

# Tehran's Efforts to Mobilize Antisemitism: The Global Impact<sup>1</sup>

by Matthias Küntzel

More Jews live in Iran than in any other Muslim country in the world. Its leadership insists that it is not antisemitic but a friend of the Jews. "My colleagues and I are telling the world that Iran is opposed to antisemitism and genocide," emphasized Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif in May 2014.<sup>2</sup> Well-known critics of the Islamic regime tend to defend Iran in this respect. Thus, Baham Nirumand, an influential Iranian exile in Germany, has claimed that even Ahmadinejad's call to eliminate Israel had "little to do" with antisemitism. "Up to now, Ahmadinejad has never criticized Jews as such, but above all the 'Zionist occupation power,' Israel."<sup>3</sup> Why then is it nonetheless right to talk of Iranian antisemitism?

A second major question concerns Iran's foreign policy. The negative image of the Ahmadinejad years (2005-2013) has been changing with the advent of Hassan Rouhani, Ahmadinejad's successor to the Iranian presidency. Rouhani's "vision aims to move Iran away from confrontation and toward dialogue, constructive interaction, and understanding", claims his foreign minister.<sup>4</sup> Does this new image of Iran correspond to a real shift in its hitherto ideology-driven foreign policy?

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in: Alvin H. Rosenfeld (ed.), *Deciphering The New Antisemitism*, Bloomington & Indianapolis (Indiana University Press) 2015, pp. 508-532.

<sup>2</sup> Iran's Zarif says new diplomacy has isolated Israel, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4516775,00.html> , May 6, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Baham Nirumand, „Der Verrückte aus Teheran“, Tageszeitung, 23 June 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Mohammad Javad Zarif, "What Iran Really Wants. Iranian Foreign Policy in the Rouhani Era," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2014.

These are important questions that deserve answers. This chapter, therefore, deals first with the specific form of Iranian antisemitism and second with the particular nature of Iran's foreign policy. It then goes on to try to identify the links between the two – Iranian foreign policy and antisemitism.

### **Khomeini's antisemitism**

In the 1960s, Ruhollah Khomeini was the first Iranian to speak about Jewish world domination and to discover the mobilizing power of Jew-hatred. His antisemitism was characterized by three features.

First, it was directed not only against Zionists, but also against Jews. "I know that you do not want Iran to be under the boot of the Jews," he cried out to his supporters in April 1963.<sup>5</sup> In the same year, he called the Shah a Jew in disguise and accused him of taking orders from Israel. The response was positive, tremendously so. From then on, hatred of Jews has remained a central component of Iranian Islamist ideology.

"The Jews... wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world," Khomeini wrote in 1970 in his main work *Islamic Government*. "Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that... they may one day achieve their goal."<sup>6</sup> In September 1977, he declared: "The Jews have grasped the world with both hands and are devouring it with an insatiable appetite, they are devouring America and have now turned their attention to Iran and still they are not satisfied."<sup>7</sup>

The second feature of his antisemitism was that Khomeini propagated the extinction of Israel for religious reasons –as a precondition for Muslim unity and Islamic revival and as a core duty in the struggle against the "moral corruption" embodied by a decadent Western culture. He drew a direct link

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<sup>5</sup> Cheryl Benard and Zalmay Khalilzad, *Gott in Teheran: Irans Islamische Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 260,n 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ayatollah Rouhollah Mousavi Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division), 79. See: [http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat\\_faqeh.pdf](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat_faqeh.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> International Affairs Division (ed.), *Kauthar*, vol 1 of *An Anthology of the Speeches of Imam Khomeini Including an Account of the Events of the Revolution 1962-1978* (Tehran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, 1995), 370.

between Zionism and secularization, describing Israel as the "germ of corruption ... the destructive impulses of which threaten the entire Islamic world every day."<sup>8</sup> Thus, a political conflict was changed into a struggle between righteousness and falsehood, between pre-modern Islamic culture and cultural Westernization, in which no compromise was possible. Khomeini thus "islamized" the Arab-Israeli conflict and transformed the political-national conflict into a religious crusade.<sup>9</sup>

Third, Khomeini viewed Israel through the prism of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In a speech in June 1963 he claimed that "Israel does not wish the Qur'an to exist in this country. Israel does not wish the 'ulama to exist in this country. Israel does not wish a single learned man to exist in this country. ... It wishes to seize your economy, to destroy your trade and agriculture, to appropriate your wealth."<sup>10</sup>

Khomeini was not the first to combine crude antisemitism with anti-Zionism. In 1925, Hitler likewise attacked Zionism in *Mein Kampf*, warning that "a Jewish state in Palestine" would only serve as an "organization centre for their international world-swindling, ... place of refuge for convicted scoundrels and a university for up-and-coming swindlers."<sup>11</sup> Fifty years later, Khomeini designated Israel as a "festering sore and a cancerous tumour on the body of the Islamic countries," as a "man-eating giant and a pagan usurper," as a "monster aspiring to world domination", as a "germ of corruption in the heart of the Arab world" and an "enemy of all mankind". These quotes are taken from a 1996 brochure that was disseminated by the Iranian state in an edition of 5,000 copies in the German language.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Institution zur Koordination und Publikation der Werke Imam Khomeinis, Abteilung Internationale Beziehungen, Das Palästina-Problem aus der Sicht Imam Khomeinis, Teheran: N.p., 1996, 97.

<sup>9</sup> David Menashri, Iran, Political Islam, and Israel: Challenge and Response, Working Paper No. 64, American University of Paris, April 2008, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York:Random House, 2010), 856.

