

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, Members of the Committee—thank you for inviting me here today to provide comment on the important topics of homeland and national security.

Killing Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, both Specially-Designated Terrorists, provides for a safer Middle East and a safer homeland in America.

### **Soleimani’s Legacy of Terror:**

In strategy and warfare, leadership, networks, and resourcing matter. Soleimani and Muhandis were experienced commanders overseeing a vast terror network. Backed by Iran’s \$26 Billion military budget,<sup>1</sup> together they carried out three decades of terror against the U.S. and its vital interests and allies in the Middle East, to include (but are not limited to)<sup>2</sup>:

- i. Training, resourcing, and resupplying Shi’a militias in Iraq to disrupt U.S. operations;
- ii. Resourcing Hezbollah to attack Israel;
- iii. Planning and resourcing the thwarted attack on a Washington, D.C. restaurant;<sup>3</sup>
- iv. Creating money laundering schemes within the United States to fund terrorism;<sup>4</sup>
- v. Protecting the Bin Laden family, al Qaeda leadership, and Taliban members immediately after the 9-11 attacks;
- vi. Training, resourcing, and transporting Abu Musab al Zarqawi and other al Qaeda members to fight coalition forces in Iraq;
- vii. Resourcing the Houthi rebels in Yemen to attack Yemen and Saudi Arabia;
- viii. Resourcing and commanding multiple recent attacks against U.S. interests
  - o Shooting down two drones
  - o Seizing oil tankers
  - o Attacking Saudi oil fields
  - o Killing an interpreter and wounding two soldiers in Kirkuk
  - o Attacking the U.S. embassy in Baghdad

Just as Osama bin Laden orchestrated the attacks that killed nearly 3,000 Americans, Soleimani orchestrated attacks that killed and maimed over 6,500 Americans through improvised explosive devices alone. Just as bin Laden continued to pose a clear and present danger to American interests worldwide until his death, so did Soleimani. Soleimani, however, was more dangerous than bin Laden because he was flush with resources from Iran, a designated State Sponsor of Terror, whose defense budget has risen over 60% between 2015 and 2018 from \$16B to \$26B.

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<sup>1</sup> Decoding Iran’s Defence Spending, *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, November 13, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *The Exile - The Stunning Story of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda in Flight*, Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy, Bloomsbury (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Iranian Charged in Terror Plot, *The Washington Post*, Jerry Markon & Karen DeYoung (October 12, 2011); and Iranian agents once plotted to kill the Saudi Ambassador in D.C. - The case reads like a spy thriller, *The Washington Post*, Reis Thebault (January 4, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Attorney’s Office SDNY Press Release: *Hizballah Related Money Laundering Scheme*, December 15, 2011; and U.S. Attorney’s Office SDNY Press Release: *Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces \$102 Million Settlement of Civil Forfeiture and Money laundering Claims Against Lebanese Canadian Bank*, June 25, 2013.

Unlike Bin Laden, who spent his final years as an isolated hermit, Soleimani was able to use his title and rank as a shield from prosecution and retribution. He skillfully used the Iranian-state apparatus as his “keys to the kingdom” of the Middle East. With approval from the highest-authority in Iran, the Supreme Leader, Soleimani used Iranian-state owned businesses and banks as virtual cash-machines to fund and support his terrorist activities, and those of proxy groups including Hamas, Hezbollah, and al Qaeda. To think that Soleimani was not planning or actively trying to kill Americans at the time of his death is to deny or ignore everything he had done in Iraq for years preceding his death. Soleimani spent those years zealously targeting Americans and killing them - more so than any single individual terrorist in recent times.

### **Impact on U.S. Service members, Contractors and their Families:**

Indeed, Soleimani was an expert at death and destruction. In April of 2007 I had just returned from a 13-month tour of duty as the Deputy Commanding General of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan and was appointed as the Deputy Director of the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization—responsible for training the force, defeating enemy IEDs, and attacking enemy IED networks. Accordingly, we had operations and intelligence cells stateside and in both the Iraq and Afghanistan theaters of operations.

Soleimani developed, refined and deployed explosively formed penetrators (EFPs)—lethal roadside bombs made of an Iranian-milled six-inch copper disc, PVC/Steel pipe, urea nitrate, a blasting cap, and typically, a passive infrared switch trigger. When a target crossed the beam of the passive infrared switch it ignited the blasting cap which in turn detonated the explosives, propelling a molten copper disc at 8,000 feet per second through its mark, killing and maiming whoever might be in the projectile’s (and its many fragment’s) path of destruction. Frequently the destruction from an EFP sealed the vehicle doors shut, leaving American soldiers to burn alive. Often Soleimani’s EFPs were deployed in multiple “arrays” where several copper discs would punch through Humvees and other fighting vehicles, ripping arms and legs from servicemen and women. Soleimani and his chief lieutenant Muhandis were the masterminds behind, and suppliers of, the EFPs. Soleimani and his terrorist proxies spearheaded Iran’s efforts to inflict death and destruction on Americans in an attempt to disrupt American foreign policy objectives in the region, and to deny the Iraqi people a free and democratic Iraq.

