


THE RECENT IRANIAN TERRORIST PLOTS IN EUROPE

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February 2019

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Pictures on the cover: Assadollah Asadi, currently detained in Belgium, awaiting his trial for the June's 2018 attempt to blow-up a MEK event in Villepinte (Paris); Police intervention in Brussels, on June 30, on the car containing the bomb; Iranian Embassy in Vienna, from which Asadi directed all the MOIS operations in Europe and organized the June's plot; Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ali Khamenei who gave the order for the attack.

Contents

About the Author

Claude Moniquet is the co-founder and the co-Chief Executive Officer of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center (ESISC), where he heads Operations, Intelligence and Analysis.

Previously he was a journalist specialized in Security, Intelligence and International Affairs and, for twenty years an operative for the French external intelligence (DGSE).

He authored or co-authored twenty books on History, Intelligence and International Terrorism.

He was a professional observer of the Iranian intelligence and terrorist operations since 1987.

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Executive Summary

In 2018, the Iranian regime, facing a domestic uprising, collapsing economy, and international sanctions, took the decision to step up terrorism on European and US soil against the Iranian opposition movement, which it accuses of fomenting and organizing the uprisings all across Iran.

The regime was involved in **two unquestionable terrorist plots against its opposition in the European Union** (in France and Denmark**) and in a probable plot against Israeli and Jewish targets (in Germany). The plot in France targeted a massive rally, "Free Iran-The Alternative" organized by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, with tens of thousands of participants and an array of Parliamentarians and scores of political dignitaries from across the world[1].**

In Denmark an Iranian dissident was the target of the alleged attack. Finn Borch Andersen, head of the Danish security and intelligence service, said: "It is, in short, a case of an Iranian intelligence unit that in our view has planned an attack in Denmark.[2]"

A fourth "Iranian plot" against members of Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) was uncovered and foiled in a country which is not yet an EU member but is, nevertheless, a political and economical partner of the Union: Albania[3].

On August 9, 2018, the U.S. Justice Department arrested (and later indicted) two Iranian citizen who were accused of conducting surveillance operations on a Chicago's Jewish facility and on two prominent members of the MEK, the main opposition organization to the regime, Alireza Jafarzadeh and Ali Safavi.[4]

Additionally, on June 7, 2018, **the Netherlands** authorities expelled two unnamed diplomats involved in intelligence operations against Iranian opponents.[5]

On October 2, 2018 France took a new decision to impose sanction on Iranian Intelligence apparatus and two officials. "The foiled attack in Villepinte confirms the need for a demanding approach in our relations with Iran", said Jean-Yves Le Drian, France's foreign affairs minister. "Behind all this was a long, meticulous and detailed investigation by our [intelligence] services that enabled us to reach the conclusion,

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[1] Reuters, *Iran diplomat among six arrested over suspected plot against opposition meeting*, July 2, 2018. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-attacks-belgium-iran/iran-diplomat-among-six-arrested-over-suspected-plot-against-opposition-meeting-idUSKBN1JS1C3

[2] **Denmark accuses Iran of planning attack near Copenhagen, October 30, 2018**
https://www.ft.com/content/47e0fb9c-dc46-11e8-9f04-38d397e6661c

[3] Those cases will be developed in the third chapter of this report.

[4] *Two Iranians indicted in US on spying charges*, Deutsche Welle, August 21, 2018

[5] Reuters, *The Netherlands expels two Iranian embassy staff: Dutch Intelligence service*, July 6, 2018.

without any doubt, that responsibility fell on the Iranian intelligence ministry," the diplomatic source said.[6]

On **October 26, 2018**, it was reported that **"France has expelled an Iranian diplomat in response to a failed plot to carry out a bomb attack at a rally near Paris organized by an exiled Iranian opposition group**."[7]

On **December 19, 2018 Albania expelled Iran's ambassador and another diplomat for "damaging its national security[8]"**: "The source with knowledge of the mater said the expulsions were connected to an aborted March 2018 scheme by two alleged Iranian members of the Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force, its foreign secret operations branch, caught planning "an explosive" attack against eh base or personnel of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq or MEK.[9]"

The **Council of European Union adopted an unusual Decision on January 8, 2019, including for the first time a government entity of the Iranian regime in the EU terrorist list**.

The spokesperson for foreign ministry of France said "The Council of the European Union decided today, with the unanimous agreement of all member states, to include on the European list of individuals, groups and entities involved in acts of terrorism, one entity and two individuals responsible for plotting to attack a meeting of the Mujahedeen Khalq, a group that advocates the overthrow of the Iranian leadership, on June 30, 2018, in Villepinte": "This European decision, which was taken on the basis of a national law adopted on October 2 by France to freeze the assets of these same entities and individuals, reflects the solidarity of EU member states and their determination to act in a united manner in order to respond to a hostile and unacceptable act perpetrated on European soil.[10]"

Iranian regime's use of terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Since its inception, the ruling clerics in Iran uses terrorism as a means of gaining leverage both in the Middle East and also in Europe. Many rightly argue that export of terrorism and extremism, in addition to domestic suppression, is another pillar of its survival. The West conciliatory policy has proved to be counterproductive, emboldening the regime to pursue its objectives through terrorism.

The new surge in Iran regime's use of terrorism could only be understood in the context of the current state of affairs in Iran and deep crises the regime is facing.

Various political, judicial, and security officials of the regime have spoken of the danger of more protests demanding fundamental change including regime change as well as

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[6] France imposes sanctions on Iranians over bomb plot claim, October 2, 2018; https://www.ft.com/content/d149d3a8-c64e-11e8-ba8f-ee390057b8c9

[7] *Reuters, France expels Iranian diplomat over failed bomb plot – sources, October 26, 2018.*

[8] Reuters, *Albania expels Iranian diplomats on national security grounds*, December 19, 2018.

[9] Independent, *Iran diplomats expelled from Albania plotted against dissidents*, December 20, 2018. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/iran-albania-diplomats-dissidents-mek-terrorism-trump-bolton-irgc-a8692876.html

[10] France Diplomatie; Iran – Q&A – Excerpts from the daily press briefing (08.01.19) https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/iran/events/article/iran-q-a-excerpts-from-the-daily-press-briefing-08-01-19

the threat posed by the MEK in organizing protests at home and the high priority the regime places on thwarting the link between the Iranian Resistance movement and the protesters across various Iranian cities and social sectors.

This report examines **the elements linking the Iranian "security" apparatus to those plots**. Based on a historical and political analysis, it demonstrates why the use of terrorism is seen as a normal "political tool" by the mullahs' regime to advance and protect its interests and how the Iranian "***deep state***"[11] is functioning.

The report also raises serious questions for the policy makers in Europe to engage in meaningful review of the past policy which has failed to prevent the regime's use of terrorism in European soil. Indeed, many argues that it has been counterproductive.

It further raises the question of what should be the next step in the aftermath of recognizing that Hassan Rouhani's government has been involved in terrorism in Europe through its Ministry of Intelligence.

[11] The "***Deep State***" is a political concept used to describe a kind of "clandestine government" functioning independently and secretly. It generally refers to a security apparatus being the main or one of the main real organizers and actors of internal and external policy of a given State. It is also possible to use the terms "***State within a State***" (in French "Etat dans l'Etat"). It perfectly matches the situation in countries like the former USSR, in which the KGB was at the core of the power and depicted itself as the "***Sword and the Shield***" of the country. Despite the fact that the *Deep State theory* is frequently used by the supporters of conspiracy theories, and, thus despised by the academic world, we think that this expression is a good image to qualify the Iranian security administration.

