



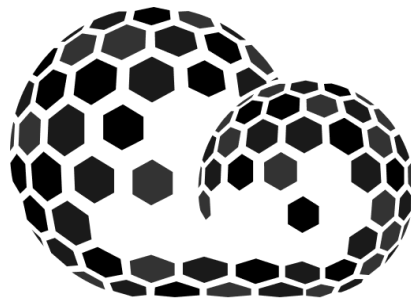
Bankrolling Terror: Iran's Role in Fundraising and Recruiting for Hamas Post-10/7



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Cloudburst Technologies
February 2024



<https://burst.cloud>

Since the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks in Israel launched by commandos from the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Western governments (including the United States) have undertaken sweeping efforts to detect and thwart external sources of financial support for Palestinian militant groups. There has been a particular high-profile public focus on the role of cryptocurrency as a means to channel covert cash to Hamas—although according to fundraising organizers monitored by Cloudburst, cryptocurrency exchanges in Gaza have generally been shuttered in the wake of the Israeli invasion, rendering it an ineffective means of transfer. Based upon messaging data gathered from Telegram and various other social media platforms, a much more traditional financial instrument has flourished as a means to support Hamas and its allies in the wake of October 7: the Iranian banking system. These efforts have been directly blessed by senior Hamas officials, have been clothed in a thin veneer of charitable fundraising, and have resulted in millions of dollars added to Hamas’ coffers.

A prime example of this phenomenon is the Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front, an Iranian non-governmental organization established in March 2017 “with the cooperation of the youth of various countries, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, England, Africa, America, Brazil, etc. to perform and export pure Islam with the views of the resistance to various countries.”¹ According to senior officials from the group, their three primary goals are “moving towards a new Islamic civilization, unity around the axis of resistance and the destruction of Israel, and the liberation of Jerusalem.”² Shabab al-Muqawama claims to have recruits from more than 100 countries and holds annual conferences in the Iranian city of Qom featuring thousands of attendees and speeches by representatives of Iranian-aligned militant groups, including Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Yemen’s Ansarullah (the Houthis), and even the deputy leader of Lebanese Hezbollah Shaykh Naim Qassem.³



While the organization is structured as a private entity, it has substantial connections to the Iranian government. The current leader of Shabab al-Muqawama, Hozjat al-Islam Mohammad Ismail Pourahvashmi, is a Qom-based seminarian and media executive who was formally appointed to his role by senior Iranian cleric and regime official Ayatollah Mohsen Araki, a member of Iran’s Assembly of Experts and its Expediency Council.⁴ According to Pourahvashmi, the group “started its activity under the guidance of two religious scholars, Hazrat Ayatollah Arafai and Hazrat Ayatollah Araki.”⁵ Like Araki, Ayatollah Arafai is a member of the Assembly of Experts and is also a member of Iran’s Guardian Council. The “main speaker” at Shabab al-Muqawama’s conference in the winter of 2019 was Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the chairman of Iran’s Assembly of Experts and



¹ <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1399/05/20/2324743/شباب-المقاومة-چیست>

² <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1399/05/20/2324743/شباب-المقاومة-چیست>

³ <https://ana.ir/fa/news/514425/شباب-المقاومة-جبهه-جهانی-بین-المللی-همایش-بین-المللی-شباب-المقاومة> See also:

<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4644141/شود-ار-می-شود> See also:

<https://www.irna.ir/news/84555409/انقلاب-اسلامی-روز-یه-روز-در-حال-گسترش-و-توسعه-است>

⁴ <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13980609000893/مدیر-جدید-جبهه-جهانی-شباب-المقاومة-منصوب-شد> See also:

<https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4707267/حجت-الاسلام-پور-واشمی-مدیر-جبهه-جهانی-شباب-المقاومة-شد>

