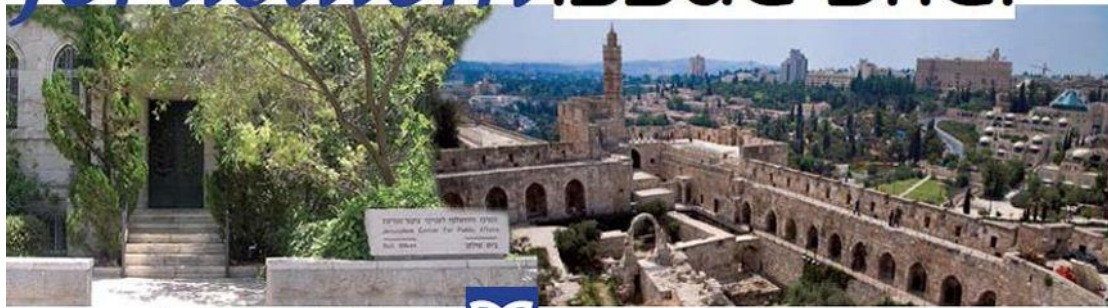


# Jerusalem issue brief



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## Terror Is Terror Is Terror

Lt.-Col. (ret.) Michael (Mickey) Segall



“Islamic State Boomerang.” Iranian cartoon suggesting that ISIS was a Western tool used by French President Hollande that came back to attack France. (*Tasnim News*)

- Iran keeps promoting its long-term strategic policy in Syria; it views the country as an integral component of its national security.

- Russia, which has moved urgently to help Assad's regime survive, has paid a heavy price with the downing of a Russian passenger plane by the Islamic State.
- Iran is encouraged by several key regional and international developments, including Russia's involvement in Syria, the beginning of the JCPOA nuclear agreement's implementation, the first breaches in the sanctions, and by being cast as a regional actor that can help settle the region's problems.
- Iran is exploiting the West's weakness, especially the United States' fecklessness and lack of a clear policy on the Middle East's future in general and on Assad's in particular.
- If terror is to be fought and soundly defeated, the struggle must be waged against all the terror organizations and the states that support them. Iran has already headed the list of terror-supporting states for years. It is now awarded the status of a partner in trying to settle the Syrian crisis.
- The United States and the West continue to take an approach to terror that is unfocused, selective, and indulgent. They are no longer prepared to pay the price that is entailed in a resolute, hands-on struggle against terror.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was scheduled to make an official visit to France on November 14, 2015. Then, a short time before his arrival, terror struck Paris, and the Iranian foreign minister hastened to announce the visit's postponement. In a letter of condolences to his French counterpart, the Iranian president said:

*"I, on behalf of the great Iranian nation which has been a victim of scourge of terrorism [sic], strongly condemn the anti-human crimes...the most important message following these kinds of incidents is more serious resolve and determination in all-out combat against terrorist groups."*<sup>1</sup>

## **Iran Exploits the West's Weakness and Vulnerability**

The terror attack in France has again concentrated the minds of the Western states on the crisis in Syria, from which at least some of the attackers came, some of whom disguised as refugees. The Syrian crisis is beginning to radiate outward and directly affect the character and security of Europe. The fighting in Syria, in which global-jihad elements are involved (mainly the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, which are waging both battles on the ground and battles of prestige over who is the global jihad's standard-bearer), is also affecting the moderate Arab states. These states have not yet disintegrated as an outcome of the Arab Spring – particularly Tunisia and Egypt, which constitute a secondary arena for Al-Qaeda and Islamic State activity.

The attack in Paris occurred between rounds of the Vienna talks on a solution to the Syrian crisis. The 17 countries participating in these talks include the United States, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. It appears that Oman, which has been a key facilitator of the U.S.-Iranian talks on the nuclear issue, is also playing a central role in the Syrian talks, particularly regarding the attempts to bridge the profound gap between Iran, which supports the “legitimate” regime of Bashar Assad, and Saudi Arabia, which backs some of the rebel organizations.<sup>2</sup>

The first round of talks was held on October 30, 2015, the second on November 14. It is mainly Russia that is setting the tone, and its proposal for a solution involving elections that would leave Assad in the picture is the topic under discussion.



Cartoon in the Iranian Fars News, affiliated with Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps; on the box is written “Elections in Syria,” and on the bear...“Russia.”  
The caption says: “Russia’s proposal: early elections in Syria.”

The West, beset by waves of refugees and terror and in growing distress, has paradoxically adopted the line of Syria and its patron Iran. The two say that the Assad regime is grappling with the terror problem and that finding a solution and combatting the terrorists require solving the Syrian crisis. Iran has, indeed, been pushing the public-diplomacy line that Assad is struggling with a wave of terror supported by the West and the Gulf States headed by Saudi Arabia. *Keyhan*, Iran's conservative newspaper which usually reflects the leader's policy, ran this headline following the Paris attack: "The IS rabid dog bit his master's the leg."<sup>3</sup> At the reconciliation conference in Vienna, the Iranian and Saudi representatives exchanged harsh words.

Meanwhile Iran keeps promoting its long-term strategic policy in Syria; it views the country as an integral component of its national security. Ali Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's adviser on international affairs and former foreign minister, declared in a recent interview to the Lebanese daily *al Safir* that Iran will never abandon Bashar, Hizballah and the Palestinian organizations ( Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad), adding

that Bashar position is stronger than ever. Velayati said that “no one supported Assad to the extent Iran did...without its support Syria’s fate would be worse than Libya’s.”<sup>4</sup>

Assad’s travails since the crisis erupted during the “Arab Spring” have not led Iran to abandon him but, on the contrary, to deepen its involvement in the Syrian arena and indeed to get Hezbollah involved as well. Meanwhile the death toll of senior Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leaders and of Hezbollah fighters keeps rising. The November 12, 2015 terror attack on Hezbollah’s stronghold in Beirut is also part of the price the organization is paying for its ongoing activity in Syria.

Russia, too, which has moved urgently to help Assad’s regime survive, has paid a heavy price with the downing of a Russian passenger plane by the Islamic State.

In the reconciliation conference, Iran participated as one of the sides seeking a solution. It did so with the quiet consent of the United States, which has been temporizing ever since the Syrian crisis began and is now leaving the arena to Russian and Iranian military and political involvement. Iran is part of the problem in Syria, but the West now sees it as part of the solution.

Iran is greatly encouraged by several key regional and international developments, including Russia’s involvement in Syria, the beginning of the JCPOA nuclear agreement’s implementation, the first breaches in the sanctions, and by being cast as a regional actor that can help settle the region’s problems.

All this has occurred without Iran altering its basic condition for solving the Syrian crisis (the Assad regime’s survival), ceasing its calls for Israel’s destruction (Rouhani, a short time before his planned visit to France, told the French media that “Israel in its current form is not legitimate”),<sup>5</sup> or ending its ongoing efforts at terror and subversion in the Persian Gulf and in Yemen.

Iran is exploiting the West’s weakness, especially the United States’ fecklessness and lack of a clear policy on the Middle East’s future in general and on Assad’s in particular. The United States searches for a definition of terror and how to conduct the struggle against terror. For example, Secretary of State John Kerry said this after the latest Paris attack:

*“There’s something different about what happened from Charlie Hebdo, and I think everybody would feel that. There was a sort of particularized focus and perhaps even a legitimacy in terms of—not a legitimacy, but a rationale that you could attach yourself to somehow and say, okay, they’re really angry because of this and that. This Friday was absolutely indiscriminate.”<sup>6</sup>*

Those words were preceded by, in a similar vein, President Obama’s February 2015 remarks after the attack on the Hyper Cacher supermarket in Paris that killed four Jews:

*"...my first job is to protect the American people. It is entirely legitimate for the American people to be deeply concerned when you've got a bunch of violent, vicious zealots who behead people or randomly shoot a bunch of folks in a deli in Paris."*<sup>7</sup>

If terror is to be fought and soundly defeated, the struggle must be waged against all the terror organizations and the states that support them. Iran has already headed the list of terror-supporting states for years. It is now awarded the status of a partner in trying to settle the Syrian crisis even as it continues to support Hizbullah (officially designated a terror organization by the United States and Europe) and other terror groups in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. The West's agreement to include Iran in seeking a solution in Syria may help defeat the Islamic State, but it will create a greater problem in the long term.

