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## IRAN-US RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THEIR SPECIAL SERVICES

VASIL GHLONTI

# 214

EXPERT OPINION





საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი  
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## **EXPERT OPINION**

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## **Introduction**

The dynamics of Iran-US relations in the last decade show that there are many ongoing challenges between them. What does Iran want and what is its attitude towards the USA? The political elite of Iran considers the USA to be its number one foreign threat, and seeks to expel it from the Middle East region in its entirety, and in this process, actively using the capabilities of its special services. Meanwhile, the USA considers Iran one of the main financiers of world terrorism and one of the main opponents to its state interests. The American goal is thus to neutralize the terrorist threat coming from Iran and to weaken it both in the region and abroad, and here also the American special services are actively involved. Against this background, there is both a secret and open war between Iran and the US special services, which has been gaining more and more scope in recent years. The purpose of our present work is to discuss and analyze the relations between the Iranian and US special services, and their role in the current political processes happening in the Middle East.

## **The Middle East**

Due to the fact that during the last decade, Iran's special services and related financial organizations have been operating around the world, and are seen to be engaged in the promotion of terrorism, the export of weapons, participation in illegal drug business, the illegal export of oil, money laundering, and various financial machinations, they, along with the Institute of Ayatollahs, have become a global problem and threat to the US and its allies. And as both Iran and the US regard the Middle East as an object of special interest and a sphere of influence, this most important region of the world has become the epicenter of the conflict between the special services and military of the two countries. While the Iranian government, in order to strengthen its positions, carries out political-economic, military, religious, and ideological expansion in the Middle East, the interests of Iran and the US clash there, including in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Politically, for partially isolated Iran, which is under international sanctions, having access to the Mediterranean Sea with the help of Syria and Lebanon is of strategic importance, since oil (Navvar Saban, 2023), weapons and drugs (Baria Alamuddin, 2021) can thus be taken to different countries

through their ports. Their smuggling is overseen by Iran's special services, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which is under international sanctions for its terrorist activities in many countries around the world. The fact that the representatives of the Bashar Assad regime of Syria, the Syrian Shiite militia, and the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah are actively involved in the international export of contraband goods leads us to believe that we are dealing with an organized, international criminal syndicate, whose area of activity has gone beyond the Middle East region and likely operates worldwide.

The drug manufacturing factories affiliated with the Iranian special services and Hezbollah that are operating (voanews.com, 2023) in Syria, under the auspices of the local authorities, further corroborates this assumption. The Iranian special services, under the leadership of the special unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Al-Quds, are actively recruiting local Shiite Muslims in order to further use them for their own interests, including against the USA and Israel. At the next stage, they are enrolled in Shiite proxy groups, trained, and involved in combat operations according to their interests (Joby Warrick and Evan Hill, 2023). In parallel, mini-factories in Iranian military cities in Syria are manufacturing various types of weapons, including drones, missiles, and ammunition (Timesofisrael.com 2022). According to the Israeli special services, there are numerous Iranian military bases and intelligence centers operating in Syria (Ahmad Majidiyar, 2018) (Mohammed Hassan, Samer al-Ahmed, 2022).

At first, the successful operation of Iran's special services relied on General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the elite unit of the Guards Corps, Al-Quds, who established a huge network of agents and military infrastructure under the influence of Tehran throughout the Middle East. Some say it was precisely after General Qasem Soleimani's visit to Moscow that the Russian leadership decided to actively participate in the ongoing civil war in Syria and sent its own military (Laila Bassam, Tom Perry, 2015). It is a fact that the Iranian intelligence officer, with the joint support of Iran and Russia, played a big role in the Assad regime's maintaining power and winning the civil war, which resulted in the serious dissatisfaction and irritation of the US and its ally Israel.

Moreover, as Iraq, populated by Shiite Muslims and rich in energy resources, was of strategic importance to Iran, Qasem Soleimani became very active in that country and gained great influence over its Shiite

government. Such terrorist organizations as Kataib Hezbollah, Al-Hashd Al-Sham and others owe their strengthening to his efforts. As Soleimani's actions led to the weakening of the US positions in Iraq and Syria, the issue of assassinating him was put on the agenda in Washington. Moreover, the significantly strengthened pro-Iranian proxy groups and terrorist organizations operating in Iraq had already attacked US military bases and even the US embassy in Baghdad, which the American government and its special services accused General Qasem Soleimani of organizing and carrying out (Sheena McKenzie, 2019). In order to stop the political-economic, religious, and ideological expansion of Iran in the Middle East and so as to weaken the activity of their special services, the Pentagon and the US special services assassinated General Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad on January 3, 2020 (Yaron Steinbuch, 2020).

