

# ***Zürcher Beiträge***

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## **Tangled Skein or Gordian Knot?**

**Iran and Syria as State Supporters  
of Political Violence Movements  
in Lebanon and in the Palestinian  
Territories**

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## Preface

When we began our work on terrorism in the context of the Political Violence Movements Project on the eve of 9/11, we were hardly prepared for the sudden demand for information about this topic. Nevertheless, we were trying to meet the challenge by investing our capacities in a critical reappraisal of what could be termed a paradigmatic inflation in the field of political violence and terrorism research. A set of related questions we were concerned with addressed the issue of whether those conceptions of terrorism that germinated since the end of the Cold War, and which were effectively eclipsed by the catastrophic attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, were purely event-driven.

The head of the Political Violence Movements project, Dr Doron Zimmermann, published first results of his research in a monograph entitled “The Transformation of Terrorism,” in which he concluded that not only was there a problem with event-driven analyses of terrorism, but that such an approach was largely responsible for obscuring a changed threat-scape of terrorism. Consequently, he identified and isolated two mid-term trends in the development of terrorism as key elements in an overall development that will likely render the terrorism threat graver still than previously estimated by the proponents of the “New Terrorism” paradigm: Impact scalability and the dynamic of reciprocal threat perception. Both trends factor in recent innovation in weapons technologies and how these developments intersected with terrorist actors’ agendas; a functional understanding of the phenomenon led him to understand terrorism as the weaponization of a communicable act of terror, which, in turn, permitted him to better place his analysis in the context of mass media processes.

The task ahead, once we had concluded our initial, conceptual research, was to follow through with the logic of actor-centered

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analysis, and to apply it to a regional case study. As our project had established a focus on Western Europe and the greater Middle East, we decided to concentrate our efforts on the latter region, not least because events in the Middle East were coming to a head with the U.S.-led Coalition's invasion of Iraq in March 2003. First and second order consequences of this military intervention could be expected to affect the region as a whole, especially with respect to those Middle Eastern states with the highest stakes in keeping a strong U.S. presence at bay after the fall of Saddam Hussein's Iraq: Iran and Syria.

The centerpiece of Doron Zimmermann's more recent research was the interaction and interdependence between, on the one hand, states utilizing terrorism and, on the other, the political violence movements involved in terrorist activity. The ties of dependency, as well as more circumstantial marriages of convenience, between state and non-state actors, however, did not only follow a vertical-hierarchical gradient, but instead his research brought to light the significance of multiple, vertical and horizontal linkages, connecting state actors with other states, while also unveiling interstate partnerships with non-state actors. The analysis of the long-term objectives of state support for sub-state proxies employing terrorist tactics brings together the different strands of this complex issue and unveils some of the underlying motives of both the state supporters, their proxies and the forces opposed to them in a geopolitical and regional context.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Doron Zimmermann for his effort to paint a clear, detailed, yet concise picture of the use of terrorism by Middle Eastern states. This monograph constitutes an important contribution in our understanding of the utility of terrorism in the context of the dynamics of state/non-state partnerships.

Zurich, 27 February 2004

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## Abstract

The systematic and calibrated deployment of political violence movements and terrorism by states, which use them as proxies in their conflicts with other state or sub-state actors constitutes one of the major driving forces behind the current political and military strife in the greater Middle East. The principal state supporters of terrorist groups in the Middle East are here identified as, on the one hand, the Islamic Republic of *Iran* and, on the other, the secular Ba'athist regime in Damascus, *Syria*.

In the last two decades, both states have pursued a foreign and security policy geared towards regional preponderance, albeit from different positions within the regional strategic pecking order. In terms of their foreign political agendas, Iran and Syria have at least one other commonality in that they both support PVMs in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories (the West Bank and Gaza).

The author here argues that there is a compelling rationale for Iran and Syria to conduct a policy of carefully covert, vicarious violence against their adversaries. The reason for this surrogate warfare can be found in the stark reality of the Middle Eastern military balance: The military might arrayed against Iran and Syria by opposing powers in the region does not permit symmetric conflict without incurring the risk of massive retaliation.

On the international level, the U.S. has traditionally taken a narrow view of state support for terrorist organizations; after the attack on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the U.S. government has declared a war on terrorism in general and, aside from its principal perpetrators, its backers in particular. This policy specifically targets Iran and Syria in the Middle East. The U.S. long-term involvement in the Middle East, also made manifest in its leadership of the Coalition that invaded Iraq in March 2003, is resulting in the exertion of considerable pressure on both Iran and Syria to abandon policies and interests resulting in the destabilization of the region. U.S. policy specifically targets the use by states of PVMs involved in terrorist activity.

In a regional context, a nascent Israeli-Turkish working relationship since the mid-1990 in defense-matters, which is based on a

broadly compatible security agenda – the maintenance of the status quo –, has more permanently decreased the possibility of a direct military confrontation in the Middle East and served the maintenance of regional stability.

It is therefore the glaring imbalance of power in the region, coupled with the Iranian and Syrian agendas that challenge the status quo upheld by the regional Western allies, which compel and impel Iran and Syria to depend on asymmetric confrontations by proxy, in the context of which the use of terrorism plays a significant role. Unless Iranian and Syrian pretensions in the region are not decisively and even proactively confronted diplomatically and militarily, these two states will have no incentive to abandon what they have come to view as a winning long-term strategy underpinned by the convenient use of proxies successfully employing terrorist tactics.



## List of Terms and Abbreviations

Al-Saiqa	“Thunderbolt,” Palestinian PVM integrated into Syrian armed forces
Al-Qaida	“The Base/Source,” Islamist-jihadist PVM umbrella organization governed by the tenets of Wahabism
Al-Qods Brigade	“Jerusalem Brigade,” elite Pasdaran special operations formation
APF	Alliance of Palestinian Forces, Iranian-Syrian engineered rejectionist framework emerging in the wake of the Oslo Agreement.
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Syrian-funded, Marxist-Leninist Palestinian PVM
Deuxième Bureau	Early Syrian intelligence agency
HAMAS	Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, (Islamic Resistance Movement) Jihadist-rejectionist Palestinian PVM
Hezbollah	“Party of God,” Lebanese Shi’ite PVM
IDF	Israel Defense Forces (“Zahal”)
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (“Pasdaran”)
Izzeldin al-Kassam Brigades	Alleged “military wing” of Hamas, operating under the direct leadership of the Hamas “political wing”
LF	The Lebanese Forces rose to become the most significant Christian Maronite Force in Lebanon after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1976
MEK	Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, the “People’s Mujahadeen” is the largest PVM opposed to Khomeini’s theocratic state in Iran
Mukhabarat	Compound of security services in authoritarian Arab states
PA	Palestinian Authority, quasi-sovereign successor to the Palestinian Liberation Organization
Peshmerga	Kurdish guerrilla forces fighting for an independent Kurdistan
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Syrian-funded, Marxist Palestinian PVM
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, Syrian-directed and funded Palestinian PVM
Phalange	Conservative, right-wing Christian Maronite political movement in Lebanon

PIJ	Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami al Filastini (Palestinian Islamic Jihad), Jihadist-rejectionist Palestinian PVM
PKK	“Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan” – the Kurdistan Worker’s Party constitutes the major Kurdish guerrilla group inside Turkey. It has recently assumed the designation KADEK (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress)
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization, umbrella organization subsuming most of the Palestinian PVMs
PVM	Political Violence Movement
Return Brigades	“Kata’ab al-Awda” – Palestinian Jihadist PVM recruited by Hezbollah with the support of the Pasdaran and Fatah members in the PA
Shihab-3	Recently tested and fully operational Iranian ballistic missile delivery system for conventional and unconventional munitions with a range of 1,300 kilometers
SLA	South Lebanon Army, a Christian militia financed and trained by Israel with a view to control the Israeli security zone in the south of Lebanon; largely defunct in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in June 2000

“You can’t come to a hockey game and expect to play by the rules of touch football; Middle East diplomacy is a contact sport.”<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Friedman

## **1 Setting the Stage: Iran, Syria and Political Violence Movements in the Middle East**

This study centers on the interaction between secular and religious political violence movements (PVM) and states that support them in the Middle East. It seeks to investigate one of the major driving forces behind the current political and military strife in the greater Middle East: The systematic and calibrated deployment of political violence movements and, by extension, terrorism by states that use them as proxies in their conflicts with other sub-state, or state actors in the Middle East region.

Attention is directed to the related questions of how and why regional state actors collude with a number of PVMs in their respective power orbits; finance and help planning terrorist attacks and support recruiting, as well as arming their operatives; and what long-term objectives of the two states – Iran and Syria – are served by their involvement in a mode of surrogate warfare that has been repeatedly stigmatized and branded as terrorist.

According to the U.S. State Department’s *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report of 2002, the principal state supporters of terrorist groups in the Middle East are, on the one hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran and, on the other, the secular Ba’athist regime in Damascus,

1 Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 510.

Syria.<sup>2</sup> In the last two decades, both states have pursued a foreign and security policy geared towards regional hegemony, albeit from different positions within the strategic pecking order. Moreover, Iran and Syria have at least one other commonality in that they both support PVMs in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories, i.e. the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

There is a compelling rationale for Iran and Syria to conduct a policy of carefully covert, vicarious violence against their adversaries. Its principal benefit rests in the state supporter's ability to press an adversary without having to take the risk of an open confrontation; the harnessing of political violence movements by Middle Eastern states in pursuit of their foreign policy objectives tends to be more cost-effective than engaging in prohibitively expensive conventional warfare, both financially and politically. This remains a truism in spite of the fact that the U.S. as a strategic stakeholder in the region has traditionally taken a narrow view of state support for terrorist organizations. After the attacks on New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, the U.S. government has declared a war on terrorism

- 2 US Department of State and the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Washington D.C., *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgrpt/2002/> released April 2003, accessed on 2 October 2003, pp. 52–53, 76–77, 81. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also not beyond reproach and, while no conclusive evidence as yet points to official sources as purveyors of petrodollars, elements of its royal family appear to be involved in the financing of Salafist groups and other Sunni PVMs in the Middle East. This is effected through intermediary organizations, such as the Muslim World League (MWL), the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) and the al Haramain Islamic Foundation. Cf. Pamela Hess, "Saudi Arabia sets aside \$50M for 'Martyrs,'" *United Press International*, 4 September 2002 at [www.upi.com/print.cfm?StoryID=09042002-050314-4015r](http://www.upi.com/print.cfm?StoryID=09042002-050314-4015r) accessed on 31 July 2003; Rolf Tophoven, "Geld für Waffenschiff der Palästinenser kommt vermutlich aus Saudi Arabien," *Die Welt*, 29 January 2002 at [www.welt.de/daten/2002/01/29/0129au310883.htm?print=1](http://www.welt.de/daten/2002/01/29/0129au310883.htm?print=1) accessed on 11 August 2002; "Saudi Donations Make Up Half of Hamas's Budget," *Ha'aretz*, 17 September 2003 at [www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=341244](http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=341244) accessed on 17 September 2003; Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Testimony of Matthew Levitt Senior Fellow in Terrorism Studies, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Before the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism United States Senate. Subversion From Within: Saudi Funding of Islamic Extremist Groups Undermining US Interests and the War on Terrorism From Within the United States," 10 September 2003, [www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/levitt/levitto91003.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/levitt/levitto91003.htm) accessed on 17 September 2003.

in general and, aside from its principal perpetrators, its backers in particular.

Despite the fact that the differences of the two countries in geo-strategic terms are pronounced – Iran’s pretensions are more variegated than Syria’s and its potential for power-projection in the region is significantly higher both diplomatically and militarily –, their use of proxy warriors is a key component in furthering their influence in the Middle East that has also led to a convergence of interests in the past two decades. Conversely, this practice has also caused increasing isolation for its patrons through other, adversarial regional actors, who, in turn, have also converged as a result of the threat posed to their security by state supporters of terrorism. On the regional level, Iran and Syria and their proxies therefore find themselves confronted by powerful enemies.

Because Syria is hemmed in by two militarily potent, allied countries with close ties to the West – Turkey and Israel – and is therefore not in a position to pursue its regional aspirations in an unfettered or overt manner, its influence outside its own borders is restricted locally to Lebanon. Though nominally governed by President Emil Lahoud, Lebanon remains in the vise-like grip of the Syrian intelligence agencies, the *Mukhabarat*. This is even truer since the conclusion of the recent war in Iraq. Although Syrian armed forces numbering approximately 25,000 maintain a military presence in the Beqaa and Beirut areas since the later 1970s, Syrian influence outside Beirut and especially in South Lebanon is also felt through the Shi’ite Hezbollah militia.

In many ways, Iran currently faces a condition of encirclement by states that are at least nominally closer to the U.S. and its allies than to the Islamic republic. Iran’s post-revolutionary regional isolation, which has been reinforced by an even stronger U.S. military presence in the Gulf region after the conclusion of the war against Iraq earlier this year, has acted as a deterrent against a forceful bid to expand its influence locally and regionally.<sup>3</sup> Even before the late war in Iraq,

3 Anthony Lake, “Confronting Backlash States,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 2, pp. 45–55. Lake succinctly described the US policy toward Iran under Clinton in the following words: “As the sole superpower, the United States has a special responsibility for developing a strategy to neutralize, contain an, through selective pressure, perhaps eventually transform these backlash states into constructive members of the international community.” *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Iran's Sunni contender, the Taliban regime, was toppled by Coalition forces in Afghanistan in 2001/2002 and replaced by a government firmly in the U.S. orbit. Iran, too, maintains an underhand presence in various countries of the region, not the least of which is Lebanon, where the Islamic republic vies with its ally of convenience, Syria, over control of Hezbollah and other PVMs.

Beyond their longstanding interference in Lebanon, Iran and Syria are responsible for funding and training a variety of secular, Islamist and preponderantly Palestinian PVMs in Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>4</sup> Hezbollah is not the only PVM to receive support through Syrian and Iranian state institutions. The tangled interrelationship between the two states and the Sunni, Shi'ite and the more secular, nationalist Palestinian groups (Hezbollah, Hamas/Izzeldin Al-Kassam Brigades, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Fatah, Tanzim, Force 17, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, PFLP, PFLP-GC, DFLP, Usbat al-Ansar, Al-Qaida) in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories (i.e. Gaza and the West Bank), constitute the principal focus of this study. Specifically, this study will review the PVMs and investigate their relationships among themselves and the ties they maintain with their state supporters and their respective state institutions tasked with implementing Iranian and Syrian interests in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories.

An analysis of the long-term strategic objectives of Iran and Syria and the pivotal role played by PVMs in the context of their underhand pursuit of regional hegemony is embedded in each case, and will try to explain the reasons why Iran and Syria will persist in their policy of employing proxy warriors conducting terrorist operations in the present and prospectively. An investigation on how the U.S. and Israel tackle the problem of combating state supported PVMs in the

- 4 Robert G. Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours. Syria, Israel & Lebanon* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003), pp. 100–103, 127–132; Gary C. Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Hamas," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 10 (October 2002) at [www.meib.org/articles/0210\\_51.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0210_51.htm) accessed on 6 December 2003; Reuven Erlich, "State Sponsored Terrorism: Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy," International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 10 October 2001 at [www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=400](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=400) accessed on 17 June 2003; Matthew Levitt, *Targeting Terror. U.S. Policy Toward Middle Eastern State Sponsors and Terrorist Organizations, Post-September 11* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2002), pp. 48–68; Daniel Byman, Shahram Chubin, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, Jerrold Green, *Iran's Security in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), pp. 81–86.

region follows. This study will conclude with a few observations on the long-term objectives of Iranian and Syrian support of PVMs; and on international (U.S.) and regional (Israeli) opposition to state support for PVMs in the Middle East.

## **1.1 General Background on Support for PVMs by Iran and Syria**

The authors of a recent study conducted by the RAND Corporation on outside support for insurgencies concluded that state supporters “are primarily motivated by geopolitics.”<sup>5</sup> They continue to point out that other considerations, be they ideological, ethnic or religious, may well play a role in the decision of states to support political violence movements, but that this occurs less frequently. This perspective certainly applies to the historical development of support for political violence movements by Iran and Syria. The last three decades have revealed to what extent Iranian and Syrian interactions with organizations engaged in terrorist activity have been based on a motley assembly of rationales, some of an ideological cast, others dictated by the strategic reality of the Middle East.

## **1.2 Background on Iranian support for PVMs Since the Revolution of 1979**

The starting point of Iran’s track record as state supporter for Islamist extremist groups lies in the heady days of Revolution of 1979, in the course of which the strategic balance of the Middle East underwent a profound change. One of the few non-Arab states of the Middle East, Iran’s foreign policy under Shah Reza Pahlavi was also shaped by its quest for natural allies. During the later stages of the Cold War, Iran cultivated its ties with the West. In a regional context, Iran conducted a quiet cooperation with Israel in the face of an adversarial array of Arab states. From the mid 1970s to the eve of the Iranian revolution, a close collaboration between Israeli intelligence and its Iranian counterpart, the notorious SAVAK, was directed against mutual enemies, especially the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (MEK) and the Palestinian Lib-

5 Daniel Byman, Peter Chalk, Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, David Brannan, *Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001), p. 23.

eration Organization (PLO).<sup>6</sup> Formerly a mainstay of U.S. interests in the region, revolutionary Iran's national interest after the Revolution turned inimical to the Western position and all those associated with it. The theocratic cast of the new regime therefore infused Iranian relations with the West and its allies in the Middle East with a particular virulence after 1979.

But Iran's ability to project its power and influence in the region was largely checked by its principal Arab rival, U.S.-backed Iraq, with whom it fought a long and bloody war from 1980–1988. Traditionally, the Gulf States feared their powerful Persian neighbour; and not only were they Arab, but their populations were largely Sunni and thus on the other side of the denominational divide of Islam. For the duration of the Cold War, Iran also feared the threat represented by the Soviet Union, with which it shared a border and which had turned suspicious of the Islamic revival due to unfolding events in Afghanistan. Therefore, Iran had to bypass a hostile Arab cordon. Where an expedient alliance based on a strategic convergence of interests with any of its regional neighbours eluded revolutionary Iran (a development which later occurred in the case of Syria), power projection into the Middle East on the basis of shared religion opened up a new avenue.

Iranian clerical rhetoric directed against the West first became palpable when in 1982–1983 a militant movement born of Lebanon's Shi'ite minority – a largely underprivileged group in Lebanon's multi-confessional state system – made its bloody debut.<sup>7</sup> Considerable Iranian support went hand in hand with the rise of the Islamic Lebanese resistance against Israel. It was masterminded by Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, the Iranian ambassador to Syria, and given further credence by the influx of 2,000 members of the Pasdaran – the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) – into the Beqaa with the connivance of the Syrians.<sup>8</sup>

A series of dramatic suicide attacks and the routine kidnapping of Westerners beginning a few months after the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was henceforth associated with an organization

6 Shorab Sobhani, *The Pragmatic Entente. Israeli-Iranian Relations, 1948–1988* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 121–129.

7 Center for Defense Information (CDI) Terrorism Project, *In the Spotlight: Hezbollah (Party of God)*, 25 February 2002, p. 1, at [www.cdi.org/terrorism/hezbollah-pr.cfm](http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/hezbollah-pr.cfm) accessed on 6 March 2003.

8 Gary Sick, "Iran: Confronting Terrorism," *The Washington Quarterly*, 26:4, pp. 83–98, p. 85; Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 76.



later known as Hezbollah – the Party of God.<sup>9</sup> Iran’s clerical establishment was closely linked to what Martin Kramer has since referred to as a “coalition of ulama [Muslim jurisconsults], each of whom brought with him his circle of disciples.” The bonds among Hezbollah clerics were forged at one of the principal centers of Shi’ite learning, in Najaf, Iraq. Subsequent to his expulsion from Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini himself arrived in Najaf in 1965. Notably, many of Hezbollah’s key exponents and spiritual leaders hail either from Najaf, or otherwise spent considerable time in training there: Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli, Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the spiritus rector of the group rather than its active leader, and the mysteriously vanished Musa Sadr.<sup>10</sup>

While some of these men dominated much of the later 1980’s, a steady process of “Lebanonization” – a carefully orchestrated reappraisal of ideological values keeping the group in the fold of Iranian radicals versus pragmatic politics that would determine the group’s position with a view to an eventual cession of the Lebanese civil war – was commenced under Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi. Following Musawi’s assassination, “Lebanization” became the underlying tenor of Hezbollah under the direction of its present Secretary-General, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah.<sup>11</sup> In spite of Hezbollah’s stunning evolution from a parochial Islamic resistance movement to Iran’s ideological extension and a key terrorist player in the Middle Eastern regional context, to the self-confident champion of Lebanon’s Shi’ite minority in constitutional politics, the group has remained a willing pawn in a game played by Iran and increasingly dominated by its wary ally in this matter, Syria’s regime and, by extension, its forces of occupation in Lebanon.<sup>12</sup> In a program published on 16 February 1985, Hezbollah

- 9 Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah. Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 17–18; Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam. Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003), p. 118; Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 179–182.
- 10 Martin Kramer, “The Moral Logic of Hizballah,” in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 131–157, pp. 134–135; Jaber, *Hezbollah*, 11.
- 11 Magnus Ranstorp, “The Strategy and Tactics of Hizballah’s Current ‘Lebanonization Process,’” *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 3, No.1 (Summer 1998), pp. 103–134, pp. 116–130.
- 12 Gary C. Gambill and Ziad K. Abdelnour, “Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (February 2002) at [www.meib.org/articles/0202\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0202_11.htm) accessed on 11 June 2003.

made plain to whom it owed its allegiance and how it defined itself as “the party of God the vanguard of which was made victorious by God in Iran... We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and *faqih* [supreme jurist/leader] who fulfils all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini. God save him!”<sup>13</sup>

Through Hezbollah, revolutionary Iran became a regional player of considerable significance in the Near East. Thanks to its proxy and a strategic convergence with Syria, the Iranian radical clerics were also able to bypass a cordon consisting of Arab states that had by and large constrained Iranian freedom of action in the sphere of power politics: Hezbollah effectively set a limit to Iran’s post-Revolutionary isolation and extended its patron’s grasp to the Levant. Iran’s support for political violence movements is rooted in the interplay of denominationally determined ideology, exemplified by the strategic export of the Islamic Revolution after 1979; the Iranian self-perception as a regional outsider; and the continuity of traditional Iranian foreign policy that has remained steeped in much of its attendant historic insecurities and pre-Revolutionary animosities.

### **1.3 Background on Syrian support for PVMs under Hafez and Bashir al-Asad**

Syria’s dalliance with terrorism and political violence predates that of Iran. While early Syrian dealings with terrorist sub-state actors are closely connected to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the wake of the Suez crisis, Syrian support for political violence movements has in the interim transcended that particular battleground. The precedent showcases were Syria’s campaign of terror conducted against the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan from 1960–61 and its late support for Kurdish insurgents.<sup>14</sup> In terms of its clientele, Syria’s support for political violence movements and terrorism in the Middle East and beyond can be traced to the early days of Palestinian militant groups from the later 1950’s onward; it is further evidenced by the close cooperation achieved between Fatah and the Syrian Deuxième

13 Barry Rubin and Judith Colp Rubin, eds., *Anti-American Terrorism and the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 50.

