

# Iran's Islamic revolution is alive and well in the heart of the Balkans

U.S. needs a strategic partnership there now



*Iran's Islamic revolution tentacles around the world illustration by Alexander Hunter/The Washington Times Iran's Islamic revolution tentacles around the ... more >*

## COMMENTARY

By Rod Blagojevich  
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## OPINION:

Iran isn't only in the Middle East. Iran is in Europe. In the Balkans.

It is there, in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, that Iran has developed a base of operations modeled after what it did with Hezbollah in Lebanon.

It began in the 1990s, when Iran participated in the war in Bosnia. It waged war with the Bosniak Muslims to establish in Bosnia a European copy of Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Iran actively supported and shipped arms to the jihadi fighters in the Bosnian war against the Catholic Croats and Serbian Orthodox Christians. It armed Muslim terrorist groups like the mujahedeen, who fought in Bosnia. Qasem Soleimani was personally involved in leading the effort of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to supervise the shipment of arms to Bosnia. Iran trained al-Qaida in Bosnia, and two of its trainees went on to join the attack against the United States, crashing into the Pentagon on 9/11.

The Clinton administration was also aware of this. In congressional hearings conducted in May 1996, it was concluded that the Clinton administration looked the other way as Iran shipped weapons to terrorists in Bosnia.



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Late last month, Iran’s top Shiite cleric issued a religious decree, announcing a “fatwa” against President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi urged Muslims worldwide to take a stand, stating that any individual or government that endangers the leadership and unity of the global Islamic community is to be regarded as a “warlord” subject to execution. The top Iranian cleric then posted on his X account that the Islamic Republic’s aggression will not be limited to domestic dissent. He signaled plans for broader international, religiously motivated violence.

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Let's keep it real. Until a satisfactory resolution involving Iran's capability to produce nuclear weapons is reached, the Islamic Republic of Iran is not only targeting its people, but is also preparing for global violence in the name of religion. Israel, the United States and Europe are prime targets for Iranian-sponsored terrorism.

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But this shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. Iranian-sponsored terrorism, jihad and fatwa are nothing new.

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Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, which established the regime, Iran has been actively involved in state-sponsored terrorism. One of the core priorities of the Iranian regime has been the export of its revolution abroad via its support of terrorist groups and their activities in other countries.

Throughout its tumultuous history, Iran has strategically employed terrorist groups as proxies in its foreign policy, using the groups to wield influence across the Middle East and beyond. From its long-time financial support of Hezbollah in Lebanon to its backing of militias in Iraq and Yemen, Iran's use of proxy groups has shaped regional dynamics, fueled conflicts and represented a complex challenge to global security.

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With the recent defeat of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and the Assad regime in Syria, Iran may now be looking to Bosnia-Herzegovina as the next place to fill the void and establish its principal base of operations to replace Lebanon in exporting terrorism.

The likelihood of this happening is so real, last month it prompted Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to send a letter to Bosnia-Herzegovina's minister of defense threatening the country with sanctions and the suspension of all military cooperation programs if the U.S. discovered it was implementing military cooperation with Iran.

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The Balkans are often referred to as the Western flank of the Middle East. More than 30 years after the Bosnian War in the 1990s, Iranian influence in Bosnia remains entrenched. It is masked through the activities of NGOs, USAID, and subtle political alliances. And while the left-wing nation builders of the West congratulate themselves for supporting multi ethnic governance in Bosnia, the reality is far more concerning. Bosnian Muslim leaders have engaged in collaboration with Iranian military officials and shown public support for Hamas. Bosnian Muslims frequently rally in support of Hamas and, this week, staged a rally condemning the Israeli and the United States' preemptive attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Yet despite this, the Democrats and their European liberal counterparts continue to downplay the threat of Iranian expansionism while attacking those who stand with the United States and Israel.

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**America needs new friends in the Balkans.**

The Biden and Obama administrations' persistent persecution of Milorad Dodik, the president of the Republic of Srpska, and the Serbian Christian minority in the Bosnian Federation is a continuation of the same failed policy of the Clinton administration. When will the United States learn that trying to appease Iran doesn't stop the spread of its Islamic revolution? It only furthers it.

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America's national interest will be far better served when the failed Biden-Obama-Clinton appeasement of Iran is abandoned and replaced by a new strategic partnership with the Serbian people in the Balkans. A partnership that would be rooted in the same Judeo-Christian values and in the shared common interests that form the foundation of America's unshakeable alliance with Israel.

This new strategic partnership would make the world a safer place.

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*• Rod Blagojevich served as governor of Illinois from 2003 to 2009. In February, he was pardoned by President Trump for his conviction on corruption charges.*

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