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## How to Contain and Roll Back Iranian-Backed Militias

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Chairman Poe, Ranking Member Keating, and distinguished committee members: Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing on Iranian-backed militias. I'm proud to be giving testimony to the House for the first time as a new American citizen, an immigrant, and an adopted son of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

We're here today because Iran is in the process of spreading its military and political influence across the Middle East to a greater extent than ever before. How is it achieving this?

Iran is investing heavily in the survival of the Assad regime in Syria, without doubt. But what makes the current situation so dangerous is that Iran has found an economical and sustainable means of resourcing its expansion -- the so-called Iranian Foreign Legion comprised of Iran-backed militias. This formula works for one simple reason: At little cost, Iran can take poor, enthusiastic young men from Arab countries and Afghanistan and throw them into the meat-grinder of the region's wars.

In the past, we have seen that Iran is quite hesitant to risk its own people, particularly members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). In Iraq, we saw Iran withdraw its IRGC operatives after just a few of them were detained by U.S. forces in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

Instead of risking its own people, Iran has hit on an alternative way of putting "boots on the ground." Iran can draw upon a deep well of volunteers and wage-seekers in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and the Gulf States.

This will increasingly allow Iran to "fight to the last Arab" or "the last Afghan" in its regional wars, because these casualties bear no political repercussions in Iran. This is a capability that cannot be allowed to develop any further because it is a potential war-winner -- against America, our allies in Iraq and Yemen and Syria, and even against Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-worst-case-analysis-irans-likely-responses-to-an-israeli-preventive>

## Iran-Backed Militias in Iraq

Iran-backed militias were openly operating in Iraq from the very first days of the U.S.-led occupation in 2003. In fact, we accepted these forces as a natural part of the landscape because they had been operating against Saddam Hussein's regime for over two decades.<sup>2</sup>

The Badr Corps (today the Badr Organization, a political party with a 15,000-strong militia) worked alongside the United States in Iraq from 2003 to 2011, sometimes assisting U.S. initiatives but always taking its orders from the IRGC in Iran.<sup>3</sup> The IRGC also held back parts of Badr to use as a separate "action arm" inside Iraq. The U.S.-designated terrorist group Kataib Hezbollah, led by U.S.-designated terrorist Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, is one such faction.<sup>4</sup>

Aided by Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran began to further split off parts of Moqtada al-Sadr's nationalist-Islamist movement to form other stand-alone Iranian-backed "special groups" such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq.<sup>5</sup> These forces were lumped together with other non-Iranian-backed Iraqi militias under the administrative umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq in June 2014, following the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State.

The Iranian-backed militias are now a formal part of the Iraqi Security Forces, even including the U.S.-designated terrorist group Kataib Hezbollah.<sup>6</sup> Sympathizers of the Iranian-backed militias and even full members also work inside the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Security Forces (such as the Iraqi Army and Federal Police).<sup>7</sup> The risks posed by Iranian-backed militias have thus become more serious and complex.

First, the Iranian-backed militias can now draw on a state budget (\$1.96 billion in 2017) to defray the costs of running militias in Iraq.<sup>8</sup> Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iranian-backed militia commander, is the operational commander of the PMF and distributes its budget.

This situation could worsen in time. Badr leader Hadi al-Ameri is presently, according to reputable polling, Iraq's most popular Shia leader. And another Badr leader, Qassem al-Araji, is the Minister of Interior, running Iraq's largest ministry, despite having been in an orange jumpsuit at U.S. detention facilities for twenty-six months during the occupation period prior to 2011.<sup>9</sup> If Badr leaders continue to bow to Iranian pressure, an even larger share of Iraq's defense budget could end up in Iranian-backed hands.

Second, Iran can use covert financial aid and provision of weapons to bolster the Iranian-backed militias within the PMF, over and above what the Iraqi budget provides.

