



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

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

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

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

PRESENTED MARCH 20, 2024

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

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

TERRORISM THREAT ASSESSMENT

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

IRAN THREAT OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POST OCTOBER 7 – IRAN & HAMAS

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

HIZBALLAH

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

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

CONCLUSION

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