

## CHAPTER 8

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This memorandum examines Iran's involvement in the landscape of international terrorism, focusing on trends that have characterized its activities in recent years. While there is growing international recognition of the threat posed by Iran in terms of its nuclear ambitions, its support for terrorist organizations in the Middle East, and its production and sale of drones, its continued engagement in international terrorism has been sidelined and does not receive the necessary attention. This is primarily because most attacks have been thwarted, preventing the bloodshed that typically attracts media and public attention. This memorandum lays out the factual basis for the argument that, in recent years, Iran has returned with increased intensity to the kind of international terrorist activity that largely defined its operations in the early years of the Islamic Republic in the 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, other states such as Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Sudan followed similar paths, but their reliance on terrorism declined over the years until they disappeared from the scene of international terrorism. Initially, it seemed that Iran had also reduced its direct engagement in international terrorism in an effort to evade its rogue state image and integrate into the international system as a legitimate state with which diplomatic negotiations could be conducted. However, recent years have seen Iran revert to its former practices, actively engaging in international terrorism.

This memorandum advances three key arguments:

The first claim: Iran is accelerating and expanding the scope of its activities and the resources it dedicates to advancing terrorist operations. On the one hand, this enables Iran to promote its interests and objectives, while on the other hand, maintaining plausible deniability regarding its responsibility for these actions. As observed, since 2010—and even more so since 2020—Iran

has significantly increased the number of operations it attempts to carry out, as well as the scale of resources it allocates to this effort and to the various entities involved in it, including the intelligence organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Quds Force, and the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence.

The second claim: The escalation of activity is global in scope, and Iran is willing to operate in all arenas. It conducts activities in numerous Western countries, including within the European Union, the United States, Canada, South America, Africa, and Asia. In some cases, it leverages support networks that it has established itself or that were created by its proxy organizations, such as Hezbollah; in others, it collaborates with local criminal organizations. It is evident that Iran does not respect the sovereignty of nations or international law, operating through illegal and illegitimate means to advance its interests.

The third argument focuses on Iran's increasing use of criminals and criminal organizations to carry out terrorist activities—another indication of its disregard for the established rules of the state-based international system. In recent years, Iran has not only relied on criminal entities for financing its operations and supporting its proxy organizations but has also engaged them as direct executors of terrorist attacks. This trend has been evident in attempted attacks in Germany, Sweden, and Turkey, as discussed in this memorandum.

Alongside these three arguments, Iran's use of hostage diplomacy as a combat-support tool was also examined. This strategy enables Iran to extract operatives, even in cases where they are apprehended and a direct link to Iran is proven, thereby avoiding accountability for its actions. This is achieved through the exploitation of innocent civilians from other countries, using them as bargaining chips to exert pressure on their respective governments.

The emerging picture from this research is of a rogue state that spares no means in spreading terror and international crime worldwide, yet does not pay the price for its actions. This Iranian conduct does not receive significant

attention, both due to the overwhelming scale of other threats posed by Iran—its nuclear ambitions and its support in transforming terrorist organizations into formidable terrorist armies—and due to the fact that most Iranian terrorist attempts have been thwarted.

So far, Iran has not been subjected to a severe and proportionate penalty for its ongoing involvement in international terrorism. Meanwhile, developments in the global arena—including the Russia-Ukraine war and the Swords of Iron war—have further emboldened Iran. This growing audacity is evident across several dimensions, including kinetic measures such as Iran’s attack on Israel on the night of April 13–14, 2024. In parallel, Iran has strengthened its allies, increased military support for terrorist organizations, and supplied UAVs to Russia in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. Given several widely publicized disclosures, it is evident that Iran has also escalated its efforts to carry out attacks on Israeli soil and target senior Israeli officials. This growing audacity raises concerns that Iran’s operational patterns may persist and even intensify.

Against this backdrop, we propose several key recommendations: First and foremost, a comprehensive account of Iran’s involvement in international terrorism in recent years should be presented and disseminated globally. This would highlight Iran’s increasing audacity as a rogue state that threatens the global order not only in the nuclear realm but also through “classical” terrorism. Additionally, attention should be drawn to Iran’s cultivation of the military capabilities of its proxy organizations and its use of these groups to exacerbate regional instability in the Middle East. This has been particularly evident over the past year and a half of combat against Israel and in the threats posed to international maritime trade routes. It is possible that nations with specific interests—those that are not directly threatened or concerned by Iran’s nuclear ambitions, military-economic support for regional actors, or war-mongering—may be more inclined to take notice when the threat of international terrorism directly endangers their citizens. This recognition could

encourage greater receptiveness and willingness to participate in concrete international cooperation to curb Iran's activities.

