ANALYSIS

THE COMING WAR IN AMERICA— IRANIAN THREATS TO THE U.S. HOMELAND

Christopher A. Williams

Introduction

War is coming to America.[1] In many respects it is here today. In the eyes of our avowed enemies, the U.S. homeland is a central battleground in the intensifying competition between divergent—indeed, irreconcilable—political systems and beliefs.

As a practical matter, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been at war with the United States for nearly fifty years. This despite numerous diplomatic efforts aimed at rapprochement and various agreements intended to curb Iran's nuclear weapons development program and regional ambitions. In light of high-intensity military operations conducted by the United States (Operations Midnight Hammer and Epic Fury) and Israel (Operations Rising Lion and Roaring Lion) as well as severe economic measures such as a blockade on all ships heading into or from Iranian ports and targeting of illicit oil-smuggling networks, Iran's leaders will likely redouble efforts to target key U.S. government officials and institutions, critical infrastructures, and the American people.

Various organs of the U.S. Government as well as state and local governments and law enforcement agencies are closely monitoring the growing threat to the homeland posed by Iran and its proxies. At the same time, many U.S. citizens are either unaware of the threat or tend to downplay it. However, pretending the threat does not exist or minimizing it only serves to undermine efforts to uncover and disrupt Iran's nefarious plans and operations and bring to justice those responsible.

This paper highlights various threats to the U.S. homeland posed by Iran and its agents and sympathizers. It describes plots hatched and operations conducted by Iran-affiliated organizations and personnel and notes important actions taken by various Federal, state and local government organizations to identify, disrupt, and prevent such attacks. Lastly, it calls for comprehensively enhancing the U.S. homeland security posture in response to the growing threat posed by Iran, its proxies, and supporters.

History of Iranian Aggression Against the United States

Over the past nearly half-century, Iran has planned and conducted numerous attacks against the homeland and U.S. Government personnel and civilians overseas—and, in the process, has killed or injured thousands of Americans. As noted by the Institute for Economics and

[1] As discussed in, Christopher A. Williams, "The Coming War in America," National Institute for Public Policy, *Information Series*, No. 650, February 10, 2026, https://nipp.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/IS-650.pdf.

Peace, "Official U.S. threat reporting states that Iran's strategy is heavily reliant on a network of partners and proxies and on hybrid warfare, combining conventional capabilities with unconventional tools to threaten U.S. interests and allies while limiting the risk of direct conflict. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force is assessed by the U.S. National Counter Terrorism Center as "providing guidance, training, funds, and weapons to partners and proxies, sustaining multi-theatre capabilities and preserving plausible deniability…. When outmatched conventionally, the Iranian regime tends to fall back on decentralised terrorism to impose costs on its adversaries."[2]

A March 2, 2026 White House press release noted that "For nearly half a century, the Islamic Republic of Iran—the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism—has killed or maimed American citizens and service members through its own forces and proxy militias. More Americans have been killed by Iran than any other terrorist regime on Earth."[3] According to the release, Iran has sponsored over forty attacks on U.S. citizens since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. These include:

- **November 1979:** Iranian students, backed by the regime, seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran—taking 66 Americans hostage in a 444-day standoff.
- **April 1983:** The Islamic Jihad, an Iran-backed terrorist group, carried out a suicide car bombing at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 17 Americans.
- **October 1983:** Iran-backed Hezbollah terrorists killed 241 U.S. military personnel—including 220 U.S. Marines and 21 other service personnel—in a truck bombing at a Marine compound in Beirut.
- **September 1984:** Iran-backed Hezbollah terrorists killed 23 innocent people—including two American service members—in a car bomb attack at the U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut.
- **June 1985:** Iran-backed Hezbollah terrorists hijacked TWA Flight 847 on its way from Athens to Rome, torturing a U.S. Navy diver before shooting him point blank in the head and tossing his body onto the Beirut airport tarmac.
- **March 1996:** A suicide bomber linked to the Iran-backed Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist groups killed 20 people—including two Americans—in a suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv shopping center.
- **June 1996:** Iran-backed Hezbollah Al-Hijaz terrorists killed 19 U.S. Airmen and wounded nearly 500 others in a truck bombing at a U.S. Air Force housing complex in Saudi Arabia.

