

# **RS 84C Iran insights - Iran's intelligence and security apparatus**

By Oliver Jones, Research Associate, U K Defence Forum

## **Introduction**

Intelligence services throughout the Middle East have traditionally played a key role in providing political stability and Iran is no exception to this rule<sup>1</sup>. Whilst Iran's intelligence and security apparatus is a difficult subject to research much can be learned from their historical development.

This paper is an historical overview of the development of Iranian intelligence services, starting with a look at the pre-revolutionary services under the Shah and continuing on to look at the activities of the Iranian intelligence services up to the present day. It also gives a general assessment of capabilities, motivations and also what kind of a threat (if any) Iranian covert policy can pose to the UK.

## **A history of Iranian intelligence**

### **Pre-revolutionary intelligence in Iran**

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Iran came to be seen by many in the West as an important strategic partner in the struggle against the Soviet Union. As a result, the US and UK provided significant support to Iran, who in turn supported covert Anglo-American operations. The former US ambassador to Iran William H. Sullivan suggested that the US maintained at least one covert "listening post" within Iran for collecting Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) from the Soviet Union. US forces were also apparently instrumental in opposing the Tudeh (Iranian Communist Party) throughout the Cold War period.

In 1957 Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi established the National Intelligence and Security Organisation (SAVAK), with the cooperation of American and Israeli authorities. As the SAVAK was primarily tasked with securing the regime it was initially geared towards counter-subversion and counter-intelligence. Primary targets included dissident organisations and ethnic groups identified as opponents to the regime. Although technically a civilian organisation, military personnel periodically served in the SAVAK. The organisation's leadership came to be closely associated with the military, with three of four heads of SAVAK being generals and the fourth having served in the army. Despite this the organisation was deliberately located outside of the military bureaucracy, in order to prevent

power being concentrated within the Army. The Shah feared that such a concentration of power had the potential to invite a further coup against his own reign. To ensure that the SAVAK remained loyal to the regime and could never be used to foment insurrection its officers were also regularly shuffled.

At the height of its powers the SAVAK was staffed by almost 15,000 employees and wielded almost unlimited authority. Yet the early years of the SAVAK were plagued by mistrust and problems. The SAVAK's first two directors - General Teymur Bakhtiar (1957-61) and General Hosain Pakravan (1961-66) - were both dismissed due to accusations of treason and failure to crush opposition.

In the early 1960's the focus of SAVAK fell upon Iran's opposition parties and in particular the communist Tudeh party. The Tudeh ("Party of the Masses") was founded during 1941-42, with the stated objective of:

"on the one hand to expose the nature of imperialism and the expansionist and savage policies of fascist Germany, and on the other defend the Soviet Union as the first socialist state in the world."

During the early 1950's, the Tudeh provided support for the policies of the populist Mossadeqh government. The Tudeh was particularly supportive of oil nationalisation, a policy that was instrumental in galvanising British support for Operation AJAX, the 1953 coup which saw the Shah seize power from the democratically elected government.

In 1957, the Shah sought to help consolidate his power by forming the SAVAK. Initially the SAVAK did not make as great a use of the tools of repression against these groups which came to characterise the organisation in later years. SAVAK's responsibilities were: the penetration of radical and left wing movements; the vetting of officials and government departments to ensure that left wing sympathisers did not gain power; and purging left wing elements from the armed forces.

By the early 1960's protests against the government of the Shah were increasingly met by violence from the military and security forces. It was this violence and repression which led to a change in the opposition movement. By the end of 1963 Iranian security forces had effectively crippled most forms of dissent by violently putting down public protest and infiltrating and arresting the membership of opposition groups.

"The Shah's determination to use massive force, the army's willingness to shoot down thousands of unarmed demonstrators, and SAVAK's eagerness

to root out the underground networks of the Tudeh and the National Front, all combined to compel the opposition, especially its younger members, to question the traditional methods of resistance - election boycotts, general strikes, and street demonstrations. Not surprisingly, in the next few years, militant university students formed small secret discussion groups to explore new methods of resistance, to translate the works of Mao, Che Guevara, and Fanon, and to learn from the recent experiences of China, Vietnam, Cuba, and Algeria...After 1963, militants, irrespective of their ideology, had to ask themselves the question 'What is to be done' The answer was clear: 'guerrilla warfare'<sup>2</sup>

