

2 Iran as a State Supporter of PVMs

Iran has actively supported political violence movements in the Middle East since the Revolution of 1979; its leadership has done so in the wider context of a concerted effort to export the values of the Revolution beyond its borders. In retrospect, the Iranian endeavor has picked up in speed and intensity after 1982, finding an environment utterly congenial to its agenda in areas inhabited by Lebanon's Shi'ite minority: the Beqaa Valley, especially in the environs of Balbeek, West Beirut and the country's south bordering on adjacent Israel. During the mid to late 1980's, Iran's theocratic oligarchy sent money, near 2,000 Pasdaran and arms via the Damascus road to Lebanon – a task facilitated by Iran's expedient strategic partnership with the Syrian Alawite regime and the underhand dealings of its ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, also known as Hezbollah's "midwife."¹¹⁸ More recently, Iran has also sponsored Palestinian rejectionist groups. Concerning Iran's policy toward the Lebanese Shi'ites and the Palestinians, Mohtashemi in an interview suggested "that 'humanitarian' aid might not necessarily exclude arms" and that "*any* help that can be given to the Palestinian people is legitimate" – that is up to, and including, arms and explosives used in suicide attacks, as evidenced by the "Karine-A" affair.

In the period between the Oslo Accords (1993) and the withdrawal of the IDF from southern Lebanon in June 2000, Iranian and Syrian-backed Hezbollah operations were time and again modulated in accordance with either the progress of the Israeli-Syrian track in the Israeli-Arab peace negotiations, or brought into alignment with Iranian fears of a separate Israeli-Syrian settlement.¹¹⁹ The uses of Iranian proxy warfare capabilities were exemplified during the Wye Plantation talks begun in late December 1995, with Syria and Israel engaged in serious negotiations over the Golan, when, according to one observer "it appeared that Syria and Iran had pushed Hizbollah to heighten the tension in the south of Lebanon, as fighting contin-

¹¹⁸ Sick, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹¹⁹ Ranstorp, *op. cit.*, 107.

ued unabated.”¹²⁰ Since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000, and certainly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, Iranian agents appear to be masterminding an unholy alliance, “a kind of Shiite ‘axis’ spanning the region from Tehran to Beirut and including a number of its sectarians in newly liberated Iraq” that is to extend beyond the Shi’a to include Sunni political violence movements, such as Hamas, PIJ, the armed wing of the Kurdish Workers Party – KADEK (formerly the PKK), Usbat al-Ansar and even the less regionally focused al-Qaida.¹²¹ Evidently, Iran not only funnels funds into Lebanon by way of Damascus: The West Bank and the Gaza Strip, too, have become lucrative markets of terror, where Iranian direct investments sometimes disguised as charities, and Hezbollah’s recent foothold in the terror infrastructure help ensure the continued level of violence and bloodshed.¹²² According to an article published in the London-based Saudi daily newspaper *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* in June 2002 “Iran has decided to increase its financial aid to some organizations that oppose peace efforts in the Middle East. Iran has allocated a special budget for the support of some Palestinian groups who lost their sources of funding when the Soviet Union and the communist bloc collapsed...”¹²³

2.1 Iranian State Institutions Tasked With Implementing Policy Involving PVMs in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories

The security and intelligence services are usually responsible for handling relations with Iran’s proxy warriors. The security sector is comprised of three services: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), also known by its Persian appellation “Sepah-e Pasdaran,” the regular armed forces services, collectively known as Artesh, and a

¹²⁰ Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 214. Also cf. pp. 181, 213.

¹²¹ Rolf Tophoven, “Iran koordiniert offenbar Terrorkoalition in Nahost,” *Die Zeit*, 25 March 2002 at www.welt.de/daten/2002/03/25/0325au322415.htm?print=1 accessed on 8 November 2002; Gal Luft, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹²² Matthew Levitt, “New Arenas for Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism,” *op. cit.*; Ibid., “Hezbollah’s West Bank Terror Network,” *op. cit.*

¹²³ Middle East Media Research Institute, “Iran Increases Funding and Training for Suicide Bombings,” Special Dispatch, 13 June 2002 at www.memri.de accessed on 1 July 2002.

sizeable paramilitary militia, the Basij. Together, they form the three pillars of Iran's defence establishment. Of particular significance and relevance to supporting terrorism among the governmental system of Iran is the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, known by its Persian acronym VEVAK (Vezerat-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar).

Iran's governmental structure is subjected to a constitutionally entrenched theocratic apparatus that acts as a parallel, and in many cases, superseding second set of government institutions. Supreme power in the state is vested in the velayat-e faqih – a wise member of the community of clerical Islamic jurisconsults. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the first faqih following the Iranian Revolution. The faqih appoints all members of the Council of Guardians comprised of reputable and pious jurists, which in turn has the power to veto decisions taken in the marginally more secular Majlis, the Iranian parliament. A second extra-parliamentary body, the Expediency Council, supposedly tasked with mediating between the Council of Guardians and the Majlis, in reality is an undemocratically constituted body of Ayatollahs called upon to at least nominally advise the faqih.¹²⁴ The faqih also appoints the judges in the nation's judiciary, and the army chief of staff, as well as the commander of the Pasdaran, while sending his special envoy as a representative to the Supreme Defence Council. The faqih has the power to dismiss the president of the Islamic Republic should he be found in dereliction of his duty by either the Majlis or the judiciary, which are indirectly also subject to the faqih's office.¹²⁵ Seyyid Ali Khamene'i is the current incumbent of the faqih's post.

While the Artesh has been relegated to the backseat with respect to special, covert operations, VEVAK and the Pasdaran are the two key-players in the coordination, financing, training and equipping of political violence movements in the Middle East and beyond. The Basij also plays a role in Iran's policy of supporting political violence movements, albeit a minor one. After the Revolution, VEVAK gradually became the most powerful ministry in the Islamic Republic and has, since the elections of 1997, been at the heart of a power

¹²⁴ Sick, *op. cit.*, 83.

¹²⁵ Sharam Chubin and Jerrold D. Green, "Engaging Iran: A US Strategy," *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Autumn 1998), pp. 153–169, p. 165. Another concise summary of the Iranian system of governance can be found at <http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/iran/iran127.html> accessed on 5 December 2003.

struggle between the Reformers under Islamic Republic's president, Hojjatolislam Mohammad Khatami, and the faqih and the Council of Guardians.

The Reformers' confrontation with VEVAK culminated in a series of political assassinations of dissident intellectuals between November and December 1998, which was masterminded by place-men of VEVAK's divested, former director, Ali-Akbar Fallahian-Khuzestani. Deputy Minister Saeed Emami, who was charged with the murders, reportedly committed suicide following his arrest. Gary Sick suggests that Khatami was then able to purge VEVAK.

