



Iran's soft war against Israel has combined propaganda, international conferences, and transnational activist and political networks to challenge Israel's legitimacy and spread Tehran's anti-Zionist message abroad. At the 6th New Horizon International Conference in Tehran, May 2018, fifth from right is Iranian filmmaker and producer Nader Talebzadeh; beside him is Russian political theorist Alexander Dugin; second from right is Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss. (Credit: Nima Najafzadeh/Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0)

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Iran's Islamist Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism (Part 2): The Propaganda Industry

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The Jews and Israel as a Source of All Evil

This is the second part of a two-part article; the first part appeared in the Summer 2026 issue of the Middle East Quarterly. It continues the analysis developed in Part 1, which examined the various sources of the Islamic Republic of Iran's antisemitism and anti-Zionism, ranging from classic tropes such as The Protocols of the Elders of Zion to accusations of Jewish and Israeli malfeasance against Iran. The present study focuses on the extensive institutional and transnational infrastructure the regime has developed to disseminate these narratives.

Spreading Antisemitic and Anti-Zionist Themes: A Multimillion Dollar Enterprise

Although the Islamic Regime of Iran maintained a strongly anti-Israel and anti-Zionist posture from 1979

onward, it was Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, appointed Supreme Leader in 1989, who provided strategic direction by situating it within a broader doctrine of soft warfare against the West. In the Iranian version of civilizational jihad, Khamenei called for a “jihad of information” (Jahād-e Tabyīn; جهاد تبیین). At the heart of this

informational campaign stood the production and dissemination of narratives concerning Jews and their collective embodiment, the State of Israel, which occupied a place of particular prominence in the Supreme Leader's strategic vision. Multiple sources funded the program: the government, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the Supreme Leader's Office (Rahbar's Office; *Beyte Rahbari*), and an array of *bonyads* (charitable foundations).¹

A wide range of materials and media platforms have been used to convey the antisemitic and anti-Zionist ideology. For instance, the Islamic Research Foundation of the Astan Quds Razavi (AQR) (*Pajohesh-haye Islami-e Astan-e Qods Razavi*), the most powerful of the regime's *bonyads*, has published multiple editions of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Farsi and several other languages. During his tenure as head of AQR, the future President Ebrahim Raisi decided to increase the output of antisemitic literature with a special emphasis on *The Protocols*. Numerous references to the book appeared in government media, including Tasnim News Agency and Fars News Agency, both affiliated with the IRGC.²

As noted in Part 1, the Jewish Studies Center (JSC) was a premier provider of antisemitic content. Under Khomeini's guidance, the IRGC, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Organization of Endowments and Charitable Affairs (OECA) (*Sazman Awqaf va Umur Kheyrieh*) invested large sums of money to launch the think tank in 2016. The cleric Keyvan Ezzati managed the Center while doubling as the head editor of *Rasekhoon*, its highly antisemitic platform. The scope of the JSC "research" was broad. Out of the 1,500 articles produced and posted on its website, 50 were devoted to alleged Jewish plots. Others described the myriad negative Jewish traits, including a few reports on Jews as spawn of Satan. Ezzati was honored for his work with a special prize from the Hourglass Festival, a 2018 international conference that regime officials had organized to mark the countdown to the destruction of Israel. The Imam Khomeini Institute, another think tank led by the reactionary cleric Mohammed Taqi Mezbah Yazdi, produced similar content and translated it into Arabic and other languages.³

Holocaust denial, minimization, and other forms of revisionism were high on the propaganda industry agenda.

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office in 2005, denialism went into overdrive, fueled by a substantial infusion of government funding. As one observer put it, the regime turned "fringe hate speech to a state-approved pseudo-intellectual debate where Iranian university experts and journalists helped to validate the revisionist view that Jews were never murdered in great numbers during the Holocaust." The Political Studies and Research Center (PSRC), funded by the Ministry of Security and Information (MOIS), specialized in Holocaust denial for the domestic market. In 2006, the Center published Mohammed Taghi Taghipoor's *Beyond the Holocaust Scene*. Described as "definitive," the book argued that the Nazis had no plans to eliminate the Jews and that typhus caused deaths in the camps.⁴