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<sup>2</sup> See my piece with Michael Eisenstadt for a background on Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/mini-hizballahs-revolutionary-guard-knock-offs-and-the-future-of-irans-mili>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-future-of-iraqs-armed-forces>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/tehran-seeks-to-consolidate-power-in-iraq-in-2018>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Third, Iran can hide its "fifth column" under the legal protections of being part of the PMF.<sup>10</sup> Until the Iraqi government tightens its command and control of the Iranian-backed militias within the PMF, Iran can use the PMF umbrella to legitimize the running of training camps and the retention of heavy weapons (such as tanks) by the IRGC proxies inside Iraq.<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, Iran can use Iraq as a power projection hub for striking out into Syria (drawing on reinforcements from the PMF) or the Gulf states (using Bahraini, Kuwaiti, and Saudi Shia, trained and equipped at PMF bases in Iraq). This phenomenon is already unfolding.<sup>12</sup>

### **Iranian Support to the Houthis in Yemen**

The situation in Yemen is not nearly so bad but it deserves close attention. I recently heard Iranian influence with the Houthi rebels in Yemen characterized as "shallow-rooted," and I think this is an apt description.

The Houthis are desperate, having fought wars against the Saudi Arabian-backed Yemeni government from 2004 to 2014,<sup>13</sup> and then having over-reached by trying to seize the whole country in 2014-2015. However, the Houthis are not yet a full proxy like Lebanese Hezbollah, though they accept Iranian help. The IRGC is providing niche support that has transformed the Houthi capacity to inflict pain on Saudi Arabia and to threaten sea-lanes of communication in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab, and Suez Canal areas.

Iranian support has enabled the Houthis -- tough mountain fighters but hardly NASA rocketeers -- to rebuild surface-to-air missiles into Burkan-1 and Burkan-2 missiles.<sup>14</sup> These Burkan missiles have given the Houthis an ability to launch large surface-to-surface missiles as far out as Riyadh and to strike cities along the western coast of Saudi Arabia such as Taif, Jeddah, and Yanbu. Six missiles of the Burkan class have now landed more than 500 km inside Saudi Arabia in the last year.<sup>15</sup> The Houthis claim that they will next target Abu Dhabi,<sup>16</sup> another city packed with civilians, Western expatriates, and U.S. military facilities.

Since Iran began supporting the Houthis, the rebels have been showing greater and greater technical sophistication. They have used "suicide drones" to strike Saudi Arabian Patriot missile battery radars.<sup>17</sup> A few thousand dollars' worth of drone is capable of putting out of action U.S.-supplied radars that cost hundreds of millions of dollars. Since Iran began supporting the Houthis, the rebels have also developed

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iraqs-popular-demobilisation>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/foreign-fighters-among-the-hashd-al-shaabi>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/yemens-forever-war-the-houthi-rebellion>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/07/yemeni-houthis-release-video-of-missile-launch-on-saudi-oil-refinery.php>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.janes.com/images/assets/330/72330/Yemeni\\_rebels\\_enhance\\_ballistic\\_missile\\_campaign.pdf](http://www.janes.com/images/assets/330/72330/Yemeni_rebels_enhance_ballistic_missile_campaign.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2017/09/14/535158/UAE-not-safe-from-Yemens-Ansarullah-missiles>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/03/22/houthi-forces-appear-to-be-using-iranian-made-drones-to-ram-saudi-air-defenses-in-yemen-report-says/?utm\\_term=.526216e2b23e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/03/22/houthi-forces-appear-to-be-using-iranian-made-drones-to-ram-saudi-air-defenses-in-yemen-report-says/?utm_term=.526216e2b23e)

"suicide drone boats"<sup>18</sup> that have crippled one Saudi Arabian warship (January 30, 2017) and been used unsuccessfully to attack Saudi oil-loading terminals on the Red Sea (April 26, 2017).

