

Iran's Proxies: State Sponsored Terrorism in the Middle East

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Abstract

Iran's use of terrorist proxies throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and South America has continued since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Not only is Iran currently the number one state sponsor of terrorism, it has continued to pursue this policy despite international condemnation and will continue to do so unless effective policy is implemented that will force Iran into compliance. The especially disturbing aspect of this sponsorship is not the flagrancy with which Iran provides support, but the influence that Iran has – through its various proxies - on Middle East politics; projecting its power into Arab countries and disrupting the Middle East peace process. While Iran is unlikely to abandon its support of terrorism any time soon, there are certainly ways in which the international community can help reduce Iran's reliance on terrorist proxies in projecting its influence. Yet, any effort will require the full support of Arab and Western states along with both patience and good diplomacy amongst those involved, with countries placing long-term stability and prosperity in the Middle East over short term political and economic aims.

Key Words: HAMAS, Hizballah, Iran, PIJ, Proxies, Terrorists

Introduction

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has continually supported terrorism for a variety of reasons (Byman, 2005, p. 79). Not only has Iran exported its ideology throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and Central and South America via its various proxies, it has projected its power through these groups; stalling the Middle East Peace Process and disrupting progress throughout the region which it views as counterproductive to its policies. Terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Hizballah all rely heavily on Iran's support and will continue to receive it as long as Iran views these organizations as useful in serving its interests. Perhaps this is why the United States Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2010 states that:

Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2010. Iran's financial, material, and logistic support for terrorist and militant groups throughout the Middle East and Central Asia had a direct impact on international efforts to promote peace, threatened economic stability in the Gulf, and undermined the growth of democracy (p. 150).

This active support, as noted above, takes many forms, yet is primarily handled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force which is "tasked with exporting the revolution" (Wright, 2008, p. 332).

Iran's sponsorship of terrorism is unique from other state's support in that Iran has done very little to hide it. While countries such as Pakistan use various terrorist groups as proxies, they vehemently deny involvement with these organizations, and go far out of their way to avoid creating a nexus that would serve as evidence of a relationship. This is especially true of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). According to Jaysree Bajoria (2011), "Most analysts believe that even though the Pakistani army and the ISI are now more willing to go after militant groups, they continue some form of alliance with groups they want to use as a strategic hedge against India and Afghanistan. But Pakistan's security establishment denies these charges." Yet, unlike Pakistan, Iran has shown very little discretion in sponsoring terrorists; voicing open support for organizations such as Hizballah (Worth 2010). Iran's flagrant admittance of sponsoring terrorism is disturbing because it serves as a very clear reminder that Iran endorses violence on civilians as being a legitimate way of achieving political goals. In fact, not only have Iran's leaders welcomed the heads of terrorist organizations such as Hamas to visit their country (al-Mughrabi 2012), they have also received praise from groups such as al Qaeda for their support. (Coughlin 2008). These realities become even more disturbing when coupled with the fact that Iran is constantly attempting to project its power and ideology throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and South America through these terrorist proxies, especially in recent areas of conflict such as Afghanistan and Iraq, where Iran has provided extensive support to various terrorist and insurgent groups (Kagan, Kagan and Pletka 2008).

Iran has, and will, continue to provide support to terrorists until the international community can implement effective sanctions which will give the state a reason to rethink its policies. However, these sanctions must have the backing of the major powers, including Russia and China, who frequently use their veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for financial benefit and political maneuvering. These two nations have helped Iran circumvent international pressures placed on the rouge state; frequently ignoring international sanctions, and thwarting UNSC attempts to enforce tougher sanctions (Zirulnick 2011). We can see further evidence of these two countries abuse of veto power in their recent decision to veto the UNSC resolution denouncing the Syrian government. Many believe that their veto decision had more to do with trade (Russia), and political maneuvering (China) than ideological reasons (Yan 2012). However, if the world's superpowers agree to take solid, meaningful action against Iran, designed to curb its support of terrorists, these sanctions will most likely prove more effective than those of the past, which Iran was able to circumvent with the support of countries such as China and Russia.

