

IRGC and Iranian Soft and Hard Power Influence Within the Middle East

2018

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IRGC and Iranian Soft Power influence within the Middle east

By: Daryl F. Urbina

Abstract

The IRGC, or the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Iran have utilized soft power to increase their influence within the Middle East. By using military superiority; ideological influence; and trade, both the Iran and the IRGC established dependency between themselves and patron states. Of these patron states, the research focuses on Iraq; Syria; and Yemen, and how Iran and the IRGC affect them through soft power. This research suggests that Iran and the IRGC is using the disability of the aforementioned states to increase their own influence by making them dependent on Iranian military supplies; cultural indoctrination to align with Iranian ideology; and economic dependent on Iran. As Iran's influence grows within these states, its power in the Middle East grows and becomes a security risk for Saudi Arabia; Israel; and any other regime that does not have its interests align with the Iranian regime.

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my Mother; Ms. Tamera Jenkins; and Professor Houman Sadri. To my mother, who always supported me in striving for a higher education, regardless if it meant for her to toil in numerous job positions to ensure that I would have the economic means to attend university. To Ms. Tamera Jenkins who worked arduously to motivate me to have confidence in my ability as a writer, even when other teachers believed that I was not a capable student. And finally, to Professor Houman Sadri who gave me the guidance as a mentor. Without these individuals, I would not have been able to see to make this research come to light.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Thesis

Evidence suggests that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, or the IRGC, is active in destabilized regions through the use of soft power tactics in an attempt to garner greater regional influence. In doing so, the IRGC is amassing influence in a global scale through increased funding and improved political and economic relations with state governments or non-state actors.

Iran has been ostracized by the international community for their support of terrorist organizations that propagate war and their ambitions to become a nuclear power. The international community has also implemented policies against the Iranian regime in order to force policy reform, as exemplified by economic sanctions and political separation. In response to the international communities' attempt to influence Iranian politics, both the Iranian regime and the IRGC utilize their presence in other countries to counteract any political and economic loss. Through the use of creating a greater military dependency; increased ideological connection; and economic soft power with foreign countries, Iran and the IRGC are creating clientele states to secure international power. The following countries will be used in a case study examination: Iraq; Syria; and Yemen. By analyzing the extent of influence that the IRGC and Iran has to the aforementioned

countries, the benefits of their relationship can establish a correlation between the profiteering of their destabilized government and Iran.

The significance of the topic

Since the fall of the former Soviet Union, there has been a proliferation of civil wars in the global sphere. Typically, these wars take place in regions that have low to moderate stability, such as the Middle East. These areas have seen large migrants crisis that have affected the world politically; socially; and economically. In better understanding how foreign actors affect civil wars, e.g., the prolonging of civil wars and greater disability, then the international community can better understand how to react to civil wars and the interests that foreign actors typically have. For example, Iran has taken advantage of the civil conflicts that have occurred in Iraq; Syria; and Yemen. They have garnered a large inflow of power that could signify that sanctions and other counter measures that aim to counter Iranian activities will not affect them, because they have become self-dependent on their own means of power accrument. With the amount of success that Iran has achieved, this will also signify that they will continue their tactics of profiting from the further destabilization of other countries by establishing soft power dominance. Venezuela, which has one of the largest petroleum reserves, is already receiving assistance from

Iran and so are certain countries in Africa, e.g., Nigeria. These interactions could become pre-cursors to further destabilization within these areas that will have been planned by the Iranian regime. By understanding Iran's actions, there format can also be used to understand the interaction that countries like Russia and China have in areas of low stability, as well.

The Opinion of the Literature

The opinion of the literature that discusses Iran; the IRGC; and their support for likeminded militia groups to gain increase power, which causes Iran to become destabilized, is supportive of my argument. One of the most essential themes that gives perceived legitimacy to the domestic and international actions of the IRGC is their role in the Iranian constitution and the ideology of the exportation of their revolution¹The IRGC was created to aid in the Islamic Revolution that took place in 1979 and would be maintained in order to over watch the actions of Iranian military that served the Shah and to export the Islamic revolution to other countries and protect it within Iran². The interpretation of protecting the revolution within Iran has been a point of contention because the IRGC has transcended a militaristic guardianship role and become a political and economic entity that works beyond the control of the Iranian Government³. The Domestic role of the IRGC has been one of suppression and violent intervention when it

believes that the citizenry of Iran is beginning to make strides to make their dissatisfaction known. The Basij organization, which is a branch of the IRGC, has been tasked with policing Iranian cities and maintaining peace and organization within the country⁴. However, the Basij, which has poorly trained youths who are driven by ideology to radicalize its members, has taken violent countermeasures to counteract dissidents of the regime. This takes the form of beatings; killings; and imprisonment of student protesters; political opponents of the regime; and so on⁵. The IRGC also has a foreign presence that is known as the Quds force. The Quds force is tasked with the direct assistance of militia groups that it deems to meet the requirements of support by the Iranian government. This criterion usually is targeted towards Shiite groups and militia groups that target Iran's enemies, such as the GCC states and the western world⁶. Quds is most active in regions that have a large Shiite presence, e.g., Syria; Lebanon; and Iraq, and their actions range in training; funding; dedication of soldiers; arms trade; and so on⁷. Quds is also supporting organizations that have similar interests such as their own. For example, Quds funds Hamas, the defacto Gaza Strip government that takes violent and illegal actions against Israel in order to vie for freedom. Quds is also supporting the Houthi rebels because of their military campaign against Saudi Forces and the attempt to

overthrow the monarchy of Yemen. Quds even extends their influence past Middle Eastern states and have a presence in South America and in Eastern European countries⁸. The IRGC itself also coordinates with the Ministry of Intelligence and Security in order to gather intelligence to give guidance to the Basij; the IRGC; and the Quds force⁹. The power dynamic of the IRGC is growing as the Iranian regime continuously gives power to the IRGC. Currently, the IRGC relies on the Iranian regime as its legitimacy as an organization stems from the legitimacy for the Iranian regime. But while the IRGC has a firm grip on the domestic policies of Iran, its expansionist policies has promulgated destabilization throughout the Middle East, specifically: Iraq; Syria; and Yemen. Within all three states, the IRGC has focused on its usage of soft power to establish patronage between the aforementioned states with both the IRGC and Iran. Through the use of the IRGC's exceptional training and network of trade routes, it is able to supply weaponry and training to organizations that fulfill their interests. The IRGC has also exploited cultural links, e.g., religion, to garner support within states and to use religion as an avenue to spread an justify Iran's revolutionary ideology and anti-western ideology. Through economic soft power, the IRGC establishes bi-lateral trade agreements that favor both itself and the Iranian regime by establishing deals that sees a large inflow of Iranian products and

IRGC business growth within a country. For example, Iraq imports more Iranian products than Iran imports Iraqi products. The IRGC also uses its construction companies in an attempt to restore the infrastructure of countries once war has subsided. With the IRGC gaining substantial power through the use of soft power influence internationally, it will most likely trade the use of hard power for soft power in order to discreetly gain more influence. With regions such as Venezuela; Nigeria; Tajikistan; and other unstable regions that do not have international actors support their infrastructure, Iran will be able to fill said position.

How the Topic fits

My topic fits in the literature by explaining the connection that Iran and the IRGC have within the Middle East. I give special attention to the IRGC because as an organization, it has the ability to transcend the Iranian regime by achieving a level of self-autonomy that is also free of international influence from non-state actors, e.g., the UN and the World Bank. The IRGC has gained the most influence when referencing the use of soft power in foreign regions. This is because of the dependency that these states and non-state actors form with the IRGC and not the Iranian regime through the receiving of military aid; cultural influence; and economic assistance. While the IRGC has the ability to transcend other organizations, it is the domestic Iranian regime that is the

largest obstacle. The IRGC is dependent on the relationship that it has with the Supreme Leader, because the appointment of the IRGC commander is decided by the Supreme Leader. In addition, its legitimacy is linked to the Supreme Leader because its inception was suggested by the former Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. With the relationship between the IRGC and the Iranian regime in consideration, it can be predicted that the IRGC will attempt to consolidate power within their regime legitimately through power and influence increase. This power increase can be achieved through its increased presence within foreign states and will create an avenue for further expansion domestically and internationally. Wars such as the ones that took and that are currently taking place in Iraq; Syria; and Yemen will also be understood as concept models. This is because the accrument of power that the IRGC and Iran has within the aforementioned states follow a pattern that can be used to understand how the former and latter will attempt to consolidate power in other foreign arenas.

Research Design

There will be five sections within this study. The Introduction will be the proposal of my study and it will describe my thesis; the significance of the topic; the current opinion of the literature; and how my research affects the current literature. The second paragraph will go over a brief overview of the IRGC; its structure;

and its functions. Afterwards, the chapter will begin to discuss the interests that the IRGC has within Iraq. The third and fourth paragraph will follow a similar design to the Iraq chapter, as all three will focus on the IRGC and the Iranian regime's soft power influence within the aforementioned states. At the end of the first; second; and third chapter will be a historical chronological order will discuss the evolving level of influence that both Iran and the IRGC has had within said nation-states. The conclusion of the research will begin by answering the research question through a synthesis of the findings of the first; second; and third case study. Then a synopsis will be given regarding the case studies and their findings. The conclusion will end with a perspective on the future outlook of the countries that the IRGC is present in and of the growth of the IRGC, as well.

Chapter II: IRGC: Nature; Forum; and Functions

The History of the IRGC

Brief Summary of its changing nature

Kenneth Katzman is the first contemporary scholar to publish detailed research on the IRGC.¹⁰ The IRGC has attempted to solidify its legitimacy with the rationale that it is the defender of the Islamic Revolution and for its role in reconstructing Iran after the Iran-Iraq War¹¹. The IRGC was established originally to monitor and replace the Artesh, which at this point was the remained of the Shah's military. It was on May 5, 1979 that Ayatollah Khomeini declared the creation of *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami* or the Army of the Guardians of the Revolution¹².

