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Recent Trends and Future Prospects of Iranian Sponsored International Terrorism

Bruce Hoffman

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International terrorism has been a prominent feature of Iran's foreign policy since the revolution in 1979 that brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power. At the root of this policy is a desire to extend the fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law by exporting the Islamic revolution in Iran to other Muslim countries and cleansing the Middle East of all Western influence. This report examines the basic rationale of Iran's international terrorism campaign, its trends and patterns of activity over the past six years, and the Iranian personalities behind the policy. It assesses the future course of Iran's policy of supporting terrorism and, accordingly, focuses on the ongoing power struggles within the Iranian regime that are likely to determine the country's foreign policy now that Khomeini has died. The author discusses four key issues: (1) the reason Iran has supported international terrorism as a foreign policy instrument; (2) the ties between Iran and extremist Shia organizations elsewhere; (3) the trends in international Shia terrorism activity and the explanations for these patterns; and (4) the ways these trends have been affected or influenced by internal rivalries within the Iranian ruling elite.

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March 1990

Prepared for the
Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

RAND

PREFACE

This report examines the Iranian clerical leadership's use of international terrorism as a policy instrument. It was prepared as part of a project analyzing the evolution of the Shia clerical establishment in Iran since the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. A companion report, *The Clerical Establishment in Iran*, R-3788-USDP, by Nikola B. Schahgaldian et al., examines the nature, role, modus operandi, and sources of various clerical power centers, focuses on major issues of factional discord, and identifies the likely domestic and foreign policy directions of the clerical elite in the post-Khomeini era.

The study reported here was sponsored by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and was carried out within the International Security and Defense Policy Program of RAND's National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center supported by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The findings of this report should be of interest to both Middle East and terrorism specialists, as well as policy analysts concerned with social and political developments in Iran.

SUMMARY

International terrorism has been a prominent feature of Iran's foreign policy since the revolution that brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power. At the root of this course of action lies the common desire of many influential clerics and their supporters to extend the fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law to other Muslim countries by exporting the Iranian revolution and by attempting to establish Islamic republics along the Iranian model wherever possible. An ancillary but equally significant motivation for this policy has been the clerical regime's deep-seated suspicion of and hostility toward the Western powers. Thus the effort "to unite true Islam against imperialism" has inevitably brought Iran into conflict with the United States and most other West European countries.

Clerical authorities, often irrespective of their factional identity, have commonly pursued a two-pronged strategy concerning the use of terrorism. On the one hand, they have repeatedly used international terrorist activities as a planned and deliberate instrument of Iranian foreign policy goals; on the other hand, they have attempted to exploit and co-opt the spontaneous indigenous agitation and support for political and socioeconomic reform that exists among radicalized Muslim populations throughout the world, and in several Arab countries in particular. During the 1980s, the necessity for continuing the armed struggle against Iraq and its supporters became inextricably intertwined with the broader struggle against Islam's enemies as defined by Khomeini. Involvement in and support for terrorist activities became an essential cornerstone of the Iranians' campaign.

The clerics' involvement in Shia international terrorism has ebbed and flowed during the past several years. However, unlike most areas of Iranian foreign policy behavior, support for terrorist operations has often been related to both factional disputes in Teheran and tactical shifts in the clerics' foreign policy calculations. The dramatic escalation of terrorist activities in 1985 was followed by an equally dramatic decline in the number of terrorist incidents in 1986. The change was essentially the result of the reshaping of Iran's foreign policy behavior which followed Khomeini's endorsement in June 1985 of efforts to mitigate Iran's diplomatic isolation and acquire desperately needed military hardware from the West. Nonetheless, the clerical regime's decision to disband the so-called Islamic Liberation Office and transfer the responsibility for supervising and/or directing the activities of foreign

Islamic radical groups to the Foreign Ministry in December 1987 did not reduce the incidence of Shia terrorist actions.

The record of the clerical regime's involvement in Shia terrorism suggests that little change, at least in the short term, can be expected in Iran's use of terrorism as an instrument of its foreign policy. Indeed, it seems that most of the clerical decisionmakers in Teheran agree on the utility of Shia terrorism, precisely because this course of action has been sanctioned by Khomeini himself. Therefore, the regime's commitment in this area is likely to stay intact unless either Iran's leadership changes its mind or such involvement can be exploited by one faction to weaken another.

However, if the recent Gulf ceasefire holds and is followed by an acceptable political resolution of the Iran-Iraq conflict, the clerics' sponsorship of such activities could be greatly reduced. Nevertheless, the post-Khomeini era may actually witness an increase in Shia terrorist activities, since some of the contending clerical factions may not hesitate to utilize their newly found domestic freedom of action to mount such activities if they believe this would enhance their short-term partisan interests.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report benefited greatly from the advice and suggestions of Zalmay Khalizad and Graham Fuller, who reviewed an earlier draft, and Nikola Schahgaldian, the project leader. Christina Meyer's assistance was critical in improving the final product and, as always, Karen Gardela provided superlative research help. A special debt of thanks is owed to Janet DeLand and the RAND Publications Department for their speed in processing the manuscript.

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I. INTRODUCTION

International terrorism has been a prominent feature of Iran's foreign policy since the revolution in 1979 that brought Ayatollah Khomeini to power. At the root of this policy is a desire to extend the fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law by exporting the Islamic revolution in Iran to other Muslim countries and cleansing the Middle East of all Western influence. Iran has sought to overthrow not only the ruling regime of its arch-enemy Iraq, but also the regimes of the conservative Arab monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Jordan; it has also attempted to establish an Islamic Republic along the Iranian model in Lebanon. An ancillary, but no less consequential motivation of this policy has been the Iranian regime's enmity toward the West. This enmity has inevitably brought Iran into conflict with the United States, Israel, and France, along with a number of other European countries.

This report examines the basic *raison d'etre* of Iran's international terrorist campaign, its trends and patterns of activity over the past six years, and the Iranian personalities behind the policy. It seeks to assess the future course of Iran's policy of supporting terrorism and, accordingly, focuses on the ongoing power struggles within the Iranian regime that are likely to determine the country's foreign policy now that Khomeini has died. Four key issues are discussed:

- Why has Iran supported international terrorism as an instrument of the regime's foreign policy?
- What ties exist between Iran and extremist Shia organizations elsewhere?
- What have been the trends in international Shia terrorist activity and what explanations account for these patterns?
- How have these trends been affected or influenced by internal rivalries within the Iranian ruling elite?

II. IRAN'S REVOLUTIONARY GOALS AND SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

On the occasion of the Iranian New Year in March 1980—just over a year after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran—Ayatollah Khomeini laid out the purpose of both the Islamic fundamentalist revolution that brought him to power and the foreign policy that the new regime would pursue:

> We must strive to export our Revolution throughout the world, and must abandon all idea of not doing so, for not only does Islam refuse to recognize any difference between Muslim countries, it is the champion of all oppressed people. Moreover, all the powers are intent on destroying us, and if we remain surrounded in a closed circle, we shall certainly be defeated. We must make plain our stance toward the powers and superpowers and demonstrate to them that despite the arduous problems that burden us. Our attitude to the world is dictated by our beliefs.[1]

Khomeini's proclamation became a clarion call for a global Islamic revolution based on his fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic tenets. Thus, much as the fledgling Soviet Union had embarked on a dual campaign to consolidate the revolution in Russia and export it to other countries nearly sixty years earlier, Khomeini defined a similar purpose for Iran. As a report in *The Economist* noted,

> The Iranian revolution changed the political landscape for Shias in two ways. First, it inspired Moslem—Sunni, as well as Shia—fundamentalists to take a stand against governments they regarded as immorally secular. Second, it brought into being in Iran a government which wants to export the Islamic revolution, and which has the resources to try it.[2]

The revolution in Iran, accordingly, was held up as an example to Muslims throughout the world to reassert the fundamental teachings of the Koran and at the same time resist the intrusion of Western—and, particularly U.S.—influence in the Middle East. This policy was, in fact, a reflection of the beliefs and history of Shia Islam as interpreted by Khomeini and pursued by his followers both in Iran and elsewhere.

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[1]Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution* (translated by Hamid Algar), London: KPI, Ltd., 1981, pp. 286-287.

[2]*The Economist* (London), July 13, 1985.

"The world as it is today is how others shaped it," Ayatollah Mohammed Baqer al-Sadr, a prominent Shia cleric, has written. "We have two choices: either to accept it with submission, which means letting Islam die, or to destroy it, so that we can construct the world as Islam requires."[3] Indeed, three ineluctable desiderata form the basis of this ideology:

> First, Shiites do not believe in the legitimate authority of secular governments. The 12th and last of the Shiite Imams, or successors to the Prophet Mohammed, is expected to reappear eventually to institute the rule of God's law on earth. Until then, all states are, on some level, inalienably illegitimate. Since Iran is the only state to have begun to implement "true" Islam, however, it is thought to be the world's only legitimate state with a unique obligation of facilitating the worldwide implementation of Islamic law. Force and violence are not only acceptable but necessary means of doing so.
>
> . . .
>
> Second, the Shiites see themselves as a persecuted minority. They believe that through their special knowledge of the Koran . . . passed on to them by the Prophet Mohammed and the 12 Imams, they are the righteous few dominated by an innately wrongful majority.
>
> . . .
>
> Third, the Shiites view themselves as victims of injustice and oppression. Ayatollah Khomeini has interpreted this theme to make the Shiites the representatives, even vanguard, of the "oppressed and innocent masses crushed under foot all over the world."[4]

In this respect, the necessity for continuous and intensive struggle against Western influence and domination was embraced as one of the primary aims of Iranian foreign policy. Indeed, as Marvin Zonis has stated, "Islam is being used as a vehicle for striking back at the West, in the sense of people trying to reclaim a very greatly damaged sense of self-esteem. They feel that for the past 150 years the West has totally overpowered them culturally, and in the process their own institutions and way of life have become second rate."[5]

The first tangible manifestation of this resentment toward the West in general and the United States in particular appeared in November 1979, when militant religious students seized the U.S. Embassy in Teheran and held 52 American diplomats hostage for 444 days. As

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[3]Quoted in Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism*, London: Sphere Books, 1987, pp. 7-8.

[4]Marvin Zonis and Daniel Brumberg, "Behind Beirut Terrorism," *New York Times*, October 8, 1984.

[5]Quoted in Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam*, New York: Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1985, p. 252.

events would later show, this incident was only the beginning of an increasingly serious and extensive international terrorist campaign directed against the United States and other Western countries.

The reverberations of this policy, however, were felt almost immediately throughout the Middle East and in other regions with considerable Muslim populations. Inspired by the Islamic revolution in Iran—though perhaps not directly ordered to action by Iran—Sunni fundamentalists seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November 1979 and staged a bloody uprising that, although quickly and viciously suppressed, proved to be a harbinger of similar religiously motivated disturbances elsewhere. Soon Shia workers rioted in the oil-rich eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia. In Bahrain, mass demonstrations by Shias (who comprise over 60 percent of the country's population) erupted in protest against alleged discrimination by the minority Bahraini Sunnis. Later on, violence broke out in Turkey, when protests by the Shia minority there provoked bloody clashes with government troops. In the early 1980s, more serious disturbances occurred in Iraq during the annual march between the Shia holy cities of Karbala and Najaf commemorating the death of the Shia martyr Hussein. As a result of the disturbances, many leading Shia clerics were arrested and later executed, and thousands of Iraqi Shias (who form a majority of the population in that country) were forcibly deported to Iran.[6]

These heady currents soon erupted into terrorist violence. Throughout 1979 and 1980, militant followers of a prominent Shia cleric in Lebanon, the Imam Musa al-Sadr, who had mysteriously disappeared while on a visit to Libya in August 1979, pursued a campaign of aircraft hijackings and bombings to pressure the Qaddafi regime to release the Imam. In March 1981, a group of Indonesian Muslim extremists dedicated to implementing an Islamic revolution based on the Iranian model seized a passenger jet in Indonesia and hijacked it to Thailand.

