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Abstract

This thesis analyses the rise to power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, also known as 'the Sepah', in post-Khomeini Iran, particularly after the election of Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005. It explains the manner in which the Sepah has become a powerful political force with a substantial stake in Iran's economy and foreign policy. To understand the growing role of the Sepah as a political and economic actor, the thesis develops a theoretical framework by combining the literature on civil-military relations and institutionalist studies with an analysis of power relations in post-revolutionary Iran. Drawing on Laswell's concept of the 'garrison state', the thesis explains the growth in power of the Sepah from the vantage point of its evolution from a pillar of the regime, referred to here as an 'auxiliary guardian', to a leading political and economic player in the IRI. The thesis demonstrates that this evolution has taken place gradually, within the context of Iran's factionalised political process, and under conditions of perpetual domestic and international tension; moreover, it will show that while the Sepah was imbued with political and non-military functions owing to its role as the guardian of the revolution, the scope of its political involvement and its influence over Iran's economy and foreign policy was the outgrowth of its responses to internal crisis and perceived external threats in the context of Iran's ongoing elite struggle for power.

The Military in the Islamic Republic of Iran: an Assessment of the Sepah's Role (IRGC) as a Political and Economic Actor

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics.

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List of Abbreviations

Basij   Basij Popular Resistance Force

CFI   Credit and Finance Institute

EFP   Explosive Formed Penetrator

IRI   Islamic Republic of Iran

IRGC   Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

IRGCN   Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Navy

IRP   Islamic Republic Party

JAEE   Jame'eh-ye Abadgaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami

                                  (Society of Developers of Islamic revolution)

JIEE   Jame'eh-ye Isargran-e Enqelab-e Eslami

                                    (Society of Devotees of the Islamic revolution)

JMIE   Jebhe-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami

JMHEQ   Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzwh-ye Elmiyeh Qom

JME   Jam'iyat-e Mo'talefeh-yeh Eslami

JRM   Jame'eh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez

                                  (The Society of Combatant Clergy)

KS   Kargozaran-e Sazandegi

LEF   Law Enforcement Forces

MJF   Mostaz 'afin and Janbazan Foundation

MODFL   Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics

MOIS   Ministry of Intelligence and Security

NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
OLM	Office for Liberation Movements
PIB	Political-Ideological Bureau
PG	Provisional Government
Sepah	Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami
SMEE	Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami
	(Organisation of Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution)
SCIRI	Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution of Iraq
SNSC	Supreme National Security Council

Statement of Copyright

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Introduction

For political analysts and academics, one of the intriguing developments currently taking place in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) is the increasing power of Iran's ideological military, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) or the Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, also known as the Sepah. Established in 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini as a paramilitary organisation in charge of protecting the nascent Islamic regime and countering the untrustworthy Imperial army (or Artesh), the Sepah has evolved into one of the most powerful political, ideological, military and economic players in Iran over the years. The Sepah's influence is visible in nearly all arenas of the Iranian state and society. The Sepah is entrusted with a diverse set of indoctrination apparatus, training programs and system welfare provisions intended to broaden support for the regime and inculcate in the nation the ideological tenacity and military preparation required for the defence of the country (Wehrey, *et al.*, 2008, p. xi).

In the political sphere, the Sepah has also become a salient political force. Sepah veterans filled important ministerial positions during President Ahmadinejad's first (2005-2009) and second terms (2009-2013) and have constituted a substantial proportion of seats in the Iranian parliament, the Majles, since 2004. In addition to the sway it holds over the Iranian government and legislature, the Sepah's political profile has been supplemented by extensive security prerogatives, intended not only to counter political unrest but also to act as a junior power broker among the IRI's political groups and factions. The Sepah's grip on this confluence of security and political prerogatives expanded in the wake of the political uprisings and growing factional splintering that followed the disputed re-election of Ahmadinejad in June 2009.

Another aspect of the Sepah's ascent to political power has been its far-reaching influence over the IRI's foreign policy, in particular its national security policy. In this regard, the Sepah's long-established authority in export of the Iranian revolution and procurement of Iran's military industry has been substantially augmented, strengthening its position as a leading actor in determining Iran's national defence and regional policies. Nevertheless, the Sepah is becoming increasingly engaged in Iran's national economy and has established a predominant

position in nearly all sectors of Iran's economic sectors, from large-scale developmental projects and public works to financial ventures.

Initially established as a paramilitary organisation, the Sepah developed to have its own ministry, complex bureaucracy, and diversified functions, alongside its networks and personnel. As a political-ideological and military force, the Sepah has only a few historical parallels. A glance at similar cases, such as the Waffen SS in Nazi Germany and the popular militia in Ba'athist Iraq, demonstrates the short life and rarity of such forces. The Iraqi popular militia, for example, saw a dramatic decline in the aftermath of the two Gulf wars (Kamrava, 2000, p. 86). One archetype of this type of a more powerful political military, the Waffen SS, ceased to exist following the collapse of Nazi Germany. By contrast, the Sepah's trajectory throughout the life of the Islamic Republic of Iran, although incorporating some intervals of decline, has been that of a continuous growth. What factors have contributed to the Sepah's increasing power? How did the Sepah evolve into such a leading actor in Iran's politics and economy? While many of the works on the Sepah have provided a historical narrative of its development over the three decades, they have not adequately dealt with the above questions.

Though the literature on contemporary Iranian politics makes a general reference to the Sepah, there are only a few works that focus on it in particular. Notable among the earlier works that deal partly with the Sepah are studies by Nikola Schahgaldian (1988) and Sepehr Zabih (1988). Both Schahgaldian and Zabih provide an overview of the Sepah's development during the formative years of the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. They offer some useful information about the Sepah's chain of command, and control and its key role in the IRI's defence strategy during the Iran-Iraq war. Nonetheless, both of these studies' main focus is on the Iranian military, and they cover the Sepah only as a subset of the post-revolutionary armed forces. In addition, both these studies give far greater weight to the Sepah's defence efforts during the Iran-Iraq war and its privilege over the regular military (the Artesh). With the main emphasis placed on the Sepah's combat missions, a consideration of the Sepah as a political force receives only scant attention in both works.

This topic is studied in more depth, however, by Kenneth Katzman (1993). Katzman examines the Sepah's strength as a revolutionary institution in terms of its organisational complexity, political resiliency and autonomy. To this end, Katzman

provides informative and fruitful insights not only into the Sepah's compartmentalised bureaucratic structure, reflecting its political, security and military functions, but also its civilian control and relative autonomy over its internal affairs, such as appointment or dismissal and promotion of its military personnel to key government positions. Despite his contribution to the literature, Katzman's work only covers the Sepah's development through 1993. Since then, the Sepah has experienced many changes and risen to become a political and economic power wielder in ways that could not be foreseen by Katzman. The Sepah's surge in political, social and economic influence is the focus of a 2009 Rand study, The Rise of Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (Wehrey, *et al.*, 2009). The Rand study provides a brief assessment of the Sepah's role in IRI's factionalised political landscape and its growing engagement in the economy. It offers an overall description of the ideological and political views of the Sepah's personnel and their involvement in internal politics, and also provides a summary of the Sepah's economic dealings in oil and gas, infrastructural projects and public works. Afshon Ostovar's thesis on the Sepah, Guardians of the Islamic Revolution: Ideology, Politics and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979-2009), mainly examines the expansion of the Sepah's military power in terms of numerous politicised conflict taking place in the IRI at domestic and international levels. As such, the study completely neglects the structural characteristics of the Sepah and its position within the state apparatus, which are fully as important in discussing its rise to the level of intervention in politics and society. Moreover, while alluding to the Sepah's entry into Iran's national economy, the work leaves the issue of the Sepah's growing economic activities since Rafsanjani's presidency largely unexamined.

Among the most recent works on the Sepah is Emanuel Ottolenghi's The Pasdaran: Inside Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Ottelenghi, 2011). Ottelenghi has written an up-to-date account of the Sepah's growing role in Iran's political system by piecing together the specifics of its military, economic and political power. In the context of the interaction between these tripartite powers, Ottelenghi demonstrates the Sepah's influence in Iran's internal politics, national economy and foreign policy. In the same vein, Ali Alfoneh's Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards is Turning Theocracy into Military Dictatorship discusses how the Sepah has risen to power (Alfoneh, 2013). Alfoneh uses a wealth of Persian

sources to provide an overall account of the Sepah's role in Iran's politics, economy and foreign policy. This account is kept current by a detailed discussion of the Sepah's civilian control manifested in the IRI's leadership's use of political and ideological indoctrination and political commissars. Despite his contribution, Alfoneh's main argument that Sepah's rise has transformed Iran's theocracy into a military dictatorship is overtly misjudged. Not unlike other works on the Sepah, Alfoneh's work lacks a rigorous analytical framework that can explain not only the Sepah's emergence and ascendency to Iran's corridor of power, but also its consequences for Iran's political configuration and its practices and policies at both the domestic and the international level.

Taken together, the existing literature on the Sepah suffers from two major shortcomings. First, while the current works provide a narrative of the Sepah's history, they are by and large merely descriptive. A number of these works (Alfoneh, Ottelenghi and the Rand Report) exhibit ideological biases that stymie the more serious conceptual approach necessary for a sufficient understanding of the Sepah. This is not to discount the wealth of valuable information available in some of these works, in particular that of Alfoneh but rather to point out that this body of work is in need of a conceptual framework. Notably, what is missing in the literature is a rigorous engagement with theoretical and empirical research on civil-military relations. The 1993 study by Katzman is among the few works that draw on civil-military relations in the revolutionary states in order to analyse the Sepah's relationship with its civilian masters and its wide array of security conducts. It must be noted, however, that Katzman's study is outdated and while some of his observations still hold true, his conceptualisation of the Sepah must be recast in the light of recent changes, particularly since the 2005 election of Ahmadinejad and his 2009 re-election.

Second, the body of work fails to locate the Sepah in the wider context of the Iranian political structure, including its political struggle and its policies. While the literature hints at the Sepah's role in various contexts in post-Khomeini Iran, it does not adequately define the multiple contexts in which the Sepah's power has arisen. Nor does it assess continuity and change in the role of the Sepah in the IRI, whether domestically or internationally.

In light of this gap in the literature, this thesis examines the Sepah's ascent as a political and economic actor from 1979 to the present. The thesis achieves this

through consideration of the following questions: What is the place of armed forces, in particular the Sepah, in the Iranian state? What is the nature of the relationship between the Sepah and its political masters? What is the nature of the Sepah's involvement in politics? How does it engage in political contestation among the regime's factions? How does the Sepah's involvement in power dynamics affect its role in the economy and the foreign policy of the IRI?

The thesis develops its theoretical framework by combining literature on civil-military relations and institutionalist studies with an analysis of power relations in post-revolutionary Iran, as to be discussed in chapters 1-3. It builds on Laswell's concept of the 'garrison state' and makes the argument that the development of the Sepah can be seen as a progression from a structure at the base of the regime, referred to here as an 'auxiliary guardian', to a leading political and economic power, defined here as the 'garrison state'. The central argument of the thesis is that the Sepah's emergence as a political force and its growing involvement in the economy is partly the product of its interactions with its volatile political field and its external threat perception.

The Sepah's reactions to its external environment have spilled over its internal characteristics, which were already political given its non-military functions and well- placed position and privilege in the Iranian state. While the Sepah is barred from joining political parties, it is a political institution due to its advantageous position in the state and its purview on internal and external security threats that are political in nature and exceeds the conventional military concerns with national defence. Various observers have noted that the primary concern with countering internal threats is that it politicises the military and inevitably links it with domestic politics (Stepan, 1973; Saddiqa, 2007; p. 44). In this respect, the Sepah, like other political militaries, has at its disposal special units for surveillance and intelligence activities. In addition, the Sepah controls the paramilitary unit Basij, through which it engages in popular and political mobilisation in defence of the regime.

What makes the Sepah all the more unique, and its involvement in politics further warranted, is its maintenance of a special unit for the export of revolution beyond Iran's borders. In contrast to its conventional territorial security role, which is defensive, the Sepah's endeavours to export the revolution are offensive (Katzman, 1993, p. 95). It includes ideological indoctrination, provision of military training, and financial support to various Islamic movements, particularly Shiite

militias in the region, as well as covert operations against Western interests and Iran's oppositionists abroad. All of these could be considered part of the Sepah's overseas political/military mission to safeguard Iran's regional interests and its political standing in the Muslim world and ward off the US-Israeli axis in the region. Arguably, the interplay of these military, security and political functions, combined with the legacy of 'protecting the republic against its domestic foes and participating in the war against Iraq', allows the Sepah to invoke a broader interpretation of its legal duties and responsibilities when faced with a challenging political and security environment (Zabih, 1988, p.223). While the Sepah has always been well-positioned in the Iranian state in terms of its organisation and functions, the scope of its political involvement and its activities has been expanded by the pressures stemming from the broader political processes in post-Khomeini Iran.

This thesis demonstrates that both the ongoing infighting among regime factions and their disputes over the nature of the state and its foreign and domestic policies, on the one hand, and increasing social demand for change expressed in repertoire of actions that encompasses voting for the more moderate candidates to holding protests, on the other, has increased the Sepah's influence in IRI internal politics. Beginning in 2004 and early 2005, the impact of the Sepah on domestic politics grew, culminating in its increasing informal power as its veterans and associates were rewarded with key cabinet positions in Ahmadinejad's government. At the same time, this trend coincided with the far-reaching formal power of the Sepah in the broad sphere of national security in a national context of a securitised state responding to perceived internal challenges at home and securitised regional environment. No doubt the 2001 US war with Afghanistan and 2003 invasion of Iraq, along with the threat of a US military attack following Iran's impasse in negotiation with the West over its nuclear programme, added to the regime's sense of vulnerability and thereby handed to the Sepah overarching security prerogatives in dealing with external threats. Accordingly, the Sepah's leeway in dealing with Iran's security and foreign policy grew, as evidenced by its sway over Iran's national defence and regional policies.

Yet another dimension of the expansion of Sepah's formal power is its increasing weight over the domestic security of the country. As Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde note, 'Threats against which military responses may be effective can arise inside and outside the state – or sometimes in the case of "fifth columns," both. The

securitisation of such threats may reflect a genuine fear of attack, a desire by ruling elites to consolidate their domestic and international legitimacy, or both' (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998, p. 50). In the case of the IRI, while the Sepah's rise was partly the consequence of the regime's response to existential threats, such threats have provided a pretext for the rise to power of security elites from the ranks of the Sepah, as well as a reliance on its heavy-handed approach in dealing with contending political and social forces at home. The result of this, as will be argued in this thesis, has been the emergence of a 'garrison state' in which specialists in violence are leading political actors, wielding tremendous power in managing both internal and external crises.

This thesis is structured into two parts and six chapters. Part I deals with the emergence of the Sepah as a political and economic actor and is composed of three chapters. Chapter 1 presents the conceptual model of the thesis by looking at the nature of the Sepah's relationship with the political elite in the IRI and its role in the non-military sphere – in other words, politics from a theoretical perspective. To this end, the chapter compares the civil-military (Sepah) relations in the IRI with civil-military relations in authoritarian regimes with a politicised military, namely communist China as well as authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East (Turkey, Pakistan, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile).

Here, two models will be proposed in order to provide an adequate understanding of the case of civil-military relations in the IRI: the 'auxiliary guardian' model and the 'garrison state'; model. The 'auxiliary guardian' model highlights the conventional role of the Sepah from 1979-2005 as the defender of the Iranian political system's ideological foundation – the doctrine of clerical rule. In this role the Sepah acted as one of the most important pillars of the regime, tasked with popular mobilisation and security maintenance against the regime's internal and external enemies. The 'garrison state' model, which is borrowed from Harrold Laswell's concept, characterises the increasing reliance of the political elite on the military to keep themselves in power, and by extension the growth in the power of the military under conditions of perpetual conflict. The 'garrison state' model does not equate to military dictatorship, but rather describes an ascending trajectory in the rise of the military in the country with a civilian-based political system, particularly democratic systems. This chapter will argue that the case of the IRI is illustrative of the 'garrison state' model. While the IRI political system does not fall under the

category of ideal democracy, the rise of the Sepah has taken place against the backdrop of an authoritarian regime that exhibits some nominally democratic elements, as well as under the endemic conditions of international threats and domestic political crises in the form of increasing regime factionalism and social dissatisfaction with the status quo. These factors provided the ground for the Sepah's march to power in early 2004 and culminated in its ascendency by the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. In sum, this chapter argues that the emergence of a 'garrison state' in the IRI is the consequence of the state's experience with interstate military conflict and political crises stemming from increasing political factionalism and perceived external security threats. Of equal importance to the creation of the 'garrison state' is the military's (Sepah) place in and its relationship with the state apparatus of the IRI. This is an important intervening variable in shaping the Sepah's predisposition to extra-military spheres of activity and to politics in particular, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 looks at the internal characteristics of the armed forces, namely their composition, internal structures and their functions in the broader structure of the post-revolutionary Iranian authoritarian regime, defined as an electoral autocracy. The chapter begins by providing a brief overview of the pre-1979 Iranian armed forces, in particular those under the Pahlavi monarchy. The chapter then moves on to look at the post-revolutionary Iranian armed forces, particularly the Sepah and the Basij, and analyses their structure and position in the IRI political system. It does this through sketching a broad picture of the Iranian political system, drawing on the institutionalist studies of Amos Perlmutter and new institutionalist literature. Building on recent works of new institutionalist literature, in particular the work of Andrea Schedler, in this section the Iranian political system is described as being an electoral autocracy, which combines autocratic institutions (which legitimate based on the principles of the Mandate of the Jurist and Shiite jurisprudence) and nominally governing, popularly elected institutions. The chapter also draws on a variant of old institutionalist studies by Amos Perlmutter to bring to attention the functions of the authoritarian power structures in the IRI. Adopting Perlmutter's typologies, the IRI's various religious and revolutionary authoritarian bodies are identified as parallel and auxiliary political structures. Taking into account the electoral political institutions and authoritarian power structures, distinction is made between three components of IRI. These are referred to here as 1)

'republican structures'; 2) 'parallel religious structures'; 3) 'auxiliary religious revolutionary structures'. The republican structures are the conventional structures of a secular modern state. They include electoral institutions, namely, the Majles and the presidency, along with the conventional military or Artesh, which is tasked with the protection of the country's territorial integrity. The parallel religious structures embody various religious institutions aligned with Iran's Supreme Leader that check and challenge the functions of elected institutions. The auxiliary religious revolutionary structures include revolutionary religious bodies that serve as vehicles of mobilisation and financial security for the poor, as well as offices such as the Leader Representatives, who are placed in almost all state institutions to oversee their ideological conformity with the Supreme Leader's directives. Among the auxiliary structures, the Sepah is the most powerful institution due to its intricate bureaucratic divisions, political security, and military units as well as its relative autonomy over its internal affairs. Following a detailed look at the Sepah's complex structure, chain of command and its civilian control, the chapter concludes by comparing the revolutionary armed forces, in particular the Sepah, with the pre-revolutionary armed forces under the Pahlavi monarchy. An analysis of the Sepah's involvement in the non-military sphere, especially its internal politics, is without examining its civilian role institutionalised in the Constitution of the IRI and its own legal statutes as well as its interface with society, the political process, and its perceived external security threats, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

Having covered the internal characteristics of the Sepah manifested in its privileged place in the political regime of the IRI in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 looks at the Sepah as an actor with political and economic influence. The chapter first discusses the Sepah's role in Iranian politics and society in the view of its legally sanctioned functions, founded in the Constitution of the IRI, and the Sepah's own legal statutes, passed by Parliament (Majles) in 1982. To bring to attention the Sepah's influence in the domestic sphere, the chapter moves to the social and political contexts within which the Sepah's political and economic activities take place. The chapter outlines the Sepah's link with poor segments of society via its mobilisational, ideological, recreational and educational outlets, as well as its increasing economic activities, particularly since 2005. The chapter then turns to the Sepah's interactions in a political space. This space is characterised by a factional struggle for power along with disagreements on policy-making at international and domestic levels. After a

brief overview of the Sepah's link with political contestations in the IRI and its political actors, the chapter analyses the Sepah's political involvement in IRI factionalism, with particular emphasis on President Khatami's administration (1997-2005). This period began with the increasing politicisation of the Sepah and the Conservative factions' increasing reliance on it to torpedo Khatami's agenda based on political liberalisation and normalisation of Iran's relations with the West.

The momentum for further politicisation of the Sepah came to the fore in the wake of the post-September 11th regional environment. These developments, along with US military threats against Iran, helped the rise to power of a Neo-Conservative faction identified with Sepah affiliates and veterans, who saw their interests as threatened by President Khatami's liberalising agenda. While the Neo-Conservative faction had begun to win sizable seats in the Tehran Council elections in 2003 and in parliamentary elections by appealing to the lower middle class and the urban poor, the Sepah's major influence in Iran's internal politics occurred after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, with the appointment of Sepah veterans to important ministries in the Cabinet – a trend which continued with the second Cabinet of Ahmadinejad (2009-2013).

Concurrent with its increasing informal power in the government and the Majles, the Sepah's influence over the national security of the IRI abounded, allowing the Sepah to assume an overarching position in dealing with internal and external threats. The consequence of the Sepah's focus on internal threats provided the Sepah with even greater leverage in internal affairs, particularly after the mass protests that followed the controversial elections of 2009. Still another consequence of the Sepah's increasing involvement in internal security was its engagement in the power struggle amongst Iran's political factions. Arguably, with the Sepah's official pronouncement against the participation of 'seditious factions' in the future political process in the IRI, the Sepah emerged as the de facto power broker in Iran's political struggle.

Yet another aspect of the Sepah's role as a political actor and its extending purview over Iran's national security was its increasing influence over Iran's military and security as well as over the regional dimensions of Iran's foreign policy. Evidently, with the looming threat of a US military attack and its presence in Iran's neighbouring countries, as well as the shift in IRI configuration of power towards the

security elite identified with the Sepah, the Sepah's influence over the national defence and regional policies of the IRI grew even further.

To expand on the theoretical model introduced in Chapter 1, the first part of the thesis pieces together: a discussion of the role of the Sepah in the Iranian state; the internal characteristics of the Sepah, which are discussed in Chapter 2; and an analysis of its scope of political and economic involvement, namely its responses to broader power relations in Iranian state and society, factional disagreement over domestic and foreign policy making, and perceived external threat to national security, which are discussed in Chapter 3. The second part of the thesis examines the role of the Sepah in the politics, economy, and foreign policy of the IRI from 1979 to 2013, which are discussed thematically in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The individual themes regarding the Sepah's role in politics, economy and foreign policy are discussed in separate chapters and in chronological order, cognisant of the Sepah's gradual evolution over the course of three decades. These are the revolutionary period under Khomeini (1979-1989), the administrations of Presidents Rafsanjani (1989-1997) and Khatami (1997-2005), and finally the administration of President Ahmadinejad (2005-2013).

Chapter 4 analyses the role of the Sepah in domestic politics over the course of three decades in the life of the IRI. To this end, it looks at the Sepah's involvement in domestic security and factional power struggles among Iran's various political factions. Given that the Sepah's formal domestic security functions are entwined with countering various political and ideological threats to the Republic, they are politicised and thereby are considered to be part of the Sepah's political security remit. Another indication of the Sepah's role in politics is its influence over the factional power struggle in the IRI, which reached its apogee after the 2005 election of Ahmadinejad (himself an affiliate of the Sepah) to the presidency. While the Sepah had been an important part of the political contestation in the IRI, by the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 it had expanded its influence over IRI political factionalism by gaining entry into Iran's legislature and access to important cabinet posts in the executives. To study the evolution of the Sepah from its role as an auxiliary guardian to its emergence as a 'garrison state', this chapter begins by providing an overview of the Sepah's role and functions during the revolutionary phase of the IRI (1979-1989). The chapter then moves on to Rafsanjani's administration (1989-1997), focusing on the emergence of the Sepah as the political

base of the Traditional Conservative faction that countered President Rafsanjani's lax approach to socio-cultural policies and provided impediment to the government reforms in regard to the professionalisation of the Sepah.

The election of Khatami in 1997 further strengthened the alliance between the Sepah and the Traditional Conservative faction aligned with the Supreme Leader. The Conservative faction's reliance on the Sepah to crush social unrest and stem Khatami's reform agenda facilitated further politicisation and mobilisation of the Sepah. The consequence of this politicisation was the success of the Neo-Conservative sub-faction known as Usulgarayan in Persian or 'Followers of Principle', which were associated with the Sepah in the parliamentary elections of 2004 and the unexpected victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, another associate of the Neo-Conservatives, in the 2005 presidential election. With the election of Ahmadinejad, the Sepah's penetration of the Iranian state was amplified by the appointment of Sepah veterans to the Cabinet, while the organisation became increasingly active in supporting the through its media outlets and official pronouncements. The notion of Basij involvement in elections drew further attention given the outcome of the presidential election of 2009; in the view of evidence of widespread anomalies in the election results, mass protests were held in several cities in support of Ahmadinejad's electoral contender, Mir-Hussein Mussavi. With the breakup of the protests, the Sepah was granted sweeping internal security roles evidenced by the upgrading of its intelligence directorate. As a consequence of its predominance in internal security matters, the Sepah became a junior broker in the factional power struggle that pitted the Usulgarayan and Conservatives against the Reformists. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the internal divisions in the shrinking IRI establishment, which concentrated power in the emerging garrison state, with particular emphasis on the growing tensions between the Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejad, as well as the Sepah's important position in the new shape of power struggles in IRI.

Chapter 5 explores the Sepah's increasing activities in the IRI economy, in particular after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. It looks at the Sepah's involvement in large-scale developmental projects and the financial sector. The Sepah's experience with economic activities began during the Rafsanjani administration, in which the Sepah was encourage to take part in post-war re-construction projects and finance itself in order to lessen its reliance on the state

budget. The Sepah's involvement in economic activities, however, rose during Khatami's administration and expanded during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013), owing both to its increasing political influence in the government and to the implementation of the privatisation directives which favoured the allocation of substantial assets to para-statal entities, many of which were affiliated with the Sepah. As this chapter shows, with the election of Ahmadinejad the Sepah's economic dealings thrived, participating in large-scale projects in oil and gas sector and in a financial sector where the companies associated with the Sepah and the Basij enclaves became a leading beneficiary of the government's no-bid contracts and its privatisation schemes. The rise of the Sepah as an economic actor is not irrelevant to its predominant position as a security force, which is the position that has allowed the Sepah to out-maneuver its economic competitors on security grounds and has enabled it to claim autonomy from official oversight.

Chapter 6 examines the Sepah's role in the regional and national defence dimensions of Iran's foreign policy since 1979, with particular emphasis on the Sepah's influence post-2005. It analyses the way in which a combination of changes in domestic politics and geopolitical factors led to the ascendency of the Sepah as a 'garrison state'. Moreover, the chapter examines the impact of the 'garrison state' on the foreign policy of the IRI in terms of its military defence and regional dimensions. The central argument of the chapter is that the regime's perception of looming threat from the US, combined with the shift in domestic dynamics of power towards the security elite associated with the Sepah, increased the regime's reliance on the Sepah to manage external conflict. This factor along with the imperatives of geo-political interests, increased the Sepah's influence at both regional military and defence levels. The chapter begins by providing the background of the Sepah's involvement in foreign affairs from the onset of the Islamic Republic to the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations. The chapter then goes on to analyse the Sepah's increasing relevance in military and defence policies and its growing overseas involvement in the region, in particular in the case of Iraq. In doing so, it looks at the evolution of the role of the Sepah in the regional and military/ defence spheres of Iran's foreign affairs in the past thirty years of the IRI.

Methodology and Sources

Study of the Sepah is made difficult by its arcane structure, the non-transparent nature of its economic activities and political missions, and restricted access to first-hand information. Ideally, an analysis of the Sepah would require extensive fieldwork in Iran and personal interviews with the Sepah's Commanders and its ranks, or with the regime insiders who have connections to the organisation. An approach based on fieldwork is not practical because of the unwillingness of security officials to provide information, as well as the sensitivity of the issues, which may expose both researcher and interviewees to danger.

That the access to first-hand data and conducting fieldwork is difficult does not mean that an attempt to study of the Sepah is a futile task. The Sepah is part of the IRI system and its development is entwined with different domestic trends during critical periods of post-revolutionary Iran. There are various sources of information which can yield useful insights regarding the institutional evolution of the Sepah and its military, as well as non-military involvement and the history and background of its personnel. Contextualising this existing data in the framework of the Islamic state in the IRI and its complex process of political change in post-revolutionary Iran can contribute to the analysis of the Sepah over the past thirty years of its life.

In addition to secondary information in English, this thesis draws on a variety of primary Persian sources such as the Persian press, books and websites: in particular, the Sepah's own publications *Payame Enqelab* and *Sobhe Sadeq*. These sources provide valuable information regarding organisational changes in the Sepah's military structure, its political control, its extent of reach over and training of its popular paramilitary, the Basij. These publications also contain interviews with various Sepah Commanders and their official statements, which deal not only with the Corps' internal affairs, but also with political and foreign policy issues. The Sepah's statements on the latter indicate its official position regarding various issues of contention in the political and socio-cultural arenas among Iran's political factions. This information can be supplemented with biographies of the Sepah veterans now employed in Parliament and the government, found in Iran's official news websites such as Hamshari and FarsNews.

More importantly, these primary sources offer a report of the Corps' economic activities. Though the Sepah does not disclose details about the amount of its financial holdings, the report of its giant economic dealings under the banners of

reconstruction as well as the substantial share of Iran's para-statal sector, of which the Sepah is a part, suggests its growing commercial and financial involvement.

Part I Emergence of the Sepah

1 Conceptualising the Sepah's Role in Post-Revolutionary Iran

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conceptual framework of the thesis. It engages with theoretical literature on civil-military relations in order to conceptualise both the relationship between the Sepah and its political authority, and its role in non-traditional military spheres – in particular, in politics and the economy. To this end, this chapter compares the case of post-revolutionary Iran with authoritarian regimes in communist China as well as certain regimes in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East (Turkey, Pakistan, Brazil, Argentina, Chile). This comparison of the Sepah, including its politicised counterparts, with these authoritarian polities yields interesting insights. Similar to the aforementioned politicised armed forces, the Sepah's role extends beyond defending the country's borders from external threats to further include internal security and other domestic functions. As with authoritarian political systems run by a single party, it is imbued with ideology, although, in this case, the ideology is religious rather than political. Unlike state forces in dictatorial regimes such as communist China, the Sepah is not subject to political control by an organised party apparatus, yet it has remained loyal to the conservative core of the regime. Finally, other than its internal role in suppressing unrest, its vital role in popular mobilisation is unparalleled by those of its counterparts. In recognition of these features that are distinctive to post-revolutionary Iran, the chapter proposes alternative models of civil-military relations in the IRI.

1.2 Theoretical Debates

The armed forces in post-revolutionary Iran represent an interesting post-Cold War case in the developing world: that of an armed force which has been resilient to democratisation. Similar to armed forces elsewhere, the IRI armed forces are tasked with protecting the state from internal and external threats. Since the IRI armed forces have always been at an advantageous position with access to instruments of coercion, they presented the post-revolutionary civilian elite with a serious predicament: how to build a strong military to protect the state and at the same time curb its potential to dominate the state or push aside its civilian elites (Alagappa, 2001, p. 29; Kamrava, 2000, p. 67). This, according to Samuel P. Huntington (1957),

is a key dilemma of civil-military relations which applies to both the developed and developing worlds.

Post-revolutionary Iran is not an exceptional case of 'civilian control', as this dilemma is indeed a salient feature in other modern states. To address this dilemma, Samuel P. Huntington (1957) proposes the *professional* or *objective model* of civilian control as an ideal type, as opposed to what he calls 'subjective civilian control.' In subjective control, there is no clear-cut boundary between the civil and military spheres. The civilian authorities seek to maximise their control over the military by inculcating it with their political values and ideology. In such cases, a maximisation of civilian power further politicises the military while stripping it of its professional expertise (Huntington, 1957, pp. 80-85). The most successful model of civilian control is a professional or objective one. The professional or objective model of civil-military relations hinges on the proper balance between the civil and military spheres, under which each sphere engages in its own appropriate expertise. The civilian 'acknowledges the integrity of military profession and its subject matter and the military in turn accepts [the] political guidance of the statesman' (Huntington, 1957, pp. 70-72). A professional military that embodies military-specific characteristics, namely expertise, corporateness and responsibilities, is apolitical. In this regard, civilian control of the military is maintained 'not because the military groups share in the social values and political ideologies of society, but because they are indifferent to such values and ideologies. The military leaders obey the government not because they agree with its policies but simply because it is their duty to obey' (Huntington cited in Stepan, 1971, p. 60).

Despite its influence amongst academics and policymakers, Huntington's thesis has not been immune to scholarly critique. Various works on civil-military relations have noted that professionalisation and politicisation are not always mutually exclusive and may not be inversely linked, particularly in developing countries. Some observers, for example, argue that the notion of professionalisation furthers the military's political posture, rather than depoliticising the military. For example, Abrahamson (1971) challenges Huntington's thesis by arguing that professionalisation encourages military involvement in politics by generating corporate interest, which the military is motivated to defend.

In practice, the armed forces in many countries contain both elements of subjective and objective or professional models of civil-military relations. In Latin American countries, for example, particularly in the case of the Peruvian and Brazilian militaries in the late 1950s and 1960s, 'the professional standards coexisted with increasing politicisation' (see Stepan, 1973, p. 48). As Stepan (1973) points out, in both countries the increasing professionalisation of the military did not yield to its depoliticisation but contributed to its 'new professionalism' based on highly interrelated political and managerial skills (Stepan, 1973, p. 52). Beyond the Latin American experience, an overall look at many countries in Asia and the Middle East – such as Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, and communist China – brings to the fore cases of professional yet politicised militaries.

Another limitation of Huntington's thesis is its overt focus on the internal characteristics of civil-military relations to the exclusion of external factors. In this respect, Stepan (1971; 1973), Janowitz (1977) and Desch (1999) point out that a complete analysis of civil-military relations must not only focus on the internal factors associated with organisational components of the military, but must also look at how civil-military relations (in general) and the role of the military (in particular) are shaped by the interaction of the military's institutional characteristics within an external environment. Desch, for example, shows how civilian control of the military is influenced by external and internal threat conditions. According to Desch (1999), a state that faces a high external threat and low internal threat exhibits the strongest civilian control, while a state encountering 'high internal threats and low external threats should experience the weakest civilian control, and is more predisposed to intervene in politics' (Desch, 1999, p. 14). Another theorist, Stepan (1973), shows how the Brazilian military's perception of threat to the internal security of the country led to its 'new professionalisation' by shifting the military's emphasis to the 'highly interrelated political and security skills' needed to deal with the internal security sphere (Stepan, 1971, p. 50).

Beside its limited focus on the role of the military and purely in terms of its discussion of civilian control, however, Huntington's professionalisation thesis has little persuasive power in explaining the complexity of civil-military interactions, particularly in developing countries where the military is not only a national defence actor, but an equally influential actor in society (Bienen, 1981, p. 364). The

involvement of the military in non-military fields is particularly prominent in developing countries, where the military take on an increasing role in politics, the economy and society. With this in mind, other than looking at military institutions and their models of civilian control, a complete survey of civil-military relations (in general) and of the military's political functions (in particular) must pay attention to the military's broader interactions with political processes, its extra-military involvement in society and its reactions to external factors (Bienen, 1981, p.364). The following section will provide an outline of the dominant models of civil-military relations in the cases of authoritarian political systems, namely, in communist China, Latin American, Middle Eastern countries and Asia – situations marked by highly politicised militaries. The pattern of civilian control in each case will be examined in terms of its 'particular contexts, national histories and external environment.' These serve as intervening factors by shaping aspects of civilian control and influencing its outcomes (Bienen, 1981, p. 369). Moreover, particular attention will be paid to the broader involvement of individual militaries in the national economy and their interactions with political elites. These non-military involvements and relations are distinct, but are closely related to civilian control.

The following models of civil-military relations will provide a conceptual tool for analysis of the Sepah's relationship with its political civilians and its growth over the years, as well as for assessment of how it compares and contrasts with its historical counterparts.

1.3 Patterns of Civil-Military Relations in Authoritarian Political Systems

Within the literature on militaries in authoritarian political systems, two general models of civil-military relations are of relevance to this study. In this thesis these models are called the *totalitarian model* and the *praetorian model*. The former is used to depict the mode of civil-military relations which is controlled by party-state political systems, such as those of communist China; the latter refers to civil-military relations in countries with a highly interventionist military, such as Pakistan (1958-1971,1977-1988, 1999-2008), Turkey (1960-1961, 1971-1973), Egypt (1953-1968, 1968-2011), Brazil(1945-1963, 1964-1968), Peru (1968-1980) and Argentina (1945-1955, 1968-1988). The term 'praetorian' in reference to these countries highlights the weakness of their political institutions compared to those of their military – a

condition that provides fertile ground for the military's takeover of the political system (Huntington, 1968, p. 168; Perlmutter, 1974, pp. 4-20).

The totalitarian model exists in communist China. As in the professional model outlined by Huntington, the communist totalitarian model places emphasis on military expertise. Nonetheless, civilian supremacy is maintained by the indoctrination of the military with the civilian government's norms and political ideas. The aim of the communist authority is the creation of an army that is both 'red and expert.' Theoretically, civilian control is maintained according to Mao Tse-tung's famous proclamation: 'Power grows out of barrel of the gun. Our principle is that the party commands the gun and the gun shall never be allowed to command the party' (Nordlinger, 1977, p. 16). According to this principle, the army is politically dependent on the vanguard party, although it reserves the right to 'limited institutional independence' in areas pertaining to 'maintaining internal order and waging wars' (Perlmutter and LeoGrande, 1982, p. 784). The military is also penetrated by various control channels, which include the political commissars in military divisions and political-intelligence surveillance. As a result, the potential source of tension between the military and the party is resolved by the integration of the political ideas of civilians and officers. The army is distinguished from civilian authority in terms of professional expertise, but is harmonious with it in terms of a shared ideology (Nordlinger, 1977, p. 12).

Despite the foregoing generalisation on the differentiation between the Communist Party and the Chinese military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), a detailed look at the Chinese experience shows that the party's control of the military in its present institutional form did not happen overnight, but developed over many years. While the party has always maintained supremacy over the army, there was a greater symbiosis between the two during the revolutionary stage under Mao. During this stage, as Perlmutter and Leogrande (1982) point out, the party and the PLA were dependent on one another to survive and there existed a blurry line between the functional and institutional boundaries of the military and non-military structures (Perlmutter and Leogrande, 1982, p. 76). This blurry line between the two structures had its origin in the foundation of the communist system in China, which was established by the waging of guerrilla warfare by political-military elite revolutionaries (Perlmutter and Leogrande, 1982, p. 76). Thereafter, Mao and his

successor Deng sought to strengthen subjective civilian control by cultivating charismatic leadership; civilian control was achieved in part by imposing personal loyalty on the military (Lee, 2006, p. 445).

The post-revolutionary period, however, brought about a transition of Chinese civil-military relations, in the form of a movement from charismatic control to institutional subjective control. This transition was defined by a transfer of leadership from the revolutionary cadre to technocrats and by more clearly defined boundaries between the party and the army. This institutional control, which lasts to the present date, places much more emphasis on the professional training of the army, which continues to act politically on behalf of the party. In contrast to charismatic control, the politicisation of the army is subject to institutional party control, and the party does not have to rely on personal charismatic revolutionary figures to maintain civilian control (Lee, 2006, pp. 443-445).

With regard to its economic activities, the PLA serves as the instrument of the party and takes part in national development and economic enterprises on its behalf. The PLA's involvement in economic activities can be traced back to the very origin of the communist state. Due to its engagement in guerrilla war and its involvement in the establishment of communist political order, the PLA was entrusted with aiding the political elite with non-traditional military responsibilities and national programs. Military subordination to the state manifested in the capacity of the state leaders to mobilise the military in order to contribute to major national projects (Mani, 2007, p. 603).

The revolutionary leadership instilled the PLA with the doctrine of self-reliance to finance its defence budget (Lee, 2006, p.439). With the inauguration of free market policy and economic reforms, the PLA's economic activities entered a new phase. As the military was called upon to cut down its military spending, so did its business expansion reach an unprecedented peak. The PLA's enterprises entered into a wide range of market oriented activities, and the PLA thereby evolved into an economic conglomerate that encompassed 20,000 enterprises by the late 1980s (Mulvenon, 2001, p. 7). Nonetheless, such expansion could not continue unchecked. Amidst growing concerns over the PLA's commercial activities, especially in the aftermath of revelations about its corruption and profiteering, the Chinese authority ordered the divestiture of military enterprises. While the Chinese military continued

its activities in the industrial sector, the level of success achieved by the divestiture act in compelling the military to abandon its substantial wealth and revenue in the commercial sector is unique among developing countries, and is a testament to the strong capacity of the Chinese state and its totalitarian civilian control.

The praetorian model is based on weak civilian control and a highly interventionist military. Although the civilian government is held up as an ideal form of governance in praetorian societies, in reality, due to the ineffectiveness of civilian institutions in resolving conflict, military intervention is the norm during moments of political instability. Military entry into politics is more often carried out by civilian initiatives than by the military alone (Perlmutter, 1974, p. 13). The praetorian model often develops in societies that exhibit high levels of political mobilisation and low levels of political institutionalisation. Such a society is 'praetorian' in that it is characterised by highly politicised institutions and groups, which, due to their penetration by various political interests, are ill-equipped to cope with mounting political demands and social changes (Huntington, 1968, pp.192-260). In praetorian societies, the military is also politicised and inclined toward political intervention, but because of its superior organisation, all political groups – including the executive, various members of the parliament and other politically relevant elites – seek to co-opt the military to boost their political power (Stepan, 1971, p. 62). It is not unusual for the military to overthrow a dysfunctional government, particularly when it is supported by various political actors in that endeavour. In this respect, military interventions can be differentiated in terms of three types of civil-military relations within the praetorian model. Drawing on Perlmutter's study in 1974, civil-military relation in praetorian societies can be classified as being of the 'praetorian arbitrator' type or the 'praetorian ruler' type (Perlmutter, 1974). There is also another type of civil-military relation to be discussed here, which is the 'military-civilian mixed' type (see Bienen and Morrel, 1976).

In the praetorian arbitrator type of civil-military relations, the civilians designate the military as the arbiter and protector of civilian stability from the barracks. The role of the military as arbitrator varies from that of 'moderator' to 'guardian' in different praetorian societies (see Stepan, 1971). In both cases, however, the military acts primarily as a caretaker following the overthrow of the executive, and is entrusted to hand over political power to an acceptable authority

after a certain time limit. While the military-as-moderator, such as that in Brazil (1945-1964), was expected to be subservient to the executive within the limits of law, it reserved the power to act as a moderator of the political conflict and to overthrow a dysfunctional and ineffective government if necessary. In this role, military action was legitimated by at least a segment of civilian strata and the formal and informal rules of the country on the grounds of stabilising the political and economic situation *per se* (Stepan, 1971, pp. 57-120).

In the case of the military-as-guardian prototype, such as the one found in post-1960 Turkey, the military's intermediary role from the barracks coexisted with its guardian role. The guardian role of the military ascribes to it the role of protector of secular ideology and national unity. To this end, the military was traditionally imbued with a more proactive role to directly intervene in politics during crisis − at times by changing the Constitution. Nonetheless, not unlike the moderator subtype in Brazil, the military in Turkey (until 1980) refrained from direct military rule (Dekmejian, 1982, pp. 9-27). In both the moderator and guardian subtypes, the military played an active role in managing socio-political and economic conflicts. The military in both subtypes was oriented toward internal security threats and was tasked with internal security functions in dealing with domestic political unrest. This focus on highly interrelated political and internal security functions, which Stepan terms 'new professionalism,' pulled the military into domestic politics (Stepan, 1973). As a separate issue, the expansion of military intervention in both subtypes was the function of the external environment, namely, the increasing loss of the government's legitimacy and the expanding polarisation between socio-economic groups.

In the praetorian ruler type of civil-military relations, the military takes over the political system and governs directly or indirectly. The ruler pattern is different from that of arbitrator in that the military's withdrawal from politics is not definite. As in the moderator subtype of praetorian arbitrator relations, the military as a praetorian ruler uses its predominant position in state institutions and its formal legal mandate as the protector of the political system as a means of channelling the political system. Nonetheless, the ruler type often entails the seizure of the executive in an attempt to establish a prolonged period of military dictatorship (Perlmutter, 1974, p.131). In the context of Latin America, the seizure of the executive by the

military may follow the establishment of a military regime ruled by a committee of officers known as the 'junta', or it may follow a hybrid of a civil-military regime by a substantial segment of senior military leaders coexisting with the civilian politicians and bureaucrats. Though both cases signify the assumption of executive power by a military commander, the latter operates alongside the shadow of the civilian political system, such as the legislature or the judiciary.

The military junta model represents the peak of militarism and a dismissal of civilian institutions. The successful anti-communist governments in Brazil (1969-1973) and Chile (1973-1990) are examples of the Junta model. These military governments were ruled by the decreed power of the military committee, to the exclusion of the legislature, in conjunction with their brutal repression of political opponents on a massive scale. In Chile and Brazil, as well as in Argentina, military intervention was prompted by communist movements and the military was the principal director of economic development. To this end, the military regimes co-opted individual and private interest in the systems to ensure the 'continued advance[ment] of capitalist economic development' – the technocratic orientation O'Donnell has called 'bureaucratic authoritarianism' (see Cardoso, 1979, p. 38). Despite their professional training and structure, these militaries were hardly involved in fighting external threats. They were, rather, far more concerned with internal threats to the implementation of their market-oriented policies, and thereby the military was tasked with internal security functions to repress various leftist groups.

In a fashion that resembles the Junta model in Latin America, in the second half of the twentieth century a host of post-colonial states in the Middle East and North Africa embarked on establishing military committees within their armies staffed by 'free officers.' The committee, in the case of a ruler, may either function as a parallel executive enclave or as the executive and legislature combined, and thus in charge of the activities of the government, armed forces, civilian institutions and society (Perlmutter, 1974, p. 139). In the erstwhile ruler regime type in the Middle East and North Africa, the military committee, apart from its role as the executive, was intended to enhance mass mobilisation, although in reality it served as the primary means of co-option. The prominent military committees in the Arab Middle East were the Revolutionary Command Councils (RCCs) in Egypt (1953-1968) and

Iraq (1958-1963; 1968-2003) (see Dekmejian, 1982, pp. 30-34; Helm, 1984, pp. 89-92; Tripp, 2002, p.194). As a military cabinet, the RCC enjoyed a predominant position in relation to other state institutions, if it was not running the executive and legislature together. In Nasser's Egypt (1953-1968), from 1953 to 1954 the RCC acted as a parallel executive controlling both the cabinet and the General Headquarters and Command units of the professional armed forces. It also established organisations such as the Islamic Congress and the Liberation Rally, whose contributions were twofold: they helped the Nasserite regime promote the legitimacy of its projects and at the same time enabled the leadership to scrutinise the political field, eliminating competing rivals and thereby preventing the rise of autonomous centres of political power (Cook, 2007, p. 69).

As the erstwhile military regimes evolved into civilian semi-democracies or autocracies, the military entry into politics proceeded with some degree of civilianisation of the political system, including the military executive. This type of military rule is referred to in this thesis as the civil-military mixed type. In this subtype of the praetorian model, the military seeks to garner popular legitimacy by forming an alliance with existing political groupings while retaining its own political power and influence (Bienen and Morrel, 1976, p. 6). In many of the countries whose governments fall under this model, the prospect of civilianisation is countervailed by the external environment, namely, interstate conflict and the imperative of having the political support of the military to manage national affairs (Bienen and Morrel, 1976, p. 7). While the military may retreat to the barracks, it oversees the political contours in the background of the political system. Occasionally, it enters into the political fray when its interests are endangered by unfolding political and social crises (see Cook, 2007). In a case of a civilianised but semi-democratic military regime, such as Pakistan, civilianisation was merely designed to reflect military interest. It assured 'continuity of major policies and key personnel in the post-withdrawal period' (Rizvi, 2000, p. 1). This is evident in all four episodes of military rule in Pakistan (1958-62, 1969-1971, 1977-1985) during which the military has been able to restructure the political arrangements to its benefit through civilianisation. This has meant a hybrid of civil-military relations intended to safeguard the military's institutional interest and privileged standing in Pakistan's politics and society even after its disengagement from politics.

In other states, such as Egypt under Sadat (1970-1981) and Mobarak (1981-2011), the military has remained a key actor behind the veneer of civilian government. Unlike the case of Pakistan, however, the Egyptian military had no inclination to resort to a coup, given the substantial benefits and privileges it drew from the military-dominated authoritarian *status quo* and its consistent political privilege in the Egyptian power structure (Cook, 2007, p. 74). Furthermore, in Pakistan the office of the presidency has shifted back and forth between the elected officials and military officers; Egypt's heads of states until 2011 were all chosen through the Officer Corps. This suggests that 'the basic support within the military high command has been historically an informal requirement for position' (Cook, 2007, p. 74).

In both Pakistan and Egypt, the military has taken up non-traditional economic functions and amassed substantial profits. In Egypt, the military's engagement in economic activities can be traced back to Nasser's era, following the Free Officer takeover in 1954. During this era, the army was expected to be an instrument of state-led economic development and fight against corruption of the ancient regime. To this end, the military took on the leadership of bodies such as the Committee to Eradicate Feudalism. Despite this pretence to a just cause, individual military officers took advantage of their position in the state to enrich their personal wealth (Cook, 2007, p. 19). Under the succeeding President, Anwar Sadat, the military's involvement in the economy was further expanded. The President's policy of privatisation enhanced the military's socio-economic link with private interests. Beginning in 1980, military involvement in the economy gathered further momentum through the establishment of the National Service Projects Organisation (NSPO), the Organisation for Industrial Development and various cooperative ventures. The military's increasing economic and financial dealings were justified on the grounds that the military's self-sufficiency allowed the country to finance its military needs without imposing pressure on the state budget. This rationale overlooks the fact that the military's self-sufficiency does not preclude its dependence on its state assets, insofar that many military enterprises enjoy access to state subsidies (Cook, 2007, p. 19).

In Pakistan, the military's experience with domestic politics and the economy began in the late 1950s, following political instability brought about by the elite

civilian struggle for power. To crush competition and advance the pursuit of industrialised economic development, General Ayub Khan forged a coalition comprised of regime bureaucrats, the military and industrialised business (Mani, 2007, p. 598). This coalition strengthened the military's link with private interests, although the scope of military activities up to the fall of Ayub Khan remained modest and were limited to charitable foundations that had been originally established to provide pension benefits and employment for military retirees. The military's expansion of economic activities came to the fore through the inauguration of the military regime of General Zia ulHaq in 1977, following military conflict with India. To cultivate support among military officers, Zia ulHaq rewarded the officers with political posts and provided the military with numerous opportunities for investment. Under Zia's rule, the above-mentioned charitable foundations evolved into the military's own self-contained financial and economic entities. Moving beyond their original remits in pension and employment provisions, the charitable foundations became involved in numerous ventures, a situation that continues to this date (Mani, 2007, p. 598).

These two models of civil-military relations and their subtypes are the prevailing ones in the developing world. It is worthwhile analysing the extent to which civil-military relations in the IRI correspond to these models. In this regard, one important area of enquiry is the assessment of the existence of civilian control (or lack thereof) in the IRI in comparison to both the totalitarian and praetorian models. It is equally important to examine the evolution of civil-military relations in the IRI, not only in terms of the dynamics of civilian control and the military's internal affairs, but also in terms of the larger process of military involvement in political affairs.

Looking at the surface, the Iranian post-revolutionary experience fits some dimensions of both the totalitarian and praetorian models. Not dissimilar to the totalitarian model, the IRI armed forces (including the Sepah) are instilled with a revolutionary ideology, which is deeply influenced by the tenets of Islamic fundamentalism. Similarly, the Iranian politico-clerical civilians have established control devices, namely the Political Ideological Bureau (PIB), a system of clerical representatives which functions as a sort of political commissar at all levels of the armed forces (Schahgaldian 1987, pp. 28-32; Zabih 1988, pp. 137-163). There are

also parallels between the Iranian post-revolutionary experience and the praetorian model: for instance, as the guardian of the revolution the Sepah has intervened in politics for partisan political aims, often through the civilian elite's initiative. More so, the presence of ex-officers from the Sepah rank-and-file in key state institutions in more recent years is analogous to the pattern prevalent in autocratic and semi-democratic military dictatorships, where the military retains informal power in the state.

If one looks at the social reality of post-revolutionary Iran, however, the two models fall short of offering a consistent understanding of civil-military relations. To begin with, the application of the totalitarian model poses a number of difficulties due to the presence of a parallel ideological military, the Artesh, alongside the Sepah, as well as the absence of a hegemonic party tasked with civilian control. In contrast to the armies in communist China, the Sepah was not a professional army in terms of its organisational characteristics and recruitment. However, and not unlike communist China in its early years, the Sepah's allegiance during the first decade of the revolution was maintained through the personal loyalty of the Sepah to the then-Supreme Leader or Faqih, Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-1989). Nevertheless, whereas in post-Mao communist China the existence of single-party infrastructure and the departure of the revolutionary elite allowed for a more institutionalised civilian control, in the case of post-Khomeini Iran civilian control continues to be charismatic, as it is still the personal loyalty of the senior leaders in the Sepah to the authority of the new Supreme Leader, Khamenei that trumps the Sepah's loyalty to the revolution. Given these differences, the applicability of the totalitarian model is inadequate.

Additionally, the existence of a less-than-strict control mechanism means that a particular dimension of IRI civil-military relations can be compared with the praetorian model. Although it is a paramilitary and not a professional military, the formal and primary role of the Sepah as the guardian of the revolution approximates the guardian or arbitrator subtypes of the praetorian model, where the military is highly political in its claim to act as the protector of the political system. In this way, the Sepah's status as the so-called defender of the IRI and its ideological foundation is akin to the system seen in Turkey. The former, however, is the protector of the

Islamic ideological character of the revolutionary-driven political system, while the latter is the guardian of the Turkish Republic's secular character.

In spite of these parallels, one of the key elements of the praetorian model – which also prevails in the ruler subtype – is absent in post-revolutionary civil-military relations: the episode of a classic military coup. As Katzman (1993, p. 176) rightfully states:

> A coup against the clerical leadership would violate Khomeini's legacy of clerical rule, and violating Khomeini's ideals is tantamount to countermanding the very ideology on which the Sepah's own legitimacy rests. Moreover, even in its crusade to maintain the purity of the revolution, the Sepah has not threatened or demonstrated to take power itself.

By the same token, an analysis of the Iranian post-revolutionary experience from the vantage point of the praetorian ruler and the mixed military regime subtypes of the praetorian model – though it is not entirely irrelevant – fails to shed light on the peculiar nature of military politics in the IRI. The application of both subtypes as a suitable framework is contingent on the assumption of the most powerful state office by the elite affiliated with the military. In this regard, though the Iranian political system has witnessed the recruitment of former officers of the Sepah into a number of key positions – including the top leadership, the supreme religious leader (*Faqih*), and a host of other parallel religious structures – the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council, the Assembly of Leadership Experts and the judiciary have always been the domain of the clerical civilians. Nonetheless, the fact that the Sepah's elite have not yet instigated a coup or created a personal autocratic figure in the ways that have prevailed in parts of the Middle East and South Asia does not insinuate that it is non-interventionist in politics.

In sum, the two models provide some general insights into the study of the Iranian experience, with particular attention paid to the politicisation of the military, the scope of its political control by the civilians, and (amongst others) the extent of military presence in social life in different contextual circumstances. Still, neither model is fully compatible with the complex Iranian experience. Hence, a different

model needs to be constructed in order to cast light on the continuing patterns of civil-military interactions that characterise the national context of post-revolutionary Iran.

1.4 The 'Auxiliary Guardian' and 'Garrison State' Models

Post-revolutionary Iran points to the development of two patterns of civil-military relation that this thesis will call the *auxiliary guardian model* and the *garrison state model*. While the former term casts light on the conventional role of the Sepah as the protector of the IRI's ideological foundation and the doctrine of clerical rule, the latter denotes its recent proactive and expansive involvement in politics and society (2004-2013). Herewith, I borrow the term 'garrison state' from Harold Laswell (1941; 1962) to refer to the growing power of the military in a state which is encountering domestic and international challenges (Laswell, 1941; Laswell, 1962). This section describes the respective characteristics of the two patterns of civil-military relations in the IRI. It shows that the two patterns defy both praetorian and communist models – wherein the military is (by design or tradition) the ultimate arbiter or a mere partisan guard of the party. Before scrutinising these models, it is useful to highlight the broader features of revolutionary state-building and the socio-political dynamics within which both Iranian civil-military relations and the Sepah developed and evolved.

The current state of Iranian civil-military relations has been shaped by various factors. On one hand, some of these factors stem from the dual nature of the IRI political system and existence of the political Sepah, whose range of responsibilities, including its internal security functions, exceeds those of the Artesh. On the other hand, other factors emanate from the conflicting choices and initiatives of various political elites and from a range of pressures exerted on the polity by societal demands and continuous elite rivalry. All these variables are reminiscent of the praetorian symptoms common to many developing societies. In this thesis, though, the presence of praetorian conditions has not been followed with the trappings associated with an outright military coup (Hen-Tov, 2011, p. 46). Nonetheless, new relationships have emerged, between the Sepah and the state apparatus on the one hand and a society that is an indicative of a subtle form of its participation in politics on the other. The Sepah has been transformed from the

'auxiliary guardian' of the revolutionary system and its Islamic purity to a *de facto* guardian of the authoritarian *status quo*.

This thesis uses the term 'auxiliary guardian model' to define a dimension of the pattern of civil-military relations in the IRI that was prevalent for more than two decades of Iran's revolutionary life (1979-2005). This model is built on Amos Perlmutter's study of modern authoritarianism, in which he points to various auxiliary structures that serve as an authoritarian regime's instruments of mobilisation and control (see Chapter 2 for more details). As Perlmutter points out, auxiliary structures such as a political military and a secret police were important in protecting the communist and Nazi authoritarian political systems (Perlmutter, 1981, 16-21). In the IRI, however, because of the absence of a centralised party and the lack of a tyrannical mode of control, auxiliary structures such as the Sepah have taken on a more prevalent role in the political system. Due to the absence of an organised channel of penetration, the Sepah's relationship with its clerical-political authority in the auxiliary guardian type is sustained to a great extent by its method of charismatic control based on ideology, personal loyalty and shared values. At the heart of these values is a sense of devotion to Shiite Islamic tenets, to the Islamic Revolution, and most importantly to *Velayat-e Faqih* (the Mandate of the Jurist), which confers the right to rule upon a high-ranking clergy (see Chapter 2 for more detail). The sum of these civilian values and interests are given a legal mandate which promotes the Sepah's political action in an array of parameters, while at the same time deterring it from supplanting its civilian Commander-in-Chief and civilian political institutions, which legitimises its authority.

The Sepah's role is defined primarily as one that provides additional, but vital, support for the maintenance of the system of *Velayat-e Faqih*. The Sepah's formal constitutional authority as the 'guardian of the revolution and its achievements' designates it as the defender of the system, charged with fighting the enemies of the revolution within and without (Algar 1980, p. 81; Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1983). In spite of this vaguely defined role, the Sepah's political mission is bounded by its auxiliary status. In this way, the Sepah does not have a supervisory role over the functioning of the political system in the same sense as its Brazilian and Turkish counterparts do. This is not surprising given the duality of the IRI political system, which designates the leader's 'extended arms institutions'

and 'super-religious' bodies with supervisory and vetting authority over the popularly elected Majles and the presidency (Schirazi, 1997, pp. 75-77). In this context, the Sepah functions under the auspices of the political-religious figure Supreme Leader (the position held by Khomeini from 1979 to 1989 and occupied by Khamenei since 1989), who, as the ultimate authority and arbiter in the IRI, is supposed to stand above the political fray and intervene directly when the survival of the system is at stake.

That the Sepah has not become a sort of outright intervener in political affairs by its own right should not imply its non-participation or non-interference in politics. Indeed, the increasing reliance of clerical civilians on the Sepah to manage mounting domestic security problems has led to its ascent into the political fray. In his study of Brazilian and Peruvian militaries, Stepan (1973, p. 47-65) notes that the 'professional socialisation' of the military in the internal security matters contributed to the blurring of the line between the military and the political elite leading to military politicisation and its role expansion into civilian social life.

Post-revolutionary Iran shows a similar pattern of military politicisation as outlined by Stepan, as clerical civilians have awarded the Sepah with a broad range of internal and external functions beneficial for its vitality as a security organisation. Nonetheless, unlike the secular, pragmatic ideology of developmentalism espoused by the Brazilian military, the pattern of the Sepah's involvement in internal security and its politicisation has been prompted by its outwardly religious and revolutionary outlook. Grounded in the thesis of *Velayat-e Faqih* and the exclusively Iranian branch of Shiite precepts of Islam, the Sepah and its affiliated institutions have gained access to tremendous political, economic and ideological incentives, as well as extensive involvement in Iranian social life. The confluence of these norms and incentives, together with factionalised internal politics, has encouraged the Sepah to support its political allies indirectly, as well as display antagonism towards those governments and politicians it perceives as existential challenges to the basis of the political regime – and, in effect, its own privileged position within that regime. In this sense, the Sepah played a partisan role for the pro-Khomeini forces (1979-1989) and, later on, for the conservative branch of the Khomeinist faction during the moment of crisis whereby domestic uprising and mounting fissures amongst Iran's leadership and political factions came to the surface.

An evaluation of the Sepah's domestic role is not comprehensive without paying attention to its unprecedented rise in post-revolutionary politics and society. Over the years the Sepah has evolved into a socio-political force, participating in internal politics while augmenting its political/security status against what it considers to be the IRI's opponents. Ironically, these opponents are often from the ranks of the regime's insiders. Taking note of this development, many outside observers have pointed to the 'militarisation' of post-revolutionary Iran and its coming out of a 'military-led system' or 'military dictatorship' (Alamdari, 2005; Vali Nasr, 2005 Ehteshami and Zweiri, 2007; Hen-Tov, 2011; Alfoneh, 2013). Nonetheless, the use of such terms in the case of Iran is a mistake, as it implies an utter dominance over the state by the military which has not yet taken place in Iran.

There is, however, another description used by the reformists that refers to a more nuanced type of civil-military relations between the Sepah and IRI's clerical elite, which falls short of military dictatorship but is attentive to the informal power of the Sepah in Iran's power politics. Many reformists use the term 'garrison party' to account for the Sepah's rise to power in the parliamentary elections of 2004. The term originated from Harrold Laswell's concept of a 'garrison state', and entered Iran's political lexicon following the 2002 article *Police State Garrison State* by Said Hajarian, the former reformist aide to President Khatami(Hajarian, 2002). Drawing on Laswell's concept, Hajarian brought into the discussion the increasing roles of specialists of violence, in particular the military and paramilitary forces, in an autocratic political system which faces various internal and external threats (see Hajarian, 2002, pp. 4-5). While not mentioning Iran explicitly, the article was written at a time when the reformists' drive for political liberalisation and the expansion of a civil society appeared to be dwindling. Thus, it was considered by many observers as the author's attempt to forecast the possibility of similar political trends in Iran – trends which would be characterised by the rise of the military and security forces in managing manifold political tumults while penetrating the state.

Another Iranian political analyst, Behrouz Khaliq, used the concept of the 'garrison state' to describe the gradual rise of the Sepah in Iran's post-revolutionary experience. Following Hajarian's observations on the emergence of a garrison state in the autocratic context, Khaliq explains the growth of the Sepah in terms of its interactions with various historical conjunctures: namely, revolution, engagement in

prolonged war and military threat. According to Khaliq, the interplay of these historical events, together with the authoritarian structure of power in Iran and the weakness of civil society, has contributed to the Sepah's increasing involvement in Iran's internal politics and participation in the foreign policy of the IRI (Khaliq, 2006).

Herewith, this thesis expands on Hajarian's and Khaliq's useful, but unelaborated, insights into the garrison state to offer an adequate understanding of the Sepah's evolution. Nonetheless, the author of this thesis engages in a discussion of the garrison state in ways that are more attentive to the socio-political reality of contemporary Iran. As discussed, Hajarian does not mention Iran in his analysis of the garrison state. In the same vein, while Khaliq applies the concept to post-revolutionary Iran, he does not bring to the discussion a sufficient understanding of uniqueness of the Iranian case. Evidently, the various historical moments and crises that he mentions are not exceptional to revolutionary Iran, as many revolutionary states – such as communist China – as well as praetorian states have gone through similar experiences in their developments. Khaliq points to the rise of the Sepah in the IRI in terms of the authoritarian regime's increasing reliance on military force to suppress its rivals and protest movements. According to Khaliq, in Iran, this process opened the way for the entry of the Sepah into political power by paving the way for the development of the garrison state, with military and paramilitary forces occupying key political and administrative position in the state.

Yet all authoritarian regimes resort to military forces to keep themselves in power. While in some of these regimes the reliance on specialists of violence may give rise to the growing involvement of the military in politics, in others the military is strictly kept in control by the civilian apparatus. What is unclear, from Khaliq's description, is the particular quality which makes the case of Iran unique from other authoritarian regimes, and which makes the garrison state hypothesis applicable to IRI civil-military relations. Khaliq does not elaborate on this point, other than briefly mentioning that the garrison state in Iran has not reached the level of the more militaristic garrison state subtypes in Turkey and Pakistan. He also points out that this development is still unfolding in Iran. Of equal importance to the IRI's case, which Khaliq mentions but does not give enough attention to, is Iran's authoritarian structure and its power relations. The authoritarian Iranian regime is peculiar in that

it has competing centres of power and multiple structures alongside various political factions. Still, the political regime of the IRI is different in its origin when compared with the regimes in Pakistan and Turkey, where the military has been historically a dominant power. Moreover, as Morris Janowitz points out, the garrison state is not a direct domination of politics by the military *per se*, but rather the outcome of its increasing power through historical processes under conditions of prolonged international tension (see Janowitz, 1977, p. 80). Thereby it is only in the context of the gradual evolution and ascendency of the Sepah that the garrison state model is more readily applicable to the case of the IRI's civil-military relations.

Nonetheless, the applicability of the concept of the garrison state in its entirety to the IRI is not without its problems. This is because the concept was originally proposed as a construct to account for the future trend towards the growth of a specialist in violence, namely, the military, in industrialised societies (the Soviet Union, the US, Germany and Japan during World War II). This is not to dismiss the usefulness of the concept for non-industrialised countries, especially those that imported many elements into their political systems from industrialised countries. In the case of post-revolutionary Iran, the intellectual challenge is to revisit and modify the concept of the garrison state in the context of the IRI's hybrid political system and its peculiar form of power politics. In view of this challenge, the model of a garrison state presented here will look at the trajectory of the Sepah in the wider context of political contestation in the Iranian authoritarian regime on the one hand, and the regime's responses to internal crisis and external threat conditions on the other; this is the process that abetted the Sepah's penetration of the Iranian state as its specialist in violence and management of conflict, and thereby trumpeted its political and administrative power.

Moreover, the overt focus of the garrison state hypothesis on the industrialised world, to the exclusion of developing countries, needs to be revisited. In his formulation of the garrison state hypothesis, Laswell applies the concept exclusively to industrialised countries and particularly to democratic political systems on the grounds of these countries' access to modern technology. This access is not readily available to developing states as they are on the margins of the creative centres of western civilisation and hence are not as integrated with modern technology (Laswell, 1948, pp. 457-458). According to Laswell, the availability of

modern technology in industrialised countries (in periods of war) has blurred the boundaries between non-traditional military tasks and traditional military tasks, and thereby the specialists of violence have assumed many functions that were previously understood to be 'a part of modern civilian management' (Laswell, 1948, p. 458). Since Laswell wrote this, decades ago, industrialised countries no longer have a monopoly on modern technologies of violence; as a result developing countries like the IRI have gone to great lengths to modernise their defence capability. Still, access to the technology of violence is not the only necessary variable in facilitating a garrison state system and expanding the domain of specialists of violence. As Laswell's thesis is about 'the need to study [the] management of the instrument of violence, a much more broader and generic type' can hold true in many developing countries, in which there exist various security agencies, pressure and paramilitary groups that are tasked with non-traditional security functions (see Janowitz, 1977, p. 16). This is prevalent particularly in the case of the IRI, which has at its disposal various security forces, such as the Sepah and the Basij, among other pressure groups.