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[2] "The Iran War and the Global Terrorism Threat, Global Terrorism Index 2026: Special Supplement," Institute for Economics and Peace, Sydney, March 2026, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/The-Iran-War-and-The-Global-Terrorism-Threat.pdf.

[3] The White House, *Press Release*, March 2, 2026, https://www.whitehouse.gov/releases/2026/03/the-iranian-regimes-decades-of-terrorism-against-american-citizens/.

- **August 1998:** Al-Qaeda suicide bombers, facilitated by Iran-backed Hezbollah, simultaneously bombed U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people—including a dozen American citizens.
- **July 2002:** An Iran-backed Hamas terrorist killed five Americans in a bombing at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.
- **Between 2003 and 2011:** Iran-backed militias killed at least 603 U.S. troops in Iraq—"roughly one in every six American combat fatalities in Iraq."
- **January 2007:** A dozen men affiliated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force killed five U.S. soldiers and wounded three others in Karbala, Iraq, after disguising themselves as U.S. soldiers and entering the Provincial Joint Coordination Center.
- **January 2020:** 109 U.S. troops suffered traumatic brain injuries in an Iranian ballistic missile attack on the Ain al-Asad airbase in Iraq.
- **October 2023:** Iran-backed Hamas terrorists killed 46 Americans and kidnapped at least 12 Americans in the October 7th massacre.
- **Between October 2023 and November 2024:** Iran and its proxies conducted more than 180 attacks against U.S. forces in the Middle East, wounding more than 180 U.S. service members and killing three service members.
- **November 2024:** An Iranian national and IRGC asset was charged for plotting to assassinate President Trump.
- **June 2025:** Iran-backed militias attacked at least three U.S. bases in Syria and two U.S. bases in Iraq.

The record of sustained Iranian aggression against "the Great Satan (America)" is overwhelming and undeniable. Prior efforts to appease Iran or negotiate agreements with Tehran have failed to eliminate the threat posed to the American people.

Iranian Threats to the Homeland

As noted by former FBI counter terrorism official Kristin Shapiro, "In moments of major geopolitical upheaval, the question is never just what happens *there*; it is how adversaries may move to create effects *here*. And in light of the Iran war, the operative question is whether Iran poses an imminent threat to the United States. If we evaluate intent, capability, and opportunity the way practitioners must, the answer is yes." She went on to assert:

> Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its external operations arm, the Qods Force, have already demonstrated activity inside the United States across the two vectors that matter most: physical operations and cyber intrusions…. Signals always precede attacks. The United States has recently seen a cluster of them: charges against IRGC-linked actors targeting U.S. officials; public reporting on

> retaliatory rhetoric tied to the Iran war; media coverage of bounty offers; and FBI testimony outlining how Iran's Axis of Resistance posture elevates homeland risk during conflict spikes abroad. This pattern does not indicate inevitability, but it does indicate intent and a willingness to test opportunities. The Qods Force record, from physical plots in ordinary places to cyber intrusions into essential services, is clear. These activities map onto the spaces where Americans live, work, receive care, and expect normalcy. In a compressed conflict environment, homeland risk is not hypothetical. It is present, immediate, and evolving.[4]

Iran clearly poses an immediate and multifaceted threat to the U.S. homeland. Several likely threat vectors, including terrorism, assassinations, anti-Semitic attacks, cyber warfare, and drone attacks, are discussed below.

Terrorism, Assassinations, and Anti-Semitic Attacks

The U.S. formally designated Iran a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" in 1984 and since then Iran has actively engaged in or directed an array of violent and deadly acts against the United States and its citizens globally. The United States also designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) a Foreign Terrorist Organization on April 15, 2019 for its direct involvement in terrorist plotting and operations. The Trump administration is rightfully concerned that violent extremist groups and individuals tied to the Iranian regime pose a growing threat against American citizens and interests both overseas and in the homeland.

