

Top Iranian Cleric Warns US Not to Designate Guards as Terrorists

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A top Iranian cleric has warned the United States during a live radio broadcast not to blacklist Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization.

In Friday's sermon, Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami said "fugitive counter-revolutionaries" were pushing the United States into a confrontation that would prove to be what he called a "quagmire" with no exit.

He said that if the United States labeled the Guards a terrorist organization, it would be a matter of pride.

The conservative cleric is a member of the Assembly of Experts, which selects Iran's supreme leader.

This week, U.S. officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told news agencies the Bush Administration may soon designate the Revolutionary Guards as a terrorist organization.

Washington has accused Iran of arming insurgents in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If the United States declares the Guards to be a terrorist group, it would cut off the group from the U.S. financial system and restrict the movement of its leaders. The United States has never taken such a step against the armed forces of a sovereign country.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had caused international controversy over his anti-Israeli remarks and his hard-line stance in the dispute over Iran's nuclear program.

In remarks this week, another senior Iranian cleric, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Sharoudi, criticized President Ahmadinejad after he unexpectedly replaced Iran's oil and industry ministers. Sharoudi, who is Iran's judiciary chief, said changing managers and ministers would not improve anything. Mr. Ahmadinejad has been facing internal criticism for his management of the economy and high inflation.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2007-08-17-voa30.cfm>

Analyst: Iranian force gaining power
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WASHINGTON — An elite Iranian force likely to be designated a foreign terrorist organization by the Bush administration has close links to Iran's nuclear program and operates most of its surface-to-surface missiles, a leading analyst says.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, established during the 1979 Iranian revolution, has evolved into a powerful and influential organization that is believed to have custody over most or all of Iran's chemical, biological and radiological weapons, Anthony H. Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies says in a study to be published in late September.

The force has some 125,000 men, and has exported thousands of rockets to Hezbollah militants in Lebanon and shipped arms to various Palestinian movements, including the Palestinian Authority, Cordesman writes in "Iran's Military Forces and Warfighting Capabilities."

Some 5,000 of the group are assigned to unconventional warfare missions as well as special Quds, or Jerusalem, forces for operations overseas. They support the Palestinian militant group Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza and on the West Bank and Shiites in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Cordesman, a former director of intelligence assessments at the Pentagon.

Links to al-Qaida and other Sunni extremist groups have not been "convincingly confirmed," he said.

The Bush administration appears to be moving toward designating the guard corps as a foreign terrorist organization. That would enhance a tougher line toward Iran.

"We are confronting Iranian behavior across a variety of different fronts, on a number of different, quote-unquote, 'battlefields,' if you will," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said this week.

His reference to "battlefields" attracted notice.

Political directors of key U.N. Security Council nations have been discussing what to do in light of Iran's continued refusal to suspend uranium enrichment. Two resolutions imposing sanctions have failed to stop Tehran's reprocessing activities.

The United States is seeking tougher punishment at the United Nations, while some other nations want to wait for a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

If the revolutionary guards are designated as a terrorist group the United States could freeze U.S.-based assets of companies connected to the guards. Also, the listing would give the United States a club to pressure foreign companies into suspending business with firms linked to the guards — or risk being seen as supporting terror.

While some guard units are trained for covert missions, most of the forces are lightly equipped infantry trained for internal security missions, Cordesman said.

The guards are the center of Iran's effort to develop warfare tactics in case of a U.S. invasion and could be contemplating sending units into countries like Iraq and Afghanistan to attack U.S. forces, he said.

There are other paramilitary, internal security and intelligence forces in Iran, and leadership is fragmented, the analyst said. But, he said, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps holds control of several of them.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/ap/politics/5060892.html>