



Cultural Inputs and Military Strategies: The Imamate in Contemporary Iran

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*"We are the imam's soldiers," she says.
Astonished, I asked: "Soldiers? Imam? What do you mean?"¹*

It was autumn October 2010 when I was running from town to town in Iran, trying to find these "mujtahidats"² women; religious women who hold an unusual title and are very different from their secular peers, to talk to them about their special status and their roles in Iranian society. In Mashhad, I had the chance to visit one of the husayniyya³ where these women are active in *Ijtihad*⁴. The latter is a form of research into religious knowledge, and "mujtahidats" position themselves as a link with their peers to be advisors where rationality and spirituality are one face of the same coin.

I spoke with Zohreh, a woman in her forties who arrived dressed in an all-black tchador, revealing no detail of her figure. Greeting me, she invited me to take a seat in her office and spoke to me in English, while referring to Arabic terms in her speech. She spoke to me as if she'd known me all my life, inviting me to share her red tea, seasonal fruit, and sweets. She took off her tchador and behind this imposing black veil, I discovered a modern woman, her hair cut in a Western style and coloured mahogany, dressed like any other woman in Europe. Her round face, white skin and large, imposing black eyes underlined a strength of character well hidden behind the humble and discreet appearance of the tchador.

Since then, my quest to elucidate imamate thought, both rational and spiritual, has been part of my research. These efforts have enabled me to transcribe important religious data into a cultural and military strategic's register.

I believe understanding the essence and the mind-set of a group, a society or state is an essential step in setting up an anticipation strategy and effective foresight.

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¹ Interview in Mashhad with Mujtahida Zohreh, Oct. 2010

² Mujtahida is a religious title for women equivalent to that of a male ayatollah.

³ Husayniyya, is a religious place for the Shi'a community equivalent to a mosque, but it also has the role of teaching religious studies.

⁴ *Ijtihad*: intellectual effort to read and interpret Quranic verses in the light of modern times.

Introduction

The reality of the political and religious functioning of the Islamic republic of Iran is misunderstood and often neglected by the West in its evaluation of the significance of *Vilayet e-Faqih*⁵ and its mission as a messenger of a certain “divine justice” beyond Iranian borders. The imamate has gone beyond its political-economic, theological, and social missions. It carries within it a purely strategic and military background dimension, in reference to the warriors of Karbala and the sacrifice of Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet of Islam. The *missionary unconsciousness* of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) strategic thought had led to the creation of an “Axis of resistance” as part of a military security and defence strategy in line with the imamate ideological thought supported by the various spiritual, temporal, and rational actions included in *the Secrets of the Imamate*⁶.

“The faithful” warriors of the Islamic Revolution carry out their fight with determination and lucidity, without expecting any reward for their actions. Above all, they are ready to die for their mission to transmit the imamate values⁷. Indeed, the value of sacrifice for the “just cause” to a divine believe is a catalyst that is still misunderstood, if not unjustified, according to the codes of Western thought. The notion of belief in a divine entity remains an irrational approach, which the Western world has detached itself from with the advance of modernity. The philosophy of “waiting” in the absence of the hidden Imam, i.e., Imam al-Mahdi, is another *Secret of the Imamate* initiated by Ayatollah Khomeini. It is completely neglected for various reasons, one of them a lack of understanding of the spirituality attached to a religious philosophy, although it is more than necessary to grasp contemporary Iran. The rational imperative initiated by Ayatollah Khomeini is to introduce a solution in the present time to put an end to the injustice that the imperialist regimes, such as the one that fought it, the Shah Pahlavi regime, are inflicting on the impoverished population. To this end, the Imam’s own religious leadership, such as the presupposed “hidden Imam”, is transferred to those closest to the Imam in religious terms, while waiting his arrival. This philosophy is a revolutionary concept in Shi’a clerical thought⁸.

⁵ *Vilayet e- Faqih*, otherwise known as the imamate: the law of the Shi’a clergy established by Ayatollah Khomeini

⁶ *Secrets of the Imamate* refers to the theological and spiritual *know-how*, as well as the political and military thought of Ayatollah Khomeini as a spiritual and political leader. This knowledge is said to have enabled the Islamic Revolution to be institutionalised as an Islamic Republic, and to have given it a long life.