As reported by *ABC News*, "The Department of Homeland Security has warned of potential lone-wolf and cyberattacks amid the ongoing strikes in Iran, according to a law enforcement bulletin. 'Iran and its proxies probably pose a persistent threat of targeted attacks in the Homeland, and will almost certainly escalate retaliatory actions—or calls to action—if reports of the Ayatollah's death are confirmed.'"[5]

ABC News also subsequently reported that "The U.S. has intercepted encrypted communications believed to have originated in Iran that may serve as 'an operational trigger' for 'sleeper assets' outside the country, according to a federal government alert sent to law enforcement agencies. The alert cites 'preliminary signals analysis' of a transmission 'likely of Iranian origin' that was relayed across multiple countries shortly after the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei…. The intercepted transmission was encoded and appeared to be destined for 'clandestine recipients' who possess the encryption key, the kind of message intended to impart instructions to 'covert operatives or sleeper assets' without the use of the internet or cellular networks. It's possible the transmissions could 'be intended to activate

[4] Kristin Shapiro, "The Iran Threat is Already Here," *HSToday*, March 31, 2026, https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/the-iran-threat-is-already-here/.

[5] Luke Barr, "Department of Homeland Security warns of potential attacks amid Iran operation," *ABC News*, March 1, 2026, https://abcnews.com/US/department-homeland-security-warns-potential-attacks-wake-iran/story?id=130665784.

or provide instructions to prepositioned sleeper assets operating outside the originating country,' the alert said."[6] Likewise, Fox News recently reported that "American counterterrorism agencies are quietly monitoring suspected sleeper cells on U.S. soil in the wake of joint U.S.–Israel strikes on Iran, stepping up surveillance amid heightened fears of possible retaliation from Iran-linked operatives or sympathizers. Federal and local law enforcement have also boosted on-the-ground security in major U.S. cities as part of a precautionary posture, even though no specific, credible threats have been publicly identified."[7]

Such concerns are certainly not new. As noted in a Department of Homeland Security National Terrorism Advisory System Bulletin issued in 2020, "Iran and its partners, such as Hizballah, have demonstrated their capability to conduct various operations in the U.S. Based on Iran's historic homeland and global targeting patterns, the financial services and energy sectors, maritime assets, as well as U.S. Government and symbolic targets represent consistent priorities for Tehran's malicious operational planning. Homegrown Violent Extremists sympathetic to Iran could capitalize on the heightened tensions to launch individual attacks, with little or no warning, against U.S.-based Iranian dissidents, Jewish, Israeli, and Saudi individuals as well as against the U.S. Government infrastructure and personnel."[8]

Indeed, Tehran possesses a broad range of capabilities for attacking targets in the U.S. homeland. Senior Department of Justice officials have noted that the U.S. Government is on "high alert" for threats posed by Iranian operatives performing various nefarious activities inside the United States. In June 2025 then-Attorney General Pam Bondi confirmed that "well over 1,000" Iranian nationals have illegally entered the U.S. in recent years and stated that various federal agencies are scrutinizing that population for signs of illegal activity.[9] And on March 6, 2026 the Department of Justice announced that an Iranian intelligence agent, Asif Merchant, had been convicted of terrorism and murder for hire in connection with a foiled plot to assassinate U.S. politicians and government officials, including President Donald J. Trump. The announcement stated, "Merchant admitted at trial that the IRGC sent him to the United States to arrange for political assassinations and steal documents, but law enforcement foiled the plot before any attack could be carried out. According to Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg, 'Merchant, a trained Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps operative, entered the United States intending to commit acts of

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[6] Aaron Katersky and Josh Margolin, "Iran may be activating sleeper cells outside the country, alert says," *ABC News*, March 9, 2026, https://abcnews.com/US/iran-activating-sleeper-cells-alert/story?id=130897687.

[7] Amanda Macios, "Enemy within: Counterterrorism experts fear sleeper cells could be poised inside US," *Fox News*, March 1, 2026, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/after-u-s-israel-strike-kills-iranian-leaders-fbi-shifts-high-alert-home.

