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Iran's Irregular Warriors:

The Institution of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

By/par LCol Dave Yarker

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Iran plays a crucial role in world politics due to its strategic location between the Middle East and Asia and its ability to control the crucial Straits of Hormuz. In addition, its defiant anti-Western rhetoric and historic support of terrorism means that it posses a significant challenge to the West. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the Iranian regime has also displayed an uncommon willingness and ability to turn to irregular warfare with a surprising degree of success. Given the extreme rarity of successful state use of irregular warfare, Iran's ability to apparently institutionalise its use is worthy of closer examination. Furthermore, Iran's political structure is complex and confusing, even to experienced analysts. Within that confusing system the *Pasdaran* or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the most important military and security institution responsible for the conduct of irregular war.

Using Scott's model of institutional analysis this paper looks at the *Pasdaran*'s ability to conduct irregular war from three different points of view to conclude that within the model the Guards show well aligned support across the institutional pillars. The degree of support provided, as well as the degree to which the pillars are integrated, both explain the *Pasdaran's* success to date in institutionalising irregular war as well as highlighting some of the key sources of their ability to do so. Finally, the study also suggests that the *Pasdaran* may be in the middle of a process of maturation which could limit its future institutional capacity for the conduct of irregular war.

INTRODUCTION

Iran plays a crucial role in world politics due to its strategic location between the Middle East and Asia and its ability to control the crucial Straits of Hormuz. In addition, its defiant anti-Western rhetoric and historic support of terrorism means that it posses a significant challenge to the West. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the Iranian regime has also displayed an uncommon willingness and ability to turn to irregular warfare with a surprising degree of success. Given the extreme rarity of successful state use of irregular warfare, Iran's ability to apparently institutionalise its use is worthy of closer examination. Furthermore, Iran's political structure is complex and confusing, even to experienced analysts. Within that confusing system the *Pasdaran* or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the most important military and security institution responsible for the conduct of irregular war.

Throughout the last few years the IRGC have been consistently making headlines as they expand and consolidate their power.[1] Formed from a variety of armed revolutionary groups shortly after Khomeini's return to Iran, the *Pasdaran* exist to protect and solidify the gains of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Of particular interest is the *Pasdaran*'s ability to successfully integrate significant irregular warfare, even terrorist, elements into a large institutionalized force. Indeed, it is one of a very small number of institutions to have done so successfully. Some other potential examples of those who

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[1] "Clinton's Truth-Telling on Iran - the Boston Globe," http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2010/02/17/clintons_truth_telling_on_iran/ (accessed 2/20, 2010); Robert Burns, "Clinton: Iran Becoming a Military Dictatorship with the Guard Corps Supplanting Government," http://ca.news.yahoo.com/s/capress/100215/world/ ml_clinton_mideast_4 (accessed 2/20, 2010); Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran Steps Up Crackdown, Assaults Protesters at University of Tehran - Washingtonpost.Com," Washington Post, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/08/AR2009120801388.html?hpid=moreheadlines (accessed 2/23, 2010); and Fareed Zakaria, "Why Iran's Dictators can be Deterred," Washington Post, http://www.washingtonpost.com /wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/21/AR2010022102918.html (accessed 2/23, 2010).

have tried include Pakistan and Libya, but it is arguable that the former has been successful given its current struggle with the Taliban they helped create and the later has largely expunged irregular and terrorist warfare from its military.[2]

The purpose of this paper then is to eplain how and why the *Pasdaran* have been successful in their use of such tactics. There are numerous potential ways to approach the question, and this paper will use an institutional analysis framework to examine the *Pasdaran* from several angles or "lenses". By looking at the *Pasdaran* from the perspective of an Islamic, Persian and then Revolutionary institution, it will be shown that the Guards are particularly well suited for the conduct of irregular war.

IRAN IN THE WORLD

Over the past few years Iran has emerged as perhaps the key foreign relations challenge for the Western world. Iran's current status as world provocateur is based on the ideology of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 since which Iran's relations with the West have varied between poor and terrible. Despite the over thirty years that have passed since the Revolution, Iran's rhetoric remains very hostile towards the West and certainly under its current leadership it does not seem likely that relations will soften in the near future. Although there was a brief period of significant support to the West from Iran during the early days of the Afghanistan invasion this was thoroughly repudiated with the Karine-A incident and the inclusion of Iran in Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech.[3] In particular the Guards were very vocal in their anti-US rhetoric following the speech to the

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[2] Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (Spring, 2000), 67-92, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2658034. In addition China and the People's Liberation Army's "Unrestricted Warfare" could be considered the institutionalization of a form of irregular war.

[3] Gary Sick, "Iran: Confronting Terrorism," *Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (Autumn, 2003), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=10945266&site=ehost-live, 90.

extent that even the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, intervened to encourage moderation.[4]

From the perspective of this discussion, the Revolution also marks the formation of the

Pasdaran and the Iranian regime which it serves. This means that the character of the

institution of the *Pasdaran* is inextricably tied to that event and as such the Revolution is

a major topic of discussion throughout this paper. Indeed, the Revolution was very much

formed through the union of two very separate strands of culture – Shiite Islam and

Persian nationalism, strands that will form the basis of the structure of this analysis.

Against this backdrop, Iran has a history since the Revolution of being

exceptionally active in its support, and even conduct, of terrorism and other forms of

irregular warfare throughout the Middle East and the world.[5] Admittedly the term

irregular war is very broad, and even contentious. For the purposes of this paper the

focus will be on "classical" irregular warfare, comprising actions varying from

conventional special operations to terrorist activities. This paper will focus particularly

on the more difficult to institutionalise aspects towards the terrorist end of this spectrum.

Specifically this paper has not focussed on propaganda, information and psychological

operations. Within this spectrum Iran has frequently topped the United States' list of

countries sponsoring terrorism due to their support of foreign terrorists and the actions of

the *Pasdaran*.[6] In addition, the *Pasdaran* are also a key component of the military and

political establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and therefore represent a

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[4] Gregory F. Giles, "The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture," in *Know Thy Enemy: Profiles of Adversary Leaders and their Strategic Cultures*, eds. Jerrold M. Post and Barry R. Schneider (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2002), 156.

[5] See for example: Sick, *Iran: Confronting Terrorism*, 83.; Shaul Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005).

[6] "Country Reports on Terrorism," http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/ (accessed 3/14, 2010).

fascinating institution combining the conduct of terrorism and irregular war with formal state support.

INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS

Given the importance of the *Pasdaran* in Iran, and therefore to modern foreign policy, it should not be surprising that this is not the first study of the institution. There have been numerous studies of the *Pasdaran* adopting a wide range of approaches.[7] Two of the most recent from the RAND Corporation, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*[8] and *The Rise of the Pasdaran*,[9] provide an in depth narrative view of the history, structure, and societal place of the *Pasdaran* in modern Iran. Each of these is illuminating, and indeed thoroughly referenced throughout this study. They do not, however, attempt to explain why Iran, through the use of the *Pasdaran*, has so successfully continued to adopt irregular warfare despite the institutionalization of the Revolution. This study takes an alternate approach and seeks to ground an analysis of the *Pasdaran* within the theoretical framework of Institutional Analysis.

This is also not the first attempt to leverage institutional analysis to provide insight into the *Pasdaran*. Kenneth Katzman's in depth study of the Guards in *The Warriors of Islam* used Samuel Huntington's institutional analysis framework to

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[7] For instance: Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Steven R. Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Kenneth Katzman, "The Pasdaran: Institutionalization of Revolutionary Armed Force," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1993), http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310864; and Sepehr Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[8] David E. Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010).

[9] Frederic M. Wehrey, United States. Dept. of Defense. Office of the Secretary of Defense and National Defense Research Institute, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (Santa Monica: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009).

conclude as early as 1993 that the *Pasdaran* were indeed institutionalized.[10] He was

perhaps the first to note that despite beginning along the same path, the Guards did not

follow a typical trajectory for a revolutionary armed force in accordance with Katherine

Chorley's model of revolutionary armies.[11] In particular, he notes the somewhat unique

aspect of the Guards remaining political actors, long after parallel revolutionary military

forces have been professionalized.[12] Perhaps more important to modern analysis he

highlighted the crucial impact of informal ties between members of the Guard, presaging

one of the most essential points of *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads*.[13] Although some of

Katzman's conclusions have been questioned, there is general agreement that the

Pasdaran are one of the key institutions in Iran.[14] This paper does not aim to repeat

Katzman's analysis, but rather to build on his conclusion that the *Pasdaran* are indeed an

institution.

In addition, this paper seeks to build on a series of other successful applications of

institutional analysis to explain and illuminate the failure of various militaries to conduct

irregular war. These include Eric Ouellet's studies of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force[15]

and the Boxer Rebellion[16] as well as Eric Ouellet and Pierre Pahlavi's analysis of the

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[10] Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993).

[11] Ibid., 31-3.

[12] Ibid., 168-71.

[13] Ibid., 105-6, 119.

[14] James A. Bill, "The Challenge of Institutionalization: Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1993), 403-406, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310865, 404.

[15] E. Ouellet, "Institutional Analysis of Counterinsurgency: The Case of the IPKF in Sri Lanka (1987-1990)" (Chicago, 23-25 October, 2009).

French failure in Algeria.[17] In each of these cases a counterinsurgency failure can be adequately explained through reference to the institutional analytical framework proposed by Richard Scott.[18] The *Pasdaran*, rather than an example of a failure of counterinsurgency, are an example of a state institution's successful use of irregular war. As such, an examination of the *Pasdaran* using Scott's model not only illuminates the key factors that allow it to do so, but also points to potential areas of weakness within the institution.

Scott's Framework

Richard Scott proposes a three pillar intellectual model for the study of institutions and the broader frameworks in which they operate.[19] These three pillars include the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars. The first of these pillars, the regulative, examines the rules and structures that form the institution – both formally and informally. This includes not only the rules and structures themselves, but also the capacity to establish and enforce them.[20] The normative pillar on the other hand focuses on the institutional impact of the values and norms common within an institution, or what the institution inherently prefers and how it believes things should be done. It includes the constraints on social action, and what actions are particularly enabled or

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[16] Eric Ouellet, "Multinational Counterinsurgency: The Western Intervention in the Boxer Rebellion 1900-1901," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 3 (09, 2009), 507-527.

[17] Eric Ouellet and Pierre Pahlavi, *Institutional Analysis and Irregular Warfare: A Case Study of the French Army in Algeria, 1954-1960* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Forces College, 2009).

[18] W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations : Ideas and Interests*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 52.

encouraged.[21] Finally, the cultural-cognitive pillar examines the impact on the institution of "internal" cognitive frameworks and predispositions along with the way those frameworks interact with "external" cultural perspectives. It emphasizes the impact of mental processes on the way the world is perceived.[22]

Although these three pillars are presented separately within the framework they are not mutually exclusive and have significant impacts on each other. Indeed institutions function best where all three pillars are aligned and supportive. Where normative or cultural-cognitive elements either conflict with each other or with the regulative aspects of an institution, some degree of dysfunction is likely. In the studies of irregular war already mentioned, a misalignment between the pillars has been correlated to an inability to successfully integrate irregular war into military institutions.

Within this study the full depth of sociological thought present in Scott's analysis is not generally brought to bear. Specifically, this paper does not attempt to address rational-choice or alternate models. That said, Scott's three pillar model is used as a method of examining aspects of the *Pasdaran* that might otherwise go unconsidered. This is not to say that applying the model is without its challenges. In particular conducting institutional analysis on an organization like the *Pasdaran*, where few sources are available from within the institution, can be very difficult. Many sources of information that would ideally be used to conduct institutional analysis are unavailable or available only in Farsi. In particular, without honest information about the mindset of key participants it is exceptionally difficult to separate those actions arising from normative elements and cultural-cognitive elements. In the end however, whether an

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[21] Ibid., 54-5.

[22] Ibid., 56-8.

element is normative or cultural-cognitive matters little to the overall analysis since it is the degree of conformity between elements that is most essential – not their label.

Finally, there is much in Scott's theory regarding the nature of both the formation and modification of institutions, in particular the actions of institutional entrepreneurs. Although this paper will use several of these ideas, generally the intellectual depth provided by Scott has, by the necessity of space, been abbreviated. One key idea however that does resonate in this paper is that of institutional isomorphism, or the idea that in general institutions with similar functions will end up looking fairly similar.[23] Using this idea, generic norms for military forces in general, and revolutionary forces in specific, have been examined from the works of Theo Farrell[24] and Katherine Chorley[25] respectively. These are discussed largely in Chapter 3 examining the *Pasdaran* as a Revolutionary institution, but some amplification, particularly of Chorley's work, is included in the appendices. In addition, Scott's recognition that institutions are also built from the ground up[26] is a key justification for the detailed look at the broad cultural impacts of Shiite Islam and Persian nationalism in the next two chapters. Finally, this paper examines the institution as situated within a very broad cultural context and so the paper generally adopts an open system perspective, although the analysis has by no means been specifically limited to such a view point.[27]

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[23] Ibid., 152-5.

[24] Theo Farrell, *The Norms of War : Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

[25] Katharine Campbell (Hopkinson) Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973; 1943).

[26] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations : Ideas and Interest*s, 103.

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The *Pasdaran* are a complex organization consisting of numerous subcomponents which have been in existence for over thirty years. Furthermore, the Guards are buried in a culture with nearly three thousand years of recorded history and as such the number of possible influences on the institution is enormous. In an attempt to break down these influences this analysis will examine the *Pasdaran* through three separate institutional lenses. The influences of Shiite Islamic ideology on the *Pasdaran* are examined first, since this not only provides the most coherent picture, but also represents how the *Pasdaran* present them-selves to the world, namely as an Islamic institution. Following this the *Pasdaran* will be examined as a Persian institution to elucidate key factors coming from the deeply held nationalistic culture of Iran. Finally, the *Pasdaran* will be examined as a purely Revolutionary institution. Although not totally arbitrary, there are certainly numerous other potential ways to divide the problem. These were selected to correspond to the major formative elements of the *Pasdaran* based on its requirement to defend a Revolution founded on a blended view of Islam and Persian nationalism. Within each of these institutions the various pillars of Scott's framework will be examined in parallel. By selecting a key influence on the institution each chapter will examine its impact on the **regulative, normative**, and **cultural-cognitive** pillars of Scott's model. Likewise within each lens the degree of coherence and alignment between the pillars will also be considered, with some final comment at the end of the paper about the overall convergence of the pillars.

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[27] W. Richard Scott and Gerald F. Davis, *Organizations and Organizing : Rational, Natural, and Open Systems Perspectives*, 1st ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007).

As with each of Scott's pillars, the institutional lenses are not mutually exclusive and there is plenty of room for debate as to which elements are clearest through each lens. Khomeini's development of the *veleyat-e faqih*, or rule of the qualified jurist, is an excellent case in point. The doctrine of the *faqih* is an innovation of Shiism but Khomeini used the concept as a core part of the revolutionary doctrine and indeed some have identified it as the centre of gravity for the regime.[28] This paper largely discusses the *faqih* as a Shiite element, but it is also discussed as a revolutionary element. That said, as with Scott's pillars, in the end the impact on the institution as a whole will exist regardless of which chapter a given factor is discussed in.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps represents a key institution in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and an institution which is almost uniquely enabled to conduct irregular warfare. An institutional analysis examining the *Pasdaran* using three different lenses demonstrates that the Guards have strong integrated support across Scott's three pillars, suggesting a good capacity for the conduct of irregular war. In addition, viewing the *Pasdaran* through the different lens provides useful insight into the factors that have allowed it to so successfully institutionalize the use of irregular war.

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[28] Giles, *The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture*, 158.

CHAPTER 1 – THE *PASDARAN* AS AN ISLAMIC INSTITUTION

Although it can be difficult to firmly differentiate the various elements that make up an institution, this paper will look at the *Pasdaran* from three different perspectives: as an Islamic, Persian, and Revolutionary institution. Obviously these categories cannot be completely separated from one another, but viewing each institution in turn provides an opportunity to examine facets of the *Pasdaran* that may otherwise go unnoticed. Generally, as an Islamic institution the *Pasdaran* have coherent support across the pillars for the conduct of irregular war. Beginning with a broad view of the history of Islam this Chapter will then move on to consider the specific impacts of Shiism, the Islamic Way of War, with a particular focus on the culture of martyrdom, and finally Khomeini's innovation of the *veleyat-e faqih*.

Before beginning, however, it is worth noting one potential challenge in viewing the *Pasdaran* as an Islamic institution. It is exceptionally difficult to separate Shiism from Persian culture since some have more or less defined Shiism as Persian Islam.[29] In addition, the Islamic Republic was very much formed from the uniting of these two strands of culture – Shiite Islam and Persian nationalism. Shiism is a religion of the persecuted minority, wary of neighbours, whereas in Persian culture Iran is "the 'center of the universe', a society that should be emulated by the Arab masses."[30] In fact, Khomeini did not see the revolution as Persian, or Iranian, but rather insisted that the "revolution is

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[29] As discussed in Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006), 79.

[30] Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Times Book, 2006), 81.

an Islamic Revolution and not an Iranian one."[31] As such, an examination of the

Pasdaran as an Islamic institution is worthwhile, even if some overlap with the other

institutions is inevitable.

ISLAM

As the well known Middle-East expert Bernard Lewis has said, Islam is "more

than fourteen centuries of history, a billion and a third people, and a religious and cultural

tradition of enormous diversity."[32] Any summary of Islam presented here must therefore

only skim the surface and will naturally miss much that others will feel is important.

