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

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