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# From Decapitation to Internal Pressure: How Iranians Are Seeing Israel as Liberators

📅 March 2, 2026(<https://compassionpulse.org/blog/2026/03/02/>)

Since the attacks on Iran began, a dramatic escalation in the conflict between Israel, the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran has unfolded. What began with a joint U.S.–Israeli strike that killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah **Ali Khamenei and senior Iranian officials** has now expanded into deeper operations inside Iran itself. Israel has struck not only missile infrastructure and military leadership but also key headquarters (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-888401>) used by the Iranian regime to suppress internal dissent, including **the Interior Ministry and units linked to Basij and IRGC oppression**.

This marks what many analysts describe as a **strategic pivot** from a focus on “decapitation” of external threats to directly weakening the regime’s domestic repression apparatus. The strikes are unprecedented in scope and signal a new phase in the campaign that touches directly upon the regime’s ability to control its own people.

# Key Developments, Updated March 1, 2026

- **Israel and the U.S. have expanded strikes inside Tehran** to hit (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-888401>) regime buildings linked to suppression of protests and internal repression, including the **Interior Ministry headquarters** and **Tharallah headquarters**, which coordinated IRGC and Basij actions against protesters.
- **Dozens of regime repression headquarters were struck** in a push to complicate the regime's ability to organize against domestic dissent.
- **Over 1,200 bombs reportedly dropped** across Iran by the Israeli Air Force and U.S. forces reflect broad target sets including internal as well as external military infrastructure.
- **Internet access inside Iran remains severely restricted** amid ongoing suppression of protests and strikes, complicating independent reporting from within the country.
- Satellite and local footage shared on social platforms before the blackout reportedly showed Iranians cheering (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202602287056>) strikes on regime targets.

## What Israel Targeted

Reporting confirms (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-888401>) that Israeli forces struck **dozens of regime headquarters used to coordinate protest suppression** throughout Tehran, locations tied to the regime's Interior Ministry as well as the **Basij and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)** units deeply involved in domestic oppression (<https://www.ncr-iran.org/en/news/terrorism-a-fundamentalism/inside-irans-army-of-terror-and-oppression-revolutionary-guards-irgc/>).

The Interior Ministry headquarters struck had been central to coordinating the security apparatus's violent and bloody response (<https://iranhumanrights.org/2026/02/irans-machinery-of-repression-escalates-arbitrary-arrests-torture-enforced-disappearances-and-death-sentences-after-protest-massacre/>) to the protests that erupted across Iran beginning in late 2025, including orders for Basij militia and IRGC mobilization against demonstrators.

The Tharallah headquarters, another struck target, was identified in reporting as a locus of repression planning and coordination for the capital district, where many of the largest protests occurred.

# Background: Domestic Unrest in Iran (2025–2026)

Mass anti-regime protests (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202601255198>) erupted across Iran in late 2025, driven by economic hardship, political frustration, and longstanding opposition to the clerical establishment. Thousands have taken to the streets in dozens of cities.

The Iranian regime's violent response included widespread use of live ammunition, drones, machine guns, and other lethal force by IRGC and Basij units, with documented incidents such as the January 8, 2026 **Fardis massacre**, where at least 50 protesters were reportedly killed by regime forces.

To control dissent, Tehran also imposed one of the most comprehensive internet blackouts in modern history, cutting national connectivity drastically in January and again after the joint U.S.–Israeli strikes began.

## Why Targeting Protest Suppression Matters

Previously, Israeli and U.S. strikes were described as aimed primarily at degrading Iran's nuclear, missile, and external military capabilities. The reported new strikes on repression headquarters, buildings used to plan and coordinate internal security actions, represent a **targeting of the regime's coercive tools** inside Iran rather than only its outward military capability.

This shift has several implications:

- **Undermines regime repression capacity:** By striking the command structures tied to protest suppression, the operation could constrain the regime's ability to deploy forces effectively against demonstrators.
- **Signals to domestic opposition:** The targeting of institutions historically associated with repression may be interpreted by opposition groups, and by outside observers, as weakening the regime's grip on internal security.
- **Reduces risk of retaliation from security units:** Disrupting the infrastructure that enables rapid response to protest unrest may overextend or slow key elements of the IRGC and Basij.

## Public Reaction Inside and Outside Iran

Reports of people celebrating strikes on regime facilities circulated on social platforms before the internet blackout, with footage showing groups expressing relief or joy at the disruption of institutions long associated with repression.


Iran's domestic unrest, earlier protests, and networked opposition movements have generated significant anti-regime activism over recent years, which the regime has repeatedly sought to suppress violently.

## Conclusion – A New Phase in the Campaign

The shift on March 1, as described in credible reporting, shows Israeli and U.S. forces striking not just *external military targets* but also *centers of internal repression* used by Iran's security apparatus, including the Basij and IRGC units most associated with protest suppression.

This represents a **broader strategic objective**: to degrade not only Iran's military threat to its neighbors, but its ability to internally enforce its rule through violent coercion.

Iranians are already seeing in these strikes the possibility of liberation, and have celebrated them.

