

Special Conference 2

Israel-Iran proxy conflict



Forum	SPC2
Issue:	Israel-Iran proxy conflict
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Introduction

The ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel has persisted for 76 years, with no clear indication of whether it will reach a resolution in the near future. News pages, media, debates full of worsening situation in Palestinian regions; the whole world is involved. Although the war seems to be primarily between Palestine and Israel it is important to recognise the involvement of other regional actors; all neighboring countries, such as Iran, Syria Lebanon or Yemen, have their own complex relations with Israel, which are mostly based on indirect confrontations. Recent events have definitely intensified these conflicts. It is crucial to acknowledge that both parties contribute to the complexity of the situation by receiving support from superpowers such as the United States, Russia, or Saudi Arabia, as well as radical and military groups. Such conflicts could be easily prevented by mutual understanding of each other's culture and cultural and political differences, yet history has shown us that this may not always be achievable. In this report we will look further into the Iran-Israel war and examine their relation with Israel. This report will try to precisely analyze the religious, cultural and political differences, historical context, the involvement of the parties, and the way in which the war in one country can affect another.

Definition of Key Terms

Proxy war

Easily defined is a proxy war is a war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved. The opposite sides use third parties as substitutes for fighting with each other directly. A great example of such proxy war is the Vietnam war in 1955-1975 where the two biggest superpowers U.S and USSR fought for their ideological ideas (capitalism vs communism) in Vietnam.



The USSR supported communist parties in Vietnam by sending more military support when the capitalistic U.S sent their troops to fight communism in Vietnam.

Shia

Shia is one of two major branches in Islam, mainly followed in Iran with a Shia leader. It has fewer adherents than the main branch Sunni, which is followed by 80-95% of all muslims. This is also the reason why most muslim leaders are Sunni leaders. There are slight differences between the two branches, with the successor being the main one.

Militias

Militia groups are private, organized and armed forces of a country, formed by common citizens, which is typically motivated by a religious or political ideology against the government. They often see themselves as the defenders of freedom.

Gulf States

The Gulf States are oil-producing states around the Persian Gulf (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman)

Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire (also known as the Turkish Empire) was one of the most powerful states in the 15th and 16th centuries. After almost 600 years it fell in 1922 into the Turkish Republic and multiple territories promised to countries such as Great Britain, France, Italy, and Russia.

Mandates

Mandates were British territories that used to belong to the Ottoman Empire in 1920. The British Mandate included the territory of Palestine (picture 1) and later Transjordan (picture 2)

Fatah

Palestinian political and military organization founded by Yassir Arafat in 1950s. It was mainly supported by Syria based in Damascus. In 1967 Fatah took control of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. In 1968 Fatah was centered with its headquarters in Jordan until the civil war, known as Black September, in 1970. Fatah, now already known as the PLO, transferred its headquarters to Lebanon.



Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO)

Organization representing Palestinian People was formed in 1964 with its 'debut' in 1967 during the Six-Day War, when it started to be more recognized. The first chairman, Ahmad Shuqayri, was closely tied to Egypt. PLO was formed out of many other factions such as Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). PLO has organized many guerrilla attacks on Israel from its bases in Jordan and later from Lebanon. However from 1974 the policies of the PLO changed and the attacks ended in hope of recognition. The Arab world recognized the PLO as representative of the Palestinian folk and in 1976 it was permitted membership in the Arab League.

General Overview

Historical context

In order to understand the current state of both countries and the ongoing proxy war historical knowledge will be needed and will be provided in this research report.

Origins

The state of Israel was founded in 1948 on May 14th. Before that that region was an Ottoman province until the early 20th century. After the Ottoman Empire fell apart the regions and territories became under UK's control in 1922 and divided in 'mandates' with 'Mandatory Palestine'. However the tension already started in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration; Britain's support for a Jewish State in Palestine. In the meanwhile Britain made 2 other contradictory promises, leading the situation to tension even more. In correspondence with Hussein-McMahon in 1915 Britain already promised Arabs independence from the Ottoman Empire. After that, most Mandates did in fact receive their independence, except for Palestine. In 1916 Britain made another treaty called Sykes-Picot, this time with France, which specified that the majority of Palestine would be under international administration, while the rest of the region would be split under Great Britain and France after World War I. It was to Britain 's advantage to keep control over Palestine as it was a very strategic move in order to keep Suez Canal within their influence. After World War II many countries involved felt lots of sympathy towards the Jews, making the idea of a 'Jewish State' even more



attractive and it seemed to be the right way to compensate the Jewish community for what happened by giving them their own land. These factors are seen to be the main root of the Palestinian Nakba in 1948 after the State of Israel declared its independence.

