

# IRAN'S ANTI-ISRAEL IDEOLOGY: QUDS DAY

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## Iran's Anti-Israel Ideology: Quds Day

Quds Day (“Jerusalem Day”), held on the last Friday of Ramadan, is an annual day of protest organized by the Iranian government against Israel. While nominally about Jerusalem, the Quds Day rally serves as a forum for regime figures to call for hostilities against Israel and the liberation of Palestine, envisaging the inevitable elimination of the “Zionist regime.” “Death to Israel” is a common chant at the rallies, often accompanied by “Death to America. The rhetoric often slides into overt anti-Semitism, including characterizations of Zionism as a cosmic evil and statements denying the Holocaust.

### Background

On August 7, 1979, shortly after the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed Quds Day as an annual day of solidarity against the “usurper Israel.” **He declared:**

“I invite Muslims all over the globe to consecrate the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan as Al-Quds Day and to proclaim the international solidarity of Muslims in support of the legitimate rights of the Muslim people of Palestine. For many years, I have been notifying the Muslims of the danger posed by the usurper Israel which today has intensified its savage attacks against the Palestinian brothers and sisters, and which, in the south of Lebanon in particular, is continually bombing Palestinian homes in the hope of crushing the Palestinian struggle. I ask all the Muslims of the world and the Muslim governments to join together to sever the hand of the usurper and its supporters. I call on the Muslims of the world to select as Al-Quds Day the last Friday in the holy month of Ramadan- which is itself a determining period and can also be the determiner of the Palestinian people’s fate- and through a ceremony demonstrating the solidarity of Muslims world-wide, announce their support for the legitimate rights of the Muslim people. I ask God Almighty for the victory of the Muslims over the infidels.”

Quds Day fits into Khomeini’s revolutionary paradigm as a show of resistance in support of “oppressed peoples” against “arrogant, oppressive powers,” and Khomeini went so far as to issue a **fatwa** declaring the elimination of the “Zionist entity” as a religious duty incumbent on Muslims. Iranian politicians **abidingly attend** Quds Day rallies and deliver anti-Israel diatribes to showcase their steadfast commitment to the regime’s opposition to Israel.

### Quds Day: 2019 – Present

#### 2019

Tehran’s May 2019 Quds Day festivities were centered around Iran’s rejection of the Trump administration’s forthcoming Israeli-Palestinian peace plan, branded as “the deal of the century.” The procession featured numerous examples of **incitement**, including demonstrators burning American and Israeli flags and effigies of President Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In remarks to reporters, President Rouhani **declared**, “Palestinians will definitely emerge victorious in confrontation with the Zionist aggressors. ... The issue of Deal of the

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Century will undoubtedly turn into the bankruptcy of the century and will certainly not yield results."

Following the rally, the participants issued a communique in which they vowed to reject negotiations and back armed "resistance" as the only viable path to advance the Palestinian national movement. The statement **proclaimed**, "Liberation of the al-Quds and all other Palestinian territories from the Zionist (Israel) occupation is the main goal of the Islamic world. The only way to settle the issue of Palestine is to press ahead with resistance, to allow for the return of all displaced Palestinians from around the world to their motherland, and to hold a free referendum to decide the fate of their country."

## 2020



*Quds Day 2020 Poster*

Quds Day in 2020 took place on Friday, May 22. Iran, which has been especially hard hit by the coronavirus, weighed **canceling** the 2020 demonstrations or moving them online. Ultimately, Iran decided to put on a modified Quds Day, which underscored that even a pandemic would not deter the Iranian regime from holding its annual display of demonization of Israel.

Ahead of the 2020 Quds Day, the Office of Iran's Supreme Leader also released an anti-Semitic poster calling for "the final solution: resistance until referendum," evoking Nazi-era rhetoric. The poster depicted Jerusalem following a Muslim reconquest with a poster of slain former IRGC-Quds Force

commander Qassem Soleimani prominently displayed on the city's walls.

## 2021

Although Quds Day events in Iran were canceled in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader **Ali Khamenei** did not miss the occasion to disseminate propaganda and demonstrate his commitment to anti-Israel causes. His office frequently takes to the X platform, formerly Twitter, to encourage Palestinian violence against Israel. His tweets were so horrific that the Anti-Defamation League **called on Twitter** to close his account for violating **Twitter rules** that state users will be suspended if they "glorify, celebrate, praise or condone violent crimes." The civil rights organization asserted that Khamenei's tweets, which have a global reach, constitute blatant anti-Semitism.