14 Efraim Inbar, *The Israeli-Turkish Strategic Relationship* (Ramat Gan: The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2003), pp. 177–179; Andrew Rathmell, “Syria’s Intelligence Services: Origins and Development,” *The Journal of Conflict Studies* (Fall 1996), pp. 75–96, pp. 83–88.

Bureau by 1964.<sup>15</sup> Following the end of the French mandate in 1943/1946 to 1969, the Deuxième Bureau was the principal Syrian intelligence agency, closely modelled upon services maintained by its European mandatory power.

This development is significant, as Syrian war by proxy – its application of terrorism internally and externally – was managed, and is run to this day, through the intelligence services – the ubiquitous Mukhabarat. Among many others, al-Saiqa (“Thunderbolt”) stands out as the most blatant example among the Palestinian client groups. It is a sizeable Palestinian group embodied in 1968 and answerable directly to the leadership of the Syrian Ba’ath party; capable of sustained guerrilla warfare, this group was created and backed by the Syrians with the express intent of using it against Israel. Notably, al-Saiqa’s loyalty towards Syria was such that, against the backdrop of the Lebanese civil war, this “unit” elected to fight against Yassir Arafat’s Fatah organization alongside its Syrian patrons in 1976, and again in 1983. Most important, operations carried out by al-Saiqa, and other Palestinian groups domiciled in Damascus, were, and remain, plausibly deniable by the Syrians.

The extent of Syria’s involvement with terrorism became pronounced during the long reign of Hafez al-Asad. Asad, the nationalist exponent in government, and the then minister of defence, came to power through a coup against his socialist nemesis, Salah Jadid, in November 1970. His accession paved the way for a period of continuity in the forceful, and increasingly frequent underhand, pursuit of foreign policy objectives against regional rivals, and the ruthless consolidation of suzerainty in the country, peaking with the persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood and the partial razing of the town of Hama in early February 1982.<sup>16</sup> Asad’s tenure was also characterized by the homogeneity of the elite. This circumstance, more than any other, aided in the entrenchment of the authoritarian Syrian Ba’athi state: Members of the ruling Alawite clique – a branch of the Shi’a denomination – connected to Asad were given many key posts in the Syrian regime. The Alawite ruling caste, in turn, was tightly controlled by Asad’s favourites, who acted as his satraps in the Syrian security establishment; the numerous security services controlled each other, too.

15 Rathmell, “Syria’s Intelligence Services,” pp. 78–79.

16 Friedmann, *From Beirut to Jerusalem*, pp. 77–105.

This tight system of control and oversight afforded Asad the room to streamline, even regiment, his country's resources in the service of foreign political objectives in the region – not the least of which was confrontation with Israel. Subsequent to the conclusion of the armistice between Syria and Israel in 1974 in the wake of the Yom Kippur War that left the Syrian military in tatters – a condition that has only gone from bad to worse since the collapse of the Soviet empire –, Asad's exertions against Israel of necessity shifted towards attacking Israel by other, less overt, means.<sup>17</sup> Indubitably, the rationale behind the Syrian "terror weapon," as it has been referred to by one analyst, "was the wide gap between the far reaching aspirations of the Ba'ath regime to achieve regional hegemony... and the objective limitations and weaknesses of Syria from a military, economic and demographic perspective..."<sup>18</sup> A veritable growth industry, Syrian support for Palestinian dissident-nationalist and Marxist groups, such as Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) and Naif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and George Habash's now largely defunct Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), burgeoned as of the mid-1970s. In the 1990s, Syria also took the most recent manifestation of Palestinian terrorism under its wing: The Islamist-rejectionist groups, such as Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami al Filastini (Palestinian Islamic Jihad, i.e. PIJ) and Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya ( Hamas) accordingly found a new home in the environs of Damascus.<sup>19</sup>

The acquisition of Islamist "arrows" to Syria's figurative "quiver" of Palestinian militancy is in and of itself quite significant. On

17 R. Reuben Miller, "The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Fall 2000, pp. 117–139, pp. 125–126; for a current assessment of the military balance in the Middle East cf. Amnon Barzilai, "Study: Israel's Strategic Edge is at High Point After Iraq War," *Ha'aretz*, 22 September 2003 at [www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=342920](http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=342920) accessed on 22 September 2003.

18 Reuven Erlich, "State-Sponsored Terrorism: Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy," jointly published by *The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center* at the *Center of Special Studies (C.S.S.)* and *The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 1998, 21 pp., p. 2. An updated version of this article of 2001 is available at [www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=400](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=400) accessed on 17 June 2003.

19 Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

this point, Robert Rabil recently commented: “[B]y supporting the Islamists, the [Alawite] regime sends a clear message to Israel that Syria not only has at its disposal tools of political pressure, but also holds cards for either enhancing or curbing future radical Islamic activism.”<sup>20</sup> Evidently, this change has not been lost on the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) itself, for Syria’s support of PIJ and Hamas after the Cold War has yet again created a serious challenge to the preponderance of Fatah, its primacy within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), its credibility in the eyes of its natural constituents in the Palestinian refugee camps across the Arab world and, by implication, its role as the uncontested defender of the Palestinian people.<sup>21</sup> More recently, relations between the nationalist elements of the Palestinian militants that gradually settled into the impugnable respectability afforded by the PA, and those Palestinians having espoused the principles of Islamic militancy are increasingly equivocal. This sense of ambiguity has only been reinforced by the criticism voiced through PIJ vis-à-vis the PA – the PIJ being the Islamist group that traditionally maintained closer ties with Arafat’s men, as opposed to the anti-nationalist mainstream of Islamism represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian subsidiary, Hamas.<sup>22</sup> Syrian support for Palestinian Islamic groups, not unlike that given by the conservative Ayatollahs in Tehran, constitutes a two-edged weapon that is *not only* directed at Israel and its allies, but was also devised to allow for a degree of control over, and leverage against, the Palestinian nationalist incumbents in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

On the one hand, Syria’s relations with all Palestinian factions since the death of Hafez al-Asad in June 2000 have undergone considerable change to the effect that Syrian support for Palestinian political violence movements has become more pronounced – in the

20 Ibid, p. 137.

21 The last direct challenge to PLO chairman Yassir Arafat, who controls Fatah and by extension the PLO, was represented by the Fatah Revolutionary Council/Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), headed by Sabri al Banna, which acted at the behest of the Iraqi Ba’athi state after 1974 and waged a veritable campaign of terror against Arafat’s Fatah, the PLO and the Syrians.

Cf. the relevant entry in the data base on the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism at [http://www.ict.org.il/inter\\_ter/orgdet.cfm?orgid=2](http://www.ict.org.il/inter_ter/orgdet.cfm?orgid=2)

22 Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine*, Dayan Center Papers No. 127 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2001), pp. 67–76.

face of mounting U.S. disapproval. On the other hand, the accession to power of Bashir al-Asad, Hafez' son, has created favourable conditions for a rapprochement between the Ba'athi state and Arafat.<sup>23</sup> From the vantage of regional stability, both trends are reason for concern. While Bashir's mounting support for the "Palestinian resistance" from Damascus, and the concomitant legitimizing rhetoric vis-à-vis the West, point towards a potential escalation of hostilities with Israel, and the provocation of a direct intervention by the United States, the convergence of Palestinian nationalist and Syrian regional interests suggests an emphasis on carrying the war to the Palestinian territories adjacent to Israel. According to all outward appearances, this shift is increasingly assuming the characteristics of a trend, as Hezbollah's activities in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and even in Israel, have been on the rise since 2001.<sup>24</sup>

#### **1.4 Geo-strategy and Power in the Middle East: Iran and Syria Between Regional Aspirations and Isolation**

Before entering a discussion on Iran's and Syria's place in the pecking order of Middle Eastern power politics, two issues require clarification: First, there are no credible supranational Middle Eastern institutions to speak of, only spheres of influence cloaked in the trappings of multilateralism and exclusively maintained by those potentates with the means to back them up. Analogous to Martin Kramer's epithet for the lopsidedness of Middle Eastern Studies in the U.S. – figuratively rendered as *Ivory Towers on Sand* –, the frequently invoked perception at seats of higher learning throughout Western Europe and elsewhere of weak institutions in the Middle East that only require positive incentives (read: cash) to propel them to fruition is in need of a fundamental reappraisal.<sup>25</sup> Targeting the U.S.'s recent fit of idealism as

23 Gary Gambill, "Syria's Foreign Relations: The Palestinian Authority," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 2001) at [www.meib.org/articles/0202\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0202_11.htm) accessed on 12 June 2003.

24 Levitt, *Targeting Terror*, pp. 51–53.

25 Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001). In his book, and as suggested by its title, Kramer launches into an in-depth investigation of the world of publicly funded academic research on the Middle East in America. Similarly, in 1984 the late Elie Kedourie had established a precedent with his seminal essay "The Chatham House Version," in which he castigated

expressed in President's George W. Bush's desire to help the spread of democratic ideas in the Middle East, two observers ironically commented that "[c]ontrary to Washington powerbrokers' expectations and sensibilities, it has been the indulgence of the autocrats, not the benevolence of the Arab populace, that has kept America's influence in the Middle East intact."<sup>26</sup> Institutional well-wishers from other regions would do well to differentiate between those Middle Eastern non-governmental organisations that have been co-opted by authoritarian governments, thrive, but lack all independence and thus constitute "failed" rather than "feeble" institutions when measured against the institutional yardstick; and such as have been subsumed under the term of "civil society," have retained a measure of autonomy and are therefore frequently proscribed by their governments, which view them as insidious revolutionary fronts. By way of an example, the court of Western public opinion has proven lax in remembering that one of the few non-state actors in the Arab world worth the qualification "independent" only survives due to the fact that the indigenous, quasi-autonomous and patently corrupt *governmental structure* that is not dissimilar to itself, and therefore woefully inadequate to its task, has proven unable to suppress it: Hamas – an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood – and the Palestinian Authority respectively. Reportedly, the fate of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria after the spring of 1982 and in Egypt following Anwar el-Sadat's assassination in October 1981 clearly contrasts with the experience of its Palestinian subsidiary and serves as a bloody, if illustrative, case in point. Inappropriate cultural transposition is a scourge apprehended not only by the practitioners of anthropology.

Second, recourse to coercive diplomacy and military power in the settlement of disputes is, not by choice but lack of alternatives, frequently the final arbiter in a conflict – an alliteration of territorial and existential wars since 1945 attests to the veracity of this assertion.

Arnold Toynbee and the British academic establishment at the Royal Institute for International Affairs with considerable wit and irony for having expounded a facile, and hence undifferentiated perspective on the Middle East. Elie Kedourie, *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1984), pp. 351–461.

- 26 Ray Takeyh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "Democratic Impulses Versus Imperial Interests: America's New Mid-East Conundrum," *Orbis*, Vol. 43, No.7 (Summer 2003), pp. 415–431, p. 419.

The greater Middle East is exemplary of the Realist school's anarchic system – even more so after the conclusion of the Cold War than during the half-century of bipolar conflict: Democracy has remained an island in a vast sea of Oriental-style despotism cloaked in presidencies, party secretariats and other euphemisms used to flatter autocrats and their narrow ruling elites. Although the issue of democratizing the Middle East has been raised repeatedly, not least against the backdrop of the Second and Third Gulf Wars, one important question concerning this matter, whether democratizing the Middle East is ultimately desirable for the members of the Coalition, remains unanswered.<sup>27</sup> Be that as it may, for the present purpose the above attempt at characterizing Middle Eastern regional politics applies particularly well to Iran and Syria – states run by their respective secret police and intelligence organizations rather than democratic institutions.

Iran and Syria are fundamentally different in terms of their respective political clout and military potential, yet, on the level of their regional aspirations, and the manner in which these two states pursue their respective objectives, they have much in common. Expediency and pragmatism have made possible the bridging of such differences between Iran and Syria, as would otherwise stand in the way of limited cooperation in the security political domain. On the strategic end, the glaringly obvious commonality resides in their status as pariah states – albeit for different reasons – on the regional, as well as on the international levels.<sup>28</sup> Despite the frequent (if, in the case of Syria, guardedly) instrumental invocation of Islam as the common denominator superseding occasional political ruptures and the intermittent acrimonious bickering over territorial legacy problems among the Islamic states of the greater Middle East, Iranian and Syrian aggressive posturing towards other regional actors has done

27 Israel Harel, "A Free Middle East," *Ha'aretz*, 13 November 2003 at [www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=360181](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=360181) accessed on 13 November 2003; Martin Kramer, "Should America Promote a Liberal Democratic Middle East?" 2002 Weinberg Founders Conference, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy at <http://www.geocities.com/martinkramerorg/Landsdowne2002.htm> accessed on 12 November 2003.

28 Syria has been on the US State Department's state sponsors of terrorism list since 1978. Iran is held to be "the most active state sponsor of terrorism in 2002." Levitt, *op. cit.*, p. 48; US State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2002*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.



much to foster a pervasive sense of unease and even of outright apprehension throughout the region.

Iran constitutes something of a wild card in the greater Middle East. This is largely due to the circumstance that the country's political elite is sundered by irreconcilable visions of the future. Two forces impel Iran toward a course of foreign political adventurism: The more obvious of these dynamics is the Islamic radicalism that emerged as a consequence of the Revolution of 1979, which created the ideological basis for fuelling the ongoing export of Islamic revolutionary values to like-minded groups in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia.<sup>29</sup> Unrequited Persian nationalism, the second driving force behind Iranian assertiveness in the region, will almost certainly protract "[t]he quest for influence and status... [that] will remain an important component of any future Iran."<sup>30</sup> Beyond these catalytic dynamics, the fall of the Soviet Union removed a substantial threat along Iran's borders and greatly impacted on Iran's security political environment and, hence, its geo-political outlook in that it created a novel sense of relative safety and stability. In the short term, the waning of external Arab threats was further marked by the U.S.-led intervention against Iraq during the Second Gulf War (1990–1991). An augmented U.S. presence in the Gulf region, however, has created its own problems by introducing a new, vested interest into the brittle Middle Eastern balance of power.<sup>31</sup>

Conversely, following the First Gulf War against Iraq (1980–1988) and subsequent to the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, a new long-term trend in Iranian politics came to the fore that largely set the stage for events that followed. It constitutes a new source of instability in the country and, potentially, for the entire region: The ascendancy of the reformers in parliament and its corollary, the challenge to the clerical regime in Tehran. Paving the way to reform were the forces of moderation that gradually re-entered the mainstream of Iranian politics. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the leader of the "centrists" in the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) was elected to the newly empowered presidency in 1989 and served a second term until

29 Byman, Chubin, Ehteshami, Green, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

31 *Ibid.* p. 12. With special reference to Iranian territorial claims, this is especially evident in the case of the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the concomitant curtailment of Iranian influence in the Gulf region.

1997; following the failure of his Western influenced market reform policies, Rafsanjani's succession was resolved in a surprise landslide election that enthroned the reformist Seyyid Mohammad Khatami as new president. Considerable tension has marked Iranian politics since. While Rafsanjani had been a close confidante of Khomeini, and therefore possessed the necessary credentials to assuage conservative concerns about his economic policies, Khatami was an outsider and his electoral victory came as a crushing defeat to the clerical hard-liners.<sup>32</sup>

The period between 1997 and the present has been marked by internecine power struggles pitting reformers against conservatives in government. The tremors of the resulting imbroglio have been felt beyond Iran; one of its principal manifestations is the continued support for Islamist groups in the region during a period of open challenge to the Ayatollahs. At its epicenter, the conflict has engendered a Manichean culture of governance, aptly adumbrated by Gary Sick:

Some parts of its [the Iranian] government – the presidency, the Majlis (parliament), and the functional ministries – though far from a fully functioning democracy, are held accountable for their policies and actions through public review and frequent elections. A second set of government institutions, including the Supreme Leader (velayat-e faqih), oversight committees such as the Guardian Council and the Expediency Council, and the security services, are dominated by a conservative clergy who are officially above reproach, essentially accountable only to themselves... The tension between these two unevenly balanced power centers affects Iranian policy at all levels so that, at times, Iran appears to be pursuing different or even contradictory objectives.<sup>33</sup>

One example of this equivocacy, ostensible vacillation and to all outward appearances, confused policy, is Iran's stance on al-Qaida vis-à-vis the West.<sup>34</sup> In the face of its evident drawbacks, the continued support for proxy warfare in the pursuit of strategic national interests also begs the question of which Iranian faction stands to profit by

32 Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921. The Pahlavis and After* (London: Longman, 2003), pp. 241–256.

33 Sick, *op. cit.*, p. 83. On this point also see Bahman Baktiari and Haleh Vaziri, "Iran: Doubting Reform?," *Current History*, (January 2003), pp. 36–39, p. 37.

34 A. William Samii, "Iran's Al-Qaeda Problem Won't Go Away," *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty Iran Report*, Vol. 6, No. 38, 22 September 2003, pp. 1-2.

the use of terrorism.<sup>35</sup> Another issue illustrative of the tension within the Iranian governing elite is the development of a nuclear capability – allegedly for civilian use only. The recent testing of a delivery system with a range of 1300 kilometers, a radius that encompasses the state of Israel, has further helped to raise apprehensions in Jerusalem; coupled with the likely development of unconventional capabilities, the debut of the ballistic missile “Shihab-3” has opened up the prospect of potential strategic instability in the Middle East.<sup>36</sup>

This complex development of Iranian security policy under adverse conditions in the past two decades has significantly contributed to the general assessment of Iran as a state ruled by radicals, and a government that is not beyond the use of extreme options as a means to redress grievances, or above projecting its power clandestinely in order to influence regional developments. In particular, the record of Iranian covert operations, persecution of regime dissidents and support of non-Iranian groups prone to use terrorism attests to its theocratic rulers’ evident propensity for the calculated use of sub-state actors in the service of foreign political interest. Indeed, Iranian support for terrorism has effectively provoked a Western policy, albeit one marked by heterogeneity, of containment that has left Iran economically isolated and politically untouchable. Iran’s current debate on the strategic level is two-pronged: Either to put an end to the current encirclement by diplomatic means (e.g. through the so-called policy of “engagement” and “critical dialogue” of the European Union), or to counteract the containing stranglehold of the Western powers by whatever means necessary and available.<sup>37</sup> Concerning the latter question, the response is frequently to bypass the U.S. presence by supporting proxies, either as ideological clients,

35 Sharam Chubin, “Iran’s Strategic Predicament,” *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Winter 2000), 18 pp., p. 3, at [www.mideasti.org/html/chubin.html](http://www.mideasti.org/html/chubin.html) accessed on 23 June 2003.

36 Ze’ev Schiff, “IDF: Shihab-3 Upgraded to Give Iran Ability to Strike at Israel,” *Ha’aretz*, 22 July 2003 at [www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=320485](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=320485) accessed on 22 July 2003; Ibid., “Discovering the Shihab-3,” *Ha’aretz*, 23 July 2003 at [www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=320992](http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=320992) accessed on 23 July 2003; Matthew Gutman, “Shihab-3 ‘Very Bady News,’” *The Jerusalem Post*, 8 July 2003 at [www.jpost.com/servlet/Servlet?pageName=Jpost/A/JPArticle/PrinterFull&cid1057](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Servlet?pageName=Jpost/A/JPArticle/PrinterFull&cid1057) accessed on 8 July 2003.

37 Gawdat Bahgat, “Iran and Terrorism: The Transatlantic Responses,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 22 (1999), pp. 141–152, p. 146.

as in the case of the southern Iraqi and Lebanese Shi'ite minorities and their respective militias, as political allies, as in the case of Hamas and other non-Islamist Palestinian groups, or as mutually convenient joint ventures, as in the case of the Iranian and Syrian-backed PIJ and Hezbollah.<sup>38</sup> Retrospectively, and somewhat ironically, there is an Imperial precedent in Iranian foreign policy of avoiding a cordon sanitaire, albeit of a different kind: The Shah, too, skipped across the Arab belt in the 1970s and sought support from the U.S., while also cooperating with Israel on, inter alia, defense affairs.<sup>39</sup>

A strong U.S. military presence in the wake of the Third Gulf War (March–May 2003) at Syria's doorstep has as yet not shown a deterrent effect; it has proven unable to visibly dampen Syria's penchant for the supporting of terrorist activity. Although the U.S. has not yet played its hand, and U.S. impatience with Syria over its support for PVMs and the Ba'athi resistance in post-war Iraq is mounting, the current Syrian geo-strategic concern after the Cold War can be reduced to the threat of being sandwiched in between two U.S. allies that also constitute, in terms of the Middle Eastern military balance, the principal regional powers.<sup>40</sup> Israel and Turkey upgraded their bilateral relations during the later 1990s and have, for all practical purposes, entered into an extended understanding on regional challenges. At the heart of this understanding was the need to credibly deter the three principal poles of Middle Eastern instability: Iran, Iraq and Syria. Linguistically, culturally and ethnically, these two non-Arab states are outsiders in the Middle East – a condition they share with Iran and which has in recent years contributed to, if not the formation of a mutually obligatory defense pact then, an initially awkward defense cooperation that currently displays all the trappings of a durable regional alliance in the offing. In addition, both

38 On Iranian-Syrian support for PIJ see Matthew A. Levitt, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Islamic Jihad," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 11–12 (November–December 2002) at [www.meib.org/articles/0211\\_s1.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0211_s1.htm) accessed on 12 June 2003.

39 Sobhani, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–135.

40 Ziad K. Abdelnour, "The US-Syrian Crisis: Why Diplomacy Failed," *The Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 10 (October 2003), p. 3 at [www.meib.org/articles/0310\\_s1.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0310_s1.htm) accessed on 29 October 2003; Andrew Buncombe, "Iran and Syria Told to Stop Foreign Fighters Going to Iraq," *The Independent*, 29 October 2003 at [http://news.independent.co.uk/low\\_res/story.jsp?story=458316&host=3&d1r=70](http://news.independent.co.uk/low_res/story.jsp?story=458316&host=3&d1r=70) accessed on 29 October 2003.

