



The Iran Novin Party
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**IRGC is NOT an
organ of a
nation-state,
but a terrorist
organization.**

This report was originally written by Arash Behgoo and Reza Parsaee, with valuable contributions from a group of activists in the Iranian diaspora. The draft was provided to the Office for Strategic Studies at the Iran Novin Party where it was modified to be used for the campaign against the Islamic Revolution and its IRGC.



The Iran Novin Party [INP] entered the political scene in the heat of the national revolution of Iran in the first days of 2023. With a significant member base both inside and outside the country, the Iran Novin Party is a major political force against the Islamic regime in Iran and for the establishment of an inclusive national transitional government representing all Iranians regardless of their political, religious or ethnic background. The INP upholds the values of liberal democracy in politics and sees secularism as a vital and unavoidable basis for it. The INP believes that a stable democracy is one that follows a democratic rule of law, which is based on the separation of powers and ensuring the fundamental rights of citizens. The Iran Novin Party supports peaceful relationships with all countries worldwide and prioritizes Iran's national interests.

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Preface

What comes next is a report that is addressed to all governments to emphasize the importance of helping Iranians by designating the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist entity. We are focusing on a case study of the alleged legal challenges presented by the Australian Attorney General's Department (AGD) for not listing the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC). We aim to refute them and prove that the IRGC is not an organ of a nation-state but a terrorist entity with the mission to suppress Iranians, spread instability and terrorism abroad and export the Islamic Revolution to other countries.

On 31 Jan. 2023, the AGD made a last-minute submission to the relevant Senate committee and argued:

*"The Attorney-General's Department is of the **view** that, as an organ of a nation-state, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is not the kind of entity that is covered by the terrorist organisation provisions in the Criminal Code".*

This view is wrong on two levels.

- 1- The IRGC is not an organ of a nation-state. The IRI's Constitution separates the IRGC from the country's military and law enforcement forces and establishes its purpose to guard the Islamic Revolution over and beyond Iran, therefore, it is aptly named "the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps".
- 2- While an entire nation or an entire government cannot constitute a terrorist organisation under the (Australian) law, there is no reason why a discrete agency, with its own constitution and organisational structure, cannot be designated as such.

(See the judgment of the Honourable Chief Justice Kourakis in *Abdirahman-Khalif vs R* [2019] SASCFC 133 paragraphs 22 -28)

The following report shows why the IRGC is not an organ of any nation-state.

The Islamic Revolution is the constitutional codename of a wannabe borderless Islamic State (Caliphate), that has so far, occupied Iran, and dominated large parts of Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere.

The Caliphate views Iran as just one of its territories¹. The Islamic Republic regime in Iran (IRI) is a local government within the broader Caliphate of the Islamic Revolution. By turning a blind eye to the elephant in the room and pretending that the Islamic Revolution does not exist, the international community continues to wrongfully recognise the IRI, a local government within a Caliphate, as the state of the Iranian nation. That provides the Caliphate with “State” immunity. Such a wrongful recognition must be revoked: A supranational Caliphate, that seeks to forcefully reduce nations into “One Ummah”, is not a nation-state and it should not be granted “state” immunity.

The IRGC is NOT an organ of a nation-state. It is an organ of a supranational Islamic State. The terrorist arm of a Muslim Supremacist Caliphate.

¹ Only one example amongst the many:

In a ceremony for the anniversary of the incident that killed IRGC Gen. Tehrani Moqadam (known as the father of the missile program of the Islamic Revolution), IRGC Gen. Majid Mousavi made these remarks:

*“Today we see this reality in the geography of the Resistance, in sacred **territories** that were led by Iran’s claws [a.k.a. tentacles] and became the frontline of defending the **Islamic Revolution**.*

*What we see today is the power that martyr Moqadam left for the motherland of this movement, Islamic Iran, the sacred **territory of Iran**, and **the territories of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, oppressed Palestine, and Yemen.**”*

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Introduction

This report is intended for foreign states, foreign officials and diplomats, and think tankers who take the Islamic Republic as the current government of Iran. We, the Iran Novin Party, do not take the Islamic Republic as the legitimate government of Iran and as it will be made clear throughout this report, the regime does not hold itself responsible for the Iranian nation, but Iran, to them, is a one territory they have occupied and rule for their Islamic revolution.

This report seeks to examine the validity of the following proposition put forth by some Western governments such as the Australian Attorney General's Department: "The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps² (**IRGC**) is an organ of a nation-state."

This proposition has some underlying assumptions:

1. The Islamic Republic of Iran (**IRI**) is the legitimate representative state of the Iranian nation.
2. IRGC is the same entity as described in the IRI Constitution.
3. Any entity that is described in the IRI Constitution is an organ of the IRI.

This report shall not lend itself to the assessment of the first underlying assumption and will instead, remain focused on the verification of the underlying assumptions 2 and 3.

To do so, we first review the relevant parts of the Constitution of the IRI and the charter of the IRGC, as well as the remarks made by the IRI's highest authorities, to observe how they elucidate the nature of the relationship between the IRI and the IRGC. We then compare the reality of today's IRGC to the picture these documents and speeches paint, to verify if the IRGC is what it should lawfully be. To create a frame of reference, we also compare the IRGC's declared goals, structure, and behaviour with potentially similar organs of other states.

Our objective is to answer these questions:

- i. How is the relationship between the IRI and the IRGC defined by the highest authorities in the IRI (the Constitution, the law, and the leader)?
- ii. Is the reality of IRGC compatible with this definition?

Repeatedly in this document, we had to use IRI's specific terms and phrases. To preserve the true meanings in the translation of these terms to English, we have favoured accuracy over convenience. We apologise for having had to invent a few new

² The correct translation of سپاه پاسداران انقلاب اسلامی is Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. This is what the 'Constitution Project' has also used in their English translation of the IRI Constitution. It is a common mistake to translate it to Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

abbreviations – like APJ which stands for the Absolute Patriarch Jurist³ instead of the familiar, yet inaccurate, “Iran’s Supreme Leader”.

Background

Before February 1979, Iran’s armed forces, under the constitutional order of the Pahlavis, were like those of the other nations: An army, whose main mission was protecting the territorial integrity of the country, a police force, and a small group called the Perpetual Guards tasked to protect the royal family.

