

Focus on Iran's support of terrorism

BY IVAN SASCHA SHEEHAN

The Trump administration has made great strides in shifting U.S. policy from the conciliatory gestures of the Obama years to a much firmer stance that acknowledges American intolerance for violent extremism, human rights violations and the support of terrorism. Leading administration figures have repeatedly taken to the airwaves to broadcast this message and carried it with them on official trips abroad. Today the messaging is resonating with officials from both parties and in elite policy circles.

The time has never been better for the White House to focus on Iran's support of terrorism.

The Syrian crisis has been complicated by the Iranian regime's determined efforts to arm and defend murderous Syrian President Bashar Assad. Tehran's rulers have dispatched members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to fight directly in the conflict and recruited Afghan and Pakistani refugees to form entire brigades that fight as mercenaries in exchange for the promise of permanent residence in Iran and work permits that they otherwise would never be able to obtain.

Then there are the true believers — recruited from among Iranian hard-liners and Shiite communities throughout the Middle East — who fight as part of a decentralized network of militant groups, many of which have explicitly sworn allegiance to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Further complicating matters

are similar groups in Iraq, as well as the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Taken together, the Iranian project to promote terrorism and expand its regional hegemony becomes apparent.

To the further credit of the new U.S. administration, it is not only speaking out about Iran's destructive influence in the Middle East and the world, it is also taking steps to actually confront and contain the regime's destabilizing influence. Chief among these efforts is President Trump's insistence that the State Department review the possible designation of the IRGC as a foreign terrorist organization. This move by the executive branch spurred action in the legislative branch with the Senate approving a sanctions package that makes the IRGC subject to all terror-related sanctions. This is an important first step, but without further action the Iran-backed terror network will coalesce into something much like what the ISIS militants aspired to create: a region-wide caliphate.

Maryam Rajavi, the president of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), highlighted the regime's ambition in a statement dated June 7, which noted that the Iranian supreme leader seems to be recognized as a "Caliph." The observation was made in response to the news of an ISIS terrorist attack in Tehran, and it sought to emphasize that despite the mullahs' efforts to exploit the incident to portray their regime as a victim of terrorism, the fact remains that President Trump and his allies are right to emphasize that the Islamic Republic is firmly on the wrong side of history — as a supporter, originator and

benefactor of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism.

In fact, the NCRI routinely refers to the Iranian regime as the "godfather of ISIS," partly because of the foundational role that the founders of the Islamic Republic played in promoting political Islam, and partly because Iran specifically backed ISIS predecessor al-Qaida-in-Iraq against the U.S. during the American occupation of Iraq.

That Iran is now in ISIS' crosshairs does not diminish these facts. It simply highlights an important point that is sure to be the focus of the NCRI's Iran Freedom rally in Paris on July 1, namely that the conflicts in the Middle East should never be seen as a contest in which the world accepts the lesser of two evils. Rather, they should be seen as conflicts between moderates of every stripe on one hand and extremists of every stripe on the other.

Whereas President Obama operated from a position that containing ISIS made it necessary to reach out to Iran, despite its own history of terrorism, President Trump has so far been unwilling to make such blithe moral compromises. In the wake of the Tehran attack, he should further challenge the Iranian regime by formally embracing the Iranian Resistance and its plan for regime change. Doing so will give voice to the very moderates who have been marginalized in the Middle East and lay the foundation for a lasting Middle East legacy.

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Learning shouldn't end just because school is out for summer

BY STACIE SANDERS EVANS AND MATTHEW BOULAY

Ahhh, another "end" of the school year. Or is it? We typically think, by default, that our children's "education" only happens from September to June. But while this time is certainly important, we need to expand our thinking — and our time frame — if we are going to truly support our children's academic progress and future opportunities. We should be inspiring children to discover their passions and realize their potential all year — and the summer space gives us an opportunity to try new ways to advance education.

"Summer learning loss," in which students lose academic knowledge and skills over summer break, is a significant problem. In a 2013 study by the National Summer Learning Association, 90 percent of teachers reported spending at least three weeks at the beginning of the school year re-teaching content from the previous year; 24 percent of these teachers reported spending five to six weeks reviewing previous lessons.

This loss is even more significant for students from low-income families, who can lose up to three months of academic progress over the summer. By fifth grade, summer learning loss can leave low-income students 2½ to three years behind their peers in reading and math.

Beyond the impact on academic advancement, imagine what this loss does to a student's motivation, self-esteem and prospects for future academic or personal growth. Imagine a summer filled with the food insecurity and lacking safe, supervised places for informal play or opportunities to experience our city's rich cultural assets like the zoo, the aquarium or our local theatres and museums.

