

Research Briefing

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By Philip Loft

Iranian state threat activities in the UK

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Summary

Concerns about Iranian foreign policy are not limited to its [nuclear programme](#) or [support for armed groups and terrorist organisations in the Middle East](#), but also extend to its actions targeting critics, journalists and opponents overseas. The [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) (IRGC) Quds force has played a central role in extending Iranian influence across the Middle East and targeting wider global activity.

As set out in a 2024 [Washington Institute report on overseas Iranian operations](#), since 1979, when the last Shah was overthrown and the Islamic Republic was established, Iran has targeted dissidents, dual nationals and Israelis overseas. It has also conducted espionage and cyberattacks across Europe, North America, and elsewhere, with the aim of maintaining the Islamic Republic.

Actions by Iranian state-linked actors form part of a wider practice of “[transnational repression](#)”. Transnational repression generally involves harassing or intimidating an individual overseas, with the aim of silencing them, coercing them or obtaining information.

This briefing sets out Iran’s activities in the UK, the UK Parliament Intelligence and Security Committee’s 2025 report on Iran, and UK Government actions.

What is the nature of the threat from Iran?

In July 2025, Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee published [a report on Iranian state threats to UK interests](#), based on evidence taken from 2021 to 2023. The committee said that Iran poses a “wide-ranging, persistent and unpredictable threat”, though one less developed and strategic than the threats posed by Russia and China. It also said that the greatest threat currently posed by Iran in the UK was the “physical threat posed to dissidents and other opponents”. Previously, this had been espionage (referring to attempts to access non-public information through covert means).

In October 2025, the Director General of MI5, Sir Ken McCallum, reported that security agencies have tracked “[more than 20 potentially lethal Iran-backed plots](#)” in the previous year. He has issued [similar reports in earlier years](#).

[Those targeted by Iran in the UK](#) include dissidents, journalists, regime opponents, Israelis, Jews, and sectors including government, travel and universities. [BBC Persian](#) and the UK-based news agency [Iran International](#) are among those who have long reported Iranian state threats. In addition to its state agencies, including the IRGC and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, Iran has used criminal groups to conduct operations in the UK and elsewhere. [Iran denies allegations of state involvement in activity in the UK](#).

How has the government responded?

General response to threats from foreign states

As set out on the Commons Library briefing, [The impact of foreign interference on security, trade and democracy](#), a range of government strategies on trade, sanctions and security aim to counter state threats.

Diplomatic statements

The government has said [international cooperation is “critical” for addressing Iranian state threats](#). In July 2025, [the UK joined 13 other countries in condemning Iranian intelligence activities](#). The G7’s Rapid Response Mechanism also highlights [Iranian activity across G7 states](#).

Sanctions regime

The [government introduced a new sanctions regime against Iran in 2023](#). Sanctions measures include asset freezes, travel bans and director bans. As of December 2025, [547 individuals and entities had been sanctioned](#) under the regime, including IRGC members and criminal networks such as [Foxtrot](#).

Debate on proscribing the IRGC

The IRGC has an important role in managing Iranian overseas operations. In the UK, [there has been a long-running debate on proscribing the IRGC](#) as a terrorist group. While the IRGC is already subject to sanctions in its entirety, in 2025, the government said it would introduce a new power targeting state-backed organisations. This followed the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism and State Threat Legislation recommending [“Statutory Alert and Liability Threat” notices](#) (PDF), which would be similar to terrorist group proscriptions. The notices would be issued by the Home Secretary.

Foreign Influence Registration Scheme

Established under the National Security Act 2023, from July 2025 [individuals and organisations are required to register arrangements with foreign states](#) when directed to carry out political influence activities in the UK. [Iran has been designated under the enhanced tier](#), which mandates registration for any activities carried out at the direction of Iranian state bodies, including the Supreme Leader’s Office and the IRGC. Not registering is a criminal offence.

Other measures

[Additional steps announced in 2025](#) include training for police forces on state threats, enhanced immigration enforcement and funding for protective security for synagogues. Further sanctions on Iran remain under review.

1 Nature of Iran-linked activities in the UK

1.1 Intelligence and Security Committee report

Background

In July 2025, [the UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee](#), which oversees the work of UK intelligence agencies, published a report on threats emanating from Iran. The committee is a joint committee of both Houses.¹

The committee's inquiry began in 2021 and concluded taking evidence in August 2023. A [press release accompanying the Iran report summarised its findings](#) (PDF).

