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Committee on Homeland Security

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October 23, 2011 marked the twenty-eighth anniversary of the beginning of an asymmetrical war waged by radical Islamists against the United States and its allies. It was on that day in 1983 during the Lebanese civil war that coordinated suicide truck bombings in Beirut killed 241 American peacekeepers under my command, as well as 58 French peacekeepers. These atrocities led to the withdrawal of the Multinational Force from Lebanon and to major changes in U.S. national policy. Since then, radical Islamism has evolved into the major national security threat to Western civilization.

Perhaps the most significant development that grew out of the Beirut peacekeeping mission was the ascent of Iran into becoming a major player, not only in the region but also globally. Since Iran does not share a border with Lebanon (or Israel), in the early 1980's it deployed through Syria a contingent of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) into Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. The Iranians established an operational and training base that remains active to this day. They founded, financed, trained, and equipped Hezbollah to operate as a proxy army and used these Shiite surrogates to attack the U.S. and French peacekeepers early that October morning. We can see today that Iran's entry into Lebanon was a game-changer while continuing to destabilize Lebanon and attack Israel indirectly, which raises its stature, popularity and influence throughout the Arab region and globally. Iran's capability to cause havoc on

several fronts and on its own schedule provides convenient distractions while its nuclear centrifuges continue to spin.

Iranian mullahs, while waging a radically aggressive campaign, support al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, three of whom are Sunni. They also support the Taliban in Afghanistan against NATO forces and use the IRGC's elite Quds Force to train, finance, and equip Sunni and Shiite militias in Iraq.

Some of the key leaders who are implementing the Iranian mullahs' aggressive policies are worth closer scrutiny. Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, a veteran commander of the 150,000-man IRGC, was named minister of defense in August 2005. In 1983, he was commander of the IRGC contingent in Lebanon and was directly responsible for the Beirut truck bombings.

Ahmadinejad's fiercely disputed reelection in 2009 also reveals another connection with IRGC in Lebanon. His selection as the new minister of defense, Gen. Ahmad Vahidi, also participated in the 1983 Beirut bombings and later succeeded Najjar as commander of the IRGC contingent. He founded the elite Quds Force of the IRGC, serving as its first commander. He currently is on Interpol's most wanted list, the Red Notices, for the bombings in Buenos Aires of the Israeli Embassy in 1992 killing twenty-nine and the Jewish Community Cultural Center in 1994 killing eighty-six. Vahidi was linked by the European Union to Iran's nuclear activities and its development of nuclear weapons delivery systems while overseeing the research and development of WMDs. Vahidi's assignment and background lays out a bloody roadmap of Iranian intentions. It also provides a deeper understanding as to why Iran has retained the dubious distinction for over a quarter century of being the world's leading state-sponsor of terrorism.

The expanding relationship between Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez requires close vigilance by the U.S. and our allies. Their open boast to “oppose world hegemony” is clear propaganda to provide cover for other activities. Plans include Russia to build an arms plant in Venezuela to produce AK-103 automatic rifles and to send fifty-three military helicopters. Besides having a major operating base in the tri-border areas of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, they have also established another one on Venezuela’s Margarita Island. Weekly flights between Iran and Venezuela are not monitored which brings back memories of my U.S. Multinational Peacekeepers headquarters at Beirut International Airport in 1983 and which evolved into a terrorist hub in the late 1980’s. The U.S. Southern Command has expressed concern of the connections between state sponsor of terrorism Iran and Hezbollah. All this is not happening without a purpose.

The former Drug Enforcement Agency Chief of Operations Mike Braun, confirmed that Hezbollah operatives have formed a partnership with the Mexican drug cartels. They have been using cartel smuggling routes to get people and contraband into the United States. These developments should cause many red flags to fly for the intelligence, defense diplomatic and Homeland Security communities. We have to presume that Hezbollah cells are present and being fortified while awaiting orders from Iran. To discount this threat and their capabilities would be an invitation to disaster. Reports from DHS documents reveal that over 180,000 illegal aliens from countries Other than Mexico were apprehended from 2007 and mid-March 2010 which begs the question of how many we missed.

The recent Iranian-backed plot to assassinate Saudi Arabia’s Ambassador to the United States involved a key Quds Force commander linked to the killings of U.S. troops in Iraq. This should come as no surprise. Abdul Reza Shahlai led a group of the Quds Force, within the Iraqi militia

of cleric Moqtada al Sadr, dressed as U.S. and Iraqi soldiers, in an assault in Karbala which killed five Americans. According to a U.S. Treasury report, he supplied Sadr's group with weapons. Shahlai is the cousin of the arrested co-conspirator Manssor Arabsiar, an Iranian American living in Texas. The bizarre plot involved using Mexican drug traffickers to bomb a restaurant in Washington, DC which the Ambassador frequented. The uniqueness of the plot provides some insight to the nature of the asymmetrical threat we face. The plotters also discussed bombing the Saudi and Israeli Embassies in Washington. I wonder if the modus operandi considered involved the Beirut truck-bombing model used against the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and the U.S. and French Peacekeepers headquarters(both 1983); the two U.S. Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya (1998) and the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires (1992).

In closing, I believe that Iran is intent in attacking us in our Homeland. All one needs to do is review their strategy, behavior, attacks and targets the past three decades. Their ideology mixed with their obsessive hatred of America makes us a prime target. Their use of proxies has proven successful while avoiding any retribution for the carnage they have wrought as the leading state-sponsor of terrorism. The commendable work performed daily across our defense, intelligence and domestic law enforcement agencies is a matter of record. Our national unity and eternal vigilance is needed more than ever.

