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POLICY BRIEF

Australia Expels Islamic Republic Ambassador, Plans to Designate IRGC

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The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) has come to the "deeply disturbing conclusion" that the Islamic Republic in Iran directed at least two antisemitic arson attacks in Sydney and Melbourne using a "layer cake" of criminal intermediaries. In response, the Albanese Government has expelled the Islamic Republic's ambassador, suspended its embassy in Tehran, and will move to list the IRGC as a terrorist organization. This move marks the first expulsion of a foreign ambassador from Australia since World War II.

The Bottom Line

- ASIO assessed with "credible intelligence" that **Tehran directed at least two antisemitic attacks** targeting a kosher restaurant in Sydney on October 20 of last year and the Adass Israel Synagogue in Melbourne on December 6 of last year.
    - The ASIO further assessed that "**it is likely Iran directed further attacks as well**."
- In response to these findings, the Australian government has:
    i. Informed the Islamic Republic's ambassador to Australia that he and three additional **regime diplomats are *persona non grata*** and must depart within seven days.
    ii. **Suspended operations at the Australian embassy in Tehran**, already placing all Australian diplomats in a third country.
    iii. Made clear an intent to **legislate so that the IRGC can be listed as a terrorist organization** in Australia. Current legislation only allows for the listing of non-state groups.
- ASIO says the IRGC used "a complex web of proxies" to hide its involvement in the attacks, and that investigators had uncovered a "layer cake of cut-outs" between the IRGC, "organized crime elements

offshore," and perpetrators in Australia. This is consistent with patterns seen in the Islamic Republic's transnational activities in the UK and Sweden.

- British authorities say they've disrupted at least **20 regime-linked plots** to kidnap or kill people in Britain since January 2022.
- In January 2024, the Foxtrot Network, a Swedish organized crime group, orchestrated an attack on the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm, Sweden, on behalf of the Islamic Republic.
- These transnational attacks are part of a wider surge in Islamic Republic plots that have been consistently condemned by Western governments since 2022, including in a joint statement from the United States, France, Germany, and 11 other European countries on July 31 of this year. **Allied governments must align and coordinate their efforts, and all tools available to them, to effectively combat this threat** from the Islamic Republic.

Context

- The arson attack in Sydney targeted **Lewis' Continental Kitchen**, a well- known kosher restaurant in the area. It took 30 firefighters an hour to bring the fire under control. The 21 residents who lived in seven units above the restaurant had to be evacuated.
- The arson attack in Melbourne targeted the **Adass Israel Synagogue**, built in the 1960s by Holocaust survivors. One person was injured and the fire caused widespread damage to the synagogue.
  - At the time of the attack, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu wrote on X: "Unfortunately, this criminal act cannot be separated from anti-Israel spirit blowing from the Labor government in Australia."
- On August 19, 2025, Netanyahu posted on X: "History will remember Albanese for what he is: A weak politician who betrayed Israel and abandoned Australia's Jews."
  - Coming a week before Albanese's expulsion announcement, **international focus of the type seen in Netanyahu's X post likely raised the perceived cost of inaction by Australia**'s Labor government.

The Islamic Republic's Reaction

- The spokesperson of the Islamic Republic Foreign Ministry, Esmail Baghaei, said in response to the expulsion: "Any inappropriate action at the diplomatic level will be met with a reaction…An appropriate decision regarding how to respond to this issue will be made."
  - Baghaei continued, "the concept of antisemitism has no place in our culture and history, and this phenomenon is a Western and European concept."
  - Baghaei also suggested that the Australian decision was influenced by domestic politics, referencing recent anti-Israeli demonstrations held throughout the country."

- Referencing Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's August 19 post on X, Islamic Republic Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote: "I am not in the habit of joining causes with wanted War Criminals, but Netanyahu is right about one thing: Australia's PM is indeed a 'weak politician.'"
- The IRGC-linked Tasnim News characterized the expulsion as a "hostile action based on unsubstantiated pretexts." The internationally-facing regime-run Press TV said Australia was "falsely accusing" the Islamic Republic.

Recommendations

- **For Australia:**
  - Prosecute local facilitators and organized crime intermediaries. Issue an urgent brief to banks on IRGC cash-movement patterns and require enhanced due diligence for flagged tracks.
  - Surge policing around Jewish and Iranian dissident sites. Establish a single point of contact within Home Affairs for diaspora threat reporting tied to foreign interference.
  - Use MLATs and Five Eyes channels to pursue IRGC handlers overseas. Publicize indictments to deter third-country "cut-outs."
- **For Europe and Other Allies Nations:**
  - Match Australia's IRGC terrorist listing and add synchronized sanctions on IRGC-linked intelligence officers and financial facilitators.
  - Issue a Five Eyes advisory on Islamic Republic use of organized crime proxies for hate crimes and assassinations. Share payment paths and known front entities.