

# Terrorist Nation or Scapegoat?

## Taking a Close Look at Iran and the "Islamic Threat"

By Hooshang Amirahmadi

The July 1994 criminal bombing incidents in Buenos Aires and London have refocused world attention on the alleged role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in promoting "fundamentalist" Islam and terrorism. Once again talk of an "Islamic threat" led by Iran is being thrown around. A strident voice has been added to those accusing Iran of masterminding world terrorism, and that is Israel. After years of focusing mainly on its Arab adversaries, Israel has now singled out Iran as the greatest threat to its security. But do the facts really warrant Israel's new Iran policy? Is Iran truly leading a global terrorist movement?

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Following the Buenos Aires bombing, in sharp contrast to their previous approach, Israeli officials quickly focused attention on Iran and singled out the government (not any particular faction) as the primary culprit for the bombings. *The New York Times* quoted Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres as saying that "there is no longer the slightest doubt that Iran stands behind the bombings." Why would Israel so categorically accuse Iran and take an unusually confrontational stand against Tehran? The curiosity behind the question is particularly inspired by the fact that, according to the same news report, senior officials and intelligence officers in the Clinton Administration disagree with Israeli officials and view the bombings as a direct outgrowth of battles between Israel and the Party of God (Hezbollah).\*

While a more informed response to the question will have to wait until a

later date when more information may become available, it is possible to speculate about some of the tactical and strategic concerns driving Israel toward a change of policy toward Iran. To begin with, Israeli officials have a legitimate concern about, and an obligation to react to, the fact that the Jewish and Israeli peoples and institutions are targets of a worldwide vicious terrorist campaign, which only since last year has resulted in the death of some 580 Jews in various parts of the world; they cannot afford to remain indifferent given their perceived guardianship of the Jewish people. Nor can they simply blame groups like the Hezbollah, Hamas, and neo-Nazis. The Argentinean Jews, for example, should not be paying a heavy price for the Israeli conflict with the first two, and targeting the neo-Nazis as independent actors has dangerous implications. As a result and because of other considera-

\*Officials in Argentina's government have since voiced their disapproval of the investigation into the Buenos Aires bombing. *The New York Times* reported on August 25 that, "the case against the Iranian diplomats was very thin, based mainly on circumstantial evidence provided by an Iranian dissident whose credibility was uncertain."



Bombing of the Jewish Community center July 18 in Buenos Aires

tions discussed below. Israelis have directed blame toward Iran, which continues to remain a supporter of anti-Israeli groups in the Middle East.

No wonder then that an emerging confrontational Israeli policy toward Iran has already been reported by Israeli sources. According to Ron Ben-yishai, a "highly regarded" military reporter for *Yediot Aharonot*, Israel's largest daily paper, this new approach toward Iran may become unavoidable. Citing anonymous high-ranking Israeli security officials, he has said: "Questions are arising in Israel over the wisdom of avoiding a direct conflict with the Iranians, as Israel has done until now . . . Senior defense officials think it's time to change policy and go after the Iranians, as we did [with] the international terror of Black September and the PLO." (Quoted in August 5-11, 1994 issue of *The Jewish Week*)

To persuasively hold Iran responsible for the bombings, the Israeli officials and intelligence sources have tactically sought to link the incidents to the Middle East peace process. Iran opposes the current peace negotiations and could therefore be involved in efforts designed to terrorize the Jewish people and disrupt the peace process. This assertion assumes that Iran is totally oblivious of its national interests and acts on the basis of some overarching ideological imperative. Yet, the country's officials, including President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, have frequently denied that Iran would do anything to sabotage the ongoing negotiations. In a June 7, 1994 press conference, the President stated that Iran disapproves of the peace process, but "does not wish to intervene in practice and physically disrupt the process."

By linking the bombings with the peace process, Israel also hopes to secure American and Arab support for their emerging confrontational policy toward Iran. Americans have invested tremendous amounts of money, time, energy and, above all, prestige in the current peace negotiations and want to see them succeed. If Iran was to be found involved in disrupting the process, and given the already inimical relations that exist between the two governments, the Clinton

Administration could lose its temper altogether and take actions that would further isolate Iran and ultimately strangle it. The Arab states in the negotiations could also become seriously upset at Iran and take some form of collective action, themselves.

