

Khomeini's vision: Why Iran seeks Israel's destruction

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 15.03.2026

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has placed the vision of Israel's destruction at the core of its ideology and state policy. In 2015, Ali Khamenei set a target date for realizing this vision: 2040. In 2018, senior Iranian official Hossein Amir-Abdollahian revealed that the Islamic regime is advancing an operational plan to implement, but added he could not disclose its details to the media. Documents seized by the Israel Defense Forces in Gaza during Operation Iron Swords exposed coordination between Hamas, Hezbollah, and Tehran in carrying out the October 7th massacre attack. However, Yahya Sinwar initiated the attack without waiting for final coordination between the parties.

An examination of the motivations driving Iran's vision of Israel's destruction reveals a complex web of ideological, religious, geopolitical, political, and historical factors that together shape Tehran's policy toward Israel.

First, at the core of Iranian hostility lies a deep antisemitic element rooted in the ideology of the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ruhollah Khomeini. In his central work, "Islamic Government," Khomeini portrayed the Jews, "enemies of Islam", as a cunning force operating throughout history to harm and weaken Islam. According to his view, Jews have sought since the early days of Islam to undermine its expansion and even distort the Qur'an. This worldview continued under his successor, Ali Khamenei.

Although Khamenei has claimed his opposition is directed at Zionism rather than Jews, in practice, he has promoted a clearly antisemitic policy. He has repeatedly denied the Holocaust, hosting Holocaust deniers from around the world, described Israel as a "cancerous tumor," and advanced antisemitic propaganda through the education system and state-controlled media. Cultural and educational materials in Iran have likewise depicted Jews as pursuing global domination.

Alongside the antisemitic dimension, hostility toward Israel is also rooted in an

anti-imperialist worldview. According to the regime's ideology, Israel is perceived as a forward outpost of Western imperialism, led by the United States, in the Middle East. This perception was heavily influenced by the Islamic Revolution's key theorist, Ali Shariati, who blended Marxist ideas with Islamic interpretation. Ruhollah Khomeini adopted the terms "oppressors" and "oppressed," but infused them with a theological meaning, in contrast to Shariati's socio-economic framing.

In Khomeini's view, the "oppressed" are Muslim peoples suffering under Western domination, while the "oppressors" are Western powers and their regional allies. Within this framework, the struggle against Israel is presented as part of a broader confrontation with American and Western hegemony. Accordingly, Israel's destruction is viewed by Iran's leadership as a necessary condition for liberating the region from Western influence and establishing a new regional order in which Iran would be the central power.

Another key motivation is geopolitical. The struggle against Israel serves Iran as a central tool for gaining influence in the Arab and Muslim world. Despite being a Shiite-Persian state in a predominantly Arab-Sunni region, Iran has managed to leverage the Palestinian issue to build regional legitimacy and export the Islamic revolution. As early as 1979, Khomeini declared "Quds Day," held annually on the last Friday of Ramadan, as a platform for demonstrating support for the struggle against Israel.

By emphasizing its commitment to the "liberation of Palestine," Iran has appealed directly to Arab publics while bypassing regional governments. Through this strategy, Iran gradually established the so-called "Axis of Resistance", a network of organizations and militias, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Houthis in Yemen, and others. In this way, opposition to Israel has become a kind of "shared language" enabling Iran to consolidate regional influence while mitigating Sunni suspicion of its ambitions.

Alongside the ideological and geopolitical drivers, there is also a religious-jurisprudential justification. According to a doctrine consistently promoted by the regime's religious leadership, the territory of the Land of Israel/Palestine is considered a "waqf," a religious endowment that cannot be relinquished. From this stems the claim that Jewish sovereignty in the area violates divine law.

Accordingly, the conflict is framed not merely as political, but as a religious struggle over sacred land. Within this framework, Khomeini issued a fatwa calling on Muslims to act toward Israel's elimination, granting the struggle the status of a religious obligation. Some senior figures, including Quds Force Commander Esmail Qaani (December 2021) and Deputy Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ali Fadavi (July 2017), as well as senior Ayatollah Nuri Hamedani (23 October 2023), have linked Israel's destruction to the appearance of the "Hidden Imam," who, according to Shiite belief, is destined to emerge at the end of days. In this view, victory over Israel and the weakening of the West could hasten the Hidden Imam's reappearance and bring about the redemption of the Shiite world.

Another layer of hostility is rooted in a historical memory of struggle against the Pahlavi Shah. In official Iranian discourse, Israel is portrayed as having helped and trained the Shah's secret police, SAVAK, including in interrogation and torture methods used against opposition activists, among them Khomeini's disciples, who later came to power. As a result, Israel's destruction is sometimes framed as "historical justice" and as revenge for that period. Finally, hostility toward Israel also serves as a domestic political function. The regime frequently attributes its economic and social failures to Israel and the United States. The presence of an external enemy helps consolidate support around the leadership and justify the system's authoritarian nature. Without such an enemy, the regime would likely struggle to explain its persistent crises.

In conclusion, Iran's drive to destroy Israel is not the product of a single motive, but of a combination of ideological antisemitism, anti-imperialism, geopolitical interests, religious justifications, historical memory, and political utility, each reinforcing the others. This framework makes the struggle against Israel central to the regime's identity and regional strategy. As a result, a significant change in this policy is unlikely, whether under Mojtaba Khamenei or any other figure, so long as it remains grounded in the ideology of the Islamic Revolution. Therefore, the overthrow of the Islamic regime must remain the central strategic goal in Israel's historic struggle against Iran. In any reality where the regime remains in power, it will seek to rehabilitate its offensive capabilities and the "Axis of Resistance," and once again advance, at the opportune moment, the vision of Israel's destruction, in order to fulfill the legacies of Khomeini and Khamenei.

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