

## Who Would Iran Pay to Confront Israel?

JOHN HUDSON 4,437 Views FEB 3, 2012

Today, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei pledged to support any group that confronts the "cancer" Israel, in an address broadcast on state TV. "From now on, in any place, if any nation or any group confronts the Zionist regime, we will endorse and we will help," he said. "We have no fear expressing this." The speech comes following news that Defense Secretary Leon Pannetta believes Israel could strike Iran in the next few months. So what sort of groups might be on Ali Khamenei's rolodex to "confront" Israel? To get a sense, we pinged a handful of foreign policy think-tanks here in Washington. Here's what they said:

**Al Qaeda** The idea of the embattled terrorist network teaming up with Iran is a hot topic in foreign policy circles these days, especially following the publication of Seth Jones's article on the subject in *Foreign Affairs* last week. Iran recently gave new freedoms to a handful of top Al Qaeda operatives who were detained in 2003, according to U.S. officials. Both the Brookings Institution's Kenneth Pollack and CATO's Justin Logan mentioned the group in phone calls with The Atlantic Wire today. While Logan said other groups outside of Al Qaeda constituted a more significant threat, he did fear a "near-term shooting war" with Israel. Pollack said "I think this is mostly rhetoric—they already are helping every group that hates Israel." According to reports, the new freedoms were given to "Al Qaeda's so-called management council, a group that includes members of the inner circle that advised Osama bin Laden and an explosives expert widely considered a candidate for a top post in the organization."

**Palestinian Islamic Jihad** This small Palestinian militant group was cited as a potential recipient of Iranian funds. It's been labeled a terrorist group by the U.S., European Union, Israel, and a range of other countries, and it supports the destruction of the Jewish state. In the picture to the right, Islamic Jihad militants are taking part in a funeral for fallen comrades in southern Gaza Strip. The group has claimed responsibility for a range of suicide bombings and killings, which have been catalogued here.

**Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command** More than 30 countries consider this Palestinian nationalist organization a terrorist organization, which is backed by

Syria and Iran, and is lead by Ahmed Jibril, pictured to the right. The group has been accused of involvement in the 1988 Lockerbie bombing of Pan Am flight 103, in which 270 were killed. Jibril has denied his group was linked to the bombing.

**Hamas** The Islamic political party that governs the Gaza strip is a commonly-cited recipient of Iranian support. The U.S. and a number of other Western countries consider it a terrorist group while countries such as Russia and Turkey do not. In the picture to the right taken in December, "members of Hamas' security forces march in formation during a graduation ceremony for new recruits in Gaza."

**Hezbollah** The Shia Muslim militant and political group based in Lebanon often gets backing from both Iran and Syria. To varying degrees, Western nations such as the U.S., the U.K. and Canada classify it as a terrorist organization. It's led by Hassan Nasrallah, pictured to the right. Though it began as a small militia movement, it expanded into a political force that holds seats in the Lebanese government.

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