That said, the aim is to present those elements of Islam that may influence the *Pasdaran*

as an institution conducting irregular war. Any institution formed in Iran can reasonably

be assumed to have significant Islamic, and particularly Shiite, influences. Naturally,

such influences would be greatly exaggerated in the case of an institution that was

explicitly Islamic as in the case of the *Pasdaran*. It is clear that the vast majority of the

leadership joined for ideological and religious reasons.[33]

Islam, unlike modern western religions, is not merely a faith. Unlike Judaism and

Christianity, which are otherwise similar to Islam in many ways, Islam is fundamentally

inseparable from politics. Islam from its founding was simultaneously a religious

grouping and a political one and Muhammad was both a prophet and a head of state.[34]

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[31] Khomeini as quoted in Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 26.

[32] Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam : Holy War and Unholy Terror*, Modern Library ed. (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 3.

[33] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 246.

[34] Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam : Holy War and Unholy Terror*, 6-10. Indeed, Muhammad was also a war leader, and certainly his early campaigns included significant raids and other irregular warfare actions. See for instance John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1993), 193; Moojan

From the founding of Islam then there is a close alignment of the **regulative** functions of politics with the **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** functions of religion. Specifically with the *Pasdaran* this implies that there would be great difficulty separating the *Pasdaran* as an Islamic institution from the *Pasdaran* as a political institution. Given that terrorism, as one form of irregular war, is by its nature political it is likely that only a political institution could adequately conduct it. The **cultural-cognitive** impact of Islam demanding a political engagement therefore provides support to the conduct of at least this form irregular war. Indeed, Khomeini once went as far as to state that "Islam is politics or it is nothing."[35]

Shiism

As an Islamic institution however, the *Pasdaran* are not merely Islamic, but Shiite. The vast majority of Iran, and likely an even greater portion of the *Pasdaran,* are Shi'a. Even if, as some have argued, the bulk of the *Pasdaran* are not extreme Islamist ideologues,[36] they are certainly Shiite and can be considered at least as devout as the rest of the Iran. This may at first seem to be a minor point, but it is an essential **cultural-cognitive** factor that increases the cohesion of the institution. The strength of this cohesion, aided by other factors to be discussed, reinforces the other influences of Shiism on the institution. What is interesting to note here is that, as Ray Takeyh, a prominent commentator on the Middle East with the Council on Foreign Relations, puts it – it is

Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 6-7; and John Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 22; as well as a broader treatment in Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[35] Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam : Holy War and Unholy Terror*, 8.

[36] United Kingdom Border Agency, *Country of Origin Information Report - Iran,* http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/iran-070809.doc, (accessed 26 Feb 2010), 51.

"easy to be an ex-Marxist, but very difficult to be an Ex-Shiite"[37], particularly when the

penalty for apostasy is death.

Khomeini very deliberately used Shi'a cultural references in his construction of

the revolution and therefore they feature prominently in the *Pasdaran*.[38] Indeed,

Khomeini carefully managed his rise to power to be the "embodiment and fulfillment of

numerous Shi'i themes on which the people of Iran had been raised from childhood."[39]

This included an underlying cultural impulse to fight injustice. Khomeini also explicitly

based the revolution, and therefore the formation of the *Pasdaran*, on Shiite metaphors,

using the imagery of Shiism to frame the revolution.[40] This was particularly explicit

when he stated that "everywhere is Karbala and every day is Ashura",[41] calling on two of

the most potent images of sacrifice and fighting injustice in Shiism. These Shiite

elements provide strong **normative** influences on the *Pasdaran*. The influence of this

utilisation of Shiite imagery can be clearly seen in the *Pasdaran* dominated Hezbollah,

who have cleverly manipulated Shiism by reviving key Shi'a ceremonies

commemorating Imam Hussein's struggle and unjust murder while simultaneously

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[37] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 22.

[38] There is room for debate regarding which elements of Khomenei's philosophy are Shiite, Islamic, or Revolutionary. This paper has adopted the approach of viewing Khomeini's philosophy as largely Shiite. There are, or course, numerous other strands of Shiite philosophy and Khomenei's is hardly universally accepted. For one discussion regarding different versions of "revolutionary" and "monarchist" Shiism see Christian Pahlavan, "Islamisme Contre Iranité : L'Iran Assassiné," *Politique Internationale*, no. 10 (hiver 1980/1981), 191-201.

[39] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 288.

[40] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 121, 132.

[41] Khomeini as quoted in Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 288.

equating Israel with those who killed him.[42] The specific instances where this influence affects the conduct of irregular warfare are discussed in more detail below.

This paper is far too short to describe in depth the tenets, doctrines, and beliefs of the Shi'a and as such any comments provided here can only be a summary of a stereotype. That said, there are several key supports for both **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** pillars of the *Pasdaran* tied to this essential part of their existence. Two of the most important are the centrality of martyrdom, which is discussed in more detail below, and Shiite resistance to illegitimate authority.[43] In addition, "Islam for the Shi'is is, even more than for Sunnis, a religion of rituals, obligations and prohibitions."[44] This **cultural-cognitive** habit of following obligations and prohibitions has the effect of enabling a strong justification of irregular war when and where it can be aligned with existing obligations and prohibitions, or where new obligations can be developed. Throughout this Chapter examples will be used to show that, on balance, the obligations and prohibitions assist in the conduct of the asymmetric activities the *Pasdaran* have undertaken.

One such factor that provides **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** support for asymmetric warfare is the fact that Shiism includes decentralized power. Indeed, numerous authors have noted that there is no one "pope" like figure for Shiites, rather there are numerous *marja al-taqlid* or "sources of emulation" from which religious doctrine is promulgated. Indeed, Shiite Islam is characterized by "decentralised power,

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[42] Augustus Richard Norton, "Hizballah and the Israeli Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 1 (Autumn, 2000), 22-35, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2676479, (accessed 17/12, 2009), 25.

[43] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 43.

[44] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 233.

independent-minded clerics, and seminaries that vehemently disagree with one another."[45] From a **cultural-cognitive** approach this could allow the *Pasdaran* to accept whatever **regulative** rulings and Islamic philosophies that best support their desired actions. A potential counter-veiling factor however, is that this influence may be lessened within the Guards by their extreme loyalty to Khomeini who was indeed very nearly a "Pope" like figure.[46] Nevertheless there is a **cultural-cognitive** predisposition in Shiite society towards both permitting and managing debate over religious disagreements. This trait may become more important as the direct influence of the personality of Khomeini wanes with time.

Another key aspect of the Shi'a tradition in the *Pasdaran* goes to its roots as a revolutionary organisation. Although the formation and the specific impacts of the Revolution on the *Pasdaran* will be left to be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, it is useful to note that the revolution itself was heavily influenced by the **cultural-cognitive** aspect of Shi'a ideology which celebrates resistance, even impossible resistance, against injustice. This general belief sees the current world order as unjust and organized to favour the Western powers. Against this injustice heroic, even potentially self destructive, actions are not only warranted but encouraged and even celebrated in Shiite ideology.[47] This tendency strengthens the resolve and even enables the conduct of actions that could be considered foolish or self-destructive, providing the *Pasdaran* with

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[45] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 29.

[46] Indeed Khomeini's doctrine of the *veleyat-e faqih* which is discussed in more depth later provides additional support for the idea that the *Pasdaran* do not gain the full advantage of the variety of Shiite ideologies since they follow Khomeini's much narrower version. That said, this aspect of Shiite culture nevertheless remains engrained in the culture.

[47] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 13.

enormous **cultural-cognitive** flexibility to pursue irregular methods that might otherwise be unthinkable.

Another key cultural aspect of the Shi'a is their general rejection of majority rule.[48] There are several reasons for this, including a long history as a minority, and that "truth is vested not in the community of believers but in the virtuous leadership of the Prophet and his descendents", unlike the rest of Islam.[49] This rejection of the validity of majority rule enables and supports much of what the *Pasdaran* do, particularly their ability to act against not only Iranian majorities, but also to freely reject world opinion and condemnation of their actions. Given the degree of world wide scorn that the *Pasdaran* have faced this **cultural-cognitive** support certainly has assisted in the conduct of irregular warfare.

Islamic Way of War

Given the military nature of the *Pasdaran*, in analysing it as Islamic institution the Islamic way of war naturally features heavily. Indeed, within the Islamic tradition, from both a **regulative** and a **cultural-cognitive** perspective, the causes of war cannot be separated from the will of God and therefore the religious impacts of how war is fought are essential to the *Pasdaran*.[50] After beginning with a basic outline of some of the tenets of Islamic war the specific influences of just and unjust war concepts will be discussed along with the issue of justifying actions beyond Iran itself. A few specific norms of the conduct of Islamic war will be discussed, along with their impact on the

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[48] This is not to suggest a deep democratic belief within Islam, merely that Sunni Islam includes key elements of loyalty directly to the *umma* or community of believers. Shiism on the other hand requires loyalty to the Imams (descendents of the Prophet) and not to the community as a whole.

[49] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 51.

[50] S. K. Malik, *The Quranic Concept of War*, 1st ed. (Lahore: Wajidalis, 1979), 142.

Pasdaran as an Islamic institution and this will be followed by an examination of the impact of the culture of martyrdom on the *Pasdaran* within Iran.

The phrase "Islamic Way of War" is generally used in two different connotations, both of interest to this paper. The first is to capture the generic approach to war within the Islamic tradition. The second, discussed later in this chapter, is a specific doctrine developed by the *Pasdaran* during the Iran-Iraq War. Within the Islamic tradition "the object of war is to obtain conditions of peace, justice and faith. To do so, it is essential to destroy the forces of oppression and persecution."[51] The core of Islamic military strategy however is "to strike terror into the hearts of our enemies, known or hidden, while guarding … from being terror-stricken by the enemy".[52] Indeed the imposition of terror on an opponent is the goal, rather than a potential tool in the psychological defeat or physical destruction of an enemy as in western thought. This does not imply that Islamic strategy is dominated by terror tactics. In fact, Islamic law provides significant protections to civilians as well as limitations on the conduct of war. However, even if the function of these maxims was intended to support conventional strategy, they can certainly be taken to provide **regulative** (religious approval) and **cultural-cognitive** support for irregular war. "Whatever the form or type of strategy directed against the enemy, it must, in order to be effective, be capable of striking terror into the hearts of the enemy."[53]

The second connotation of the phrase Islamic Way of War is no less important in understanding the *Pasdaran* as an institution. Although future chapters will discuss in

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[51] Ibid., 35.

[52] Ibid., 58.

[53] Ibid., 60.

detail the formation of the *Pasdaran* in the crucible of the Iran-Iraq war, one key element to come out of that conflict was a new tactical doctrine referred to as the Islamic Way of War. This tactic relied on large groups of *Pasdaran* or *Basij* either lightly armed or not armed at all, to swarm over strong Iraqi defences accepting horrendous causalities to gain the position through their fanatical devotion. Preparation for these attacks focussed on the development of the spirit of martyrdom rather than detailed military planning. In particular, the success of the *Pasdaran* in April 1981 in regaining the initiative during the Qasr-e Shirin offensive using human wave attacks led to their adoption as a key tactic throughout the war.[54] Although such tactics were enabled by the culture of martyrdom of the *Pasdaran*, their enshrinement in *Pasdaran* doctrine provides **regulative** support for their conduct, and the conduct of similar activities. In addition, at a **cultural-cognitive** level, Khomeini's "militant disciples equated caution and planning with lack of revolutionary commitment."[55] Overall the adoption of human wave tactics by the *Pasdaran* provides evidence of an alignment of **regulative** and **cultural-cognitive** pillars in the pursuit of its goals through fanatical attacks.

Just War and Imposed War

This is not to suggest that all factors related to the Islamic norms of warfare strengthen the various pillars of the *Pasdaran* institution. Indeed one potential weak spot is tied to the fundamental doctrine of Shiism. Within Islam, when an offensive war or *jihad* is declared by an appropriate authority it becomes a religious obligation. Under Shiite theology though only the Imams held the requisite authority so until the *Mahdi*

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[54] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Force*s, 254.

[55] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 91.

returns the Shi'a do not recognise any temporal authorities as authorised to direct *jihad*.[56]

Much of the standard Islamic jurisprudence of warfare must therefore be considered

through a Shiite lens. Although there remain circumstances under which Shiite war is

legal, the boundaries are much more confined, theoretically providing greatly reduced

cultural-cognitive and **normative** legitimacy of some of the *Pasdaran*'s activities.

Of course Shiism is not pacifistic, and the *Pasdaran* are still a military force.

Khomeini frequently used religious and ideology to justify the use of violence (and war)

to promote the goals of Islam.[57] Despite Shiite restrictions on offensive war, the use of

violence is not only authorised in the defence of the community but is mandatory in that

case. Under these conditions war is not considered to have been started by the Shi'a, but

rather "imposed" on them. The language used by Iranian leadership during the 1980s is

important – the term "Imposed War" when used to describe the Iran-Iraq War is more

than simple media "spin", but an essential element of justifying the war in Shiite Islamic

terms. This is underlined by the fact that the Iran-Iraq war was not defined as *jihad* by

the ruling elites, but rather as *defa*,[58] or a "sacred defense"[59] imposed by Iraqi hostility to

Islam. Overall then, Islam does provide **regulative** justification for war, but Shiism only

supports such justifications in the defence of Islam.

The conduct of the Imposed War by Iran further highlights other **normative** and

cultural-cognitive aspects of Shiism. As has already been discussed, given that the

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[56] Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 38; and
Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 180.

[57] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 87.

[58] Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 39, 49.

[59] Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls : Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*
(Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 44.

defensive war was imposed by Iraq, Iran could argue that the fighting was indeed a religious duty.[60] Culturally the war was framed in Iran through religious ideology, and specifically Shiite ideology, as a spiritual mission for moral purposes.[61] Iran seems to have fought the war generally in accordance with Islamic principles, on occasion even when these principles were counter to sound strategic thinking.[62] One such example is the fact that advice from the regular Army was frequently overruled and ignored during the early phases of the war in favour of the *Pasdaran*.[63] Indeed, Khomeini went so far as to tell the President at the time, Bani-Sadr, that a key counter offensive would be considered *haram*, or religiously forbidden, if it did not include the *Pasdaran* and their irregular approach.[64] Such mixing of religious direction and military conduct underlines both the depths of the **regulative, normative** and **cultural-cognitive** impacts of Shiism on the *Pasdaran* and the degree which they generally supported each other in the pursuit of irregular tactics. Another example of Iran's maintenance of Islamic principles is the fact that Iran avoided the use of chemical weapons in the war, despite the fact that they possessed them[65] and that Iraq used them extensively.[66] A final example in the same vein is the fact that the Guards were hesitant to target Islamic civilian targets entitled to

[60] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 180 Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 38.

[61] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 170.

[62] Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 50.

[63] Yonah Alexander and Milton Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 19.

[64] Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 172.

[65] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 318.

[66] Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 50.

protection under Islamic law.[67] All of this suggests that, where permitted under Islamic

principles, rather than international law, the *Pasdaran* have significant **normative** and

cultural-cognitive support for irregular activities.

War Beyond Iran's Borders

To examine the nature of the Shiite restrictions on war a little closer would be to

suggest, at first glance, severe limitations on the ability of the institution to fight an

effective ongoing asymmetric conflict, particularly beyond the immediate defence of

Iran. To explain why this is not the case it is important to examine two factors – the first

is where the right to defensive warfare comes from, and the second is who the aggrieved

parties are. To begin with Khomeini argued that defensive war was authorised to fight

both the Shah and Saddam due to their assaults on Islam. The Shah due to allowing the

Americans into Iran and Saddam due to his anti-Shiite secular approach in Iraq.[68] The

second point is that from Khomeini's perspective, as well as the *Pasdaran's*, Iran was not

the aggrieved party – but rather Islam was. Although this point is certainly debateable,[69]

from the point of view of Khomeini and the *Pasdaran* this justified not only the

Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war but also provided a powerful **normative** justification for

the conduct of further operations against others who threaten Islam beyond the borders of

Iran. This is even explicitly embedded as a **regulative** aspect in the Iranian constitution

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[67] Ibid., 74-5.

[68] Ibid. 38-9, 49-50.

[69] The key nature of the debate is, as discussed earlier, the degree of similarity or difference between the Shiism of the ideology espoused by Khomeini and other thinkers of the Revolution (including principally Shariati) on one hand and "mainstream" Shiism on the other. See for instance Pahlavan, *Islamisme Contre Iranité : L'Iran Assassiné*, 191-201.; Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*; and Shahrough Akhavi, "The Ideology and Praxis of Shi'Ism in the Iranian Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 2 (Apr., 1983), 195-221, http://www.jstor.org/stable/178650.

which states that the Islamic Republic "must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world."[70]

In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Iranian constitution gives the *Pasdaran* the **regulative** task of aiding oppressed people throughout the world. Although this may sound like typical anti-colonialism, Shiite Islam imbues the specific term used, *mostazafan*, with additional meaning. Throughout history the Shiites have viewed themselves as oppressed by illegitimate authorities and therefore Shiite culture includes a responsibility to challenge illegitimate authority.[71] This **cultural-cognitive** aspect of Shiite culture again lends weight to the desire and justice of defending the oppressed against illegitimate rulers wherever they are with whatever means necessary, including irregular war.

Throughout this chapter, evidence has been provided that the *Pasdaran* are firmly an Islamic institution that includes significant support across Scott's pillars, particularly **cultural-cognitive** and **normative,** for the conduct of irregular warfare. Before moving on to address Martyrdom, which is perhaps the largest cultural enabler of irregular warfare within Shiism, there are a few specific tactics of irregular war for which Shiism is important. These include assassination, hostage taking, and the particular nature of the state of Israel.

