

Islamic Republic of Iran as a State Sponsor of International Terrorism

Since 1979, the U.S. State Department has published annually a list of countries that have been identified as sponsors of terrorism. In 1984, the Islamic Republic of Iran was inscribed on it, and it still appears there today. Although Cuba, North Korea and Syria are also on the list, it is currently the situation between Tehran and Washington that raises the greatest concerns about the future of international security. Recent years have seen a marked increase in tension in relations between the two countries, sparked by Donald Trump's 2018 withdrawal of US participation in the nuclear deal negotiated with Iran three years earlier, resulting in the reinstatement of US economic sanctions. Another era of mutual hostility and aggressive rhetoric in official statements by representatives of both governments has begun.

The aim of the project is to analyze the problem of states supporting international terrorist organizations using the example of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Recognizing the actions of this state will allow me to construct a model that will also apply to future analysis of other cases of states providing support to international terrorist organizations. To show how complex this problem is and how important it is for international security, I will analyze the ideology, goals, modus operandi and structure of the main groups receiving assistance from the Islamic Republic. These include Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as two Iraqi organizations, Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq. I will also examine the types of assistance Iran provides to international terrorist organizations. I will conduct a study of archival records and other source documents in English and Persian, from which I will attempt to distinguish the reasons for the Ayatollah regime's involvement in the sponsorship activities and the goals it seeks to achieve. In order to fully understand the problem of the sponsor states of international terrorism, I will also analyze the actions that are currently being taken by the United States, the UN, and the EU to combat this type of foreign policy of the Iranian government. I will obtain the documents needed for the project from archives and libraries in Iran, Israel, Lebanon, and the United States. In order to provide a complete picture of the phenomenon and to avoid the risk of misrepresentation due to the possibility of unreliability of sources, I will juxtapose them with existing studies of particular aspects of state sponsorship of terrorism, and will consult with experts in the field or related fields.

The current dynamically changing situation in U.S.-Iranian relations, especially in the context of Joe Biden becoming U.S. President and the upcoming presidential elections in Iran, fully justifies the need to analyze the deep sources of mutual dislike between the two countries. The choice of Iran as an example of a state sponsoring international terrorism was not accidental. It stemmed both from my interest in Iranian political and socio-economic issues (evidenced by my BA in Iranian Studies and defended undergraduate and master's theses) and from the contemporary relevance of this issue in the international arena. Media coverage of the nuclear deal and the assassination of General Ghasem Soleimani has reinforced my belief that research needs to be done to understand the problem of Iranian sponsorship of terrorism in order to take effective action to counter it. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979, Iran has sought to pursue its national interests and strategic objectives through various illegal activities in the international arena, including through providing support to terrorist organizations whose activities and proclaimed ideology are in line with the Islamic Republic's credo. Although there has been a sharp shift in Iranian foreign policy since the late 1980s toward a stronger defense of national interests, the government has not abandoned its sponsorship activities for terrorist entities.

The project is part of critical studies on terrorism. Based on the available literature in this area, it is difficult to form a complete picture of the phenomenon of states providing support to terrorist organizations. There is a lack of a comprehensive work explaining the whole problem of the sponsor states of international terrorism, on the basis of which one can understand its sources, manifestations, goals and consequences for the security of a particular region and the world. The analysis of this issue from the Iranian perspective, using sources in Persian, is a novel approach to the phenomenon described and will fill one of the gaps in the literature on state sponsors of international terrorism. The project will result in a doctoral dissertation and scientific articles published in open access. The conducted research can form the basis for future analyses of the problem of sponsorship activity of states for terrorist organizations. It will also create a theoretical construct that will contribute to a better understanding of the problem and thus effectively counteract and prevent similar actions in the future.