The campaign to de-couple Iran from Europe has also been stepped up. Following the Buenos Aires bombing the Israeli government sent a delegation to the European capitals in an effort to further isolate Iran. An August 1994 issue of *The Jerusalem Report* focused on "Iran's use of terror to blackmail the West." The story "revealed" that "in exchange for immunity from Iranian terror operations on their soil, several European nations have rescheduled Iran's debts, boosted trade with Tehran and even released Iranian murder suspects." Such revelations, Israelis hope, will embarrass countries like France and Germany, and make them significantly reduce their economic relations with Iran. If this happens, Iran, already on inimical terms with the United States and England, would be suffocated.

To focus attention on the Islamic Republic and its "terrorist diplomats," the Israelis have also sought to avoid directly linking the Lebanese Hezbollah to the incidents. According to Ben-yishai, the terrorists involved in the bombings in Buenos Aires "were not necessarily Hezbollah, but locals, guided by Iranian diplomats." Here, Iran is suspected to have used neo-Nazis as "surrogates" so Iran can deny involvement even if the actual perpetrators were to be caught. While such a scenario is not all that impossible, it is hard to believe that Iran would ever rely upon such capricious elements to undertake a terrorist act of such magnitude and with such ramifications. The wisdom of avoiding directly implicating the Hezbollah is because the Israelis do not wish to confront Hezbollah with whom they have now developed a unique combative relationship in south Lebanon.

As part of these tactical changes, Israelis are also avoiding direct confrontation with Islam as a source of threat; instead, they are increasingly immersing "the Islamic threat" in "the Iranian threat." This emerging change

of focus is designed to parallel the new US policy of distinguishing between Iran and Islam and so avoid confrontation with certain Islamic nations and movements whose support Israelis may need in confronting Iran. An emerging Arab-Israeli alliance in the wake of the peace negotiations would also require a more hospitable attitude toward Islam on part of the Jewish state.

This new Israeli strategy, however, does not always work. There are numerous examples of Islamic movements that are quite obviously distinct from Iran. For instance, the anti-Israeli Hamas and Hezbollah movements are not just "Islamic," but movements of real non-Iranian people. And even Israelis have not implicated Iran in the murderous bombing campaigns in India for which the Indian government blames the Pakistani government and radical Muslims. Iran has also been notably silent about the death threat by the Islamic fundamentalists against Taslima Nasrin, the feminist Bangladeshi writer. More recently, Iran took a conciliatory stance at the population conference in Cairo that was sharply at odds with the hardline views of Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the Vatican, among others.

Israelis may have also become increasingly concerned about their strategic importance to the United States in the post-Cold War era. After the conclusion of the current peace negotiations with its main Arab opponents, Israel's importance as a strategic asset will further diminish. In the absence of a serious regional threat to the West's interests, the Jewish state will become just another state to its Western allies. In such an eventuality, Israelis could not only lose billions of US dollars in foreign aid each year, but also the strong commitment of the West to its security and well-being. Iran, on the other hand, remains the only country in the region with sufficient resources to become a future regional power.

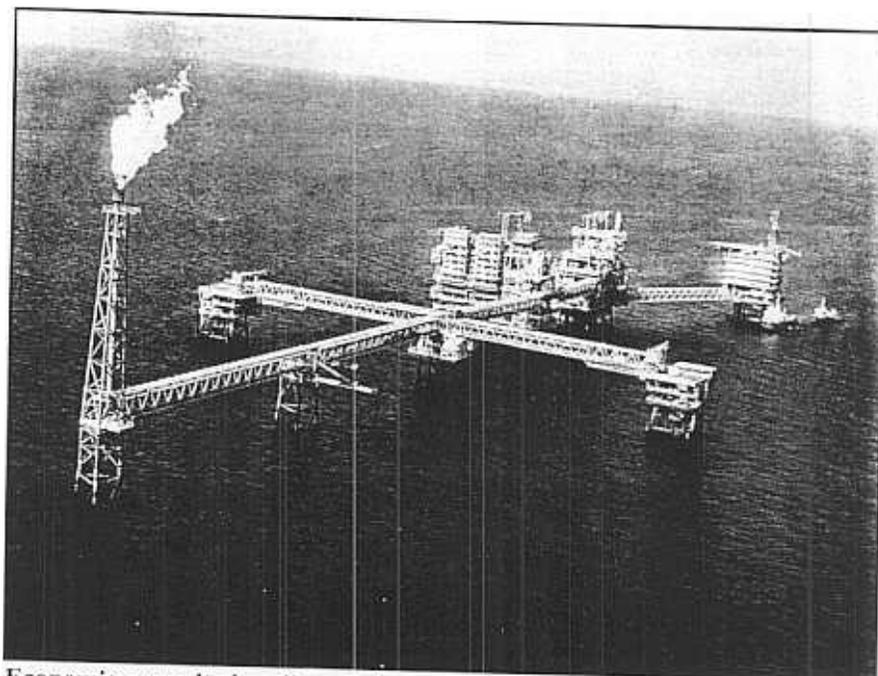
Finally, it is also possible that Israelis are genuinely fearful of Iran's Islamic government, or at least of certain anti-Israeli factions within the Tehran regime. This fear is partly based on the unsettled state of politics in the