⁷ Field research in Iran between 2006 and 2010

⁸ MOLAVI, Afshin (June 2008), Backgrounder: Religion and Politics in Iran, *New York Times*

From the imamate to *Vilayat e-Faqih*⁹

Imamate is a concept based on the choice of a religious guide close to God to lead the Muslim community, grounded in the link between spiritual and political authority. This conception is close to the vision of the Sunni branch, which claims the Caliph as the one who reigns in an emirate and is also the guide of the Muslim community on earth. Both Shi'a and Sunnis justify such a concept with the hadith¹⁰ of the Prophet Mohamed: "I leave two things in you, if you consider them, you will not be misled - the Book of God, the Highest, and my family"¹¹. This hadith attests that the Prophet leaves his Ummah¹² the Qur'an and his family to enlighten them and help them find the path of Islam. The general doctrine of the imamate is too complex to define in a few lines and deserves more in-depth work. As such, this paper will focus on the most important aspects of how religion, as part of a culture, is used in military strategy, and more specifically the imamate in the *Vilayat e-faqih* version.

The *Vilayat e-faqih* remains a revolutionary act in modern Shi'a thought initiated by Ayatollah Khomeini. As argued by Constance Arminjon: "the doctrine of the *Vilayat e-faqih*, far from perpetuating a tradition threatened by secularisation, constitutes a revolution"¹³. According to Ayatollah Khomeini's vision, it was essential to establish a government governed by the precepts of Islam, under the authority of a wilaya and faqih, i.e. a jurist entrusted by God to ensure the continuity of the Prophet's functions. One of the novelties in Ayatollah Khomeini's conception of this doctrine is the function of the imam, who is elevated to a higher rank, equivalent to that of the prophets by virtue of his "infallibility"¹⁴. It should be emphasised that this remains a major point of contention among Shi'a thinkers. This re-reading of Islam seems revolutionary in Shi'a thought, serving to strengthen the position of the clergy, i.e. the Imam, not only as the spiritual guide of the Muslim Ummah but also as its political leader. As a result, religion became an essential driving force behind the establishment of the Islamic Republic in contemporary Iran.

Afshon Ostovar describes this leader of the *Vilayat e-faqih* system as a leader who functions as both a spiritual guide and a political authority. He is the symbol of the revolution, of the primacy of Shi'a Islam and of the divine¹⁵. Here the word "divine" deserves some thought since this leader of the *Vilayat e-faqih* must be chosen by God to represent his affairs on earth. His supremacy is linked to his status as a scholar and as a descendant of the Prophet's family, but also to the fact that he is "infallible"¹⁶. His status as a religious and political leader is therefore like that of a Prophet. It is important to add that Ayatollah Khomeini's approach is based on the notion of *Ijtihad*, i.e. the intellectual effort and personal will to reread the Quranic precepts and establish Islamic jurisprudence in the light of modern times.

The sacredness of Ayatollah Khomeini's status as a religious leader makes him a charismatic figure and gives him a sense of political, religious, and military strategy¹⁷. He became a symbol and an example to follow for thousands of young Iranians in the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards Corps and among supporters of the Islamic Revolution. A mausoleum housing the body of Ayatollah Khomeini, elevated to the rank of "infallible"¹⁸ imam, is in Tehran near the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery. His tomb has become a holy place where Shia pilgrims come to pay their respects. In keeping with Shia tradition, the worship of imams in the form of recollection and access to those who have been closest to God enables followers to benefit from their honours and blessings. The sacredness of spiritual thought is deeply rooted in Iranian tradition and social culture, especially among the working classes and the poor¹⁹.

Shi'a thought is based on two levels of reflection: spirituality and rationality. The paradox of Khomeini's vision lies in this duality: on the one hand, the sacred status of the Shi'a imam and, on the other hand, the rationality of *ijtihad* in a modern rereading of the Quran. This duality between rationality and sacredness with reference to spirituality marked the beginning of new political thought at the service of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its future institutions, as well as its bodyguard, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

⁹ *Vilayat e- Faqih*, otherwise known as the imamate: the law of the Shi'a clergy established by Ayatollah Khomeini

¹⁰ Hadith: facts and gestures of the Prophet Mohamed

¹¹ ABU JAAFER AL KELANI, *The Origins of Al Kafi*, one of the Shi'a history books, 2014 (the original text is in Arab).

¹² Ummah: The Muslim community

¹³ Hachem Constance Arminjon, *L'instauration de la guidance du juriste en Iran : Les paradoxes de la modernité chiite*, Ed. EHESS 2010, P 211.