These Guerrilla movements were initially considered more of a nuisance than a genuine threat to the Shah's regime. But despite this, the use of force by small clandestine groups had predictable consequences for the growth of SAVAK. The organisation successfully countered the early attempts by opposition groups to form armed cadres. In 1965 over fifty arrests were made as a result of the formation of the 'Party of the Nation of Islam'. The following year saw the arrests of religious students trying to form the 'Front for the Liberation of Iran'. In 1969 members of the 'Revolutionary Organization of Iranian Communists' were arrested after they robbed a bank to finance guerrilla operations. These arrests resulted in relatively lenient punishments - especially in comparison with the reputation the SAVAK was later to acquire - as they were thought to be the actions of a few students with little consequence for the fate of the government.

During the 1970's, however, guerrilla movements emerged that were able to execute successful operations against the regime. Success can largely be attributed to cooperation and training provided by Palestinian resistance movements. The left-wing Iranian 'Fedayi' movement, for example, received training from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and other groups supported by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). This caused the threat to become far more significant in the eyes of the regime, resulting in more oppressive measures to end revolt, including the use of torture and killings.

Although the primary role of the SAVAK was the suppression of internal opposition they were also involved in some overseas operations. It was involved in the supply of arms to Lebanon's 'National Liberal Party', after their leader faced internal opposition against his attempts to seek a further term in office. The SAVAK also had a major role in the monitoring of overseas dissidents. Student organisations were under particularly close surveillance,

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with many students arrested upon their return to Iran. There is also evidence that the SAVAK became involved in assassination attempts against opposition figures living in exile by the late 1970's, probably due to changing attitudes regarding the threat from any forms of dissent. This could be partially attributed to the increasingly effective guerrilla groups at home.

By the late 1970's SAVAK had gained a worldwide reputation for brutality, and had some successes against Guerrilla movements. However it was unable to prevent the Iranian revolution and the installation of the "Islamic Republic" and, indeed, the end of the organisation itself.

### **Post-revolutionary intelligence in Iran**

After the 1979 Islamic revolution the Iranian intelligence service' missions were similar to those of any revolutionary state. Covert activities remained focussed upon the elimination of dissidents and defectors at home and abroad, with the gathering of information a lower priority. Initially, the Khomeini government relied on the PLO for some of its foreign intelligence information, however from the outset it is clear that the the Soviet Union's KGB utilised this connection to pass disinformation to the Khomeini regime, characterising the US as being continually embroiled in anti-Khomeini coup and assassination attempts.

The Islamic Republic established several intelligence and security agencies, the most significant being the SAVAMA (Ministry of Intelligence and National Security). The first leader of the SAVAMA was General Hussein Fardust, a former SAVAK officer. Under his guidance the SAVAMA inherited the overseas intelligence functions of SAVAK whilst the new Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (PASDARAN) was granted responsibility for internal security as a separate organisation. Later in life this distinction appears to have broken down, with the PASDARAN becoming increasingly involved in external intelligence operations.

Throughout the 1980's Iran's security forces maintained their focus on the repression of those it deemed to be counter-revolutionary. This included former supporters of the Shah and left wing organisations. In 1983 Iranian intelligence agents even cooperated with US counterparts to curtail the activities of the Tudeh Party. US intelligence provided lists of Tudeh members that was used by Iranian agencies to kill or imprison party activists and expel eighteen Soviet diplomats<sup>3</sup>. Yet like the SAVAK, the early days of the SAVAMA were

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also characterised by mistrust, with its first head meeting a similar fate to that of SAVAK's, having been accused of working for the KGB<sup>4</sup>.

In 1984 the SAVAMA was reorganised into the Ministry of Information and Security (MOIS). Reform occurred amid increasing concerns of the continued presence of left wing political and paramilitary movements. Several prominent religious leaders advocated an amnesty with old military intelligence and SAVAK officers in return for their recruitment in order to utilise their expertise and experience on the revolutionary left. As a result of the reorganisation many former employees of the SAVAK were re-recruited by Iran's principal intelligence agency.

This new policy was also influenced by a need from the regime to employ officers with expertise on the Iraqi Baathist regime in the middle of the Iran-Iraq War. This likely reflects on Iranian intelligence's poor performance against Iraq to this point, with a need for those with knowledge of the Baath party to be recruited into key positions. Despite suggestions that the Iranian provisional government regime received warning of Iraq's plan to invade from the US government<sup>5</sup>, no action appears to have been taken. This suggests that either Iranian intelligence agencies were unable to effectively corroborate US information or that the government wilfully ignored intelligence they were provided. As a result, intelligence failure may also have prompted the recruitment of former SAVAK specialists, in an effort to improve analysis.

