

Written evidence submitted by National Council of Resistance of Iran (MENA0013)

This submission intends to highlight the growing threats that the Iranian regime poses to the stability of the region and provide recommendations on how best the UK Government could address these challenges.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI):

Founded in Tehran in 1981, the NCRI is a broad coalition of democratic Iranian organisations, groups and personalities.

The NCRI is an inclusive and pluralistic parliament-in-exile that has more than 500 members, including representatives of ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds, Baluchis, Armenians, Jews and Zoroastrians, representing a broad spectrum of political tendencies in Iran. The NCRI aims to establish a secular democratic republic in Iran, based on the separation of religion and state. Women comprise 50 percent of the Council’s members. There are five organisations represented in the NCRI, including the People’s Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI), the largest and most popular resistance group in Iran.

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Executive Summary

1. The Middle East, a perennial hotbed of geopolitical turmoil, finds itself inevitably entangled in a recurring narrative of instability mainly attributable to one key player – Iran. An examination of any contemporary crisis in the region invariably necessitates an assessment of Iran's involvement. This influence extends across a contiguous geographic expanse, stretching from Tehran through Baghdad, Damascus, Sana'a and Beirut, firmly establishing Iran as a destructive actor in the Middle East's ongoing upheavals.
2. Iran's far-reaching regional engagement finds its roots in the 1980s but gained significant momentum in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, serving as a catalyst for its interventionist pursuits. Subsequently, the outbreak of civil conflicts in Syria and Yemen further fueled its involvement. As a result, a prevailing perception has taken hold, suggesting that Iran nurtures ambitions of regional dominance, a perception that has, in turn, exacerbated tensions and conflicts in the region.
3. A prominent manifestation of Iran's regional strategy is the "axis of resistance," comprising Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, and Houthis . Faced with threats to the Assad regime following the 2011 Arab uprisings, Iran transitioned from a primarily defensive stance to an aggressive military posture. It expanded its presence in Syria, aiming to safeguard its supply routes to Hezbollah.
4. Crucially, Iran's influence in the region transcends mere military might, relying extensively on a network of non-state allies and proxies. In recent years, Iran has bolstered the capabilities of foreign forces, forging partnerships with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps - Quds Force (IRGC-QF), responsible for foreign operations. Taking advantage of lack of a decisive policy in the region and in the International community, partners operate in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan with some impunity, while Iran seeks to establish land corridors to facilitate the movement of personnel and resources.
5. Concurrently, Iran has consistently wielded hostage-taking as a strategic tool in its foreign policy endeavours. Since the 1979 revolution, the Iranian regime has maintained a well-documented record of abducting hostages from various countries, exploiting their plight to extract concessions such as prisoner releases and lifting economic sanctions. This reprehensible practice has persistently featured in Iran's diplomatic playbook.
6. Even more alarming is the perceived inaction of the United States and Western governments in response to Iran's hostage-taking tactics. Rather than taking resolute measures to curb this behaviour, their responses have inadvertently emboldened the Iranian regime to escalate and reinforce its hostage-taking strategies.
7. Several theories underpin Iran's engagement in such behaviour. Some argue that Iran seeks to safeguard its security interests, given its encirclement by hostile neighbours. Others contend that it aims to propagate its ideology and weaken rivals like Saudi Arabia. A third perspective posits that Iran seeks to secure access to vital oil and gas resources, solidifying its regional dominance.
8. However, the linchpin of Iran's involvement in the region lies in the regime's nature and its relentless pursuit of survival. Rooted in Islamic Fundamentalism, the regime grapples with anachronistic values in congruent with a rapidly modernizing society. In response, it has devised a survival strategy characterised by internal repression and external destabilization, with the IRGC as its primary implementer.

