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University under Siege: The Case of the Professors' Basij Organization

Saeid Golkar

The purpose of this article is to analyze the evolution of the Professors' Basij Organization (PBO) and its role in maintaining state control over Iranian universities. This study will examine why and how the PBO became involved in politics in general and in controlling Iranian universities in particular, and will discuss the implications of the expansion of the PBO at Iranian universities. While the PBO has been helping the Islamic regime control Iranian universities through different methods, including repressing the student movement and training a new cadre for the Islamic regime, it has transformed into one of the most influential organizations in Iran's political structure, especially after hardliners assumed power in 2005.

The emergence of Mahmud Ahmadinejad in the 2005 presidential election brought a new force to Iran's political power, namely, the Professor's Basij Organization (PBO). Ahmadinejad himself was a Basiji professor. This organization is one of several branches of Iran's militia group known as the Basij (in full: *Basij-e Mostaz'afin*, "Mobilization of the Oppressed"), which is part of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).¹ The Basij was established by Ayatollah Khomeini's order to defend the newly established clerical regime in 1980. It was upgraded to comprise one of five branches of the IRGC — with the navy, air force, ground forces, and the Quds Force representing the other four — after the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988.² The Basij dramatically expanded into society with the support of Ayatollah 'Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader. For example, in 1991, the Basij created its student branch, known as the Students' Basij Organization (SBO), to intimidate and confront opponents among students and faculty and to defend conservative values in Iran's universities.³ The Basij now has

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1. Nikola B. Schahgaldian and Gina Barkhordarian, *The Iranian Military Under the Islamic Republic* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1987); and Roy Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

2. Mehdi Khani, *Dar-amadi bar Shanakht-e Basij* [Introduction to Knowing the Basij] (Tehran: Culture and Knowledge Institute, 2001).

3. Saeid Golkar, "The Reign of Hard-Line Students in Iranian Universities," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Summer 2010), p. 26.

19 different branches for different social strata in Iran, including the PBO.⁴ The PBO is primarily responsible for recruiting and organizing Iranian professors at universities and asserting political control over Iran's learning centers.

Despite the importance of this subject, there exist only a few publications about the Basij in general⁵ and the Basij's branches at universities in particular.⁶ While those publications have focused on the SBO in universities,⁷ there are no academic publications about the Basij professors' branch, even in Persian. With the increasing influence of the PBO in the Islamic regime as well as in institutions of higher education, the study of this organization and its functions is essential. This is the focus of the present article.

Due to the scarcity of current research on the PBO, this article uses various resources for data collection. Both primary and secondary resources were used, including legal documents, official statements, online content, and direct observation. Moreover, because of the sensitivity of the topic and the restrictions on accessing necessary and relevant information, this study uses examples of PBO activities at different universities instead of focusing on Basiji professors at one specific university. Some of the observations presented in this article are based on my personal experience as a lecturer in the Iranian university system from 2004 to 2009.

This study will proceed in two sections. First, I will discuss the history and transformation of the PBO, focusing on its assertion of control over Iranian universities a decade ago. Next, I will explain the PBO's potential for success or failure, as well as the PBO's structure and membership.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PBO (2001–2005)

The PBO was officially established in 2001 for the purpose of carrying out the objectives of Iran's clerical regime and strengthening its authoritarian apparatus on university campuses. According to its first chief, General 'Ali Asghar Zare'i, the PBO was set up at the suggestion of some veteran professors who had participated in the Iran-Iraq War. In 1998, they requested the creation of a new organization in universities that was separate from the SBO.⁸ However, the course of Iranian politics after the victory of

4. Other branches of the Basij include the Worker Basij Organization, the Employee Basij Organization, the Guilds' [Asnaf] Basij Organization, the Medical Society Basij Organization, the Engineers' Basij Organization, the Lawyers' Basij Organization, the Artists' Basij Organization, the Sports Society Basij Organization, the Cultural/Teacher Basij Organization, the Students' Basij Organization, the Clergy's and Islamic Students' Basij Organization, the Panegyrists' [Maddah] Basij Organization, and the Media/Journalist Basij Organization, the Women's Society Basij Organization, the Pupils' Basij Organization, Babies' Basij Organization, the Retirement Basij Organization. For a full explanation of these institutions, see, Saeid Golkar, "Organization of the Oppressed or Organization for Oppressing: Analysing the Role of the Basij Militia of Iran," *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (December 2012), pp. 455–471.

5. Ali Alfoneh, "The Basij Resistance Force," in Robin Wright, ed., *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics, and U.S. Policy*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010), pp. 62–65.

6. Saeid Golkar, "The Reign of Hard-Line Students in Iranian Universities," pp. 21–29.

7. Azadeh Pourzand, "Change They Don't Believe In: The Political Presence of the Basij in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Harvard Kennedy School Review*, Vol. 10 (2010).

8. "Basij-e Asatid: Pali-ye Bineh-ye 'Elm va San'at" ["Basiji Lecturers: A Bridge Between the University and Industry"], *Iran*, Azar 18, 1386 [December 9, 2007], p. 18.

Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential election indicates that the establishment of the PBO was the result of Ayatollah Khamenei's desire to expand the social influence of religious hard-liners in order to confront social groups who backed reformists.⁹

For this reason, upon the suggestion of the Basij Resistance Force, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution approved the establishment of the PBO under the guardianship of the Basij and confirmed its constitution in 2001. According to this constitution, the goals of the PBO include implementing Ayatollah Khamenei's orders and advice, defending the values and achievements of the Islamic Revolution, and promoting religious education at universities. Moreover, the PBO constitution stipulated that the its budget should be prepared by the wider Basij organization; the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics; the Ministry of Higher Education; and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education.¹⁰ As a branch of the Basij organization, the PBO chief is appointed by the Basiji commander and should be a full-time member of the Basij or the IRGC.

In 2001, Ayatollah Khamenei strongly supported the expansion of the PBO, emphasizing, "My recommendation is to expand the PBO in universities as much as possible," and telling PBO members to "Identify the Basiji professors and recruit them in your organization."¹¹ With Khamenei's support, PBO offices were established at a few large universities, including the University of Tehran, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, and the Iran University of Science and Technology. The military, Basij, and IRGC veterans teaching at these universities welcomed the establishment and inauguration of the Basij bureaus at universities, as most of them were already enrolled in such bureaus in other settings.

Despite the Supreme Leader's support for the PBO, the expansion of the organization proceeded very slowly due to the presence of reformists in power, especially in universities and the higher education ministry.¹² In 2002, the PBO's director, Dr. Zare'i claimed that only 1,200 people had joined the organization in its first two years.¹³ During that time, the PBO's activities were also limited to publishing books critiquing reformists¹⁴ and providing its members with some ideological training. The PBO held a series of ideological political talks where radical clerics, such as Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi

9. Saeid Golkar, "Iran's Basij: Transformation, Structure, and Sociology," in Abbas Milani and Larry Diamond, eds., *The Prospect of Democracy in Iran* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).