On the night before Quds Day, May 6, 2021, in a ceremony in Esfahan, Iran, IRGC Commander-in-Chief **Hossein Salami** touted Iran's missile program and Iran's readiness to act militarily against Israel. "Israel could be blown up in a single operation," **he said**. Furthermore, Salami **mentioned** that attacks against Israeli interests, like those that occurred in April and May of 2021, could happen again. Some of those attacks, such as the **April 13th attack** on an Israeli commercial vessel, have Iran's fingerprints all over them.

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On Quds Day in 2021, Khamenei **emphasized in a speech** that “some weak Arab governments” had undermined “Muslim unity” in normalizing ties with Israel within the Abraham Accords. He **referred to the Abraham Accords** as a “stab in the back to Palestine.” He also took the occasion to reiterate his call for a referendum on the “political system of Palestine.” The supreme leader **tweeted** that only “original residents” should be allowed to participate in the referendum and decide on the fate of “foreign settlers.” This is just one of many examples of Iran **fueling anti-Israel sentiment** throughout the Muslim world. Quds Day provides the opportunity for the Iranian regime to bolster its legitimacy among anti-Israel Muslim populations.

Amplifying anti-Israel propaganda, hackers have in the past **launched cyberattacks** against websites in Israel. In 2020, websites displayed a simulation of a bombing of Israeli cities and conveyed messages calling for the destruction of the Jewish state. The Israeli National Cyber Directorate issued warnings against coordinated cyberattacks from hackers around the world in 2021 and noted that Iran was preparing for more attacks in 2022.

Quds Day in 2021 witnessed the escalation of hostilities between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. Tensions were already running high because the Israeli Supreme Court was deciding on a case to determine whether four Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah could be evicted from their homes. A hearing on the case was **scheduled for May 10<sup>th</sup>**, the day that Israelis celebrate their capture of East Jerusalem in the 1967 war.

These tensions were exacerbated when Khamenei **expressed his support** for Palestinian militant groups that are intent on reclaiming East Jerusalem, including its Muslim, Christian, and Jewish holy sites, and establishing it as the capital of a Palestinian state. Then on Quds Day, Palestinian youths brought rocks and fireworks to their gathering at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest place in Islam, with which to attack the Israeli police that were present in the area to keep the peace. In response to this threat, the Israeli police **raided the mosque** and fired rubber bullets and stun-grenades.

The religious tensions in 2021 finally boiled over into **a violent conflict** between Israel and Gaza militant groups **Hamas** and **Palestinian Islamic Jihad** (PIJ), with the former carrying out airstrikes against military targets in the Gaza Strip in response to the latter’s decision to launch rockets into Israeli population centers. Iran, who **supplies** the terrorist organizations with weapons, instigated further escalation and threw its diplomatic weight behind the groups.

## 2022

A number of terrorist attacks were committed in Israel throughout the month of Ramadan in 2022, notwithstanding Israel’s efforts to ease tensions. Israeli police reduced barriers at the Damascus Gate, but violence between security forces and protesters still broke out at the gate on several occasions. Furthermore, the Supreme Court **suspended a ruling** on the evictions, allowing the Palestinians to stay in their homes until a dispute over property ownership is resolved; permit requirements for travel into Israel from Palestine **have been eased**; and Israeli security forces recently **lifted the closure** of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Nevertheless, **tensions were running high** given the wave of Arab terror attacks against Israelis throughout March and early April 2022, which have claimed the lives of 14 people in

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Israel. The Israeli army **conducted a raid** in the West Bank on suspects involved in a terror attack in Bnei Brak and killed Palestinian militants that opened fire on them. On **Friday, April 15th, 2022**, after morning prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Palestinians began throwing stones and fireworks at Israeli forces, who responded with stun grenades and tear gas.

Militants in Gaza fired rockets into Israel on **April 18<sup>th</sup>**, **April 20<sup>th</sup>**, and **April 22<sup>nd</sup>**. No group claimed responsibility for the rocket attacks, but **several media outlets** blamed the opening salvo on PIJ. Hamas' involvement was not clear, but earlier in the month, the terrorist group **reportedly** prevented PIJ from firing rockets at Israel, knowing that it would be drawn into an escalation. In charge of the government in the Gaza Strip, Hamas has more to lose than PIJ, as any extended hostilities could result in political backlash in Gaza. Hamas **indicated** that it was more averse to an escalation, particularly after the 11-day conflict in May 2021.