9. It is crucial to understand that Iran's regional interventions cannot be viewed in isolation from its domestic challenges; they are, indeed, interdependent facets of the same overarching strategy.
10. Iran's substantial investments in nuclear and missile initiatives, with billions of dollars in annual costs, must be contextualized within these survival strategies. These programs serve a dual purpose: first, they give the regime substantial strategic leverage on the international stage, ensuring it is not easily subdued. Second, they serve as deterrents against potential external threats, conveying an unambiguous message that Iran will not readily capitulate.
11. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has emphatically conveyed that relinquishing these strategies, especially the IRGC and its nuclear and missile programs, would equate to "suicide from the fear of death." In other words, abandoning these pivotal tools would spell the regime's demise.
12. Numerous regime officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have openly asserted that if they were to disengage from regional conflicts, they would confront threats within their own borders, conceivably even within Tehran itself. This underscores the regime's belief that regional interventions function as a protective buffer against domestic unrest and challenges to its rule.
13. In summary, as long as the current regime endures, its regional interventions will persist, for they are inextricably bound to its survival strategy. Therefore, any prospect of altering Iran's regional conduct hinges heavily on a regime change initiated by the Iranian people themselves.

Introduction

14. The Middle East has long been a hotbed of geopolitical turmoil, and one name consistently looms large in the ongoing crises in the region - Iran. Almost every crisis in today's Middle East requires an analysis of Iran's involvement.

15. Iran's influence in the Middle East is undeniable as it continues to extend its meddling across a contiguous geographic arc from Tehran to Baghdad, Damascus, Sana's and Beirut. This intervention gained momentum after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and further accelerated with the outbreak of civil wars in Syria and Yemen. The result is a perception that Iran aspires to become the region's hegemonic power, which has fuelled tensions and conflicts in the region.

16. One of Iran's key objectives in the region is to ensure the perpetuation of the Islamic Republic. To achieve this goal, it has cultivated close alliances with regional actors. Iran's support for the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad and the establishment of Hezbollah² in Lebanon are prime examples of its long-term strategic partnerships. Iran has not only provided military support to Hezbollah but has also used Syria as a conduit for these supplies.

17. Iran has established a network of partners and proxies in the region. This strategy, which Iran refers to as its "forward-defence" policy, entails exploiting the vulnerabilities of states like Lebanon and post-2003 Iraq. This approach enables Iran to confront its adversaries on the battlefield through proxies while minimizing direct threats to its own territory.

The "Axis of Resistance"

18. A prominent manifestation of Iran's regional strategy is the "axis of resistance¹," which includes Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah, and Houthis. In the face of threats to the Assad regime in Syria after the 2011 Arab uprisings, Iran shifted from a primarily defensive posture to an expeditionary war-fighting stance. It significantly expanded its military presence in Syria, aiming to protect its supply lines to Hezbollah and counter perceived threats from Saudi Arabia.

19. Iran's influence in the Middle East is not solely dependent on its military capabilities. It relies on a network of non-state partners and proxies. In recent years, Iran has expanded the size and capabilities of foreign forces, partnering with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps - Quds Force (IRGC-QF)², the organisation responsible for foreign operations. These partners are active in countries like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Afghanistan. Iran is also working to establish land corridors across the region, facilitating the movement of fighters and material.

20. The decision-making process in Iran concerning the region includes deliberations within the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC)³, a central institution chaired by the president and composed of senior government and military officials. Nevertheless, ultimate decisions lie in the hands of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who also holds the position of commander-in-chief.

¹ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/iran/irans-axis-resistance-rises>

² <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/publications/special-reports/the-iranian-regimes-irgc-quds-force-1980s-present/>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_National_Security_Council

The Geopolitical Influence of the Iranian Regime on the Middle East

21. The regime has strategically harnessed the region's climatic conditions and its own ideological underpinnings to reshape the Middle East's political landscape. Central to this endeavor was the Iranian regime's approach towards Iraq as the initial focal point for its ambitions, with Ayatollah Khomeini spearheading the strategy. Several factors, such as Iraq's shared borders with Iran and a substantial Shiite population, rendered it an ideal platform for the regime's objectives. Khomeini initiated a war-mongering campaign under the banner of "conquest of Jerusalem through Karbala," encouraging dissent within Iraq and fostering turmoil.

22. Post the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian regime shifted its focus to clandestine terrorist interventions, arming and organising radical Islamic fundamentalist and militant groups in various Middle Eastern nations. The regime strategically exploited the region's geopolitical landscape to advance its interests, employing slogans like "Defence of the oppressed and Muslims of the region," "War until the end of sedition in the world," and "Freedom of Quds through Karbala."

