

HEZBOLLAH'S STRATEGIC SHIFT: A GLOBAL TERRORIST THREAT

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,
NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

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The Honorable Ted Poe, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas, and chairman, Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade:	
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HEZBOLLAH'S STRATEGIC SHIFT: A GLOBAL TERRORIST THREAT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NONPROLIFERATION, AND TRADE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:30 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ted Poe (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

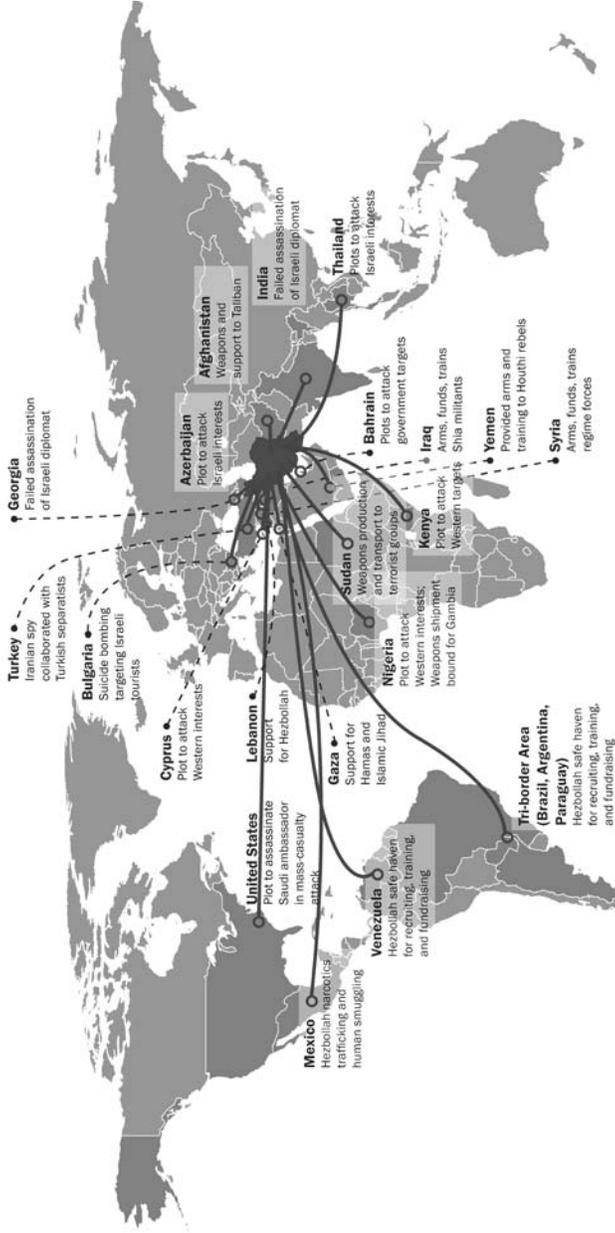
Mr. POE. The TNT Subcommittee will come to order. Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to the length limitation and the rules.

Recent focus on Iran has centered on Tehran's quest for nuclear weapons, but the Iranians and their proxy Hezbollah also use terrorism to threaten global stability. Hezbollah enjoys the full backing of the Iranian regime. The Supreme Leader and the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps direct Hezbollah's global terror campaign. Years ago, Hezbollah was a limited regional threat. Today, it is an international movement conducting terrorist and criminal acts in several parts of the world.

Your attention can be directed to the poster on the right here showing some of Hezbollah's activities since 2010.

[The information referred to follows:]

Global Terror Campaign | 2010-2013



Graphic Credit: Rep. Ted Poe (TX-02) and AEI's Critical Threats Program

Global Terror Campaign | 2010–2013

- **October 2010:** Nigerian authorities seize Quds Force weapons shipment bound for Gambia.
- **October 11, 2011:** U.S. Department of Justice reveals Quds Force plot to assassinate Saudi ambassador in mass-casualty attack in Washington, D.C.
- **November 14, 2011:** Bahraini authorities arrest six men with links to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for plotting attacks against targets in Bahrain.
- **January 16, 2012:** Hezbollah member leads authorities in Bangkok, Thailand to warehouse stocked with 8,800 pounds of urea fertilizer and several gallons of liquid ammonium nitrate meant to be shipped out of country.
- **January 25, 2012:** Azerbaijani authorities arrest two men linked to Iranian intelligence plotting to attack Israeli ambassador in Azerbaijan.
- **February 13, 2012:** Individuals linked to IRGC attack Israeli diplomatic personnel in New Delhi, India.
- **February 13, 2012:** Iranian-linked assassination attempt of Israeli diplomat in Tbilisi, Georgia fails.
- **February 14, 2012:** Thai authorities arrest two of three Iranians plotting to attack Israeli targets in Thailand after they accidentally detonate explosive device in Bangkok apartment.
- **June 19, 2012:** Kenyan authorities arrest two Iranians plotting to attack U.S., Israeli, Saudi, or British targets in Kenya, leading authorities to 33-pound stash of explosives.
- **July 7, 2012:** Cypriot authorities arrest Lebanese man with links to Hezbollah for plotting to attack Israeli targets in Cyprus.
- **July 18, 2012:** Hezbollah suicide bombing targeting Israeli tourists in Burgas, Bulgaria kills six people.
- **December 17, 2012:** Nigerian authorities arrest three men with links to Iranians in "high profile terrorist network" for plotting to attack U.S. and Israeli interests.
- **January 23, 2013:** U.S. Navy intercepts Iranian ship carrying forty tons of arms, shells, and explosives destined for al Houthi rebels in Yemen. Vessel also carries ten Chinese-made QW-1M heat-seeking antiaircraft missiles, ten SA-7 shoulder-fired antiaircraft missiles, 63,000 cartridges for PK machine guns or Dragunov sniper rifles, and nearly 17,000 blocks of Iranian-made C-4 plastic explosives.

Graphic Credit: Rep. Ted Poe (TX-02) and AEI's Critical Threats Program



Mr. POE. Hezbollah is responsible for plots and activities throughout the world: Attempted assassination of Israeli diplomats in New Delhi and India, February 2012; potential involvement in the bombing of an Israeli diplomat in Tbilisi, Georgia, February 2012; storing over 8,000 pounds of explosive material in a warehouse in Thailand, uncovered in January of this year; attempted assassination of Israeli targets in Bangkok in February of this year; attempted laundering of approximately \$70 million from Venezuela to Germany in January 2013; running training camps and international narcotics smuggling operations in Venezuela, Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua, and even Mexico; suicide bombing of a bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria in July 2012.

In addition to these attacks, Hezbollah may have had a hand in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force plots such as the attempted assassination of the Saudi Ambassador to the United States in Washington, DC, in October 2011.

The uptick of Hezbollah's activity in recent years is a direct result of Iran. The Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, recently described the Iran-Hezbollah relationship as "a partnership agreement, with the Iranians as the senior partner." The Iranian agents running Hezbollah are the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Quds Force.

General Qassim Suleimani is the leader of the Quds Force. In his role, he serves as the de facto director of Hezbollah. Now major general, which is the highest rank in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, he has been the mastermind behind key Iranian foreign policy moves. He helped Iran grow its influence in Iraq and continues to support the murderous Assad regime in Syria. American and British intelligence officials draw comparisons between the real life Iranian general and the fictional Soviet spymaster Karla of John le Carre's Cold War novels. Only Suleimani is real and his war with the United States is real.

Hezbollah is using social media to spread its propaganda and get new terrorist recruits. As of August, Hezbollah had tweeted an average of 250 tweets a day and had 18,000-plus followers. Clearly, Hezbollah understands the value of Twitter when it comes to spreading its propaganda. Too bad Twitter and our own Government don't recognize it, too, and prohibit the advertising of Hezbollah terrorism.

Hezbollah is also getting information via apps and smartphones. BlackBerry and iPhone users who download an app called WhatsApp can get daily updates from Hezbollah. WhatsApp is one of the top overall paid apps, and the company is based in Dallas.

The IRGC, Quds Force, and Hezbollah don't have to go it alone. They maintain lots of friends and allies in the world. The Venezuelans under the Chavez regime serve as one of the Iranians' closest allies. Hezbollah has used the Venezuelan banking sector to launder hundreds of millions of dollars a year and smuggle narcotics to the United States and even European markets. Hezbollah has also conducted terror training on Margarita Island for recruits from Venezuela and other Latin American countries. Hezbollah operatives and their co-conspirators hold senior positions in the Venezuelan Government. They provide travel documents, weapons,

and logistics support to terrorist operations and cocaine smugglers as our witnesses will explain further.

In Afghanistan, the Iranians provide arms and training to Taliban fighters to kill United States and Afghan forces. In Africa, Iran and Hezbollah are expanding their terrorist and criminal networks in places like Senegal and Gambia. In Asia—be China, North Korea or smaller countries like Malaysia—the Iranian-Hezbollah conspirators are outpacing our ability to constrain them.

So far, U.S. efforts to combat the expanding threat have fallen short. Sanctions are necessary but they are not enough to counter the expanding activities of Hezbollah and the IRGC. Despite several international pressures, the EU has flat out refused to declare Hezbollah a terrorist group. This is too bad. This would pave the way for additional sanctions. If Western leaders continue to allow these actors to engage in a global campaign of terror without some repercussion, a dangerous precedent will be set.

Hezbollah is not going away. It is even more troubling to imagine what the Iranians might be empowered to do if they are allowed to develop nuclear weapons. The United States and its allies must understand this threat and develop a comprehensive strategy of their own to confront these activities of Hezbollah and Iran.

I will now yield 5 minutes to the ranking member, Mr. Brad Sherman from California, for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Poe follows:]

Recent focus on Iran has centered on Tehran's quest for nuclear weapons but the Iranians and their proxy Hezbollah also use terrorism to threaten global stability. Hezbollah enjoys the full backing of the Iranian regime and the Supreme Leader and the IRGC direct Hezbollah's global terror campaign.

Years ago Hezbollah was a limited, regional threat. Today, it is an international movement conducting terrorist and criminal acts all over the world. Recent notable activity includes:

- Attempted assassination of Israeli diplomats in New Delhi, India in February 2012.
- Potential involvement in the bombing of an Israeli diplomat in Tbilisi, Georgia in February 2012.
- Storing over 8,000 pounds of explosive material in a warehouse in Thailand, uncovered in January 2013.
- Attempted assassination of Israeli targets in Bangkok in February 2013.
- Attempted laundering of approximately \$70 million dollars from Venezuela to Germany in January 2013.
- Running training camps and international narcotics smuggling operations in Venezuela, Bolivia, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Mexico.
- Suicide bombing of a bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria in July 2012.

In addition to these attacks, Hezbollah may have had a hand in Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' and Quds Force plots such as the attempted assassination of the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. in Washington, DC in October 2011.

This dangerous uptick in Hezbollah activity in recent years is a direct result of Iranian prodding. The Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, recently described the Iran-Hezbollah relationship as "a partnership agreement, with the Iranians as the senior partner."

The Iranian agents running Hezbollah are the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Quds Force. General Qassim Suleimani is the leader of the Quds Force. In this role, he serves as the de-facto Director of Hezbollah. Now a major general — the highest rank in the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps — he has been the mastermind behind key Iranian foreign policy moves. He helped Iran grow its influence in Iraq and continues to support the murderous Assad regime in Syria. American and British intelligence officials have drawn comparisons between the

real-life Iranian general and the fictional Soviet spymaster Karla, of John le Carre's Cold War novels. Only Suleimani is real and he is at war with the U.S.

Hezbollah is also using social media to spread its propaganda and get new recruits. As of last August, Hezbollah had tweeted an average of 250 tweets per day and had 18,903 followers. Clearly Hezbollah understands the value of Twitter when it comes to spreading its propaganda. Too bad Twitter and our government don't recognize it too

Hezbollah is also getting information out via apps on smartphones. Blackberry and iPhone users who download an app called "WhatsApp" can get daily updates from Hezbollah. WhatsApp is one of the top overall paid apps and the company is based out of Dallas.

The IRGC, Quds Force, and Hezbollah also don't have to go it alone. They maintain lots of friends and allies around the world. The Venezuelans, under the Chavez regime, serves as one of the Iranians' closest allies. Hezbollah is currently using the Venezuelan banking sector to launder hundreds of millions of dollars a year and smuggle narcotics to US and European markets and has also conducted terror training on Margarita Island for recruits from Venezuela and other Latin American countries. Hezbollah operatives and their co-conspirators hold senior positions in the Venezuelan government. They provide travel documents, weapons and logistical support to terrorist operatives and cocaine smugglers, as our witnesses will explain.

Hezbollah is active in other regions, as well. In Afghanistan, the Iranians provide arms and training to Taliban fighters to kill U.S. and Afghan forces. In Africa, Iran and Hezbollah are expanding their terrorist and criminal networks in places like Nigeria, Senegal, and Gambia. In Asia, be it China, North Korea, or smaller countries like Malaysia, the Iranian-Hezbollah conspirators are outpacing our ability to constrain them.

So far, U.S. efforts to combat the expanding threat have fallen short. Sanctions are necessary, but they are not enough, to counter the expanding activities of Hezbollah and the IRGC. Despite severe international pressure, the EU has flat-out refused to declare Hezbollah a terrorist group. This is too bad. This would pave the way for additional sanctions.

If Western leaders continue to allow these actors to engage in a global campaign of terror without some repercussion, a dangerous precedent will be set. Hezbollah is not going away and it is even more troubling to imagine what the Iranians might be empowered to do if they are allowed to develop nuclear weapons. The United States and its allies must correctly understand this threat and develop a coherent, comprehensive strategy of their own to confront these activities of Hezbollah and Iran.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing.

Iran, indeed, presents a global challenge to the United States, and Hezbollah is a major part of that challenge. The United States is building a coalition of countries that are confronting Iran in meaningful ways. Unfortunately, what we are doing now is exactly what we should have been doing in roughly 2001. That doesn't mean we are doing the wrong thing, it just means we have to do more and we have to do it quicker.

The Europeans, or elements in Europe, have asked us not to take military action against Iran and to use our good offices to persuade Israel not to do so as well. That being the case, you would think that Europe would do everything possible to assist us in using non-lethal methods to control Hezbollah, and more importantly, to stop the Iran nuclear program. One important step that European countries could take would be to list Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. They are on the spear of Iran's efforts to influence the world and to carry out terrorism in virtually every continent.

As to Latin America, the United Nations Security Council approved the first round of U.N. sanctions in 2006. Ahmadinejad embarked on a tour of Latin America to try to emerge as a leader of anti-Americanism not only in Venezuela, but also Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. Hezbollah and Iran have expanded their operations in Latin America, especially fund-raising for illicit activities. This subcommittee and others, and the full committee, have focused on how Hezbollah has been involved in the tri-border region where Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina come together. An extensive smuggling network there run by Hezbollah funnels large sums of money and there have been reports of training camps in the region.

They have been able to cultivate ties to narcotraffickers and other criminal enterprises and even the government officials. And as they engage in narcotics activity, they are able to combine the true believer dedication of some of their operatives with the lucrative opportunities provided by the drug trade.

We should point out that Hezbollah and Iran, working together, blew up the Buenos Aires Jewish community center late last century. That illustrates that Iran and its ally Hezbollah, or proxy, pose a greater danger perhaps than North Korea. Although Iran doesn't have nuclear weapons, Iran's desire to influence the world go all the way to Buenos Aires, which is as far from Tehran as you can get, I believe, on this planet. In contrast, the thugs who run North Korea seem mostly focused on maintaining their power in North Korea.

The presence of Hezbollah in the region could very well serve as an important part of Iran's campaign to retaliate for efforts to curtail its nuclear program. One need look no further than the Quds Force sponsors' efforts to kill the Saudi Ambassador in Washington and the attack on Israeli interests in Europe and Asia to see examples of what we could see in the future.

To that end, I worked, along with Chairman Poe and the author of the bill, Mr. Duncan, on the Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012, which raised the profile of this problem and hopefully provided the Obama administration with tools that

it will use to combat it. This legislation, of course, was signed into law last December.

As to Syria, Hezbollah has an active part in the defense of the criminal Assad regime. Tehran has been sending commanders and fighters from Hezbollah and from the Revolutionary Guard Corps to Syria, as well as providing aid in arms. For those who question whether we should provide spare parts to Iran's supposedly civilian aircraft as "the humanitarian thing to do," I would say those planes should be grounded until Iran grounds its nuclear program. Those planes right now are carrying those who would kill thousands of Syrians, and humanitarianism requires that we not provide spare parts to make sure those planes can do even more damage to the people of Syria.

It appears that Hezbollah has a force of up to 50,000 rockets trained on Israel. Before Iran develops a nuclear weapon, those rockets are a way of trying to threaten Israel into not doing something militarily. After Iran, if God forbid, has a nuclear weapon, we will see terrorism with impunity, and Iran's nuclear umbrella may allow Hezbollah to fire those rockets and also have defense.