10. "Ayin Nameh Tashkil Basij-e Asatid-e Dansheghah-ha va Marakez-e Amowzesh 'Ali-ye Keshvar" ["Regulations of the Establishment of the Professors' Basij Organization"], December 18, 2001, available at <http://www.iranpolymerinstitute.org/pdfs/basij/ayiname.pdf>.

11. "Matn-e Farmayeshat-e 'Maqam-e 'Ozma-ye Velayat' dar Didar ba Asatid-e Basiji Daneshgahha 18/7/1380" ["The Text of the Supreme Leader's Meeting with the Basiji University Professors 10/10/01"], *Tebyan*, Azar 4, 1389 [November 25, 2010], <http://www.tebyan.net/GodlyPeople/Occasions/2010/11/25/145272.html>.

12. "Haddad 'Adel: Osulgarayan Raftari Nakonand keh Majlesi Manand Majles Sheshom Sar-Kar Bi'ayad," ["Haddad 'Adel: Hard-Liners Must Not Act in a Way that Brings About a Parliament Like the Sixth Parliament"], *Javan Online*, Shahrivar 19, 1390 [September 10, 2011], <http://javanonline.ir/vdcccxsq002bqps8.alaz2.html>.

13. 'Ali Asghar Zare'i, "Basij-e Asatid-e Keshvar Bara-ye Hamfekri va Sazandagi dar Keshvar Asr" ["The Professors' Basij Organization is for Participation and Construction the Country"], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Esfand 13, 1380 [March 4, 2002], p. 15.

14. Hoseyn Pur-Ahmadi and Yahya Fowzi, *Gofteman-e Eslahat dar Iran* [The Reform Discourse in Iran] (Tehran: Danesh va Andisheh-ye Mo'aser, 2003).

Mesbah Yazdi, preached their ideas about the Islamic government. One prominent participant in these sessions in the city of Qom between 1998 and 2001 was a founding PBO member, Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who was an assistant professor of engineering at Iran University of Science and Technology at the time.¹⁵

Thanks to these meetings, and many Iranians' growing disenchantment with Khatami's reform project, some Basij professors won the second election of Tehran city council members in 2003.¹⁶ Among the fifteen members of the City Council of Tehran, who then chose Ahmadinejad as mayor, four people were members of the PBO, including Dr. Khosrow Daneshjoo and Dr. Nasrin Soltankhah. As a member of the PBO, Ahmadinejad financially supported the organization and involved it in Tehran's municipal projects. Some Basiji professors, especially those from the Iran University of Science and Technology, where Ahmadinejad had been a faculty member, joined the Tehran Municipality.¹⁷

Moreover, the PBO became active in politics by encouraging some Basiji professors to participate in the 2004 parliamentary election. Some of the PBO members were elected with the support of other Basiji members, including Dr. Mehdi Kuchakzadeh, Hoseyn Najabat, 'Alireza Zakani, Mohammad Khowshehreh, Hamid-Reza Fowladgar, Fazlollah Musavi, and others. As a newly established political group, they actively supported Ahmadinejad's presidential campaign, and paved the way for his victory in the 2005 election.¹⁸

CONSOLIDATION OF THE PBO (2005–2009)

After Ahmadinejad took office in 2005, the PBO became more involved in politics by providing Ahmadinejad a list of its members for his new cabinet.¹⁹ In fact, more than half of the members of Ahmadinejad's first cabinet members were members of the PBO themselves. These included Mohammad Soleymani, minister of communication and information technology; Mas'ud Mir-Kazemi, minister of commerce; Mohammad-Mehdi Zahedi, minister of science, research, and technology; and Kamran Bagheri Lankarani, minister of health and medical education.

Following these appointments, the presence of PBO members in government increased rapidly, especially in the higher education system. PBO members began taking leading positions in higher education ministries and universities, and helped the clerical regime Islamicize the universities by expelling politically active students and lecturers opposed to Basiji positions.²⁰ During the first six months of Ahmadinejad's

15. "Khatr-e Mohemm-e Fel'i 'Fetneh' Ast / Mo'amma-ye In Aqa (Masha'i) Hanowz Hall-e Nashodeh" ["The Actual Important Danger is 'Seduction' / The Puzzle of this Gentleman (Masha'i) is Still Unsolved"], Fars News Agency, Dey 3, 1390 [December 24, 2011], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13901003000284>.

16. Asef Bayat, "Tehran: Paradox City," *New Left Review*, No. 66 (2010), p. 115.

17. Kasra Naji, *Ahmadinejad: the Secret History of Iran's Radical Leader* (University of California Press, 2008).

18. Kazem Khatibi, "Komak-e 150 'Ozv-e Basij-e Asatid beh Sameneh Barnameh Rizi Keshvar," ["The Help of 150 Basiji Professors in Planning the Country's Management System"], *Akhbar-e Shahrestan-e Torbat-e Heydariyyeh*, Ordibehesht 30, 1387 [May 19, 2008], <http://torbatkhabar.blogfa.com/post-551.aspx>.

19. "Na-gofteh-ha-ye Mir-Kazemi az Vezarat," ["Untold by Mir-Kazemi of His Ministry"], *Aftab News*, March 17, 2012, <http://www.aftabnews.ir/vdcefo8zzjh8eni.b9bj.txt> (accessed March 19, 2012).

20. Saeid Golkar, "Cultural Engineering Under Authoritarian Regimes: Islamization of Universities in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring 2012), p. 6.

government, 90% of university deans were fired and replaced.²¹ According to Ja'far Ya'qubi, the chief of the PBO in 2005, the organization helped the higher education ministry dismiss the deans of 26 universities and replace them with Basiji professors in just 24 hours.²² Thanks to the presence of PBO members in the higher education ministry, many Basiji professors have since been appointed as deans of universities, faculty members, and deputies and executive managers in institutions of higher education.²³

In addition to Basiji members taking over leading positions in universities, the PBO-dominated administration paved the way for others by dismissing dissident scholars, especially reformists who joined university faculties during the second term of Mohammed Khatami's presidency. For example, PBO member Farhad Daneshju fired many reformist lecturers from Tehran's Tarbiat Modares University upon becoming dean in 2005.²⁴ To carry this out, universities were asked to send professors' files to the Central Professors Selection Committee (*Hay'at-e Markazi-ye Gozinesh-e Ostad*) for thorough investigation. This committee, originally established after the Cultural Revolution of the 1980s, has been responsible for reviewing the ideological qualifications of lecturers — investigating the ideological beliefs of academics who want to join universities, and removing some who had taught at universities for years. As a RAND report on the IRGC states, “In a policy reminiscent of the university purges of the early 1980s, numerous university professors and administrators have been removed from their positions and replaced with IRGC officials.”²⁵

As secular and liberal professors were expelled, the PBO replaced them with Basiji candidates. There is at least one report showing a PBO member appointing their spouse as a university faculty member without relevant credentials.²⁶ As the IRGC's official weekly, *Sobh-e Sadeq*, emphasized in 2010, the clerical regime should do anything to recruit new professors who are most ideologically capable.²⁷ To ensure that people who are practically committed to total guardianship of jurists (*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*) will be recruited, hiring professors in universities has become increasingly centralized since the hard-liners seized power in 2005. Now, the Center for Recruiting Faculty Members (*Markaz-e Jazb-e A'za-ye Hey'at-e 'Elmi*) in the higher education ministry is responsible for recruiting university professors. This center is managed by PBO members, and its current chief is

21. “Daneshju: Dastgah-ye Jasusi Doshman Baray Tasirgozari bar Daneshgah-ha-ye Keshvar Fa'aland” [“Daneshju: The Enemies’ Apparatus is Activated to Influence on Universities”], Fars News Agency, Mehr 6, 1389 [September 28, 2010], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8906070889>.

