

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

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

Written Statement

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10:00 AM

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the critical issue of countering Iran and Iran-backed threats to the United States. The Department of State is actively engaged in a comprehensive effort to address the multifaceted threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United States homeland and to U.S. personnel and facilities.

Iran-Backed Threats to the United States

The threats posed by Iran-backed terrorism are among the most pressing challenges we face to international peace and security. Today, I will focus on Iran-supported terrorism against the U.S. homeland or U.S. personnel and facilities abroad and how the Bureau of Counterterrorism addresses those threats.

Iran has been designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism since 1984 and has long been directly involved in attack plotting against the U.S. homeland and U.S. personnel and activities, mainly but not exclusively via Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ (IRGC) Quds Force. For decades, the Quds Force has engaged in many assassination attempts, terrorist plots, and other violence against those whom the Iranian regime views as enemies, including through ongoing plots against U.S. citizens and former United States government officials. In the past few years, we have seen a rise in plotting attacks against American citizens or on American soil, including a disrupted plot targeting a former U.S. National Security Advisor in 2022.

Iran also continues to support a range of proxies, who are engaged in terrorist plots and activities in the Middle East and beyond. Hamas would not have been able to carry out its devastating October 7 terrorist attack without Iran’s long-time assistance, funding, and training. Hamas’ terrorist attack on Israel was a sobering reminder of the enduring threat of terrorism enabled by Iran and our imperative to protect American citizens, as well as our partners and allies, from this threat. Approximately 1,200 people were killed and over 3,400 wounded by Hamas during its October 7 attack, including approximately three dozen American citizens. And among the

hundreds taken hostage by Hamas, a handful are also American, and we are doing everything in our power to ensure that they are returned.

In addition to Hamas, Iran's support for terrorist groups, such as Hizballah, various Iran-aligned militia groups in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen, resulted in repeated attacks and hostage taking against U.S. personnel and facilities in the Middle East – from the Marine Corps barracks bombing in Beirut over 40 years ago to the death of three American servicemen and the wounding of dozens more in Jordan this past January. Iran-backed groups not only directly threaten the U.S. homeland and American personnel and facilities, but as we have seen in the past few months, also destabilize global commerce. We must remain vigilant against and disrupt this plotting and destabilizing activity. As Secretary Blinken stated at a United Nations Security Council Ministerial Meeting last October regarding Hamas, we know where Iran-backed terrorism leads to death, destruction, suffering, and darkness.

In addition to Iran-backed attacks, Iran's development, procurement, and proliferation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), missiles and missile-related technology remains one of the greatest challenges to international peace and security. We see the horrific impact of Iran's provision of missiles and UAVs to designated terrorist organizations and militant proxies that directly threaten the security of U.S. personnel and installations as well as our allies, partners, and interests. We see the destructive result of Iran's transfer of lethal UAVs to Russia that have been used in Russia's war, striking civilian infrastructure, and killing civilians in Ukraine.

The Hamas attack on October 7, enabled by Iran, has also triggered a wave of reported anti-Semitic and Islamophobic attacks around the world. In Senate testimony earlier this month, Avril Haines, the Director of National Intelligence, highlighted the “generational impact” that the Gaza conflict, instigated by Hamas, will have on terrorism. She stated that both al-Qa’ida and ISIS, inspired by Hamas, “have directed supporters to conduct attacks against Israeli and U.S. interests.” Furthermore, she emphasized the Hamas attack “is inspiring acts of antisemitism and Islamophobic terror worldwide.”

In the face of these challenges, it is crucial that we take a strong stance against hate and violent extremism. We must ensure that the conflict in Gaza does not expand further, because Iran and its terrorist proxies would benefit from global instability. As we navigate complex global threats, addressing these issues remains a critical priority for our broader efforts to preserve a rules-based international order.

