Main Argument

The Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) has become a major intelligence apparatus of the Islamic Republic, having increased its influence and broadened its authorities. Iran’s intelligence apparatus, similar to other control and governance apparatuses in the Islamic Republic, is characterized by power plays, rivalries and redundancy. The Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, which answers to the supreme leader, operates alongside the Ministry of Intelligence, which was established in 1984 and answers to the president. The redundancy and overlap in the authorities of the Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization have created disagreements and competition over prestige between the two bodies. In recent years, senior regime officials and officials within the two organizations have attempted to downplay the extent of disagreements between the organizations, and strove to present to domestic and foreign audience a visage of unity.

The IRGC’s Intelligence Organization (ILNA, July 16, 2020)

The IRGC’s Intelligence Organization, in its current form, was established in 2009. The Organization’s origin is in the Intelligence Unit of the IRGC, established shortly after the Islamic Revolution (1979). The Unit underwent several organizational and structural changes, culminating in the establishment of the Intelligence Organization. Since the late 1980s, and even more so in the late 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century, the intelligence organ of the IRGC has gained power at the expense of the Ministry of Intelligence. The
causes for the rise in the power of the IRGC’s intelligence include the blow suffered by the Ministry of Intelligence after the exposure of its involvement in the “chain murders” of Iranian intellectuals; the power struggles between the supreme leader and presidents Muhammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which reinforced the desire of the supreme leader to bolster the intelligence organ of the IRGC, as it is not subject to oversight of the government and the legislative branch; the 2009 Green Movement protests, which demonstrated the need for improved control of the top echelon of the regime, led by the supreme leader, over the means of repression; the waves of protests that erupted in recent years due to the intensifying economic crisis; and growing tensions between Iran and the United States and its allies since the withdrawal of the United States under the leadership of President Trump from the nuclear accord (JCPOA). The upgrade in the status of the Intelligence Organization and the expansion of its authorities is part of a general trend of the rise of the IRGC, which currently plays a significant role in Iran’s political system and economy.

> Starting in 2009, after the Intelligence Branch of the IRGC was upgraded to an Organization, Iranian cleric Hossein Taeb, who is considered to be a close adviser to Khamenei, has headed the Organization. Taeb joined the IRGC in the early 1980s, served for about a decade in the Intelligence Ministry, and in the late 1990s, returned to the IRGC. In 2008, he was appointed as the commander of the Basij arm of the IRGC, and played a central role in repressing the 2009 protests. Shortly after the quashing of the protest movement, he was appointed as the leader of the Intelligence Organization. He holds hardline and hawkish views, which reflect the official line dictated by the supreme leader of Iran.

Hossein Taeb (Tabnak, January 27, 2020)

> Similarly to the decentralized modus operandi of the IRGC over the past decade, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC operates through intelligence centers operating across Iran’s 31 provinces. Based on partial and sporadic information about the structure of
the organization, it appears that it is comprised of a number of thematic departments, in line with the tasks assigned to the Organization.

Some of the central tasks of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC are: foiling terror attacks, thwarting political subversion, actively participating in repression of protests and riots, combating “Western cultural penetration" and morality violations, monitoring and enforcement in the virtual sphere, countering ethnic separatism and “religious deviance,” preventing grave crimes and smuggling, and tackling economic corruption. In recent years, additional missions were assigned to the Organization, which were previously under the sole purview of the Intelligence Ministry, such as: capturing regime opponents abroad, arresting tourists and dual-nationality Iranians for the purpose of prisoner swap deals with Western countries, or for advancing various economic interests. In addition, the Organization’s involvement in repressing regime opponents and critics at home has been expanded.

According to a number of unverified reports, the cyber arm of the IRGC also operates under the Intelligence Organization. The Cyber Defense Command of the IRGC was established over the past decade to protect local information systems from cyber attacks; monitor organized crime, terrorism and cyber intelligence collection; thwart attacks on the values of the Islamic Revolution; and increase the security of user of cyber systems.

The expanding roles and growing clout of the Organizations have resulted in increased public and political criticism of the Organization, which includes accusations of abuse of its authorities, as well as involvement in corruption and financial irregularities. Despite this criticism, not only has the standing of the Organization not been diminished, but it appears that the regime is determined to bolster the Organization’s standing even further, as the challenges the regime faces mount at home and abroad.

The Structure of the Report

This report contains the following chapters:

- Introduction
- Central Milestones in the Evolution of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC
- The Relationship between the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC with the Ministry of Intelligence
- The Head of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, Hossein Taeb
• Estimated Structure of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC
• Responsibilities of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC:
  • Combating Terrorism
  • Foiling Political Subversion
  • Repression of Protests and Riots
  • Kidnapping Regime Opponents Abroad
  • Arrests of Tourists and Dual Nationals
  • Combating “Western Cultural Penetration” and Preserving Morals in Physical and Virtual Spaces
  • Combating Ethnic Separatism
  • Combating Manifestations of “Religious Deviance”
  • Preventing Grave Crimes
  • Foiling Smuggling
  • Combating Economic Corruption
  • The Fight against COVID-19
• Accusations of the Organization of Involvement in Corruption and Irregularities

Methodological Notes

This is the first extensive report to be written on the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC. Over the past decade, a handful of articles have been written about the Iranian intelligence community, which provide a partial and limited description of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC. Among the most prominent of these studies is an extensive study of the Iranian Intelligence Ministry, published in December 2012, by the American Congressional Research Service “Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile;” an article by Carl Anthony Wege, titled “Iran’s Intelligence Establishment” published in the summer of 2015; and the article by Udit Banerjea titled “Revolutionary Intelligence: The Expanding Intelligence Role of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps,” published in the fall of 2015.

In addition, a number of studies published in recent years dealt extensively with the activities of the IRGC. The research produced by Ali Alfoneh, Afshon Ostovar and Saeid Golkar are worth noting, as well as a 2009 report published by RAND Corporation. However, those studies too, which described the various aspects of the IRGC’s activities at length, rarely discussed the work of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC.
For the purpose of writing this report, I relied on the above-mentioned studies, in addition to two other types of sources:

- Occasional reports, published in recent years on Iranian news websites, websites affiliated with Iran’s exiled opposition, and websites of leading Western media outlets in Persian, and particularly BBC Persian.
- Many dozens of reports published in Iranian media about the activities in various spheres of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC.

Naturally, the publicly available information about the activities of one of the most secretive organizations in Iran is non-systematic and the extent of its veracity is often unclear. This applies to reports published by the Iranian regime, which are often intended to glorify the capabilities of the organization. Reports published by the Iranian opposition, on the other hand, often include false information intended to tarnish the image of the Iranian regime. More so, the extent to which the information published about the Intelligence Organization is up-to-date is also unclear, due to the structural changes that the Organization has undergone over the years. Due to the secretive nature of the organization, some of the reports about it (particularly in the West) contain factual errors. The challenge of lack of reliable, up-to-date information is particularly acute when it comes to describing the structure of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC. Despite these limitations, it is possible, based on the available information, to describe the main spheres of activity of the Intelligence Organization, its position within Iran’s intelligence community, and the major trends in its evolution over the years.

**Introduction**

The Intelligence Organization of the IRGC (سازمان اطلاعات سپاه پاسداران) has become a major intelligence agency of the Islamic Republic over the past decade, increasing its influence and holding broad authorities.

The Iranian system of rule involves multiple bodies who are tasked with overlapping responsibilities. This institutional redundancy is a prominent characteristic of the Iranian regime, which allows the supreme leader, who holds most executive authorities, to encourage competition between the various power centers that have overlapping authorities, thus preventing the concentration of power in any one of them. One such example is the overlap of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the adviser on international affairs to
the supreme leader, the Supreme National Security Council, the Strategic Council on Foreign Policy, and the Qods Force of the IRGC, all of them institutions involved in developing and executing Iran’s foreign policy. Iran’s intelligence apparatus is also characterized by power struggles, particularly between the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, which answers to the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and the Ministry of Intelligence (وزارت اطلاعات), which answers to the president (although the appointment of the minister of intelligence by the president is subject to the approval of the supreme leader).

The logos of the Ministry of Intelligence (right) and IRGC (left)

In October 2014, the Fars News Agency, which is affiliated with the IRGC, described 16 governmental bodies (some of which were established over the past two decades) involved in intelligence activities. According to the report, the coordination between the intelligence agencies is vested in the Council for Intelligence Coordination (Fars, October 14, 2014). According to the 1983 law that established the Ministry of Intelligence, the Council for Intelligence Coordination initially included nine members: the minister of intelligence, the attorney general, the minister of interior or his representative, the head of the intelligence security unit of the IRGC, the head of the Intelligence Unit of the IRGC, the head of the Intelligence Security Unit of the Iranian Armed Forces, the minister of foreign affairs or his representative, and the head of the Intelligence Security Unit at the Internal Security Forces. The Council is responsible for holding meetings and exchanging ideas concerning intelligence missions and related issues, exchanging information about methods for carrying out intelligence missions of the various intelligence community members, assigning responsibilities to each of the bodies, coordinating issues common to all the bodies with the Supreme National Security Council, examining suggestions of the Armed Forces regarding intelligence matters for the purpose of transferring the suggestions to the legislative branch,
setting criteria for the work of intelligence agencies, and establishing an intelligence “war rooms” for managing crises and emergency situations. The Ministry of Intelligence was determined to be the central intelligence body charged with setting goals, missions and the strategy of the various intelligence agencies (the website of the Ministry of Intelligence, October 18, 2014).

