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The Regime in Tehran Digs in its Heels

Recent protests across Iran illustrate what many have known for years: The Iranian regime continues to repress its own people in order to extend its influence across the Middle East and beyond. Iran’s hegemonic foreign policy goals, combined with its brutal domestic policies, have produced a toxic mix both for Iran’s citizens and the region as a whole. President Trump’s refusal this month to certify (for the second time) that the 2015 nuclear deal is in America’s best interest has once again focused attention on the need to prevent Iran from ever acquiring nuclear weapons.

The protests that rocked Iran in late December and early January clearly illustrate the interrelationship of the nuclear deal, Tehran’s military adventurism, and the Iranian government’s disregard for human rights. Just two years ago, Iranian officials and their supporters in the West suggested that the nuclear deal (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) would produce a more peaceful Middle East and a more stable, prosperous Iran.

Instead, to the dismay of its citizens, Iran’s leaders have diverted much of the money accessed under the JCPOA into foreign military campaigns in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Since 2015, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Hezbollah and other Iranian-funded Shia militias have returned much of Syria to its brutal dictator, Bashar al-Assad. The IRGC also helped eject the U.S.-allied Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government from Kirkuk and assisted Shia radicals fighting the internationally recognized government of Yemen. All of this did not come cheap—some estimates put Tehran’s annual foreign military spending as high as $18 billion.

It was no surprise, then, that the resulting steep price hikes for eggs and other commodities and a severe banking crisis triggered the most recent round of mass Iranian protests. Iranians clearly realize that their leaders are misappropriating their nation’s wealth. Accordingly, demonstrations that began with an economic focus soon took on an avowedly political, anti-regime tone. Working-class Iranians in the provinces—long assumed to be a bulwark of regime support—came out in droves, chanting slogans such as “Death to [Iranian Supreme Leader Ali] Khamenei,” “Death to [Iranian President Hassan] Rouhani,” and “The people are begging, the clerics act like God.”

Iran’s protestors quickly homed in on the relationship between unbridled spending abroad and surging inflation plus severe youth unemployment at home. Shouts of “No to Gaza, no to Lebanon, I give my life only for Iran,” and “Leave Syria, think about us” were common. These subversive cries challenged the government’s foreign policy and also demonstrated a bedrock patriotism placing allegiance to Iran as a country over loyalty to the cleric’s Islamic system.

Almost 40 years ago, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Iranian Islamic Republic, derided such attitudes with the warning that “patriotism equals paganism.” But
the Iranian people continue to reject Khomeini’s approach, which is shared by his successors.

The demonstrations should also put to rest any notion that the Iranian people see President Rouhani as a “moderate” who seeks prosperity at home and less adventurism abroad. The protestors drew no distinction between Rouhani and Supreme Leader Khamenei, decrying both as bulwarks of a brutal system that impoverishes and oppresses them.

In virtually every election over the past 20 years, Iranian voters, although restricted to candidates loyal to the Islamic system, have chosen whoever appeared to embody change. Last year, they chose Rouhani over the unpopular, extremist Ibrahim Raisi. In previous elections, Presidents Khatami, Ahmadinejad and Rouhani all deceptively draped themselves in the banner of change. And each failed to deliver, whether for lack of trying or because the system hamstrung every attempt at reform.

Finally, the protests remind us that Iran’s severe economic and political problems have little to do with the alleged failure of the United States or the EU to provide Tehran with sufficient sanctions relief. The most important nuclear-related sanctions—those against Iran’s central bank and the EU’s oil boycott—were removed more than two years ago. In response, the Iranian economy grew 6.5 percent in 2016 and between 3.5 and 5 percent during 2017. But the benefits of growth have not trickled down to the average Iranian. Instead, senior IRGC officers and clerics have lined their own pockets and maximized the power of the huge financial interests they control.

It is hard to see how Iran’s government can cure its economic ills or win legitimacy. Tehran may have succeeded in crushing the recent protests—killing dozens and arresting almost four thousand citizens. But the grounds for protest remain, and the mullahs’ regime is unlikely to enjoy clear sailing ahead.

The United States must continue to stand with those in Iran who seek basic human rights and oppose Iranian efforts to expand the regime’s influence across the Middle East. Moreover, America must implement a comprehensive strategy to thwart Iran’s aggression, prevent it from ever acquiring nuclear weapons, and secure other key American interests.

New Horizons for the U.S.-Israel Relationship

The U.S.-Israel relationship has made important advances in the three years since Congress passed landmark legislation to foster bilateral cooperation. The 2014 U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act (SPA) affirmed in law that Israel is a “major strategic partner” of the United States, and authorized expanded U.S.-Israel cooperation in a wide range of fields, including defense, intelligence, homeland security, cybersecurity, energy, water, agriculture and alternative fuel technologies.