¹⁴ Infallible: who can't make a mistake

¹⁵ Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of The Imam, Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards*, Oxford University Press 2016, p. 62.

¹⁶ Infallible: who can't make a mistake

¹⁷ Interviews conducted in religious circles in Iran between 2006 and 2011.

¹⁸ Infallible: who can't make a mistake

¹⁹ Unlike in other countries, where poverty is associated with a lack of access to education, in Iran this juxtaposition does not necessarily apply.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Strategic Thought

As part of the social, political, and military application of the imamate, Ayatollah Khomeini surrounded himself with a group of loyal volunteers, the IRGC, to protect the values of the new Islamic Republic. The strategic thought of the Revolutionary Guards Corps is thus inspired by the imamate. This imamate strategic thought carries with it a duality: a spiritual dimension and a temporal dimension.

The spiritual dimension is based on the question of the return of Imam al-Mahdi and the preparation for this return. The imamate's followers aim to militarise social thought by preparing the partisan mass to become soldiers of al-Mahdi's army. Every member of Shi'a civil society would have a duty to do this; they are future soldiers in a literal and figurative sense. In the ideal of Shi'a society, every civilian, whether a teacher, a doctor or other, is a future soldier. Everyone has a role to play in fighting evil and establishing "divine justice" on earth. The philosophy of the "waiting" is summed up in the dynamism of preparatory actions for the return of Imam al-Mahdi, and upon his return, everyone unconsciously knows his duty and mission²⁰. This is a form of preparation for another life detached from today's reality. The strength of this reasoning is rooted in the history of the Prophet's family. This worship, different from the figure of the martyr in the spiritual/temporal duality, is more developed and sacralised, not only in contemporary Shi'a thought but also in the vision of the imamate's followers and the commitments of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Above all, it is a properly philosophical rhetoric of what life owes to death.

The temporal dimension is attached to the present moment and the everyday reality in the pursuit of a common project of these worshippers of the cult of the Prophet's family and what the imamate has taught them. The common project is to carry the truth, transmit the word of Islam and establish justice on earth²¹. This reflection is closer to a concrete reality than to the philosophy of the expectation of the twelfth Imam the al-Mahdi. According to the present analysis, the soldiers of the IRGC, in this temporal quest, are endowed with a *missionary unconscious*. The later is the driving force behind any endeavour, whether it is as military-warrior in a defence perspective or oriented towards the transmission of religious and political knowledge, business, or Islamic culture. This *missionary unconscious* is awakened by the dogma that is at the heart of the teaching of the culture of the IRGC, since the latter are the guarantors of an established order following the Islamic revolution. It should be added that the Islamic revolution can lose its purpose if it is not shared. Since God has recommended it, the duty of this *unconscious missionary* is innate as soon as a member of the IRGC or a supporter adheres to this ideology; he is committed to a mission on earth.

The strategic thought of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is largely based on the imamate's pragmatic politico-religious approach. Persian history and a sense of national pride provide additional insights. For the authors of the book *Mullah, Guards and Bonyads*, the elites of the Islamic Republic see Iran as naturally "endowed" with the role of regional leader, and even of leader of the Muslim world, as Iran historically sees itself as one of the oldest regional powers²².

The imamate understanding of the Islamic Republic of Iran is both religious and political, and the *Secrets of the Imamate*²³ also provide a lesson in warfare. So, imamate's strategic and military value should not be overlooked in any geostrategic or tactical thinking. In our interviews, our interlocutors stressed that the warriors of the Islamic Revolution were ready to die in their mission, to transmit imamate thought²⁴. This sentiment is often overlooked in the West when analysing the concept of *Vilayet e-Faqih*, which for the regime aims to transmit a certain "divine justice" beyond Iran's borders. The imamate has gone beyond its political-economic, theological, and social roles. It has a purely strategic and military dimension, in reference to the warriors who died at Karbala and the sacrifice of Imam Hussein. Indeed, the value of sacrifice for the "just cause" is a catalyst that is still misunderstood and even ignored in Europe and the United States. Reference to the religious is ignored today in Western military and strategic thinking. The expectation

²⁰ Interviews with Mujtahida Zohreh Sefati, Qom 2006.