After the regime change in 1979, several officials of the monarchy, including a group of high-ranking army officers faced summary executions, but this did not seem to be enough for some revolutionaries who believed Shah’s army must never be trusted. By April 1979, Khomeini decided that he would maintain the army, yet “cleanse” it from Shah’s Generals. He also established a second armed force, parallel to the army; A force whose purpose was to guard the Islamic Revolution and was aptly named “the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps”.

What IRGC is meant to be

According to the IRI Constitution

The preamble of the IRI [Constitution](#) reads:

“In the formation and equipping of the country's defence forces, due attention must be paid to faith and ideology as the basic criteria. Accordingly, the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps are to be organised in conformity with this goal, and they will be responsible not only for guarding and preserving the frontiers of the country, but also for fulfilling the ideological mission of Jihad in God's way; that is, expanding the sovereignty of God's law throughout the world (this is in accordance with the Qur'anic verse "Prepare against them whatever force you are able to muster, and steeds of war, striking fear into the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and others beyond them" [8:60]).”

³ In the IRI Constitution, the head of the state is referred to as مقام ولایت مطلقه فقیه which translates to the Absolute Patriarch Jurist (as in the Islamic Jurisprudence). This role is also referred to as the Absolute Patriarch of the Affairs امر مطلقه ولایت, or the Leader of the global Muslim super-nation امام امت (Imam of Ummah). While the English media often uses the term ‘Supreme leader’ [of Iran, or, of IRI], we will use the more accurate constitutional term, APJ. It is noteworthy that in the APJ’s own [media](#), the APJ is customarily called ‘supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution’ or in short ‘leader of the revolution’; virtually never ‘[Supreme] leader of Iran’, or even ‘[Supreme] leader of the IRI’.

Article 57 states:

“The ruling powers in IRI are separated into the legislative, the judicial, and the executive branches and all three branches function under the supervision of the “Absolute Patriarch of all the Affairs”, [who is also] the “Imam of the Ummah”⁴.

Article 110 lists the duties and the authorities of the incumbent APJ. The below items are relevant to the purpose of this document:

- Article 110-4: [APJ shall assume the role of] The commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
- Article 110-6-d: [When needed, APJ shall appoint, dismiss, or accept the resignation of] the chief of the joint staff.
- Article 110-6-e: [When needed, APJ shall appoint, dismiss, or accept the resignation of] the commander-in-chief of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.
- Article 110-6-f: [When needed, APJ shall appoint, dismiss, or accept the resignation of] the supreme commanders of the military and law enforcement.

It is important to note that while IRGC is introduced in the Constitution under the section that explains the “Armed Forces”, the Constitution separates the IRGC from the country’s military and law enforcement forces.

Chapter IX of the IRI Constitution explains the construct of the executive branch. Under section 3, titled “The Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps”, article 143 asserts:

“The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran is responsible for guarding the independence and territorial integrity of the country, as well as the system of the Islamic Republic.”

Under the same section, article 150 reads:

“The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organised in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the revolution and its achievements. The scope of the duties of this Corps, and its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of

⁴ **Ummah** means nation in Arabic (as in the الامم المتحدة for the United Nations). In the Islamic context (see “the Constitution of Medina” for example), the term Ummah is referred to the supernational community of those who are the subjects of the sovereignty of the Islamic State. The legitimate head of the Islamic State is the prophet or his successors. For the Twelver Shia (the official school of Islam in IRI as per Article 12 of the IRI Constitution), the legitimate successor of the prophet are the twelve Imams after him, but the 12th Imam is expected to return as a Messiah. The founding leader of the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini, believed that until the 12th Imam returns, a qualified Jurist will inherit the “Absolute Patriarchy” of the prophet and will be the Imam of Ummah. This belief in an “Absolute Patriarchy” of a Jurist is constitutionalised in the IRI.

responsibility of the other armed forces, are to be determined by law, with emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them.”

While the preamble of the Constitution makes it clear that both the Army and the IRGC must fulfil the ideological mission of Jihad in Allah’s way and expand the sovereignty of the law of God throughout the world, section 3 draws a clear distinction:

The Army is responsible for guarding the independence and territorial integrity of the country, as well as the system of the IRI.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, however, must guard the Islamic Revolution and its achievements.

Clearly, the Constitution regards the system of IRI and the Islamic Revolution as two separate institutions.

But what is the Islamic Revolution?

According to a part of the preamble that explains the purpose of the Constitution, the Islamic Revolution

“has been a movement aimed at the triumph of all the mustad’afin (the oppressed) over the mustakbirin (the arrogant), [so] the Constitution provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad. In particular, in the development of international relations, the Constitution will strive with other Islamic and popular movements to prepare the way for the formation of a single global Ummah in accordance with the Qur’anic verse “Truly is this Ummah of yours, a single Ummah, and I am your Lord, so worship Me” [21:92], and to assure the continuation of the struggle for the liberation of all the deprived and oppressed nations in the world.”

(Note that the term “international relations” is used to refer to relations with other Islamic and popular movements [not other nations]. Relations whose goal is to help those movements to turn into constituents of the single global super-nation that the Islamic Revolution aspires to build.)

Article 151 refers once again to the Qur’anic verse (8:60) that appears on the IRGC logo:

“Prepare against them whatever force you are able to muster, and steeds of war, striking fear⁵ into Allah’s enemy and your enemy, and others beyond them unknown to you but known to Allah ...” (8:60).

⁵ The verb that is used in the original verse is ترهبون whose infinitive form is الارهاب. In today’s Arabic الارهاب is used for “Terrorism” and a terrorist is called الارهابي. The term ترهبون can then translated to “terrorise” but we have used “striking fear” to convey the same meaning.