Israel and Turkey take a dim view of Iran – the former because of Theran’s nuclear ambitions and consistent support for Shi’ite and Palestinian PVMs in the region, the latter for Iran’s meddling in its internal affairs and, in an intersection of interests with Israel, due to a pronounced post-Cold War rivalry over political and economic interests in the former Soviet Central Asian republics.<sup>41</sup> At the end of the day, the Israeli-Turkish rapprochement presents Syria with a more persistent and palpable threat than that of an impressive, albeit only short to mid-term sustainable, U.S. military presence on its doorstep: The prospect of a two-front war against the regional hegemon and NATO’s second largest conventional military force looms large in the event that Damascus will in the future not curb its support for terrorist proxies.<sup>42</sup>

Syria’s dispute with Turkey is varied and simultaneously exists on several levels. As riparian stakeholders in the management of water resources, the regime of Asad the elder, alongside that of Saddam Hussein of Iraq, has in the past taken umbrage at Turkey’s unilateral management of the Tigris, Euphrates and Asi rivers. Concerning a matter of territorial dispute, Syria’s historical claim to the Turkish Hatay province of Iskenderun (formerly Alexandretta), which was ceded to Turkey by France in 1939, has proven conducive to a bilateral climate of friction.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Damascus sought to create leverage vis-à-vis Ankara by supporting Kurdish insurgents of the Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) engaged in a guerrilla war in Anatolia. The PKK leadership enjoyed a safe haven in Syria and was provided by Damascus with training facilities in the Syrian satrapy of Lebanon.

The contentiousness of these unresolved issues intensified in the early 1990s, when Syrian and Iraqi opposition to Turkish control of water became determined in the face of the completion of the Atatürk dam that established Ankara’s stranglehold on water

41 Raphael Israeli, “The Turkish-Israeli Odd Couple,” *Orbis*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 65–79, pp. 72–73.

42 Ely Karmon, “A Solution to Syrian Terrorism,” *Middle East Quarterly* (June 1999), 10 pp., pp. 2–3 at [www.meforum.org/pf.php?id=464](http://www.meforum.org/pf.php?id=464) accessed on 23 June 2003.

43 Meltem Müftüleri Bac, “Turkey and Israel: An Evolving Partnership,” *Ariel Center for Policy Research*, Policy Paper No. 47 (1998), p. 2 at [www.acpr.org.il/publications/policy-papers/pp047-xs.html](http://www.acpr.org.il/publications/policy-papers/pp047-xs.html) accessed on 23 June 2003.

resources in the immediate area. At the same time, the deployment of Turkish regulars across the Iraqi border underlined Ankara's determination to extraterritorially hunt down PKK guerillas. The upshot was that the decisive pursuit of Turkish counter-insurgency operations against PKK led the to brink of war. In a dramatic show-down that was initiated by an ultimatum delivered to Damascus in 1998, Turkish troops massed along the Turkish-Syrian border. Turkish divisions stood poised to invade Syria in the event that Asad would not agree to significantly scale down – if not effectively terminate – support for PKK. Only the expulsion of Abdullah Öcalan averted a Turko-Syrian military confrontation in the nick of time.<sup>44</sup>

The key lesson of Turkish policy with respect to Syrian support for political violence movements was not lost on Syria's major adversary, Israel. As Efraim Inbar somewhat dryly observed in the wake of the Turkish-Syrian crisis: "Syria is susceptible to military pressure."<sup>45</sup> Israel and Syria have officially been at war since the inception of the Jewish state in May 1948. In the wider context of the regional security system, Syria's relations with Israel, by and large dominated by proxy-warfare interspersed with only few instances of direct confrontation, are subject to a precariously ill-defined understanding of territorial, political and military "Red Lines" – informal do's and don'ts. Formal agreements merely act as legal fallback positions. Subsequent to the cession of hostilities that began with the joint Syrian-Egyptian attack on Israel in October 1973, Syria and Israel signed the Israeli-Syrian Disengagement Agreement on 31 May 1974; the 1974 armistice was itself a successor to the then practically defunct Israeli-Syrian General Armistice Agreement of 20 July 1949.<sup>46</sup>

The introduction of Palestinian Fedayeen to Lebanon following their defeat during the Jordanian Civil War in 1970 was largely responsible for a volatile and explosive skewing of the Lebanese confessional balance by 1975, with the Christian Maronites demanding the ouster of a quasi-autonomous Palestinian state within Lebanese

44 Efraim Inbar, "Turkey's New Strategic Partner: Israel," in Efraim Inbar, *The Israeli-Turkish Strategic Partnership*, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 53 (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University), pp. 165–190, p. 168.

45 Efraim Inbar, "The Calculus of Violence in Lebanon," *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 January 1999 at [www.jpost.com/com/Archive/11.Jan.1999/Opinion/Article-3.html](http://www.jpost.com/com/Archive/11.Jan.1999/Opinion/Article-3.html) accessed

46 Rabil, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 26.

territory, and the Muslims throwing their weight behind the PLO as a natural ally.<sup>47</sup> As a consequence, the Lebanese army divided along sectarian lines. Hence, one year after the conclusion of the Israeli-Syrian armistice, the Lebanese Civil War (April 1975-May 1992), provided the stage for both direct and indirect conflict between the Soviet-backed Syrians and the U.S.-supported Israelis and their local Christian allies. Following the outbreak of the Civil War, Syria invaded its neighbor on 31 May 1976.

While the first phase of the Lebanese Civil War belonged to the various Palestinian and indigenous Lebanese confessional militias (e.g. Druze, Christian Maronites and Shi'ites), the Lebanese conflict came to be dominated by a new force after 1982: Islamism claimed the center stage. Syria used most, if not all of these belligerent elements in a protracted campaign against Israeli forces and allied groups. Israel itself invaded Lebanon on two occasions, in 1978 (operation "Litani") and again 1982 (operation "Peace for Galilee"), with the intent of dislodging the Palestinian Fedayeen. Between the second Israeli invasion and their retreat in June 2000, Israel financed, trained and equipped its own auxiliaries, mostly Christian Maronite troops (e.g. the Phalange in the late 1970s and through the 1980s and the South Lebanon Army (SLA) in the 1990s).<sup>48</sup> Arrayed against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and its confederates were the numerous Syrian, and in some instances joint Syrian-Iranian, backed Sunni and Shi'ite Islamist, and in the early 1990s even Christian (i.e. the Lebanese Forces (LF)), militias. Due to the confessional divides among its clients, Syria, as mentioned elsewhere, was time and again compelled to manage its recalcitrant Lebanese warlords with an iron fist.<sup>49</sup>

The origins of the Iranian-Syrian cooperation against Israel can also be traced to the Lebanese theater of war of the 1980s. The strange dynamic of the Iranian-Syrian entente in Lebanon serves to illustrate the tensions that contributed to the shaping of Syrian defense policy with respect to the use of political violence movements. In spite of Iranian and Syrian jockeying for a position of preeminence with Leb-

47 Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17.

48 Jaber, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–14.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 31–35; Daniel Nassif, "Maj. Gen. Ghazi Kanaan. Head of Syrian Intelligence in Lebanon," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 2000), p. 2 at [www.meib.org/articles/0001\\_15.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0001_15.htm) accessed on 12 June 2003; Michael Young, "Lords Over Lebanon," *Slate MSN*, 8 May 2003, p. 3 at <http://slate.msn.com/id/2082730/> accessed on 7 August 2003.

anon's Shi'ites, (the Syrians backed Amal and Iran was busy establishing Hezbollah), it was indeed Syria that entered into an alliance with Iran out of a position of relative weakness resulting from its resounding defeat at the hands of the IDF in 1982. Conversely, it is important to understand that Syria's predicament in the wake of Israel's second invasion was preceded by a six-year-period of virtual military preponderance, which firmly entrenched it as a key player in Lebanon.

Under cover of an Arab League Council mandate entitled the "Arab Deterrent Force" (ADF) that expired in July 1982, Syria has since created a power base in Lebanon. The Asad regime has deployed some 30,000 troops there. Moreover, it has systematically permeated the fabric of Lebanese political life with a veritable host of Mukhabarat operatives. By the mid-1990s, the head of the Lebanese Sureté Générale (the principal Lebanese intelligence agency) was effectively subordinated to Major General Ghazi Kanaan, the senior Syrian intelligence officer in Lebanon. Nothing happens without the knowledge or sanction of Syrian intelligence: Lebanon has become a Syrian-run police state – a part of "Bilad ash-Sham," of Greater Syria.<sup>50</sup> Kanaan's intelligence network was at the time also responsible for the supervision of terrorist attacks against the Christian SLA, the IDF and U.S. military and civilian targets.<sup>51</sup> Notably, the Syrian military presence in Lebanon since 17 September 1982 is maintained in contravention to United Nations Resolution 520, while, by a twist of fate, United Nations Resolution 425 justifies it. Resolution 425 specifically calls on the belligerents to respect Lebanese sovereignty, stipulates the withdrawal of the IDF, but not that of the Syrian armed forces.<sup>52</sup>

Aside from the 500 Iranian volunteers that served as auxiliaries alongside Syrian regular troops in the Beqaa Valley, Damascus permitted the deployment of 1,500–2,000 Iranian Pasdaran – members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – to Baalbek in the Beqaa. The Pasdaran proved instrumental in the training and equipping of a then nascent Hezbollah. Despite an ongoing power struggle between Damascus and Tehran over its Shi'ite clients at that time, it

50 Nassif, *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.

51 Boaz Ganor, "Syria and Terrorism," Survey of Arab Affairs, *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, 15 November 1991, p. 7 at [www.jcpa.org/jl/saa26.htm](http://www.jcpa.org/jl/saa26.htm) accessed on 30 June 2003.

52 Eric V. Thompson, "Will Syria Have to Withdraw from Lebanon?," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 72–93, pp. 73, 75–78.



was Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, Iran's ambassador to Syria, who directed Hezbollah operations with the connivance of Hafez al-Asad.<sup>53</sup> The Saudi-Syrian engineered Taif Accord of October 1989 revised the confessional balance of power in the Lebanese government in that it created a new power-sharing settlement favorable to Syrian interests: "The Taif agreement erected a re-designed troika regime headed by the Christian Maronite President with reduced powers, the Sunni Prime Minister with increased powers, and the Shi'ite Speaker of the National Assembly."<sup>54</sup> In more recent times, the Iranian-Syrian working relationship in the exporting of terrorism has not only turned Lebanon into an effective staging area from which its proxies are able to prick the IDF, but has managed to successfully transplant itself to the very gates of Israel in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

## **1.5 The Palestinian Territories and Lebanon as Operational Theaters of Iranian and Syrian Supported PVMs**

Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have become operational theatres for Lebanese, Palestinian and other political violence movements, the former starting in 1976 – the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War – and the latter after 1987 – the beginning of the first Intifadah – respectively. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, this trend has recently picked up, not least because of a further military intervention by the IDF locally after 29 March to 21 April 2002 (operation "Defensive Shield") and by the Coalition regionally in March 2003. Meanwhile, the Lebanese front has experienced more or less turbulent times since the withdrawal of IDF in June 2000, but remains a potential theatre for low-intensity conflict. Notably, the traditionally self-absorbed, almost parochial Lebanese theatre appears to have witnessed a shift from multi-confessional strife to a linkage with pan-Jihadist movements after the terrorist attack on U.S. soil of 11 September and the subsequent U.S. campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan (2001). Accordingly, most of this section will focus on the Palestinian arena.

53 Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 507; Sick, *op. cit.*, p. 85; Jaber, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32.

54 Mordechai Nisan, "The Syrian Occupation of Lebanon," [n.d.], p. 4 at [www.gotc.org/syrian\\_occupation\\_of\\_lebanon.htm](http://www.gotc.org/syrian_occupation_of_lebanon.htm) accessed on 7 September 2003.

The sustained character of the guerrilla and terror campaigns in these locales is to a significant extent made possible by the initially covert, and increasingly brazenly overt, support of Iran and Syria. The Lebanese Civil War brought about the conflation of the Lebanese internal confessional strife and the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although this admixture brought to the fore tensions among anti-Israeli forces in Lebanon, it also gave rise to a dangerous convergence of such belligerents' agendas. This process invariably culminated in numerous, fluid marriages of convenience between the most virulent political violence movements currently operating in the Middle East and their sponsors, while also cementing the working relationship of the powers backing violent groups. In many respects, the present cooperation between political violence movements in the region constitutes one of the ugly legacy problems deriving from a continuing, amalgamated Israeli-Palestinian-Syrian-Lebanese war. This conflict is being reinforced and protracted, if not exacerbated, by Iran's and Syria's strong disapproval of the Coalition's military presence in the Gulf region after 1991, and its occupation of nearby Iraq after May 2003, and these two states' fluid position ranging from tacit approval of anti-Western political violence movements to collusion with such groups. Against this backdrop, a significant factor is Saudi Arabia's equivocation concerning the U.S. driven War against Terror.

Following the successful dislodgement of the PLO from its Beirut fastnesses in 1983, and wracked by internal dissension, Palestinian resistance was considered all but a spent force. The spontaneous uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of 1987 was brought to a close following the Madrid Conference of 1991, which culminated in the Oslo Peace Process of 1993. The hope for peace that burgeoned during the heady days following the Oslo Agreement and the Israeli-Jordanian Peace one year later, however, were shattered with the assassination in 1995 of Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. During the tenure of Ehud Barak, an electoral decision in Israel compelled the withdrawal of the IDF from the Security Zone in southern Lebanon in June 2000, thus creating a power vacuum in the former Security Zone that was quickly filled by Hezbollah guerrilla. In the meantime, the former Security Zone has earned itself a reputation as "Hizballahland." The situation along the Lebanese border with Israel went from bad to worse; and renewed tensions with the Palestinians culminated in October 2000

with the sparking off of a riot at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The start of the so-called al-Aqsa Intifadah marked the beginning of a new epoch of Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it has also been linked to the Israeli withdrawal from the Security Zone.<sup>55</sup>

The three intervening years between October 2000 and October 2003 have witnessed the skyrocketing of suicide attacks; the number of cross-verified, conventional armed attacks against the IDF and civilians inside Israel, too, is at an all time high.<sup>56</sup> In the context of a generally deteriorating economic, political and military situation in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian militants of all hues have become emboldened and are implementing a more offensive manner of waging war against the IDF and civilians in the Palestinian Territories and in Israel. On the ground, the sustained nature of this violent surge in the past three years is intimately connected to a previously inexistent, potent constellation of sources of outside support. Although outside support for Palestinian political violence movements does not come as a surprise to the experienced observer of recent Middle Eastern history, the sources of support for terrorist activity themselves have become aggressively involved, while the level of activities financed and otherwise upheld by these outside supporters has waxed concurrently.

Hezbollah's direct involvement in the Palestinian territories following the Israeli withdrawal from the Security Zone constitutes a serious shift away from its self-declared role as an Islamic resistance movement directed against the IDF's presence in southern Lebanon; this organization's military track record in Lebanon, its international outreach and its irrefutable ties to the Guardian and Expediency Councils, the IRGC and the Iranian intelligence service VEVAK in Tehran, as well as its arrangements with Damascus that have allowed it to emerge as the only Lebanese militia spared the decommissioning of arms at gunpoint, bode ill for the prospect of a cession of hostilities in the West Bank and Gaza. In the light of the poor relations

55 Karmon, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

56 Gady Paran, "Palestinian Terrorism in Israel: Developments and Trends," presentation on the occasion of a conference on "International Terrorism: After the War in Iraq," held on 14 October 2003 in Stockholm, Sweden and organized by the Centre for the Study of Low Intensity Conflict and Terrorism (CLIENT) of the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). Dr Paran is with the National Security Studies Center (NSSC), University of Haifa, Israel.

between Tehran and the PLO following a brief honeymoon period after the Iranian Revolution, Hezbollah's stepping up of acts supportive of Palestinian militancy equally suggests a "strategic shift in Iran's dealings with the Palestinians."<sup>57</sup> The recent rapprochement between chairman Arafat and Bashir al-Asad following a meeting on 27 March 2001 also indicates a remedying of historically tense relations between the late Hafez al-Asad and the Fatah brand of Palestinian nationalism.<sup>58</sup> A number of analysts, such as Daniel Byman and Matt Levitt, have been drawing attention to this novel trend with respect to Iran and Syria.<sup>59</sup>

Since the accession of al-Qaida to the position of public enemy No. 1 of the West after 11 September, however, only little attention has been paid to the role of Hezbollah as one of the key elements in a negotiated Israeli-Syrian peace treaty and, by extension, as a significant conduit for Iranian funding of proxy warfare and for the continued support of Palestinian rejectionist groups by Syria. Addressing this issue, Byman in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* recalled U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, who pronounced that "Hezbollah may be the A team of terrorists," while "al Qaeda is actually the B team."<sup>60</sup>

The roles of Iran and Syria with respect to the Lebanese operational theater have been aptly juxtaposed thus: "If Syria is Hizballah's landlord, Iran is the sugar daddy who pays the rent."<sup>61</sup> The roles in the strategic partnership between Syria and Iran have conveniently fallen into place, rather than having been allotted. In that, the divi-

57 Kenneth R. Timmerman, "Iranian Government Involved 'At The Highest Level,' Israelis Say," *Insight Magazine*, 14 January 2002 at [www.insightmag.com/main/cfm/include/detail/storyid/163929.html](http://www.insightmag.com/main/cfm/include/detail/storyid/163929.html) accessed on 28 May 2003.

58 Gambill, "Syria's Foreign Relations," *op. cit.*

59 Daniel Byman, "Should Hezbollah Be Next?," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (November/December 2003), pp. 54–66, p. 54; Matthew Levitt, "New Arenas for Iranian-Sponsored Terrorism: The Arab-Israeli Heartland," *Policywatch*, No. 605, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (22 February 2002) at [www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch2002/605.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Policywatch2002/605.htm) accessed on 6 June 2003; Ibid., "Hezbollah's West Bank Terror Network," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 8–9 (August–September 2003) at [www.meib.org/articles/0308\\_13.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0308_13.htm) accessed on 4 November 2003.

60 Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

61 Gal Luft, "Hizballahland," *Commentary Magazine*, Vol. 116, No. 1 (July 2003) at <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/luft.html> accessed on 16 July 2003.

sion of labor in this case accurately reflects the expedient nature of Iranian-Syrian collaboration. Since the withdrawal of the IDF in 2000, most of the fighting involving Hezbollah centers around the disputed territory of the Sheba Farms area in the Golan, or attacks on IDF border patrols. Although Hezbollah's operations in Lebanon against Israeli targets are a known quantity and largely confined to the southern part of the country – and it was long held, erroneously so, that beyond its inflammatory rhetoric Hezbollah had no intention to carry the conflict across the Israeli-Lebanese border for lack of precedents – what is new in the Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah joint venture is clearly its augmented presence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>62</sup>

In the Palestinian territories, the division of labour is currently just that: Iran and Syria each run major operations, and while they do cooperate with each other on a case-by-case basis, the degree of that cooperation is not yet as advanced, or as clear cut as that in Lebanon. This is particularly evident in the area of arms smuggling through the sea-lanes of the Middle East, to which we will return below. While the recent past has shown that Syria, since its cession of direct involvement in international terrorist activity in 1986, can fall back on Ba'athi and Marxist Palestinian groups, such as Saiqa, PFLP-GC, DFLP, and even on Hezbollah-inspired offshoots of nationalist groups, such as the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades linked to Fatah, it also finances Jihadist groups, for example, the Izzeldin al-Kassam Brigades operating under the political leadership of Hamas, and the PIJ. Most of these organizations maintain offices and make use of training facilities in Damascus. According to the research of Reuven Erlich

[t]he leaders of most of these terrorist organizations reside in Syria, where they direct the operational, political and propaganda activities of their organizations. The senior officials of the seven terrorist organizations that appear on the [U.S.] State Department's list and receive Syrian support are as follows: Dr Ramadan Shalah, Secretary General of the "Palestinian Islamic Jihad," and his deputy Ziad Nakhlah; Khaled Mash'al, the head of the Hamas political bureau, Musa Abu-Marzuk,

62 Karmon, *op. cit.*, 4. Ely Karmon maintains that the argument about Hezbollah's lack of interest in operations conducted on Israeli territory is false, as Hezbollah attempted a seaborne attack on 16 June 1991 against the Israeli town of Nahariya. Cf. Magnus Ranstorp's argument concerning the "Lebanonization" of Hezbollah on pp. 17–18; note No. 11.

his deputy and Imad al-Alami, chairman of Hamas Interior Committee, representative of the organization in Syria and an important figure in activating the organization's military apparatus for carrying out attacks; Ahmed Jibril, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command and Jihad Jibril [deceased since], his son; Maher Taher, PFLP spokesman, and other senior officials in the leadership of the organization. In addition, there are other senior leaders and activists of other terrorist organizations, also residing in Damascus, who do not appear on the State Department [list], such as Nayef Hawatmeh, the leader of the “Democratic Front” [for the Liberation of Palestine].<sup>63</sup>

The most notorious examples of Syrian-supported Palestinian rejectionist organizations are indubitably Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-GC, the PIJ and Hamas.<sup>64</sup> Notably, among the Syrian-backed Palestinian organizations lines between secular and religious motivations blur in the face of a common enemy and, probably more important, due to the ironfisted coordination of Damascus.

One especially sinister group to emerge out of the al-Aqsa Intifadah, however, is the direct result of Iranian-Syrian collusion that has been reified by their crony, Hezbollah: The Return Brigades (Kata'ab al-Awda) are the product of recruiting efforts undertaken by Hezbollah operatives, elements of the PA and the IRGC in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and of training opportunities provided for by the Iranians in Iran under the guise of humanitarian aid efforts. For example, Hezbollah managed to recruit four members of the Fatah military wing, the Tanzim, and train them in the summer of 2002. According to Matt Levitt, a former FBI counter-terrorism analyst, collusion between Iran and members of the Palestinian Authority has reached alarming levels. This novel cooperation between sponsors and perpetrators of terrorist activities threatens to thoroughly discredit Palestinian credibility at the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating table. His information is worth quoting at some length:

Lebanon-based operatives from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hizballah have built... a network of rogue Fatah Tanzim cells to serve as Hizballah's West Bank cadres... Under the direct oversight of a senior IRGC official, the brigades were to recruit Palestinians who were opposed to PA negotiations with Israel and who

63 Erlich, *op. cit.*, pp. 4–5.

would embrace Tehran's stance of attacking Israel and opposing peace... Intended to be compartmentalized from each other, the military wing was tasked with conducting terror attacks, while the political wing would 'infiltrate representatives into the PA and the Palestinian security mechanisms' to take over 'when and if the current Fatah infrastructure collapses.'<sup>65</sup>

Concerning the Return Brigades, what is especially disquieting is the confession obtained during the debriefing of one suspect arrested by the IDF in October 2002, who attested that his handlers were senior Fatah functionaries resident in Amman; and that they were not only answerable to the IRGC, but to a prominent member of the Fatah Central Committee and to the head of the PLO Political Department.<sup>66</sup>

Although the ongoing recruiting and instrumentalizing of rogue elements and the connivance and even open collaboration of the Palestinian nationalist security services does cast a shadow over the future ability of the PLO and its successor, the Palestinian Authority (PA), to act as the Palestinian plenipotentiary, it is the several attempts by members of the PA (or individuals in the employ of the PA and with traceable links with the PA's multiple security services) to smuggle contraband in clear contravention to the terms of the bilateral agreement on diplomatic and political engagement with the Israeli government, which derailed the Peace Process that had slowly but surely become all but untenable. The substance of the contraband discussed in the cases below consisted of light weapons and heavy ordnance. The incidents involving the vessels "Calypso-2," (2001) "Santorini," (2001) the "Karine-A" (2002) and the "Abu Hassan" (2003) have not only implicated the PA on the highest levels but also indicted the PA of assisting militant elements in Palestinian soci-

64 Gary C. Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No. 9 (February 2002) at [www.meib.org/articles/0209\\_s1.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0209_s1.htm) accessed on 12 June 2003; Gambill, "Syria and Hamas," *op. cit.*; Matthew Levitt, "Syria and Islamic Jihad," *op. cit.*

65 Matthew Levitt, "Hizballah's West Bank Foothold," *Peacewatch*, No. 429, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (20 August 2003) at [www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2003/429.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2003/429.htm) accessed on 4 November 2003.