The Department of Defense reports that, at least, 602 brave Americans were killed by Soleimani’s lethal IEDs. While accurate, that number is misleading. For every casualty there are historically tenfold wounded. The math then suggests that Soleimani killed and wounded over 6,500 American servicemen and women. Even that number in no way captures the costs to tens of thousands of American spouses, children, parents, and communities all ripped apart as if they themselves were hit by these gruesome bombs.

### **Iran and Soleimani Responsible:**

Just in the last 18 months, two U.S. federal judges each separately found Iran liable for their role in killing and injuring Americans in Iraq by providing material support to Iran’s proxy terrorist groups. Those U.S. District Court cases are *Karcher et al v. the Islamic Republic of Iran* and

*Fritz et al v. the Islamic Republic of Iran* (attached). Evidence in both cases proved that Soleimani and Muhandis, both senior leaders in Iran's IRGC Quds Force acted on behalf of Iran to ensure Americans would die. Both of these cases introduced expert witness testimony from combat veterans on the front lines in Iraq that describe Iran's role in supplying EFPs to Iraqi militias that were carrying out these brutal attacks. I submit these two federal district court rulings and refer to just a few quotes of supporting expert witness testimony<sup>5</sup> buttressing each:

- Former CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus said at an MNF-I press conference in April 2007:

*“And there's no question, again, that Iranian financing is taking place through the Quds force of the Iranian Republican Guards Corps (to Iraqi fighters).”*

- Former Division and JIEDDO commander Lieutenant General Mike Oates said:

*“In fact, one of Iran's primary forms of material support to the Special Groups was financing, manufacturing and deploying EFPs.”*

- The State Department issued a country report that stated:

*“Iran's Qods Force continued to provide Iraqi militants with Iranian-produced advanced rockets, sniper rifles, automatic weapons, and mortars that have killed Iraqi and Coalition Forces as well as civilians.”*

- Dr. David Gartenstein-Ross, said of Muhandis:

*“Muhandis was given Iranian citizenship in the 1990s, and became an advisor to IRGC-QF commander Qasem Soleimani. Muhandis returned to Iraq in March 2003 and created Kata'ib Hizballah in 2007.”*

### **Authorization of Use of Military Force:**

As they were moving freely about the region coordinating terror with Hezbollah and Shi'a militias in Iraq, Soleimani and Muhandis presented themselves in a designated combat zone<sup>6</sup> as the leaders of designated terrorist organizations, the Quds Force<sup>7</sup> and Kataib Hezbollah. President Trump responded appropriately under the same Authorization of Use of Military Force<sup>8</sup> that President Obama used against state and nonstate actors in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, the Northern Tier of Africa, and other locations. Indeed, Iran never stopped attacking

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<sup>5</sup> *Karcher, et al. v. Islamic Republic of Iran* Case No. 1:16-cv-00232-CKK (Aug. 26, 2019); and *Fritz et al. v. Islamic Republic of Iran* Case No. 1:15-cv-00456-RDM (August 2, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Executive Order 12744 (The Arabian Peninsula Areas).

<sup>7</sup> Executive Order 13224.

<sup>8</sup> AUMF, Pub. L. 107-40, codified at 115 Stat. 224 and passed as S.J.Res. 23 by the United States Congress on September 14, 2001.

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U.S. interests in the Middle East even after the Iran nuclear deal. Given Soleimani's assistance to al Qaeda in the immediate aftermath of the 9-11 attacks, the strike on Soleimani was especially consistent with the AUMF. Indeed, President Trump's strike was part of our national security strategy of pursuing terror "threats to their source."<sup>9</sup>

### **Imminent Threat:**

Commanders with combat experience leading servicemen and women in harm's way are required to make life or death threat assessments as part of their job. Threats requiring decisive action are usually kinetic and complex, derived from a vast array of information and intelligence that needs to be considered holistically, often times in a matter of moments. The forces loyal to and commanded by Soleimani and Muhandis had already attacked and killed an American interpreter and wounded two soldiers with rockets, and then subsequently attacked the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. Whether larger successive attacks were minutes, days, or weeks from happening, the fact that Soleimani/Muhandis-led terrorists had already attacked the United States twice in a matter of days, coupled with their Commanders' battlefield presence and their long and malevolent pasts, underscores the very imminence of a real and present threat. It would have been irresponsible for President Trump not to act. And he did so decisively and proportionally.

