

40 years of Iranian threats against Israel and few pay any attention



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Last month a conference in Warsaw brought together high ranking officials from 60 countries, called to discuss the current chaos in the Middle East, and to zero in on the threat posed to the region by the regime in Tehran.

This year, as Iran observes the 40th year of its revolution, its geostrategic objectives remain unchanged. But one other constant that has been in place since the fateful day that a triumphant Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini left France for Tehran is Iran's incessant call for the elimination of Israel.

It didn't take long for the regime in Tehran to send its message on this subject. I was involved in efforts in 1979 and 1980 to save the lives of Iranian Jewish leaders Habib Elghanian and Albert Danielpour, both of whom were summarily executed because of contact with Israel and Israelis. Among the charges against Elghanian was "friendship with the enemies of God;" against Danielpour it was working to form "the Zionist government in Israel."

Over these four decades, hardly a day has passed without threats against Israel. The level of vitriol has remained essentially the same over this period, spouted by religious and military leaders at the highest level.

There was former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's "As the Imam said, 'Israel must be wiped off the map,'" delivered in a speech to a "World Without Zionism" conference in 2005.

This past June, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called Israel a "cancerous tumor," which "must be eradicated," a favorite theme he has used for years. In August Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, in remarks at an Al-Quds Day rally, organized each year as an anti-Israel-fest, said that "the life of the Zionist regime was never in danger as it is now."

Mohsen Rezaee, who formerly led Iran's Revolutionary Guard threatened last

February that Iran would “level Tel Aviv” if Israel attacked Iran. And just a few weeks ago, another Revolutionary Guard commander, Brig. Gen. Yadollah Javani, announced that “we will raze Tel Aviv and Haifa” should the United States attack.

Underscoring its verbal threats, Iran always makes sure to mark the sides of the missiles it tests with the threat “Israel Must Be Wiped Out.”

Iran’s demonization of Israel extends to Jews generally. For years the Iranian regime has sponsored a cartoon contest focused on Holocaust denial. A 2016 winning entry depicted an old-style cash register topped by the gates and tower of a concentration camp. The register drawer, with the words “Shoah Business” on the outside, was filled with cash, with the number 6,000,000 showing just above the drawer. The key to the register, fashioned into a Star of David, contained the words “B’nai B’rith.”

When the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev famously announced that “we will bury you,” at a 1956 gathering of Western ambassadors at the Polish embassy in Moscow, we took him seriously. To us, the Cold War was very much about Soviet nuclear capability and its desire to bring the West down. The West mobilized all its resources to meet the threat, led by NATO and a consensus among the world’s democracies that the Soviet threat must be met.

Today, Israel is the only country to be incessantly threatened with annihilation. There are numerous border disputes in the world between neighbors, and trade wars which flare up and die down. But where in the world, except for Israel, is any country’s major cities threatened with being razed, or its very existence called a “cancerous tumor?”

Some years ago, there was an attempt by leading Western legal figures to bring Iran to the International Court of Justice on the basis of the militant language against Israel, asserting its threats constituted “incitement to genocide.” That effort, which seemed to have stalled, should certainly be reignited.

In his State of the Union speech this year, President Donald J. Trump called out Iran when he said “We will not avert our eyes from a regime that chants ‘Death to America’ and threatens genocide against the Jewish people.” U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley regularly castigated Iran on its threats to Israel.

Yet in the rest of what we used to call the civilized world, most seem not fazed in

the least by Iran's genocidal language. Some dismiss it as rhetoric for home consumption, and some just see it as Iranian bullying-as-usual, or as just "Israel's problem."

The United Nations Humans Rights Council will open its new session next week, and the question of the Iranian threats will not be on the agenda. Countries will simply look away, as many did three generations ago when similar language directed then at Jewish communities in Europe went unanswered. Not completely analogous, but close enough to cause us very deep concern.

Can it be that there are no leaders in the international community worthy of the name who will stand behind Israel? Will Israel have to continue to face these existential threats virtually alone?

Those who continue to swear by Iran's compliance with the JCPOA (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal) are whistling past the graveyard. The list of concerns about Iran is well known: the support for terrorism, the military build-up in Syria, the rockets shipped to Hezbollah, the theft of Lebanon's sovereignty and the extension of malign influence in Iraq and Yemen.

The Iranian call for the elimination of Israel never seems to make that list. After all that history teaches us, what a verdict that is on the notion of decency and scruples in the international community.

The Warsaw gathering is an important development in the campaign to develop a consensus on the threat to the region, and beyond, from the Iranian regime. The genocidal talk emanating from Tehran should be placed high up on the agenda when these countries meet again. In the meantime, those who continue to cling to the JCPOA at the expense of all else should be ashamed of their indifference to Israel's continually being on the receiving end of such hatred.

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