

Al Quds Day as an Antisemitic Mobilization of the Islamic Republic of Iran and a Threat to Security in Germany

Al-Quds Day has served the rulers of the Islamic Republic of Iran as an instrument of power demonstration and global antisemitic mobilization since 1979. Its international dissemination was part of the strategy of exporting the revolution. Al Quds Day forms the central ideological core of the regime and remains a unifying element of all ruling camps in Iran today. With Al Quds Day, the regime uses an anti-Western and anti-Israeli ideology as a central propaganda tool abroad. In the process, antisemitic images are disseminated worldwide and resentment is stoked. This year, the regime published an Al Quds Day poster announcing the destruction of Israel in Nazi vocabulary as the "Final Solution of Israel"; in the run-up, Ali Khamenei, the regime's spiritual leader, called the Jewish state a "cancer" and demanded that the West Bank be "armed just like Gaza."

Since 1996, an annual Quds March has also taken place in Berlin. The organizers strive to present themselves as an independent association of Shiite communities. However, the organization of the Quds March in Germany cannot be separated from the organizational structures of the Iranian regime and Hezbollah, which is dependent on it. In the past, supporters of Hezbollah in particular, as well as officials of the "Islamic Center Hamburg" (IZH) and leaders of the umbrella organization "Islamic Community of Shiite Communities of Germany" (IGS), appeared at Al-Quds Day. All of these organizations are significantly influenced from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The antisemitic content of the Al Quds march poses a threat to Jews living in Germany, but also to exiled Iranians and Muslims who do not want to follow the ideological guidelines of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, a broad alliance has been engaged against the antisemitic event for years. This alliance has worked through its tireless commitment to ensure that political decision-makers deal with the event and the organizers.

In this context, the ban on Hezbollah in Germany is an important step. Like Hezbollah, the Quds March is directed against the idea of international understanding and endangers internal security in Germany. The intention of Berlin's Interior Senator Andreas Geisel to consider a ban on the Quds March, is therefore to be welcomed.

The Berlin Senate should work to obtain a court-proof ban on the antisemitic Quds March.

This handout is intended to shed light on the background of the Al Quds March based on four questions:

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1. What is the Quds March and how did it originate?

To answer this question, we must look at the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This led to the deposition of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in February 1979 and the end of the monarchy. Hostility toward Israel and the goal of destroying the Jewish state were central to the ideology of the newly established theocracy. One of the first foreign policy actions of revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini was to break off relations with Israel on February 17, 1979, even before the proclamation of the "Islamic Republic of Iran." ¹

Al Quds Day (Quds = Arabic for Jerusalem) was proclaimed by Khomeini on July 28, 1979, as a political day of struggle. On this day, the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of Israel were to be propagated; since 1979, it has taken place at the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

In Iran, there are mass demonstrations in all major cities on this day. The central slogans are "Death to America" and "Death to Israel. However, Al Quds Day also pursues the goal of propagating the Islamic revolution beyond Iran's borders. The day thus serves the goal of exporting the revolution, with the help of which the Islamist ideology is to be spread throughout the world. This goal is enshrined in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. ²

Al Quds Day is the day on which this goal is proclaimed. Khomeini defined it this way: "Al Quds Day is the day of Islam. [...] The governments of the world must know that Islam is invincible. Islam and the Quranic verses must prevail in all states of the world [...] and Al Quds Day is the proclamation of this task." ³

In organizing the export of ideology, powerful religious foundations in Iran occupy a dominant position alongside the "Office for Liberation Movements" based in the Foreign Ministry. ⁴ Influenced by these institutions, groups close to the regime organize demonstrations for Al Quds Day in all parts of the world: in South and East Asian countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia or the Philippines, in Turkey, in African countries such as Nigeria, but also in Canada, the USA and most European countries. The largest demonstration in Europe so far has mostly taken place in London. ⁵

2. Who is organizing the Quds March in Germany?

The Quds March has been registered and organized since 2006 by the "Quds Working Group," which claims to speak on behalf of the Shiite communities in Berlin.⁶ According to the federal government, "Iranians close to the regime" and German nationals who are favorably disposed toward the regime are organized in this working group.⁷

The Quds-AG is represented in public primarily by its spokesman Jürgen Grassmann, who has acted as organizer and spokesman since 2008. The Berlin icon dealer, who converted to Shiite Islam years ago, is a staunch supporter of the regime in Iran who also has contacts with regime leaders. During a trip to Iran in 2011, for example, he gave a speech in front of the mausoleum where Khomeini is buried and can be seen in photos with spiritual leader Ali Khamenei.⁸

