

# United States House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security

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

### Prepared Statement of Masih Alinejad Women’s rights campaigner

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished members of the committee.

Permit me to begin by thanking you for holding this hearing on Islamic Republic’s threats to Homeland Security and for the opportunity to testify before you.

Last month, I had the privilege to testify before a subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, on the Iranian regime's malignant actions and escalating threats. During that hearing, I emphasized the resilience of the Iranian people in resisting the oppressive clerical regime. The murder of Mahsa Amini, while in the custody for the crime of inappropriate hijab ignited massive protests. Tragically the regime brutality continues. Armita Geravand, a 16-year-old girl is in a coma and fighting for her life for refusing to wear the hijab in public.

The regime’s destructive nature extends beyond its own borders – Islamic Republic funds, trains and equips groups like Hamas and Hezbollah to carry out its lethal agenda. At least 30 Americans have been killed in the war started by Hamas. At least 200 are held as hostage, including at least 20 Americans. The Islamic Republic poses a substantial threat, not only to its regional neighbors but also to the United States, threatening Americans on our soil.

Appearing here today comes with its own perils. After my testimony last month, my organization endured a severe cyberattack from sources linked with the Islamic Republic. I have received death and kidnap threats. I am not alone, other Americans have also come under attack from the Iranian regime. This is not new; I have endured death threats from the Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah and Taliban. And more recently, you can now add Hamas to the list after I publicly condemned the brutal attack on Israel.

Let me share just a bit about my personal experience. I was born in a traditional and religious family in northern Iran. My parents were poor farmers. Growing up, I was brainwashed at a young age, like thousands of other young children, to chant slogans like death to Israel and death to America. As a teenager, my political activism landed

me in jail. Much later on as a journalist, I was often critical of the government, and was forced to leave my birth country in 2009, during the Green protests. I started my second life in my adopted country, the United States which allowed me to flourish as a journalist, an author, a women's rights activist and a vocal critic of the Islamic Republic.

As an American citizen I don't feel safe in my home. My family doesn't feel safe. Since 2021, I have been forced to relocate over a dozen times, under the supervision of the FBI. Two years ago, Iranian intelligence operatives were plotting to kidnap me and take me from Brooklyn via a speedboat to a cargo ship bound for Venezuela and then to Iran. The constant need to move without knowing the exact nature of the dangers, brought great hardships on myself, my husband and my step children. We all had to pretend to live a normal life while constantly on the move.

I have come to realize that "being safe" is a luxury. Even after the Department of Justice exposed the kidnap plot, my life didn't return to normal. On two separate occasions, special FBI units whisked my family back into safe locations after receiving notice of credible and serious threats. There is no escaping the fact that the Iranian regime had put a target on my back and I had to accept my new circumstances. As one agent told me, Iranian regime is persistent and will try again and again.

This reality again struck home last July when a man armed with AK-47 came to my house in Brooklyn to kill me on direct orders from the Islamic Republic. The assassin, a member of an East European criminal gang had been stalking me for days, waiting outside my home and monitoring my activities and those of my family, neighbors, and friends.

The incident marked the second serious attempt on my life in America, precisely 12 months after the kidnap plot.

Again, I was forced to abandon my Brooklyn home and leave behind my friends and neighbors in exchange for a series of temporary locations. Today, the three assassins are behind bars awaiting trial but I am forced to take elaborate precautions whenever I'm in public. But I am not alone in not feeling safe. Other Iranian American dissidents, and former officials, also feel unsafe. I'm still shocked that the Iranian regime is threatening us in our own homes with impunity.

It is not just physical threat. The Iranian regime has engaged in election interfering in the past and will exploit the war in Gaza to spread disinformation and hate speech on our campuses and on social media.

I am grateful to members of Congress who passed the Masih Alinejad Hunt Law in response to the kidnapping plot.

However, the administration's response has been inadequate. By not holding the regime accountable, the administration appears weak in the face of Iranian aggression. The White House is treating these plots on our soil as criminal matters, to be treated by the Justice Department. I beg to differ. These plots against Americans are national security

threats. This issue extends beyond me and other dissidents; the Revolutionary Guards have threatened former government officials, including former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and former National Security Advisor John Bolton. These threats against Americans on US soil are nothing short of a declaration of war.

Instead of holding the Iranian regime accountable, the administration prefers my silence. In the aftermath of the assassination plot, no senior administration official has ever reached out to meet me, or other Iranian-Americans facing these threats. The White House warned me earlier this year that there have been more than 31 credible threats against me on US soil, but their advice was to strongly suggest that I enter into witness protection.

Witness protection would entail changing my name, social security number, identity and be silent and disappear. This is precisely what the Islamic Republic wants. To be silenced is not an option for me.

The administration has a responsibility to combat terror and protect American lives. The administration should never have approved to release \$6 billion in exchange for five hostages wrongfully held. We should permanently stop Islamic Republic from accessing those funds, which will be used to bring more terror to people of Israel and here in the United States.

It is time to confront the reality that after more than four decades in power, the character of the Islamic Republic is unlikely to change. Hamas's attack on Israel should serve as a wakeup call. It is important for the White House to acknowledge the threats posed by Iranian regime as national security threats.

We need to find ways to stop Iranian agents from spreading disinformation, and from turning our freedoms against us. Family members of regime officials work and travel freely in the United States but their loyalty is with the Islamic Republic.

Finally, I ask that a dedicated office to be set up at the appropriate law enforcement agency to monitor Iranian threats on our homeland and protect Americans from the physical and cyber reach of Iranian regime. That would be a start for Americans to feel safe at home. We need to find ways to help Americans who are not government officials but are targeted by the Iranian regime.

Thank you for holding a hearing on this important topic, and your bipartisan commitment to safeguarding our country. I look forward to answering your questions.

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# CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

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**Testimony Before  
The House Committee on Homeland Security**

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

United States House of Representatives

**October 18, 2023**

Robert Greenway  
Director  
Center for National Defense  
The Heritage Foundation

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.<sup>1</sup> 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).

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<sup>1</sup> 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 1,200 Israelis were killed, 2,200 wounded, and approximately 150 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. 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> As of September 4, 2023, Iranian crude exports flowed between 1.4 million and 1.9 million barrels per day.<sup>7</sup> The Trump Administration's maximum pressure campaign, by contrast, dramatically reduced Tehran's oil

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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>.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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 targeted<sup>13</sup> Americans,

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<sup>8</sup> 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>.

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

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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

<sup>13</sup> 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).

Europeans, Latin Americans, Israelis, and Arabs as well as Iranian opposition members<sup>14</sup> living abroad, according to U.S.,<sup>15</sup> Canadian,<sup>16</sup> European,<sup>17</sup> Israeli,<sup>18</sup> and other government reports.<sup>19</sup>

Iranian plots have forced U.S. and European governments to reconsider long-held assumptions<sup>20</sup> regarding *the* constraints governing Iranian external operations.<sup>21</sup> Following the 2011 Arbabsiar plot to bomb the Café Milano in Washington, D.C.,<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup>

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

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<sup>14</sup> Saeid Golkar, “Iran’s Intelligence Organizations and Transnational Suppression,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Policy Watch* No. 3517, August 5, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

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

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> 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.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Select Iran-Sponsored Operational Activity in Europe, 1979–2018,” July 5, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Levitt, “‘Fighters Without Borders’—Forecasting New Trends in Iran Threat Network Foreign Operations Tradecraft,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (February 2020).

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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.

aggressive, more brazen and more dangerous” over the preceding 18 months.<sup>24</sup> National Counterterrorism Center Director Christine Abizaid reinforced Director Wray’s warnings, telling Congress that the regime “raises significant concerns from a security perspective” both at home and in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

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.”<sup>28</sup> How he and other Iranian officials maintain U.S. social media accounts in violation of Twitter’s policies<sup>29</sup> and U.S. law<sup>30</sup> is difficult to understand.