²¹ Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of The Imam, Religion, Politics, and Iran's Revolutionary Guards*, Oxford University Press 2016, P103

²² Alireza Nader, David E. Thaler, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold D. Green, Charlotte Lynch, Frederic Wehrey, *Mullahs, Guards and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics*, National Defense Research Institute, RAND 2010. P.3

²³ The *Secrets of the Imamate* refers to the theological and spiritual *know-how*, as well as the political and military thought of Ayatollah Khomeini as a spiritual and political leader. This knowledge is said to have enabled the Islamic Revolution to be institutionalised as an Islamic Republic, and to have given it a long life.

²⁴ Interviews with Mujtahidats and Ayatollahs during my filming trip to Qôm, Mashhad and Tehran.

of the hidden imam, Imam al-Mahdi²⁵, another “*Secret of the Imamate*” carried by Ayatollah Khomeini, is neglected, even though these influences are central to contemporary Iran.

For the author Dabashi, throughout his revolutionary career, the Ayatollah Khomeini sought, through his strategic and political vision, to choose a more powerful external enemy to intimidate his less powerful internal adversaries²⁶. Ayatollah Khomeini's political choice was pursued by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. Through their actions and positions, the Revolutionary Guards have shown that war is not just a question of survival, but also a form of resistance, at least on the part of its Shi'a core, rooted in a cultural memory of resistance to illegitimate power that stretches back centuries before the Iranian revolution of 1979²⁷.

This desire to resist was theorised by Iranian intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s such as Jalal Al-e Ahmed and Ali Shariati²⁸. The latter was critical of Orientalist writers and suggested that Iranians should create modernity from their own Islamic heritage. Ali Shariati, the ideologist of the Islamic Revolution, a French speaker and good orator, worked on the philosophy of Shi'a, laying the foundations for an Islamic revolutionary ideology. This conception of resilience from Shariati appealed to Iranian youth and the religious leftists of his time. At the same time as he was interested in the philosophy of Shi'a Islam, Shariati was interested in Marxism, the Third World anti-colonialism of Franz Fanon and French existentialism, to create a new line of Islamic thought advocating anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-clerical resistance²⁹. Shariati's thought reinvented Marx's class struggle by mixing it with Shi'a Islamic data: the term oppressed is replaced by *mostaz'afin*³⁰ and oppressors by *mostakbarin*³¹. In his work as a scholar, Shariati questioned the position of the institutionalised clergy, inactive before the Shah. Shariati transformed the traditional interpretation of the Shi'a myth of the battle of Karbala from a position of quiet perseverance for justice in the hereafter to a revolutionary model of resistance in the here and now. Imam Hussein is transformed into a Third World revolutionary par excellence³²; “rather than holding Iran hostage between tradition and modernity, true Shi'a for Shariati was a force for authenticating and mobilising resistance against the oppression of the superpowers over the Third World”³³. Shariati's thinking is used by the imamates and to pursue Ayatollah Khomeini's *Vilayat-e Faqih* project.

²⁵ Term used by Shi'a to refer to the Hidden Imam or twelfth Imam, who is supposed to reappear to establish justice on Earth.

²⁶ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted*, New York: New Press, P 167- 2007: in Bandor A. Pinkley, *Guarding History: the IRGC & the Memory of the Iran-Iraq War*, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC. 2018

²⁷ Arron Merat, *How Iran's Missile Strategy Has Rewritten the Rules of Middle Eastern Wars*, Report, Sept 2021, New/Lines Magazine

²⁸ Ali Shariati was an Iranian intellectual engaged in the sociology of Shi'a and presented a modern understanding of Islam. Shariati died in obscure circumstances in 1977 in Great Britain.

²⁹ Bandor A. Pinkley, *Guarding History: the IRGC & the Memory of the Iran-Iraq War*, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC. 2018.

³⁰ *mostaz'afin* is persian word meaning oppressed.

³¹ *mostakbarin* is pesian word meaning oppressors.

³² Bandor A. Pinkley, *Guarding History: the IRGC & the Memory of the Iran-Iraq War*, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Washington, DC. 2018.

³³ Ibid.