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# How the Islamic Republic of Iran Sees the United States and Its Citizens as Its Greatest Enemy

On February 28, the United States and Israel carried out a joint military operation deep inside Iranian territory that resulted in the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other senior Iranian regime figures. This moment marked a dramatic escalation in a long [history](#) (<https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/anti-american-timeline>) of hatred by Tehran towards the U.S. The origins of that hostility lie more than four decades in the past, rooted in Iran's post-revolution ideological opposition to the U.S., repeated use of terrorist proxies, and direct and indirect attacks on American personnel and interests around the world. Understanding this history of Iranian obsessional enmity towards the U.S. is essential to grasping this historic moment.

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## Key Takeaways

- On February 28, joint U.S.–Israeli strikes killed (<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-ali-khamenei-who-based-iron-rule-fiery-hostility-us-israel-dies-86-2026-03-01/>) Iran’s Supreme Leader and senior regime figures.
- Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution completely severed diplomatic ties with the United States and framed the U.S. as an enduring enemy (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/khamenei-us-is-main-enemy-zionist-regime-a-close-second/>), calling it the “Great Satan”.
- State-sponsored proxy militias such as Hezbollah conducted (<https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/20121108-Levitt-Hezbollah-Briefing.pdf>) deadly terrorist attacks against U.S. forces and diplomats in the 1980s.
- Iranian-backed militias in Iraq killed and wounded U.S. military personnel after the 2003 invasion.
- The U.S. targeted Iran’s Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani in 2020 for his role in directing proxy operations.

## Origins of Hostility: The 1979 Revolution and Break With the U.S.

The defining rupture in U.S.–Iran relations came in 1979, when the Islamic Revolution overthrew the pro-Western Shah and replaced his government with an extreme theocratic regime. Tehran immediately cast the United States as the principal enemy and accused Washington of meddling in Iranian affairs. In the same year, Iranian students seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days, events that shattered diplomatic relations and fueled Iranian anti-American ideology.

From its inception, the Islamic Republic rejected what it viewed as American interference in Iran and the broader Middle East. The regime’s leadership developed a revolutionary doctrine that equated U.S. policy with oppression and sought to export its model to other Muslim societies.

# State Sponsorship of Terrorism and Proxy Militant Groups

A central element of Iran's foreign policy

(<https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/anti-american-timeline>) has been the use of **proxies and militant groups** to attack U.S. interests indirectly. Tehran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), especially its Quds Force, has been the main instrument for organizing, training, and funding these groups across the region and beyond.

## Hezbollah and the 1983 Beirut Bombings

In the early 1980s, Iran helped create and sustain **Hezbollah**, a Shiite militia in Lebanon. Under Iranian guidance, Hezbollah carried out some of the deadliest attacks on American personnel in history. On October 23, 1983, Hezbollah suicide bombers, with Iranian support, attacked U.S. Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, killing 241 American service members. On the same day, a separate allied French unit was also targeted.

Hezbollah also attacked the U.S. embassy in Beirut in April 1983 and again in September 1984, killing American diplomats and staff. Courts and U.S. investigators found that the group acted on behalf of Tehran's IRGC network.

## Use of Proxies in Iraq and Beyond

After the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran expanded its influence through a network of Shia militias such as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq. These groups, trained and armed by Iran, conducted rocket attacks, ambushes, and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks that killed and wounded U.S. troops stationed in Iraq.

Even outside traditional battlefield zones, Iranian-linked militias have struck at American interests, including assaults on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in 2019 by Iran's allied militia Kata'ib Hezbollah — actions Washington attributed to Iranian direction.

## The Quds Force and the Soleimani Strike

Iran's Quds Force, a branch of the IRGC, has been internationally recognized for orchestrating Tehran's external military operations. Its commander, **Qassem Soleimani**, became the face of Iran's proxy warfare strategy. In January 2020, the U.S. military killed

(<https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2049534/statement-by-the-department-of-defense/>)Soleimani near Baghdad International Airport, citing intelligence that he was planning imminent attacks on U.S. personnel. That operation underscored the long-standing danger U.S. officials associated with Tehran’s proxy network.

## International Response to Iranian Proxy Activities

Because of its backing of militant groups, nations and international bodies have designated Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah and Hamas as terrorist organizations. Iran’s support for these groups has contributed to sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and repeated confrontations with global powers, including the United States.

## The 2026 Joint U.S.–Israeli Operation

The February 28 joint U.S.–Israeli strikes against Iranian leadership, including the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, occurred against this backdrop of decades-long enmity. American authorities, and much of the world, saw Tehran’s support for violent proxies and hostile rhetoric toward the United States and its allies as ongoing threats. The operation marked a significant escalation in open conflict between Tehran and Western powers.

## Conclusion: A Long-Standing Conflict

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s relationship with the United States has been defined by Iranian hostility since 1979. Tehran’s revolutionary ideology, use of proxies such as Hezbollah, and involvement in attacks that targeted and killed American service members, diplomats, and civilians established a pattern of antagonism that has persisted for decades. The recent joint U.S.–Israeli operation against the Iranian leadership must be understood in this historical context of sustained conflict and repeated proxy violence.

This history sheds light on why U.S. policymakers have repeatedly viewed Iran’s actions as a direct challenge to American security and interests worldwide, shaping foreign policy, sanctions, and military strategy across generations.

