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# Middle East Brief

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## The Ideological-Political Training of Iran's Basij

Dr. Saeid Golkar

In the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential election in Iran, the Mobilized Resistance Force (*Niruy-e muqavemat-e basij*, better known as the Basij) was thrown into the limelight when it was used by the Iranian government to crush and eventually control opposition demonstrations. For the past twenty years, the Iranian state has used Ideological-Political Training (IPT) in order to remold the Basij as a new security force, tasked with confronting internal unrest and social revolt. Given the increasing role of the Basij in Iranian society and the increasing resort to it by the state as an instrument of suppressing internal unrest, knowledge of what the Basij is and how it functions has become vital. While there are some publications about the use of IPT with military forces in Iran, such as the Army<sup>1</sup> and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC),<sup>2</sup> less is known about the Basij. This Brief, the first of its kind, seeks to improve fundamental understanding of the Basij by examining the evolution of the organization's use of Ideological-Political Training.

### Background

The Organization for the Mobilization of the Oppressed (*Sazman-e basij-e mostazafan*, or Basij) was established on the orders of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in November 1979 to counteract the increasing domestic and international threats against the newly founded Islamic Republic of Iran. In 1981, less than a year after the beginning of the war with Iraq, the Basij became

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a unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (*vahed-e basij-e mostazafan-e sepah-e pasdaran*) and the most important organization in Iran for recruiting and organizing volunteers and deploying them to the war front. In 1990–91, by order of the new Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Basij unit of the IRGC changed its name to the Mobilized Resistance Force (*Niruy-e muqavemat-e basij*) and became one of the five main divisions of the IRGC, the others being its air force, ground force, navy, and Quds corps. In 2009, the Basij changed its name back to the Organization for the Mobilization of the Oppressed, and General Mohammad Reza Naqdi became its commander. With this last name change, came a change in mission: No longer one-fifth of the IRGC military forces, the Basij was now a special organization with the specific objective of confronting political and cultural threats against the regime.

According to Article 36 of the Basij constitution, one of its most important responsibilities is to train volunteers to “defend the country and the Islamic Republic regime.”<sup>3</sup> As such, from its first days, military and IPT training of volunteers was considered the most important means of confronting internal and foreign threats to the regime. Although the first IPT program was designed in 1985,<sup>4</sup> in the first decade after the revolution there was little need for it. The Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) and the strong religious and revolutionary beliefs of people during that time made ideological training superfluous. The end of the war saw a shift in the mission of the Basij to a security force responsible for local defense, suppression of urban revolts and protests, and ensuring the internal security of the regime, and at this point a course of ideological and political training was added to the Basij training system in order to strengthen the ideological beliefs of its volunteers. As time went on, the ideological component of the training became more important than the military one. Eventually, a new plan went into effect, on October 7, 1994,<sup>5</sup> according to which ideological-political training was incorporated into all levels of Basij training, from basic training to refresher courses.

When, in 1997, 73 percent of Basij and IRGC members voted for the reformist presidential candidate, Mohammed Khatami,<sup>6</sup> the Basij intensified its ideological training for its members. A new series of IPT courses was added to the Basij program: *velayat* (guardianship) in 1997, *basirat* (insight) in 1998, and *marefat* (awareness) in 2001. In 2002–3, the IRGC updated its own Ideological-Political Training: Not only would IPT now account for about 20 percent of IRGC and Basij education, but it was also made a requirement during a member’s years of service and before any member’s promotion. Furthermore, some IPT courses, such as Quranic sciences (interpretation, translation, and reading) and moral and Islamic ideology were required on a weekly basis,<sup>7</sup> and IPT was made available to the families of Basijis as well.<sup>8</sup> The result of all of these activities and policies was the widespread internalization of the regime’s values and beliefs, and the creation of a Basij voting block in support of right-wing candidates in subsequent elections.

Shortly after the 2005 victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the presidential election, the Supreme Leader’s representative in the IRGC reviewed the existing IPT programs and designed a new one for IRGC and Basij members that went into effect in 2008. According to the Deputy for IPT Education and Training of the IRGC, the main change made was replacing the previous “training approach” (*amoozesh mehvari*) in these programs with an “educational approach” (*tarbiyat mehvari*).<sup>9</sup> In other words, the priorities of the IPT program shifted from training Basij and IRGC members to educating them in various ideological and political issues.