[8] "Summary of Iran-Related Terrorism Threat to the U.S. Homeland," *Department of Homeland Security Bulletin*, January 18, 2020, https://www.dhs.gov/ntas/advisory/national-terrorism-advisory-system-bulletin-january-18-2020.

[9] Kaelan Deese, "Pam Bondi says DOJ has 'countless' threat cases against the US amid Iran concerns," *Washington Examiner*, June 24, 2025, https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/3451597/pam-bondi-doj-countless-threat-cases-iran-concerns/.

terror, and ultimately, to facilitate the assassination of U.S. government officials, including President Trump'."[10]

In addition, according to a news report, "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested a former member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps with suspected Hezbollah ties, a former Iran Army sniper, and a terror watchlist suspect during a sweep targeting illegal Iranian migrants across the country."[11] And in May 2023, the Justice Department announced that Alexi Saab was sentenced to 12 years in prison for receiving military-type training from Hezbollah. By Saab's own admission, he surveilled "soft targets" in the U.S. for potential future attacks.[12]

General Gregory Guillot, Commander of US Northern Command, recently testified to Congress that "Iran's surviving leadership seems to retain some capacity to direct reprisal attacks on the homeland through asymmetric means…. Given its diminished capabilities, Iran's most viable threat vector toward the homeland remains homegrown violent extremists inspired to conduct attacks on Tehran's behalf."[13] And according to former Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Intelligence and Analysis John Cohen, "Iran has an extensive presence in Canada, Mexico, Central America and South America, where they have both IRGC and intelligence service personnel. They work closely with criminal organizations within the United States to conduct physical attacks. Iran also has an extensive information operation capability and has regularly sought to inspire, inform, even facilitate destructive and violent activities within the United States by posting online content and exploiting divisive current events for the purposes of enabling and facilitating destructive and even violent demonstrations."[14]

As reported in TIME, "In the days since the U.S. and Israel launched the war against Iran two weeks ago, retaliatory strikes around the Middle East and a series of incidents labeled as potential acts of terrorism in other parts of the world have raised concerns about the possibility of Iranian attacks on U.S. soil…. A gunman opened fire at a bar in Austin, Texas, the day after the initial strikes on February 28, killing three people and injuring more than a dozen others in what is being investigated as a potential act of terrorism. The suspected

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[10] Department of Justice, "Iranian Intelligence Agent Convicted of Terrorism and Murder for Hire in Connection with Foiled Plot to Assassinate U.S. Politicians and Government Officials," March 6, 2026, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/iranian-intelligence-agent-convicted-terrorism-and-murder-hire-connection-foiled-plot.

[11] Ailin Vilches Arguello, "US Justice Department Warns of Threats to Jewish Targets as Concerns Mount Over Iranian Sleeper Cells," *The Algemeiner*, June 26, 2025, https://www.algemeiner.com/2025/06/26/us-justice-department-warns-threats-jewish-targets-concern-mounts-iranian-sleeper-cells/.

[12] Department of Justice, "New Jersey Man Sentenced To 12 Years for Receiving Military-Type Training from Hezbollah, Marriage Fraud and Making False Statements," May 23, 2023, https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/new-jersey-man-sentenced-12-years-receiving-military-type-training-hizballah-marriage.

[13] Statement of General Gregory Guillot, USAF, Commander, United States Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 19, 2026, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/guillot_opening_statement1.pdf.

[14] Connor Greene, "What Does the Iran War Mean for the Threat of Attacks in the US?," *TIME*, March 14, 2026, https://time.com/article/2026/03/13/iran-war-us-attacks-threat-cyberattacks-drones-terrorism-proxies/.

gunman was wearing a t-shirt with an Iranian flag design at the time of the attack…. Federal authorities have reportedly issued warnings about potential Iranian attacks within the U.S. since the beginning of the war, raising particular concern about cyberattacks and transmissions that could activate 'sleeper assets' outside of Iran."[15]

The threat from Iran and its proxies extends to the U.S. private sector. For example, multiple U.S. Government organizations issued a notice in November 2024 warning Defense Industrial Base contractors of possible efforts by foreign actors to conduct sabotage operations against their facilities.[16] Entitled "Safeguarding the U.S. Defense Industrial Base and Private Industry Against Sabotage," the advisory described known threats, highlighted indicators of possible future attacks, detailed steps that can be taken to investigate such attacks, and provided contact information for the FBI and other Federal agencies to report suspicious activities or any attacks. Such potential sabotage operations could slow the production of critical war materiel being used to support U.S. military operations against Iran.