America and Israel are both strengthened by confronting these challenges together. Here are highlights of how Congress, the Obama administration and the Trump administration have invested in achieving SPA’s objectives,
specifically in the areas of energy, water, homeland security and cybersecurity.

**ENERGY**

Israel’s focus on energy efficiency has resulted in the development of leading technologies. Simultaneously, Israel discovered significant natural gas reserves off its coast in the Mediterranean Sea—the largest of which is the Leviathan field, with an estimated 500 billion cubic meters of gas. Recognizing that Israel could help the United States in relation to energy efficiency, and that America could strengthen Israel’s energy security by lending expertise in the area of natural gas, Congress within SPA authorized the creation of a U.S.-Israel Center of Excellence in Energy and Water Technology.

The new center will bring together the best minds in both countries for the development of new energy and water technologies. Following passage of SPA, the U.S. Department of Energy and Israel’s Ministry of Energy, as well as the private sectors from both countries, began organizing the creation of the center, and in 2017, House and Senate committees appropriated money for the center for the first time: $4 million for fiscal year 2018 that will be matched annually by Israel and the private sectors of the two countries.

Underscoring America’s interest in Israel’s renewable-energy technologies, Congress has appropriated $2 million each year for the U.S.-Israel Binational Industrial Research and Development Energy program (BIRD-Energy). BIRD-Energy is a bilateral cooperative program whereby U.S and Israeli companies may apply jointly for grants to cover up to 50 percent of their project development and commercialization costs. The October 2017 BIRD-Energy awards included projects that would develop new processes of ethanol production; a safe hydrogen transport and storage system; and a new energy-efficient, low-maintenance, high-performance bicycle.

**WATER**

Dozens of U.S. states are currently experiencing abnormally dry conditions and water shortfalls. California is the primary example, but ominous conditions have been prevalent throughout the interior West and in Texas. In addition, cash-strapped cities on the East Coast and in the Midwest are grappling with rapidly deteriorating water infrastructure.

Israel, on the other hand, effectively became “water secure” in 2014. This remarkable feat was achieved by a country with historical water scarcity problems, whose basic water needs have been consistently imperiled by hostile neighbors and an arid climate. Israel reached this status through the development of desalination, drip irrigation, wastewater treatment and advanced pipe technologies that identify leaks and contamination in aging pipes.

Each of these Israeli technologies is more advanced and used more widely in Israel than in the United States; for example, while America recycles approximately one percent of its wastewater, Israel recycles more than 90 percent, enabling its agricultural sector to prosper even in the event of a drought.

As for desalination—a process by which salt or gray water is made potable—in 2015, an Israeli company began operating a desalination plant in California, the largest such plant in the Western Hemisphere. The Carlsbad Desalination Plant provides nearly 50 million gallons per day of fresh water from the Pacific Ocean.
to the residents of San Diego County. Israel already has five such plants and is constantly modernizing its plan for future plants, which will be more cost-effective and energy-efficient.

In 2016, Congress passed the Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation Act (WIIN). This important legislation incentivized grantees of federal desalination programs to partner with Israeli companies and institutions; established a government mechanism for U.S.-Israel cooperation in desalination research and development (R&D); and authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to cooperate with Israel and other key allies.

Taken together, these provisions represent a positive trend: The U.S. government’s approach to water technologies includes greater collaboration with Israel. As a result, U.S.-Israel cooperation is accelerating the joint research, development and commercialization of water technologies.

**HOMELAND SECURITY**

By necessity, Israel has gained broad experience in homeland security. Constantly under threat, the Jewish state has developed leading techniques and technologies for preventing and addressing mass-casualty incidents, particularly in relation to airport perimeter security, and identifying threatening objects before they enter the airport itself. According to a 2016 CNN report, Israel’s Ben Gurion airport is considered by many experts to be the world’s safest—it has not suffered a shooting or terrorist attack since 1972.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Congress have proactively sought to increase cooperation with Israel following the passage of SPA. In 2015, DHS embarked on a pilot program with Israel’s Ministry of Public Security, whereby the two countries provide grants to collaborative U.S.-Israeli projects to develop wearable and first-responder technologies. Recent awards from this program were for the development of public safety off-network broadband communications and unmanned search-and-rescue systems. And on the basis of the pilot’s early successes, in 2016 Congress passed the U.S.-Israel Advanced Research Partnership Act, H.R. 5877, which permanently authorized the pilot program and expanded it to include cybersecurity.

**CYBERSECURITY**

As a uniquely global and borderless challenge, cyber threats to the U.S. digital economy and critical infrastructure require partnership between America and its close allies. Israel has emerged as a crucial partner. In addition to being a close and trusted ally, Israel in 2015 alone attracted 20 percent of global private-sector investment in the cybersecurity industry.