### **The Lesson Not Learned**

The United States and the West continue to take an approach to terror that is unfocused, selective, and indulgent. In actuality, they are no longer prepared to pay the price (which Russia and Iran are prepared to pay) that is entailed in a resolute, hands-on struggle against terror. The strategy they have chosen so far for the anti-Islamic State campaign has collapsed. No real benefit has accrued from the relatively sparse aerial bombings they have been carrying out for months. Moreover, they continue to regard Iran as a legitimate partner in the fight against terror (particularly in Iraq) without thinking about what this means in light of Iran's ambitious plans for regional hegemony. Although those plans – whether pursued in Yemen, Iraq, or Bahrain – are not hidden from view, the West opts to ignore them because of the Syrian crisis and its ramifications for Europe. Shiite Iran (sometimes a terror target itself though still not a high-intensity one in its own territory) is exploiting the convergence of interests with the West in the struggle against the Islamic State to make political gains.

Furthermore, the West (primarily the United States, as Secretary Kerry's comments made evident) persists in refusing to recognize that the war being waged against it -- by Iran as well -- in an all-out war that is aimed against its liberal values and culture. It is very doubtful that the murderous attack in Paris will prompt a turnabout in the West's indulgent, selective approach and in its basic perceptions of radical Islamic terror (Sunni and Shiite), whether that of Hizbullah or of the Palestinian organizations that oppose the peace process and are funded and equipped by Iran. Will the U.S. president acknowledge that Islamic terror exists, that the incitement for terror attacks comes from mosques, that the perpetrator of the lethal attack at the Hyper Cacher was a radical Muslim, and that Iran is a terror-supporting state and hence abhorrent? The answer is apparently no.

Further indications of Europe's difficulty in fighting terror and the states that support it are its agreement to host Rouhani (who was behind the murder of regime opponents in France and behind the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing that killed 58 French soldiers and 241 U.S. Marines who were serving in the Multinational Force). Incredibly,



French President Françoise Hollande placed a phone call<sup>8</sup> to his Iranian counterpart, Rouhani, to coordinate anti-terror efforts. A further testament to Europe's difficulty is the labeling of products from the Israeli territories, where Europe chooses to label products of the victims of terror who are under unceasing, daily assaults, thereby giving a boost to the terrorists, their dispatchers, and the states that finance them such as Iran.

So long as the West continues with its euphemisms and evasions on the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism, the terror will continue and so will its support from states, with Iran at the forefront. Iran regards terror and support for terror organizations as a key and legitimate means to promote its foreign policy goals, and in light of the weakness and vagueness of the West's stance, it will keep using terror to subvert Western values (the ethos of individual freedom and freedom of worship) while burning American, British, and Israeli flags. It will continue to undermine the Western states' interests and influence in a Middle East that is splintering.

In an article published after the Paris attack, philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy termed the terrorists "Fascislamists." The U.S. president, however, and meanwhile Europe as well, still avoid using such terms in the name of freedom, democracy, and political correctness. As Lévy concludes:

*"What holds us back? Why have we been so stinting in assisting our Kurdish allies? What is it about this war that the America of Barack Obama, at least for the moment, seems not to really want to win?"*

*I do not know the answer, but I know where the key lies. And I know the alternative to using the key: No boots on their ground means more blood on ours."<sup>9</sup>*

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.president.ir/en/90493>

<sup>2</sup> <http://sputniknews.com/politics/20151113/1030063131/oman-saudi-iran-vienna-talks.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://kayhan.ir/fa/news/60703>

<sup>4</sup> <http://assafir.com/Article/1/457496>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2015/11/11/01003-20151111ARTFIG00230-hassan-rohani-l-etat-actuel-d-israel-n-est-pas-legitime.php>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/11/249565.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.vox.com/a/barack-obama-interview-vox-conversation/obama-foreign-policy-transcript>

<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/HassanRouhani/status/666552410995892224>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-levy/war-thinking-the-unthinka\\_b\\_8590406.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernardhenri-levy/war-thinking-the-unthinka_b_8590406.html)

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