



IRANIAN SUPPORT OF TERRORISM

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ABSTRACT

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iran views terrorism as a legitimate means to further its ideological and strategic aims - to "export the Revolution." Iran assists Islamic groups and organizations worldwide, especially in the Middle East - in striving to attack Israel, whose existence is not recognized by Iran; and in attempting to sabotage the political process and destabilize the regimes of the more pragmatic Arab countries. Terrorism is also a means of eliminating the Iranian regime's opposition.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

Khomeini bequeathed to his successors the support for the armed struggle of the “Muslim Militants”. Since his death Iran has expanded and improved the terror option. Although the claim is heard frequently in the West, that only the Iranian radicals support terrorism, the reality has proved otherwise. The radicals in recent years have been ousted from the centers of power, whereas both the Iranian spiritual leader, Khamene’i, and President Rafsanjani were in all probability, directly involved in ordering the execution of terrorist attacks. Moreover, there are several Iranian agencies involved (directly or indirectly) in terrorism abroad: the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Guardians of the Revolution. Various other Iranian organizations, cultural centers and mosques serve as an infrastructure for the recruitment of local militants and as a cover for terrorist activity.

In spite of its undercover nature, Iran’s worldwide involvement in international terrorism cannot always be concealed. Occasionally, events come to light that are proof of Iranian government’s involvement in terrorist activities. For instance, the March 1996 discovery, in Belgium, of a Howitzer canon sent by ship from Iran to Germany; or the involvement of the highest Iranian officials in the assassination of Kurdish leaders in Germany, the so-called “Mikanos Affair.”

The Islamic regime’s determination to continue supporting terrorism, frowned upon by the international community, has forced the Iranian Foreign Ministry to strive, under extreme international pressure, to offset the damage caused by this policy to Tehran’s economic and political ties. Iran does not deny its adherence to Khomeini’s “Islamic Revolutionary Ideology”, which supports all radical Islamic movements worldwide, but stresses that Iranian assistance is merely cultural, moral and humanitarian in nature. Tehran strongly denies any military and/or financial assistance to these movements. It must be emphasized that such denial is deeply imbedded in the Shi’ite tradition, in the principle of the “taqyy’a” (concealing the faith) which was used as a means of protection against the persecutors of the Shi’ite religion.

Iranian Terror Against Israel

Since the “Madrid Conference” in October 1991, Iran has been active in attempting to disrupt the peace process in the Middle East, on the grounds that it threatens to increase Iran’s political isolation in the region, and to limit its influence and harm its interests in Lebanon. This opposition led Iran to strengthen its ties with those Palestinian organizations that oppose the peace process, such as “The Palestinian Islamic Jihad” (PIJ), Hamas and the various “Fronts”. Iran hoped that terrorist attacks carried out by the Palestinian organizations, together with those perpetrated by “Hizballah”, would hamper the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and undermine Yasser Arafat’s position. This goal concurs with the basic Iranian hostility towards Israel that originates from the regime’s Islamic religious ideology. Iran refuses to recognize Israel’s existence, and refers to Israel as “the occupation regime of al Quds”, and constantly calls for the destruction of Israel.

Iran does not conceal its ties with the Palestinian organizations that oppose the political process, Hamas, the PIJ and Ahmad Jibril's PFLP-GC. Furthermore, these organizations make public their connections and cooperation with Iran. Most of the Palestinian organizations that oppose the peace process participated in the "Conferences for the Support of the Uprising" organized by Tehran (4-6 December 1990; 19-22 October 1991).

During these highly publicized conferences, the leaders of the Palestinian organizations met with the top political echelons in Iran. A special committee headed by the Iranian Vice President in charge of Parliamentary and Legal Affairs, Attalla Maharjani was formed as a result of Tehran's decision to provide the "Palestinian uprising" with financial, military, political and humanitarian. An Iranian "Fund for the Fallen Soldiers" give financial and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, in support of the "Jihad". Within the framework of Iran's efforts to instill its hostility towards Israel into the rest of the Muslim world, Khomeini declared the last Friday of the month of Ramadan as "al Quds Day", to mark the Muslims' aspirations to liberate Jerusalem.

In February 1996 at a meeting in Damascus with the leaders of the ten Palestinian opposition organizations, Iran's Vice President, Habibi stressed the need to coordinate the struggle against Israel. Iran also justified the terrorist suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Ashkelon (25 February 1996) and described them as the answer to Israel's "inhumane" policy towards the Palestinians.