22. Khatibi, “The Help of 150 Basiji Professors in Planning the Country’s Management System.”

23. “Basij-e Asatid, Peymankaran-e Prowzheh-ye Enghelab-e Farhanghi dar Danshegah-ha” [“Professors’ Basij, Project Contractors of the Cultural Revolution at Universities”], *Nowruz*, <http://norooznews.ir/news/4303.php#more>, accessed December 15, 2011.

24. Abdolkarim Soroush, “‘Padegan-e’ Tarbiyyat Modarres” [“The Tarbiat Modares ‘Garrison’”], ‘Abdolkarim Soroush (blog), Azar 6, 1385 [November 27, 2006], http://www.dr.soroush.com/Persian/News_Archive/P-NWS-13851006-Modarres.html.

25. Frederic Wehrey et al., *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2009), p. 39.

26. “Dard-e Del-e Yek ‘Ozv-e Hey’at-e Elmi-ye Keshvar Darbareh Entesabat-e Dansheghahi” [“Anxieties of a Faculty Member About Academic Appointments”], *Gooya*, Bahman 18, 1384 [February 7, 2006], <http://news.gooya.com/society/archives/043689.php>.

27. Reza Garmabdari, “Powst-Andazi-ye Daneshgahi” [“Peeling the Universities”], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Mordad 25, 1389 [August 16, 2010], p. 1.

Mohammad-Reza Mardani, a former SBO commander. The main goal of this center is facilitating the recruitment of pro-regime candidates and blocking reformists or pro-opposition individuals from attaining the rank of professor. In fact, Basiji members found support from fellow members in university departments and faced no opposition from the Professor Selection Committee in the higher education ministry. Using these inclusion and exclusion mechanisms institutionalized the PBO's permanent presence in universities.

"To conquer the universities with Basiji professors,"²⁸ several laws were passed to increase the number of PBO members managing universities. For instance, in 2005, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution passed a regulation announcing that the chief of the Professors' Basij clubs in each university should be a member of the school's "cultural council" (*showra-ye farhangi*). According to the regime, these councils are responsible for strengthening and deepening students' ideological and religious foundations according to Islamic values and principles, and creating an appropriate environment for bringing up "sublime human beings." The councils have a broad range of duties, including the administration of all cultural activities on campuses, such as publishing newsletters and holding cultural ceremonies, including Nowruz celebrations, 'Ashura ceremonies, other religious observances, and student meetings. It is interesting to note that, in addition to the head of the PBO, the head of the SBO is also a member of this council.

Just as other branches of the Basij have been involved in business, the PBO has won a number of lucrative government contracts, especially after the victory of hardliners in 2005.²⁹ In one case, the Supreme Council for Information and Communication Technology signed a contract with the SBO and the PBO in April 2006. According to this contract, these organizations became responsible for consulting, monitoring, and implementing some company projects, including Iran's Smart Fuel Card Project which issued cards to allocate the subsidized quota of fuel for private cars.³⁰

As a division of the Basij and the IRGC, the Basij asked the PBO to implement the Change and Development Plan (*Tarh-e Tahavvol va Ta'ali*), which prescribed the intensification of ideological training in the PBO and the expansion of PBO activities in Iranian society.³¹ In 2006, Ja'far Ya'qubi, professor of security studies at the IRGC-affiliated Imam Hossein Comprehensive University and former IRGC general, succeeded Zare'i as PBO chief and was tasked to implement this plan. Since then, the PBO became so involved in policy-making and management in Ahmadinejad's first term (2005–2009) that, according to the science minister, Dr. Zahedi, the Ahmadinejad Administration was actually the PBO Administration.³² Ahmadinejad ordered his administration to use PBO members as their

28. "Ta'sis-e Reshteh Adabiyyat-e Moqavamat" ["Establishment of the Field of Resistance Literature"], *Ketab Aftab*, Ordibehesht 30, 1387 [May 19, 2008], http://www.abook.ir/index.php?action=show_news&news_id=165.

29. Sa'ed Golkar, "Paramilitarization of the Economy: The Case of the Iran's Basij Militia," *Journal of Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 38, No.3 (July 2012), pp. 345–560.

30. "Javabiyeh-ye Daftar-e Zirbanayi-ye Fanavari-ye Ettela'at beh Sayt-e Baztab" ["The Telecommunication Information Infrastructure Telecom Company's Answer to the Baztab Site"], *ITanalyze.ir*, Tir 24, 1385 [July 15, 2006], <http://itanalyze.com/articles/2006/07/15/466.php>.

31. "Hadafe Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid-e Keshvar Modiriyyat-e Pezhuhez Ast" ["The Professors' Basij Organization's Goal is Management of Research"], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Ordibehesht 23, 1387 [May 12, 2008], p. 5.

32. "Kashf-e Posht-e Pardeh Sahneh-ha ba Motala'at Amerika" ["Discovering the Hidden Hands with an American Studies Major"], *Kayhan*, Mordad 7, 1388 [July 29, 2009], p. 12.

consultants and encouraged the PBO to be involved in preparing Iran's fifth economic development plan.³³ According to the PBO chief, more than 150 Basiji professors collaborated with the Ahmadinejad Administration to prepare the fifth development program.³⁴

The 2008 parliamentary election was another step toward expanding PBO political activities. Some prominent members of the PBO were selected as parliament members in 2008, including former PBO chief Dr. Zare'i, as well as Nasrin Soltankh-wah, Zohreh Elahiyan, Elyas Nadran, 'Ali-Reza Marandi, Mohammad Dehqani, and Mohammad-Karim Shahrzad, among others. Thanks to the presence of its members, the PBO received substantial parliamentary support. As a result, according to the fifth economic development plan, which was approved by parliament in 2009, the government became increasingly responsible for supporting the PBO as "the center of the thinking of [the] Islamic regime."³⁵ According to Article 196 of this plan, the government was asked for the first time to use PBO's capacity in administrative affairs.³⁶