Donald Trump, in October 2023 raising this topic again and confirming the participation of the Israelis only in the preparatory stage of this special operation, while denying their participation at the moment of Soleimani's assassination, suggests that, in light of the tensions in Palestine, a certain part of the US political establishment is trying to insulate Israel from the topic of the killing of Qasem Soleimani and to shoulder the entire blame itself, so as not to antagonize the Iranians, who are unhappy about the killing of Qasem Soleimani, to look to Israel. The American side is likely trying to prevent Iran from opening additional front lines in Lebanon and Syria and thus further expanding the conflict. It is worth noting here that the representatives of the US special services and those military circles who directly participated in the planning and implementation of this special operation do not completely agree with Trump and, unlike him, completely deny the participation of Israel (Courtney Kube and Katherine Doyle, 2023). The fact that high-ranking officials of the Israeli special services have confirmed their participation in the special operation (Anna Ahronheim, 2021) suggests that, despite the strategic partnership, on this matter there is some disagreement between the political elites of the US and Israel.

As following the death of General Soleimani, his replacement, Esmail Khan, did not have much influence on the Iraqi government or Shiite proxy groups, the Iranian special services have changed their tactics in Iraq and instead of using large groups, they have focused on using relatively small mobile and at the same time reliable teams (John Davison and Ahmed

Rasheed, 2021). Although pro-Iranian proxies continue to carry out attacks on American bases (Phil Stewart, Idrees Ali and Ahmed Rasheed, 2023), with the elimination of Qasem Soleimani, the US achieved its goal, and Iran's positions in Iraq and Syria were noticeably weakened. However, to say that the terrorist threat from Iran has finally been neutralized would be untrue. The kidnapping/arrest of Russian-Israeli citizen Elizabeth Tsurkov in Iraq by Kataib Hezbollah, the Iraqi branch of the Lebanese Hezbollah, under the control of Iran's Guard Corps (Lahav Tsurkov, 2023), shows that the Iranian special services and the Shiite organizations under their influence have taken control over the movement of Israeli citizens in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. The attention of the Iranian special services was likely attracted to Tsurkova due to her work on a doctoral degree at Princeton University in the US, and her collaboration with a research institute focused on security/terrorism issues (New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy), areas which included the study of the activities of jihadist and terrorist organizations in the Middle East. The fact that Tsurkova "admitted" (alrabiaa.tv, 2023) to working for the US and Israeli special services in a video broadcast on Iraqi television suggests that she was most likely psychologically and physically influenced by the Iranian special services and Kataib Hezbollah. This means that Iran's special services, and pro-Iranian groups under their influence, still have enough resources to carry out terrorist activities. This was confirmed in October when pro-Iranian proxy groups operating in Iraq and Syria under the control of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps several times attacked the US military stationed on bases there (Carla Babb, 2023). Successful retaliatory actions by the US military (Idrees Ali and Phil Stewart, 2023) show that the US has considerable military capabilities in the region. It is expected that the Pentagon will further strengthen its military units and bases in the Middle East, a trend that has already been observed (Phil Stewart, 2023).

As Iran, like Syria and Iraq, has made huge investments in the economy, energy, military, and health sectors of Lebanon, it also has a strong position there. In order to further increase its influence, the Iranian regime, with the help of its special services, is also exporting the ideas of the Islamic revolution in both countries. As a result of its military and financial support, the terrorist organization Hezbollah has become a paramilitary political party serving Tehran's interests in the Middle East, whose area of activity has gone beyond Lebanon and reaches Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and even Palestine. Most likely, Iran's goal, with the help of Hezbollah, is to

turn Lebanon, especially its southern part populated by Shiite Arabs, into its own outpost, and thus to be able to control the Mediterranean coast and ports. Fighters of this paramilitary party are supplied from Iranian military bases in Syria using Syrian Mediterranean ports. At the same time, under the supervision of the Iranian special services, missile and drone manufacturing factories and airfields are being built on the territory of Lebanon. It is conceivable that Iran intends to create a Shiite strip of Syria-Iraq-Lebanon-Iran, a fact of concern to both the US and Israel.