The work of the council was evident, as an example, in the February 2010 operation to capture Abdolmalek Rigi, the leader of the Sunni-Balochi separatist organization, Jundollah, when the plane he boarded in the UAE, en route to Kyrgyzstan, was forced to land by Iranian authorities. This operation required the coordination between the various intelligence agencies, the armed forces including the IRGC, the Ministry of Intelligence and the Air Force of the Armed Forces (Tasnim, September 21, 2018).

The arrest of Abdolmalek Rigi, the Commander of the Jundollah organization
(YJC, August 6, 2020)

The Intelligence Organization of the IRGC works in parallel to the Intelligence Protection Organization (سازمان حفاظت اطلاعات سیاسی). This organization, established in 1983, also underwent structural changes, similarly to the Intelligence Organization. The Intelligence Protection Organization works to prevent spying within the IRGC, penetration of the ranks of the organization, and leaking of secret information outside of Iran. The Intelligence Protection Organization is also tasked with protecting senior officials, diplomats, sensitive sites, flights and airports. This Organization is also tasked with political and security monitoring of IRGC members and ensuring their safety. The Organization is currently headed by Mohammad Kazemi, who rarely appears in the media (IranWire.com, April 9, 2019).
As part of the structural changes carried out within the IRGC in 2009, three units within the Intelligence Protection Organization were merged: the Air Security Unit, tasked with securing planes and airports; the Ansar al-Mahdi Corps, tasked with protecting senior regime officials, except the supreme leader; and the Vali Amr Corps, tasked with the protection of the supreme leader. According to a number of reports, the Vali Amr Corps operates independently, and does now answer to the Organization of Intelligence Protection (BBC Persian, December 28, 2016).

Central Milestones in the Evolution of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC

Following the Islamic Revolution (1979) and the dismantling of the National Organization for Security and Intelligence (SAVAK), the IRGC was tasked with the collection of intelligence. During this period, the organization focused on collecting intelligence for the benefit of the persecution campaign the regime led against its political opponents, including Mojahedin-e Khalgh, and the Communist Party (Tudeh). The employees of the Intelligence Unit of the IRGC were recruited among the revolutionary youth, and were overseen by directors with experience in clandestine activity against the monarchy (Shahrvand.com, December 8, 2016). At first, the unit operated under the name The Unit of Intelligence and Investigations, and was involved in the recruitment into the ranks of the IRGC and identifying and repressing anti-revolutionary activities. Later, the name was changed to the Intelligence Bureau, and its intelligence and security authorities were expanded (IranWire.com, April 9, 2019).

Following the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War (September 1980), and the entry of the IRGC into the battlefield, the organization diverted most of its intelligence resources to the war
effort. As a result, the need arose to consolidate the non-war-related intelligence and security activities in the hands of a different body. In 1984, the Ministry of Intelligence was established, and became the central actor in collection of intelligence and thwarting activities against state security. Upon its establishment, most of the resources of the Intelligence Unit of the IRGC were transferred to the new ministry, and the IRGC’s Intelligence Unit became a more operational-tactical one, focusing mostly on gathering military intelligence in support of the war effort (Shahrvand.com, December 8, 2016).

The involvement of the IRGC in non-military-related security and intelligence mission was resumed after the war (1988). Starting in the late 1980s, the IRGC required intelligence support for operations of the Qods Force, which was established at the end of the war with Iraq, and in assassination operations of Iranian opposition activists abroad, particularly during the 1990s (Shahrvand.com, December 8, 2016). In light of the transformations in its mission, the IRGC’s intelligence unit came to operate under the name The Intelligence Branch of the General Staff of the IRGC (Mashregh News, May 18, 2019). The Branch enjoyed this growth in prestige and authorities owing to the blow suffered by the Ministry of Intelligence after the exposure of its involvement in the “chain killings” of Iranian intellectuals in the 1990s. This involvement led to the resignation of the Minister of Intelligence Ghorbanali Dorri Najafabadi in 2000, and the purging of the Ministry of “rogue elements.” The subordination of the Ministry of Intelligence to the reformist president at the time, Mohammad Khatami, increased the resolve of the Supreme Leader Khamenei to bolster the Intelligence Branch of the IRGC, which is not subject to the oversight of the government and legislative branch (Majlis), and assign additional tasks to it, the most important of them, repressing regime opponents (Shahrvand.com, December 8, 2016).

In October 2009, the Intelligence Branch was upgraded to the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, after it had been merged with a number of other intelligence units within the IRGC. Hossein Taeb, who previously served as the commander of the Basij branch of the IRGC, was appointed to head the Organization. The Organization cohered against the backdrop of the protests, which erupted in the summer of 2009 across Iran (the Green Movement), due to the perceived falsification of the presidential elections in June 2009 to the disadvantage of the reformist opposition. The establishment of the Intelligence Organization awarded the supreme leader and the Iranian leadership with a greater
ability to control the means of repression and surveillance, which are not subordinate to the government.

The diminution of the Ministry of Intelligence was accelerated following the political crisis that erupted between President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader Khamenei. In April 2011, the president announced that he will accept the resignation of the Minister of Intelligence, Hayder Moslehi. Shortly afterwards, Khamanei issued an extraordinary statement, in which he expressed support for the minister of intelligence, and ordered him to assume his position again. The disagreements between the president and the supreme leader quickly turned into a major political crisis within the leadership of the regime and further reinforced Khamenei’s desire to bolster the standing of the IRGC, which is directly subordinate to him.

In May 2019, the Intelligence Organization was merged with the Strategic Intelligence Branch of the IRGC. Hossein Taeb remained at the helm of the Organization. Hossein Mohaqeq, who previously served as the head of the Branch for Strategic Intelligence, was appointed as Taeb’s deputy, replacing Hossein Nejat, who served as the deputy head of the Organization since December 2016. Nejat was appointed as the head of the Branch on Cultural and Societal Affairs within the IRGC (Tasnim, May 18, 2019; DW, May 18, 2019).

During the ceremony marking the new appointments, the Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, declared that Iran is waging a total intelligence war with the United States and the “front of the enemies of the revolution and the Islamic Republic.” This total war includes psychological warfare, cyber operations, military operations and public diplomacy. He asserted that it is possible to defeat the enemy in this war. He remarked that the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC is tasked with identifying the threats facing Iran, and not neglect for a single moment the analysis of the strategy of the United States. Salami added that the Intelligence Organization will now place a particular emphasis on the United States and will expand its activities abroad as well (Tasnim, May 18, 2019).
The organizational changes in the IRGC’s intelligence took place against the backdrop of the intensifying conflict between Iran and the United States due to the May 2018 decision of President Donald Trump to withdraw from the nuclear accord (JCPOA) and adopt the “maximum pressure” strategy against Iran. In addition, the structural changes occurred after the announcement of the United States to add the IRGC to the list of designated foreign terrorist organizations of the U.S. State Department starting April 15, 2019. The growing standing of Taeb at the helm of the upgraded Organization is seen as another indication for the determination of the regime to enhance the response to the growing challenges at home and abroad, and intensify internal repression due to concerns about the resumption of popular protests in response to the worsening economic crisis.

Following the merger of the Intelligence Organization with the Branch of Strategic Intelligence, the newspaper Jahan assessed that the structural changes are intended to boost the capacities of the IRGC and its ability to operate in the total intelligence campaign against the United States, and to provide a better response to the threats originating in “hostile intelligence agencies” and the “regional and supra-regional intelligence networks” operated by them (Jahan News, May 19, 2019).

In November 2019, the Deputy Commander of the IRGC, Ali Fadavi, addressed the expansion of the missions of the Intelligence Organization in light of the protests across the country and escalating tensions between Iran and the United State and its allies. Fadavi accused the United States, France, Britain, Germany and Saudi Arabia of being involved in the protest that erupted across Iran in November 2019 (“the fuel protests”), and remarked that the intelligence of the IRGC is responsible for carrying out tasks on behalf of the IRGC, and is serving as the law enforcement arm of the Judiciary (Mashregh News, November 24, 2019).
The upgrade in the standing of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC and expansion of its missions should be seen as part of an overall trend of increasing clout of the IRGC, which currently plays a significant role in Iran’s political system and economy. The appointment of Mohammad-Ali Jafari as the Commander of the IRGC in 2007 marked an important step in increasing the involvement of the organization in politics. In a speech Jaafari made in September 2007, he stressed that the IRGC is not a uni-dimensional military organization, and that its goal is to preserve the Revolution and its accomplishments against enemies as home. Jaafari defined the IRGC as an organization that is not “purely military” but also “political and ideological” (Hamshahri, September 29, 2007).

The Relationship between the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC with the Ministry of Intelligence

The overlap in the authorities of the Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC created, unsurprisingly, disagreements and competition over prestige between the two bodies. Below are some examples.

On February 24, 2017, the deputy head of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC at the time, Hosseij Nejat, claimed that the Organization arrested 15 terrorists, who planned on carrying out attacks during the annual processions marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. His claim was quickly rebuffed by a source within the Ministry of Intelligence, who argued that the operation to arrest the cell was fully carried out by the Ministry of Intelligence. The source added that the Ministry of Intelligence was also responsible for the capture of Abdelmalek Rigi in 2010, and the prisoner swap between Iran and the United States in January 2016, which was made possible by Iran’s arrest of American-Iranian dual citizens. He mentioned that the Supreme National Security Council also asked the Ministry of Intelligence to lead the negotiations that resulted in unfreezing of Iranian assets, totaling in $1.7 billion, which the United States transferred to Iran in 2016, and that every stage in the talks was run by a representative of the Ministry of Intelligence, in cooperation with the Central Bank and the president’s office, without any involvement of any other intelligence agency (ISNA, February 26, 2017).