Following the structural change in the IRGC and the Basij after 2008, Lotf'ali Bakhtiyari, who was the deputy director of the Basij, became the third head of the PBO in April 2009. As the former commander of the Basij Resistance Force, Hojjatoleslam Hoseyn Ta'eb stated that General Dr. Bakhatri was appointed to accelerate the recruitment of Iranian professors into the Basij, defend the Islamic regime in the "soft war,"³⁷ and support the regime's values at universities.³⁸

In brief, during Ahmadinejad's first term, the influence of the PBO in the regime increased due to its participation in and penetration of city councils and the parliamentary elections. Moreover, the regime's comprehensive support of the PBO, which included granting the organization numerous concessions, lured many professors into enrolling in the organization. As a result, the number of PBO members increased from 1,200 in 2004 to 4,000 in 2006³⁹, and more than 11,000 in

33. "Asatid-e Basiji Baray-e Tadvin-e Barnameh-ye Panjom-e Towse'eh Amadeh Mishvand" ["The Professors' Basij Will Be Ready Themselves for Preparing the Fifth Development Program"], *Kayhan*, Aban 5, 1386 [October 27, 2007], p. 3.

34. "150 Ostad-e Basiji dar Tadvin-e Barnameh-ye Panjom-e Towse'eh Hamkari Mi-Konand" ["150 Basiji Professors are Collaborating in Writing of Fifth Development Plan"], Mehr News Agency, Ordi-behesht 12, 1388 [May 2, 2009], <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=870982>.

35. 'Abbas Lotfi, *Basij-e Asatid-e Enqelab-e Eslami: Resalatha va Rahkarha* [Islamic Revolutionary Professors' Basij Organization; Missions and Functions] (Tehran: Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid, 2003).

36. "Qanun-e Barnameh-ye Panjsaleh Panjom-e Towse'eh-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran (1390–1394)" ["The Law of the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2011–2016)"], *The Iranian Council for Reviewing Books and Texts on Human Sciences*, March 14, 2011, <http://www.shmoton.ir/PDF/Poor/3.pdf>.

37. "Soft war" (*jang-e narm*) is a term popularized by Ayatollah Khamenei to describe the perceived Western cultural invasion against the Islamic Republic. The aim of this purported war is the overthrowing of Iran's clerical regime by undermining its ideology, norms, and values.

38. "Basij-e Asatid bar Faza-ye Melli va Bin-ol-melali dar 'Arseh-ha-ye Mokhtalef Ta'sirgozar Ast" ["The Professors' Basij Organization has Impacts on Different National and International Environment"], Fars News Agency, Farvardin 25, 1388 [April 14, 2009], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8801241388>.

39. "Ra'is-e Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid-e Daneshgah-ha-ye Keshvar: Asatid-e Basiji Hemayat az Dowlat ra Lazem va Vazifeh Khwod Mi-Danand" ["Supporting the Government is the Duty and Responsibility of Basiji Professors"], Fars News Agency, Tir 18, 1385 [July 9, 2006], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8504180538>.

2008.⁴⁰ In fact, by exploiting individual materialistic motivations, the regime was able to co-opt many Iranian instructors and professors at universities and incorporate them into the PBO. In addition to the increasing the number of PBO members, the number of bureaus belonging to the organization also expanded to include nearly all universities.

PBO IN POWER (2009–PRESENT)

Thanks to all of Ahmadinejad's government support of Basiji professors, the PBO not only declared its complete support for his presidential bid in 2009, it also played a direct role in his reelection that same year. Kamran Daneshju, a leading PBO member, was appointed as the head of the Election Commission within the Ministry for Internal Affairs. In this role, Daneshju was responsible for administering the 2009 presidential election, which was criticized by many as rigged. Following the election, Daneshju was selected as Iran's new minister of science, research, and technology in Ahmadinejad's second cabinet. As with the first, more than half of the ministers in the new cabinet came from the ranks of the PBO, as did many chiefs of governmental organizations.

With the sparking and expansion of the Green Movement following the disputed 2009 presidential election, the PBO fully supported Ahmadinejad and served the regime by controlling politically active students. In the 2009 annual PBO meeting, which was held one month before the start of the new academic year but after the 2009 uprising, Ahmadinejad asked PBO members to help the regime repress student demonstrations.⁴¹ Additionally, Ayatollah Khamenei also called on Basiji professors, as the commanders of the "soft war" at universities, to confront the enemies of the clerical establishment. According to Iran's Supreme Leader, the PBO has significant duties, including identifying the regime's enemies' aims, designing the strategic plans for confronting their plans at Iranian universities, and leading and directing university students.⁴²

In the wake of these orders, Basiji professors have helped the government monitor universities and repress student movements. Since then, many of the Basiji professors have tried to silence the regime's opponents at universities, including both students and faculty. A student explained the situation as follows:

Last semester, I argued with a professor who was a Basiji. First, he asked me not to come to his class... Then, he told the administration that I had plagiarized a paper, which was so baseless that the school administration exonerated me. That semester, I got in an argument about the June 2009 demonstrations with the same professor. This time, he slapped me in the face and I pushed him. This gave them reason to expel me. My life was a nightmare. From that point, I decided to beg him and every-

40. Yadollah Sane'i, "*Basij Motor-e Moharrekeh-ye 'Elmi-ye Keshvar*" ["The Basij is the Country's Scientific Driving Motor"], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Azar 25, 1387 [December 15, 2008], <http://www.sobhesadeq.ir/1387/0380/M05.HTM>.

41. "*Rabetehe-ye Ma ba Rahbari az Jens-e Mahabbat*" ["Our Relationship with the Supreme Leader is Based on Kindness"], *Raja News*, Mordad 9, 1388 [July 31, 2009], <http://www.rajanews.com/detail.asp?id=33423>.

42. "*Asatid-e Daneshgah-ha Farmandehan-e Jabbeh-ye Jang-e Narm Hastand*" ["The University Professors are the Front Commanders in the Soft War"], Fars News Agency, Shahrivar 9, 1388 [August 31, 2009], <http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8806090111>.

one in charge. I apologized to him, but he said, "I am going to make sure that trash like you never comes to our university." . . . I signed a bunch of papers promising not to ever participate in so-called "sedition" activities. I don't argue with that professor anymore. As a matter of fact, I don't even go near him.⁴³

The pervasive presence of PBO members creates an atmosphere of fear at universities, in which students and professors who might sympathize with the opposition do not dare to expose themselves. There are reports of some Basiji professors using grades as leverage over supposedly dissident students. According to one report, a PBO member failed a reformist student who was active in Mir Hossein Mousavi's presidency campaign in 2009.⁴⁴

Another method for controlling both students and professors derives from disciplinary committees (*komite-ha-ye enzebati*). These committees are in charge of imposing penalties on students and professors who commit administrative, political, and moral violations. In the past few years, committees have become increasingly active in confronting students and professors, dismissing many of both for various reasons.⁴⁵ The PBO has representatives in each disciplinary committee, one for students and another for faculty. With the dominant presence of the PBO in Iran's universities, almost all of the members of these committees, even the dean of the university, tend to be members of the PBO.