To give the subject academic respectability, in 2006 Ahmadinejad ordered the more prestigious Foreign Ministry Institute for Political & International Studies (IPIS) to launch the International Holocaust Institute (IHI). His adviser Mohammed Ali Ramin, a vice minister for culture in the cabinet, served as secretary general tasked with organizing outreach events and finding a cadre of "researchers." The timing of the new initiative was opportune. The California-based revisionist Institute for Historical Review was in decline amid financial difficulties and public pressure. In Europe, Holocaust denial became increasingly illegal. The changing climate led several revisionists to seek employment at the IHI: two—Jürgen Graf and Wolfgang Frölich—sought political asylum in Iran. Others made periodic, well-remunerated visits to Tehran to supplement their finances. Ramin was also instrumental in soliciting cash prizes for "outstanding" deniers. For instance, upon his recommendation, in 2012 Ahmadinejad bestowed the Award for Courage on Robert Faurisson, one of the most prominent French Holocaust deniers. The IRGC-linked media outlets, Fars News and Tasnim News, assisted in disseminating the Holocaust denial narratives. Hassan Karbalaee, a journalist who headed the IRGC's news organs in the years from 2008 to 2018, was a leading champion of Ernst Zundel, a German Canadian publisher of Holocaust denial literature.⁵

Playing to a different audience, the paper *Hamshahri* launched a cartoon competition in January 2006, which

proved to be a popular medium for Holocaust denial. The Saba Arts and Cultural Institute in Tehran exhibited 200 of the winning cartoons to rave reviews from the press. In 2016, the Owj Media and Art Institute and the Sarcheshmeh Cultural Complex sponsored another cartoon contest. The former was owned by the IRGC and managed by its domestic militia, the Basij. The Islamic Propaganda Organization (IPO), part of the Rahbar's Office, ran the Sarcheshmeh Complex. In 2020, another cartoon competition was held and featured some 800 images.⁶

The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), a giant state-controlled radio and television conglomerate that transmitted in some 36 languages, was ready-made for antisemitic and anti-Israel propaganda. Its popular English-language Press TV channel, a premier outlet in the West, pushed the theme of Israel as a “colonial-apartheid” state. Press TV's *Investigator* section and *Palestine Declassified* carried numerous accounts of alleged Israeli brutalities and atrocities. To give credence to its propaganda, Press TV producers sought out Israeli and Jewish academics to legitimize these views. As noted in Part 1 of this study (Summer 2026), Shlomo Sand, a professor at Tel Aviv University, gained significant attention, followed by Ilan Pappé, formerly from the University of Haifa and a prolific author of works critical of Zionism and Israel. *Tehran Times*, the English-language newspaper of the regime, quoted Pappé as saying that “Zionism has reduced Judaism into a narrow-minded ethno-nationalism that depends on the success of the colonial project.”⁷

Through its film and documentary division, IRIB generated copious antisemitic material. *Saint Mary*, a historical drama, was so full of antisemitic tropes that even the normally timid Jewish community in Iran complained that the production “has hugely and negatively impacted the public's perception of Jews and Judaism.” *The Saturday Hunter*, another popular show in this genre, portrayed “everyday crimes of the Zionists against the Palestinian people, including the killing of innocent children and human beings.” The Islamic Radio and Television Union (IRTVU), created in 2009, was a multimedia operation designed to train staff and provide content to a large number of outlets, both Iranian and foreign. IRTVU

supported the communication outlets of Iranian proxies, including Hezbollah's station *Al Manar*, the Houthi's *Al Masirah*, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad's *Palestine Today*. Nominally controlled by Iran's Ministry of Islamic Guidance, the U.S. Treasury Department described it as the propaganda arm of the IRGC-Quds Force.⁸

The IRGC has run or supported many media disinformation sites masquerading as independent outlets. One of the most notorious was the *American Herald Tribune* (AHT), a website launched by Anthony Hall, a Canadian professor known for equating the fate of the indigenous peoples in North America with that of the Palestinians. It featured articles purporting to show the “Zionist domination” of the American political system, with titles like “Joe (Biden) is a Zionist” and “Kamala Panders to Jewish Donors.” Other posts reinforced the linkage between Zionism and the alleged genocidal war against the Palestinians. COVID-19 inspired some authors to compare Zionism to the virus, with one headline declaring “Zionism and Covid-19: Two Viruses That Require the Same Remedy.” Another article called to “Stomp Out the Outbreak of the Zionist Virus of the 1948 Nakba.” All along, the readers were reminded of the “Irreconcilable Conflict with Zionism” and the “Wisdom in Khamenei Guidelines to Liberate Palestine.” The Poynter Institute for Media Studies and its global fact-checking arm, the International Fact-Checking Network, reported that the AHT carried fabricated news. In November 2020, the U.S. government took the website down.⁹

