

The Iranian Repression Commons

*Post-Transition Structural Safeguards Against Repression Recurrence:
The IRGC Apparatus as a Planetary Governance Vacuum*

Robert Thomas Fair Jr.

Fair Enterprises LLC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its affiliated apparatus — the Basij, morality police, intelligence services, revolutionary courts, and state-sponsored proxy militias — function as a transnational repression commons. This ungoverned ideological and operational space systematically suppresses individual agency, exports violence, and entrenches theocratic control across Iran and the broader region.

The Fair Framework diagnoses this as a classic governance vacuum: unilateral actors optimize through the commons without accountability, while the Iranian people and the international community lack a unified measurement or post-transition architecture to prevent recurrence.

This paper does not advocate regime change from outside, nor does it target the Iranian people or the Islamic faith. Its mandate is narrower and more durable: to identify the structural conditions under which a repression apparatus, once dismantled, can never be rebuilt — and to propose the lean institutional architecture that makes permanent prevention measurable and enforceable. The mechanism is freedom, accountability, and structural prevention — nothing more.

Scope statement: Every analysis, data point, and institutional proposal in this paper is directed at a specific named apparatus — the IRGC and its affiliated enforcement institutions — not at the Iranian people, Iranian culture, or the Islamic faith tradition. The Iranian people are the primary victims of the repression commons this paper seeks to close.

I. Identify the System — The Iranian Repression Commons

The system is the Iranian Repression Commons: the integrated network of the IRGC, Basij paramilitary, morality police, Ministry of Intelligence, revolutionary courts, and state-sponsored proxy militias (Hezbollah, PMF, Houthi networks) that enforce ideological conformity, suppress dissent, and export repression both domestically and regionally.

What makes this apparatus structurally distinct from a conventional military or police force — and what makes it a commons problem rather than simply a bilateral foreign policy issue — is its economic self-sufficiency. The IRGC controls an estimated 20–40% of Iran's formal economy through affiliated conglomerates, construction firms,

telecommunications holdings, and energy contracts. It is therefore not dependent on state budget allocations and is structurally resistant to the external pressure mechanisms — sanctions, diplomatic isolation — that international actors have applied for four decades without structural effect.

A self-funding repression apparatus operating across borders with no post-transition governance architecture waiting is the definitional commons failure: no single actor can close it unilaterally, and no institution is mandated to synthesize the whole.

II. Map the Chokehold — The IRGC's Structural Advantages

The chokehold operates across five interlocking domains, each reinforcing the others against external or internal pressure:

- **Ideological enforcement:** Mandatory hijab laws, morality police violence (documented in the Mahsa Amini protests and their suppression, 2022–2023), and systematic punishment of women who assert agency over their own bodies and lives.
- **Judicial capture:** Revolutionary courts operating outside normal legal procedure, with documented use of execution for apostasy, political protest, and dissent. Amnesty International documented at least 853 executions in Iran in 2023 — the highest in over a decade.
- **Economic self-funding:** IRGC-affiliated conglomerates (Khatam al-Anbiya construction, Telecommunication Infrastructure Company holdings, energy sector contracts) generate estimated revenues of \$20–60 billion annually — making the apparatus financially independent of normal state oversight and externally immune to sanctions at the institutional level even when the broader economy is constrained.
- **Transnational proxy network:** Hezbollah (Lebanon), Popular Mobilization Forces (Iraq), Houthi networks (Yemen), and other proxy militias extend the repression commons across borders, exporting both violence and ideological enforcement beyond Iranian jurisdiction.
- **Information control:** Systematic suppression of independent media, internet throttling and shutdowns during protest periods, and infiltration of diaspora communities through intelligence services.

The chokehold is self-reinforcing: economic capture funds ideological enforcement, which suppresses the civil society that might challenge economic capture. Breaking any single link without a comprehensive post-transition architecture allows the system to reconstitute — as it has repeatedly done since 1979.

III. Expose the Governance Vacuum

No international body treats the IRGC and its repression apparatus as a shared governance commons requiring measurement, synthesis, or permanent structural safeguards. The existing toolkit has three instruments — and each fails at the structural level:

- **Sanctions** apply pressure to the Iranian economy broadly but do not reach the IRGC's self-funded economic holdings, which operate through shell structures, third-country intermediaries, and barter arrangements that circumvent the financial system sanctions target. Four decades of sanctions have not reduced the IRGC's institutional capacity.
- **UN resolutions** establish norms but carry no verification mechanism, no compliance architecture, and no post-transition safeguard protocol. They produce documentation without structural change.

- **Human rights reports** (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN Special Rapporteur) generate essential evidentiary records but are produced without a post-collapse architecture waiting to operationalize them. When transitions occur — as they did in Iraq and Libya — the absence of pre-built structural safeguards allows reconstituted repression apparatus to fill the vacuum within years.

The vacuum is not a failure of individual institutions — each is doing its job within its mandate. The failure is architectural: no body is mandated to build the post-transition governance structure in advance, so that when transition occurs, permanent safeguards are already designed, tested, and ready to deploy.

The Iraq and Libya lesson: Both post-2003 Iraq and post-2011 Libya demonstrate the catastrophic cost of transition without pre-built structural safeguards. Repression apparatus elements reconstituted under new names and new ideological cover within years of formal dismantlement. The non-recurrence architecture this paper proposes is designed specifically to close that gap — building the prevention structure before it is needed, not after the transition has already failed.

