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The House Committee on Homeland Security**

“An Examination of the Iranian Regime’s Threats to Homeland Security”

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Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Greenway. I am the Director of the Center for National Defense at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation, the Department of Defense, the United States Army, or any other organization.

The risk from the Islamic Republic of Iran—*and those acting on their behalf*—has expanded as has the scope and scale of the terrorism it has long sponsored. This risk has increased dramatically in response to the dismantling of U.S. deterrence since the Biden Administration initiated its policy of appeasement beginning in January 2021.¹ Despite Iran’s escalation and warnings from policy experts that pursuing a return to a flawed and already expiring nuclear deal would prove disastrous, President Biden shifted American policy from pressure to accommodation in hopes of facilitating the restoration of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

¹ President Joe Biden, “There’s a smarter way to be tough on Iran,” CNN, updated September 13, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/13/opinions/smarter-way-to-be-tough-on-iran-joe-biden/index.html>.

Tehran's escalation reached its apogee last week. At least 1,300 Israelis were killed, 3,000 wounded, and approximately 200 hostages taken as Hamas terrorists carried out an unprecedented, multi-front attack on Israel at daybreak on October 7. Covered by over 2,500 rockets, dozens of Hamas fighters infiltrated the heavily fortified border in several locations by air, land, and sea, catching Israel and the U.S. off-guard a day after the 50th anniversary of the 1973 Yom Kippur War and during a religious holiday. Israelis were not the only victims, 31 Americans were killed and a dozen held hostage making it the deadliest terror attack in U.S. history since September 11, 2001. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force helped plan and finally approved the operation by Hamas, an organization funded, trained, equipped, and supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran.²

As Israel mobilizes its reserves in preparation for a ground offensive, former Hamas leader abroad Khaled Mashal published an announcement on October 10 calling on the global Muslim community to join the battle for Al-Aqsa Mosque and provide economic aid to the Gaza Strip. Hamas published an announcement on October 12 calling on all those with weapons in the West Bank to join the war against Israel. Both statements echo Hamas's October 10 formal announcement calling on the Palestinians, Israel's Arabs, and the Arab and Muslim communities worldwide to mount a widescale uprising and to advance toward the borders of Israel this past Friday, October 13.³ During a visit to Beirut on October 12, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian publicly stated that the Islamic Republic's other proxies will respond to Israel's bombing of Gaza, escalating the conflict regionally.⁴

This has been a predictable trajectory. On March 28, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley testified before Congress that U.S. forces had been attacked by Iranian-backed surrogates 83 times since 2021 and had responded on only four occasions, reflecting the erosion of deterrence in the region.⁵ In just the last week, there have been 9 attacks perpetrated by Iranian backed surrogates against U.S. Military forces in Iraq in Syria.

We have directly funded the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism. Since 2021, the Biden Administration has provided unprecedented resources to the Islamic Republic.⁶ As of September 4, 2023, Iranian crude exports flowed between 1.4 million and 1.9 million barrels per day.⁷ The Trump Administration's maximum pressure campaign, by contrast, dramatically reduced Tehran's oil

² Summer Said, Benoit Faucon, and Stephen Kalin, "Iran Helped Plot Attack on Israel over Several Weeks," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 8, 2023.

³ Middle East Media Research Institute, "Hamas Declares Friday, October 13, As General Mobilization Day for 'Al-Aqsa Flood Operation,' Urges West Bank, Jerusalem Palestinians to Join Massive Rallies and Confront Israeli Soldiers," *Special Dispatch* No. 10849, October 10, 2023.

⁴ Jeremy Quinn, "Iran's Foreign Minister Says Israel 'Will Receive a Response' from Other Terror Groups over Gaza Strikes," *National Review Online*, October 12, 2023.

⁵ Marc Rod, "Biden administration has only launched four 'major responses' to Iranian-backed attacks on U.S. forces, Austin says," *Jewish Insider*, March 29, 2023.

⁶ Alaric Nightingale, "Iran's Booming Oil Flows Surge Above 2 Million Barrels a Day," *Bloomberg*, August 21, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-21/iran-s-booming-oil-flows-surge-above-2-million-barrels-a-day?sref=3OIZCXOE>.