Since Iran began providing support, the Houthis have fired multiple anti-shipping missiles at UAE and U.S. vessels in the Red Sea.<sup>19</sup> U.S. cruise missiles destroyed Houthi radar systems in October 2016.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to these high-profile systems, Iran has been found by international arms trafficking specialists<sup>21</sup> to have imported advanced antitank guided missiles (ATGMs), sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, small arms, and ammunition into Yemen, in violation of a UN arms embargo on Yemen's Houthis and in defiance of UN Resolution 2231, which bans Iranian arms exports.<sup>22</sup>

### **Iranian-Backed Militias in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia**

I also want to highlight one additional area of concern that may not be fully covered by other witnesses. This is the slowly growing role of Iranian-backed militias in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states of Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Post-revolution Iran has always employed its intelligence services and the IRGC to exploit tensions between the Sunni-led GCC states and their Shia minorities.

Since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, when Saudi Arabia and the UAE deployed military forces to underpin the Bahraini royal family, Iran has been increasing its support to militant proxies inside Bahrain. The Washington Institute has been closely tracking the movement of advanced roadside bombing components into bombmaking workshops in Bahrain.<sup>23</sup> The components have been shown to come from smuggling boats that originated in Iraqi and Iranian waters. Personnel seized by the Bahraini security forces have stated that they were trained by Iran in bases in Iraq and Iran.<sup>24</sup>

Iranian-backed militants have begun to set up resistance cells that closely resemble the anti-U.S. insurgent cells established in Iraq between 2005 and 2011. For example, on December 28, 2013, a speedboat was tracked by coastal radar and intercepted carrying large quantities of advanced bomb components, including thirty-one Claymore-type antipersonnel fragmentation mines and twelve armor-piercing explosively formed penetrator (EFP) charges, plus electronics to arm and fire the devices.<sup>25</sup> This includes building whole houses over hidden bomb-making workshops containing multi-ton industrial presses.<sup>26</sup> The result is that the number of lethal explosive devices being used by insurgents in Bahrain has skyrocketed.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/idex/2017/02/19/new-houthi-weapon-emerges-a-drone-boat/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/houthi-antishipping-attacks-in-the-bab-al-mandab-strait>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/10/12/more-missiles-fired-from-rebel-held-territory-in-yemen-at-u-s-navy-ships/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/responding-to-irans-arms-smuggling-in-yemen>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iranian-efps-in-the-gulf-an-emerging-strategic-risk>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iranian-backed-terrorism-in-bahrain-finding-a-sustainable-solution>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Prior to 2011, the island saw only a smattering of arson bombings and concussion-inducing "sound bombs," which almost never caused fatalities. Since 2012, however, at least 28 terrorist bombings have occurred, killing 15 security personnel and maiming 65 others.<sup>27</sup>

In 2013, Iranian-backed militants began to send advanced armor-piercing bombs from Bahrain into Saudi Arabia. At least one shipment was intercepted, but we do not know how many got through.<sup>28</sup>

Since 2016, Saudi Arabia has witnessed increasing numbers of explosive devices used against its security forces. In 2015, the security forces suffered four deaths in the Shia majority Eastern Province, which jumped to thirteen deaths in 2016 and nine already in 2017.

In 2017, there have already been four roadside bombing attacks on security forces and two rocket-propelled grenade attacks. In May 2017, security forces engaged militants inside Awamiyah, an Eastern Province town, with tank main-gun fire, causing heavy damage to the town and displacing all local civilians.