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<sup>24</sup> 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.’”

<sup>25</sup> “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.”

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Udit Banerjea, “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.

<sup>28</sup> Tweet from @khamenei\_ir, December 16, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> Twitter violent threats policy, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/violent-threats-glorification>.

<sup>30</sup> 18 U.S.C. § 875.

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."<sup>31</sup>

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.<sup>32</sup>

- **January 2023.** An IRGC video was posted to social media<sup>33</sup> 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 shots<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>
- **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.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Reuters, "Iran vows revenge for Soleimani killing if Trump not put on trial," January 3, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> Tweet from @hadis\_rah, "There is no night that we sleep without thinking about you... Revenge is near Very near!" posted January 3, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> Reuters and Associated Press, "Bomb Found Outside Swedish Festival Where Iranian Dissident Played," *Haaretz*, August 22, 2022.

- **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.<sup>37</sup>
- **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.<sup>38</sup>
- **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.<sup>39</sup> The men pleaded guilty to federal conspiracy and other charges later in 2022 and are awaiting sentencing.<sup>40</sup>
- **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 51<sup>41</sup> Americans had been targeted for what it called “terrorism” and human rights violations. An additional 61 were sanctioned in July.<sup>42</sup>
- **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.

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<sup>37</sup> Scott Wilson, “Grand jury indicts Salman Rushdie’s alleged attacker,” *The Washington Post*, August 18, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Complaint, U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York, 22 MAG 6185, Case 1:22-mj-06185-UA, filed July 29, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Complaint, The United States District Court for the District of Columbia, Crim No.: 22-cr-133 (CKK), April 6, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> 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.

<sup>41</sup> Reuters, “Iran sanctions 51 Americans over the 2020 killing of top general Qassem Soleimani,” January 8, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Reuters, “Iran sanctions 61 more Americans as nuclear talks hit impasse,” July 16, 2022.

\$300,000 to carry out the assassination in Washington, D.C., or Maryland, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.<sup>43</sup>

- **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.<sup>44</sup>
- **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, 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.<sup>45</sup>
- **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.<sup>46</sup>
- **January 2021.** Iran requested Interpol to issue a “red notice” for the arrest of President Trump and 47 other U.S. officials (including Victoria Coates and 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.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>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.

<sup>44</sup> Nate Raymond, “Iranian-backed hackers targeted Boston Children’s Hospital, FBI chief says,” Reuters, June 1, 2022.

<sup>45</sup>Press 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.

<sup>46</sup> James LaPorta, “AP sources: Iran threatens US Army post and top general,” Associated Press, March 21, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Bill Chappell, “Iran Renews Interpol Request to Arrest Trump, Other U.S. Officials,” National Public Radio, January 5, 2021.

- **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.<sup>48</sup>
- **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.<sup>49</sup>
- **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.<sup>50</sup>
- **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.<sup>51</sup>
- **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.<sup>52</sup>
- **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.

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<sup>48</sup> Nahal Toosi and Natasha Bertrand, “Officials: Iran weighing plot to kill U.S. ambassador to South Africa,” Politico, September 13, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Reuters, “Iran issues warrant for Trump over killing of top general,” June 29, 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Humeyra Pamuk, “U.S. believes Iran was ‘directly involved’ in killing of Iranian dissident in Turkey,” Reuters, April 1, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Emil Gjerding Nielson and Jacob Gronholt-Pedersen, “Iranian spy service suspected of assassination plot in Denmark: security chief,” Reuters, October 30, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> BBC News, “France bomb plot: Iran diplomat Assadollah Assadi sentenced to 20 years,” February 4, 2021.

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.<sup>53</sup>

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.<sup>54</sup>

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 United States of America will protect and defend its citizens. This includes those serving the United States now and those who formerly served.”<sup>55</sup>

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.<sup>56</sup>

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.<sup>57</sup>

It is clear that there are specific, credible threats against us and our families from Iran and those inspired to act on Iran’s behalf. This necessitates urgent steps to improve our physical and cyber security. At the moment, Iran is clearly undeterred. It is pursuing assassination,<sup>58</sup> abduction,<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> 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.

<sup>54</sup> Hanna and Nada, “Timeline: Iran’s Assassinations and Plots.”

<sup>55</sup> “Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Iranian Threats and Provocations Against American Citizens,” The White House, January 9, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew Lee, “US extends protection for ex-Trump aides from Iran threats,” Associated Press, January 10, 2023.

<sup>57</sup> Matthew Lee, “US pays \$2M a month to protect Pompeo, aide from Iran threat,” Associated Press, March 12, 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Vanguard News, “How we saved Dasuki IBB, from assassins—DSS,” February 21, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security: A Profile*, December 2012.

terrorist,<sup>60</sup> cyber,<sup>61 62 63</sup> and surveillance<sup>64</sup> plots in an increasingly aggressive fashion. Iran may choose to prioritize targets that lack the protection afforded to others on its hit list.

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.<sup>65</sup> If we fail to restore deterrence and the conflict in Israel 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 close 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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<sup>60</sup> 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.

<sup>61</sup> 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.

<sup>62</sup> 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.

<sup>63</sup> 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.

<sup>64</sup> Press release, “Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Kidnapping Conspiracy Charges Against an Iranian Intelligence Officer and Members of an Iranian Intelligence Network.”

<sup>65</sup> Robert Greenway, “Strength in Unity: A Sustainable US-Led Regional Security Construct in the Middle East,” Hudson Institute, August 2023.

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# **An Examination of the Iranian Regime's Threats to Homeland Security**

## **U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security**

**October 18, 2023**

### **Testimony of Ambassador Nathan A. Sales**

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, it is a pleasure to be here today.

My name is Nathan Sales. I am the founder and principal of Fillmore Global Strategies LLC, a consultancy that provides legal and strategic advisory services on matters at the intersection of law, policy, and diplomacy. I am also a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a member of the advisory board at the Vandenberg Coalition, and a senior advisor at the Soufan Group.

From 2017 to 2021, I served at the U.S. Department of State as the Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism. Concurrently, I was the acting Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights, as well as the Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. I previously served at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, and at the U.S. Department of Justice as Senior Counsel in the Office of Legal Policy, where I worked on counterterrorism policy. I am here as a private citizen, but my testimony is informed by my experiences working on national security and counterterrorism for the U.S. government over the course of two decades.

Today I will begin by describing the Iranian terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland; then discuss Tehran's campaign of terrorism against Israel, including Americans in Israel; and conclude with suggestions on what more can be done to better protect Americans from the specter of Iran-backed terrorism.

This hearing is taking place in the aftermath of a horrific terrorist attack on our ally Israel – an attack that has Iran's fingerprints all over it. On October 7, hordes of gunmen from Hamas – a Palestinian terrorist group that the Islamic Republic provides with money, weapons, and training – invaded southern Israel from the Gaza Strip, perpetrating horrors seemingly taken from the pages of a Cormac McCarthy novel. More than 1,400 men, women, and children were mercilessly slaughtered, and nearly 200 hostages were carried off into captivity, including infants and toddlers.<sup>1</sup> October 7 was the deadliest day in Israel's 75-year history. More than that, it was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. It was also a dark day for America, with 30 U.S. citizens killed and an estimated 13 missing, some of whom are being held hostage in Gaza, as of this

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<sup>1</sup> Abbas Al Lawati et al., *Israel Is at War with Hamas. Here's What to Know*, CNN, Oct. 16, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/16/middleeast/israel-hamas-gaza-war-explained-week-2-mime-intl/index.html>.

writing.<sup>2</sup> That makes October 7 the deadliest attack on Americans by international terrorists since 9/11 and the fourth deadliest such attack in history. I look forward to discussing with the Committee what the United States should do to prevent future atrocities like these.