The unprecedented revelations of rogue operations in the security services, including widespread allegations that Emami was killed to prevent him from implicating other ultraconservative figures at the very highest levels of the clerical leadership, created a public sensation and seemed to indicate that unauthorized terrorist operations might become subject to international and perhaps even public scrutiny and control.¹²⁶

William Samii of *Radio Free Europe*, however, suggests otherwise: "Even if the MOIS [Ministry of Intelligence and Security, i.e. VEVAK] is no longer a hard-line stronghold, as Sick indicates, that doesn't mean that hard-liners have not created alternative structures to it."¹²⁷ According to a member of the Majlis, former members of VEVAK set up camp in Tehran following their fall from power, and "the intelligence apparatus of one of these organs in Tehran has three times the number of personnel that the MOIS has throughout the country."¹²⁸

At their inception, the Pasdaran sported a modest force of approximately 10,000 men. The original purpose of the Pasdaran was to quell counter-revolutionary challenges that arose in the wake of the events of 1978–1979 within the Artesh and among oppositional groups. At the time, formidable forces opposed the Pasdaran: the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK), the Fedayeen in general and the combined Kurdish Peshmerga. The influence of the Pasdaran, whose key tasks were confined to protecting the leaders of the Iranian Revolu-

¹²⁶ Sick, *op. cit.*, 90.

¹²⁷ A. William Samii, "Executive Branch Confronts Existence of Parallel Intelligence Organizations," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Iran Report, Vol. 6, No. 37, 15 September 2003, pp. 1–11, p. 5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

tion and keeping the peace, grew apace with the establishment of the new regime. The First Gulf War against Iraq acted as a catalyst and boosted the number of the Pasdaran from its original 10,000 to 450,000 by 1987.¹²⁹ The Pasdaran even received their own ministry as early as 1982 – the year they projected their activity and sphere of influence into the Beqaa in Lebanon. On a par with the Iranian Defense Ministry, the Pasdaran were a power to be reckoned with. In 1985, Khomeini's decree for the establishment of the Pasdaran's own armed services branches transformed the Revolutionary Guards into a fully independent military organization. By the end of 1989, the Pasdaran counted as its own no less than 21 infantry divisions, 15 infantry brigades, 21 air defence brigades, three engineering divisions, and 42 divisions consisting of armoured and artillery units, as well as chemical defence brigades. "The IRGC [Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps] also forged its own military-to-military ties to a number of Iran's allies, including Syria, Pakistan, and the Sudan."¹³⁰

In the widest sense, the Pasdaran have been, and continue to act, as the principal vehicle for exporting the Iranian Revolution, as exemplified in Lebanon, where they have succeeded at "establishing a 'front-line base' of the Islamic Revolution."¹³¹ Thus, the Pasdaran are in the main responsible for maintaining and managing the network that connects their client Hezbollah with Palestinian rejectionist groups from Damascus to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Initially, the Pasdaran presence in the Beqaa acted as a catalyst in the formation of Hezbollah. Since the peace process has lain in the doldrums after October 2000, and possibly even earlier, the Pasdaran have established a presence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: "...Islamic Jihad in the West Bank and Gaza essentially operates as a branch of Hizballah, only getting paid by Iran on delivery of terrorist operations. The fundamentalist Hamas also receives Iranian contributions."¹³² In the interim, the Pasdaran continue to use Lebanon as a training ground for Palestinian political violence movements. Reportedly, Pasdaran General Ali Reza Tamizi in the recent past coordi-

129 Byman, Chubin, Etheshami, Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–34.

130 *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 35. For types of troops cf. p. 36.

131 Reuven Erlich, "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror," Special Information Paper, *Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, (April 2003) at www.intelligence.org.il/eng/iran.htm accessed on 18 June 2003.

132 Kershner, "The Changing Colors of Imad Mughniya," *op. cit.*, p. 4.

nated a training course for Fatah and Hamas members in the Jenata Camp in the Beqaa, where the participants learned to use ground-to-air missiles with SA-7s. The key go-between in this relatively new Iranian-Palestinian collaboration is a renegade Fatah commander, Mounir al-Muqdad.¹³³

Another key actor, Imad Mugnyiah is the personified incarnation of the Pasdaran's relationship with Hezbollah, and Iran's Palestinian clients: "Informed U.S. sources say that Mugnyiah was tasked by his Iranian bosses some time ago to establish a triangle between Hizballah, Hamas and [Palestinian] Islamic Jihad, and to train the Palestinian Sunni militants in Hizballah camps in Lebanon."¹³⁴ This link is further corroborated when Mugnyiah's role in the "Karine-A" affair is duly considered, for according to Israeli intelligence "Mugnyiah was the mastermind of this operation... he made all the preparations."¹³⁵ The arms aboard the "Karine-A," we may recall, were destined for the PA. Notably, Imad Mugnyiah is closely associated with the Pasdaran's elite unit, the Qods Force, or Jerusalem Force; as Hezbollah's foreign operations manager, he is the perfect choice for liaising with the parallel Pasdaran organization. The Qods Force's mandate includes covert operations abroad, the training of Islamic fundamentalist activists, pre-attack target surveillance for its clients; it also commands its own corps of Iranians, Afghans, Iraqis, Lebanese and citizens of various states in North Africa fluent in Arabic, and therefore has established for itself a considerable outreach within the greater Middle East.¹³⁶

Finally, the Basij has been involved in training Hezbollah, PIJ and Hamas operatives in Iran in the context of its own military exercises. Apparently, the Basij's services for these political violence move-

133 Rolf Tophoven, "Geheimdienste: Tehran bildet Palästinenser an Raketen aus," *Die Zeit*, 28 February 2002 at www.welt.de/daten/2002/02/28/0228au317222.htm?print=1 accessed on 8 November 2002; Rubin, „No Change,” *op. cit.*

134 Ibid, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

135 Richard Beeston, "Waite's Kidnapper 'Was Behind Arms Cargo,'" *The Times*, 15 January 2002 at www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,3-2002023700,00.html accessed on 29 October 2002. For Mugnyiah's links with top Iranian and Iraqi intelligence officials cf. Kenneth R. Timmerman, "A Reformer Without Results: Iran's Khatami Needs to Hand Over Terrorists," *The Washington Times*, 1 November 2001 at www.iran.org.news.wt_khatami_01_11_01.htm accessed on 29 October 2002.