In addition, a new wave of anti-Semitism, in part encouraged and supported by Iran and its proxies, is sweeping the nation. According to a June 22, 2025 DHS bulletin, "Multiple recent Homeland terrorist attacks have been motivated by anti-Semitic or anti-Israel sentiment, and the ongoing Israel-Iran conflict could contribute to U.S.-based individuals plotting additional attacks…. The conflict could also motivate violent extremists and hate crime perpetrators seeking to attack targets perceived to be Jewish, pro-Israel, or linked to the U.S. government or military in the Homeland."[17]

Indeed, such attacks have become more frequent and more prominent. For example, a suspect died in an attack on a West Bloomfield, Michigan synagogue on March 13, 2026, in what the FBI said was a "targeted act of violence against the Jewish community." The Department of Homeland Security identified the suspect as Ayman Mohamad Ghazali, a Lebanese-born U.S. citizen who had become radicalized following Israeli attacks in Lebanon. According to the Detroit Field Office, after a full-scale investigation the FBI labeled the attack as a "Hezbollah inspired act of terrorism" against Michigan's largest Jewish temple. The FBI said that hundreds of digital and forensic pieces of evidence were reviewed and dozens of

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[15] Connor Greene, "What Does the Iran War Mean for the Threat of Attacks in the US?"; also see Josh Campbell, "US intelligence community ramps up warning of possible retaliatory attacks by Iran," *CNN*, March 10, 2026, https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/10/politics/us-intel-warning-retaliatory-attacks-iran.

[16] "Safeguarding the U.S. Defense Industrial Base and Private Industry Against Sabotage," Joint Advisory of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, Army Counterintelligence Command, Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency, and Navy Criminal Investigations Services, November 21, 2024, https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/products/FINAL_Safeguarding_DIB_Against_Sabotage.pdf.

[17] Department of Homeland Security, National Terrorism Advisory Bulletin, June 22, 2005, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/ntas/alerts/25_0622_S1_NTAS-Bulletin-508.pdf.

people were interviewed over the course of the investigation. FBI Detroit said that Ghazali made multiple searches online related to guns and "shootouts" since January 2026.[18]

These and other incidents have occurred as Iran has actively promoted attacks against synagogues across the globe. According to a report in The Times of Israel, the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, has determined that "senior IRGC-Quds Force commander Sardar Ammar heads the network, which has intensified its efforts to attack Jewish and Israeli sites around the world since the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks. Ammar commands some 11,000 operatives in carrying out covert operations."[19]

The Anti-Defamation League recently issued an "Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents in the United States."[20] That report showed the number of Anti-Semitic acts in America rising from 942 in 2015 to 9,354 incidents in 2024—an astonishing increase. Iran is a major contributor to this trend as a result of its support to groups and individuals who promote anti-semitism in America. Iranian-sponsored or -supported anti-Semitic attacks in the U.S. and abroad are likely to expand in the coming months. America must become ever more vigilant in its efforts to counter such vile attacks.

Cyber Threats

The cyber threat posed by Iran and its proxies to the U.S. homeland includes a broad range of sophisticated probes, prepositioning of malware, and attacks. For example, on April 7, 2026, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, National Security Agency, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, and U.S. Cyber Command Cyber National Mission Force issued an advisory entitled, "Iranian-Affiliated Cyber Actors Exploit Programmable Logic Controllers Across US Critical Infrastructure." It warned that "Iran-affiliated advanced persistent threat actors are conducting exploitation activity targeting internet-facing operational technology devices, including programmable logic controllers (PLCs) manufactured by Rockwell Automation/Allen-Bradley. This activity has led to PLC disruptions across several U.S. critical infrastructure sectors through malicious interactions with the project file and manipulation of data on human machine interface and supervisory control and data acquisition displays, resulting in operational disruption and financial loss." It called upon U.S. organizations to urgently review the tactics, techniques and procedures and evidence of

[18] Caleb Holloway, "FBI releases details on motives in Michigan synagogue attack, confirmed act of terrorism," *KATU.com,* March 30, 2026, https://katu.com/news/nation-world/fbi-shares-new-info-on-investigation-into-michigan-synagogue-attack.

