

# Another Crescent for Iran to Exploit

written by Asher Fredman | 28.05.2024

While the United States and Israel focus on threats from the Iranian-dominated Shia crescent stretching from Lebanon to Yemen, Tehran is quietly laying the groundwork for a second Iranian crescent that will soon pose a grave threat to U.S. interests. In Africa's strategic Sahel region, Iran is taking advantage of Western weakness to deepen its economic and military influence, access critical materials, threaten moderate regimes, and undermine Israeli-Arab normalization.

The U.S., Israel, and their allies must take bold steps to counter this growing threat before it is too late.

The Sahel region has suffered widespread instability since 2020. Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Gabon, Chad and Sudan have all seen coups or the rise of military governments, driven by economic difficulties, governmental mismanagement, frustration over continued Islamist terror, and in some cases, growing hostility towards the West. The U.S. has distanced itself from these new governments, creating a void which Iran, Russia and China have been eager to fill.

In Sudan, for example, Iran is seeking to take advantage of the ongoing civil war in order to expand its military presence. Sudan, under the leadership of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, current chair of Sudan's Sovereignty Council, joined the Abraham Accords with Israel in October 2020, in return for U.S. promises of support. However, after al-Burhan dissolved Sudan's governing council in 2021, the U.S. backtracked on its promises and pressured Israel not to upgrade its relations with Khartoum. This lack of Western support contributed to the eruption of the devastating Sudanese civil war in 2023.

Al-Burhan continues to desire to move Sudan closer to the West and has no illusions about the Iranian regime. However, in the absence of Western support, he has been left with little choice but to turn to Tehran for the security assistance and aid necessary to defeat the rebels. Iran was willing to quickly provide Sudan with military support, while asking to establish a naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast. Such a base, together with those of Iran's Houthi proxy in Yemen, would

give Iran far-reaching control over one of the world's most vital waterways. To date, Sudan has resisted the Iranian request, but it is not clear how long Khartoum will be able to withstand Iranian pressure.

Iran is also seeking to expand its influence in Niger, home to 5 percent of the world's uranium output, a vital resource which can serve Iran's illicit nuclear program. There are indications that Iran has already taken steps towards acquiring Nigerian uranium. Similar efforts by Iran to deepen its ties are taking place in Mali, Burkina Faso, and other countries of the Sahel.

In addition, Iran has set its sights on Chad, which reestablished ties with Israel in 2019 but has since become disappointed by the lack of Western assistance, as well as on Mauritania, a vital gateway to Africa for Iran's bitter rival, Morocco.

A crescent of Iranian influence in the Sahel would allow Tehran to destabilize Egypt and threaten Israel and Saudi Arabia in a pincer movement from the north and south. Just as Iran and its proxies have sown terror and destruction across the Shia crescent stretching through Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, a second Iranian crescent would enable Tehran to further spread instability and violence.

Of course, Iran is not the only threat to Western interests in the Sahel. Russia has been quickly filling voids created by the exit of Western troops, sending former Wagner fighters and other military personnel to assist the new governments. China, too, continues to offer ready economic assistance to the region's leaders, who are desperately seeking solutions to their countries' socioeconomic woes.

The U.S. and its allies now face a choice. They can continue to distance themselves from the governments of the Sahel, while reducing or cutting off economic and military support. The result will be greatly increased Iranian, Russian, and Chinese influence in the region. The ayatollahs in Tehran will expand their efforts to create a new Iranian crescent, which will pose a grave threat to U.S. allies such as Israel, Egypt and Morocco, while giving Iran access to critical resources and undermining the Abraham Accords.

Instead, the U.S. and its allies, including Israel, should find ways to work with the region's governments and deliver on previous commitments, while continuing to urge these countries to improve their records on democracy and human rights. Such a strategic approach would help counter the expansion of Iran's nefarious influence in the Sahel, and prevent disastrous consequences for Africa, the

Middle East, and regional peace.

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## **Israel's strike was the perfect response**

written by Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser | 28.05.2024

It sent a message to the regime that we can hit them any time but allowed us to focus on Gaza.

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## **A multi-theater reality has emerged; Israel faces a test**

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 28.05.2024

Israel's first objective is to prevent attacks and demolish terrorist networks, of any kind and from any element. Above all else, topping the list of Israel's foreign policy objectives is cementing and strengthening relations with the US.