1) The Iranian *Deep State* and terrorism

For four decades, now, terrorism or funding of terrorism were used by the Tehran's mullahs as a "legitimate" (but secret) political tool.

1.a. Terror as a political tool

Terror is used to **support Iran's political agenda in the Middle East and extend its influence** on the "Shiite crescent" (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon), **to fuel tensions in the Gulf area** (for instance in Yemen and Bahrain) and, thus, to undermine Iranian opposition by claiming that the country is "under siege", **to provoke the Israeli "arch-enemy"** (and offering the mullahs the possibility to pose as the "only fighters of the Zionist oppressor"[12]) or **to eradicate opponents** living in exile.

Most parts of the world were targeted by Iranian sponsored terrorism: Middle East and the Arab world, obviously, but also South America, Asia and Europe. Most of the time, Iran is cautious enough to hide its involvement behind smoke screens and to act through proxy organizations (as the Lebanese ***Hezbollah***) but orders, funding and even, sometimes arms and explosives come from Tehran, as it was proved in various judicial investigations during the past 40 years. But in some specific occasions, Iranian agents are clearly identified as the main planners and, even, authors of those attacks.

This is not an accident. It is a political choice which was made at the very beginning of the so-called *Iranian Islamic Revolution*.

Since its inception, the Iranian regime sees itself as a "revolutionary" one and, as the Soviet Union at its beginnings, it uses all the possible means to advance its interests and destabilize its enemies.

Thus, it organized an impressive "security" apparatus designed not to protect the country, as it is the case for most of the nations, but to spread its ideology. In October 2014, the ***Fars News Agency***[13] published an article[14] saying "*During the last two decades, new intelligence-security agencies have been created, which today total 16*". It was the first time a source close to the Iranian government publicly acknowledged the importance of the Iranian Intelligence Community. Unfortunately, this "transparent exercise" was limited and Fars only named five of those organizations.

Nevertheless, it is possible to have a quite comprehensive and precise view of the Iranian intelligence and security community.

[12] "Zionist oppressor", "Zionist regime" or "Zionist entity" are some of the terms used by the Iranian officials when they refer to Israel…

[13] Fars News Agency presents itself as "independent" but is widely seen as a semi-official agency and is thought to be linked to the **Iranian intelligence community**.

[14] Fars News Agency: "*How are Intelligence Agencies coordinated?*", October 14, 2014.

1.b. The Iranian Intelligence and Security community

Here are the main organizations of Iran's national security establishment which are used to organize terror operations.

1.b.1 The Supreme National Security Council

The coordinator of the security establishment is the **Supreme National Security Council, or SNSC** (*Showrāye Āliye Amniyate Mellī*). This body is so important that a separate chapter of the Constitution is dedicated to it[15].

The SNSC is presided by the President of the Republic which selects its Secretary[16] but its decisions are effective only after their confirmation by the Supreme Leader. The Council is **the highest national authority (second to the Supreme Leader) on all the matters related to security, intelligence and foreign policy**. It takes all the decisions regarding terrorist operations and oversees their realizations and progresses.

The SNSC is formed by **12 permanent members**:

- The President of the Republic (**Hassan Rouhani**), President of the Council.
- The Secretary (**Ali Shamkhani**[17]) also personal representative of the Supreme Leader.
- The Speaker of the Parliament (**Ali Larijani**[18])
- The Chief Justice (**Sadeq Larijani**[19])
- A second representative of the Supreme Leader (**Saeed Jalili**[20])
- The Chief of the General Staff (**Mohammad Bagheri**[21])
- The Chief of the army (**Abdolrahim Mousavi**)
- The Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (**Mohammad Ali Jafari**)

[15] Chapter XIII, consisting in a single article (176). It is reproduced in an annex of this report, from the unofficial translation of the Iranian Constitution, University of Bern.
[16] It is interesting to underline that the current President of Iran, **Hassan Rouhani, was the Secretary of the SNSC from October 14, 1989 to August 15, 2005**.
[17] Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani, an engineer by formation, was the **commander of the Iran Revolutionary Guards Corp Navy and then the Minister of Revolutionary Guards**. He was appointed Minister of Defense in August 1997 (until August 2005) and became the Secretary of the SNSC on September 10, 2013.
[18] Ali Larijani is a former **commander of the Revolutionary Guards** and a **former Secretary of the Council** (15.08.05-20.10.07).
[19] Sadeq Larijani is the brother of Ali Larijani…
[20] Saeed Jalili was a member of the **Basij**, the "volunteer reserve" of the **Revolutionary Guards** and is **a former secretary of the Council** (20.10.07-10.09.13).
[21] Mohammad Bagheri is a former commander of the **Revolutionary Guards**.

- The Minister of Foreign Affairs (**Mohammad Javad Zarif**)
- The Minister of Interior (**Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli**)
- The Minister of Intelligence (**Mahmoud Alavi**)
- The head of Management and Planning Organization (**Mohammad Bagher Nobakht**)

If necessary a temporary member joins the meetings of the Council, usually a minister in charge of a subject on which the SNSC deliberates.

The composition of the Council gives us extremely interesting information on the way the Iranian regime functions, on the nature of this regime and on the real decision process.

First of all, the core of the power is **a small group of people who are close associates for a long time**: most of them are linked since the Revolution; three of them (Larijani, Rouhani, Jalili) are former Secretaries of the Council; two of them are brothers and most of them have family links with other prominent members of the regime *elite*.

Secondly, five of them share **a common past in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC)**, *the Sword and the Shield* of the regime.

Thirdly, even if **the Supreme Leader is "only" officially appointing six of the twelve permanent members** of the Council (two representatives, the chief justice, the chief of the General Staff, the chief of the army and the chief of the Revolutionary guards) **he actually directly or indirectly controls eight members**: his six appointees but also the Speaker of the Parliament (Ali Larijani, former Revolutionary Guard, the IRGC being directly controlled by the Supreme leader) and the Minister of Intelligence (who is reporting to him).

Those three points clearly show us that, at the end of the day, the reality of the power remains in the hands of the Supreme Leader and under the control he delegates to the hardline Revolutionary Guard (see below).

Thus, the Byzantine analysis of some European chancelleries **trying to distinguish between "hardliners" and "liberals" or even "reformers" to advocate for appeasement with Tehran is a pure non-sense**: the center of the power is completely locked and "under control"[22].

[22] As a reminder, the Western world made exactly the same mistake forty years ago when some "Kremlinologists" tried to persuade themselves that a member of the "Politburo" was more liberal than some others because he was…drinking Scotch Whisky or listening jazz music…

1.b.2. Intelligence and "Security" organizations involved in terrorist operations[23]

Two main organizations are involved in the conception, in the planning and in the implementation of terrorist operations while they are decided by the Supreme Leader and the SNSC. But, as in other totalitarian States, there are some **overlapping** between their responsibilities, some **inter-penetrations** between them and a **dispersion of capacities** between them and between some of their branches (which are, often, subjects to a "**double control**": by their own hierarchy and by the Supreme Leader). **This complexity aims to prevent any concentration of power that could favorize an "anti-regime" plot or a "palace coup"**.

As Professor **Carl Anthony Wege** wrote in a 2015 article[24]: "*The strength of Iran's intelligence and security organizations is built on the twin pillars of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security and the Revolutionary Guards*."