⁷ Sharon Cho, Serene Cheong, and Anthony Di Paola, "Iran's Booming Oil Exports Are Poised to Slow for Rest of Year," *Bloomberg*, September 4, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-09-04/iran-s-booming-oil-exports-are-poised-to-slow-for-rest-of-year?embedded-checkout=true>.

exports to a few hundred thousand barrels per day.⁸ This is also a violation not only of the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015 (INARA), but also of other U.S. sanctions law requiring the imposition of sanctions on entities involved in the transactions. In exchange for the release of five U.S. hostages, the United States would release unnamed Iranian nationals imprisoned in the United States and authorize the transfer of \$6 billion in funds from South Korea to Qatar. In addition, the Biden Administration has permitted Iraq to pay for Iranian electricity it doesn't need, providing some \$10 billion to cash-strapped Tehran.⁹ The Islamic Republic of Iran's total revenue derived during Biden's tenure is estimated to be from \$81 billion to \$90.7 billion, compared to less than \$8 billion in 2020.¹⁰

The threat is not limited to the Middle East. The U.S. Border Patrol has encountered 72,823 "special interest aliens" on America's borders over the past two years, many from the Middle East. Multiple Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reports of apprehensions between ports of entry between October 2021 and October 2023 shows that agents encountered 6,386 nationals from Afghanistan in that period, 3,153 from Egypt, 659 from Iran, 538 from Syria, 139 from Yemen, 123 from Iraq, 164 from Lebanon, 1,613 from Pakistan, 15,594 from Mauritania, 13,624 from Uzbekistan, and 30,830 from Turkey.¹¹ The ease with which Iran can exploit our open borders should not be underestimated, but we also should not forget that they were already here and are expanding but not establishing an operational presence.

The Islamic Republic has also succeeded in obtaining unprecedented access to and influence over the U.S. Administration's policy toward Tehran. At least three of the people selected by the Islamic Republic's Foreign Ministry were top aides to Robert Malley, the Biden Administration's special envoy on Iran, who has been on leave following the suspension of his security clearance. Another remains employed by the Defense Department.¹²

As of August 2022, the Islamic Republic had assassinated at least 20 opponents abroad and killed hundreds in bombings of foreign military, diplomatic, and cultural facilities. It targeted¹³ Americans, Europeans, Latin Americans, Israelis, and Arabs as well as Iranian opposition members¹⁴ living

⁸ Alex Lawler, "As Trump's sanctions bite, Iran's oil exports slide further in June," Reuters, June 24, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oil-iran-exports-idUSKCN1TP1F0>, and Grant Smith, Anthony Di Paola, and Ben Bartenstein, "For Global Oil Markets, a US-Iran Deal Is Already Happening," Bloomberg, August 25, 2023. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-25/for-global-oil-markets-a-us-iran-deal-is-already-happening>.

⁹ Agence France Presse, "Iraq Says in Touch with US Over Paying for Iranian Gas," August 1, 2023.

¹⁰ Saeed Ghasseminejad, "The Monetary Value of Relaxed Oil Sanctions Enforcement by the Biden Administration," Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, September 28, 2023.

¹¹ Adam Shaw, Bill Melugin, and Griff Jenkins, "Thousands of 'special interest aliens' from Middle East countries stopped at southern border since 2021: data," Fox News, October 10, 2023.

¹² Jay Solomon, "Inside Iran's Influence Operations," SEMAFOR, September 29, 2023.

¹³ Ioan Pop and Mitchell D. Silber, "Iran and Hezbollah's Pre-Operational Modus Operandi in the West," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2021).

