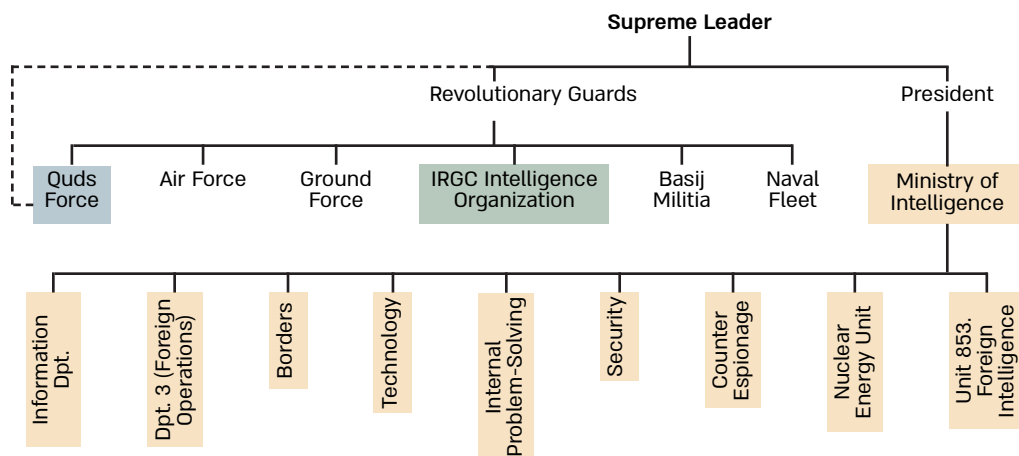


CHAPTER 4

THE INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR CARRYING OUT IRANIAN TERRORISM

The execution of terrorist attacks by Iran is managed and overseen by several key bodies. This is consistent with the broader structure of the Iranian government, which often relies on institutional duplication in many aspects of its operations. Such institutional redundancy is characteristic of the Iranian regime, allowing the Supreme Leader to encourage competition among different power centers with overlapping authorities, thereby preventing any single entity from accumulating excessive power (Zimmt, 2020). Accordingly, several governmental bodies are responsible for executing Iran's terrorist activities, each subordinate to different organizational frameworks.

In recent years, most terrorist operations abroad have been carried out under the responsibility of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), specifically the Quds Force and the IRGC Intelligence Organization. Other attacks fall under the purview of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence. A third



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category of attacks, which will only be briefly addressed in this document, are conducted by Iranian proxy organizations, primarily Hezbollah, with Iran's general approval, occasional assistance, and, at times, direct collaboration with its agencies.

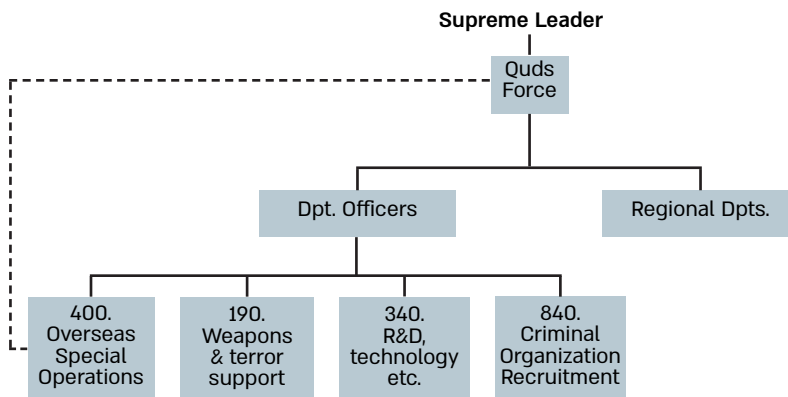
Entities Subordinate to the IRGC

The first section outlines the entities operating under the IRGC. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was established by Ayatollah Khomeini shortly after he rose to power, as he distrusted the Iranian army, which had been loyal to the Shah, and needed a force that was both loyal to him and directly subordinate to his authority. The organization was initially composed of young religious men, primarily from lower social classes, who were drawn to Khomeini's vision. From the outset, the IRGC was characterized by deep ideological commitment and the belief that violence was a legitimate response to perceived threats to the Islamic Republic, both domestically and abroad (Takeyh, 2016). The IRGC was given several central objectives: Ensuring the ideological purity of the revolution; maintaining internal security in Iran and preventing coups; serving as a counterbalance to the regular Iranian military, though it was required to coordinate with it; exporting the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran's borders (Pinko, 2019; Wherey et al., 2009)

The Iran-Iraq War transformed the IRGC into a more conventional fighting force, with a structure akin to Western militaries. The organization consists of several branches: Ground forces stationed across various Iranian provinces; a separate naval force (distinct from Iran's regular navy); a separate air force (distinct from the Iranian Air Force); an intelligence organization; the Basij militia, initially an independent force, now under IRGC command. Additionally, since its involvement in the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC has supported and financed armed groups across the region. The Quds Force was created as Iran's primary external military and intelligence arm, developing relationships with militant groups in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and beyond, providing them with

training, weapons, funding, and military advice, while also conducting terrorist operations itself (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023; Ostovar, 2016; Silinsky, 2021).

