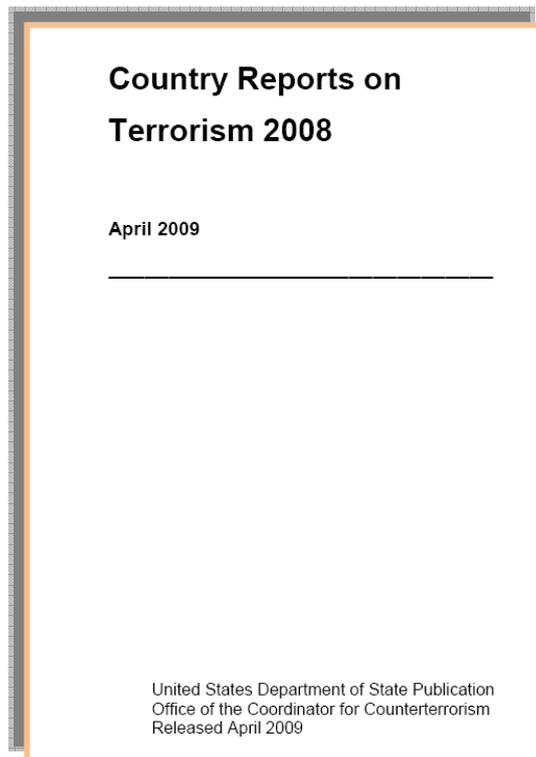




**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage
& Commemoration Center (IICC)**

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**Iran and Syria as state sponsors of terrorism in
the annual report on terrorism issued by the US
Department of State**



Overview

1. Iran and Syria, two countries designated as state sponsors of terrorism by the US Department of State, have consistently pursued a long-term strategy of encouraging and inciting violence and terrorism against Israel ("resistance") by relying on Palestinian terrorist organizations (mostly

Hamas) and the Lebanese Hezbollah. The purpose of that strategy is to strengthen the radical Iranian-Syrian axis in the Middle East, to weaken Israel by hitting its economy and social structure, to reinforce the radical Islamic forces in Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, Iraq, and other sites in the Middle East and worldwide, and to undermine the prospects of a US-sponsored Middle East peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

2. Iran and Syria tend to play down or even deny the military-operative nature of the assistance they provide to what the US Department of State has designated as terrorist organizations, portraying it as political, informational, or even humanitarian assistance. However, reliable intelligence information collected by Israel, the US, and other countries conclusively proves that those claims are false. The annual report on terrorism issued by the US Department of State, based on considerable information held by the US, **conclusively proves that in 2008 there was no real change in the extent and nature of Iranian and Syrian support of terrorist organizations.** For their part, the Iranians deny the findings of the report, claiming that it is the US which pursues a strategy of violence and terrorism, and that Iran itself is a “victim of terrorism”.

3. The US Department of State's annual report on terrorism, published in April 2009, dedicates a separate chapter to **state sponsors of terrorism. Iran and Syria**, two major state sponsors of terrorism, feature prominently in Chapter 3, which deals with the two countries. The report indicates that Iran remained the most significant state sponsor of terrorism and that it has long employed terrorism to advance its key national security and foreign policy interests. The report further notes that Iran continues to rely primarily on its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-**Qods Force** to clandestinely cultivate and support terrorist and Islamic militant groups abroad, including: Lebanese Hezbollah, Palestinian terrorist groups such as **Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad**, certain **Iraqi Shi'a militant groups**, and Islamic militants in **Afghanistan, the Balkans, and elsewhere** (pp. 10, 182-183). Also according to the report, Hamas and Hezbollah continued to finance their terrorist activities mostly through state sponsors of terrorism Iran and Syria (p. 120).

Iran

4. As indicated in the beginning of the chapter about Iran (pp. 182-183), **“Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism”**. Iran's involvement in the planning and financial support of terrorist attacks throughout the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia had a direct

impact on international efforts to promote peace, threatened economic stability in the Gulf, and undermined the growth of democracy.

5. The report asserts that **Iran remained a principal supporter of groups that are implacably opposed to the Middle East Peace Process**. Iran provided weapons, training, and funding to **Hamas** and other Palestinian terrorist groups, including **Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)**. Iran's provision of training, weapons, and money to Hamas since the 2006 Palestinian elections has bolstered Hamas's ability to strike Israel. According to the report, **in 2008, Iran provided more than \$200 million in funding to Lebanese Hezbollah and trained over 3,000 Hezbollah fighters at camps in Iran** (p. 183). Since the end of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, Iran has assisted Hezbollah in rearming, in violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.¹

6. The report indicates that Iran's **Qods Force**,² the elite unit of the Revolutionary Guards, is the Iranian regime's main instrument of supporting terrorism outside of Iran. According to the report, the Qods Force provides assistance in arms, training, and funding to Hamas, other Palestinian terrorist organizations, Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraqi militants, and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.

