



# IRAN'S "SECOND" ISLAMIC REVOLUTION: ITS CHALLENGE TO THE WEST

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad delivers a speech on the 18th anniversary of the death of the late revolutionary founder Ayatollah Khomeini, under his portrait, at his mausoleum just outside Tehran, Iran, June 3, 2007. Hard-line Ahmadinejad said the world would witness the destruction of Israel soon, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported.

The ideological engine powering the Iranian regime's race for regional supremacy is among the more misunderstood – and ignored – aspects of Iran's political and military activity in the Middle East. Particularly since the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, Iran's revolutionary leadership has thrust the Islamic Republic into the throes of what has been called a "Second Islamic Revolution."<sup>1</sup> In its basic form, this revolution seeks a return to the principles of former Iranian leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1979 Islamic Revolution, which was based on: destroying Israel – "the Little Satan" – as a symbol of the United States, "the Great Satan;"<sup>2</sup> exporting the Islamic revolution domestically and against Arab "apostate" governments in the region, and forcing a clash of civilizations with the "infidel" West; and asserting leadership over the Arab Middle East, particularly in the oil-rich Gulf.

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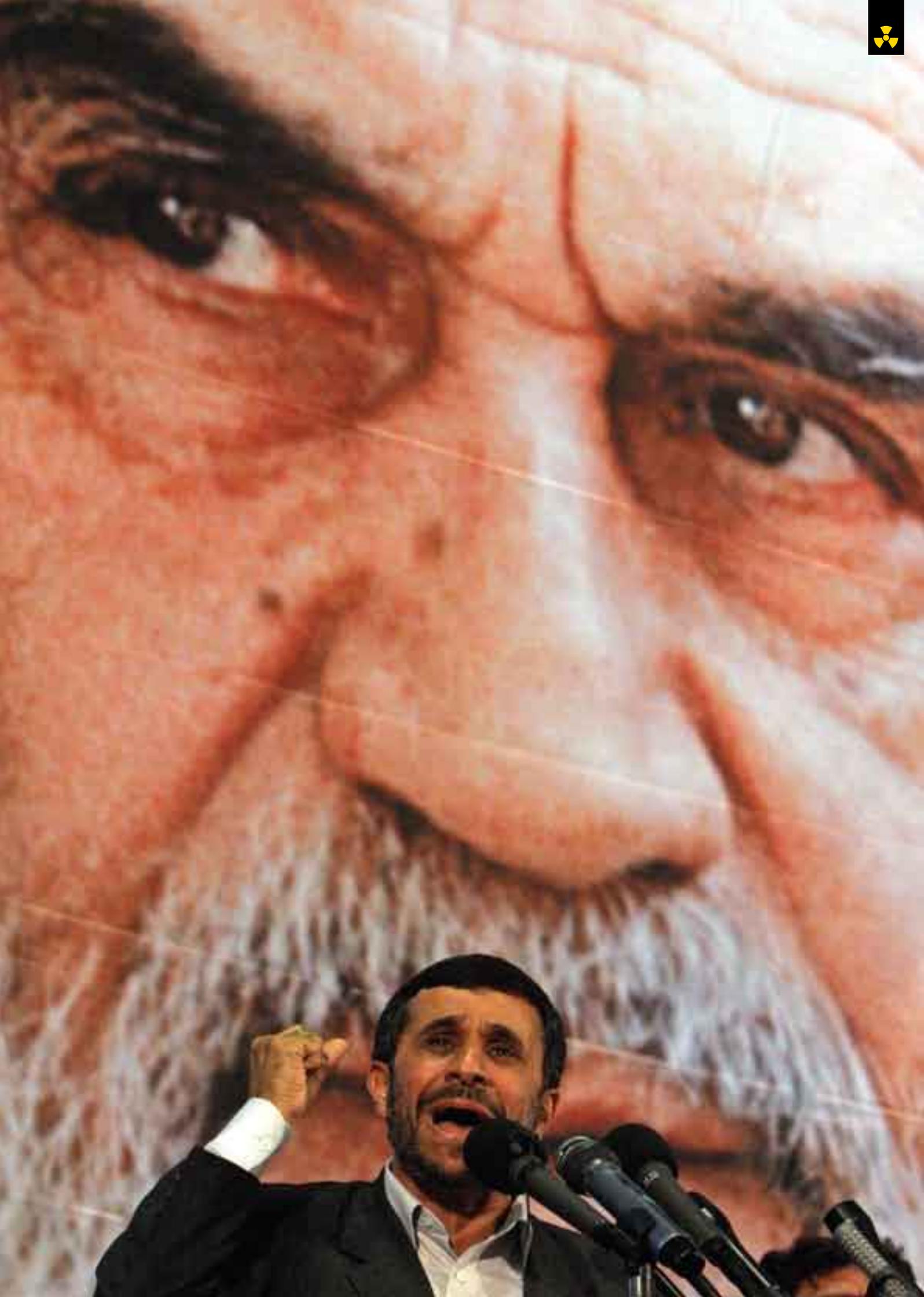
The current regime's desire to fulfill Khomeini's revolutionary plans for the Islamic Republic could have been understood without arguing that Iran is exporting a Second Islamic Revolution. However, the current regime – under the guidance of Khomeini's successor, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – is succeeding in exporting the revolution where Khomeini had stopped short. Ahmadinejad in particular has exceeded Khomeini's original revolutionary vision for Iran. His apocalyptic dedication to triggering the return of the Mahdi – the vanished Shiite messiah –

via what is known in the West as "Gog and Magog" events is driven by his spiritual fealty to the fundamentalist Ayatollah Mohammad Mesbah Yazdi and the messianic *Hojjatiyeh* organization. These religious convictions have propelled the regime toward an end-of-days scenario that Khomeini had sought to avoid.<sup>3</sup>

Iran's Second Islamic Revolution is distinguishing itself from the original Islamic Revolution in other important ways: Iran is not only spreading its power in the region by reaching out to Shiite communities such as in Iraq and Lebanon, the regime is also actively cooperating with Sunni terror groups in an effort to solicit support from the Sunni Arab street over the heads of established Arab governments. Second, Iran's leadership also seeks broader support from non-Muslim Third World leaders, such as President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. Finally, the new revolution has factored in Iran's nearly completed nuclear weapons capability in order to challenge U.S. domination of both the Middle East and the prevailing international system. Understanding the revolutionary ideology to which many in the Iranian leadership are currently dedicated is key to understanding Tehran's ambitions in the Middle East.

Such an analysis runs counter to the assumption that the current Iranian regime can be transformed into a stabilizing and constructive presence in the region. Rather, an understanding of the regime's revolutionary zeal may help shed light on its plans to defeat the West, achieve leadership of the Arab world, and assert control across the Middle East.

Amir Taheri, the former editor of the Iranian daily newspaper *Kayan*, noted that the real Iranian strategy is "Iran's determination to reshape the Middle East in its own image – a deliberate 'clash of civilizations' with the United States."<sup>4</sup>





Militant Iranians chanting outside the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, November 8, 1979, a few days after their takeover of the American compound. A poster caricaturing President Jimmy Carter is in the background.

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### **Implementing Khomeini’s Revolution Against the “Infidel” West**

The Iranian regime’s financing, arming, and training of Islamist groups across and beyond the Middle East is an extension of the regime’s approach since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini, the “father” of the revolution, viewed the world’s superpowers as the source of world corruption. In this context, he labeled the United States “the Great Satan,” Iran’s number one enemy, while America’s ally, Israel, was “the Little Satan.”<sup>5</sup> Khomeini argued that a billion “Muslims should unite and defeat America.”<sup>6</sup>

Ahmadinejad has been a loyal soldier in Khomeini’s revolution against the West since he participated, while still a student, in the 1979 takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran and the abduction of 66 hostages, of which 52 members of the embassy staff were held for 444 days. Then-Iranian President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr would admit in an October 2006 interview that Ahmadinejad was not only present in the occupied American compound, but served as liaison between the hostage-takers and Ali Khamenei, currently Iran’s Supreme Leader and at the time one of the most important Friday preachers in Tehran.<sup>7</sup>

Ahmadinejad and ruling clerics Khamenei, Khatami, and Ali Akbar Rafsanjani have continued in Khomeini’s path, exporting the Islamic Revolution and supporting international terrorism via the regime’s closely controlled Islamic Revolutionary Guards Force (IRGC) and, later, the establishment of the IRGC’s clandestine “Qods Force” that is mobilized for foreign operations. The IRGC was established in 1979 by Khomeini as a separate command structure whose loyalty to the revolution would not be in doubt.