## I.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the world’s worst state sponsor of terrorism. Acting through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and numerous terrorist proxies, the regime has murdered countless innocent civilians, taken hostages remorselessly, and shed blood on an industrial scale. The threat it poses is not confined to the Middle East but extends across the entire world – including the United States.

Let me share just a few examples of the Iranian threat to the homeland.

Right now, as we speak, the Islamic Republic is actively plotting to assassinate a number of former senior U.S. officials here on American soil. Last year, the Justice Department announced charges against an IRGC member believed to be the ringleader of a plot to murder John Bolton, the former National Security Advisor. The would-be assassin reportedly also was targeting former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. These former officials and others like them now live under constant, 24-hour government protection because of the Iranian threat to their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in July 2022, the Islamic Republic tried to assassinate one of the witnesses at today’s hearing: Masih Alinejad, the celebrated Iranian-American human-rights activist. This brazen attempt on her life – the regime sent a gunman armed with an AK-47 to her Brooklyn home in broad daylight – came on the heels of a plot in 2021 to kidnap her in New York and render her back to Iran to face torture or execution.<sup>4</sup>

In August 2022, an IRGC supporter tried to murder acclaimed author Salman Rushdie at a book festival in New York State, stabbing him multiple times on stage. In a grotesque irony, Rushdie, who has been under an Iranian death sentence since the publication of his novel *The Satanic Verses* in the 1980s, was set to speak on the subject of America’s role as an “asylum for writers and other artists in exile and as a home for freedom of creative expression.”<sup>5</sup> The assailant reportedly was in contact with IRGC officials before the attack.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not Tehran formally

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<sup>2</sup> Vivian Salama, *U.S. Raises Toll of Americans Dead in Hamas Attack to 30*, Wall St. J., Oct. 15, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-war-gaza-conflict/card/u-s-raises-toll-of-americans-dead-in-hamas-attack-to-30-za3PuIwJTc6sNWD0xHMj>.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Hansler, *US Sanctions Iranian Officials Accused of Plotting Assassinations Abroad Including Against Bolton and Pompeo*, CNN, June 1, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/01/politics/us-iran-sanctions-assassination-plots/index.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Weiser & Glenn Thrush, *Justice Dept. Announces More Arrests in Plot to Kill Iranian Writer*, N.Y. Times, Jan. 27, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/27/us/politics/masih-alinejad-doj-assassination-plot.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ginger Adams Otis, *Author Salman Rushdie Stabbed Onstage at New York Event*, Wall St. J., Aug 12, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/salman-rushdie-attacked-at-new-york-event-11660320109>.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell Prothero, *Salman Rushdie Stabbing Suspect “Had Contact With Iran’s Revolutionary Guard”*, Vice News, Aug. 14, 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/88qxvz/salman-rushdie-hadi-matar-revolutionary-guard>.

tasked him with the assault is beside the point. The regime put a multi-million dollar bounty on Rushdie's head – which was reaffirmed and even increased as recently as 2016<sup>7</sup> – so it is fully responsible.

A decade earlier, in 2011, the Iranian regime attempted to assassinate Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States by bombing a popular restaurant in Washington, DC's Georgetown neighborhood. Had the plot succeeded, it could have resulted in mass casualties – not just the intended target, but countless innocent Americans who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. For Tehran, that was a feature of the operation, not a bug. Discussing the possibility of other deaths, one of the plotters reportedly stated: “They want that guy done, if the hundred go with him f\*\*k ’em.”<sup>8</sup>

Critically, Iran has attempted to carry out several of these plots by exploiting vulnerabilities in our southern border. In the attempted assassination of John Bolton, Tehran planned to use a Mexican national with ties to drug cartels.<sup>9</sup> It likewise attempted to use a Mexican drug cartel in the plot against the Saudi ambassador.<sup>10</sup> There is a significant risk that Iran-backed and other terrorists might take advantage of these vulnerabilities again in the future. U.S. Customs and Border Protection has reported a dramatic spike in the number of individuals on its Terrorist Screening Dataset watchlist who were apprehended crossing the southern border: zero in fiscal year 2019, three in fiscal year 2020, 15 in fiscal year 2021, 98 in fiscal year 2022, and 154 in fiscal year 2023.<sup>11</sup> Those are just the ones we know about. It is not implausible that other watchlisted individuals have been able to enter the country undetected.

Of course, the Iranian regime targets Americans abroad as well as at home. The IRGC was responsible for killing 603 American soldiers in Iraq, in part due to the advanced explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) it provided to its terror proxies in the country. That is one-sixth of all

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Erdbrink, *Iran's Hard-Line Press Adds to Bounty on Salman Rushdie*, N.Y. Times, Feb. 22, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/world/middleeast/irans-hard-line-press-adds-to-bounty-on-salman-rushdie.html>.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Two Men Charged in Alleged Plot to Assassinate Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the United States*, Oct. 11, 2011, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-men-charged-alleged-plot-assassinate-saudi-arabian-ambassador-united-states>.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Schifrin, *Iranian Man Charged for Trying to Assassinate Former National Security Adviser John Bolton*, PBS, Aug. 10, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/iranian-man-charged-for-trying-to-assassinate-former-national-security-adviser-john-bolton>.

<sup>10</sup> Charlie Savage & Scott Shane, *Iranians Accused of a Plot to Kill Saudis' U.S. Envoy*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 11, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/12/us/us-accuses-iranians-of-plotting-to-kill-saudi-envoy.html>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *CBP Enforcement Statistics Fiscal Year 2023*, Oct. \_\_, 2023, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics>. The Terrorist Screening Dataset “is the U.S. government's database that contains sensitive information on terrorist identities.” It “originated as the consolidated terrorist watchlist to house information on known or suspected terrorists (KSTs) but has evolved over the last decade to include additional individuals who represent a potential threat to the United States, including known affiliates of watchlisted individuals.” *Id.*

U.S. fatalities during the war in Iraq.<sup>12</sup> In Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic reportedly paid Taliban fighters a \$1,000 bounty for every American soldier they killed.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most potent tool in Tehran's global terror campaign is Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist group responsible for the 1983 attacks on the U.S. embassy and Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, which killed 63 and 305, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Today, Hezbollah is the Islamic Republic's proxy of choice for terrorist attacks on Israelis and Jews around the world. In Argentina, in March 1992, Hezbollah bombed the Israeli embassy, killing 29; two years later, in July 1994, it bombed a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, killing 85.<sup>15</sup> In Bulgaria, in July 2012, a Hezbollah suicide bomber killed five Israeli tourists and their bus driver.<sup>16</sup> In the past several years, the group has been caught planning attacks or stockpiling explosives in Western Europe, Latin America, the Gulf, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere.<sup>17</sup>

Hezbollah is also active here at home. Between 1997 and 2020, 128 suspected Hezbollah members were arrested in the United States.<sup>18</sup> In recent years the FBI arrested three suspected Hezbollah operatives who were conducting surveillance on the Panama Canal and casing potential targets in New York City, including the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Times Square, and Rockefeller Center. Two have been convicted of various terrorism-related crimes and sentenced to lengthy prison terms, while the third case remains pending.<sup>19</sup> We have to assume that

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<sup>12</sup> Alex Horton, *Soleimani's Legacy: The Gruesome, Advanced IEDs that Haunted U.S. Troops in Iraq*, Wash. Post, Jan 3, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/01/03/soleimanis-legacy-gruesome-high-tech-ieds-that-haunted-us-troops-iraq/>.

