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Are We Prematurely Designating Iran's Revolutionary Guards as Criminal-Soldiers?

By [Robert Bunker](#)

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By Robert J. Bunker and Hakim Hazim

The recent U.S. consideration to designate the 125,000 personnel of the Revolutionary Guard of Iran as a "specially designated global terrorist" (per Executive Order 13224) has quite a few international security implications. (1) On the most basic level, it highlights growing U.S. and Iranian tensions over Iran's nuclear weapons program and Iranian involvement—via the Quds Force—belonging to the Revolutionary Guard—in both fermenting and supporting terrorist and insurgent activities in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

What may be far more significant, however, is the U.S. designating the military branch of a sovereign state as a terrorist organization. In the past, such designations have applied only to non-state entities. (2) While the intent of such a designation would be to target the Revolutionary Guard's multi-billion dollar business network with ties to over 100 companies, (3) broader implications concerning state sovereignty, political legitimacy, and, ultimately, non-state-on-state conflict readily emerge. Before these issues are discussed, a short overview of Iran's Revolutionary Guard or IRG should be provided with a focus on the Quds Force.

IRG and Quds Force

Iran's Revolutionary Guard (IRG) was originally conceived to be the guardian of the values, mores, and ideals of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Ayatollah Khomeini established it with this purpose in mind. In time, the domestic dimension of its responsibilities proved too limited due to the fact that the Ayatollah believed the Islamic Revolution should be exported. The ambitions of the Revolution were fueled by Shia eschatology and the 'soldiers of the Last Days' were the IRG, particularly the special unit known in later years as the Quds Force.

Following Khomeini's lead, the Ayatollahs have continued to increase the Revolutionary Guard's training and sphere of influence. It has proven to be a formidable adversary in the region and a thorn in the side of the U.S. and Israel. The Quds force specializes in setting up training camps, funding, safe havens, and weapons for terrorist organizations including the following: Hizballah, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and other lesser known groups. The Israel-Hizballah war, and the subsequent damage Hizballah inflicted on Israel, gave the world a glimpse of the extent in which Iran has aided just one of its proxies.

There is strong evidence that the Quds Force has, in the last four years and with ever increasing boldness, turned its attention to Iraq. The evidence has come not only from the U.S. but from captured operatives as well. Ali Mussa Daqduq was captured in Iraq on the 20th of March this year. He is a known Hizballah special operative and confessed to being supported by the Quds force. (4) There is no shortage of Last

Days soldiers like Daquduq and Iran is getting the most out of them. Iran is doing all of this behind the scenes, via the Quds force and Hizballah, while acting on its interest in Iraq.

Iran sees Iraq as a golden opportunity to expand its ever-widening influence in the region. Although Iraq is predominantly Arabic, Iran knows the primary loyalty of the majority of Iraqis is in the Shia faith. Since the invasion, Iran's clerics have openly called for the Shia militias to resist the occupation and have green-lighted the Quds Force to assist some of the Shiite militias, giving rise to yet another problem for U.S. troops and their attempts to help support the creation of Democratic institutions in Iraq.

Criminal-Soldier and Criminal-State Implications

As seen in the previous section, the Quds Force, as 'soldiers of the Last Days,' represent holy warriors who do the bidding of Iran's Shia clerics. These clerics, in their spiritual role as the representatives of the Mahdi (the hidden one), openly advocate the overthrow of perceived apostates and non-believers and the future establishment of an Imamate (Shia version of a caliphate). (5) The Quds, viewed from this perspective and coupled with the fact of their direct involvement in terrorist activities, are more of a non-state entity than a component of a national military force such as the IRG.

Given this realization, the term 'criminal-soldier' can be readily applied to the Quds Force because they are representative of pre-nation-state soldiers. Its members, furthermore, should be recognized as 'holy warriors' that exist somewhere within the blurring of crime and war that is taking place globally. Such holy warriors are incompatible with our perceptions of political legitimacy and, for that reason, a "specially designated global terrorist designation" would be well warranted.