The IRGC has operated as a parallel force to the regular Iranian military and has come to be entrusted with operating the regime’s most sensitive forces and weapons systems, including weapons of mass destruction, Iran’s ballistic missile program, and its foreign insurgency operations.<sup>8</sup> Khamenei’s personal commitment to the IRGC began during the Iran-Iraq War when, as Iran’s president between 1981 and 1989, he was the regime’s senior political figure directly involved in the strategic directives of the IRGC and Qods Force.

### **Ahmadinejad: A Loyal Soldier of the Revolution**

Ahmadinejad held senior roles in Khomeini’s revolutionary leadership in the 1980s. He served as a commander in the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War and subsequently became a senior commander in the Qods Force.<sup>9</sup> During the Iran-Iraq War, Ahmadinejad also served as an instructor in the Basij Mostazafin, the Revolutionary Guard-commanded volunteer militia that was part of Khomeini’s “mobilization of the oppressed.” The Basij’s radical indoctrination claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Iranian youth, many no more than twelve years old. These “child martyrs” were given plastic keys to wear around their necks assuring them of entry to heaven after they sacrificed themselves as human minesweepers to clear a path for IRGC forces.<sup>10</sup>

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In 1980, Khomeini explained that “the Basij must understand that he is a soldier of God for whom it is not so much the outcome of the conflict as the mere participation in it that provides fulfillment and gratification.”<sup>11</sup> “The natural world,” Khomeini explained in October 1980, “is the lowest element, the scum of creation. What is decisive is the beyond: The divine world, that is eternal.” In Khomeini’s view, death is only a corridor from this world to the world beyond, where martyrs live eternally and in splendor.<sup>12</sup>

Ahmadinejad is today still closely allied with the Basij, regularly appearing in public with a black-and-white Basiji scarf, and frequently praising the power of the Basiji culture and ethos in his speeches. The Basij have grown in numbers and influence: They have served as a vice squad to enforce Islamic Sharia law, and were used as a paramilitary force to suppress anti-government forces and student riots in 1999 and 2003. The Basij, who served as loyal Ahmadinejad campaign staffers, also constituted a core part of his voter base. They stormed the Ministry of Interior during the first round of balloting, a virtual putsch that, according to many local observers, explains how Ahmadinejad advanced to the second round of voting with only 12 percent public support.<sup>13</sup>

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Ahmadinejad’s presidency, then, coincides with a new generation of revolutionary leaders whose worldview emerged from the carnage of the Iran-Iraq War. Ahmadinejad and his fellow Revolutionary Guard warriors wield “a more fervently ideological approach to politics than their predecessors. The children of the Revolution are now its leaders.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Advancing the Regime’s Foreign Policy: Defeating the West**

A good example of Ahmadinejad’s revolutionary agenda was on display in October 2005 at a regime-hosted conference entitled “A World without Zionism,” at which senior members of Iranian proxy groups such as Hizbullah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad figured prominently. Ahmadinejad, quoting Khomeini, remarked, “the Imam said: ‘This

regime that is occupying Qods [Jerusalem] must be eliminated from the pages of history.’”<sup>15</sup> The Iranian president also called for defeating the United States, which he labeled “the world of arrogance.”<sup>16</sup>

**The IRGC, Iranian cultural centers, economic legations, religious and charity institutions, the state intelligence apparatus, consulates, and embassies provide cover for Iran’s terror activity and international subversion.**

Drawing international condemnation from the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States, Ahmadinejad further emphasized that “a world without Americans and Zionists” is “attainable.”<sup>17</sup> Since then, Ahmadinejad and other regime officials have repeated these themes.<sup>18</sup> Maj.-Gen. Ataollah Salehi, General Commander of the Iranian armed forces, warned just months before the outbreak of the 2006 Hizbullah war against Israel that a clash between the Islamic Republic and the U.S. is inevitable, saying, “the Americans will run away [from the Middle East] leaving their illegitimate child [Israel] behind, and then Muslims will know what to do.”<sup>19</sup> Ahmadinejad has noted on numerous occasions that the Middle East conflict “has become the locus of the final war between Muslims and the infidel West.”<sup>20</sup>

The IRGC, Iranian cultural centers, economic legations, religious and charity institutions, the state intelligence apparatus, consulates, and embassies provide cover for Iran’s terror activity and international subversion. Iran’s Bank Melli and Bank Sad-erat (the Export Bank of Iran) have provided significant terror financing for the regime.<sup>21</sup>

Declassified Western intelligence reports reveal that Iranian diplomats have been engaged in intelligence-gathering and surveillance of targets for future attacks.<sup>22</sup> It was an ominous sign in early 2006 when the Foreign Ministry replaced nearly sixty ambassadors, particularly in Western capitals, despite Tehran’s insistence that the move was part of a regular diplomatic rotation.<sup>23</sup>

IRGC senior commander Mohammed Reza Jaafari has opened offices in major Iranian cities for the recruitment of volunteers for “martyrdom-seeking operations” against Western targets. Jaafari told the Iranian weekly *Parto Sokhan*, “Forces like these are established in other countries, and even in America, and in NATO countries. 50,000 volunteers have been registered and organized. The first



blow we strike at the enemy will be the final blow that will obliterate it.”<sup>24</sup> “America and Israel should know, each of our suicide bombers equals a nuclear bomb.” Jaafari added, “Ahmadinejad should be a role model for Iranian officials.”<sup>25</sup>

Ayatollah Mohammad Mesbah Yazdi, the hard-line Iranian cleric who is considered the major inspiration behind Ahmadinejad’s dedication to trigger the reappearance of the Mahdi – Shiite Islam’s 12th and “vanished” messianic figure – has also issued public calls for volunteers for an Iranian martyr’s organization called *Zeitun*, to carry out suicide op-

erations abroad. *Zeitun* was reportedly established by Elias Naderan, a faction leader of the Iranian Parliament, a former intelligence officer in the Revolutionary Guard, and an ally of Ahmadinejad.<sup>26</sup> According to reports, *Zeitun* already has upwards of 40,000 male and female volunteers for martyrdom operations, especially against U.S., British, and Israeli forces.<sup>27</sup>



## The Second Lebanon War and Tehran's Revolutionary Designs

It is in this context of the regime's dedication to the Islamic Revolution and its mandate to defeat the Western alliance and destroy Israel that the watershed 2006 Second Lebanon War should be assessed. Ahmadinejad told Iran's national news channel in July 2006, a week after the war broke out, that "Lebanon is an historic test which will determine the future of humanity....[America] is the one who started this fire. They have collected

a bunch of people [the Jews] and put them in the occupied lands to serve as their shield, so they can realize their colonialist domineering goals."<sup>28</sup> The Iranian daily *Jomhour-e Eslami*, affiliated with the Islamic seminaries of Qom, reiterated in a July 17, 2006, editorial: "America's collaboration with the Zionists in murdering the Palestinian people, destroying Lebanon, and [hurling] baseless accusations against Iran [regarding] nuclear activity – which is now coming to a head – is a new phase in America's crusade against the Muslims."<sup>29</sup>

Actually, Iran, its Syrian ally, and Hizbullah proxy understood the Second Lebanon War to be the first round of an Iranian-U.S. war fought over Israel's bow. The Iranian regime and its allies have long viewed Israel as a veritable branch office for Washington's interests in the Middle East – a forward operating base of the "arrogant powers." In the middle of the war, a Syrian cabinet minister wrote in the pan-Arab daily *Asharq Alawsat* that the conflict in Lebanon "is between the forces of Islam and America with Israel acting as an American proxy."<sup>30</sup> Iranian scholar Amir Taheri has noted that "Israel's role as an American proxy is better understood in the Middle East than in the West."<sup>31</sup>

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During the 2006 war, Gholam Ali Adel, Iran's parliament speaker, declared in a nationally televised speech in Tehran that "England, then America, wished to have control over the Islamic world, to prevent Muslim unity, and to have control of the oil resources in the Middle East. Therefore...they established an artificial, false, and fictitious entity called Israel."<sup>32</sup>

These differing perceptions between Iran and the West over the nature of the conflict are key to understanding Iran's revolutionary motivations and their implementation in the Second Lebanon War. Ahmadinejad's sanctioning of Iranian participation seemed to demonstrate the fulfillment of Khomeini's revolutionary vision to "rid the world of the cancerous tumor called Israel."<sup>33</sup> The revolutionary leadership's Qods Force, whose operatives are integrated into Hizbullah's command structure, were advising

Backdropped by an anti-Israeli and anti-American oversized banner, Iranian female paramilitary militiamen (Basij) parade in front of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Tehran, Aug. 24, 2005.