<sup>13</sup> *Report: Iran Pays \$1,000 for Each U.S. Soldier Killed by the Taliban*, NBC News, Sept. 5, 2010, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna39014669>.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Levitt, *The Origins of Hezbollah*, The Atlantic, Oct. 23, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/the-origins-of-hezbollah/280809/>.

<sup>15</sup> Ronen Bergman, *Mossad Sheds New Light on Argentina Terrorist Attacks in 1990s*, N.Y. Times, July 22, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/22/world/middleeast/argentina-mossad-hezbollah-bombings.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Weinthal, *Hezbollah Terrorists Who Killed Israelis in Bulgaria Bus Blast Get Life in Prison*, Jerusalem Post, Mar. 21, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-734936>.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Dep't of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*, Dec. 2021, at 266 [hereinafter *2020 Country Reports*], <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/>; *US Accuses Hezbollah of Storing Explosive Chemical in Europe*, AP, Sept. 17, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/italy-militant-groups-greece-terrorism-europe-8e559f3e5a2696ba8cda679c5cccb0c0>.

<sup>18</sup> Anyssia S. Kokinos et al., *Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States*, June 2022, at 4, [https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/Hezbollah's\\_Operations\\_and\\_Networks\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_June30\\_2022.pdf](https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/Hezbollah's_Operations_and_Networks_in_the_United_States_June30_2022.pdf). See also Colin P. Clarke, *Hezbollah Has Been Active in America for Decades*, The National Interest, Aug. 26, 2017, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/hezbollah-has-been-active-america-decades-22051>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Dep't of Justice, *New Jersey Man Sentenced To 12 Years in Prison for Receiving Military-Type Training From Hezbollah, Marriage Fraud and Making False Statements*, May 23, 2023, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/new-jersey-man-sentenced-12-years-prison-receiving-military-type-training-hezbollah-marriage>; U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Hizballah Operative Sentenced to 40 Years in Prison for Covert Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah's Islamic Jihad Organization*, Dec. 3, 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/hizballah-operative-sentenced-40-years-prison-covert-terrorist-activities-behalf-hizballah-s>; U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Two Men Arrested for Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah's Islamic Jihad Organization*, June 8, 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-men-arrested-terrorist-activities-behalf-hizballahs-islamic-jihad-organization>.

other Hezbollah operatives are here as well, hiding in plain sight and awaiting activation orders in the event of open conflict between Iran and the U.S. or Iran and Israel.

## II.

Which brings us to last week's horror in Israel.

Iran is pursuing an encirclement strategy with respect to the Jewish state – surrounding it with a range of terrorist proxies to threaten its citizens and apply pressure. Hamas is just the tip of the iceberg.

To the north, in Lebanon, Iran has spent decades lavishly bankrolling Hezbollah, building a corrupt state within a state that serves Tehran's interests and impoverishes the Lebanese people. According to the U.S. State Department, the Islamic Republic has provided Hezbollah with some \$700 million a year.<sup>20</sup> Hezbollah now sits on a massive arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, and with Iran's help it is developing the capability to build its own precision guided munitions that could reach all of Israel's territory.<sup>21</sup> In the northeast, in Syria, the IRGC is hard at work propping up the brutal Assad dictatorship, greatly adding to the misery of the long-suffering Syrian people. Hezbollah fighters are there, too, of course.

In the south, in Gaza, Iran-backed Hamas runs a terror statelet whose priority is not providing basic services to the Palestinian people, but devoting enormous resources to terrorism – tunnels, rockets, even incendiary kites and balloons. Extensive Iranian support in the past several years has enabled Hamas to dramatically improve its capabilities. Hamas has never wavered from the goals it announced in its founding covenant in 1988: killing Jews and destroying Israel.

“Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious.... The Day of Judgement will not come about,” [the covenant] proclaims, “until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.... There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad.”<sup>22</sup>

Hamas's neighbors in Gaza, Palestine Islamic Jihad, are also on Tehran's payroll. All told, Tehran has provided various Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza and the West Bank with upwards of \$100 million annually, according to the State Department.<sup>23</sup> This year, Iran's support to Hamas alone has ballooned to \$350 million a year, according to Israeli security sources.<sup>24</sup> It might come as a

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<sup>20</sup> *2020 Country Reports* at 267.

<sup>21</sup> *2020 Country Reports* at 122, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Bruce Hoffman, *Understanding Hamas's Genocidal Ideology*, The Atlantic, Oct. 10, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/10/hamas-covenant-israel-attack-war-genocide/675602/>.

<sup>23</sup> *2020 Country Reports* at 272-73.

<sup>24</sup> Samia Nakhoul, *How Hamas Secretly Built a "Mini-Army" to Fight Israel*, Reuters, Oct. 13, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-hamas-secretly-built-mini-army-fight-israel-2023-10-13/>.

surprise that Shiite Iran would bankroll Sunni terrorists like Hamas, but their shared hatred of Jews and of Israel allows them to overlook their theological differences to form an alliance of convenience.

Farther afield, in Yemen, the Iranian regime provides the Houthis with precision weapons they use to attack airports, energy infrastructure, and other civilian targets across the region while bringing the Yemeni people to the brink of famine. Lately, the Houthis have signaled that they might start targeting Israel with Iranian drones.<sup>25</sup>

Why does this all matter to the United States? For several reasons. First, we have a vital national interest in ensuring that Israel, our closest ally in the region and the only democracy in the region, is secure against its many enemies – enemies that seek its extermination. When Hamas and its supporters say they want a Palestinian state “from the river to the sea” – i.e., from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea – what they are really saying is that they reject the right of Israel to exist at all. They are saying they want the region to be cleansed of Jews. Or, as you might put it in German, a Palestine that is *judenrein*.

Second, the United States and Israel have common enemies. For the Islamic Republic, Israel may be the Little Satan, but America is the Great Satan, and the Iranian terror proxies that want to slaughter Israelis want to slaughter Americans as well. Consider Hamas. The October 7 attack killed at least 30 U.S. citizens, making it the deadliest attack on Americans by international terrorists since 9/11 and the fourth deadliest such attack in history.<sup>26</sup> More Americans were killed on October 7 than in the attacks on Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996 (19 Americans killed), the USS *Cole* in 2000 (17 Americans killed), our embassy in Beirut in 1983 (17 Americans killed), or our embassies in East Africa in 1998 (12 Americans killed).

In all, Hamas has killed at least 76 Americans in at least 30 terrorist attacks stretching back to the 1990s, according to research by the Soufan Group. For example, in August 2001, Hamas terrorists bombed a Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem, killing 16 people, including three Americans: Malki Roth, who was just 15; Judith Shoshana Greenbaum, who was pregnant and whose unborn child also died; and Chana Nachenberg, who succumbed to her injuries this year after spending 22 years in a coma. The mastermind of the bombing, Ahlam Ahmad Al-Tamimi, is now living freely in Jordan, where she hosts a show on a Hamas-affiliated television channel. Tamimi is on the FBI’s list of most wanted terrorists and the U.S. Justice Department unsealed criminal charges against her in 2017 for her role in the attack.<sup>27</sup> Despite the existence of a valid extradition treaty between

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<sup>25</sup> Tom O’Connor, *Iran-Backed Houthis Ready to Join War on Israel with Drones and Missiles*, Newsweek, Oct. 9, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/iran-backed-houthis-ready-join-war-israel-drones-missiles-1833221>.

<sup>26</sup> The 9/11 attacks killed nearly 3,000 Americans, followed by the 1983 bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut (241 Americans killed), and the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland (190 Americans killed).