According to Laswell, the main components of a garrison state system are as follows:

(1) The powerful elites value power enough to resort to large-scale coercion when they regard such coercive strategies as useful to the maintenance of their ascendency.

(2) 'The elites accept the expectation that the retention of power during at least the immediate and middle-range future depends upon [the] capability and willingness to coerce external and internal challengers' (Laswell, 1962, p. 53).

(3) The increasing domination of the state by the political elite, composed of specialists of violence equipped with modern technology for warfare (Laswell, 1948, pp. 457-458).

(4) The presence of a perpetual crisis in the form of general or limited wars (Laswell, 1962, p. 58).

Fitch (1985) reiterates Laswell's concept of the garrison state, but he discusses the case of the US after the Vietnam war. Fitch confirms Laswell's argument, stating that, unlike its totalitarian industrial counterparts in the USSR and the Nazi Germany, 'in the US and Europe, the garrison state need not… be

characterised by overt abolition of democratic institutions. The external form of democracy might continue to exist, but effective power would be concentrated in the hands of a loosely knit elite of civilianised military and militarised civilians, with increasing integration of corollary skilled elites – the police, party and interest group leaders, scientists and educators – into a growing military-industrial complex' (Fitch, 1985, p. 32). Fitch, however, maintains that a modern-day garrison state relies on decentralised violence instead of systematic repression to keep itself in power. Revising Laswell's garrison state hypothesis in the view of US foreign policy in the post-Vietnam era, Fitch argues 'that high expectation of violence and a clear enemy are necessary, though not sufficient conditions for [the] emergence of a garrison state' (Fitch, 1985, p. 32). In addition to such conditions, Fitch stresses the importance of public emphasis on specific external or internal enemies. According to Fitch, the US participated in the new Cold War period because it was marked by the strong sense of threat; growing references to aggression, conflict, and violence; and a heavy emphasis on Soviet Union as the enemy. The absence of an overarching consensus on the place of the US within world foreign policy, however, led to an urgent US reliance on propaganda. If propaganda failed and it was not possible to cope with the Soviet threat democratically, there would have been increasing pressure from the government, especially from American military officers and their political counterparts, to resort to non-democratic means and create a new form of the garrison state (Fitch, 1985, p. 43).

Morris Janowitz (1977) offers a definition of the garrison state that is very similar to Laswell's but puts the concept in a clear civil-military model. According to Janowitz (1977, pp. 80-81):

> The garrison state is a model for describing the weakening civilian supremacy, especially in the democratic state because of a 'permanent' threat of mass warfare. While the end result of the garrison state approximates some aspect of the totalitarian state, the garrison state has a different natural history. It is, however, not the direct domination of politics by the military. Since modern industrial nations cannot be ruled merely by the political domination of a single leadership bloc, the garrison state is not a throwback to military dictatorship. It is the end

result of the growth of power by the military elite under conditions of prolonged international tension. The garrison state is a new pattern of coalition in which military groups, directly or indirectly, wield unprecedented amount of political and administrative power. The military retains its organisational independence provided that it makes appropriate alliance with civilian political factions.

While Iran is not an industrialised country, it is symptomatic of the garrison state model; that is, the expansion of the role of the Sepah has taken place under perpetual tensions and crises and behind the backdrop of the civilian political system that, albeit authoritarian, contains limited democratic dimensions. While the Islamic regime is non-democratic, it is composed of democratic and autocratic power structures. It consists of multiple centres of power with a popularly elected presidency and legislature, while the Supreme Leader remains the locus of power. Below him a multitude of religious officials and a religious, revolutionary structure dominate and maintain the *status quo*. Added to this hybrid and multi-layered mix is the existence of various civilian factions in the IRI that vie for power, albeit within the confines of Iran authoritarianism which limits competition within an increasingly contracting oligarchy. The presence of this multi-layered power structure, combined with increasing elite factionalism, renders the position of the ultimate power wielder, the Supreme Leader, and his allies more vulnerable to crisis than a one-man dictatorship (Khalaji, 2012). This tendency to remain in power has facilitated the established elite's increasing resort to specialists of violence, in this case, the Sepah. At the same time, it has invited the Sepah into internal politics and made possible a new nexus between veterans of the Sepah and the political elite remaining from the technocratic and clerical strata.

In post-revolutionary Iran, the rise of the 'garrison state' is a consequence of the state's experience with interstate military conflict and political crises stemming from increasing political factionalism and perceived external security threats. Beyond these factors, the military's place in, and its relationship with, the state apparatus is just as important to the creation of the garrison state in the IRI. By contrast, in industrial countries such as the US the military is more professional in a

Huntingtonian sense of the term, and 'military support for any form of garrison state is unlikely in the absence of a serious perceived threat to the national security' (Fitch, 1985, p. 32). In the case of Iran, the Sepah is a political institution that is indoctrinated with the religious ideas and Shiite principles of the clerics. Moreover, given its complex bureaucracy, which is composed of political, security and military structures, it is more predisposed to augment its functions during various crises and security threats (for more details see Chapter 2).

The Sepah's participation in politics, evidenced by its informal power and influence in the key institutions of the state, is different from its praetorian counterparts. Though the military's exercise of political power through the veneer of civilian government is also seen in a host of civilianised regimes where military officers have erected civilian infrastructures to legitimise their rule, the Sepah's emerging pattern of participation in politics is unique in that its far-ranging influence has been facilitated by a political regime that has been essentially civilian-based, comprised of a clerical and non-clerical technocratic oligarchy. The Sepah is not compelled to establish a civilianised military rule like the military-civilian mixed subtype. Neither is it engaged in managing political conflicts, like the praetorian regimes in Turkey and Brazil. Rather, it utilises the socio-political space in the theocratic system to its advantage to become an integral part of the narrowing political military oligarchy, dominating the state, society and economy.

Other than directly intervening in the politics of the state in a manner similar to military prototypes in Pakistan, Turkey and the southern cone of Latin America, the Sepah asserts its covert influence in national politics through the upward mobility of its network of personnel and veterans in the administrative, bureaucratic machinery of the state and various civilian institutions: namely municipalities, universities, local governments and various economic ventures. The ascendency of the Sepah to important civilian echelons has been facilitated by direct appointment of the religious lay and clerical stratum of the establishment, including the President and the Supreme Leader. Yet the Sepah's involvement in politics was also driven by the personal ambition of the Sepah veterans who saw their economic and political interests threatened during the reform period under President Khatami (1997-2005), who cautiously sought political liberalisation and a greater economic transparency within the framework of the Islamic Republic Constitution. Utilising their experience

in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the internal defence of the regime during the reform years, these veterans began to engage in local and domestic politics in 2003, promoting their former veterans and personnel to stand for election. The far-reaching presence of the Sepah was furthermore present in the government between 2004 and 2013), in which both the Chief Executive Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and many members of his cabinet, had a background in the Sepah and other mobilising apparatus.

The evolution of the Sepah's from that of an auxiliary guardian to that of a garrison state took place gradually over the course of the Sepah's endeavours in revolution, the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), its backlash to the reform movement during Khatami's administration (1997-2005) and its perceived sense of threat posed by the US military attack and US regional hegemony due to, among other issues, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the opposition of the West against Iran's nuclear program. During the reform period, the 'hardliners' increasing reliance on the Sepah to displace their political rivals in the regime and crush any societal opposition facilitated the Sepah's bid to capture the non-clerical institutions. With its increasing sway over the government and the Majles, after three decades of the republic, the involvement of the Sepah in Iran's security and foreign policy was enhanced in an unprecedented way. This occurred in tandem with the Sepah's growing involvement in the political economy and its business and financial activities. In this respect, the development of the Sepah over the three decades of the IRI is illustrative of its ascending trajectory from a mere institutional base of the regime to one of the regime's important power wielders.

The military's involvement with crises, of course, is not limited to the IRI. In communist China, the PLA was involved in the factional power struggle in the Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution (see Joffeh, 1982, pp. 145-149). Nonetheless, the PLA's engagement in politics decreased in the post-Mao period, a development that coincided with the Communist Party's retention of civilian control over the PLA as well as control of its economic activities a decade later. In the IRI, however, the Sepah's civilian control remained incomplete after the death of its charismatic leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. The departure of a charismatic leader in the IRI, unlike its counterpart in communist China, did not abate political factionalism but increased it. The increasing fissures in the regime, along with the persistence of

perpetual tensions between Iran and the United States, nurtured the Sepah's continuous rise.

The Sepah can then be compared with its authoritarian counterparts in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. In the case of the Sepah, the military's civilian control was stronger than its praetorian counterparts. While the praetorian militaries were involved in the management of crises, they were mainly inwardly-oriented and drew on their tradition of direct military intervention through a coup to placate political instability and internal threat conditions. Within the praetorian model, the case of Iran most closely approximates that of Pakistan's military, where the military was engaged in both internal and external security functions and its rise to power coincided with its interstate conflict with India. Nonetheless, in the case of Pakistan, such conflicts followed a direct military intervention, something that has not happened in Iran's case. It must be noted, however, that unlike the other military types covered here, the Sepah has special units for surveillance and security activities beyond Iranian territory and in the wider region – a factor that has been important to its ascending trajectory as a garrison state.

1.5 Conclusion

In comparing the IRI civil-military with the above-discussed two civil-military relations models, it was argued that neither the totalitarian model nor the praetorian model provides an accurate understanding of civil-military relations in the IRI. While the auxiliary guardian model underscores the conventional role of the Sepah as the defender of the system's ideological foundation – the doctrine of clerical rule – the garrison state model expands on the auxiliary guardian model by indicating a marked rise in military political power in the face of mounting internal and external challenges which are perceived as an existential threat to the dominant political elite. As an auxiliary guardian, the Sepah acts as an additional support base to the regime through its sacred defence of the IRI's Islamic pillar. In this role, the Sepah's mission is ideologically coloured within and without the Iranian nation-state. This ideology is backed by an array of interests that renders the Sepah an incorporated but independent actor in the IRI political system. The Sepah is loyal to the Office of the Supreme Leader, but at the same time it is provided with a noticeable level of autonomy in areas concerning its ideological indoctrination, its internal security, its

various economic activities and its external security and strategic activities outside the Iranian borders.

In the garrison state model, the Sepah retains its status as an ideological-military-security actor penetrating society, though it has developed into a *de facto* political power through working within the backdrop of the civilian political system. The Sepah undergoes partial civilianisation as its networks of personnel are further elevated to the echelons of the highly autocratic power structure through, among other things, local and national elections and through its appointment by the Supreme Leader to various bureaucratic and administrative positions. In this way, the Sepah acts as the *de facto* guardian of the authoritarian *status quo*. It has been converted into a managerial agent to handle societal challenges; it does this through political repression and an attempt to cultivate support based on nationalism and state-led economic populism, to the exclusion of democratic politics.

2 The Sepah in the Post-Revolutionary Iranian State: Internal Dimensions

The day to day patterns of control [in the developing nations] rest to an important degree on the variety of police and paramilitary that symbolise the extent of government's penetration to the local levels-urban and rural.

(Morris Janowitz 1977, p.16)

Modern authoritarianism depends on political elites, on popular support and on political mobilisation, however limited, exclusionary, and restrictive, but above all on specialised political structures and institutions.

(Amos Perlmutter 1981, p.2)

2.1 Introduction

One of the key features of the modern state, in the words of Max Weber, is its successful claim to a monopoly over the legitimate use of force within a given territory. Historically, the modern state asserted its monopoly over the use of force through its control over the means of coercion: the military and the armed forces. In both the European and non-European world, the use of the military was integral to the process of state-formation by maintaining internal order and protecting the territory from external threats. In Europe, state formation often coincided with the need for states to prepare for national wars. During the process of warfare, the military was a major state instrument in shaping socio-economic order, by facilitating capital growth and economic industrialisation. As a coercive apparatus, the military provided the European statecraft with the means to prepare for wars (concentration of coercion). The preparations necessary for war in turn prompted rulers to extract and distribute social resources (accumulation of coercion) and, among other things, organise interstate relations (see Tilly, 1990, p. 14; pp. 19-20). This type of socio-economic order was built on an increasingly urbanised social and political structure whereby the peasantry was weakened and local resistance to central authority was rare, if not completely absent. This European state-formation was followed by a pattern of military professionalism, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, which was meant to impart discipline, expertise, unity and

autonomy within the military sphere. One of the salient features of this professionalism in the European state, in the words of Samuel P. Huntington, was the political neutrality of the officer corps. While the military kept their distance from interfering in domestic affairs and eschewed the appointment of political generals, the political leaders avoided using the military as a political support base (Huntington, 1957, pp. 19-20; Khuri, 1982, p. 12).

Unlike this European experience, the process of state-formation in the Middle East did not result from national wars. Little or no industrialisation took place and there were rampant domestic challenges to the central authority of the new states, in the form of colonial interferences and various local rebellions against central authorities. In the case of Iran in the early part of the twentieth century, under the Qajar dynasty, the state authority was weakened by various local tribes and the division of its territories along the foreign forces' spheres of influence. It is against this backdrop that the role of the military in the creation of modern Iran (i.e., in the twentieth century) comes to light. The Reza Shah, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, came to power in 1921 through a military coup which facilitated his rise to kingship in 1926. Under his reign, the Iranian state underwent considerable efforts at centralisation due to the establishment of a unified military force. The succeeding Pahlavi monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, followed in his father's footsteps in relying on the military apparatus to solidify his regime (Halliday, 1979, p. 65; Entessar, 1988, pp. 56-57).

Shortly after the collapse of the Shah regime, the new revolutionary leadership under Khomeini embarked on the ideological and organisational restructuring of the military in ways that would reflect the objectives of the Islamic Republic. To this end, the new regime established multiple revolutionary armed forces, Islamic revolutionary committees, the popular militia or the Basij, and in particular the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or *Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami* also known as the Sepah.

Given the importance of the armed forces as the defender of the internal political order under the Pahlavi dynasty and the IRI, both regimes struggled with one of the striking dilemmas of civil-military relations: that is, how to use the military as an instrument of internal order, while at the same time keeping in check any political ambitions to take over the state it may develop.

In examining the link between the function of the armed forces and their role in politics, the focus of this chapter is to look at the organisational characteristics of Iran's armed forces the Sepah in particular. Central to an understanding of the organisation of the armed forces is an understanding of how they were placed in the political system: that is, how they were utilised and arranged to assure the survival of the regime while guaranteeing their subordination to the civilian authority. To this end, this chapter begins by providing a historical overview of the Iranian armed forces before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The chapter then moves on to the period of the Islamic Republic, and examines the place and the security role of the Islamic armed forces in the overall framework of Iran's post-revolutionary authoritarian power structure. This authoritarian structure is defined here as the 'electoral' autocracy. By disaggregating the electoral autocracy, the chapter brings into focus the presence of both *parallel political structures* and *auxiliary political structures*. The parallel structures are those bodies that replicate the structures of state institutions and monitor their functions. The auxiliary structures are the vital tools of the revolutionary regime's social mobilisation, internal security and ideological propagation. This provides the context within which the chapter discusses the internal characteristics of one of the most important political auxiliary structures, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or the Sepah. This analysis emphasises the Sepah's intricate bureaucratic, military and internal security structure, its mobilisation machinery and its social make-up since 1979. The chapter concludes by comparing and contrasting the Iranian armed forces under the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Pahlavi dynasty.

2.2 Iran's military modernisation, pre-1979

Although Iran had a long legacy of military might under successive powerful empires, it was not until the 1920s that it developed a unified national army. Historically, separate units of armed and tribal groups lent their support to the Iranian emperors and monarchs to fight wars and deflect invaders (Kazemi, 1980, p.218). Iran's experiment with a model of military modernisation dates back to the eighteenth century during the Qajar dynasty. Humiliated by the crushing defeat and the loss of territories to Russia, the Iranian modernisers in the Qajar court undertook various measures aimed at reforming the traditional structure of the army in order to bolster Iran's defence (Cronin, 1997, p. 2; also see Lampton, 1987, p.98). The

earliest attempt in this period at modernising the army based on the European model was made by Abbas Mirza, the crown prince (*vali'ahd*) and the Governor of the Azarbaijan, who sought to develop a standing army that would protect the Iranian territory against further Russian invasion. For this purpose, he developed a program called *Nazam-e Jadid* based on the Ottoman model of military restructuring. Under this program, Abbas Mirza brought the first French and British instructors into Iran and dispatched students abroad for military training; however, Abbas Mirza's program failed because of internal opposition and further loss of territory in the war with Russia (Cronin, 1997, p. 2). The Qajar period witnessed two additional efforts for the development of an army based on the European model: the first under Amir Kabir in 1848-51 and the second under Mirza Husayn Khan, *Moshir al-Dowlah*, in the 1870s. Like their predecessor, both Amir Kabir and *Moshir al-Dowleh* adopted a program based on the Ottoman model, albeit implemented more rigorously. This included the importation of foreign military instructors, the introduction of measures for financial reforms of the army, the setting up of new recruitment practices and the development of indigenous arms production. Amir Kabir implemented a new type of recruitment and instituted *Dar al-Funawn*, an elite school which provided military education in its curriculum. Two decades later, *Mushir al-Dawleh* created the Cossack Brigade, a military cavalry influenced by Russian tutelage (Cronin, 1997, p.3; Bakhash, 1978, p.100).

These early measures brought a degree of modernisation to the army in seeking to establish central control over the army's finances, to eliminate nepotism and to upgrade its structure and capability through the selection of skilled officers, foreign instructors and the purchase of modern weapons. Nonetheless, they only introduced limited changes into the structure of the army, the composition of the military budget and training and tactics (Bakhash, 1978, p. 100). One of the obstacles to modernisation of the army was the problem of regular payment necessary for the delivery of military equipment. This, coupled with the lack of a modern bureaucratic organisation for provision of military supplies and goods for the troops, stalled the development of the army as a unified fighting force (Lampton, 1987, pp. 98-99).

Another factor that curtailed the formation of a centralised army was the involvement of certain European powers and their use of Iran as a sphere of

influence in competition amongst themselves. This involvement brought about a measure of foreign control over army reorganisation, allowing for no more than a cosmetic change in its traditional structure (Cronin, 1997, p.3). As a result, the bulk of Iran's defence force remained composed of a permanent royal forces and an irregular cavalry and artillery based on tribal levies (Bakhash, 1978, p 100; also see Lampton, 1987, p. 98).

The fall of Qajar and the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty by Reza Khan signified the beginning of modern state-building in the Iranian history. This period was accompanied by a considerable growth in the centralisation of state power. This went hand in hand with an increasing centralisation of the Iranian military and its involvement in the Iranian society. Ascending to power through the use of the Cossack regiment in the coup of 1921 before he was crowned king, Reza Shah continued to boost his authority by creating a loyal national military. The national military was a newly developed institution that, along with a modern bureaucracy and extensive court patronage, constituted a central pillar of the new political structure (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 136). To restructure the Iranian army based on the European model, Reza Shah eliminated some military units while incorporating the rest into a unified army (Kazemi, 1980, p. 220). In 1925 he requested that the Iranian Majles pass a law introducing compulsory military service for all men aged 21 and over (Kazemi, 1980, p. 220). As a result of a fivefold increase in the annual defence budget from 1926 to 1941, as well as the establishment of the conscription law in villages and towns, the armed forces were transformed from five divisions totalling 40,000 men to eighteen divisions totalling 127,000 men (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 136). The armed forces were critical to the centralisation of state power, both through restoring peace and order in troubled areas and through implementing social and political reform in the modern state. The army's vital role in the making of the modern Iranian state was carefully kept in check through its loyalty to the person of Reza Shah. This was reinforced by a civil-military symbiosis based on mutual interest, as the officers in the Cossack Brigade (who constituted the army's commanders) were aware that their individual status relied on the centrally controlled military structure (Cronin, 1997, p. 190-205).

The second Pahlavi monarch, Mohammad Reza Shah, gradually consolidated his power and central authority via support of the military after a decade of political

upheaval that followed his father's forced abdication at the hands of the Allies in 1941. One of the defining episodes in the first decade of the Shah's reign was the debate over oil nationalisation, and the efforts of a popular coalition, known as the National Front, to gain control over Iranian oil from the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Led by Dr. Mohammad Mossadiq, the leader of the National Front, the Bill for Nationalisation was passed by the Majles in March 1951. Mossadiq became the Prime Minister following the resignation of Hussein Ala, a Conservative politician, who supported a formula that proposed a fifty-fifty profit share between the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the Iranian government (Katouzian, 1981, pp. 169-170).

During the two years in which Mossadiq presided over the government, he was responsible for far-reaching reforms which stripped the Shah of his absolute authority. A key action was the reform of the armed forces. Mossadiq eventually won control of the armed forces after his conflict with the Shah over the issue culminated in his resignation, only to be brought back to the post in the aftermath of massive demonstrations and riots in support of him. Entrusted with the responsibility for the Ministry of National Defence, Mossadiq purged a number of pro-Shah army generals who were corrupt and disloyal to the government. He was aided in this task by a network within the military loyal to the authority of the government, known as the 'patriotic officers' (Katouzian, 1990, pp. 131-132). The purged officers, however, remained active in opposing the government and constituted the bulk of the forces behind the successive coups of August 1953, which, with the help of the United States and Britain, overthrew Mossadiq and restored the Shah to power.

The post-Mossadiq era was marked by the centralisation of power in the hands of the Shah. This was particularly evident after the dismissal of Premier Zahedi, a former general who had a leading role in the overthrow of the Mossadiq government, in early 1955. As Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, the Shah implemented a host of measures to gain absolute control over the military and security apparatus. While heavily relying on the assistance from the United States, the Shah carried out a major overhaul of the military and security forces. To this end, a growing number of US military advisors were brought to Iran over the years. It is estimated that before the 1979 revolution, more than 20,000 US advisors, granted with extra-territorial rights and exempt from prosecution under Iranian law, were engaged in defence-related contracts (Bill, 1988, pp. 155-157). With the assistance

of the United States, the Shah also created the State Security and Intelligence Organisation (SAVAK) to crush domestic opposition to the Pahlavi regime (see Halliday, 1979, pp. 78-90). The army underwent rapid growth in the size and quality of its sophisticated weaponry, especially in the 1970s, during which the rise in oil revenues increased the Shah's purchases of arms from American firms (Kazemi, 1980, p. 233). The western influx of arms and financial support to Iran was prompted by the status of Iran as a regional power set against communism, as well as the Shah's ambition to strengthen his autonomy and power and thus to offset both domestic forces in Iran and great powers abroad (Katouzian, 1981, pp. 318-319). In addition, the military budget grew astronomically, from 2,544 million *rials* in 1954 to 92,100 million *rials* in 1972. Another significant change during the 1970s was the rapid growth in the size of the military: the armed forces on active duty totalled over a quarter of a million (Kazemi, 1980, p. 233).

Despite these changes, the military could not resist the tide of revolution that broke out in 1978 and dismantled the Pahlavi dynasty in the course of a year. A host of factors contributed to the armed forces' inability to suppress the protests, leading in turn to the defection of its segments to the revolutionary forces. The first factor was the way in which the Shah attempted to dominate the armed forces. Though the armed forces proved to be loyal to the Shah, a few instances of opposition within the military-security sector – first from the Tudeh network in 1954 and later from his once-loyal allies – had made the Shah wary of potential threats to his rule from military personnel. To hinder the emergence of a potential rival, he sought to prevent the military's involvement in politics while relying on the armed forces as an instrument of coercion. The Shah encouraged competition among the military-security personnel while being careful not to allow any one figure to become powerful within them. To this end, he assigned overlapping responsibilities within the security sector (Kazemi, 1980, p. 235-237). This strategy, along with the provision of financial benefits and assignments of punishment, not only aimed to ensure that military-security personnel were loyal to the regime, but also prevented them from taking a significant role in the government. Though these methods hindered the emergence of a challenge to the Shah, they fell short of yielding an effective strategy in response to the crisis of 1979. This is because the Shah's tactics were mainly designed for combating internal threats from the system and; therefore

they did not provide the armed forces with sufficient training to deal with civil disturbances and riots (Afshar, 1985, p. 188). By being personally involved in all military matters including promotions, the Shah forced the military to be extremely dependent on his decision-making and therefore left the armed forces devoid of their own initiative (Afshar, 1985, p. 188). In addition, his method of divide and rule compounded the unity of the armed forces. As a result, the armed forces were incapable of implementing cohesive action that dealt decisively with the revolutionary crisis.

2.3 The armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The new revolutionary regime that came to power in 1979 brought about a unique ideological and political reconstitution of the armed forces, which endures to the present day. Similar to the Pahlavi dynasty, the new Islamic regime created multiple and overlapping security organisations alongside the Artesh (the army). In some ways, these parallel forces can be compared with the Pahlavi regime's strategy of assigning overlapping security functions to separate organisations such as the police, gendarmeries and SAVAK. Under the Shah, these organisations were put in charge of internal security tasks, while neutralising the concentration of power by any single security organ and the army.

Nonetheless, the Islamic regime brought a new political and ideological dimension to the Iranian armed forces. Reflecting the new regime's commitment to Islamic ideology, the Islamic Republic armed forces are composed of the regular armed forces, the Artesh, and the revolutionary armed and security forces: the Sepah, the Basij, the law enforcement forces or erstwhile revolutionary committees, and the vigilantes known as the Helpers of God (*Ansar-e Hezbollah*). While the latter have all developed over the past thirty years, their origins trace back to the early days of the revolution. The Sepah (*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami*) was set up as a militia in May 1979 by the decree of Ayatollah Khomeini as an auxiliary counterweight to the Shah's Artesh, whose loyalty to the revolution was suspect. Since the revolution, the Artesh has been dramatically undermined as an independent force, while the Sepah has become an important pillar of the regime due to its broad role in defending the revolution and its achievements. Another militia, the Mobilisation Army or Basij (*Basij-e Mostaz'afin*), was set up by a later decree of Khomeini in November 1979, following the takeover of the US embassy to defend

the regime against internal enemies and external intervention (particularly by the US).

In addition to the aforementioned forces, various revolutionary committees (*Komiteha-ye Enqelabe Eslami*) which had been the precursors to the Sepah were assigned to internal security functions, such as implementing Islamic morality, fighting various armed and unarmed political oppositions, and restoring order in urban and rural areas. During the 1980s, the committees acted independently under the patronage of various revolutionary clerics. To reduce their scope of independence, in the 1990s the Majles ordered the merger of the committees with the city police and gendarmerie (countryside police) into a single entity called the Law Enforcement Forces (*Niruha-ye Entezami*) (Buchta, 2000, p. 65). Since then, however, the regime's goal of establishing a single law enforcement force has remained elusive, as there remain various independent units within the LEF which operate independently of the government (Samii, 2002). The problem of asserting authority over the LEF is further compounded by the membership within it of the former committee members and the revolutionary personnel, who are assigned to its command positions and are subordinate to the Supreme Leader.

While the committees were disbanded through the establishment of the Law Enforcement forces, they gave their place to a new non-state pressure group, known as the Helpers of God, which was set up in the mid-1990s. The Helpers of God act as an autonomous vigilante force which is known to have ties with the Iranian Conservative elite, in particular the Ayatollah Ahmad Janati, the Head of the Council of Guardians and is believed to be well connected and well financed (Rubin, 2001, p. 45). The group also is said to have been financed by the Foundation of the Oppressed and has a core membership of servicemen who participated in the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s (Rubin, 2001, p. 50).

Having provided a brief overview of the post-revolutionary Iranian armed forces, it is necessary to examine their organisational structures and functions in detail. This examination requires the consideration of the Islamic Republic power structure and the institutional position of the regular and irregular armed forces within it. This is important because it enables us to understand how civilian control is exercised in the post-revolutionary context, which is marked by the presence of highly political armed forces. Broaching the analysis of post-revolutionary armed

forces within the framework of the post-revolutionary authoritarian power structure sheds additional light on the armed forces' organisational strength and capacity and the extent of their reach to other state institutions. Given that these characteristics imbue the armed forces with venues that help shape their political, military and security actions, they are vital in determining why some armed forces, such as the Sepah and its paramilitary subcomponent the Basij, are inherently political while others are not.

2.3.1 The Armed Forces and the Sepah in the Post-Revolutionary Authoritarian Regime: Context

While a discussion of the military in the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and Latin America has taken an important place in the field of sociology and comparative politics, the subject has not been adequately dealt with by the literature on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Studies on the post-revolutionary authoritarian regime in Iran have primarily drawn on comparative political analysis and historical institutional theories in order to bring to attention its contending ideological and institutional features, which combine elected institutions with authoritarian religious and revolutionary structures (Brumberg, 2001; Buchta, 2000; Moslem, 2002; Keshavarzian, 2005).

While some of these studies have seen the Sepah and other security agencies as revolutionary components of the Iranian regime, they fail to treat them systematically and to elaborate on their roles, functions and dynamics within the larger authoritarian power structure (see Buchta, 2000; Moslem, 2002; Keshavarzian, 2005). The lack of analysis of the Sepah, by Iranian scholars in general and the field of historical institutionalism in particular, may partly result from sensitivity to the issue; it may also be partly due to the fact that the Sepah has not directly intervened in the politics of the country through an outright military coup, nor has it controlled the country in the form of a military regime. This stands in sharp contrast to the many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, referred to as 'populist-authoritarian', which consist of a core military component. Drawing on historical institutionalist theory, a number of observers have shed light on the military's leading place within Arab-Middle Eastern regimes as a core pillar of populist-authoritarianism, while also noting the way in which these regimes established inclusionary practices through incorporating various social classes in

their single-party/corporatist systems (Ehtesahmi and Murphy, 1996; Hinnebusch, 2006). Using historical institutionalist explanations, observers noted that many regimes in this category emerged as a result of 'revolution from above' in the form of military coups, and operationalised in a single-party military regime together with a degree of elite contestation and social inclusion of the poorer segments of society (Hinnebusch, 2001; Ehteshami, *et al.*, 2013). Ba'athist Syria, like other populist-authoritarian variants in the Middle East, for example, had at its disposal a social base among the peasant and working class or the plebeian strata, although their political inclusion began to diminish in the 1980s (Ehteshami, *et al.*, 2013, p. 225).

The Islamic Republic of Iran, however, did not arise from military-led processes, although the Sepah enabled the fundamentalist consolidation of power shortly after the revolution. The Iranian regime came into being as a result of a revolution from below, which established an amalgam of clerical-republican institutions and gave way to the hegemony of the lay religious and clerical power elite. Having liquidated the secular rivals with whom they had toppled the Shah, the power elite's factionalism and their myriad networks, together with periodic parliamentary, presidential and council elections, allowed a measure of contestation and inclusion in the Islamic Republic. Consequently, the level of political inclusion in the Islamic Republic of Iran, though tightly controlled, was greater than those of its authoritarian counterparts in the Middle East (Ehtehami, *et al*., 2013, p. 225).

That the Sepah has neither taken political power for itself nor usurped Iran's clerical bodies must not be construed as politically irrelevant to the Islamic Republic's authoritarianism. Indeed, as will be shown in the next chapter, the lay and clerical establishments' heavy reliance on the Sepah to manage domestic security problems, together with the presence of its networks in the executive and legislature branches and its various economic networks, all bear witness to its increasing political salience. Given the importance of the Sepah, any studies on post-revolutionary politics need a perspective that goes beyond the focus on civilian components of the IRI and gives equal weight to the configuration of the Sepah, along with other revolutionary armed forces, in the wider framework of Iran's post-revolutionary authoritarianism. This will enable a greater understanding of the ways in which the behaviour of military and security forces are shaped in the Iranian authoritarian system, as well as the manner in which power is allocated among them.

2.3.1.1 Understanding the Iranian Authoritarian System: The Need to Bring Together Old Institutionalism and New Institutionalism

To fill the gap on analytical literature on Iran, this section brings together the new institutionalist theoretical approach with a variant of the old institutionalist approach introduced by Amos Perlmutter's work on the study of modern authoritarianism (see Perlmutter, 1981, pp.7-48). Perlmutter's analysis fits into the framework of old institutionalism by placing its emphasis on authoritarian institutions and political structures, such as the party, the state and in particular the military by contrast, the new institutionalism focuses on the institutions in authoritarian regimes that are modelled after liberal and electoral democracies, such as the parliament, elections and the popularly elected government (see Schedler, 2009, pp. 3-4). As will be shown in the following section, the combination of Perlmutter's old institutionalist study and the new institutionalist studies provides a comprehensive picture of the IRI political system that is cognisant of both civilian and military institutions.

Both the new institutionalist approach and Perlmutter's old institutionalist analysis have many similarities. They share an emphasis on the importance of modern institutions to the functionality and the preservation of different authoritarian regimes. Rather than seeing authoritarian regimes in the generic sense of the term, new institutionalists compare authoritarian regimes across the board; that is, they analyse different authoritarian regimes by emphasising how their distinct institutional make-up shapes elite interactions and the inclusion and exclusion of social forces. Perlmutter also analyses the behaviour of the authoritarian regimes along a continuum by looking at the ways in which their mobilisational, ideological, and coercive political structures provide them with means of domination (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 7-12). In the words of Perlmutter, 'modern authoritarianism depends on political elites, on popular support and on political mobilisation, however limited, exclusionary, and restrictive, but above all on specialised political structures and institutions' (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 2). Such structures are the means by which authoritarian regimes penetrate society, integrate social and political institutions, and undermine autonomous social and political actions (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 8).

The new institutionalist analysis of Iran, as previously mentioned, has largely omitted the study of the military. The adoption of Perlmutter's premise concerning modern authoritarian regimes' political structures enables a fruitful analysis of the myriad religious bodies in the Iranian regime, namely the Council of Guardians, the

Council of Experts and the Expediency Council, on the one hand, and the revolutionary organs that are military and paramilitary in nature, especially the Sepah, on the other. These bodies and organisations in essence correspond to what Perlmutter refers to as auxiliary structures and parallel structures, which most modern authoritarian regimes rest on.

According to Perlmutter, parallel structures are devised to support and legitimise modern authoritarian regimes by fulfilling political functions which '[parallel] the historical-classical liberal political structures as parties, parliament and cabinet' (Perlmutter, 1981, p.18). They are policy-making organs and as such are established to monitor 'the modern state's traditional political institutions: parties, parliament and the bureaucracy' (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 19). Auxiliary structures, on the other hand, embody the instrument of control in that they serve as an 'instrument of mobilisation, penetration and police' (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 12). They are pivotal for the eradication of internal and external enemies of authoritarian regimes, especially in their seizure of power. They represent political paramilitary security formations such as 'the revolutionary guards, terror squads and special troops that are essential for penetration of society and elimination of the authoritarian regimes' enemies' (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 12). The distinction between parallel and auxiliary structures in most authoritarian regimes is not precise, since parallel structures may become auxiliary structures in the course of their development. The Chinese Red Guards, for example, evolved from a parallel structure to an auxiliary structure in the course of the Cultural Revolution, in which it assumed a mobilisational campaign. Likewise, some auxiliary structures may become parallel structures in a way: they may parallel the function of the governing political institutions and bureaucracy and serve as a channel for political mobility. One case in point is the military in both China and Cuba. In these countries, the military simultaneously operates as both a parallel and an auxiliary structure. The military's function is equivalent to that of a political institution, as it assumes the role of a legislative body and protects the party against corruption. It serves as the instrument of ascendency to political power and, among other functions, liaises with the party in overseeing and disseminating political propaganda, cultural activities and national security (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 60).

In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the auxiliary and parallel structures are even more prevalent because of the lack of a centralised political authority. While the Supreme Leader's position remains the locus of power in the Islamic Republic, below him a plethora of loosely linked and sometimes relatively autonomous power centres prevail. These include religious parallel structures, namely, the Council of Guardians (*Showra-ye Negahban*), the Expediency Council (*Majma'-e Tashkhise Maslahat-e Nezam*), the Judiciary (*Qowve-ye Qazai'-ye*) and the Assembly of Leadership Experts (*Majles-e Khobergan*), which parallel the republican governing institutions and monitor their functions. The Sepah is another important power centre which operates as both an auxiliary structure and, more recently, as a parallel structure. As an auxiliary structure, it is entrusted with ideological and political mobilisation and is tasked with combating the regime's internal and external foes. At the same time, the Sepah is a parallel institution. Although historically the Sepah acted as an auxiliary structure with the mandate of protecting the revolution, over the years it has evolved into a parallel structure by aiding the mobility of political elite and by wielding increasingly political influence and power. Nonetheless, the function of the Sepah and its role is situated in, and has evolved, in a distinct context different from the authoritarian settings covered by Perlmutter.

More specifically, Perlmutter focuses his study primarily on the following authoritarian regimes: communist, Nazi, praetorian, corporatist, and fascist. The IRI's institutional makeup does not correspond to any of these regimes. In Communist regimes, auxiliary bodies such as the Soviet KGB, the Chinese Red Guards, and various political militaries were the pivotal machineries of the Leninist Party. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, there is no single party. Though initially the Islamic Republic Party was established to sustain the fundamentalist monopoly of power, the party was disintegrated amidst the breakout of factionalism and was disbanded by Khomeini in 1986. Whereas in the Communist model the Party acted as the super-structure overseeing state institutions, the Islamic Republic of Iran has at its disposal a multitude of parallel religious bodies which, on behalf of the Supreme Leader, supervise the ideological and political workings of the official governing institutions.

As for the Sepah, due to the absence of a single party, the fundamentalists' penetration of the Sepah has been less authoritative and complete, allowing it to have more autonomy than its communist counterparts (Katzman, 1993, p. 15). Still, the Islamic Republic sharply contrasts with praetorian, fascist and corporatist models on a particular issue. The IRI does not share the structural weakness of the praetorian regimes characterised by non-institutionalised political authority. As such, it is not necessarily subject to military domination in the manner that the praetorian regimes were. Neither does the IRI rely on a corporatist state or party, like the corporatist and fascist regimes, to represent society. Hence, the IRI is a unique party-less state in which auxiliary and parallel structures take on an even more prominent role in the maintenance of the authoritarian regime. The only precedent that approximates the IRI in its use of auxiliary and parallel structures is Nazi Germany, in which Hitler's political military Waffen SS acted as a strong auxiliary independent of the Nazi party. The Islamic Republic of Iran, however, is not a tyrannical regime where power is concentrated in the hands of single individual and, as previously noted, has myriad overlapping power centres.

Another aspect of the IRI political system that cannot be separated from a study of its auxiliary and parallel structures is its electoral institutions, which are overlooked by Perlmutter's study on modern authoritarianism. In his study, Perlmutter gives agency to authoritarian institutions and structures to the exclusion of democratic ones. This leads him to see the presence of 'pluralistic structures' under authoritarian systems as insignificant and hence politically irrelevant to an institutional analysis of non-democratic regimes. For Perlmutter, the study of democratic institutions in authoritarian regimes is beside the point due to these regimes' reliance on instruments of domination and restricted inclusionary practices instead of 'fully mobilising the population' (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 69). More recent institutionalist literature, however, challenges Perlmutter's analysis by suggesting that the democratic institutions in authoritarian regimes such as elections, legislatures and multi-parties cannot be easily neglected as unimportant, and hence their impact and politics deserve special attention (see Lust-Oscar, 2007; p. 458; Schedler, 2009; pp. 3-4). For example, Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Prezeworski find that nominal democratic institutions under authoritarianism have been central to the regime's maintenance by extending its basis of support and deterring the threat of

rebellion (Gandhi and Prezeworski, 2007, pp. 1279-1301). Moreover, a volume edited by Andreas Schedler offers a model of electoral authoritarianism 'which takes seriously both the authoritarian qualities' of the non-democratic regimes and 'the electoral procedures they put into practice' (Schedler, 2006, p.5). Schedler argues that these elections matter because they differentiate electoral authoritarian regimes from their authoritarian counterparts, known as 'closed' autocratic regimes. That is, unlike electoral authoritarian regimes, whereby the top positions of executive and legislative power are filled through multiparty elections, the 'closed' autocratic regimes either abstain from such procedures or hold elections in a much more limited way (Schedler, 2006, p. 5). Analysing authoritarianism by broaching it through the power of election will enable us to differentiate who gains and loses through electoral politics and raises our understanding of the ways elections either reproduce or threaten the *status quo* regime (Lust-Okar, 2009, pp. 456-457).

Elections and nominally democratic institutions are, however, only one aspect of authoritarian systems. Another aspect is the way in which the system's authoritarian structures, both parallel and auxiliary shape and are continually being shaped by the aforementioned democratic procedures. At any point these structures, such as security forces and parallel bodies, invoke a wide range of actions and reactions in order to reposition themselves towards democratic procedures and manage their unintended consequences. In order to gain insight into the ongoing dynamics in many authoritarian systems, it is therefore essential to use a framework that is attentive to both democratic and authoritarian structures. Piecing together Perlmutter's variant of old institutionalism and the abovementioned new institutionalist analytical literature, this framework particularly helps in the examination of revolutionary armed and security forces, particularly the Sepah in the unique context of the IRI political system. However, before examining the revolutionary armed and security forces, it is essential to disaggregate the political system that gives rise to the institutional power of these forces.

2.3.1.2 An 'Electoral' Autocracy: An Alternative Concept for Understanding the IRI

The IRI is a unique political system that combines authoritarian institutions that are markedly religious and revolutionary with governing state institutions whose legitimacy rests with the electorate. Here, the term 'electoral' autocracy is used to define the IRI political system. The notion of 'electoral' autocracy defined here is an addition to Andreas Schedler's typologies of 'electoral authoritarianism' and 'closed' autocracy. It is an intermediate system between the 'closed' autocracy and electoral authoritarianism, and shares many features with the latter. It is distinguished from a closed autocracy and approximates the electoral authoritarian regimes in that it holds participatory elections for the positions of executive and legislative power. Nonetheless, unlike the electoral authoritarian regimes that stage multiparty elections, the IRI political system tolerates only a variant of limited electoral competition among the ruling elites. These ruling elites are themselves rigorously vetted by the parallel religious body, the Council of Guardians. Moreover, the form of pluralism that exists in the IRI, while more open than in a closed autocracy, is vulnerable to repression and abuse directed by authoritarian auxiliary structures such as the Sepah. As a result, the extent of pluralism that the IRI allows for lacks the more inclusionary pluralism that is characteristic of electoral authoritarianism.

The presence of limited pluralism does not mean that democratic institutions are irrelevant to the workings of the IRI. Elections were central to the stability of the IRI by regulating elite contestations, at least until 2009 (Tezcür, 2013, p.209). They were characterised by candidates' vigorous campaign competitions, including visits around the country in an effort to attract voters. The elections were also important in shaping the political dynamics of the IRI in an unpredictable way, as they were characterised by a moderate to high level of voter turnout. In 1997, a large number of people, especially youth and middle-class voters, went to the polls and elected the reform-minded candidate Mohammad Khatami against the preferences of the Conservative establishment. Khatami's victory was accompanied by 'political liberalisation' which, to use Huntington's terminology, allowed some issues to be opened up for public debate, the loosening of censorship, the sponsoring of elections for offices that have little power, and some renewal of civil society (Huntington,

1991, p. 5). This tide of political liberalisation was followed by a series of electoral victories by the reformists, including Khatami's re-election in 2001. The elections also played an important role in the Conservative resurgence in the presidential election of 2005 and the emergence of Ahmadinejad as a victor by appealing to the urban poor and lower-middle class segments of society. In the 2009 election, however, it was the reformists' turn to change the balance of power by seeking to capitalise on the support of their middle class constituents, many of whom had been apathetic on previous occasions and did not go to the polls in the 2005 presidential election. The significance of the elections in galvanising mass support and overcoming voter apathy was nowhere more evident than in the widespread uprising that followed the disputed outcomes of the 2009 election that announced the incumbent Ahmadinejad as the ultimate victor.

Hence, elections in the IRI were not irrelevant, and in fact closely correspond to the electoral authoritarian regimes in that they are based on universal suffrage and are occasionally marked by a high level of turnout. On the other hand, the ascendance of the IRI representative institutions through popular elections has not provided their personnel with a free hand to pursue their mandate, because they have to share power with parallel autocratic institutions whose legitimacy is conferred by divine authority. With regards to the executive powers in the IRI, while Iran's president is in charge of the government, appointing cabinet ministers and responsible for the country's economic policies and foreign and domestic affairs, he does not occupy the highest office in the IRI. Ultimate authority lies in the hands of the Supreme Leader, also known as the Faqih (*Vali-ye Faqih*). The origin of the Supreme Leader's position is traced back to the eschatological doctrine of the Mandate of the Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*), which found expression in the 1979 Constitution. Based on the Shiite doctrine of 12th Shi'aism, the 12th Imam, the last descendant of the infallible Shiite Imam (Saint) in the line of the Imam Ali, the cousin of the Prophet Mohammad, was occulted (hidden away) by God's will in 847 AD and will eventually reappear as a Mahdi, to establish a just rule (see Zahedi, 2000, p. 68-69). Accordingly, under the 1979 Constitution, during the occultation of the hidden 12th Shi'a saint, the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran is the responsibility of the Faqih (religious guide), who is qualified as a *Marja'* or top-ranking member of the Shi'a clerical jurists in the rank of Ayatollah and who is

familiar 'with the circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful, and possessing administrative capability' (see Algar, 1980, pp. 29-30, 107). The Constitution of 1979 delegated political and religious authority to the Supreme religious jurist by making the candidacy for the post of the Faqih conditional on being an accepted *Marja'* as well as a political leader, as was the case with Khomeini himself (Algar, 1980, p. 66). Following the death of Khomeini, however, the constitutional amendment of 1989 omitted the Faqih's religious scholarly requirement (*Marja'iat*) while emphasising his ability as a political leader. The amendment further enhanced the power of the Assembly of Leadership Experts, the clerical body that is in charge of electing the succeeding Supreme Leader, by giving them the power to dismiss the Supreme Leader (Arjomand, 2009, p 248). In practice, however, the new amendment provided the Supreme Leader with sweeping powers. In addition to his general authority to command the armed forces, declare war and peace and appoint the clerics of the Council of Guardians and Judiciary stated in the 1979 Constitution, the new Constitution provided the Supreme Leader with additional power to decree referendums, to hold the position of Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, to appoint as well as dismiss or accept the resignation of the clerics of the Council of Guardians, the Chief of the Judiciary, the head of National Radio and TV, the Chief of Joint Staff, and the Chief Commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Corps and the police forces. Additionally, the amendment provides the Supreme Leader with the political authority to determine the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to resolve disputes and coordinate relations between the legislative, judicial and executive branches (see Moslem, 2002, p. 79).

The foregoing demonstrates the non-democratic nature of the IRI, whereby a religious figure, the Supreme Leader, who rules indefinitely and is not directly elected by the electorate, is at the heart of the political system. While the IRI has often been described as 'rule by clergy' or a theocracy, the concept is not suitable to describe the variant of religiously-inspired political rule in the IRI. As Chehabi rightfully points out, it is not the clergy that direct the system, but the politicised segment of the clergy Most of the senior Shiite clergy have remained distant from public life and have questioned the scholarly credentials of the Supreme Leader Khamenei (Chehabi, 2001, p. 52). It is more appropriate to treat the Iranian authoritarianism as an autocracy rather than a theocracy.

The autocratic nature of the regime is further confirmed by a section of the 1989 amendment which omitted the article requiring the Faqih to be a high Shi'a theologian (*Marja'*). Since then it has been the political determinants of the Supreme Leader that define the place of religion in politics. Moreover, while the current Supreme Leader is a religious figure, he does not have the charisma or the scholarly qualification of his predecessor. Nonetheless, what makes the system an electoral autocracy is the division of power between the president and the Supreme Leader. As noted earlier, the all-encompassing power of the Supreme Leader overshadows that of the president. The Constitution of the IRI also makes it clear that the Supreme Leader is the ultimate source of authority, and after the Supreme Leader, it is the president that occupies the highest office in the country.

2.3.1.3. The Parallel and Auxiliary Structures in the IRI's 'Electoral' Autocracy
Next to the Supreme Leader are his appointed and semi-appointed structures that operate to safeguard the Faqih in the political system. Some of these structures make sure that the electoral institutions do not pose a challenge to his rule. These structures stand alongside elected institutions. In the spirit of Perlmutter's insight and the new institutionalist analysis, the IRI 'electoral' autocracy can be divided into groupings of three distinct elements: 1) republican state structures; 2) parallel religious structures; 3) auxiliary religious-revolutionary structures (see Figure 2.1). The republican structures include the conventional military structures such as the Artesh, which is in charge of protecting the country's territorial integrity, as well as nominally democratic governing institutions such as the Majles and the government. While the latter are popularly elected, they do not have the exclusive authority to exist on their own, let alone enact laws without sharing power with a myriad of parallel religious bodies. These parallel structures closely monitor and challenge the activities of the governing state institutions.

One of the most powerful parallel religious structures is a 12-member body called the Council of Guardians. The Council of Guardians is made up of six religious jurists appointed by the Supreme Leader and six lay lawyers elected by the Majles following their selection by the Judiciary. The Council has the responsibility to review all laws passed by the Majles and reject any legislation that it deems un-Islamic. Since 1990, it has also been entrusted to act as a body in charge of approving and vetting all candidates running for election in the Assembly of

Leadership Experts, the presidency, and the Majles, as well as supervising those elections. The Council of Guardians is vital to the legislative functions of the IRI and, as the Constitution states, without the existence of the Council, the parliament has no sovereignty (Moslem, 2002, pp. 31-32). Next to the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council serves as yet another parallel religious body. Though created in 1988 as an arbitration body to resolve disputes between the parliament and the Council of Guardians, it soon became an independent legislative body (see Moslem, 2002, p.32; Arjomand, 2009, p. 252). In contrast to the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council is not obligated 'to return the legislation it has changed to any other government body for review'; according to the Council of Guardians' ruling on 15 October 1993, 'no legislative organ has the right to annul or rescind an enactment of the Expediency Council' (Arjomand, 2009, p. 252).

Another religious body is the 83-member clerical Assembly of Leadership Experts. The Assembly is designed to elect the Supreme Leader for life, supervise his performance, and (theoretically) dismiss him if he fails to live up to his qualification. While the members of the Assembly of Leadership Experts are directly subject to election by the electorate, the Conservative-dominated Council of Guardians, whose members are directly and indirectly appointed by the Supreme Leader, has ensured that the assembly will be occupied by 'like-minded' Conservatives (Kamrava, 2004, pp. 504-505). The Assembly of Leadership Experts has also served as a regular advisory arm to the Supreme Leader, providing the intellectual foundation for further defence of the IRI's doctrine of the Mandate of the Jurist, which the legitimacy of the Faqih is based on (Arjomand, 2009, p. 253). Given the position of the Assembly of Leadership Experts as an exclusive clerical body which defends the Faqih's system, and due to the selection of its members by the Supreme Leader's Council of Guardians prior to popular election, it is more accurate to treat the Assembly as a semi-appointed body and a parallel religious structure.

In addition to the parallel religious structures, there is a plethora of religious and revolutionary structures that serve to enhance the ideological and mobilisational foundation of the system without necessarily being a legislative or policy-making body. Some of these structures are official institutions mentioned in the Constitution and legislation, such as the Sepah, the Basij, and the Law Enforcement Forces, while

others have no constitutional basis. These include the Representative of the Supreme Leader, the Association of Friday Prayer Leaders, Revolutionary Foundations (*Bonyadha-ye Enqelabi*), the Special Court for Clergy (which is responsible for addressing offences committed by the clergy), the Revolutionary Court and the Press Court (see Moslem, 2002, p. 34; Kamrava, 2004, p. 508-512). These institutions are the essence of what Perlmutter calls auxiliary structures in that they are meant to provide the regime with a means of popular mobilisation in order to accomplish the religious and revolutionary ideals of IRI society and to safeguard the system from inward and outward threats (Kamrava, 2004, p. 508). For example, the Leader's Representatives are tasked with safeguarding the ideological canon of the regime. They are appointed by the Supreme Leader to nearly all state institutions in order to assure the ideological conformity of such institutions to his guidelines. The Supreme Leader's Representatives are particularly assigned to various armed and security services, including the Artesh and the Sepah. They have their own subordinate clerical staff and are responsible for ideological indoctrination and implementation of the Supreme Leader's directive within these forces (Schahgadian, 1987, p. 31).

Another example of revolutionary-religious auxiliary structures are the various foundations that have proven pivotal for consolidation of power in the IRI, through facilitating mobilisation of a wide array of socio-economic groups, in particular the 'deprived segment' of society (Maloney, 2000, pp. 150-151). While the foundations are considered state institutions, it is more accurate to describe them as parastatal and quasi-public because of their financial autonomy and due to the fact that they are subject to little or no governmental supervision (Maloney, 2000, p. 150). The foundations are headed by the prominent clerics and lay religious figures aligned with the Supreme Leader (Buchta, 2000, p.73). Since their personnel are appointed by the Supreme Leader, they are not accountable to the government (Moslem 2002, p. 34). Among the prominent foundations are the Martyr Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*) and the Foundation of the Oppressed and Self-Sacrificers (*Bonyad-e Mostaz 'afin*), abbreviated MJF. The Martyr Foundation was created as a welfare institution with the purpose of transmitting financial aid to the victims of war and their families. Another prominent foundation, the Foundation of the Oppressed, was established by seizing control of the Pahlavi Foundation. The Foundation of the Oppressed was originally founded to redirect the resources of the Pahlavi Foundation

and the confiscated holdings of the Pahlavi elite towards helping the poor and the deprived. Over the years, however, the Foundation of the Oppressed has evolved into an economic enterprise forming its own cliental. According to its head, Mohsen Rafiqdust, in the year 2002 the Foundation of the Oppressed was the largest economic organisation after the government. The Foundation had an annual turnover of US$3.5 billion and together with its affiliated organisations ran more than 400 companies and factories (Kamrava, 2004, p. 510).

2.3.1.4. The Sepah as a Unique Auxiliary Structure

Among the institutions of the state, the Sepah occupies a special position. It is by far one of the most powerful institutions among the regime's auxiliary structures. Although it was originally established as a paramilitary group and as a counterweight to the un-trusted Artesh that was the legacy of the Pahlavi regime, the Sepah soon evolved into an auxiliary force designed to fulfil the nascent regime's revolutionary and populist mandate. To this purpose, the Sepah helped with the Islamisation of the Artesh and acted to thwart its potential attempts to orchestrate a coup (Zabih, 1988, pp. 14-15). It also proved to be an important venue of popular mobilisation for the pro-Khomeini non-clerical and lay religious members who had previously served in various guerrilla groups fighting the Shah's regime (Katzman, 1993, p. 8; Zabih, 1998, p. 14). Consequently, as a political military, its efforts at subduing the secular forces of the IRI regime and crushing various opposition groups were crucial for the clerical consolidation of power. The Sepah underwent further expansion during the course of the Iran-Iraq war. Through the course of the war, the Sepah became involved in external defence alongside the Artesh and developed into a fighting force with enhanced manpower. In part, it replicated the structure of the Artesh by developing its specialised air force, navy and ground force branches. It also gained command of the popular mobilisation force, the Basij, another auxiliary created in 1979. The Basij added an additional boost to the Sepah's mobilisation capacity and ideological indoctrination. The Basij comprised of young and elderly volunteers drawn from the poor social strata. During the war, Basij recruits provided the Sepah with dedicated manpower and went on suicidal human wave missions against the Iraqi enemy.

Considering its rise through revolution and war, its military and extra-military functions, its independence from the Artesh and its relative autonomy, it is

difficult to find historical cases comparable to the Sepah other than Nazi Germany's Waffen SS (see Schahgaldian, 1987, p. 73; Arasli, 2006; p. 15). The Waffen SS in Nazi Germany was initially created as a political organisation tasked primarily with protecting Adolf Hitler. Due to the weakness of the Nazi party, the Waffen SS became an independent political auxiliary and an 'elite militarised police force' that was loyal only to Hitler. The SS also occupied a dominant place in the Nazi state and aspired to have a 'revolutionary role in leading the German military' (Perlmutter, 1981, p.103). During the Second World War, the Waffen SS underwent unprecedented growth in size and its various armed units were expanded (Wegner, 1990, 116; see also Stein, 1996, p. 27). These units, especially, the SS Verfugungstruppe, were independent from the regular military or Wechrmacht and were accountable only to Hitler (Stein, 1966, pp. 20-21).

The Sepah, however, is distinguished from the Waffen SS in terms of its durability. The Waffen SS lasted only until the downfall of the Third Reich in 1945. With the destruction of the Nazi regime, the SS vanished and thereby its prospects for becoming a political actor during peacetime ceased to exist. As Perlmutter notes, 'had the Third Reich survived, it is quite possible that police would have begun to provide more and more leaders' (Perlmutter, 1981, p. 36). By contrast, the case of the Sepah demonstrates a trajectory of permanent growth and expansion after the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the death of Khomeini to the present date. The Sepah's rise in post-Khomeini Iran stems from its claim to be the saviour of the regime during the war and revolution as much as it is due to the post-Khomeini political dynamics of Iran's electoral autocracy. With the Supreme Leader's reliance on the Sepah to consolidate his position on one hand, and the unintended consequences of the elections in 1997 and 2001 which resulted in the rise of Khatami and the reformists on the other, the Sepah's ascendance was assured.

The precursor for the Sepah's rise had already come to the fore following the death of Khomeini and the appointment of Khamenei to the post of the Supreme Leader. Khamenei who had neither the charisma nor the scholarly qualifications of his predecessor Khomeini to unify Iran's factions, increasingly relied on support of like-minded forces in the Conservative camp who shared his attitude and could assure support for him due to their positions in the religious academies. Accordingly, he had increasingly begun to take decisions both to augment his position as an

individual and serve the interests of the Conservative camp (see Schirazi, 1997, pp. 78-79). Integral to these decisions were Khamenei's attempt to consolidate his position in the armed forces, in particular the Sepah, by appointing to command positions persons devoted to him, and among other things enhancing the institutional power of the Sepah and its subcomponent the Basij (see Schirazi, 1997, p. 85; Ahram, 2011, pp. 207-208). In doing so, he counterbalanced President Rafsanjani's reforms, which aimed to de-revolutionise the structure of the Sepah in order to bring it in line with conventional military structures.

Rafsanjani's efforts to integrate the Sepah into the Artesh had already met with reservations in some quarters of the Sepah. Many Commanders of the Sepah portrayed their organisation's role as pivotal to the continuation of the revolution and thereby were resistant to government measures that sought to curb its autonomy and wide scope of function (Ahram, 2011, p.207). In this regard, the protection provided to the Sepah by Khamenei and his Conservative allies guaranteed the Sepah's institutional interests and prevented the successful implementation of its merger with the Artesh. Consequently, Rafsanjani's reform failed to achieve its intended purpose. As will be shown, while the Sepah was theoretically integrated under a unified command, it came to retain its own chain of command and perks independent of the Artesh.

Equally important to the Sepah's evolution as an institution has been its interactions with the nominally democratic and popularly elected institutions in the IRI, such as the government. When the elections in 1997 brought to the fore a trend toward reform and relative political liberalisation, the Sepah was called into the political fray to defend the autocratic pillars of the regime and above all Khamenei. To this end, it intimidated the liberal politicians in the Khatami administration and their supporters in civil society. To counterbalance Khatami's reformist agenda and the massive social movement it unleashed, the Sepah portrayed itself as the permanent vanguard of the revolution against the new domestic enemies. In this regard, the Conservatives' increasing reliance on the Sepah to deal with political unrest and the reformist activists on the one hand and the increasing ambition of Sepah Commanders, on the other, led the Sepah to greater institutional power in terms of surveillance. The Sepah's domestic apparatus was rendered far more active, working closely with newly-formed parallel intelligence agencies under the

Conservatives. The largest military and non-military expansion of the Sepah, however, took place during Ahmadinejad's presidency. In 2007, the new Commander of the Sepah, Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, announced the full integration of the Basij command into the Sepah, emphasising his organisation's need to adjust to a new national security environment. Subsequently, following the disputed presidential elections of 2009 that gave rise to massive protest, the Sepah took up a dominant position in the internal security of the IRI, wherein its intelligence branch was promoted to intelligence agency. This promotion gave the Sepah's intelligence unit equal standing with the government's intelligence organ, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security.

Having sketched the Sepah as a unique auxiliary force, the following section will underline the evolution of the Sepah's organisational characteristics by looking at its chain of command, civilian control, social and political composition, and domestic security apparatus.

Figure 2.1The Structure of Iran's Electoral Autocracy

Supreme Leader

Republican State Structures

Artesh (Army)

Ministry of Information and Security

Parliament

President

Assembly of Leadership Experts

Expediency Council

6 Lay Jurists in the Council of Guardians (appointed on advice of the Parliament)

Head of the Judiciary

Council of Guardians (6 Clerical Members)

Parallel Structures (Religious)

Sepah(IRGC)

Basij Paramilitary

Bonyads (Foundations)

The Law Enforcement Forces (LEF)

The Leader's Representatives

Auxiliary Structures (Religious-Revolutionary)

Elects

Vets

Appoints

Confirms

2.4 The Sepah's Internal Characteristics

2.4.1 The Sepah's Chain of Command within Iran's Post-Revolutionary Armed Forces

Similar to the structure of the modern armed forces in a host of secular states, post-revolutionary Iran adopted a vertical, top-down chain of command. Unlike the presidential systems in Latin America and the United States, however, the command of the armed forces is held under the authority of a religious guide, the Supreme Leader. Though the president of the IRI has some say over general policies regarding the reform of the armed forces, his only link to the armed forces is the Ministry of Defence and Logistics. In this respect he is shunned by the Supreme Leader, who appoints the heads of the armed forces and has the last say in determining the direction of military and security policies of the regime (see Moslem, 2002, p. 79). Thus, any presidential policies regarding the reform of the armed forces need to be approved by the Supreme Leader.

The Iranian armed forces' top-down structure is composed of multitudes of key figures at the military commanding heights, particularly in the Sepah (see Figure 2.1). The equivalent to a Defence Organisation in the IRI, the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (*Vezarat-e Difa' va Poshtibani-ye Niruha-ye Mosalah*), does not take part in operational command or direction of the armed forces. Its position is limited to providing logistics and funding for the armed forces (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1989).

The chain of command of the IRI armed forces is partially unified and yet at the same time independent. Theoretically, the command of the two armed forces, the Sepah and the Artesh, is placed jointly at the general staff level. However, the two armed forces are composed of their own individual chain of commands below the general staff level. In the case of the Sepah, the chain of command is even more complex because of its intelligence apparatus and various political and ideological military units (more details are provided in the following paragraphs). In addition to its air force, ground force and navy, which mirror the defence structure of the Artesh, the Sepah also includes internal security forces at the district, regional and provincial levels, as well as command of the Basij. It also has at its disposal the extra-territorial Qods force, which seeks to export the Islamic revolution beyond the boundaries of Iranian territory.

The Supreme Leader (currently Ali Khamenei) is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, and has the sole responsibility to declare war or peace as well as to appoint the Supreme Commander of the Sepah, the Supreme Commander of the Artesh, the Commander of the Joint Staff of the armed forces, and the General staff of the armed forces. Below the Supreme Leader is the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah, who is in charge of overseeing and formulating the organisation's political and military policies and its entire operation. Below the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah are the divisional Commanders of various ground forces; these include regional, district and base Commanders (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). The Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah appoints and dismisses regional and divisional Commanders. These Commanders are entrusted with the same rights in relation to the levels of command below them (Shahgaldian, 1987, p. 78). Also below the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah is the Deputy Coordinator of the Sepah (known as the former Chief of Joint Staff of the Sepah until 2007) who oversees the Joint Staff of the Sepah (*Setad-e Moshtarak-e Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami*) (*Keyhan*, 7 March 2008). The Deputy Coordinator of the Sepah coordinates the activities of the Corps' specialised military components, including the navy, air force, ground forces, the Qods force and the Basij (see *Payame Enqelab*, 1990d, pp. 20-21; Khamenei, 1992).

To coordinate the activities of the Sepah with those of the Artesh, command of the Sepah and Artesh are formally subordinated to the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces *(Setad-e Kol-e Niruha-ye Mosalah,* occupied by Hassan Firouzabadi since 1990), while the logistics, planning and funding of the two armed forces are entrusted to the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics under the government (currently occupied by Ahmad Vahidi) (see Khamenei, 1989a; Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1989; *Payame Enqelab*, 1990d, p. 21). The two offices were set up in 1989 in order to enhance cooperation and counterbalance the rivalry between the two armed forces. The general staff of the armed forces is in charge of policy implementation and command of the Sepah, the Artesh and the Law Enforcement forces. Nonetheless, the Sepah has its own independent command structure and directly reports to the Supreme Leader via its Joint Staff (currently Deputy Coordinator) and the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah. This independence goes back to 1979, when the Sepah acquired the right to have a Commander-in-

Chief. In contrast, the post of Commander-in-Chief had not existed in the Artesh until 1998, when it was established by the Supreme Leader's decree (Einestaat, 2001, p. 7; Buchta, 2004, 10). Before then, the Chief of the general staff of the Armed Forces, previously known as the general staff of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces was delegated with the command and coordination of the army's ground force, air force and navy divisions (*Payame Enqelab*, 1990d, p. 21).

At the brink of political crisis with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1998, Khamenei saw that it was necessary to have a more unified and independent central command in the Artesh, and duly appointed General Ali Shahbazi as its first Commander-in-Chief. This step seemed to represent the regime's effort to upgrade the significance of the army by putting it on a more equal footing with the Sepah (Einestaat, 2001, p. 7). Nevertheless, the Sepah continues to play a more significant role in the country's national defence than the Artesh. During the Iran-Iraq war the Sepah acquired naval and air force units which reduced the Artesh's monopoly on external defence. Since then, the Sepah has retained a crucial role in military operations. Indeed, the Sepah's naval branch has been at the forefront of asymmetrical warfare – namely unconventional hit-and-run tactics – against external threats and has been given a purview to safeguard the Iranian waters in the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the Sepah's naval operations in the Persian Gulf provide it with leverage to tighten Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz, a vital sea passage where a considerable flow of oil shipping takes place (see Robert S. Strauss Centre, 2008; *IHS Janes Defence Weekly*, 2012, p.18). The closure of the Strait of Hormuz remains a potential retaliatory option by the Sepah in the event of a US military strike on Iran. The recourse to such an option is particularly plausible given the Sepah's naval exercises in the Strait of Hormuz and its timely use of the threat to disrupt shipping in the Strait and, by extension, dampen the world market. These campaigns of intimidation were particularly evident during the Iran-Iraq war in response to the US and the west's cooperation with Baghdad (see *Payame Enqelab*, 1983e, p.3).

Another important factor that props up the Sepah's position in relation to the Artesh is the Sepah's ground forces. More recently, this division has gone through a reorganisation to adapt to the nature of external and internal security challenges. Under its current Commander-in-Chief (Mohammad Ali Ja'fari), the Sepah

provincial forces have been divided into 31 brigades in line with the total number of provinces in Iran (see Chapter 6). In recognition of the Sepah's role in asymmetrical warfare and the move towards decentralisation, the provincial Corps is provided with greater power to act swiftly in the case of an attack on Iranian territory. The Sepah is also in control of Iran's strategic missile and rocket forces and, more recently, has established autonomous missile units (see *The Middle East-Iran*, 2000; *IHS Janes Defence Weekly*, 2012, p.18)

The Sepah's other components include paramilitary forces, namely the Basij (Mobilisation Army) − also known as the Basij Resistance Force (*Niru-ye Muqavemat-i Basij*) and Mobilisation of the Oppressed (*Basij-e Mostaz'afin*) − and the Qods force (*Niru-ye Qods*). The Basij or Mobilisation army was set up on 26November 1979, following Khomeini's decree for the establishment of the Army of 20 Million, to defend the Islamic Republic from its internal enemies. Once an independent paramilitary organisation, in 1980 it came under the control of the Sepah following an act of the Majles (Schahgaldian, 1987, p. 87). The Basij is made up of approximately 90,000 soldiers, with an active and reserve strength of up to 300,000 and a mobilisation capacity of nearly 1,000,000 men (Cordesman, 2005, p. 49). The Basij was established as an organisation with both military and non-military components. The Basij forces are composed of regular, active and special members. Unlike regular and active members, its special members serve as the permanent personnel of the Sepah and are called to duty on a full-time basis when necessary (see the Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). The Basij provided the bulk of the dedicated youth and elderly volunteers for the defence effort during the Iran-Iraq war. After the war it was provided with the lion's share of socio-cultural functions, such as scrutinising the activities of citizens, enforcing an Islamic dress code for women (the wearing of the *hejab*), and withholding indecent material and satellite dishes. The Basij also acquired an internal policing role in urban areas to quell civil unrest through the establishment of its Ashura Brigade. The Brigade was established following popular unrest in 1994 (Cordesman, 2005, pp. 49-50).