Besides the MOIS the other "pillar" of Iran's post-revolutionary intelligence apparatus is the PASDARAN. The organisation received recognition as an independent Ministry in 1982, though it had performed internal security functions since the revolution. Alongside this internal security function it is also clear that the PASDARAN developed capabilities for external operations in support of Iranian revolutionary foreign policy goals Reports suggest<sup>6</sup>. that the PASDARAN cooperated very closely with MOIS on overseas operations, and that the external operations of the IRGC (Quds) may now have become the de facto external operations department of the MOIS.

During the 1990's Iranian intelligence agencies continued to target overseas dissidents. This included the planning of assassination attempts against dissidents like Shahpour Bakhtiar, a key figure of the Iranian left who was appointed Prime Minister by the Shah in 1979 to placate opposition, and prominent Kurdish opposition leaders.. Iranian intelligence agencies

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also attempted to assassinate those deemed to be enemies of Islam. MOIS officers were speculated to be directly involved in the gathering of operational intelligence in preparation for an assassination attempt upon Salman Rushdie<sup>7</sup>. Iran's intelligence agencies have also been accused of state sponsored terrorism. Tehran was accused by Argentina of providing "unspecified support<sup>8</sup>" to Hezbollah for the 1994 bombing of a Jewish centre in Buenos Aires and the Israeli Embassy

Indeed cooperation with Lebanon's Hezbollah has been a longstanding policy for Iran's intelligence agencies. The relationship complements the Iranian security services' overall objective to defend Islam and counter threats from Israel. Iranian support for terrorist operations has reportedly included logistical and material support alongside the provision of operational intelligence. It is also speculated that support is coordinated by intelligence personnel operating out of Iranian diplomatic premises. According to a 1990's assessment on Iran's intelligence services:

"The largest European Al-Qods facility was in the Iranian embassy in Germany. The embassy's third floor had twenty Qods employees coordinating terrorist activities in Europe...Recently, major operational centres [sic] were established in Bulgaria, and Al-Qods has attempted to establish another operational facility in Milan"<sup>9</sup>

It has also been suggested that throughout the 1990s the MOIS received direct support from Russian intelligence agencies, including training and communications equipment from Russia's foreign intelligence service<sup>10</sup>. Prior to this it is also indicated that Iran established some form of intelligence relations shortly after the rise of Khomeini, though these were only limited<sup>11</sup>. Although . Despite significant ideological differences, Russian-Iranian intelligence cooperation has gathered momentum over the last two decades. Prior to this, Iranian-Russian relations were complex, characterised by some cooperation, but also a significant amount of action against each one another. This included brutal Iranian suppression of Soviet-backed dissidents. Yet Tehran has a number of interests that make cooperation with Moscow essential. Both states are keen to limit US influence in Central Asia, alongside the need to suppress potential ethnic unrest. Iran is also actively seeking modern Russian air-defence equipment. Exchanges of such products may gather momentum in light of the

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successes of NATO's Suppression of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD) missions over Libya against Cold-War era equipment.

Despite extensive reorganisation Iran's intelligence agencies have remained susceptible to infiltration. In 1989 it emerged that US intelligence had maintained a number of human intelligence (HUMINT) sources within the Iranian military. Iranian HUMINT and covert operations also suffered severe setbacks as a result of US activities. Operation SAPPHIRE, for example, led to the unmasking of Iranian intelligence officers around the world after Iran's alleged involvement in the bombing of a US barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1997.

Recent Iranian intelligence operations have also reflected historical trends by largely focusing upon covert action in support of Iranian foreign policy, continuing support for Hezbollah and involvement in Iraq after the 2003 US-led invasion. Iranian intelligence personnel have been accused of training Iraqi insurgents in sophisticated weapons manufacture techniques<sup>12</sup> and possibly in the direct targeting of operations against US forces<sup>13</sup>.