136 "Qods (Jerusalem) Force. Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC – Pasdaran-e Inqilab)" [n.d.] at www.globalsecurity.org/intell/world/iran/qods.htm accessed on 28 May 2003.

ments are reciprocated as “Hizballah and PIJ or Hamas participation in the current exercises supports reports by the Student Movement Coordination Committee for Democracy in Iran that Arabic-speaking Lebanese mercenaries were among the hardline forces who attacked student demonstrators in July 2000.”¹³⁷

2.2 Iranian PVM Clients: Who’s Who?

Iran’s support for political violence movements extends to several beneficiaries. The most prominent among these is certainly Hezbollah in Lebanon. Palestinian rejectionist groups, principally PIJ and Hamas, have more recently assumed the place of a close second. Ahmed Jibril’s PFLP-GC, a wholly secular group, also features among Iran’s protégés.¹³⁸

Iran’s oldest and most reliable weapon of proxy warfare is indubitably the Lebanese Hezbollah. The CIA’s former head of the Near East Division at a conference recently observed that: “While participants here might argue over whether violence by Hizballah against Israeli forces in Lebanon is international terrorism, there is no doubt that Iran’s continued and recently increased support to Hizballah is a deliberate use of a terrorist organization to advance Iranian national and geopolitical objectives.”¹³⁹ And although it is very likely that Damascus’ agents in Lebanon have in the course of the 1990’s been successful at consolidating their hold over Hezbollah in the context of Syria’s ongoing rivalry with Iran for ultimate control of Hezbollah, it is Iran that has consistently bolstered Hezbollah to the point that this political violence movement has become a strategic threat on Israel’s northern border, one that harkens to its master’s voice – which, for the time being, remains that of the faqih in Tehran.¹⁴⁰ Ominously, Hezbollah’s track record suggests that it looks to the conservative clerical Iranian faction for leadership, which by and

137 A. William Samii, “Hizballah and Palestinians Involved in Basij Exercises,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Iran Report, Vol. 3, No. 40, 23 October 2000, 7 pp., p. 1.

138 Sick, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

139 Frank Anderson, “International Terrorism and International Cooperation,” in International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, *Countering Suicide Terrorism* (Herzliya, Israel: ICT, 2001), pp. 47–57, p. 53.

140 Gambill and Abdelnour, “Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus,” *op. cit.*; Levitt, *op. cit.*, *Targeting Terror*, pp. 66–68.

large underwrites Hezbollah's penchant to strike at Israel given half the opportunity, and that it does not take well to Iranian Reformist attempts at fettering its freedom of action in the interest of Iran's relations with Syria – that it will, indeed, prefer a Mohtashemi to a Rafsanjani.¹⁴¹ Following the withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon in June 2000, Hezbollah's power has increased dramatically, enabling it to create its own franchise in the Palestinian territories: the Return Brigades.¹⁴² In addition, it is likely that Hezbollah, with the collusion of both Syria and Iran, is attempting to set up another subsidiary in Coalition-occupied Iraq.¹⁴³

Hamas defines itself as the Palestinian manifestation of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist umbrella organization that originated in Egypt in 1928 in reaction to a trend of secular nationalism that swept through the Middle East at that time. Hamas' ultimate objective is the establishment of a Palestinian theocracy encompassing all of Israel within its 1967 borders, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank on the ruins of what it refers to as the "Zionist Entity." Among Palestinian groups in the Iranian orbit, Hamas' ties with the Islamic Republic are relatively old; the PA does not enjoy a comparable kind of established relationship with Tehran. The authors of a study on Hamas contend that: "Reports of Hamas' attempts to establish contacts with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards [i.e. the Pasdaran] in search of arms and training appeared as early as November 1989..."¹⁴⁴ Notably, a Hamas delegation visiting Tehran in November and again in December of 1992 reportedly met with the current faqih, Khamene'i, in order to sign a bilateral, Hamas-Iranian military and political treaty, "that spurred Hamas to escalate its military operations against Israel..."¹⁴⁵

141 Magnus Ranstorp, *Hiz'Ballah in Lebanon* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 125.

142 Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 59. Levitt, "Hezbollah's West Bank Terror Network," pp. 3–5.

143 Don van Natta, Jr., and Douglas Jehl, "Hezbollah Seen Moving in Iraq," *International Herald Tribune*, 16 April 2003 at www.iht.com/cgi-bin/generic/cgi?template=articleprint.tmplh&ArticleID=93362 accessed on 4 November 2003; "Hezbollah Shops Plan to Organize in Iraq," *WorldNetDaily*, 19 May 2003 at www.worldnetdaily.com/news/printer-friendly.asp?ARTICLE_ID=32624 accessed on 4 November 2003; Buncombe, "Iran and Syria Told to Stop Foreign Fighters Going To Iraq," *op. cit.*

144 Shaul Mishal & Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas. Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 87.

145 *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, 97.

Engaged in a perennial campaign to bolster its credibility, Hamas, because of the blatancy of Iran's and other parties' support for it, is concerned to demonstrate its independence from outside powers – especially Iran – at every turn and in particular vis-à-vis its competition, the PIJ. In the context of the smouldering Arab-Persian tension among its state supporters, Hamas's leadership has attempted to steer the movement toward a middle ground. Although Syria and Saudi Arabia have become staunch supporters of Hamas, Iran remains Hamas' strategic ally. This is not without consequences with respect to Hamas' utter refusal to countenance a Middle East peace settlement, as "Iran unambiguously rejected the looming political settlement in the region and gave its support to the Palestinian opponents... of the process. This support was crowned by the convening in Tehran of a conference of forces opposed to a settlement with Israel on 22 October 1991, just eight days before the Madrid Conference began."¹⁴⁶ Hamas entertains a close working relationship with Hezbollah, while recognizing the Palestine Liberation Organization, of which Fatah is the key member, as "a father, a brother, his relative, [and] a friend."¹⁴⁷

Originally a splinter group of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad was formally established in 1980/1981. Its ideological makeup is a distinct mixture of "Palestinian nationalist ideas, themes drawn from the beliefs of the Muslim Brethren, and the teachings of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini... (this despite the fact that PIJ is a Sunni movement)."¹⁴⁸ True to its ideological precepts, it is credited with having "denounced the factionalist stance of the Brothers [i.e. Muslim Brotherhood/Hamas] for advocating non-participation in the struggle against the [Israeli] occupation and for devoting its energies to battering the PLO."¹⁴⁹ By contrast, the PIJ is accused by Hamas of blind obedience to the faqih and his clerical advisers. According to Ziad Abu-Amr, "[t]he Jihad is

146 Khaled Hroub, *Hamas. Political Thought and Practice* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000), p. 177.

147 Jaber, *op. cit.*, p. 154; Excerpt from the Hamas Charter of 1988 in Rubin and Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

148 Ely Karmon, "The U.S. Indictment of Palestinian Islamic Jihad Militants: The Iranian Connection," *Policy Watch*, No. 718, 3 March 2003 at www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/policywatch2003/718.htm accessed on 10 June 2003.