Since 2007, the Sepah has pushed for the merging of the Basij and the Corps' ground units. Command of the Basij has been merged with the Supreme Command of the Sepah, while Basij provincial forces have been incorporated with provincial brigades under the Sepah's headquarters in each province. These changes reflect the

regime's desire to build up its ideological militaries to their full potential in response to the changing security environment both within and without Iran (see Chapter 6).

The Sepah also has at its disposal the paramilitary Qods force, which engages in military operations abroad. It provides military and financial support for Islamic militant movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and is reported to have contacts with various Islamic groups in the region such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIR) and its militia, the Badr Corps. The historical antecedent of the Qods force lies in the Sepah's multiple bodies and independent affiliated units that were engaged with exporting the revolution in the heyday of revolutionary Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini. Among these were the Sepah's Lebanese contingent and the Office of Liberation Front under its firebrand leader, Mehdi Hashemi (*Payame Enqelab*, 1982g, pp. 26-28). Mehdi Hashemi later separated from the Sepah while continuing to actively export the revolution, until the dissolution of his organisation by the IRI leadership in the mid-1980s. In 1990, these various bodies were merged into a single unit called the Qods force, which was then charged with masterminding activities related to the export of the revolution (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1996). The new unit was led by a politically oriented command called the Command of the Islamic Revolution. This command devised the specifics of military operations, but also carried out surveillance and intelligence gathering on Iranian opposition groups in a number of countries. For this purpose, it has several branches: 1) the Iraqi Directorate; 2) The Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan Directorate; 3) The Turkey Directorate; 4) the Afghanistan, Pakistan and Indian Subcontinent Directorate; 5) The Western Nations Directorate; 6) the North Africa Directorate; 7) the Arabian Peninsula Directorate; and 8) The Republics of the former Soviet Union Directorate (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1996). Since the toppling of the regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Qods force has been granted overarching scope to influence the political direction of the two countries on behalf of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, the Qods force has been accused by the US of interfering in the affairs of Iraq, and its Commander General, Qassem Suleimani, is considered by the US State Department to be the main actor directing and formulating Iraq policy with authority second to only to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei (Embassy of United States Baghdad, 2009, cited in Alfoneh, 2011).

Figure 2.2 Organisational Chart of the Military and Security Forces in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces  │
│            (Supreme Leader)              │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                                    ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                    │ Chairman, Supreme National│
                                    │ Security Council (President)│
                                    └──────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐           ┌──────────────┐
│ Chief of the │  │ Ministry of  │  │ Ministry of  │           │ Ministry of  │
│General Staff │  │ Defence      │  │ Interior     │           │ Information  │
│of the Armed  │  │ and Armed    │  │              │           │ and Security │
│ Forces       │  │ Force        │  │              │           │              │
│              │  │ Logistics    │  └──────────────┘           └──────────────┘
└──────────────┘  └──────────────┘

┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│ Commander of │ │ Commander-in-│ │ Commander-   │ │ Law          │
│ the Basij    │ │ Chief of the │ │ in-Chief of  │ │ Enforcement  │
│              │ │ Sepah        │ │ the Artesh   │ │ Forces       │
└──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────────┘

                 ┌──────────────┐                 ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────┐
                 │ Deputy       │                 │ Deputy       │  │ The      │
                 │ Coordinator  │                 │ Coordinator  │  │ Artesh   │
                 │ of the Sepah │                 │ of the Artesh│  │ Navy     │
                 └──────────────┘                 └──────────────┘  └──────────┘

┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌────────┐ ┌────────┐  ┌──────────┐
│The Basij │ │The Sepah │ │The Sepah │ │The     │ │The     │  │The Artesh│
│Provincial│ │Ground    │ │Air Force │ │Sepah   │ │Sepah   │  │Air Force │
│Commands  │ │Force     │ │          │ │Navy    │ │Qods    │  │          │
│(31)      │ │          │ │          │ │        │ │Force   │  └──────────┘
└──────────┘ └──────────┘ └──────────┘ └────────┘ └────────┘  ┌──────────┐
  ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────┐                                   │The Artesh│
  │The Sepah │ │The Sepah │                                   │Ground    │
  │Provincial│ │Intelligence│                                 │Force     │
  │Commands  │ │Branch    │                                   └──────────┘
  │(31)      │ └──────────┘
  └──────────┘
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Note: Adapted (with substantial revisions) from IRGC Organisational Chart cited in Cordesman &Seitz, 2009, p.12.

Figure 2.3 Organisational Chart of the Sepah since 2009

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Commander in Chief of the    │
│ Armed Forces (Supreme Leader)│
└─────────────────────────────┘              ┌──────────────────────┐
                                              │ Chairman of the       │
                                              │ Supreme National      │
                                              │ Security Council      │
                                              │ (the President)       │
                                              └──────────────────────┘
        ┌────────────────────┐
        │ Commander-in--      │              ┌──────────────────────┐
        │ Chief of the Sepah  │              │ The Representative    │
        └────────────────────┘              │ of the Supreme        │
                                              │ Leader in the Sepah   │
                                              └──────────────────────┘
┌──────────────┐
│ Commander-    │
│ in-Chief of   │     ┌──────────────┐                      ┌─────────┐
│ the Basij     │     │ Deputy        │                      │ The Sepah│
└──────────────┘     │ Coordinator of│                      │ Qods     │
                      │ the Sepah     │                      │ Force    │
                      └──────────────┘                      └─────────┘

┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐
│ The Basij     │  │ The Sepah     │  │ The Sepah │  │ The       │
│ Ground Forces │  │ Ground Force  │  │ Navy      │  │ SepahAir  │
└──────────────┘  └──────────────┘  └──────────┘  │ Force     │
                                                    └──────────┘
┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐      ┌────────────────────────┐
│ Provincial    │  │ Provincial    │      │ -Human Resource         │
│ Commands      │  │ Commands      │      │                          │
└──────────────┘  │ (31)          │      │ -Intelligence           │
                   └──────────────┘      │  Agency                  │
┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐      │ -Operations             │
│ District      │  │ District      │      │ -Logistics              │
│ Commands      │  │ Commands      │      │ -Ideological            │
└──────────────┘  └──────────────┘      │  Education and           │
┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐      │  Training                │
│ Local Cells   │  │ Local Cells   │      │ -Weapon                  │
└──────────────┘  └──────────────┘      │  Procurement             │
                                          │ -Reconstruction          │
                                          │ -Women's issues          │
                                          └────────────────────────┘
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Note: Adapted (with substantial revisions) from The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Diagram 13: (IRGC) cited in Buchta, 2000, p. 69; Figure 3.2: IRGC Organisational Chart cited in Cordesman and Seitz, 2009, p.12.

2.4.2 Political and Ideological Control of the IRI Armed Forces, in particular the Sepah

Similar to the Soviet and Chinese pattern of civilian control, the IRI is composed of control channels in charge of political and ideological control of the armed forces. The Artesh is penetrated by multiple political and intelligence organisations. Amongst these organisations is the Political-Ideological Bureau (*Edar-e 'aqidati Siyasi*), or PIB, with branches in all sections of the Artesh. The Bureau offices are supervised by clerical personnel and are in charge of ensuring that the Artesh conforms to Islamic ideology, as well as carrying out Islamic indoctrination of the Officer Corps (Shahgaldian, 1987, p. 26; Zabih, 1988, pp.137-163). Another mechanism for civilian control of the Artesh is theocratic supervision (*Nezarat-e Rowhani*). This involves the appointment of mid-level clerical representatives (*Namayandegan-e Rahbari*) in the ranks of *Hojjat al-Eslam* to all services of the Artesh to ensure its conformity with the Supreme Leader's guidelines (Shahgaldian, 1987, p. 27). A Theocratic Supervision office also exists in the Sepah, representatives of which are appointed by the Supreme Leader through recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah. These representatives are seated on the Sepah's central command, ensuring the ideological and political adherence of the Corps to IRI precepts. Within this broad duty, the Leader's Representative has two sets of responsibilities. The first set of responsibilities are related to those of the central command, whereby the Leader's Representative is granted the authority to verify the conformity of the Sepah's decisions to the Supreme Leader's guidelines. The second set of responsibilities is related to the political and ideological indoctrination of the Sepah. To this end, the Leader's Representative supervises and monitors the ideological training of the Sepah and the content of the Sepah's publications. The Leader's Representative also has his own supervisory offices, staffed with his subordinate clerics, in all Sepah ranks (Schahgaldian, 1987, p. 79).

In spite of periodic purges within the Sepah, it is apparent that the Sepah is subject to a less rigid system of political and ideological control than the Artesh because of its status as the Guardian of the Revolution and the fact that it is trusted by the fundamentalist clerical power elite of the IRI. Evidently, the system of clerical

representatives in the Sepah lacked the rigid characteristics of Chinese political commissars. In communist China, the political commissars' tasks included 'an entire spectrum of what is normally meant by military concerns, including military organisation, the assignment, transfer and promotion of personnel, logistics, and battle plans, as well as the implementation of directives and orders issued by superior officers' (Nordlinger, 1977, p. 16). In the IRI, the system of clerical supervision was supposed to act as an independent body on behalf of the political clerics. Nonetheless, its appointed representatives had to be chosen by means of a consensus among the Sepah's Commanders. As a result, the system suffered from factionalism and saw the brief appointments of various civilian personalities in the first decade of the revolution (Alfoneh, 2010, pp. 1-7). In addition, as Katzman points out, the clerical representatives did not seem to have control over the security and military decision-making of the Sepah (Katzman, 1993, p. 121). The limited authority of the clerical supervisors over the Sepah's military and security affairs is further confirmed by the Sepah's Statutes. According to these, the clerical supervisors are responsible for ensuring the conformity of the Sepah's decision with the Supreme Leader's guidelines, rather than interfering with the details of its military decision (Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). The main function of the clerical supervision is ideological and political, based on which it has sought to prevent the emergence of an ideological clash between the Supreme Leader and the Sepah. To this end, the system of clerical supervision took on the task of purging the factions within the Corps that were seen to challenge the regime's leadership. During the Khomeini era, the system of clerical supervision insisted on the Sepah's non-interference in power struggles between IRI political factions. In more recent years, the system has relaxed its previous restrictions on the Sepah's involvement in politics (Alfoneh, 2010, p. 6-7). It has done so by approving the transfer of Sepah Commanders to political office and by tacitly supporting the partisan stances of certain Commanders on the domestic landscape of Khamenei's Iran (for details see Chapter 4).

2.4.3 The Sepah's Composition and Background

The Artesh is composed of 350,000 men on active duty. It has come a long way since the formative stage of the revolution which lasted until 1986, during which 45 percent of its cadre was subject to intensive purges (Shahgaldian, 1987, p. 26;

Buchta, 2004, p. 9). Three decades into the Islamic Republic, the Artesh is no longer the force that was created by the Shah. Most of Iran's current military officers have little history of loyalty to the Shah and have come from the ranks of the regime's loyalists, who share in common their battlefield experience during the Iran-Iraq war (Cordesman, 1999, p. 37). Despite passing the test of loyalty to defend the regime in the war it is the Sepah, not the Artesh, which occupies a dominant position in Iran's security, owing to its broad mandate to protect the revolution and owing to its close personal and family ties to the lay and clerical power elite in the IRI (Buchta, 2004, p. 10). Moreover, the Sepah has considerable bearing on the ideological indoctrination of, and promotion of, future officer Commanders in the Artesh. The current Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and the subsequent Ministers of Defence and Armed Force Logistics in Khatami's and Ahmadinejad's administration came from the Sepah's rank-and-file (see Table 2.2).

Most members of the Sepah appear to be drawn from the urban-based lower and lower-middle classes. Employees of the Sepah are required to be between the ages of 16 and 40. Recruitment into the Sepah is made flexible by its availability of various civilian and military personnel (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1991). The Sepah's civilian personnel include students and civilian employees. There are four types of military personnel in the Sepah: conscripts, permanent military personnel, short-term and special Basij personnel. The Basij personnel are exempted from the minimum and maximum age requirements. Recruitment into the ranks of permanent military personnel is made based on post-elementary educational credentials and practical expertise (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1991). The Sepah consists of approximately 120,000 soldiers in Iran's armed forces, including many conscripts (Cordesman, 2005, p. 45).

Although it was little more than a disorganised and poorly trained militia when it was formed, the Sepah soon evolved into a military force with a professional cadre. This evolution coincided with the regime's need for military defence during the Iran-Iraq war. In 1984, as part of the objective to create a professional Officer Corps and enhance the Sepah's combat capability at the front, the regime introduced a new plan called *Malek-e Ashtar'*. The plan called for the recruitment of the most competent and talented personnel that could be trained as future Commanders in the Corps. According to the new plan, professional expertise in military matters was just

as important as devotion to the doctrine of the Mandate of the Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*) and other ideological and religious criteria (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984d, p. 16). It was in the view of this new emphasis on military calibre and fighting capabilities that a new generation of Sepah Commanders came into being. Subsequently, following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Sepah adopted a system of formal military ranks, roughly paralleling those of the regular forces, and began to create a truly professional officer and NCO Corps (*Payame Enqelab*, 1990b, pp. 38-41; Cordesman, 1999, p. 139).

The trajectory of the Sepah's development in the Khatami and post-Khatami eras is testament to the emergence of the second generation of personnel in its command. This has taken place in tandem with the increasing politicisation of the Sepah in Iran's domestic landscape. While the first generation of Sepah was characterised by their common experience in fighting the monarchy and founding the Sepah, the second generation consists of those who joined the Sepah after their common battlefield experience in Kurdistan in 1979-1980. Still others in the second generation rose to prominent command positions after the war against Iraq (Quchani, 2005; Amirshahi, 2007). Included in this later generation are such figures as Mohammad Baqir Zolqadr, Mohammad Ali Ja'fari and Qasem Suleimani.

The further shift towards the predominance of second-generation personnel is evident in the recent appointment of the wartime Commander Mohammad Ali Ja'fari to the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah in 2007. This took place in tandem with the dismissal of the Sepah's Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah, Morteza Rezaei – the only remaining member from the ranks of the Sepah's founders – and with the installation of Mohammad Hosseinzadeh Hejazi as his replacement (Niknejad, 2009). In contrast to his predecessors, who had revolutionary credentials, the current Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah rose to the level of command during the Iran-Iraq war and gained fame by conducting major military operations. During the Khatami era, he served as the Commander of the Sepah's ground forces and of the Sarallah headquarters, the function of which is to provide urban security for the capital. Along with a number of other wartime heroes, Ja'fari was among the fiercest opponents of Khatami's reform movement, and he was one of the signatories of the famous letter to President Khatami in the wake of student protests in the summer of 1999 warning the president of serious repercussions if the

protests were not dealt with effectively (Iran Data Portal, 2012b). In his current position as the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah, Ja'fari, has emphasised the importance of the Sepah in dealing with internal threats.

Table 2.1 Commanders-in-Chief of the Sepah since 1979

Title and Name	Years of Service	Career Experience
Abbas Zamani (Abu Sharif)	1979-1980	The co-founder of an anti-Shah political organisation, the Islamic Nation Party; founder of the Sepah
Morteza Rezaei	1980-1981	Member of the anti-Shah Militia of Organisation of Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution; founder of Sepah
Major General Mohsen Rezaei	1981-1997	Trained in guerrilla warfare in Syria before the Revolution; founder of the Sepah
Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi	1997-2007	Member of the anti-Shah Militia of the Organisation of Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution, Mansouroun; founder of the Sepah, and Deputy Commander-in-Chief (1989-1997); Commander of the Southern Operation Staff in the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war
Major General Mohammad Ali Ja'fari	2007-Present	Commander of the Ground Force (1997-2007); Commander of Najaf and Qods brigades (1988) during Iran-Iraq war

Source: Katzman, 1993; Hamshahri, 2007b; 2009c; Boroujerdi and Rahim Khani, 2010.

Table 2.2 Prominent Veterans of the Sepah

Name	Position	Years of Service	Career Experience
Mohsen Rafiqdust	Head of the Nur Foundation	1999-Present	Member of the anti-Shah Organisation, the Coalition of Islamic associations, founded in 1963; founder of the Sepah; Minister of the Sepah (1983-1989); Head of the Dispossessed Foundation (1990-1999)
Mohsen Rezaei	Secretary of the Expediency Council	1998-Present	Commander of the Sepah (1981-1997)
Brigadier General Ali Reza Afshar	Deputy Minister of the Interior	2011- 2013	Deputy Commander of the Sepah (1982-1988) and Chief of the Sepah's Joint Staff during the Iran-Iraq war; Commander of the Basij (1989- 1997); Deputy Minister of the Interior for Political Affairs (2007-2008); Deputy Minister of the Interior for Social Affairs (2009-2010)
Brigadier General Mohammad Baqir Zowlqadr	Social Advisor to the Chief of Judiciary	2010- 2013	The Chief of the Joint Staff of the Sepah (1989-1997); the Commander of the Headquarters for Asymmetric Warfare during Iran-Iraq war; Deputy Commander of the Sepah (1997-2005); Deputy Minister of the Interior in Security Affairs (2005-2007); Cultural Deputy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces
Mohammad Baqir Qalibaf	Mayor of Tehran	2005-present	Commander of the five Nasr Khorasan Divisions during Iran-Iraq war; Commander of Ghorb (*Khatam al-Anbiya*) Headquarters (1994-1997); Commander of the Sepah Air Force (1997-2000); Chief of the Law Enforcement Forces (2000-2005)

Table 2.2- Continued

Name	Position	Years of Service	Career Experience
Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani	Chief of the Defence Strategic Study and Deputy Inspector of the General staff of the Armed Forces	2005- Present	Commander of the Sepah Ground Force during the Iran-Iraq war; Commander of the Army's Navy (1989-1990); Commander of the Sepah Navy and Army's Navy (1990-1997); Minister of Defence (1997-2005)
Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi	Minister of Defence	2009-2013	Commander of the Overseas Forces and the Sepah Intelligence Unit (1980-unknown); Ministry of Defence Deputy (2005-)
Mostafa Mohammad Najar	Minister of the Interior	2009-2013	Participant in various war offensives in 1980; Member of the Board of Directors of the Organisation of Defence Industry (1989-2000); Minister of Defence (2005-2009)

Source: Khamenei, 1989b; 1990; 2005; Hamshahri, 2007b; 2008b; 2009c; 2011; Radio Farda, 2009; 2011a;b; Boroujerdi and Rahim Khani , 2010 .

Table 2.3 Current Commanders of the Sepah

Title and Name	Position	Background Prior to Appointment	Functioning Period
Major General Mohammad Ali Ja'fari	Commander-in-Chief	Commander of the Sarallah Headquarters in Tehran (1997-2007); Commander of Najaf and Qods staff until the end of Iran-Iraq war	2007-Present
Brigadier General Hossein Salami	Deputy Commander-in-Chief	Commander of the Air Force (2006-2009); Deputy of the Commander-in-Chief of the Joint Staff (1997-2005)	2009-Present
Brigadier General Mohammad Hejazi	Commander of the Sarallah Headquarter in Tehran	Deputy of Salman Headquarters; Deputy Chief of the Qods Headquarters during the Iran-Iraq War; Commander of the Basij (1998-2007); Chief of the Joint Staff of the Sepah (2007-2008); Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah (2009-2010)	2010-Present
Rear Admiral Lower Half Ali Fadavi	Commander of the Navy	Division Commander during Iran-Iraq War	2010-Present

Table 2.3 Continued

Title and Name	Position	Background Prior to Appointment	Functioning Period
Brigadier General Mohammad Pakvar	Commander of the Ground Forces	Not Known	2010-Present
Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi	Commander of the Basij	Chief of the Intelligence Directorate of the Law Enforcement Forces (1997-2009); Member of the Badr and Qods force in the 1980s	2009-Present
Major General Qassem Suleimani	Commander of the Qods Force	Commander of operations against narcotics trafficking in Southern Iran (1990-1997); Operational Commander stationed at Sarallah division in the Southern Front until the end of the Iran-Iraq War	1998-Present

Source: Khamenei, 1998; 2006; 2007; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; Hamshahri, 2007b; 2012 ; FarsNews, 2009b; Niknejad 2009; Alfoneh, 2011.

2.4.4 The Sepah's Political and Ideological Military Units

In addition to military components, the Sepah's structure includes administrative bureaucratic components that reflect its manifold security missions – ideological, mobilisational and political. These diverse missions enhance the Sepah's reach into Iranian state and society. Among these administrative and bureaucratic components outlined in the Statutes governing the Sepah, passed by the Majles, are the following (Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982):

1. The Personnel Unit: responsible for determining manpower requirements for admission and tasks that are related to personnel matters.

2. Intelligence and Security: responsible for tasks that will be approved by law and passed by the Majles.

3. Ideological and Political Training Unit: in charge of determining the content of ideological-political education and mobilisation of members and of planning and implementing the training and recruiting of teachers.

4. Military Training Unit: responsible for planning and conducting military training (both individual and unit) and specialised organs of the Corps.

5. Propaganda and Publication Unit: in charge of propaganda and publications, which the Corps publishes and broadcasts through books, pamphlets, magazines, statements, tapes, films and radio and television programs.

6: Preparation and Logistics Unit: responsible for needs assessment, maintenance and distribution of supplies, equipment and facilities of the Corps.

7: Operations Unit: responsible for operational planning, communication matters and dispatching troops.

8: *Basij-e Mostaz'afin* Unit: responsible for military training, ideological indoctrination, education, and organisation of Basij members.

9: Engineering Unit: in charge of arms and military engineering, civil engineering, geography, telecommunications and electronics.

2.4.5 The Sepah's Intelligence Security apparatus and networks

In addition to its internal organisational units designed for its personnel, the Sepah also has at its disposal a host of units and departments, such as the Women's Affairs Unit, the Reconstruction Unit, the Tribunal Section Unit and the Disaster Unit. Many of these units exert an indirect influence on and are in close liaison with other governmental, extra-governmental and revolutionary organisations. These include the Martyr Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*), the Dispossessed Foundation (*Bonyad-e Mostaz 'afin* or *Bonyad-e Mostaz 'afan va Janbazan*), the Ministry of Intelligence (*Vezarat-Ettela'at*), the Ministry of the Interior (*Vezarat-e Keshvar*), the Office of the Supreme Leader (*Daftar-e Maqam-e Moa'zam-e Rahbari*) and the Office of the President (*Daftar-e Riyasat Jomhuri*) via the Supreme National Security Council (*Showray-e A'li-ye Amniat-e Melli*).

The two revolutionary foundations, the Martyr Foundation and the Dispossessed Foundation, serve as a sophisticated welfare system that distributes and subsidises household goods and protects the martyr families of the Sepah, as well as its personnel and veterans (Zabih, 1988, p. 218). Though established as parastatal charitable organisations, the foundations developed into a semi-autonomous and wealthy conglomerate in the 1990s. Partly due to their connection with the Sepah, the directors and managers of these foundations were capable of gaining access to sources of capital and government tender (Ehteshami, 2010, p. 27). For example, both the current and former Heads of the Dispossessed Foundation, Mohammad Forouzandeh and Mohsen Rafiqdust, come from the ranks of former Sepah officers.

Following the post-war reduction of the military budget, the Sepah augmented its ties with clerical-controlled foundations, in particular the Dispossessed Foundation (Ahram, 2011, p.120). In addition to its economic and financial dealings, the Dispossessed Foundation is believed to cooperate substantially with the Sepah in weapons procurement and production. For example, the foundation's heavy presence in legitimate mining and chemicals production is an alleged camouflage for the Sepah's chemical weaponry plants. In addition, German intelligence sources contend that the MJF had utilised a network of sham enterprises to acquire materials for the Sepah's defence industry projects, including its biological, chemical and nuclear weapons as well as its missile development. In addition, the foundation apparently undertakes international endeavours that

transgress the traditional definition of trade – the MJF is commonly cited as a generous supporter and active political patron of the Lebanese terrorist organisation Hezbollah (Maloney, 2000, p. 159).

The security sector is another location of the Sepah's interface with governmental organisations. Among these organisations, the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) serves as one of the highest governmental bodies in which the Sepah is in contact with the governing elite. The SNSC is a mixed civilian-military body in charge of general policies of the IRI, including its national security. The body is chaired by the president and is comprised of the Secretary General of the SNSC; the heads of the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches; the Supreme Commanders of the Armed Forces (both the Artesh and the Sepah); the Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces; the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Interior and Intelligence Minister. It should be noted that though the president chairs the body, his decisions have to be approved by the Supreme Leader. Although both the Sepah and the Artesh have equal representation in the SNSC, it is apparent that the former has greater clout in the strategic decision-making of the body, due to its status as the protector of both the internal and external security of the IRI. The influence of the Sepah over the SNSC is also apparent in the key positions of its personnel (see Chapter 6 for details). Another indication of the Sepah's influence in the decision-making process of the SNSC can be seen in the ways the domestic policies of this organisation affect the Sepah. In recent years, the Sepah has been bestowed with a large number of internal security prerogatives by the SNSC. The details of this will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The Sepah also has at its disposal various intelligence and security services. These services include the Sepah's Office of Intelligence (*Edare-ye Hefazat-e Ettella 'at-e Sepah*) and the Sepah's Intelligence Directorate (*Vahed-e Ettela 'at-e Sepah*). The Sepah Office of Intelligence is in charge of protecting classified information pertaining to the Sepah's personnel, organisation and military secrets. The execution of these duties is categorised as a preventive function, in that they aim to prevent the dissemination of information to Iran's enemies. Another duty of the Corps' Office of Intelligence is to pursue any suspected cases of transmission of classified information and respond to such cases forcefully (*Payame Enqelab*, 1986a, pp. 35-36). The Sepah's other intelligence service is its Intelligence Directorate, which is responsible for the surveillance of the enemies of the IRI, within and without Iran's

borders. The Sepah's intelligence unit remains an important means of contact with various intelligence agencies under the government, in particular the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). The establishment of the Sepah's Intelligence Directorate (*Vahed-e Ettella 'at-e Sepah-e Pasdaran*) dates back to the inception of the revolution and the establishment of the Sepah. During the early years of the revolution, this unit served as one of the main entities charged with the surveillance and targeting of counter-revolutionary activities. Its prerogative was reduced by the establishment of the MOIS in 1983, as its host of domestic security functions became the domain of the MOIS. In addition, the Sepah was required to share its intelligence with the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1983). Nonetheless, the Sepah retained its Intelligence Directorate under a new division and remained an important auxiliary adjunct in foreign intelligence activities, closely cooperating with the Ministry of Information and Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Cordesman, 2005, pp. 48-49). With the emergence of the reform movement, the Sepah's Intelligence Directorate was activated and became part and parcel of the shadow intelligence network, aligned with the Supreme Leader and other Conservative-controlled bodies while competing with the Ministry of Intelligence under the government. To this end, the Sepah began to operate as a parallel security adjunct under the Bureau for Information Protection, the Office of the Judiciary (*Edare-ye Hefazat-e Ettela 'at-e Qovveh-ye Qaza'iye*), and thereby became active as an enforcer (*zabet-e ejra'i*) of the IRI Judiciary in dealing with domestic forces that are deemed a security threat to the regime.

The Sepah's intelligence division gained further prominence in the aftermath of protests surrounding the 2009 contested presidential election. In response to social unrest and the rise of the Green movement, the Sepah's intelligence division underwent unparalleled expansion through its development into the Sepah Intelligence Agency (*Sazman-e Ettela 'at-e Sepah-e Pasdaran*). The upgrading of the Sepah intelligence unit to the Sepah Intelligence Agency suggests the Corps' leading role in surveillance and intelligence matters in Iranian social life after the controversial election of 2009.

The Sepah also maintains a liaison with the Law Enforcement Forces (*Niruha-ye Entezami*). The Law Enforcement Forces were established in 1991 by a merging of the Sepah's precursor, the committees (*Komiteha-ye*), the Municipal Police (*Shahrbani*) and rural gendarmeries. The influence of the Sepah is evident in

the LEF senior leadership, which consists of Sepah officers. This has created a parallel mode of authority beyond the official one. While the LEF is formally subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior, its senior leadership is loyal to the Supreme Leader (Eisenstadt, 2001). At times of crisis, the LEF, along with non-state security vigilantes the Helpers of God (*Ansar-e Hezbollah*), are positioned against elements of unrest, while the Sepah and the Basij are placed in a backup position. When instability arises, the LEF and the Basij are accompanied by the Sepah's special units, followed by the Sepah's ground forces (Eisenstadt, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, the Sepah also liaises with Iran's judiciary and acts as an enforcer of the IRI judiciary in dealing with domestic forces that are deemed as a security threat. In addition, the Sepah has control of the head warden of the notorious Evin Prison in Tehran, called '2-Alef,' which functions independently of Iran's intelligence services. After the contested election of 2009, scores of political activists, journalists and students were detained in '2-Alef' for several months. Such detention ensured that the files of the detainees were hidden from the judiciary (Najdi and Karim, 2012, p. 82).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the organisational structures of Iran's post-revolutionary armed forces. It began by providing an overview of the Iranian armed forces under the Pahlavi dynasty. An outline regarding the functions of the Imperial Army, or the Artesh, was provided which placed emphasis on its role as a major base of political support for the regime and as an instrument of repression against internal opposition. In addition to emphasising the roles of the Artesh, the role of other sections of the Pahlavi armed forces, namely the Security Organisation (SAVAK), the city police or gendarmeries and the municipal police (*Shahrbani*) were covered. The chapter then discussed the post-revolutionary period, paying special attention to the armed forces in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The chapter presented a new framework for understanding the Islamic Republic of Iran's political system by combining two approaches to the study of the authoritarian regimes: the new institutionalist approach and the old institutionalist approach. This framework provides a setting for analysing the structure and functions of the revolutionary armed forces, especially the Sepah, in the broader context of the IRI authoritarian political system. The chapter is built on the recent work in new institutionalist literature, especially Andrea

Schedler, by defining the Iranian political system as an electoral autocracy which combines autocratic institutions, which derive their legitimacy from the principles of the Mandate of the Jurist and Shiite jurisprudence, with the nominally governing institutions that are popularly elected.

The chapter also borrowed from a variant of old institutionalist studies by Amos Perlmutter to bring to light the dynamics and functions of authoritarian bodies in the electoral autocracy of the IRI. In the spirit of Perlmutter, the IRI's various revolutionary and religious authoritarian bodies were referred to as parallel and auxiliary political structures. Taking into account the IRI's electoral institutions and authoritarian structures, the chapter demonstrated that the IRI political system is composed of groupings of three components: 1) republican structures; 2) parallel religious structures; and 3) auxiliary religious-revolutionary structures. The republican structures are the popularly elected institutions, such as the Majles and presidency, as well as various cabinet ministries. They also include the Artesh, which is responsible for the protection of the country's borders and the security of the country against external threats. The parallel structures in the IRI are found in various religious institutions, namely the Council of Guardians, the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Leadership Experts, which monitor and challenge the functions of elected institutions such as the Majles and the government. The auxiliary structures are organisations such as the revolutionary foundations that serve as instruments of mobilisation and financial welfare for Iran's urban poor. They also include positions such as the Leader's Representatives, who are appointed to almost all state institutions to supervise ideological conformity with the Supreme Leader's directives. The auxiliary structures also include the revolutionary armed forces – namely the Sepah, the Basij, the Law Enforcement Forces and the voluntary unit the Helpers of God – that are instruments of political control and domestic security via popular mobilisation, ideological indoctrination and political repression. As shown in this chapter, the Sepah is one of the most important auxiliary structures in the IRI. It is one of the most autonomous institutions and occupies a dominant position in the internal security of the regime.

Given the primacy of the armed forces in the political order under the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is interesting to compare and contrast the way in which both regimes deployed their armed forces. In continuity with the Shah's regime, the IRI re-established a pattern of personal loyalty to the ruler while

indoctrinating the erstwhile Imperial armed forces with religious nationalist principles coupled with fierce suppression of pro-monarchy sentiments. In the same vein, by establishing the Sepah alongside the Artesh, the IRI policies echoed the Shah's pattern of division of labour among the armed forces, wherein imperial control over the army was facilitated by the creation of overlapping security organisations, such as SAVAK, the second Bureau of SAVAK and town and city police, and gendarmerie and military police, which were entrusted with internal security tasks.

In the case of the IRI, however, the division of labour between the armed forces was made unequal with the creation of the ideological military, the Sepah, which was continually given privileges at the expense of the Artesh. Since 1979, the Artesh has been restricted to external defence functions, while the Sepah has been rewarded with diverse internal security functions beyond protecting Iran's borders. The distribution of power is further tilted towards the Sepah due to the separation of the two armed forces, subjecting them to an uneven scope of clerical control. As mentioned earlier, the Artesh is penetrated by an extensive political and intelligence apparatus, as well as subjected to ideological oversight by the clerical commissars. It remains loyal to the current political leadership and generally refrains from interfering in political matters and domestic political struggles in the IRI. By contrast, the Sepah is an independent force in the IRI that is subject to less intensive clerical control. It considers itself loyal only to the Supreme Leader and on occasion has bypassed the civilian authorities represented by the clerical commissars and the executive (Buchta, 2000, p.70). This uneven control mechanism over the two wings of the armed forces stands in sharp contrast to the Shah's system of mutual surveillance among the armed forces, which aimed to stymie the rise of an independent power centre within the military and security forces. Another contrast between the IRI armed forces and those of the Shah lies in their related security functions and degree of autonomy which allowed them to carry out such functions and determine their military affairs.

As discussed previously, while reliant on the armed forces as the saviour of his regime, the Shah feared the potential threat posed by the army. In order to contain such threats, the Shah not only encouraged rivalry among the Officer Corps, but also enhanced his personal grip over the armed forces. This personal control encompassed nearly all military affairs, including orders, promotions and the details

of the meetings between the branches of the armed forces. The army's increasing reliance on the Shah undermined its operational viability despite its well-equipped weaponry. Since the Shah's strategy of divide and rule was mainly designed to contain the enemy within his own power base, it was not sufficiently prepared to deal with potential riots and uprisings. This was particularly the case in 1963, when the army's mission began to shift towards external defence and the task of dealing with internal threats was assigned to the SAVAK and various security organisations. As a result of this shift, the armed forces were not adequately trained in crowd control mechanisms for civil unrest. Because of the lack of training and inability to function independently of the Shah's decisions, the army was operationally ineffective in crushing the revolutionary upheaval of 1979, especially after the Shah left the country.

In case of the IRI, by contrast, while the close control of the army has been sustained to an even greater extent, the Sepah has risen to prominence because of its ample degree of autonomy to pursue its military, political and ideological missions. Due to its political role as the Guardian of the Islamic Revolution, the Sepah and its affiliate subcomponent the Basij perform various internal security functions, including intelligence surveillance and ideological mobilisation and training, which are not isolated from their control of riots and unrest. While the Sepah is subordinated to the Supreme Leader and its Commanders are appointed by him, it is provided with plenty of discretion with which to conduct its internal affairs, such as the placement and promotion of personnel in various command positions. This autonomy is exemplified by the fact that the Sepah Commanders exert great influence over leadership changes in the Sepah through naming, moving and promoting various Sepah leaders to command positions (Katzman, 1993, p. 116). Equally important to the Sepah's operational independence is its ability to determine the direction of the organisation. This ability was further enhanced in 2007 by the decentralisation of Sepah command and control following the appointment of its new Commander-in-Chief, Mohammad Ali Ja'fari, and the sweeping discretion allotted to provincial Commanders of the Sepah to improve the defence capability of the Iranian forces against external and internal threats.

The Sepah's considerable autonomy and advantageous position in the domain of internal security has endowed it with a political role in the IRI. The institutional involvement of the Sepah in internal security has required the Corps to become adept

at mutually inclusive political and military issues. In addition to its military remit, which is aimed at combating external threats and protecting Iran's territory, the Sepah is a political auxiliary structure responsible for sustaining Iran's autocracy. To this end, it is well-equipped with multifaceted political-military and ideological bureaucracies to suppress the domestic enemies of the revolution, to redress the ideological and revolutionary aspirations of the regime, and to articulate alternative approaches to national security challenges arising from internal political crises and external threats. In terms of its structure, the Sepah's privileged standing among IRI institutions, together with its organisational capacity to widen its presence in numerous political and social arenas interconnected with security, provide a potential for its involvement in the non-military domain and, above all, in politics.

3 The Sepah's Socio-Economic and Political Reach

The Armed Forces must not interfere in political matters in order to keep their unity.

Ruhollah Khomeini (*Payame Enqelab,* 1981)

There exist different interpretations about the revolution. When the Constitution states that the Sepah must protect the 'revolution and its achievements', it is here that the scope of the Sepah's missions is expanded, and in this path we must not set constraints on its Guardianship role.

Mohammad Ali Ja'fari (*FarsNews Agency,* 2011)

I feel it is more empirically accurate and theoretically useful to recast the analysis of the role of the military in politics as a political institution, subject to many of the pressures experienced in the polity.

Stepan, (1971, p.8)

3.1 Introduction

Having covered the organisational structure of the Sepah and its evolution during the existence of the IRI, this chapter analyses its civilian dimension. In its broadly defined role as 'the Guardian of the Revolution and its achievements', the Sepah took up numerous missions in both military and civilian realms. These missions were by no means confined to the traditional military purview of external security, but also included internal politics and security, mobilisation of the population, ideological propaganda and overseas operations – all of which were and can be considered part of the normal political and security functions of the Sepah within the framework of the Islamic Republic's Constitution and the Sepah's own legal Statutes. There is no doubt, through the abovementioned extra-military functions, that the Sepah exerted considerable influence on Iran's civilian sphere at political, socio-economic and international levels. The Sepah's official roles, functions and well-placed position within the structure of Iran's electoral autocracy shaped its profile and facilitated its reach into the social and political life of post-revolutionary Iran. These early roles did not indicate the development of the Sepah as the dominant force in various aspects of Iran's civilian sphere, particularly its politics and economy. As will be shown, not unlike other militaries elsewhere in the developing

world, the Sepah's prominence as a political economic actor and its increasing involvement in many varying aspects of civilian life is a product of wider power relations, dynamics and pressures that have arisen in Iran's domestic space (see Stepan 1971, p. 55).

Of equal importance to the rise of the Sepah is its volatile external environment. The Sepah's ascendency in this context challenges the notion of civil-military relations that correlates a high level of external security threat with an enhancement of the military's war-fighting capability and its growing withdrawal from domestic functions. According to Desch (1999), for example, the presence of a high level of external threat to the state – arising from a volatile security environment or conflict – directs the military's attention towards its professional external combat missions. Thus, the shift towards its external security functions encourages civilian control of the military and prevents it from being involved in non-military missions (Desch, 1999, p. 12-13). In the context of post-revolutionary Iran, while the Sepah has not openly challenged its civilian masters, external security factors seem to have broadened rather than reduced the Sepah's involvement in Iranian society and politics over time. These external factors, together with changing political developments at home, have led the Sepah to invoke a broad reading of its constitutional mandate and expand the span of its non-military functions. Hence, an adequate analysis of the Sepah's civilian aspects must consider its interactions with wider domestic power dynamics as well as external developments.

In order to examine the growing involvement of the Sepah as a political and economic actor in post-Khomeini Iran, this chapter first looks at the Sepah's role in Iranian politics and society, as it is reflected in its political-security functions as the defender of the revolutionary regime and its values – functions that were institutionalised in the constitution of the IRI and the Sepah's Statutes, passed by Parliament in 1982. It will be argued that the Sepah's entry into political and economic fields is partly the result of the interpretation of its legally sanctioned role and function as an all-encompassing security actor.

While the Sepah is supposedly forbidden by law from engaging in national politics, or with any political groups, its legally sanctioned role as the defender of the regime against any threats, as well as its responsibility to realise the regime's ideological and mobilisation ideals, has allowed the Sepah to become a force in post-revolutionary politics within Iranian society.

The chapter then turns to the social and political contexts within which the Sepah's political involvement and economic functions are embedded. This discussion will elucidate the Sepah's place in the post-revolutionary social structure. It will outline the Sepah's link with the poorer segments of Iranian society, on one hand, along with its privileged access to the state's distribution of rent on the other. This access to state capital, together with its involvement in post-war economic reconstruction, has enabled the Sepah to acquire an advantageous position as an intermediary between the state and social forces. This was achieved by generating considerable economic dividends through its various subsidiaries and sub-contracting works. The accumulation of financial and economic wealth was made possible by the Sepah's provision of financial security to its members (Basij and their families). The Sepah's distribution of patronage to its societal clients and networks was inextricably linked with its security role in ideological indoctrination and mobilisation of society, in order to ensure support for the regime amongst its social base.

In addition to the social contexts which helped the Sepah gain access to these resources, an assessment of the Sepah's behaviour in the civilian sphere must be placed in the context of the political space in which it is rooted. This space is broadly defined by the factional struggle for power along with its various discourses, interests, and practices, which revolve around the state's policy-making at both domestic and international levels. In this regard, the chapter pays particular attention to the Sepah's links with Iran's political elite, along with its interactions and encounters with the constellations of socio-economic and political actors. It will be argued that these interactions and encounters have led to the emergence of the Sepah as an important centre of power in post-Khomeini Iran. Focusing on the IRI's power struggle in this period, we will bring to the fore a crucial moment in the ascendency of the Sepah as a political force during the administration of President Khatami. The chapter will draw on the concept of 'securitisation', introduced by the Copenhagen School of International Relations, to provide insights into the Sepah's mounting influence in defining the National Security of the IRI (see Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1997). The chapter then moves onto Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013), where it focuses on the Sepah's emergence as a leading political force with a growing stake in the distribution of power and foreign policy of the IRI.

3.2 The Sepah's Legal Framework

According to Article 150 of the Constitution of the IRI, 'The Corps of Guardian of Islamic Revolution, established in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained in order that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements. The duties of this Corps, together with its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of responsibility of the other Armed Forces, are to be determined by law, with emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them' (Algar, 1980, p. 81). The article's reference to the Sepah's role as guardian of the revolution and its achievements is broadly defined and its scope of duties and functions are unclear. To quote one observer of civil-military relations in post-revolutionary Iran, 'Nowhere does the Constitution define the "enemies" against which the Sepah is obliged to protect the revolution. It is even unclear whether the Sepah's primary role will be defence against external threats, in which case it should act as an army, or internal threats, in which case it might act as a police force' (Alfoneh, 2008). The revised Statute passed by Majles on 6 September 1982 provides a clearer picture of the Sepah.

According to the first chapter of the Statutes of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the Sepah's role (under the direction of the Supreme Leader) to 'fulfil the divine ideal of the revolution and spread out the rule of God [is] based on the laws of the Islamic Republic' (Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). The fourth chapter effectively bars the Sepah from participating in political feuds by setting out the conditions of non-membership in political parties, groups and institutions as one of the requirements for service in the Sepah (Alfoneh, 2008). According to the article, 'The Corps of Guardians of the Revolution is ideologically and politically subordinated to the Supreme Leader (*Vali-ye Faqih*) and is independent from political parties and groups and should not function as a political party or political organisation' (Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). The other conditions of membership are 'faith in Islam, the Islamic revolution and the principle of the Mandate of the Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*)' (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). At first glance, the requirements of loyalty to the revolution and non-membership in political parties imply that the Sepah is not permitted to become involved in politics (Alfoneh, 2008). This is reaffirmed by the first chapter of the statute which renders the functions of the Sepah to the determinants of the 'law of the Islamic Republic' – namely, the legislation passed by Majles. Nonetheless, the provision of wide-ranging

security and ideological functions infused with a commitment to Shiite precepts and Supreme Leader (*Vali-ye Faqih*) allows the Sepah to be a political institution tasked with maintenance of the Islamic Republic and its ideological foundations. Among the large number of these functions are '[the] legal fight against persons who resort to activities aimed at overthrowing the Islamic Republic; coercive action against groups that deny the legitimacy and authority of the IRI leadership; cooperation with the police and Law Enforcement Forces to maintain law and order; cooperation with the regular military or Artesh during the time of war to protect the territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and cooperation with Ministry of Intelligence (*Vezarat-e Ettela'at*) and Judiciary (*Qovveh-ye Qaza'iyeh*) to maintain security' (Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1982). As can be seen, even within the boundaries of the law, the Sepah is entrusted with wide ranging security-military, political and ideological functions, and as a result the potential for the Sepah's involvement in politics and society is already manifest (see Alfoneh, 2008).

In addition to the legal responsibilities outlined in its Statutes, the Sepah has *de facto* responsibility based on its broader interpretation of its constitutional status. This discretionary reading of the Constitution makes its civilian control problematic. For one, the Sepah's overall role as the 'Guardian of the Revolution and its achievements' allows it to interpret the Constitution as it sees fit. For another, the Sepah's portrayal of itself as a faithful warrior – under the command of the Leader of the revolution – allows it to present itself as a 'political-military-ideological' security force that is not limited by the bounds of written statute. This sentiment reflected the Sepah's position before the preparation of its legal statute by the Majles. In the prelude to the passing of the Statutes of the Sepah in 1982, a writer in the Sepah's periodical *Payame Enqelab* (Message of the Revolution) stated that 'the Sepah operates independently under the command of the Leader in order to save the revolution and its achievements and the scope of its duties as a military-ideological-political entity is determined only by the decree of the Leader and the Leadership Council' (*Payame Enqelab*, 1981a, p. 37). The aforementioned claim renders governmental and parliamentary oversight of the Sepah ineffective. While the Sepah makes reference to its codified statute for its self-serving purposes, it can always claim independence from elected institutions and set out a broader interpretation of its constitutional duties. This is particularly the case during moments of internal

crisis in the Islamic Republic. In the words of the current Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah, Mohammad Ali Ja'fari (FarsNews, 2011):

> As Aqa [Supreme Leader, Khamenei] has declared, the Sepah is not necessarily a military institution, but in addition a security, cultural, ideological and political institution. This means that it is expected to perform its pertinent functional dimensions in order to fulfil its role in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. There exist different interpretations about the revolution. When the Constitution states that Sepah must protect the 'revolution and its achievements', it is here that the extensive scope of the Sepah's functions becomes evident and in this path we must not set constraints on its Guardianship.

3.3 Social Contexts: The Sepah's Social Links and Economic Position

An analysis of the Sepah's engagement in non-military spheres and its emergence as an economic actor, in particular, must be situated in the context of post-revolutionary Iranian social structure. In this regard, an assessment of the Sepah must consider its place in society and its socio-economic reach to social forces. As with militaries elsewhere, the Sepah is distinguished from other institutions in its society due to the superiority of its organisation, its peculiar hierarchy and its monopoly of arms (Finer, 1988, pp. 5-12). These conventional components only constitute one aspect of the Sepah as an auxiliary structure. Most of all, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Sepah is an instrument of social mobilisation and control.

Through its involvement in society, the Sepah serves as an important institution for social integration within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran's system of distribution of interests. Aware of the importance of their legitimacy, the state elites created various mediums and institutions to satisfy the popular causes of the masses without permitting them to participate in the political process. In the IRI, a host of revolutionary and religious organisations such as the committees, a network of mosques, Friday prayer leaders and Revolutionary Foundations are examples of institutions that cater to popular sentiment and the

material interest of the regime's core constituencies, particularly among the lower social classes.

Among the revolutionary and religious organisations and networks mentioned above, the Sepah occupies a unique place in the Iranian state. The Sepah's distinctive position stems on the one hand from its extent of reach to a segment of rural and urban poor, and the Corps' peculiar system of distribution of benefits and social services to these groups on the other. Within these strata, particularly the youth demographic, membership in the Sepah provides a more viable option for securing a career.

3.3.1 The Sepah's Outlets and Its Presence in Non-Military Spheres

As an organisation responsible for mobilisation and ideological propagation, the Sepah has at its disposal a host of outlets through which it strengthens its link with its constituencies. The Sepah's special high school, for example, has its own specialised curriculum that combines religious seminary teaching with studies in science, humanities and military training (*Payame Enqelab*, 1982e, pp.49-50). Aside from high school education, the Sepah has various technical universities that engage in the ideological indoctrination and training of students, offering them the possibility to become future Commanders and directors (Alfoneh, 2013).

In addition to its specialised schools, the Sepah's bond with society is further enhanced through its control of the Basij. During the heyday of the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, the Basij was tasked with the mobilisation of Iran's population at the front. To this end, the Sepah's provincial brigades began recruitment of the provinces' inhabitants for military training and defence of the homeland (*Payame Enqelab*, 1981c, pp. 82-83). Moreover, to improve the unity of the Basij beyond the battlefield, the Sepah organised various summer camps and recreational programmes. These outlets were created to strengthen the ties between Basij veterans previously serving in the war and the active Basij units, in addition to transferring the skills of these veterans to the new volunteers (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984a, pp. 62-63). Today, the summer camps serve as crucial venues for the Sepah's and Basij's outreach to young people in rural provinces and small towns. Notwithstanding their importance to ideological propagation, the camps have various programmes in sports, recreation and technical training that are extremely appealing to young people in remote rural provinces (Wehrey, *et al*., 2009, p. 38).

Beside its own ideological apparatus, the Sepah and the Basij come into contact with society through involvement in developmental activities, as well as their widening presence in Iran's civilian institutions. The Sepah and the Basij's entrance into these non-military realms can be traced back to the presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997). During this period, the Basij were given sponsorship to participate in non-military national projects, in line with the government's post-war policy of reconstruction. The engagement of the Basij and Sepah in reconstruction projects enabled them to generate income while extending their socio-economic reach into war-damaged regions. The Basij obtained additional entry into the social sphere when the Majles granted it sweeping security functions, specifically in saving and monitoring Islamic revolutionary norms. For this purpose, the Basij enhanced its various units and cells in nearly all civilian institutions of the state. Among the most important of these units, which is active to this day, is the Student Basij Organisation (SBO). The SBO was established in 1989, following the selection of the new Supreme Leader Khamenei, in order to mobilise students for the Basij and to bolster students' 'ideological-political-training capability' (Golkar, 2010, p. 144, see also Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution, 1990). Following Khatami's presidency, the SBO became an active force in suppressing reformist student organisations such as the Office for Consolidating Unity (*Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat*) and the Office for Consolidating Democracy (Wehery, *et al*., 2009, p. 43). After Ahmadinejad's presidency, the SBO attained a new prominence in political functions and experienced significant growth in membership from 420,000 in 2004 to 600,000 in 2007. With the new government's crackdown on pro-reform organisations in universities, the SBO was given considerable support to counter the oppositionist students. In this role, the SBO effectively lobbied the government to implement a 'second cultural revolution in the University' in order to purge the oppositional student groups and university professors deemed to be too liberal (Golkar, 2010, p. 25).

3.3.2 The Sepah's Privilege and its Economic Position
The Sepah's and Basij's ideological indoctrination and mobilisation take place in tandem with a peculiar system of distribution of privileges and benefits to its members and constituencies. A prominent example of distribution of patronage is the favouritism and entitlement given to the constituencies of the Sepah in regard to

admission to higher education: for example, 40 percent of university slots are reserved for war veterans and their families. Most of these students are drawn from lower-class backgrounds and lack the academic standards required by the highly competitive university entrance examinations (Zahedi, 2000, p. 119). In 2008 and 2009, the regime made an attempt to expand the 40 percent admission quota for Basij students to state universities (Golkar, 2010, p. 25).

Of equal importance to the Sepah's and the Basij's allocation of privileges are their cooperative foundations (*Bonyadha-ye Ta'avoni*). The Cooperative Foundation of the Sepah was established in the early 1980s through generous government assets in an attempt to take care of the needs of its veterans and servicemen. In 1989, with the delegation of its household goods and department stores to the Ministry of Defence and Armed Force Logistics, the Sepah's Cooperative Foundation became mainly involved in two sectors: Housing and Loans. The Cooperative Foundation began to provide free interest loans to the Corps' members for housing, marriage and entrepreneurial activities. At the same time, it took on the task of acquisition of lands from the Ministry of Housing for construction of residential units in a number of small cities (*Payame Enqelab*, 1990c, pp. 14-15).

Alongside the Sepah's cooperative, the Basij developed its own cooperative foundation during the 1990s. Accordingly, it followed in the Sepah's footsteps by entering into the service sector (see Basij Resistance Force, 1996). Over the years, both the Sepah's Cooperative Foundation and the Basij Cooperative Foundation developed their networks of banks, subsidiaries, and finance and credit institutes by cultivating their arrays of clients and businessmen. Beyond their own economic bases, both the Sepah and the Basij also accrue their financial muscle through their strong links with the Mostaz 'afin Foundation and the Shahid Foundation. While the Sepah does not control the Foundations directly, it exerts indirect influence over them. From 1990 to 1999, the Mostaz 'afin Foundation was headed by former Sepah veteran Mohsen Rafiqdust. Similarly, the head of the Mostaz 'afin Foundation since 1999, Mohammad Forouzandeh, also comes from the ranks of the Sepah. The influence of the Sepah is also evident in the Shahid Foundation, with former Sepah Air Force Commander Hossein Dehghan acting as its director. Shahid provides home loans to thousands of Basijis and the families of martyrs. It has reportedly

provided loans of approximately 120 million *rials* to urban families and 140 million *rials* to rural families (Rizvi, 2012, pp. 592-593).

The amalgam of financial patronage, ideological indoctrination and mass mobilisation described above has been in part due to the Sepah's unique economic position in the state's system of distribution of interest. As an important pillar of the regime the Sepah, like the religious revolutionary foundations, has privileged access to income arising from the state's oil and gas revenue. The engagement of the Sepah in various economic ventures since 1990, coupled with its rise to political power, has enabled it to use its proximity to the state's resources and funds to enhance its economic dealings and amass profits. This profit has enabled the Sepah to cultivate a network of state capitalist and technical staff while sustaining its pool of supporters from the ranks of its veterans and the lower classes. This network consists of a powerful financial elite and employees belonging to its own firms and subsidiaries or otherwise parastatal institutions. Chief among the venues through which the Sepah incorporates this web of socio-economic forces is its engineering firm, Khatam al-Anbiya (also known as Ghorb). Ghorb serves as one of the largest contractors for oil and gas, construction, agriculture, and mining; it employs 25,000 engineers and staff and own 812 registered companies inside and outside Iran (*Sarmayeh*, 2007c). The Sepah's economic base also includes the abovementioned cooperative foundations. In recent years, the cooperatives have developed into the financial vehicles of the Sepah and the Basij, primarily through their finance and credit institutions, which account for a substantial volume of deposits and new bank accounts in Iran by providing attractive loans and high-interest saving accounts for the urban population (for details see Chapter 5).

The commercial activities and socio-economic reach of the Sepah should not be seen as a rebuttal of either the arcane and non-transparent nature of its economic dealings or its advantageous position in relation to all economic actors. This advantage stems from the profile the Sepah maintains as an organisation which blurs the boundary between the public and quasi-public sectors. Although the Sepah is officially known as a state institution as decreed by Iran's Constitution, in reality it operates as a parastatal or quasi-governmental institution which is independent from the government and is responsible only to the Supreme Leader. The Sepah obtains a significant amount of funding from the government's annual budget. Nonetheless, not unlike religious revolutionary foundations, it is not subject to governmental

oversight given that it is legally designated as being under the Supreme Leader's authority (Moslem, 2002, p. 38). Adding to its autonomy and power within the state institution is the Sepah's advanced machineries and private assets, as well as its political and economic ties to the political system, which has allowed it to build an unchallenged position in Iran's economy. In recent years, particularly since the ascendancy of the Neo-Conservatives and the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Sepah has been the main supplier of governmental contracts (see Chapter 5 for more details). A number of these were awarded to the Sepah out of favouritism and without competitive bidding, including the development of the 15th and 16th phases of the South Pars oilfield and the development of the gas pipeline from Assaluyeh to Sistan and Balouchestan. Beyond these developmental projects, the Sepah and the Basij have expanded their power over the country's financial sector partly as a result of the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. In 2009, in the largest trade in the history of Tehran's stock market, a consortium affiliated with quasi-governmental bodies and the Sepah's Cooperative Foundation purchased 51 percent of the shares of Iran's giant Telecommunication Company.

Notwithstanding its diverse constituency among the echelons of its connected business elite and a segment of Iranian citizens, it must be noted that the increasing economic power of the Sepah has unfolded at the expense of the exclusion of wide segments of society, including the bazaar, arrays of local private companies, and the middle class, from the economic scene. The scope of the Sepah's commercial endeavours has expanded to such an extent that it sparked criticism within the ranks of the Conservative quarter, which is considered supportive of the Sepah and in accord with its religious revolutionary mindset. In the summer of 2010, the Conservative parliamentarian Elyas Nadaran criticised the handover of the telecommunication shares by the Ministry of Economy to the consortium partly affiliated with the Sepah. He likened the Ministry of Economy's handover to a replacement of 'the government monopoly with [a] quasi-government monopoly' (Ictna, 2010).

The controversies surrounding the Sepah's engagement in the national economy have had a negative implication on its cohesion and its populist-egalitarian façade. As the Sepah becomes increasingly ridden with corruption and nepotism, it may risk eroding its unity and religious revolutionary credentials, especially among the segment of the population which tends to view the Sepah favourably. While the

Sepah's constituencies in the lower strata of Iranian society are recipient of some benefits (as briefly described above), the privileges attached to membership in the Sepah and the Basij is by no means comparable to the substantial wealth amassed by senior Sepah officers and veterans. This disparity may engender antagonism among the social bases of the Sepah and the Basij, undermining their revolutionary tenacity and fervour (Thaler, *et al*., 2010, p. 63).

3.4 Political Contexts: The Political Elite, Factional Politics and Policy-Making

3.4.1 1980-1989: The Sepah's Link with Factions and Its Influence Over the Politics of War

Despite Khomeini prohibiting the Sepah from interfering in political matters and involving itself in factional struggles among power groups, the Sepah remains closely linked with the dynamics of political contestation in Iran. Indeed the first instances of power rivalry in the Islamic Republic of Iran began to surface in the newly-established Corps of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. Created from the multitude of militias that fought against the Pahlavi state, the Sepah consisted of diverse revolutionary and religious militant groups with close personal ties to individual clerics and lay religious leaders (Schahgaldian, 1988, p. 66; Katzman, 1993, p. 49; Khaliq, 2006). Among these groups were militias that belonged to the Organisation of Mojahedin Islamic Revolution (*Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami*) or SMEE, not to be confused with the Organisation of People Mojahedin, along with other radical militias led by the firebrand figure Mohammad Montazeri and Abbas Zamani, also known as Abu Sharif. Some of the original founders of the Sepah, such as Ayatollah Lahouti and later Abu Sharif, were forced to resign from their posts in the course of the power struggle that led to the victory of Khomeini's clerical and lay religious loyalists (referred to here as fundamentalists) over their secular rivals (see Chapter 4). Others departed from the Sepah voluntarily to form their own militias. This led to a predominance of groups affiliated with the Organisation of Mojahedin Islamic Revolution over the Corps. Despite the supremacy accrued by the SMEE, factionalism remained a feature of the Sepah throughout the 1980s, complicating the civilian control imposed by Khomenei's clerical supervisors (see Chapter 4 for more details).

The factionalism within the Sepah corresponded with a broader domestic power struggle between the two regime factions within the victorious fundamentalist block: the Conservative faction and the Radical Left faction. While the Conservative faction and Radical Left faction shared views on the foreign policy of export of the revolution and insisted on Iran's isolationism during the first decade of the Republic, they adhered to different economic and political views and appealed to different sets of constituents in the Sepah and in Iranian society (see Table 6). The Radical Left faction, which consisted of Khomeini's revolutionary-populist loyalists, believed in state control of the economy and a dynamic reading of the principle of the Mandate of the Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*) (see Moslem, 2002, p. 16, pp. 119-121). This faction revolved around groups such as the Assembly of Combatant Clergy (MRM), which was set up by those left-leaning members of the Society of Combatant Clergy (JRM) who separated from their ultra-orthodox clerical counterparts in 1988 amidst differences over economic issues (Moslem, 2002, p.52). The Radical faction also included non-clerical Islamist populist revolutionaries, namely the Organisation of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (SMEE) (Moslem, 2002, p. 60). To the Radical Left faction, people could play an important role in the affairs of the country regardless of their obedience to the religious leader; simply put, this faction believed that republican dimensions are an integral part of Iran's political system, without which the Islamic Republic could not function (see Moslem, 2002, p.116).

The Conservative faction was comprised of socially conservative and traditional clerical groups: namely the Society of Combatant Clergy and the Society of Qom Seminary Teachers, as well as 'non-clerical religious bourgeoisie and merchants of bazaar' (Moslem, 2002, p. 48). This faction supported the protection of private property and pre-industrial capitalism, and adhered to the concept of the Absolute Mandate of the Jurist (Moslem, 2002, pp.99-100, pp. 104-105). Proponents of this view emphasised the religiosity of the Islamic Republic and the power of the Faqih rather than its republican aspects and the roles of the electorates (Moslem, 2002, pp. 99-100).

The same fissures dividing the Radical Left and the Conservative also infested the Sepah, representing internal rivalry between the right wing and left wing of the SMEE. While the Conservative wing dominated the command level of the Sepah, the Radical Left retained its influence in the body of the corps. The Radical faction's sway over the corps was indeed evident in the patronage of many of its

members to Khomeini's designated successor Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was closely tied with the left-wing faction of the IRI. Yet the influence of the Radical Left was also visible in the assignment of the radical revolutionary figure Ali Akbar Mohtashami to the post of Iran's ambassador to Syria. Mohtashami was a close ally of the Sepah who oversaw the creation of the Lebanese militant organisation Hezbollah following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Notwithstanding the factionalism in the Sepah, it must be noted that it was the Conservative wing of the Sepah that was instrumental in the war strategy of the IRI, due to its predominant position in the upper levels of its command and proximity to various mediums of 'informal civil-military relations.' According to David Pion Berlin, 'informal civil-military relations' are behaviours 'that do not normally occur within the chain of command, are not mandated by law and do not conform to official procedures' (Pion Berlin, 2010, p. 526). What is meant here by 'informal civil-military relations' are the civil-military behaviours that occur through unofficial institutions and structures, as well as personal networks. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Office of the Supreme Leader, which is not mandated by law, has functioned as an unofficial backchannel between the Sepah's Commanders and the Supreme Leader. Yet another important institution that serves as an informal backchannel between the Sepah and Iran's political elite is the Supreme National Security Council or (SNSC). Established originally under the name Supreme National Defence Council (*Showra-ye 'Ali-ye Difa'*) following the Iran-Iraq war, the SNDC operated as an informal civil-military body in charge of devising the regime's defence policy and war strategy in response to the demands of the war. Accordingly it was in the SNDC that a nucleus of informal bonds between the Conservative Commanders of the Sepah and the clerical elite was cemented. One example of these informal bonds was the one between the Speaker of Parliament Rafsanjani and the high-ranking personnel of the Sepah.

During the mid-80s, Rafsanjani was appointed as Khomeini's *de facto* Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces – the position he served concurrently with his duty as Speaker of Parliament. In the Supreme Defence Council, Rafsanjani appeared to be the chief advocate of the Sepah's military operations and unconventional 'human wave' tactics. This support gave the Sepah a competitive edge over the Artesh in regard to Iran's defence planning and its necessary wartime logistics. Indeed, the triumvirate of Rafsanjani, Rezaei and Rafiqdust was

instrumental in a host of military operations, including the Karbala IV and V offensives, carried out by the Sepah until 1988 (Zabih, 1988, p. 216).

However, as Rafsanjani's stance on military strategy began to turn moderate and shift towards the Artesh's position on cautious and cost-effective tactics, he was opposed by the many Sepah leaders who supported massive human wave tactics (Zabih, 1988, p.252; Katzman, 1993, p. 132). The differences of opinion between Rafsanjani and the Sepah's leaders, particularly Rezaei, unfolded further with Rafsanjani's decision to end the eight-year war (Khabaronline, 19 July 2010). As will be shown, this decision cast a dark shadow over the Sepah's relationship with Rafsanjani in the course of his presidency (1989-1997). Despite attacking Rafsanjani for accepting a UN cease-fire resolution, the Conservative leader Mohsen Rezaei retained his position until 1997. Other leaders of the Sepah such as Mohsen Rafiqdust were assigned to powerful revolutionary institutions such as The Foundation of the Dispossessed, while many others such as Ali Larijani (the political advisor to the Sepah) were promoted to important cabinet positions. The upward mobility of the Sepah into bureaucratic and revolutionary institutions, as well as its representation in the government, signified its status as an important constituent the Iranian political leaders had to reckon with.

Table 3.1 Political Factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran 1981-1989

Ideological Orientation	Islamic Left			Islamic Right		
Political Factions	Islamic Radical (Followers of Imam line)			Traditional Conservative		
Sub-factions	SMEE	MRM (Separated from JRM in 1988)	Leftists affiliated with IRP	JRM	JME	JMHEQ
Figures	Behzad Nabavi	Mehdi Karrubi, Mohammad Khatami, Mohammad Musavi Khoiniha, Ali Akbar Mohtashami	Mir-Hossein Musavi, Hadi Ghaffari, Mehdi Hashemi	Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, Mahdavi Kanni, Ali Khamenei, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani	Habibolah Asghar Owladi	Ahamd Janati, Emami Kashani
Economic Position	State control of economy, nationalisation of foreign trade, land reform			Protection of private property, pre-industrial Bazzar Capitalism		
Socio-cultural Position	Relatively liberal			Strongly conservative		

Source: Siavoshi, 1992; Buchta, 2000; Moslem, 2002

Note: Adapted (with minor revisions) from Ideological Factions within the Power Apparatus cited in Buchta, 2000, p. 14. SMIR stands for Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami (Organisation of Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution); MRM stands for Majma'-e Rouhaniyoun-e Mobarez (The Assembly of Combatant Clergy) ; IRP stands for Islamic Republic Party; JRM stands for Jame'eh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez (The Society of Combatant Clergy); JME stands for Jam'iyat-e Mo'talefeh-ye Eslami (The Coalition of Islamic Society) and JMHEQ stand for Jame'eh–ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-yeh Elmiyeh Qom.

Table 3.1 Continued

Ideological Orientations	Islamic Left			Islamic Right		
Factions	Islamic Radical (Followers of Imam Line)			Traditional Conservative		
Sub-factions	SMEE	MRM (Separated from JRM in 1988)	Leftists affiliated with the IRP	JRM	JME	JMHEQ
Power Base	The dispossessed , Revolutionary Committees, the Revolutionary Foundations, Judiciary, Sepah ranks and files and affiliates (Ex. Abbas Duzduzani, Mehdi Hashemi, Abdollah Nouri), The Supreme Leader's Representatives, The Student Office of Islamic Unity (Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat)			Society of Islamic Association of Guilds and Bazzars of Tehran, Council of Guardians Zeinab Society, Society of Islamic Engineers and Islamic Society of Culturalists, Sepah Commanders (Ex. Mohsen Rezaei, Mohammad Baqir Zowlqadr)		
Foreign Policy Position regarding the west	Isolationism, while favouring cultural relations			Supportive of trade relations, opposing cultural relations		
Position on Export of the Revolution	Strongly supportive of the export of the revolution			Supportive of the export of the revolution with individual exceptions		

3.4.2 The Post-Khomeini Period (1989-1997): The Emergence of the Sepah as a Conservative Auxiliary

The inauguration of Hashemi Rafsanjani's government, together with the selection of Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader, brought about further realignment of the Sepah with the Traditional Conservative faction. With the passing of Khomeini, the Radical faction was deprived of his timely intervention and support in its favour, and thereby its position was gradually diminished in the ensuing political contestation. The emerging vacuum following the death of Khomeini brought about a convergence of interest between the Traditional Conservative faction and the newly-established Pragmatic Conservative faction, led by President Rafsanjani. The two Conservative factions, which had opposed the Radical Left's economic policies and sought the privatisation of the Iranian economy, united to gain victory over the Radicals in almost all corridors of power. In 1990, with the tacit support of Khamenei, the pragmatist Rafsanjani facilitated the exclusion of Radicals, including those in cabinet posts allied with the Sepah and important parallel structures such as the Council of Leadership Experts (see Chapter 4). Subsequently, in the prelude to the fourth parliamentary elections, Rafsanjani (with the help of the Conservative-led Council of Guardians) crafted a strategy which led to the exclusion of Radicals from the Majles. The loss of parliamentary seats was a blow to the Radicals, who had previously dominated important committees such as the Budget and Planning and the Defence and Military affairs. In addition, the Conservatives forced out many Radicals from revolutionary institutions, security services and the media (Ashraf and Banuazizi 2001, p. 245; Moslem 2002, p. 56).