<sup>11</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol.1 (München: Verlag Franz Eher Nachfolger, 1934), 356.

<sup>12</sup> Institution zur Koordination, Abteilung Internationale Beziehungen, 38, 182, 197, 241.

It is difficult, according to Robert Wistrich, the leading historian of antisemitism research, “to imagine a more dehumanizing and repulsive terminology, yet the significance of its usage is widely ignored by the Western world.”<sup>13</sup>

After the victory of the revolution in 1979, three major changes took place with regard to Iranian antisemitism.

### **Iranian antisemitism**

First, the rhetoric against Jews was toned down. Khomeini could ignore neither the signs of submission given by the Iranian Jewish community nor the precept of tolerance laid down in the Koran. In May 1979, he declared: “We distinguish between Jews and Zionists. Zionism has nothing to do with religion.”<sup>14</sup> From now on, Jews (like the Armenian Christians and Zoroastrians) were treated as wards of a traditional Islamic state – Dhimmis – according to the “principles of Islamic justice.” The fundamental antisemitism, however, did not vanish. Iranian copies of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – Hitler’s textbook for the Holocaust – spread all over the world. Some examples:

- In 1984, the journal *Imam*, published by the Iranian Embassy in London, reproduced parts of the *Protocols* in a series of articles.<sup>15</sup>
- In 2005, at the Iranian stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair, this author purchased a complete English edition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, published by the Islamic Propagation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its foreword explains the purpose of this publication: “to expose the real visage of this satanic enemy” in order to “awaken the Moslems to this great danger”. Zionism, the editors continue, is a “deadly, cancerous tumor” that must be eliminated. There then follows a collection of citations, such as “The United Nations is Zionism. It is the Super Government mentioned many times in the Protocols of the

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<sup>13</sup> Wistrich, *Lethal Obsession*, 862.

<sup>14</sup> David Menashri, “The Jews of Iran” in *Antisemitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University, 1991), 363.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Wistrich, *Hitler’s Apocalypse. Jews and the Nazi legacy*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1985), 180.

Learned Elders of Zion.” After a call to “Jihad against this menace”, the English text of the antisemitic tract follows.<sup>16</sup>

- At the same Iranian stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair, this author also bought an English copy of Henry Ford’s “The International Jew,” published by the Tehran based Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in 1997. In the preface, the editor wrote that “the grip of the Jewish parasitic influence has been growing stronger and stronger ever since [Henry Ford’s time]. The Jewish danger – now called Zionism – is ... directed against the entire humanity.” The numerous footnotes added to the text by the Iranian publisher are particularly interesting. Here we find talk of an “expansion of power” of the Jews during the Second World War and of German “resistance” against this “Jewish control” while Salman Rushdie is presented as an example of the insidiousness of Jewish calumny.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2000, the Iranian government published a special edition of the *Protocols* whose introduction was designed to show “the Zionist ... inveterate rancor against Islam and Muslims,” as well as their “boundless passion for usurpation and hegemony.”<sup>18</sup>
- In 2004, the Iranian TV station al-Alam aired a documentary ... which purported to explain how the Jews control Hollywood by the directives set out in the *Protocols*.<sup>19</sup>
- In 2012, the Iranian daily *Resalat* claimed that the *Protocols* were “the most dangerous collection of laws and regulations in history” while the regime’s English-language website *Press TV* published articles attributing the economic crisis in Europe to a scheme by the “Jewish Banking Cartel”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Matthias Küntzel, The Booksellers of Tehran, Wall Street Journal, October 28, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Meir Litvak, The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism, Journal of Israeli History, 25, no. 1 (March 2006): 272.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Image Of The Jew In The Eyes Of Iran’s Islamic Regime. – Part II: The Blood Libel And ,The Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion’, Inquiry and Analysis Series Report No. 944, March 6, 2013, 1.

In August 2014, Hassan Rouhani, the new and allegedly moderate Iranian president, blamed Zionism for pulling the strings against the interests of the American people: “Unfortunately, a pressure group in the US, which is a warmongering group and is against constructive talks, is [pursuing] the interests of a foreign country and mostly receives its orders from that foreign country. ... The interests of one foreign country and one group have been imposed on the members of the US Congress.”<sup>21</sup>

It is true that the Iranian regime distinguishes between Zionism as a menace and Judaism as a legitimate religion and at holiday time, wishes “all Jews, especially Iranian Jews, a blessed Rosh Hashana.”<sup>22</sup> However, a “Jew” is here characterized as someone who is willing to support Tehran’s antisemitic program and Israel’s elimination. Only this kind of Jew – the fanatical followers of the *Neturei Karta* sect, the intimidated leaders of the Iranian Jewish community, or the useful idiots of the Jewish radical left – are acceptable to Tehran.