Aug. 18, 2007: Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Maj.-Gen. Yahya Rahim Safavi (left), greets Sheikh Naim Qassem, Deputy Secretary General of Lebanon's Hizbullah, during a religious ceremony in Tehran. A week after this photo was taken Safavi was replaced as IRGC commander by Mohammad Al-Jaafari on the orders of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

and assisting in attacks on Israeli forces and in rocket assaults against Israeli cities.<sup>34</sup>

High-ranking IDF sources note that the Qods Force, under the command of Brigadier General Qassem Suleimani (who is also an adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on Iraq), coordinated terror actions with Hizbullah.<sup>35</sup> Suleimani has been responsible for Iranian military activity in Syria and for directing Palestinian terrorist organizations in Syria and throughout the region. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Iran's Bank Melli provides banking services to the IRGC and the Qods Force, which are engaged in overseas operations.<sup>36</sup> The Qods Force alone provides substantial material support to the Taliban, Shiite militants in Iraq, Lebanese Hizbullah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.<sup>37</sup> Iranian support for Hizbullah via the Qods Force has included some \$100-200 million annually, in addition to \$380 million dollars for postwar reconstruction.<sup>38</sup>

## Nasrallah's deputy, Sheik Naaim Qassem, told the Iranian Arabic-language TV station *Al-Qawthar* that Hizbullah requires permission for operations from Iran's supreme leadership.

Hizbullah, like the IRGC, does not operate primarily as an independent actor, but takes instructions from and reports to the Iranian leadership.<sup>39</sup> Hizbullah's representative in Iran, Abdallah Safiy Al-Din, told the Iranian daily *Kayhan*, in the middle of the Israel-Hizbullah war on August 7, 2006, "Everything we have, we [obtained] thanks to the Islamic Revolu-

tion [in Iran]."<sup>40</sup> The leader of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, acts as Khamenei's personal emissary in Lebanon. In March 2007, Nasrallah's deputy, Sheik Naaim Qassem, told the Iranian Arabic-language TV station *Al-Qawthar* that Hizbullah requires permission for operations from Iran's supreme leadership.<sup>41</sup> Hizbullah's preeminent terrorist mastermind, Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in Damascus in February 2008, maintained direct ties to Iranian military intelligence and was named by senior Israeli intelligence figures as a main interlocutor between Hizbullah and Iran during the 2006 war.<sup>42</sup>

Mughniyeh's past role as an agent of the Iranian revolutionary leadership is well-documented. He carried out the 1994 bombing of the Argentinean Jewish Community Center under direct instructions from Ali Khamenei.<sup>43</sup> In 2002, he was instructed by Khamenei to purchase the *Karine A* to sail arms to the Gaza Strip – a journey that was intercepted by the IDF.<sup>44</sup> While the Iranian leadership had kept its relationship with Mughniyeh shrouded in secrecy, following his death he was celebrated as a national hero. A stamp featuring Mughniyeh was issued by Iran in commemoration.<sup>45</sup>

During the 2006 war, Khamenei personally issued calls for 2,500 suicide fighters to be deployed to Lebanon.<sup>46</sup> According to Iranian news agencies, during the war two groups of IRGC-trained volunteer fighters were sent to Lebanon for martyrdom operations. The Second Lebanon War was one of the most recent demonstrations that the Iranian regime is attempting to make good on Ahmadinejad's 2005 post-election promise to destroy Israel as the first step towards defeating the West.

## Washington's Recalibrated Assessments

Iran's participation in the Second Lebanon War also seemed to trigger recognition by some Bush Administration officials that Iran's goals were broader than simply supplying weapons and financing to its long-time Hizbullah client. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State David Welch noted to the *Washington Post* shortly after the war broke out that Iran's "hand" is in each of the conflicts in the region: Southern Lebanon, Gaza, and Iraq. Welch noted that the outbreak of the war "does cross a threshold because, as Hizbullah has now said, this action was planned. It was intended to escalate and widen the battleground."<sup>47</sup>

Bolder U.S. assessments of Iran's behavior were offered by other U.S. officials at the time, including David Schenker, adviser on Syria and Lebanon to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and David



Wurmser, Middle East Advisor to Vice President Dick Cheney. Schenker and Wurmser both noted that the Second Lebanon War reflected Tehran's regional intentions for a new phase of the Iranian Revolution.<sup>48</sup> Schenker emphasized that for Iran, the war broke out prematurely before its nuclear program was ready, which cost the Iranian leadership some of the valuable rocket deterrence it had built in Lebanon against Israel. However, Schenker also noted that Tehran's leading role in Hizbullah's massive post-war troop and arms build-up both north and south of the Litani River, and Iran's re-supply of tens of thousands of rockets, reflect Tehran's ongoing revolutionary and strategic designs on the region.<sup>49</sup>

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It seems that Iran's revolutionary designs have also made a greater impression on U.S. officials and lawmakers in the years since the Second Lebanon War. In July 2007, Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman assessed in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed that "Iran is acting aggressively and consistently to undermine moderate regimes in the Middle East, establish itself as the dominant regional power and reshape the region in its own ideological image. The involvement of Hizbullah in Iraq...illustrates precisely how interconnected are the different threats and challenges we face in the region. The fanatical government of Iran is the common denominator that links them together."<sup>50</sup> The U.S. ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, told the *New York Times* in April 2008 that Iran is fighting a proxy war in Iraq.<sup>51</sup>

Iran's behavior has confirmed these assessments. Since November 2006, the regime has hosted 4,500 Hizbullah members for three-month training sessions led by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.<sup>52</sup> The objective has been to create a core of Iranian-trained fighters for the next round of war with Israel. Muhammad Ali Hussein, head of the Islamic Union in Lebanon, admitted to a Kuwaiti newspaper, "The training in Iran lies at the heart of our connections with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and this is known to all Lebanese people."<sup>53</sup> One Hizbullah fighter told the *Christian Science Monitor* in April 2008 that he had recently returned from Iran, his second trip in a year, where he was taught how to fire antitank missiles. "The holy fighters are

leaving universities, shops, places of work to go and train."<sup>54</sup>

The head of the IDF's Southern Command, Major General Yoav Galant, and other senior Israeli security officials have noted Iran's penetration of Gaza and the West Bank, where Iran is attempting to replicate the regime's success with Hizbullah in Southern Lebanon.<sup>55</sup> Hamas has increasingly been transformed into an Iranian organization since Ahmadinejad's election.<sup>56</sup> Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal was in Tehran for "consultations" on the eve of Hamas' parliamentary victory in January 2006, and immediately following the elections, Hamas' Gaza-based leader, Ismail Haniyeh, visited Ahmadinejad and the mullahs in Tehran as one of his first post-election visits – and called the Iranians his "key allies."<sup>57</sup> Mashaal – a "frequent flier" to Tehran, according to Avi Dichter,<sup>58</sup> Israel's Minister of Internal Security – said at Tehran University that "the famous sentence by the late founder of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, still resonates in our ears, that Israel is a tumor which needs to be removed."<sup>59</sup>

The long and well-disguised arms of the Iranian regime may have struck Jerusalem in the March 2008 suicide terror shooting of eight teenagers in the library of a religious seminary. Iran's Hizbullah-operated "Unit 1800" in Lebanon has been tied to the attack,<sup>60</sup> although whether Iran ordered it directly is unclear. However, the extent of Iranian influence, especially in terms of ideology, was clear: Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, Lebanon's most senior Shiite cleric, publicly praised the attack, thereby closing ranks with Iran and Hizbullah.<sup>61</sup>

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The body of the terrorist, Alaa Abu Dheim, a resident of Jerusalem who had been previously arrested by Israeli security forces for ties to Hizbullah, was wrapped in a yellow Hizbullah flag, while his family's mourning tent also flew Hizbullah and Hamas flags.<sup>62</sup> Palestinian assessments have claimed that Iran's agent in Bethlehem, Palestinian Islamic Jihad commander Mohammed Shahada, was behind the attack, despite IDF denials.<sup>63</sup> Shahada had converted to Shiism after his expulsion to Southern Lebanon in 1992. Shahada and three of his associates



were killed by the IDF a week after the Jerusalem attack; their bodies were also shrouded in Hizbullah flags.<sup>64</sup> At a minimum, it was clear that Iran had penetrated West Bank cities and neighborhoods adjacent to Israel’s capital, Jerusalem, and that the regime’s radical ideology had gained currency among some Palestinians.

