



## **Submission from the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) to the Inquiry into the Human Rights Implications of Recent Violence in Iran**

### **Executive Summary**

The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee in response to its inquiry into the human rights implications of recent violence in Iran.

AIJAC believes that Australia has long been out of step with key allies and partners when it comes to holding the Iranian regime and associated entities and individuals accountable - not only for the horrifying and pervasive human rights abuses against Iranians domestically, but also for its global sponsorship and orchestration of terrorism; its proliferation of drones and missiles to regional terrorist groups; its nuclear program; its hostage-taking and piracy; its assassination of dissidents and journalists across the world; its regional destabilisation and aggression; and its participation in Russia's invasion of Ukraine via the provision of drones and missiles and advisers on the ground.

Furthermore, the Iranian regime has successfully exported its murderous, repressive, misogynistic, religious supremacist system to Yemen; is directly responsible for extensive war crimes in Syria; is largely responsible for the ruinous condition of Lebanon through its proxy Hezbollah; and has helped prop up Venezuela's oppressive regime, as well as the junta in Myanmar.

This disconnect on Iran policy between Australia and our allies has only become more blatant and problematic in recent weeks, as Australia's allies have introduced a suite of measures to punish Teheran for its bloody repression of Iranian protesters who want an end to the brutalities that have been a hallmark of the regime since it came to power in 1979, and for its active military assistance to Russia's bloody and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Several countries have already imposed multiple tranches of sanctions and other punitive measures against the regime since protests began in September, including the US, Canada,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Sanctions – Gross and systematic human rights violations in Iran", Government of Canada, <https://www.international.gc.ca/campaign-campagne/iran-sanction/index.aspx?lang=eng>.

the UK<sup>2</sup> and the European Union.<sup>3</sup> The UK and the European Union have further joined the US in sanctioning entities and individuals involved in transferring Iranian drones to Russia in violation of UN resolution 2231, which codified the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The European Union is also considering listing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organisation,<sup>4</sup> as the US has already done. New Zealand, for its part, has terminated bilateral human rights dialogue with the regime<sup>5</sup> and has openly called for the removal of Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>6</sup>

Australia has done none of these things. We have confined our response to purely verbal expressions of concern about the situation in Iran and support for the rights of the protesters.

The Australian Government should, at the very least, immediately enact measures similar to those hitherto imposed by its allies and partners. The identifying information for all potential entities and individuals to be subjected to sanctions is laid out in detail by the respective governments and would require no separate investigation by Australia. This, however, should only be the first step.

### Policy Recommendations

To enable Australia to better uphold international law and its own professed values, protect human rights and present a united front with its allies and partners against such a dangerous regime, AIJAC recommends that the Australian Government consider the following proposals:

- Immediately impose or expand sweeping autonomous sanctions, including those covered by the new **Autonomous Sanctions Amendment (Magnitsky-style and Other Thematic Sanctions) Act 2021**, on Iranian regime officials, its judiciary, the IRGC and its associated organs and any other entity or individual associated with, inter alia, domestic human rights abuses; war crimes; terrorism; maritime piracy; kidnapping; illegal nuclear activity; cyberattacks; the shooting down of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 in January 2020; missile and drone proliferation and involvement in the invasion of Ukraine.
- List the IRGC as a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code Act 1995.

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Wintour, "UK announces sanctions against Iran's morality police", *Guardian*, Oct. 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/10/iran-morality-police-uk-sanctions-mahsa-amini-protests>.

<sup>3</sup> "Iran: EU sanctions perpetrators of serious human rights violations", European Council, Oct. 17, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/17/iran-eu-sanctions-perpetrators-of-serious-human-rights-violations/>.

<sup>4</sup> "EU examines classifying Iran Revolutionary Guards as terrorists – Germany", *Reuters*, Oct. 31, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/eu-examines-classifying-iran-revolutionary-guards-terrorists-germany-2022-10-30/>.