23. Hezbollah in Lebanon, a product of Iranian influence, played a significant role in Middle Eastern crises, particularly in Lebanon. The Iranian regime extended its reach by providing support and weaponry to groups like Ansarullah in Yemen, thereby fueling regional instability. Moreover, as the first self-declared Shia Islamic government, the Iranian regime's ascent indirectly ignited discussions of an Islamic caliphate within Sunni circles.

24. The occupation of Iraq in 2003 accelerated the Iranian regime's expansion in the Middle East's geopolitical arena. The regime established numerous armed and paramilitary groups in Iraq, including Hezbollah of Iraq, Asaib al-Haq, and Hashd al-Shaabi. This presence in Iraq facilitated access to Syria, enabling the Iranian regime to intervene in the Syrian conflict and support Bashar Assad's regime, cementing an alliance with a fellow regional player.

Quds Force: Iran's Global Nexus of Terrorism and Covert Operations

25. Iran's Quds Force is a clandestine branch of the IRGC⁴ responsible for conducting covert operations and supporting proxy groups abroad to advance Iran's strategic interests. The Quds Force is one of five distinct branches within the IRGC, alongside the ground forces, air force, and navy. Additionally, the IRGC maintains a mobilization force known as the Basij Organisation.

26. Officially established in the late 1980s, it has remained shrouded in secrecy for much of its existence. Led by commanders who are solely accountable to Iran's Supreme Leader, the Quds Force has played a pivotal role in extending Iran's influence across the Middle East and beyond.

27. Before the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011, the Quds Force's existence was never officially acknowledged. Its involvement in supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime brought it into the international spotlight, along with its commander, Qasem Soleimani⁵.

⁴ <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/terrorism-a-fundamentalism/inside-irans-army-of-terror-and-oppression-revolutionary-guards-irgc/>

The Quds Force's Expansive Operations

28. The Quds Force has been involved in numerous regions across the Middle East, often supporting groups designated as terrorist organisations by the United States. Some of its key areas of operation include:

1. Lebanon: The force supports Hezbollah, aiming to expand its influence within Lebanon's government and security structures.
2. Syria: It has played a crucial role in supporting the Assad regime, including the formation of pro-government militias.
3. Iraq: The Quds Force was instrumental in establishing the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), also known as Hashid Shaabi⁶, fostering closer relations with Iran and managing relations with Iraq's Kurdistan region.
4. Yemen: It has backed the Houthi⁷ government in Sanaa against Saudi pressure.
5. Afghanistan: The force supports political and armed groups close to Iran⁸, seeking to exert influence within the Afghan government.

29. Beyond these countries, the Quds Force's activities have extended throughout the Middle East, including involvement in Bahrain⁹. Suspected members of the force have been detained in Arab Gulf states.

Historical Roots and Evolution

30. Many of the activities currently attributed to the Quds Force were initially carried out by various organisations before Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Mohammad Montazeri, initially oversaw these activities. After his death in 1981, Ali Khamenei, who was then president, assumed leadership of Iran's overseas activities.

31. During the Iran-Iraq War, IRGC commander Mohsen Rezaee¹⁰ concealed official ties to Iranian-backed groups abroad. These efforts marked the IRGC's initial attempts to consolidate Iran's activities abroad, especially in response to potential competition from the newly established Intelligence Ministry.

32. Qasem Soleimani took over as the head of the Quds Force in 1997, ushering in a new era of expansion and influence. He divided the force into separate departments focused on individual

⁵ <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/terrorism-a-fundamentalism/who-was-the-vicious-criminal-qassem-soleimani/>

⁶ <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/irans-expanding-militia-army-iraq-new-special-groups/>

⁷ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/iranian-and-houthi-war-against-saudi-arabia>

⁸ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/how-irans-new-quds-force-commander-could-hurt-the-us-in-afghanistan/>

⁹ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/us-news/2022/06/06/us-sanctions-quds-force-associates-and-bahrain-based-irgc-groups/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/iran-election/irans-elections-2021-who-is-mohsen-rezaee/>

countries, each commanded by individuals accountable solely to him. Additionally, Soleimani established five new branches within the Quds Force, overseeing Intelligence, Finance, Politics, Sabotage, and Special Operations, which interacted under a Council of Commanders with Soleimani at its helm.