In parallel with the aforementioned changes in the republican and parallel structures of the IRI, Rafsanjani carried out extensive post-war reforms in the Sepah. In line partly with what Samuel P. Huntington identifies as 'professionalisation', the pragmatic Rafsanjani sought to enhance the Sepah's military expertise, corporateness and responsibility in order to depoliticise it and achieve greater civilian control over it. To this purpose, he introduced reforms to upgrade the Sepah to a well-trained and well-disciplined military institution that is able to use sophisticated weapons. These measures however, did not yield to Sepah's depoliticisation because of Sepah's compliance and informal links with the Supreme Leader. As noted in the previous chapter, the Sepah was constitutionally required to be loyal to the Supreme Leader, Khamenei; a consequence of this loyalty was the

growing personal bond between Khamenei and the Sepah. Khamenei, who lacked his predecessor's charisma, cemented the support of the Sepah by providing the Corps with a host of incentives and perks within Iran's civilian sphere. The use of the Sepah as a base of support became even more instrumental in Khamenei and the Traditional Conservatives' efforts to constrain the scope of Rafsanjani's cultural policy and foreign policy. Reinvigorated after ousting its Radical rivals, the Conservative faction, with the tacit support of Khamenei, increasingly turned against its Pragmatic Conservative allies and forced Rafsanjani's Minister of Culture Mohammad Khatami, whom it considered too liberal, to resign. The Conservative faction also imposed its choices for Minister of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) on Rafsanjani's cabinet. The incoming Minister of Culture Ali Larijani (currently the Speaker of Parliament) and Minister of Intelligence and Security Ali Falahian came from the ranks of Conservative hardliners, one from the Sepah and the other from the traditional *Haqani* Seminary in Qom.

Apart from imposing its interests on cabinet choices, the Conservative faction sought to undercut Rafsanjani's relatively tolerant socio-cultural policies partly through activation of the Sepah's paramilitary forces, as well as the Basij, in the public sphere. Invoking its defence effort during the Iran-Iraq war, the Basij used its proximity to the Traditional Conservatives to rebuff Rafsanjani's efforts on the cultural front and to safeguard revolutionary Islamic values in Iranian society. In this regard, the Basij was legally given powers equal to those of the Law Enforcement Forces in dealing with criminals (see Chapter 4 for details; also see Ahram 2011, p.118). Besides, given its authority as an enforcer in the capital, the Basij was further emboldened following the outbreak of riots in a number of cities including Qazvin, Mashhad and Islamshar; these riots were born out of dissatisfaction with government economic policies. To crush these riots, the regime called on the special units of the Basij. Through these experiences of unrest, the Sepah learnt that it needed to liven up the mobilisational capacity of its security forces to its fullest. Hence, it both ideologically and institutionally empowered the Basij units in Iran's rural and urban areas in order to prop up societal constituents necessary for the defence of the regime (see Chapter 4).

The same factional bickering affected Rafsanjani's pragmatic foreign policy, inviting the Sepah into the political scene as a Conservative auxiliary. To pursue their self-serving interests, the Conservatives weakened Rafsanjani's foreign policy

of rapprochement based on the normalisation of Iran's relations with other countries, particularly those in the immediate region (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001, p. 245). In this regard, while the Conservatives did not oppose economic relations with the West, they rejected the turn towards normalisation of political and cultural relations with the US, fearing that such a development would open doors for the import of western culture and westernised technocrats, as well as the return of expatriates to the country. Hence, they utilised a discourse of 'cultural onslaught' from the west to paint the cultural issue as a threat to the revolution and mobilise the Basij in society (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001, p. 246).

In addition, the Conservatives stymied Rafsanjani's attempts to improve Iran's relations with Persian Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, along with his initiatives for opening relations with the US. In the factional battle over foreign relations that pitted the Traditional Conservatives against the Pragmatic faction, the Sepah joined the former by returning to its efforts by exporting the revolution, by supporting Iran's militant proxies, and by engaging in terrorism abroad. In this respect, the Sepah's importance within these power dynamics can be understood in the framework of the contradictory foreign policy of many revolutionary states, described by Fred Halliday. Halliday notes that revolutionary states pursue 'dual' foreign policy based on constellations of revolutionary principles and diplomatic relations with the outside world. The ebb and flow of both revolutionary and diplomatic components is susceptible to 'events within the revolutionary state on one hand, and developments in the outside world on the other' (Halliday, 1999, p. 134). In the case of Iran, Rafsanjani's turn towards rapprochement was not complete, and was curtailed by internal voices that demanded adherence to Islamic and revolutionary militancy to meet their own interests. In this respect, the Sepah proved to be an important force in the factionalist games surrounding Iran's foreign policy. Emboldened by the Conservatives, the Sepah acquired the ability to export the revolution, through which it countered, if not forced, Rafsanjani to compromise on Iran's normalisation of relations with the outside world.

Table 3.2 Political Factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran 1989-1997

Ideological Orientation	Radical		Moderate	Conservative		
Political Factions	Islamic Radical (Maktabi)		Pragmatic Conservative (Modern Right)	Traditional Conservative		
Sub-factions	SMEE	MRM	KS	JRM	JME	JMHEQ
Figures	Behzad Nabavi	Mehdi Karrubi	Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Gholam Hossein Karbaschi, Ata'ullah Mohajerani	Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri	Habibolah Asghar Owladi, Mohammad Reza Bahonar	Ahmad Jannati
Power Base and affiliated institutions	The Office of Student Unity		Middle Class, Technocrats in Bureaucracy	Society of Islamic Association of Guilds and Bazzars of Tehran, Council of Guardians Zeinab Society, Society of Islamic Engineers and Islamic Society of Culturalists, Sepah Commanders (Ex. Mohsen Rezaei, Mohammad Baqir Zowlqadr); Some Sepah veterans (Ex. The Minister of Culture Ali Larijani, the Interior Minister, Mohammad Ali Besharati); The Supreme Leader's Representatives; Council of Guardians, Assembly of Leadership Experts, Judiciary , Revolutionary and Religious Foundations, Ansar-e Hezbollah Vigilantes, Basij militia		

Table 3.2 Continued

Ideological Orientation	Radical	Moderate	Conservative
Political Factions	Islamic Radical (Maktabi)	Pragmatic Conservative (Modern Right)	Traditional Conservative
Economic Position	State Control of Economy	Modern Industrialisation	Pre-industrial Bazzar capitalism
Foreign Policy Position	Isolation and Radicalism/ Less radicalism and more pragmatism since 1996	Reconciliation with the outside world	Cautious Reconciliation
Relations with the US	Opposed/ in favor of since 1996	Supportive	Opposed
Export of Revolution	Less supportive	Less supportive	supportive

*Source*s: Siavoshi, 1992; Buchta, 2000; Moslem 2002

Note: Adapted (with minor revisions) from Ideological Factions within the Power Apparatus cited in Buchta, 2000, p. 14. SMEE stand for Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami; MRM stands for Majma'-e Rohaniyun-e Mobarez (Assembly of Militant Clerics); KS stand for Kargozaran-e Sazandegi (The Servers of Constructiveness);   JRM stands for Jam'eh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez (The Society of Combatant Clergy); JME stands for Jam'iyat-e Mo'talefeh-ye Eslami (The Coalition of Islamic Society) and JMHEQ stands for Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyah Qom (The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers of Qom).

3.4.3 The Khatami Presidency: The Politics of Reform versus the Politics of 'Securitisation'

In the prelude to the 1997 presidential elections a coalition of Reformist factions comprised of Rafsanjani's pragmatic Modern Right and the Radical Left nominated the Moderate Minister of Culture, Mohammad Khatami, to compete with Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, the candidate of the Traditional Conservatives (Mir-Husseini and Tapper, 2006, p. 29). In 1997, the Iranian public, which had become increasingly disenchanted with socio-cultural restrictions and the authoritarian nature of the leadership, voted in large number for Khatami, who campaigned on the platforms of democracy, rule of law, and social and economic justice. The election of Khatami gave rise to the emergence of the Reform movement. This movement coalesced around a loose coalition which encompassed a variety of divergent groups and political orientations (Ibid, p. 29). Amongst this group were opposition elites in the regime who subscribed to the idea of reform within the framework of the Iranian Constitution and its enshrined power, as well as secularists who demanded the promotion of liberal democracy and separation of religion from government. The Reform movement also included students, the middle-class, youth, and women, who were demanding greater political freedom and relaxation of social strictures.

It was in this context that the Sepah's increasing entry into the political arena developed. Following his election to the presidency, Khatami tried to exert control over the Sepah and the MOIS forces. Using his influence behind the political scenes, he gained the approval of the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, to dismiss Mohsen Rezaei, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah since 1981, along with the controversial Minister of Intelligence and Security Ali Falahian. Khatami also appointed as his new Defence Minister Admiral Ali Shamkhani, a moderate apolitical officer from the ranks of the Sepah (Einsenstadt, 1998, p.72; Pollak, 2005, p. 314). As noted earlier, the activities of the security services, in particular the Sepah, were one of the major hurdles to Iran's diplomacy in the context of its dual foreign policy. Hence the replacement of personnel in the security services was indicative of the commitment of Khatami's government to *détente* aimed at relieving tension with the west and with Iran's neighbours. In addition, such an overhaul in security personnel represented a necessary move for the implementation of Khatami's reforms in the domestic sphere: namely, the relaxation of socio-cultural

strictures, freedom of the press and the activation of civil society groups and associations.

Despite the foregoing measures, the Sepah continued to be an important centre of power in Iran's hybrid power structure whose interests were highly influential. While Khatami reduced the Sepah's revolutionary activities, he also tried to appeal to the Sepah by acknowledging their role in Iran's military industry. In an attempt to undermine any potential for confrontation with the Sepah, Khatami supported the Sepah's efforts to procure weapons and stock its unconventional arsenal.

The inducement of military incentives, however, did little to assuage the Sepah's ambition for increasing involvement in Iran's civilian life. As an auxiliary backbone of the regime, the Sepah joined the Conservative-dominated structures such as the Judiciary, the Special Court for clergy and the Council of Guardians in order to strike a heavy blow to the Reform movement. The Sepah's alliance with the Conservatives was partly due to its fear that the enactment of reforms would challenge the Sepah's ideological security prerogatives, its economic position and its standing among its social base. This challenge became increasingly imminent after the revelation that 69 percent of the Sepah rank-and-file had voted for Khatami, which called into question the ability of the Sepah's Commanders to count on their forces in the case of a violent confrontation with the reformists (Eisenstadt, 1998, pp. 73-74). The Sepah's positioning amidst this bi-polar struggle for power between the Conservatives and the Reformists was further motivated by its ambition to augment its control over national security in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In order to achieve this, the Sepah concentrated on the politics of securitisation: that is, it characterised Khatami's politics of reform and his pursuit of *détente* with the US as an existential threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. While the Conservative faction and the Sepah did not reject Iran's economic relationships with the outside world, they were alarmed that the pursuit of rapprochement with the west would go too far. The Sepah leaders feared that the prospect of improvement of relations with the West and the prospects of opening talks with the US, though limited, would inevitably force Khatami's administration to compromise, which would seriously undermine the Corps' leverage on its support of terrorism and its importance to Iran's unconventional defence strategy. In the domestic sphere, the Sepah capitalised on the worst fears of the Conservatives by framing the discursive current of political

liberalisation and 'dialogue of civilisation' as a western conspiracy to overthrow the IRI. Voicing his discontent with this movement, in April 1998 the new Commander in Chief of the Sepah, Yahya Rahim Safavi, remarked that the Sepah would behead and cut off the tongues of counter-revolutionaries who challenged the foundation of the system, the dogma of *Velayat-e Faqih*. In the same speech Safavi called into question the reformist call for *détente* and the discourse of 'dialogue of civilisations' in the face of what he characterised as 'American's threat and domineering attitude'. This campaign of intimidation gave way to the Sepah's open threat of force following the student demonstration that erupted in the summer of 1999 in protest at the closure of the pro-reformist newspaper *Salam*. After five days of protests, which the vigilantes and the Law Enforcement Forces responded to with violent action, 24 Commanders of the Sepah sent a letter to Khatami threatening to stage a more a violent crackdown if he failed to deal with the protests decisively. This was the first time in the history of the IRI that the Sepah had openly challenged the government. To be sure, such threats left an imprint on the government's decisions concerning internal affairs, leading to Khatami's cautious approach in dealing with domestic crisis.

The Conservatives' use of violence and intimidation did little to stem the Reformists' early victories in the council elections of 1999 and the parliamentary elections of 2000. Nonetheless, the Reformist majority in the Majles failed to pass through reform bills in the face of the Council of Guardians, which used its discretion to block legislation. In 2003, it was evident that the Reform movement was at the end of its tether. Taking advantage of the public apathy towards reform, the Sepah's associates won a number of seats in the council elections of 2003 and thereby captured a number of towns and city councils, in particular the capital Tehran. Prior to the elections of 2003, emerging Conservative factions, which included a significant portion of Sepah veterans, capitalised on the population's dissatisfaction with the parliamentary reformists and the constant gridlock in the Majles. Setting their sights on the capture of a number of city councils, in particular Tehran, a group of middle-aged Conservatives (referred to here as Neo-Conservatives) adopted a new political message in order to seize power (see Khosrokhavar, 2004; Ehteshami and Zweiri, 2007). Calling themselves Usulgarayan, 'which means followers of Principle' (Axworthy, 2013, p. 373), the Neo-Conservatives, including their Sepah affiliates, adopted a new, third way of

approaching conservatism. They used the term Usulgarayan (or 'Usulgara' as an adjective) in an attempt to present a conservative platform that used an innovative nationalist-populist-technocratic approach, while also adhering to the principles (Usulgara-yi) of Islamic revolution and the Mandate of the Jurist. To a certain extent, the Neo-Conservatives incorporated the reformist themes of national pride and social justice with radical Islamic motifs in order to compete in the electoral arena. In this respect, along with their new electoral platform, the low turnout in the council elections of 2003 helped the Usulgarayan factions get elected by giving their loyal constituency, which was drawn from the poorer segments of society, a vital impact on the electoral competition (Ansari, 2007).

Subsequently aided by the sweeping disqualification of reformists, the Sepah encouraged its personnel to run for parliamentary election in 2004. Veterans of the Sepah represented one-third of the newly-established Conservative factions (Gheissari and Nasr, 2005, p.181).

The Usulgarayan factions served as informal networks of recruitment for the middle generation of Conservative bureaucrats as well as for Sepah members and their affiliates. These sub-factions, namely the Developers of Islamic Iran (*Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami*) and the Society of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution (*Jame'eh-ye Isargran-e Enqelab-e Eslami*) were made up of, among others, security and bureaucratic functionaries and veterans of the Iran-Iraq war. Indeed, the upward mobility of the Sepah to such administrative and electoral positions signified its new development into an important gateway for promoting its members to important institutions of the state. The entry of these new circles of bureaucratic and security elite to the Majles was partly due to these members' loyalty to the regime during the war and various political crises, and partly the result of the Council of Guardians' vetting of a massive number of reformist candidates.

Beyond public apathy and the electoral manipulation by the Council of Guardians, the rise of the Neo-Conservatives to power was facilitated by the changes in geopolitical environment taking place following the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as Iran's nuclear stand-off with the west. In this regard, the Sepah's rise to power was partly the consequence of the ongoing buildup of tensions between Iran and the US in the post-September 11th environment, which gradually put an end to Iran's brief experience with post-1997 *détente* and rapprochement. The outbreak of tension began in 2002, despite

opportunities that presented the two countries with prospects of improved relations in the prelude to the US's war with Afghanistan. After September 11th, Iran found a common goal with Washington in the overthrow of its nemesis the Taliban. The removal of the Taliban served Tehran's strategic interests, insofar as it could replace Iran's arch-enemy with a friendly government that would be sympathetic to the pro-Iranian militia, the Northern Alliance. More importantly for Khatami's administration, the circumstances of fighting a common enemy could 'accelerate rapprochement with the US' (Milani 2006, p. 246). To this end, Iran provided the US with intelligence assistance and participated in the US-sponsored talk in Bonn that discussed the political future of Afghanistan and led to the establishment of its Interim Government (Milani, 2006, p. 247; Maloney, 2008, p. 40).

Nonetheless, these conciliatory moves did not result in a substantial improvement in Iran-US relations. Indeed, the cooperation between Iran and the US witnessed a sharp decline following President Bush's State of the Union Speech in 2002, where he included Iran along with Iraq and North Korea as part of the 'Axis of Evil'. President Bush's speech was a blow to Khatami, who had offered Iran's goodwill and cooperation in the US war on Afghanistan. At home, Khatami and the Reformists were further criticised by Conservatives for putting too much faith on opening relations with the US.

With the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as well as looming US military threats against Iran following the revelations about the scope of Iran's nuclear program in Natanz, the Conservative comeback to the helm of Iran's foreign policy was assured. Concurrent with the Conservatives cautionary approach to the west, Khatami, with the approval of Iran's Supreme Leader, appointed the Pragmatic Conservative figure Hassan Rowhani as Secretary of Iran's SNSC in charge of nuclear negotiations. With Rowhani on board, the nuclear policy of the government fell into accordance with the Conservatives' guidelines. With the delegation of negotiation to Rowhani, the Conservatives could show off their diplomatic prowess in dealing with the Europeans in regard to Iran's nuclear issue (Ansari, 2007, p. 30). In October 2003, Iran agreed to temporary suspension of its uranium enrichment program as a goodwill gesture in order to reach a mutually acceptable deal with the EU3 (Britain, France and Germany). Subsequently, in December 2003, in what was known as the Tehran Agreement, Iran signed an additional protocol whereby it agreed to make required reports to the IAEA on its nuclear activities and allow inspections of all its

nuclear sites (Maloney, 2008, p. 54; Patrikarakos, 2012, p. 200). This agreement was seen as testament to Rowhani's diplomatic triumph, insofar as it was approved following voluntary and temporarily suspension instead of permanent suspension (Patrikarakos, 2012, p. 200). The Tehran Agreement paved the way for the Paris Agreement between Iran and the EU3 in November 2004, whereby Iran prolonged its reinstated commitment to temporary suspension of all enrichment and reprocessing activities and reaffirmed that its nuclear program was for civilian purposes. In return the EU3 promised to begin discussions on security issues, in addition to providing firm guarantees of nuclear, technological and economic cooperation (Patrikarakos, 2012, p. 209).

Nonetheless, as talks continued through mid-2005 with no resolution, Iran's patience grew thin. Central to diplomatic tensions between Iran and the EU3 was Iran's assertion of its right to enrichment, as well as its emphasis on suspension as a temporary measure depending on the reciprocity of the Europeans. As Iran's proposals for resumption of its enrichment activities, together with offers of additional safe measures, were overruled by the Europeans, the Rowhani team ended the temporary suspension in August 2005 (Patrikarakos, 2012, p. 214).

Iran's diplomatic confrontation with the west inserted itself into Iran's domestic politics. With the parliamentary elections of 2004 resulting in new legislature dominated by the Neo-Conservatives (including many veterans of the Sepah), the Majles became a bastion of opposition against the rival faction in charge of the government's nuclear policy. Soon after capturing the Majles, these Neo-Conservative deputies had declared that they would not approve an additional protocol and passed a bill in favour of resumption of enrichment (Ansari, 2007, p.32; Patrikarakos, 2012, p. 205). The Usulgarayan intensified their criticism of Khatami's government following the Paris Agreement. They asserted that the acceptance of suspension was detrimental to Iran's interests and that Iran was not gaining anything in return (Thaler, *et.al*., 2010, p. 95).

With Supreme Leader Khamenei no longer backing the negotiations, the Usulgarayan's attack took a new turn. These mounting criticisms found expression in the prelude to the 2005 presidential election, whereby the three candidates from a Sepah background framed the issue of Iran's civilian nuclear programme as a national right beyond political disputes. While this emphasis on national rights was nothing new, in this Neo-Conservative usage it echoed with the chauvinistic rhetoric

of the Pahlavi monarchy. Pointing out the failure of Khatami's administration, the Usulgarayan talked of Iran's right to a civilian nuclear programme while emphasising Iran's geopolitical position (see Chapter 6 for details). This approach to nuclear policy was part of the Usulgarayan's wider worldview of Iran's foreign policy, which suggested a somewhat confrontational approach to deal with the perceived security-military and regional threats. In the essence of what the Copenhagen School calls 'Securitisation', the Usulgarayan presented the issue of US military attacks and its regional hegemony as a security problem, calling for emergency measures and actions outside the normal confines of politics (see Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, p. 24). On the nuclear front, the Usulgarayan identified with the Sepah dismissed the trappings of *détente* and accommodation, and called for the resumption of a nuclear programme in order for Iran to improve its deterrencecapability and improve its bargaining power in negotiations with the west.

Table 3.3 Political Factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran 1997-2005

Ideological Orientation	Reformist (Moderate)				Conservative			Neo-Conservative (post- 2003)		
Political Factions	Former Islamic Radical			Modern Right	Traditional Conservative			Usulgarayan (Followers of Principle)		
Sub-factions	MRM	SMEE	JMIE	KS	JRM	JME	JMHEQ	JAIE	JIEE	Independent
Figures	Mehdi Karrubi	Behzad Nabavi	Mohammad Reza Khatami, Said Hajarian	Gholam Hossein Karbaschi	Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani, Hassan Rowhani	Habibullah Asghar Owladi	Ahmad Jannati	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Esfandiar Rahim Mashayee, Gholam Ali Hadad Adel	Gholam Ali Hadad Adel, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hossein Fadaie	Ali Motahari, Ali Larijani, Mohsen Rezaei
Political Position	Supportive of the Mandate of the Jurist within the limits of Iranian Constitution				Strongly supportive of the Absolute Mandate of the Jurist at the expense of the sovereignty of people			Supportive of the Absolute Mandate of the Jurist while appealing to Revolutionary-populist ideology on social and economic justice		Strongly Supportive of the Absolute Mandate of the Jurist while appealing to 'Performance Legitimacy'

Table 3.3 Continued

Ideological Orientation	Reformist (Moderate)				Conservative			Neo-Conservative		
Political Factions	Former Islamic Radical			Modern Right	Traditional Conservative			Usulgarayan (post-2003)		
Sub-Factions	MRM	SMEE	JMIE	KS	JRM	JME	JMHEQ	JAIE	JIEE	Independent
Power Base	Middle Class, Youths, Students, Women activists, Various Provinces, Muslim Minorities				Society of Islamic Association of Guilds and Bazaars of Tehran, Council of Guardians, Religious Foundations			Sepah, Revolutionary Foundations, Society of Islamic Engineers, Traditional Middle Class, Lower-Middle Class and Urban poor		Traditional Middle Class, some elements of Conservative clergy
Economic Position	Mixed Economy (Based on Command Economy and capitalism)				Pre-Industrial Capitalism			Economic Populism		Mixed Economy (Based on Command Economy and capitalism)
Socio-cultural Position	Relatively Liberal				Conservative			Conservative		Conservative
Foreign Policy Position regarding the West and the US	Accommodation				Restricted Accommodation			Confrontational and Security-oriented		

Source: Siavoshi, 1992; Buchta, 2000; Moslem, 2002

Notes: Based on ideological factions within the Power Apparatus cited in Buchta, 2000, p. 14, with substantial updates. MRM stands for Assembly of Militant Clerics (Majma'-e Rohaniyun-e Mobarez); SMEE stands for Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami (Organisation of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution); JMIE stands for Jebhe-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami (Islamic Participation Party of Iran); KS stands for Kargozaran-e Sazandegi (The Servers of Constructiveness); JRM stands for Jam'eh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez (The Society of Combatant Clergy); JME stands for Jam'iyat-e Mo'talefeh-ye Eslami (The Coalition of Islamic Society); JMHEQ stands for

Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyah Qom (The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers); JAIE stands for Jam'iat-e Abadgran-e Iran-e Eslami (The Developers of Islamic Iran); JIEE stands for Jam'iat-e Isargran-e Enqelab-e Eslami (Society of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution).

3.4.4 The Ahmadinejad Presidency (2005-2013): The Securitisation of Politics and the Rise of the Sepah

After the election of Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, the Sepah's influence in Iranian politics increased in earnest, paving the way for the Sepah to emerge as a political force with a stake in the distribution of power. The influence of the Sepah in this regard was visible at an informal political level, which manifested in its networks of veterans in the government cabinet. Ahmadinejad has been aware of the importance of the Sepah as a powerful constituent since 2005, and has sought to ensure 'factional support' within the Sepah by rewarding it with substantial representation in his cabinet (Risvi, 2012, pp. 593). Indeed, the two cabinets of Ahmadinejad (2005-2009, 2009-2013) were distinguished from those of his predecessors in terms of the appointments of senior Sepah Commanders and otherwise clerical commissars to key administrative posts in the government (see Table 2.4). Among the important ministries given to former Sepah Commanders in the Ahmadinejad's first term (2005-2009) were the Ministry of Energy, held by Parviz Fattah, and the Ministry of Culture, occupied by Hussein Safar Harandi. These senior members permeated critical government positions at deputy levels with the appointment of Brigadier General Mohammad Baqir Zowlqadr as Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security Affairs (2005-2007) and Brigadier General Ali Reza Afshar (2007-2008), the previous Commander of the Basij, as the Deputy Minister of the Interior for Political Affairs and Elections Office. This office serves an important body entrusted with overseeing the elections and qualification of candidates before the Council of Guardians' final vetting procedure.

Similarly, in Ahmadinejad's second cabinet (2009-2013) Sepah veterans occupied seven out of 21 cabinet posts, with five of its senior leaders holding key ministries. Included among these were the Ministry of Intelligence held by Heidar Moslehi, the former clerical commissar of the Sepah's ground forces and the Basij; the Ministry of the Interior occupied by the former Minister of Defence, Brigadier General Mohammad Najar, Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics held by Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, the Ministry of Oil headed by Brigadier General Rostam Qassemi, the previous Commander of the Sepah engineering headquarters, Khatam al-Anbiya or Ghorb and the Ministry of Energy held by Majid Namjou, the former Commander of the 41th Sarallah headquarters and deputy of developmental projects in the Ghorb's subsidiary, Karbala headquarters.

The Sepah's advancement to these cabinet posts signified the increasing securitisation of Iranian politics that had been presaged during the Khatami administration. With the inauguration of a new Usulgara government sympathetic to the Corps, the Sepah gained access to corridors of power and hence gained the tangible political authority to exclude rival forces in the Iranian state and its society. Encouraged by its mounting political muscle, the Sepah helped to securitise the political space in Iran's electoral autocracy, hence reducing the republic to the shrinking Usulgarayan factions and their hardline Conservative counterparts. The impetus for the Sepah's efforts in preparing the political field for the Usulgarayan's monopoly occurred a few months prior to the parliamentary elections of 2008 with the appointment of Brigadier General Ali Reza Afshar as Deputy Minister of the Interior for Political Affairs and Election Office. This appointment was illustrative of a scheme aimed at massive disqualification of reformist and moderate candidates, this time by the Ministry of the Interior. In contrast to the Khatami era, the Ministry was now held by an 'Usulgara government', with the former Commander of the Sepah in charge of vetting the elections. As will be shown, the placement of a Sepah Commander in such an important Ministry created a politically-charged vetting mechanism which was hostile to the reformists' success (see details in Chapter 4).

Besides capturing governmental outlets, the Sepah aided in the securitisation of electoral politics at the official level. This was achieved through the efforts of its members, notably the Basij, in active campaigning and mobilisation of voters together with the alleged manipulation of results in order to secure the Usulgarayan's victory. The first instance of electoral manipulation by the Sepah surfaced as early as the 2005 presidential elections, wherein the elements of the Sepah and the Basij were believed to play a critical role in maximising Ahmadinejad's votes in the first round. It must be noted that the support given to Ahmadinejad by these elements increased following a secret meeting with the Supreme Leader. During the meeting, the Supreme Leader is reported to have changed his preference from Qalibaf, another revolutionary Sepah candidate, to Ahmadinejad, given the latter's popularity amongst the religious Conservative grassroots forces drawn from the ranks of the Basij (Ansari, 2007, p. 36; Naji 2007, p. 76-77). The intervention of the Sepah and the Basij in that election came further to the fore following the reformist candidates' complaints about the widespread manipulation of the ballot box by the Basij, stating that 'we cannot have the Basij funded by taxpayers involved in the support of a

particular candidate' (Naji, 2007, p. 77). By the parliamentary elections of 2008 the Sepah's intervention had reached a peak, as the leaders of the Sepah and the Basij went public in encouraging its members' political activism in support of the Usulgarayan already in the legislature (for details see Chapter 4). This, along with a negative public campaign by Sepah propaganda outlets, 'created a bias against the Reformist candidates' (Sanandaji, 2009, p.627). It was against the backdrop of this context that these candidates repeatedly criticised the Sepah and the Basij for violating the decree of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, which banned the involvement of the Armed Forces in electoral competition (for details see Chapter 4).

Table 3.4 The Sepah Veterans and Affiliates in the IRI Governments (1989-2012)

Government	Number of Cabinet posts given to former Sepah members (out of 21)	Ministries
Fifth (1989-1993)	4	Telephone and Telegraph (Mohammad Qarazi), Labour (Abolqassem Sarhadizadeh), Construction Jahad (Qolam Reza Foruzesh), Ministry of Culture (Ali Larijani from 1991-1993)
Sixth (1993-1997)	4	Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (Mohammad Forouzandeh), Ministry of the Interior (Ali Mohammad Besharati), Ministry of Construction Jahad (Qolam Reza Forouzesh), Ministry of Telephone and Telegraph (Mohammad Qarazi)
Seventh (1997-2001)	2	Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (Ali Shamkhani), Ministry of Transportation (Rahman Dadman),
Eighth (2001-2005)	1	Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (Shamkhani)
Ninth (2005-2009)	9	Ministry of Economy (Davoud Danesh Ja'fari), Ministry of Energy (Parviz Fattah), Ministry of Culture (Mohammad Hussein Safar Harandi), Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (Mostafa Mohammad Najar), Ministry of Labour (Mohammad Jahromi), Ministry of Trade (Masoud Mirkazemi), Ministry of Industry and Mines (Ali Reza Tahmasebi), Ministry of the Interior (Ali Kordan September 2008-November 2008; Sadegh Mahsouli November 2008-September 2009)

Tenth (2009-2013)	6	Ministry of Intelligence (Heidar Moslehi), Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (Ahmad Vahidi), Ministry of the Interior (Mohammad Najar), Ministry of Oil (Masoud Mir Kazemi 2009-2011; Rostam Qassemi 2011-2013); Ministry of Industry (Ali Akbar Mehrabian); Ministry of Energy (Majid Namjou)

Source: Katzman, 1993, p. 124; Aftabnews 2005b; *Hamshahri*, various years; Ministry of Road and Urban Development, 2010.

Yet again, the Sepah demonstrated its political engagement in the presidential election of 2009. Indeed, prior to the day of the election, the Sepah's political office had warned that a velvet revolution was underway and that the Sepah would carry out forceful action to foil the forthcoming post-election conspiracy that aimed to topple the Islamic Republic. Following the disputed elections of 2009, the Sepah and the Basij became active in suppressing the massive protests that gave rise to the Green Movement. The protests were spearheaded by supporters of the Reformist candidates, former Prime Minister Mir-Hussein Musavii and Mehdi Karrubi, in response to the Ministry of Interior's declaration of Ahmadinejad's landslide victory within a few hours after the closure of the polls on June 12, 2009. The hasty announcement of Ahmadinejad's landslide and the small percentage of votes declared for other contenders, as well as the security environment that ensued soon after, provided enough reasons for the Reformists' supporters to question the official results, citing widescale fraud (see Ansari, 2010; Berman and Rentoul, 2009).

Through suppression of the massive protests, the Sepah emerged as a junior arbiter in the IRI's power struggles. Not only did it acquire additional political/security purviews at official levels in dealing with the protests, it also obtained a *de facto* political profile, in charge of determining which political factions deemed an existential threat to the maintenance of the establishment and the continuation of the revolution. The increasing role of the Sepah as an arbiter was particularly apparent in the context of the political contours of the IRI after 2009, when the deepening of the factionalism among the Usulgarayan was exposed. An illustration of this was the increasing fallout between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, which reached a peak after Ahmadinejad dismissed his Intelligence Minister, Heidar Moslehi, in April 2009. Moslehi, who was considered to be the ally of the Conservative establishment, was soon reinstated through the Supreme Leader's intervention, much to the dismay of Ahmadinejad. In this fallout the Sepah backed Khamenei, demonstrating its ability to unravel the emerging schism in the Conservative camp. As a consequence of proving its loyalty to the Supreme Leader, by identifying a new enemy in the context of the power struggle that engulfed the government, its Usulgara and Traditional Conservative opponents and the Supreme Leader, the Sepah's role as an arbiter further increased.

Table 3.5 Conservative Factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran 2005-2009

Factions	Traditional Conservative		Usulgarayan allied with Government before presidential elections of 2009			Usulgarayan Not allied with Government
Sub-factions	JMHEQ	JRM (Various Elements Opposing the government)	JME (Various elements)	JRM (Various Elements)	JAIE	Independent
Figures	Ahmad Jannati	Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri	Habibullah Askar Owladi	Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani	Gholam Ali Hadad Adel, Hossein Safar Harandi	Ali Motahari Ahmad Tavakoli
Power Base	Society of Islamic Association of Guilds and Bazaars of Tehran		Society of Islamic Association of Guilds and Bazaars of Tehran, Members of Conservative Clergy in Council of Guardian and Judiciary		The Sepah, the Basij**,** the Revolutionary Foundations, the traditional Middle class, Urban poor	The Traditional Middle Class, Some members of Conservative clergy
Economic Position	Pre-capitalist Industrialisation		Pre-capitalist Industrialisation		Economic Populism and State Capitalism	Mixed Economy based on command economy and capitalism

Source: Buchta, 2000; Moslem 2002; IrandataPortal, 2012b.

Note: Based on Ideological factions within the Power Apparatus cited in Buchta, 2000, p. 14, with substantial updates JMHEQ stands for Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyah Qom (The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers); JMHEQ Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyah Qom (The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers); JRM stands for Jam'eh-ye Rouhaniyat-e Mobarez (The Society of Combatant Clergy); JME stand for Jam'iyat-e Mo'talefeh-ye Eslami (The Coalition of Islamic Society); JAIE stand for Jam'iat-e Abadgran-e Iran-e Eslami (The Developers of Islamic Iran).

Table 3.6 Reformist Political Factions in the Islamic Republic of Iran 2005-2009

Faction	Reformist				
Sub-faction	HEM	MRM	JMIE	KS	SMEE
Figures	Mehdi Karrubi	Mohammad Khatami, Musavii Khoi'niha	Mohsen Mirdamadi, Mostafa Tajzadeh	Mohammad Atrifar, Hedayat Aqaei	Behzad Nabavi, Mohsen Armin, Mohammad Salamati
Power Base	Middle Class, Traditional Middle Class, Youths, Students, Women activists, Various Provinces, Muslim Minorities				
Political Position	Supportive of the Mandate of the Jurist within the limits of the Iranian Constitution				
Pluralism?	Supportive				
Economic Position	Between Islamic Socialism and degree of capitalism				
Socio-cultural position	Relatively Liberal				

Source: IranDataPortal, 2012b.

Note: Based on ideological factions within the Power Apparatus cited in Buchta, 2000, p. 14 with substantial updates. HEM stand for Hizb-e e'temad-e Melli (National Trust Party); MRM stands for Majma'e Rouhaniyun-e Mobarez (Majma'-e Rouhaniyun-e Mobarez) ; JMIE stands for Jebhe-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami (Islamic Participation party of Iran; KS stands for Kargozaran-e Sazandegi(the Servers of Constructiveness); SMEE stands for Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami (the Organisation of Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution).

3.4.4.1 The Securitisation of Iran's Foreign Policy: External Security Threats and Foreign Policy-Making

Another aspect of the Sepah's emergence as a leading political force was its rising portfolio in Iran's foreign policy-making, notably its regional security and military/security dimensions. This change in foreign policy, as will be argued in Chapter 6, has been driven by the regime's perception of the looming threat of the US, as well as a shift in the domestic balance of power since 2005 towards the security elite affiliated with the Sepah and other security services. Faced with a disgruntled public at home and increasing pressure abroad over Iran's nuclear programme, Iran's Supreme Leader considered the Usulgarayan affiliated with the Sepah more capable of managing the crisis than the previous diplomatic teams under Khatami (1997-2005) and Rafsanjani (1989-1997) (Alfoneh, 2007). These security elite eschewed the previous administrations' accommodationist approach to foreign policy and introduced more highhanded and confrontational means to deal with perceived existential threats.

This hardline agenda, as discussed, found expression in the Usulgarayan candidates' debates during the presidential election of 2005. Nonetheless, it came to inform Iran's foreign policy-making with the election of Ahmadinejad. Once in office, Ahmadinejad's Usulgara government departed from diplomacy and embarked on an uncompromising and aggressive nuclear policy based on its security priorities. While the decision to terminate uranium enrichment suspension was reached in the final days of Khatami's government, it was under Ahmadinejad's government that Iran's nuclear programme gathered tremendous speed in defiance of western pressures. In keeping with this new shift in Iran's nuclear policy, Ahmadinejad replaced most of Iran's negotiation team. Unlike Rowhani's team, the new team had no qualms about Iran's referral to the UN Security Council (Patrikarkos, 2013, p. 221), the continuation of which could be used as a bargaining chip in Iran's negotiations with the west. While claiming that its nuclear programme was designed for civilian purposes, Iran's reluctance to succumb to international pressures provided it with a window of opportunity to accelerate its fuel enrichment and otherwise develop the technology for building a nuclear bomb, if not the bomb itself (Millani, 2009, p. 51). Although it was difficult to assess Iran's intentions, Ahmadinejad's determination to advance with the continuation of uranium enrichment appeared to be in line with Tehran's deterrent strategy in the case of a

US military attack. Ahmadinejad hinted at this when mocking what the EU3 had offered in 2005 in exchange for Iran's cessation of its nuclear activities:

> You [Iran] should give up enrichment and any fuel
> production forever and in return we [the west] will send you
> our people to train you on using the internet, and will let
> you trade with us, and if a nuclear country attacks you, we
> will let you complain to the Security Council (Thaler, *et al*.,
> 2010, p. 95).

This preference for security over diplomacy was conducive to the Sepah's mounting political profile and helped strengthen its hand in Iran's foreign policy and security policy, notably its security/defence calculations (Thaler *et al*., 2010, p. 86). The Sepah had already held responsibility for the security of Iran's nuclear program and had been engaged in nuclear research and proliferation; now, with its mounting political profile, the Sepah's influence over Iran's nuclear policy was further secured. During Ahmadinejad's presidency, the Sepah expanded its strong presence in the Supreme National Security Council and its veterans began to dominate the parliamentary commission on National Security (for more details see Chapter 6). This of course made the Sepah a political force whose vested interests coincided with the continuation of the country's nuclear programme. The Sepah's entry into the above policy-making bodies is likely to have provided it with political capital and pool of assets to procure Iran's strategic weapons and missiles. The build-up of such an unconventional arsenal was meant to compensate for Iran's weak conventional military equipment and provide the Sepah with the technological capability to deter the US security-military threat.

In addition to its strong presence in important foreign policy bodies (particularly since the presidency of Ahmadinejad), the Sepah was prized by Khamenei for its far-reaching purview over the defence and security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2007, Khamenei approved an extensive overhaul of the Sepah's internal structure in order to adjust to new external challenges and improve its potentials. To this end, Khamenei appointed Mohammad Ali Ja'fari as the new Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah in charge of the Corps' restructuring. The appointment of Ja'fari, who had impressive credentials as the former Commander of

Tehran's garrison and a remarkable war service record, indicated the regime's increasing reliance on mobilisation and deployment of Sepah forces to deal with perceived security threats, both internal and external. Once Ja'fari was appointed, he announced wholesale structural changes aimed at enhancing the deterrent and retaliatory capabilities of the Sepah forces against the military threat posed by the US. In addition, these structural changes were meant to enhance the Sepah's readiness in dealing with internal threats. Among these changes were the decentralisation of the Sepah's command and control. In accordance with this move towards decentralisation, Basij ground forces were integrated with the new Sepah brigades in all 31 provinces, with the Basij units of each province reporting to the Sepah provincial brigades.

Yet the Sepah's position on foreign policy was further expanded, partly owing to the geopolitical transformation following the US military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and partly due to the Usulgarayan's rise to the power and their approach to the Middle East. No doubt, the removal of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan and the Ba'ath regime in Iraq shifted the regional balance of power in favour of Iran, activating the Sepah's role in expanding Iran's foot-hold, if not outright exporting its revolution. After the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and immediately following its occupation of Iraq in 2003, the Sepah's network together with its overseas unit, the Qods force, had entrenched their security presence in Iraq and Afghanistan by cultivating the ethnic and religious ties the IRI had built there over the years. It must be noted that while the Qods force had established its intelligence network in Iraq prior to 2005, it was only after Ahmadinejad's election that its full range of security and political activities were operationalised. No doubt the rise of Ahmadinejad paved the way for a new approach to Iran's foreign policy based on opposition to US hegemony in the region. Insofar as this new approach emphasised the use of extraordinary means against the increasing threat posed by the US military stationed in Iran's neighbours, it gave the Qods force a proactive role in implementing Iran's regional policy. Beyond being an instrument of policy-making, the Qods force appeared to have acquired a leading profile in determining Iran's foreign policy in Iraq. After 2005, the Commander of the Qods force, Qassem Suleimani, seemed to have been entrusted with sweeping power in behind-the-scene political manoeuvres, helping to secure the reign of a Shi'a-dominated government favourable to Iran's sphere of influence and its political and economic interests. At

the same time, in order to deflect the military threat posed by the US and undermine its regional hegemony, the Qods force aimed to keep Washington entrapped in its confrontation with the Iraqi insurgents. According to US intelligence, the Qods force supplied various Shiite militias, including the Mahdi army and SCIR's Badr force, with weapons and explosives, which were then used against the US forces. The covert military activities of the Qods force and its engagement in Iraq's political and economic affairs, along with other Iranian networks, led to concern in the Bush administration over Iran's ambition. As the US alleged that Iran was supporting Iraqi rebels in 2006, Washington's approach to the Qods force became increasingly aggressive. For the US, which was already overwhelmed by the mismanagement of post-Saddam Iraq, the rise of Iranian power in the region was alarming and needed to be countered by the use of force if necessary. It was in the context of this regional competition that a new escalation of tensions in Iran-US relations was set in motion, exacerbating the low-level confrontation between the US forces and the Qods force in Iraq (see Chapter 6).

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the Sepah's leading role in politics, the economy and foreign policy. After looking at the Sepah's constitutional role and its own legal statutes, the role of the Sepah in IRI was examined in the two distinct but related contexts within which its political involvement and economic functions are embedded: social and political. Beginning with the social context, the chapter examined the unique position of the Sepah in Iran's post-revolutionary social structure. In this regard, it explored the Sepah's link with the poorer segments of society. This link, as the chapter showed, was bound by the Corps' various vehicles of ideological mobilisation and indoctrination, together with its peculiar system of distribution of benefits amongst its social constituents and members. The chapter also looked at the Corps' unique economic position, manifested in its involvement in the national economy and its access to the state's distribution of rent. This involvement arose particularly since the 2005 election of Ahmadinejad and the subsequent increasing political influence of the Sepah in his new government. Through its engagement in economic ventures, the Sepah has cultivated a network of connected state capitalists while co-opting constituents amongst the lower strata of Iranian society through provisions of financial security. The chapter then moved to the political context of

the Sepah's links and interactions with factional power struggles, with an emphasis on post-Khomeini Iran in particular. This period first began with the presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997), during which the Sepah was politicised as the auxiliary base of the Traditional Conservative faction to undermine the rather moderate domestic and foreign policy of Rafsanjani. It was during Khatami's presidency that the Sepah's increasing politicisation unfolded, first by intimidation and repression of reformist politicians and activists and then by the rise to power of Sepah veterans in the Majles. As shown in this chapter, the position of these Sepah veterans, who filled the Neo-Conservative faction, was strengthened by the post-September 11th regional atmosphere and the IRI's sense of vulnerability in the wake of the discovery of Iran's nuclear programme in 2003 and the US military threat in the aftermath of the Iraq war in the same year. At a discursive level, the Neo-Conservative factions and figures discarded Khatami's policy of *detente* and diplomacy and argued for a more security-driven approach in Iran's foreign policy, in consideration of its regional influence and the imperative of deterrence against the perceived threat of a US military strike. With the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Neo-Conservative consolidation of power was complete. Reinvigorated by the Neo-Conservatives' capture of the executive and legislature, and with the blessing of Iran's Supreme Leader, the Sepah became a leading political force with a growing edge in IRI power politics and its foreign policy. With the discourse on securitisation being translated into practices of domestic and foreign policy, the Sepah's importance as the manager of internal crises and external threats peaked. The Sepah became a principal player in the regime's confrontational posture towards the west while wielding increasing political power in Iran's domestic scene by penetrating the state. This process occurred in tandem with the Sepah's growing political and security levers to exclude the reformist factions that it deemed an existential threat to Iran's regime and enemy's fifth column.

Part II- The Sepah's Penetration of the Islamic State

4 The Sepah in Politics: From Auxiliary Guardian to Garrison State (1979-2013)

It is not permissible for the Sepah to enter into political feuds, one supporting one group and the other supporting another. What is happening in the Majles must be none of your concern. I have been informed that there is a dispute amongst the Sepah over the elections. The elections have their suitable place and process. What is it to do with the Sepah other than creating divisions amongst its ranks? This is not permissible for the Sepah and is not permissible for Artesh. This prevents the Sepah and Artesh from carrying out their duties and commitments.

(Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, 1988)

In the current political climate, in which both foreign pressures and internal forces were trying to prevent us from forming a Usulgara government (*Dowlat-e Usulgara*), we had to operate with complexity. Usulgarayan forces, thanks to God, won the election, thanks to their smart and manifold plan and through the massive participation of the Basij.

(Brigadier General Mohammad Baqir Zolqar, 2005)

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Sepah is an institution with military, political, ideological, and not least, economic institution. The multidimensional nature of the Sepah has had implications on state-Sepah relations and the internal politics of post-revolutionary Iran. On the one hand, the state elite has sought to keep the Sepah's political activities in check by introducing modern military equipment and a classical ranking system, and by establishing military procedures for recruitments and training. On the other hand, they were reluctant to stymie its political-ideological missions due to their increasing reliance on the Sepah as the regime's base of support and its defender behind the scenes. In more recent years, the Sepah has emerged as a dominant political force in IRI power politics. This is despite Ayatollah Khomeini's repeated statements and written decelerations – in the first decade of the revolution – that banned the armed forces, including the Sepah, from entering into the power struggle that engulfs Iran's ideological factions.

This chapter analyses the role of the Sepah in IRI politics. To this end, the chapter provides an overview of, and context for, the Sepah's involvement in politics from the revolutionary period to the Khatami administration. It then looks at the Sepah's post-2005 ascendency to the status of a predominant political stakeholder and arbiter in a factional power struggle. In contrast to the pre-2005 era, in which the Sepah's political activities were limited to a behind-the-scenes 'regime maintenance' role, since the rise of Ahmadinejad the Sepah has undertaken assertive formal and informal roles in IRI politics through its political positioning towards various factions. It has primarily accomplished this through the increasing transfer of its associates and members to civilian institutions of the state such as the Majles, the presidency, the cabinet, and city municipality and provincial governmental posts. By examining the trajectory of the Sepah in IRI politics, this chapter aims to address the following questions: What has been the impact of the Sepah on the political contours of the Islamic Republic? What is the relationship between the professionalisation and politicisation of the Sepah and the IRI? Why did the professionalisation of the Sepah not yield to its depoliticisation? How has the relationship between the Sepah and the clerical elite unfolded over the past thirty years? What has been the nature of the change in the Sepah's role in politics? To deal with these questions, the chapter looks at the nature of state-Sepah relations in terms of the functions of the Sepah, its various channels of civilian control and policies regarding the politicisation, depoliticisation and professionalisation of the Sepah during the war and following the Khomeini era. Furthermore, it looks at the Sepah's interactions with the political dynamics of post-revolutionary Iran. This includes the Sepah's direct and indirect interactions with the factional struggle for power and, by extension, the changing configuration of power in post-revolutionary Iran.

4.2 The Birth of the Sepah

The near collapse of Pahlavi state institutions in 1979 culminated in armed clashes between the revolutionary militias and the remnants of the Shah's military and security apparatus. Upon the Imperial army's declaration of neutrality on the eve of a revolutionary victory, a state of anarchy prevailed as garrisons and military installations were taken over by revolutionary militias, paving the way for the circulation of weapons amongst the population. The unfolding chaos confronted the revolutionary elite with the daunting task of restoring order, but more importantly

with the need for consolidation of power. The new elite neither trusted their rival leftist militias nor had confidence in the paralysed Artesh, which they subjected to purges and Islamisation. It is against this backdrop that the need for the establishment of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps came into being.

Though the decision behind the establishment of the Sepah was taken by Khomeini's appointed Revolutionary Council (the extra-governmental body in charge of running the affairs of the country before the formation of the Majles) and the Provisional Government (PG), led by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, the Sepah eventually became the base of the Council, helping to consolidate power against its counterparts in the PG as well as the Leftist Secularist factions that had become emboldened in the armed clashes of the revolution's heyday. The first official announcement concerning the establishment of the Sepah was made in February 1979 by the PG's spokesman, Abbas Amir Entezam. Speaking in an interview, Amir Entezam announced that 'in accordance with government decision, Guardian of Revolutionary Corps will be formed' and that 'the regulations concerning the formation of this Corps have already been prepared' (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979a; Ostovar, 2009, p. 53). Initially authority over the Sepah was designated to the PG. Governmental control of the Sepah meant that it had to be brought alongside other armed forces and function as a national defence force. This also meant the diminution of its domestic security function, as the PG decided that the Sepah should undergo training before they could start collecting weapons and dislodging garrisons (Ostovar, 2009, p.55).

The plan to establish the Sepah under governmental authority was announced in view of the fact that individual Sepah units had already begun operating in cities and had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities (Ostovar, 2009, p. 55). Similarly to their precursor, the revolutionary committees (*Komiteha-ye Enqelab*), these operations were often exercised outside legal jurisdiction (Bazargan, 1983, p.167). Prime Minister Bazargan on several occasions complained about the independent activities of the bands of committees and the Sepah, as well as their disregard for the law (Bazargan, 1983, p.167). In the view of Bazargan, the Sepah (along with the committees and the revolutionary court) was part and parcel of the mushrooming power centres bypassing the central authority (Bazargan, 1983, p. 166).

The existence of centres of power was made evident by the emergence of parallel militias. Other than the original founders of the Sepah (such as Mohsen

Rafiqdust, Ali Mohammad Besharati, Ali Danesh Monfared and Asqar Sabaqian), there were hosts of militias, each operating on behalf of their clerical patrons (see Rafiqdust, 2004, p. 175). These militias included the forces under the command of Abbas Zamani and under the patronage of Ayatollah Musavi Ardebili; the Universities' Militia under the command of Mohammad Montazeri and supported by Ayatollah Beheshti; and finally the amorphous militias of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organisation (not to be mistaken for the Islamic-Marxist armed group, Iran's People Mojahedin) commanded by Mohammad Boroujerdi and supported by Morteza Motahari. Upon the intervention of the Revolutionary Council, it was decided these militias should be integrated into the Sepah (Rafiqdust, 2004, p. 175).

The integration of the aforementioned militias into the Sepah dramatically increased the already existing frictions between the Corps and the PG. While the militant figures in the Sepah, led by Mohammad Montazeri, favoured the export of the revolution, the elements in the PG believed in strict discipline in the Sepah and disapproved of the Sepah's intervention abroad (*Payame Enqelab*, 1982a, p. 10). The situation was compounded by the Sepah's complaints about the PG's reluctance to provide the Corps with ammunition and funds so that it could perform to its best capacity (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979j; Rafiqdust, 2004, p. 179-182). Differences also appeared regarding the place of the Artesh in the new regime. Arguing that the Artesh was not purely revolutionary because of its suspicious royalist elements and association with the Pahlavi regime, the Sepah boasted of its importance as the only revolutionary organisation that could prevent a potential coup (*Daily Report Middle East,* 1979j).

In light of mounting disputes, a coalition made up of the 12 founders of the Sepah (led by Rafiqdust) and representatives of the merged militias asked Khomeini to approve the formation of the Sepah under the authority of the Revolutionary Council. Khomeini, who in the words of his son Ahmad was concerned that the Sepah might weaken in a volatile revolutionary environment, approved the request (*Payame Enqelab*,1982a, p. 11), and thereby announced the formal creation of the Sepah on the 5 May 1979 under the Revolutionary Council (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979b). To this end, Khomeini appointed the revolutionary clerical figure Ayatollah Lahouti as the first civilian supervisor of the Sepah's political activities. Simultaneously, the Sepah's Command Council (*Showra-ye Farmandehi-ye Sepah*)

was formed to organise and coordinate the activities of the Corps (see FarsNews, 2008). The Command Council was a seven–member body comprising the Commander of the Sepah and the Heads of its six bureaucratic divisions. Soon after its formation under the Revolutionary Council, the Sepah became an important auxiliary structure for the new regime against internal and external challenges. These included the rebellions of the Kurds in northwest Iran and the Arabs in the southwest province of Khuzestan. Moreover, the Sepah appeared to be capable of reining in the fundamentalists' internal challengers in the revolutionary coalition, which included religious secular forces and a host of leftist groups.

4.3 The Sepah during the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

4.3.1 The Sepah and the Consolidation of Khomeini's Regime

The Sepah proved instrumental in crushing the various ethnic uprisings that broke out across Iran soon after the revolution. Through its forceful campaigns (which caused the Sepah to suffer heavy losses of life), the Sepah gained the confidence of the political elite as the die-hard foot soldiers of the new regime. Moreover, it was during the course of crushing these uprisings that the Sepah became aware it needed professional training, as well as cooperation with the Artesh (Zabih, 1988, p. 211). The net result of these campaigns added a military dimension to the Sepah's remit that was mainly involved in restoring order to the cities by tackling counter-revolutionaries. The Sepah's operations were also instilled with a political dimension equal to its military one, as the Sepah was dispatched to troubled areas alongside the revolutionary committees to augment central authority (Beck, 1983, p. 118).

One of the first ethnic uprisings took place in oil-rich Khuzestan when armed Sunni Arabs, who were suspected of being provoked by Iran's neighbour Iraq, rebelled (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979f2). Upon the outbreak of the rebellion in the Khuzestan city of Abadan, the Sepah was active in the arrests of counter-revolutionaries and the confiscation of weapons (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979e). Following this act of sabotage in the province of Khuzestan, the Sepah was instructed by the Governor, Admiral Ahmad Madani, to be vigilant and forceful when confronted with suspicious individuals in oil and gas installations (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979f1).

The Sepah actively dealt with other simultaneous uprisings that broke out in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan in the northwest of Iran. These uprisings took place in the

city of Marivan, and were led by the Revolutionary Kurdish Workers Movement and the Movement for the Defence of Liberty and Revolution of Kurdistan (*Daily Report MiddleEast*, 1979f3). In other Kurdish cities, such as Sardasht, Mahabad and Sanandaj, where the Kurdish Democratic Party dominated and had a large following, there was also widespread unrest (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979d). In these areas, the Sepah proved to be an important source of auxiliary support to the local gendarmeries and police posts, which were ill-prepared or unwilling to resist the rebels (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979g). In tandem with the Artesh's onslaught on Paveh (led by the Minister of Defence Mostafa Chamran) the Sepah became embroiled in protracted and violent armed clashes with the Kurdish Democratic Party in Kurdish cities, including Kamyaran, Ravansar, Javanrud, Paveh, Marivan, Nosoud, Sanandaj, Kerend, Qasr-e Shirin and Sarpol-e Zahab (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979h; 1979i).

Through these coercive campaigns, the Sepah learnt that it was in need of coordinated tactics in confronting the armed rebels. One illustrative case in point is the establishment of Hamzeh Headquarters in Kurdestan, designed for undertaking concerted offensives on counter-revolutionary positions (*Payame Enqelab*, 1983a, pp. 46-49). The Headquarters also had a political/security dimension, as it aimed to co-opt and train the local population in countering the Kurdish Democratic Party and its radical armed allies (*Payame Enqelab*, 1983a, p. 78). While taking control of the troubled areas, the Sepah developed the power of the local Sepah units, committees and revolutionary courts, enabling them to rein in the armed dissidents and their suspected collaborators. At the same time, the Sepah was bent on creating local Basij units for military training and the ideological and political indoctrination of the provinces. In the once troubled region of Khorasan, the Sepah created tribal Basij units to help secure the border from its enemies' infiltration (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984f, p.33-34). These units were also considered useful in facilitating the entry of Iranian forces into Iraqi territory during military operations (Ibid, p. 35).

In addition to fighting against ethnic dissidents across the country, the Sepah was instrumental in Khomeini's endeavours to monopolise power and thereby enhanced its institutional autonomy and political-ideological missions. The Sepah's efforts to this end had already begun by successfully lobbying for the transfer of its supervision to the Revolutionary Council. Still, the Sepah did its best to shun the remnants of governmental control to which it was subjected at both consultation and

financial levels. The Sepah did this by interpreting the law at its discretion. In the words of the Sepah's spokesman: 'The Corps is supervised by the Revolutionary Council and this is explicit order of the Imam but we consult with the government in all areas in the sense that we assist the government if necessary' (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1979c). He went on to say that:

> The Sepah is mainly active in the military field, but they are expanding on the political and ideological field too. The revolution is safeguarded on all levels, and God willing, we want to expand our programmes so that we can supervise all the works that are being carried out in the Islamic society (Ibid, 1979c).

In view of its autonomy, the Sepah forced its civilian representative, Ayatollah Lahouti, to resign in the autumn of 1979. Lahouti's resignation from the post came in the wake of his association with the PG and fierce disagreement with the newly-established Sepah Command Council. To the displeasure of Lahouti, the affairs of the Corps were run by a single faction of the Sepah led by the SMEE (Organisation of Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution) without due regard for his authority (*Keyhan*, 1979).

The ousting of Lahouti was illustrative of the Sepah's efforts to make defunct various factions affiliated with the PG, whose chief figures had already been toppled by the takeover of the American Embassy in November 1979. Indeed, the Sepah did not only refrain from preventing the takeover of the embassy, but also praised it as a second revolution for striking a severe blow to the liberals who were actively seeking diplomatic relations with the US (*Payame Enqelab* 1982f, pp. 12-17). Moreover, while the takeover was instigated by the radical students known collectively as the pro-Imam line, the evidence shows that the takeover was planned well in advance by the hardline clerics, the students and at least one top official in the Sepah (Christian Science Monitor December 31, 1980; cited in Katzman 1992, p. 36). The relationship between the Sepah and the students is further proven by the fact that after a failed US rescue mission in April 1980, the hostages were moved to Sepah installations around the country (Ibid 1992, p. 36).

With the election of Banisadr, who presided over the first IRI government after the drafting of the Constitution, the Sepah's politicisation reached a new phase.

Though the Corps sponsored his presidency, albeit under its preferred Commander Abbas Duzduzani, from the outset it viewed Banisadr as an outsider who sought to weaken and restrict its independence and growth (see the Sepah's Announcement to President Banisadr in *Payame Enqelab*, 1980a, p. 35). Like his predecessor, Banisadr wished to bring the Sepah under his control. To this end, he sought to exert his leverage over the Sepah by controlling its command. This was made possible via his appointment by Khomeini to the position of Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Having been granted the appointment power and official capacity to head the armed forces, Banisadr strictly disapproved of the Sepah's partisan activities and proclaimed the Corps' independence before the law. On several occasions, he criticised the Sepah's entry into factional quarrels, insisting on the importance of the Sepah's obedience to his authority. This was explicit in his 1980 speech to the Sepah's representatives, wherein he stated that:

> Your main duty is to prevent conspiracies of the two groups [Americans and Russians]. Your involvement in low politics would leave you with supporters and opponents ... and would reduce your weight [in] the eyes of the public (*Payame Enqelab*, 1980b, p. 41).

He added that, 'According to the principle of Islam, the organisation must accept its Commander... as shown in the Islamic history, if an individual disobeys his Commander, he will be killed promptly' (Ibid, p 41). In spite of the president's repeated insistence on the importance of his command, the Sepah considered itself to be loyal only to Khomeini and was reluctant to acquiesce to civil authority. The Corps' Leaders undermined Banisadr's efforts at implementing top-down control by forcing the resignation of his appointed Commanders, first Abbas Zamani and then Kazem Bojnourdi. Despite the revolutionary credentials of the two men, they fell foul of the Sepah because of their patronage with the president.

The conflict between the Sepah and Banisadr reached its peak following the rivalry between the secular forces led by Banisadr and the clerical forces in the Islamic Republic who had a large following among the Sepah's Leaders and various revolutionary organisations. One of the first disputes between Banisadr and the Islamic Republic Party majority in the Majles took place in the wake of the appointment of the prime minister and the cabinet. After three months of wrangling

with the Majles, Banisadr was forced to name the Islamic Republican Party's ally, Mohammad Ali Rajaei, as Prime Minister. The differences between him and Rajaei over how to conduct the war brought the Sepah and the Artesh to the centre of the conflict. While Banisadr argued for the reinstatement of purged officers and the delegation of the conduct of war to the Artesh, the IRP emphasised the importance of ideological purity and demanded that the task of war should be entrusted to the Sepah (Milani, 1994, p. 180). The Sepah itself accused the president of preventing the supply of much-needed arms and ammunitions to the Corps and inciting rivalry between the Sepah and the Artesh (see Khabaronline, 2011). Banisadr's engagement with forces at the front, moreover, was perceived by the clerical forces as an attempt to prop up the Artesh as a power base from which he could defeat them (Zabih, 1988, p. 16).

Banisadr's alliance with the leftist faction the People's Mojahedin further escalated the political crisis and brought the Sepah into this political infighting to gain a monopoly on power on behalf of the IRP (see Abrahamian, 1989, pp. 206-207). This chain of events culminated in Khomeini's dismissal of Banisadr from the post of Commander-in-Chief, paving the way for a mass demonstration organised by the People's Mojahedin and pro-Banisadr forces in support of the ousted president on 20 June 1981 (see Abrahamian, 1989, pp. 218-219). The regime's reaction to the demonstration was ruthless. To deal with the demonstrations, Sepah and Hezbollah vigilantes were dispatched, resulting in the killing of over a hundred people and the arrests of many others. Within the two weeks following the march of 20 June, a state-controlled radio broadcast reported the summary trial and execution of another 150 (Zabih, 1982, p. 133). An intense reign of terror followed, including the bombing of the IRP headquarters in June 1981 and the bombing of the prime minister's office in August of that year. In response to the bombings, which appeared to have been planted by the People's Mojahedin, the regime stepped up its revenge on its armed opponents and their associates. To this end, the Council of Supreme Justice urged all court officials to speed up the executions of traitors to Islam, after a rapid review of their cases (Zabih, 1982, p. 149). Mohammad Gilani, a cleric and the Chief of Tehran's Revolutionary Court, went even further by announcing that, 'Islam does not allow wounded rebels to be hospitalised. They should be finished off' (Bakhash, 1985, p. 221). It was through such sanctions that the Sepah was brought to urban centres to violently suppress the Mojahedin followers and other Secular Leftist

factions, as well as the associates of Banisadr. With the ousting of Banisadr and the remnants of leftists, as well as liberal factions, the Sepah helped to install the clerical hegemony to which it triumphantly refers as the third revolution. The only potential opponent of the regime was the Leninist-Marxist Tudeh party, which was crushed by the Sepah in the spring of 1983.

4.3.2 The Emphasis on Warfare and Restraints on the Sepah's Political Activities (1981-1988)

With the ousting of Banisadr and the various secular oppositions, the Sepah's internal security missions were reduced and it was reassigned to military functions. To this end, the regime enacted measures aimed at facilitating the Sepah's cooperation with the Artesh in military operations. This was made difficult during Banisadr's presidency due to the rift between Banisadr and the clergy over the way the war was conducted, the competition for heavy arms between the Sepah and the Artesh, and the clerics' fear of loss of political leverage should Banisadr be victorious at the front. It was due to this apprehension that clerics of the IRI accused Banisadr of having Bonapartist tendencies in seeking to use the Artesh for political ends. With the removal of Banisadr, the war was no longer the continuation of domestic politics at home but the centrepiece of domestic politics itself (Chubin and Tripp, 1988, p. 37). With the politics of war no longer driven by factional infighting, the regime's policy shifted to the prerogative of defence and mobilisation for war. The clerics' focus on the necessity of the war required the closer cooperation of the Sepah and the Artesh, the net result of which led to the lifting of the siege of Abadan and the recapturing of Khoramshahr in May 1982 (see Hickman, 1982, pp.26-27; Schahgaldian, 1987, p. 53).

The coordination of the Sepah and the Artesh, however, did not mean that the two armed forces were regarded equally by the clerical elite. Neither did it signal the end of the rivalry between the two armed forces. While the armed forces' territorial breakthrough was a testament to the capacity of both the Artesh and the Sepah to execute joint military operations, it was the latter that seemed to have an upper hand in the critical issue of military offensives, at least until 1985 (Zabih, 1988, p.175). As one example, while the clerics saw the usefulness of the Artesh at a time when the Sepah was still a nascent organisation, they were reluctant to place any trust in it or allow it to bear the brunt of military operations (Chubin & Tripp, 1988, p. 49). As another, many clerics who sat on the Security Defence Council (SDC) – the body in

charge of coordinating Iran's war strategy – tended to be pro-Sepah. Regardless of any adequate representation of the Artesh in the Security Defence Council, these clerics had often blunted the Artesh's power by siding with the Sepah on such 'critical issues as the timing and the objectives of the military offensive' (Zabih, 1988, p.175).

While the Sepah was improving its military performance through operational cooperation with the Artesh, it was careful to retain its institutional autonomy and growth (Ahram 2011, p. 113). By 1985 the Sepah had grown to a force of 250,000, from 25,000 in 1980 (Schahgaldian, 1987, p. 69). Moreover, the Sepah further expanded its military strength by establishing its own separate Ministry in 1982. The Ministry of the Sepah afforded the Corps with an institutional link to the government and Majles, which was necessary for the provision of financial and logistical needs and service personnel (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984b, p. 26-28). In addition, it proved to be a vital arm of the Sepah's special military industry, which was evident from the fact that its head, Mohsen Rafiqdust, had shown a strong commitment towards the expansion and self-sufficiency of the Sepah's military arsenal (*Payame Enqelab*, 1982b, p.56-59). In 1985, Rafiqdust announced plans for the development of Sepah air and naval units; in the following year Khomeini ordered the establishment of the Sepah's ground, air and naval forces, which further stepped up the plans for the Sepah to acquire its specialised units under its new general headquarters – something that drew it closer in structure to the Artesh. These developments illustrated the Sepah's awareness of the inadequacy of its former structural settings and its need to modernise its military capability in the face of war. Indeed, this sentiment was shared by the then-Deputy Commander of the Sepah, Ali Reza Afshar. In an interview with the Sepah's periodical, *Payame Enqelab*, Afshar stated that:

> We are using more than 90 percent of the Sepah's capacity to the service of war and the military missions of the Corps overshadow the rest of its responsibilities caus[ing] us to reorient towards a stronger military organisation. The previous organisational make-up was not conducive to the current missions. For example, there are no such things as divisions and brigade in the Sepah Statutes and instead there are internal organisational settings in [the] capital and other regions and bases across the country. This issue restricted the

Corps to carry out its military operations and thereby with the order of Imam [Khomeini], the Sepah's tripartite forces began to operate so we could use our capability and human capital with compatible organisational makeup. Because the Statute does not allow for combining the tripartite forces, it was decided that these forces [be] put under the control of the separate Sepah Headquarters, while the current forces in the cities and provinces devise their own terms and carry out their functions based on the statutes (*Payame Enqelab,* 1986c, p.20).

