

October 25, 2023

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Via email: [praesident@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:praesident@uni-potsdam.de); [darius.scherer@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:darius.scherer@uni-potsdam.de)

**Re: Potsdam University Ties with IRGC-Affiliated University in Iran**

Dear Prof. Günther:

United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”)<sup>1</sup> is writing to seek your clarification and urgent review on the status of Potsdam University’s official partnership and collaboration with the University of Religions and Denominations (“URD”), Qom, Iran, which is extensively affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (“IRGC”)<sup>2</sup> – an entity subject to United Nations (UN), US and European Union (EU) sanctions<sup>3</sup> – and linked to Hezbollah in Lebanon – a designated terrorist organisation in Germany.<sup>4</sup> We note that Potsdam University – specifically, the “Department of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies” – has had ties and a “long tradition [of] cooperation”<sup>5</sup> with the URD since 2011<sup>6</sup>, with the stated intent to “deepen and structurally strengthen the already existing contacts.”<sup>7</sup> We also note that URD is listed as an “cooperation partner” of the Department of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies<sup>8</sup> – an agreement that remains in place according to Iranian state-run outlets.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, our records indicate that the cooperation partnership with URD is a DAAD German taxpayer-funded project, which has included multiple reciprocal delegation trips, student exchange projects, workshops and joint-publications with URD since 2011.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UANI is a leading not-for-profit, non-partisan, advocacy organization whose mission is to promote the cessation of economic and financial support of the Islamic Republic of Iran by corporations and business until the Iranian regime verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons and support for terrorism and human rights violations. (<http://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com>)

<sup>2</sup> The IRGC was designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in the United States as of April 2019: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

<sup>3</sup> For full designation list, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/irgc-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>

<sup>4</sup> For Hezbollah designation, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hezbollah>

<sup>5</sup> “[Institute of Jewish Studies and Religious Studies](#)”, Potsdam University Website

<sup>6</sup> “[Germany shows EU has no firm resolve on Iran](#)” (in Persian), Bultan News, 11/09/2013; “[Potsdam University Cooperation Agreement](#)”, International Quran News Agency, 15/02/2011

<sup>7</sup> “[Cooperation Project of Potsdam University and Goethe University of Frankfurt with URD](#)”, Frankfurt University Website

<sup>8</sup> “[Cooperations Religious Studies](#)”, Potsdam University Website

<sup>9</sup> “[URD Report](#)”, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 18/06/2023

<sup>10</sup> “[Germany shows EU has no firm resolve on Iran](#)”

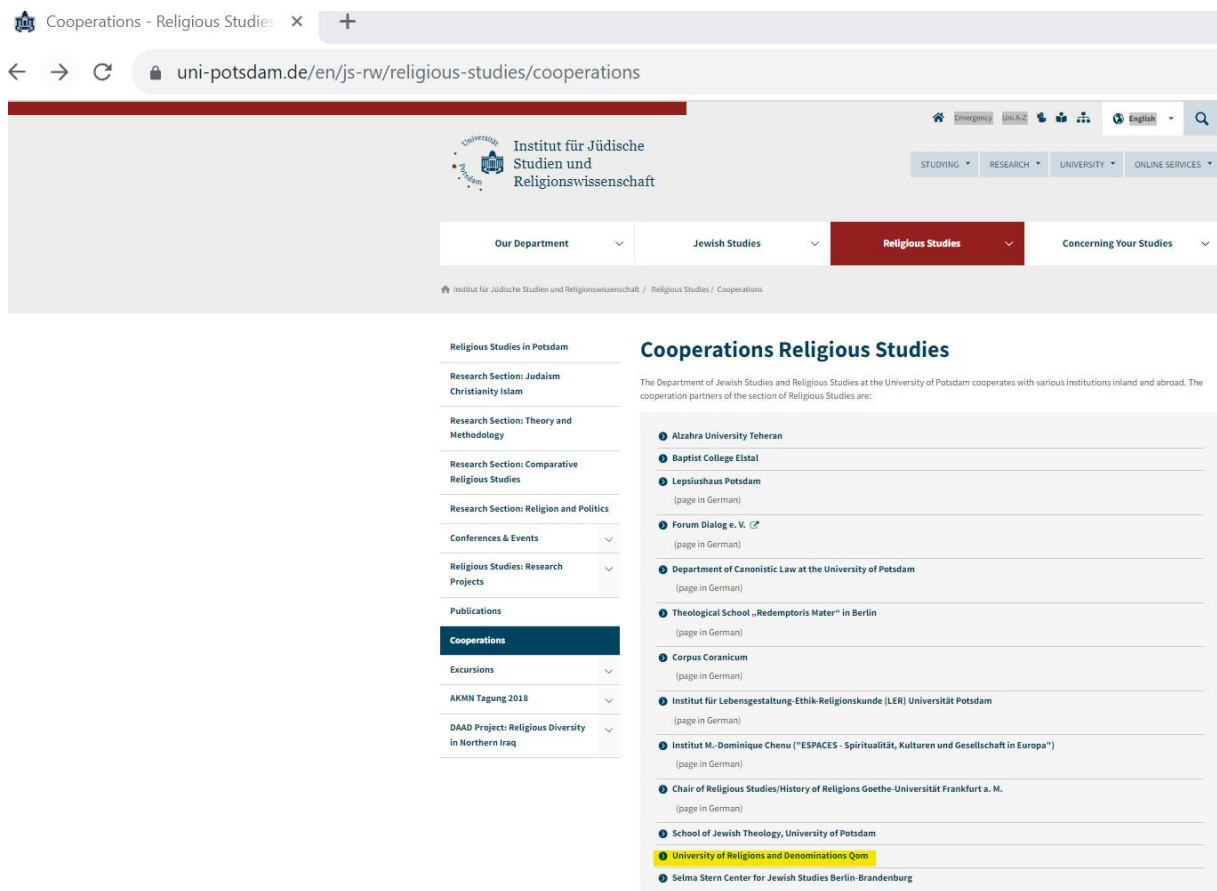


Fig 1. Potsdam University Website Listing URD as Cooperation Partner

*The IRGC and University of Religions and Denominations (“URD”), Qom, Iran*

URD (a.k.a University of Religions and Denominations) is extensively affiliated with the IRGC – an entity that is under UN, US and EU sanctions for global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and/or gross human rights abuses in Iran.<sup>11</sup> The president of URD, Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab (a.k.a. Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Nawab) has held multiple senior positions in the IRGC.<sup>12</sup> This includes holding the position of “Representative of the Supreme Leader for Logistics in the IRGC” and “Head of Affairs for the Clergy in the IRGC”.<sup>13</sup>

More importantly, Navab has also served as one of the Heads of the IRGC’s Ideological-Political Organisation (“IRGC IPO”). The IRGC’s IPO oversees the official programme of indoctrination in the IRGC, which is designed to radicalise all IRGC members and their families in a

<sup>11</sup> For full designation list, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/irgc-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>

<sup>12</sup> “[Dr Seyyed Abolhassan Navab Biography](#)” (in Persian), URD Website; For [English Version](#)

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

violent, Islamist extremist ideology.<sup>14</sup> A 2020 study published by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change exposed – for the first time – the internal training manuals the IRGC’s IPO uses to radicalise IRGC recruits and their families.<sup>15</sup> The evidence published in this landmark paper explicitly demonstrated that the IRGC’s ideology is both violent and extremist, and is based off a distortion of Islamic scripture that is no different from proscribed Islamist terrorist organisations: from Hezbollah to ISIS and al-Qaeda.

The IRGC’s IPO textbooks glorify, justify and prioritise armed jihad against what it describes as “enemies of Islam”, who are identified as non-Muslims and opponents of the regime in Iran (including Muslims).<sup>16</sup> The IRGC IPO textbooks used to radicalise IRGC members openly call on recruits to kill Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians via armed jihad on the basis that they “do not have acceptable faith” while explicitly underscoring that it is “obligatory for Muslims to fight them to pressure them to give up their devious beliefs and to accept Islam.”<sup>17</sup> The IRGC’s IPO material also prescribes that IRGC members are to torture Iranians who oppose the Islamic Republic regime prior to their execution on the basis that they are “waging war against God” (*moharebs*). These IRGC IPO textbooks outline specific torture punishments for moharebs, including: “execution, hanging, cross-amputation (cutting off a hand and the opposite foot) and exile.”<sup>18</sup> The ongoing anti-regime “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Iran, which was triggered following the murder of 22-year-old Iranian-Kurdish girl Mahsa Jina Amini by the regime’s so-called “Morality Police” for “improper hijab”, have resulted in numerous Iranian protestors being executed and tortured on the charges of being a mohareb, including 21-year-old Mohammad Mehdi Karami, who had political sponsorship by German Members of Parliament.<sup>19</sup>

As one of the Heads of the IRGC’s IPO, Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab – the current president of URD who struck an agreement with Potsdam University in 2011 – was personally responsible for the implementation of IRGC’s official programme of indoctrination. It is entirely inappropriate and unacceptable for Potsdam University to have an official partnership with URD – not least on the basis of “inter-faith dialogue” – when the president of URD was formerly the head of the IRGC’s IPO, which openly prescribes violence and intolerance against both non-Muslims and Muslims.

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<sup>14</sup> Saeid Golkar, “[The Supreme Leader and the Guard: Civil-Military Relations and Regime Survival in Iran](#)”, Washington Institute, 25/02/2019

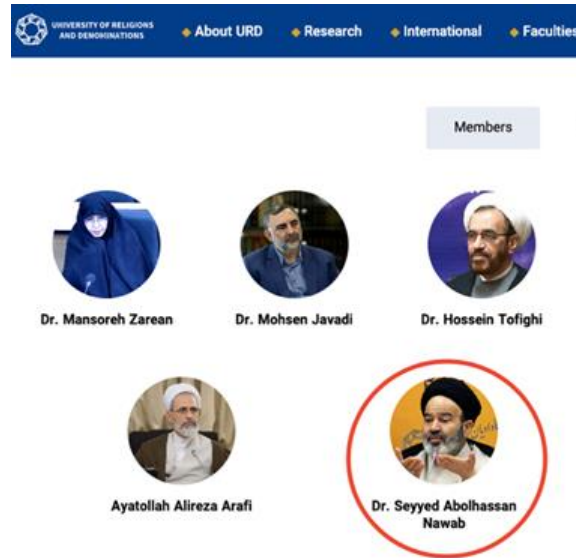
<sup>15</sup> Kasra Aarabi, “[Beyond Borders: The Expansionist Ideology of Iran’s IRGC](#)”, Tony Blair Institute, 04/02/2020:

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*; Kasra Aarabi, “[Making the Case to Proscribe Iran’s IRGC](#)”, Tony Blair Institute, 23/01/2023

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> “[German MP political sponsor heartbroken over hanging of Mohammad Mehdi Karami](#)”, Global News, 07/01/2023



*Fig. 2 URD Website Founders Board Page with Navab Circled*

It is worth noting that, unlike Western militaries, senior members of the IRGC – such as Navab – are members of the organisation for life and are never classified as “civilians” even when they hold positions outside of the IRGC.<sup>20</sup> In his official capacity as URD president, Navab remains in constant communication and contact with the most senior levels of the IRGC, not least the IRGC’s Quds Force (“IRGC-QF”): its extraterritorial branch that is subject to terrorism sanctions. On 12 January 2020, Navab wrote an official URD letter, published on URD’s website, congratulating Esmail Qaani, then IRGC-QF deputy commander, on his appointment as IRGC-QF head.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, on 20 January 2020, Navab, again in his official capacity as URD president, wrote to IRGC-QF commander Seyyed Mohammad Hejazi, congratulating him on his appointment as IRGC-QF deputy commander. In the letter, the URD president openly states the nature of his close relationship with Qaani, stating that he is “closely familiar with your [Qaani’s] service and capabilities”, while openly expressing support for the IRGC-QF and its acts of militancy in relation to the US and Israel, stating: “Brigadier General Qaani, I wish you and the Glorious Quds Force success in serving the oppressed of the world against the forces of global arrogance<sup>22</sup> and Zionist occupiers”.<sup>23</sup> Both Qaani and Hejazi are subject to terrorism sanctions.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Kasra Aarabi, “[The IRGC Eyes Iran’s Presidency](#)”, Middle East Institute, 01/07/20

<sup>21</sup> “[The congratulatory message of the university president to the new commander of IRGC Quds Force](#)”(in Persian), URD Website: 12/01/2020

<sup>22</sup> The regime in Iran refers to the US and its allies as the “forces of global arrogance”.