149 Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine*, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

also labelled as a Shi'ite group, carrying out Iranian policies, which the Muslim Brotherhood rejects."¹⁵⁰ It has been described as having evolved as an "umbrella organization" for various Islamic fundamentalist groups that rode the wave to notoriety on the back of the Intifadah after 1987.¹⁵¹

PIJ's size contrasts with that of Hamas. While the latter is more broadly based, the former compensates with the virulence of its members. At the end of the day, however, the PIJ closely coordinates its activities with its sponsors Iran and Syria, as well as with its erstwhile competitor and rival, Hamas. Cooperation between the PIJ and Hamas improved in the wake of the Oslo Accords of 1993. Despite the amelioration of initial animosities, and its traditional material dependence on Syria for logistical support and arms, "Islamic Jihad operatives soon began training at Hezbollah camps in Lebanon, under the supervision of Iranian Revolutionary Guards stationed in the country, and carried out some joint operations with Hezbollah against Israeli forces in south Lebanon during the 1990s."¹⁵² Moreover, the successes of the second Bush administration in interrupting the flow of funding for PIJ from U.S.-based charities may well have reinforced, even corroborated, the PIJ's financial dependence upon Iran.¹⁵³

Closely following the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifadah in October 2000, the PIJ, following a spell in the doldrums after the liquidation of its leader Fathi Shiqaqi in 1995, returned to the Palestinian theatre with a vengeance: The reason for the reanimation of the PIJ was that "Tehran began paying Islamic Jihad millions of dollars in cash bonuses for each attack against Israel."¹⁵⁴ After an attack near Meggido claimed by the PIJ, Iran's government increased its funding for PIJ by 70%.¹⁵⁵ Such was the quantity of money injected into the Palestinian territories by the Iranians through the PIJ that members of the Fatah-controlled al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades defected and joined

150 Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza. Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 124.

151 Yonah Alexander, *Palestinian Religious Terrorism: Hamas and Islamic Jihad* (Ardsley, N.Y.: Transnational Publishers, 2002), p. 30.

152 Levitt, "Syria and Islamic Jihad," *op. cit.*

153 Karmon, "The U.S. Indictment of Palestinian Islamic Jihad Militants," *op. cit.*

154 Levitt, "Syria and Islamic Jihad," *op. cit.*

155 Rubin, "No Change," *op. cit.*

the PIJ.¹⁵⁶ With respect to Hamas, however, the enmity between the two Palestinian Jihadist organizations had in the meantime all but vanished. In the course of the second Intifadah, the true extent of the PIJ's close collaboration with Hamas has been revealed, as documents illustrating the two groups' plans to carry out large-scale suicide attacks on Israeli targets have since come to light.¹⁵⁷

2.3 The Nature and Extent of Iranian Support for PVMs

The smuggling of contraband, exemplified by the "Karine-A" affair, only represents one facet of Iranian support for Middle Eastern political violence movements engaging in terrorist acts. According to the U.S. State Department's annual report *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, Iran "remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism during 2002. It has provided funding, training, and weapons to Central Asian and anti-Israeli terrorist groups."¹⁵⁸

Weapons. Aboard the "Karine-A," Iran sent weapons to Palestinian political violence movements that would act as a force multiplier, and consequently help to potentially alter the military balance in the context of the low-intensity conflict raging in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since late 2000. If the intercepted shipment of the "Karine-A" and the contraband successfully smuggled by Iran's intermediaries, the PFLP-GC and Hezbollah, aboard the "Calypso-2" and the "Santorini" are added up, the result is impressive: In excess of 100 tons of weaponry, including the full range of light arms to short-range ballistic missiles, have been procured by Iran, its proxies and its Syrian ally for the two Palestinian theatres alone. Not only does Iran seek to supply its Palestinian proxies, it also has "qualitatively and quantitatively bolstered support for Hezbollah and Palestinian Terror... Hezbollah has in recent months deployed thousands of new Katyusha rockets and 45-kilometer range Fajr-5 surface-to-surface missiles capable of striking the outskirts of Haifa."¹⁵⁹

Training and Logistics. Iran not only equips Hezbollah with arms, but also provides for the training of Palestinian rejectionist groups

156 A. William Samii, "Iran May Be Funding Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Iran Report, Vol. 5, No. 44, 2 December 2002 at www.rferl.org/iran-report/2002/12/44-021202.html accessed on 11 July 2003.

157 Alexander, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32.

158 U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism* 2002, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

159 Rubin, "No Change," *op. cit.*; Gal Luft, "Hizballahland," *op. cit.*, p. 3.

with those weapons in Lebanon and in Iran; according to a recent testimony given at the U.S. House of Representatives, Pasdaran personnel were responsible for training Lebanese and Palestinian candidates in the use of SA-7 systems and in executing underwater suicide attacks.¹⁶⁰ With respect to the training facility, we need to recall that although Hezbollah holds sway over the Beqaa, it does so at Syria's sufferance: And thus it is with the connivance of the Syrian government that Iranian Pasdaran and experienced veterans of the Hezbollah train Palestinian members of Fatah and Hamas in the Jenata camp, which is situated in the Beqaa.¹⁶¹ As an aside, it should be noted that in the interim Iran's reach extends even beyond Lebanon and the Palestinian territories into the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, from where Iranian clients have repeatedly attempted to launch missile attacks across the border on Israeli targets.¹⁶² The perpetrators were members of the PIJ, of Hezbollah and of Hamas. All of them had undergone training in the Beqaa valley.¹⁶³

Notably, Lieutenant-Colonel Mounir al-Muqdash has long been the key intermediary between a resourceful rogue Fatah splinter group, the Black September 13 Brigades (named after the date of the Israeli-PLO agreement signed at Oslo, and reminiscent of the earlier Fatah commandos emerging from the Jordanian civil war of 1970) based in Lebanon, and which seceded from Arafat's Fatah movement following the Oslo Accords, and Iran's agents. With considerable Iranian financial backing at his disposal that helped wean Arafat-loyalists away from loyal Fatah units, al-Muqdash's Black September 13 group exercises suzerainty over all other militant groups in Ayn al-Hilweh, one of the largest Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.

From this power base, al-Muqdash forged his ties with Hezbollah and the PIJ. Al-Muqdash has been instrumental in recruiting suicide bombers for PIJ and Hamas in Lebanon and has been acting as Iran's

160 Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Testimony of Matthew Levitt Senior Fellow in Terrorism Studies, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Before The House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Middle East and South East Asia, United States House of Representatives 'Syrian Sponsorship of Global Terrorism: The Need for Accountability,'" 18 September 2002, p. 6 at www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/levitt/levitto91802.htm accessed on 6 June 2003.