At the same time as the Sepah was reconstituting its bureaucratic and administrative make-up to reflect the war's objectives, the clerics were undertaking efforts to scrap a host of the Sepah's internal security functions while ensuring the Sepah's depoliticisation from internal politics. On one hand, with Banisadr and the secular forces eliminated, the need for the Sepah's involvement in a factional squabble was substantially reduced. On the other hand, the clerics (particularly Khomeini), while trusting of the Sepah, were worried about the implications of their excessive involvement in political-security affairs. In December 1982, Khomeini issued an eight-point declaration which aimed to curtail the worst excesses of the revolutionary organisations, in particular the Sepah (Bakhash, 1985, p. 228). As Bakhash notes, 'the declaration banned the Revolutionary Guards and committees from entering homes, making arrests, conducting searches and interrogations, and confiscating property without legal authorisation. It also banned the revolutionary bodies from tapping telephones, delving into the political and religious beliefs of job applicants, spying on Iranians in the privacy of their homes, and dismissing civil servants on flimsy evidence' (Ibid, 1985, p. 228). In addition to the partial reduction of its internal security functions, the clerics undermined the Sepah's monopoly on domestic intelligence matters by creating the Ministry of Intelligence (see Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami, 1983) To the chagrin of the Sepah, a number of its activities were transferred to the newly-established Ministry of Intelligence (Rafsanjani's memoirs, quoted in Jamejam, 2002).

With the role of the Sepah partially reduced in internal political and security missions, the regime stepped up more rigid efforts to strengthen the clerical control of the Corps. In 1982, less than a year after the removal of Banisadr, the clerics

began to subject the Sepah to stricter internal disciplinary measures (Shahgaldian, 1988, p. 72). To this end, the clerical supervision established in 1980 took on the ideological-political indoctrination of the Sepah, to lessen the possibility of division in the rank-and-file of the Corps and to force it to internalise the clerics' political ideas. To strengthen the ideological indoctrination of the Sepah, the newly-established Centre for Research and Political-Ideological Determination was assigned an Imam Representative, and faculty members from Qom Seminary were appointed to oversee the ideological and political training of the Corps' members (*Payame Enqelab*, 1983b, pp. 29-31). Its first director, *Hojjat al-Eslam* 'Araqi, summed up the two key objectives of the Centre: '1. Preparation and planning of courses and lessons suitable for ideological political training at different levels. 2) Training qualified trainers who can teach in the Corps in the acceptable way' (*Payame Enqelab*, 1983c, pp. 29-31).

Furthermore, to ensure cohesion among the Sepah ranks, the regime began a campaign of depoliticisation. This did not by any means equate to stripping the Sepah of its political status. Nonetheless, it marked an effort to reduce the Sepah's motivation to become involved in internal politics or support different factions. While the Sepah was expected to be committed to the necessary political beliefs and religious ideological principles, it was strictly forbidden from meddling in political competitions involving Iran's political factions. In 1981, Khomeini asked the Sepah to stay away from discussions over, and involvement in, the parliamentary elections (Khomeini, 1988, p. 12). In the following year, he reiterated his position on the Sepah's non-involvement in the factional power struggle. Prohibiting the armed forces' entry into politics in April 1982, he stated, 'If the Artesh and the Sepah or other armed forces enter into [the] party then it will be the end of the military. Don't enter into parties and groups' (Khomeini, 1982, pp. 322-323). In conjunction with Khomeini's edict, the system of clerical supervision put in place various measures to implement and internalise the Imam's message within the Corps. For these purposes, the Sepah's representatives held monthly seminars to remind themselves of the Imam's message, its supposed spiritual virtue in society and its holy mission at the front (*Payame Enqelab*, 1983d, pp. 28-32). In 1982, Khomeini's one-time co-representative to the Sepah, *Hojjat al-Eslam* Tahri Khoram Abadi, announced a plan for the appointment of representatives in 15 provinces (*Payame Enqelab*, 1982d, p. 53). He also introduced a list of measures that prohibited the Sepah from supporting

political groups and parties, with the exemption of its affiliates and non-active Basij members who were not actively employed or serving the Corps.

As if these measures were not enough to assuage the clerics' apprehension, the clerical representatives went further in their objectives by issuing various communiqués and acts to the Corps. For example, the communiqué issued by the short-tenured co-representatives to the Corps, *Hojjat al-Eslam* Mohammad Reza Faker, strictly advised the Sepah and the Basij at the front to refrain from taking a personal position against the political factions and political personalities in their written testaments. To Faker, this was advisable in light of the fact that some Sepah servicemen had expressed their personal opinions about internal conflicts and people with whom they disagreed. According to Faker, this must be avoided to prevent bickering and misunderstandings amongst the servicemen's friends after their martyrdom (*Payame Enqelab*, 1983a, p. 31).

By far the strictest attempt at civilian political control was carried out by Khoram Abadi and Faker's chief associate *Hojjat al-Eslam* Fazlullah Mahalati, who served as the Leader's Representative from 1980 until his death in an aeroplane crash in 1988. Mahalati expanded the system of clerical supervision by establishing more than 70 offices to operate as his subordinate assistant representatives across Iran and throughout the ranks of the Corps (Alfoneh, 2010a, p.3). To outrival his associate Taheri Khoram Abadi, who had created certain loopholes in the order forbidding the Corps' involvement in politics, Mahalati sought to de-emphasise the domestic political-security prerogative of the Sepah in favour of its military efforts in the Iraq war (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984c, p. 18-19; 1984g, p. 27). He went further than his colleagues on the issue of the Sepah's non-entry into politics. Not only was he watchful of the Sepah's involvement in factional politics, but he was also equally concerned about the Sepah's political positions on issues that involved Iran's factions (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984g, pp. 28-29). On top of this, to keep the Sepah focused on its combat duties and stymie its entry into civilian affairs, Mahalati aimed to strictly hinder the transfer of Sepah personnel to other civilian institutions. To this end, and with Khomeini's approval, he issued a communiqué that curbed the transfer of experienced and committed Sepah personnel to bureaucratic and administrative institutions (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984g, pp. 25-26). Clarifying his position on this issue, he stated that:

Brothers must know that their religious duty for now is to stay in the Corps and continue to carry out their responsibilities. This is particularly relevant to the committed personnel. Of course, in time, if it were to be necessary, the Commanders and authorities would approve their transfer to other organisations, but these cases have their own terms and conditions that must be observed (Ibid, p. 25).

Though Mahalati's effort was crucial in making the Sepah a more efficient and disciplined military institution during wartime, he was confronted with several challenges that impeded his authority, particularly during the first three years of his tenure (Alfoneh, 2010a, p.3). As one example, the Sepah bypassed Mahalati and liaised directly with Khomeini to settle internal disputes; as another, the system of clerical supervision suffered from factionalism on occasions due to ties of patronage between Sepah circles and various civilian factions. One illustrative case is Khomeini's appointment of Montazeri's supporter, Taheri Khoram Abadi, to serve as a co-representative alongside Mahalati. Khomeini made this choice to placate the clients of Ayatollah Montazeri, his one-time designated successor, in the Corps (Alfoneh, 2010a, p.3). Nonetheless, the system of supervision was rendered superfluous, as it was enmeshed in rivalry between the two representatives (Ibid, 2010, p. 3). This mounting rivalry led Khomeini to replace Taheiri Khoram Abadi with *Hojjat al-Eslam* Mohammad Reza Faker. This, however, did not end the problem of competition with Mahalati. Moreover, Faker's interference in the Sepah's operational matters resulted in the Corps' members threatening to resign. This incident led to the dismissal of Faker and the reinstatement of Khoram Abadi for a year (Ibid 2010a, p. 3).

The aforementioned instance of factionalism bears witness to the muddled system of clerical supervision which was enforced by pressures within the Corps' cliques. None of these cases, however, should be construed to dismiss the effectiveness of the clerical supervision in its entirety. That is, the Sepah's representatives, in spite of their competition, were concerned about the political control of the Sepah and as a result issued measures to extend clerical supremacy in the Corps.

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4.4 The Sepah in Post-Khomeini Iran

4.4.1 The Sepah's Intrusion into Factional Politics and its Resistance to Professionalisation

With the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the death of Khomeini, the Sepah went through a degree of military professionalisation, marked by the promotion of a centralised and technologically advanced armed forces. This attempt to professionalise the armed forces was rendered incomplete by Supreme Leader Khamenei and the Traditional Conservatives, who viewed the Sepah and the security forces as a potential base of support for entrenching their seat of power and counterbalancing their pragmatist rivals. The reliance on mobilisational and security forces was reinforced by the fact that Khamenei did not have the unwavering authority and charisma of his predecessor Khomeini. The vacuum left by the loss of Khomeini's commanding authority laid a fertile ground for elite factionalism amongst the erstwhile Khomeinist forces who were vying for power. While the Pragmatic Conservatives advocated the professionalisation of the Sepah and the revolutionary forces, their efforts were to an extent thwarted by the Traditional Conservative faction. In acknowledgement of their political importance in maintaining their predominance in the post-Khomeini *status quo*, the hardline-wing sought to prop up the Sepah's prerogatives and expand the venues of operation for these revolutionary auxiliary forces.

In line with the move towards the de-revolutionalisation of the state, the post-Khomeini republic under the presidency of Rafsanjani (1989-1997) undertook several steps in order to bring the organisational make-up of the Sepah and their operations in line with classical military parameters – i.e., entrusted with the primary task of military defence and deterrence. The need for the professionalisation of the Sepah had already been realised towards the end of the war. As Rafsanjani, Khomeini's acting Commander in Chief in 1988, pointed out:

> This is one of the responsibilities of the Sepah Commanders to think and change their organisation into a military one, a completely military organisation. And it is the responsibility of the Sepah personnel to accept that. They should feel that they are a member of a serious military organisation. Training should be taken very seriously. I spoke earlier about the time when we were attacked.

Well, with only a few hours' preparation, the least one could do was to equip oneself with G3s and Kalashnikovs and to fire them. However, that is not sufficient for us now. We should receive the most appropriate type of training. Now that you have an opportunity to do so, training should be taken seriously. The Sepah has had armoured units for some time. You have captured hundreds of tanks from your enemy and you have repaired and reconstructed many of them so that they are ready for action. You now have the capability for proper armoured forces (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1988).

Integral to Rafsanjani's initiatives was a host of command changes that aimed to undermine the divisions within the military, improve efficiency, and combine the Sepah and Artesh leadership (Cordesman 1999, p. 33). These included the abolition of the Ministry of Sepah in the autumn of 1989 and the establishment of a Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL), in charge of planning, coordination and enhancing the military capability of the armed forces. The creation of MODAFL was an important step towards the coordination of the two wings of the armed forces. It served as a portfolio that combined the administrative apparatus of the Artesh and the Sepah. Moreover, the appointment of civilian technocrat Ali Torkan as the Minister of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics, with no ties to either Artesh or the Sepah, was supposed to be a step towards a unified Ministry of Defence, the revitalisation of the armed forces and the enhancement of the capability of the military-industrial complex (Cordesman 1999, p. 34; Ehteshami 1995, p 173).

In conjunction with these changes, there was a change to new uniforms and military ranks in the Sepah, similar to those of the regular armed forces, in 1989. According to the director of the Sepah General Headquarters, the introduction of ranks was intended to guarantee the organisation of the Sepah would appropriately utilise its human capital and provide a suitable parameter for the advancement of its personnel and determination of the issue of payments and benefits (*Payame Enqelab*, 1990b, p. 40). The Sepah was to set out 21 ranks from soldier to general which, with the exception of one additional rank, all corresponded to identical ranks in the Artesh (Ibid, p. 40).

Connected to these professionalisation initiatives was Rafsanjani's effort to depoliticise the Sepah. This was evident from Rafsanjani's attempt to keep the

Sepah's extra-territorial endeavours under control while he reached out to Iran's Arab neighbours across the Persian Gulf. In line with Iran's neutral position in the 1991 Gulf War between Iraq and the United States, Rafsanjani's administration undermined the interference of the Sepah and other revolutionary organisations in the conflict.

The professionalisation of the Sepah and its control of rogue operations, however, did not translate to its merging with the Artesh or, for that matter, its complete depoliticisation. For example, the Sepah retained its own independent organisational command and reported to the Supreme Leader independently of Rafsanjani. Still, in pursuance of its military power and influence as an interest group, the Sepah was able to convince Khamenei to assign to the Corps its own general headquarters in charge of coordinating the operations of its army, naval and air units. The Sepah also began to achieve tangible gains in the domestic arena, particularly the economy, due to Rafsanjani's policy of economic liberalisation. To undermine the Sepah's interference in politics and buy off its support, Rafsanjani supported the Corps' involvement in post-war reconstruction and thereby its economic activity. The Sepah was encouraged to use its entrepreneurial expertise to contribute to the country's industrial capacity and developmental projects, without much reliance on the government's funds (Wehrey, *et al*., 2009, p. 56; Ansari, 2010, p.53). To this end, the government provided Sepah with a slice of oil rent as 'seed money' to carry out its economic ventures and generate its own earnings (Ansari, 2010). As previously noted, integral to the Sepah's entry into economic activities was the Sepah's engineering headquarters, Khatam al-Anbiya (Seal of the Prophet), also known as Ghorb. The Ghorb headquarters served as the nucleus of the Sepah's engineering units and were mainly entrusted with reconstruction projects. According to Ali Reza Afshar, the one-time Commander of the Corps' Joint Staff, by 1994 the Ghorb was in charge of 367 projects (*Payame Enqelab*, 1995, p. 16). This included the construction of the Karkhe Dam in the Southern province of Khuzestan, as well as a plethora of industrial projects that were meant to ensure the Sepah's self-sufficiency and its responsiveness to the country's industrial needs. In addition to these developmental and industrial ventures, the Sepah was reported to have been involved in the agricultural sector through the design and manufacture of agricultural machinery, albeit this enterprise was limited in scope (Ibid, 1995, p.16).

In tandem with its entry into economic involvement, the Sepah began to entrench its widening privileges both in the military-security sphere and in diverse areas of Iranian social life in the new post-Khomeini social context. This was facilitated by the regime's pretence of the ideological character of the Republic, as well as emerging power struggle amongst its political factions. On the one hand, the regime's revolutionary ideology entailed a post-war policy that provided the Sepah and the Basij with the lion's share of domestic functions in acknowledgement of their heroic sacrifice on the warfront. For example, the Basij was promoted to the Basij Resistance Force of the Sepah (*Niru-ye Moqavemat-e Basij-e Sepah-e Pasdaran*) (*Payame Enqelab* 1990a, p. 4) by the decree from the new Supreme Leader, Khamenei. According to the then-Commander of the Basij, General Ali Reza Afshar, the Basij in its new position retained its directorate in the Sepah General Headquarters. Within the Sepah General Headquarters, the Basij was to be mainly in charge of staff affairs and planning while it was granted access to all other administrative affairs, bases and resistance units. In addition to its military/security activities, the Basij was also employed as resistance units in cities to foster non-military defence across the country. Afshar also announced the formation of Basij units in different societal sectors with the help of government and executive agencies. The proposed Basij units were Clergy Basij, Student Basij, Worker Basij, Employee Basij, Women Basij and Tribal Basij (*Payame Enqelab*, 1990a, p. 4-5).

On the other hand, the ensuing factionalism between the Pragmatic Conservatives (led by Rafsanjani) and the Traditional Conservatives provided a further catalyst for the growing reach and influence of the Sepah and the Basij in the domestic sphere. Indeed, the Sepah and the Basij became an catalyst for factional struggle as the far right-wing, led by Traditional Conservatives, sought to sideline their Pragmatic Conservative counterparts on various domestic agendas. One of the major sources of contention which split Khamenei and his hardline Conservative allies from Rafsanjani and his supporters were differences over socio-cultural issues. Shortly after Rafsanjani's re-election in 1993, Khamenei, who did not wish to be relegated to the background of a factional dispute due to ideological proclivity and political calculations, began to consolidate his political and religious authority by countering Rafsanjani's economic liberalisation reform measures and his lenient approach to socio-cultural issues (Cordesman, 1997, pp. 52-53; Moslem, 2002, pp. 200-202). Implicitly attacking Rafsanjani's cultural lenience, Khamenei stated in

October 1992 that 'Some in the system [are] mocking the Hezbollah and their virtues, but if we spend billions on development projects and ignore moral issues in the country, all achievements amount to nothing' (*Etella 'at*, October 20, 1992; quoted in Moslem 2002, p. 201). It was due to such statements that the Sepah's auxiliary unit, the Basij, was assigned to defend revolutionary Islamic values within and throughout the public sphere. Simultaneously, the Traditional Conservatives in the Majles, led by the Society of Combatant Clergy (JRM), passed a law that brought the Basij into the cultural sphere at the same time that it allotted the Basij with internal security prerogatives mirroring those of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF) (Ahram, 2011, p. 121). Under the legislation approved by the Majles in December 1992, the Basij Resistance Force was given an equal status with other executive officers of the Judiciary branch to operate within a legal capacity in dealing with criminals and suspects. The legislation also provided a legal mandate for the Basij to carry out its mobilisation efforts and establish resistance units in mosques, offices, factories and educational centres. By the same token, the aforementioned institutions and networks were required by law to cooperate with the Basij by providing facilities and assistance to the Basij Resistance Force (see Islamic Consultative Assembly, 1992).

If these measures were not enough, the Basij was further pushed to the foreground of internal security in the aftermath of the social unrest that erupted in the capital and a host of small cities, including Qazvin, in the early 1990s in protest against economic liberalisation measures. Given the reluctance of some Sepah units to deal with the riots forcefully, as seen in Qazvin, the Sepah saw it necessary to enhance its human capital by reorganising the Basij in two ways. First, the Basij was expanded to promote mass mobilisation, political patronage and ideological propagation, as various Basij cells were augmented in universities, factories and schools. Second, separate Basij units were created to provide the Sepah with additional auxiliaries dealing with social unrest. To this end, full time paramilitary units – the Ashura Battalion for men and the Zahra Battalion for women – were established, trained and equipped for riot control (Ahram, 2011, p. 121).

The increasing factional rivalry that came to the fore in the parliamentary elections of 1996 between the Pragmatic and Traditional camps of the Conservative faction reinforced the insertion of the Sepah and the Basij into the political conflict. While the Pragmatic Conservatives were backed by Rafsanjani and the technocrats

around him in the emerging Servant of Reconstruction party, the Traditional Conservatives sided with Khamenei and gathered around Conservative figures such as Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, the Speaker of the Majles and Major-General Mohsen Rezaei, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah (Cordesman, 1997, p. 55). Faced with the challenge stemming from the victory of several moderate candidates in the fifth parliamentary elections, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah warned that ' the Sepah will knock down the liberals and prevent them from entering Majles even if they were elected' (Moslem 2002, p. 38). Eschewing the Pragmatists' fairly good performance in the election results, the Speaker of the Majles, Nateq-Nuri, chastised the moderates for their conciliatory approach to foreign relations (Cordesman, 1997, p. 58). Moreover, the far right-wing majority in the Majles strengthened its efforts to rebuff the government through use of the Basij to attack what they viewed as the crest of liberalisation and reform. In doing so, they employed a network of mosques and a contingent of the Basij to crack down on and arrest men and women for wearing western clothing and improper wearing of the veil. This Basij campaign was supported by Mohsen Rezaei, who hinted that the Sepah should purge its opponents and restore its integrity (Ibid, 1997, p. 60).

This purge in the Sepah took place in parallel with the Corps' ideological change of direction towards rising conservatism, over the course of its development during the past thirty years – i.e., since the end of the war and the death of Khomeini (as previously discussed in chapter 3). Following Ayatollah Montazeri's dismissal as Khomeini's heir, the Corps witnessed a further ideological shift towards the Conservative faction. In 1989, Montazeri criticised the regime for its violations of human rights, in particular the execution of thousands of political prisoners during the autumn of 1988 (Montazeri, 2001, pp. 343- 353). In reaction to Montazeri's bold criticisms, Khomeini dismissed him. The episode paved the way for the departure and the purge of other Radical-leaning personnel who were affiliates of Montazeri. The purge of Montazeri's supporters, and other leftist members of the Corps and its affiliates in civilian institutions, reached a peak with the succession of Khamenei to the position of Supreme Leader and the presidency of Rafsanjani in 1989. In 1992, Khamenei appointed a new representative to the Sepah, Ayatollah Mohdavi Kermani. In his long tenure as representative to the Sepah, Mohdavi Kermani displayed a strong commitment to further purges in the Sepah. In line with these efforts, he stated in 2002 that the 'representative of the Guardian Jurist must also

supervise the entire body of this institution so there is no deviation in it' (*Sobhe Sadeq*, 2002 cited in Alfoneh 2010).

Other than purging the remaining Radical cliques in the Sepah, the new leadership sought to undermine the Radical affiliates of the revolutionary organisations, including the Corps, in the Majle*s* and the government. Following his election to the presidency, Rafsanjani dismissed several Radicals in the government. Prominent among them was the Minister of the Interior, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, who was a former Ambassador to Syria and affiliate of the Sepah (see Brumberg, 2001, p. 155). In 1990 the Council of Experts, the body which is in charge of the selection and supervision of the Supreme Leader, changed its election laws to ensure the reign of Conservatives and the elimination of the Radicals in the Council of Leadership Experts. The new law made a candidate's election to the Council of Leadership Experts conditional on their expertise in Islamic Jurisprudence. It also delegated to the Council of Guardians the responsibility for vetting candidates to the Assembly of Leadership Experts (Siavoshi, 1992, p.46; Moslem, 2002, pp. 156-157). Given the predominance of the Conservatives in the Council of Guardians, several prominent members of the Radicals – in particular, their affiliates of the revolutionary organisations and the Sepah – were disqualified on the grounds of being unfit to run. These included Mohtashamipour and a former 'hanging judge' of the revolutionary court, Sadegh Khalkhali (Moslem, 2002, p. 159). In another measure to undermine the Left, the Council of Guardians, with the full backing of Khamenei and Rafsanjani, issued a new ruling which extended the role of the Council. According to the new ruling, other than its previous role in overseeing the proper conduct of elections, the Conservative-dominated Council of Guardians was entrusted with the power of vetting all candidates running for presidential and parliamentary elections (Brumberg, 2001, p. 173). This measure resulted in the disqualification of 40 Radical candidates, while the remaining eligible candidates of the Radical faction lost their seats to their Conservative counterparts in the electoral competition (Jamejam, 2012). These included Mehdi Karrubi, the former Speaker of Majles and former Head of the Martyr Foundation; Abbas Duzduzani, a leftist member of the first, second and third Majles and the one-time Commander of the Sepah; and Morteza Alviri, a member of the third Majles and the one-time Head of the Sepah's public relations office (Ibid, February 2012).

While Rafsanjani supported the elimination of the Radical factions who opposed his economic and foreign policy, he was later faced with a more powerful rival in the Traditional Conservative camp. Ironically, the political forces he once saw as allies came back to haunt him, targeting the president over a list of domestic policies and foreign policy issues. As discussed, with the rift between the traditional and modern Conservative camp growing, the latter began to use the Sepah as its partisan base, fearing the loss of its power to the emerging moderate bureaucrats aligned with Rafsanjani.

4.4.2 Khatami's Presidency and the Sepah's Politicisation

With the election of the Reformist Khatami in 1997 and the comeback of the Radical-turned-Reformists in coalition with their Pragmatic Conservative allies, the Sepah became further entrenched as the auxiliary base of a Conservative backlash which enabled the Corps to consolidate and mobilise its power. On the one hand, Khatami's landslide victory over political reform and the expansion of civil society, backed by a wide sector of society comprised of youth, women and the middle class, put the Sepah on the defensive to protect the widening niche it had acquired through its ties to the Traditional Conservatives. On the other hand, with the clerical reliance on the Sepah to suppress their opponents, the Sepah was to gain more political-security prerogative and hence a momentum for its politicisation. The Sepah's unease towards the reform movement had already become apparent during the implementation of the liberalisation of the press. With this liberalisation resulting in a critical scrutiny by the press of what was once considered taboo, such as the principle of the Mandate of the Jurist, the new Commander of the Sepah warned Khatami's liberal-minded Minister of Culture, Atao'llah Mohajerani, that:

> If we see that the foundations of our system of government and our revolution are threatened... we get involved. When I see [the] political current has hatched a cultural plot, I consider it my right to defend the revolution against the current. My Commander is the exalted leader and he has not banned me from doing so (Moslem, 2002, p.38).

In April 1998, he reiterated his position firmly, stating that:

> These days, newspapers are published that are endangering national security and are in line with the words of [the] enemy and the United States... I am after uprooting anti-revolutionaries everywhere; we must behead some and cut out the tongues of others (Ibid, 2002, p. 262).

The Sepah's verbal warning gave way to vigilantism and the threat of force in response to the student protests of July 1999. The protests, which were prompted by the closure of the reformist newspaper *Salam*, escalated to the point that the regime's thugs stormed student dormitories, resulting in the deaths of three students. As the protests spread, Basij forces, along with the non-state club wielders known as Ansar-e Hezbollah, were used to disperse the protest as hundreds were injured and scores of students were arrested. In line with the activation of the Basij, the Sepah responded by threatening to use force in a letter sent to the executive branch, signed by 24 Commanders of the Corps. The letter stated that the Sepah believed it had the right to intervene as it could not stand to see the fruits of the revolution destroyed (Entessar, 2001, pp. 46-47). The situation was defused by the executive branch, which reminded the Sepah that it was not allowed to issue an ultimatum against political leaders. In a subsequent correspondence, the signatories of the letter retracted their comments and pledged their loyalty to the president (Ibid, 2001, pp. 47). Nonetheless, Khatami's response did little to ameliorate the tension between the Sepah on one hand and the president and his reformist allies on the other.

Still, with the revamping of the Ministry of Intelligence by the Khatami administration following its involvement in the chain of murders in the autumn of 1998, the Sepah seemed to be an important auxiliary in the parallel intelligence organisation under the control of the Supreme Leader. According to the statements of the Reformist representatives of the Sixth Majles and the reports of the reformist press, the parallel body served as one of the informal channels that linked the multitude of security networks to the Conservatives, bypassing the government-controlled Ministry of Intelligence and Ministry of the Interior (Behnoud, 2003; Gooyanews, 2005; see Mazroui's statements as quoted by BBC Persian, n.d.). While the Conservatives did not hesitate to use the Sepah as their partisan police force to

carry out the decisions of the judiciary, the new Intelligence Minister Ali Yunesi told the Majles of his inability to challenge any arrests resulting from the Conservatives' use of these organisations (Chubin, 2002, p.39).

The Sepah also began to use its informal ties to recruit its affiliates and veterans into the administrative and bureaucratic spheres, a phenomenon that had at least been restricted during the reign of Khomeini. In 2004, Khamenei appointed the former Sepah Commander Ezatullah Zarqami as the Head of Islamic Radio and Broadcasting Services. Similarly, Mohammad Baqir Qalibaf, Commander of the Air Force, was appointed the Head of the LEF. Although this position had been controlled by the Sepah since early 1990 and the succession of Khamenei, the appointment of Qalibaf to the post seemed to be an important managerial step, given that he was one of the signatories of the letter to Khatami warning the president about the implications of instability and the breakdown of law and order following the student protests of the summer of 1999.

In addition to its upward mobility by appointment to state institutions, the network of Sepah veterans and affiliates used elections for their political ends and to consolidate power. The council elections of 2003, due to a low turnout, provided Sepah veterans with the opportunity to test their fortune in the political field. The elections led to the victory of a veteran of the Basij, Ahmadinejad, who was appointed the Mayor of the city of Tehran. The parliamentary elections of 2004, which saw massive disqualification of the Reformists by the Council of Guardians, provided another opportunity for the entry of scores of Sepah veterans to the Majles, as the Usulgarayan front (comprised of various affiliates of the Sepah) gained a considerable number of seats in the seventh Majles. The Sepah took a more assertive and participatory role in the 2005 presidential elections, in which three of the Conservative candidates had a background in security under the Sepah. These were the Chief of the LEF, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf; the Mayor of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; and the Head of Broadcasting Services, Ali Larijani. No longer part of the auxiliary base of the Traditional Conservatives against the Reformists, these former Sepah officials constituted a new third way: that of the Neo-Conservative force known as the Usulgarayan. As Usulgarayan, they sought to define conservatism in terms of social justice and nationalism, while distancing themselves from the corruption and excesses associated with the Traditional Conservative candidates like Rafsanjani. The presidential election of 2005 was also interesting in

that it brought the security and Basij forces into the political field in mobilisation of support for the Usulgarayan candidates. In June 2005 the former president Rafsanjani, standing for the presidential elections, complained to the Ministry of the Interior about several cases of the Basij and LEF forces' involvement in the Usulgarayan electoral headquarters (Aftabnews, 2005c). Heedless of Khomenei's edict forbidding the Sepah from interfering in IRI elections, the Deputy Commander of the Sepah, General Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, in a speech to a Basij gathering implied that the Basij had been involved in the presidential election of 2005. He stated that:

> In the current political climate, in which both foreign pressures and internal forces were trying to prevent us from forming a Usulgara government (*Dowlat-e Usulgara*), we had to operate with complexity. Usulgarayan forces, thanks to God, won the election, thanks to their smart and manifold plan and through the massive participation of Basij (Aftabnews, 2005l).

4.4.3 The Presidency of Ahmadinejad and the Strengthening of the Sepah

The election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 paved the way for the Sepah's growing influence on Iran's political landscape. As illustrated, the Sepah had already begun to take up an assertive role in Iran's political corridors, through the entry of its associates and veterans into the Majles in the 2004 elections combined with the nomination of its former officers in the 2005 presidential election. As shown above, the trend of the Sepah's mobility to the upper political echelons of the state appeared to occur hand-in-hand with the alleged involvement of the Corps and the Basij to bring voters to the ballot box (Arjomand 2009, p. 150). Nonetheless, the election of Ahmadinejad was a watershed moment in the history of the IRI, in that it began to open up opportunities for the increasing participation of the security-military apparatus in all levels of the bureaucratic and administrative organisations of the state. To begin with, the first cabinet of Ahmadinejad radically differed from all previous governments in terms of the sizable presence of military-bureaucratic-religious associates from the security mobilisation stratum, particularly the Sepah and the Basij. Indeed, Ahmadinejad granted nine out of 21 cabinet positions to Sepah veterans; not least of these was the former Sepah veteran and intelligence officer and

the current Chief of Staff, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, who was appointed Head of the Organisation of Cultural Heritage in Ahmadinejad's first cabinet.

The presence of the security-military-bureaucratic stratum was further apparent at a local level. Soon after Ahmadinejad took office, he undertook a considerable overhaul of local governments by purging local officials associated with the previous administration (Alfoneh, 2008). To this end, the Ministry of the Interior, under Ahmadinejad's orders, appointed new governors with a security-military background to almost all provinces across the country. Notable in these appointments were the governors of Kerman, Azerbaijan, Khuzestan, Hamadan and Ilam from the ranks of Sepah veterans, as well as the appointment of former prison administrators as the Governors of Zanjan, Lorestan, Isfahan, and South Khorasan (see Alfoneh, 2008).

A further illustration of the Sepah's political leverage was the development of a tangible liaison between the upper echelons of the Sepah and that of the Ministry of the Interior. While at times this link appears to be loose, in that it is characterised by a series of short-tenured former Sepah affiliates and officials at the deputy level, the high proportion of Sepah personnel within the Ministry of the Interior, particularly during critical moments, is illustrative of the Sepah's political clout as a junior arbiter. In 2005, the Head of the Ministry of the Interior, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, appointed a high-ranking Sepah officer, Mohammad Baqir Zolqadr, as the Deputy Minister of the Interior for Security Affairs (FarsNews, 23 November 2005). Zolqadr's appointment to the post can be attributed to his critical role in mobilising voters for Ahmadinejad's victory in the 2005 elections. In spite of his initial support, Zolqadr later fell out with Ahmadinejad amidst differences over how to conduct internal security affairs and was therefore forced to resign in December 2007 (Aftabnews, 2007).

This departure, however, did not put an end to the opportunities for Sepah personnel. In August 2007, four months before the resignation of Zolqadr, Brigadier General Ali Reza Afshar, former Commander of the Basij, was appointed the Deputy Minister of the Interior for Political Affairs and the Interior Ministry's Election Office, which, along with the Council of Guardians, was entrusted with overseeing the election (Radio Farda, 2007). This appointment was significant in the prelude to the parliamentary elections of 2008, and was indicative of the rising political muscle of the Sepah in vetting moderate candidates and securing the election of an Usulgara

Majles. While delivering the Usulgara majority for the eighth Majles, Afshar's tenure ended a year after his appointment. Nonetheless, this should not suggest a diminution of the Sepah in the Ministry of the Interior. For one thing, the Sepah's reshuffling in the Ministry of the Interior represents a dynamic which does not seem to have abated. One illustration of this is Afshar's move promotion to the Deputy Minister of the Interior for Cultural and Social Affairs in January 2009. This new post did not seem to have as much political significance as his previous one, according to which he was tasked with overseeing elections. Nevertheless, according to experts, it was still equally important because of the coming 2009 presidential election, as well as the broad scope of the responsibilities allotted to the social and cultural affairs of the Ministry of the Interior (BBC Persian, 2009). The Sepah's indirect and informal influence is also evidenced by the fact that throughout Ahmadinejad's administration the Ministry of the Interior – with the exception of its first Minister – was headed by personnel who had served in or were otherwise affiliated with the Sepah. These include Sadeq Mahsouli, who served as the Sepah Commander in western and eastern Azerbaijan and as Head of Research and Inspection of the Sepah in 1980 (Hamshahri, 2008b); and Mostafa Mohammad Najar (2009-2013), the former Minister of Defence and former Sepah official who served as the Sepah's deputy executive director for defence (Hamshahri, 2008b). It must be noted that, despite his predecessors, Mohammad Najar was able to secure a foothold as Head of the Ministry of the Interior from 2009-2013.

4.4.3.1 The Sepah's Involvement in Full Swing: The Parliamentary Elections of 2008 and Presidential Election of 2009

The Sepah's increasing involvement during Ahmadinejad's administration entered a pronounced phase in the parliamentary elections of 2008 and the presidential election of 2009. The Sepah's involvement in the parliamentary elections of 2008 bears witness to its political influence at the level of its networks and the organisation of the Sepah. At the administrative level, the presence of the Sepah's network in the Ministry of the Interior assured the predominance of the Usulgarayan in the forthcoming eighth Majles. At an indirect level and alongside the Council of Guardians, the Sepah proved to be an important junior arbiter safeguarding the field for the Usulgarayan, who had already been aiming to take over the legislature by forming a broad Usulgara front.

In a preview of Conservative-sponsored vetting mechanisms, the Reformists and moderates were already confronted with the perennial challenge of an electoral campaign in an unequal playing field. This time, however, the likelihood that the oppositional elite would yield a tangible gain in the elections was further downplayed by the Usulgarayan's control of the Ministry of the Interior. This was in sharp contrast to the previous elections in Khatami's administration, when the existence of ideological factionalism between the Conservative Council of Guardians and the Reformist-affiliated Ministry of the Interior could to an extent compensate for the unlevelled competition (*Etemaad*, 2008b; The New American Foundation, 2008). In the words of former Speaker of the Reformist Majles Mehdi Karroubi and Secretary General of the Reformist semi-party Etemaade Melli, 'Our rival is the executive and supervisor all at once and is in control of all tools and mechanisms which leaves us empty-handed in competition' (*Etemaad*, 2007e). In addition to these obstacles, the Reformists were faced with the problem of campaigning through the media outlets. This was compounded by the presence of another Sepah veteran, Ezzatollah Zarqami, as the Head of the Islamic Republic Broadcasting, the post to which he was appointed by Khamenei in 2004. In his capacity as the Head of the IRIB, Zarqami was reluctant to air remarks by the Reformist candidates (Alfoneh, 2008; see also *Etemaad*, 2008f).

It was against this backdrop that the Deputy Minister of the Interior, former Sepah Commander Mohammad Reza Afshar, struck a severe blow to the reformists by a mass disqualification of their candidates. In January 2008, the Ministry of the Interior announced the disqualification of 3000 candidates. According to the Ministry of the Interior, of this number:

> 69 candidates had missed the deadline to file paperwork; 131 had a record of treason, fraud or embezzlement; and 329 had a bad record in their neighbourhood. In addition, 188 individuals were deemed to have a deficient educational background or lacked five years of senior professional experience. The bulk of those disqualified had lost their right to candidacy due to narcotics addiction or involvement in drug smuggling; connection to the Shah's prerevolutionary government and lack of belief in or insufficient practice in Islam; being against the

Islamic Republic; or having connections to foreign intelligence services. (quoted in Alfoneh, 2008; also see *Etemaad*, 2008a).

What distinguished this election from its precursors was that the process of vetting was carried out by the Ministry of the Interior before reaching the Council of Guardians. To this end, the Ministry of the Interior designated its executive committees, composed of representatives from the governor's office and trusted colleagues, to enquire into candidates' backgrounds and assess their qualifications. This made the vetting mechanism highly securitised, as the executive bodies had taken up the vetting power of the Council of Guardians while downgrading the Council to a supervisory body with the capacity to confirm or reject the decisions made by the executive committees. This coincided with the Ministry of the Interior's ideological and factional bias against the Reformist candidates. Prior to the announcement of the mass disqualifications, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, Ali Reza Afshar, forewarned the Reformists that they should be cautious about their candidate lists by stating, 'Those candidates who are unlikely to be qualified should avoid participation in the elections' (*Etemaad*, 2007d). This was followed by the revelation, in the words of the Deputy of the Reformist party, E'temmad-e Melli that 'In some provinces, a number of candidates were issued a warning by the executive committees to terminate their candidacy, otherwise they will be disqualified' (*Etemaad*, 2008d). Worse, the Ministry of the Interior disqualified a score of key Reformist candidates on spurious grounds such as insufficient practice of Islam and being against the Islamic Republic, grounds that rendered the pursuit of complaints superfluous (see Haji in *Etemaad*, 2008f; Kadiver, 2008). Amidst growing complaints, Afshar warned the disqualified candidates not to endanger the national security and reputation of the regime by stating that the accusations against the executive committees were baseless and constituted mere propaganda (*Etemaad*, 2008b).

The presence of the Sepah's network in the Ministry of the Interior is only one aspect of its rather indirect political involvement. At another level the influence of the Sepah can be found in the Ministry in terms of its political and security activities; in the political positions and statements of its various leaders and civilian commissars; and in the mobilising activities of the Sepah and the Basij. These activities are of critical importance in the wake of perceived existential threats

necessitating an overhaul in the levels of high command. For instance, in September 2007, six months prior to the parliamentary elections, Major General Mohammad Ali Ja'fari replaced his predecessor Rahim Safavi as the Supreme Commander of the Sepah. In addition to far-reaching changes in the Sepah's organisation, Ja'fari's appointment indicated new dynamics in the political-military makeup of the Sepah and a new approach to political-security problems. On 29 September 2007, in a speech at a Basij gathering, Ja'fari stated that: 'The Sepah is not necessarily a military institution; rather, its duty is saving the achievement of the revolution and confronting the internal threats. The Sepah will combat any threat that endangers the achievement of the revolution' (Hamshahri, 2007a). In his speech, Ja'fari emphasised the importance of the Basij in the new internal security calculus by stating that 'Today the Basij's mission must be the main axis of the Sepah... and as the Leader has said, half of the work of the Sepah takes place in the Basij and we have to pay particular attention to the Basij in order to make possible the Imam's wish for the creation of [a] 20 million [-strong] army.' He added, 'In order for this objective to be realised, in line with the advice and approval of the Leader, the responsibilities of the Basij are to be delegated to the Corps command' (Ibid, 2007a). In November 2007 he reiterated that the Sepah's priority lay in dealing with internal threats by stating, 'This critical mission should occur in all dimensions and for which there is no limitation' (*Resalat*, 2007).

The aforementioned statements took place at a time when the Reformist factions of the IRI were already concerned about the Sepah's involvement in parliamentary elections. The Vice President of the Reformist National Trust Party reflected this concern by stating, 'Recently, there have been rumours that some organisations [the Basij and the Sepah] are participating in the elections and becom[ing] active in parties..., but we feel that this is a very dangerous conspiracy against the Islamic Republic' (*Etemaad*, 2007c). These recurring warnings, however, were not enough to keep the Sepah from interfering in elections. In February, Ja'fari, in a speech at a gathering of Basij students, stated that, 'Support for the Usulgara current is necessary, inevitable and [a] holy duty for [the] continuation of the revolution.' He went on to say, 'After 25 years, Usulgara-yi (literally 'principle-ism') is alive again and Usulgarayan are in control of the two branches of the country and if the Basij members want to preserve this current, they must eliminate weak points' (Tabnak, 2008).

Ja'fari's statement prompted a controversy amongst many of the political elite in the IRI. The most direct criticism, however, came from Ayatollah Khomeini's grandson Hassan Khomeini. In his interview with the monthly periodical *Shahrvand Emrooz*, Hassan Khomeini criticised the involvement of the armed forces in politics as being contrary to his grandfather's decree (*Shahrvand Emrooz*, 2008). Such criticisms, however, were countered by the Sepah Representative *Hojjat al-Eslam* Ali Sai'di. Speaking in his capacity as the supervisor of the Sepah, Sai'di recognised the ban on the Sepah's political activity in support of a particular party, while justifying the Sepah's and the Basij's political involvement on the ambiguous grounds that both forces were supporting Usulgaray-i as a tenet of the revolution above party politics. He added that, while the Sepah was forbidden from entry into party politics, 'It is essential for the Basij and the Sepah to be familiar with political currents. This means being able to identify whether or not the positions, practices and behaviours of these organisations are in conformity with true criteria' (Hosun, 2008). As if these measures were not enough to assuage reservations about the political involvement of the armed forces, Hassan Firouzabadi, the Chief of the General Staff of the armed forces and a former Sepah officer, began to intimidate the Reformists. Demanding a ban on the entry of parliamentarians who had engaged in a sit-in to protest against their disqualification in the previous Majles, Firouzabadi gave his support to Ahmadinejad by singling out the Reformist factions as 'the materialists and enemies of independence who have wasted billions from public funds to their worldly needs' (*Etemaad*, 2008c).

The involvement of the Sepah in politics appears to be nowhere more prominent than in the presidential election of 2009. Though it is difficult to analyse the details of the Sepah's political tactics in this respect, the study of available sources, such as the speeches made by Sepah personnel and its civilian commissars in the aftermath of the elections as well as an analysis of the recent institutional directives allotted to the Sepah, points to the emergence of the Sepah as a prominent political-security force in the post-2009 Iranian environment. Analysis of the Sepah's statement indeed signifies the existence, well before the election, of a contingency plan to confront any potential electoral crisis. This, followed by anomalous results produced by the Ministry of the Interior in a hasty fashion and the alleged involvement of the Basij in manipulating the ballot box, amounted to a political-security coup at least, if not an outright military one. Indeed, in the

immediate prelude to the presidential election that pitted Ahmadinejad against his competitors, the Sepah warned the latter that it would combat the forces that the reformist electoral campaign might unleash. Immediately before the elections, the director of the Sepah's political office, Yadollah Javani, warned the former Prime Minister Musavi's campaigners that, according to its sources, Musavi's entourage and supporters were planning to orchestrate a 'velvet revolution' that would topple the Islamic Republic. The use of the colour green in Musavi's campaign, according to Javani, signified preparations for a 'velvet revolution', the key planners of which were behind the 9 July 1999 student protests and the parliamentary sit-in of 2004. Javani added that 'The Revolutionary Guard Corps, with the help of the people, would forcefully uproot any move oriented towards velvet revolution' (*Sobhe Sadeq*, in BBC Persian, 2009c).

Given Musavi's impeccable revolutionary credentials as the former Prime Minister and those of his followers as erstwhile pro-Khomeini veterans, the Sepah's accusation was difficult to believe; nonetheless, the charge indicated the path on which the Sepah had embarked, eliminating the potential rivals to the *status quo* Faqih system, Ahmadinejad's government, and the political and economic privilege that it derived from both. The sidelining of the Reformists was made even more necessary because of their wide political following amongst the middle class, women and the young, who were demanding a change in the domestic and foreign policy of the IRI and a loosening of the securitised atmosphere. While this constituency went to the ballot box *en masse* to curtail any possibility of vote-rigging, its enthusiasm gave way to disappointment and anger following the Ministry of the Interior's announcement of Ahmadinejad's landslide victory. The causes of the anger, and of the eruption of widening protests in a number of cities, were the murky circumstances that led to the speedy announcement of results in favour of Ahmadinejad. For one thing, the existence of many anomalies, such as the small percentage of reported votes cast for contenders, generated suspicions as to the validity of the results given by the Ministry of the Interior (Ansari, 2010, pp. 57-58). For another, the move towards securitisation elevated the public's frustration, thereby prompting popular anxieties over the manipulation of results by the government. This was exemplified by Khamenei's overt interference in the election process. In a move that signalled undue disregard for the rules and norms of the IRI, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei endorsed the Interior Ministry's contested

results. This violated the law, which required confirmation of the results by the Council of Guardians before they were handed over to him. Another issue that gave further cause for concern was the securitised environment surrounding the elections. Soon after the closure of the polling stations and in the time leading up to the announcement of the results, the SMS services used by campaign organisers were shut down and the mobile and internet services went out, while the security forces 'blockaded' the Interior Ministry, 'surrounded' the campaign headquarters of the Reformist candidates, and 'set up positions across the capital at nodal points' (Arjomand, 2009, p. 167). On the morning of 13 June, when the results were announced, the security forces rounded up the leaders of the Reformist organisations while both Musavi and Karrubi contested the elections. For the first time in the history of IRI presidential elections, the contenders openly challenged the results of the elections. Equally significant were the demonstrations that were held in Tehran and other towns and cities across the country for much of the week following the announcement of the results.

It was against this backdrop that the Sepah's emerging security functions came to light. The Sepah took the lead in the suppression of the protests by taking command of auxiliaries such as the Basij. Indeed, the civilian and military leaders of the Sepah later revealed their role in the suppression of the protests. While denouncing some organisations of the IRI, along with the Reformist organisations, as emerging opposition movements against the government and the Faqih, *Hojjat al-Eslam* Ali Sai'di (the Leader's Representative in the Sepah) praised the cooperation between the Sepah and the Basij in confronting the unrest (*Etemad Melli*, 2009b). The Commander of the Sepah Ja'fari stated that the Sepah had been given the responsibility of controlling the situation and, due to the initiative taken by the Corps, a deeply seditious movement (*Fitnah*) was foiled (Ibid, 2009d). In line with these statements, the Commander of the Sepah's Tehran headquarters, Abdollah 'Araqi, announced that, 'According to the Supreme National Security Council's approval, the Tehran's LEF and Basij as the executive arm of the Sepah entered the scene to help the LEF and based on division of labour taking place from 14:30 PM on 20th of June, ...the forces of Sepah, Basij and the LEF were expanded in Tehran' (*Etemad Melli*, 7 July 2009d).

Due to its role in exercising coercion against the demonstrations, the Sepah was granted a whole range of political-security prerogatives in intelligence

gathering, thereby challenging the monopoly of the Ministry of Intelligence in this regard. Indeed, the Sepah's intelligence directorate had been the chief office in charge of rounding up and detaining demonstrators and reformist politicians (Ansari, 2010, p. 105). The Sepah was also a staunch supporter of the televised confessions of the Reformist detainees on trial, in spite of the resistance of the hardline Head of the Ministry of Intelligence Mohseni Ejei (BBC Persian, 2009a; *Etemmad Melli*, 2009c). Still, Ja'fari's revelation of the confessions acquired from detainees illustrated the prominent role of the Sepah in interrogations and torture (*Siasatrooz*, 2009). The internal purview of the Sepah witnessed an unprecedented reorientation in recognition of its political-security salience in the post-2009 election environment. In October 2009, Supreme Leader Khamenei ordered the upgrading of the Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Directorate to the Revolutionary Guard Corps Intelligence Agency (Alef, 2009). Concurrently, he appointed Hussein Taeb, the ex-security staff of the office of the Leader, to head the new organisation. This structural change and reshuffling of personnel signifies the predominance of the Sepah in fighting the 'soft revolution' and its entry into functions that were once exclusive to the Ministry of Intelligence.

4.4.3.2 The Emerging Garrison State and its Tensions

As previously noted, the term 'garrison state' refers to the gradual rise in the power of the military following political crises and international tensions (Laswell, 1941, p. 455). The military may wield an unprecedented amount of administrative and political power provided that it makes an appropriate alliance with civilian political factions (Janowitz, 1977, p. 11). In the case of Iran, the garrison state signifies a shift in the role of the military – in this case, the Sepah – as a power base of the regime to a political player and actor in its own right. While the Sepah retained its previous position as the support base for the maintenance of the regime, as well as for popular mobilisation and policy-making, it emerged as a prominent force amongst the new 'political class.' This 'political class', to quote Arjomand, was composed of a 'narrowing ruling elite and a much broader second stratum from revolutionary and security background' (Arjomand, 2009, p. 112). The rise of the Sepah as the predominant force within the new political class resulted in a distinct pattern of power sharing amongst the elite, creating a civil-military hybrid system. While the ruling clergy allied with the Supreme Leader were in charge of the religious

organisations of the state, the administration, the government and Majles were increasingly occupied by the new non-clerical elite within revolutionary and security organisations, in particular the Sepah and the Basij.

It should be remembered that the emerging garrison state entails a further move towards securitisation. The move towards securitisation was intended to sustain the power of the Supreme Leader by undermining the republican dimension of the IRI, specifically in terms of its content. At least until 2005, the republican dimension of the regime permitted its moderate and reformist factions a degree of participation in Iran's electoral autocracy. However, beginning with the presidential election of 2005, Khamenei and his Conservative allies aimed to displace the Reformists and instead opted for a homogeneous Majles and government. It is against this backdrop that the rise of new political elites from the ranks of veterans and affiliates of the Sepah, as well as the involvement of the Sepah in the aforementioned elections, can be explained.

The emergence of the garrison state and further securitisation, however, did not go unchallenged. On the contrary, as the garrison state gained strength, the political establishment became deeply divided. Indeed, the emerging garrison state indicated growing fissures between the clerical elite in religious institutions and the new elite in key republican organisations. Moreover, there appeared to be increasing factional infighting between the new elites in the Majles and those in the government. At this point, fissures between the government and the Sepah had been appearing, further polarising the power configuration in the IRI. Though the Sepah has been an important support base for Ahmadinejad, its backing of Ahmadinejad is not unconditional, and is dependent on its tripartite configuration with the Supreme Leader and the president. As will be discussed in this section, any challenge to this delicate balance caused the Sepah to confront Ahmadinejad because of their competition for power and influence before the Supreme Leader. Ironically, since the 2009 elections the Sepah has been a vocal critic of Ahmadinejad's conduct in dealing with the Majles. Furthermore, the Sepah is concerned about Ahmadinejad's growing ambition to establish an independent power centre around his cohort to circumvent the Majles and the Faqih. In the following paragraphs, this thesis will illustrate that the Sepah is a heterogeneous network of oligarchs competing for loyalty to the Supreme Leader as well as an emerging arbiter in an increasingly factionalised landscape in the Islamic Republic.

It should be remembered that as the hardline affiliate in the Conservative press court and the former Mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad was a fierce opponent of the reform movement and the Khatami administration (Tabnak, 2012b). Indeed, it was this credential that earned him the support of the Supreme Leader. Though Ahmadinejad's candidacy attracted a constituency amongst the urban poor and traditional middle class, his success in the 2005 election seems to have been helped by the Sepah and the Basij following the last-minute backing of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Ansari, 2007, p. 36). As impressive as Ahmadinejad's revolutionary credentials seem to be, his prominence can also be attributed to his patronage of the narrowing clerical oligarchy, led by Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, who drew upon an increasingly authoritarian version of Islamic governance while weakening its republican legacy. Influenced by his intellectual master Mesbah Yazdi, Ahmadinejad was part of a coterie in the military-security-religious stratum that claimed its legitimacy directly from the hidden Imam (Aftabnews, 2005f).

As promising as hardline enthusiasm for Conservative domination may have seemed, the ensuing developments brought to the fore the existing frictions between the Pragmatic Conservatives, such as Hashemi Rafsanjani, and the Neo-Conservatives, who either aligned with Ahmadinejad on one hand or with Hashemi Rafsanjani and his Traditional Conservative counterparts on the other. Targeted by Ahmadinejad for his associations with corruption and the oil mafia, Rafsanjani had every reason to fear the election of Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, due to his own privilege and power within the system. During Ahmadinejad's first term, Rafsanjani was able to rebuff the challenges posed by the executive branch because of his support from the Conservatives and the Supreme Leader. For example, in October 2005, Supreme Leader Khamenei extended Rafsanjani's power by entrusting the Expediency Council, which he chaired, with extended oversight over the president, the Majles Speaker and the head of the Judiciary. Two years later, Rafsanjani's position was strengthened even more by his election to the Chair of the Council of Experts, the committee in charge of the selection of the Supreme Leader and of supervising his performance. Rafsanjani's election to the post was a significant political asset due to the defeat of his opponent, the hardline cleric Mesbah Yazdi, who was an ally of Ahmadinejad. All of this changed in Ahmadinejad's second term, when Rafsanjani's alliance with Musavi in the prelude to the presidential election of 2009 and his sympathy with the protesters provoked a

furious response from the Supreme Leader, the narrowing Conservative elite, Ahmadinejad's supporters and elements of the Sepah. Since then, Rafsanjani's political fortune has gradually faded, culminating in his resignation from the Council of Leadership Experts in 2011.

Still, the Neo-Conservative elite was split between the loose coalition of the Usulgarayan who backed Ahmadinejad and the moderate Usulgarayan who were critical of the government. Prominent among the latter were Ali Larijani, Mohsen Rezaei, and Mohammad Baqir Qalibaf, who were Ahmadinejad's rivals in the presidential election of 2005. Before the 2008 parliamentary elections, Qalibaf had accused Ahmadinejad's government of mismanagement of the economy and heavy reliance on oil rent (*Etemaad*, 2007g). Within the second generation of Conservatives, Larijani had criticised Ahmadinejad's government for its populist policies (*Etemaad*, 2008e); additionally, Larijani's earlier resignation as the secretary of SNSC was another indication of his disagreement with Ahmadinejad over nuclear negotiations.

The above frictions translated into intra-factional rivalry during the elections. The first instances of intra-elite factionalism between the Usulgarayan surfaced a year after Ahmadinejad's election during the local council elections of 2006, when Ahmadinejad's Usulgara faction, the 'Sweet Scent of Service' coalition, lost to its moderate Usulgara opponents, including Mohammad Baqir Qalibaf, who had the backing of the pragmatic Hashemi Rafsanjani. Still another instance of factional rivalry took place in the prelude to the parliamentary elections of 2008, in light of the Usulgarayan's efforts to reduce factionalism amongst themselves and produce a united Usulgara list of candidates. The failure to form a broad Usulgara coalition for the parliamentary elections paved the way for the formation of the independent Usulgara front (*Etemaad*, 2008e). This front was formed around the triumvirate of Larijani, Rezaei and Qalibaf, who constituted the prominent critics of Ahmadinejad among second-generation Conservatives. Though this coalition avoided registering a list of its candidates to prevent damage to Usulgarayan's performance in the elections (*Etemaad*, 2008e), one of its prominent figures, Ali Larijani, was able to secure the candidacy for the city of Qom and become the Speaker of the eight Majles.

Added to these factional divisions has been the increased infighting between the president and the Majles. The first conflict between the executive branch and the

legislature took place in the seventh Majles, when the Majles began to compensate for its lack of success in asserting control over the government. It successfully pushed for the reinforcement of daylight saving time, which Ahmadinejad had abolished by an executive order (Arjomand, 2009, p. 163). The Majles also pushed for the submission of the budget line and passed the legislation to supply cheap gas to villages during the winter of 2007-2008 (Ibid, 2009: p. 163). Ahmadinejad, however, overruled the Majles by writing to the Speaker of Majles, Hadad Adel, in January 2008, stating that the legislature was meddling in the prerogatives of the executive branch with daylight savings time and declined to implement the last item of the legislation (Ibid, 2009, p. 163).

In spite of its shortcomings in exercising governmental control over the presidential budget, Majles still retained supervisory power over the dismissals and confirmations of ministers. In August 2008, Ahmadinejad's hardline opponents in the eighth Majles dismissed Ali Kordan, the Interior Minister, upon learning about his faked Oxford University doctorate and his attempt to bribe the parliamentarians in exchange for his confirmation (Ibid, 2009, p.163). The dismissal of ministers by the president himself was also a source of intense discord between the president and Majles. This issue invited a constitutional crisis in the final days of Ahmadinejad's government when his dismissal of the Minister of Intelligence Mohseni Ejei and the Minister of Culture and Guidance Safar Harandi exceeded the limits of dismissal allowed by the Constitution (Ibid, 2009, p. 165; *Etemad Melli*, 2009). This caused the Majles' Deputy Speaker to call Ahmadinejad's government illegal, stipulating that any cabinet meeting before the end of Ahmadinejad's term was conditional on the Majles' vote of confidence.

The same behaviour continued in Ahmadinejad's second, bringing the Judiciary, the Council of Guardians, the Supreme Leader and the Sepah into the midst of the conflict. Following his second inauguration, Ahmadinejad refused to implement a host of legislation passed by the Majles. These included the Majles' alternative initiatives for targeted subsidies, the currency exchange legislation for the metro of Tehran and other metropolitan cities, and legislation on the dress code for women (see Motahari's criticism in *Sharq,* 2010d). Reacting to Ahmadinejad's high-handedness towards the Majles, its Speaker, Ali Larijani, filed a complaint with the Head of the Judiciary for what he perceived to be the executive branch's violation of the law (*Sharq*, 2010a). A year later, Ahmadinejad's dispute with the

Majles and its Speaker, Larijani, over the executive decision to merge a host of ministries brought the Head of the Council of Guardians, Ayatollah Jannati, into mediation. Responding to the Speaker's complaint, Jannati ruled that the government's decision regarding the merging of ministries required the Majles' approval (Aftabnews, 2011b). In a further move that signalled his flat disregard for the Majles, Ahmadinejad designated a new diplomatic team in parallel to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: this team was comprised of Ahmadinejad's associates as special representatives in the foreign affairs of the Middle East, Afghanistan and Caucasus (*Sharq,* 2010a). The Majles responded by asking the Supreme Leader for help; he stated that all parallel activities by the government must cease (see Khamenei's speech in *Sharq*, 2010b).

The Sepah was not an indifferent actor in the disputes that pitted the Majles against the president. While the Corps was an important support base of the government, it began to take a stand against Ahmadinejad's excesses following his second term. In November 2010, the Sepah periodical *Payame Enqelab* firmly criticised Ahmadinejad for his disregard of the Majles and for overstepping the responsibilities of the executive branch. The Sepah's reaction was prompted by Ahmadinejad's interview with a pro-government mouthpiece in which he insisted on the importance of the executive amongst all branches of government, while saying that Khomeini's statement about the importance of Majles was related to a time when the IRI was a parliamentary system with a Prime Minister (*Iran,* 2010). In what it perceived to be Ahmadinejad's misrepresentation of Khomeini's statement, *Payame Enqelab* warned Ahmadinejad that 'this dangerous approach leads the forthcoming governments to use transcendental ideas of Imam [Khomeini] to the pursuit of their own views and partisan interests' (*Payame Enqelab*, 2010, p.11). *Payame Enqelab* responded by asking the president, 'Does the power of the executive mean that it can do whatever it wants without regard for the Majles?' (*Payame Enqelab*, 2010, p 11).

The Sepah's conflict with Ahmadinejad also arose over his lack of deference to the Supreme Leader. Ahmadinejad's reluctance to acquiesce to the Leader has increasingly come to the fore over time, due to his continuous support of his confidant and relative by marriage, Rahim Mashaei, despite the Supreme Leader's reservations. As the deputy of the president, Mashaei was a controversial figure whose statement regarding the Iranian people's friendship with the people of Israel

had already generated rancour amongst the Conservative establishment (Molavi and Gandilfo, 2010). Upon his appointment to the vice presidency, the Leader promptly asked Ahmadinejad to dismiss Mashaei, and Ahmadinejad refused to follow Khamenei's order; the episode caused the hardline ministers of Ahmadinejad – Minster of Intelligence Mohseni Ejei and Minister of Culture and Guidance Safar Harrandi – to leave the cabinet meeting in opposition to Ahmadinejad's support for Mashaei. Although Ahmadinejad was forced to acquiesce to the Supreme Leader's order after much delay, he appointed Mashaei as his Chief of Staff instead, which is an equally important post in the government. His delayed response to the Leader's order, however, was taken by the Conservatives as an act of disobedience against the ultimate authority of the Islamic Republic (Ibid 2010). The most overt criticism against Ahmadinejad came from the Sepah's mouthpiece, *Sobhe Sadeq* In an editorial published in *Sobhe Sadeq,* the Chief of the Sepah's political office, Yadollah Javani, criticised Ahmadinejad's delay in carrying out the Leader's order and his appointment of Mashaei to the post of Chief of Staff. Javani stated, 'This pattern amounts to disregard [of] the responsibilities of the Executive and the Head of the government, more than others, must be considerate to his interest and the interest of his government' (*Sobhe Sadeq*, 2009a).

Mashaei's relegation to the post of Chief of Staff did not end his leverage over executive affairs, as he remained the closest aide of the president and an influential figure behind his decisions and millenarian worldviews. Due to his confidence in Mashaei, Ahmadinejad entrusted him with a host of responsibilities in the executive branch. Other than his post as the president's Chief of Staff, Mashaei's positions in the executive branch included, among others, Chief Advisor to the President, Head of the Centre for Globalisation Studies, President's Deputy in the Supreme Council for Iranians Abroad, Member of the Central Council for Supervision of the National Television and Radio Broadcasting, Member of the Cultural Council of the Government, Chief of the Supreme Committee on the Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline Project, Supervisor of the Presidential office, and member of the president's aforementioned diplomatic team that operates independently of the Foreign Ministry (see Hamshahri, 2009b).

Given Mashaei's presence in equally important executive positions and backchannels, the Conservative opponents of the government and the Commanders of the Sepah had every reason to believe that the President and his cohorts were

seeking to carve out an independent centre of power from which to challenge the clergy and even the Supreme Leader. The Conservatives' paranoia was reinforced by Mashaei's statements and millenarian worldviews, which were a departure from the regime's theological discourse and IRI ideological underpinnings, in particular the Mandate of the Jurist. As previously noted in chapter 2, Khamenei's principle of the Mandate of the Jurist is based on the millenarian idea of the clergy's right to run affairs of state during the Occultation of the 12th Shiite Imam Mahdi, who was proclaimed to be occulted more than a thousand years ago and is expected to reappear as a Messiah. Mashaei and others of the president's cohort represented an aberration to official Islamic doctrine, as they proclaimed to have a direct link to the hidden Imam and were thereby proclaiming the role of the clergy at the time of the occultation as something of an anachronism (*Economists*, 2010).

Ahmadinejad himself seems to accept this millenarian view about a direct link, which in Persian is referred to as 'Mahdaviat', with the hidden Imam. This is evidenced by his occasional reference to the hidden Imam in his pronouncements. For example, in his statement to Ayatollah Javadi 'amuli, he claimed that he was enveloped in a halo of light when addressing UN delegates in the summer of 2005 (Alef, 2008). Two years later, on the occasion of his speech to the clerics and scholars of the holy city of Mashhad, he alluded to the role of the hidden Imam in managing the affairs of his government (Ja'fari, 2008). This sentiment was reiterated by Rahim Mashaei in his address to the Chiefs of Young Advisors to the governors. In his speech Rahim Mashaei stated, 'You, the youths are capable to devise and provide a management model for the world and the pursuit of fulfilment of Mahdavi Community' (Government Website, 2011). Such statements constituted a challenge to the clergy, who believe that they were the only legitimate authority to direct society on behalf of the hidden Imam, and by extension, mediate society's contact with him.

What made Mashaei and Ahmadinejad's challenge to the clergy even more blatant was their reference to nationalist discourse. Fused in their ideology with the millenarian idea was Mashaei's proclaimed admiration of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage and its contribution to the Muslim world. In his speech to the Iranian expatriates who were invited to Tehran on behalf of the government, Mashaei stated, 'There are various interpretations in the Islamic School, but our reading on the truth of Iran and Islam is the Iranian school and from now on we must introduce the Iranian school to

the world' (Radio Farda, 2010). The speech provoked a fierce reaction from the Conservative establishment, for it hinted at a messianic nationalist theme as an alternative to the Mandate of the Jurist, which was losing ground. The new theme stood for all that the Conservative establishment resented. It borrowed from Shiite millenarian tradition and Iranian pre-Islamic heritage to pander to the religious and nationalistic sentiments of the public, while it avoided the trappings of the traditional Shiite jurisprudence represented by the principle of the Mandate of the Jurist. Given Mashaei's important government positions, his view seemed even more threatening to the ruling clergy, the Traditional Conservatives, and the Usulgara critics of the government who were fearful of being sidelined from the political arena. It was in light of the looming danger to their power that the hardline Conservative clergyman Ahmad Khatami refuted the compatibility of Mashaei's statement with the spirit of Islam and called his Iranian school a 'blasphemous nationalism.' The sentiment was shared by a Conservative member of Majles, Ahmad Tavakoli, who called on Ahmadinejad to 'make up his mind about Mashaei and his political stance'. He added that, 'if he [Mashaei] was not in charge of key official post[s], this nonsense which is part of the discourse of decadent and false nationalism and Islam minus clergy would not deserve attention' (Radio Farda, 2010). Joining the series of critical comments against Mashaei was the Sepah periodical *Payame Enqelab,* which stated, 'For some time, peripheral and unnecessary matters have become the major issues by the policy makers... Policy-making in Iran, which must be the main promoter of the Islamic Revolution, is suddenly focused on the Iranian school instead of Islam' (*Payame Enqelab*, 2010, p.11). The Sepah's statement indicated a pointed criticism of the affairs of the executive branch, but more importantly signified a verbal warning to Ahmadinejad that there would be serious repercussions to his relationship with the Corps if he continued to place his friend's support over subservience to the Supreme Leader.

The peak of the Sepah's conflict with Ahmadinejad, however, was reached as the tug of war between the hardline Conservative critics of Mashaei and the government deepened, following Ahmadinejad's dismissal of his Intelligence Minister Heidar Moslehi. The final episode erupted in April 2011 against the backdrop of the Conservatives' distrust of Mashaei when they had their ally, Intelligence Minister Moslehi, wiretap the office of Rahim Mashaei. Once the news of the wiretapping of Mashaei's office leaked to Ahmadinejad, he dismissed Moslehi

(*Economist*, 2011); the Supreme Leader reinstated him almost immediately. What followed in the immediate aftermath of Moslehi's dismissal signalled the growing rift between the Supreme Leader and Ahmadinejad. When the Supreme Leader reinstated Moslehi, Ahmadinejad refused to attend the cabinet for ten days, in support of his confidant and in protest against the Leader's interference in the power of the presidency. In response to Ahmadinejad's blatant refusal to obey his orders, Khamenei gave Ahmadinejad an ultimatum: to either resign from the presidency or accept Moslehi's reappointment. Facing the prospect of resignation, Ahmadinejad eventually backed down and accepted the Leader's order.

The incident caused the followers of Moslehi as well as the Sepah's Commander to denounce the President and his lieutenants, notably, Mashaei, as a 'deviant current'. The term encompassed the president's and his cohorts' questionable loyalty to the Supreme Leader, their doubtful commitment to the principle of the Mandate of the Jurist, and their recourse to superstition and false millenarian tendencies in order to encourage a cult of personality. The label provided a pretext for the government's critics to contain a threatening rival who appeared to be callous to the system of the Supreme Leader. While the Supreme Leader is theoretically above politics and only supposed to interfere in politics when necessary, his position was becoming overtly fragile due to Ahmadinejad's impertinence. Accordingly, every time Ahmadinejad brought him 'to interfere in low politics', the Leader's position became weaker and his vulnerability was exposed, as he was no longer above the political scene, but rather involved in competition with the president (*Economist*, 2011).

Yet once the Leader's jockeying for power gave way to a sort of intense competition with the executive branch that threatened the diminution of his authority, a greater source of threat to the system was apparent. This was particularly the case when the executive branch was seen to cultivate an ambition to augment its power at the expense of the Supreme Leader. Indeed, Mashaei was believed to have shown his ambition for political office despite the Supreme Leader's reservations. He was rumoured to have expressed his willingness to succeed Ahmadinejad by stating that the Supreme Leader, Khamenei, would not be alive to disqualify his candidacy for the next presidential elections (RadioFarda, 2011c). With the Supreme Leader's position thus overtly challenged, the opportunity was ripe for the Sepah, which derived its ideological/political perk from the Leader's patronage, to step in.