As noted above, H.R. 5877, which was signed
into law in 2016, promotes cooperative homeland security research and antiterrorism programs relating to cybersecurity. And Congress is already working on further legislation to establish an additional U.S.-Israel grant program supporting R&D in cybersecurity. The latter bill, the U.S.-Israel Cybersecurity Cooperation Enhancement Act, passed the House in 2017; the Senate Homeland Security Committee is currently reviewing it.

The Executive Branch is also accelerating cyber cooperation with Israel. In February 2017, President Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the formation of a joint working group focused on bilateral cybersecurity cooperation. Led by Rob Joyce from the U.S. National Security Council and Dr. Eviatar Matania from the Israeli National Cyber Directorate, the delegations aim to expand the scope and depth of current government cooperation.

**CONCLUSION**

In the three years since the passage of SPA, the U.S. government has broadened the U.S.-Israel relationship. The United States is now devoting new resources to protecting Israel’s security, while simultaneously developing new pathways to advance its own security through this bilateral partnership. SPA has spurred a cultural and institutional change in Washington, as the Departments of Energy, Interior, Homeland Security, Agriculture, Transportation, and Commerce, as well as NASA, are each developing their own unique cultures of cooperation with Israel. The pace of change is fast, and 2018 will likely bring a deepening of existing ties as well as new cooperative programs in space, agriculture, autonomous vehicles and digital health.

Greater American familiarity with Israeli capabilities will also yield new opportunities beyond the bilateral relationship. Notably, improved understanding of Israel’s new water technologies enabled the Trump administration in 2017 to broker new water agreements between the Israelis and Palestinians that will provide them with important additional water resources. In addition, Israel is already engaged with USAID’s 15 agriculture Centers of Excellence in India. Also, in December 2017, Israel officially joined the U.S.-led “Power Africa” initiative to connect 60 million African households to electricity by 2030. Further broadening of the U.S.-Israel relationship will serve to strengthen both countries and the world.

**The Iranian Cyber Threat**

As early as 2006, Iran began waging war in the cyber realm against America and its allies. Both specialized Iranian government bodies and contracted professional hackers began actively seeking to penetrate America’s computers and computer networks in order to cause damage and disruption. These efforts threaten America’s physical security as well as its economy and infrastructure.

The United States is taking a range of actions to counter this emerging threat. Most recently, on Nov. 21, 2017, the U.S. Department of Justice announced charges against an Iranian national, Behzad Mesri, for hacking and then attempting to extort American cable and satellite television...
network HBO. According to the indictment, Mesri (known online as Skote Vahshat) worked for the Iranian military to “conduct computer attacks” on military targets in Israel and other enemies of Iran.

In explaining the charges, Acting Manhattan U.S. Attorney Joon H. Kim said: “Behzad Mesri, an Iranian national who had previously hacked computer systems for the Iranian military, allegedly infiltrated HBO’s systems, stole proprietary data, including scripts and plot summaries for unaired episodes of Game of Thrones, and then sought to extort HBO of $6 million in Bitcoins.”

This article outlines the development of Iran’s cyber corps and cyber-offensive strategy, Iranian hacking attempts, America’s legal and military response, and the way forward.

DEVELOPMENT OF IRAN’S CYBER CORPS

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) is largely responsible for the program’s development. Its earliest efforts are believed to have begun in 2006 with the development of the “Iran Cyber Army”—a cadre of civilian hackers tasked with targeting networks hosted by Iran’s enemies. In 2010, the Basij, Iran’s IRGC-run paramilitary volunteer militia, launched a “cyber warrior” division with 1,500 hackers. Also that year, the Iranian military established formal cyber-offensive squadrons as well as a Cyber Defense Command tasked with preventing cyberattacks on critical Iranian infrastructure.

The Iranian regime began seriously investing in its cyber program in response to the domestic 2009 Green Revolution and a series of foreign cyberattacks from 2010-2012. At a February 2012 student conference in Iran, then-deputy head of Iran’s National Security Council, Ali Baqeri, called on students “to play a key role in the cyber area” and bragged that “a document recently published by the U.S. intelligence apparatus said that Iranian intelligence operations against the U.S. have increased in recent years, and so have [Iran’s] cyber capabilities.” In March 2012, several Iranian universities established cyber-defense schools as part of a program launched by the Passive Defense Organization—a regime entity that, as part of its responsibilities, manages Iran’s civilian cyber system.

Also in March 2012, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei ordered the formation of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace to consolidate cyber decision-making in a single body that answers to him. Through the creation of an extensive offensive cyber apparatus, the Iranian government has supplemented its destabilizing regional military actions with the capability to disrupt valuable computer systems across the world.