7. Iranian authorities continued to provide lethal support, including weapons, training, funding, and guidance, to Iraqi militant groups that targeted Coalition and Iraqi forces and killed innocent Iraqi civilians. Iran's Qods Force continued to provide Iraqi militants with Iranian-produced advanced rockets, sniper rifles, automatic weapons, and mortars. In addition, Tehran was responsible for some of the lethality of anti-Coalition attacks by providing militants with the capability to assemble improvised explosive devices (IEDs) with explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) that were specially designed to defeat armored vehicles.³ According to the report, **The Qods Force, in concert with Lebanese Hezbollah**, provided training both inside and outside

¹ **Assisted by Iran and Syria**, Hezbollah does not uphold Security Council Resolution 1701 and continues building up its military infrastructure in southern Lebanon. See our August 12, 2007 Information Bulletin: ["One year since the acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which ended the second Lebanon war: An interim report"](#).

² See our April 2, 2007 Information Bulletin: ["Using the Qods Force of the Revolutionary Guards as the main tool to export the revolution beyond the borders of Iran"](#).

³ One of the latest roadside IEDs developed using Iranian technological know-how is Shawaz 4, a shaped IED found in the possession of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Using high-energy explosives, those IEDs can reportedly penetrate over 200 mm of steel.

of Iraq for Iraqi militants in the construction and use of sophisticated IED technology and other advanced weaponry.⁴

8. As for **Al-Qaeda**, the report indicates that Iran remained unwilling to bring to justice senior Al-Qaeda members it has detained, and has refused to publicly identify those senior members in its custody. Iran also continued to fail to control the activities of some Al-Qaeda members who fled to Iran following the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (p. 183).⁵

9. In some places, the report mentions the growing ties between Iran and Latin American countries (which, we believe, may potentially increase Iran's terrorist activity in Latin America). The report also mentions that the US is concerned about the activity of Hezbollah and Hamas supporters in the tri-border area between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Regarding Iran's terrorist activity in South America, the report mentions the following:

a. **Shipment of chemicals to Venezuela seized in Turkey:** In November 2008, Turkish customs officials at the Port of Mersin seized a suspicious Iranian shipment bound for Venezuela which contained 22 shipping containers of barrels of **nitrate and sulfite** chemicals, commonly used for bombs, along with dismantled laboratory equipment. Customs officials detected the equipment during a search of 22 containers manifested as "tractor parts." They were being transshipped to Port of Mersin by trucks from Iran. In December, customs officials asked Turkish Atomic Energy Authority and military experts to examine the seized material. At year's end, disposition of the shipment remained undecided (p. 105).

b. The report also indicates that **Iran and Venezuela** continued weekly flights connecting Tehran and Damascus with Caracas (p. 180). Passengers on these flights were reportedly subject to only cursory immigration and customs controls in Caracas. Venezuelan citizenship, identity, and travel documents remained easy to obtain, making Venezuela a potentially attractive way station for terrorists.⁶

⁴ Iranian technological know-how on producing lethal IEDs (such as Shawaz) was also provided to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. See our January 12, 2009 Information Bulletin: "[Iranian Support of Hamas](#)".

⁵ For more on Iran's former "dual role" regarding Al-Qaeda, see our April 2003 Information Bulletin: "[Iran as a State Sponsoring and Operating Terror](#)".

⁶ On the activity of Hezbollah and the Revolutionary Guards in Venezuela, see our April 19, 2009 Information Bulletin: "[Iran increases its political and economic presence in Latin America, defying the United States and attempting to undermine American hegemony. It also foments radical Shi'ite Islamization and exports Iran's revolutionary ideology, using Hezbollah to establish intelligence, terrorism and crime networks, liable to be exploited against the United States and Israel](#)".

Syria

10. The chapter on Syria (pp. 184-186) starts by saying that Syria was first designated in 1979 as a state sponsor of terrorism (meaning it is now thirty years since it was designated as a state sponsor of terrorism by the US Department of State). Syria has not been directly implicated in an act of terrorism since 1986, although it did continue to defend what it considered to be legitimate armed resistance by Palestinians and Hezbollah against Israeli occupation of Arab territory, and by the Iraqi opposition against the "occupation of Iraq." The report also mentions (p. 185) Syria's involvement in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, which is still being investigated by the UN. Syria assisted terrorist organizations by providing them with military, financial, political, and informational support, as detailed in the report.

11. The report asserts that Syria provided political and material support to **Hezbollah** and allowed **Iran** to use Syrian territory as a transit point for assistance to Hezbollah. **Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC)**, among others, based their external leadership within Syria's borders. The Syrian government insisted these groups were confined to political and informational activities (a false claim often made by the Syrians), but groups with leaders in Syria have claimed responsibility for deadly anti-Israeli terrorist attacks. As for Hezbollah, the report further adds that, highlighting Syria's ties to the world's most notorious terrorists, Hezbollah Operations Chief Imad Mughniyah, perished in a February 12 car bombing near Syrian Military Intelligence (SMI) headquarters in the Damascus neighborhood of Kafr Sousa. The report mentions that Mughniyah was wanted in connection with the 1983 bombings of the Marine barracks and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, which killed over 350. The Syrian government acknowledged that one of the world's most wanted terrorists had been present and died on Syrian soil.