In addition to strong international support of UNSC sanctions, it will also be necessary for the international community to become more involved in the affairs of countries which currently host Iran's proxies. By relying on good diplomacy and incentives, perhaps states that host Iran's proxies will take stronger action against terrorist groups within their borders; limiting Iran's ability to influence Middle East and Central Asian politics, and perhaps making Iran realize that the time has come to begin to comply with international law. Past lessons from countries such as Libya and Syria can help give the international community a better idea as to how to proceed with this problem. In discussing the success of international efforts on eliminating Libya's support of terrorism, Gawdat Bahgat (2004) states, "the neutralization of Libya shows the power of multilateral pressures and diplomacy" (p. 394). This combination of international pressure and good diplomacy can be applied to Iran and the states that host its

proxies to reduce, and possibly eliminate Iran's support of terrorism, and the influence these groups – and therefore Iran – have on the politics of the Middle East and Central Asia.

Finally, there is also the option of working with organizations such as the Mujahideen e-Khalq (MEK) in order to put additional pressure on Iran and its proxies. Or perhaps conducting talks directly with Iran's proxies themselves may prove useful. As Hamas and Hizballah have begun to become more involved in politics, these groups have been forced to moderate their agendas in order to obtain more legitimacy both home and abroad. If these groups wish to increase their participation in domestic politics, they will have to adapt their policies accordingly in order to be accepted by the international community.

Iran's Proxies

Since the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 Iran has openly supported terrorism. Right from the beginning, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini made it clear that terrorism was going to serve as an extension of the new Islamic republic's power. The capture of the American embassy on November, 4, 1979 and the subsequent taking of hostages – 52 of which were held for 444 days – served as a clear message to the international community that Iran viewed terrorism as a legitimate means of it accomplishing its goals. Beginning with Iran's support of the Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO) – which was an extension of Hizballah controlled by Iran (Baer 2002) - during the Lebanese Civil War and leading to the support of numerous other groups such as Hamas, al-Qaeda, etc. This support of terrorism has continued with Khomeini's successor Ali Khamenei. Iran's policy of using terrorism to export its ideology and promote its policies throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and Central and South America has served Tehran well, and will continue to do so unless appropriate steps are taken by the international community to curb this behavior.

Iran's support for each of its respected terrorist proxies is unique in that each individual group takes care of Iran's interest in their areas of operation, but also in the purpose they serve in furthering Iran's agenda. Each group has their own unique mission; Hizballah is an active political/military entity in Lebanon with a small presence in Central and South America and helps train and provide various forms of support for other proxies. However, the groups primary purpose is to further Iran's political agenda in the Levant; Hamas is also an active political/military organization in the Palestinian territories and frequently conducts attacks against Israel. The group also helps further Iran's political agenda in the Palestinian territories; Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a group based out of Syria, shares many similarities with Hamas, and works closely with it in conducting attacks against Israel.

All these groups have different - and somewhat similar – objectives , yet they all aid Iran and act as variable extensions of Iran's Qods force; receiving financing, training and other forms of support through this branch of the IRGC.

Hizballah

Hizballah, a fundamentalist organization composed of Shiite Muslims, emerged in 1982 during the Lebanese Civil War in response to the Israeli invasion and “takes its ideological

inspiration from the Iranian revolution and the teachings of the late Ayatollah Khomeini" (United States Department of State 2010, 216). Perhaps this is why some believe that of all Iran's proxies, "none is more important to Tehran than the Lebanese Hizballah" (Byman, 2005, p. 79). Not only has this group proven to be a valuable tool for Iran – allowing it to export its ideology and influence – Tehran exercises almost complete control over the organization. This relationship allows Iran to use Hizballah as it would its military and at the same time, maintain a level of deniability when confronted with international pressure over the group's actions. In addition to the close relationship between Iran and Hizballah, Iran finds the geographical positioning of Hizballah advantageous, as the group has a heavy presence throughout the Levant, and increasingly, South America (Voice of America 2009).

Because of the heavy control that Iran has over Hizballah, it is arguably an extension of Iran's military and therefore a legitimate extension of Iran itself. Not only does Hizballah's leadership consult Iranian officials on a regular basis, they also receive massive amounts of support from Iran. According to Byman (2005) Iran provides, "direct military support, training, financial backing, organizational aid, and numerous other forms of assistance" (p. 87). The financial backing Hizballah receives is especially disturbing considering that the group receives roughly \$100 million per year from Iran. While it has been noted that a large portion of this money goes into the numerous social programs that Hizballah sponsors, it is important to note that Hizballah is still involved in less legitimate activities such as arms smuggling (Byman, 2005, p. 86) rocket attacks against Israel (Human Rights Watch 2006), and drug trafficking (Becker 2011). While Hizballah has slowly distanced itself over the years from relying on terrorism as a primary means to accomplish its tasks, there have been occurrences as recently as 2012 where Hizballah was believed to be behind attacks, on Israelis abroad in Georgia, India, Thailand and Azerbaijan (Keinon 2012). While there appears to be very little solid evidence linking these attacks to Hizballah, Iran's support of these groups could lead to serious repercussions if a nexus is discovered linking Hizballah to these bombings. In addition, it is believed that Hizballah's presence in South America is centered around the group's increasing involvement in drug-trafficking, which it uses to produce additional revenue and further bolster its strength in the region.