While the Sepah had proved to be an important base of support for Ahmadinejad, his indiscretions represented a substantial dilemma for the Corps, whose political power rested on the delicate pact between the Government and the Supreme Leader. As a consequence, the Sepah was required to display its obedience to the Leader while securing its continued political/security relevance, regardless of its break with Ahmadinejad. The ongoing struggle for power at highest levels of leadership provided the Sepah with the momentum to acquire the Supreme Leader's confidence and thereby assure not only its security prerogative, but (more importantly) its increasing role as an arbitrator. Ironically, this time the Sepah was turning against the government it once supported, as it was sanctioned to take the lead to foil the conspiracy of its associates. According to the Kashan's Friday prayer, in a meeting with Khamenei, the Commander of the Sepah asked the Supreme Leader for permission to arrest Mashaei and his cohorts, while the Leader agreed to the uprooting of the operational team of the 'deviant current' with the exception of the arrests of Ahmadinejad and Mashaei (RadioFarda, 2011). The role of the Sepah in dealing with the so-called 'deviant current' was confirmed by the Commander of the Sepah, who announced that 'The Sepah is designated with the arrest of the "deviant current" at the discretion of the Judiciary' (Aftabnews, 2011).

The episode further testifies to the loyalty of the Sepah to the Supreme Leader. While Ahmadinejad could count on the backing of the Sepah to a certain point, this support could not be taken for granted and was conditional on the balance of power between the Supreme Leader, the government and the Corps. The episode also points to the dynamic ways in which the Sepah sought to ensure its rising political influence in the garrison state in proximity to the Supreme Leader. Though the elections of Ahmadinejad bestowed the Corps with further political assets through the promotion of its veterans to the cabinet, the Sepah was equally cautious not to overstep its loyalty to the Supreme Leader, from whom it derived its ideological-political legitimacy and autonomy. Indeed, the Sepah's alliance with the Supreme Leader in the aftermath of the Moslehi fiasco points to the intricate way in which it adjusted to the political circumstances in order to safeguard its leading security and political prerogatives, albeit this time in the detention and interrogation of new enemies inside the government.

4.5 Conclusion

The chapter has examined the role of the Sepah in IRI politics by analysing the Sepah's involvement in political security matters and factional politics. Developed out of a plethora of disorganised militias into a military organisation, the Sepah played an important role in enabling clerical dominance and the removal of their secular-religious rivals. In the aftermath of the removal of their opponents as well as during the Iran-Iraq war, the Sepah retained its auxiliary role in defending the regime against domestic threats; at the same time, its internal political and security remit was partly diminished by the clerical regime, which was fearful of the implications of the Sepah's political power for the regime's survival. To this end, the clerics sought to seize firm control of the political activities of the Sepah through ideological and political indoctrinations. In line with their focus on the necessity of the war, they insisted on the primacy of the Sepah's external mission of defence while equally discouraging its influence on other organisations of the state. The firm position of the clerics, with the blessing of Ayatollah Khomeini, delegated the Sepah to an auxiliary status, working in conjunction with other security forces, in the defence of the regime from its internal and external foes. The death of Khomeini brought to the fore the crisis of leadership and increasing factionalism in the IRI's political landscape. To consolidate their power, the Traditional Conservatives and the Supreme Leader further propped up the Sepah by entrusting the Corps with various incentives and venues of operation. As a consequence, the Sepah was transformed into a Conservative base of support and an interest group in its own right, acquiring a cultural-economic and ideological niche in the domestic sphere. President Rafsanjani made several changes to the Sepah's command to professionalise it and bring it in line with conventional military infrastructure. However, these changes had little effect on the depoliticisation of the Sepah as it was solidified to strengthen the position of Khamenei and his hardline allies, who rewarded the auxiliary of the Sepah and the Basij with various venues for operations. With the election of the Reformist Khatami in 1997, the Sepah became further entrenched as the base of the Conservative backlash which enabled the Corps to consolidate and mobilise its power. Through their role in the suppression of protests and cracking down on reform activists alongside networks of Conservatives, many personnel from the ranks of the Sepah rose to managerial positions in the state bureaucracy, while many others began to access seats of power in the Majles and

administration at state and local levels. This trend gathered pace during Ahmadinejad's administration through the appointment of the Sepah's affiliates to the government cabinet and various local governors' positions. Moreover, the Sepah played an assertive political role in the forthcoming elections of the IRI at times, mainly through the appointment of Sepah Commanders to various directorates in the Ministry of the Interior and through the involvement of the Basij in mobilising voters. These developments took place with the transformation of the clerical representatives within the Sepah's network in order to extend its involvement and influence in politics, especially during the course of the elections. This was in sharp contrast to the republic under the reign of Khomeini, where such a political stance was firmly avoided by the civilian commissars and was deeply discouraged in the Corps itself. With the contentious re-election of Ahmadinejad and the rise of the Green movement, the Sepah garnered official permission to expand its security-political role. The Sepah was given the ability to expand its intelligence directorate into an intelligence agency surpassing even the Ministry of Intelligence in terms of domestic counter-intelligence activities. During the Khatami administration this was a prerogative that was only given to the Sepah informally in liaison with various security and intelligence organisations operating under the Leader.

The rise of securitisation and the garrison state, however, uncovered fissures amongst the Usulgarayan and revealed the tension between the Sepah and the government in the post-2009 military-backed regime. With the narrowing of the competitive political field and the elimination of rivals, the Sepah has transformed itself into an overtly politicised organisation which, while proclaiming its loyalty to the Leader, seeks to assure its prevailing political and security involvement by constantly adjusting its position in relation to the balance of power between the Supreme Leader and the Government. It is against this backdrop that the recent political stance of the Sepah against Ahmadinejad and his cohorts can be understood.

5 The Sepah's Growing Role in the Economy

The Sepah must be the promoter of economic fronts in the country.

Mohammad Ali Ja'fari (*Resalat*, 2011)

The Sepah is taking on some [economic] affairs to address the people's concerns. The Sepah is the guardian of the regime and the revolution's ideal. His holiness the Leader is at the helm of the affairs and the Sepah is instrumental for achieving this. No one should complain about the Sepah given its transcendental horizon and its important mission.'

Ali Larijani (*Sobhe Sadegh,* 2012)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the increasing role of the Sepah in the Iranian economy post-Khomeini. The Corps' position in the economic sector has been crucial to its importance as a new political class in the garrison state. Indeed, prior to establishing itself as a political force, the Sepah had already been engaged in economic activities thanks to President Rafsanjani's policy of post-war reconstruction and economic liberalisation. Nonetheless, in more recent years, the Sepah has emerged as one of the dominant stakeholders in Iran's economy through expanding its economic ventures in gas and oil projects, numerous industries, and the service and financial sectors. Though the Sepah's involvement in the economy as a military institution is not a new phenomenon and can be compared with its counterparts in Latin America and Asia, the Sepah's activity is distinctive in many ways. To begin with, the case of the Sepah provides a unique example of a military institution that did not historically have a traditional role in controlling the state's power politics and economy, similar to the Latin American militaries and those in Turkey, Pakistan and Egypt. The Sepah's recent ascent to economic power seems to be in line with familiar trends found in the foregoing polities. Similarly to the militaries in Pakistan, Turkey and Egypt, the Sepah first established an independent economic base before expanding its economic activities into other sectors. Moreover, like these examples, the Sepah came to prop up its political power, albeit informally, in order to enhance its economic dividends.

The Sepah's ascent to political influence and economic power has unfolded gradually against the backdrop of a political system that is essentially civilian-based. Given the nature of the Islamic Republic's political system as a civilian-led regime and the conventional role of the Sepah as its protector, the development of the Sepah as a financial conglomerate deserves special attention. This is particularly important due to the lack of literature on the subject. Although studies of Iranian politics allude to the increasing power of the Sepah, they have thus far fallen short of dealing with the Sepah's role in the economy in more depth. These limitations notwithstanding, there are three major works that study the Sepah's economic role in detail. The first of these works is a study by the Rand Corporation, published in 2009 (Wehrey, *et al.*, 2009). Though the Rand study provides a general picture of the Sepah's economic expansion since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, it mainly focuses on the Corps' activities in the developmental sector, particularly oil and gas, and leaves a range of the Sepah's ventures in the financial sector and the activities of its cooperatives unaccounted for. Along the same line, a 2007 article by Ali Alfoneh covers the extent of the Sepah's involvement in the economy in the military industry, oil and gas sectors, telecommunication and the informal economy (Alfoneh, 2007). Nonetheless, like the Rand study, the article is limited in its time-frame and only provides an introduction for further research on the topic. In this regard, a second article published by Alfoneh in 2010 provides a more complete account of the Corps' economic expansion by covering its increasing involvement in the financial sector since 2005 (Alfoneh, 2010b). Alfoneh does not only identify the Sepah's economic ventures, subsidiaries and front companies, but also demonstrates the scope of their involvement in the financial market following the state's privatisation initiative. Alfoneh's work, however, falls short of providing a mode of analysis that throws light on the increasing financial power of the Sepah. Neither article addresses the mechanisms through which the Sepah first accrued its economic power from the state. Although Alfoneh alludes to the impact of the government's privatisation initiative in strengthening the Sepah's economic arsenal, he does not identify the official civilian bodies at work that channelled the Corps' participation into the financial sector. Neither does he sufficiently attend to the internal economic dynamics by which the Sepah and its extended web of networks have translated such economic opportunities into financial power, in spite of occasional political pressures from the Majles and the government.

This chapter seeks to fill in the gaps in this important area of research by examining how the Sepah became absorbed in economic activities and expanded its reach into diverse sectors of the Iranian economy. More specifically, it explores the consequences of the Sepah's emergence as a 'garrison state' for its economic role. In doing so, this study will look at the evolution of the Sepah's role in the economy of the IRI in the wake of the post-2005 political and security environment. This chapter demonstrates that the Sepah's economic interest is intertwined with its political influence. Armed with political influence, the Sepah has used its financial and commercial networks to penetrate Iran's formal and informal economy, broadening its reach into the strata of society comprising its business clients and the rural population, while outmanoeuvering foreign and domestic private companies in the economic landscape.

This chapter provides a context for the Sepah's introduction to economic activities during President Rafsanjani's administration and its emergence as an economic player during the Khatami administration. It then looks at the growth of the Sepah's commercial and business enterprises since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. To this end, the chapter outlines the way in which the Sepah's ties with the government provided its engineering firm with new economic horizons in the development sector in light of the post-2005 security environment. More specifically, it will describe the manner in which the confluence of the security environment with the government's incentives and generous concessions enlarged the Sepah's economic leverage against the domestic private sector, contributing to the Sepah's entry into the oil and gas sectors. The chapter then goes on to look at the increasing economic activities of the Sepah and the Basij in the financial sector, following the state-sponsored privatisation initiative in 2005. The chapter demonstrates the dynamics by which the Sepah's economic opportunities in the financial sector abounded and, by extension, gave rise to a monopoly of state assets under control of the Sepah and the Basij. As will be shown in this chapter, at one end of this dynamic stands the Privatisation Organisation affiliated with the Ministry of the Economy, which facilitated the transfer of state assets to the Sepah and the Basij's financial cooperatives. At the other end, however, there seems to be a plethora of financial operations between the Sepah, the Basij and their extended networks that have contributed to the Sepah's ability to generate enormous financial power.

5.2 Background to the Sepah's Entry into Iran's Post-war Economy

As previously noted, the Sepah's involvement in the economy can be traced back to the period of post-war reconstruction under President Rafsanjani (1989-1997). While cutting the defence budget and reducing subsidies, the Rafsanjani administration encouraged the involvement of the Sepah and the Basij in non-military national reconstruction projects. The participation of the Sepah and the Basij in these reconstruction works, particularly in war-torn regions of Iran, was designed to bring them into the post-war economy by offering these institutions and their personnel an independent source of income. In line with the developmental priorities of the reconstruction, the Sepah was sanctioned to use the experience and expertise it had earned during the Iran-Iraq war to contribute to economic development in a time of peace. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, under the aegis of reconstruction, the Corps' engineering firm Khatam al-Anbiya or Ghorb undertook a sizable number of developmental and industrial projects. Although the scope of the Sepah's involvement in the developmental and industrial sector was still modest in comparison to its present predominance, it was at this time that many of the Sepah's economic 'enclaves' came into being. These 'enclaves' provided the armed forces – in particular the Sepah and the Basij – with an independent economic base, while extending their access to the state's resources. This was made possible by the privileges accrued by the revolutionary institutions. One case in point is the formation of the armed forces' Cooperative Foundations, including the Cooperative Foundation of the Sepah (*Bonyad-e Ta'avon-e Sepah*) and the Cooperative Foundation of the Basij (*Bonyad-e Ta'avon-e Basij*). The two cooperative foundations were established to serve the economic and housing needs of their personnel (see *Payame Enqelab*, 1990c, p. 14-15; Basij Resistance Force, 1996). Not unlike other revolutionary organisations such as the Foundation of the Dispossessed, these cooperatives, along with the Sepah's engineering firm, Ghorb, became vast economic enterprises involved in industry, housing and banking, while controlling numerous subsidiaries and companies. Other than its own cooperatives and firms, the Sepah and the Basij continued to amass economic dividends through their informal links with other revolutionary and governmental institutions, such as the Foundation of the Oppressed and the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics, both of which are headed by former members of the Sepah.

5.2.1 The Sepah's Ascent to Economic Force

Having laid its independent economic base, it was during the Khatami presidency that the Sepah's economic activities began to flourish. Indeed, the Khatami administration set in motion the growing conflict between the Reformists in the executive and the legislature and various Conservative-led institutions, in particular the Sepah. Aware of the Sepah's unease with his political reforms, President Khatami sought to win the Sepah's compliance by following in his predecessor's footsteps. Like Rafsanjani, Khatami acknowledged the importance of the Sepah to Iran's economic development. Speaking at a meeting with the Sepah Commanders in March 2000, Khatami paid tribute to the Corps' role in the defence of Iran, as well as its protection of the country's reconstruction plan (Hassan-Yari, 2005). The timing of Khatami's speech coincided with the Sepah's emerging prominence in the infrastructure industry. Indeed, the Sepah's engineering firm, the Khatam al-Anbiya, had become one of the largest contractors of industrial and developmental projects. Among the Khatam al-Anbiya's large subsidiaries during the Khatami administration was the Kowsaran Foundation, which was tasked with the irrigation of 8800 hectares of Omidi-ye land in Khuzestan Province (*Sobhe Sadeq*, 2004). Another of Khatam al-Anbiya's subsidiaries, the Imam Ali Foundation, undertook the construction of the Avishan Dam to irrigate 4800 hectares of agricultural land in Khoramabad Province (*Sobhe Sadeq*, 2004c). In addition, Khatam al-Anbiya was contracted to construct 280 kilometres of gas pipeline in the Caspian Sea from Sari to Ray and 36 kilometres of gas pipeline from Sari to Neka, as well as the development of the petrochemical ports of South Pars and Shahid Rajaei (*Sobhe Sadeq*, 2004a; *Sobhe Sadeq*, 2004d).

Although the bulk of the Sepah's activities took place under the auspices of post-war reconstruction, their exemption from official oversight constituted a source of apprehension for the government. Given the Sepah's status as an independent body controlled by the Supreme Leader, there was legitimate concern about the Sepah's economic activities should it continue to operate outside of the official state system. That said, the problem of managing the Sepah's economic activities presented the government with a most difficult challenge. While Khatami was concerned about the consequences of the Sepah's excessive involvement in the economy, he could not afford to put a severe hold on the Sepah's enterprises. Indeed, doing so would prompt further confrontation with the Sepah's Commanders, who were already suspicious of Khatami's political reforms. To tackle the problem,

Khatami took two contradictory measures. First, to appease the Sepah, he affirmed the Sepah's contributions to 'Iran's reconstruction plan'. For example, on 11 June 2003 the Ministry of Defence and Armed Force Logistics, which was affiliated with the office of the president, issued a decree summoning 'units designated and identified by the Islamic Revolution's Guard Corps... the Islamic Republic Army, Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics and its affiliated institutions to act as contractors in development schemes and projects. Any profit, the directive continued, should be transferred to the Chancery, which in turn would fund not only the contract in question, but would use any surplus to purchase and upgrade equipment for the Revolutionary Guards and fund its other activities' (Alfoneh, 2007). In addition, in the same year the Khatami administration increased the annual budget of revolutionary organisations by 14 percent. According to the estimate reported by the Office of Planning and the Budget in Majles, of the 22 trillion *rial* that were allotted to the revolutionary organisations, 20 trillion belonged to the General Headquarters of the Sepah and the Artesh (BBC Persian, 2004a).

At the same time, Khatami sought to impose a degree of financial oversight on the Sepah by subjecting them to government taxation. To this end, the Speaker of the Reformist Majles, Mehdi Karrubi, gained the approval of the Supreme Leader to terminate the law granting tax-exempt status to revolutionary organisations (Shamshiri, 2006). According to the new communiqué, the former tax exemption (with the exception of a few organisations, namely *Astan-e Qods-e Razavi*, *Astan-e Hazrat-e Ma'sum-e and Astan-e Emam Khomeini*) was revoked; the Sepah, the Basij, and the *Mostaz 'afin* Foundations were thereby obliged to pay taxes to the government (see Islamic Consultative Assembly , 2006).

The above measures did little to keep the Corps' economic ambition at bay. Although the Sepah and the Basij were required to pay taxes, the efforts of the government to obtain tax payments from these organisations met with little success. In addition, the new requirement was offset by the increasing expenditures allotted to these organisations in the annual budget. Neither did they ameliorate the Sepah's relationship with the government or the Reformist Majles.

Fearing the erosion of its economic interests and in search of opportunities for economic expansion, the Sepah found further momentum in the Conservative bid to consolidate power in the prelude to the seventh Majles elections. Transferring its affiliates and members to the seventh Majles, the Sepah entrenched its political

influence in the new Majles dominated by the Conservatives. With the Conservatives' annulment of the contracts previously granted by the government to foreign companies, the Sepah's economic horizons expanded greatly. Soon after their victory, the Conservative majority in the Majles opposed the government's allocation of telecommunication and aviation contracts to two Turkish consortia, TAV and Turkcell. Accordingly, they accused the government of failing to consider the interests of domestic companies (Farahmand, 2004a). The controversy surrounding TAV, which was awarded operation of the new Imam Khomeini International Airport Terminal, had already come to the fore in the wake of the airport's closure by the Sepah. One day after its inauguration by the Transportation Minister, the Sepah took control of the airport through its tanks and armouries, claiming that the TAV's operations threatened national security (Farahmand, 2004a). The Sepah's action was based on the claim that the TAV had close ties with Israeli companies in various arenas, including the military industry (*Sobhe Sadeq*, 2004). Meanwhile, the Sepah announced that it would prevent the landing of aeroplanes should the TAV deal remain in place (Farahmand, 2004a).

The fiasco of the Imam Khomeini Airport exemplified the greatest confrontation between the Sepah and the government during the Khatami administration. To begin with, the Sepah's claim was presented in spite of a statement by the Ministry of Intelligence that the TAV case had no security problems, but rather operational problems (Aftabnews, 2004b). Still, the incident caused additional havoc in the Majles. In the events that followed, the Conservatives forced the dismissal of Transportation Minister Ahmad Khoram (BBC Persian, 2004b). At the same time, they passed a twin bill which required the government to seek the Majles's approval before contracts could be delegated to foreign companies in the Telecommunication and Aviation industries (Farahmand 2004a). Consequently, the TAV contract was annulled, forcing the government to pay a heavy fine to the Turkish company.

Although security concerns were raised as a concern in the airport conflict, many observers point to the economic interests of the Sepah in the termination of the TAV deal. This is in view of the fact that when the TAV won the contract to operate the airport, the losing bidder was reportedly a company with close ties to the Revolutionary Corps (Ehteshami, 2010, p. 32). Among other things, the termination of the deal seemed to have been the consequence of the government's refusal to take

the interests of the Sepah into account. According to the Minister of Transportation, Ahmad Khoram, prior to the airport fiasco the Sepah had demanded the handover of 2000 hectares of the airport's lands for the establishment of a Sepah airfield. The Sepah's demands, nonetheless, were rejected by the Ministry of Transportation on the grounds that they did not correspond with international conventions on the separation of military and civilian airports (Aftabnews, 2012). Whatever the motives, the beneficiary of the strictures against foreign companies turned out to be those armed forces companies which had direct and indirect links to the Sepah. This was apparent in the case of another Turkish consortium, Turkcell, which had been awarded the operation of Iran's second mobile network after winning a telecommunications bid against the South African-based company MTN (Aftabnews, 2005g). According to the agreement approved by the Ministry of Communications in September 2004, Turkcell was joined in the venture by certain Iranian companies, yet had a 70 percent share of ownership in the venture. The company was expected to make a US$300 billion investment in Iran, conditional on a payment of €300 million, which was required for granting a licence (RadioFarda, 2004). It did not take long, however, before the contract became the subject of criticism from the Conservatives.

Again, despite the Ministry of Intelligence's reluctance to categorise the Turkcell operation as a security threat, the Majles protested against the Turkcell pact on security grounds, stating that its access to Iran's telecommunications would enable the wiretapping of conversations and other discourse by foreigners (Aftabnews, 2004a; Farahmand, 2004a). Further objections were raised against Turkcell's share of ownership. The Conservatives objected that Iranian companies would have only 30 percent of the ownership of the new company. With the intervention of the Majles, a new arrangement was set up whereby the ownership of Turkcell was decreased to 49 percent against the 51 percent allocated to its Iranian partners, comprised of the Iranian National Bank, Iran Electronic Industry Inc. and Parham Communication Inc. (Aftabnews, 2005g). While Turkcell initially agreed to the new arrangement, it eventually retreated from the contract amidst a dispute regarding the management of the new consortium, leading to the transfer of its 49 percent share to the South African firm MTN (Aftabnews, 2005k). Consequently, a consortium named 'Irancell' was formed, composed of MTN and the two Iranian companies holding 51 percent of the shares (Aftabnews, 2005j). The two companies

were Iran Electronic Industry Inc., a subsidiary of the Ministry of Defence, and Parham Communication Inc., a subsidiary of the Dispossessed Foundation – both of which had close ties with the Sepah and were run by its personnel and affiliates. Once again, the Sepah had used its political muscle to become the beneficiary of economic dividends once taken up by foreign competitors. This restraint on foreign companies' operations provided an impetus for the Sepah to expand its reach beyond the developmental and industrial spheres.

5.3 The Presidency of Ahmadinejad and the Expansion of the Sepah's Economic Base

Although the Sepah had already taken on a significant presence in Iran's economy beginning in the 1990s, it was in the aftermath of Ahmadinejad's election to the presidency that its economic activities reached a peak. The Sepah's proliferation in the Iranian economy took place in tandem with its rising political influence in the executive branch, once controlled by its Reformist challengers.

The political weight the Sepah exerted over the executive branch was in part a further outgrowth of its past ties with the current office holders. One illustrative case is Ahmadinejad's relationship with the Corps' engineering and construction firm, the Khatam al-Anbiya, prior to his election to the presidency. Indeed, during his tenure as the Mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad was known to have handed over several projects to the Sepah without competitive bidding. In 2008, Ahmadinejad's administration passed legislation that allowed the Basij construction organisation to implement construction projects associated with the government and public sector. According to legislation passed by the government, all units of the Basij construction organisation 'were allowed to enact agreements and contracts with executive agencies' (Islamic Consultative Assembly, 2008; also see Mehrjou, 2011, p.23). In turn, all ministries and public institutions were entitled to assign parts of their activities, assets, inexpensive projects and public works to the Basij construction firm.

Further evidence of the Sepah's influence are the many members of the cabinet who come from the Corps' economic networks., These cabinet members continued to maintain their ties with the Sepah while holding important posts in the government. One case in point is the former Minister of Energy, Parviz Fattah. Before joining the government, Fattah was in a top position in the Sepah's affiliated

construction firm, Sepasd. After his departure from the government in 2009, Fattah went on to serve as the Deputy Commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarter and the Head of the Sepah's Cooperative Foundation concurrently. Another example of the Sepah's influence in the government was the appointment of Rostam Qassemi, the former Head of Khatam al-Anbiya, as Minister of Oil in the summer of 2010, rendering the Sepah a *de facto* convener as well as contractor of developmental projects in oil and gas.

Consolidating political power in the government and exploiting its incentives, the Sepah thrived on economic power in ways that were unprecedented. Though there is no accurate data on the size of the Sepah's financial holdings, the Sepah is estimated to control up to 40 percent of Iran's GDP (Rubin, 2013). There seems to have been a general trend in the growth of the Sepah's involvement in economic ventures by the turn of the millennium, as well as its considerable expansion since 2005. In the year 2007, the Khatam al-Anbiya was reported to have implemented 1500 projects since its establishment in 1990 and run more than 812 registered companies, both within the country and overseas (Behnoud, 2007; also see *Sarmayah*, 2007c). Even without this estimate, more than a year after the election of Ahmadinejad, Khatam al-Anbiya inaugurated 247 projects and was awarded an additional 100 large-scale projects by the government (Behnoud, 2007; *Sarmayah*, 2007c). Whereas in the past the Sepah was mainly active in the construction of dams and roads, since the election of Ahmadinejad the Corps have run large-scale industrial projects in oil and gas, thereby gaining an upper hand in an industry once dominated by foreign-based companies and a joint consortium of Iranian and foreign partners (*Sarmayah*, 2007c). Prominent amongst these projects were the development of the gas pipeline from Asaluye to Sistan and Baluchestan and the development of the fifteen and sixteen phases of Iran's South Pars energy fields (Ibid, 2007c).

In addition to developmental projects, the Sepah has extended its reach into the financial sector. In more recent years, the Sepah's network has developed its own finance and credit institutions, many of which operated outside the government. The Sepah has also become very active on the Tehran Stock Exchange. This was apparent by the presence of the Sepah's front companies and subsidiaries that competed with the private sector in the purchase of various business deals. More recently, the Sepah subsidiary *Etemad-e Mobin* was engaged in the biggest deal in

the history of the Tehran Stock Exchange: the purchase of the 51 percent of shares in Iran's telecommunications business, worth $8 billion, within hours of the disqualification of the Sepah's competitor (Boger and Tait, 2010).

In addition to its predominance in the aforementioned sectors, the Sepah is alleged to have engaged in the smuggling of goods such as alcohol, cigarettes and satellite dishes, and thusly leveraging an estimated net value of $12 billion dollars a year on the black market (*Economics*, 2009). The control of these goods by the Sepah has generated a shadow gateway for the transfer of commodities without paying any duty (Boger and Tait, 2010).

This overview of the Sepah's activities in Iran's development sector, its oil and gas industries and its financial markets is demonstrative of its burgeoning economic power. Nonetheless, a description of the Sepah's involvement in these spheres must be placed in a broader analytical perspective which makes clear how it evolved into such a dominant force in the Iranian economy. To this purpose, the next section aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the Sepah's predominance in the context of Iran's state-society dynamics, as well as in the broader post-2005 political dynamics in the IRI, both internal and external, since the rise of the military-security cast to bureaucratic and administrative power.

5.4 The Sepah in the Economy: Context

The evolution of the Sepah into one of the predominant economic actors since the mid-1990s is arguably the product of the social structure of post-revolutionary Iran and its developmental policies, as well as of the broader political trends in the IRI towards securitisation in both the international and domestic spheres. The latter, by feeding on the former through the rise to power of the security elite, has thereby yielded to the Sepah's preponderance in the Iranian economy. Therefore, in the first instance, the analysis of the Sepah's reach into the economic sectors must be attentive to the inherent social characteristics unique to the Iranian experience that provide the Sepah with an advantageous position compared to other social classes. This necessitates a closer look at the mapping of Iranian social classes and at the place of the Sepah within such a mapping.

According to the conventional western approach to social structure, social classes are corporate entities in a horizontal system of differentiations and are defined by the relationship of their members to the means of production. The western paradigm, however, has limited merit in explaining the complexities of non-western societies, where classes are less distinguished by their relationship to the 'means of production' than to 'consumption patterns' (Ayubi, 1995, p.175). As Nazih Ayubi notes, Middle Eastern societies have articulated modes of production, which are often interlocked with "modes of coercion" and "modes of distribution" (Ayubi, 1995, p.175). As it has a monopoly over the means of violence, the Middle Eastern state is the primary locus of an articulated mode of production through its allocation of resources on a social basis. The crucial role of the state in interest articulation has yielded to the elastic nature of social structure, where features of horizontal stratification along classes and elites coincide with features of vertical differentiation along interest group affiliations (Ayubi, 1995, p. 3; also see Bianchi, 1990). The persistence of two features of vertical and horizontal differentiation is integral to access to power via the state-society relationship represented by corporatism: i.e., the prominent feature of the body politic in most of the Third World and the Middle East, where the state is the primary engine of interest representation claiming to serve the interests of society as a whole. It is a type of state-society relations in societies where social classes are not fully formed and the political institutions and democratic procedures are either weak or non-existent. In

such societies, due to the absence of organised classes, there exists a whole range of arrangements in which the state organises its relationship with various groups to cultivate support. These arrangements are imbued with patterns of inclusion and exclusion which determine social stratification and proximity to power and state rent (Ibid, 1995, pp. 33-34).

As in the rest of the Middle East, the case of post-revolutionary Iran exhibits a social structure in which the horizontal mode of stratification is penetrated by vertical divisions. Nonetheless, in contrast to many Middle Eastern prototypes where such social structures are founded by corporatism on organisational varieties, the post-revolutionary Iranian state practices clientalism on a more personalised basis (Keshavarzian, 2005, p. 82). Under clientalism, informal personal networks based on individual and group relations with members of the regime are more prominent in social stratification. The existence of these informal networks is not unique to post-revolutionary Iran and is deeply rooted in Iranian history. In his analysis of Iranian politics and society under the Pahlavi dynasty, James A. Bill (1973) points to the 'clusters, cliques, coteries and *ad hoc* collectivities' whose activities have a direct bearing on the exercise of power. Similarly, these informal groups were prevalent in all levels of society where proximity to the Shah or monarch defined the group's power and privilege, as well as those of its various members and associates (Bill, 1973, pp. 135-140).

Revolutionary Iran followed the legacy of the Pahlavi system of power, as informal power structures and networks constituted a salient feature of the politics of the new regime. Nonetheless, the new regime created its own political elite and informal network, based on its particular amalgam of revolutionary ethos and its religious strand of Shiite Islam. With the elimination and flight of the political elite and entrepreneurs under the Shah, the new regime proclaimed itself committed to the general welfare of society and, in particular, the dispossessed. In reality, however, political power was to be delegated to those who had the correct religious/skilled credentials, while the rest of society – in particular the middle class – was marginalised (Arjomand, 2009, pp. 120-121). Thereby, the power structure of the post-revolutionary regime mainly consisted of the narrowing political clerical elite, made up of the religious Jurists who controlled the religious bodies; these were supported by a second stratum of mid-level clerical elite and lay civil servants, who controlled bureaucratic administration and a variety of quasi-governmental sectors

affiliated with revolutionary and religious organisations (Arjomand, 2009, pp. 120-121). The clerical families, as well as associates of the religious and religious organisations – namely, revolutionary foundations and the Sepah – have been crucial components of the second stratum over the past thirty years and have come to acquire economic and political power. While the clerical families and associates of certain foundations dominated the regime's social base in the first two decades of the revolution, in more recent years the social political mobility of the regime has tilted towards the military-intelligence elites and their network, associated with the Sepah (Thaler, *et al*., 2010, pp. xiv, xv, xvi).

The advantageous position of the clerical-bureaucratic-military caste affiliated with quasi-governmental sectors in the social structure has had consequences for state-led economic development and its mode of rent distribution to the social classes. In Iran, as in the rest of the developing world, the state's ownership of the economy has led 'to a process of accumulation that is called state capitalism' (Richard and Waterbury, 1990, p. 214). Meanwhile, the state's ownership of the means of production and the weakness of the local private sector has contributed to the creation of a 'state bourgeois' – a class which controls the means of production due to its proximity to the state (Ibid, 1990, p. 214-215). In post-revolutionary Iran, this state bourgeoisie is represented by the personnel of the foundations and the Sepah, who have dominated the economy and by extension become the main recipients of the government's rent (Arjomand, 2009, p. 121). Consequently, the state-led privatisation and economic liberalisation initiatives, although touted as strengthening the local private sector, have made possible the monopoly of the economy by the parastatal organisations – namely, the foundations and the Sepah and their numerous networks comprised of subsidiaries' front companies and their relevant members (see Azad, 2010, pp. 67-69).

Among the parastatal organisations which constitute the regime's power base, the Sepah deserves particular attention. Though its unparalleled rise in the economy since 2005 can be compared to those of the revolutionary foundations in the 1990s, the Sepah is unique because of its position as the 'civilian-in-arms' in the economy and contractor in the military-industrial cartel. The Sepah's economic arsenal was further deepened by its rise as a powerful force in the Iranian political landscape. With international and domestic crises looming large, the emerging security-military elite affiliated with the Sepah exploited 'Iran's emphasis on

security issues as a political and economic lever' (Thaler, *et al*., 2010, xv). As a consequence of this trend, there was an even greater leeway for the Sepah's economic activities insofar as access to the state's privatised assets is not merely based on market competitiveness, but security considerations as well. The use of security issues as an economic lever provided a pretext for the Sepah to outrival its competitors whose security credentials were deemed unfit, a manoeuvre which has hindered the logic of competitive bidding in the market. Consolidating the seat of power in the state had further consequences in the Sepah's bid to accumulate economic windfall, since the mobility of its personnel within the government and civil bureaucracy led to a massive handover of contracts and assets to the Corps' subsidiaries and networks. Thanks to the international tension surrounding Iran's nuclear programme and the enforcement of certain sanctions by (among others) the UN Security Council, the United States and the European Union, that are imposed on foreign companies wishing to invest in Iran, the Sepah became an even more powerful cartel aspiring to replace foreign companies and consortia.

The fact that the Sepah benefited from the international sanctions against Iran does not imply that the sanctions have been completely ineffective. Arguably, the Sepah has been hit by the 'smart' sanctions, such as those that target foreign trade, Iranian banking and oil exports, and the Sepah's affiliated companies, business dealings and assets. Nonetheless, the deleterious impacts of these sanctions have been offset by the incentives given to the Sepah to fill the vacuum left by the foreign companies which previously invested in Iran's oil and gas sector. Since the aforementioned ban on foreign companies has come into effect, the Sepah has taken advantage of its proximity to the state and has thereby been the recipient of large economic contracts in oil and gas. In the words of the Supreme Commander of the Sepah: 'In the current climate of international sanctions, contracts cannot be handed over to foreign companies that only seek to maximise their profit' (Jaras, 2011). He went on to say that 'it is illegal for the Sepah to enter in contracts smaller than 1 billion U.S dollars' (Jaras, 2011). This sentiment was reiterated by Rostam Qassemi, Minister of Oil, who remarked that: 'The [Khatam al-Anbiya] headquarter must replace large foreign companies' (Zandi, 2011). He insisted that 'the headquarter will not participate in small to medium projects because the local private sector is already burgeoning' (Zandi, 2011).

Moreover, the likely intended effects of the smart sanctions appear to have been counterbalanced in part by the Sepah's access to the network within the state capitalist stratum of the IRI – the conduit that helped the Sepah and Iran's major financial institutions evade sanctions. Included in this network is the Iranian tycoon Babak Zanjani, who manipulated a murky 'web of 64 companies in Dubai, Turkey and Malaysia to sell billions of barrels of oil' to meet needed foreign exchange for 'Iran's Oil Ministry, Revolutionary Guards and Central Bank' (Erdbrink, 2013). Zanjani is said to have had contact with the Ministry of Oil and is said to have sat in on a 'meeting of the cabinet directly dealing with' the former Oil Minister Rostam Qassemi. Reportedly, in one of his dealings with Khatam al-Anbiya, he was able to obtain US$40 million for the engineering firm in a few days (Erdbrink, 2013). The aforementioned discussion suggests that despite international sanctions, the Sepah has been able to amass wealth while ameliorating the impacts of smart sanctions by exploiting rough schemes to maintain its needed funds. This places the Sepah at odds with the private sector and the rest of society, which have borne the cost of international sanctions.

Having laid the analytical context of the chapter, the following sections will bring the discussions of the Sepah's involvement in Iran's economy into more depth, particularly in two areas: developmental and public works and the financial sector. These sections will look at some of the processes and policies that have led to the Sepah's all-encompassing influence over Iran's economy in more detail. To this end, the thesis will examine the extent to which the interplay of the vested interests and power of the Sepah influence the government's initiatives and policies, such as privatisation. In addition, it identifies some of the Sepah's subsidiaries and the dynamics of their operations, in order to show how the Sepah makes use of its multiple and extended networks to yield economic and financial power in spite of some occasional political pressures.

5.4.1 Large-Scale Developmental Projects and Public Works
A year after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Sepah's economic reach began to take a turn towards large-scale developmental and industrial projects and public works. The Sepah's new involvement into these spheres was brought to a head in the summer of 2006. In less than a month from the start of June, the Ministry of Oil, Energy and Transportation signed a series of contracts worth more than US$7 billion

with the Sepah's engineering firm, Khatam al-Anbiya (*Sarmayeh*, 2006). These included a US$1.3 billion contract for the construction of a gas pipeline from Asaluy-e to Sistan and Baluchestan; a US$2.5 billion contract for the extension of the Tehran underground Metro; and a US$2.5 billion contract for completing phases 15 and 16 of the South Pars (*Pars-e Jonubi*) oil field (*Etemaad Melli* 2006; Sarmayeh, 2006e). The distinguishing feature of some of these contracts – namely, the Asaluy-e to Sistan and Baluchestan pipeline and the South Pars oilfields – was the absence of any bidding procedures prior to their handover to the Sepah's engineering construction firm. This was particularly remarkable given the complexity and the large scope of the projects in hand. In the eyes of the Iranian press, the Sepah's entry into the oil and gas sector was a huge shift for an organisation which was previously involved mainly in moderate infrastructural works, such as the construction of roads and dams (Zandi, 2006). What factors led to the control of such vast enterprises by the Sepah, and how was the Sepah able to sustain a durable and relatively uninterrupted leverage in the oil and gas sector? Addressing these questions necessitates an examination of the relationship between the state and various class interests, in particular those with ties to the Sepah. This includes the state relationship with various quasi-state bodies comprised of quasi-governmental organisations, as well as the various local business forces that represent the private sector. Ultimately, the ways in which class interest is reflected in the state have a tangible bearing on the state's interventionist approach to business and its initiatives in privatisation and economic liberalisation (Richards and Waterbury, 1990, p. 401).

No doubt the emergence of the Sepah into extensive developmental projects was facilitated by the post-2005 government that conferred upon the Sepah a leading economic position amongst the local contractors. The Ahmadinejad government's turn towards the Sepah in this regard was legitimised on both economic and political grounds. Legally, the Sepah's contribution to the economy was enshrined in Article 147 of the Constitution. According to Article 147 of the Constitution, 'In time of peace, government must utilise the personnel and the technical equipment of the Army in relief operations, and for education and productive ends, and Construction Jihad, while fully observing the criteria of Islamic justice and ensuring that such utilisation does not hurt the combat readiness of the Army' (Algar, 1980, p. 88).

Though the aforementioned Article legally permitted the distribution of such post-war responsibility to the army, the place of the Sepah as one of the armed forces of the IRI enabled it to draw on this constitutional provision to justify its involvement in developmental tasks, to the chagrin of the Artesh. While the Sepah's engagement in these civilian economic affairs has not been unfamiliar since the 1990s, it was through the political support of the Supreme Leader and Ahmadinejad's government that its developmental activities were realised to the fullest extent. As a consequence of such political support, the Sepah began to draw upon a broad reading of the constitutional provisions and its role as the Guardian of the Revolution to justify its unfettered presence in all aspects of economic and social life, and by extension distinguish itself from the Artesh. In an interview with *Sharq* newspaper, the Deputy Commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters, Abdul Reza Abedzadeh, alluded to this distinction by stating that 'the duty of the Artesh is national defence and the protection of the borders of the country. The Sepah*,* beside national defence, is responsible for saving the ideals of the revolution' and is permitted to enter into affairs 'based on the country's necessities and the determination of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces [the Supreme Leader]' (Zandi, 2006). He goes on to say that 'unlike the Sepah, the Artesh does not have in its disposal the Basij forces and is not in contact with the population to the same extent, while the Sepah's forces are diverse' (Ibid, 2006).

With the government and the Supreme Leader united in throwing their support behind the Corps, the Sepah was to be a beneficiary of the government's economic coffers in the form of large contracts and concessions in oil and gas. This was all made possible by the difficulties of foreign companies in investing in the oil and gas sector, due to international sanctions; economic problems pertaining to the completion of the projects; and other technical issues, involving the negotiation, financing and stipulation of warranties and memoranda of understanding between Iran and its foreign partners. The confluence of these factors deepened the government's support for the Sepah as its favourite contractor, claiming that it offered low costs, was equipped with skilled personnel and had the engineering and technical capacity to finish so-called 'sensitive projects' in a timely manner, while taking into account security considerations in dealing with existing difficulties in the impoverished areas of the country (*Sarmayeh*, 2006d).

Similar claims were made regarding the contracts that were awarded to the Sepah without bidding procedures. A case in point is the signing of the aforementioned pipeline contract between the Ministry of Oil and the Sepah's engineering firm, Khatam al-Anbiya. When asked why the Ministry abandoned the bidding requirements for Khatam al-Anbiya, a Ministry representative stated that 'providing gas to underprivileged regions was an urgent necessity and that a formal bidding process would have taken more than a year to complete' (Wehry, *et al*., 2009, p. 62). In the case of the handover of yet another contract, this one for the completion of the 15th and 16th phases of the South Pars oilfields, the government spokesman justified waiving the bidding process on the grounds of the withdrawal of foreign companies able to carry out such projects. According to the Minister of Oil, 'At first, the bidding process was exercised for the implementation of phases 15 and 16 of the South Pars oilfield. Nonetheless, because the foreign companies did not have the necessary capacity for the task, the government waived the bidding requirements and, in due regard to the common interest of society and the capacity of the companies, awarded the contract to the Khatam al-Anbiya engineering headquarters' (*Sarmayeh*, 2006d). A further argument in favour of the Sepah was put forth on security grounds. To counter the critics' concern over the consequences of the Sepah's economic excesses for fair and open competition, the government and representatives of the Sepah claimed that the Sepah was no competitor to the private sector, and had taken up the task in the provinces where foreign contractors and other local private companies were unable to operate due to the lack of security and the adverse weather conditions (*Sarmayeh*, 2006d).

Though the logic behind the government's preference for the Sepah over foreign contractors or other local private companies seems convincing on the surface, there are a number of issues that one has to consider when assessing the mounting involvement of the Sepah as local contractor in such large-scale developmental projects. First and foremost, the participation of military institutions such as the Sepah in the economy, and by extension its ability to obtain civilian contracts, hinders free-market competition. The same is true in cases where the Sepah turned out to be the winner of contracts by offering lower prices than those of its competitors. To begin with, the local private companies were in no position to compete with the Sepah given the sheer scope of its private assets, advanced machineries and financial networks. Moreover, because of its political and economic

ties with the political system, the Sepah was capable of securing additional sources of funding from the state in ways that were not entirely feasible for conventional private companies in Iran.

Although there is no data regarding the details of the Sepah's financing, it can be safely said that a large volume of its funding came from Iran's foreign currency reserves. This was announced by the Executive Director of the Pars Oil and Gas Company, stating that 'the Khatam al-Anbiya Headquarters must gain the approval of the Board of Trustees of the Foreign Exchange Reserve before the transfer of phase 15 and 16 of the South Pars Oil fields become finalised.' He went on to state that 'To assure the financial warranty for the funding of the project, the necessary assets will be lent to the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters and for this purpose, written communication is underway between the Commander of the Sepah and the President' (Behnoud, 2007). In keeping with the statement of the Executive Director of the Pars Company, the Deputy Commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters confirmed the allocation of foreign reserve currency to the organisation. At the same time, he claimed that the Sepah was not the subject of government favouritism, insofar as other private companies obtained those funds as well (Zandi, 2006).

In practice, however, the private sector's access to foreign reserve funds compared to the public sector is not as even as it seems. Set up during the Khatami administration from the volume of funds accrued from the sale of oil, the foreign exchange reserve funds were designated for the provision of loans to the private sector. Although according to the second development plan the government was supposed to delegate 50 percent of the foreign currency reserve's income to the private sector, by 2008 the share of the private sector resulting from foreign exchange currency reserve amounted to less than 20 percent compared to the increasing shares of the government and the public sector (Fararu, 2009). The provision of loans to the private sector was further compounded by the government's interference in the decision of the Board of Trustees of the foreign exchange reserve, an independent body made up of officials from the government and the Central Bank, in charge of overseeing the private sector's proposals for the approval of loans from the Foreign Exchange Reserve. In theory, the Board of Trustees was supposed to facilitate the lending of loans to the private sector by doing away with a long bureaucratic process involving the approval of the private applicant's proposal.

However, due to the strong government presence on the Board of Trustees, the overseeing function of the Board and its approach to the private sector had long been the subject of criticism. With the government's decision in May 2008 to dissolve the Board of Trustees altogether (Hamshahri, 2008a), the goal of provision of loans to the private sector appeared to be further out of reach. Rather, the dissolution of the Board of Trustees seemed to have resulted in the government's full control over the foreign exchange reserve currency, as well as its full autonomy to extract from the reserve and subsidise it at its own discretion. It is in this context that the privileged position of the quasi-governmental bodies, such as the Sepah, comes to light. Indeed, the absence of oversight over governmental use of the foreign currency reserve seemed to have increased the opportunity for the distribution of rent to institutions such as the Sepah, which were not bounded by public scrutiny or audition.

5.4.2 Financial Sector

The Sepah's economic activities were not limited to the developmental sector and, in more recent years, its economic networks have witnessed a remarkable breakthrough in the financial sector. The momentum for the Sepah's dominance over the financial sector was provided by the state privatisation initiatives. One illustrative case is the Supreme Leader's edict to speed up the pace of privatisation. In the summer of 2005, shortly before Ahmadinejad was elected to the presidency, the Supreme Leader issued a decree which mandated the privatisation of state-run ventures. The decree followed the Expediency Council's revision of Article 44 of the Constitution, which divides the economy of the IRI into three sectors – State, Cooperative and Private – while emphasising the state ownership of 'all large-scale and mother industries, foreign trade, major minerals banking, insurance, power generations, dams and large-scale irrigation networks, radio and television, post, telegraph and telephone services, aviation, shipping, roads, railroads and the like' (Azad, 2010, p. 67) The Expediency Council's ruling drastically revised the original article, opened the gates for a broad privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and permitted all major industries, manufacturing and service sectors to be ceded to the private sector (Azad, 2010, p. 67).

In the follow-up to the Expediency Council's broad revision, the Supreme Leader's decree allowed the investment, ownership and management of the spheres included in Article 44 by businesses, public non-state organisations and the

cooperative and private sectors. At the same time it required the government to decrease its activities (previous economic activities and their operations) to a rate of 20 percent per year and transfer such activities to the aforementioned sectors by the end of the first five-year plan. These spheres included 'the large industries, the mother industries and the large mines with the exception of oil and gas, foreign business activities, banking and energy, post and telecommunication and railroad and transportation, aviation and shipping' (Majma'e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam, 2004). In addition, Khamenei's directive mandated a 25 percent increase in the share of cooperatives in Iran's economy by the end of the first five-year plan. To this end, the government was obliged to support the formation and expansion of cooperatives through tax cuts and the provision of funds from the financial institutions of the country, as well as prevent any additional tax payment from the cooperatives as compared to the private sector. The government was also called upon to remove all strictures on the cooperatives' participation in all economic spheres, including insurance and banking (Ibid, 2004).

Although the revision of Article 44 of the IRI's Constitution constituted the first major attempt at privatisation since the inception of the revolution, its implementation seemed to have implications for the state, as it possessed a weak private sector compared to a sizable extra-governmental sector that was not fully accountable to the government while benefiting from its rents and incentives. As an observer of the post-revolutionary Iranian economy correctly foresaw, 'one of the greatest pitfalls of privatisation initiatives may be the creation of [a] quasi-state shadow sector acting under the camouflage of private companies. These quasi-state bodies already cover a significant volume of business and economic activities and because of their links and financial capacity can surpass other competitors and create a monopoly. These bodies are the prototypes that render the oversight mechanism superfluous' (Bavand, 2006 quoted in *Sarmayeh*, 2006). Amongst these quasi-state bodies were the Revolutionary Foundations (*Bonyads*). According to an announcement by the Plan and Budget Organisation of the Khatami government, in 2004 the foundations, along with other quasi-state bodies, controlled over 35 percent of the financial flow and business in the country, while the shares of the cooperative and the private sectors accounted for 45.8 percent and 19.8 percent respectively (Naseri, 2006). Also important among these quasi-state bodies were the Sepah and the Basij's economic ventures. Although the Leader's directive excluded

privatisation in regard to the management and production of those armed forces projects which were confidential in nature, it did not rule out the wide spectrum of the armed forces' ventures in the civilian economy. The result of this was the indirect participation in the economy of the Sepah and the Basij through their civilian-oriented economic organisations.

Prominent among these economic organisations were the Sepah Cooperative Foundation and the Basij Cooperative Foundation. Originally formed in the mid-1980s and early 1990s to meet the housing needs of, and provide interest-free loans to, their members, the cooperatives emerged as vast financial enterprises under Ahmadinejad's watch, having at their disposal a web of multiple financial networks, subsidiaries and front companies. Ultimately, the cooperatives and their clients went on to become the main beneficiaries of the privatisation directive. With the inauguration of the first round of privatisation underway, the government put into effect a law that would allow the ministries and the public sector to allocate the surplus which had accrued from the sale of immovable property and assets to the private and the cooperative sector (*Sarmayeh*, 2006a). Emboldened partly by this initial support, the web of economic and business hubs that constituted the cooperatives' channels became highly active in the financial sector. Standing at the heart of the financial flow of the country were the cooperatives' Finance and Credit Institutions. These included the Mehr Credit and Finance Institution, affiliated with the Basij Cooperative Foundation, the Sina Credit and Finance Institution, affiliated with the Foundation of the Dispossessed; and the Ansar and the Samen al-a'em-e Credit and Finance Institutions, affiliated with the Sepah Cooperative Foundation.

The credit and finance institutions operate on the basis of Islamic non-interest loans to the poor, as well as to veterans and staff of their respective organisations. Nonetheless, their lack of conformity to the central government and Central Bank's regulations renders a sizable portion of their lending and business activities unaccounted for. A case in point is the Mehr Credit and Finance Institution, which has more than 700 branches across Iran, making it the largest private bank in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Alfoneh, 2010b). The Mehr also oversees the financial activities of its subsidiary, the Mehr Investment Company, which has been the top-ranking winner of significant shares on the Iranian Stock Exchange following the privatisation initiative. Amidst mounting concerns over the CFI's financial activities, the Central Bank inaugurated a plan to bring these institutions in line with its

financial regulations. Accordingly, as part of the negotiation between the Central Bank and the Sepah, the Commander of the Corps delegated the authority to oversee the two CFIs, Ansar and Mehr, to the Central Bank (*Sarmayeh*, 2007b). This was followed by the approval of the Money and Credit Council for the transformation of the two CFI to banks, given their adjustment with the country's monetary and fiscal guidelines (Omidvar, 2009). Still other attempts were introduced by the Central Bank to terminate the unlicensed CFI and otherwise urge them to request legal permission.

None of the aforementioned initiatives were fully implemented to monitor the financial power of the CFIs. From the time the Central Bank called on the CFIs to request a legal license, many of these institutions were reluctant to acquiesce and nonetheless continued their shadow operations. Indeed, the financial manoeuvres of the CFIs went unhindered, to the chagrin of many members of the Conservative quarter in the IRI, particularly its old-time clerical elite. In the words of *Hojjat al-Islam* Muhammad Taqi Rahbar, a member of the clerical faction in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, 'We have warned time and again that the Credit and Finance Institutions do not comply with the directives passed by the Majles and the central government and continue to engage in rogue operations.' He went on to state that 'the Credit and Finance Institutions that boast of the name of the revolution have gone beyond the legal limits and in some cases obtained an interest rate of above thirty percent… The greatest attention must be paid to the Credit and Financial institutions that under the guise of eight Imams [Shiite Saint], the Basij and the Sepah are sucking people's blood' (Tabnak, 2011).

Not only have the CFIs by and large kept their operations intact; the expansion of their financial transactions, services and loans have also increasingly cast a shadow over the IRI's private and public banking system. According to a report by the Central Bank, the CFIs held twice the customers as the private banks . The Iran Central Bank reported that deposits and accounts for new customers in both CFIs went up 7.5 percent over the course of a year, compared to those of the private and public banks which amounted to 3.5 percent (Khabaronline, 2011b). What contributed to the appeal of the CFIs, particularly amongst the rural population, was their high interest in savings accounts and provision of particular loans and funds. While many of the CFIs had adjusted their savings interest on the deposits to fall in line with the Central Bank guidelines, they were reluctant to lower the rate of interest

on the provision of loans, and at times their interest rates were higher than those of the private banks (Ibid, 2011).

The banking services via the CFIs constitute only one aspect of the Basij's and the Sepah's participation in the financial sector; another aspect of such participation stems from the networks of subsidiaries and front companies with links to the cooperative foundations. One such network is the subsidiary of the Mehr Credit and Finance Institution; the Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Investment Company is affiliated with the Basij Cooperative Foundation. The Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Company accrued a large fortune, occasioned by the privatisation initiative, as it took over a sizable share of state-owned companies. Evidently the Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Co. invested over US$15 billion in the stock market and owned, partially or entirely, shares in major companies. These include Mobarak-e Steel, Zinc Mines Development Co., Parsian Bank, Sadra, Alborz Insurance, Iran Telecommunication, Tabriz Tractor Co and Iralkow.

The ease with which the Mehr was able to win the abovementioned shares has been subject to complaints, causing critics to label the delegation of deals to the company an 'auction' rather than a genuine privatisation. In one of the biggest deals on the stock market, for example, the Mehr Investment Company was able to purchase more than 42 percent of shares in the giant Tabriz Tractor Company worth US$177 million in the final day of the bidding (*Donya-eh Eqtesad*, 2008b). Initially seated in the bidding were two private companies and five quasi-statist companies: Saipa Investment Company, Iran Khowdro Investment Company, Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Investment Company and Bahman Group. Given the extent of quasi-state participation in the Tabriz Tractor Company deal, the fairness of the bidding was doubtful from the outset. In the words of the chairman of the private company Mehr-e Afarin, 'If the government aims to fulfil the privatisation objectives, and the entry of the private sector in this sphere, it must consider their capacity and must not repeat what occurred in the Tractor Tabriz deal. This is because the private sector with all its capacity is serious about industrial production, and the government must not weaken this sector through the entry of the powerful quasi-state rivals" (Ibid, 2008b).

Besides the participation of quasi-statists in the bidding, the Tabriz Tractor deal was subject to additional criticism on the grounds of the actual bidding price. Allegedly, the final price at which the Tabriz Tractor was sold to the Mehr

Investment Company bore testament to the state's strategy of accelerating the transfer of state assets to quasi-state organisations without estimating their real value. According to the Majles member for the city of Tabriz, 'the proposed prices for the company's assets over the past thirty to forty years compared to today's prices are 100 times lower and there is no denying that this is the auction of the state assets' (RadioFarda, 2008). In the words of Karim Sadeqzadeh, executive director of the East Azarbaijan Workers associations, 'Some people take the liberty [of selling] such a giant company at the price of 64 billion *toman* and at the final price of 220 billion *toman* [US$220 million] following complaints. This was in spite of the fact that the proposed figure does no[t] amount to the price of the vacant land, let alone that of the giant company with all its machineries and equipment' (Ibid, 2008).

In the same vein, the Sepah Cooperative Foundation itself emerged as an active stakeholder of the country's financial ventures following the privatisation initiative, while its networks continuously exhibited financial liaisons with those of the Basij Cooperative Foundation. Though the Sepah was already a prevailing presence in the stock market, financial power was brought to a head by the purchase of shares in the giant Tehran Telecommunication Company in September 2009, three months after the contested presidential elections and the rise of the Green Movement. In what was referred to as the biggest deal in the history of the stock market, the 51 percent of shares of Iran Telecommunication, worth US$8 billion were sold to the Etemad-e Mobin consortium. The consortium comprises three companies, two of which, the Mobin Electronic Development Company and Shahriar-e Mahestan, are subsidiaries of the Sepah Cooperative Foundation; the third company, the Etemad Development Company, is affiliated with the Executive Command Headquarters of Imam, a public non-governmental body under the Supreme Leader with links to the Sepah (*Etemaad*, 2009a).

The Iran Telecommunication deal was an interesting case illustrative of the Sepah's economic weight for a number of reasons. To begin with, it shows the way in which the mantle of security was exploited by subsidiaries of both the Basij and the Sepah in order to assume their monopoly over one of the largest state-owned companies. Notably, a few hours before the final handover, the Privatisation Commission affiliated with the government announced the withdrawal of the other contender, the Pishgaman-e Yazd Company, on the grounds that it was unfit for the security and financial qualifications. This was in spite of the fact that the company

was announced to have passed the security and financial conditions in the first place (*Etemaad*, 2009a). With the withdrawal of the Pishgaman-e Yazd, there remained two companies in the competition, the Etemad-e Mobin consortium and the Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian investment, the subsidiary of Mehr CIF affiliated with the Basij Cooperative Foundation.

Ultimately the conclusion of the deal invited a wave of criticism, due to the domination of the market by two quasi-state competitors each linked with military and security apparatus. Ironically, such criticism came from amongst the ranks of the Conservative quarter in the Majles. For example, Elyas Naderan, an Usulgara member of the Majles and a member of the Economic Council, had harshly criticised the deal, stating that 'the way in which the telecommunication was sold amounted to a sort of pocket-to-pocket transfer of shares. This matter [the transfer of the 51 percent of shares] was by no means acceptable and the stock market could approach the telecommunication by transfer of its small shares…Unfortunately, the environment for the transfer is by no means competitive and this is against Article 44' (*Donya-e Eqtesad*, 2009a). Responding to the critics, the Minster of the Economy, defended the compatibility of the transfer with privatisation law while claiming that the deal was not purchased by the Sepah, but by the Sepah Cooperative, which deals with the affairs of retired veterans of the Corps (*AsriIran*, 2010; *Donya-e Eqtesad* 2009a; ICtna, 2010). This assertion, however, seems unrealistic in view of the unquestionable link between the Sepah Cooperative and the Sepah, and the fact that the director of the Cooperative was appointed by the Supreme Commander of the Sepah (see Naderan's statement cited in ICtna, 2010).

Yet the Iran Telecommunication fiasco bears testament to the way in which the Sepah is able to bypass political oversight and keep its economic benefits unhindered. Another case in point was the attempt by the Inspection Organisation and the Majles economic commission to scrutinise the matter. While the Inspection Organisation reported ambiguity surrounding the transfer of the Iran Telecommunication shares, in the end the Economic Commission decided that it was the Privatisation Organisation, affiliated with the government, which had the ultimate say in the matter (MehrNews, 2009). Eventually, the Telecommunication deal was transferred to the Etemad-e Mobin consortium.

In an action that further testified to the Sepah's link with the Foundation of the Dispossessed, the consortium reached out to the Sina Bank, subsidiary of the

Dispossessed Foundation, for prepayment of 20 percent of the deposit that was required for the transfer of the Telecommunication shares. In exchange, the Sina Bank was given ownership of 5 percent of the Telecommunication shares as a new member in the consortium (*Etemaad*, 2009b). Not only did the Sepah protect its economic dividends in the face of parliamentary pressures, but it also managed to reward the foundation, its extended client. The incident was another indicator of the power of the state bourgeoisie in the business sphere.

The Iran Telecommunication deal was illustrative for another reason. It showed the financial liaisons, and at the same time the competition, between the Sepah's and the Basij's economic networks to control the assets of the state. A case in point is the ambition of the Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Investment Company and the Etaemad-e Mobin consortium to purchase shares in Iran Telecommunication. Indeed, prior to the flotation of the shares of Iran Telecommunication in September 2009, it was the Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Investment affiliated with the Basij Cooperative Foundation that showed strong interest in the deal. According to the director of the Mehr Investment Company, in the beginning the company announced to the Privatisation Organisation that it was prepared to purchase 51 percent of the shares in Iran Telecommunication all at once via its subsidiaries. Nonetheless, the Privatisation Organisation approached the matter through the consortium and as a result it was Etemad-e Mobin that won the deal (*Parsatigar*, 2009). In the words of the director of the Mehr Investment Company, in the aftermath of the delegation of shares to the Etemad-e Mobin the company was invited by the Privatisation Organisation to take up portions of the deal. In response to this offer, the Mehr Investment Company declared its participation, conditional on its direct ownership of 12.5 percent of the shares. Rather than by direct transfer, however, the Etemad-e Mobin was ready to transfer this volume through its subsidiaries to the Mehr Company; this condition was not agreeable to Mehr and caused it to withdraw from the deal, taking up 1.5 percent of the shares in Iran Telecommunication instead. While the Mehr Investment Company withdrew and did not participate in the consortium, it provided US$300 million in loans to Etemad-e Mobin to obtain 50 percent of the Telecommunication shares (Baghani, 2009b). The Iran Telecommunication case indicates the way in which the economic interests of the Sepah, the Basij, and their extended networks such as the Foundation of the

Dispossessed are interconnected in spite of their competition. This interdependence enables them to feed each other financially to extend their reach in the market.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the Sepah's involvement in the economy, in particular after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. The chapter showed how the rise of the Sepah's political profile was crucial in its expansion of economic activities. By having a government aligned to its economic interests, the Sepah derived enormous economic privileges in developmental projects. To this end, the securitisation of the international environment following the economic sanctions provided an additional catalyst for the Sepah's involvement in large-scale developmental projects such as oil and gas. Indeed, the difficulties facing the foreign companies when investing in Iran and the problems pertaining to the issuance of financial warranty between Iran and its foreign partners provided a vacuum that was to be filled by the Sepah's engineering firm, Khatam al-Anbiya.

By exploiting government incentives and using its financial base, the Sepah was able to undermine its domestic competitors and monopolise the Iranian economy. In this respect, the Sepah's access to the foreign reserve exchange and to government loans, let alone to the government's financial assets, created an unequal competition with the private sector, which lacked the Corps' privileges. The Sepah's upper hand in the economy versus the private sector was also to be seen elsewhere, namely in the financial sector. In this respect, the Sepah's and Basij's Cooperative Foundations were helped by the state's privatisation initiative. The overview of the transfer of state-owned enterprises to the private sector, as discussed in this chapter, provided evidence of the extent to which the quasi-state bodies linked with the Sepah and the Basij, namely the cooperatives and their subsidiaries, were measured in the state privatisation initiative. In this respect, the privatisation organisation affiliated with the Ministry of the Economy was one of the primary agents in engaging the Cooperatives, along with other quasi-state bodies in the flotation of the state-owned enterprises in the stock market. Still, as shown in this chapter, the Sepah and the Basij were instrumental in translating their accrued economic dividends into economic and financial power by keeping an active liaison with their web of economic networks and subsidiaries.

6 The Sepah in Iran's Foreign Policy: Security Dimensions

The Sepah will be in the battlefield and will handle the war.

(Ali Khamenei, 1984)

The military capacity of the Sepah and its greatest missile power in the region has prevented the foreign ambition on our dear homeland. To the acknowledgement of the enemies of the revolution, the Middle East is being [spun] around by the strings of few Commanders and generals of the Sepah.

(*Resalat*, 23 June 2012)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the importance of the Sepah in the foreign policy of post-revolutionary Iran, in particular, since the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. Equally important to the rise of the Sepah as a garrison state has been its crucial position in the security dimensions of the IRI's foreign policy, which include the military/defence and regional spheres of post-Khomeini Iran. The Corps' involvement in these spheres, military/defence and regional endeavours, is built on its political and ideological profile as the 'vanguard' of revolutionary Islam beyond Iranian borders – as well as its duty as the protector of the regime and its achievements. From the outset of the revolution in Iran, the Sepah was charged with exporting the Iranian revolution on behalf of its civilian political-clerical establishment. Indeed, it was this duty to export the Iranian revolution that provided an ideological underpinning for a plethora of the Sepah's overseas operations, namely the provision of military training, funds and at times overt operations in support of military revolutionaries. These revolutionaries included, in particular, Shi'a militants in Lebanon and Iraq, as well as operations against the US interests in the region and 'covert action against regime opponents' abroad (Katzman, 1993, p. 96). With the republic's turn towards rapprochement, the Sepah's leeway in the export of the revolution was reduced if not completely seized. It was not until the removal of Iran's enemies in neighbouring Afghanistan and Iraq that the Sepah's endeavours in this regard were able to thrive. Indeed, the presence of this volatile environment seemed to have provided the Sepah with

both challenges and opportunities to sustain Iran's regional influence via its overseas activities in the Middle East.

In addition to its role as the exporter of the revolution, the Sepah was granted military and defence functions. In this, though, the Sepah's functions tended to overlap with the Artesh's in defending the territorial integrity of the country; the Sepah's additional internal status as the protector of the regime and its ideology had already imbued it with the upper hand in military/security policies and strategies of the IRI. This was particularly evident during the Iran-Iraq war, in which the Sepah participated in asymmetric warfare and in which the human wave tactics of its paramilitary unit, the Basij, had a special bearing on the military and security strategies of the IRI.

Nonetheless, in more recent years, the Sepah's role in the military and defence policies of the IRI has become more palpable due to the regime's perception of existential threats. Today, the Sepah is not only an 'export of the revolution apparatus', but a crucial stakeholder in the IRI's national security calculus in the region and its strategies in relation to security threats, challenges and opportunities. Having established its reputation during the Iran-Iraq war, the Sepah's influence over security/military affairs during the post-Khomeini administrations was already evident from its portfolio in the SNSC. With the withdrawal of the Reformists' and Pragmatic Conservatives' personnel and their replacement by Ahmadinejad's cronies, the Sepah took on a more prominent role in the military/security policies of the IRI. As an example, the foreign policy views of Conservative civilian personnel were in many ways closely aligned with the Sepah's, enabling it to have a significant input in national security decision-making. As another example, given the securitisation of international relations in light of the post-September 11th environment, the Sepah's expert advice in the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) carried greater weight.

This chapter examines the features of continuity and change in the Sepah's influence on foreign policy from 1979 to the present. This examination highlights a significant turning point in the Sepah's influence after 2005. It analyses the impact of the external environment on the IRI's internal dynamics of power and its foreign policy strategies and options, as well as the influence of the internal dynamics of power on the external environment, in turn. More specifically, it examines the manner in which the interplay of domestic politics and geopolitical

factors contributed to the rise of the Sepah as a 'garrison state'. Equally, it examines the consequences of the 'garrison state' and its impact on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in terms of its military/defence and regional dimensions. The chapter makes two major claims: first, it argues that with the rise of the garrison state, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic has been, by and large, securitised. That is, its foreign policy decision-making has come to reflect the priority of the regime's survival against what it perceives as existential threats. This change in foreign policy has been driven by the regime's perception of the looming threat of the US, as well as a shift in the domestic balance of power towards the security elite since 2005. The chapter argues that the security elite have adopted, in the words of Barry Buzan, a more 'extra-ordinary means' of foreign policy in order to handle what it perceives as existential threats. The second claim of this chapter is that the interplay of Iran's geopolitical interests and the imperative for deterrence has increased the importance of Sepah's role at both regional and defence/military levels. At a military/defence level, this has boosted the Sepah's purview over defence, including among others Iran's development of ballistic missiles, the operation of asymmetric warfare and its control of Iran's nuclear programme. At the regional level, Iran's geopolitical ambition has boosted the Sepah's overseas operations. In supporting its proxies and allies as well as covert actions against US forces, the Sepah is a vital tool both in strengthening Iran's foothold in the region and even more importantly as a pivotal political actor in Iran's post-2005 foreign policy.