Iranian Assistance To Palestinian Terror Organizations

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad

The Palestinian organization most loyal to the Iranian revolutionary ideology is the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In spite of it being a Sunni organization, the Iranian revolution sees in it an example to be followed. After the deportation of its leader, Fathi Shkaki, from the Gaza Strip, the ties between Iran and the organization have been strengthened, particularly in the field of Iranian military assistance. Instructors of the Guardians of the Revolution give regular military instruction courses to the organization's activists from the Territories and abroad, as well as in the Hizballah camps in Lebanon and Iran. Iran also provides the organization's activists with logistic support, including Iranian identification papers.

As an example, a militant by the name of Khaled Zakkharana of Jenin, was given extensive military training in January 1995 at the Hizballah camp in the Baka'a Valley, as well as at the Guardians of the Revolution's camp in Ba'albek, Lebanon. There he underwent advanced

training in light weapons, the handling of mines and Lau anti-tank rockets. He was then infiltrated into the Territories to establish an extensive network in support of suicide bombings.

Iran also aided The PIJ in laying the groundwork for terrorist attacks abroad. At the beginning of 1996, the organization's representative in Iran visited Turkey to prepare for the training in Iran of several of the organization's activists. These activists were due to infiltrate back into Israel in order to carry out terrorist attacks. The Turkish security authorities arrested some of the PIJ militants and one of them, Khalil Itta, was arrested in Israel. Itta was one of nine PIJ militants who underwent training in Iran in the period of July - September 1995.

The Hamas

Since 1992, Iran has drawn closer to Hamas, which it perceives as the leading Islamic movement in the Territories. At the foundation of their relationship lies their common interest in the disruption of the political process, and their efforts to undermine the PLO. These common goals transcend the ideological variance between them due to religious differences between the Sunni Hamas and the Shi'ite Iran. These ties are manifest themselves in frequent high-level meetings between the two sides, and the relative importance of the Hamas rein Tehran. For example, a Hamas delegation headed by two top activists, Imad Alami (Chairman of the Internal Committee) and Mustapha Qanua (the representative in Syria) visited Iran in October 1995 and met with high ranking Iranian officials.

In addition to political ties, Iran also provides Hamas with military assistance. The movement's activists train on a regular basis at the camps of Hizballah and the Guardians of the Revolution in Lebanon, as well as in Iran. This includes training for suicide attacks. Several Iranian-trained militants succeeded in infiltrating back into the Territories under Palestinian Authority control. Israel has arrested Hamas activists who admitted that they were trained by Iranian instructors in the Beka'a Valley, in Lebanon, and in Iran. The training included the use of light weapons, photography and sabotage.

Iran also gives Hamas financial assistance. In 1992, several million dollars were transferred to Hamas' account, including money originating from the Iranian "Fund for the Fallen", which grants assistance to victims of the "Palestinian Uprising."

Assistance to Hizballah

The Hizballah organization is the spearhead for Iran in its use of terrorism in general, and in its fight against Israel in particular. The organization began its large-scale terror acts in 1982, when its militants blew up the American Embassy in Beirut, killing 61 people and wounding more than

120. Later, it was behind a series of terror attacks against Western targets, among them: the suicide bombing of the Marines Headquarters in Beirut (23 October 1983) and the French Military Headquarters in Beirut, in which 241 Americans and 56 French soldiers were killed. In the 1980s, Hizballah activists were involved in the kidnapping of Western citizens in Lebanon whom they held as hostages. In some cases, this was done on Iranian orders, for the purpose of obtaining economic or political concessions from Western governments, such as the release of Iranian or Lebanese terrorists imprisoned in Western Europe.

Financial Assistance

Iran provides financial assistance on a large scale to Hizballah, reaching, according to some estimates, millions of dollars a year. They also give tactical assistance in terror attacks against Israel, through the Guardians of the Revolution units posted in the Baka'a Valley. The Hizballah General Secretary, Hassan Nasrallah, made public Iranian support in an interview given to al-Wast (11 March 1996), where he stated that his organization receives financial and political assistance to continue, in his words, "the legitimate struggle against Israel."

Weapons and Ammunition

Iran has been Hizballah's main weapons supplier since its establishment. Iranian assistance includes a wide range of weapons and ammunition, such as mortars, Sagger anti-tank rockets, mines, explosives and small arms. As far as is known, the largest arms consignment sent by Iran to Lebanon was in February/March 1992 in the wake of the incidents between Israel and the Hizballah. Since then, there have been no significant arms consignments dispatched by air, probably due to Syrian objection. However, six trucks carrying arms from Iran to Lebanon, were apprehended in Turkey in mid- January 1996. Thus it can be assumed that Iran is now making extensive use of the land route to transfer arms to Hizballah.

