

Iran's Use of International Terrorism

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The following paper and chronology were prepared by the Office of the Ambassador at Large for Counter-Terrorism and made available October 27, 1987, in connection with the announcement of U.S. sanctions against Iran. The chronology of selected terrorist incidents is not intended to be all-inclusive but is illustrative of Iran's involvement in and support for terrorism and terrorist groups. The groups cited in this chronology have links with Iran.

Iran is currently one of the the world's most active states supporting international terrorism and subversion against other countries. The revolutionaries who came to power in Iran with the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini first attracted public attention to their use of terrorism with the takeover of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979. Their activities have continued since then in a variety of forms and places. The Government of Iran regards terrorism as an integral tool of its foreign policy, to be used when the opportunity seems propitious.

An official explanation of the use of terrorism was made as early as May 1979 by Ayatollah Sadeq Khalkhali who supported killing:

those who enter into a war against God and His prophets and who try to spread corruption on earth. No one who kills any of these persons can be arrested as a terrorist by a foreign government inasmuch as

he will have carried out the orders of the Islamic Revolutionary Court of Iran.

Iran has shown exceptional readiness to use terrorism and subversion of other governments as a policy tool. The Government of Iran or groups over which it has strong influence have attacked civilians, government officials, peacekeeping forces, Iranian dissidents at home and abroad, and the economic assets of neighboring states. Kidnaping, car bombing, suicide attacks, hijacking, and assassination have been used in these attacks. While Iranian Government personnel have been used directly in terrorist operations, particularly those against Iranian dissidents, the Iranian Government prefers to use surrogates such as the Lebanese-based Hizballah group.

The Iranian Government's use of terrorism and subversion of other countries is wide ranging. The major goals of Iranian-backed terrorism and subversion include spreading its Shi'a fundamentalist revolution to other Islamic states, creating a copy of an Iranian Islamic Republic in Lebanon, and driving Western influence—especially that of the United States—from the Middle East. Iran also uses terrorism as part of a broader strategy to deter Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states from supporting Iraq in the gulf war.

Iran recruits disgruntled Shi'a from the gulf states and elsewhere, gives them paramilitary and terrorist training, and returns them home. Most of the Iranian-backed terrorist acts in

the gulf are conducted by Iranian-inspired and sponsored Shi'a radicals. Such Iranian-inspired Kuwaiti Shi'a were convicted of a number of sabotage attacks at Kuwaiti oil facilities since June 1986. Groups in the gulf area promoted by Iran include the Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, the Islamic Dawa Party (which has local branches in Kuwait, Bahrain, and Lebanon), and the Organization for the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula.

But Iranian terrorist-related activities reach well beyond the gulf. Egyptian officials announced in July that they apprehended members of what they described as a new Iranian-backed terrorist ring with explosives in their possession. In March 1987, Tunisia broke relations with Iran, charging it was supporting fundamentalist groups trying to undermine the government.

In Lebanon, Hizballah operates under multiple cover names, including "Islamic Jihad," "Right Against Wrong," and "Revolutionary Justice Organization." In Iraq and Kuwait, the Dawa Party has been used. Iran has nurtured these groups with financial assistance, arms, and training. In Lebanon, Iranian Revolutionary Guards coordinate closely with Hizballah leaders and maintain co-located headquarters. Iran has made clear its ability to manipulate Hizballah's foreign hostages.

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This pattern of support, combined with evidence of direct Iranian involvement in some Shi'a terrorist operations (e.g., the 1985-86 Paris bombings and the 1983 "Dawn 17" attacks on U.S., French, and Kuwait targets in Kuwait), demonstrates Iran's culpability in many, if not all, of its radical Shi'a surrogates' terrorist operations. Hizballah's involvement in hostage-taking, hijackings, and bombings is well known.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, formed in the early stages of the Iranian revolution, has served to support Iranian terrorism abroad, especially in Lebanon. A contingent of Revolutionary Guards went to Lebanon's Bekka Valley in the summer of 1982 and has remained there since. One of their principal functions is liaison with and training of Hizballah.

Iran also has shown a disregard for internationally accepted conventions and norms, including those applying to diplomats. On November 4, 1979, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was seized and its personnel held hostage for 444 days. More recently, a British diplomat in Tehran was abducted and beaten in May of this year. The French Embassy in Tehran was surrounded as part of the "embassy war" with France when French officials attempted to question a suspected terrorist who took refuge in the Iranian Embassy in Paris.