I see my time has more than expired. Let me just add that the transfer of chemical weapons to Hezbollah needs to be the reddest of red lines for the Assad regime. And I yield back.

Mr. POE. I recognize members for a 1-minute opening statement.

Mr. Yoho from Florida, you are recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Berman, for holding this hearing today. Today's topic is an—

Mr. SHERMAN. Point of personal privilege. That would be Sherman.

Mr. YOHO. I am sorry, sir.

Mr. SHERMAN. Quite a difference between the two.

Mr. YOHO. My apologies.

We cannot hope to effectively deal with Iran until we understand the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah, and as Iran's de facto enforcer, Hezbollah has and will continue to be a large threat to not only peace in the region, but the world at large.

I look forward to your testimony. And I have never seen this kind of involvement in the Western Hemisphere when you see Hezbollah going into South America in the reaches and the tentacles it has. I look forward to what you say about it and how we, on a foreign policy side, can help stop that. Thank you.

Mr. POE. The gentleman yields back. Without objection, all the witnesses' prepared statements will be made part of the record. I ask that each witness keep your presentation to no more than 5 minutes. I will now introduce the three witnesses that we have before they give their testimony.

Mr. Will Fulton is an Iran analyst with the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute. His research focuses on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Quds Force, and Iran's Global Force Protection Network.

Dr. Matthew Levitt is the director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He previously served as a deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and analysis at the Department of the Treasury and as a State Department counterterrorism advisor to the Special

Envoy for Middle East Regional Security. He is also the author of the forthcoming book, "Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God."

Ambassador Roger Noriega is the founder and managing director of Vision Americas, which advises the United States and foreign clients on international business issues. He is also a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. Prior to these roles, he was the United States Ambassador to the Organization of American States and Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Mr. Fulton, we will start with you. You have 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MR. WILL FULTON, IRAN ANALYST, CRITICAL THREATS PROJECT, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Mr. FULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify today alongside my esteemed colleagues.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is first and foremost concerned with regime preservation. So when we talk about Iran's global terror campaign and Iran's relationship with Lebanese Hezbollah, we must think about it in that context. Iran has established a substantial global force projection network that includes the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, or IRGC, and the Quds Force, Hezbollah, and proxies in Iraq and Gaza. And although these groups may justify their activities in religious and ideological terms, at the end of the day they are a power projection, deterrent, and retaliatory force.

The regime's vulnerability and relative military weakness demand an aggressive and far-reaching asymmetric capability. As a result, Iran's leaders have crafted a national security policy designed to protect the regime from external threats by demonstrating a capability to strike U.S. and Israeli interests anywhere in the world, and this strategy dates back to the regime's earliest years.

Ultimately, Mr. Chairman, the IRGC is responsible for Iran's global force projection. The IRGC's mission is regime preservation and is responsible for every related internal and external security task required to accomplish this mission.

The IRGC is a highly structured organization led by a small core network of individuals. This group fought side by side during the Iran-Iraq War, where they developed professional military experience, as well as enduring personal relationships. They are battle-tested commanders who played key roles early on, leading to increasingly important roles later, including within the Quds Force.

The commander of the IRGC, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, reports to Iran's Supreme Leader. Each of the IRGC's five combat service commanders report directly to Jafari, except one. Quds Force Commander, Major General Qassim Suleimani, also reports directly to the Supreme Leader. Suleimani has the trust and confidence of the Supreme Leader and has had it for over 15 years. Any Quds Force activity has tacit, if not explicit approval of the Supreme Leader.

I think that is one of the most important points to understand when we think about the complicity of Iran's top leadership and the global activities of the Quds Force, its partners and proxies.

The notion that Quds Force operations are undertaken by rogue elements is implausible and not supported by any available information.

Iran has provided continuous substantial support to Hezbollah since the 1980s, and their partnership has materialized in the form of multiple terrorist attacks around the globe, targeted assassinations, and military operations in wartime environments. During the Iraq war, the Quds Force worked closely with Hezbollah to train, fund, and arm Iraqi Shia militant groups, and plan and execute attacks against U.S. and coalition forces. I would like to pick out just a couple of examples where Quds Force commanders involved in Iraq have resurfaced recently.

In 2007, Senior Quds Force Commander Abdul Reza Shahlai, along with a senior Hezbollah commander, planned the infamous attack in Karbala, Iraq, that resulted in the deaths of five U.S. soldiers. Shahlai later went on to help plan and facilitate the failed 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. here in Washington, DC.

The Quds Force's number three in command was also active in Iraq. Mohsen Chizari, the head of Quds Force operations and training, was arrested in Baghdad in 2006 by U.S. forces, but was quickly released at the insistence of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who cited diplomatic immunity. Now Chizari is considered one of the key members of the Quds Force's training and advising mission fighting to keep Bashar al-Assad in power in Syria.

Syria is enormously important to Iran. It has long been Iran's closest state ally. It has provided Iran access to its proxies and partners. Iran has invested in Syria as a strategic ally as part of its deterrence against Israel. Iran's primary goal, then, has been to preserve Assad for as long as possible. But Iran is also working aggressively to establish a militant network that will enable them to retain a certain level of capability in post-Assad Syria.

As you might expect, the Quds Force has been leading Iran's efforts in Syria. Just last month, a brigadier general in the Quds Force, with substantial ties to Hezbollah by the name of Hassan Shateri, was killed near Damascus after having been in Aleppo. We don't know exactly what Shateri was doing in Syria, but we suspect that he was on a mission related to the Al-Safir chemical weapons and missile storage facility near Aleppo. Shateri was important enough that Qassim Suleimani personally delivered the news of his death to Shateri's family and wept openly at his funeral. Senior Hezbollah officials also traveled to Iran to attend Shateri's funeral.

Hezbollah has been integral to Iran's efforts in Syria, which has collaborated with the Quds Force in several areas, including training, advising, and arming pro-Assad forces. Iran, along with Hezbollah, may achieve some success with its strategy in Syria. But Iran's efforts offer only a temporary solution to Tehran. A rump Alawite state or a militant network cannot provide Iran with the same level of deterrence or political and economic support as Assad's Syria. This is why I think the fall of Assad has serious implications for Iran's global force projection strategy, and I will conclude on this point.

As the conflict in Syria stretches on and Iran sees its strategic depth continually eroded, they are likely to seek to expand their

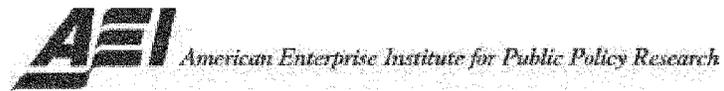
operational territory. The interception in January of an Iranian weapons shipment containing sophisticated Chinese-made anti-aircraft missiles and large quantities of light arms, ammunition, and explosive material destined for al Houthi rebels in Yemen suggests that Iran has already ramped up its support for militants in at least one area. We should look for similar behavior in other areas where Iran has a presence.

And finally, if you are wondering what a more active Iranian global force projection network might look like, consider the past 2 years where we have seen a plot to conduct a mass casualty attack here in Washington and plots in Georgia, India, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Kenya, and Nigeria. We have seen Iran become more risk prone in its behavior and we are likely to see this trend continue.

Thank you.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Mr. Fulton.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Fulton follows:]



Statement before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade
Hearing on “Hezbollah’s Strategic Shift: A Global Terrorist Threat”

Iran’s Global Force Projection Network: IRGC Quds Force and Lebanese Hezbollah

Will Fulton

Critical Threats Project Iran Analyst and IRGC Project Lead

American Enterprise Institute

March 20, 2013

The views expressed in this testimony are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of the American Enterprise Institute.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is first and foremost concerned with regime preservation, and its strategic calculus and behavior are deeply influenced by this concern. It is therefore essential that Iran's global terror campaign is considered within this context. Iran's global force projection network, to include the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and the Quds Force, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Iran's proxies in Iraq and Gaza, is primarily a deterrence and retaliatory force, nested within a strategy designed to protect the regime from external threats. By demonstrating a capability to strike U.S. and Israeli interests anywhere in the world, or creating a perception of this capability, Iran's leaders hope to stave off a military strike, or at least make it extremely costly for their foes.

This has been a component of Iran's strategic thinking since the earliest years of the Iranian Revolution. In 1980, while the regime was still in its infancy and officials were debating the direction of Iran's foreign policy, the official organ of the IRGC published an editorial describing why Iran's global terrorist network is fundamental to regime survival. It reads in part:

In order to achieve ideological, political, security and economic self-reliance we have no other choice but to mobilize all forces loyal to the Islamic Revolution, and through this mobilization, plant such a terror in the hearts of the enemies that they abandon the thought of an offensive and annihilation of our revolution.... If our revolution does not have an offensive and internationalist dimension, the enemies of Islam will again enslave us culturally, politically, and the like, and they will not abstain from plunder and looting.¹

This, in my view, is an accurate reflection of Iranian strategic thinking still today. In order to understand the Iranian global terrorist activity that we see currently, it is important to bear in mind the strategic thinking out of which this behavior has emerged.

It is noteworthy that this sentiment was articulated by the IRGC, as this is the organization that is primarily responsible for managing Iran's global force projection network.

The IRGC is a revolutionary, ideological military organization and an economic and political powerhouse within Iran. The IRGC's self-described primary mission is to defend Iran's Islamic Revolution; in other words, to preserve the regime.² To accomplish this mission, the IRGC is tasked with internal security, conventional deterrence and defense, internal and external intelligence collection, and foreign military operations.

The IRGC's senior leadership consists of a core network of individuals who developed professional military experience and enduring personal relationships during Iran's eight-year war with Iraq (1980-1988).³ The commander of the IRGC, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, reports to Iran's Supreme Leader and each of the IRGC's five combat service commanders report directly to Jafari, with the exception of one. Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Suleimani also reports directly to the Supreme Leader.⁴

This point is extremely important to understanding the extent to which Iran's senior leadership is complicit in the global activities of the Quds Force, its partners, and proxies. There is no

intermediary between the Supreme Leader and Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani. Any Quds Force activity has, at a minimum, tacit approval of the Supreme Leader.

The notion that Quds Force operations – such as the 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. in a mass-casualty attack in Washington, D.C. – is undertaken by rogue elements of the Quds Force without the approval of Qassem Soleimani and the Supreme Leader is anathema to the IRGC's command structure.⁵

The IRGC and Lebanese Hezbollah have a well-known historical relationship that continues to this day. The IRGC deployed one of its brigades to southern Lebanon in the early 1980s to create and stand up Hezbollah.⁶ Since that time Iran has provided continuous financial and materiel support to Hezbollah, and their partnership has materialized in the form of multiple mass-casualty terrorist attacks around the globe, targeted assassinations, and military operations in wartime environments.⁷ This last element of collaboration is well-documented and provides insight into the depth of cooperation between the Quds Force and Hezbollah in their operations. Moreover, the Quds Force personnel known to have been involved in these operations continue to play senior roles in Iran's global force projection network today.

During the Iraq War, the Quds Force teamed with Lebanese Hezbollah to train, fund and arm Iraqi Shia militant groups, and plan and execute attacks against U.S. and Coalition Forces. In one such example, Deputy Commander of the Quds Force External Special Operations Unit, Abdul Reza Shahlai, along with senior Hezbollah operative Ali Musa Daqduq, planned a sophisticated attack in 2007 that resulted in the death of five U.S. soldiers in Karbala, Iraq.⁸

Shahlai later went on to help plan and facilitate the failed 2011 plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. in Washington, D.C.⁹ Daqduq, who had been appointed in 2005 by Hezbollah to coordinate training for Iraqi militants inside Iran with the Quds Force, was detained by Coalition Forces in 2007.¹⁰ He was released by the Iraqi government in 2012.¹¹ Reports indicate that Daqduq fled Baghdad for Lebanon after his release.¹²

The third highest-ranking commander of the Quds Force, Operations and Training Deputy Mohsen Chizari, was also active in Iraq. Chizari was detained by U.S. forces in Baghdad in 2006 along with another unnamed Quds Force officer and detailed information on the import of sophisticated weaponry from Iran to Iraq.¹³ The Iraqi government quickly released Chizari and his co-conspirator, citing diplomatic immunity.¹⁴ Five years later, in May 2011, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated Chizari, along with Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani, for their role in supporting Bashar al Assad's regime in Syria.¹⁵

Iran's involvement in Syria is not surprising. Iran maintains a number of strategic interests that have been affected by the ongoing crisis, and the centrality of Syria to Iran's regional objectives has necessitated an integrated effort. Syria has long been Iran's closest state ally and provided crucial access to Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as Hamas in Gaza, and Islamic Jihad in the West Bank. Iran has used Syria as a hub to finance and transport personnel and weapons to these groups. Furthermore, Iran has invested in Syria as a strategic partner as part of its deterrence strategy vis-à-

vis Israel and as an Arab ally in its rivalry with Turkey and the Persian Gulf states. Iran is, therefore, implementing a two-track strategy in Syria, undertaking efforts to both preserve the Assad regime for as long as possible while working to create a permissive operational environment in post-Assad Syria.¹⁶

This effort has been led primarily by the Quds Force, which has deployed senior personnel into Syria in order to arm, train, and advise elements of Assad's security forces.¹⁷ The assassination of senior Quds Force commander Brigadier General Hassan Shateri in Syria last month is evidence of ongoing Quds Force activity directed at the highest levels.¹⁸ Iran's efforts have also increasingly involved Lebanese Hezbollah. The Quds Force and Hezbollah have cooperated in ensuring the passage of Iranian arms shipments to Syria since at least 2012.¹⁹ They have also cooperated to train pro-Assad forces inside Syria.²⁰

Hezbollah has recently increased its direct combat role in Syria. Hezbollah forces launched an attack in February 2013 in coordination with Assad's forces against rebel-held villages near al Qusayr, Syria.²¹ The January 2013 Israeli strike on a Hezbollah military convoy transporting SA-17 anti-aircraft missiles revealed that the organization was working to move more sophisticated weaponry out of Syria into Lebanon.²² The emergence of the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade in Syria, a conglomerate of Syrian and foreign Shia fighters, including members of Hezbollah and Iraqi militia groups which purports to protect the Shia Sayyeda Zeinab shrine and surrounding neighborhood in Damascus, could provide Iran and the Quds Force another avenue to both assist Assad militarily and influence the conflict after regime collapse.²³

The extent of Iranian and Hezbollah involvement in Syria reflects the centrality of Syria to both. The loss of Syria as a state ally will significantly impact Iran's ability to deter Israel, project power in the Levant, and supply its proxies.

Iran may achieve some success with this two-track strategy, prolonging the conflict and creating conditions whereby it can retain some of its operational capacity in the Levant. The loss of Syria as a state ally, however, will significantly limit Iran's strategic depth. A rump Alawite state cannot provide Iran with the same level of deterrence, or political and economic support as Assad's Syria. Moreover, a rump Alawite state cannot be sustained indefinitely.²⁴ Iran's efforts in this regard offer only a temporary solution to a much greater problem.

Iran is certainly aware that the loss of Syria will significantly degrade its ability to project power in the Levant and has planned for such a contingency. In order to compensate for this loss and continue to present an effective deterrence force, Iran may look to expand its activities in other countries and regions. The interception earlier this month of an Iranian weapons shipment containing sophisticated Chinese-made anti-aircraft missiles, and large quantities of arms, ammunition, and explosive material destined for al Houthi rebels in Yemen suggests that, in at least one area, Iran has ramped up its support for militants elsewhere.²⁵

The Quds Force's recent escalation of global activity over the past two years, including a plot to conduct a mass-casualty attack in Washington D.C., a mixed bag of failure and success in its terrorist

plots against Israeli interests in Georgia, India, and Azerbaijan, and plans to carry out attacks in Bahrain, Kenya, and Nigeria, indicate that Iran is growing and operationalizing its global force projection network.³⁰ This is likely an effort on Iran's part to demonstrate that it, indeed, has a robust deterrent and retaliatory force in place. As the conflict in Syria stretches on, Damascus slips from Assad's control, and Iran sees its strategic depth continually eroded, we are likely to see not just increasing Iranian military activity in Syria but a more risk-prone Iranian regional and global strategy.

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Mr. POE. Dr. Levitt.

STATEMENT OF MATTHEW LEVITT, PH.D., DIRECTOR, STEIN PROGRAM ON COUNTERTERRORISM AND INTELLIGENCE, THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Mr. LEVITT. Thank you, Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Sherman, distinguished members of the committee. It is an honor to appear before you again this morning to discuss the nature of the global terrorist threat posed by Iran's strategic partner and principal terrorist proxy, Hezbollah. The nature of this threat has indeed increased dramatically over the past few years.