According to the IRGC charter

In line with articles 110, 150, and the preamble of the Constitution, the first article of IRGC's charter⁶ explains the purpose of the IRGC:

"The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is an institution under the high command of the leader, whose purpose is to guard the Islamic Revolution [of Iran?]⁷ and its achievements, and the continuous endeavour in realising Allah's ideals and expanding the sovereignty of God's law as per the law of the Islamic Republic, and the reinforcement of the defensive foundation of the Islamic Republic by collaborating with other armed forces, military training, and organising civilian forces"

Below is a recap of this brief review of how the IRI Constitution and the IRGC charter describe the IRGC:

- The Constitution of the IRI draws a clear distinction between what it calls "the system of the IRI", which is the Islamic Republic as a state, and the "Islamic Revolution".
- The Constitution of the IRI describes the Islamic Revolution as a movement that must be continued both inside the country and abroad to help the formation of the "single Ummah". In this super-nation building process, IRI is the first achievement of the Islamic Revolution.
- IRGC's purpose is to guard the Islamic Revolution and its achievements.

According to the leader of the Islamic Revolution

Khomeini, the founding APJ has repeatedly praised IRGC as 'the soldiers of Islam'.

In a lecture in 1999, Khamenei, the second and the current APJ [defined](#) IRGC as follows:

"The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is formed to defend the Revolution, the entirety of the Revolution, and to fight the enemies of the Revolution. All the enemies of the Revolution, all those with animosity have naturally lined up

⁶ This charter is ratified by the IRI's Parliament as law.

⁷ Foroutan, the IRGC's Public Relations manager in its early days explained in an [interview](#): "in the original copy of the IRGC charter that is stored in the parliament, the term that is written is 'the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' (without any mention of Iran). Because IRGC is not limited to Iran, the word Iran was not included in the proposed logo. When the logo was being discussed in the parliament, some MPs suggested that we name it the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps of Iran, but we believed Islam is not limited to Iran. Some MPs insisted that this might cause debates that the IRGC would use force to intervention everywhere and this would create problems. So, after some debating, it was finally decided that the logo uses Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (without Iran) but the charter includes the term "of Iran" [to hide the intentions and avoid political problems with the international community in the early days of the IRI]"

against the IRGC, and are ready [to fight IRGC], because [the IRGC personnel] are the guards of the Revolution. All the forces that exist in this God-made nature and in the law and tradition of God to defend the Revolution and the rightfulness of Islam, all those divine forces, all those capabilities and built-in talents are available at the behest of this entity that is formed to defend the Revolution.”

What IRGC actually is

Structure and Behaviour

Given the common misconception that the IRGC is an armed force of the Iranian nation-state, we have dedicated Appendix A of this document to outlining what the real-world IRGC is and does.

We have shown where the IRGC sits on the complete picture of the IRI armed forces. To do so we have looked at the overall firepower of IRI’s regular Army in global rankings, and then briefly compared the IRGC against the Army.

The remainder of Appendix A focuses solely on the IRGC and its structure, which consists of:

- armed forces parallel to the Army (32 corps of regional land forces, aerospace force, navy, Quds force and Basij),
- four security and intelligence organisations, in addition, and with parallel activities to the IRI government’s intelligence agency, cyber-space organs, judiciary and correction system;
- media and social media organisations, including numerous news agencies, newspapers, art and media corporations, ideopolitical indoctrination programs, and the so-called cyber-army;
- education centres comprising several universities belonging to IRGC’s main command or owned and operated by the Basij force,
- a vast economic and finance section with ever-expanding activities in banking, investment, insurance, construction, mining, energy, transportation, telecommunications, childcare, tourism, and virtually every sector of Iran’s economy.

IRGC has secured key positions in the system of the IRI. Six ministers, a speaker of the Parliament, more than half of the Parliament’s presiding board, and several ambassadors of the IRI are the IRGC members. Certain judges and procedures of the IRI judicial system are strictly controlled by the IRGC. See Appendix A for details and references.

Rafsanjani, the former president of the IRI [revealed](#):

“IRGC has full control over the economy, as well as foreign and domestic policy and is not happy with anything less than the whole country.”

In 2011, during a conference on "New strategies to counter smuggling", Ahmadinejad (6th president of IRI) [said](#) the smuggling networks are connected to some powerful and influential figures and criticised what he referred to as “our very own smuggler brothers” for their use of the “illegal wharves”. By condemning these remarks, IRGC commander-in-chief, Gen. Mohammad Ali (Aziz) Jafari confirmed the speculations that suggested Ahmadinejad was referring to IRGC when he said “our very own smuggler brothers”.

Ahmadinejad’s statement referred to IRGC’s businesses in Iran that involved the mass importation of goods into the country through IRGC’s own legal and illegal wharves.

Rouhani (7th president of IRI) in 2017 [insinuated](#):

“There was a part of the economy that was still in the hands of the unarmed government. We handed that part [too] over to the armed government.”

IRGC commander-in-chief strongly condemned these remarks.

Western sources [estimate](#) IRGC to be in control of a third to two-thirds of Iran’s economy. IRGC has been sanctioned for conducting numerous financial crimes, including currency counterfeiting, money laundering, drugs, and arms trafficking. See subsection ‘Systematic non-military crimes’ in Appendix B for details.

To summarise, IRGC is a giant, multi-faceted entity with a stake in most, if not all, of the IRI system and its economy, as well as its media outlets and cultural institutions.

With the lion’s share of the economy under its thumb, with judges and prisons, intelligence, news agencies, mines, ports, hotels, and banks, it has expanded in all directions to the point that, to an outside observer, it may be unrecognisable as an armed force, even if it started as one.

However, one must not overlook the fact that the Constitution of the IRI tasks IRGC to “muster whatever force” it may, in defence of the Islamic Revolution.

Comparison to other armed forces

Appendix B studies the similarities and differences between IRGC and the armed forces of states other than IRI.

The comparison is made on the bases of self-image and symbols, structural complexity, presence and level of role duplication between state organs, and certain behavioural traits.