The Spotlight on the Quds Force

33. The Quds Force became even more engaged in the region during Syrian civil war, which erupted in 2011. Soleimani was given the mission by Iran's Supreme Leader to intervene in support of Bashar al-Assad's regime, deploying thousands of Quds Force members and trained Iraqi Shia militiamen to Syria. Under Soleimani's leadership, the Quds Force also began training minority Shia fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan for deployment in Syria¹¹. Subsequently, thousands were sent to Syrian.

34. The Quds Force has conducted numerous international operations, including acts of terrorism against Western targets. Some notable instances include the 1983 American embassy bombing in Beirut¹², the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut¹³, the 1983 American embassy bombing in Kuwait¹⁴, the 1992 Israeli embassy bombing in Buenos Aires¹⁵, the 1994 bombing of a Jewish Center in Buenos Aires¹⁶, and the 1996 Dhahran residential complex bombing in Saudi Arabia¹⁷. In addition, the Quds Force has been involved in various operations in Iraq, including supporting militia groups and conducting operations against Iran's main opposition group, the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK).

¹¹ <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-quds-force-in-syria-combatants-units-and-actions/>

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/event/1983-United-States-embassy-bombing>

¹³ <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2019/10/23/1983-beirut-barracks-bombing-the-blb-building-is-gone/>

¹⁴ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/suicide-bomber-destroys-u-s-embassy-in-beirut>

¹⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/hezbollahs-1992-attack-in-argentina-is-a-warning-for-modern-day-europe/274160/>

¹⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/amia-bombing-rafecas-argentina-lebanon-a4c4b8eb816781116d4003f98baf0e4e>

¹⁷ <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/saudi-arabia-khobar-towers-bombing-kills-19>

Iran's Hostage Diplomacy

35. Simultaneous with the regime's meddling in the region and its acts of terrorism, Iran has consistently employed hostage-taking as a strategic tool in its foreign policy endeavours. Since the 1979 revolution, the clerical regime in Iran has maintained an extensive and well-documented record of seizing hostages from a range of countries, including but not limited to the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany¹⁸.

36. On multiple occasions, Iran has resorted to hostage-taking as a means to extract concessions from these nations, leveraging the plight of captives to secure outcomes such as the release of prisoners or the lifting of economic sanctions. This sinister practice has remained a recurrent element of Iran's diplomatic strategy.

37. One of the most infamous instances of Iran's use of hostage-taking was the 1979-1981 hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in Tehran¹⁹. In November 1979, a group of Iranian students stormed the embassy, holding 52 American diplomats and citizens as hostage for a harrowing 444 days. Their eventual release was secured through a complex negotiation process.

38. Iran's hostage-taking efforts extended to other countries as well. In 1987, Iran took two British hostages, and in 2011, it detained five French hostages, subsequently releasing them after receiving concessions from the respective nations.

39. Hostage-taking has evolved into a fundamental component of Iran's foreign policy, enabling it to exert influence over other nations and achieve its political objectives.

40. After the 1979 revolution, proxy groups affiliated with the Iranian regime began abducting Western citizens in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon. Iran secured weapons and spare parts from the United States in exchange for the hostages' release, including at least \$300 million from frozen assets in France intended for French and American hostages in Lebanon.

41. Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament at the time, openly acknowledged the policy's effectiveness, stating, "Thanks to the hostages in Lebanon, the French finally paid \$330 million as the first instalment of their debt."

42. Hostage-taking, often involving American citizens and Europeans in the region, primarily at the hands of Hezbollah, began during Ruhollah Khomeini's era and continued under Khamenei. Between 1980 and 1992, more than 104 foreign nationals from 21 different countries fell victim to this policy, with some tragically losing their lives.

43. Since 2004, the Iranian regime's hostage policy has evolved further, with a notable shift marked by Ali Khamenei's speech emphasising "enemy influence." Subsequently, many dual-citizen Iranians and foreigners travelling to Iran have faced baseless accusations such as espionage, resulting in imprisonment.

44. Accusations against hostages typically fall into three categories:

1. Non-political offences, such as drug trafficking and money laundering.

¹⁸ <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/publications/special-reports/an-overview-of-irans-history-of-hostage-taking-and-how-western-appeasement-has-fueled-tehrans-terrorism/>

¹⁹ <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/iraniancrises>

2. Infractions like illegal entry into Iran's borders or photographing sensitive locations.
3. Espionage and collaboration with hostile nations which are the most frequent and contentious charges faced by dual citizens.