By 2016, the regime stated that it spent $1 billion annually on its cyber programs. In addition to its domestic efforts, Iran has also intensified its recruitment of foreign hackers to help carry out attacks. And this overall investment has yielded results: The 2017 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, published by the Director of National Intelligence, lists Iran among the top cyber threats to the United States.

IRAN’S CYBER-OFFENSIVE STRATEGY

Iranian cyber operatives use select methods to impede the function of important computer networks hosted by the United States and its allies. The most commonly employed
cyberattack is a distributed denial-of-service attack (DDOS), which floods a computer system with information requests until the targeted server crashes. Iranian hackers are also increasingly using false social media profiles and malware-infused email attachments to extract the personal information of their victims.

Iran’s cyber-offensive divisions are currently developing strategies to disable the most secure networks used by the U.S. military, which host the deployment of missiles, command-and-control centers and unmanned vessels.

**IRANIAN HACKING CAMPAIGNS**

Iranian hackers constantly seek to infiltrate, disable or destroy American computer systems. While most such attacks fail, some achieve success and public mention.

Between September 2012 and January 2013, Iranian hackers launched an extensive campaign of attacks on American computer networks controlling finance, infrastructure and military operations. The primary targets were the U.S. stock exchange, 46 major banks, the Bowman Dam in northern New York and the U.S. Navy intranet. The attack on the Navy system was so severe that its repair required millions of dollars and multiple months.

In November 2015, four months after the announcement of the Iran nuclear deal, Iranian hackers stole data from U.S. State Department employees via fake Facebook profiles that mined personal information. In 2016, Iranian hackers attacked the Israeli power grid and Saudi Arabia’s Aviation Authority. A report released by the United Kingdom’s National Cyber Security Centre concluded that Iranian hackers were responsible for a cyberattack in June 2017 that leaked emails from members of its parliament.

**AMERICA’S RESPONSE**

The United States has developed a robust strategy to address the growing cyber threat posed by Iran and other bad actors. In March 2016, the U.S. government issued indictments and sanctions against seven hackers that took part in the cyber offensive on America between 2012 and 2013. In September 2017, the Treasury Department sanctioned 11 entities and individuals implicated in malicious Iranian behavior.

Two of the sanctioned entities, ITSecTeam and Mersad Co., worked directly with the IRGC to conduct cyberattacks against American networks. U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin said then that the Treasury “will continue to take strong actions to counter Iran’s provocations, including support for the IRGC… and cyberattacks meant to destabilize the U.S. financial system.”

In 2009, the U.S. Cyber Command was established under the direction of the National Security Agency at Ft. Meade, Maryland. The U.S. Cyber Command was established in 2009 under the direction of the National Security Agency at Ft. Meade, Maryland.
command focuses on securing the Defense Department’s information network, supporting combatant commanders, and strengthening America’s ability to withstand and respond to cyberattacks, such as those from Iran. In August 2017, the Trump administration announced that Cyber Command would be elevated to the status of a Unified Combatant Command focused on cyberspace operations.

The Department of Homeland Security is also working with industry and critical infrastructure providers to protect against attacks and build resiliency.

**MOVING FORWARD**

Despite the many efforts underway, a January 2018 report from the Carnegie Endowment recommended even more increased information sharing between the U.S. government and allies, as well as the private sector.

A range of new cybersecurity initiatives involving both government and civilian cybersecurity specialists can serve to substantially reduce Iranian opportunities to sabotage American networks. Pending legislation, such as the United States-Israel Cybersecurity Cooperation Enhancement Act that passed the House in January 2017, would create a cybersecurity grant program for joint research-and-development ventures that would deepen cooperation on issues of security related to commercial, governmental and military computer networks.

The administration should also continue to add Iranian cyber attackers to the Specially Designated Nationals List, increase indictments against Iranian hackers targeting Americans, and seek extradition of these hackers to the United States for trial when possible. As the cyberwarfare threat from Iran continues to evolve and increase, so too must America’s efforts to protect itself and its allies.

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**30 Years On: Hamas Still Promotes Terrorism, Calls for Israel’s Ruin**

Established in 1987 as the violent Palestinian offshoot of the Egyptian-based Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas has never veered from its original goal: destroying Israel and replacing it through “armed struggle” with an Islamist Palestinian state. For 30 years, Hamas has pursued this objective through suicide bombings, rocket strikes, kidnappings, attack tunnels, and other forms of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians.

A straight line leads from Hamas’ infamous 1988 charter, which said “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it,” to its most recent statement in January 2018. Following the shooting murder of father-of-six Raziel Shevah, Hamas stated: “the Nablus attack is the first practical response with fire to remind the enemy’s leaders that what you feared has now come. The West Bank will remain a knife in your body.”