66 *Ibid.*

ety. The arms smuggling affairs explicitly and irrefutably revealed the conspiratorial nature, extent, sophistication and joint involvement of the PA, Syria, Iran – and even of Saudi Arabia – and its Palestinian and Shi'ite clients, as well as those sub-contractors acting under the aegis of the conservative clerical establishment in Tehran.

The scene to these incidents was set across the border, in Lebanon. After twenty years of adherence, Israeli forces reneged upon the “red lines” established with Syria in Lebanon – not to strike directly at Syrian forces – in response to an Hezbollah attack in April 2001 that killed one IDF member: Israeli Air Force planes attacked a Syrian position in the mountainous Dahr al-Baidar region on the dawn of the 15<sup>th</sup>. Characteristically, the Syrian response was to eschew direct retaliation. Instead, the Syrians tasked Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-GC with the procurement and clandestine transfer of a massive, 40-tons weapons shipment, including launchers for rocket propelled grenades, anti-tank grenades, anti-aircraft missiles, two types of mines, Hungarian manufactured Kalashnikov assault rifles and considerable quantities of ammunition, to the Palestinian territories by sea.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Hezbollah was given leave to attack Israeli positions near the disputed Sheba Farms area in the Golan; a restaurant in the Golan environs also became the site of an attack with remote-detonated bombs.

On 7 May 2001, the IDF announced the capture of a ship sailing off the Israeli coast during a routine patrol. Officialdom in Israel declined to comment on the source of the discovered contraband. And although “it is not clear if the weapons were bound for the Palestinian Authority or for other Palestinian military organizations... [t]he aim was apparently to drop the barrels into the sea at a designated point off the Gaza coast, where the Palestinians would retrieve them.”<sup>68</sup> The case of the vessel “Santorini” (formerly the “Abd Al-Hadi”) is illustrative of the number of successful contraband shipments, and therefore of the difficulties of interdicting illicit arms trafficking in Israeli waters, or on the high seas. Background infor-

67 Ziad K. Adbelnour, “Syrian Provocations Go Unanswered,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (May 2001) at [www.meib.org/articles/0105\\_s1r.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0105_s1r.htm) accessed on 12 June 2003; Ellis Schuman, “Gaza-bound Weapons Arsenal Seized by Israeli Navy,” 9 May 2001 at [www.israelinsider.com/channels/security/articles/sec\\_0041.htm](http://www.israelinsider.com/channels/security/articles/sec_0041.htm) accessed on 23 June 2003.

68 Schuman, *op. cit.*



mation concerning the origin, dispatcher and intended recipient of the “Santorini’s” shipment was not long in waiting. According to one report, the vessel was acquired for the PFLP-GC on a small island off the Syrian coast; it was even registered as a Syrian vessel. The arms were smuggled from Damascus to Beirut by bus and loaded on board the “Santorini” in the Lebanese port of Tripoli.<sup>69</sup>

On 10 May, a report published by the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) quoted Ahmed Jibril, who, according to the French Press Agency (AFP), stated that “[t]his cargo that we sent will not be the last,” and that the intercepted shipment was intended to serve towards creating “a sort of balance of terror between us and the enemy.”<sup>70</sup> Members of the “Santorini’s” crew confirmed that the cargo had been commissioned by Jibril’s PFLP-GC and that this had been the fourth arms run – that on three prior occasions involving the “Santorini” and another boat named the “Calypso-2” they had successfully dumped “barrels full of arms into the water at a prearranged point near the coast of Gaza, whereupon the Palestinian security services would send out boats to retrieve them.”<sup>71</sup> The three prior runs occurred in November 2000, and two in April 2001; the PFLP-GC was responsible for the first shipment, and the Hezbollah for the two subsequent ones.<sup>72</sup> The upshot of the “Santorini” incident was that in the wake of the “Karine-A” affair, Adel Mughrabi, the PA’s weapons acquisitions officer, was directly implicated by the IDF as having acted as the PA’s go-between.<sup>73</sup>

69 Mitchell Ginsburg, “Santorini Arms Ship Completed Three Smuggling Trips Before Israel Intercepted It,” *The Jerusalem Report*, 18 November 2002 at [www.jrep.com/Reporter/Article -8.html](http://www.jrep.com/Reporter/Article -8.html) accessed on 15 April 2003.

70 “Ahmed Jibril Vows Further Arms Shipments to Palestinians,” *International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism*, 10 May 2001 at [www.ict.org.il/spotlight/det.cfm?id=606](http://www.ict.org.il/spotlight/det.cfm?id=606) accessed on 23 June 2003.

71 *Ibid.*; Ginsburg, *op. cit.*; Michael Rubin, “No Change. Iran Remains Committed to Israel’s Destruction,” *National Review Online*, 1 July 2002 at [www.nationalreview.com/script/printpage.asp?ref=/comment/comment-rubin070102.asp](http://www.nationalreview.com/script/printpage.asp?ref=/comment/comment-rubin070102.asp) accessed on 9 December 2003; cf. item No. 64 in “Training and Infrastructure for Palestinian Terrorists in Syria and Lebanon,” Israeli Report at [www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/aug/aug5.doc](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/aug/aug5.doc) accessed on 9 December 2003.

72 Cf. item 64 in “Training and Infrastructure for Palestinian Terrorists in Syria and Lebanon,” *op. cit.*

73 “A Briefing held at Eilat Port after the Seizure of the Palestinian Weapons Ship,” IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, 6 January 2002 at [www.idf.il/english/news/briefing060102](http://www.idf.il/english/news/briefing060102) accessed on 26 June 2003.

Only seven months after the uproar over the “Santorini” had died down, the “Karine-A” affair shattered the international communities’ confidence in chairman Arafat and the PA. For three months, Israeli intelligence with support from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had carefully followed the motions of the PA-owned and captained “Karine-A” in the context of a major intelligence operation dubbed “Milk and Honey.”<sup>74</sup> In the early hours of 3 January 2002, operation “Noah’s Ark” was set in motion: Airborne and seaborne Israeli commandos seized the ship in international waters, 500 kilometers off Israeli shores between Saudi Arabia and the Sudan. The yield of “Noah’s Arc” went beyond the most audacious forecasts of U.S. and Israeli analysts. The “Karine A” carried some 50 to 80 tons of light arms, anti-tank rocket propelled grenades and mines, mortars and ammunition, fragmentation grenades, sniper rifles and sophisticated optics (long range sights) and short range ballistic missiles of the Soviet “Katyusha” type with ranges of 8 to 20 kilometers. Last but not least, several hundred kilos of TNT and 3,000 pounds of military grade C4 plastic explosive – the preferred explosive of suicide attackers – were found aboard the “Karine-A.”<sup>75</sup>

Despite attempts to exonerate chairman Arafat, the evidence implicating him and his accessories in the PA was overwhelming.<sup>76</sup>

74 Tracy Wilkinson, “Israel Seizes Arms Allegedly Being Shipped to Palestinians,” *L.A. Times*, 5 January 2002 at <http://latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-00001045jan05.story> accessed on 15 April 2003; Robert Satloff, “The Peace Process at Sea: The Karine-A Affair and the War on Terrorism,” *The National Interest* (Spring 2002), Internet edition posted on 21 January 2003 at [www.nationalinterest.org/ME2/Segments/Articles/Template1/Common/print.asp?](http://www.nationalinterest.org/ME2/Segments/Articles/Template1/Common/print.asp?) accessed on 26 June 2003.

75 Oleg Granovsky, “Weapons Found on ‘Karine-A’ and ‘Santorini,’” transl. by Noam Primak, *War Online* at [http://www.waronline.org/en/analysis/pal\\_weapons.htm](http://www.waronline.org/en/analysis/pal_weapons.htm) accessed on 23 June 2003.

76 Mr Brian Whitaker of the British daily *The Guardian* was quick to call the Israeli-US intercept of the “Karine-A” into question, accusing Israeli authorities of, if not directly engineering the event, capitalizing upon the “Karine-A” affair, and of using the circumstance of having caught the PA in flagranti as a means to overthrow Yassir Arafat. The findings of the investigation – not least the incontrovertible proof of the cargo itself, the crew of the ship and the personal implication of high ranking PA military – do not support the view held by Mr Whitaker. Brian Whitaker, “Voyage of the Arms Ship,” *The Guardian*, 14 January 2002 at [www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4335079,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4335079,00.html) accessed on 18 July 2003; Ibid., “The Strange Affair of Karine A,” *The Guardian*, 21 January 2002 at [www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4339656,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4339656,00.html) accessed on 18 July 2003.

The PA's involvement in the "Karine-A" affair is glaringly obvious; a number of incriminating elements leading to the "Karine-A's" journey add up to a comprehensive indictment of the PA. To begin with, the head of the PA's weapons acquisitions office, Adel Mughrabi, had purchased the 4,000-ton freighter "Karine-A" (formerly the "Rim K") for the sum of \$400,000 in October 2000, the month that marked the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifadah. Arafat's near confidante, Fouad Shobaki, a Brigadier-General in the PA military hierarchy, provided for the funds. The "Karine-A's" captain, arrested by the Israelis during the raid on 3 January 2002, was Colonel Omar Akawi, whose occupation was that of a commissioned officer in the PA Naval Police. Notably, the investigation revealed that the "Karine-A" was an Iranian-Palestinian joint venture, supported by Hezbollah at the behest of Teheran. In this regard, the activities of Lieutenant-Colonel Masoud Iyyad of Arafat's bodyguard, the "Force 17," who had been cultivating the link with Hezbollah and was promoting their foothold in the Gaza Strip by the early months of 2001, strongly suggests Iranian collusion at an early stage of the plot.<sup>77</sup> Following its purchase, the "Karine-A" was dispatched to the Sudan; necessary repairs were accomplished in the Yemenite port of Hodeida; it proceeded to Aden, from where the ship made its way to the island of Kish, off the Iranian coast.

At Kish, "Karine-A" was loaded with eighty crates of weapons, by agents, and under the supervision, of Imad Mugniyah, Hezbollah's foreign operations commander – and a former member of Arafat's "Force 17." Here we need to recall that Imad Mugniyah is the man held responsible for the devastating attack on the U.S. Marines contingent of the Multinational Force (MNF) in 1983, killing 241 Marines and 58 French paratroopers; the murder of the CIA's station chief in Beirut, William Buckley (1984); for the attacks against the Israeli embassy (1992) and the Jewish community center in Argenti-

77 "The PLO Weapons Ship from Iran," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, Jerusalem Issue Brief, Vol. 1, No. 15, 7 January 2002 at [www.jcpa.org/art/biref1-15.htm](http://www.jcpa.org/art/biref1-15.htm) accessed on 15 April 2003.

na (1994).<sup>78</sup> Hezbollah had sent their highest-ranking and most notorious field commander to Iran in order to personally arrange for the dispatch of the contraband through his associates. This circumstance is highly suggestive of the importance Hezbollah, and by extension, Hezbollah's Iranian masters, attributed to the mission of the "Karine-A." On 12 December 2001, the "Karine-A" lifted anchor and set out for the port of Dubai, from where it made the journey around the Arab peninsula. It was intercepted on its way to the Suez Canal, after which the "Karine-A" was apparently scheduled to rendezvous with three smaller vessels in order to distribute its cargo. Once transferred to the three boats, the arms consignment was to be transported to the coast of Gaza and dumped overboard in watertight containers – to be picked up by co-conspirators apprised of the operation.

Reactions by the parties involved and by the international community at large were varied. When IDF chief of the general staff, Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz, announced the capture of the "Karine-A" and its crew, on 4 January, he openly accused the PA and Iran of complicity.<sup>79</sup> At a briefing in Eilat, Mofaz also implicated Adel Mughrabi, known because of his involvement in the "Santorini" incident, Fathi Gazem, the deputy commander of the Palestinian Naval Police and, of course, Omar Achawi, the head of the shipping administration of the PA, who captained the "Karine-A."<sup>80</sup> Despite the massive amount of signals intelligence collected on the "Karine-A's" jaunt to and from Kish, Ali Samkhani, the Iranian defense minister denied having any knowledge of the "Karine-A" and, more generally, any involvement in the affair.<sup>81</sup> In a similar vein, albeit in a more incriminating manner, Hezbollah's official statement did as much as divulge this group's central role, observing that what "is surprising is that the

78 Isabel Kershner, "The Changing Colors of Imad Mughniyah," *The Jerusalem Report Magazine*, 25 March 2002 at [www.jrep.com/Mideast/Article-2.html](http://www.jrep.com/Mideast/Article-2.html) accessed on 8 November 2002. Rolf Tophoven, "Mann ohne Gesicht: Topterrorist Imad Fayez Mugniyeh," *Die Welt*, 9 September 2002; Kenneth R. Timmerman, "Lebanese Madman Leaves Trail of Terror" at <http://www.vfw.org/magazine/apr02/hezbollah.htm> accessed on 8 November 2002.

79 "Briefing by Chief of the IDF General Staff... Following the Seizure of a Palestinian Weapons Ship," IDF Spokesperson's Unit, 4 January 2002 at [www.idf.il/english/news/briefing040102.stm](http://www.idf.il/english/news/briefing040102.stm) accessed on 26 June 2003.

80 "A Briefing held at Eilat Port after the Seizure of the Palestinian Weapons Ship," *op. cit.*

81 Satloff, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

U.S. administration provoked such a fuss over the arms ship while it provides unlimited military support to... Israel.”<sup>82</sup> A delegation of the Israeli military intelligence service presented “incontrovertible evidence” to the U.S. President on Iran’s collusion at the highest level: Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i was very much aware of the „Karine-A” mission, as the elite al-Qods Brigade of the Pasdaran, which is directly answerable to the Supreme Leader, had reportedly played a key role in the plot. “The Israeli team presented hard evidence that this was a joint operation between the Qods Brigade commander and the Palestinian Authority...”<sup>83</sup>

U.S. reactions were mixed, too. The seizure of the vessel in the Red Sea prompted an incredulous Secretary of State to complain directly to Arafat; the enormity of its cargo’s potential to wreak destruction in the region staggered President Bush, who was at that stage reluctant to link the affair directly to Arafat for fear of the repercussions to such an implication; while U.S. special envoy General Anthony Zinni “insisted on an explanation from Mr Arafat during a meeting with the Palestinian leader...”<sup>84</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell, who had at first refrained from linking the “Karine-A” affair directly to Arafat on April 21 rephrased his position: “What we have said is that we believe that knowledge of that shipment extended rather high into the Palestinian Authority... Chairman Arafat gave us a letter some time ago accepting responsibility on behalf of the Palestinian Authority for that shipment.”<sup>85</sup> Even though the PA had several of its own members arrested in connection with the shipment of contraband, it was evident that such arrests as were made, were the result of intense U.S. and Israeli pressure, and were helped along by the in flagranti

82 Ibid., p. 2.

83 Timmerman, “Iranian Government Involved ‘At The Highest Level,’ Israelis Say,” *op. cit.*

84 U.S. Department of State, “Seized Weapons Ship Linked to Palestinian Authority,” 10 January 2002 at <http://usinfo.state.gov/regional/nea/summit/text/0110ship.htm> accessed on 15 April 2003; Jonathan Marcus, “Analysis: The CIA and the Arms Ship,” *BBC News*, 15 January 2002 at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1761836.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1761836.stm) accessed on 15 April 2002; Graham Usher, “Israel Halts Palestinian Ship,” *The Guardian*, 5 January 2002 at [www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,627978,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,627978,00.html) accessed on 18 July 2003.

85 U.S. Department of State, “Interview on CNN’s Late Edition,” 21 April 2002 at [www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2002/0605.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2002/0605.htm) accessed on 26 November 2003.

character of the “Karine-A’s” seizure.<sup>86</sup> The PA’s behavior during the weeks following the incident, introduced a sea change in U.S. policy in the Middle East. According to Robert Satloff

Arafat’s double-game performance throughout the Zinni mission infuriated the Bush Administration. But the piece de resistance was the Karine-A... The revelation of the Karine-A affair, with its strategic consequences for U.S. interests and those of America’s Arab and Israeli regional allies, triggered a fundamental re-assessment of U.S. policy. This process produced analytical consensus regarding Arafat’s unsavory character, his untrustworthiness, his collusion with Iran, and his lack of fitness to serve as a partner for peace.<sup>87</sup>

In the aftermath of the “Karine-A” affair, the credibility of the Palestinian Authority was eroded. Especially, Yassir Arafat and his multiple “hats” (i.e. he currently is the incumbent of the presidency of the PA, of the chairmanship of the PLO and he is also the leader of Fatah) came under the close scrutiny of international observers. The collusion of state supporters in the shipping of contraband on board the “Santorini” and the “Karine-A,” among which weapons of strategic potential were identified, in the latter case exacerbated the erstwhile gun-running scandal and gave it the stature of a serious blow to the Peace Process in the Middle East with implications for U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian relations. However, the series of clandestine weapons transfers through the sea-lanes did not come to a close in early January 2002. Yet another shipment of arms organized by the Lebanese Hezbollah, and chaperoned by members of Fatah, was intercepted approximately three months after the “Karine-A’s” capture. Apparently, the weapons were supposed to better prepare the Palestinian territories in the face of an impending IDF operation.<sup>88</sup>

86 Rula Amin, “Arafat Orders Officials Detained in Arms Probe,” *CNN.com*, 11 January 2002 at <http://cnn.worldnews.printhis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&expire> accessed on 15 April 2003.

87 Satloff, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

88 According to the English language Internet edition of the Russian newspaper “Pravda,” Israeli navy sunk a fishing vessel between late April and early May 2002 off the Gaza coast, or if another source is to be trusted, off the Lebanese coast. Israeli military censors for fear of jeopardizing ongoing operations against the authors of the clandestine contraband shipments initially suppressed the story. “IDF Refuses Comment on Reported Sinking of Gaza-Bound Weapons Boat,”

The most recent incident of transferring arms to terrorist organizations occurred on Thursday, 22 May 2003: The “Abu Hassan” was intercepted between 40 and 90 miles off the Israeli coast. The Egyptian-registered vessel had traveled from Egypt to Lebanon on the first leg of a journey that was supposedly to end off the Gaza coast. Hamad Muslam Moussa Abu Amra, a known member of the Lebanese Hezbollah, was also captured on board the “Abu Hassan.” In contrast to earlier intercepts, one element of the impounded cargo, which included 25 fuses for Katyusha missiles, 15 electronic delay units, and other remote-detonation technology, was comprised of “36 instructional CD-ROMs that gave detailed explanations on aspects on how to prepare bombs, how to improve the effectiveness of a suicide bomb belt and just where a suicide bomber should stand on a bus to kill as many people as possible...”<sup>89</sup> Although Israeli authorities made clear that they could not determine whether the cargo of the “Abu Hassan” was destined for the PA, or for a Palestinian political violence movement, they did conclude that persons close to the PA were directly involved. Israeli foreign minister, Silvan Shalom accused two senior PA figures, Fathi Razam and Adal al-Mughrabi, of being responsible for the smuggling attempt. Al-Mughrabi had been heavily implicated in the “Karine-A” affair. In spite of strident denials by Hezbollah, “the seizure of the compact discs and of Abu Amra provides strong evidence of a link between the Hizbullah and the Palestinian Authority.”<sup>90</sup>

Establishing the culpability of the senior PA personnel in the context of the “Karine-A” affair proved comparatively easy; backtracking the multiple money trails to the financiers of the shipment presented something of a challenge. On the principal subject of this paper, it may be said that Iran was implicated by virtue of being the supplier of the “Karine-A” arms shipment; Syria, on a prior occasion, had been directly involved the case of the “Santorini,” not least

*On-line Pravda*, 13 May 2002 at <http://english.pravda.ru/hotspots/2002/05/13/28593.html> accessed on 23 June 2003.

89 Julie Stahl, “Israel Seizes Hizballah Weapons Shipment Heading for Gaza,” 23 May 2003 at <http://new.crosswalk.com/news/1201606.html?view=print> accessed on 23 June 2003.

90 “IDF Seizes Bomb Making Supply Ship Headed for Gaza,” *JINSA Online*, 26 May 2003 at [www.jinsa.org/articles/print.html/documentid/2045](http://www.jinsa.org/articles/print.html/documentid/2045) accessed on 23 June 2003.

through its adamant patronage of the PFLP-GC. Unexpectedly, however, it was Saudi Arabia that took the center stage of the investigation:

The financing of the Karine-A arms-smuggling ship destined for the Gaza Strip came from Saudi Arabia – a shocking discovery made, according to intelligence sources, by all three teams investigating the affair: American, Israeli and Palestinian. They established that Saudi sources put up the \$10 million paid over to Iran for the weapons cargo, the \$400, 000 purchasing price for the vessel and another \$1 million to cover miscellaneous expenses, such as hiring the crew, fuel, repairs and port charges... this new fact is disturbing evidence of the uncertain internal situation in Saudi Arabia, demonstrating for the first time the willingness of influential figures in the royal house and Saudi intelligence to go out on a limb and back the Palestinian-Hezbollah-Iran connection.<sup>91</sup>

The reputable German daily “Die Welt” further corroborated this report on 29 January 2002.<sup>92</sup> Conversely, Saudi funneling of funds into the Palestinian terror infrastructure should not come as a surprise, as the Saudi Ministry of the Interior has been funding Hamas – specifically families “of ‘martyrs’ who conducted ‘quality attacks’ against Israeli civilians.”<sup>93</sup>

Beyond its involvement in the “Karine-A” affair, Saudi Arabian sources – opinion leaders close to government and private individuals – reportedly fund up to 50% of Hamas’ operating budget in addition to official Saudi contributions sent to the PA in the range of between \$80 to \$100 million per annum.<sup>94</sup> According to the recently published research conducted by Dore Gold, Saudi Arabia directly

91 “Saudis Financed Terror Ship. Paid \$10 million to Iran for Arms Destined for Palestinian Intifada,” *DEBKA File*, 17 January 2002 at [www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=26100](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=26100) accessed on 15 April 2003

92 Rolf Tophoven, “Geld für Waffenschiff der Palästinenser kommt vermutlich aus Saudi-Arabien,” *Die Welt*, 29 January 2002 at [www.welt.de/daten/2002/01/29/0129au310883.htx?print=1](http://www.welt.de/daten/2002/01/29/0129au310883.htx?print=1) accessed on 8 November 2002.