161 Tophoven, "Theran bildet Palästinsener an Raketen aus," *op. cit.*

162 Rubin, "No Change," *op. cit.*

163 Levitt, *Targeting Terror*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

manager for the Return Brigades and another political violence movement active in Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem in the West Bank, which calls itself al-Nathir (the Harbinger). The groups steered by al-Muqdash are Iranian-funded, just like the PIJ, which, following an altercation over the disbursement of funds with Hezbollah, in more recent times receives its own budget from Tehran.¹⁶⁴ The difference between the two organizations is that the al-Muqdash franchise ensures that members of Fatah associated with Arafat in its own sphere of influence will remain biddable vis-à-vis Iran; al-Muqdash thereby confers influence over Palestinian militancy against Israel and the West – currently including the Coalition forces deployed in Iraq – to the paymasters in Teheran and to the abettors in Damascus.¹⁶⁵

Recruiting and Funding. The training activity organized by the Pasdaran's elite Qods Force and by Hezbollah at the Jenata camp, which brings together Hamas, PIJ and PFLP-GC activists, cost an estimated \$50 million. This sum was likely paid out of the Pasdaran's war chest.¹⁶⁶ As Iran's principal agent, Hezbollah was also tasked with the recruitment and financing of Palestinian militants. Shortly after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifadah, this proved more difficult than expected. Only by the middle of 2001, in the wake of a concerted effort by the Pasdaran and Hezbollah, did the Iranian recruiting campaign pick up. According to a template applied in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in the late 1990s, Iran has been making use of the social welfare hook in the Palestinian territories. In exchange for free-of-charge medical treatment provided by the "Iranian Committee for Aiding Wounded Victims of the Intifada" in Iranian hospitals, Palestinian recruits have to undergo a combat training course.¹⁶⁷ They are later transferred back to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with the intention of establishing "terrorist cells."¹⁶⁸

164 Middle East Media Research Institute, "Iran Increases Funding and Training for Suicide Bombings," *op. cit.*

165 Gary C. Gambill, "Dossier: Mounir al-Maqdash," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 2003) at www.meib.org/articles/0307_pald.htm accessed on 18 August 2003; Ziad K. Abdelnour, "Syria's Proxy Forces in Iraq," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (April 2003) at www.meib.org/articles/0304_s2.htm accessed on 10 December 2003.

166 Levitt, *Targeting Terror*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

167 Rolf Tophoven, "Iran koordiniert offenbar Terrorkoalition in Nahost," *op. cit.*

168 Levitt, "New Arenas for Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism," *op. cit.*; Ibid., "Hezbollah's West Bank Terror Network," *op. cit.*

Iran currently supports Hezbollah with an estimated contribution of \$100–200 million per annum, of which a portion is used for the funding and recruitment of Palestinian activists and operations in the Palestinian territories.¹⁶⁹ Its Iranian benefactor and Khomeini's ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, originally procured the finances for the support of Hezbollah.¹⁷⁰ Following Mohtashemi's fall from grace, financial aid for Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups was presumably based on a more permanent settlement, a portion of which, it is suspected, may be stemming from the immensely wealthy and politically unaccountable parastatal foundations in Iran, the Bonyads. For example, it was the Bonyad-e 15th Khordad, which put a price on Salman Rushdie's head following Ayatollah Khomeini's fatal fatwa (i.e. a legal opinion or pronouncement vested with religious authority and issued by a member of the Islamist community of jurisconsults) condemning the hapless author. Another one of these Bonyads, the Bonyad-e Shahid, has been known to disburse funds to "families of martyrs."¹⁷¹ "Shahid" is the *Arab* word for martyr that, in the context of the contemporary strife gripping the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, has been used to designate suicide terrorists.

Moral Support. Iran has hosted three conferences in support of the first and second Intifadah since 1990, bringing together representatives of Hamas, Hezbollah, the PIJ and the Syrian-backed PFLP-GC. The principal subject of the conferences has been the excoriation of the "Little Satan" and of the "Big Satan" – of Israel and of the U.S., respectively. The principal object of the conference is to create a sense of unity among its participants and to harness potential synergies of those present towards a mutual future agenda.¹⁷²

169 Luft, "Hizballahland," *op. cit.*, p. 4; Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch, "Iran Increases Funding and Training for Suicide Bombings," *op. cit.*; Byman, "Should Hezbollah Be Next?," *op. cit.*, p. 6.

170 Jaber, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

171 Byman, Chubin, Ehteshami, Green, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

172 A. William Samii, "Theran Hosting Another Intifada Conference," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Iran Report, Vol. 5, No. 20, 3 June 2002.

2.4 The Long-Term Strategic Objectives of Iranian Support for PVMs

For as long as Iran remains under the thumb of a theocratic oligarchy, and the efforts of the reformist movement under president Khatami to seek normalization with the West is hamstrung by the Guardian and Expediency councils, the future projection of the clerics' reactionary agenda in the Middle East through PVM clients will remain a salient reality.¹⁷³ The stridently anti-Western Iranian conservatives, though much blamed for the Islamic Republic's current stagnancy, appear to have been reinvigorated as a radical political force. Not least among the reasons for this development is the second Bush administration's aggressive stance toward political violence movements associated with radical Islam, as exemplified by its "War on Terror" begun after the attacks of 11 September 2001; it can also be partially accounted for by the decline of Tehran's and Washington's mutual nemesis, the Taliban, after operation "Enduring Freedom" put an abrupt end to their rule.¹⁷⁴

The conservative clerics' perspective of Iran's security political requirements in a geopolitical context is cast in the rhetoric of an Iran encircled by hostile forces, which is reinforced by what a group of experts has labelled "the rampant instability that characterizes its immediate neighborhood today."¹⁷⁵ Iran's defense minister, Admiral Ali Samkhani, in 1997 stated that the dynamics of Iran's policies are largely determined by the concept of "deterrent defense."¹⁷⁶ Arguably, "deterrent defense" is not fundamentally different from the idea of "forward defense," which, in turn, subsumes the notion of offensive deployment. By and large, the constitution of Hezbollah as an elongated arm of the Islamic Revolution after 1982, and the blatantly obvious presence of approximately 2,000 Pasdaran in southern Lebanon and the Beqaa largely fit that description.

173 An Israeli source suggests that President Khatami is "kept out of the decision-making process" on the deployment of political violence movements and the planning of terrorist acts. Erlich, "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror," *op. cit.*, cf. chapter 2, p. 1 of 2.

174 Baktiari, Vaziri "Iran: Doubting Reform?," *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 39; Gawdat Bahgat, "Iran, the United States, and the War on Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (March–April 2003), pp. 93–104, p. 95.

175 Byman, Chubin, Ehteshami, Green, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

176 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Despite the evident cost to itself, three factors in the context of Middle Eastern regional power politics impel Iran to continue its support for ideologically like-minded proxy warriors. A derivative of its historic mission of exporting the values of the Islamic Revolution is Iran's vociferous, if somewhat expedient, support (not unlike the help it extended to the Shi'ites of Lebanon in 1980s) of Palestinian rejectionist militancy in the 1990s beyond the merely rhetorical castigation of Israel, which has not only endured to the present, but intensified since October 2000. In granting this support to groups, such as Hamas, the PIJ and the PFLP-GC, Iran notably differs little from Arab states that have traditionally been playing the Palestinian card in order to bolster their claims to Islamic (as distinct from Arab) leadership.¹⁷⁷

