

## A CUFI PRIMER: The Islamic Republic of Iran



### The Iranian - Syrian Alliance

The alliance between Iran and Syria began to flourish in the years following the Islamic Revolution in Iran that overthrew the Shah in 1979. Syria was the first Arab state and the third in general to recognize the newly established Islamic Republic; it also had the distinction of being the only Arab country that explicitly stood by Iran during the bloody Iran–Iraq War (1980–88). While Syria under the Assad regime is supposedly secular and Iran is a Shiite Islamic Republic, the alliance is driven by common political and strategic goals. Most importantly, both sides declare themselves as fully committed to "resistance" against Israel.

Bashar al-Assad inherited the Syrian Presidency from his father, which led to a deepening of strategic ties between Syria and Iran. As Iran's proxy and Hezbollah's leader, Hasan Nasrallah played mentor to the inexperienced Syrian president. Since then, Iran has firmly entrenched itself into Syria's most sensitive affairs of state and uses Syrian territory to transfer advanced arms to Hezbollah.

### The Syrian Civil War

At the breakout of the Syrian Civil War in early 2011, the Syrian regime increasingly turned to and in turn became dependent on Iranian support. The Quds Force, the Special Forces unit of Iran's Revolutionary Guards responsible for their extraterritorial operations, became integral to the regime and spearheaded foreign involvement on the ground.

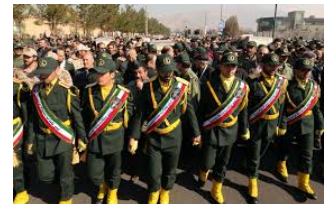
Initially Iranian involvement was limited to propping up the regime and preventing the fall of Damascus and strategic Northern cities to Assad's opponent. Iran supported the regime with arms transfers, economic aid, and military advice.

***"Close Iranian-Syrian ties will be able to confront enemies in the region, especially the Zionist regime"***

*- Iranian President Hassan Rouhani*

### Switching Focus

In mid-2015 the advances of ISIS, Al Nusra and others cast doubt that the Assad regime could actually survive. Iran, seeing Assad's survival as a strategic interest, intensified its support of the regime and escalated its involvement in Syria. Iran's active involvement was bolstered by the deployment of large numbers of Shiite foreign fighters: Lebanese Hezbollah as well as Afghan, Iraqi and Pakistani militias.



The Gatestone Institute estimated that as of late 2016, Iran controlled over 70,000 troops deployed in Syria (15,000 soldiers of the Iranian military, 20,000 members of Liwa Fatemiyoun, 20,000 Iraqi Shia militiamen in ten different groups, 10,000 Lebanese Hezbollah fighters, and 5,000 to 7,000 Pakistani and Palestinian militiamen), while also paying monthly salaries to 250,000 "militia and agents" supporting the Assad government. Thus, over the past two years, Iran has had a crucial part - alongside Russia - in changing the course of the war in favor of the Assad regime. As the war winds down to a victory for the Assad regime, Iran is entrenched on Israel's borders and has switched its focus to the Jewish state.

***"Israel is a malignant cancerous tumor in the West Asian region that has to be removed and eradicated: it is possible and it will happen."***

*- Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei*

## Israel Under Attack

With the growing number of Iranian bases in Syria, it has seized the opportunity to facilitate the supply of weaponry, including sophisticated missiles, to its Lebanese proxy Hezbollah. These Iranian missiles in Lebanon pose one of the most serious strategic threats to Israel's security. In early 2018, with the Assad regime regaining control of rebel-held areas. Iranian forces launched a series of direct acts of aggression against Israeli territory.



In February of 2018 an Iranian drone, launched from Syria, violated Israel's sovereign airspace. At 4:30 am on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2018, an Israeli Apache helicopter shot down an Iranian-produced Saegheh drone near the northern Israeli town of Beit Shean. The drone was sighted taking off from a base in Syria and was intercepted 90 seconds after crossing the Israeli border. In response to the violation of its sovereignty, Israeli F16i fighter jets struck Syrian and Iranian targets in Syria. In the course of the strikes, an Israel F16i was downed over Northern Israel by Syrian Air Defense systems. This marked the first time since 1982 Israel had lost a fighter jet to an enemy combatant. In April it was confirmed that the Iranian drone was armed, suggesting an attack against an Israeli target was planned. This event marked the first time Israel and Iran had directly engaged each other.



On 10<sup>th</sup> May 2018, Iranian Quds forces on the Syrian-held side of the Golan Heights launched 20 Fajr-5 rockets in an unprovoked attack on Israel. Thankfully, none of the rockets hit their intended targets and the Iron Dome system intercepted a number of them. Israeli aircraft responded by extensively hitting both Syrian and Iranian military sites in Syria.



In November of 2018, it was revealed that two new Syrian military divisions, trained and led by officers of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard special forces - the Al-Quds Forces- have been mobilized on Syria's borders. Estimates suggest that 10,000 Iranian-trained soldiers currently sit on Israel's border.

With Iran's patronage of Hamas in Gaza, its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and now its military entrenchment in Syria, a regime that has repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel and is the largest state sponsor of terror in the world is now on three of Israel's borders.