While it is questionable as to if Hizballah should be labeled a terrorist group because of the dramatic changes the organization has undergone since its creation and the lack of solid evidence linking it to recent terrorist attacks, the support it continues to receive from Iran makes this organization an area of concern, as the potential may still exist for Iran to use the group to conduct further attacks against its enemies. Although Hizballah's increased "political participation also led to increased moderation" (Byman, *Deadly Connections States That Sponsor Terrorism* 2005, 104), the potential exist for future attacks from the group because of their heavy reliance on Iran for support. In addition, the fact that Hizballah is involved in drug trafficking makes the group a criminal organization; being placed in this category certainly makes the group an illegitimate entity under international law. With the current debate over Iran's nuclear program taking place and increased tension between Tehran and Israel, if tensions reach a critical point, Hizballah may once again be called into action as a tool to further Iran's interests. While some claim that Hizballah's current power in Lebanon has made the "proxy" argument obsolete, and that the current legitimate status it enjoys in the country has made the organization an independent entity separate from Iran and Syria's influence (El-Hokayem 2007,

35), the fact that Iran remains a major supporter of Hizballah makes one wonder about the nature of their continuing relationship. Even though Hizballah has become a relatively moderate organization, it could potentially give “Iran a potential lever that it could employ if necessary” (Byman, *Deadly Connections States That Sponsor Terrorism* 2005, 102).

Hamas

While Hamas, like its ally and supporter Hizballah, is a politically established organization, it is far less moderate than Hizballah and continues to conduct terrorist attacks against Israel on a regular basis; the victims of these attacks are often civilians. These attacks are especially disturbing considering the indiscriminate nature with which Hamas attacks these civilian targets as demonstrated by the Hamas school bus attack on April 7 2011. Although only one child was on the bus at the time of the attack – later succumbing to his injuries – the attackers had no way of knowing this, and because of the obvious nature of the target, were well aware of who the potential victims were. Because of the nature of Hamas’ attacks, Iran’s sponsorship of this group is especially disturbing.

While Hamas was founded in 1987 during the first intifada, the organization did not begin its relationship with Iran until 1990. This relationship has been strengthened over the years after various events. According to Meyrav Wurmser (2007) this relationship solidified in three stages: in the late 1980s, during which time Hamas and Iran enjoyed a marginal relationship and clashed over various issues such as Iran’s support of the PIJ; the second stage, which followed the first Gulf War, in which Iran hoped to emerge as a dominant power following Iraq’s defeat, and hoped to use Hamas as a tool in accomplishing this task. During this time Iran and began to provide the group with various forms of support; and the final stage, following the second intifada, the second invasion of Iraq, the death of Yasir Arafat, and Hamas’ entrance into politics, during which time the Hamas/Iran relationship transformed into a full-blown alliance as Iran viewed Hamas as an excellent tool in achieving its regional ambitions and Hamas, increasingly isolated from the international community, found Iran to be a reliable patron.

Hamas, like Hizballah is an essential part of Iran’s strategy in its push to establish its influence throughout the Middle East. By having such a heavy presence in the Levant, Iran is hoping to one day establish itself within the region enough where it can use it as a spring board in conducting attacks against Israel and the West (Wurmser, 2007). As Iran has sought to expand the Shi’ite crescent from Central Asia across the Middle East, its influence in the Levant through its various proxies could serve as a means of achieving this end. While Hamas is a Sunni organization, it is important to note that Iran has carefully balanced its power by also financing other groups such as Hizballah which it can use to curb the Hamas if it begins to question Iran’s strategy. Also the heavy reliance Hamas has on Iran for support makes Iran an essential patron – at least for the time being – if Hamas wishes to continue its operations. While there has recently been some strain in this symbiotic relationship between Tehran and Hamas over the formers support of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad during his recent crackdown on demonstrators, “For now, Hamas won’t cut ties with Iran or close its headquarters-in-exile in the Syrian capital of Damascus” (Murphy and Laub 2012). However, this may not be the case for long, as Hamas is increasingly receiving more financial and political support from Arab Persian Gulf states;

reducing the group's dependence on its primary sponsor Iran and making the group less likely to bend to Iran's demands.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

Palestinian Islamic Jihad, like Hamas, is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and continues to conduct attacks against Israel in its quest for Palestinian independence. Like Hamas, this group also receives support from Iran, and is critically dependent on this support in conducting its operations. Although it is relatively small – estimated at fewer than 1000 members (United States Department of State 2010) – it regularly conducts attacks against Israel using rockets and various other explosive devices. While this organization does not enjoy the political status that groups such as Hizballah and Hamas enjoy, its close working relationship with these two groups along with the support the group receives from Damascus and Tehran make PIJ a formidable terrorist organization.