The second reason militating against the termination of Iran's sponsorship of political violence movements that use terrorist tactics is the emergence of an incipient partnership on defense related matters between Turkey and Israel, which even at an early stage was possessed of the character of an ad-hoc arrangement that severely curtails Iran's strategic freedom of movements in the region. As one commentator put it, the Ankara-Jerusalem Entente largely "offsets Iran's ties with Syria."¹⁷⁸ Evidently, the Syrian alliance is vital to Iran's ability to project its power beyond the Arab cordon, toward the Mediterranean. By June 2000, the Turks were known to threaten transiting Iranian aircraft with cargoes destined for Damascus – a clear hint to Tehran that Ankara would not knowingly permit supplies for Hezbollah to pass through Turkish airspace.¹⁷⁹ Conversely, with respect to Iran, the Israeli-Turkish defense cooperation has "brought Israel to its borders," and thus made the perceived Israeli threat palpable.¹⁸⁰

On the regional strategic level, the implications for Iran of the drawing together of the two Middle Eastern states with the most potent conventional military forces – one of which is suspected to have at its disposal one of the world's most fearsome atomic arsenals – that both also suffer from the scourge of Iranian-financed and

177 Ibid., p. 83.

178 Chubin, "Iran's Strategic Predicament," *op.cit.*

179 Inbar, *The Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership*, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

180 Michael Eisenstadt, "Turkish-Israeli Cooperation: An Assessment," *Policy Watch*, No. 262, 24 July 1997 at www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/policywatch1997/262.htm accessed on 23 June 2003.

Iranian-directed political violence movements (Iran is also a supporter of the PKK/KADEK) are unsavoury at best. Indeed, Iran's perception of Israel as one of its principal regional rivals bears special significance relative to Israel's supposed unconventional arsenal. In the light of Iran's declared enmity toward the Jewish state, its understandable apprehension of conventional and unconventional Israeli power projection coupled with the absence of a similar, comparable Iranian capability, and viewed against backdrop of the recent deployment of Coalition troops at Iran's doorstep, may well represent a compelling rationale and the driving force behind Tehran's continued attempts to fight its avowed opponent with the only means at its disposal: proxy warfare by Iran's PVM clients. For it appears that for Iran confrontation with Israel is only possible on the level of vicarious, low-intensity warfare, well below the escalation threshold of inter-state war, as the imparity in the military balance of the antagonists renders a direct military confrontation highly unlikely. Instead, the military imbalance compels Iran, and its ally Syria, too, to compensate their weakness by indirectly, and, if possible at all, deniably, strike at its rivals through honing the weapon of terrorism, and by playing the asymmetric warfare card to the hilt. On the face of it, the withdrawal of the IDF from southern Lebanon in June 2000, which has been conveniently misconstrued as a military victory for Hezbollah in some quarters, has served as an example of the long-term successes of Iran's policy in the Levant.

Under the impact of increasing political pressure on, and the crippling force of hard-hitting sanctions applied against, Iran by the United States to abandon its support for political violence movements – a policy which starkly contrasts with the European Union's appeasing and predominantly economically motivated “policy of engagement,” Iran's policy has ever so slowly shifted away from the direct involvement in, and support for, terrorist activity evident throughout the 1980s and mainly, but not exclusively, occurring in Lebanon.¹⁸¹ Instead, Iran has of late tended toward a more diversified “portfolio” encompassing the funding, training, recruiting and equipping of Palestinian rejectionist groups through its proxy Hezbollah, its strategic part-

181 “Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA),” Public Law 104–172, *U.S. Department of State*, 5 August 1996 at www.state.gov/e/eb/c9998.htm accessed on 11 December 2003; Bahgat, “Iran and Terrorism: The Transatlantic Responses,” *op. cit.*, pp. 146–149.

ner, Syria, and the Syrian-supported client, the PFLF-GC, that also appears to maintain close ties with Teheran.¹⁸² Nevertheless, Iran's "achievement" as it were is, indeed, considerable: The West Bank and the Gaza Strip have, with substantial Iranian financial, logistical and material aid, become war zones; and Israel within its 1967 borders is suffering from almost daily attacks on the lives of its citizens that are co-sponsored by Iran.

Effectively, Iran in close cooperation with Syria and through Hezbollah has managed to keep open a front against Israel in Lebanon at a time, when other Arab states have preferred to reach an accommodation with their Israeli neighbour. And while the stated goal of both Iran's clerical government and the Hezbollah leadership for Lebanon is the establishment of an Islamic state, the ultimate Iranian objective transcends the narrow Lebanese Shi'ite agenda. In summary, Iran is an important, if not the most significant, contributor to the destabilization of the Levant in particular, and the Near East in general. The principal objective of Iran's indirect support for political violence movements therefore is to carry its struggle with forces perceived to be inimical to its Islamic Revolutionary principles to the doorstep of that very enemy, but without being called to account; and thereby to derail any inclusive peace process leading to a comprehensive settlement for the region. As long as a martial interpretation of the values of the Islamic Revolution is underpinned by a sense of encirclement, and the resources of the Islamic Republic are harnessed by extremist, undemocratic forces, Iran's strategy of exporting violence to neuralgic locales in the Middle East will likely continue.

2.5 U.S. Policy on Iran's Support for PVMs

"Dual containment," Anthony Lake wrote in April 1994, "does not mean duplicate containment. The basic purpose is to counter the hostility of both Baghdad and Tehran, but the challenges posed by the two regimes are distinct and therefore require tailored approaches."¹⁸³ According to Lake, the specific Iranian threat, as perceived by the U.S. under Clinton, has been vested in the Islamic Republic's efforts at developing nuclear and other unconventional weapons, plus delivery systems; and the circumstance that Tehran was regarded, then as

182 Sick, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

183 Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 49

now, as “the foremost sponsor of terrorism and assassinations worldwide.”¹⁸⁴ Therefore, as the introductory section of the “Iran and Libya Sanctions Act” of 1996 appositely states “[t]he Congress declares that it is the policy of the United States to deny Iran the ability to support acts of international terrorism...”¹⁸⁵ The application of Dual Containment required that the U.S. “exert economic and political pressure on these two countries [i.e. Iran and Iraq], including through the use of covert Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations to curb what the administration called Iran’s ‘expansionist ambitions.’”¹⁸⁶

Following President Bill Clinton’s tenure, the U.S. position under George W. Bush toward Iran has become, if anything, more combative. In his State of the Union address of 29 January 2002, President Bush enunciated “Iran aggressively pursues these weapons [of mass destruction] and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom... States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.”¹⁸⁷ Addressing both Syria and Iran in July 2003, President Bush unequivocally warned that in the event of their failure to accommodate Washington’s global campaign against terror they “will be held accountable.”¹⁸⁸ Much of the U.S.’ belligerence toward Iran was arguably rooted in the preponderance in Washington’s corridors of power of the neo-conservative faction, headed by U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, Dr Paul Wolfowitz. One commentator aired suspicions about the long-term objectives of the course of U.S. policy in the Middle East under the aegis of the neo-conservatives, when she confided, “that Iran... is clearly the target that many of the neo-cons have in mind. First we’re going to do Iraq – and then

184 Ibid., *op. cit.*, p. 52; U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

185 “Iran and Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA),” *op. cit.*

186 Fawaz A. Gerges, “Washington’s Misguided Iran Policy,” *Survival*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Winter 1996–1997), pp. 5–15, p. 6.