<sup>27</sup> Raffi Berg, *Jerusalem Sbarro Pizza Bombing Victim Dies After 22 Years in Coma*, BBC News, June 1, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-65754102>; Spencer S. Hsu, *U.S. Unseals Charge Against Jordanian Woman in 2001 Jerusalem Sbarro Bombing*, Wash. Post, Mar. 15, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/us-unseals-charge-against-jordanian-woman-in-2001-jerusalem-sbarro-bombing/2017/03/14/6b5a51f8-08f9-11e7-b77c-0047d15a24e0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/us-unseals-charge-against-jordanian-woman-in-2001-jerusalem-sbarro-bombing/2017/03/14/6b5a51f8-08f9-11e7-b77c-0047d15a24e0_story.html).

Washington and Amman, the government of Jordan has refused to extradite her to the United States to face justice for her crimes.

In July 2002, Hamas bombed a busy cafeteria at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem around lunchtime. Nine people, including five Americans – all students – were killed. Hamas claimed responsibility for the atrocity at a rally in Gaza City that was attended by 10,000 supporters.<sup>28</sup> The next year, in August 2003, a Hamas suicide bomber detonated a bomb aboard a bus in Jerusalem, killing 20, including five U.S. citizens. Three of the American victims were young children: Yitzhak Reinitz (9 years old), Tehilla Nathanson (3 years old), and Shmuel Taubenfeld (3 months old).<sup>29</sup>

Let's be clear: The Islamic Republic manifestly bears responsibility for the October 7 Hamas attack. It has enlisted Hamas as a proxy in its broader terror campaign against Israel, and it has spent years providing the group with tens of millions of dollars' worth of cash, weapons, and training to enable precisely the sort of bloodshed unleashed on October 7. To be sure, Tehran's exact role in the attack remains somewhat opaque at the moment.<sup>30</sup> Yet in a broader sense it doesn't matter. Whether or not Tehran "planned" or "directed" or "ordered" or "approved" the Hamas attack is hairsplitting. Tehran certainly enabled the attack, providing weapons and training in recent years that vastly improved Hamas's lethality, and it has celebrated the attack as advancing its strategic objectives. We are therefore entirely justified in holding the regime accountable for the innocent lives lost.

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<sup>28</sup> *Israel Arrests Suspects in University Bombing*, CNN, Aug. 21, 2002, <https://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/meast/08/21/mideast/>; *Seven Killed, Dozens Wounded in Bomb Blast at Israel University*, AP, Aug. 1, 2002, <https://www.poconorecord.com/story/news/2002/08/01/seven-killed-dozens-wounded-in/51073881007/>.

<sup>29</sup> *Mideast Awaits Israeli Response*, CBS News, Aug. 20, 2003, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mideast-awaits-israeli-response/>.

<sup>30</sup> According to *Wall Street Journal* reporting, Iran helped plan the attack and gave the final go-ahead on October 2. Summer Said et al., *Iran Helped Plot Attack on Israel Over Several Weeks*, Wall St. J., Oct. 8, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-israel-hamas-strike-planning-bbc07b25>. Some *New York Times* sources likewise recount that "a tight circle of leaders from Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas helped plan the attack starting over a year ago, trained militants and had advanced knowledge of it," while in September the *Times* reported that Israel "had intelligence suggesting ... Iran's supreme leader had ordered a wide campaign against Israel including targeting its citizens abroad, conducting sabotage inside its borders, and smuggling sophisticated weapons to the Palestinians to ignite a civil war in the West Bank." Farnaz Fassihi & Ronen Bergman, *Hamas Attack on Israel Brings New Scrutiny of Group's Ties to Iran*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 13, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/13/world/middleeast/hamas-iran-israel-attack.html>. On the other hand, administration officials have pointed to a preliminary intelligence assessment suggesting that certain elements of the Iranian regime were surprised by the timing and scope of the attack, though they likely knew Hamas was planning attacks on Israel. Adam Entous et al., *Early Intelligence Shows Hamas Attack Surprised Iranian Leaders, U.S. Says*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 11, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/11/us/politics/iran-israel-gaza-hamas-us-intelligence.html>; Warren P. Strobel & Michael R. Gordon, *Iran Knew Hamas Was Planning Attacks, but Not Timing or Scale, U.S. Says*, Wall St. J., Oct. 11, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-knew-hamas-was-planning-attacks-but-not-timing-or-scale-u-s-says-d8c669f1>.

### III.

What then should the United States do about October 7, and about the wider terrorist threat the Islamic Republic of Iran poses to the homeland and to Americans abroad? At a minimum, we must impose real costs on Tehran to deter terrorism, enforce sanctions to deny the regime resources for terrorism, and back Israel to the hilt.

First, the Biden administration must do more to deter Iran from plotting assassinations in our country. One might have expected the administration to insist, as a precondition for nuclear or other talks, that the regime abandon its efforts to assassinate former U.S. officials and activists. It did not. At a minimum, one might have expected the administration to obtain, as an element of the recent agreement with Tehran to exchange prisoners, an Iranian commitment to abandon its assassination plots. Again, it did not. Instead, Iran's president – Ebrahim Raisi, who has been under U.S. human rights sanctions since 2019 for his role in the regime's 1988 "death commission" that slaughtered thousands of political prisoners – has reaffirmed (on American soil, no less) the regime's intent to assassinate Americans. Here is what he said at the United Nations last month, referencing the 2020 operation to eliminate U.S.-sanctioned terrorist Qasem Soleimani:

The Islamic Republic of Iran, through all tools and capacities in order to bring to justice the perpetrators and all those who had a hand in this government sanctioned act of terror, will not sit until that is done. The blood of the oppressed will not be forgotten.<sup>31</sup>

The Justice Department certainly deserves credit for prosecuting some of those involved in the Bolton plot. And I imagine the targets of Iran's assassination campaign appreciate the White House's promise that, "[s]hould Iran attack any of our citizens, ... Iran will face severe consequences."<sup>32</sup> (Of course, they might prefer for some of those consequences to be imposed now, while they are still alive, as a deterrent.)

But these efforts pale in comparison to how we responded to past attempts to kill American officials. In 1993, the United States uncovered a plot by Saddam Hussein's Iraq to assassinate former president George H.W. Bush during a trip to Kuwait. President Clinton retaliated by launching 23 Tomahawk cruise missiles at the headquarters of the Iraqi intelligence service in Baghdad. As President Clinton explained, a firm and decisive response was essential because the plot, which was "directed against a former president of the United States because of actions he took as president," was ultimately "an attack against our country and against all Americans." He continued: "We could not and have not let such action against our nation go unanswered. From the first days of our revolution, America's security has depended on the clarity of this message: Don't

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<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Farnaz Fassihi, *Iran's President Threatens U.S. Officials From the U.N. Podium, Dimming Hopes for a Rapprochement*, Seattle Times, Sept. 19, 2023, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/irans-president-threatens-u-s-officials-from-the-u-n-podium-dimming-hopes-for-a-rapprochement/>.

<sup>32</sup> The White House, *Statement by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Iran's Continued Targeting of U.S. Citizens*, Aug. 10, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/10/statement-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-irans-continued-targeting-of-u-s-citizens/>.

tread on us.”<sup>33</sup> Saddam got the message, and the scheme was abandoned. No one is calling for a military strike on Tehran, but indictments and statements are plainly inadequate to establish deterrence. Tehran should have more to fear than a sternly worded press release.

Second, the administration should resume robust sanctions enforcement to deny the Islamic Republic resources to fund terrorism around the globe. The Iranian regime is richer today than it has been in years. A great deal of attention has been paid to the \$6 billion held in South Korea that the White House agreed to unfreeze as part of a deal to release some of the American hostages held in Iran. The administration deserves credit for announcing that, in the wake of the Hamas attack on Israel, it will deny the regime access to those funds “for the foreseeable future”<sup>34</sup> – though it would be preferable to freeze the \$6 billion indefinitely, along with \$10 billion that was unfrozen in the summer of 2023 to cover energy payments from Iraq to Iran.<sup>35</sup> The bigger problem, in my view, is the fact that the regime has been able to dramatically increase its energy exports, and thus dramatically improve its economic strength, over the past several years.