Among the different units within the IRGC, two main bodies are involved in conducting terrorist attacks: the Quds Force and the IRGC Intelligence Organization. The Quds Force was established in 1990 to replace the *Office of Islamic Liberation Movements*, under the direct guidance of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Notably, the Quds Force is directly subordinate to the Supreme Leader, who also appoints its commander (Khoshnood, 2020; Tabatabai, 2020). Its establishment aimed to create a structured framework to conduct Iran's external operations and implement the doctrine of exporting the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran's borders.



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Over the years, the Quds Force has evolved into Iran's central terrorist arm, operating beyond its borders against various adversaries. It primarily works through proxies, attempting to conceal Iran's direct involvement to maintain plausible deniability. Quds Force operatives are stationed at Iranian

embassies abroad and work under the cover of charitable organizations, religious institutions, and educational centers operated by Iran worldwide (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2012a).

In 1998, Qassem Soleimani was appointed as commander of the Quds Force. Under his leadership, the organization flourished and expanded its operations, partly due to his close relationship with Khamenei, who trusted him deeply. During Soleimani's tenure, the Quds Force developed into a fully bureaucratic entity with various departments, each responsible for different aspects of its operations. Soleimani was assassinated by the United States in Iraq in January 2020, after which Esmail Qaani, his former deputy, was appointed as the new commander (Tabatabai, 2020).

It is important to note that while the Quds Force primarily operates as a military entity, its leadership and senior officials are often integrated into Iran's diplomatic service. The Quds Force actively influences and advances Iranian foreign policy by appointing its members as diplomatic representatives and, in some cases, even as ambassadors. Additionally, Quds Force operatives who do not hold official diplomatic positions sometimes carry out diplomatic missions (Khoshnood, 2020).

There are two main reasons for the Quds Force's involvement in Iranian diplomacy. First, from both a strategic and operational perspective, and given the central role of Iran's proxies in its defense doctrine, as well as their presence in key regional countries, it is logical for the Quds Force to operate through diplomatic channels alongside its military activities. Second, the personal influence of Qassem Soleimani enabled him to establish significant relationships with key figures across the region, allowing Iran to leverage these connections to further its agenda (Tabatabai, 2020).

The Quds Force operates in a wide range of regions across the world, including Lebanon, Bahrain, Iraq, South America, Asia, Africa, Afghanistan, Syria, Western Europe, and North America (Khoshnood, 2020; Wigginton et al., 2015). The force comprises headquarter divisions, specialized command

units, and regional directorates, each with designated geographical areas of responsibility (Cohen, 2012).

In addition to its regional structure, the Quds Force has specialized units responsible for specific aspects of its operations. The two units directly responsible for international terrorism are: Unit 400, which specializes in overseas special operations (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2012a); and Unit 840, which recruits foreign operatives and criminal mercenaries to carry out attacks (Solomon, 2021). Other supporting units include Unit 190, which handles weapons smuggling and logistical support for terrorist networks (ManSharof, 2019) and Unit 340, which serves as the Quds Force's technical department, developing and transferring weapons technology to Iran's regional militias, including the Houthis in Yemen, Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas (Kais, 2023)

Various types of attacks against a wide range of targets have been attributed to the Quds Force. Among these actions is the foiled 2011 assassination attempt on the Saudi ambassador to the United States, carried out in collaboration with a Mexican drug cartel (Banerjee, 2015). The force is also extensively involved in attempts to execute attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets through Units 400 and 840, as detailed below.

One of the units involved in Iranian terrorist operations is Unit 400, whose existence was revealed in 2012. This unit operates clandestinely within the Quds Force and is assigned to special operations abroad. It is responsible for planning and executing terrorist attacks outside Iran and for assisting opposition groups and militias in various countries (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2012a). According to reports, the unit is tasked with establishing covert and operational infrastructure outside Iran to support all Quds Force activities, including the clandestine transfer of weapons, drug trafficking, and terrorist operations—though its members do not personally carry out assassinations (Pinko, 2022).

Unit 400 operates under the direct authority of the Supreme Leader, who issues directives to execute attacks when a decision is made in Iran to advance an operation. Upon receiving such an order, the unit recruits foreign operatives for the execution team, trains and prepares them in Iran, and then dispatches them to the target location through a third country, in order to obscure Iran's "fingerprints" (Cohen, 2012). Unit 400 has been linked to, among other actions, the attempted assassination of the Israeli consul in Istanbul, Moshe Kamhi, in May 2011, in coordination with Hezbollah (Harel & Mana, 2011). Another operation attributed to this unit is the attempted assassination of businessman Itzik Moshe in Georgia (Salameh, 2023).