Most likely, it was this activity, alongside the Iranian special services' presence in the Middle East, that encouraged the US to build a huge new embassy in Lebanon (Nadeen Ebrahim, 2023), where the powerful intelligence center of the American special services, the CIA, will be located (Intelligenceonline.com, 2023). The American side will thus seek to strengthen coordination with the Lebanese special services and push them to help obtain intelligence information about Iran's special services, Hezbollah and, at the same time, Sunni radical groups. Given that the US traditionally provides a lot of assistance to the Lebanese armed forces (Kareem Chehayeb, 2023), it is highly probable that it will cooperate precisely with the special military services of these forces. Against this background, the proposal of the Republicans in the US Congress to help the Lebanese army (Intelligenceonline.com, 2023), proves that American politicians intend to increase the influence of the US in Lebanon. At the same time, the US has offered Israel joint military planning of actions against Iran (Barak Ravid, 2023). Israel will likely look to this undoubtedly promising and positive proposal with interest, but at the same time with caution, because if it agrees, it will have to share its plans with the Americans, something that will be difficult for the Jewish state to accept, seeing as Israelis traditionally avoid others being able to look into their affairs.

In light of this, the fact that the fighters of the terrorist organizations, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad, are based in Lebanon together with Hezbollah, supports the opinion that the Iranian special services are trying to use Palestinian fighters, who have undergone military and terrorist training with their help, against the USA and Israel. On March 28, 2023, the spokesman of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, General Ramezan Sharif, advised Palestinians to take advantage of the ongoing large-scale anti-government protest



movement in Israel, and publicly called for the destabilization of Israel (Iranintl.com 2023). According to available information, Iran and its ally Hezbollah also have intelligence centers in Syria and Lebanon (Iran International Newsroom. 2023), one of the likely tasks of which is to obtain information about the US and Israeli military forces and special services. In particular, according to Israeli military circles and special services, the Iran-Hezbollah intelligence center operates in Lebanon, providing intelligence information obtained about the Israeli military forces to the terrorist organization Hamas operating in Palestine (Jonathan Schanzer, 2022).

In this regard, in August, the capture/neutralization of the intelligence-terrorist network by the Israeli counter-intelligence Shin Bet, acting on the orders of the Iranian special services, which included Palestinians, and whose purpose it was to carry out terrorist attacks on the Minister of Security of Israel, Itamar Ben Gvir, and other high-ranking officials, shows that Iran is seeking to activate its operations in the territory of Israel (Yoav Zitun, Lior El-Hai, 2023). According to the Israeli security service Shabak, in recent years, Iran has greatly increased its financing of Hamas in Judea and Samaria, in order to allow it to carry out terrorist attacks on Israel (Newsru.co.il, 2023). These circumstances lead us to think that Iran hopes to further complicate and worsen the difficult internal political situation in Israel with the help of the Palestinians. The probable Iranian goal here is to limit Israel's time and opportunities for activity abroad. This will make it significantly easier for them to protect their interests in Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and other countries. As such, it is possible that Iran is behind the events that took place in Israel on October 7, when members of Hamas carried out a series of terrorist attacks on Israeli cities (Gadi Zaid, Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, 2023). This opinion is actually confirmed by Ghazi Hamad, the Press Speaker of Hamas, who openly talks about the assistance provided by Iran in an interview given to the BBC (Paul Kirby, 2023).

Given that the terrorist attack by Hamas was so well organized and unexpected, the level of preparedness and awareness of the Israeli special services should be assessed as unsatisfactory, more so in light of the fact that the American special services warned their Israeli colleagues several times, shortly before the attack, about unusual activity among the Hamas members (Katie Bo Lillis, Zachary Cohen, Alex Marquardt and Natasha Bertrand, 2023). In addition, it is possible that a large amount of the intelligence information kept in the buildings and institutions of the Israeli

security, police and border troops of the border towns, somehow found its way into the hands of Palestinian terrorists. The level of organization of this large-scale terrorist attack, and the degree to which the terrorists were informed, leads us to believe that the high-class special services of a powerful country are behind this event, and not simple terrorist organizations.

According to the Wall Street Journal, a week before the attack on Israel, some 600 fighters of the Palestinian organizations, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, underwent military training in Iran, under the direct leadership of Al-Quds, a special unit of the Islamic Guards Corps (Summer Said, Dov Lieber, Benoit Faucon, 2023), which makes the role of Iran in this terrorist attack even more significant. The fact that the drills were led directly by General Esmail Khan shows that the Iranian side attached great importance to them. An interesting circumstance for us is the terrorist-sabotage style and other specific characteristics the Palestinians used during the aforementioned terrorist/military attack, which are very similar to the handwriting of the Iranian special services - for example, the use of drones and motorcycles. Given this, it is worth emphasizing the fact that prior to this, neither Hamas nor Islamic Jihad were able to carry out special operations and terrorist attacks at such a high level. Now, we can judge they have a much higher level than ordinary terrorist organizations in terms of their organization and quality of "performance," and they show characteristics of state power structures, in which Iran's Guard Corps plays a huge role.

