

Testimony of

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on

**“IRAN’S LAND-BRIDGE IS OPERATIONAL.  
THE IRGC-QF AND ITS PROXIES HAVE PRIMACY,  
FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT, AND A PERMISSIVE  
ENVIRONMENT TO FURTHER DESTABILIZE  
THE MIDDLE EAST”**

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform’s  
Subcommittee on National Security**

**Wednesday, April, 2018**

Chairman King, Ranking Member Rice, and distinguished members of the subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, on behalf of the Hudson Institute, I am honored to testify before you today about Iran's Global Terrorism Network and what fuels it.

I am a former intelligence officer with 28 years of experience working security issues in the Middle East and North Africa.

My area of expertise focuses on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Quds (Jerusalem) Force (IRGC-QF) and their destabilizing activities across the Middle East. Like Secretary of Defense Mattis said in December of 2017, "Everywhere you find turmoil [in the Middle East], you find Iran's hand in it." <sup>1</sup>

Iran's destabilizing activities have accelerated under the protections of the JCPOA - the Iran Deal. We've seen increased lethal and financial aid to Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, and as Representative Brad Sherman of California said in 2015, during the JCPOA debate, "those are just the ones that begin with the letter H." <sup>2</sup>

Specific to the Houthis, the IRGC is providing an increased capability to fire precision rockets and missiles. Missiles recently fired by the Houthis at Riyadh and towards Mecca. A capability the Houthis would not have without IRGC-QF advisors on the ground.

The IRGC has increased support to IRGC-QF militias in Iraq that have killed Americans in the past and pledge to do so again. The IRGC now deploys these very same militias to prop up Assad in Syria and move against our Kurdish allies in Iraq.

The IRGC has increased lethal aid to the Taliban in Afghanistan, and is behind fomenting internal sectarian divisions with U.S. regional Arab allies.

The IRGC-QF is fomenting sectarian strife in the Shia enclaves of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Bahrain is concerned about Shia Bahrainis – around 200 - who joined IRGC-QF militias in Iraq, and are now bringing explosively formed penetrator (EFP) and improvised explosives expertise back to Bahrain to target its security forces.

Iran is increasing Hezbollah's capability to target Israel with more advanced and precision guided rockets and missiles designed to take out Israeli command and control centers, Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Garamone, "Mattis: Iran Working to Destabilize Middle East" defense.gov, December 16, 2017 (<https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1398540/mattis-iran-working-to-destabilize-middle-east/>)

<sup>2</sup> William Booth, "Iran's post-sanctions windfall may not benefit Hamas", The Washington Post, August 31, 2015 ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/will-irans-post-sanctions-windfall-benefit-hamas-maybe-not/2015/08/30/08d0c62c-481e-11e5-9f53-d1e3ddfd0cda\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.0e3cf2f7ba7e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/will-irans-post-sanctions-windfall-benefit-hamas-maybe-not/2015/08/30/08d0c62c-481e-11e5-9f53-d1e3ddfd0cda_story.html?utm_term=.0e3cf2f7ba7e))

Defense Forces (IDF) headquarters, and civilian population centers. These missiles are being developed in Syria under the protection of Syrian and Russian air defense networks.

Iran is moving Afghan and Iraqi militias to Syria to shore up Assad and to retake areas cleared of ISIS. They are transporting and paying for Afghan and Iraqi Shia families to relocate to vacated Sunni areas south of Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor in Syria.

We're not going to be able to stop Iran's Global Terrorism Network without getting Iraq right – we are ignoring too much.

### **In Iraq.**

Qassem Soleimani used the Hezbollah model to create loyal IRGC-QF proxies in Iraq and the Badr model to infiltrate the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense. The Hezbollah model replaced ISIS with IRGC-QF militias throughout Iraq, and the Badr model is now being used in Lebanon to co-opt the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)

The “building institutions to counter Iran” strategy we hear from academics, diplomats, and national security officials, is actually building institutions for Iran to co-opt, to infiltrate, and to saturate. IRGC-QF proxies have access to U.S. funds and equipment in the Iraqi MOD and MOI and Hezbollah has access to the same with the LAF.

Faith is believing in something you can't see - Denial is Ignoring something you don't want to see. Call it Iran's Land-bridge, a Permissive Environment, or a FASTPASS to Syria - whatever you want to call it - it exists. (show graphic #1)

Those colored units also form a political party, The Fatah Party. Fatah is positioned to win big in Iraq's elections on 12 May. Fatah answers to Tehran and they are demanding the immediate exit of U.S. forces from Iraq under the threat of violence. If the Fatah Party fields a prime minister, the U.S. must end the U.S. Train and Equip Program and trigger sanctions on Iraq's economic sectors where the IRGC is already playing – with the goal of making Iraq itself a “shell company” for the Iranian regime.

This graphic challenges prevailing narratives in DC. Show graphic #2

It's a busy slide and a crowded one at that – but what it depicts is shared battle-space with IRGC-QF proxies – shared ownership of territory. A permissive environment for Qassem Soleimani and his lieutenants.

As of now, no Iraqi Security Force (ISF) units will impede or engage IRGC-QF militias in Iraq. Today, IRGC-QF militias outnumber U.S. advisors 20:1, and they are now in the Iraqi Security Forces and they want primacy.

The IRGC-QF militias are now officially in the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and have access to U.S. Funds and Equipment. The IRGC-QF, through its proxies, are hijacking the US Train and Equip Program. The Peshmerga are no longer in the ISF. There are no Sunni Arab brigades, battalions, or companies left in the ISF. Iran's IRGC-QF has effectively co-opted the MOD and MOI through its premier IRGC-QF proxy BADR – giving IRGC-QF militias primacy.

Again, Iran's IRGC-QF militias moved against our Kurdish allies in Iraq using US M1A1 Abrams tanks a mere 60 hours after the President designated the IRGC a terrorist entity. The tanks used were not captured on the battlefield – they were provided by the Iraqi Security Forces.

**We can hurt Assad and Iran's Global Terrorism Network by focusing on what fuels Iran's malign activities in Syria and the broader Middle East.**

**The Iran Protests. Iran's Terror Network is derailing the Iranian economy.**

The Iranian people fault the regime for squandering the economic windfall from the JCPOA on ballistic missile tests, IRGC-QF adventurism in Yemen and Bahrain, propping up Assad, and increasing the capabilities of Iraqi militias and Lebanese Hezbollah all at the expense of the Iranian people.

Ending the protections of the Iran Deal and sanctioning the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) will hurt the IRGC's capability to sustain these activities. Iran's Global Terrorism Network accelerated its destabilizing activities after the JCPOA went into effect - fueled by upwards of 150 billion dollars in unfrozen assets.

Ending the protections of the Iran Deal and sanctioning the CBI as well as the Supreme Leader's massive holding company Setad or "The Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order" (EIKO) will hurt the regime and stem malign activities. Setad (Persian for headquarters) or EIKO was worth 95 billion dollars in 2013 and is now estimated to be worth 190 billion in 2018.

Both the CBI and Setad were delisted under Annex II of the JCPOA. Re-imposing sanctions on the CBI and Setad will severely impact Iran's ability to fund its terror network and purchase advanced military equipment from Russia and China. It will also make Russia and China subject to secondary sanctions for fueling Iran's activities.

The regime simply won't be able to afford sustaining its malign activities. Not when the price of an egg in Iran - under the JCPOA - is the equivalent of paying 5 dollars an egg in the U.S., or sixty-dollars for a dozen eggs all on a six-thousand dollars' annual salary. This is Iran today.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

Michael Pregent