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[70] "Islamic Republic Constitution - Chapter I [Article 1 to 14] General Principles," http://www.salamiran.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=41&Itemid=77 (accessed 3/18, 2010), Article 11.

[71] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 43.

Assassination

Although it would be easy to make too much of the origin of the word assassin as having Shiite Islamic origins,[72] it is true that fanatical violence directed at individuals has a long history within Shiite Islam. Indeed, more recently assassinations have been a significant aspect of Iranian political discourse since the beginning of the 20th century, carrying if not a degree of acceptance, certainly a degree of normality.[73] This **normative** background in the use of assassination could certainly be assumed to contribute to the ability to conduct similar operations by the *Pasdaran*. Indeed, other Iranian agencies made extensive use of assassination throughout the 1990s in pursuit of perceived enemies of the Revolution abroad.[74] Although recently such means may have been used less frequently, the historical **normative** acceptance of assassination would certainly provide support for the conduct of irregular and asymmetric activities.

Hostages

One place where there is a counter-veiling influence suggesting some degree of conflict between two of Scott's pillars can be seen in the *Pasdaran's* use of hostages. Shiite jurists are clear that taking hostages is forbidden.[75] This is not to say that the *Pasdaran* have not made effective use of the taking of hostages, Iranian influence on the

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[72] Indeed the word originates from the Persian term *Hashshashin* which refered to a Shiite sect which frequently used assassination to further their political and religious goals in the Middle Ages. See for example: Wikipedia contributors, "Hashshashin," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashshashin (accessed 2/16, 2010).

[73] Sepehr Zabih, "Aspects of Terrorism in Iran," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 463 (Sep., 1982), 84-94, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1043613, 85-6, 91; and Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 110-2.

[74] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 10.

[75] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 100; and Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 109.

taking of hostages in Lebanon during the 80s is well known, and was a very effective tool. Not only did the use of hostages give Iran leverage against the US, it specifically enabled them to obtain modern weapons and equipment for which it was desperate (through the Iran-Contra dealings).[76] More recently Iran's taking of British sailors and then holding them for a considerable period is another example. Although it is likely that the *Pasdaran* held the hostages for domestic political considerations it does not change the fact that once again they made effective use of hostages as an asymmetric tool to obtain their goals.[77] Overall then it could be said that the **normative** approach of the *Pasdaran* to the use of hostages (they are effective and will be used) is somewhat at odds with the **cultural-cognitive** expectations based on Shiism. There was an attempt to argue that the hostages were all spies for the West,[78] but it seems likely that this fiction can at best mitigate the impact of this misalignment.

The Israel Question

It is in countering Israel, and what they perceive as Zionism more broadly, that the *Pasdaran* have resorted to irregular warfare most regularly since their inception. This is not to say that Israel has been their only target, merely that Israel has been the most consistent target for irregular and even outright terrorist acts supported by, or perpetrated by, the *Pasdaran*. Indeed, the *Pasdaran* have even called their international branch the *Qods*, or "Jerusalem", Force. There are numerous reasons, tied to its existence as an Islamic institution why this would be so. The first and largest is that there is a coherent

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[76] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 50-2.

[77] Juan Cole, "Iran's New Hostage Crisis - Iran - Salon.Com," http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/feature/2007/04/03/iran (accessed 3/18, 2010).

[78] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 117.

argument, valid for both Sunni and Shi'a, that it is a **regulative** duty of every Shi'a to fight against Israel. This is tied to the fact that the holy lands are, in Islamic terms, clearly Islamic lands whose rulers are no longer valid Islamic rulers. As such, even under Shiite theology there is an obligation to fight.[79]

Beyond this relatively simplistic requirement however the *Pasdaran* have numerous other issues with Israel. Anti-Israeli sentiment in Iran is also fuelled by Israel's historic support of the hated Shah. It is clear that Khomeini had an issue with even the existence of Israel, a feeling not uncommon among senior Iranian leaders.[80] Another Shiite characteristic is a deeply held cultural requirement for a scapegoat to blame for current suffering. In the recent history of Shiism the scapegoat for all that is wrong in the world has become the Zionists, Israel and their supporters.[81] This provides a significant **cultural-cognitive** driver for the use of any means necessary to write the wrongs inflicted by the scapegoat. Even the vastly more moderate President Khatami, whose statements with respect to the United States were relatively even handed, could not temper his comments against Israel.[82] Although there are Realpolitik reasons for Iranian rhetoric against Israel, including a desire to move attention away from domestic political realities, there is also a deeply held view that, as an Islamic state, Iran should lead anti-Israeli sentiment.[83] Indeed members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were some of the first foreigners received by Khomeini after the revolution, and were

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[79] Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 99-100.

[80] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 194-6.

[81] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 237.

[82] Peter Jones, *Iranian Security Policies at the Crossroads?*, 50th ed. (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies, 2003), 15.

[83] Sick, *Iran: Confronting Terrorism*, 95.

given the Israeli embassy in Tehran for their own.[84] Although this **cultural-cognitive**

aspect only assists in the conduct of irregular warfare against one opponent it would not

be unreasonable to assume the conduct of such acts against one opponent would lessen

any **normative** bias against irregularly warfare overall.

Terrorism

No discussion of Iran and the *Pasdaran* can really be complete with a word on

terrorism and yet even defining terrorism can be exceptionally difficult. For the purposes

of what is presented here terrorism can be considered as those violent actions taken

outside recognised war to intimidate a population to achieve a political or social goal.[85]

To begin with, it is clear that the *Pasdaran* have effectively and repeatedly turned to

terror tactics in an attempt to achieve its goals. Indeed, "although terrorism is historically

a weapon of the weak and oppressed, the Guard devoted considerable resources to make

such unconventional operations an important element of Iran's overall national military

strategy."[86]

From an Islamic perspective much has been written on whether or not there is a

justification for the conduct of terrorism contained within Islam. Despite the fact that

Iran has occasionally called for Hezbollah to "display prudence and self-restraint"[87] and

President Khatami explicitly rejected terrorism,[88] there is more evidence for support of

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[84] Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, 348.

[85] There are numerous potential definitions, this one is based heavily on the FBI definition: "Federal Bureau of Investigation - Terrorism - Denver Division " http://denver.fbi.gov/nfip.htm (accessed 3/17, 2010).

[86] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 303.

[87] Sick, *Iran: Confronting Terrorism*, 85.

[88] Ibid., 89.

terror tactics. From a **regulative** perspective the Quran statement *"And slay them where you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you; for persecution is worse than slaying"* is often taken as legitimizing terror activities against the Western world.[89] In addition Khamenei has openly endorsed terrorism as both valid and understandable.[90] From a **normative** perspective the praise frequently given to those who conduct terrorist activities by senior Iranian officials is aligned to this overall support.[91] Terrorism then, even if many Islamic scholars reject it, remains validated within the Islamic institution of the *Pasdaran*. Indeed, the link between the support of terrorism and the support of Martyrdom, which will be discussed next, is strong.

MARTYRDOM

Another key **normative** factor in Shiite culture is the notion of martyrdom or *shahadat*.[92] Although martyrdom has a history in many world religions, including Christianity, its roots in Islam are particularly strong. Yet even within the Islamic world martyrdom has an even deeper meaning to the Shi'a. Not only are all of the holy Imams considered to have been martyred, but the Shi'a have been persecuted throughout history.[93] A core Shiite belief is that Imam Hussein intentionally chose martyrdom at Kabala as "as an expression of his love for Allah and out of his desire to defend his

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[89] Quran 2:192 quoted in Haroon Siddiqui, *Being Muslim* (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2008), 128.

[90] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 191.

[91] Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, 347.

[92] In particular Ali G. Dizboni provides an indepth analysis of the historical place of martyrdom within Islam and Shiism in particular at Ali G. Dizboni, "Le Concept De Martyre En Islam," *Théologiques* 13, no. 2 (automne 2005), 69-81 (accessed 29 March 2010).

[93] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 57.

faith."[94] His death is the supreme example of chivalry and courage and is certainly

viewed as something to emulate.[95] To this day his act of martyrdom is venerated and

marked across the Shiite world as Ashura. This creates a powerful **cultural-cognitive**

narrative among the Shi'a supporting martyrdom. The depth and strength of this

connection is visible not only through the exceptional, and to western tastes excessive,

mourning of Ashura, but also through the tradition of the *rowzehs* where the story of

Hussein's martyrdom is told as a Passion play.[96] These events are exceptionally

emotional as the listeners are swept away by the supreme injustice of the situation and the

honour and heroism of Hussein.[97] These cultural events solidify the **cultural-cognitive**

support for martyrdom and have taken on an even larger role in modern Iran, where such

events are publicised on television, with even the President and other key leaders

weeping at the story.[98] In addition, Islamic tenants are frequently used to justify and

exalt "martyrdom" operations by Islamic suicide terrorists across the globe. As

elsewhere in this chapter, this is not to argue that this interpretation of Islam is correct,

just an existing **cultural-cognitive** base within Islam. Indeed, until very recently suicide

attacks were "predominantly a Shi'a phenomenon, tied to the myths of Karbala and the

Twelfth Imam."[99] The Iranian leadership certainly emphasised this trait, particularly

during the Iran-Iraq War.

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[94] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 16.

[95] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 43.

[96] Varzi, *Warring Souls : Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*, 51.

[97] Hooman Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 1st ed. (New York ; Toronto: Doubleday, 2008), 139-42.

[98] Varzi, *Warring Souls : Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*, 144-5.

Further to this **cultural-cognitive** base the *Pasdaran* have explicitly made martyrdom one of their **normative** elements. Although the *Pasdaran* certainly do not seem to have implemented a norm of suicide terrorism, they do view themselves as tied to the broader concept of martyrdom. The former head of the Revolutionary Guard, Yahya Rahim Safavi was explicit: "We must behead some, cut off the tongues of others. Our language is the language of the sword and the seekers of martyrdom."[100] Similarly a doctrine manual found in Lebanon, likely left by *Pasdaran* serving with Hezbollah, emphasises martyrdom as "the height of *jihad*".[101] Perhaps the best historical examples of the strength of the **normative** power of martyrdom in the *Pasdaran* were the very successful human wave operations during the Iran-Iraq war. Such attacks were "militarily unsound as practiced but fulfilled the Islamic forces' commitment to martyrdom in the service of Islam."[102] Likewise the ability of the *Pasdaran* to suffer horrendous casualties to Iraqi chemical weapons and yet continue to press their attacks, even advancing into chemical clouds, speaks to the broader acceptance of martyrdom as a norm of the organisation.[103]

Throughout the Imposed War both the leaders of the revolution and the *Pasdaran* leveraged and reinforced this **normative** impact. Khomeini explicitly leveraged the

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[99] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 133.

[100] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 191.

[101] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Hezbollah as a Strategic Arm of Iran,* (Center for Special Studies, 2006), http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_hezbollah_e1.pdf (accessed 18 Jan 2010), 11.

[102] Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, 19.

[103] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 68.

images of Karbala and Ashura in an attempt to "institutionalize martyrdom".[104] During

the war, professional actors were used to act as knights on white horses blessing the

peasant troops, drawing directly on the culturally well known imagery of Hussein at

Karbala to stoke the martyr spirit before battle.[105] In addition, the clerics played a key

role in bolstering battlefield morale, deploying over eighteen thousand clerics to glorify

Ashura and emphasize the value of martyrdom.[106] Indeed, throughout the Imposed War

Iran, and particularly the *Pasdaran,* relied on religious fervour. Not military weapons or

tactics, but the **normative** culture of martyrdom, was essential to the success of the

Pasdaran and *Basij*.[107] The indoctrination of young members of the *Basij* into the

culture of martyrdom, including issuing each of them with the "key to heaven" is further

evidence not only of the **normative** power, but a clear attempt to provide martyrdom

regulative support.[108] Indeed, one of the key defining features of the current *Pasdaran* is

its formation in the crucible of the Imposed War and the firm commitment to martyrdom

shared by its senior leadership, many of whom lived the commitment and did not survive

the war.[109]

Following the "sacred defence" Khamenei has continued to emphasize the justice

and righteousness of martyrdom, saying that: "The martyrdom of the Palestinians is the

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[104] Varzi, *Warring Souls : Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*, 54-5.

[105] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 121, 132.

[106] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 38.

[107] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 171.

[108] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 88.

[109] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 246.

crowning glory of their struggle."[110] In addition, Khamenei has made his support of

suicide attacks explicit: "self-martyrdom is the pinnacle and symbol of human dignity:

The youth, the boy and girl, who are willing to sacrifice their lives while serving the

interests of their country and religion." [111] In addition, the government undertook several

major activities to solidify the **normative** influence of martyrdom within the Iran. There

are significant monuments to the martyrs throughout Iran, notably key monuments in

Tehran, and the burial of martyrs in many of Tehran's parks to provide a continuous and

obvious reminder, and veneration, of their sacrifice during the war.[112] When he was

mayor of Tehran, the current President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also erected

large posters celebrating Palestinian suicide terrorists as martyrs.[113] The end result has

been the enshrining of martyrdom into the culture of Iran in a way that exceeds even the

influence of martyrdom within the rest of Shiite Islam. Roxanne Varzi's fascinating

examination of the impact of the culture of martyrdom on the youth and media in Iran

since the revolution makes it clear that martyrdom is now one of the defining elements of

modern Iranian culture.[114]

Finally, in addition to the clear support across that martyrdom provides for the

conduct of general irregular war, its role in suicide attacks, including terrorism,[115] is also

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[110] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 102.

[111] Ibid., 102.

[112] Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad : The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 50-1.

[113] Ibid., 49.

[114] Varzi, *Warring Souls : Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*.

[115] A suicide attack targeting a purely military target for military gain does not meet most standard definitions of terrorism. That said, suicide attacks have proven to be particularly effective for the conduct of terrorism.

important. Suicide attacks were, for a period in the mid-2000s, one of the most potent

weapons deployed against US and other forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Clearly, a strong

predisposition to martyrdom assists in such activities and the support of the *Pasdaran* for

the use of suicide attackers is relatively easy to see. Suicide attacks have been given

explicit **regulative** support through the work of *Pasdaran* think tanks.[116] Furthermore,

an organization in Iran calling itself the Headquarters for Commemorating the World

Martyrs of Islam has conducted several training activities for suicide bombers to defend

Iran from oppression, in other words from US attack. Although this organisation is not

subordinate to the *Pasdaran* it is unlikely that the training could have been conducted

without at least their tacit support.[117] Yet another example of this support is that the

Pasdaran assisted Hezbollah and Hamas have repeatedly, and effectively, used suicide

attacks and other vicious terrorist actions in their struggle with Israel.[118] Martyrdom

remains important in Iran, with Ahmadinejad underlying martyrdom as important to the

defence of Iran as follows: "A nation which is armed with faith and martyrdom will

never experience defeat".[119]

VELEYAT-E FAQIH

Finally, no discussion of the *Pasdaran* as an Islamic institution could be complete

without addressing Khomeini's key innovation – the rule of the qualified jurist or

Veleyat-e Faqih. This doctrine essentially provides for the exercise of Shiite religious

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[116] Ali Alfoneh, "Iran's Suicide Brigades," *Middle East Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Winter2007, 2007), 37-44, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=23396990&site=ehost-live (accessed 18 Jan 2010).

[117] Naji, *Ahmadinejad : The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, 193.

[118] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 142

[119] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 35.

authority as a temporal and political power under the rule of the clergy. Such a position

is far from universally accepted in Islam. Indeed it faces outright rejection among most

Sunni thinkers and many Shi'a as well. Indeed, Khomeini's doctrine overturned

centuries of tradition among Shiite clerics of maintaining a distance from politics.[120]

> His [Khomeini's] politics and religious views reflected not so much Shia
> history and theology (indeed, he was something of a theological innovator
> and maverick) as the authority that he claimed by virtue of his
> understanding of mystical doctrines. His was a new Shiism, interpreted by
> someone who claimed direct knowledge of the truth.[121]

Nevertheless the doctrine was accepted as a defining characteristic of the Islamic

Revolution and is a powerful **regulative** factor on the *Pasdaran*, who in many ways are

seen as the power behind the throne (in this case the "throne" of the *faqih*) in Iran.

Furthermore Khomeini did not see the doctrine of *veleyat-e faqih* as Iranian, but

rather a broader religious duty. Indeed, Khomeini did not see himself as a leader of a

state, but rather as a leader of a broader community of believers "seeking to emancipate

the Islamic community, or *ummah*, from the transgressions of American imperialism and

Israeli Zionism."[122] From the very early days of the revolution this had a profound

regulative and **normative** impact on the *Pasdaran* as they were seen as one of the key

elements to conduct the operations required to actually emancipate the *ummah*. The

veleyat-e faqih, combined with the concept of the Islamic *ummah*, provides the Islamic

institution of the *Pasdaran* with significant **normative** and **regulative** support for the

conduct of a very broad range of actions, certainly including irregular warfare, when

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[120] Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63.

[121] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 121.

[122] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 4.

carried out to pursue the expansion of the rule of the qualified jurist. It also provides

significant **regulative** scope to work around the severe limitations placed on warfare by

Shiite doctrine; specifically it provides for the possibility of taking the offensive.