Iran's early relations

Iran-Israel relations seemed very prominent in the beginning. It's important to remember that Iran was the second muslim country that recognized Israel as an independent state in 1948 under the Pahlavi dynasty. Before that Iran tried to stay positive about the solution of splitting Mandate Palestine into the Arab and Jewish part of the country, hoping to stay friendly with the Western side of the world, as well as with Muslim neighbors. After the Arab-Israeli war, Israel decided to get all the Jews from Iraq to Israel when Iraq forbade emigration. Iran helped Israel out by making a safe emergency exit route through Iran to Israel. Although for Israel the relationship between Iran seemed promising the efforts failed, as Iran stayed ambivalent. Things started to worsen under Mohammad Mosaddegh's rule in 1951 as prime minister. The Iranian nationalist saw Israel and the West as a threat to his idea of nationalizing the Iranian oil-industry, which was back then monopolized by Britain. This caused severing ties between Israel and Iran. That changed quickly again, after the coup of Mohhamad Remza Pahlavi in 1953 supported by the UK and US; Iran became a western ally once again.

The ties between Israel and Iran started to grow again; It was possible for them to exchange ambassadors in 1970's. Iran became the main provider of oil to Israel and the rest of Europe. Especially after thousands of Israelis came to Iran as military advisors. This brought advantages to both countries; Iran created a powerful army to defend itself against the USSR's aggression and improved its relations with the US, while Israel became less isolated when it came to diplomatic relations.

The downhill

Iran and Israel became good allies until the Iranian Revolution in 1979; a shah supported by the Western countries was overthrown by the new Islamic Republic of Iran and the alliance between Iran and the West came to an end. The new ideology of the leader of the revolution, Iranian nationalist, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was that Iran should bring back the strict Islamic rules and should be obeyed by the whole country. He saw western countries



including Israel as a threat to his ideas; Iran has cut all ties with Israel by transforming the Israeli embassy in Tehran into Palestinian embassy and canceling all travels to Israel.

Israel did in fact see hope in renewing good relations with Iran during the Iraq-Iran war, where Iran asked for military equipment in the 1980s. Iran, on the other side, didn't particularly see Israel as an ally, but more as a good opportunity and strategy to support itself during the war. This transfer kept on going until the mid-1980's when Iran failed to pay on time.

Proxy war

Since 1979, the downhill of the promising friendship, both countries have been 'secretly' attacking each other. This is what we call 'shadow war' since both sides deny those attacks. However there are few main attacks that cannot be missed to understand the proxy war that's going on between Iran and Israel.

Lebanon & Hezbollah

Israel-Lebanon's relations have never been good, starting with the Arab-Israeli war after Israel's day of independence in 1948. Lebanon has also been (minimalistically) involved in 1967 during the Six-Day War between Arab countries and Israel. Palestinian movement Fatah, founded by Yasser Arafat, took control of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which is known for representing the Palestinian people.

In 1969 on November 2nd talks between PLO and Lebanon in Egypt had led to the Cairo Agreement, which stated that the 16 official UNRWA's, Palestinian Refugee Camps, will no longer be under control of the Lebanese Army Forces, but Palestinian Armed Struggle. This agreement also permitted Palestinian revolution and PAS activity in Lebanon. Back then the headquarters of the PLO were located in Jordan, but after the failed uprising there (known as Black September), they changed it to Beirut, capital of Lebanon and the military headquarters to the south of Lebanon. These actions have led to Israeli Special Forces' attack on PLO leaders on the night of April 9 -10. This hasn't stopped the Palestinian raids to continue, which has, again, led to Israeli attack in Lebanon in 1978. After the UN Security Council's resolution (425) Israel had to withdraw and the Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established.



Meanwhile Israel was backing up the South Lebanese Army, a group of armed Lebanese Christians, by financing and arming them up further. At the same moment the Palestinian forces were supported by Syria. This is another important event that further escalated the conflict between Iran and Israel indirectly, with the biggest root in 1982.