country and the fact that Iran is a resourceful nation whose capabilities could expand quickly. To be sure, Iran's consistent anti-Israeli pronouncements have further deepened this fear in recent years when the Jewish state has become increasingly vulnerable to both domestic and international pressures. From this perspective, Israelis may naturally think Tehran must have had a hand in the bombings in Argentina and London. Meanwhile, Israelis remain confused about Iran's real intentions in the region. Signals emanating from Tehran are not always consistent and the regime has spoken in many languages over the years.

In short, a complex of factors have induced Israel to rethink its Iran policy, and design new tactics to facilitate implementation of the emerging confrontational approach. But, while uncertainty exists about the real causes of the deteriorating relations between Israel and Iran, it is quite clear that this Israeli-Iranian confrontation will not serve either party's immediate or long-term interests, and it could become a new source of regional instability and increased terrorism. Such an outcome would hardly be to anyone's benefit inside or outside the Middle East. It is thus imperative that world policymakers seek more accurate information about the real sources of terrorism in order to form more informed opinions, eliminate such barbaric acts, and help reduce tension between Iran and Israel. Policymakers in Iran and Israel may also wish to reconsider their rather unproductive and often equivocal approach toward each other. Other regional players must also take a responsible approach to the emerging Iranian-Israeli confrontation and help, with whatever means, to reduce tensions between the countries. At stake are national development, regional stability, and world peace.

### Deconstructing the Islamic Threat

The perceived "Islamic threat" that causes all this tension needs to be further examined and stripped of some of its myths. The "threat" is in fact rooted in a set of objective and subjective factors that include both real and imagi-



Economic necessity has disarmed any kind of Islamic oil weapon

nary sources. The fictitious side of this perceived threat is largely a product of certain media misconceptions and pundits who explain the present day tension between the Western and Muslim worlds as partly reflecting an alleged classical Islamic view that regards the two as inherently inimical. One such argument comes to us from the historian Bernard Lewis in his widely publicized 1990 article "The Roots of Muslim Rage" from the *Atlantic Monthly*. "In the classical Islamic view, to which many Muslims are beginning to return, the world and all mankind are divided into two: the House of Islam, where the Muslim law and faith prevail, and the rest, known as the House of Unbelief or the House of War, which it is the duty of Muslims ultimately to bring to Islam."

In itself, this is a recklessly abstract characterization of Islam, held nowhere in the Muslim world today by any rational individual, group, or institution. Even the late Ayatollah Khomeini, a leader of modern Islamic movements who no one can accuse of lacking conviction, is not known to have espoused such an extreme and obsolete view of Islam. Like other world religions, Islam is protective of its borders and wishes to see non-Muslims convert. But to interpret this as reflecting a Muslim design to bring

the Western world to Islam is unjustified. On the contrary, Muslims see themselves threatened by adverse forces and are on the defensive. This fact is also emphasized by Leon Hadar of the Cato Institute in his 1993 article "What Green Peril?" from *Foreign Affairs*: "Far from being a unified power that is about to reach again the gates of Vienna and the shores of Spain, Islam is, in fact, currently on the defensive against militant anti-Muslim fundamentalists."