[19] Lazar Berman, "Mossad reveals details of Iranian terror network behind attacks on Jewish sites worldwide," *The Times of Israel*, October 26, 2025, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/mossad-offers-details-on-iranian-terror-network-behind-attacks-on-jewish-sites-worldwide/.

[20] Anti-Defamation League, "2024 Audit of Antisemitic Incidents," April 22, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2024.

compromise described in the advisory for indications of current or historical activity on their networks, and take action to reduce the risk of compromise.[21]

This announcement followed a 2024 Department of Homeland Security advisory noting that Iran maintains a robust cyber program and is capable of carrying out attacks with temporary disruptive effects against critical infrastructure in the United States. It warned that hackers working on behalf of the Iranian government are likely to target industrial control systems used at wastewater treatment plants and other critical infrastructure as retaliation against military strikes by the United States and Israel. The advisory further stated:

> Based on the current geopolitical environment, Iranian-affiliated cyber actors may target U.S. devices and networks for near-term cyber operations. Defense Industrial Base companies, particularly those possessing holdings or relationships with Israeli research and defense firms, are at increased risk…. In November 2023, IRGC-affiliated cyber actors using the persona 'CyberAv3ngers' began actively targeting and compromising Israeli-made Unitronics Vision Series programmable logic controllers and human-machine interfaces… The victims spanned multiple U.S. states and foreign countries. These PLCs are commonly used in the Water and Wastewater Systems Sector and used in other industries including, but not limited to, energy, food and beverage manufacturing, transportation systems, and healthcare. The PLCs may be rebranded and appear as originating from different manufacturers and companies.[22]

In addition, the Department of Justice recently conducted a Court-authorized domain seizure to disrupt Iranian cyber-enabled psychological operations. Specifically, the Justice Department removed four websites (domains) facilitating Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security's (MOIS) hacking efforts tied to psychological operations and transnational repression. According to the DOJ announcement, those websites were used by the MOIS to post sensitive data stolen during hacks and call for the killing of journalists, regime dissidents, and Israeli persons. For example, the MOIS used the Handala hack to claim credit for a March 2026 destructive malware attack against a U.S.-based multinational medical technologies firm. According to Assistant Attorney General for National Security John A. Eisenberg, "Iran, the leading state sponsor of terrorism worldwide, used the seized domains

[21] Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, "Iranian-Affiliated Cyber Actors Exploit Programmable Logic Controllers Across US Critical Infrastructure," April 7, 2026, https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa26-097a?utm_source=IranPLC202604&utm_medium=GovDelivery.

[22] Department of Homeland Security, "IRGC-Affiliated Cyber Actors Exploit PLCs in Multiple Sectors, Including US Water and Wastewater Systems Facilities," December 18, 2024, https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa23-335a.

to dox and harass dissidents and journalists, incite violence against Jewish communities, and spread Tehran's anti-American propaganda."[23]

Drone Threats, Incursions and Attacks

Drones have become a high-value, low-cost tool of nation-states and subnational organizations, possibly including entities allied with or motivated by Iran, for conducting operations against various U.S. targets. According to a U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency official, "In fiscal year 2025, CBP detected over 42,000 near-border, unmanned drone flights. This highlights the magnitude of the problem, even if not every one of those threats was nefarious."[24]