⁵ <https://www.isna.ir/news/qom-52582/اولین-و-بزرگ-ترین-همایش-جوانان-جبهه-مقاومت-در-قم-بر-گزار-شد>

the chairman of its Guardian Council.⁶ Shabab al-Muqawama has posted specific endorsements from, among others, the deputy commander of Basiji militia forces in Iran’s Qom Province⁷ as well as the commander of police forces in Qom Province.⁸ In November 2023, the group posted a photo of Mohammad Ismail Pourahvashmi in Damascus, Syria meeting with the Iranian ambassador to Syria. The photo was labeled, “The programs of Shabab al-Muqawama in Syria are supported by the Iranian Embassy in this country.”⁹

Following the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks by Hamas targeting Israeli communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip, Shabab al-Muqawama announced on Telegram and Iran’s Al-Eitaa messaging platform that it was organizing a conference for late October in Qom, Iran, “in order to declare readiness for harsh revenge against Israel.”¹⁰ Advertised speakers at the event included official Hamas representative to Iran Khaled Qaddoumi and the official Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) representative in the country as well, Nasser Abu Sharif. Attendees at the event – carrying the flags of Lebanese Hezbollah and the Fatemiyoun Brigade – were recorded on video chanting, “Death to Israel, Death to America!”¹¹



The conference attendees included non-Iranian jihadi volunteers seeking to travel to Gaza and join alongside Hamas, some of whom were carrying flags of Lebanese Hezbollah, the Fatemiyoun Brigade, and the “Azerbaijani Islamic Resistance.”¹² They assembled under a large banner featuring former IRGC-QF chief Qasem Soleimani.

Following the conference in Qom, Shabab al-Muqawama posted a video recording on its Telegram channel of Hamas representative Khaled Qaddoumi under the title, “The official invitation of the representative of Hamas to help the oppressed people of Gaza through the Global Front of Shabab al-Muqawama.” In the video, Qaddoumi explained, “Shabab al-Muqawama Front currently has a special plan to help the oppressed people of Gaza; therefore, I invite all benefactors and supporters to donate their donations through the Shabab al-Muqawama group, which is trusted by us and all groups and organizations to bring it to Gaza.”¹³



Shabab al-Muqawama directed those interested in contributing money “to help the oppressed people of Palestine and other social affairs” to send donations to a Maestro debit card with the BIN 603799 operated by Iran’s Bank Melli: “Pay in the name of ‘Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front.’”¹⁴ According to U.S. Treasury, “Bank Melli has acted as a conduit for payments to the [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - Quds Force]. The IRGC-QF has used Bank Melli to dispense funds to Iraqi Shia militant groups... Since the mid-2000s, Bank Melli increasingly provided

⁶ <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/11/28/1948989/> 50-کشور -نمایندگان -حضور -مغنیه-با-حضور -نمایندگان -50-کشور

⁷ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

⁸ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

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¹³ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

¹⁴ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

services to Iranian military-related entities as they became further involved in all aspects of the Iranian economy. Bank Melli has enabled the IRGC and its affiliates to move funds inside and outside of Iran.”¹⁵ According to Shabab al-Muqawama, in only its first month of fundraising on behalf of Hamas and allied Palestinian militant groups, it was able to collect at least 32 billion riyals [\$750,000].¹⁶



These financing activities were merely the beginning for the group. Shabab al-Muqawama likewise announced on its Telegram channel that it was openly soliciting international paramilitary volunteers “to be dispatched to the occupied territories” and join Palestinian fighters in the Gaza Strip. It requested would-be volunteers to send their personal details to an SMS number, instructing would-be applicants to provide “which country are you from and which city do you currently live in.” According to the appeal published on

Telegram, “this registration does not mean a definite dispatch, but means priority allocation if the necessary conditions are met.”¹⁷ By late October 2023, Shabab al-Muqawama posted photos of its leader Mohammad Ismail Pourahvashmi meeting with Hamas representative Khaled Qaddoumi and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) representative Nasser Abu Sharif to announce “that youths of 100 nationalities who are part of Shabab al-Muqawama are ready to participate in Palestine and fight against Israel.”¹⁸



