

THE QUDS FORCE AND ITS INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONFLICTS OF WEST ASIA***Samin Ustiashvili**

Department of American Studies, The International Black Sea University, Tbilisi 2 01031-David Aghmashenebeli Alley, Georgia

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Abstract

The essential crises in the West Asian region, which have been widespread since 9/11, are those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. A study of the situations that have taken place in those four countries shows that all these calamities have incorporated conflicts and military wars. Notable points and participation in all crises in West Asia are their connection with Iran. In the sense that each situation has somehow seen Iran's involvement. Accordingly, Iran's methods of dealing with crises in the West Asian region are essential. Therefore, this article seeks to answer the central question of what role the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has played in conflicts in West Asia and with what consequences and results this has been associated.

Keywords: Quds Force, The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Crisis, war, West Asia.

INTRODUCTION

As a crisis-prone region, West Asia has witnessed numerous conflicts since 9/11, the most important of which are the wide-ranging conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The conflict in those countries is significant due to their size and nature. Each of the West Asian region crises has its own characteristics that distinguish them from each other. A review of the situations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen shows that they all were accompanied by conflict and military war. For example, the Afghan crisis in 2001 began to fight the Taliban government and destroy al-Qaeda as a supporter of the 9/11 attacks. However, as things progressed, the situation and policies changed: proximity to Central Asia to control Russia, the establishment of a pro-US government, and an American military presence on Iran's eastern borders became the reasons to remain in Afghanistan for over 20 years (Terry McDermott, 2020). The invasion of Iraq by the United States and its allies in 2003 was also formed under the pretext of Saddam Hussein's connection with al-Qaeda and the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (The Robb-Silberman Commission, 2005). Nevertheless, regime change to consolidate Western influence, access to Iraq's oil sources, eliminate the threat of Western allies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, and again having the U.S. presence on Iran's western borders was the real excuse for the invasion (Rumsfeld, 2001). After the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States, Iran and Iraq improved their bilateral relations in 2002 when an Iranian delegation led by Amir Hussein Zamani visited Iraq for final negotiations to resolve the conflict through talks on issues of prisoners of war and the missing in action (Wayback Machine, 2002). The crisis in Syria and Yemen is similar to other situations in the West Asian region. In a way, the Syrian crisis started by supporting the political opponents of the Assad government and backing up the Arab spring by the United States. However, with Bashar Al-Assad committing war crimes and suppressing protestors, other goals, such as regime change and consolidating Western influence, were considered (Rapp, 2021).

Moreover, the American presence in Syria was also to try to cut off Syrian cooperation with Iran, a country weaponizing Hezbollah and Palestinians through the Assad regime (Rauschenbach, 2020). In Yemen, even though the purpose of American presence was to support Abd al-Mansour Hadi's government, it was mostly to fight Ansarullah's rise to power as a close ally of the Iranian regime. A common point in all West Asian crises is their connection with Iran. Each of the conflicts has seen Iran's political and economic involvement in them. This complicity has resulted in war, military occupation, the spread of terrorism, insecurity, and instability in the Middle East. Thus, it can be concluded that the regional crises have been acute events associated with Iran and the insurgency it is creating in different states. Accordingly, Iran's methods of dealing with and managing these events in the West Asian region are essential. Therefore, the present article seeks to answer the central question: what role did the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps play in the crises in West Asia, and with what consequences have this involvement been accompanied? In order to answer the above question, first, the involvement of the Quds Force in West Asia will be discussed, and then the dimensions and consequences of this implication will be examined.