Examples of Iranian Terrorism and Subversion

We have good reason to believe that Iran or its surrogates are responsible for the following acts. For more specific information, see the detailed chronology (pp. 3-4).

Kidnapings in Lebanon

Although the Iranian-supported Hizballah is responsible for almost all of the kidnapings of westerners in Lebanon, Iran exercises strong influence over all hostage-related decisions. For example, we believe Iran ordered the June 1987 kidnaping of journalist Charles Glass, who was held for 2 months before he escaped in August.

Assassinations of Anti-Khomeini Iranian Dissidents

- October 1987—Two murdered in London
- August 1987—One murdered in Istanbul
- August 1987—One murdered in Geneva

July 1987—Failed assassination attempt in London

July 1987—Three murdered in Karachi

January 1987—One murdered in Hamburg

Attacks Against Arab and Islamic Interests

July 1987—Disruption of the pilgrimages to Mecca, Saudi Arabia; at least 400 killed

January 1987—Attempt to disrupt the Organization of Islamic Countries meeting in Kuwait by a series of bombings

1986—Bombing of Saudia airline offices in New Delhi, Vienna, and Karachi

August 1986—Arrest of 113 Iranian pilgrims trying to smuggle 51 kilos of plastic explosives into Mecca, Saudi Arabia

June 1986-May 1987—Bombings at oil installations in Kuwait

May 1985—Attempt to assassinate Amir Sabah of Kuwait

December 1983—Bombings of Kuwait Government buildings along with bombings of U.S. and French Embassies

Attacks on Peacekeeping Forces

October 1983—Suicide bombings of the French and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut

Embassy Bombings

September 1984—Bombing of U.S. Embassy annex in Lebanon

December 1983—Attacks on the U.S. and French Embassies in Kuwait

April 1983—U.S. Embassy in Lebanon destroyed by suicide bomber

Airline Hijackings

July 1987—Hijacker of Air Afrique flight from Rome to Paris claimed Hizballah affiliation

December 1986—Hijacking of Iraqi airliner en route to Jordan; over 60 killed when the plane crashed in Saudi Arabia

June 1985—TWA 847 hijackers had and have strong ties to Iran

December 1984—Kuwait Airlines flight 221 hijacked to Tehran; two U.S. Government auditors, Charles Hegna and William Stanford, killed

Bombings in Europe

December 1985-September 1986—Series of bombings in Paris

August 1986—Bookstore in London

July 1985—Northwest Airlines office in Copenhagen

Responses to Iranian Terrorism

Several countries have responded to Iranian terrorism.

Tunisia broke diplomatic relations with Iran earlier this year, charging Iran was stirring up fundamentalist unrest. After a Tunisian court in September passed sentences on 90 Tunisian nationals accused of fundamentalist subversive activities, several pro-Iranian groups held demonstrations and threatened retaliation.

The French Government in 1983 closed down the Iranian cultural center in Paris because of concern it was being used by potential terrorists. In July 1987, France broke diplomatic relations with Iran as part of the so-called embassy war, which started when an Iranian translator without diplomatic immunity fled to the Iranian Embassy to avoid questioning about his role in a series of terrorist bombings in France. Subsequently, French officials in Iran were ordered to appear before Iranian courts on trumped-up charges. Each country's embassy continues to be surrounded by the security forces of the other.

The United Kingdom, France, and the United States, exercising their special responsibilities in West Berlin, ordered the expulsion in August 1987 of Iranian consular officials following Iran's renewed threats of terrorist activities.

The United States broke diplomatic relations and imposed a series of trade and financial sanctions against Iran after official government complicity in the seizure of our embassy became clear. After the hostages were released in January 1981, the trade and financial restrictions were lifted. Iran was formally placed on the U.S. Government's list of countries repeatedly supporting acts of international terrorism in January 1984. (Other countries now on the list are Libya, Syria, Cuba, and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.) A number of measures, including a ban on Iranian imports, have been taken because of Iran's support for terrorism and its refusal to end the war with Iraq, which has threatened international shipping. Export controls and other economic measures have been taken against Iran in the past and, coupled with these more recent additional steps, are part of a process of trying to contain Iran's support for terrorism and subversion.

