

February 19, 2019

VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Nielsen, Director Wray, and Acting Secretary Shanahan:

We write to you today regarding a recent interview that Secretary Pompeo gave, in which he confirmed there are active Hezbollah cells in Venezuela.¹ This information is extremely troubling, especially given reports that nefarious elements of the Cuban, Iranian, Chinese and Russian states have also infiltrated Venezuela.² We applaud the Trump Administration's strong stance on a free and democratic Venezuela. We also appreciate the Trump Administration's unapologetic commitment to protecting our homeland, and it is because of that commitment that we write to you.

Effective border security not only addresses the ongoing problem of illegal immigration, but also prevents the cross-border movement of Special Interest Aliens (SIAs) and known or suspected terrorists (K/STs). SIAs are a broad category of individuals who pose a security threat to our homeland. The spectrum of K/STs and SIAs located in Venezuela may include not only Hezbollah terrorists, but also agents of Cuba, Iran, Russia and China. The prospect of such bad actors in our hemisphere raises significant concerns about the safety and well-being of the American people. Should the U.S. government not address these concerns head-on, it would be an absolute abdication of our primary responsibility to provide for the common defense.

Therefore, we request a briefing as soon as possible, but no later than March 12, 2019, on the following questions:

¹ See Fernandez, Henry, *Cuban, Hezbollah and Iranian cells drawn to embattled Venezuela: Mike Pompeo*, Fox Business, Feb. 6, 2019, available at <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/cuban-hezbollah-and-iranian-cells-drawn-to-embattled-venezuela-mike-pompeo>

² See Cara Labrador, Rocio, *Maduro's Allies: Who Backs the Venezuelan Regime?*, Council on Foreign Relations, Feb. 5, 2019, available at <https://www.cfr.org/article/maduros-allies-who-backs-venezuelan-regime>

1. In 2016, the Obama administration was aware of the potential for cross-border movement of SIAs due to vulnerabilities at the southwest border.³ In 2017, POLITICO reported that the Obama administration was also aware of Hezbollah presence in the Western Hemisphere, including the group's strategic networks throughout Central America.⁴
 - a. How is the Trump administration improving upon the Obama administration's failed attempts to deter K/STs and SIAs, as well as their affiliate networks in Central America?
 - b. Without adequate improvements to our border security apparatus, is the U.S. border still vulnerable to penetration by Hezbollah terrorists or agents of the aforementioned countries?
2. In January 2018, the Attorney General announced the creation of the Hezbollah Financing and Narcoterrorism Team (HFNT). In forming the team, the Attorney General recognized that Lebanese Hezbollah poses a sophisticated threat to U.S. national security, and that an aggressive, coordinated law enforcement response is needed to effectively combat and disrupt Hezbollah and restrict the flow of money to the organization.
 - a. Has the Department of Justice's HFNT requested assistance or input from the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Defense in terms of narco-trafficking, terrorism, or money laundering operations occurring within Central and South America? If yes, to what extent is DHS and/or DoD involved in the HFNT?
 - b. Would designating Hezbollah a transnational criminal organization help U.S. efforts to stop their illicit activity in Latin America in terms of drug trafficking and money-laundering? If not, then what action should we take against Hezbollah to stop their regional advances?
3. Since at least the mid-2000s, Cuba, Iran, China and Russia have provided some form of political, security, economic, or military assistance to either the Chávez regime or the Maduro regime.⁵
 - a. What is our counterintelligence capability in dealing with Cuba, Iran, Russia, and China's intelligence operations in the region?
 - b. What methods are being devised to identify, deter, mitigate, and combat foreign intelligence influence in the region?

³ See Bensman, Todd, *Terrorist Infiltration Threat at the Southwest Border*, Center for Immigration Studies, Aug. 13, 2018, available at <https://cis.org/Report/Terrorist-Infiltration-Threat-Southwest-Border>

⁴ See Meyer, Josh, *The secret backstory of how Obama let Hezbollah off the hook*, POLITICO, Dec. 2017, available at <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>

⁵ See Cara Labrador.

- c. Have U.S. intelligence, defense, and law enforcement agencies been able to receive reliable biometric data on any such potential SIAs or K/STs?
 - d. Does this adversarial foothold in Venezuela allow for Central and South America to become a point of entry, or staging location, in the Western hemisphere for other bad actors?
4. Last August, the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force arrested Omar Ameen, a 45-year old Iraqi national living in Sacramento, California, as a purported refugee.⁶ Despite being a member of Al-Qaeda and ISIS, Ameen received legal status and residence in the U.S.
 - a. Are your agencies committing additional and appropriate scrutiny to our visa-screening process, and to the admissions process for refugees and asylees?
 - b. Are there adequate resources at our ports of entry to prevent K/STs and SIAs from entering the country under legal pretenses?
5. Publicly available reports estimate that up to 4 million Venezuelans have left their homeland due to severe economic deprivation at the hands of the oppressive socialist Maduro dictatorship.⁷
 - a. Is there a potential for Hezbollah terrorists and agents of countries, including but not limited to Russia, China, Cuba, and Iran, to infiltrate these refugee populations?
 - b. If so, is the U.S. government taking adequate steps to address that issue?

Thank you both for your attention to this matter. Please direct any questions or follow-up correspondence to our respective staffs.

Sincerely,

Chuck Grassley (R-IA)
U.S. Senator

Ted Cruz (R-TX)
U.S. Senator

⁶ See Department of Justice Press Release, *Iraqi National Wanted for Murder in Iraq Arrested in California*, Aug. 15, 2018, available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/iraqi-national-wanted-murder-iraq-arrested-california>

⁷ See Tharoor, Ishaan, *Venezuela's refugee exodus is the biggest crisis in the hemisphere*, The Washington Post, Aug. 23, 2018, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/08/23/venezuelas-refugee-exodus-is-biggest-crisis-hemisphere/?utm_term=.a51d53ce1db8