How the Quds Force is involved in different conflicts in the region

Iran's approach and involvement in regional crises indicate that the Islamic Republic has used specific tactical and operational strategies at each stage. The implication of Iran in every single conflict in the region started before, during, and after the end of the crisis. The specificity of Iran's involvement in those conflicts and the team-related institution and organization has been of considerable importance. In particular, the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has played a crucial role in the crisis in all four countries of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The Quds Force invested time and capital to secure Iran's revolutionary ideas and ideology in the region (Karami, 2016). Examining the positions and performance of the Quds Force in the current crises indicates that the force has had a different approach to those conflicts. General Soleimani stated that those crises could endanger Iran's national security;

***Corresponding Author: Samin Ustiashvili**

Department of American Studies, The International Black Sea University, Tbilisi 2 01031-David Aghmashenebeli Alley, Georgia

the Quds Force crisis management justified their involvement in the internal affairs of those four countries as turning the existing threats into opportunities (Butt, 2019). According to the Washington Post and Harvard University, the Syrian intelligence service and the Islamic Republic of Iran were instrumental in founding ISIS to confront the Free Syrian Army, opposed to Bashar Al-Assad regime, and make Iraq a hell for the American army (Washington Post, 2016). Therefore, the Quds Force had no difficulty keeping the ISIL fighters away from the Iranian borders and territory. Adopting the above strategy helped Iran create significant opportunities in Iraq from the crises it helped to generate. The Quds Force is using four simultaneous methods for its involvement in other states:

The use of "Islamic" diplomacy

One of the essential tools of involvement, is diplomatic action during a crisis, which may be intimidating, compromising, or a combination of both (Kazemi, 1999). Accordingly, the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to engage in crisis in West Asia by using diplomacy. The main goal of the "Islamic" diplomacy with the Islamic revolutionary ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to establish and maintain a long-term influence of culture, values, and policies on other societies. Therefore, the Islamic revolutionary diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be considered as strategic planning on the one hand and the implementation of educational, cultural, and information programs to promote the movement's ideas benefiting Iran on the other hand (AsgharFani, 2016). For this reason, organizations and movement theorists attribute this diplomacy as "the stronghold" of the liberating revolution. (Hallsty, 1993). The Islamic ideology and interference of the Quds Force in the internal affairs of other states create an atmosphere where the ummah and the Islamic community see this organization as a group that liberates and seeks justice (Taheri, 2018).

Based on this objective, the most important goals of diplomacy in Islamic societies can be listed as follows:

1. The first goal of Islamic diplomacy is to support the existing regime in the Islamic State and create new support for it. Accordingly, within Islamic diplomacy, communication with existing movements and working to strengthen them in favor of the ruling party play an essential role. Additionally, Islamic diplomacy is paving the way for new movements in Islamic countries.
2. The second goal of Islamic diplomacy is to propagate the Islamic movement as a genuine and right-wing movement. In this regard, the Quds forces have used media and raised "modern" mollahs to assist pupils and students in different states to present and propagate a plan in which Muslims get closer to the fact that the Iranian Islamic movement is the only protector of their interests (KhatibZadeh,2022).
3. The third goal of Islamic diplomacy is to identify and inform Muslims about the current situation. Accordingly, Islamic diplomacy propagates in nations, especially Islamic societies, the identity they want people to believe in, political and social situations, and the "unjust" conditions of the international system, providing them with "a proper" understanding of their talents and abilities (Khalaji, 2016). In this regard, Islamic diplomacy can express the existing truths in various ways, expose the authorities' unwillingness to cooperate with them, and arouse Muslims'

emotions and feelings towards what is happening around them. Islamic diplomacy can be essential in provoking Muslims and calling them to stand firm against any ideology and movement harming the Iranian regime (Shqeir, 2014).

4. The fourth goal of Islamic diplomacy is to impose the recognition of the occupation of Palestine by Israel on all Muslims around the world. Hence, Islamic diplomacy promotes the concern and struggle against the Israeli regime (Ziabari, 2018).
5. The fifth goal of Islamic diplomacy is to show a different Islam and Islamic state, to those seeking to separate religion from politic (Daneshgahian, 2014).
6. The sixth goal of Islamic diplomacy is to keep the region's nations away from the contentious issues between Shiites and Sunnis. In recent years, this strategy, presented by some Western research institutes and experts, has been implemented by some Islamic governments. However, resolving the dispute or keeping it quiet is far to reach. Islamic diplomacy carried out by the Quds Force provokes different movements to benefit Iran's interests at different times (Santos, 1999).