Along with the Basij's most recent name change, the Basij's Deputy for Training (*moavenat-e amoozesh*) became the Deputy for Education and Training (*moavenat-e amoozesh va tarbiyat*), responsible solely for the organization's ideological and political training. Whereas before 2006 only 33 percent of the activities of the Deputy for Training were focused on IPT, with the transfer of the Basij's military training component to the IRGC, this office focused exclusively on IPT and management training.<sup>10</sup> Here again, organizational change went hand in hand with new IPT policies. The proportion of training time devoted to IPT, especially for special Basijis, was increased from 20 percent to 30 percent. Furthermore, Basijis had to take the IPT programs every year during their membership, compared with every four years in the past.<sup>11</sup>

## Basij Membership

According to IRGC employment regulations, Basij members are divided into three groups: regular, active, and special members. This classification is based on their training, the level of their involvement with the Basij, and their ideological commitment. According to my estimate, there are currently more than three million regular members of the Basij, 800,000 active members, and 200,000 special members.

Regular Basij members are those who only join the Basij, pass basic training, and become integrated. They usually have little connection with Basij bases. Active Basij members are regular members who have engaged in at least six months of continued activity, passed complementary training, and cooperated with the IRGC in accomplishing missions.

Special Basij members (also known as honorary Revolutionary Guards) are those regarded as having the military and ideological qualities of a Revolutionary Guard, and are technically members of the IRGC. They are designated as such after having passed "guard" (*pasdari*) special training courses, both military and ideological; they are committed to serving the IRGC full time, and are the core members of the Basij organization.<sup>12</sup>

According to the Basij constitution, ideological-political training is the responsibility of the Office of the Representative of the Supreme Leader (ORSL) within the Basij. The ORSL designs the programs, prepares the syllabi, writes textbooks, and trains IPT educators. Additionally, in collaboration with the Basij Deputy for Education and Training, it is responsible for implementing IPT programs. Within the ORSL, the Center for Islamic Research was established in Qom to produce and publish all the textbooks and pamphlets needed for all IPT programs

in the IRGC and the Basij. The Center also oversees the contents of any publications published by the IRGC and the Basij to ensure that they are in accordance with Islam and with the political ideology of the regime.<sup>13</sup>

IPT trainers in the Basij can be divided into three groups: organizational trainers, nonorganizational trainers, and invited trainers.<sup>14</sup> Organizational trainers are employed as full-time special Basij members, and their job is solely to teach the IPT course. A majority of this group, who constitute IPT's most important human resources, have high school diplomas or less, and have only passed short courses of ideological training (180 hours) in Qom and received a certificate from the Basij.<sup>15</sup> Some have studied at the Basij College for Research and Analysis (*majma-e barresi va tahlil-e basij*), branches of which have been established in every province in Iran. This "community college," which is controlled by the ORSL, offers four semesters (two years) of education for Basijis who want to become IPT teachers. Founded in 1994–95, it is very similar to Shahid Mahallati University, which serves a similar function for the IRGC. Its graduates specialize in ideological or political training and are sent throughout the country to teach IPT courses to other Basijis. According to the ideological-political deputy chief of the Basij, there are 30,000 organizational IPT trainers in the Basij,<sup>16</sup> 10,000 of whom have graduated from the Basij College for Research and Analysis.<sup>17</sup>

Nonorganizational IPT trainers are members of the Basij and the IRGC who are not official educators, but on account of their rank teach some IPT courses. Some are Basijis or Revolutionary Guards commanders who are selected to discuss political issues with elite Basijis such as students, professors, engineers, and doctors. And invited trainers are usually connected to conservative groups and communities such as the Imam Khomeini institution, run by Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi (a radical cleric believed to be close to Ahmadinejad); his disciples have taught many IPT courses, especially in the guardianship (*velayat*) program.

To improve the political knowledge of IPT trainers, a network of political guides (*hadyan-e siyasi*) was established to streamline the ideological training in the IRGC and the Basij and to supervise the teachers. This network, which falls under the political bureau of the IRGC, was temporarily established in 1996 and formally recognized in 2002. Political guides are the highest-ranked of IPT trainers and teach political courses, while other IPT trainers are usually responsible for the religious and Islamic courses. This reveals the priority given to political issues versus religious ones within IPT programs.

According to the chief of the political bureau of the IRGC, the Basij had more than 8,000 political guides as of August



2008,<sup>18</sup> who are assigned such specialties as political groups and ideologies in Iran (*jaryanhay-e siyasi dar jameh*), “soft war,” contemporary Iranian history, ethnic politics, and regional studies.<sup>19</sup> They are responsible for justifying the national, regional, and international policies of the regime and for removing doubts with respect to these policies among Basijis.