93 Matthew Levitt, “The Political Economy of Middle East Terrorism,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (December, 2002), pp. 49–65, pp. 59–60.

94 “Saudi Donations Make Up Half of Hamas’ Budget,” *op.cit.*; Matthew Levitt, “The Political Economy of Middle East Terrorism,” *op.cit.*, p. 51.



finances the Izzeldin al-Kassam Brigades – Hamas’ so-called “military wing.”<sup>95</sup> In April 2002, United Press International’s Pentagon correspondent suggested that the Saudis had disbursed \$33 million to Palestinian families of casualties and fatalities of the al-Aqsa Intifadah and set aside another \$50 million for future payments. Controversially, “Saudi Arabia makes no distinction in compensation to families of suicide bombers and those killed by Israeli military action.”<sup>96</sup> The information on Saudi funding for Hamas that reached the U.S. Secretary of State came from no lesser personage than Yasir Arafat himself.<sup>97</sup>

Within the framework of the reviewed state support for political violence movements in the Middle East, the interrelationships between the individual states involved are not necessary equitable, for while Iran’s relations with its Saudi neighbor are at best tense, the Syrian government entertains cordial relations with Riyadh. In retrospect, it was after all the Saudis, who helped engineer the questionable, predominantly Syrian-staffed “Arab Peacekeeping Force” at the Arab League Summit after 1976 that has illegally occupied Lebanon, and whose machinations culminated in the Taif Accord of 1989, which made possible the ex post facto legitimization of a Syrian satrapy in Lebanon. The Saudi government’s financial injections into the Syrian-dominated Lebanese economy leave very little room to doubt that they serve first and foremost to perpetuate the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Focusing on the Saudi-Syrian bilateral relationship, Esam Sohail has concluded:

The evidence suggests that either directly, or in a circuitous manner, the Saudis have subsidized Syria’s continuation of two particular policies that have a direct bearing on terrorism: the occupation of Lebanon and the hosting of terror groups in Damascus. Added to that, [Crown] Prince Abdullah’s [the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia] personal and political

95 Janine Zacharia, “Dore Gold: Saudi Provides Most of Hamas Funding,” *Jerusalem Post*, 15 July 2003 at [www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Jpost/A/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1058240688098](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Jpost/A/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1058240688098) accessed on 3 December 2003. Cf. Dore Gold, *Hatred’s New Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2003).

96 Hess, “Saudi Arabia Sets Aside \$50M for ‘Martyrs,’” *op.cit.*

97 “Bush Confronted Abdullah on Saudi Funding of Hamas,” *World Tribune com*, 26 April 2002 at [http://216.26.163.62./2002/me\\_saudis\\_04\\_26.26](http://216.26.163.62./2002/me_saudis_04_26.26) accessed on 3 December 2003.

Syrian connections have led to a troubling Syrian presence in the heart of the Arabian peninsula itself.<sup>98</sup>

But then, the Saudis are, unfortunately, not the only underwriters of political violence movements, or perpetrators of the conditions in which such groups continue to flourish in the Middle East. Of all the sources tapped to provide for groups engaging in terrorist tactics in this troubled region, those supplied inadvertently by well-wishing parties arguably represent the most controversial of all.

Even with a documented record of embezzlement and corruption, the probably worst malpractice of the PA is the diversion of international aid – specifically from EU donor funds – to the terror nexus in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>99</sup> In a nutshell, “the biggest problem has been the cash budgetary support that the EU began providing the PA in June 2000.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, there are serious questions about how

98 Esam Sohail, “The Syrian-Saudi Arabian Nexus,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (July 2003) at [www.meib.org/articles/0307\\_s1.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0307_s1.htm) accessed on 18 August 2003.

99 Dr Ehrenfeld of the American Center for Democracy conducted an in-depth study on this subject. Cf. Rachel Ehrenfeld, “Where Does the Money Go? A Study of the Palestinian Authority,” American Center for Democracy (New York: 2002). An online version of the study is available at [www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/financing/articles/where/where.htm](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/financing/articles/where/where.htm) accessed on 21 November 2003.

100 The EU’s ambivalent position on terrorism in the Middle East remains controversial. Cf. “EU Rejects Full Hamas Ban,” *BBC News*, 29 June 2003 at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3026992.stm> accessed on 10 December 2003 and Joel Brinkler, “Bush Urges Europe To Cut Hamas Funds,” *International Herald Tribune*, print edition, 26 June 2003, pp. 1,6. As Matthew Levitt has pointed out, the EU perpetuates its ambiguous stance on terrorism in the Middle East because it continues to “adopt the fallacy of drawing a distinction between the non-violent activities of terrorist groups and the terror attacks that they carry out. By distinguishing between the terrorist and welfare ‘wings’ of Hamas, for example, the EU lent legitimacy to the activities of charitable organizations that fund and facilitate terrorist groups’ activities and operations.” Levitt, “The Political Economy of Middle East Terrorism,” *op. cit.*, p. 60. As of this writing, the EU has come under pressure to ban Hamas as a whole and has, subsequent to diplomatic interventions mainly by the U.S. and Israel, followed suit. “EU Blacklists Hamas,” *Allazeera.Net*, 6 September 2003 at <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/554FAF3A-B267-B9EC-54881BDE0A2E.htm> accessed on 10 December 2003; Ian Black, “EU to Ban Hamas Political Wing,” *The Guardian*, 8 September 2003 at [www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,1037314,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,1037314,00.html) accessed on 10 December 2003. For the inseparability of the Hamas “military” and “political” wings, cf. Matthew Levitt,

the PA uses this cash aid, amounting to 10 million Euros per month, which is not tied to specific humanitarian or development projects.”<sup>101</sup> PA management of EU funds has come under increasing fire in the recent past, as evidence strongly suggests the siphoning off of EU cash donations by official Palestinian parties (which often cannot be distinguished from the political violence movements) for terrorist activities resulting in dozens if not hundreds of deaths.

Shortly after the conclusion of operation “Defensive Shield,” Israeli authorities reportedly turned over a file to the EU Commission on Arafat’s involvement in terrorist activities funded by diverted international donations supplied by the EU and other parties.<sup>102</sup> An investigative article published in the German newspaper “Die Zeit” on 6 June 2002, which accused the EU of irresponsibly supplying money to the PA without instituting any financial safeguards or, for that matter, any viable control mechanisms, brought to the fore the deep divide between the EU perspective and that presented by this article’s authors.<sup>103</sup> It also sparked off a row between EU Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten, and his numerous critics in the European Parliament. By early February 2003, a group of 170 Members of the European Parliament (MEP) demanded an inquiry into Patten’s handling of the EU cash donations to the PA. Aside from the key Israeli accusation raised in its report to the EU that roughly 10% of the EU funding of the PA was being used for illegal purposes, the principal charges of the MEPs were “[t]he use of a part

“ Hamas’s Political Wing: Terror by Other Means,” *PeaceWatch*, No. 440 (6 January 2004), available shortly at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/peacewatch/> received as Email from WINEP mailing list server on 6 January 2004. In contrast with Hamas, the EU has not yet banned the only political violence movement to rival the capabilities of al-Qaida, Hezbollah and all its subsidiaries, e.g. in Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Rubin, “No Change,” *op. cit.*

101 Matthew Levitt, “Accounting and Accountability: Defining Donor Requirements for Palestinian Reform,” *Policy Watch*, No. 638 (18 July 2002) at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/policywatch/policywatch2002/638.htm> accessed on 21 November 2003.

102 Rachel Ehrenfeld and Sarah Zebaida, „Why Does The Commission Fear a PA Probe?,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 January 2003 at [www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/financing/articles/WhyDoesTheCommissionFearPA\\_Probe.htm](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/financing/articles/WhyDoesTheCommissionFearPA_Probe.htm) accessed on 21 November 2003.

103 Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff and Bruno Schirra, “Arafat Bombt, Europa Zahlt,” *Die Zeit*, 6 June 2002 at [www.zeit.de/2002/24/Politik/print\\_200224\\_arafat\\_haupttext.html](http://www.zeit.de/2002/24/Politik/print_200224_arafat_haupttext.html) accessed on 26 June 2003.

of the Palestinian Authority's budget to reward the families of suicide bombers," and, moreover, that "EU funding has wrongly been used to finance school textbooks promoting hatred and inciting martyrdom."<sup>104</sup> The EU's anti-fraud office announced in early February that an investigation would take months; it is still not available at the time of this writing.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, Ilka Schröder MEP, one of the proponents of a commission of inquiry to investigate the uncontrolled disbursement of EU funds to the PA, has complained of obstructionism by Commissioner Patten. She has exposed a conspicuous lack of interest in investigating the allegations of PA misappropriation of EU funding for terrorist activities by the EU Commission (and with the connivance of some members of the European Parliament) with EU taxpayer money. Schröder charges that this policy of the EU Commission is connected to its pursuit of a covert rivalry with the U.S. for influence via a role in the Middle East peace process, in the context of which the EU acts as a PA partisan.<sup>106</sup>

When juxtaposed with a resounding rebuttal by Commissioner Patten, the conclusions and observations made in the "Zeit" article made a glaring contrast. According to the article's authors, Commissioner Patten in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary maintained that the "EU-Commission has no hard evidence, according to which EU funds have been used for the financing of terror or have been abused for any other means."<sup>107</sup> Patten also praised the EU's stringent control mechanisms for the donations to the PA. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) assumes responsibility for the financial flows from the EU to the PA. Karim Naschaschibi, a Jerusalem resident, files verification reports on the money transfers for the IMF. Naschischibi, who according to Patten is responsible for monitoring the flow of EU money on the Palestinian end, is himself

104 Ian Black, "Patten Faces Battle Over EU Funds for Palestinians," *The Guardian*, 5 February 2003 at <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4598731,00.html> accessed on 26 June 2003.

105 "EU Probes Evidence its Aid to Palestinians Funded Terrorism," *World Tribune.com*, 7 February 2003 at [http://216.26.163.62/2003/eu\\_palestinians\\_02\\_07.html](http://216.26.163.62/2003/eu_palestinians_02_07.html) accessed on 26 February 2003.

106 Ilka Schröder, "Theodor Lessing Preis für Aufklärerisches Handeln: Rede von Ilka Schröder," 26 September 2003 at [www.hagalil.com/archiv/2003/09/schroeder-2.htm](http://www.hagalil.com/archiv/2003/09/schroeder-2.htm) accessed on 5 January 2004.

107 Kleine-Brockhoff and Bruno Schirra, *op. cit.*, p. 2. (My translation from the German original in this note and all subsequent quotations from this source).

a Palestinian and a member of the same family, as that of Arafat's finance minister with an identical name. The IMF's man in Jerusalem, Naschischibi was even considered for the job of Arafat's finance minister himself. What certainly aroused the suspicion of the Israelis was the circumstance of Naschischibi's intimacy with Fouad Shoubaki, Arafat's financial advisor. Shoubaki is nobody else than the individual responsible for the purchase of the "Karine-A."<sup>108</sup> Astonishingly, the IMF's own rendition of its task for the PA was that it simply does not have a mandate to audit the PA's budget; all it does is to support the budget's constitution.<sup>109</sup> Should the IMF's version of the story apply, then, as the two German authors of the "Zeit" article conclude, "the Palestinians have controlled themselves – in other words, not at all."<sup>110</sup>

Subsequent to operation "Defensive Shield," an IDF report was published on the Internet in March 2003 that largely corroborates earlier findings in other sources.<sup>111</sup> It shows that the PA engages in a double reporting system for the salary payment of its employees, thereby using only an estimated 55–65% of the allotted sum and creating an unaccounted for surplus of 35–45%, of approximately \$60 million set aside for PA salaries. Furthermore, the IDF report documents how the PA engages in large-scale exchange-rate fraud, thus creating an additional unaccounted for surplus of \$7.7 million per annum. According to the IDF report, the PA regularly deducts 1.5–2% from the salaries of various Palestinian security personnel as Fatah membership fees. "The implication is that the PA paid salaries to hundreds of Fatah personnel who engaged in terrorism... the PA financed dozens of Fatah branches in order to establish a broad infrastructure of field activists who in time became armed local militias. This was a calculated move, which took place many years before the confrontation with Israel."<sup>112</sup>

Appositely, the source of the IDF – PA documents captured during operation "Defensive Shield" – have caused many a reader to

108 Ibid., p. 5.

109 Ibid., p. 5; Ehrenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

110 Ibid., p. 5.

111 Israel Defense Forces, "International Aid to the Palestinian Authority Redirected to Terrorist Elements," TR2–317–02, 5 June 2002 at <http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/financing/pdfs/09.pdf> accessed on 26 June 2003. Rachel Ehrenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

112 Ibid., pp. 2–4.

critically question their authenticity and to question the soundness of Israeli conclusions based on the study of the impounded documentary evidence. The German intelligence service, the “Bundesnachrichtendienst” (BND), has authenticated the documents alongside U.S. intelligence agencies, and reached conclusions compatible with those of the Israeli investigation. And although the second BND verification report designated “39C-04/2/02” states that no “direct evidence” can be found for the financing of terror with EU cash donations, it also states in no uncertain terms “that Arafat does not distinguish between the structure of the PA regime and his Fatah movement.” Significantly, and despite the traditional tension between Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti and Yassir Arafat (Barghouti is an “insider” from the Palestinian territories, while Arafat returned from the “outside” exile in Tunis), we need to remind ourselves of the constitutive character of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades/Tanzim relative to Fatah. Reportedly, the BND therefore concluded that the misappropriation of donor funds could not be excluded.<sup>113</sup> Even an NGO decidedly critical of operation “Defensive Shield,” such as Human Rights Watch, in its report on the subject found that “[t]he al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades appear to have benefited from the routine misuse of PA funds.”<sup>114</sup> In the interim, an investigative endeavor by the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) has established the integral membership of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades in Fatah. According to the BBC’s interview with a Fatah leader in Jenin, “the al-Aqsa group is the military wing of his organization and that Mr Arafat is the overall leader of both the political and military arms.”<sup>115</sup>

At about the same time, a team of U.S. accountants hired by the PA that has been investigating Arafat’s personal financial assets has revealed to CBS’s reputable investigative program *60 Minutes* that “part of the Palestinian leader’s wealth was in a secret portfolio worth close to \$1 billion,” and that “although the money for the portfolio

113 Kleine-Brockhoff and Bruno Schirra, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Ehrenfeld and Zebaida, *op. cit.*

114 Human Rights Watch, “Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians,” October 2002 at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/isrl-pa/> accessed on 3 December 2003. Cf. chapters II and VI of the report entitled “Recommendations” and “Financial and Logistical Report,” respectively. This quote is also rendered in Ehrenfeld and Zebaida, *op. cit.*

115 “Palestinian Authority Funds Go To Militants,” *BBC News*, 7 November 2003 at [http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/3243071.stm](http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3243071.stm) accessed on 5 December 2003.

came from public funds like Palestinian taxes, virtually none of it was used for the Palestinian people.”<sup>116</sup> Adding insult to injury relative to the misappropriation of inadvertent donor funds, *60 Minutes* revealed “Arafat accumulated another \$ 1billion with the help of – of all people – the Israelis. Under the Oslo Accords, it was agreed that Israel would collect sales taxes on goods purchased by Palestinians and transfer those funds to the Palestinian treasury.” But according to Martin Indyk, an advisor on Middle Eastern affairs in the Clinton administration, “that money is transferred to Yasser Arafat to, amongst other places, bank accounts which he maintains off-line in Israel.”<sup>117</sup>

In conclusion, it stands to reason that PA involvement at a senior official level in the matter of recruiting militants, as well as in the areas of arms smuggling and the backdoor financing of terrorism with donor funds discussed above, allows for at least one out of two conclusions. First, dissent, internecine power struggles and covert opposition manifesting as sabotage hopelessly wrack the Palestinian nationalist leadership and its security services, in which case its current capacity to credibly conduct negotiations with the Israeli government must be questioned. As a matter of course, the PA’s utility – absent an alternative – should still remain subject to international scrutiny. Second, and still more pessimistic, the top echelons of Palestinian nationalist organizations around chairman Arafat have no interest in concluding a peace with Israel, but rather aim for a settlement without the Jewish state. In such an event, their repeated assertions of peaceful intention and willingness to find a political solution would then be just so much talk.

In the final analysis, either one of the two alternative perspectives opens up the vista of the long-term involvement of state-supported terrorism and the concomitant instrumentalization of Palestinian militants in PA territories (with or without the PA’s license), and in the Palestinian refugee camps in the contiguous and near Arab states. Finally, the recently burgeoning Jihadist brand of Palestinian rejectionism (e.g. Hamas/Izzeldin al-Kassam Brigades, the Hezbollah-supported Return Brigades and PIJ), may well presage a comeback of Palestinian political violence in the international arena in the guise

116 “Arafat’s Billions,” *CBS News*, 9 November 2003 at [www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/11/07/60minutes/printable582487.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/11/07/60minutes/printable582487.shtml) accessed on 5 December 2003.

117 *Ibid. op. cit.*

of a constituent element within a broader Islamist coalition, such as Usama bin Laden's supra-organizational "World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders" that encompasses even al-Qaida. Should this prospect prove attractive to Palestinian Jihadist groups, and if it is viewed against the track record of fundamentally undemocratic Middle Eastern states as generators of regional instability – even if measured against the yardstick of their current domestic and foreign policy –, both Iran and Syria may be expected to facilitate activities conducive to a disruption of a final Israeli-Palestinian settlement. For the time being, Palestinian militants operating out of the refugee camps in Lebanon, or within the Palestinian territories adjacent to Israel; and the Shi'ite guerrillas of the Beqaa, southern Lebanon and West Beirut all continue to be at the heart of a tragedy: Tied as it is to the objective of Israel's destruction, the support for the Palestinians' and the Lebanese Shi'ites' causes from outside sources comes with strings attached that have become a hopelessly tangled skein.



## 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."<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> 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.”<sup>120</sup> 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.<sup>121</sup> 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.<sup>122</sup> 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...”<sup>123</sup>

## **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](http://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](http://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 Amniat-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.<sup>124</sup> 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.<sup>125</sup> 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

<sup>124</sup> Sick, *op. cit.*, 83.

<sup>125</sup> 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, Hojjatoleslam 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 placement 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.<sup>126</sup>

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."<sup>127</sup> 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."<sup>128</sup>

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-

<sup>126</sup> Sick, *op. cit.*, 90.

<sup>127</sup> 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.

<sup>128</sup> *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.<sup>129</sup> 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."<sup>130</sup>

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."<sup>131</sup> 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."<sup>132</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>133</sup>

Another key actor, Imad Mugniyah is the personified incarnation of the Pasdaran's relationship with Hezbollah, and Iran's Palestinian clients: "Informed U.S. sources say that Mugniyah 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."<sup>134</sup> This link is further corroborated when Mugniyah's role in the "Karine-A" affair is duly considered, for according to Israeli intelligence "Mugniyah was the mastermind of this operation... he made all the preparations."<sup>135</sup> The arms aboard the "Karine-A," we may recall, were destined for the PA. Notably, Imad Mugniyah 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.<sup>136</sup>

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](http://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](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,3-2002023700,00.html) accessed on 29 October 2002. For Mugniyah'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](http://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](http://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.”<sup>137</sup>

## 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.<sup>138</sup>

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.”<sup>139</sup> 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.<sup>140</sup> 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.<sup>141</sup> 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.<sup>142</sup> 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.<sup>143</sup>

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..."<sup>144</sup> 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..."<sup>145</sup>

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](http://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](http://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.”<sup>146</sup> 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.”<sup>147</sup>

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).”<sup>148</sup> 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.”<sup>149</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>150</sup> 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.<sup>151</sup>

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."<sup>152</sup> 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.<sup>153</sup>

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."<sup>154</sup> After an attack near Meggido claimed by the PIJ, Iran's government increased its funding for PIJ by 70%.<sup>155</sup> 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* (Ardsey, 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.<sup>156</sup> 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.<sup>157</sup>

### 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.”<sup>158</sup>

*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 “Sanctorini” 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.”<sup>159</sup>

*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](http://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.<sup>160</sup> 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.<sup>161</sup> 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.<sup>162</sup> The perpetrators were members of the PIJ, of Hezbollah and of Hamas. All of them had undergone training in the Beqaa valley.<sup>163</sup>

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](http://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.<sup>164</sup> 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.<sup>165</sup>

*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.<sup>166</sup> 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.<sup>167</sup> They are later transferred back to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with the intention of establishing "terrorist cells."<sup>168</sup>

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](http://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](http://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.<sup>169</sup> Its Iranian benefactor and Khomeini's ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, originally procured the finances for the support of Hezbollah.<sup>170</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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."<sup>171</sup> "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.<sup>172</sup>

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.<sup>173</sup> 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.<sup>174</sup>

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."<sup>175</sup> 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."<sup>176</sup> 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.<sup>177</sup>

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."<sup>178</sup> 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.<sup>179</sup> Conversely, with respect to Iran, the Israeli-Turkish defense cooperation has "brought Israel to its borders," and thus made the perceived Israeli threat palpable.<sup>180</sup>

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](http://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.<sup>181</sup> 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](http://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.<sup>182</sup> 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."<sup>183</sup> 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

<sup>182</sup> Sick, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>183</sup> Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 49

now, as “the foremost sponsor of terrorism and assassinations worldwide.”<sup>184</sup> 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...”<sup>185</sup> 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.’”<sup>186</sup>

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.”<sup>187</sup> 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.”<sup>188</sup> 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](http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A25463-2003Jul21?language=printer) accessed on 22 July 2003.

there's Iran, and there's Syria.”<sup>189</sup> 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](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](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.<sup>190</sup> 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.<sup>191</sup> 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..."<sup>192</sup>

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](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](http://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."<sup>193</sup> 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.<sup>194</sup>

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.<sup>195</sup> 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.<sup>196</sup>

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.”<sup>197</sup> 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](http://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."<sup>198</sup> 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..."<sup>199</sup> 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.<sup>200</sup>

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.<sup>201</sup> 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.<sup>202</sup> 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."<sup>203</sup>

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," *Brun's 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](http://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."<sup>204</sup> 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..."<sup>205</sup>

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](http://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](http://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."<sup>206</sup>

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

### 3 Syria as a State Supporter of PVMs

Following Syria's altercation with Jordan in the late 1960's, the principal target of Syrian-supported political violence movements was Israel. The rationale for Syria's strategy of indirect, proxy warfare against Israel may be sought in the outcome of the Middle East war in 1967, although Syria's policy of supporting Palestinian militants predates this conflict. After June 1967, "[t]he Ba'athi regime continued to glorify the Palestinian guerillas, whose reputation had been enhanced as a consequence of the regular Arab armies' defeat."<sup>207</sup>

With one avenue of attack closed to the Syrians through the Golan because of Israel's victory in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, and due to its subsequent annexation (1981) resulting in a de facto border (enshrined in the preceding Israeli-Syrian armistice of 1974), Hafez al-Asad had to turn to an alternative. But another opportunity for offensive action had been severely curtailed by the unwritten terms of the "Red Line" Agreement with the U.S. and Israel after the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in 1976, which barred Syrian forces from crossing into southern Lebanon. Thus, first Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and in later years the Shi'ites of the south were instrumentalized by the Syrian regime as pawns in its clandestine war on Israel.

