

BTR: Iran Conflict Spotlights Need to Map Global Proxy Connections and Relationships

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The current conflict with Iran has been building, relationship by relationship, across four decades and multiple continents, placing new urgency on tracking the diffuse and often hidden connections between Iranian proxy networks and drug cartels in Latin America, whose interactions carry increasingly unpredictable and far-reaching consequences.



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Cormac Meiners, i2 Group

So says Cormac Meiners, a retired Green Beret and i2 Group's federal lead for the Department of War and the intelligence community (IC), whose firm has spent more than 30 years developing software to map exactly these kinds of complex, shifting networks. Meiners made that assessment in an exclusive interview with BizTechReports recorded shortly after Operation Epic Fury began. His argument has only grown more urgent in the days since, as a complex array of variables is converging to create a

kaleidoscope of factors for intelligence analysts to consider, including, but not limited, to the fact that:

* Tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz has dropped to a trickle, with hundreds of oil tankers trapped in the region. Oil prices have surged, prompting the [International Energy Agency to authorize a record release](#) of 400 million barrels of crude in response.

* Hezbollah has re-entered the war from Lebanon.

* Iraqi militias are striking U.S. targets in Baghdad.

* Law enforcement agencies across the United States are investigating a series of domestic incidents as potential acts of terrorism linked to the conflict.

What is unfolding, Meiners argued, is precisely the scenario that an inadequate understanding of Iran's global proxy architecture makes so difficult to manage. The relationships Tehran has cultivated over four decades, across the Middle East, Latin America, and within the United States,

are not passive. They are reorganizing under pressure, and tracking that reorganization requires both a new generation of data fusion and artificial intelligence tools as well as a willingness to mine decades of accumulated intelligence history.

A Proxy Architecture Forty Years in the Making

To understand what Iran can do right now, it is essential to understand the institutional architecture through which it operates. Meiners argues that this dimension of the problem statement can be easily misunderstood.



Cormac Meiners, i2 Group

"Everyone talks about the IRGC, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, but a lot of folks didn't realize Iran has a regular army," he said. "While the IRGC is also an army, it's a political army that's beholden directly to the Ayatollah." Alongside the IRGC sits the Basij militia, a religiously motivated paramilitary beholden not to the Iranian state but to the regime itself. Meiners compared the dual structure to that of Nazi Germany, where an ideologically driven SS answered directly to Hitler rather than to the regular Wehrmacht.

Within the IRGC sits the Quds Force, whose global mission Meiners described in terms that underscore how long Iran has been at this work.

"This is an arm of the IRGC that is actually quite similar to our Green Berets as far as what they do. They go around the world arming, equipping, and training militia groups for combat in various regions, such as Iraq or Lebanon."

That mission has been ongoing for decades, and the relationships it has built form the connective tissue of a network now actively fighting from Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen. This is why, despite the significant disruption of Iran's leadership structure, it is important to understand the underlying players and their relationships. It is the key to Iran's resilience.

Indeed, the [Atlantic Council](#) cautioned that degrading the authorizing center of a network does not dissolve it. Hezbollah retains an estimated 25,000 missiles, 1,000 drones, and thousands of fighters. Iraqi militias continue attacking U.S. targets. The Houthis remain operational. Decapitation creates disruption. It does not eliminate four decades of relationship-building

overnight.

The Domestic Dimension -- How Proxy Players Reorganized Inside the United States

The reach of these elements extends all the way to the United States. Iranian backed players have spent decades quietly building a financial and logistical infrastructure inside the country, and that network has arguably received less analytical attention than its military operations abroad. That oversight now carries serious consequences.

"They have cells that mainly operate in order to gather resources and money for the IRGC," he said. "They operate smuggling rings, they do fraud, they do money laundering." It is not primarily a violent network. It is a financial and logistical one, designed to fund operations while maintaining the capacity to activate for other purposes when circumstances warrant.

The historical record of that activity is concrete. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a Hezbollah-linked network in North Carolina purchased untaxed cigarettes and transported them to Michigan, exploiting state tax differentials to generate substantial revenue for the IRGC. The scheme was a window into a broader pattern that has been documented across multiple states and has funded terrorist activities for years.

"That network in this hemisphere is actually quite robust," Meiners said.

Since the start of Operation Epic Fury, that network has moved from a background concern to an active area of focus. U.S. law enforcement is investigating a series of domestic incidents as potential acts of terrorism. An attack at a synagogue in a Detroit suburb has been labeled an act of targeted violence. Two other incidents, including an attempted attack on protesters outside the New York City mayor's mansion and an attack that killed a student at Old Dominion University in Virginia, are under FBI investigation as acts of terrorism.

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