Unlike the ORSL, which is responsible for basic and permanent ideological issues, the political guides’ network has as its goal the preparation of IPT educators to answer current political questions.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, daily bulletins are issued on key social, political, and economic issues, guiding IPT educators with respect to how to provide convincing answers to Basij members, especially in potential crisis periods occasioned by elections, political unrest, and the like. For example, after the 2009 unrest and the formation of the Green movement, the political guides’ network published a series of new books for IPT educators entitled “The Enlightenment Movement” (*Nehzat-e roshanghari*), covering topics such as the velvet coup, media diplomacy and psychological warfare, and the Green movement in Iran. The aim of these books is to provide guidelines to IPT educators for explaining the Green movement—described in these books as an oligarchic movement of the rich—both to other Basijis and to the populace at large.<sup>21</sup>

## Common Ideological Training for Regular and Active Basijis

According to the constitution of the Basij, training for Basij members consists of introductory general training, complementary general training, specialized training, refresher training, and consistency training. Introductory general training, a fifteen-day program which is compulsory for those who are regular Basij members, comprises training in weapons, guard duty, civil defense, and first aid<sup>22</sup>—along with at least eighteen hours of ideological and political courses on “Basij Ethics and Etiquette” and “Major Islamic Commandments.”<sup>23</sup>

Complementary federal training follows for those regular Basij members who have been confirmed by Basij bases to have been active for six months and who complete a forty-five-day program of military and intelligence training, including a guide to weapons, target practice, courses on asymmetrical and psychological warfare, anti-riot training, intelligence theories, and an introductory guide to the armed forces. Ideological and political courses at this level include “Fluency in Reading the Quran,” “Jihad and Defense in the Quran,” and “Islamic Government and the Guardianship of the Jurist (*Velayat-e Faqih*),” as well as

second-level courses in “Basij Ethics and Etiquette” and “Major Islamic Commandments.”<sup>24</sup>

Specialized training, lasting for at least one month, is offered only to active Basij members who are interested in moving up the ranks of the Basij. Some of the most important training at this level is in advanced psychological warfare and anti-riot training. There are also courses related to religious beliefs, for example there is one on “Origin and Resurrection,” and another on “Leadership Ethics.” After passing these special courses, active members of the Basij can be commanders at resistance bases—often mosques, schools, and factories—where mostly regular and active members are organized.

To remain up to date, Basijis take part in “refresher” and “consistency” training every year. These sessions, mostly repetitions of complementary and specialized programs, are usually held for between five and fifteen days each year.<sup>25</sup> Members take various courses alongside their military training including ideological re-training courses.

Since special Basijis are full members of the IRGC, they must go through specially designed military training, similar to that required for members of other IRGC armed forces when they want to join the Basij; and like other IRGC members, they must also pass seven IPT courses, on:

- The fundamentals of belief (*osul-e aghayed*): ideology and Islam, monotheism based on reason and Sharia, prophecy, the imamate, resurrection, the hidden imam (*mahdaviyat*)
- Islamic ethics and education (*akhlagh va tarbiyat-e Islami*): education and training in Islam; family and social ethics; political, military, and economic ethics; the ethics of military management; the imams’ moral traditions generally and Khomeini’s moral traditions in particular
- Islamic commandments (*ahkam*): the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence, commandments regarding the use of public property or *bayt al-mal*, commandments concerning praying and fasting, economic commandments, military management commandments, and commandments prescribing emulation of the grand ayatollahs (*marajeh*)
- Familiarity with the Quran (*ashanayi ba Quran*): reading, translating, and interpreting the Quran, commanding the right and forbidding the wrong (*amr beh maruf va nahy az monkar*), and guardianship (*velayat*) in the Quran
- History of Islam (*tarikhe Islam*): the history of Shia Islam, from the time of the prophet to the period of the hidden imam
- Sociopolitical knowledge: familiarity with the Islamic political system, the Islamic revolution and its roots,

political thought in Islam, the history of Iranian foreign policy, public opinion and the mass media, contemporary Islamic freedom movements, Palestinians and Israelis; and

- The Islamic defense system (*nezam defaei Islam*): defense and jihad (holy war), military management and defense systems in Islam.<sup>26</sup>

These courses were increased to eleven in 2008, with topics such as logic and philosophy, the psychology of military force, the sociology of war, and management theories (pertaining both to Islamic military management and to management sciences generally) being added to IRGC and Basij IPT training.<sup>27</sup>

## Continual Ideological and Political Training

With the dramatic increase in Basij membership due to the monetary and non-monetary benefits offered members (such as a 40% university entrance quota)<sup>28</sup> and the simultaneous weakening of *ideological* motivations for joining the organization, the Basij, in cooperation with some other institutions, become responsible for holding regular ideological and political retraining sessions during the year under the name of “Continual (*Tadavom*) Ideological and Political Training.” In these programs, which are offered as both regular and correspondence courses, Basij members must study the books and pamphlets designed and compiled by the ideological-political deputy chief of the Basij, who is himself overseen by the Representative of the Supreme Leader.