Today's hearing on Hezbollah's strategic shift is extremely timely. This week marks the 21st anniversary of the 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing in Buenos Aires. Failure to respond to that attack emboldened Hezbollah, which incurred no cost for that attack. Two years later, Hezbollah struck again, this time escalating from a diplomatic to a civilian target and blowing up the AMIA Jewish community center, also in Buenos Aires. Hezbollah is watching Europe and the West closely right now, much as it watched Argentina 21 years ago this week, to see if there will be any consequence to its recent escalation of terrorist activity around the world.

Today's hearing is also well timed because tomorrow is a critical day for Hezbollah, the West, and Europe in particular. This is because a verdict is expected tomorrow in the case of Hossam Yaacoub, a self-confessed Hezbollah operative now on trial in Cyprus.

You have the flier from my book, and in there I get into in great detail Hezbollah's global footprint, its activities in North America, South America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. I won't go into that right now. But as Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified just last week before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and I quote, "We . . . face uncertainty about potential threats from Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, which see the United States and Israel as their principal enemies." He continued, "We continue to assess that Hezbollah maintains a strong anti-U.S. agenda but is reluctant to confront the United States directly outside the Middle East."

But Hezbollah is certainly active well beyond the Middle East, and that uncertainty about these potential threats stems from Hezbollah's recently increased global terrorist activities. Hezbollah today has two distinct operational trends. One involves its intent to avenge the death of Imad Mughniyah killed in Damascus in February 2008. Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, promised at the time "open war," which is a quote, against Israel. They intend to target a current or former Israeli official in response and they have tried several times since and they have failed.

The second operational trend is their effort to target Israeli tourists internationally as part of Iran's shadow war with the West, and here again we see Hezbollah acting outside the Lebanese interest, completely and only in the interest of its strategic partnership with Iran. There are two key dates to understand this latter threat. The first is September 2009, where after several failed attempts to conduct an attack against the Israelis to avenge Mughniyah's death, they tried again in Turkey, in September 2009, targeting a

consul-general in Istanbul. They failed, despite extensive and increased Quds Force logistical support for that attack, leading Hezbollah and Iran to yell at each other, you are not good enough anymore, you are not providing as much support as you used to.

As they are arguing with each in January 2010, someone assassinates Professor Mohammadi in Tehran with a sticky bomb. Professor Mohammadi was a particularly important person in Iran's nuclear program, and at that point Iran decides that two things will happen. The one is that the Quds Force will create a new unit, Quds Force Unit 400, specifically to target Western diplomats abroad, and also targets reflecting Israel, that is to say, Jewish targets, for example, the plot in Baku targeting two Jewish rabbis and a Jewish school. And the second is that Hezbollah will get its act together, would reenergize itself, rejuvenate the Islamic Jihad Organization, recruit people with foreign passports who could travel abroad, and begin to target Israeli tourists worldwide, and this happened.

Hezbollah has been recruiting people with foreign passports from Sweden, from Canada, and Australia, just to give some examples. They have returned to old school tradecraft, and they have presented threats in Azerbaijan, Thailand, Cyprus, Bulgaria, kidnapping plots in Africa, delivering weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen, and more.

According to Bulgarian authorities, two of the three suspects from the July attack there last year were foreigners. One had an Australian passport, one had a Canadian passport. One returned back to Lebanon through Poland and one through Romania.

But while that attack killed several people, the one that is going to have a bigger impact on Europe is the one that doesn't involve intelligence and information that won't be shared publicly, but the one that happened and was thwarted 2 weeks earlier in Cyprus, where that information is now not classified but being presented in open court, in a European court, undergoing complete European judicial review, including cross-examination by defense, and that verdict is expected tomorrow.

Hossam Taleb Yaacoub has described himself as a Hezbollah operative. In an eerily similar plot to the one in Bulgaria, he was conducting surveillance of Israeli tourists arriving there. At one point he said, I am not Hezbollah. Later he said, I didn't tell the whole truth, something weird was going on and when Hezbollah told me to conduct surveillance of an airplane, maybe they were plotting to bring down an airplane. I don't know. I am just speculating, he said. Later he said he was not part of a terrorist plot in Cyprus at all. Instead, he said, and I quote, "It was just collecting information about the Jews, and this is what my organization does all over the world."

Hossam Yaacoub is a European citizen. He is a Swede. He grew up in Sweden. His father still lives there. The rest of his family is in Beirut. Before being sent to Cyprus to carry out this attack, he was sent on missions—he described them as missions, I am not describing them as missions, this is his word—as a courier, first to Turkey, then to Lyons, France, to meet some Hezbollah operative there, then to Amsterdam to meet some Hezbollah operative there. Taken together, the Bulgarian and Cypriot cases present compel-

ling evidence of Hezbollah's continued operational activity, specifically in Europe.

Hezbollah is watching Europe and the rest of the international community closely, much as it watched Argentina 21 years ago this week. Argentina failed to respond to Hezbollah's challenge then and suffered the repercussions 2 years later. Europe has an opportunity now to avoid that same mistake and should designate Hezbollah in whole or even just in part as a terrorist group for executing terrorist plots on the continent. History suggests that failure to do so could result in still more attacks by even still more emboldened Hezbollah.

Thank you.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Dr. Levitt.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Levitt follows:]



Iran's Global Threat

Testimony by Dr. Matthew Levitt
 Director, Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
 The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs
 Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade
 March 20, 2013¹

Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Sherman, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you this morning to discuss the nature of the global terrorist threat posed by Iran, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its Qods Force (QF), and Iran's strategic partner and principle terrorist proxy, Hezbollah. The nature of this threat has increased dramatically over the past few years, allow me to explain why and how.

In January 2010, the Qods Force—the elite unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)—decided that it and Hezbollah, its primary terrorist proxy, would embark on a new campaign of violence aimed at Israel, the United States, and other Western targets. Since then, the organizations have cooperated—and competed—to launch attacks globally. Although targets have been poorly chosen and assaults carried out with gross incompetence, this sloppy tradecraft could quickly be replaced by operational success as the groups professionalize their operations. Indeed, one particularly odd effort might have succeeded were it not for the fortuitous placement of an undercover U.S. government informant: the case of an Iranian-American used-car salesman who pleaded guilty in October 2012 to conspiring with Iranian agents to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States.

Nevertheless, in some ways Mansour Arbabsiar's guilty plea raised more questions than it answered. The plea closed the case, but the U.S. and British governments had already traced the conspiracy back to Tehran and had blacklisted Qods Force commander Qasem Soleimani for his role.² Not only had Arbabsiar tried to hire an assassin who was actually a U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) informant, but once arrested Arbabsiar quickly confessed to his role in the plot and, at the direction of law enforcement, placed a call to his cousin, a Qods Force handler, Gen. Gholam Shakuri. With agents listening, Shakuri confirmed that the plot should go forward and as soon as possible. "Just do it quickly. It's late."³

But why was the Qods Force, which had earned a reputation for operational prowess even among its enemies, so eager to move forward with an obviously flawed operation? Arbabsiar, for his part, appears to have been a weak character who "wants to be important," as a government-retained psychiatrist determined, and who was drawn into the plot by his cousin.⁴ The real question is, What was the Qods Force thinking?

According to the director of national intelligence, 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

¹ This testimony is drawn from *Hezbollah and the Qods Force in Iran's Shadow War with the West*, Policy Focus 123, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-and-the-qods-force-in-irans-shadow-war-with-the-west>

in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime.⁵⁴ Intelligence officials believe that this new calculus dates back to January 2010 when the Qods Force decided that it and Hizballah would embark on a new campaign of violence focused on Israel along with U.S. and other Western targets.

Tracking Hizballah's Militant Trajectory

Hizballah's anti-Western militancy began in 1983 with attacks against Western targets in Lebanon, then expanded to include attacks abroad intended to exact revenge for actions threatening its or Iran's interests, or to press foreign governments to release captured operatives. At times, such as the 1992 and 1994 bombings in Argentina, Hizballah's own interests in carrying out attacks abroad were magnified by Iran's interests in the same. These coincident interests led to joint operations—such as the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia—that leveraged each party's strengths and maximized their combined capabilities.

Over the course of the always intimate relationship between Iran and Hizballah, the head of the Qods Force or other senior Iranian leaders might have told Hizballah to jump and the response would have been "How high?" In part, this has been a function of the close alignment between Hizballah's senior leadership and Iran's clerical regime. Yet how firmly do Hizballah leaders believe in *velayat-e faqih*, the Islamic Republic's principle of rule of the jurisprudent? According to Hizballah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, "the subject of the *velayat-e faqih* and the Imamate is at the heart of our religious doctrine, and any offense to it is an offense to our religion."⁵⁵ But the close relationship also persists because of Hizballah's dependence on Iran for financial, material, and political support. For years, Hizballah relied almost exclusively on Iranian largesse, which hovered around \$100 to \$200 million a year or more.⁵⁶ Such generous state sponsorship, however, came with strings attached that Hizballah, as Tehran's primary pan-Shiite militant proxy group, could not easily ignore.

While it kept up its relentless campaign of military and terrorist activities targeting Israel, and despite unabated tensions with the West, Hizballah had not carried out a successful spectacular attack targeting Western interests since the Khobar Towers bombing. Moreover, Hizballah worked hard under former military commander Imad Mughniyah to establish a measure of independence from Iran. In mid-2008, four months after Mughniyah's assassination, an Israeli intelligence official concluded that "Hezbollah does not always do what Iran wants."⁵⁷ But under the leadership of Mughniyah's successors, Mustafa Badreddine and Talal Hamiyeh, Iran's role seems to have hardened again.⁵⁸ In February 2012, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper characterized the relationship between Hizballah and Iran as "a partnership arrangement, with the Iranians as the senior partner."⁵⁹ This "strategic partnership," as National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) director Matthew Olsen put it, is the product of a long evolution from the 1980s, when Hizballah was just a proxy of Iran. Together, Olsen added, the two entities pursue their shared "aims against Israel and the United States."⁶⁰

To be sure, Hizballah has engaged in militant, terrorist, criminal, and other activities over the years, from bombings in Argentina and Saudi Arabia to plots in Southeast Asia and Africa.⁶¹ Its ability to continue to do so at pace, however, was severely constrained by an act of terrorism not of its own making. Ironically, al-Qaeda's attacks of September 11, 2001, proved to be a turning point for Hizballah, the terrorist group previously responsible for the most American deaths. Desperate not to be caught in the crosshairs of Washington's "war on terror," Hizballah appears to have decided consciously to roll back its international operations and keep its efforts to strike at Israeli targets as focused and limited as possible. But while spectacular embassy bombings were put on ice, Hizballah continued to target Israeli interests, infiltrate operatives into Israel to collect intelligence and carry out operations, and support Iranian interests such as training Iraqi Shiite militants after the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime.⁶²

But the February 2008 assassination of Imad Mughniyah led to the resurgence of Hizballah's international operations arm, which will no doubt regain its former potency—especially when paired with Iranian intelligence and Qods Force operatives. But as the Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO)—now under the command of Badreddine and Hamiyeh—first set out to avenge Mughniyah's death, Operation Radwan (named for Mughniyah, who was also known as Hajj Radwan) experienced a series of setbacks. These ultimately led Iran and Hizballah to reassess how they would prosecute, both separately and together, a three-tiered shadow war targeting Israeli, Jewish, American, and sometimes British interests worldwide.

Reassessing Hizballah's Place in Iran's Arsenal

When Nasrallah promised an “open war” to avenge Mughniyah’s assassination, Israeli officials quickly took preventive action—from issuing specific travel warnings to covert disruptive measures—against what they deemed the three most likely scenarios. These included (1) an attack on current or former senior Israeli officials traveling abroad; (2) an attack on an Israeli diplomatic mission abroad; or (3) an attack targeting a location affiliated with a Jewish community abroad, such as in the 1994 bombing of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) in Buenos Aires.¹³ They knew better than to ignore Nasrallah’s warning.

Nevertheless, however committed Hizballah was to carrying out such attacks, the IJO was simply not up to the task. For one thing, Hizballah leaders had actively pared down the IJO’s global networks of operatives following the 9/11 attacks. And the “strategic partnership” it had shared with Iran for the past decade appears to have focused on funding, training, and arming Hizballah’s increasingly effective standing militia, not on its cadre of international terrorists. And so, Hizballah not only lacked the resources and capability to carry out a successful operation abroad, it also no longer had Mughniyah around to quarterback operations.

Tightened security in the post-9/11 world also meant Hizballah opted to operate in nations with comparatively lax security rather than vigilant Western nations. But even then, in places like Azerbaijan, Egypt, and Turkey, and even with significant support from Qods Force agents, Hizballah suffered a series of embarrassing failures, starting with the May 2008 fiasco in Baku, when a series of spectacular actions, including the planned bombing of the U.S. and Israeli embassies, was disrupted. The event led to the quiet release of Qods Force personnel but the public prosecution of two Hizballah operatives. Operations were soon foiled in Egypt and Turkey too, as well as attempts to kidnap Israelis in Europe and Africa.

A foiled attack in Turkey in September 2009 was a watershed event for Hizballah operational planners and their Iranian sponsors. Despite the massive logistical support Qods Force operatives provided for that plot, Hizballah operatives still failed to execute the attack successfully.¹⁴ Meanwhile by late 2009, Iran’s interest in Hizballah’s operational prowess focused less on local issues like avenging Mughniyah’s death and more on the much larger issue of combating threats to its nascent nuclear program. Malfunctioning components ruined Iranian centrifuges;¹⁵ IRGC officers defected;¹⁶ and then in January 2010 a bomb killed Iranian physics professor Masoud Ali Mohammadi outside his Tehran home.¹⁷

According to Israeli intelligence officials, furious Iranian leaders reached two conclusions after Mohammadi’s death: (1) Hizballah’s IJO had to revitalize its operational capabilities and (2) the IRGC would no longer rely solely on Hizballah to carry out terrorist attacks abroad. It would now deploy Qods Force operatives to do so on their own, not just as logisticians supporting Hizballah hit men.¹⁸ Even more than the loss of its scientists, Tehran sought to address its damaged prestige—the image of an Iran so weak it could not even protect its own scientists at home could not stand.

Much finger-pointing ensued between Hizballah and the Qods Force regarding where the blame lay for the two years of failed operations, culminating in the botched attack in Turkey and then another failed plot in Jordan in January 2010. Under Nasrallah’s instructions, Badreddine and Hamiyeh “undertook a massive operational reevaluation in January 2010, which led to big changes within the IJO over a period of a little over six months.” During this period, IJO operations were put on hold and major personnel changes made. New operatives were recruited from the elite of Hizballah’s military wing for intelligence and operational training, while existing IJO operatives were moved into new positions. At the same time, the IJO invested in the development of capabilities and tradecraft that had withered on the vine since the 2001 decision to rein in operations.¹⁹

As part of its IJO shake-up, Hizballah engaged in detailed talks with Iranian officials to lay out Hizballah’s role in Iran’s larger plan for a coordinated shadow war targeting Israeli, American, British, and Gulf States’ interests. The coordinated plan, it was decided, would include operations intended to achieve several different goals, including taking revenge for Mughniyah’s assassination, retaliating for attacks on Iran’s nuclear program, and convincing Western powers that an attack on Iran would result in—among other things—asymmetric terrorist attacks worldwide.²⁰

To this end, Iranian decisionmakers settled on a campaign of violence based on a three-tiered threat stream targeting the following: Israeli tourists, government figures (diplomats, retired officials), and targets broadly representative of Israel or the

Jewish community (community leaders, prominent Israeli companies). It assigned the task of targeting Israeli tourists—a soft target—to Hizballah and maintained for the Qods Force operations targeting Israeli, American, British, or Gulf States' interests. The latter would be carried out by a new Special External Operations Unit known as Unit 400.²¹

Iran's Three-Tiered Terror Campaign

At first, Iran's new terrorism strategy, and the IJO's overhaul, seemed to have little effect. In March and September 2010, authorities disrupted undisclosed Qods Force plots in Azerbaijan and Turkey, respectively.²² In May 2010, Kuwaiti authorities arrested Kuwaiti, Lebanese, and other individuals on suspicion of spying, monitoring U.S. military interests, and possessing explosives for attacks.²³

Meanwhile, Hizballah fared no better. Itching to prove their rejuvenated operational capabilities, IJO leaders reportedly pressed Nasrallah to allow them to carry out an attack abroad.²⁴ In April 2011, the Israeli Counterterrorism Bureau issued an advisory for Passover holiday travel to countries in the Mediterranean Basin and the Far East, warning of Iranian and Hizballah plots.²⁵ In fact, the warning was a planned leak by Israeli intelligence aimed at exposing and therefore frustrating a budding Hizballah plot to target Israeli tourists in Cyprus.²⁶ Israeli officials told the press that under instructions from Nasrallah and Qods Force leader Qasem Soleimani, Hizballah IJO chief Talal Hamiyeh was plotting the attacks with a small group of trusted lieutenants. These included Hamiyeh's "right-hand man and bodyguard, Ahmed Faid," as well as "explosives engineer Ali Najam al-Din and bomb assembly expert Malik Oviyad." False documents were reportedly produced by Majd al-Zakur, aka "the Forger," while logistics support came from Lebanese and Turkish businesspersons.²⁷

Given Hizballah's role in the new three-tiered arrangement, Nasrallah was clearly uncomfortable with the notion that people might mistake Hizballah attacks against Israeli tourists as the best the group could muster to avenge Mughniyah's death. A few days after media reports exposed the Cyprus plot, Nasrallah gave an interview to a Kuwaiti newspaper underscoring Hizballah's continued commitment to carry out an operation of equal severity to avenge the death of the IJO commander. The point was not retaliation for retaliation's sake, he stressed: "Had we wanted to, we could have retaliated by killing Israeli tourists in this or that country."²⁸ But that was not Hizballah's calculus. Attacks on Israeli tourists were something different—the IJO's part in Iran's shadow war—a threat stream of its own, distinct from Operation Radwan.