The second key unit within the Quds Force engaged in perpetrating attacks is Unit 840. This unit focuses on managing intelligence assets in target countries and maintaining ties with criminal organizations and dormant cells composed of local operatives (Solomon, 2020). Unlike Unit 400, this unit relies on foreign operatives and mercenaries from local crime organizations. It is responsible for the kidnapping and assassination of foreign civilians worldwide, including Israelis and individuals fulfilling official roles (Fassihi & Bergman, 2022).

According to open sources, the unit's commander is Yazdan Mir, also known as "Sardar Bagheri" (Ben-Menachem, 2021b). Its deputy commander was Hassan Sayyad Khodayari until his assassination by Israel in May 2022. Khodayari was allegedly responsible for the unit's operations in the Middle East and neighboring countries, and in the two years preceding his assassination, he was involved in attempts to carry out attacks against Israeli, European, and American civilians and officials in multiple countries, including Colombia, Kenya, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates, and Cyprus. The assassination of Khodayari was reportedly intended as a signal to Iran to halt Unit 840's activities (Fassihi & Bergman, 2022). Another senior figure within the unit is Mohammad Reza Ansari, who commands the unit's operations in Syria and also implements directives to target Jewish sites in South America (Eichner, 2022c).

Unit 840 has been involved in numerous attempted attacks against Israeli and Western targets as well as Iranian opposition figures. For example, in October 2019, an Iranian terrorist network established by this unit was uncovered in Antalya, utilizing a Turkish organization controlled by Abdulsalam Turgut, who specializes in smuggling humans, weapons, and hazardous materials. The investigation into this network indicated, for instance, that Unit 840 was involved in planning a bombing attack in March 2018 during an event held by the Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq in Tirana, Albania. Another attempted attack linked to this unit likely took place in Colombia in June 2021 (Solomon, 2021; Azarmehr, 2021).

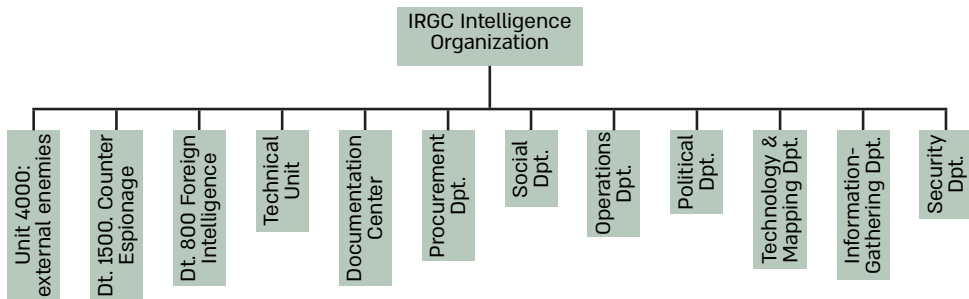
Further reports on Unit 840's involvement in executing attacks surfaced following the public disclosure of the arrest of an individual named Mansour Rasouli by the Mossad in Iran. He was interrogated, filmed, and later released. Rasouli, allegedly a member of Unit 840, had been dispatched to establish an operational network in Turkey by recruiting local citizens to carry out several attacks (Eichner, 2022a). The Iranian opposition website, Iran International, claimed that Rasouli had been recruited into the unit by Khodayari (Iran International, 2022a). According to reports, Unit 840 was also involved in the attempted assassination of Israeli businessman Yair Geller in Turkey in February 2022 (Pinko, 2022). In September 2022, it was revealed that in the preceding months, operations by Quds Force's Unit 840 had been thwarted, including plans to target American personnel as well as a Chabad House in Kinshasa (Intelli Times, 2022).

Alongside the operations of its various units, it is important to note that the Quds Force utilizes Iran's diplomatic missions, as well as a large number of civilian, religious, economic, and humanitarian organizations, to smuggle weapons, financial aid, and even militia operatives into target countries (Mansharof, 2019).