Isolated and uncoordinated as these events were, they represented the beginning of an international terrorist campaign by Shia extremists throughout the Middle East and in Europe. Iraq's invasion of Iran in September 1980 proved to be the catalyst for a more intense and wide-ranging onslaught of Shia terrorism. The new regime was now provided with a visible and immediate external threat to the revolution. In this respect, the use of violence against several of the Gulf countries—particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Bahrain—occurred within the context of the war with Iraq (and countries that the Iranians regarded as virtual belligerents on the side of Iraq), alongside the

[6]Ibid.

regime's wider regional and revolutionary objectives. Thus, although local Shias in these countries clearly had their own agendas, Iranian support was a critical element in their actions.

In December 1981, the first of many international terrorist attacks in Beirut occurred when a terrorist organization composed of Iraqi Shia—backed by Iran and calling itself *al-Dawa* ("The Call," as in "the call for Holy War")—bombed the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut.

During the months following the Beirut attack, Iran established an organizational framework for exploiting the revolutionary fervor of external Shia extremist groups and providing the financing needed to support their activities. At the vortex of this policy was Khomeini's dictum that "boundaries should not be considered as the means of separation. . . . Not only does Islam refuse to recognize any difference between Muslim countries, it is the champion of the oppressed people."[7]

At about this time, Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri emerged as the regime's key "front man" in these efforts.[8] The regime's strategy was based on the principle that "religion and politics are indivisible." Mosques, Montazeri declared, "should not only be places of prayer but, as in the Prophet Mohammed's time, should be centres of political, cultural and military activities."[9] Islam was to function "not just as a religion but [as] a religious polity."[10]

The foundation of this campaign was laid at a conference to promote the creation of the "Ideal Islamic Government," held in Teheran during March 1982. Under the aegis of the Association of Combatant Clerics and the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC), representatives from two dozen Arab and Islamic countries met with Iranian officials to discuss the means required to achieve this goal. The participants discussed three primary objectives:

1. To unite "true Islam" against imperialism.
2. To raise the flag of "authentic Islam" against its usurpers, principally seen as the rulers of Saudi Arabia and their agents.
3. To promote the aims of the Iranian revolution throughout the Moslem world.[11]

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[7]Ibid., p. 42.

[8]Colin Legum, "Iran's Role in World Terrorism Depicted," *The Age* (Melbourne), January 5, 1984.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Robin Wright, "Quiet Revolution: The Islamic Movement's New Phase," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 6, 1987.

[11]Legum, "Iran's Role in World Terrorism Depicted," 1984.

The conference reportedly represented the heart of a movement advocating worldwide Islamic revolution. The attendees embraced Islam as "a weapon in revolutionary wars against the rich and corrupt . . . [aiming to awaken Muslims] from the sleep of centuries, putting a sword in their hands and sending them into battle against the forces of Satan."[12] To this end, a special training program was established for Muslims throughout the Islamic world as "messengers of true Islam." After receiving instruction in Iran, these militants were to return to their home countries to popularize and advance the regime's revolutionary goals, foment unrest, and generally create a climate favorable to the adoption of fundamentalist Islamic precepts.[13]

Iran's clerical rulers were to pursue a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, the regime would use international terrorist activities as a planned and deliberate instrument of Iranian foreign policy; on the other, it would exploit and co-opt the spontaneous support for its revolutionary goals among radical Muslims throughout the world. The necessity for continuous struggle against Iran's enemies consequently became inextricably intertwined with the broader struggle against Islam's enemies as well—and terrorism became the essential cornerstone of this campaign. An ideal opportunity for Teheran to implement the revolutionary strategy and exert its influence in another part of the Middle East arose within months of the March conference, when Israel invaded Lebanon.

IRAN'S INTERVENTION IN LEBANON

Although the Israeli invasion facilitated Iran's involvement in Lebanese affairs, a number of other factors made Lebanon susceptible to foreign intervention in general and Iranian exploitation in particular.

In June 1982, Israeli forces stormed across the border into Lebanon in a massive attack on the military and political infrastructure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in that country. Since its expulsion from Jordan over a decade before, the PLO had sought to transform Lebanon into a base from which to attack Israel and a training site from which to dispatch its fighters to assault Israeli targets throughout the world. The historically fragile foundations of the Lebanese state had enabled the PLO to operate from that country with virtual impunity, flouting the authority of the government and

[12]Quoted in Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam*, pp. 27–28.

[13]Thomas L. Friedman, "Some Detect Master Plan," *New York Times*, December 13, 1983.

establishing within part of Lebanon literally a state within a state. The inability to constrain the growth of the PLO's power in Lebanon and prevent it from carrying out operations from Lebanese soil further weakened the ability of the Lebanese government to prevent Israeli reprisal attacks, much less repel the more serious invasions that occurred in 1978 and 1982.

The chronic weakness of the Lebanese state stemmed from the imbalance of political power among its many sectarian groups. The Maronite Christians and the Sunni Muslims had shared power uneasily since Lebanon was granted its independence in 1946; the Shia community, meanwhile, was all but ignored. Although this system may have been appropriate to the population divisions that existed in the 1940s, less than 30 years later it had become outmoded. The higher Shia birthrate had transformed a minority group into the majority, yet the Lebanese political system was never altered to compensate for this change. The poor, less-educated, and politically disorganized Shia were powerless to redress the imbalance. Residing in the underdeveloped southern half of Lebanon, they suffered discrimination from their Sunni co-religionists and the Christians for years. Consequently, the Shia felt disenfranchised and alienated from the mainstream of Lebanese politics, commerce, and society.

This situation began to change in 1968, after Imam Musa al-Sadr returned to his native country from the Iranian holy city of Qom. In 1974, al-Sadr organized the Movement of the Underprivileged to advance Shia interests and improve the community's lowly socioeconomic condition. This movement was subsequently reorganized as the principal Shia political party in Lebanon, *Amal*, which formed its own militia during the civil war that wracked Lebanon a year later.

In 1979, as previously noted, al-Sadr vanished during a visit to Libya. The disappearance of the Imam created a vacuum within *Amal* that made the party fertile ground for Iranian influence and rendered the movement susceptible to the fundamentalist call of the revolution that had brought Khomeini to power earlier that year. Nabih Berri, a lawyer, was appointed head of *Amal* in 1980. Hussein Musavi, the alleged mastermind behind the terrorist campaign against Libya to recover the Imam, was named as Berri's deputy and commander of the militia. A fanatical supporter of Khomeini, Musavi sought to place *Amal* in the vanguard of a regional revolution based on the new Iranian Islamic Republic. Berri, on the other hand, clung to a moderate line and advocated a new deal for the Shia community within the confines of the existing Lebanese state structure.

By this time, the radicalization of the Shia in Lebanon had gone far beyond the narrow nationalist and social aims of *Amal.* In 1981, Musavi broke with Berri and founded his own organization, *Islamic Amal.* Shortly thereafter, another faction split from *Amal,* and under the leadership of Abbas Musavi (a nephew of Hussein Musavi) and the "spiritual guidance" of Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, it soon came to be known as the *Hezbollah,* or the Party of God. Like *Islamic Amal, Hezbollah* embraced Khomeini's summons for a pan-Islamic revolt designed to turn Lebanon into an Iranian-style Islamic Republic.

Although these developments made Lebanon the immediate cynosure of Iranian revolutionary efforts, Iran was not accorded the crucial opening needed to consolidate and expand its influence in that country until Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. Within months of the invasion, the first IRGC cadres were dispatched to Lebanon, ostensibly in support of the beleaguered PLO forces. As Iran's Foreign Minister, Ali Akbar Velayati, later explained, "If our friends anywhere in the world ask us, of course we will help them." Thus, Velayati described the deployment of the Revolutionary Guard units to Lebanon as "a symbol of help . . . in the confrontation with Israel."[14]

Iran's motives in aiding the PLO, however, went far beyond the simple altruistic missions to which Velayati alluded. They were part and parcel of the two-pronged international terrorist strategy the regime had formulated earlier that year. The IRGC, for example, quickly established a forward headquarters at Baalbek in the predominantly Shia Bekaa Valley and a general headquarters just over the border in the Syrian village of Zebdani.[15] The Zebdani headquarters, in fact, was transformed by the Revolutionary Guards into their largest single base of operations outside Iran.[16] With the IRGC firmly entrenched in Lebanon, direct and immediate contact had been established between Teheran and sympathetic Shia extremist groups in that country. Iran's ruling clerics, in pursuit of their original goals, could now take advantage simultaneously of the revolutionary ferment among Lebanon's Shia and the massive disruption caused by the Israeli invasion in the already fragile Lebanese state.

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[14]Quoted in Elaine Sciolino, "Iranian Promises Help to World's Oppressed," *New York Times,* October 4, 1984.

[15]Friedman, "Some Detect Master Plan"; and David B. Ottaway, "Baalbek Seen as Staging Area for Terrorism," *Washington Post,* January 19, 1984.

[16]Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam,* pp. 80–81, 84.

THE ESCALATION OF SHIA TERRORISM IN LEBANON

The establishment of Iran's policies in Lebanon depended largely on the latter's continued instability. Only as long as the fighting between the myriad indigenous factions and external forces continued unabated and the Lebanese government remained incapable of asserting its authority would Iran be able to fill this vacuum. The deployment of a Multi-National Peacekeeping Force (MNF) comprising military units from the United States, Great Britain, France, and Italy to Lebanon in August 1982 thus posed a serious threat to Iranian aims. Although the MNF had been dispatched to Lebanon following the massacre of Palestinian civilians by Maronite militiamen that month in order to protect the Palestinians from further attack, its broader objective was to restore some semblance of order to the country and stabilize the worsening situation there. Hence, it was not surprising that the targets of Shia terrorist activity in Lebanon soon expanded to include the diplomatic and military facilities, attendant personnel, and private citizens of the MNF member nations as well as the Israeli forces occupying the southern part of the country.

On March 15, 1983, the first of a series of terrorist operations against the MNF occurred when a detachment of Italian soldiers was attacked by Shia operatives. The following day, a group of U.S. Marines was fired upon, and three days later a French paratroop unit was targeted. Another attack was carried out against the French on April 9. But these incidents paled in comparison with the April 18 suicide car bombing that destroyed the U.S. Embassy in West Beirut and killed 69 persons.