The above objectives show that Islamic diplomacy has taken the methods and tools of diplomacy out of its traditional contexts and has provided a new arena for the role of movement thinking. Consistently, in Islamic diplomacy, movement thinking enters into foreign relations. This way, the Quds Force uses their intellectual, experimental, and financial possibilities to establish International Relations based on the principles of their beliefs. By transferring the desired values and policies, they take the lead in foreign relations in various fields and interfere with the international relations of that state with western countries.

Enjoy soft power

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has created a religious seminary in the city of Ghom, where it raises clergy members from China, Africa, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, and so on. Sending those Mollahs back to their original states gives Iran the potential to influence Muslims and, therefore, a significant part of the population, which can be seen as interfering in those countries' internal affairs. In recent years, the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the person of General Soleimani became a symbol of Iran's influence and power in the region. The Iranian military units are not present in Bahrain, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, etc.; however, Iran uses those clergy as a soft power to influence Muslims in those states. Thus, like other regional and supra-regional rivals, which seek to increase their acquired influence through cash, weapons, and propaganda, Iran's regional influence is also based on those mollahs' activities and cultural principles manipulation (Zand, 2004).

Michael Rubin describes the broad dimensions of Iran's soft power in a study entitled "Iran's Basic Soft Power Strategies" for the U.S. Army of Foreign Operations in the Environment Monitoring magazine: *Iran's approach to power is soft, skillful, and exceptionally diverse. Although the Western perception of Iran may have been influenced more than anything by the religious rhetoric of the Islamic Republic, the various governments of Iran, one after the other, expanded their influence on neighboring countries. Achieving goals beyond their borders, they have sought to invest in these*

countries' culture, religion, and historical heritage (Rubin, 2017).

Therefore, to understand the soft power of Iran, one must recognize the history of the empire, religious developments, Persian language and culture, and without doubt, the history of this country after the Islamic Revolution. History is one of the pillars of Iranian influence and the common ground around which Iranian officials shape soft power strategies. Religion is the other pillar of Iran's soft power. Even though Iran forms the first Shiite theocratic government in the modern world, it is wrong to limit Iran's influence to Shiite countries. The influence of the pre-Islamic history of Iran should be considered even in how the Iranian government and authorities perceive Islam (Bruno, 2008).

The Persian language is another cross-border tool of Iran's soft power. Persian is the language of culture and poetry in most parts of West, South, and Central Asia. Along with Arabic, which is the common language of the Middle East from the Mediterranean to the shores of the Persian Gulf, the Persian language plays this role in the area that extends from Kurdistan to Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. For this reason, while Iran is using religious commonalities to influence Shiite countries, its goal is to influence non-Shiite countries, such as Tajikistan, predominantly Sunni, by using its soft power based on ethnic heritage (including language) (Lob, 2022).

Iran is a serious and skilled player on the world stage. Confronting Iran's hard power is not enough, and the West must focus on its soft power, especially since the soft power strategies of the Islamic Republic are complex and deep and often go unanswered (Rubin, 2017.)

In a general assessment, it can be said that the influence and soft power of the Islamic Republic in the region have three complementary aspects:

- Religious culture emphasizes the unity of Shiites and avoids sectarianism.
- Political culture and the model of religious democracy, which is the form of democracy within constitutional law and Islamic law. This ables the combination of religion and politics in any government.
- -Anti-arrogance, according to which the Islamic Republic of Iran confronts the dominating powers in the region. This plays an essential role for countries having good relations with Western states.

Regarding Iran's influence in the region, it should be noted that this influence is no different from hegemony and is only using the spiritual aspects.

The influence of the Islamic Republic in the region is the influence of a discourse that has several different aspects:

First, Iran's influence is based on a religious culture that emphasizes the unity of the Islamic world under the leadership of Seyed Ali Khamenei (Bucala, 2016). From time to time, the Quds Force orchestrates the provocation of the Shiites and Sunnis in different countries, such as Pakistan or Yemen. (Al-Alimi, 2004). This approach has deepened Iran's influence spiritually among other clergies in those countries (Armanios, 2004)

Second, Iran's influence is based on the culture of the Islamic Revolution, which emphasizes exporting the Islamic Revolution worldwide, especially in the Islamic world (Khamenei, 1998)

Third, Iran's influence is based on a culture of resistance that relies on confronting the United States and Israel as the number one enemy of all Muslims (Smucker, 2010).

