How Iran Intends to Assist Hamas in the War

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 26.10.2023

Since the war in Gaza broke out, Iran has been considering how to contribute to the great upheaval the region, and how it can assist Hamas. Iran's support for the goal of destroying Israel is a central pillar of its policy. Indeed, in speeches made since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has given the barbaric massacre a religious and moral seal of approval. According to Khamenei, this was a legitimate reciprocal offensive against Israel's actions toward the Palestinians. Khamenei also has rejected criticism voiced around the world against Hamas' slaughter and kidnapping of women, children, and the elderly, stating that every Israeli citizen is to be treated as an armed combatant.

It appears Iran's leadership currently wishes to keep Tehran outside the circle of war, and does not wish to slide into a direct conflict with Israel or the U.S., which would put at risk its nuclear facilities and the stability of its regime. Reuters has reported, based on three Western security sources, that Iran's upper echelons have decided that Hezbollah will continue to strike Israel from the north, while Iraqi Shi'ite militias, which are supported by Iran, will carry out low-profile attacks on U.S. targets in the region. These moves are all one step below direct Iranian involvement in the war. On October 15, the Iranian delegation to the U.N. announced that Tehran would stay out of the war as long as Israel does not try to attack Iran.

It appears that Iran intends to directly assist Hamas in two ways. It will try to supply Hamas in Gaza with more weaponry, and it may try to target Israeli institutions in Western countries.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force specializes in arms smuggling, but Iran has an extensive parallel, and ostensibly civilian, infrastructure assisting the country's smuggling apparatus. The Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS), which has been serving this apparatus since the 1980s, appears to be the instrument through which Iran now aims to send weapons, and potentially even Quds Force members, into the Gaza Strip. Alternatively, the IRCS

will seek to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza, with the aim of increasing Iran's influence in the Strip, particularly in view of the intense pressure placed on Palestinian society in Gaza during this war.

The IRCS has been operating in Gaza for years by virtue of the "Law for Support of the Palestinian People's Islamic Revolution," approved by the Iranian parliament in 1990. The law authorizes the society to provide financial support to families of Palestinian prisoners and "martyrs", in coordination with representatives of the IRGC and Ministry of Intelligence.

In January 2020, Ali Akbar Salehi, formerly Iran's Foreign Minister, admitted that the Quds Force had previously engaged in smuggling to 'revolutionaries' during the Libyan civil war (2014-2020), under the cover of the IRCS. In addition, as revealed on WikiLeaks, the IRCS has an extensive record of arms smuggling operations under the guise of medical equipment to Hezbollah during the Second Lebanon War (2006), and of sending IRGC troops and Ministry of Intelligence personnel to Lebanon disguised as IRCS officials. Iran also has used the IRCS to smuggle weapons to the Shi'ite opposition in Bahrain and Yemen.

Saeed Qassemi, a former high-ranking IRGC commander, admitted in 2019 that, under the cover of the IRCS, the IRGC had smuggled weapons to the Muslims fighting in the Bosnian War in the 1990s, and had trained terrorist operatives, including Al Qaeda personnel. The IRCS's publications reveal its intent of transporting the equipment to Gaza with help from Iranian airline Qeshm Air, known for delivering weapons shipments on behalf of the Quds Force to Syria. The Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sameh Shoukry, in an October 22 conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Ami-Abdollahian, welcomed the latter's request to allow the society to deliver aid to Gaza.

It further appears that Tehran is pushing for a terrorist attack on an Israeli target in a Western country. Iranian Intelligence Minister Esmaeil Khatib has declared that "the freedom-seeking peoples across the world" will avenge themselves on the U.S. and on governments supporting Israel in the Gaza War. This implied threat on the part of the Intelligence Minster is consistent with Iran's motivation to promote terrorist attacks against Israel abroad.

This motivation was affirmed by Mossad Chief Dedi Barnea in September, when he stated that over past year, the Mossad had been involved in thwarting 27

attempted attacks committed on Iran's behalf against Israeli and Jewish targets in Europe, Africa and South America. Iran's Ministry of Intelligence is substantially involved in planning attacks on foreign soil, having orchestrated Hezbollah's 1994 Jewish Community Center (AMIA) bombing in Argentina.

Faced with this situation, Israel must take action alongside Egypt to prevent the delivery of Iranian aid to the Gaza Strip. Israel and its allies must increase their efforts to thwart any attempt by Iran to attack Israeli interests in Europe and the U.S.

Dr. Yossi Mansharof, an expert on Iran and Shiite political Islam, is a Fellow at the Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy.