

DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
WASHINGTON, DC 20511

JUN 03 2015

The Honorable Marco Rubio
United States Senate

The Honorable Dan Coats
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Cotton
United States Senate

The Honorable Susan Collins
United States Senate

The Honorable James Risch
United States Senate

The Honorable James Lankford
United States Senate

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate

Dear Senators:

The United States (US) Intelligence Community (IC) continues to assess that Iran and Hizballah directly threaten the interests of the United States and our allies and that Hizballah remains a global terrorist threat. This has been the consistent view of the IC for more than three decades.

Iran remains the foremost state sponsor of terrorism and is increasing its ability to influence regional crises and conduct terrorism. Iran is doing this largely through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) and Lebanese Hizballah, as well as the support and use of sectarian political and militant proxies closely aligned with the IRGC-QF and its anti-Western ideology.

Iran and Hizballah's efforts in Syria have been instrumental in preventing the collapse of the Asad regime, which they view as critical to maintaining their "axis of resistance" against Israel and the West, preventing spillover violence into Lebanon, and protecting their influence. They have sent billions of dollars in military and economic aid, trained pro-regime and Shia militants, and deployed their own fighters into the country. Iran and Hizballah have also leveraged allied Iraqi Shia militant and terrorist groups—which receive training in Iran—to participate in pro-Asad operations.

Iran continues to mount a broad military campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq through its provision of funds, weapons, training, and direct operational support to Shia militias dedicated to preserving the Shia-dominated Iraqi government. These militias have also threatened to conduct terrorist attacks against US interests in response to US involvement in Iraq.

Hizballah is committed to using terrorism and has the capability to attack its perceived enemies worldwide with little to no warning, notwithstanding the group's

ongoing involvement in Syria. Hizballah takes a calculated approach in determining when and how to use terrorism and/or respond to perceived Israeli actions, but is willing to take measured actions that could have the potential to risk a broader conflict should it feel this level of response is necessary.

Iran and Hizballah continue to provide support to Palestinian militant groups as a means of countering Israel. Iran in the last year tried to smuggle weapons into Gaza to resupply Palestinian militant groups, particularly Palestine Islamic Jihad, and Iranian governmental officials have declared their willingness to resume Iran's military support of Hamas.

Iran is attempting to provide aid to its Huthi partners in Yemen and senior Hizballah leadership has spoken out against the Saudi offensive against the Huthis. Hizballah is providing Huthi militants with training and advice.

In Bahrain, Iranian-linked Shia opposition groups, including the 14 February Youth Coalition, the Al Ashtar Brigades, and the Al Mukhtar Brigades, have been involved in attacks and some have publicly criticized US influence in Bahrain.

Specifically regarding your concerns about the 2015 *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community* the unclassified assessment clearly outlines the threat Iran poses to the US and our regional interests, including its support to militant groups, stating:

- "The Islamic Republic of Iran is an ongoing threat to US national interests because of its support to the Asad regime in Syria, promulgation of anti-Israeli policies, development of advanced military capabilities, and pursuit of its nuclear program."
- "Iranian assistance has been instrumental in expanding the capabilities of Shia militants in Iraq."
- "Iran's actions to protect and empower Shia communities are fueling growing fears and sectarian responses."

During the 26 February open hearing on worldwide threats with the Senate Armed Services Committee, for which this assessment was prepared, I responded in the affirmative when Senator Ayotte asked whether I still characterize Iran as one of the largest state sponsors of terrorism in the world.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has also testified in other open venues on the terrorist threat posed by Iran. On 12 February 2015, Director Nicholas Rasmussen of the National Counterterrorism Center—contained within my office—also testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. During that hearing, Director Rasmussen testified:

- "Beyond their role in Syria and Iraq, Iran and Lebanese Hizballah remain committed to conducting terrorist activities worldwide and we are

concerned their activities could either endanger or target US and other Western interests. Iran remains the foremost state sponsor of terrorism, and works through the Iranian Revolutionary Guards-Qods Force and Ministry of Intelligence and Security to support groups that target US and Israeli interests globally. Hizballah has engaged in an aggressive terrorist campaign in recent years and continues attack planning abroad."

Director Rasmussen also provided the following response to questions in that hearing from Senator Lankford:

- "Iranian sponsorship and association with particularly Lebanese Hizballah provides a global reach to that organization. So I could not give you a direct answer as to how many countries, but I would certainly argue it is global. It extends to pretty much every single region of the world."

The 2015 *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community* was written as an overview of top threats facing the United States. It is not now, nor has it been, a comprehensive listing of every threat facing the United States. This year, there were many topics to consider, including ISIL, cyber threats, and events involving Ukraine and Russia, to name a few. A specific reference to the terrorist threat from Iran and Hizballah—which was not included in any of the drafts of the testimony—would have been appropriate for the 2015 Assessment, but the lack of its inclusion is in no way a change in the IC's assessment.

Sincerely,



James R. Clapper