This new and more wide-ranging terrorist campaign was probably the result of another conference chaired by Montazeri in Teheran in February 1983. Some 400 persons attended this co-called "First Conference on Islamic Thought." After the meeting, another special training center for foreign Muslims was reportedly established in Qom, where sponsored students pursued both religious studies and methods of armed insurrection.[17] In addition, responsibility for channeling Iranian volunteers to Lebanon was assigned to Fazollah Mahalati, who acted as Khomeini's "special representative" to the Lebanese Shia organizations. Under a banner proclaiming "The path to Jerusalem passes through Beirut," which hung on the wall of his Teheran office, Mahalati oversaw the dispatch of volunteers to Lebanon to fight against Iran's three principal enemies there: the United States, Israel,

[17]Legum, "Iran's Role in World Terrorism Depicted."

and France.[18] By the end of 1983, the number of Revolutionary Guards deployed in Lebanon had grown to between 2,000 and 3,000.[19] As Mahala i explained in an interview broadcast by Teheran radio in late 1983, "There is no other country in the world where Muslims find such joy in fighting." Lumping Lebanon and Syria together in a single entity, he went on to state, "We find in Syria the three main enemies of Islam at the same time."[20]

The basic underpinnings of the Iranian strategy were subsequently elucidated by Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, one of the leaders of the principal Shia terrorist group in Lebanon, *Hezbollah*, and a key figure in the terrorist campaign unleashed against the United States in that country:

> We do not hold in our Islamic belief that violence is the solution to all types of problems; rather, we always see violence as a kind of surgical operation that a person should use only after trying all other means, and only when he finds his life imperiled. . . . The violence began as the people, feeling themselves bound by impotence, stirred to shatter some of that enveloping powerlessness for the sake of liberty.

In this context, Fadlallah pointed out, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was the embodiment of the United States' hostility to revolutionary Islam:

> This invasion was confronted by the Islamic factor, which had its roots in the Islamic Revolution in Iran. And throughout these affairs, America was the common denominator. America was generally perceived as the great nemesis behind the problems of the region, due to its support for Israel and many local reactionary regimes, and because it distanced itself from all causes of liberty and freedom in the area.[21]

Thus, according to this analysis, the Israeli invasion indirectly brought Iran into renewed conflict with the United States. As Fadlallah explained,

> Confronting the question of America, which was itself exerting political, military, economic and intelligence pressure on the area in order to deliver it to Israel's grip, the people felt they had to do something.

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[18]"Extent of Iranian Involvement in Lebanon Is Discussed," *al-Majallah* (London), November 5-11, 1983.

[19]Unidentified Lebanese intelligence sources cited in Friedman, "Some Detect Master Plan."

[20]Quoted in "Extent of Iranian Involvement in Lebanon Is Discussed."

[21]Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadl Allah [sic], "Islam and Violence in Political Reality," *Middle East Insight*, Vol. 4, Nos. 4-5, 1986, pp. 4-13.

> It's only to be expected that any situation of despair can impel one to suicide, when it is a personal matter involved. When a person owns nothing, or has nothing to lose, he will resort to any means, ordinary and extraordinary, even those which would destroy both his adversary and himself. . . . Islam takes to war . . . [not] to bring people to Islam, but only when others try to limit its freedom of movement.[22]

Velayati made the identical point in a 1984 newspaper interview. "The United States intervention in Lebanon," he stated, "is the main cause of developments that followed. When the United States intervenes in another country it should expect certain reactions from people."[23]

The intervention to which Velayati referred was the increasing assistance U.S. military forces were providing to the Lebanese Army in its offensive against Shia militiamen and their Druse allies during September 1983. On September 8, the U.S. Navy battleship *New Jersey* had shelled Druse positions in the mountains around Beirut. Targeting instructions were relayed to the gunners aboard the *New Jersey* by the U.S. Marine contingent in the MNF from its headquarters and observation post at the Beirut International Airport. This provision of support profoundly changed the Marines' role—no longer an impartial peacekeeping force, the Marines had become active participants in the fighting. By this time, moreover, their mission in Lebanon had become to support U.S. Secretary of State George Schulz's unrealistic and doomed effort to force Lebanon into a peace treaty with Israel against the inclinations of numerous Lebanese internal elements and in the face of Syria's total hostility. Thus the Marines were militarily supporting one faction in Lebanon and pursuing Israel's goals there. In turn, the United States was brought into direct conflict with the Shia and Druse militias, and with their Iranian patrons as well.

In response to this situation, Iran—with Syrian backing—unleashed an intensified campaign of terrorist suicide car and truck bombings in October and November designed to drive the U.S. forces from Lebanon and destroy the MNF arrangement. On October 23, simultaneous suicide truck bombings rocked the U.S. Marine Headquarters at Beirut International Airport (killing 241 Marines) and the French paratroop headquarters in that city (killing 58 persons). A similar attack was staged on the Israeli military government building in Sidon on November 4, resulting in 67 deaths.

The uproar generated in the United States over the attacks played right into Iran's hands. One of the main aims of a terrorist act is to

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[22]Ibid. See also, "Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah: The Palestinians, the Shia, and South Lebanon," Interview on November 21, 1986, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, pp. 3-10.

[23]Quoted in Sciolino, "Iranian Promises Help to World's Oppressed."

produce far-reaching psychological repercussions, and the American reaction to the suicide bombings of the Marine Headquarters and the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait (described below) provides a textbook case of how this objective was achieved.[24] For example, U.S. naval vessels stationed off the coast of Lebanon were immediately placed on alert because of fears that Islamic terrorists were planning to make "kamikaze-type" attacks in airplanes loaded with explosives. The concern over suicidal attacks by Islamic fanatics, moreover, was not confined to the Middle East: Concrete barriers were hastily erected outside the White House, the Department of State, the Pentagon, and other government and military facilities in the United States.

In addition, the decision to deploy the Marines to Lebanon as part of the MNF was criticized with increasing fervor in the United States. The Reagan Administration was faulted both for putting the Marines at risk and for inadequately considering the implications of their active involvement in support of the Lebanese Army. When the Marine contingent sustained further casualties after heavy fighting erupted between Lebanese Army units and Shia militiamen in February 1984 (bringing the number of U.S. servicemen killed in Lebanon to 264),[25] the United States bowed to public pressure and ordered the withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon. With the departure of the U.S. forces, the MNF arrangement crumbled. Iran had achieved an important objective, and a major obstacle to its designs in Lebanon was removed.

IRAN'S TERRORIST SPEARHEAD: ISLAMIC JIHAD

At the end of 1983, the geographical scope of Iranian-backed Shia terrorist operations broadened as six bombing attacks rocked Kuwait. A suicide truck bomb exploded at the U.S. Embassy and nonsuicide vehicular bombings occurred at the French Embassy, the Kuwaiti Water and Electricity Ministries, the Kuwait airport, an American diplomatic residential compound, and a Kuwaiti petrochemical factory. Another car bomb was discovered and defused near the Kuwaiti government passport office. Nine days later, bombs exploded near the Iraqi Embassy in Istanbul and in Ankara; and on the same day, car bombs were set off near a French military post and a hotel in Beirut.

The extension of the Iranian-backed terrorist campaign to Kuwait brought into sharp focus one of Teheran's principal foreign policy

[24]Bonnie Cordes et al., *Trends in International Terrorism, 1982 and 1983*, The RAND Corporation, R-3183-SL, August 1984, p. 1.

[25]Lou Cannon and Michael Getler, "Reagan's Decision: A Political Gamble," *Washington Post*, February 8, 1984.

objectives: the export of the Islamic revolution to other Muslim countries. Notwithstanding Kuwait's geostrategic position astride the Persian Gulf, it is a small, relatively defenseless, and thus vulnerable target. But more important, like Lebanon, Kuwait has a sizable Shia community, and consequently, Iran viewed it as fertile ground for subversive revolutionary activity. Finally, the generally pro-Western policies of Kuwait, coupled with its unstinting support of Iraq in the war with Iran, inevitably incurred the enmity of the Iranian regime. The terrorist attacks thus had a dual motivation: to advance Iran's regional, revolutionary ambitions and to punish the conservative Kuwaiti rulers for their support of Iraq.

The violent onslaught directed against the United States, France, Israel, Kuwait, and Iraq provided the first indication of the political consciousness and tactical sophistication of the Iranian regime's two-track strategy and the internal dynamics of its international terrorist campaign. All of these attacks were carried out by Arabs—either Lebanese or Iraqi Shia—not Iranians. Although the operations were staged at the behest of Iran, and the attacks in Lebanon doubtlessly were facilitated by the logistical support and guidance of the Revolutionary Guardsmen stationed in that country, Iran was able to preserve at least a veneer of deniability of the attacks and thereby avoid possible retaliation.[26]

Indeed, all of the 1983 attacks—in Lebanon, Kuwait, and Turkey—were claimed in the name of "Islamic Jihad." This term had first appeared in May 1982. Although it was initially suspected that Islamic Jihad was a previously unknown Lebanese Shia terrorist organization, the 1983 operations—in particular, the bombings in Kuwait and Turkey—suggested that Islamic Jihad was not in fact a single terrorist entity, but a front or coalition of individual Shia groups operating at the behest of Iran under a common framework. Islamic Jihad is in fact now known to be a cover name for operations carried out by Hezbollah, sponsored by Iran, with additional support provided by other Middle Eastern countries such as Libya and Syria.[27] The individual terrorist

[26]For example, retaliatory airstrikes were carried out by both France and Israel against Lebanese Shia terrorist concentrations in the Bekaa Valley in November 1983 and by the United States, through the guns on the USS *New Jersey*, in the same area the following month. Despite suspicion of Iranian complicity in the terrorist bombings, no military action whatsoever was carried out directly against Iran. (See Shahram Chubin, "Iran and Its Neighbors: The Impact of the Gulf War," *Conflict Studies* (London), No. 204, October 1987, pp. 4-5.)

[27]As many as 25 separate terrorist groups are believed to operate under the aegis of Islamic Jihad (*The Economist, Foreign Report*, No. 1841, September 27, 1984). However, Taheri notes that "a study of some of the most important terrorist attacks against Western interests since 1983 shows that at least eight different groups have been involved, most of which do not seem to have any structured and regular relationship with

organizations that are believed to have carried out operations under the banner of Islamic Jihad include *Hezbollah, al-Dawa,* and *Jundollah* (Soldiers of God). At the same time, these organizations often carry out their own operations entirely separate from Islamic Jihad.

Although the inherent secrecy of this arrangement makes any definitive analysis of Islamic Jihad's organizational structure based on open, unclassified sources difficult, its operations are thought to be directed by a secret council with four regional and several local commands. Its controlling body, which is known as The Supreme Coordinating Council between the Iranian Islamic Revolution and Islamic Revolutionary Organizations in the World, is believed to be directed from Iran by Ayatollahs Montazeri and Musavi Khoeyniha. Members of the council reportedly include Mohsen Rafighdust, Iran's former Minister for the Revolutionary Guards; Mohammed Mir-Salim, adviser to the Iranian Defense Ministry; Zabih Zanganeh, a representative of the Iranian secret police; Hussein Musavi of *Islamic Amal*; and Ahmad Nahaullah, a leader of underground Shia cells in Saudi Arabia. The council also allegedly directs terrorist operations in Egypt.[28]

There is reason to believe that the nerve center of Islamic Jihad operations in the Middle East in the early 1980s was Iran's Embassy in Damascus. With an operational budget in 1983 of some $400 million—the largest of any Iranian legation—the embassy also had a staff of over 200 persons. The Ambassador, Ayatollah Ali-Akbar Mohtashami, reportedly enjoyed direct access to Khomeini in his role as coordinator of Islamic Jihad activities.[29] Mohtashami chaired an informal working group whose members included Hussein Musavi, Abbas Musavi, Ayatollah Fadlallah, and Mohammed Khansari (described as Khomeini's permanent link with Libyan leader Mu'ammar Qaddafi), together with several high-ranking Syrian intelligence officers, including Colonel Ghazi Kenaan, the head of Syrian military intelligence and the former military commander of Syria's armed forces in Lebanon. Acting on instructions from Teheran, this working group allegedly commissioned and paid for the terrorist attacks carried out by Islamic Jihad.[30]

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one another beyond a deep ideological affinity." (Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism*, p. 125; see also Brian Michael Jenkins and Robin Wright, "The Kidnappings in Lebanon," *TVI Report*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1987, p. 4.)

