



TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE

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ON

*“Examining the Current Status of Iran’s Axis of Resistance and the
Implications for Homeland Security and U.S. Interests”*

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee. My name is James Dunlap and I am the Deputy Under Secretary for Analysis within the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS or the Department) Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A). I direct a staff of over 250 government and contractor personnel generating all of DHS/I&A's finished intelligence products for I&A's full range of customers, including the President and senior National Security Council staff, to the DHS Secretary and senior leaders within the Department, and federal and state, local, territorial, tribal, and private sector (SLTT/PS) partners. I&A's analytic expertise includes specialties in counterterrorism and cyber threats to our nation's critical infrastructure; transborder security and transnational organized crime; and nation-state economic and counterintelligence threats.

Now, Iran's so-called "axis of resistance"—its network of proxies in the Middle East—poses a variety of threats to United States interests and homeland security. While correctly associated in the minds of many as a state sponsor of terrorism, Iran poses a threat to the United States from multiple threat vectors, and it is on these vectors that I will begin my remarks today. Here at I&A, the work of our analysts examining the threats from Iran span all four of our analytic centers. A key part of our mission in I&A is building the capacity of our SLTT/PS security partners to react to and prevent threats from developing, and as such we strive to publish intelligence on this critical threat at the SECRET level and below; indeed, with regard to many of the threat vectors I will discuss, we have been successful publishing at the UNCLASSIFIED level to maximize readership of our intelligence.

CYBER

Our Cyber Intelligence Center routinely works with the Department's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to publish intelligence on the cyber threat from Iran, which continues to pose a threat to U.S. systems, networks, and information. Iranian government cyber actors employ a variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures—including social engineering, using easily accessible scanning and computer hacking tools, and exploiting publicly known software and hardware vulnerabilities—to conduct cyber espionage operations targeting the U.S. government and the defense industry, and to disrupt critical infrastructure.

The Israel-HAMAS conflict shows how Iran uses cyber operations to respond to geopolitical events while attempting to maintain plausible deniability. For example, in November 2023, Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated cyber actors—ostensibly posing as a criminal hacktivist group called the "Cyber Av3ngers"—defaced Israeli-manufactured operational technology devices in the United States, specifically devices in water and wastewater systems and other critical infrastructure sector entities (energy, food and beverage manufacturing, and healthcare). The IRGC-affiliated actors left a defacement image on the devices stating, "You have been hacked, down with Israel. Every equipment 'made in Israel' is CyberAv3ngers legal target." While the attacks did not result in disruption of services or impact public health, they are demonstrative of the Iranian regime's and its proxies' desires to target our citizens here in the United States.

IRAN'S TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION EFFORTS IN THE HOMELAND

Our Nation State Threats Center works with our interagency partners to produce intelligence on Iran's efforts to target dissidents. Iran continues to conduct transnational repression activities within the homeland against anti-regime critics. Tactics used in the past to target dissidents and critics of the regime include assassination attempts, digital threats and harassment, family intimidation, mobility controls, spyware, and unlawful detention.

Iran has targeted Iranian dissidents in the United States to suppress anti-regime protests and calls for social and political reform in Iran. In January 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) indicted one Iranian and two Canadian nationals in a murder-for-hire scheme targeting two U.S. residents.

DHS I&A has not observed Iranian transnational repression activities against the United States in relation to the Israel-HAMAS conflict. However, Iran has previously targeted outspoken critics, and could target individuals critical of Iran's role in the conflict should it perceive them as a threat.

TERRORISM

Finally, I&A works regularly with our partners at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and other interagency partners to assess the counterterrorism threat from Iran and its proxies, including Lebanese Hizballah. I&A assesses that Iran will remain the primary state-sponsor of terrorism and continue its efforts to advance plots against individuals in the United States. Specifically, Iran maintains its intent to plot attacks against current and former U.S. government officials in retaliation for the 2020 death of IRGC-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) Commander Qassem Soleimani.

Iran relies on individuals with pre-existing access to the United States for surveillance and lethal plotting—having previously used dual nationals, members of criminal networks, and private investigators—and has attempted plots that do not require international travel for operatives.

- In August 2022, the DOJ indicted an IRGC-QF member for allegedly conspiring to assassinate a former U.S. National Security Advisor between late 2021 to mid-2022.

With regard to Lebanese Hizballah, DHS I&A does not have any indication that Hizballah is pursuing attacks in the homeland directly in response to the Israel-HAMAS conflict. We most commonly see individuals involved in financial facilitation to support Hizballah, through money laundering, although Hizballah-affiliated individuals have also been involved in attack plotting.

- The most recently disrupted homeland plot was in 2017 when an individual affiliated with Hizballah was arrested for surveilling potential government and military targets in New York City. The individual, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Lebanon, received weapons training in Lebanon before allegedly being tasked to conduct surveillance of the government and military facilities. The individual also allegedly collected intelligence on former members of the Israel Defense Forces as well as New York's LaGuardia Airport.

DHS I&A believes that lone offenders inspired by, or reacting to, the Israel-HAMAS conflict pose the most likely threat to the homeland compared to Iranian directed or supported attacks in the homeland. Since the conflict began, leaders from the IRGC, Hizballah, and Iran-aligned militant groups have issued strong statements of support for HAMAS's attack on Israel, although we have not seen this translate to operations in the Homeland directly in response to the conflict. We believe that Iran-backed militant groups and proxies such as the Houthis are regionally focused and do not have the intent or capability to target the homeland.

HAMAS itself has not conducted attacks in the United States, as the group historically has been focused on opposition to Israel rather than supporting or directing attacks in the West. However, in recent years, a small number of individuals in the United States have been arrested and convicted for attempting to provide material support to HAMAS.

- In September 2020, the FBI arrested two individuals who allegedly sought to overthrow the U.S. government and enact violence against police officers, among other targets, whose claimed motivation was Boogaloo ideology. Although they possessed no direct ties to HAMAS, the individuals believed they could act as mercenaries for the group, who they believed shared and could help advance their anti-U.S. government goals.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear here today and I look forward to answering your questions.