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# History Written in Blood: Iran's Decades of Hostility Toward the U.S.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently positioned itself as a direct adversary of the United States, describing the U.S. as the "Great Satan" and pursuing [policies \(https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/anti-american-timeline\)](https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/anti-american-timeline) that have repeatedly targeted Americans and Western interests, shedding a lot of blood. This deep-rooted ideological enmity has been expressed through embassy seizures, proxy attacks that killed hundreds of U.S. service members and civilians, and continued support for militant groups that threaten Western security. Successive U.S. administrations, Republican and Democrat alike, have labeled Iran *the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism* and a major destabilizing force in the Middle East. That [legacy \(https://www.ajc.org/news/iranian-regimes-war-on-america-four-decades-of-targeting-us-forces-and-citizens\)](https://www.ajc.org/news/iranian-regimes-war-on-america-four-decades-of-targeting-us-forces-and-citizens) of violent confrontation and strategic hostility exploded into open warfare in early 2026 with a **joint U.S.–Israeli military operation that targeted the Iranian nuclear program and its oppressive terrorist-supporting regime.**

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## KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- The **joint U.S.–Israeli strikes on February 28**, killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, targeting Iran’s terror network and nuclear threats.
- Successive U.S. presidents have repeatedly described Iran as the world’s **top state sponsor of terrorism** (<https://www.congress.gov/event/115th-congress/house-event/108155/text>) and a direct threat to U.S. interests and allies.
- The term “**Great Satan**” became central ([https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op\\_ed/2025/04/08/ali-khameneis-revealing-glimpse-into-the-islamic-republics-fears/](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/op_ed/2025/04/08/ali-khameneis-revealing-glimpse-into-the-islamic-republics-fears/)) to Iran’s revolutionary doctrine in 1979, defining the U.S. as an existential enemy.
- Iran-backed militias and proxies carried out some of the deadliest anti-American attacks in modern history, including the **1983 Beirut Marine barracks bombing**.
- Iranian-linked groups have continued to attack Americans and Western targets through the 2000s and 2010s, including in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula.
- U.S. policy (<https://cognitura.org/blog/category/policy-analysis>) under Presidents Trump, Biden, and others has consistently sought to counter Iran’s proxy networks and prevent nuclear armament, culminating in the major military escalation of 2026.

## The “Great Satan” and the Ideological Roots of Iranian Hostility

From the moment the Islamic Republic seized power after the **1979 Iranian Revolution**, it cast the United States as its chief enemy, labeling it the “**Great Satan**.” That term, widely used by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his successors, framed the U.S. not as a geopolitical rival but as a moral and existential threat to Iranian independence and Islamic governance. Rejecting U.S. influence became a defining feature of Iran’s ideological narrative, tying domestic legitimacy to opposition abroad.

Iran’s leadership used this rhetoric to justify support for terrorist groups (<https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/iran-regime/iran-s-proxies-entrenching-the-middle-east/>) across the Middle East, cast U.S. policy as illegitimate, and rally its population against perceived foreign encirclement. Over time, this anti-American ideology was operationalized through violent action and proxy warfare that directly targeted U.S. lives and interests.

## 1979–1980: Hostage Crisis and Early Confrontations

Just months after the revolution, **Iranian students seized** (<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/short-history/iraniancrises>) **the U.S. Embassy in Tehran**, holding 52 Americans hostage for 444 days in an event that traumatized U.S. foreign policy and cemented mutual hostility. This was not an

isolated protest but occurred with the tacit support of Iran's revolutionary leadership and marked the first major act of violent confrontation between the new Iranian regime and the United States.

Iran's backing for this crisis made clear that Tehran was willing to defy diplomatic norms and that the "Great Satan" rhetoric had concrete, violent implications for U.S. personnel. It set the tone for decades of mistrust and confrontation that followed.

## Iran-Backed Proxies: Beirut and Beyond

Iran's support for militant proxies was one of the deadliest expressions of its anti-American posture. Through the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Quds Force**, Iran funded, trained, and equipped groups like **Hezbollah** that carried out terrorist [attacks \(https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/anti-american-timeline\)](https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/anti-american-timeline) against Americans.

According to historical records:

- In **April 1983**, a suicide car bombing at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut killed dozens of Americans.
- In **October 1983**, a Hezbollah bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut killed **241 U.S. servicemembers**, one of the deadliest attacks on American military personnel outside of wartime.
- Throughout the 1980s, Hezbollah and related groups abducted, tortured, and killed U.S. citizens and allies in Lebanon. These acts were widely understood to be supported operationally and financially by Tehran's security apparatus.

These attacks did not exist in a vacuum; they were part of a Tehran strategy to project power by proxy, targeting U.S. forces and representatives in the region rather than confronting the U.S. military directly.

## Iran's Proxy Warfare After 2003

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran expanded its network of Shia militias that [targeted \(https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/irans-proxy-war-against-the-united-states-and-iraq/\)](https://understandingwar.org/research/middle-east/irans-proxy-war-against-the-united-states-and-iraq/) U.S. and coalition forces. Groups like **Kata'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, and others**, backed by Tehran, used rockets, improvised explosive devices, and other tactics to attack U.S. bases and personnel.

Iran's support for these groups contributed to hundreds of American deaths in Iraq and reflected a deliberate strategic choice: to use proxies to bleed U.S. forces without engaging directly in conventional warfare. These militias were part of a broader "Axis of Resistance" that Iran cultivated across Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon.

