



Islam, Iran and Twelvers

Who is the Mahdi?

Twelve True Imams

Throughout history, Shia Muslims have not recognized the authority of elected Muslim leaders [caliphs], choosing instead to follow a line of leaders who they believe have been appointed by the Prophet Muhammad or Allah Himself. They believe the true leaders of Islam should be true descendants of Mohammed. The leaders are called "Imams." They believe that there have been 12 of these true "Imams" since the death of Mohammed.



History of the 12Th Imam (Al Mahdi)

- Al Mahdi (means, “the chosen one,” or “the anointed one.”)
- Muhammad Ibn Hasan Ibn Ali was born in Samarra, Iraq in AD 870
- He vanished from society at around 5 years old
- Some believe he fell in the well at Samarra, or he became supernaturally invisible (occultation)

Iran's Muslims

- Iran is an Islamic Republic (theocracy)
- [Supposedly] 98% Muslim, 89% Shiite, 85% are Twelvers
- **Mojtaba Khamenei** - since 8 March 2026— Supreme Leader (Twelver)
- Hassan Rouhani, president (Twelver)

The Constitutionalizing of Guardianship

Ruhollah Khomeini (17 May 1900 – 3 June 1989) was an Iranian politician and [Shia cleric](#) [religious leader] who served as the first [supreme leader of Iran](#) from 1979 until [his death](#) in 1989. He was the leader of the [Iranian Revolution](#), which overthrew [Mohammad Reza Pahlavi](#), ended the [Pahlavi era](#), and transformed the country into an [Islamic republic](#). As supreme leader, he implemented policies that came to be known as [Khomeinism](#).

The Constitutionalizing of Guardianship

Khomeini argued that the [12th] Imam's absence did not suspend divine governance. He asserted that qualified jurists must rule as deputies of the Hidden Imam until his return. This doctrine transformed clerical authority into political sovereignty. In 1979 this doctrine became constitutional law. The Supreme Leader governs not merely as a political head of state but as a steward of the Islamic Revolution and representative of the Hidden Imam. [A Theocracy]

The Iran Hostage Crisis

The Iran hostage crisis began on November 4, 1979, when Iranian students seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran and took 66 Americans hostage, with 52 held until January 20, 1981 [444 days]. It ended when all remaining hostages were released minutes after Ronald Reagan was inaugurated. The revolutionary government of Iran, under the Ayatollah Khomeini, supported the hostage undertaking.

Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp

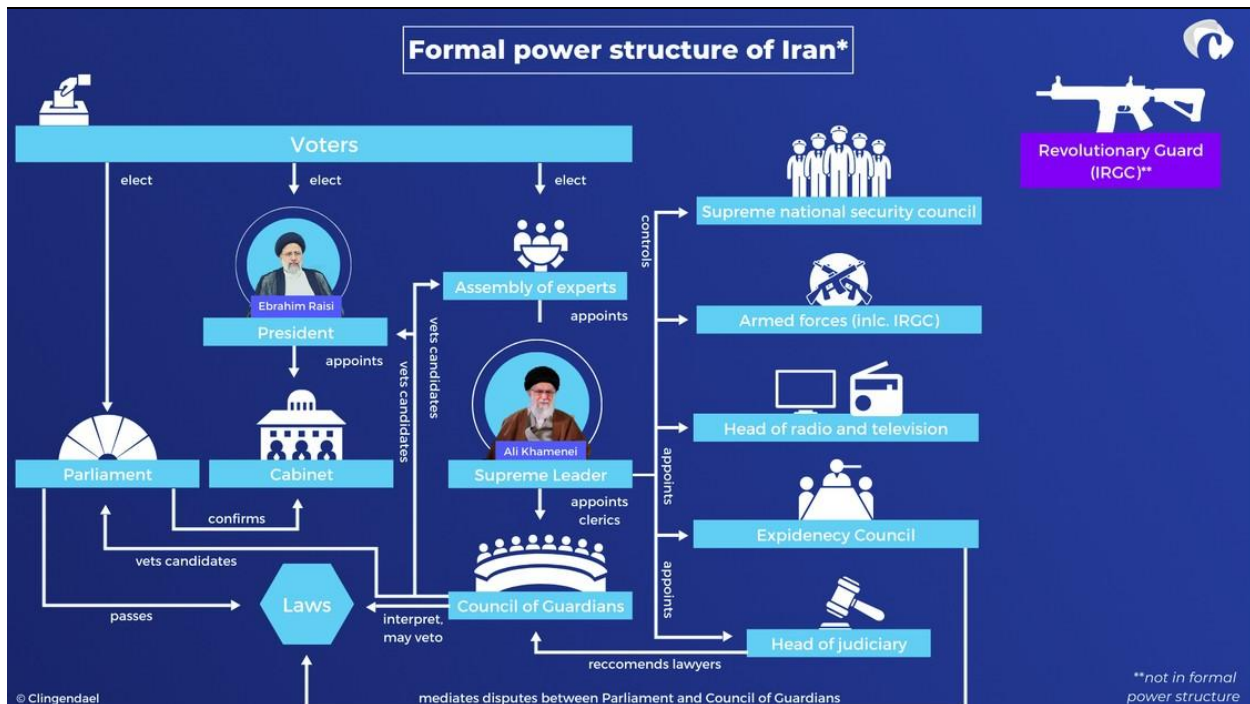
- Focused on protecting the Islamic Republic and answerable directly to the Ayatollah and not by the government itself.
- They have their own weapons, and they have control of the ballistic missiles and the drones.
- The IRGC control major sectors of the Iranian economy (many of the generals are billionaires).