In summary, this study shows that:

- The symbol of the IRGC featuring the contours of a globe to signify its global mission is unique among state-owned armed forces. This is rarely seen even amongst armed violent political groups. Some designated terrorist organisations, coincidentally with a close connection to the IRGC, have similar logos to that of the IRGC.
- The structural complexity of IRI-attributed armed forces is quite unique among all nation-states. No other sitting state has parallel and distinct land, air and naval forces. The only instances we found with a similar existing structure are:
 - a. Libya, a failed state, because of an ongoing civil war that has torn the armed forces into two opposing fronts, and
 - b. the Islamic State (**IS**), with its sets of provincial land forces replicating a common command structure, and an elite 'Caliphate Army' in parallel.
- Basij-like militias are not uncommon, especially among authoritarian states. However, most states seem to prefer containing these paramilitary groups or disassociating them from the state. Considering violence against their own people, the entities we found most akin to Basij are the likes of Venezuelan "Colectivo" which is a non-state, but closely-linked-to-state, actor.
- If IRGC were a state entity in its conventional sense, it would be uniquely positioned as the only state entity ever designated by the United State government as a terrorist organisation.

IRGC, IRI, and the Islamic Revolution

As stated before, the Constitution of the IRI draws a clear distinction between the IRI and the Islamic Revolution. The ultimate source that can help clear this distinction is the incumbent APJ whose [remarks](#) elucidate the relation between the IRI and the Islamic Revolution. In summary, the APJ describes the Islamic Revolution as an institution that must expand and evolve in five stages:

- Overthrowing the oppressor
- Constitutionalising an Islamic system (such as IRI)
- Establishing an Islamic State (such as IRI) based on the Islamic constitutional prescriptions.
- Ensuring the society becomes an Islamic Society (He stresses that IRI has yet to achieve this)
- Forming the single global Muslim super-nation (Islamic Ummah)

In other [remarks](#) on IRGC and its Quds Force, the APJ asserts:

"We will not announce that we will run military campaigns and intervene in others' affairs, but we do announce that the organised, experienced, and

revolutionary force of the first nation that has emerged by the Islamic Revolution, definitely, has responsibilities about the armed cells⁸ of the Party of God, all around the world.”

The leader of the Islamic Revolution regards Iran as the first nation that was built by the Islamic Revolution, on its pursuit of setting all the oppressed of the world free and creating a single super-nation, or as the Constitution calls it “a single Ummah”.

To the Islamic Revolution, IRI is an achievement, but it is a work in progress; it is only the first step of building the single Ummah.

Conclusion

To examine whether IRGC is an organ of a nation-state, we reviewed the Constitution of the IRI, the charter of the IRGC, and the remarks of the IRI’s highest authority. We also studied the structure of the IRGC and the range of its activities. Comparing the IRGC to the IRI Army, armed forces of other states, failed states and a few non-state armed forces, we highlighted similarities and differences among these entities and found the most IRGC-like symbolisms, structures and behaviours.

These are our key findings:

- The Constitution of the IRI defines the ‘Islamic Revolution’ as an ongoing global movement to form the super-nation that it calls “the single Ummah”. It introduces the IRI as an offspring of the Islamic Revolution.
- The Constitution of the IRI and the charter of the IRGC define the "Islamic Revolution Guards Corps" as an entity tasked to defend, continue, and expand the Islamic Revolution.
- The words of the leader of the Islamic Revolution and head of IRI, who is known in the Constitution as the Imam of Ummah, confirm the definition, goal, scope, and tasks of the IRGC as those defined in the Constitution and the IRGC charter. He clearly underlines the borderless nature of the IRGC, and its purpose to guard the entirety of the Islamic Revolution.
- The structure and behaviour of the IRGC, as well as its name and symbol corroborate its authorised definition as a borderless force of a borderless revolution.

⁸ The exact phrase that the APJ has used in his remarks translates to “the armed nuclei”. We translated that into “the armed cells” to avoid potential confusion about any reference to nuclear arms.

Both in theory and in practice, IRGC is an organ of the Islamic Revolution; An organ whose modus operandi is to “strike fear” in the hearts of everyone whom it regards as an enemy using “whatever force” that is available “in this God-made nature”.

Neither Australia nor any other member-state of the United Nations has recognised the Islamic Revolution as a state; nor has the Islamic Revolution ever claimed that it is one.

Therefore,

- IRGC is not an organ of a nation-state.
- IRGC is the organ of a global Islamic Revolution.
- IRGC has been fulfilling its mission by creating and enabling numerous terrorist proxy groups in the Middle East and around the world.
- IRGC is the largest organised terrorist entity in the world, with its own economic and media conglomerate, responsible for suppressing the people of countries such as Iran and Syria to protect the super-nation that it calls “the single Ummah” and conquer more territories. They have a global network of organised crime ranging from kidnapping and assassination to bombing, to just name a few.

Appendix A – Dimensions of the real IRGC

IRGC's position in IRI armed forces

The armed forces of the IRI are organised into three distinct groups: Army, IRGC and the Police.

AJP is the commander-in-chief of all armed forces. "Joint chiefs of staff" act as the coordinator between these forces as well as the Ministry of Defence.

The Army also referred to as Iran's regular army, is further divided into 4 forces shown in Figure 1. According to both [Forbes](#) and Global Firepower [Index](#), the army alone ranks 3rd powerful military in the Middle East and 17th globally.

With nearly 400,000 personnel, it is predominantly geared for classic warfare, operating equipment such as heavy artillery, fighter planes, large surface ships and submarines. The army also features a 'special forces' unit but this is not officially designated as a separate force by law.

IRGC is the second major force by active personnel with around 260,000 active members. IRGC predominantly favours lower-cost, improvised weapon systems that are designed for asymmetrical engagements. In 2023, the [budget](#) IRGC receives from the state per capita of active personnel is **3.5 times that of the army**. IRGC also runs an enormous financial, industrial and media conglomerate in and out of Iran.

IRGC's armed forces

Land force

This is the first established unit of IRGC. It consists of 100-150 thousand troops organised in 32 corps, one in each province of Iran except Tehran province which has 2 corps. Equipment of the IRGC land force includes main battle tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery units, rocket launchers as well as some home-grown weapons such as a range of surface-to-surface ballistic and cruise missiles. The most recent operation run by the force was the [bombardment](#) of villages in Iraq's Kurdistan region using artillery and ballistic missiles days after the start of the 2022 protests in Iran.

Aerospace Force

Recruiting 15000 personnel, the aerospace force mainly acts as a missile force, airborne force, and air attack unit. In the latter domain, it has a limited number of attack choppers but is mainly focused on developing and stockpiling low-cost drone systems. The most recent engagements of the IRGC aerospace force are supplying the Russian army with suicide drones as well as shooting down the passenger flight PS752 in January 2020 using surface-to-air missiles.