<sup>5</sup> Lucy Craymer, "New Zealand suspends bilateral human rights dialogue with Iran", *Reuters*, Oct. 31, 2022, [https://www.reuters.com/world/new-zealand-suspends-bilateral-human-rights-dialogue-with-iran-2022-10-31/?taid=635f71486c9af100016610ea&utm\\_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm\\_medium=trueAnthem&utm\\_source=twitter](https://www.reuters.com/world/new-zealand-suspends-bilateral-human-rights-dialogue-with-iran-2022-10-31/?taid=635f71486c9af100016610ea&utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter).

<sup>6</sup> Jenna Lynch, "PM Jacinda Ardern signs international letter calling for Iran to be removed from UN women's rights body", *Newshub*, Oct. 31, 2022, <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2022/10/pm-jacinda-ardern-signs-international-letter-calling-for-iran-to-be-removed-from-un-women-s-rights-body.html>.

- Impose sanctions against IRGC proxies and allies in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and elsewhere.
- Support the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and other Australian allies and partners in the endeavour to remove Iran from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. It is obviously farcical for an inherently and violently misogynistic regime to remain a member. While Australia released a joint statement alongside New Zealand and Canada questioning Iran's membership,<sup>7</sup> no Australian official has directly called for Iran's removal.
- Explore possible means of helping the United States ensure internet connectivity and other means of communication for Iranian protesters.
- Investigate Iranian regime propaganda activities in Australia, particularly the Australian branch of its Al-Tajamu propaganda network,<sup>8</sup> with a view to limiting the Iranian regime's ability to financially promote violence and extremism in this country.
- Impose a visa ban on individuals affiliated with the regime's security forces, IRGC, and institutions of repression, including the Iranian judiciary, and ensure no such individuals are allowed to study in Australian universities.<sup>9</sup>
- Conduct a cost-benefit review, in consultation with DFAT and Australian intelligence and security agencies, of maintaining an Australian embassy in Iran, with a view towards considering downgrading diplomatic relations and expelling Iranian diplomats based in Australia if appropriate.

The Australian Government has every practical, moral and strategic imperative to help strengthen the efforts of its allies and partners in punishing, deterring and isolating the Iranian regime and helping the Iranians, Syrians, Ukrainians, Iraqis, Lebanese, Saudis, Israelis, Afghans, Yemenis and others that continue to suffer due to its dangerous and illegal conduct.

## Human Rights Violations

Since the protests began on Sept. 16 - sparked by the death of 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian Mahsa Amini, who was detained and severely beaten by Iran's "morality police" for not wearing her hijab according to regime standards - the regime has murdered at least 300 Iranians, including 41 children and 24 women,<sup>10</sup> although the actual death toll is likely orders of magnitude higher and simply impossible to verify due to the regime shutting down

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<sup>7</sup> "Joint CANZ Statement for Arria Formula meeting on Iran Protests", DFAT Nov. 2, 2022, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/news/news/joint-can-z-statement-arria-formula-meeting-iran-protests>.

<sup>8</sup> Arash Azizi, "Is This Pro-Regime Academic Tehran's Voice Down Under?", *Iran Wire*, Sept. 14, 2021, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/70345/>; Ran Porat, "Iran's propaganda organisation in Australia", *Australia/Israel Review*, Apr. 27, 2021, <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/irans-propaganda-organisation-in-australia/>.

<sup>9</sup> Kylie Moore-Gilbert, Twitter, Nov. 6, 2022, <https://twitter.com/KMooreGilbert/status/1589024893005598720?s=20&t=NbLPGTzOxmJsmQo5LvJYAw>.

