

Iran: the “most active state sponsor of terrorism”

What is state-sponsored terrorism?

State-sponsored terrorism is the act of a state directly supporting terrorist acts or organizations through funds, weapons, smuggling assistance, training camps, media outlets, propaganda, and sanctuary. The United States Department of State further outlines state-sponsored terrorism: “Countries determined by the Secretary of State to have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism are designated pursuant to three laws: section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act, section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act, and section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act. Taken together, the four main categories of sanctions resulting from designation under these authorities include restrictions on U.S. foreign assistance; a ban on defense exports and sales; certain controls over exports of dual use items; and miscellaneous financial and other restrictions.”¹

Why is Iran the “most active state sponsor of terrorism”?

The State Department lists Iran, Syria, Cuba, and Sudan as state sponsors of terror. Since the hostage crisis, Iran (specifically the Revolutionary Guard Corps - IRGC) has been repeatedly tied to terrorist acts against the United States and its allies throughout the world.

What terrorist organizations does Iran have ties to?

- **Hezbollah:** Originating in Lebanon in 1982, Hezbollah (“Party of God”) is a Shia militant group highly influenced by the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the teachings of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Hezbollah maintains an anti-Western and anti-Israeli stance. Its current leader is Hassan Nasrallah.² Iran is believed to provide Hezbollah with financial and military assistance worth some \$60-100 million annually.³ Hezbollah has used this money throughout its existence to launch attacks on US military installations throughout the Middle East and against Israel. In addition, Iran funds Al-Manar, Hezbollah’s propagandist television network. By 2002, Iran reportedly provided Al-Manar with some \$15 million annually.⁴
- **Hamas:** Hamas (“Harakat Al-Muqawama Al-Islamia” or Islamic Resistance Movement) is a Sunni radical group formed in the late 1980s as the Palestinian faction of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Its militant wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, operates against Israeli targets through rocket attacks and suicide bombings. Hamas is believed to have killed more

¹ United States Department of State, “State Sponsors of Terrorism,” <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm>

² “Hezbollah,” GlobalSecurity.org. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hizballah.htm>

³ Blanca Madani, “Hezbollah’s Global Finance Network: The Triple Frontier,” Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, January 2002, http://www.meib.org/articles/0201_12.htm

⁴ Nicholas Blanford, “Hezbollah Sharpens Its Weapons in Propaganda War,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 28, 2001 as quoted in Matthew Levitt, “Iranian State Sponsorship of Terror: Threatening U.S. Security, Global Stability, and Regional Peace,” testimony given during a Joint Hearing of the Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, and the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation of the United States House of Representatives, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 16, 2005. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/Iran-Testimony-2-16-05.pdf>

than five hundred people in over 350 attacks since 1993⁵ and has sent thousands of Qassam rockets into Israeli towns like Sderot since 2001. After winning the Palestinian elections in 2006, Hamas solidified its position in the Gaza Strip. A December 2000 Palestinian intelligence report confiscated by Israeli officials notes that in one specific instance Iran provided \$400,000 to the Qassam Brigades to support “the Hamas military arm in Israel and encouraging suicide operations.”⁶ Canadian Secret Intelligence Service (CSIS) believes Iran transfers between \$3 and \$18 million a year to Hamas.⁷ Expert testimony in *Susan Weinstein et al v. The Islamic Republic of Iran et al* notes that Iran gave Hamas and other terrorist organizations some \$100 to \$200 million per year in 1995 and 1996.⁸ In 2008, Iran gave Hezbollah more than \$200 million and provided training camps within its borders for 3,000 Hezbollah terrorists.⁹

- **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ):** A Sunni organization, PIJ formed in the late 1970s as a more radical and militant off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. PIJ is heavily influenced by the Islamic Revolution and seeks to establish an Islamic Palestinian state with pre-1948 borders. It “advocates the destruction of Israel through violent means” and believes that violence is “the only way to remove Israel from the Middle East map.”¹⁰ The State Department reports that PIJ receives financial assistance and training from Iran.¹¹ Throughout the past twenty years PIJ has launched suicide attacks on public locations in Israel, killing and wounding countless innocents.¹²
- **Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC):** The PFLP-GC formed in 1968 out of the PFLP, a Marxist-Leninist group that viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a “broader revolution against Western imperialism.” The PFLP-GC focuses more on resistance and less on politics than its parent organization and has been responsible for dozens of attacks in Europe and the Middle East. Throughout the 1970s it pioneered airplane hijacking throughout the Middle East.¹³ It receives financial support from