<sup>23</sup> “[The congratulatory message of the university president to the new deputy commander of IRGC Quds Force](#)”, (in Persian), URD Website: 20/01/2020

<sup>24</sup> [For sanctions on Qaani](#); [For sanctions on Hejazi](#)



Fig. 3: URD Website Showing URD President Congratulatory Letter to IRGC-QF Commander Qaani

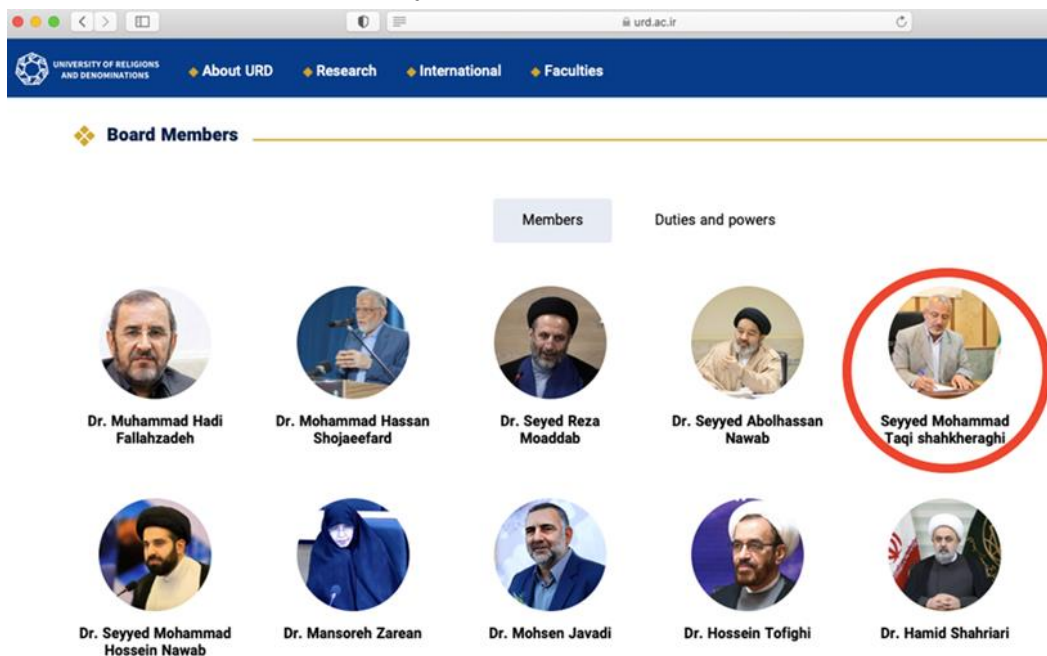


Fig. 4: URD Website Showing URD President Congratulatory Letter to Deputy IRGC-QF Commander Hejazi



*IRGC Commander on URD Board*

URD’s senior leadership links to the IRGC are not just restricted to its Navab. Beyond its president, a number of the Qom-based university’s senior leadership, who make-up the “Founding Board” and the “Board”, have ties to the IRGC.<sup>25</sup> This includes a serving senior IRGC commander Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Shahcheraghi (a.k.a. Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Shahkheraghi), who has been on “Board” of URD since November 2021.



*Fig.5:URD Website Board Members Page with IRGC Commander Shahcheraghi*



*Fig.6: Commander Shahcheraghi Biography, URD Website*



*Fig.7: Shahcheraghi in IRGC Military Fatigues*

<sup>25</sup> [“Founding Board and Board of URD”](#), URD Website

Shahcheraghi, who, was appointed as Governor of Qom by Islamic Republic of Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi, has served as IRGC commander for a number of Iranian provinces, including Qom, Mazandaran, Semnan, Golestan, and Tehran, as well commanding the IRGC’s 17<sup>th</sup> Ali-ibn-Taleb Division – something that is openly stated in his Farsi biography on the official URD website.<sup>26</sup> Shahcheraghi is personally implicated in human rights violations in Iran, including women’s rights abuses, internet restrictions and attacks on freedom of speech.<sup>27</sup> As well as this, in his current role as Governor of Qom (and alongside his position on the Board of URD), Shahcheraghi has overseen the recruitment and radicalisation of “young students and children” for the creation of a new IRGC-linked cyber-army in Qom, known as the “Hazrat Qassem Army”.<sup>28</sup> According Ahmad Hajizadeh, who serves as Political, Security and Social Deputy to Shahcheraghi: the “Hazrat Qassem Army is formed from battalions and groups made up of trained students in Qom.”<sup>29</sup> Hajizadeh also underlined “cyberspace trainers and experts train young students and teenagers of Qom really well, so that they can propagate religious-ideological and revolutionary doctrines and confront the enemy’s conspiracies in the soft-war.”<sup>30</sup>

*Senior IRGC Commanders and IRGC-affiliated Events on URD Premises*

URD has also hosted senior IRGC commanders and IRGC-affiliated events on its university premises. On 27 October 2017, URD’s president Navab hosted senior IRGC-QF commander Mohammad Reza Naqdi (a.k.a. Mohammad Reza Naghdi) in his official capacity as the IRGC’s deputy for cultural and social affairs on URD premises.<sup>31</sup> Naqdi, who served as the commander of the IRGC’s Basij Militia, was designated by the US Department of Treasury on 23 February 2011 for “being responsible for or complicit in serious human rights abuses in Iran since June 2009.” He was also designated by the EU on 12 April 2011 for human rights abuses and is subject to UN sanctions.<sup>32</sup>



Fig.8: Naghdi in IRGC Fatigues



Fig. 9: URD President Navab and IRGC’s Naghdi at URD

<sup>26</sup> “[Commander Seyyed Mohammad Taqhi Shahcheraghi Biography](#)” (in Persian), URD Website

<sup>27</sup> Full details on Shahcheraghi human rights violations (in Persian): <https://spreadingjustice.org/fa/individual-violator/sj62621/>

<sup>28</sup> “[Qom Governorate announced the creation of a cyber army: Using students in soft war after reopening schools](#)” (in Persian), ICTNA News Agency, 27/11/2021

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> “[The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD](#)” (in Persian), URD Website: 27/02/2017

<sup>32</sup> [For list of designations on Naqdi](#), Counter Extremism Project

An official write-up of Naghdi's visit to the Qom-based university published on the URD website reveals the close, long-standing relationship between this senior IRGC commander and the URD president Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab, stating: "In this meeting, Navab first mentioned his long-standing friendship with Commander Naghdi from the time of the Bosnian War" (see image below).<sup>33</sup> Naghdi served as the IRGC-QF commander to Bosnia during the Bosnian War in the 1990s, when the IRGC-QF sent hundreds of its operatives to train the Bosnian Mujahedeen. This includes tacitly training Al-Qaeda terrorists, as stated by IRGC-QF commander Saeed Ghasemi in an interview on Iranian state-tv in 2019.<sup>34</sup> In and of itself, this official statement published by URD suggests URD president Navab has ties to the IRGC-QF.<sup>35</sup>

The screenshot shows the website of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (URD) with a blue header. The main navigation bar includes links for 'درباره دانشگاه' (About University), 'آموزش' (Education), 'پژوهش' (Research), 'بین الملل' (International), 'دانشکده‌ها' (Faculties), and 'اعضای هیئت عا' (Members of the Board). The page title is 'حضور سردار نقدی معاون فرهنگی و اجتماعی سپاه در دانشگاه ادیان و مذاهب' (Presence of Commander Naqdi, Cultural and Social Deputy of the IRGC, at the University of Religions and Denominations). The date is '۵ آبان ۱۳۹۶'. A central photograph shows a group of men in a meeting around a long table. Below the photo, a text block contains a quote: 'به گزارش روابط عمومی دانشگاه ادیان و مذاهب سرتیپ سردار محمدرضا نقدی، معاون فرهنگی و اجتماعی سپاه پاسداران انقلاب اسلامی روز پنجشنبه چهارم آبان در این دانشگاه حضور یافت و با حجت‌الاسلام والمسلمین نواب، رئیس، رؤسای دانشکده‌ها و جمعی از مسئولان و اساتید دیدار و گفتگو کرد.' A red box highlights a portion of the text: 'در این دیدار حجت‌الاسلام والمسلمین نواب ابتدا به سابقه دوستی دیرین خود با سردار نقدی از زمان جنگ بوسنی اشاره کرد و در ادامه با توضیحاتی وی را در جریان تاریخچه و اهداف تأسیس، ساختار آموزشی و نیز دستاوردهای پژوهشی دانشگاه ادیان و مذاهب قرار داد.'

Fig 10. Official Write-Up on IRGC Naghdi URD Visit with URD President Ties to IRGC QF Quote Circled

<sup>33</sup> ["The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD"](#)

<sup>34</sup> ["Iran used Red Crescent as Cover for IRGC"](#), Iran Wire, 17/04/2019

<sup>35</sup> ["The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD"](#)



The event with Naqdi was by no means the exception. URD regularly hosts IRGC commanders and affiliates on its premises. On 27 September 2023, Mahdi Kabiri (a.k.a. Mahdi Kabiri Pour, a.k.a. Mehdi Kabiri Pour), deputy commander for the IRGC’s Ali-ibn-Taleb Brigade in Qom, was a keynote speaker at a panel event in URD.<sup>36</sup> The IRGC Brigade Kabiri commands was active in violently suppressing the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Qom 2022.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, as part of its IRGC “Basij Week” activities, URD hosted Mohammad Bagher Nadem on 29 November 2019.<sup>38</sup> Nadem, who is an affiliate of the IRGC’s Basij civil militia, has previously encouraged “martyrdom” at universities, schools and high schools across Iran.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 11: URD Event with IRGC Commander Kabiri

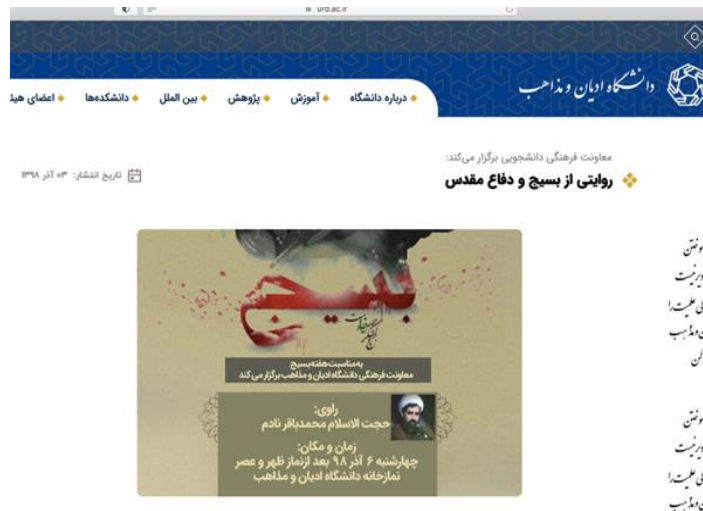


Fig. 12: URD Basij Event with Basij Affiliate Nadem

<sup>36</sup> “[Commander Kabiri: The difficulties of the path of the Islamic revolution show that this path is correct](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 27/09/2023

<sup>37</sup> “[The recent riots are the result of being away from the lives of the martyrs](#)” (in Persian), ISNA, 02/10/22

<sup>38</sup> “[Narration of Basij and Holy Défense](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 24/11/2019

<sup>39</sup> “[Nadem’s Warning](#)” (in Persian), Aparat.

