

IRAN

IRAD Case Concerns: Istanbul

Research Unit

USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

February 2020





Country Background

- Known as **Persia** before 1935 (great ancient empire)
- Distinct cultural identity within the Islamic world (Persian language; Shia)
- **1963 Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (The Shah)** alienated powerful religious, political, and popular forces with '**White Revolution**' program of land reform, social and economic modernization, and Westernization, with heavy repression of dissent (SAVAK secret police controlling opposition)
- **1979 Revolution**, Shah forced into exile, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini gained power, and **Islamic Republic of Iran** was proclaimed by referendum

Country Background

- **Sept. 1980 to July 1988: Iran/Iraq war** - Iraq was initial aggressor, exploited chaos of Iranian revolution to seize territory and suppress domestic Iraqi Shia majority; Iran reclaimed territory and went on offensive, though Iraq supported by U.S., Britain, France, Soviet Union, and most Arab states; conflict ended with ~500,000 soldiers dead and no border change
- **1989 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** appointed for life, succeeding Ayatollah Khomeini
- 1995 onward, **U.S. oil/trade sanctions** over terrorism, nuclear program
- 2005 – 2013 ultra-conservative **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** president
- 2013 to present Reformist-backed cleric **Hassan Rouhani** president
- **2015 Nuclear deal**, then U.S. withdraws 2018
- January 3, 2020 U.S. kills **Qassem Suleimani**

General Human Rights Landscape

- Crackdown on protestors of deteriorating economic conditions, corruption, and lack of freedom; arbitrary mass arrests and lethal force; recent months at least 305 killed; 7,000 arrests with risk of mistreatment and torture
- Ministry of Intelligence and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Intelligence Organization increased targeting of human rights defenders and activists; long jail terms and punishments such as flogging
- Environmental and women's rights activists jailed on vague charges such as "cooperating with a hostile state"
- Torture and forced confessions
- Prisoners refused access to lawyers and medical care
- Death penalty, including juvenile offenders

General Human Rights Landscape

- Iranian women face substantial discrimination: marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody, employment, travel, residence, attire (hijab protestors received sentences as high as 20 years)
- Government discrimination against religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims and Christians
- Restrictions on cultural and political activities of Azeri, Kurdish, Arab, and Baluch ethnic minorities

General Human Rights Landscape

- Media tightly controlled
- Journalists "constantly exposed to intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and long jail sentences imposed by revolutionary courts at the end of unfair trials"
- Web is main forum for dissident, but also used by conservative and pro-establishment activists
- Authorities routinely block or filter websites they consider objectionable, including content deemed pornographic or anti-Islamic
- Facebook and Twitter are blocked, but Iranians use virtual private networks (VPNs) and other methods to circumvent filtering.

IRAD Case Composition

- Gay/bisexual men
- Apostasy and religious claims
- Azeri Turks and Kurds
- Military service

Apostasy and Religious Claims



Apostasy and Religious Claims

- A Muslim who leaves his or her faith or converts to another religion can be charged with apostasy
- Apostasy not explicitly deemed a crime under Penal Code. Provisions in the Islamic Penal Code and the Iranian Constitution state that Shari'a (Islamic religious law) applies to situations in which the law is silent. As a result, the Iranian judiciary is empowered to bring apostasy charges based on its interpretation of Shari'a law.
- The Qur'an does not explicitly state that apostasy should be penalized, but the majority of Islamic jurists agree that an apostate is to be put to death; some death penalties carried out, some lengthy prison sentences
- Cases of apostasy are rare, but a diverse group have been charged: Muslim-born converts to Christianity, Bahá'ís, Muslims who challenge the prevailing interpretation of Islam, and others who espouse unconventional religious beliefs
- Some apostasy cases have been politically motivated, while others primarily of a religious nature

Apostasy and Religious Claims

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- Some clerics believe denying infallibility of Shi'a Imams qualifies as apostasy
- Any person, Muslim or non-Muslim, may be charged with the crime of "swearing at the Prophet" if he or she makes utterances that are deemed derogatory towards the Prophet Mohammad, other Shi'a holy figures, or other divine prophets.

Apostasy and Religious Claims

- The extra-judicial killing of apostates or individuals who have “sworn at the Prophet”, or are simply alleged to have done so, is considered acceptable by many Islamic jurists.
- A person who kills another person for apostasy or swearing at the Prophet may receive between three to ten years of imprisonment
- Converts to Christianity: 1990 execution; 2009 death sentence but commuted to three years; 2011 sentenced to 2 years.

Apostasy and Religious Claims

Christian divisions:

- “Ethnic Christians” (old churches based on common language and ethnicity): Apostolic Church of Armenia, Assyrian Church of the East, Catholics – generally don’t mix with Muslims and don’t proselytize, more representation in government
- Protestant/Evangelical: Assembly of God (evangelical group), Presbyterians, Anglican denominations particularly targeted lately
- All subject to surveillance and strict regulation

Apostasy and Religious Claims

- Revolutionary Guard and Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) are mainly responsible for the ill treatment of Christians
- Raids of church services, threats to church members, arrests and detention of worshipers and church leaders, particularly Evangelical Christian converts
- Accusations of national security crimes such as “acting against the national security” or “propaganda against the state” (spying for the West)
- Those who store and distribute Bibles, evangelize, lead house churches face more pressure from the authorities

Apostasy and Religious Claims

“Elam Ministries stated that the pressure will be built up - they might get called in for questioning and then let go at first. If a person doesn't stop their Christian worship, then the phone calls will start. Depending on how much information the authorities have on a person, the strategy may change, with arrests without warrants, huge bails, charges of politically-related or security crimes, floggings and exiles to remote areas of Iran. Within the last ten years, thousands of Iranians have converted to Christianity. In this time the Iranian authorities have arrested hundreds of people and built up a good database of activities and developed an idea of the different levels of activity. Those who watch satellite TV are considered a lower threat; those who open a house church or evangelise are in a different category.”

Apostasy and Religious Claims

- Pressure within academic institutions; lose opportunities for education or the right to complete educational courses
- Can face problems with relatives, neighbors
- Reporting to police for financial gain
- Targeting of family members including children

Baha'is

- Largest non-Muslim religion: over 300,000
- Labeled by government as heretical “deviant sect”
- Numerous arrests in Tehran and across country merely based on faith: “membership in the anti-State Baha’i cult”
- City Council member in Shiraz City detained 10 days, lost seat, placed under judicial surveillance due to calling for release of Baha’is online
- Businesses forced to close
- Societal discrimination (pressure to dismiss from jobs; students expelled) and vandalism (cemeteries)

Sabean Mandeans

- Small minority religion primarily in Iraq: 5,000-10,000 in Iran
- Old Testament beliefs (John the Baptist)
- Don't proselytize or marry outside religion (not threatening to the State?)
- Not recognized; some pressured to declare Christian or convert to Islam
- Forced to give children Islamic/Iranian names; Children take Islamic course of study; other academic discrimination

Gay and Bisexual Men

- Iranian Law: Sexual relationships between two men or two women criminalized
- Specific acts proscribed: sodomy (men), tafkhiz (men), mosaheqeh (women), other same-sex sexual acts (kissing and touching)
- Punishments range from lashes to death (4000-6000 killed for having same-sex sexual relations between 1979 and 2015, mostly men)
- The law defines transgender persons as mentally ill; government provides assistance in the form of grants of up to 45 million rial (\$1,506) and loans up to 55 million rial (\$1,841) to undergo gender-confirmation surgery (sometimes gay/lesbian/bi individuals pressured)

Gay and Bisexual Men

Treatment by State:

- Official harassment: all investigative services, including the Basij, the IRGC and the intelligence services are mandated to pursue homosexual activities
- Arbitrary arrest and detention (particularly raids on parties)
- Cruel and degrading treatments or punishments, including torture, sexual assault and rape by police and Basij, and anal examinations by medical doctors without consent
- Prosecution
- Dismissal from military service with card noting reason
- Some discreet activity tolerated; authorities intervene immediately once there is activism or activities might “give Iran a bad name abroad”

Gay and Bisexual Men

“A number of interviews with persons accused of homosexual behaviour seem to show that the authorities use harsh measures during arrests and interrogations. Intimidation, blackmailing, incommunicado detention, rape, torture, coercion to sign (false) confessions and extrajudicial punishments such as flogging are widely practiced during detention and interrogation. In most cases, authorities try to press the detainee to make a confession of homosexual conduct and/or to reveal the identity of other homosexual persons.”

Gay and Bisexual Men

Treatment by society:

- Harassment and abuse from family members, religious figures, school leaders, and community elders.
- Taunts, insults, and threats are a constant reality for lesbian, gay and transgender people, leading to self-isolation
- Sexual assault and other physical attacks common; many lesbian, gay and transgender people express a constant fear of being assaulted and raped by men.
- Absence of an adequate police response to incidents of sexual assault and rape makes non-state actors feel emboldened to enact homophobic and transphobic violence with impunity

Azeri Turks



- Largest minority in Iran (16%)
- Mostly located in the northwest
- Mainly Shi'a; generally been the least troubled of Iran's minorities
- Reports of discrimination by authorities: education, employment, housing
- Harsh consequences for Azeri Turk protests: arbitrary arrest, torture, unfair trials and imprisonment

Azeri Turks

- Some groups advocate for Azeri Turks to secede territory from Iran to join Azerbaijan or Turkey; most often Azeri Turk activists advocate for equal treatment within Iran, calling for a federal system that gives them State-like autonomy
- **REPORT:** Iran's Azerbaijan Question in Evolution Identity, Society, and Regional Security, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, p.35-52, Sept. 2017 - details various Azeri Turk groups seeking to influence circumstances in Iran, acting both from within Iran and from the outside (summary on next slide).

Azeri Turks

1. **Nationalist Organizations of Iranian Azerbaijan** (p.35-39) contains information on:
 - The South Azerbaijani National Awakening Movement (SANAM, Güney Azərbaycan Milli Oyanış Hərəkatı);
 - The South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement, established in 1991 (SANLM or NLMSA, Cənubi Azərbaycan Milli Azadlıq Hərəkatı);
 - The South Azerbaijan National Revival Organization, established in 1995 (SANRO, Güney Azərbaycan Milli Dirçəliş Təşkilatı);
 - The South Azerbaijan National Liberation Front, established in 2012 (SANLF, Güney Azərbaycan Milli Azadlıq Cəbhəsi),
 - The South Azerbaijan Independence Party, established in 2006 (Güney Azərbaycan İstiqlal Partiyası).
2. **Demonstrations and Manifestations** (p.40-44) discusses the rise of demonstrations for the emancipation of Azeris from the mid-1990s to about 2013
3. **Lake Urmia and the Nationalization of the Environmental Movement** (p.44-47) discusses the ethnic dimensions of the Iranian regime's neglect of Lake Urmia, including Azeri Turk efforts to protest and bring change
4. **Regime Reaction to Azerbaijani Protests** (p.47-51) discusses some of the government's methods and actors used to squash dissent
5. **Impact of the Syrian Civil War on the Iranian Azerbaijani Community** (p.51-52)

Kurds

- 10% of population
- Mostly settled along borders with Iraq and Turkey; some in the north-east, along the border with Turkmenistan
- Government banned Kurdish-language publications and penalized journalists for criticizing government policies
- Schools forbidden from teaching the Kurdish language
- Most Kurdish names for children not allowed to be registered at official registries
- High levels of property confiscation and governmental neglect in Kurdish region of north-west Iran - Iranian Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam provinces