Syria's management of its proxy warfare capability is highly sophisticated, and further suggests the level of control it exerts vis-à-vis its clients is considerable and probably exceeds that of its partner, Iran, by a generous margin. The operationalization of the Palestinian and Lebanese Shi'ite terror weapons only became feasible because of Syria's dominion over Lebanon after 1976.

Syrian occupation of most Lebanese territory, since the early 1970's, had enabled it to dictate to the many terrorist organizations there how and when to operate. The Syrian military presence in Lebanon has also made it possible for Syria to provide organizations under its influence with military and strategic backing; intervene in disputes between organizations; penalize organizations or leaders who have deviated from the standards

207 Rabil, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

set by Syria; and carry out terrorist attacks against Israel, not originating from the Israeli-Syrian border in the Golan Heights.<sup>208</sup>

After 1982, the utility of Fatah and its allies within the PLO as a ready tool of Syrian designs against Israel declined and, following the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in fact became a liability. Syria's momentary, and indubitably politically motivated, aloofness contributed to the PLO's expulsion a year later. In its place, the initially Iranian-inspired and supported Shi'ite Hezbollah assumed the position of *primus inter pares* among those Lebanese political violence movements that were sustained from within the confines of the Iranian-Syrian strategic partnership. Although Hezbollah is usually associated with Iranian patronage, Magnus Ranstorp reminds us that "Syria remained in firm control over Iran's access to Lebanon in terms of numbers and frequency of visits, as the Pasdaran was dependent on being inserted to the Biq'a [i.e. Beqaa Valley] via Syria."<sup>209</sup>

Following a period of initial cooperation between 1982 and 1985, the Iranian-Syrian joint support for Hezbollah entered into a phase of rivalry in the years 1985–1992 over the escalation of the group's activity in southern Lebanon that betrayed Syria's momentary lack of control over its client, and because of the hostage crisis in 1986/1987 that compelled Syria to reign in Hezbollah by force of arms. In Tehran, Syria's fettering of Hezbollah was perceived as too conciliatory toward the West. Conversely, Syria feared a massive Israeli intervention due to provocations by Hezbollah that was incompatible with Syria's long-term objective of consolidating its power in Lebanon without any outside interference. In line with Hezbollah's reorientation toward "Lebanonization," the period between 1992 and 2003 has in equal measure seen the increasing "Syrianization" of Hezbollah. On the one hand, Hezbollah has remained strongly committed to Iran's revolutionary values. On the other hand, "Hezbollah's willingness to relegate virtually complete authority over its military operations to Damascus over the last year [2002] has coincided with an unprecedented degree of political backing for the Syrian occupation."<sup>210</sup>

208 Boaz Ganor, "Syria and Terrorism," *op. cit.*, p. 1.

209 Ranstorp, *Hiz'Ballah in Lebanon*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

210 Gambill and Abdelnour, "Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus," *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Certainly since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifadah in October 2003, Syria has supported the coalescence of its clients' resources, and the expansion of PVM operations from Lebanese staging areas and its disputed border with Israel to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Syria's clientele is without equal among other states listed as supporting political violence movements by the U.S. State Department: "[S]even of the twenty-eight terrorist groups cited in *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000* receive some level of sponsorship and support from Syria... since September 11, no fewer than five Damascus-based organizations... have undertaken operations, from suicide bombings to assassinations, resulting in the deaths of dozens of civilians and an Israeli cabinet minister."<sup>211</sup>

In line with Syria's time-honored practice of shaping its tools of proxy warfare, the Alawite regime in Damascus has in the recent past embarked upon a strategy of engineering cooperation and instigating disagreement among Syria's clients in the manner that best suits its policy objectives with a view to carrying on its conflict with Israel. Between late 2000 and 2003, Syria has consolidated its support for, and incrementally enhanced the capabilities of, the PIJ, Hamas, Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-GC, Hezbollah and, to a lesser extent, the DFLP. For example, Damascus has, with the assistance of Tehran, actively supported the convergence of PIJ and Hamas in the framework of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces, which emerged as a rejectionist reaction to the Oslo Accords.

According to a report issued in October 2001 by Jibril Rajoub, a security chief with the PA, "intensive meetings are being held in Damascus, in which leaders of the Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front and the Hezbollah take part, in an attempt to increase joint activities 'inside,' with financial support from Iran."<sup>212</sup> "Inside" in this context is to mean within the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, whereas "outside" refers to the Palestinian extremists active beyond the Palestinian territories. Concerning Hamas, "Syrian sponsorship has fueled its willingness to kill, by weakening the internal leadership of Hamas vis-à-vis the external leadership, making the group's military cells less responsive to public disaffection with the costs of terror."<sup>213</sup>

211 Levitt, "Syrian Sponsorship of Global Terrorism: The Need for Accountability," p. 3.

212 Levitt, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Islamic Jihad," *op. cit.*, p. 3.

213 Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Hamas," *op. cit.*, p. 1.

In terms of its operational independence, the recent outfitting of the PFLP-GC with tanks by the Syrian army puts it on a par with its sister Palestinian organization, al-Saiqa, which has become largely interoperable with Syrian forces. The PFLP-GC's proximity to the Asad regime also suggests that it acts on Syria's direct orders, for example by ensuring the influx of arms into the Palestinian territories, as evidenced by the Israeli intercepts of the "Calypso-2" and the "Santorini." The return of the PFLP-GC to the center stage of Syrian supported political violence movements after a prolonged period in the doldrums, coupled with its role as Syria's purveyor of arms and its active support for the second Intifadah from Damascus, strongly suggest that the new Syrian government under Bashir al-Asad is intensifying its use of the terror weapon.<sup>214</sup> Currently, the sustained levels of violence maintained along Israel's northern border and within the Gaza Strip and the West Bank largely confirm this conclusion.

A summary review of the uses of political violence movements and terrorism in the military strategy of Syria concludes that its rationale rests on five pillars: First to sap the IDF's resources and undermine the readiness of its preparedness in case of a war between Israel and Syria; second, undermining the Israeli civilian population's morale, especially that of the denizens of northern Israeli towns; third, the destruction of Syria's enemies in its Arab-Palestinian sphere of influence; fourth, the promotion of Syria's long-term objective of uniting Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian homeland in the shape of a "Greater Syria;" and, finally, the sabotage of a comprehensive Israeli-Arab settlement for the benefit of Syria's specific requirements in the context of the Israeli-Syrian negotiation track, as well as enforcing discipline among Arab states prepared to deviate from the path of violent confrontation with Israel.<sup>215</sup> In a nutshell, "[t]he central reason for Syria's support for terrorism is the wide gap between the far-reaching ambitions of the Syrian regime to achieve regional hegemony... and to play a leading role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and

214 Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and the PFLP-GC," *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 5.

215 Ganor, "Syria and Terrorism," p. 2.

the objective limitations and weaknesses of the Syrian state.”<sup>216</sup> Thus, Syria’s preference for the terror weapon in its foreign policy is directly linked to its military inferiority vis-à-vis regional powers opposed to it, in this case Turkey and Israel, and the circumstance that these two rivals also restrict Syria’s territorial ambitions, and may well compromise its interests in disputed areas.

### **3.1 Syrian State Institutions Tasked with Implementing Policy Involving PVMs in Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories**

Syria’s principal font of support for terrorism – from the planning stages to its implementation is what has been referred to as the “Mukhabarat state” – an iconic description of the de facto repressive, praetorian regime prevalent in many Arab countries, not only in Syria. To the extent that it can be portrayed, the Syrian Mukhabarat is an amalgam of closely interlocking intelligence services in a state of centrally directed, internecine contention, and constant jockeying for prevalence among its multiple agencies. Asad senior and junior have for years dexterously played off one service against another in order to cement the presidential power base within the Ba’athi apparatus. But even in this condition of flux, certain structural characteristics are discernible, albeit without any finality.

The three principal services are the General Intelligence Directorate (GID), the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) and the Air Force Intelligence Service (AIS), all of which are nominally subordinate to the Presidential Security Council. The Syrian GID, with its principal instrument of control, the Political Security Directorate (PSD), is tasked with the charge of internal security and hence is responsible for keeping tabs on the Ba’ath party and enforcing conformity in its ranks; it keeps watch over the civilian segment of the Syrian governmental apparatus, and employs wide-ranging networks of informers that are embedded in the populace. This agency also directs both the police forces and the border guards. The GID’s role in the support for terrorist acts is auxiliary, as, for example, when it

<sup>216</sup> Erlich, “Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy,” p.5. N.B. The reference refers to Dr Erlich’s revised paper published by the International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism.

permits the transit of weapons for Hezbollah to pass through Syrian-controlled territory; or, as a more recent example tellingly illustrates, when Syrian border guards abet the passage of busloads full of fighters for Saddam Hussein's resistance, the Fedayeen Saddam, against the Coalition forces, and permit them to pass the Syrian-Iraqi border despite contrary promises made to the U.S.<sup>217</sup>

The AIS is the Syrian intelligence service that has in the past been directly associated with Hafez al-Asad's office. Covert, foreign operations are usually planned and carried out by the AIS. During the Cold War, the AIS was implicated in an attempt to detonate an explosive device aboard an El Al passenger airliner due to take off from London-Heathrow in 1986. Following the severance of diplomatic relations by Britain, the mastermind of this operation, General al-Khuli of the AIS, was elevated to the position of deputy commander of the Syrian Air Force and continued to work with the AIS in his capacity of chairman of the Syrian National Security Council. The Syrian NSC operates under the direct leadership of the presidential office. Further incidents traced back to the AIS are the attack in March 1986 on the West German-Arab Friendship Association in Berlin, and the bombing a month later of a German discotheque – “La Belle” – a venue frequented by U.S. servicemen. The explosive charge for the “La Belle” attack was procured by the Syrian embassy in East Berlin; the perpetrators were trained in a facility run by the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO) in the environs of Damascus.<sup>218</sup>

The principal Syrian institution engaged in the support of political violence movements, however, is the MIS, and even more than any other Syrian agency, its branch in Lebanon is the pivotal cultivator of political violence movements in the Middle East. The MIS is the current manifestation of its progenitor, the post-World War II, French-inspired Deuxième Bureau. Syrian-occupied Lebanon constitutes the most significant staging area for Syria's covert warfare against Israel and Arab rivals in the area: It is largely an MIS fiefdom run by Damascus's local strongmen out of Beirut and the Beqaa. Unlike the other two intelligence services, unconventional warfare operations

217 “Syria's Pivotal Role in Iraqi Resistance Is Glossed Over in Washington,” Special Military Report, *Debka File*, 15 June 2003 at [www.debka.com/article\\_print.php?aid=506](http://www.debka.com/article_print.php?aid=506) accessed on 15 December 2003. Cf. Abdelnour, “Syria's Proxy Forces in Iraq,” *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2.

218 Ganor, “Syria and Terrorism,” *op. cit.*, p. 7.



fall into the MIS's purview, and, yet again, nowhere more so than in Syrian-occupied Lebanon.<sup>219</sup> The recently promoted head of the MIS subsidiary in Lebanon, Major-General Ghazi Kanaan, although not a member of the Asad clan himself, because of his family's long-standing alliance with the ruling house, is an integral part of the Alawite ruling clique. The centrality of Kanaan's role in the suborning of loyalist Lebanese Forces as a precursor to the sponsorship and instrumentalization of political violence movements in the service of Syria's foreign policy, and at the expense of Lebanon's sovereignty, is attested to by Daniel Nassif, who relates that

Kanaan's most significant achievement during the 1980's was his successful effort to lure collaborators within the predominantly Christian (and ostensibly anti-Syrian) Lebanese Forces (LF) militia. This process began in 1985 with the defection to Syria of LF Commander Elie Hobeika (notorious for the 1982 massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila) and culminated with the decision of LF Commander Samir Geagea to collaborate with Damascus in October 1990, when Syrian forces invaded East Beirut and ousted the constitutional government of Lebanon headed by interim Minister Michel Aoun.<sup>220</sup>

An ardent supporter of Bashir al-Asad, Syria's new president since 2000, Kanaan's true power lies beyond his office, in his control over the political establishment in Lebanon, especially in his almost unchallenged power over the Lebanese Security service, the *Surété Generale*. The bloody initiation of Hezbollah's "Syrianization" was another "feat" accomplished by Kanaan, not least when he ordered the summary execution of a score of its members in 1987 for defying him. Only following his promotion in October 2002 was Kanaan replaced by Rustom Ghazaleh, a Sunni officer in the Syrian army.<sup>221</sup>

This was a highly unusual move for the new and untried retainer of Alawi (read: Shi'a) power in Damascus and is illustrative of the many problems, but also suggestive of the potential chances, created by the Syrian succession. At the same time, it certainly points to the continuity of the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, which had already become a structural component of Syrian foreign policy under Asad

219 Rathmell, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

220 Nassif, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

221 Young, "Lords Over Lebanon," *op. cit.*

the elder. For with its sinecures and other rewards, the Lebanese dependency had conferred considerable power unto Hafez al-Asad after 1976, a point he did not fail to impress upon his son, Bashir. However, in the words of Eric Thompson,

[t]he allegiance of Syria's military and the many overlapping intelligence and security agencies, is not necessarily transferable from father to son. The continued occupation of Lebanon gives Bashar a chit to play in the high stakes game of Syrian politics. The ability of Syrian soldiers – especially the officer corps – to make money via legal or illicit activities in Lebanon is a perk that keeps this critical constituency supportive of the regime. Additionally, the ability of the Syrian forces to carry on the Arab struggle against Israel on the political and military battlefields of Lebanon has allowed the Syrian regime to gain maximum political advantage with minimal strategic risk.<sup>222</sup>

Thus, in many ways, Syrian control over Lebanon constitutes the linchpin of the younger Asad's power structure, but it also imposes upon the new regime the retention of its predecessor's commitment to political violence movements as an integral component of its foreign policy. Realistically, and absent a decisive intervention by the U.S. and its regional allies, Syrian support for organizations involved in, and intending to commit, terrorist acts will remain a likely prospect for years to come.

### **3.2 Syrian PVM Clients: Who's Who?**

What certainly distinguishes Syria from other state supporters of political violence movements is the diversity of its clients: Marxist, Lebanese and Palestinian Shi'ite and Sunni Islamist and nationalist forces freely mingle in Damascus, with these organizations' press offices and training facilities located in its agglomeration. If a truncated southern Lebanon has indeed become "Hizballahland" in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal, then Syria's capital has been turned into a veritable Disneyland of terrorism. Syria's new ruler, Bashir al-Asad, not unlike his father, plays host and sponsor to at least seven active political violence movements.

Although U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage has dubbed Hezbollah "the 'A-team' of terrorists," the most prominent

<sup>222</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, 93.

organizations among the Syrian coterie of proxy warfare groups are certainly both the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah, each in their respective territorial context.<sup>223</sup> There is a deep-seated irony to Syria's staunch, almost passionate support for Hamas, for the Syrian domestic branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – Hamas' parent organization, was brutally suppressed by Asad the elder in February 1982. In the course of Asad's campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood in the town of Hama, civilians in the thousands were murdered in cold blood.<sup>224</sup> While Hezbollah has had long-standing ties with the Syrian regime in the context of the Syrian-Iranian strategic partnership in Lebanon, Hamas is a relative newcomer. The elder Asad invited Hamas to join the "Damascus-based rejectionist coalition" only following the Oslo Accords.<sup>225</sup> According to Gary Gambill, Syria's sponsorship since the early 1990s has affected Hamas to the effect that the organization's hawkish foreign leadership, that is, its Damascus headquarters, has been empowered at the expense of the "inside" leadership in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, that has proven more sensitive to opportunities for accommodation with the PA and with Israel.<sup>226</sup>

Syria's relationship with Hezbollah has undergone several phases. Even so, what is clear is that Syria realized the potential of Hezbollah from an early date. In the aftermath of the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Hezbollah's emergence as the Islamic resistance to Israeli occupation provided both Syria and Iran with the perfect pretext to project their own foreign policy interests to southern Lebanon, and to manifest these interests in the shape of full-fledged support for Hezbollah. "Although the escalatory Hizb'allah attacks on Israel suited the strategic designs of both Syria and Iran, a few signs of tension emerged in the Iranian-Syrian relationship," Magnus Ranstorp tells us.<sup>227</sup> The Iranian-Syrian rivalry, which was to leave its imprint on the years between 1985 and 1992, took on the shape of an Iranian challenge to Syrian suzerainty in occupied Lebanon. On the ground, the temporary deterioration of the Iranian-Syrian relationship found ample expression in the feud between the Shi'ite Amal militia, which

223 Luft, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

224 Cf. Friedman, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–105.

225 Gambill, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Hamas," *op. cit.*, p. 4.

226 *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*,

227 Ranstorp, "Hizb'allah in Lebanon," *op. cit.*, p. 118.

acted as Syria's proxy force, and Hezbollah, Iran's principal ally in Lebanon. In their struggle over Hezbollah, Syria and Iran had certainly come to the end of their honeymoon.

Hezbollah's "Lebanonization" process in the 1990s, that is, Hezbollah's political will to engage with the realities of a multi-confessional state and its participation in this state's political system, was largely due to Syria's brutal assertion of its military brawns in the later 1980s. With control over the supply routes of the Pasdaran in the Beqaa, which, in turn, represented the mainstay of Iranian power in Lebanon, Syria had the upper hand. As a consequence, Hezbollah had undergone "Syrianization" at the expense of Iran's influence over the Shi'ite militants.<sup>228</sup> Currently, Hezbollah's cardinal utility to Syria rests in the fact that it has filled the power vacuum left behind in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in June 2000; and also in the sustained pressure Hezbollah exerts on Israeli defensive positions along its northern borders, especially in the area of the Sheba Farms disputed by both Lebanon and Syria. In specialist circles, the threat posed by Hezbollah "with its sophisticated armaments, territorial base [in Lebanon], state sponsorship by Syria and Iran, and financial resources" supersedes even the risks represented by al-Qaida.<sup>229</sup>

The PFLP-GC and the PIJ make an unlikely couple, and, indeed, their only common denominator, other than Syria's patronage, is that in the framework of Syria's pecking order they are held to rank below Hezbollah and Hamas in terms of their relative power.<sup>230</sup> In terms of manpower, the PFLP's membership is estimated at anything from 500 to 1,000 militants. The PFLP-GC split first from the second largest Palestinian militant group, George Habash's PFLP, in 1968, and then became estranged from Arafat's Fatah in 1983, after the PLO chairman had proposed to negotiate with Israel. Subsequent to the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon by Israeli and Christian Maronite forces, also in 1983, the PFLP-GC "operated less as a Syrian-backed Palestinian group than as a Palestinian auxiliary of Syrian military

228 Gambill and Abdelnour, "Hezbollah Between Tehran and Damascus," *op. cit.*, p. 8.

229 "Meanwhile Back in Damascus," *Jerusalem Post*, 14 July 2003 at [www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Jpost/A/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1058153636544](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=Jpost/A/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1058153636544) accessed on 15 July 2003.

230 This also appears to be true vis-à-vis Hamas and the PLO's Fatah movement in the territories, where the PIJ has become a minority faction since 1987. Hatima, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

intelligence.”<sup>231</sup> Ahmed Jibril’s PFLP-GC for all intents and purposes constitutes an integral part of Syria’s armed forces. With practically no capacity for independent action, it is reasonable to assume that the PFLP-GC’s operations are carried out at the command of the Syrian leadership. As the proxy war against Israel in southern Lebanon after the IDF’s withdrawal has been in the hands of Hezbollah, a group that has maintained some freedom for maneuver despite Syrian attempts at achieving absolute control over it, Bashir al-Asad has been actively grooming Jibril’s organization as a backup. In the context of the al-Aqsa Intifadah, the PFLP-GC has carried out multiple arms smuggling missions at the behest of its Syrian masters and on behalf of Palestinian political violence movements in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, notably aboard the “Santorini.” Moreover, the PFLP-GC has also become a component of the well-oiled Iranian-Syrian cooperative framework, in that it has reportedly trained members of Palestinian rejectionist groups (notably the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade and the PIJ) and been rewarded for its trouble by the Islamic Republic, while the Syrians provided for the logistics of the joint-venture.<sup>232</sup>

Besides the Islamic governments of Iran and Sudan, Syria is the principal supporter of the PIJ. Following the expulsion of the PIJ’s leadership from the Palestinian territories in 1988, the movement’s base of operations moved to Lebanon and Syria.<sup>233</sup> The former head of the PIJ, Dr Fathi Shiqaqi, allegedly assassinated by Israeli agents in 1995, resided in Damascus. Dr Ramadan Shalah, Shiqaqi’s successor, also has settled in the Syrian capital and directs the PIJ’s operations from his Damascus office. Moreover, the PIJ “shares a training base with Hizballah in the Syrian-controlled northern Bekaa Valley of Lebanon.”<sup>234</sup> Although the PIJ follows an Islamist ideology, in the Damascus context, its ties with the PFLP-GC, an organization with decidedly nationalist-socialist credentials, are cordial, whereas its relation with its fellow rejectionist-religious political violence movement Hamas have been marred by considerable rivalry. Under the aegis of the Syrians, and under Iranian duress, the PIJ joined Hamas in a rejectionist coalition called the Alliance of Palestinian Forces

231 Gambill, “Sponsoring Terror: Syria and PFLP-GC,” p. 3.

232 Levitt, *Targeting Terror*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

233 Hatima, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

234 Alexander, *op. cit.*, 34.

(APF) after the signing of the Oslo accords.<sup>235</sup> The Iranian-Syrian division of labor with respect to the PIJ is fairly banal: Iran provides the funds and Syria the logistical support. The similarity with Hezbollah's case is striking indeed, for as with Hezbollah, Syria capitalizes upon its power of granting or denying access to Iranian resources intended for the PIJ.

A few smaller, nationalist and nationalist-socialist Palestinian splinter-groups that seceded from the PLO, such as George Habash's PFLP, Naif Hawatmeh's Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) and a renegade Fatah faction under Abu Mussa all have found refuge in Damascus, and to a greater or lesser extent are all on the Syrian government's payroll.<sup>236</sup> In line with the logic of the Asad clan's regional alignment, Syria is also known to have a long history of supporting the PKK and its successor organization, KADEK, in their struggle against the Turkish government.