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Western media reports and other assessments have generally attributed terror attacks such as the Jerusalem massacre and other suicide operations against Israelis to Palestinian revenge for Israel’s war with Hamas in Gaza. However, the Iranian leadership’s view is broader. For Ahmadinejad, Israel is the bridgehead of the “arrogant powers,” with which there is no possibility of compromise.<sup>65</sup> He has also declared on more than one occasion, “We are in the process of an historic war between the world of arrogance [i.e., the West] and the Islamic world, and this war has been going on for hundreds of years.”<sup>66</sup> It is no coincidence, then, that almost all of the major terror attacks of the past several years – including the Gaza-based rocket war – have been carried out by groups that are funded, armed, and trained by Iran.

### **Exporting the Revolution to “Apostate” Arab States**

Aside from the Iranian leadership’s dedication to eliminating Israel en route to defeating the West, we are also currently witnessing another potentially historic upheaval that also derives from Iran’s Second Islamic Revolution. This, too, is an assault on an established order, but it is an assault that is geographically and culturally much closer to home than the West.

The rapid growth of Iranian-led Shiite power across the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Lebanon,<sup>67</sup> has triggered fear in Sunni Arab states – Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states – that Iran

will soon be able to dramatically shift the cultural and geopolitical balance between Shiite and Sunni Muslims in the region.<sup>68</sup>

### **A Return to Khomeini**

Ayatollah Khomeini had first advocated exporting the Islamic Revolution across the Middle East when he came to power in 1979, calling for Islam’s return to its “rightful path” from which the Rashidun, Ummayyad and Abbasid Caliphs – the Sunnis – had deviated from 632 to 1258 CE. Initially, Khomeini exported the revolution through Ayatollah Hasayn Ali Montazeri, who in the early 1980s established a special organization called the Bureau of Relations for Islamic Movements that was established for supporting Islamic liberation movements in the Arab world.

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Iran provided money and advice to radical Shiite groups in Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, where it backed Shiite uprisings in the oil-rich Eastern Province in 1979 and 1980.<sup>69</sup> Iran was suspected of being involved in coup plots in Bahrain in 1981 and Qatar in 1983.<sup>70</sup> Besides founding Hizbullah in Lebanon in 1982, Khomeini also established Hizbullah branches for the Hijaz (Saudi Arabia) and in Turkey. However, Iran’s revolutionary evangelism stalled during the later years of its decade-long war with Iraq, so that by the 1990s Montazeri had been replaced and efforts to export the revolution lost much of their steam.

Israel’s withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000 gave Iran new momentum, as Hizbullah was able to take credit for being the first Arab military force to defeat Israel. Shiite prestige was further, if unintentionally, enhanced by the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 that would at last empower the country’s Shiite majority. In historical terms, this was perhaps a major sign that the time was ripe for Shiite ascendancy.

## Sunni Concerns at Iran’s Ascendancy

Today, Ahmadinejad’s confident reassertion of Shi-ite power has become a grave concern in states where Sunnis and Shiites live together, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. The Sunnis are accustomed to regarding the Shiites as inferior, as second-class Muslims, and as a threat to the long-standing dominance of Sunni Arabs in the Middle East. Never before has the Sunni mainstream establishment perceived the Shiites to be so daunting a threat.

The Ahmadinejad era has been marked by the regime’s ability to forge alliances with groups that in decades past may have been improbable collaborators, such as the Sunni terror organizations Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade.

In the past year alone, Iran accused the Sunni Gulf states of being “illegal regimes” that were established through the intervention of “arrogant Western imperialism.”<sup>71</sup> The Iranian threats to Arab regimes east of the Suez Canal go hand in hand with a strategy of reaching out to what Tehran sees as its rightful inheritance of the Shiite majorities in Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen, and Azerbaijan, as well as the large Shiite minorities in Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates and the three million Shiites in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The Iranian regime continues to claim sovereignty over three UAE islands: Greater and Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa. Hussein Shariatmadari, spiritual adviser to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, inflamed tensions with Gulf states in 2007 by repeating Iran’s implied threat to “liberate” Bahrain, which he labeled a “district of Iran” that should be annexed “to the motherland.”<sup>72</sup>

Iran’s collaboration with Syria and Hizbullah in the destabilization of the Lebanese central government is a good example of Iran’s export of its revolution, as seen in Hizbullah’s May 2008 temporary hijacking of the government of Prime Minister Fouad Seniora. Jordan’s King Abdullah, recognized as Prophet Muhammad’s direct, 43rd-generation descendent, first sounded the alarm in 2004 when he warned that a “new crescent” of Shiites, stretching from Iran into Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, could emerge and shift the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects.<sup>73</sup>



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He also noted that Iran’s flooding of Iraq with a million Iranians, mobilizing the Revolutionary Guard forces, and working to influence the outcome of elections could transform Iraq into another Islamic Republic.<sup>74</sup> Abdullah said, “It is in Iran’s vested interest to have an Islamic Republic of Iraq.”<sup>75</sup> Egypt’s

A Lebanese Hizbullah supporter waves a Hizbullah flag in front of a banner showing pictures of Hizbullah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah (bottom), Shiite Muslim spiritual leader Imam Moussa Sadr who disappeared on a trip to Libya in 1978 (center), and Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (top), in Kfar Kila, Lebanon, Sept. 21, 2006. Hundreds of Hizbullah supporters from across Southern Lebanon began marching on foot toward Beirut for a major rally to support Hizbullah in the aftermath of its war with Israel.

Hosni Mubarak followed suit in 2006 when he said during an interview on *Al-Arabiya* television, “Most of the Shiites are loyal to Iran, and not to the countries they are living in.”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, a former senior Kuwaiti government advisor, Sami al-Faraj, admitted to the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Siyassah* in March 2008 that Israel should attack Iranian nuclear installations. According to al-Faraj, “[Israel] would be achieving something of great strategic value for the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] by stopping Iran’s tendency for hegemony over the area.”<sup>77</sup>

## The Revolution’s New Sunni Allies

What is different, though, about the Second Iranian Revolution is that its success has not been limited to Shiite communities in the region or to the creation of proxy groups such as Hizbullah in Lebanon, the nurturing of Shiite militias such as the Badr Brigade and the Mahdi Army in Iraq, and the establishment in Afghanistan of the Sepah-e-Mohammed militia by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards.<sup>78</sup>

**Ahmadinejad’s message to the Palestinians is simple: Palestine should not participate in a two-state solution; it is an inseparable part of the land of Islam, and there is no need to sacrifice even an inch of it; and since the Palestinian cause is supported by the entire Muslim world, especially Iran, which will soon have nuclear weapons, there is no need to compromise.**

The Ahmadinejad era has been marked by the regime’s ability to forge alliances with groups that in decades past may have been improbable collaborators, such as the Sunni terror organizations Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. Middle East scholar Fouad Ajami has noted, “We needn’t give credence to the idea of a vast ‘Shiite crescent’ stretching from Iran to Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to appreciate the challenge posed by the Iranian theocrats to the order of that Greater Middle East....In its struggle for primacy in the habitat around it, Iran is not a Shiite power per se: It aids and abets a Shiite-armed movement in Lebanon and also works with the Sunni die-hards

of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian territories.”<sup>79</sup>

If it seems strange that a secular Arab regime would be so closely tied to a Shiite theocracy, the fact is that majority-Sunni Syria has been ruled by a minority Alawite regime since the late 1960s. The Syrian constitution demands that the president be a Muslim, and since both Sunnis and Shiites have historically regarded Alawites as heretics, the ruling cadre lacked legitimacy until the presidency of Hafez al-Assad. In 1973, Assad reached out to the head of the Higher Shiite Council in Lebanon, the Iranian-born cleric Moussa al-Sadr, who confirmed that Alawites were genuine Shiite Muslims, a gesture that consolidated several interests at once. Not only did Sadr shore up the religious status of the Assad regime, he also won Lebanon’s Shiite community a powerful patron in Damascus, and set the groundwork for Syria’s alliance with the Shiite regime in Tehran.