Kuwait has also seen signs of the extension of Iranian-backed militant networks. In July 2017, Kuwait expelled fifteen Iranian diplomats and accused Lebanese Hezbollah of training 21 Shia militants who were reinserted into Kuwait.<sup>29</sup>

On August 14, 2015, Kuwait uncovered a total of 19,000 kg in ammunition, 144 kg in explosives, 68 weapons, and 204 grenades smuggled across the border from Iraq. The incident led to the subsequent arrest of 26 Kuwaiti Shia linked to Iran and Hezbollah.<sup>30</sup>

If Iran-backed militias continue to grow, and continue to project power into the Gulf from an Iraq training base, then we may see destabilization of presently secure areas of critical importance such as Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

### **Iranian-Backed Militias: Tehran's Deniable Power Projection Capability**

The above material, which only focuses on a sub-set of Iranian-backed militias in five countries, shows that Iran is developing new power projection capabilities that allow Tehran a degree of deniability. The testimony also shows that Iraq is being developed as a training base, manpower pool, and land bridge for Iranian power projection. In March 2017, an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia called Harakat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (led by a former Asaib Ahl al-Haq leader, Akram Kabi, who fought U.S. forces prior to 2011) formed a "Golan Liberation Brigade" and threatened to attack Israel.<sup>31</sup>

In the last year, Iran has used the Houthis to shower Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles and to besiege the Red Sea maritime environment. Since 2013, Iran has used militias to threaten to destabilize the oil-rich Eastern Province, containing the greatest concentration of oil wells, refineries, and loading termi-

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<sup>27</sup> <https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/DB224759/Saudi-Arabia-will-use-security-risks-to-manage-dissent>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/iranian-efps-in-the-gulf-an-emerging-strategic-risk>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.dawn.com/news/1346939>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/foreign-fighters-among-the-hashd-al-shaabi>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/irgc-controlled-iraqi-militia-forms-golan-liberation-brigade.php>

nals anywhere in the world. As long ago as December 2013, Kataib Hezbollah, another Iranian-backed Iraqi militia, fired rockets into Saudi Arabia.<sup>32</sup>

These are examples of the way Iran can now use Iraqis to threaten U.S. allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia without facing the direct consequences of such steps. This offers a form of impunity for Tehran.

### **How to Contain and Roll Back Iranian-Backed Militias**

The United States will shortly announce its new strategy for countering Iran's destabilizing activities.

Within this strategy, the issue of containing and rolling back Iranian-backed militias will loom large.

I would like to suggest six areas in which the United States can get started on this long-term project.

#### **1. Compete with Iran in key spaces**

Iran always fills a vacuum: it is opportunistic. The reduced U.S. confidence and diminished role in the Middle East since 2013 has given Iran a free ride.

The United States must compete in any and all spaces where Iran could seek to expand. This means rhetorically committing to the reduction of malign Iranian influence in a range of areas: Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and others.

Specifically, there must be no significant Lebanese Hezbollah or Iraqi militia or Iranian forces in southern Syria, adjacent to Israel. There must be no significant Lebanese Hezbollah or Iraqi militia or Iranian forces on the Iraq-Syrian border. There must be no significant Lebanese Hezbollah or Iranian forces in Yemen.

We are not certain to succeed in these difficult tasks, nor will success be quick, but we must not cede the IRGC or Iranian intelligence agencies an acceptable role in any of these areas. The United States should openly adopt a strategic aim of diminishing malign Iranian influence in all these spaces. This sends the right signal to regional allies and to the Iranian regime.

#### **2. Build/repair and maintain alliances**

Iran has spent the last four decades developing alliances and building up military allies such as Lebanese Hezbollah and a range of other Iranian-backed militias. I don't typically give the Iranian regime praise but I will say this: they earned their current position by staying focused on their objective and investing in it for decades.

We now need to commit to a decades-spanning containment and roll back effort. Great powers do not tire, or lose interest. They endure and outlast their enemies.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-shells-border/iraq-militia-says-fires-mortar-bombs-at-saudi-warning-idUSBRE9AK0NJ20131121>

The United States needs to intensify its direct and indirect support to allied forces or even neutral forces who may not love the United States but also don't like Iran either. In Iraq, for instance, the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service is an example of the former, an allied force that can compete with Iranian-backed militias. U.S. security assistance must strongly back this force.