¹⁴ Saeid Golkar, "Iran's Intelligence Organizations and Transnational Suppression," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch* No. 3517, August 5, 2021.

abroad, according to U.S.,¹⁵ Canadian,¹⁶ European,¹⁷ Israeli,¹⁸ and other government reports.¹⁹ Research indicates there have been at least 52 attacks or plots.²⁰

Iranian plots have forced U.S. and European governments to reconsider long-held assumptions²¹ regarding *the* constraints governing Iranian external operations.²² Following the 2011 Arbabsiar plot to bomb the Café Milano in Washington, D.C.,²³ to kill the Saudi Ambassador without regard for collateral deaths, then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified before Congress that the plot “shows that some Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime.”²⁴

In November 2022, FBI Director Christopher Wray warned lawmakers of increasing threats to Americans from Iran, suggesting that “the Iranian regime across multiple vectors has become more aggressive, more brazen and more dangerous” over the preceding 18 months.²⁵ National Counterterrorism Center Director Christine Abizaid reinforced Director Wray’s warnings, telling

¹⁵ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community*, February 7, 2022; “Escalating Tensions Between the United States and Iran Pose Potential Threats to the Homeland,” *Joint Intelligence Bulletin*, January 8, 2020; Judith Yaphe, “Iranian Support for Terrorism in 1987,” U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate for Intelligence, *Terrorism Review*, February 25, 1988, declassified and approved for release June 1999; U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1991*, April 1992; U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Director of Central Intelligence, “Iran’s Use of Terrorism,” *Interagency Intelligence Assessment*, September 1987, declassified in part, sanitized copy approved for release December 4, 2013; and testimony of James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, in hearing, *Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States*, Select Committee on Intelligence, U.S. Senate, 112th Congress, 2nd Session, January 31, 2012.

¹⁶ Shane Harris, Souad Mekhennet, and Yeganeh Torbati, “Rise in Iranian assassination, kidnapping plots alarms Western officials,” *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2022.

¹⁷ Press release, “Iran: EU sanctions perpetrators of serious human rights violations,” Council of the European Union, October 17, 2022, and press release, “Fight against terrorism: Council renews the designations on the EU terrorist list and adds two Iranian individuals and one Iranian entity in response to recent foiled attacks on European soil,” Council of the European Union, January 9, 2019.

¹⁸ Yoram Schweitzer, Anat Shapira, and Sima Shione, “Increased Iranian Terrorist Activities: Emphasis on Israeli and Jewish Targets,” Institute for National Security Studies *Insight* No. 1672, December 19, 2022.

¹⁹ Matthew Levitt, “Iran’s Deadly Diplomats,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 11, No. 7 (August 2018), and Andrew Hanna and Garrett Nada, “Timeline: Iran’s Assassinations and Plots,” U.S. Institute of Peace, updated August 17, 2022.

²⁰ Freedom House, “Iran: Transnational Repression Case Study,” *Special Report*, 2021.

²¹ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Select Iran-Sponsored Operational Activity in Europe, 1979–2018,” July 5, 2018.

²² Matthew Levitt, “Fighters Without Borders’—Forecasting New Trends in Iran Threat Network Foreign Operations Tradeecraft,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (February 2020).

²³ Press release, “Manssor Arbabsiar Sentenced in New York City Federal Court to 25 Years in Prison for Conspiring with Iranian Military Officials to Assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States,” U.S. Department of Justice, May 30, 2013.

²⁴ Greg Miller, “Iran, perceiving threat from West, willing to attack on U.S. soil, U.S. intelligence report finds,” *The Washington Post*, January 21, 2012, and Clapper testimony, January 31, 2012.

²⁵ Marc Rod, “FBI’s Wray Warns That Iran ‘Has Become More Aggressive, More Brazen, More Dangerous’” *Jewish Insider*, November 16, 2022, and “Statement of Christopher A. Wray, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation Before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, at a Hearing Entitled ‘Threats to the Homeland,’ presented November 17, 2022.”