- **Ministry of Intelligence[25]**: The *Vezarat-e Ettela'at Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran* which is also known as the **Ministry of Intelligence and Security** (MOIS) and under various acronyms (VAJA, VEVAK, SAVAMA…) replaced the infamous SAVAK of the Shah. **It must be underlined that numerous members of the SAVAK were incorporated in the new intelligence organization**: if hundreds of officers were executed, and approximately 3 000 others jailed, thousands of SAVAK members continued to work in the mullahs' intelligence body. The most evident case of this "soft transition" was **Hussein Fardust**[26],[27] (1917-1987), former SAVAK "number 2" and close friend of the Shah: after a short term in jail, he served as an adviser of the new regime for the conception and organization of the SAVAMA.

  Beginning as a "classical" intelligence and security agency, the SAVAMA became a ministry of full exercise on August 18, 1984[28]. The current Minister of Intelligence is **Mahmoud Alavi**, a close associate of the President Hassan Rouhani.

  After more than a turbulent decade, the MOIS began to "professionalize" itself in the 1990's and **especially benefited from a close relation established with the Russian foreign intelligence, the SVR[29]**. The SVR trained MOIS

[23] In the last years, Iran has established a variety of units and services specialized in the cyber-activities. They belong to the intelligence community but they won't be analyzed in this report which focus on terrorist operations.
[24] Carl Anthony Wege, *Iran's Intelligence Establishment*, in **The Intelligencer** (published by the *Association of Former Intelligence Officers*), Falls Church, Volume 21, Number 2, Summer 2015; pages 63-67.
[25] The MOIS has an official website (in Persian): http://vaja.ir/Portal/Home
[26] Claude Moniquet, *L'Iran, un Etat terroriste ?*, Les Editions de Passy, Paris, 2011 ; pages83-84.
[27] Fardust was arrested again in December 1985, suspected to be an informant of the Soviet intelligence…
[28] Moniquet, op.cit.; page 85.
[29] *Sluzhba vneshney razvedki*, formerly the "First Directorate" of the KGB.

officers and has taught hundreds of them the disinformation methods, which were a specialty of the KGB. Today, the Disinformation Department of the MOIS is one of the most important departments. It specializes in creating "materials" to discredit opponents and divide them, which is often a first step before a physical elimination[30]. **The MEK has been its prime victim**, especially since widespread protests erupted in late December 2017, which is widely blamed on the organization by the regime's officials, including Khamenei[31].

With a large budget (which is secret[32]), the **MOIS is one of the most powerful Iranian ministries and answers directly to the President and to the "Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution"** (Ruhollah Khomeini from 1979 to 1989 and Ali Khamenei since 1989). In case of divergence between the Supreme Leader and the President, the Constitution clearly establishes that the last word and the final decision belong to the Supreme Leader[33].

Even if the exact figure is not known, Western intelligence services and specialists estimate that the MOIS employs approximately **30 000 officers**[34].

It has a very large range of duties, both in Iran and abroad which involve: internal security and surveillance of opposition, external intelligence procurement, censorship, disinformation operations, detention of "suspects", etc.: "*The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) uses all means at its disposal to protect the Islamic Revolution of Iran, utilizing such methods as infiltrating internal opposition groups, monitoring domestic threats and expatriate dissent, arresting alleged spies and dissidents, exposing conspiracies deemed threatening, and maintaining liaison with other foreign intelligence agencies as well as with organizations that protect the Islamic Republic's interests around the world*"[35].

As the government considers ***Mojahedin-e-Khalq*** (MEK/PMOI) and the ***National Council of Resistance of Iran*** (CNRI) to be the most threatening organizations of the opposition, one of the main responsibilities of the MOIS was ever and still to organize and conduct overt and covert operations against them.

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[30] MOIS officers use an Arab word to refer to disinformation: ***Nefaq***, which means "discord".
[31] ISNA, Iranian Students' News Agency, 9 January 2018, *Khamenei addressing a group of people from the holly city of Qom*. (https://en.isna.ir/news/96101910197/Recent-damage-inflicted-on-Iran-by-U-S-will-gain-a-response)
[32] The MOIS is not, even, accountable to other governmental branches…
[33] Article 176 (1) 1.:" *In order to safeguarding the national interests and preserving the Islamic Revolution, the territorial integrity, and the national sovereignty, a Supreme Council for National Security presided over by the President shall be constituted to fulfil the following responsibilities: 1. Determining the defence and national security policies within the framework of general policies determined by the Leader*".
[34] "*Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: a Profile*"; Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., December 2012, page 24.
[35]"*Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security: a Profile*"; op. cit.; page 1.

Three departments of the MOIS are **directly in charge of terrorist operations**:

- **Directorate of Overseas Affairs**: it supervises the networks of the service outside Iran and especially focus on operations against the MEK.

- **Directorate of Foreign Intelligence and Liberation Movements**: it conducts "classical" intelligence operations but also on the liaison with terrorist organizations supported by Tehran, as the Hezbollah.

- **Directorate for Security**: despite its name, this department is the primary responsible for assassination of opponents abroad.

When it posts its officers abroad, the MOIS often assign them in **embassies**[36] with an "official cover" of diplomats and all the immunities attached to this status. But it could also use **"non-official covert" (NOC) and assigns its agents to Iran Air offices, state-controlled banks** (as the Bank Melli, which has agencies in France, Germany or United Kingdom) or in "cultural centers" and organizations. And of course, **others could enjoy positions without any visible link with an Iranian official organization** and pose as students, shopkeepers or even…opponents.

- **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps**: the IRGC or *Sepâh-e Pâsdârân-e Enghelâb-e Eslâmi* also known as Pasdaran was founded in May 1979, just after the "revolution". Today, it is directed by **Mohammad Ali Jafari**[37].

  Primarily created to counter the possible influence of the regular army, the IRGC began as a relatively small organization (around 10 000 members) but it took advantage of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) to become a real army, controlling its own ground, naval and air forces as well as its own intelligence organization and special forces. **It probably counts, today, between 120 000 and 150 000 men**.

  Inside the borders of Iran, the Pasdaran serve both as a *Praetorian Guard* for the regime "*constituting the backbone of the Islamic Republic*"[38] and a tool of repression of any kind of opposition. The importance of the IRGC dramatically increased in 2005 when the organization was tasked with **a critical mission**:

[36] The Iranian embassies in Paris, Berlin and Vienna are particularly known by the European intelligence services to be important spots of the MOIS.
[37] Mohamed Ali Jafari (1957) was a « revolutionary student" in 1979. He holds a degree in Civil construction and he considered to be a "specialist" in "unconventional war". He is particularly conservative: in 1999, he was one of the 24 Revolutionary Guards commanders who warned President Mohammad Khatami against any "liberalization" of the regime…
[38] Wege, op. cit., page 65.

supervise and protect the nuclear program. To fulfill this mission, the IRGC created a new organization, ***Oghab 2*** ("Eagle 2").

We have, here, a new and interesting window on how those things are done in Tehran: with a probable team of a few thousand officers, *Oghab 2* **is a creation of the Revolutionary Guards but reports both to the IRGC and to the MOIS.** Both organizations are, thus, in a position to know what the other one is doing.

It is also interesting to consider that **the IRGC is also running hundreds of "private" companies in Iran**, providing money for the regime and its officials but **also covert organization for its secret and terrorist operations**.

Outside Iran, the IRGC conducts non-conventional (and, most of the time, non-declared) military operations to protect the interests of the regime and/or support and train its local allies. It is, today, particularly active in Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Lebanon.

The IRGC has its own Intelligence services, the **Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp**, which was established in 2009 and is active both inside and outside Iran. This organization, gathering thousands of members give a full independence to the IRGC which doesn't need to rely on the MOIS to collect the intelligence useful to its operations.