Moqtada al-Sadr's nationalist-Islamist movement is an example of a neutral that dislikes Iran as much as it dislikes the United States. We may not have any ties to Moqtada's movement, but we should recognize that he is a key force capable of frustrating Iran's consolidation of power in Iraq, and we must structure our actions so as not to undermine that possibility.

In light of the anti-Qatar blockade, we also need to repair as much of the damage done to the GCC as possible. This distracts the GCC at a critical moment.

Europe is also important in light of Counter-Threat Financing efforts against Lebanese Hezbollah, the Syrian regime, and other Iranian-backed elements. To get Europe onside we need to avoid undermining our credibility: President Trump might decertify the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA), but we should not abrogate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). We need to provide Europe not only with proof of Iran's malign actions but also with proof that America understands Europe's concerns. This will secure more cooperation against Iran and Hezbollah.

### **3. Divide Iran from potential proxies, don't push them together**

Iran's interests are rarely perfectly aligned with its proxies, but such proxies are often desperate for assistance and Iran is the only one making a credible offer. For instance, Iraq did not necessarily wish to formalize the role of the Iranian-backed militias in 2014, but the fall of Mosul and the slowness of visible U.S. support to the defense of Baghdad panicked the Iraqi system. Iran stepped in and (unfairly) gained credit for saving Baghdad, while its proxies gained a large state budget as a bonus.

By getting ahead of this kind of curve, the United States can work with allies to drive a wedge between Iran and potential proxies. In Iraq the process will be hard, because the roots of malign Iranian influence run deep.

Demobilization of Iraq's PMF -- likely to be a long process, not an event -- is one opportunity. If there are enough good jobs inside Iraq in the formal security forces and the civilian economy, the number of potential recruits to Iranian-backed militias will drop. Quietly and through the international coalition, the United States should back a gradual disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process.<sup>33</sup>

U.S. policy needs to continue to strongly back Iraqi government interactions with other Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt, plus Turkey. Situating Iraq more firmly in the Arab world is a great way to lessen the country's dependence on Iran.

In Yemen and the Gulf states, Iranian malign influence is more "shallow rooted" and the trick is to act quickly before deep relationships are formed. Ending the destructive war in Yemen through dialogue,

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<sup>33</sup> <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/73186>

with the Houthis receiving a fair settlement (after more than ten years of victimization by the Sana government) is the best way to splinter the Houthis away from Tehran.<sup>34</sup> Pushing Saudi Arabia to clean up its war effort in Yemen and reduce civilian casualties,<sup>35</sup> and pushing all the Gulf states to improve the conditions of Shia minorities are good examples of ways to split potential proxies from Iran instead of pushing them together.

#### **4. Interdict Iranian lines of communication**

Much has been made of the so-called "land bridge" between Iran and Syria (via Iraq) but it is worth noting that air and sea communications are just as important to Iran in supporting their militia proxies. Land communications undoubtedly add resilience to Iranian connections to their proxies, but Iran's sponsorship of Lebanese Hezbollah, including its large missile force, was achieved without a land bridge.

The United States should instead focus on interdicting all kinds of Iranian communications with all militant proxies. On land, this will mean tightening U.S. relations with the Iraqi government (which controls the land bridge) and supporting rebel forces in southern and northeastern Syria.

The Gulf coalition's aerial blockade has been very effective. In case it is one day needed, the United States needs to think about how a no-fly zone might be enforced in Syria or Lebanon, in the teeth of Russia-provided air defenses. Israel manages to operate in this airspace. Can America?