## U.S. Presidential Statements and Policy on Iran

For decades, U.S. leaders have publicly identified Iran as a major sponsor of terror and a destabilizing force:

- **President Donald Trump** repeatedly characterized (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/read-trumps-full-statement-on-iran-attack>) Iran as “*the world’s number one state sponsor of terror*” and cited its role in attacks against Americans and allies as justification for sanctions, military pressure, and direct strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. In early 2026, Trump reaffirmed that Iran must never obtain a nuclear weapon, tying this threat directly to its history of terrorism and proxy attacks.
- **U.S. intelligence and policymakers** have long listed (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202412132588>) Iran as the top state sponsor of terrorism, detailing how Tehran’s proxies have been implicated in plots and attacks in more than 40 countries, including attempted terrorist activities against Americans on U.S. soil. According to U.S. government testimony, Iran’s regime has been tied to assassinations, terrorist plots, and direct attacks that have threatened the homeland.

These statements formed the basis of sustained U.S. policy aimed at countering Tehran’s influence, including sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and military responses.

## Escalation to Full-Scale Military Confrontation in 2026

On **February 28**, the United States and Israel launched coordinated strikes on Iran’s leadership and military infrastructure, an unprecedented direct military action against Tehran. President Trump announced the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as part of this campaign, framing it as a response to decades of Iranian hostility, terrorism support, and nuclear threats.

This event marked a sharp departure from decades of proxy warfare and deterrence to open conflict, reflecting the intensity of the historical grievances and strategic threats that have accumulated between the two countries.

## Conclusion: A History of Hostility Now in Open Conflict

From the revolutionary declaration of the U.S. as the “Great Satan” to repeated deadly proxy attacks, Iran’s record has been defined by ideological hostility and violent confrontation with the United States. Successive American presidents, including Donald Trump, have publicly identified Tehran as the principal state sponsor of terrorism and a destabilizing actor in global security. This history, written in blood and conflict, has culminated in the unprecedented military engagement of early 2026, a direct confrontation that reflects decades of failed deterrence, continued Iranian aggression, and a strategic choice by U.S. leadership to confront those threats decisively.

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# IRAN IS THE WORLD'S LEADING STATE SPONSOR OF TERRORISM FOR 40 CONSECUTIVE YEARS

For four [decades](https://www.iranintl.com/en/202412132588) (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202412132588>), the United States government has consistently identified the Islamic Republic of Iran as *the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism*. Since 1984, five years after the Iranian Revolution and one of the earliest foreign policy decisions of post-revolutionary Tehran, Iran has been on the U.S. State Department's annual "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list. Each year, U.S. reporting has cited Tehran's financial support, training, arming, and strategic direction of militant groups that have killed Americans, threatened U.S. diplomats, funded transnational violence, and supported terrorist attacks around the world. This pattern of violent behavior, rooted in Iran's anti-American ideology — including the slogan "Great Satan" — now underlies the unprecedented direct military confrontation between the U.S. and Iran in early 2026 following joint U.S.–Israeli strikes that reportedly killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

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## Key Bullets: Iran's Enduring Terror Designation

- *40 consecutive years*: Iran has been designated by the United States Department of State as a "state sponsor of terrorism" every year since 1984, longer than any other country.



U.S. reporting links Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its Qods

Force to the arming, funding, training, and organizational support of

Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Houthi militants, and Iraqi militias

- Iran's support has enabled large scale civilian and military attacks, including the

**JUSTORIUM**

(<https://justorium.org>)

1983 marine barracks bombing in Lebanon and dozens of deadly attacks on

U.S. consuls and diplomats across the Middle East.

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- Successive U.S. administrations, Republican and Democrat, have publicly

affirmed Iran's status as the most active state sponsor of terrorism and a

destabilizing regional power.

- In 2025, the U.S. designated multiple Iran-aligned militias as Foreign Terrorist Organizations, reinforcing Tehran's global terror footprint.
- U.S. threat assessments warn of ongoing threats to U.S. persons globally and highlight potential terror plots or proxy violence tied to Tehran or its networks.

## Origins of a Designation: Why Iran Has Been Listed Since 1984

Following its 1979 revolution, Iran embraced an ideological narrative of opposition to Western influence, especially the United States. That narrative was soon paired with action.

The U.S. Department of State established the "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list in 1979 to track governments that *repeatedly provide support for international terrorism*. Iran first appeared on that list in **1984** (<https://www.state.gov/state-sponsors-of-terrorism>), and has remained (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202412132588>) on it every year since — a continuous designation that no other nation has maintained for as long.

According to the State Department, this designation reflects Iran's **ongoing provision of funding, weapons, training, and sanctuary to militant organizations** that the U.S. government identifies as terrorist groups. These include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (<https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/activities-of-saeed-izadi-head-of-the-qods-forces-palestine-branch-reflected-in-captured-document/>) in Gaza and Judea and Samaria, otherwise known as the West Bank, Iraqi militia groups, and others across the Middle East.

## How Iran's Terror Network Works

Rather than relying primarily on conventional military forces to confront the United States and its allies, Iran uses a network of armed groups as proxies. Tehran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), particularly the IRGC-Qods Force (<https://rewardsforjustice.net/rewards/islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-qods-force-irgc-qr/>), channels money, weapons, logistics, and strategic direction to these groups. U.S. reporting, including the 2023 Country Reports on Terrorism, underscores this pattern:

- **Weapons and training:** Iran provides missiles, rockets, drones, and other weaponry to groups like Hezbollah and the Houthis.