Chronology of Selected Terrorist Incidents by Iranian-Supported Groups, 1980-87

The following is an illustrative list of terrorist incidents attributed to Iran or Iranian surrogates.

1987

October 2: London. An anti-Khomeini activist and his son were shot and killed in their home. A group called "The Guardians of the Islamic Revolution and Soldiers of Imam Khomeini" claimed responsibility.

August 10: Geneva. A former Iranian Air Force pilot who had defected in February was shot by two unknown assailants. Iran is suspected.

July 24: Geneva. An Air Afrique airliner was hijacked en route from Rome to Paris and diverted to Geneva. One French passenger was killed. The Lebanese hijacker was subdued, and Swiss police took control of the aircraft. The flight originated in Brazzaville with an intermediate stop in Bangui. The hijacker said he was affiliated with Hizballah.

June 17: Beirut. American Charles Glass was kidnaped. Iran reportedly approved the operation, which was carried out by elements of Hizballah. Glass escaped on August 17.

January 24: Beirut. Four Beirut University College professors were kidnaped (three American citizens and one Indian U.S. permanent resident). Responsibility claimed by "Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine."

January 20: Beirut. Church of England envoy Terry Waite disappeared. Hizballah is suspected.

January 19: Kuwait. Several explosions damaged several oil installations south of Kuwait City. Iranian involvement is suspected.

January 17: Beirut. German businessman Rudolph Cordes was kidnaped. Three days later, another German businessman, Alfred Schmidt, was kidnaped. "Organization of the Oppressed on Earth" claimed responsibility. Hizballah is suspected.

1986

December 25: Saudi Arabia. An Iraqi airliner en route from Baghdad to Amman crashed in Saudi Arabia following a hijacking attempt; at least 62 of the 107 persons on board were killed, including two of the four hijackers. Several groups claimed responsibility, but Iranian-backed terrorists probably were responsible.

October 26: Istanbul. A prominent Iranian dissident was killed. Iranian suspect.

October 21: Beirut. Edward Austin Tracy was kidnaped. The Revolutionary Justice Organization, a cover name used by Hizballah, claimed responsibility.

September: Paris. A series of bombings was claimed by "Committee in Solidarity with Arab Political Prisoners." The French have arrested Hizballah members involved and believe this network was connected to Iran. (See December 1985 entry.)

September: Beirut. The French military attache was assassinated in September by a Hizballah member.

September 12: Beirut. American citizen Joseph Cicippio was kidnaped. Revolutionary Justice Organization claimed responsibility.

September 9: Beirut. American citizen Frank Reed was kidnaped. Hizballah is suspected.

August 8: Mecca. 113 Iranian pilgrims were arrested with 51 kilos of plastic explosives.

August: New Delhi. Saudia airline office was bombed. Other airline offices were bombed in Vienna in April and in Karachi in May. Iran is suspected.

August 19: London. A video shop owned by an Iranian dissident was bombed; one person died. Iran is suspected.

June: Kuwait. Five explosions occurred at Kuwaiti oil installations. Iran-backed Kuwaiti Shi'a are suspected.

April 28: Beirut. Two Greek Cypriots were kidnaped. The Islamic Liberation Organization, a name used by Hizballah, claimed responsibility.

April 7: Stockholm. The Northwest Airlines office was bombed. Hizballah is suspected.

March 8: Beirut. A four-man French TV crew was kidnaped, probably by elements of Hizballah.

February: Beirut. Seven Iraqi Ba'ath officials were killed. Dawa Party is suspected.

1985

December: Paris. A series of bombings was claimed by "Committee in Solidarity with Arab Political Prisoners." The French have arrested Hizballah members involved and believe this network was connected to Iran. (See September 1986 entry.)

December 25: Istanbul. A prominent Iranian dissident was assassinated.

November 24: Frankfurt. A car bomb exploded in a parking lot adjacent to a U.S. military shopping center. German authorities have issued an arrest warrant for an Iranian identified as having placed the bomb.

July 12: Copenhagen. Simultaneous bombings damaged the Northwest Orient Airlines office and a synagogue; one person was killed and 26 injured. Islamic Jihad took responsibility. Hizballah is suspected.

June 14: Lebanon. TWA 847 was hijacked by two Lebanese Shi'a gunmen en route to Athens from Rome and forced to land in Beirut after two round trips from Beirut to Algiers. The hijackers demanded the release of Shi'a prisoners. U.S. Navy diver Robert Stethem was murdered aboard the aircraft. Hizballah gave support to the hijackers, holding 39 Americans hostage in Beirut for 17 days.