The second entity within the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) involved in carrying out terrorist attacks is the Intelligence Organization. This

body, in its current form, was established in 2009 as a successor to the IRGC's intelligence unit, which was originally founded in 1979. Similar to the IRGC's decentralized operational characteristics, the Intelligence Organization operates through intelligence centers across Iran's 31 provinces. Based on partial and sporadic information regarding the organization's structure, it appears to be composed of several thematic departments, each responsible for different intelligence-related domains in accordance with assigned missions. These tasks include counterterrorism efforts, suppression of political subversion, active participation in quelling protests and riots, combating "Western cultural infiltration and moral offenses," surveillance and enforcement in the virtual domain, suppression of ethnic separatism and "religious deviation," countering serious crime and smuggling, and fighting economic corruption. In recent years, the organization has taken on additional missions—some of which were previously the exclusive domain of the Ministry of Intelligence—including the capture of regime dissidents abroad and the arrest of foreign nationals with dual citizenship for the purpose of facilitating prisoner exchange deals between Iran and Western countries or advancing various economic interests. Furthermore, the organization has become increasingly involved in suppressing domestic opposition and critics of the regime (Zimmt, 2020).

Until June 2022, the Intelligence Organization was led by Hossein Taeb, who had previously commanded the IRGC's Basij force and was considered close to Supreme Leader Khamenei (Banerjee, 2015). In June 2022, Taeb was dismissed—likely due to his failure to prevent the assassinations of senior Iranian figures and nuclear scientists on Iranian soil in recent years, which were attributed to Israel, as well as his inability to retaliate effectively (N12, 2022). His dismissal occurred shortly after Iranian attempts to carry out attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets in Istanbul were thwarted. According to reports, Taeb was replaced by Mohammad Kazemi, who had previously headed the IRGC's Intelligence Protection Organization (Segal, 2022). Some argue that following Kazemi's appointment, the organization's priorities shifted



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somewhat, with a newly defined objective to focus intelligence efforts on the West Bank and Israel's home front, in addition to protecting the regime, preventing Israeli infiltration into Iran, and thwarting the assassinations of senior Iranian figures (Buhbut, 2023).

Relatively little is known about the internal structure of the Intelligence Organization. According to information detailed in a February 2012 blog post affiliated with the Iranian opposition, the organization is composed of several departments, including an Intelligence-Gathering Department responsible for amassing intelligence and distributing it among different units; a Mapping Department in charge of mapping all Iranian cities; a Political Department that receives information from the Intelligence-Gathering Department and conducts analysis and research on political parties and figures; an Operations Department responsible for planning the physical activities necessary to execute missions; a Social Department tasked with combating crime, monitoring religious minorities, overseeing activities in social organizations and mosques, and tracking non-governmental organizations while also countering economic corruption, smuggling, and fraud; a Procurement Department responsible for acquisitions, logistical support, and preparing intelligence units' operational needs; a Security Department; a Documentation Center in charge of preserving documents and maintaining a computerized intelligence database; and

a Technical Center responsible for preparing and managing surveillance, imaging, and computing equipment for the various units (Zimmt, 2020).

Another assessment of the organization's structure suggests that it consists of seven different intelligence and security departments, one of which is the Supreme Leader's personal intelligence office, also known as Department 101. It also includes the Internal Security Directorate within the Ministry of Intelligence, the Security Directorate of the Basij forces, and additional policing units. The Intelligence Organization also oversees the Cyber Command (Banerjee, 2015).

Beyond its division into departments, the organization is also structured into various directorates, although the precise relationships between these divisions remain unclear based on publicly available information. One known division is Directorate 800, responsible for foreign intelligence, which is led by Reza Saraj (Eichner, 2022b). Saraj previously headed Unit 4000, tasked with addressing "external enemies" outside Iran, a role now held by Mostafa Javad Rafari (Iran International, 2022b). Another senior figure within Directorate 800 is Javad Sarai, who was responsible for handling the operative who attempted an attack on Israeli targets in Cyprus. That operative, Hassan Shushtari Zadeh, is a well-known senior official in the Iranian Intelligence Organization, overseeing "special operations" (Eichner, 2023c).

Another division involved in terrorism is Directorate 1500, also known as the Counterespionage Unit, which is responsible for countering espionage and subversion within Iran. While this is its official mandate, its leader, Rouhollah Bazghandi, has been implicated in failed attempts to attack Israelis in Istanbul in June 2022. In light of these failures, Iran International reported significant dissatisfaction within the Intelligence Organization regarding Bazghandi—not only due to his failures in Turkey but also because Directorate 1500, as the counterespionage unit, was supposed to prioritize internal security within Iran. Instead, Bazghandi chose to focus on operations outside the country. This shift in focus allegedly led to the neglect of domestic counterintelligence

efforts, contributing to the failure to prevent high-profile assassinations and attacks on sensitive facilities and bases within Iran—actions attributed to Israel in various foreign reports (Iran International, 2022b).

As part of its political suppression efforts, the IRGC's Intelligence Organization is actively involved in capturing dissidents abroad. For instance, in 2019, the organization was implicated in the abduction of journalist and regime critic Ruhollah Zam at Baghdad airport. According to reports, Zam had traveled to Iraq under the false impression—likely induced by individuals connected to the IRGC's Intelligence Organization—that he was to conduct an interview with Ayatollah Ali Sistani. Upon his arrival in Iraq, Zam was arrested by local authorities and handed over to Iran. He was subsequently tried, sentenced to death for corruption, and executed in December 2020 (Harris et al., 2022).

