



Iran: IRGC Establishes Biological Defense Headquarters

OE Watch Commentary: In the excerpted article from *Tasnim News*, an outlet affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Mohammad Pakpour, the commander of the IRGC Ground Forces since 2009, discusses the IRGC's role in countering the coronavirus outbreak in Iran. He describes a crucial if not pivotal role for the Ground Forces in all aspects of the Iranian public health fight, from securing the supply chain to sending forces into the infected zones to spray disinfectant.

As the article discusses, the IRGC Ground Forces' actions include "a deployment of modern war battalions, including the 24th modern warfare group, the elite Steadfast Commando Battalions and the Mirza Kuchek Khan brigade, into areas where the coronavirus has spread... Experts from the IRGC Corps of Microbiology and Virology have also been deployed in the areas infected with the coronavirus." (Mirza Kuchek Khan, considered a national hero in modern Iranian history, led a Robin Hood-like movement in Gilan during World War I in the early 1920s.)

That these elite forces, alongside the Health Ministry and the IRGC's own microbiology and virology centers have joined together to form a biodefense base under the command of the Ground Forces highlights the primacy of the IRGC within the Iranian system. It also shows the domestic role the IRGC assumes in any time of crisis. The use of elite forces could suggest that even the most ideologically pure and well-paid IRGC troops would abide by the call to enter the infected zones.

More broadly, the severity of Iran's outbreak highlights Iran-China ties and has led to complaints by ordinary Iranians that the government's slow response and its initial refusal to suspend flights to China were due to the regime's prioritization of its relations with Beijing over the health and well-being of its own citizenry. That the initial epicenter of the Iranian outbreak was Qom also may focus some local animus toward the clergy and their prioritization of pilgrimage to Qom's shrines (and the money it brings them) over the public good. After the outbreak was well underway, the Iranian authorities began taking other measures such as the closure of schools and the disinfection of all buses and metros at the end of each line. Pakpour continued to report that he had implemented a careful hygiene regimen for military garrisons and had started health screenings for anyone entering the bases.

While Pakpour describes the nitty-gritty of Iran's response, the broader Iranian press continues to eschew responsibility and to spread the conspiracy that the coronavirus was a deliberate American plot to sabotage both Iran and the Chinese economy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“There have been deployments...into areas where the coronavirus has spread.”



photo : Amir Hesaminejad

Anti-Coronavirus disinfection, Qom, March 2020.

Source: *Tasnim News*, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1398/12/10/139812101029196819806244.jpg>



Continued: Iran: IRGC Establishes Biological Defense Headquarters

Source: “Tashkil Qarargah-e Zisti dar Niru-ye Zamini Sepah (Opening of a biological defense base in the IRGC Ground Forces),” *Tasnim News*, 2 March 2020. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1398/12/12/2214777>

Formation of a Bio Headquarters in the Ground Forces

General Pakpour outlined the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps [IRGC]’ Ground Forces’ actions in recent days to combat the coronavirus, adding, “In recent days, there has been the deployment of modern war battalions, including the 24th modern warfare group, the elite Steadfast Commando Battalions and the Mirza Kuchek Khan brigade, into areas where the coronavirus has spread, and these units are now stationed in the areas of concern.” He added, “Experts from the IRGC Corps of Microbiology and Virology have also been deployed in the areas infected with the coronavirus.”

The commander of the IRGC Ground Forces further stated, “There have been meetings with the Self-Sufficiency Research and Jihad Organization for the use of spray systems and DSM machines for disinfection in the areas infected with the virus, and also to coordinate military units to combat coronavirus and to coordinate the purchase of necessary items for disinfection, tracking and supply of disinfectants and cleaners, etc., and these have been the most important steps the IRGC Ground Forces have taken in recent days to combat the coronavirus.”

Source: “Chinese Twitter diplomacy on coronavirus,” *Tehran Times*, 13 March 2020. <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/446046/Chinese-Twitter-diplomacy-on-coronavirus>

The continuation of Mahan Air flights to China increased concerns among journalists and social media users as well.

Source: “Coronavirus in Iran: A case of misinformation, conspiracy theories and propaganda,” *Deutsche Welle*, 9 March 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-in-iran-a-case-of-misinformation-conspiracy-theories-and-propaganda/a-52695116>

Hossein Salami, the current chief of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps, has blamed the United States for the COVID-19 epidemic in Iran. “We will win in the fight against the virus, which may be the product of the American biological invasion, which it first spread to China and then to Iran and the rest of the world,” Salami said Thursday, without providing any evidence for his claims.



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>