

Iranian Terrorism on the International Stage— Possible Revenge Against Israel

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The delay in Iran's promised military response against Israel, with the exception of Hezbollah's targeted retaliation, raises the possibility that Iran could take revenge on the international stage. Over the past five years, Iran has significantly expanded the number and geographic scope of its international terror attacks, utilizing networks and terror cells that collaborate with criminal elements worldwide. Iran could leverage this established terror infrastructure to exact a price from Israel. The fact that most of Iran's terror attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets have been thwarted, without casualties, can largely be attributed to the cooperation between international and local security, intelligence, and police forces. Therefore, multilateral international cooperation among these agencies, along with heightened joint readiness, is urgently needed.

Amid the current tension between Israel and Iran and its Shiite axis partners, following the assassinations of Hezbollah's Fuad Shukr in Beirut and Hamas's Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, it is important to remember that Iran has another avenue for action—international terrorism—alongside its proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. International terrorism could serve as a more convenient and effective alternative to a broad, multi-front retaliation against Israel.

Iran has employed international terrorism as a policy since the early days of the Islamic Revolution, and it continues to do so today. Over the years, terror attacks by Iranian agents and proxies have become a key part of Iran's modus operandi for advancing its interests against both internal and external adversaries, regardless of accepted norms or foreign sovereignty. While Iran used to be one of several states involved in sponsoring terrorism, today it remains the only prominent state actively engaged in international terrorism alongside its extensive support for terrorist militias in the Middle East.

In the past five years, Iran has intensified its international terror activities and has been responsible for dozens of attempted attacks across Europe, North and South America, Africa, Australia, and Asia. These operations were carried out under the direct guidance of Iran's Quds Force, the intelligence organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence. These entities are responsible for initiating and executing attacks on regime opponents in exile, senior

government officials in Western countries and targets in Arab states, perceived as hostile to the regime, in addition to Israeli and Jewish targets.

Indeed, Israeli and Jewish entities have been the targets of dozens of Iranian terror activities across various countries and continents. Targets have included embassies and official Israeli representations, Israeli businesspeople and tourists at popular sites, as well as synagogues, Chabad centers, and other Jewish community institutions. Jewish businesspeople, known for their ties to Israel, have also been targeted.

In 2021 alone, Iran was linked to attempted attacks and terror-related activities in Kenya, Tanzania, Cyprus, Colombia, Thailand, Sweden, Uganda, Ethiopia, India, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi. In 2022, nine terror attempts in Congo, Germany, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tanzania, Turkey, and the United Kingdom were associated with Iran while in 2023, Iran was connected to nine terror attempts in India, Cyprus, Brazil, Israel, Azerbaijan, and Greece. This year, Iran has already been implicated in attempted terror attacks in Belgium, Sweden, and Peru, while the Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah, with the support of the Quds Force, has been linked to attempted terror attacks in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In some countries, such as Turkey and Cyprus, multiple terror attacks have been carried out, sometimes within the same year.

Iran has also operated in Western countries, which were previously perceived as less susceptible to such attacks, based on the assumption that Iran would not want to provoke a diplomatic confrontation with them. However, Iran has not hesitated to carry out attacks in these countries, striking both Western targets and opposition exiles, in addition to its activities against Israel-linked targets.

One notable aspect of this rise in international terrorism is Iran's collaboration with criminal organizations. The Revolutionary Guards Corps maintain close contact with gangs, drug cartels, and international criminal networks, using their services. Iran exploits their willingness and "professional" experience in undertaking assassinations, gathering operational information, and smuggling people and equipment before and after missions. By working with these criminal networks, Tehran is able to deny and disguise its terrorist activities as purely criminal acts. For example, Iran used the services of the Hells Angels in Germany to plan attacks against Jewish community institutions in various German cities. In January 2024, they collaborated with the Swedish crime organization Foxtrot in an attack against the Israeli embassy in Sweden.

Due to the fact that most of the Iranian attacks were thwarted, the momentum of Iranian activity and the scale of cooperation between terrorism and criminals received little attention from the international media. As a result, the public and policymakers may not be fully aware of the scope and the acute nature of the threat posed to citizens worldwide. Although there has been a slight change in the media coverage of this ominous phenomenon in recent months, the issue still has not received sufficient

coverage and as a result, the vital legal and diplomatic punitive measures to curb these threats have not been taken,

Iran's growing audacity, however, raises concerns that it will escalate its international terrorism, particularly targeting Israeli and Jewish interests. This could constitute part of its response to the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, chair of Hamas's Political Bureau, in Iran.

Implications for Israel

Given Iran's temporary self-restraint following its threat of a harsh response to Haniyeh's assassination, it is possible that Iran may choose a course of action outside of the direct conflict zone in the Middle East. By doing so, Iran can harm Israel's interests, fulfill its "obligation," at least temporarily, and send a deterrent message to Israel, while avoiding sanctions from the countries in which it operates, even if it is suspected of being responsible, and preventing an escalation into a regional war with Israel.

To address this challenge, Israel is advised to:

- **Initiate a diplomatic and media campaign** to expose all aspects of Iranian behavior as a rogue state that threatens international norms and the global order by engaging in extensive international terrorism. It is crucial to highlight the common interests of all countries affected by Iran's activities on five continents, including those that could become victims in the future. Increased media exposure could potentially change the perception of countries that have not seen themselves as threatened by other Iranian actions, such as nuclear weapons development and support for terrorist groups in the Middle East. This, in turn, may lead to a joint diplomatic, economic, and security campaign with Israel to prevent the import of international terrorism into their territories.
- **Lead an international effort to include the Quds Force on the list of terrorist organizations in various countries**, including the UK and EU countries, following the example already set by the United States and Canada. Although the Quds Force is already subject to extensive sanctions, its designation as a terrorist organization would have practical implications. Membership and support for the Quds Force would be considered criminal offenses, potentially reducing its support and hindering its operation. Secondly, its designation as a terrorist organization would provide enforcement and security agencies with expanded means and authority to effectively thwart attacks during the early planning stages. Sharing information about the Revolutionary Guards' involvement in attacks could help garner legal support for this fight.

- Given the increasing involvement of criminal elements in Iranian terrorist attacks, **it is recommended to inform and involve law enforcement agencies in counterterrorism and enforcement efforts against Iran's terror initiatives.** This should be done in addition to the successful cooperation already in place with international intelligence and counter-terrorism organizations.

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