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PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

IRGC Proscription: Legal Position and Policy Assessment –

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Executive Summary

The question before Parliament is no longer whether the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) poses a threat to the United Kingdom. That point has already been settled by the evidence placed before our own security institutions.

The Intelligence and Security Committee has documented multiple Iran-linked plots on British soil. MI5 has confirmed publicly that the Iranian regime has been responsible for a series of hostile operations in the United Kingdom, including plots involving lethal intent. Across Europe, Iranian intelligence networks have been tied to assassination attempts, kidnappings, and the systematic intimidation of dissidents, journalists, and political opponents. These are not hypothetical risks. They are recorded incidents.

The threat is not prospective. It is already present.

The real question before Parliament is whether the United Kingdom is prepared to respond in a manner proportionate to that reality.

Proscribing the IRGC does not require Parliament to rewrite the law or invent new legal mechanisms. The Terrorism Act already provides the necessary authority.

What is lacking is not statutory power but political determination.

For too long the IRGC has been treated as though it were simply another branch of a foreign state's armed forces. That description no longer reflects how the organisation operates. In practice the IRGC functions as a hybrid structure: a military force, an intelligence service, and a transnational coercive network operating through proxies, covert cells, and intimidation campaigns far beyond Iran's borders.

Its methods - targeted violence, surveillance of dissidents, intimidation of diaspora communities, and the use of intermediaries to conduct hostile acts - are indistinguishable from those employed by organisations already proscribed under British law.

The issue before Parliament is therefore straightforward. The threat has been identified. The legal tools exist. The question now is whether the United Kingdom will use them.

Executive Summary

The UK faces a hybrid threat ecosystem that combines (i) Iranian state-directed intimidation and hostile activity linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and (ii) a gradualist ideological infrastructure linked to the Muslim Brotherhood that can enable radicalisation pathways, institutional capture, and community-level intimidation.

Two complementary legal regimes should be used in parallel:

1. Proscription (Terrorism Act 2000): creates enforceable offences (membership, support, fundraising, meetings, propaganda/glorification) and removes the “grey zone” exploited by networks operating in the UK.
2. Asset-freezing designation (UK sanctions/asset-freezing legislation): enables the UK to freeze assets and impose financial restrictions not only on organisations, but also on key personnel, facilitators, and financial enablers, in a manner that can be rapidly operationalised.

This dual-track approach strengthens enforcement, reduces institutional ambiguity, and enables coordinated European action, as UK asset-freezing designation closely corresponds to EU designation practice.

Core asks: Initiate proscription procedures for the IRGC and the Muslim Brotherhood; simultaneously pursue targeted organisational and individual designations under UK asset-freezing legislation; and align these measures with European partners.

1. The IRGC Is Not a Conventional Military Institution

The argument that the IRGC cannot be proscribed because it is part of a sovereign state misunderstands the organisation's operational character.

The IRGC, particularly through its Quds Force and external networks, functions as a transnational coercive actor. It directs, funds, and enables proxy organisations engaged in terrorism. It conducts or facilitates assassination plots abroad. It oversees external operations that blur the line between intelligence activity and violent subversion.

The Terrorism Act 2000 requires that an organisation be "concerned in terrorism." That test is behavioural, not constitutional. It does not exclude state-affiliated bodies where evidence demonstrates involvement in terrorist activity.

Parliament has previously proscribed the military wings of organisations embedded within political or state-adjacent structures. The relevant threshold is activity, not formal status.

Where an organisation repeatedly engages in or supports acts meeting the statutory definition of terrorism, proscription is legally defensible.

2. Proscription Serves Strategic Purposes Beyond Symbolism

Proscription is not merely declaratory. It generates tangible effects:

- Criminalises membership, support and recruitment;
- Enables disruption of logistical and facilitation networks;
- Restricts fundraising and asset movement;
- Signals to financial institutions and civil society that association carries legal consequences;
- Simplifies evidential thresholds for intervention.

In the case of the IRGC, proscription would narrow the permissive space in which intermediaries, facilitators and ideological sympathisers operate.

The hybrid nature of the threat - blending state actors, criminal proxies, and ideological infrastructure - makes this particularly relevant. Proscription would sharpen the boundary between lawful engagement and criminal support.

3. Addressing the Sovereignty Argument

Concerns about diplomatic escalation are legitimate but should not be decisive. The UK has already sanctioned the IRGC extensively. The regime has already demonstrated willingness to target individuals in Europe. The escalation risk is not theoretical; it is ongoing.

Diplomatic channels can be preserved through state-to-state mechanisms even where an organisation within that state is designated. Many jurisdictions maintain diplomatic relations with states whose military or intelligence branches are sanctioned or designated.

National security policy cannot be subordinated to the fear of retaliation from an actor already engaged in coercive behaviour. Moreover, the fact that the UK sanctions the IRGC abroad, but refuses to proscribe the group within its own borders creates a legislative and political discrepancy and allows for individuals to take advantage of loopholes without repercussions.

4. Proscription Alone Is Insufficient

Proscription must form part of a broader strategy. Parliament should consider parallel measures:

A. Targeted State Threat Offences

Strengthen and resource the National Security Act framework to ensure rapid prosecution of those acting on behalf of the IRGC in intelligence, surveillance, or coercion roles.

B. Financial Disruption

Expand enforcement against shadow finance networks, trade-based money laundering and front companies facilitating IRGC-linked revenue streams. Financial enablers are force multipliers.

C. Counter-Proxy Disruption

Fuse state-threat teams, serious organised crime capability and counter-terror policing to address the criminal outsourcing model used by Iranian services.

D. Institutional Resilience

Increase scrutiny of ideological and organisational structures that may provide permissive environments for facilitation or recruitment. This must be intelligence-led and legally grounded, not politically reactive.

E. Cyber Preparedness

Adopt a standing heightened posture for entities with Middle East exposure, particularly in sectors vulnerable to destructive cyber spillover.

5. The Cost of Inaction

Failure to proscribe where statutory thresholds are met carries consequences. It signals ambiguity. It invites legal arbitrage. It allows hostile actors to exploit definitional hesitancy.

The IRGC's operational model relies on blurring categories - state actor, terrorist facilitator, intelligence service, criminal network. The UK should not reinforce that ambiguity by declining to apply the terrorism framework where evidence supports it. More crucially, by playing into this ambiguity, the UK directly contributes to a system that allows actors like the IRGC to operate with little to no ramifications. Proscription is not a panacea. But it is a clear legal boundary.

Conclusion

The IRGC represents a hybrid threat actor: part military institution, part intelligence service, part transnational coercive network. Its conduct satisfies the behavioural test within existing terrorism legislation. Parliament does not need new law to act. It needs the confidence to apply the law as written.

At the same time, proscription must be embedded within a broader state-threat strategy encompassing sanctions enforcement, financial disruption, proxy interdiction and cyber resilience.

The issue is not whether Britain possesses tools. It does. The issue is whether it is prepared to deploy them with clarity and consistency, in keeping with our democratic values - and duty to protect.

Strategic ambiguity benefits the aggressor. Legal clarity strengthens the state.