In contrast to the basic training that is common to all Basijis across different ages and literacy levels, *Tadavom* programs vary depending on members’ education, age, and sex. Level 1 is for those who have elementary or junior high school education; Level 2 is for those who are in or have finished high school; and Level 3 is for members with higher education.<sup>29</sup> *Tadavom* programs, which have been approved by the office of the commander in chief of the armed forces, are referred to respectively as guardianship (*velayat*), insight (*basirat*), and awareness (*marefat*), and the righteous (*salehin*). Their goal is to ensure Basij members’ loyalty to the ideology of the regime, while at the same time creating new staff for the regime.

### The Guardianship (*Velayat*) Plan

The *velayat* (guardianship) plan, which was one of the first ideological programs of the Basij, was at first designed (in 1997) specifically for Basij university students, but owing to its desirable results it is now being implemented with most Basij groups: students, university professors, doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Active members from different groups are chosen to attend an intensive ideological

and political program every summer for several weeks. The program aims primarily to “improve understanding of Islamic fundamentals” among Basij students and to “remove their doubts in order to perform the commands of the Supreme Leader.” The goal is to prepare a new generation to confront the opposition, particularly student opposition groups.<sup>30</sup>

The *velayat* plan has been provided on two levels since 2001. The introductory level is held in all provinces of Iran. For the elite students who complete this introductory training, a supplementary one is held in special camps.<sup>31</sup>

### The Insight (*Basirat*) Plan

The *basirat* plan was the second IPT program instituted by the Office of the Representative of the Supreme Leader (ORSL) in the IRGC in 1998. The aim of this program was the improvement and reinforcement of the religious beliefs and political insight, in the Reform Era, of the top ranks of Revolutionary Guard commanders. Although, in the beginning, “some of the IRGC commanders did not agree to take this program,”<sup>32</sup> owing to the emphasis of the Supreme Leader on increasing and amplifying the Guards’ political knowledge and analysis, the program has now become a requirement. Like other ideological plans, the *basirat* program, which was initially designed only for a special group—namely, IRGC commanders—has been implemented for all Basij members, including regular Basijis as well as the families of special and active Basijis.

### The Awareness (*Marefat*) Plan

The *marefat* plan was designed in the year 2000 for IRGC ground and navy forces, but in 2001–2 the Basij became the main organization responsible for implementing it.<sup>33</sup> This is a three-day, forty-hour program that aims to identify internal and foreign threats, explain religious and ideological principles, and interpret current political issues.<sup>34</sup> It is held on two levels in all Basij ranks: introductory and supplementary. According to the Basij commander, in the plan’s first year (2003), more than one million four hundred thousand members took these courses.<sup>35</sup>

### The Righteousness (*Salehin*) Plan

In the third decade of the Islamic Republic, a *Tahavvol va Ta’ali* (Change and Elevation) plan was designed that aimed to improve the quality of Basij and IRGC members’ ideological training, and that has become the most important plan used in the Basij organization. This plan, based on the Supreme Leader’s sermons and edicts, began in 5,000 Basij bases in June 2008. It has been held in mosques and neighborhoods, for teenagers, youth, and middle-aged people, and aims to improve the ideological beliefs of Basij members as they confront the “cultural invasion” and other soft threats.<sup>36</sup>

## Contents of Ideological-Political Training

This plan has some similarities with other ideological plans but is also different. The difference is in its implementation model. Unlike the other plans, which are conducted in modern classes, with a teacher lecturing to students, the *salehin* plan was designed based on a seminary school model. Students form a training circle of fifteen to twenty people, and sessions are participatory and conducted like seminars. A high-ranked Basiji or clergyman, always introduced by a Basij commander, is chosen as the educator and is responsible for encouraging students to participate in discussions and to ask any questions they may have about Islam, ideology, or current political issues; the educator, in turn, is expected to provide them with convincing answers. To be an educator, candidates must pass an intensive training program covering the *salehin* plan as well as their duties as laid out by the Basij Deputy for Education and Training.

