Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) poses a serious threat to Israel, other U.S. allies and global security. Founded in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the IRGC wields vast military, economic and political influence in Iran and across the region. It funds terrorist proxies and frequently targets U.S. interests. Sworn to Israel’s destruction, the IRGC is now entrenched on Israel’s northern border, where it supports Lebanese Hezbollah and seeks to cement Tehran’s foothold in Syria.

The IRGC drives Iran’s global terrorist network.
In 1984, the U.S. State Department designated Iran a State Sponsor of Terrorism. The IRGC is the principal entity controlling Iran’s vast terror enterprise under the authority of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. In 1989, the IRGC began expanding its global reach by establishing the IRGC-Quds Force (IRGC-QF). This elite branch conducts covert missions outside Iran’s borders, to include recruiting, training and equipping terrorist groups. The IRGC-QF is a destabilizing force in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Yemen and Bahrain. In 2017, the State Department reported Iran remains the “foremost” state sponsor of terrorism, using the IRGC-QF to create “instability in the Middle East.”

The IRGC commands a growing missile capability.
The IRGC controls substantial land, sea and air forces in parallel with Iran’s national military. The IRGC also controls Tehran’s strategic missile forces. The medium-range Shahab-3/3B ballistic missile can already reach Israel, other U.S. allies and U.S. military bases. Since 2015, in defiance of U.N. prohibitions, Iran has conducted at least 20 illicit ballistic missile tests. Two new classes of more accurate medium-range missiles are in development with a size and payload inherently capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

The IRGC threatens Israel’s security.
The IRGC threatens Israel directly and through support for terrorist groups. In February 2018, a hostile Iranian drone—likely controlled by the IRGC—infiltrated Israeli airspace. The IRGC provides its Lebanon-based proxy Hezbollah with military training, funding and sophisticated weaponry—including missiles that can reach all of Israel. The IRGC supports the Gaza-based terrorist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Also, the IRGC runs a cyberterrorism effort that targets Israeli and American assets.
The IRGC’s activity in Syria threatens regional stability.
The IRGC-QF has established a network of military bases covering most of Syria since the onset of the civil war in 2011. The group currently supports an army of more than 60,000 Shia militiamen recruited from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The estimated 6,000-8,000 Lebanese Hezbollah troops deployed to Syria have gained significant battlefield experience to bring to any future conflicts with Israel. The direct intervention of the IRGC and its proxies also enables brutal Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to remain in power.

The IRGC has hijacked the Iranian economy.
The IRGC has become Iran’s largest economic force, dominating most economic sectors including banking, finance, energy, construction, real estate, telecommunications, oil and gas. Experts estimate that the IRGC controls approximately 40 percent of the Iranian economy. In addition to using its national security authority to seize control of profitable sectors and projects, the IRGC receives thousands of no-bid government contracts, uses state funds to finance its projects, and maintains a large stake in cross-border smuggling.

The IRGC abuses the Iranian people.
The IRGC was created as a counterweight to the regular military to protect the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The IRGC ruthlessly defends the regime’s radical ideology and leadership. It employs secret police methods to silence domestic “enemies” who allegedly hold beliefs inconsistent with the regime’s revolutionary ideals, and commits countless human rights abuses against the people of Iran. As the primary means for enforcing the Iranian regime’s repression of the Iranian people, the IRGC undermines democratic processes, persecutes religious minorities, censors the media and executes Iranians for a host of non-violent crimes.

THE WAY FORWARD

To counter Iran’s malign activities, the United States must dramatically step up its efforts to counter the IRGC. The administration must significantly increase the enforcement of existing sanctions and institute a far more effective pressure campaign against the group. To increase transparency and limit its revenues, the United States should rapidly sanction the hundreds of additional companies known to be controlled by the IRGC. Congress must also look to tighten standards for designating IRGC-affiliated entities and strengthen sanctions against those supporting the terror group. Further, the administration and Congress must urge our allies to recognize and oppose the destabilizing efforts of the IRGC, to include its work to establish a permanent Iranian military presence on Israel’s northern border.