In May 2011, Iranian agents shot and killed a Saudi diplomat in Karachi, Pakistan, foreshadowing the plot already under way targeting the Saudi ambassador to Washington, D.C.²⁹ Ten days afterward, Qods Force and Hizballah operatives carried out a far more complex operation targeting an Israeli diplomat in Turkey. Turkish authorities originally assumed the attack was the work of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), intended to have an impact on upcoming Turkish parliamentary elections.³⁰ Within weeks, however, investigators would determine the attack was a botched Hizballah–Qods Force assassination attempt targeting the Turkish-born Israeli consul-general to Istanbul, Moshe Kimhi, intended as retribution for the assassination of Mohammadi, the Iranian physicist. According to *Corriere della Sera*, the Italian paper that broke the story, Qods Force operatives cased the area, recording Kimhi's routine, before Hizballah operatives were called in to place the explosive along a route the diplomat was known to take. Within weeks of the bombing, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL)—the body charged with investigating the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri—would indict four Hizballah operatives, including Mustafa Badreddine, for their roles in the murder. Closer to home, Hizballah operatives carried out two attacks that wounded French peacekeepers—six civilians and three soldiers—assigned to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mission in southern Lebanon, according to the State Department.³¹ But the plot targeting the Saudi ambassador to Washington was the most brazen of all.

"They Want That Guy Done"

On October 11, 2011, U.S. attorney general Eric Holder announced that charges had been filed in New York against dual U.S.-Iranian citizen Mansour Arbabsiar and a Qods Force commander for their alleged roles in a plot to murder the Saudi ambassador, Adel al-Jubeir. The plot had developed quickly over just a few months, starting in spring 2011 and culminating with the arrest of Arbabsiar in September. According to the Justice Department, Arbabsiar told a DfA confidential source

posing as an associate of a Mexican drug cartel that “his associates in Iran had discussed a number of violent missions for [the source] and his associates to perform, including the murder of the Ambassador.”³²

The plot had fallen into the lap of Qods Force planners just as they decided to unleash Unit 400 to attack the West, facilitated by an encounter between the dejected Iranian-American and his cousin while the former visited family in Iran. Arbabsiar sent about \$100,000 in wire transfers as a down payment for the assassination, and the money was deposited in an FBI undercover account he thought belonged to the assassin. In October 2012, Arbabsiar pleaded guilty to charges related to murder-for-hire and conspiring to commit an act of international terrorism.³³

Signaling that U.S. authorities had traced the plot to senior Iranian decisionmakers, the Treasury Department designated IRGC Qods Force commander Qasem Soleimani as a global terrorist for his role overseeing the officers involved in the plot.³⁴ British officials agreed, designating Soleimani and others involved in the plot themselves as well.³⁵ At the UN General Assembly, member states passed a resolution by an overwhelming majority deploring the plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador and calling on Iran to “cooperate with States seeking to bring to justice all those who participated in the planning, sponsoring, organization and attempted execution of the plot.”³⁶ This plot against the Saudi diplomat, director-general of MI5 Jonathan Evans explained in June 2012, was the work of the IRGC, to which he added, “and of course the IRGC leads straight back to the Iranian leadership.”³⁷ Iranian leaders, U.S. intelligence concluded, now appeared willing to attack the United States in response to actions, real or perceived, that Iranian officials thought were threatening the regime.³⁸

Indeed, Iran correctly perceived it was the target of a string of actions against its nuclear program, although Iranian leaders were wrong to suspect the actions were part of a plot aimed at promoting regime change. In September 2010, Iranian computer networks linked to uranium enrichment at the Natanz facility were infected with the Stuxnet virus, leading to the destruction of some one thousand centrifuges, reportedly part of a U.S.-Israeli effort code-named Olympic Games.³⁹ The next month, an explosion at an IRGC missile base leveled most of the buildings and killed seventeen people, including Gen. Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, a founder of Iran’s ballistic missile program.⁴⁰

A “Jumble of Overlapping Plots”

The Arbabsiar plot also underscored Qods Force leaders’ willingness to work with criminal elements to further operational planning, perhaps as a means of countering enhanced law enforcement and intelligence efforts. Western officials saw the same trend several more times, perhaps most tellingly in Baku. In October 2011, signals intelligence intercepted emails suggesting Azeri criminal elements with known ties to Iranian intelligence and militant groups were planning to transfer weapons and explosives into Azerbaijan from Iran.⁴¹ Over the next few weeks, weapons and operatives—including at least ten Iranian recruits—were smuggled into Azerbaijan, where they met up with other Azeri criminal recruits. The Azeris were strictly in it for the money and used their knowledge of the area to conduct surveillance of a Jewish school, an American-owned fast-food joint, the office of an oil company, the U.S. embassy, and specific U.S. diplomats. “They were going after individuals,” a State Department official familiar with the investigation confirmed. “They had names [of employees]. And they were interested in family members, too.”⁴²

Over several months, the operatives planned what one investigator described as a “jumble of overlapping plots,” including assassinating U.S. diplomats and a local rabbi or striking other Jewish targets.⁴³ One subplot involved snipers using rifles with silencers; in another, a car bomb would target U.S. embassy employees or their families. One plot was planned for December 2011, another for February 2012. Together, these were intended to avenge the assassinations of Iranian scientists, the captured leader of the network would later tell investigators.⁴⁴ Some two dozen accomplices were arrested by authorities in a series of raids in Azerbaijan in early 2012, most of whom were local criminal recruits.⁴⁵ U.S. officials concluded the plots were overseen by the Qods Force, with possible support from Hizballah, as part of a coordinated thirteen-month campaign targeting foreign diplomats in at least seven countries.⁴⁶ According to a U.S. law enforcement official, Hizballah paid criminal gang members \$150,000 each to target the Jewish school in Baku.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Hizballah operatives were busy planning operations to fulfill their end of the three-tiered plan: targeting Is-

raeli tourists abroad. Around the same time that authorities foiled a January 2012 plot targeting Israeli vacationers in Bulgaria—just weeks ahead of the anniversary of Mughniyah’s assassination—another Hizballah plot was disrupted in Greece.⁴⁸ But it was halfway across the world, in Bangkok, where Israeli and local authorities broke up a far more ambitious Hizballah bid to target Israeli tourists.

On January 12, 2012, acting on a tip from Israeli intelligence, Thai police arrested Hussein Atris—a Lebanese national who also carried a Swedish passport—at Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi Airport as he attempted to flee the country. Another suspect, whose police composite portrait strongly resembled Naim Haris, a Hizballah recruiting agent whose photo Israeli officials had publicized a year earlier, escaped. Within days, police would issue an arrest warrant for Atris’s roommate, a Lebanese man who went by the name “James Sammy Paolo.”⁴⁹

Questioned over the weekend of January 12, Atris led police to a three-story building on the outskirts of Bangkok where he and his housemate had stockpiled some 8,800 pounds of chemicals used to make explosives. The materials were already distilled into crystal form, a step in building bombs.⁵⁰ Information on international shipping forms found at the scene indicated at least some of the explosives—which were stored in bags marked as cat litter—were intended to be shipped abroad. Intelligence officials surmised that Hizballah had been using Thailand as an explosives hub—Atris had rented the space a year earlier—and decided to use its on-hand operatives and material to target Israeli tourists. The conclusion should not have been a surprise: U.S. officials had already determined that Hizballah was known to use Bangkok as a logistics and transportation hub, describing the city as “a center for a [Hizballah] cocaine and money-laundering network.”⁵¹

Amateur Hour

At the same time that Hizballah operatives were running sloppy operations around the world, the Qods Force was doing the same and worse. While counterterrorism officials worried about the increased operational tempo of Iranian-sponsored terrorism, including both operations carried out by Hizballah and the Qods Force’s new Unit 400, their concern focused on Tehran’s aggressive posture and intent to harm Western interests. The fact that Iran’s intentions were not yet coupled with the capability to act effectively on them gave Western officials only so much comfort. In time, they feared, both Hizballah and the Qods Force would be capable of carrying out deadly attacks targeting Western interests. The pace of Unit 400’s planned attacks underscored just how determined Iran was to attack Western interests. Yet the failure of all these plots pointed to the new unit’s still-limited capabilities.

The American ambassador to Baku may have breathed a sigh of relief when the plot targeting him and his staff was disrupted in February 2012, but other diplomatic missions across the globe would endure their own close calls at the hands of the Qods Force.⁵² Five attacks targeting Western diplomats were scheduled to be carried out as close to the February 12 anniversary of Mughniyah’s assassination as possible. The plot in Baku was foiled; another in Turkey was delayed; others would play out in India, Georgia, and Thailand.⁵³

On February 13, twin bombings targeted personnel from the Israeli embassies in New Delhi, India, and Tbilisi, Georgia. In both cases, Qods Force operatives encountered more sophisticated security arrangements than anticipated and so they settled for modest strikes. In India, an assailant on a motorcycle attached a magnetized “sticky bomb” to a car taking the Israeli defense attaché’s wife to pick up her children at school; the blast injured the woman, her driver, and a few bystanders. About three hours later, in Georgia, a similar sticky-bomb attack targeted a local citizen employed by the embassy, but was discovered and defused before doing any harm.⁵⁴ Just a month earlier, the deputy director of Iran’s uranium enrichment facility at Natanz, Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, was killed in a nearly identical sticky-bomb attack. Roshan was the fifth Iranian scientist to be assassinated, and the use of sticky bombs to target Israeli diplomats was a not-so-subtle message of retaliation from Iran.⁵⁵

The next day, February 14, in central Bangkok, police rushed to the scene of an explosion in the early afternoon at a home rented by a group of Iranians. Two barefoot men fled the house, but a third was injured and tried to hail a taxi to es-

cape. When the taxi refused to stop, the injured man threw a bomb at the car, destroying half the vehicle and injuring the driver and four bystanders. Police soon cornered the injured suspect, who tried to throw another explosive at them but was too weak; the resulting explosion blew off both his legs. The other two men were soon caught—one was detained at the airport as he tried to catch a flight to Malaysia; the other managed to escape to Malaysia, where he was arrested boarding a flight to Iran. A Malaysian court ruled he would be extradited to Thailand. A fourth suspect, an Iranian woman who rented the house, was believed to have fled to Iran.⁵⁶

Unlike the Hizballah plot foiled just weeks earlier in Thailand, in this plot Qods Force operatives were targeting Israeli diplomats, Thai investigators determined. At the scene of the explosion, authorities found several undetonated devices, all homemade magnetic sticky bombs of the same type used in India and Georgia.⁵⁷ In time, investigators would tie the three attacks together not only based on the explosives used but through phone records, travel documents, and money transfers. About a dozen Qods Force operatives coordinated their preparations for the attacks, which began ten months earlier in April 2011—not long after press reports tied the Stuxnet virus to Israel and the United States and the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Majid Shahriari to Israel. That month, Iranian operatives traveled to India and Thailand to scope out targets, followed by more trips in the summer and fall of 2011 to rent apartments, hire local help, arrange finances, and conduct surveillance. During his 2011 reconnaissance visits to India, Houshang Afshar Irani, identified by Indian police as the assailant who attached the bomb to the Israeli diplomatic vehicle in New Delhi, used a cell phone number that was also used in June 2011 in Tbilisi.⁵⁸ According to Israeli officials, cell phone calls and text messages between operatives in Thailand, India, and Azerbaijan also link the attacks.⁵⁹ Based on these findings and more, U.S. counterterrorism officials concluded that Iran was tied to the terrorist plots in Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, and Thailand.⁶⁰

In the case of the Thailand plot, senior Qods Force commander Majid Alavi reportedly arrived on the scene on January 19, 2012, after traveling through Malaysia on a diplomatic passport bearing a fictitious name. Responsible for Qods Force Unit 400, Alavi previously tracked Iranian dissidents in places as varied as London and Los Angeles. It was Alavi who ordered the attacks on Israeli diplomats to occur as close to the anniversary of Mughniyah's death as possible.⁶¹

Yet despite the direct oversight of senior Qods Force officers, the attacks not only failed but also demonstrated pathetic tradecraft and operational security—the very strengths for which the Qods Force is usually known. Aside from reusing phone numbers and SIM cards across multiple operations, operatives traveled on Iranian passports, checked in to hotels as Iranians, carried Iranian currency in their wallets, and in at least one instance took off time from their surveillance to party with prostitutes. A group photo on one of the women's cell phones helped identify accomplices who fled the country.⁶² In the words of one flabbergasted analyst, "It's as if there's a systematic policy of Iran recruiting low-rent, downright kooky terrorists."⁶³

Instead of restoring Iran's damaged prestige, the attacks only further underscored Iran's operational limitations. Following the 2009 Green Revolution in Iran, the Qods Force gained prominence at the expense of the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) over the latter's perceived soft-handed approach to suppressing political protests. Within the Qods Force, quick promotions of mediocre managers diluted the group's professional capabilities at the management level.⁶⁴ Desperate to quickly implement its new offensive strategy and exact revenge for covert attacks against Iran's nuclear program, the Qods Force traded speed for tradecraft and cut corners—compounding the problem. Qods Force planners were stretched thin by the rapid tempo of their new attack plan, and were forced to throw together random teams of operatives who had not trained together.⁶⁵

Worse, despite Iran's preference for signature attacks against embassies, diplomats, or other official targets—and despite concerns by U.S. intelligence that Iran was developing contingency plans for such attacks targeting the United States and its allies—Iranian planners found their chosen targets too well protected and settled for less-hardened targets.⁶⁶ In the end, not one of the five planned attacks could be considered an operational success. Ever since, Israeli officials say, the frustrated Iranian operatives have been "trying harder than ever" to execute successful attacks.⁶⁷

Indeed, the operational tempo would continue apace. In March 2012, the Israeli National Security Council's Counterterrorism Bureau warned of terrorist threats against Jewish and Israeli targets in Turkey. According to the Turkish press, the warning came less than a week after Israeli intelligence tipped off Turkish authorities about a Qods Force plot to be carried

out by at least four individuals who crossed the border from Iran armed with weapons and materials.⁶⁸ The plot, again targeting Israeli diplomats, had originally been timed to coincide with the other plots in February but was postponed.⁶⁹ In May, yet another Hizballah attack targeting Israeli tourists was thwarted, this time at the Johannesburg airport in South Africa.⁷⁰

Also in March, forty-year-old Hamid Kashkouli, an Iranian PhD student at the University of Pune in India, was deported for spying on Israeli nationals, a Jewish center, and a synagogue. According to Indian police, Kashkouli, who worked as a paid undercover agent of the Iranian government, traveled regularly to the Iranian consulate in Mumbai, where Iranian government officials met him, according to his driver. Intercepted emails revealed he was providing Iranian officials with pictures of Jewish people in the area and reporting on their business dealings.⁷¹

In June 2012, authorities in Nairobi, Kenya, arrested two Iranian nationals, both of them purportedly Qods Force operatives.⁷² Prior to the two men's arrest, Kenyan police reported, they had scouted out the Israeli embassy, the British High Commission, and other sites, leading authorities to conclude the pair were planning attacks targeting Israeli, U.S., British, or Saudi Arabian interests in Kenya or elsewhere in Africa.⁷³ The day after their arrest, one of the two operatives led authorities to thirty-three pounds of RDX explosives hidden under a bush at the Mombasa Golf Club, overlooking the Indian Ocean.⁷⁴ In a seeming effort to deflect attention from Iran, the Iranian operatives had apparently partnered with al-Shabab, the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group in Somalia. This tie underscored how desperate Tehran was to see successful attacks carried out. Indeed, that interest has only grown more acute, as efforts to disrupt Iran's nuclear program—from sanctions to assassinations to covert sabotage of equipment—continue to gain momentum.