Shabab al-Muqawama is also “affiliated” with a separate Iranian charity known as Rah-e-Omid. According to messages posted on Iran’s Eitaa.com social media network, Rah-e-Omid “started its activity many years ago, under the leadership of religious scholars and with the presence of youth from more than seventy nationalities of the world.”¹⁹ Rah-e-Omid’s account on Al-Eitaa further explained, “The Rah-e-Omid charity organization is affiliated with the Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front, with a transnational and trans-religious perspective, setting our feet on the path of serving the deprived and oppressed.”²⁰ The account added, “The view of the founders of this charity about poverty and deprivation is not limited to financial poverty. The Rah-e-Omid charity considers itself responsible for the intellectual, cultural, social, and financial needs of people.”²¹



Rah-e-Omid claims to have previously provided support to natural disaster victims in Khuzestan, Golestan, Lorestan, and Kermanshah, as well as supporting COVID relief efforts and “supplying the debt of financial prisoners with the help of the prisons organization.”²² In Farsi-language social media appeals Rah-e-Omid describes providing aid to suffering children and hospital patients, and—unlike the interrelated Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front—rarely makes

¹⁵ <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm541>

¹⁶ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

¹⁷ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

¹⁸ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

¹⁹ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

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²¹ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

²² Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

mention of politics or extremist religious perspectives in its fundraising appeals. Only in the wake of the latest conflict in Gaza has Rah-e-Omid publicly declared its solidarity and support for “the victory of the fighters of Islam and the oppressed people of Palestine.”²³

Nonetheless, on numerous occasions, Rah-e-Omid has disclosed its underlying relationship with the Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front.

- On August 2, 2023, Rah-e-Omid posted an update about a joint “meeting at the office of Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front” with a famous Iranian internet personality, Seyyed Kazem Roohbakhsh. According to the update, “during this meeting, solutions were presented to carry out joint activities involving Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front and the Rah-e-Omid charity affiliated with this Front.”²⁴
- On June 15, 2023, Rah-e-Omid posted an update on its Eitaa channel about a meeting with Iranian university official Dr. Hakim Elahi that again emphasized its close ties with Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front. In the update on Eitaa, Elahi himself was quoted about the progress made during the meeting with Rah-e-Omid: “The activities of Shabab al-Muqawama and the Rah-e-Omid Charity are promising, and the meeting with the Rah-e-Omid Charity was one of the few meetings that I enjoyed.”²⁵
- On June 10, 2023, an update was posted to Rah-e-Omid’s Eitaa channel advertising a visit to the charity from soccer player Mohammad Ansari. According to the update, “Mohammed Ansari, the moral man of Iranian football, who recently said goodbye to the green pitch, attended the Rah-e-Omid charity organization affiliated with the Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front and got to know the activities of this center closely.” Ansari was pictured chatting with charity officials with the Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front banner sitting prominently in the background.²⁶
- On July 16, 2023, Rah-e-Omid posted an update on Eitaa.com about “a meeting between the administrators of Qom University of Medical Sciences and the officials of the Rah-e-Omid charity.” The meeting included senior university officials, including a vice-chancellor at the institution. Photos of the meeting broadcast on Eitaa.com show that the meeting actually took place in front of a Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front banner.²⁷
- The same MCI-Iran mobile contact phone number advertised by Rah-e-Omid in its fundraising appeals has also been simultaneously used elsewhere by Shabab al-Muqawama. On May 14, 2023, a Farsi-language message was posted on the Telegram channel “Fetan” seeking donations for a child’s surgical operation: “For this good cause and to help cultural and social good affairs, you can transfer your amounts to the [following] card number... Deposit in the name of the Shabab al-Muqawama Global Front.”²⁸



²³ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

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²⁸ Source available to paid subscribers upon request.