Naval Force

A force of roughly 20000 people strong, features 2 warships, 2 logistical support ships, over 1500 light attack boats, missile boats and suicide boats. Since 2019, the IRGC navy in cooperation with the special forces has been involved in multiple operations of confiscating oil tankers across the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea.

Basij e Mustad'afin (Mobilisation of the Oppressed)

Basij is a paramilitary unit that was formed less than a year after the 1979 revolution with the [aim](#) of "organising the oppressed masses in defence and expansion of God's law, Islamic revolution and its achievements". Founder of IRI, Khomeini, called Basij 'the selfless army of God'. Basij has bases in most mosques and schools, all universities, government administrations, large factories and alike. Its active membership offers benefits such as exemption from military service and the privilege of admission to top-ranked universities. During the Iran-Iraq war, Basij members were at times used by IRGC as a pool of manpower to clear minefields and launch probing attacks.

Basij has gone through several rounds of restriction in the last 20 years. It is currently merged with the IRGC land force. However, parallel to IRGC, it possesses its own extensive non-military arm (for more, see the section dedicated to economic activities below). Basij's latest armed engagements were the crackdown on protests using 'plain-clothed' (out of uniform) forces.

Quds Force

IRGC Quds (aka Qods, Arabic for Jerusalem) Force is the dedicated extraterritorial unit of IRGC.

In his remarks on 17/01/2020, the incumbent APJ, Khamenei described the Quds Force as "fighters without borders". In the same speech, Khamenei added:

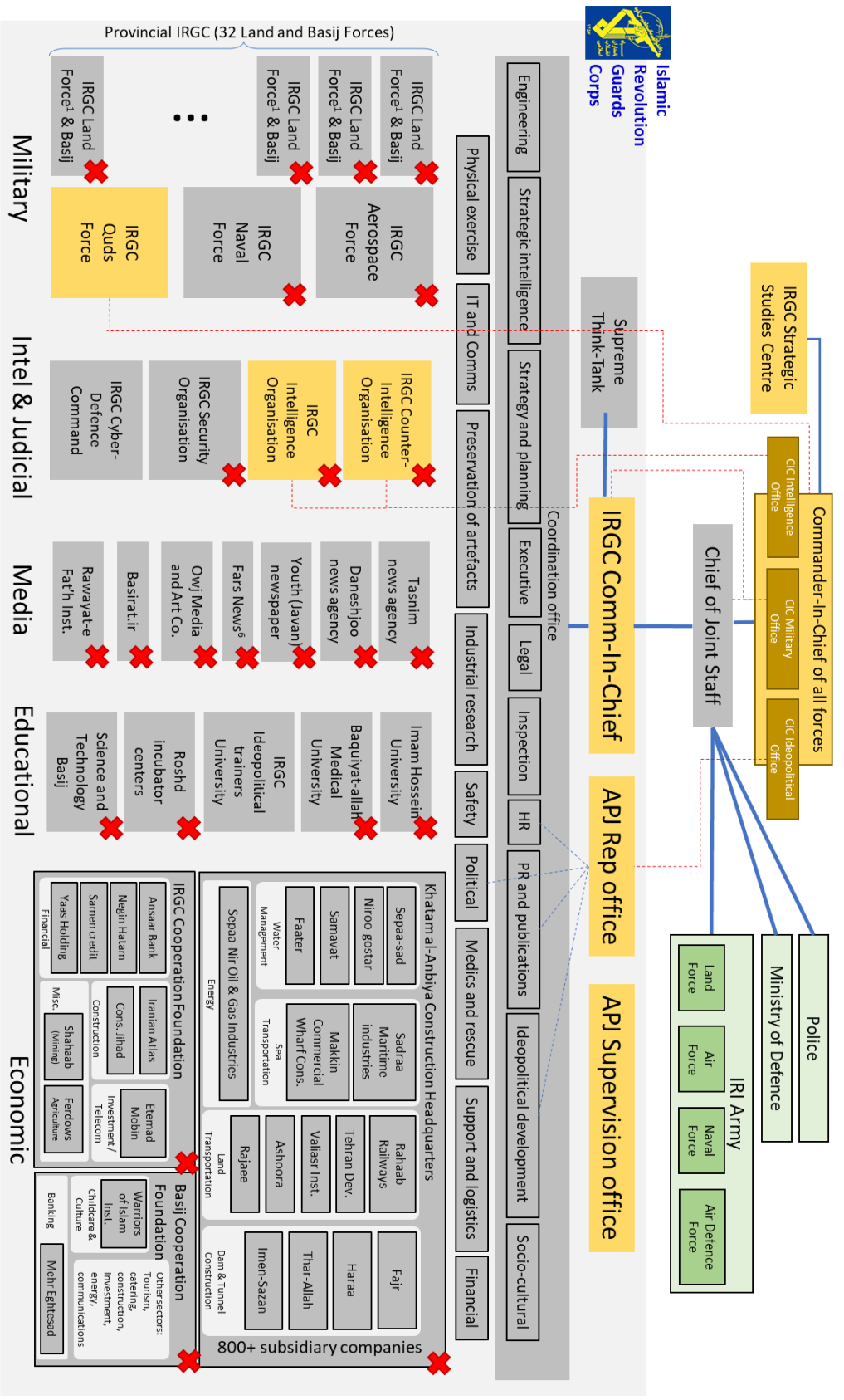
"We will not announce that we will run military campaigns and intervene in others' affairs, but we do announce that the organised, experienced, and revolutionary force of the first country that has emerged by the Islamic Revolution, indeed, has responsibilities about armed cells of the Party of God⁹ all around the world."

CIA world factbook [reports](#):

"In recent years, Quds Force planning for terror attacks has been uncovered and disrupted in several countries worldwide, including Albania, Bahrain, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Kenya, Turkey, and the United States."

These attacks span a wide range of forms: [kidnapping](#), [assassination](#), and bombing, to name a few.

⁹ Translation of حزب الله. Not to be confused with the Hizballah in Lebanon. The Party of God is another name for "the true Muslim believers" whom God recognises as his own party.