Congress that the regime “raises significant concerns from a security perspective” both at home and in the Middle East.²⁶

In fact, the first external assassination plot carried out by agents of the Islamic Republic of Iran took place outside our nation’s capital. In July 1980, Iranian agents recruited David Belfield (aka Dawud Salahuddin), an American convert to Shiite Islam, to assassinate former Iranian diplomat Ali Akbar Tabatabai in Bethesda, Maryland.²⁷

The most recent and explicit threats to us and other current and former U.S officials followed the January 3, 2020, strike that resulted in the death of IRGC Major General Qassem Soleimani at Baghdad International Airport while he was planning imminent operations against U.S. forces and diplomatic facilities. Soleimani was commander of the Quds Force, one of five branches of the IRGC subordinate to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. While this strike was used specifically as justification for retaliation against U.S. officials judged by Iran to have been responsible for the operation, it was hardly the first time that threats have been made against current and former U.S. officials that Iran has perceived as advocating or pursuing policies that it views as hostile.²⁸

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei vowed “harsh revenge” in the immediate aftermath of the strike against Soleimani. On December 6, 2020, Khamenei posted on Twitter that “[t]hose who ordered the murder of General Soleimani as well as those who carried this out should be punished. This revenge will certainly happen at the right time.”²⁹ How he and other Iranian officials maintain U.S. social media accounts in violation of Twitter’s policies³⁰ and U.S. law³¹ is difficult to understand.

Other Iranian officials have followed suit. IRGC chief General Hossein Salami publicly stated, “We will target those who were directly or indirectly involved in the martyrdom of [Soleimani].” Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, speaking on the second anniversary of Soleimani’s assassination, stated that former President Donald Trump must face trial for the killing or Tehran would take revenge. On November 15, 2021, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh stated, “The basic principle in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was formed after the cowardly assassination of (Soleimani): The action taken by the perpetrators and advisers of this cowardly act will not go unpunished.”³²

²⁶ “United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Annual Threat Assessment to the Homeland, Statement for the Record, Ms. Christine Abizaid, Director, National Counterterrorism Center, November 17, 2022.”

²⁷ Hearing, *Iranian Terror Operations on American Soil*, Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management and Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, 112th Congress, 1st Session, October 26, 2011.

²⁸ Udit Banerjee, “Revolutionary Intelligence: The Expanding Intelligence Role of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps,” *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2015); Matthew Levitt, “Iranian State Sponsorship of Terror: Threatening U.S. Security, Global Stability, and Regional Peace,” Testimony before the Subcommittee on Middle East and Central Asia and Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, February 16, 2005, and Daniel Coats, Director of National Intelligence, “Statement for the Record, Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community,” January 29, 2019.

²⁹ Tweet from @khamenei_ir, December 16, 2020.

³⁰ Twitter violent threats policy, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/violent-threats-glorification>.

³¹ 18 U.S.C. § 875.

³² Reuters, “Iran vows revenge for Soleimani killing if Trump not put on trial,” January 3, 2022.

Specific threats against U.S. officials deemed by Iran to be responsible for Soleimani’s death have been increasingly specific, credible, and imminent. The threats include efforts by Iran to inspire and celebrate “lone wolf” actors whose activities, by their nature, are hard to detect and preempt.³³

- **January 2023.** An IRGC video was posted to social media³⁴ associated with the IRGC. It explicitly threatens former U.S. officials (including myself) with imminent assassination by drone, sniper fire, bomb, lethal injection, or stabbing in retaliation for the strike against Qassem Soleimani.
- **January 2023.** A social media account located in Iran and presumably affiliated with the regime posted mug shots³⁵ of 26 current and former officials (including myself) as “most wanted fugitives” and stating, “There is no night that we sleep without thinking about you... Revenge is near Very near!”
- **March 2022.** Police body camera footage obtained by local news outlet KLAS showed Nika Nikoubin, 22, confessing that she stabbed her date in the neck in a Las Vegas-area hotel room because she wanted to “spill American blood.” Asked by the officer why she attacked her date, Nikoubin, then a student at UCLA, said it was to avenge the death of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Qassem Soleimani.³⁶
- **August 2022.** Stockholm police destroyed a bag containing explosives that was found in a park in the Swedish capital threatening a five-day Culture Festival featuring Iranian pop singer Ebi, whose real name is Ebrahim Hamedi and who is a known Iranian dissident.³⁷
- **August 2022.** Hadi Matar stabbed novelist Salman Rushdie multiple times as Rushdie was about to give a public lecture at the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. The 24-year-old Iranian American suspect was arrested at the scene and was charged the following day with assault and attempted murder.³⁸
- **August 2022.** Khalid Mehdiyev was pulled over a block from Iranian dissident Masih Alinejad’s home the same day after failing to stop at a stop sign. Mehdiyev was earlier caught on camera outside the home of Alinejad, who believes the man was there to kill her. Police found an AK-47 in his car. Mehdiyev is now facing multiple federal charges, including criminal possession of a machine gun.³⁹

