

# Iranian Mischief Persists Despite Coronavirus Pandemic



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By Julie Lenarz

The coronavirus pandemic has turned lives upside down, and with entire countries on lockdown it is easy to forget the world beyond one's borders.

But while we are stuck in loops of endless Zoom sessions and conference calls, conflict and violence continue unabated in many parts of the world.

Hostile states and militia groups are still pursuing their nefarious activities. This is no time to let down our guard.

Pressing global challenges – from Islamist terrorism to antisemitism to other ideologies of hate – are as relevant today as they were before the virus struck.

For evidence, look no further than Israel.

The country is **fighting** at the frontline at the frontline of the pandemic in partnership with the US, European allies, and other friendly nations.

We have heard encouraging stories of **productive cooperation** between Israeli and the Palestinian Authority. We have also **seen** heart-warming images of a Jewish and Muslim paramedic praying side by side in peace.

On March 27, Israeli communities **came** under rocket fire from Palestinian terrorists in Gaza.

Imagine for a moment being at home with your family during a pandemic and having to choose between seeking refuge in a bomb shelter, risking potential exposure to the deadly disease, or taking your chances with getting killed by hostile fire.

This is a choice no one should have to make. Yet it is the reality of Israeli civilians. Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad – two Iranian-backed terrorist organisations – know only one language: violence.

That was true before the coronavirus outbreak, and it is still true now.

Likewise, the Iranian-aligned Houthi rebels in Yemen have not ceased their aggression.

On March 28, ballistic missiles were **launched** by the Shiite rebel force toward the Saudi cities of Riyadh and Jazan.

Iran has been sending advanced weapons and military advisers to the Houthi movement as part of its regional policy to empower Shiite and other friendly proxy forces.

This mirrors the strategy the Iranian regime has used to support its Lebanese protégé Hezbollah in Syria and Palestinian groups in Gaza.

It is strikingly obvious that the Iranian leadership is investing in rockets and other tools of terror rather than investing in the wellbeing of its own countrymen despite the Iranian people passionately rejecting the regime's costly foreign adventurism.

“Not Gaza, Not Lebanon, our lives are devoted to Iran,” protesters **shouted** in demonstrations across the country in 2017.

If this feels like a million miles away, don't think for a moment that we are safe from Iranian aggression.

Earlier this month, Kata'ib Hezbollah, an IRGC-backed militia in Iraq, **killed** two American and one British soldiers in a rocket attack.

In response to the incident, British special forces and Iraqi soldiers **stormed** a militia base northeast of Baghdad and killed four Iraqis linked to the Iranian-backed Hashd al-Sha'abi.

Both groups are part of the Popular Mobilization Force, a grouping of Shiite-dominated paramilitary factions with intimate links to the regime in Tehran.

There are also examples of Iranian hostility in Europe.

On March 25, prosecutors in Denmark **charged** a Norwegian citizen of Iranian descent with planning to assassinate an Arab Iranian opposition figure on Danish soil with the help of an unidentified Iranian intelligence agency.

This was not an isolated incident.

Iran has ordered several attacks in Europe in recent years. Iranian assets **killed** two opposition figures in the Netherlands in 2015 and 2017.

Four people were **arrested** in connection with a foiled Iranian-led bomb plot against a prominent Iranian opposition rally in Paris in 2018.

Last year, Hezbollah operatives were **caught** stashing tons of explosive materials in a secret bomb factory in London.

Iran is shamelessly exploiting the global health crisis to spread antisemitic and anti-American conspiracy theories to distract from its botched response to the coronavirus outbreak.

With more than 3,000 dead, and more than 47,000 infected, as of April 1, Iran is a regional epicentre for the coronavirus.

Yet Tehran has **described** the virus as a “Zionist biological terrorist attack” and claimed that nuclear-related sanctions have robbed the country of the resources needed to fight the disease, a charge flatly **denied** by American officials.

Now more than ever, we need global cooperation to counter the continued threat of the pandemic.

The disease does not distinguish between Muslim or Jew. Sunni or Shia. Israel, the United States, or friends in the Arab world.

But the response to this crisis helps us distinguish between the pariah states of this world and countries that seek peaceful coexistence.

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