187 A full transcript of President George W. Bush’s State of the Union Address, delivered on 29 January 2002 is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html> accessed on 11 December 2003.

188 Mike Allen, “Bush Warns Syria, Iran on Terrorism,” *Washington Post*, 22 July 2003 at www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A25463-2003Jul21?language=printer accessed on 22 July 2003.

there's Iran, and there's Syria.”¹⁸⁹ There appears to be a conceptual continuation linking the long-term strategic objectives of the U.S. in the Middle East, as envisioned by Anthony Lake under the Clinton administration, with the more recent U.S. Middle East policy of the second Bush administration. This linkage certainly also has a bearing on U.S. policy vis-à-vis Iran's involvement in the support for political violence movements.

In the wider context of Lake's conception of Dual Containment with its intent of restraining Iran economically, diplomatically and by other means, it is suggested here that the Coalition invasion, and its occupation of Iraq after March 2003, may be understood as a culmination of U.S. strategy. This proposition appears reasonable, if viewed against the backdrop of Iraq's declining utility in the containment of Iran after the Iraq-Iran War (1980–1988); and if the Second Gulf War (1990–1991) is held to have been fought in compliance with the long-term objective of U.S. Middle East policy. In the sense of a parallel, or even superseding, objective to the Coalition's quest to eliminate Iraq's alleged clandestine weapons of mass destruction program, the Third Gulf War can, and likely should, be understood as a U.S.-led attempt at directly implementing the containment of Iran in Iraq. Moreover, as one of the U.S.'s principal grievances, Iran's support for terrorism plays a defining role in the shaping of U.S. policy towards Iran. Accordingly, this analysis of bringing the policy of Dual Containment to its conclusion is further corroborated by the second Bush administration's priorities after the attacks of 11 September, for within the U.S.-strategy of fighting a war on terrorism, and following the Afghan precedent of late 2001, the interdiction of terrorism also features high on the list of U.S. motives to overthrow the Iraqi Ba'ath regime. The logic underlying Lake's Dual Containment and that of the architects of the U.S.'s “War on Terrorism” is that after the invasion of Afghanistan and the occupation of Iraq, which both serve the encirclement of Iran, the U.S. is, indeed, setting its sights on the Islamic Republic.

189 Judith Yaphe of the National Defense University in an interview with BBC's Roger Hardy, “US Sets Sights on Iran,” *BBC News*, 30 July 2003 at http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3106771.stm accessed on 2 September 2003. On the neo-conservative faction, cf. Max Boot, “Think Again: Neocons,” *Foreign Policy* (January/February 2004), pp. 3–4 at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=2426 accessed on 15 January 2004.

In spite of the momentary prevalence of the neo-conservative agenda, the U.S. still has a range of policy options open to it. It can attempt to engage Tehran in a dialogue, which depends on the progress of the reformers under president Khatami. Failing Iran's advancement of normalization with the West, the U.S. can pressure Iran into compliance in tandem with its allies, or, as a last resort, turn to forced regime change.¹⁹⁰ The third and last policy option is assuming more weight, for, in review, the portrayal of the neo-conservative faction as the ogre of the U.S.' Middle Eastern policy requires a reappraisal in light of Iran's track record. The acceptance of the neo-conservative position vis-à-vis Iran in the second Bush administration can also be ascribed to Iran's ambivalence, intransparency and outright disingenuity on the issue of terrorism. Iran has failed to satisfy U.S. concerns regarding Tehran's involvement in terrorist attacks that occurred after the 1983 attack on the MNF compound in Beirut on at least three counts. The attack on the Khobar Towers barrack that left 19 U.S. citizens dead and wounded 372 was perpetrated by the Saudi branch of Hezbollah, which receives considerable logistical support and training from its parent organization in Lebanon. The Khobar Towers attack resulted in an investigation that heavily implicated Iran, and specifically the Pasdaran and the faqih's office, not least by the incriminating information provided by Ahmad Reza'i, the son of the former chief of the Pasdaran, who defected in 1998.¹⁹¹ Ahmad al-Mughassil, one of the principal suspects of the case, told a confidante "he enjoyed close ties to Iranian officials who were providing financial support to the party..."¹⁹²

With respect to the U.S.'s alliance with Israel in the Lebanese context, Iran has failed to restrain Hezbollah from continued attacks against Israeli forces. Israel offered to withdraw from southern Lebanon in 1998 in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425 as a quid pro quo for the deployment of the Lebanese Army to the former Security Zone and, in the best of all possible worlds, Hezbollah's renunciation of political violence. As Sharam Chubin and

190 Roger Hardy, "US Options on Iran," *BBC News*, 1 August 2003 at http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east?3115973.stm accessed on 4 September 2003.

191 Michael Eisenstadt, "The Long Shadow of Khobar Towers: Dilemmas for the U.S. and Iran," *Policywatch*, No. 414, 8 October 1998 at www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch/policywatch1999/414.htm accessed on 11 December 2003.

192 Rubin and Rubin, *op. cit.*, pp. 123–126.

Jerrold Green observed at that time, Israel's unilateral withdrawal "provides a test of Iran's intentions, and of Khatami's influence."¹⁹³ However, after the Israeli retreat from Lebanon had been completed after June 2000

the exact opposite occurred: promptly declaring that its next objective was the liberation of the entire land of Palestine and the destruction of the 'Zionist entity,' Hizballah seized control of the 350-square-mile area that had been occupied by Israel, turning it into a de facto state within a state... the group has managed to amass an impressive stockpile of weapons, including 10,000 rockets and missiles capable of hitting a quarter of Israel's population, and it has continued to launch numerous armed attacks across the border.¹⁹⁴

Lastly, the widely held complicity of Iran in the "Karine-A" affair, its support for Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups torpedoing the Middle East process and its current, stagnated manifestation, the "Road Map;" the collusion with Syria, which is also accused of supporting terrorism, its alleged cultivation of ties with groups proximate to al-Qaida – even its direct ties with Usama bin Laden's network –, have fuelled the current U.S. administration's resolve to treat Iran as a supporter of terrorism.¹⁹⁵ In the light of the current assessment, the U.S. mid-term preference for regime change cannot be discounted.

2.6 Israeli Policy on Iran's Support for PVMs

Fifteen years ago, Sohrab Sobhani outlined Iran-Israel relations in terms of a pragmatic relationship, sensitively reactive to the vagaries of Middle Eastern power politics. Following the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini sought and received Israel's military support against Sunni-Arab hegemonic pretensions. "This pragmatism," Sobhani explains,

has been tempered by the Islamic republic's vision of its regional goals, namely, the strengthening of Islamic and other revolutionary forces in the region. To a certain extent, the Islamization of the region does not appear to be in tandem with Israel's orientation of a status quo foreign

193 Chubin and Green, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

194 Luft, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

195 U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Levitt, *Targeting Terrorism*, pp. 62–71.

policy. Rather, it is in direct conflict with Israel's attempts to bolster the moderate elements in the region for peace with Israel.¹⁹⁶

Israel's close association with the U.S. – the “Great Satan” – earned it the diminutive sobriquet of “Little Satan.” Israel's second invasion of Lebanon in 1982, bringing a predominantly Shi'ite area under direct Israeli military control, the ongoing occupation of the Palestinian inhabited Gaza Strip and West Bank, as well as Israel's unrepentant claim to Jerusalem as its inviolable capital after 1967, all served to create an irreconcilable breach between the clerical regime in Tehran and the Israeli government.