Conclusions

The committee said that Iranian state threats to the UK were less strategic and extensive than those undertaken by Chinese and Russian state-linked actors (it published a [report on Chinese state threats](#) (PDF) in 2023 and a [report on Russian state threats](#) (PDF) in 2019). However, it concluded that Iran nonetheless “poses a significant threat to the UK”. The committee said that:²

- The Iranian Government is “persistent and – crucially – unpredictable”, though regime survival was its primary priority in all its actions.
- The aim of regime survival means that Iran has four main objectives:
 - weakening UK relations with the United States and Israel
 - weakening UK security relationships in the Middle East
 - reducing the UK's military presence in the Middle East
 - silencing UK criticism of Iran on issues such as human rights
- Iranian threats were wide-ranging, including nuclear, physical, espionage, offensive cyber and political interference.
- Physical attacks on opponents of the Iranian regime were “the greatest level of threat we currently face from Iran” (the committee referenced evidence from the UK Home Office's Homeland Security Group). These threats had increased significantly in the 18 months prior to the report.

¹ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), HC 1116, July 2025

² As above, paras 5 to 8, 10, 56, 61-4, 87, 94-7, 192, 253-7, 259-61, 263-7, 324

- The Iranian Government does not view attacks on UK-based targets as representing attacks on the UK, but rather as “handling [...] internal matters” (referring to perceived enemies of the regime) on UK soil.
- Cyber activity was also a “significant area of asymmetric strength” for Iran. However, the UK was not a primary target of this, and Iranian cyber capacity was less developed than Chinese and Russian cyber capacity. An Iranian cyberattack on UK infrastructure was considered unlikely by the committee.
- Before the rise of physical threats, espionage (referring to the gathering of non-public information through covert means), including in the form of cyberattacks, had been considered the leading threat.

The committee said that while “Iran’s intent exceeds its capability” on cyber operations, it nonetheless remained a “significant threat”. Iran’s cyber activities were considered a threat to any sector, though there were particular threats to:

- the travel and aviation sector, as this supported targeting dissidents and opponents of the regime
 - the university and defence sectors (often for intellectual property)
 - Israeli or Jewish entities
 - the UK Government and [critical national infrastructure](#)
- While Iran does seek to conduct political interference activity (known as “[cognitive warfare](#)”), its effects were judged “negligible”. However, attacks on journalists and Iranian dissidents had “had a significant impact on the Iranian diaspora community in the UK” and some organisations had been “promot[ing] violent and extremist ideology”.

1.2

Joint Committee on Human Rights report

A [2025 report on Transnational repression in the UK](#) by another parliamentary committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, described further ways that physical and other threats were being undertaken by actors linked to the Iranian state.³

These methods and threats had included assassination plots, physical attacks, intimidation of family members, asset freezing, judicial proceedings, smear campaigns, online abuse, surveillance and digital attacks.

³ Joint Committee for Human Rights, [Transnational repression in the UK](#), July 2025, para 11

Digital threats included hacking, doxing (searching for and publishing private or identifying information about an individual on the internet) and impersonation. It also heard that women are subject to “gendered and sexualised abuse”.

Iranian global activity

The UK’s intelligence services are not the only such agencies to warn against Iranian activity overseas.

In its 2025 report, the UK Parliament’s Intelligence and Security Committee noted several assassination and kidnap plots carried out by Iranian state-linked actors in Europe in recent years.⁴

In March 2025, the US Intelligence Community said that Iran “remains committed to its decade-long effort to develop surrogate networks” in the US and to target officials whom it believes were involved in killing [IRGC-Qods Force Commander Qasem Soleimani in 2020](#).⁵

In October 2025, the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution reported that it had been receiving a growing number of reports of espionage and transnational repression linked to Iran.⁶

The French intelligence services have warned of an increase in targeted killings by Iran.⁷

In 2025, the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on human rights in Iran, Mai Sato, also reported “increasing cases of transnational repression, including interrogation, threats, and surveillance of families of Iranian journalists abroad”. Her office received information indicating that 45 journalists in seven countries had “faced credible threats as a result of reporting on events in Iran”. The Special Rapporteur noted that the transnational activity coincided with increased repression in Iran in 2025, including greater use of the death penalty.⁸

⁴ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), pp55-8

⁵ Office of Director of National Intelligence, [Annual threat assessment](#), March 2025, p23

⁶ Reuters, [Iran stepping up harassment of its nationals in Germany, says opposition group](#), 20 November 2025

⁷ VOA, [Iran’s secret service plots to kill Jews in Europe, says France](#), 7 September 2024

⁸ UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, [Iran: UN Fact-Finding Mission alarmed by surge in repression and extraordinary spike in executions](#), 30 October 2025

1.3

MI5 statement on “potentially lethal plots”

The Director General of MI5, Sir Ken McCallum, provides annual updates on security threats facing the UK, including those emanating from Iran.