Goals

The IRGC is tasked with nine primary duties by the Revolutionary Courts¹³:

1. Aiding the police and security forces in the removal of counterrevolutionary
2. Combating counterrevolutionaries
3. Defense against foreign aggression
4. Coordinating with Iran's armed forces
5. Training IRGC personnel in the expected moral, ideological, and politico-military code

6. Assisting in the implementation of the Islamic Revolution
7. Supporting likeminded militia groups and oppressed Muslims.
8. To aid in catastrophic events
9. promulgate the resources that the IRGC has at its disposal¹⁴

Structure

The Regular IRGC

After the creation of the IRGC, the new military organization was tasked with not just phasing out the Shah's Artesh force, but with monitoring the Kurds of Iran and the communist Mujahedin force, which posed as threats to the stability of Iran.¹⁵ The IRGC would undergo skirmishes that became violent against the former and latter, and this form of policing would persist even during the Iran-Iraq war, or the great defense.¹⁶

During the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC gained greater power as the creation of the IRGC Navy and Air Force was authorized to aid in the war effort. However, what caused the IRGC to gain the most authority was their inclusion into the Iranian political field and market. Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the IRGC should not be involved in Iranian politics because it would undermine corrupt IRGC interests from a militaristic organization to a politicized military group¹⁷¹⁸. While the IRGC contested that their constitutional objective of protecting the Islamic Revolution meant that they needed a political presence, it was the ascension of

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that gave the IRGC the most political power. When the former President Ali Khatami took office, his reformist views became a threat to Khamenei and saw the IRGC and the Basij force as allies due to symbiotic relationship of the IRGC and Supreme Leader. That is when IRGC veterans began to take positions in political offices in order to counteract the growing influence of reformists¹⁹²⁰.

During the 1992-1993 period, then President of Iran Rafsanjani, proposed and allowed government entities, such as the IRGC, to begin initiating their own business transactions to create separate income²¹²². The IRGC created numerous business ventures that ranges from construction companies to telecommunications, but their most influential venture are bonyads, or foundations. Under the foundations, the IRGC is able to distribute loans and other forms of economic support to gain the favor of the populace and to incentivize conscription and support for the IRGC²³.

The IRGC has transitioned from a policy enforcing institution into a policy creating institution. With the political; economic; and social capabilities of the IRGC, it has amassed enough power within Iran and abroad to challenge the government of Iran as the dominant institution.

The Basij

In order for the IRGC to fulfill its constitutional objective, the IRGC established the Basij, which stands for Mobilization in Persian, and the Quds force. The Basij force, a subordinate militia of the IRGC, was established under the guises of being a program for military training for Iranian citizens. This was to ensure that all citizens would be able to defend Iran from any potential domestic or foreign threat²⁴²⁵. Many Basij members were deployed alongside the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq war and this would result in the deaths of thousands, as Basij members received little to no training²⁶. While the Basij is expected to stabilize Iranian society, it is often correlated with corruption and human rights violations²⁷. Most supporters of the Basij are hardliners who believe that the Islamic Republic should follow a strong, theocratic approach to government²⁸²⁹³⁰³¹³².

The Quds Force

The Quds force, or the Jerusalem force, which its fighters have promised to liberate from Israel, was established to aid in the IRGC's constitutional obligation to aid in the exportation of the Islamic Revolution³³. The Quds force main area of operation is in foreign theaters of conflict in which they offer training; equipment; money; and troops support to like-minded militia groups³⁴. The Quds force has been active in Iraq by giving support and training to the Shi'a militias of southern Iraq since the inception of their

force. Iraq is of geographical importance to the Iranian regime because it is a gateway to the Levant. The Levant itself is essential to Iranian politics because of Lebanon; Israel; Palestine; and Syria. Hizbollah, an important ally to Iran, is based in Lebanon; the Assad regime supports Iran; HAMAS operates in the Gaza strip; and Israel is an enemy of Iran³⁵. Therefore, by Iran improving its presence and coordination with Iraq, Iran is able to supply Lebanon; Palestine; and Syria with resources. In addition, Iran's increasing influence in the Levant will put Israel at a greater state of vulnerability, which will also allow Iran to pressure the United States.

Intelligence: Ministry of Intelligence and Security

Little is known about Iran's Intelligence and Security apparatus, but their historical roots and adaptation from the Shah's *Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar*, or SAVAK, organization can give an improvised understanding of their function. SAVAK was established by the assistance of both the United States and Israel and its responsibilities would include countering internal opposition and communists/leftist parties within Iran³⁶. After the 1979 revolution, Iranian intelligence adopted the model intelligence platform of the typical revolutionary group. This included assassinating defectors and identifying internal opposition movements and individuals for eventual eradication³⁷. Iranian

Intelligence was primarily constructed from tips and leads from the Palestinian Liberation Unit and Kumitehs, which were established by Ayatollah Khomeini to counter possible police forces that were loyal to the Shah³⁸. Eventually, the Revolutionary government established various intelligence agencies, of which, *Sazman Ettela'at va Amniar Melli Iran*, or SAVAMA, was the most prestigious. SAVAMA was built on the foundation of SAVAK, it would use the same methods of SAVAK to collect intelligence and to conduct operations³⁹. Eventually, a plethora of intelligence offices would be formed and internal disarray began. In August 1983, the Iranian Parliament approved the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security, or MOIS, by combining the most experienced intelligence apparatuses⁴⁰. MOIS was tasked with developing an intelligence presence that rivaled their enemies and were expected to target external enemies of the Iranian Revolution⁴¹. One of the main objectives of MOIS is to assist the IRGC in logistics; communication among the operatives; and documents needed for their operations⁴².

The Power Structure of the IRGC

The IRGC and its influence is hypothetically dictated by complex system of bureaucracy. The IRGC is commanded by the Joint Armed Forces General Staff, which unites the IRGC and the traditional Iranian military.

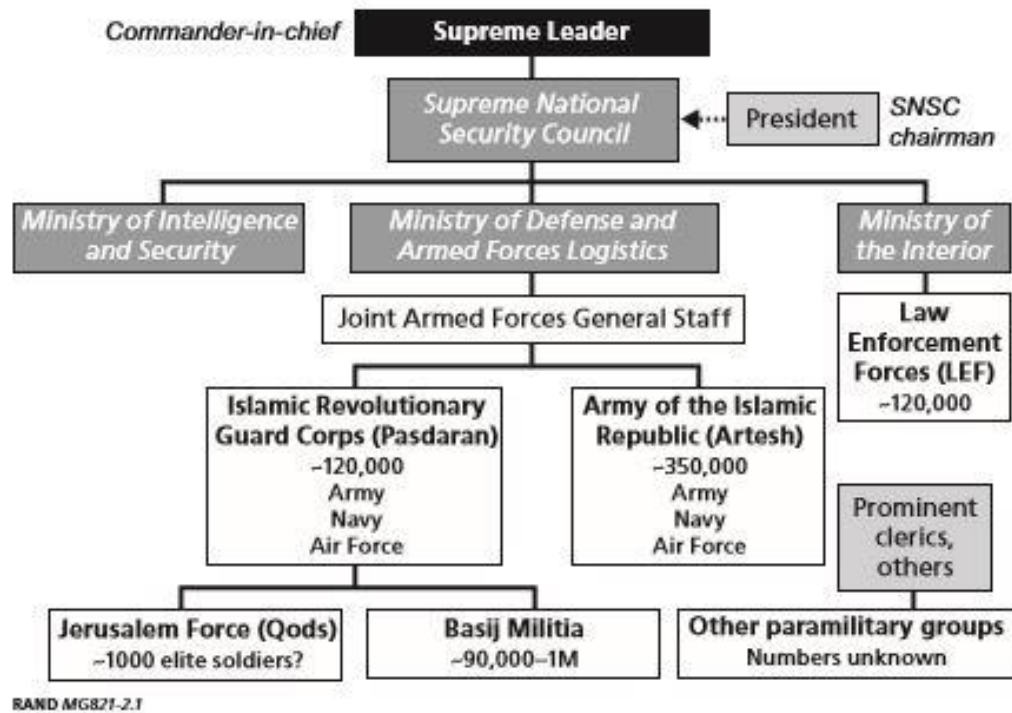


Figure 1⁴³

The IRGC's autonomy was reduced by the creation of the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics because it would mean another institution that the IRGC had to be delegated by⁴⁴. The IRGC also is adjudicated by the Supreme National Security Council. This council is compromised by the President; the Defense and Foreign Ministers; the commander of the Revolutionary Guards; and other representatives (Figure 2).



Figure 2⁴⁵

Chapter III: IRGC and Iranian Socio-Economic Soft Power

Influence in Iraq

The Importance of Iraq to the IRGC and Iran

Controlling Iraq is a key strategic necessity for Iran if it is to increase its influence throughout the Middle East. Tactically, Iraq is the gateway to the Levant for Iran, and with stronger relationships with Iraq, Iran will be more apt to support Hezbollah; the Assad Regime; target Saudi Arabia and Israel; and have stronger relationships with Turkey. Iraq's majority population is of Shi'a orientation and this is a common religious/cultural background gives Iranian politics a pivot for control over Iraq. Another important aspect regarding Iraq's importance is its Kurdish population in the North. By improving relations with the Iraqi Kurds, Iran will be able to improve relations with the Kurds that reside within Iran. The Kurdish population that resides in Iran has been one of the most concerning domestic actors of Iran because of the possibility to incite violence throughout multiple regions. Iraq's political alliance should be the most concern for Iran because Iraq is currently considered an ally to the United States. If Iran is to gain control of the Iraqi state, then it would have secured its position in the Middle East even more simply by removing an ally to the United States.