Kurds

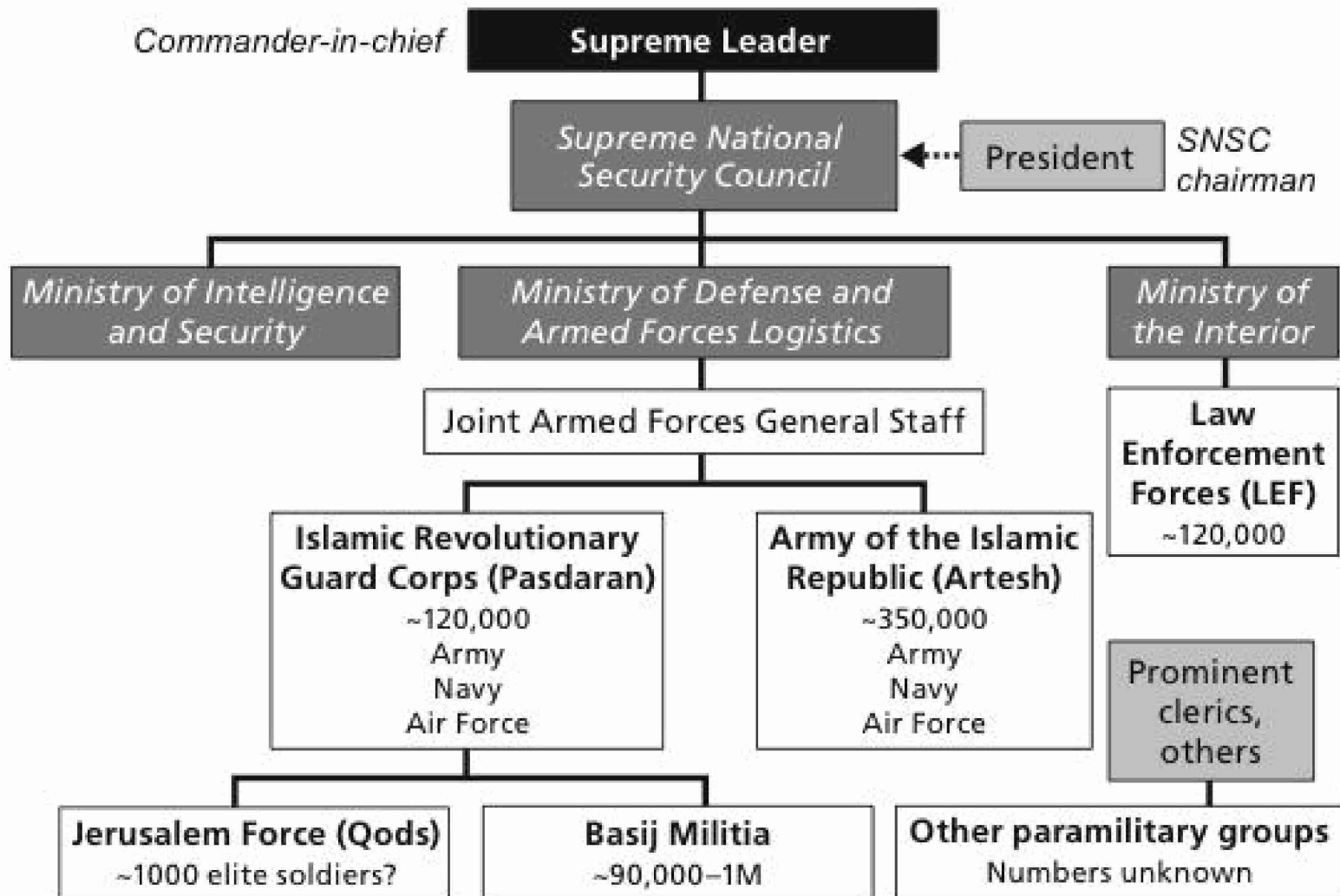


- Long history of Kurdish resistance, separatism, and armed conflict
- Kurdish groups have fought against the pre-revolution Shah, as part of the 1979 revolution, and against the resulting theocracy of the ayatollahs

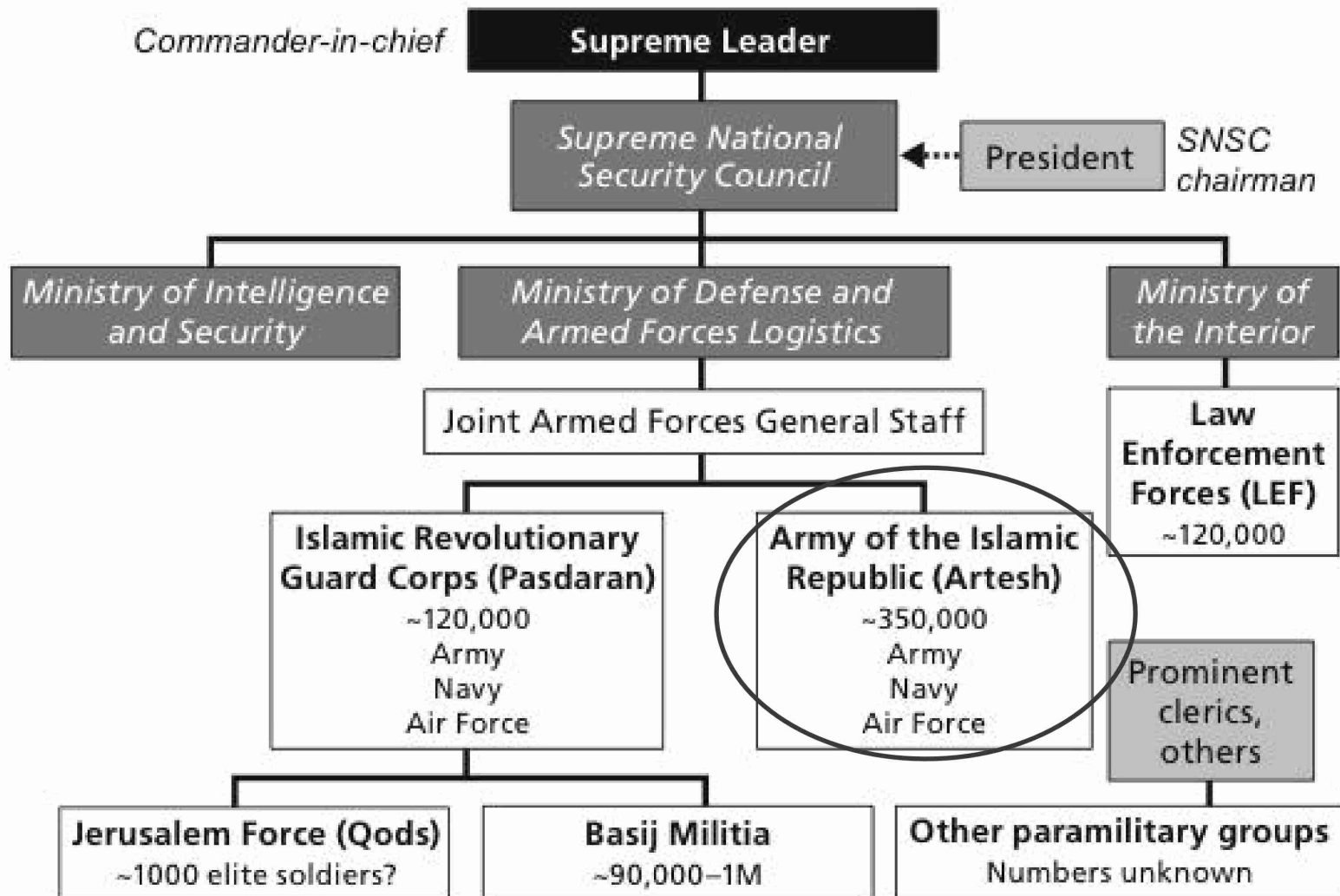
Kurds

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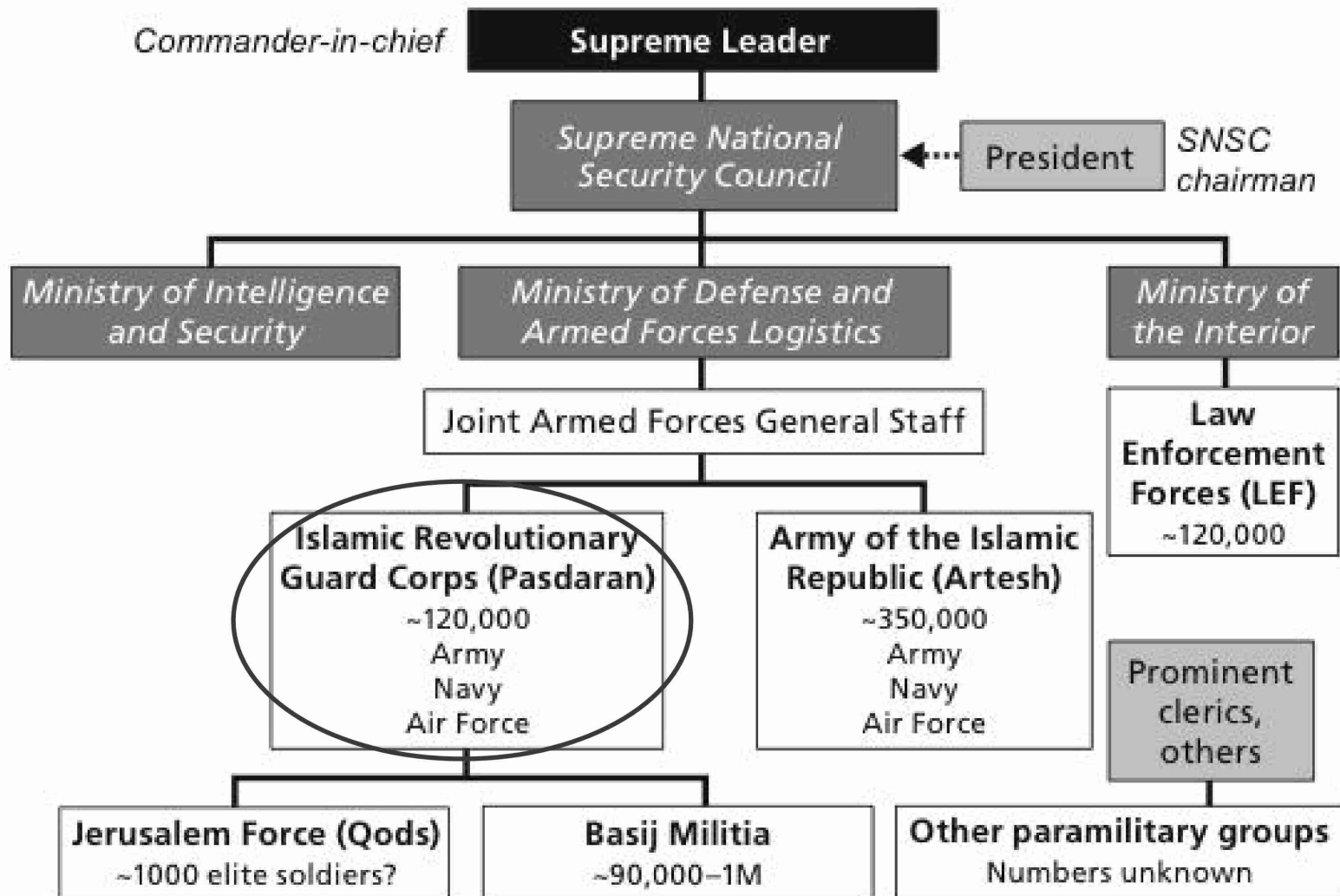
Military Service