45. Iran's demands for hostage release can also be categorised into three main areas:

1. Receipt of military equipment and weaponry.
2. Reclaiming confiscated assets, outstanding debts, or monetary compensation.
3. The release of Iranian regime prisoners held in Western nations. Another covert demand has been to impose limitations and restrictions on the activities of the principle Iranian opposition, the NCRI and PMOI within the concerned country.

46. Hostage-taking escalated significantly during nuclear negotiations with the United States and Western governments, beginning in 2014 under Hassan Rouhani's presidency, known as the JCPOA. Hostages were frequently released in exchange for substantial sums of money. This practice became so entrenched that former Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Mohsen Rezaei openly suggested taking Americans hostage to address Iran's economic woes.

47. On July 13, 2015, Rezaei stated²⁰, "We'll take 1000 Americans hostage; then the United States will have to pay several billion dollars to get every single one free. That's how we can solve our economic problems."

Sample notable cases illustrate Iran's hostage diplomacy:

48. Lebanese-born American permanent resident Nizar Zakka²¹, imprisoned in Iran on espionage charges, was released in June 2019 and returned to the United States.

49. Xiu Wang, a Princeton University student²², was imprisoned in Iran in 2016 on espionage charges but was exchanged for Massoud Soleimani, a U.S.-imprisoned stem cell researcher.

50. Iranian-British Nazanin Zaghari²³ and Anoushe Ashuri were released in 2022 after the payment of £393.8million to the Iranian regime²⁴.

51. Ahmadreza Jalali²⁵, an Iranian-Swedish researcher, faced a death sentence, later commuted to life imprisonment, as Iran sought to pressure Sweden during the Hamid Nouri case.

52. American Navy veteran Michael White²⁶ was detained in Iran in 2018 and sentenced to prison. He was released in June 2020, leading to the release of imprisoned Iranian Sirius Askari in the U.S.

²⁰ <https://english.mojahedin.org/article/irgc-hostage-taking-and-ransom/>

²¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48593391>

²² <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/12/07/iran-releases-xiyue-wang-princeton-student-held-prisoner-since-2016/4364154002/>

²³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/british-iranian-aid-worker-handed-over-british-team-tehran-2022-03-16/>

²⁴ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/nazanin-zaghari-ratcliffe-nazanin-uk-iran-b2037030.html>

²⁵ <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-jalali-hostage-sweden-nouri-trial/31846894.html>

The Case of Assadollah Assadi:

53. In 2018, Assadollah Assadi²⁷, the third secretary of the Iranian regime's embassy in Vienna, the capital of Belgium, was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in prison for attempting to bomb the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) annual gathering.

54. The Iranian regime took Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele hostage in front of the Belgian court's verdict and sentenced him to 40 years in prison. The Iranian regime pressured the Belgian government to release Assadi.

55. Finally, the Belgian government agreed to exchange and release Assadollah Assadi with Vandecasteele in 2023, with the mediation of the Omani government.

U.S. Pays \$6 Billion to Iran to Secure Release of Five Hostages:

56. In a transaction that has sparked significant controversy, the United States disbursed a staggering \$6 billion from Iran's frozen assets in South Korea to secure the release of five dual-national hostages who had been held in Iran for an extended period²⁸. This deal, unveiled on September 11, 2023, has faced intense international scrutiny and has been categorically denounced as a ransom payment by its critics.

57. Despite the U.S. government's insistence that the \$6 billion payment was not a ransom, skeptics argue that characterizing the arrangement otherwise is challenging. They underscore Iran's extensive track record of employing hostage-taking as a means to compel concessions from other nations.

58. Furthermore, this prisoner exchange has triggered anxieties regarding the potential misuse of substantial funds by Iran, potentially diverting them toward its nuclear program or other activities deemed detrimental to global security.

The West's Ineffective Response to Hostage-Taking:

59. Since its rise to power, the Islamic Republic of Iran has not only expanded its practice of hostage-taking but has also achieved significant success in abducting foreign nationals and dual citizens while extracting substantial sums of money from Western governments.