³³ Jana Winter, “U.S. government warns that Iran may try to kill American officials as revenge for killing top general,” Yahoo News, updated July 13, 2022.

³⁴ Tweet from @Terror_Alarm, “#Breaking: Iranian IRGC threatens to assassinate Trump, other former US officials, using #Shahid drones and Russian #Novichok agent, in a new video published on social media today,” posted January 8, 2023.

³⁵ Tweet from @hadis_rah, “There is no night that we sleep without thinking about you... Revenge is near Very near!” posted January 3, 2023.

³⁶ David Charns, “‘Somebody on American soil should die,’ Woman admits to ‘revenge’ stabbing in Las Vegas-area hotel for death of Iranian leader,” KLAS, posted December 15, 2022.

³⁷ Reuters and Associated Press, “Bomb Found Outside Swedish Festival Where Iranian Dissident Played,” *Haaretz*, August 22, 2022.

³⁸ Scott Wilson, “Grand jury indicts Salman Rushdie’s alleged attacker,” *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2022.

³⁹ Complaint, U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York, 22 MAG 6185, Case 1:22-mj-06185-UA, filed July 29, 2022.

- **April 2022.** Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua Rothstein said the government wanted Haider Ali and Arian Taherzadeh—who were arrested on charges of impersonating federal law enforcement, specifically with the Department of Homeland Security—held in jail while they await trial. Taherzadeh, 40, and Ali, 35, were charged in what prosecutors described as a ruse that started in February 2020 and ended only after a postal inspector came across the pair while investigating an unrelated case. Federal law enforcement officials remain uncertain about what motivated the men or what they wanted in return as they, according to prosecutors, “ingratiated themselves with and infiltrated” Secret Service agents and DHS personnel who lived in their D.C. apartment building. The men were in possession of a weapons cache, a high-powered telescope, surveillance equipment, documents pointing to false names and other fake identities, access to significant financial resources, and, in Ali’s case, visas for travel to Iran according to media accounts of the case.⁴⁰ The men pleaded guilty to federal conspiracy and other charges later in 2022 and are awaiting sentencing.⁴¹
- **January 2022.** Iran imposed sanctions on dozens more Americans over the 2020 killing of General Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike. Iran’s Foreign Ministry said the 51⁴² Americans had been targeted for what it called “terrorism” and human rights violations. An additional 61 were sanctioned in July.⁴³
- **October 2021.** According to court documents, beginning in October 2021, “Shahram Poursafi, aka Mehdi Rezayi, 45, of Tehran, Iran, attempted to arrange the murder of former National Security Advisor John Bolton, likely in retaliation for the January 2020 death of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps–Qods Force (IRGC-QF) commander Qasem Soleimani.” Working on behalf of the IRGC-QF, Poursafi tried to pay people inside the U.S. \$300,000 to carry out the assassination in Washington, D.C., or Maryland, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.⁴⁴
- **August 2021.** Hackers sponsored by the Iranian government attempted a cyber-attack against Boston Children’s Hospital that threatened to disrupt services to patients according to FBI Director Christopher Wray.⁴⁵
- **July 2021:** The Department of Justice charged four Iranians with conspiring to kidnap an Iranian American journalist and dissident, Masih Alinejad, living in Brooklyn. The four men were charged with conspiracy to kidnap, violating U.S. sanctions on Iran, money laundering, and bank and wire fraud. They faced a lifetime in prison if apprehended and convicted on all charges. The indictment, unsealed in a New York federal court, identified the conspirators by name. Alireza Shavaroghi was an intelligence official living in Iran who oversaw the operation. Mahmoud Khazein, Kiya Sadeghi, and Omid Noori were “intelligence assets” who worked under Farahani. The indictment also named a female accomplice: Niloufar Bahadorifar, age 46,

⁴⁰ Complaint, The United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Crim No.: 22-cr-133 (CKK), April 6, 2022.