There have been numerous reports of unauthorized drone or small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS) flights over sensitive U.S. military installations in recent years. These include incursions of Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, various military bases in New Jersey, Langley Air Force Base in Virginia, Vandenberg Space Force Base in California, and more.[25] In addition, numerous unauthorized drones were recently spotted over Barksdale Air Force Base (BAFB)—one of the largest and most important military airfields in the U.S. arsenal that houses B-52H Stratofortress long-range, nuclear-capable bombers. As reported by *ABCNews*, "Between March 9-15, 2026, BAFB Security Forces observed multiple waves of 12-15 drones operating over sensitive areas of the installation, including the flight line, with aircraft displaying non-commercial signal characteristics, long-range control links and resistance to jamming. After reaching multiple points across the installation, the drones dispersed across sensitive locations on the base…. The flights lasted around four hours each day and the drones used varied routes of ingress and deliberate maneuvering within restricted airspace." The article further noted that the drones appeared to be custom-built and required "advanced knowledge of signal operations." It concluded that "The drone incursions at BAFB pose a significant threat to public safety and national security since they require the flight line to be shut down while also putting manned aircrafts already inflight in the area at risk."[26]

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[23] "Justice Department Disrupts Iranian Cyber Enabled Psychological Operations," U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Maryland, March 19, 2026, https://www.justice.gov/usao-md/pr/justice-department-disrupts-iranian-cyber-enabled-psychological-operations.

[24] Bob Price, "CBP: Cartels Flew 42,000 Drones Near U.S. Border in FY25," *Breitbart News*, February 15, 2026, https://www.breitbart.com/border/2026/02/15/cbp-cartels-flew-42000-drones-near-u-s-border-in-fy25/.

[25] See, for example, Howard Altman, "Drones Over U.S. Bases May Be Threatening Spy Flights: USNORTHCOM Commander," *The War Zone*, February 13, 2025, https://www.twz.com/news-features/drones-over-u-s-bases-may-be-threatening-spy-flights-northcom-commander; and Howard Altman, "FAA Insider Opens Up About Drone Incursions Over Military Bases," *The War Zone*, August 15, 2025, https://www.twz.com/air/foreign-nexus-in-military-base-drone-incursions-detailed-by-government-insider.

[26] Josh Margolin and Aaron Katsky, "'Multiple waves' or unauthorized drones recently spotted over strategic U.S. Air Force base, Lights on drones suggested the operators may be testing security responses," *ABCNews.com,* March 20, 2026, https://abcnews.com/International/multiple-waves-unauthorized-drones-spotted-strategic-us-air/story?id=131245527.

In this regard, *DefenseScoop* reported that "Shortly after President Donald Trump initiated Operation Epic Fury against Iran on February 28, forces under U.S. Northern Command used a new 'Flyaway Kit' (FAK) to eliminate a drone threat at an undisclosed strategic military base... General Gregory Guillot, the head of Northcom and North American Aerospace Defense Command, [stated] 'In the early hours of Operation Epic Fury last month, a deployed FAK successfully detected and defeated sUAS operating over a strategic U.S. installation.' He did not specify how many drones were involved in that event, or where it took place. The term 'strategic' in U.S. military parlance is sometimes used to refer to assets linked to the nation's nuclear forces."[27] The article further noted that drone incursions over domestic U.S. military bases and critical infrastructure have surged in the last few years and that officials have raised concerns that some episodes could mark deliberate, high-tech surveillance operations involving foreign actors or cartels targeting sensitive sites.

There is no publicly available information that specifically attributes the aforementioned drone incursions to Iran or Iran-inspired actors. However, Iran and/or its proxies may be practicing drone operations in an effort to hone their performance and test America's defenses in advance of future attacks on U.S. military bases and other important targets. Here, these nefarious actors may be seeking to replicate Operation Spider's Web, the sophisticated Ukrainian drone attack that destroyed several Russian long-range strategic bomber aircraft.[28]

In this regard, *ABC News* reported in March 2026 that the FBI issued a warning to police departments that Iran sought to attack California with drones in retaliation for the on-going attacks on Iran by the United States and Israel. "'We recently acquired unverified information that as of early February 2026, Iran allegedly aspired to conduct a surprise attack using Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) from an unidentified vessel off the coast of the United States homeland, specifically against unspecified targets in California, in the event the U.S. conducted strikes against Iran', according to the alert distributed at the end of February."[29]

Drones provide a relatively cheap and easy-to-operate means of surveilling and/or attacking various U.S. military and civilian targets. They are becoming an increasingly attractive option for America's adversaries, including Iran and its proxies, to disrupt U.S. military operations and damage U.S. critical infrastructures.