<sup>10</sup> "Protests Death Toll Rises To 304; Tehran Youths Call For More Demos", *Iran International*, Nov. 5, 2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211058206>.

the internet and the IRGC occupying certain cities. During Nov. 2019 protests, the regime reportedly murdered approximately 1,500 Iranians, including 400 women.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the regime has implemented its decades-old playbook against dissent, detaining, disappearing and systematically torturing numerous Iranians. This includes not only beatings, solitary confinement, electric shocks, and other forms of torture, but the long-standing, systematic IRGC practice of rape and sexual violence against both male and female detainees, including children, as well.<sup>12</sup> The regime has also reportedly implemented the totalitarian practice of condemning dissenters to psychiatric institutions and forcibly drugging them.<sup>13</sup>

Iran also has the highest per capita execution rate in the world, and has condemned hundreds of children, male and female, to death, the former from 15-years-old and the latter from as young as nine.<sup>14</sup> Iran's judiciary is simply the regime's instrument of detention, torture and mass murder. Capital crimes include "insulting the Prophet", "spreading corruption on earth", apostasy, same-sex relations, adultery, drug-related offences and financial corruption.<sup>15</sup> The death penalty is explicitly used to suppress dissent.

From a total of 290 Iranian parliamentarians, 227 recently praised the IRGC for killing protesters, who they termed "enemies of God", and called for mass executions of detained protesters.<sup>16</sup> Every one of these 227 should be sanctioned under Australia's **Autonomous Sanctions Amendment (Magnitsky-style and Other Thematic Sanctions) Act 2021, passed last year.**

Aside from the death penalty, the regime mutilates scores of Iranians as official policy through flogging, forced amputation and blinding.<sup>17</sup> The current Iranian regime also continues to systematically oppress and attack ethnic and religious minorities, particularly members of the Baha'i faith, something it has been doing consistently since 1979.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Michael Lipin & Katherine Ahn, "US Confirms Report Citing Iran Officials as Saying 1,500 Killed in Protests", *Voice of America*, Dec. 23, 2019, [https://www.voanews.com/a/middle-east\\_voa-news-iran\\_us-confirms-report-citing-iran-officials-saying-1500-killed-protests/6181546.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/middle-east_voa-news-iran_us-confirms-report-citing-iran-officials-saying-1500-killed-protests/6181546.html).

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Ritchie & Teele Rebane, "Stalked, tortured, disappeared: Iranian authorities have a playbook for silencing dissent, and they're using it again, *CNN*, Oct. 20, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/10/19/middleeast/iran-protesters-repression-investigation-intl-cmd/index.html>; Ostovar, A. (2016). *Vanguard of the Imam: religion, politics, and Iran's revolutionary guards*. Oxford University Press, pp. 184-185.

<sup>13</sup> Kylie Moore-Gilbert, Twitter, Nov. 2, 2022, [https://twitter.com/KMooreGilbert/status/1587694530333409280?s=20&t=2Cbei19rzben\\_u6HLpN6Lw](https://twitter.com/KMooreGilbert/status/1587694530333409280?s=20&t=2Cbei19rzben_u6HLpN6Lw).

<sup>14</sup> "Iran is sentencing children and teenagers to death," Amnesty International, Aug. 16, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/iran-juvenile-offenders-death-row-execution>;

<sup>15</sup> "Iran: Events of 2015", Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/iran>; "Iran", Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/>.

<sup>16</sup> Fazel Hawramy, "Iranian lawmakers say protesters are 'enemies of God' who should be executed", *Rudaw*, Nov. 8, 2022, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/07112022>.

<sup>17</sup> See note 14.

<sup>18</sup> "Iran: Intensified assault on Iran's Baha'i minority", Amnesty International, Aug. 22, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/5975/2022/en/>.

There is perhaps no better example of regime impunity than the fact that current Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, previously the head of Iran's judiciary from 2019 to 2021, was one of four members of the so-called "Death Commission" that massacred thousands, and potentially tens of thousands, of Iranian prisoners across dozens of sites in 1988.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, as Amnesty International noted in 2021, "The authorities continued to conceal the truth surrounding the January 2020 shooting down of Flight 752 by the Revolutionary Guards, which killed 176 people, and harassed, arbitrarily detained, tortured or otherwise ill-treated bereaved relatives for seeking justice."<sup>20</sup>

State media also plays a key role in the regime's terrorism against its own people by publicly airing hundreds of forced confessions.<sup>21</sup>