**THE MYTH THAT “ISRAEL CREATED HAMAS”**

Since the turn of the century, when Hamas’ international standing sharply deteriorated following its campaign of murderous suicide
bombings in public places, detractors of Israel have sought to shift blame by assiduously spreading the myth that “Israel created Hamas.” But a quick review of Hamas’ origins dispels this defamatory myth.

Prior to Hamas’ official creation, it was an Islamic charity known as Mujama al-Islamiya (Islamic Association), established in Gaza in 1973 by the imam Ahmed Yassin as an offshoot of the Egyptian-based Islamist group Muslim Brotherhood. Until its metamorphosis 14 years later into Hamas, it engaged in charitable work and provided medical and social services to Gaza’s Palestinian residents. Since, at the time, Hamas’ bitter rival—the Yasir Arafat-led Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—was perpetrating horrific terrorist attacks, Israel allowed the still-peaceful Islamic charity to operate in Gaza as a counterweight to the PLO. This is a far cry from having “created Hamas.”

THE HAMAS CHARTER: A CALL FOR GENOCIDE

Soon after its establishment, Hamas’ leaders set out to develop its founding charter as a blueprint for its future ideology and activities. Adopted in August 1988, the 36-article, 9,000-word charter—which has never been revoked—is replete with anti-Semitic statements, incitement and violent threats against Israel. Here’s a sample:

“The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say ‘O Moslem, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.’”

“With their money, they took control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations, and others. With their money they stirred revolutions in various parts of the world with the purpose of achieving their interests and reaping the fruit therein…With their money they formed secret societies, such as Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, the Lions and others in different parts of the world for the purpose of sabotaging societies and achieving Zionist interests…They were behind World War I…They were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state.”

“The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion,’ and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying.”

“In face of the Jews’ usurpation of Palestine, it is compulsory that the banner of Jihad be raised.”

“There is no way out except by concentrating all powers and energies to face this Nazi, vicious Tatar invasion.”

“…[L]iberation of Palestine is…an individual duty for every Moslem wherever he may be.”

“[Hamas] strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine.”

“[Hamas] believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [endowment]
consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgement Day.”

“Initiatives, and so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences, are in contradiction to the principles of [Hamas].”

Understandably, this vile charter has undermined Hamas’ standing in the West. Therefore, Hamas supporters hailed the May 2017 publication of a new policy document that declared, for the first time, a willingness to accept an interim Palestinian state in the territories—albeit without recognizing Israel. The document also said Hamas’ struggle was not with Jews but with “occupying Zionist aggressors.” In contrast to the charter, the new document did not mention Hamas’ parent organization—the Muslim Brotherhood—which was then, and still is, banned in Egypt.

The BBC quoted analysts as saying that the document was “aimed at improving relations with the outside world, including Egypt and Gulf Arab states, where the Brotherhood is also banned.” According to the BBC, “Hamas says [the new document] does not replace the charter,” and it accepts an interim Palestinian state “as a stage towards the ‘liberation’ of all of historic Palestine west of the River Jordan” (emphasis added). The document says Hamas still does not recognize Israel’s right to exist “in any part of the land” and still advocates violence against Israelis.

INCITEMENT TO VIOLENCE AND THE ELIMINATION OF ISRAEL

For 30 years, Hamas has issued many thousands of statements calling for Israel’s violent annihilation. These statements have taken multiple forms: press releases, interviews, fatwas (Islamic legal opinions), sermons, radio and television broadcasts, school textbooks, pages on social media, literature, movies, plays, songs and more.

Each statement clearly draws inspiration and direction from the 1988 charter. In 2016, both Facebook and Twitter took the unusual step of shutting down popular pages managed by Hamas due to their content inciting violence against Israelis. One closed Twitter account alone—managed by Hamas’ spokesman—had as many as 156,000 followers.

In 2013, the New York Times ran an article on Hamas’ use of textbooks—a potent tool for indoctrinating young minds—to promote its agenda:

“What Gaza teenagers are reading in their 50-page hardcover texts this fall includes references to the Jewish Torah and Talmud as ‘fabricated,’ and a description of Zionism as a racist movement whose goals include driving Arabs out of all of the area between the Nile in Africa and the Euphrates in Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

“‘Palestine,’ in turn, is defined as a state for Muslims stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. A list of Palestinian cities includes Haifa, Beersheba and Acre—all within Israel’s 1948 borders. And the books rebut Jewish historical claims to the territory by saying, ‘The Jews and the Zionist movement are not related to Israel, because the sons of Israel are a nation which had been annihilated.’”

To further reinforce the textbooks’ messages, Hamas runs annual training camps in Gaza for thousands of schoolchildren to learn how to use weapons and explosives in order to “emulate
the path of the *shahids*” (martyrs).