Operating out of the Rahbar's Office, the Islamic Development Organization (IDO) emerged as an important producer of anti-Israel content. The arch-conservative Ayatollah Ahmed Jannati, known for his predictions about the coming demise of the “Zionist entity,” set the tone during his three-and-a-half-year-long tenure, starting in April 1989. Under the auspices of the IDO, Mehr News Agency, *Tehran Times*, and the Tebyan Cultural Center were all engaged in the campaign. Mehr News routinely described Palestinians killed in clashes with the Zionist enemy as martyrs. Tebyan, arguably the largest cultural organization in the country, propagated the view that “Palestine is the throbbing heart of the world of Islam.” The organization has a department dedicated to research

on “Palestine, Gaza, and the Zionist regime,” which has published a large number of books and articles demonizing Israel. Tebyan has also hosted numerous conferences on the subject, including one at the University of Tehran.¹⁰

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In addition to Tebyan, the regime established three organizations dedicated to Palestinian affairs. After the Majlis passed the 1990 Law in Support of the Islamic Revolution of the Palestinian People, the Cabinet of Ministers approved executive regulations for its implementation in September 1998. That year, the regime established the Center for Palestinian Studies under the auspices of the Office of the President. Another institution, Israel–Palestine Studies, operated as a think tank supported by the Middle East Strategic and Scientific Center. A third, Palestine Studies, functioned within the Neda Political Scientific Research Institute, which was affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Together with the Besat Institute for Strategic Studies and the Kheybar Zionist Studies Center, these organizations produced a large volume of anti-Israel propaganda. Mehdi Taeb, a hardline cleric known for his Holocaust denial and the brother of the former head of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization, served on Kheybar’s board. Kheybar also operated five websites that portrayed Israel as an illegitimate usurper and as a regime that deliberately murdered children.¹¹

Abdollah Shahbazi, who made a career of writing anti-semitic books and articles full of fabrications, headed the Political Studies and Research Institute associated with the powerful Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS). In 1995, Ayatollah Khamenei ordered Shahbazi to reorganize the documentation center of the wealthy Mustazafeen Foundation. Under its new name, the Institute for Contemporary Iranian Studies generated a large number of anti-Israeli screeds. In addition, Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of the hard-line *Kayhan* newspaper, known as the mouthpiece of the Supreme Leader, published a series

on “Imperialism in History,” depicting Jews as major actors in global imperialism. The paper also showcased sensationalist “research” from the think tanks and centers.¹²

Textbooks routinely carried antisemitic messages to socialize the young. In schools, children were taught to chant “death to Israel” and wish for the Jewish state’s destruction. School textbooks were filled with conspiracy theories alleging that Jews and Israel orchestrated the COVID-19 pandemic to reduce attendance at Iranian Revolution anniversary events. These texts portrayed Israel as an illegitimate regime destined for eradication and accused Jews of long-standing conspiracies against Islam, including tampering with Islamic texts and resorting to war and blackmail to fulfill their sinister aims.¹³

The regime encouraged anti-Zionist freelancing, a career move that many hardliners found financially rewarding. Hassan Rahimpour Azghadi, a follower of the extremist cleric Mohammed Taqi Mesbah Yazdi and a fabricator whose academic credentials were questioned, was a case in point. His *Palestine Declassified* reports specialized in describing Israel as an “apartheid-genocidal” state. Appointed by Ayatollah Khamenei to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in 2003 and to the Council of Representatives of the Supreme Leader to the Universities in 2007, Azghadi declared that Israelis abducted Palestinian children, sexually abused them on military bases, and harvested their organs for sale to wealthy Jews.¹⁴

International Conferences: Propaganda to the World

Hamid Mowlana, an Iranian professor of communication at American University and a consultant to UNESCO, provided the blueprint for the regime’s international communication strategy. In 1986, Mowlana, who was close to the Islamist leaders, published a Farsi-language book, *Information and World Communication: New Frontiers in International Communication* (Etela’at va Ertebatat-e Jahani, Marz’hay-e Naw Dar Ravabet-e Baynal-Melal). The study suggested sophisticated ways to appeal to the minds of international audiences. The work of Mowlana, subsequently appointed an adviser to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was required reading for the various institu-

tions involved in global outreach, such as the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Cultural Guidance, the IRGC, and the different foundations, universities, and art institutions.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, Holocaust revisionism took a prominent place among the numerous conferences organized by the regime. Ramin arranged one titled International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust. Commencing on December 11, 2006, the proceedings featured 67 attendees from 30 countries, including Robert Faurisson, Richard Krege, Fredrick Töben, David Duke, and Bradley Smith. In a dramatic appearance, Ahmadinejad addressed world Jewry: “We propose that, if you are not lying, let a group of impartial researchers come to Europe, speak with the people, examine the documents, and then inform the nations about the results of their research regarding the Holocaust myth.” Commenting on the proceedings, Töben stated: “Minds are being switched off to the Holocaust dogma as it is being sold as a historical fact, and yet we are not able to question it. This is mental rape.”¹⁶