While PIJ is older than its allies – founded in 1979 – it is probably the least powerful of the trio; falling with Hamas under the Hizballah umbrella. Yet, to Iran, this group acts as a vital component in the projection of its ideology and is just as important to Iran in its power projection as PIJ's more powerful allies. While the PIJ receives financial assistance along with training from Iran, it also receives assistance from both Hamas and Hizballah, further bolstering Iran's support indirectly because of the backing both Hamas and Hizballah receive from Iran. While PIJ works closely with these groups, the relationship that each has with the PIJ is different. While Hamas can be considered a peer of the PIJ, and has worked in conjunction with this organization on numerous occasions, Hizballah has predominately provided training, weapons, and cash assistance to the group; acting more as a patron. This tripartite was forged during the first intifada, where Israel exiled various members of these two groups to Lebanon. During this time, “the Hamas exiles were able to establish the organization's first ties to Hezbollah. The PIJ, for its part, benefited doubly, forging tighter relations with Iran while significantly enhancing its military capabilities under Hezbollah tutelage” (Hoffman 2006, 148). This relationship represents a critical component of Iran's foreign policy objectives, because together, these groups can both conduct attacks against various targets in their respected regions, and work together in order to facilitate these attacks. As they all ultimately answer to the leadership in Tehran, these groups are essential in furthering Iran's interests in the Levant. While PIJ and Hamas have been both rivals and allies over the years, their relationship is now one of general cooperation and the group's leaders are currently considering merging their organizations (AFP 2012). This potential merger is troubling as these two groups continue to wage violent jihad against Israel and have both targeted civilians in their attacks. Also, with the substantial influence Iran has on these groups, they will surely carry out operations in support of Iran. As Tehran provided financing, training, and weapons to this group, it will most likely continue to follow Iran's orders in order to continue its attacks against Israel.

Like Iran's funding of both Hizballah and Hamas, its funding of the PIJ serves both its ideological and strategic goals. By funding the PIJ, Iran is able to wage an unconventional war against Israel, and at the same time, is further extending Tehran's influence. Also, as is the case with various other states support of terrorism, Iran is bolstering its credentials by taking up the banner of the Palestinian cause. While Iran's motives for this are most likely ideological – unlike

those of Syria and Libya which can be argued to be superficial in nature – Iran benefits from the public relations boost that this support provides. However, as PIJ is currently considering a merger with Hamas, and Hamas is increasingly receiving political and financial support from Arab Persian Gulf states, there is the potential that a reduced reliance on Iran for funding could lead to a distancing of this organization from Iran; reducing the influence Tehran has on controlling PIJ operations. However, as Iran is likely to remain – along with Syria – one of the few states that will provide training, weapons, and refuge to this organization, as with Hamas, PIJ most likely will not distance itself from Iran any time soon.

Policy Suggestions

Any state relying on terrorist proxies to enforce its foreign and domestic policies is certainly dangerous. As these proxies purposely target civilians, and interfere in the affairs of foreign nations, if these groups are an extension of a state's military/political institutions, any acts which they commit then becomes an action of the patron state. While state sponsors of terrorism often use terrorist proxies in order to avoid this nexus, Iran's sponsorship is unique in the fact that it is a well-known secret amongst the international community. While Hizballah, Hamas and PIJ are Iran's proxies of choice, the country has sponsored numerous other groups including; the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombian (FARC), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC), the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), Kata'ib Hizballah, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Abu Nidal, and recently, al-Qaeda. All of these groups, either directly or indirectly are responsible for attacks which have killed civilians in their respected areas of operation. As Iran provides both direct and indirect support of these organizations, it can be argued that the blood these groups have spilt is on Iran's hands as well.