### **Terrorism and Iran's Nuclear Program**

That the IRGC is itself a terrorist group by any definition, and particularly under the terms of Australia's Criminal Code Act 1995, cannot be contested. One need only look at the IRGC terrorist operatives released from Thailand in exchange for Australian hostage Dr Kylie Moore-Gilbert to recognise that there can be no argument against the evidence substantiating that the IRGC acts as a terrorist group.<sup>22</sup> These operatives had been arrested as part of a foiled plot to bomb Israeli targets in Thailand and were overseeing other IRGC cells across the world attempting to kill Israeli diplomats.<sup>23</sup>

Iran remains the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism, not only funding, arming, training and overseeing proxies like Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Iraqi and Syrian militias, the Houthis in Yemen and Bahraini terrorist cells, among others, but serving as a primary headquarters for, and partner of, Al-Qaeda and its senior leadership, as well.<sup>24</sup> Many of these groups are already listed by Australia as terrorist organisations,<sup>25</sup> which, given just how intertwined they are with the IRGC, should automatically lead to the listing of the IRGC itself.

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<sup>19</sup> Tzvi Kahn, "The Massacres of Ebrahim Raisi", *Australia/Israel Review*, Jul. 1, 2021, <https://aijac.org.au/australia-israel-review/the-massacres-of-ebrahim-raisi/>.

<sup>20</sup> "Iran", Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/>.

<sup>21</sup> Jon Gambrell, "Report: Iran TV airs 355 coerced confessions over decade", *AP*, Jun. 25, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/2f5e336cb7f96c2829a98a522f705855>.

<sup>22</sup> Farnaz Fassih, "Iran Frees British-Australian Scholar in Prisoner Swap", *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/25/world/middleeast/iran-prisoner-exchange.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Neeraj Chauhan, "Cops name Iran military arm for attack on Israeli diplomat", *Times of India*, Jul. 30, 2012, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Cops-name-Iran-military-arm-for-attack-on-Israeli-diplomat/articleshow/15263013.cms?referral=PM>.

<sup>24</sup> Bill Roggio, "Rare photo surfaces of top Al Qaeda leaders inside Iran", *Long War Journal*, Sept. 2, 2022, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2022/09/rare-photo-surfaces-of-top-al-qaeda-leaders-inside-iran.php>.

<sup>25</sup> "Listed terrorist organisations", <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/what-australia-is-doing/terrorist-organisations/listed-terrorist-organisations>.

The global reach<sup>26</sup> and ongoing plots<sup>27</sup> of the IRGC and its terrorist networks since the late 1970s against dissidents, journalists, and Jewish and Israeli targets leave no doubt that the group must be listed as a terrorist organisation and all appropriate sanctions applied.

*Iran International* recently reported that the UK has warned several of its journalists living there that there is an “imminent & significant risk to their lives and those of their families” due to regime threats.<sup>28</sup> The regime recently designated the media outlet a terrorist organisation.<sup>29</sup>

Particularly disturbing is the Iranian regime’s oft-repeated and explicitly stated goal of destroying Israel.<sup>30</sup> Coupled with qualitative Iranian nuclear advances, obstruction of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors and activities and the regime’s stonewalling of negotiations to bring it back into compliance with the JCPOA for over a year, these threats and actions should lead to a significant expansion of sanctions on the regime.

### **Foreign Intervention, Proliferation, and Ukraine**

Iran has reportedly already sent hundreds of drones, at the very least, to Russia, which has already used swarms of them primarily to terrorise Ukrainian civilians and strike critical infrastructure. Massive new weapons shipments, including more drones as well as Iranian ballistic missiles, are reportedly either in or en route to Russia to continue Moscow’s campaign of war crimes.<sup>31</sup> Iran also reportedly has advisers on the ground helping the Russians conduct these attacks. It must be understood that these Iranian drones and missiles are vital to Russia’s ability to continue its bombing campaign against Ukrainian infrastructure, which makes punishing Iran and trying to halt these shipments all the more vital.