Fourth, Iran's influence is based on the support of governments losing legitimate power and popular support, such as in Syria (Toumaj, 2016)

The foundations of Iran's spiritual influence in the region and the Islamic world have made this influence utterly different from the cooperation of Western countries. Unlike the United States, which settles military bases for strategic partnership and signs treaties with different governments as a point of reliance, Iran has based its influence on brainwashing the population using cyber militias of the Quds units and trained clergies (Citrinowics, 2022).

The soft power that the Iranian Supreme Leader mentions in his speeches is rooted in the Islamic culture and national norms of the Islamic government. These national-religious values in the field of geography and civilization of West Asia have become the most important factor of regional influence for Iran. It allows this country to maintain its strategic interests among the region's countries without using military force and tactics and relying solely on politics and cultural and widespread influence through brainwashing (Professor Schein, 2018).

The table below shows the essential sources of the soft power of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Sources of the soft power of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran's soft power	Sources Scope
Culture and art	around the world
Antiquities	around the world
Humanitarian actions	around the world
The model of political Islam	in the Islamic world
Suppressing movements against ruling government	the Islamic world
The influence of the Shiite authority	the Shiite community
The culture of martyrdom and expectation	the Shiite community
The value of independence and resistance of anti-imperialist nations	around the world
The value of supporting the oppressed and downtrodden of anti-imperialist nations	around the world
Opposition to the system of domination of anti-imperialist nations	around the world
Customs and rituals	nations with a common cultural and civilizational background
Persian language	in the region of Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent limited worldwide

Among the above, one issue that has increased Iran's soft power is the goals set by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iran's primary goal in the region is to arouse people from western influence, especially the American government. This policy has created a conflict in the region, sometimes not against the Western States but the Iranian government. Since 2009, with widespread demonstrations, the Iranian population has protested against the exportation of their resources and the

long-term agreements signed between Iran, China, Russia, and Venezuela and requested a regime change (Reuters, 2022). The regional influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been and is a threat to all of the countries in the Middle East. States such as Palestine, which is looking for peace, cannot achieve any because Iran interferes in the Arab world. During the last demonstration organized by the Salafist Ibn Baz Charity Organization in the southern Gaza Strip, Palestinians burned pictures of Hassan Nasrallah and Qasem Soleimani (Jalal, 2022). The state of Israel is in ongoing conflict with Lebanon because Iran supports Hezbollah (Robinson, 2007). Even though Iran invests millions of Dollars in Lebanon, a large group of Lebanese politicians has established a new opposition group to end what they call the "Iranian occupation of Lebanon," represented through Hezbollah (Fatfat, 2022). The secondary goal of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region is to control the stability and conflicts, economic situation, and political relations of each state with the western countries. For this reason, using power and soft influence has become one of the tools for Iran's involvement in regional crises in West Asia.

Create cores of resistance across the region

One of the most important strategies of the Quds Force in their involvement in regional crises has been to create and organize resistance cells. A clear and successful example of this model is Hezbollah in Lebanon, which plays a vital role in the conflict between Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Hezbollah is a political-military and militant organization that emerged in Lebanon in the early 1980s with the ideology of political Islam influenced by Imam Khomeini's ideas. Since day one, this group slogan has been fighting the State of Israel and retaking the occupied territories (Harel, 2022). This institution, financed by Iran, used its brainwashing tactics in schools and attracted many youths (Nasrallah, 2018). With the financial and political assistance of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the movement trained its militant forces. It used them to mobilize and organize military and terrorism attacks and, on some occasions, suicide bombers against the State of Israel (Jackson, 2012). Hezbollah was able to push back the Israel forces from the southern borders of Lebanon during the year 2000, and the 33-day resistance against Israel increased the popularity of Hezbollah among the Lebanese people and the Arab countries until today (Mohammadi, 2006). Hezbollah is not a mere national and ordinary party in a small West Asia country. Although the party has defined itself within the national framework and has been highly active in such a process, at the same time, it has other transnational characteristics and has found a significant regional function. This feature is one of the most important indicators of the Islamic Revolution of Iran that Hezbollah is using the similarity of its religion with the Islamic revolution and has based its behavior and policy according to it (Committee of Foreign Affairs- House of Representatives, 2013). This organization helped Iran form such groups as nuclei of resistance in other countries. In Iraq, for example, Iran made significant contributions to the formation of Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi, employing snipers and beatings to quell protests, in which at least 250 people died in 2019 (Allinson, 2019). Despite U.S., European, and regional allies' concerns about the rise of such groups in Iraq, Iran has openly supported organizations and groups such as the "Badr Corps," "Asaib Ahl al-Haq," "Hezbollah" in Iraq. These groups were formed in response to a Shia fatwa calling for resistance to the "Islamic