## **Iranian intelligence activities and capabilities**

### **Technical intelligence**

Despite financial and technological constraints Iran appears to be developing signals intelligence (SIGINT) capabilities. In 2006 Jane's reported that two joint Iranian-Syrian SIGINT stations had been operating in the Al-Jazirah region in northern Syria and on the Golan Heights. It was also estimated that two additional SIGINT stations were expected to be operating in northern Syria by January 2007<sup>14</sup>. Iran's SIGINT stations are reportedly funded by the IRGC and are believed to be an attempt to develop intelligence capabilities throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East. However, Iranian capabilities are still limited with little scope for high-level strategic SIGINT gathering from these sites. According to the Israeli press, the intelligence posts appear to be primarily focused upon providing support to Hezbollah forces in Lebanon<sup>15</sup>. Other technical collection capabilities are also limited to small military operations, with only a few specialised reconnaissance aircraft available.

The extent of the damage suffered through the now infamous "Stuxnet Computer Worm", which targeted Iranian nuclear technology, also suggests that Iranian cyber capabilities are not significantly developed. "Stuxnet", a computer worm designed to cause

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significant damage to infrastructure in the physical world, represents a significant leap in both operations against Iran's nuclear program and in terms of cyber operations. According to some expert opinion it is likely that the Virus was created by the US and Israeli intelligence agencies, possibly acting in conjunction with Germany<sup>16</sup>. Iran may well be starting to take cyber-threats more seriously. In the summer of 2011, according to several media sources, Iran established a "cyber command" to tackle the threats to Iran from the cyber realm and to conduct retaliatory operations.

### **Human intelligence and covert activities**

While technical intelligence programmes remain under development, human intelligence (HUMINT) is likely to remain Iran's principal intelligence activity.

A 1997 assessment of Iranian intelligence organisations stated that:

"Iranian collection ability depends upon a target's function and accessibility, and the local security environment. The relative effectiveness of that collection capability can, in general, be mapped in terms of a series of concentric circles surrounding Iran. Other factors being equal, collection activity is more productive in areas geographically closer to Iran."<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, Iranian intelligence activities have been at their most productive in states located close to Iran, but have experienced problems against developed intelligence and security apparatus in stable states. Iran has utilised its geographical proximity to states like Iraq deploy intelligence officers, and agents, and it has exploited instabilities to recruit assets. A US government diplomatic cable exposed by Wikileaks demonstrates clearly that Iran has been highly active in deploying assets to Iraq in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion.

"Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - Quds Force (IRGC-QF) officers are active in Iraq, conducting traditional espionage and supporting violent extremists as well as supporting both legitimate and malign Iranian economic and cultural outreach."<sup>18</sup>

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Iran may have operated several intelligence rings in other Middle Eastern states. Alleged espionage rings have been 'uncovered' in Kuwait and Bahrain in 2010 and 2011 respectively. This suggests that Iranian intelligence agencies target states with large Shi'ite communities, with a view to exploiting religious ties or discontent with ruling Sunni elites.

Despite the setbacks of the late 1990s Iran continues to operate intelligence networks beyond the Middle East. Washington remains concerned that Iran's diplomatic initiatives throughout Latin America are accompanied by a significant expansion in intelligence activities<sup>19</sup>. Iran has sought the friendship of the so called "Pink Tide" states that elected left wing governments during the first decade of the new millennium. Initiatives have included extensive economic cooperation and investment. Iran sponsored, for example, the development of a major car manufacturing plant in Venezuela. Improved ties with Brazil influenced their decision to reject US calls in 2010 for sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme.

Iran has also sought improved diplomatic and economic relations with sub-Saharan Africa. In 2010 Iran was accused of attempting to ship large quantities of arms bound for Gambia through Nigeria<sup>20</sup>. Despite attempting to foster relations with Gambia since the 1990's, the incident led the country to sever ties with Iran. Tehran also had significant political and military ties to Sudan. IIRCG-Quds forces have reportedly assisted Sudanese counterparts with training<sup>21</sup>.

Despite Tehran's ideological opposition to the Taliban and al-Qaeda it is speculated that Iran's intelligence services have been willing to cooperate with them in order to meet policy objectives. Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer, says that Hezbollah facilitated meetings between such organisations and Iranian intelligence agencies as early as the 1990's. A 2002 Testimony from George Tenet, the former director of the CIA, also indicates that Al-Qaeda and Iran may cooperate on the basis that "my enemy's enemy is my friend", at least in the short term. It was also reported in March 2011 that Iran has directly supplied sophisticated weaponry to Taliban forces<sup>22</sup>, only a decade previously Iran had been actively undermining the Taliban by providing significant arms and support for the Northern Alliance<sup>23</sup>.