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<sup>26</sup> Oved Lobel, “Hezbollah’s explosive global plans: London explosives cache highlights terror group’s stockpiling efforts for shadow war with Israel”, AIJAC, Jun. 17, 2019, <https://aijac.org.au/featured/hezbollahs-explosive-global-plans-london-explosives-cache-highlights-terror-groups-stockpiling-efforts-for-shadow-war-with-israel/>.

<sup>27</sup> Oved Lobel, “Israel successfully neutralising Iran’s global terrorism apparatus”, AIJAC, Jul. 20, 2022, <https://aijac.org.au/featured/israel-successfully-neutralising-irans-global-terrorism-apparatus/>; Oved Lobel, “Bolton and Pompeo assassination plot reveals Iran’s malign intentions – and poor capabilities”, AIJAC, Aug. 12, 2022, <https://aijac.org.au/featured/bolton-and-pompeo-assassination-plot-reveals-irans-malign-intentions-and-poor-capabilities/>.

<sup>28</sup> *Iran International*, Twitter, Nov. 7, 2022, <https://twitter.com/IranIntl/status/1589589074670665734?s=20&t=NbLPGTzOxmJsmQo5LvJYAw>.

<sup>29</sup> “Tehran Designates London-Based Iran International News A ‘Terrorist’ Organization”, *RFERL Radio Farda*, Nov. 9, 2022, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-international-terrorist-organization/32122561.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Behnam Ben Taleblu, “When Iran Says ‘Death to Israel,’ It Means It”, *Atlantic*, Jul. 16, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/joe-biden-middle-east-israel-iran/670530/>.

<sup>31</sup> Kylie Atwood, “Iran is preparing to send additional weapons including ballistic missiles to Russia to use in Ukraine, western officials say”, *CNN*, Nov. 1, 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/01/politics/iran-missiles-russia/index.html>.

While the US,<sup>32</sup> European Union<sup>33</sup> and UK<sup>34</sup> have all condemned the transfers as well as imposed sanctions in response, the Australian Government has done neither. This must be rectified, with an official condemnation as well as the imposition of autonomous sanctions against all entities and individuals designated by these allies.

The Iranian regime is also directly responsible for atrocities committed by Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, which has always been inextricably intertwined with Iran's, since 2011. Its representatives not only have direct input in decision-making at the highest level of the Assad regime,<sup>35</sup> but also oversee a vast network of Syrian militias<sup>36</sup> and imported IRGC regional proxies<sup>37</sup> that have done most of the fighting on the ground.

It is also responsible for Houthi war crimes and human rights abuses<sup>38</sup> in Yemen as well as attacks against Saudi Arabia and the UAE.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, IRGC-affiliated militias have been responsible for the assassination of dissidents and murderous suppression of protests in Iraq for several years. Before this, they were directly responsible for the deaths and injury of hundreds of US and allied troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan, where they armed, funded, trained and protected their loyal Shia militias in the former and the Taliban in the latter.<sup>40</sup> Long-standing instability and human rights abuses in Lebanon can also be attributed to Hezbollah, and thus to the IRGC.

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<sup>32</sup> "Treasury Sanctions Iranian Persons Involved in Production of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Weapon Shipment to Russia", US Treasury Department, Sept. 8, 2022, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0940>.

<sup>33</sup> "Ukraine: EU sanctions three individuals and one entity in relation to the use of Iranian drones in Russian aggression", European Council, Oct. 20, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/20/ukraine-eu-sanctions-three-individuals-and-one-entity-in-relation-to-the-use-of-iranian-drones-in-russian-aggression/>.

<sup>34</sup> "UK sanctions Iran over kamikaze Russian drones", Oct. 20, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-iran-over-kamikaze-russian-drones#:~:text=The%20UK%20is%20implementing%20new,drones%20used%20to%20bombard%20Ukraine..>

<sup>35</sup> Dagher, S. (2019). *Assad or we burn the country: how one family's lust for power destroyed Syria*. Hachette UK, pp. 288-289.