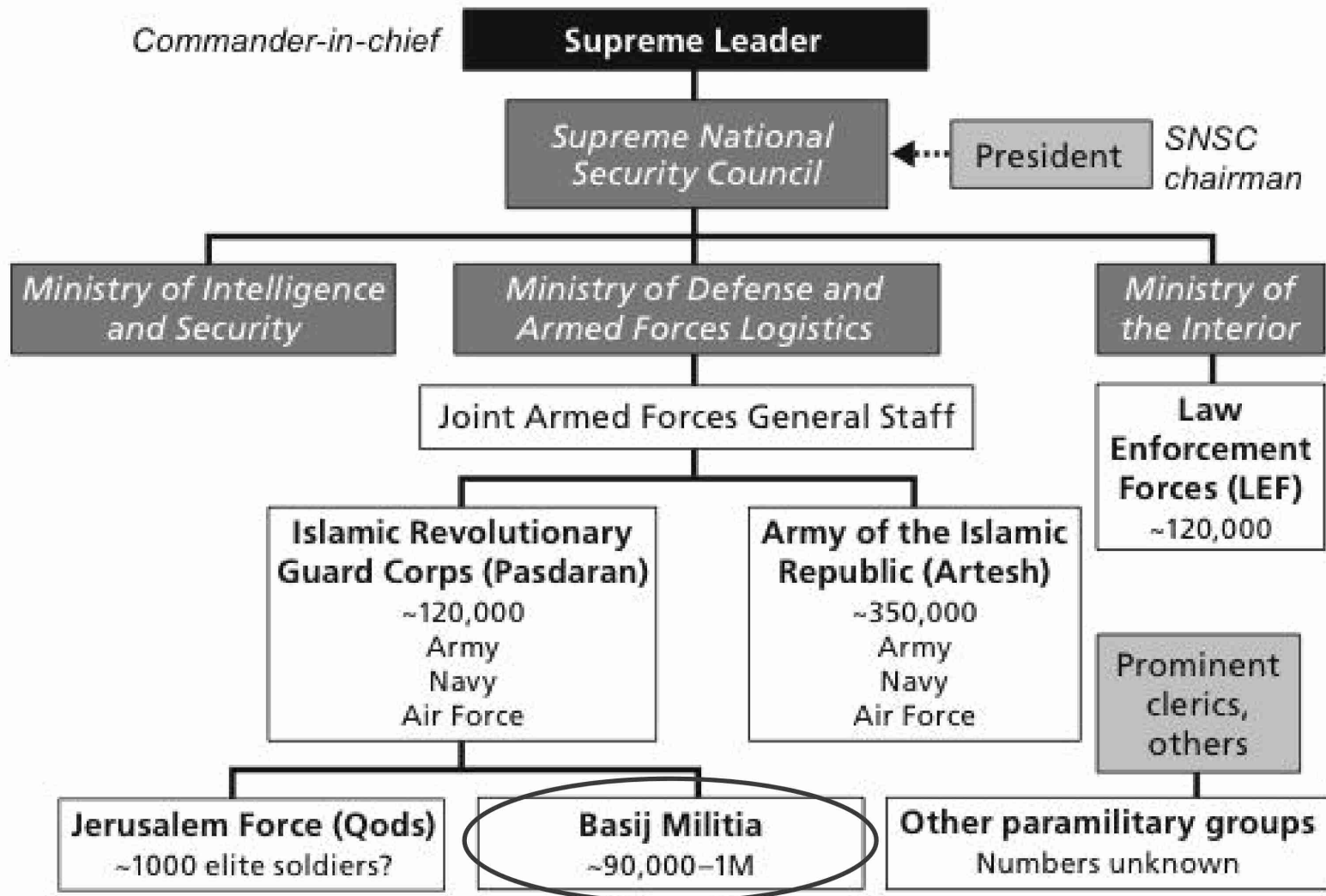
Military Service



Military Service



Military Service



Artesh

- Army, Navy, Air Force (Applicant: “Land Forces of Islamic Republic of Iran”)
- Mission: protect independence and territorial integrity of Iran; focused on first-line defense against invading forces
- 3 times as many personnel as IRGC but much smaller budget (third of total 2018 defense budget) and older weaponry and equipment
- Applicants typically claim service after the Iran-Iraq war of Sept. 1980 to July 1988; no major operations since

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

- April 15, 2019: Designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by Trump/State – in its entirety including Quds and Basij

“The IRGC, with the support of the Iranian government, has engaged in terrorist activity since its inception 40 years ago.”

- In 2017, Department of the Treasury designated the IRGC as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist pursuant to its counterterrorism sanctions authority (Executive Order 13224) for its activities in support of the IRGC-Quds Force, which was previously designated in 2007 under this same authority for providing support to a number of terrorist groups, including Hizballah and Hamas.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

- AKA Seppah; Pasdaran
- Founded by Ayatollah Khomeini shortly after 1978–1979 Revolution
- Mission: protect the Revolution “and its achievements”; significant internal presence
- Has its own Army, Navy, Air Force, intelligence divisions (eclipsed the Ministry of Intelligence in scope and authority)
- Expansive socio-political-economic conglomerate whose influence extends into every corner of Iranian political life and society: media resources, training, economic activities (dam/pipeline construction; automobile manufacturing; laser eye surgery, illicit/black market enterprises, etc.)

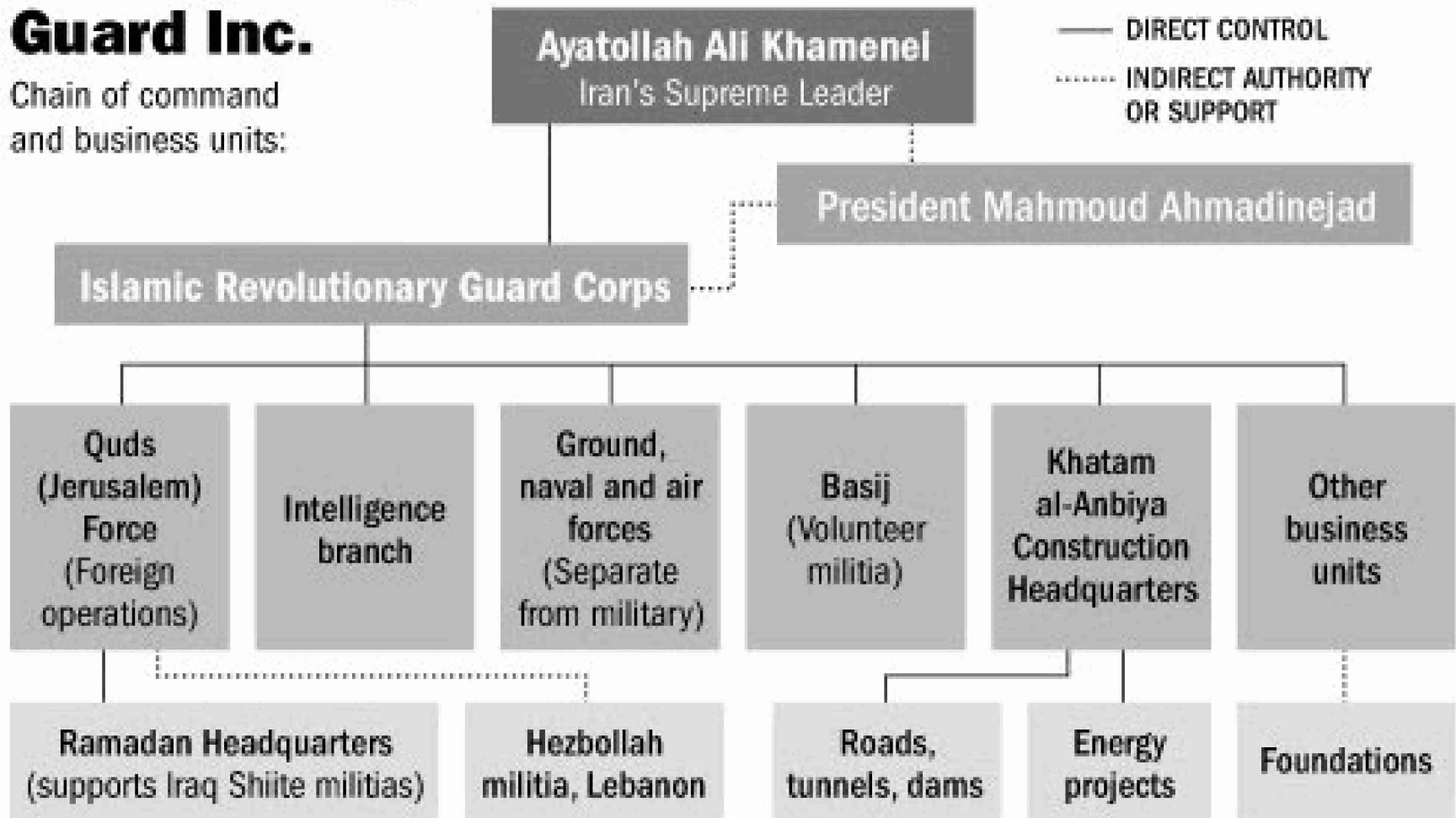
Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

- Recruitment, training and command of the Basij
- Secretive Quds Force has trained and equipped proxy groups, such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Iraqi Shiite insurgents
- Elite anti-riot brigade created in 1992
- Enforcing Islamic dress and moral codes
- Political detentions, torture, and executions

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

Revolutionary Guard Inc.

Chain of command and business units:



Basij

- Fifth Division of the IRGC
- Tasked largely with internal security
- 90,000 active forces but can mobilize 1,000,000
- Used to suppress opposition movements and create counter-demonstrations
- Members assigned to one of over 40,000 Basij bases (Paygha-e Basij) throughout Iran; also grouped into combat battalions in IRGC ground forces

Basij

- Suppression of opposition demonstrations at the height of 2009 Green Movement-led protests
- Authority to arrest alleged perpetrators of felonies and hand to police (urban areas)
- Monitors “suspicious” activity of citizens; arrests women who fail to observe Islamic dress code and men who consume alcohol
- Growing role in Iran’s economy: construction, mining, real estate, banking/finance, stock market

Government Divisions Cited in Cases

- **Eta'alat (Ettelaát)**: aka Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS, aka Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar or VEVAK) – monitors political, social, ethnic, and religious dissidents, overseas and domestically; reports of assassinations, prisons, censorship and targeting journalists; Department of Disinformation reportedly largest component
- **FATA (the Iranian Cyber Police)**: Part of police; targets activists using online media; 2012 guidelines for internet cafes retaining browsing/contact info on users; crackdown on VPNs

Military Service: Conscription

18-24 month mandatory military service for men starting age 18

Some reported variations: “16 years of age for volunteers”, “17 years of age for Law Enforcement Forces” (LEF) and “15 years of age for Basij Forces”

Military Service: Conscription

Exceptions:

- Physical or mental health problems or disabilities (“moral and sexual deviancy, such as transsexuality” can be grounds for a medical exemption)
- Man who has demonstrated exceptional scholastic achievement
- Man who is the only child in a family (on the grounds that the parents require the assistance of their only child)
- Man who is the only male in the family and his father is over 65 years old
- Man who is the sole caretaker of a parent, a minor or ill sibling or ill grandparents
- Students in secondary school or university are exempt as long as they are attending classes (deferral)
- May be possible for those who work in industries vital to the government or military
- Payment in lieu of service (not always offered)
- Having a brother currently serving in the military.

No members of religious minority groups are exempt from military service by law

Military Service: Documentation

- Iranian men over 18 who were exempt from military service will have exemption cards issued by the General Conscription Department of the Police Force (Niroo-e Intizami Jumhoori-e Islami) – may not have card if exempted before 1990
- For military service completed in 1980 or later, completion cards are issued by the Armed Forces of Iran (for Air Force, Navy, Army, or police) and the IRGC (for IRGC or Basij)

Military Service: Evasion or Desertion

- No alternative civilian service
- Conscientious objection not accepted
- Evasion is punishable under Article 40 of the Armed Forces Penal Law by imprisonment of six months to two years, or an extension of the service
- Draft evaders may lose social benefits/civic rights: educational opportunities, registration of a business, issuance of driver's license, passport (need special permission to leave Iran), employment in government jobs or high-paying positions.