PBO members are also encouraged to impose moral control over universities through "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong"⁴⁶ (Persian, *amr beh ma'ruf va nahy az monkar*; from the Qur'an 3:110, et al., in Arabic, *al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*). Many reports confirm that Basiji professors are stricter than others in warning students to follow the required Islamic dress and behavior codes. Female students are especially advised to wear an adequately modest hijab, remove their makeup, and sit separately from male students. Many of my female students in Islamic Azad University told me that their Basiji lecturers asked them to wear a more appropriate hijab or not to put too much makeup on their faces. While some students have to abide by their lecturers' orders, many resist these pressures. For example, when a Basiji lecturer in Tehran University asked his female students to wear their hijab more appropriately, students objected and refused to attend subsequent classes.⁴⁷ In one such altercation, the PBO chief at the Iran University of Science and Technology canceled the registration of several female students in 2010 because they wore

43. "Iran Cleanses Universities of Political Dissent," *Inside Iran*, April 15, 2011, <http://www.insideiran.org/news/iran-cleanses-universities-of-political-dissent/> (accessed March 15, 2012).

44. "Hafz-e Nomreh Yek Daneshju-ye Eslah-taleb Tavassot-e Ostad-e Basijiyash" ["Failing a Reformist's Students by Her Basiji Professor"], *Qasr News*, <http://qasrnews.blogfa.com/post/1791> (accessed March 12, 2012).

45. "Punishing Stars: Systematic Discrimination and Exclusion in Iranian Higher Education," *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran*, July 12, 2011, <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/punishing-stars-english-final.pdf>.

46. Saeid Golkar, "Politics of Piety: The Basij and Moral Control of Iranian Society," *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2011), pp. 207–219.

47. "Ostad-e Cheshm Cheran Nabayad Motavajjeh bi Hejabi Daneshju Mi-Shod!" ["The Leering Professor Should Not Look at the Student Without a Hijab!"], *Jahan News*, Azar 4, 1388 [February 22, 2009], <http://www.jahannews.com/vdcb8sbz.rhbw8piuur.html>.

their hijab improperly.⁴⁸ In fact, these committees serve as the preeminent authority for putting pressure on student activists.

Some PBO members work with the Herasat, a branch of the Ministry of Intelligence in universities, to monitor and maintain surveillance over dissidents and pro-opposition students and professors. According to Ayatollah Khamenei, Basiji professors are responsible for identifying the Islamic Republic's enemies and their goals by attaining positions in their headquarters (e.g., foreign universities, think tanks).⁴⁹ That is why some of the PBO members are appointed as the Herasat chiefs at several universities. For example, from 2005 until 2011, the chief of Herasat in the higher education ministry was the PBO's first chief, 'Ali Asghar Zare'i. It is worth mentioning that Farhad Rahbar, the dean of Iran's largest university, the University of Tehran, is an official member of the intelligence ministry.⁵⁰

In accordance with the 2010 structural reform of the Basij as a whole, the PBO intensified its activities at universities. Sohrab Salahi from the IRGC-affiliated Imam Hossein Comprehensive University became the PBO's fourth chief and aimed to strengthen the Islamic regime's soft power at universities, Islamizing universities to train cadres for the clerical regime.⁵¹ "The Islamic regime's enemy cannot attack our country, if Basiji professors can train the Basiji students, who are powerful, scientifically and ideologically."⁵²

To achieve this goal, changing university texts is a must. According to Daneshju, Iran's higher education minister, Basiji professors cannot train ideological students and monotheistic people (*ensan-e towhidi*) based on texts rooted in liberal democracy and assorted "isms," such as capitalism, liberalism, humanism, etc.⁵³ To solve this problem and to address Ayatollah Khamenei's criticism of the teaching of Western human sciences in universities in the summer of 2009, the PBO has been involved in reviewing social studies and humanities syllabi. According to Iran's Supreme Leader, social sciences and humanities disciplines are based on Western philosophies that are completely antithetical to Islamic belief. Iran's Supreme Leader has said that teaching those disciplines has

48. "Mahrumiyyat-e Tahsili bara-ye Dehha Daneshju-ye Dokhtar-e Daneshgah-e 'Elm va San'at" ["Exclusion of Tens of Female Students at the the University of Science and Technology"], *Daneshjoo News*, Esfand 14, 1390 [March 04, 2012], <http://www.daneshjoonews.com/news/university/11034-1390-12-14-06-13-28.html/> (accessed March 15, 2012).

49. Mohammad Tavalla'i, "Pish-daramadi bar Jang-e Narm" ["An Introduction to Soft War"], *Mashhad University of Medical Sciences*, www.mums.ac.ir/shares/bmr/bmr/.../jang_narm.ppt/ (accessed April 18, 2011).

50. "Az Mo'avanat-e Eqtesadi-ye Vezarat-e Ettela'at ta Daneshgah-e Tehran" [From the Economics Division of the Ministry of Intelligence to the University of Tehran], *Saye News*, Farvardin 30, 1387 [March 22, 2008], <http://www.sayenews.com/fa/pages/?cid=441>.

51. "Kader-sazi az Karha-ye Vizheh-ye Asatid-e Basiji Bashad" ["Training a Cadre Should be a Duty of Professors' Basij Organization"], *Fars News Agency*, Tir 2, 1390 [June 23, 2011], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9004020269>.

52. "5 Hezar Ostad-e Daneshgah, Moteqazi 'Ozviyyat dar Basij and" ["5 Thousand University Professors Want to Join the PBO"], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Khordad 16, 1382 [June 6, 2003], p. 5.

53. "Pishnahad-e Bargoziari yek Hame-porsi" ["Suggesting Holding a Referendum"], *Serat News*, Shahrivar 10, 1389 [September 1, 2010], <http://www.seratnews.ir/fa/news/9715/%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4%D9%86%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%87%D9%85%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C>.

increased skepticism among students and weakened their belief in Islam.⁵⁴ To train a new cadre of individuals loyal to the regime, the PBO must remove any skepticism among students about Islamic ideology. The Professors' Basij was asked to transform the humanities curriculum at Iran's universities. Under the name of "transformation of humanities" (*tahavvol-e 'olum-e ensani*), the PBO became responsible for confronting and eradicating secular science by preparing an Islamic science curriculum based on religious values.