Iran's constitution of, and unstinting support for, Hezbollah as a tool to strike at Israel in southern Lebanon up to 1985, and subsequently within the Security Zone and across the Lebanese border into Israel after June 2000, militates against a rapprochement with Iran in the foreseeable future. The nature and extent of Iran's enduring support for Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups, as well as its partnership with Syria geared, as it is, specifically against Israel, has been discussed at length and requires no further elaboration. Nevertheless, the advent of Khatami's ascendancy following the election in 1997 was greeted with enthusiasm by Israeli officialdom. A communiqué issued by the Israeli ministry of foreign affairs was quick to clarify that “[t]ogether with many other nations, Israel viewed the electoral victory of President Mohammed Khatemi as a sign of moderation... that Israel has never determined that Iran is our enemy. We would be very happy to see Iran joining the regional efforts to lessen tensions, stop terrorism, and search for ways of cooperation and peace.”¹⁹⁷ Israel's optimism was dampened in due course, not least by the trial of alleged Jewish Iranian spies in May 2000.

The seizure of the “Karine-A” in January 2002, coupled with the fact that some of the weapons aboard the smuggling vessels were found to act as force multipliers that, once they had safely been delivered to their recipients, had the potential to alter the military balance in the Palestinian territories prompted Israel to critically reassess its

196 Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente*, p. 163

197 Cited from the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs Communique on Iran's New President,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 August 1997 at www.mfa.gov.il/go.asp?MFAHoenxo accessed on 11 December 2003.

position on Iran. "The PLO-Iranian link will require a complete re-examination of the strategic landscape in the Middle East, particularly with respect to intentions of the PLO's governing institution in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the regional role of Iran."¹⁹⁸ According to a report issued by an institution close to the Israeli government in April 2003, "[f]rom the Israeli viewpoint, the Islamic regime in Iran is an existential threat, for it is a regime that embodies an uncompromising ideology that publicly calls for the annihilation of the State of Israel..."¹⁹⁹ And, indeed, the faqih, Ali Khamene'i, had addressed a sizeable rally at Tehran University and called for the destruction of Israel on the eve of the second millennium.²⁰⁰

Israel's policy vis-à-vis Iran, however, is not only determined by the ideological hostility of Tehran's clerics, or the time-honored use by Iran of the terror weapon. Instead, a significant factor in the shaping of Israel's defense policy toward Iran is the Islamic republic's endeavour to create a nuclear weapons capability able to strike at Israel. The announcement in early July of 2003 of the successful tests, and the subsequent commencement of the serial production of the Shihab-3 ballistic missile shocked Israel to the core.²⁰¹ Shortly before, the Iranian defense establishment to satisfy a range requirement of 1,300 km had upgraded the Shihab-3. The specifics of this delivery system's range clearly pointed to the operationalization of an unconventional strike capability specifically targeting Israel's population centers.²⁰² A senior Israeli intelligence source warned that "[w]e shouldn't ignore, either, the statement attributed to spiritual leader, Ali Khamenei, that the missile is part of the answer to the Palestinian problem."²⁰³

198 "The PLO Weapons Ship From Iran," *op. cit.*

199 Erlich, "Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror," *op. cit.*, cf. "Abstract."

200 "Hizbollah Promises Israel a Blood-Filled New Year, Iran Calls for Israel's End," *Bruns International*, 31 December 1999 at <http://www.unb.ca/bruns/9900/issue14/intnews/israel.html> accessed on 11 December 2003.

201 Gutman, "Analysis: Shihab-3 'Very Bad News,'" *op. cit.*

202 Yiftah Shapir, "Iranian Missiles: The Nature of the Threat," *Tel Aviv Notes*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, No. 83, 9 July 2003 at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/taunotes.html> accessed on 11 December 2003.

203 Amos Harel, "IDF: Shihab-3 Upgraded to Give Iran Ability to Strike at Israel," 22 July 2003 at www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=320485 accessed on 22 July 2003.

The linkage of Iran's antagonism toward Israel with the Palestinian question is certainly ominous, and will place an imperative for the framing of contingency options at the door of Israeli defense planners. Iran's fiery rhetoric may well affect the shaping of future Israeli policy towards Iran, and initiate a doctrinal shift from striking against its proxies, to crossing "red line" agreements in a manner comparable to incidents involving the IDF's recent direct attacks on Syrian positions in the Beqaa. By 31 August 2003, Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom had arrived at the conclusion that "Iran is fast approaching the point of no return in its efforts to acquire nuclear capabilities."²⁰⁴ Shalom's apprehensions were given substance when the head of Israel's foreign intelligence service, Mossad, in November 2003 delivered his testimony before the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in a historic, unprecedented appearance. Meir Dagan, Mossad's head, largely corroborated Shalom's fears and later added that "the spectre of nuclear weaponry in Iran was the greatest threat that Israel has faced since its founding in 1948..."²⁰⁵

Not since 1973, after having fought at least two existential wars, has Israel have to face a threat of comparable gravity. Given Iran's continued and recently intensified support for Palestinian rejectionist groups active in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and what appears to be a linkage between Iran's current development of an unconventional strike capability directed against Israel and its opposition to an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, Israel is likely to revert to its strategy of pre-emptively striking against a perceived existential threat. Israel's attack on 7 June 1981 against the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak some 600 miles from Israel's borders should be kept in mind before dismissing Israel's propensity to take drastic measures against a strategic threat: Iran's nuclear facility at Busher may well be on the Israeli Air Force's (IAF) radar. Below the threshold of deploying unconventional and strategic arms, or the full might of its conventional force, it is conceivable that Israel may indeed reciprocate, and

204 "Israel: World Must Halt "Nightmare Scenario" of Nuclear Iran," *Jerusalem Post*, 31 August 2003 at www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Jpost/A/JParticle/PrinterFull&cid=1062305443424 accessed on 1 September 2003.

205 "Mossad Head: Nuclear Iran is Worst-Ever Threat to Israel," *Ha'aretz*, 18 November 2003 at www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=361693 accessed on 11 December 2003.

seriously consider adopting the proposal made by the doyen of security policy in the Israeli media, Ze'ev Schiff: "It would be interesting to [see] the Iranian reaction if Israel were to aid Iranian opposition groups such as the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq."²⁰⁶

206 Schiff, "Discovering the Shihab-3," *op. cit.*