Iranian HUMINT operations are likely to be severely hampered by Iran's significant use of Covert Action. Although in recent years much of this has been limited to the Middle East and

Central Asia, with few of the assassinations of dissidents that marked the 1990's, Iran is still active in supporting violent operations. This has been shown through the deployment of significant assets to Iraq, where Iran, through the IRGC, has been active in both political operations to influence Iraqi electoral and local politics and violent operations involving the training of insurgent groups.

Added to this, it is still apparent that Iran is willing to use its intelligence and diplomatic personnel in direct support of probable covert action and terror operations. In a previous study of Iranian intelligence organisations conducted in the 1990's it was noted that: "Tehran does little to conceal its role in these assassinations [also applicable to other "covert" operations]. Iranian Embassy employees are frequently used in support roles"<sup>24</sup>. This is an accusation that still appears to be true with reports that Iran has been caught attempting to use its diplomatic privileges to smuggle weapons across borders in Iranian diplomatic bags<sup>25</sup>. By utilising its intelligence services and diplomatic premises in this fashion Iranian intelligence is providing itself with a severe handicap.

### **Counter-intelligence**

Since the turn of the century Iran's intelligence services have suffered a number of setbacks in the field of counter-intelligence. In 2004 US intelligence managed to acquire information from an Iranian government laptop detailing designs for a nuclear warhead. Western intelligence services have also benefitted from the defection of high IRGC ranking officials like General Ali Reza Asgari. The defection of Asgari was particularly significant as he was intimately involved in establishing Iran's links with Hezbollah. According to media sources Asgari may also have provided Israel with intelligence to support Operation ORCHARD, an Israeli strike on an apparent Syrian nuclear reactor. The penetration of Iran utilising opposition ethnic groups, in particular the Kurds of Northern Iran, also remains a major concern for Tehran. Iran has also apparently failed to detect several US led operations to sabotage its nuclear program through the deliberate provision of faulty equipment and schematics. In 2000 and 2003, according to a special report by the Financial Times, the United States co-opted intermediaries into the provision of faulty blueprints for a nuclear warhead, and sabotaged centrifuge devices for uranium enrichment.

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In 2005 Iran established a new counter-intelligence agency known as “Oghab 2”. The agency was formed in response to the discovery of secret nuclear facilities at “Parshin” and “Lavizan”. Accordingly, Oghab 2 is charged with the protection of Iran's nuclear programme from foreign intelligence threats. Despite political and financial endorsement by the “Supreme National Security Council” and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Oghab 2's record has been less than impressive. In 2007 it was reported that a key Iranian nuclear scientist had been killed, possibly by Israel's Mossad. This was followed in 2009 by further revelations of a secret nuclear facility near the city of Qom and the disappearance of Shahram Amiri, another Iranian nuclear scientist. In 2010 a third scientist, Massoud Ali Mohammadi was assassinated, though it is unclear what his links to the Iranian nuclear programme may have been. During this period Oghab 2 has seen a significant increase in its resources, but has still been unable to prevent major setbacks.

Yet Iran's intelligence services have scored some notable successes. Iran has occasionally managed to disrupt the intelligence activities of its adversaries. In 2007, for example, Iranian intelligence ordered the seizure of 15 British sailors who were patrolling in the Gulf. The seizures were made after a British television programme raised Iranian suspicions regarding the nature of the Royal Navy's activities, which were, in part, aimed at gathering intelligence on Iran. It has also been suggested that Iran's intelligence services have penetrated insurgent groups utilised by the Western powers for intelligence gathering. This includes the “Peoples Mujahedin of Iran”, who were thought to be instrumental in providing Washington with intelligence on Iranian nuclear activities. It is speculated that Iranian intelligence's penetration of this movement allowed Tehran to pre-empt Washington's announcement of the presence of nuclear facilities at Qom, and send a letter of confirmation to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In 2011 it was also reported in the LA times that Iranian counter-intelligence efforts had managed to dismantle a network of more than 30 US “espionage and sabotage” agents, who had been recruited and run through US embassies in the UAE, Turkey and Malaysia.