Countering Iran-Backed Terrorist Threats to the United States

Countering threats posed by Iran to the United States homeland and U.S. personnel and facilities abroad requires a comprehensive strategy, integrating diplomatic, financial, and informational tools to disrupt Iran-backed threats. To counter Iranian and Iran-backed threats, the Department of State is taking a multi-pronged approach, including:

1. Strengthening Alliances and Partnerships

Working closely with our allies and partners in the Middle East and beyond to present a united front against Iran's aggressive actions. This includes security assistance, joint military exercises, and intelligence sharing to counteract Iranian influence and threats. At the forefront of our strategy is the reinforcement of diplomatic engagements and alliances. We are working closely with our partners around the globe to isolate Iran multilaterally and diplomatically until it ceases its support for terrorism. Through the Countering Transnational Terrorism Forum, at the United Nations, and elsewhere, we advocate for stringent sanctions against Iranian entities involved in terrorist activities, aiming to cut off the financial and material support that fuels these groups.

The State Department has been leading diplomatic campaigns to press other governments to take action to crack down on Iran-backed terrorism. We have achieved some good results and will continue the effort. Over the past several years, 16 countries have designated, banned or restricted Hizballah, which is not only an important symbolic declaration, but also constrains Hizballah's ability to operate freely in these locales. Since October 7, a number of governments have designated both Hamas and individual leaders and other members as terrorists – an important step in ensuring that Hamas is held responsible for the October 7 attacks.

2. Economic Sanctions

Sanctions are another powerful tool to constrain Iran's finances and support networks. The State Department implements and enforces stringent economic sanctions against the Iranian government, IRGC, and affiliated entities to limit their access to the financial resources needed to fund their malign activities. Our targeted sanctions are designed to dismantle the complex financial networks that underpin Iran's support for terrorism. The Department of State, in coordination with the Treasury Department, continuously works to identify and disrupt individuals, entities, and countries that facilitate the funding of terrorism.

For example, the Administration has recently sanctioned individuals who were part of a criminal network that attempted to assassinate U.S.-based dissidents and Iranian regime opponents at the behest of Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security. Additionally, under counterterrorism authority Executive Order (E.O.) 13224, the Administration designated a procurement network facilitating the illegal export of U.S. goods and technology to end users in Iran, including the Central Bank of Iran; the IRGC –Quds Force deputy commander; and companies involved in shipping over \$100 million in Iranian commodities on behalf of Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics.

3. Supporting Counterterrorism Capacities Globally

Our defense of the U.S. homeland does not stop at our own physical border. Recognizing that no country can face its terrorism challenges alone, the United States is committed to enhancing the counterterrorism capabilities of our allies and partners. Through training, joint exercises, and the provision of counterterrorism equipment, we help build the resilience of partner nations, enabling them to better prevent and respond to terrorist threats. This collaborative approach not only strengthens our collective security but also sends a clear message that we stand united against the forces of terror. For years, the Bureau of Counterterrorism has dedicated funding to counter Iran-backed terrorism. We have used this funding to bolster our partners' ability to address the Iranian terrorist threat in the Middle East, Europe, South America and elsewhere.

The Bureau of Counterterrorism is also working to improve border security abroad and counter terrorist travel by encouraging and assisting our foreign partners to employ effective threat-based security systems, expand information sharing on terrorist threats, and strengthen transportation and traveler screening procedures. By enhancing the U.S. government's understanding of the terrorist threat and adding layers to our shared defenses against terrorism we are identifying and neutralizing terrorist threats before they reach our borders.

4. Countering Disinformation

We also must expose and counter Iran's disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining the U.S., destabilizing the Middle East, and inspiring attacks in the United States and against U.S. personnel and installations around the world. In the age of information, the battle against terrorism extends into the digital realm. Iran-backed groups often exploit social media and the internet to spread propaganda, recruit followers, and incite violence. In response, we have bolstered our efforts to counter these narratives. Through strategic communications and public diplomacy, we aim to discredit the violent ideologies that feed terrorism, offering instead a narrative of peace, stability, and mutual respect among nations.

Conclusion

The threats posed by Iran are complex and evolving, requiring a dynamic and multifaceted response from the United States and our allies. Through a combination of diplomatic, economic, and military strategies, we are committed to countering Iran's aggressive actions and ensuring the safety and security of the United States. Protecting the United States homeland and U.S. personnel and facilities abroad against terrorist threats is our top priority. Thank you again, I look forward to answering your questions.