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## **Iran's attack means Israel has an**

# opening: Derailing its nuclearization

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 28.05.2024

It would be wise to keep Iranian nerves in tense anticipation, allowing the Iranian rial to continue plummeting and enabling internal criticism of the regime to intensify.

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## Israel needs a high-intensity campaign strategy against Iran

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 28.05.2024

Iran's unprecedented missile and drone attack against Israel last night is the pinnacle of a decades-long Iranian campaign that has been ongoing since the Islamic regime took power during the 1979 revolution. Over the years, Iran has gradually built a sophisticated proxy system and, with the exception of very few instances, has preferred to fight Israel via its proxies. Hiding behind them is part of Tehran's calculated strategy, which strives to distance Iran from war or any punishment for acts of terror, despite the Islamic Republic's key role in training, funding, directing, and, at times, actively dispatching its proxies.

Now, feeling obligated to restore its eroded deterrence vis-à-vis Israel following the targeted killings attributed to the latter in Damascus in early April, Iran has chosen to take a public stand and attack Israel directly using its advanced drones and missiles. This is not a comprehensive strategic shift on Iran's part. As soon as the strike ended, and before its scope had even been confirmed, Tehran clearly signaled, via its UN embassy, that it wished to end this historical event and return to normal.

Israel cannot go back to October 6. It must not allow Iran to surround it with a tightening ring of fire while making intolerable threats of a potentially nuclear

nature.

However, Israel does not operate in a vacuum either and is required to coordinate its actions with the Biden administration, both by virtue of the strategic alliance forged between the two countries and in view of the implications of an Israeli assault against Iran on local US forces and interests. Tehran seems to regard the United States as the weaker player in this arena, and therefore, since the Israel-Hamas War broke out, has instructed its proxies to carry out dozens of attacks against US interests in Iraq and Syria, in an effort to make President Biden pressure Israel to stop the war. The partial US response to the lethal drone strike in early January by Iran's Iraqi proxy, Kataib Hizballah, killing 3 US troops, appears to have only partially and temporarily deterred Tehran. The United States had, once again, chosen to retaliate against the Iraqi proxy, instead of its Iranian master.

Thus, although Quds Force Commander, Ismail Qaani, has reportedly instructed Iraqi Shiite militia groups to desist attacks against US interests, and has probably attempted to convince the Houthis in Yemen to do the same, the Iraqi militias have renewed (albeit not significantly) their assaults against US forces in Syria, while the Houthis continue to attack US sea vessels. Tehran itself, during its strike against Israel last night, threatened to attack any US forces that would help Israel in its retaliation against Iran. It is therefore clear that Iran views the United States as the weakest link and more easily pressured player.

Israel must formulate a comprehensive strategy for a high-intensity campaign against Iran, that could include peaks during which Iran would attempt to take direct action against Israel. Otherwise, Tehran would probably prefer to go back to operating via its proxies, given that direct Iranian actions against Israel would help form a regional coalition against Tehran, composed primarily of Jordan and Egypt, and supported by the United States, United Kingdom, and France (as seen in action last night). Such a coalition could shift from defensive to offensive mode since Iran is threatening to take action against any country supportive of Israel's defense efforts.

Israel appears to have certain latitude vis-à-vis Iran, despite US pressure. The Biden administration opposes broad conflict that would run the risk of regional war. At the same time, if Israel and the United States choose to restrain their response, Iran would interpret their inaction as permission to attack Israel, the

United States' ally, directly, as well as other US partners in the region (to which Iran poses a threat) without paying the price for doing so. Furthermore, war breaking out between Iran and Israel still seems a long way off, allowing Israel to take action against Iran without necessarily leading the region to war. For instance, Israel could utilize the unprecedented Iranian attack to strike Iran kinetically when it is most suitable and convenient, whereas Tehran, which suffers from an acute domestic legitimacy crisis and can still collectively recall the destruction and aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), would think twice before aggravating its conflict with Israel. The cyberattack weapons that Israel has developed over the years could also serve it to repay Iran by damaging its essential infrastructure in an arena where responsibility is not unequivocally assumed by anyone.