The second major change since the Islamic revolution is that Iranian antisemitism has been radicalized in several ways: Some of Iran’s leading clergymen such as Grand Ayatollah Nuri-Hamadani infused a messianic element into their struggle against the Jews. He insisted that it was necessary to “fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam [i.e. the Shiite messiah] be met.” Thus he hinged the redemption of the Muslims or even of the whole world upon the destruction of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a supporter of the messianic approach, radicalized the idea of a Jewish conspiracy. In a presidential speech for Quds Day in August 2012, he maintained that “the Zionists planned World Wars I and II ... with the aim of controlling others.” He continued: “All the main centers of power, the strong governments, the banks, and the major media in the world are in the hands of the Zionists, and they exploit them all, with the aim of destroying

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<sup>21</sup> Rouhani: US officials still do not fully grasp the Iran’s realities, Iran Daily Brief, August 9, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Yoel Goldman, Iranian president tweets Rosh Hashana greeting, Times of Israel, September 4, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> Meir Litvak, Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust, 272.

cultures, values, nations, and the existence of states. The Zionists are behind every [instance of] extensive moral destruction, war, conflict, or massacre.”<sup>24</sup>

Another escalation, never conceived by Khomeini, related to the denial of the Holocaust. Whoever calls the Holocaust a “myth” implicitly portrays the Jews as a group of people who for filthy lucre have been duping the rest of humanity for the past seventy years. It started in April 1998, when the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, met Roger Garaudy, a French Holocaust denier, for the first time. Later, he claimed, that the “exaggerated numbers” of Jews killed in the Holocaust, were “fabricated”. While Rouhani’s current government avoids this issue, Holocaust denial has remained an essential component of Iran’s official doctrine. “It’s not clear what the reality is about it [the Holocaust – MK], whether it even has a reality, or how it happened,” declared Ali Khamenei in March 2014.<sup>25</sup>

The third major change is that after the revolution, Khomeini’s paranoid attitude towards Israel became the policy of a powerful state. Before 1979, Israel and Iran had co-operated successfully for several decades, not only on security issues but also in the fields of agriculture, hydraulic engineering, health, and industry. The two nations had no territorial disputes or any kind of refugee problem. Indeed, throughout history, Iranians have viewed the Arabs as their adversaries while Iranian Jews and non-Jews have lived together for more than 2,500 years.

In 1979, however, “in one of the most rapid and dramatic shifts of alliance in modern Middle Eastern history, Iran went from being an important strategic partner of Israel ... to becoming its most dangerous and implacable enemy,” writes Robert Wistrich. “With no other country were Iran’s relations overturned so speedily and drastically.”<sup>26</sup>

Already during Yassir Arafat’s visit to Iran shortly after the revolution, Khomeini proclaimed “*imruz iran, farad felestin*” (“today Iran, tomorrow Palestine”)

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<sup>24</sup> MEMRI, The Image of the Jew in the Eyes of Iran’s Islamic Regime, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Reuel Marc Gerecht, Holocaust Denial and the Iranian Regime, Wall Street Journal, April 25, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Wistrich, Lethal Obsession, 853.

implying that the “liberation of Palestine” would come next.<sup>27</sup> Khomeini and his followers had (and have) no doubt that this "liberation" requires the elimination of Israel and an Islamic revolution in Palestine.

### **No peace, but martyrdom**

Since 1979, Tehran has been committed to destroying any peace process. Whenever a compromise between Arabs and Israel “threatens” to mitigate the Middle East conflict, Tehran does everything to thwart the peaceful solution. Nadia von Maltzahn gives an example: “In September 1993, after Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles in Washington, President Rafsanjani at once condemned the agreement and called it ‘the biggest treason committed by the PLO against the Palestinian people’. Rafsanjani sent his Deputy Foreign Minister, Sheikholeslam, to Damascus to deliver a message to Assad and discuss the implications of the Israeli-PLO accords.”<sup>28</sup> Iran's activism was successful. Syria and Lebanon joined the rejection front and the peace initiative did indeed fail. Other efforts to destroy a peaceful solution have focused on shipping weapons and ammunition to militant Jew-haters such as Hezbollah and Hamas.<sup>29</sup>

The antisemitic hatred behind this behavior has a long tradition. “All Arabs who collaborate with the Jews should be destroyed before they help the Jews destroy us“, announced Nazi Germany’s Arabic-language radio program back in April 1943.<sup>30</sup> A generation later, Khomeini declared: “It is the duty of all Islamic countries to completely eradicate Israel. ... Any relation with Israel and its agents ... is religiously prohibited and constitutes a hostility to Islam”.<sup>31</sup> A generation later, Ahmadinejad exclaimed: “If someone ... recognize[s] the Zionist regime – he should know that he will burn in the fire of the Islamic *Ummah* [nation]”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Nadia von Maltzahn, *The Syria-Iran Axis*, (London: Tauris, 2013), 78.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>29</sup> Iran’s Hand in Gaza, *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi-Propaganda for the Arab World*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 171.

<sup>31</sup> Institution zur Koordination, *Abteilung Internationale Beziehungen*, 97. This statement was made on June 8, 1967.

<sup>32</sup> MEMRI, Iranian President at Tehran Conference, MEMRI Special Dispatch Series No. 1013, October 28, 2005.



This abhorrence of peace with Israel and the concomitant disregard for the vital interests of the Palestinian population is facilitated by a radicalized version of martyrdom ideology. Mahdi Mohammad Nia vividly describes the contrast between the Western and the Iranian world view in Tehran's official *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*.

On the one hand, "according to the Holy Quran, a martyr has a guaranteed place in Paradise. Martyrdom-seekers and Jihadists are not afraid of death at all in a battle front." On the other hand, the "fear factor is a serious dilemma in mundane and materialistic societies in which the life is defined solely within the boundaries of the physical existence. They regard the happiness and well-being within the short span of life on earth. This culture is completely opposite to the cult of martyrdom."

