

## IRAN AS A STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM



The radical regime in Iran has sponsored terrorism against the United States, Israel and the West for decades. The State Department has repeatedly designated Iran as the world's leading state sponsor of terror. Iran has sponsored airplane hijackings, lethal attacks against U.S. soldiers stationed in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, kidnappings of Americans and Europeans, and a restaurant bombing in Spain.

### **Terrorist Groups Linked to Iran**

U.S. officials say Iran mostly backs Islamist groups, including the Lebanese Shiite militants of Hezbollah (which Iran helped found in the 1980s) and such Palestinian terrorist groups as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. A few months after Hamas won the

Palestinian Authority (PA) elections in early 2006, Iran pledged \$50 million to the near-bankrupt PA. The United States, among other nations, has cut off aid to the PA because of Hamas' terrorist ties.

Iran also interferes in Iraq such as funding, safe transit, and arms to insurgent leaders like Muqtada al-Sadr and his forces. It has also been reported that Iran has assisted both Al-Qaida and the Taliban.

### **Hezbollah and Iran**

Clerics originally sent to Lebanon by Khomeini as well as members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard were responsible for the creation of Hezbollah. Iran, which regards Hezbollah as a means of achieving its own ideological and strategic goals, is a large-scale provider of military, financial and spiritual support to Hezbollah. Iran supplies Hezbollah with a variety of military hardware and support including, anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles, missile launchers and land to land missiles, as well as military training, logistic support, and financial assistance estimated to be \$200 million (U.S.) annually.

For its part, Hezbollah has openly expressed its alliance to Iran. Hezbollah's 1985 platform states, "We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, those of our tutor and jurist who fulfills all the necessary conditions, [Ayatollah] Khomeini." Hezbollah shares a special relationship with Iran, it is the only organization outside Iran that subscribes to that nation's ideology of theocratic leadership. The group receives Iranian funding, and has at times turned to Iran's supreme leader for guidance on major political issues. Iran is suspected of encouraging Hezbollah's July 2006 attack on Israel to deflect international attention from its nuclear weapons program. Iran was also reportedly involved in a Hezbollah-linked January 2002 attempt to smuggle a boatload of arms to the PA.

Hassan Nasrallah is Hezbollah's current senior political leader. Nasrallah was originally a military commander but his military and religious credentials—he studied in centers of Shiite theology in Iran and Iraq—quickly elevated him to leadership within the group. Nasrallah took advantage of rivalries within Hezbollah and the favor of the head of Iran's theocratic government, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, to become the group's secretary general in 1992.

### **Terrorist Activities Linked with Iran**

The U.S. government first listed Iran as a terrorist sponsor in 1984. Among its activities have been the following:

- Observers say Iran had prior knowledge of Hezbollah attacks, such as the 1988 kidnapping and murder of Colonel William Higgins, a U.S. Marine involved in a UN observer mission in Lebanon, and the 1992 and 1994 bombings of Jewish cultural institutions in Argentina.

- Iran still has a price on the head of the Indian-born British novelist Salman Rushdie for what Iranian leaders call blasphemous writings about Islam in his 1989 novel *The Satanic Verses*.
- U.S. officials say Iran supported the group behind the 1996 truck bombing of Khobar Towers, a U.S. military residence in Saudi Arabia, which killed nineteen U.S. servicemen.
- The **AMIA bombing** was an attack on the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA; Argentine Israelite [i.e., Jewish] Mutual Association) building in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994, that killed 85 people and injured hundreds. INTERPOL has issued extradition warrants against six of the suspects seven of which are Iranian and one who is a member of Hezbollah.

### **Iran During Operation Iraqi Freedom**

President Bush announced in 2007 that Iran gave Shiite Iraqi insurgence tactical and material support to kill U.S. forces. Material support includes mortars and parts for sophisticated roadside bombs.

The Quds Force, a special operations wing of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, is accused by U.S. officials of furnishing Shiite militias with explosively formed penetrators (EFPs), or roadside bombs, as well as rocket-propelled grenades and Katyusha rockets. Specifically, the United States alleges that it supports, trains, and finances militias like the Badr Brigade, the armed wing of one of Iraq's most religious Shiite parties whose base is in southern Iraq. Some experts estimate as many as thirty-thousand Iranian operatives may be in Iraq. In October 2007 the U.S. State Department designated the Revolutionary Guard and the Quds Force supporters of terrorism, and imposed sweeping economic sanctions on both.

Iran has sent more than two thousand religious students and scholars to the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. There is also a booming cross-border religious tourism business. Tens of thousands of Iranians and Iraqis cross borders to visit holy sites each year. Many powerful Shiite political parties made Iran their home base during the reign of Saddam Hussein's Sunni Baath Party. One of the most prominent was Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of Iraq's largest Shiite political party and commander of the Badr Brigade, its military wing. After a brief uprising by Iraq's Shiites in the southern port city of Basra in 1991, the group returned to Iran and competed for influence with other exiles. When Saddam was ousted in 2003, Iraqi Shiites returned, followed by Iranian leaders seeking to cement ties with a new era of Iraqi politicians.

Despite its recent history with Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist, Iran has longstanding ethnic, religious, and political ties to Iraq. Iraq's leading religious authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, is a native of Iran. Iran's mullahs do not want to see democratization spread across the region or a U.S.-backed client state to emerge on their western border, experts say. Nor does Tehran seek a failed state. Some have called Iran's policy one of "managed chaos"—enough instability to eject U.S. forces from Iraq but not enough to engulf Iraq's neighbors in a wider sectarian war.



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#12 Millstone Campus Drive, St. Louis, MO 63146-5776 E-mail [jrcstl@jrcstl.org](mailto:jrcstl@jrcstl.org) 314-442-3871 [www.jrcstl.org](http://www.jrcstl.org)  
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