Military Power

Iranian Back Militias and Daesh

In 2007, a report that focused on militia activity within Iraq has stated that over 50 percent of attacks on coalition forces have been supported by Iran⁴⁶. Prior to the invasion of Daesh in Iraq, Iran would supply and educate Shi'a militias on the various forms of explosives that could be used against the American supported coalitions. These explosives ranged in the forms of mortars; roadside bombs; and IEDs⁴⁷. Iran's support of Shi'a militias was direct, but it was not substantial enough to help the Shi'a majority gain greater control of the Iraqi polity. What gave leeway to the Iraqi Shi'as and Iran to have greater influence would be the arrival of Daesh in Iraq. In 2014, Daesh, a Salafi terrorist organization that has state interests invaded Iraq in 2014. Daesh began to target Shi'a groups because they were declared as heretics against Islam, or the more popular Sunni Islam. In response to the growing threat of Daesh Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, an Iranian Cleric that oversees religious duties in Iraq, made a Fatwa, or a religious declaration, for Shi'a muslims to come together to fight back Daesh⁴⁸.

The Popular Mobilization Unit

The Popular Mobilization Unit, or the PMU, a Shi'a militant group was established as a result of Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's fatwa⁴⁹. Just as previous Shi'a groups before the PMU, the IRGC oversaw the organization's funding; training; and coordination. As the fight against Daesh continued, the PMU became the largest military unit

in Iraq. It was considered so popular because the Shi'a population felt galvanized to the military unit, as it was established by the Shi'a for the Shi'a⁵⁰. In addition, many recruits stated that the PMU was a desirable alternative than the military of Iraq because the PMU was considered less corrupt than the Iraqi army⁵¹. Allegations of corruption are rampant in Iraq as stories such as 50,000 "ghost soldiers" who were on the government's payroll but did not physically exist are widely accepted⁵². The PMU is also a popular alternative because PMU soldiers are paid higher wages than they would if they were in the Iraqi military⁵³. As years of conflict continued, the PMU were able to play an important role in liberating Iraq from Daesh. The PMU were so influential that the Iraqi Parliament passed a law to transform the PMU into a separate, official, and permanent military corps⁵⁴. The PMU's popularity in Iraq became evident because the majority of the Shi'a; Sunni; and Kurdish members of the Iraqi Parliamentarians supported the PMU's transition into a permanent military force⁵⁵. While the Iraqi paradigm has a positive perspective of the PMU, there are certain concerns about the inclusion of the PMU into Iraq's military. One is that the PMU exists to defend and remain loyal to a Shi'a centered Iraq⁵⁶. Shi'a influence is on the rise in Iraq and that is because sectarianism is becoming the primary form of identity politics with Iraq, as nationalism no longer has much

influence⁵⁷. As a result, a stronger preference to the Shi'a identity will give the IRGC a basis to increase their presence in Iraq further. The PMU also has a regional role that is linked to Iran's interests to having increased influence over Iraq. The PMU will give Iran further hegemonic goals that are rooted in economic; political; and social dominance. The PMU will also have the ability to bridge a political connection between Iraq and Iran because PMU leaders will campaign in the national elections of 2018 and use their military experiences as a platform for their campaign⁵⁸. The PMU has the potential of transforming the power influx of Iraq into a Shi'a dominated country, and with the help of the IRGC, this is a likely possibility.

Political Influence

Since the fall of Saddam's regime, Iran has attempted to increase its influence within Iraq in order to destabilize the region through the empowerment of the Shi'a majority. The objective is to create a weak state that will be amenable to Iranian influence. The Iraqi Shi'a population is estimated to be around 60 percent, which Iran has ensured to support through its Political Parties. In addition, Iran has supported Northern Iraqi Kurdistan politically to maintain a strong relationship with Northern Iraq⁵⁹. Iran has supported political entities such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, or ISCI; the Badr Organization; The Islamic Dawa Party; and the

Sadrists. Iran also advises and funds its preferred candidates during parliamentary elections and in provincial elections, as it has done in 2005; 2009; and 2010⁶⁰. In 2014, Nouri al-Maliki, the secretary general of the Islamic Dawa Party and a Vice President of Iraq, secured 94 seats in Parliament⁶¹. Nouri al-Malki is a close ally of Iran, and his power over parliament translates to to greater Iranian influence over the Iraqi polity. It should be expected that Iran will play a greater role in Iraq's 2018 parliamentary elections, as PMU services members and other Iranian allies will find great support from Iran. The historical connections between Iran and the aforementioned parties is that the IRGC controlled and trained the militias that belonged to the ISCI and the Badr Organization⁶². It was after the fall of Saddam Hussein that former military members of the ISCI militias and the Badr Organization returned to Iraq and began to secure positions in the Iraqi ,military and political life. Iran has become a powerful entity in the Iraqi polity, and as Shi'a forces begin to gain greater political control, then the goal of a united Shi'a state will become a reality and a powerful ally to both Iran and the IRGC.

Ideological Inleunce

Religious Influence

Iraq, much like Iran, is ethnically compromised of a Shi'a majority, which establishes a common ground between both

aforementioned countries through religion. However, religious leaders within Iraq, specifically Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, are suspicious of Iran because of their desire to establish *velayat-e faghih*, or rule of supreme jurisprudence from Iran⁶³. While Iran's religious influence is too great within Iraq, the close proximity; the large influx of pilgrims between countries; and growing authority from the Shi'a majority within Iraq are few of many incentives for Iran to change their lukewarm relations⁶⁴. The obstacle that proves to be the most bothersome to Iran is the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, as he holds a negative opinion towards growing Iraqi influence within Iraq. Even though Sistani funds thousands of religious scholars to study in Iran, the Ayatollah warns his followers, who are 80% of the world's Shi'a population, to be wary of Iranian *velayat-e faghih* in Iraq⁶⁵. In order to curtail the negative feelings of a religious interconnection between Iran and Iraq, Iran has begun to fund religious foundations; build religious schools; mosques; and medical clinics in heavily concentrated Shi'a regions within Baghdad; Najaf; and other Shi'a centers. The Iranian regime has also been accounting to counter Ali Sistani in the form of grooming other potential successors for the Ayatollah passes. An example is low ranking clerics such as Seyyed Mohamad Tabtabi promotes Iranian ideology within his sermons⁶⁶. However, regardless of Iran's ambitions, they cannot ensure that

they will have a replacement that is loyal to the regime when Sistani passes, as his influence is not an appointed role, rather, his power comes from emulation and respect conferred to him by every Shi'a follower⁶⁷. Iran has also used pilgrimages made by Iranian Shi'a adherents into Iraq as a form to expand their influence. This takes the form of the construction of tourist facilities and the improvement of transit routes that are funded by Iran. For example, Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC Quds force, spear-headed the construction of a road from the Diyala province into the Samarra province in Iraq, as a sign that Iran is supportive of the local Shi'a population⁶⁸.

Education

In the aftermath of the armed conflicts that occurred within Iraq, Iran has offered to help improve the education system. Iran's Islamic Azad University is planning to open new branches within Iraq, with Velayati, a senior advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, has stressed that educational issues must be helped⁶⁹. The universities main focus is to create the next generation of "Resistance," which is a term that is correlated with those that fight Israel, the United States, and other enemies of Iran⁷⁰. The university is anticipating in opening branches in Karbala; Najafl

Basra; and Baghdad after both the Iranian and Iraqi regime signed a memorandum⁷¹.

Media

After the fall of Saddam Hussain, Iranian television were some of the first channels to reach the homes of Iraqis.⁷² By using transmitters near the Iranian-Iraqi border, Iran has been able to transmit programs that portray Iran as the protectors of Iraq from foreign invasive forces⁷³. With the use of these transmitters, Iran can also broadcast other forms of materials that aims to persuade the Iraqi public to form a positive opinion of the Iranian regime and their interaction with the Iraqi polity. An example is *Al-Alam*, a 24 hour news program that broadcasts news from the Iranian perspective that exploits the ever changing political landscape⁷⁴.

Economic Soft Power

IRGC Economic Apparatuses

In seeking to control all areas of Iranian society, the IRGC has taken the appropriate measures to increase its economic control over the Iraqi domain. It is reported that the IRGC controls up to one sixth of the declared GDP of Iran⁷⁵. The sectors that the IRGC operates in, but are not limited to banking; telecommunications; oil; gas; and construction⁷⁶. Of the most influential companies that is under IRGC control is the engineering firm, Khatam al-Anbya

Construction Headquarters. This construction company has stated that it has completed over 1,800 projects⁷⁷. The IRGC would also have control of economic organizations that were established from the confiscation of wealth from the upper class and pre-Shah institutions⁷⁸. The IRGC would control foundations, or bonyads, that are tax-exempt; government subsidized; and populist led organizations. Examples of these bonyads that are under the control of the IRGC are the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs and the Foundation of the Oppressed⁷⁹. Some of the most recently established foundations are the IRGC Cooperative Foundation, which was formed by IRGC commanders to structure the IRGC's investments⁸⁰. The IRGC Cooperative Foundation has also established Ansar Bank to serve IRGC members and Mehr Bank to service Basij members, both of which are controlled by the foundation⁸¹. The IRGC has also employed Liner Transport Kish to support terrorist activities outside of Iran, such as providing shipping services to Hizballah⁸². There are various companies that are owned by the IRGC and not many have been designated as affiliates of the IRGC. It is important to study and be aware of the economic might that the IRGC is becoming.⁸³

IRGC Technology Programs and

Iraq is a client state of the IRGC's services, and the economic activity in Iran is a form of soft power that the IRGC exploits to gain further control over the countries' polity. Telecommunication Company of Iran has made an agreement with Iraq in 2011 to develop a communication network in the towns of Karbala and Najaf in Iraq.⁸⁴ TCI representatives have stated that the billion-dollar project that connects from Iran into Iraq will allow Iraq to expand its communication networks throughout the country.⁸⁵ Both Iran and Iraq have also decided that they will work together to create a joint stamp printing system that will be utilized for both countries.⁸⁶ Iraq has traditionally been an important trading partner with Iran, and that is because the close proximity of both states would typically make trade inevitable. In 2014, a free trade agreement was signed between the Iranian and Iraqi regime, however, there has been limitations in the trade deal being implemented.

