



TESTIMONY OF

James Dunlap  
Deputy Under Secretary for Analysis  
Office of Intelligence and Analysis  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

BEFORE

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security

ON

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

March 20, 2024  
Washington, DC

## **INTRODUCTION**

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

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

## **CYBER**

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

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

## **IRAN'S TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION EFFORTS IN THE HOMELAND**

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

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

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

## **TERRORISM**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# **Department of Justice**

---

**STATEMENT OF**  
**ROBERT WELLS**  
**ASSISTANT DIRECTOR**  
**COUNTERTERRORISM DIVISION**  
**FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE**  
**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**  
**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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

**PRESENTED MARCH 20, 2024**

**STATEMENT OF  
ROBERT WELLS  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
COUNTERTERRORISM DIVISION  
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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

**Presented  
March 20, 2024**

Good morning Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Robert Wells and I am the Assistant Director for the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division. I am honored to be here representing the FBI’s counterterrorism personnel who tackle some of the most complex terrorism threats here in the United States and throughout the world.

Thank you for inviting me to join you this morning. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about our current threat environment, specifically as it relates to Iran and its proxies.

**TERRORISM THREAT ASSESSMENT**

As I’m sure you’ve heard from Director Wray, we are currently in a heightened terrorism threat environment. Since the HAMAS attack against Israel, we’ve seen almost every major terrorist organization in the world, including Al Qaeda, AQAP and ISIS, call for terrorist attacks against the United States. We’ve also seen an uptick in threats against the Jewish community here in the US and abroad. We remain concerned about threats from lone actors or small cells radicalized to violence online. In addition, we are very focused on the threat posed by the more traditional foreign terrorist organizations and the state-sponsored terrorism threat from Iran.

**IRAN THREAT OVERVIEW**

Iran continues to plot attacks against former government officials in retaliation for the death of IRGC-QF, Commander Qassem Soleimani. They also have continued to provide support to their proxies and terrorist organizations throughout the world, to include Lebanese Hizballah.

The FBI believes Iran is capable of a variety of attack options against US targets, to include cyber operations intended to sabotage public and private infrastructure, and targeted assassinations of individuals who are deemed to be a threat to the regime or its stability.

The FBI continues to use intelligence to identify threats related to Iran's lethal capabilities targeting US persons. We work closely with other US Government agencies and foreign partners to address the threat to US interests from Iran and its proxies.

There have been several examples of Iran's intention to carry out lethal attacks in the United States. For instance, in 2022, an Iranian IRGC-QF Officer, Shahram Poursafi was charged related to his attempt to arrange the murder of former National Security Advisor, John Bolton. Poursafi attempted to pay individuals in the United States \$300,000 to carry out the murder in the Washington, DC area. Thankfully, Poursafi attempted to pay one of our confidential human sources to carry out the attack. This incredible investigative work by our Washington Field office resulted in charges against Poursafi. Even though Poursafi remains at large abroad, this investigation highlighted Iran's incredibly bold plot to murder a former US Government official.

In 2023, three members of an Eastern European criminal organization were charged for plotting the murder of a US citizen, who has been targeted by the Government of Iran for speaking out against the regime's human rights abuses. The Victim was targeted for exercising the rights to which every American citizen is entitled. An attempted assassination on US soil shows how far Iranian actors are willing to go to silence their critics.

These brazen attempted attacks on US soil by Iran are not new. You may also recall that in September 2011, Mansour Arbabsiar was arrested for plotting to murder the Saudi Ambassador to the United States on US soil. This plot was directed and approved by the IRGC-QF.

Based on the examples I just described, it's clear the Iranians are determined to carry out attacks in the United States, whether it be to avenge the death of Soleimani, to silence one of their critics, or to kill the Ambassador of an ally nation. The FBI's mission is to work with our partners in the US and throughout the world to prevent attacks like this.

In January 2024, fourteen foreign nationals were intercepted by a US military vessel during their alleged transportation of suspected Iranian-made weapon parts to Houthi rebel forces in Yemen. Four of these individuals were recently brought to the United States to face charges outlined in a criminal complaint unsealed in February. Tragically, two Navy SEALs lost their lives in the pursuit of this mission. The disruption of these individuals prevented Iranian-made weapon parts from getting into the hands of the Houthis, who could have used the weapons to target US forces.

#### POST OCTOBER 7 – IRAN & HAMAS

The persistent threat from Iran came into sharper focus following the October 7 HAMAS attack against Israel. Despite their praise for the attack and threat to join the conflict should Israel invade Gaza, Iran will likely still rely on their proxy networks to action retaliatory attacks focused in the region, in the near term. We assess that Iran IRGC will continue to provide training, weapons, and financial support to HAMAS.

#### HIZBALLAH

The FBI remains concerned Hizballah, Iran's primary strategic partner, could conduct retaliatory attacks against former US officials, not only overseas but also within the US.

Since its inception in 1982, Hizballah has been involved in numerous anti-US terrorist attacks. Historically, Hizballah has sent operatives to build terrorist infrastructures worldwide, and are likely to continue conducting intelligence collection, financial activities, and procurement efforts worldwide to support their terrorist capabilities.

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, the threat from Iran and its proxies remains persistent and the FBI continues to engage with our partners to ensure protection of the American people and US interests, both at home and abroad. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and I look forward to answering your questions.