<sup>36</sup> "Insight: Syrian government guerrilla fighters being sent to Iran for training", *Reuters*, Apr. 4, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-iran-training-insight/insight-syrian-government-guerrilla-fighters-being-sent-to-iran-for-training-idUSBRE9330DW20130404>; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "Saraya al-Ra'ad: Idlib Local Defence Forces Affiliate", Dec. 26, 2017, <https://www.aymennjawad.org/2017/12/saraya-al-raad-idlib-local-defence-forces>.

<sup>37</sup> Phillip Smyth, "The Shiite Jihad in Syria and Its Regional Effects", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 138, Feb. 2, 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/shiite-jihad-syria-and-its-regional-effects>.

<sup>38</sup> Oved Lobel, "What Everyone Thinks They Know About the Yemen War is Wrong," *European Eye on Radicalization*, Oct. 11, 2021, <https://eeradicalization.com/what-everyone-thinks-they-know-about-the-yemen-war-is-wrong/>.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Knights, Adnan al-Gabarni & Casey Coombs, "The Houthi Jihad Council: Command and Control in 'the Other Hezbollah'", *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, Oct. 2022, Vol. 15, Issue 10, [https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-houthi-jihad-council-command-and-control-in-the-other-hezbollah/?fbclid=IwAR00NC8dyJRxydUzfmoS\\_2gRRVTdIlggAb1PI4C-73-QcY6HJ1M-97kggM](https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-houthi-jihad-council-command-and-control-in-the-other-hezbollah/?fbclid=IwAR00NC8dyJRxydUzfmoS_2gRRVTdIlggAb1PI4C-73-QcY6HJ1M-97kggM); Oved Lobel, "Becoming Ansar Allah: How the Islamic Revolution Conquered Yemen", *European Eye on Radicalization*, Mar. 24, 2021, <https://eeradicalization.com/becoming-ansar-allah-islamic-revolution-yemen-oved-lobel/>.

<sup>40</sup> Oved Lobel, "The Graveyard of Empires: The Causes and Consequences of American Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *European Eye on Radicalization*, Aug. 4, 2021, p. 43, <https://eeradicalization.com/afghanistan-report-three-jihads-us-withdrawal-and-delusions-oved-lobel/>.

Iran's missile and drone proliferation to its proxies has destabilised and endangered the entire Middle East,<sup>41</sup> and its attacks on oil tankers since 2019, among other Iranian violations of international law and terrorist activities, were specifically condemned by the previous government in 2021.<sup>42</sup> Once again, however, Australia limited its response to verbal condemnation, without imposing any new sanctions.

The IRGC is also aiding the junta in Myanmar in its brutal crackdown and civil war<sup>43</sup> and has been deeply involved in propping up the brutal regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela, including with weapons.<sup>44</sup>

Each of these cases, among others, likely merit autonomous Australian sanctions against the Iranian regime.

### **Cyberattacks**

Iranian regime-linked hackers have directly targeted Australia's research institutions and companies, including shipbuilder Austal and dozens of universities.<sup>45</sup> These IRGC-linked groups must be held accountable through the imposition of autonomous sanctions.

### **Australian Embassy in Iran**

AIJAC recommends a classified review be conducted into the demonstrable benefits, if any, of Australia maintaining an embassy in Iran. If neither DFAT nor Australian intelligence agencies can cite instances where maintaining an embassy led to tangibly good outcomes for either Iranians or Australia and its allies, then AIJAC further recommends serious consideration be given to closing the embassy, with Australia's diplomatic relations with Iran henceforth potentially being managed from an interest section in the embassy of a friendly state, as Canada currently does.

To an outsider, it is unclear, from an intelligence viewpoint, what material benefits our embassy provides to Australian or allied diplomatic and security interests.

Another factor to consider is whether maintaining an embassy in Teheran may, in some scenarios, influence Australia's diffidence in speaking out, much less taking action against, the Iranian regime due to worries about the safety of its diplomatic staff and the operation of the embassy. Numerous officials and political leaders have told AIJAC privately that

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<sup>41</sup> Fabian Hinz, "Missile multinational: Iran's new approach to missile proliferation", IISS, Apr. 26, 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2021/04/iran-missile-proliferation-strategy>.