State" (I.S.) and Sunnis' power threat in 2014 (Pomeps.org, 2021). Under General Qasem Soleimani, the Quds Force funded and trained these groups as they fought the U.S. after the 2003 invasion (Dodge, 2013). In Syria, too, Iran strongly supported the formation of national defense and assistance to Bashar Al-Assad. One of the actions of General Hossein Hamedani in Syria was to organize the national defense as a popular mobilization in Syria, which played an essential role in the fight against rebellions after the uprising of the Arab Spring against Bashar Al-Assad (Tasnim, 2015). It is now eleven years that Syria has been in a civil war. More than six hundred thousand people lost their lives, more than half of the country's population was displaced, and millions fled abroad. Nowadays, Bashar Al-Assad controls less than forty percent of Syrian territory. The civil war could have ended way earlier, and life could have been spared if it was not for Iran's involvement, support, and the financial and military assistance of the Quds Force (Mazel, 2022).

In addition, Iran played an essential role in forming particular groups such as the "Fatimid Banner." The "Fatemioun brigade" core had Afghans known as the "Muhammad Corps" as principal members. This group of Afghan fighters are refugees living in Iran, Syria, and Iraq. Those Afghans and their family members were not allowed to study, have a resident card and officially work in those countries (Raja, 2022). The Quds Force led a militia that recruited from the millions of undocumented Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran, Iraq, and Syria, coercing them to fight in Syria under the threat of arrest or deportation (Jalali, 2021). Several hundred Fatemioun Division fighters, including children as young as 14, have died fighting Iran's war in Syria (Shuja Jamal, 2019). Female family members of those Afghan fighters were given the right to attend school and university in those three countries but not the right of acquiring resident permit or citizenship.

In addition to Syria and Iraq, in Yemen, the "Ansar Allah" group or the "Houthi Movement," a predominately Zaidi Shia force, took over the government in the 2014-2015 revolution led by Ali Abdullah Saleh (Wells, 2015). The Ansarullah movement has significant potential for change in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula and is politically and ideologically one of the movements influenced by the Islamic Revolution and supported by the Quds Force. General Qasem Soleimani announced in 2017 that the Quds Force is increasing the amount of help through training, arms, and financial support to the Houthis (Saul, 2017). In 2018, IRGC commander Nasser Shabani was quoted by the Fars News Agency: "*We (IRGC) told Yemenis [Houthi rebels] to strike two Saudi oil tankers, and they did it*" (Vaisibiame, 2017). The "Ansar Allah" movement can be considered one of the newest and most influential political and religious movements in the Middle East, supported by the Quds Force and backed by the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei (Staff, 2019).