On July 7, a month after the Kenya plot was exposed, Cypriot authorities raided the hotel room of a twenty-four-year-old Lebanese-Swedish man traveling on a foreign passport. The suspect had in his possession photographs of Israeli targets in Cyprus, along with information on buses carrying Israeli tourists and Israeli flights to and from the island nation. According to press reports, the suspect initially denied ties to terrorist activity but later admitted to being a Hizballah operative.⁷⁵

Tragically, Israeli tourists in Burgas, Bulgaria, were less fortunate. On July 18, 2012, at the height of the summer tourist season, a bomb destroyed one of seven tour buses in a caravan, killing the Bulgarian bus driver and five Israelis and wounding some thirty more.⁷⁶ From the onset, Israeli officials publicly insisted—and anonymous American and British officials confirmed—that Lebanese Hizballah was behind the attack.⁷⁷ "We are confident without any doubt," Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak told CNN, "about the responsibility of Hezbollah [for] the actual execution of the operation—preparation, planning and execution."⁷⁸ Nor, officials added, was the attack the work of rogue Hizballah gunmen. "Nobody pushes the button in Burgas without Nasrallah's approval," explained an Israeli official close to the investigation.⁷⁹

In the months that followed, more threats arose, prompting Israeli travel advisories covering countries from Cyprus and Greece to Thailand, Bulgaria, and Ukraine.⁸⁰ All told, more than twenty terror attacks by Hizballah or Qods Force operatives were thwarted over the fifteen-month period between May 2011 and July 2012; by another count, nine plots were uncovered over the first nine months of 2012.⁸¹ The key to all these attacks, however, whether carried out by Hizballah or the Qods Force, was deniability. Both Hizballah and Tehran wanted attacks carried out, but neither wanted to invite a full-fledged military response targeting them back in Lebanon or Iran. Indeed, ever since the July 2006 war between Israel and Hizballah, Nasrallah has reportedly refused to approve any attacks along the Israel-Lebanon border for fear of sparking another full-scale war.⁸²

Contrary to conventional wisdom, however, while Hizballah and the Qods Force have worked together on some plots—Baku in 2008, Istanbul in 2009, among others—in other cases they failed to deconflict their operational activities and found themselves engaged in completely disparate operations in the same place. When Hizballah operatives laid the groundwork for a bombing in late 2011–early 2012 in Bangkok, they were apparently unaware that the Qods Force was also preparing for an attack in the same city. Whether the Qods Force was, in turn, ignorant of Hizballah's activities there is unclear, but the Iranians appear not to have known Hizballah was using Bangkok as an explosives distribution hub. And even once Hizballah operative Hussain Atris was arrested in January 2012, the Qods Force operation there was not suspended. Similarly, within days after the explosion in Burgas—while the investigation into the bombing and the search for accomplices was at its height—Bulgarian authorities reportedly caught a Qods Force operative scoping out a synagogue in the capital, Sofia.⁸³

Operation Radwan Continues

Even as Hizballah remains committed to exacting revenge for Mughniyah's death, IJO leaders grudgingly have begun to appreciate the difficulty of hitting a high-level Israeli abroad. Such targets are typically well protected, so while Hizballah operational planners have continued to search for viable targets abroad, they have initiated parallel plans for attacks targeting Israeli officials inside Israel.⁸⁴ By leveraging networks of criminal associates who typically trade intelligence for drugs, and sometimes recruiting Israeli Arabs through ideological appeals to spy for the group, Hizballah pursued at least two plots targeting Israeli officials within the country within a three-month period in 2012, both of which were thwarted.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, Iran has leveraged Hizballah's operational capabilities to actively support the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Hizballah, the Treasury Department revealed in August 2012, had been providing "training, advice and extensive logistical support to the Government of Syria's increasingly ruthless efforts" against the opposition.⁸⁶ Most funerals for those killed in the fighting were quiet affairs, as Hizballah tried to keep a lid on the extent of its activities in Syria, but news began to leak.⁸⁷ Hizballah's "resistance" rhetoric notwithstanding, U.S. officials informed the UN Security Council in October 2012, "the truth is plain to see: Nasrallah's fighters are now part of Assad's killing machine."⁸⁸ Two months later, a UN report confirmed Hizballah members were in Syria fighting on behalf of the Assad government.⁸⁹ By that time, reports had already emerged that Hizballah had set up small training camps near Syrian chemical weapons depots in November 2012. According to one senior U.S. official, "The fear these weapons could fall into the wrong hands is our greatest concern."⁹⁰

Conclusion

The net effect of Iran's shadow war against the West is that Hizballah and the Qods Force have climbed back up the list of immediate threats facing the United States and its allies. In July 2012, NCTC director Matthew Olsen warned that while Iran and Hizballah had not yet hit targets in the United States, U.S. officials worry that could soon change. "We're seeing a general uptick in the level of activity around the world," he noted, adding that "both Hezbollah and the Qods Force have demonstrated an ability to operate essentially globally." In fact, the Hizballah-Qods Force threat has sometimes eclipsed that of al-Qaeda. Olsen continued: "There are times when we are briefing the White House [on terror threats and] at the top of the list are Hezbollah or Iran."⁹¹

These threats are quite real, despite the failure of Hizballah and the Qods Force to register many successes in their recent operational blitz. In the case of Hizballah, this poor track record has much to do with the atrophy of the group's operational capabilities after 9/11. For the Qods Force, it reflects Tehran's desperate desire to exact quick revenge for covert attacks against its nuclear program. Hizballah and the Qods Force traded speed for tradecraft and reaped what they sowed. In some cases, Iranian agents employed laughable operational security; in others, Iran dispatched bungling agents, like the Iranian-American car salesman Mansour Arbabsiar. But the recent failures of Hizballah and the Qods Force give Western counterterrorism officials little comfort. As the attack in Burgas demonstrated, terrorists learn from their mistakes, evolve, and adapt, and with sufficient determination they may carry out successful attacks even after a long string of failures.

Indeed, officials fear that both Hizballah and the Qods Force are likely to recover from their operational sloppiness. True, the world in general and the West in particular have become far more vigilant over the past several years, making it more difficult than before for terrorist groups to execute successful attacks. But Iranian leaders appear committed to a policy of targeting Western interests, not only in places where countermeasures may be comparatively underdeveloped (e.g., Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, India, Georgia, Thailand) but, if opportunities present themselves, even in world capitals like Washington, D.C. To be sure, Arbabsiar's guilty plea ends one chapter in Iran's shadow war against the West, but authorities must remain watchful for the plots yet to come.

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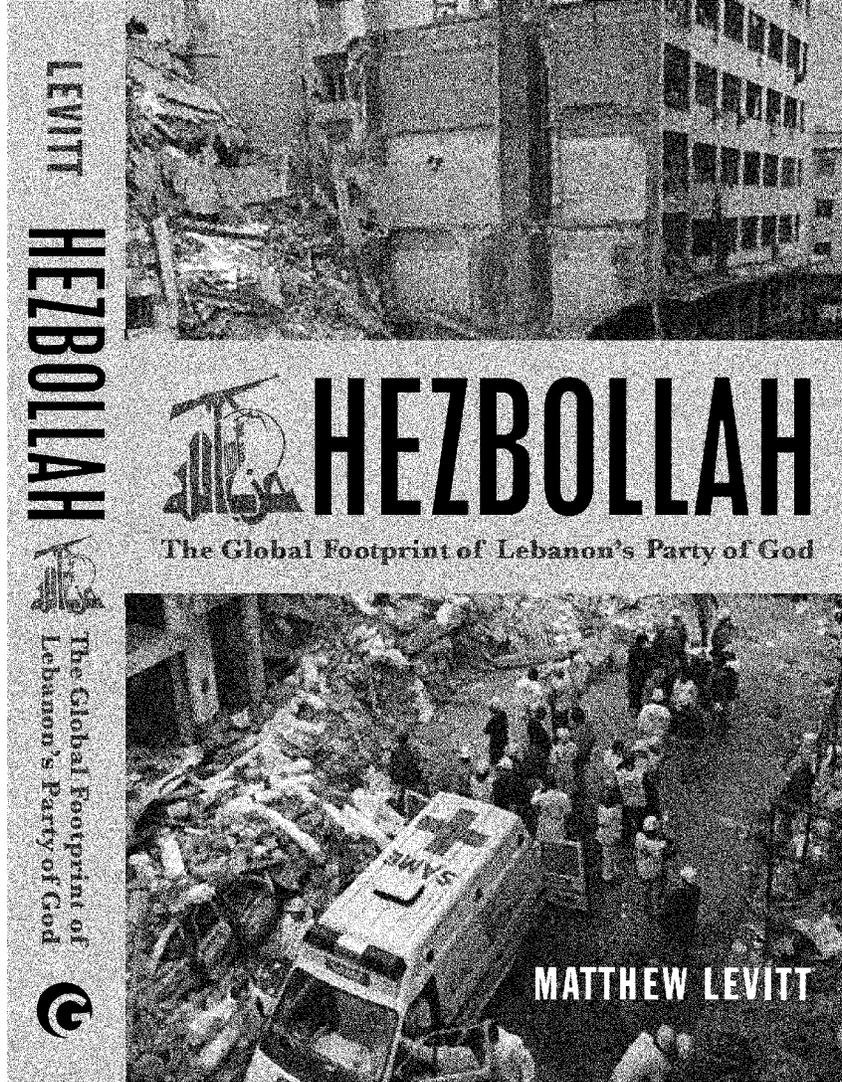
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Mr. POE. Ambassador Noriega.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ROGER NORIEGA, FOUNDER AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, VISION AMERICAS LLC (FORMER ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WESTERN HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES)

Mr. NORIEGA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I applaud you and other members of the subcommittee for focusing attention on the global threat posed by Hezbollah, and I thank you for inviting me to share insights about that terrorist organization's growing network in the Americas that carries that threat to our doorstep.

Mr. Sherman and Dr. Levitt referred to the 1992 and 1994 bombings in Buenos Aires for which Hezbollah is considered responsible, and Iran. This is Hezbollah's despicable legacy in the Americas, and that terrorist group, along with Iran, has returned to the scene of the crime. During the last decade, Hezbollah has extended its reach quickly and substantially in dozens of countries in the Americas.

This surge can be attributed to two key facts. Hezbollah counts on the direct political, diplomatic, material, and logistical support of governments, including one in this region, Venezuela, which has little in common with Iran but its hostility to the United States. Also, to facilitate its smuggling, money laundering, training, and fund-raising activities, Hezbollah collaborates with well-financed drug traffickers and narco-guerrilla groups with deep roots in the region and sophisticated smuggling and money laundering networks worldwide.

I believe this challenge must be understood as the product of a conscious strategy of rogue regimes, Iran and Venezuela, to wage asymmetrical warfare against the United States' security interests and allies close to the homeland. This unconventional challenge in each of its political, criminal, and terrorist components requires a much more robust and comprehensive response. Allow me to share some of the details that explain the breadth and the depth of what Hezbollah is up to in our hemisphere.

Two terrorist networks proselytize, fund-raise, recruit and train operatives on behalf of Hezbollah in many countries in the Americas. One of these parallel networks is operated by the Lebanese-born Ghazi Atef Nassereddine Abu Ali. That Nassereddine clan is based in Venezuela. And another is managed by Mohsen Rabbani, a former Iranian diplomat and Muslim cleric who is wanted for his role in those 1992 and 1994 bombings.

Hezbollah operatives and their radical anti-Semite allies, anti-Semitic allies, use their senior positions in the Venezuelan Government to provide logistical, material, and even diplomatic and political support to help Hezbollah and other terrorist groups grow stronger very close to our homeland. In recent years, the Chavez regime has sent weapons to Hezbollah and it has shipped refined fuel to Hezbollah's allies in Iran and Syria. Venezuela's Margarita Island has become a safe haven for terrorists and drug smugglers. Hezbollah operates numerous businesses and safe houses in Venezuela and it has provided terror training in that country for re-

cruits from that country as well as from other countries in Latin America.

Numerous Latin American governments have detained Iranian and Lebanese and other persons carrying authentic Venezuelan passports among the thousands of Venezuelan passports and other documents that were issued to people of Middle Eastern background in the last dozen years. The state-owned airline of Venezuela, Conviasa, provides Iran, Hezbollah, and associated narco-traffickers a surreptitious means to move personnel, weapons, contraband, and other material in and out of this hemisphere. The Lebanese drug lord, Ayman Joumaa, was indicted in the United States in November 2011 for running cocaine-smuggling and money-laundering schemes that benefitted Hezbollah. His network, which laundered as much as \$200 million a month, involved criminal associates and corrupt businesses in Colombia, the United States, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, as well as Lebanon. Also, in recent years, Mexico has arrested numerous individuals associated with Hezbollah engaging in various criminal activities, including smuggling of persons across the U.S. southwest border.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the foregoing discussion about the facts on the ground would lead most reasonable observers to conclude that Hezbollah is a problem in the Americas that can no longer be ignored, and I will highlight just a few recommendations on how we ought to respond.

First, congressional leadership is absolutely essential, and pressure from this body is really important to get executive branch agencies to act more decisively. Legislation that Mr. Sherman referred to, I think the chairman referred to as well, passed by this Congress with strong bipartisan support late last year requires the State Department to report to Congress on Iran's activities in the region and to provide a strategy for countering this threat. This committee must insist on a whole-of-government response from the State Department. In some cases, you might decide that more resources are needed by the intelligence or law enforcement organizations responding to the threat, but also political will is just as important, and that requires pressure and oversight to ensure that the executive branch acts responsibly and rigorously.

The links between Venezuelan officials and state-run agencies with drug trafficking, terrorism, Iran, and Hezbollah must be on the table as the State Department presents tough conditions for normalizing bilateral relations with Venezuela in a post-Chavez era. In the meantime, this criminal activity must be publicized and punished in the form of Federal indictments. Administrative sanctions are good interim measures; however, the Department of Justice should be asked, where are the indictments?

And finally, the narcoterrorism on our doorstep advanced by Hezbollah with Iranian and Venezuelan support demands a response from those whose job it is to keep us safe. Our Government must take effective measures to disrupt and dismantle illicit operations and neutralize unacceptable threats before it is too late.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. POE. I thank the witnesses for their testimony. The rest of their testimony will be made part of the record.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Noriega follows:]

TESTIMONY OF
AMBASSADOR ROGER F. NORIEGA
BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM, NON-PROLIFERATION AND TRADE

“Hezbollah’s Strategic Shift: A Global Terrorist Threat”

1:30 PM, Wednesday, March 20, 2012
2172 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC

Mr. Chairman, I applaud you and other members of the Subcommittee for focusing attention on the global threat posed by the terrorist group Hezbollah and for inviting me to share my insights on that organization’s growing network in the Americas that carries this threat to our doorstep.

This past weekend marked the ^{21st}~~31st~~ anniversary of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which murdered 29 people and injured about 250 others. Two years after that attack, the Jewish Community Center in Argentina’s capital city was leveled by another car bomb, leaving 85 persons murdered and hundreds more wounded. Mr. Chairman, this is Hezbollah’s despicable legacy in the Americas. And that terrorist group – along with its sponsor, Iran – has returned to the scene of the crime.

As a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, I head a project to examine and expose the dangerous alliance between the Venezuelan regime of Hugo Chávez and Iran. To date, we have conducted dozens of interviews with experts and eyewitnesses on the ground – including some foreign government officials – from throughout the world and in the region. We also have obtained reams of official Venezuelan and Iranian documents from our sources inside these regimes, only a fraction of which we have published to support our conclusions.

Our principal conclusions reveal why and how Hezbollah has extended its reach in the Americas so substantially and so quickly:

- Hezbollah is not a lone wolf. In this Hemisphere it counts on the political, diplomatic, material and logistical support of governments – principally Venezuela and Iran – that have little in common but their hostility to the United States.

Roger F. Noriega was U.S. Ambassador to the Organization of American States from 2001-03 and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State from 2003-05. He is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, managing director of Vision Americas LLC, which represents U.S. and foreign clients, and contributor to www.interamericansecuritywatch.com.

- To facilitate its activities in our neighborhood – including smuggling, money laundering, training and fund-raising – Hezbollah operatives collaborate with well-financed narco-traffickers and guerrilla groups with sophisticated societal, smuggling and money laundering networks in the region.
- Hezbollah networks have extended their reach into at least a dozen countries throughout Latin America.

Some may assess this cooperation between “narcos” and terrorists as a marriage of convenience between different criminal elements or just another *modus operandi* of powerful international drug syndicates that can be tackled by law enforcement. Instead, this criminal activity is the product of a conscious strategy of rogue regimes in Iran and Venezuela to wage asymmetrical warfare against U.S. security, interests and allies close to the homeland. As such, it requires a much more robust analysis and coordinated response – from exposing terrorist groups working within Venezuela, identifying narcoterrorist activities in Central America, imposing sanctions against state-run entities being used to conceal criminal transactions, to dismantling transnational money laundering schemes.