On the seas, one of the major successes of the Gulf coalition in Yemen has been to make it very difficult for Iran to provide large military items (like accurate long-range missiles),<sup>36</sup> forcing the Houthis to rely on scavenging parts from surface-to-air missiles. Naval interdictions of Iranian supply to Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas have also been successful.<sup>37</sup> The United States should put more effort into analyzing and deliberately interdicting all Iranian arms exports, in line with the expectations of UN Security Council Resolution 2231.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the United States should always ensure that blockading actions are carefully targeted: in Yemen, the Gulf coalition gifted Iran many propaganda victories (which swell the ranks of its proxies) by overlooking the humanitarian costs of the blockade.<sup>39</sup>

As Israel does,<sup>40</sup> the United States should focus intelligence resources on Iranian efforts to help their proxies develop indigenous arms manufacturing capabilities: such as the local build of Burkan missiles in Yemen, the development of Hamas missiles in Gaza, or the fabrication of advanced roadside bombs in Bahrain.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/escalation-in-yemen-risks-famine-collapse-iranian-entrapment>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/gulf-coalition-operations-in-yemen-part-2-the-air-war>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/addressing-iranian-weapons-smuggling-and-the-humanitarian-situation-in-yeme>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/rethinking-u.s.-strategy-for-intercepting-iranian-arms-transfers>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/addressing-iranian-weapons-smuggling-and-the-humanitarian-situation-in-yeme>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/opinion/how-to-understand-israels-strike-on-syria.html>

Finally, the United States should work with regional allies to pressure places like Iraq to clamp down on the actions of their citizens in foreign wars, and the presence of non-Iraqi fighters in the PMF training camps. Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi claims to want to develop a neutral foreign policy and to keep Iraq out of regional wars,<sup>41</sup> so he should be receptive to insistent, gentle pressure to prevent Iranian-backed militias from dictating Iraqi foreign policy and getting Iraqis killed in foreign wars.

## **5. Impose and exercise painful redlines on Iran**

The Israeli military strikes when Israel perceives that Tehran and Lebanese Hezbollah are crossing a redline with the importation or construction of a new weapons system in Lebanon or Syria.<sup>42</sup> Iran is a bitter enemy, but it has learned to respect this Israeli attitude, and retaliation is selective.

Once upon a time, in Iraq in 2007, Iran greatly lowered the presence of IRGC operatives inside Iraq because it feared that they would be targeted in raids and fall into U.S. captivity. Iran's sensitivity to the loss of senior advisors was notable.<sup>43</sup>

The United States needs to develop some intermediate redlines that represent the next steps we don't want Iran to take. Then we need to clearly communicate these redlines -- perhaps using backchannel means.

If Iran breaks the rules -- say, by trying to move inside agreed deconfliction zones in southern Syria -- the United States should select a painful option from a set of pre-surveyed targets. This will mean developing granular and constantly updated understanding of the Iranian advisors, Lebanese Hezbollah operatives, militia interlocutors, bank accounts, weapons systems, intelligence outposts, or other assets that Iran values the most.

Credibility will come from exercising the threat at the right time with no hesitation, and repeating the exercise as many times as necessary until the subject, the Iranian regime, accepts that we will not stop. Iran will test Washington's resolve by kidnapping American citizens in Iraq and elsewhere. Only further shows of U.S. resolution will deter such retaliatory steps.

## **6. Put someone in charge of containing and rolling back Iranian-backed militias**

Iran has spent decades building up the Iranian-backed militias. The United States must commit to spending decades breaking down those same forces.

Many Iranian agencies are involved in their effort, but it is possible to point to one central figure who "owns" many of the processes required to support Iranian-backed militias. He is IRGC Qods Force Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-usa/iraq-says-will-stay-clear-of-u-s-iran-tensions-idUSKBN15Q08D>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/opinion/how-to-understand-israels-strike-on-syria.html>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/beyond-worst-case-analysis-irans-likely-responses-to-an-israeli-preventive>

<sup>44</sup> <http://time.com/collection/2017-time-100/4736337/qasem-soleimani/>

This begs the question: who is our Qasem Soleimani? Clearly there is an intelligence part, a diplomatic part, a special operations part, and a sanctions part. But who draws all this together in a really focused effort that employs all the tools of national power?

We have experienced significant success by placing the anti-Islamic State campaign under the supervision of a special presidential envoy.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the same should be done for the counter-Iranian influence portfolio.

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/bureau/213058.htm>