



## PERSPECTIVES

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# Iran's Global Terror Network Lurks Behind Its Threats of Vengeance

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Iran's repeated threats to avenge the reported **assassination** of its chief nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who was shot dead outside Tehran in November, raise the likelihood of Iranian armed action against Israeli targets. The threats also serve as a reminder that Iran has a long history of both sponsoring terrorism and actively engaging in it with its own personnel, and that it has spent decades building a global, highly active Shiite terror network.

Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who attended North Korea's 2013 underground atomic bomb test, was **responsible** for the weaponization phase of the Iranian nuclear program, previously known as Amad. While the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran is in charge of stockpiling uranium, Fakhrizadeh and his team were tapped by the Iranian regime to take over following the decision to break out to nuclear weapons.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are now examining options and possible timing for retaliation for Fakhrizadeh's killing, which occurred at the end of November. They are presumably weighing opportunities to launch painful attacks while attempting to avoid an all-out regional war.

To get a sense of what the regime's retaliation might look like, it is worth recalling how it reacted when four of its nuclear scientists were assassinated on Iranian soil between 2010 and 2012.

In the space of two days, in February 2012, Iranian bombers **attempted** to murder Israeli diplomats in Georgia, India, and Thailand. Israel **named** Iran's elite Quds Force, which is responsible for subversion campaigns beyond

Iran's borders as well as arming and activating international terror networks, as responsible for implementing those attacks.

In New Delhi, an Israeli diplomat's wife and three other people were injured when an attacker on a motorcycle stuck a magnet bomb on her vehicle. In Bangkok, [two Iranian men](#) were arrested and later jailed after an enormous explosion ripped through a home where they were staying. In the ensuing police pursuit, one of the suspects lost his legs in a blast after he attempted to hurl an explosive at Thai police.

Thai police said the two were part of a hit team sent to kill Israeli diplomats in Bangkok. A third Iranian was arrested in Malaysia after fleeing Thailand and later extradited and jailed.

In November, Thailand freed the three men as part of a [prisoner exchange deal](#) to secure the release of Australian-British scholar Kylie Moore-Gilbert, who had been languishing in an Iranian prison for two years on espionage charges and held as a bargaining chip by Tehran.

Israel's former ambassador to Thailand, Itzhak Shoham, [reacted furiously](#) to the release, saying, "It saddens me to see the pictures as [the Iranians] celebrate instead of rotting in prison."

During the 2012 attack wave, a driver for the Israeli embassy in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi noticed an [explosive device](#) planted under his vehicle, alerting authorities and preventing a terror attack.

Iran's modus operandi is clear enough: It targets Israeli diplomatic assets overseas on a regular basis. But Iran also works closely with Hezbollah on carrying out international terror attacks. When diplomatic targets prove trickier than planned, the Shiite axis goes after the soft target of Israeli tourists.

The division of labor between Iran and Hezbollah has emerged in a fairly clear manner over the past decade: Iranian agents target Israeli embassies and diplomats, while Hezbollah targets Israeli civilian targets overseas.

In September 2020, a Bulgarian court [convicted](#) two suspected Hezbollah operatives in absentia for a 2012 bus bombing in the resort city of Burgos, which killed five Israeli tourists and their Bulgarian driver.

This pattern is nothing new. In 1992, a month after Israel assassinated Hezbollah chief Abbas Musawi in Lebanon in an Apache helicopter strike, bombers struck the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Twenty-nine people [were murdered](#) and 250 injured in that mass casualty attack. "Iran

stands behind the heinous attack; Iran conceived and planned the attack and carried it out through its proxy—Hezbollah,” the Israeli Foreign Ministry [stated](#).

Two years later, in 1994, a suicide truck bomber [attacked](#) the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, killing 85 and injuring hundreds. Argentine prosecutor Alberto Nisman and fellow prosecutor Marcelo Martínez Burgos formally accused senior Iranian regime officials of involvement in the attack and Hezbollah of carrying it out. In January 2015, Nisman was found dead in his Buenos Aires home just one day before he was scheduled to [testify](#) before an Argentine congressional panel regarding his charge against former Argentine president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, whom Nisman accused of covering up Iran’s role in the AMIA bombing.

The Iranian-Shiite terror network has shown no sign of slowing down in recent years, though it did run into successful interceptions of its plots. Throughout 2013 and 2014, the Iranian Quds Force [supplied](#) Hezbollah cells worldwide with hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate explosive materials for the purpose of preparing future attacks.

In September 2015, British counter-terrorism police [raided four properties](#) in London and uncovered three metric tons of ammonium nitrate stored in thousands of ice packs.

That same explosive chemical was [found](#) by police in a Thai property during the 2012 arrest of a Hezbollah agent. The investigation later suggested that the property was being used to prepare shipments of the explosive to Hezbollah cells in other countries.

In 2015, Cypriot police found [8.2 tons](#) of ammonium nitrate in ice packs, and arrested a suspected Hezbollah agent for plotting attacks on Israeli targets on the Mediterranean island. The investigation revealed that the explosive stockpile had been hidden in place since 2011 and could have been used as a “point of export” to other destinations around the world.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of countries worldwide, and specifically in the EU, are finally [designating](#) Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in recognition of its central role in a global terror network. Slovenia and Latvia recently banned the organization, as did the Czech Republic.

The activation of terrorism is second nature to the Islamic regime in Iran, so much so that it has even brazenly sent its own diplomats on bombing runs on European soil. At the end of November, a trial in Belgium began against

an [Iranian diplomat](#) charged with plotting to bomb an Iranian opposition rally outside Paris.

In 2018, Belgian authorities arrested a Belgian-Iranian couple in a vehicle containing 500 grams (1.1 pounds) of TATP explosives and a detonator. The investigation [concluded](#) that the Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi, who was serving as the third counselor at Iran's embassy in Vienna, organized the plot with the backing of the Iranian regime. The couple, Assadi, and an additional co-conspirator are all currently on trial.

"The attack plan was conceived in the name of Iran and under its leadership. It was not a personal initiative by Assadi," Jaak Raes, head of Belgium's state security service (VSSE), told prosecutors in February 2020.

Previous operations targeting Iranian opposition activists have been organized by Iran's Intelligence Ministry, which is tasked with killing and kidnapping missions. A month ago, an opposition Iranian Ahwahzi (an Arab community residing in southwest Iran) figure living in Sweden [was lured](#) by Iranian intelligence agents to Turkey, where he was kidnapped and transported back to Iran.

Iran clearly has multiple avenues it can consider as it threatens retaliation for the killing of its chief nuclear scientist. Its options include activating terror squads stationed in southern Syria on Israel's border, although Iran's activities in Syria are highly exposed to Israeli military action. Iran could even try to activate a terror cell inside Israel, a possibility about which Israeli former nuclear scientists were [reportedly](#) warned.

However Iran attempts to respond, it will continue to try to build a global Shiite jihadist terrorism network overseen by the Quds Force and including Hezbollah operatives. The network's goal will be to build up attack capabilities against Israeli and Jewish targets overseas. As an Israeli security source has [noted](#), the network functions as a fully coordinated axis in the murderous pursuit of international terrorism and does not distinguish between diplomats and tourists.

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