Moreover, the organization plays a central role in the arrest and imprisonment of tourists, most of whom hold dual citizenship from Western countries, who are detained while visiting Iran and accused of espionage or activities endangering national security. These arrests are often part of Iran's hostage diplomacy, which will be discussed further below. They are typically intended to facilitate prisoner exchange deals between Iran and Western nations or to advance various economic interests (Zimmt, 2020).

In addition to these activities, as previously mentioned, the organization is sometimes directly involved in carrying out attacks against Israeli and Western targets. For example, in June 2023, reports surfaced regarding the thwarting of an Iranian attack in Cyprus, which was to be executed by Directorate 800 of the Intelligence Organization. The primary suspect was an Iranian operative who had traveled from Iran to Istanbul and from there to Turkish-controlled northern Cyprus. He then crossed into the Republic of Cyprus to gather intelligence on the intended targets (Eichner, 2023b), later recruiting a team of operatives. Reports also indicated that during his time in Cyprus, the agent established contact with Iranian, Pakistani, and local accomplices (TOI Staff, 2023b).

Furthermore, and even more intensively since Kazemi's appointment, as noted above, the Intelligence Organization has been involved in financing and initiating terrorism in Israel. Iran-funded terrorist activities manifest in several ways, the most prominent of which is a method dubbed "terror spraying." This approach exploits instability in the West Bank to channel large sums of money to fund weapons and attacks. The second method involves what has been described as pinpoint terrorism, consisting of concrete attempts to carry out attacks against senior figures in Israel, including intelligence collection on the target, execution planning, and selecting the timing of the attack. Additionally, Iran engages in classic intelligence operations using various espionage methods against Israel. Another key Iranian effort focuses on influencing the internal environment within Israel by exacerbating tensions and societal divisions (Buhbut, 2023).

Ministry of Intelligence

In 1979, Khomeini established his own intelligence service, primarily tasked with domestic security and intelligence gathering on Iraq. In 1984, the service underwent restructuring, with Mohammad Reyshahri appointed as its head, and it was renamed the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). As part of this reorganization, the ministry expanded its intelligence operations against Iraq and other foreign targets, playing its part in the broader mission of exporting the revolution. Thanks to generous funding and a large workforce, the Ministry of Intelligence accumulated significant power within the Iranian regime. Although it is officially subordinate to the president, in practice, its heads have been appointed from among the Supreme Leader's close associates and have effectively operated under his directives (Shay, 2003).

During its early years, under Reyshahri's leadership, the Ministry of Intelligence focused on eliminating Iranian opposition leaders, particularly members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK). After 1989, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's loyalists gained influence within the ministry, leveraging his support. As a

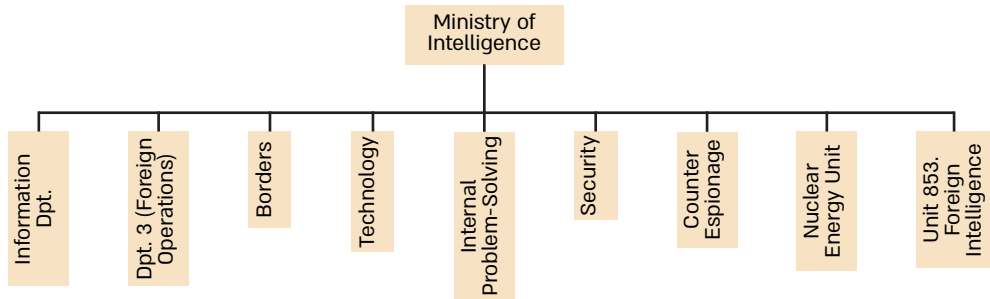
result, the ministry redirected its focus to assassinating Iranian exiles under the leadership of Ali Fallahian. In parallel with its external operations, the ministry was also involved in the arrests and killing of numerous activists and writers within Iran.

Following Mohammad Khatami's victory in the 1997 presidential elections, a compromise between the new president and the Supreme Leader led to the appointment of Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi. During the early part of his tenure, political assassinations continued. Following public criticism of the ministry's involvement in these assassinations, the ministry admitted partial responsibility but attempted to portray the killings as a foreign conspiracy. Several operatives were arrested and tortured until they confessed to being Israeli agents. As a result, Dorri-Najafabadi resigned in 1999 and was replaced by Ali Younesi.

In 2005, newly-elected President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appointed Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejei as Minister of Intelligence. Under his leadership, the ministry focused on neutralizing internal threats—particularly plots perceived to be related to the “Color Revolutions”—while continuing the policy of abducting Iranian exiles abroad. However, Mohseni Ejei was dismissed due to his failure to suppress the Green Movement protests and was replaced by Heydar Moslehi, who conducted another purge within the ministry, dismissing many reformist-affiliated members. With the assistance of other security agencies, the ministry ultimately succeeded in quelling the Green Movement.

Nevertheless, the ministry failed in several of its other missions. For example, it was unable to prevent the assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists—allegedly carried out by Israel. Likewise, Iran's attempts at retaliatory attacks, such as the failed 2012 bombing in Bangkok, were unsuccessful. Additionally, tensions developed between President Ahmadinejad and the ministry.

Upon his election, President Hassan Rouhani appointed Mahmoud Alavi as Minister of Intelligence. This appointment was a compromise supported by Khamenei, who had already shifted much of his backing to the IRGC



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Intelligence Organization. Due to Alavi's demonstrated ineffectiveness and this shift in priorities, the Ministry of Intelligence was sidelined in internal security matters, focusing instead on foreign intelligence. In February 2017, its official powers were expanded, leading to increased involvement in external operations, including extensive surveillance and even the planning of attacks against exiles, defectors, and Iranian dissidents (Golkar, 2021). In 2021, Esmail Khatib was appointed Minister of Intelligence (Khoshnood & Fard, 2021).

In 2024, it was reported that the Deputy Minister of Intelligence for Internal Security, Yahya Hosseini Panjaki, was responsible for overseas assassination operations (Pourmohsen, 2024). Panjaki is said to have close ties with the IRGC and has traveled multiple times to Syria and Lebanon, where he collaborated with Hezbollah and the Quds Force, facilitating intelligence exchanges between the IRGC in Iran and the Ministry of Intelligence. Furthermore, in addition to his role as Deputy Head of Internal Security, Panjaki is also in charge of "Israeli Affairs." This dual responsibility was reportedly assigned to him under Khamenei's directives, with the Supreme Leader allocating increased financial and human resources to offensive operations against Israel (Eichner, 2024b).

It is important to note that, given the overlap between the responsibilities of the Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC Intelligence Organization, the

ministry's status has weakened in recent decades compared to that of the IRGC's intelligence apparatus. Several factors have contributed to this decline, including the ministry's subordination to the president and Khamenei's efforts to weaken the presidency amid power struggles between the Supreme Leader and successive presidents. These struggles have reinforced Khamenei's desire to strengthen the IRGC Intelligence Organization, which is directly accountable to him (Zimmt, 2020). Nevertheless, the Ministry of Intelligence continues to play a significant role in carrying out attacks against Israel, and recent regional and domestic developments could potentially expand its role.

As noted earlier, reliable and publicly available information on the structure of Iran's intelligence agencies is limited. Reports suggest that the Ministry of Intelligence consists of 12 departments, the most critical of which include the Information Department, responsible for collecting and analyzing intelligence on Iran's adversaries, and Department 3, tasked with foreign operations (Solomon, 2020).

The interrogation of an Iranian intelligence officer arrested in Tanzania in November 2022—after being dispatched to establish an unofficial branch for recruiting agents and facilitating terrorist activities—provided significant insights into the Ministry of Intelligence's structure and operational methods. The officer detailed the responsibilities of the ministry's various divisions, including: Foreign Intelligence Division—responsible for intelligence collection and operational activities outside Iran, organized into geographic units based on Iran's areas of interest, with each department overseeing a specific country or region; Counterespionage Division—tasked with capturing foreign agents and uncovering espionage operations conducted by rival states inside Iran, subdivided according to the countries Iran considers adversaries; Security Division—focused on preventing sabotage activities within Iran; Internal Affairs Division—responsible for suppressing riots, protests, and public disturbances; Operations Division—oversees field activities, including surveillance, arrests, interrogations, and other operational tasks; Technology Division—a large

division responsible for the ministry's cyber activities. While various technical departments exist within the different divisions, all are connected to this main unit; Border Division—handles intelligence operations at Iran's border crossings; Nuclear Energy Affairs Division—tasked with preventing threats to Iran's nuclear program, including protecting nuclear facilities and personnel from intelligence threats (Eichner, 2023a).

One of the Ministry of Intelligence's key advantages is its ability to collaborate effectively with other government ministries, particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to coordinate terrorist activities beyond Iran's borders. Reports indicate that Department 3 of the Ministry of Intelligence integrates intelligence units within the Iranian Foreign Ministry, composed of diplomatic representatives and cultural attachés engaged in intelligence gathering through the recruitment of assets and Quds Force operatives (Solomon, 2020).

