Iran’s Revolutionary Guards (Sepah-e-Pasdaran)

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | International Relations*

Why in News?

- The IRGC, or Sepah-e-Pasdaran, was one of the ***earliest revolutionary institutions decreed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.***
- **Aim -** To preserve the revolution and the theocratic, constitutional system Khomeini and his followers built.
- **Post-Revolutionary Origin (1979) -** It is created after the 1979 revolution that brought down the monarchy of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.
- The revolutionaries were *doubtful of the loyalty of Iran’s regular Army* that was commanded by royalists until the revolution.
- They wanted a fighting force that was completely loyal to the clergy. So, they went on to build one.
- **Ideological Foundation-** Khomeini envisioned the Guards as "soldiers of Islam," tasked specifically with preserving the theocratic, constitutional system.
- **Impact of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) –** This war transformed Pasdaran into a powerful fighting force.
- The participation of ideologically driven Guards in the war, which ended in a ceasefire after both sides suffered heavy casualties, laid the ground for the IRGC to emerge as the most influential wing of the state.
- **Dual-Track Military Structure -** Today, the IRGC and Iran’s regular military (Artesh) operate as *two parallel armed wings of the state.*
- While Artesh and the police force are entrusted with protecting the country’s territorial integrity and order at home, Pasdaran’s primary responsibility is the protection of the revolutionary government.
- With a military wing, an overseas operational unit (Quds Force) and a civilian voluntary organization (Basij) at home, the IRGC’s operations overlap with the regular service forces.
- But, under the direct command of the Supreme Leader, the Guards have

the resources and capability to influence the direction of the foreign and security policies of the state more than any of its other wings.

- **Organizational Components and Capabilities -** The IRGC is a self-contained military-industrial complex with its own:
- **Ground Forces -** Stationed across all 31 Iranian provinces to ensure internal stability.
- **Aerospace Force -** Manages Iran's strategic missile and drone programs.
- **Navy -** Responsible for patrolling maritime borders, most notably the Strait of Hormuz, a global energy chokepoint connecting the Gulf to the Indian Ocean.
- **Basij-** A civilian volunteer paramilitary organization used for domestic surveillance and social control.
- **External Influence - The Quds Force & "Axis of Resistance"**
- The Quds Force (Jerusalem Force) serves as the IRGC's elite overseas operational wing, tasked with neutralizing enemies and expanding Iranian influence through unconventional warfare and regional alliances.
- **The Axis of Resistance -** A network of non-state and state actors supported by the IRGC to counter Western and Israeli influence. Key members include:
- **Levant -** Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas, and Islamic Jihad (Palestine).
- **Arabian Peninsula -** Houthis (Yemen).
- **Iraq & Syria-** Various Shia mobilization brigades.

Reference

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