IRGC Building Iraqi Infrastructure

The IRGC has a control over petroleum products, however, there are other companies that work in conjunction with the IRGC to complement the growth of one another. One is known as the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines, or IRISL, and this company also has companies that are involved in the extraction

and exportation of petroleum by products⁸⁷. This pipeline is expected to begin in Iran and follow through Turkey and Syria until it reaches Europe.⁸⁸ This pipeline is expected to be a \$2.3 billion dollar agreement that will see up to 4 million cubic meters of gas per day.⁸⁹ While the free trade agreement has not been officially implemented, an agreement being reached signifies a desire for increase trade relations between the two countries. There are soccer stadiums that are being built in Iraq, and that is the Al-Zawraa stadium and the Al-Tajiat stadium. These two stadiums are under construction by Iranian companies, and while it has not been disclosed as to which companies are building the stadiums, it should be known that IRGC construction companies undertake a majority of construction contracts. Iranian construction companies have also helped build dams in the Shatt al-Arab waterway, but it is argued that water has been redirected from the Kalal River and the Karun and Karkah rivers in order to undermine Iraqi agriculture⁹⁰. This action has also resulted in the Basra province in Iraq to experience a drought that has lasted since 2007⁹¹

Trade

The volume of trade between Iraq and Iran in 2017 has been the highest since 2003. It is reported that Iranian exports to Iraq amount to 13 billion USD and that his figured is the result of

Iranian exports doubling over 17 times over the past decade⁹². However, the trade balance between Iran and Iraq is heavily skewed because Iranian imports have relatively significant tax cuts while Iraqi imports suffer from large tariffs⁹³. Of the items that Iran trades the most with Iraq, it is subsidized agricultural products.⁹⁴ The stark difference in trade taxes is because of protectionist policies within the Iraqi polity that focuses on favoring Iran. Iran is also aiding Iraq with their electrical needs because Iraqi needs has outstripped the country's ability to provide for the demand. However, many Iraqi's argue that Iran manipulates the distribution of power in Iraq in an effort to control political demands⁹⁵.

Banks/Foundations

Iran operates five banks in Iraq and this development has allowed Iraqi banks to open letters of credit with Iranian banks, which aid in promoting trade⁹⁶. These banks are located in Baghdad; Najaf; and Karbala, areas that have communication lines running from Iran. In addition, bonyads and construction firms, which are controlled by the IRGC, are very active in the Shi'a South; Baghdad; and Kurdistan Regional Government. The bonyads and construction companies have helped build hospitals; clinics; and other essential infrastructure to have support within Iraq. In

addition, these institutions also lead housing construction in Southern Iraq, which will represent 150 billion USD market value nationwide⁹⁷.

These aforementioned examples are case studies of how IRGC companies have infiltrated the Iraqi economy. By growing its economic influence within Iraq, the IRGC will have greater funding to provide services to its forces both domestic and abroad. In addition, the IRGC will have the opportunity to exploit its economic influence within Iraq by deciding to shut down operations or to limit productivity in an effort to cause policy change in Iraq to favor the IRGC.

Regarding the IRGC, it has been noted that the organization values its use of hard power. However, the IRGC is also adept at influencing the political sphere of countries through the use of soft powers.

Conclusion

2003 – The overthrow of Saddam Hussein

After the removal of Saddam Hussein from the Iraqi Polity, Iran was in an advantageous position to improve its relationship with its neighbor. This form of relationship improvement came in the form of increasing border interaction; trade; the armament of military

groups; and establishing strong political connection between Iraqi and Iranian Politicians in order to destabilize the government⁹⁸

2003-2009

Iranian backed political organizations return to Iraq and relations between Iran and Iraq improve drastically. Iranian sympathizers begin to mobilize in the populated Southern Iraq movement and Iran supports many Shi'a politicians to win seats of representation in parliament and general positions of power. The Quds force also begins to arm Shi'a militants in order to help breed instability in areas that are supported by the United States government.

2009- 2014

Shi'a led political groups gain more power. Daesh invades Iraq and conquers northern Iraq and destabilizes the region. Iran begins to mobilize militant groups in Iraq to repel Daesh. The PMU is formed and it becomes the military organization that is most active in repelling Daesh.

2014-Present

Daesh is repelled and the PMU is established as a permanent military organization in Iraq. Trade between Iran and Iraq reaches an all-time high in 2017, by having traded 17 billion USD worth of goods between the two nation-states. Iran receives contracts to aid in the construction of the infrastructure of Iraq, which results in greater economic influence. Iranian supported politicians secure

multiple seats in Parliament and it is expected that Iran will support more Iranian sympathizers during the 2018 Parliament election.

Chapter IV: IRGC and Iranian Socio-economic Soft Power

Influence in Syria

The Importance of Syria to the IRGC and Iran

Since the aftermath of the Arab Spring within Syria, Iran has praised the level of destabilization that has occurred in the Gulf States and Northern Africa as “Islamic Awakenings” that were inspired from its own revolution. But when that “Islamic Awakening” reached Syria, the support of the Arab Spring quickly shifted to one of opposition claiming that the Arab Spring in Syria was a by-product of Western interference⁹⁹. This shift in tone is because the Iranian regime needs Syria to remain a functioning authority in the Middle East to serve Iran’s interests. One of the most vital functions that Syria plays is that it aids the IRGC in supplying Iran’s most important ally, Hizbollah.¹⁰⁰ Syria also is a member of the Iranian fashioned “Axis of Resistance” that was formed on the basis of resisting any form of influence that the United States and Israel attempts to enforce¹⁰¹. Syria is also an economic ally of Iran, as both countries have traded with one another and Syria has become a nexus of supplies that imports wares, e.g., weapons that are prohibited to be sold to Iran¹⁰². Socially, The Assad regime’s religious affiliation to Alawites, an offshoot of Shi’ism, has gravitated both countries together in sectarian similarities and resistance to terrorist organizations that

target Shi'a Muslims¹⁰³. Syria has historically been one of the few allies that Iran has within the Middle East, and because of the role that it plays in supporting Hizbollah; its proximity to Israel; and its poor relations with Saudi Arabia; the United States; and other pro-western forces, it is an ally that Iran cannot lose.

Military Power

Military Advisors

The Iranian regime has not directly sent military forces to aid in the Syrian civil war, however, it has sent the IRGC and Quds force to act as military advisors to coordinate militia groups and to train the supporters of the Assad regime.¹⁰⁴ In giving financial; technical; and educational support to the Shi'a militias and Assad regime¹⁰⁵. Of the first set of training that the IRGC offered the Assad regime were techniques on how to suppress uprisings; unpopular protests; and social media/internet interruption.¹⁰⁶ The IRGC's training and advice from the experiences that the organization had in suppressing the Green Movement and the 1999 student protest.¹⁰⁷

Syrian War Negotiations

Throughout the peace talk negotiations within the Syrian Civil War, Iran has played an important role in the peace talk process. The influence that Iran has with the actual peace talk process is that they are prolonging the Syrian Civil War until main the

factions of the war, the Syrian Government and the rebel forces, come to an agreement that mainly appeases Iran.¹⁰⁸ Iranian officials have claimed that the Iranian regime believes in a political solution, but that it must be a part of that political solution, which means that Iran will only negotiate with actors that it is willing to make peace with.¹⁰⁹ It is evident that Iran is prolonging the war in Syria, and it is to Iran's best interests in attempting to secure its position as regional hegemon to ensure that the war continues until western forces no longer support the rebels. The Syrian War has transformed from a civil conflict into a proxy war that has Iran as the main force in determining the duration of the war in Syria.

Iranian Influence with Russia

Russia has had a checkered past with Syria, however, Syria is the closest ally to Russia in the Levant. Syria permits Russia to have naval bases within the country and to aid the Assad regime with its civil conflict, which helps create a position of international influence within the Middle East for Russia through Syria¹¹⁰¹¹¹. Russia's primary concern with the fall of the Assad regime is that it will greatly weaken Iran because Syria is an essential ally in connecting Iran with Hizbollah, but Iran also has numerous economic; political; and social interests within Iran¹¹². While the war in Syria has caused many to question why Russia is defending the Assad regime, it should be considered that Iranian relationship

with Russia in coordinating in the Syrian front is increasing relationships between both parties and their influence within the area. While both Iran and Russia have not traditionally worked together: The Shah had staunch anti-Soviet ideals those feelings did not improve after the fall of the Shah¹¹³. It is speculated that Iran's interests in becoming a nuclear power and investing in Russian resources to improve Iranian capabilities began dialogue for both countries to cooperate.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, both countries have similar political orientation in anti-western sentiments; both fear the resurgence of the Taliban; and greater Sunni influence.¹¹⁵ Russian and Iranian influence have even increased to the point that Tehran joined the Customs Union, a Moscow-led free trade organization¹¹⁶. Iran and Russia have not operated as closely together than the Syrian war, and the outcome of the Syrian war will create an even greater alliance between Iran; Russia; and Syria, which will give Iran an even greater ally within the UN. The relationship between Iran and Russia being the made cause for Putin's intervention in Syria is furthered because while Syria receives shipment of weaponry, it is Iran that pays for the delivery of the arms. When Russia is not able to directly deliver the firearms to Syria, Russia will send the weaponry to Iran so that the IRGC or Quds force may deliver the weapons on the behalf of Russia.¹¹⁷ Russia's support for the Assad regime both in the UN

and the frontlines has assured the survival of the Assad regime, however, if Iran were not involved in the situation, then it is not likely that Russia would have supported the Assad regime.

Ideological Influence

Sectarian Dominance

Syria is a diverse country with a variety of ethnicities and religions that compromise the social paradigm. The Alawite community, an offshoot of Shi'a Islam, currently wields the most authority within Syria, even though it compromises only 13 percent of the population. Since the ascent of Hafez Al-Assad's rise to power in claiming the presidency.¹¹⁸ Positions of governmental authority have traditionally been assigned to loyal Alawite followers and this trend still persists with the current Syrian President, Bashar Al-Assad¹¹⁹. The Al-Assad regime has been notorious for attacking its Sunni communities, as seen by the Hasam Massacre that saw 20,000-40,000 Sunnis being killed to stop the spread of revolt against the Assad regime¹²⁰. Since the Daesh occupation of Syrian territories and the Arab Spring, Iran has contributed to training and maintaining Assad's dominance within Syria. This also is done through the utilization of Shi'a militias within Syria and the empowerment of Shi'a community at large.

