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POLICY BRIEF

Leaked Document Casts Doubt on Cohesion of the IRGC

MARCH 30, 2023 | Andrew Ghalili, ***SENIOR POLICY ANALYST***

A 44-page leaked document containing notes from a January 3 meeting between top Islamic Republic officials, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders, and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei shows that major cracks are starting to appear within the IRGC. Though it is impossible to assess the legitimacy of this document with absolute certainty, it potentially represents a major development in the ongoing revolution in Iran in which Iranians are calling for an end to the Islamic Republic. The report also dovetails with developments inside Iran observed by NUFDI and other analysts.

The Bottom Line

- In the leaked notes from the January 3 meeting, top Islamic Republic officials, including the Minister of Intelligence and the chief of the IRGC Intelligence Organization, depict a security force that is rapidly losing its loyalty to its leaders, and faith in their cause, due to extreme corruption and the brutalization of Iranian women and youth. Still, it is important to be cautious with reported "leaks" that make the Islamic Republic look weak, especially with a document that contains so much detail without audio to confirm its legitimacy.
- The IRGC is at the core of the Islamic Republic's power, both domestically and internationally. Yet many fighters now reportedly refuse to carry out their orders, and some have allegedly stolen food from their unit to give to the people. One IRGC commander expressed concern that, instead of food, fighters would soon be stealing weapons.
- The document also shows that, from the regime's perspective, Iranian women and youth are the leading forces in the revolution, as some IRGC personnel appear to struggle with the morality of beating and arresting Iranian women. Islamic Republic intelligence reportedly estimated that four million 14–18 year old Iranians are opposed to the regime.

IRGC Loyalty to Khamenei is Fading

- The morale of IRGC personnel, as well as their loyalty to the Islamic Republic, appears to be extremely low, according to data and anecdotes from top officials in the regime.
- Khamenei's representative in the IRGC, Abdollah Haji Sadeghi, estimated that anywhere from 12 to 68 percent of each IRGC unit has shown signs of defection.
- IRGC commanders expressed strong opposition to how the regime has brutalized protestors, with one saying, "I am ready to right now return the rank insignia that his eminence (Khamenei) put on my shoulders with his sacred hands to his eminence and go back home so I could keep my head up in front of my family."
- Top IRGC and regime officials harshly and directly criticized regime leaders for their corruption and economic mismanagement. This type of strong and direct criticism is relatively unprecedented in the Islamic Republic, and reflects the regime's current weakness.

Young Iranians are Fearless. It's Terrifying the Regime.

- The Islamic Republic dictatorship is used to controlling Iranians through violence and fear. But, based on the comments from IRGC commanders in this January 3 meeting, the Iranian people—especially the youth—are no longer afraid of the regime. Instead, the regime and the IRGC appear afraid of them.
- Understating the impact that Iranian students have made through their persistent, organized protests, the Minister of Intelligence, Esma'il Khatib, said the Ministry of Intelligence "believes that school and university students are more important than striking petroleum workers."
- Some fighters in the security forces appear increasingly unwilling to cross one specific line: attacking Iranian women and girls. Abbas Banai Kheir-Abadi, who is in charge of the Fars province corps' welfare and benefits, said, "My force has no inclination to engage women and girls," but added that they have no problem attacking Iranian men.
- Note that these comments are from January, prior to the mass poisoning of Iranian schoolgirls across the country. It is very likely that the poisonings exacerbated the already-growing resentment of the regime among some in the security forces.

The United States Should Pay Attention

- The Islamic Republic's security forces becoming increasingly dysfunctional and disloyal to the regime, as depicted in this document, is more evidence that, as NUFDI suggested in its Maximum Support policy initiative, the United States "should begin post-transition strategic planning to support a democratic transition in Iran."
- As IRGC commanders lament the growing dissension amongst their fighters, U.S. national security and intelligence agencies should encourage high-ranking regime officials to defect from the regime and engage with the mainstream, secular, democratic opposition to absorb these defections.