⁵ “Hamas,” Council on Foreign Relations, January 7, 2009. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/8968/>

⁶ “Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror,” Special Information Bulletin, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies, Israel, April 2003 <http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/iran.htm> as quoted in Levitt, *Op.Cit.*

⁷ “The Financial Sources of the Hamas Terror Organization,” Israel Foreign Ministry, July 30, 2003 <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0nmu0> as quoted in Matthew Levitt *Ibid.*

⁸ See Testimony of Patrick Clawson and Reuven Paz in *Susan Weinstein et al v. The Islamic Republic of Iran et al*, United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Civil Action No. 00-2601 (RCL), February 6, 2002 as quoted in Matthew Levitt *Ibid.*

⁹ United States Department of State, *Op.Cit.*

¹⁰ Holly Fletcher, “Palestinian Islamic Jihad,” Council on Foreign Relations, April 10, 2008. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/15984>

¹¹ United States Department of State, “2008 Country Reports on Terrorism,” April 30, 2009. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122449.htm>

¹² Fletcher, *Op.Cit.*

¹³ “PFLP, DFLP, PFLP-GC, Palestinian Leftists,” Council on Foreign Relations, October 31, 2005. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9128/>

Iran.¹⁴ Support dates back to 1989, when PFLP-GC leader Ahmad Jibril met with Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati; the group was the first Palestinian organization to receive funds from Iran.¹⁵

- **Al-Qaeda:** Responsible for the September 11 attacks and countless other against the United States, Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda formed in 1988 in Afghanistan. Taking an extremely anti-Western stance, its "ultimate goal is the establishment of a pan-Islamic caliphate throughout the world."¹⁶ Iran has attempted to provide al-Qaeda with anti-tank mines and mortars in recent months.¹⁷ Al-Qaeda operatives trained in Iran in the early 1990s and have also been allowed to easily travel through Iran.¹⁸ Al-Qaeda has links to Hezbollah, and Iran has provided a safe-haven and meeting place for terrorists.¹⁹

What state agencies does Iran use to support terrorism?

- **Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)/*Vezarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar (VEVAK)*:** The Ministry of Intelligence and Security has been linked to intelligence collection for terrorist operations of Islamic fundamentalist organizations. The MOIS is supervised by only the Supreme Leader, "is not accountable to either the cabinet or the parliament, has a secret budget, and stands above the law. Over the past two decades, it has grown into a huge machinery of political repression."²⁰ In addition, MOIS has sought to protect its own through cover-ups: "From 1997 to 1998, after a series of gruesome murders of Iranian dissidents by MOIS 'liquidators' became public, the then-deputy Intelligence Minister Saeed Emami was jailed on conspicuous charges, and later 'committed suicide' in prison."²¹
- **Jerusalem Force, Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (*Qods, Pasdaran- e Enghelab-e Islami*):** The Qods Force conducts extraterritorial paramilitary operations and supports and trains Islamic fundamentalist organizations throughout the Middle East. The United States believes the Qods Force has played a significant role in attacks against US troops in Iraq.²² Reports suggest it "... appears to be as close to America's Shiite and Kurdish allies as to splinter groups accused of killing perhaps 170 of the more than 3,000 American soldiers who've died in Iraq." The US Department of State notes that the Qods Force "provided aid in

¹⁴ United States Department of State, Op.Cit.

¹⁵ Gary C. Gambill. "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC," Middle East Intelligence Bulletin, September 2002. http://www.meib.org/articles/0209_s1.htm

¹⁶ United States Department of State, Op.Cit.

¹⁷ "Iranian weapons getting through to Taliban," *Telegraph UK*, June 8, 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/5477283/Iranian-weapons-getting-through-to-Taliban.html>

¹⁸ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, available online at <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/index.htm> as quoted in Matthew Levitt Op.Cit.

¹⁹ Matthew Levitt, Op.Cit.