In addition to hosting members of the IRGC, URD has held several IRGC-affiliated events on its campus. This includes multiple events linked to former IRGC-QF commander Qassem Soleimani – who was subject to terrorism sanctions.<sup>40</sup> On 5 December 2021, URD also officially co-sponsored an event with the IRGC on its university premises.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 13: URD Event for IRGC QF Soleimani



Fig 14: URD and IRGC Co-Sponsored Event Circled

### *URD's Ties to Hezbollah of Lebanon and Support for Terrorism Against Israel*

Beyond having ties to the IRGC, URD also has links to Hezbollah in Lebanon – a proscribed terrorist organisation in Germany since 30 April 2020.<sup>42</sup> On 6 December 2018, URD hosted Sheikh Naim Qassem, second-in-command of the Hezbollah, on its premises. As Hezbollah's second-in-command, Qassem has, on multiple occasions, called for the “eradication of Israel” and is committed to so-called “armed resistance” against the Jewish state.<sup>43</sup> Horrifyingly, this is a policy that URD has openly and officially endorsed. On 23 May 2021, URD's public relations department issued an official statement on the university's website endorsing terrorist attacks against the State of Israel, stating “there is no other option than armed resistance”.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> [For Soleimani Designations](#), Counter Extremism Project

<sup>41</sup> [“Deputy for cultural and student affairs of URD Statement”](#) (in Persian), URD Website, 05/12/21

<sup>42</sup> [“Germany Designates Hezbollah as a Terrorist Group”](#), France 24, 30/04/20

<sup>43</sup> [“Israel must be ‘wiped off’ the face of West Asia: Hezbollah Official”](#), Press TV, 23/08/2023

<sup>44</sup> [“In the face of the Zionists forceful language, there is no other option but armed resistance”](#) (in Persian), URD Website, 23/05/2021

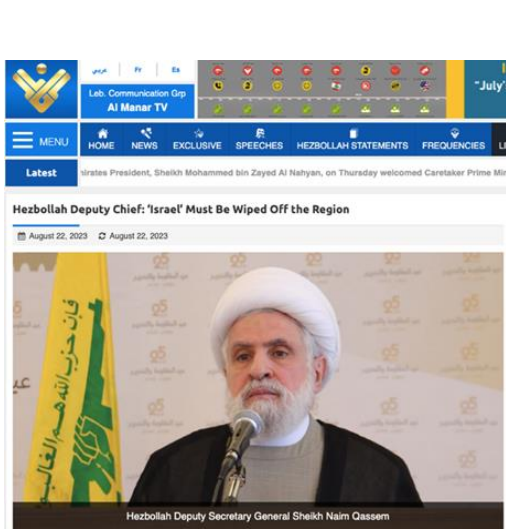


Fig.15: Hezbollah's Sheikh Naim Qassem



Fig.16: Hezbollah's Qassem Visits URD with URD President

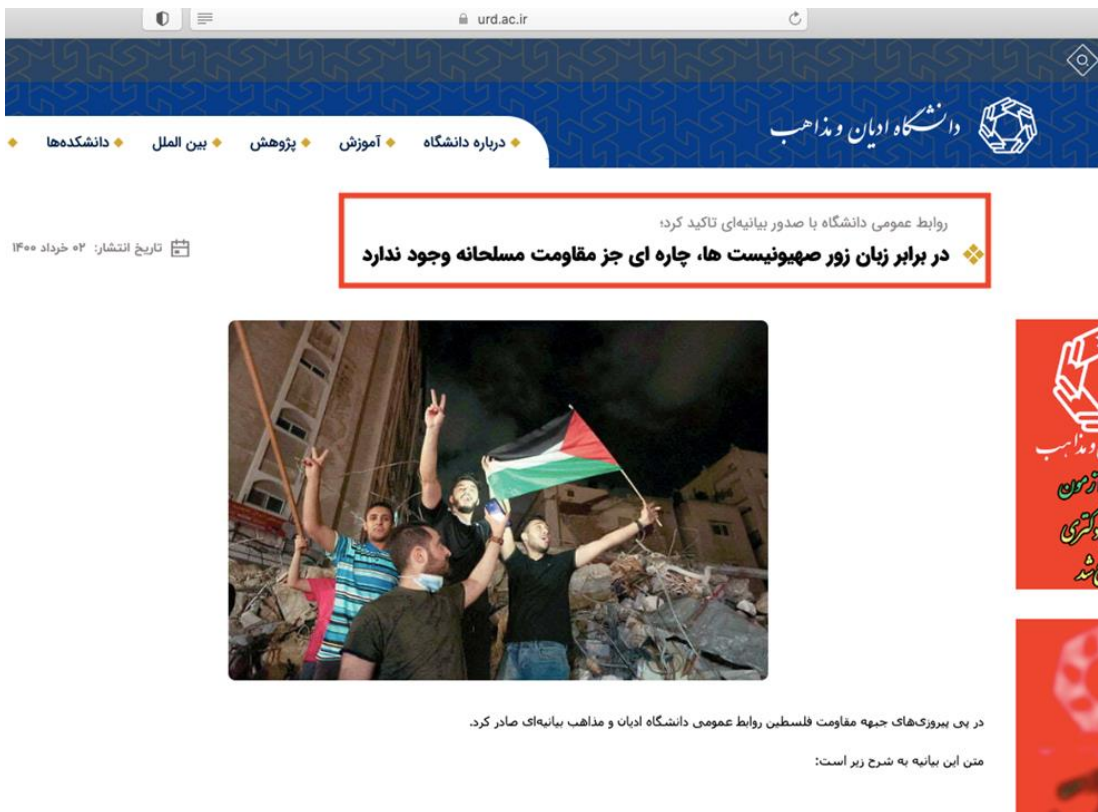


Fig. 17: URD Statement "In the face of the Zionist forceful language, there is no other option but armed resistance"



As well as the above, member of the URD’s “Founding Board”, Ayatollah Alireza Arafī,<sup>45</sup> has open links with Hezbollah and its terror chief, Hassan Nasrallah. Arafī regularly and consistently engaged and communicated with Nasrallah, not least in his former role as head of Al-Mustafa International University – an entity that was sanctioned by the US due to its role in recruiting foreign students for IRGC-QF militias and cells.<sup>46</sup> Despite his ties to the IRGC and Hezbollah, last year, Arafī travelled to Germany and delivered a speech at the Iranian regime-affiliated Islamic Centre in Hamburg, which the was declared as an “extremist Islamic organisation” by the German Federal Administrative Court on 1 July 2023.<sup>47</sup> Beyond his academic work, Arafī is a regime insider as a member of its Guardian Council, which engages in mass disqualifications and electoral fraud during “elections” in the Islamic Republic.

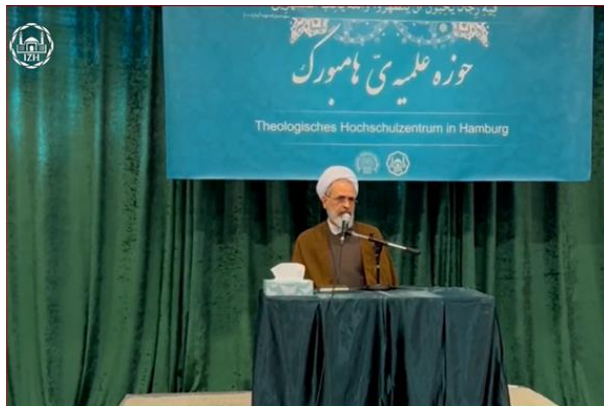


Fig. 18: URD’s Hezbollah-linked Arafī, Hamburg Centre 2022

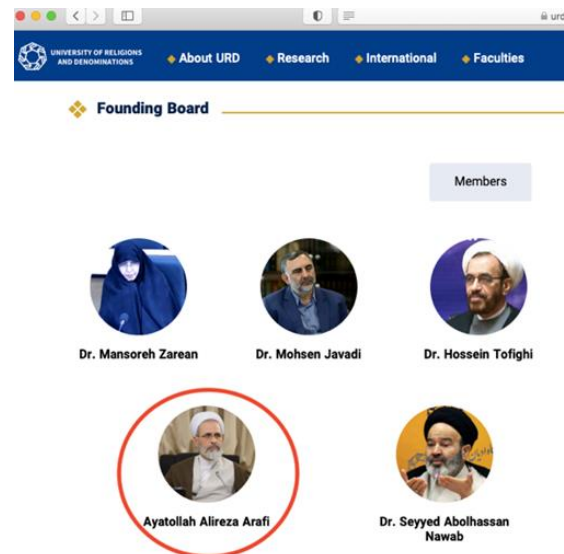


Fig.19: URD Founding Board Members  
Page with Hezbollah-linked Arafī

### IRGC’s Hostage-Taking of Foreign Academics in Iran

For decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented a callous policy of unlawfully detaining foreign nationals, and, increasingly, those working in academia, on fictitious allegations in order to extract political concessions from other nations. This policy, which is widely recognised as the regime’s “hostage-diplomacy”, is spearheaded by the IRGC and the Islamic Republic’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (“MOIS”).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> “[Founding Board and Board of URD](#)”, URD Website

<sup>46</sup> “[What happened during Ayatollah Arafī's trip to Hamburg?](#)” (in Persian), IQNA News, 26/06/2022

<sup>47</sup> “[German Court Finds Islamic Centre As An Extremist Organization](#)”, Iran International, 01/07/2023

<sup>48</sup> “[Over a dozen 'innocent' Westerners still detained in Iran](#)”, France 24, 26/06/2023



In April 2016, Swedish resident Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali, a professor at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, was arrested on espionage charges by the MOIS while visiting Iranian universities. Without a fair trial, Dr. Djalalai was sentenced to death in 2017 and has been subjected to torture. He remains in Iran's brutal prison system today. German nationals Jamshid Sharmahd and Nahid Taghavi are currently being held hostage by the regime as of the writing of this letter. Like Djalali, Sharmahd faces a death sentence.

URD's extensive affiliation with the IRGC elevates the risk of any academic exchange with, or travel to, the university.

### *Conclusion*

Given the URD's extensive affiliation with the IRGC, which is subject to terrorism and human rights sanctions, and its links to Hezbollah – a proscribed terrorist organisation in Germany – we urge you to rescind the cooperation agreement signed between Potsdam University and URD.

It is entirely inappropriate for Potsdam University to have an official partnership with URD, not least on the basis of "inter-faith dialogue", when this Qom-based entity is affiliated with the IRGC: a violent, Islamist extremist and anti-Semitic organisation that radicalises its members to kill non-Muslims as part of its official programme of indoctrination. URD's ties to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is a proscribed terrorist organisation, in Germany also puts Potsdam University at risk of major sanctions violation, including engaging with a terrorist organisation via a third party – a terror offence under German law. Beyond the legal ramifications, Potsdam University's relationship with the IRGC-affiliated URD poses major reputational damage to Potsdam University – an otherwise prestigious and respectful German academic institution.

We trust that you share our grave concerns and we respectfully request that you conduct a thorough review into the foregoing. Please let us hear from you within 10 days of receipt of this letter.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

*terrorism and gross human rights violations. Former U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman is UANI's Chairman. UANI's Advisory Board consists of distinguished leaders in government, academia and business.*  
See [www.unitedagainstmucleariran.com/about/leadership](http://www.unitedagainstmucleariran.com/about/leadership).