In this context, an effective international effort should be directed at the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), with the aim of designating it as a terrorist organization in multiple countries, thereby assisting the United States and Canada, which have already taken this step. In recent months, there has been extensive international discourse regarding the possibility that additional Western nations—particularly members of the European Union and the United Kingdom—may adopt this measure, given the IRGC's active role in orchestrating Iranian terrorism and its involvement in other controversial activities, such as providing military support to Russia in its war against Ukraine. While the primary impact of such a designation is symbolic—considering the extensive sanctions already imposed on the IRGC—its importance should not be underestimated. Moreover, this step has two significant practical consequences.

First, designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization would criminalize membership, support, and assistance to the group. This measure could reduce support for the IRGC within local communities, at least in overt forms, thereby complicating its operations. Second, as a direct result of this criminalization, law enforcement and judicial authorities would be granted expanded powers, enhancing their ability to preempt terrorist attacks at early stages of planning and organization. Given the extensive activities of the IRGC in relevant countries, increasing enforcement measures could have tangible effects in the fight against terrorism. We therefore recommend sharing relevant intelligence with these nations regarding attempted Iranian attacks, and particularly the IRGC's role in them, to help meet the legal requirements for such a designation and to garner additional public support.

Should the designation of the entire IRGC face opposition or difficulties, diplomatic efforts could focus on securing at least the inclusion of the Quds Force in these terrorist organization lists. This is justified by the Quds Force's

central role in orchestrating Iranian terrorism, as evidenced by unequivocal proof of its involvement.

Furthermore, given that the measures taken thus far by Israel and other nations have failed to deter Iran from employing terrorism, there may be grounds to consider kinetic responses—at least in cases where Iran successfully executes major terrorist attacks. Until now, international responses to Iran’s terrorist activities have remained primarily within the legal and diplomatic spheres, alongside economic sanctions targeting individuals and entities involved in terrorism. However, in light of Israel’s recent willingness to respond directly to Iranian provocations—demonstrated following the UAV attack in April 2024 and the missile attack in October—it may be worth considering kinetic responses to terrorist attacks initiated and executed by Iran. Naturally, such actions should be weighed carefully against potential Iranian retaliatory measures. It is also advisable to encourage other nations to adopt a more assertive stance against Iranian terrorism, given the failures of the prevailing policies.

It should be noted that recent regional developments—including the blows inflicted upon Iran’s proxy network in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen; the death of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and the significant damage to Hezbollah, which has been a key pillar of Iran’s proxy strategy and an integral part of its defense doctrine; and the considerable damage inflicted on Iran in the Israeli strike of October 26, 2024—have placed Iran in a difficult position. This may hinder its ability to respond forcefully both to the intensification of international sanctions and to kinetic attacks. Garnering international support for such measures could thereby become more feasible.

Furthermore, based on the projections outlined in this memorandum, the trend of increasing Iranian terrorist activity on the international level is unlikely to subside and may even intensify, given Iran’s escalating confrontation with Western countries and Israel. Therefore, we recommend continued cooperation with intelligence agencies and international counterterrorism bodies. Given

the extensive reach of Iran's terrorist network and its collaborations with local organizations, a coordinated international effort is required to contain and thwart Iranian terrorist initiatives. Such cooperation would also strengthen the public diplomacy campaign highlighted in the previous section, as local security agencies could emphasize the significance of this issue to their respective governments.

Due to Iran's integration of criminal organizations into its international terrorist activities, we suggest expanding the circle of knowledge-sharing and coalition-building by involving law enforcement agencies in counterterrorism and enforcement efforts against Iran's terrorist-criminal operations through joint and coordinated action. This is particularly important as intelligence and law enforcement bodies often operate separately.

Additionally, given the significant involvement of seemingly benign local support networks—particularly local and international crime organizations—in Iran's global terrorism campaign, attention should be given to monitoring these entities. Their growing role within Iran's terrorist network raises concerns that they may assume an even more central role in the future.

Moreover, while Iran does not directly employ hostage diplomacy against Israel for obvious reasons, Israel should support international efforts to establish a systematic policy response to Iran's use of this tactic, as it serves as a tool that facilitates terrorism. Among other measures, we recommend advocating for the development of both diplomatic and economic punitive mechanisms that would be automatically triggered whenever Iran engages in hostage diplomacy.