A few days before these happenings, hackers connected to the special services of Iran published "compromising" photos of the former Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak, and other Israeli politicians in opposition to the current government, Benny Gantz and Ehud Olmert, on social media, photos allegedly stolen from the office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Stav Namer/Maariv, 2023). Presumably, the goal of the Iranian special services was to further increase the internal conflict among the Israeli political elite. The fact that the leaders of the US, Germany, and other countries only indirectly blame Iran for the Hamas attack (Reuters, 2023) and do not have accurate intelligence information confirming and exposing Iran's direct involvement (news.sky.com, 2023), raises many questions. It is possible that both the USA and Germany, by refraining from directly accusing Iran, are trying to avoid escalation of the conflict so as to prevent a possible war from breaking out between Iran and Israel, as in that

case they will be forced to engage in large-scale military operations on the side of Israel. The fact that the US has already voiced proposals regarding the provision of military aid and intelligence to Israel (Oren Liebermann and Alex Marquardt, 2023) shows that the American side will definitely be involved in this conflict in some form, however, the prospect of a direct war with Iran is less than ideal for the country. Therefore, the American side will likely try to find alternative, peaceful ways to resolve the conflict.

There is a high probability that there is a connection between the aid provided by the US to Israel and the attacks carried out by pro-Iranian proxy groups under the supervision of the Iranian Guardian Corps on the American military bases in Syria and Iraq in October, as discussed above. This is verified by the fact that the leaders of the pro-Iranian proxies, before the attack on the American military, warned the US authorities in advance that if the US helped Israel in the fight against the Palestinians, they would attack the US military (Reuters, 2023). In this regard, it is interesting to note the information disseminated throughout the Iranian media by the security services of the Ayatollahs' regime, according to which 5,000 American soldiers are helping the Israeli army in the ongoing hostilities in the Gaza Strip (tasnimnews, 2023), which the American side has not confirmed.

The fact that the ongoing peace talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia, in which the US was acting as a mediator, are now in jeopardy also speaks in favor of the belief that the Iranian side is behind the intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There was a plan to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries, which Saudi Arabia traditionally associated with the solution of the "Palestinian problem," yet, due to the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Saudi Arabia postponed the renewal of negotiations for an indefinite period (Aziz El Yaakoubi and Parisa Hafezi, 2023). Further, Iran and Saudi Arabia had agreed to restore diplomatic relations on March 10, 2023, through the mediation of China (Stephen Kalin and Summer Said, 2023). Most likely, Iran is trying to escape international sanctions and isolation and settle the existing conflicts with the Persian Gulf countries. The warming of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia shows that the Muslim countries of the Persian Gulf intend to strengthen their cooperation.

As this important region has long been considered a US sphere of influence, the attempt to change the existing geopolitical configuration through the

mediation of China was perceived as a serious threat in Washington. In an unplanned visit to Saudi Arabia on April 6, the head of the US Central Intelligence Agency, William Barnes, conveyed the displeasure of the American side about the intensification of contact with Iran and Syria to Prince Mohammad bin Salman. Despite the opposition from the US, the restoration of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia in early September 2023, and the subsequent exchange of ambassadors, can be considered a great success for Iran's foreign policy (voanews.com, 2023). In all likelihood, it was this success of Iranian diplomacy that led to William Barnes visiting Israel again on November 5 as part of his Middle Eastern tour. In addition, against the background of the complex processes going on in the Gaza Strip, the US is likely to provide even more assistance to Israel in the field of intelligence (Julian E. Barnes, 2023). Moreover, in Qatar, Barnes held a meeting with the Prime Minister and head of Mossad, David Barnea, during which he officially spoke about the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the need to release the hostages captured by Hamas. It is possible that during the meeting, the parties also discussed the issue of Iran as the main source of destabilization in the region (Reuters, 2023). It is conceivable that on November 11 of this year, after an interval of 45 years, the meeting between the President of Iran, Ibrahim Raisi, and the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, (alarabiya.net, 2023) was held precisely to balance and cover the recent activities of the American and Jewish sides. Although Iran unofficially played a large role in the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, Saudi Arabia is likely to continue the process of trying to improve relations with Iran.

