

Committee: DISEC 1

Topic: Iranian Proxies

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Summary

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution in Tehran, the Iranian government and military has created a vast labyrinth of Islamic proxies across the Middle East and some parts of Africa. The Iranian government has fabricated relationships and alliances with several major militias, terrorist organisations and extremist political parties. Iran has supplied many of these organisations with weaponry, military training and financial support. Their alliances with these organisations have caused political turmoil, war, death, civil unrest and economic catastrophe. The proxies are located all around the Middle East but are primarily found in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, The Gaza Strip, The West Bank, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Definition of Key Terms

PIJ– Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Ansar Allah – The Houthi movement in Yemen

CTC- Counter-terrorism committee

UNOCT – UN Office of Counter-Terrorism

Proxy groups- When a country aids different groups, such as militias and political parties, in other countries to further their objectives and power in a region

PMF – Popular Mobilisation Forces (an Iranian proxy in Iraq)

IDF – Israeli Defense Forces

Non-state actors – Private organisations or individuals not aligned with countries, this includes terrorist groups and extremist militias

Background Information

Iranian proxies are militant groups and political organisations supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran to achieve their strategic objectives across the Middle East and beyond. These groups often share ideological ties with Iran, particularly with their revolutionary Shia Islamic doctrine, and receive varying degrees of financial, military and logistical support from Tehran.

Iran has long utilised proxy groups as a central component of its foreign policy and defence strategy. The proxy groups extend Iran's influence across the Middle East, allowing their government to project power, counter adversaries, and promote their ideological and strategic interests.

Iran's use of proxy organisations dates back to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which marked the beginning of a new era in Iranian foreign policy and defence strategy. The establishment of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Quds forces facilitated the creation and support of proxy groups all over the Middle East. Iran's plan of action is rooted in its desire to export the Islamic Revolution to other Muslim nations and counter western influence across the subcontinent, particularly from the United States, United Kingdom and their allies.

Iran has supplied billions of US dollars to proxy organisations in order for them to carry out their objectives no matter how extreme. Examples include: Supplying over \$100 million to Hamas and PIJ annually; this helped the terrorist organisation to acquire weaponry, ammunition and funded the tunnel building that allowed for security and mobility to Hamas militants during the 2023 October 7th attack. Additionally, Ansar Allah were supplied with millions of dollars worth of missiles and rockets allowing them to attack ships travelling in the Gulf of Aden and Bab al-Mandab strait. This therefore had a significant negative impact on globalisation and world trade. Furthermore, Iran has also provided the Assad regime in Syria with an estimated 15 billion U.S. dollars annually permitting them to execute significant human rights abuses and mass atrocities during the Syrian civil war.

Tactics used by some Iranian proxies in the Middle East:

1. Guerrilla warfare – Iranian proxies engage in guerrilla tactics, including ambushes, hit and run attacks, and improvised explosive devises (IEDs), to challenge superior conventional forces like the United States Military and IDF.
2. Terrorism – Many Iranian proxies conduct terrorist attacks to destabilise regions and target enemies, including high profile bombings and assassinations.

3. Political engagement – Iranian proxies often have political wings that participate in local and national governments, gaining political legitimacy and influence eg. Hezbollah and Hamas.
4. Humanitarian and social services – Groups like Hezbollah provide social services, healthcare and education, therefore winning public support and opinion and embedding themselves within communities.



(To the left) A map of all know Iranian funded proxy organisations in the Middle East.



(To the left) An image of the Iranian proxy Hezbollah. Iran supplies Hezbollah with tanks, anti- aircraft weapons, missile launchers and armoured personnel carriers etc like most generic armies.

Many Iranian proxy organisations have extremely fundamentalist beliefs that impose a threat on many western nations home security, including the United States and the state of Israel. This can be seen below.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Hamas – An example of an Iranian Islamic Proxy located in the Gaza Strip. Hamas is a Palestinian nationalist militant group and political party. Since 2006, they have been the governing power in the Gaza Strip. On October 7th, 2023, 3,000 Hamas fighters broke into neighbouring Israel killing 1,143 Israelis. The leader of Hamas (Yahya Sinwar) has been accused of war crimes by the ICC.

Hezbollah – An example of an Iranian Islamic proxy located in Lebanon. Hezbollah is the largest of all Iran's proxies, with a believed strength of over 100,000 trained fighters and a weapons arsenal of over 150,000 missiles and rockets. Hezbollah's key goal is to destroy the state of Israel and eradicate Judaism. It is estimated that Iran supplies Hezbollah's with substantial financial support, ranging from 700 million to 1 billion US dollars annually.

Counter-terrorism committee - The CTC was established by Security Council resolution 1373 in 2001. The committee monitors the implementation of counter-terrorism measures by UN member states, providing technical assistance and fostering international cooperation. It supports efforts to curb the activities of terrorist organisations, including Iranian proxy groups, through monitoring, support and assistance.

UN Office of Counter-Terrorism – Established in 2017, the UNOCT enhances coordination and coherence across different UN member nations throughout the counter-terrorism arena. The UNOCT promotes development of national counter-terrorism strategies, the strengthening of legal and institutional frameworks and partnerships with other member states, organisations and the private sector to help fight terrorism. They are currently working in Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq and Syria to assist in the reduction of Iranian backed proxy militias.

United States of America – The United States involvement with Iranian proxies, like Hezbollah, Ansar Allah and Iraqi Shiite militias, aims to counter Iran's regional influence. Key actions include the assassination of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in 2020, support for the Saudi Arabian led coalition in Yemen against Ansar Allah and missile strikes against Ansar Allah's bases and missile production facilities. These efforts, while intended to promote stability and security in the Middle East, face criticism for contributing to regional instability and humanitarian crises.