⁴¹ Press release, “D.C. Man Pleads Guilty to Carrying Out Conspiracy to Impersonate Federal Law Enforcement Officer,” U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Columbia, August 1, 2022.

⁴² Reuters, “Iran sanctions 51 Americans over the 2020 killing of top general Qassem Soleimani,” January 8, 2022.

⁴³ Reuters, “Iran sanctions 61 more Americans as nuclear talks hit impasse,” July 16, 2022.

⁴⁴ Press release, “Member of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Charged with Plot to Murder the Former National Security Advisor,” U.S. Department of Justice, August 10, 2022.

⁴⁵ Nate Raymond, “Iranian-backed hackers targeted Boston Children’s Hospital, FBI chief says,” Reuters, June 1, 2022.

who allegedly “provided financial services” to the plotters while living in California. She was arrested on July 1 and arraigned before a federal judge on July 8. Bahadorifar was charged with violating U.S. sanctions on Iran, money laundering, and bank and wire fraud. The four other Iranians “remain at large,” the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York said in a statement on July 13.⁴⁶

- **March 2021.** Iran has made threats against Fort McNair and against the Army’s Vice Chief of Staff according to the Associated Press, citing two senior U.S. intelligence officials. Reportedly, communications intercepted by the National Security Agency in January showed that Iran’s Revolutionary Guard discussed mounting “USS Cole-style attacks” against the Army post, referring to the October 2000 suicide attack in which a small boat pulled up alongside the Navy destroyer in the Yemeni port of Aden and exploded, killing 17 sailors.⁴⁷
- **January 2021.** Iran requested Interpol to issue a “red notice” for the arrest of President Trump and 47 other U.S. officials (including myself), citing the targeted killing of Qassem Soleimani, a powerful Iranian general. This was the second time Iran asked for help in detaining the U.S. President and other officials.⁴⁸
- **September 2020.** U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Lana Marks was reportedly an Iranian assassination target. According to news reports, the U.S. claimed Iran was considering several options as retaliation for the U.S. killing of General Qassem Soleimani in January 2020.⁴⁹
- **June 2020.** Iran issued an arrest warrant and asked Interpol for help in detaining former President Trump and dozens of other current and former U.S. officials that it believes carried out the strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad according to Tehran prosecutor Ali Alqasimehr as reported by the state-run IRNA news agency.⁵⁰
- **November 2019.** Masoud Molavi Vardanjani, an Iranian dissident, was shot dead in Istanbul. Turkish and U.S. officials said that Iran appeared to be behind the assassination. “Given Iran’s history of targeted assassinations of Iranian dissidents and the methods used in Turkey, the United States government believes that Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) was directly involved in Vardanjani’s killing,” a senior Administration official told Reuters in April 2020.⁵¹

⁴⁶Press release. “Iranian Intelligence Officials Indicted on Kidnapping Conspiracy Charges,” U.S. Department of Justice, July 13, 2021, and press release, “Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Kidnapping Conspiracy Charges Against an Iranian Intelligence Officer and Members of an Iranian Intelligence Network,” U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York, July 13, 2021.

⁴⁷ James LaPorta, “AP sources: Iran threatens US Army post and top general,” Associated Press, March 21, 2021.

⁴⁸ Bill Chappell, “Iran Renews Interpol Request to Arrest Trump, Other U.S. Officials,” National Public Radio, January 5, 2021.

⁴⁹ Nahal Toosi and Natasha Bertrand, “Officials: Iran weighing plot to kill U.S. ambassador to South Africa,” Politico, September 13, 2020.

⁵⁰ Reuters, “Iran issues warrant for Trump over killing of top general,” June 29, 2020.

⁵¹ Humeyra Pamuk, “U.S. believes Iran was ‘directly involved’ in killing of Iranian dissident in Turkey,” Reuters, April 1, 2020.

