

# Rouhani and Iran's Foreign Policy – Israel

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Much attention has focused on Rouhani's willingness to change Iran's foreign policy. The degree to which he is willing or able to do so is arguably the critical question that the U.S. is looking to answer in the coming weeks.

One area in which there is little hope for change is in Iran's commitment to Israel's destruction. Rouhani's rhetoric – both during the election and since his victory – has been consistent in its hostility toward the Jewish state. It's been echoed in recent weeks by other prominent members of Iran's military and parliament.

Rouhani made a controversial statement in August 2013 calling what Tehran describes as “the Occupation” – i.e. all of Israel – “a wound” on the Muslim world (<http://is.gd/Bvld8j>). But perhaps more worrisome – and revelatory – was a comment he made a month later, in which he described a global conspiracy drawing in the whole world on behalf of Israel. AFP reported at the time (<http://is.gd/cHmhyE>):

*Iranian President Hassan Rowhani warned Monday of a Western campaign to transform the Arab world to suit the interests of Israel, with the Syria conflict part of the plot... He said the uprisings in Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain, together with the resultant instability, were all "chains of a single plot with one goal," according to state television speech. The aim was to "benefit Israel, to consolidate Israel and its power" while weakening the anti-Western and -Israeli fronts in the region, where Iran and Syria back Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas.*

## [A] Rouhani has consistently issued statements blasting Israel

- July 2013: Rouhani reaffirms support for Syria and Hezbollah so that they can – according to Iranian state-controlled outlets – “confront ‘enemies in the region, especially the Zionist regime’” (AP, <http://is.gd/uZBzVL>).
- July 2013: Rouhani gives a speech to veterans of the Iran-Iraq war describing Israel as a “miserable regional country” and emphasizing what AFP described as “Tehran's threats of forceful retaliation” should Israel act against Iran's nuclear program (AFP, <http://is.gd/PbJSIE>)
- August 2013: Iranian media reports that Rouhani tells a rally in Tehran that Israel has been “a wound for years on the body of the Muslim world” (PressTV, <http://is.gd/Bvld8j>). Some analysts attempted to characterize Rouhani as talking only about Israel's presence in the West Bank, not to Israel itself. The claim was described by WSJ Iran expert Sohrab Ahmari as based on “literal-mindedness that borders on stupidity” (<http://is.gd/uwoo0T>).
- September 2013: Rouhani claims that Western moves against Syria are part of a global conspiracy spanning “Syria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain” and designed to boost Israel (AFP, <http://is.gd/cHmhyE>).



- September 2013: In an interview with NBC News, Rouhani refuses to acknowledge that the Holocaust occurred and blames Israel as the root cause of all Middle East instability (AFP, <http://is.gd/GH4OsX>)

**[B] Iranian officials have echoed Rouhani's anti-Israel rhetoric**

- August 2013: Commenting on the possibility that the U.S. could strike Syria, Mohammad Ali Jafari, the chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, called Israel a "fake regime" and said that an attack on Syria would mean "the immediate destruction of Israel" (AP, <http://is.gd/sYvSwM>)
- August 2013: Iranian MP Mansur Haqiqatpur threatened that "the flames of outrage of the region's revolutionaries will point toward the Zionist regime" should the U.S. strike Syria (NYT, <http://is.gd/luCTLw>)
- September 2013: Amid declarations that the tone from Tehran was changing, regime insider Hamid-Reza Taraghi made clear that the country's long-standing antagonism towards Israel would not be altered: "we have no intention to change...Our ideology will remain the same." (NYT, <http://is.gd/bojx19>)