The chapter starts off by providing the background to the Sepah's involvement in foreign affairs, from the onset of the Islamic Republic to the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations. It then goes on to look at the Sepah's increasing importance in Iran's military and defence policy and its growing overseas involvement in the region, in particular in the case of Iraq. In doing so the chapter looks at the evolution of the role of the Sepah in the regional and military/defence spheres of foreign affairs in the past thirty years of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

6.2 Background: The Sepah's Role in Foreign Policy during the Revolution and In Wartime (1979-1988)

As will be shown in the next sections, through the revolution's first decade (1979-1989) the Sepah showed itself to be a pivotal base for the fundamentalists by promoting radicalism in Iran's foreign policy. Shortly after the revolution, the Sepah played a critical role in undermining the secular elite led by Prime Minister Bazargan, who favoured a pragmatic foreign policy. The Sepah's endeavours in undermining Bazargan's provisional government occurred in the wake of the seizure of the American embassy in 1979, which led to the fundamentalists' rise to power. Moreover, the Sepah proved to be instrumental in the removal of the liberal-oriented President Abolhassan Banisadr and thereby strengthening the fundamentalists' power monopoly.

In addition to the fundamentalist hegemony and the further shift in IRI foreign policy towards radicalism, which emphasised non-conformity with the west and Islamic revolutionary activism, the Sepah proved to be one of the major driving forces in the IRI's battle with the US, Israel and the west. The Sepah's aggressive missions against the west and its Arab and Israeli allies were evident in a number of key incidents throughout the 1980s, namely its confrontation with the US military in the Persian Gulf at the end of the Iran-Iraq war, as well as its export of revolutionary activities by providing various Islamic groups with organisational, moral and military support. This tenacious hold on the IRI's radical ideology continued to be integral to the Sepah's conduct, even as the fundamentalists moved towards a degree of pragmatism in terms of Iran's foreign policy. Nonetheless, while the Sepah's activities occasionally ran counter to the official foreign policy of the IRI, there was a limit to the Sepah's ideological missions. As this thesis will argue in the following section, in its pursuit of radical revolutionary activities, the Sepah increasingly served as an apparatus of the regime. In this function it was increasingly beholden to the guidance of the fundamentalist elite in Tehran. While the Sepah's activities in exporting the revolution continued, such activities were carried out in tandem with the civilian elite, and came to reflect Iran's geopolitical calculations to drive out the US and occasionally obtain concessions from it. In general, when the state's survival and its ambitions contradicted revolutionary ideology, the politico-religious elite prioritised the former and were more cautious of the Sepah's revolutionary

activism. This was evident in the mid-1980s during Iran-Contra when the realities of the war with Iraq forced the pragmatist elite of the fundamentalist block to make a secret arms deal with the US, much to the disappointment of the Sepah's hardline elements. In 1988, in another turn that further pointed to the victory of the civilian leadership over the Sepah, the pragmatists led by Rafsanjani convinced Khomeini to accept the ceasefire with Iraq. The resulting resolution further emphasised the supremacy of civilian decision-making within Iran's foreign policy, despite the Sepah's military stance which favoured the continuation of the war until the collapse of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq.

6.2.1 The Hostage Crisis and the Radicalisation of Iran's Foreign Policy

The origin of the Sepah's involvement in foreign policy can be traced back to the first decade of post-revolutionary Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-1989). Though the Sepah's role in security decision-making and its overseas operations for the export of the revolution became fully active following the Iran-Iraq war, the ideological and political underpinning of such a role was markedly established in the early days of the revolution.

The first instance of ideological discord in foreign affairs surfaced between radical factions of the Corps and the religious/secular personnel in the provisional government (PG), which was headed by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, and initially granted the authority of the Sepah. Time and again the Sepah's Commanders protested against the PG's moderate stance on foreign relations, which they perceived as both a betrayal of the revolution and a hindrance to the wide scope of their functions beyond Iran's borders. While elements of the Sepah were in favour of the export of the Iranian revolution to Shi'a–dominated Iraq, Bahrain and the western-backed Gulf monarchies – in particular, Saudi Arabia – the PG insisted on strict military discipline and disapproved of the Corps' military, political and ideological interference abroad (see *Payame Enqelab*, 1982a, p. 10). The Sepah's uneasy relationship with the PG was later acknowledged in a series of issues of the Sepah's periodical *Payame Enqelab*. In one of the series of comments in condemnation of the PG's indifference to the revolutionary movement, *Payame Enqelab* stated, 'Unfortunately, the Provisional Government and the Foreign Ministry of the time did not only pay attention to these principles [export of the revolution], but saw

the export of the revolution as an interference in the internal affairs of other countries and refrained from it to the point that they disrepute the liberation movements in the world with various insults' (*Payame Enqelab*, 1981b, p. 86).

Still, the PG's insistence on maintaining diplomatic relations with the west, including the US, was seen by the Sepah and the Radical, Conservative and Secular Leftist factions as an aberration within the revolution, given the US's long-standing support for the Pahlavi dynasty. As such, the PG's efforts to keep channels of communication open with the west were vehemently opposed and widely resisted by the revolutionary factions, which favoured Iran's diplomatic isolation and an active engagement with the Islamic Ummah. Such widespread revolutionary sentiment provided fertile ground for the Sepah to shun the provisional government and thereby eliminate the only challenge to the expansion of its international role. The events unfolding between the summer and the autumn of 1979, during which the US permitted the deposed Shah to travel to the United States for medical treatment, provided an occasion for the downfall of the PG. Following this, in November of 1979 pro-Khomenei radical students, known as 'students in the line of Imam', took over the American Embassy in retaliation against the US's prior support for the Shah, while accusing the embassy of being a spy nest. This action had further implications for Iran's internal politics and foreign policy, as the students meant to oust the provisional government and put an end to the prospect of Iran's diplomatic relations with the US.

Although the aforementioned incident, known internationally as the Iran hostage crisis, was said to have been instigated by radical students, one must not overlook the crucial role of the Sepah in the political environment following the embassy takeover; their actions cast a shadow on Iran's relations with the US to this day. While its involvement in the actual takeover of the embassy was indirect, the Sepah was instrumental in exploiting the crisis, thus paving the way for the dismissal of the secular forces and the radicalisation of Iran's foreign policy. To ensure the predominance of the Radicals in foreign policy decision-making, the Sepah, in unison with the radical students, carried out a campaign of psychological propaganda against those ministers who occupied key positions in Bazargan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and who opposed the Mandate of the Jurist. To defame their rivals in the PG, the students selectively released documents containing descriptions of the contact between Bazargan's officials

and the US embassy. By the same token, the Sepah (and in particular, its militant personalities, such as the late Mohammad Montazeri) engaged in a smear campaign by portraying the foreign ministry's personnel as 'the fifth column' of the enemy (see *Payame Enqelab*, 1981f, p. 21; Milani, 1994, p. 173). These tactics led to the arrest, incarceration and exile of many PG officials who were accused of being spies for the United States.

In addition to psychological warfare, the Sepah was a crucial force not only in perpetuating the revolutionary environment in the aftermath of the embassy takeover, but also in cutting off the remaining secular officials from the succeeding negotiations. Following the disastrous U.S. rescue mission in April 1980, the hostages were claimed to be taken to the Sepah's installations around the country (Katzman, 1993, p. 36). While the students retained responsibility for safeguarding the hostages, the Sepah's tacit support for the students and its obedience to the clerical-dominated Revolutionary Council proved vital for neutralising the government's manoeuvres headed by President Banisadr. To this end, the Sepah was careful not to be used as a political base of the government, in keeping with the predominance of the Khomeini-led Revolutionary Council. In an interview published by the periodical *Payame Enqelab* in the summer of 1981, an official of the Sepah recalled an incident in which he refused an order from President Banisadr to transfer the hostages to the care of the government (*Payame Enqelab*, 1981e, pp. 48-49). Accordingly, the Sepah took the matter to the Revolutionary Council, insisting that under no circumstances would it accept the President's order. Evidently, it was after the Sepah's refusal that Khomeini assigned the matter of the hostages to the Majles, which at that time was controlled by the Radical and Conservative factions (*Payame Enqelab*, 1981e, p. 49). The incident attests to the Sepah's early influence in keeping the hostage issue outside the purview of the President and Foreign Ministry. These efforts helped with the subsequent isolation of the head of state from the final resolution of the crisis and the handover of the negotiation to the radical Khomeinist faction. In October 1980, a special committee chaired by *Hojjat al-Eslam* Khoeiniha, the leader of the radical students, was convened in order to oversee Iran's negotiations, paving the way for the final settlement of the dispute and release of the hostages in early January (Milani, 1994, p. 181).

6.2.2 The Sepah's Growth Under the Fundamentalists and Its Regional Operations

With the ousting of the secular forces, the Sepah was rid of one of the greatest impediments to its growing power. Now under the hegemony of the politico-clerics and lay religious factions, the political environment appeared more suitable for the Sepah to exert influence on the regime's war policies and internal security functions, as well as the export of the revolution. Though the fundamentalists' consolidation of power had a mixed impact on the Sepah's military and extra-military functions, the Sepah had far more power under this new leadership than under previous governments. While the Sepah's internal security role was reduced, it assumed a considerable degree of clout in the prosecution of the war and the related military tasks of defence and combat. This was made difficult during Banisadr's tenure, during which the internal factional feud at home and the mutual distrust between the president and the Sepah had prevented the development of a concerted civilian strategy in favour of its war efforts.

None of these changes, however, ended the tension between the Sepah and the government, which was now controlled by fundamentalist personnel. In August 1984, for example, *Payame Enqelab* vehemently questioned the ideological credentials of Iran's Foreign Ministry, which at that time was led by Khomeini's trusted ideologue, Ali Akbar Velayati. Fearing that the Sepah's influence in foreign affairs might wane, an anonymous author stated that:

> The presence of the opportunist diplomats and ambassadors [from the previous government] has not only undermined the export of the revolution to the world, but has resulted in various contradictions between the embassies and the Hezbollah forces that are represented in the Islamic associations abroad… In comparison to the weakness of the Iranian embassies in this regard, the embassies from the United States and Europe to Saudi Arabia and Iraq have been able to exploit the media and press as means of propaganda against the Islamic Republic (*Payame Enqelab*, 1984e, p. 67).

In the foregoing statement, the Sepah advised the Foreign Ministry to appoint a devoted cadre and called for an extensive purge of the diplomatic personnel remaining from previous governments. Nevertheless, it intimated in part the ministry's futile capacity for the export of the revolution – something which, in the eyes of the Sepah, had to be placed under its own control. Given the views of the Sepah, the merging of the Sepah with the Foreign Ministry proved difficult. To broach this matter, Iran's political leaders and officials sought to ensure the importance of the Sepah as an apparatus for the export of the revolution, while simultaneously insisting on the primacy of the foreign ministry with regard to the direction of the Corps' overseas activities.

6.2.2.1 The Sepah At The Front (1980-1989)

Although the Sepah's experience with military operations had already unfolded during the ethnic uprisings that broke out in Iran soon after the revolution, it was during the Iran-Iraq war that the Sepah evolved into a combat force and thereby gained relevance in the prosecution of war. Indeed, the Sepah's offensive strategy, though costly in terms of human lives, was crucial in recapturing the Iranian territory of Khoramshahr and ending the siege of Abadan in the early stages of the war. Though the Artesh was equally impressive in pushing back the Iraqi forces, the leadership's view of the Sepah as the trustworthy Guardians of the Revolution and dedicated Islamic warriors meant that the Sepah was entrusted with increasing military capability, logistics and a considerable share of influence in the strategic and defence policy of the Islamic Republic. In February 1981, to the chagrin of President Banisadr, the Fundamentalist Prime Minister Rajaei praised the Sepah's military endeavours and called for the establishment of its own separate ammunitions and the expansion of its forces to at least 100,000 men (*Payame Enqelab*, 1981d, p. 18). Consequently, by 1985 the Sepah's manpower had grown to 150,000 and it had established an independent navy and air force, following Khomenei's orders. In addition, the Sepah assumed the task of the command of its volunteer forces, the Basij. The command of the Basij provided the Sepah with additional manpower, which was to be used for its high-risk human wave offensives. Unlike the Artesh's classical tactics of warfare, based on selected strikes and elements of close air and artillery support, the Sepah's offensives were unconventional in their use of hit-and-run tactics and laid the

basis for the Corps' strategy of asymmetric warfare against the US ships during the Tanker Wars.

With the growth of its military arsenal, the Sepah took on a leading role in the war's strategic decision-making, thereby challenging the monopoly of the Artesh in the defence arena. Consequently, the Sepah came to occupy a seat in the Security Defence Council (SDC), which served as a civil-military body in charge of decisions regarding the armed forces' affairs, defence of the country and internal security. In 1986, in a move that signified the gradual rise of the Sepah's influence in the IRI's defence calculus, the Ministry of the Sepah was granted voting rights in the SDC (*Payame Enqelab*, 1986d, p. 13). This enabled the Sepah to provide solutions to its problems and needs, while having a stake in the strategy of the country's defence.

Having established its position in the IRI military strategy game, the Sepah was decisive in extending Iran's asymmetric warfare into a sea-going context. Unlike conventional maritime tactics, the Sepah's asymmetric warfare emphasised the use of frequent hit-and-run attacks in order to target the weaknesses of far stronger fleets in the region. Asymmetric warfare became the fulcrum of the Iranian naval strategy in the last phase of the Iran-Iraq war in 1987 and 1988, paving the way for the US-Iran confrontation at sea. The skirmishes known as the 'tanker wars' were provoked by Iraqi offensives against Iranian targets at sea (Wise, 2007, p. 7). Stung by the failure of its initial maritime attacks and the subsequent Iranian offensives, from 1985 to 1986 Baghdad intensified its aerial attacks on Iranian tankers and ships in the Persian Gulf (Wise, 2007, p. 7). In response, Iran retaliated by attacking nearby ships in the Persian Gulf that supported Iraq. In this regard, given the Artesh's cautious military response and its limited artillery power compared to that of other western naval powers present in the Gulf, it was the Sepah navy (IRGCN) that filled the vacuum by making use of its guerrilla operations, a strategy that was unfamiliar to the enemy (Haghshenass, 2008, p. 5). Initially achieving limited results, the IRGCN's guerrilla tactics improved Iran's retaliatory operations against Saudi Arabia and (in particular) Kuwaiti tankers in early 1987. Consequently, to protect Kuwaiti tankers from Iranian attacks, the US navy was sent forth into the Gulf to escort the Kuwaiti fleets (Wise, 2007, p. 8).

The entry of the US navy did not, however, put an end to the Sepah's unconventional naval attacks; rather, it transformed the Iran-Iraq maritime war into an international confrontation involving Iran and western naval powers, specifically the US navy. Despite Iranian officials' efforts to normalise relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, the IRGCN quickly stepped up its mission to push the US navy into a quagmire by attacking Kuwaiti tankers and the US companies escorting them. One case in point was the episode in April 1987 when the reflagged Kuwaiti fleet was damaged by Iranian mines (Haghshenass, 2008, p. 8). The episode prompted both Iran and the US into a series of low-level confrontations in the Persian Gulf, characterised by the tenacity of the IRGCN's armed speedboats and the Islamic Republic's navy in the face of subsequent attacks by the US naval arsenal. This included the seizure of the Iranian minelayer Iran Air by the US Special Ops forces; the destruction of three IRGCN speedboats by a US air attack; an Iranian missile strike on the reflagged tanker Sea Isle City; a US retaliatory attack against Iranian oil rigs that turned into military bases; and the destruction of the USS *Samuel B. Roberts* by an Iranian mine (Arasli, 2006, p. 20).

Although, in the end, the US naval attacks bore fruit over the course of nine months, the IRGCN's tenacious missions challenged the superiority of US military might, uncovering its sensitivities. It is certainly true that it was not until April 1988, when the US navy engaged in an all-out attack (known as Operation Praying Mantis) against Iranian targets, that the US gained the upper hand in the war of attrition, culminating in Iran's acceptance of a ceasefire with Iraq – much to the Sepah's dismay (Arasli, 2006, p. 20). Aside from challenging US naval capability, the Sepah's tactics had wider economic implications for the west. Though the scope of material losses of the US navy from the Iranian attacks was limited, the IRGCN's threat to shut down the strait of Hormuz, a major conduit for the export of oil from the Gulf region, combined with its naval operations, proved effective in countering western interests by disrupting the oil energy market while raising additional costs for the US military engagement (Arasli, 2006, p. 20).

6.2.2.2 The Sepah and the Export of the Revolution

Another arena of the Sepah's activities in 1980, besides its national defence aspects, was the export of the revolution. It was here that the Sepah's overseas operations took root, despite the fact that it was already burdened with the lion's share of responsibilities with regard to the Iran-Iraq war. In parallel with its combat functions, it was at this point that the Sepah's ties with Shi'a groups in the region, particularly Iraq and Lebanon, came into being. Though the origin of these groups' connections with Iran goes back to their relationship with Iranian revolutionaries, it was due to the Sepah's efforts during the 1980s that such connections were bolstered and assumed concerted military, political and ideological dimensions. One example was the anti-Ba'athist Shi'a opposition group in Iraq known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Republic of Iraq (SCRI). The SCRI began its formal links with Islamic Iran when its leader, Muhammad Baqir A-Sadir, sent his disciple Mahmoud Hashemi to represent him in Tehran (Mallat, 1988, p. 727). Following the execution of A-Sadir by Saddam Hussein, the organisation's leaders fled to Iran and established the 'Iraqi government in exile' (Mallat, 1988, p. 699); however, it was only after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war that it formed a paramilitary wing and became embedded in the Sepah's military activities against Saddam's regime. One case in point is the SCRI's military operations using its newly-formed regiments. With the help of, and in liaison with, the Sepah, the SCRI formed contingents of Iraqi forces, namely the nine Badr Brigades and the Al-Fajr divisions, to serve at the front and assist with guerrilla activities on the Iraqi border. In addition to these contingents, the SCRI was said to be involved in recruiting and organising a formation comprised of Iraqi Kurdish opposition fighters in the highlands of Northern Iraq for asymmetric operations (*Payame Enqelab*, 1986b, p. 29).

In spite of Iranian support, the SCRI fell short of posing any significant threat to the Iraqi regime. For one thing, the sabotage attacks launched by its various groups and formations had little impact. For another, as the organisation's activities were heavily dependent on the outcome of the war being in favour of Iran, its cross-border activities were superfluous (Dekmejian, 1985, 127-136; Mallat, 1988, 728-729). Regardless of its shortcomings, the SCRI and the various groups under its umbrella provided the Sepah with multiple conduits that seem to have been useful in ensuring Iran's regional influence in Iraq decades later.

Against the backdrop of the post-2003 era following the US invasion of Iraq, these groups were to assume an international importance, becoming crucial in shaping the regional competition between Iran and the U.S. (see section 6.4 for more details).

Of all the Sepah's activities in exporting the revolution to the Middle East during the 1980s, the case of Lebanon was distinct. In contrast to its approach in Iraq, whereby the Sepah's support for its Iraqi proxies was by and large limited to the battle front, in Lebanon the export of the revolution was launched as an extension of Iran's war efforts in Iraq, and in line with Islamic Iran's proclaimed struggle against Zionism and imperialism (Goodarzi, 2009, pp. 63-64). For the Iranian leadership, the theatre of war in Lebanon in the 1980s could add a further international dimension to the war with Iraq, through which Iran could expand the Islamic revolution and tip the regional balance in its favour by expelling its regional nemesis and finally invading Iraq. Also, through the Lebanese front, Iran could deal a heavy blow to its main enemies, the US and Israel, and establish a permanent position at Israel's borders (Ehteshami, 1997, p. 123).

To achieve this goal, the Sepah contingents and their various superfluous affiliates were an important apparatus in support of the Shi'a militant groups' resistance; in particular, Hezbollah was crucial against the pro-western Maronist government and army, as well as the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) that invaded Lebanon to rein in the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) (see Goodarzi, 2009, p. 76-79). In 1982 the Sepah's Lebanese units were dispatched to Lebanon under the direction of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in accordance with the agreement signed between Syria and Iran to assist the Shi'a community in the fight against the Zionist regime. This was made possible by the developing strategic interest between Syria and Iran. As Iran's strategic ally in the Iran-Iraq war, Syria emerged as an even closer Iranian ally following the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. In the theatre of the Lebanese war, Syria saw a common interest with Iran in fighting its US and Israeli enemies. Nonetheless, unlike Iran's objective of the export of the revolution, the Syrians' position was motivated by the threat of Israeli occupation of its territory, the Golan Heights, as well as the threat it felt from a possible, further Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon due to its long-standing influence in the country. It was in light of these merging of interests that Syria and Iran helped with the mobilisation of the Shi'a community against the

Israeli occupiers. In this regard, Syria and Iran saw the Sepah as a crucial tool for the co-option of Shi'a groups which could intimidate the pro-western-Israeli axis.

The outcome of the Iranian and Syrian presence in Lebanon showed the Sepah to be a crucial tool in extending Iranian influence in Lebanon. Accordingly, the Sepah was deployed into numerous skirmishes with western and US forces in Lebanon, which were stationed in support of Israel and the pro-western Maronist government. In November 1982, Tehran sent 2000 soldiers to Balback in the Syria-held Bekka Valley. Days after their arrival, 300 men from the Sepah marched on the town hall in Balback and attacked the Lebanese garrison in the town (Goodarzi, 2009, p. 77). In addition to its own offensive against the Lebanese government's targets, the Sepah played a key role in creating a pro-Iranian militant Shi'a proxy in Lebanon. Disenchanted with Amal's (the Lebanese Shi'a movement) emphasis on the rights of the Shi'as within the framework of Lebanon at that time, Ali Akbar Mohtashami, the Iranian ambassador to Syria, oversaw the formation of Amal's rival Shi'a movement, Hezbollah. For this purpose, the Sepah regiments stationed in Balback provided military training, arms and leadership for resistance against the Israelis in the South (Ehteshami, 1997, pp.123-124). Working closely with Hezbollah, the Sepah allegedly planned sporadic guerrilla actions against the multinational forces in Lebanon. These terrorist missions were brought to a head on 18 April with the US Embassy Bombing, killing at least 63 people including Senior CIA Middle East expert Robert Clayton Ames, the CIA Station Chief, his deputy, and other agency personnel (Ignatius, 2008; Goodarzi 2009, p.88). The Sepah also seemed to have been involved in the bombing of the US Marines' and French paratroopers' barracks on 23 October 1983 (see Radstorp, 1997, p. 38).

In addition to keeping US retaliation at bay, the Sepah played both a direct and indirect role in the hostage-taking and abduction campaigns targeting western diplomats and staff in Beirut; most famously these include the abduction of David Dodge, the active President of American university in Beirut; the abduction of the American colonel William R. Higgins in the south; and the kidnapping and killing of the CIA Station's Chief William Francis Buckley (Hijazi, 1991; Ranstorp, 1997, p. 102). Many hostages were kept in the barracks of Sheikh Abdullah in Lebanon, which housed the revolutionary guard contingent; others like David Dodge were reportedly sent to the Corps' unit in Iran's notorious Evin Prison for

torture and interrogation (Katzman 1993, p. 98; also see Jaber, 1997, p. 100). Through the actions outlined above, the Sepah proved to be a key organisation in the export of revolutionary activities. This, however, must not be construed as indicating the Sepah's overall independence in its overseas operations. Though the Sepah exhibited a great degree of authority over the training and arming of militant foreign proxies, the civilian leadership in Tehran made sure to oversee the Sepah's operations and to ensure they were in line with the general objectives of the Islamic Republic in Lebanon. To this end, while the civilian authorities continued to utilise the Sepah's activities to force the enemy into concessions, they sought to halt the various extra-legal bodies and shadow associates that were functioning outside civilian control and found to be counter-productive to the foreign policy calculations of the pragmatic faction, led by the Majles Speaker Rafsanjani. In 1986, the shadow Office of Liberation Movements (OLM), led by Ayatollah Montazeri's supporter Medi Hashemi, was eliminated at the initiation of Iran's pragmatists in power, who were fearful of implication in Hashami's rogue activities within Tehran's grand bargain for the release of the US hostages held by Hezbollah. The dissolution of the OLM constituted a severe setback for Mehdi Hashemi, who had already left the Sepah two years earlier to form his own export of the revolution organisation under the patronage of Khomeini's designated successor Montazeri. In 1986 Hashemi, who sought to settle the score with the regime's pragmatic faction, leaked the news of the Iran-US arms deal (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1986). He was subsequently arrested and executed a year later on Khomeini's direct orders (see *Payame Enqelab*, 1987a, p. 38-41). Shortly after the leak, it was revealed that the US had requested that Tehran release its hostages in return for supplying spare parts for aircrafts, tanks and weapons needed for the war efforts.

The Hashemi episode indicates that the Sepah's export of the revolution was mainly a means for the state to deal with geopolitical conflict. Insofar as state logic was concerned, Iran saw the taking of US hostages as a useful strategy in order to obtain arms and to extract its frozen assets from the US, as well as possibly prevent US intervention against it in the war with Iraq (Ehteshami, 1997, p. 128). The Sepah's revolutionary activities were thus seen as a viable strategy to this end. Once the Islamic revolutionary ideology ran counter to the logic of the state, as in the case of Hashemi, Khomeini's pragmatic lieutenants were resolute

in choosing the latter and showed no hesitation in undermining its ideological excesses.

This is not to say that ideology had no role in state decision-making. Indeed, at varying moments, the IRI's foreign policy's emphasis on revolutionary ideology and the scope of the Sepah's overseas activities was the product of an internal power struggle, and depended on the Radical or Pragmatic faction in charge at the time. Nonetheless, it was under Khomeini's commanding authority that contending views on Iran's foreign policy amongst Iran's political factions were resolved and shaped the state's interest. In view of Khomeini's turn towards pragmatism, following his famous ruling that emphasised the primacy of the Islamic state over Islamic precepts, it was the pragmatic faction that had the upper hand in foreign policy decision-making. In this regard any attempt against state interests, even amongst the regime's revolutionary ideologues and hardline factions in the Sepah, constituted a violation of the sanctity of state and had to be dealt with decisively.

6.3 The Ebb and Flow of the Sepah's Export of the Revolution Activities during the Rafsanjani and Khatami Administrations (1989-2005)

With the death of Khomeini and the election of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to the presidency (1989-1997), the Sepah seemed to have experienced some degree of reduction in its role as an apparatus for export of the revolution in the region. This temporary reduction was in part a reflection of the shift towards pragmatism within the regime's foreign policy. This was particularly evident in 1993, when the imperatives of post-war reconstruction forced the regime – in particular, its Pragmatist faction – to reassess its radical foreign policy of the 1980s and pursue a certain degree of rapprochement towards Iran's neighbours and the west (with the exception of the US). The fading of the Sepah's overseas activities also reflected the weakening of its allies in the Radical Islamic faction and the rise of the Pragmatic–Traditional Conservative coalition. While Khomeini was alive, the Radicals relied on his support and thereby had a strong presence in the Islamic Revolutionary bodies, including the Majles, the government and the judiciary. With the death of Khomeini, the Radicals were deprived of his effective intervention in their favour. This provided an opportunity for the new Supreme Leader, Khamenei, and President-Elect Rafsanjani to undermine the position of

the Radicals in the corridors of power in the government and revolutionary institutions of the IRI. With the strengthening of his power as Leader through constitutional amendments, Khamenei further consolidated his power by appointing Conservative figures to the highest ranks of the Sepah and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security Organisation (MOIS). Through these efforts, the Sepah became aligned with the rising tide of conservatism. Hence, its overseas actions became dormant, to the dismay of the Radical allies who were increasingly losing influence in the domestic power struggle. With the dismissal of the Radicals, however, the Sepah escalated its overseas operations under the auspices of the Conservative-dominated MOIS. It did this against the backdrop of the Conservatives' mounting efforts to block Rafsanjani's attempts at introducing moderation into Iran's foreign policy. To this end, the Sepah was believed to be linked to various terrorist activities, namely the bombing of the Jewish Centre in Argentina in 1992 and the bombing of US installations at the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia.

After the appointing of Khatami in 1997, the Sepah's and the MOIS's overseas operations witnessed another break. With the exception of his last two years in office (2003-2005), Khatami oversaw a dramatic reduction in the terrorist activities of both the Sepah and Iran's security services. This reduction partly reflected the new administration's commitment to *détente* and partly mirrored the Conservatives' reluctance for any direct confrontation with the west, following as it did the Mykonos affair and the looming threat of a US military strike in the wake of the Khobar Towers bombings. Despite this restraint laid on its activities, the Sepah remained one of the obstacles to improved relations between Iran and the US. While a source of alarm for the Khatami administration concerning the utility of its *détente* policy in the face of US hostile intentions, the Sepah waited for an opportunity to make an assertive bid on regional issues facing the IRI. Such an opportunity was brought about by the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003, paving the way for the Sepah to engage in another wave of regional activities.

6.3.1 Rafsanjani's Presidency (1989-1997)

The first major event that demonstrated Iran's commitment to pragmatism during the first post-Khomeini administration was exemplified by Iran's non-confrontational posture following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent bombing campaign by the west. In this respect, Iran's pragmatic approach and the Sepah's non-confrontational conduct towards the western coalition took place much to the annoyance of the radicals. Although the Conservatives insisted on Iran's neutrality in the conflict, certain Radicals including Mehdi Karoubi and Ahmad Khomeini demanded that the government should hold a solid anti-American position. Other Radicals, such as the Sepah's former ally Mohtashami, favoured Iranian support for Iraq, urging the Faqih to declare a jihad against the United States and its allies (Arjomand 1991, p. 57; Brumberg, 2001, p. 173). The Radicals' opposition towards the government led to a series of attacks on Rafsanjani's economic policies, which forced him to reach out to western financial institutions (Ibid, p.173). This set the stage for Rafsanjani's alliance with the Traditional Conservatives. The Traditional Conservatives, who wished to consolidate power and block their Radical counterparts, saw the benefits of a tactical alliance with Rafsanjani and thereby backed his foreign policy on Iraq. Subsequently, this alliance provided further grounds for the Conservative-dominated Council of Guardians to disqualify the majority of Radical candidates from the Council of Experts elections in the autumn of 1990 (Ibid, p. 173).

Interestingly, the Sepah seem to have acted in line with the wishes of the pragmatic leadership and the Traditional Conservatives, despite the hawkish stance of the Corps' radical element and its civilian patrons. The evidence regarding the Sepah's official announcements from 1990 to 1991 supports its non-confrontational posture. In 1991, while condemning US aggression (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1990), the Sepah's Supreme Commander Mohsen Rezaei ruled out the involvement of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards in the Gulf War in support of any of the belligerent parties (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1991). This was in line with Rezaei's prior statement in 1990, which emphasised the Sepah's defensive rather than offensive approach and in which he remarked upon the Iranian forces' 'readiness [in defence] in the face of the US presence in the region' (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1990).

This restraint over the Sepah's role in IRI foreign policy did not prove to be permanent, as the Sepah witnessed a resurgence in its export of the revolutionary mission during Rafsanjani's second term (1993-1997). This resurgence appears to have been produced by the emergence of factionalism, this time between the Traditional Conservatives and the Pragmatic Conservatives, resulting in the use by the former of the Sepah as a political support base. Having marginalised their Radical rivals out of a position of power and bolstered their influence over the revolutionary institutions, in particular the Sepah, the Traditional Conservatives did their utmost to blunt Rafsanjani's pragmatism, if not force him into compromise. As previously noted, during Rafsanjani's first term the Traditional Conservatives supported the president's foreign policy initiative out of acrimony towards their Radical rivals. Now, with the strengthening of their power in internal political fields, the Conservatives sought to advance their agenda by taking up a more hardline position on foreign policy. The breakout of inter-elite factionalism between the two Conservative camps (i.e. Traditional and Pragmatic) took place simultaneously with the split between President Rafsanjani and the Supreme Leader Khamenei. As noted earlier (see Chapter 4), following Rafsanjani's second term in 1993, Khamenei began to assert more control over Iran's foreign and domestic policies by securing key posts for his protégés and taking political positions aligned with the Traditional Conservative faction (Menashri,1997, p. 35; Bakhash, 1998, p. 83; Moslem, 2002, pp. 200-202). The rifts within the top levels of leadership and amongst the Conservative camps stymied Rafsanjani's initiatives, resulting in an inconsistent foreign policy. As a consequence, the IRI's foreign policy reflected an uneasy balance between the imperative of pragmatism and the revolutionary ideology backed by narrowed factional interests (see Menashri, 1997, p. 69-71; Gheissari and Nasr, 2006, p. 107).

At the heart of the foreign policy issues that were undermined by the Traditional Conservatives and the Supreme Leader was the prospect of relations with the US. The issue was raised as early as 1992, following the fall of the Soviet Union, when President Rafsanjani warned of the dominance of the US while intimating Iran's interest in economic ties, conditional on the US proving its goodwill first (Menashri, 1997, p.73). On another occasion in 1994, Rafsanjani remarked, 'I have always [been] opposed to completely breaking our ties with the

United States. They provide us with much needed spare parts and we sell them petrol. Therefore, our economic ties have never been completely halted and some kind of dialogue must always exist' (Moslem, 2002, p. 225). These statements provoked fierce attacks from the Traditional Conservatives, who not only portrayed the issue of rapprochement as being contrary to the wishes of Khomeini and the current Supreme Leader, but also rejected its benefits altogether (see the Conservative mouthpieces *Keyhan*'s and *Resalat*'s statements in Menashri 1997, pp. 74-75; also see MP Mohammad Qomi and the Speaker of Majles Nateq-Nuri's remarks in Moslem 2002, p. 226).

The emergence of a rift between the Traditional Conservatives and Rafsanjani's Pragmatic Conservatives gave way to the insertion of the Sepah into Iranian foreign policy. To this end, the Sepah took advantage of the factional differences within Iran's foreign policy in order to pursue its extra-territorial actions. Accordingly, the Sepah operated as a political base for the Traditional Conservatives, who had successfully compelled Rafsanjani to compromise his rapprochement agenda with due regard to Islamic revolutionary ideology. Rafsanjani's acquiescence to, and timely complicity with, the wishes of the hardline Conservatives and their Sepah allies was exemplified in the three prominent cases of terrorist activiys in the 1990s which were allegedly planned by the Sepah and MOIS. The first of these terrorist activities was the 1994 bombing of the AMIA, the Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires, which killed 85 people. Though the bombing was instigated by Hezbollah, there is a body of evidence that points to Iran's security and intelligence apparatus playing a key role in orchestrating the attack. For example, in 2002 Mr Mesbahi, a leading Iranian defector, was reported to have disclosed valuable information concerning the involvement of the Iranian cultural attaché Mohsen Rabani and a senior officer of the Iranian Intelligence agency, Hamid Naghashan, in the 1994 bombing (Rother, 2002). A year later, in 2003, a report by Argentina's Secretariat for State Intelligence (SIDE) lent further evidence to the pivotal role of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the Sepah Qods forces in planning Hezbollah's AMIA attack. According to the SIDE report, the bombing of AMIA was planned by Iran in retaliation for the Israeli assassination of Abbas Musavii, the first Hezbollah leader, in March 1992. The SIDE report also asserted that the attack was launched with the approval, supervision and financial assistance of

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Hashemi Rafsanjani (Javedanfar, 2007, p. 214). In 2006, an arrest warrant was issued by Argentinian prosecutors against eight prominent officials, including Hashemi Rafsanjani and the former foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati. In March of that year Interpol acquitted the two top politicians. This led to Interpol's decision in 2007 to grant an arrest warrant for five Iranian suspects, among whom were the former Iranian intelligence Chief Ali Falahin, former Supreme Commander of the Sepah Mohsen Rezaei, and former Commander of the Qods force Ahmad Vahidi (BBC, 2007; also see Yapp, 2011).

Another act of terrorism which seems to have been planned by the Sepah was the Khobar Towers attack on US interests in Saudi Arabia. In 1996, a truck loaded with bombs exploded at the side of the US military housing complex at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia. Though the bombing was found to have been orchestrated by Saudi operatives, the investigation carried out by US agencies including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) laid bare the role played by the Sepah in 'selecting the targets and training the perpetrators' (National Security Archive, 2010). According to the claim by then-director of the FBI Louis Freeh most of the Saudi perpetrators were members of the Saudi *Hezbollah,* which was an offspring of the Iranian-backed organisation, also called Hezbollah, based in Lebanon. The link between the Saudi *Hezbollah* and the Sepah was further established by information obtained about the truck used in the bombing. According to the FBI's findings, the truck was purchased by a trainee soldier in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This finding was reported to be backed by the driver, taken into custody, who provided information about other cell members and revealed a broad plan devised by the top officials of the Corps to target sites in Saudi Arabia (Walsh, 2001).

These covert activities against Israeli-US interests constituted one aspect of the Sepah's export of the revolution operation. Another aspect of the Sepah's export of the revolution operations, which became prominent during Rafsanjani's second term, was directed against the Iranian opposition exiled to the greater western world. In this regard, the Sepah's operations were carried out through the cooperation of its Qods force employees with Iran's Ministry of Information and Security Organisation (MOIS). The first instance of these activities occurred in 1991 with the assassination of the Shah's last Prime Minister, Shahpour Bakhtiar,

and his Chief Aid in his home in Paris. Ironically, the incident took place at a time when Rafsanjani's government was seeking to improve relations with France by playing a mediatory role in freeing the six French hostages in Lebanon (Riding, 1991).

A year later, in September 1992, the Iranian intelligence services under the direction of MOIS assassinated the Kurdish opposition leader, Sadegh Sharafkani, and his associates in a Greek restaurant in Berlin. The incident was given international attention, surrounding the extended trial of the suspects in what became known as the 'Mykonos Trial after the name of the Greek restaurant where the attack took place. In December 1995, German prosecutors investigated the role of the Iranian Minister of Intelligence and Security Organisation, Ali Falahian, in the killings (Mickolos and Simmons, 1997, p. 207). The investigation into and legal deliberation over the Mykonos case was brought to its conclusion in March 1996, when the German prosecutors issued an arrest warrant for Fallahian in addition to a long term prison sentence for five defendants. The court also implicated the top Iranian authorities, President Rafsanjani and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, by concluding that the perpetrators had followed orders from the Iranian officials.

The fact that the aforementioned incidents carried out by the Sepah and MOIS arose in spite of President Rafsanjani's attempts at reconciliation with the outside world complicates any understanding of Iran's motive. Some sources assert the possible involvement of Iran's hardline elements in such acts of terrorism independent of the government (Ashraf and Banuazizi, 2001, p. 245; Chubin, 2001, p. 91; Buchta, 2004). Arguably, the rise of the Sepah's and MOIS's foreign operations is suggestive of hardline efforts to challenge Rafsanjani's reconciliation agenda. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that such actions were carried out without Rafsanjani's knowledge. Terrorist acts overseas usually involve the coordination of numerous government ministries and revolutionary organisations; such coordination cannot be maintained without the tacit approval of senior leadership (Byman, *et al*., 2001, p. 93).

There is further evidence concerning the functions of the IRI intelligence services, which verifies the role of top civilian leaders in approving such terrorist operations. According to a report by the German office for the protection of the Constitution, the tasks and targets of the Iranian intelligence agencies are decided

by the Supreme National Security Council, a key national security and defence assessment body which is chaired by the president and whose members include representatives of the Artesh, the Sepah, other security agencies and the Supreme Leader (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1995). In addition to this, the testimony of former President Abol-hassan Banisadr in the Mykonos trial throws further light on the complicity of the top Iranian leaders in overseas acts of terrorism. According to Banisadr's testimony, the murders of the regime's enemies were approved by the Supreme Leader, the President and the Minister of the Intelligence and Security Organisation (MOIS) within the secret body called the Special Operation Council (The Iran Brief, 1996).

Regardless of Rafsanjani's tacit acquiescence to the hardline contingent and the Sepah's overseas involvement, it became increasingly apparent at the end of his second term that such acts of terrorism had undermined, by and large, his move towards the normalisation of Iran's foreign policy. Suspicions of the Sepah's involvement in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing had led to a deterioration in Iran's relationship with the Arab states in the Persian Gulf. At the same time, the idea that the Sepah's had possibly had a role in the incident had resulted in Iran being threatened with the possibility of a US military strike. Fearing a US attack, the outgoing President Rafsanjani urged the country's politicians to keep their distance from revolutionary militant activism. He remarked that:

> We have powerful enemies; US, Israel and other countries. I still have my concern about this. We have to be careful in the future. In our foreign policy we should act in a way that could achieve our objectives and maintain our ideals without seriously damaging our country (cited in Chubin 2001, p. 50).

These actions of the security forces and the Sepah also had a deleterious impact on Iran's relations with the Europeans. This was particularly evident following the German legal decision in March 1997 to implicate the Iranian officials in the Mykonos affair. The ruling led to the EU's seizure of critical dialogue with Iran. It also led to the EU's recall of its ambassadors from Tehran; the Iranian foreign

ministry followed suit by recalling its ambassadors in Germany and dismissing the court's accusations as politically motivated (Elder, 1997, p. 50).

6.3.2 The Khatami Administration (1997-2005)

The election of Khatami and the emergence of the reform movement in May 1997 heralded a rapprochement and *détente* in Iran's foreign policy towards the west and its Arab neighbours in the Persian Gulf. The shift towards normalisation had already been initialised by Rafsanjani, although it was sought in vain due to domestic differences. Khatami, however, was more successful in this respect, partly due to his willingness to put a restraint on the Sepah and the MOIS acts of terrorism. Surprisingly, Khatami's attempts to reduce the use of terrorism abroad faced little opposition among the hardline faction. Following the German court's decision in 1997, the Iranian extremist elements became increasingly aware of the political risks and threats associated with its unfettered pursuit of terrorism (Chubin 2001, p. 91; also see Eisenstadt, 1998, pp. 80-81). In addition, the Khobar Towers incident of 1996 informed Iran's civilian leadership of the real threat of US military attack (Ibid, p. 91). This was in view of the fact that shortly after the bombing, the Clinton administration suspected Iranian involvement in the incident and considered a military strike on Iran, but refrained from that option given the lack of hard evidence at the time (Pollack, 2005; pp. 282-283; National Security Archive, 2010).

To end the impasse in Iranian-European relations affected by the Mykonos affair, Khatami made a series of steps to re-establish contact with the EU. Upon his inauguration, Khatami dismissed Iran's Minister of Intelligence and Security Organisation, Ali Falahian, who was found responsible for Iran's terrorist activities and in particular the Mykonos affair. This was followed by the resignation of the Supreme Commander of the Sepah Mohsen Rezaei (see Eisenstadt, 1998, pp. 82-83), who was also implicated in the 1992 bombing of the Jewish centre in Argentina. To ease the tense relations with Europe, in August 1998 Iran's new Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kamal Kharazi, offered to meet with UN ambassadors at the UN General Assembly Session in New York (Elder, 1997, p. 52). This initiative was followed by various public statements by Khatami, aimed at opening relations with Europe and given at the OIC Conference in November and during his CNN interview in January 1998 (Chubin, 2001, p. 31).

A year later in 1999, Khatami made various visits to European countries, notably Italy, France and Germany, which strengthened Iran's diplomatic and economic relations with the EU.

A semblance of relaxing was also seen in Khatami's approach to the United States. In his interview on CNN in 1997, Khatami signalled the hope for dialogue between Iran and the US which he referred to as a dialogue among civilisations. While this was more of a moderate gesture rather than a political dialogue, it brought into discussion what had previously been a key ideological red line in Iran's foreign policy. Khatami's gesture was followed by an official statement from his Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharazi, in which he stated, 'We are ready to work with all nations, provided that they are ready to establish their relations with us based on mutual respect' (Menashri, 1998, p. 28). The emerging soft tone and goodwill coming from the Khatami administration set in motion a degree of *détente* and non-confrontation in Iran's approach to the US. Nonetheless, it did not translate into concrete political dialogue between Iran and the US for many reasons. To begin with, the prospect of better relations was overshadowed by long-standing issues of disputes between the two countries over the previous two decades. This was made even more difficult because of Iran's domestic opposition to improved relations with the US, voiced by the Supreme Leader, his hardline allies and the Sepah. For its part, the Sepah feared that better relations with the US would lead Iran to compromise support for its proxies and geopolitical ambitions in ways that would weaken its leverage on IRI regional policy.

The Sepah's opposition to closer relations with the US happened at a time when Khatami's efforts in raising public awareness about the issue had already begun to challenge the Sepah's exaggerated and exclusively military-oriented take on security (Chubin, 2001, p. 34). Thus, it is not a surprise that Khatami's approach was received by the higher echelons of the Sepah with growing discontent. This sentiment was shared by the incoming Supreme Commander of the Sepah, Rahim Safavi. In his interview with FarsNews, Rahim Safavi recalled an episode in which he forewarned Khatami about the dangers of the growing debate around the issue of relations with the U.S., adding that, 'The debate (*Gofteman*) will not stop American and Israeli aggression against Iran' (FarsNews, 2010). These paranoid views on the US threat were reiterated in the

Sepah's report on national security challenges published by the Majles' Centre for Research in December 1999. The report presented the US presence in the Persian Gulf and Iran's immediate neighbours as a conspiracy to encircle Iran. The report remarked that this conspiracy was facilitated by the use of westernised elements at home to undermine the Supreme Leader and the principles of the regime, thus effectively blaming the Reformists for the issue (see Islamic Consultative Assembly Centre for Research, 1999, pp. 1-5).

In any case, the Sepah proved to be a major obstacle to Iran's opening relations with the US, as well as subsequent US overtures to Iran. One illustrative example was Clinton's 1999 overture to President Khatami in the wake of US intelligence agencies' new evidence that the Sepah were involved in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombings during the presidency of Rafsanjani. As noted, in 1996 the Clinton administration had suspected that the Sepah played a role in the incident but waived the option of a military strike against Iran due to the lack of definitive evidence. In 1999, however, the Clinton administration became convinced of Iran's role in the incident due to the revelation of evidence that it saw as credible. While considering a military option, however, the Clinton administration feared that an attack on Iran would weaken the Reformists, who had shown an interest in improved relations with the US. Rather than retaliation, Clinton sought to use the evidence as a catalyst to reach out to the Reformists by asking for the cooperation of President Khatami regarding the Khobar Towers case. Khatami's assistance was put forth as an opportunity for confidence-building between the two countries. Accordingly, in a letter to President Khatami the Clinton administration indicated that it had credible evidence about the involvement of members of the Sepah in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing. Alluding to the differences between Khatami and his hardline counterparts, the letter noted the positive steps the Khatami government had taken against domestic terrorism and international criminal activities. The letter asked Khatami to end Iran's involvement in terrorist activities, particularly the threats against American citizens, and bring those responsible to justice as grounds for improved relations between Iran and the US (National Security Archive, 2010b).

As it turned out, however, the US's overture to Iran was stymied by domestic opposition. Based on published accounts, Khatami was said to have responded positively upon receiving the letter from the Omani foreign minister,

who was used as a channel to communicate the U.S. message (National Security Archive, 2010d). Nonetheless, after consulting with Iran's senior leaders, Khatami seemed to have encountered disapproval from the Supreme Leader and other senior officials who rejected the US's demands. As a result, Khatami's official response to Clinton's message came to reflect the decision-making process in the IRI which requires consultation with Iran's ruling circles. The letter sent by Khatami conveyed the Iranian government's commitment to the 'vigorous pursuit of *détente* and rule of law' (National Security Archive, 2010c). At the same time, it rejected the allegations as inaccurate and thereby discarded the offer of dialogue with the US under the stipulated conditions. The case of Clinton's failed overture points to the US administration's misreading of the decision-making process in Iran. The Clinton administration overestimated Khatami's ability to control Iran's foreign policy in isolation of the views of other powerful circles, such as the Sepah and the Conservative clerics aligned with the Supreme Leader. In any case, closer relations with the US would not only require the approval of the Supreme Leader but also approval from the Sepah, which had a vested interest in the policies of the regime. As such, the Sepah remained an important stakeholder to reckon with in any negotiation with the US. Evidently, the Sepah did not wish to give up its anti-western ideological character and power, and therefore opposed relations with the US. The Sepah's opposition was no surprise, given that any government's compromise on Clinton's demands required the Corps to relinquish its role as an apparatus for the export of the revolution. Agreement with the US's proposed conditions was further impossible given that it required the government to reign over the Sepah and admit Iran's past role in activities that it had so far denied. In any case, the notion of government confrontation with the Sepah, as one of the most powerful institutions enjoying the support of the Supreme Leader and the hardline faction, remained far from reality.

6.3.3 The Sepah's Role in the National Defence Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Under Rafsanjani and Khatami (1989-2005)

While it was during Ahmadinejad's presidency that the Sepah saw the most significant expansion of its defence policy, this trajectory was already gradually taking place against the backdrop of post-Khomeini Iran, in particular during the Khatami administration. Indeed, prior to its rise as a leading foreign policy actor, the Sepah had already made certain its influence over the Islamic Republic of Iran's national security and foreign policy issues, namely the military procurement and development of ballistic missiles and the control of Iran's nuclear programme. The Sepah's endeavours in this regard began during President Rafsanjani's administration (1989-1997) and gathered momentum during the Khatami administration (1997-2005).

6.3.3.1 Rafsanjani's Presidency (1989-1997)

Learning from the bitter experience of the Iran-Iraq war, Rafsanjani's military policy not only emphasised the need for military training and formal organisation, but also stressed the modernisation of Iran's conventional weapons and warfare in order to boost its deterrence capability for future wars (Chubin, 1994, pp. 17-21). To this end, efforts were carried out to upgrade the country's arms as Iran replaced its stockpile of US-supplied armed inventory with one in which the vast bulk of arms were imported from China and Russia. According to Chubin, from 1989 to 1992 within the arms trade, imports from Russia and China accounted for 64 percent and 16 percent respectively, while Europe's share plummeted to 8 percent (Chubin, 1994, p. 33). In addition, Iran sought to meet some of its weaponry needs through its (admittedly limited) domestic military industry. In 1991, Iran announced that it had started the mass production of long-range missiles. By doing so, Iran sought to secure its needs through a domestic production base at the same time as it was increasing its missile inventory for future emergencies, from a variety of suppliers – in particular North Korea, China and Pakistan (Chubin, 1994, p. 23; Cordesman, 2001, p. 306).

Though Iran's efforts at military procurement during Rafsanjani's presidency was modest in comparison to its neighbouring countries, it was here that the first comprehensive measures for equipping Iran's parallel armed forces with technological capability came into being. Though there is no clear data

regarding the details of the Sepah and the Artesh's arsenals, the existing evidence points to Rafsanjani government's peculiar distribution of resources, mindful of the Sepah's vested interest. To assure the Sepah's compliance with the government and to professionalise the Corps, Rafsanjani granted to the Sepah control of certain crucial military programmes and strategic weapons. While the Artesh was relegated to the operation of most of Iran's heavy weaponry, the Sepah was to have leverage over fast patrol boats, new kilo-class submarines and, most importantly, on Iran's missiles, including man-portable surface-to-air missiles and a number of HN-5 light surface-to-air missiles (Chubin, 1994, p 32; Cordesman, 2001, p. 133). Moreover, the Sepah became the principal operator of Iran's surface-to-surface missile forces while concurrently controlling Iran's nuclear and its alleged chemical programme (Cordesman, 2001, p. 133). These measures provided an additional reward to the Sepah, which had already at its disposal a professional weight with regard to its own military industry and preferred choice of purchased weapons, thanks to its distinct diplomatic-military ties with states such as Syria, Pakistan and North Korea (Chubin, 1994, p. 32; Cordesman 2001, p. 133).

6.3.3.2 Khatami's Presidency (1997-2005)

Under Khatami's government, the Sepah's military activities built further on its previous endeavours in procurement. While, at the official level, the Khatami government's adherence to the policy of *détente* and to arms control seemed to have reduced Iran's conventional military build-up, Iran's arsenal of missiles grew rapidly in tandem with the development of its civilian nuclear programme (Eisenstadt, 1998, p. 71). Indeed, the issue of arms control proved to be difficult for the Khatami administration from the outset. Although Khatami's government officially expressed a commitment to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, it was ambivalent about reducing Iran's procurement of unconventional weapons to a significant degree due to the country's imperative for self-defence.

Matters were complicated by the Conservative faction and the Sepah, who not only opposed the relaxation of military build-up but also saw Khatami's policy of *détente* as an existential threat to its established vested interests and the survival of the regime. This sentiment had already surfaced amongst the

Conservative Commanders of the Sepah. In April 1998 in a meeting with the Sepah naval officers, Sepah Commander Rahim Safavi remarked:

> Can we withstand America's threats and domineering attitude with a policy of detente? Can we foil dangers coming from America through dialogue between civilisations? Will we be able to protect the Islamic Republic from international Zionism by signing conventions to ban [the] proliferation of chemical and nuclear weapons? (Eisenstadt, 1998, p. 83).

In view of the fact that the Sepah was in charge of Iran's chemical and nuclear programmes and missile forces, Safavi's remark illustrated the Corps' hold over Iran's national defence policy and matters pertaining to Iran's nuclear programme and missile forces. Indeed, under Safavi's tenure (1998-2007) as the Supreme Commander of the Sepah, the Corps began to expand its missile capability and its stock of unconventional weaponries. One case in point was Iran's capability to produce Scud missiles and the extended range Shahab 3 missiles (Einestadt, 1998, p. 79; Cordesman, 2001, p. 309). In July 1998, Iran tested the Shahab 3 missiles, arguing that it was a defensive action in the face of potential threats from Iraq and Israel. This sentiment was shared by President Khatami, who praised the missile test on the grounds of Iran's right to self-defence while maintaining that 'the government's policies towards improving relations with various countries, especially our neighbours, has not changed' (Cordesman, 2001, p. 310). In another effort to expand its missile arsenal, in July 2000 the Sepah air force set up ballistic missile units. In the words of the Supreme Commander of the Sepah, Rahim Safavi, 'the organisation of five ballistic missile units is one of the major tasks that was accomplished by the Sepah air force,' adding that 'the deterrent capability of the Islamic Republic has increased as a result of its ballistic missile power and Iran is amongst the greatest missile powers in the region' (*The Middle East-Iran*, 2000).

Though the Sepah had already established extensive missile capabilities, the post-Septermber 11th environment and the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan brought an additional sense of urgency to the further advancement of Iran's forces for defence and war capabilities. Soon after the US invasion of Iraq,

the Basij and the Sepah were pushed to the forefront of guerrilla warfare against invasion modelled on a decentralised-defensive doctrine known as Mosaic doctrine (Eisenstadt, 2011, p. 5).

Aside from having an impact on the Sepah's defence preparation, the post-September 11th environment gave the Corps an opportunity to exert pressure over the national security debate by portraying Khatami's foreign policy as a failure. This was reinforced by Bush's 2002 'axis of evil' pronouncement and subsequent exposures regarding the scale of Iran's nuclear programme in 2003, which it had kept hidden from the IAEA (Ehteshami, 2009, p. 337). That this information surfaced despite Iran's demonstration of goodwill in cooperation with the US in Afghanistan in removing the Taliban was a blow to Khatami's accommodationist agenda. At the same time, this turn of events provided the Sepah and its emerging Neo-Conservative allies with an opportunity to attack the government for what they had previously foreseen as an ineffective and passive foreign policy. With nuclear negotiations becoming a prevailing issue in Khatami's second term, the Sepah and the emerging Neo-Conservatives did their utmost to capture the seat of power by exposing the Reformists' weakness in nuclear diplomacy while adopting a much more hardline foreign policy position in order to generate public support. The Neo-Conservatives' and the Sepah's attacks on the government became even more pronounced following Khatami's decision to temporarily suspend Iran's uranium enrichment as a goodwill gesture during talks with the EU3 and IAEA. Indeed, this was nowhere more evident than in the prelude to the presidential elections of 2005, when the idea of nationalism and Iran's right to a nuclear programme were two of the main themes of the debate among the Neo-Conservative Sepah veterans who were standing as presidential candidates (see Chapter 3).

6.4 The Turn Towards Securitisation and the Sepah's Rise in IRI National Defence and Regional Policy

With the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iran's foreign policy of *détente* and accommodation gave way to a more rigid, if not confrontational, stance. The turn towards securitisation in Iran's foreign policy reflected, on one hand, the rise of the Sepah and its Neo-Conservative allies in Iran's domestic politics. On the other, it reflected the geopolitical environment featuring both Iran's encirclement

by US presences on its eastern and western frontiers, and its vulnerability to the potential threat of US attack. This was further reinforced by the impasse in Iran's nuclear negotiations with the Europeans in the last days of the Khatami administration. Pressured by the Supreme Leader and finding no resolve in the nuclear negotiation with the Europeans, Khatami hinted at ruling out the unlimited suspension of uranium in the autumn of 2004 (see Chapter 3). With nuclear negotiations embroiled in a stalemate, the momentum for a more unyielding policy, in line with the Supreme Leader's wishes and those of his Sepah lieutenants, was underway. In the autumn of 2005 Supreme Leader Khamenei, in unison with the Expediency Council, passed a final document regarding Iran's 20-year outlook and aimed toward making Iran a regional power. In doing so, the document proposed a set of idealist objectives, namely expanding bilateral regional relations with friendly states, strengthening Iran's unity with the Muslim world and support for oppressed people, and augmenting Iran's economic position and defence and deterrent capabilities in the region (Ebrahimi, nd). Not surprisingly, the tone of the document resonated with the nationalist and Islamic revolutionary themes exploited by the Sepah and its Neo-Conservative allies, and provided the basis for the implementation of a more security-oriented approach to foreign policy.

One area where the shift in foreign policy was evident was the incoming administration's approach towards nuclear negotiations. While he allowed Iran to resume its nuclear activities, Ahmadinejad made it clear that Iran would not back away from its national right to a civilian nuclear programme, although it was open to negotiation without condition that stipulated the enrichment of uranium activities. In this respect, this firm position was hailed by the Sepah's mouthpiece as part of an active and offensive foreign policy (Katebi, 2010, p.35). According to Siamak Baqeri, the author of an article published in the Sepah's mouthpiece *Payame Enqelab,* 'in seeking to access nuclear technology in all aspects and raising the stake in negotiations, Ahmadinejad's diplomatic team enabled [a] change in the rule[s] of the game in favour of Iran' (Baqeri, 2007, p. 25). Baqeri maintained that that this was in sharp contrast to the diplomatic approach of the previous administration, which yielded to gradual suspension and delay in nuclear activities in the face of the fact that the west would never be willing to recognise Iran's nuclear rights. He added that the foreign policy of the ninth government

(i.e. Ahmadinejad's administration), in line with the 20-year outlook, has so far been used to promote Iran's position as a superpower in the region (Baqeri, 2007, p. 25).

Tied in with the Sepah's support for Ahmadinejad's nuclear politics was its stake in the defence policy of the IRI. Thanks to Ahmadinejad's heavy-handed approach, the Sepah's position as a stakeholder in the IRI's defence and deterrence priority gathered considerable pace. For example, the mounting tension between Iran and the US and its allies gave way to an even more substantial effort by the Sepah to build up its unconventional arsenal of missiles and rockets, thus enhancing its readiness for potential threats from the US and Israel. To this end, as will be shown in the next section, the Sepah went to great lengths. As another example, due to the Sepah's control over Iran's nuclear programme and its strong presence on important foreign policy committees, its opinion was poised to have a crucial weight in the national defence calculus, especially its nuclear programme. Indeed, the longstanding presence of Sepah personnel and their affiliates in the SNSC since Khatami's administration laid bare its pivotal role in this regard. One case in point was the appointment of the former Sepah officer Mehdi Bokharaizadeh as the head of foreign policy affairs in 2007, under the tenure of Ahmadinejad's SNSC Secretary General Saeid Jalili (*Iran*, 2008). Another member of SNSC personnel under Ahmadinejad's predecessor was the former Sepah affiliate Ali Agha Mohammadi, who served as the deputy of Iran's nuclear negotiation team under former Secretary General Hassan Rowhani and concurrently as the directorate of the SNSC for Iraqi affairs (see *AsrihIran*, 2009). During Ahmadinejad's tenure, the position of the Sepah became even more strengthened, which was evident from the fact that its veterans dominated the parliamentary commission on National Security and other powerful commissions (Khabaronline, 2012; see Table 8.1). By 2012, Sepah and Basij veterans occupied nine seats in the commission on National Security along with other personnel from the security apparatus (Khabaronline, 2012).

Besides its growing influence over Iran's decision-making in terms of its defence policies, the Sepah saw an unprecedented increase in its overseas activities in the region. Ironically, the involvement of the Sepah and its overseas unit of the Corps, the Qods force, gained a new boost from the presence of US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this respect, despite the fact that the US

encirclement of Iran constituted a threat to the IRI, the overthrow of Iran's ideological and geopolitical rivals – both the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Sunni-dominated regime of Saddam Hussein – provided the Qods force with an opportunity to entrench an Iranian foothold in the region. The presence of Iran was particularly evident in the case of Iraq, whereby Iran and the Qods force proved to be crucial actors in providing economic, political and military assistance to the Shi'a-dominated state while exerting equal weight on a plethora of Shi'a groups that challenged the central government. Evidently, the Iranian and in particular the Sepah's influence on the Shi'as was further maintained by the fact that many of these organisations, as previously noted, enjoyed Iran's financial backing and protection while in exile and worked closely with the Sepah in their resistance against Saddam Hussein.

As its reach in Iraq loomed large, the US grew fearful of the prospect of Iran's influence, which it saw as being counter to its nation-building efforts and stakes in that country's affairs. Likewise, it was concerned over the presence of the Qods force in Iraq, which had become one of the key stakeholders in shaping Iran's agenda in the country in all its aspects – economic, political and military. In this way, due to the Iranian Qods force's efforts to enhance Iran's influence in the emerging Shi'a crescent, the Iranian presence in Iraq was alarming to its Arab neighbours and the west. The US's rising fear of Iran's presence in this regard paved the way for its confrontation with the Iranian Qods force, as the latter's support for its various arms surrogates and increasing role in shaping Iraq's political and economic future had grown steadily. To this end, the Qods force seemed to have taken up a leading position in Iran's foreign policy towards Iraq, the details of which will be discussed in the following sections.

Apart from its influence in Iraq, the Sepah's overseas involvement increased given the ebb and flow of Iran's place in the regional dynamics in the Middle East, Arabia and Levant post-2005. Remarkably, the Sepah's overseas activities were catalysed by a series of events that tipped the regional balance of power in Iran's favour. These events in January 2006 were marked by the victory of the Iranian surrogate group Hamas in the Palestinian parliamentary elections; this was followed by the 33-day Israel-Hezbollah war in the summer of 2006, whereby the Iranian-backed Hezbollah demonstrated a great degree of resilience in the face of the Israelis' show of force. Though the reports pertaining to the

Qods force's active presence, let alone its role in instructing Hezbollah fighters during the war, cannot be substantiated, it can be said for certain that Iran and the Sepah's military backing for Hezbollah in the form of Iranian-made rockets was crucial to its good performance, in particular in the last phase of the war, as it forced Israel to agree with an internationally negotiated cease-fire (see Cordesman, 2008).

Emboldened by these favourable regional dynamics, the confidence of the Sepah and of Ahmadinejad's Iran grew. This sense of grandeur was echoed in a remark made by the Qods force Commander Qassem Suleimani. Shortly after the end of the war, Suleimani stated, 'Following the success of Hezbollah, a new Middle East has appeared, with an Islamic character not an American one' (*BBC Monitoring Middle East-Political*, 2006a). Coated in what was propagated as the Islamic ideology of the new Middle East was Iran's pursuit of its regional interest in light of these fertile geopolitical changes. As Ehteshami observed, 'the 2006 war was to illustrate Iran's ability to capitalise on the major geopolitical transformation taking place in the region to advance its own interests' (Ehteshami, 2009, p. 338). Obviously, one aspect of this 'geopolitical transformation' which was manifested in the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war was the rise of Iranian-Syrian influence in the region, in the face of the weakening leverage of the US in the Middle East. This was the product of the precarious situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the Middle East peace process, and the Israelis' failure to demolish the Iranian and Syrian-backed Hezbollah in 2009 (Goodarzi, 2008, XV). To the advantage of the Sepah and Iran's military establishment, two years after the Hezbollah-Israel war, both Tehran and Damascus signed military and strategic treaties which strengthened the military-diplomatic and strategic cooperation between the two countries (*AsriIran*, 2008). As a consequence, these measures significantly increased the Sepah's scope in the region in dealing with broader geopolitical changes.

Three years after the treaty, however, with this Iranian-Syrian influence gradually tapering off against the backdrop of the Arab Spring since December 2010, the Sepah's role has changed yet again. The unfolding waves of civil uprisings and wars taking place in the Middle East and North Africa have toppled some of Iran's nemeses such as the Mobarak regime. At the same time, it has

reached Iran's most reliable ally, Syria, posing an existential threat to the Assad regime and Iranian-Syrian influence in the region. Given Assad's precarious position in Syria amidst the bloody uprising, the Sepah's regional position still matters; that is, the Sepah serves as the IRI's last resort in protecting the Syrian regime and Iran's geopolitical interests. To this end, the Sepah is reported to have helped the Assad regime in the suppression of the uprising, and its role has become pivotal as the IRI regime has pledged to support Damascus to the bitter end (see Warrick, 2011; the statement of Sepah Commander Baztab-e Emrooz 2012)

6.4.1 The Sepah's Lead in Defence Restructuring and Deterrence

During Ahmadinejad's presidency the Sepah's efforts to improve its defence and military capabilities reached their peak. Initial steps to this end were carried out under the tenure of the former Supreme Commander of the Corps, Rahim Safavi, aimed to protect the IRI from a possible strike by the US forces stationed in neighbouring Iraq since the fall of the Baghdad regime in 2003. In December 2006, for example, the Supreme Commander of the Sepah announced the implementation of the Doctrine of Units (*Doktorin-e Yagan-ha*) to improve the readiness of Iran's military forces, including the army, the air force, the navy, the Basij resistance forces and the Qods force. According to Safavi, the new doctrine prioritised the readiness of individuals, units and equipment while adding that 'In order to improve the combat readiness of the air force by implementing the doctrine of units, we should focus in the main on the substantial development of air defence and missile capabilities, various plans for withstanding foreign military threats, improving security and counter-intelligence department' (*BBC Monitoring*-Political, 2006b).

This measure provided the grounds for a yet more comprehensive upgrading of the Sepah's defence capabilities, carried out by Safavi's successor General Mohammad Ali Ja'fari. One year later in the summer of 2006, in an effort that seemed to be a response to the US decision to include the Sepah on a list of terrorist organisations and with the possibility of a US strike looming, the new Commander of the Sepah announced a wholesale overhaul in the structure of the Corps. The overhaul was composed of the following changes:

1. The broadening of the role of the Sepah's Centre for Strategic Studies (CSS) in the macro-level decision-making processes pertaining to defence policy. According to the director of the CSS, in pursuance with the guidance of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei the Sepah's Central Headquarters was to assume a strategic dimension in regard to the Corps' military affairs, in addition to its usual operational aspect (*Payame Enqelab*, 2007, p. 15).

2. The reconfiguration of the Sepah's ground forces into 31 provincial brigades (*Sepah-e Ostani*) and the merging of the Basij forces with the Sepah units in each province. This overhaul was designed to enhance the Corps' capability in combat by improving the cooperation of the Sepah ground forces with the Basij resistance forces.

3. According to the new arrangement, command of the Basij was delegated to the Supreme Commander of the Sepah, with the Basij units of each province reporting to the Sepah provincial brigade.

Besides the aforementioned, under the tenure of Mohammad Ali Ja'fari the Sepah boosted its military capability. To this end, the Sepah assumed command of all maritime operations in the Persian Gulf in place of the conventional navy. In addition, it further expanded the capability of its air force, which oversaw the regime's missile programme (Cordesman, 2009, p.14). The Sepah showed its missile capability by engaging in four publicised exercises known as the 'noble prophet' (Burgess, 2012, p. 13). According to the United States' Defence Intelligence Agency, Iran was reported to be continuing its development of ballistic missiles, including 'an extended range of variants on the Shahab-3 and 2000km medium range ballistic missiles, the Ashura' (Burgess, 2010, p. 13). Moreover, it invested in the technology of intercontinental ballistic missiles. In 2009, for example, Iran tested the Safir, a multi-stage space launch vehicle (SLV), exhibiting a breakthrough in some technologies relevant to ICBMS. It also experimented with its next generation SLV, the Simorgh, in February 2010 (Burgess, 2010, pp. 13-14).

Added to the Sepah's investment in Iran's unconventional capabilities was its interest and influence in Iran's nuclear programme. The Sepah and its various affiliates have portrayed Iran's development of its nuclear programme as an effective strategy enabling Iran to stand up to the US while transforming the status of the country to regional power. In this respect, some affiliates of the

Sepah viewed Iran's development of a nuclear programme as a viable card that, within the confines of the non-proliferation treaty, empowered Iran's negotiation with the west and its deterrent of a possible US military strike. According to this view, any compromise over Iran's enrichment rights in such a way that was implemented by the Khatami administration would lead to a continued effort by the west to force Iran into additional concessions (Ehsani, 2006). This view was voiced by the previous Supreme Commander of the Sepah, Mohsen Rezaei, who stated that:

> Concerning America, we neither seek war nor accept submission. They want to make us choose between either of the two and no matter which one we choose we fail. We should choose a new way and that is imposing a powerful Iran onto the region and the world (cited in Ganji, 2006, p. 26).