- **October 2018.** Habib Jabor, the leader of an Iranian dissident group (the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz, or ASMLA) based in Copenhagen, was reportedly the target of an assassination plot according to Denmark’s intelligence agency. A Norwegian citizen of Iranian descent had taken photographs and watched Jabor’s home in Ringsted, a town nearly 37 miles southwest of Copenhagen. The suspect was arrested in Sweden on October 21 and extradited to Denmark.⁵²
- **June 2018.** An Iranian diplomat was convicted of a plot to bomb a big French rally held by an exiled opposition group at which Americans were present. Assadollah Assadi, 49, who worked at the Iranian embassy in Vienna, was given a 20-year jail term by the court in Antwerp, Belgium. It was the first time an Iranian official had faced such charges in the European Union since the 1979 revolution. Three others were also convicted. They were arrested during a joint operation by German, French, and Belgian police. Tehran insists the plot was a fabrication. Tens of thousands of people attended the June 2018 rally outside Paris, including former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.⁵³
- **October 2011.** United States officials uncovered a plot tied to the Iranian government to assassinate Saudi Ambassador Adel al-Jubeir in the United States. The Federal Bureau of Investigation named the case Operation Red Coalition. Iranian nationals Manssor Arbabsiar and Gholam Shakuri were charged on October 11, 2011, in federal court in New York with plotting to assassinate Al-Jubeir with the cooperation of narco-trafficking criminal organizations. According to U.S. officials, the two planned to kill Al-Jubeir at Washington’s Café Milano restaurant with a bomb and subsequently to bomb the Saudi embassy and the Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. Arbabsiar was arrested on September 29, 2011, at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York while Shakuri remained at large. On October 24, 2011, Arbabsiar pleaded not guilty. In May 2013, after pleading guilty, Arbabsiar was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment.⁵⁴

This list is illustrative but not exhaustive. Iran’s increasingly and uninterrupted provocations reflect that it is undeterred—and even emboldened to take increasingly hostile actions.⁵⁵

White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that the U.S. will “protect and defend its citizens” after Iran purported to impose sanctions on 52 Americans and that “as Iran’s proxy militias continue to attack American troops in the Middle East, and as Iranian officials threaten to carry out terror operations inside the United States and elsewhere around the world...[m]ake no mistake: the

⁵² Emil Gjerding Nielson and Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, “Iranian spy service suspected of assassination plot in Denmark: security chief,” Reuters, October 30, 2018.

⁵³ BBC News, “France bomb plot: Iran diplomat Assadollah Assadi sentenced to 20 years,” February 4, 2021.

⁵⁴ Press release, “Man Pleads Guilty in New York to Conspiring with Iranian Military Officials to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States,” U.S. Department of Justice, October 17, 2012; Press release, “Treasury Sanctions Five Individuals Tied to Iranian Plot to Assassinate the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, October 11, 2011; “General Notice: Renewal of Final Designations, Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010,” Her Majesty’s Treasury Department, October 10, 2012; and “Two Men Charged in Alleged Plot to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States,” U.S. Department of Justice, October 11, 2011.

⁵⁵ Hanna and Nada, “Timeline: Iran’s Assassinations and Plots.”

United States of America will protect and defend its citizens. This includes those serving the United States now and those who formerly served.”⁵⁶

Former high-profile officials encompassed within Iran’s specific threats have been provided personal security details. This includes former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Former Special Envoy for Iran Brian Hook, former National Security Advisors John Bolton and Robert O’Brien, and former U.S. Central Command General (Retired) Kenneth McKenzie.⁵⁷

The State Department notified Congress that both Pompeo and Hook were still both subject to a “serious and credible threat from a foreign power or agent of a foreign power” stemming from their work while in government. The State Department says it’s paying more than \$2 million per month to provide 24-hour security to former Secretary of State Pompeo and former Special Envoy Hook, both of whom face “serious and credible” threats from Iran.⁵⁸

It is clear that there are specific, credible threats against former U.S. government official and their families from Iran and those inspired to act on Iran’s behalf. This necessitates urgent steps to improve their physical and cyber security. At the moment, Iran is clearly undeterred. It is pursuing assassination,⁵⁹ abduction,⁶⁰ terrorist,⁶¹ cyber,^{62 63 64} and surveillance⁶⁵ plots in an increasingly aggressive fashion. Iran may choose to prioritize targets that lack the protection afforded to others on its hit list.