A more recent development in Syria's support for political violence movements is its sponsorship of the ruler of Ain al-Hilweh, Lieutenant-Colonel Mounir al-Muqdash. Syria has traditionally worked to undermine Arafat and his Fatah faction by supporting secessionist splinter groups: This modus operandi certainly applies to the al-Muqdash Fatah faction, which has become the enforcer of the Iranian-Syrian agenda among Lebanon's Palestinian militants. Al-Muqdash has proven most useful in a number of endeavors, but his greatest utility to his Syrian patrons has been in the area of recruiting militants for the Palestinian and Iraqi theaters of war.<sup>237</sup> Crowning the diversity of clients under Syrian patronage, al-Muqdash's faction is credited with being a point of contact for Usama bin Laden's al-Qaida network, of having trained al-Qaida personnel in Ain al-Hil-

235 Levitt, "Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Islamic Jihad," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

236 Yonah Alexander, *Middle East Terrorism. Selected Group Profiles* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 2003), pp. 21, 91–92; Erlich, "Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy," *op. cit.*, p. 7; Ganor, "Syria and Terrorism," pp. 9–13.

237 "Syria's Pivotal Role in Iraqi Resistance Is Glossed Over in Washington," *op. cit.* Cf. Abdelnour, "Syria's Proxy Forces in Iraq," *op. cit.*, pp. 1–2. Cf. Abdelnour, "Syria's Proxy Forces in Iraq," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

weh – the Palestinian refugee camp it controls – while it is also suspected of having allowed Usbat al-Ansar, a Sunni Islamist group close to al-Qaida, to flourish under its wings.<sup>238</sup>

### 3.3 The Nature and Extent of Syrian Support for PVMs

Not unlike the Iranian case, the facilitation of illicit arms transfers to Shi'ite extremists in Lebanon and the Palestinian rejectionist groups active in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as shown in the case of the "Santorini" in May 2001, is not the only avenue of Syrian support for political violence movements. Syria's long history and its continued and unabated backing of organizations involved in terrorist acts largely accounts for being listed as a terrorist state sponsor by the U.S. State Department. "Syria," Robert Rabil tells us "has been on this list since its creation [in 1979], and thus has stopped receiving any type of assistance from the US."<sup>239</sup>

*Weapons.* The composition of the arms shipment intercepted aboard the "Santorini" may here serve as an indication for the quality and quantity of three prior attempts to land arms on the Gaza and Sinai coast, of which two were successful and one abortive due to the early appearance of a routine Israeli naval patrol.<sup>240</sup> The purveyor of arms and its taskmaster on the fourth run of the "Santorini" can clearly be identified as the PFLP-GC and, hence, the Syrian regime. As mentioned earlier, the PFLP-GC does not act autonomously, or without license from Damascus. Apparently, the PFLP-GC had been responsible for the first and last voyage of the smuggling yacht, while Hezbollah at the behest of Syria's potentates, took care of the second and third attempts.<sup>241</sup> Concerning the Syrian armament of political violence movements in Lebanon, Gal Luft suggests that in exchange for services rendered by Hezbollah, such as weapons smuggling,

238 Gambill, "Dossier: Mounir al-Maqdah," *op. cit.*, p. 3; Gary Gambill and Bassam Endrawos, "Bin Laden's Network in Lebanon," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 9. (September 2001), p. 5 at [www.meib.org/articles/0109\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0109_11.htm) accessed on 11 June 2003. Cf. Yoni Fighel and Yael Shahar, "The Al-Qaida-Hizballah Connection," International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 26 February 2002 at [www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=425](http://www.ict.org.il/articles/articleDet.cfm?articleid=425) accessed on 25 March 2003.

239 Robert Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US in the US-Israeli-Syrian Relationship," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. No. 3 (Summer 2001), pp. 415–438, p. 416.

240 "Ahmed Jibril Vows Further Arms Shipments to Palestinians," *op. cit.*

241 Ginsburg, *op. cit.*

drug trafficking and money laundering, the group receives “weapons directly from the Syrian arsenal.”<sup>242</sup>

*Training and Logistics.* According to an assessment made by Reuven Erlich, “[h]eadquarters, training camps, installations, and logistic, political and propaganda offices of most of these terrorist organizations [i.e. PIJ, PFLP-GC, Hamas, etc.] are located in Syria.”<sup>243</sup> In a testimony given before the House Committee on International Relations of the U.S. House of Representatives, Damascus has been portrayed as the logistics center of several political violence movements from whence “the groups and leaders incite, recruit, train, coordinate, and direct terrorism.”<sup>244</sup> In the time since the attacks of 11 September 2001, five political violence movements have planned and executed operations from their base in Damascus.<sup>245</sup> In addition to its base in Damascus, the PFLP-GC alone allegedly maintains no less than fifteen different facilities in Syrian-occupied Lebanon. Furthermore, Syria has also shown considerable talent in the spotting and coordinating of synergies among its clients, as evidenced by the use of the PFLP-GC to train members of several Palestinian rejectionist groups in PFLP-GC facilities in the Damascus environs.<sup>246</sup> Syria therefore stands accused of having provided a significant number of organizations involved in terrorist acts with a base of operations and logistical resources. Conversely, the extent of the Syrian clients’ dependence on their patron is aptly illustrated by Syria’s ability to deny resources, for example,

whenever Hizb’allah has seriously challenged Syrian authority, the Syrian regime has moved to exercise control over the activity of the Hizb’allah through a blockade of the transfer of Iranian Pasdaran in the Biq’a [Beqaa] area and the control of movement of the Hizb’allah in the Biq’a and Beirut areas.<sup>247</sup>

242 Luft, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

243 Erlich, “Terrorism as a Preferred Instrument of Syrian Policy,” *op. cit.*, p. 7.

244 Levitt, “Syrian Sponsorship of Global Terrorism: The Need for Accountability,” *op. cit.*, p. 2.

245 *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3.

246 Matthew Levitt, “Terror From Damascus, Part 1: The Palestinian Terrorist Presence in Syria,” *Peacewatch*, No. 420, 7 May 2003 at [www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2003/420.htm](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/watch/Peacewatch/peacewatch2003/420.htm) accessed on 6 June 2003.

247 Ranstorp, *Hizb’allah in Lebanon*, *op. cit.*, p. 132.



Despite angry denials from Damascus, and in spite of the application of considerable pressure by the U.S. throughout 2003, the Syrians continue to groom Palestinian extremist groups as a ready tool in the service of their foreign political designs against regional rivals.<sup>248</sup>

*Recruiting and Funding.* Syria's involvement in the recruiting of militants is as opaque, as it is deniable. Because of the protracted Syrian occupation in Lebanon with its pronounced anti-Western tenor, this multi-confessional state comprised of minority religious groups provides Syria's clients with an optimum reservoir of resentment against U.S. and Israeli interests in the Middle East. A good example of Syria's policy of circuitous involvement in the recruitment drive of its proxies is the activities of the master of Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp in Lebanon, and erstwhile Fatah officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Mounir al-Muqdah. "Israeli security forces discovered that some Hamas and Islamic Jihad suicide bombers were being recruited from Muqdah's militia."<sup>249</sup> Muqdah appears to be behind the embodiment of two new Palestinian rejectionist groups affiliated with, but not necessarily subject to, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades: the Return Brigades and al-Nathir (the Harbinger). According to the Palestinian newspaper "Assennara," Muqdah claimed that he was responsible for the recruitment of hundreds of Palestinians in Ain al-Hilweh, and for sending them into Iraq to join the struggle against the Western Coalition forces deployed there. Syria is actively assisting the endeavor. Reportedly, Damascus has become the nexus of anti-Western "resistance-tourism" in the Arab world, currently directed against the U.S.-led Coalition forces in Iraq. But domestic potential is tapped, too, by the Alawite regime, for "at least 1,000 Palestinians from the Yarmouk refugee camp outside of Damascus volunteered to fight in Iraq."<sup>250</sup>

As opposed to Iran and Saudi Arabia, Syria is not known for its financial largesse vis-à-vis its proxies in terms of straightforward cash donations. Syrian financial assistance usually comes with multiple strings attached. Either this is the case, because the political violence

248 Dexter Filkins, " Hamas Going Strong in Syria, Some Say," *International Herald Tribune*, 14 July 2003, p. 3; "Syria and Iran Deny That They Harbor Terrorists," *International Herald Tribune*, 23 July 2003, p. 5; Brian Knowlton, "Syria Still Helping Terrorists, U.S. Official Says," *International Herald Tribune*, 17 September 2003, p. 3.

249 Gambill, "Dossier: Mounir al-Maqdah," *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

250 Abdelnour, "Syria's Proxy Forces in Iraq," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

movement in question is virtually integrated into the Syrian army establishment (e.g. al Saiqa, the PFLP-GC “mechanized brigade” and certain cells of Hezbollah in Lebanon that are also supplied out of the Syrian armory), or because the material support provided by Syrian sources comes in the shape of arms, facilities, or logistics. As suggested by Gal Luft, in the context of the Iranian-Syrian strategic partnership’s division of labor, the supply of finances is not really the preserve of Syria. In practice, this is evidenced by Hezbollah, which receives most of its funding from Iran.<sup>251</sup> In the case of Hamas, for example, “the Assad regime’s most significant contribution,” is “the virtually unrestricted access it [Hamas] was granted to Syrian-occupied Lebanon.”<sup>252</sup> In that sense, it is probably more appropriate to stress the role of Saudi Arabia in having supported “two particular policies that have a direct bearing on terrorism: the occupation of Lebanon and the hosting of terror groups in Damascus.”<sup>253</sup>

### 3.4 The Long-Term Strategic Objectives of Syrian Support for PVMs

The likely perpetuation of Alawite preponderance in the Syrian political structure, either in the current shape of the Asad-clan’s succession, or by the entrenchment of an Alawite oligarchy around a weakened presidential office, suggests a future retention of proxy warfare as a ready tool of Syrian foreign policy. And as Bashir al-Asad’s hold on power heavily depends on Syria’s continued occupation of Lebanon as a reservoir of perks for the Syrian armed forces, and an augmentation of the all but exhausted Syrian economy, the critical question is that of whether the Syrian occupation of Lebanon can be maintained in the face of mounting pressure in the aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal in June 2000. Absent a dramatic development in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations track, the response to this question may well be “yes.”<sup>254</sup> The further consolidation of Syrian power in, and the retention of, Lebanon as a “qutr,” or province of an Arab land that, at least as seen from Damascus’ perspective, is ideally congruent with the

251 Luft, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

252 Gambill, “Sponsoring Terrorism: Syria and Hamas,” *op. cit.*, p. 5.

253 Sohail, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

254 Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

conception of a Greater Syria, therefore constitute twin priorities on Syria's foreign political agenda.<sup>255</sup>

Syria's unabated investment in, and maintenance and control of, the terror infrastructure in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps, and the Shi'ite strongholds in the Beqaa, West Beirut and southern Lebanon further suggests that Bashir al-Asad considers the support for political violence movements a critical means to maintain Syria's grip on Lebanon. The deployment of Lebanon's terror infrastructure serves Bashir al-Asad both to stabilize his rule in Damascus, and as a base of operation and as a staging area from which his proxies can continue to conduct Syria's underhand low-intensity conflict campaign against Israel and other antagonistic actors in the region. This dual utility of Lebanon to Syria's ruling elite also contains a reciprocal element, in that the use of political violence movements allow Bashir al-Asad to maintain the pressure on Israel concerning the annexation of the Golan Heights, which in turn confers credibility on Asad's regime in the eyes of his supporters. "Peace with Israel will undoubtedly put Syrian interests in Lebanon at risk and thus may very well disrupt the stability of the Ba'athi regime. In the event of a peace treaty, Syria will have no reason to keep its military in Lebanon."<sup>256</sup>

Peace with Israel could well prove catastrophic for Syria's president, and for the governing Alawite elite, too. Indeed, Syria's continued support for political violence movements active in, and operating out of, Lebanon will almost certainly preclude an Israeli-Syrian settlement. Hence, Syria cannot in good sense afford to discard its terror weapon for the sake of territorial gains in the Golan and peace with Israel. Additionally, Bashir al-Asad's options for a settlement have been fundamentally restricted by his father's historic pledge to link any settlement with Israel to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli treaty. Following the "defection" of Egypt and Jordan, both of which have signed peace treaties with Israel in 1977/1978 and 1994 respectively, the Syrian position has become more pragmatic by defining the unconditional return of the Golan Heights as the sine qua non of any kind of bilateral agreement with the Jewish state. Any deviation from this position would compromise Syria's credibility in the

255 Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

256 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

Arab world.<sup>257</sup> If the survival of Asad's regime is tied to the lack of a bilateral Israeli-Syrian, or even that of a comprehensive regional settlement, then the critically important role of political violence movements in the maintenance of the status quo of low-intensity conflict and cross-border tit-for-tat attacks will ensure the continuance of Syria's support for Hezbollah, the PIJ, Hamas, the PFLP-GC and all its other proxies.

The Israeli perception of Syria's position on support for its clients – especially Hezbollah – by and large substantiates this picture. In an article entitled “The Calculus of Violence in Lebanon,” Professor Efraim Inbar, one of Israel's foremost pundits on matters strategic not so long ago concurred with the IDF's assessment

that Hizbullah will not be satisfied with Israel returning to the international border [with Lebanon], but will continue to harass Israeli targets south of it. Hizbullah is not entirely independent; and it is Syria, which controls Lebanon, that allows this radical Islamic organization to bleed Israel for its own reasons.<sup>258</sup>

In the interim, Inbar's assessment has proven accurate in that the eruption of Hezbollah's violence, and by extension, that of Palestinian rejectionist groups on the Syrian payroll, has been closely tied to the progress, or rather lack of it, in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations track. The Syrian position on its unabashed support for anti-Israeli groups further corroborates this impression. Syria's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Buthaina Shabaan, was quoted as saying “[i]t is not possible for Syria to consider the Palestinian struggle for freedom, independence and ending Israeli occupation' of Arab territories as terrorism...”<sup>259</sup>

Syria's long-term strategic objectives in its support for political violence movements may also be gleaned from the Turkish example. With respect to Turkey, Syria's regime is essentially facing an extension of its fundamental problem in the Israeli context – that it is militarily hamstrung by the declining condition in which it finds its forces more than a decade after Syria's principal supplier of military hardware, the Soviet Union, has collapsed. Despite an abundance of

257 Henry Siegman, “Being Hafez al-Assad. Syria's Chilly But Consistent Peace Strategy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (May/June), pp. 2–7, pp. 2–5.

258 Inbar, “The Calculus of Violence in Lebanon,” *op. cit.*, p. 1.

259 “Syria and Iran Deny That They Harbor Terrorists,” *op. cit.*

grating disputes with Turkey, Syria is not in a position to present a determined stance on these contentious issues by exerting credible military pressure against Ankara. Recourse to the terror weapon has ultimately not paid off either, as the Turko-Syrian showdown over Syria's support for PKK in 1998 demonstrated. Turkey is known for its tough stance on Syria's support for political violence movements and has even accused Israel of "appeasement."<sup>260</sup> This does not signify, however, that Syria will not continue to use proxies in its multiple disputes, involving water resources and historical territorial claims, with its regional rivals.

For on the regional level, Syria, not unlike Iran, finds itself threatened by the prospect of a federated Israeli-Turkish bloc. In the long vista of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Turko-Israeli defense relationship is of relatively recent origin, and its long-term effects on Syria's support for its Lebanese and Palestinian clients is therefore difficult to gauge. What can be said at this point is that the Middle East has witnessed a loose drawing together of coalitions, which, in turn suggests, that bilateral tensions may well be translated to a supranational level in the near future:

...the [Turko-Israeli] alliance is an encirclement of Syria and a challenge to Damascus which Syria is quick to realize... In response to the Turkish-Israeli axis, there seems to be a rapprochement between Syria and Iran. Although the Iranian government denies that a Syrian-Iranian axis is forming in response to the Turkish-Israeli military pacts, it may very well have been triggered by the Turkish-Israeli axis.<sup>261</sup>

The increasing polarization of these two blocks, exacerbated by the ties each one entertains with extra-regional allies, whose relationships are also marked by deep-seated antagonisms (i.e. India and Pakistan), contribute to the stabilization of instability in the region.<sup>262</sup>

In such a climate, the continued use, if not augmentation, of the Syrian terror-weapon in the service of cementing Bashir al-Asad's power at home by keeping Lebanon in the Syrian fold, while still

260 Robert Fisk, "Jerusalem Draws in the Turks to Spy on Arab Foes," originally published in the *Independent*, c. January/February 1999 at [www.middleeast.org/archives/1999\\_02\\_24.htm](http://www.middleeast.org/archives/1999_02_24.htm) accessed on 23 June 2003.

261 Bac, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

262 Ilan Berman, "Israel, India, and Turkey: Triple Entente?" *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Fall 2002), p. 3. at [www.meforum.org/pf.php?id=504](http://www.meforum.org/pf.php?id=504) accessed on 23 June 2003.

striking at Israel through its Lebanese and Palestinian proxies, and possibly supporting Kurdish insurgents in Anatolia and Iraq, is a foregone conclusion. As long as Syria is not compelled to forgo the terror-weapon, for example, by the credible threat of an imminent invasion by the Coalition forces in the Middle East (and in accordance with the Turkish precedent of 1998), its leadership will not desist from continuing its support for political violence movements. In this vein, an editorial in the *Jerusalem Post* recently argued “if past performance is any indicator of future behaviour, Syrian President Bashir al-Assad has shown that he can be counted on not to believe the US is serious and not adhere to Washington’s demands.”<sup>263</sup> For against the backdrop of the Middle Eastern military balance’s stark realities, and in accordance with the chilling logic of the Syrian praetorian state, the calibrated use of the terror-weapon as a component of its carrot-and-stick diplomacy constitutes Syria’s only promising means of, in the best case, realizing its regional political designs by increments. This creeping policy may then conceivably lead to a victory by sheer attrition, or, alternatively and more likely, by maintaining the post-1976 status quo that holds the promise of future change to Syria’s advantage in the context of bilateral treaties: the maintenance of Lebanon as a Syrian colony, and Israeli and Turkish concessions on territorial and resource issues, all of which will ensconce Bashir in Syria’s leadership position.

### **3.5 U.S. Policy on Syria’s Support for PVMs**

The stage of the U.S.’ current policy on Syria was set in 1979, when Syria became what Matthew Levitt has ironically referred to as a “charter member of the State Department’s state sponsors of terrorism list.”<sup>264</sup> Even before that date, Syria fell under the “International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act” (1976); and was also included in the “Export Administration Act” (1979). These two legal instruments enacted the termination of foreign aid to state supporters of political violence movements deemed “terrorist,” and restricted technology transfer to such entities by subjecting the permission to export to Congressional scrutiny.<sup>265</sup> However, when jux-

263 “Meanwhile, Back in Damascus,” *op. cit.*

264 Levitt, *Targeting Terror*, p. 48.

265 Rabil, *Embattled Neighbours*, *op. cit.*, pp. 85–86.

taped with the exercise of Washington's conduct vis-à-vis Damascus, the U.S. State Department's continued classification of Syria as a "state sponsor of terrorism" begs the question of why successive U.S. administrations since the late 1970s have not taken a tougher line toward first Hafez al-Asad's regime, and more recently, toward Bashar al-Asad's new government. While U.S. policy on Iran's support for political violence movements is relatively clear-cut, the case of America's approach toward Syria on the diplomatic stage is more ambivalent.

The principal reason for U.S. equivocality must be sought in the divergent positions on Syria's conduct by U.S. state institutions. "Upon analysis it becomes clear that while American administrations have been closer to the Syrian position regarding resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict (thereby found tacitly biased toward Syria), Congress has always greatly supported Israel."<sup>266</sup> Despite having been the victim of terrorist attacks in 1983 and thereafter in the Levant, the lack of a clear U.S. policy on Syria is even more pronounced with respect to Lebanon and the illegal Syrian occupation thereof after 1976. An acerbic critic of both Syria's regime and U.S. policy on Syria, Daniel Pipes in the later 1980s argued that the U.S. had allowed itself to be duped by the Syrians in the context of the serial abductions taking place in Lebanon after 1983:

First, the Syrian government engages in some outrageous act, usually involving terrorism, against Americans. Second, the United States government indicates strong displeasure, or even takes action against Damascus. Third – and this is the key – [Hafez al-] Asad arranges the release of captive Americans, or makes publicized gestures to this end. Fourth, American public opinion is diverted and Washington scraps plans to retaliate against Syria.<sup>267</sup>

Gary Gambill has gone beyond Pipes' critique of U.S. foreign policy on Syria, suggesting that "while US officials have long paid lip service to the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty, two successive administrations have found it politically expedient for one reason or another

266 Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US in the US-Israeli-Syrian Relationship," *op. cit.*, p. 415.

267 Daniel Pipes, "Assad's Cunning Game," *Washington Post*, 4 November 1986 at [www.danielpipes.org/pf.php?id=172](http://www.danielpipes.org/pf.php?id=172) accessed on 26 August 2003.

to tacitly support Syrian authority over the country.”<sup>268</sup> And, indeed, when the interim president of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, installed by the last elected head of state, launched an offensive to defend the country’s sovereignty against an aggressive Syrian attempt to assert absolute control, the first (G.H.W.) Bush administration undermined the final concerted Lebanese effort to escape Syrian hegemony. After all, Syria had agreed, albeit for its own reasons, to join the U.S.-led Coalition against Iraq during the Second Gulf War (1990–1991), and therefore managed to bask in the good graces of the first Bush administration. The Republicans’ flirt with the Coalition’s Arab allies during the Second Gulf War at the cost of compelling Israeli inactivity during that conflict had disgruntled pro-Israeli lobbies in Washington. As a consequence, they pledged their allegiance to the Democratic candidate, William Clinton.<sup>269</sup>

Bent on bringing about a comprehensive settlement for the Middle East, the Clinton administration focused on the Israeli-Syrian track, especially on the principal bone of contention – the return of the Golan Heights to Syria – and conveniently abandoned its pre-election championing of a free Lebanon. With the U.S. emphasis on the Israeli-Syrian track, there was no need to compel a withdrawal of Syrian troops that occupied Lebanon in violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 520 since 17 September 1982, and effectively since the Syrian invasion of 1976; nor could the political will be found in order to secure the reinstatement of Lebanese sovereignty by diplomatic means.<sup>270</sup> In contrast to Saddam Hussein’s regime in the historical context of the Gulf region during the Cold War, and in its role as a layer in the containment of Iran before the Third Gulf War was fought in early 2003, the Asad dynasty has never offered the U.S. any palpable benefits or utility that would justify U.S. reticence toward Syria’s sustained involvement in terrorist acts. Arguably, the U.S. position on Syria before 2000 makes very little sense: It failed in its repeated attempts to prod Syria into abandoning its support for political violence movements, while Syria’s occupation never did – at

268 Gary C. Gambill, “US Mideast Policy and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (March 2001), p. 1 at [www.meib.org/articles/0103\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0103_11.htm) accessed on 9 July 2003.