[28]*The Economist, Foreign Report,* No. 1841, September 27, 1984.

[29]Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism*, p. 126.

[30]See *The Economist, Foreign Report,* No. 1841, September 27, 1984; "Extent of Iranian Involvement in Lebanon Is Discussed"; and Taheri, *Holy Terror: The Inside Story of Islamic Terrorism*, p. 125.

III. TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL SHIA TERRORISM

The clerics' involvement in Shia international terrorism has ebbed and flowed several times. Unlike most areas of Iranian foreign policy, the support for execution of terrorist operations has been related to both factional disputes in Teheran and tactical shifts in clerics' foreign policy calculations. This section examines patterns in international Shia terrorism since 1983 and attempts to explain these trends and place them within the context of developments in Teheran among the Iranian ruling elite.

1983: THE WAVE OF BOMBINGS

The establishment of Islamic Jihad and the attacks carried out under its aegis in 1983 were a watershed in the pattern of Shia terrorism. Whereas throughout the preceding four years the level of Shia terrorism had remained fairly low and constant (four incidents in 1979, three in 1980, five in 1981, and six in 1982), in 1983, Shia extremists staged 19 attacks (see Fig. 1).[1] Eleven of these attacks—more than half the total—occurred in Lebanon. Indeed, from this time onward, that country would be the primary locale of Shia terrorism. Similarly, Islamic Jihad was responsible for the majority of terrorist incidents that year, as it would be in succeeding years, carrying out eight of the attacks. At the same time, the proliferation of individual Shia terrorist groups in Lebanon also accounted for the increase recorded during 1983. *Al-Dawa* claimed responsibility for four incidents, and a variety of other Shia extremists groups such as the Black Berets, *al-Sadr* Brigades, and *Hezbollah* took credit for the remaining seven.

1984: THE EMERGENCE OF KIDNAPPING

In 1984, the number of terrorist operations carried out by Shia extremists again increased, to 31. Although a majority of the incidents occurred in Lebanon, others were carried out, or attempted, in France,

[1]Unless otherwise noted, the data and statistics on Shia terrorist incidents presented in this analysis are based upon information from the RAND Chronology of International Terrorism.

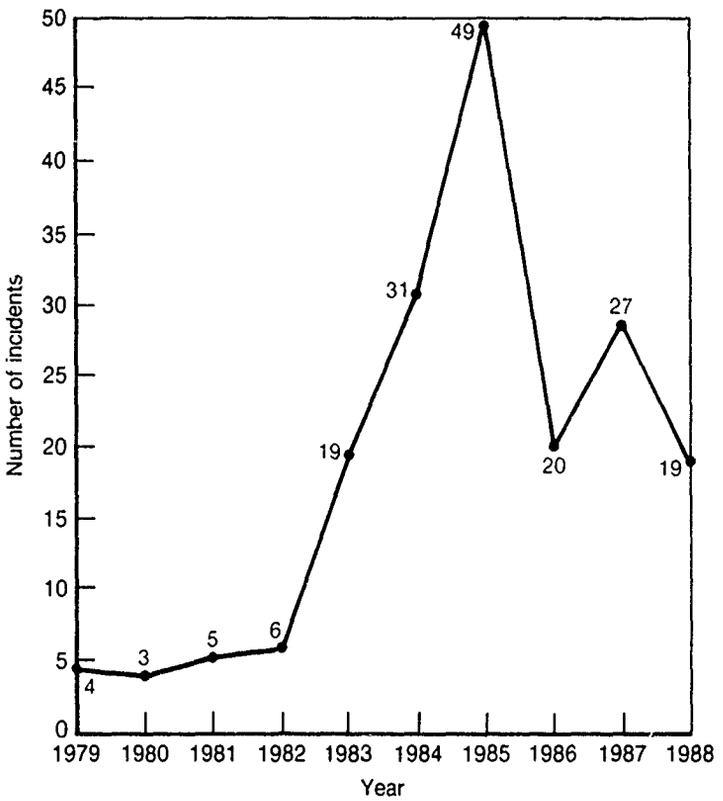

Fig. 1—International terrorist acts committed by Shia extremists

Spain, West Germany, Italy, Greece, Iraq, Kuwait, and Indonesia.[2] The three most significant of these were an attempt by Islamic Jihad to hijack a Saudi airliner and shoot down another in Spain in July, a planned suicide truck bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Rome (which was foiled when Italian police arrested seven Lebanese Shia members of Islamic Jihad on November 27), and the hijacking in December of a Kuwaiti airliner by five Iraqi Shia terrorists belonging to *al-Dawa*, in which two American passengers were murdered. The bombing plot

[2]This list does not include the 19 ships that struck mines in the Suez Canal between July 9 and September 20, 1984. Although Islamic Jihad released a communique on July 31 claiming that it had laid 190 acoustic mines in the Gulf of Suez and the southern entrance to the Red Sea to punish "imperialists" for encouraging an expansion of the Iran-Iraq war, the minings are believed to have been done by Libya. (Data from the RAND Chronology of International Terrorism.)

against the U.S. Embassy and the hijacking of the Kuwaiti airliner were undertaken in a bid to obtain the release of 17 Islamic Jihad members who had been arrested and imprisoned in Kuwait following a series of bombings that rocked that country in December 1983; as noted above, those involving Saudi Arabia were intended to punish that country for its support of Iraq.

However, Shia terrorist tactics changed significantly at this time (see Table 1). Where bombings had previously been by far the preferred tactic (between 1979 and 1983, 56 percent of all Shia terrorist attacks involved bombing),[3] the 11 bombings in 1984 accounted for only 35 percent of Shia terrorist operations—a decline of 12 percent compared with the previous year (bombings accounted for 47 percent of all operations in 1983). In what was to become a pattern of Shia terrorist activity, kidnappings in 1984 accounted for 41 percent of all Shia terrorist incidents. There were 13 kidnappings that year and 23 in 1985. The number declined to 11 in 1986 (55 percent of all incidents) and to only 5 in 1987 (18 percent of the incidents that year).

The change in tactics from bombing to kidnapping appears to have been influenced by a number of factors. First, the increased security measures taken by foreign governments at their embassies and other diplomatic facilities in Lebanon had made bombing attacks more difficult to execute. The attackers were thus forced to shift their attention to less protected targets, such as foreign nationals, who became the victims of the new campaign. Indeed, analyses of terrorist tactics in

Table 1

SHIA TERRORIST TACTICS, 1979–1988

Year	Kidnapping	Attack	Hijacking	Bombing	Assassination	Threat
1979	—	1	2	1	—	—
1980	—	—	1	2	—	—
1981	—	—	2	3	—	—
1982	1	1	1	3	—	—
1983	1	6	1	9	2	—
1984	13	1	2	11	3	1
1985	23	2	2	17	5	—
1986	11	3	1	3	2	—
1987	5	3	1	14	3	1
1988	4	2	1	9	3	—

[3]During this four-year period, a total of 41 incidents occurred: 23 bombings, 7 aircraft hijackings, 7 armed assaults, 3 assassinations, and 1 kidnapping.

general have shown that increasing security at certain targets does not necessarily neutralize the terrorist threat, but merely shifts attention to "softer," more vulnerable targets. In Lebanon, foreign diplomats, businessmen, academicians, journalists, and clergymen became targets of tactical convenience for the Shia terrorist organizations.

Second, the seizure of foreigners provided the terrorists and their Iranian patrons with a sustained means of applying pressure to the victims' governments. Unlike the evanescent pressure created by bombings or other forms of immediate attack, the prolonged holding of hostages provided a festering reminder of the terrorists' demands. Islamic Jihad abducted five Americans in 1984 to coerce the United States into pressuring Kuwait to release the aforementioned 17 Islamic Jihad prisoners in that country. To pressure Saudi Arabia to end its support of Iraq, Islamic Jihad kidnapped a Saudi Arabian diplomat. Islamic Jihad abducted the Spanish Ambassador to Lebanon in an attempt to secure the release of four Iranian terrorists who had been arrested in Spain in July.[4] By the same token, the seizure of a French engineer in Beirut was most likely intended to exert pressure on France to end its arms sales to Iraq.

Islamic Jihad was responsible for 12 terrorist incidents in 1984—more than any other Shia extremist group. However, in contrast to the previous year, the number of incidents attributed to other groups declined slightly (from 11 to 9).[5] This decrease is probably attributable

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[4]The Saudi Arabian consul in Beirut, Hussein Farrash, was the first person seized by the terrorists that year, on January 17. The following month, Frank Reiger, a U.S. citizen working as a professor at the American University of Beirut, was kidnapped; in March, Jeremy Levin, the Beirut bureau chief of Cable News Network, and William Buckley, the CIA station chief in Lebanon, were seized; the Rev. Benjamin Weir was kidnapped in May; and an American student was abducted in November. Of the nine hostages taken by Shia terrorists, only the American student and Weir were released voluntarily by their captors. Although the student was freed 48 hours after he was abducted, Weir was in captivity for 16 months before he was released in September 1985. In what his captors described as an "act of good faith," Weir was allowed to go free after being instructed to inform the U.S. government that more Americans would be kidnapped and possibly executed if the 17 Islamic Jihad terrorists in Kuwait were not released from prison and allowed to leave that country. Reiger, the French engineer, and the Spanish and Libyan diplomats were freed in three separate rescue operations staged by the mainstream Shia *Amal* militia. Buckley, however, was murdered by his captors after being tortured by them to obtain information on U.S. intelligence operations in Lebanon. Of the original kidnap victims, Levin escaped, or was released by his captors, in February 1985, and the Saudi consul, Farrash, was released in May 1985. At least eight different terrorist groups have claimed credit for the eight Americans and 12 other foreign nationals (including the British Anglican Church envoy, Terry Waite) who are currently held hostage in Lebanon.

[5]For example, the *al-Sadr* Brigades claimed responsibility for both the kidnapping of a Libyan diplomat in June and the attack on the Libyan Embassy in Beirut in July to protest the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr; *al-Dawa* took credit for the bombing of the Kuwaiti Embassy in Beirut in November and for the hijacking of a Kuwaiti airliner

to the efforts reportedly undertaken by the Shia extremist groups in Lebanon to consolidate their forces and coordinate their varied operations. Indeed, all of the major Shia groups active in that country—including *Islamic Amal, al-Dawa, Jundallah,* the Hussein Suicide Squad, and the Islamic Students Union—apparently were absorbed by *Hezbollah.*[6] Hence, an array of terrorist operations under the catch-all banner of Islamic Jihad were carried out by a strengthened, internal Shia terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon.[7]

1985: FACTIONAL RIVALRY AMONG THE IRANIAN RULING ELITE

More significant than the developments in Lebanon were the reports that surfaced near the end of the year of internal disagreements within the ruling clerical elite over Iran's involvement in and support of international Shia terrorism. The main point of contention concerned the efforts of the government in Teheran to restrain Shia terrorist activities somewhat in order to improve Iran's relations with the West and the Persian Gulf states and to curtail their support of Iraq. A number of extremist clerics entrenched in several revolutionary organizations insisted on the continuation of the existing policy.