Israeli government and IDF – Israel views Iranian proxies, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, as significant security threats due to their hostility and support from Tehran. These groups pose direct challenges through attacks and missile launches against Israeli territory, leading to ongoing military engagements and security concerns. The IDF has conducted numerous military operations to deter and counter Iranian proxies. This includes air strikes targeting Hezbollah positions in Syria and Lebanon and operations against Hamas in Gaza.

Syrian Arab Republic- Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, Iran has been a key supporter of Bashar al-Assad's regime, providing military, financial and political aid. Tehran's support includes deploying Iranian Revolutionary Guard forces and coordinating with Hezbollah. This backing has been crucial in Assad regaining control over much of Syria and has strengthened Iran's strategic position, counterbalancing Sunni Arab states and Western powers' influence in the region. The Assad regime shares similar characteristics with many Iranian proxies.

Timeline of Events

Date – Description

1979 – The Islamic revolution takes place in Tehran introducing Khomeini as the first supreme leader of Iran, turning the nation into an Islamic republic and authoritarian dictatorship.

1982 – Iran assists in the formation of Hezbollah in Lebanon, aiming to resist Israeli occupation and spread Iranian influence.

1983 – Hezbollah, with Iranian aid, bombs U.S. and French military barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, killing 241 U.S. marines and 58 French paratroopers.

1987 – Hezbollah, with Iranian support, forms the Islamic Jihad Organisation in order to carry out attacks against western targets.

1992 – Hezbollah is greatly implicated in the Israeli embassy attack in Buenos Aires that kills 29 people.

1994 – Hezbollah, with alleged Iranian backing, bombs the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people.

1996 – Hezbollah Al-Hejaz, a Saudi Arabian affiliate of Hezbollah, bombs a U.S. military housing complex in Saudi Arabia (Khobar Towers) that kills 19 United States servicemen.

2003 – Iran begins supporting many Shiite militias in Iraq following the United States invasion.

2006 – Hezbollah and Israel declare war on each other for 34 days. The conflict results in significant casualties and destruction, with Iran providing substantial support and aid to Hezbollah.

2011 – Iran supports Hezbollah and other Shiite militias to bolster the Assad regime during the Syrian civil war, significantly impacting the course of the conflict and keeping Bashar al-Assad in power.

2014 – Ansar Allah, supported by Iran, seizes control of the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, intensifying the conflict and regional tensions.

2017 – The PMF and other Shiite militias, with Iran's backing, play a crucial role in defeating ISIS in Iraq, leading to increased influence in the region for Iran.

2020 – The United States military assassinates Qassem Soleimani, head of Iran's Quds Force, who coordinated Iranian Proxy activities across the Middle East, leading to heightened tensions between the two nations and impacting Iran's proxy operations.

2023 – The Iranian proxy group Hamas invades southern Israel killing 1,143 Israelis resulting in a war causing mass casualties and destruction in the Gaza Strip and at time of writing this, is still ongoing.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

1. International convention for the suppression of the financing of terrorism (1999). The convention aimed to criminalise the provision of funds to terrorist organisations and religious fundamentalists and to enhance international cooperation in the investigating and prosecuting those involved in terrorist financing. By targeting the financial networks of terrorist organisations, the convention impacts groups like Hezbollah, PIJ and PMF who are known involve in terrorism.

2. United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). Adopted in the wake of the September 11 attacks, resolution 1373 calls upon all UN member states to criminalise terrorist attacks, deny financial support and safe havens to terrorists and enhance information sharing and cooperation in combating terrorism. The resolution laid the groundwork for international efforts to disrupt the activities and support networks terrorist organisations and militias, including those backed by Iran.
3. United Nations Security Council resolution 1540 (2004). The resolution aimed to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to Non-state actors, including terrorist organisations. It addresses the threat of weapons of mass destruction potentially being acquired or used by Iranian proxy groups or other terrorist bodies, ergo enhancing global security measures of such risks.
4. United Nations Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). The resolution aimed to resolve the 2006 conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, calling for a ceasefire of hostilities and the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon. The resolution specifically targeted Hezbollah (an Iranian proxy) by addressing its military capabilities and presence in Lebanon. It emphasised the need for a Lebanese state control of all weapons and territory.

Possible Solutions

Public awareness- This can be achieved by the respective nations' educational system. Educational schemes in secondary schools could teach students about the dangers of indoctrination by the extremist organisations and militias. This could limit the amount of overseas collaborators from joining Iranian backed radical groups, ergo reducing the number of members and reducing the threat which they can impose. This can also be achieved by creating mass media campaigns, in complying countries, which could educate civilians of the threat of multiple Iranian proxies to the free world.

Sanctions and trade restrictions- Sanctions and trade restrictions against terrorist organisations (including Iranian proxies) aim to weaken them by cutting off their support. Methods include trade embargoes, arms bans and travel restrictions. In the past they have been implemented by entities such as the United Nations and European Union. They can highly disrupt the group's operations, although could lead to an escalation in tensions or a retaliation from certain groups.

Financial regulation- Financial regulation on terrorist organisations and Iranian proxies aims to cut off their funding and resources from the Islamic Republic of Iran. This would disrupt their operational capabilities and deter support from Iran. Key measures could include Anti-money laundering (AML), asset freezes and electronic transaction monitoring. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is leading operator in this field. Suggested challenges would be a greater complexity in financial networks, privacy concerns and impacts on humanitarian aid on the region.

The solutions listed above may create animosity between the Islamic republic of Iran and other nations and therefore a fair compromising result needs to be reached.

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