²⁰ "Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security," Iran Focus. May 6, 2005. <http://www.iranfocus.com/en/other/iran-s-ministry-of-intelligence-and-security-02020.html>

²¹ "Operations: Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)," GlobalSecurity.org.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/vevak-ops.htm>

²² "Iran's Revolutionary Guards: Qods Force," *Telegraph UK*, October 4, 2007.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1565107/Irans-Revolutionary-Guards-Quds-force.html>

the form of weapons, training, and funding to HAMAS and other Palestinian terrorist groups, Lebanese Hizballah, Iraq-based militants, and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.” The Qods Force also provides Iraqi militants with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) used to pierce armored vehicles.²³

- **Mobilisation Resistance Force (*Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij*):** The Basij is a people’s militia formed in 1980 with more than 11 million volunteers; approximately 90,000 of them are active-duty and full-time. Basij volunteers enforce the women’s dress code through imprisonment and seize material deemed inappropriate (like satellite dish antennae).²⁴ The Basij has been featured in the press lately because of its brutal repression of Iranian dissidents in the aftermath of the disputed Presidential elections on June 12, 2009. The Basij is reportedly responsible for the death Neda Agha-Soltan on June 20, 2009. Neda’s death was captured on film and uploaded online shortly after. She has become a symbol of freedom for Iranian people in their struggle against the repressive Islamic regime.

What major acts of terror have been linked to Iran?

- ❖ **November 4, 1979:** Iranian students influenced by the Islamic Revolution seize the US embassy in Iran and take 65 Americans hostage under the auspices of Ayatollah Khomeini. The hostage crisis lasts until January 20, 1981; several hostages are released over the 444 day period.
- ❖ **April 1980:** Iranian supporters fail at an attempt to assassinate senior Iraq officials (including then-Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz), further influencing Saddam Hussein’s decision to invade Iran late in 1980.
- ❖ **Early 1980s:** Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, Iran’s ambassador to Syria in the early 1980s, helps create Hezbollah. Shortly after, the group is linked to the bombings of US Marines barracks and the US embassy in Lebanon in 1983.
- ❖ **1989:** Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* provokes Ayatollah Khomeini’s *fatwa* against Rushdie and his supporters. The *fatwa* “...signal[s] the beginning of an assassination campaign against individuals associated with Rushdie’s book as well as other ‘enemies of the revolution.’” Kurdish leader Abdol Rahman Qasemlu is assassinated in Vienna in 1989.
- ❖ **1991:** former Iranian Prime Minister and opposition leader Shapour Bakhtiar is assassinated in Paris.²⁵ From October 14-22, Iran hosted terror conferences to support Palestinian terrorism; at the conference, a *fatwa* was issued that “decreed any discontinuation of jihad for the liberation of Palestine was forbidden and unlawful.”²⁶

²³ United States Department of State, Op.Cit.

²⁴ “Mobilisation Resistance Force,” GlobalSecurity.org. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/basij.htm>

²⁵ Above dates from Sick, Op.Cit.

²⁶ Meir Hatina, “Islam and Salvation in Palestine,” The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv: 2001 as quoted in Levitt, Op.Cit.

- ❖ **1992:** Four Iranian Kurds and several leaders of the Mujahideen-e Khalq opposition movement are assassinated in Berlin. German courts subsequently investigated the murders and linked the Iranian government and Minister of Intelligence Ali Fallahian to them.
- ❖ **March 1992:** Hezbollah bombs the Israeli embassy in Argentina with Iranian assistance.
- ❖ **July 1994:** Hezbollah bombs a Jewish community center in Argentina with Iranian assistance.
- ❖ **June 1996:** Saudi Hezbollah bombs the US military barracks at Al-Khobar, killing 19 US soldiers and wounding 372..
- ❖ **January 2002:** Israel stops the *Karine-A*, a ship secretly purchased by the Palestinian Authority. The ship was reportedly transporting approximately 50 tons of weapons and explosives from Iran.²⁷
- ❖ **2003-Present:** US authorities link Iran to al-Qaeda and Iraqi militants via monetary and weapons support.
- ❖ **June 2009:** Iran's Basij cracks down on the protests of Iranians after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is re-elected. Reports suggest over 100 deaths, though exact numbers are unknown.²⁸

How does this relate to Iran's nuclear program?

Since 1979, the Iranian regime has provided significant material, logistic and monetary support to a number of terrorist and proxy organizations. The chance of nuclear technology, material, or most disturbingly - a nuclear weapon - falling into the hands of one of these Iranian terrorist proxies would greatly increase if Iran were to acquire a nuclear weapon. Terrorist organizations are not restrained in their use of a nuclear weapon by traditional methods of deterrence. Unless the responsible organization took credit for the attack it would be extremely difficult - if not impossible - to determine the source of the attack, retaliate and deter additional attacks in the future.

²⁷ Sick, *Op.Cit.*

²⁸ "Iran's post-election death-toll still unknown," Associated Press, July 13, 2009.
http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31909617/ns/world_news-mideastn_africa/