The dispute, it should be emphasized, was not over the use of international terrorism as a means of achieving Iran's foreign policy objectives, but rather over the emphasis, timing, and targets of such operations. The so-called revisionist politicians within the ruling elite—including Khamenei, Rafsanjani, and Velayati—apparently stressed the need to encourage like-minded revolutionaries abroad through example, notably by educating the oppressed in Islamic countries about how the Iranian people rose up against the Imperial regime and tyranny. To opponents of this approach, such measures were not enough. The extremists contended that revolutionary movements had to be supported through arms, funding, and training, and that Iran as a revolutionary country was obligated to actively encourage and be intimately

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the following month; members of *Hezbollah* were responsible for the attack on the Saudi Embassy in Beirut in August; and two hitherto unknown groups, the Guardsmen of Islam and Islamic Action in Iraq, respectively, claimed credit for the hijacking of an Air France jet to Teheran in July and the three bombings of Iraqi targets in Greece in December.

[6]Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam,* p. 95.

[7]See "I Have Met the 'Suicide Men,'" *Jeune Afrique,* January 25, 1984; Richard Harwood, "The Riddle of Islamic Jihad," *Washington Post,* September 21, 1984; David B. Ottaway, "Fixing Responsibility in a Vacuum of Power," *Washington Post,* June 21, 1985; Peyman Pejman, "Hezbollah: Iran's Splintered Ally," *Washington Post,* August 1, 1985; and Glenn Frankel, "Hezbollah Threatens Precarious Balance in S. Lebanon," *Washington Post,* September 28, 1986.

involved in the conduct of these activities.[8] The revolutionary politicians apparently sought to check the ascendance of their rivals by backing an intensified and more geographically wide-ranging terrorist campaign to sabotage the government's new initiative. It was reported, for example, that on November 23, 1984, a meeting was held in Teheran between representatives of *al-Dawa* and *Islamic Amal* and Ayatollah Montazeri, the nominal head of a number of revolutionary organizations.[9] The meeting occurred just four days before the Islamic Jihad plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Rome was foiled and 11 days before the *al-Dawa* hijacking of the Kuwaiti airliner. According to some reports, the meeting resulted in a decision to launch more "armed resistance" actions against Saddam Hussein's helpers in the Gulf War, such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and to shift the anti-American campaign to western Europe.[10]

The repercussions of this decision were evident in the dramatic escalation of Shia terrorist activity during 1985. A record 49 terrorist incidents were recorded—18 more than the previous year. Although there was no significant deviation from the 1984 pattern of operations—Lebanon again being the main site of Shia terrorism, Islamic Jihad claiming responsibility for the most incidents, and kidnapping accounting for the largest share of operations—each of these categories showed a percentage increase.

The escalation of terrorist incidents in Lebanon was largely a product of the consolidation of the Lebanese Shia terrorist forces and the support received from revolutionary clerics in Teheran. The latter also accounts for the succession of terrorist incidents that occurred during 1985 in Western Europe and the Persian Gulf region. In March 1985, a cinema in Paris at which a Jewish film festival was being held was bombed; in April, a car bomb exploded outside of a restaurant in Madrid frequented by U.S. servicemen; that same month, a branch of an Israeli bank in Paris was bombed. Two bombings (one near a U.S. military compound) occurred in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on May 19, and six days later, an attempt was made on the life of the Emir of Kuwait by a terrorist driving a car packed with explosives. Four simultaneous bombings were carried out in Copenhagen against two Jewish targets and two American airline offices, followed by the bombing of the Istan-

[8]Kambiz Foroohar, "The Post-Khomeini Era Begins," *The Middle East*, January 1988, pp. 12–13.

[9]These included the Office of Islamic Revolutionary Movements, a semi-independent structure which maintained close ties with a host of revolutionary and Islamic underground organizations throughout the world.

[10]See, for example, *The Economist, Foreign Report*, No. 1852, December 13, 1984.

bul offices of the Israeli airline, El Al, and several Paris department stores. All of these operations were claimed by Islamic Jihad.

The increasing incidence of kidnapping was also reflected in the diversity of the nationalities of the victims. In 1984, five U.S. citizens, four Lebanese, one Saudi, one French, one Spanish, and one Libyan national were kidnapped. In 1985, five Americans, five Britons, four Soviets, three Frenchmen, one Lebanese, one Kuwaiti, one Swiss, one Dutch, one Canadian, and one Austrian national were seized. With American targets in Lebanon in scarce supply as a result of repeated warnings by the U.S. State Department concerning the safety of U.S. citizens there, the Shia terrorist groups turned to nationals of other Western countries who remained in Lebanon.

Accordingly, a sort of competition was generated among the Shia groups, all of whom regarded the seizure of foreign nationals as a means to either enhance their own stature or better serve—and impress—their Iranian patrons. Although Islamic Jihad claimed credit for ten of the abductions, *Amal* and *Hezbollah* were each responsible for two more, and two hitherto unknown groups, the Khaibar Brigade and the Islamic Liberation Organization, respectively, kidnapped two Britons and four Soviets.

1986: THE STRUGGLE OVER THE DIRECTION OF IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

The dramatic escalation of Shia terrorism in 1985 was followed by an equally dramatic decline in 1986. For the first time since 1980, the level of Shia terrorist activity decreased. Only 20 incidents occurred—less than half the number of the previous year. This decline was partly the result of the Iranian factional disputes that had begun the year before. In June 1985, Iranian foreign policy behavior shifted after Khomeini endorsed the curtailment of international terrorist activity in order to mitigate Iran's diplomatic isolation. By improving relations with the West and Persian Gulf states, Iranian leaders, including Rafsanjani, apparently hoped that Iran would be able to acquire much-needed military hardware for use in the war with Iraq, and that such a policy would also reduce outside support for the Iraqi war effort.[11] As a result, the geographical scope of terrorist activity narrowed considerably in 1986. Whereas nine countries had been the sites of Shia terror-

[11]Robin Wright, "Iranian Power Plays Reflected in Terrorist Moves?" *Christian Science Monitor*, November 5, 1986.

ist incidents in 1985, attacks occurred in only four countries in 1986, and no operations at all were carried out in Western Europe.[12]

The first tangible manifestation of this change occurred in June 1985, when a TWA flight was hijacked and its 41 American passengers were taken hostage by terrorists belonging to *Hezbollah.* With Khomeini's backing, the Iranian regime played an active part in resolving the nearly month-long crisis, applying pressure on the terrorists to release their captives. In a stunning reversal of his earlier position, Speaker Rafsanjani emerged as a pivotal figure in the negotiations with *Hezbollah* to free the hostages, a role that the United States acknowledged promptly.[13] Iran's intervention also proved to be the catalyst behind subsequent efforts by the Reagan Administration to obtain the release of the ten Americans then being held by Shia terrorists in Lebanon and to improve U.S.-Iranian relations in general.

As part of the so-called "arms for hostages" deal the United States pursued, several shipments of weapons were delivered to Iran, and two of the American captives (Father Lawrence Jenco and David Jacobsen) were freed. More than any other development, the decline in the number of terrorist incidents that occurred while these negotiations proceeded underscored Iran's involvement in and support of international terrorism. Islamic Jihad, the terrorist entity most closely associated with Teheran, was responsible for only 13 incidents in 1986, compared with 23 in 1985. Moreover, whereas 10 of the kidnappings in 1985 were attributed to Islamic Jihad, only 3 of the 11 abductions in 1986 were claimed in its name.

This shift in Iranian policy, however, did not go uncontested by the Iranian factional leaders who were opposed to the pragmatist camp. Working through their minions in Lebanon, they attempted to thwart the negotiations with the United States through an independent terrorist campaign, hoping to thereby undermine the credibility of their rivals. The percentage increases recorded in 1986 in both kidnapping and terrorist attacks in Lebanon were a direct result of this campaign.

Although fewer persons were abducted in 1986 than in 1985, kidnappings nevertheless accounted for 55 percent of all terrorist incidents, an increase of 6 percent over the previous year. This increase was largely due to the activity of extremist Lebanese Shia groups other than Islamic Jihad and was reflected in the escalation of the percentage of operations in Lebanon.

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[12]Kuwait, Egypt, and Israel accounted for one bombing each, and an Iraqi aircraft was hijacked en route from Baghdad to Saudi Arabia.

[13]Wright, "Iranian Power Plays Reflected in Terrorist Moves?"

A particularly significant aspect of the 1986 kidnappings was the predominance of French victims, especially early in the year. All but one of the *Hezbollah* kidnappings involved French nationals. This selective kidnapping appears to reflect some apprehension on the part of the Iranian clerics who exercised influence with the Lebanese extremist groups. They may have been wary of using anti-American actions to discredit their pragmatist rivals at a time when the "arms for hostages" deal was being negotiated. Anti-American actions were perhaps thought to be overly bold: They could backfire and turn the Teheran regime against its sponsors, rather than convincing the regime to reverse its "moderate" foreign policy tilt. Therefore, to test the reaction in Teheran to the continuation of its anti-Western terrorist campaign, the hardline faction at first focused exclusively on French targets. Only later, after the new round of abductions was not significantly opposed, did Americans again become the targets of the Shia extremists. Thus, in 1986, Lebanon simply became the battleground of a bitter power struggle within the Iranian ruling elite. And, as events progressed, two figures in particular emerged as the principal actors: Rafsanjani and Montazeri.

In a bid to strengthen his own position, Rafsanjani had almost abandoned the hardline position he previously shared with Montazeri and others. In addition to the prominent role he played in ending the TWA hostage incident, Rafsanjani also appeared to moderate his position on a number of key domestic policy issues. He began to "cultivate the image of the statesman, trying to reassure the middle classes that the days when patrols of zealots raided their homes with impunity in search of such emblems of the counter-revolution as a chess board or a cassette of music, [were] over."[14] In addition, he made increasingly reassuring public statements regarding Iran's intentions should it win the war with Iraq (e.g., that Iraq's territorial integrity would not be violated, nor would the country be dismembered), indicating a willingness to negotiate with a new government in Baghdad ("even if it were pro-American") and taking a less strident position on the extension of the Islamic revolution to the Gulf states.[15]

By contrast, following his reaffirmation in November 1985 as Khomeini's heir-designate, Montazeri seemed to gravitate further toward the factions opposing Rafsanjani's initiatives. In particular, Montazeri took a harder line against anything less than complete vic-

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[14]Hazhir Teimourian, "Succession Struggle Gathers Pace," *The Middle East*, April 1987, p. 17.

[15]Jean Gueyras, "No-Holds-Barred as the Mullahs Struggle for Succession," *Le Monde* (Paris), October 25, 1986.

tory in the war with Iraq.[16] In the meantime, many of the most extremist Iranian clerics, including Medi Hashemi, the alleged mastermind behind many of the kidnappings in Lebanon, continued their close association with Montazeri.[17]

Events came to a head during October 1986—in the midst of what was to be the final round of U.S.-Iranian negotiations for the release of the hostages—when members of the Office of Islamic Liberation Movements (ILM), allegedly acting on Hashemi's orders, kidnapped Mahmud Ayat, the Syrian charge d'affairs in Teheran.[18] The abduction of Ayat was widely seen as an attack on Rafsanjani's policies.[19] It apparently was calculated both to embarrass Rafsanjani and his allies and to warn Syria about its support for and encouragement of Iran's "moderate" foreign policy tilt.[20] Although Ayat was freed by the government 24 hours later, it took the personal intervention of Ahmad Khomeini, the Imam's son, to secure his release.