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[27] Brandi Vincent, "U.S. Northern Command says it thwarted a drone threat over a 'strategic' installation hours into the Iran war," *DefenseScoop*, March 19, 2026, https://defensescoop.com/2026/03/19/drone-incursion-strategic-us-military-base/.

[28] See, for example, Kateryna Bondar, "How Ukraine's Operation 'Spider's Web' Redefines Asymmetric Warfare," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2, 2025, https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-ukraines-spider-web-operation-redefines-asymmetric-warfare.

[29] Josh Margolin, Aaron Katersky, Alex Stone and Luke Barr, "FBI warns Iran aspired to attack California with drones in retaliation for war: Alert," *ABCNews.com*, March 11, 2026, https://abcnews.com/US/story?id=130973820.

Conclusion

Tehran-supported terrorist organizations, criminal groups, and individual actors—working independently or in concert—could severely disrupt the U.S. economy, cause significant loss of life, and create chaos in the United States. In the context of escalating crises or conflicts overseas, Iran and its proxies could carry out attacks—including terrorist bombings, drone strikes, cyber attacks, and/or other means and methods—to damage ports, bridges, highways, airports, railways, power generation stations, water supplies, and more. Likewise, they could seek to assassinate Federal, state and local government officials.

The implications of Iranian or Iranian-sponsored and -motivated attacks on America are potentially severe. For example:

- Such attacks could interfere with local, regional and national transportation systems, slow the production and supply of consumer goods thereby significantly damaging the U.S. economy, and cause other serious societal problems.
- Given the razor-thin margins that separate the majority and minority parties in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, a successful effort to kill or debilitate only a few members of the majority political party could result in the minority party taking effective control of one or both houses. Such a scenario would likely inflame domestic tensions and could result in institutional gridlock that inhibits the ability to pass vital legislation.
- Attacks on airports, sea ports, railways, and military bases could dramatically slow the flow of forces and equipment from the U.S. homeland in support of overseas military operations.
- Cyber attacks could greatly damage various U.S. critical infrastructures and impact the livelihood and well-being of millions of Americans.
- The assassination of President Trump and one or more of his key civilian and military advisors could seriously inhibit national-level decision making.

An inwardly-focused America, forced to respond to a series of debilitating attacks in the homeland, could open the door to overt hostilities against U.S. friends, allies and interests across the globe by Russia, China and/or North Korea. As Russian Federation President Putin, Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea Supreme Leader Kim must fully appreciate, the U.S. ability to respond in a timely and effective manner to additional foreign crises or conflicts, while U.S. military forces are heavily engaged in the Mideast and America is reeling from multiple attacks on the homeland, would be severely tested.

To address these real and growing threats, Federal, state and local government organizations, together with law enforcement and intelligence agencies, must act expeditiously to strengthen America's homeland security posture. This includes efforts to rapidly harden critical infrastructures, put in place effective defenses of key assets and facilities against missile, drone and cyber attacks, expand law enforcement operations

against known and suspected Iranian and proxy terrorists, and strengthen intelligence collection and analysis of Iranian and other threats to the homeland. As one analyst noted, this will require surging analytic, operational, and counterintelligence resources back toward the Iran problem set "before intent becomes impact in both the physical world and the digital domain."[30]

The stakes for America could not be higher. While important progress has been made in safeguarding the nation against threats from Tehran and its supporters, more work is needed. It's time to defend the homeland against the clear and present danger posed by Iran and its proxies.

Christopher A. Williams previously held senior staff positions in the U.S. Congress and Department of Defense. He also chaired the Defense Policy Board. He currently serves as an independent consultant.

[30] Shapiro, "The Iran Threat is Already Here."