

Is Iran Ill-advised to Finance Its Regional Allies While Under Sanctions?

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Many Iranians question the benefits of arming and financing Iran's many allies in the Middle East while Iran is suffering the harshest ever US "maximum pressure". Iran's allies are spread over Afghanistan, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. Is Iranian support for these allies the main cause of the US's aggressive attitude towards the Iranian people and their state, or are there other factors? What makes Iran finance these allies and strengthen them with the most advanced warfare equipment, and be ready to fight and die on their territory?

Since Iran's "Islamic Revolution" prevailed in 1979 under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, the country has been heavily sanctioned, sanctions increasing with the advent of almost every new US President. In 1979, Iran had no allies but was surrounded by enemies. Its regional neighbours joined western countries in supporting Saddam Hussein's war ([1980-1988](#)) on the "Islamic Republic". The US war on Iran has its origin in the fall of its proxy the Pahlavi Shah. It was disclosed how the [CIA](#) brought Pahlavi to power in an organised Coup d'état against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohamad Musaddeq in 1953 in order to keep Iranian oil under US-UK control. Democracy has never been the real issue: western-provoked wars can be understood as motivated by self-interest and the quest for dominance. But attempts to overthrow regimes are always publicly justified by the West in the name of freedom and democracy.

In 1979, the US set a [trap](#) to drag the Soviets into invading Afghanistan by [supporting](#) the mujahedeen from whom al-Qaeda was born. This catastrophic result and similar destructive phenomena are habitually described as "unintended consequences" in order to rationalise the devastating costs of these savage interventions into other people's lives and in world affairs. However, in 2001 the US fell back into exactly the same type of quagmire and invaded Afghanistan with tens of thousands of US troops. The US plan was to block the path of a possible return by Russia to Eurasia; to weaken the Russians and to encircle Iran with a chain of hostile elements; to [bully](#) all countries concerned into submission, particularly the oil-rich states, thus preventing any possible alliance with Russia and China. This is still the US objective in the Middle East. History has never been a good guide to powerful leaders and their administrations because they apparently consider themselves not subject to its lessons.

Iran found itself deprived of allies. With the consent of the Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 to remove and subdue the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat, who had rejected King Fahd's [peace initiative](#). However, the "unintended consequences" of the invasion and the occupation of the first Arab capital by Israel (Beirut) offered Iran an excellent opportunity to respond to the

demands of a group of Lebanese [asking for help](#) to stand against the Israeli aggressor. Imam Khomeini replied to his Lebanese visitors (who described the horror and the killing committed by the Israeli war machine): “al-kheir fima waqaa”, meaning “What has happened is a blessing”. His visitors did not understand the meaning of Khomeini’s words until many years later.

Iran found in the Lebanese Shia fertile ground to plant seeds for its ideology. The ground was already prepared in 1978. Lebanese Islamist followers of Sayyed Mohamad Baqer al-Sadr were already receiving training in various Palestinian camps, including the Zabadani training boot camp (Syria), and had embraced the Palestinian cause. When Imam Khomeini took power in Iran, Sayyed Mohammad Baqer al-Sadr [asked](#) his followers in Iraq and Lebanon to declare loyalty to Imam Khomeini and “melt into him as he has melted into Islam” (which means “adopt Imam Khomeini as your Imam and Marja’ al-Taqleed”). Iran established great ideological compatibility with the Lebanese Shia, who had historically been considered second-class citizens in Lebanon. Their territories in the south of Lebanon were considered disposable and were put on offer to Israel by Lebanese leaders (Maronite President Emile Eddé [suggested](#) to detach South of Lebanon and offer it to Israel to reduce the number of Muslim Shia) , [elites](#) and governments.

The Iranian constitution ([articles 2 and 3](#)) stipulates that the Iranian government will support any group or country suffering from an oppressor. Its outlook fit perfectly with the oppressed Lebanese Shia.

The Iranian IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps) travelled to Lebanon and shipped their weapons via Syria to strengthen the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, known later as Hezbollah, and defend their country from the occupier. It was, therefore, necessary to establish a strategic relationship with the Syrian President because most shipments arrived via Syria.

The Iranian-Syrian relationship went through various ups and downs. It had reached its high point in the last years of President Hafez al-Assad’s rule when his son Bashar was responsible for the relationship with Lebanon and Hezbollah in particular.

The destinies of Lebanon, Syria and Iran became linked. President Bashar al-Assad was struggling to keep his country out of the conflict when the US-occupied Iraq in 2003. The circle around Iran became tighter, and US forces occupied neighbouring Iraq. Even though getting rid of Saddam Hussein was a blessing for the Iranian regime, Saddam was so weak that he did not represent any real danger to Iran. The US embargo had weakened him, and he had no friends in the Gulf countries after his invasion of Kuwait and his bombing of Saudi Arabia.

The US prevented Iran from moving forward to support the Iraqi resistance to overthrow Saddam Hussein, instead of establishing its own control over Baghdad. The next US objective was Syria and Lebanon. Secretary of State Colin Powell [warned](#) President Assad that he was next on the list of presidents to be taken down if he continued offering support to Hamas and Hezbollah. The US declared itself an occupying power, and the Iraqi right to defend their country was acknowledged by the United Nations resolutions. Assad, like Iran and Saudi Arabia, [supported](#) the insurgency against the US occupation forces in Iraq. The Saudis rejected Shia-dominated governance over Iraq. The Iranians were next on the US list. So, Iran chose to fight the US on Iraqi ground, which was much less costly than fighting on

Iranian ground. Strengthening Iraqi allies was, therefore, an essential component of Iranian national security and an important line of defence.



