

OPINION: The EU and Josep Borrell Have Thrown Another Lifeline to the Ayatollahs

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FILE PHOTO: Josep Borrell attends a joint news conference, in Tehran, Iran June 25, 2022. REUTERS./

By Potkin Azarmehr

On Wednesday January 18th, the European Parliament passed a historic resolution with an overwhelming majority, calling for Iran's Revolutionary Guards to be designated as a terrorist entity by its member states.

Although European Parliament votes in matters of foreign policy are non-binding, it was hoped that the sheer decisiveness of the vote — 598 votes for, nine against and 31 abstentions — would convince the EU Council of Ministers to implement the resolution as a policy on January 23rd.

In parts of Iran, the people even celebrated the EU Parliament's decision by coming out on the streets and setting off fireworks. Hopes were raised that finally the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, or IRGC, the enforcer of the Ayatollahs' rule in Iran, would be forced to pay for its heinous crimes against peaceful protesters, which include the killing of more than 60 children in the recent wave alone.



FILE PHOTO: Ali Khamenei (R) greeting commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Esmail Qaani (L), Iranian Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri (C), and Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Chief Commander Hossein Salami, during a mourning ceremony in Tehran for Qasem Soleimani, Tehran, Iran.

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These hopes were dashed, however, when EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell claimed that the European Union cannot list Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist entity until an EU court has determined that it is so. "You cannot say 'I consider you a terrorist because I don't like you'," he told reporters.

Josep Borrell's forestalling of the IRGC from being designated as a terrorist group was received with much delight and relief on behalf of Iran's ruling clique. At the same time, his reasoning was held in much contempt by the Iranian diaspora in Europe and the majority of the Iranian population inside Iran, who have long regarded him as a Leftist regime appeaser and a friend of the Ayatollahs in Iran.

Soon after Borrell threw the regime a lifeline, pictures lampooning him dressed in IRGC uniform went viral in the Iranian social media sphere.



The IRGC — whose full name in Persian translates as Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Corps — had been visibly anxious and alarmed at being designated a terrorist entity by the EU. In an attempt to prevent this from happening, it had resorted to a range of legal steps, back-channel diplomacy and even threats and intimidations against Europe.

On the legal side, the IRGC issued a long statement arguing that designating the official national armed forces of a country as a terrorist entity is against international law. Apart from the amusing aspect of an enforcer of a pariah state resorting to international law, this argument that the IRGC is the official national armed forces of Iran is of course totally baseless. The IRGC is not Iran’s regular army: There is no mention of Iran in its title, nor any reference to or sign of Iran in its insignia, and its role, defined in its constitution, does not mention defending Iran’s borders but is categorically defined as being “to defend the Islamic Revolution”, i.e. the regime.

The IRGC is also actively involved in economic activities, much of it the trade in illicit drugs and money laundering. Its Qods Force is specifically designated to carry out overseas operations, and its volunteer militia arm, aka the Baseej, is frequently used in internal repression. It has also already been designated as a terrorist group by the US — since 2019.

The IRGC statement did not, however, stop at legal arguments to save itself from being listed as a terrorist organization. It also carried out clear physical threats against EU interests on the European soil and within the region.

The statement sent an intimidating threat by saying: “The IRGC will meet Europe in the Persian Gulf,” and threatened to target international oil shipping and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The statement then continued: “The Persian Gulf of course is just one corner of the world where they [EU] will encounter the IRGC.” It reminded the EU that the IRGC has

been involved in wars for more than 40 years and is hardened in the art of war, whereas the entire EU, even with the help of the US, is no match for the Russians, and when they face a Shahed drone “they melt like a candle and flutter their wings like a butterfly.”

More than 12,000 members of the Iranian diaspora gathered outside the EU parliamentary debating chamber in Strasbourg to urge the deputies to vote in favor of naming the IRGC a terrorist group. The IRGC statement described them as a rented crowd hired by the EU officials.

The strong but panic-driven reaction by the IRGC clearly showed how concerned they were if the Council of Ministers had implemented the EU Parliament resolution. The implications of the EU Council designating the IRGC a terrorist group would seriously curtail its commercial, fundraising and money laundering activities and make a huge impact to the detriment of its global operations.

Borrell’s claim that an EU court ruling is required has not gone unchallenged by the EU deputies. The Swedish MP Alireza Akhondi, of Iranian heritage, dismissed Borrell’s claim and said there was no such legal requirement or legal precedent; it is purely a political decision.

Charlie Weimers MEP (Member of the European Parliament) also confronted Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom by asking him why there was such hesitation to add the IRGC to the EU’s terrorist list. When Billstrom said “proof was required,” Weimers provided examples of past IRGC terrorist activities in Europe, and the Belgium court ruling against IRGC operative Assadolah Assadi.

Norbert Röttgen, a Christian Democratic Union lawmaker in the German Bundestag, rejected Josep Borrell’s demand for a court decision to classify the IRGC as a terrorist entity by saying: “All the legal requirements are already fulfilled. The German Foreign Ministry knows that the terror listing can be based on non-EU cases, but it doesn’t say so publicly.

Perhaps this interactive map can remind the EU ministers of IRGC’s terrorist activities throughout the world and on European soil. <https://institute.global/policy/irgc-global-tracker>

For now, Borrell and the EU ministers seem to have thrown another lifeline to the Ayatollahs in Iran. The IRGC and the regime are swaggering, and boisterously reminding the people in Iran that even the European Union is afraid of them. But the fight is not over yet and MEPs leading the call to list the IRGC as a terrorist group will take the fight into the next round, when Foreign Ministers of the European Union meet in Brussels on 20th February.

Whatever happens then, Borrell, the current EU Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security and a member of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), has earned his place in history as an appeaser of the Ayatollahs.

[Enlarge](#)



FILE PHOTO: Iraqi Shiite Muslim men from Shi'ite Badr organisation hold a portrait of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as they walk along a street painted in the colours of the Israeli flag.
REUTERS./

[Enlarge](#)



FILE PHOTO: Officers of Islamic Revolutionary Guard, with Israel flag drawn on their boots, are seen during a graduation ceremony for student officers and guard trainees in Tehran, Iran September 13, 2019. REUTERS./

[Enlarge](#)



FILE PHOTO: A member of IRGC shoots with his rifle towards the U.S. flag during a war exhibition at a military base in central Tehran. The Persian script reads, 'Down with USA.' REUTERS./