Notwithstanding the views of its previous Commanders and veterans, however, the current leaders of the Sepah have gone further in opposing altogether the prospect of negotiation with the US over the issue of nuclear proliferation. This view was voiced by the current Representative of the Supreme Leader to the Sepah, *Hojjat al-Eslam* Ali Sai'di, in response to Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's offer of direct talks with Iran. Sai'di remarked that direct talks with the US threatened Iran's national security interest. Accordingly, he stated that, 'The US is seeking its predominance in their world and… through negotiations they are seeking to bring Iran to give up its demands' (FarsNews, 2012).

The Sepah's uncompromising approach to negotiation stems from its vested interests in Iran's nuclear programme. As the force in charge of Iran's nuclear programme since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Sepah seemed to have contributed enormously to Iran's nuclear efforts. In the mid-1990s the Sepah's intelligence units stationed abroad were reportedly involved in the acquisition of military materials and nuclear weapons (*Daily Report Middle East*, 1995). Besides these efforts, the Sepah was involved in Iran's nuclear programme through its support for and ties with a wide range of organisations, such as defence industry organisations, university laboratories, and companies engaged in Iran's nuclear research (Takayeh, 2006, p. 156). More recently, a plethora of

financial organisations and nuclear-related research entities and personnel affiliated with the Sepah were subject to travel restrictions and had their assets frozen by the UN Security Council 1737 and 1747 (see Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1737, 2006).

Given its stakes in the nuclear project, the Sepah's strategy in protecting Iran's nuclear programme has been twofold: to safeguard Iran's shadowy nuclear sites, and to increase Iran's deterrent capability in the face of a military attack. Evidently, the Sepah safeguarded the construction of the secret enrichment facility located in its military base in Qom, which was uncovered in the summer of 2009 (Burgess, 2010). To protect Iran's nuclear programme, the Sepah stepped up Iran's deterrent capability in such a way that rendered any military attack on its nuclear sites a costly endeavour for the US or Israel. In a remark that encapsulated this deterrent approach against the US threats, the Supreme Commander of the Sepah, Mohammad Ali Ja'fari stated that 'One of the Americans' vulnerabilities in the region is that they have established a presence all around Iran. Thus, they cannot keep themselves out of our firing range' (see *Payame Enqelab*, 2008, pp. 6-8; Cordesman and Seitz, 2009). Though Ja'fari's statement cannot be simply read as an indication of Iran's offensive strategy, it points to the Sepah's ability to employ a range of options in response to a potential military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. While Iran's conventional military arsenal is obsolete and does not threaten its immediate neighbours or the US (see Ehsani, 2006), it has a technological edge in the region in terms of its ballistic missile capability (see Rubin, 2008). This, alongside the Sepah's presence in the region as well as its ties with its militant surrogates, lends Iran substantial leverage with which to retaliate against the interests of the US and their allies in the region in the aftermath of a potential strike by the US and Israel (Takeyh, 2006, p. 184).

6.4.2 Evidence of the Sepah's Regional Role: Iraq

The Sepah's role in the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy was nowhere more evident than in its post-2005 regional purview. In this respect, the Sepah's extra-territorial endeavours were consistent with its export of the revolution activities in the 1980s. Nonetheless, in contrast to the 1980s, when its activities were mainly of an operational dimension characterised by its military support of

its proxies and its use of terrorism, in more recent years the Sepah Qods force has assumed a political-intelligence function, thereby asserting a pivotal role in the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region. This was particularly evident in Iraq, where the Sepah's activities took on an increasingly political profile in tandem with its security military presence and at times shadowy operations against the US forces.

The Iranian presence in Iraq began to surface amidst Khatami's second term in office. There is strong evidence that demonstrates the rise of the Qods force's intelligence military involvement shortly after the fall of Baghdad. For this purpose, the Qods force was lent tremendous gain by the network of Iraqi opposition groups it had cultivated over the past two decades (Gordon and Trainor, 2012, p. 153). The evidence suggests that beginning in December 2003, the Qods force had begun to allocate a section of its headquarters originally located in the old American Embassy in Tehran to the border city of Mehran, where its special Iraqi unit, the Ramezan Corps, was stationed (Ibid, p. 153). According to the documents and archives of US and British intelligence cited by the veteran military experts Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor (2012), through tripartite regional commands of the Ramezan Corps, the Iranian Qods force personnel were allegedly involved in smuggling Iranian-made weapons to various networks of Shiite militias. These regional commands included the Qods force's Zafr command, based at Mehran, which served as a shadowy gateway through which weapons, EFPs and rockets were smuggled to the Iraqi SCIRI's Badr Corps operative, Abu Mustafa Al-Sheibani. Another regional command centre was Fajr command base in Khoramshahr and Ahvaz, which was a route to Southern Iraq – home to a smuggling cell run by a former Mahdi Army Commander, Abu Sajjad al-Garawi, whose group was involved in EFP attacks on British troops on 29 May and 16 July in Basra. Among other shadowy armed networks active in the South was the militia led by Ahmad al-Fartusi, a veteran of Lebanese Hezbollah who joined that force in Iraq after the fall of Baghdad. Fartusi was subsequently detained by British forces in September 2005 after he was found to be involved in three EFP attacks in Basra over the course of a single week (Gordon and Trainor, 2012, pp. 153-154).

After Ahmadinejad's election to the presidency, the Sepah's activities in Iraq reached a peak. The Sepah's aggressive approach seems to have been in line

with the turn in Iran's foreign policy towards securitisation. To undermine the possibility of a US strike, Iran planned to embroil the coalition forces in Iraq's quagmire by arming various Shiite proxies at the same time as it was seeking to carve out its influence in the central government. To this end, Iran relied increasingly on the Sepah's Qods force. In February 2006, for example, the Supreme National Security Council was reported to have delegated all operations in Iraq to the command of the Qods force. In addition, the SNSC increased the manpower of the Qods force to 16,000 (Cordesman a, 2007, p. 8; Cordesman b, 2007, p. 79).

As the Qods force established and increased its monopoly over operations, it seems to have also increased its operation against the coalition forces via its proxies. In the year 2006 US officials voiced more claims about Qods force involvement in the operation and planning of Iraqi insurgencies, based on the caches of Iranian-made EFPs that were being captured from the Shiite militias. Evidently, the EFP attacks accounted for a sizable proportion of lethal attacks on American forces. According to classified data of the US military, the EFP attacks accounted for 18 percent of combat deaths of US and allied troops (Gordon and Trainor, 2012, p. 317). These attacks set the stage for an American onslaught against the Qods force, particularly after January 2007 when the Bush administration issued a communiqué to the US armed forces to capture and kill Iranian operatives and agents in Iraq (*Washington Post*, 2007). Prior to the issuance of the communiqué, the American forces had already begun their military campaign against the Qods force's stronghold in Iraq. One example of this was the US forces' raid on the SCRI compound in Baghdad in December 2006, which led to the capture of Iranian operatives and diplomats, two of whom were in the country by invitation from the Iraqi President Jalal Talebani (Glanze and Tavernise, 2006). Among those captured were Iranian Sepah officials Mohsen Chizari and Reza Dyanati, both of whom served as high-ranking officials in the Qods force Operations Department (Gordon and Trainor, 2012, p. 232). The raid was also said to have resulted in the capture of a cache of materials that were to be examined by US forces (Glanze and Tavernise, 2006).

Yet another case of a raid by US forces took place on two Iranian offices in the northern city of Irbil. According to US allegations, the raid led to the arrest of five Iranian Qods force operators. While the Iraqi leaders called for the release

of the arrested Iranians, asserting that they were diplomats, US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad justified the detention of the Iranians by pointing to the role they had played in the smuggling of weapons across the border in addition to their training and money (Iran focus, 2007). The Irbil incident was followed by a score of vehement condemnations from Tehran as the Iranian officials stated those arrested in Irbil were diplomats.

Also in play, alongside its support for various militias and its reconnaissance missions, was the Qods force's political sway. Qods force members were appointed as diplomats in various Iranian embassies in Iraq and thereby took on a key role in foreign policy decisions in that country. According to US intelligence, in 2004 twenty members of the Iranian embassy's personnel were Qods force operatives (Gordon & Trainor, 2012, p. 315). The political presence of the Qods force was further evidenced by the appointment of the Qods veteran Hassan Kazemi Qomi, who had previously served in Lebanon, as the Iranian charge d' affaires (*BBC monitoring*, 2004). The political influence of the Qods force became increasingly evident as it mediated the political conflict between opposing Shi'a groups. At the same time, the Qods force was arming the Shi'a militia, also known as the Mahdi Army, against the US forces. In the city of Fallujah, for example, the Qods force was believed to be behind gathering the Shiites led by Muqtada Al-Sadr against US forces in order to keep the city in line with the Iranian sphere of influence. Furthermore, the Qods force played a pivotal role in the agreement between the two Shiite groups led by Al-Sadr and Ayatollah Systani who bickered over the control of holy sites in Karbala. The agreement took place following a large payment to the institutions of Al-Sadr by the Iranians to get him to accept his restricted control of the Kufa mosque and honour his rival claim on the Husayn site in Karbala (*BBC Monitoring*, 2004). In another example of its financial and political power over the Shiite community in Iraq, the Iranian-allied Shiite group SCIRI was estimated to have accepted US$100 million from Iran, with a substantial amount of it coming from the Qods force and with US$45 million earmarked for the SCIRI's Badr Corps (Gordon and Trainor, 2012, p. 156).

After 2005, the Sepah essentially assumed command of the Iranian political portfolio in Iraq at both operational and diplomatic levels. The rise in the Sepah's political profile became more apparent in light of the promotion of

Kazemi Qomi to the post of the Iranian ambassador to Iraq. According to one source, the promotion occurred on the orders of the Supreme Leader, independent of foreign ministry officials (*Asharq al-awsat*, 2007). This suggests that it was the Qods force rather than the Foreign Ministry which was to be responsible for Iraq's foreign affairs. The appointment of Kazemi Qomi to the new post also reflected the Supreme Leader's preference for a more hardline approach to Iran's foreign policy towards the invading US forces in Iraq, in line with the increasing security capacity of the Qods force. The tough stance of the new ambassador was evident in his interview with *Time* magazine, where he pointed to Iran's role in the stability of Iraq while demonstrating a firm line on mounting US warnings against Iran's regional ambition. He remarked, 'We do not deny that Americans have interests here and we do not act as a barrier to those interests, but we do not take orders from the Americans' (Ware, 2006).

At an operational level, the Commander of the Qods force, Qassem Suleimani, was granted sweeping powers. Not only was he responsible for the military conduct of the Qods force and its military and financial support to various Iranian proxies; he was also entrusted with behind-the-scenes political manoeuvres in Iraqi domestic politics. In an effort that echoed the ending of the Karbala clashes in 2004, Suleimani's mediatory role in 2008 between the coalition-led Da'wa-SCIRI faction in Prime Minister Nouri Al-maleki's central government and their rival Shiite militias led by Al-Sadr Mahdi Army led to the ceasefire between the two sides (Coachrain, 2008; Cordesman, 2008).

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the Sepah's role in the security dimension of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy, namely, military defence and regional activities, before and after 2005. The chapter demonstrated the gradual increase in the role of the Sepah and its growing influence in foreign policy over the past three decades. While the Sepah was a nascent organisation in the early days of the revolution, it was one of the key actors in pushing Iran's foreign policy towards radicalisation by undermining the secular moderate forces in the provisional government. With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, the Sepah entered a regional conflict with Iraq and its allied Arab states. As the conflict invited western intervention in favour of Iraq and its neighbouring states, the Sepah's first

confrontation with the US military occurred at sea in the form of a war of attrition. It was also at this point that the Sepah's initial ties with various Iraqi opposition groups were established. Yet the Sepah's other regional task, namely the export of the revolution, arose against the backdrop of the 1980s Arab-Israeli conflict in Lebanon. To this end, the Sepah, in tandem with Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, played an instrumental role in founding and supporting the Lebanese group Hezbollah against the Zionist invaders and their US and Lebanese backers, in an attempt to advance its sphere of influence in the region and humiliate its nemesis. With the election of Rafsanjani, the Sepah's activities in exporting the revolution came to a temporary halt, but resumed in 1994 amidst increasing factional rivalry between the two Conservative factions, the Pragmatic and Traditional. Evidently, in the face of mounting hardline Conservative pressures, Rafsanjani was forced to compromise on his rapprochement with Iran's neighbouring states and the west. The consequence of this was the Sepah's involvement in various terrorist activities abroad in the mid-1990s, namely the 1994 bombing of the Jewish centre in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the 1996 bombing of the US military installations in Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia.

Parallel to the Sepah's regional operations was its role in the military defence policy of the IRI. As shown, the Sepah's position in Iran's military policy was inaugurated during Hashemi Rafsanjani's, tenure when it gained control of Iran's unconventional programmes such as its missile programme and its civilian nuclear programme. Under Khatami, the Sepah continued its pace with the build-up of Iran's unconventional arsenal and stepped up these efforts following the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, the greatest scale of the Sepah's involvement in Iran's regional and defence policy occurred after 2005, when the Sepah consolidated its power in the government and in various foreign policies with the backing of the Supreme Leader. For example, the international tension surrounding Iran's nuclear programme and the prospect of a US strike heralded far-ranging changes in the Sepah's defence and military structure and advanced its military capability to a substantial level in order to deal with the external threats. At the same time, the overthrow of Iran's former nemesis in Iraq, Saddam Hussein, afforded the Sepah the opportunity to broaden Iran's interests in post-2003 Shi'a dominated Iraq. To this end, the Sepah Qods force was brought to the helm of Iran's regional

policy towards Iraq in addition to its military role in supporting its surrogates. In contrast to the 1980s, when the Sepah's overseas activities were exclusively of a security dimension on behalf of the Iranian leadership at home, the Sepah have assumed assertive control of the diplomatic and operational aspects of Iran's regional policies since 2005, as a consequence of its rise as a 'garrison state'.

Conclusion

The thesis examined the increasing power of the Sepah (the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) as a political and economic actor in light of the following questions: What is the nature of the relationship between the Sepah and its political masters? What is the place of the armed forces, and in particular the Sepah, in the Iranian state? What is the nature of the Sepah's involvement in politics and how does it engage in the political contestations among the regime's factions? How does the Sepah's involvement in the dynamics of power and its responses to external security threat conditions affect its role in the economy and the foreign policy of the IRI? To lay the conceptual foundation, Part I of the thesis synthesised theoretical and empirical work on civil-military relations, including institutional and new institutional studies, with a specific study of power relations, namely political factionalism, in the IRI. The first chapter provided a theoretical model for the thesis by analysing the Sepah's relationship with its civilian authority, composed of the clerical and lay power elite, as well as its role in politics and the economy, from a theoretical perspective.

Comparing the Sepah with the cases of political militaries in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, Chapter 1 illustrated the ascending trajectory of the Sepah's political power. In line with the 'garrison state' model, this chapter examined the gradual development of the Sepah into a dominant political elite and dominant security force, albeit in the context of the hybrid Iranian political system that is composed of electoral and authoritarian structures. As also illustrated, the 'garrison state' is different from a military dictatorship or other military-led systems. It is the culmination of military-political, administrative and coercive power under conditions of perpetual crisis. In contrast to military dictatorships and military-led political systems, a garrison state does not equal the obliteration of civilian state institutions, in particular its democratic elements. The exterior facade of the civilian political system is maintained while true power is concentrated in the hands of a coalition of civilianised military officers and a segment of the political elite. In this respect, it was argued that the garrison state model offers a better understanding of the civil-military relationship in the context

of the Iranian political system, in which the Sepah had not been a dominant political player even given its privileges and importance as the protector of the regime. Using the garrison state model as a framework, this thesis argued that the increasing power of the Sepah, particularly since 2005, has occurred gradually in reaction to both internal political tensions and external security threat conditions, thereby shifting the position of the Sepah from an instrument and pillar of the regime, referred to here as an auxiliary guardian, to a dominant power in the Iranian state and its society. This shift had implications for the Sepah's relationship with the political establishment. For more than two decades after the revolution of 1979, the Sepah served mainly as one of the most important instruments for the maintenance of the IRI political establishment, personified first by the pro-Khomeini forces (1979-1989) and later by the Supreme Leader and his Conservative allies (1989-2005). The reliance of the Conservatives on the Sepah as an instrument for managing domestic political crisis and external security threats culminated in the post-2005 symbiotic civil-military relationship, whereby the Sepah has emerged as an important political class in a new configuration of power in the IRI. This trend highlights a turning point in the power of the Sepah, where it is strong enough to augment its political and economic interests assertively while drawing on the legitimacy of the Faqih system.

While the above dynamics have been crucial to the emergence of the garrison state, equal attention must be paid to the internal characteristics of the military which shape its political profile and affect 'its response to influences coming from the political system (Stepan, 1971, p. 55). That the Sepah's ascendency is an extension of its internal characteristics is evidenced by its advantageous position in the Iranian state. In the times when the Sepah was not a dominant political player, it was still a political-ideological-military organisation responsible for both overall internal and external security functions and the realisation of the IRI mobalisational ideal; as such it was endowed with relative autonomy in regard to its internal military affairs. These structural advantages, along with the Sepah's independence from the government and loyalty to the Supreme Leader, made it one of the most powerful auxiliary structures in the IRI, serving as an instrument of control and mobilisation as well as of state domestic and foreign policy. This brings this thesis to its second question regarding the

nature of the Sepah's involvement in politics. Under Khomeini the nature of the Sepah's involvement in politics was characterised by its status as an important support base or pillar of the IRI. Its political function was restricted to the maintenance of the political regime of the Islamic Republic, and it relinquished political affairs of the state to the fundamentalist political power elite that represented the clerical and lay pro-Khamenei groups. During the post-Khomeini period, under the leadership of the new Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Rafsanjani (1989-1997), the Sepah continued to act as the instrument of the regime. At the same time, however, it was increasingly used as the power base of the Supreme Leader and the Traditional Conservative faction to undermine the Pragmatic Conservatives led by President Rafsanjani, who sought to implement military reforms and more moderate socio-cultural policies. It was through its alliance with IRI's Traditional Conservatives that the Sepah established its political interest through mobilisation and activation of the Basij, its para-military militia, to maintain domestic security and uphold the implementation of Islamic revolutionary values in society.

The election of the Reformist Khatami in 1997 on the platform of political liberalisation and the development of civil society further drew the Sepah into internal politics. Establishing its interest in the societal sphere during the Rafsanjani era, the Sepah feared that its position would be weakened by Khatami's reforms. With the flourishing of a more open socio-cultural environment and the intensifying political factionalism between the Reformists and Conservatives, the Sepah sided with the Conservatives by characterising Khatami's drive for political liberalisation as a danger to the foundation of the IRI, while threatening the use of force against the critics of the regime.

During Khatami's second term and particularly during his last two years in office, the Sepah further entrenched itself in the internal politics of the republic by penetrating the various right-leaning Usulgara sub-groups, collectively called Neo-Conservatives, that had gathered around the issues of Iran's security agenda and economic populism. Supported by many religious conservative figures, the Neo-Conservatives identified by the Sepah's veterans tested their political fortune and captured both the legislature in the parliamentary elections of 2004 and the government in the presidential election of 2005, in which a Neo-Conservative candidate and former Sepah veteran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was the victor.

The participation of Sepah veterans in these elections provided an impetus for the Corps to become more assertively involved in internal politics in the post-2005 domestic landscape. No longer a mere instrument of the Conservative faction, the Sepah became part of Iran's political power elite, free to pursue its political and economic interests and operate as a more independent force. Because of the Sepah's emergence as a strong centre of power, President Ahmadinejad, who owned his victory to the backing of the Sepah and the Basij, sought to gain the interest of the Corps by filling his cabinet with Sepah veterans. The upward trajectory of the Sepah as a force had significant implications for elite contestation, as evidenced by the assertive role it played in the forthcoming elections. To this end, the Sepah's engagement with political contestation was evident at the informal and formal levels. At the informal level, as illustrated in Chapter 4, the Sepah's influence was seen in the appointments of former Sepah veterans as the Head of the Ministry of the Interior and its various political and cultural deputies. These appointments were illustrative of the Sepah's tightening leverage over the electoral process, given the important role that the Ministry of the Interior plays in vetting candidates for parliamentary and presidential elections. As shown in Chapter 4, the rise of the Sepah to this important Ministry proved instrumental for the exclusion of the Reformist factions and secured the Neo-Conservative consolidation of power during the parliamentary elections of 2008. At the formal level, the Sepah's political role is demonstrated by the official statement of its Commanders and representatives, calling on mobilisation and participation of Basij voters in support of the Usulgarayan current.

The third question addressed by the thesis concerned the implications of the Sepah's involvement in the dynamics of power and of its responses to external security threat conditions within its roles in the economy and foreign policy. The thesis found that while the Sepah was inherently an auxiliary political organisation with special outlets and units that widened its reach at home and abroad, the extent of its role in the economy and foreign policy was the result of its interaction with internal crises and external threats in the context of Iran's factionalised political landscape. This factionalised landscape is characterised by on-going elite competition and disagreement over domestic and foreign policy. The Sepah's interactions with these perpetual tensions caused it to develop into a

garrison state and to expand its purview over the economy and foreign policy of the IRI.

In the aftermath of the fundamentalists' consolidation of power, the Sepah's attention shifted from urban fighting against the armed opposition to combat fighting against Iraq. The Sepah's experience in the prolonged war in Iraq established it as a national defence force and enabled it to modernise and upgrade its military industry under the aegis of President Rafsanjani's military reforms. To undermine the revolutionary character of the Sepah and its possible threat, President Rafsanjani sought to professionalise it through its integration with the regular armed forces under a unified command and designation of its ranks. Rafsanjani's efforts, however, were stymied by Supreme Leader Khamenei, who allowed the Sepah to retain its central headquarters – a measure that endowed the Sepah with considerable institutional interests with regard to the national defence dimension of Iran's foreign policy. Another area in which the Sepah had an impact, in addition to Iran's national military defence policy, was in the regional dimension of the IRI's foreign policy. While President Rafsanjani sought to place the Sepah's radicalism in check, his efforts were foiled by his opponents, particularly the Supreme Leader and the Traditional Conservatives. To undermine Rafsanjani's efforts to relieve tensions in the Persian Gulf and achieve normalisation with the West, the Traditional Conservatives met the Sepah's interests by unofficially supporting its export of revolutionary activities to the Middle East and the rest of the world. These activities manifested in the Sepah's historic role in military training and the financial backing of various opposition movements in the Middle East. Since it perceived the unabated normalisation of relations as a threat to its institutional and ideological interests, the Sepah in liaison with the Ministry of Security and Intelligence allegedly took part in various violent missions against western and Israeli interests, as well as the Iranian oppositionists abroad. During the Khatami administration (1997-2005), the Sepah's activities in exporting the revolution were reduced due to Khatami's policy of *détente*, which was aimed at a normalisation of tensions with the outside world and the Conservative establishment's fear of US retaliation, following Washington's suspicion of the involvement of Iran in the Khobar Towers terrorist incident in Saudi Arabia. Despite the reduction of its overseas activities in this period, the Sepah pursued the growth of Iran's unconventional arsenal, and

intensified this effort following the 2001 US attack on Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In view of these external developments in the region, the Sepah's overseas activities began to increase. With the encircling of Iran by the presence of US forces on its eastern and western borders and the nuclear issue dominating Khatami's second term, the Neo-Conservative forces identified by the Sepah veterans came to dominate Iran's foreign policy debate, thus providing a harbinger for a more confrontational approach to Iran's foreign policy dominated by its security agenda.

With the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Sepah's influence in Iran's regional and defence policy peaked due to its increasing informal power in foreign policy bodies, such as the National Security Council and the foreign policy commission in the Majles. The presence of civilianised military groups in these important bodies coincided with the rise of the Neo-Conservative elite, many of whom had a security background in the Sepah and who shared the Sepah's security-oriented world view on foreign policy. Motivated by their security agenda rather than diplomacy, these elites increasingly relied on extraordinary means to manage the threat posed by the US military attack and its hegemony in the region. The abandonment of diplomacy and the emphasis on a confrontational and security-centred approach strengthened the Sepah's influence over Iran's foreign policy, with the blessing of Supreme Leader Khamenei. As shown in Chapter 6, with the growing prospect of a US military strike on Iran, Khamenei's newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Sepah, General Ja'fari, implemented far-ranging changes in the structure of the Sepah and its defence capability in preparation in 2007 for external and internal threats. At the regional level, the Sepah's Qods force assumed a prominent role in IRI's foreign policy in Iraq. It exceeded its previous involvement in the export of the revolution, which according to Buchta was characterised by its 'logistical support and military training' (Buchta, 2000, p. 70) of various Shi'a opposition groups to include both diplomatic and operational aspects of Iran's regional policies.

Similar to its role in foreign policy, the Sepah's influence over Iran's economy is illustrative of its continuous growth. This trend has unfolded over the years in line with the IRI's factionalised dynamics, and reached a climax with the rise of the Sepah's Neo-Conservatives allies and its affiliated civilianised groups in the government. The Sepah's involvement in Iran's political economy began

during President Rafsanjani's administration. To control the revolutionary fervour of the Sepah and the Basij, and by extension buy up their support, Rafsanjani encouraged their engagement in Iran's economic reconstruction. To this end, both the Sepah and the Basij were invited to take part in developmental activities in war-torn regions in order to earn income and relieve pressures on the post-war state budget. Rafsanjani's efforts to make the revolutionary armed forces an active participant in the economy may have resulted from his calculated wish to appease these forces. However, the increasing involvement of the Sepah in Iran's economy provided a recipe for a tense relationship between the Sepah and the incoming Reformist government. With the election of President Khatami in 1997, the Sepah had already evolved into an economic force. While Khatami followed in his predecessor's footsteps in encouraging the Sepah's involvement in national projects, he could do little to win the Sepah's compliance because of his Reformist agenda. As Ehteshami correctly notes, pro-Khamenei groups who had amassed economic benefits from the status quo Faqih system could not tolerate reform, 'which would come at the expense of their power' (Ehteshami, 2010, p. 29). As a prominent beneficiary of the system, the Sepah had its reasons to be fearful of Reformist projects, due to Khatami's efforts to subject its economic activities to governmental oversight, particularly in view of the Reformist Majles' allegations about the Sepah's engagement in shadow economy. The efforts of the Reformists to subject the Sepah's enterprises to public scrutiny did little to control the Sepah's appetite to take over Iran's economy. Emboldened by the rise of the Neo-Conservatives in the 2004 Majles, the Sepah's economic activities grew in ways that superseded the authority of the government in delegating contracts to foreign companies. This led to an overt confrontation between the Sepah and the government. The peak of this confrontation is discussed in Chapter 5 and was exemplified by the Sepah's takeover of Tehran's new Imam Khomeini International Airport. The Sepah justified the closure of the airport on the grounds that TAV, the Turkish consortium which had been awarded the operation of the airport terminal, posed a threat to Iran's security because of its connection with Israel. This incident forced the government to cancel the airport deal, illustrating a crucial moment in which the Sepah openly challenged civilian authority. After the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, the Sepah's engagement in Iran's economy witnessed a period of unparalleled expansion. With the displacement of the

Reformists from the Majles and the rise of a Neo-Conservative government favourable to the Sepah's economic and political interests, the Sepah's economic enterprises came to include large-scale developmental projects in oil and gas as well as a sizable portion of Iran's financial sector. The Sepah was helped by its access to state funds, no-bid inducement of contracts and the government's privatisation initiatives, which favoured the allocation of state-owned enterprises to its affiliated cooperatives and subsidiaries. Using its security purview as camouflage, these cooperatives were able to outmanoevre their competitors in the private sector and assume the control of giant state-owned enterprises. The Sepah's endeavours in this regard were aided by the securitisation of Iran's foreign policy and an atmosphere of international sanction. The flight of foreign companies probably also aided the Sepah's monopoly over Iran's developmental and financial sectors.
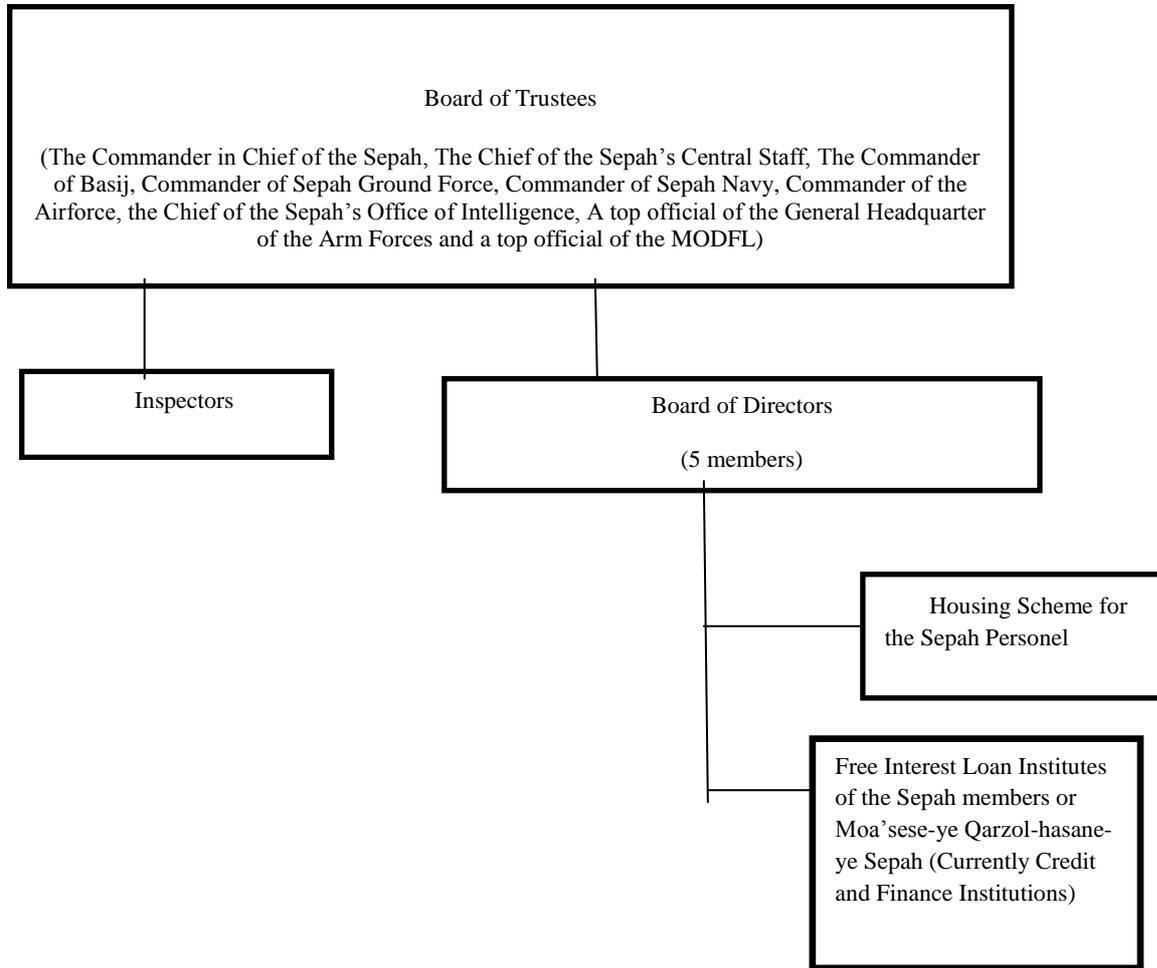
The development of the Sepah as a political and economic actor raises questions regarding the implications of its influence and power in the post-Ahmadinejad period. The questions regarding the future trajectory of the Sepah and its impact on Iran's political scene is particularly pertinent, given the recent developments in Iran marked by the election of the Pragmatic Conservative figure Hassan Rowhani to the presidency in June 2013. The victory of the new president, who stands for political moderation and rapprochement with the west, raises questions as to whether these new political contours will lessen the power and influence of the Sepah and lead the way for a gradual desecuritisation of Iran's domestic politics and foreign policy. The fact that the Supreme Leader and auxiliary structures such as the Sepah and the Basij did not intervene in the elections, despite public expectation, and allowed the victory of a figure who ran on a reformist platform, can be considered a positive step that signifies the establishment's move towards moderation. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the 2013 presidential elections were held in a highly securitised environment marked by the complete vetting of the reformist candidates. The only candidate who appeared to enjoy the support of the Reformist groups and Iran's electorate was the former President Rafsanjani, who was disqualified by the Council of Guardians on spurious grounds. Apparently, Rafsanjani has said that his disqualification took place following the intervention of a security official at a last-minute meeting of the members of the Council of Guardians (Akhbare-Rooz,

2013). While this cannot be confirmed, Rafsanjani's account is plausible because of his support for the Green movement in the 2009 election in tacit defiance of the Supreme Leader, a gesture which earned him the resentment of the Sepah's Commanders. It was after Rafsanjani's elimination from the race that the Iranian public galvanised around Rowhani, who was not a Reformist but a more centrist political figure. Rowhani's victory was further aided by the divisions among the Neo-Conservatives and their inability to support a single candidate, unlike the previous occasions.

Regardless of the causes that led to the victory of Rowhani, his ability to desecuritise Iran's domestic politics, improve Iran's economy and strike a resolution with the west regarding Iran's nuclear issues remains an open question, due to the political and economic power that the Sepah has carved out for itself over the years and particularly since Ahmadinejad's presidency. Rapprochement with the US cannot be easily pursued without considering the interests of the Sepah. As discussed in Chapter 6, the issue of the Sepah and its security prerogatives was one of the main obstacles to Khatami's rapprochement with the US during the Clinton administration. In light of the fact that the Sepah has assumed an even greater leverage in the area of security, especially its overseas activities, Rowhani has no choice but to consider the Sepah's views when pursuing his foreign policy agenda. At the domestic level, the improvement of Iran's economy, which was one of the main slogans of Rowhani's campaign, requires a degree of control over the Sepah's economic enterprises, which seems to be an arduous task. At a minimum, the erosion of these enterprises needs to be sanctioned by the Supreme Leader. The prospect of this scenario is unlikely given the Sepah's growing economic strength and its importance for keeping the Supreme Leader in power. While future developments in Iran are open to many possibilities, it is certain that the normalisation of Iran's foreign and domestic policy will not be a smooth process because of the emergence of the Sepah as a garrison state.
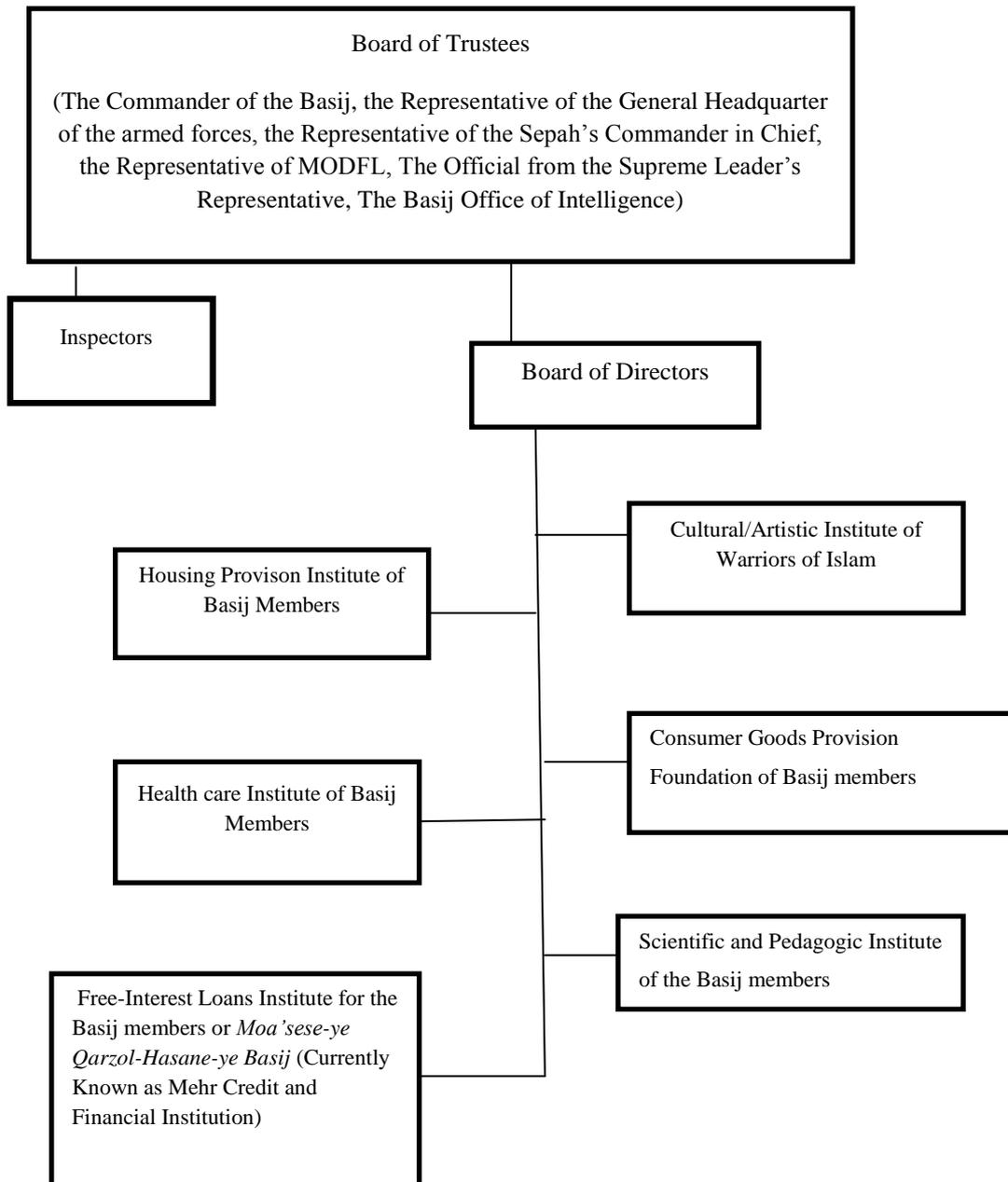
Appendices

**Appendix 1 Organisational Chart of the Sepah Cooperative Foundation**

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                        Board of Trustees                          │
│                                                                   │
│ (The Commander in Chief of the Sepah, The Chief of the Sepah's    │
│ Central Staff, The Commander of Basij, Commander of Sepah Ground  │
│ Force, Commander of Sepah Navy, Commander of the Airforce, the    │
│ Chief of the Sepah's Office of Intelligence, A top official of    │
│ the General Headquarter of the Arm Forces and a top official of   │
│ the MODFL)                                                        │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
        │                                    │
┌───────────────┐                  ┌──────────────────────┐
│   Inspectors  │                  │  Board of Directors   │
└───────────────┘                  │                      │
                                   │     (5 members)       │
                                   └──────────────────────┘
                                              │
                                   ┌──────────────────────┐
                                   │  Housing Scheme for   │
                                   │  the Sepah Personel   │
                                   └──────────────────────┘

                                   ┌──────────────────────┐
                                   │ Free Interest Loan    │
                                   │ Institutes of the     │
                                   │ Sepah members or      │
                                   │ Moa'sese-ye Qarzol-   │
                                   │ hasane-ye Sepah       │
                                   │ (Currently Credit     │
                                   │ and Finance           │
                                   │ Institutions)         │
                                   └──────────────────────┘
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Source: Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, 1990.

**Appendix 2 Organisational Chart of the Basij Cooperative Foundation**

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                        Board of Trustees                          │
│                                                                   │
│  (The Commander of the Basij, the Representative of the General   │
│   Headquarter of the armed forces, the Representative of the      │
│   Sepah's Commander in Chief, the Representative of MODFL,         │
│   The Official from the Supreme Leader's Representative,           │
│   The Basij Office of Intelligence)                               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
        │                                  │
┌───────────────┐                 ┌──────────────────┐
│   Inspectors  │                 │ Board of Directors│
└───────────────┘                 └──────────────────┘
                                          │
                                                   ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                   │ Cultural/Artistic Institute│
                                                   │    of Warriors of Islam    │
                                                   └──────────────────────────┘
        ┌────────────────────────┐
        │ Housing Provison Institute│
        │     of Basij Members      │
        └────────────────────────┘
                                                   ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                   │  Consumer Goods Provision  │
                                                   │ Foundation of Basij members│
                                                   └──────────────────────────┘
        ┌────────────────────────┐
        │ Health care Institute of  │
        │     Basij Members         │
        └────────────────────────┘
                                                   ┌──────────────────────────┐
                                                   │ Scientific and Pedagogic   │
                                                   │ Institute of the Basij     │
                                                   │ members                    │
                                                   └──────────────────────────┘
        ┌────────────────────────┐
        │ Free-Interest Loans        │
        │ Institute for the Basij    │
        │ members or *Moa'sese-ye    │
        │ Qarzol-Hasane-ye Basij*    │
        │ (Currently Known as Mehr   │
        │ Credit and Financial       │
        │ Institution)               │
        └────────────────────────┘
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Source: Basij Resistance Force, 1996; Fars News, 2009a.

Appendix 3 Percentage of Assets Purchased through Privatisation of State Owned Enterprises in Iran by Purchasing Sector
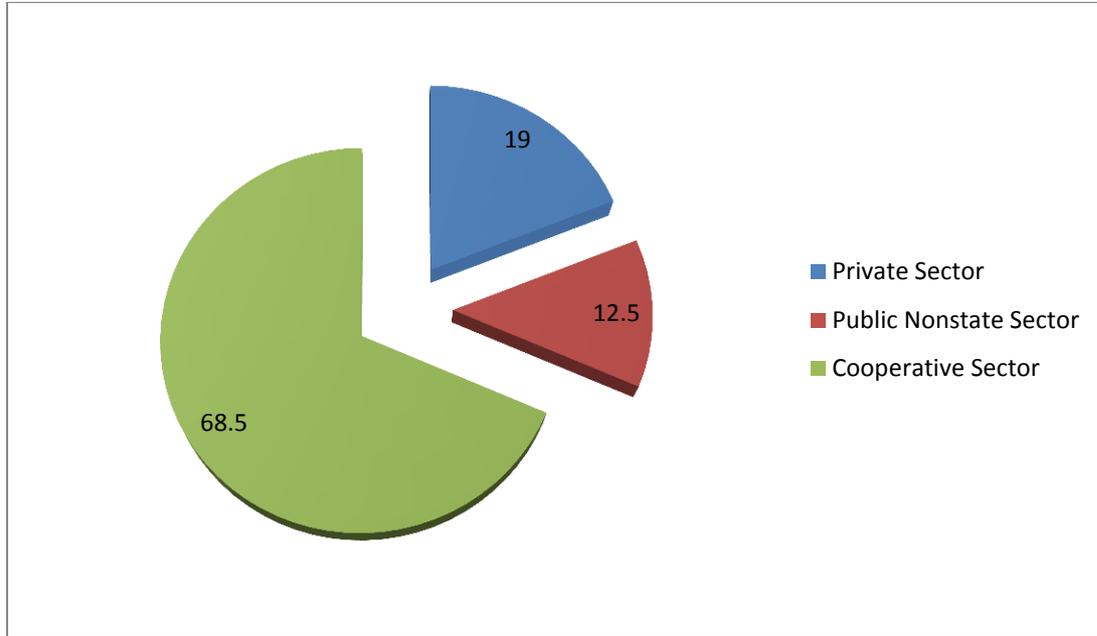
Source: Strategic Majles Research Centre, 2009 cited in Alfoneh, 2010.

Appendix 4 The Allocations of State-Owned Assets to the Private Sector 2004-2009 (First Quarters of 1384-1388 in Persian Calendar)
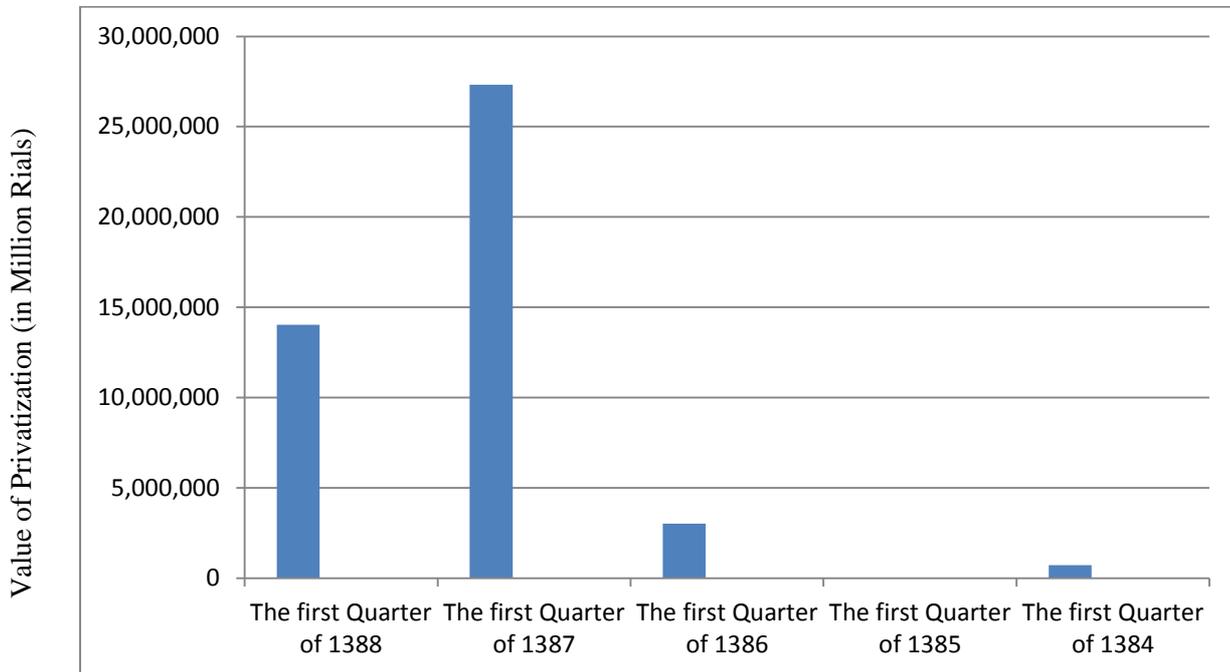
Source: the Organisation of Privatisation cited in *Donya-e eghtesad*, 2009b.

Appendix 5 List of the Sepah's and the Basij's Enclaves, Subsidiaries and Companies

Enclaves	Affiliated bodies	Subsidiaries and Companies
Ghorb (Khatam al-Anbiya)	Karbala Headquarters Nowh Headquarters Qae'm Headquarters Kowsar Headquarters	Kowsaran Foundation Tehran Gostaresh Sahel Sepasd Hara Rahab Makin
Sepah Cooperative Foundation	Ansar CFI Samenol 'aemeh CFI	Shahriar Mehestan Co Mowjgostar Telecommunication and Electronic Co. Mobin Electronic Development Co. Shadab Khowrasan Agro-cultural Co.

Appendix 5 Continued

Enclaves	Affiliated bodies	Subsidiaries and Companies
Basij Cooperative Foundation	Mehr CFI	Mehr-e Eqtesad-e Iranian Investment Co.
	Consumer Goods Provision Foundation of Basij members	Jousha Peidar Co.
	Scientific and Pedagogic Institute of the Basij members	Mehr-e Ayandegan Commerce Service Company

Azarbaijan Kowsar Company |
| | Cultural/Artistic Institute of Warriors of Islam | Tadbirgarane Atieh Company |

Source: Anvari, 2009; Aftabnews, 2010; Alfoneh 2010; *Sobhe Sadeq*, 2004c; 2004d; 2004e.

Appendix 6 List of Ghorb's (Khatam al-Anbiya) Major Contracts since 2005

Sector	Project	Year	Contract Value
Oil and Gas	Asaluye to Sistan and Baluchestan Pipline	2006	$ 1.3 billion
Oil and Gas	Phase 15 and 16 of South Pars Pipline	2006	$ 2.5 billion
Oil and Gas	Oil Well Expoloration in Joint Boder of South Pars	2008	$ 1.5 billion
Infrastructural Work	Second Phase of Rajaei Port	2006	$ 450 million
Infrastructural Work	Kish Port	2007	$ 320 million
Infrastructural Work	Tehran Underground Metro	2006	$ 2.5 billion
Infrastructural Work	Tabriz Metro	2012	$ 1.2 billion
Infrastructural Work	Transfer of Caspian Sea Water to Central Iran	2011	$ 2 billion

Source: Sarmayeh, 2006; Anvari, 2009; RadioFarda, 2012; Tabnak, 2012.

Appenix 7 Companies' Shares Owned by the Mehr Credit and Finance Institution Affiliated with the Basij Cooperative Foundation

Company	Percentage of Shares	Year
Tabriz Tractor Factory	42. 5 %	2008
Mobarakeh Steel Co.	5 %	2008
Sina Credit and Finance	4%	2008
Teknowtar	33 %	2008
Iralkow (Iran Aluminium)	20%	2008
Taws Gostar	8 %	2008

Source : Donya-e Eqtesad, 2008b.

Appendix 8 Companies' Shares Owned by the Sepah's Cooperative Foundation

Company	Shares	Year
Bahman Group	45 %	2009
Iran Telecommunication	51 %	2009
Kermanshah Petrochemical Industry	19.83 %	2009
Mae'deh Food Industry	100 %	2009
Mawj-e Nasr Gawstar Electronic and TeleCommunication	100 %	2009
Pars Airline Company	100 %	2009
Shadab Agro-Industrial Company	100 %	2009

Source: Ahmadi, 2009.

**Appendix 9 The National Security Commission in the Ninth Majles 2009-2013**

Name of the Members of Parliament	City	Prior Experience in Parliament and Membership in Commissions	Education	Previous Career
Ahmad Vahidi	Kangavar	Third Parliament/National Security	Masters in Jurisprudence	The Chief Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Parliament
Mohammad Esmaili	Zanjan		MA in Strategic Affairs	The Chief of Ansar Al-Mahdi Headquarters, The Deputy Coordinator of the Sepah Zanjan Brigade and the Provincial Commander's Deputy
Mansour Arami	Bandar Abbas		Doctorate Student in Management	The Former Mayor of Bandar Abbas, The Chief Manager of the Youth and Sport Organisation in Hormozgan Province

Appendix 9 Continued

Name of the Members of Parliament	City	Prior Experience in Parliament and Membership in Commissions	Education	Previous Career
Mohammd Ashuri Taziani	Bandar Abbas	The Seventh and Eighth Parliament/ National Security	Doctorate in Strategic Management	The Political and Security Deputy of Hormozgan Province
Mohammad Hassan Asferi	Arak		Bachelors Student in Political Science	The Governor of Arak and Member of the Sepah
Ebrahim Agha Mohammadi	Khoram Abad		Doctorate Student in Public Administration	The Member of the Command Council of the Sepah's Brigade in Lorestan Province, The Commander of the Basij in Lorestan Province
Aledin Broujerdi	Boroujerd	The Sixth to Eighth Parliament	Masters in International Relations	The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Chief of the National Security Commission
Kazem Jalali	Shahroud	The Sixth to Eight Parliament	Doctorate Degree in Political Science	The University Lecturer and the Speaker of the National Security Commission

Name of the Members of Parliament	City	Prior Experience in Parliament and Membership in Commissions	Education	Previous Career
Mohammd Saleh Jokar	Yazd		The Doctorate Student in National Security	The Coordinator of Basij in Yazd province
Javad Jahangir Zadeh	Orumieh	The Seventh and Eight Parliament/National Security	Doctorate Degree in Sociology	The University Lecturer, The Researcher in the Centre for National Security Studies
Baqer Hosseini	Zabol		Doctorate Degree in Theology	The University Lecturer, The Vice President of the Sepah's Elite Association
Fathollah Hosseini	Qasreh Shirin	Fourth and Eighth Parliament/ Development	Bachelor's Degree in Law and Political Science	Provincial Coordinator Director in Telecommunication, The Director of welfare and National Affairs
Mansour Haghighat Pour	Ardebil		Doctorate Degree in Strategic Management	The Sepah Commander of the Airports and Flight Safety, Member of the Sepah's overseas Staff, the Governor of Ardebil

Appendix 9 Continued

Name of the Members of Parliament	City	Prior Experience in Parliament and Membership in Commissions	Education	Previous Career
Avaz Heidar Pour	Shareza	The Seventh and Eighth Majles/ Health and National Security	Medical Doctor	University Professor
Hojjat al-Eslam Khodayi Souri	Selseh Delfan		Bachelors in Political Science	Not Known
Ahmad Reza Dastgheib	Shiraz	The Eighth Parliament/ Culture	Doctorate Degree in Political Science	University Professor, Advisor to the Governor
Mehdi Sanayi	Nahavand	The Eighth/National Security	Doctorate Degree in Political Science	Iran's Negotiator in Kazakhstan and Russia, The Director of International Studies
Nozar Shafi'i	Mamsani		Doctorate Degree in International Relations	University Professor
Hadi Shoushtari	Quchan		Masters in International Law	The Governor of Quchan, the member of Budget and Planning of Khorasan Province

Appendix 9 Continued

Name of the Members of Parliament	City	Prior Experience in Parliament and Membership in Commissions	Education	Previous Career
Ahmad Shohani	Ilam		Doctorate Degree in Political Science	University Professor
Hassan Kamran	Esfahan	The Fourth, Fifth, Seventh and Eighth/ National Security	Doctorate Degree in Political Geography	The Chief of the Teachers' Basij, the Chief of the Law Enforcement Forces, Office of Intelligence
Javad Karii Qodoussi	Mashhad	The Eighth Parliament/ National Security	Master's Degree in Law	The Basij Commander of Khorasan Razavi
Esmai'l Kowsari	Tehran	The Eighth Parliament/National Security	Master's Degree in Defence and Security	The Veteran of the Sepah, The Chief of Staff of Security

Appendix 9 Continued

Name of the Members of Parliament	City	Prior Experience in Parliament and Membership in Commissions	Education	Previous Career
Mohammad Mosen Sani	Sabzevar	The Eighth Parliament/Social Commission	Doctorate Degree in Public Administration	Governor and Political Deputy
Safar Nai'mi raz	Astara		Master's Degree in Judicial Law	Sepah Veteran, The Commander of various units in Iran-Iraq War
Hossein Taqva	Varamin	Eighth Parliament/ National Security	Doctorate Degree in Political Science	Member of the University's Board of Science

Source: Khabaronline, 2012.

Appendix 10 Total Gulf Military Manpower by Service
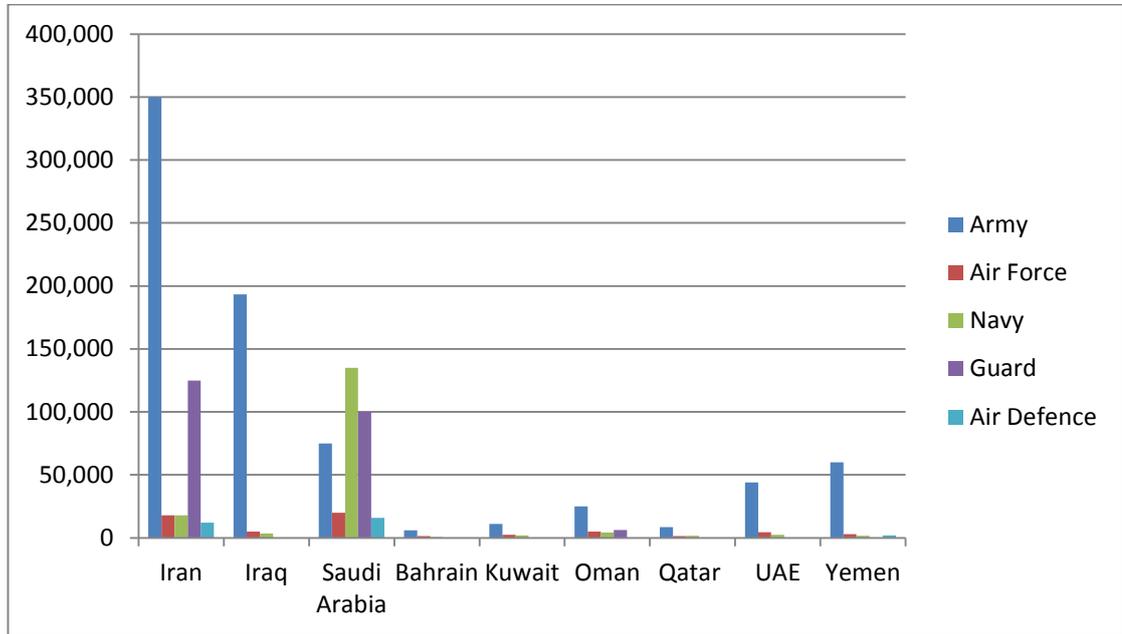
Source: Cordesman and Wilner, 2012, p. 20.

Appendix 11 Gulf Inventory of Multiple Rocket Launchers by Caliber in 2012
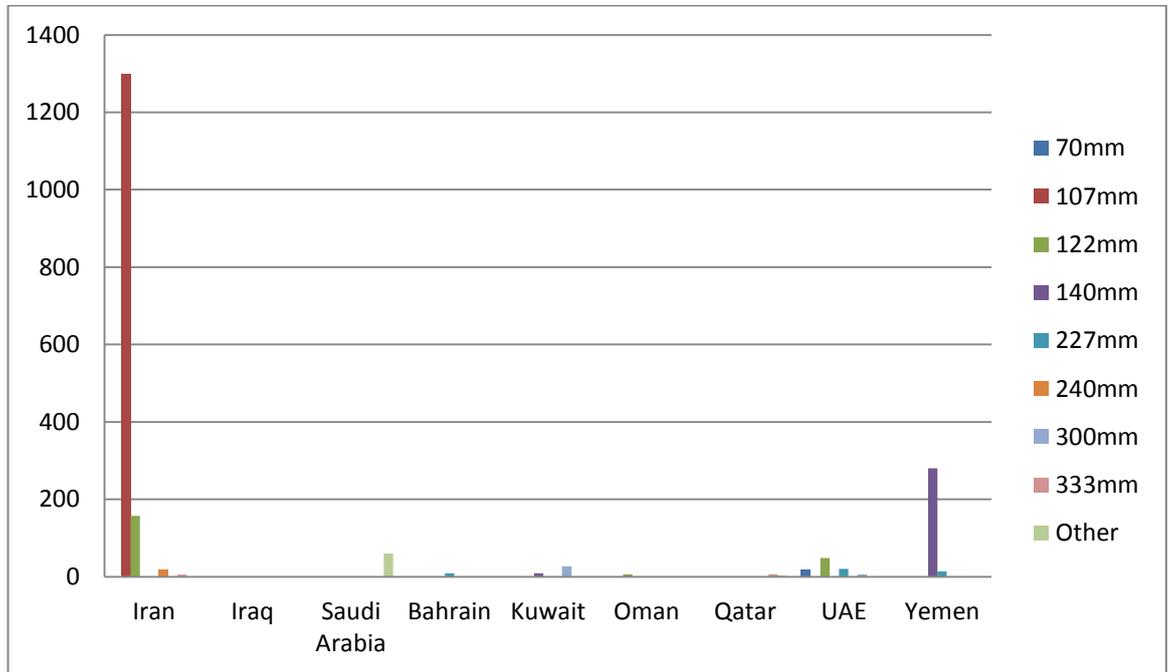
Source: Cordesman and Wilner, 2012, p. 34.

Appendix 12 Gulf Naval Ship by Category in 2012
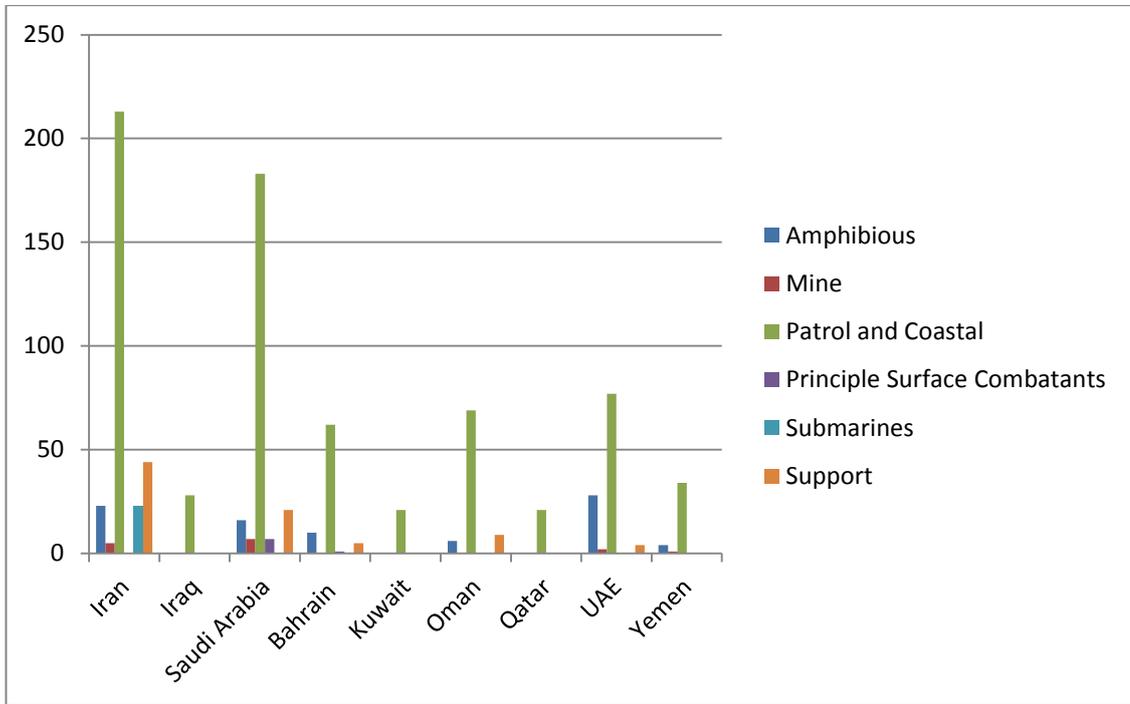
Source: Cordesman and Wilner, 2012, p.34.

Appendix 13 Gulf Warship with Anti-ship Missiles in 2012
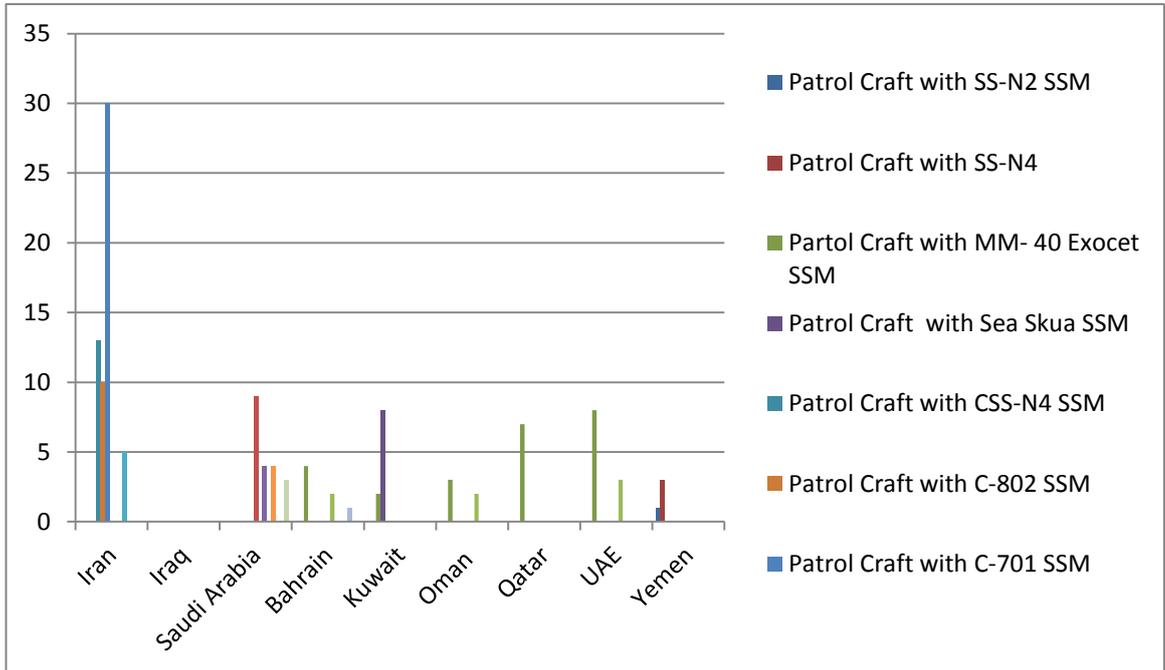
Source : Data from Cordesman and Wilner, 2012, p. 48.

Appendix14 Southern Gulf Military Expenditure by Country in 2012
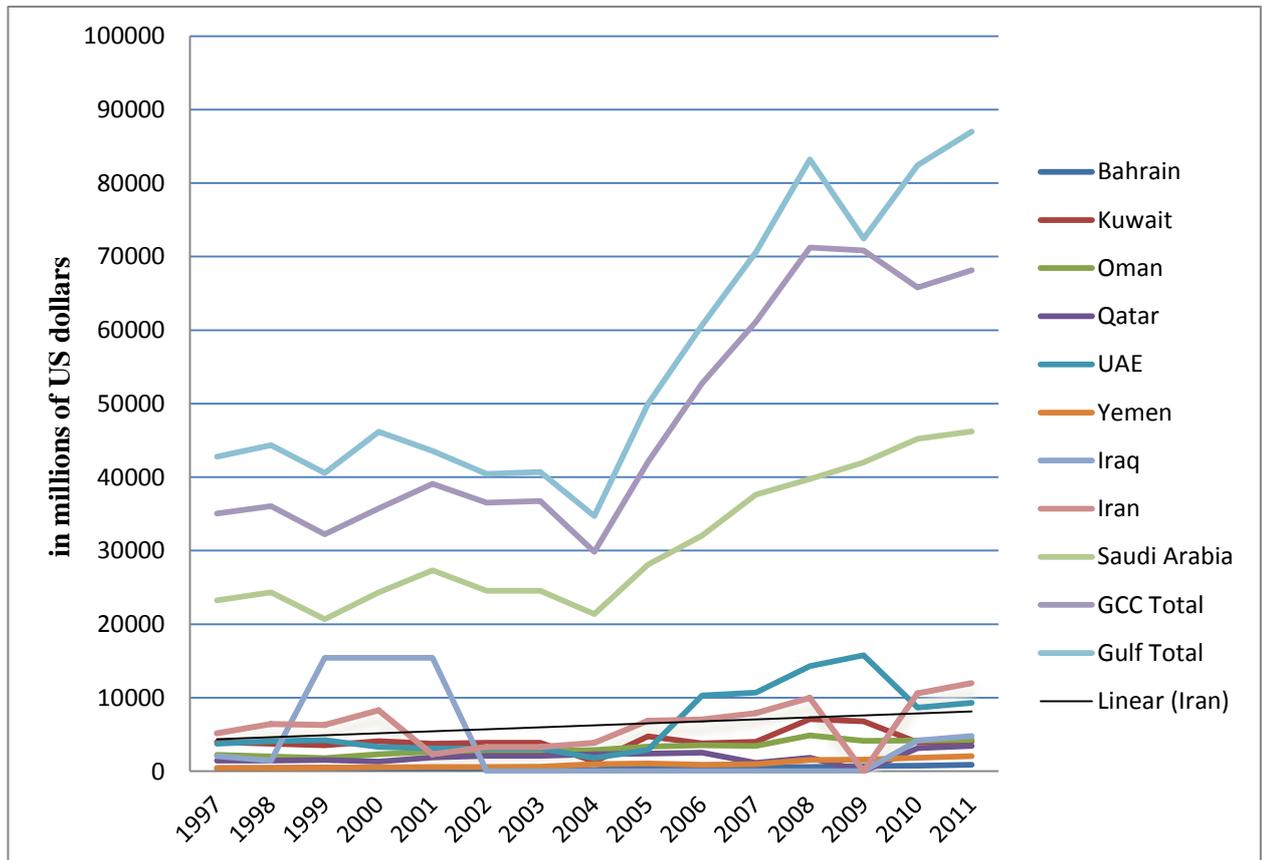
Source: Cordesman and Wilner, 2012, p. 54.

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