**A HISTORY OF TERRORISM**

Over the years, Hamas has relentlessly practiced what it preaches by way of attacking Israelis with Molotov cocktails, followed by suicide bombings, rocket attacks, kidnappings, attack tunnels and more. As a tactically pragmatic (not to be confused with moderate) organization, Hamas has varied its terrorist methods and at times even paused its violent activities to maximize its gains or minimize its losses.

Thus far, Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, Canada, the European Union, Japan (which froze Hamas’ assets), Egypt and, of course, Israel. In addition, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom have designated Hamas’ “military wing” as a terrorist organization (a false distinction, since Hamas’ political leadership controls both the “political wing” and the “military wing”).

During the First Intifada (1987-1993), Hamas—still in its infancy—played second fiddle to the PLO, which carried out the bulk of the shootings, stabbings and Molotov cocktail attacks on Israeli civilians. Yet among the 100 Israeli civilians killed and 1,400 injured during that period, dozens were killed and hundreds injured by Hamas.

**Suicide bombings:**

Hamas perpetrated its first suicide bombing in April 1993, killing one person and injuring ten. The following year, the pace of Hamas suicide bombings greatly accelerated when it perpetrated five suicide attacks that killed 38 Israelis and injured another 13. Among these attacks, the most horrifying was the Dizengoff Street bombing, which killed 21 Israeli civilians and one Dutch national in the heart of Tel Aviv.

After a relative hiatus in 1995, when Hamas conducted “only” two suicide bombings killing 10 Israeli civilians, the death toll increased dramatically in 1996, when Hamas murdered 59 Israelis in four suicide attacks; among those, two bombings were carried out in February and March on Bus No. 18 in Jerusalem, killing 45 Israelis.

The years 1997-2000 saw another relative hiatus: During those four years, Hamas carried out nine suicide bombings that killed 31 Israelis—fewer than the number of Israeli fatalities in 1996 alone.

Then came the Second Intifada (late 2000-2005), and with it a rapid growth in Hamas attacks. As many as 64 Hamas suicide bombings (sometimes in collaboration with one or two other terrorist organizations) were carried out during those years, killing 324 Israelis and injuring many more. In 2002 alone, 138 Israelis were murdered in 21 Hamas suicide bombings, including the deadliest such attack in Israel’s history: In March 2002, Hamas perpetrated the Passover Massacre during a Seder at the Park Hotel in Netanya, killing 30 civilians—mostly elderly, including Holocaust survivors—and injuring 140.

But by 2005, Hamas leaders concluded that the suicide bombings had actually been counterproductive. Far from advancing Hamas’ goal of “liberating Palestine,” they had severely damaged the Palestinian cause and inflicted immense material losses on the Palestinian residents of the territories. Accordingly, Hamas’ focus shifted to firing mortar shells and rockets from Gaza into Israeli population centers.
**Mortar and rocket attacks:**

Soon after the Second Intifada broke out, Hamas began firing mortar shells and short-range Qassam rockets from the Gaza Strip. At the time, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was still present in Gaza, as were nearly 8,000 Jewish settlers. But under the Oslo Accords, most of the area was under the security and administrative control of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which did little to stop those attacks, mostly directed at Israeli settlements in Gaza.

The first major change occurred in August 2005, when Israel withdrew overnight all its soldiers and settlers from the Gaza Strip and the entire area fell under full Palestinian control. After Hamas won the January 2006 parliamentary elections, a Hamas-majority government in partnership with Fatah was formed. While shifting its rocket fire from the settlements (now removed) to small Israeli towns in Gaza’s close proximity, Hamas was now able to extend the range of its Qassam rockets. In July 2006, a Hamas-launched, upgraded Qassam rocket landed in Ashkelon, a major Israeli city with more than 100,000 residents. Hamas fired barrages of rockets into Israel; while Israeli casualties were relatively light, the frequent rocket launches disrupted the lives of nearby residents and forced them to flee into bomb shelters.

The second major change was the violent Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Hamas terrorists killed dozens of Fatah activists, throwing some of them from the rooftops of high-rise buildings. Since then, Hamas has retained full control of Gaza.

Almost immediately after the takeover, Hamas began a campaign of launching almost daily barrages of rockets into Israeli cities and towns.

In early 2009, Ashdod and Beersheba (200,000 inhabitants each) were hit by longer-range Hamas rockets, mainly Katyusha and Grad, smuggled through tunnels from Egypt and by boat. In 2012, Israel’s capital Jerusalem (800,000 inhabitants) and Tel Aviv (400,000 inhabitants) were targeted with locally made M-75 and Iranian Fajr-5 rockets, respectively. In July 2014, Haifa (200,000 inhabitants)—nearly 100 miles north of Gaza—was targeted for the first time.