While the conference attracted overwhelming criticism in the West, the regime considered it a resounding success. The Institute for Political & International Studies published the proceedings in Farsi and English. The attendees agreed to establish a worldwide Foundation for Holocaust Research, with Ramin as secretary general. Five of the participants were to serve on the council to assist him. The office was initially located in Tehran, with plans to open an office in Berlin. Holocaust denial also facilitated the regime’s effort to “indigenize” the Holocaust—that is, to appropriate its terminology and imagery and apply it to more local conditions. Having questioned the historical genocide of European Jewry, Iranian leaders increasingly portrayed Palestinians as victims of a contemporary Holocaust at the hands of Israel. Scholars who study the indigenization of the Holocaust in Third World countries noted that Iran stood out for its vehement denial. One observer said the Tehran conference was “atypical and deviant.”¹⁷

Obliterating the Zionist enemy was, as mentioned, a long-standing goal of the regime. Ahmadinejad took it a step further during the 2005 conference titled “A World

without Zionism,” organized by the Ministry of Interior. In his keynote speech, President Ahmadinejad emphasized three points: the “world oppressor” (the United States) created the “occupying regime of Quds” (Jerusalem); the Islamic world lost the desire to fight for Jerusalem; and the “dear Imam (Khomeini) said that the ‘occupying regime must be wiped off the map.’” Not surprisingly, he vowed to lead the fight against the “little Satan.”¹⁸

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U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan addresses the 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa. Iran used the conference and its parallel NGO forum to promote anti-Israel narratives and forge ties with international NGOs and activists, creating networks that would later amplify its campaign against Israel. (Credit: UN Photo/Evan Schneider via Wikimedia Commons, CC0)

Advocating for Palestinian human rights was another way to delegitimize Israel. Remarkably, despite its own poor human rights record, Iran helped elevate the Palestinian issue into a major international cause. The 2001 U.N. World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, provided a major opportunity to advance this agenda. The Asian regional preparatory conference, held in Tehran under U.N. auspices in February 2001, was preceded by an unofficial gathering of political activists that featured extreme anti-Israel rhetoric. Many of these themes later surfaced at the parallel NGO Forum in Durban, attended by approximately 3,000 organizations, which adopted resolutions describing Israel as a “racist, apartheid state,” guilty of “racist crimes, including war crimes, acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing.”¹⁹ Iran’s participation in the Durban conference and its parallel NGO forum allowed it to forge connections with hundreds of

NGOs and political activists, creating a durable international network for future political mobilization.²⁰



Former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made Holocaust denial and the delegitimization of Israel prominent elements of Tehran's international propaganda campaign. At the 2009 Durban Review Conference in Geneva, he denounced Israel as a racist state and accused Western governments of exploiting the Holocaust to justify its creation. (Credit: Shutterstock)

In preparation for the 2009 Durban Review Conference (Durban II), the Iranian Foreign Ministry created a scientific, artistic, and communications committee tasked with producing literature, billboards, programs, and panel themes. The Iranian delegation reportedly included 30 trained public relations personnel and 40 human rights activists who distributed materials translated into several languages. Among the resources was a cartoon depicting Israeli soldiers targeting a pregnant Palestinian woman under the caption, “One Shot, Two Killed,” implying that a single bullet could eliminate both the woman and her unborn child. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—the only head of state to attend the conference—described Israel as a “totally racist” state and accused Western governments of exploiting the Holocaust as a pretext for aggression. English-language content distributed by the Iranian delegation also referred to the Holocaust as an “ambiguous and dubious question.”²¹

The International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Intifada repeated the narrative that Israel was a colonial apartheid state bent on obliterating the Palestinians. Four meetings—in 2001, 2006, 2008, and 2017—harshly condemned the “treasonous” Oslo peace process and urged

armed resistance as the best way to deal with the “malignant tumor” of Zionism. The secretary general of the conferences, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a hardliner who served as deputy foreign minister for Arab affairs between 2011 and 2016 and became foreign minister under President Ebrahim Raisi, was a vocal advocate of this position. In one particularly strident speech, he reassured the audience of Palestinian victory and repeated the prediction of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that Israel would cease to exist by 2040.²²