**Arming insurgents:** In Iraq and Syria, Iran-aligned militias have repeatedly attacked U.S. forces and coalition partners, using advanced weaponry and battlefield coordination.

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**Regional impact:** Iranian support extends beyond Iraq and Lebanon, contributing to violence and instability in Yemen, Syria, and the Palestinian territories.

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**Global reach:** U.S. reports have linked Iranian support to plots against dissidents abroad, including attempts to kill Iranian dissidents in New York and other countries.

These activities illustrate why U.S. counterterrorism reporting continues to place Tehran at the center of global terror sponsorship.

## Successive U.S. Administrations on Iran's Terror Record

Over the decades, leaders from both political parties in the United States have publicly characterized Iran's regime as a principal source of international terrorism and regional instability:

- **President George W. Bush** called (<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/mideast/text/>) Iran a major state sponsor of terror and cited its support for groups like Hezbollah and other militants linked to attacks on U.S. interests.
- **The Obama administration's State Department** repeatedly ([https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/08/state\\_department\\_ira\\_1.php](https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/08/state_department_ira_1.php)) described Iran in official terrorism reports as one of the most active sponsors of terror.
- **President Donald Trump** repeatedly branded Iran the "number one state sponsor of terror," emphasizing Tehran's role in supporting groups that have killed Americans and threatened allies.
- **Presidential proclamations and fact sheets in 2025 and early 2026** underlined that Iran's terror sponsorship, its nuclear ambitions, and its use of proxies to threaten the U.S. and allies remain central national security threats.

This bipartisan clarity has shaped decades of sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and military responses to Iranian behavior.

## Designations in 2025 and Continued Threat Assessments

In 2025, the U.S. State Department took further steps by designating multiple **Iran-aligned militia groups as Foreign Terrorist Organizations**, underscoring that Tehran's terror network is broad and active. These groups have been tied to attacks on U.S. bases and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, U.S. homeland security and intelligence assessments warn of a *heightened threat environment* tied to Iran and its proxies, including potential plots overseas and concerns about inspired attacks in the United States.



# Conclusion: A Policy of Terrorist Sponsorship and Destabilization Continues

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For 39 straight years, Iran has topped the U.S. State Department's "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list, reflecting long-term and documented patterns of funding, arming,

and directing militant groups that attack American interests and partners. Successive American presidents, from George W. Bush to Donald Trump and beyond, have consistently reaffirmed Tehran's role as a principal sponsor of terrorism and a destabilizing force in the Middle East.

As of **today**, this designation is not merely symbolic. It reflects ongoing threats that have shaped U.S. foreign policy, military strategy, and national security priorities, and it provides important context for the dramatic escalation of conflict between the United States, Israel, and Iran that has unfolded in recent days. The record of Iranian violence, proxy warfare, and terror sponsorship remains central to understanding Tehran's dangerous role on the global stage.

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# No, Americans Have Not Fought Israel's Wars: Clearing Up a Persistent Claim About U.S. Troops and the Iraq War

A common talking point says American troops have "fought for Israel," or that Israel drags the United States into wars, including the 2003 Iraq War. These claims collapse under basic fact-checking. The United States and Israel are close partners, yet there is no mutual defense treaty that obligates U.S. forces to fight for Israel, and Israel has built its defense around fighting with its own military. When people point to Iraq, the public record shows U.S. leaders cited U.S. national security arguments, not an Israeli request for American troops.

## Key Takeaways

- The United States and Israel do **not** have a mutual defense treaty requiring U.S. troops to fight for Israel.
- Israel has received (<https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-israel>) U.S. security assistance and cooperation, not U.S. combat divisions fighting Israel's wars.
- The U.S. has at times deployed (<https://apnews.com/article/mideast-gaza-israel-hamas-us-military-c19caf7b193dbb3bfaf056366f9e2369>) personnel in or near Israel for support missions and coordination, not to fight Israel's wars.

- The 2003 Iraq war authorization focused (<https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/olc/legacy/2009/08/24/memo-military-force-iraq.pdf>) on U.S. national security claims and UN Security Council resolutions, not “fighting for Israel.”

## What the U.S.-Israel Relationship Is, and What It Is Not

The U.S. and Israel work closely on defense technology, intelligence sharing, and missile defense. The U.S. State Department describes long running U.S. security cooperation and large scale assistance over decades.

That cooperation is real. It is not the same thing as American troops fighting Israel’s wars.

A key point is legal and political: Israel is often called an American “ally,” yet there is **no** mutual defense agreement binding the U.S. to fight for Israel. Congressional Research Service reporting has stated this plainly: there is no mutual defense treaty or agreement that provides a formal U.S. security guarantee.

This matters because the United States does have treaty allies where an attack triggers clear obligations. Israel is not in that category. U.S. support has centered on funding, arms sales, joint projects, and diplomatic backing, not U.S. infantry and armored units deploying to fight Israel’s enemies.