This is another example of where some strain may be placed upon the institution

over the long term given the lack of universal acceptance of the *veleyat-e faqih*.[123] The

effort in Iran to enshrine key legal precepts in Shiism under the *faqih* is also viewed as

relatively un-Shiite. Historically Shiite belief and piety have been considered much more

important than specific Shiite law. This means that the legalistic approach of Khomeini

and the Iranian regime seem un-Shi'a. The fact that Khomeini rarely attended Ashura

further underlines this break in tradition.[124] Indeed, both the senior Shiite cleric in Iraq,

Ayatollah al-Sistani,[125] and the senior cleric in Lebanon, Muhammad Husayn

Fadlallah,[126] object to the concept of *veleyat-e faqih.* Indeed, the "struggle within Shiism

between Khomeini-style proponents of clerical rule and traditional quietism is as fierce as

any sectarian struggle between Sunnis and Shiites."[127] It is therefore possible that the

normative function of the *veleyat-e faqih* may be weakened in the future even if the

Pasdaran retain its **regulative** support. That said, much of the **normative** impact could

potentially be subsumed into other aspects of Shiism. Despite Fadlallah's rejection of the

veleyat-e faqih Hezbollah maintains a very effective irregular campaign against Israel.

Likewise despite al-Sistani's rejection of the doctrine, indeed even with his outright call

[123] Ibid., 12.

[124] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 58, 135.

[125] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 180.

[126] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 181.

[127] Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan and Danielle Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan* (American Enterprise Institute, 2008), 64.

for Shi'a clerics to remove themselves from politics, there is no reason to believe that those that follow him have not been engaged in irregular warfare against the US in Iraq.[128]

CONCLUSION

A broad range of Islamic influences have been examined to determine their potential influence on the *Pasdaran*. Overall, the *Pasdaran*, when considered as an Islamic institution, are a strong institution with well aligned pillars under Scott's model of institutional analysis. In particular the *veleyat-e faqih* provides a strong **regulative** foundation based within the doctrine of Shiism which combined with a culture of martyrdom provides **cultural-cognitive** and **normative** support for the conduct of irregular or even terror based warfare. This firm base is further supported by the Islamic Way of War, in both of the senses discussed here, and numerous more minor Islamic values. As mentioned in the introduction of course viewing the *Pasdaran* solely as Islamic is to ignore many significant influences of the institution. These will be addressed in following chapters. The major potential future challenge facing the *Pasdaran* as an Islamic institution would be the continuing credibility of the *veleyat-e faqih* as a Shiite doctrine. As a final word of conclusion here however, if the *Pasdaran* were simply an Islamic institution it is very likely that could still successfully resort to the irregular warfare. On the other hand, an analysis of the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution will be shown to provide further support, particularly from Iran's burning nationalism.

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[128] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 183

CHAPTER 2 - THE *PASDARAN* AS A PERSIAN INSTITUTION

There is a general dichotomy in Iran between those who primarily support the revolution to create an Islamic Republic, and those who simply sought an Islamic Revolution. The latter viewed the revolution as an opportunity to remake Islam across the world, starting with Iran. The former sought to remake Iranian politics into a more acceptable form.[129] The previous chapter discussed at some length the Islamic nature of the *Pasdaran* as an institution, and therefore focussed on the religious aspects. This chapter will examine the *Pasdaran* as a Persian Institution, and in so doing will focus more on the political aspects. Obviously, as has been discussed on several occasions, it is difficult to tease apart the influences on the formation of any institution. That said, this chapter will look at the impacts of aspects of Iranian culture that are either not necessarily held in common with other Shiites or that are particularly emphasised within Iranian culture. Perhaps the most obvious such element is that Iranians hold a very strong opinion of their place in the world and a great deal of pride in their two and half thousand years of civilized history.[130] This Chapter will begin by examining this strident nationalistic pride and the desire for hegemony that it engenders. Following this a look at the cultural impact of patronage and dissimulation within Iran will be examined for their potential impacts on the *Pasdaran* as an institution. Overall this chapter will show that, despite some potential weakness, the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution shows strongly integrated **cultural-cognitive** and **normative** pillars under Scott's model with somewhat limited **regulative** support for the conduct of irregular war.

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[129] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xv.

[130] Iran Policy Committee, *What Makes Tehran Tick : Islamist Ideology and Hegemonic Interests : A White Paper*, 23-4.

Before examining Iran's strident nationalism a brief comment on the terms Persian and Iranian is in order. Simply put Iran is the name of the country and what the people there have called themselves for a long time, although some now associate the term with the current regime.[131] Persia and Persian are terms applied to the area and its inhabitants during ancient times by the Greeks. For the purposes of this paper the term Persian has been adopted to highlight the deeply held cultural beliefs, in most cases broad national characteristics that predate both the revolution and the modern squabble over terminology.[132]

NATIONALISM

Perhaps the greatest influence on the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution is the powerful nationalism of Iranians that far predates the Islamic Revolution.[133] As Iranian peace activist Shirin Ebadi noted in her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Persian culture stretches back twenty-five hundred years and one of its key founders, Cyrus the Great, remains a figure for inspiration for some modern Iranians.[134] All Iranians are taught of the incredible empire they once controlled and their cultural achievements, long before the barbarian Arabs received Allah's message. There is a widespread belief "that Iran

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[131] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 161-2.

[132] There is clearly an issue with the lexicon in this case. Technically Persian would refer to only a portion of Iranians. That said, many Kurdish, Azeri, or numerous other minority ethnicities still feel the deeply nationalistic pride and other elements discussed throughout the chapter.

[133] Giles, *The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture*, 146.

[134] Cyrus' human rights views are lauded in Shirin Ebadi's nobel prize speech: "Shirin Ebadi | Nobels Fredspris " http://nobelpeaceprize.org/en_GB/laureates/laureates-2003/ebadi-lecture/ (accessed 2/14, 2010). In addition, Iranian leaders continue to emphasize the prestige and importance of early Persian history. Iran also marked marked the 2500th anniversary of Cyrus' reign with a massive celebration. See for instance Cyrus Kadivar, "2,500-Year Celebrations," The Iranian, http://www.iranian.com/CyrusKadivar/2002/January/2500/ (accessed 3/27, 2010).

was the equal, if not the better, of Rome and Athens."[135] Reaching back to this ancient

history Persia has long accepted irregular warfare and effectively used it to resist the

invasions of Alexander, Rome, and others.[136] This nationalistic tendency was cleverly

managed by Khomeini during the revolution and has been continuously reinforced by

numerous Iranian leaders, including most recently Ahmadinejad.[137] For those born after

the revolution, which now includes 80% of Iran, the revolution was largely "the birth of a

nation" and a nation to which they are profoundly patriotic.[138] This burning nationalism

provides the *Pasdaran* significant **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** support for

irregular war to defend and expand Iran's influence. In addition to this broad institutional

influence, specific aspects of Persian nationalism, including a desire for independence

combined with the tense mix of perceived cultural superiority and persecution and

exploitation provide deeper support for the conduct of irregular war.

Independence

One key Persian cultural trait is a strong desire for independence. Indeed, some

authors have noted that since Persia first fell to the invasions of Alexander two and a half

millennia ago it has jealously sought to maintain its independence.[139] Although some in

Iran view the invasion of Islamic Arabs in the 7th century as positive, since it brought

Islam to the region, there is no doubt that overall there remains a strong anti-Arab and

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[135] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 163.

[136] Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows : The Guerrilla in History* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1975), Chapter 1. In addition, another group of ancient Iranians gave their name to the 'Parthian Shot', which refers to the classic irregular tactic of hit-and-run attacks. See for instance Wikipedia contributors, "Parthian Shot," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthian_shot (accessed 4/4, 2010).

[137] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 118.

[138] Ibid., 231.

[139] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 312.

independent streak in Persian culture.[140] This desire for independence provides strong **cultural-cognitive** support for the defence of Iran, even in the face of overwhelming odds and using whatever means necessary, in particular irregular approaches. This is illustrated well by the current *faqih*, who said: "Remaining alive under the condition of subjugation to the rule of the superpowers is, in reality, death, while death through cutting the bloody claws of the superpower is life"[141]

As with many other aspects of the *Pasdaran* as an institution this influence was heavily affected by the Imposed War. Specifically, the fact that Iran was left alone to face the power of Saddam, and his murderous attacks on their cities and indiscriminate use of chemical weapons, led the *Pasdaran* to conclude the world was against them and a militant independence was the only way to survive. Even further, the large number of Scud missiles, improved with US technology, that hit Tehran led to a firm belief in self-sufficiency in matters of defence.[142] This had the effect of moving the **cultural-cognitive** influence of Persian culture into a **normative** element for the *Pasdaran*. Self-sufficiency and independence are essential institutional elements of the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 this **normative** pillar of the requirement for independence requires irregular war since, given the destruction of the Iranian army during the War, there is no other way to ensure the defence of Iran. This provides a strong **normative** push to irregular war.

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[140] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 6.

[141] As quoted in Varzi, *Warring Souls : Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*, 56.

[142] Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, "The Conservative Consolidation in Iran," *Survival* 47, no. 2 (Summer2005, 2005), 175-190, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=17524509&site=ehost-live, 187.

Superiority

In addition to a fierce desire for independence, Persian culture also sees itself as superior to Arab culture. Indeed, Iranian elites see themselves as the natural and essential leading cultural power of the Middle East.[143] This trait can be seen in many ways in Iran, perhaps the most blatant is the efforts of senior Iranian leaders to ensure that the Gulf is publicly and internationally referred to as "Persian", rather than "Arabian".[144] Indeed, Iran sees itself "as the 'center of the universe', a society that should be emulated by the Arab masses."[145] This feeling has a long history and can be seen before the Revolution in the actions of Mossadeq when he assumed that the great powers would give into Iran's demands simply due to its prestige.[146] The middle-eastern analyst Ray Takeyh goes so far as to call this superiority "an enduring Persian conceit."[147] It is reasonable to assume that this **cultural-cognitive** perspective of natural superiority is well established within the *Pasdaran*. Such a feeling would also serve to strengthen the **normative** and even **regulative** aspects of irregular warfare elements developed or innovated within Iran, for example, the mosaic defence doctrine discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, strong feelings of superiority are simply the positive side of the degree of condescension towards other cultures which is very strong in Persian culture.[148] Psychologically this type of prejudice fosters a degree of dehumanisation for non-Persians, who become

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[143] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xii.

[144] Ibid., 12. In addition it is interesting that this justification relies on Quranic sources, underlining the linkages between the Persian and Islamic institutions.

[145] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 81.

[146] Ibid., 92.

[147] Ibid., 92.

[148] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 166.

deserving of whatever happens to them. As such it could provide **cultural-cognitive** support for the conduct of otherwise forbidden activities, potentially including in this case irregular war.

This feeling of cultural superiority also manifests itself in several other key aspects of the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution. The first is that it tends to produce a **cultural-cognitive** drive to stubbornness which has been noted throughout modern Iranian history with successive Iranian political elites being very difficult to convince to change their minds.[149] An example of this trait can be seen in the Guards resistance to the settlement of the Iran-Iraq War, even after the key leadership had decided to end it.[150] This **cultural-cognitive** drive would therefore tend to reinforce decisions already taken, and provide additional strength to **normative** actions already undertaken. Specifically relevant in this case is the fact that many of the core members of the *Pasdaran* had an extensive history of the conduct of terrorist and irregular war tied to their experiences fighting the Shah. This **cultural-cognitive** drive then could be reasonably assumed to support maintaining such an approach, even in the face of potential counter-arguments.[151] Finally, as will be discussed next, this feeling of superiority feeds and animates the Persian feeling of persecution and exploitation at the hands of foreign powers.

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[149] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 325.

[150] Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, 58.

[151] This is not to say that Iran is completely intransigent, indeed both the *Pasdaran* and the leadership have shown an ability to modify their intentions and actions. The example provided above of the leadership choosing to end the Iran-Iraq War is one. Another is the eventual engagement of Saudi Arabia and a general reduction in the incitement of pro-Shiite elements throughout the Gulf region. See for example: Green and others, *Understanding Iran*, 6.

Persecuted Feeling

Perhaps one of the most fascinating aspects of Persian culture is its ability to simultaneously nurture an attitude of supreme superiority while also maintaining an extensive feeling of continuous persecution. This widespread Iranian feeling of victimization, insecurity, and imposed inferiority blamed on the machinations of outside powers leaves Iran very sensitive to perceived slights.[152] Indeed, this feeling of persecution has a long standing tradition in Persian culture, dating back at least to the invasion of Alexander who was viewed as "such a brute and ignoramus that he burned magnificent libraries along with the greatest city in the world, Persepolis, to the ground."[153] In later periods the persecution of the Abbasids by the Romans further entrenched this feeling.[154] Persia was conquered again by the Arabs in the 8th Century and, despite the fact that this invasion brought Islam, Iranians have not forgotten the humiliation of defeat at the hand of the "barbarians".[155] More recently, Russian and British invasions in the 19th and 20th centuries, along with the puppet regimes they installed, have all assisted in engraining this impression.[156] This feeling is further entrenched in Persian culture by Shiism's emphasis on persecution and the need for a scapegoat, further emphasising the influence of this **cultural-cognitive** element. Finally, this **cultural-cognitive** influence reinforces a view of the world in terms of the oppressed

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[152] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 154.

[153] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 163-4.

[154] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 53.

[155] Tarek Fatah, *Chasing a Mirage : The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State* (Mississauga: J. Wiley & Sons Canada, 2008), 200.

[156] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xii.

and oppressors, as discussed in Chapter 1.[157] Given the self-identification of the Persian

institution with the oppressed, and the *Pasdaran*'s history of freeing themselves through

irregular war during the revolution, there is an alignment of **cultural-cognitive** and

normative factors to conduct the same actions to assist the oppressed elsewhere.

Anti-Americanism

Following the United States' support of the Shah during the coup of 1953 which

ousted Mossadeq, Iranian sentiment came to include the United States along with other

occupying and oppressing powers.[158] Indeed, anti-American feeling was crucial to the

Revolution, and therefore can be reasonably expected to be found most strongly within

the ranks of the *Pasdaran*. There is a general feeling that Iran is a great power, defeated

and oppressed by the United States, and to a lesser extent Great Britain.[159] The intense

feelings of persecution and oppression at the hands of the United States is further

amplified by the natural Persian belief in their superiority, providing **cultural-cognitive**

support to the conduct of violent irregular acts, even beyond what could be justified by

other means.

These feelings of oppression at the hands of the US were proven to the *Pasdaran*

during the Imposed War by the West's decision to ignore Iraq's use of chemical

weapons, in flagrant violation of relevant international treaties, [160] certainly would have

heightened this feeling of persecution. In addition, this action can be reasonably assumed

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[157] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 20.

[158] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 5. This is not the only reason of course. In addition to the specific case against the US, Iran also maintains a feeling of superiority and condescendingly compares its two and half millennia of history to the US's meagre two hundred and fifty.

[159] Ibid., xii.

[160] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 187.

to have weakened the strength of international **norms** with respect to the laws of armed conflict and international relations on the *Pasdaran*.[161] Having seen the chemical weapon treaties so thoroughly ignored by the West it is reasonable to believe that the **normative** pillar of the institution with respect to the conduct of irregular warfare would have been likewise strengthened. In addition, a distrust of international **normative** and **regulative** treaty law was created which persists in the *Pasdaran*, providing support for the conduct of activities counter to such laws, including irregular war.

The distrust created by American support for both the Shah and Saddam created a deep-seated animosity which predates the Islamic Revolution and results in Iran blaming most of its current ills on the United States.[162] Specifically within the *Pasdaran* this animosity first surfaced very early in the Revolution with the taking of the American Embassy.[163] Although the role of the Guards in the planning of the action are not clear, they certainly provided direct support to the students who took the embassy by taking shifts as guards for the hostages.[164] In addition, after the American aborted rescue attempt some hostages were moved to facilities run by the *Pasdaran*.[165] This degree of animosity towards the West, and the US in particular, has been sustained as a **normative** aspect of much of Persian culture, particularly the more conservative factions from which the *Pasdaran* draw much of their support. With respect to the conduct of irregular war this deep animosity assists in justifying, in both a **normative** and **regulative** way the

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[161] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 106.

[162] Jones, *Iranian Security Policies at the Crossroads?*, 15.

[163] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 40.

[164] Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah : The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), 202.

[165] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 236.

conduct of irregular actions against the oppressive regimes of the West. Indeed, as late as 2005 a conference on the negative impacts of the Mossadeq coup supported by the US was still headline news in Iran.[166] The *Pasdaran* leadership sees the US as both hostile and uncompromising, and believes this is due to American hatred of Iran's Islamic character, Iran's insistence on independence and the US's rapacious desire for the energy resources of the region. They therefore view the US as posing an existential threat to the Islamic Republic.[167] Furthermore, fighting the US was viewed as essential to maintaining the Revolution since America was seen as assaulting the Islamic values at the core of the revolution.[168] Again this provides more **cultural-cognitive** support for the conduct of anti-US irregular war.

The heavy influence of this fear can be seen in more recent times given the current apprehension of a US sponsored revolution against the current regime.[169] Many members of the opposition in Iran, including the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner, have condemned US support for their own actions due exactly to the fear that it does more harm than good.[170] Some have even argued that the recent surge in conservative power,

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[166] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 85-6.

[167] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 187; and Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 14.

[168] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 163.

[169] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 10 and Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 202. Indeed, it is interesting to note the degree to which the *Pasdaran* are now emphasizing their role in resisting the perceived information operations campaign (cultural war) waged against them by the US. As elsewhere in this document an in depth analysis of the information operations and psychological warfare dimensions of the *Pasdaran* have been left aside.