More recently, Samuel Huntington of Harvard University has come up with an even more explicitly banal theory of "civilizational conflict" between the West and the Islamic world. In his well known 1993 article "The Clash of Civilizations?" from *Foreign Affairs*, Huntington asserts that the fundamental source of conflict in the new world will be cultural and that a possible third world war, if it ever happens, will take place between the Western civilization and its main antagonist, Islamic civilization. Similar views are also expressed by a variety of other pundits, describing the so-called Islamic threat in such terms as "global intifada," "Islam international," and "Khomeinitern." Unfortunately, such ideologically inspired characterizations of Islam have at times justified horrifying practices against even peaceful

Muslims. For example, Serbian nationalists have justified their “ethnic cleansing” policies as part of the West’s collective attempt to crush fundamentalist Islam and prevent its spread in Europe.

Some who use this monolithic characterization to explain Islam then contradict it with an equally fanciful division of Muslims into two groups, the so-called fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists. This division, which ignores the rich diversity of Islam, Muslims and the Muslim world, is taken to greater heights of confusion when fundamentalism is equated with radicalism and considered anti-West and inimical to capitalism. Lost in these generalizations are the realities that for most Muslims there is a distinction between anti-West and anti-Westernism, that fundamentalism and radicalism do not always coincide, and that fundamentalism is hardly anti-capitalist.

What all these pundits choose to ignore is the fact that the roots of Islamic radicalism must be looked for outside the religion, in the real world of cultural despair, economic decline, political oppression, and spiritual turmoil in which most Muslims find themselves today. The Shi’a population of Lebanon was the largest and least represented ethnic group in that country. The poor and oppressed Palestinians of the Gaza Strip form the backbone of Hamas. According to all objective accounts, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) appeared to be the largest vote-getter in Algerian elections before it was brutally and unjustly decimated by the army. The Egyptian government admits that the wretched slums of large urban areas are the principal recruiting areas for the country’s own increasingly powerful Islamic movement.

The most significant qualities of Islamic radicalism and anti-Westernism are, therefore, their reactions to existing conditions and past memories, and their search for a utopian Islamic community. These qualities make these Islamic movements more ephemeral than enduring, significantly reducing the likelihood that they can create an Islamic model society, and thus diminishing their potential threat

to the West. As the Iranian experience indicates, over time and as the revolutionary vision fails to be realized, radicalism and anti-Westernism lose their potency and often are replaced by pragmatism with reactive behavior, cautious accommodation of the West, and *realpolitik*.

### Islam and the Oil Weapon

While misperceptions or ignorance have caused the fictitious side of the perceived Islamic threat to dominate the debate, one must not underestimate the significance of an objective basis for the West’s concern. There are two such areas of concern remaining in the post-Cold War era: access to oil and maintenance of the status quo.

Some 75 to 77 percent of the world oil is located in the Muslim world, where the majority of people have become poorer and live in a state of spiritual unrest. Some 66 percent of this oil comes from the Persian Gulf region, where corrupt and/or undemocratic regimes rule by decree and face problems ranging from economic malaise to political instability. The Gulf reserves will also last the longest among the known world oil reserves and cost the least to produce. The West depends on this oil for a significant portion of its increasing energy needs, making its economy potentially vulnerable to disruptions in supply from the region.

Yet, the West’s dependency on the flow of oil from Muslim countries must be viewed in relation to an equally critical dependency of the Muslim oil producers on oil revenues and Western markets. Almost all petroleum states face tremendous economic hardship and depend on oil revenue for 90 to 99 percent of their foreign exchange earnings. Oil revenue is needed to pay for ballooning import bills for food, industrial inputs, military purchases, and debt services among other foreign obligations. This dependency on oil revenue is such that it makes it impossible for any of these states, even when they fall in the hands of Islamic radicals as in Iran, to use oil as a weapon against the West.

A closer look at the geographic distribution of Muslim oil reserves shows that there is even less cause for concern

on the part of the West. In general, the countries in which the Islamic movements are strong are those whose oil production is not critical for the West. These countries include Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Sudan. In contrast, in the Muslim countries whose oil production is critical for the West, the Islamic movements are either weak or follow a moderate ideology—such as in Saudi Arabia and other smaller Gulf Arab states. Algeria remains a boiling pot, and it could see radicalism of historic proportion if the current repression lasts longer and democratic forces fail to take state power. Libya is neutralized, Iraq is devastated, Syria is fast becoming moderate, and Iran is playing a waiting game.