It is directed by **Hossein Taeb**[39]**,** a former Basij (see below) commander and **Hossein Nejat** (his deputy), who was in charge of the **Vali Amr Corps,** the personal protection unit of the **Supreme Leader** between 2000 and 2010**.**

Taeb is also the commander of the Security Directorate of the MOIS (new example of the inter-penetration of the intelligence/security organizations), which is tasked to eliminate opponents abroad (see above).

- ***Quds Force***: Quds Force was created during the Iran-Iraq war and rapidly became the "foreign special forces unit" of the ICRG. It was deployed in Lebanon in 1982 and was particularly involved in the creation of **Hezbollah** (which continues today to enjoy a full support of the Quds Force).

  Quds Force reports both to the IRGC chief and directly **to the Supreme Leader**. Its precise size is unknown, but the estimations of the Western intelligence situate them **between 2 000 and 5 000 men**, but some sources evoke "10 000 to 20 000" members[40]. It is placed, for the last

[39] Hossein Taeb is blacklisted in the European Union (were his properties are frozen) and by the U.S. governments for his involvement in the repression of "peaceful protestors in Iran" in 2009.
[40] Dexter Filkins, *The Shadow Commander*, in The New Yorker, September 30, 2013.

twenty years under the command of Major-General Qassem Suleimani[41]. Quds Force is divided in eight directorates referring to the regions of the world it is active in: Western Countries; former Soviet Union; Iraq; Afghanistan, Pakistan and India; Israel, Lebanon and Jordan; Turkey; North Africa and Arabic Peninsula[42].

It is interesting to know that **the Quds Force is, at the same time, a fierce adversary of Sunni extremist organizations** (for instance the ***Islamic State*** in Syria and Iraq) **and a supporter of other Sunni extremists** (***Hamas*** in the Gaza strip) which highlights the fact that Tehran is not reluctant to instrumentalize Sunni extremists when they can act as a "proxy organization" or support Iranian interests and strategy (here, against Israel).

Quds Force is (or was) engaged in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, but also at the borders of Europe, **more precisely in the Balkans, in Bosnia** (at least in the 1990's, but when the Quds forces "lands" somewhere**, it usually create support infrastructures that can last for years and be utilized even 10 or 15 years later** for other purposes…**).**

In 2013, **Matthew Levitt**, one of the best American experts on Iranian intelligence[43] wrote: "*In January 2010, the Quds Force—the elite unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)— decided that it and Hizballah, its primary terrorist proxy, would embark on a new campaign of violence targeting not only Israel but U.S. and other Western targets as well. Since then, the two organizations have been cooperating but also competing to launch attacks across the globe…*"[44]

This "new trend" was, apparently, a retaliation against the covert effort to slow down and to stop the Iranian nuclear program: "*Since then, Suleimani has orchestrated attacks in places as far flung as Thailand, New Delhi, Lagos, and Nairobi—at least thirty attempts in the past two years alone. The most notorious was a scheme, in 2011, to hire a Mexican drug cartel to blow up the Saudi Ambassador to the United States as he sat down to eat at a restaurant a few miles from the White House…*"[45]

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[41] Qassem Suleimani joined the IRGC in 1979, he was an officer during the Iraq-Iran war. The last years, he was deeply engaged in Iraq and Syria, in operations against the Islamic State.
[42] David Dionisi, *American Hiroshima: The reasons why and a call to strengthen America's democracy*, Traford Publishing, 2005, page 8.
[43] Matthew Levitt, a former FBI analyst, and a former senior executive as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis at the U.S. Department of the Treasury and now a fellow Researcher at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has extensively worked on "Iranian affairs" for the last 15 years.
[44] Matthew Levitt, *Hizballah and the Qods Force in Iran's shadow war with the West*, The Washington Institute for Near east policy, Policy Focus 123, January 2013, page 1.
[45] Dexter Filkins, op. cit.

- **Basij**: The Basij or "**Mobilization Resistance Force**" (*Sāzmān-e Basij-e Mostaz'afin*) is a paramilitary volunteer reserve force of the IRGC, which was created in 1979 and incorporated in the Revolutionary Guards in 1981.

  Initially used for internal purposes (essentially repression of opposition demonstrations), **the Basij was used outside the borders of Iran since the end of 2013**, when they deployed thousands of members in Syria and, probably, in Iraq. It counts a permanent staff of approximately 100 000 members and a "reserve" of more than 11 million…

We cannot close this chapter without evoking **the Hezbollah case**. Obviously, Hezbollah is not an "Iranian" organization: it is a Lebanese one, but, **since its inception, it has been a proxy organization of the MOIS and the IRGC and it was frequently used by Tehran as an "umbrella organization" to cover its involvement in terrorism activities**.

Hezbollah was created in 1982, shortly after the invasion of South-Lebanon by Israel; It was a creation of local clerics, but those clerics were **passionate followers of Ayatollah Khomeini,** and, from its very first day, Hezbollah was funded, supported, trained and armed by Tehran. At least **1 500 Revolutionary Guards were sent to Lebanon** (with the agreement of Damascus, as Syria was occupying a part of the country, at the time) to train the first volunteers of the new organization.

The **first targets of the Hezbollah were the Israeli forces and their local associates** of the South Lebanon Army (SLA, a local Christian militia) but **the organization was also extremely active against Western forces present in Lebanon**, especially against the American and the French ones, **and generally speaking against the Western presence in the country**.

Quds Force helped the Hezbollah to build and train **an intelligence and security service**, which is divided in three main branches: ***Amn-al-Hizb***, in charge of the protection of the organization and of its leaders, ***Amn-al-Muddad*** in charge of "external operations" (terrorism operations outside Lebanon) and ***al-Amn al-Khariji***, also operating outside Lebanon.

The organization frequently used "front organizations" to conduct operations under "false flag" and try to avoid any retaliation: ***Lebanese resistance Brigades*** and ***Islamic Jihad Organizations*** were organizations of such type.

Today, Hezbollah counts **around 65 000 fighters**, between a few hundreds and 2 000 of theme specially trained for "external operations".

Since the 1980's, Hezbollah organized and conducted numerous terrorist operations in the Western World: notably in **France, Argentina, Panama, United Kingdom, Singapour, Bulgaria.**

Given the fact that Hezbollah is closely associated to the Iran's regime, and given the that those operations abroad were politically very sensitive, **it makes to doubt for the Western intelligence community that they were conducted with the full**

approval of Tehran and even with its logistical, financial and intelligence support.

2) A brief look on four decades of Iranian terrorism

Having schematically described the "security-intelligence" apparatus the Mullahs' regime uses to organize terrorism abroad, we will, now, remind some of those operations conducted against Western interest or against the opposition abroad. The regime was involved in dozen of such operations in the last decades, so **we decided to examine only some of the most significant ones**.

- **Iran Hostage Crisis**: the seizure of the American embassy in Tehran, on November 4, 1979 and the subsequent hostage crisis that lasted for 444 days is **a unique event in the modern history of diplomatic relations**.

  It was obviously not officially claimed by the Iranian authorities (it would have been a "casus belli" …) but **the fact that the embassy was seized and kept for 444 days in the core of the capital without any attempt of the new regime to retake it or to force the hostage takers to release their prisoners speak by itself**.