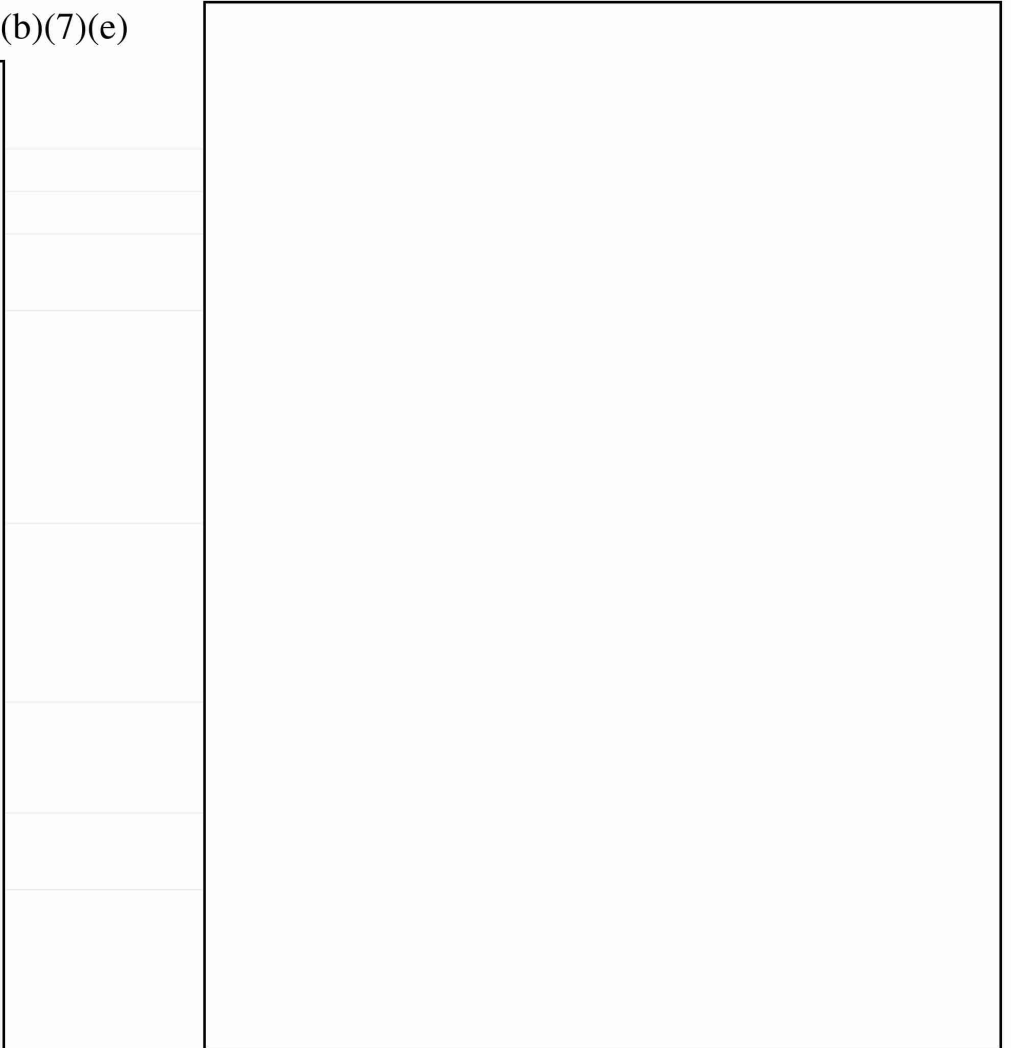
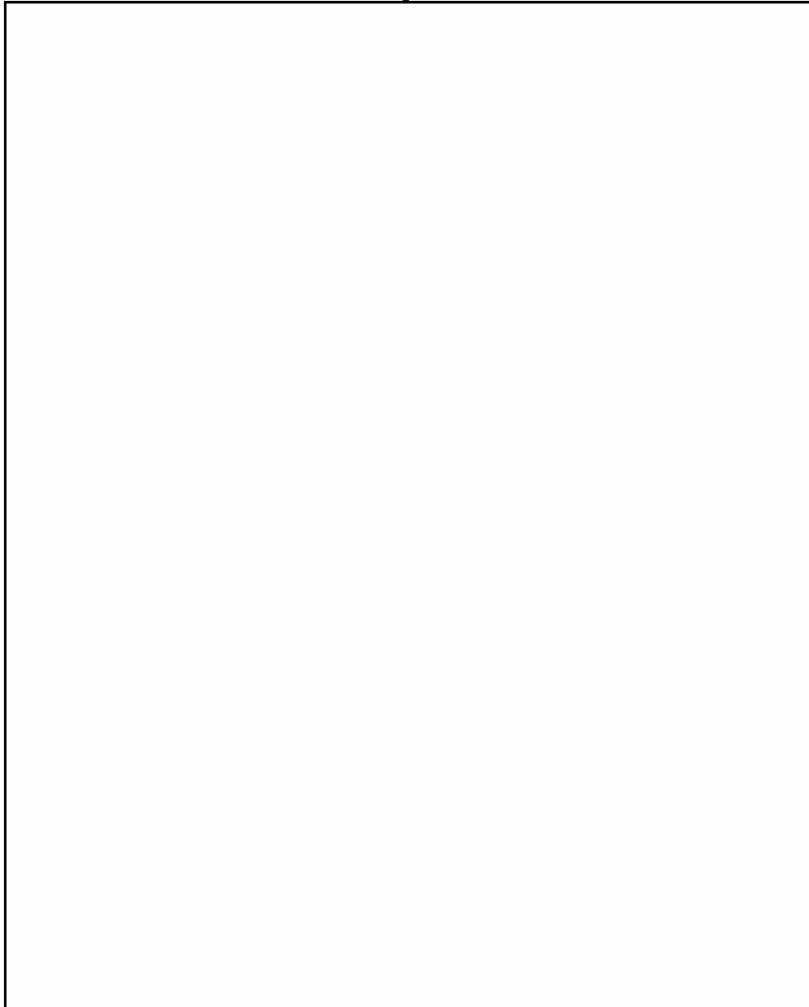
Resources

- **General history, government, military:** Iran: Country Study, Library of Congress, 2008
- **General human rights:** Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre (IHRDC), <https://iranhrdc.org/>
- **Apostasy/Christians/Religious Minorities:** Country Policy and Information Note Iran: Christians and Christian converts, United Kingdom: Home Office, Mar. 2018; Iran: COI Compilation, ACCORD, July 2018; Article 18, <https://articleeighteen.com/>
- **LGBT:** Country Information and Guidance - Iran: Sexual orientation and gender identity, United Kingdom: Home Office, Sept. 27, 2016
- **Military Service:** Country Policy and Information Note - Iran: Military service, United Kingdom: Home Office, Oct. 24, 2016
- **Military Structure:** US-Iranian Competition: The Gulf Military Balance – I, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, January 6, 2013.

Resources

TRIG Reports:

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- Political Dissent (Internet café; journalism)
- Gay men
- Adultery and divorce
- Azeri Turks and Kurds
- Military service

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Adultery and Divorce

- Adultery or extramarital relations prevalent; Divorcing increasing
- Adultery cases rarely go to court (judges avoid cases to adjust to changing society; confession and many witnesses typically required)
- Police usually do not intervene (larger cities) unless there is a private complainant
- Punishments like stoning are no longer being practiced in major Iranian cities but may occur in provincial and less-urban areas
- Issues regarding adultery often handled outside of court; adultery is a shame for the family and is dealt with using social codes
- Both women and men vulnerable to honor-related violence in Iran; Honor killings of women not adequately punished
- Man has the right to kill his adulterous wife and her lover if he catches them in the act
- Iranian law does continue to provide for the death penalty for adultery (Two women sentenced to death by stoning in recent history)

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 - The South Azerbaijan National Liberation Front, established in 2012 (SANLF, Güney Azərbaycan Milli Azadlıq Cəbhəsi),
 - The South Azerbaijan Independence Party, established in 2006 (Güney Azərbaycan İstiqlal Partiyası).
2. **Demonstrations and Manifestations** (p.40-44) discusses the rise of demonstrations for the emancipation of Azeris from the mid-1990s to about 2013
3. **Lake Urmia and the Nationalization of the Environmental Movement** (p.44-47) discusses the ethnic dimensions of the Iranian regime's neglect of Lake Urmia, including Azeri Turk efforts to protest and bring change
4. **Regime Reaction to Azerbaijani Protests** (p.47-51) discusses some of the government's methods and actors used to squash dissent
5. **Impact of the Syrian Civil War on the Iranian Azerbaijani Community** (p.51-52)

Kurds

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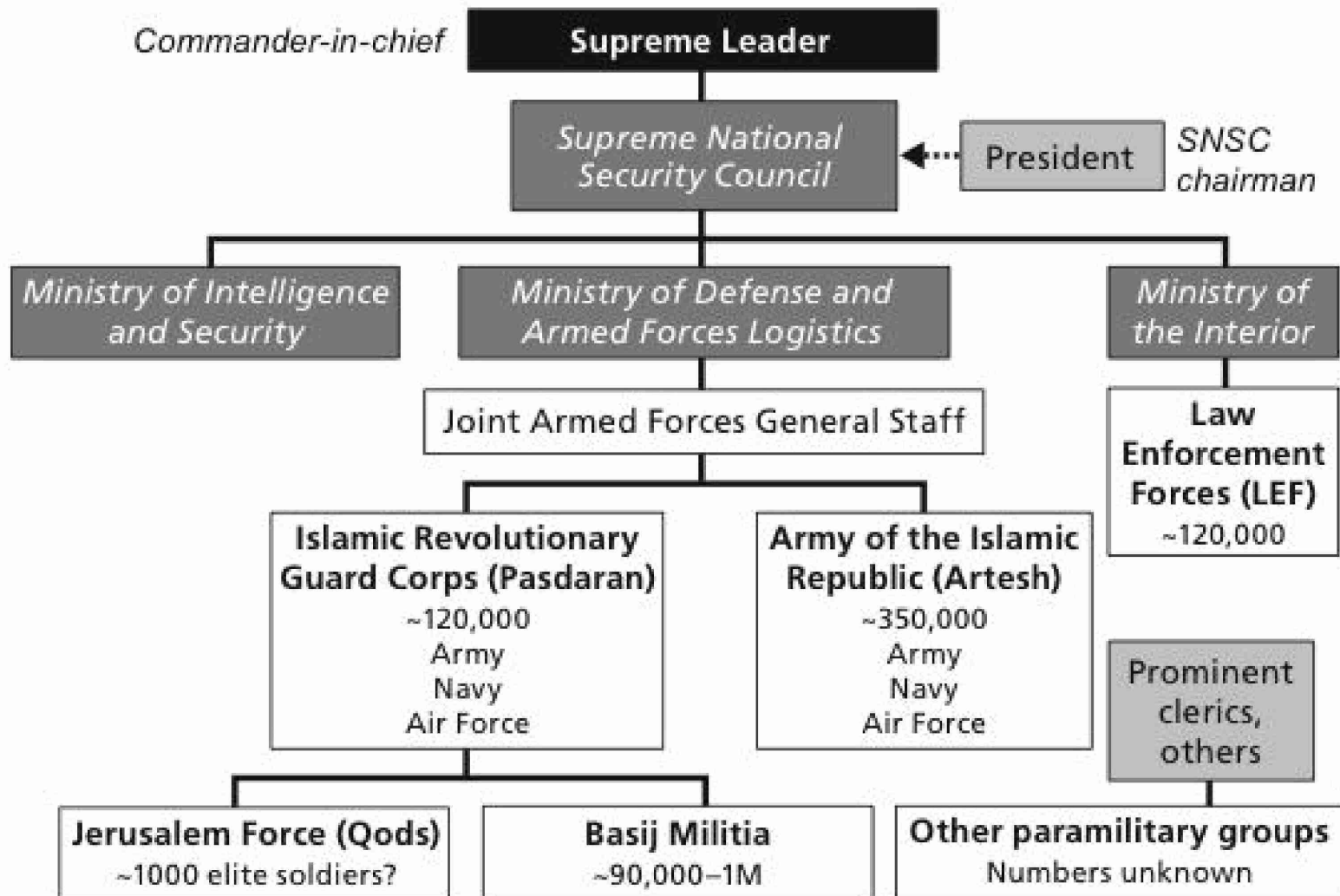


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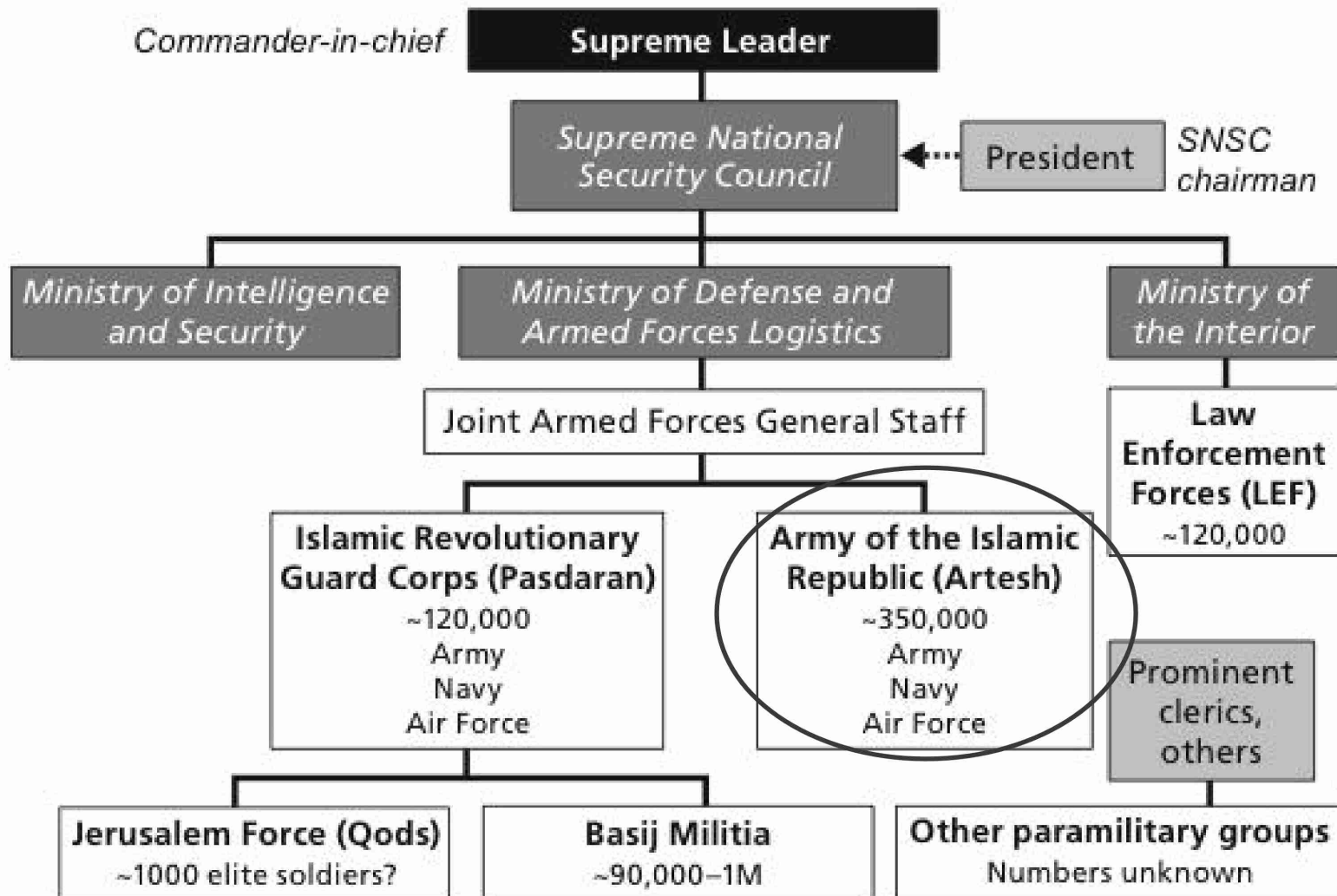
Kurds