In June 2017, another contest for credit of the two bodies took place, following a missile strike that Iran claims to have carried out against ISIS targets in Deir Ezzor in Syria, in
retaliation for a terror attack carried out by the organization in Tehran. Following the strike, the minister of intelligence declared that it was the Ministry of Intelligence that located the meeting place of the senior ISIS officials, which was hit in the strike, and provided the information to the missile unit of the IRGC. In a statement of the IRGC, on the other hand, it was claimed that the location of the strike was identified by ground forces of the Qods Force (BBC Persian, October 15, 2017).

Another disagreement between the organizations emerged following the arrest of Abdolrasoul Dorri-Esfahani by the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC. The detainee is an accountant who holds both Canadian and Iranian citizenship, who served as an adviser to the Iranian Central Bank and was a member of the Iranian negotiations team that led the talks concerning the JCPOA. In 2016, he was arrested and accused of spying on behalf of the UK and the United States, and in October 2017, he was sentenced to five years of imprisonment. Following the verdict, the Minister of Intelligence, Mahmoud Alavi, declared that the Ministry of Intelligence has no proof concerning the involvement of Esfahani in espionage, and that only the Counter Espionage Division at the Ministry of Intelligence is qualified to make a determination on issues pertaining to espionage. Esfahani was arrested and charged based on findings gathered by the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC (The Guardian, September 8, 2018).

In another case, interference by the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC led to the proof of innocence and release of Mazyar Ebrahimi, who was arrested in June 2012 under suspicion of collaborating with Israel and being involved in the assassination of four Iranian nuclear scientists in 2010-2012. Following the intervention of the IRGC, it became public that the confessions were extracted from him by force by the interrogators of the Ministry of Intelligence (Iran International, August 9, 2019).

Over the past two years, another issue emerged as a point of contention between the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC and the Ministry of Intelligence: the involvement of the Organization in handling dual-nationality Iranians. In 2018, the Majlis received an investigative report concerning senior officials in Iran who hold dual citizenship and permanent residency in the United States (Green Cards). The report, produced in cooperation between the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, the Judiciary, the Chief Prosecutor, the Internal Security Forces, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dealt with different aspects of employing dual nationals in executive organs of the Iranian state. According to a report in
Iranian media, the Ministry of Intelligence refused to collaborate in the preparation of the report, and was unwilling to respond to the request of the Prosecutor General to file a list of dual nationals who hold executive positions within state institutions (Mashreqh News, May 13, 2018).

The disagreements between the two bodies also came to the fore during the process of legislating a bill intended to settle the matter of citizenship of children born to Iranian women who are married to non-Iranian men. During the legislation process, the Majlis proposed to assign to the Ministry of Intelligence the responsibility for giving security clearances to these children. The Guardian Council, on the other hand, which is authorized to alter or void laws passed by the Majlis, demanded the inclusion of the Intelligence Organization as a body providing the clearances (IndependentPersian.com, September 26, 2019). This amendment provides additional testament to the efforts of the regime to enhance the authorities of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC.

In light of reports about power struggles between the Ministry of Intelligence and the IRGC, senior Iranian officials, including in the two parallel intelligence institutions, tried to downplay the extent of the disagreements, and project to the public, at home and abroad, a united front:

- In February 2017, the Deputy Head of the Intelligence Organization, Hossein Nejat, declared that there is full cooperation between the intelligence agencies, and that his Organization has no problem with its activities being publicly credited to the Ministry of Intelligence. He remarked that the Council for Intelligence Coordination is the body tasked with deliberating on disagreements between the two bodies and settling them. Nejat added that at times, certain actions are attributed to one of the intelligence agencies, but it clear that the Ministry of Intelligence, which is the body overseeing the Council, is also involved in the missions of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC (Tabnak, February 27, 2017).

- A few months earlier, Nejat stated in an interview to Iranian television that the Ministry of Intelligence and IRGC maintain a solid relationship, in line with the law stipulating the clear division of authorities between the bodies. He remarked that the IRGC has intelligence-related authorities as part of the defense of the Islamic Revolution, and thus it plays a complimentary role to the Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence of the Internal Security Forces. Nejat added that when there is a need
for greater cooperation, this is done through the office of the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (Tabnak, September 23, 2017).

Hossein Taeb and the Minister of Intelligence, Mahmoud Alavi (Tasnim, May 23, 2019)

Below are several statements of senior Iranian officials concerning the disagreements between the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC and the Ministry of Intelligence:

♦ In February 2018, the member of the Majlis’ Judiciary Committee, Mohammad Ali Pourmokhtari, rejected the criticism concerning overlapping authorities between the Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC. He argued that if only one country was engaged in spying on Iran, one intelligence agency would have been sufficient to cope with the threat, but in a situation in which multiple countries are operating their intelligence services to collect intelligence on Iran and try to harm it, there is a need for synergy among all intelligence apparatuses. He asserted that those who claim that espionage can only be foiled through the Ministry of Intelligence are unfamiliar with the intelligence environment in the country, and that the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC assists the Ministry of Intelligence and reinforces it. According to him, the intelligence war is a serious war, and Iran’s enemies are using their capabilities to harm Iran. Therefore, Iran must use all the means at its disposal to fight off the efforts of the enemies (Mashregh News, February 14, 2018).

♦ In March 2018, the Member of the Majlis’ Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy, Kamal Dehghani, also addressed the disagreements between the Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC and the division of labor between them. He remarked that the Ministry of Intelligence operates within the law and may intervene in crimes pertaining to national security. The struggle against security crimes and activities of terrorist groups, such as ISIS, is under the purview of the IRGC’s intelligence, and if the Ministry of Intelligence has information on these
matters, it should forward it to the IRGC. Dehghani stressed that any claim concerning disagreements between the organizations serves the interests of the foreign intelligence agencies that seek to obtain information about Iran and harm it. According to him, Iran’s accomplishments in the war on terror, including foiling ISIS attacks in Iran, were made possible by the coordination between the two central intelligence agencies (Tasnim, March 3, 2018).

In May 2019, shortly after his appointment, the incoming Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, met with the Minister of Intelligence, Mohammad Alavi. He declared that the two intelligence organizations serve as the “eyes of the revolution” and complement each other. He remarked that the Iranian intelligence community, and particularly the Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, are acting in solidarity and brotherhood in carrying out their dangerous missions. In the meeting, the minister of intelligence claimed that there is good cooperation and coordination between the two bodies, and expressed hope that the synergy between them will be maintained (ISNA, May 5, 2019).

Over the past two years, the heads of the two organizations were quick to express mutual appreciation following successful intelligence operations of their colleagues. In October 2019, after the arrest of the journalist and regime opponent, Ruhollah Zam, by the IRGC’s intelligence, the Minister of Intelligence, Mahmoud Alavi, congratulated the commander of the IRGC for the arrest (Tabnak, October 16, 2019). Similarly, Hossein Taeb expressed his appreciation to the Ministry of Intelligence following the announcement of the Ministry about the arrest of 17 CIA agents that operated in Iran in sensitive positions in the sectors of the economy, nuclear energy, the military, cyber and the private sector (Tabnak, July 23, 2019). The capture of the exiled opposition activist, Jamshid Sharmahd, who was arrested by the Ministry of Intelligence on his way from the United States to India through Dubai, which took place in late July 2020, received praise from Taeb. Sharmahd was arrested on suspicion of overseeing a terrorist network of supporters of the Shah, based in the United States. The head of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization praised the Ministry of Intelligence for the successful operation, and said that it attests to the strength of the Iranian intelligence community. He stressed the importance of coordination between the various intelligence bodies, in protecting national security and Iran’s citizenry (Fars, August 4, 2020).
Despite the efforts of the leaders of both organizations to downplay the conflicts between them, it is fair to assume that the continuous or expanding the authorities and assigning new responsibilities to the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC will likely mean that the rivalry and competition for resources and prestige will persist, possibly even exacerbating further. The expansion of the activities of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization may result in overlap and some form of competition with the IRGC’s Qods Force as well, which also has an intelligence unit that is used to collect intelligence needed for its operations and execution of its missions. It is quite possible that as part of its work beyond Iran’s borders, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC also supports Qods Force operations, although the division of labor between the two bodies remains unclear.

The Head of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, Hossein Taeb

► Hojatt-ul-Islam Hossein Taeb was born in Tehran in 1963 under the name Hassan Taeb. After completing high-school, he went on to study religion in Tehran, Qom and Mashhad. In 1982, he joined the IRGC in Tehran and served in the provinces of Qom and Razavi Khorasan (Khabar Online, October 1, 2009). Hossein has two bothers: Mehdi and Ali, both of them clerics. Mehdi is a hardline cleric and a lecturer at a Qom religious seminary, who serves as the head of the Ammar HQ, a hardliner think-tank. Another brother of his, Hossein (whose name he adopted), was killed in the Iran-Iraq War.

► Following the establishment of the Intelligence Ministry, in 1984, Taeb joined the Ministry, and in mid-1990s, was appointed as the head of the Counter-Surveillance Division in the Ministry. In the mid-1990s, he was fired from the Ministry and was even briefly arrested, after he was accused by the president at the time, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, of trying to investigate the involvement of his children in corruption (Radio Farda, October 28, 2019).