## “American Troops Have Fought for Israel” Versus the Historical Record

When people say “American troops fought for Israel,” they usually blur together several different things:

### **1) U.S. weapons and funding.**

The U.S. has provided significant security assistance and helps fund missile defense programs. That support can be debated, praised, criticized, or defended. It is still not U.S. troops fighting Israel’s wars.

### **2) U.S. forces in the region.**

The U.S. has often stationed forces in the Middle East for American objectives: protecting shipping lanes, deterring Iran, fighting ISIS, supporting Gulf allies, or maintaining readiness. Those missions are not the same as fighting for Israel.

### **3) Small U.S. deployments connected to Israel that are not combat for Israel.**

A recent example makes the distinction clear. In late 2025, the Associated Press reported the U.S. was sending about 200 troops to Israel tied to monitoring and

supporting a Gaza ceasefire coordination effort, with reporting that U.S. forces would not enter Gaza. That is a support and monitoring role, not "U.S. troops fighting Israel's war."

Across Israel's major wars and campaigns, Israel has relied on the Israel Defense Forces, its reserves, and its own command structure. The absence of a mutual defense treaty is not a paperwork detail. It reflects Israel's longstanding posture: Israel asks for diplomatic support and matériel, while maintaining independent battlefield responsibility.

## **The Iraq War Myth: "Israel Made America Do It"**

The claim that Israel pushed the U.S. into the 2003 Iraq War has circulated for years. It often shows up in two forms: "Israel asked the U.S. to invade Iraq," or "the U.S. invaded Iraq on Israel's behalf." Both claims clash with the public record.

## **What the U.S. government said it was doing in 2002–2003**

The domestic legal basis for war was the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq. Its core language authorized force to defend U.S. national security against the perceived threat posed by Iraq and to enforce relevant UN Security Council resolutions. That is a U.S. vote, a U.S. law, and a U.S. stated rationale.

The wider public case emphasized alleged weapons programs, alleged ties to terrorism, and enforcement of UN resolutions.

## **Conclusion**

Israel and the United States have a close relationship that includes real military cooperation and significant security assistance. That relationship does not include American troops being sent to fight Israel's wars, and it is not governed by a mutual defense treaty requiring the U.S. to do so. On Iraq, the record shows an American decision made through U.S. law and U.S. political arguments.

# Frequently Asked Questions About U.S. Involvement and Israel

## What is the U.S.–Israel alliance and how does it affect American military strategy?

The **U.S.–Israel alliance** represents a strategic partnership grounded in defense, intelligence, and technology. Rooted in **shared Western values**, this alliance promotes American interests in a complex and volatile region. For the U.S., the relationship is reciprocal; it enhances American strategies for deterrence, crisis response, and the protection of U.S. personnel. The stakes are high; any weakening of this alliance could jeopardize the quality of intelligence and increase risks for American forces abroad.

This partnership directly influences U.S. military operations by boosting preparedness and reducing uncertainty. Working with allies who provide tested capabilities and timely intelligence allows U.S. commanders to make faster, more informed decisions.

Key components of this strategy include:

- **Security cooperation** that enhances joint problem-solving and interoperability.
- **Intelligence sharing** (<https://allyvia.org/allyvia/alliance/counterterrorism-shared-threats>) focused on counterterrorism and emerging threats.
- **Defense technology collaboration** to strengthen U.S. military readiness.
- *Deterrence* reflecting the capacity of U.S. allies to defend themselves alongside U.S. forces.

## How does U.S. training and intelligence sharing with Israel enhance American security?

**U.S.** training and intelligence sharing with Israel play a crucial role in bolstering American security. They empower U.S. forces and agencies to learn quickly, prepare thoroughly, and respond to challenges with increased confidence. This collaboration is essential to the **U.S.–Israel alliance** (<https://allyvia.org/alliance>), rooted in mutual democratic ideals.

Joint military exercises and exchanges sharpen essential skills for real-world missions...urban operations, air defense coordination, emergency medical response, and counterterrorism strategies. Insights gained through these engagements are vital for *military readiness* and operational planning for U.S. partners and forces abroad.

On the intelligence front, this partnership leads to enhanced capabilities in threat assessment, particularly regarding terrorism networks, missile developments, and cyber threats to **critical infrastructure cybersecurity**. Recent trends highlight the ongoing nature of cyber threats, as exemplified by the **BIRD Cyber program**, which underscores how these collaborative efforts strengthen resilience in both nations.

## What historical events have shaped perceptions of U.S. involvement in Israel's conflicts?

Public perceptions of U.S. engagement have often been shaped by instances where Washington combined **diplomacy** with **security cooperation**...viewed as an extension of the **U.S.–Israel alliance** and America's commitment to regional stability.

Key historical milestones include:

- **1948**: The U.S. recognized Israel, establishing an early political framework for the bilateral relationship.
- **1967** and **1973**: Arab-Israeli conflicts intensified U.S. focus on deterrence and crisis management.
- **1979 Camp David Accords**: A pivotal U.S.-mediated peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, cementing America's role as a mediator.
- **1991 Madrid Conference** and **1993 Oslo process**: Notable diplomatic initiatives reflecting U.S. leadership expectations.

As discussions around arms sales, missile defense, and the **Qualitative Military Edge (QME)** evolve, they continue to shape public sentiment...supporters highlight U.S. security benefits, while critics voice concerns about potential entanglement. These conversations remain pertinent, often resurfacing during periods of regional tension.