[170] Jeffery Gedmin, "Shirin Ebadi Prepares for the End," Foreign Policy, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/01/11/shirin_ebadi_prepares_for_the_end?page=0,2 (accessed 3/20, 2010).

including the sweep of the *Majles*[171] and Presidential elections, was motivated by the

perception that the reformers needed to be marginalized in the face of a more proactive

US foreign policy, particularly their invasion of Iraq.[172] Shirazi, a leading reactionary

cleric, went so far as to say that "those who weaken the Guardian Council and the

Revolutionary Guards are spreading discord among the people and want to promote

American influence."[173] The strong **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** influence of this

anti-Americanism on the *Pasdaran* can be clearly seen in their previous commander's

statement: "Americans, British and Zionists are the root cause of all atrocities in the

world ... Americans' hands are stained with the bloods of Iraqi, Palestinian and Afghan

people."[174] It is not difficult to conclude that this attitude provides strong **normative** and

cultural-cognitive support for the conduct of irregular war against 'the root cause' of all

atrocities.

Regional Hegemony

One final major aspect of Persian nationalism, in addition to its twin feelings of

superiority and persecution, is its firm belief in the justice and desirability of Iranian

regional hegemony. Persians have a major influence already over the region, even the

key Iraqi Shiite leader, al-Sistani, speaks with a Persian accent.[175] Beyond this however,

Iran seeks to become the regional hegemon despite the fact that it is surrounded by non-

Persian powers. There exists in Iran a view that Iranian hegemony is not only natural and

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[171] The *majles* is the Iranian parliamentary body.

[172] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 189.

[173] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 53.

[174] Safavi as quoted by Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 198.

[175] Nasr, *The Shia Revival : How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 67.

benign, but also a reasonable outcome of the natural Persian superiority and desire for independence already discussed in this paper.[176] Iran's current president, along with Khamenei and the Guards, believe that Iran has not only the right, but the obligation, to emerge as a leading power in the world.[177] This **cultural-cognitive** aspect of Persian thought once again lends support to the conduct of irregular warfare to bring about Iran's rightful place in the world.

One specific tool used by Iran and the *Pasdaran* to bring about this regional hegemony is the extensive use of proxies to further Iranian interests. The best example of such a proxy is the Hezbollah in Lebanon.[178] A former Iranian interior minister went so far as to say that "Hezbollah is a central component of the Iranian military and security establishment."[179] Given that Hezbollah was directly created by the *Pasdaran* in 1982 it is not surprising to find that there is a strong and deep connection between to two.[180] Indeed, beyond significant training in irregular warfare the Guards, and in particular its *Qods* Force, have been directly implicated in providing weapons and direct funding.[181] The Guards have also been implicated in planning and participating in the hostilities as

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[176] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 61, 81.

[177] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 238.

[178] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Hezbollah as a Strategic Arm of Iran*, 5.

[179] Ali Akbar Mohtashemi quoted in Kagan, Kagan and Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 9.

[180] Norton, *Hizballah and the Israeli Withdrawal from Southern Lebanon*, 24.

[181] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 21; Kagan, Kagan and Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 6-7; and Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the Main Tool to Export the Revolution Beyond the Borders of Iran.*, 7-8.

well as directly participating in the chain of command.[182] The use of proxies has been very effective to both contain Israel and intimidate Arab rulers.[183] Hezbollah began its operations with extremely irregular actions, most notably a very successful string of suicide bombings including the US Marine Barracks in 1982 and the successful use of hostage taking throughout the 1980s.[184] More recently Hezbollah has shied away from such tactics and it fought the 33-Day War against Israel using irregular, but not terrorist, techniques taught by the *Pasdaran*.[185] Overall this shows extensive **normative** support for the conduct of irregular war by the Persian Institution of the *Pasdaran*.

BONDS OF PATRONAGE

Beyond the very strong sense of Iranian nationalism, Persian culture also includes several other key influences on the *Pasdaran*'s ability to wage irregular war. To begin with Iranian culture places far more influence on the bonds of patronage that would be typical in North America. Indeed, throughout the current Iranian system informal power based on family, professional, and other personal contacts is far more important than the power based on position or rank within an organization.[186] There is even a specific term, "*khodi",* for those with the connections to benefit from the current Iranian system. This

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[182] Ibid., 7; Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 21; and Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 133.

[183] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 174.

[184] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Hezbollah as a Strategic Arm of Iran*, 7.

[185] Kagan, Kagan and Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 7; Matt M. Matthews, *We were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, 26th ed., Vol. 26 (Ft Leavenworth, Kansas: I.S. Army Combat Studies Institute, 2008), 3; Ralph Peters, "Lessons from Lebanon - the New Model Terrorist Army," *Armed Forces Journal,* 2006.

[186] Giles, *The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture*, 144; and Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xiii.

group is estimated to make up approximately 15% of the population of Iran.[187] There is

therefore an understandable desire to become part of this group, to gain access to

education, power, and wealth. Furthermore, the recent trend has been for an increase in

the influence of patronage as a source of power.[188] Given the strong bonds created by

war, and in particular the strong bonds among Guardsmen who served through the

horrors of the Imposed War, it is not surprising that the *Pasdaran* gain a significant

amount of its **regulative** power through the influence of these **cultural-cognitive** bonds

with ex-Guardsmen who have moved into influential positions within Iranian society, and

in particular within the political elites who now dominate politics.[189] These bonds

between those who have **normative** experience of irregular war in key positions of

influence greatly assist the *Pasdaran* in their conduct of irregular war.

Going back to the early 19th century "it was normal for prominent *ulama* in any

town to surround themselves with a band of the town's ruffians, known as *lutis*, to their

mutual benefit."[190] The *Pasdaran* were founded, in part, from such bands that existed

around the clerical leaders of the Revolution. Given the *Pasdaran*'s historical roots in

such patronage networks, and their strong influence on Iranian politics and culture, it

should not be surprising that patronage imposes a powerful **normative** influence on the

institution. Specifically to the matter at hand, this **normative** influence leads to both an

increased cohesion within the institution, and more importantly underlines the ties of

patronage between the *Pasdaran* and the radical clerics they support. This bond of

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[187] Ibid., 52.

[188] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 183.

[189] Green and others, *Understanding Iran*, 12; and Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 19-20.

[190] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 199.

patronage is further reinforced by significant intermarriage between the families of key Guard leadership and senior clerics.[191] The powerful arguments from such clerics justifying irregular war and even terrorism against non-Muslims provide a strong **normative** influence to irregular war for the *Pasdaran*. Indeed as already discussed in some detail, the current *faqih* has openly endorsed terrorism as valid.[192]

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

In addition to these **normative** influences it is clear that a significant amount of the actual power attributed to the Guards is due to both the depth and breadth of the penetration of people with informal links to the *Pasdaran*.[193] There is a significant informal economy within Iran dominated by the *Pasdaran* and so called "invisible piers" under their control. This underground economy is significant and not only forms firm **regulative** and **normative** bonds within the organisation but also ties many of the inner circle together.[194] Although the eventual use of the funds which the *Pasdaran* make through these illicit channels is unknown it seems reasonable that many of these funds are being used to fund *Pasdaran* irregular warfare activities outside of Iran.[195] What is certain is that the *Pasdaran* acted with a great degree of boldness to ensure that they could control Khomeini International Airport, the most important international air hub in Iran. Although a Turkish company had received the contract to run the airport the Guards forcibly closed the airport on its first day of opening and ensured that the contract to run

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[191] Giles, *The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture*, 144.

[192] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 191.

[193] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, xiii.

[194] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 181.

[195] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 66.

the airport was given to an element of the Guards.[196] It is not hard to see how such an

action would greatly aid the **regulative** ability of the *Pasdaran* to control the flow or

arms and resources and other illicit activities crucial to the conduct of irregular war.

Although this arrangement does not appear in any formal organisational diagram of the

Pasdaran it is nevertheless a key accepted structural, or **regulative,** aspect which

provides the means necessary for the conduct of irregular war.

Indeed the large, and growing, economic activities of the *Pasdaran* give it a

somewhat unique character as an institution. Although some have compared these

activities to both an earlier version of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China or

the "milbus" (military business) complex of Pakistan, the *Pasdaran* remain a unique mix

of military, internal security, indoctrination, and commercial enterprise.[197] The Guards

control much of the defence industry, and are heavily involved in many other aspects of

the economic sphere.[198] In particular they are active in taking control of numerous

industries including the oil and telecommunications sectors, accounting for some of the

largest financial transaction in the history of the Tehran stock exchange.[199] Perhaps more

worrying is the fact that the Guards control the majority of the economic enterprises

engaged in the Regime's nuclear projects.[200] So significant is the engagement of the

Guards in these technologies that the US has specifically targeted the Guards with

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[196] Ibid., 74.

[197] Ibid., 96.

[198] Ed Blanche, "Pasdaran Power," *Middle East*, no. 360 (Oct, 2005), 22-26, http://proquest
.umi.com/pqdweb?did=910266071&Fmt=7&clientId=1711&RQT=309&VName=PQD, 24.

[199] D. Motadel, "March of the Guards," *The World Today*, no. 11 (Nov, 2009), 8-11, http://
proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1887298371&Fmt=7&clientId=13664&RQT=309&VName=PQD, 9.

[200] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 38 and
Burns, *Clinton: Iran Becoming a Military Dictatorship with the Guard Corps Supplanting Government.*

sanctions in order to attempt to force them to back down of the nuclear issue. As US

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently stated; "Washington will therefore seek new

international sanctions that target Revolutionary Guard bosses who have turned a large

part of the Iranian economy into a Mafia fiefdom."[201] Although this move into the

economic sphere can be easily understood based on the power and prestige it brings the

Guards, it also provides a significant boost to its **regulative** ability to wage irregular war

by providing internally the resources required for its conduct. In addition, it also

potentially provides a countervailing disruptive **normative** influence on the institution.

Specifically, the impact on the Guards of conducting significant illegal smuggling

activities would seem to risk a degree of separation within the **normative** pillar between

the ideologically pure elements and those more interested in profit. Many of the corrupt

practices which began in the *bonyads*, or foundations, have recently begun to migrate to

the Guards.[202] In addition, as the Guards become a good route to wealth and influence

they will likely begin to attract those seeking access to power and wealth rather than

revolutionary success.[203] In Iran there is a common political aphorism: "In the United

States, people become rich and then go into politics; in Iran, people go into politics to

become rich."[204] Membership in the *Pasdaran* is certainly a route to politics in Iran due

to the highly connected nature of the *Pasdaran*'s patronage webs, and so may begin to

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[201] *Clinton's Truth-Telling on Iran - the Boston Globe*

[202] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 38.

[203] John Foran and Jeff Goodwin, "Revolutionary Outcomes in Iran and Nicaragua: Coalition Fragmentation, War, and the Limits of Social Transformation," *Theory and Society* 22, no. 2 (Apr., 1993), 209-247, http://www.jstor.org/stable/657771, 221.

[204] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 37.

attract those interested in power for its own sake.[205] This suggests the potential for an

emerging weakness in the **normative** influences on the institution, in this case towards

power and wealth attainment, a shift which would likely lessen the institutions ability to

conduct irregular war.

DISSIMULATION

Strict truth telling is certainly not common in any society and there are heavy

cultural biases towards what should and should not be said. Persian culture is naturally

no different, but the simultaneous feelings of persecution and superiority give rise to two

similarly opposed approaches that are occasionally taken to extremes. In specific, the

boastful exaggeration that is common in much of the rhetoric of Iranian leadership, along

with the *Pasdaran*, has its roots in the national trait of *gholov* or "the Persian art of

exaggeration".[206] This habit is offset somewhat by the similar Persian habit of *ta'arouf*

which also includes exaggeration, this time an excessive (to western tastes) degree of

politeness with outsiders.[207] The cultural norms behind these two habits lead naturally to

the Persian expression: "You say something; I believe it. You insist; I begin to wonder.

You swear on it; I know you are lying." [208] Such a cultural flexibility with the truth is

further ingrained in Persian culture due to the influence of the Shiite tradition of *al-

taqiyya*, frequently translated as lying or dissimilation.[209] Due to the fact that Shiites

have been for most of their history a persecuted minority, and indeed generally put to

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[205] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 38.

[206] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'Ism*, 141.

[207] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 65.

[208] Ibid., 100.

[209] Kelsay, *Islam and War : A Study in Comparative Ethics*, 103-5.

death as heretics when found, a religious doctrine allowing them to lie about their beliefs seems a reasonable outcome. That said, the tradition of *al-taqiyya* now has become more flexible.[210] Persian culture also includes the very similar tradition of *ketman*, essentially yet another cultural habit towards dissimulation and dishonesty.[211] Indeed, within Persian society "tools such as artifice, flattery, dissembling, and treachery became standard for survival."[212] Said another way "Iranians have proved themselves masters of the art of doing the opposite of what they say, in order better to obtain what they want."[213] The overall effect of these three traits is to produce a society with **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** factors encouraging dissimulation. Using this norm to provide support for the conduct of similar activities in warfare provides yet more support for the conduct of irregular war by the Persian institution of the *Pasdaran*.

CONCLUSION

The *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution is not, of itself, nearly as coherent an organization on its own as the *Pasdaran* as an Islamic institution. That said, what emerges is a mutually supporting web of largely **cultural-cognitive** and **normative** factors supporting the conduct of irregular war. In particular, extreme nationalism and strong interpersonal bonds supported by a considerable source of commercial and political power create an institution capable of implementing an irregular agenda supplied by the other institutions examined in this study. In other words, the *Pasdaran* as a

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[210] Majd, *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ : The Paradox of Modern Iran*, 59.

[211] See for example Christopher Hitchens, "The Persian Version," The Atlantic, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/07/the-persian-version/4961, (accessed 3/31, 2010).

[212] Giles, *The Crucible of Radical Islam: Iran's Leaders and Strategic Culture*, 141-162., 146

[213] Pierre Pahlavi, "The Place of Shi'Ism in Iranian Grand Strategy," *Défense Nationale Et Sécurité Collective* 64, no. 8 (08, 2008), 51-60, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=35690904&site=ehost-live, 59.

Persian institution integrates and supports the Islamic and Revolutionary *Pasdaran*. More important, as will be seen shortly, the Persian institution provides essential **cultural-cognitive** support to the Revolutionary or Islamic institution. This is another way of saying that, from an institutional perspective, the *Pasdaran* were also built on a mix of Shiite and nationalist ideology. Finally, as a Persian institution the *Pasdaran* show the possible development towards commercial and profit motives which could reduce the capacity of the institution to conduct irregular warfare as it matures.

CHAPTER 3 - THE *PASDARAN* AS A REVOLUTIONARY INSTITUTION

As has been emphasised throughout this paper the *Pasdaran* represent a complex and multi-faceted institution. Using the two views already discussed a broad range of cultural and societal impacts on the *Pasdaran* have been examined. Given that the *Pasdaran* were formed explicitly to defend the Revolution, it is not surprising that the final lens focuses directly on the structure and doctrine of the *Pasdaran* as a Revolutionary institution. Although the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution provides broad cultural (**cultural-cognitive** and **normative**) support to the conduct of irregular war, as a Revolutionary institution the influence of the **normative** and **regulative** pillars are emphasised in a greater way.

Given the *Pasdaran*'s formal existence as an institution of the Revolution it would be possible to argue that all of the aspects discussed so far are, in fact, aspects of the *Pasdaran* as a Revolutionary institution. That said, the purpose of this section is to examine the institution through a narrower lens on those aspects tied directly to the Revolution. In doing so many of the key **regulative** and **normative** aspects of the Guards which have not been discussed yet, including its structure, doctrine, and methods, come to light. Starting with the formation of the *Pasdaran* this chapter will examine these aspects in some detail. A look at some historical actions by the Guards will be used to highlight key aspects of Scott's model that suggest strong support across the **regulative** and **normative** pillars of his model.

FORMATION OF THE GUARDS

Looking in some detail at the formation of the *Pasdaran* during the early days of the Revolution provides not only key insight into **regulative** aspects of the *Pasdaran*'s

conduct of irregular war, but also highlights the source of key **normative** support. This

will be followed by a discussion of the Iranian Constitution, which shows significant

regulative support to the *Pasdaran* for irregular war.

Forming of Corps

The *Pasdaran* were initially formed during the Revolution and then directly

enshrined in the constitution shortly thereafter. That said, the roots of the organization go

back further into the violent anti-Shah movements that preceded Khomeini's rise to

power. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a Persian tradition of local gangs supporting

key clerics. It was these organisations, along with other armed revolutionary groups,

which provided the armed support for the Revolution. Some of these organisations, in

particular those associated with the clerics, had significant religious leanings; others were

motivated by secular, communist, and other ideologies.[214] Khomeini formed the

Pasdaran around the *komitehs*, or revolutionary committees, that had sprung up along

Islamic lines throughout the country. Khomeini however was very concerned that the

other armed revolutionary groups, including the *mojahedin-e-Khalq* (MEK), Tudeh, and

Fedayeen, who generally did not hold with Khomeini's vision of the *veleyat-e faqih,*

would disrupt the Islamic nature of the revolution.[215] In order to strengthen his position

Khomeini ensured that the *Pasdaran* assimilated or destroyed as many of these groups as

possible, always ensuring their loyalty remained to Khomeini, and not to the emerging

government.[216] The *Pasdaran*'s use of irregular techniques to smash the Tudeh during

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[214] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 216.

[215] Ibid., 226.

