



30 Years of Terror Sponsored by Iran

by [Matthew Levitt](#)

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As negotiators try to find a diplomatic solution to the nuclear impasse, the anniversary of the Beirut bombings serves as a timely reminder that tensions with Iran go beyond the nuclear issue.

Thirty years ago today, on Oct. 23, 1983, a delivery van filled with 18,000 pounds of explosives slammed into the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut. Seconds later, another car bomb hit a French military building four miles away. A total of 241 American and 58 French soldiers lost their lives, all members of the Multi-National Forces in Lebanon.

The attack on the Marine barracks was not only the single-largest nonnuclear explosion since World War II, it was also the deadliest terrorist attack against Americans up to that time.

And the legacy of that moment haunts us to this day.

The attacks, perpetrated by Hezbollah under orders from Iran, announced the arrival of the Lebanese Shiite group as a potent, anti-Western terrorist force supported and directed by Tehran. Today, despite warming relations between the United States and Iran, Hezbollah remains a weapon in Iran's arsenal, a means to pursue the agenda of the Islamic Revolution in Syria and in terrorist operations around the world.

Despite the current charm offensive of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani -- and suggestions by some that the Islamic Republic is moderating its stance -- it is highly unlikely that Iran will ever give a thought to reining in Hezbollah.

Founded by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps soon after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Hezbollah has always had an intimate relationship with Iran based on a shared ideological foundation. Today, Hezbollah is no longer just a

proxy of Iran; it is in a "strategic partnership" with Iran, as National Counterterrorism Center director Matthew Olsen put it. Or, in the words of Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, Hezbollah and Iran are in "a partnership arrangement...with the Iranians as the senior partner."

For the past 30 years, this has proven to be a mutually beneficial relationship. From Iran, Hezbollah gets tens of thousands of rockets, hundreds of millions of dollars a year, training and operational logistical support from Iran. From Hezbollah, Iran gets an extended reach -- to the Mediterranean and beyond -- and a means of targeting its enemies from afar with reasonable deniability.

Today, Hezbollah targets Israeli tourists around the world -- in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Thailand, Nigeria -- not out of any Lebanese interest but at Iran's command. The U.S. State Department concluded in its annual Country Reports on terrorism that 2012 represented "a marked resurgence of Iran's state sponsorship of terrorism" in which "Iran and Hezbollah's terrorist activity has reached a tempo unseen since the 1990s."

Could the recent election of Rouhani as president mark the beginning of the end for this 30-year, violent partnership between Tehran and Hezbollah?

Not likely.

Iran's last "moderate" president, Muhammad Khatami, elected in 1997, was considered by the CIA to be a Hezbollah supporter. And, like every other Iranian president before and since, he did not have the power to overrule the decisions of hard-line Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who calls the shots on Hezbollah and all other significant Iranian decisions.

Meanwhile, as Hezbollah is conducting operations around the world at Iran's behest, Iran's own operatives are engaged in their own covert operations as well. Just last month, an alleged Iranian Qods Force operative was arrested in Tel Aviv with pictures of the U.S. embassy in his possession.

As negotiators try to find a diplomatic solution to the standoff over Iran's nuclear program, the anniversary of the Beirut bombings serves as a timely reminder that tensions with Iran ought not be limited to Tehran's pursuit of a nuclear weapon. At the very same time, through its terrorist proxy, this government is eagerly sponsoring the killing of innocents around the world.

Matthew Levitt directs The Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence and is author of [Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God](#). ❖

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