269 Rabil, “The Ineffective Role of the US in the US-Israeli-Syrian Relationship,” *op. cit.*, p. 426.

270 Gambill, “US Mideast Policy and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon,” *op. cit.*, pp. 2–4.



least not officially – coincide with the U.S. vision for a peace in the Middle East. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite has been the case since 1979.

The in the interim almost characteristic schizophrenia of U.S. policy on Syria only became marginally more consistent after the accession to power of the second Bush administration in 2000, and the gradual emergence of its forward strategy with respect to the Middle East and the Gulf region. Nevertheless, the habitual tension between U.S. state institutions has remained, although it has been toned down considerably. The current U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, despite all his rhetoric to the contrary, appears to tread in the footsteps of his predecessor, James Baker, in that he prefers a diplomatic solution to a more forceful approach to the Syrian issue.<sup>271</sup> Powell's outlook on the Middle East, however, does not represent the majority consensus in the second Bush administration, which is strongly influenced by the neo-conservative agenda that is as intrinsically inimical to a continuation of the Alawite regime, as it is hostile to Iran's theocratic oligarchy. Moreover, the new administration does not accord the Israeli-Syrian track the priority status it was given by its predecessor: The current emphasis is on the remodelling of the Middle East in the face of the Islamist threat, in line with the "Axis of Evil" paradigm, and in the larger context of the "War on Terror." Accordingly, Bashir al-Asad has felt the full scrutiny of the U.S. government of late, and even more intensely since the eve of the Third Gulf War that has transported the forces of the Coalition to his very doorstep.

The position of the incumbent U.S. Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Ambassador Cofer Black, is illustrative of immediate U.S. concerns, as they relate to Syria, and suggests a more pronounced criticism of Syria from the U.S. vantage on the terrorism issue:

The terrorist threat posed by Syria can best be understood by addressing three areas: border security, which is directly related to the security of our forces in Iraq; Syrian government support for Palestinian rejection-

271 U.S. Department of State/Secretary Colin L. Powell, "Interview on ABC's This Week With George Stephanopoulos," 4 May 2003 at [www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/20164.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2003/20164.htm) accessed on 3 September 2003. For Powell's position cf. Zvi Bar'el, "Decyphering the Syrians," *Ha'aretz*, 7 September 2003 at [www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=316000](http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=316000) accessed on 7 September 2003.

ist groups; and Syrian support for Lebanese Hizbollah... We... remain concerned about the possibility of anti-coalition activity being organized inside Syrian territory... Syrian tolerance of Palestinian rejectionist groups' offices in their country shows a lack of commitment to support reasonable efforts toward a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Palestinians... Syrian support for Hizbollah continues to be a major impediment towards progress in our counterterrorism efforts.<sup>272</sup>

Ambassador Black's view is more in line with the U.S. Department of Defense's own position on Syria, and may well enjoy tacit approval by the President and some of his closest advisers, such as his National Security Advisor, Condoleeza Rice. Nevertheless, there still remains a pointed lack of congruity concerning the U.S. policy on Syria in the administration. Consistent with an almost traditional distribution of interests of the past two decades, "[t]he US government's tacit support for Syria's occupation of Lebanon is not endorsed outside the executive branch..."<sup>273</sup>

With a climate turned progressively less favorable for Syria during the tenure of the second Bush administration, and more immediately, during the Third Gulf War that found Syria opposing and sharply condemning U.S. action in Iraq, a fundamental change in U.S. policy toward Syria could have been expected to occur earlier in the year. In effect, the tide only did turn in October 2003. By July 2003, President Bush warned Syria in tandem with Iran that they would "be held accountable," should they fail to work with Washington in its "War on Terror."<sup>274</sup> On 3 October, a PIJ suicide bomber detonated his weapon in the Israeli port city of Haifa, killing 20. On 4 October, the Israeli Air Force attacked Ain Saheb camp in the vicinity of Damascus – a facility used by the PFLP-GC earlier in 2003. At the time of the attack this training camp was undergoing refurbishment for future use, allegedly by the PIJ. In the aftermath of the Ain Saheb air raid, and in spite of European pressure to censure Israel, President George W. Bush clearly stated that Israel should not "feel

272 US Senate Foreign Relations Committee/Ambassador Cofer Black, "Syria and Terrorism," 30 October 2003 at [www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2003/25778.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2003/25778.htm) accessed on 17 November 2003.

273 Gambill, "US Mideast Policy and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon," *op. cit.*, p. 6.

274 Allen, *op. cit.*

constrained.”<sup>275</sup> While not a clear-cut endorsement of the Israeli air-raid, America’s position with respect to Israel’s retaliatory course of action had shifted, and thereby also suggested a change in its position towards Syria. Even so, “most public statements by US officials indicated that Syrian non-compliance would merely preclude an *improvement* in US-Syrian relations.”<sup>276</sup> But as wave after wave of Palestinian suicide bombers terrorized Israel, the final obstacles to passage of the “Syria Accountability and Lebanese Restoration Act” (SALSA) – especially the executive branch’s habitual opposition to legislation restrictive of its policy options – crumbled in the face of massive Congressional pressure on the U.S. administration. On 15 October 2003, the House of Representatives voted 398–4 for the “Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act” of 2003, which calls for a halt to Syrian support for terrorism, an end to its occupation of Lebanon, a halt to its development of weapons of mass destruction and a cessation of its illegal importation of Iraqi oil. On 11 November 2003, the Senate voted 89–4 for SALSA.<sup>277</sup> U.S. legislators have signed SALSA into law. It remains to be seen, whether the passage of SALSA will be able to reinforce the trend begun under the second Bush administration to reconcile the differing interests of U.S. state institutions, and to streamline its policy toward a determined, zero-tolerance U.S. policy with respect to Syria’s sustained, partially underhand support for political violence movements involved in terrorist acts. What is certain is that Lebanon’s government has lived up to its image as Syrian satellite and dutifully protested SALSA’s passage through Congress.<sup>278</sup>

275 Gary C. Gambill, “Implications of the Israeli Reprisal in Syria,” *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. 5, No. 10 (October 2003) at [www.meib.org/articles/0310\\_s2.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0310_s2.htm) accessed on 29 October 2003.

276 Abdelnour, “The US-Syrian Crisis: Why Diplomacy Failed,” *op. cit.*

277 For the contents of the act as discussed since the summer of 2002, and arguments for its enactment, see “US Policy Toward Syria and the Syria Accountability Act,” Hearing Before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002)

278 Elie Hourani, “Politicians Deplore US Pressure on Syria,” *The Daily Star*, 15 December 2003 at [www.dailystar.com.lb/15\\_12\\_03\\_/art1.asp](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/15_12_03_/art1.asp) accessed on 15 December 2003.

### 3.6 Israeli Policy on Syria's Support for PVMs

In the context of the Iranian-Syrian axis as the principal regional threat to Israel, Syria's geographic proximity to Israel renders the Alawite regime in Damascus the more immediate and dangerous contender in the region. In spite of Syria's military inferiority, this is certainly true on the level of conventional warfare. One rung higher – on the level of unconventional strategic threats – Israel does not fear the possibility of Syrian escalation as much, as it does apprehend the future deployment of nuclear weapons by Iran, presaged by the development of the “Shihab-3” ballistic missile with its ominous range that allows Iran to strike at Israel, but not at targets located further away.

One rung lower – on the level of low-intensity warfare –, the picture looks very different, and there Israel has, indeed, faced one of the worst scourges to plague it since its inception. Time and again Israel defeated the full force of conventional Arab military might on the field of battle, only to be stung by Palestinian infiltrators, the “Fedayeen,” starting in the late 1960's, to be bogged down after 1982 by Lebanese militiamen and, more recently, to find that its security forces cannot be expected to outwit the ultimate smart bomb, the suicide attacker, at every turn.<sup>279</sup> “Unlike the Palestinians, Syria continues to pose a strategic/military threat to Israel and to be engaged indirectly in the bloody war of attrition against Israel in southern Lebanon, through the Hizballah and in association with Iran.”<sup>280</sup> And although Israel has withdrawn its army from south Lebanon since these words were penned, the Israeli-Syrian territorial dispute and, by extension, Syrian control over Lebanon in conjunction with the instrumentalization of Palestinian rejectionism, constitute key determinants in the shaping of Israeli policy on Syrian support for political violence movements.

Against the backdrop of more than twenty years of rigid obedience to the unofficial “Red Lines” agreement between Israel and Syria that demarcates spheres of influence in Lebanon, the recent development of Israel's foreign policy with respect to Syria has gone

279 Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 120–121. Cf. Paran, *op. cit.*

280 Moshe Ma'oz, “From Conflict to Peace? Israel's Relations with Syria and the Palestinians,” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 393–416, p. 411.

from conciliation and concession under Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak to confrontation after the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifadah. Following a succession of abortive attempts at achieving bilateral and multilateral peace agreements with Syria in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict after 1974, the Israeli government in essaying to break this deadlock in early 2000 initiated a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. Banking on successfully jumpstarting the flagging bilateral negotiations, and despite Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's understanding that such a step could not realistically be made conditional upon the much hoped for negotiations with Syria, a marginal majority of Israel's political establishment at the time regarded the decision for unilateral withdrawal as a viable course of action.<sup>281</sup> Adding a layer of complexity to the Israeli-Syrian track is the element of outside mediation provided for by Israel's ally, the U.S. Israel's attempts at making headway vis-à-vis Syria have thus not only been stalled in the confines of the bilateral Israeli-Syrian track, for even before Israel's dramatic decision to pull out of Lebanon was on the domestic political radar, Israel has had to contend with a difficult multilateral environment. This is especially true concerning the matter of Syria's involvement in terrorist acts. The Clinton administration, for example, "put much emphasis on Syria's key role in regional stability to the point of downplaying the issue of terrorism in the interest of the peace process."<sup>282</sup>

The advent of the second Bush administration; the burgeoning of the neo-conservative agenda in Washington's corridors of power and its implications for the Middle East; the events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent climate of polarization in the West; the emergence of "Hizballahland" in southern Lebanon as an undesired result of the Israeli withdrawal in 2000; and the election of a conservative Israeli government, as well as the near simultaneous outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifadah have all in some measure contributed toward a hardening of the Israeli attitude in general. Specifically, however, Israel's growing irritation with its neighbour is directed against Syria's intransigence regarding the deadlocked bilateral negotiations, and, in

281 Dalia Dassa Kaye, "The Israeli Decision to Withdraw from Southern Lebanon: Political Leadership and Security Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 4 (March 2002), pp. 561–585, p. 582.

282 Rabil, "The Ineffective Role of the US in the US-Israeli-Syrian Relationship," *op. cit.*, p. 427.

that context, is exacerbated by Syria's use of the terror-weapon as a goad to be used against Israel with apparent impunity.

The sum of these developments indicates that the figurative noose around Syria's neck is being drawn tight and is interpreted as a broad endorsement of Israel's increasingly bellicose posturing toward Syria's support of Hezbollah and Palestinian rejectionist groups: "Bush administration hawks... believe economic sanctions won't work in this [i.e. the Syrian] case; it would be better, they say, to begin talking frankly with Syria, or even threaten war."<sup>283</sup> Viewed through the prism of recent regional political developments, Israel, in a sudden, positive reversal of fortunes, finds itself in the position, where it may become the indispensable, if controversial, asset of the U.S.' manifest determination to wage the "War on Terror" against Syria. U.S. military assets in the Middle East are spread thin, which may render the option of excluding Israeli participation in a campaign against Syria a moot point. For the first time in decades, Syria may be susceptible to the credible threat of forcible regime change by an U.S.-Israeli invasion: Syria's erstwhile rival and latter-day ally, Saddam Hussein, has been overthrown; analogous to a game of chess in which the opening gambit has been made, U.S. troops now guard the reaches of the Iraqi-Syrian border, only a heartbeat away, and with the military capability to undo the Alawite regime at a moment's notice.

In April 2003, Israel's defense minister, Shaul Mofaz, endorsed a list of demands made of Syria and submitted by his government to U.S. mediators, which placed considerable pressure on Syria to end its strategy of proxy warfare against Israel. The publication of the Israeli demands followed repeated threats against Syria by the U.S. not to shelter loyalists of the deposed Iraqi dictator.<sup>284</sup> Mofaz' list and the newfound sense of direction in Israeli security agencies it betrayed, also dovetailed with an editorial published in the *Jerusalem Post* in July, which, indeed, suggested that should the U.S. intervene with "military operations somewhere between Syria and Lebanon, Israel must be a partner in such an effort. For Israel, being kept at arm's length during such an US actions would send a message of weakness and impotence to its neighbours that would only sow the seeds of

283 Bar'el, *op. cit.*

284 "Israel Adds to US Pressure on Syria," *Security Watch*, 15 April 2003. Email news service available at [www.isn.ethz.ch](http://www.isn.ethz.ch).

future aggression.”<sup>285</sup> In spite of a temporary respite for Syria due to a victory for the “diplomacy-based approach” favoured by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell between late summer and early fall of 2003, the current administration does not appear to fall in line with the State Department’s plotted course – a fact not lost on Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.<sup>286</sup> In response to a suicide terrorist attack on Haifa in early October 2003, the perpetrators of which had received Syrian support, Israel went on the offensive, raiding deep into Syrian air space: The attack on a Syrian training facility for Palestinian rejectionist militants “inaugurated a new reprisal doctrine... Every location where Palestinian terrorists train is a legitimate target... no one has immunity”<sup>287</sup> Current Israeli attitudes may well point to an advanced state of resignation and frustration to bring about more than an armistice and an informal “Red Lines” agreement with Syria. Considering Israel’s desire for a stable security architecture based on peace with its neighbours, this is not entirely surprising. For the status quo with Syria has not much to show for itself, if measured against just under thirty years of dolorous engagement with an enemy, who has long ago determined that peace bears too many risks; and that its advantage thus lies in retaining the status quo and, hence, the part of antagonist.

285 “Meanwhile Back in Damascus,” *op. cit.*

286 Knowlton, *op. cit.*

287 Gambill, “Implications of the Israeli Reprisal in Syria,” *op. cit.*





## **4 The Long-Term Objectives of Iranian and Syrian Support for PVMs: Tangled Skein or Gordian Knot?**

There can be little doubt that Iranian and Syrian state support for political violence movements, which regularly engage in terrorist tactics, act in the capacity of a fulcrum for much of the political violence and low-intensity warfare taking place in Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Aside from other states, such as Sudan and Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria today constitute the mainstay of state supported political violence in the Middle East and Gulf regions. In fact, this perspective applies to such an extent that, if their financing of proxy warfare in the service of their respective foreign policy were rendered unfeasible, both states would arguably lose their only viable means of power projection.

Support by Iran and Syria for Lebanese and Palestinian militants comes in different guises and the two states, acting in the framework of a strategic partnership since the early 1980s, have in the interim established a sophisticated *modus operandi*, at the heart of which stands their division of labor. The nature of cooperation between Iran and Syria is made manifest in the example of the Lebanese Hezbollah. To use Gal Luft's terminology, the Syrian "landlord" provides for the logistics, training and base of operations in Lebanon and Damascus, as well as a staging area for attacks against Israel; and the Iranian "sugar daddy" provides the financial resources, and also maintains a permanent base in Lebanon to uphold its stake in the joint venture, and in order to take a direct hand in the training, recruitment and deployment on site. The question of whether Hezbollah could have left its mark on the Lebanese civil war and waged its guerilla war against the IDF and its Lebanese allies to the extent, and with the sustained intensity, that it did between 1982–2000, if the Party of God had not been actively supported by the Iranian-Syrian axis, must be deemed rhetorical only.

Iran's principal contribution to the perpetuation of political violence in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories is the massive outflow of petrodollars and Bonyad profits to Hezbollah via the Damas-

cus road, and to the Palestinian rejectionist camp either through Syrian intermediaries, such as the PFLP-GC (cf. the “Santorini”), or only slightly less vicariously, through its Hezbollah emissaries in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It appears that now that the conflict in Lebanon has wound down to quasi-peacetime conditions (with the notable exception of the prevailing situation in the Shi’ite south and the Sheba Farms area), Tehran’s theocratic rulers have not been content with having to witness first the “Syrianization” of Hezbollah, and more recently, to stand idly by while Hezbollah’s Secretary-General Nasrallah is leading the Party of God into Lebanon’s halls of parliament. Hezbollah’s arrival in constitutional politics will eventually lead to its departure from militancy; or, failing its full cession of political violence, Lebanon’s premier Shi’ite militia will gradually diminish with, or without, making a racket. However, for the time being, and not unlike the Provisional Irish Republican Army in Ulster after 1972, Hezbollah will continue to campaign with both the Kalashnikov and the ballot box. At the end of the day, it may well be the politicization of Hezbollah and the implications of “Lebanonization” for its utility as Iran’s executioner, which has alerted Tehran to an incrementally closing window of opportunity on its interests in the Levant.

Arguably, Hezbollah’s transformation into a political party willing to throw in its lot with a Syrian-controlled, multi-confessional Lebanese state is exerting pressure on its Iranian handlers to use its oldest proxy one last time in order to galvanize Palestinian rejectionism of the religious brand. Indeed, the inception by Iran’s proxy of a new generation in the Palestinian territories is underway through the good offices of Hezbollah’s agents in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This development also dovetails with Iran’s reallocation of funding to established Palestinian rejectionist groups, especially the PIJ and Mounir al-Muqdadh’s renegade Fatah faction in Ain al-Hilweh; the Islamic Republic does not appear to be quite as successful in the case of Hamas, which strongly emphasizes its Sunni confessional heritage and politico-military autonomy. The underlying motive for Iran’s heavy investment – financial, logistical and military – in the Palestinian terror infrastructure (cf. “Karine-A”) must be sought in the application of the Islamic Republic’s ideology to regional politics: Israel, or, as the Iranian government prefers to call the Jewish state, the “Zionist entity,” will likely remain Iran’s public enemy No. 1. This perspective holds true for at least as long, as Iran remains bent

on exporting its Revolutionary principles, and continues to see its path barred by an Israeli state acting in the capacity of a diminutive version and catspaw of the “Great Satan,” that is, the U.S. Absent a strike with strategic arms, such as a “Shihab-3” armed with an unconventional warhead, Iran’s likeliest weapon against its regional rival in the future will be the instrumentalization of Palestinian militancy. In the light of Israel’s opaque, but nevertheless aggressively propagated, deterrent nuclear capability, Iran (provided it follows a rational course of action) will have little choice but to play the Palestinian, and to a progressively lesser extent, the Lebanese cards.

The failure of Syria’s terror patronage system and the concomitant loss of its Lebanese and Palestinian clients would rob Bashir al-Asad of the most critical asset in the negotiations concerned with the return of the Golan Heights. The late Hafez al-Asad vividly demonstrated what a cunning mind could achieve with the calibrated and carefully timed use of proxies, ever balancing the scourge of terror with the tranquility of its absence. Thus the price for peace has always been made palpable for Syria’s enemies, never permitting them to forget that it was Asad’s to give or deny. And with the progressing decline of the praetorian Alawi state’s arsenal, and Washington’s eye fixed upon itself (cf. SALSA), Syria’s durable and proven program of vicarious, deniable warfare continues to have a bright future. Hemmed in by the Israeli-Turkish defensive relationship, militarily hamstrung by the delayed, cascading effects of the collapse of its Soviet ally and, more recently, constrained by a threatening Coalition military presence along its border with Iraq, the Syrian regime’s options in the pursuit of its hegemonical aspirations for the region are dwindling. In that sense, Syria’s ability to retain its hold over Lebanon in the longer term also is becoming ever more doubtful. By extension, with the future of Lebanon as a Syrian satrapy becoming an increasingly uncertain prospect, Syria potentially also stands to lose its only remaining battleground in the long war of attrition with Israel; its occupation of Lebanon has allowed it to eschew the consequences of a direct military confrontation with the IDF since 1982. In the current constellation, the elimination of Lebanon as Syria’s “terrarium” of political violence movements would reduce the key attribute of deniability inherent in Syria’s Lebanon-based proxies (as opposed to its Damascus-based clients), critically curtail Asad’s reach, and therefore constitute a crippling blow to Syria’s influence in the region.

With the exception of the threat along the Israeli-Lebanese border upheld by a massively armed Hezbollah, the only relevant outlet for Syria's terror weapon in the near future lies in the Palestinian territories. Even so, Syria's stake in the Palestinian cause is not without difficulties. The younger Asad's active engagement in funneling Syrian aid to Palestinian rejectionist organizations, in many ways signifies a departure from his father's reluctance to support Palestinian proxies not utterly under his thumb. Even though Bashir al-Asad encourages the PIJ's and Hamas' dependence on Damascus' aid in much the same way that has allowed his father to bring Fatah apostates and Syrian-Palestinian militants (cf. al-Saiqa and Ahmed Jibril's PFLP-GC) into the Syrian Ba'athi fold, the new generation of religious Palestinian rejectionist militancy is loath to part with its autonomy. The upshot of this development is that the PIJ and Hamas now have to contend with a divided leadership, one "outside," and backed by the Iranian-Syrian strategic partnership, and the other, fiercely independent, "inside" the Palestinian territories. Moreover, in contrast to the Palestinian socialist and nationalist clientele, the Palestinian Islamist rejectionist organizations, like Hezbollah before them, have become the subject of an internecine, Iranian-Syrian tug-of-war. Whether Bashir's investment in the Palestinian rejectionist camp will pay a dividend in the long-term, for example in the context of the Golan Heights dispute, is among the more interesting questions awaiting a response in the near future; the current state of the Middle East peace process, the imminent obsolescence of its current manifestation – the "Road Map" – and the unabated, sustained level of terrorist acts perpetrated by the PIJ and Hamas, alongside Fatah offshoots like the Tanzim/Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, suggests that Syria has successfully maximized its resources in the short-term.

Finally, for the U.S., and for Israel as its principal ally in the Middle East, the quest for an effective response to the continued Iranian-Syrian propensity to use the terror-weapon in the face of Western diplomatic and economic sanctions will inevitably lead to the posing of one central question: Are they confronted by a tangled skein, or a Gordian Knot? If the former is the case, which is to be hoped, then a denouement does remain an option, albeit one whose feasibility decreases with each passing month. On the other hand, if the U.S. and/or Israel determine that they face an implacable enemy in Iran and Syria, whose protracted use of the terror weapon will continue to

destabilize the Middle East and further corroborate the intractability of the Arab-Israeli impasse, an alternative course of action perforce opens up. To remain consistent with the classical analogy in the title of this study, the stroke of a sword will likely be at the heart of this alternative policy. As a corollary to the “War on Terror,” the Coalition’s invasion of Iraq of March 2003 has not only demonstrated the costs of cutting another Gordian Knot, and the ex post facto burden it imposes upon the authors of such a course of action; but in a time when brutal dictatorships are only a fading memory in the West, it indubitably also revealed the benefits of intervention by removing a long-standing source of conflict in the region and by improving the lot of a much tried people.



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