In interviews with Iranian media, he explained that he sees himself as a mouthpiece for the ideology of the Quds March in Germany. "We explain the facts about Palestine to the Germans," he himself described his task there.⁹ A photo shows Grassmann in the "Islamic Cultural Community of Iranians in Berlin-Brandenburg." This community hit the headlines in January 2020 when a funeral service was held there for the commander of the Iranian Quds Brigades, Qassem Soleimani. This mastermind of "revolutionary export" and top terrorist of the Iranian regime had been killed by an American drone in January 2020.¹⁰

It can be assumed that the Quds-AG is influenced by institutions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The history of the march in Germany also points to this. In the 1990s, Al Quds Day, which took place in Bonn until 1996, was organized by an Iranian student association that had ties to three Iranian intelligence services.¹¹

During this period, Kazem Darabi acted as a coordinator and financier of the Quds marches. Darabi was arrested in 1992 as the chief planner of the so-called "Mykonos murders." In this assassination attempt, four Iranian-Kurdish opposition members were shot dead in a Berlin bar on behalf of Iranian intelligence in September 1992.¹² Darabi, as an agent of the Iranian regime, was also considered an organizer and financier of Hezbollah in Germany. This example shows the dangerous link between ideology and state terrorism in the institutions of the Iranian regime.

The Quds March, which is directed against "Zionists" but also against Iranian regime opponents living in Germany, is therefore a serious threat to internal security in Germany. It is an instrument of the regime in Iran and not a local matter of independent Shiite communities in Germany.

3. Which actors are involved in the mobilization for the Quds March?

In the past, three important actors played a role in the mobilization: the "Islamic Center Hamburg" (IZH), the umbrella organization of the "Islamic Community of Shiite Communities in Germany" (IGS), and supporters of the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah.

The "Islamic Center Hamburg" (IZH) has been an important hub for the organization of the Quds March since the beginning.¹³ According to the Hamburg Senate, leading cadres of the IZH have been involved in the organization and implementation of the event for years, even in 2018.

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The State Office for the Protection of the Constitution describes the IZH as an "instrument of the Iranian state leadership" that represents Iran's theocratic state doctrine and thus a set of values that is incompatible with the free democratic basic order. Supporters of the now banned terrorist organization Hezbollah also frequent the IZH.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the organization is still linked to the city of Hamburg by a state treaty. While the IZH presents itself as cooperative and willing to engage in dialogue, its activities are essentially aimed at spreading the ideology of the Iranian regime in Germany and Europe.

The "Islamic Community of Shiite Communities in Germany" (IGS) is an umbrella organization of, according to its own statement, more than 150 Shiite mosque communities, which was founded in 2009 on the initiative of the IZH. The IGS also has personal connections and ideological similarities with the regime in Tehran. For example, the chairman of the IGS, Mahmood Khalilzadeh, belongs to the "political-religious establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran," according to the German government. Member congregations of the IGS promoted participation in the "Quds March" in Berlin, and IGS board members participated in the Quds March.¹⁶

In June 2018, the managing director of the IGS refused to distance himself from the Quds March to a television crew from ARD Kontraste.¹⁷ It can be assumed that mobilization for the Quds March is organized primarily in some of the 150 mosque congregations that have joined together in the umbrella organization of the IGS. According to the German government, the member organizations of the IGS include extremist associations, and there are indications that some of them have ties to Hezbollah.¹⁸

Hezbollah is a Lebanese terrorist organization that is ideologically and financially dependent on Tehran.¹⁹ Al Quds Day cannot be separated from the ideology of exporting revolution, which legitimizes support for Islamist terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, as well as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other groups. In the run-up to Al Quds Day this year, Ali Khamenei therefore announced the arming of the West Bank and Gaza.²⁰

In Khomeini's view, Hezbollah in particular should realize the unity of all Muslims in the world.²¹ According to security authorities, Hezbollah has about 1,050 supporters in Germany. In the past, Hezbollah flags and symbols were repeatedly shown at the Quds marches, as were pictures of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.²²

4. Who is taking part in the Quds March in Berlin and what are the slogans?

In the last five years, between 650 and 1,200 people have participated in the Quds March. An overview of the participants and their slogans is provided by the evaluations of the Quds March by the Research and Information Center on Antisemitism Berlin ([RIAS](#)), the Jewish Forum for Democracy and Against Antisemitism ([JFDA](#)) and the [Register](#) for the Registration of Right-Wing Extremist and Discriminatory Incidents Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf.²³