Thus there is a different understanding of war: "The martyrdom shows Shia attitudes toward war which is *less goal-oriented* than the western concepts. ... In this context, *defeat is not necessarily equated with failure*. This emphasis on continuing the struggle against oppression and injustice (as an Islamic duty) rather than on achieving 'victory' is seen as producing a *high tolerance of pain* in Iran. The cult of martyrdom inherent in Shi'ism, specifically, the honor accorded those who give their life to defend the faith, may give Iran certain practical military advantages."<sup>33</sup>

In other words: Iran's foreign policy with regards to Israel is not motivated by the desire to provide the Palestinians with "happiness and well-being" but by the desire to conduct a religious war and to fulfill an Islamic duty even if defeat is inevitable and a reward only obtainable "in Paradise". This program of inhumanity represents the counter-concept to Judaism par excellence.

"Shia culture ... drives Iranian behavior in ways that are not readily understood by the West" continues Mahdi Mohammad Nia, "some objectives of Iranian foreign policy are most difficult for some to understand, unless we interpret them within the ideological context".<sup>34</sup> This is true. Let us now take a closer look at this peculiarity of Iranian foreign policy.

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<sup>33</sup> Mahdi Mohammad Nia, Discourse and Identity in Iran's Foreign Policy, *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 3, (fall 2012), 53. Emphasis by the author.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

## Revolutionary Foreign Policy

Antisemitism is rampant in many countries. One of the worst examples today is certainly Egypt. Nevertheless, if we ask whether Egypt also practices an antisemitic foreign policy, our answer would have to be no. Why? Because in Egypt, there is no totalitarianism, no triumphalism, no expansionism at work.

Iran's antisemitism, in contrast, is a revolutionary antisemitism, and Iran's foreign policy is a revolutionary policy. Its scope is global, its program chiliastic, and its goal revolutionary.

*Its scope is global:* The Islamic revolution was publicly characterized as being neither Iranian nor Shiite, but rather Islamic and universal. "We will export our revolution to the whole world because it is an Islamic revolution", declared Khomeini in February 1980. "The struggle will continue until the calls 'there is no god but God' and 'Muhammad is the messenger of God' are heard all over the world."<sup>35</sup>

This missionary zeal is not only embodied in the emblem of the Islamic Republic - the word "Allah" written in Arabic script so as to form a stylized globe<sup>36</sup> - but is also dictated by Iran's constitution, which outlines "the country's foreign policy on the basis of the Islamic criteria: fraternal alignment towards all Moslems and unsparing support" for "any rightful struggle of the weak against the strong on the face of the globe."<sup>37</sup> Thus, Ali Khamenei's homepage is currently translated into 12 languages: English, French, Spanish, Indonesian, Azeri, Russian, Kiswahili, Turkish, Hindi, Arabic, Urdu, and German.

*Its program is chiliastic:* Ali Khamenei describes the Islamic Revolution as "the turning point in modern world history" that carries a precise message: "the message of salvation of humanity." And he adds: "Our historical movement is creating a new civilization."<sup>38</sup> The creation of this new civilization depends – as

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<sup>35</sup> Farhang Rajaee, *Islamic Values and World View*, (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983), 83.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Binswanger, *Das Selbstverständnis der Islamischen Republik Iran im Spiegel ihrer Verfassung*, *Orient* 3 (1980), 330.

<sup>37</sup> Article 3, paragraph 16, and article 154, see: Henner Fürtig, *Islamische Weltauffassung und außenpolitische Konzeption*, *Studie 8* (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1998), 269.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

always – on the annihilation of its enemies – in this case Israel and the United States. “Preservation of the safety and revival of world peace,” writes Monouchehr Mohammadi, a former deputy minister of defense in 2012, “is only possible through the destruction and defeat of the hegemonic powers”. Ahmadinejad expressed the same idea in this way: “The Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated.”<sup>39</sup>

Regardless of any day-to-day pragmatism, Iran’s foreign policy is still inspired by this kind of expectancy, based on an alleged spiritual superiority.

*Its goal is revolutionary* rather than accommodating and *idealistic* rather than status quo oriented.<sup>40</sup>

Iran displayed its rejection of the pillars of international relations when it violated diplomatic immunity and took hostage more than 50 US American embassy personnel in Tehran. It negated the very basis of the international state system when Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie, a British citizen. In both cases, Iran was isolated within the international community because it placed so-called divine law above secular international law.

“Revolutionary states often do not engage in cost-benefit analysis that other states do”, explained the Tehran based *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* in 2012. “The main goal of such states is to pursue their revolutionary mission and to construct a particular identity based on a certain set of norms and values. ... Hence, this country [Iran – MK] can be considered as a mission-oriented state rather than interest-oriented.”<sup>41</sup>

Are we today, under Rouhani’s presidency, entering a more pragmatic phase, in which considerations of national interest are prioritized over mission-oriented considerations? Mohammad Javad Zarif, the new Iranian Foreign Minister and figurehead for an alleged moderation, says no: “We are claimants of a mission, which has a global dimension,” he writes in Farsi in his memoirs, published in early 2014. “We have defined a global vocation, both in the Constitution and in the ultimate objectives of the Islamic revolution ... I believe that we do not exist

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<sup>39</sup> Yigal Carmon, “The Role of Holocaust Denial in the Ideology and Strategy of the Iranian Regime,” MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series, No. 307, December 15, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam: Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran, in: *Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 3 (fall 2005):, 265-292, 280.

