

AJC SERIES ON TERRORISM



Hizballah

A Mega-Terrorist Organization

Yehudit Barsky

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

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HIZBALLAH: A MEGA-TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

We consider [America] to be an enemy because it wants to humiliate our governments, our regimes, and our peoples. Because it is the greatest plunderer [of] our treasures, our oil, and our resources, while millions in our nation suffer unemployment, poverty, hunger, unmarriageability, ignorance, darkness, and so on.

America ... This American administration is an enemy. Our motto, which we are not afraid to repeat year after year, is "Death to America."

... Any rift, civil strife, disintegration, or dispersion in any Arab or Islamic country, or in the entire nation, serves our Zionist enemy and its plan of hegemony, and serves the Great Satan—the American administration, whose main concern is to control our oil, our treasures, our resources, and our markets. [They want us] to become millions of slaves who eat and drink but are living dead, devoid of honor, respect, and existence.¹

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, in a speech delivered to thousands of Hizballah supporters, broadcast on Hizballah's Al-Manar television station, February 18, 2005

Since the Lebanese branch of Hizballah was created by Iran in 1982, it has metamorphosed from its early beginnings as a localized terrorist organization into a significant armed presence in Lebanon that has demonstrated its ability to carry out terror attacks far beyond the borders of the Middle East. Hizballah's primary goal is to establish a radical Islamist state in Lebanon, based on the Khomeini-style theocracy in Iran.

Today Hizballah is the only armed force that controls a political party in Lebanon. It holds twelve seats, or 10 percent, of the Lebanese Parliament. For its supporters in Lebanon, Hizballah is the sponsor of social welfare agencies that provide education, health care,

employment, and other services. Hizballah uses these institutions as a mechanism for indoctrination and a pool for recruiting new members to its Islamic Resistance Movement.

Hizballah came to the forefront in March 2005 as the Lebanese and international community pressed for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Hizballah openly opposed the Syrian withdrawal because of Syria's longtime sponsorship of its activities in Lebanon. On March 8, 2005, it organized a pro-Syria demonstration together with other Lebanese supporters of Syria. Although Syria officially withdrew its troops on April 26, it is still maintaining a presence in Lebanon via pro-Syrian Lebanese political parties, Syrian intelligence agents,² and Hizballah.

Hizballah has emerged as a primary operative in Gaza and the West Bank, carrying out terrorism against Israelis, and it also poses a threat to the Palestinian Authority.

Indeed, these activities should be the focus of concern by Western governments, but until now only the United States has listed Hizballah as a terrorist organization. European nations have yet to do so.

The "Party of God"

Hizballah, Arabic for the "Party of God," is a radical Shi'i Islamist terrorist organization created by Iran and based in Lebanon. The organization is led by Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, its "spiritual mentor," and by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, its secretary-general. Hizballah has a twenty-three-year history of attacking Americans, other Westerners, Israelis, and Jews. Its ultimate goal is to eradicate Western influence from the Muslim world.

Iran created Hizballah for the purpose of exporting Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1979 Islamic Revolution. The group's first leader in Iran was Hadi Ghaffari, who served as a minister in Khomeini's government and also was responsible for cooperating with the Lebanese branch of Hizballah,³ which was established in 1982.⁴

Iran provides the organization with \$100 million annually.⁵ It also has established a network of terrorist cells "in at least twenty states, including the U.S., Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Switzer-

land, Italy, Greece, Turkey and Pakistan.”⁶ Former CIA Director George Tenet testified in 2003 that twelve Hizballah cells were operating in the U.S., involved in “actively casing and surveilling American facilities.”⁷

In 1997, the U.S. State Department’s Office of Counterterrorism⁸ designated Hizballah a foreign terrorist organization. On November 2, 2001, President George W. Bush updated Executive Order 13224 of September 23, 2001,⁹ to include freezing U.S. assets of organizations and individuals linked to Hizballah.¹⁰ The European Union has not yet listed Hizballah as a terrorist organization¹¹ as the result of a lack of consensus among its members.¹²

From Terror Organization to Terror Enabler

Hizballah is presently one of the few state-sponsored terrorist organizations in the world. Iran’s support has transformed Hizballah over the past decade from a localized terror organization in Lebanon to an important, disruptive factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It assists Palestinian terrorist organizations such as Hamas, the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine, and branches of the Palestinian Authority’s Fatah organization, including the Tanzim and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades. Hizballah has also provided weaponry directly to the Palestinian Authority, most notably in the January 2002 attempt to transfer arms via the *Karine-A* ship, which Israel captured at sea.