While no single Muslim state can challenge the West’s access to oil, as was well demonstrated during the Kuwaiti crisis, the prevailing conditions make the formation of a common Islamic front even more unlikely. Significant differences exist among Persians, Arabs and Turks, as well as between Shi’ites and Sunnis. OPEC is also manifestly incapable of bringing its producers together in any common action against the West. In reality, the organization is having a hard time just surviving. Equally unlikely in the foreseeable future are such scenarios as external aggressive designs and a local dispute escalating into open war. The Iraqi blunder serves as a good lesson to any potential challenger. Thus, unless the political status quo in the Middle East changes drastically, the West need not lose any sleep about an Islamic oil threat.

From the West’s perspective, therefore, preserving the status quo seems a logical thing to do. Yet, as has been argued, this same status quo is a major source of radicalism and Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East. While an Islamic alternative would not seem to serve Western interests, any “premature pressure,” advises Bernard Lewis, will lead to the regimes’ overthrow, “not by democratic opposition, but by other forces that then proceed to establish a more ferocious and determined dictatorship.” Examples include Iran and the Sudan. What then does the West need to do? To go slow, to influence events at the margin, recommends

Judith Miller in her 1993 article "the Challenge of Radical Islam" in *Foreign Affairs*. This would in practice mean, she asserts, "increased political participation in government and the need for a freer press and freer public debate in all countries in the region."

But is this possible? Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia have indeed been practicing this formula with relative success. A major factor of their achievement has been the willingness of those in power to incorporate a range of power contenders including Islamic groups. While one would wish to see the Persian Gulf Arab states, Egypt, and Algeria also implement similar political reforms, their governments' current practices suggest a reverse trend. Fear of Islamic radicalism is then used to justify resisting needed political reform. The West also seems content with the justification. Yet, this approach will only delay an inevitable resolution of the contradiction between the need for reform and preservation of the status quo, making its peaceful resolution increasingly impossible. The West needs to make a choice and quickly: to remain aloof of the growing need for change and risk endangering its interests, or exert pressure on its allies for introduction of immediate meaningful reforms.

### Iran and Islamic Movements

In the past several years, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Jordan, as well as Israel and the PLO, have battled to varying degrees with so-called pro-Iranian Islamic fundamentalists. Among the groups alleged to have close ties with Tehran are Hamas in the Occupied Territories, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, the al-Nahda movement in Tunisia, the Shi'a movement in Iraq, and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria. Muslim guerrillas from these movements were supposedly trained in Afghanistan and Lebanon by Iranian agents in the 1980s (never mind that the CIA was operating several camps for training the Afghan mujahideen in Pakistan and elsewhere in the world). Presently, the Sudan is considered the main training ground—second only to



Middle East Photo

### Other than Hezbollah (above) Iran has had difficulty establishing positive relations with most Islamic groups

Iran itself—for Iran's "international Islamic extremists." "What is fascinating to me," pointed out John Esposito at a conference on US-Iran relations in Washington, D.C., in September of 1993, "is that after a year-and-a-half of talking about Iran's influence in the Sudan, and given the capabilities of our intelligence services and the self-interest of many governments in the region, no one is coming forward with significant evidence about the size and number of these camps."

It is hard to believe that a generally weak and economically crippled Iran could create a vast network of underground training and support activities, and then use it for so many disparate goals around the globe to create a so-called global intifada. Note also, that most Islamic movements are Sunni while Iran is a Shi'a theocracy. This fact explains why, except with the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Hamas to

some extent, Iran has not been successful in developing entrenched and lasting relationships with many of the most significant Islamic movements in the Arab world, including the FIS, the Islamic Brotherhood, and al-Nahda. Even Shi'ites have not always responded to Iran's calls for help; for example, Iraqi Shi'a soldiers, in spite of their hatred for the Iraqi Sunni regime, fought a fierce and nationalistic battle against Iran, disregarding the late Khomeini's repeated pleading, asking them to desert the "infidel" Iraqi army and join their Shi'a brothers on the "Islamic" Iranian side.

Needless to say, as an Islamic regime, Iran does have a significant impact on the Islamic movements. At the very least, it is a source of inspiration for them because of the obvious fact that it espouses a similar ideology and supports their anti-status quo posture. In certain cases Iran can be direct-

ly linked to these movements as in the cases of the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas who receive logistic support from Tehran. Hamas was originally created by the Israelis as a counterweight to the PLO. The organization soon began receiving funds from Saudi Arabia. Iran was the last to support Hamas. Iran's relation with smaller more extremist groups, like the Islamic Jihad in Palestine and Egypt, is the least congenial. While Iran sometimes sympathizes with their causes and wishes to give them some logistical support, it is fearful of their rather violent approach, doubts if their acts could ever be brought under control, and remains dubious about their longevity. No wonder those who wished to show connection between the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center and Iran were basically disappointed.