Israel's updated security strategy should include various aspects, primary among which are: the desirable *modus operandi* vis-à-vis Iran; increased coordination with the United States on efforts to thwart the drone, missile, and terror infrastructure in Iran and the region; strengthening the IDF's force buildup so that it would tally with the challenge posed by Iran; and closing the various gaps that enable Iran to carry out cyberattacks and influence campaigns in Israel.

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# **Unity is more than just a naïve cliché, it's a matter of national security**

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 28.05.2024

This is The Plan. All we have to do, is not cooperate with the plot and understand that unity is more than just a naive cliché, but a matter of national security.

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# **The Creation and Consequences of the Iranian Threat Network**

written by Dr. Raphael BenLevi | 28.05.2024

Countering Iran's influence across the region is a strategic imperative of the highest order for Israel and the US. Decisive action against Hezbollah and the Houthis is a crucial first step, while direct action against Iran is the only path to a prosperous and stable Middle East in the long term.

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# **Biden Misinterprets Iran's Proxy Warfare**

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 28.05.2024

Iran cannot be absolved of responsibility for the terrorist actions of its clients.

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# **The US is absolving Iran of responsibility for terrorist proxies**

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 28.05.2024

By striking only at Iranian proxy targets, Biden signals he is still seeking to "restore trust" between Washington and Tehran in order to revive the JCPOA.

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# Israel Must Target the “Head of the Octopus” - Iran

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 28.05.2024

Israel must take action against Iran as part of its post-Oct. 7 updated doctrine of security. To protect its borders, Israel can no longer be content with fighting Iran’s proxies, but rather must target Iran itself, in keeping with that country’s critical role in the destabilization of Israel’s security.

Since Oct. 7, an ongoing dispute has emerged as to the extent of Iran’s involvement in Hamas’s fatal attack, with an emphasis on the question of whether Iran knew of the attack in advance and took part in planning it. Even if Tehran was not aware of the attack, its responsibility for the massacre and the horrific terror committed by Hamas is clear to all. In point of fact, Hamas would not have been able to carry out the attack without the systematic assistance it has been receiving from Tehran for decades.

Some of the information disclosed since the attack has served to reveal with greater clarity the extent of Iran’s responsibility and involvement. First the heads of Hamas’s military wing had been in regular contact with the heads of Iran’s security apparatus, sharing with them their plans for taking actions against Israel. In an interview on Iranian media on November 8, Esmail Kowsari, currently a member of the Iranian Majles’ Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, and formerly a high-ranking commander in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (among other positions, he served as head of the IRGC forces in Tehran), stressed the part taken by the head of the IRGC’s Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani (who was eliminated by the U.S. in January 2020), in the planning of Hamas’s attacks.

Kowsari stated that the Head of Hamas’s military Wing, Mohammad Deif, had planned many of Hamas’s operation in concert with Soleimani, and that accordingly, “The capability required for that operation is not a matter of a day or two, but rather goes back several years.” Beyond the planning, Kowsari mentioned Tehran’s responsibility for building up Hamas’s force, saying that “The



resistance front empowered Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and as a result Hamas carried out this operation with high capabilities.” This intensive collaboration continued even after Soleimani’s elimination and survived the crisis which took place in the Iran-Hamas relationship following Hamas’s support of the Syrian insurgents. As may be recalled, in the first few years following the outbreak of the war in Syria, Hamas relocated its command posts from Syria to Qatar, and terrorists from its military wing even took part in the battles, fighting at the side of the rebels against Assad’s forces.

Yet Hamas later changed its policy, and did so to an even greater extent once it became clear that Assad had managed to survive thanks to the support he had received from Russia and Iran. The relationship between Assad and Hamas has not been fully restored since (despite the historic meeting held in Damascus between Assad and top Hamas officials Khalil al-Hayya and Osama Hamdan in October 2022). However, it appears that the collaboration between Iran and Hamas’s military wing persisted over the years, despite Iran’s attempt to undermine Hamas in Gaza, primarily by establishing a competing organization, Al-Sabireen, in 2014.