In his most recent update, in October 2025, Mr McCallum said that the agency had tracked “more than 20 potentially lethal Iran-backed plots” since his 2024 update. He said that MI5 had been “required... to grow [its] counter-Iran effort once again”.⁹

Earlier in 2025, the parliamentary Intelligence and Security Committee had noted that the UK intelligence community assesses that threats are “specifically targeted at those individuals perceived to be opposed to the Iranian regime”. However, it also said that there “clearly remains a risk of collateral damage to the wider UK population in the event of an attack”.¹⁰

In the previous update, delivered in October 2024, Ken McCallum had said that, from 2022, the agency and the police had “responded to 20 Iran-backed plots presenting potentially lethal threats to British citizens and UK residents”.¹¹

Counterterrorism policing: Arrests in May 2025

In May 2025, in two separate counterterrorism operations, eight men, all Iranian nationals, were arrested in locations across England. UK media reports suggested that five were arrested for planning a terrorist attack on the Israeli embassy in London. The Iranian Government said it “categorically rejects any involvement”.¹² The police and the UK Government have not commented on the reports. Announcing the ongoing operations, the Home Office Minister, Dan Jarvis, said that they were “some of the largest counter-state threats and counter-terrorism actions that we have seen in recent times”.¹³

The cases are ongoing. On 17 May 2025, the Iranian ambassador was summoned to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), after three Iranians were charged under the National Security Act.¹⁴ The then Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, explained to the Commons that they were

⁹ MI5 Security Service, [Director General Ken McCallum gives threat update](#), 16 October 2025

¹⁰ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), HC 1116, July 2025, paras 157-8

¹¹ MI5 Security Service, [Director General Ken McCallum gives latest threat update](#), 8 October 2025

¹² Times, [Iranian terror suspects ‘targeted Israeli embassy in London’](#), 8 May 2025

¹³ HC Deb, [6 May 2025](#), c547

¹⁴ FCDO, [Summoning of the Iranian Ambassador to the United Kingdom](#), 19 May 2025

charged with “engaging in conduct likely to assist a foreign intelligence service”:

All three have been charged with engaging in conduct likely to assist a foreign intelligence service. Additional charges were brought in relation to engaging in conduct, including surveillance, reconnaissance and open research, with the intention to commit acts of serious violence against a person in the United Kingdom. The foreign state to which these charges relate is Iran, and those individuals are the first Iranian nationals to be charged under the National Security Act [of 2023]

[...]

[The] Foreign Secretary has told the Iranian Foreign Minister in the strongest terms that we will not accept any Iranian state threat activity in the UK.¹⁵

The Director General of MI5 also said that Iranian state actors were making “extensive use of criminals”, such as drug traffickers and “crooks” as proxies to conduct activity in the UK, including reconnaissance.¹⁶ Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security and [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps](#) (IRGC; see section 3.4) are also linked to operations outside Iran, including in Europe.¹⁷

In July 2025, the Intelligence and Security Committee had warned that “the use of a wide range of organisations means physical threat can manifest from a much broader pool of suspects, adding a further layer of unpredictability”.¹⁸ A similar use of criminal gangs by Iran has been reported in the US and Turkey.¹⁹

1.4

Threats to journalists

In recent years, media reports have highlighted threats, harassment and violence against UK-based journalists and media organisations. These include journalists working for BBC News Persian, Manoto TV, and Iran International.²⁰

Some protesters and others writing about Iran have also reported intimidation and harassment in the UK.²¹

In 2021, the BBC issued a statement saying that “for over a decade” Iran had conducted a “campaign of harassment and intimidation” against BBC News

¹⁵ HC Deb, [19 May 2025](#), c760

¹⁶ As above

¹⁷ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), HC 1116, July 2025, paras 168-70

¹⁸ As above, paras 168-173

¹⁹ BBC News, [Iran using criminal gangs for hit jobs abroad, court papers show](#), 15 May 2025

²⁰ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), para 180

²¹ The Guardian, [How Iran is targeting protesters in Britain](#), 18 December 2023

Persian and their families in Iran, including arbitrary detention, death threats and discrimination. This has extended to BBC journalists and their family members in the UK.²² The BBC first raised these issues with the UN in 2017.²³

The BBC has continued to report threats and harassment, saying in June 2025 that there had been a “sharp and deeply troubling escalation in the persecution of BBC News Persian journalists” in both the UK and Iran.²⁴

Iran International, which reports on events in Iran and the wider region, has also reported that, since it was founded in 2017, its journalists have been subject to “sustained harassment”. In August 2025, it said that 45 journalists and 315 family members had been targeted during the previous six weeks.²⁵ The channel had previously suspended its operations in the UK and moved to the United States in 2023, citing safety concerns.²⁶

The UK’s National Union of Journalists and the international non-governmental organisation Reporters Without Borders have echoed these reports.²⁷ Germany’s DW Persian Service has also raised similar threats made against it in the past.²⁸

1.5

Cyberthreats

The UK’s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has issued warnings about targeted phishing and ransomware campaigns launched by individuals on behalf of the Iranian state.