Iran has spearheaded the creation of multiple Shi'a militias to aid the Assad regime, the most prominent being the Shabiha militia, or

the National Defense Force, which will be referred to as the NDF.¹²¹ The NDF has been compared to the Iranian Basij for practicing aggressive tactics to secure authority in the Syrian domestic front, e.g., extortion; blackmail; kidnappings; and extrajudicial killings.¹²² The Quds commander, Qasem Soleimani, has been attributed with the creation of the NDF. During the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, 7,000 Iranian and Iraqi fighters have been deployed through the guidance of the Quds and general IRGC force to assist that Assad regime.¹²³ Alongside the NDF, the IRGC has also coordinated with its allied groups to send 5,000 Hizbollah fighters; 5,000 Iraqi Shi'a fighters; and 18,000 Afghan and Pakistani fighters to aid the Assad Regime¹²⁴. The exact figure as to the extent of how many Shi'a fighters is still unknown because it is estimated that thousands of Shi'a militiamen have come to Syria to help defend Shi'a shrines and interests¹²⁵. The large inflow of Shi'a fighters and their dominance over security within Syria has caused sectarian tension, as Sunni and Christian Syrians are weary of the power influx in the military influence that the Shi'a have in Syria. A top advisor to Ayatollah Khamenei has also stated that Iran must and will have an enduring military presence within Syria and Iraq in an effort to defend "Islamic Unity."¹²⁶ Khamenei's advisor stated that Iran's liaison furthered the justification for military occupation of Iraq and Syria by stating

that it must do so to combat potential Israeli and American incursion and to suppress any Kurdish attempt to challenge the governments of Iraq and Syria.¹²⁷

Iranian Education

As basic infrastructure begins to re-open, Iran has focused on expanding its influence in the education field. One major Iranian institution that has recently been granted approval to open a satellite institution in Syria is the Islamic Azad University. Iranian officials have reached out to Al-Assad stating that Iran is prepared at any moment to construct Islamic Azad University branches in all the major cities of Syria¹²⁸. Iranian officials have stated in establishing Iranian funded universities, it is to be expected that Shiite and Islamic culture will be focused on; the Persian language will be an essential language; and Iranian ideals will be promoted¹²⁹. In addition, educational; charitable; and cultural organizations to indoctrinate young Shiites for Iran's regional power struggle.¹³⁰ Iranian officials emphasized the institutions like the Islamic Azad University is essential for training the next generation of resistance, a term used to describe Iranian areas of influence. It was also stated that the Basij organization should play a direct role in directing the social; cultural; and political direction of the Iranian backed educational communities within Syria.¹³¹

Economic Soft Power

Reconstructing Syria

In the aftermath of the occupation of Syrian cities, the task of reconstructing the Syrian infrastructure became a source of income and an avenue of power aggregation for Iran and the IRGC. In January 8th, 2018, The Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis gave all Iranian companies priorities in bidding for contracts that focused on the reconstruction of Syrian cities¹³². In addition, the meeting assured Iranian delegates that the Syrian government will add incentives to persuade Iranian companies to take part in the Syrian reconstruction and to have a direct role in the Syrian market¹³³. The Commander of the IRGC, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, also stated It has been disclosed that the IRGC will lead the reconstruction effort within Syria instead of private companies in order to assure that Syria will also remain secured¹³⁴.

The IRGC has also secured multiple contracts that focuses on rebuilding the electrical grids for Syria and has begun to work alongside Venezuelan counterparts to constructed oil refineries within Syria by the end of the year.¹³⁵ A majority of these contracts have been estimated to be worth several million Euros and focused mainly on the reconstruction of electricity equipment; power plants; and telecommunication lines.¹³⁶ One of the contract

agreements was to create five gas-powered power plants to Northwestern Aleppo, and the Mapna Group, a suspected IRGC owned company, is leading this 130 million euro effort¹³⁷. Iran has also secured a contract to restore Damascus' main electricity power plant in Deir Ezzor and Homs¹³⁸. While Deir Ezzor is still a warzone that is occupied by Daesh, Syrian and Iranian forces expect its liberation and have begun to discuss reconstruction efforts. Syria has also announced that it will import 540 megawatts of electricity from Iran to the Latakia Province.¹³⁹ The IRGC has also been granted a contract to build a mobile phone network system and this project is to be taken by the Mobile Telecommunication Network of Iran.¹⁴⁰ The IRGC has secured lucrative contracts from Iran as a form of reward for the Iranian regime preserving the Assad regime. In response to Iran's assistance, the Assad regime will focus on further strengthening economic relations with Iran, which will predominantly favor the IRGC for its role in protecting the Assad regime.¹⁴¹

Trade

As the Syrian regime makes further progress in securing its most populated areas, Iranian exports within Syria are increasing. In 2010, the volume of annual trade between Syria and Iran reached \$545 million dollars, with 30 percent accounting for Syrian exports into Iran¹⁴². However, it has been reported that trade between Iran

and Syria has amounted to about one billion dollars in 2018¹⁴³. However, while the volume of trade has increased between both countries, Iranian exports account for about 95 percent of the trade.¹⁴⁴ In an effort to increase bi-lateral trade relations between Iran and Syria, two shipping lines are expected to be built connecting both countries. Iran's trade attaché in Damascus, Ali Kazmeni, stated that while Syrian markets are filled with merchandize from the Arab world, the Syrian government is keen in making Iranian goods the main imports.¹⁴⁵ Iranian officials have also discussed about the potential of having a free trade agreement between both countries.¹⁴⁶ Iranian officials have also attempted to encourage Iranian businessmen to purchase property in the Shiite majority neighborhoods of Damascus¹⁴⁷.

Banking

Between the discussions with Iranian and Syrian delegates, there are aspirations to begin to improve banking relations. While there are not official banks that have been established in Syria with connections to Iran or IRGC companies, both countries have decided that the inclusion of banks will bolster trade relations¹⁴⁸. The discussion opening banks within Syria of Iranian designation can be troubling for Syria because Syria already has borrowed billions of dollars from Iran in the past years. If Syria continues to

focus on Iranian credit lines then Syria will eventually be at the economic mercy of Iran.

Conclusion

1979 – 2000

President Hafez Assad has been in power after a successful military coup for 8 years, Syria's alliances with Egypt and Iraq have fallen through but Syria found an ally with Iran after the successful Islamic Revolution of 1979.¹⁴⁹ Khomeini reciprocated the positive feelings and looked at Syria as a useful ally to empower the Shi'a dominated Southern Lebanon.¹⁵⁰ Syria supported Iran throughout the Iran-Iraq war by stopping an anti-Iranian coalition from being formed within the Arab League; shut down oil pipelines that connected from Iraq into Syria; and began to limit trade between both countries.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Iran would offer aid to Syria by providing one million free barrels of oil and eight million barrels at 2.50 USD below market value per barrel. Iran also did not condemn the Assad regime for Hama massacre of 1982 in an effort to prioritize a strong relationship.¹⁵² During the Iran-Iraq war, when Iran suffered embargos from western forces in being prevented from buying firearms, Syria became a transit country to deliver weapons to Iran. Syria also played an important role in the creation of Hizbollah because the Assad regime gave passageway for 500 IRGC soldiers to enter southern Lebanon and

to train and give guidance to the Shi'a in order to create
Hizbollah.¹⁵³

2000-Present

After the death of Hafez Assad, Bashar Assad rose to power and the relationship between Iran and Syria changed into a strategic cooperation. After Syrian forces were removed from Lebanon and relations between Syria and other Arab countries suffered due to Assad's support for the Iranian regime, so Iran became one of few allies that Syria had.¹⁵⁴ During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Iran would fund and support Shi'a militias in attacking U.S. forces. Syria would allow terrorist forces to use Syria as a transit country to passage into Iraq for training.¹⁵⁵ After Assad was compelled to withdraw 18,000 troops from Lebanon, the Assad regime felt "loosing Lebanon" was a humiliating blow, and this incited an even stronger relationship between Syria; Iran; and Hizbollah. This eventually culminated into the "Axis of Resistance" a defensive agreement that would see all three parties support each other in the case of Israeli and western incursion.¹⁵⁶ After the Arab Spring, Iran ensured that the Assad regime did not fall and it was because of Iran's support that the Assad regime survived the civil war. While Syria has not reclaimed all of its territory, the war has become one of attrition with Syria receiving full support from Iran and Russia. While Syria has survived a potential revolution, it is

Iran that has succeed the most, because it has not just gained a stronger relationship within Syria, but a foothold in its economy; politics; and society.

Chapter V: IRGC and Iranian Socio-Political Soft Power

Influence in Yemen

The Importance of Yemen to the IRGC and Iran

Geographically, Yemen is adjacent to Saudi Arabia. Yemen's ethnic Houthis group, which has beliefs that align with the Shi'a sect, has also overtaken the monarchy of Yemen and has replaced it with an ethnically dominated quasi-democracy. Yemen also has negative views on Saudi Arabia because of a military campaign that the KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) has launched on the Houthis rebels. Because of Yemen's geographical location; varying ethnic groups that align to Shi'a ideology; and anti-monarch sentiments make it the optimal ally for Iran. Iran can and is using Yemen as a source of recruitment for Iran's proxy wars and a staging ground to conduct operations against the KSA. In addition, the IRGC is exploiting the Yemeni war to improve its political influence within the country; increase economic trade; and establish Iran and the IRGC as a social icon. Iran, through its socio-economic activities, is attempting to establish a strategic foothold. By having greater presence in Yemen, Iran will be able to control the traffic in the Gulf of Aden and the Strait of Bab Mandal, which links the Arabian Gulf to the Indian Ocean in the Red Sea to the Suez Canal, the main waterway for the World's Oil¹⁵⁷.