The Society for the Defense of the Palestinian Nation (SDPN), created by the IRGC in conjunction with the Rahbar's Office, was a venue for attracting international human rights activists. Chaired by Zahra Mostafavi, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's daughter, it served as a frequent platform for Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The Society hosted annual conferences to emphasize the plight of the Palestinians. At the 2017 meeting, “All Together for Palestine,” delegates from Hezbollah, Hamas, PIJ, and other resistance groups were introduced to a contingent of activist international lawyers, including Jan Fermon, the secretary general of the influential International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), and representatives from the U.S.-based International Committee of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG). All routinely accused Israel of committing grave abuses against Palestinians. Ayatollah Khamenei made an appearance to reiterate his view that Israel is “a cancerous tumor” that needs to be eliminated. These conferences were also popular with some peace and women's groups, most notably the New York-based CODEPINK, co-founded by Medea Benjamin and Jodie Evans in 2002. In 2017, Evans married the left-wing entrepreneur and philanthropist Neville Roy Singham, who, according to investigative reporting, has supported groups aligned with the Chinese Communist Party. According to a *New York Times* investigation, about a quarter of CODEPINK's funding since 2017 came from two groups linked to the Singham network.²³

In another successful tactic, the regime organized specialized gatherings to emphasize different antisemitic and anti-Israeli themes. In the early 2010s, Tehran launched a series of international conferences on “Holly-

woodism.” Each conference was built around a specific issue. For instance, the inaugural gathering in 2011 featured a two-day symposium on Hollywood Jews and the influence of the Zionist regime on Hollywood. In 2012, 48 international guests were treated to a discussion of Hollywood and the Holocaust. Faurisson accused the “Hollywood Jews” of creating the “myth of the Holocaust.” The third conference, in 2013, attracted some 130 attendees—a mix of Holocaust deniers, conspiracy theorists, and pro-Palestinian activists—to discuss how, through its alleged control of the movie industry, the Zionist enemy used the Hollywood myth of the Holocaust to facilitate the dispossession of the Palestinians. Mark Weber of the Institute for Historical Review was on hand to denounce Hollywood Jews for giving a hand to the fiction. The 2013 conference became especially notorious because it featured Western extremists and conspiracy theorists, including David Duke, who promoted antisemitic claims that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated by Israel’s Mossad intelligence service.²⁴

Nader Talebzadeh, a filmmaker and TV producer, energized the propaganda field through several ventures. Known as the chief of the cultural revolution and the jihadist of soft warfare, he had a long history of anti-Americanism and antisemitism. Among other works, he produced a glowing documentary on Louis Farrakhan and the film *The Messiah*, portraying Jews in virulent terms. Talebzadeh was the founding secretary of the Ammar International Popular Film Festival (AIPFF), which ran a contest for antisemitic films and documentaries between 2000 and 2016. Winning entries included *A Path to Gaza Prison Camps*, *The Money Lobby*, and *Christian Zionism: The Tragedy and the Turning*. The organization held screenings in schools, universities, mosques, and other public venues.²⁵

Talebzadeh was also involved with the New Horizons Organization (NHO), part of the International Institute of Independent Thinkers and Artists. Gholamreza Montazami was listed as the founder and executive director, and Hamed Ghashghavi as the secretary for international affairs. The marquee event of the NHO was a series of International New Horizon conferences, launched in the early 2010s, whose motto was Quds, the Permanent

Capital of the Palestinians. The 2012 conference in Tehran brought together an eclectic mix of anti-Israel activists, conspiracy theorists, fringe political figures, and foreign participants aligned with Iran’s anti-Western and anti-Zionist narrative. The 2013 conference was especially notorious because it featured David Duke and other conspiracy theorists who claimed that the Mossad was behind 9/11.

In 2014, an NHO conference promised “to unveil the secrets behind the dominance of the Zionist lobby in U.S. and E.U. politics.”²⁶ The meeting featured antiwar activists Medea Benjamin and Ann Wright from CODEPINK, Gareth Porter, who made his name by denying the Pol Pot genocide in Cambodia, and a number of 9/11 conspiracy theorists. Panels titled “Mossad-9/11 Link: Empirical Evidence,” “Zionist Fingerprints on the 9/11 Coverup,” “9/11 and the Zionist Myth,” “History of Mossad False Flags,” and “Uniting the Muslim Ummah for 9/11 Truth and Against Zionism” were designed to appeal to the audience. During the 2018 gathering, Talebzadeh stated that “holding the conference is only a small part of the plans that can be implemented dealing with Israel; there are many others that other departments can implement.”²⁷



CODEPINK activists at a press conference in Iran, March 2019. A 28-member delegation, led by co-founder Medea Benjamin, traveled to Iran, met senior Iranian officials, and appeared before state-linked media, illustrating Tehran’s cultivation of international activist networks sympathetic to its antiwar and anti-Zionist messaging. (Credit: Soheil Sahranavard/Fars News Agency via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0)