In an effort to stem the rocket launches, the IDF mounted three major operations in the Gaza Strip—Operations Cast Lead in 2008-2009, Pillar of Defense in 2012, and Protective Edge in 2014. The first two operations led to temporary pauses in rocket launches; the third has continued to deter Hamas from firing rockets, both because of the massive destruction it inflicted on Hamas’ infrastructure and because of the effectiveness of Israel’s Iron Dome missile defense system. But other terrorist organizations in Gaza continue to fire rockets into Israeli towns. Israel holds Hamas—Gaza’s governing authority—responsible for all attacks emanating from its territory and has often responded by attacking Hamas assets in Gaza. Meanwhile, Hamas continues to amass rockets and other weaponry for future attacks on Israel and test-fired rockets into the Mediterranean Sea earlier this month.

**Abductions:**

Based on the high value that Israelis place on the lives and freedom of their fellow citizens, Israel released—as of the early 1980s—thousands of imprisoned Palestinian terrorists in return for a handful of captured Israelis. Hamas took notice, and began taking hostages...
to extract the release of incarcerated Hamas terrorists.

As early as 1994, Hamas kidnapped the Israeli soldier Nachshon Wachsman, murdering him during an IDF rescue operation. In 2006, Hamas abducted IDF tank gunner Gilad Shalit. He was released five years later in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian terrorists held in Israeli prisons. In 2014, Hamas terrorists kidnapped three Israeli boys near Jerusalem, murdering all three after one of the boys called the police on his cellphone. And in violation of the Geneva Conventions, Hamas is holding for ransom the bodies of two Israeli soldiers it killed and abducted during Operation Protective Edge in 2014. Israel’s security services have thwarted several Hamas plots to kidnap Israelis, most recently just last month.

**Attack tunnels:**

Hamas has created and used smuggling tunnels from the Gaza Strip into Egypt since 1983, a year after the completion of Israel’s withdrawal from Sinai under the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Egypt has also since constructed a barrier on the border between then-Israeli held Gaza and its own territory. Hundreds of such tunnels have been dug and used both for passing civilian contraband and for smuggling a variety of weapons, including rockets. The current Egyptian government has destroyed most of those tunnels, but some are thought to remain in operation.

A second system of tunnels runs within the Gaza Strip itself, with the purpose of concealing weapons and explosives, hiding terrorists and enabling them to surprise Israeli soldiers engaged in operations inside Gaza.

The third system is of the greatest concern to Israel. Those are attack tunnels that originate in Gaza and end in Israel. Cross-border tunnels were used in the abduction of Gilad Shalit in 2006, and by Hamas terrorists to attack Israeli soldiers during the 2014 Operation Protective Edge. In response, the IDF reportedly “neutralized” 32 tunnels, 14 of which had crossed into Israel.

Given the proximity of Israeli towns to Gaza, the possibility that Hamas will use the attack tunnels to abduct Israeli civilians has been of even greater concern. Israel has made significant efforts to prevent this scenario. It is, for example, building an underground barrier along the Gaza-Israel border, and has invented a sophisticated tunnel-detection system. These efforts are already bearing fruit. Earlier this month, the IDF detected and destroyed a Hamas cross-border attack tunnel—the third in recent months—which penetrated hundreds of yards into both Israeli and Egyptian territory from the Gaza Strip.

**CONCLUSION**

While Iran remains Israel’s foremost long-
term strategic threat, Hamas is second only to Hezbollah as an immediate threat to Israel’s security and the lives of its citizens. By successfully disseminating its core, unchanged ideology of destroying Israel through “armed struggle” and replacing it with an Islamist Palestinian state, Hamas has managed to indoctrinate and recruit many young Palestinians to commit suicide bombings, fire rockets, kidnap Israelis and dig attack tunnels.

Unfortunately, the current lull in Hamas’ attacks is the product of Israeli deterrence, not a change of heart. Hamas will strike again as soon as it believes that the benefits of another round of fighting outweigh the costs. That is why, similarly to Hezbollah, Hamas continues to amass thousands of increasingly effective rockets with the hope that their sheer number will eventually overwhelm Israel’s Iron Dome. Hamas is also likely to continue its effort to abduct Israelis in order to secure the release of imprisoned Hamas terrorists.

Israel, therefore, remains vigilant. It is doing all it can to continue deterring Hamas from renewing its attacks, while simultaneously developing countermeasures to block any future Hamas strikes. It is incumbent upon the U.S. government to wholeheartedly support these Israeli efforts against the terrorist organization Hamas.

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**Washington Brief: A Recap of News From the Hill and Beyond**

**U.S.adopts New Iran Sanctions**

On Jan. 12, the U.S. administration sanctioned 14 individuals and entities for their support of Iran’s illicit activities—including serious human rights abuses, censorship and ballistic missile activity.