<sup>41</sup> Nia, *Discourse and Identity in Iran’s Foreign Policy*, 31, 38.

without our revolutionary goals.”<sup>42</sup>

Advancing this global mission, however, does not exclude the semblance of conventional diplomacy. Instead, Iranian foreign policy zigzags between moderation and militancy – a pattern determined “by the total interdependence of state-making and revolutionism.” Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, therefore, calls the Islamic Republic of Iran a *quasi-state*: “Quasi-state refers to a state-movement characterized by a dual logic of action in which the disparate interests of revolutionism and national state-making are fused; moreover, the quasi-regime is uniquely resistant to diplomacy as usual.”<sup>43</sup>

This analysis captures accurately the particularity of the current nuclear negotiations with Iran. This is not diplomacy as usual: At the same time as Foreign Minister Zarif is claiming that his “vision aims to move Iran away from confrontation”, Supreme Leader Khamenei is calling America an “eternal enemy” and identifying these negotiations as a form of warfare: “Every step, forward and reverse, is similar to a battlefield and must be decided upon in advance in order to achieve the goal.”<sup>44</sup> Khamenei’s cost-benefit analysis, however, is based on ideological values rather than material interests.

But what about the anti-Jewish impact of this foreign policy approach? In what follows we consider a number of facets of Iranian foreign policy – international media, mobilization, terrorism, and diplomacy from the point of view of their relationship to antisemitism.

## Incitement

Iran’s international mouthpiece is *Press TV*, a TV channel founded in summer 2007 with four hundred staff members and twenty-six reporters worldwide.<sup>45</sup> Headquartered in Tehran, it broadcasts in North America, Europe, the Middle

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<sup>42</sup> Ali Alfoneh and Reuel Marc Gerecht, *An Iranian Moderate Exposed*. Everyone thought Iran’s foreign minister was a pragmatist. They were wrong, *New Republic*, January 23, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Kaveh L. Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini. New Directions in Iran’s Foreign Policy*, (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 29-30, 16.

<sup>44</sup> Khamenei: I Told the Negotiating Team that the Nuclear Talks Have Red Lines that Must Not Be Crossed, *Iran Daily Brief*, November 20, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Nazila Fathi, *Iran Expands Role in Media, via Satellite and in English*, *New York Times*, July 3, 2007.

East, Asia and parts of Africa and Latin America via a number of satellite television providers.

Some years ago the following advertisement decorated the red buses of London: “*Press TV*. Giving a voice to the voiceless. 24/7. News. Truth. The World is changing. People are changing. Opinions are changing. The News is changing. Why do you still watch the same tired news channel? GET THE FULL STORY AT *PRESS TV*.”<sup>46</sup>

What does this slogan mean? What is the “full story?” Here is a collection of *Press TV* headlines:

“Dirty Zionist Game in Syria”

“Jewish Mafia tied to death in America”

“Zionist fingerprints all over 9/11 attacks”

“Israeli lobbies dominate US system”

“Netanyahu still has his hands on the strings that control puppets around the world, the press, entertainment industry, key world leaders”

“Only war satisfies Israel lobby in US”

“I wouldn’t say Israel is running the US, I would say Jews in America are running the US. Israel is a euphemism for that.”

In October 2013, the Anti-Defamation League published an updated version of its documentation “Iran’s *Press TV*: Broadcasting Anti-Semitism to the English Speaking World”. “The antisemitic themes frequently broadcast on *Press TV* ... fall into five major categories of classic anti-Jewish conspiracy theories,” says this study. “1. Allegations of Zionist Control over World Events. 2. Allegations of ‘Israeli Lobby’ Control of America. 3. Allegations of Excessive Jewish/Zionist Influences as a Result of Disproportionate Wealth. 4. Allegations of ‘False Flag’ Conspiracy Theories. 5. Allegations that Israel is Committing a ‘Holocaust’ in Gaza.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> John Plunkett, *Press TV Can Say It Tells the Full Story, Rules Ad Watchdog*, Guardian, December 2, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Anti-Defamation League, *Iran’s Press TV: Broadcasting Anti-Semitism To English-Speaking World*, October 21, 2013, <http://www.adl.org/anti-semitism/united-states/c/press-tv-iran.html>

*Press TV* gives the impression of being highly professional. It pretends to be a credible and independent channel. Its programs include information about criticisms of Iran's nuclear program. However, it is not dedicated to spreading reliable information but is used as a revolutionary tool. *Press TV* reporters, for example, are not allowed to use the term "state of Israel". They are instructed to stick with "Israel" or "the Zionist entity".<sup>48</sup>

At the beginning of 2012, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Company (IRIB) established a similar channel for the Spanish-speaking world: *Hispan TV*.<sup>49</sup> Broadcast from the Venezuelan satellite Simon Bolivar, this channel now has a growing audience in South America.<sup>50</sup>

The Iranian propaganda machine has been successful but has also suffered setbacks. In 2009, the Mullahs tried to launch their own Arabic-language movie channel al-Alam. However, by order of Saudi Arabia, two Arab-controlled satellite companies – Nilesat and Arabsat – took this channel off the air.<sup>51</sup> In October 2012, the European satellite Hotbird also stopped broadcasting Iranian channels. Russian satellites have stepped in to fill the gap.<sup>52</sup>

## **Mobilization**

In 1979, Khomeini declared the last Friday of the month of Ramadan as Jerusalem (Quds) Day, and called on the Muslims of the world to participate. Since then this day has marked an international high point of antisemitic mobilization, when demonstrators all over the world call for the annihilation of Israel.