As a result of crippling sanctions, by the end of the previous administration, Iran’s economy was hobbled, its coffers were drained, and its ability to project power abroad was reduced. Tehran is in a substantially stronger position today. By 2021, the regime’s accessible foreign currency reserves were down to \$4-6 billion – roughly the same as Haiti. Now, the International Monetary Fund estimates that Iran’s reserves will hit \$43 billion this year, and that was before the \$6 billion and \$10 billion were unfrozen over the summer.<sup>36</sup> Energy analysts assess that, since 2020, Iran’s oil exports have increased by a factor of four or five, with the lion’s share of sales going to China.<sup>37</sup> According to United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI), a nonpartisan group that tracks Iranian energy sales, Iran was exporting an average of 749,000 barrels of oil per day in August 2020. In August 2023, its exports were up to an average of 1,932,000 barrels per day.<sup>38</sup> In 2020, Iran sold \$12.5 billion of oil. That number jumped to \$43 billion in 2022.<sup>39</sup> Between January 2021 and September

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<sup>33</sup> David Von Drehle & R. Jeffrey Smith, *U.S. Strikes Iraq for Plot to Kill Bush*, Wash. Post, June 27, 1993, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/iraq/timeline/062793.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Crowley & Alan Rappeport, *U.S. and Qatar Deny Iran Access to \$6 Billion From Prisoner Deal*, N.Y. Times, Oct. 12, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/12/world/middleeast/us-qatar-iran-prisoner-deal.html>. While the hostages deal provides that the \$6 billion may only be released for “humanitarian purposes,” *id.*, Iran’s president has stated that the regime will spend the money “wherever we need it.” Dan De Luce, *Iranian President Says Tehran Will Spend the \$6 Billion Released in Prisoner Exchange “Wherever We Need It”*, NBC News, Sept. 12, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iranian-president-says-tehran-will-spend-6-billion-released-prisoner-exchange-104475>. Moreover, money is fungible, and if Iran now has \$6 billion to spend on food and medicine, that will free up \$6 billion to spend on guns and bombs.

<sup>35</sup> David S. Cloud & Ghassan Adnan, *Iraq Tests U.S. Sanctions with Oil-for-Gas Deal with Iran*, Wall St. J., July 14, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraq-tests-u-s-sanctions-with-oil-for-gas-deal-with-iran-c318b917>.

<sup>36</sup> *Washington Unlocks Frozen Iranian Funds*, Jewish Inst. for Nat’l Sec. of Am., June 14, 2023, at 3, [https://jinsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/20230614\\_FrozenIranianFunds\\_v2-1.pdf](https://jinsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/20230614_FrozenIranianFunds_v2-1.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Manuel Quinones & Bob King, *Biden’s Choice: Let Iranian Oil Flow or Watch Prices Rise*, Politico, Oct. 12, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/12/biden-iran-oil-gas-prices-00120924>.

<sup>38</sup> United Against Nuclear Iran, *Iran Tanker Tracking*, <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/tanker-tracker>.

<sup>39</sup> United Against Nuclear Iran, *Analysis of Iranian Oil Sales Under President Trump vs. President Biden*, Oct. 6, 2022, <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/blog/analysis-of-iranian-oil-sales-under-president-trump-vs-president-biden>.

2022, the regime's oil sales to China alone totaled \$38 billion.<sup>40</sup> In all, UANI estimates that Iran has been able to sell \$80 billion of oil since January 2021.<sup>41</sup> \$80 billion can buy a lot of bombs.

Tehran will certainly use this windfall to support terrorism across the region, against Israel, and against the United States, and the White House should restore the economic pressure that brought Iran's economy to its knees. Terrorism sanctions work. Sanctions deny terrorists the money they need to plan and carry out attacks. As I've mentioned, for years Hezbollah could count on its patrons in Tehran to provide it with upwards of \$700 million annually, and Hamas and other Palestinian terrorists received \$100 million a year. But after the United States used sanctions to squeeze Iran's economy, the money dried up. By 2019, both groups had to adopt "austerity plans" to cope with the shortfall. Hezbollah's leader was reduced to going on TV and pleading for donations.<sup>42</sup>

Third, the United States must support Israel until it achieves its goals in the war with Hamas. This is not a war that Israel sought, but it is one that it cannot afford to lose. President Biden gave a powerful speech last week about Israel's right to self-defense. The speech was a marked improvement over the confused messaging from his administration in the days immediately prior. The day of the attack, the State Department's Office of Palestinian Affairs tweeted a call for "all sides to refrain from violence and retaliatory attacks" (it was quickly deleted), which was followed the next day by a tweet reporting that Secretary of State Blinken urged a "cease-fire" in a call with his Turkish counterpart (it too was quickly deleted).<sup>43</sup> Presumably these posts were scrubbed because higher-ups realized that standing in the way of Israeli retaliation and demanding a cease-fire would only reward Hamas and cripple Israel's ability to prevent future attacks.

Now the White House will need to put the diplomatic heft of the United States behind the president's words. Israel has articulated expansive goals for the war in Gaza – degrading Hamas to the point it is no longer capable of threatening Israel or functioning as a quasi-governmental entity, an ambitious goal that is comparable to the United States's aim of destroying al Qaeda in the aftermath of 9/11, and defeating ISIS's so-called "caliphate" in Iraq and Syria during the Obama and Trump administrations. The United States will need to ensure that Israel has the time and space it needs to accomplish its mission, pushing back against its critics at the United Nations and elsewhere when they inevitably begin to demand that Jerusalem stand down prematurely before its objectives are met.

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Crowley, *U.S. Penalizes Chinese Companies for Aiding Iran's Oil Exports*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 29, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/29/us/politics/iran-sanctions-china-oil.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Nassim Khadem, *As Israel's War Against Hamas Escalates, US Sends a Warning to Iran, Raising Fears of a Recession*, ABC News (Australia), Oct. 12, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-10-13/israel-war-against-hamas-iran-oil-price-economy-global-recession/102968608>.

<sup>42</sup> Special Representative Brian H. Hook, *Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 116th Cong., Oct. 16, 2019, at 3, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/download/hook-testimony-101619>.

<sup>43</sup> Katelyn Caralle, *State Department Slammed for Deleting MULTIPLE Tweets Urging Israel to Stand Down on Retaliating Against Hamas*, Daily Mail (UK), Oct. 9, 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12611231/State-Department-slammed-deleting-MULTIPLE-tweets-urging-Israel-stand-retaliating-against-Hamas.html>.

At the same time, United States must use its influence to ensure that Israel prosecutes the war in a way that causes as little harm as possible to civilians in Gaza. Heartbreaking images of human suffering have begun to emerge from the war zone and Israel – neither more nor less than any other combatant – should fully comply with law-of-war requirements designed to prevent civilian harm, as it has done in the past and has pledged to do now. We should also be clear about who bears responsibility for this suffering: Hamas, which has a long and sordid history of using Palestinian civilians as human shields; of storing weapons in and around schools, mosques, and other protected civilian infrastructure; and even of preventing Palestinian civilians from evacuating conflict zones. Hamas puts its own population at risk to further its murderous terror campaign. Its atrocities against Israelis and Jews and its cruelties to Palestinians are two sides of the same coin.

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Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and Members of the Committee, thank you again. I look forward to your questions.