Training

Iranian assistance to Hizballah in this field is mostly advice and supervision of the Hizballah's training program, since the basic instruction is carried out by the organization's militants themselves. The Guardians of the Revolution (more explicitly the training arm of the al-Quds Forces) provides higher level training in Iran mainly at the al-Quds Force training base "Imam Ali" in northern Tehran). These include courses for officers, company commanders, commandos, and courses in communications and powered-glidors.

Elimination Of Opposition Activists

Since the Islamic regime came into power in 1979, it has consistently acted to eliminate Iranian opposition activists outside the country and has invested considerable intelligence efforts in surveillance and tracking-down of anyone conceived as a threat to the regime. Examples of this activity became glaringly obvious in the wake of the following trials in which Iran was implicated:

*The liquidation of Iran's former Prime Minister, Shahpur Bakhtiar, an opposition activist (6 Aug. 91) in France. The investigation of this incident led to the arrest of three Iranians (including a diplomat), who probably belonged to the Iranian Intelligence Department. The trial exposed the involvement of various Iranian bodies (the Ministry of Communication, Diplomatic representatives, commercial companies, "Iran Air") - all of which assisted in the liquidation. One of the accused was sentenced to life imprisonment, another was given a 10-year prison sentence, and the diplomat was acquitted owing to lack of evidence and returned to Iran.

*The Liquidation of high ranking activists belonging to Iran's Democratic Kurdish Party (17 Sept. 92) at the Mikonos restaurant in Berlin. This operation was carried out by a squad composed of Hizballah and Iranian intelligence operatives, headed by a member of the Islamic Students Association in Germany Khat'm Dara'abi, who apparently was employed by the Iranian Intelligence Department as the liaison between the Iranian Consulate in Berlin and the hit team. Dara'abi and four other Shi'ite activists were arrested by the German police. German security officials stressed the involvement of Iranian Intelligence and the Guards of the Islamic Revolution in the affair.

The latter affair has resurfaced recently due to the German Federal Prosecution's decision to issue a warrant for the arrest of the Minister of Iranian Intelligence, Falahian, as the official who ordered the liquidation of the opposition members. It would appear that the grounds for this far-reaching decision (which has significant implications for the relations between the two countries) was the testimony given at the trial, which revealed the depth of Falahian's involvement.

Since Rasfanjani rise to power in 1989, scores of Iranian opposition members have been liquidated worldwide, among them:

*Abed al-Rahman Kadmallo, General Secretary of the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (13 July 89)

*Khat'm Rajui Hamjahdin Hilek (in Switzerland, 24 April 90)

*Mahmad Hassin Nakadi, the Italian representative of the National Opposition Council - the umbrella organization of the Iranian regime's Opposition (16 March 93)

*Liquidation of Opposition members in 1994 includes the killing in Turkey of a Section Head of Iran's Democratic Kurdish Party (on 4 January) and another assassination in Rumania (15 Nov)

In 1996 the Iran regime continued to act against the Opposition worldwide, particularly against their main centers in Iraq and Turkey. One example is the assassination (on 20 February, 96) in Istanbul of two activists from Mujahedin-e Khalq by Iranian intelligence agents and the assassination of another Mujahedin-e Khalq activist in Baghdad (7 March 96), which the organization claims was carried out by the Iranian intelligence. There has been a rise in the volume of Iranian efforts to increase intelligence capabilities in the Kurdish district in Iraq, in order to direct subversive activity, inter alia, against opposition targets there.

As a rule, Iran, in an effort to improve its relations with the West and to appear in a more positive light, refrains from carrying out terror attacks in Western Europe. However, should an occasion presents itself, Iran does not hesitate to rise to the occasion - mostly through deniable emissaries, to prevent the attacks being traced directly to Iraq. For proof one need look no farther than the explosive device intercepted on an Iranian vessel on its way from Iran to Antwerp port (14 March '96). This explosive charge, addressed to a shop with Iranian intelligence connections in Germany, and ready for activation, was probably intended for a future terror attack against Iranian opposition members or Israeli/Jewish targets in Europe.

The Rushdie Affair

Within the framework of Iranian terror, it is worth mentioning the obsessive and unrelenting pursuit and incitement campaign which Iran is conducting against the writer Salman Rushdie (author of "Satanic Verses"), whom they perceive to be the symbol of the degradation of Islamic values. Notable is Khomeini's ruling (February 89) which permits the shedding of his blood and calls for his liquidation. The Iranians are continuing to persecute Rushdie in spite of the strong criticism voiced by the West against them, which continues to overshadow any improvement in relations between the West and Iran. The Iranians have placed a large reward on Rushdie's head and their intelligence mechanism has spared no efforts in trying to locate him, as well as trying to prevent the distribution of his book by eliminating publishers and translators. On 11 July 93,

Hitushi Igrashi, who translated the book into Japanese, was murdered. And in Norway William Negraad, the local publisher of “Satanic Verses”, was badly injured (11 Oct.93). In spite of Iranian pragmatic officials’ efforts to find a solution to the “Rushdie Affair” by giving him a written commitment that he would not be harmed, the religious establishment insists on adhering to Khomeini's ruling and refuses any compromise.

