

Iran's Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows While America Sleeps. By Steven O'Hern. Washington: Potomac Books, 2012.

Martin Scott Catino Ph.D.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss>
pp. 82-83

Recommended Citation

Catino, Martin Scott Ph.D.. "Iran's Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows While America Sleeps. By Steven O'Hern. Washington: Potomac Books, 2012.." *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 2 (2013): : 82-83.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.6.2.8>

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss2/8>

***Iran's Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows While America Sleeps.* By Steven O'Hern. Washington: Potomac Books, 2012. ISBN 978-1-59797-701-2. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 272. \$29.95.**

Iran has become more than just a headline grabber. Tehran's intent, policies, and terrorist activities directly and increasingly threaten and harm the United States and its interests. The growing political and economic power of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) shapes that country's foreign and domestic policy; agents of the ayatollah plant cells around the globe and in the United States; Quds Force and Hezbollah attack US and Coalition Forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, continuing a long and bloody history of terrorism against the US and the West. Moreover, the Islamic Republic continues its reach into Latin America while it penetrates the US border with "special interest aliens" who operate in dark networks reaching into the very heart of American cities and other areas. All these challenges occur while Tehran energetically develops the capability to build and deliver a nuclear bomb—a subject inseparable from and exacerbating these other activities. Steven O'Hern's *Iran's Revolutionary Guard* elucidates these issues and discusses their urgency while adding insights that only a counter intelligence officer who hunted these nefarious characters can provide.

But if the reader is looking for a focused study on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard he or she will be pleasantly disappointed. O'Hern rightly places the Guard in its context of a growing institutional force transformed from tool to independent power yet marching alongside its country's expanding global influence. Aiding the IRGC's rise, the author notes, is its ability to exploit regional and global conflicts--like Iraq and Afghanistan--and opportunities created as much by this potent military as by the failure of Washington to respond effectively to the threats and attacks.

Finding cracks in the author's assessments on his subject would be difficult. His experience as the Director of the Strategic Counterintelligence Directorate (SCID) for Multi-National Forces--Iraq (MNF-I) in Baghdad provided not only critical information on Iran, but also fostered skills for identifying relevant information, capabilities of the IRGC, and flaws in the pursuit of the Guard and its malign influence. Adding to these qualities, the study utilizes key interviews with counter terrorism and other security experts, and is presented in a clear and logical style due in part to the author's ability to argue as an attorney (O'Hern's current profession), which is a role that complements his intelligence background. This retired Air Force colonel also places his work within a wider context of strategic studies, which he applies adroitly to his main points.

O'Hern's main argument is that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is Tehran's primary tool to influence "events outside [that] country" (p. xii). Iran's purposes for the Guard include projecting power globally, retaliation, and deterrence, and the author understands this well. He posits that "a triad" of deterrent threats are at the core of Iran's policy of national defense: economic disruption of the Persian Gulf and its oil transshipments; development of ballistic missiles to strike Tehran's regional neighbors; and third, the IRGC's ability to command terrorist cells globally. Building each of the areas into main arguments, he provides essential facts and examples that clarify these lethal aims.

Another contribution of *Iran's Revolutionary Guard* is its keen analysis of Iran's dark networks

globally. Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, the Levant, and Latin America, as well as Europe, emerge in vivid detail. Shadowy figures like Imad Mughniyah, Qassem Suleimani, and Qais al Khazali—the leaders of Hezbollah, the Quds Force, and Iraq Special Groups, respectively—emerge within their worlds of criminal patronage and financing, exploitation of the human terrain, and rat lines leading back to Iran. Furthermore the financing, critical linkages, key events and movements, and relationships to areas like the Bekaa Valley (Lebanon) and Margarita Island (Venezuela), all frame the subjects well.

Colonel O'Hern's chapter on "The Threat to the U.S. Homeland" is perhaps his most telling. This chapter details the financing, sleeper cells, and movements of Hezbollah in the United States, stories that include weapons trafficking, drug trafficking, fund raising, insurance fraud, and counterfeit goods. The chapter's description of the Los Angeles Fashion district is typical of the insightfulness of the book. O'Hern describes the area as "a replica of an Iranian bazaar" where "tough looking men with scowls on their face" stand as look outs to alert the store owners to the presence of law enforcement, which pose a threat to transactions that ultimately find their way to Hezbollah.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard also excels at clarifying the implications of Iran's increasing weapons capabilities. The ability to hide, move, and defend nuclear facilities is a critical aspect of Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, a point O'Hern notes in addition to deliverability—the menacing development of missiles with increasing reach and reliability. Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) is yet another weapon that Iran includes in its arsenal of asymmetrical force to use against the United States. The author deftly draws a linkage between Iran's intent, military thought, preparations, and capabilities on this matter.

Iran's Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows While America Sleeps would be an ideal source for undergraduate and graduate study. Also, novices through experts on Iran will find this book useful for its realism, detail, and comprehensiveness. Yet the author's greatest challenge will not be in reaching this audience, those already interested in the subject, but in penetrating the public mind jaded by decades of war, economic problems at home, and media reporting on Iran lacking depth and certainty—obstacles he candidly acknowledges.

Martin Scott Catino, Ph.D., American Military University