In 2024, it said that the activity was targeted at “current and former senior government officials, senior think tank personnel, journalists, activists and lobbyists” who have links to Middle East and Iranian affairs. The US issued an alert at the same time, warning that US politicians were among those targeted.²⁹

Ransomware attacks by Iran-sponsored actors have also targeted critical national infrastructure organisations. The NCSC has not reported which UK organisations had been targeted, but in the US such attacks have been

²² BBC Media Centre, [To mark Human Rights Day, the BBC calls on Iran to end harassment of BBC News Persian staff](#), 10 December 2021 and [Iran’s targeting of journalists across Europe raised at UN Human Rights Council in Geneva](#), 17 March 2023

²³ The Guardian, [BBC appeals to UN over Iran’s crackdown on journalists](#), 25 October 2017

²⁴ BBC Media Centre, [Statement on threats to BBC News Persian journalists](#), 2 June 2025

²⁵ Iran International, [Iran International lodges urgent UN appeal over persecution of staff](#), 6 August 2025 and [Iran International journalists face escalating threats from Tehran](#), 10 August 2025

²⁶ BBC News, [Iran International: Channel leaves UK after regime threats](#), 18 February 2023

²⁷ National Union of Journalists, [Iran’s targeting of journalists](#), 14 November 2024; Reporters without Borders, [\[...\] Unprecedented transnational repression of Iranian journalists in the UK](#), 17 April 2024

²⁸ DW Corporate, [Broadcasting Council protests against actions taken by Iran](#), 28 November 2022

²⁹ National Cyber Security Centre, [UK and US issue alert over cyber actors working on behalf of Iranian state](#), 27 September 2024;

launched against police departments, local governments and the aviation sector.³⁰

Iran was reportedly linked to a cyberattack on the UK Parliament in 2017, in which the accounts of some MPs were reportedly compromised.³¹

The Intelligence and Security Committee said that Iranian state-linked actors had been “obtaining and analysing extensive datasets” from, among others, airlines, hotels and travel companies. It also said that Iranian state-linked actors had been launching “spear-phishing” campaigns (targeted emails asking for sensitive information or encouraging targets to visit a fake or compromised website).³²

The committee noted that Iran undertakes “offensive” cyber operations, referring to using cyber-attack to respond to perceived aggression, in an attempt to “contain Western and regional adversaries without resorting to conventional military action”. However, it said that the UK does not appear to be a “top priority” for such Iranian state action and that Iran would be unlikely to launch such an offensive attack “unless it was directly provoked”.³³

1.6

Charities and civil society

General “interference” activities

The 2025 Intelligence and Security Committee report said that “Iran has historically posed a reasonable [political] interference threat to the UK and its interests” and that its “capability to undertake interference operations may be lower than its intent”.³⁴

The committee noted that while such interference had had a substantial effect on the individuals Iran had targeted, including dissidents, the wider effect on society and public opinion was “negligible”. This included efforts to influence the public via social media during the Scottish referendum campaign in 2014 and the Scottish parliamentary elections in 2021. However, in response to the interference, Iranians in the UK were reported to have “limited their social contact with other Iranians [...] moderated their criticism of Iran, and reduced their advocacy for contentious Iranian topics”.³⁵

³⁰ National Cyber Security Centre, [UK and allies expose Iranian state agency \[...\]](#), 20 September 2022; US Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency, [Iranian IRGC-affiliated cyber actors exploiting vulnerabilities](#), 14 September 2022

³¹ The Times, [Iran attacks 9,000 email accounts in parliament](#), 14 October 2017

³² Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), paras 308-12

³³ As above, paras 317-19, 324

³⁴ As above, paras 354, 356, 358, 369, 392

³⁵ As above, para 374

The committee said that multiple Iranian agencies are linked to such activity, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Intelligence Services, state media, Iranian-funded Islamic cultural centres, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the IRGC. Actions have included publishing media stories and spreading divisive narratives.

IRGC generals and UK universities

Iranian IRGC generals have also been linked to antisemitic speeches and events on UK university campuses. In 2024, the Charity Commission for England and Wales launched an investigation into events promoted by the Islamic Students Association of Britain and affiliated groups (the association said in response to the media reports that they respect people from all backgrounds, faiths and communities). These events were held at a site owned by Al-Tawheed Charitable Trust, which was also under investigation by the Charity Commission.³⁶

The Intelligence and Security Committee said that “this appears to be the first indication” that the Iranian intelligence services are “attempting to directly engage with, and influence, students in the UK”.³⁷

The Charity Commission has the power to investigate, sanction or close down charities which breach the charity regulations.³⁸ As of 2025, the investigations are ongoing, and no findings have been published.³⁹

Iranian state and the Islamic Centre of England

The Islamic Centre of England (ICE) has been largely funded by the Iranian Supreme Leader’s Office. It is based in London and has sub-branches in Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow and Manchester. It acts as a Shia cultural and religious educational centre.