In order to prevent Iran from using these various groups to further its interests across the globe – especially Central Asia and the Middle East – the international community must take meaningful action to force Iran to abandon its state sponsorship of terrorists. While there has been both a large amount of saber rattling and speculation by foreign leaders as to what means may prove effective in forcing Iran's compliance on this issue, there are certain measures which have proven effective in dealing with similar problems with other states in the past. While Syria and Libya were previously major state supporters of terrorist organizations, there were points where international pressure was successful in reducing these states support for various terrorist groups. Therefore the combination of factors that produced results in both Libya and Syria could perhaps help the international community in formulating effective policies to deal with Iran's sponsorship of terrorists. For instance, Daniel Byman (2005) notes that increased rhetoric by Washington, along with various economic sanctions forced Syria to cooperate – although not completely - in the war on terror (p. 110). This combination of economic sanctions and the possibility of U.S. military action against Syria was indeed successful in forcing Assad into a certain level of compliance with international norms. While these sanctions did not completely encourage Syria to abandon support of terrorists, it certainly limited this support. Similar evidence of the effectiveness of this combination of sanctions in reducing state sponsorship of terrorism can be seen in the case of Libya. In this instance, Qaddafi was forced to both change Libya's policies on terrorism and to begin working with the international community to disrupt terrorism in order to maintain internal order; avoiding crippling economic sanctions and an Islamist insurgency that used Libya's faltering economy to discredit Qaddafi's regime (Bahgat 2004).

However, Bahgat notes that, "the Shift in Libya's policy did not happen overnight." (p. 394). He also notes that "a combination of military, political, and economic measure were needed to achieve success in compelling the Libyan leadership to abandon terrorism and abide by international legal norms" (p.394).

While these cases are somewhat different in the specific combination of sanctions applied and the overall conditions which ultimately forced these regimes to comply with international law, they help provide policy makers with a reference when considering policies that may reduce/eliminate Iran's sponsorship of terrorism. While Iran's ideology may make them less susceptible to some of these measures (Byman, *Confronting Syrian Backed Terrorism* 2005, 111), like the individual cases of Syria and Libya, a unique combination of sanctions will be required to force compliance on Tehran. Finding this balance will be critical in maintaining stability throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, and potentially South America. Policy makers must also consider the possibility of sitting down with some of Iran's proxies and holding talks. As Byman (2009) notes:

Talks with insurgents are politically costly, usually fail, and can often backfire. Nevertheless, they are often necessary to end conflicts and transform an insurgent group into a legitimate political actor or wean them away from violence. Policymakers and analysts alike must recognize that the conditions for success are elusive. This should make them cautious about initiating talks in general, but also eager to seize on potential opportunities should the stars align and the insurgent groups become ready to make a fundamental change and move away from violence (p. 136).

It is also important to emphasize that both a combination of sanctions on these groups combined with talks may prove effective in moving these organizations away from Iran's sphere of influence. As insurgents/terrorists are often quick to jump into negotiations when they are struggling (Byman, 2009, p. 131), perhaps emplacing tougher sanctions against these groups and will make them more likely to concede to international demands; moderating their agendas and moving them away from Iran, while at the same time bringing these groups into the political arena which may move them further away from terrorism.

There is also the option of working with groups such as the Mujahideen e-Khalq (MEK) to push Iranian influence out of certain areas such as Iraq and to place additional pressure on Tehran to change its support of terrorists. Not only has the MEK provided valuable support and intelligence to the U.S. government on various occasions, the group's democratic ideology meshes well with that of many Western nations. However, as the United States government currently considers the MEK a terrorist group, it will need to reconsider this label if it is going to work with the organization to counter Iran's proxies in the Middle East. As the "terrorist" label placed on the MEK is arguably a product of political maneuvering by the Clinton administration, the US should follow the example of Britain and the EU which in both have taken the MEK off their lists of terrorist organizations. Perhaps this is why, "some argue the MEK can serve as a tool to increase US pressure on Iran to effect positive developments regarding the issues in dispute" (Bahgat, 2009, p.98), one of which is "sponsoring terrorism." Reuters columnist Bernd Debusmann (2010) notes that:

The United States designated the MEK a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997, when the Clinton administration hoped the move would help open a dialogue with Iran. Thirteen years

later, there is still no dialogue. But the group is still on the list, despite years of legal wrangling over the designation through the U.S. legal system. Britain and the European Union took the group off their terrorist lists in 2008 and 2009 respectively after court rulings that found no evidence of terrorist actions after the MEK renounced violence in 2000.

