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# Iranian power plays reflected in terrorist moves?

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Terrorism emanating from the Middle East is beginning to move beyond the control of even those states that have traditionally supported the myriad extremist factions operating both in and outside the region.

Groups such as Hizbullah ("Party of God"), the umbrella Shiite Muslim movement in Lebanon of which Islamic Jihad is believed to be a part, are increasingly acting on their own initiative. This trend, which has been emerging in the past year, often runs contrary to the wishes of states such as Iran and Syria that have helped create and support the groups.

But Iran and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Syria retain influence over the extremist groups and are now trying to reassert their control. This jockeying for power may well be a contributing factor in this week's release of American hostage David Jacobsen.

Iran's apparent involvement in convincing Islamic Jihad ("Holy War") to free Mr. Jacobsen may have flowed in part from Tehran's self-interest. At least one faction of Iranians have something to gain domestically - and in the region - by reining in the extremists at a crucial juncture. There also appears to have been a more specific quid pro quo in what White House chief of staff Donald Regan conceded over the weekend was "a deal" with unspecified parties.

Iran's sponsorship of terrorism and misadventures by Muslim extremists now appear to be a key element in the rivalry between moderates and radicals over the future leadership of that country. At stake ultimately is Iran's reputation abroad, particularly at a

time of economic trouble, and its entire approach toward foreign policy and the six-year-old war with Iraq. The current dispute in Tehran is not likely to settle the issue of Iran's future direction. But it may establish a different framework.

The power struggle is reflected in a recent controversy centered on the Islamic Liberation Movement (ILM) headed by Mehdi Hashemi. He is son-in-law and aide to Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who, a year ago, was chosen to be Ayatollah Khomeini's successor.

The ILM oversees foreign extremist groups from Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere, based in Tehran and involved in "exporting the revolution" or undermining Western influence and moderate regimes in the Middle East.

Mr. Hashemi and several of his ILM colleagues were arrested last month on charges of murder, both before and after Iran's 1979 revolution; illegal possession of weapons and secret government documents; forging official papers; and secret illegal activities. Hashemi was also reportedly linked with last month's kidnapping in Tehran of a diplomat from Syria, Iran's closest Arab ally, and with smuggling guns on a Saudi airliner during the annual Muslim pilgrimage in August.

The charges are among the most damning indictments ever against a high-level government insider, particularly one so close to Ayatollah Khomeini's successor.

The case offers an indication of how key figures in the extremist campaign are now considered to have gone beyond what is acceptable to Iran's leadership. It also demonstrates how far the government is prepared to go to stop that. The Iranian theocracy rarely launders its dirty works with such publicity. This development is all the more interesting in light of Jacobsen's release and suggestions that other Americans may be freed.

Iran seems to be reining in the extremists, at home and in the region, and trying to tone down its image as a terror master.

The initiative for Hashemi's arrest apparently came from the emerging moderate block in the Iranian hierarchy, which seeks to change both Iran's policy and the leadership succession. For more than two years, the moderates have struggled to improve relations with Arab moderates and Western nations for political, economic, and military reasons.

Politically, the moderates have long been concerned about breaking out of the isolation enforced by the outside world, which has often held Tehran culpable for various terrorist acts. Radical elements that have supported ILM practices feel that extremist acts are the most effective way to undermine rivals and promote militant Islam. But many moderates argue that the Islamic revival is best served by proving Iran a model state that others will voluntarily want to imitate.

One early indication of the moderates' new approach came during the intervention of parliamentary Speaker Hashemi Rafsanjani during the hijacking of a Trans World Airlines plane in June 1985. Mr. Rafsanjani played a pivotal role, which the US acknowledged, by exerting influence on Hizbullah, to gain the release of 39 US passengers. Iran's moderates

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