On the day of the first attacks in April 2022, Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign policy advisor of Iran's supreme leader, **reportedly** spoke via phone with Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh and Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement Ziyad al-Nakhalah. Separately, Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, engaged in phone calls with the leadership of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Israeli officials believe that a faction of Palestinian militants based in southern Lebanon were behind a rocket attack on **April 25<sup>th</sup>** on northern Israel. On Thursday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, the Commander-in-Chief of Iran's IRGC, Hossein Salami, **addressed** Gaza via live video link from Tehran, which Axis of Resistance media hailed as the first time the IRGC commander-in-chief had done so.



Frontpage of the Kayhan Newspaper April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Then ahead of Quds Day 2022, on Holocaust Remembrance Day, a state-controlled Iranian newspaper **ran an article** titled “Maybe Without War” by Mohammad Hadi Sahraei, head of the Kermanshah Basij Media Organization. In this vile article, which must have had the approval of the *Kayhan* newspaper's editor, Hossein Shariatmadari, an appointee of the Supreme Leader of Iran, Sahraei declared that “with expelling these [Jewish] people from Germany... Hitler showed he is smarter than all the current leaders of Europe and he is braver in expressing himself.” The article also promotes anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and Holocaust denial.

Finally, this hate-filled piece ends with threats against Israel and musings on the day that Iran will take control of Jerusalem “without war.” This line is meant to be a commentary on World War II, with parallels drawn between the Holocaust and the Iranian leadership's fantasy of expelling the Jews from Israel.

2023

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*Flags of the U.S., Israel, and the U.K. Set on Fire, with Hezbollah's Flag in the Background*

Several high-profile regime officials were spotted at Quds Day parades around the country on April 14, 2023. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi attended a rally in Tehran, where he **repeated** the common regime notion that “the collapse of the Zionist regime is very close” and that “the normalization of relations with regional states [such as the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain] has not brought and will not bring security for the Zionist regime,” as onlookers chanted “Death to America” and “Death to Israel.” Other regime officials participating included one of the supreme leader’s sons, members of his cabinet, and Iran’s chief justice.

## Quds Day Around the World

While ostensibly Quds Day’s primary focus is on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran sees this localized struggle as part of a broader global initiative. By hosting Quds Day celebrations around the world, Iran seeks to frame the Palestinian struggle as a pan-Islamic cause, and to claim the leadership mantle as the preeminent defender of the Palestinians.

Iranian-affiliated agents and entities have helped grow Quds Day internationally, **organizing and financing** events in over 80 countries annually, including western cities such as **New York, London, Berlin, and Toronto**. In addition to shows of support for the Palestinians and denunciations of Israel, displays of support for Iran and Hezbollah – including flags, and posters depicting Ayatollah Khomeini, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah – are a staple at Quds Day events worldwide.

Quds Day rallies in the U.S. in 2023 **were** rife with antisemitism and anti-Americanism, with attendees calling for the dissolution of the state of Israel and venerating terrorist leaders, such as Imad Mughniyeh, the former senior Hezbollah operative who was responsible for several devastating attacks against the U.S. in the eighties. He was **held responsible** for the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in 1983; the Marine barracks in Beirut later that year, which killed 241 U.S. personnel; Israel’s Embassy in Argentina in which 29 people were killed; and a Jewish center in Buenos Aires two years later that killed 95. Mughniyeh was assassinated by Israel in 2008 in Damascus, Syria. Yet, those who attend these pro-Iran, pro-Palestinian rallies portray Mughniyeh as a heroic “martyr.” Amid the war in Gaza, the 2024 Quds Day will serve as a platform for the regime to stoke anger and provoke violent acts and chaos.

## Anti-Israel Extremism: Regime Quotables

As noted above, Quds Day occurs every year. However, it is primed by the regime's sustained extremist rhetoric and propaganda. To contextualize Quds Day and better understand how the regime reinforces its anti-Israel ideology, it is necessary to briefly overview this content. In the aftermath of Hamas' October 7 terrorist attack, the regime has amplified and escalated its anti-Israel public statements.