Thus, in a paper published in December, Leila Seurat, a researcher of the Palestinian sphere from the research institute “The Arab Centre for Research and Political Studies” who had demonstrated her access to Hamas by holding interviews with the heads of the organization in Gaza and Lebanon, explained that the top officials of Hamas’s military wing, most notably the wing’s deputy commander Marwan Issa, have over the years maintained a strong relationship with Iran, notwithstanding the damage caused to Iran-Hamas relations by the war in Syria. As part of that relationship, she notes, “Issa would regularly visit Tehran whenever he was able.”

Moreover, statements issued by Tehran have also helped in better understanding its crucial contribution to the development of Hamas’s tunnel system. In an interview with Iranian media in mid-November, Iranian commentator Amir Moussaoui, who is allegedly an IRGC official and is considered one of the regime’s principal mouthpieces in the Arab media, recounted that Soleimani had provided Hamas with advanced technologies so that the organization could enhance its subterranean system. According to him, Hamas was able to enhance that system owing to Soleimani’s direct supervision of the technological equipment provided to Hamas by the Qods Force, thanks to which Hamas successfully constructed a

sophisticated subterranean system across Gaza. In this context, he explained that the Hamas terrorists constructed the tunnels to be resistant to attempts to flood them with either poisonous gases or water.

Furthermore, in early January the IDF revealed terrorism infrastructure and components for the manufacture and development of precision rockets of Hamas, carried out under Iranian guidance in Darj Tufah in the Gaza Strip. This revelation makes it clear that Iran has been smuggling advanced knowledge into the Gaza Strip, in the form of training courses provided by it to Hamas and Islamic Jihad experts in its territory (as publicly stated by the Islamic Jihad's representative in Tehran, Nasser Abu-Sharif, in an interview with the media in November 2018). The training provided in Tehran to Mohammed Zouari (who was eliminated in 2016), one of the significant founders of Hamas's UAV array, also demonstrates Iran's determination to export its knowledge to Hamas in Gaza, with the aim of supplementing the tunnel system, which has been facing certain difficulties after El-Sisi's Egypt has been taking action against it to a certain extent.

The Iran-Hamas relationship is not one of authority, but rather a strategic partnership, in which Tehran equips Hamas with the best of technologies and weaponry available to it. As part of the new security doctrine which Israel is now called upon to formulate, Israel cannot tolerate Iran's subversive influence in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, as a complementary act to Israeli military control of the Gaza Strip and to the establishment of a thwarting array on or near the Philadelphi Route, it must take direct action against Iran. This is due to the fact that Iran forms the "head of the octopus" and the principal supplier which trains, funds, arms and equips Hamas; and past experience has shown that it will soon strive to rebuild Hamas after the war is over.

Accordingly, and in light of Iran's additional responsibility for promoting terrorism on Israel's northern border, Israel must adopt a new and current strategy as self-defense against the activity being promoted by Iran striving to destroy Israel by encircling it and subjecting it to an untenable significant threat. The purpose of that strategy will be to prevent the rise and establishment of a militia backed by Iran on Israel's borders. Within that scope, alongside its ongoing efforts in the Gaza Strip, Israel must also directly strike within Iran, against the capabilities conferred by Iran on its proxies in the region, while also taking further action against the Qods Force. Thus, it must carry out targeted

strikes against Iran's UAV capabilities and missile program, on the well-founded assumption that any weaponry currently in Iranian hands will eventually come into the possession of its proxies across the region.

Concurrently with that course of action, Israel can no longer permit Hamas's continued funding by Iran. Therefore, alongside the policy of sanctions, which has proved to be ineffective in completely preventing the continued Iranian financing, Israel must cut off the financial resources used by Iran to remit the funding, including money changers used as intermediaries in Hawala transactions with changers from the Gaza Strip.

The proposed Israeli intensive action against Iran is not expected to bring about a war with Iran; first, because Tehran would fear that such war would be playing into Israel's hands since it would legitimize an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Second, in light of the prolonged crisis of legitimacy suffered by the Iranian regime, it is highly doubtful that it would willingly choose to enter a war which could risk its domestic survival. Third, Tehran understands that, in the scenario of a war with Israel, the U.S. would find it difficult not to intervene and would be forced to join the fray due to Israel's strategic importance for the American policy in the region and due to the shared values forming the foundation of the deeply entrenched alliance between Israel and the U.S.