

## **Designation of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as FTO**

### **Why in news?**

The US Secretary of State recently announced the U.S.'s intent to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including its Quds Force, as a foreign terrorist organisation (FTO).

### **Who are the IRGC and Quds Force?**

- The IRGC was set up in 1979 after Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution as an ideologically-driven branch of the armed forces of Iran.
- The aim was to protect the newly established Islamic system from hostile foreign powers and internal dissensions.
- The IRGC is today a 125,000-strong force with ground, naval, and air wings.
- It is tasked with internal and border security, law enforcement, and protection of Iran's missiles.
- It controls the Basij militia, a semi-government paramilitary force estimated to have up to a million active members.
- The elite Quds Force or Qods Corps is an elite wing of the IRGC, reporting directly to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.
- It has perhaps 10,000-20,000 members, and carries out unconventional warfare beyond Iran's borders.
- It often works with non-state actors such as the -
  - i. Hezbollah in Lebanon
  - ii. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and West Bank
  - iii. the Houthis in Yemen
  - iv. Shia militias in Iraq and Syria

### **What is a Foreign Terrorist Organisation?**

- Section 219 of the United States Immigration and Nationality Act provides for the designation of an organisation as an FTO.
- It authorises the Secretary of State to designate an organization as an FTO if s/he finds that -
  - a. the organization is a foreign organization
  - b. the organization engages in terrorist activity or terrorism
  - c. it threatens the security of U.S. nationals or the national security of the

country

- FTO designation plays a critical role in the US's fight against terrorism.
- It is an effective means of curtailing support for terrorist activities and pressuring groups to get out of the terrorism business.
- Currently, 67 terrorist organisations figure on the State Department's list of FTOs.
- These include Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaida and its regional branches, the Islamic State and its regional operations, Jundallah, Boko Haram, and the Colombian FARC.
- Several organisations based in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which directly threaten India, are also on the list.
- These include the Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Hizb ul-Mujahideen, Haqqani Network, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.
- The Indian Mujahideen, LTTE, and Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami-Bangladesh are also on the list of 67 FTOs.

### **Why is IRGC designated so?**

- IRGC, part of Iran's official military, has engaged in terrorist activity or terrorism since its inception 40 years ago.
- Its support for terrorism is foundational and institutional, and it has killed US citizens.
- The Iranian regime is responsible for the deaths of at least 603 American service members in Iraq since 2003.
- This accounts for 17% of all deaths of US personnel in Iraq from 2003 to 2011.
- This is in addition to the many thousands of Iraqis killed by the IRGC's proxies.
- IRGC is also responsible for taking hostages and wrongfully detaining numerous US persons, several of whom remain in captivity in Iran today.
- Besides, IRGC, mainly through Qods Force, has the greatest role among Iran's actors in directing and carrying out a global terrorist campaign.
- In recent years, IRGC Qods Force terrorist planning has been uncovered and disrupted in many countries.
- These include Germany, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Kenya, Bahrain, and Turkey.

### **What is the contention now?**

- The designation of IRGC as an FTO highlights that Iran is an outlaw regime that uses terrorism as a key tool of statecraft.
- This makes it fundamentally different from any other government.
- But notably, this is the first time that the United States has designated a part

of another government as an FTO.

- Designating a foreign military as an FTO may put the U.S. troops, particularly in the neighbouring Iraq, at risk.

### **What is Iran's stance?**

- Iran's President Hassan Rouhani condemned the United States as the real "leader of world terrorism".
- He said that America has used terrorists as a tool in the region while the Guards have fought against them from Iraq to Syria.
- Iran asserted that the Revolutionary Guards had sacrificed their lives to protect the people of the country.
- In retaliatory action, Iran named the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) as a terrorist organisation and the US government as a sponsor of terror.

### **What are the possible implications?**

- The designation will impose sweeping economic and travel sanctions on the IRGC and on organisations, companies, and individuals that have links to it.
- Businesses and banks around the world will now have to ensure that companies with which they conduct financial transactions are not connected to the IRGC in any material way.
- Iran-U.S. relations plunged after Trump pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers. Click [here](#) to know more.
- It also got affected after Trump reimposed sanctions on the country in May 2018.
- With the present designation, Iran has threatened to resume its suspended nuclear work.
- The IRGC commanders have warned that US bases in the Middle East, and US aircraft carriers in the Gulf are within the range of Iranian missiles.
- Iran has also threatened to disrupt oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf if the US tries to strangle its economy.
- In all, the US action is bound to raise tensions in the Middle East.

**Source: Indian Express**