Israel must assume that Iranian weapons always reach its proxies

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 06.08.2024

Intense debate persists regarding continued Israeli control of the Philadelphi Corridor and Rafah crossing from Egypt to Gaza. In this context, one must note the deadly consequences of systematic Iranian arms smuggling to Hamas over the years through this border.

Everyone is aware of the years of armed support that Iran has been providing to terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip, mostly led by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. The leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, confirmed this publicly in his statement on July 23, 2024, in which he ordered his men to arm the West Bank just as they do the terrorist organizations in Gaza: "I believe that the West Bank should be armed as well as Gaza. All those who care about the fate of the Palestinians, if you want to do something for them, this is what must be done."

Tehran has smuggled into Gaza a significant arsenal of UAVs, missiles, rockets, weapons, and more. It also has provided Hamas and PIJ terrorists with terrorist training in Iranian-based camps as well as training for their experts to transfer that knowledge to the terrorist elements within Gaza.

The large amount of weaponry seized by the IDF during the takeover of the *Karine A* weapons ship in 2002 reflected Iran's strong motivation to arm the Gaza Strip with a wide range of deadly weapons. The captured ammunition included rockets, mortar bombs, sniper rifles, mines, and more, with a total weight of about 50 tons.

In the current war, it seems that one of the dominant Iranian weapons used by Hamas and the PIJ is the "Iranian Sayyad." This is a rifle from the Austrian company Steyr Mannlicher, which in February 2004 sold eight hundred units of the Steyr HS .50 caliber rifle (a heavy and modern sniper rifle) to the Islamic Republic. The weapon is marketed as a tool to eliminate enemy snipers and penetrate difficult materials at an effective range of 1,500 meters. The sale was made with the consent of the Austrian government, which claimed that the weapon was intended for units that fight drug trafficking in Iran.

Since its transfer to Iran, however, the weapon has been manufactured there under the name AM-50 Sayyad, and from there, the sniper rifles are systematically and massively transferred to Iran's proxies. Accordingly, in 2005, the US imposed sanctions on the Steyr Mannlicher company.

HEZBOLLAH USED this sniper rifle against the Syrian rebels as part of its long-term participation in the Syrian Civil War. Hezbollah also uses the rifle in the current war, boasts about it in its publications, and showcases it as an effective weapon against the IDF. Iran also smuggled the sniper rifle into the hands of its proxies in Iraq, who used it against American forces in the country.

Additionally, Iran smuggled the rifle to the Houthis in Yemen through the Quds Force's sophisticated smuggling apparatus, despite American efforts to thwart this. (America succeeded in intercepting at least one shipment of weapons from Iran to the Houthis, which included this weapon, in May 2021).

Iran has also smuggled the AM-50 Sayyad to terrorist organizations in Gaza, who are using it extensively. Hamas has not hidden the receipt of the sniper rifle and, in May 2021, even showcased it in one of the military displays held by Hamas's military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades.

According to published documentation, the terrorists who carried out the massacre attack on October 7 used this weapon (among others). Since the outbreak of the war, Hamas and the PIJ have been using it extensively against IDF soldiers operating in the Gaza Strip, as evidenced by their repeated publications documenting their deadly attacks.

Recently, a lawsuit against Iran was filed in a US court by some of the victims of the October 7 massacre. The Iranian aid that strengthens Hamas and the PIJ's power, as manifested in the smuggling of the deadly "Sayyad," is further evidence of why Tehran should pay for its part in the horrific attack.

Considering the efficiency of the Sayyad, it is no wonder that the Mashregh News website, which is closely tied to security circles in Iran (allegedly to the intelligence organization of the Revolutionary Guards), boasted in a July 4 article about the "hunting of the Zionist child-killers by the Iranian Sayyad" through Hamas. Mishrak reported that this weapon allows Hamas to effectively confront the IDF, enhancing its resilience against the Jewish state.

Israel must assume that weapons in Iran's possession always reach its proxies. Tehran is the primary actor flooding the region with a variety of dangerous weapons.

The war obliges Israel to urgently redesign its strategy vis-a-vis Iran, which aims to strengthen its array of emissaries and tighten its "circle of fire" surrounding Israel. The smuggling of the Sayyad sniper rifle from Iran to Gaza, as well as to other Iranian proxies in the region, is carried out as part of this strategy.

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