The Ministry of Intelligence employs two primary channels for deploying its agents abroad. The first channel consists of intelligence officers operating under the cover of diplomatic representatives, often stationed in embassies. The second channel involves the deployment of military intelligence officers masquerading as economic operatives. These agents plan assassinations, kidnappings, and acts of sabotage, which are frequently carried out by proxy organizations to maintain plausible deniability. Prominent drug traffickers often serve as contractors for these missions (Pourmohsen, 2024).

Examples of the first channel—deploying agents under diplomatic cover—can be found in the involvement of Iranian diplomats in terrorist attacks and the support provided by Iranian embassies worldwide for terrorist operatives. For instance, an American citizen who converted to Islam and worked in the Iranian department at the Algerian embassy in Washington assassinated Ali Akbar Tabatabai, a former press attaché at the Iranian embassy in Washington who opposed the Ayatollahs' regime. After the assassination, the perpetrator fled to Geneva, where he found refuge at the Iranian consulate before traveling to Iran (Zahed, 2017). Another example is the expulsion of two Iranian diplomats

from Bosnia and Herzegovina in April 2013 after they were discovered to be Iranian intelligence officers (Levitt, 2018).

Beyond the use of diplomatic cover, the interrogation of an Iranian intelligence officer captured in Tanzania revealed an additional operational method employed by the ministry—establishing “unofficial branches” in various countries. According to the officer, his superiors in the Ministry of Intelligence had tasked him with recruiting three agents per year and developing relationships with ten individuals from the Baloch community in Tanzania to solidify his cover. This method allows the organization to position its operatives in different countries without requiring approval from the host nation, enabling them to recruit agents and advance terrorist operations from within these locations. The personnel of these unofficial branches operate under civilian-business cover and do not engage with Iranian embassies or official diplomatic missions to avoid raising suspicion among local authorities. The officer also indicated that additional unofficial branches of the ministry exist beyond those in Tanzania (Eichner, 2023a).

During his interrogation, the intelligence officer also described the methods used to recruit local and foreign sources within Iran. He stated that the organization recruits prisoners convicted in Iran, as well as other criminals involved in smuggling, drug trafficking, and contract killings, offering them reduced sentences in exchange for cooperation. Another recruitment method involves targeting individuals at border crossings, where the ministry interrogates foreign nationals entering Iran for extended stays and offers them work as informants (Eichner, 2023a).

Given its mandate and powers, the Ministry of Intelligence has been significantly involved—more so than any other Iranian intelligence agency—in attacks against Iranian exiles and opposition leaders. For example, in December 2015, a Ministry of Intelligence operative killed Mohammad-Reza Kolahi Samadi, a Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) member suspected of orchestrating the 1981 bombing of the Islamic Republican Party headquarters. In 2018, the FBI

arrested a group of Iranian-American dual nationals linked to the ministry and accused them of surveilling Jewish centers and MEK activists. That same year, a Ministry of Intelligence officer operating under diplomatic cover was implicated in an attempted attack on an MEK rally in Paris. The ministry has also been linked to two assassinations of Iranian dissidents in the Netherlands. The Ministry of Intelligence is also involved in the kidnapping of Iranian opposition activists. In June 2022, Turkey's state news agency confirmed that the Iranian ministry had collaborated with the criminal organization of Naji Sharifi Zindashti to kidnap and assassinate Iranian dissidents on Turkish soil. According to reports, Zindashti's operatives had been targeting Iranian exiles since at least 2015 without interference. Several notorious murders and kidnappings of Iranian exiles have been attributed to Zindashti's network, including: The murder of Saeed Karimian and his Kuwaiti business partner in May 2017; the assassination of Masoud Molavi in November 2019; the kidnapping of Habib Farajollah Chaab (also known as Asiyud) in October 2020 (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2022; Golkar, 2021; Pourmohsen, 2024).