The most important aim of the *salehin* plan is to control the Basijis.<sup>37</sup> In fact, through this plan, Basijis are under the complete surveillance of their educators. In addition to attending the seminars—usually held two nights a week, in a mosque that serves as a Basij base—members have to spend time together during the week and take part in group activities, such as visiting the families of martyrs, visiting martyrs' cemeteries, hiking, and camping. At the heart of the *salehin* plan is establishing and strengthening the relationship between educator and student. The educator is charged with maintaining contact with his trainees outside the Basij base, guiding and leading them and supervising them in the course of their everyday lives.<sup>38</sup> To do this the educator has to establish an emotional relationship with his students.

The seminars themselves are devoted to analysis of current political and social issues; question-and-answer encounters on moral, political, and ideological questions; book-reading sessions focusing on ideological books; classes on Islamic culture (with the focus on jihad and holy defense); and Quranic sessions involving reading and memorizing the Quran and becoming familiar with the prophet's and imam's lives—though the texts used and issues addressed vary depending on members' age, literacy, and social situations. In accordance with a suggestion of the Supreme Leader, the most important textbooks in this program—such as *Islam and Current Necessities (Islam va moqtaziyat-e zaman)*, *Imam and Leadership (Imamat va rahbari)*, and *About the Islamic Republic (Piramoone Jomhooriye Islami)*—are mostly written by Ayatollah Motahhari, a theoretician for the Islamic Republic of Iran. According to the Oppressed Basij Organization's chief, there are now 17,000 *salehin* circles in the Basij, but this number should reach 100,000 sometime in 2010.<sup>39</sup>

According to the chief of the ideological-political bureau in the Office of the Representative of the Supreme Leader (ORSL) in the IRGC, the core concerns of ideological-political education in the Basij and the IRGC are: the religion of Islam (*diyanat*) and guardianship (*velayat*), the importance of purification [of the soul] (*tazkiyeh*) over training, the role of the ideological guard (*pasdar*), and the revolutionary value and culture of *martyrdom*.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, a study of the contents of IPT programs shows that they aim to ensure the internalization and improvement of the religious and political beliefs of Basijis. The religious content is usually permanent, whereas the political content changes depending on the state of current political affairs in Iran.

The religious content of IPT programs focuses on theology (*din shenasi*), on Islam as a religion and ideology, on prophecy (*nabovat*) and Shia leadership (*imamat*), and on morality and spirituality. The courses start by proving the existence of God, demonstrating the necessity of prophecy, establishing Islam as the most complete religion in comparison with other religions, and upholding the legitimacy of the imams as successors of the Prophet Mohammad. The most important part of this section is the discussion of *Mahdaviyyat*, the "hidden imam"; of the role of clerics in the era of the hidden imam; and of the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship), according to which jurists are the true successors of the hidden imam and have the right to rule in Islamic societies. In the next section, emulation (*taghlid*) is emphasized—including why it is important for Muslims to emulate the grand ayatollahs, and especially the Supreme Leader, as the legitimate successors of the hidden imam—along with the relationship between religion and government, the role of religion in man's social and individual life, and religious leadership.

IPT trainers also argue for the superiority of Shia over Sunni. Here a very brief and sometimes distorted interpretation of other religious heterodoxies, such as Wahhabism and Bahaism, is presented. The argument presented is that these groups are deviant religious sects established by Western countries to divide the Islamic countries and exploit them: "With these discussions, Basijis will understand that global imperialism has created these groups and [has] been paying all of their budgets."<sup>41</sup>

Mysticism is another religious philosophy which IPT programs have been trying to critique and confront. Because of the appeal of mysticism to many of today's youth in Iran, the program criticizes Buddhism, Gnosticism, and Sufism as "false or faked mysticism," promoted by enemies.<sup>42</sup>



Against this backdrop, the IPT programs work to present Islam, and particularly Shi'ism, not just as a religion but as an ideology, which stands in contrast to Western ideologies such as liberalism. The attention given to ideology in the IPT training of military forces is based on Ayatollah Motahhari's writings, which have had an important influence on the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic. Motahhari makes a distinction between *weltanschauung*, which is a comprehensive worldview, and ideology, which is a doctrine or a set of rules. For him, Islam as a *maktab* or school of thought is both a *weltanschauung* and an ideology that is rooted in human nature or instinct (*fitrat*). While Western schools of thought, he argued, are based on special interests such as class or race. In this framework, Islam is not only a *weltanschauung* which interprets the world, but is also an ideology, which has programs for the social and political life of Muslims. Conversely, Western ideologies are only sets of rules or false *weltanschauungs*. During the Pahlavi era, Ali Shariati and Motahhari, the founders of Islamic ideology, tried to formulate Islam as a revolutionary ideology in competition with Marxism.