It is also clear that Iran is not averse to interdicting what it feels may be intelligence operations conducted against it from US platforms outside Iranian territory. In January 2011 Iran brought down two US unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's) operating outside Iranian airspace<sup>26</sup>. Claims have also been made that Iran's intelligence agencies successfully penetrated Israel's Mossad foreign intelligence service during their search for perpetrators of the assassinations of Iranian scientists, though the public declaration of such a coup would seem highly irregular and calls the idea into some doubt.

## Conclusion

Several important conclusions can be drawn about the motivations, capabilities and the threat posed by Iran's security and intelligence services. Firstly, Iran's intelligence and security apparatus has remained largely consistent throughout its historical development. It remains an internally focused establishment with a particular focus on the safeguarding and preservation of the current regime. Iran's intelligence agencies supports this objective with covert overseas activities. However the agencies' capacities and commitment to these operations weakens in correlation to their distance from Iran.

As a revolutionary organisation Iran's intelligence services are committed to the global spread of the ideals of the Iranian revolution. However revolutionary zeal is countenanced by pragmatism. The Iranian intelligence establishment is no stranger to realpolitik. Iran will seek to counter individuals and organisations regarded as an internal threat, but it will abandon this approach if the costs of pursuit become too high and clash with other foreign policy objectives.

Among the most significant threats posed by Iranian intelligence services is the export of violent conflict to neighbouring states in the Middle East. Tehran's support for Hezbollah is likely to threaten Israel for the foreseeable future. Iranian support for insurgent groups in Afghanistan and Iraq is likely to remain a foreign policy option. Political developments emanating from the 'Arab Spring' will also be of particular concern to Iran. Regime change in Syria is likely to have a significant impact on Iranian intelligence as is the potential for change in states with a significant Shi'a population such as Bahrain. More than any other area of "intelligence" work Iran seems to prioritise direct covert intervention in problems often using violent methods. Speculation over Iranian cooperation with Al Qaeda is a worrying issue, but it is important to note that ideologically these two actors are opposed, cooperation, if any, will be limited, and it will be possible to change Iranian policy in this area.

Iran's ability to gather covert intelligence is likely to remain limited. Technical intelligence disciplines remain at the developmental stage and represent a limited threat. Traditional espionage efforts are hampered both by a penchant for violent or interfering covert operations (which exposes networks and attracts significant attention) and by severe operational deficiencies. Iran appears unconcerned with maintaining cover of its intelligence officers and openly uses its diplomatic premises for intelligence missions. Intelligence often appears to be collected primarily through Iranian diplomatic missions and front companies within the target state. This in turn hinders operational security and offers a "home-ground" advantage to domestic security agencies.

Even if Iran does manage to overcome the obstacles facing its collection effort it is still likely to be significantly hampered by problems with intelligence analysis. Open source information regarding Iranian analysis capabilities remains unavailable. Yet it is unlikely that Iran's intelligence services are politically neutral. As the IRGC Qods Force is largely responsible for external intelligence operations it is probable that most activities conform to the specific worldview of the Iranian revolution.

Iran's counter-intelligence activities have also suffered from establishment a chain of severe setbacks. As a result, it seems unlikely that Iran has an extensive network of high-value sources of foreign intelligence. Penetration of the likes of Mossad are likely to remain subject to speculation. Iran's domestic intelligence apparatus also appears to have its problems. Despite the establishment of a well-equipped and staffed new agency, Iran's nuclear programme was unable to remain hidden from Western intelligence agencies.

As a result of such weaknesses, it is unlikely that Iran will be able to sustain any major information gathering operations against the United Kingdom. Indeed, Tehran is likely to experience difficulties in countering UK operations against Iran. The main challenge that Iran may pose to the UK is by threatening British interests in the Middle East and Central Asia. Currently Iranian activity in Afghanistan puts UK military personnel at increased risk, and certain regional allies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel remain in direct opposition/competition with Iran. Potential cooperation between Iran and Al Qaeda may also be a concern. However the events of the "Arab Spring" have yet to be truly felt, if at any point in the future should UK and Iranian interests align, over Afghanistan, or Arab revolutions, or a host of other issues Iranian cooperation (albeit limited) will likely be forthcoming and threat the to the UK significantly curtailed..

### **About the author**

Oliver Jones is a Research Associate with the U K Defence Forum and works as Programs Assistant at the Atlantic Treaty Association In Brussels. Oliver gained a Master's Degree in Intelligence and International History from Aberystwyth University in 2011.

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December 2011