Terror against Western Targets

During the 1980s, Iranian and pro-Iranian agencies were involved in the planning and execution of attacks against Western targets, particularly in Lebanon. In the context of opposition to Western Influence, the Islamic Jihad and Hizballah, under instructions from Iran, carried out a series of attacks against Western representatives. Among them:

*The bombing of the French army barracks in Beirut (15 April 83).

*The bombing of the Marines headquarters in Beirut (26 Oct. 83).

*The car bomb that exploded near the American embassy in Beirut (20 Sept. 84).

During the latter half of the 1980s, the Iranians directed the handling of the Western hostages, including the negotiations for their release, via special emissaries. These emissaries acted as mediators between the various Lebanese groups holding the hostages (such as Ahmad Ma'aniya) and the Iranian government, which conducted the negotiations. Iranian bartered the release of citizens of Western countries being held in Lebanon in return for the release of Iranian or Lebanese activists arrested for involvement in terrorist activity in Western Europe. Since the release of the last Western hostage (mid 92), Iran and its emissaries have avoided carrying out terror attacks on Western targets. It is also possible that Iran was behind the attempt to disrupt the “Madrid Conference” (Oct. 91) by executing several terror attacks during the Conference against the citizens and interests of the countries taking part in the Conference.

Examples of these activities:

28 *October, 91 An explosive device blew up the car of an American sergeant in Turkey. The Turkish Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack.

29 *October, 91 A rocket was fired at the American Embassy in Beirut and caused slight damage. A front organization calling itself "The Revolutionary Arab Forces" claimed responsibility for the attack in protest against the Peace Process.

30 *October, 91 A rocket was fired at the Spanish Consulate in Zidon. There were no casualties.

17 *March, 92 A car bomb was discovered next to the American Consulate in Istanbul.

Iranian Agencies Involved in Terror

Intelligence Agency

This agency, headed by Hajet al-Aslam Ali Falahian, is the leading body in the “Exportation of the Revolution” policy, the direction of terrorist activity, the and elimination of the opponents of the regime. His deputy, Mustapha Fur Mahmadi is responsible for all the Intelligence Agency activities outside Iran, the assistance to the Palestinian organizations and the Hizballah, and the directing of terrorist activity against Israel and Western targets, as well as widespread subversive activity in Muslim countries. Operating within the framework of the Intelligence Agency is a department that centralizes the terrorist activity against opposition targets. The Intelligence Agency has several branches worldwide. Among the most prominent are: the one in Lebanon, whose main purpose is to disrupt the peace process; the branch in Sudan, which assists in subversive activity in North Africa; and the branch in Germany which centralizes the activity against the opposition organizations.

Guards of the Revolution

A major Iranian issue is the need to obscure Iran’s involvement in terrorism and cover up the activities of the Intelligence Agency and the Guards of the Revolution outside Iran. In many Iranian embassies, the number of staff is much larger than required by the diplomatic needs of the host countries, a situation that occasionally leads to the discovery of illegal activity and the deportation of those involved. In 95-96, Iranian “diplomats” were deported from Germany, Norway and Turkey. Iranian embassies usually serve as a base and hiding place for Iranian and other activists involved in terrorism. In certain instances, the Guards of the Revolution appointed ambassadors highly experienced in subversive activity in Lebanon:

*Kamal Magid (until 94 Ambassador to Sudan)

*Ahmad Destmelshian (Ambassador to Jordan)

*Etzar-Mahmad Fur (head of Bureau for Iranian Interests in Egypt)

*Hassin Nikhnan (Ambassador to Iraq)

"The Department for Islamic and Arab Movements" in the Guards of the Revolution is responsible for developing ties with the various Muslim movements, and providing them with financial and organizational assistance. In turn it is understood that the activists of these movements will assist Iran in various capacities.

"al-Quds" Force

The "al-Quds" is a branch of the Guards of the Revolution skilled in training and instructing Islamic organizations at Lebanese camps (under the Hizballah's control) and camps in Iran. "Al-Quds" members are known to be present in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Sudan and Iraq. One such training camp is the Ahmad Ali camp in Northern Tehran where training is given to Hizballah and Palestinian activists.