60. This troubling trend has continued unabated, with the Iranian regime accumulating billions of dollars through its hostage policy, securing a substantial arsenal of military weapons and spare parts, and even securing the release of 25 of its own officers from prisons in both America and Europe.

61. What makes this situation even more concerning is the apparent inaction and passivity the United States and Western governments exhibited in response to Iran's hostage-taking tactics. Rather than taking decisive measures to curtail this behaviour, their responses have, in effect, emboldened the Iranian regime to systematically expand and reinforce its hostage-taking strategies, effectively transforming them.

²⁶ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/04/politics/michael-white-iran-released/index.html>

²⁷ <https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/iran-regime-diplomacy-of-terror/>

²⁸ <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/08/10/iran-releases-five-iranian-american-prisoners-to-house-arrest/>

The Puzzle of Iran's Regional Meddling: Understanding the Pieces

62. Iran has long been meddling in the affairs of other countries in the Middle East. This meddling has taken many forms, including providing financial and military support to proxy groups, training and arming militants and dispatching militias to other countries to fight for its interests.

63. There are several theories about why Iran engages in this kind of behavior. Some experts believe that Iran is simply trying to protect its own security interests. Iran is surrounded by countries that are hostile to its regime, and it sees meddling as a way to deter these countries from attacking it.

64. Other experts believe that Iran is motivated by a desire to spread its ideology. Iran is an Islamic republic, and it sees itself as a leader of the Shia Muslim world. By meddling in other countries, Iran hopes to promote its own brand of Islam and to weaken the influence of its rivals, such as Saudi Arabia.

65. Other experts believe that Iran is simply trying to gain power and influence in the region. Iran is a major oil producer and sees control over the Middle East as essential to its economic future. By meddling in other countries, Iran hopes to secure its access to oil and gas resources and gain a strategic advantage over its rivals.

66. Iran's involvement in the region is likely influenced by a combination of factors, but the primary underlying cause stems from the nature of the regime and its perception of survival. Parallel to domestic repression, export of terrorism and fundamentalism, as well as its effort to acquire nuclear bomb are pillars of the survival of the regime. After four decades, not only the regime has not abandoned its aggressive foreign policy and meddling in other countries, but it has expanded its malign activities in the region.

A Glimpse into Iran's Regime Cultural and Ideological Roots:

67. The Iranian regime adheres to Islamic Fundamentalism, a medieval ideology and world-view that seems out of touch with the present century. This clerical regime is steeped in cultural and ideological values dating back over 14 centuries.

68. A closer examination of the archaic laws enforced by the Iranian regime over the past four decades underscores its anachronistic nature. From opposing modernisation and progress to restricting individual and societal freedoms, including enforcing mandatory veiling and brutally suppressing women, the regime's laws harken back to a bygone era. These laws include cruel and inhumane punishments like whipping, amputation, and blinding.

69. The Iranian Constitution²⁹, based on so-called "Islamic principles" and the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist), plays a significant role in shaping Iranian society and its legal system.

70. Article 2 of the Iranian Constitution designates "Shia Islam" as the official state religion, and it stipulates that all laws and regulations must adhere to "Islamic criteria." This provision has far-reaching consequences for Iranian society, as it allows for the application of the more repressive laws in various aspects of life, under the pretext of religion.

²⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Iran#:~:text=The%20Constitution%20of%20the%20Islamic,ource%2C%20on%2028%20July%201989

71. Article 110 grants immense authority to the Supreme Leader, who is the highest religious and political authority in Iran. This article endows the Supreme Leader with control over the military, the judiciary, and the power to appoint key officials.

72. Consequently, the Supreme Leader's interpretations of Islamic principles significantly influence government policies and decisions, which can lead to the imposition of strict and inhumane measures.

73. Article 167 establishes the role of the Guardian Council, which is responsible for interpreting the Constitution and ensuring that legislation adheres to "Islamic principles."

74. The strict interpretation and application of these constitutional articles have profoundly impacted Iranian society. Freedom of speech and expression is curtailed. Women face significant legal and social discrimination, with laws related to dress codes, gender segregation, and unequal rights.

The Iranian Regime's Survival Blueprint:

75. The Iranian regime, since its inception, has grappled with a fundamental challenge: how to reconcile its rigid, antiquated ideology with the aspirations of a rapidly evolving and modernizing society.

