

# **Iran, Israel, and Zionism since the Islamic Revolution**

## **- From Rational Relationship to Threat and Disaster**

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### **Abstract**

The onset of the Islamic Revolution on 1979 abruptly wiped out years of friendship and strong relations between Israel and Iran. The new regime, headed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Mustafa Musavi Khomeini, spoke in extreme terms, against the "Zionist Entity" and its part in corrupting the Iranian state. This attitude caused Iran to cease relations with Israel in favor of investing in its fragile relationships with the Arab states.

When developing Iran's relations with the Arab world as declared by Khomeini, Khomeini actually hoped that the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran would bring about a similar revolution in neighboring Iraq. Khomeini's hope led Saddam Hussein of Iraq to impose a war upon Iran, attempting to halt Iran's attempt to spread its revolution to Iraq and possibly other Arab countries.

Revolutionary Iran has sought hegemony in the Middle East under its leadership. The existence of the state of Israel within the Middle East area has been viewed as a wedge, splitting the Arab world, as well as the entire Islamic world, of which Iran sees itself as leader. While hatred of the "Zionist Entity" previously existed in the Arab world and was not Khomeini's own invention, Khomeini and his successors have viewed their main and foremost goal to demolish the "Zionist Entity" – Israel.

Since the revolution until today, Iran has acted against Israel in two main axes; militarily and diplomatically. While fighting Iraq (1980-1988), Iran assisted the Lebanese Shiites to set up a militia force (Hezbollah) that served as an alternative to Amal (the secular Shiite wing) for Lebanese Shiites. The second feature of Iran's policy involved an attempt to convince the United Nations to expel Israel as a member country. During that period, Israel fought to retain its UN status, all the while concurrently selling Iran arms and ammunition for its war against Iraq. Indeed, the Israeli naivety regarding the possibility of renewing Iran-Israel relations was perceived differently by the Iranians.

Once Iran managed to barely extricate itself from the bloody war against Iraq, recover from the death of its spiritual leader, and began constructing itself anew, it placed renewed emphasis on the Middle Eastern arena. Three decades since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran that have included six presidents can be

summed up by one central goal – to dispel the Zionist entity from the Middle East. This goal has become more significant since the onset of the Iranian nuclear development project.

Iran believes that nuclear capabilities would make it easier for Iran to realize its goal of “exporting the revolution”. In such a situation, assuming that the Western world will avoid military confrontation with such a fundamentalist “crazy” state that has already proven that it is willing to sacrifice in the name of religious goals, Iran will be able to achieve its goal quite easily. The extermination of Israel, as far as Iran is concerned, is only a matter of time. Thus, we see the regime’s leaders express this goal, repeatedly. However, the destruction of Israel does not constitute an ultimate goal – it is merely the means towards reaching Islamic hegemony in the Middle East.

Historically, Ayatollah Khomeini emphasized hatred of Zionism in his propaganda, and viewed Zionism, along with the United States as an infectious disease of Iranian society. Today, approximately 30 years after the revolution, much of Iranian society did not directly experience Khomeini’s propaganda, as almost half of Iran’s population was born after the Islamic Revolution. In this study, we have assumed that the Iranian society holds different views than its leadership, regarding Zionism.

To prove this assumption, this study used tools such as surveys, Internet blogs, and radio broadcasts to analyze Iranian society’s attitude towards Israel. These tools showed ambivalent attitudes towards Israel - Iranians view Israel as a major problem when asked directly about this issue, reflecting propaganda expressed by the regime. However, a small percentage of blogs studied deal specifically with the "Zionist entity". This study found that the various identities of those who compose blogs comprise diverse elements within society. These bloggers generally write to express their attitudes about events in the Islamic Republic, international politics, and social issues. Indeed, Iranians are concerned with a wealth of social and political issues beyond “exporting the revolution” and destroying the “Zionist entity”.