► In 2009, Amir Farshad Ebrahimi, a former member of the radical Iranian militia, Ansar-e Hezbollah, revealed details about the members of the militia and the internal security forces who participated in the repression of the protests in Iran, and fled Iran. He claimed on his website (October 27, 2012) that Taeb is incredibly close to the son of the supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamanei, since their days of studying together in a religious seminary in Tehran. He noted that due to this connection, Taeb obtained a position in the office of the supreme leader, as the the head of the Coordination Division in the Supreme Leader’s Office,
after being ousted from the Ministry of Intelligence by former President Rafsanjani. An Iranian news website, affiliated with supporters of the Iranian reformist opposition leader, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, claimed that Taeb maintains a close relationship with the Office of the Supreme Leader. According a report published by the website on July 2010, Taeb is considered extremely close to Khamenei also because Khamenei was Taeb’s private tutor in religious studies, and also because he served alongside Khamenei’s son, Mojtaba, in the ranks of the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War, and became one of his closest friends (Jaras, July 23 and 25, 2010).

In the late 1990s, Taeb returned to the IRGC, serving as the head of the Cultural Department in the General Staff of the IRGC, and as the head of the Faculty of Culture in the Imam Hussein University, the staff college of the IRGC (Khabar Online, October 1, 2009). Between 1999 and 2005, he served as the deputy head of the Intelligence Branch of the IRGC, and between 2005 and until 2008, as the deputy commander of the Basij arm of the IRGC, and in July 2008, he was appointed at the commander of the Basij. In October 2009, he was appointed as the head of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC (Justice4Iran.org, July 14, 2014). As part of his role as the commander of the Basij, Taeb played a central role in repressing the 2009 protests. In 2010, the U.S. Treasury Department placed sanctions against Taeb for his involvement in human rights violations in Iran. A year later, the EU also placed him under sanctions.

Hossein Taeb (during his time as the commander of the Basij) at a conference of Basij commanders (Mehr, May 27, 2009)

Taeb holds conservative and hardline views, reflective of the official line dictated by the Supreme Leader, Khamenei. In November 2019, Taeb warned of American efforts to act through different means against Iran, and that the ultimate goal of the United States was to bring Iran back to the negotiations table to force it to sign follow-up agreements to the
nuclear accord in the spheres of defense and Iran’s regional activities, thus ensuring Israel’s security (Mizan Online, November 14, 2019).

Hossein Taeb taking part in procession marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution (Mehr, February 11, 2018)

► In January 2020, during a conference of Basij commanders, Taeb declared that any divergence from the original path of the Islamic Revolution and willingness to compromise with the enemy will surely end in defeat. He asserted that Iran’s power should be increased to allow it to win the battle against the “global arrogance” (the West). Taeb added that Iran's enemies are trying to maintain a foothold in the region by using soft power and hard power tactics, as could be seen in the assassination of the Commander of the Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, but they should know that the path of the American President, Donald Trump, will lead to the collapse of the “great Satan,” meaning, the United States (Tabnak, January 27, 2020).

Hossein Taeb during a procession marking International al-Quds Day (Mashregh News, May 31, 2019)
Similarly to the decentralized mode of operation of the IRGC over the past decade (owing to structural changes carried out within the organization following the 2009 protests), the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC operates through intelligence centers present in Iran’s 31 provinces. In each province, there is an intelligence unit subordinate to the Intelligence Organization, which is headquartered in Tehran. This mode of operation is intended to improve the ability of the organization to control and deal with internal challenges in routine times and midst crisis.

The publicly available information about the structure of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC is partial, and is based on few occasional reports, whose reliability and the extent to which they represent the current situation is unclear. In a report published in February 2012 in a blog affiliated with the Iranian opposition, details were disclosed about the structure of the organization (SepahOnline, February 23, 2012). According to the report, it was written with the assistance of Sajjad Haghpanah, who previously served in the Intelligence Protection Organization of the IRGC. The credibility of the report can not be established, and neither whether the information is still up-to-date.

According to the information detailed in the report, the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization is comprised of a number of departments:

- **The Collection Department**: responsible for collecting intelligence through various means and forwarding it to the relevant units. The collection of information is carried out through: receiving information from citizens (the phone line number 114); collection of information from Basij members, who operate in bases in cities or patrols in neighborhoods, or from Basij representatives in government institution; a convert network of intelligence collection from governmental ministries and offices, political parties and various institutions; and collection of open-source intelligence from newspapers and the Internet.

- **The Mapping Department**: tasked with mapping all cities across Iran. Its main role is to map sensitive locations, tall buildings and observation posts, sensitive economic, political and social centers, neighborhoods that are likely to see gatherings and protests, activities of armed gangs and various religious groups, religious centers,
housing of senior officials, neighborhoods that are considered sensitive due to the political leanings of their inhabitants, and locations in which “immoral” activities take place.

- **The Political Department:** receives reports from the collection department and analyzes and researches reports about political parties and personalities. The department is responsible for collecting intelligence on all associations and political parties. Based on the information at its disposal, the department turns to political activists and demands that they cooperate with it. If they refuse to cooperate, the department draws up a plan intended to apply pressure on them, on their relatives and associates. The representatives of the department are present, either clandestinely or openly, in meetings of province governors, of senior government officials, and at universities.

- **The Operations Department:** responsible for planning the activities required to carry out operations, including: arrests, interrogations, issuing warrants for intelligence activities, provision of weaponry, planning and organizing of special units, provision of dress and transportation, and planning and overseeing repression of protests.

- **The Social Department:** Responsible for fighting crime (activities of criminal gangs in cities, sale of drugs and alcohol, operation of brothels, theft, etc), monitoring religious minorities (including Sunnis) and activities of “wayward” religious sects and mosques (such as Sufi orders, Baha’is, Satanists), tracking the work of non-governmental NGOs (such as human rights organizations and social activists), preventing financial corruption, smuggling and fraud. It should be assumed that in light of the expansion of the Organization’s activities against financial corruption in recent years (see below), a specialized department was established this matter alone.

- **The Equipment Department:** responsible for purchasing equipment and tools required by the various intelligence units, such as vehicles and food.

- **The Security Department (500):** Responsible for coordination between the Basij brigades, securing military areas in cities, conducting security patrols, establishing checkpoints, conducting military parades and maneuvers in cities, overseeing access to weaponry and foiling smuggling of weapons, monitoring armed groups opposed to the regime, preparing files to handle armed criminal activities, prepare cases on activists planning protests, overseeing disciplinary measures against Basij and IRGC
members who committed infractions, ensuring the security of senior regime officials, clerics and Basij members.

- **The Documentation Center**: charged with keeping records and digital tracking of intelligence information. The center is tightly defended due to the sensitivity of the information held in it.

- **The Technical Center**: Responsible for preparing and handling wiretap equipment, photography and computers and providing them to the various units. The center is also responsible for developing the visual documentation of protests for the purpose of identifying the participants, as well as installing cameras, wiretapping equipment and monitoring satellite channels.

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**A chart of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC**  
(SepahOnline, February 23, 2012)

According to the Iranian opposition website Saham News (November 23, 2014), there is also a Branch of **Interrogations and Psychological Operations**, commanded by Abdollah Zeighami, who was appointed by Hossein Taeb in 2013. The Branch is responsible for operating safe houses of the IRGC throughout Iran.

**Abdollah Zeighami**  
(Saham News, October 6, 2010)
Additional information about the activities of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC was exposed in 2019 by Reza Golpour, an author and political activist, and a confidant of the former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who maintained ties with the IRGC. In 2017, he was arrested on accusations of spying on behalf of Israel (New York Times, October 21, 2017). During his time in Tehran’s Evin Prison, Golpour, transmitted information, whose credibility is unclear, regarding the activities of the Intelligence Organization and exposed the names of senior officials and interrogators within the Organization (IranGlobal.info, July 5, 2019), including:

- **Mehdi Seyyedi**, also known as Taha, the head of the Branch for Counter-Intelligence in the Intelligence Organization.
- **Ruhollah Bazghandi**, known as Azimi, the head of the Branch on Special Affairs at the Intelligence Organization.
- **Hamid Mirzaei**, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Branch (Branch 800) at the Intelligence Organization. On October 31, 2020, a number of Iranian social media channels reported that Mirzaei had died of COVID-19.

- **Ali-Akbar Bavand**, also known as Mojtaba Babaie, the head of the Branch on Jewish Affairs at the Intelligence Organization.
- **Ali Bigi**, also known as Hajj Davoud, the director of the Intelligence Organization in Tehran.
- **Maysam Afshari**, also known as Rajaei, who is responsible for conveying messages from the Intelligence Organization to the convicts.
- **Hamid Miramand**, known as Seyyed Hamid Rafi’I, who is the warden of war A-2 in Evin Prison, which is run by the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC.
Jalal Mehraban, the liaison officer of the Intelligence Organization with the Supreme National Security Council.

Cyber Command

According to a number of reports, the Cyber Command of the IRGC is also subordinate to the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC (IranFocus.com, June 20, 2010), although there is no incontrovertible evidence to this effect. The Cyber Defense Command of the IRGC was established over the past decade to protect local information systems from cyber attacks, and monitor organized crime, terrorism and espionage in cyberspace, foil attempts to harm the values of the Islamic Revolution, upgrade the protection of users of cyber systems, and to create online content.

As part of the Cyber Defense Command, the IRGC operates a Center for Investigating Cyber Crimes, which was established in 2007, and also known as the “Cyber Army.” This body was involved in a number of Cyber operations, and the project Gerdab, which aims to identify the administrators of “immoral” websites. In addition, the Center operates the Kheibar HQ, a joint project of the Technical Branch of the Ministry of Intelligence, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, and the Ministry of Defense. The HQ is charged with carrying out cyber attacks against foreign targets (IranWire, April 9, 2019; al-Arabiya, January 15, 2017).