Under bipartisan legislation passed by Congress in December, the Department of State was given six months to provide you with an analysis of and strategy for dealing with Iran’s activities in the Americas. Until now, the State Department has earned a reputation within the U.S. government of minimizing this threat. This Subcommittee will have to press the Department to conduct a thorough and rigorous review of the Iranian and Hezbollah activities in our region and to expose the extraordinary role that is played by Venezuela in this regard. U.S. diplomats will then have to inform our neighbors about this problem and lay the groundwork for a coordinated strategy for dealing with this phenomenon in our Hemisphere.

Mr. Chairman, I fear that these narcoterrorist activities will exact an increasingly terrible price from our neighbors and our nation until our national security establishment recognizes the nature of the threat and fashions an effective response.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

Allow me to describe some of the elements of this narcoterrorist network, followed by a fuller discussion to provide the necessary context to understand why this threat is extraordinarily dangerous.

- **Two terrorist networks proselytize, fund-raise, recruit and train operatives on behalf of Hezbollah in many countries in the Americas.**
 - One of these parallel networks is operated by a Lebanese-Venezuelan clan, and another is managed by **Mohsen Rabbani**, a former Iranian diplomat and Muslim cleric who is wanted for his role in the 1992 and

- 1994 Buenos Aires bombings against the Israeli Embassy and Jewish community center, respectively.
- **Hezbollah operatives and their radical anti-Semitic allies hold important senior positions in the Venezuelan government** and run a network that provides logistical and material support to terrorist operatives.
 - In recent years, the Chávez regime has sent weapons to Hezbollah (ammunition, grenades, rockets, etc., intercepted in 2009 by Israeli commandos)ⁱ and shipped refined fuel to Iran and Syriaⁱⁱ.
 - Thousands of **authentic Venezuelan travel documents have been provided to persons of Middle Eastern descent** in the last decade, and numerous Latin American governments have detained many Iranian and Lebanese persons carrying Venezuelan passports.ⁱⁱⁱ
 - The Venezuelan state-owned airline, **Conviasa**, operates regular service from Caracas to Damascus and Teheran -- providing Iran, Hezbollah, and associated narco-traffickers a surreptitious means to move personnel, weapons, contraband and other materiel.
- **Hezbollah conspires with drug-trafficking networks** in Mexico and Central and South America as a means of raising and laundering funds, sharing tactics and “reaching out and touching” U.S. territory.
 - **Venezuela’s Margarita Island**, best known as a Caribbean tourist destination, has become a **safe haven** for terrorists and drug smugglers. We have published documentary evidence that **Hezbollah agents operate numerous businesses and safe houses on the island and elsewhere in Venezuela**. In addition to fund-raising activities, Hezbollah has provided terror training in Venezuela for recruits from that country and others in the region.
 - The “Lebanese Cartel” (*Cártel Libanés*) was formed by the Lebanese-born Venezuelan businessman, Walid Makled García, to transport cocaine from Venezuela in complicity with the military and the Colombian terrorist group known as the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*). Makled also brokered corrupt deals with the Shiite Muslim communities in Venezuela with close ties to Hezbollah.^{iv} Makled is wanted in the United States for cocaine smuggling and has been detained by Venezuelan authorities.
 - The criminal case against Lebanese drug lord **Ayman Jouma** is very instructive. Jouma was indicted in November 2011 for a sophisticated cocaine smuggling and money-laundering scheme benefiting Hezbollah.^v His network involves criminal associates and corrupt businesses in Colombia, the United States, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Lebanon. In June 2012, Venezuelan-Lebanese dual citizens Abbas Hussein Harb, Ali Houssein Harb (*sic*), and Kassem Mohamad Saleh and several Venezuelan and Colombian companies were sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department for their role in Jouma’s narco-terrorist operation.^{vi}

- In recent years, **Mexico has arrested numerous individuals associated with Hezbollah** engaging in criminal activities – including smuggling of persons across the U.S. southwest border.^{vii} For example, in September 2012, a Lebanese-born U.S. citizen, convicted in 2010 for a credit card scheme that raised \$100,000 for Hezbollah, was arrested in Merida by Mexican authorities. Rafic Mohammad Labboun Allaboun, an imam from a mosque in San Jose, California, was traveling with a falsified passport issued by Belize. He was extradited to the United States.^{viii}
- **The regime of the late Hugo Chávez was able to broker ties between Hezbollah and narcotraffickers, because it is a narcostate.**
 - U.S. officials have fresh, compelling information implicating the late leader, the president of the National Assembly (Diosdado Cabello Rondón), the former Minister of Defense (Henry de Jesús Rangel Silva), the current army chief (Cliver Alcalá Cordones), and the newly appointed deputy Minister of Interior (Hugo Carvajal), and dozens of other senior military officials in trafficking in cocaine.
 - These politicians and active duty and retired military officers are responsible for transporting tons of cocaine to Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean, the United States, west Africa, and Europe. The very conservative estimates released by the State Department say the amount of cocaine transiting Venezuela since Chávez took power in 1998 has more than doubled.^{ix}
 - **Our sources also report that representatives of the Mexican Sinaloa cartel operate in key cocaine transit corridors in Venezuela in close coordination with Venezuelan officials. It is a little known fact that the world's most powerful cocaine smuggler and head of the Sinaloa cartel, Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo" Guzmán conducted his business from Venezuela for much of 2010, living in a suburb of Caracas and on Margarita Island until early 2011 under the protection of Venezuelan security officials working for Chávez.**
 - Senior *chavista* officials engage routinely in lucrative schemes involving Hezbollah front companies, Colombian terrorist groups, narcotraffickers, Venezuelan financial institutions and even powerful state-run entities.
- **Today, Venezuela is a key ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is carrying its asymmetrical battle to our doorstep.** Since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid his first visit to Caracas in September 2006, Venezuela has become one of Iran's most important allies in the world – certainly Teheran's closest partner in our neighborhood.
 - Venezuela has helped Iran launder at least \$30 billion to evade international sanctions. Seventy Iranian companies – many of them fronts for the IRGC that have been sanctioned by Western governments for their support for Iran's illicit nuclear program – operate suspicious industrial facilities in Venezuela. The two governments also cooperate in nuclear technology and the exploration for uranium, despite UN sanctions.

DISCUSSION AND BACKGROUND

VENEZUELA'S HEZBOLLAH-NARCO NEXUS

It is said that wherever Iran goes, Hezbollah is not far behind. In the case of Venezuela, Hezbollah blazed the trail in Venezuela, establishing a network of commercial enterprises meant to raise and channel funds and hide its financial tracks. These activities have exploded in the last seven years, as Hezbollah's activities in the region gained the active complicity of the Venezuelan government, the backing of Iranian security forces and notorious Muslim radicals, and the cooperation of powerful Mexican and narcotrafficking syndicates that reach onto U.S. soil.

Research from open sources, subject-matter experts, and sensitive sources within various governments has identified at least two parallel, collaborative terrorist networks growing at an alarming rate in Latin America. One of these networks is operated by Venezuelan collaborators, and the other is managed by a former Iranian diplomat and infamous Muslim cleric. These networks encompass more than 80 operatives in at least 12 countries throughout the region (with their greatest areas of focus being Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and Chile).

The Nassereddine Network. Ghazi Atef Nassereddine Abu Ali, a native of Lebanon who became a Venezuelan citizen about 12 years ago, is Venezuela's second-ranking diplomat in Syria. Nassereddine is a key Hezbollah asset because of his close personal relationship to Chávez's Justice and Interior Minister, Tarik El Aissami, and because of his diplomatic assignment in Damascus. Along with at least two of his brothers, Nassereddine manages a network to expand Hezbollah's influence in Venezuela and throughout Latin America.

Nassereddine's brother Abdallah, a former member of the Venezuelan congress, uses his position as the former vice president of the Federation of Arab and American Entities in Latin America and the president of its local chapter in Venezuela to maintain ties with Islamic communities throughout the region.^x He currently resides on Margarita Island, where he runs various money-laundering operations and manages commercial enterprises associated with Hezbollah in Latin America. Younger brother Oday is responsible for establishing paramilitary training centers on Margarita Island. He is actively recruiting Venezuelans through local *circulos bolivarianos* (neighborhood watch committees made up of the most radical Chávez followers) and sending them to Iran for follow-on training.

The Rabbani Network. Hojjat al-Eslam Mohsen Rabbani, who was the cultural attaché at the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Buenos Aires, Argentina, oversees a parallel Hezbollah recruitment network.^{xi} Rabbani is currently the international affairs advisor to the Al-Mostafa Al-Alam Cultural Institute in Qom, which is tasked with propagation of Shia Islam outside Iran.^{xii} Rabbani, referred to by the

important Brazilian magazine *Veja* as “the Terrorist Professor,”^{xvii} is a die-hard defender of the Iranian revolution and the mastermind behind the two notorious terrorist attacks against Jewish targets in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994 that killed 144 people.^{xviii}

At the time, Rabbani was credentialed as Iran’s cultural attaché in the Argentine capital, which he used as a platform for extremist propaganda, recruitment and training that culminated in the attacks in the 1990s. In fact, he continues to exploit that network of Argentine converts today to expand Iran’s and Hezbollah’s reach—identifying and recruiting operatives throughout the region for radicalization and terrorist training in Venezuela and Iran (specifically, the city of Qom).

At least two mosques in Buenos Aires—Al Imam and At-Tauhid—are operated by Rabbani disciples. Sheik Abdallah Madani leads the Al Imam mosque, which also serves as the headquarters for the Islamic-Argentine Association, one of the most prominent Islamic cultural centers in Latin America.

Some of Rabbani’s disciples have taken what they have learned from their mentor in Argentina and replicated it elsewhere in the region. Sheik Karim Abdul Paz, an Argentine convert to Shiite Islam, studied under Rabbani in Qom for five years and succeeded him at the At-Tauhid mosque in Buenos Aires in 1993.^{xv} Abdul Paz is now the imam of a cultural center in Santiago, Chile, the Centro Chileno Islamico de Cultura de Puerto Montt. Another Argentine convert to radical Islam and Rabbani disciple is Sheik Suhail Assad, who lectures at universities throughout the region and recruits young followers to the cause.^{xvi}

A key target of the Rabbani network—and Hezbollah in general—is Brazil, home to some one million Muslims. Rabbani travels to Brazil regularly to visit his brother, Mohammad Baquer Rabbani Razavi, founder of the Iranian Association in Brazil.^{xvii} Another of his principal collaborators is Sheik Khaled Taki Eldyn, a Sunni radical from the Sao Paulo Guarulhos mosque. Taki Eldyn, who is active in ecumenical activities with the Shia mosques, also serves as the secretary general of the Council of the Leaders of the Societies and Islamic Affairs of Brazil.^{xviii} A sensitive source linked that mosque to a TBA network cited by the US Treasury Department as providing major financial and logistical support to Hezbollah.^{xix} As far back as 1995, Taki Eldyn hosted al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheik Mohammed in the TBA region.

According to Brazilian intelligence sources cited by the magazine *Veja*, at least 20 operatives from Hezbollah, al Qaeda and the Islamic Jihad are using Brazil as a hub for terrorist activity.^{xx} The fact that Brazil is set to host the FIFA World Cup tournament in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016 makes it an inviting target for international terrorism. U.S. officials should be approaching Brazilian officials to discuss the potential threat of Venezuelan-Iranian support for narcoterrorism. Unfortunately, most U.S. diplomats are as indifferent to this reality as their Brazilian counterparts.

IRAN'S DANGEROUS GAMBIT IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

To comprehend what Iran is up to, we must set aside conventional wisdom about its ambitions, strategies and tactics and follow the evidence where it leads. For example, in the aftermath of a brazen plot discovered in October 2011 in which Iranian agents conspired with supposed Mexican drug cartel leaders to commit a terrorist bombing in the heart of our Nation's capital,^{xxi} Director of National Intelligence, James R. Clapper, revealed that "Iranian officials" at the highest levels "are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States...." General Clapper also reported that Iran's so-called "supreme leader" Ali Khamenei was probably aware of this planning.^{xxii}

Iranian officials have made no secret of the regime's intention to carry its asymmetrical struggle to the streets of the United States. For example, in a May 2011 speech in Bolivia, Iran's Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi promised a "tough and crushing response" to any U.S. offensive against Iran.^{xxiii} At the same time that Iran caught the world's attention by threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced a five-nation swing through Latin America aimed at advancing its influence and operational capabilities on the U.S. doorstep.^{xxiv}

The intelligence community's fresh assessment of Iran's willingness to wage an attack on our soil leads to the inescapable conclusion that Teheran's activities near our homeland constitute a very real threat that can no longer be ignored.

Bracing for a potential showdown over its illicit nuclear program and emboldened by inattention from Washington in Latin America, Iran has sought strategic advantage in our neighborhood. It also is preparing to play the narcoterrorism card—exploiting its partnership with Venezuelan operatives, reaching into Mexico, and activating a decades-old network in Argentina, Brazil and elsewhere in the region.

Today, a shadowy network of embassies, Islamic centers, financial institutions, and commercial and industrial enterprises in several countries affords Iran a physical presence in relatively close proximity to the United States. Iran is well-positioned to use its relationships with these countries to pose a direct threat to U.S. territory, strategic waterways and American allies. Iran also has provided the Venezuelan military with weapon systems that gave Venezuela unprecedented capabilities to threaten its neighbors and the United States.

Notably, a half-dozen Iranian companies sanctioned by U.N., U.S. or European authorities have built suspicious industrial installations at various sites in Venezuela.^{xxv} These facilities were important enough to attract secret visits by Iranian Major General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the Revolutionary Guard Corps aerospace commander who previously headed Iran's missile program, in July 2009 and November 2011.

VENEZUELA'S PIVOTAL ROLE SUPPORTING IRAN AND TERRORISM

In recent congressional testimony, investigative journalist Doug Farah describes “the merging of [Hugo Chávez’s] Bolivarian Revolution’s criminal-terrorist pipeline activities and those of the criminal-terrorist pipeline of radical extremist groups (Hezbollah in particular) supported by the Iranian regime.”^{xxvi} Such ties are invaluable to groups like Hezbollah, as they afford them protection, safe havens in which to operate, and even diplomatic status and immunity. In short, Venezuela plays a singular role as a platform for the Hezbollah threat in the Americas.

It is important to bear in mind that Venezuela is not just another developing country that is unable to control its territory. Venezuela is an oil-rich state that has collected about \$1.1 trillion in oil revenue in the last decade. It also is not just an isolated hostile state: Venezuela has collected \$28 billion in loans from China in the last two years, and has purchased at least \$9 billion in arms from the Russians in the last decade.^{xxvii}

With the success of the U.S.-backed Plan Colombia, about six or seven years ago, South American narcotraffickers had to adjust their smuggling routes. They had to look no farther than Caracas. Chávez doled out lucrative drug trafficking deals as a means to secure the loyalty of military subordinates and to generate billions in revenue and make them complicit in his corrupt regime. As described above, dozens of senior military officials closely associated with Chávez have been implicated in narcotrafficking crimes. The *de facto* head of the Venezuelan *Cártel del Sol* is Diosdado Cabello, National Assembly president and ruling party chief.

That military syndicate operates parallel to a civilian network known as the *Cártel Libanés*, which was formed by the Lebanese-born Walid Makled García. According to journalist and narcoterror expert, Douglas Farah, “The supplier of the cocaine [to the Makled cartel] was the FARC in Colombia....” Farah’s sources also reported that Makled was a key link between various criminal groups and Venezuela’s Shiite Muslim communities that have a strong financial relationship with Hezbollah.^{xxviii} Makled is wanted in the United States for cocaine smuggling; after being detained in Colombia, he gave a series of media interviews implicating dozens of Venezuela officials in cocaine smuggling. Colombia surprised many observers by extraditing Makled to Venezuela, where his closed-door trial began in April 2012.^{xxix}

Even before Chávez won power in 1998, he established intimate links to the Colombian guerrilla group FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*)—which wages a terrorist war against a democratic government and ally of the United States. For many years, FARC commanders and troops have operated in and out of Venezuela with the complicity of the Chávez regime. A principal activity of the FARC today is the transportation of cocaine to safe havens operated by the Venezuelan military for transport to the United States and other countries.

In September 2012, pursuant to section 706(2)(A) of the Foreign Relations

Authorization Act of 2003, President Obama determined that Venezuela was one of three countries in the world (along with Bolivia and Burma) that “failed demonstrably during the previous 12 months to adhere to their obligations under international counternarcotics agreements....”^{xxx}

Venezuela’s internal security apparatus has been organized and directed by Cuba, a country designated by the U.S. State Department as a state sponsor of terrorism. That same report cited Venezuela’s “economic, financial and diplomatic cooperation with Iran....”^{xxxi} Chávez’s aides make no secret of ongoing oil shipments to a third terrorist state, Syria. Just as Hezbollah, Cuba, Syria and Iran are considered terrorist threats to U.S. national security interests, Venezuela’s crucial support for each of them should be, too. Although this support may not pose a classical conventional threat, it is precisely the kind of asymmetrical tactics that our enemies favor today.