In 2006, the Bush administration pushed an unprepared Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to agree to destroy Hezbollah and was expecting the war [to be expanded to Syria](#). This was an opportunity to conquer Syria and cut the supply of Iranian arms. The US and its allies were aiming to close the circle around Iran by eliminating its strong ally in Lebanon. Hezbollah was an impediment to the US-Israeli project of bringing all the Arabs to the negotiating table, eliminating the Palestinian cause and its defenders, and weakening Iran as a prelude to overthrowing its government.

When Israel bombed and invaded Lebanon in 2006 with the goal of defeating Hezbollah, President Assad opened his warehouses and offered dozens of game-changing anti-tank missiles and anything Hezbollah [needed](#) to fight back, regardless of Israeli air force superiority. Assad became an essential partner in the successful defeat of Israel in Lebanon. The fall of Hezbollah would have had devastating consequences for Syria and Iran. Joining

the destinies and alliances of the Lebanese-Syrian-Iraqi-Iranian front was necessary for the survival of each.

In 2011, the world declared war on Syria. It took President Assad two years before he realised the plot was both [regional and international](#), aiming to create chaos in the Levant and to produce a failed state dominated by [jihadists](#). The same ideological jihadists first planted in Afghanistan were expanding and offered a perfect tool for the US to destroy Iran and its allies. The regional and world intelligence services infiltrated the jihadists, and well understood their strengths and weaknesses. They were well suited to fighting the Iranian ideology and Iran's ally. Wahhabi jihadism was perfect cancer to destroy Iran on many fronts.

Jihadists were growing in Iraq and expanding in Syria under the [eyes](#) of the US, as US intelligence sources themselves revealed. The Levant was the perfect and most desirable ancient place for jihadists to mushroom and expand. This was when President Assad [asked](#) his allies for support. Iran's IRGC forces came to Damascus and the journey to liberate Syria started. Syria, like Iraq, offered a vital defence line to Iran. It was another platform to fight - on non-Iranian soil - an enemy that was about to migrate to Iran (had Syrian been defeated). An opportunity that Iran could not miss because of Syria's strategic importance.

It took Russia until September [2015](#) to wake up and intervene in the Middle Eastern arena, in Syria in particular. All these years, the US was planning to leave no place for Russia to create alliances, preparing to vanquish Iran and its allies, the "[Axis of the Resistance](#)" standing against US hegemony in the Middle East. All Gulf countries succumbed to US power, and today they are hosting the largest US military bases in the region. The US had deployed tens of thousands of troops to these bases and through them enjoyed superior firepower to any country in the world. Still, Iran and the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) remained impervious to the US attempt at complete dominance.

Without Iran's allies, all US military efforts would have been concentrated on Iran alone. The US would have moved from sanctions to military attack with little fear of the dire consequences. Today, the US needs to consider the now unquestioned fact that if Iran is attacked, its allies in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq will open hell for the US and its allies in the Middle East. Forty years of Iranian support for its allies have created a wall of protection around it and a bond whereby the allies join their fate to that of Iran. There are no allies in the world any country could count on to sacrifice their men more readily and stand for a common ideological motivation and shared objectives. Iran is not only investing in its partners, but it is also investing in its own security and well-being. Iran is prepared to offer the same sacrifices provided by its allies to support them when needed.

Many Lebanese and Iraqis fought in the Iraq-Iran war. Thousands of Iranian, Iraqi and Lebanese Hezbollah (and other allies) lost their lives in Syria protecting the well-being of the Syrian ally and preventing the country from falling into the jihadists' hands.

Many Iranians and Lebanese were killed in Iraq to support the Iraqis against the terror of ISIS. Iranians and Lebanese Hezbollah are today in Yemen, supporting it against the Saudi-led genocidal massacres. Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah took the risk of supporting the Palestinians and their cause to free their land, to have their own state and the right to return home. No US allies anywhere in the world are ready to offer comparable solidarity to the US. Iran has created deep alliances whereas the US has failed to do so.

Iran openly [attacked](#) the US Ayn al-Assad military base following the unlawful assassination of Major General Qassem Soleimani. No other country in the world has dared to attack the US face-to-face and inflict over a hundred casualties on US service members while continuing to challenge US hegemony. There was no need for Iran to ask its allies to act on its behalf. Iran and its partners on the battlefield are united against their enemies. The US wants Iran without missiles, without armed drones, and without access to intelligence warfare. These vital programs have proved crucial to protecting the country and preventing it from becoming vulnerable. If Iran did not have the allies it has today and the missiles it has manufactured, the US would already have retaliated without hesitation.

The war is far from over. Iran and its allies are still in the heart of the struggle, and the US and Israel are not sitting idly by. Solidarity between Iran and its allies is needed more than ever. The question of how much of its annual budget Iran is spending on its partners is less than relevant, though ordinary Iranians may complain and even challenge its benefits. The spirit of sacrifice that unites allies in mutual protection cannot be limited to monetary considerations. It is priceless.

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