[216] Ibid., 226.

this period[217] is a good example of a **normative** influence to irregular war. In addition, the initial members had been armed revolutionaries conducting terrorist and irregular warfare against the Shah before the formation of the *Pasdaran*. Many of these revolutionaries had previously been trained and worked together in Lebanon with the Amal organization, beginning a long history of close ties between the *Pasdaran* and irregular warriors in Lebanon.[218] These future *Pasdaran* leaders were initially political actors and felt that they were loyal to the Supreme Leader only, not subject to broader civil control.[219] This gave the *Pasdaran* significant **regulative** freedom to first win and then maintain the Revolution, largely through irregular action.[220] The *Pasdaran* therefore possessed a **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** predisposition to such activities that would strengthen these pillars for the conduct of irregular war even as the institution became more formal.

The existence of a powerful armed body, separate from the potentially disloyal *Artesh*, was essential to the success of the Revolution. In addition, its existence allowed Khomeini to resist the pressure to form a "People's Army" along communist lines, which was contrary to what Khomeini desired. With the *Pasdaran* to protect him, Khomeini was able to maintain the *Artesh* while purging it to ensure it would not support a immediate coup.[221] The existence of the *Pasdaran* as a unique institution was further solidified by the quick imposition of war on Iran by Iraq in 1980. In summary, the early

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[217] Riaz Hassan, "Iran's Islamic Revolutionaries: Before and After the Revolution," *Third World Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (Jul., 1984), 675-686, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3992069, 684.

[218] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 70.

[219] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 228.

[220] After all, there were few conventional armed confrontations during the Revolution.

[221] Ibid., 229-231.

Pasdaran was an irregular body which had experience in irregular and terror tactics fighting both the Shah and the regime's early non-Islamic allies.

Iranian Constitution

Given the importance of the Guard to Khomeini it is not surprising that its existence became formally enshrined in the Constitution of Iran. The Constitution of the Republic, Article 150, gives the role of the IRGC as:

> The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements.[222]

Constitutionally then the *Pasdaran* were not only explicitly created as a revolutionary institution, but were charged with guarding it. They were charged not only with physically protecting it, but defending its ideology, or achievements. This provides **regulative** authority to the Guards not only to exist, but explicitly to function as a revolutionary element within the government. Its role was to "maintain Iran's religious nature and spirit."[223] In addition, it is clear that the Guards' loyalty is to the Revolution, and therefore to the *veleyat-e faqih*, rather than to the people, the state, the constitution, or the President. This provides a powerful **regulative** authority to operate in a manner that enables the conduct of irregular warfare where and when advantageous for the protection of the Revolution and its achievements.

Prior to the Imposed War Khomeini gave the Guards a range of tasks to meet the goal of defending the Revolution including internal security, ensuring the loyalty of the

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[222] "Islamic Republic Constitution - Chapter IX [Article 113 to 151] the Executive Power," http://www.salamiran.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=50&Itemid=9, (accessed 2/22, 2010), Article 150.

[223] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 19.

armed forces, assisting in implementing the Revolution, and supporting liberation movements.[224] This last task saw the *Pasdaran* support Shiite forces in Lebanon through the creation of the Hezbollah as already discussed. This task was considered sufficiently important that it is also directly embedded in the constitution article 154:

> The Islamic Republic of Iran has as its ideal human felicity throughout human society … it supports the just struggles of the mustad'afun [oppressed] against the mustakbirun [oppressors] in every corner of the globe.[225]

This is a task that provides **regulative** support for the intervention in other countries internal affairs, effectively charging the Guards with aiding the "oppressed" people of the world.[226] A constitutionally authorized framework for the conduct of such operations, which by their nature will be irregular, is as strong **regulative** support as is possible.

STRUCTURE

So far this chapter has focussed on the formation of the *Pasdaran* and the Iranian constitution, both of which provide significant **regulative** support for the conduct of irregular war. This section will examine the actual organisational structure of the *Pasdaran*, which has become very conventional looking, along with the relationship of the *Pasdaran* to the *Artesh*. . The conventional structure of the *Pasdaran* simultaneously shows significant **normative** and **regulative** support for the conduct of irregular war as well as the potential for the growth of the institution to eventually limit this same support. Finally, as will be seen, the *Pasdaran*'s difficult relationship with the *Artesh* provides

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[224] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 21.

[225] "Islamic Republic Constitution - Chapter X [Article 152 to 155] Foreign Policy," http://www.salamiran.org/content/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=51&Itemid=92, (accessed 2/22, 2010), Article 154.

[226] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 20.

normative support for the conduct of irregular war, as well as displaying **regulative** support for irregular war from the regime.

Arm Structure

As already discussed, the *Pasdaran* were initially formed from a variety of lightly armed revolutionary bands and, in the absence of the Imposed War, they likely would have remained that way. The Imposed War however, thrust the *Pasdaran* into conflict as a military organization, and, given their poor relations with the conventional *Artesh,* they found themselves engaged in battles on their own with the well equipped Iraqi Army. One of their "solutions" to this problem was the development of the Islamic Way of War described in Chapter 1, relying on human wave attacks of poorly equipped and trained Guards and Basij to overrun the Iraqis. In addition to this approach the *Pasdaran* also began efforts to build armoured units based on equipment captured from the Iraqis in order to increase their capability and reduce their reliance on the *Artesh*. Indeed, between 1982 and 1985 the *Pasdaran* began to look more and more like a conventional military, adding air and naval components and creating staffs to support commanders and conduct operational planning, administration, and logistics.[227] None of these elements would be typical for revolutionary groups, particularly given that a conventional army was maintained.

This is not to say that these elements added to the *Pasdaran* became completely conventional. In fact, the Islamic Way of War remains an important **normative** aspect of how the *Pasdaran* conduct operations. For instance, the *Pasdaran* Navy was formed in 1985 from a fledgling capability equipped with patrol boats for customs duty. By 1986 it was very well organized with an effective Headquarters and was larger than the regular

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[227] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 259.

Navy with over 20,000 members and a large number of small craft. Institutionally however it remained attached to the **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** aspects already discussed and trained to do suicide attacks with explosive laden boats.[228] This capacity was further developed and extensively used by the *Pasdaran* during the Tanker War, where Iran attempted to blockade Iraqi oil exports by attacking shipping in the Gulf.[229] The tactics used in the Tanker War included mining transportation lanes and direct attacks on civil shipping by non-unformed members of the *Pasdaran*, are certainly examples of irregular warfare. These tactics are "significant because they indicated Iran's willingness to use unconventional, even terrorist, methods to pursue a political and military strategy."[230] Overall then, the *Pasdaran* Navy, despite being **regulatively** structured as a conventional force, applied the **normative** approach of irregular war.

Following the War it was expected that the *Pasdaran* would give up its conventional units, but this never happened.[231] Although the backbone of the *Pasdaran* ground units remained light-infantry they did keep armour, artillery, air defence, engineering and chemical defence units.[232] In 1991 the Guards also accepted formal uniforms and standardized ranks similar to the *Artesh*.[233] Similarly the *Pasdaran* developed many of the institutional trappings associated with professional militaries including intellectual resources such as universities, think tanks, journals and other media

[228] Ibid., 304.

[229] Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, 202.

[230] Sick, *Iran: Confronting Terrorism*, 87.

[231] Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, 156.

[232] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 316.

[233] Ibid., 304.

outlets.[234] This trend of modernisation and professionalization continued and by 1993 "the *Pasdaran*'s military arm [had] taken on the form of a conventional armed force, instituting ranks and some traditional unit formations, and acquiring sophisticated conventional weaponry such as MiG-29 aircraft, SA-5 surface to air missiles, and SCUD ballistic missiles."[235]

Interestingly, as the *Pasdaran* have taken on many of the norms of common military institutions, it should be possible to apply institutional analysis from the organizational population of other militaries to predict other **normative** pressures.[236] One source of such norms is Theo Farrell's *The Norms of War* which outlines the **normative** influence of conventional war on militaries.[237] "Norms of conventional warfare prescribe military organizations that are standing, standardized, technologically structured, and state-based."[238] In the case of Iran both the *Pasdaran* and the *Artesh* are standing, standardized, technologically structured, and state-based institutions. As such the norms of conventional war should prescribe both institutions. Indeed, an examination of Farrell's norms shows that many are met by the *Pasdaran*, but not all. The gap between the **regulative** structure of "standing, standardized, technologically structured, and state-based" entities and the **normative** impact of conventional war norms may suggest a potential misalignment of the pillars for the *Pasdaran*. Farrell notes that some of the key norms of conventional war include the tri-service structure, basic units of

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[234]Green and others, *Understanding Iran*, 12.

[235] Katzman, *The Pasdaran: Institutionalization of Revolutionary Armed Force*, 391.

[236] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations : Ideas and Interests*, 85-6.

[237] Farrell, *The Norms of War : Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict*.

[238] Ibid., 33.

organisation, functional specialisations and technology, all of which the *Pasdaran*

meet.[239] Another key norm, civilian supremacy, is very questionable in the case of the

Pasdaran, unless the *faqih* is taken to fill the role of civilian oversight.[240] This question

of civilian control is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Two other key norms

however are not found in the *Pasdaran*. The first is the use of conventional tactics,

which although used have also been frequently ignored, human wave attacks provide an

outstanding example. The final norm to be discussed here is that of the

professionalization of the officer corps[241] which, despite the existence of a significant

investment in educational institutions, remains something the *Pasdaran* seek to avoid,

perhaps to assist in arresting their slide to conventionality.[242] One key traditional aspect

of the professionalization of the officer corps is its removal from political life. As has

been discussed however the *Pasdaran* are at their heart a political body charged with

defending the political success of the Revolution. An examination of other theories of

revolutionary military forces also suggests that the *Pasdaran* may be under a **normative**

influence towards conventionality.[243] Therefore, one of the "largest factors shaping

Iran's military remain the continuation of its dual militaries, inconsistent and sometimes

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[239] In addition the use of missile forces, drones, and other high technologies also underlines the degree to which the *Pasdaran* follow many of the conventional norms.

[240] Ibid., 39.

[241] Ibid., 38.

[242] Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, 60, 159.

[243] This idea, that the institution of the *Pasdaran* is subject to norms of other military institutions, and in particular other revolutionary military institutions, is expanded in Appendix B. The conclusion of Appendix B suggests the possibility that the *Pasdaran* are under a normative influence to transition to a more conventional force, although there is some evidence suggesting the *Pasdaran* may be unique and avoid such a transition.

antagonistic views toward military professionalism, and persistent problems with politicization."[244]

Today the *Pasdaran* structure would be very familiar to any member of a conventional military, consisting of tri-service components along with a reserve in the Basij and a special operations capability in the *Qods* Force.[245] Although these last two have some idiosyncrasies to them, the overall structure is not that different from the Canadian Forces with three environments, Special Forces, and a reserve component. That said, the Basij and *Qods* are significantly more political than similar branches elsewhere and bring substantial irregular capabilities to the mix. Perhaps the most essential difference is the degree to which Shiite themes and the religious faithful dominate the Basij, providing a **normative** influence towards Islamic militantism for the *Pasdaran*. Some have suggested that that the Basij were integrated in the Guards for precisely to increase the ideological fervour of the Guards.[246] Certainly the Basij are at the front of the suppression of most of the major anti-regime disturbances, indicating a high degree of loyalty and support for the religious powers.[247] This is not to say that the

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[244] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 300.

[245] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 19.

[246] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 32-33.

[247] Iason Athanasiadis, "Iran Move to Defrock Dissident Ayatollah Opens Rifts in Theocracy / the Christian Science Monitor - CSMonitor.Com," Christian Science Monitor, http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/0106/Iran-move-to-defrock-dissident-ayatollah-opens-rifts-in-theocracy (accessed 2/20, 2010); Martin Fletcher, "Iran Opposition Leaders Attacked as Regime Floods Streets," The Times, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article7022905.ece (accessed 2/23, 2010); Chip Cummins and Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran Cracks Down on Protests, Heralds Uranium Advance - WSJ.Com," The Wall Street Jounral, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703382904575058581696499688.html?mod=WSJ_World_LeadStory (accessed 2/23, 2010); Erdbrink, *Iran Steps Up Crackdown, Assaults Protesters at University of Tehran - Washingtonpost.Com*; Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran Mobilizes to Stifle Opposition Protests," The Wall Street Journal, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB100014240527487041401045750569725143729994.html?mod=WSJ_World_LeadStory (accessed 2/23, 2010).

Pasdaran are without their-own militancy. Two examples of such militancy from the

Imposed War include the mining of the Gulf and the launching of the Tanker War.[248] It

does however underline both the movement away from militancy for the *Pasdaran*

overall and, more importantly, a continuing **normative** desire to maintain that militancy.

The embedding of the Basij in the *Pasdaran* therefore provides both **regulative** and

normative support for the conduct of irregular war.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, the *Qods*, or Jerusalem, Force of the *Pasdaran*

is an entity specifically created to support the export of the Revolution. This implies the

conduct of operations firmly within the irregular war domain including sabotage,

terrorism, support to foreign militaries and similar missions. The Iranian push to expand

the Revolution was initially created as the Office of Liberation Movements[249] but *Qods*

was formed in 1990 to take over this mission.[250] Its operations are such that it does not

advertise its activities, making firm attributions difficult.[251] Furthermore, although *Qods*

elements are embedded in Iranian embassies around the world, their precise relationship

with Iranian intelligence, the MOIS, is also unclear.[252] That said, *Qods* has been

implicated in operations as diverse as direct combat support to Hezbollah against Israel in

the 33-Day War,[253] planning and conducting operations against the US in Iraq,[254] and

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[248] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 287.

[249] Ibid., 267, 303.

[250] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the Main Tool to Export the Revolution Beyond the Borders of Iran*, 2-3.

[251] Green and others, *Understanding Iran*, 59.

[252] Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, "Insights into the Future of Iran as a Regional Power" (Ottawa, Ontario, 30-31 Mar 2009), 16; and Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and Other Intelligence and Paramilitary Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2009) (accessed 13 Dec 2009), 9.

assisting in the conduct of terrorist attacks in Argentina.[255] *Qods* also operates training facilities all over the world including the notorious "Imam Ali University" in Tehran and camps in the Sudan and Lebanon among others.[256] Indeed, it is likely that the kidnapper who started the 33 Day War was trained by *Qods* in Iran.[257] Throughout this study many of the actions attributed to the *Pasdaran*, particularly those involving irregular war beyond the borders of Iran, were possibly, and even likely, conducted by the *Qods* Force.[258] The fact that the *Pasdaran* created a specific branch of the institution tasked with this type of irregular war is a clear sign of **regulative** support for the conduct of such operations. In addition, by gathering within one sub-organisation the majority of those supporting terrorism, it is likely that within that sub-group a degree of **normative** support can also be provided. It would be interesting to compare an institutional analysis of the *Pasdaran* in general to the *Qods* Force in specific. It is quite possible that one reason for the *Pasdaran*'s success has been its construction of a dedicated body to conduct the most irregular activities, but a detailed examination of such a hypothesis is beyond the scope of this paper.

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[253] Kagan, Kagan and Pletka, *Iranian Influence in the Levant, Iraq, and Afghanistan*, 7.

[254] Cordesman, *Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and Other Intelligence and Paramilitary Forces*, 9.

[255] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the Main Tool to Export the Revolution Beyond the Borders of Iran.*, 19-20.

[256] Cordesman, *Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and Other Intelligence and Paramilitary Forces*, 9.

[257] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the Main Tool to Export the Revolution Beyond the Borders of Iran.*,9.

[258] Cordesman, *Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and Other Intelligence and Paramilitary Forces*, 8.

Relations with the *Artesh*

Unsurprisingly the *Artesh* have not been altogether happy with the rising importance of the *Pasdaran*. Indeed, given the close ties the *Artesh* had with the Shah it is somewhat surprising that it survived the Revolution at all.[259] Certainly the senior officers of the *Artesh* were purged on several occasions, and several potential counter-coups were discovered and destroyed – the largest being the Nuzhih Coup of July 1980.[260] The rivalry between the *Pasdaran* and *Artesh* was intensified during the Iran-Iraq War. Early in the war there were severe and occasionally violent disagreements between the two. Some members even refused to follow the orders of an officer of the other armed force.[261] At one point during the war the Army Chief of Staff General Shirazi physically came to blows with the commander of the *Pasdaran*, Mohsen Rezai, and was relieved of his position.[262] Although there were some significant efforts to ease this tension, such as the creation of a unified command, these were only partial and a good degree of tension remains to this day.[263] While a key operation during the War to capture the Faw region was initially very successful, eventually it foundered due to poor planning by the *Pasdaran*, and yet the *Artesh* took the bulk of the blame with senior Army officers purged.[264] Indeed, throughout the Imposed War the *Pasdaran* were

[259] As has already been discussed, one reason was Khomeini's desire to avoid a communist style People's Liberation Army.

[260] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 241.

[261] William F. Hickman, *Ravaged and Reborn : The Iranian Army, 1982 : A Staff Paper* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), 20.

[262] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 277.

[263] Mohsen M. Milani, "Power Shifts in Revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (Summer - Autumn, 1993), 359-374, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4310862., 371.

[264] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 100.

generally granted credit and the *Artesh* handed the blame, with the Guards using their links to the *faqih* to ignore their civilian political masters.[265] This conflict with the conventional military can reasonably be assumed to provide **normative** support for a non-conventional approach to war, an approach that would be irregular by definition.