In 1982 on June 6th Israel invaded Lebanon once again to stop the PLO and establish a Pro-Israeli Christian government in Beirut. Iran's influence cannot be missed as they showed full support to their Shiite friend in the south and allegedly sent the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to southern Lebanon, but never directly fought the Israeli corps. However the Iranian Guard Corps seems to have cooperated directly with the newly created Hezbollah, militant group established during the Lebanon War in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah was created by Lebanese Shiites in order to drive Israel away and, inspired by the Iranian Revolution in 1979, create an Islamic Republic in Lebanon. As Iran saw their new 'follower' growing, they trained and equipped them, and by that saw Hezbollah as their unofficial wing of Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which now clearly explains the further relation between Iran and Hezbollah. Israel now saw Hezbollah as their new biggest threat. The following years in Lebanon were full of bloody attacks and bombings until 2000 when Israel decided to withdraw and yet Israel concluded that Iran was still at war.

In 2002 Israel laid their hands on Palestinian ship, Karine A at Iran's Kish Islands, which was full of weapons, ammunition and other explosives. In the following years, Israel and the US have tracked other ships from Iran to Lebanon's Hezbollah that went through Syria. This led to Hezbollah's guerilla attacks on Israeli patrol in 2006 that killed 3 Israelis and captured 3 of them. Hezbollah then demanded the release of Lebanese prisoners in exchange of the captured 3, which, again, led to a new, 34-day war with Israeli airstrikes and Lebanese rockets. Hezbollah was, and still to this day is, seen as Iran's frontline, as the rockets were supplied by Iran.

Since 2006 the border has been seen as 'pretty quiet' with occasional shadow attacks, without further escalation, but since October 8th Hezbollah and Israel have been intensively firing at each other.



Syria

Lebanon isn't the only country Iranian Revolutionary Guards supported over the past decades. Syria is another great example of the proxy war between Iran and Israel. IRGC has supported Assad's regime in Syria by backing it up financially and militarily. The relation between Iran and Syria has a long history of common strategic goals. Their bond has strengthened over the past years, especially after sharing a common threat; Israel and the US. The sympathy towards the Assad dynasty started during the 1970s when Hafiz Assad provided shelter to the members of the Iranian Revolution.

Syria was also the first country to recognize Iran's new government with Assad's positivity about Islamic Republic. Syria has also supported Iran's raid on Iraq's al-Walid airbase, which brought advantage to both countries as Syria received Iranian oil. But the center of their bond must've been previously described as Lebanon. That area was the center of focus for both states as both of them were interested in mobilization of Shia in Lebanon. Syria and Iran have cooperated to make that happen in 1982. While Iran was supporting Hezbollah by training and weapons, Syria made sure to deliver Iranian arms to Hezbollah. As we now can tell both countries seem to have a strong Iran-Syria-Hezbollah relation.

Iran's nuclear programme

Before 1979

Another large centre of Israeli attacks on Iranian military interests was Iran's nuclear programme. This civil nuclear programme was established in 1957 under the Pahlavi dynasty with the support of the US. In 1974 Shah announced plans for construction of 23 nuclear power plants for the greener world, good use and to leave oil and gas for export, all supported by the West. In the following years many Western (French and German in particular) firms signed contracts with Iran to build nuclear reactors. In 1976 the construction of two units was started in Bushehr province by the German firm Siemens, which paid 3 billion dollars. The payment was withdrawn after the Iranian Revolution and work was abandoned with 2 of the reactors half done and one almost done. Close to the Iraqi border, France also started with the construction of 2 reactors and paid about 2 billion dollars, which was also cancelled in April 1979.



After 1979

The project slowed down after the Iranian Revolution, especially during the Iran-Iraq war that caused damage to some reactors. Although ties were breaking with the western world, Iran sought support for their nuclear project with Russia and China, especially after the withdrawal of the German company in Bushahr. In the early 1990's Iran and Russia made an agreement to complete work abandoned by Siemens, which was finally finished in 2011. This is also to be seen as a 'bonding moment' for Russia and Iran.

Although Tehran claims that the nuclear programme was made for civilian purposes only, it raised concerns during the 2000s. The main concern was Iran's progress which focused on enrichment of uranium and their growth of nuclear facilities. These facilities were in fact confirmed in 2002 by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). They revealed the existence of two nuclear units; a uranium enrichment plant at Natanz and a heavy water production plant at Arak. These two mainly raised huge concerns in the western world, as these facilities are capable of production of highly enriched uranium which can be used in nuclear weapons. In December 2002 Iran agreed on inspection of Natanz and Arak by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Although Iran agreed on suspending uranium enrichment activity in 2003, it didn't stop the shadow attacks between Iran and Israel.

