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# Designating Iran's Revolutionary Guards As Terrorists Will Have Dire Consequences

Such overt U.S. hostility towards Iran would be the nail in the coffin of any hopes to improve ties between the two states.

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Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (L) and IRGC Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari (R) in Tehran, Iran on September 15, 2015.

According to [reports](#), the Trump administration is considering designating Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) a terrorist organization, even as senior U.S. defense and intelligence officials have [warned](#) against such a move. Of course, the IRGC and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) have been bitterly at odds for over three decades. In the early 1980s, after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran, both forces were established and assumed responsibility for their country's extra-territorial actions. CENTCOM's [area of responsibility](#) — the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia — is in Iran's neighborhood and overlaps with the area of responsibility of the Qods Force, the IRGC's foreign operations wing.

America and Iran both frame the actions of their respective militaries in the region as reflective of aims for regional hegemony. However, the reality is that many regional states intervene militarily outside their borders; whether it be

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There are four leading reasons for why the U.S. designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization will be dangerous and harmful for both U.S. national security interests and regional stability.



MARK KAUZLARICH / REUTERS

Trump is reportedly considering designating Iran's revolutionary guards terrorists. Here's why that's dangerous.

First and foremost is the fact that CENTCOM and the Qods Force are the most powerful and influential outside actors in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and the Persian Gulf. Even in Yemen, [American](#) and [Saudi](#) officials contend the Qods Force is a primary opponent. As such, if there is to be a peaceful solution to any regional crises, cooperation with the IRGC is a must. To label it terrorist will shut the door on opportunities for successful diplomacy.

Secondly, the IRGC is a government institution, a [conscript](#) force and an integral part of the Iranian Armed Forces. Declaring it a terrorist organization is the equivalent of designating the military of another nation a terrorist organization. Consequently, such a designation would be tantamount to an unofficial declaration of war and at the bare minimum, immensely inflame regional tensions

Third, President Donald Trump has proclaimed that destroying the self-proclaimed Islamic State will be his [top](#) foreign policy priority. Iranian Armed Forces are currently at the [forefront](#) of the ground war against the group in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere in the region. Even Iraqi Kurdish leaders have [stated](#) that were it not for Iranian assistance, Erbil would have fallen to the group in 2014. Furthermore, the Russia-Iran military alliance resulted in a major victory in Aleppo. Designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization will deliver the biggest imaginable setback to the fight against ISIS and ensure any gains against it will come at the maximum expense of the United States.

Last but not least, despite at-times rancorous political differences inside Iran, all Iranians from across the political spectrum are united in support of their armed forces. Trump already started his presidency by issuing a blanket ban on Iranians and six other predominately Muslim nations, which has served to foster resentment against the U.S. government amongst even more cosmopolitan Iranians. For him to now convey such overt hostility towards Iran's

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## “ Designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization will deliver the biggest imaginable setback to the fight against ISIS.”

With the appointment of James Mattis and John Kelly to senior positions, the Trump administration has allotted significant power to military generals. Anyone who speaks to them knows they have a grudge against Iran for incidents they hold it responsible for, such as the [1983 Beirut barracks bombing](#) and a number of U.S. casualties in Iraq.

On the other hand, anyone who speaks to Iranian officials will hear of America's support for Saddam Hussein during his eight-year war against Iran, in which the CIA logistically [supported](#) his use of chemical weapons, which killed tens of thousands of Iranian and Kurdish soldiers and civilians. Towards the end of the war, the U.S. military even [attacked](#) Iranian navy positions in the Persian Gulf and shot down an Iranian [civilian airliner](#), killing all 291 men, women, and children onboard.

The fact is that the list of mutual grievances is long, but is precisely the reason why dialogue is necessary and cooperation between the two countries' armed forces vital. Unfortunately, while there is a track record for cooperation, it has been too one-sided.

In the late 1980s, the H.W. Bush administration appealed to Iran — then under the presidency of centrist Hashemi Rafsanjani — to help release American hostages trapped in Lebanon and promised to reciprocate Iranian goodwill. At the time, I worked in the Iranian foreign ministry and was dispatched along with one colleague to facilitate the freedom of the prisoners. After several months of grueling efforts, their release was secured, due largely to cooperation from the Gods Force and intelligence ministry. Unfortunately, after the American and Western hostages were freed, the H.W. Bush White House did [not](#) reciprocate the goodwill gesture and the U.S. government later moved to increase pressure on Iran.



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An Iranian man stands in front of placards showing a caricature of President Donald Trump during a rally marking the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution on Feb. 10, 2017.

After 9/11, the Bush Administration also received Iranian help at the beginning of its “War on Terror.” I was head of the foreign relations committee of Iran’s National Security Council when Iran responded [positively](#) to Bush’s request for help in overthrowing the Taliban. Soon after, the Taliban were ousted from Kabul with Qods Force assistance, which was a short while after followed by Bush declaring Iran a part of an “Axis of Evil.” The same story [repeated](#) itself in Iraq, where opponents of Saddam who had been given shelter and support in Iran for years cooperated with the U.S. to overthrow Saddam. Iran’s integral role in this endeavor was rewarded by the Bush White House pursuing every measure to eliminate Iran from Iraq.

America’s misfortunes in Iraq and Afghanistan increased after it stopped cooperating with Iran. Trump has regularly lambasted the Bush administration for these wars and highlighted the [trillions](#) of dollars “wasted” on Middle Eastern wars. However, his actions as president so far indicate he does not yet have a grasp on the reasons and root causes of these failures. If they are to never happen again, the door must be kept open for cooperation with Iran.

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