The Army has continued to languish since the end of the Iran-Iraq War, while the Guards continue to obtain and develop more advanced capabilities, particularly in the realm of long range missile and rocket technologies.[266] Some degree of antipathy is almost inevitable; after all, one of the significant roles of the *Pasdaran* is to ensure that the *Artesh* is incapable of conducting or supporting a coup.[267] This does, however, imply **regulative** support, or even favouritism, from the state for the Guards and by extension their approach. By looking at the degree of support the *Pasdaran* receive, and the *Artesh* do not, it would be difficult not to conclude that the Guard's irregular approach has the **regulative** and **normative** support of the regime.

DOCTRINE

Thus far the discussion has focussed on the formation and structure of the *Pasdaran* which has provided evidence of a Revolutionary institution which is well suited to the conduct of irregular warfare. In particular, the *Pasdaran* demonstrate strong alignment of the **normative** and **regulative** pillars of Scott's model. In addition to these major factors already discussed, two additional areas provide further support. The first is the nature of the *Pasdaran*'s doctrine and strategy, both formal and informal including exporting the Revolution and the impact of the Imposed War. Finally, a brief look at the

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[265] Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, 102-4.

[266] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 178.

[267] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 226.

Guard's perspective on terrorism rounds out the key doctrinal influences discussed here. While examining these aspects of the *Pasdaran* it is possible to tease out some additional factors that strengthen, or in some cases weaken, the institutional pillars of the Guards.

Exporting the Revolution

As already discussed, one key aspect of the Islamic Revolution was its focus on the world beyond the borders of Iran. Khomeini himself clearly declared that "we should try to export our revolution to the world."[268] This view is widely held among the ruling elites of Iran, and within the *Pasdaran*.[269] For instance, Rafsanjani, a major figure within Iranian politics and ex-President, stated that the "Islamic revolution does not confine its true and noble nature to geographic borders." [270] This expansion was both an ideological and existential imperative for the regime. Khomeini felt it was essential that Iran seek to expand the revolution since "all the superpowers and the [great] powers have risen to destroy us. If we remain in an enclosed environment we shall definitely face defeat."[271] So great was this imperative that it was embedded in the constitution as previously discussed.

Iran's specific actions to bring about this exportation leaned directly on the *Pasdaran* and irregular methods. The fact that the *Pasdaran* were, in some ways,

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[268] Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism*, 41-2.

[269] It should be noted that Iran's efforts to export the Revolution have certainly been moderated since the formation of the Republic. Despite these objections the argument presented here takes the view that the *Pasdaran* have shown a strong ability as an institution to conduct irregular war to support exporting the Revolution. That they currently choose not to violently export the revolution is tied more to the cost of doing so in the face of active US opposition, rather than a change in the institution. See for instance Afshin Hojati and Pierre Pahlavi, "Iran and Central Asia: The Smart Politics of Prudent Pragmatism," in *The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors*, ed. Emilian Kavalski (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010), 215-238.

[270] Alexander and Hoenig, *The New Iranian Leadership : Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, 200.

[271] Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism*, 92.

constitutionally tasked to conduct irregular war in support of the oppressed outside of

Iran is a very powerful **regulative** factor in the formation of the institution. Due to the

imposition of the Iran-Iraq War Khomeini's ability to export the revolution was

disrupted, but not destroyed.[272] Iran, almost certainly through *Pasdaran* supported

elements, conducted a range of bombings of embassies, industrial infrastructure, and oil

installations, throughout the Gulf. Eventually, when these means failed to convince

Shiite populations to rebel and support the Revolution, Iran and the *Pasdaran* turned to

terrorism.[273] Iran supported Shiite communities in the Gulf, both to expand the

Revolution and to remind its neighbours it could hurt them in the face of their support for

Iraq. Indeed, during their early revolutionary fervour some radicals did speak of

revolutionary change throughout the region.[274] This shows a **normative** influence, well

aligned with the **regulative** function of exporting the revolution. Given that the tactics

and strategy of exporting the revolution are directly irregular in nature there is evidence

of support from these pillars for irregular war more broadly within the Revolutionary

institution of the *Pasdaran*. That said, these influences have been tempered over the past

decade with few overt actions by the *Pasdaran* as Iran withdrew from active

inflammation of Shiite entities in the Gulf States. More is at play than pure ideology,

either revolutionary or Islamic.[275] Although the *Pasdaran* have chosen to limit their

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[272] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 106-7.

[273] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 65.

[274] CSIS, *Insights into the Future of Iran as a Regional Power*, 45.

[275] Other examples of tempering of ideological fervour include Iran's decision not to engage the Islamic populations in its neighbouring Russian republics and in its decision in Chechnya, despite the slaughter of Islamic Chechens, to treat the issue as an internal problem for Russia. (see Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 78 and Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 152-3).

actions in the face of power politics it does not necessarily speak to limitations or reductions in its institutional capacity to conduct irregular war, it is likely that the **normative** and **regulative** pillars remain well aligned.

Military Capacity

As has been seen in each of the preceding chapters the Imposed War was a defining moment for the *Pasdaran* for a variety of reasons. From a doctrinal and strategic perspective its impact was largely felt in the massive destruction it created. Despite the fact that the *Pasdaran* maintained all of its military components, it was a shattered institution. The *Pasdaran* maintained its confidence in the new "Islamic Way of War", but there can be little doubt that the Imposed War had an enormous impact on both the quantity and quality of the equipment available to Iranian forces. Following the War Iran was alone in the region, surrounded by hostile powers and with a sufficiently powerful conventional army Iran was forced to pursue a defence based on an asymmetric and irregular approach. An approach it maintains to this day.[276]

> The early reliance on superior morale, sheer numbers, indoctrination, and youth, necessitated by Iran's conventional weaknesses, set the template for the Islamic Republic's current "asymmetric" strategy of homeland defence - the conduct of partisan warfare, defense-in-depth, and scorched-earth tactics by lightly armed popular forces against a militarily superior opponent. [277]

As such the primary strategy adopted by Iran for the defence of the country is the "mosaic" defence, which relies on a combination of strongly held defensive positions, largely in urban areas, combined with "guerrilla" actions to impose cost and delay on the

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[276] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 325.

[277] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 33.

enemy.[278] Interestingly, this is the same doctrine the *Pasdaran* taught Hezbollah in

Lebanon and assisted them in implementing during the 2006 33-Day War.[279] In that case

Hezbollah is generally considered to have been very successful against the powerful

Israeli Defence Force. As the Guard's Commander Jalili stated: "Lebanon turned into a

successful model in terms of resistance and solidarity for other countries of the region

after its triumph in the 33-day war".[280] Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War this type of

unconventional defence has been emphasised due largely to its effectiveness and low cost

in terms of equipment and standing forces.[281] A doctrinal emphasis on this type of

irregular war then is clear **regulative** support for the conduct of irregular war.

Given the strategic necessity for the use of a mosaic defence there is a firm

requirement to provide training and doctrine, providing a **normative** influence for the

conduct of such operations in other contexts. By adopting a strategy of unconventional

defence, including bombings, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), and other

unconventional attacks, the *Pasdaran* have successfully aligned the **normative** and

regulative pillars since the approved doctrine and training reflects the conduct of such

actions. Finally, in addition to being the national strategy for the defence of Iran, the

Pasdaran have also been clear that such tactics provide a capable deterrent.[282] Again the

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[278] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 323; and Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 27.

[279] Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Hezbollah as a Strategic Arm of Iran*, 23.

[280] "Jalili: Lebanese Resistance, a Successful Pattern for Regional States," *Arabia 2000* (10/15, 2008), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=6FI2121406814&site=ehost-live, (accessed 26 Jan 2010).

[281] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 315.

[282] Iran views the capabilities of its allies and proxies in Iraq and elsewhere as possible weapons to attack US interests throughout the Gulf with unconventional attacks if necessary. See for example: Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 184-5.

Pasdaran show excellent alignment between **regulative** and **normative** pillars for the conduct of irregular war.

Terrorism

Terrorism, as perhaps the most extreme version of irregular war, is worth directly considering in the case of the *Pasdaran*. In addition to the Islamic influences on terrorism discussed in Chapter 1, there are also considerable revolutionary influences. Not only were the founding members of the *Pasdaran* essentially revolutionary terrorists, but the institution came into being in the middle of a terror/counter-terror campaign against the Shah's forces and, eventually, communist revolutionaries such as Tudeh and MEK. Overall the fact that the founders had come from a culture accepting terrorism as valid in the Revolution provides **cultural-cognitive** support to continuing that means of war, and the fact that they engaged in a terror campaign provides aligned **normative** support.[283] This is typical of the early phases of many revolutions, what is interesting is that the *Pasdaran* maintained their ability to conduct this type of warfare well after the success of the Revolution was assured. The use of **"**terrorism as an instrument of policy greatly undermined Iran's quest to reclaim its position as a legitimate member of the community of nations."[284] It is clear that terrorism was, through the 1980s and 90s, a key tool for Iran and in the somewhat humorous words of the Crown Prince of Bahrain: "In Iran you have three people in charge: You have Khamenei, who is in charge of religion and terrorism. You have Rafsanjani, and he is in charge of business and terrorism. And

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[283] Zabih, *Aspects of Terrorism in Iran*, 91.

[284] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 146.

then you have Khatami, and he is in charge of internal politics, moderation, and terrorism."[285]

This is not to say that Iran and the *Pasdaran* are unwilling to abandon terrorism, indeed as discussed in Chapter 1 the use of assassination has become uncommon since the fallout of the killing of Kurdish leaders in Berlin.[286] Furthermore Iran appears to have stopped directly supporting terror in the Gulf after the Khobar Towers attack, perhaps fearing it had gone too far.[287] That said, there remains a strong tendency within the *Pasdaran* to resort to irregular warfare and to support such activities both internally within Iran[288] and externally in Iraq[289] and Yemen.[290] As recently as 2001 the Guards confirmed the fatwa against the author Salman Rushdie and indicated a desire assassinate him.[291] As such it is reasonable to assume that the historical **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** influences to resort to irregular tactics remain potent within the *Pasdaran*, even if the current consequences of such actions are too grave to accept. In the end, despite the potential international **normative** and **regulative** pressure to abandon the use of such methods, the Revolutionary institution of the *Pasdaran* likely maintains sufficient counter **normative** and **cultural-cognitive** support. After all, it is one of the few tools

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[285] As quoted in Iran Policy Committee, *What Makes Tehran Tick : Islamist Ideology and Hegemonic Interests : A White Paper*, 26-7.

[286] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 225.

[287] Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism*, 50.

[288] Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution : Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 191.

[289] Takeyh, *Hidden Iran : Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*, 179; and Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, *Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the Main Tool to Export the Revolution Beyond the Borders of Iran.*, 16-7.

[290] "Washington Times - EDITORIAL: Iran's Al Qaeda Connection in Yemen " http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jan/06/irans-al-qaeda-connection-in-yemen/print/ (accessed 3/17, 2010).

[291] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 236.

that the *Pasdaran* can afford that has the potential to advance its interests against a stronger state.[292] Iran, with the *Pasdaran* as their tool, remains one of the foremost leaders in the world for the use of terror as a weapon precisely because it is one of the few weapons at its disposal against the US.[293]

THE REGIME AND *FAQIH*

In addition to being the crucial Shiite Islamic authority for the *Pasdaran* the *veleyat-e faqih* is also an important revolutionary doctrine.[294] Indeed, Khomeini's doctrine of leadership by the clerics became the resulting government after the fall of the Shah. This is not to say that the revolution was, from the start, destined to result in Khomeini's rule as *Faqih*. After all, several key groups of revolutionaries already discussed, particularly those with communist leanings, disagreed with this approach. In the end, the American Embassy hostage crisis was a crucial element in motivating public support for the incorporation of the *faqih* into the constitution of Iran.[295] The *Pasdaran*, through their involvement in that crisis, and their direct action against anti-*faqih* factions, were the crucial armed element to ensure that the *veleyat-e faqih* became the law of Iran. As such installing and protecting the rule of the *faqih* has been, since its formation, the **regulative** role of the *Pasdaran* and irregular war its **normative** approach.

An additional key factor with respect to the political aspects of the *Pasdaran* is the degree to which it is dependent on the structure of the *faqih* and the current regime.

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[292] Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism*, 264.

[293] Shay, *The Axis of Evil : Iran, Hizballah, and Palestinian Terror*, 10.

[294] As mentioned elsewhere in this document, a good source for some of the ideological underpinnings of Khomenei's ideology as something other than pure Shiism, including influence of Ali Shariati see Pahlavan, *Islamisme Contre Iranité : L'Iran Assassiné*; and Akhavi, *The Ideology and Praxis of Shi'Ism in the Iranian Revolution*.

[295] Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs*, 115-120.

Certainly in the early days Khomeini spent considerable effort in coordinating with the *Pasdaran*.[296] Given the degree of **regulative** and **normative** support the *Pasdaran* have received from the *faqih* it is very likely they would resist any change in the structure of the Iranian regime. Indeed, in the event of a failure of the regime it seems unlikely that any replacement would leave the Guards in place, and particularly not with the degree of power and influence they currently enjoy.[297] As such they are, in general, loyal to the *veleyat-e faqih*[298] and have strong, long standing relations with Khamenei dating back to the Imposed War. During the War Khamenei spent a lot of time "organizing resistance at the front" and formed a close relation with the Guards and Basij who saw him as one of their own.[299] This loyalty is not absolute, but the *Pasdaran* appear to realize that any threat to the current unelected regime is an existential threat to them. In particular, in July of 1999 key Guard commanders sent a letter to Khamenei threatening to take action unless he acted to suppress the activities of the moderates under Khatami.[300]

More recently, the current President also has strong roots in the Guards, including serving with them in Kermanshah during the War.[301] Furthermore, even before his election as President, Ahmadinejad maintained a very close relationship as mayor of Tehran, where "the relationship between the Guard and the municipality was so close that

[296] Indeed, many of the current key figures in Iran including Khamenei and Rafsanjani filled the role of liaison in the early days of the Revolution. See Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 228.

[297] Gheissari and Nasr, *The Conservative Consolidation in Iran*, 178.

[298] Cordesman, *Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Al Quds Force, and Other Intelligence and Paramilitary Forces*, 9.

[299] Naji, *Ahmadinejad : The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, 260.

[300] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 307.

[301] Naji, *Ahmadinejad : The Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader*, 34.

it was difficult to say whether the Guard was supporting Ahmadinejad or vice versa."[302]

This relationship, however, is useful to the Guard, rather than formative despite the fact

that so many of the key current political leaders also have deep roots in the Guards.[303]

This can be clearly seen in the fact that the relationship between the Guards and the

governing bodies is not always harmonious. This does, however, show that the *Pasdaran*

have both **regulative** and **normative** pressures to maintain the current regime, which

more or less requires the use of irregular warfare given the weakness of Iran's

conventional forces.

Despite these **normative** and **regulative** pressures the *Pasdaran* have shown an

ability to maintain a degree of independence from the regime. One example of the

regime's fear of this independence is the existence of the Ideological-Political Directorate

(IPD), which is both structured and employed very similar to the political directorate in

the Red Army. This organisation was formed in every unit of the *Pasdaran* and *Artesh* to

ensure loyalty to the regime.[304] Interestingly this organization exists in both armed

forces of Iran, despite the fact that the *Pasdaran* has been given significant indoctrination

tasks of their own. More concrete examples include the continuing disagreements

between Rezai and Ahmadinejad.[305] Another is that during Iran's attempt to broker

peace between Hezbollah and Amal in Lebanon the Guards continued to support

Hezbollah throughout, despite pressure from Tehran to stop.[306] The Guard's attempts to

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[302] Ibid., 53.

[303] Motadel, *March of the Guards*, 9.

[304] Zabih, *The Iranian Military in Revolution and War*, 234.

[305] Motadel, *March of the Guards*, 10.

[306] Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism*, 100.

both continue and heighten the Tanker War are other potential examples.[307] In addition

to these examples, Katzman spends a chapter of his book outlining in detail the high

degree of independence the *Pasdaran* have from the regime.[308] Finally, it appears as if

Khamenei may have created a new elite personal guard dedicated to his defence call the

Haydaryan.[309] If true, this would show some friction between the *Pasdaran* and the

faqih. Overall then there is evidence that, while the *Pasdaran* remain loyal to the regime,

they do possess both **normative** and **regulative** support to operate outside this direction

when necessary.[310] The *Pasdaran* have historically used this flexibility to conduct

irregular war in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Gulf.

CONCLUSION

As a Revolutionary institution numerous potential influences on the *Pasdaran*

have been examined and once again they show considerable convergence and mutual

support across Scott's three pillars, particularly the **regulative** and **normative** pillars.

Indeed, the **regulative** influence of a fervent revolutionary ideology and a structure and

organization supportive of irregular war provides a firm base. On this **regulative** base

the *Pasdaran* have built a **normative** structure condoning and supporting the conduct of

irregular war, particular irregular war to support the revolution and its goals. If there is

one aspect of Scott's model that is weakest in the *Pasdaran* as a Revolutionary institution

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[307] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 287.

[308] Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam : Iran's Revolutionary Guard*, Chapter 5, 115-138.

[309] Motadel, *March of the Guards*, 10.

[310] There is some debate as to whether or not these disagreements are real or merely for public consumption as there is some scholarship to suggest that the *faqih* remains in control, but wishes to have some deniability over the actions of the Guards and *Qods*. See for example: Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, *Insights into the Future of Iran as a Regional Power*, 16; Sick, *Iran: Confronting Terrorism*, 84, 87; Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 90; or Green and others, *Understanding Iran*, 59.

it is the **cultural-cognitive** pillar. This should not be surprising, after all the revolution is only slightly more than thirty years old, and the underlying ideology not much more than a generation older than that. Despite this potential difficulty, as discussed next, any deficiencies in **cultural-cognitive** support as a Revolutionary institution are easily available to the *Pasdaran* as a Persian institution.

