



Iranian Influence Extends to the Mediterranean

OE Watch Commentary: In 2007, Mohammad Ali Jafari succeeded Yahya Rahim Safavi as the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and immediately set upon restructuring it. Because Jafari calculated that the greatest threat to the Iranian regime would come from inside the Islamic Republic rather than outside it, he reorganized IRGC units so that there would be one in each province (and two in Tehran). On 23 July 2011, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei delivered a speech to Iranian sailors at Iran’s main Persian Gulf port of Bandar Abbas, telling the Iranian Navy that they were “symbols of the might of the Iranian nation” and the vanguard of Iranian force projection. Three months later, Ali Fadavi, commander of the IRGC Navy, said “The military power of the United States is maritime,” he explained, “Naturally, the main battlefield is the sea and so the Revolutionary Guards Navy will be the center of resisting and defending and safeguarding the Islamic revolution.” Iranian leaders and military officials began talking about Iran not only as a regional power, but a pan-regional power as well (See, “Iran’s Navy Expands Operational Range,” *OE Watch*, January 2013). On 24 November 2014, Deputy IRGC chief Hossein Salami declared, “While, one day, our nation was fighting the enemy at the shore of Karkheh River [in the Iranian province of Khuzistan], now it has expanded its strategic borders in this fight against enemies to the Eastern Mediterranean and Northern Africa.”

“The Islamic Revolution has expanded its strategic influence to the Mediterranean Sea.”



Deputy Commander of the Armed Forces General Staff Mehdi Rabbani.
Source: Tasnim News, <https://goo.gl/rLfffc>, CC 4.0.

While Iranian officials have previously described Iran’s strategic boundaries as the Eastern Mediterranean (“Strategies Underlying Iranian Soft Power,” *OE Watch*, March 2017), the comments by General Mehdi Rabbani, deputy commander of the Armed Forces General Staff, in the accompanying excerpted article, seem to focus more on extension of Iranian boundaries in a manner broader than its naval exploits. Against the backdrop of Iranian-directed militias in Iraq, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s recent offensive against opposition forces, Houthi expansion in Yemen, and Hezbollah’s unprecedented grip over the very top reaches of Lebanese state institutions, it is the IRGC rather than the Iranian Navy which is at the vanguard of Iranian power projection. His remarks also stand in sharp contrast to those of many Iranian diplomats, who downplay Tehran’s regional involvement.

That Rabbani speaks of the spread of the Islamic Revolution highlights the ideological and revisionist nature of Iranian regime ambitions. Tehran’s goal is not only to have allies, but rather to have clones. It also suggests that if Bashar al-Assad is able to consolidate his power in Syria, Iran plans to extract an ideological price in greater Islamism. Indeed, the ideological ambition of Iranian leaders and the IRGC has also been recently demonstrated by repeated efforts to proselytize in Morocco.

Also of note is the paranoid tone of Rabbani’s remarks. He views the entire world plotting against Iran, and refuses to recognize the agency of Iran’s own leaders in the Islamic Republic’s failings. Hence, the 2009 post-election unrest becomes foreign-sponsored sedition, rather than the result of blatant election manipulation and widespread Iranian distrust toward their leadership. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Sardar Rabbani: Enghalab-e Islami Nafuz-e Estratezhik Khod ra ta Mediteraneh Gosteresh Dadeh Ast (General Rabbani: The Islamic Revolution has Extended its Strategic Influence to the Mediterranean),” *Tasnim News Agency*, 12 June 2018. <https://goo.gl/1Zjb6b>

According to the defense correspondent of the Tasnim News Agency, Brigadier General Mehdi Rabbani, deputy commander of the Armed Forces General Staff, speaking to the special unit staff of Khorasan Razavi province, pointed out that the enemy has short, medium, and long-term projects to address the Islamic Republic, and stated that proxy war and the use of terrorists in the region was a short-term strategy of the enemy to confront the Islamic Republic. He added, “The enemy used a combination of unconventional weapons in its wars and today, in addition to diplomatic wars, it uses economic and ethnicity [strategies] and imposes sanctions. To confront us, the enemy has a short-term strategy of creating and supporting terrorists. In the medium term, it looks for social weakness and, in the long-term, it seeks to undermine the system.”

The head of the Armed Forces General Staff assessment team continued: The enemy began their threats with terrorist groups at the time of the Islamic Revolution, and after that imposed eight years of unequal war against us. After that, the elements of the terrorist groups managed the sedition of 2009 against us and then the enemy turned to economic threats and cultural invasion.

General Rabbani stated: “While the enemy has mobilized all its capabilities against the Islamic Republic, the Islamic Revolution has expanded its strategic influence to the Mediterranean Sea and has extended its defensive borders in the form of a resistance axis to all parts of the region.”