Hamas’ abhorrent terrorist attack on Israel resulting the deadliest day in their history and the second most deadly terrorist attack on American citizens since September 11, 2001 reflect the failure of the administration’s Iran appeasement policy and has resulted in Israel’s only declaration of war since 1973 and we now stand on the precipice of a regional conflict.

In August, I concluded that we have not faced a similar period of risk to U.S. interests in the Middle East since the turmoil following the Iranian Revolution, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and storming of the Grand Mosque in 1979.⁶⁶ If we fail to restore deterrence and the conflict in Israel

⁵⁶ “Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Iranian Threats and Provocations Against American Citizens,” The White House, January 9, 2022.

⁵⁷ Matthew Lee, “US extends protection for ex-Trump aides from Iran threats,” Associated Press, January 10, 2023.

⁵⁸ Matthew Lee, “US pays \$2M a month to protect Pompeo, aide from Iran threat.” Associated Press, March 12, 2022.

⁵⁹ Vanguard News, “How we saved Dasuki IBB, from assassins—DSS,” February 21, 2013.

⁶⁰ Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile*, December 2012.

⁶¹ Matthew Levitt, “Hizballah and the Qods Force in Iran’s Shadow War with the West,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Focus* No. 123, January 29, 2013.

⁶² Press release, “Treasury Sanctions Iranian Organizations and Individuals Supporting Intelligence and Cyber Targeting of U.S. Persons,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 13, 2019.

⁶³ Press release, “Former U.S. Counterintelligence Agent Charged with Espionage on Behalf of Iran; Four Iranians Charged with a Cyber Campaign Targeting Her Former Colleagues,” U.S. Department of Justice, February 13, 2019.

⁶⁴ Press release, “Two Iranian Nationals Charged for Cyber-Enabled Disinformation and Threat Campaign Designed to Influence the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election,” U.S. Department of Justice, November 18, 2021.

⁶⁵ Press release, “Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Kidnapping Conspiracy Charges Against an Iranian Intelligence Officer and Members of an Iranian Intelligence Network.”

⁶⁶ Robert Greenway, “Strength in Unity: A Sustainable US-Led Regional Security Construct in the Middle East,” Hudson Institute, August 2023.

becomes regional or global, Americans at home and abroad will be at unprecedented risk. I appreciate all the efforts taken to protect U.S. citizens and former government officials like me, but I also judge that the measures taken are no longer adequate. More must be done.

Recommendations:

- Increase assets required to identify existing infrastructure within the U.S.
- Provide protection to *all* former government officials and dissidents targeted by the Islamic Republic (including the appropriations required).
- Disrupt active operational cells, physically and in the cyber domain.
- Degrade their command, control, and communications infrastructure.
- Establish a joint task force encompassing Justice, the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Homeland Security Investigations, Customs and Border Protection, state and local law enforcement, our Intelligence Community, and our partners and allies including Five Eyes Alliance (FVEY) partners and Israel. This could be built upon the foundations of Joint Terrorism Task Forces.
- Leverage existing counterintelligence authorities to accelerate operational activity to disrupt hostile intelligence threats, especially in the cyber domain.
- Preserve the capabilities of FISA Section 702 with necessary reforms to protect the liberties of Americans.
- Enact H.R. 2 to secure our border and reestablish territorial integrity.
- Reinstate any statutory sanctions imposed with respect to Iran pursuant to section 1244(c)(1) or 1247(a) of the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012 (22 U.S.C. 8803(c)(1) and 8806(a)), or section 1245(d)(1) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 (22 U.S.C. 8513a(d)(1)), that were waived, suspended, reduced, or otherwise relieved pursuant to an agreement between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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