### **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 2024**

"The Palestinian resistance continues to stand strong, and with God's assistance, it will rub the Zionists' nose in the dirt... The Muslim world is duty-bound to help Palestine. Assisting the enemy of Palestinians is definitely haram [forbidden] and a true crime," Khamenei said in a public address in Iran.



### **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 2024**

The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, reiterated his demand that countries "cut off political, propaganda, and arms aid and [do] not send consumer goods to the Zionist regime." This statement echoed one he made in November in which he urged countries to cease oil, food, and goods exports to Israel.



### **President Ebrahim Raisi, 2024**

On the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, at a ceremony at Tehran's Azadi square, Raisi said that "We believe that one of the important steps that should be taken is the expulsion of the Zionist regime from the United Nations." The audience frequently chanted "Down with the U.S.," "Down with Israel," and "Down with the U.K."



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## **IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Qaani, 2023**

Esmail Qaani said the Axis of Resistance supported the Tehran-backed Hamas militant group in its war with Israel in Gaza. "Your brothers in the Axis of Resistance stand united with you ... the resistance will not allow the enemy to achieve its dirty goals in Gaza and Palestine," Qaani said.



## **President Ebrahim Raisi, 2023**

"Gaza is not an arena for words. It should be for action," Raisi said at Tehran airport. "Today, the unity of the Islamic countries is very important," he added.



## **IRGC Commander-In-Chief Hossein Salami, 2023**

"The world's hatred of Zionists is not confined to Muslims anymore," Iranian state-run media quoted Salami as saying. "People have rallied against Zionists even next to the White House and in the streets of London and Europe."



## **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 2023**

"The Zionist entity is lying to you," Khamenei wrote on the social media platform X. "The Zionist entity is helpless and confused right now, and without American support, will be paralyzed within days."

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## **Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda, 2023**

"The Holy Essence proclaims that divine signs are manifest in the land of Palestine," a senior cleric, Ayatollah Alamolhoda said on October 20, 2023 in an effort to provide religious legitimacy to Hamas and other terrorist groups with intentions to attack Israel. He also said that it was a Quranic command for Muslims to defend Al-Aqsa against "infidels."



## **Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, 2021**

"The heroic resistance of Palestine once again forced the occupying Zionist regime to retreat and take another step towards the lofty ideal of liberating Holy Quds," Ebrahim Raisi said during the height of the 2021 Gaza Strip conflict. "The Palestinian resistance in Gaza and the Palestinian youth have been able to bring great victory to the Muslim and Arab ummah, bring honor to the Muslims and freedom seekers of the world, and compromising governments that have been competing for some time to normalize relations with the Israeli child-killing regime and make them more ashamed."



## **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 2021**

"The endeavors of Palestinians and the pure blood of the Resistance martyrs have managed to hold up this auspicious flag and to increase the internal power of Palestinian jihad by a hundred times... One day, the Palestinian youth used to defend themselves by throwing stones, but today, they respond to enemy attacks with precision missiles."

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## **Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, 2020**

Foreign Minister Zarif used a derogatory Persian slur against Jews, calling them “juhood” during an interview with Iranian media: “I cannot imagine any circumstances under which we would officially recognize Israel...What is our solution? [Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei] has stated the solution. It is not throwing the juhood into the sea, or a military attack...The supreme leader has said what the solution is...Our solution is a popular referendum.” The comment caused great controversy, forcing Zarif to walk back his comments on Twitter.



## **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 2020**

“Why is it a crime to raise doubts about the Holocaust? Why should anyone who writes about such doubts be imprisoned while insulting the Prophet...is allowed?”



## **Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, 2019**

“The message of (rallies) today is that al-Quds is not up for sale.”

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## **President Hassan Rouhani, 2019**

"The plots that the global arrogance and aggressors have hatched against Palestine and al-Quds will get nowhere. We have no doubts that ultimate victory will be for justice and for Palestine."



## **President, Hassan Rouhani, 2018**

"Israel can never feel that it is in a safe place."



## **General Yahya Rahim Safavi, 2018**

"The results of the great rallies on Quds Day are becoming increasingly evident every year...The occupied territories have turned into an unsafe place for the Zionists, and Israel's dream to make those lands a safe haven for Jewish European migrants and other occupiers is just an illusion."