In 2015 the JCPOA was signed in Vienna by the P5+1 and Iran in order to limit enrichment uranium levels, under the condition of lifting sanctions that were set on Iran.

Events in the 2000s seem to be the main reason for (sabotage) attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities, which Tehran blames Israel, and US, for. Both countries are involved in attacks on each other's nuclear interests. Both sides deny any sabotage attacks, whether it comes to Israel's or Iran's interests.

Direct conflict

Although the conflict between Iran and Israel always seemed to be indirect, recent events start to show otherwise. For that we should head back to 2019 when an Israeli airstrike killed 2 Iranian-militants in Syria as a warning for Iran to not send any more smart missiles to Israel's borders. Such 'shadow' attacks weren't anything new; Israel continued attacking Iran-backed commanders, militias or other places where Iran's influence was visible. The best example is when Israel killed the IRGC's commander in Baghdad (Iraq) and Iran answered with an attack on two American bases, also



located in Iraq. This should be a great example of a proxy war. Until April 2024, there was no mention of direct strikes, but Iran has left the long-held policies and for the first time attacked directly and not through proxies. The cause of this directed attack was an earlier attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, capital of Syria, which killed the top 3 Iranian commanders and 4 officers. Israel was blamed and thus enough reason to directly attack.

This should explain the recent, intensified attacks between Iran and Israel. Since we already know about the close relations between Iran, Syria and Lebanon, it is obvious that these countries would back each other up when it comes to their common enemy, Israel.

Major Parties Involved

Iran

Iran is mostly known for its Iranian Revolution in 1979. Before that it used to be an ally of the US and Britain, after they helped and sponsored the coup of the pro-western Shah Pahlavi. Iran has always been a western interest, especially after the Iranian Revolution. This huge event in 1979 seems to be the root of further conflicts between Israel and Iran. Until April 2024 both countries had been indirectly attacking each other's interests, mainly through their proxies (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq). Recently Iran attacked Israel, for the first time in their history, directly.

Israel

Israel's founding in 1948 has always been a very controversial case; starting with the Arab-Israeli war the day after its founding and ending with the current war in Gaza. Israel is the biggest western ally in the Middle-East, with the biggest support of the U.S. Iran's interests, especially nuclear interests, are huge targets for Israel. Israel's last attack on the Iranian Embassy in Syria and Iran's airstrikes made the world hold its breath, as this could have escalated the conflict more into the region.

Lebanon

Lebanon-Iran relations are not to be missed; the close relation between the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Hezbollah can be seen as the biggest proxy of the Iran-Israel war. Lebanese Hezbollah is seen as the 'unofficial right wing' of the IRGC and as an 'Iranian frontline'.



Attacks against Israel by Hezbollah are mainly supported by Iran. Although Iran and Israel never fought directly, Iranian leaders and facilities in Lebanon have always been a great target for Israel.

United States

The United States has played its role in this proxy war also as one of the 'proxies'. Their very close relations with Israel make them another enemy of Iran. The U.S backs Israel with ammunition, weapons, financial support, and troops. Their operations and military facilities in the Middle East are provoking Iran to heighten their own military facilities (for example in Lebanon), which then seems to be an interest of Israel and the U.S. This never-ending-loop of proxy attacks is thus also sponsored by the U.S making it also responsible for the proxy war. The United States, together with Israel, is believed to be behind cyberattacks on nuclear facilities in Iran in the 2000s.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
1919	Turkish War of Independence (Ottoman War);
1915	The promise of independence for Arabs made by Great Britain through Husayn-MacMahon correspondence;
January 3, 1916	Sykes-Picot treaty between France and Great Britain;
November 2, 1922	Balfour Declaration;
1922	Fall of Ottoman Empire; Mandates under control of Great Britain;
May 14, 1948	Founding of State Israel;
May 14, 1948	First Arab-Israeli War;
1957	Start of Iran's nuclear programme;
1967	Six-Day War;
November 2, 1969	Cairo Agreement was signed;
September 17, 1970	Black September; PLO headquarters transferred to Beirut;
1974	Iranian Shah announces construction of 23 nuclear reactors;
March 14, 1978	South Lebanon conflict;