**Thomas S. Warrick**  
**Atlantic Council Senior Fellow and Director, Future of DHS Project**  
**October 18, 2023, “An Examination of the Iranian Regime’s Threats to Homeland Security”**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson, members of the House Committee on Homeland Security, thank you for the honor to testify today on the Iranian regime’s threats to homeland security. I have forty years’ experience addressing challenges from Iran, starting in the private sector in 1981 with the Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal and the aftermath of the Iran hostage crisis. I served ten years at the U.S. State Department, including working to counter Iranian influence. I served more than eleven years at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), most of that as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counterterrorism Policy, where countering the Iranian regime’s actions as the leading state-sponsor of terrorism was one of our foremost counterterrorism priorities. For a time, I was DHS’s senior-most Iran expert. I am proud to have served under four presidents of both parties. Today, I’m a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and director of the Future of DHS Project, working on a number of initiatives to strengthen the Department of Homeland Security. I co-lead our Counterterrorism Study Group and am the convener of the Experts’ Coalition on Borders, Immigration, and Trade. Our work supports the extraordinary efforts of the men and women of DHS and throughout the homeland security enterprise to keep our country safe.

## **How We Should Address Iran’s Threat to the United States**

I’m going to summarize the threats that the Iranian regime poses to the United States homeland, but first, I would make two short points. The Hamas terrorist attack on October 7 ranks among the world’s worst terrorist attacks in modern history. In addition to the more than 1,400 Israelis killed, at least [thirty American citizen deaths](#) make this one of the worst terrorist attacks against Americans since the Pulse nightclub attack in Orlando, Florida, in 2016. American resolve, as shown by the President’s and the Congress’s bipartisan support for Israel, and President Biden’s deployment of two aircraft carrier battle groups to the eastern Mediterranean, are an essential response to this terrorist attack. Americans have a stake in what will come after Hamas’s military defeat. The United States is already in discussions with the Israelis and other allies over [the future of Gaza](#), to ensure these terrorist attacks do not repeat in a few years—and to ensure that Iran does not determine the future of Gaza. There is a role for our homeland security agencies in supporting this. But Iran’s role in funding, arming, equipping, and helping train Hamas terrorists is something that our government must, and will, address.

Second, today’s hearing takes place against the background of unprecedented efforts by the Iranian people, women and men, to fight for greater freedoms and justice against the current Iranian regime. We should acknowledge the historic importance of this struggle, which is led by Iranians and should have the support of all Americans. The Iranian regime has chosen to make the United States an adversary. The Iranian people want to make different choices.

Turning back to the subject of this hearing, I want to leave you with four important points.

**First, Iran poses a threat to the security of the United States, including here in the homeland.** We should not think of Iran as a purely Middle Eastern security challenge. That's why today's hearing is important. The phrase "great power competition" is the organizing principle for our national security agencies, but it has its limits. While China and Russia are "great powers," and they *do* pose the greatest challenges to American security, Iran is not a great power but is nevertheless a serious challenge, and not just because of its nuclear program and its threat to overseas American allies like Israel and our Arab partners. **Iran and its proxies are currently carrying out a campaign of hybrid warfare against the United States and our allies.** I'm not the only one saying this: the Director of National Intelligence likewise warned of Iran's hybrid approach to warfare in the [2023 Annual Threat Assessment](#).

This requires vigilance here at home, including from the private sector. North Korea is a challenge, too, but Iran poses a unique, multi-dimensional threat that requires us to think in 3-D technicolor, not just two-dimensional black and white. Given that chess originated in Iran, I've often heard the criticism that the United States plays checkers while the Iranian regime plays chess. Now is the time for the United States and our allies to start playing three-dimensional chess.

**Second, we need to address the threat from the Iranian regime on a sustained, bipartisan basis.** We will not succeed with a policy that changes radically if the White House or the Congress changes. A consistent, sustained, bipartisan response is how the United States won the Cold War. It took the United States decades of sustained, bipartisan effort, working with U.S. allies around the world, and including efforts both at home and abroad, to win the Cold War without a hot war with the Soviet Union. We are approaching the challenge from China today with a similar bipartisan approach, including some excellent work here in the Congress. We need to build a sustainable, bipartisan strategy to address the threat from the Iranian regime. We need to play defense by protecting the homeland, including American citizens and the private sector, from Iran's destabilizing actions. Both protecting Americans at home and turning Iran away from its destabilizing ambitions and its state-sponsorship of terrorism will require a sustained, bipartisan effort, working with U.S. allies, and with an eye towards strengthening security, including in the private sector.

**Third, one of the lessons the United States needs to embrace after October 7 is that strategic surprise is still possible.** Even the State of Israel, with all its focus, technology, and capabilities, was surprised by Hamas's attack on October 7. The so-called "[Iron Wall](#)" between Israel and Gaza did not protect Israel's citizens from the October 7 attack. What happened on October 7 is well past any effort to analogize it to 9/11 or Pearl Harbor. The United States is thirty-five times the size of Israel. ***On a proportional basis, the number of Israelis killed on October 7 is more than half the number of Americans killed during the whole of the Vietnam War***—and Israel suffered most of those deaths in a single day. The Iron Wall was not enough—we should learn that lesson, too. Today in the homeland security enterprise, every watch and warning officer, and every strategic planner in the U.S. government, should be using red cells to look for vulnerabilities, including those we have not focused on. The Iranian regime is precisely the kind of threat that deserves this attention, especially in the areas of cybersecurity and countering Iranian disinformation. I will have more to say about these points below.

**Fourth, I urge this committee to understand Iran’s peculiar sense of symmetry.**

Understanding Iran is a challenge, but Iran is far from incomprehensible. Eighty-four years ago this month, Winston Churchill famously described the Soviet Union as “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” What everyone forgets are his next words: “Perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.” Churchill was one of the most clear-eyed leaders in history about the Soviet Union. We need to be equally clear-eyed about the Iranian regime. The Iranian regime is not ten feet tall, and the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps’ Qods Force, while dangerous and committed, is not lurking behind every tree.

Instead, we need to understand **Iran’s peculiar sense of symmetry**. Let me give several examples. The day after the January 2, 2020 strike that killed Qasim Soleimani, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamene’i gave his Supreme National Security Council a written order to “strike America directly and in exact proportion to the attack,” two sources told the New York Times. Other Iranian military leaders made similar statements. In May 2018, when the United States started a “maximum pressure” campaign to reduce Iran’s oil exports, which Iran considered [economic warfare](#), Iran showed it could reduce U.S. allies’ ability to export oil, first in [May](#) and [June](#) with attacks on tankers and [a Saudi pipeline](#), then with the September 14, 2019 [Abqaiq attack that halved Saudi oil exports](#).

Iran’s sense of symmetry is more pronounced in cyberspace. After the “[Stuxnet](#)” malware that targeted Iran’s [Siemens industrial control systems](#) came to light in June 2010, Iran developed its own [cyberattack capability](#) that [it used in 2013, three years later](#), to target U.S. infrastructure. On July 30, 2012, [new U.S. sanctions targeted Iranian banks](#). [Two months later, Iran ramped up denial of service attacks](#), whose [main targets were—US banks](#). In [August 2012](#), Iran’s surprise “[Shamoon](#)” attack deleted [35,000 hard drives at Saudi Aramco](#), described as “[the biggest hack in history](#).” What got less publicity is that in early 2012, “Wiper” malware [deleted data on Iranian Oil Ministry and National Iranian Oil Company computers](#).

The symmetry can be positive and negative: When the Iran nuclear deal was in force, Iranian cyberattacks [appeared to decrease](#). When the Trump Administration began its 2018 “[maximum pressure](#)” campaign, [Iranian cyberattacks increased within 24 hours](#). On June 20, 2018, after Iranian attacks on civilian tankers, President Trump [retaliated by cyberattack](#). Private U.S. businesses [noticed a further increase in Iranian cyberattacks](#).