In South Africa, demonstrations on Al Quds Day are regularly held in Cape Town. In November 2002, the march was led by children, disguised as suicide bombers or armed Hezbollah fighters. In Nigeria, Al Quds demonstrations, led

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<sup>48</sup> Nathan Guttman, All the News Iran Sees Fit To Broadcast Is Aired on Press TV, [www.forward.com](http://www.forward.com), May 5, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Iran Officially Launches Hispan IV, Press TV, January 31, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Sammy Eppel communication with the author, March 24, 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Iran Arabic channel taken off air, BBC News, November 4, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Russia steps in to broadcast Iranian channels, on: [radiozamaneh](http://radiozamaneh), November 4, 2012.

by Muslim Brotherhood activists, take place each year in the Northern federal states where the population is predominantly Muslim.<sup>53</sup>

The biggest Al Quds demonstrations take place in countries with a high proportion of Shiite Muslims such as Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Bahrain, and Iraq. In 2005, during Al Quds Day in Beirut, thousands of uniformed militia including children formed battalions marching in lockstep. Broadcast worldwide live via satellite over the Hizbullah channel Al-Manar, the festive proceedings were attended by representatives of the Lebanese president, the prime minister, and the president of the parliament.<sup>54</sup>

In Turkey, only a few hundred people took part in demonstrations on the 2005 Al Quds Day in Istanbul and the Kurdish town of Batman. In Western countries, Al Quds Day demonstrations are mostly organized by Shiite activists. In Berlin, in December 2000, more than 2,000 demonstrators – separated according to gender - called for “the liberation of Palestine”. In London, the 2005 Al Quds Day rally was supported by the Jewish sect Neturei Karta while in the United States supporters of radical Sunni organizations joined the rallies. In recent years, however, Al Quds Day demonstrations in Western countries have become smaller.

The annual Al Quds Day is also used by Iran’s Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO). Set up in 1995, ICRO has the sole responsibility for coordinating Iran’s cultural foreign policy. It is affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance under the ultimate guidance of the Supreme Leader. ICRO has set up cultural centers across the world, in particular in countries with a Muslim majority. “These centers, of which there exist over 60 worldwide, are formally attached to the Iranian embassy or consulate in each country”, writes Nadia von Maltzahn. “ICRO published over 20 journals in different languages inside Iran, to be distributed in the representations outside Iran; and over 30 of its cultural centers abroad have their own publications.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Arne Behrensen, International Dimensions of Al Quds Day, in: American Jewish Committee, Antisemitism ,made in Iran’. The International Dimensions of Al Quds Day, Berlin 2006, 19-20.

<sup>54</sup> Mira Dietz, Lebanon, in: American Jewish Committee, Antisemitism ,made in Iran’,21.

<sup>55</sup> Von Maltzahn, Syria-Iran Axis, 67-69.

Von Maltzahn's study concentrates on Iran's cultural policies vis-à-vis Syria. Here, the Iranians launched a quarterly journal – *Islamic Culture* – which between 1985 and 2006 published thirty-five articles on "Palestine and the crimes of Zionism and imperialism." In 2010, Iranian officials also organized an Iranian cinema festival in Damascus. At the opening night, a Syrian-Iranian co-production called *Al-Ghuraba* (Strangers) was screened which defended suicide bombing and "clearly fed into the discourse on resistance, Anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism."<sup>56</sup>

Antisemitic words, spread by Press TV or by films such as *Al-Ghuraba*, are intended to trigger antisemitic deeds, which brings us to the next topic: Anti-Jewish terrorist operations.

## **Terrorism**

The killing of five Israeli tourists in Bulgaria in 2012 and the attacks or planned attacks in Thailand, Georgia, and India perpetrated by Hezbollah terrorists and Iranian agents made headlines.<sup>57</sup> Iran has also made other attempts to kill Jews that are less well known.

In 2012 two members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards were arrested in the coastal city of Mombasa, Kenya, in possession of extremely powerful explosives. They were obviously planning to attack Jewish targets in Kenya, several hotels on that coast being Israeli-owned.

In 2013, security forces in Nigeria exposed another terror cell. Their leader had been paid and trained in Iran. The planned attacks were aimed at the Chabad Cultural Center and an Israeli company in Lagos.<sup>58</sup>

In 2014, Hezbollah terrorists were planning to carry out attacks at six locations in Bangkok during Passover. One of two suspected Hezbollah members

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 102-115.

<sup>57</sup> Nicholas Kulish and Eric Schmitt, Hezbollah Is Blamed for Attack on Israeli Tourists in Bulgaria, New York Times, July 19, 2012; Kate Hodal, Bangkok bombers planned to attack Israeli diplomats, say Thai police, Guardian, February 16, 2012; Ernest Petrosyan, Car bombs in Tblisi and New Dehli linked to Iran-Israel conflict, Messenger Online, Februar 15, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Iranische Terrorzelle in Nigeria verhaftet, Tachles, February 21, 2013.



“confessed that he and at least two others entered Thailand to carry out a bombing against Israeli tourists in Bangkok as well as other Israeli groups.”<sup>59</sup>

The 1994 suicide bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), the Jewish Center in Buenos Aires, caused the death of eighty-five persons, injured more than 150 and destroyed or damaged the surrounding buildings in a radius of 200 meters. This was the most deadly terror attack against Jews since World War II and it was the Iranian leadership including Khamenei and Rafsanjani that made this decision and instructed Hezbollah to commit the crime. The sole reason was Argentina’s unwillingness to continue its nuclear co-operation with Iran. Who, however, should be blamed and punished for Argentina’s independent decision? Jews were the scapegoat, of course.

