



## A Special Report to the House Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights

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# THE CHALLENGE OF REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

By James Phillips  
Senior Policy Analyst<sup>1</sup>

The recent Middle Eastern travels of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan have sparked considerable controversy. Several Congressmen have called for a government investigation of the trip, including Representative Peter King, who gave a persuasive speech on this subject at The Heritage Foundation on March 6.

Today, I would like to focus on the foreign activities of Iran, which I believe poses the greatest threat to America and to American interests of all the countries that Minister Farrakhan visited.

The U.S. and Iran have clashed repeatedly over a wide variety of issues since Iran's 1979 revolution, which brought to power radical Islamic fundamentalists led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Bilateral tensions initially flared due to the November 4, 1979, seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian militants and the subsequent holding of American hostages for 444 days. Iran-U.S. tensions continue to simmer due to Iran's persistent efforts to export its revolution, Iranian support for international terrorism, Iran's ideological hostility to the U.S., and Iran's military buildup, which includes clandestine efforts to acquire nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction.

Iran today looms as the chief threat to American interests in the Middle East. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the military defeat and diplomatic isolation of Iraq, Iran's traditional archrival, has given Iran the opportunity to expand its influence. Although Tehran has toned down its revolutionary rhetoric since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, Iran remains a volatile revolutionary state. Tehran continues to denounce the U.S. as "the Global Arrogance," calls for the expulsion of American influence from the Middle East, seeks to discredit and overthrow moderate Arab governments friendly to the U.S., advocates the destruction of Israel, and adamantly opposes the U.S.-sponsored Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> Substantial portions of this were given in testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights, on March 19, 1996.

nounced as "treason." As the leading Muslim power unequivocally opposed to Israel's existence, Iran stands to gain much from prolonging the Arab-Israeli conflict.

## IRAN'S SUPPORT OF TERRORISM

Iran is the world's "most active state sponsor of international terrorism and continues to be directly involved in planning and executing terrorist acts," according to the State Department's most recent report on terrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1994*, which was published in April 1995. Iranian intelligence agencies support terrorism, either directly or through extremist groups, primarily aimed against Iranian opposition movements, Israel, or moderate Arab regimes. Tehran has established over 20 ideological and military training camps in Iran, Lebanon, and Sudan staffed by Arabic-speaking Revolutionary Guards.

Hezbollah, Iran's most important surrogate, has become the "world's principal international terrorist organization," according to former CIA Director James Woolsey, testifying before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on July 28, 1993. The Lebanon-based organization has established groups of supporters as far away as Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, and South America. Hezbollah's long list of terrorist atrocities includes the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks at Beirut Airport, and the kidnapping of most of the 15 American hostages held in Lebanon between 1984 and 1991.

The last American hostages held in Lebanon were released by Hezbollah at Iran's direction in late 1991 after Tehran concluded that it could gain nothing from holding the hostages any longer. Iran's use of terrorism as an instrument of policy remains undiminished, however. In recent years, Tehran has stepped up its terrorist attacks against Iranian exile leaders and Israel. More than a dozen Iranian dissidents have been assassinated in European cities since 1987, including the August 1991 murder of former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar in Paris and the September 1992 murders of four Kurdish opposition leaders in Berlin.

Iran's terrorist campaign against exiled opposition activists appears to be growing in intensity in recent months. On February 20, 1996, two Iranian exiles were assassinated in Turkey. On March 2, two Sunni Iranian clerics were assassinated in Pakistan. And on March 7, another Iranian opposition activist was assassinated in Baghdad, the sixth killed inside Iraq since May 1995.

Iran's assassins also have struck inside the United States. Iranian political activist Ali A. Tabatabai, the founder of the Iran Freedom Foundation, was murdered at his home in Bethesda, Maryland, on July 2, 1980.

Although Iranians recently have not been caught launching terrorist attacks on American targets, Iran furnishes substantial financial, logistical, and training support to terrorist groups that continue to target Americans. Tehran provided financial support, at a minimum, for some of the Islamic militants arrested for the February 1993 bombing that killed six people at the World Trade Center in New York. Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman, the radical Egyptian cleric who inspired and guided the bombers, long has been funded by Iran's intelligence service, according to Vincent Cannistraro, former head of CIA counterterrorism operations. Sheik Omar reportedly was regularly given large sums of money by Iran's delegation to the United Nations.

Although no direct Iranian participation has been established in the World Trade Center bombing, senior U.S. officials warned in March 1993 that Iranian-backed terrorist groups appeared to be becoming more aggressive. Iran also reportedly has begun cooperating with non-fundamentalist terrorist groups such as the Abu Nidal Organization, a renegade Palestinian terrorist group that has launched some of the bloodiest and most indiscriminate terrorist attacks, such as the December 1985 massacres at the Rome and Vienna airports. Iran also financially supports the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), a pro-Syrian group which it reportedly asked in 1988 to bomb a

U.S. airliner in retaliation for the July 1988 accidental downing of an Iranian airliner by the *U.S.S. Vincennes*. The plot was disrupted by the arrest of a terrorist cell in Germany in October 1988. Libyan agents reportedly then bombed Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988.