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# The War Didn't Start Now: Iran-Linked Assassination Plots on U.S. Soil In The Last Five Years

Some critics see the attacks on Iran by the U.S. and Israel as unprovoked, when the truth is Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iranian state actors have faced repeated U.S. criminal charges tied to plots that aimed to kidnap or kill people living in the United States. Court filings and Justice Department announcements describe operational steps like surveillance, payments to intermediaries, and attempted recruitment of would-be hitmen. These cases matter for Americans who want a fact-based view of what Iran has tried to do inside the United States, and what U.S. law enforcement says it stopped. The strongest claims are the ones backed by federal complaints, indictments, trials, and sentencing records.

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5. President-elect Trump: DOJ's 2024 allegation of IRGC tasking

6. Biden and Nikki Haley: what is claimed, what is charged

7. Conclusion

## Key takeaways

- The U.S. Justice Department charged (<https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/iranian-intelligence-officials-indicted-kidnapping-conspiracy-charges>) Iranian actors in a 2021 kidnapping conspiracy targeting Iranian American activist Masih Alinejad in New York.
- A separate 2022 murder-for-hire plot against Alinejad led to U.S. convictions (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-eastern-european-organized-crime-leaders-convicted-murder-hire-targeting-us-based>) in March 2025 and 25-year prison sentences in October 2025 for two organizers.
- The Justice Department charged (<https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/member-irans-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-irgc-charged-plot-murder-former-national>) an alleged IRGC-QF member in 2022 for trying to hire a killer to murder former National Security Advisor John Bolton, with filings referencing a possible second “job” reported as tied to Mike Pompeo.
- In November 2024, DOJ announced charges (<https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-murder-hire-and-related-charges-against-irgc-asset-and-two>) alleging an IRGC asset directed U.S.-based associates to surveil and target an Iranian-origin U.S. victim in New York, and that the same IRGC asset was tasked with a plan to kill President-elect Donald J. Trump.
- Public reporting (<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202409061134>) has circulated claims that President Joe Biden and Nikki Haley were among possible Iranian targets, tied to summaries of FBI records released by Sen. Chuck Grassley.

## What “attempt” means in this article

This article uses “attempt” in the way U.S. prosecutors often frame these cases: concrete steps toward kidnapping or murder, backed by evidence in complaints, indictments, trials, and sentencings. That can include surveillance, arranging payments, recruiting intermediaries, traveling to a target location, or possessing weapons while stalking a target. Some claims that circulate online do not reach that standard in the public record, so they are described as allegations instead of established attempts.

# **Iranian dissidents in the U.S.: Masih Alinejad as the clearest documented case**

The most fully documented Iran-linked [targeting \(https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jul/13/iran-intelligence-officer-kidnap-plot-us-journalist\)](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jul/13/iran-intelligence-officer-kidnap-plot-us-journalist) of a dissident in the United States centers on Masih Alinejad, an Iranian American journalist and activist based in New York.

In July 2021, the Justice Department unsealed an indictment charging four Iranian nationals, described as Iranian intelligence officials, in a conspiracy that prosecutors said aimed to kidnap a U.S.-based journalist from Brooklyn and move her out of the country. The charging announcement publicly tied the plot to Iranian state actors, not just to freelance criminals.

In July 2022, law enforcement arrested a man outside Alinejad's Brooklyn home with an AK-style rifle and related items, after reported surveillance activity around her residence. Major outlets reported the arrest and noted the earlier federal case tied to Iranian efforts against her.

That 2022 threat later connected to a wider murder-for-hire case. In March 2025, DOJ announced convictions of Polad Omarov and Rafat Amirov for murder-for-hire and related charges, describing the plot as work done "on behalf of the Government of Iran," with prosecutors stating Iran offered \$500,000 for Alinejad's killing. In October 2025, DOJ announced both men received 25-year prison sentences.

Separately, in November 2024, DOJ announced charges alleging an IRGC asset used U.S.-based criminal associates to surveil and attempt to murder "a U.S. citizen of Iranian origin" in New York who had been targeted in "multiple prior plots." The press release does not name the victim in the excerpted lines, yet it describes repeated Iran-directed targeting of a U.S.-based Iranian-origin critic.

## **High-level U.S. officials: Bolton, Pompeo, and the documented murder-for-hire effort**

In August 2022, DOJ announced charges against Shahram Poursafi, described as working on behalf of the IRGC-QF, alleging he tried to arrange the murder of former National Security Advisor John Bolton in the Washington, D.C. area. DOJ said the plot included offering \$300,000 for the killing and described it as retaliation tied to the January 2020 killing of Qasem Soleimani.

Reporting at the time also highlighted that DOJ filings referenced a second “job” with a much larger payment figure, and Axios reported that this second job related to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Publicly available DOJ materials in that announcement focused on Bolton as the named target, so Pompeo should be described as linked by reporting around the court document’s language, not as a separately charged murder-for-hire victim in that same press release.