Military power

Military Advisory

Mohammad Ali Jafari, the head of the IRGC has admitted that Tehran is assisting the Houthi rebels, a move that they had previously gone on record on denying¹⁵⁸. Jafari has stated that the IRGC is keen on assisting the resistance front, whenever one may be found, and that the people and government of Yemen have sought the assistance of Iran in the wake of Saudi aggression.¹⁵⁹ The IRGC commander has stated that it will not hesitate to offer assistance to the Houthi forces in the future either. IRGC commanders have stated that they would also like to increase their presence directly in Yemen by embarking in “military advisory missions.¹⁶⁰” The purpose of these “military advisory missions” is to increase their military presence in an attempt to influence the countries social; political; and economic decisions. Similar to what has occurred in Iraq and Syria, the IRGC plans to replicate conditions in Yemen¹⁶¹.

Weaponry

Asides from sending military advisors, the IRGC has sent military hardware in the forms of weaponry to Yemen. Saudi; Americans; and their allies have reported in confiscating weapon shipments from Iran to Yemen.



Figure 2¹⁶²

Riyadh has reported that they have been aware of Iranian led support to the Houthi rebels since 2015 and earlier¹⁶³. The Conflict Armament Research, or CAR, center obtained photos and information regarding the transfer of weapons in the Arabian Peninsula. Between February and March of 2016, coalition warships have intercepted vessels that originate from the Iranian shipbuilder, Al Mansoor, and have discovered newly manufactured weapons. It is speculated the seized weapons were destined for Somalia and Yemen and originated from Iran. ¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the weapons that were seized has similar matching parts of origin from weapons that are in circulation in the Yemeni black-market.

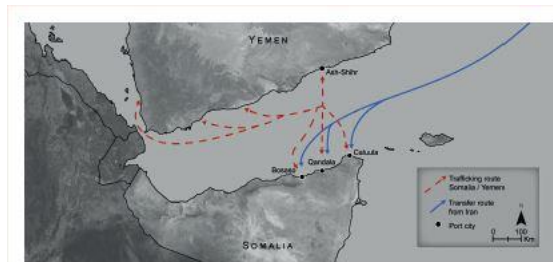


Figure 3¹⁶⁵

Asides from an increase flow in weaponry, Houthi forces have also ascertained sophisticated weaponry, e.g., Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, or UAV, technology. On February 26, 2017, Houthi forces have displayed four UAVs and there has been research gathered that these UAVs have been outfitted with explosives to detonate when reaching their targets, e.g., Saudi led coalition forces¹⁶⁶. Upon investigation of the Houthi used drones, the Qasef-1, it is determined that it is an offshoot of the Ababil-II, a drone manufactured by the IRGC company, Iran's Aircraft Manufacturing Industrial Company, or HESA¹⁶⁷. The drones that have been utilized by Houthi forces have been intercepted via a known smuggling route in Oman, which denotes that the drones are manufactured by Iran and sent to the Houthi forces for usage¹⁶⁸. The purpose of the UAVs are to enter enemy air space and to target MIM-104 Patriot surface to air missile systems. The UAVs are outfitted with explosives in order to crash into the surface to air missile systems, disabling them¹⁶⁹. Outside of aerial drone technology, Houthi forces are utilizing unmanned water crafts outfitted with explosives to target Saudi coalition naval forces. These unmanned boats are known as Water-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices, or WBIED(s)¹⁷⁰. Unlike other weaponry that has been use by the Houthi forces, devices such as

the WBIED have not been linked to Iran, however, parts that are utilized in constructing these barges have been linked to Iranian manufactures. Simia Cable Co. an Iranian cable company, specifically, the cable that are used to transmit commands from the WBIED's computer guidance system and the rest of the ship's infrastructure¹⁷¹.

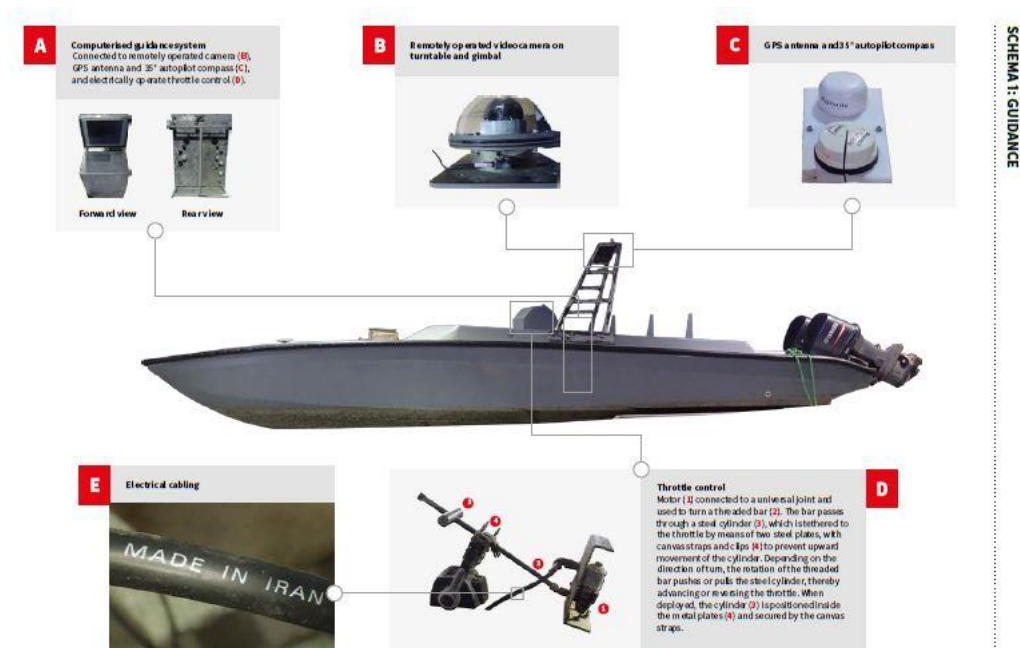


Figure 4¹⁷²

Houthi forces have used IEDs against Saudi coalition forces, however, the level of technology in current IEDs have become more sophisticated. New devices created to resemble natural rocks have been discovered and are armed through radio control.¹⁷³



Figure 5¹⁷⁴

Between April 2017 and February 2018, Conflict Armed Research, or CAR, have conducted missions in Yemen in which they retrieve sophisticated IEDs and have linked their components to Iranian origins. Of the components that have been retrieved from the aforementioned mission, they have similar builds from the captured Jihan 1 cargo vessel that was intercepted in 2013 en route from Iran¹⁷⁵.

Pre and Post Arab Spring

Iran has had a role in the Yemeni polity throughout history, but its role has increased drastically from 2004 – 2010 during the Houthi conflict with the government¹⁷⁶. It was in 2011, when Yemeni politics became even more chaotic than it was due to the political transition that was being attempted due to the Arab Spring that prompted Iran to become greatly involved in the Yemeni Polity.

Iran strengthened its alliance with the Houthi rebels through ideological; political; financial; and military support.

Ideological Influence

Education

Prior to Iranian intervention within Yemen, Iran has endeavored to affect Yemeni politics by encouraging specific ethnic groups to study within Iran to undergo political manipulation.¹⁷⁷ The Zaidi community within Yemen was one of the communities that was targeted by Iran. Iran has succeeded in attracting many Zaidi men, many of whom are prominent members of the Houthi movement, such as Abdul-Malik, the current leader of the Houthis¹⁷⁸. The Houthi movement has multiple qualities that are borrowed from the rhetoric of the Iranian Revolution mentality. In the speech given by Abdul-Malik, he references in admiration Khomeini and Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah as the leading examples in the resistance to both Colonialism and Zionism. Abdul-Malik also borrows some slogans from the Iranian Revolution, such as "Death to America" and "Death to Israel¹⁷⁹."

The Iranian regime has also offered scholarships to many Yemeni students who belongs to the Houthis to study in Qom. Zaidi students who belong to tribes of Sheiks or high school graduates were also granted scholarships, of which were all supplied by the Iranian embassies¹⁸⁰. Those that would receive these scholarships

would be given admission to institutions that specialize in the education of the principles of the Iranian Revolution and the theology of the Twelvers¹⁸¹. There would be large inflows of Yemeni students that would decide to study in Iranian institutions, and while they were not recipients of scholarships, their living and costs and tuitions were covered by Iranian government. The students that would study in Iran were essentially transformed to focus on bringing a positive Iranian perspective to the Houthi movement and Yemeni political system. Many of the students that would study in Iran were also prompted to convert to the Twelver Shi'a sect and to become advocates of the Twelver sect once the students would return to Yemen. Most of the students that would come to study in Iran would be received by leaders of the IRGC. The students would be distributed to three IRGC camps in Shiraz; Mashhad; and Isfahan¹⁸²

Religion

Southern Yemen, long thought to be the stronghold of the Zaidis, has also had the support from Iran in reviving its religious institutions, which have found large scale support from Iran. Iranian Marji, who are predominantly followers of the Shia' clerics: Ali Sistani and Jawad Shaherstani in Qom, have provided religious educational programs and multimedia for the Zaidiss¹⁸³. The religious material that is given to the Zaidis are certified by the

University of Religions and Denominations, which is specialized to train Twelvers Shi'a or non-Twelve Shi'a¹⁸⁴. The intent of the Iranian regime was to transform those that study in Iran to return to Yemen and to become advocates of Iranian ideology.

To further Iran's own influence within Yemen, the Iranian embassy has exported many celebrations and conversion tactics within Yemen to influence the Zaidi sect that Iran has the most influence over. For example, Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, ordered the renovation of the Shrine of Nasser Haqq, who was a Zaidi Imam of the 3rd century, to strengthen the relationship between Iran and the Zaidi community¹⁸⁵. Iran

Media

Iran has attracted prominent Yemeni media professionals to assist in promoting a positive Iranian image across various Yemeni governorates and have even succeeded in recruiting many aforementioned media professionals in working for the Iranian media industry¹⁸⁶. The Iranian regime has trained over 1300 Yemeni media professionals who have been sent to Lebanon; Iraq; and Iran to specialize in technologies and software for satellite broadcasting. They have also been trained to become directors; news anchors; writers; and hosts for radio stations¹⁸⁷. Iran has also funded the launch of several satellite channels that focus on the promotion of the Iranian and Houthi ideologies¹⁸⁸. Examples of

these programs are the Mayadeen Maserah channels that have their content created in Beirut by Houthis and the Aden Live Channel that belongs to the Southern Movement of Yemen¹⁸⁹. Iran is also using its religious connection with the Zaidi community as a gateway to begin to influence the politics of the country by embedding religious politics within different political blocs. To be more exact, Political Shiism has been taught and preached within Shi'a dominant areas to convert those that do not ascribe to the Twelver Shiite doctrine¹⁹⁰. While not every Zaidi member follows the Twelver sect, the Zaidi community is aware of Iranian conversion efforts and permits Iranian activities to continue, which will give Iran a social foothold within Iran¹⁹¹.