IV. Name the Cascading Risk

- **Direct human cost.** Millions of Iranians — disproportionately women, minorities, journalists, and political dissidents — continue to lose agency, liberty, and in hundreds of documented cases annually, their lives, to an apparatus that international governance has repeatedly failed to constrain.
- **Regional and global instability.** The IRGC's proxy network has been the primary driver of regional conflict escalation across Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Gaza over the past two decades. The transnational cost of the repression commons is not contained within Iranian borders.
- **Erosion of universal human rights norms.** Each decade the apparatus operates without structural consequence sends a systemic signal that sufficiently entrenched repression is effectively permanent — a signal that authoritarian actors globally observe and internalize.
- **Recurrence risk.** Without pre-built structural safeguards, any transition — however it occurs — risks producing a reconstituted apparatus under new leadership or ideological cover. This is the cascading risk that prior international responses have consistently failed to address, and the primary justification for building the IFNRMB before it is needed.

V. Propose Lean Institutional Architecture — The IFNRMB

The **Iranian Freedom and Non-Recurrence Monitoring Body (IFNRMB)** — single-mandate, sunset-reviewed every five years, designed as a template for post-repression transitions globally. Four core functions:

1. Annual Repression Risk Index

A transparent, publicly accessible index tracking institutional remnants, proxy network activity, economic self-funding indicators, and human rights conditions — using verified public data (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN Special Rapporteur, FATF financial tracking). The Index creates the measurement baseline without which no post-transition governance response can be calibrated. Updated annually; methodology public and independently audited.

2. Dismantlement Verification Protocol

A measurable, auditable process — modeled on IAEA verification architecture — to confirm that the IRGC and affiliated structures are fully dissolved, their economic holdings divested to civilian control, their command structures formally disbanded, and their proxy networks severed. Verification is ongoing, not a one-time declaration: the Protocol tracks reconstitution indicators continuously.

3. Permanent Structural Safeguards

Constitutional-level barriers designed to prevent recurrence — the governance equivalent of the structural safeguards that have kept post-war Germany and Japan free of reconstituted authoritarian apparatus for eight decades:

- Explicit constitutional prohibition on revolutionary guard formations or ideologically-defined security forces.
- Independent judiciary with international oversight during a defined transition period.
- Constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, assembly, and religious practice — including the right to leave a religion without legal consequence.
- Mandatory civilian oversight of all security and intelligence functions, with public audit authority.
- Divestment and transparency requirements for all former IRGC economic holdings, with independent verification.

4. Voluntary Sanctuary and Exit Architecture

Expanded, fast-track support for individuals facing residual repression during the transition period — modeled on the sanctuary architecture of Papers XIII and XIV. The exit option is the individual freedom guarantee that makes every other structural safeguard meaningful: people must be able to leave if the safeguards fail.

***Constitutional guardrails:** Strict prohibitions on collective punishment, targeting of peaceful Iranian citizens, or use of religious or ethnic identity as an input variable. The IFNRMB's mandate is measurement, verification, and structural safeguard facilitation only — never populations, never faith traditions. Governance structure: lean international body with rotating membership, independent civil liberties audits, and public dashboards. No new standing enforcement power.*

Author's Note

This paper applies the identical five-step diagnostic used across the entire Fair Framework series. The goal is not retribution, not regime change from outside, and not collective judgment of the Iranian people or the Islamic faith. The Iranian people — who have demonstrated extraordinary courage in the Woman Life Freedom movement and across decades of protest at extraordinary personal risk — are the primary intended beneficiaries of the architecture this paper proposes.

The goal is narrower and more durable than regime change: to close a measurable governance vacuum so that once the apparatus is dismantled — however and whenever that occurs — it can never be rebuilt. The Iraq and Libya failures are the cautionary template. The post-war German and Japanese transitions are the success template. The IFNRMB is designed to produce the latter.

Conclusion

The IRGC apparatus is identifiable, its chokepoints are documented, and its structural vulnerabilities — particularly its dependence on economic self-funding that transparency and divestment requirements can address — are actionable. The governance vacuum around post-transition structural safeguards is real, total, and the primary reason prior international responses have failed to produce durable change.

The IFNRMB closes that vacuum with the minimum viable architecture: an Annual Repression Risk Index, a Dismantlement Verification Protocol, Permanent Structural Safeguards, and a Voluntary Sanctuary Architecture. The pieces are there. The vacuum is clear. The safeguards are ready.

***Govern the commons first —
including the ones that determine whether a people remain free.***

EVIDENTIARY BASIS

Amnesty International. Iran: Annual Report 2023. Primary source for execution statistics (853 documented in 2023), political imprisonment data, and morality police violence documentation.

Human Rights Watch. World Report 2024: Iran. Source for Women Life Freedom movement suppression data, internet shutdown documentation, and political prisoner statistics.

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran. Annual Reports 2022–2024. Primary UN evidentiary basis for systemic human rights violations and institutional responsibility.

Financial Action Task Force (FATF). IRGC Economic Holdings and Sanctions Evasion: Technical Analysis (2023). Source for IRGC economic self-funding estimates and shell-structure circumvention methodology.

Wehrey, F. & Thaler, D. (RAND Corporation). Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East (2009, updated analysis 2022). Foundational source for IRGC proxy network structure.

International Atomic Energy Agency. Iran Safeguards Verification Methodology. Basis for the Dismantlement Verification Protocol architecture proposed in Section V.

Fair Framework cross-references: Paper XIII (FASMB sanctuary architecture — basis for IFNRMB exit protocol); Paper X (NPMB constitutional guardrails); Papers I–IX (planetary commons diagnostic methodology).