



Canadian Security Intelligence Service

Service canadien du renseignement de sécurité

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# IRANIAN FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN CANADA

The Government of Canada (GC) severed diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran in September 2012; it subsequently declared Iran a state sponsor of terrorism and listed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Force (IRGC-QF) as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code of Canada. In November 2022, following Iran's violent suppression of mass protests, the GC designated the Iranian regime under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), barring entry of senior officials of that regime to Canada. Hundreds of Iranian officials and entities have been sanctioned by the GC since October 2022. (U//OUO)

**FOREIGN INTERFERENCE**

## WHAT IS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE?

Section 2(b) of the CSIS Act defines foreign interference as "activities within or relating to Canada, that are detrimental to the interests of Canada, and are clandestine or deceptive, or involve a threat to any person." (U//OUO)

Foreign interference is a national security threat and poses a significant problem for the integrity of our political system, democratic institutions, social cohesion and fundamental rights and freedoms. Foreign interference can be a single act, but is most often characterized by systematic activity—a series of activities and behaviours that may occur over time and space. (U//OUO)

Foreign interference is conducted to further the interests of a foreign state—to the detriment of Canada and its people. It may include state or non-state entities, including proxies and co-optees. (U//OUO)

## IRANIAN THREAT ACTORS



**MINISTRY OF INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY (MOIS)**  
Iran's civilian intelligence agency responsible for domestic counterintelligence and foreign operations, including countering dissent. (U//OUO)



**ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS QODS FORCE (IRGC-QF)**  
The foreign operations arm of the IRGC and a designated terrorist entity under the Criminal Code of Canada. (U//OUO)



**IRGC INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATION (IRGC-IO)**  
The intelligence arm of the IRGC that also conducts foreign operations. (U//OUO)



## TARGETS & TACTICS

Iran and the Iranian Intelligence Services (IIS) are interested in monitoring, influencing and clandestinely collecting information on the Iranian diaspora community in Canada, including:

- anti-regime activists and political dissidents;
- human, women's and minority rights activists;
- fugitives wanted by the regime, and others. (U//OUO)

In many cases, the objective is to silence criticism of the regime. The IIS use a range of tactics that are centred on monitoring, intimidation and harassment, including:

- direct approaches in Canada;
- the use of social media;
- cyber operations;
- the monitoring of anti-regime protests outside of Iran; and,
- threats against family and friends in Iran. (U//OUO)

Iran uses agents, proxies and/or sympathizers who may be witting or unwitting accomplices. Their immediate objective may include identifying or locating anti-regime activists in Canada, with the ultimate goal of silencing them. (U//OUO)

## PS752 A CASE STUDY

On January 8, 2020, the IRGC downed Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752, killing all 176 persons on board, including 85 Canadian citizens and permanent residents. (U//OUO)

**Weeks after the crash, many victims' families** – several of whom had criticized the regime's initial denial of responsibility, subsequent handling of the case and called for justice – **experienced harassment and intimidation.** (U//OUO)

The Honourable Ralph Goodale, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister, noted in his December 2020 report, Flight PS752: The Long Road to Transparency, Accountability and Justice, that family members had reported intimidation, harassment and cyber threats. The GC's July 2021 Forensic Examination and Assessment Team report, *The Downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752: Factual Analysis*, also referred to **numerous complaints from victims' families who were suspected victims of foreign interference.** (U//OUO)

## WHY DOES IRAN CONDUCT FOREIGN INTERFERENCE?

Canada is a multicultural, democratic society, home to people from every corner of the world, including more than 200,000 persons of Iranian descent. Many people have found asylum in Canada after fleeing persecution in their native countries. (U//OUO)

Some foreign states, like Iran, are guided by regime preservation; they do not tolerate domestic criticism of their political systems or leaderships. Lawful advocacy—regarded by Canadians as a democratic right—is severely curtailed or deemed illegal, even punished, by some foreign states, including Iran. Foreign interference serves to further strategic interests of some foreign states. (U//OUO)

## WHY DOES FOREIGN INTERFERENCE POSE A RISK TO CANADIANS?

FI is a form of transnational repression (TNR). Although monitoring, harassment and intimidation—whether direct, via social media or cyber intrusion—are representative of FI and TNR activities, they may also be precursors of more violent actions, including kidnappings, forced repatriation and lethal operations. (U//OUO)

FI erodes our sovereignty and threatens individual freedoms. Unreported or undetected, these activities may pose risks or harm to our citizens, or jeopardize the integrity of Canadian institutions and national security. (U//OUO)

Canada is neither immune to Iranian foreign interference nor an isolated case. CSIS partners in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and several European countries have publicly highlighted Iranian FI and TNR activities targeting their citizens. (U//OUO)





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