The 2008 analysis of the website Tech Defense assessed that the cyber command of the IRGC employees about 2,400 employees. Among the cyber capabilities is development of malware by including malicious code in fake software, developing tools to penetrate computers and networks to collect intelligence, and development of various tools that are installed on target computers and activated in a delayed manner or when prompted by a command. The report did not mention, however, to which body the Cyber Command is subordinated (military.com/DefenseTech, September 23, 2008).
Responsibilities of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC

Combating Terrorism

Combating terrorism is one of the central missions of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC. In recent years, the Organization announced on several occasions foiling plans of terrorist organizations, opposition organizations and foreign intelligence services, which according to the official Iranian claims, had intended to carry out terrorist attacks on Iranian soil.

- In February 2017, the Intelligence Organization announced thwarting an attempt of Mojahedin-e Khalq, the militant opposition group, which had tried to infiltrate Iran to carry out terror attacks during the processions of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. At the same time, the Deputy Head of the Intelligence Organization, Hossein Nejat, warned of attempts by Saudi Arabia to operationalize regime opponents in the Khozestan province in southwestern Iran and additional regions (Tabnak, February 23, 2017). Another cell of Mojahedin-e Khalq was captured by the IRGC’s intelligence in the Fars Province in July 2020 (Mashregh News, July 16, 2020).
- In February 2019, ahead of the processions marking the 40th anniversary of the Revolution, the Head of the Organization, Hossein Taeb, declared that the Intelligence Organization stands by the rest of Iran’s intelligence community and security organs, and seeks to ensure the security of the citizens who will be participating in the processions. He asserted that the enemies of the Iranian nation are despondent and helpless due to the intelligence monitoring by Iran of the intelligence services in the region and beyond, and the surveillance of “hostile groups” wishing to harm its security (Mehr, February 10, 2019).
- In early October 2019, the Intelligence Organization exposed a plot to assassinate the Commander of the Qods Force of the IRGC, Qasem Soleimani (who was eliminated in January 2020 in Iraq by the United States) with a powerful explosive device. The head of the Organization, Hossein Taeb, claimed that the intelligence services of Israel and an Arab country (likely referring to Saudi Arabia) intended to dispatch into Iranian territory a team, which was supposed to explode a 500-kilogram (1,100 lbs) near Soleimani at a prayer hall during a religious ceremony. He stated that the cell was tracked for a long period and that the Intelligence Organization tracked all the stages of planning the attack, including the...
departure of cell members from Iran for meetings and training (Mashregh News, October 8, 2019).

Hossein Taeb visiting the border crossing between Iran and Iraq to coordinate efforts to protect the safety of Iranian pilgrims to Shia holy sites in Iraq (Mashregh News, October 14, 2019)

**Foiling Political Subversion**

<table>
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<th>The 2009 protests, which contributed to the decision to upgrade the status of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, resulted in broadening the authorities of the organization to handle threats emanating from regime opponents at home and abroad. As part of these responsibilities to <strong>foil political subversion</strong>, and repressing regime opponent, <strong>the Intelligence Organization is responsible for running the A-2 ward of notorious Evin Prison in Tehran</strong>, which is used for jailing political dissidents. According to the report Iran Prison Atlas documenting the detention facilities of the IRGC in Tehran, published in April 2020, the IRGC uses the A-2 ward as its main detention center in Tehran (Medium, April 2, 2020).</th>
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The activities of the Intelligence Organization to thwart political subversion, at times, was directed against senior government officials who adopted a critical position toward policies of the regime. For example, in November 2016, the attorney general of Khorasan province claimed that the IRGC’s intelligence has prevented the member of Majlis Ali Motahari, known for his criticism of regime policies, of giving a speech in the city of Mashhad. The Spokesman of the IRGC, Ramazan Sharif, did deny the report, but confirmed that the Organization sent a letter to the governor of the province and the attorney general demanding that they take steps to ensure that his speech will not include “security violations” given Motahari’s prior statements (Tehran Times, November 23, 2016).  

On the eve of the February 2020 elections for the Majlis, Hossein Taeb warned of attempts by the enemies of Iran to infiltrate Iran’s political system through the elections. On November
14, 2019, in a meeting with members of the monitoring committees of the elections, Taeb stated that the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC intends to prevent “anti-revolutionary” and corrupt elements from being elected to the parliament. According to him, the enemies of Iran strive to insert their agents into the Majlis, but the IRGC is determined to prevent this from happenings (Radio Farda, November 14, 2019).

In early November 2020, the reformist paper Etemaad reported (November 1, 2020) that as part of a law proposal of the Majlis to amend the law on electing the president, a suggestion was made to add the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC to a list of bodies, including the Ministry of Intelligence and a number of other authorities, charged with filing reports to the Guardians Council, which is responsible for screening candidates for the elections, and assessing their qualification. Although the proposal eventually failed to pass, it reflects the efforts of conservative circles in Iran to further increase the involvement of the IRGC’s intelligence in the elections process of the Islamic Republic.

Over the years, a number of reports have been published about the Intelligence Organization’s involvement in surveilling senior Iranian officials. The Organization has denied these reports. In February 2019, the Spokesman of the IRGC, Ramazan Sharif, rejected a claim made by a Majlis member, that the organization presented to him the findings of wiretapping a phone of a senior government official with an agent of the British intelligence service, the MI6. He reported that the Intelligence Organization asked the Majlis’ National Security and Foreign Policy Committee to avoid commenting on or disclosing the matter (Mehr, February 25, 2019).

Repressing Protests and Riots

The waves of popular protests witnessed by Iran in late 2017-early 2018 and in late 2019, led to increasing involvement of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization in repressing the protests. During the Fuel Protests, which erupted in November 2019, and were violently crushed by the regime, killing hundreds of protesters, the Intelligence Organization went on an arresting spree of leaders of the protests. According to the Spokesman of the IRGC, Ramazan Sharif, the intelligence and security organs, and particularly the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization, managed to arrest the leaders of the protest. He claimed that these protests were fomented by pro-monarchy groups, the opposition organization Mojahedin-e Khalq, and some separatist groups, supported by the United States, Israel and several countries of the region. Sharif reported that the Organization carried out a series of arrests of the protest
leaders in the provinces of Tehran, Alborz and Shiraz, which resulted in quashing the protests (Tabnak, November 20, 2019; Mashregh News, November 23, 2019).

In a meeting with the family of a Basij commander who was killed in a confrontation with rioters during the Fuel Protests, the Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, stated that those responsible for the death of security personnel are wanted by the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC (Tabnak, November 24, 2019). In December 2019, the IRGC’s intelligence arrested in Khozestan men who were accused of firing toward civilians and security forces during a deadly incident in Mahshahr, during the Fuel Protests (Mashregh News, December 25, 2019). According to the protesters, the IRGC opened live fire against protesters who blocked a central crossing in the city and killed several dozens of protesters. The regime, on the other hand, accused armed protesters of the killing (Tehran Times, December 6, 2019).

Kidnapping Regime Opponents Beyond Iran’s Borders

As part of the Intelligence Organization’s growing involvement in countering political dissent, a notable aspect its work is *kidnapping regime opponents residing outside of Iran*. The involvement of the Organization in this activity, which was previously under the sole purview of the Ministry of Intelligence, clearly demonstrates the expansion of the Organization’s authority and mission beyond Iran’s borders.

In addition to the capture of the leader of the Baloch organization, Abdelmalek Rigi in 2010 (see above), which was likely carried out by a joint operation of the Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence Organization, over the past two years, the Intelligence Organization led several additional operations to capture regime opponents outside of Iran.

On October 14, 2019, the IRGC’s Intelligence announced the arrest of Ruhollah Zam, a journalist and regime opponent, who has been residing in Paris in recent years and was kidnapped by the Intelligence Organization upon arrival at the Baghdad Airport.
Ruhollah Zam is known mostly for operating the Telegram channel Amad News, which he established in 2015, and played a central role in organizing the wave of protests that erupted in Iran in late 2017. Shortly after Ruhollah Zam’s kidnapping, the IRGC gained control of his Telegram channel and publicized through it the announcement of his capture.

On October 30, 2020, Iranian media reported that the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization captured in Turkey Habib Ka’abi, the leader of the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz, a separatist organization headquartered in Europe, which operates among the Arab minority in Khozestan province in southwestern Iran (Elaph, October 31, 2020). On September 22, 2018, the organization claimed responsibility for an attack carried out during a military parade marking the anniversary of the Iran-Iraq War in the city of Ahvaz. The attack killed 25 people, including many IRGC soldiers.
Arrest of Iranian Dual-Nationals

In recent years, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC played a central role in the detention and jailing of tourists, and Iranians who also possess citizenship in a Western country, who were arrested during a visit to Iran and accused to espionage or harming national security. These arrests, for the most part, are carried out to facilitate prisoner swaps between Iran and Western countries, or to promote various economic interests. In recent years, the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization arrested dozens of dual-nationals.

Some of the prominent arrests of tourists or Iranians holding a dual nationality:

- **The arrest of three American journalists** Joshua Fattal, Shane Baueuer and Sarah Shourd in July 2019. The three were accused to illegal entry into Iran for the purpose of spying. In August 2010, Shourd was released, and in September 2011, two of her friends were released in exchange for two Iranian citizens who were detained by U.S. forces in Iraq (New York Times, September 21, 2011).

- **The arrest of Washington Post reporter, Jason Rezaian, arrest of Amir Hekmati** (August 2011) and **Saeed Abedini** (July 2012). The three were released in exchange for seven Iranians who were accused of violating sanctions and breaching American computerized systems (New York Times, January 17, 2016).