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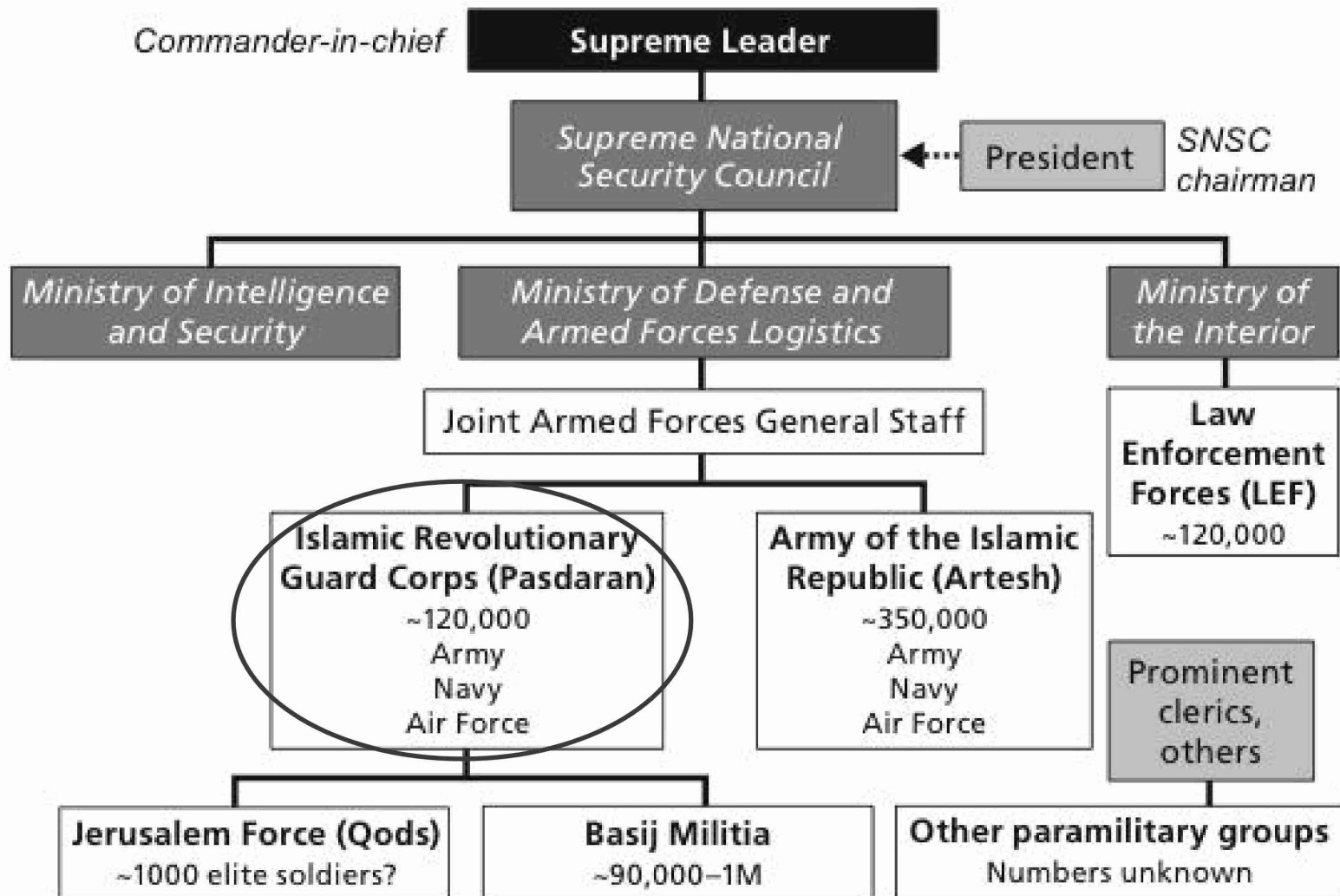
Military Service



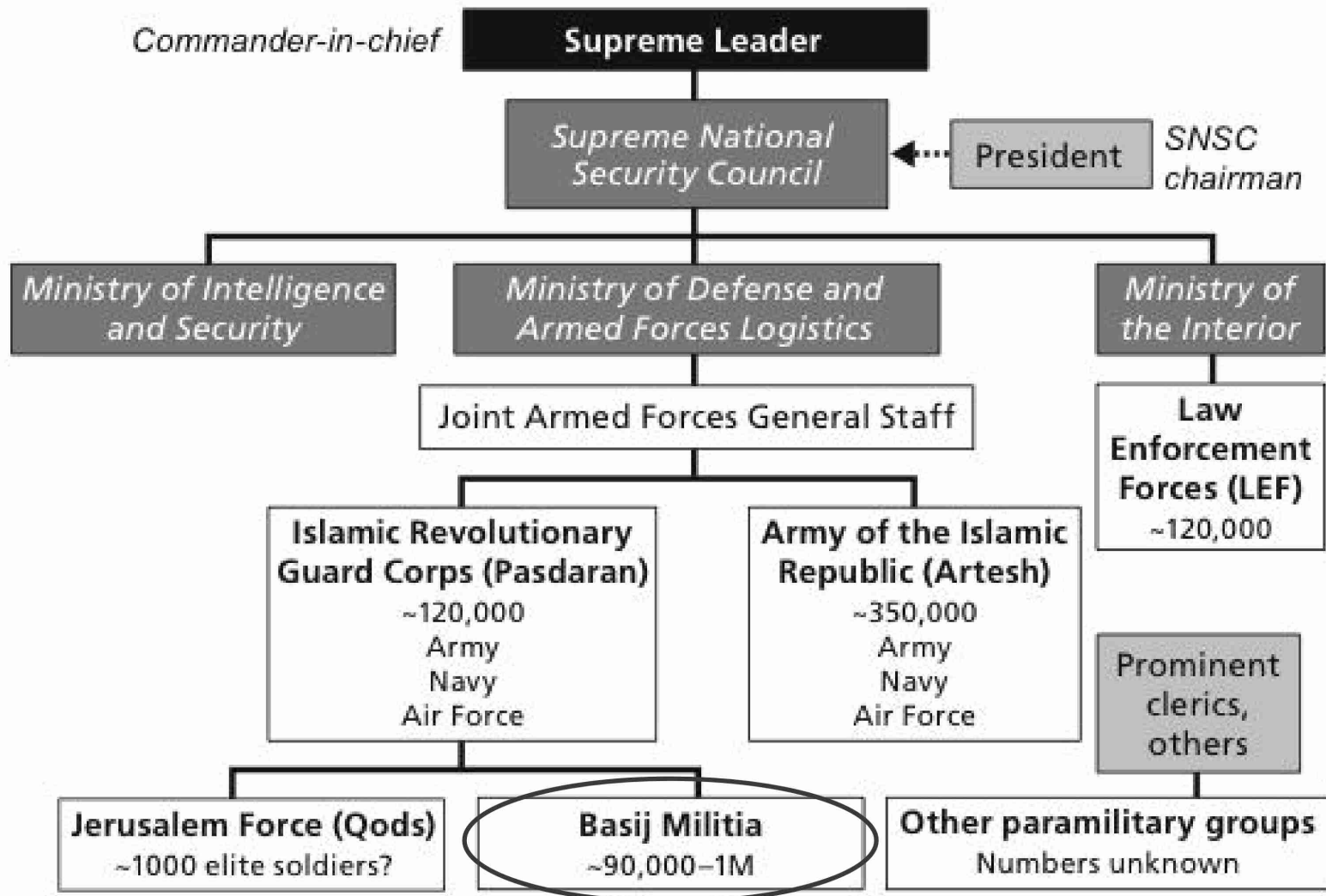
Military Service



Military Service



Military Service



Artesh

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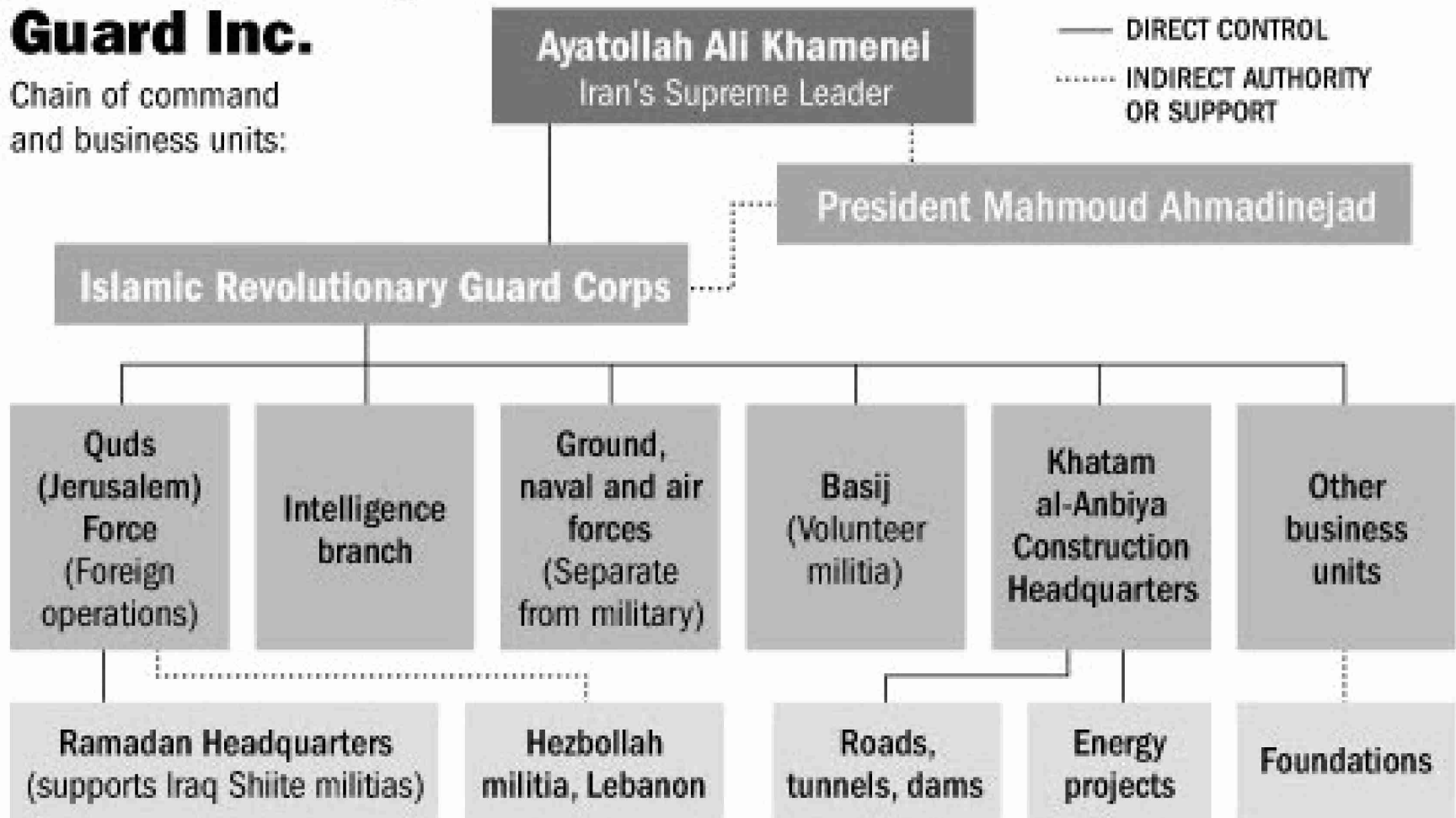
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Chain of command and business units:



Basij

- Fifth Division of the IRGC
- Tasked largely with internal security
- 90,000 active forces but can mobilize 1,000,000
- Used to suppress opposition movements and create counter-demonstrations
- Members assigned to one of over 40,000 Basij bases (Paygha-e Basij) throughout Iran; also grouped into combat battalions in IRGC ground forces

Basij

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- Authority to arrest alleged perpetrators of felonies and hand to police (urban areas)
- Monitors “suspicious” activity of citizens; arrests women who fail to observe Islamic dress code and men who consume alcohol
- Growing role in Iran’s economy: construction, mining, real estate, banking/finance, stock market

Government Divisions Cited in Cases

- **Eta'alat (Ettelaát)**: aka Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS, aka Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar or VEVAK) – monitors political, social, ethnic, and religious dissidents, overseas and domestically; reports of assassinations, prisons, censorship and targeting journalists; Department of Disinformation reportedly largest component
- **FATA (the Iranian Cyber Police)**: Part of police; targets activists using online media; 2012 guidelines for internet cafes retaining browsing/contact info on users; crackdown on VPNs

Military Service: Conscription

18-24 month mandatory military service for men starting age 18

Some reported variations: “16 years of age for volunteers”, “17 years of age for Law Enforcement Forces” (LEF) and “15 years of age for Basij Forces”

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Exceptions:

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- Man who is the sole caretaker of a parent, a minor or ill sibling or ill grandparents
- Students in secondary school or university are exempt as long as they are attending classes (deferral)
- May be possible for those who work in industries vital to the government or military
- Payment in lieu of service (not always offered)
- Having a brother currently serving in the military.