Military Strategies: Regional Alliances

“The Revolutionary Guards Corps has become an agent of war culture,” notes A. Ostovar³⁴

The *missionary unconsciousness* introduced in the IRGC’s strategic thought section is integrated into an action-oriented and field-oriented mindset. The ideal of creating an “Axis of Resistance” as part of a security and defence strategy is in line with the imamate ideological thought supported by the various spiritual or temporal and rational actions included in *the Secrets of the Imamate*³⁵. It is important to outline the work of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the context of conversions to Shi’a before analysing its operational actions. Specifically, there has been significant work on the conversion of Sunnis to Shi’a conducted following the imamate’s policies since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979³⁶. The Iranian regime is very discreet in its recurrent attempts to export the ideas of the Ayatollah Khomeini revolution to neighbouring Sunni Arab countries. This aborted experiment of transferring the values of the Islamic revolution through the export of the imamate by the Islamic Republic of Iran made it possible to grasp very quickly the reality of Sunni Muslim countries and their intolerance towards attempts to convert their populations to Shi’a movement. It was very quickly confronted with a categorical rejection of the *Vilayat -e Faqih* model in Arab-Muslim countries. This fact is important for understanding the subsequent strategy implemented by the Islamic Republic through the efforts of the IRGC. There are two operational actions undertaken by the IRGC in its military strategy to export the Islamic values of *Vilayat e-Faqih* to the Middle East: mirror effect and common interest.

The level of mirror effect. Here, the choice is made by Tehran for neglected Shia’s minorities aspiring towards better living conditions in their country. A mirror effect is observed in the recognition of the suffering of the other. This imaginary is highly developed in religious literature and the confessional nature of Shi’a tradition, stemming from the wars between Shi’a and Sunnis after the death of the Prophet Mohamed. Spirituality is more present on this level as it responds to the status of being oppressed in the name of one’s religious belief, “to be a de facto Shi’a is to be oppressed and neglected”. The *unconscious missionary* invests in saving his brother in religion and reaches out to him to complete his duty on earth. The communities targeted and invited to be part of this Shi’a ideal in turn take up this same ideal. Responding logically to this approach, they invest themselves in the same way. Indeed, they find their own examples to follow. From then on, we are no longer dealing with the transfer of ideas but with the application of ideas in concrete actions on the ground.

The level of common interest. This is a dialectic that is less understood by Western policymakers, as it is mainly a rather pragmatic approach in which politics negotiates with religion and gains the upper hand. Common interests with rivals on the political, economic, religious, and social levels can be negotiated without the foundations of the imamate ideology being totally flouted. The approach remains very subtle as it is based on codes of honour and commitment. The rhetoric of a Muslim *Ummah* as an alternative to an imperialist power is one of the avenues exploited. Thus, the message to the poor to resist and fight against oppression and injustice is also a driving force for effective action on the ground in the long term to build alliances.

Regional alliances have been successful in the long term through the development of military security and defence strategies that are articulated on both levels: mirroring and common interest. These alliances involve groups or entities that share ideological values or tacit agreements that are more political than religious and respond to a particular context.

³⁴ Afshon Ostovar, *Vanguard of The Imam, Religion, Politics, and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards*, Oxford University Press 2016. p.236

³⁵ *Secrets of the Imamate* refers to the theological and spiritual *know-how*, as well as the political and military thought of Ayatollah Khomeini as a spiritual and political leader. This knowledge is said to have enabled the Islamic Revolution to be institutionalised as an Islamic Republic, and to have given it a long life.

³⁶ Interviews with foreign intellectuals who have converted to Shi’ism, Qom 2006 & 2010.

Conclusion

It has to be said that the revolutionary gift of the imamate heritage did not extend beyond Iran's borders due to resistance from predominantly Sunni Muslim countries. However, the institutionalisation of the Islamic Republic has given rise to the only model of Islamic society which is under both political and religious authority. From the outset, this “success story” has posed a security threat to the monarchical model found in the Arab countries of the Gulf. The failure to export imamate values became clearer with the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). This experience imposed a new reality of strategic defence to promote the leadership of the Islamic Republic.

However, with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the revolutionary Islamist discourse aimed at “liberating the oppressed from the yoke of the infidels and the imperialists”³⁷ became stronger and stronger, resulting in the formation of a nationalist Iranian lineage. This strengthened the determination of the Iranian revolutionaries to put in place new security and external defence policies. This period of war gave a foretaste of imamate Shi’a determinism, as Iranians, young and old, committed themselves to defending their borders. The young revolutionary volunteers (*basij*) were the first to be sent to the front lines. This historical trajectory has enabled the Islamic Republic of Iran to put forward pragmatic policies and adapt to the context in which it finds itself, resulting in an implicit refusal to export the Islamic Revolution or at least to change the way in which it is to be transmitted.

