needs the sea of martyrs.
- The door of heaven is always open for martyrs.
- God has angels in heaven and has basijis on earth.
- The name of hossein is our vision and martyrdom is our mission.
- When the end of the world come martyrs are selected among the best people.
- Revolution is like a sun which basiji is the light of it.
- I wish I could be a basiji. (Imam Khomeini)

- The men of God, wants martyrdom without any condition. (Ayatollah Motahari)
- If you want to be accepted in the university of martyrdom, you have to attend the war front class first.
- Basij is the sincere army of God (Imam Khomeini)
- Basij never wants bullets from the back.
- The sincere basiji is the carpet of tanks.
- The last mission of basiji is martyrdom.
- When your faith is completed, the honor of martyrdom arrives.
- I will kiss the red bullets bring the message of martyrdom.
- What is the best university rather than war front and what is the best course rather than martyrdom and what is the best lecturer rather than Imam Khomeini.
- Oh God, tell me how to live. I know how to die.
- My birthday is the date of my martyrdom.
- Sepah is flower and basij is its scent.
- The paradigm of revolution is jihad and martyrdom.
- Martyrdom is prosperity and martyrs are ever prosperous.
- Martyrdom is the border of right (haq) and wrong (batil)
- Martyrs are selected by God.

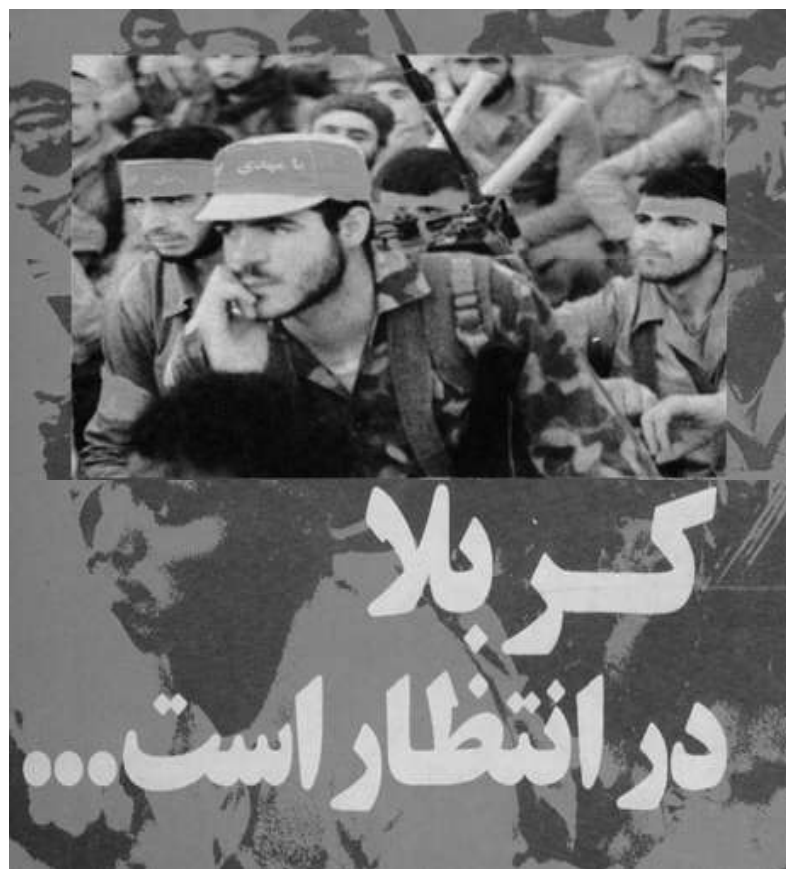
- Sincerity is in the heart of martyrs.
- Going to karbala needs the blood of martyrs.
- Our tribe is the tribe of martyrs. Those who are devotee can accompany us.
- We are the followers of hosein and martyrdom is out destiny.
- Martyrdom is an art and hosein is its main artist.
- Nothing can satiate the thirst of jihad unless the martyrdom.



The zone of the war



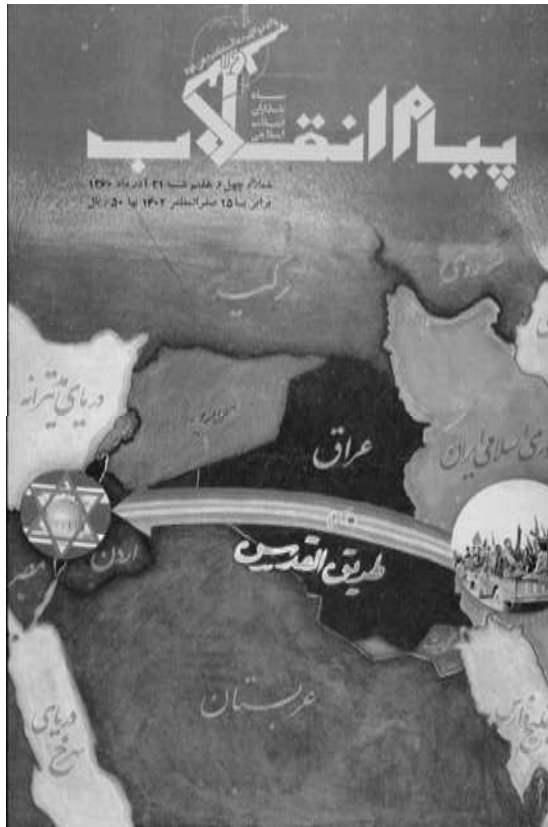
Persian Gulf Shipping Routes and Maritime Exclusion Zones
(From: Karsh, The Iran – Iraq War 1980 – 1988)



KARBALA IS WAITING...



ROAD TO KARBALA



PATH OF JERUSALEM

A photograph of this billboard is published in Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging*, 286.



IRGC EMBLEM



Donald Rumsfeld shakes hands with Saddam Hussein, on 20 December 1983. Source: The National Security Archive, 'Shaking Hands with Saddam Hussein: The U.S. Tilts toward Iraq, 1980-1984', <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB82/>, last update 25 February 2005. visited on 9 August 2006.



Reagan and Tariq Aziz meet at the White House and officially restore bilateral relations. Source: The National Security Archive, 'Iraqgate 1980-1994', <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/iraqgate/igp1.gif>, last update unknown, visited on 14 August 2006.



People mobilization for the war. (Azadi Stadium)



Iran's liberation of Khorramshahr in May 1982 drove the final nail in the coffin of the Iraqi invasion. Some 12,000 Iraqis became prisoners of war.



Pasdaran Revolutionary Guards



Here, a revolutionary guard using a motorcycle to monitor the destroyed Iraqi tanks.
The Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988 efrain karsh



Iranian Martyr of the war



A mother of a Basiji who is saying goodbye to him before leaving to war front.



The Khorramshahr's city signboard which stated that the population of this city is same as the population of the whole Iran. The symbol of resistance during the war.



A mother of three martyrs of Iran-Iraq war who posed the pictures of her son at the door of her house.



A young Basiji Soldier with the picture of Ayatollah Khomeini on his chest.



A picture of Martyred Basiji with the photo of Ayatollah Khomeini on his chest.



Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohammad Redzuan Othman on his visit
from a War zone in Bustan, southwest of Iran in late 1981.
Left; an Iranian Commander.



Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohammad Redzuan Othman standing in middle,
Visiting Ayatollah Meshkini and some Iranian Commanders in
City of Qom, late 1981.