According to the PBO's deputy of the "transformation of humanities" campaign, the PBO has established a policy-making council consisting of 14 working groups responsible for designing a comprehensive plan to transform humanities, social sciences, and liberal arts; including economics, philosophy, law, and political science.⁵⁵ The Basiji professors in each group are mainly responsible for changing university curricula, adding new syllabi, and preparing new textbooks for teaching. Like the first attempt to change economics textbooks in Iranian universities after the Cultural Revolution,⁵⁶ the PBO began changing some economics textbooks to prevent the teaching of Western economic theories.⁵⁷ Moreover, new courses studying "resistance literature; "holy defense" — i.e., the Iran-Iraq War; and the "soft war" have been made obligatory parts of university programs.⁵⁸ Clearly, the aim of these changes is to inculcate the regime's ideology in university students and "counter [their] flagging religiosity and ideological fervor."⁵⁹

In another effort to train a new cadre for the Islamic regime, the PBO has used peer pressure by organizing the Basiji students into "scientific circles" or *halqeh-haye 'elmi*. Through these groups, students are put in contact with a Basiji professor as soon as they enroll at a university. Each 20 students, especially those in graduate and postgraduate studies, form a circle which is supervised and mentored by a Basiji professor. As an example, the PBO club in Shahid Rajaei Teacher Training University has established 33 different scientific circles consisting of Basiji students and professors. Some of these circles have organizational topics such as women and family, philosophy of science, Qur'anic knowledge, engineering, etc.⁶⁰ In these circles, the professors not only help the Basiji students in the special field, but also serve as moral authorities who influence and guide their students. Through these circles, the

54. "Enteqad-e Khameneh'i az Tahsil Dow Milyown Dansheju dar Reshteh-ha-ye 'Olum-e Ensanī" ["Khamenei's Critique of Having Two Million Students Studying in the Humanities"], *Radio Farda*, Shahrivar 9, 1388 [August 31, 2009], http://www.radiofarda.com/content/f4_Khamenei_critique_human_science/1810881.html.

55. "14 Gorowh-e Takhassosi-e Tahavvol dar 'Olum-e Ensanī dar Basij-e Asatid-e Keshvar Ijad Mi-shavad" ["14 Special Groups Will be Established in the PBO for Transformation of the Humanities"], Mehr News Agency, Aban 26, 1390 [November 17, 2011], <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=1462180>.

56. Sohrab Behdad, "Islamization of Economics in Iranian Universities," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (May 1995), p. 204.

57. Ja'far Ya'qubi, "Tahavvol dar Sameneh-ye 'Elmi-ye Keshvar Zarurati Ejenab Napazir" ["Transformation in the Country's Scientific System is an Inevitable Necessity"], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Khordad 13, 1387 [June 2, 2008], p. 5.

58. "Establishment of the Field of Resistance Literature," *Ketab Aftab*.

59. Frederic Wehrey et al., *Rise of the Pasdaran*, p. 40.

60. "Paziresh-e Asatid va Daneshjuyan-e Basiji dar Halqeh-ha-ye 'Elmi" ["Admission of Basiji Professors and Students in Scientific Circles"], *Professors' Basij Official Website*, <http://basijasatid.srt-tu.edu/Packages/PageMaker/ShowPage.aspx?56514264031GT57043596239JTpPU0451330212654> (accessed March 20, 2011).

PBO is trying to train new academic groups of pro-regime students. As Salahi has stated, “this plan helps to arm the next generation of Iranian scholars with both scientific and religious knowledge.”⁶¹

Moreover, as “commanders of the soft war,” the PBO has been asked to lead the Basiji students who represent the “soldiers of the soft war.”⁶² According to Mohammad Hashemi-Nezhad, a PBO deputy, one of the policies of the PBO is using the Basiji professors as political guides, or “*hadiyan-e siyasi*,” at universities.⁶³ Their duties include disseminating regime ideology, defending the Islamic Revolution, and increasing the political and ideological visions (*basirat-e afzayi*) in society. To do that, some PBO members are organized into scrutiny and analysis committees (*komite-ha-ye bararsi va tahlil*) in each university. These committees are subordinated to the PBO’s deputy of scrutiny and analysis, who is responsible for analyzing domestic and international political issues and preparing pamphlets about them for PBO members.⁶⁴

Based on official IRGC and Basij positions, Basiji professors are asked to “enlighten” their colleagues and students. For example, these professors are also responsible for leading their students, especially during different parliamentary or presidential elections, by encouraging them to vote for hard-line candidates. According to the PBO deputy in Shiraz Province, “the PBO members should assist the authorities in reducing the false political emotions in society by showing people how to select candidates based on the Supreme Leader’s opinions.”⁶⁵ They also serve as political guides in other branches of the Basij. As university professors, they are invited to talk to other Basiji groups in defense of the Islamic regime.

In spite of the close relationship between Ahmadinejad and the Basiji professors, the PBO took Ayatollah Khamenei’s side in his 2011 power struggle with President Ahmadinejad. Many Basiji professors announced their complete submission to the Supreme Leader and emphasized that they only follow Ayatollah Khomeini’s orders.⁶⁶ As a result, for the first time after the inception of the PBO, Ahmadinejad did not participate in the 13th PBO annual meeting in the summer of 2011. In fact, as a branch of the Basij, the PBO is ultimately under control of the Supreme Leader as the commander in chief of the armed forces, and not the president.

61. “*Tabdil-e Iran beh Marje’iyyat-e ‘Elmi-ye Jahan, Shart-e Dashtan Qodrat-e Beyn-ol-Melali Asr*” [“Transforming Iran to Global Scientific Authority is the Condition for Having International Power”], Shahrivar 16, 1390 [September 7, 2011, International Quran News Agency, http://iqna.ir/samen/news_print.php?ProdID=856463].

62. “*Tashkil Kargorowh-e Jang-e Narm dar Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid*” [“Establishing a Soft War Workgroup at Professors’ Basij Organization”], Fars News Agency, Shahrivar 12, 1390 [September 3, 2011], <http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13900612000916>.

63. “*Siyasat-e Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid Mo’arrefi Hadiyan Siyasi Asr*” [“Introducing the Political Guides is the Mission of the Professors’ Basij Organization”]) Mehr News Agency, Shahrivar 7, 1390 [August 29, 2011], <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1395275>.

64. “*Basij-e Asatid az Farhikhteh-ye Tarin Nehadha-ye ‘Elmi-ye Keshvar Asr*” [“The PBO is One of the Best Educated Institutions in the Country”], Iranian Students’ News Agency, Dey 28, 1390 [January 18, 2012], <http://semnan.isna.ir/Default.aspx?NSID=5&SSLID=46&NID=3834>.

65. “The University Professors are the Front Commanders in the Soft War,” Fars News Agency.

66. “*Tab’iyyat az Velayat-e Mohem-Tarin-e Resalat-e Basij-e Asatid Asr*” [“The Main Duty of PBO is Subordinating to the Supreme Leader”], Fars News Agency, Khordad 31, 1390 [June 21, 2011], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9003311029>.