October 25, 2023

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**Re: Free University Berlin Ties with IRGC-Affiliated University in Iran**

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According to Iranian state-run outlets, the Free University Berlin’s partnership with URD remains in place.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, our records indicate that the cooperation partnership with URD is a DAAD German taxpayer-funded project<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UANI is a leading not-for-profit, non-partisan, advocacy organization whose mission is to promote the cessation of economic and financial support of the Islamic Republic of Iran by corporations and business until the Iranian regime verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons and support for terrorism and human rights violations. (<http://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com>)

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<sup>5</sup> “[URD Student Delegation at FU Berlin University, Germany](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 07/02/2018

<sup>6</sup> “[Prof Johannes Niehoff gives a lecture at URD](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 18/07/2023

<sup>7</sup> “[URD Report](#)”, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 18/06/2023

<sup>8</sup> “[Germany shows EU has no firm resolve on Iran](#)” (in Persian), Bultan News, 11/09/2013

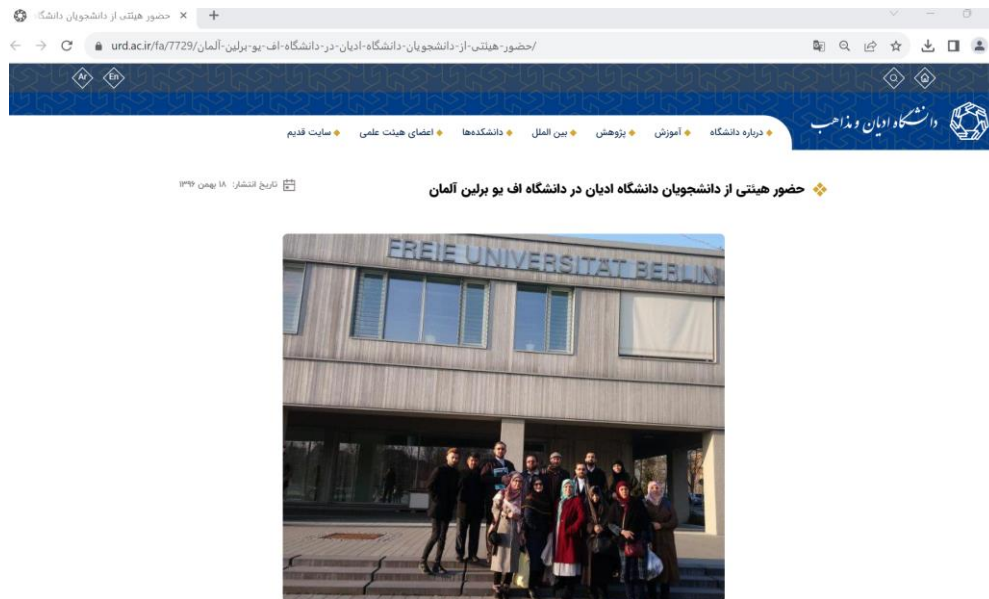


Fig. 1: URD Student Delegation Visit to Free University Berlin, 2018



Fig. 2: Free Berlin University Prof. Niehoff Lecture at URD, 2023

*The IRGC and University of Religions and Denominations (“URD”), Qom, Iran*

URD (a.k.a. University of Religions and Denominations) is extensively affiliated with the IRGC – an entity that is under UN, US and EU sanctions for global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and/or gross human rights abuses in Iran.<sup>9</sup> The president of URD, Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab (a.k.a. Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Nawab) has held multiple senior positions

<sup>9</sup> For full designation list, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/irgc-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>



in the IRGC.<sup>10</sup> This includes holding the position of “Representative of the Supreme Leader for Logistics in the IRGC” and “Head of Affairs for the Clergy in the IRGC”.<sup>11</sup>

More importantly, Navab has also served as one of the Heads of the IRGC’s Ideological-Political Organisation (“IRGC IPO”). The IRGC’s IPO oversees the official programme of indoctrination in the IRGC, which is designed to radicalise all IRGC members and their families in a violent, Islamist extremist ideology.<sup>12</sup> A 2020 study published by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change exposed – for the first time – the internal training manuals the IRGC’s IPO uses to radicalise IRGC recruits and their families.<sup>13</sup> The evidence published in this landmark paper explicitly demonstrated that the IRGC’s ideology is both violent and extremist, and is based off a distortion of Islamic scripture that is no different from proscribed Islamist terrorist organisations: from Hezbollah to ISIS and al-Qaeda.

The IRGC’s IPO textbooks glorify, justify and prioritise armed jihad against what it describes as “enemies of Islam”, who are identified as non-Muslims and opponents of the regime in Iran (including Muslims).<sup>14</sup> The IRGC IPO textbooks used to radicalise IRGC members openly call on recruits to kill Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians via armed jihad on the basis that they “do not have acceptable faith” while explicitly underscoring that it is “obligatory for Muslims to fight them to pressure them to give up their devious beliefs and to accept Islam.”<sup>15</sup> The IRGC’s IPO material also prescribes that IRGC members are to torture Iranians who oppose the Islamic Republic regime prior to their execution on the basis that they are “waging war against God” (*moharebs*). These IRGC IPO textbooks outline specific torture punishments for *moharebs*, including: “execution, hanging, cross-amputation (cutting off a hand and the opposite foot) and exile.”<sup>16</sup> The ongoing anti-regime “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Iran, which was triggered following the murder of 22-year-old Iranian-Kurdish girl Mahsa Jina Amini by the regime’s so-called “Morality Police” for “improper hijab”, have resulted in numerous Iranian protestors being executed and tortured on the charges of being a *mohareb*, including 21-year-old Mohammad Mehdi Karami, who had political sponsorship by German Members of Parliament.<sup>17</sup>

As one of the Heads of the IRGC’s IPO, Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab – the current president of URD – was personally responsible for the implementation of IRGC’s official programme of indoctrination. It is entirely inappropriate and unacceptable for Free University Berlin to have an official partnership with URD – not least on the basis of “inter-faith dialogue” – when the president of URD was formerly the head of the IRGC’s IPO, which openly prescribes violence and intolerance against both non-Muslims and Muslims.

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<sup>10</sup> “[Dr Seyyed Abolhassan Navab Biography](#)” (in Persian), URD Website; For [English Version](#)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Saeid Golkar, “[The Supreme Leader and the Guard: Civil-Military Relations and Regime Survival in Iran](#)”, Washington Institute, 25/02/2019

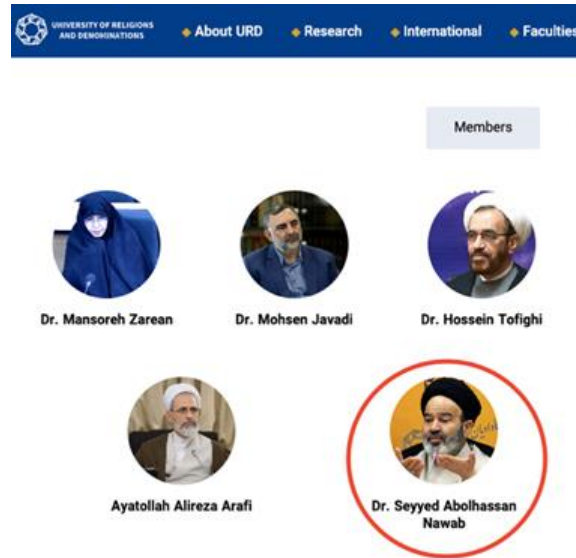
<sup>13</sup> Kasra Aarabi, “[Beyond Borders: The Expansionist Ideology of Iran’s IRGC](#)”, Tony Blair Institute, 04/02/2020

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Kasra Aarabi, “[Making the Case to Proscribe Iran’s IRGC](#)”, Tony Blair Institute, 23/01/2023

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “[German MP political sponsor heartbroken over hanging of Mohammad Mehdi Karami](#)”, Global News, 07/01/2023



*Fig.2: URD Website Founders Board Page with URD President Navab Circled*

It is worth noting that, unlike Western militaries, senior members of the IRGC – such as Navab – are members of the organisation for life and are never classified as “civilians” even when they hold positions outside of the IRGC.<sup>18</sup> In his official capacity as URD president, Navab remains in constant communication and contact with the most senior levels of the IRGC, not least the IRGC’s Quds Force (“IRGC-QF”): its extraterritorial branch that is subject to terrorism sanctions. On 12 January 2020, Navab wrote an official URD letter, published on URD’s website, congratulating Esmail Qaani, then IRGC-QF deputy commander, on his appointment as IRGC-QF head.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, on 20 January 2020, Navab, again in his official capacity as URD president, wrote to IRGC-QF commander Seyyed Mohammad Hejazi, congratulating him on his appointment as IRGC-QF deputy commander. In the letter, the URD president openly states the nature of his close relationship with Qaani, stating that he is “closely familiar with your [Qaani’s] service and capabilities”, while openly expressing support for the IRGC-QF and its acts of militancy in relation to the US and Israel, stating: “Brigadier General Qaani, I wish you and the Glorious Quds Force success in serving the oppressed of the world against the forces of global arrogance<sup>20</sup> and Zionist occupiers”.<sup>21</sup> Both Qaani and Hejazi are subject to terrorism sanctions.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Kasra Aarabi, “[The IRGC Eyes Iran’s Presidency](#)”, Middle East Institute, 01/07/20

<sup>19</sup> “[The congratulatory message of the university president to the new commander of IRGC Quds Force](#)”(in Persian), URD Website: 12/01/2020

<sup>20</sup> The regime in Iran refers to the US and its allies as the “forces of global arrogance”.

<sup>21</sup> “[The congratulatory message of the university president to the new deputy commander of IRGC Quds Force](#)”, (in Persian), URD Website: 20/01/2020

<sup>22</sup> [For sanctions on Qaani](#); [For sanctions on Hejazi](#)



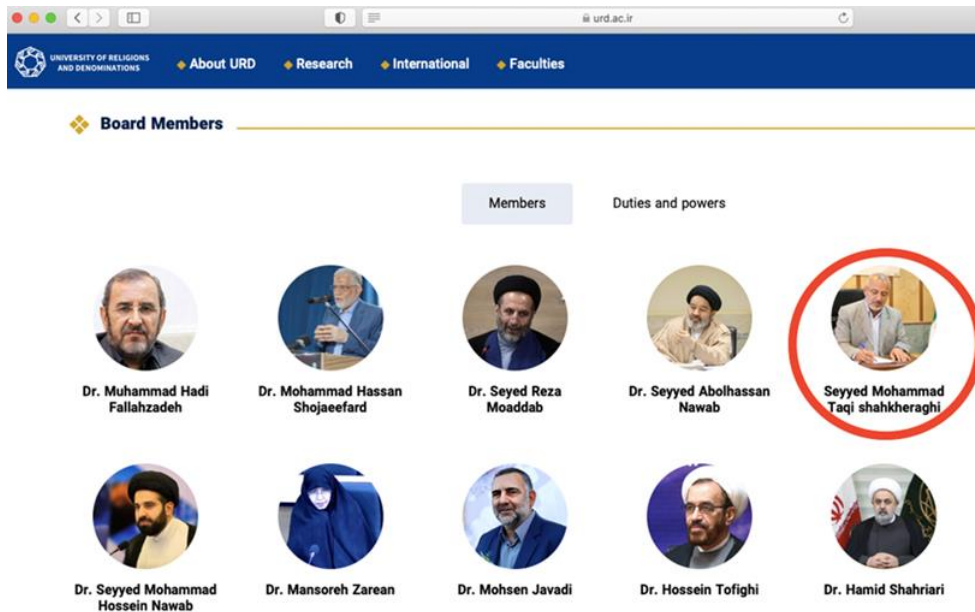
Fig. 3: URD Website Showing URD President Congratulatory Letter to IRGC-QF Commander Qaani



Fig. 4: URD Website Showing URD President Congratulatory Letter to Deputy IRGC-QF Commander Hejazi

*IRGC Commander on URD Board*

URD’s senior leadership links to the IRGC are not just restricted to its Navab. Beyond its president, a number of the Qom-based university’s senior leadership, who make-up the “Founding Board” and the “Board”, have ties to the IRGC.<sup>23</sup> This includes a serving senior IRGC commander Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Shahcheraghi (a.k.a. Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Shahkheraghi), who has been on “Board” of URD since November 2021.