- **The arrest of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe**, a British-Iranian aid worker, in early April 2016. She was arrested at the Khomeini International Airport in Tehran by the Kerman bureau of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization, and remains in detention as of the writing of this report. According to the Kerman Prosecutor General, Yadollah Movahed, during 2014-2015, the IRGC’s Intelligence has been able to identify a number of members in a group that operated against national security by establishing Internet websites and launching media campaigns. According to him, the British-Iranian citizen
belonged to his group, some of whose members operated outside of Iran (The Guardian, June 25, 2016).

- The arrest of Fariba Adelkhah, a French-Iranian researcher at the University of Paris. She was arrested in June 2019 alongside another French citizen, who was released ten months later. She was sentenced to five years in prison for conspiring against Iranian national security.

- The arrest of Behdad Esahbod, an Iranian-Canadian software engineer, who resisted in the United States and worked for companies such as Google and Facebook. During a family visit to Tehran in January 2020, he was arrested by the IRGC’s Intelligence, accused of acting against Iranian national security, and transferred to Evin Prison. According to him, he was released from prison after promising to provide the Iranian regime with information about his workplace and colleagues after returning to the United States. He reported that Iranian authorities contacted him via social media after returning to the U.S., and when he did not respond to their messages, they called his sister, who lives in Iran (BBC Persian, August 18, 2020).

- The arrest of Homa Hoodfar, a Canadian-Iranian anthropologist, in February 2016 by the IRGC’s Intelligence from her apartment. In June 2016, she was moved to Evin Prison and accused to security offenses. She was released in September 2016 (New York Times, September 26, 2016). In a report published about her on the conservative Iranian website YJC.Ir (June 23, 2016), her research, which focuses on women in Muslim societies, was presented as proof of her involvement in the efforts of the West to culturally penetrate Iran. According to the website, she was arrested by the IRGC’s intelligence after working “under academic cover” to promote “feminist outlooks” and “sexual liberation” of Muslim women, aiming to “weaken the religious structures and religious beliefs of Muslim women.”

In a report published by the website YJC.Ir on March 2020 under the headline “The Role of the IRGC’s Intelligence in Releasing an Iranian Engineer from Jail in France,” it is possible to detect clear indications for the involvement of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC in arrest of foreign nationals for the purpose of carrying out prisoner swaps between Iran and Western countries. The report discussed the release of Jalal Ruhoallanejad, an Iranian engineer arrested in France for violating sanctions and selling advanced technologies to Iran, in exchange for the release of the French citizen, Roland Gabrielle Marchal, who was arrested.
in Iran in June 2019 and sentenced to five years in prison. According to the website, the release of the Iranian engineer was made possible owing to efforts of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, which resulted in the French government rejecting the extradition request of the Iranian citizen to the United States (YJC.Ir, March 21, 2020).

The involvement of the Organization in the arrest of foreigners to be used as bargaining chips manifested in the arrest of two Australian citizens, Mark Firin and his friend Jolie King, in June 2019, accused of flying a drone without permission and filming military sites. They were released several months later in a prison swap deal in which Australia release Reza Dehbashi, an Iranian PhD student at the Australian Queensland University, who was arrested in 2018 and charged with intending to sell advanced radar technology in violation of sanctions. An article published on the website Mashregh News (October 6, 2019) reported that the two Australian were arrested by the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC to make possible the release of the jailed Iranian scientist.

**Combating “Western Cultural Penetration” and Preserving Morals in Physical and Virtual Spaces**

As part of the expansion of authorities of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization, the **Supreme Leader of Iran, Khamenei, entrusted the Organization with countering “Western penetration” of Iran.** According to Khamenei, the efforts of Iran’s enemies to carry out a “soft campaign” against Iran are intended to lay the ground for toppling the regime through means that are not purely military or economic. The fear among Iran’s leadership of Western efforts to expand its political, economic and cultural penetration of Iran, in an effort to destabilize the stability of the Iranian regime, has only grown after the signing of the nuclear accord (JCPOA), which was inked between Iran and Western powers in the summer of 2015. This perception is reflected in the statements of senior Intelligence Organization officials. In September 2017, the Deputy Chief of the Organization at the time, Hossein Nejat, declared that the United States strives to change the composition of the Islamic Republic, and not merely its behavior. According to him, the enemies of the Islamic Republic are plotting to change the lifestyle of Iran’s citizens and use satellite TV and the Internet to this end (Mehr, September 24, 2017).
In April 2017, during a conference at the city of Mashhad, Nejat stated that the ongoing Western penetration poses a major problem to Iran. He reported that he spoke with the President, Hassan Rouhani, about the dangers associated with the Telegram application, but the president told him that there is no need to oppose every technology originating in the West (Tabnak, April 22, 2017).

As part of the Intelligence Organization’s activities against “Western penetration” it is worth noting a number of arrests carried out by the Organization of workers of the fashion and modeling industry. In December 2016, a court in Shiraz sentenced 12 employees of the fashion industry to prison terms ranging from six months to six years accusing them of “promoting decadence” through the publication of immoral photographs online, organizing Western-style fashion shops, modeling and promotion of Western culture. An investigation of the NGO The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran revealed that the targeting of fashion industry workers were carried out by the Intelligence Organization, in cooperation with the Judiciary, following a directive of the supreme leader to counter Western cultural penetration. The investigation showed that agents of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization were involved in intimidation and arrests of fashion industry workers, particularly in the city of Mashhad, as well action against fashion businesses in the cities of Qazvin, Arak and Zahedan. One of the detainees in Mashhad reported that after he opened a photography studio and publicized a number of photos of some models on his Instagram to promote his business, agents from the IRGC’s Intelligence came to his business, arrested him, confiscated the photography equipment and his computer, and shuttered the office (Payvad, September 12, 2016).

Another example of the Intelligence Organization’s activities against so-called morality crimes is tracking and arresting those operating brothels. For example, a manager of a...
brothel in Esfahan, which operated near one of the city’s hotels, as arrested by the IRGC’s intelligence (Tabnak, December 20, 2019).

The IRGC’s Intelligence Organization takes an active and significant role in the IRGC’s efforts to monitor and enforce norms on social media. In recent years, the Center of Investigating Organized Crimes Online, which operates under the IRGC, stepped up the efforts to monitor crimes on social media. Two statements to the media, published by the center at the end of January and early March 2015, stated that the IRGC was able to monitor the activities of social media users, and expose before the public the dangers entailed in using Facebook when it comes to carrying out crimes online and immoral activities. The activity of the IRGC led to identifying and arresting a number of online activists, who according to the IRGC, planned to offend the sanctities of Islam, spread immoral content, encourage the perpetration of crimes, and offend the dignity of several individuals, all with the assistance of Western government (Alef, January 31, 2015; March 1, 2015).

In February 2017, the Deputy Head of the Intelligence Organization, Hossein Nejat, addressed the activities of the organization in the cyber sphere, reporting that the Organization identified 157 Telegram channels that shared illegal photographs and videos. According to him, most of the channels ceased operating after the Organization reached out to their administrators, while eight of those running the channels refused to shutter the channels, and were arrested by the IRGC’s Intelligence, as part of the struggle against moral degeneration of society (Tabnak, February 23, 2017).

In April 2018, senior officials at the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC met with Majlis members and discussed with them ways to deal with the threats Iran is facing due to the activities of its enemies online. The Spokesman of the Majlis’ Committee on Foreign Policy and National Security, Seyyed Hossein Naqabi Hosseini, who was present in the meeting, declared that since the cyber space is used by the United States and “the Zionist regime,” the citizens of Iran must be rescued “from its claws” (Mehr, April 10, 2018). In a speech he gave on the occasion of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in February 2020, the Head of the Intelligence Organization, Hossein Taeb, stated that the organization was able to achieve a good degree of oversight over the penetration of the enemy of virtual space through professional tricks and advanced intelligence tools (Hamshahri, February 12, 2020).

As part of the Organization’s activities in cyber space, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC arrested social media users who spread prohibited content. For example, in July
2018, the Intelligence Organization arrested social media users in Sistan-Balochestan who were accused of spreading false reports to incite public opinion and encourage riots (Mashregh News, July 9, 2018). In December 2019, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC arrested the administrator of the Telegram channel Ayaan News, in the city of Ardabil in northern Iran. He was accused of spreading false news, inciting against political activists, media personalities and government officials in the province (Mashregh News, December 30, 2019). In July 2020, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC arrested the administrator of an Instagram page in the city of Nahavand in Hamadan province, accusing him of propagating Western lifestyle and culture (YJC.ir, July 8, 2020).

**Combating Ethnic Separatism**

For decades, the issue of ethnic-linguistic minorities, who make up almost half of Iran’s population, and reside mostly in peripheral areas along Iran’s borders, has raised concern among the Iranian regime, which fears any displays of separatism among the minority groups. The Intelligence Organization of the IRGC acts to thwart ethnic separatism across Iran’s provinces.

Among the activities of the Organization in this sphere was the arrest of a university lecturer in the Sistan-Balochestan province in eastern Iran who was accused of spreading content online, which according to authorities, was intended to “harm unity.” According to a report in Iranian media, the lecturer shared a video that included offensive content against Sunnis who reside in the province, aiming to sow discord between ethnic and religious groups (YJC.Ir, May 26, 2018). In June 2020, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC arrested in Ardabil province in northern Iran the leader of an Azeri separatist militia. According to authorities, the members of the group spread anti-regime propaganda and tried to recruit supporters for an armed struggle (Tabnak, June 14, 2020).