In spite of these problems, the clerical regime has continued its strong support of the PBO over the past decade. As a result, the number of PBO members has increased from 12,000 in 2009⁶⁷ to about 15,000 in 2010, and 20,000 members in 2011, according to its official statistics.⁶⁸

With strong support from the clerical regime, the PBO's influence has expanded in the last decade. Now, the Professors' Basij exists in every corner of Iran's political structure. For example, three out of every twelve members of the Guardian Council are members of the PBO, including the Speaker of the Guardian Council, 'Abbas'ali Kadkhoda'i. Even some of the clergy at the Assembly of Experts, which consists of senior clerics, are PBO members. An example is Hojjatoleslam Mahmud 'Alavi, who is also the head of the PBO club at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting College.⁶⁹ In fact, the PBO gradually changed from a small association to an influential group that, in effect, helps the regime to rule the country. However, the main arena of PBO activities remains at universities, where the PBO priorities are transforming the humanities, fighting the soft war, and training the future leadership of the Islamic Republic.⁷⁰

WILL THE PBO SUCCEED OR FAIL?

In spite of the expansion of PBO clubs within Iran's universities and the organization's recruitment efforts, there are many doubts about the success of this organization in controlling universities in Iran. To explain why this organization cannot achieve the goals necessary for controlling universities, we must study the organizational structure of the PBO and the reasons why Iranian professors continue to enroll in the organization.

In a bottom-to-top view, PBO clubs (*Kanunha-ye Basij Asatid*) comprise the lowest level of the PBO organization, which exists at each state university, as well as the private Islamic Azad University, and the long-distance Payame Noor University. According to the PBO's chief, there are currently 350 PBO clubs in Iranian universities.⁷¹ Each club generally includes several units, such as science and research; culture; recruiting and organizing; training and operation; information-gathering and news; and scrutiny and analysis (*bararasi va tahlil*). Club chiefs are appointed by the university heads from a list of usually three candidates nominated by the school's Basiji professors.

67. "25 Darsad az Asatid-e Keshvar Basij Hastand" ["25% of the Country's Professors are Basiji"], Mehr News Agency, Tir 31, 1386 [July 22, 2007], www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=522059.

68. "Tashkil Kargrowth-e Jang-e-Narm dar Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid" ["Establishing a Soft War Work Group in the PBO"], Fars News Agency, Shahrivar 12, 1390 [September 3, 2011], <http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13900612000916>.

69. "Aghaz beh-Kar Neshast-e Baznagari dar Asasnameh-ye Basij-e Asatid" ["Starting the Meeting for Reviewing the PBO Constitution"], Mehr News Agency, Mordad 10, 1389 [August 1, 2010], <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=1126324>.

70. "Tashkil Otaq Fekr Sazman-e Basij-e Asatid dar Ostandari-ha" ["Establishing PBO Think Tanks in Local Governments"], Mehr News Agency, Khordad 30, 1390 [June 20, 2011], <http://www.mehrnews.com/fa/newsdetail.aspx?NewsID=1339598>.

71. "Kanun Basij-e Asatid Efteta'h Shod" ["The Professors' Basij Club was Inaugurated"], *Islamic Azad University Bardsir Branch*, Esfand 22, 1388 [March 13, 2010], <http://www.bardsiriau.ac.ir/news/print-news.aspx?id=68387>.

According to regulations, all of the PBO clubs in one province are under the control of the provincial PBO center (*Markaz-e Basij-e Asatid dar har Ostan*). The PBO has one center in each province, except Tehran, which has two. The 32 provincial centers throughout Iran direct the Basiji professors in each province and are controlled by the PBO headquarters, located in Tehran. In fact, the chief of each PBO center is appointed by the PBO chief, who is himself appointed by the commander of the Basij. The PBO headquarters includes a supreme council, which consists of the minister of science, research, and technology; the minister of health and medical education; the Supreme Leader's representative at the universities; the head of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution; and 22 Basiji professors.

Organizational Chart of the PBO

As this diagram shows, the PBO is a branch of the Basij militia, which is ultimately part of the IRGC. In fact, as a paramilitary organization, the PBO is responsible for recruiting, organizing, and indoctrinating university professors. According to its constitution, anyone who teaches in a university, from the level of instructor (having at least a master's degree) to full professor, can be a member of the PBO. Members must be Muslim, profess belief in Khomeini's principle of absolute clerical rule (*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*), and prove their loyalty to the regime. That is why the regime asks members to participate in governmental celebrations and rallies, and to promote the regime's ideology, especially at universities.

Although the precise size of the PBO remains an open question, as there are no independent statistics about this organization. According to the PBO chief, there were about 20,000 Basiji professors in 2011, and that number is expected to increase to 35,000 by 2014.⁷² According to Tehran's PBO chief, however, there are only 12,000 Basiji professors throughout Iran.⁷³ The majority of PBO core members come from the IRGC-affiliated Imam Hossein Comprehensive University (IHU), including all four PBO chiefs who are all IRGC generals and IHU faculty members. Another example is the deputy of study and analysis and the PBO, General Hashemi Nasab. Another group of the PBO members are Iran-Iraq War veterans, who number about 2,500 members.⁷⁴ The third group of PBO members is Basiji students who entered

72. "Establishing a Soft War Work Group in the PBO," Fars News Agency.

73. Mohammad-Reza Suri, "Mabna-ye 'Olum-e Ensani Mota'alleg beh Daneshmandan-e Moslem-e Irani Ast" ["The Foundations of Humanities Belong to Muslim Iranian Scientists"], *Javan Online*, Shahrivar 8, 1390 [August 30, 2011], <http://javanonline.ir/vdcgny9txak9tn4.rpra.html>.

74. "Majma'-e Asatid Isargar Bayad Farasenfi Bashad" ["The Association of Veteran Professors Should be Over Guilds"], Moj News Agency, Mordad 2, 1389 [July 24, 2010], http://www.mojnews.com/fa/Miscellaneous/ViewContents.aspx?Contract=cms_Content_I_News&r=545264.

universities using the revolutionary quota after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, which helped veterans gain admission to universities.⁷⁵ In fact, a large proportion of them have IRGC and Basij backgrounds. In addition to this group, some people without Basij organizational membership join the PBO, enrolling as regular members and undergoing some training to become active members.