It is also possible that Iran has tried to kill two birds with one stone by taking advantage of the incitement of the Palestinians against Israel to advance its interests in the direction of the South Caucasus as well. The significant Israeli assistance to Azerbaijan in the military and intelligence domain played a big role in Azerbaijan's victory in the Karabakh conflict, strengthening its position in the country bordering Iran, and meaning that Iran found itself in a rather difficult situation. Now, due to the complications of its conflict with the Palestinians, Israel is unable to continue to help Azerbaijan. It is also possible that a Russian touch will be found behind the Palestinian terrorist attack, as Israel's "excessive" activity in Azerbaijan and Ukraine did not meet the Kremlin's interests either.

## **Ukraine**

Where Ukraine chose a pro-Western foreign policy course, Iran took a pro-Russian orientation, particularly after the Russian invasion in February 2022, and began actively supporting the Kremlin in the war with its neighboring country. Due to the low quality of management and high corruption in the state system, Russia found itself lacking certain types of modern weaponry, including drones, and thus the Kremlin was forced to buy them from Iran. Although Iran continues to deny it supplied drones to Russia, it is a fact that the Iranian side supplied Russia with various modifications of drones through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The fact that Russia and Iran have agreed to build an Iranian drone factory in Elabuga, Republic of Tatarstan (Dion Nissenbaum and Warren P. Strobel, 2023), and Iranian military instructors and special service personnel are assisting the Russian military on the territory of Ukraine and Russia to master the use of drones, suggests that Iran and its special services have far-reaching plans for the countries of the post-Soviet space. Indeed, it is likely that Iran will further increase the scale of its military cooperation with Russia. Based on the strategic partnership between the US and Ukraine, doing so will precipitate a negative reaction from the American government. The actions of the Iranians thus far have been followed by the imposition of sanctions on the Iranian special services by the US. The scrupulously accurate list of representatives of the Iranian special services included in the US sanctions list shows that the CIA and the FBI are very well informed about the activities of the Iranian special services in the territory of Ukraine, and monitor their activities as much as possible both in Iran and abroad. In light of this, the US ban on the sale of high-tech microchips to Iran, China, and Russia (Alexandra Alper, Karen Freifeld and Stephen Nellis, 2023) confirms that Washington is trying to weaken the military potential of these three countries.

## **The USA**

Over the last decade, an analysis of the activities of Iran's special services shows that, under the leadership of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, they are active on all continents of the world. When the theocratic regime of Iran recognized the USA as its main strategic enemy, its special services started to create intelligence networks on US territory. And when the Americans caused even further damage to the Iranian intelligence

system by assassinating the commander of the elite unit of the Guards Corps, General Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian special services, in turn, attempted to eliminate the former head of the US Central Intelligence Agency, Mike Pompeo, and ex-President Donald Trump's adviser in security affairs, Michael Bolton. Both attempts were unsuccessful due to the timely intervention of the American special services. According to the American mass media, the terrorist attempts on the lives of Bolton and Pompeo were overseen by high-ranking officers of Iran's Guardian Corps, Shahram Fursavi and Mohammad Reza Ansari (Jennifer Hansler, 2023). Most likely, the choice of the Iranian side was determined by the fact that both Pompeo and Bolton are considered the instigators behind Soleimani's assassination and were directly involved in the special operation (Nicole Gaouette and Jamie Gangel, 2020).

## **Europe**

With the special services of Iran and the USA already confronting each other on a global scale, a front line of the secret war between them has been opened in Albania. On September 9, 2022, a group of Iranian hackers linked to the intelligence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran attacked and severely damaged Albania's critical digital infrastructure (Talha Ozturk, 2022). On September 10, 2022, the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, announced that hackers under the supervision of Iran's special services had carried out another cyber attack on the common information management system of Albania. It is probable that the large-scale cyber-special operation of the Iranian special services came due to the head office of the Iranian opposition party "Mojahideen of the Iranian People" being located on the territory of Albania, in the city of Manez in the Durres region. Their party conference (according to other sources the "World Summit of Free Iran") was scheduled for a few days after the Iranian special services conducted the cyber attack. The aforementioned event failed due to the threat of a repeat attack. The Albanian government immediately severed diplomatic relations with Iran and expelled Iranian diplomats from the country.