January 1978 - February 1979	Iranian Revolution;
1979	
1979	Iran's first Shia leader rules the country;
1982	Israel attacks Lebanon; Iran supports Lebanon;
1982	Founding of Hezbollah;
1990s	Russia starts cooperating with Iran and its nuclear programme;
2000	Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon;
2000	Iran's continuation of nuclear programme;
2002	Uranium enrichment facilities confirmed in Iran by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI);
December 2002	Inspection in Natanz and Arak by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA);
2003	Iran suspends uranium enrichment;
2011	Nuclear plant in Bushahr started by Siemens finished through Russian cooperation;
2015	JCPOA was signed in Vienna by the P5+1 and Iran to limit uranium enrichment in Iran;
October 7th 2024	Hama's attack on Israel; Israel officially declares war;
April 1, 2024	Israel attack on Iranian Embassy in Syria;
April 13-14, 2024	Iran's airstrikes at Israel.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Iran Nuclear Issue, 20 July 2015 (S/RES/2231)
- Territories occupied by Israel, 22 November 1967 (S/RES/242)
- The situation concerning Iran Non-proliferation, 31 July 2006 (S/RES/1696)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As mentioned in General Overview and UN involvement, there have been agreements and attempts made which include Iran and Israel in order to prevent their conflict from escalating.



First attempts were made in 2002 when Iran allowed inspections in Natanz and Arak and made agreements to suspend their activity there. First agreement though was made in 2015 known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which lifted Iran's sanctions and prevented Iran's nuclear programme to weaponize. This agreement was a great step to better relations between the West and Iran, but Israel stayed skeptical. The tensions raised again after US's withdrawal from the agreement in 2018.

Another attempt made by the West was putting sanctions on Iran. Although sanctions in theory were supposed to cut Iran's ties with proxy groups (such as Hezbollah and militias in Iraq and Yemen), through, for example, resolution 1803 in 2008 which banned travel for individuals and monitored Iran's fundings through financial institutions, these sanctions failed in reality to stop Iran from backing mentioned groups. For example Sanctions on export of Iranian oil made Tehran just look for other buyers than EU. Despite that, sanctions did have some influence on negotiations with Iran.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) also seems to have influence in the region. Since GCC doesn't in particular want to interfere with the war in Gaza in order to maintain good relations with the United States and provoke escalation of the conflict. This also pushes Iran to maintain calm when it comes to Israel, as some GCC members (such as UAE and Bahrain) normalized relations with Israel and exchanged Embassies.

Possible Solutions

Although the near end to (proxy) wars in the Middle-East, and Iran-Israel in particular, doesn't seem to come, there are few factors which, when solved, could lead to better relations.

The biggest issue now, that intensified proxy attacks between Israel and Iran, is the war in Gaza. International Court Justice (ICJ), known as the highest body of the UN, has confirmed that Israel is in fact violating international law. That is why the most important step for now is the immediate ceasefire and opening borders for international aid. This could also be the beginning of achieving peace in the region.

Direct diplomatic talks between the U.S, Israel and Iran could be the next step of understanding each other and creating peace; US sponsored 'peace operations' in the Middle East seem to be more of a reason for Iran to prepare itself for conflicts. American facilities in the Middle



East, and U.S presence in general, is viewed by Iran as a threat, which could push Iran even more to weaponize its nuclear facilities. Next huge problem are the assassinations of high placed personas in the Iranian government by the U.S and Israel. These assassinations seem to only heighten the tension in the region. Such diplomatic talks and agreements between the two sides should be made. Despite tensions between Iran and the U.S. both countries have common interests, such as common enemy ISIS. Cooperation between US, Israel and Iran could be made to prevent ISIS from further escalation in the region. These countries could also bond through agreements and prevention of nuclear weaponization in Iran as well as Israel.

Next step could be academic exchange between both sides; understanding each other's cultural differences can reduce misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Since the tensions and conflicts are mainly rooted in misunderstandings and differences in cultures, such exchanges could help in the future relations.



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Appendix or Appendices

- I. Following news; this report is made months prior the actual debate and as we can tell, in those few months everything can happen, which can worsen/improve the relations between Israel and Iran
- II. Current EU sanctions on Iran
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-iran/>
- III. GCC relations with Iran and Israel
<https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/gulf-arab-states-avoid-iran-israel-tensions/>
- IV. Possible solutions and consequences
<https://mepc.org/commentaries/the-israel-iran-military-conflict-consequences-and-solutions/>