To encourage Iranian professors to join the PBO, the regime provides many privileges, including financial benefits and legal support, if necessary. Despite condemning Khatami's government for having arranged government scholarships for reformist students, the PBO since 2005 has been awarding its own supporters fellowships for post-graduate studies in Western universities.⁷⁶ However, for the majority of individuals, the prospect of job security is the most important motive for joining the PBO. For instance, securing a tenure-track job at a university is based more on ideological than objective qualifications, and those applying for the job must be approved by the ideological-political selection committee. Being a member of the Basij aids this process and virtually guarantees a tenure-track position. For this reason, temporary professors and instructors, especially at small universities, usually join the PBO to ensure their employment as permanent professors. For example, nearly 70% of the professors at Payame Noor University in Kerman, who are mainly temporary instructors, have joined the PBO.⁷⁷

After being recruited into the PBO, Basiji professors undergo intensive ideological and political training designed to solidify their loyalty to the regime. For the regime, the ideological commitment of PBO members is more important than their academic credentials. It is mandatory for Basiji professors to complete some ideological-political training (IPT). With the dramatic expansion of IPT for all Basijis after the period of turmoil in 2009, the IPT program for professors is now held in six different provinces throughout Iran. The aim of these courses is to enhance professors' Basiji commitment to the Supreme Leader and to create an ideological staff for the regime.⁷⁸

To intensify the process of installing its members in Iranian universities, the PBO is also establishing ideological circles called "the righteous" or *salehin*. According to new Basij regulations, each 15 to 20 lecturers will form a righteous circle and should convene at least twice per week to participate in discussions mainly about current political issues. Each circle has a coach, who is responsible for managing the group. In these circles, the PBO members are indoctrinated through ideological religious and political discussions, such as the doctrine of *velayat-e faqih*, "knowing the enemy" (*doshman shenasi*), the "velvet revolution," and the soft war. The most crucial goal of the *salehin* plan is to form strong social relationships between PBO members in order to keep them connected to the organization.

75. According to the IRGC commander, only 20% of PBO members are full members of universities and have tenure track jobs. It is claimed that 10% of Basiji professors are female and 90% are male. See, "25% of the Country's Professors are Basiji," Mehr News Agency.

76. "Sabt-e Nam-e Bowrs-e Doktora-ye Kharej az Keshvar" ["Registration for PhD Fellowship in Foreign Universities"], Mehr 10, 1389 [October 2, 2010], *Allameh Tabatabaei Teacher Training University*, <http://tmat.ir/fa/files/2010/11/basij.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2012).

77. "70 Darsad Asatid-e Daneshgah-e Payam-e-Nur-e Kerman 'Ozv-e Basij Hastand'" ["70% of Professors at Payame Noor University in Kerman are Basij Members"], Fars News Agency, 6 Mehr, 1389 [September 28, 2010], <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8907061325>.

78. Saeid Golkar, "Understanding Iran's Mobilized Resistance Force: The Ideological-Political Training of the Islamic Republic's Basij Organization," *Middle East Brief*, Vol. 44 (September 2010).

By emphasizing ideological criteria and loyalty to the Supreme Leader, Basij professors are essentially guaranteed job security even if they do not produce any scientific publications or conduct research. Due to the use of quotas for entering universities and the total support from the regime during one's education, it is widely accepted among students and other professors that PBO members are usually poorly educated and not sufficiently qualified to teach at universities. To help these people advance in the universities, the clerical regime has announced a new regulation for the promotion of faculty members, which emphasizes the "cultural qualities" of professors. According to the first article of this regulation, the socio-cultural and educational activities of faculty members are endeavors that strengthen and promote ideological religious beliefs and are in accordance with the constitution and the Islamic Revolution's values.⁷⁹ To analyze these activities, there are criteria, including "the scientific and practical commitment to the total guardianship of jurists," "commitment to glorious religious values," and "respect to the Islamic ethics and values."⁸⁰

In spite of the clerical regime's efforts to recruit, organize, and indoctrinate Iranian professors into the PBO, many have still not joined the organization. In fact, while the PBO announced its goal of recruiting more than 70% of Iranian lecturers, only 12,000 people have joined the group.⁸¹ Some of these professors have enrolled in the organization only because of peer pressure at the universities. That is why the majority of PBO members generally would rather not be labeled as Basiji and actively defending the regime by participating in regime rallies at universities. In this regard, the chief of the SBO criticized PBO members for being too conservative and not sufficiently radical, stating "despite Basiji students' [activism], Basiji professors are absent on the soft war battlefield."⁸² The IRGC newspaper has pointed out the Basiji professors' fear of being looked down upon by their counterparts in the West and labeled as poorly educated (*bi savad*).⁸³ In fact, some of the PBO members have been accused of plagiarism and having fake credentials. One such member was 'Ali Kordan, Iran's former interior minister, who claimed he had a doctorate from Oxford University. It seems that most professors join the PBO just to take advantage of the privileges that membership affords them, but are not involved in its programs. According to one academic study, only 1,220 members are actively collaborating with the organization.⁸⁴

79. Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, "Ayin Nameh-ye Erteqa-ye Asatid ba Takid bar Naqsh-e Farhangi" ["Regulation of Promotion of Professors with an Emphasis on Cultural Role"], *Nameh-ye Farhanghi*, No. 55 (February 2012), p. 2.

80. Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, "Ruykard Daneshgah-e Mazandaran beh Ayin Nameh-ye Erteqa-ye Asatid" ["The University of Mazandaran's Approach to the Regulation of Promotion of Faculty Members"], *Nameh-ye Farhanghi*, No. 55 (February 2012), p. 5.

81. Suri, "Foundations of Humanities Belong to Muslim Iranian Scientists."

82. "Shabkeh-ye Majazi beyn Asatid va Daneshjuyan-e Basiji Ijad Mi-Shavad" ["Establishment of Cyber-Networking Between Professors and Basiji Students"], *Sobh-e Sadeq*, Mordad 29, 1389 [August 20, 2010], p. 5.

83. 'Abdollah Ganji, "Farmandehan-e Jang-e Narm Koja Hastand" ["Where are the Commanders of the Soft War"], *Javan Online*, Shahrivar 23, 1389 [September 14, 2010], <http://www.javanonline.ir/vdchknzkn623nzid.tft2.html>.

84. Reza Molla-hoseyni Ardakani, "Basij va Towlid 'Elm va Fanavari (Zhe'opolitik-e Ettela'at)" ["Basij and Producing Science and Technology (The Geopolitics of Information)"], *Yazd-e Farda*, Azar 2, 1387 [November 22, 2008], <http://www.yazdfarda.com/news/13908.html>.

CONCLUSION

The strong presence of the PBO — along with the SBO and the Employee Basij Organization, which is responsible for university office personnel — clearly illustrates how universities in Iran have been influenced in the post-Revolution era for the purpose of controlling the student body and confronting reformists and university professors who voice dissent. With strong support from regime hardliners, the PBO's influence has expanded since Mahmud Ahmadinejad seized power in 2005. Now, PBO members exist in every university throughout Iran, as well as every segment of the state's machinery. In fact, the organization was transformed into a key institution for managing universities and the governmental bureaucracy. However, the main arena of PBO activities is still the universities, where the Basiji professors serving the clerical regime “purify” universities of dissidents, train new soldiers (Basiji students) to wage “soft war,” and “purify the humanities from Western ideas.” Equally important is how the PBO has eroded the quality of higher education in Iran, especially in the social sciences and humanities, based on the poor quality of its members. This will impose a high cost on Iran's higher education system. In spite of all of the PBO's activities, the following question yet remains: in an era of globalization dominated by information communication technologies, to what extent can, and will, the PBO continue to be an effective force in controlling universities in Iran?