**Combating Manifestations of “Religious Deviance”**

For years, the Iranian regime has targeted manifestations of popular Islam, superstition, Sufi orders and Satanism, as part of its effort to enforce its exclusivist interpretation of Islam, and preserve the status of the establishment’s clergy. In addition, Iranian authorities have targeted the members of the Baha’i community, who are not a recognized religious minority in Iran (unlike Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians), and are persecuted by the Islamic Republic as apostates. In recent years, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC
has also been involved in repressing Baha’is, whose religious practice is perceived by the regime as a sign of theological and political defiance against the Islamic Republic.

Among the activities of the Organization in this sphere was the arrest of a Sufi order and 11 members of the order by the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization in Esfahan in the summer of 2017. According to authorities, the members of the group were involved in spreading ideas concerning superstitions and natural medicine, which were designed to “weaken religious faith in society” (Tasnim, August 3, 2017). In October 2019, IRGC intelligence intercepted in Karaj a shipment of equipment and clothes, which according to authorities were marked with symbols associated with Satanism (Tasnim, October 29, 2019).

The capture of clothes and equipment of Satanists in Karaj (Tasnim, October 29, 2019)

In the summer of 2020, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC arrested in Elam province members of a “wayward group” (unclear whether those were Sufis, Baha’is or Satanists), which organized illegal meetings and spread content online that is offensive to the Shia (Tabnak, June 17, 2020).

The Intelligence Organization was also involved in investigating the violent clashes that erupted in February 2018 between security forces and members of the Sufi order Nematollah Gonabadi, who protested in front of a police station in Tehran against the arrest of one of the order’s member. During the clashes, five members of the security services were killed, three of them died after a member of the order rammed a bus into them. In April 2019, the Intelligence Organization published a statement concerning the arrest of those involved in the death of the Basij member, Mohammad Hossein Haddadian, who was killed during the protest (Mehr, April 16, 2019).
Preventing Grave Crimes

The Intelligence Organization of the IRGC works to prevent organized and serious crimes. Some of the activities in the sphere including, for example, the arrest of members of a gang in the city of Tabriz, which was involved in money-laundering and illegal trade of foreign currency (Tabnak, December 11, 2019); the arrest of members of a network who forged university documents and diplomas in the city of Karaj, who also faked passports and various financial documents (Tabnak, June 20, 2019); and the arrest of one of the leaders of a criminal organization in Hamadan province in August 2020. The man, who holds a Turkish citizenship, was arrested after entering Iran, under the suspicion of sharing photos of members of a gang to which he belonged, for the purpose of intimidation (Tabnak, August 17, 2020).

Foiling Smuggling

As part of its efforts to prevent smuggling, the Intelligence Organization operates in borders areas to ensure security there. In recent years, multiple reports were published by Iranian media concerning successful interceptions of shipments of goods, drugs and weapons intended to enter or exit Iran’s borders.

Some of the operations to thwart smuggling included: foiling the shipment of explosives in Kerman in July 2016 (Mashregh News, July 18, 2016); foiling the smuggling of over 250 kilogram of drugs to Europe, which were hidden as a shipment of food in a car (Mashregh News, March 11, 2018); netting a network of fuel smugglers, which amassed large quantities of diesel and oil and smuggling fuel outside of Iran (Mehr, March 4, 2019); capturing an organized network to smuggle fuel worth 80 million dollars to neighboring countries, which operated in Esfahan under the name Kian Espadana in January 2020 (Tabnak, January 31 2020); capturing over 50,000 liters of alcoholic beverages in Fars province in March 2020. The operation, carried out following a wave of poisonings due to drinking fake alcohol, resulted in the arrest of manufacturers and distributors of the beverages. The spike in drinking alcohol was the result of rumors spread among Iranians that drinking alcohol is a prophylactic against COVID-19 (Tabnak, March 19, 2020); identifying 100 tonnes of smuggles flour in two storage sites in Tabriz (Mehr, April 28, 2020); thwarting the smuggling of over 2,000 tonnes of zinc and lead, worth about nine million dollars, which were stored in illegal warehouses of a
company in Bandar Abbas in southwestern Iran, ahead of their smuggling abroad (YJC.Ir, September 29, 2020).

On the right: foiling the smuggling of drugs by the IRGC’s intelligence in Tehran (Mashregh News, March 11, 2018); On the left: location alcoholic beverages in an operation of the IRGC’s intelligence in Fars (IRNA, March 19, 2020).

**Combating Corruption**

In recent years, the involvement of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization has grown also in the efforts to combat corruption, which is endemic across Iran’s public, political and economic institutions. Corruption in Iran stems from several factors: a bloated public sector, extensive control of governmental institution over the economy, low public sector salaries that encourage bribe-taking and corruption, and the effect of the severe economic crisis and international sanction. Although this has been a well-known problem for years, public criticism of it has grown in recent years due to increased awareness of the grave ramifications of corruption, and due to the deteriorating economic situation in the country. Senior Iranian regime officials have been declaring for years their intention and determination to fight corruption, although the determination of the regime and its ability to eliminate the phenomenon is highly in doubt.

In July 2016, Hossein Taeb declared that handling macro-economic corruption is one of the responsibilities of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, and that the organization has had many successes in handling this matter, in cooperation with the Judiciary. His statement was made after public controversy erupted following the exposure of exorbitant salaries of senior directors in governmental companies and institutions, including major banks and health institutions. Taeb stated that thanks to its involvement in the exorbitant salaries scandals, the Organization was able to return to the state treasury large sums of money. He added that the Organization continues to monitor the manner, and that the investigation will
result in legal measures against those responsible (Tasnim, July 12, 2016). According to a report in the Mehr news agency (July 28, 2016), the Intelligence Organization was able to intervene in this case, under the direction of the Judiciary, and managed to expose organized corruption in the banking sector. As part of this work, a number of senior officials in the Mellat Bank were arrested, including the former Executive Director of the Bank, Ali Rastgar, and the head of the International Affairs Division of the Bank.

In July 2018, the Deputy Director of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, Hossein Nejat, declared that fighting corruption is one of the most important missions of the Organization, which according him, achieved impressive results in this sphere (Tasnim, July 25, 2018). In a hearing held by the Bureau of the Fight against Economic Corruption, headed by the First Deputy of the Iranian President, Eshaq Jahangiri, under the title “Corruption in the Era of Sanctions,” the representative of the Intelligence Organization submitted a report that detailed the Organization’s strategy to tackling corruption while under sanctions (Tasnim, July 3, 2018). In September 2019, representatives of the Organization participated in a hearing in the Majlis, during which they provided members of the Majlis with an intelligence report concerning economic corruption (Mashregh News, September 29, 2019). In November 2019, the Head of the Coordination Division at the IRGC, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, declared that for three years running, the IRGC has focused not only on the military sphere, but expanded their activity to fighting economic corruption as well (Dana.ir, November 23, 2019).

Among the activities of the Organization to fight corruption were the netting of networks involved in banking corruption. In February 2019, the Deputy Head of the Organization, Hossein Nejat, reported that the Organization was able to capture two large networks that took out loans from banks and did not repay them (Tabnak, February 23, 2017).

In the past two years, Iranian media outlets reported extensively about the involvement of the IRGC’s Intelligence in countering economic corruption, for example: the arrest of the executive director of a company operating industrial parts in Qom province, on charges of financial corruption (Asr-e Iran, December 15, 2018); arrest of two employees of the General Department for Sports and Youth in Semnan province for suspicions of financial malfeasance (Tabnak, February 3, 2019); the capture of a criminal cell that gave bribes in government deals at a center connected to the Ministry of Petroleum in Fars province (Tabnak, March 16, 2019); the exposure of embezzlement at a petrochemical trade company and arrest of several of its directors (Mehr, March 17, 2019); exposing financial corruption at a gas company
in Lorestan province, which resulted in the firing of the company’s director (Tabnak, September 28, 2019); the arrest of former director of the Red Crescent, Ali-Asghar Payvandi, for accusations of corruption and irregularities at the organization (Tabnak, December 3, 2019); the arrest of former Mayor of Tabriz, Safegh Najafi, and a member of the city council in Tabriz, as part of an investigation into corruption at the municipality (Tabnak, June 2, 2020).

The involvement of the Organization in combating corruption won the appreciation of senior regime officials, who attribute a great importance to the role of the Organization in this effort, as part of Iran’s attempts to counter the severe impact of the economic sanctions reimposed on Iran, following the decision of President Trump to withdraw from the nuclear accord (JCPOA) in May 2018. Thus, for example, the Head of the Judiciary, Ebrahim Ra’isi, expressed his appreciation of the Organization for its fight against financial and banking corruption, and due to the Organization’s involvement in efforts that resulted in return of funds of some debtors to a number of banks (Etemmad, June 8, 2020).

The Fight against COVID-19

Over the past year, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC assisted in the national effort to address the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of the IRGC’s growing role in managing the crisis. Similar to prior cases of emergency, such as natural disaster, this crisis too was characterized by growing involvement of the IRGC in directing the responses to the crisis, and efforts to prevent the spread of the virus, assist the infected (for example by disinfecting streets, establishing hospitals, carrying out tests to detect the virus, and providing medical equipment, logistics and personnel). The growing involvement of the IRGC, which is made possible by the vast resources at their disposal, is important not only for protecting the economic interests of the force, but also to preserve political influence in the balance of power within Iran, and particularly in their contestation vis-a-vis the president, to improve their public image, and expand their penetration of society, which serves their security interests related to regime preservation and stability.