In most cases, as in Algeria and Egypt, the popularity of the Islamist forces are the direct result of the acutely inept economic forces of the existing governments and not because of any actions in the part of Iran. In the case of the Hezbollah, Iran became an institutional and material source of support for a sector of the population that had been historically excluded from the political process. Here, however, Iran's ultimate influence has been to moderate the force (as opposed to Hamas, upon whom Iran has had a radicalizing influence). With Iranian persuasion, Hezbollah released all Western hostages it was holding and joined the Lebanese parliament. In July 1993, Hezbollah acted upon Iran's advice when it accepted a cease-fire with Israel in southern Lebanon. It must be noted, however, that in the course of the last several years of confrontation, Israelis and Hezbollah have developed their unique problem, independent of the Palestinian issue, Syrian connection, or Iranian-Israeli relations.

The case-specific and opportunistic nature of the relationships between Iran and the Islamic movements in the Middle East should be readily apparent to many pundits. Yet, their approach has thus far been to generalize such relationships and make them look strictly ideological and insane. In their 1993

article "Ambitious Iran, Troubled Neighbors" from *Foreign Affairs*, Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson present Iran as the callous party in these relations. Its real aim is not to help the groups but to use them toward its "satanic objectives" of overthrowing reactionary Arab regimes, exporting the Islamic revolution, disrupting the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, murdering leaders of its opposition, blackmailing the West or blasting its holdings, taking hostages, hijacking planes, and destroying Israeli or Jewish targets. If you asked why would Iran undertake such senseless terrorist acts and how would such acts achieve their national or ideological interests, the authors would possibly say such questions never arise for an "irrational" and "outlaw" extremist regime, and that the prime mover of Iran for involvement in terrorist politics is its avowed anti-Western, anti-American, anti-Israeli, anti-status quo, and anti-democratic nature. To create an even more monstrous picture of Iran the article also alleges that "Iran appears to have launched a program to acquire nuclear weapons."

Yet, the actual practice of Iran, when seen in its totality, does not support such a monolithic and one-sided characterization of the regime in Tehran. One only needs to recall Iran's principled stand during the Kuwaiti crisis or its responsible Central Asian diplomacy to conclude that Tehran is not all that irrational or mindless. Then, of course, there is the other side of Iran's behavior: dogmatic, fiercely uncompromising, and unrealistically skeptical of the West's intentions toward Muslims. Tehran's other problems relate to its reactive behavior or policies and the fact it believes in international conspiracy theory. Iran has also shown at times that it miscalculates its capabilities and constraints, and misunderstands some of the world's major trends and events. These problems have often led Tehran to design agonizing or unfortunate policies.

Iran, like any normal state, calculates its moves to the best of its ability, accounts for the pros and cons of its actions, and considers its national and

ideological interests when formulating policies. This rational behavior is even more evident in Iran's relationship with Islamic movements. In particular, Iran carefully plans the direction of its impact on these movements and considers the pros and cons of their actions for its foreign relations and national interests.

### **The Effects of Islamic Movements on Iran**

While current literature emphasizes Iran's impact on and use of Islamic movements, it hardly pays any serious attention to the reverse influence of these movements on Iran. To begin with, the Islamic movements provide Iran with significant opportunities to boost its domestic image and international bargaining power. At the same time, they have also become a source of tremendous constraint on Iranian relations with the West and neighboring states. This contradictory impact of Islamic movements on Iran is a main cause of instability and incoherence in Iran's foreign policy.

The Islamic movements around the Middle East contribute to Iran's prestige in the region in three major ways: they boost Iran's power and bargaining leverage; they act as legitimizing tools for the whole concept of Islam as a political ideology; and they are a source of strategic purpose and direction. The power-boosting function of the Islamic movements stems from the fact that they are popular and stand against mostly unpopular regimes in the Islamic world. They could, therefore, be easily utilized as a source of pressure on domestic politics. Besides, the Islamic nature of the state in Iran affords it a better position to manipulate the movements for its regional diplomatic aims. As such, these movements have the potential to increase Iran's bargaining power vis-à-vis certain states and their foreign protectors.