This movement has long, deep roots and different and critical dimensions. Regional processes and developments of the past few decades, especially the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its regional consequences, have affected this country (Karmon, 2017). The emergence of "Ansar Allah" is due to the political and social conditions in Yemen, particularly the characteristics and unique atmosphere of Saada province. "Ansar Allah" forces are fundamentally close to the Shiites in terms of belonging to the Zaidi religion. However,

the most crucial point is that the Islamic Revolution ideologically and politically influences this movement (Shahid Saless, 2015). The five slogans of "Ansar Allah": "Allah Akbar, Death to America, Death to Israel, Curse Jews, Victory to Islam," show the profound closeness of this movement to the goals and slogans of the Islamic Revolution. Iran has successfully exported its Islamic Revolutionary ideas and ideology to that state (Zimmerman, 2017). In addition to intellectual-political and objective ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its leaders, this movement shows behaviors within the framework of Iran's regional goals and plans and the Resistance Front (Antonopoulos, 2017). The Quds Force has also generated another civil war in Yemen by provoking the Sunni and Shiites against each other. This Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflict is the ongoing struggle for influence in the Middle East between those two states. The Quds forces are assisting "Ansar Allah" in fighting against Saudi Arabia and the potential ideology they might impose (Hamid, 2017).

Overall, Iran has taken two steps in recent years to establish resistance cells throughout the region:

The first action was based on support for forming and solidifying resistance nuclei or strengthening existing nuclei. This action allowed each group assisted by the Quds Force to operate individually in their own countries.

The second step was to link the core of those groups or organizations. Today, there is an inseparable connection between Hezbollah, Ansar Allah, patriotic defense, Hashad Shaabi, and so on (Bahman, 2017:230-231). Thus, organizing resistance cells or terrorist groups throughout the region is one of the factors influencing Iran's involvement in the internal affairs of other states in the Middle East.

Iran and the Quds Force have been involved in the conflicts of this region in such a way that they have successfully empowered various movements, groups, nations, and governments. At present, as a product of Iran's involvement, assistance, and support, the Resistance Front in any country Iran has been involved in has significant capacities at the regional and global levels to influence events and trends.

The presence of advisers and the military in crises

Since the Iran-Iraq war, Iran has not tried to invade any other state. In has, on the other hand, used the Quds Force to control the region, the conflicts, and the international relations of Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The presence of Iranian advisors and direct military commanders in the conflicts of this region is one of the main reasons for the success of the Quds Force in their involvement in the internal affairs of other states. One of the crucial features of military involvement in other states is the Iranian commanders' presence in the region's conflicts. This feature has enabled ordinary military forces to act independently. The German weekly "Der Spiegel" wrote about General Soleimani on the battlefields: General Qassem Soleimani is not a person who stays at home when he sends his troops to the battlefield. This commander can easily stay behind the frontline but prefers to show himself on the battlefield (Salloum, 2014).

Reuters also describes the presence of Iranian commanders in the battle for the liberation of Fallujah: "In recent weeks, thousands of Iraqi soldiers and members of Iranian-backed

Shiite militias have been deployed around Fallujah to attack the Sunni city" (Reuters, 2016). On the eve of the attack, General Qassim Soleimani met with the Iraqi Shiite militia coalition leaders known as the "Hashad Shaabi" and took direct control of the situation (Bazzi, 2016). All the crises in West Asia have been of a military and security nature, most of them orchestrated by the Quds Force. In order to manage them in favor of Iran, the Quds Force has used its military forces, both directly and as advisers. The direct presence of Iranian military forces in regional crises shows that their military presence was carried out at the request of the governments of the countries in crisis, such as Syria. To prove their power against Russia and Turkey, Iran is not willing to leave the Syrian territory, neither Yemen nor Afghanistan (Spyer, 2021).

Dimensions and consequences

The establishment of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps can be considered a strategic initiative of the Islamic Republic. During its years of activity, this organization was able to infiltrate into different countries and take control of their decision-making processes. From the conflict Lebanon-Israeli of 33-days, 22-days, 8-days, and 51-days to the conflict in Gaza, its infiltration in Iraq, and the suppression of protesters in Yemen and Syria, the Quds force were able to "succeed" where the United States failed. The involvement of the Quds Force in the cross-border area is not limited to these cases and extends to Africa, Europe, and Latin America. This geostrategic extension of the Quds Force worldwide has prompted Americans to reconsider many of their long-term patterns and strategies (Department of Defense, 2020). Therefore, studying the dimensions and consequences of the Quds Force's involvement in regional developments is essential.