The *chavista* regime also has served as the principal interlocutor on Iran’s behalf with other like-minded heads of state in the region, primarily Rafael Correa (of Ecuador) and Evo Morales (of Bolivia), both members of the Chávez-sponsored Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and both of whom have established dubious networks with criminal transnational groups.^{xxxii}

CONTINUED CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP REQUIRED

Mr. Chairman, our project has shared substantial information about these aforementioned threats with U.S. government officials—either directly or through Members of Congress. Too often the attitude we have encountered in the executive branch has been one of skepticism or indifference. Apparently, this indifference has left senior U.S. officials uninformed on the subject. For example, President Obama told a Miami journalist in July 2012, “[M]y sense is that what Mr. Chávez has done over the last several years has not had a serious national security impact on us.” U.S. General Douglas Fraser (USAF), the former regional commander of U.S. Southern Command, subsequently supported the appraisal that Venezuela does not represent a threat to U.S. national security.^{xxxiii} “As I look at Iran and their connection with Venezuela,” said Fraser, “I see that still primarily as a diplomatic and economic relationship.”

Mr. Chairman, I believe the foregoing discussion of the facts on the ground will lead most reasonable observers to a very different conclusion. Important exceptions to executive branch neglect is the work of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the Department of the Treasury to sanction numerous Venezuelan officials and entities for their complicity with and support for Iran and international terrorism; in addition, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Preet Bharara, has investigated and prosecuted key cases to attack this international conspiracy. Inexplicably, according to law enforcement sources, State Department officers systematically resist the application of sanctions against Venezuelan officials and entities, despite the fact that these suspects are playing an increasingly important role in Iran’s operational capabilities near U.S. territory.

Mr. Chairman, I am convinced that Congressional attention, such as this hearing, is essential to encourage Executive branch agencies to act. For example, sanctions against Venezuela's state-owned petroleum company for transactions with Iran were the direct result of pressure by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, acting in part on information uncovered by AEI's project.

As I mentioned earlier, the "Countering Iran in the Western Hemisphere Act of 2012," authored by Representative Jeff Duncan (R-SC), passed with strong bipartisan support, require the Executive branch to report to Congress on Iran's activities in a host of areas and to provide a strategy for countering this threat.

I believe that such a thorough, Congressionally-mandated review will require the Executive branch to apply additional needed intelligence resources to collect on subject matters in Venezuela, Mexico, Bolivia, Ecuador, Central America and beyond. Once national security officials study the scope and depth of the problem, I hope for a whole-of-government response to protect our security, our interests and our allies against the threat posed by a narcoterrorist network in the Americas. Once Congress receives this report, perhaps this challenge will be treated as a budgetary priority so that law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the resources to respond urgently and effectively. Of course, our project at AEI is prepared to cooperate with this policy review by providing the Subcommittee documents and analysis regarding suspicious transactions and installations operated by Iran in Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia and elsewhere in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The involvement of Venezuelan officials and state-run entities in drug trafficking, terrorism and/or Iran must be on the table as the State Department presents conditions for normalizing bilateral relations with Chávez's successor. In the mean time, this involvement must be publicized and punished in the form of federal indictments. Sanctions by the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control are good interim measures. However, in the case of Venezuelan officials and state-run entities, indictments are much more meaningful. The Department of Justice headquarters should be asked to explain why such prosecutorial actions have failed to meet this extraordinary lawlessness.
- Congress should demand U.S. diplomats be more cooperative with law enforcement and intelligence efforts aimed at exposing and punishing criminal behavior and terrorist activities in the region. Specifically, the Department of State must be more cooperative in raising this phenomenon with our neighbors. We also must find a way to talk about this problem with our friends in a way that it is not misunderstood as an accusation against those governments as they work with us to confront the problem.

- Congress should give U.S. intelligence and security agencies the resources required to expand their capabilities to confront extra-regional threats and cross-border criminality.
- U.S. national security agencies, led by the Department of State, should increase the dialogue and cooperation with regional and European military, intelligence, and security agencies on the common threat posed by the Hezbollah-Iranian-Venezuelan alliance.
- Congress should use its oversight functions to determine if U.S. Northern and Southern Commands, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the Drug Enforcement Administration have adequate programs and funding to support U.S. anti-drug cooperation with Mexico and Central America.

CONCLUSION

As I stated before another Congressional subcommittee nearly two years ago, the “Hezbollah/Iranian presence in Latin America constitutes a clear threat to the security of the U.S. homeland. . . . In addition to operational terrorist activity, Hezbollah also is immersed in criminal activity throughout the region – from trafficking in weapons, drugs, and persons. . . . If our government and responsible partners in Latin America fail to act, I believe there will be an attack on U.S. personnel, installations or interests in the Americas. . . .” as a result of this dangerous conspiracy.

The narcoterrorism on our doorstep, perpetrated by Hezbollah with Iranian and Venezuelan support, demands a response from those whose job it is to keep us safe. Our government must take effective measures—unilaterally and with willing partners—to disrupt and dismantle illicit operations and neutralize unacceptable threats.

ⁱ <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/nov/05/world/fg-israel-arms-boat5>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/23/world/americas/chavez-appears-to-use-venezuelan-fuel-to-help-syrias-assad.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ One of the 9/11 attackers had ties to a man traveling on an *authentic* Venezuelan passport bearing the name “Hakim Mohamed Ali Diab Fattah.” Diab Fattah was detained by the FBI and deported to Venezuela; when the FBI asked the Venezuelan government for access to this man, authorities there claimed that he never entered the country.

^{iv} “The Further Narco-Terrorist Ties of the Chávez Government,” by Douglas Farah, November 12, 2010. <http://www.douglasfarah.com/article/543/the-further-narco-terrorist-ties-of-the-chavez-government>

^v “Ties Between Hezbollah and Mexican Drug Cartels Revealed,” by Rebecca Anna Stoil, *The Jerusalem Post*, December 15, 2011. <http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=249684>

^{vi} “Treasury Targets Major Money Laundering Network Linked to Drug Trafficker Ayman Joumaa and a Key Hizballah Supporter in South America,” U.S. Department of the Treasury

press release, June 27, 2012. <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/ig1624.aspx>

^{vii} “Exclusive: Hezbollah Uses Mexican Drug Routes into the U.S.,” *Washington Times*, March 27, 2009.

^{viii} “Mexico Extradites Suspected Hezbollah Member,” September 11, 2012.

<http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/09/11/mexico-extradites-suspected-hezbollah-member/>

^{ix} International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2013, U.S. Department of State, March 3, 2013. <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2013/vol1/204052.htm#Venezuela>

^x This organization was founded in Argentina in 1972 to unite Muslims, namely the Syrian and Lebanese communities, in Latin America and has spread rapidly throughout Latin America, with offices in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Guadalupe Island, Antigua, and Uruguay. It is overtly anti-Israel; supportive of anti-American regimes in the Middle East and Latin America; and used as a platform for Hezbollah to raise money, recruit supporters, and solicit illegal visas.

^{xi} “Reis-Jomhour-e Arzhantin Dar Sazeman-e Melal: Tehran Ba Mohakemeh-ye Maqamatash Dar Keshvar-e Sales Movafeqat Konad” [The President of Argentina: Tehran Should Accept Trial of Its Authorities in a Third Country], *Asr-e Iran (Tehran)*, September 25, 2010, www.asriran.com (available in Persian, accessed September 29, 2011).

^{xii} “Din va Siasat Dar Amrika-ye Latin Dar Goftegou Ba Ostad Mohsen Rabbani” [Religion and Politics in Latin America in Conversation with Professor Mohsen Rabbani], *Book Room (Tehran)*, May 3, 2010.

^{xiii} “The Terrorist ‘Professor,’” *Veja (Brazil)*, April 20, 2011.

^{xiv} Marcelo Martinez Burgos and Alberto Nissman, Office of Criminal Investigations: AMIA Case (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Investigations Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, 2006), www.peaceandtolerance.org/docs/nismanindict.pdf (accessed September 27, 2011). Eight Iranian officials are considered fugitives by Interpol for their role in the Argentina attacks, including Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (former Iranian president); Ali Fallahijan (former Intelligence minister); Ali Akbar Velayati (former Foreign Affairs minister); Mohsen Rezaei (former head of the Revolutionary Guards Pasdaran); current Defense minister Ahmad Vahidi; Mohsen Rabbani (former Cultural affairs officer at the Iranian embassy in Buenos Aires); Ahmad Reza Asghari (former third secretary at the Iran embassy in Buenos Aires); and Hadi Soleimanpour (former Ambassador in Argentina). <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/06/19/jewish-centre-asks-for-arrest-of-iranian-terrorist-suspects-if-they-attend-rio-20>

^{xv} “Goftegou Ba Sarkar-e Khanom-e Ma’soumeh As’ad Paz Az Keshvar-e Arzhantin” [Conversation with Lade Ma’soumeh As’ad Paz From Argentina], *Ahlulbayt (Tehran)*, June 13, 2011.

^{xvi} Marielos Márquez, “‘El Islam es una forma de vida’: Sheij Suhail Assad,” *DiarioCoLatino*, August 27, 2007.

^{xvii} “Sourat-e Jalaseh” [Agenda], *Iranianbrazil (Brazil)*, March 17, 2010.

^{xviii} “Aein-ha-ye Ramezani Dar Berezil” [Ramadan Traditions in Brazil], *Taghrib News (Qom)*, September 5, 2010.

^{xix} US Department of the Treasury, “Treasury Designates Islamic Extremist, Two Companies Supporting Hizballah in Tri-Border Area,” news release, June 10, 2004.

^{xx} “The Terrorist ‘Professor,’” *Veja (Brazil)*, April 20, 2011.

^{xxi} “Notorious Iranian Militant has a Connection to Alleged Assassination Plot Against Saudi Envoy, by Peter Finn, *The Washington Post*, October 14, 2011.

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^{xxiii} “Sanction shows US weakness, says Iran minister,” *Iranian Students’ News Agency*, June 1, 2011; “Iran Warns of Street War in Tel Aviv If Attacked,” *Fars News Agency*, November 8,

2011.

^{xxiv} “Iran Seeking to Expand Influence in Latin America,” by Joby Warrick, *The Washington Post*, January 1, 2012.

^{xxv} Iranian companies sanctioned on repeated occasions by the U.S Treasury, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, the U.N. Security Council (United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1747, 1803, 1929), the European Union (2008, 2010, 2011), the United Kingdom (2007,2008), Germany (2005), and Japan.

^{xxvi} Douglas Farah, “Hezbollah in Latin America: Implications for U.S. Security,” Testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, July 7, 2011, www.homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/Testimony%20Farah.pdf (accessed September 27, 2011).

^{xxvii} In the last four years, the Russians have sold at least \$9 billion in arms to Venezuela and has constructed a factory in Maracay, Venezuela, that can produce about 25,000 assault rifles per year. The latest \$4 billion Russian line of credit announced in June 2012 will go toward arming chavista militias – shock troops loyal to the regime and meant to intimidate the opposition.

^{xxviii} “The Further Narco-Terrorist Ties of the Chávez Government,” by Douglas Farah, November 12, 2010. <http://www.douglasfarah.com/article/543/the-further-narco-terrorist-ties-of-the-chavez-government>

^{xxlix} “5 Things to Watch for in Venezuelan Kingpin Walid Makled’s Trial,” by Elyssa Pachico, *Latin America Monitor*, July 31, 2012. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Americas/Latin-America-Monitor/2012/0731/5-things-to-watch-for-in-Venezuelan-kingpin-Walid-Makled-s-trial>

^{xxx} See the September 14, 2012, Presidential Memorandum at this site:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/14/presidential-memorandum-presidential-determination-annual-presidential-d>.

^{xxxi} <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195546.htm>

^{xxxii} José R. Cárdenas, “The Chávez Model Threatens Ecuador,” *ABI Latin American Outlook* (March 2011), www.aei.org/outlook/101037; Douglas Farah, *Into the Abyss: Bolivia under Evo Morales and the MAS* (Alexandria, VA: International Assessment and Strategy Center, 2009), www.strategycenter.net/files/2011/10/06/20090618_IASCIntoTheAbyss061709.pdf (accessed September 27, 2011).

^{xxxiii} “Top U.S. General: Venezuela not a Threat,” by Frank Bajak, *The Associated Press*, July 31, 2012. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/top-us-general-venezuela-not-threat>

Mr. POE. Some observations. We had a map of some of the activities of Iran and where their tentacles of terrorism through Hezbollah have moved throughout the world. I suspect that if we come back a year from now and we have a similar hearing, we will have more red lines throughout the world instead of fewer red lines. Hezbollah is moving throughout the world, and I think the situation, based on your testimonies, is getting worse.

Ambassador Noriega, you mentioned in your testimony that Hezbollah, working in the Americas directly in the south and southwest, is smuggling into the United States. Would you care to elaborate on that? Smuggling what?

Mr. NORIEGA. Well, smuggling people and smuggling drugs and other things. They involve themselves in various criminal activities and collaborate with narcotraffickers on techniques in terms of smuggling. There is anecdotal information that Hezbollah provided Mexican narcotraffickers with training in how to make car bombs, which soon became a tactic used by the Mexican narcotraffickers in that country. You have a significant number of cases of individuals who were associated with Hezbollah in Venezuela also having contact with Mexican narcotraffickers. It is a little known fact that the Mexican cocaine smuggler, Chapo Guzman, who is the biggest—

Mr. POE. Public enemy number one.

Mr. NORIEGA. Yes, absolutely. He spent most of the year 2010 in Venezuela, including part of that time on Margarita Island, and we believe that it is there that some of the very highest links with Hezbollah and with some of the Venezuelan generals who are also involved in narcotrafficking took place, and some of that collaboration took place.

Mr. POE. Just for the record, he is the leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel that operates in Mexico and other places. And is your testimony that he has been trained or works with Hezbollah as well to bring drugs into the United States?

Mr. NORIEGA. Well, I think it is pretty clear that Hezbollah cooperates with narcotraffickers all along that chain, not only smuggling but in the money laundering part of it.

Now, whether Guzman was operational there, I don't have proof of that, but my sense of it is that that is where he had contact, regular contact while he was in Venezuela on Margarita Island with Hezbollah elements, and they cooperate up and down the chain, smuggling, money laundering, training in tactics to confront law enforcement, and all of those issues.

Mr. POE. Two more questions, one for Mr. Fulton and one for Dr. Levitt.

You mentioned that Hezbollah really is under the auspices and control, not just of Iran, but of the Supreme Leader in Iran. Would you elaborate on that some?

Mr. FULTON. Mr. Chairman, I don't know that I would say that Hezbollah is completely and utterly under the control of Iran. In recent history, we have seen Hezbollah emerge as somewhat of an independent actor. However, Iran obviously still maintains significant control over Hezbollah operationally. And when I say the Supreme Leader, what I mean by that is that, based on all of the information I have seen, there is nothing to indicate that there are

rogue elements in the IRGC or other elements of the Iranian regime that are working with Hezbollah to undertake operations or to undertake any of the activity that they are involved in. So, if there is activity that the Iranian Government and Hezbollah are collaborating in, then that is undertaken with, at a minimum, tacit approval of the Supreme Leader.

Mr. POE. All right.

Dr. Levitt, what is going to happen next with Hezbollah? I mean, where are they going next? Back to you and Ambassador Noriega's comments about some of the things that we can do, and also, in your opinion, why hasn't Europe labeled this group as a foreign terrorist organization? So, where are we headed? What about the Europeans?

Mr. LEVITT. You can't put a clock on me for that, sir.

Mr. POE. I will have to.

Mr. LEVITT. Where we are going is more of the same. Hezbollah has multiple interests and identities. It is Lebanese and it is interested in its position in Lebanon. It is pan-Shia and it is in partnership with Iran. What we are seeing is that the identity of its partnership with Iran is trumping the others. It is willing to do things now, whether it is targeting tourists in Bulgaria or Cyprus or flying a drone over southern Israel last fall that are completely in the Iranian interest, even explicitly against Lebanese interests. That makes Hezbollah very, very dangerous.

Why are some European countries uninclined to designate Hezbollah? For a variety of reasons, from concern about what might happen to the UNIFIL soldiers, many of whom are European, Italian, and French, in particular in southern Lebanon, to what this means for the stability of Lebanon, which is politically quite unstable right now, to concern about retaliatory attacks at home. There are answers to all of those questions. There is no evidence that Hezbollah has ever retaliated with attacks against the entity that has designated it. Let's be honest, a designation is just calling it a name, saying that blowing things up is terrorism.