  The attack was claimed by the "***Muslim Students Followers of the Imam's Line***" (*Dânešjuyân-e Mosalmân Piruv- Khatt-e Emâm*). The fact that the leaders of the group had important political responsibilities after the Embassy crisis is a good indication of the real attitude of the regime:

  - **Ebrahim Asgharzadeh** embraced a political career as a majlis (Parliament) member and as a member of the City Council of Tehran;
  - **Mohsen Mirdamadi** became also a member of the Majlis and is the Secretary-General of a "reformist" party;
  - **Habibollah Bitaraf** became Energy Minister under Mohammad Khatami presidency and a provincial governor of Yazd province. He is considered, today, as a "reformist";
  - **Masoumeh Ebtekar,** the only woman leading the operation became Minister of Environment from 1997 to 2005and, again, from 2013 to 2017and is currently Vice-President of Iran.

  The hostages were finally released on January 20, 1981.

- **Assassination of Shariar Shafiq**: Shariar Shafiq, **a nephew of the last Shah** was assassinated in Paris on December 7, 1979.

Ayatollah Sadeq Khalkhali[46] (1926-2003), the newly appointed President of the Revolutionary Courts **claimed that the assassination was carried out by a commando he specially sent to Europe**.

Shariar Shafiq appears to be **the first victim ever of the Iranian regime death squads**.

- **Assassination of Ali Akbar Tabatabaei**: On July 22, 1980, Tabatabaei, a former press attaché to the Iranian embassy in Washington and a virulent critic of the new regime, was shot dead in front of his home, in Bethesda (Maryland), by **Dawud Salahuddin**, an American convert to Islam.

  After the attack, **Salahuddin escaped to Iran**, where he arrived a few days later, on July 31, 1980. Living in Tehran, he became an English teacher, a journalist and a writer. In an interview to ABC News, in 1995, **he admitted he had killed Tabatabaei**. Some years later, he told a journalist from "The New Yorker" that **the killing was not a "murder" but "*an act of war*"**: *"In Islamic religious terms, taking a life is sometimes sanctioned and even highly praised, and I thought that event was just such a time.*"[47]

- **United States Embassy bombing in Beirut**: On April 18, 1983, a suicide attack against the U.S. embassy in Beirut **killed 63 people (including 17 Americans)**.

  It was claimed by the ***Islamic Jihad Organization*** (IJO), a "false flag" for the Hezbollah. When he claimed the responsibility for the bombing, immediately after the attack, an anonymous spokesman of the IJO said: "*This is part of the Iranian Revolution campaign against imperialist targets throughout the world. We shall keep striking at any crusader presence in Lebanon, including the international* forces"[48].

  On May 30, 2003, **the U.S. District Court of Washington D.C. stated that the bombing was carried out by the Hezbollah "*with the approval and financing of Senior Iranian Officials*".**

- **Beirut Barracks Bombing**: On October 23, 1983, two suicide attacks targeted the buildings housing American and French peacekeepers of the Multinational Forces in Lebanon. 241 U.S. servicemen, 58 French soldiers and 6 civilians were killed.
  The Islamic Jihad Organization claimed the responsibility of the attacks.

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[46] In the first days and months of the Islamic Republic, Khalkhali sentenced to death hundreds of former Shah officials, most of them judged without a lawyer. He was nicknamed "the Butcher" and "the Hanging Judge".
[47] "*An American Terrorist*", The New Yorker, August 5, 2002.
[48] Quoted by Terry Anderson in "*Bomb kills 28 at U.S. Embassy"*, Syracuse Herald Journal, Aptril 18, 1983. **Terry Anderson was, later, taken by the IJO in 1985 and held as an hostage until 1991…**

On May 30, 2003, the U.S. District court for the District of Columbia **found Iran legally responsible for providing Hezbollah with financial and logistical support that helped them carry out the attack.**

Shortly after the trial, the attorney of the victim's families released documents from the National Security Agency **linking the Iranian intelligence and the then Iranian ambassador in Damascus, Ali-Akbar Mohtashemi, to the attacks.**

- **1984 United States embassy bombing**: On September 20, 1984, a suicide attack was carried out against an annex of the U.S. Embassy in East-Beirut, killing 24 people. The responsibility was claimed by **the Islamic Jihad Organization**.

  Using satellite reconnaissance, the U.S. intelligence discovered that **a mock-up of the annex had been created at the IRGC barracks in Baalbek to practice for the attack**: "*Intelligence also discovered **that Iran has shipped explosives to Baalbek through its Embassy in Syria, just before the attack.***"[49]

- **Lebanon hostage crisis**: Between 1982 and 1992, **104 foreign hostages**, mostly American and French were taken and held in Lebanon. **Nine of them[50] were killed,** six escaped or were rescued, the others were released, often after years of detention in terrible conditions.

  Hezbollah ever denied being linked to those kidnappings, but **it makes no doubts that they were conducted by Hezbollah members under the leadership of Imad Mughniyah**[51], a senior member and a commander for special operations of Hezbollah.

  There is also no doubt that **those hostage operations took place under the direct authority of Tehran**: the French authorities were the most engaged in negotiation to free their own four hostages and **all the**

[49] David Willis, *The first war on terrorism: Counter-terrorism policy during the Reagan administration*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, 2004, pp 84-85.
[50] **William Francis Buckley**, former CIA bureau chief in Beirut (dead of a heart attack under torture); **Alec Collett**, a British employee of UNRWA (hanged); **Arkady Katkov**, a soviet consulat attache (killed during the kidnapping); **Michel Seurat**, a French researcher (dead of hepatitis during his captivity); **Peter Kilburn, Leigh Douglas and Philip Padfield**, employees of the American University in Beirut (assassinated in retaliation); **William R. Higgins**, an American colonel and peacekeeper (hanged); **Dennis Hill**, an English lecturer at the American University of Beirut (shot in an escape attempt).
[51] Mughniyah was killed on February 12, 2008 in a car bomb blast near Damascus. The responsibility of this action is, generally attributed to the Israeli Mossad.

negotiations were conducted between French envoys and Iranian senior officials, most of the times in Tehran[52].

- **Attacks in Paris**: In 1985-1986, 14 bomb attacks rocked Paris, killing 14 people and wounding 303 others.

  Investigative judge **Gilles Boulouque** proved that **the attacks were linked to the "Lebanon hostage crisis" and organized by Fouad Ali Saleh, a Tunisian having learned theology in Qom (Iran)**. Saleh was trained and armed by the Hezbollah. Saleh and his three associates were sentenced to the life imprisonment and several Hezbollah members were sentenced in absentia to the same penalty.

  The goal of those attacks was **to exert a pressure on the French government to change its position in the Iraq-Iran war (Paris was supporting and arming Iraq…), to expel the MEK leaders residing near Paris and to solve several other "problems" in the French-Iranian relations**.[53]

- **Assassination of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and two others**: On July 13, 1989, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the leader of the ***Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran*** (KDPI) and a founding member of the ***National Council of Resistance of Iran*** (NCRI), **Abdullah Ghaden Azar** (his assistant) and Fadhil Rassoul, an Iraqi mediator were killed in Vienna.

  Ghassemlou has been lured in Vienna by a proposal of negotiation. The Austrian authorities decided to let **the three Iranians involved in the murder go back to Iran**.

- **Murder of Kazem Rajavi**: Kazem Rajavi, the **elder brother of Massoud Rajavi**, founder and leader of the MEK, was shot dead near Geneva on April 24, 1990.

  The investigations of the Swiss justice stated that **the murder was planned by Iran's government and executed by 13 "Iranian diplomats"** using "service passports" to enter the country. **Arrest warrants were issued against the 13 "diplomats" directly involved in the murder and against Ali Fallahian, the minister of Intelligence**.

- **Assassination of Shapour Bakhtiar**: last Prime minister of the Shah, Shapour Bakhtiar was murdered in Paris on August 6, 1991.