The *Vilayet-e Faqih* model has not been copied in neighbouring countries, as Tehran has always wanted. However, the unifying discourse of the values of the Islamic Revolution has become a driving force in the implementation of an arsenal of new security and defence policies, aimed at both the country's interior and exterior. In this new context, where the Islamic Republic feels threatened, its security and defence policies are being put in place with the help of its armed wing, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Over the course of four decades, the Guardians underwent transformations in their operations, while at the same time keeping in step with civil society, where they played a part in the emergence of a new societal, partisan, and youthful base. This gave rise to a *Structured Global Movement*³⁸ and enabled Iran to change the situation regarding the projection of its power outside its own borders.

Yet, the empowerment activities carried out by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in support of minorities neglected in their countries of origin are considered to undermine the internal security of these states. These actions create imbalances between the central powers and the civil societies in which they operate as they are carried out in countries where the state is weakened or completely bankrupt. Tehran's mastery of the vagaries of the regional context and of each country in the region has enabled it to create an “Axis of resistance”. Imamate values have enabled it to weave the first pillars of its security and external defence strategies. It is no longer a question of exporting the Islamic Revolution, but of building a policy that puts the security and advancement of Iran as a regional power first. The transformation of the Islamic Republic's objectives from purely imamate values to pragmatic policies in a security and defence strategy should not, however, be viewed with surprise: its policies are in line with its civilisational background and its regional ambitions.

These aspects did not disappear with the arrival of the mullahs in power. On the contrary, Iran has become even stronger, combining its imamate values with its desire to project power. Its security and defence policies are no longer based solely on a clearly visible “Axis of resistance”; its “legitimate” offensive actions enable it to create and strengthen an international societal partisan base³⁹.

The dream of exporting the model of the Islamic Republic to Muslim countries, by placing them under the authority of the Iranian Supreme Guide, will probably remain impossible: socio-cultural data do not allow it to go beyond regional alliances with well-defined groups, nor do they allow it to find a broader alliance with most of the population of Arab-Muslim countries and their rulers. As a result, the “Axis of resistance” is becoming the alternative par excellence for exporting the imamate to certain sections of the popular strata in neighbouring countries. Above all, it enables Iran to project its regional power politically and militarily, a necessary condition for the survival of its imamate project and its national security.

³⁷ Interviews conducted in religious circles in Iran between 2006 and 2011.

³⁸ *The Structured Global Movement* refers to a national and international societal base sympathetic to imamate aspirations. In Fatima Moussaoui, *Imamate's Asymmetrical Strategies Influence & the Empowerment of Ansar Allah* (2017-2023), IUGM, Madrid

³⁹ *Ibid*

Main Points

- The Khomeini imamate archetype has an innovative and controversial role in installing an Islamic institution and an imamate *deep state*, while putting a dichotomy between the religious and ideological aspects in its functioning.
- The Khomeini imamate archetype remain ideological, but the internal functioning of the IRGC is religiously based, and it is necessary to focus on this anthropological aspect on the religious level.
- The socio-cultural and religious aspect of Iranian society allows understanding the shaping of the societal bases in Iran and internationally allowing the reinforcement of the legitimacy of the functioning of the IRGC.
- The reactionary political role of the opponents to the advancement of Iran through its militia implantation, allows it to legitimize its actions and to widen its societal bases, which are not as visible as the militias themselves claiming to be pro-Iranian.
- The understanding of this rather complex dialectic is especially linked not only to the societal context in which Tehran establishes itself through its choice of militia-partner, but also to the policies engaged in this same local context with a state that is in most cases weak or non-existent.
- The dream of exporting the model of Islamic state is no longer a priority for the mullahs. The Imamate's followers have failed to export to Muslim countries the Islamic revolution, and the project of imamate as Ayatollah Khomeini decreed and these security and defence policies to empower devalued minorities and in search of social justice remain only an imamate military strategy for its national security.
- Tehran is aware that it cannot export its Islamic revolution and cannot create the model of *Vilayet e-Faqih* in the Muslim countries, this imamate military declination represents today, the new Iranian security model which aims to maintain its imamate state inside Iran and survive to counter its adversaries outside with the choice of engagement in an asymmetric war by removing the confrontation out of its territory through the progressive and evolving shaping of the "Axis of resistance".
- Tehran is committed to implementing security and external defence strategies to feed an "Axis of resistance" with a primary military value, but also invests in policies of influence and *Power projection* on both levels: military and socio-cultural. IRGC being the primary tool to shape different environments are missioned on the material and spiritual levels to defend the values of the imamate.



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