There is no one that does more to undermine stability in Lebanon today than Hezbollah, which dragged Israel and Lebanon both into a war neither country wanted in 2006, took over downtown Beirut by force of arms leading to the deaths of fellow Lebanese in 2008, and raided the Chouf Mountains. It has been accused by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, the U.N. Tribunal, with the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and other political assassinations, and of course now what is happening in Syria, which is going right across the border into Lebanon.

We have to be, and I assure you that U.S. and foreign intelligence and law enforcement agencies are quite aware of the need to be very on top of these two threats, Iran, Hezbollah, which operate together and sometimes in competition, especially as we are concerned about Iran's nuclear program. If the diplomatic track doesn't produce results, the theory is that eventually there might have to be a strike on Iran's nuclear facilities and that Iran would, without a question, respond with asymmetric terrorist attacks worldwide.

Mr. POE. Thank you, Dr. Levitt.

Yield 5 minutes to the ranking member from California, Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Levitt, Mr. Fulton, if Israel did take military action, obviously, Iran would want Hezbollah to open up with all the rockets it has got in southern Lebanon. Is there any doubt that Hezbollah would be willing to do that?

Mr. FULTON. Sir, I would say on the Iranian side we have seen senior IRGC commanders state explicitly that Hezbollah would respond were Iran to be attacked by Israel. But I will defer to Dr. Levitt on the internal Hezbollah politics.

Mr. SHERMAN. And who in Hezbollah has said that?

Mr. LEVITT. Thrown under the bus.

My assessment is a little bit different. My assessment is that if Iran is attacked by Israel or someone else, that there will definitely be rockets fired at Israel from Lebanon, probably from Gaza, but that, depending on who attacks and how they attack and what the damage is and what the collateral damage is, will have a big impact on how many rockets, what types of rockets, because at the end of the day, you shoot a rocket into Israel, Israel can respond back. The only thing that there is no question is that there will also be reasonably deniable asymmetric terrorist attacks as well.

Mr. SHERMAN. Turning to Syria, Mr. Levitt, what is the status of Iran and Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, what specifically are they doing to help the Assad regime, and what have Iran and Hezbollah done to prepare for a possible transfer of chemical weapons to Hezbollah if the Assad regime is likely to fall or at least lose Damascus and other key parts of Syria?

Mr. LEVITT. Iran and Hezbollah are deeply committed to the Assad regime even today, even though it is clear that the Assad regime will in time fall. The question is how it falls and when it falls. Is Assad killed, does he flee, do they establish an Alawi statelet along the coast? I think that is something that Hezbollah, in particular, is very eager to see happen. It is trying to help the Syrian regime establish territorial contiguity in Syria between Damascus and the Alawi areas. Failure to do that, it will provide that contiguity through the Bekaa Valley. One of the reasons—

Mr. SHERMAN. Continuity between Damascus, which is in south Syria, and the Alawite region, which is in north Syria.

Mr. LEVITT. Curving along the Lebanese border where the Syrian FSA and others maintain control of some of the area in between.

The reason Hezbollah is so keen for this is because one of the things that Hezbollah is most worried about, aside from losing the state sponsorship and all that, which it clearly sees it is going to lose, is the ability to get resupply of rockets and other things from Iran. If it can't get those resupplies, it will be much more constrained in shelling Israel indiscriminately for fear that it won't be able to restock. But if it has access to places like Latakia, which has an airport and which has a seaport that Hezbollah has long, long used for its international criminal arms proliferation purposes, something that has come up in several FBI investigations of Hezbollah here in this country, I think they feel that would give them some hope.

In terms of the chemical weapons, we have a lot of questions. We are very concerned. But in particular we were concerned when we

saw Hezbollah setting up small, little movable training camps right next to chemical weapon depots. Did they do that because they felt that was a good place where they could set up camp and people probably wouldn't shell them for fear of hitting the chemical weapon depots? Did they set that camp up because it is a good place to be to raid the storage site in the event that the regime falls? Both? We don't know. But as you, sir, said, and I couldn't say it better, that has to be the reddest of the red lines.

Mr. SHERMAN. And I assume Hezbollah has the technical capacity to use these chemical weapons in the event that they get their hands on them? Does anyone disagree?

Mr. LEVITT. I think the biggest concern is that they get them. Once you have them, you can get the capability to use them, especially since you are so close to Iran.

Mr. SHERMAN. And you are right there with the Assad regime, so you only need a few of their people to help you out.

Mr. LEVITT. Exactly.

Mr. SHERMAN. You have talked about Europe not designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. What can the United States do to push Europe in the right direction on that? I will take an answer from any one of the three of you.

Mr. LEVITT. I just came back yesterday from a trip to Europe, Rome, Paris, and Berlin. The good news is I saw more movement in those three countries on this issue than I have in a long time, including since I was last in several of those countries.

Mr. SHERMAN. I mean, this is a terrorist organization that carries out terrorism on European soil.

Mr. LEVITT. Europeans often see things in big dialectics. For them, there is no longer a debate is Hezbollah engaged in these activities, which there long was. Now the debate is, is this the right policy? What would it mean for stability in Lebanon? What would it mean for UNIFIL? I believe those are all answerable questions, and I made what I thought was a forceful argument to them that they need to do this not as a favor to the United States, not as a favor to Israel, but as a responsibility that they have to their constituents. Hezbollah has challenged them. Hezbollah is active in Europe, again operationally. And let's be clear, there was never a point when it was not active in Europe in terms of logistics, finance, arms procurement, or for sending people into Israel or elsewhere to carry attacks through Europe.

Mr. SHERMAN. And finally, the Europeans care a lot about overflowing Assad. They may or may not want to provide weapons, but here is a chance to help the free Syrian forces.

I yield back.

Mr. POE. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Cook, for 5 minutes.

Mr. COOK. Thank you, Judge.

It is kind of ironic, I guess. Many years ago I was a company commander, spent a long time, as I said, as a leader of troops and marines, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, which happened to be the unit that was blown up by Hezbollah in 1983, and we are perhaps going full circle.

I appreciate the ranking member asking the question about chemical weapons. That is what I was going to ask. But I am also

concerned about the Strait of Hormuz from a military standpoint. If you have got an organization that are almost, if you described it correctly, if I understood it correctly, that are almost like the Spetsnaz, to a certain degree, of Iran, and they have issues right now as to what is their international border, can they stretch it out. And it is that chokepoint which is very, very inflammatory and which many people think, you know, if a shooting engagement starts, it could very well be.

And I was surprised that there has been no activity against Qatar or the United Arab Emirates because of their support for the United States and other more moderate regimes, and I just wanted to see if you would comment on the possibility that this agency that has been at the forefront of Iranian policy might be involved in that area in the future.

Mr. FULTON. Sir, the IRGC has said time and time again, as has the chief of the Armed Forces General Staff that they intend to close the Strait of Hormuz if they were struck or if their interests were threatened otherwise. Now, my expertise does not lie in Iran's conventional military power. My understanding, from assessments that I have seen, is that they could close the Strait of Hormuz, but it would be for a very limited period of time. But absolutely, if that were to happen, the IRGC would be in the lead of those operations.

Similarly, if there were to be any type of flash point conflict in the Persian Gulf in the Strait of Hormuz, it would very much likely be the IRGC and its navy at the forefront of that, sir.

Mr. LEVITT. I will just add two quick comments. The first on the 1983 Beirut bombings. The relevance to today is that in the book I was able to find, for the book, a significant amount of declassified intelligence, declassified CIA reports, FBI reports, done a lot of interviews with current and former officials, and it is quite clear across the board that the assessment after the fact was that our failure to respond to those attacks in a way that was meaningful to Iran and to Hezbollah, again after the Khobar Towers bombing in 1996, emboldened both Iran's Quds Force, the IRGC more generally, and Hezbollah. We are at that type of a precipice again right now.

In terms of the Gulf regimes, I think there are lots of parts of the book that will surprise people, maybe nothing more so than the fat chapter on Hezbollah in Southeast Asia. But I think some people will be surprised by how extensive the two chapters are on Hezbollah in the Gulf. One chapter more historically oriented leading up to Khobar Towers bombing, regarding some of the earlier history, and the second one, getting much closer to today, Hezbollah established a dedicated unit to target coalition forces in Iraq, Unit 3800, and if you talk to our allies and friends in the Gulf area, of course they are concerned about Iran's nuclear capabilities, power projection in the region. They are no less concerned about Hezbollah's activities in the region. Iran, I believe, not only is interested in regime preservation, but also it remains today as it was at its founding, interested in exploiting the revolution, and that starts, for them, in the Gulf.

Mr. COOK. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Yoho, for 5 minutes. We are going to try to finish before votes. Votes have already started, but we will try to finish the hearing so you all don't have to come back.

Go ahead. Gentleman from Florida.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate you guys' testimony. And the big thing I see, you know, that concerns me probably more than anything is the infiltration into the Western Hemisphere of Hezbollah. My question is for all three of you, how much effect do the sanctions on Iran for funding to Hezbollah, how much effect do they have, our sanctions, and what can we do to make them stronger? And also how much funding is Hezbollah maybe getting out of Venezuela that we may not know about.

Mr. NORIEGA. Well, as a matter of fact, for our sanctions on Iran to be more effective, we should be going after Venezuelan institutions.

Mr. YOHO. That is what I was thinking.

Mr. NORIEGA. The Saderat Bank of Iran, which is involved in all of these illegal activities and rogue nuclear programs, et cetera, wholly owns a bank called the Banco Internacional de Desarrollo in Venezuela. They also have tens or probably hundreds of millions of dollars in every bank in Venezuela today, the Iranians do. And Hezbollah also is able to skim some money out of some of the fundraising activities that they do in their own right, but also in some of these criminal activities with narcoterrorist organizations, so they are able to skim money off of that. My sense of it is they probably take hundreds of millions of dollars because of the foothold that they have and the complicity they have in Venezuela.

Mr. YOHO. Before we go on, Dr. Levitt, what is your opinion with the changing of guards in Venezuela?

Mr. NORIEGA. It bodes very ill, sir.

Mr. YOHO. Yeah.

Mr. NORIEGA. Because Chavez, for all of his bombast and everything, was a strong character who could modulate some of these extreme influences that he comes under. Maduro, on the other hand, is demonstrating that he is very weak and he seems to be following a script that the Cubans have laid out for him. And the Iranians and Hezbollah have every intention of keeping ahold of that, that platform that they have in Venezuela, and I am afraid that without a strong hand, that whatever regime or whatever government takes over for Chavez will not be able to manage this, what Hezbollah and Iran are up to in their territory.

Mr. YOHO. Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Levitt.

Mr. LEVITT. Briefly, the issue of Western infiltration, infiltrating into the United States in particular, is one that is mostly one of, when it comes to hard facts, of vulnerability. There is no question, Roger is right, there is a lot of overlap in terms of smuggling routes, but there is only one known instance of a Hezbollah operative entering the United States from crossing the border illegally. You should take no comfort from that. He was one of the most dangerous Hezbollah people ever to be in this country. I refer to him as kind of Hezbollah's 007. And the person, the Lebanese Mexican

who smuggled him in, admitted that he has smuggled, I think it was something like 1,500 other people in the country, and there is vulnerability. We don't know. I can't tell you that any of them were Hezbollah, I can't tell you none of them were Hezbollah. But that one individual was a pretty scary guy.

In terms of the sanctions and the impact on Hezbollah, the good news is we have done some very, very good work there. There is always more to be done because our adversaries don't just capitulate. It is like squeezing a balloon, so they move someplace else. One of the ways Hezbollah has tried to respond not only to the sanctions against itself, against Hezbollah, but against our sanctions on Iran, which have made it more difficult for Iran to be able to be as generous in funding to Hezbollah, is to expand ever more so into crime, especially into narcotics trafficking, moving the product, especially from South America across the 10th parallel, which law enforcement refers to as Highway 10, to Africa, northward into Europe.

Another point that we raise when we talk to the Europeans, Hezbollah, aside from its terrorist activity, is deeply engaged in criminal activity in the continent, in particular and including moving drugs into Europe. This gives us a whole nother set of tools that we can use. Roger said we should see more indictments. I expect that you will. I know that you will.

Mr. YOHO. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to yield back because I have got to go do my duty and vote. Thank you.

Mr. POE. I thank the gentleman.

I have one last question. Your testimony mentioned not only Hezbollah and Iran, but the Quds Force and Iran working together. Can you explain to me briefly the relationship, if any, between Hezbollah, the Quds Force, and Iran working with the other two, those two organizations together? Whoever wants to? Mr. Fulton, go ahead? Whoever wants to weigh in on that. That will be the last question.

Mr. FULTON. Mr. Chairman, I would just add that, again, that the Quds Force, it is a component of the IRGC. The IRGC is first and foremost concerned with regime preservation and is led fundamentally by the Supreme Leader in that the commander of the IRGC and the Quds Force both report directly to the Supreme Leader. The Quds Force is the organization in Iran that takes the lead in its cooperation with Hezbollah.

Mr. POE. Dr. Levitt?

Mr. LEVITT. Hezbollah is Iran's creation, and the Quds Force is the primary interlocutor with Lebanese Hezbollah. My written statement goes into great detail about the nature of the relationship between them, as does our institute report on Hezbollah and the Quds Force, and Iran's shadow war with the West.

I want to make two points that are maybe contrary to conventional wisdom, however, as we look at this recent trend of events and threats. One, as I alluded to earlier, is that we see these two groups engaging in significant operational cooperation together as they always have, but we also see them a little bit in competition. Right now from the Quds Force's perspective, it is Hezbollah 1, Quds Force nothing. Unfortunately, that means Hezbollah has car-

ried out one successful terrorist attack, Burgas, Bulgaria, and the Quds Force has not.

On the flip side, we also see an element of a lack of deconfliction. So in January of last year, when Hussein Atris, a Swedish Hezbollah operative, was arrested there in a case that has ties back to South America, explosives that he was sending there, just a couple of weeks later an IRGC Quds Force cell that was putting together sticky bombs was discovered there, not through any of our activities but because the bomb they were putting together exploded in their hands. It appears that there was not enough deconfliction. You would think that the Quds Force would have stopped its activities in Thailand at a time when Thai, U.S., Israeli, all international law enforcement and intelligence agencies were supremely focused on Thailand.

We have seen it in another case that has gotten basically no press, and that is Bulgaria. Not only was the attack in Burgas, Bulgaria, the second Hezbollah attempt to carry out an attack there, but just about a week or two later authorities found an IRGC official conducting surveillance of a synagogue in Sofia. So, again, it is unclear why there is this level of deconfliction, but there is.

Mr. POE. Last word, Ambassador Noriega, briefly.

Mr. NORIEGA. Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Twenty seconds.

IRGC has a presence, a foothold in Venezuela. There are about 70 Iranian companies, many of them sanctioned by the U.N., EU, U.S., for involvement in the ballistic missile program or the illicit nuclear program, that have industrial footprints in the United States and obviously accounts there, too. And IRGC Major General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, of the Revolutionary Guard Corps' aerospace program, has visited Venezuela on two occasions in the last 3 years to sites nearby of nitroglycerin and nitrocellulose plants associated with the Venezuelan petroleum industry. So there is something going on, on the chemical side there, too, that needs to be looked into.

Mr. POE. I want to thank all three of our witnesses for being here today and your expertise. Without objection, the chart, page 1 and 2, of the global map and the detailed back page, will be made part of the record. And this committee hearing is adjourned. Thank you once again.

[Whereupon, at 2:23 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X



MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade
Ted Poe (R-TX), Chairman

March 19, 2013

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at www.foreignaffairs.house.gov):

DATE: Wednesday, March 20, 2013

TIME: 1:30 p.m.

SUBJECT: Hezbollah's Strategic Shift: A Global Terrorist Threat

WITNESSES: Mr. Will Fulton
Iran Analyst, Critical Threats Project
American Enterprise Institute

Matthew Levitt, Ph.D.
Director
Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

The Honorable Roger Noriega
Founder and Managing Director
Vision Americas LLC
*(Former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs and
Former Ambassador to the Organization of American States)*



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Terrorism, Nonproliferation, and Trade HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 03/20/2013 Room RHOB 2172

Starting Time 1:31 Ending Time 2:23

Recesses NA (to) (to)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Ted Poe

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)

Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

Hezbollah's Strategic Shift: A Global Terrorist Threat

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Reps. Brooks, Cook, Cotton, Kennedy, Kinzinger, Perry, Poe, Sherman, and Yoho

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

Rep. Weber

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

Prepared Statement of Mr. Will Fulton

Prepared Statement of Dr. Matthew Levitt

Prepared Statement of The Honorable Roger Noriega

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 2:23


Subcommittee Staff Director