*Fig.5: URD Website Board Members Page with IRGC Commander Shahcheraghi*



*Fig.6: Commander Shahcheraghi Biography, URD Website*



*Fig.7: Shahcheraghi in IRGC Military Fatigues*

<sup>23</sup> “[Founding Board and Board of URD](#)”, URD Website



Shahcheraghi, who, was appointed as Governor of Qom by Islamic Republic of Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi, has served as IRGC commander for a number of Iranian provinces, including Qom, Mazandaran, Semnan, Golestan, and Tehran, as well commanding the IRGC’s 17<sup>th</sup> Ali-ibn-Taleb Division – something that is openly stated in his Farsi biography on the official URD website.<sup>24</sup> Shahcheraghi is personally implicated in human rights violations in Iran, including women’s rights abuses, internet restrictions and attacks on freedom of speech.<sup>25</sup> As well as this, in his current role as Governor of Qom (and alongside his position on the Board of URD), Shahcheraghi has overseen the recruitment and radicalisation of “young students and children” for the creation of a new IRGC-linked cyber-army in Qom, known as the “Hazrat Qassem Army”.<sup>26</sup> According Ahmad Hajizadeh, who serves as Political, Security and Social Deputy to Shahcheraghi: the “Hazrat Qassem Army is formed from battalions and groups made up of trained students in Qom.”<sup>27</sup> Hajizadeh also underlined “cyberspace trainers and experts train young students and teenagers of Qom really well, so that they can propagate religious-ideological and revolutionary doctrines and confront the enemy’s conspiracies in the soft-war.”<sup>28</sup>

#### *Senior IRGC Commanders and IRGC-affiliated Events on URD Premises*

URD has also hosted senior IRGC commanders and IRGC-affiliated events on its university premises. On 27 October 2017, URD’s president Navab hosted senior IRGC-QF commander Mohammad Reza Naqdi (a.k.a. Mohammad Reza Naghdi) in his official capacity as the IRGC’s deputy for cultural and social affairs on URD premises.<sup>29</sup> Naqdi, who served as the commander of the IRGC’s Basij Militia, was designated by the US Department of Treasury on 23 February 2011 for “being responsible for or complicit in serious human rights abuses in Iran since June 2009.” He was also designated by the EU on 12 April 2011 for human rights abuses and is subject to UN sanctions.<sup>30</sup>



*Fig.8: Naghdi in IRGC Fatigues*



*Fig. 9: URD President Navab and IRGC’s Naghdi at URD*

<sup>24</sup> “[Commander Seyyed Mohammad Taqhi Shahcheraghi Biography](#)” (in Persian), URD Website

<sup>25</sup> Full details on Shahcheraghi human rights violations (in Persian): <https://spreadingjustice.org/fa/individual-violator/sj62621/>

<sup>26</sup> “[Qom Governorate announced the creation of a cyber army; Using students in soft war after reopening schools](#)” (in Persian), ICTNA News Agency, 27/11/2021

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> “[The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD](#)” (in Persian), URD Website: 27/02/2017

<sup>30</sup> [For list of designations on Naqdi](#), Counter Extremism Project

An official write-up of Naghdi's visit to the Qom-based university published on the URD website reveals the close, long-standing relationship between this senior IRGC commander and the URD president Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab, stating: "In this meeting, Navab first mentioned his long-standing friendship with Commander Naghdi from the time of the Bosnian War" (see image below).<sup>31</sup> Naghdi served as the IRGC-QF commander to Bosnia during the Bosnian War in the 1990s, when the IRGC-QF sent hundreds of its operatives to train the Bosnian Mujahedeen. This includes tacitly training Al-Qaeda terrorists, as stated by IRGC QF commander Saeed Ghasemi in an interview on Iranian state-tv in 2019.<sup>32</sup> In and of itself, this official statement published by URD suggests URD president Navab has ties to the IRGC-QF.<sup>33</sup>



The screenshot shows the website of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (URD) at urd.ac.ir. The header features the URD logo and navigation links in Persian. The main content area displays a news article titled "حضور سردار نقدی معاون فرهنگی و اجتماعی سپاه در دانشگاه ادیان و مذاهب" (Presence of Commander Naqdi, Cultural and Social Deputy of the IRGC, at the University of Religions and Islamic Studies). The article includes a photograph of a meeting around a long table. A quote from the article is circled in red: "در این دیدار حجت‌الاسلام والمسلمین نواب ابتدا به سابقه دوستی دیرین خود با سردار نقدی از زمان جنگ بوسنی اشاره کرد و در ادامه با توضیحاتی وی را در جریان تاریخچه و اهداف تأسیس، ساختار آموزشی و نیز دستاوردهای پژوهشی دانشگاه ادیان و مذاهب قرار داد." (In this meeting, the Islamic scholar Navab first mentioned his long-standing friendship with Commander Naqdi from the time of the Bosnian War, and then continued with explanations of his role in the history and objectives of the establishment, educational structure, and research achievements of the University of Religions and Islamic Studies.)

Fig 10. Official Write-Up on IRGC Naghdi URD Visit with URD President Ties to IRGC QF Quote Circled

<sup>31</sup> [“The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD”](#)

<sup>32</sup> [“Iran used Red Crescent as Cover for IRGC”](#), Iran Wire, 17/04/2019

<sup>33</sup> [“The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD”](#)

The event with Naqdi was by no means the exception. URD regularly hosts IRGC commanders and affiliates on its premises. On 27 September 2023, Mahdi Kabiri (a.k.a. Mahdi Kabiri Pour, a.k.a. Mehdi Kabiri Pour), deputy commander for the IRGC’s Ali-ibn-Taleb Brigade in Qom, was a keynote speaker at a panel event in URD.<sup>34</sup> The IRGC Brigade Kabiri commands was active in violently suppressing the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Qom 2022.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, as part of its IRGC “Basij Week” activities, URD hosted Mohammad Bagher Nadem on 29 November 2019.<sup>36</sup> Nadem, who is an affiliate of the IRGC’s Basij civil militia, has previously encouraged “martyrdom” at universities, schools and high schools across Iran.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 11: URD Event with IRGC Commander Kabiri

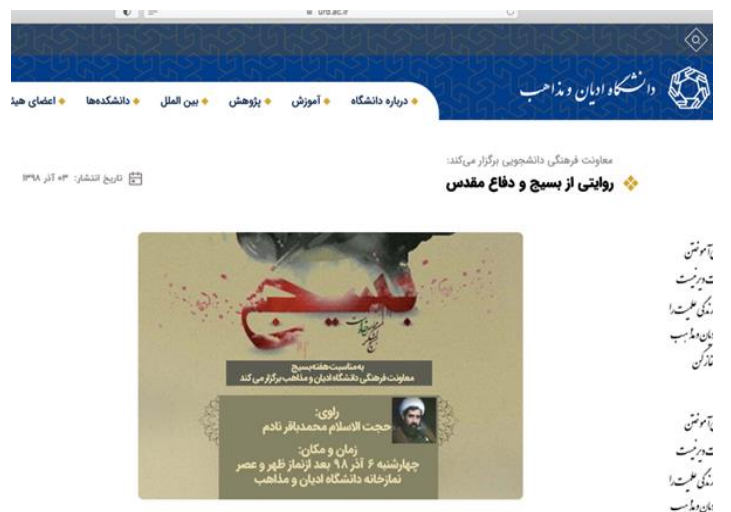


Fig. 12: URD Basij Event with Basij Affiliate Nadem

<sup>34</sup> “[Commander Kabiri: The difficulties of the path of the Islamic revolution show that this path is correct](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 27/09/2023

<sup>35</sup> “[The recent riots are the result of being away from the lives of the martyrs](#)” (in Persian), ISNA, 02/10/22

<sup>36</sup> “[Narration of Basij and Holy Defense](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 24,11,2019

<sup>37</sup> “[Nadem’s Warning](#)” (in Persian), Aparat.



In addition to hosting members of the IRGC, URD has held several IRGC-affiliated events on its campus. This includes multiple events linked to former IRGC QF commander Qassem Soleimani – who was subject to terrorism sanctions.<sup>38</sup> On 5 December 2021, URD also officially co-sponsored an event with the IRGC on its university premises.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 13: URD Event for IRGC QF Soleimani



Fig 14: URD and IRGC Co-Sponsored Event Circled

### *URD's Ties to Hezbollah of Lebanon and Support for Terrorism Against Israel*

Beyond having ties to the IRGC, URD also has links to Hezbollah in Lebanon – a proscribed terrorist organisation in Germany since 30 April 2020.<sup>40</sup> On 6 December 2018, URD hosted Sheikh Naim Qassem, second-in-command of the Hezbollah, on its premises. As Hezbollah's second-in-command, Qassem has, on multiple occasions, called for the “eradication of Israel” and is committed to so-called “armed resistance” against the Jewish state.<sup>41</sup> Horrifyingly, this is a policy that URD has openly and officially endorsed. On 23 May 2021, URD's public relations department issued an official statement on the university's website endorsing terrorist attacks against the State of Israel, stating “there is no other option than armed resistance”.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> [For Soleimani Designations](#), Counter Extremism Project

<sup>39</sup> “[Deputy for cultural and student affairs of URD Statement](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 05/12/21

<sup>40</sup> “[Germany Designates Hezbollah as a Terrorist Group](#)”, France 24, 30/04/20

<sup>41</sup> “[Israel must be ‘wiped off’ the face of West Asia: Hezbollah Official](#)”, Press TV, 23/08/2023

<sup>42</sup> “[In the face of the Zionists forceful language, there is no other option but armed resistance](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 23/05/2021





Fig.15: Hezbollah's Sheikh Naim Qassem



Fig.16: Hezbollah's Qassem Visits URD with URD President



Fig. 17: URD Statement "In the face of the Zionist forceful language, there is no other option but armed resistance"

As well as the above, member of the URD’s “Founding Board”, Ayatollah Alireza Arafī,<sup>43</sup> has open links with Hezbollah and its terror chief, Hassan Nasrallah. Arafī regularly and consistently engaged and communicated with Nasrallah, not least in his former role as head of Al-Mustafa International University – an entity that was sanctioned by the US due to its role in recruiting foreign students for IRGC-QF militias and cells.<sup>44</sup> Despite his ties to the IRGC and Hezbollah, last year, Arafī travelled to Germany and delivered a speech at the Iranian regime-affiliated Islamic Centre in Hamburg, which the was declared as an “extremist Islamic organisation” by the German Federal Administrative Court on 1 July 2023.<sup>45</sup> Beyond his academic work, Arafī is a regime insider as a member of its Guardian Council, which engages in mass disqualifications and electoral fraud during “elections” in the Islamic Republic.