The Intelligence and Security Committee said that “the ICE may well provide [Iranian intelligence service] agents with a useful base from which to act”. In 2022, the government said that “there is a whole ecology of these organisations operating, promoting extremist ideology, promoting violence and inciting hatred” in the UK.⁴⁰

In 2022, the Charity Commission opened an inquiry into the ICE. This followed a warning that the commission had issued against the organisation following events held at its premises in 2020 which “eulogised Major General Qasem Soleimani” ([Qasem Soleimani was head of the IRGC’s Quds Force](#), and killed in a US strike in 2020). During the inquiry, the charity’s governing document

³⁶ BBC News, UK [officials probe Iran generals' antisemitic talks to students](#), 22 January 2024

³⁷ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), para 392

³⁸ [Charities Act 2011](#), as amended, sections 75A to 84B

³⁹ HL Deb, [7 May 2025](#), c1656

⁴⁰ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), paras 293-4, 387, 389

removed a requirement for one trustee to be the official UK religious representative of Iran's Supreme Leader.⁴¹

The Charity Commission's inquiry is ongoing.

2

Iranian Government response

The Iranian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Ali Mousavi, addressed the allegations of Iranian state threat activity to the UK in an oral evidence session with the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in June 2025.

In relation to the reported threats against journalists and abduction plots in the UK, he said that Iran "need[s] evidence". He also said that [the Iranian Government had "some criticism" of the BBC Persian service](#):

These claims have been raised by different people. We need evidence. We ask the Foreign Office several times for consultation meetings with the military services regarding the addresses [referring to journalists subject to attacks or harassment], and all of these issues. These issues are some allegations against and blaming my country. We have some criticism regarding BBC Persian's activities. They are intervening in Iranian domestic affairs. According to our bilateral diplomatic relations, we have suggested several times to the British authorities considering bilateral consultations. [...] If you have any evidence, please submit it, and we will consider it.⁴²

In relation to the statements by the Director General of MI5 about the number of potentially lethal Iranian plots in the UK, [the ambassador said Iran was keen to work with the UK](#):

More than 10 times, we declared by verbal note, in diplomatic negotiations, that we will send our security services to resolve these matters raised in our bilateral relations. [...] I am very keen to provide and prepare different co-operation between Iran and the United Kingdom.

[...]

[All] of these matters should be considered between the expert groups. These are claims. There is no doubt that the Iranian side is ready to co-operate with the British side to consider and remove these kinds of misunderstandings.⁴³

Directly responding to the October 2025 update from the Director General of MI5, the ambassador said that Iran "unequivocally denies any involvement in acts of violence, kidnapping, or harassment targeting individuals" in the UK.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Charity Commission, [Regulator orders reform to governance at Islamic Centre of England](#), 16 May 2025 and [Regulator launches inquiry into Islamic Centre of England](#), 22 November 2022

⁴² Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence: The Iran-Israel conflict](#), 17 June 2025, Q 21

⁴³ As above, Q 22

⁴⁴ Iranian embassy to the UK, [Iran firmly rejects MI5 Director General's baseless allegation](#), 17 October 2025

Iran has also opposed the foreign influence registration scheme (see section 3), which it said would “aggravate the Iranian nation’s distrust towards [the] UK’s policies”.⁴⁵

3 UK Government actions

3.1 Intelligence and Security Committee report

In its July 2025 report on threats emanating from Iran, the Intelligence and Security Committee discussed how the UK could better respond to the threat from Iran.

The committee was critical of government responses up to the date of the report’s publication, arguing that it had been focused on “crisis management” and driven by “concerns over Iran’s nuclear programme – to the exclusion of other issues”. It also raised concerns about the levels of funding and staffing focused specifically on Iran, and the potential for a focus on Russia and China to crowd out work on other threats.⁴⁶ The committee’s recommendations for action included:⁴⁷

- Reforming “over-complicate[d] governance structures and strategies”.
- Assessing the possibility of proscribing the IRGC as a terrorist organisation.
- Engaging more with Iran at a ministerial level.
- Considering whether sanctions encourage behavioural change, or push Iran towards China.
- Continuing “disruptive immigration measures” to ensure that the UK is a “hard operating environment” for Iran. These include refusals for visas or British citizenship.
- “Rais[ing] the cost to Iran of it launching a cyber-attack on the UK”

The government published a response to the committee’s report in September 2025, as [Government response to the Intelligence and Security Committee](#). This response describes actions set out in sections 3.2 to 3.6 below (many of which were underway before the committee report).

⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring, [Tehran summons UK envoy in objection to “anti-Iran stances”](#), 7 March 2025

⁴⁶ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), paras 11, 13, 479, 492, 496, 501, 503

⁴⁷ As above, pp234-41, para 589, 633

3.2 Diplomatic activity

In May 2025, the then Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, said that “international co-operation is critical in challenging Iranian transnational threats” and that she would be convening foreign ministers for this purpose.⁴⁸

In July 2025, the UK Government, alongside 13 other countries, issued a statement condemning “the growing number of state threats from Iranian intelligence services in our respective territories”. The statement said these threats represented a “clear violation of our sovereignty”, called on Iran to cease its threatening activities, and said the signatory countries would take further steps to combat such activities.⁴⁹

Signatory countries included Albania, Sweden and the United States.

The G7 also has a Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), established in 2021, to counter evolving foreign threats to democracy.⁵⁰ In September 2025, the G7 said that many states had been reporting Iranian intelligence services activity:

Iranian intelligence services have increasingly attempted to kill, kidnap, and harass political opponents abroad, following a disturbing and unacceptable pattern of transnational repression, and clearly undermining state sovereignty. Other malign activities include operations to obtain and disclose the personal information of journalists and attacks designed to divide societies and intimidate Jewish communities.⁵¹

3.3 UK sanctions regime

In December 2023, the UK introduced a new sanctions regime against Iran. This replaced an existing regime which included sanctions on human rights and Iran’s nuclear programme. These have continued under the new system.⁵²

The sanctions regime allows the government to sanction an individual on a range of grounds, including “threatening, planning or conducting attacks against persons and assets in the United Kingdom or any other country”, undertaking such acts to support “the destabilisation of the United Kingdom” and “planning or conducting espionage for the Government of Iran”.⁵³

⁴⁸ HC Deb, [19 May 2025](#), c760

⁴⁹ FCDO, [Statement on state threats from Iranian intelligence services](#), 31 July 2025

⁵⁰ German Federal Interior Ministry, [G7 RRM](#). The G7 is the UK, US, Canada, France, Italy, Japan and Germany

⁵¹ FCDO, [G7 RRM statement on Iranian transnational repression \[...\]](#), 12 September 2025

⁵² FCDO, [New Iranian sanction regime comes in to force](#), 14 December 2023

⁵³ [The Iran \(Sanctions\) Regulations 2023](#), Part 2, section 8

Under the regime, the assets of named individuals and organisations can be frozen. A travel ban and director ban can also be put in place.

As of December 2025, the UK has designated 547 individuals and organisations under its Iran sanctions framework (the majority relate to nuclear activity).⁵⁴

Sanctions introduced in April 2025 include those against [the Foxtrot Network, a criminal network based in Sweden](#), which the UK Government said had been “involv[ed] in violence against Jewish and Israeli targets in Europe on behalf of the Iranian regime”. The sanctions were announced following a similar action by the United States.⁵⁵

In January 2024, the UK also sanctioned Naji Ibrahim Sharifi-Zindashti, the head of an international drug and trafficking cartel, as well as members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) linked to a threat made against Iran International.⁵⁶

3.4

Proscribing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

Long-standing debate on proscribing the IRGC

There has been a long-standing debate in the UK over whether to proscribe the IRGC as a terrorist organisation under the Terrorism Act 2000. For an explanation of the act and the proscription criteria and effects, see the Commons Library briefing [Proscribed terrorist organisations](#).⁵⁷

Proscription would put the IRGC on the same standing as Hezbollah and Hamas, two groups supported by Iran. Proscription creates offences such as being a member of, or encouraging support for, the organisation in question, and allows financial sanctions to be imposed on it (although sanctions are already applied against the IRGC).⁵⁸

Like previous Conservative governments, the current Labour government has not announced plans to proscribe the IRGC under the 2000 act. One of the major challenges cited has been that the IRGC is part of the Iranian state. In evidence to the Intelligence and Security Committee in 2023, the then Home

⁵⁴ FCDO, [The UK sanctions list: Search](#) (1 December 2025)

⁵⁵ FCDO, [UK sanctions Iranian organised crime network](#), 14 April 2025; US State Department, [Sanctioning the Foxtrot network](#), 12 March 2025

⁵⁶ FCDO, [UK and US step up action to tackle domestic threat from Iran](#), 29 January 2024

⁵⁷ For a summary of the debate, see Commons Library briefing, [Iran’s influence in the Middle East](#), section 2.4 and [Israel-Iran April 2024: UK and international response](#), section 3.4

⁵⁸ There is a separate mechanism on proscribed group assets, under the [Terrorism Act 2000](#), pt 3

Secretary, Suella Braverman, noted that any decision to proscribe the IRGC would be “complex” because of it being a part of the Iranian state:

[It would be] a complex decision, that is definitely clear... it is a state organisation, unlike many of the organisations that have been proscribed in the past, and there are lots of factors that need to be weighed up, the diplomatic implications, the implications on intelligence, the implications for the region, the military implications... [We would have to] weigh up the operational benefits of proscription and the extent to which proscription would mitigate the extant threat posed by the IRGC as well as any risks posed by proscription itself.⁵⁹

In 2023, the then Foreign Secretary, (now Sir) James Cleverly, also noted that the effects of proscription would be limited due to the asset freezes and bans that are already in place under the existing sanctions against the IRGC.⁶¹

What is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps?