Iranian-supported terrorists have been particularly active against targets in Turkey. The Turkish Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility in 1992 for the murder of an Israeli diplomat and the bombing of an Istanbul synagogue. It also is believed to be responsible for a series of murders of Turkish journalists. Iran also supports the Marxist Kurdish Workers' Party, which has waged a long-running terrorist war against the government in eastern Turkey.

But in recent years it has been Israel that has been the prime foreign target of Iran's terror campaign. Iran was involved in the March 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which killed 29 people. In March 1994, three Iranian agents were arrested in Thailand after an abortive attempt to detonate a truck bomb at the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok. Iranian involvement is also suspected in the July 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires that killed 96 people. Iran continues to support Hezbollah's terrorist offensive against Israeli forces along the Lebanese-Israeli border, as well as the terrorist operations of Hamas inside Israel.

Under Iranian tutelage, Sudan has emerged as a leading sponsor of international terrorism. Sudan has given sanctuary to a wide spectrum of terrorist groups, including many Arab militants who participated in the fundamentalist jihad in Afghanistan. Sudan gave Sheik Omar Abdul Rahman sanctuary before he moved to New York. Two Sudanese diplomats were implicated in the aborted plot by eight of the Sheik's followers to bomb the United Nations headquarters in New York. Moreover, five of the eight suspected terrorists arrested for the plot in June 1993 were Sudanese. Sudan's escalating involvement in international terrorism led Washington in August 1993 to add Sudan to the State Department's list of states that sponsor terrorism, which also has included Iran since 1984. This prohibits the transfer of U.S. military equipment, militarily useful civilian technology, and foreign aid to the terrorist state, strips it of favorable trade privileges, and requires the U.S. to block loans by international financial institutions.

## IRAN'S MILITARY BUILDUP

Iran currently poses only a limited conventional military threat to its neighbors. Since the 1979 revolution, its armed forces have been weakened by political purges, huge losses of up to 60 percent of their major weapons systems in the eight-year war with Iraq, and shortages of spare parts for U.S. and Western arms supplied before 1979. But President Rafsanjani has accorded a high priority to building Iran's military strength. Shortly after coming to power in July 1989, Rafsanjani traveled to Moscow to sign a \$1.9 billion arms deal that included 48 modern MiG-29 *Fulcrum* fighters and 100 T-72 tanks. His government, in January 1990, allocated \$2 billion per year for five years to buy advanced arms.

Iran's ambitious military plans have sparked considerable concern that Tehran seeks to establish regional hegemony by building its military capabilities far beyond its legitimate defense needs. Iran's long-term objective reportedly is to acquire a modern air force of roughly 300 advanced combat aircraft; a modern army with 5,000 to 6,000 tanks, 2,000 self-propelled artillery pieces, and thousands of armored personnel carriers; and a navy upgraded with three advanced Russian *Kilo*-class submarines and scores of fast patrol boats armed with missiles.

Iran also has purchased hundreds of ballistic missiles and the technology to produce them from North Korea and China. Tehran has acquired at least 300 SCUD-B surface-to-surface missiles with a range of approximately 185 miles, and an unknown number of improved SCUD-Cs, which have a range of approximately 370 miles. These missiles enable Iran to attack states across the Persian Gulf. Iran also reportedly has agreed to buy 150 North Korean Nodong 1 missiles with an estimated range of over 600 miles. These surface-to-surface missiles are capable of delivering conventional, chemical, or nuclear warheads on targets as far away as Israel.

Iran's missile buildup is especially worrisome given Tehran's determined efforts to build weapons of mass destruction. Iran has "the most active chemical warfare program" in the Third World, according to an anonymous U.S. government official quoted in the *Washington Post* on March 8, 1996. The CIA estimates that Iran has produced and stockpiled up to 2,000 tons of chemical warfare agents, which it used at least once during the Iran-Iraq war. Iran also has an active biological warfare program and is trying to buy biological agents from Europe that could be useful in developing such weapons, according to U.S. intelligence sources. Some U.S. experts believe that Iran already may have produced biological weapons in the form of toxins or anthrax.

But the West's chief worry is Iran's effort to develop nuclear weapons, which has been making steady progress under the cover of Iran's civilian nuclear power program. CIA Director John Deutch stated in November 1995 that Iran could produce a nuclear weapon in as little as four years if it received extensive foreign assistance. American intelligence analysts have reported that Iranian acquisition teams have shopped for weapons-related nuclear equipment and nuclear scientists in the former Soviet Union, concentrating on Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine.

In conclusion, although Iran now poses primarily an ideological, subversive, and terrorist threat to American interests in the Middle East and the Muslim world, in the long run Iran will pose an increasingly grave military threat to the security of the U.S., American military forces in the Middle East, and American allies in the region.