## **President-elect Trump: DOJ’s 2024 allegation of IRGC tasking**

In November 2024, DOJ announced a criminal [complaint](https://www.axios.com/2022/08/10/iran-assassination-pompeo-bolton) (<https://www.axios.com/2022/08/10/iran-assassination-pompeo-bolton>) alleging that Farhad Shakeri, described as an IRGC asset, directed a network of associates to conduct surveillance and murder operations, and that the IRGC tasked him on October 7, 2024 to provide a plan to kill President-elect Donald J. Trump. The same DOJ release alleges tasking tied to other targets, including Jewish American citizens in New York City.

That DOJ complaint is a significant data point for Americans evaluating claims about Iran targeting senior U.S. leadership, since it places the allegation inside a federal charging document rather than in political rhetoric.

## **Biden and Nikki Haley: what is claimed, what is charged**

Claims that Iran targeted President Joe Biden and Nikki Haley appear in reporting tied to summaries of FBI records released by Sen. Chuck Grassley’s office. As of the DOJ releases cited above, the most concrete, publicly described federal assassination-related tasking names President-elect Trump, and the most concrete charged murder-for-hire effort names John Bolton.

## **Conclusion**

Far too many who are unaware of the facts, assume that the attack on Iran by the U.S. and Israel was unprovoked and about nefarious aims. The truth is the Islamic Republic of Iran has long seen the U.S. as its chief enemy and has been waging a war against America, its leaders and others for many years.

Over the last five years, the strongest public evidence of Iran-linked assassination or kidnapping activity in the United States comes from U.S. Justice Department cases. Those cases describe Iran-directed plots targeting Iranian American dissidents, with Masih Alinejad’s cases moving from indictment to conviction and long prison

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sentences. They also describe an alleged IRGC-QF murder-for-hire effort aimed at John Bolton, plus DOJ's allegation that the IRGC tasked an asset with producing a plan to kill President-elect Donald Trump.

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# WHEN SILENCE MEETS OUTRAGE: THE DOUBLE STANDARD ON IRAN'S REGIME AND ITS PEOPLE

In recent days, critics have labeled U.S. and Israeli military action against Iran as illegal and immoral. Yet many of the same voices said little when the Iranian regime turned its weapons inward and crushed mass protests with lethal force. This contrast raises a serious question: why is force against an oppressive regime condemned loudly, while force used by that regime against its own people often draws a muted response? Americans deserve a clear-eyed review of what the Iranian government has done to its citizens and why accountability for that conduct cannot be separated from today's security decisions.

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## Key Takeaways

- The Iranian regime has a documented [record](https://editorials.voa.gov/a/oppression-and-mass-executions-in-iran-persist/8086048.html) (<https://editorials.voa.gov/a/oppression-and-mass-executions-in-iran-persist/8086048.html>) of violently suppressing protests, including mass arrests, executions, and lethal force against civilians.
- U.S. government [assessments](https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iran) (<https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/iran>) and human rights organizations have reported thousands detained and tens of thousands [killed](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/27/iran-protests-) (<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/27/iran-protests->



death-toll-disappeared-bodies-mass-burials-30000-dead)during major protest

aves in recent years.

an's leadership, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has been

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• On those who object to military action against Iran often gave limited attention to

the regime's internal repression

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- Any discussion of legality and morality must account for the regime's actions against its own population and its record of targeting Americans.

## The Regime's Record of Internal Repression

Iran's current political system centers on the authority of the Supreme Leader, an unelected position that has absolute power in the country, and security bodies such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has been defined (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2026/02/19/eu-terrorist-list-council-designates-the-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps-as-a-terrorist-organisation/>) as a terrorist organization by many nations. Since the 1979 revolution, the regime has maintained power through strict controls on speech, assembly, and political participation. When citizens protest, the response has often been swift and deadly.

The protest wave that began after the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022 is well documented. According to reporting by major human rights organizations, hundreds of protesters were killed and thousands arrested. Public executions increased in the following year. The U.S. government imposed sanctions on Iranian officials and entities for their role in the crackdown.

Earlier episodes show a similar pattern. During nationwide protests in November 2019, Amnesty International reported that security forces killed hundreds of demonstrators. The U.S. State Department described those events as among the bloodiest crackdowns since 1979. These are not isolated incidents but part of a recurring approach to dissent.

When demonstrations resumed in late 2025, multiple reports indicated that security forces again used lethal force, mass detentions, and intimidation to silence opposition. Even without finalized tallies that some estimate in the tens of thousands, the pattern aligns with prior conduct: protests met with arrests, prison sentences, and in some cases executions after rapid trials.

## Targeting Americans and Dissidents Abroad

The regime's actions have not been confined within Iran's borders. U.S. federal prosecutors have charged Iranian operatives in plots targeting American officials and Iranian dissidents on U.S. soil.





Accountability should recognize that distinction. Support for the Iranian

means acknowledging their suffering under state violence and recognizing

right to protest without fear of execution or torture.

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Debate over military action against Iran will continue, and Americans should expect rigorous scrutiny of legality and proportionality. Yet it is inconsistent to condemn force against a murderous regime while overlooking that regime's record of killing and imprisoning its own citizens and plotting attacks abroad. The documented history of repression and the charged assassination plots against Americans form part of the context.

A balanced moral standard requires attention to both state sovereignty and state conduct. If the international community demands restraint from democratic nations, it must also demand accountability from regimes that silence dissent with bullets and prison cells. Those calling the attacks illegal and immoral should be called out for their silence in the face of decades of state repression by the Islamic Republic's murderous regime.

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