As part of the Intelligence Organization’s involvement in the efforts against COVID-19, the Organization took part in manufacturing and distributing medical equipment, and worked to prevent illegal hoarding of medical equipment, masks and disinfectants. In April 2020, the head of the HQ to fight COVID-19 in Tehran, Alireza Zali, reported that disinfectants were provided to medical teams in hospitals across Iran, with the assistance of the IRGC’s
Intelligence Organization. Prior to this, the head of the board of governors of a company manufacturing disinfectants stated that the Intelligence Organization provided support for the establishment of a new production line of disinfectant solutions, and assisted in the distribution of the production. Zali also mentioned that the Intelligence Organization intends to establish a manufacturing line for masks, which would produce 250,000 masks per day (Ansaf News, April 6, 2020).

As part of the organization’s efforts to prevent the hoarding of essential equipment to address the COVID-19 pandemic, the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC launched a number of operations intended to uncover prohibited storing of equipment. In March 2020, the Organization uncovered a large warehouse in southern Tehran, used to hoard medical equipment such as masks, surgical gloves, and surgical suction tubes (Tabnak, March 2, 2020). In additional operations, the Organization uncovered a factory manufacturing fake disinfectants in northern Tehran (Tabnak, March 3, 2020), illegal stores of medicine and medical equipment in Tehran, including eight million gloves (Tabnak, March 6, 2020), and over 8,000 liters of disinfectant alcohol in a residential apartment in Tabriz (Tabnak, March 10, 2020).

Gloves and fake disinfectants confiscated in an operation of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization in Tehran (Tasnim, March 3, 2020).

Accusations of the Organization of Involvement in Corruption and Irregularities

The growing influence of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC and expansion of its activities to additional realms have exposed the Organization to growing criticism from the public and politicians, which included claims about abuse of its powers and involvement in corruption and other irregularities.
Following the establishment of the Intelligence Organization and the appointment of Hossein Taeb at its help following the 2009 protests, the Majlis Member Ali Motahari, who is considered as one of the Majlis members most critical of the regime and its policies in recent years, argued that when the management of a crisis is given to a person who is more intimately familiar with bats than with thinking and reason, one must not be surprised by the outcomes (IranWire.com, October 17, 2014). Motahari warned of the dangers entailed in the IRGC’s interference in matters of intelligence, arguing that the overlap in authorities in the sphere of intelligence poses a threat to the existence of the Islamic Republic. He even offered that Taeb will be presented as the minister of intelligence, or that the missions of the IRGC’s intelligence will be limited, as before, to internal matters of the Organization and action against armed opposition groups (Kilma, October 22, 2019).

In February 2014, the Minister of Intelligence, Ali Younesi, warned of infringement upon the authorities of the Ministry of Intelligence, and asserted that when others tried to carry out the central missions of the Ministry in the past, the results were devastating (IranWire.com, October 17, 2014).

In November 2014, the reforming website Saham News, which is affiliated with the reformist opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi, who has been under house arrest since February 2011, reported on attempts by Taeb to act against Rouhani’s government. According to a report on the website, whose veracity is unclear, Taeb and Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the supreme leader, oversaw a secret project intended to harm the government and paralyze it, through psychological warfare, aiming to besmirch the government, and recruit different segments of society and within the political system against the president and his government. According to the report, the president complained to the supreme leader of the IRGC’s attempts to depose him, but no steps were taken to prevent the activity of the Intelligence Organization against the government (Saham News, November 18, 2014). Another report on the website (November 23, 2014) claimed that two years prior to the 2009 protests, the IRGC’s Intelligence was tapping the phone calls of reformist activists, and surveilling their activities through advanced technological systems.
In April 2018, then-Majlis Member, Mahmoud Sadeghi, criticized the involvement of the Intelligence Organization in grave violations of human rights. In a public letter sent by Sadeqhi to Hossein Taeb, he demanded that Taeb alter his management style, arguing that those subordinate to him in the Organization are ignoring regulation during interrogations, abusing the legitimate rights of the detainees. Sadeghi wrote that he has received multiple complaints from his constituents regarding the behavior of personnel of the IRGC’s Intelligence during detention and interrogation. Sadeghi sounded his criticism after the suicide of Iranian-Canadian citizen Kavous Seyyed Emami, an environmental activist, who was arrested on charges of espionage in January 2018, along with a number of activists and died a month later in Evin Prison. According to Iranian authorities, he killed himself, but this claim was rejected by his relatives. In his letter, Sadeghi accused the IRGC’s Intelligence of violating the legal rights of detainees, who are prevented from meeting their lawyers of relatives. He asserted that the attitude of the IRGC’s Intelligence toward political and social issues tarnishes the public image of the IRGC. He also complained that the IRGC has been unwilling to respond to appeals by Majlis members (Radio Farda, April 22, 2018).

In recent years, the Intelligence Organization and its head were accused of corruption and irregularities. In early 2017, reports emerged in Iran concerning arrests of senior Intelligence Organization officials accused of financial corruption. These reports were denied by the Deputy Head of the Organization at the time, Hossein Nejat, who labeled them “a complete fabrication” of media outlets connected to Iran’s enemies. Nejat claimed that counter-espionage within the centers of power of the regime, and the struggle against terror groups seeking to destabilize national security are the top priorities for the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, and that the struggle waged by the Organization against corrupt networks and spies is jeopardizing the activities of the corrupt and the spies (Tabnak, January 15, 2017).
In 2019, a new scandal erupted surrounding the alleged involvement of the Intelligence Organization and its director in corruption:

- The former Executive Director of the Iranian Broadcasting Authority, Mohammad Sarafraz, who quit his job in 2016, after 1.5 years on the job, accused Hossein Taeb of abusing his powers and illegal activities. Among other things, Sarafraz revealed that Taeb planned and executed a plot to assassinate Shahrzad Mirgholikhan, who worked at the director of international relations in an Iranian state TV channel in English, Press TV, and a special inspector at the Broadcasting Authority.

- Mirgholikhan was previously married to an IRGC senior official, and served five years in prison in the United States (2012-2017) after being convicted of attempting to smuggle thousands of night-vision goggles to Iran, as part of a deal in which her ex-husband was involved, aiming to bypass the embargo placed on Iran. Upon her return to Iran, she divorced and moved to Oman. According to Mirgholikhan, this move stemmed from threats against her made by Taeb and senior officials in the ranks of the IRGC’s Intelligence. These threats followed her decision to expose information about corruption of senior IRGC commanders, and her threats to reveal additional information about senior regime officials, as well as transfers of Iranian weaponry to Iran’s proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

- Sarafraz, who served as Mirgholikhan’s director at the Broadcasting Authority, met her after she had left to Oman, and upon his return to Iran accused Taeb and the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC of carrying out activities that threaten the security of the regime. He claimed that Mirgholikhan was subjected to pressures of the Intelligence Organization, which accused her of espionage. Sarafraz also claimed that Taeb and Jamaladin Abormand, who served as the head of the Coordination branch at the IRGC, forced the Rose’e Ta’avon Bank to withdraw from a bid of the Broadcasting Authority in 2015, to allow the IRGC to participate in it (DW, May 6, 2019; Radio Farda, April 26, 2019; Kilma, October 22, 2019).

- The IRGC’s Intelligence Organization rejected these accusations by Sarafraz and Mirgholikhan. Addressing Mirgholikhan’s claim that the IRGC extorted her by threatening to publicize a video documenting an immoral relationship between her and Mohammad Sarafraz, a senior official in the Intelligence Organization claimed
that the IRGC does not hold a single file about the connection between the two
(Tabnak, May 7, 2019).

In October 2019, Mohammad Hossein Rostami, a former hardliner political activist, accused Hossein Taeb of running a network of illegal businesses and entrapping potential rivals in corruption scandals. Rostami, who was arrested in 2016 and accused of passing on information to the Telegram opposition channel Amad News, claimed that he was arrested because he uncovered the network of businesses run by Taeb. In a voice note he sent from prison, Rostami wondered how Taeb, who was removed from his position at the Ministry of Intelligence, managed to become the head of a parallel security organization and amass so much power, allowing him to intervene in all matters. He accused Taeb for maintaining ties with the real-estate firm Yas, which is run by the IRGC to bypass sanctions, and has won a number of bids across the country, including from the municipality of Tehran. One of the directors of the company is Mahmoud Sayf, the ex-husband of Shahrzad Mirgholikhan. The ties between the company and Taeb were also exposed by Mohammad Sarafraz (Radio Farda, October 28, 2019).

Esfandiar Rahim Masha’i, the Adviser to the former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also joined the chorus of criticism against the Intelligence Organization and the man heading it, accusing them of manufacturing evidence against him and other officials close to the former president. According to him, Taeb met with Ahmadinejad’s Deputy, Hamid Baqaei, who was arrested in 2015 on charges of corruption, and demanded that he admit to spying (Kilma, October 22, 2019).

Despite the criticism about the expansion of authorities of the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC, and the claims concerning its alleged corruption and abuse of power, the standing of the Organization has not been harmed, and it continues to enjoy the great appreciation of senior regime officials. In November 2019, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, participated in a conference of the Organization in Tehran and praised its activities. Shamkhani declared that the Intelligence organs, and particularly the IRGC’s Intelligence, play an important and decisive role in the successes of the Islamic Republic against its enemies. He praised the Organization for its success in foiling internal and external “plots”, and remarked that the experience of Iran’s intelligence community in waging war, and the struggle against counter-revolutionary actors at home
and abroad, and sophisticated operations of foreign intelligence agencies, have ensured high
levels of preparedness among Iran’s intelligence organs (Tabnak, November 12, 2019).