✖ - Unit has an equivalent or parallel in government, IRI Army or private sector. ■ - Unit directly operating, and unit commander appointed by, APJ.

¹ IRGC land forces have the Army land force as their parallel. Basij does not have a duplicate in the rest of the IRI structure.

Figure 1- Organisational structure of the IRGC

Quds Force is the face of IRGC's engagement in civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. It funds, trains, and manages multiple proxy militias across the Middle East, some of which are designated terrorists by several Western nations. Apart from proxies, IRGC-QF has created formal armies of foreign Shia fighters such as the Fatemiyoun Brigade (made up of roughly 15,000 Afghan soldiers) and Zeynabioun Brigade (mainly Pakistani fighters) and uses them to score military victories in other countries such as Syria and Yemen.

IRGC-QF has a two-way financial relationship with the business branches of the IRGC. On one hand, it generates income by smuggling [arms](#), [missiles](#), and [drugs](#), money [laundering](#), and [forging](#) currencies under the cover of IRGC's many civilian-looking companies. On the other hand, it funnels money, either generated by itself or obtained from the financial activities of other IRGC units, into its proxy militias worldwide.

In a leaked [interview](#) after finishing his term, Zarif, the former IRI Minister for Foreign Affairs, stated that the IRGC-QF commander invariably dictated the details of foreign policy to him:

“Almost every time I went for negotiations, it was Soleimani who told me what points to make and what to achieve [...] I virtually never could – not that I didn't want to – tell the commander to do something because I needed it in my diplomacy [...]. Always diplomacy paid for the field [operations], and never the other way round”.

The APJ mounted a strong defence of IRGC-QF following the publication of these remarks, praising IRGC-QF as 'the main stoppers of passive diplomacy in Western Asia'. Elsewhere, the APJ has hailed IRGC-QF for generating the largest contribution to IRI's diplomatic gains.

Quds Force reports directly to the APJ. Its commander is appointed by direct order of the APJ. General Vahidi, the first commander of the Quds Force, is currently IRI's minister for home affairs and chair of the strategic council of foreign relations. General Soleimani, the second commander, was the subject of intensive PR campaigns by the IRI and the IRGC media outlets, portraying him as 'the pious General'. He was assassinated in Iraq by US forces back in 2020.

IRGC's non-military branches

Intelligence

Alongside the government's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), IRGC intel units work under the duo of the Supreme National Security Council - the SNSC, namely the official state intel body and APJ's intelligence office (the actual ultimate decision maker).

IRGC conducts its intelligence-related activities using the following 4 organisations:

- **IRGC counterintelligence organisation** is IRGC's internal anti-espionage arm. The head of this organisation is directly appointed by and reports to, Khamenei.
- **IRGC Intelligence Organisation** works as a parallel organisation to MOIS, with a virtually identical role. The competition between the two has become public on numerous occasions. IRGC-IO maintains control over certain [wards](#) in public prisons to keep political prisoners. As well, it operates its own [secret](#) prisons in parallel with the judiciary system. IRGC-IO is also formally the law-enforcement unit of the judiciary. The Commander of this unit is directly appointed by and reports to, Khamenei.
- **IRGC Security Organisation** oversees providing security for top IRI officials, diplomatic guests, key state and military sites, airports, commercial flights, nuclear facilities and alike.
- **IRGC Cyber Defence Command** got established in 2015 as an upgrade to the previously existing 'IRGC Centre for Studying Organised Cyber Crime' – also known as the 'Cyber Army'. Responsibilities of this unit include combating espionage against the cultural order of the society, identifying profanity against the revolution and its values, improving the security of cyberspace users, and generating content. In September 2022, Australian, US, Canadian and UK cyber security agencies jointly issued an [advisory](#), warning about multiple cyber-attacks on respective states by IRGC-backed actors.

Media

IRGC runs a media empire, consisting of at least three news agencies (Tasnim, Daneshjoo, Fars), one newspaper (Javaan), think tanks, indoctrination circles, Jihadi expeditions, film productions, and art and media firms (Owj and Rawayat-e Fat'h). Figure 1 presents a non-exhaustive list of these media and cultural activities. Many of these are formally under Basij but are shown under the general IRGC command hierarchy for simplicity. APJ [praised](#) the intellectual, artistic and cultural works of IRGC as a "new creature" that has been or is being, born in these fields.

Education

IRGC runs several universities covering a broad range of studies such as military, intel and security. cyber warfare, politics, international relations, and medicine. IRGC also has several general and specialised hospitals. Basij force has bases in most schools and universities. In addition, Basij owns a separate set of universities and education centres. These are predominantly focused on soft subjects such as human science, culture, leadership, and media.

Economic and Financial

IRGC's involvement in Iran's economy is primarily driven by three mega-conglomerates explained below. However, other sections of IRGC such as the Quds Force also run their own banks, charities and other business activities that are not mentioned here for sake of brevity.

IRGC as a whole, and its economic activities in particular, are outside the realm and supervision of the government and parliament. Their allocated budget, income and spendings are well-kept secrets. Although occasionally some figures are published, they are mostly based on word-of-mouth speculation based on contradicting sources, or leaks resulting from inner-circle competition within IRGC and other factions of IR. APJ has [stated](#) no other organ or institute compares to IRGC in providing social services.

Khatam al-Anbia Construction Headquarters (hereafter in this section: 'the HQ' for brevity)

[Not to be mistaken with Khatam al-Anbia Central HQ, a parallel organisation to the 'General Staff']

As per its [website](#), is established to further to goal of protecting the Islamic revolution using Jihadi spirit and strengthening the 'resistance economy'. It has specialist holdings in oil and gas, mining, agriculture, urban development, maritime, telecom, social science, consultation and a research centre.