76. The regime's conducts, rooted in reactionary ideology and desire to establish a, clashed with the desires of a population yearning for freedoms and progress. As Iran transformed into a nation with a dynamic, educated youth, a burgeoning middle class, and a thirst for engagement with the global community, the regime found itself out of touch with contemporary Iran.

77. In order to adapt and ensure its survival amidst a populace eager for change, the regime devised a comprehensive survival strategy. This strategy revolved around two critical components: internal repression and the export of crises beyond its borders. The regime established the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to implement this strategy effectively.

78. "Article 1 of the IRGC statutes³⁰ succinctly outlines its mission, which, in part, states: 'The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps operates as an institution under the supreme command of the leader. Its primary mission is to safeguard the Islamic Revolution of Iran, protect its achievements, and tirelessly work toward its realization. This includes upholding divine ideals and promoting the expansion of God's law in accordance with the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran...'"

79. The IRGC was entrusted with a dual mission: suppressing internal opposition to maintain the regime's grip on power and exporting crises and instability to neighbouring regions to further its interests, and divert attention from domestic problems.

80. Central to this survival strategy is the IRGC's Quds Force, responsible for orchestrating and supporting terrorism and subversion abroad.

³⁰ <https://justice4iran.org/persian/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%B2-%D9%BE%DA%98%D9%88%D9%87%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%BE%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C.pdf>

81. In summary, the Iranian regime's struggle to adapt to the demands of contemporary society led to the formulation of a survival strategy hinging on internal repression and external destabilization. This strategy, orchestrated by the IRGC and rooted in the ideological fervour of the regime's founder, has shaped Iran's domestic and foreign policies.

82. This approach serves multiple purposes:

1. **Shifting Focus:** By generating crises abroad, the regime redirects attention away from pressing internal issues, effectively framing them as secondary concerns in the face of larger regional problems.
2. **Blurring Responsibility:** The regime exploits external crises to disclaim responsibility for internal challenges, portraying them as consequences of external factors.
3. **Suppressing Opposition:** The narrative of a larger crisis enables the regime to label internal dissenters as conspirators against the nation, providing a pretext for suppressing opposition.
4. **Diverting Attention:** The spectre of a greater crisis allows the regime to divert attention from its suppression of internal dissent and maintain a semblance of stability.
5. **Mobilising Forces:** The framing of a larger crisis motivates internal supporters to rally behind the regime, creating a conducive environment for material, organisational, and ideological expansion.

83. This approach not only sustains the regime's authority but also allows it to manipulate and manage internal challenges. Understanding the nature of power within the Islamic Republic entails recognising the pivotal role played by the export of crisis to maintain control, deflect responsibility, and divert attention from domestic issues.

84. Javad Mansouri³¹, the former commander of the IRGC, stated in an interview on Iranian TV regarding the Iran-Iraq war:

“If there had been no war, I believe the Islamic revolution might have faded away. It was the war that galvanised the Islamic revolution. For many of us, the war yielded significant results. It was through the war that we were able to quell the internal counter-revolution and suppress various insurgent groups.”

Iranian Regime's Regional Meddling and the Call for Regime Change

85. Over the years, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) and the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI/MEK) have emerged as pivotal players in shedding light on the

³¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjXFp_oURlg

Iranian regime's interventions in the Middle East. Their relentless efforts to unveil Tehran's nefarious activities have reverberated across the global stage.

86. The NCRI, with its U.S. Representative, has organised numerous press conferences to shed light on the Iranian regime's regional interventions. These events have brought together experts, policymakers, and journalists to discuss and analyse Iran's destabilising activities. Additionally, the NCRI has published a series of influential books that delve into various aspects of the Iranian regime's regional conduct. Some of these publications³² include:

“Iran IRGC: The Machinery of Terrorism”: This book highlights how the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its extraterritorial arm, the Quds Force, continue to sponsor and fund terrorism. It reveals a significant increase in the budget allocated to the IRGC for supporting terrorism.

“Formation of Proxy Naval Units”: This publication exposes how the IRGC-Quds Force has been recruiting mercenaries to create armed and trained terrorist units targeting ships and maritime targets in the region.