As a result, in any IPT program there are discussions about Occidentology (*gharb shenasi*) and Western ideologies. The program again varies according to the audience: Thus, Occidentology for university students and professors in the *basirat* plan is about "the critique of modernity; crises of modernity (ethical, identity, environmental, economic, and philosophical); the principles of the modern West (humanism, technologism, nihilism and capitalism, tolerance and democracy); the Islamic revolution and the West (conflict or compromise); secular science and religious science."<sup>43</sup>

The second, and the most important, part of any IPT program focuses on political education. The issues discussed range from domestic to international affairs. There is some focus on the constitution, elections, the various political parties and groups, and the structure of political power in Iran; other topics include Islamic movements, "knowledge of the enemy" (*doshman shenasi*), political groups and ideologies in Iran (*jaryanhay-e siyasi dar jameh*), and the achievements of the Islamic revolution (*shenakht-e dastavardehay-e inqelab-e Islami*) and of the Ahmadinejad government<sup>44</sup>—along with nuclear technology and relations with the United States. After the disputed presidential election of 2009 and the ensuing political unrest, the subjects of the "velvet revolution" and "soft war," the terms used to refer to the Green movement, were added to the curriculum. That is why the *basirat* plan for 2010 was announced as focusing on the struggle against the "soft (or cultural) war" as well as on, political knowledge and insight and morals and spirituality.<sup>45</sup>

Since one of the most important elements in the regime's ideology is the "enemy," knowledge of the enemy (*shenakht-e doshman*) is an inevitable component of any IPT program.<sup>46</sup> In fact, all IPT programs have a unit for discussing how "enemies," domestic and international, are trying to confront the Islamic regime on different religious, political, economic, and social levels. Here, the study of different intellectual and political groups in Iran, from the Constitutional Revolution (*mashrooteh*) of 1906 to the reform period (1997 onwards), becomes crucial, as the goal is to show how all of these groups, except for Islamic intellectuals, have been dependent on the West.

Although there are no statistics about the relative proportions of religious and political instruction in IPT programs, one can surmise that the amount of political instruction has increased steadily during the last decade. Whereas in 2002–3 only 10 percent of the *velayat* program dealt with political issues,<sup>47</sup> the 2009 Basij organization's cultural report indicates that the majority of discussions were about contemporary political affairs.

## Conclusion

During the second decade of the Islamic Republic, and especially during the reform era, the number of ideological training sessions for IRGC and Basij members increased. Various new programs were designed and implemented for different groups of Basij members and even for their families. The goal of these IPTs has been to increase the ideological knowledge of Basijis so as to enhance their loyalty to the Islamic Republic and to enable their use as an internal security force in confrontation with various opposition groups in Iran.

There are few official reports about the actual impact of IPT training on Basij members. Some studies show that the training was not successful: One report showed, for example, that after a decade, the student-oriented *velayat* plan did not succeed in fully training Basij students to carry out their responsibilities in classrooms, dormitories, and universities.<sup>48</sup> Political doubts evidently still existed among Basij students.

In addition, by some accounts there were active and even special Basijis who refused to take part in the violent suppression of the opposition after the disputed presidential election of 2009, making it even clearer that the IPT programs had not been entirely effective in carrying out their stated goals.<sup>49</sup> This explains why the regime has decided to increase the extent of IPT programming, while at the same time creating training circles for Basij members in which they are thoroughly controlled and supervised. Yet, despite the increasing

imposition of IPT training and the various adjustments made to its programs, the question remains: In an era dominated by information communication technologies, to what degree can and will the Basij be an effective force for combating internal strife in Iran?

## Endnotes

- 1 Rebecca Cann and Constantine Danopoulos, "The Military and Politics in a Theocratic State: Iran as Case Study," *Armed Forces & Society* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998).
- 2 See, for example, [Frederic Wehrey, Jerrold D. Green, Brian Nichiporuk, Alireza Nader, Lydia Hansell, Rasool Nafisi, and S. R. Bohandy, \*The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps\* \(Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009\)](#), and [Ali Alfoneh, "Indoctrination of the Revolutionary Guards," \*Middle Eastern Outlook\*, no. 2 \(American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington, DC, February 2009\).](#)\*
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