IRGC's general commander is the head of the HQ. He customarily appoints an acting commander to manage the organisation. [According](#) to its former acting commander, Saeed Mohammad, the HQ employs 15000 staff directly and outsources work to over 5000 subsidiary companies (amounting to roughly 10% of countries' workforce in some estimates). Mohammad claimed that the HQ has completed 1800 mega-projects by 2020, including 28% of the total railway capacity of the country, 900km of freeways, 4000km of water transport lines, 5000km of oil and gas pipelines, 6 phases of South Pars (world largest gas field) oil and gas projects, produces 40% of country's petrol, 85% of country's optical fibre network, over 50% of all subway lines, and 80% of all active wharves. Mohammad stated in the same interview that the HQ is also involved in international construction projects in many countries. Amid corruption news leaks, he resigned from the HQ to become a presidential candidate and was immediately assigned as IRGC's general commander advisor.

IRGC Cooperative Foundation (Bonyad Ta'avon Sepah)

IRGC-CF, according to its [charter](#), is established to assist full-time employees of IRGC with their accommodation needs through economic and financial activities. The general commander of IRGC is the head of this unit. Possessing major shares in 4 banks, 51% of TCI (Telecommunication Company of Iran), and activities in mining, tourism, media, agriculture, construction, stocks brokering, leasing, and insurance, it has become a financial giant, or as US government [describes](#) it, "a wellspring of corruption and graft". Yas Holding, one of the largest IRGC-CF subsidiaries, was dissolved in 2018 following a damning corruption scandal. Yas Holding owned 'Tejarat Almas Mobin', which was [sanctioned](#) by the US government for currency counterfeiting in support of IRGC-QF.

Basij Cooperative Foundation (Bonyad Ta'avon Basij)

according to its [charter](#), BCF was established to encourage cooperation and assist Basij members to take maximum advantage of the IRI government benefits. It owns and operates businesses in construction, tourism, rail and road transportation, education, medical services, art and culture, catering, a major private bank (Parsian), and multiple stock trading firms.

IRI key organs

Even though IRI law bans military personnel from engaging in politics, IRGC officers have been active in politics throughout the last 44 years. Presently, 10 members of the IRI [cabinet](#) (6 ministers and 4 presidential assistants) are current or former IRGC officers at the time of writing this article (April 2023). 7 out of 12 members of IRI Parliament's board of directors are IRGC officers, including the Chair of the Parliament.

IRI's international hostages have reported that the IRGC has so-called [puppet-judges](#) and an overall strong grip on judicial [procedures](#).

Appendix B - What does IRGC resemble most?

In this Appendix, we explore similarities and differences between IRGC and other entities (state organs and otherwise) in terms of concept and symbols, architecture, and behaviour.

Symbols

Contrary to regular armies, including the IRI's army, the name of the IRGC does not indicate affiliation to a nation-state, country, or region. As mentioned in footnote 6 of the main text, Gen. Foroutan, a former PR chief of IRGC, [described](#) this as the outcome of a conscious decision-making process rooted in the fact that IRGC is not meant to be limited by any political borders.

IRGC reasserts its global scope in its emblem using the outline of a globe. Our study shows none of the current or former rogue states, nor Russia and China display a globe or any other symbol of universality, in their armed force emblems. An identical globe to that of IRGC appears on the emblem and flag of Hizballah, though Hizballah has partly rectified the matter by inscribing 'Islamic Resistance in Lebanon' at the bottom of its symbol.

A few examples are shown in Figure 2:



Figure 2 - examples of symbols of armed forces

Architecture

Organisational complexity

Most nation-states have their armed forces divided into three main branches: land, air and naval. Other than these, two types of armed forces are seen commonly among nation-states:

- Many, including IRI, consider law enforcement a part of their armed forces.
- Guards: national/presidential/royal/republican/home guards are included in many states' armed forces. There are small and highly specialised units in charge of the protection of the state, key buildings and top officials. In IRI, this is done primarily by the 'IRGC Security Organisation'.

Other common classes of the military include:

- Special Forces: highly trained forces used for counter-terrorism, search and rescue, and alike. In IRI, each of the three forces (army, IRGC and police) features a Special Operation unit.
- Militia or reserved forces: forces consisting of civilians, either as a reserve or for cultural and political purposes are common mostly among authoritarian regimes. Basij can be considered one of these types.
- Miscellaneous: Some states consider logistics, support, and medical units as separate forces.

In terms of the number of distinct main forces, the combination of IRGC (land, aerospace, navy, Quds, Basij), Army (land, air, navy, air defence) and police, making up ten forces in total, is unrivalled even among military superpowers and highly authoritarian regimes. See Figure 3.

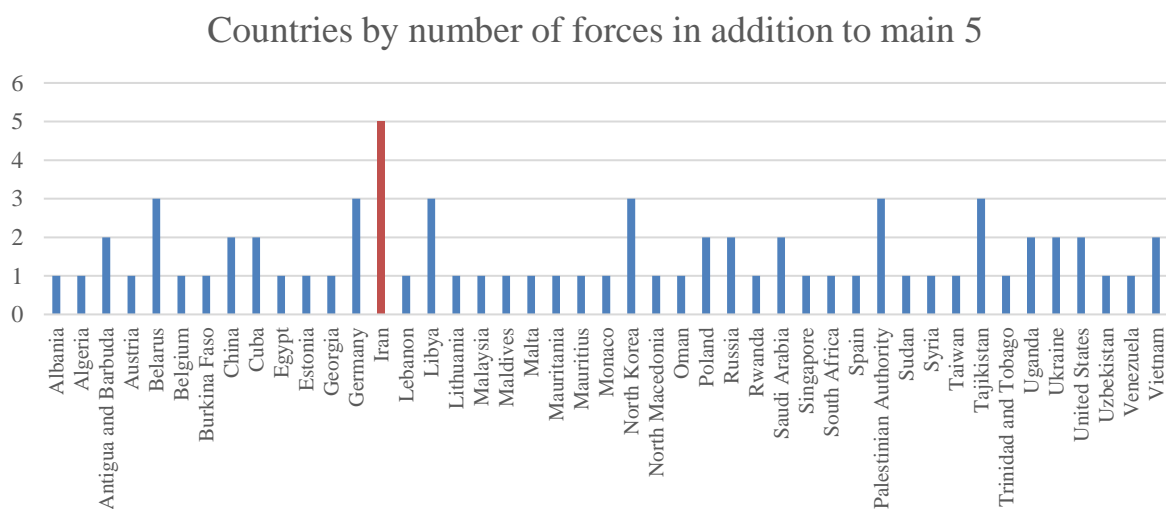


Figure 3 - countries by the number of forces in addition to the main 5 (land, air, navy, police, and guard).