No members of religious minority groups are exempt from military service by law

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- No alternative civilian service
- Conscientious objection not accepted
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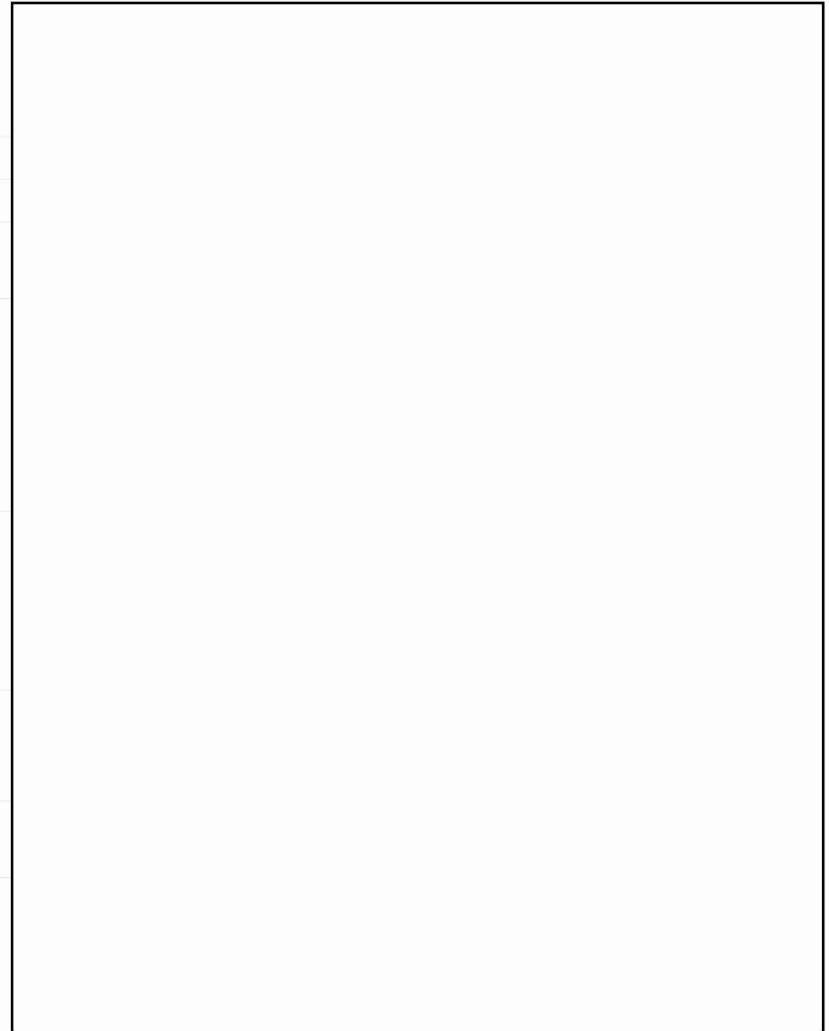
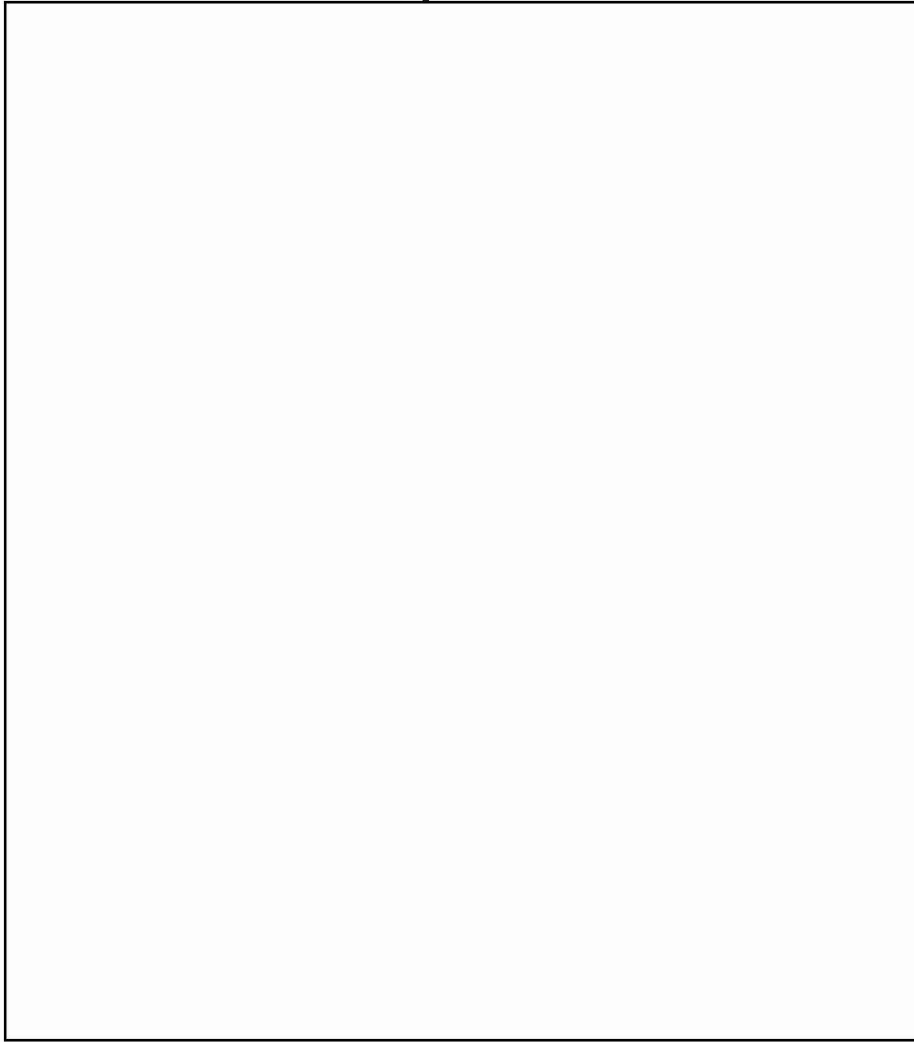
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- **Military Structure:** US-Iranian Competition: The Gulf Military Balance – I, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, January 6, 2013.

Resources

TRIG Reports:

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Acting Chief

Researcher for Europe, Central Asia, Afghanistan

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IRAN

History, Human Rights, Military

Research Unit

USCIS Refugee, Asylum and International Operations

April 2020





Country Background

- Known as **Persia** before 1935 (great ancient empire)
- Distinct cultural identity within the Islamic world (Persian language; Shia)

Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (The Shah) - Emperor from 1941 until his overthrow in 1979

Backed by Britain and U.S.; anti-Soviet, oil interests

1963: Alienated powerful religious, political, and popular forces with '**White Revolution**' program of land reform, social and economic modernization, and Westernization, with heavy repression of dissent (SAVAK secret police controlling opposition)



1979 Revolution:

Shah forced into exile,
Ayatollah Ruhollah
Khomeini gained power,
and **Islamic Republic of
Iran** was proclaimed by
referendum



Iran/Iraq war Sept. 1980 to July 1988:

Iraq was initial aggressor, exploited chaos of Iranian revolution to seize territory and suppress domestic Iraqi Shia majority.

Iran reclaimed territory and went on offensive.

Iraq supported by U.S., Britain, France, Soviet Union, and most Arab states.

Conflict ended with ~500,000 soldiers dead and no border change.



Country Background

- **1989 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** appointed for life, succeeding Ayatollah Khomeini
- 1995 onward, **U.S. oil/trade sanctions** over terrorism, nuclear program
- 2005 – 2013 ultra-conservative **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** president
- 2013 to present Reformist-backed cleric **Hassan Rouhani** president
- **2015 Nuclear deal**, then U.S. withdraws 2018

January 3, 2020 U.S. kills Qasem Soleimani



Covid-19



Covid-19



General Human Rights Landscape

- Crackdown on protestors of deteriorating economic conditions, corruption, and lack of freedom; arbitrary mass arrests and lethal force; recent months at least 305 killed; 7,000 arrests with risk of mistreatment and torture
- Ministry of Intelligence and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Intelligence Organization increased targeting of human rights defenders and activists; long jail terms and punishments such as flogging
- Environmental and women's rights activists jailed on vague charges such as "cooperating with a hostile state"
- Torture and forced confessions
- Prisoners refused access to lawyers and medical care
- Death penalty, including juvenile offenders

General Human Rights Landscape

- Iranian women face substantial discrimination: marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody, employment, travel, residence, attire (hijab protestors received sentences as high as 20 years)
- Government discrimination against religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims and Christians
- Restrictions on cultural and political activities of Azeri, Kurdish, Arab, and Baluch ethnic minorities

General Human Rights Landscape

- Media tightly controlled
- Journalists "constantly exposed to intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and long jail sentences imposed by revolutionary courts at the end of unfair trials"
- Web is main forum for dissent, but also used by conservative and pro-establishment activists
- Authorities routinely block or filter websites they consider objectionable, including content deemed pornographic or anti-Islamic
- Facebook and Twitter are blocked, but Iranians use virtual private networks (VPNs) and other methods to circumvent filtering.

Common RAIO Claims

- Political Dissent (Internet café; journalism)
- Apostasy and religious claims
- LGBT
- Azeri Turks and Kurds
- Military service

Apostasy and Religious Claims



Apostasy and Religious Claims

- A Muslim who leaves his or her faith or converts to another religion can be charged with apostasy
- Qur'an does not explicitly state that apostasy should be penalized, but the majority of Islamic jurists agree that an apostate is to be put to death; some death penalties carried out, some lengthy prison sentences
- Cases of apostasy are rare, but a diverse group have been charged: Muslim-born converts to Christianity, Bahá'ís, Muslims who challenge the prevailing interpretation of Islam, and others who espouse unconventional religious beliefs ("Swearing at the Prophet" charge more common)
- Some apostasy cases have been politically motivated, while others primarily of a religious nature

Apostasy and Religious Claims

- Raids of church services by IRGC and MOIS, threats to church members, arrests and detention of worshipers and church leaders, particularly Evangelical Christian converts
- Accusations of national security crimes such as “acting against the national security” or “propaganda against the state” (spying for the West)
- Those who store and distribute Bibles, evangelize, lead house churches face more pressure from the authorities

Baha'is

- Largest non-Muslim religion: over 300,000
- Labeled by government as heretical “deviant sect”
- Numerous arrests in Tehran and across country merely based on faith: “membership in the anti-State Baha’i cult”
- City Council member in Shiraz City detained 10 days, lost seat, placed under judicial surveillance due to calling for release of Baha’is online
- Businesses forced to close
- Societal discrimination (pressure to dismiss from jobs; students expelled) and vandalism (cemeteries)

LGBT

- Iranian Law: Sexual relationships between two men or two women criminalized
- Punishments range from lashes to death (4000-6000 killed for having same-sex sexual relations between 1979 and 2015, mostly men)
- The law defines transgender persons as mentally ill; government provides assistance to undergo gender-confirmation surgery (sometimes gay/lesbian/bi individuals pressured)

LGBT

Treatment by State:

- All investigative services, including the Basij, the IRGC and the intelligence services are mandated to pursue homosexual activities
- Arbitrary arrest and detention (particularly raids on parties), torture, rape, prosecution
- Some discreet activity tolerated; authorities intervene immediately once there is activism or activities might “give Iran a bad name abroad”