Once the suicide operation had been approved, the Revolutionary and Spiritual Leader issued a fatwa authorizing the action from the standpoint of Islamic Law. Argentina’s Attorney General, Alberto Nisman, wrote a 650-page report about this case. Although mostly ignored by the media, it is shocking. Nisman’s examination shows “beyond a shadow of doubt that the realization of acts of terrorism abroad was not the outgrowth of an unusual foreign policy instrument, but was instead based on the principles of the Iranian revolution of February 1979.”<sup>60</sup>

That is to say: based on antisemitic principles! The AMIA example clearly shows that the anti-Jewish paranoid pattern contains a call to kill. If the Jews of Argentina are responsible for the government’s decisions you have to kill them in revenge. If Israel is responsible for the wars in the world, you have to wipe it out in order to secure peace. Iran's diplomacy is just another tool to this end.

## **Diplomacy**

“It is necessary to be present in all world forums and to defend Islam and Iran effectively in all international tribunals and conventions”, explained former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami. “But we cannot ultimately flourish and

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<sup>59</sup> Times of Israel staff and Aron Donzis, Lebanese Man Cops to Thai Terror Plot against Israelis, Times of Israel, April 18, 2014 and Wassayos Ngamkham & Anucha Charoenpo, Israel calls for extra security after thwarted ‘terror plot’, Bangkok Post, April 20, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Alberto Nisman and Marcelo Martinez Burgos, Office of Criminal Investigations: AMIA CASE, October 25, 2006, 20. See: [www.peaceandtolerance.org/docs/nismanindict.pdf](http://www.peaceandtolerance.org/docs/nismanindict.pdf)

make our weight felt in the international scene ... unless we maintain our unique idealism.”<sup>61</sup> Here it is again: The particular mixture of terrorism, idealism, and pragmatism which characterizes Iran’s foreign policy. Every forum of the United Nations is misused for this end. To present just one example of “unique idealism”: In January 2007, the Iranian government filed a complaint with the UN Human Rights Council against those who do *not* deny the Holocaust. Let me quote from Iran’s official letter of complaint: “History cannot be rewritten as it pleases [the] Israeli regime. It cannot be manipulated and hand-picked selectively and it cannot be reformatted based on [the] political agenda or historical ambitions of this regime.”<sup>62</sup> Here, the UN, of all organizations, which was founded in the 1940s in response to the horrors of the World War II, is being urged to oppose all those who do not deny the greatest horror of that war.

Iran, however, is not only present in world forums but also organizes international events in Tehran. A case in point is the annual Conference of the International Revolutionary and Liberation Movements of the World, organized by Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which later developed into annual international conferences in support of Palestine. “A common feature of all these conferences was the rejection of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and the praising of ‘martyrdom operations’ such as suicide bombings”, states Udo Wolter, a German Iran expert.<sup>63</sup>

This applies to the 2006 conference “On Al-Quds and support of the rights of Palestinian people”, as well. According to IRNA, Iran’s official news agency, this conference was attended by six hundred foreign officials, including twenty parliamentary speakers from Islamic as well as non-Islamic countries like Zimbabwe, Cuba, Sri Lanka and Venezuela.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran*, 285.

<sup>62</sup> Ambassador Alireza Moayera, Permanent Representative of Iran to the Council, Geneva, to Ambassador Luis Alconso De Alba, President of the Human Rights Council, letter January 8, 2007 as documented by UNWatch.org, Iran’s UN Human Right Envoy Questions Holocaust, Ban Ki-moon Urged to Respond, Geneva, January 11, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Udo Wolter, April 2006: A New Conference Against Israel in Tehran, in: American Jewish Committee, *Antisemitism ,made in Iran’*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

More effective, however, is the hidden part of Tehran's diplomacy. It serves the purpose of isolating Israel.

My first example relates to a Sunni Muslim country: Mauritania. In 1999, Mauritania established diplomatic relations with Israel and was one of the few Arab League countries to have done so. In 2000, the Ministry of Health decided to establish an advanced center for cancer research in the country's capital, Nouakchott. This project was partly funded by the Israeli government and partly by the America Jewish Committee and was considered as a symbol of Israeli-Mauritanian cooperation. A team of Israeli doctors was planning to travel to Mauritania to train local physicians in the treatment of cancer patients.

In 2009, some month before the opening of the cancer center, Mauritania decided to suspend diplomatic ties with Israel. The country recalled its ambassador to Israel and requested Israel to close its embassy in Nouakchott. Following these steps, the hospital project was stalled. The Iranian government praised these steps. There were reports that Iran paid the Mauritanian government about \$ 10 million to expel the Israel ambassador. In March 2009, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki came to Mauritania and promised to boost trade with Mauritania and increase cooperation in health, oil, energy, business, agriculture and mines. He visited the nearly completed hospital, known by locals as "the Israeli hospital". "We'll equip the hospital with whatever gear it needs," the Iranian minister was quoted by the Mauritanian news agency. The cancer research center was inaugurated in 2010.<sup>65</sup>

My second example deals with a deeply Roman Catholic country, Venezuela, which was among the founding members of OPEC but had always maintained a neutral position on Israel and had no history of antisemitism. This changed as soon as Presidents Hugo Chávez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad struck up a friendship in 2006. The Chávez administration subsequently broke off relations

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<sup>65</sup> A Search for Allies in a Hostile World, *Economist*, Feb 4 2010; Barak Ravid, Iran to Complete Hospital that Israel Started Building in Mauritania, in: *Haaretz*, March 29, 2009 and Media Line News Agency, Iran Steps into Israeli Void in Mauritania, in: *Jerusalem Post*, March 26, 2009.

with Israel. This step was accompanied by the outbreak in Venezuela of an antisemitic wave.