Iran’s collaboration with Syria and Hizbullah in the destabilization of the Lebanese central government is a good example of Iran’s export of its revolution, as seen in Hizbullah’s May 2008 temporary hijacking of the government of Prime Minister Fouad Seniora. Walid Jumblatt, the Lebanese Druze leader, has consistently shared this perspective, saying in July 2006, “The war is no longer Lebanon’s...it is an Iranian war.” In this context, it was no surprise that both the Lebanese government under Prime Minister Seniora and the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt leveled sharp criticism at Hizbullah and Syria for “dragging the entire region into a war with Israel.”<sup>80</sup> Seniora would also blast Syria on Lebanese Television during the April 2008 Arab League Summit in Damascus and excoriate Hizbullah a month later for its bloody takeover of Beirut.<sup>81</sup>

Blaming an Arab faction for a war between Arabs and Israel was an unprecedented development in the region that powerfully bespoke Sunni fears of Shiite expansionism. Meanwhile, in Jordan, government spokesman Nasser Judeh accused Hamas of recruiting Jordanians and seeking to send them for training in Syria and Iran.<sup>82</sup>

Palestinian leader Hani al-Hasan, a senior adviser to PA leader Mahmoud Abbas and one of the founders of the Fatah party, noted that Iran’s imperial interest in transforming the entire region into an Islamist trust threatens the Palestinian Authority no less than it threatens Israel.<sup>83</sup> Palestinian human rights activist Bassem Eid, a leading proponent of democratic reform in the PA, has also noted, “Hamas now represents Iranian interests, not Palestinian interests.” He warned, “Iran’s goal



is to destroy both Israel and subvert any possibility of a Palestinian state governed by Mahmoud Abbas and other leaders amenable to the United States and the West, and they are doing the job through Hamas.”<sup>84</sup>

Ahmadinejad’s message to the Palestinians is simple: Palestine should not participate in a two-state solution; it is an inseparable part of the land of Islam, and there is no need to sacrifice even an inch of it; and since the Palestinian cause is supported by the entire Muslim world, especially Iran, which will soon have nuclear weapons, there is no need to compromise.<sup>85</sup> In this way, the current Iranian regime is fulfilling one of Ayatollah Khomeini’s original ambitions – to transcend doctrinal differences between Sunnis and Shiites and create a coherent revolutionary Islamic force of “a billion Muslims.”<sup>86</sup>

**Hamas’ destruction of the border fence between Gaza and Egypt in January 2008 was also strategically coordinated with the Iranian leadership and is a good example of Iran’s hegemonic plans, according to Egyptian and Palestinian officials.**

Hamas’ destruction of the border fence between Gaza and Egypt in January 2008 was also strategically coordinated with the Iranian leadership and is a good example of Iran’s hegemonic plans, according to Egyptian and Palestinian officials.<sup>87</sup> Hosni Mubarak reportedly lamented to a European diplomat in early 2008 that Egypt now effectively shares a border with Iran<sup>88</sup> – an Iran that has not hidden its contempt for the Egyptian government, which signed a peace treaty with Israel and maintains a cold peace with the Jewish state. Ahmadinejad has publicly threatened such Arab regimes, saying, “those who recognize the Zionist regime will burn in the fire of the Islamic *umma*.”<sup>89</sup> In April 2008, Ahmadinejad even issued a thinly veiled threat to Iran’s Syrian ally, lest it consider “siding with the United States.”<sup>90</sup> Not coincidentally, Egypt has also been directly threatened by al-Qaeda, an example of radical Shiite and Sunni cooperation against what both radical Shiites and Sunnis consider apostate control of the Arab world.

While Iran’s Shiite revolution has laid bare Muslim sectarian strife, and has often sought to exacerbate such strife, the 1,400-year-old argument between Sunnis and Shiites still takes a back seat when it comes to cooperation between Islamist Shiite and



Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei sits as Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad speaks during a meeting with officials and ambassadors from Islamic countries to commemorate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad in Tehran, Iran, April, 16, 2006. A photo of Iran’s late leader Ayatollah Khomeini is in the background.

Sunni groups in attacking mutual enemies. For example, Hizbullah’s post-2006 military buildup has not been confined to Shiite Lebanese. Sunnis, Christians, and Druze also are being recruited into reserve units called *Saraya*, or battalions. For example, in the southern coastal town of Sidon, a Sunni Islamist militant group called the Fajr Forces, which battled the IDF in Southern Lebanon in the early 1980s, has been resurrected as a Hizbullah ally.<sup>91</sup> The 9/11 Commission Report documented the fact that al-Qaeda received assistance from Tehran and was provided sanctuary in Iran before and after the September 11, 2001, attacks.<sup>92</sup>

By 2008, however, it seemed clearer that the Bush administration had begun to understand the extent, danger, and regional implications of Iran’s project inside Iraq.<sup>93</sup> In the aftermath of battles with Iranian-backed Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi army in Basra, Coalition Forces Commander General David Petraeus concluded, “Iran is playing a destructive role in funding, training, arming and directing the so-called ‘Special Groups’ that has generated concern about Iran in the minds of many Iraqi leaders. Unchecked, the ‘Special Groups’ pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a democratic Iraq.”<sup>94</sup>

**Today, the region’s Sunni governments are animated more by a rejection of Iran than they are by a rejection of Israel.**

The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, also testified that “Iran continues to undermine the efforts of the Iraqi government to establish a stable, secure state.”<sup>95</sup> Crocker specifically referred to Iran’s arming and training of “lethal networks” via the Qods

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (left) welcomes leader of the militant Palestinian group Hamas Khaled Mashaal in Tehran, March 6, 2007.



Force, the goal of which, he said, was the replication of a Hizbullah proxy force in Iraq that would act according to the interests and instructions of Tehran.<sup>96</sup> An April 8, 2008, *Washington Post* editorial noted, “The proxy war in Iraq is just one front in a much larger Iranian offensive,”<sup>97</sup> while Crocker had accused Iran of “meddling” in Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Gaza, in addition to Iraq.<sup>98</sup>

Yazdi and his faithful believe it is a duty to create the conditions for the Mahdi’s return, including the occurrence of global disasters that trigger “grief and sorrow” – a phenomenon similar to the biblical concept of “Gog and Magog.”

### Sunni “Blowback”

It is fair to say that today, the region’s Sunni governments are animated more by a rejection of Iran than they are by a rejection of Israel. In historical terms, this situation is not dissimilar to the thinking that brought Anwar al-Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977 to make peace with Israel. Following the 1973 war with Israel, Sadat moved closer to America and sought to sideline Moscow. Sadat had become increasingly concerned about Soviet influence in Egypt, and there were sections of Cairo that contained Soviet

military bases that were off-limits even to top Egyptian officials. Sadat’s concerns led him to order Soviet military advisors out of the country in 1972 and to abrogate in 1976 the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty that he had signed in 1971.<sup>99</sup>

When he addressed the United Nations in September 2005, Ahmadinejad first dumbfounded the General Assembly and other world leaders by concluding his remarks with a special prayer for the Mahdi’s reappearance.

In the mid-1970s, the Egyptian president estimated Israel to be less dangerous than the Soviets. The analogy to today is apt because the Iranian Revolution, like the Russian Revolution, is a real one and “it has now reached the Stalinist phase,” as Bernard Lewis has noted.<sup>100</sup> Arab fears of Iran’s revolutionary mood and apocalyptic appetite dominated the April 2008 Arab League Summit in Damascus. Ten of twenty-two heads of Arab League member states boycotted the summit as a gesture against Syria and Iran for meddling in Lebanon and destabilizing the region. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process was of little interest to the participants compared to discussions of Iran. For example, in the press conference at the end of the two-day summit, the subject of Israel came up only twice in the 90 minutes allotted for questions and answers, and the participating foreign ministers agreed that they would only review the progress of the peace process six months later.<sup>101</sup>

### Beyond Khomeini: Ahmadinejad’s Apocalyptic World View

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s commitment to Shiite messianism has helped propel the Second Islamic Revolution even beyond the point to which Khomeini had brought it. Ahmadinejad is motivated by a divinely inspired mission to trigger the reappearance of the Shiite Mahdi, or the lost Twelfth Imam, and recover the ideal of Islamic justice in the world.<sup>102</sup>

The Iranian president is a member of a semi-secret religious group, the *Hojjatiyeh*, headed by the radical cleric Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, who is Ahmadinejad’s spiritual mentor. Once a peripheral figure, Yazdi has grown in stature and in 2006 was



cited as a possible successor to replace Iran’s ailing Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini.<sup>103</sup> Yazdi inspired Ahmadinejad to make the destruction of Israel a publicly declared strategic goal that sits near the top of the Iranian agenda. Yazdi garnered poorer than expected results in the December 2006 elections for the ruling Assembly of Experts. However, the cleric still holds sway over his presidential pupil.

Yazdi and his *Hojjatiyeh* faithful believe it is a duty to create the conditions for the Mahdi’s return, including the occurrence of global disasters that trigger “grief and sorrow” – a phenomenon similar to the biblical concept of “Gog and Magog.”<sup>104</sup> According to this messianic belief, the hidden imam will reemerge to save the Muslims during their obligatory and final confrontation with the stronger power – the United States.