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[52] **The author of this report, at the time a junior operative from the French external intelligence (DGSE), was involved in some intelligence operations in the Lebanese Shia circles in Europe linked to this hostage crisis and has, due to this assignment and further researches for a book, a precise and in-deep knowledge of this matter.**

[53] Same remark as in note 44.

It was **the second time a team of killers sent by Tehran attacked Bakhtiar in Paris**: a first attempt failed on July 18, 1980, but a police officer and a neighbor were killed and two other police officers badly wounded. The five killers (including the Lebanese **Anis Naccache** were captured, put on trial and given life sentences. They were pardoned in July 1990 and sent to Iran[54].

The second attempt, in August 1991 (a year after the release of Naccache and his associates…) was, sadly, the "good one". Two of the three killers escaped immediately to Iran, the third one, **Ali Vakili Rad** was arrested in Switzerland, deported to France and was given a life sentence. Paroled in May 2010, after 18 years in jail, he was received as a hero when returning in Tehran.

- **Attack, on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires**: On March 17, 1992, a suicide attack was carried out against the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 civilians and wounding 242 others.

  The Islamic Jihad Organization claimed the responsibility of the operation and released surveillance images they took prior the attack.

  U.S. National Security Agency interceptions **revealed the implication of Senior Iranian official and of Hezbollah's commander Imad Mughniyah** in the planning of the of the bombing[55]. Six years later, **in May 1998, Mohsen Rabbani, former Cultural Attaché in the Iranian Embassy in Argentina, was briefly detained in Germany, and the Argentine government expelled seven Iranian diplomats**.

- **Mykonos assassinations**: On September 17, 1992, Three Iranian Kurdish Leaders (**Sadegh Sharafkandi**, **Fattah Abdoli**, **Homayoun Ardalan**) and their translator, **Nouri Dehkordi**, were gunned down at the **Mykonos Greek restaurant**, on Prager Strasse, in Berlin.

  Three suspects, two of them Iranian (**Kazem Darabi**, a grocer and **Abdolraham Banihashemi**, an intelligence officer) and a Lebanese (**Abbas Hossein Rahayel**) were found guilty of murder by a German court, in October 1993 and sentenced to life terms[56].
  On April 10, 1997 **the court issued an international arrest warrant against the Iranian Intelligence Minister, Ali Fallahian**, stating that he directly ordered the murders.

- **Amia bombing**: On July 18, 1994, a suicide bombing was carried out against the AMIA (***Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina***) building in Buenos Aires. The attack killed 85 people and hundreds of others were wounded.

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[54] "*Iran gives hero's welcome to killer of former Prime minister Shapour Bakhtiar*", "Voice of America", May 10, 2010.
[55] Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah : a short history*, Princeton University Press, 2007, page 79.
[56] Kris Kutschera, **A Network of terror**, The Middle East, June 20, 2013.

The responsibility of the attack was claimed by **Ansar Allah**, considered to be a "front organization" for the Hezbollah.

A years-long complicate investigation **established a link with Iran and president Carlos Menem was suspected of having accepted a ten million dollar payment from Tehran** to stop the investigation. On October 25, 2006, **the Argentinian justice charged Iran and Hezbollah** for the bombing[57] and the **Iranian Defense Minister, Ahmad Vahidi[58]**, was accused, with some other senior Iranian officials (**Mohsen Rezai**[59] , **Ali Akbar Velayati**[60]**, Mohammad Hejazi**[61] and **Ali Fallahian**[62])of masterminding the operation. **Interpol emitted a "Red notice"[63] and sought the arrest of Vahidi and others.**

On January 18, 2015, **Alberto Nisman**, the prosecutor in charge of the AMIA investigation was found dead at his home. The Argentinian authorities said he committed suicide, but, on February 26, 2016, Prosecutor Ricardo Saenz stated the death of Nisman was "a homicide"[64].

- **Assassination plot against the Saudi ambassador in Washington**: In October 2011, the FBI foiled a plot to assassinate Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi ambassador to the U.S.

  Mansor Arbabsiar a naturalized U.S. citizen from Iranian descent and **Gholam Shakhuri, an IRGC commander** were charged with the plot.

  In May 2013, **Arbabsiar confessed having been recruited by Shakhuri to execute the murder**. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 25 years in jail. Shakhuri is still at large[65].

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[57] "*Iran charged over Argentina bomb*", BBC News, October 25, 2006.
[58] Ahmad Vahidi was **a former IRGC commander and a former Quds Force Commander**. Today President of the Supreme National Defense University, Vahidi is blacklisted by the U.S. government.
[59] Mohsen Rezai was **a former IRGC commander and a former chief of IRGC Intelligence service**.
[60] Ali Akbar Velayati is a "conservative" politician
[61] Mohammad Hejazi was an **IRGC commander and, then, the Intelligence and Security advisor to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**. Today, he is the commander of **Basij**.
[62] Ali Fallahian was the **Intelligence minister**.
[63] An Interpol « Red notice » is an official document emitted by the organization to inform all the member States that a person is wanted in an investigation.
[64] « *Un fiscal afirmo en la causa que a Nisman lo mataron* », Clarin, February 26, 2016.
[65] On October 15, 2011, **Mehdi Taeb**, an Iranian mid-ranking cleric (and the brother of Hossein Taeb, the chief of the Intellignece unit of the IRGC…) made a strange statement: "***We don't need to assassinate the Saudi ambassador. If we needed to assassinate anyone, we have enough capability to assassinate King Abdullah himself…***". Taeb was quoted on the website of Iran's Journalist Club before being removed a few hours later…

- **Foiled attack against the Israeli embassy in Baku**[66]: In February 2011, Azerbaijan security services foiled an attack against the Israeli embassy and against a Jewish facility in Baku.

  Twenty-two suspects were arrested and firearms, cartridges, explosives and espionage devices seized. The investigation proved that some of them have been recruited as far back as 1999 and were active since this year. **It was also established that most of the suspects have been trained to use arms and explosives and to some intelligence collection methods in IRGC camps in Iran**.

- **Bangkok bombings**: On February 14, 2012, a series of explosions rocked the capital of Thailand, injuring five people.

  The police investigations led to the **identification of seven Iranian nationals** (one of them wounded in the explosions). Two of them fled to Iran and two others were sentenced to life in prison and 15 years of imprisonment.

  Authorities think that the explosion were the result of the failure of an assassination attempt against the Israeli Defense Minister, due to visit Thailand.

- **Kenya failed attack**: On June 22, 2012, **two Iranians thought to be IRGC members** were arrested while preparing an **attack against the Israeli embassy in Nairobi.**

- **Burgas bus bombing**: On July 18, 2012 **a suicide attack was carried out against a bus transporting Israeli tourists** at the Burgas airport (Bulgaria). The driver and five Israelis were killed; 32 people were wounded.

  The Bulgarian authorities accused the Hezbollah and Europol stated that "all points" to Hezbollah involvement.

  The ***New-York Police Department*** (NYPD) intelligence unit **linked the attack to Iran**[67].

- **Assassination of Saeed Karimian**: Saeed Karimian, **a British citizen from Iranian descent**, owner of a Dubai based television group broadcasting to Iran was sentenced to six years by an Iranian court for spreading propaganda against the regime.

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[66] The relations between Iran and Azerbaijan are particularly sensitive as **approximately 20% of the Iranian population which means between 13 and 15 million people) is composed of "ethnic Azeris"** (Azerbaijan itself having a population of 10 million). The Supreme Guide **Ali Khamenei himself is an "ethnic Azeri".** Another source of tensions between the two countries is the fact that **the pro-Western and mostly Shia Azerbaijan has extremely good and close relations with Israel**, the "arch-enemy" of Iran.