[The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps \(IRGC\) is an Iranian state military and intelligence service](#), established following the 1979 revolution as a counterweight to Iran’s regular armed forces.

The IRGC has ground forces in Iran totalling more than 100,000 personnel, as well as naval and air forces. It also controls the [paramilitary Basij force](#), which can mobilise up to 600,000 volunteers, and supported [the suppression of the protests that followed the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022](#).

As set out in the US State Department [country report on terrorism: Iran](#), the Quds Force ([the IRGC’s external arm](#), which was designated a foreign terrorist organisation by the US in 2019) is Iran’s “primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorist activity abroad”, including in Syria and Iraq.⁶⁰

Review and planned actions against the IRGC in 2025

In March 2025, the Home Office announced that the government’s Independent Reviewer of Terrorism and State Threats Legislation, Jonathan Hall KC, would conduct a review into responding to state threats and the design of a proscription mechanism for state and state-linked bodies, including the IRGC.⁶² The terms of reference were published in late March 2025.⁶³

Mr Hall’s report was published in May 2025, as [Legislation to address state-based security threats to the UK](#) (PDF). One of its recommendations was to

⁵⁹ Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, [Iran](#), HC 1116, para 603

⁶⁰ US State Department, [Country reports on terrorism 2023: Iran](#), 2024

⁶¹ HC Deb, [6 July 2023](#), c1002

⁶² HC Deb, [4 March 2025](#), c196

⁶³ Home Office, [Independent review of legislation to address state-based security threats to the UK](#), 27 March 2025

introduce a power akin to proscription for foreign intelligence services, including the IRGC:

[Introduce the] ability to issue Statutory Alert and Liability Threat [SALT] Notices against Foreign Intelligence Services, an equivalent to proscription under the Terrorism Act 2000. By way of example, this strong power would be available for use against the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.⁶⁴

These proposed Statutory Alert and Liability Threat (SALT) notices would be issued by the Secretary of State and be available against state entities and private entities acting as foreign intelligence services. It would require amendments to the National Security Act 2023, and be subject to the same [parliamentary affirmative process](#) as terrorism proscription.⁶⁵

Mr Hall noted that the SALT notice could include offenses that were additional to the offense of providing material assistance that is set out in the National Security Act 2023. These could include the offence of inviting support, displaying in public a flag or other insignia of the designated body, and terrorism funding offences.⁶⁶

Mr Hall also noted that the notice would also act as a “threat to that entity, putting it on notice that its operations, and its minions and influence networks”, could be at risk of further UK action.⁶⁷

Following the report’s publication, in May 2025, the then Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, said that the government would create such a proscription power:

I can tell the House that we will create a new power of proscription to cover state threats—a power that is stronger than the current National Security Act powers in allowing us to restrict the activity and operations of foreign state-backed organisations in the UK—including new criminal offences for individuals who invite support for or promote the group in question. We will not hesitate to use the power against organisations that pose a threat to UK residents, because we will not stand for foreign state organisations seeking to escalate threats on UK soil.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Independent Reviewer, [Legislation to address state-based security threats to the UK](#) (PDF), May 2025, para 1.3

⁶⁵ As above, paras 5.3-5.4

⁶⁶ As above, paras 5.11- 5.29, 5.41-5.58

⁶⁷ As above, para 5.9

⁶⁸ HC Deb, [19 May 2025](#), c761

Actions of other states against the IRGC

Several states have taken action against the IRGC in recent years. These follow already existing sanctions against the group.

In 2019, the first [Trump administration designated the IRGC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization](#) in its entirety.

In 2024, the [Canadian Government listed the IRGC as a terrorist entity](#) under the country's Criminal Code. This followed the [listing the IRGC's Qods Force as a terrorist entity in 2012](#).

In November 2025, Australia designated the IRGC as a “state sponsor of terrorism” [following the passage of a new legislative framework](#) which allowed it to do so. This followed [the expulsion of the Iranian ambassador from Australia](#) and Iran being blamed for two antisemitic attacks.

3.5 Foreign Influence Registration Scheme

Established under [National Security Act 2023](#), the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS) came into force on 1 July 2025.

What are the registration requirements?