U.S. intelligence asserted that the IRGC sponsored the events for a dual purpose: to demonize Israel and to recruit spies from among antiwar activists, peace advocates, and 9/11 conspiracy theorists. Indeed, it was subsequently

revealed that Monica Witt, a former U.S. Air Force counterintelligence and cryptologic specialist who attended the first two conferences, defected to Iran in 2013, converted to Islam, and was later charged by the United States with espionage-related offenses. She exposed highly sensitive information, helped to target other Americans, and appeared in numerous propaganda productions. Steven Mnuchin, the treasury secretary in the first Trump administration, sanctioned the NHO in 2019, shortly after the indictment of Witt was unsealed. He explained that it

recruited individuals for intelligence purposes while “propagating antisemitism and Holocaust denial.” Talebzadeh denied the charges, but in 2019 he moved the conference to Beirut, near the U.S. Embassy to embarrass Mnuchin and his assistant Sigal Mandelker, whom he described as “Treasury Jews.” As expected, the gathering featured vehement anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric, including the trope that Jews control Washington.²⁸



The International Criminal Court in The Hague. Within weeks of Hamas’s October 7, 2023, attack, Iran pressed international institutions to pursue Israel for alleged war crimes. In November 2023, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian called on the ICC to prosecute Israeli officials, part of what the authors describe as Tehran’s broader effort to shift international discourse toward criminal accountability for Israel’s conduct in Gaza. (Credit: OSeveno/Wikimedia Commons)

In between conferences, CODEPINK carried out a number of intermittent initiatives. For instance, in March 2019, a 28-member delegation led by Benjamin traveled to Iran, where they met with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and other government officials. They held a press conference hosted by the semi-official Fars News Agency and were interviewed by other state-linked media outlets. During these engagements, the group criticized U.S. sanctions on Iran and stated that Iran has a right to self-defense, including the maintenance of missile defense capabilities.²⁹

Upon becoming foreign minister under Ebrahim Raisi in 2021, Amir Abdollahian leveraged his academic training and long international experience to expand Iran’s engagement with human rights, legal, and pro-Palestinian advocacy networks. One of these, Law for Palestine (L4P), a global group of legal professionals dedicated to fighting for Palestinian human rights, was especially helpful. John Dugard, the South African jurist and former U.N. special rapporteur for the Palestinian territories, who played a leading role in promoting the characterization of Israel as an apartheid state, served on L4P’s board of trustees. The

National Lawyers Guild, a U.S. left-wing legal organization that supported BDS, was also considered an ally. The cultivation of such an extensive network proved advantageous following the outbreak of the Gaza war.³⁰

Iran's Transnational Networks and the Gaza War: From Delegitimization to Genocidal Framing

The Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, and the ensuing Gaza war enabled these organizations and advocacy networks to amplify the regime's pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel narratives internationally. Engaging with the United Nations was high on the regime's list of priorities. On October 17, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning Israel for "committing genocide" in Gaza, followed by discreet contacts with South Africa, one of the mainstays of the regime's network of influence in Africa. Five days later, on October 22, Naledi Pandor, Pretoria's minister for international relations, met with Amir Abdollahian in Tehran to discuss referring Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for genocide; she also met President Raisi. On November 12, Pandor, a convert to Islam and a harsh critic of Israel, called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to issue an arrest warrant for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The foreign minister reinforced South Africa's position by submitting a letter to the U.N. General Assembly and Security Council reiterating the genocide allegations. On December 29, South Africa asked the ICJ to urgently issue a provisional order to stop the fighting in Gaza. Dugard served as one of South Africa's lawyers before the ICJ tribunal. Although the ICJ did not order Israel to cease fire immediately, the Iranian regime took credit for linking the Zionist enemy to the crime of genocide.³¹

The Human Rights Council and affiliated U.N. special rapporteurs were another arena where Iran applied significant pressure in order to advance allegations of Israeli war crimes. Iranian diplomats, including Ali Bahreini, the regime's permanent representative to the United Nations, have often addressed the Council. As in the earlier case of Dugard, the office of the U.N. special rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories was viewed as an important arena for influence and cultivation. The

appointment of Francesca Albanese in 2022 was especially advantageous because her public rhetoric and legal framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict closely aligned with themes long promoted by Iranian officials and pro-Palestinian advocacy networks, particularly allegations of apartheid, colonialism, and later genocide. Her reports and public statements helped legitimize these concepts within international legal and diplomatic discourse. In March 2025, the Center for Peace and Environment, an NGO run by Masoumeh Ebtekar, the former spokesperson for the militants who held American diplomats as hostages, awarded Albanese a peace prize. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the regime's former foreign minister, called for the nomination of Albanese for the Nobel Peace Prize and took to social media, sharing a Change.org petition that called for Albanese to receive the award alongside doctors working in Gaza.³²



