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ISIS terrorism benefits Iran / Nov. 25, 2015

The Islamic State group's terror campaign in the Middle East and in Paris plays directly into Iran's hands in three different ways.

Firstly, world attention has shifted from Iran's terrorism to that of Islamic State. Since 1984, Iran has consistently been singled out by the U.S. State Department as the country most involved in terrorism in the world. But Islamic State's threats of terrorist attacks dwarf Iran's deep involvement in terrorist activity, all while the nuclear deal gives the Islamic republic the status of a proper and well-liked country.

Secondly, governments around the world understand that Iran plays an important role in the struggle against Islamic State and in stabilizing the situation in Syria and Iraq. This understanding comes from Iran's commitment to fight Islamic State in order to save its assets in Syria and Iraq; from its significant influence in both those countries; and from its willingness to fight Islamic State on the ground in Syria -- something no other country is prepared to do.

Thirdly, common interests have been forged between Iran and the other countries fighting Islamic State, both in attacking their common enemy and in the dialogue that has developed between Western countries and Iran thanks to the nuclear deal. This has created an expectation in the West, especially in the United States, that Iran's actions against Islamic State will expand to include involvement in other regional issues, leading Iran to become a stabilizing factor in the Middle East. Iran is turning into an influential and sought-after regional player and Western governments are prepared to ignore Iranian radicalism that serves to contribute to instability in the region.

Iran sees Islamic State as a threat to its core interests in the region. Since it is a Sunni group, Islamic State is seen by Iran as a threat to the Shiite camp. Islamic State's unprecedented strength stems from its control over major areas in Syria and Iraq, its control over large sources of funds, its combination of terrorism and military capability and, most of all, its recruitment of young people from various countries.

Recognizing the severity of this threat, Iran has taken far-reaching steps to stop Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. It provides the Iraqi government and Iraqi Shiite militias with significant military aid, including fighter jets, drones and rockets. It trains the Shiite militias and builds volunteer militias to fight Islamic State. When it became clear that these steps are not enough to stop Islamic State, Iran increased its military involvement in Iraq, and members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard are now likely involved in the warfare against the organization, and also in assisting the Kurds in northern Iraq.

Iran's involvement in Syria is no less significant. When the fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime threatened to take away Iran's chief ally, the Islamic republic began to offer assistance as early as 2012, before Islamic State was on the scene. As Islamic State and other jihadist groups grew stronger in Syria, Iran transferred Revolutionary Guard units to Syria to take part in the fighting. More than 100 Iranian fighters have been killed in Syria, according to recent figures.

If and when Islamic State is defeated, Iran will be the big winner. Even now, the military aid it provides strengthens its influence in Iraq and Syria. The defeat of Islamic State means the stability of the Assad regime, stronger Shiite militias in Iraq, and the removal of threats to Iran's most important interests.

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