[67] « *Exclusive : New York police link nine 2012 plots to Iran, proxies*", Reuters, July 20, 2012.

He was shot dead in Istanbul **on April 29, 2017**. Iran was blamed for the murder.

There is no need to continue with this already long enumeration. As we stated at the beginning of this chapter, **the Iranian regime**, acting directly by its own means (MOIS, IRGC, Quds Force) or indirectly through "proxy organizations" (Hezbollah and others) **organized or tried to organize hundreds of terrorist attacks in the last forty years**, not only in the Gulf area (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq…) and in the Middle East (Lebanon) but also in Europe, the United States, Asia and Africa.

This was not only the case at the very beginning of the "Islamic Revolution", when the situation was not yet politically stabilized in Iran: **the list we draw up demonstrates that there is a systematic trend in Iranian policy to resort to terror when the regime thinks it could support its strategic ambitions or reinforce its power by crushing the opposition**.

We'll see in the next chapter that use of terror is still typical of Tehran.

3) The recent developments of Iranian terrorist operations in Europe

In 2018, several important developments were observed in the Iranian regime terrorist activities in Europe, more precisely in **Germany,** in **Albania,** in **France and Belgium, in the Netherlands, and in Denmark.**

3.a.: Germany

On **January 16**, **2018 the German security services conducted a series of raids** in several Länder - Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and Berlin. Homes and businesses belonging to 10 suspected "Iranian spies" were searched. The operation followed a tip-off of the domestic intelligence (***Bundesamt für Verfassungschutz*** or "Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution").

The internal intelligence has, indeed, information establishing that the suspects were involved in "***spying activities on persons and institutions on behalf of an intelligence entity associated to Iran***", the Federal Prosecutor Office stated[68].

Focus, a serious German magazine which was the first to report about the raids, published information saying that **the suspects were Quds Force members and that they conducted intelligence operations targeting Israeli interests and the Jewish community**, likely to prepare terrorist attacks[69].

This police operation occurred **two weeks after the Iran's ambassador in Berlin was summoned following the conviction of a 31-years-old Pakistani student for spying for Iran on the SPD politician Reinhold Robbe**. Robbe was the former head of German-Israel Friendship Society.

This was not the first case in which Iran's spies were caught in Germany: **in April 2016, two Iranians were accused of spying on the MEK and NCRI, on behalf of Tehran**[70].

In January 2019, **Germany decided to ban the Iranian company *Mahan Air*** which **belongs, actually, to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and is more specifically linked to its "special forces", the Quds Force**. Mahan Air was created in Kerman (South) in 1991 as "the first private air company in Iran". In 2017, it operated 62 planes (Iran Air, the official national company having "only" 47) and offered 41 destinations in 24 countries, including some in Europe and two in Germany Munich and Dusseldorf.

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[68] « *Raids across Germany target suspected Iranian spies* », Deutsche Welle, January 16, 2018.
[69] « *Sie sollen Israelische Ziele im Gesamten Bundesgebiet ausgespäth haben*", Focus, January 16, 2018.
[70] « *Germany charges two for spying on Iran's MEK on behalf of Iranian intelligence*", Deutsche Welle, April 4, 2016.

3.b.: Albania

On **March 22, 2018**, the Albanian State Intelligence Service (SHISH, *Shërbimi Informativ Shtetëror*) foiled **a plot planned against a meeting of the MEK for the Nowruz** (Iranian New Year). Two MOIS agents were arrested and expelled.

Tehran **dramatically increased its intelligence presence and operations in Albania after the government decided, in May 2013, to welcome around 3000 MEK members** who were under attacks by Iranian proxies in Iraq.

Albania being a small country, the Iranian embassy was not so important but, after 2013, it suddenly became one of the most staffed in Europe. The MOIS bureau in the embassy – which counted **25 officers** - was headed by **Fereidoun Zandi-Aliabadi**, a senior intelligence officer from 2014 to 2017. In 2016, Tehran decided to assign **Gholam Hossein Mohammadnia** as its ambassador in Tirana. Prior to this assignment, **Mohammadnia** was a **vice-minister of Intelligence, in charge of International affairs.** And in 2017, a new chief was in charge of the MOIS bureau of the embassy: **Mostafa Roodaki**, the former chief of Iranian intelligence in the Vienna's embassy.

The appointment of **Mohammadnia** as an ambassador **means that not only the intelligence activities of the embassy but all the Iranian diplomatic affairs in Albania are under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Intelligence…**

Finally, **Edi Rama,** the Albanian Prime minister decided to **expel Gholam Hossein Mohammadnia and Mostafa Roodaki.**

On December 19, 2018, Albanian Foreign Ministry spokesman told The Associated Press that the two diplomats were expelled for "violating their diplomatic status."

In an interview on the same day, Albanian Interior Minister Sandër Lleshaj said: "*The Iranian regime is recognized as the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world… "The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK) have been threatened in other countries. This is a method used by the Iranian regime's security agents under the cover of diplomats. We don't consider the PMOI/MEK as a threat to Albania's security. This is the position of the Albanian government, police and security officials. Our viewpoint about the PMOI/MEK is without any bias or prejudice. They are friends that have been welcomed to reside in Albania and this has nothing to do with their political activities.*"

3.c. France and Belgium

On June 30, 2018, as a result of a joint operation between the intelligence services and polices of France, Belgium and Germany, **two Iranian citizens were arrested in Brussels**.

The two, **posing as MEK followers, were, actually, the members of a "sleeping cell" of the MOIS, planted in Brussels for years**. They were tasked to conduct a terrorist operation in Villepinte, near Paris, where the MEK was

organizing its annual international meeting. This meeting is particularly important as **numerous prominent political figures from Europe and other parts of the world** are present. This includes, for instance, **Rudolf Giuliani**, the former Mayor of New York and the personal lawyer of President Donald Trump).

On July 1st, **Assadollah Asadi, an Iranian diplomat was arrested in Germany**. Asadi was accredited in Austria where he was in post since 2014.

He was actually the chief of the MOIS bureau in the embassy since 2014. Given the fact that **this MOIS bureau is supervising the activities of all the other MOIS stations in Europe** (and, thus all the Iranian intelligence activities in the European Union and in other European countries) Asadi could be considered as a top intelligence officer if not **the most important Iranian intelligence officer in the European Union**. Prior to the Berlin 1997 ruling in the Mykonos case (see above), the coordination center of the MOIS in Europe was located in the Iranian embassy in Germany, but **after the ruling, the regime decided the MOIS activities in Europe to be coordinated from Vienna**.

Born in 1971, Asadi is the son of Ali Asadi, who was in charge of the war support staff in Khorramabad (in Lorestan, Western Iran). He took part in the Iran-Iraq war, receiving his first training in explosives and **was considered as an expert in explosives manipulation**. After the war, he joined the MOIS and was in charge of internal intelligence and suppress ion of opposition in the Lorestan province[71].

After the 2003's American invasion of Iraq **he was posted in Baghdad under the cover of Third Secretary of the Iranian embassy**. In Iraq, he was tasked to collect intelligence about the coalition forces in the country and **surveillance of the opposition** (most of the MEK elements, main targets of Iran were, then, living in Iraq, in **Camp Ashraf**, in the Diyala province) closely collaborated with Quds Force officers. During his presence in Iraq (2004-2008), he organized several terrorist operations against the coalition forces, the Iraqi opposed to the Iranian influence and the Iranian opposition.

Once posted in **Vienna**, he especially supervised the operations of the MOIS stations in **Germany** (headed by **Hossein Mahdian-Fard**) and in France (headed by **Ahmad Zarif**).