**Since late 2005, Ahmadinejad has replaced at least eight of twenty-two government ministers with senior members of the IRGC.**

Ahmadinejad’s fealty to Yazdi and the *Hojjatiyeh* represents a break from Khomeini’s vision. The “father” of the revolution had prohibited Mahdi groups such as the *Hojjatiyeh* for their ideological refusal to support Khomeini’s Islamic government.<sup>105</sup> According to Mehdi Khalaji, a scholar of Shiite theology, the very essence of Khomeini’s revolutionary message was the rejection of the type of messianism that Ahmadinejad has embraced. Khomeini insisted that as the *Velayat e Faqih* (the Guardian Jurist), he served as the representative of the Mahdi in this world.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, as Khalaji notes, “religious government was a pre-requirement for the reemergence of the Shiite Messiah or the Mahdi and should be instituted in the present without waiting for the reappearance of the Hidden Imam.”<sup>107</sup> Khomeini had even called the *Hojjatiyeh* “stupid,” and in a major speech in the mid-1980s “implicitly stated that the *Hojjatiyeh*’s belief in hastening the return of the hidden Imam would spread corruption through the country.”<sup>108</sup>

This is the ideological point at which Ahmadinejad and Khomeini part ways, and it is also where the Second Islamic Revolution could derive the energy necessary to fuel itself toward an apocalyptic climax.

Throughout his professional life, Ahmadinejad been an acolyte of the doctrine of Mahdism – the study of and belief in the Mahdi. As mayor of Tehran, Ahmadinejad reportedly ordered the city council to build a major boulevard to prepare for the return

of the Twelfth Imam. In addition, he has said that it was after a secret meeting with the Mahdi that he announced his candidacy for president, an office he claims he received to advance a clash of civilizations with the West.<sup>109</sup> Several weeks after his 2005 presidential victory, Ahmadinejad told journalists in Tehran that “the goal of my government is the people’s satisfaction and I have no doubt that the people of the Islamic Republic are preparing for the return [of the Hidden Imam] and G-d willing in near future we will witness his appearance.”<sup>110</sup> In August 2005, Ahmadinejad appropriated \$17 million for the Jam Karan Mosque, which is associated with the *mahdaviat*, referring to the faithful who believe in and prepare for the Mahdi’s return.<sup>111</sup> There are reports of the government building a direct train link from Tehran to the elegant blue-tiled mosque, which lies 65 miles south of the capital, east of the Shiite religious center of Qom.<sup>112</sup>

Ahmadinejad’s apocalyptic language and new revolutionary drive represent a break from previous Iranian regimes.<sup>113</sup> Both Rafsanjani and former Iranian President Muhammad Khatami, who was considered even more pragmatic by the West, had also worked to advance Iran’s nuclear program since 1991. They nonetheless balanced Iran’s atomic interests with a desire for relations with the West, even taking periodic respites from nuclear development over the past fifteen years. During this period, Iran tried to project itself as a status quo power, joining the U.S., Russia, and other states bordering Afghanistan for talks at the UN about the Taliban. Prior to Ahmadinejad, Tehran had also been more cautious in its anti-Western rhetoric and had avoided fiery public declarations calling for the destruction of Israel as the regime’s top priority.

**Since late 2005, Revolutionary Guard factions have conducted a major purge of the military, security apparatus, civil service, state-owned corporations, and the media.**

“Reformist” leaders such as Khatami and Rafsanjani had exercised “soft power,” and sought to appeal to Iran’s youth and ensure the survival of the Islamic Republic as a functional system.<sup>114</sup> In 1998, for example, Khatami was prepared to enter into a mini-Yalta accord with the Clinton Administration that would demarcate respective zones of influence.<sup>115</sup> Ahmadinejad, in contrast, has repeatedly announced Iran’s plans to upgrade its regional status and become the leading force in the Arab and Mus-

lim world. He has continually announced Islam's intention to conquer the world via martyrdom operations, which assume a greater urgency when infused with a dedication to cause the Mahdi's necessary reappearance.<sup>116</sup> He told the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2006, "I emphatically declare that today's world, more than ever before, longs for...the perfect righteous human being and real savior who has been promised to all peoples and who will establish justice, peace, and brotherhood on the planet. Almighty God...make us among his followers and among those who strive for his return and his cause."<sup>117</sup>

**While Ahmadinejad is committed to elements of Khomeinism, his spiritual drive and religious loyalty to Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi has charged the revolution with additional energy that seeks to hasten the arrival of the Mahdi and the accompanying clash of civilizations with the West.**

When he addressed the United Nations in September 2005, Ahmadinejad first dumbfounded the General Assembly and other world leaders by concluding his remarks with a special prayer for the Mahdi's reappearance.<sup>118</sup> When he returned to Tehran, he reportedly told friends that he knew there was a halo around his head as he spoke at the UN and that he knew what to say because the disappearing imam whispered in his ear.<sup>119</sup>

Shiite messianism fundamentally shapes Ahmadinejad's political thinking. If he believes the Mahdi is destined to reappear shortly, there is nothing to be gained by compromising with the infidel forces of the West. From Iran's point of view, it is fruitless for international leaders to avoid confrontation with Tehran; rather, it is the role of the Mahdi to usher in a utopian age. In this way, Ahmadinejad's verbal declarations fit neatly into the premises of his religious ideology, and are not, as many observers contend, innocuous saber-rattling intended to frighten other nations.

## Revolutionary Control at Home

Ahmadinejad today maintains muscular control over the regime largely through a cadre of younger, ideologically committed officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), or *Pasdaran* – the most religiously extreme element of the Iranian governing establishment. Since late 2005, Ahmadinejad has replaced at least eight of twenty-two government ministers with senior members of the IRGC. They now control nearly 40 percent of Iran's key cabinet posts in the wake of their electoral success in the Majlis (parliament), though a spate of Cabinet resignations nearly resulted in a parliamentary no confidence vote in May 2008. Nearly 120 parliament members, many of whom were connected to the so-called "reformists" that included old-guard Iranian leaders Khatami and Rafsanjani, were forced to resign in 2005.

Similarly, since late 2005, Revolutionary Guard factions have conducted a major purge of the military, security apparatus, civil service, state-owned corporations, and the media.<sup>120</sup> Senior commanders of the IRGC control the armed forces; Defense Minister Mustafa Mohammed Najjar and Foreign Minister Manouchher Mottaki were both senior Pasdaran commanders;<sup>121</sup> and Supreme National Security Council head Ali Larijani was also a central figure in the IRGC during the 1980s. Ahmadinejad is not alone in his fidelity to this messianic mandate. The heads of eight government ministries were personally appointed by Ahmadinejad, and are also loyal to the rulings of Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi. These ministries include foreign affairs, intelligence, interior, defense, culture, and Islamic guidance. The *Hojjatiyeh* secret society also claims close friends who direct the conservative *Kayhan* daily and others in the Tehran municipality.<sup>122</sup>

**Since Iran's Second Islamic Revolution is a non-negotiable process, pursuing the diplomatic mirage with Tehran may well merely harden the regime's belief that its enemies in the West lack the will to fight and are on the losing side of history.**



## Conclusion

Iran's dedication to becoming the regional hegemonic power and a global nuclear force is the fulfillment of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Yet while Ahmadinejad is committed to elements of Khomeinism, his spiritual drive and religious loyalty to Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi has charged the revolution with additional energy that seeks to hasten the arrival of the Mahdi and the accompanying clash of civilizations with the West. There is a major difference between the apocalyptic world view of the Islamic Republic of Iran and other governments in the international community that acquired nuclear weapons. Would the same fear of mutually-assured destruction restrain a nuclear-armed Iran from using such weapons against the U.S. or Israel?

Ironically, it appears that for the Sunni Arab states, Israel, the United States, Britain, and the West, the Iranian threat represents a type of threat that bears certain similarities to the threat from Hitler's Germany or the Soviet Union. In the case of Iran, however, an apocalyptically-minded willingness to accept mass destruction as part of what is viewed as a necessary show-down with the West increases the urgency of the present crisis over the two previous major threats to the international order. Since Iran's Second Islamic Revolution is a non-negotiable process, pursuing the diplomatic mirage with Tehran may well merely harden the regime's belief that its enemies in the West lack the will to fight and are on the losing side of history. Such a conviction will likely hasten confrontation with the Iranian regime, not delay it.