## **Hassan Rouhani, 2017**

"The message of Quds Day is that of hatred towards the occupying and usurping regime (Israel) as well as support for the oppressed nation of Palestine."

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**Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, 2017**

"Israel is the most malignant terrorist in the history."



**Deputy IRGC Commander Brig. Gen. Hossein Salami, 2016**

"In Lebanon alone over 100,000 missiles are ready at all times to fly ... at the heart of the Zionist regime. Tens of thousands of other missiles ... have been planted across the Islamic world and are awaiting orders so that with the push of a button a sinister and dark dot on the political geography of the world (Israel) disappears forever,"



**President Hassan Rouhani, 2014**

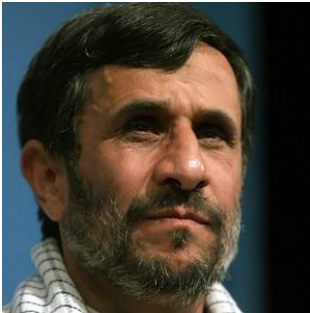
"In previous Quds Day rallies, the cry was for the land of Muslims and dear Quds, which has been occupied by the occupier, be freed and people return to their homeland. But this year, we are witnessing ... genocide in the Palestinian territories."



**President-elect Hassan Rouhani, 2013**

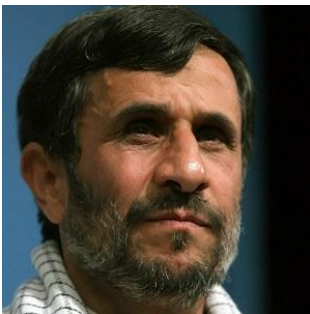
"In our region there's been a wound for years on the body of the Muslim world under the shadow of the occupation of the holy land of Palestine and the beloved al-Qods (Jerusalem)"

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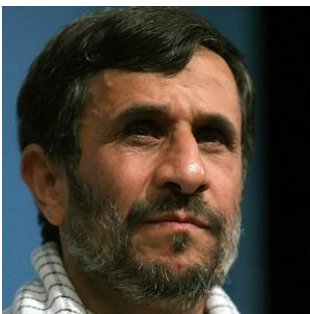
**President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 2012**

"The Zionist regime and the Zionists are a cancerous tumour. The nations of the region will soon finish off the usurper Zionists in the Palestinian land... A new Middle East will definitely be formed. With the grace of God and help of the nations, in the new Middle East there will be no trace of the Americans and Zionists."



**President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 2010**

"If the leaders of the region do not have the guts, then the people of the region are capable of removing the Zionist regime from the world scene."



**President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 2009**

"The pretext (Holocaust) for the creation of the Zionist regime (Israel) is false ... It is a lie based on an unprovable and mythical claim." "Confronting the Zionist regime is a national and religious duty." "This regime (Israel) will not last long. ... This regime has no future. Its life has come to an end."

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**Former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, 1998**

“The Zionist regime is a fake government and homeland which is shaped with millions of homeless Palestinians and hundreds of thousands of Muslim martyrs. I'm sure that in the future we will have Islamic Palestine. I'm sure nothing will remain as the territory of Israel.”



**President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, 1994**

“Can Israel really remain? In my opinion it cannot. That artificial entity cannot survive.”



**Parliament Speaker Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, 1989**

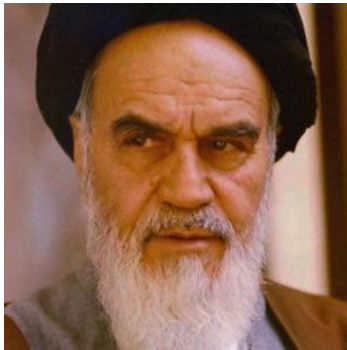
“If in retaliation for every Palestinian martyred in Palestine they will kill and execute, not inside Palestine, five Americans or Britons or Frenchmen, they (Israelis) could not continue these wrongs. It is not hard to kill Americans or Frenchman. It is a bit difficult to kill (Israelis). But there are so many (Americans and Frenchman) elsewhere in the world.”

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**President Ali Khamenei, 1987**

Palestinians "should resist and fight Zionism. This is the message of the whole Iranian people who chant the 'Death to Israel' slogan."



**Ayatollah Khomeini, 1979**

"I call on the Muslims of the world as well as on all Muslim governments to join forces to cut down this usurper (Israel) and its supporters."