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The Revolutionary Guard: Gaining Power in Iran?

By TIME STAFF Thursday, Aug. 13, 2009



Members of the Iranian revolutionary guards shout anti-Israel and anti-US slogans at the weekly Friday prayer sermon at Tehran University. ATTA KENARE / AFP / Getty

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The shadowy Revolutionary Guard already oversees a 130,000-strong parallel army and run large swatches of Iran's economy, from dentist clinics to the country's controversial nuclear program. But signs have emerged in recent weeks that the elite military arm isn't satisfied: it may just want to run the entire Islamic Republic.

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The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), or Sepah for short in Farsi, is widely believed to have played a large role in orchestrating the crackdown on political dissidents and protesters following the disputed presidential election. Its political influence within the regime has always far exceeded the actual army's and has increased exponentially since President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected to office in 2005. But the speculation among Iranian opposition sources is that, these days, the IRGC's powerful patron, whose second term began officially last week, has now become its puppet, falling under the influence of a gang of security chiefs (the so-called "New Right") that harbors schemes to further radicalize the regime, or to topple it in a military takeover.

(What's ahead for Iran's protesters?)

The IRGC's maneuvering has been quite public. On August 9, it was a top Revolutionary Guard commander who escalated the ongoing confrontation with the opposition leadership by calling for their arrest. "What is the role of [former President Mohammad] Khatami, [former prime minister and presidential candidate Mir-Hossein] Mousavi and [presidential candidate Medhi] Karroubi in this coup?" asked Yadollah Javani, the

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"It has to do with money and power and giving [Libyan ruler] Gaddafi what he wants. My feelings, as a victim, apparently count for nothing."

SUSAN COHEN, mother of a victim of the 1988 Lockerbie plane bombing, upon news that the terminally-ill Libyan Abdelbaset Ali al-Megrahi, convicted for the crime, may be set free next week on compassionate grounds

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