Because politics, rather than solid actions by the group, led to it being labeled a terrorist organization, the MEK should be taken off the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. Not only is this the ethical course of action for U.S. policy makers to take, because of the shady circumstances surrounding the labeling of the MEK as “terrorists,” but it will be a strategic necessity as well if the U.S. wishes to have another arrow in its quiver which it can use to combat Iran’s support of terrorists.

These suggestions, while providing policymakers with potential avenues of approach for dealing with Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism must also be accepted by the international community as a whole if they are to achieve their objectives. However, under the current reality of heavy political maneuvering in the UNSC by Russia and China, it may be some time before any policies that are implemented prove effective in changing Iran’s stance on terrorism. After all, if economic sanctions are put into place and these two countries continue to do business with Iran, economic sanctions may prove virtually useless. Even if one country, such as China, continues to conduct business with Iran, it may allow the country to avoid any repercussions from these sanctions (Gladstone 2012). The same goes for potential military action which would require full UNSC approval. Yet, it is essential that the international community take some action to reduce/eliminate Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism to ensure both global and regional stability. This makes the choices of holding talks with Iran’s proxies and using existing regional powers, be they governments or organizations such as the MEK, the two best choices, which under current conditions, appear to be the most realistic option in dealing with Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Iran has, and will continue, to use terrorist proxies to further its various agendas. Until the international community takes meaningful action against this unsavory policy, Iran will continue to spread its influence throughout the Middle East, Central Asia, and Central and South America. The key to stopping this lies in fomenting effective policies that have the backing of the international community as a whole; certainly not an easy task and one which most likely will not occur overnight. Yet, when we consider the influence that Iran’s proxies have on their respective regions, curbing Iran’s sponsorship of these groups will certainly limit the damage Tehran has and is doing in the areas where these groups operate. One need only look how detrimental this sponsorship has been on the Arab Israeli peace process to see the obvious need to put an end to Iran’s aggressive policies. According to James Miskel (2004), “Iran and Iraq have also modulated their support for violent Palestinian organizations in ways that reflect the tactical requirements of their own foreign policies rather than the interests of the Palestinian people” (p. 56). While Iraq can no longer be factored into this equation, Iran’s support, which clearly is not provided in the interests of the Palestinian people, is evidence of the dangerous game that Iran is playing in the Middle East. Any state which sponsors groups who intentionally target civilians and which participate in other illicit activities such as narcotics

trafficking is certainly one which does not deserve to be given legitimacy in international forums and also represents a very clear threat to global security. Hizballah, Hamas, PIJ, etc. all have unique agendas, yet because of the fact that these groups were forged in the fires of Iran's ideology, and rely heavily on Tehran for support, they will most likely continue to act as variable arms of the IRGC; receiving funding, training, and weapons from Qods Force operatives.

Despite the fact that it appears that Iran's sponsorship of terrorism is not going to end any time soon, there does indeed appear to be a light at the end of the tunnel. With Hizballah becoming more heavily involved in Lebanese politics, it will become increasingly important for the group to distance itself from terrorism and crime in order to bolster its legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. Perhaps this will serve as the catalyst that can help the West wean Hizballah off Iran's support.

The futures of both Hamas and PIJ may offer such opportunities as well. Because Hamas is currently becoming more reliant on funding from Arab Persian Gulf states, and there is an increasing ideological rift growing between Hamas and Tehran over Syria, the international community may soon have an opening to implement policies which will sever the Hamas/Iran nexus. Because PIJ may merge with Hamas in the near future, this applies to them as well. In addition, as Hamas is increasingly becoming a political actor, it will be in the best interest of this group to begin complying with international norms; abandoning terrorism will help the group gain much needed international support and recognition. By gaining legitimacy on the international arena, Hamas will find itself in a better position to represent the interest of the Palestinian people.

All in all, Iran's support of terrorism serves no one but Tehran. If this policy is allowed to persist it will continue to cause global instability and will hamper any chance of reaching a state of normalcy in the Middle East. To solve this dilemma, the international community will have to reach a consensus on potential action against Iran, utilizing policies that have proven effective in dealing with problems of this nature in the past. While the angle of attack will be unique to Iran because of its ideological position, a correct combination of both economic and military sanctions, combined with good diplomacy will most likely prove effective based on the Syria and Libya examples. Yet, states with economic ties to Iran will have to place global stability over short term financial gain in order for these sanctions to work. Minus their support, holding talks with states that harbor Iran's proxies and with groups that oppose the status quo in Iran such as the MEK appear to be a potential ways in which to make meaningful gains in the near future.

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Iran's Proxies: State Sponsored Terrorism in the Middle East

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