Treatment by society:

- Harassment and abuse from family members, religious figures, school leaders, and community elders.
- Taunts, insults, threats, sexual assault and other physical attacks common
- Absence of an adequate police response; impunity

Azeri Turks



- Largest minority in Iran (16%)
- Mostly located in the northwest
- Mainly Shi'a; generally been the least troubled of Iran's minorities
- Reports of discrimination by authorities: education, employment, housing
- Harsh consequences for Azeri Turk protests: arbitrary arrest, torture, unfair trials and imprisonment

Kurds

- 10% of population
- Mostly settled along borders with Iraq and Turkey; some in the north-east, along the border with Turkmenistan
- Government banned Kurdish-language publications and penalized journalists for criticizing government policies
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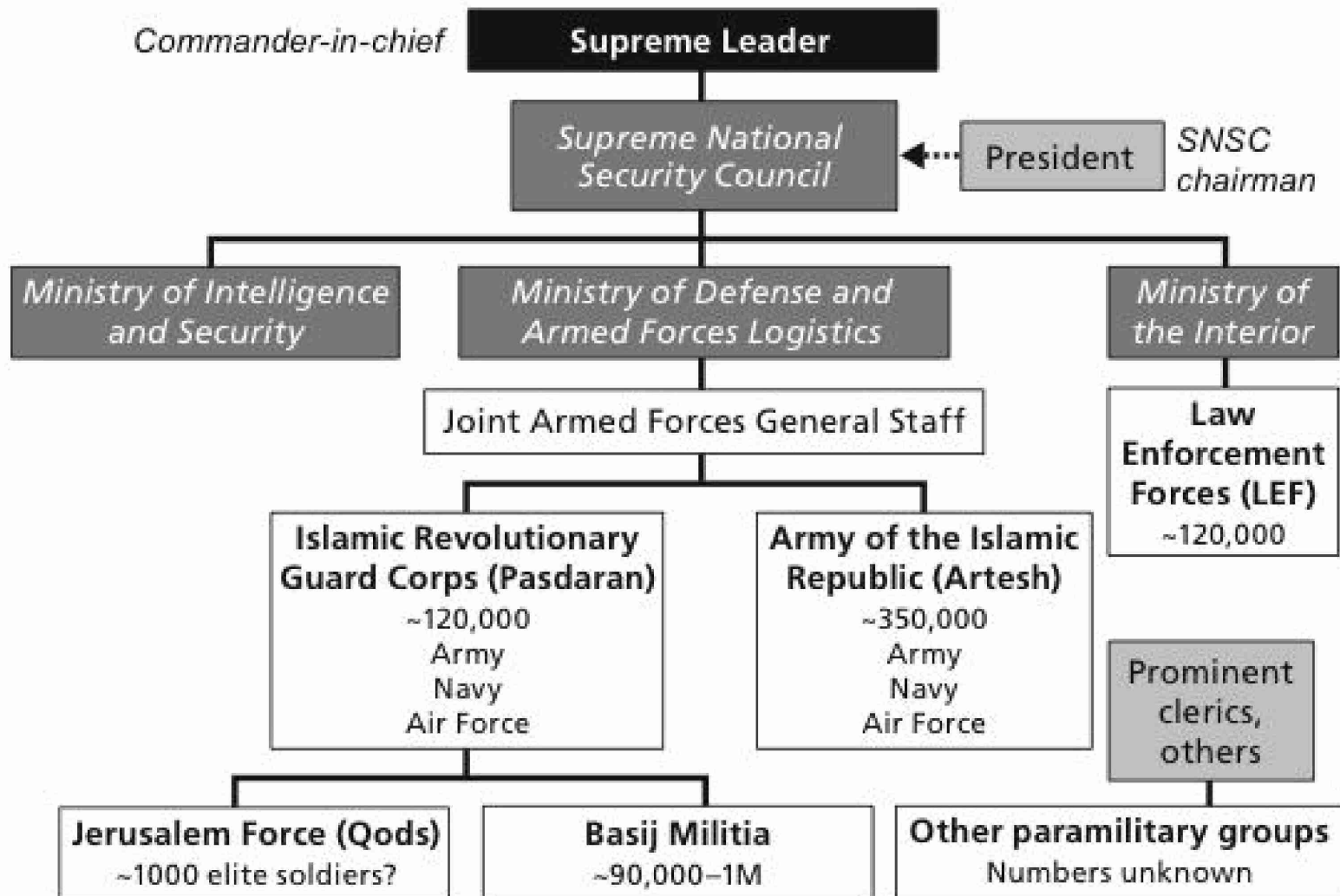


