



# Iran's Response to Qassam Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis Targeted Killings

Kidnapping and Assassination Operations





# Iran's Irregular Warfare Strategy

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- The assassinations of Islamic Revolutionary Guards-Quds Force (IRGC-QF) Commander, Qassam Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah Leader, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis will result in retaliation against the United States and potentially our Allies.
  - Iran will be reluctant to conduct direct conventional military operations against the United States.
  - Preferring instead to conduct sporadic, then if necessary, widespread irregular warfare attacks against a variety of targets.
  - Attacks will initially be focused on military facilities and personnel; avoiding killing or kidnapping non-official U.S. citizens.

# Iran's Response to a U.S. Declaration of War



- If the U.S. threatens or attempts to invade Iran, IRGC-QF, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups could attempt to expand kidnapping and assassination operations globally.
- A surge in global kidnappings combined with increased individual and vehicular suicide bombings, assassinations, and other irregular attacks would strain the capabilities of homeland security, law enforcement, and military operations wherever they occur.
- If Iran perceives imminent battlefield defeat or regime change, it could:
  - Resort to using hostages in Iran or elsewhere as human shields.
  - Consider using chemical or biological weapons against civilian targets.
  - Operationalize large-scale hostage barricade operations against soft targets, such as malls, sporting events, political rallies, large businesses and commercial operations, hotels, and restaurants.



# Likely Targets

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Attacks will include in priority order:

- Individual and vehicular suicide bombings of U.S. military and diplomatic facilities.
- Targeted assassinations of U.S. military and diplomatic personnel.
- Cyber intrusions against U.S. government websites and internet communications.
- Ambush and improvised explosive device operations against U.S. military personnel stationed throughout the Middle East.
- Prioritized, *pre-planned* kidnapping operations against U.S. civilian and military officials.
  - Ad hoc kidnappings of business owners, academics, journalists, American expatriates, and U.S. citizens traveling abroad.
  - Hezbollah Commander, Hassan Nasrallah, stated non-official U.S. persons would not be targeted at this time (DOI: 5 January 2020).



# IRGC-QF and Hezbollah Operations

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- IRGC-QF and its primary surrogates Hezbollah, various Palestinian, Iraqi Shia groups, and to a lesser extent Afghanistan terrorists and insurgents, have all used various forms of assassinations and kidnappings as one of their most effective tools to change U.S. and Western foreign policy.
  - Hostage taking began during the 1979 seizure of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and have been used effectively in airline hijackings, targeted kidnap and later assassination operations throughout the Middle East, and to a lesser extent Southeast Asia and Latin America.
  - IRGC-QF and many of its global surrogates have designated kidnap lists and pre-surveilled assassination targets of military and civilian officials that can be quickly operationalized.
  - IRGC-QF and Hezbollah are also capable of executing target of opportunity kidnappings to disrupt law enforcement and military operations.



# Operating Areas

IRGC-QF, Hezbollah, and its surrogates can conduct kidnap and assassination operations globally but will be most effective operating in the following countries:

Iraq

Syria

Afghanistan

Pakistan

Saudi Arabia

Bahrain

UAE

Oman

Qatar

Kuwait

Azerbaijan

Armenia

Lebanon

Tajikistan

Uzbekistan

Kazakhstan

Egypt

Turkey

Yemen

Jordan



# Kidnapping and Assassination Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP's)



- IRGC-QF, Hezbollah, and others will use the following TTP's to capture, detain, exploit, their hostages and to conduct assassination operations:
  - Pre-planned kidnap and assassination targets will be Iran's first priority.
  - Other pro-Iranian groups may conduct assassinations and capture hostages in a more ad hoc fashion, some with minimal to no pre-operational planning.
  - Hostages will be interrogated, tortured, and detained in locally secure safe house detention facilities.
  - Videos of detained hostages will be recorded for propaganda and maximum media exposure.
  - A small number of high-value hostages could be executed by IRGC-QF or Hezbollah for perceived political opportunities.
  - IRGC-QF and Hezbollah will be unlikely to publicly disseminate execution videos; though other less-disciplined groups may publicize hostage executions.
  - Hezbollah generally avoids taking public credit for assassination or kidnapping operations performed by its operatives.
  - Hostages will be held alive as long as the safe house networks remain intact, Iran's political and military situation remains secure, and U.S. military and rescue operations are thwarted or held in abeyance.



# Kidnapping and Assassination Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (Continued)



- IRGC-QF, Hezbollah, and others will attempt to negotiate for U.S. concessions and withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, the Gulf States, Jordan, Afghanistan and other Middle East countries.
- Hostages will be moved regularly to thwart rescue and recovery by local law enforcement or military personnel.
- IRGC-QF and Hezbollah possess excellent operational security and U.S. or Allied intelligence penetration of their hostage and assassination cells will be difficult.
- Hezbollah or its surrogates, with IRGC-QF direction, may attempt to conduct a small number of kidnappings in the U.S., Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.
  - Their capabilities and success in capturing, holding, and exploiting hostages long-term in these countries are quite diminished.
  - Such kidnap operations would be designed to generate fear by the extensive media exposure resulting from such audacious hostage operations.
- Hostages captured in the Iranian near abroad will likely be moved to Evin Prison in Tehran for exploitation and propaganda purposes.



Tehran  
Evin Prison

General Prison Section

Foreign and Political Prison Section  
Section 209



# Countermeasure Challenges

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- Daily routine travel changes, personal security protections, and avoidance of high risk areas may not be as effective in preventing being targeted by IRGC-QF, Hezbollah, or other affiliated groups.
- Kidnappings and assassinations may result from pre-planned Islamic mass demonstrations, most often occurring in the Middle East, and targeted against U.S. military, civilian, or diplomatic facilities.
- Little is known as to the operational effectiveness of IRGC-QF, Hezbollah, and other supportive groups to conduct kidnappings outside the Middle East and North Africa.



# Kidnapping Countermeasures

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- If captured by IRGC-QF or one of their surrogate groups, the captive should take the following actions:
  - Avoid physically resisting.
  - Maintain composure; listen to and observe the events going on around you.
  - Understand you are more valuable to the hostage takers alive.
  - Do not argue with your captors; instead try to engage in non-political friendly conversations.
  - Expect to be harshly interrogated, likely tortured, and forced to give a confession.
  - Understand propaganda videos can offer opportunities for a proof of life – take advantage of them.
  - Do not lose hope and if held with others strive to befriend and assist with their needs to the greatest degree possible.
- If rescue occurs avoid sudden actions, maintain composure, and inform the rescue team of your identity when the situation permits.



# Shavano Intelligence Systems

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This product has been produced by Shavano Intelligence Systems who possesses more than 30 years' experience assessing the military and paramilitary capabilities of IRGC-QF and the capabilities of Hezbollah, Palestinian, and Shia terrorist groups.

If interested in more information or have questions or comments, please contact us through our website at <http://shavanointelligencesystems.com>.