## Notes

1. See "Iran's Second Islamic Revolution," *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series*, no. 253, November 17, 2005.
2. "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, April 2003.
3. Amir Taheri, "Getting Serious about Iran," *Commentary*, November 2006. Khomeini outlawed apocalyptic *Hojjatiyeh* Mahdi groups, a secret society established to speed the return of the Mahdi, Shiite Islam's vanished messianic figure. See also, "The Return of the *Hojatieh*," December 14, 2005, [www.bahairants.com/the-return-of-the-hojatieh-81.html](http://www.bahairants.com/the-return-of-the-hojatieh-81.html).
4. Amir Taheri, "A Clash of Civilizations," *Newsweek*, September 5, 2005. There is a view that the Iranian drive for regional supremacy is a hallmark of Iranian history. Thus, Ray Takeyh writes: "More than any other nation, Iran has always perceived itself as the national hegemon of its neighborhood," Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Holt, 2006), p. 61. Another historical analysis of Iran's traditional drive for regional hegemony is explained by Patrick Clawson and Michael Rubin, who note that at Iran's height, Iran ruled Iraq, Afghanistan, parts of Central Asia and the Arabian coast of the Persian Gulf. This helps explain the Iranian view that these areas are part of its sphere of influence. Patrick Clawson and Michael Rubin, *Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 12, 30.
5. "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror."
6. *Ibid.*
7. Matthias Küntzel, "From Khomeini to Ahmadinejad," *Hoover Institution Policy Review*, December 2006-January 2007, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/4884331.html>.
8. Assad Homayoun, "Iran – the Clerical Regime and International Terrorism," excerpts from a speech by the former Iranian ambassador to the United States, December 4, 2001, [http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2001/guest\\_homayoun\\_12\\_03.html](http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2001/guest_homayoun_12_03.html). Also see Dan Diker, "President Bush and the Qods Force Controversy: Lessons Learned," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 6, no. 22, March 6, 2007.
9. Mordechai Abir, "Iran's New Revolutionary Guards Regime: Anti-Americanism, Oil, and Rising International Tension," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 5, no. 10, November 15, 2005, [http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=443&PID=0&IID=536&TTL=Iran's\\_New\\_Revolutionary\\_Guards\\_Regime:\\_Anti-Americanism,\\_Oil,\\_and\\_Rising\\_International\\_Tension](http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=443&PID=0&IID=536&TTL=Iran's_New_Revolutionary_Guards_Regime:_Anti-Americanism,_Oil,_and_Rising_International_Tension).
10. Matthias Küntzel, "Ahmadinejad's Demons: A Child of the Revolution Takes Over," *New Republic*, April 24, 2006.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. According to senior Western intelligence sources familiar with Iran, in a meeting with the author in Washington, D.C., September 17, 2006.
14. Küntzel, "Ahmadinejad's Demons."
15. "Iranian President at Tehran Conference: 'Very Soon, This Stain of Disgrace [Israel] Will Be Purged from the Center of the Islamic World – and This is Attainable,'" *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 1013, October 28, 2005, <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iran&ID=SP101305>.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* For international condemnation of Ahmadinejad's statements, see <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/27/AR2005102702221.html>.
18. [http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA38907#\\_ednref2](http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA38907#_ednref2)
19. Amir Taheri, "Iran's New Anti-Israel Rage," *New York Post*, October 28, 2005.
20. "Final War between Muslims, West: Ahmadinejad," Al Jazeera.com, January 21, 2006, [http://www.aljazeera.com/me.asp?service\\_ID=10517](http://www.aljazeera.com/me.asp?service_ID=10517).
21. Shimon Shapira, "The Nexus Between Iranian National Banks and International Terrorist Financing," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 7, no. 31, February 14, 2008. In September 2006, the U.S. Treasury disclosed that the Central Bank of Iran was sending money to Hizbullah through Bank Saderat, which was also providing financial services to Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. U.S. Treasury officials also revealed that the Central Bank of Iran was in fact asking financial institutions around the world to hide any possible connection between their transactions and Iranian missile procurement, nuclear programs, and the financing of terrorism. Bank Melli and Bank Saderat had transferred millions of dollars through their European branches to both Hizbullah and Hamas. These Iranian



