

How did the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran contribute to the deterioration of relations between Iran and Israel?

## Introduction

- Many countries have issued warnings to their citizens not to visit the region, as tensions flare and fears grow that an Iranian attack may be imminent — and the war in Gaza may spread.

- Iranian leaders have been among the sharpest critics of Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip. Tehran has made no secret of its praise for those who attack Israelis, including the Hamas-led attack that Israel says killed **1200 people on October 7.**

# Iranian Officials accuse Israel of a Deadly Attack on Iran's Consulate in Syria

→ Iran, however, wasted no time in hailing the Hamas attack as a **"victory."** Hours after news of the attack broke on October 7, Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanani told Iran's ISNA news agency that "what took place today is in line with the continuation of victories of the anti-Zionist resistance in different fields, including Syria, Lebanon, and occupied lands."

→ Iran blames Israel for April 4 airstrike on Iran's consulate in Damascus that killed seven members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, including the two IRGC generals. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied being behind the attack.

→ If Israel was responsible, it would be the latest in a long line of attacks against Iranian targets.

## 1979 was a pivotal year

While Iran was ruled by the pahlavi dynasty for more than a half century, Iranian-Israeli bilateral relations were far from hostile. Iran was one of the first Muslim countries to recognize the new state of Israel.

## The killing of US troops in Jordan Raises specter of a wider war in the Middle East

• Palestinians saw that recognition as a tacit international

acceptance of what they call the **Nakba** or catastrophe - the forced dispossession of more than 700,000 Palestinians when Israel was created in 1948.

- For its part, Israel was quick to establish ties with non-Arab states, including military and security cooperation with Iran.

- Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, though, sent relations between the two nations in a tailspin. Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was ousted, and the new Supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, pursued a policy of standing up to "arrogant" world powers. During his regime, the United States became known in Iran as the "Great Satan," and Israel as the "**Little Satan**."

- Even so, limited cooperation between Israel and Iran continued into the 1980s. But later a hostile rivalry emerged as Iran built up and funded proxy militias and other groups in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. A shadow war between Iran and Israel grew over the years.

## **Iran's Nuclear Program is a main Target**

Iran's nuclear program - which it has always insisted is entirely peaceful - has been a primary focus of Israeli attacks. Tehran believes Israel and US introduced Stuxnet Computer Virus in the early 2000s to target the centrifuges

enriching uranium for Iran's nuclear program.

- A series of sabotage attacks continued into **2020s**, as Israel sought to damage Iranian nuclear facilities. Nuclear scientists were also targeted. President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement in 2018 was seen as a blow to Tehran and a victory for Israel.

## Iranian Commandos Seize an Israeli-Linked Container Ship Near Strait of Hormuz

- Iran continues to insist that its program is 100% peaceful, although certain incidents, such as an unexplained discovery of Uranium particles at sites Iran never disclosed to the United Nations nuclear watchdog agency, trouble critics who doubt Iran's motives.

- With Iran firmly under the control of Islamist-hard liners, and conservatives leading Israel, there seems little likelihood of return to cordial Iranian-Israeli relations anytime soon.

## ↳ War by Proxy

Iran has long backed armed groups around the region that target Israel as well as the US military. The main aim is **Hezbollah in Lebanon**, formed in 1980s to fight the Israeli occupation in Southern Lebanon. Hezbollah has been firing rockets into northern Israel since the Gaza war began in October.

Iran also supports Hamas, the armed Palestinian group that led the October 7 attack on Southern Israel that triggered the current war, which Gaza health authorities say has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, over past 6 months.

## Biden Says Iran could Soon Attack Israel, and Warns, Don't

- Iran also has provided support to **Houthi rebels in Yemen**, who have fired ballistic missiles at the Israeli resort town Eilat on the Red Sea, and attacked shipping vessels - attacks which the Houthi rebels say are in support of Hamas.
- Iran supports the Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad and Israel says Tehran uses Syrian territory to ship missiles and other weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel has carried out numerous airstrikes in Syria to halt that flow of weapons, and said the Iranian general killed in the consulate strike was a key figure in that logistical chain.
- Now, however, American and Israeli officials are warning of the risk of a direct attack by Iran against Israel. Iran's supreme leader, **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**, has said the April 1 attack on the consulate building in Damascus, for which Iran blames Israel, was tantamount to an attack on Iranian territory. He has threatened that Israel "must be punished and shall be."

- Israel has said that an attack from Iranian soil would be met with a direct response against Iran. That could trigger a major regional war.

- US officials say that they have sent messages to allies with closer ties to Tehran to urge Iran to exercise restraint. The US officials noted that the US has also relayed the same message directly to Iranian officials.