[Economic Soft Power](#)

Bilateral Economic Agreements

After the Houthi rebels and their allies deposed the then president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, Iran signed joint economic agreements with the Houthi rebels in the oil; electricity; aviation; and sea transit field¹⁹². These agreements also involved a pledge from the Iranian petroleum sector to provide petrol products of a year and to establish electricity plants in the provinces of Ade, Hodeida, and Taiz. In addition, Iran will also repair electricity transmission lines between Marib and Sana¹⁹³. The Iranian regime has also vowed to expand the port of Hodeida, set a line of credit

to supply Yemen with whatever products they need, dispatch Iranian experts to help repair all Yemeni infrastructures, and create a sky bridge to improve trade between the two countries¹⁹⁴. These agreements were a blatant declaration that Iran is more than just a supporter of the Houthi rebels, they are a bonafide ally. The policies were never implemented, however, because on March 26, 2015, Decisive Storm, a Saudi-led Arab coalition against the Houthi rebels stopped the agreements from ever being put into place.¹⁹⁵

Further Research regarding economic soft power must be observed

Due to the current volatile situation that is happening in Yemen, and the likelihood that conflict will continue, the IRGC and other Iranian entities cannot commence in economic soft powers. This is because with a lack of structure in Yemen, the possibility for economic gain with the IRGC will result in a minimal return. The Saudi-led coalition is also a deterrent to Iranian economic influence because any programs that can aid in stimulating agricultural; construction; and school programs are possible targets. Until the Yemeni conflict has a political transition and a stable social order is established, the IRGC will not be able to entrench their influence with economic soft power.

Conclusion

Post Iranian Revolution

Historically, Yemen has always been an essential city in the Iranian polity, since the Hemieri dynasty, in which the Persian Empire vied over control of the region that is now known as Yemen from the Roman Empire¹⁹⁶. During the 20th century, Iran and Yemen had limited interaction until the conclusion of the Yemeni revolution against Zaidi rule, which only saw that Shah give marginal support to the Royal forces¹⁹⁷. During the Shah's dominion, Iran had little interaction with the Shi'a dominated south because Southern Yemen was affiliated with the Communist Eastern Bloc while Iran were allies with the United States. However, after the revolution of 1979, that all began to change.

Post 1979 revolution

After the Iranian Revolution, Iranian involvement within Yemen began to increase by the invitation of Zaidi students to receive greater education at the University within Iran; Syria; and Lebanon¹⁹⁸. Iran's intention was to attract Shi'a elites into studying at institution that support the political revolution ideology that led to the transition of government in Iran in an effort to export the Iranian Revolution¹⁹⁹. While Iran began to have a better relationship with Southern Yemen, Northern Yemen had little

connection to the new Islamic Republic because of the close relationship between Saddam's regime and Northern Yemen.

1990: Yemeni Unification

After the unification of northern and southern Yemen, Iran began to increase its socio-political influence within Yemen. This is because GCC countries had severed its ties with Yemen after their support for the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Iran began an religious initiative to promote the Shi'a Twelver sect and to increase interaction with the Zaidi Shi'a community²⁰⁰. Examples of these activities were inviting prominent Zaidi community members to conferences; Iranian celebrations; and a greater exportation of Iranian politics to the Zaidi community.

Arab Spring

From 2004-2010, the Iranian regime supported the Houthi rebels with their conflict against the Yemeni government. But Iranian involvement with both the Houthi rebels and Yemen proliferated during and after the Arab Spring. Because of the political; social; economic; and religious uncertainties that has resulted in the difficult political transitions since the overthrow of the Saleh regime, Yemen is in a chaotic state. The Iranian regime is supporting the Houthi rebels in order to strengthen their alliance and to influence the group through socio-political means. Prior to the emergence of the Houthi rebels, Iran has supported the south of

Yemen, as relationships between Tehran and the former Southern Yemeni politician, Ali Salem Beid, were warm. However, tensions arose between the former and latter because of Iranian support for the Houthi rebels, who have attempted to take control of the South of Yemen²⁰¹.

2015 to Present

Iran and the Houthi forces have attempted to initiate economic; social; and political agreements, all of which see Iran taking contracts and exploiting Yemen for the resources and using their people and territory as satellite regions for the interests. However, because of the ongoing war between Houthi rebels and the Saudi led coalition, Iran is not able to take a proactive role because the risk of involvement in a potential conflict with Saudi Arabia will cause strain on Iran and their attempt to agglomerate power within the region.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Overview



The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, or the IRGC, has been an apparatus of the Iranian regime that has created a large scale of destruction and destabilization throughout the Middle East. By utilizing its military prowess; ideological manipulation; and economic soft power, the IRGC has achieved in promoting their interests in Iraq; Syria; and Yemen.

Research Question Response

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has not made it discreet that it is attempting to export its revolution, as the concept of the Iranian ideology exportation is an integral portion of the Iranian Constitution. However, instead of using force or subversion to spread its belief, the IRGC has used soft power to accrue influence internationally. But when referencing that case studies of Iraq; Syria; and Yemen, it is not a political Islam agenda that Iran has been supporting, but instead a pro-Iranian stance. In each of the case studies, the IRGC has used military power; ideology; and economic soft power to improve its own positioning in the country case studies and to allow a positive Iranian stance to grow. In conclusion, Iran is not infiltrating other countries to export its revolution, but instead it is infiltrating other countries to establish a

foothold and to accrue power to eventually become a regional hegemony.

Research Graph

Case studies 	Interacting Factors 	Ideology	Military Power	Economic Soft Power
Iraq	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious training (Twelver Shia Sect) - Funded Education programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) - Parliamentary Economic Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Controls 1/6th of GDP through service contracts 	
Syria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scholarships for Education programs - Shi'a holy site renewal programs - Alawite allegiance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Russian connections maintain support from Kremlin - Military advisors and militia coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reconstruction contracts belong to IRGC. - International Banking 	

Yemen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Iranian funded education- Shi'a site renewal programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Military Advisors- Major armament trade partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Bilateral Trade agreements.- IRGC led reconstruction.
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Ideology

Iraq

The Iranian regime has utilized Ideology is a driving force to improve the interaction between Iran and Iraq at a social and political level. However, there is speculation amongst the religious leaders of Iraq that Iran is attempting to establish *velayat-e faghieh*, a concept that would concede religious leadership to Iran. The Grand Ayatollah of Iraq, Ali Sistani, is one such leader that is hesitant of allowing Iranian religious influence to expand, and because of Sistani's popularity amongst Shi'a followers, The Iranian regime cannot dispose of him. Therefore, Iran has funded the creation of universities that focuses on the installment of Iranian ideology and philosophy into the youth of Iraq. The IRGC has also constructed improve tourist facilities for pilgrims within Iraq. Iran has also donated to the construction of Islamic centers; schools; and medical facilities within Shi'a neighborhoods in order to improve relations between the regime and the people. Iran has also begun to groom potential spiritual successors to Sistani that have warmer opinions towards the regime, as Sistani's age will see him pass on. Asides from religion and education, the Iranian regime has also established media projects to broadcast a positive image of the Iranian regime as the 'protectors' of Iraq. While religion and education are both important tools of mobilization,

they are only pertinent to the religious and youth. Media is a tool that will be dispersed to everyone. While Iran does not have absolute ideological dominance within Iraq, it has taken the appropriate measures to improve its image and influence. Through religion; education; and media, Iran will be able to create a cult of personality that see's Iran as an ally and this warmer interpretation will be able to bridge better relationships between both countries.

Syria

Unlike Iraq, Syria is a state is ruled by an Alawite minority, an off short of the Shi'a sect, with a Sunni majority. Regardless, the IRGC Quds force has altered the composition of the entire country by bringing in Shi'a militia fighters. These fighters are tasked with the preservation of holy sites to the Shi'a faith. The importance of these fighters is that while they are in Syria, they create a new power dynamic that see's neighborhoods and entire cities under the control of Shi'a adherents, creating a sectarian power inflow from Sunni members of the community to the Shi'a militia fighters. Iran has also created education programs in Syria in the form of constructing schools and universities. In addition, Iran is constructing Shi'a religious culture centers that promote the Persian language and Iranian ideals, such as being anti-American and Israeli. Iran has also created a cultural Basij organization that focuses creating a positive Iranian image within poorer parts of

Syria. The Basij organization also is used to suppress protests, and with training from the IRGC Quds force, the Basij organization could be an important role in maintaining Assad in power and ensuring that protests do not progress as they did during the offset of the Arab Spring. Just like in Iraq, the ideological influence that Iran has within Syria will ensure a positive image within the people. In addition, by promoting religious; ideological and political concepts that are pushed by Iran onto the Syrian population, Iran can use these similarities to improve their influence within Syria as a whole.