FIRS requires individuals and organisations to register their arrangements with foreign states and certain foreign power-controlled entities where they are directed to carry out political influence activities in the UK. Any individual who does not register such arrangements commits a criminal offence. It does not prevent the activity taking place.⁶⁹

“Direction” could refer to a “contract, payment, coercion or the promise of a future compensation or favourable treatment” by the foreign state.

It has two tiers: a “political influence tier” and the “enhanced tier”. Iran has been designated under the enhanced tier, alongside Russia (the only two states to have been designated under this tier to date).⁷⁰

The enhanced tier of FIRS gives the Secretary of State the power to require an individual or organisation to register a broader range of activities for the

⁶⁹ Home Office, [Foreign Influence Registration Scheme factsheet](#), updated 24 June 2025

⁷⁰ For an introduction, see the Home Office collection, [Guidance on the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme: enhanced tier](#) and Home Office, [UK launches Foreign Influence Registration Scheme](#), 1 July 2025

designated countries, or for parts of that country or foreign government-controlled entities (such as specific parts of a state).

Activities can include commercial activity, academic and research activity and charitable activity.

This tier requires the registration of any activities in the UK undertaken at the direction of the specific power, or an activity carried out by such an organisation. It is an offence for anyone to carry out any such activity in the UK without it being registered. These measures are additional to any sanctions and other measures already in force.

What Iranian organisations are specified?

Under the enhanced tier, several Iranian organisations are specified as requiring individuals to report and register activities for. These are:

- a. The Supreme Leader of Iran (in their public capacity);
- b. The Government of Iran (including any part of the government) and all of its agencies and authorities including:
 - i. the Supreme Leader's Office;
 - ii. the Assembly of Experts;
 - iii. the President (in that capacity);
 - iv. the Office of the President;
 - v. the Guardian Council;
 - vi. All Ministers (in that capacity);
 - vii. All Ministries (including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security);
 - viii. The Expediency Council;
 - ix. The Armed Forces, including Artesh and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC);
 - x. The Supreme National Security Council (including all sub-committees) and;
 - xi. Any other intelligence services and;
 - xii. All police forces.
- c. The Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran [Iranian Parliament];

d. The judiciary of Iran⁷¹

Chapter 4 of the Home Office [Guidance on the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme: Specified foreign powers or foreign power-controlled entities \(Iran\)](#) provides more on each organisation, and examples of activity that requires registration.

How many organisations have been registered?

The government intends to publish an annual report setting out the number of registrations and people charged and convicted of an offence under the scheme (among other elements). The first report is expected from July 2026.⁷²

3.6

Other government actions in 2025

In March 2025, the government announced other measures, additional to those above, to address potential state threats from Iran. The Security Minister, Dan Jarvis, said that the government would be:⁷³

- offering training and guidance on state threats activity by counter-terrorism policing to all 45 territorial police forces in the UK
- considering new ways to enforce immigration rules specifically to address threats from Iran
- maintaining funding for protective security measures to synagogues, Jewish community centres and schools
- ensuring that the National Protective Security Authority and Counter Terrorism Policing continue to provide protective security advice and support to individuals and organisations threatened by Iran and criminal groups
- exploring further sanctions against Iranian-linked criminal groups.

Wider measures on foreign state threats

As set out on the Commons Library briefing, [The impact of foreign interference on security, trade and democracy](#), a range of government strategies on trade, sanctions and security aim to counter state threats.

⁷¹ Home Office, [Guidance on the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme: Specified foreign powers or foreign power-controlled entities \(Iran\)](#), September 2025

⁷² PQ 89036 [[Foreign Influence Registration Scheme: Iran](#)], 18 November 2025

⁷³ HC Deb, [4 March 2025](#), c195-7

There are specific measures to counter the actions of Russia and China which are set out in the following Commons Library briefings:

- [Countering Russian influence in the UK](#)
- [UK-China relations: recent developments](#), section 3

Wider measures taken by the government include a [Transnational Repression Review](#), undertaken by the Defending Democracy Taskforce ([established in 2022](#)) and the publication of a [National Security Strategy](#) in 2025.

The government has also established a new “state threats joint unit”. This includes staff across government departments, and aims to build partnerships with industry and academia.⁷⁴

In 2025, the government is also due to consult on new measures on charity regulation, which will “automatically ban individuals convicted of hate crimes from serving as charity trustees or senior managers”. It will also consult on making it easier for the Charity Commission to take regulatory action “against people promoting violence, terrorism or hatred”.⁷⁵

In October 2025, MI5’s National Protective Security Authority published new [guidance to better protect the UK’s democratic institutions](#) from all foreign interference and espionage threats.

⁷⁴ HC Deb, [19 May 2025](#), c760

⁷⁵ HL Deb, [26 November 2025](#), c1324

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