Dimensions of Quds Force actions

Iran is taking a different approach to each conflict in West Asia it is getting involved in. On the one hand, this requires having coherent, comprehensive, and accurate information. On the other hand, it requires an efficient force to be present in the field and manage the involvement process from within these countries. For this reason, the involvement in conflicts around Iran has been entrusted to the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This Force, using its infiltrated clerics and financing of the ruling government, among other tactics previously mentioned, had accurate information from the countries of the region (Rajabi, 2022). Hence, Iran's involvement in the internal affairs of neighboring countries and other continents can only be highlighted by the role the Quds Force is playing and by the person of General Qassem Soleimani as the former Commander of this Force and Esmail Qaani as the current Commander. The involvement of General Soleimani and the Quds Force in the regional crises promoted the position of the Islamic Republic of Iran in a way to impose the leadership of the Iranian Supreme Leader as a Holy Leader of all Muslims around the world, and worshiping him is one of the duties of any true believer (Hashem, 2022). Western, Arab, and Israeli political and military officials and analysts have repeatedly mentioned these forces' involvement in different states. The Israeli Intelligence Agency regarded the activities of these Force have mentioned:

"The Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps was formed in the 1990s to increase the overseas activities of

the Islamic Republic of Iran. Over the years, the Islamic Republic has become the center of efforts to consolidate regional power and strategic goals through military and political operations. Iran's Quds Force is the most substantial security unit in the country, consisting of elite units to carry out operations, and has carried out several vital operations so far. General Qassem Soleimani was appointed Commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in 1998. He is the second commander of Iran's Quds Force to replace Ahmad Vahidi. Soleimani was previously less in the spotlight, and his name was on the blacklist of the United States due to his activities. He was crucial in strengthening Iran's influence in the Middle East, especially during regional unrest, the Iranian demonstration in 2009, or the so-called Arab Spring. The Quds Force of the IRGC is an organized military unit with several headquarters and special units for covert operations worldwide. The Quds units have a special place among the senior officials of the Iranian regime and influenced this country's strategic decisions abroad. Using proxy battles, financial support, and the equipment of militant groups, they use tactics to try to show their supremacy in the region (Zimmt, 2015)".

This report discusses the role of the Quds Force and General Soleimani in Iran's involvement in the regional crises. The dramatic political changes in the Arab world in recent years have created a new opportunity for Iran to increase its influence in the region, constantly calling the changes in the Arab world an "Islamic awakening inspired by the Islamic Revolution" (Naqvi, 2015). During and after the Arab Spring Movement, General Soleimani took advantage of a new opportunity in the Middle East. The fall of some governments and the weakness of Sunni Arab countries opposed to Iran was the perfect occasion for the Quds Force to take control of countries hit by civil war or in danger of falling (SIPRI, 2020). Soleimani's influence extended over the Iranian Foreign Minister, and he pursued a policy based on the ideology of having the United States and Israel as the number one enemy of all Muslims and Iran as the pioneer and leader in the fight against those evils. Therefore, the Quds Force and its allies must neutralize U.S. tensions to dominate the Middle East and let Iran guide them. With Soleimani and the Quds Force's involvement, Iran has increased its position and influence in the region, including its presence in Iraq, Syria, its support for the Yemeni Houthis, and its cooperation with the Taliban regime. In 2022, in the Iranian New Year message by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, a worldwide twenty million soldiers active in the Quds Force were mentioned, all of whom are against Western interests and their presence in the Middle East or the Arab World (Khamenei, 2022). Iran seeks to strengthen its relations and defense with countries supporting its policies and where the Quds Force has the most influence. The Quds Force is responsible for global activities such as gathering tactical intelligence, conducting covert diplomacy, providing training, supporting groups and organizations, and facilitating some of Iran's economic assistance to other nations (Burgess, 2010).

Consequences of the actions of the Quds Force

The role that the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has played in their involvement in the crises in West Asia has made this Force the essential institution of Iran's foreign policy, especially in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen (Watling, 2020).