The kidnappers were immediately denounced by Prime Minister Musavi as "agents of World arrogance," and within days, Hojatoleslam Reyshahri, the Minister of Intelligence, had issued a warrant for Hashemi's arrest.[21] Additional arrests followed, including those of Hashemi's brother, Hadi (Montazeri's son-in-law), a number of ILM officials, and several members of the *Majlis* (the Iranian Parliament). Hashemi was accused in the state-run press of a variety of serious crimes, committed both before and after the 1979 revolution and involving murder and cooperation with SAVAK (the Shah's secret police). The gravity of the charges brought against Hashemi—who, in addition to being a relative of Montazeri's by marriage, had been described as Montazeri's "right-hand man"—thus constituted a serious blow to Montazeri's political prestige.

Indeed, Rafsanjani himself is believed to have played a key role in orchestrating the arrests. As Khomeini's personal representative on the Supreme Defense Council, vice-chairman of the Assembly of Experts, and serving *Majlis* Speaker, Rafsanjani had both the influence

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[16]Foroohar, "The Post-Khomeini Era Begins," p. 12.

[17]Teimourian, "Succession Struggle Gathers Pace," p. 17; see also Gueyras, "No-Holds-Barred," and Ihsan A. Hijazi, "Rift Among Iran's Leaders Appears to Widen," *New York Times,* November 6, 1986.

[18]Teimourian, "Succession Struggle Gathers Pace," p. 15.

[19]Loren Jenkins, "Iranian Power Struggle Said to Be Escalating," *Washington Post,* February 4, 1987.

[20]Ayat had reportedly been "accused by his kidnappers of meddling in the succession and plotting against Montazeri." It was later determined that the kidnapping had been undertaken in order "to teach him a lesson" and "teach him not to meddle in Iran's internal affairs." (See Gueyras, "No-Holds-Barred.")

[21]Teimourian, "Succession Struggle Gathers Pace."

to order Reyshahri to take Hashemi and his cohorts into custody and the access to Khomeini necessary to secure the Imam's consent in advance of the roundup. Moreover, by exploiting his reportedly close relationship with Ahmad Khomeini, the Imam's son, Rafsanjani was able to initiate a whispering campaign in the Iranian capital that Khomeini was considering reconvening the "Assembly of Experts" to review Montazeri's selection and possibly elect a council of leaders in his place.[22]

It appeared that Montazeri's fortunes had been dealt a devastating blow. On November 1, however, details of secret negotiations between the United States and Iran were leaked to a Beirut news magazine by supporters of both Montazeri and Hashemi.[23] They apparently hoped that disclosure of the deal would simultaneously embarrass Rafsanjani and undermine his personal base of support, as well as that of the pragmatist allies, and would thereby prompt the government to drop the charges against Hashemi and his associates.

At least initially, the revelations knocked Rafsanjani off balance. He was forced to confirm publicly that the magazine account was correct and later to defend his role in the affair before the *Majlis*. Efforts were mounted to remove him as *Majlis* Speaker, and demands were voiced for the convening of a special parliamentary committee to investigate everyone involved in the negotiations.[24] Radical "student" supporters of Montazeri circulated leaflets in Teheran denouncing Rafsanjani's "betrayal of the Islamic revolution,"[25] while senior Iranian officials condemned his willingness to deal with the United States. Prime Minister Musavi, for example, castigated Rafsanjani, declaring that "Iran could have no relations with the 'criminal' United States, because the resumption of ties would be contrary to the Islamic principles of the revolution."[26]

But as events continued to unfold in Teheran, it became obvious that the calumny and vituperation directed against Rafsanjani had little effect on his position. Rafsanjani was neither removed from any of

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[22]Teimourian, "Succession Struggle Gathers Pace"; Foroohar, "The Post-Khomeini Era Begins," p. 13.

[23]Eric Hooglund, "The Islamic Republic at War and Peace," *Middle East Report*, January-February 1987, p. 6; Jenkins, "Iranian Power Struggle Said to Be Escalating"; Robin Wright, "Iran Looks Beyond Khomeini," *The Nation*, February 7, 1987, p. 147; and Foroohar, "The Post-Khomeini Era Begins."

[24]Wright, "Iran Looks Beyond Khomeini," p. 146.

[25]Quoted in Jenkins, "Iranian Power Struggle Said to Be Escalating"; see also "Iran's Hardliners Gain," *Foreign Report* (London), No. 1946, November 27, 1986; and Wright, "Iran Looks Beyond Khomeini," p. 146.

[26]Quoted in Elaine Sciolino, "Iranian Officials Portrayed as United in Their Effort to Exploit U.S. Arms Furor," *New York Times*, November 17, 1986.

the offices he held nor made the subject of a threatened parliamentary investigation. His survival was in large measure the result of the support he continued to receive from Khomeini. Indeed, the Imam acted quickly to silence the squabbling between the Montazeri and Rafsanjani factions and ordered the Parliament not to investigate the U.S. arms deal, thereby protecting Rafsanjani and his co-conspirators.[27]

At the same time, Khomeini continued to back Montazeri, who retained his role as the Imam's successor-designate. A less charitable fate, however, awaited Hashemi. After being forced to appear twice on Iranian television confessing to his crimes, Hashemi was convicted on charges of "waging war against Islam" and being "corrupt on earth"—the most serious offenses under Iranian law—and was executed in September 1987.[28]

More significant and far-reaching was the government's decision in December to disband the ILM and transfer responsibility for supervising the activities of all external revolutionary groups to the Foreign Ministry.[29] Control of Iran's foreign Shia allies was the key to understanding the factional disputes plaguing Iranian foreign policy. Earlier attempts by pragmatist politicians in and out of the government to centralize these activities in the Foreign Ministry had been rebuffed by powerful figures outside of the government, such as Montazeri and Hashemi, who sought to maintain their independent connections with foreign extremist groups. Indeed, the struggle for control over the extremist Shia groups abroad had set in motion the chain of events that began with Hashemi's arrest and led to the revelations of the secret negotiations with the United States. In the end, therefore, it was Rafsanjani and the pragmatist camp who gained the most from this internecine power struggle.

1987: A NEW TURNING POINT

Much as events during 1983 marked a watershed in Shia terrorist activity, heralding an intensified campaign of violence, trends in Shia terrorism during 1987 also proved to be a turning point. It is especially noteworthy that the disbanding of the ILM and reassignment of

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[27]Wright, "Iran Looks Beyond Khomeini," p. 147.

[28]Roger East (ed.), *Keesing's Record of World Events*, Vol. 33, Nos. 5 and 11, Harlow, England: Longman, 1987, pp. 35541-35542; see also "Inside Iran," *Foreign Report* (London), No. 1949, December 18, 1986; Jenkins, "Iranian Power Struggle Said to Be Escalating"; Wright, "Iran Looks Beyond Khomeini," p. 147; and Foroohar, "The Post-Khomeini Era Begins," p. 13.

[29]For details see "Inside Iran," *Foreign Report* (London), No. 1949, December 18, 1986.

responsibility for the direction of external revolutionary activities did not result in a decline of Shia terrorist activity but, instead, brought changes in the geographical focus of these operations and in the terrorists' tactics.

For the first time since 1983, the majority of incidents did not occur in Lebanon. Only five terrorist operations (18 percent of the total) took place in that country, a particularly dramatic decline in contrast to the 16 operations (80 percent) that occurred there the previous year. Also, for the first time since 1983, there were more bombings than kidnappings. Fourteen bombings were recorded in 1987 (11 more than the previous year), a 36 percent increase over the 1986 total (15 percent in 1986, 51 percent in 1987). But only five kidnappings were carried out in 1987 (18 percent of all incidents), whereas 11 were carried out in 1986 (55 percent). Kidnappings probably declined because there were few operations in Lebanon, where, for logistical reasons, all of the abductions have occurred. Less dramatic, but nonetheless significant, was the increase in the total number of incidents that occurred in 1987 (26, in contrast to the 20 in 1986).

Trends in Shia terrorism continued to demonstrate the intimate connection between disputes in Teheran and terrorist operations elsewhere. The principal issue affecting both the constellation of factions within the Iranian ruling elite and the conduct of the regime's international terrorist campaign was the dispute over control of the foreign Shia extremist groups, in the context of the war with Iraq. At the heart of this power struggle was the pragmatist camp's contention that the United States and conservative Arab monarchies in the Gulf would never permit an outright Iranian victory. Accordingly, this faction often emphasized the need to end Iran's diplomatic isolation, which, they argued, could be achieved only by improving Iran's external relations through curtailing its support for international terrorism. However, after their efforts throughout 1986 failed to bear fruit, agitation for a resumption of the international terrorist campaign increased among those who opposed the pragmatist approach. Even more ominous were indications that this campaign was to be waged in Western Europe to further alienate the West and embarrass the pragmatist wing, thereby undermining its overall domestic position.

Evidence that the hardline faction had been planning for a renewal of Iranian-backed terrorist operations in Western Europe surfaced on January 12, 1987, when Bashir al-Khodur, a Lebanese national, was apprehended at an airport in Milan carrying 20 pounds of plastic explosives with detonators. The following day, Mohammed Ali Hamadi—one of the *Hezbollah* terrorists wanted for the June 1985 hijacking of a TWA aircraft—was arrested at the Frankfurt airport

when explosives were discovered in his suitcase. Hamadi's apprehension subsequently led to the arrest of his brother, Abbas Hamadi, on January 26. According to some reports, the Hamadis and al-Khodur were part of a new deployment of Shia extremists sent to Italy, West Germany, and France either as active terrorists or as "sleepers."[30]

More successful were efforts to project the terrorist campaign in the lower Persian Gulf region. On January 19, 1987, simultaneous explosions rocked three oil installations in Kuwait. Responsibility for the bombings was claimed from Beirut by the Revolutionary Organization Forces of the Prophet Mohammed in Kuwait, a terrorist group composed primarily of Kuwaiti Shias. Iranian complicity was suggested by the fact that the bombings were timed to coincide with a meeting of the 46-member Islamic Conference Organization in Kuwait three days later, which Iran had refused to attend in protest of Kuwait's support of Iraq in the Gulf War.[31] Six days earlier, a new round of kidnappings had begun in Beirut, when a French journalist was seized by members of the Revolutionary Justice Organization.[32] Then, on January 17, West German businessman Rudolf Cordes was kidnapped by the Organization of the Oppressed of the Earth, in retaliation for the arrests of the Hamadi brothers by West Germany the previous week. On January 24, three American citizens and one person with a U.S.

[30]"Iran's New Terror Plan," *Foreign Report* (London), No. 1952, January 22, 1987. As a result of information gleaned from the arrests of the two Hamadi brothers, eight persons suspected of planning terrorist bombings in France were arrested by French authorities on March 26. They admitted to having ties with both Iran's secret service and *Hezbollah* and are suspected of having been involved in the series of bombings that shook Paris in September 1986, designed to force France to release a Lebanese Christian terrorist, Georges Ibrahim Abdullah, an imprisoned Armenian terrorist, and an Iranian terrorist serving a prison sentence for an assassination attempt on former Iranian Prime Minister Shahphur Baktiar in 1980. (See Richard Bernstein, "French Terror Suspects Report Link to Iranians," *New York Times,* March 27, 1987.)