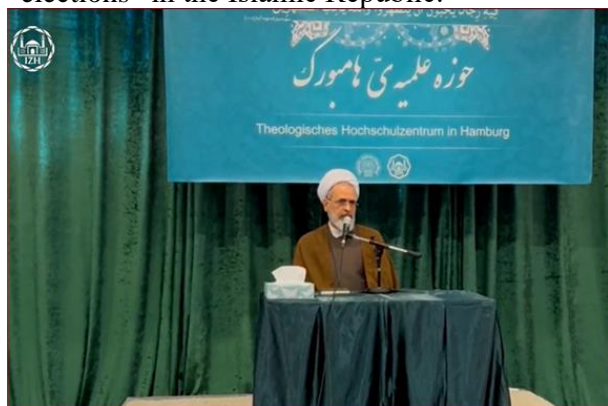


Fig. 18: URD’s Hezbollah-linked Arafī, Hamburg Centre 2022

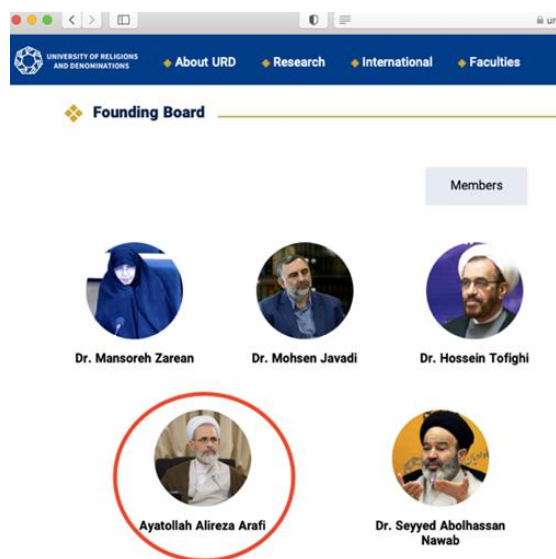


Fig.19: URD Founding Board Members Page with Hezbollah-linked Arafī

### *IRGC’s Hostage-Taking of Foreign Academics in Iran*

For decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented a callous policy of unlawfully detaining foreign nationals, and, increasingly, those working in academia, on fictitious allegations in order to extract political concessions from other nations. This policy, which is widely recognised as the regime’s “hostage-diplomacy”, is spearheaded by the IRGC and the Islamic Republic’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (“MOIS”).<sup>46</sup>

In April 2016, Swedish resident Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali, a professor at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, was arrested on espionage charges by the MOIS while visiting Iranian universities. Without a fair trial, Dr. Djalalai was sentenced to death in 2017 and has been subjected to torture. He

<sup>43</sup> “[Founding Board and Board of URD](#)”, URD Website

<sup>44</sup> “[What happened during Ayatollah Arafī's trip to Hamburg?](#)” (in Persian), IQNA News, 26/06/2022

<sup>45</sup> “[German Court Finds Islamic Centre As An Extremist Organization](#)”, Iran International, 01/07/2023

<sup>46</sup> “[Over a dozen 'innocent' Westerners still detained in Iran](#)”, France 24, 26/06/2023

remains in Iran's brutal prison system today. German nationals Jamshid Sharmahd and Nahid Taghavi are currently being held hostage by the regime as of the writing of this letter. Like Djalali, Sharmahd faces a death sentence.

URD's extensive affiliation with the IRGC elevates the risk of any academic exchange with, or travel to, the university.

### *Conclusion*

Given the URD's extensive affiliation with the IRGC, which is subject to terrorism and human rights sanctions, and its links to Hezbollah – a proscribed terrorist organisation in Germany – we urge you to rescind the cooperation agreement signed between Free University Berlin and URD.

It is entirely inappropriate for Free University Berlin to have an official partnership with URD, not least on the basis of "inter-faith dialogue", when this Qom-based entity is affiliated with the IRGC: a violent, Islamist extremist and anti-Semitic organisation that radicalises its members to kill non-Muslims as part of its official programme of indoctrination. URD's ties to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is a proscribed terrorist organisation, in Germany also puts Free University Berlin at risk of major sanctions violation, including engaging with a terrorist organisation via a third party – a terror offence under German law. Beyond the legal ramifications, Free University Berlin relationship with the IRGC-affiliated URD poses major reputational damage to Free University Berlin – an otherwise prestigious and respectful German academic institution.

We trust that you share our grave concerns and we respectfully request that you conduct a thorough review into the foregoing. Please let us hear from you within 10 days of receipt of this letter.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

*United Against Nuclear Iran ("UANI") is a nonprofit and non-partisan policy organization formed to combat the threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. UANI's diverse Advisory Board includes policy experts and distinguished former government officials. UANI was founded in 2008 by Ambassador Mark D. Wallace, the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and Middle East expert Dennis Ross. UANI's private sanctions campaigns and state and federal legislative initiatives focus on ending the economic and financial support of the Iranian regime by corporations until Iran verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons, support for terrorism and gross human rights violations. Former U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman is UANI's Chairman. UANI's Advisory Board consists of distinguished leaders in government, academia and business.*

See [www.unitedagainstinucleariran.com/about/leadership](http://www.unitedagainstinucleariran.com/about/leadership).

October 25, 2023

Prof. Dr. Birgitt Riegraf  
President  
Universität Paderborn, Warburger Str. 100,  
33098 Paderborn,  
Germany  
Via email: [praesidentin@upb.de](mailto:praesidentin@upb.de); [sandra.freise@zv.uni-paderborn.de](mailto:sandra.freise@zv.uni-paderborn.de)

**Re: Paderborn University Ties with IRGC-linked University in Iran**

Dear Prof. Riegraf:

United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”)<sup>1</sup> is writing to seek your clarification and urgent review on the status of Paderborn University’s official partnership and collaboration with the University of Religions and Denominations (“URD”), Qom, Iran, which is extensively affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (“IRGC”)<sup>2</sup> – an entity subject to United Nations (UN), US and European Union (EU) sanctions<sup>3</sup> – and linked to Hezbollah in Lebanon – a designated terrorist organisation in Germany.<sup>4</sup> We note that Paderborn University – specifically, the “Centre for Comparative Theology and Studies” – has had ties and “intensive contact”<sup>5</sup> with the URD since 2010. We also note that an official cooperation agreement between the two universities was signed by then President of Paderborn University, Prof. Dr. Nikolaus Risch, and current URD President, Seyed Abdolhassan Navab on 5 February 2013<sup>6</sup> – an agreement that remains in place according to Iranian state-run outlets.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as well as reciprocal delegation trips<sup>8</sup>, our records indicate that there have been multiple DAAD German taxpayer-funded student exchange projects with URD under the notion of “inter-faith dialogue” at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels, including between 2018-2021.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UANI is a leading not-for-profit, non-partisan, advocacy organization whose mission is to promote the cessation of economic and financial support of the Islamic Republic of Iran by corporations and business until the Iranian regime verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons and support for terrorism and human rights violations. (<http://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com>)

<sup>2</sup> The IRGC was designated Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in the United States as of April 2019: <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

<sup>3</sup> For full designation list, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/irgc-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>

<sup>4</sup> For Hezbollah designation, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/hezbollah>

<sup>5</sup> “[University Dialogue, Iran](#)”, Paderborn University Website

<sup>6</sup> “[Paderborn University Press Release](#)”, Paderborn University Website, 5/02/2013

<sup>7</sup> “[URD Report](#)”, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 18/06/2023

<sup>8</sup> “[University Dialogue, Iran](#)”, Paderborn University Website

<sup>9</sup> “[Comparative Theology in Qom und Paderborn](#)”, Paderborn University Website



Fig.1: Paderborn University-URD Official Partnership, Paderborn Website

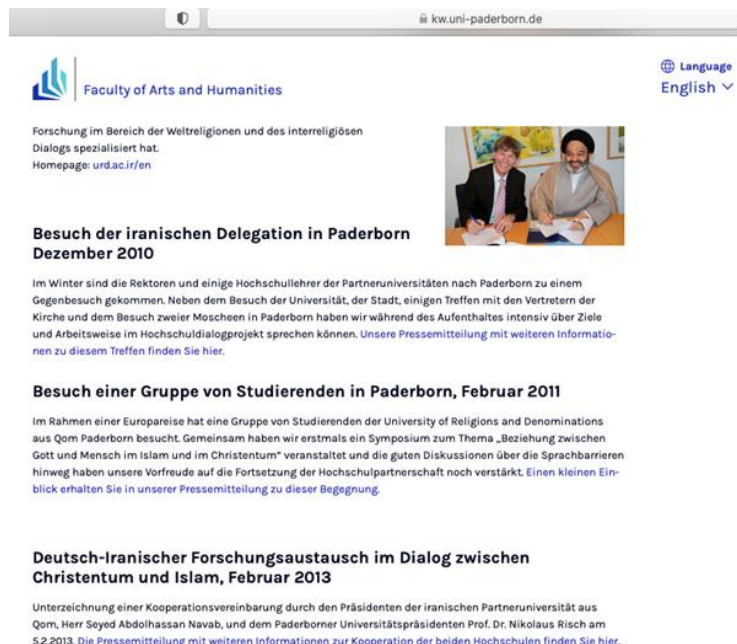


Fig. 2: DAAD Funded Paderborn-URD Summer School Poster

### IRGC and University of Religions and Denominations (“URD”), Qom, Iran

URD (a.k.a. University of Religions and Denominations) is extensively affiliated with the IRGC – an entity that is under UN, US and EU sanctions for global terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and/or gross human rights abuses in Iran.<sup>10</sup> The president of URD, Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab (a.k.a. Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Nawab) has held multiple senior positions in the IRGC.<sup>11</sup> This includes holding the position of “Representative of the Supreme Leader for Logistics in the IRGC” and “Head of Affairs for the Clergy in the IRGC”.<sup>12</sup>

More importantly, Navab has also served as one of the Heads of the IRGC’s Ideological-Political Organisation (“IRGC IPO”). The IRGC’s IPO oversees the official programme of indoctrination in the IRGC, which is designed to radicalise all IRGC members and their families in a violent, Islamist extremist ideology.<sup>13</sup> A 2020 study published by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change exposed – for the first time – the internal training manuals the IRGC’s IPO uses to radicalise IRGC recruits and their families.<sup>14</sup> The evidence published in this landmark paper explicitly demonstrated that the IRGC’s ideology is both violent and extremist, and is based off a

<sup>10</sup> For full designation list, see: <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/irgc-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>

<sup>11</sup> “Dr Seyyed Abolhassan Navab Biography” (in Persian), URD Website; For [English Version](#)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

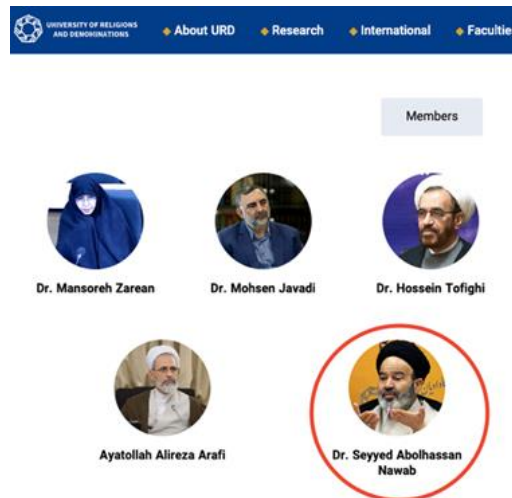
<sup>13</sup> Saeid Golkar, “[The Supreme Leader and the Guard: Civil-Military Relations and Regime Survival in Iran](#)”, Washington Institute, 25/02/2019

<sup>14</sup> Kasra Aarabi, “[Beyond Borders: The Expansionist Ideology of Iran’s IRGC](#)”, Tony Blair Institute, 04/02/2020

distortion of Islamic scripture that is no different from proscribed Islamist terrorist organisations: from Hezbollah to ISIS and al-Qaeda.

The IRGC’s IPO textbooks glorify, justify and prioritise armed jihad against what it describes as “enemies of Islam”, who are identified as non-Muslims and opponents of the regime in Iran (including Muslims).<sup>15</sup> The IRGC IPO textbooks used to radicalise IRGC members openly call on recruits to kill Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians via armed jihad on the basis that they “do not have acceptable faith” while explicitly underscoring that it is “obligatory for Muslims to fight them to pressure them to give up their devious beliefs and to accept Islam.”<sup>16</sup> The IRGC’s IPO material also prescribes that IRGC members are to torture Iranians who oppose the Islamic Republic regime prior to their execution on the basis that they are “waging war against God” (*moharebs*). These IRGC IPO textbooks outline specific torture punishments for moharebs, including: “execution, hanging, cross-amputation (cutting off a hand and the opposite foot) and exile.”<sup>17</sup> The ongoing anti-regime “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Iran, which was triggered following the murder of 22-year-old Iranian-Kurdish girl Mahsa Jina Amini by the regime’s so-called “Morality Police” for “improper hijab”, have resulted in numerous Iranian protestors being executed and tortured on the charges of being a mohareb, including 21-year-old Mohammad Mehdi Karami, who had political sponsorship by German Members of Parliament.<sup>18</sup>

As one of the Heads of the IRGC’s IPO, Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab – the current president of URD who struck an agreement with Paderborn University in 2013 – was personally responsible for the implementation of IRGC’s official programme of indoctrination. It is entirely inappropriate and unacceptable for Paderborn University to have an official partnership with URD – not least on the basis of “inter-faith dialogue” – when the president of URD was formerly the head of the IRGC’s IPO, which openly prescribes violence and intolerance against both non-Muslims and Muslims.



