

No Change:

Iran Remains Committed to Israel's Destruction

Jul 1, 2002



Articles & Testimony

On June 24, President George W. Bush outlined U.S. preconditions for the establishment of a Palestinian state. Chief among these are the cessation of Palestinian terror, as well as democratic reform in the Palestinian Authority. Bush also recognized that terror does not occur in a vacuum. He demanded that "Every nation actually committed to peace must block the shipment of Iranian supplies" to Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Countering Iranian terror sponsorship will be significant challenge to any attempts to peacefully settle the Israeli-Arab conflict. In the past two years, Iran has sharply escalated her multifaceted support for terrorism and her violent opposition to the Middle East peace process.

IRAN'S TERROR PATRONAGE

On June 2-3, the Iranian government for the second time sponsored a "Support for the Palestinian Intifada" conference bringing together members of Hamas, Lebanese Hezbollah, PIJ, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). The conference came one month after the release of the State Department's 2001 Patterns of Global Terrorism report again labeled Iran "the most active supporter of state terrorism." While the European Union still does not consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization, the group has a lengthy history of targeting Americans and noncombatants abroad. The October 13, 2001, Saudi daily Ukaz reported that Imad Mughniyeh, chief of Hezbollah special operations, has been living in Qom "for some time." Mughniyeh is believed to have been behind the 1985 hijacking of an American airliner during which Hezbollah murdered Robert Stetham, a U.S. Navy diver and a passenger on the plane. (On April 19, a U.S. district court ruled that Iran must pay \$321.4 million in damages to Stetham's family of Stetham.) Mughniyeh is also a chief suspect in the 1983 car-bomb attack on the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut that killed 241, and the 1994 attack on a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed 92 civilians.

In recent months, Iran has qualitatively and quantitatively bolstered support for Hezbollah and Palestinian terror. Following last month's closure of Turkish airspace to Iran Air's twice-weekly supply flights to Damascus, Iran, Iraq negotiated an agreement to allow Iranian cargo flights to transit Iraqi airspace (between the no-fly zones). Weapons delivered are increasingly sophisticated. Hezbollah has in recent months deployed thousands of new Katyusha rockets and 45-kilometer range Fajr-5 surface-to-surface missiles capable of striking the outskirts of Haifa.

Citing German intelligence reports, the February 28 Berlin daily Die Welt reported that Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) brigadier general Ali Reza Tamizr had begun to train Hamas and Yassir Arafat's Fatah movement in the use of SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. U.S. intelligence officials reported in April that Iran's annual budget for Hezbollah now exceeds \$100 million.

Iran also seeks to directly arm Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. In the months prior to last January's seizure of 50 tons of Iranian weaponry on the Gaza-bound Karine-A, Israeli forces seized two boats the Calypso and the Santorini involved in smuggling Iranian arms from Lebanon to Gaza. On April 10, immediately following a suicide

bus bombing that killed eight civilians near Haifa, four Iranian clerics and IRGC commander Yahya Rahim Safavi endorsed further suicide bombings. On June 8, three days after an Islamic Jihad-claimed bombing killed 17 on a public bus near Megiddo, the Iranian government announced a 70-percent increase in allocation for the group.

More dangerous to regional stability are Iranian attempts to conduct terror operations through Jordan. According to al-Sharq al-Awsat, in February, Jordan's King Abdullah presented the White House with evidence that Iran had sponsored at least 17 attempts to launch rockets and mortars from Jordan into Israel.

BACKING RHETORIC WITH ACTION

While the Iranian political spectrum is polarized between reformers and hardliners, there is broad political consensus to continue anti-Israeli terrorism and obstruct any peace process. An April 16, 2002, editorial in the official hard-line daily Jomhuri Islami urged all-out war with Israel and condemned as treasonous Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah's peace plan (such public Iranian rhetoric is remarkably similar to that used against Sadat prior to his assassination). The last 18 months have witnessed a sharp escalation in anti-Israel rhetoric largely matched by increasing Iranian material support for terror groups. In a December 15, 2000 sermon, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei declared, "The cancerous tumor called Israel must be uprooted from the region." One month later, he elaborated, "The perpetual aim of Iran is the obliteration of Israel." In a June 5, 2002, interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency, PFLP leader Ahmad Jibril thanked Khamenei for his constant support. Other hardliners urging support for tactical terror include Islamic Coalition Association Secretary-General of the Habibollah Asgar-Owlati, who last December declared, "Every day, the Zionists hear in their cities -- Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other cities of Palestine -- the explosions of Islamic rage. The day is not far when, whether they want to or not, the Zionists will have to run for their lives!" Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani, Expediency Council chairman Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and secretary general of the Militant Clergy Association, Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani, have also called for Israel's destruction. They are not alone.

REFORMIST TERROR ENDORSEMENT

President Muhammad Khatami, often considered a reformist, is no less vehement in his calls for Israel's destruction. In a televised October 2000 address, Khatami declared, "In the Koran, God commanded to kill the wicked and those who do not see the rights of the oppressed and to murder them. Today we must all hear the sound of the cries of our oppressed brethren in Palestine and mobilize to protect them. If we abide by the Koran, all of us should mobilize to kill." Speaking before an audience of Hamas, PIJ, Lebanese Hezbollah, and PFLP militants at the first "Support for the Palestinian Intifada" Conference in April 2001, Khatami called upon "holy martyrs" to follow the Hezbollah model to "open a clear future of struggle and victory for the Palestinian people." Other reformers agree. In a March 21, 2001, interview with the Lebanese daily al-Safir, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi, often considered a pro-Khatami pragmatist, declared, "The Iranian-Syrian-Lebanese cooperation, which led to the Israel Defense Force withdrawal from south Lebanon, will also lead to the liberation of Palestine." Other reformists who have endorsed suicide attacks include Khatami confidant and reformist ideologue Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur, Majlis Speaker Mahdi Karrubi, and prominent feminist parliamentarian Jamileh Kadivar.

CURTAILING THE IRANIAN CHALLENGE

The Iranian government's across-the-board support for anti-Israel terror is widening the gap between it and the Iranian people. Last month in Tehran, unpaid workers chanted, "Forget about Palestine and think about us." Nevertheless, the Iranian government's willingness to back rhetoric with action augurs a growing challenge to Middle East peace and the U.S. war on terror. So long as the Iranian government funds terror, the Bush administration should seek to obstruct rapprochement and trade with Iran. Tools at the administration's disposal include implementing provisions of the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, preventing Iranian membership in the World

Trade Organization, and lobbying the European Union to make further trade with Iran conditional on a cessation of Iranian terror sponsorship. ❖

National Review Online

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

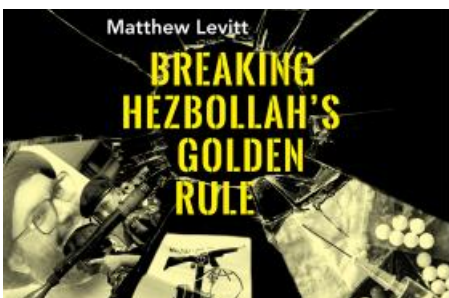
[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule](#)

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-analysis/iran)

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)