Yemen

The level of influence that Iran has within Yemen is not comparable to that that it has in Syria and Iraq. However, that is not to say that there is not a level of interaction within between Iranian ideology and Yemen. Prior to the onset of the current Yemeni civil war, Iran has sponsored members of the Zaidi community, a shi'a based ethnic group, to come study within Iran. These community members would receive boarding and scholarships on the behalf of the Iranian government with the goal of radicalizing the members into forming a zeal of loyalty to Iranian ideologies. When these members would return to their community of origin, they would also espouse the teachings that they receive from Iran to their community at large. Even when the

Houthi rebels gained powers, the Houthi would use terminology that is traditional to the Iranian Revolution mentality. Currently, Iran is still offering scholarships to Houthi youths in an attempt to continue the creation of the 'resistance' mentality into the new generation. The Zaidi community has also had a large inflow of donations in the form of twelve sect propaganda so that they may be converted. These efforts have been supported by Iran and Iraqi clerics. The Iranian regime has also begun projects to reconstruct damaged Shi'a shrines within territory that has been traditionally occupied by the Zaidi community, as well. Iran has also trained and educated Houthi members to run media outlets that promote a positive Iranian identity in an attempt to greater improve the perception of Iran throughout Yemen. The goals of Iran within Yemen is to ensure that society has a positive outlook on Iran because the greater the reception to Iranian influence, the greater the power that Iran will have over Yemeni society.

Military Power

Iraq

The destabilization or the increased destabilization of a region and nation state is a tactic that the IRGC utilizes to create an environment in which the IRGC or the Iranian regime may exploit to serve their purposes. For example, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps has permeated into the military apparatus of multiple

foreign forces. The aforementioned infiltration takes the form of supplying militaries with financial aid or equipment, which creates dependency on the Iranian regime. The IRGC also imports foreign fighters to partake in the conflicts of other countries in order to establish a dependency to Iran to continue to supply fighters. The overall objective of the IRGC is to establish dependency to both the IRGC and Iran by creating or supporting a destabilized region to supply weaponry and troops or to create a war economy.

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the IRGC trained and supplied Shi'a militias within Iraq to combat the United States and their coalition. While the assistance that the IRGC gave to these militias was not substantial, the majority was exposed to Iranian support and this would contribute to the creation of warmed opinions towards Iran and its regime. Post Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraq's military was disorganized and relied on rag tag militias. So when Daesh rose to influence and began to attack and conquer different Iraqi cities, the Iraqi military was not prepared and ultimately succumbed to the violence of Daesh. In response to the increasing violence within Iraq, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani responded with a fatwa and created the Shi'a majority Popular Mobilization Unit. The PMU was further supported by the IRGC in terms of advanced training; funding; and weapon shipments. Eventually, the PMU became the largest military apparatus in the entirety of Iraq and

would eventually be integrated as a permanent wing of the Iraqi military. The PMU is now the largest and most organized branch of the Iraqi military, and due to its connection to Iran and its Shi'a majority membership, it has the possibility to take control of the Iraqi polity. What is the most beneficial for Iran is that the Iraqi Shi'a majority have accepted and approved a majority of the actions of the PMU, whether they are military actions or political inclusion. If the PMU is able to hold the most power within Iraq by using sectarianism as a basis for their right to mobilize Iraq, then a sudden change in power will occur. The traditional establishment of the Sunni power conflux will be replaced by a Shi'a regime that has connections to Iran. In the past, Iran has supported political organizations that have promoted a positive relationship with Iran. But with the sudden ascension of the PMU to power, the IRGC will train former PMU commanders to run for positions of political power. The PMU already has a positive perception among the Iraqi population, so succeeding politically against the current regime that has been interpreted to have failed the Iraqi people is plausible. IF the PMU is to secure a high level of positions, then the PMU will transcend being a military organizations and will be political, as well, similar to Hezbollah.

Syria

Syria has experienced severe instability as a result of the Syrian Civil War that began in 2011. The current leader of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, is an Alewitee minority is an offshoot of the Shia'a sect, and is an ally of the Iranian regime. The IRGC sent its Quds force, a special force that is designated to train and supply foreign fighters to the Syrian front to act as military advisors. The Quds force has offered the Assad regime a better understanding on how to manipulate social media; how to suppress protests; create IEDs; and other techniques that the IRGC learned during the suppression of the 1999 Green Movement. With this new training, it will be assured that the Assad regime will act with greater prejudice when faced with a protest in order to stop similar demonstrations that led to the 2011 civil war. The close cooperation between the Quds force and the Syrian military also creates a closer relationship between Syria and Iran that will increase their allegiance to one another. Iran has also been included throughout the peace talks that are focused on ending the civil war. By being a part of negotiations, Iran could influence the Assad regime to accept or refuse negotiations based on the fact if they see the results beneficial. Further influence that Iran has is seen through their relationship with Russia. While the Assad regime and Russia have traditionally been allies, it is the relationship between Assad and Russia that should be examined because Iran and Russia have not

cooperated as closely as they do during the Syrian Civil War. Iran uses revenue from their oil sales to buy Russian weapons to transport to Syria, and when Russia is not able to send the weapons to Syria, they transport the arms to Iran so that the Quds force may deliver them. Iran has also bought materials to greater their capabilities of nuclear material cultivation to greater their nuclear program. The close relationship that was cultivated between Russia and Iran will continue past the Syrian Civil War, and with increased western antagonism towards Iran and Russia, they will only improve relationships with one another. With Russia being a great power in the UN, as well, Iran will have gained an ally that can veto any resolution that the US attempts to pass.

Yemen

The Yemeni Civil War has been ongoing since 2015 when the Houthi rebels overtook the capital of Yemen, Sana'a. The Houthi, an ethnic group that is predominantly Shi'a, has received support from Iran and the IRGC in the form of both advising and weaponry. The Quds force have trained the Houthi rebels in IED construction and they have supplied the rebels with a plethora of small arms and drones. One of the drones that have been used are automated boats that are outfitted with explosives that are utilized to attack coalition forces and freighter shipments. The Quds force have also supplied rockets to the rebels to launch at the Saudi

Arabian front. Yemen is an important ally to Iran because not only is Iran gaining favor with the rebel forces, but by increasing their presence they are begin given direct access to the border of Saudi Arabia. Iran has gone on record in stating that Saudi Arabia is the number one enemy of the regime, and by utilizing the Houthi rebels as a proxy force, Iran has begun to attack Saudi Arabia in the form of UAVs; rocket launches; and frater shipment attacks.

[Economy](#)

Iraq

Iran and Iraq are both essential trade partners, with Iran exporting various commodities to Iraq. But trade between both are not equal, as Iran holds more economic influence over Iraq than in vice versa. And Iranian economic influence has steadily increased since the deposition of Saddam Hussein, as Iranian foundations; bonyads; and other economic apparatuses have expanded their influence within the Iraqi borders. These aforementioned government controlled economic establishments, many of which are ran by the IRGC, employ unfair economic practices that results in the surplus economic extraction from their Iraqi patrons. By being tax exempt and receiving preferential trade agreements, Iran grows in wealth as they continue to trade with Iraq. Iran also established technological infrastructure within Iraq, such as creating communication networks, of which are controlled by Iran within

Iraq. Iran has also received construction contracts to improve the Iraqi infrastructure, mainly in Shi'a dominated areas, by building stadiums; neighborhoods; and other vital construction projects. Iran has also opened more banks within Iraq and has created credit lines, of which can have high interest rates, so that Iraq may borrow money in an effort to improve their infrastructure. While all these aforementioned economic practices seem like a normal part of foreign relations, they are a means to control power through economic practices. All the establishments that were mentioned are Iranian controlled, which means that if Iraq were to abide by any agreements that Iran does not agree to, Iran will have leverage over the entirety of Iraq by shutting down vital services. In addition, all the companies that do business within Iraq are almost all controlled by the IRGC. With Iraqi patronage, the IRGC will have the ability to fund their own operations in order to garner more influence and power within the foreign realm.

Syria

With Syria suffering from a crumbling infrastructure due to their civil war, Iran has offered to aid in reconstruction efforts. IRGC controlled companies have spearheaded this cause, as construction companies that are owned and operate by the IRGC have received exclusive contracts to rebuild neighborhoods and other vital buildings, e.g., hospitals; schools; banks; and government

buildings. Iran and Syria have also improved trading relations, as Iran has supplied Syria with various necessities from food to commodities due to the limiting trade partners that Syria has from international pressure. Trading between both countries will continue to grow as both regimes have agreed upon on signing exclusive trade deals. Iran has also opened a credit line into Syria so that companies may borrow money, even though there will be high interest rates, so that the infrastructure of Syria may be restarted. Similar to what occurred in Iraq, Iran is profiting from the essential victory of the Assad regime in the form of exclusive economic agreements. Companies that will be helping Syria rebuild are all IRGC owned, which will only increase the influence of the IRGC even more.

Yemen

Before the Yemeni Civil war began, the Houthi rebels and Iran have agreed upon several economic trade agreements. OF them, there was an agreement that Iran would help reconstruct their crippled infrastructure. They would also open up a line of credit so that Yemeni businesses may grow, even though it would be under high interest rates. And that there would be increased trades between the rebels and the Iranian regime. However, because of the attacks led by the Saudi coalition, these aforementioned trade agreements never came to fruition. It should be noted that there is

limited research done on the subject of economic relations between Iran and the Houthi rebels, so further research is required within this field.

Outlook for the Future

The research that was conducted establishes a clear correlation between both Iran and the IRGC and their interests in foreign countries that are destabilized in an effort to increase their own power inflow. By using ideological influences, Iran is able to create a societal and cultural link between countries, in which it has the dominant position. For example, religion, specifically Twelver Shi'ism has been a tool of influence that Iran exports to foreign countries. IN doing so, Iran correlates its religion with its revolutionary ideology and the necessity of the establishment of an Islamic theocracy. The IRGC and the Iranian regime use military soft power to destabilize the security apparatus of a country by creating client states that rely on Iranian military power to maintain the training and equipment of another military. Because of this, the country that is being “assisted” by Iran becomes dependent and could be coerced into maintaining pro-Iranian relations to ensure their own security. Economic soft power is linked to the business sector of a country. When both Iran and the IRGC become influential in these sectors, they establish trade deals that favor them the most; establish lines of credits with large

interest rates; and other practices that ensure that both the IRGC and Iran gain economically while their partner loses. If Iran is allowed to continue this model of exploitation, then advisory states such as Saudi Arabia will suffer because Iran will have secured the position of regional hegemon.

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