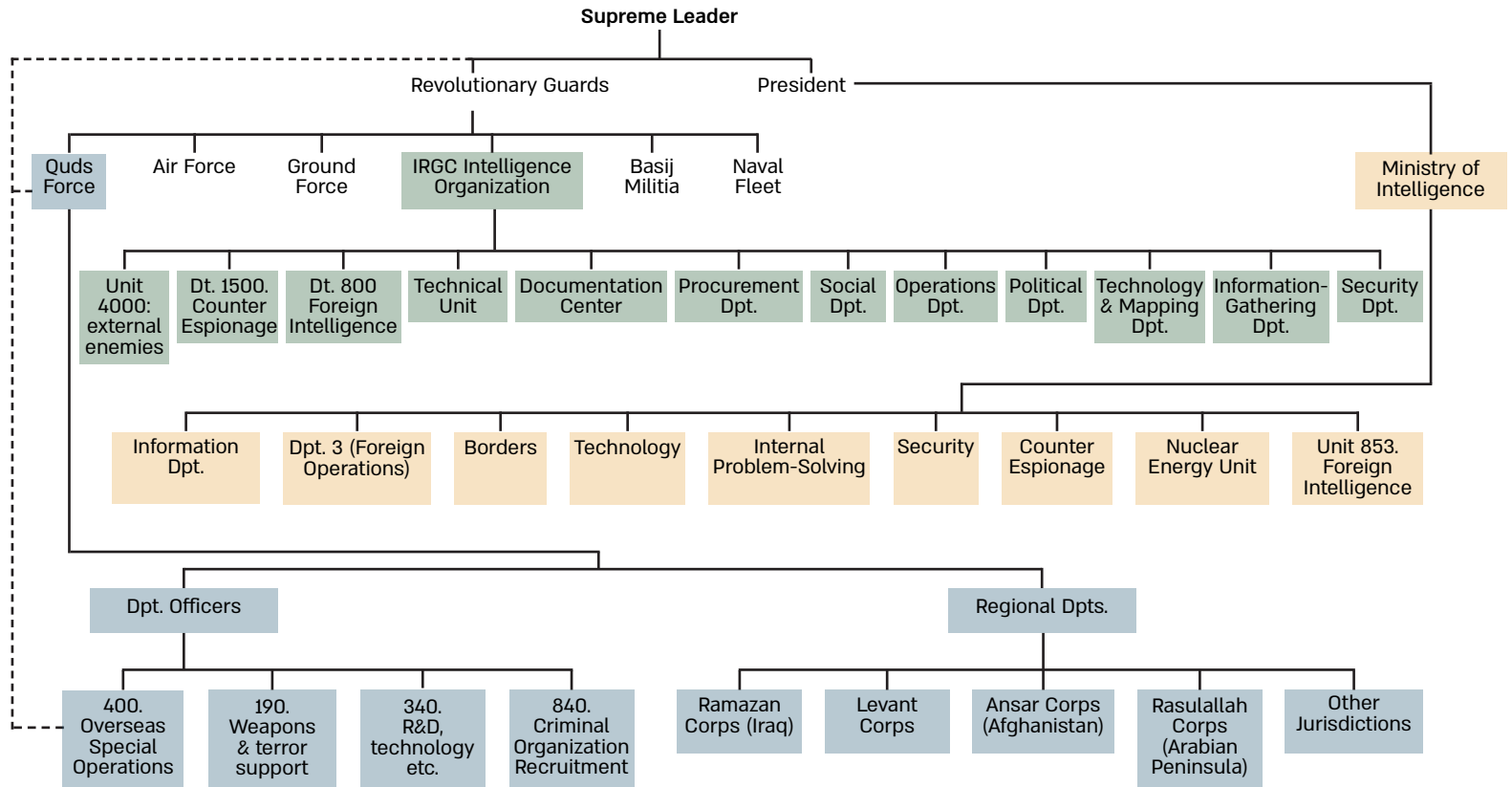
The Ministry of Intelligence is also directly involved in executing attacks against Western, Arab, Jewish, and Israeli targets. According to intelligence assessments, the Quds Force and the Ministry of Intelligence collaborated in carrying out the 1992 and 1994 attacks in Argentina; the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia; and the assassinations of Iranian Kurdish opposition leaders in the early 1990s (Banerjee, 2015). It has been alleged that Hezbollah operatives and the suicide bomber involved in the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires received assistance from Iranian intelligence and personnel stationed at the Iranian embassy in Argentina. This included intelligence gathering, encrypted communications, and the smuggling of explosives via diplomatic mail. Following the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, an international arrest warrant was issued against Iran's then-Minister of Intelligence, Ali Fallahian, for his role in the attack, along with several other Iranian intelligence officials operating

under cover. A warrant was also issued for Ahmad Vahidi, a senior IRGC officer who later became Iran's Minister of Defense (Melman, 2018).

Beyond the attacks in Argentina, the Ministry of Intelligence was also involved in an attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador to Azerbaijan in 2012. Azerbaijani security forces arrested a terror cell plotting to kill the Israeli ambassador and a local rabbi. The cell was operating under the direction of an Iranian national with ties to the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence (Dostri, 2022). Reports indicate that the assassination attempt was intended as retaliation for Israel's alleged involvement in assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists (Bardenstein & News Agencies, 2012).

The overlap in responsibilities between the Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC Intelligence Organization has led to disputes and prestige battles between the two agencies. These conflicts concern both credit for successful operations and responsibility for failures. However, in recent years, the heads of both organizations have sought to downplay their differences. Over the past two years, they have publicly expressed mutual appreciation for each other's intelligence and operational successes. Nonetheless, the continued expansion of the IRGC Intelligence Organization's authority and responsibilities is likely to escalate this rivalry further (Zimmt, 2020).

CHAPTER 4: THE INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR CARRYING OUT IRANIAN TERRORISM



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