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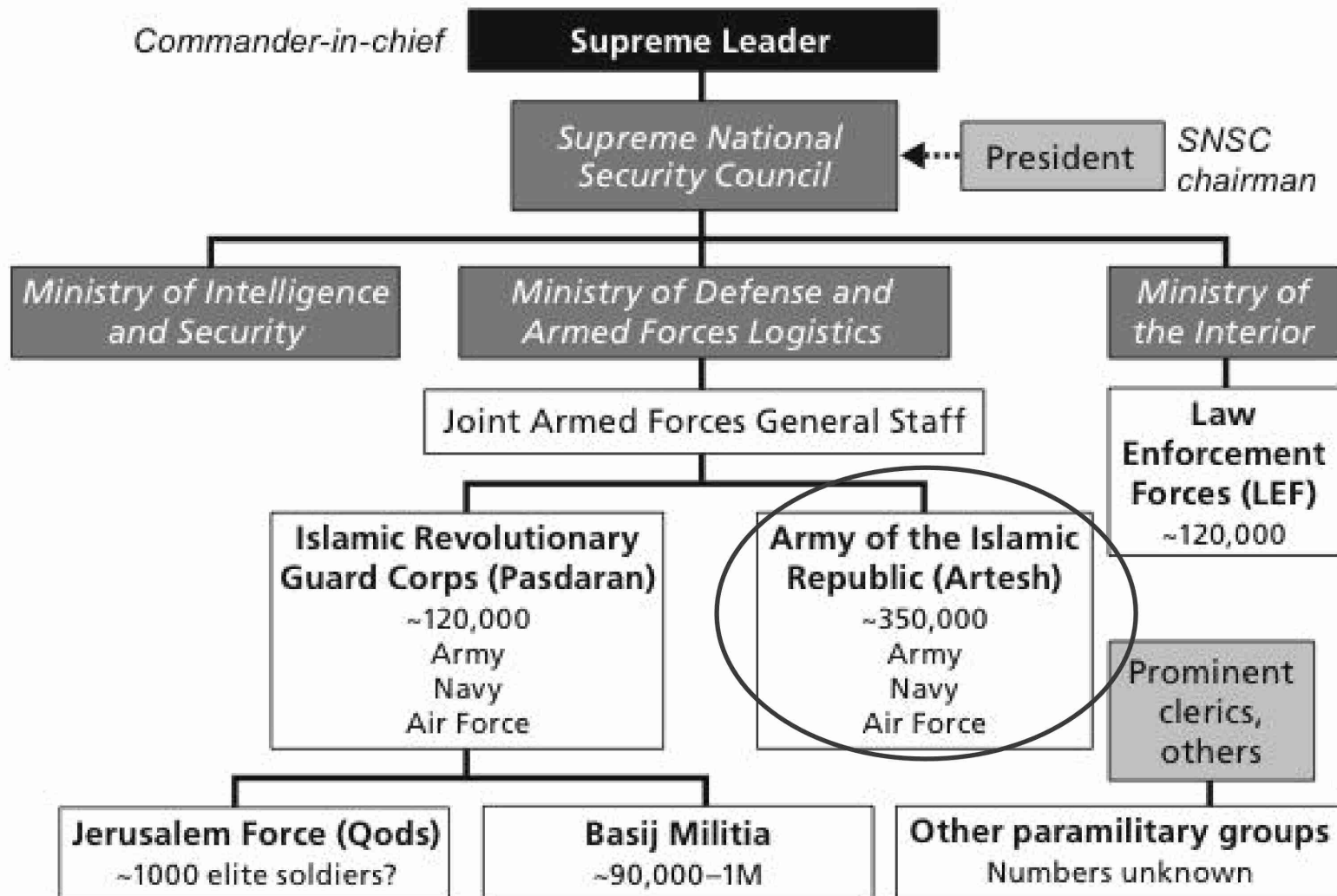
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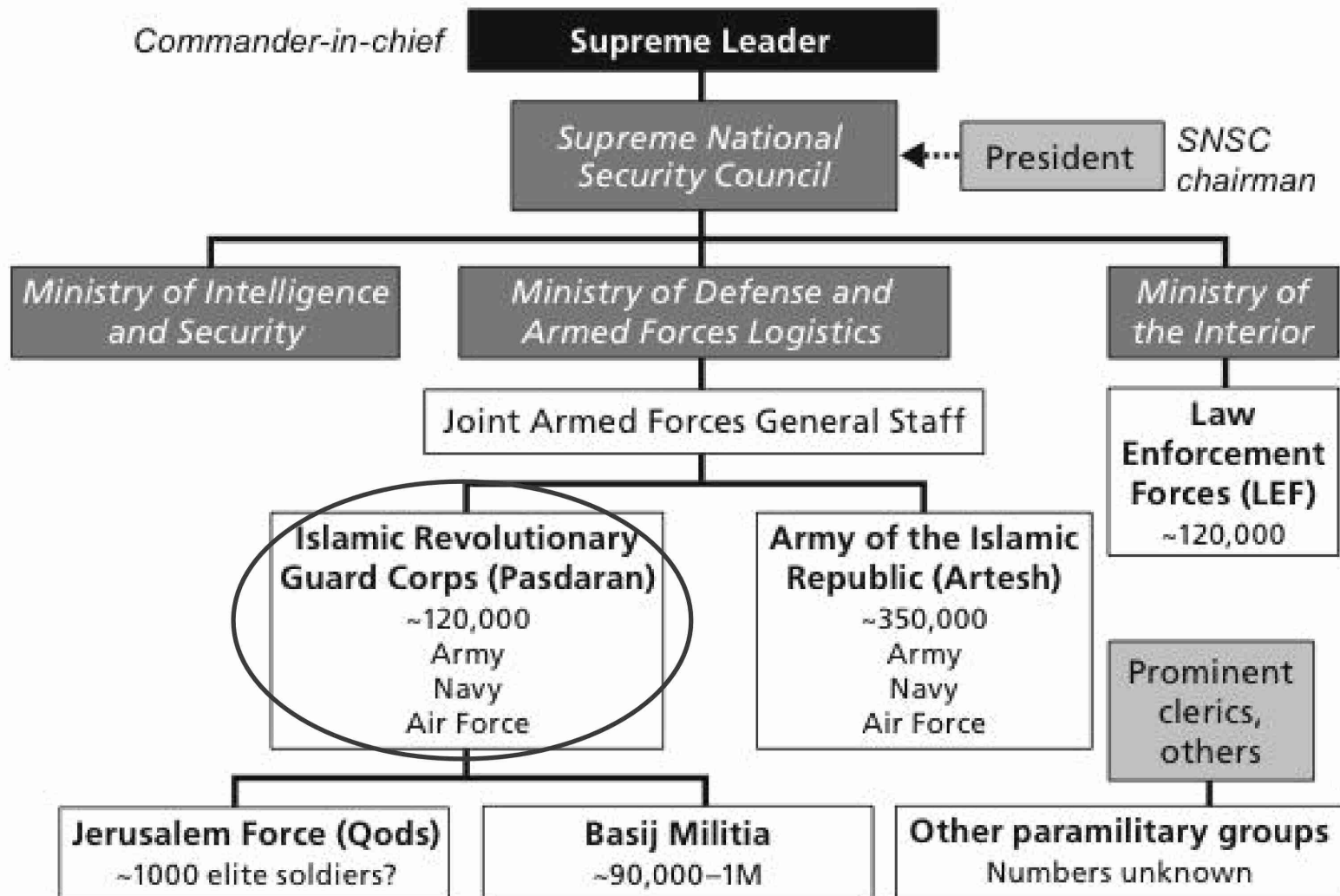
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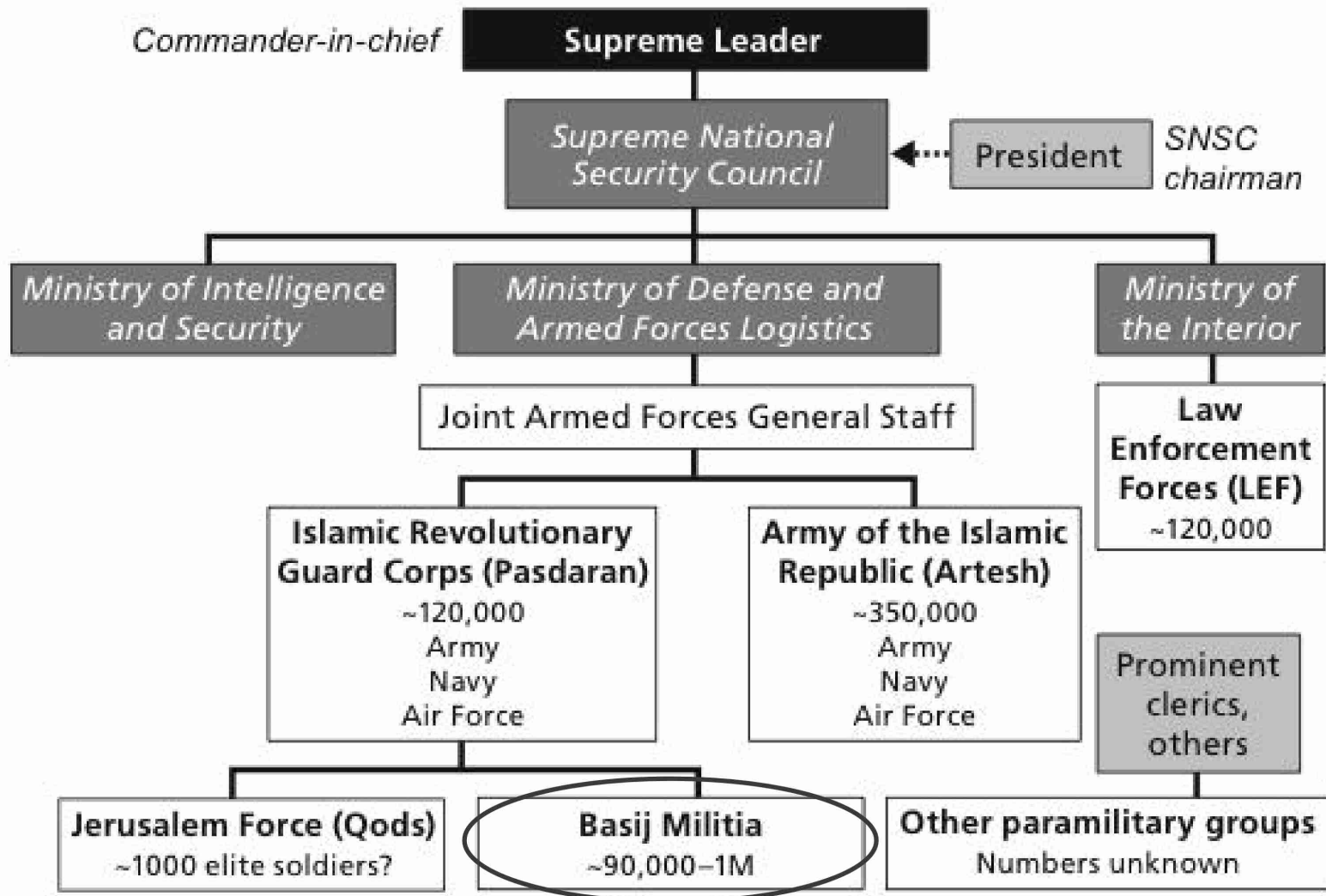
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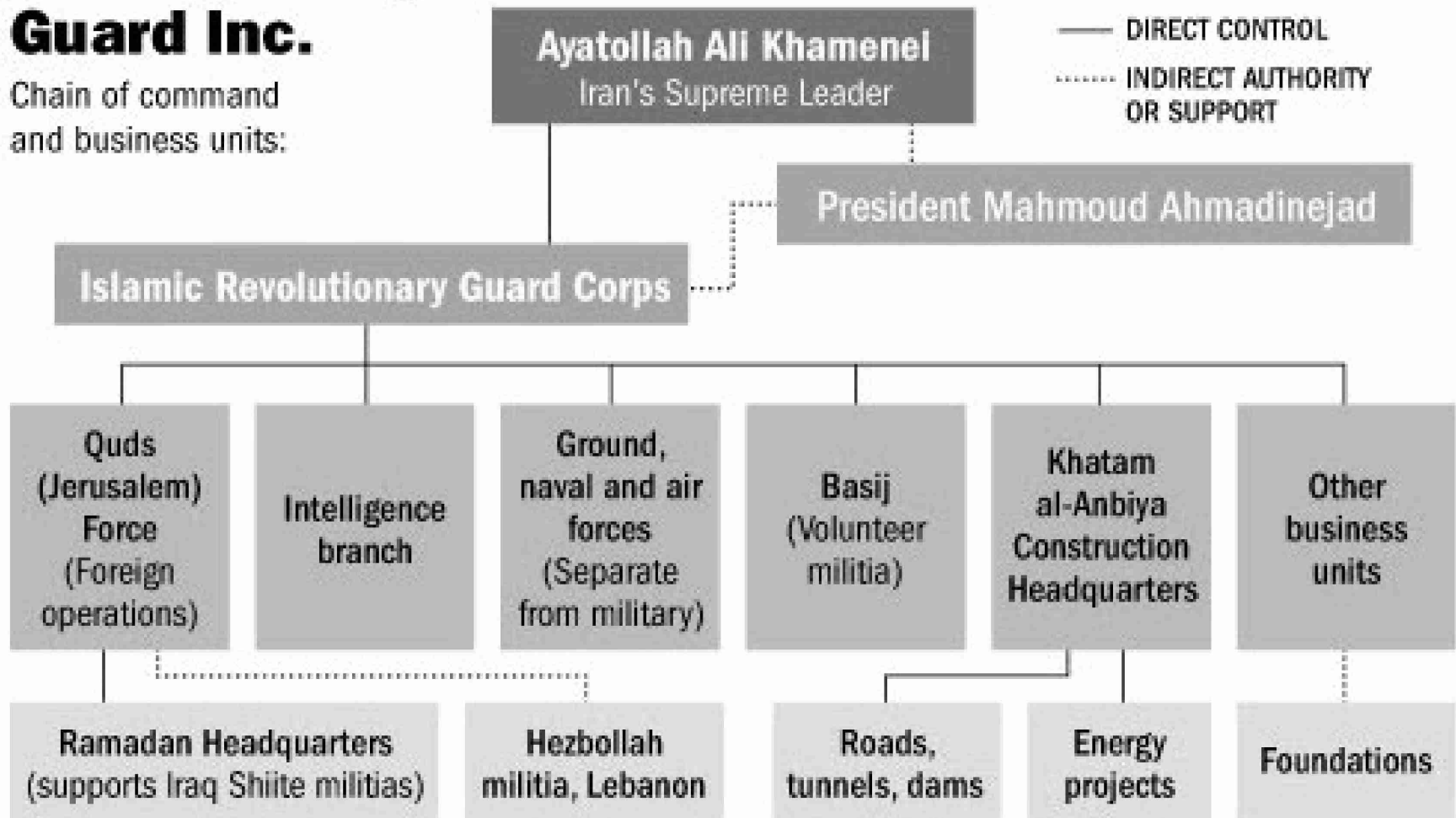
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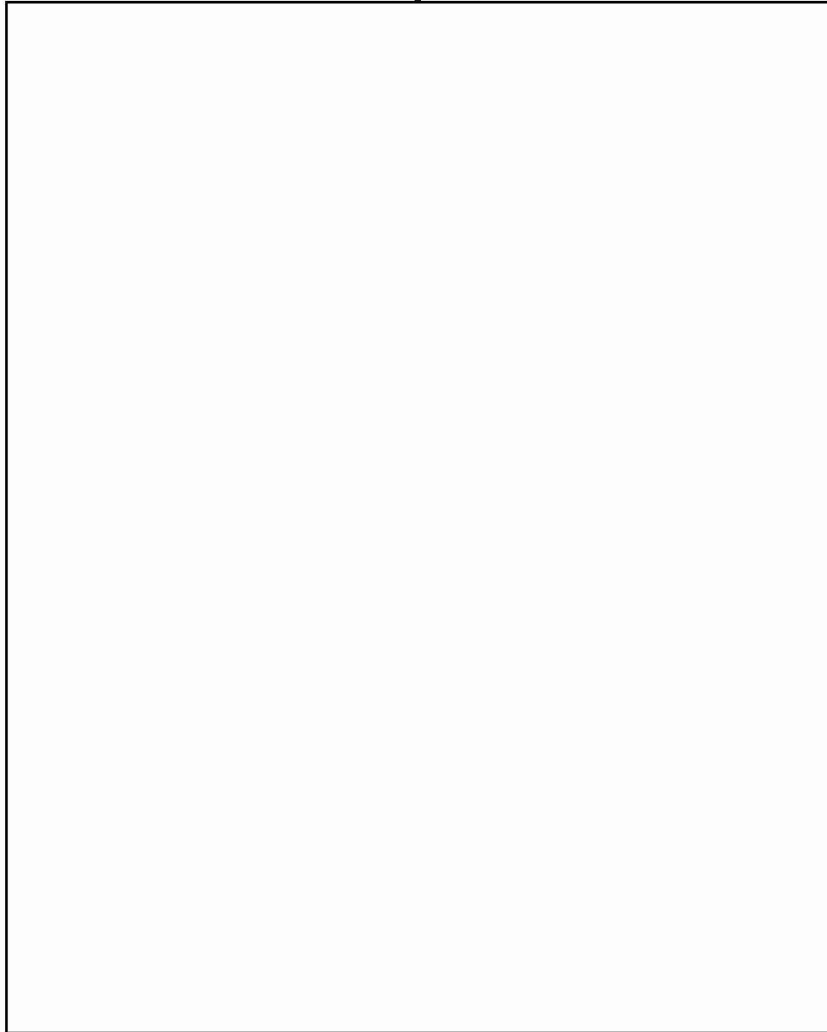
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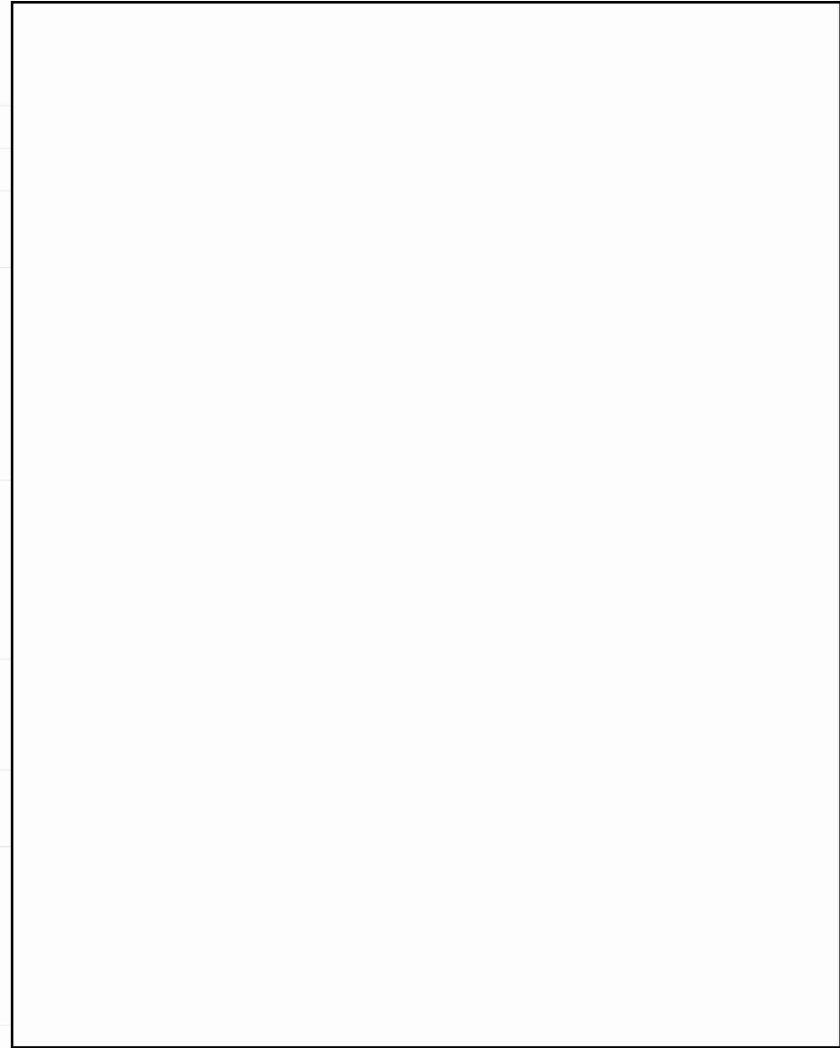
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