“IRAN: IRGC’s Rising Drone Threat”: This book reviews the production, use, and export of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by the Iranian regime, particularly the IRGC. It sheds light on the regime's use of drones for terrorist and war-mongering activities.

“Iran’s Emissaries of Terror”: This publication elucidates the role of Tehran's embassies and diplomats in planning and executing international terrorism, including attacks on Iranian dissidents and proxy terrorism in other countries.

“Iran’s Ballistic Buildup”: This manuscript surveys the regime's missile capabilities, infrastructure, launch facilities, and command centres, revealing its ballistic missile ambitions.

“Terrorist Training Camps in Iran”: This book details how the IRGC trains foreign fighters in various camps within Iran to export terrorism, furthering its meddling abroad.

“The Rise of the IRGC Financial Empire”: This study examines the consolidation of economic power within the ruling elite, primarily the Supreme Leader's office and the IRGC.

“How Iran Fuels Syria War”: This publication uncovers the Iranian regime's military occupation of Syria, its recruitment of forces, and the division of Syria into conflict zones.

87. Furthermore, the Iranian resistance held numerous meetings in Europe, attended by political figures, parliamentarians, and even government officials from various Arab countries, including Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Tunisia, Egypt, Oman, and other regional nations. These gatherings served as platforms for extensive discussions on countering the regime's influence.

³² <https://www.ncrius.org/publications/books.html>

88. The MEK's relentless activities against the Iranian regime's regional interventions profoundly impacted the people of Iran inside the country.

89. Simultaneously, through its Resistance Units, the MEK exposed the extent of the Iranian regime's influence in the region and its objectives. This culminated in a powerful slogan adopted by the Iranian people during protests: "Not Gaza, not Lebanon, I will sacrifice my life for Iran," clearly indicating the Iranian population's strong opposition to the regime's regional interventions.

90. The populace has come to a stark realisation that the regime's interventions in the region are not merely isolated actions but are driven by profound strategic motivations. They understand that as long as this regime remains entrenched in power, its regional interventions will continue unabated, often at the expense of the Iranian people's well-being and aspirations.

91. Hence, the fervent desire for fundamental change and the establishment of a democratic republic has become an ever-growing chorus among the Iranian populace. This aspiration finds its most vocal expression in the slogans that echo through the streets during uprisings.

92. Slogans like "Death to Khamenei" and "Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or the leader (mullahs)" encapsulate the people's unwavering commitment to realising their vision of a free and democratic Republic in Iran.

93. These chants reverberate with a powerful resonance, reflecting the unyielding spirit of a population determined to break free from the shackles of a repressive regime and forge their own destiny.

Conclusion

94. Iran's regional interventions are deeply rooted in the regime's primary objective: self-preservation. The regime recognises that its authority and existence are contingent upon maintaining a certain level of domestic control and external influence. Consequently, its interventions in the region cannot be viewed in isolation from its internal issues; they are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.

95. As it was examined, the regime's continued existence hinges upon two essential pillars: internal repression and the deliberate exportation of crises to foreign territories. These pillars are interconnected and serve as critical instruments in preserving the regime's authority and upholding its ideological dominance.

96. Iran's extensive investments in nuclear and missile projects, which cost billions of dollars annually, must also be seen in the context of these survival strategies. These programs serve a dual purpose: they provide the regime with strategic leverage on the international stage and act as deterrents against potential external threats. The pursuit of nuclear capabilities sends a clear message that Iran will not be easily subdued.

97. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has made it abundantly clear that relinquishing these strategies, particularly the IRGC and its nuclear and missile programmes, would be tantamount to "suicide from the fear of death³³." In other words, abandoning these essential tools for the regime means its demise.

98. Many regime officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, have openly stated that if they do not engage in regional conflicts, they will have to confront threats within the borders, potentially even in Tehran itself³⁴. This highlights the regime's belief that regional interventions serve as a buffer against domestic turmoil and challenges to its rule.

99. As long as the current regime remains in power, its interventions and belligerent actions in the region are unlikely to cease. These interventions are deeply entrenched in the regime's survival strategy. Consequently, the prospect of a shift in Iran's regional conduct rests heavily on a regime change initiated by the Iranian people themselves.

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³³ Iranian TV, Khamenei's speech on April 18, 2023

³⁴ January 25, 2016 - <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/photo-album?id=34028>