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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Executive Summary

Sense of Congress and Report on Iranian Efforts in Syria and Lebanon

October 2020

National Intelligence Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is provided by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) in response to section 5521 of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (FY20 NDAA); *Division E – Intelligence Authorizations for Fiscal Years 2018, 2019, and 2020* (P.L. 116-92). It includes an unclassified summary of Iran's strategy, use of proxy forces, and threat posed to U.S. interest and allies. The classified annex includes references to Intelligence Community finished intelligence products that address the range of Iranian involvement in Syria and Lebanon and the threat it poses to the U.S.

This product was drafted by the ODNI's National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Officer for Iran.

Iran's overall strategy in Syria probably will remain focused on five areas—consolidating gains it has made to preserve and strengthen Asad's regime, preparing preemptive and retaliatory attack options against Israel, using Syria to maintain its logistics network to Lebanese Hizballah, protecting Shia communities and religious sites, and countering the remaining Sunni extremist threat. Iran will continue to aid pro-regime operations, like those in Idlib and Badiyah, to help Asad regain sovereignty over the entire country. Iran will attempt to translate battlefield gains in Syria into long-term political, security, social, and economic influence.

- Iran continues to pursue a permanent military presence and economic deals in Syria and probably wants to maintain a network of Shia foreign fighters there despite Israeli attacks on Iranian positions in Syria over the last two years.
- Iran's efforts to expand its influence in Syria and provide arms to Hizballah have been used by Israel to justify airstrikes against Iranian positions within Syria and underscore our growing concern about the long-term trajectory of Iranian influence in the region and the risk that conflict will escalate.
- Iran probably will seek to capitalize on the reduced U.S. mission in Syria to further expand its influence in the country.

In addition to cooperating closely with Hizballah in Syria, Iran relies on a cadre of Shia foreign fighters to achieve its objectives and provide support to the Asad regime. Iran uses these militant networks—comprised primarily of Shia fighters from Iraq and Afghanistan—to fill gaps in Syrian manpower and transport lethal aid. These militants also provide Iran a pool of recruits for potential future attacks against U.S., Israeli, or allied interests in the region.