In all likelihood, the cyber-attack carried out by Iran's special services was a clear message to the US that it would not be a problem for the Iranian side to harm America's allies. The American side expressed great concern regarding the incident, as about 3,000 Iranian oppositionists had

been settled in the coastal city of Albania since 2013, precisely with the help of American funding and the United Nations initiative. The fact that in September 2022, the US sent a special group of American specialists to Albania to ensure the cyber security of its ally (Jeff Seldin, 2023), shows that the American side attaches great importance to its strategic cooperation with Albania and Albania's security. This assumption is further corroborated by the fact that the US government imposed sanctions on the Ministry of Information/Security of Iran for its cyber attack on Albania (Fatima Hussein, Frank Bajak, 2022). Interestingly, the Iranian side also imposed reciprocal sanctions on high-ranking American officials (Iranintl.com, 2022).

Against this background, on June 20, 2023, the Albanian police raided the camp of the opposition party "Mujahideen of the Iranian People" in Camp Ashraf, under the pretext of searching for cyber-criminals, during which several people were injured. The reaction of the US, which met the raid of the Albanian forces against the Iranian oppositionists with understanding and calm, suggests that the Iranian party no longer enjoys the support of the American side it once had (iranintl.com, 2023). Given that the activity of the aforementioned Iranian opposition party in the territory of Albania was also criticized by Prime Minister Edi Rama and that it was advised to leave the country for continued confrontation with the policy of Iran (albaniaandailynews, 2023), we can assume there is a concerted action between the US and the Albanian authorities. It is perfectly conceivable that the Albanian government does not want its state to become a training ground for confrontation between the Iranian government and the "Mujahideen of the Iranian People" party.

## **Conclusion**

1. After reviewing the relations between the special services of the US and Iran and analyzing the conflict between them, we have come to the conclusion that their special services and military circles play a huge role in the ongoing processes between the two countries. Based on the fact that Iran is carrying out political, economic, and religious expansion in various regions of the world, including in the Middle East and the South Caucasus, with the help of its own special services, it can be said that they are the main supporting force of the Ayatollahs' regime and the main tool in carrying out its interests outside the country. The fact

that Iranian special services and military circles are providing military support to anti-American Shia paramilitary terrorist organizations operating in the Middle East is a concern for the US and its allies, forcing their special services and military to take preventive measures against the Iranians for the purpose of self-defense, as well as to carry out retaliatory actions. As Iran has established intelligence centers and military cities in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria in recent years, in response, the US and its ally Israel, are stepping up their intelligence, counter-intelligence, and counter-terrorism activities in the region. Despite the fact that since the US special services and the Pentagon eliminated General Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Al-Quds, the elite unit of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Guards Corps, the influence of Iran and the positions of its special services in the Middle East have weakened significantly, the Iranian side still maintains considerable influence and operational resources in the region – enough, indeed, to create serious problems for the US and its ally Israel. This assumption is confirmed by the current complex situation in Israel, namely, the Palestinian terrorist organizations Hamas, Islamic Jihad and others, incited, trained, and armed by Iran, conducting a large-scale terrorist attack on Israel, which may yet turn into a full-scale war. Considering that the US always meticulously fulfills its commitment to the alliance, the assistance to Israel is expected to be timely and effective. In addition, the US will help Israel with intelligence information and arms. It is conceivable that Washington will simultaneously try to calm and neutralize the aforementioned conflict, because a full-scale war, in which Iran and its Lebanese ally, the terrorist organization Hezbollah, may also be involved, does not at this stage meet US interests.

2. There is a high probability that the USA decided to build its largest embassy in the Middle East, in Lebanon, precisely because of the active engagement of Iran's special services in recent years. There, it plans to set up a huge intelligence center, and it is expected that US special services will cooperate closely with the Lebanese special services.
3. Taking into account that the Iranian special services have become active on the territory of the USA and are even trying to eliminate US politicians and high-ranking officials, it is likely that the American FBI and CIA will further strengthen their intelligence, counter-intelligence, and anti-terrorist activities vis-à-vis Iran.



4. The activation of Iran's special services in Albania shows that they are trying to influence the authorities of this Islamic country in Europe, thus creating problems for the USA. The Iranian side may well try to strengthen its position in Albania, which has a strategic geopolitical location. Moreover, the process of recruiting Albanian students to Iranian universities and other educational institutions has been going on for a long time, which allows Iran to have a pro-Iranian operational resource and, if necessary, to use it according to its interests.

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