June 10: Beirut. American citizen Thomas Sutherland was kidnaped. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

May 28: Beirut. American citizen David Jacobsen was kidnaped. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. Jacobsen was released November 2, 1986.

May 25: Kuwait. Members of the Iranian-backed Dawa Party carried out a car bombing on the motorcade of the Amir of Kuwait. Six people died in the explosion and ensuing melee, and 12 were injured. The Amir suffered minor injuries. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

May 22: Beirut. French citizens Jean Paul Kaufmann and Michel Seurat were kidnaped.

March 16: Beirut. Terry Anderson was kidnaped. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

March 22: Beirut. Marcel Carton, Marcel Fontaine, and Danielle Perez of the French Embassy in Lebanon were kidnaped. Ms. Perez was released 9 days later.

January 8: Lebanon. An American priest, Rev. Lawrence Jenco, was kidnaped. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. Rev. Jenco was released July 26, 1986.

1984

December 4: Tehran. Kuwaiti Airways Flight 221, carrying 166 people including six Americans, was hijacked to Tehran. The hijackers demanded the release of prisoners held in Kuwait. Two U.S. AID officials were murdered. U.S. and Kuwaiti hostages were set

apart and tortured. The Iranian Government assisted the hijackers.

November: Ladispoli, Italy. Seven pro-Iranian Shi'a were arrested for planning a car attack against the U.S. Embassy in Rome.

September 20: Beirut. The U.S. Embassy annex in East Beirut was severely damaged by a suicide car bomber. Twenty-three persons, including two Americans, were killed and at least 60 injured. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

July 31: Tehran. An Air France airliner en route from Frankfurt to Paris was hijacked to Iran by three Lebanese Shi'a.

July 14: Pakistan. Police arrested eight Iranians suspected of planning attacks against a Pan Am office and three Saudi Arabian airlines offices. Iran is thought to have been responsible.

May 8: Beirut. Rev. Benjamin Weir, an American clergyman, was kidnaped. He was released September 14, 1985.

March 7: Beirut. Jeremy Levin, an American journalist, was kidnaped. He escaped February 14, 1985.

March 16: Beirut. William Buckley, an American Embassy officer, was kidnaped. Islamic Jihad claimed he was "executed" in October 1985, but other evidence indicates he died from wounds inflicted during beatings while in captivity.

February 10: Beirut. Frank Regier, an American professor at the American University of Beirut, was

kidnaped. He was rescued on April 15, 1984.

January 30: Beirut. Malcolm Kerr, president of the American University of Beirut, was assassinated. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

1983

October 23: Beirut. U.S. Marine barracks were bombed, killing 240 and wounding 70. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

October 23: Beirut. Another truck filled with explosives crashed into a French MNF (Multinational Peacekeeping Force) barracks, killing 56 and wounding 15. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

December 12: Kuwait. Simultaneous bombings of U.S. and French Embassies.

April 18: Beirut. Five U.S. Marines, part of the Multinational Peacekeeping Force, were attacked.

April 18: Beirut. A car bomb destroyed the U.S. Embassy, killing 49 and wounding 120.

1982

March 22: Beirut. Third Secretary Ali Hajim Sultan of the Iraqi Embassy was assassinated. Iranian involvement is suspected.

1981

September 4: Beirut. French Ambassador Louis Delamare was assassinated

by four gunmen. Iranian-backed Lebanese Red Brigades claimed responsibility.

September 26: Beirut. The U.S. Embassy was struck by three rocket-propelled grenades. Iranian-sponsored "Forces of Mujahedeen" claimed responsibility.

July 22: Washington, D.C. Exiled Iranian diplomat Ali Akbar Tabatabai was assassinated in his suburban Bethesda home. The assassin was identified as Daoud Salahuddin of the "Islamic Guerrillas in America."

July 18: Paris. Attempted assassination of former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar by Anis Naccache, who is serving a life sentence for the crime.

July 7: Rome. Explosions occurred at multinational corporation Snia-Techint's office. On August 8, an explosion occurred at Snia-Techint's director's home. No injuries were reported as a result of either blast. "The Guardians of the Islamic Revolution" claimed responsibility.

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