By intelligence surveillance, the services of France, Belgium and Germany knew that **Asadi met the two agents arrested in Brussels in Luxemburg to deliver a 500-gm explosive device and its detonator**. The bomb and the detonator were discovered in the car of the agents which were already on their way to Villepinte.

Asadi was arrested in Germany due to the fact **his diplomatic immunity covered him only in the country he was accredited (Austria) and not in other European States**. On October 9, he was deported to Belgium where he is awaiting his trial in jail.

[71] All the details about the intelligence career of Assadi and on the decision-process which led to the attack were provided to the author by sources in the Western intelligence and in the Iranian opposition.

Intelligence sources reveal also that the decision to conduct the Villepinte attack was taken at the **highest political level** in Tehran. The **Directorate of Foreign Intelligence and Liberation Movements** of the MOIS oversaw this mission. The chief of the Directorate, **Reza Amiri-Moghadam** tasked Assadolah Asadi with the concrete execution of the plan.

The direct involvement of a well-known Iranian diplomat in a terrorist operation is not so usual and **proves that the Villepinte plot had a high priority level for Tehran**.

According to our intelligence, **it was as early as in January 2018 that the Supreme National Security Council decided to carry out the Villepinte operation**. Extensive and in-depth discussions took place in the SNSC during the months of January and February on how organize and conduct the operation. Then the plan was presented to **Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei**. The final approval came in March and the orders to organize and carry the operation were immediately sent to Vienna.

On October 2, in **a joint statement**, **three French ministers** (Interior, Foreign Affairs and Economy) **declared that the responsibility of the Iranian regime makes no doubt and that the relations between France and Iran must be reassessed**.

On January 8, 2019, French Government made an official statement saying: "*The Council of the European Union decided today, with the unanimous agreement of all member states, to include on the European list of individuals, groups and entities involved in acts of terrorism, one entity and two individuals responsible for plotting to attack a meeting of the Mujahedeen Khalq, a group that advocates the overthrow of the Iranian leadership, on June 30, 2018, in Villepinte*."[72]

3.d. Netherlands

On June 7, 2018, the Dutch government decided to expel **two staff members of the Iranian Embassy in The Hague**. This was officially confirmed by the **AIVD** – ***Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst*** or "General Intelligence and Security Service", the service in charge of internal and Foreign intelligence in the Low Countries[73].

The authorities refused to divulge any details on the matter, but **it is generally assumed, given, the international context, that those Iranian diplomats were involved in surveillance operations against the Iranian opposition or Jewish or Israeli facilities**.

[72] https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/iran/events/article/iran-q-a-excerpts-from-the-daily-press-briefing-08-01-19

[73] « *Netherlands expels two members of Iranian Embassy Staff* », Radio free Europe, June 6, 2018.

3.e. Denmark

On October 30, 2018, the Danish government announced **it has foiled a terrorist plot targeting a group of Iranian opponents belonging to the Arab minority in the country**.

The plot was uncovered when the Danish police arrested a Norwegian citizen from Iranian descent in the Göteborg airport, on October 21. This man, **Mohammad Davoudzadeh Lului (aged 39 years) was working for the MOIS for ten years and is a senior intelligence operative**. He tried to infiltrate the MEK circles in Oslo, but his suspect behavior pushed the MEK to communicate his identity to the authorities.

Despite the fact he has no diplomatic cover, **Lului was in close relations with the MOIS station in the Iranian embassy in Oslo**. As Assadollah Asadi, he is awaiting his trial.

4) Conclusions

Obviously, any observer of the Iranian affairs should ask why Iran took the risk to resort to terrorism in Europe and, thus, incur the danger to be exposed as a terrorism godfather and harm its relations with the European Union.

There are, actually, several answers to this question.

Regarding the plots against the MEK, the NCRI and other opposition groups: the popular protests that started in December 2017 and continued, in different forms and places in Iran in 2018, undermine the regime and the Washington's decision to sanction Iran and to compel its European partners to cut all ties they had with Tehran deprive the Mullahs of any possibility to calm the street by financial means (the Iranian Rial has fallen by 300% over the past year). **Thus, to eradicate the opposition inside and outside Iran is a strategic goal for the regime for its survival**.

Regarding the plots against Israeli and Jewish interests: besides the fact that the war against Israel is an ideological priority for the regime, Tehran could think that any terror attack against Israeli or Jews **will increase the already extremely high tensions in the Middle East and make more difficult for the United States and Europe to intervene in the region**.

For those two reasons, **organize terrorist operations in Europe and even in the very heart of Europe (in Brussels and Paris) could appear to be a calculated risk and make sense.**

But there is a third answer: in the 1980's and in the 1990's, the Mullah's regime conducted numerous terrorists attacks not only against the opponents living in Europe but also against the European interests, both on the European soil and in the Middle East (attacks against the French peacekeepers in Lebanon, Lebanon hostage crisis, attack in Paris). There was never a firm response to those attacks that costed dozens of European lives and **Tehran understood that it was possible to threaten and even to attack Europe without having any price to pay**. **All the opposite: those attacks benefited Iran which got exactly what it was looking for: withdrawal of the Western forces from Lebanon, deportation of its opponents from France, end of the Western support to Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war, release of its agents imprisoned for previous attacks, etc. Appeasement was the only European answer to the Mullahs violence.**

And, finally, there is a fourth and last answer: the Iranian regime decided to resort to terrorism because this is its real nature for forty years: Iran is a terrorist State!

So, the only question, today, is the following: **what the European Union should do**?

The answer is quite simple. Appeasement having proved to be a wrong choice, only encouraging the Tehran regime to put the stake higher, the time has come to be firm. **European Union States must expel all the identified Iranian intelligence**

officers they must close all the Iranian sponsored institutions involved in terrorism or hate propaganda, they must blacklist all the officials linked to the MOIS and the IRGC and all the institutions, companies and individuals linked to Iranian intelligence activities and freeze their assets and money.

Last but not least they must **condition political relations with Iran to a strict observance of human rights inside its borders and end of terrorist activities, support and funding outside its borders and they must support democratic opposition forces seeking fundamental and democratic change in Iran.**

ANNEX

Article 176 of the Iranian Constitution regarding the composition and the role of the Supreme Council for National Security

(1) In order to safeguarding the national interests and preserving the Islamic Revolution, the territorial integrity, and the national sovereignty, a supreme Council for National Security presided over by the President shall be constituted to fulfil the following responsibilities:

1. Determining the defense and national security policies within the framework of general policies determined by the Leader;

2. Coordination of activities in the areas relating to politics, intelligence, social, cultural and economic fields in regard to general defense and security policies; and

3. Exploitation of materialistic and intellectual resources of the country for facing the internal and external threats.

(2) The Council shall consist of:

- The heads of three branches of the government

- The chief of the Supreme Command Council of the Armed Forces,
- The officer in charge of the planning and budget affairs,
- Two representatives nominated by the Leader,
- Ministers of foreign affairs, interior, and information,
- A Minister related with the subject, and
- The highest-ranking officials from the Armed Forces and the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps.

(3) Commensurate with its duties, the Supreme Council for National Security shall form sub-councils such as Defense Sub-council and National Security Sub-council. Each sub-council will be presided over by the President or a member of the Supreme Council for National Security appointed by the President.

(4) The scope of authority and responsibility of the sub-councils will be determined by law and their organizational structure will be approved by the Supreme Council for National Defense.

(5) The decisions of the Supreme Council for National Security shall be effective after the confirmation by the Leader.