Supporters of Hezbollah as well as of radical Palestinian groups such as Hamas or PFLP are present.²⁴ Non-Muslim opponents of Israel and anti-Semites of various stripes from the far-right and neo-Nazi spectrum have also taken part in the Quds March in recent years, as well as from the left-wing anti-imperialist and conspiracy ideology milieu. **They are united in the goal of wanting to destroy Israel by force.**

In Berlin, too, the Quds March serves to spread the ideology of the Iranian regime. This includes the call for the destruction of Israel. This was shown particularly drastically last year by two posters propagating the slogan of the Huthis: "Allahu Akbar - Death to America - Death to Israel - Damn the Jews - Victory to Islam".²⁵ (The Huthis are the Islamists in Yemen supported by the Iranian regime).

In order to counter the increasing criticism, the organizers in Germany are making efforts to present a more moderate image to the outside world. To this end, some of the slogans have been toned down. Last year, the Quds March in Berlin took place under the slogan "Against Zionism and for a just peace in Palestine and the world." "Peace" and "liberation" of Palestine, however, in the speeches and pronouncements means the destruction of Israel alone. It is never about democratic rights for individual Palestinians or about the question of how concrete improvements can be achieved for the Palestinian population.

The claim that one stands up against antisemitism is a rather transparent defense against criticism. This is because central messages are antisemitically charged. This includes, for example, the association of Israel with child murder. "Child murderer Israel" or "Israel kills children" are central slogans on the Quds marches in Iran and Germany since the 1990s. In 2018, the head of IZH dedicated a central sermon to Quds Day on the situation in Palestine, with his central idea being that Israel has been engaged in a "systematic murder of children" for decades.²⁶

The images of "infanticide" and "blood flowing" tie in with old stereotypes from Christian anti-Judaism. These images are reproduced in Islamist contexts, for example on Hezbollah's Al Manar television station. A television series aired there in 2004 portrayed Jews as bloodthirsty monsters seeking world domination. One series featured an alleged ritual murder of a Christian child. These antisemitic images are thus quite accessible to Arab youths in Germany who consume such TV channels or Internet offerings.²⁷

A second antisemitic motif that dominates the Quds March is that of an alleged Zionist world conspiracy. This motif dominates various speeches by the announcer Jürgen Grassmann: Zionists are responsible for all evils in the world. From the loudspeaker truck it is complained that German politics and the media are "in the hands of the Zionists" and controlled by them and that therefore there is no freedom of speech in Germany. This is also the basis for the claim that Zionists "infiltrate our democratic structures and are a danger to our democracy."²⁸ Other participants formulate their hatred of Jews more clearly. For example, at the end of a speech at Berlin's Quds Day five years ago (in 2015), a Yemeni speaker shouted in Arabic: "Death to America, death to Israel, curse the Jews and victory to Islam."²⁹

The Quds March conveys anti-Israel and antisemitic messages and uses antisemitism to

mobilize supporters in Germany. The Quds March is also propaganda for the Iranian regime and Hezbollah. Even after the display of Hezbollah symbols was banned in 2016, Hezbollah flags and pictures of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah were regularly displayed.

Recommendations: How should policymakers and civil society respond?

It is extremely important to oppose antisemitism in a very clear way, and this is completely independent of the spectrum from which it comes - whether from the right, from the left, from the center of society or from the Islamist spectrum. Antisemitism must always be fought. If antisemitism is not outlawed and pushed back, one prepares the ground for antisemitic violence.

Not all Shiite communities in Germany support Al Quds Day or the Iranian regime, even if the organizers like to claim that they do. It is precisely because the moderate and democratic forces within the Shiite structures need support that the commitment against the Quds March is important. Because this is always also a demonstration of power among Muslims in Germany.

The antisemitic content of the Al Quds march poses a threat to Jews living in Germany, but also to exiled Iranians and all Muslims who do not want to follow the ideological guidelines of the Islamic Republic. For this reason, a broad alliance has been active for years against the antisemitic event. This alliance has worked through its tireless commitment to ensure that political decision-makers deal with the event and the organizers.

In this context, the ban on Hezbollah is an important step. Like Hezbollah, the Quds March is directed against the idea of international understanding and endangers internal security in Germany. The intention of Berlin's Interior Senator Andreas Geisel to consider a ban on the Quds March is therefore welcome. This year, the Quds March was in fact only temporarily and once canceled by the organizers due to the Corona crisis.

The Berlin Senate should therefore work to obtain a court-proof ban on the antisemitic Quds March.

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Notes:

All internet sources last viewed 5/21/2020 unless otherwise noted.

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