“The United States will not stand by while the Iranian regime continues to engage in human rights abuses and injustice. We are targeting the Iranian regime, including the head of Iran’s judiciary, for its appalling mistreatment of its citizens, including those imprisoned solely for exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and for censoring its own people as they stand up in protest against their government,” said Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin. “We are also targeting Iran’s ballistic missile program and destabilizing activities, which it continues to prioritize over the economic well-being of the Iranian people.”

**House Adopts Resolution Supporting Iranian Human Rights**

On Jan. 9, the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly adopted a bipartisan resolution (H.Res. 676) supporting the Iranian people’s rights to free expression and condemning the Iranian regime’s crackdown on legitimate protests. The resolution was introduced by Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce (R-CA) and Ranking Member Eliot Engel (D-NY).
Noting that Iran’s citizens have voiced economic grievances and protested the regime’s regional aggression, the resolution expresses solidarity “with the people of Iran that are engaged in legitimate and peaceful protests against an oppressive, corrupt regime.” The resolution also “condemns the Iranian regime’s serious human rights abuses against the Iranian people, significant corruption and destabilizing activities abroad.”

Importantly, the resolution urges the administration to use targeted sanctions to address the Iranian regime’s human rights violations. It also calls for the United States to facilitate technological support to the Iranian people, who are being actively censored and repressed by their leaders.

In the Senate, a bipartisan resolution in solidarity with the Iranian people has been introduced by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker (R-TN) and Ranking Member Ben Cardin (D-MD).

**U.S. VETOES ANTI-ISRAEL U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION**

On Dec. 18, the United States vetoed an anti-Israel United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) objecting to the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

Following the vote, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley explained that “for the simple act of deciding where to put our embassy, the United States was forced to defend its sovereignty. The record will reflect that we did so proudly. Today, for acknowledging a basic truth about the capital city of Israel, we are accused of harming peace. The record will reflect that we reject that outrageous claim. For these reasons, and with the best interests of both the Israeli and the Palestinian people firmly in mind, the United States votes ‘no’ on this resolution.”

Russia, Ukraine, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Sweden, Senegal, Ethiopia, Egypt, Bolivia, Uruguay and Kazakhstan all voted in favor of the resolution.

The resolution comes almost one year after the United States abstained, rather than veto, from a vote on anti-Israel UNSCR 2334. The move broke long-standing U.S. policy and defied bipartisan majorities in both the Senate and House of Representatives, which had urged the administration to veto any such one-sided, anti-Israel resolutions.

“Given the chance to vote again on Resolution 2334, I can say with complete confidence that the United States would vote ‘no,’” Haley proclaimed during a UNSC Middle East briefing. “We would exercise our veto power. The reasons why are very relevant to the cause of peace in the Middle East.”

**HOUSE UNANIMOUSLY PASSES BILL TO ENHANCE U.S.-ISRAEL SPACE COLLABORATION**

On Dec. 20, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed the United States and Israel Space Cooperation Act (H.R. 1159) by a vote of 411-0.

Authored by Reps. Derek Kilmer (D-WA), Jim Bridenstine (R-OK), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) and Mark Veasey (D-TX), the bipartisan bill aims to enhance cooperation between the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Israel Space Agency (ISA).
The legislation specifically directs NASA to continue working with the ISA in identifying and cooperatively pursuing peaceful space exploration and science initiatives in areas of mutual interest.

“This bill allows us to work with one of our key partners to continue breaking the boundaries of space,” said Rep. Kilmer. “In turn, it will keep us on a path that fosters innovation and experimentation, encourage the growth of the U.S. space industry, and create American jobs.”

In 2015, NASA and the ISA signed a civil space agreement during the International Astronautical Congress to enable new cooperation and research in space.

U.S. WITHHOLDS UNWRA AID TO PROMOTE AGENCY REFORM

On Jan. 16, the U.S. administration announced that it is withholding a portion of its annual funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA)—the agency tasked with assisting Palestinian refugees.

In a letter to the U.N. agency, the administration declared that it is holding back $65 million in funding in an effort to motivate reform within the agency. State Department Spokeswoman Heather Nauert said the United States would withhold the money “for future consideration.”

At the same time the State Department announced it was providing $60 million to UNWRA “to sustain schools and health services to ensure that teachers and also health care providers can be paid their salaries.”

“The United States has been, in the past, the largest single donor to UNWRA. We would like other countries – in fact other countries that criticize the United States for what they believe to be our position vis-a-vis the Palestinians, other countries that have criticized us – to step forward and actually help with UNWRA, to do more,” said Nauert.

Since 1994, the United States has provided approximately $5.2 billion in aid to the Palestinians.