Rah-e-Omid has advertised several means by which donors can send money to the charity. Until approximately mid-July 2023, the Rah-e-Omid Eitaa channel encouraged would-be donors to transfer cash to a Maestro debit card number operated by Gharzolhasaneh Resalat Bank. In October 2020, the U.S. Treasury designated Gharzolhasaneh Resalat Bank under Executive Order 13902 for being a “major bank operating in Iran’s financial sector” that “funds the Iranian government’s malign activities.”²⁹ At that time, Rah-e-Omid also offered prospective donors a “Shaba” number, the Iranian domestic national equivalent of an IBAN standard.



Starting on July 15, 2023, Rah-e-Omid began advertising new financial information for prospective donors, including a Maestro debit card with the bin 610433 operated by Iran’s Bank Mellat. According to the U.S. Treasury, “Iran’s state-owned Bank Mellat has facilitated the movement of millions of dollars for Iran’s nuclear program and was designated under E.O. 13382 in October 2007 for its role in providing financial services to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and Novin Energy.”³⁰ Furthermore, “Bank Mellat has provided Mehr Eqtesad Bank, an institution owned by Bonyad Taavon Basij, hundreds of millions of dollars each year... supporting an institution that facilitates and funds the Basij’s domestic and foreign aggression.”³¹ A new Shaba/IBAN number was also provided starting in July 2023.



Although diverting humanitarian funds for militant causes is a phenomenon more commonly associated with Sunni Islamist movements, there appears to be a repeating pattern of purported charities with links to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) soliciting online donations using Maestro debit cards and Shaba account numbers operated by Iranian financial institutions such as Bank Melli, Bank Mellat, Gharzolhasaneh Resalat Bank, Ansar Bank, and Bank Sepah. In the wake of the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks in Israel, it appears that Hamas and its allies were cut off even from the unruly world of cryptocurrency—and these Iranian banks have provided a significant lifeline of financial support to Hamas thanks to the organizing role of key actors like Shabab al-Muqawama. It is rare, if not unprecedented, for such a “charity” group to have the direct public endorsement of a well-known senior Hamas official. Given the significant ties between Shabab al-Muqawama and various organs of the Iranian government itself, perhaps this endorsement is no great coincidence.

From a broader perspective, this seems to represent a simultaneous effort to both provide a financial channel for Hamas supporters, as well as to extort funds from other charitable donors who have been lured by social media appeals soliciting contributions to cover the emergency medical expenses of orphans and indigent widows. By publishing those appeals on particular messaging platforms like Telegram and Al-Eitaa, organizers have sought to target specific receptive audiences and skirt the attention of their adversaries. Assuming Shabab al-Muqawama is accurate in claiming credit for millions of dollars of online donations headed to Hamas and other like-minded groups, the strategy would appear to have been a resounding success.

²⁹ <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1147>

³⁰ <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/tg355>

³¹ <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm524>



**Khaled Qaddoumi
(Hamas)**



**Nasser Abu Sharif
(PIJ)**



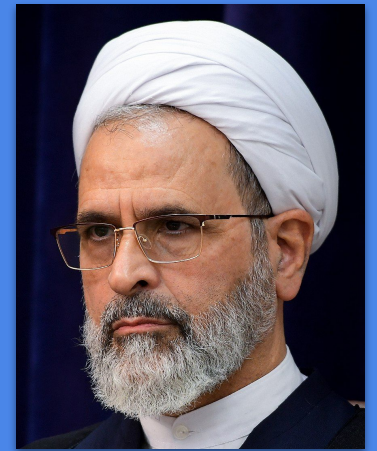
**Naim Qassem
(Hezbollah)**



**Ayatollah Mohsen
Araki**



**Mohammad Ismail
Pourahvashmi
(Shabab al-Muqawama)**



**Ayatollah Alireza
Araf**



**Ayatollah Ahmad
Jannati**



**Hossein Akbari
(Iran's Amb. to Syria)**