Role duplication

Parallel forces with similar areas of operation are extremely rare. Libya is the only country other than Iran that we identified with 2 land forces, 2 air forces and 2 navies; noting that Libya is presently a 'failed state' amid a civil war and the duplicate armies are fighting one another.

This complexity has necessitated the establishment of several new units to coordinate and resolve conflicts between IRGC on one hand, and army and non-military parallel organisations with the same functions on the other. However, it appears that even the coordination organisations have, over time, become duplicated. For instance, Figure 4 shows the command structure of military and intelligence forces in the IRI. All top-level

coordination organisations are directly under the APJ, but some are deemed closer to him (fully independent from government and parliament).

Apart from Libya, another example of military architecture with the same level of complexity was the Islamic State. The information available from the inner-working of IS is limited, but what we know from investigative journalists' [reports](#) is that lacks air and naval forces, but its ground force was structured almost identically to the new organisation of the IRGC land force; i.e. provincial forces replicating the same blueprint but relatively independent in decision-making. IS had organised its lower-level forces in these units, in much the same way that IRGC combines Basij with its land force. Parallel to these, IS also had a separate, highly skilled armed force that it called the 'Caliphate Army'.

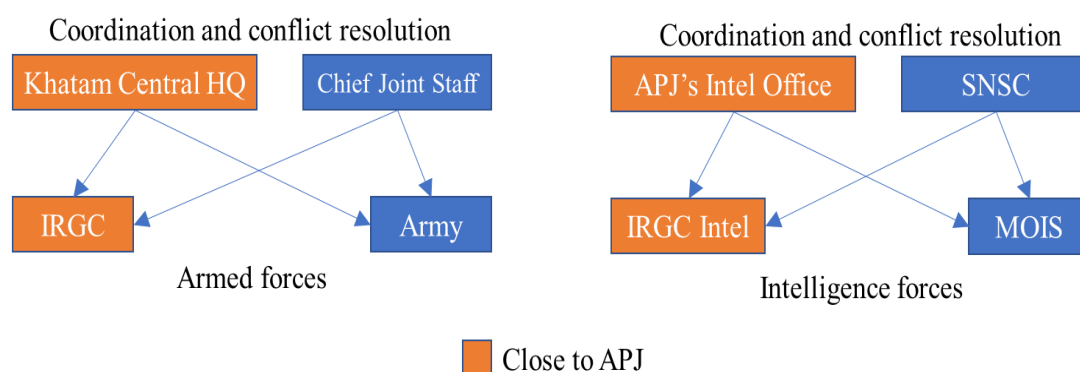


Figure 4 - Duplication of armed and intel units and coordinators in IRI

Militia groups

We have identified Basij-like forces under the state of 13 countries (10 [authoritarian](#), 2 flawed democracies and one hybrid regime). These are forces largely made up of volunteers and work as a reserved force. Most are, at least on paper, strictly limited in scope to the preparation of the public for war and emergencies. In our limited study, we did not see evidence of the state-related militias being primarily focused on protecting anything but the state. A few countries have parallel 'grassroots' organisations – such as Cuba's *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* and Venezuela's *Colectivo* – that are used for mass surveillance or oppression of dissent. These are typically closely connected to state persons, but not officially state organs.

Stressing that our research in this area is not exhaustive, we could not find organisations like Basij that combine the key factors of philosophy (protecting and expanding a revolution), affiliation to the state, open violence towards own population, and vast economical activities.

Extra-territorial forces

Further research is required.

Practices

Child soldiers

Out of 10 countries where [child soldiers](#) are still being used, IRI and war-torn Yemen are the only states where the crime is practised without ramifications or a plan to stop. In 2018 IRGC's Basij force was [sanctioned](#) by the US treasury for the continuation of this practice.

Other major perpetrators of child soldering included ISIS, Boko Haram and Al-Shahaab, all designated terrorist organisations by Australia and like-minded nations. See Table 1.

Table 1 - 10 countries using child soldiers.

Child soldier country	Current status	Who does it?
Myanmar	Action Plan signed and in progress	State army
Congo	Action Plan signed and in progress	State army
Iran	Sanctioned by the US in 2018	Basij (IRGC)
Iraq	-	ISIS and PKK
Mali	Action Plan signed and in progress	Various groups, including state
Nigeria	Action Plan signed and in progress	Boko Haram
Somalia	-	Harkat Al-Shahaab
South Sudan	Action Plan signed and in progress	Various groups, incl. the state army
Syria	Democratic Army signed Action Plan	Various groups, incl. the state army
Yemen	-	Various groups, incl. the state army

Systematic non-military crime

The topic required further research to establish a comparison with other state armies. However, ample evidence is available that shows both IRGC and the Islamic State were both routinely involved in currency [counterfeiting](#), [weapon](#), [drug](#) and [human](#) trafficking, international [hostage](#)-taking (code-named hostage-diplomacy in the case of IRGC) and alike.

Non-military activities

Further research is required.

Terrorist designations

The previous U.S. administration [listed](#) IRGC in its entirety as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation on 15/04/2019 and the current administration reconfirmed the status of IRGC as an organisation on the FTO list.

To the date of release of this document, no other entity commonly perceived as a state organ is designated by the US government as a terrorist organisation.

In the U.K., on 12/01/2023, the House of Commons unanimously voted for a non-binding resolution that urges the government to proscribe IRGC.

IRGC Quds Force has been on Canada's "listed terrorist entities" since December 17, 2012. Discussions about designating IRGC in its entirety are ongoing and the government has already listed nearly 10'000 IRGC personnel.

On 19/01/2023, in a nonbinding resolution, the European Parliament voted by a large majority to add the IRGC and all its subsidiary forces to the terror list.

On 01/02/2023, the Australian Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee recommended: "that the Australian Government take the necessary steps to formally categorise the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as an organisation involved in supporting and facilitating terrorism."

In October 2018, Saudi and Bahrain added IRGC to their lists of terrorist entities.



The PDF version of the document can be found here