- banks are state-owned; they hence have no independence and serve the interests of the Iranian regime.
22. "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror."
  23. "Iran: Replacement of 60 Ambassadors Just Routine," *AP/Jerusalem Post*, April 17, 2006.
  24. *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 958, August 15, 2005.
  25. "Islamic Clerical Regime Opens Garrison to Recruit Suicide Bombers against West," *Iran Focus*, July 22, 2005, <http://www.iranfocus.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=2944>.
  26. "Iran's New President Glorifies Martyrdom," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 945, July 29, 2005, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP94505>.
  27. *Ibid.*
  28. "Ahmadinejad: Lebanon is the Scene of an Historic Test which will Determine the Future of Humanity," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 1212, July 26, 2006.
  29. "Iran and the Recent Escalation on Israel's Borders: Reactions in Iran, Lebanon, and Syria," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 1208, July 18, 2006.
  30. Amir Taheri, "This is Just the Start of a Showdown between the West and the Rest," *The Times* (London), August 2, 2006.
  31. *Ibid.*
  32. "Iranian Parliament Speaker: The Blood of Khomeini Rages in Nasrallah's Veins," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 1210, July 21, 2006.
  33. "Iranian President at Tehran Conference."
  34. "Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the Main Tool to Export the Revolution beyond the Borders of Iran," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, April 2, 2007, [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/iran\\_e0307.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/iran_e0307.htm).
  35. Dan Darling, "General Panic: Meet General Qassem Suleimani, Commander of Iran's Anti-American Quds Force," *Weekly Standard*, October 5, 2005. See also "Using the Quds Force of the Revolutionary Guards."
  36. Shimon Shapira, "The Nexus Between Iranian National Banks and International Terrorist Financing."
  37. *Ibid.*
  38. "Hizbullah as a Strategic Arm of Iran," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 8, 2006, [http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng\\_n/html/iran\\_hezbollah\\_e1b.htm](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/eng_n/html/iran_hezbollah_e1b.htm).
  39. According to senior Israeli intelligence and military sources intimately familiar with Iran, Hizbullah, and Hamas in meetings with the authors in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem between December 2006 and March 2008.
  40. "Iranian and Syrian Media Stepping Up Statements on the War," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 1239, August 9, 2006, <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP123906>.
  41. Qassem used the term *al-Wali al Faqih*, or "the ruling jurispudent," meaning permission comes from Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/hezbollah\\_e0407.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/hezbollah_e0407.pdf).
  42. According to a senior IDF military intelligence source, in a conversation with the author, March 3, 2007.
  43. See Dan Diker, "President Bush and the Qods Force Controversy."
  44. According to a high-ranking IDF military official directly involved in the capture of the Karine A, in an interview with the author in Jerusalem, February 21, 2007. Also see testimony of former FBI counterterrorism analyst Matthew Levitt at a Joint Hearing of the Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, U.S. House of Representatives, February, 16, 2005, p. 9. Levitt testified, "Haj Bassem, Mughniyeh's deputy, personally commanded the ship that met the Karine A at the Iranian island of Kish and oversaw the ship-to-ship weapons transfer."
  45. "Iran Issues Mughniyeh Memorial Stamp," *Jerusalem Post*, March 10, 2008.
  46. "Iranian Assistance to Hizbullah," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 1220, July 31, 2006.
  47. Robin Wright, "Options for U.S. Limited as Mideast Crises Spread," *Washington Post*, July 13, 2006.
  48. Telephone interview with Dr. David Wurmser, former Middle East Affairs Advisor to Vice President Dick Cheney, on April 18, 2008. Wurmser also emphasized that, by spring 2006, several months before the conflict, officials in the vice president's office were warning other senior administration officials that Israel was headed toward conflict with Hizbullah and Hamas as part of Iran's proxy war against the United States, and suggested that the U.S. and Israel coordinate a response.
  49. Phone interview with David Schenker, former advisor on Syria and Lebanon to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, April 24, 2008. See also, Brig. Gen. (res.) Dr. Shimon Shapira, "Countdown to Conflict: Hizbullah's Military Buildup and the Need for Effective Disarmament," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 6, no. 8, August 20, 2006.
  50. Senator Joseph Lieberman, "Iran's Proxy War," *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 2007.
  51. Helene Cooper, "Iran Fighting Proxy War in Iraq, U.S. Envoy Says," *New York Times*, April 12, 2008.
  52. Robert Fisk, "Hizbullah Turns to Iran for New Weapons for War on Israel," *Independent* (UK), April 8, 2008.
  53. "20 Hizbullah Men Die in Iran Training," *Jerusalem Post*, April 10, 2008.
  54. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0414/p07s03-wome.htm>.
  55. Maj.-Gen. Yoav Galant, "The Strategic Challenge of Gaza," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 6, no. 28, April 19, 2007. Galant noted that "Iranians also come to Gaza to inspect the situation and hold training exercises. The Iranians are using whatever they can in order to attack the West, and this is a major change in the situation in the region. Fatah's Al Aqsa Brigade is already an Iranian organization similar to Islamic Jihad. This has occurred because the Iranians understood that it was easy to connect with its members, even though they are Sunni and not radical (Shiite) Muslims. This is where money makes the difference. A few years ago, the Al Aqsa Brigade in Judea and Samaria (West Bank) was bought out by Iran and activated against Israel according to Iranian instructions.
  56. Unprecedented Iranian influence over Hamas has not resulted in "Shiification" of Hamas ideologically. Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. However, Hamas is activated in many cases according to Iranian instructions and receives nearly all its budget, arms, training, and strategic support from Tehran. This explains why Hamas is today referred to as "an Iranian proxy" by Israeli defense and intelligence officials.
  57. "Hamas Chief Seeks Iran Support, Vows Resistance," *AFP/Daily Star* (Beirut), February 26, 2006.
  58. Minister of Internal Security Avi Dichter, "Components of Domestic Security in the Age of Global Jihadism," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 7, no. 2, May 31, 2007.
  59. Hamas Chief Seeks Iran's Support, Vows Resistance," *AFP/Daily Star* (Beirut), February 26, 2006.
  60. Amir Rappaport, "Highest Preparedness," *Maariv*, March 16, 2008. According to *Maariv*, Israeli security sources assess that the Jerusalem massacre may have been ordered by Hizbullah's Unit 1800, which had been under the command of Iranian agent Imad Mughniyeh until his death in February 2008. See also Avi Issacharoff, "Palestinian Sources Say Hamas, Hizbullah Helped in Jerusalem Terror Attack," *Ha'aretz*, March 9, 2008. For information on Unit 1800, see Dan Diker, "President Bush and the Qods Force Controversy."
  61. Shimon Shapira, "Lebanon's Ayatollah Fadlallah and the Merczar Ha-Rav Yeshiva Attack in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 7, no. 35, March 10, 2008.
  62. <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23515835/>. For the Hizbullah connection, see <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/Security/?id=1.0.194952094>.
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  64. Avi Issacharof, "Slain Jihad Operative's Son: My Entire Family Has Turned Hezbollah," *Ha'aretz*, March 18, 2008.
  65. "Iranian President at Tehran Conference."
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  67. "Country Analysis Brief, Iran," Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. Iranian Oil Minister Hossein Nozari stated Iran earned \$70 billion from crude oil exports from March 2007 to March 2008 in, "Iran Oil Exports Sets Post-Shah Revenue Record," *WorldTribune.com*, March 25, 2008, [http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2008/me\\_oil\\_03\\_25.asp](http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2008/me_oil_03_25.asp).
  68. Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran," *Washington Post*, December 8, 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A43980-2004Dec7>.
  69. Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict between Iran and America* (New York: Random House/Brookings, 2004), p. 198.
  70. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.
  71. Lt.-Col. (res.) Jonathan Dahoah-Halevi, "Iran's Renewed Threats to Take Over the Gulf States," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 7, no. 11, July 20, 2007, p. 2. The Iranian regime newspaper, *Kayhan*, whose editorial policy tracks the clerical leadership position, on July 15, 2007, attacked the rulers of the Gulf states who deny "the total Iranian sovereignty over parts of the recognized Iranian lands" and accused them of becoming spokesmen for the United States and its allies.
  72. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
  73. Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran."
  74. *Ibid.*
  75. *Ibid.*
  76. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, "Shiites Are Mostly Loyal to Iran Than to Their Own Countries," *MEMRI TV*, April 8 2006, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/0/0/0/0/303/1105.htm> Also see [http://www.memritv.org/clip\\_transcript/en/1105.htm](http://www.memritv.org/clip_transcript/en/1105.htm).
  77. "Kuwaiti Analyst: Best if Israel, Not U.S., Destroys Iranian Nukes," *Ha'aretz*, March 9, 2008.
  78. According to Zalmay Khalilzad, former senior U.S. National Security Council Advisor for the Middle East and Southwest Asia, both groups operated in various parts of Afghanistan as of 2002. See also Zalmay Khalilzad, Address to the American Iranian Council, March 13, 2002, as cited in Michael Rubin and Patrick Clawson, *Eternal Iran: Continuity and Chaos*.
  79. Fouad Ajami, "Iran's Sly Games in Iraq," *U.S. News and World Report*, April 11, 2008.



80. Khaled Abu Toameh, "Arab World Fed Up with Hizbullah," *Jerusalem Post*, July 17, 2006. See also, "Lebanese MKs Criticize Hizbullah, Syria," *Jerusalem Post*, July 13, 2006.

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82. Jonathan D. Halevi, " Hamas, Between al-Qaeda Jihadism and Tactical Pragmatism," in *Iran, Hizbullah, Hamas and the Global Jihad: A New Conflict Paradigm for the West* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, January, 2007), p. 78.

83. Meeting with Hanni al-Hassan in Jerusalem, November 17, 2006. Ironically, al-Hassan was the first PLO ambassador to Iran, and assumed his post in Tehran in late 1979 in the offices of the former Israeli embassy.

84. IBA English News, Jerusalem, November 4, 2006. The authors also conducted a follow-up phone interview with Bassem Eid on April 9, 2008.

85. Former Israeli Ambassador to Iran Uri Lubrani, in a speech entitled, "After the Hamas Elections," Jerusalem, February 2006.

86. "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror."

87. "Iran 'Played Role' in Gaza Takeover," *al Jazeera*, June 24, 2007. See also Allain Navarro, "Egypt Blames Iran for Fuelling Gaza Violence," June 22, 2007.

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89. "Iranian President at Tehran Conference."

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92. <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf> pp. 240- 241.

93. Karen De Young, "Iran Top Threat to Iraq, U.S. Says," *Washington Post*, April 12, 2008.

94. Gen. David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multi National Force, Iraq, Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq, April 8-9, 2008.

95. Testimony of Ambassador Ryan Crocker before the Senate Armed Services Committee, April 8, 2008, <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Ambassador%20Crocker%20-%20SFRC%20Testimony%208%20April%202008.pdf>.

96. Peter Spiegel, "For U.S., Another Top Threat Emerges in Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2008.

97. "Countering Iran," *Washington Post* editorial, April 8, 2008.

98. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/12/world/middleeast/12policy.html>. Iraqi intelligence officials have also corroborated recent U.S. assessments against Iran, saying that senior Hizbullah military commander Imad Mughniyeh, who had carried out major international terror operations on behalf of the Iranian revolutionary leadership until his assassination in Damascus in February 2008, helped form Muqdtata al-Sadr's Shiite Mahdi Army in April 2003 after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Some 300 fighters recruited from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia underwent military training with Hizbullah in Lebanon. In an August 2007 interview with the British *Independent*, al-Sadr said: "We copy Hizbullah in the way they fight and their tactics." See Nizer Latif and Phil Sands, "Mehdi Fighters Trained by Hizbullah in Lebanon," *Independent.co.uk*, August 20, 2007. See also "Tehran's Murderous Role," *Washington Times* editorial, April 8, 2008.

According to a corroborating Iraqi intelligence report, the above-mentioned Mahdi fighters were under the supervision in Lebanon of Iranian intelligence official Qassem Suleimani, who is a special advisor on Iraq to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. For this reference, see: "Mughniyeh Founded Mahdi Army, God's Revenge," *Naharnet*, Beirut, February 25, 2008, <http://www.naharnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/story/9CBFAF7789BF027CC22573F80036B1FC?OpenDocument>. Regarding Suleimani's connection to the Iranian leadership, see Dan Diker, "President Bush and the Qods Force Controversy."

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100. Bernard Lewis, "Freedom and Justice in the Modern Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2005.

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109. Amir Taheri, "The Frightening Truth of Why Iran Wants a Bomb," *Telegraph* (UK), April 16, 2006.

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114. Darius Bazargan, "Iran: Politics, the Military and Gulf Security," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 3, September 1997.

115. Taheri, "Getting Serious About Iran."

116. "Iran's New President Glorifies Martyrdom," *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, no. 945, July 29, 2006.

117. Address by His Excellency, Dr. Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, before the 61st Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, September 19, 2006.

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120. Mordechai Abir, "Iran's New Revolutionary Guards Regime."

121. *Ibid.*

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