While serving as the Deputy Commanding General of US Forces in Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007, I directed several combat missions to include drone strikes, artillery strikes, air assaults, and other operations, some of which found me on the ground with the soldiers conducting those missions. Everything I have seen, read and understand regarding this strike underscores its legality, importance, and proportionate nature to reset the balance of power in the Middle East with respect to U.S. interests and Iranian influence.

### **Regional Strategy:**

This Administration's policy and strategy in the region is well stated in the National Security Strategy document published in December 2017, and in multiple open source commentaries. I will summarize by saying broadly the strategy is to:

- Stop Iran's drive to hegemony in the region;
- Prevent their development of nuclear weapons;
- Disrupt their exportation of terror around the region and world;
- Coerce the Iranian government to stop oppressing its people;
- Root out terrorism at its source; and
- Protect U.S. vital interests in the region.

### **Eliminating Soleimani Makes the U.S. Safer:**

The Soleimani strike is consistent with U.S. National Security strategy as it relates to Homeland Security. Specifically, the 2017 National Security Strategy highlights the Administration's plan to secure the homeland by:

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<sup>9</sup> *National Security Strategy*, President Donald J. Trump, December 2017.

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- i. Secure U.S. Borders and Territory:
  - a. Defend Against Weapons of Mass Destruction.
  - b. Combat Biothreats and Pandemics.
  - c. Strengthen Border and Immigration Policy.
- ii. *Pursue Threats to Their Source:*<sup>10</sup>
  - a. Defeat Jihadist Terrorists.
  - b. Dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations.
- iii. Keep America Safe in the Cyber Era.
- iv. Promote American Resilience.

By definition, if we are concerned about Iran exporting terror either to the Middle East or to the United States, if we eliminate their chief exporter, Soleimani, then we have disrupted their operations, if not dismantled them in the near term. The Quds Force is tightly aligned with Hezbollah and its far-reaching terror tentacles around the world. They were a threat forty years ago and they are a threat now. As has been our strategy for the last two decades, we must find these threats as near to their wellspring as possible and eliminate them.

Practically, in my roles as an education leader here in Washington, DC and in North Carolina, as Secretary of Transportation of North Carolina, and now as a chief executive with Air Data Solutions, an infrastructure and agriculture imaging company, I have been steeped in analysis of threats to and responsibility for specific homeland infrastructure and citizens over the last 10 years.

That Iranian sleeper cells exist in the United States is a matter of record<sup>11</sup>. Soleimani's death has created confusion in the Quds and Hezbollah terrorist command and control networks and impacts the resourcing of terrorist operations abroad. Similarly, when we kill a high value target such as Soleimani or Muhandis, their fellow terrorists begin communicating and making mistakes. We most likely have new and actionable intelligence based upon the Soleimani strike. The idea is to keep the pressure on the enemy and never let up.

That notwithstanding, the Iranians have long persisted with "Death to America" chants and while I believe the Soleimani strike presents an opportunity for diplomatic opening, there undoubtedly will be Iranian hard-liners who wish to continue with the reign of terror. To that end, since prior to recent events, I have been and remain concerned about:

- i. Cyber-attacks on key infrastructure such as airport air traffic systems;
- ii. Physical security of soft targets such as schools and mass transit for shock value;
- iii. Attacks against seaports to impact commerce;
- iv. Smuggling of weapons and other resources to enable attacks;
- v. Biological warfare against crops affecting our food supply.

These are persistent threats, which with Soleimani gone will be much harder for Iran to execute. The strategy now should be one of continuing to engage Iran with all elements of national power,

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Iranian Charged in Terror Plot, *The Washington Post*, Jerry Markon & Karen DeYoung (October 12, 2011).

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diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, to dissuade Iran from its longstanding predilection to kill Americans.

With Soleimani and Muhandis removed from the equation, we have an opportunity to positively reshape the dynamic in the Middle East toward peace and enhance homeland security. As a young United States Military Academy cadet in 1981 my classmates and I witnessed first-hand the return of the U.S. hostages in Iran to American soil at West Point where they spent their first weeks reintegrating. The cruelty of the Iranian Islamic Revolution is seared in my memory, and I am personally proud that we have begun to fight back.

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of The Committee—thank you again for this opportunity to discuss my experience and views on this important issue and with respect to countering terrorism and protecting the homeland. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anthony J. Tata". The signature is stylized, with the first letters of the first and last names being prominent.

Anthony J. Tata  
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