

## Iran's al Qaeda

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If the Revolutionary Guards aren't terrorists, who is?

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On the morning of July 18, 1994, a suicide bomber drove a van into the seven-story Jewish cultural center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, murdering 85 people and seriously injuring 151 others. Last November, Argentine Judge Rodolfo Canicoba Corral issued international arrest warrants for eight men--seven Iranians and one Lebanese--wanted in connection to the bombing. Among them are former Iranian President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, former Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, and three other men with one important point in common: All were, or are, senior officers in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

That's something both Democratic politicians and Bush administration policy makers might consider in their respective internal debates over whether the IRGC should officially be designated as a foreign terrorist organization. For the administration, which has been mulling the issue since at least August, a terrorist designation for the IRGC is one further way to penalize Iran unilaterally as efforts to obtain a third round of international sanctions stall at the U.N. Security Council. But the Russians, Chinese and some of the Europeans are said to fiercely oppose the move, in part because much of their business in Iran runs through IRGC-controlled enterprises.

As for the Democrats, fully half their Senate conference--including Hillary Clinton--voted last month in favor of a symbolic amendment to designate the IRGC a terrorist group, albeit after the original text had been stripped of its prescription to "combat, contain and roll back the violent activities and destabilizing influence" of Iran and its proxies in Iraq. Sen. Clinton defended her vote as a way "to put some teeth into all this talk about dealing with Iran." But the rest of the Democratic presidential field took exception, with John Edwards insisting that "we cannot give this president an inch, not an inch."

There certainly is plenty to say about what consequences might flow from an adverse finding of fact about the IRGC. But there is also the matter of the facts themselves. Following the '94 bombing--which came just two years after the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires had been bombed, killing 22--the Clinton administration wasted little time fingering what it then believed was the likeliest suspect. "I am very distressed that some of our allies . . . do not recognize the full responsibility of Iran for Hezbollah attacks around the world," said then Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

It also became quickly apparent that the two attacks had been coordinated through Iran's embassy in Argentina. In 1998 an Iranian defector to the U.S. named Ahmad Rezai confirmed that "the attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires was planned in Tehran." He added that the decision to attack had been made by Mr. Rafsanjani and his top deputies (reportedly at an Aug. 14, 1993 meeting in the Iranian city of Mashad), and that the bombers had been trained for the mission in Lebanon by IRGC officers.

Mr. Rezai was uniquely positioned to know the facts: His father, Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezai, was the commander of the IRGC at the time, and the younger Rezai had accompanied his father to Lebanon to witness the training. Ahmad Rezai has since reportedly returned to Iran, though whether he did so voluntarily or under duress isn't clear. As for Mohsen Rezai, he is among the eight whose arrest is sought by Judge Corral in connection to the 1994 attack.

The second IRGC officer involved in the 1994 attack is Ahmad Reza Asghari (a k a Moshen Randjbaran, and not to be confused with Ali Reza Asghari, a former IRGC commander who either defected or was kidnapped by a foreign intelligence service from Turkey last year). According to the definitive Argentine report on the bombing, Mr. Asghari--officially the third secretary of the Iranian embassy until his abrupt departure from Argentina on July 1--was present at the Aug. 14, 1993 meeting with Mr. Rafsanjani. Mr. Asghari is described in the report on the bombing as the man "responsible for activating the clandestine networks of Iranians in Argentina."

Then there is Ahmad Vahidi, who helped oversee the operation from Tehran. According to Iran analyst Alireza Jafarzadeh, Mr. Vahidi founded the IRGC's "Lebanon Corps" in the 1980s, meaning he is responsible for the attack on the U.S. Marine barracks that left 241 American servicemen dead. He was later appointed the first commander of the IRGC's Qods (Jerusalem) Force, with oversight of "extraterritorial operations," including in Europe and South America. In 2003, the Washington Post reported that "Bin Laden's second-in-command, Ayman Zawahiri, used his decade-old relationship with Mr. Vahidi, then commander of the Jerusalem Force, to negotiate a safe harbor for some of al Qaeda's leaders who were trapped in the mountains of Tora Bora, Afghanistan, in 2001, according to a European intelligence official."

Today, Mr. Vahidi is Iran's deputy defense minister. The elder Mr. Rezai made a run for president in 2005, but dropped out at the last minute to make way for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Until earlier this year he was secretary of Iran's powerful Expediency Council. Mr. Asghari's whereabouts are less clear, though his name surfaced as a delegate to a 2002 U.N. conference in Geneva, where he was listed as the Iranian foreign ministry's first secretary in the department for international economic affairs.

That, then, is how the Islamic Republic treats its terrorist all-stars. As for the Argentines, after nearly a dozen years of botched investigations tainted by allegations of high-level corruption, President Néstor Kirchner bucked Iranian threats and denounced Tehran last month before the U.N. General Assembly. His courage on this front is all the more remarkable given that he's better known as one of Hugo Chávez's more reliable allies in South America. Which leaves the United States. No doubt the State Department has its reasons to demur at a terrorist designation, just as Mr. Edwards has his reasons to attack the president, and Mrs. Clinton, at every turn. But in the matter of the IRGC, the truth deserves at least an inch, whatever the consequences. It's the sort of point only a politician--or maybe a diplomat--could fail to see.

Mr. Stephens is a member of The Wall Street Journal's editorial board. His column appears in the Journal Tuesdays.

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