South African jurist John Dugard, a former U.N. special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories and trustee of Law for Palestine, which the authors identify as part of an international legal and advocacy network cultivated by Iran. A longtime proponent of describing Israel as an apartheid state, Dugard later served on South Africa's legal team in its genocide case against Israel before the International Court of Justice following October 7, 2023. (Credit: Renaud Hoyois/Russell Tribunal via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0)

State media (Press TV, IRIB Arabic/English services, the IRGC-linked media outlets, and social media campaigns) were mobilized to propagate the themes of "war crimes" and "genocide war" in Gaza. Press TV, the English-language arm of Iran's state broadcaster, repeatedly described Israel's campaign in Gaza as a genocide. For example, Press TV quoted Iranian officials saying Israel had a "specific intent" to commit genocide and to "complete

the Palestinian people's genocide." The Iranian ambassador to the United Nations stated that Israel conducted "textbook cases of genocide in Gaza." IRGC propaganda often fused genocide and apartheid rhetoric into a single ideological framework, presenting Israel as a uniquely illegitimate state simultaneously comparable to apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany. This language was amplified through IRGC-affiliated platforms, such as Fars News Agency, Mashregh News, Tasnim News Agency, Mehr News, and the IRGC's Telegram channel. Through sustained diplomatic engagement and alignment with pro-Palestinian advocacy and legal networks, Iran contributed to the wider diffusion of the genocide framing of the Gaza war, which gained traction among segments of international legal and civil society communities.³³

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Tehran's strategy extended beyond formal diplomacy into the legal and quasi-legal arena via activist networks, NGOs, academic forums, and international litigation campaigns, which became important vehicles for delegitimizing Israel. Iranian officials openly welcomed war-crimes charges against Israeli officials, as these accusations advanced efforts to transform the international discourse from one centered on conflict to one focused on criminal accountability. As before, conferences played an important role in advancing the anti-Israel narrative. During the 12th Conference of the Supporters of the Palestinian People Society, titled Gaza: A Symbol of Resistance, held in January 2024, Iranian officials alternated between condemning alleged Israeli genocide and vowing that the "resistance" would ultimately prevail. This message was reiterated by Mohammad Reza Fallahzade, who framed the conflict as part of a broader struggle against Israel. Meanwhile, Hojatolislam Hossein Rahimian, chairing the conference, reminded participants that Ruhollah Khomeini had been the first senior religious authority to issue a fatwa declaring support for the Palestinian cause a

religious obligation and a foremost duty for Muslims worldwide.³⁴

Transnational pro-Palestinian organizations constituted another important avenue for the dissemination of anti-Israeli narratives. Among the most prominent was the Palestinian Alternative Revolutionary Path Movement (Masar Badil). Co-founded in 2021 by Khalil Barakat, the group advocated a maximum anti-Zionist platform centered on the "liberation of all of Palestine from the river to the sea," rejection of the Oslo Accords, and support for what it calls the "Axis of Resistance," including solidarity with Hezbollah, Hamas, and other Iran-backed groups. Barakat and his wife, Charlotte Kates, together formed Samidoun, the Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network, designated as a terror group by the government of Canada. Kates serves as the primary international spokesperson for Samidoun and has traveled to Tehran, where the group opened an office. In August 2024, she received an Islamic Human Rights and Human Dignity Award from Iranian authorities. She also appeared at official ceremonies, alongside senior Iranian figures and representatives of Palestinian armed groups. Masar Badil has organized a large number of conferences, media appearances, and solidarity events across North America, Europe, and the Middle East. It has hosted Iranian officials on its panels, including Foad Izadi, a professor at the University of Tehran with known ties to the IRGC. Several policy analysts and monitoring groups have argued that Masar Badil is part of a broader Iranian-aligned network.³⁵

In the aftermath of the June 2025 hostilities with Iran, Iranian security institutions—particularly the IRGC and Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)—expanded covert operations against Israel by employing advanced cyberwarfare and disinformation tactics. These tactics were modeled on the Russian doctrine of cognitive warfare against the West, which combined cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, psychological operations, and social media manipulation to influence public opinion. The campaign also borrowed from the Russian model of hybrid warfare by integrating physical violence with cyber and information operations. One recently created group, *Harakat Ashab al Yamin al Islamiya* (the Islamic Movement of the People of the Right Hand), operated by the