<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*; Kasra Aarabi, “[Making the Case to Proscribe Iran’s IRGC](#)”, Tony Blair Institute, 23/01/2023

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> “[German MP political sponsor heartbroken over hanging of Mohammad Mehdi Karami](#)”, Global News, 07/01/2023.

*Fig. 3 URD Website Founders Board Page with URD President Navab Circled*



*Fig.4: Then Paderborn President Prof. Risch with URD President Navab*

It is worth noting that, unlike Western militaries, senior members of the IRGC – such as Navab – are members of the organisation for life and are never classified as “civilians” even when they hold positions outside of the IRGC.<sup>19</sup> In his official capacity as URD president, Navab remains in constant communication and contact with the most senior levels of the IRGC, not least the IRGC’s Quds Force (“IRGC-QF”): its extraterritorial branch that is subject to terrorism sanctions. On 12 January 2020, Navab wrote an official URD letter, published on URD’s website, congratulating Esmail Qaani, then IRGC-QF deputy commander, on his appointment as IRGC-QF head.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, on 20 January 2020, Navab, again in his official capacity as URD president, wrote to IRGC-QF commander Seyyed Mohammad Hejazi, congratulating him on his appointment as IRGC-QF deputy commander. In the letter, the URD president openly states the nature of his close relationship with Qaani, stating that he is “closely familiar with your [Qaani’s] service and capabilities”, while openly expressing support for the IRGC-QF and its acts of militancy in relation to the US and Israel, stating: “Brigadier General Qaani, I wish you and the Glorious Quds Force success in serving the oppressed of the world against the forces of global arrogance<sup>21</sup> and Zionist occupiers”.<sup>22</sup> Both Qaani and Hejazi are subject to terrorism sanctions.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Kasra Aarabi, “[The IRGC Eyes Iran’s Presidency](#)”, Middle East Institute, 01/07/20.

<sup>20</sup> “[The congratulatory message of the university president to the new commander of IRGC Quds Force](#)”(in Persian), URD Website: 12/01/2020.

<sup>21</sup> The regime in Iran refers to the US and its allies as the “forces of global arrogance.”

<sup>22</sup> “[The congratulatory message of the university president to the new deputy commander of IRGC Quds Force](#)”, (in Persian), URD Website: 20/01/2020.

<sup>23</sup> [For sanctions on Qaani](#); [For sanctions on Hejazi](#).



Fig. 5: URD Website Showing URD President Congratulatory Letter to IRGC-QF Commander Qaani



Fig. 6: URD Website Showing URD President Congratulatory Letter to Deputy IRGC-QF Commander Hejazi



*IRGC Commander on URD Board*

URD’s senior leadership links to the IRGC are not just restricted to its Navab. Beyond its president, a number of the Qom-based university’s senior leadership, who make-up the “Founding Board” and the “Board”, have ties to the IRGC.<sup>24</sup> This includes a serving senior IRGC commander Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Shahcheraghi (a.k.a. Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Shakhkeraghi), who has been on “Board” of URD since November 2021.

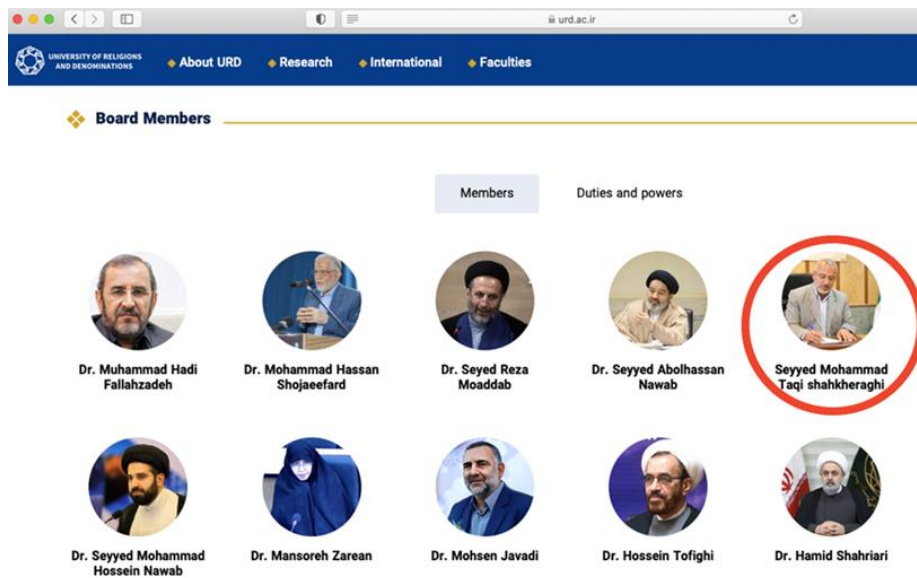


Fig.5: URD Website Board Members Page with IRGC Commander Shahcheraghi



Fig.6: Commander Shahcheraghi Biography, URD Website



Fig.7: Fig.7: Shahcheraghi in IRGC Military Fatigues

<sup>24</sup> “[Founding Board and Board of URD](#)”, URD Website

Shahcheraghi, who was appointed as Governor of Qom by Islamic Republic of Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, has served as IRGC commander for a number of Iranian provinces, including Qom, Mazandaran, Semnan, Golestan, and Tehran, as well commanding the IRGC's 17<sup>th</sup> Ali-ibn-Taleb Division – something that is openly stated in his Farsi biography on the official URD website.<sup>25</sup> Shahcheraghi is personally implicated in human rights violations in Iran, including women's rights abuses, internet restrictions and attacks on freedom of speech.<sup>26</sup> As well as this, in his current role as Governor of Qom (and alongside his position on the Board of URD), Shahcheraghi has overseen the recruitment and radicalisation of “young students and children” for the creation of a new IRGC-linked cyber-army in Qom, known as the “Hazrat Qassem Army”.<sup>27</sup> According Ahmad Hajizadeh, who serves as Political, Security and Social Deputy to Shahcheraghi: the “Hazrat Qassem Army is formed from battalions and groups made up of trained students in Qom.”<sup>28</sup> Hajizadeh also underlined “cyberspace trainers and experts train young students and teenagers of Qom really well, so that they can propagate religious-ideological and revolutionary doctrines and confront the enemy's conspiracies in the soft-war.”<sup>29</sup>

#### *Senior IRGC Commanders and IRGC-affiliated Events on URD Premises*

URD has also hosted senior IRGC commanders and IRGC-affiliated events on its university premises. On 27 October 2017, URD's president Navab hosted senior IRGC-QF commander Mohammad Reza Naqdi (a.k.a. Mohammad Reza Naghdi) in his official capacity as the IRGC's deputy for cultural and social affairs on URD premises.<sup>30</sup> Naqdi, who served as the commander of the IRGC's Basij Militia, was designated by the US Department of Treasury on 23 February 2011 for “being responsible for or complicit in serious human rights abuses in Iran since June 2009.” He was also designated by the EU on 12 April 2011 for human rights abuses and is subject to UN sanctions.<sup>31</sup>



Fig.8: Naghdi in IRGC Fatigues



Fig. 9: URD President Navab and IRGC's Naghdi at URD

<sup>25</sup> “[Commander Seyyed Mohammad Taqhi Shahcheraghi Biography](#)” (in Persian), URD Website.

<sup>26</sup> Full details on Shahcheraghi human rights violations (in Persian): <https://spreadingjustice.org/fa/individual-violator/sj62621/>.

<sup>27</sup> “[Qom Governorate announced the creation of a cyber army; Using students in soft war after reopening schools](#)” (in Persian), ICTNA News Agency, 27/11/2021.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> “[The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD](#)” (in Persian), URD Website: 27/02/2017.

<sup>31</sup> [For list of designations on Naqdi](#), Counter Extremism Project.

An official write-up of Naghdi’s visit to the Qom-based university published on the URD website reveals the close, long-standing relationship between this senior IRGC commander and the URD president Dr Seyyed Abdolhassan Navab, stating: “In this meeting, Navab first mentioned his long-standing friendship with Commander Naghdi from the time of the Bosnian War” (see image below).<sup>32</sup> Naghdi served as the IRGC-QF commander to Bosnia during the Bosnian War in the 1990s, when the IRGC-QF sent hundreds of its operatives to train the Bosnian Mujahedeen. This includes tacitly training Al-Qaeda terrorists, as stated by IRGC QF commander Saeed Ghasemi in an interview on Iranian state-tv in 2019.<sup>33</sup> In and of itself, this official statement published by URD suggests URD president Navab has ties to the IRGC-QF.<sup>34</sup>



Fig 10. Official Write-Up on IRGC Naghdi URD Visit with URD President Ties to IRGC QF Quote Circled

The event with Naqdi was by no means the exception. URD regularly hosts IRGC commanders and affiliates on its premises. On 27 September 2023, Mahdi Kabiri (a.k.a. Mahdi Kabiri Pour, a.k.a. Mehdi Kabiri Pour), deputy commander for the IRGC’s Ali-ibn-Taleb Brigade

<sup>32</sup> “[The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD](#)”

<sup>33</sup> “[Iran used Red Crescent as Cover for IRGC](#)”, Iran Wire, 17/04/2019

<sup>34</sup> “[The presence of Commander Naqdi, the cultural and social deputy of the IRGC, at URD](#)”

in Qom, was a keynote speaker at a panel event in URD.<sup>35</sup> The IRGC Brigade Kabiri commands was active in violently suppressing the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Qom 2022.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, as part of its IRGC “Basij Week” activities, URD hosted Mohammad Bagher Nadem on 29 November 2019.<sup>37</sup> Nadem, who is an affiliate of the IRGC’s Basij civil militia, has previously encouraged “martyrdom” at universities, schools and high schools across Iran.<sup>38</sup>



Fig. 11: URD Event with IRGC Commander Kabiri

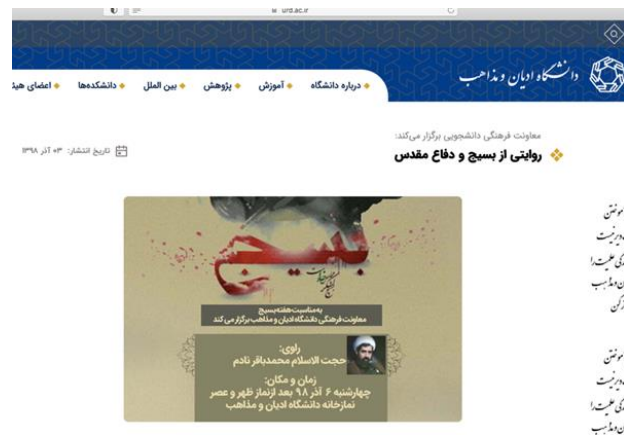


Fig. 12: URD Basij Event with Basij Affiliate Nadem

<sup>35</sup> “[Commander Kabiri: The difficulties of the path of the Islamic revolution show that this path is correct](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 27/09/2023.

<sup>36</sup> “[The recent riots are the result of being away from the lives of the martyrs](#)” (in Persian), ISNA, 02/10/22.

<sup>37</sup> “[Narration of Basij and Holy Defense](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 24/11/2019.

<sup>38</sup> “[Nadem’s Warning](#)” (in Persian), Aparat.



