US labels Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist group

Barry Grey
9 April 2019

In an unprecedented move, the Trump administration on Monday took the US closer to military conflict with Iran by designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization.

It marked the first time ever that the US government has officially listed a foreign state entity as a terror group. The move, which came after months of internal debate and over the objections of top Pentagon and CIA officials, sets a precedent that, opponents within the state fear, could rebound against US forces around the world.

President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other officials placed the step within the context of the administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, which was launched last year with Trump's decision to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear accord and re-impose harsh economic sanctions.

In their statements announcing the move, Trump and Pompeo made a point of threatening other foreign countries, officials and businesses with retaliatory sanctions and possible criminal prosecution for engaging in financial transactions or other contact with entities linked to the IRGC. Since the powerful paramilitary organization exerts strong influence over critical sectors of the Iranian economy, including construction, auto, telecommunications and energy, this is tantamount to a demand for ending business relations with Iran.

In announcing the action Monday morning, Trump said, "The IRGC is the Iranian government's primary means of directing and implementing its global terrorist campaign." He then declared that the terrorist designation, which takes effect on April 15, "makes crystal clear the risks of conducting business with, or providing support to, the IRGC."

In his statement, Pompeo called Iran "the world's leading state sponsor of terror" and said: "Businesses and banks around the world now have a clear duty to insure that companies with which they conduct financial transactions are not connected to the IRGC in any material way."

Brian Hook, the State Department's principal adviser on Iran, who claimed that the IRGC controls 50 percent of Iran's economy, said, "[W]e're adding an additional layer of sanctions on the IRGC to make radioactive those sectors of Iran's economy that are influenced or controlled by the IRGC."

This economic blackmail is directed in the first instance against Russia and China, which have extensive economic relations with Iran, but also against Europe. The European powers continue to support the nuclear accord, which they had hoped would provide an opening to gain control of Iran's energy resources and develop new markets for their exports.

The US previously imposed heavy sanctions on the IRGC as a supporter of terrorism, but with this designation it declares the military force itself to be a terrorist organization. Any material support for it carries a potential punishment of up to 20 years in prison.

Iran issued an angry response. The state news agency IRNA reported that the Supreme National Security Council of Iran had designated "the government of the United States as a supporter of terrorism and the Central Command, also known as Centcom, and all of its affiliated forces as terrorist groups."

The Syrian Foreign Ministry joined in condemning the decision, declaring: "Syria strongly condemns the US decision on the IRGC, which is a flagrant violation of Iran's sovereignty. The irresponsible step of the US administration was taken in the framework of the US

© World Socialist Web Site

unspoken war against Iran…”

The announcement by the Trump administration was timed to provide a lift to the reelection campaign of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the eve of Tuesday’s poll. It follows last month’s announcement of support for Israeli annexation of Syria’s Golan Heights, captured by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War.

Netanyahu, in a tight race with former Army Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, has lurched ever further to the right in an effort to whip up anti-Iranian and anti-Palestinian hysteria. Last week he declared that if reelected, he would begin annexing the West Bank. In a tweet on Monday, he thanked Trump for the action against Iran and stressed that it had come at his own request: “Thank you for responding to another one of my important requests, that serves our interests and the interests of regional countries.”

Among those governments opposing the move is the Iraqi regime, which maintains close relations with the IRGC and its foreign fighting arm, the Quds Force. It is unclear what impact the decision will have on Baghdad’s relations with pro-regime Shiite militias that work with the IRGC. Iraq has also been seeking to import electricity from Iran to bolster its power system, which remains crippled by the impact of US sanctions, invasion and occupation. The IRGC is said to largely control Iran’s energy industry.

Within the administration, the move was pushed by Pompeo and White House National Security Adviser John Bolton. It was reportedly opposed by the military Joint Chiefs of Staff and top intelligence officials who have warned of the consequences for the 5,200 US troops stationed in Iraq, the 2,000 who remain in Syria, the US 5th Fleet, which operates in the Persian Gulf from Bahrain, the Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, and the many hundreds of Special Operations forces and CIA paramilitary elements who operate clandestinely in the region.

While former Obama administration national security officials have denounced the move, there has been general silence from congressional Democrats. In the past, Democrats have pushed aggressively to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization. In 2007, when the Bush administration imposed sanctions on the Quds Force as a supporter of terrorism, then-senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton signed onto a bill urging Bush to extend the terrorist designation to its parent organization, the IRGC.

Trita Parsi, the founder of the National Iranian American Council and a supporter of the Iran nuclear accord, warned of the international implications of Trump’s decision, writing: “This move closes yet another potential door for peacefully resolving tensions with Iran. Once all doors are closed, and diplomacy is rendered impossible, war will essentially become inevitable.”

Jason Rezaian, the *Washington Post’s* correspondent in Iran from 2012 to 2016, wrote of the domestic considerations behind Trump’s escalation against Iran in a *Post* column Monday: “The signs of a coordinated push to prepare the public for an unnecessary military confrontation with Iran are growing. As the 2020 election campaign starts to heat up, we should all brace ourselves for a carefully orchestrated administration threat of war with Iran. This is the first installment.”

In fact, the American public is overwhelmingly opposed to war with Iran or any other country. But the broad anti-war sentiment can find no expression within a political establishment controlled by the corporate elite and monopolized by two pro-war imperialist parties.

The Trump administration’s reckless assault on Iran must be seen within the broader context of the national security and defense strategies announced at the end of 2017 and beginning of 2018, in which the military/intelligence apparatus declared that the axis of US foreign policy was no longer the “war on terror,” but rather the struggle against “revisionist” countries (China and Russia) and “great power” competition.

Washington’s campaign against Iran has the potential for rapidly implicating nuclear-armed Russia or China, or both. It is, moreover, part of a broader struggle for global hegemony that leads inexorably, if not prevented by the international working class, to nuclear world war.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site