IRGC in Great Britain, is best known for its physical assaults on the Jewish community. However, it has also run a cyber campaign posting images on social media of alleged mass starvation and other material delegitimizing Israel. Experts on digital mass communication observed that the rapid spread of artificial intelligence technology had made it very easy to generate and disseminate disinformation on a massive scale.³⁶

While the exact contribution of Iran's multidimensional campaign to delegitimize Israel is difficult to determine, the cumulative evidence suggests a marked deterioration in Israel's global image and international standing. More recently, Israeli national security experts have warned that confronting the soft-war campaigns conducted by Iran and other actors has become a major national security challenge. Research in the emerging field of digital learning lends support to these concerns. Empirical studies of opinion formation on social networking platforms indicate that individuals may develop lasting impressions from only a small number of posts, irrespective of the credibility or prominence of the platform.³⁷

Conclusion

Part 1 of the study demonstrated the remarkable breadth, depth, and scope of Iran's antisemitic and anti-Zionist ideology. This belief system was rooted in a duality: the eschatological imperative to liberate Jerusalem in order to advance the reappearance of the Hidden Twelfth Imam and the realpolitik use of the Palestinian issue to expand the standing of the Shiite regime in a Sunni Middle East. The former fostered a messianic foreign policy in which the elimination of Israel was elevated to the highest objective of the Islamic Republic. The latter required the propagation of a detailed narrative portraying the Palestinians as victims of alleged Israeli colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, and even genocide. Both objectives rested on an extensive body of accusations that held Jews, Zionists, and Israel responsible for a wide range of historical and contemporary injustices. By and large, the regime's worldview drew heavily on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Nazi ideology, while also incorporating elements of Shiite thought and Iranian nationalist historiography.

Iran's authorities classified the alleged wrongdoing of Jews into three broad categories: offenses against humanity, offenses against Islam, and offenses against Iran. The regime's antisemitic discourse employed zoomorphism, depicting Jews through animal imagery associated with treachery, predation, and impurity. Infectious agents, such as viruses, bacteria, and microbes, as well as diseases like cancer, were also popular. This vituperative rhetoric extended beyond the cognitive domain, successfully constructing Jews as "the Other" by portraying them as fundamentally different, alien, and threatening.

While antisemitism provided an important ideological foundation, it was insufficient on its own, as it did not translate into a direct strategy for legitimizing the defense of Palestinians. Holocaust denial provided a coherent ideological framework, enabling the regime to claim that Western powers . . . had compromised the rights of the Palestinian population by facilitating the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The regime drew extensively on the writings and claims of European Holocaust deniers, adapting them to its political objectives under the slogan of the four lies: "the Holocaust is a lie," "a Holocaust myth was created to legitimize the creation of the State of Israel," "Israel misuses the Holocaust to justify killing the Palestinians," and "Israel is committing a Palestinian Holocaust."

Beyond rhetorical ideographs, the regime cultivated a far-reaching infrastructure intended to disseminate anti-Israel narratives and reinforce Israel's delegitimization internationally. A brainchild of Ayatollah Khamenei, the Iranian informational jihad encompassed a wide array of platforms. Some of the channels were traditional, involving the production and dissemination of a large body of literature translated into numerous languages, with particular emphasis on Arabic and English. Conferences and art exhibitions attracted Western activists who amplified these narratives within academic, political, and cultural circles. Another mechanism consisted of building networks with sympathetic organizations and operators

abroad.

More recently, the regime has expanded its toolkit by incorporating cyber operations modeled in part on Russian information warfare strategies. This shift has reflected a move toward hybrid forms of influence combining traditional propaganda with coordinated digital campaigns across social media platforms, websites, and online forums. These operations are designed to circulate narratives at scale, often through networks of affiliated or proxy accounts that can rapidly disseminate content, engage in amplification, and shape online discourse. By leveraging the speed and reach of the digital environment, the regime has been able to target international audiences simultaneously, reinforcing existing ideological themes while adapting them to contemporary information ecosystems. With the rapid spread of generative AI, Iran's cyber operations have successfully mainstreamed the notion that

Israel is a “genocidal” regime bent on the extermination of the Palestinians through “mass starvation” and systematic deprivation of humanitarian access. These allegations have gained traction within United Nations bodies and in international legal discourse.

Iran's version of civilizational jihad attracted relatively little attention, at least compared to the widely discussed Muslim Brotherhood variety. This omission needs to be addressed, given the regime's capacity to allocate substantial financial resources to the production and dissemination of hostile narratives. Israel and other Western countries should recognize soft warfare as a critical component of contemporary warfare, functioning alongside kinetic operations to shape perceptions, influence outcomes, and extend the battlefield beyond the physical domain.

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