CONCLUSION

So far this study has discussed in detail the results of examining the *Pasdaran*

through three different lenses, as an Islamic, Persian, and Revolutionary institution. In

each of those cases key factors were examined for impact on Scott's three pillars and the

institution's capability to conduct irregular war. In the case of an Islamic institution it

was found that the institution was relatively well balanced across all the pillars, but in the

case of the Persian and Revolutionary institutions one key pillar was less emphasised. In

the case of the Persian institution this was the **regulative** pillar, and in the case of the

Revolutionary institution the **cultural-cognitive**. This section will combine the three

institutions to look at the complete Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This will be

conducted by focussing on the key strengths and weakness of the *Pasdaran* in terms of its

ability to conduct irregular war already identified.

STRENGTHS

Perhaps the greatest strength of the *Pasdaran* as a complete institution is the

degree to which the three different lenses support each other. In particular, the ideology

that is essential to the Revolutionary institution is in fact well grounded in the Shiite

tenets of the Islamic institution. In addition, what the Revolutionary institution lacks in

terms of **cultural-cognitive** support for irregular war the Persian institution provides in

terms of a nationalistic fervour. Likewise what the Persian institution lacks in terms of

regulative support can be found in great measure in the Revolutionary institution. An

interesting conclusion from the fact the Persian and Revolutionary institutions would

seem to need to support each other, is that Persian (or Iranian) nationalism is essential to

the institution, regardless of its attempts to paint itself as a purely pan-Islamic organisation.

Another significant strength within the Institution is the huge impact of the culture of martyrdom on both the institution of the *Pasdaran* and on Iranian society more broadly. By institutionalising martyrdom within all three pillars the *Pasdaran* have gained exceptional strong support for the conduct of the mosaic defence as well as human wave and other irregular tactics. Again, the exceptional mutual support across the three pillars suggests that it is very likely that this aspect of support for irregular war will continue far into the future, regardless of other impacts on the institution.

Another strength that this study has highlighted is the depth of support for the conduct of irregular war generally. Across all three institutions there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the Guards are well constructed with mutually supporting pillars in accordance with Scott's model, suggesting a very stable and legitimate institution. The key implication is that the *Pasdaran* will be difficult to dissuade from the conduct of irregular war whenever and wherever required. Although recent history has seen a decrease in terrorist and other highly irregular activities this analysis suggests that such a change may only represent present circumstances, and not a significant change in the institution. That said, as discussed in the next section, there is also some evidence to suggest that the *Pasdaran* are still in the process of maturing as an institution and that this may impose limits on its ability to conduct irregular war in the future.

WEAKNESSES

Perhaps the greatest potential weakness of the *Pasdaran* for the conduct of irregular war is the potential that it cannot be considered a mature institution. If the

Pasdaran's actions over the past thirty years are considered as the continuous maturation towards some future institution, rather than as the actions of an established institution, then the validity of applying Scott's model can be questioned. To begin with Scott's definition of institutions emphasizes the fact that they "tend to be transmitted across generations, to be maintained and reproduced." [311] Clearly in the case of the *Pasdaran*, an institution now only 30 years old, the degree of continuity is limited. This is potentially a serious limitation in the use of institutional analysis, and as has been discussed there are numerous signs of ongoing change within the *Pasdaran*. From an early focus on a degree of extremist terrorism the *Pasdaran* appear to have moderated their activities over time and have been implicated in fewer irregular activities recently. For instance, in the early 1980s the Guards assisted or encouraged Hezbollah in the conduct of a series of terrorist attacks on western elements, including major suicide bombings and the taking of civilian hostages. By the time of the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel the tactics adopted could be considered quasi-conventional.[312] Likewise many of the key aspects of the *Pasdaran*, including its rank structure, have only been approximately stable since 1991[313] and the Basij were only integrated in 2007.[314] Despite the fact that the *Pasdaran* are still clearly undergoing significant change, the use of institutional analysis has been adopted since it nevertheless provides important insight into how the *Pasdaran* have managed to maintain some ability to conduct irregular war.

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[311] Scott, *Institutions and Organizations : Ideas and Interests*, 49-50.

[312] Stephen Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008); Matthews, *We were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War.*

[313] Ward, *Immortal : A Military History of Iran and its Armed Forces*, 304.

[314] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 33.

Indeed, as the institution changes it may well be that gaps not present at this stage will grow between the institutional pillars. Caution must therefore be exercised in assuming that the formation of the institution is complete and that the conclusions presented here have a timeless quality. The information presented here could be read in a very different way to show, as Chorley suggests, that the *Pasdaran* are an institution in transition from an adhoc political Guard, similar to the Red Guard of the Soviets, to a professional military force, similar to the Red Army.[315] In such a case it is likely that the institution as presented here will continue to modify and could lose its ability to conduct irregular war.

That said, the model used in this discussion also provides for an interesting middle ground. In the case of the Russian and French Revolutions it could only be argued that the relevant institutions rested largely on revolutionary and nationalistic pillars. In these cases there is, perhaps, no equivalent lens to the Islamic institution. Yet the analysis presented suggests that the maturation of the *Pasdaran* will primarily affect the Persian and Revolutionary views.[316] Perhaps, regardless of how the *Pasdaran* matures along these paths, it will remain capable of irregular war by leaning on a strong Islamic institutional pillar. In other words, even if the *Pasdaran* are maturing towards a more conventional military force, as other revolutionary militaries have, it is quite possible that the doctrine of the *faqih* will permit the *Pasdaran* to maintain institutional support for traditional irregular war.[317]

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[315] This argument is expanded somewhat in Annex B.

[316] The Persian pillar may see the ability to conduct irregular war eroded by a continuing move towards economic factors dominating the Guard and the Revolutionary pillar by maturation towards a more conventional approach as discussed in Chapter 2 and 3 respectively.

[317] As in the introduction the People's Liberation Army may provide an alternative model to which the *Pasdaran* are maturing and in the process moving away from "classical" irregular war towards an unrestricted warfare model.

The doctrine of the *faqih* also emerges as essential to the conduct of the irregular war for two other reasons. The first, as discussed above, is that it is the **regulative** support for irregular war within the Shiite Islamic tradition. The second is that it is at the heart of the revolutionary ideology of the *Pasdaran*. The *faqih* therefore represents a crucial link across the lenses. The doctrine enables the conduct of irregular war by justifying its actions in Islamic terms, but it also justifies irregular war in the conduct of world-wide revolution against the oppressors in revolutionary terms. In many ways it could represent the *Pasdaran*'s centre of gravity for the conduct of irregular war. Note that this does not imply that the *faqih* must be strong, just that it has **regulative** authority. As far as the analysis here is concerned a *faqih* completely dominated by the *Pasdaran* would still provide the required support.

Although the purpose of this study was not to suggest possible ways of weakening the *Pasdaran*, the results certainly seem to indicate a few potential targets. The first, and most lucrative, is the legitimacy of the doctrine of the *veleyat-e faqih*, which emerged as a key enabling factor for the *Pasdaran*. Another potential avenue of approach would be to encourage the ongoing professionalization of the *Pasdaran* and hope that the maturation of the institution will indeed take it down the path of a more conventional military force.

CONCLUSION

The *Pasdaran*, as with the rest of the current Iranian political structure, represents a very complex institution. By examining it from three different points of view using a broad outline of Scott's model for institutional analysis provides a useful tool for the examination of the *Pasdaran*'s ability to conduct irregular war. The key conclusion is

that, indeed the *Pasdaran* do show well aligned support across the institutional pillars for the conduct of irregular war and, as such, should be expected to be able to capably conduct it. The study also proposes several of the key elements on which this support rests and suggests that the *Pasdaran* may be in the middle of a process of maturation which will limit its future institutional capacity for the conduct of irregular war. In addition, hopefully an in depth analysis of a key Iranian institution will assist in developing a better understanding of the Iranian regime and its occasionally confusing reactions to the western world.

Appendix 1 – Summary of Key Influences

This appendix provides a brief overview of the key influences which support the *Pasdaran*'s capacity to conduct irregular war. This list is not intended to be all inclusive since the nature of the argument presented in this study is difficult to summarise in a succinct format. However, the high level view presented here does underline a few key factors which provide influence simultaneously across the three pillars. In addition the large number of other factors supporting two pillars clearly illustrates the degree of alignment between the pillars for the conduct of irregular war. Needless to say, the detailed discussion and justification for the following conclusions are in the main body of this study.

Regulative (Rules and structures and the capacity to establish and enforce them)	Normative (values, norms, preferences and constraints of social action)	Cultural-Cognitive (cognitive frameworks, predispositions, and how the world is perceived)
Explicit Islamic support for irregular war	**Shiite desire to fight injustice**	**Islam as a political religion**
		All members are Shiite
		General Shiite loyalty to obligations and prohibitions
	Shiite power tends towards decentralization	Shiite power tends towards decentralization
		Shiite celebration of resistance, even impossible resistance
		Rejection of loyalty to majority
Intent of Islamic Way of War is to instil terror in opponent		Intent of Islamic Way of War is to instil terror in opponent
Explicit political support for martyrdom and suicide actions **Doctrinal and "think-tank" support for martyrdom**	**Martyrdom embedded as a key normative ideal**	**Culture of martyrdom**
Doctrine of Sacred defence of Islam	Doctrine of Sacred defence of Islam	
	Guards follow Islamic law in conduct of Imposed War (no chemicals etc.)	

Islam as the aggrieved party with respect to US and Iraq	Islam as the aggrieved party with respect to US and Iraq	
Constitution empowers Guards to protect the Oppressed		Oppressed peoples has broader meaning within Islam and Shiism in particular
	Cultural background of assassination	
	Acceptance of use of Hostages	*Use of hostages directly counter to Shiite (Islamic) principles* (weakens support)
Duty to attack Israel		Requirement for a scapegoat (Israel/US)
Some perception of Quranic support of terrorism (in addition to irregular war more broadly)	Praise from senior Iranian officials for the use of terror	
Veleyat-e Faqih* as a key regulative source of power.** **Explicit support for irregular war from the *Faqih	**Moral validation provided by the *Faqih***	**Actions to defend Islam are also actions to defend the *Faqih***
	Nationalism used to justify expansion and consolidation of Iranian power.	Deep Persian/Iranian nationalism
	Requirement for self-sufficiency in national defence	Strong historic desire for independence
		Persian sense of superiority
	Rejection of norms of the Western international system	Historic sense of continuous persecution from both a Persian and Shiite perspective
	Rejection of international treaty law	
		Belief of Iran as the natural and desirable regional hegemon
Power gained through the use of bonds of patronage (the informal system is the power in Iran)		Strong cultural bias towards the value of informal bonds of patronage and relationships
	Historic background in pre-revolutionary bands with tendencies towards irregular war	
Power gained through legal and under ground economics	*Guards may become focused on economic and political power rather than military* (weakens support)	

	Tendency towards dissimulation and dishonesty in general (ketman, *taqiyya, gholov, ta'arouf*)	Tendency towards dissimulation and dishonesty in general (ketman, *taqiyya, gholov, ta'arouf*)
Irregular tactics sanctioned to win the revolution	Guards formed from armed revolutionaries engaged in terrorism	Guards formed based on terror focused anti-Shah organisations
Constitution articles 150 and 154		
	Structured as a conventional military force (weakens support)	
Addition of *Basij* to the *Pasdaran*	Addition of *Basij* to the *Pasdaran*	
Creation of *Qods* force	Concentration of many irregular warfare activities within one sub-organisation (*Qods)*	
Guards continuously favoured over conventional Army.	Separation of the Guards from the conventional Army	
Explicit doctrine to export the revolution	Background as revolutionaries seeking to export their norms	
Destruction of Iranian military capacity in Iran-Iraq War	Destruction of Iranian military capacity in Iran-Iraq War	

Appendix 2 – A Different View – The Life Cycle of Revolution

The main text of this study focused on the application of the theory of Scott to the *Pasdaran* from a variety of different perspectives. In particular, Chapter 3 spent some significant time discussing various aspects of the *Pasdaran* as a Revolutionary institution purely within the context of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In addition to the evidence provided of **regulative**, **normative**, and, **cultural-cognitive** support for the conduct of irregular war, this appendix will examine potential **normative** influences of revolutions and revolutionary militaries in general. Although the scope of this study does not permit a detailed examination of the history of revolution it will consider Crane Brinton's broad model of revolutions[318] and Katherine Chorley's study of revolutionary armies in particular.[319] This examination will suggest that the Islamic revolution fits historic scholarship and as such the *Pasdaran* should be subject to historical **normative** influences on revolutionary military institutions. Examples of the *Pasdaran*'s potential historical uniqueness are also suggested. In addition, a discussion of the Irish Revolution and the IRA will show significant parallels to the *Pasdaran* and suggest additional potential **normative** influences on the institution. The overall conclusion of this examination is that the *Pasdaran* may be on a course of decreasing ability to conduct irregular war.

To begin with, Crane Brinton's model suggests that the course of a revolution can most aptly be compared to the course of a disease, with the disease being some flaw in society, and the revolution itself being something similar to a fever which is followed by

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[318] Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

[319] Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution*.

a degree of healing.[320] Indeed, revolutions appear to share very similar stages, and in

particular they are not complete with the rise of a new power, indeed in Brinton's

historical examples it can take twenty years for the ripple effects to subside.[321] In terms

of the conduct of irregular war this has tended to be a cycle of significant terrorist

violence and other irregular activity followed by a considerable reduction and the

eventual implementation of a more stable period. In terms of irregular war this has been

well illustrated both in Brinton's examples as well as in Libya and Sudan which have all

seen a significant decrease in their sponsorship of terrorism and use of irregular war.[322]

Indeed, such tendencies have been seen with in the *Pasdaran* as well suggesting a broad

normative influence away from irregular war, or at least its terrorist aspects.[323]

On the other hand, another key aspect noted in Brinton's work is the existence of

a parallel revolutionary government structure which eventually merges with, or replaces,

the existing government. Within the Iranian Revolution key elements, including the

komitehs, *faqih* and revolutionary courts with the backing of the *Pasdaran* acted as a

parallel government during the revolution, but to some degree have never fully

integrated.[324] Indeed, Iran to this day has a somewhat parallel system of unelected

government centred on the *faqih* and the Guards, and an elected system.[325] Although

there are several possible explanations for this split it does make the Islamic revolution,

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[320] Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*.

[321] Lyford Paterson Edwards, *The Natural History of Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 201.

[322] Byman, *Deadly Connections : States that Sponsor Terrorism*, 299.

[323] Wehrey, *The Rise of the Pasdaran : Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*, 36-7.

[324] Hassan, *Iran's Islamic Revolutionaries: Before and After the Revolution*, 677.

[325] Thaler, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads : An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, 22.

and the *Pasdaran* as its military arm, somewhat unique. This degree of uniqueness is also highlighted in Chorley's model of revolutionary armies.

Katherine Chorley, looking at revolutions prior to the Second World War, developed another model describing the various stages a revolutionary army would generally follow. These included the formation of bodies of armed revolutionaries, the development of these bodies into a military force which the revolutionary government relies on while forming a reliable Army, and finally the dissolution or replacement of the force by the reliable Army.[326] As such, there appear to be **normative** pressures within revolutionary regimes that tend towards both professionalization and conventionality of their military forces. Chorley based her assertion that the armed revolutionaries must be replaced on the fact that "an organization whose *raison d'etre* has been the destruction of an existing regime must necessarily be unsuitable and inadequate in many respects for permanent embodiment."[327] In specific, partisan bands of armed revolutionaries may be good at terrorism, but they tend not to be good conventional military forces.[328] Within this model the *Pasdaran* clearly followed the first two steps, but were never dissolved or replaced. This, combined with the *Pasdaran*'s uniqueness in terms of Brinton's model, suggest that they may not be subject to the same degree of **normative** influence that other revolutionary armies have been. This may imply an ability to continue to use irregular methods long after other revolutionary armies have matured beyond such actions. With a conventional army at its disposal in the *Artesh* the Iranian regime does not necessarily need the *Pasdaran* to become a completely conventional force. Overall then, the typical

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[326] Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution*, 236.

[327] Ibid., 256.

[328] Ibid., 185.

normative forces that could push the *Pasdaran* towards conventionality may be less strenuous in their case, but a study of revolutionary armies certainly suggests that they exist.

A final topic for discussion in terms of pure revolutionary theory is an examination of the Irish Revolution. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) followed Chorley's model exceptionally well, it started as an effective guerrilla force that, much like the *Pasdaran*, very efficiently married a culture of martyrdom with an intense nationalism.[329] Despite these successes, during the civil war the IRA both professionalized and became much more conventional.[330] This tendency was continued after victory and Ireland adopted a conventional defence against Britain between the two world wars despite the fact that this was poor strategy.[331] Indeed, the fact that the IRA, which had been a very effective guerrilla force, turned to conduct an ineffective conventional defence underlines the very strong **normative** pull of conventionality for military forces. As has been mentioned on several occasions, it is possible that the *Pasdaran* are successfully resisting this tendency, but it is very likely that this element, combined with the structural elements already discussed, is having an effect to moderate the *Pasdaran*'s ability to conduct irregular war, particular more aggressive actions counter to conventional norms.

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[329] Ibid., 44.

[330] Farrell, *The Norms of War : Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict*, 47.

[331] Ibid., 27-9.

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