[31]On January 31, Kuwaiti authorities announced that 11 persons had been arrested and five others were being sought for the attacks. The surnames of two of those arrested, Behbahani and Dashti, "suggested that they were Shiite Moslem Kuwaitis of Iranian origin." Both families are among "two of the half-dozen leading Shiite families of Iranian origin who came here around the turn of the century. Those families are regarded as the peers of the network of influential, largely merchant, Kuwaiti families at the pinnacle of influence." Although Iranian expatriates working in Kuwait had been regarded as the principal source of trouble, the involvement of members of these old, established families, whose loyalty had not in the past been doubted, came as a shock. An estimated 60,000 to 90,000 Iranians presently reside in Kuwait, despite the fact that "tens of thousands . . . [of Iranian nationals] have been deported in the last two years as part of a security crackdown, and because of cutbacks in the economy due to falling oil prices" (John Kifner, "Kuwait Arrests 11 in Oilfield Blasts," *New York Times,* February 1, 1987).

[32]The victim, a French television reporter named Roger Auque, was later released after France allowed Walid Gordji, an Iranian official suspected of involvement in a series of bombing attacks in Paris in September 1986, to return to Iran.

residency permit were abducted by a previously unknown group calling itself the Islamic Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine.[33]

Meanwhile, Iran launched a major military offensive against Iraq in early January 1987, apparently hoping to deliver the decisive blow needed to improve Iran's bargaining position in any future negotiations and thereby bring about an acceptable settlement. The importance the regime placed on achieving this objective was evident in the assignment of responsibility for the offensive to Rafsanjani. Iraqi resistance, however, was stronger than expected, and six weeks later, the offensive ground to a halt; on February 26, it was suspended.[34]

The failure of the operation weighed most heavily on the person responsible for its direction, Rafsanjani. The massive battlefield casualties sustained by the Revolutionary Guards, one of Rafsanjani's most important domestic constituencies, undermined the confidence of even his closest supporters.[35] But apart from the blow dealt to Rafsanjani's position within the regime, the failed offensive represented a major, if temporary, setback to the pragmatists.

Within weeks of the suspension of the offensive, a series of terrorist attacks were executed throughout the Middle East. In April, a plot to bomb an American airbase and Israeli diplomatic offices in Turkey was uncovered when Turkish police arrested four members of Islamic Jihad. That same month, an individual claiming to be a member of *Hezbollah* was arrested in Egypt after a bombing attack at the American University in Cairo. In May, three American diplomats escaped injury when the car they were driving was raked with machinegun fire. The attack was claimed by the Islamic Jihad of Egypt, an Egyptian group of Islamic extremists who are believed to be funded and directed by Iran.[36] A few days later, the same group claimed credit for the attempted assassination of two prominent Egyptians, a former Minister of the Interior and a well-known newsmagazine editor. In the wake of these shootings, the police carried out a massive roundup of Muslim

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[33]All four of the victims—Alan Steen, Robert Polhill, Jesse Turner, and an Indian national, Mithileshwar Singh, who holds an American residency permit—worked at the American University of Beirut. Although the group's name and its demand that 400 Palestinians being held by Israel be released in exchange for the four hostages suggest that it is a Palestinian terrorist organization, in recent years, particularly close ties have been established between the PLO and Iranian-backed Shia groups in Lebanon. Moreover, this particular organization is thought to include both radical Shia and Palestinian guerrillas and to be loosely tied to *Hezbollah.* (See Jenkins and Wright, "The Kidnappings in Lebanon," p. 5.)

[34]East, *Keesing's Record of World Events*, pp. 35158-35159.

[35]Ali Behrooz, "Iran Ponders Next Move," *Middle East*, August 1987, p. 6.

[36]Tom Porteous, "Cairo Breaks Ties with Tehran as Muslims Held," *The Guardian* (London and Manchester), May 15, 1987. In addition, this group had taken credit for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981.

fundamentalists.[37] Information gleaned from the arrests led to the apprehension of 37 members of the group who were charged with planning and executing the attacks. They were also accused of plotting to overthrow the government of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak through a campaign of selective assassination of Egyptian officials, military leaders, journalists, and foreign diplomats. Citing evidence of Iranian involvement in the plot, Egypt announced on May 14 that it was severing diplomatic relations with Iran.[38]

More terrorist incidents occurred in Lebanon during the summer. American journalist Charles Glass was kidnapped in June by a previously unknown Shia terrorist organization, calling itself The Organization for the Defense of Free People,[39] and in August, the Tunisian branch of Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for a series of bombings in Tunis, while the Saudi Arabian arm of *Hezbollah* took credit for blowing up a natural-gas pipeline in that country.

Shortly afterward, the locus of Shia terrorist activity again shifted to Europe. During September and October, six terrorist incidents, all aimed at Arab or Iranian targets, occurred in France and one occurred in England. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the bombings of branches of a Saudi and a Kuwaiti bank; the hitherto unknown Islamic Resistance Front took credit for the bombing of the Tunisian Consulate in Paris (in retaliation for the arrests of Muslim fundamentalists in Tunisia following the bombings in that country), as well as for the three other incidents directed against Arab nationals in France; and the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution and Soldiers of Khomeini claimed responsibility for the assassination of two Iranian dissidents in London. At the end of October, the Pan Am offices in Kuwait were bombed by a pro-Iranian Kuwaiti Shia group calling itself the Organization for the Liberation of Muslims in Kuwait. Finally, in late December, another pro-Iranian group, the Sons of Allah, claimed credit for the attempted assassination of an Iraqi diplomat in Cyprus.

This escalation of Shia terrorist activity was particularly significant because of the geographical diversity of the operations. In previous years, the vast majority of incidents had occurred in Lebanon, but in 1987, eight countries became the sites of terrorist activity and ten attacks were carried out in Europe.

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[37]Risks International, Inc., *Weekly Risk Assessment*, Vol. 4, No. 24, June 12, 1987.

[38]Porteous, "Cairo Breaks Ties with Tehran as Muslims Held."

[39]On July 1, NBC news reported that U.S. intelligence agencies had intercepted messages between the Iranian Embassy in Damascus and *Hezbollah* operatives in Lebanon that provided "conclusive evidence that Iran had ordered the kidnapping" of Glass. (Data from the RAND Chronology of International Terrorism.)

This change of geographical focus may have been related to the earlier decision to reassign responsibility for the direction of foreign Shia extremist groups to the Foreign Ministry. The officials now responsible for external terrorist activities may have been hesitant to continue to rely on Lebanese groups who were closely linked to their longstanding rivals in the disbanded ILM. The Foreign Ministry officials may have feared that their instructions would be disregarded or that effective control had not been established over these organizations. The decision to use operatives outside of Lebanon also meant that the extensive terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon which had facilitated the execution of complex operations, such as kidnappings, which required sophisticated logistical support to maintain secure safehouses and move hostages at will, could not be used. As a result, simple bombing and assassination became the most commonly used tactics of Shia terrorists during 1987.

In sum, the shift of responsibility for international Shia extremist groups from the ILM to the Foreign Ministry did not appear to significantly moderate Teheran's commitment to the use of terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy, but simply changed the terrorists' geographical focus and tactics.

1988: A CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

Fewer Shia terrorist incidents were recorded during 1988 than in any year since 1983. This decrease appears to have been a product of Iran's waning fortunes in the war with Iraq coupled with the pragmatist camp's continued efforts to assert its authority over foreign extremist groups and consolidate its position within the Iranian ruling elite. The ascendancy of the pragmatists—and of Rafsanjani in particular—was evidenced not only by this decline in terrorism but also by Iran's unconditional acceptance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 598, calling for a ceasefire in the Gulf War.

At first, the pattern of Shia terrorist activity in 1988 was remarkably similar to that of past years, involving kidnappings in Lebanon and an international airline hijacking. In January, the Revolutionary Justice Organization claimed responsibility for abducting a West German citizen, Rudolf Schray. The following month, an American Marine officer serving with the U.N. truce monitoring group, Lieutenant-Colonel William Higgins, was seized by a group calling itself the Islamic Revolutionary Brigades.[40] Both organizations are believed to

[40]Although Schray was released by his captors in March, Higgins was executed, and a videotape of his death was made public in July 1989.

be closely connected to, or affiliated with, *Hezbollah*. Other terrorists suspected of having ties to *Hezbollah* attempted to hijack two Kuwaiti airliners en route from Thailand in April. Although Thai police arrested one of the hijack teams at the Bangkok airport before they could board the targeted flight, the other team was able to commandeer a plane and divert it to Iran. In the course of the 16-day ordeal that followed, the terrorists murdered two passengers. Eventually, a deal was made whereby the hijackers agreed to free their captives in return for their own safe passage to Beirut and Thailand's release of the second hijacking team.

The motive for all of these incidents appears to have been to obtain hostages to trade for the release of imprisoned pro-Iranian terrorists. The Schray abduction was undoubtedly linked to the Hamadi arrest and trial in West Germany, while the Higgins abduction and the Kuwaiti airlines incident were related to the 17 Iraqi and Lebanese Shia terrorists imprisoned in Kuwait. An ancillary motivation may once again have been the desire to embarrass the pragmatist faction and thereby undermine its overtures to Western countries. If that were the case, the incidents might have been isolated, independent actions or part of a more concerted, though inchoate, effort orchestrated by the pragmatists' rivals from Teheran.

The pattern of international Shia terrorism during the first six months of 1988 closely mirrored developments in the Iran-Iraq War.[41] As they had in 1987, Iranian battlefield reversals initially provoked an intensification of international terrorist activity, particularly against Iraq's two principal Gulf allies, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Bombing attacks were carried out against two Saudi targets in West Germany and one in Kuwait during April and against Kuwaiti and U.S. targets in that country in May.[42] This campaign, however, was cut short by Iran's agreement in July to the U.N.-brokered ceasefire.

By the summer, it had become impossible for Iran's leaders to ignore the toll that more than eight years of unrelenting—and mostly inconsequential—warfare had taken on the Iranian people and economy. Their conviction that Iran could no longer prosecute the war and hope to survive as a nation had gained greater urgency as a result of a series of defeats suffered by Iranian forces during April and May.

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[41]See David B. Ottaway, "Iran Not Expected to Hit Back Quickly," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1988.

[42]Additional incidents recorded between January and June involved the kidnapping of a Belgian national, Jan Cools, in Lebanon; the attempted assassination of four Syrian generals in Beirut; a bombing claimed by Islamic Jihad in Jerusalem; and the bombing of a shop in West Germany belonging to Iranian dissidents. Cools was released by his captors in June 1989, following the intervention of Libyan leader Mu'ammar Qaddafi. Fourteen Western hostages, including nine Americans, are still being held in Lebanon.

On April 17, Iraqi forces dislodged some 50,000 Iranian troops from the Faw Peninsula. The military's failure to either muster enough volunteers to stem the Iraqi onslaught or marshal sufficient supplies and war materiel for a counterattack signaled that Iran had reached the limit of its warmaking capacity. The setback to Iran was all the more profound in view of the fact that this strategically important territory had been conquered by the Iranians at the cost of great loss of life only two years before.