The magnitude of the gain for Iran, however, depends on how intelligently this aspect of the Islamic movements is utilized. Generally, whenever Iran's support of these movements paralleled the West's interests, or enjoyed its cooperation, Iran's gain has been sig-

nificant as in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq. In sharp contrast, wherever the opposite has been the case, Iran has ended up paying a heavy price. The gain also depends on the nature of the movements themselves: the more popular and extensive the movements are, the better they are for Iran's image. In sharp contrast, movements identified with terrorist actions have proven the most damaging to Iran's global stature and prestige. The Islamic Jihad is a case in point.

The identifying and legitimizing functions of the Islamic movements for Iran emanate from their ideological specificity. The collapse of the bipolar ideological system has given the Islamic movements an opportunity to define themselves as a new non-Western pole. As long as Iran and the Islamic movements espouse congruity of purpose, the visibility of Iran and its strength in international politics will be enhanced. This ideological similarity and its attendant solidarity also enable Iran to claim worldwide leadership of Islamic movements.

The Islamic movements are also a source of strategic purpose and direction for the Islamic Republic. For one, these movements are indicative of a revitalized and dynamic ideology. They also function as a reminder whenever there is a tendency in the Iranian leadership to drift from its ideological commitments. Iran's tendency to re-ideologize its foreign policy after a period of pragmatism and moderation is a case in point. This tendency was partly motivated by political developments in Central Asia, Algeria, Egypt, and Afghanistan, supposedly indicating a growing strength in Islamic movements. In practice, however, Iran avoided mixing ideology with imperatives of national interests, particularly in Central Asia, where Iran has successfully established various bilateral links.

Iran's gains from the Islamic movements must be viewed in relation to its actual and potential losses, or difficulties these movements often created for Tehran's diplomacy. For example, the ideological uniqueness of the Islamic camp creates a given space for Iran in

international relations and breeds coherence. This in turn gives Iran a certain identity and creates a distinct framework for its behavior and policies. Iran's attempts to expand its relations with Islamic nations is a reflection of this sense of Islamic direction. In reality, however, such attempts have not always been successful because this sense of Islamic purpose and direction often contradicts the interests of the states in the Muslim world, where most regimes are antithetical to Islamic movements.

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## **I**slamic movements also tend to cripple Iran's foreign policy by contributing to the negative image that Iran suffers from in the West

Iran suffers from in the West. The perceived Islamic pole and Iran's self-appointed leadership of it has led to a new Western paradigm of Islamic and Iranian threat, very much in the same way that communism and the Soviet Union were seen as inseparable and dangerous to Western interests. Over time, this paradigm has increasingly become redefined in terms of demonizing Iran. Phrases like the "outlaw nation" and "Iranian menace" are now frequently heard from top Western policymakers. No doubt, this is why Iran has been included under the Administration's "Dual Containment" policy.

As long as the Islamic movements and the Islamic Republic are connect-

ed through their ideological stand, Iran cannot normalize relations with the West. The difficulty is confounded because the subjective side of the West's fear of Islam and Iran is hardly addressable in the immediate future. The objective side must be, therefore, carefully confronted by the Iranian leadership. It is only by changing the nature of this objective concern that Iran will be able to mitigate its difficulties with the West. In particular, Iran must take care to diffuse tensions with Egypt and Israel, which are presently the main forces behind the US fear of Islamic movements. Under these conditions, Iran must formulate, and consistently apply, a long-term regional foreign policy that reduces tension with the West.

The West (particularly the United States) Iran, Israel, the Arab nations, and the Islamic movements in the Middle East all have a major stake in changing the current course of events in the region; it serves no worthwhile purpose to waste resources and increase hatred. A new approach would promote comprehensive regional peace, political stability, and economic justice; it would account for the concerns and interests of all involved within a framework of compromise and compassion. This requires a truly integrative approach; no individual, group, party, or country should be left behind; no claim or complaints should be ignored. It also demands that the parties involved further their understanding of each other's complaints, intentions, capabilities, and constraints. They must also develop an attitude for mutual respect and a willingness to cooperate. Those in power must accommodate those seeking power, and those seeking power must understand that they cannot be accommodated overnight. A balance between the two attitudes has to develop—something that may not come automatically. The West, Islamic leaders, regional governments, and others involved have moral and temporal responsibilities to make this happen. No other alternative exists if the Middle East is to prosper in the foreseeable future. ■