And while the United States supports the cause of human rights and freedom in Iran, we cannot be surprised when the Iranian regime thinks this gives it a license to try to interfere in democratic processes here in the United States. There is, of course, absolutely no moral equivalency in the two situations—none. But the Iranian regime does not think this way, so we need to be prepared. We should not be deterred from pursuing what is right. One essential part of the response to Iran’s peculiar sense of symmetry is that we must raise our defenses to the level where the Iranian regime’s efforts to target our security, and especially our democratic processes, all fail.

This list could go on. But while Iran and its proxies are capable of tactical surprise, as Hamas achieved on October 7, it is possible for the United States and our allies to put in place defensive measures to protect the American people, and to help our allies, from the threats that Iran poses. Later I will discuss several specific steps Congress can take to help this.

# The Iranian Regime's Threats to the United States Homeland

Let me briefly categorize the most significant threats from the Iranian regime towards the U.S. homeland.

1. **Targeted assassinations and terrorist attacks in the United States homeland, and plots to kill or kidnap Americans here or overseas.** The Iranian regime is responsible for plots to kill or kidnap American citizens who are critics of the regime, and against former American officials. There is every reason to expect such plots to continue. Disrupting these plots will require continued vigilance from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), which has the lead in disrupting such plots. Other parts of the U.S. intelligence and law enforcement communities also play vital roles.

Cooperation among U.S. law enforcement agencies has proven extraordinarily effective in disrupting these plots. For example, in 2011, an extremely [small number of IRGC Qods Force \(IRGC-QF\) officers](#) tried to use Mansour Arbabsiar to assassinate Saudi Arabian ambassador Adel Al-Jubeir in a Washington restaurant. The plot was uncovered by agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration. The advance passenger information systems by which Arbabsiar's travel was tracked were developed by the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection. Arbabsiar was arrested by the FBI when his flight between Mexico City and Amsterdam landed at New York's John F. Kennedy airport. Arbabsiar pled guilty and cooperated with authorities in helping obtain evidence against other IRGC officers involved in the plot. He is now serving a 25-year sentence in Federal prison in Marion, Illinois. Cooperation among our law enforcement and homeland security agencies has proved successful at uncovering plots by Iran and its proxies.

In a more recent example, a U.S. citizen in California, four Iranian regime operatives, and an Eastern Europe criminal syndicate were charged with attempts to kidnap and kill [an American citizen](#) who was publicly critical of the regime's human rights abuses. This resulted in a guilty plea on material support charges for the one accused who was here in the United States and the [arrest of three members of the Eastern European crime syndicate](#). Others are still wanted for their role in these plots.

Iran's proxies Hamas and Lebanese Hizballah are also trying to build up a presence here in the United States. Here, again, cooperation among U.S., state, and local law enforcement has proved effective in uncovering and disrupting such plots. Continued vigilance will be essential.

2. **Cyber-threats from Iran are certain, and ongoing.** The Office of the Director of National Intelligence said in its [2023 threat assessment](#) that "Iran's growing expertise and willingness to conduct aggressive cyber operations make it a major threat to the security of U.S. and allied networks and data. Iran's opportunistic approach to cyber attacks makes critical infrastructure owners in the United States susceptible to being targeted...." This is an area where Iran could pull off a strategic surprise. Of particular concern is Iran's willingness to target U.S. private sector entities. Today, most government systems are better defended, as are the major firms that form the backbone of America's digital economy. But the companies that are the "fingers" and "toes" are not as well protected. The March 2023 [National](#)

[Cybersecurity Strategy](#) will help when it is fully implemented. However, since so much of the nation's critical cyber infrastructure is in the hands of the private sector, we need, as a nation, to ask if we are adequately invested in cybersecurity.

3. **Iranian disinformation operations pose an increasing challenge.** This is an area where Iran could pull off a strategic surprise. Early Iranian disinformation efforts were clumsy, but their attempt to [exploit racial polarization in Florida in the 2020 election](#) showed a significantly greater sophistication than before. I am not as concerned about actual Iranian threats to voting infrastructure, but Iranian disinformation efforts in the runup to the 2024 election are worth our attention in order to ensure that they get exposed and disrupted.

## Six Steps the United States Congress Can Take

Let me close with six ways in which Congress can help strengthen America's defenses against today's multi-dimensional threat from Iran.

1. **Work towards a bipartisan consensus to address the Iranian threat** both at home and abroad.
2. **Focus on the most significant urgent threats, starting with increasing cybersecurity in the private sector.** The governmental security partner for most private sector firms in the United States is the DHS Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). In 2021, John Katko, then the ranking Republican on this committee, said the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency should [play quarterback for cybersecurity](#), and should be funded like one. He called for CISA to become a [\\$5 billion agency in five years](#). CISA is now funded at half that level. While we focus, rightly, on specific cyber threats like ransomware and the potential for nation states like China and Iran to carry out cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, we are not engaging in the debate as to whether we as a country are devoting the right level of resources to cybersecurity, both the levels of private sector and governmental spending. Governmental spending on cybersecurity may be the purview of the appropriations committees, but encouraging the private sector to do more to protect computer systems from Iranian and other hostile attacks is something that this committee should continue to urge as an urgent matter.
3. **Renew the authorization of DHS's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction office.** This office does vital work in coordinating training and the procurement of equipment to prevent low-probability, high-impact attacks using weapons of mass destruction. I do not need to remind this committee that Iran is one of the few countries in the world that has actually used chemical weapons, during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Iran's nuclear ambitions are well past the level of technology required to build dirty bombs—conventional explosives with radiation enhancements. DHS needs the CWMD office re-authorized, and it also needs an authorized Office of Health Security. I know this committee has done its job and the bill is now held up in the Senate, I believe by a single Senator. I urge this committee to engage to break the logjam and send a bipartisan reauthorization bill to the President right away.
4. **Renew Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act section 702 with changes.** As my former government colleague Jon Darby, former director of operations at the National Security

Agency, and I wrote in [The Hill in September](#), “We can unequivocally state that Section 702 is the most timely, impactful, and cost-effective authority to obtain foreign intelligence on terrorists, spies, weapons proliferators, cyber attackers and nation-states that pose threats to the United States and our allies. History will judge us harshly if we unilaterally give up an important intelligence advantage against those who are trying to harm us.” I understand some in Congress have concerns, particularly over past FBI practices, and these do need to be addressed, but without requiring a judge to be sitting at the elbow of every government analyst working on national security cases. Given the threats we face from Iran and elsewhere, we cannot let the vital authority of section 702 lapse at the end of this year. This is the wrong time for Congress to be sending the message said in 1929, “Gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.”

5. **Enact the House language in the Intelligence Authorization Act on the collection authority of DHS’s Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A).** [Section 435](#) of H.R. 3932 calls for an assessment by the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community on the collection authority of DHS I&A. It is particularly concerning that the comparable Senate language prohibits DHS I&A from doing [any collection whatsoever](#). It is true that DHS I&A needs to be particularly conscious about respecting boundaries so that its actions do not infringe on Americans’ constitutional rights to free speech and the right to counsel, and I believe that Under Secretary Ken Wainstein agrees with this principle. But to deny I&A any ability to collect information relevant to border smuggling and trafficking, for example, goes farther than it should. When this language comes to conference between the House and the Senate, the House should stand firm on this particular issue.
6. **Extend authorities to counter unmanned aerial systems (UAS).** Congress needs to ensure that Federal counter-UAS authorities, which were extended in the continuing resolution, do not lapse at the end of this year. Drones were precisely one of the technologies that Hamas used to deadly effect against the Israeli Iron Wall in Gaza. This committee should be concerned about what Iranian operatives or Iranian proxies might try to do with unmanned aerial systems here in the United States. It is vital for the security of the homeland that Congress and the administration resolve the competing versions of this bill before counter-UAS authorities lapse at the end of the year.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you and the committee for your time and look forward to answering your questions.