The following day brought still more bad news for Iran: the loss of an estimated 20 percent of its already reduced operational naval forces. In retaliation for damage to a U.S. Navy frigate by an Iranian mine on April 14, President Reagan authorized the destruction of three Iranian oil platforms (that incidentally had also served as observation posts for Revolutionary Guards' attacks on passing commercial ships). Combined Navy and Marine units attacked the two platforms during the early hours of April 18. However, before the third platform could be destroyed, Iranian naval vessels appeared on the scene to challenge the Americans. In the brief encounter that followed, Iran's only two frigates were knocked out of action, a high-speed patrol boat was destroyed, and three smaller launches were sunk by the U.S. forces. American loses were confined to one Marine helicopter and its two-man crew (at least 44 Iranians are thought to have been killed).[43]

The following month, Iraq was able to parlay its victory at Faw into a general rout of Iranian forces from Iraqi soil. On May 25, Basra, Iran's last remaining stronghold on the Iraqi side of the strategic Shatt al-Arab waterway, fell to Saddam Hussein's forces. The war, for all intents and purposes, was over. Indeed, within weeks, Rafsanjani, Khamenei, and Hashemi had agreed to a cessation of hostilities with Iraq.[44] The accidental shooting down of an Iranian airliner by the USS *Vincennes* in July, which resulted in the deaths of all 290 persons on board, may have been the last straw in cementing the Iranian decision to sue for peace.[45] So determined was the ruling elite to end the war that Montazeri's calls for revenge attacks on American targets were immediately and completely stifled—with Khomeini's consent—by Rafsanjani.[46] Fifteen days later, Teheran officially informed U.N. Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar of Iran's unconditional acceptance of the ceasefire terms.

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[43]"What Khomeini Will Do Next," *U.S. News & World Report*, May 2, 1988.

[44]Eric Hooglund, "The Islamic Republic at War and Peace," pp. 7–8.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Youssef M. Ibrahim, "A Key Iranian Leader Mutes Calls for Revenge Against U.S. Interests," *New York Times*, July 9, 1988.

Although a petulant spasm of terrorist incidents by foreign Shia extremists followed, Rafsanjani and his allies were successful in curtailing any sustained, independent campaign by the external groups. In fact, only 6 terrorist incidents occurred between July and December, compared with the 13 that were recorded during the first six months of the year.[47] Notably, only one of these attacks was directed against U.S. or Western targets. The one exception was the midair bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, Scotland, in December, which killed all 259 passengers aboard. Although responsibility for the incident has yet to be definitely attributed to a specific terrorist group, Western intelligence experts have voiced suspicions that the bombing was carried out by Iranian elements—perhaps acting independently of Teheran—to extract revenge for the downing of the Iran Air plane by the USS *Vincennes*.

By the end of the year, the pragmatist camp appeared to have secured its power base and consolidated support for its policy of increased trade and diplomatic relations with the West. Given the resulting overall decline of Shia terrorist incidents, the Pan Am bombing could be dismissed as an aberration, an isolated instance of calculated vengeance, rather than the beginning of a renewed tilt toward anti-Western extremism. Such a dismissal, however, may have been too hasty, in light of the series of events that unfolded during the first half of 1989. These developments not only disrupted the pragmatists' efforts to push Iran further along the path of international moderation, but thrust the country into a new period of uncertainty.

1989: KHOMEINI'S DEATH AND THE SUCCESSION QUESTION

As the new year began, the pragmatist faction seemed solidly in control of Iran's foreign policy. But in February the pragmatists' ascendant position over their anti-Western, hardline rivals was suddenly undercut by no less an eminence than Khomeini himself. The catalyst behind the ayatollah's intervention was the U.S. publication of a novel that Muslims considered blasphemous. On February 12, 2,000 Muslim fundamentalists in Islamabad, Pakistan, staged a violent protest against Pakistani-born British writer Salman Rushdie's book, *The*

[47]Two incidents in Turkey involved Saudi targets (an attempted bombing of the cultural mission in Ankara in July and the assassination three months later of a Saudi diplomat stationed in Turkey); bombing attacks were carried out against Syrian and Israeli military targets in Lebanon during October; and in December, three Irish soldiers serving with UNIFIL were kidnapped by an offshoot of *Hezbollah* (they were later rescued by *Amal* forces).

Satanic Verses. The demonstration quickly degenerated into a riot; several protestors were killed and hundreds were wounded when Pakistani security forces opened fire on the crowd. Thus, the publication of a book that would normally have passed unnoticed outside of literary circles was suddenly transformed into an international phenomenon as agitated Muslims throughout the world staged their own protests. In this febrile atmosphere, Iranian hardline elements quickly exploited the furor over *The Satanic Verses* as a vehicle to gain ground on their pragmatist opponents.

The affair assumed a new and more sinister character two days later when Khomeini publicly passed a death sentence on Rushdie and his publishers, and some Iranian clerics promptly announced rewards of millions of dollars to whomever fulfilled the ayatollah's decree. Khomeini's pronouncement was a green light to aggrieved Muslims everywhere. Nine of the twelve international terrorist incidents attributed to Shia extremists in the succeeding two months were directly linked to the Rushdie novel and occurred in countries such as Britain, the United States, Italy, Belgium, and Turkey.[48] To many observers, Khomeini's action suggested a repudiation of the pragmatists' attempts to improve relations with the West and an endorsement of the hardline faction's views.[49] At the very least, the uproar over *The Satanic Verses*—like the Pan Am bombing the previous December—demonstrated the pragmatists' incomplete control of Iranian foreign policy and tenuous authority over foreign Shia extremists.

In March, however, the pragmatist faction appeared to have regained lost ground when Khomeini demanded—and received—the resignation of his designated heir, Montazeri. Although the ostensible reason for Montazeri's dismissal was his increasingly strident criticism of the country's political leadership,[50] his past association with radical hotheads like Hashemi and more recent relations with discredited liberals, such as former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, had prompted Khomeini to reconsider his choice of heir. Montazeri's greatest sin,

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[48]Based on a preliminary review of incidents recorded in the RAND Chronology of International Terrorism.

[49]Nick B. Williams, "Iranian Urges Palestinians to Kill Americans," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1989.

[50]Montazeri reportedly sent a letter to Khomeini that stated, "I dissociate myself from the mass killings going on in our prisons. . . . The world thinks of us as a nation of killers. . . . This is not in the interest of Islam or of the state Your Excellency is leading." He also declared in a public broadcast on the tenth anniversary of the revolution, "We are being led by an unrepresentative clique. . . . We have failed the people [and] have not lived up to our promises. . . . The young are right to be alienated." Quoted in Hazhir Teimourian, "The Mullah Goes Back to the Mosque," *The Middle East,* May 1989, pp. 20–21.

however, probably was running afoul of the ayatollah's son, Ahmad Khomeini. It was Ahmad who—in concert with Rafsanjani, Ayatollah Ali Meshkini (the chairman of the Assembly of Experts), and his son-in-law Mohammed Reyshari (the Minister of Intelligence)—orchestrated Montazeri's fall from grace. The younger Khomeini's intent was most likely to guarantee himself a role in choosing his father's successor and perhaps even become a member of the three- or five-man collective religious leadership that the Assembly of Experts was considering to replace a single heir-designate.[51]

With his long-time rival Montazeri out of the way, Rafsanjani moved to strengthen his own position by reaching beyond his usual constituency. During April, his public statements assumed a distinctly anti-Western tone in a bid to appeal to hardline elements and thereby enhance his candidacy in the Iranian presidential elections scheduled for July 1989. He used one Friday sermon as an opportunity to announce a purge of high-ranking military officers who were arrested on charges of being part of "a big American spy ring."[52] Rafsanjani's cultivation of this hardline image continued into early May when, during another Friday prayer service, he called on Palestinians to avenge the deaths of their brethren in the Occupied Territories by killing five Americans, Britons, or Frenchmen for every Palestinian killed by the Israelis. The *Majlis* Speaker explained his offer of "serious advice" by stating that U.S., British, and French targets were more plentiful than Israeli ones.[53] Rafsanjani, however, later insisted that he had been misquoted.[54]

Nearly five months of enigmatic change and upheaval climaxed in June with Khomeini's death. In retrospect, the timing of Montazeri's removal as heir had been critical, given Khomeini's deteriorating health. But when the ayatollah finally died on June 4, he had named no new successor. Although the Assembly of Experts selected Iranian President Khamenei to fill this position, Khamenei's clerical status—he is a hojatolislam—is beneath that of Khomeini. Moreover, none of the other potential candidates has the religious stature that Khomeini, as an ayatollah and "supreme leader," possessed.[55] This implies that, in the absence of a successor who should have been designated before Khomeini died, the person (or persons) ultimately appointed will be vulnerable to charges of illegitimacy. In this situation, factional

[51]Ibid.

[52]Quoted in Williams, "Iranian Urges Palestinians to Kill Americans."

[53]Ibid.

[54]John Kifner, "Iran Now Seen as Free to Pursue a Softer Line," *New York Times*, June 13, 1989.

[55]Khamenei's title, for instance, is that of "leader of the revolution."

rivalries could intensify as contending groups vie for power. Given past instances of clerical infighting, the contending factions' use of international terrorism either to advance their own claims or to undermine their opponents would not be unprecedented.

Iran's use of international terrorism and support of foreign Shia terrorist activities may also be determined by the way those in power interpret Khomeini's last will and testament. The will, which was made public two days after the ayatollah's death, denounced the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, before concluding, "May the curse of God and that of his angels be upon them all."[56]

[56]Quoted in "One Last Thing . . . ," *The Economist*, June 10, 1989.

IV. CONCLUSION: FUTURE PROSPECTS OF CLERICAL SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM IN THE POST-KHOMEINI ERA

It appears that, in the short term at least, little change can be expected in Iran's use of international terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy. At the heart of this policy is the regime's avowed commitment to export the Islamic revolution to other Muslim countries—a commitment that has been neither tempered nor altered in the years since Khomeini came to power. As Iranian President Ali Khamenei once explained, "We have aided the liberation movements in the best possible manner, and no government has the right or power to tell us that we have intervened in their internal affairs. . . . No one can tell us to stop publicizing our version of Islam or stop us from describing our revolution to the people of the world."[1]

Terrorism, accordingly, has thus far remained a state policy, one agreed upon by most Iranian clerics because it has been sanctioned by Khomeini himself. But, even this salient consideration apart, terrorism has emerged as an especially useful tool for the contending factions within the Iranian ruling elite to gain leverage against their rivals. These factions have manipulated foreign Shia extremist groups to embarrass or undermine the power and prestige of domestic opponents, as well as to sabotage any improvement of Iran's relations with other Middle Eastern or Western states. Changes in the fortunes of individual factions are therefore unlikely to have much impact on the regime's overall commitment to the use of terrorism *except* when it can be exploited by one faction to weaken another. Consequently, international Shia terrorist activity may well increase following Khomeini's death and the ascendance to power of a new Iranian ruler or collective leadership. Since the authority of the successor (or successors) will certainly be unequal to that of Khomeini, his (their) rivals may have more freedom to mount independent terrorist campaigns in the service of personal or factional ambitions.

The possible escalation of international terrorism may include intensified operations against the United States and various regional adversaries if the current ceasefire between Iran and Iraq is broken by the Iraqis. In that case, the terrorist activities may also become far less discriminate. To date, Shia terrorist actions have been selective and

[1]Quoted in Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam*, pp. 33–34.

cautious; their targets have been restricted to the United States, Israel, France, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other countries that have incurred Iran's enmity either by supplying weapons to Iraq or by imprisoning Shia terrorists. Similarly, if the current Gulf ceasefire holds and is followed by an acceptable political resolution of the conflict, Iran's sponsorship of international terrorist activities can be expected to be greatly reduced.

In the future, however, if factional disputes in Teheran over the succession issue become sufficiently acute and persistent to supersede concern over foreign policy, terrorist activities could proliferate as a result of various factions' preoccupation with efforts to embarrass or undermine the power of other factions. It is important to note that the Iranian-sponsored terrorists have great potential for growth, since they have not developed particularly close ties with radical, left-wing, or anti-Western *non-Shia* terrorist groups in Europe or elsewhere. Alliances with these groups could be exploited if factional infighting were to increase radically now that Khomeini has died.

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