In 2009, vandals broke into a temple in Caracas and desecrated the sacred space with graffiti calling for the death of Jews.<sup>66</sup> A series of raids on Jewish schools and synagogues added to the insecurity of the Jewish community. During 2013, Venezuela's Jewish umbrella body witnessed and recorded 4,033 antisemitic expressions in various media and in social networks.<sup>67</sup> While in the 1990s, some 25,000 Jews are thought to have lived in Venezuela, that number is today estimated to be as low as 9,000. In other words: Venezuela's Jewish community has shrunk by more than half over the last decade.<sup>68</sup>

My third and last example of antisemitic diplomacy deals with the new relationship between Tehran and Washington, D.C. It would be good if a real rapprochement between Iran and the United States were to take place. That, however, would require a new Iranian attitude toward the Jewish state. But Tehran does not intend to lessen its enmity towards Israel in exchange for the so-called bilateral thaw. On the contrary. "the Islamic Republic is offering to diminish its enmity toward the West in exchange for the latter's abandonment of Israel" – wrote Ze'en Maghen.<sup>69</sup>

Iran's calculus is to lure the U.S. away from its alliance with Israel. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's letter to U.S. president George W. Bush was revealing in this respect. "The Zionists ... would even sacrifice the Western regimes for their own sake", he claimed. "I say to the leaders of some Western countries: Stop supporting these corrupt people." Ahmadinejad's successor, Hassan Rouhani, has maintained Ahmadinejad's approach by making Israel and its supporters in the U.S. Congress responsible for difficulties during the nuclear talks: "The interests of one foreign country and one group have been imposed on the

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<sup>66</sup> Mary Anastasia O'Grady, Revolutionary Anti-Semitism. Chávez imports Ahmadinejad's ideology to Latin America, Wall Street Journal, October 4, 2009; Frank Jack Daniel, Venezuela's Chavez Calls Israel 'Murderous' U.S. arm, Reuters, November 25, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Over 4,000 Anti-Semitic Expressions Recorded in Venezuela in 2013, Study Finds, World Jewish Congress, May 6, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Jews Flee Venezuela Amid Security Fears, Ynet, January 31, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Ze'ev Maghen, Eradicating the 'Little Satan', Commentary, January 1, 2009.

members of the US Congress.”<sup>70</sup> Tehran seems to hope that one day Washington might sacrifice the Jewish state on the altar of a temporary Muslim-Christian rapprochement.

The Iranian attempt to isolate the Jewish state by driving a wedge between Jerusalem and Washington has intensified against the background of the Geneva talks about Iran’s nuclear program. In May 2014 Iran’s Foreign Minister Zarif boasted of the damage his new diplomacy had inflicted on Israel. It “had stolen Israel’s thunder” and “put an end to Israel’s portrayal of Iran as a danger”. In order to underline the success of his anti-Israel diplomacy, Zarif stated “that forces in the region, including Hamas and Hizbollah, had thanked him for this ‘success’.”<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, there seems to be a new dimension of Western indifference towards Iranian attacks against Israel. In November 2014, Ali Khamenei ranted and raved at the Jewish state, calling it a “sinister, unclean rabid dog” and added that “Israelis should not be called humans”.<sup>72</sup> Khamenei used this language just hours before the negotiations about the nuclear program between Iran and the six world powers were set to resume in Geneva.

Previously, such ranting had led Western diplomats to leave the conference room of the UN General Assembly. Now, the leader of an U.S. dialog partner had used language that recalls Nazi incitement, but the Western powers did not even address it during the talks in Geneva. The fact that Khamenei’s provocation went unheeded was a success for Iran’s diplomacy.<sup>73</sup>

### **The absence of clarity**

This chapter shows that Iran’s attitude vis-à-vis Israel is based on an antisemitic world view, which is older than the Islamic revolution. Iran is no status quo

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<sup>70</sup> Rouhani: US Officials Still Do not Fully Grasp the Iran’s Realities, Iran Daily Brief, August 9, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Iran’s Parliament ‘Satisfied’ With Minister’s Holocaust Explanation, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 6, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-parliament-zarif-holocaust/25375405.html>.

<sup>72</sup> AP and Times of Israel, Iran’s ‘Rabid Dog’ Insults to Israel Complicate Nuke Talks, Times of Israel, November 20, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> According to Marie Harf, deputy speaker of the State Department, the negotiations had not addressed the topic of inflammatory language used by Iranian officials against Israel. See: Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, P5+1 talks on Iran’s Nukes to Resume on Monday, The Times of Israel, December 7, 2013.

power like Egypt. It tries to incite nations and peoples against Israel and seeks to spread antisemitism world-wide.

The effects of this policy are devastating, as was evident in July 2014: countless people, innocent and guilty, were dying because of Hamas's decision to attack Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa with rockets. The real perpetrator, however, was Iran: Tehran delivers not only advanced missiles and money to Hamas but also a murderous ideology: the momentous call to destroy Israel with suicidal activities originates from Tehran.

The crucial question, however - *why* does Tehran wants to wipe Israel off the map? – is not raised within the West, and Iranian antisemitism is downplayed or ignored. The absence of clarity, however, is the beginning of complicity. The greatest success of Iranian foreign policy to this date is the fact that the international community seems to believe Tehran's bogus claim to be "opposed to antisemitism".

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