In addition to hosting members of the IRGC, URD has held several IRGC-affiliated events on its campus. This includes multiple events linked to former IRGC QF commander Qassem Soleimani – who was subject to terrorism sanctions.<sup>39</sup> On 5 December 2021, URD also officially co-sponsored an event with the IRGC on its university premises.<sup>40</sup>



Fig. 13: URD Event for IRGC-QF Soleimani



Fig 14: URD and IRGC Co-Sponsored Event Circled

### URD's Ties to Hezbollah of Lebanon and Support for Terrorism Against Israel

Beyond having ties to the IRGC, URD also has links to Hezbollah in Lebanon – a proscribed terrorist organisation in Germany since 30 April 2020.<sup>41</sup> On 6 December 2018, URD hosted Sheikh Naim Qassem, second-in-command of the Hezbollah, on its premises. As Hezbollah's second-in-command, Qassem has, on multiple occasions, called for the “eradication of Israel” and is committed to so-called “armed resistance” against the Jewish state.<sup>42</sup> Horrifyingly, this is a policy that URD has openly and officially endorsed. On 23 May 2021, URD's public relations department issued an official statement on the university's website endorsing terrorist attacks against the State of Israel, stating “there is no other option than armed resistance”.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> [For Soleimani Designations](#), Counter Extremism Project

<sup>40</sup> “[Deputy for cultural and student affairs of URD Statement](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 05/12/21

<sup>41</sup> “[Germany Designates Hezbollah as a Terrorist Group](#)”, France 24, 30/04/20

<sup>42</sup> “[Israel must be ‘wiped off’ the face of West Asia: Hezbollah Official](#)”, Press TV, 23/08/2023

<sup>43</sup> “[In the face of the Zionists forceful language, there is no other option but armed resistance](#)” (in Persian), URD Website, 23/05/2021

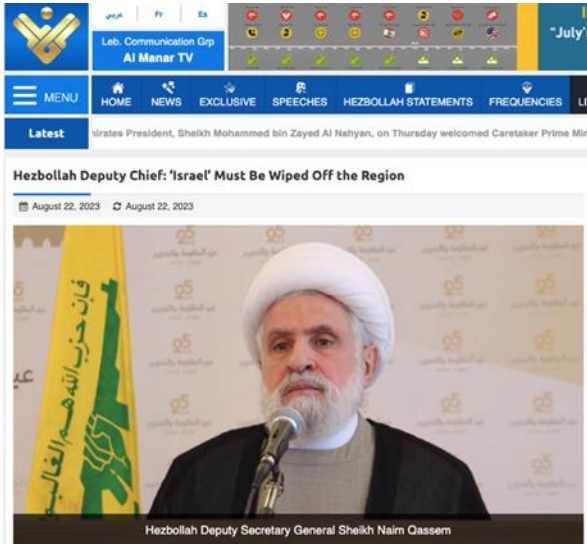


Fig.15: Hezbollah's Sheikh Naim Qassem



Fig.16: Hezbollah's Qassem Visits URD with URD President

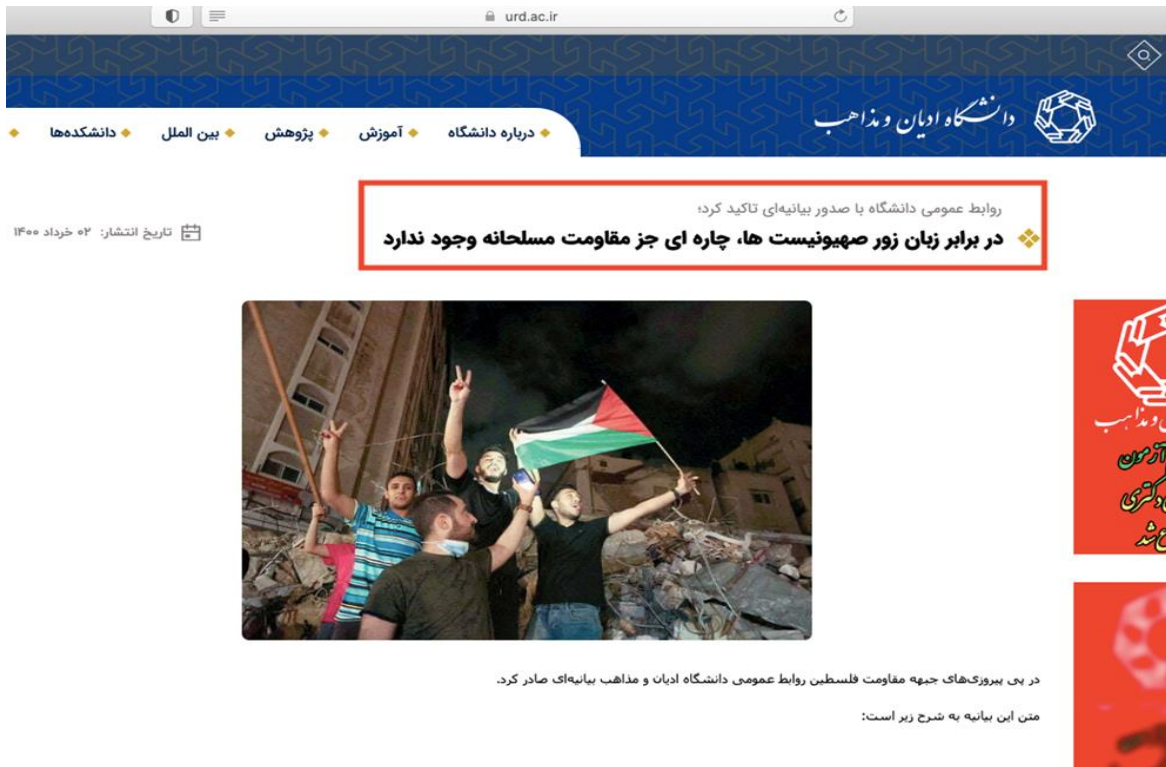


Fig. 17: URD Statement "In the face of the Zionist forceful language, there is no other option but armed resistance"

As well as the above, member of the URD's "Founding Board", Ayatollah Alireza Araf, <sup>44</sup> has open links with Hezbollah and its terror chief, Hassan Nasrallah. Araf regularly and

<sup>44</sup> "[Founding Board and Board of URD](#)", URD Website

consistently engaged and communicated with Nasrallah, not least in his former role as head of Al-Mustafa International University – an entity that was sanctioned by the US due to its role in recruiting foreign students for IRGC-QF militias and cells.<sup>45</sup> Despite his ties to the IRGC and Hezbollah, last year, Arafı travelled to Germany and delivered a speech at the Iranian regime-affiliated Islamic Centre in Hamburg, which was declared as an “extremist Islamic organisation” by the German Federal Administrative Court on 1 July 2023.<sup>46</sup> Beyond his academic work, Arafı is a regime insider as a member of its Guardian Council, which engages in mass disqualifications and electoral fraud during “elections” in the Islamic Republic.

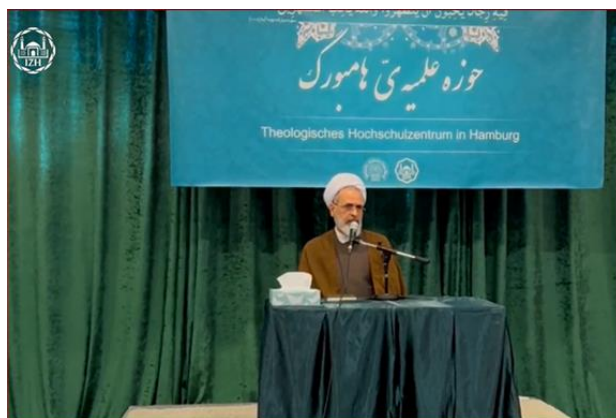


Fig. 18: URD’s Hezbollah-linked Arafı, Hamburg Centre 2022

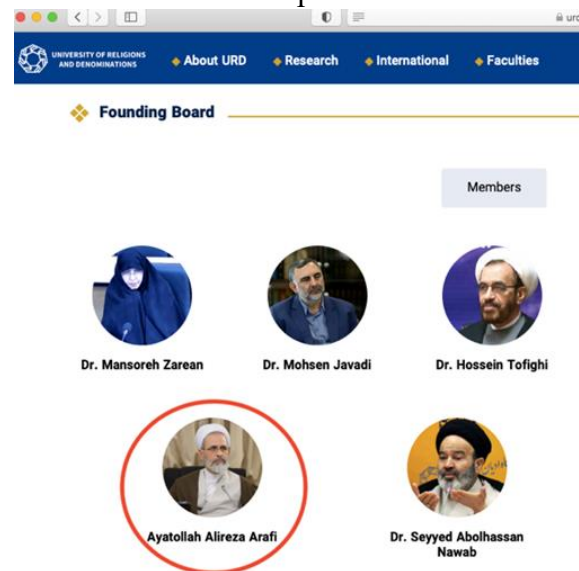


Fig.19: URD Founding Board Members Page with Hezbollah-linked Arafı

### IRGC’s Hostage-Taking of Foreign Academics in Iran

For decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented a callous policy of unlawfully detaining foreign nationals, and, increasingly, those working in academia, on fictitious allegations in order to extract political concessions from other nations. This policy, which is widely recognised as the regime’s “hostage-diplomacy”, is spearheaded by the IRGC and the Islamic Republic’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (“MOIS”).<sup>47</sup>

In April 2016, Swedish resident Dr. Ahmadreza Djalali, a professor at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, was arrested on espionage charges by the MOIS while visiting Iranian universities. Without a fair trial, Dr. Djalalai was sentenced to death in 2017 and has been subjected to torture. He remains in Iran’s brutal prison system today. German nationals Jamshid Sharmahd and Nahid Taghavi are currently being held hostage by the regime as of the writing of this letter. Like Djalali, Sharmahd faces a death sentence.

<sup>45</sup> “[What happened during Ayatollah Arafı's trip to Hamburg?](#)” (in Persian), IQNA News, 26/06/2022

<sup>46</sup> “[German Court Finds Islamic Centre As An Extremist Organization](#)”, Iran International, 01/07/2023

<sup>47</sup> “[Over a dozen 'innocent' Westerners still detained in Iran](#)”, France 24, 26/06/2023



URD's extensive affiliation with the IRGC elevates the risk of any academic exchange with, or travel to, the university.

*Conclusion*

Given the URD's extensive affiliation with the IRGC, which is subject to terrorism and human rights sanctions, and its links to Hezbollah – a proscribed terrorist organisation in Germany – we urge you to rescind the cooperation agreement signed between Paderborn University and URD.

It is entirely inappropriate for Paderborn University to have an official partnership with URD, not least on the basis of “inter-faith dialogue”, when this Qom-based entity is affiliated with the IRGC: a violent, Islamist extremist and anti-Semitic organisation that radicalises its members to kill non-Muslims as part of its official programme of indoctrination. URD's ties to Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is a proscribed terrorist organisation, in Germany also puts Paderborn University at risk of major sanctions violation, including engaging with a terrorist organisation via a third party – a terror offence under German law. Beyond the legal ramifications, Paderborn University's relationship with the IRGC-affiliated URD poses major reputational damage to Paderborn University – an otherwise prestigious and respectful German academic institution.

We trust that you share our grave concerns and we respectfully request that you conduct a thorough review into the foregoing. Please let us hear from you within 10 days of receipt of this letter.

Thank you for your kind attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



Ambassador Mark D. Wallace

*United Against Nuclear Iran (“UANI”) is a nonprofit and non-partisan policy organization formed to combat the threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. UANI's diverse Advisory Board includes policy experts and distinguished former government officials. UANI was founded in 2008 by Ambassador Mark D. Wallace, the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, and Middle East expert Dennis Ross. UANI's private sanctions campaigns and state and federal legislative initiatives focus on ending the economic and financial support of the Iranian regime by corporations until Iran verifiably abandons its drive for nuclear weapons, support for terrorism and gross human rights violations. Former U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman is UANI's Chairman. UANI's Advisory Board consists of distinguished leaders in government, academia and business. See [www.unitedagainstmucleariran.com/about/leadership](http://www.unitedagainstmucleariran.com/about/leadership).*