Other “forces” in Iran

- The QUDS forces (like our CIA) are the external proxy group. They are involved in foreign, military intelligence and some are elite external operators. They support, organize and train foreign militias and provide arms to HAMAS, HEZBOLLAH, and the Houthis.
- The **Basij** or the “Organization for Mobilization of the Oppressed” is a [paramilitary](#) volunteer [militia](#) within the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#). The organization serves as a civilian [auxiliary group](#) engaged in enforcing state control over society by acting as a [morality police](#) force in public settings, organizing pro-[government](#) rallies, suppressing [dissident](#) gatherings.

The Basij

- In September 2022, 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, died in a hospital in [Tehran](#), Iran, under suspicious circumstances. The Basij had arrested Amini for allegedly not wearing the [hijab](#) in accordance with government standards. This sparked riots where 476 people were killed by the Basij.
- In January 2026, the Basij showed up at 400 towns where anti-government protests were happening and they killed 40,000 protesters.



Twelver Shiism, the Hidden Imam, and the Revolutionary Use of Eschatology in Iran



Islam divided into Sunni and Shia branches over succession after the death of Muhammad. Sunnis grounded leadership in communal selection. Shia grounded it in divinely appointed lineage through Ali and a line of Imams. Over time, this developed into a theological system centered on sacred authority transmitted through bloodline.

Twelvers, the largest Shia group, believe twelve Imams were appointed through Muhammad's lineage. The twelfth, Muhammad al-Mahdi, entered occultation in the ninth century and remains alive but hidden. He will return to establish global justice and rule decisively over the world.

Occultation and Sovereignty

The doctrine of occultation creates a structural tension. If the only fully legitimate ruler is absent, what authority can any government claim? For centuries, clerics limited themselves to jurisprudence and religious guidance while political rulers operated without claiming divine infallibility. That restraint ended in the twentieth century.

The Constitutionalization of Guardianship

Ruhollah Khomeini argued that the Imam's absence did not suspend divine governance. He asserted that qualified jurists must rule as deputies of the Hidden Imam until his return. This doctrine, Velayat-e Faqih, transformed clerical authority into political sovereignty.

After 1979, this interpretation became constitutional law. The Supreme Leader governs not merely as a political head of state but as steward of the Islamic Revolution and representative of the Hidden Imam. The regime's legitimacy is explicitly theological.

¹ <https://theologyinfive.com/twelve-shiism-hidden-imam-iran-eschatology/>

Apocalyptic Expectation as Political Resource

Twelver hadith literature describes the period before the Mahdi's return as marked by severe injustice, violent upheaval, and widespread bloodshed. Many narrations speak of large-scale conflict in the Middle East and dramatic confrontation preceding the establishment of global justice. The Mahdi's arrival is portrayed as forceful intervention that overturns existing political orders.

Those themes provide a powerful reservoir of imagery. When a regime defines itself as guardian during the occultation, apocalyptic expectation becomes politically useful. Instability can be framed as prelude. Conflict can be cast as purification. Endurance under pressure becomes participation in sacred history rather than evidence of failure.

Leveraging Sacred Narrative

The Islamic Republic repeatedly frames its struggle in theological terms. Resistance to Western pressure is cast as moral duty. Hostility toward Israel is framed as alignment with ultimate justice. Sacrifice, whether economic or military, is presented as fidelity to the revolution and preparation for a divinely ordered future.

This does not require leaders to openly declare they seek chaos. It requires only that confrontation and hardship can be absorbed into a sacred narrative that promises ultimate vindication. That framing strengthens ideological cohesion and reduces internal pressure to normalize relations or abandon revolutionary posture.

Conclusion

Twelver Shiism teaches that history culminates in the return of the Hidden Imam to establish global justice through decisive intervention. The Islamic Republic has embedded that expectation into its governing structure and uses its imagery to reinforce revolutionary legitimacy.

By leveraging apocalyptic themes, Iran's leadership turns geopolitical struggle into theological mission. Conflict is not merely strategic competition; it is framed as alignment with sacred destiny. Any serious analysis of the regime must account for how eschatological expectation is used to sustain confrontation, justify sacrifice, and preserve ideological control.