

# Exonerate the ayatollahs but chew out Netanyahu

written by David M. Weinberg | 07.06.2024

On the sidelines of the funeral in Tehran for Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash last month, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei convened a meeting of his “resistance front” - with Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, PFLP, and Yemeni Houthi chieftains.

The purpose: To decide how to “continue jihad and struggle until a complete victory is achieved in the Gaza Strip with the participation of all resistance groups in the region,” and to “confront American imperialism.” Khamenei calls this the “ring of fire” strategy to eliminate Israel and achieve regional hegemony.

Two days ago, acting Iranian foreign minister Ali Bagheri Kani visited Lebanon and Syria where he met with Syrian president Assad and Hezbollah chieftain Nasrallah “to discuss ways to counter the Zionist regime” - which apparently means, among other things, escalating Hezbollah’s attacks on Israel. Witness the precise missile attacks on military and intelligence sites in northern Israel this past week (and the resultant wild brush fires).

The mullahs of Teheran also are behind the increasingly sophisticated and well-equipped military infrastructure in Judea and Samaria. As far back as 2014, Khamenei began to openly advocate “exporting the Islamic revolution” to the hills of Samaria. He called for “serious planning to add the West Bank to the confrontation with Israel.” “Gaza is the center of resistance, but resistance groups in the West Bank are the key that can bring the Zionist enemy to its knees,” Khamenei said.

The notorious commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani (assassinated by the US in 2020), took-up the charge, making the arming of West Bank militias an Iranian priority.

Soleimani brought Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, his deputy Saleh al-Arouri, and Islamic Jihad leader Ziyad al-Nakhleh, to meet Khamenei and Raisi in Teheran. Hamas official Osama Hamdan then bragged about a “new stage of resistance” in which Iran would back the creation of “20 to 30 new battalions of 2,000 militants

in Samaria.”

Al-Nakhleh plainly told Iranian newspaper *Al-Wefaq* that anti-Israeli operations in the West Bank reflect directives coming from Iran. “No other country in the world takes such a stance so explicitly, a testament to Tehran’s support for the Palestinian resistance factions, with strong ties between PIJ, Hamas and the Islamic Republic.”

The result? Just yesterday the Shin Bet (Israel Security Services) warned of “Iranian islands” flush with cash and weapons in Judea and Samaria.

This means that heavy battles are ahead. Israel cannot sit by and watch Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) in Israel’s center - adjacent to Israel’s three key cities of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa - become another full-fledged base of Iranian military operations against the Jewish state, like Gaza (on its southern border) and Lebanon (on its northern border).

AND WHERE is all Iran’s cash coming from? Well, the Biden administration has unfrozen at least \$6 billion in Iranian assets, and helped Tehran evade sanctions through waivers that have funneled billions more into its coffers. Iranian oil exports have consequently surged to 1.82 million barrels a day, the highest total since the Trump administration reinstated sanctions in 2018.

On behalf of Iran, Hezbollah and the IRGC also are invested heavily in drug production and distribution (Captagon pills and more) across the Middle East and Europe, and in money-laundering cryptocurrency schemes - as revealed last year by Israeli authorities.

Of even greater concern is Iran’s helter-skelter dash to nuclear bomb capability, under cover of the world’s lopsided focus on Israeli “crimes” in Gaza. The International Atomic Energy Agency says that Iran’s stockpile of 60% highly enriched uranium has doubled (!) since February from 20.6 kg to 42.1 kg and could be converted into weapons-grade enriched uranium in a matter of days. It would then be enough to fuel three nuclear weapons.

The international response? Well, the IAEA board on Wednesday condemned Iran “for its lack of cooperation” with agency watchdogs, with the US reluctantly going along at the last moment (after first lobbying European countries to avoid censuring Iran).

Wow. The Iranians must be shaking in their Islamic marching boots.

Of course, Biden's approach to Iran is a function of the long-standing Obama-Biden obsession with appeasing Tehran's ayatollahs, hoping that "they will become less medieval and more compliant if treated nicely" - as former US national security adviser and ambassador to the UN John Bolton wrote critically this week. It also is a function of Biden's desire to keep gasoline prices low and foreign distractions to a minimum before November's US presidential election.

THIS EXPLAINS the weak American responses to attacks upon its assets in the Arabian Gulf by Iranian proxies, carefully avoiding killing any Iranians themselves. It also explains Washington's insistence that Israel not respond significantly to the massive April 14 Iranian missile attacks - an event that should have led to game-changing military action against Iran on multiple fronts. But Washington publicly reassured Teheran that it would not take part in any offensive actions against Iran and made sure that Israel could not do much either.

And then there is Gaza and Lebanon, where Biden has undermined Israel's attempts to achieve crushing victories in the multi-front pincer war being waged against it by Iranian proxies. This includes withholding weaponry and ammunition, attempting to micro-manage IDF operations neighborhood-by-neighborhood and/or preventing them, forcing Israel into paralyzing, never-ending, and unlikely to succeed hostage negotiations, and insanely insisting that the supply of humanitarian aid to Gazans be Israel's "priority."

This is persistent strategic blindness. By concentrating energies on punishing Israel for daring to defend itself against extermination; by failing to give Israel the weapons and diplomatic cover it needs to achieve decisive victories; by refusing to acknowledge Iran's hegemonic "ring of fire" strategy; by failing to confront the Houthis as they close international shipping routes through the Red Sea (and Suez Canal); and by failing to truly check Iran's nuclear bomb program which is moving towards all-out nuclear attack on Israel within a decade - the Biden administration is wreaking disaster on Israel and the West.

WHAT IS particularly sad is that there *are* ways of halting Iran's march towards a nuclear bomb and regional hegemony.

A real Biden administration road map for countering Iran would include snapback sanctions on Tehran with tight supervision (especially of Iranian oil exports and

dual-use technologies); terrorist designation of the IRGC across Europe; suspension of Iranian membership in international forums; sanctions and economic pressure on individuals and organizations involved in repressing human rights; penalties on key Iranian industries; covert disruptive measures against Iran's nuclear program; and most saliently, articulation and demonstration of a credible military threat against the Iranian regime.

The Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington has outlined more than 200 specific measures in the military, cyber, financial, energy, legal, and diplomatic spheres that US government agencies can take in "deploying multiple elements of national power" to confront threats from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Taken together, these measures would enhance American deterrence, reassure America's true Mideast allies, pointedly punish Iran for terrorism, help Israel win its ground wars in Gaza, Judea and Samaria, and Lebanon, and perhaps prevent an Iranian nuclear breakout.

Alas, President Biden prefers to make allowances for Iran while reprimanding Israel; to spare the ayatollahs but scold Netanyahu; to let the Iranian bomb program advance but not the IDF. Dangerous times indeed.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, June 7, 2024.