12. The report asserts that **President Bashar al-Asad** continued to express public support for Palestinian terrorist groups. For example, Hamas Politburo head and de facto leader Khaled Mash'al and his deputies continued to reside in Syria. Syria provided a safe haven for Mash'al and security escorts for his motorcades. Mash'al's use of the Syrian Ministry of Information as the venue for press conferences this year could be taken as an endorsement of Hamas's message. Media reports indicated Hamas used Syrian soil to train its militant fighters, even

though Syrian authorities claimed they attempted to prevent such activities.⁷ The Syrian government allowed Palestinian conferences organized by Hamas, PIJ, and other terrorist organizations to take place in Syria.

13. The report states that throughout 2008, Syria continued to strengthen ties with fellow state sponsor of terrorism, Iran. Syria's Minister of Defense visited Tehran in May and initiated a Memorandum of Understanding on defense cooperation. Syria also allowed leaders of Hamas and other Palestinian groups to visit Tehran (p. 185). The report further notes that Asad continued to be a staunch defender of Iran's policies, including Iran's "civil" nuclear ambitions.

Reactions to the report

Iran

14. The US Department of State's report on terrorism was severely criticized by Iranian spokesmen, who wondered that the new administration, which had talked about change, did not change its view of Iran and was continuing to make false accusations against it. Initial reactions follow:

a. Iran's Foreign Minister **Manouchehr Mottaki**, staying in Cuba for the Non-Aligned Movement conference, said that the United States' accusations and the American "despicable" attitude were groundless. He further added that the US had no authority to accuse other countries of supporting terrorism while it followed a racist approach and continued its occupation, and that its doings in Guantanamo Prison were not to be forgotten (IRNA, May 1, 2009).

b. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman **Hassan Qashqavi** noted that Iran was itself a victim of terrorism and was always suffering from terrorism at the hands of the Mojahedin-e Khalq.⁸ He said that 16,000 Iranians had been killed by that organization. He also added that Iran had always spearheaded the struggle against terrorism, unlike the US, which

⁷ As at April 2008, 600 Hamas operatives trained in Syria. See our April 8, 2008 Information Bulletin: "[Hamas's military buildup in the Gaza Strip](#)".

⁸ Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) is a left-wing terrorist organization which operates in Iran since the 1960s. Since the 1980s, after Khomeini's revolution, the organization operates outside of Iran, mainly against the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is designated as a terrorist organization by many countries, including the US. It is also designated as a terrorist organization in the latest report on terrorism for 2008 (p. 283).

supported “the Zionist regime which is a symbol of government terrorism” (Fars News Agency, May 4, 2009).

Hezbollah

15. In response to the US Department of State's report, Hezbollah issued an announcement saying that **it was not at all surprised by the findings of the report** and by its “old-new” allegations, which Hezbollah considers “a badge of honor”. The announcement says that the Americans do not address the term of “resistance” or anything that has to do with that term (used by Hezbollah and terrorist organizations, that term legitimizes violence and terrorism). It further states that the US, which does nothing but “occupation and aggression”, arrogantly brands peoples and governments “terrorists”. The announcement argues that when the US administration speaks negatively about Hezbollah, it actually praises it, because “Hezbollah's value is not in its impressive technology but rather in its willingness and commitment to matters of justice, in the spirit of deep responsibility to fight the inequity and the aggression of the occupation” (Hezbollah's organ Al-Intiqad, May 1).

16. **Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah** portrayed the report as part of a global US-led attack against Hezbollah, referring also to the semi-annual report issued by the UN Secretary-General.⁹ According to Nasrallah, the purpose of the report is to portray Hezbollah as an organization involved in terrorism, drug trafficking, murder, forgery, and so forth. Nasrallah claims that such allegations are baseless, because Hezbollah represents “noble, real, pure and pristine resistance, which has perseverance, which fights the holy war [jihad], which is honest and loyal”. He further notes that the problem with all the report writers is the respect and prestige commanded by Hezbollah, and the fact that the organization refuses to recognize Israel and the US regional hegemony. Nasrallah brought up the claim that if Hezbollah limited its activities to Lebanese internal affairs, even if those activities were violent, its name would be crossed off the list of terrorist organizations. According to Nasrallah, it is designated by the US as a terrorist organization because its goal is confronting Israel (Al-Manar, May 1).

⁹ For more information on the UN Secretary-General's report about the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559 and Hezbollah's response, see our April 28, 2009 Information Bulletin: [“Exposure of a Hezbollah network in Egypt: state of affairs, implications, and reactions in Egypt and in the Arab and Muslim world”](#).

Syria

17. The Syrian official media has yet to respond to the findings of the annual report issued by the US Department of State. An unofficial Syrian website published a response on behalf of an organization calling itself Syria's Independent Committee, which proclaims itself a representative of all sectors of Syrian society. The website countered the US report with a report of its own, portraying the US as a state sponsor of terrorism. The reason for that, the report says, is that the US formerly supported Bin Laden and established the Al-Qaeda organization in Afghanistan, it supports "the Israeli terrorism", it occupied Iraq and committed a genocide there (all4syria, May 2).