<sup>42</sup> "Marise Payne condemns Iran and Hezbollah", *J-Wire*, Aug. 12, 2021, <https://www.jwire.com.au/marise-payne-condemns-iran-and-hezbollah/>.

<sup>43</sup> David Hutt, "What is Iran's Revolutionary Guard doing in Myanmar?", *Asia Times*, Jan. 20, 2022, <https://asiatimes.com/2022/01/what-is-irans-revolutionary-guard-doing-in-myanmar/>.

<sup>44</sup> Oved Lobel, "Iran Doubles Down in Venezuela," AIJAC, Jul. 15, 2020, <https://aijac.org.au/fresh-air/iran-doubles-down-in-venezuela/>.

<sup>45</sup> Oved Lobel, "Iran-backed cyber attackers taking aim at Australia", *Australian*, Nov. 20, 2018, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/opinion/iranbacked-cyber-attackers-taking-aim-at-australia/news-story/7bce5ea63e0ccac5c7c58b9fce9cfbd1>.



Australia needs to be careful and cautious in its policy toward Iran because of these concerns about the vulnerability of the embassy staff.

If Australia maintaining an embassy is an obstacle to the Government standing up for its principles and acting in concert with our like-minded allies and partners, then the Government should seriously consider shutting the embassy and downgrading diplomatic relations in order to give itself more freedom of manoeuvre.

Additionally, Iranian embassies are used to interface with terrorist proxies or directly conduct terrorism globally. It is well documented that Iranian diplomats routinely plan, oversee and even participate in attacks, and act as agents of the regime in monitoring, and sometimes initiating violence or threats against, Iranian dissidents living abroad.<sup>46</sup> Closing the Iranian embassy in Canberra could therefore result in tangible security benefits for Australia.

Iran's Australian embassy recently amplified the regime threats against *Iran International* journalists in the UK online,<sup>47</sup> and there are reports that the regime is directly threatening Iranians in Australia for protesting against the regime.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

AIJAC proposes that Australia join its allies in taking a much stronger and more consistent rhetorical stand against the regime - including its participation in the war in Ukraine, on which the Government has yet to comment - and impose sweeping sanctions on Iranian individuals and entities for domestic human rights abuses, as well as for the regime's provision of missiles and drones to Russia.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is not a normal country that occasionally violates international law - it has always fundamentally been a rogue state in numerous ways, domestically, regionally and globally. AIJAC therefore recommends a comprehensive review, and possible reforms as suggested above, of Australian policy towards the regime, as "normal" diplomatic relations with such a regime are neither possible nor desirable.

Holding the Iranian regime accountable for its crimes is self-evidently in Australia's interests, as is presenting a united front to the Islamic Republic and its authoritarian allies in Russia and China, while consulting and coordinating with allies who are far more familiar with Iranian activities and have more direct experience of the nature of the regime in Teheran. There appear to be no tangible reasons for Australia to remain isolated on this issue, and every reason to join the consensus efforts of our Western democratic allies.

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<sup>46</sup>Matthew Levitt, "Iran's Deadly Diplomats", *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, Vol. 11, Issue 7, Aug. 2018, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/irans-deadly-diplomats/>; Graveyard of Empires, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup>"Iran's embassy in Australia highlights warning to UK-based Iran International TV", *BBC Monitoring*, Nov. 10, 2022.

<sup>48</sup>Mahmood Fazal, "Under the Eye of Iran", *ABC Radio National*, Nov. 4, 2022, [https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/under-the-eye-of-iran/101616368?utm\\_campaign=abc\\_radionational&utm\\_content=twitter&utm\\_medium=content\\_shared&utm\\_source=abc\\_radionational](https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/under-the-eye-of-iran/101616368?utm_campaign=abc_radionational&utm_content=twitter&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_radionational); "Iran envoy summoned by Australian official", *Australian Associated Press*, Nov. 10, 2022, <https://nz.news.yahoo.com/iran-envoy-summoned-australian-official-012924458.html>.

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