The issue with such a well-warranted designation, however, are the implications for political legitimacy it then extends to Iran's Revolutionary Guard and, ultimately, to the Islamic Republic of Iran itself. If the Revolutionary Guard is labeled a 125,000 person force of 'criminal-soldiers' then would it not follow that the sovereign state that fielded it would also be considered criminal? Similar issues and designations were discussed and analyzed in a recent essay on "Defining Criminal-states". (6) Those parts of Iran under the control of the Ayatollahs ruling under Mahdi mandate were viewed to be one example of the 'Jihadi Insurgency' criminal-state form. Other examples can be found in Southern Lebanon under Hizballah influence and those lands once belonging to Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and now existing in the Pakistani tribal border regions.

State sovereignty and legitimacy issues will thus become more and more important as time goes on because warfare is shifting from state-on-state to non-state-on-state conflict. In this new form of conflict, war is increasingly being fought over 'humanity's future social and political organization' and not over more traditional notions of 'the extension and preservation of national sovereignty'. While the Islamic Republic of Iran might appear to be a state at first blush, in actuality, it is representative of a Shia apocalyptic non-state group that has taken over the vestiges of state trappings—the Ayatollahs ruling under Mahdi mandate kept in power by their religious enforcers.

The critical question stemming from this observation is should the U.S. currently designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organization and, as a result, give a de facto challenge to the political legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran? Or do we bide our time, considering the already extended nature of our resources, before preparing to engage in direct global conflict with another non-state entity and its terrorist and insurgent allies. Since the U.S. is already in a global war with radical Sunni entities (e.g. the Al Qaeda network)—do we really want to 'go hot' and openly enter into a new global shooting war with radical Shia entities (e.g. the Ayatollahs, Hizballah, et. al.)? Prudence would suggest otherwise.

In a war over humanity's future social and political organization, the U.S. along with other Western

Democracies and their allies cannot allow either an imamate or a caliphate to be established in the Islamic world. Consequently, it is recognized that the issue is not 'if' we should openly move against the criminal-state known as the Islamic Republic of Iran but 'when'. Nevertheless, the importance of success in this endeavor is such that we cannot approach it without the means to fully follow through. A possible compromise at present would be to only designate the Quds Force as terrorists per Executive Order 13224 at present while continuing to covertly exert pressure on Iran and the IRG behind the scenes.

End Notes

1. Robin Wright, "U.S. to Designate Iran's Revolutionary Guards as Terrorists." Washington Post. Tuesday, August 14, 2007.
2. Ibid.
3. Kim Murphy, "Iran's \$12-billion enforcers." Los Angeles Times. August 26, 2007.
4. Ware, Michael, "Officials: Hezbollah agent played deaf before confessing." CNN.com. www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/07/02/iraq.hezbollah/index.html. July 2, 2007.
5. Hakim Hazim and Robert J. Bunker, "Perpetual Jihad: Striving for a Caliphate." Robert J. Bunker, ed. Special issue of Global Crime on 'Criminal-States and Criminal-Soldiers." Vol. 7. Iss. 3-4. August-November 2006.
6. Robert J. Bunker and Pamela L. Bunker, "Defining Criminal-states." Robert J. Bunker, ed. Special issue of Global Crime on 'Criminal-States and Criminal-Soldiers." Vol. 7. Iss. 3-4. August-November 2006.

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Dr. Robert J. Bunker holds degrees in political science, government, behavioral science, social science, anthropology-geography, and history. Training taken includes that provided by DHS, FLETC, DIA, Cal DOJ, Cal POST, LA JRIC, NTOA, and private security entities in counter-terrorism, counter-surveillance, incident-response, force protection, and intelligence. Dr. Bunker has been involved in red teaming and counter-terrorism exercises and has provided operations support within Los Angeles County.

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- {3} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quds_Force

{4} <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/meast/07/02/iraq.hezbollah/index.html>

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