The existence and performance of the Quds Force in various crises in the region show that under the command of General Soleimani, this organization has followed a fixed policy and principles; the most important of which are:

1. Supporting ruling governments against protesters uprising;
2. Protecting governments from Western occupation and intervention;
3. Maintaining the national independence of countries;
4. Fighting against extremism and terrorism
5. Fighting the State of Israel as the enemy of the Islamic world;
6. Fighting America as the heart of global arrogance;
7. Using Islamic diplomacy to resolve the problems of the Islamic world;
8. Getting involved in internal disputes of groups and organizations in Islamic countries;
9. Providing military training and weapons support;
10. Creating nuclei of resistance around the world;
11. Confronting American unilateralism and thwarting American goals in the Islamic world and the surrounding areas;
12. Deepening Iran's influence among Islamic nations and governments.

The Quds Force is divided into two broad categories: organizational and personal. First, on the organizational side, the Force today is institutionalized and bureaucratic. Second, very little is known about Soleimani's successor, as he has operated mainly under the radar. Nevertheless, what is known of him indicates that he is likely to replace Soleimani and continue his work efficiently (Jahanbani, 2020). When President Trump decided to target Soleimani in 2020, the administration stated that it was acting to disrupt what it had described as an "imminent" attack and to reestablish deterrence. The network of non-state allies and partners Soleimani helped cultivate now composed of thousands of regional forces, and its influence extends beyond the Middle East and South Asia (Soufan, 2020).

Conclusion

The Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has played a vital role in Iran's involvement in the regional crisis in West Asia. Examining the positions and performance of the Quds Force in the current crises indicates that this Force was involved in each conflict in the region before, during, and afterward. While these crises could jeopardize Iran's national security, the involvement of the Quds Force turned the existing threats into opportunities for Iran. Their active involvement in the internal affairs of Muslim countries turned the threat into an opportunity for the Quds Force. For example, Iran seized the opportunity despite opposing the U.S. military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. It saw the fall of the Taliban government as Iran's biggest enemy in the east and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein as Iran's main enemy in the West. This means that Iran no longer had traditional enemies in the region after the defeat and weakening of Iran's two main enemies on the eastern and western borders. Thus, although the U.S. intention to invade Afghanistan and Iraq was not to defeat Iran's enemies, Iran turned the threat of siege and neighborliness with the United States into an opportunity to expand the Quds force ideology and policy in the region. On its official page of the "Reward for Justice" program, the U.S. Department of

Diplomatic Security announced that it rewards a maximum of \$15 million for any information that could disrupt the IRGC finance network. The Quds Force uses several mechanisms to finance its terrorist activities worldwide, including creating hoax companies and institutions to circumvent U.S. and international sanctions.

The recent demonstration in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine with the slogans against the Islamic Republic demonstrate that the population of those states is against Iran's policy, the Iranian government, and the Quds force.

On the 21 January (22 Bahman) of every year, during the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the government forces the population to come out and chant slogans against the United States and Israel. However, during the demonstration of 2009, the demonstration known as Bloody November of 2019-2020, May and June 2022, the slogans chanted by the demonstrators were all against the Iranian regime.

This proves that:

- 1- Although the Quds Force and the Iranian government are infiltrating into the regional government's internal and foreign affairs, they are at risk of losing power in their state and are not loved.
- 2- The Iranians and Arabs do not consider Israel and America as their enemies. However, according to their Slogans, the Iranian government, Sepah, Hezbollah, and the Quds Force are the enemy of those people.

The power gained by the Quds Force must be controlled and examined to prevent terrorist attacks such as the Pejman Iraj Khosro Abadi action in June 2022, or Nikubin case in March 2022, and the late expulsion of the Iranian Mullah named "Soleiman Mousavi Far," the deputy head of the Islamic Center of Hamburg supporting the terrorist group Hezbollah in June 2022.

It must be noted that the Quds Force and the organizations it has funded are using democracy in the European continent or other countries to recruit fighters. The freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of movement, and the freedom of thought and assembly provide the ground for such activists to disperse all over Europe and organize terrorist attacks. The Quds Force will eventually want to show its power to other Western countries and has, so far, the means for it (Straucher, 2017); therefore, understanding the scale of the activities of this unit is essential for the future security of the United States and its allies.

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