As it engages in funding, training, and providing arms for Palestinian terrorist organizations, Hizballah continues to deny publicly that it is involved in terrorist activities. Throughout its history, Hizballah has never claimed direct responsibility for terrorist attacks. Factions of the organization using various aliases have claimed responsibility for violence ranging from suicide car bombings to bombing attacks and kidnappings.

In 2004, Palestinian organizations funded by Hizballah were responsible for 20 percent of terror attacks against Israelis. Nine million dollars—nearly 10 percent of Hizballah’s \$100 million annual budget—was devoted to funding Palestinian terrorist groups operating in Palestinian Authority areas.¹³ Each cell is reported to receive

between \$5000-\$8000 a month from Hizballah for expenses, including arms, cell phone calling cards, and spending money.¹⁴

More recently, Hizballah has focused on recruiting Palestinians to collect intelligence information for future terrorist attacks within Israel. "Unit 1800," a secret wing of Hizballah, is reportedly taking control over Hamas, Fatah, and other Palestinian terror groups. More than forty terror networks operating in the West Bank and Gaza are managed from Hizballah headquarters in Beirut. As of October 2004, 80 percent of the terror attacks that took place in or originated from the West Bank against Israelis were coordinated by Hizballah.¹⁵ Hizballah is reported to award bounties of \$5,000 for each Israeli killed by Fatah terrorist cells.¹⁶

Hizballah also has a longstanding relationship with Al-Qa`ida. Since September 11, 2001, the chief of Hizballah's Foreign Operations Department, 'Imad Mughniyah, was responsible for having "organized the escape of dozens of Al-Qa`ida elements to Iran"¹⁷ after they fled Afghanistan.¹⁸ Reports from Lebanon in early 2002 indicated that Hizballah had assisted between twenty¹⁹ and fifty²⁰ senior members of the Al-Qa`ida leadership who had arrived in Lebanon. Twenty other Al-Qa`ida members were hosted by Hizballah in a southern suburb of Beirut, Lebanon.²¹ Eighteen months later, approximately 200 members of Al-Qa`ida and the Taliban were residing in 'Ayn Al-Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon.²²

Since mid-2004, Hizballah has reportedly been transferring operatives into Iraq via the Iraq-Syria border. Iran is supporting this activity to aid Iraqi insurgent forces and destabilize Iraq's efforts at establishing its new government and the rule of law.²³

Hizballah, which carried out the suicide bombing that destroyed the U.S. Marines barracks in Beirut in 1983, has also called for attacks against American forces in Iraq. In August 2004, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah of Hizballah joined with the leaders of other Islamic radical and terror organizations in a statement exhorting their followers to support the insurgent forces in Iraq to "purify the land of Islam from the filth of occupation." Other signatories included the Muslim

Brotherhood ideologue Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi; Khalid Al-Mish'al, the leader of Hamas; Sheikh Abd al-Salam Yassine, the leader of the "Justice and Charity" Group in Morocco; and Sheikh Abdullah Al-Ahmar, the speaker of the Yemeni Parliament. The statement called on "our Arab and Muslim peoples and all religious authorities and liberation forces everywhere to oppose the occupation and savage crimes in Iraq and Palestine, by providing all kinds of material and moral support to the honorable resistance ... until God's victory comes."²⁴

More recently, Hizballah in Iran has openly declared that it will carry out suicide attacks against Ma-TV, an Iranian exile-operated television station in the UK. Mojtaba Bigdeli, the spokesman for Hizballah in Iran, demanded that the British government ban the satellite station. Bigdeli asserted that Ma-TV broadcaster Manouchehr Fouladvand "has crossed our red lines by insulting our Prophet and Islamic values." He continued, "After one month, our commandos will carry out suicide attacks in London against the shameless presenter of the channel." The Hizballah spokesman further declared: "This is Hizballah's view and we have discussed it with some clerics. We are sure that they will approve it."²⁵

An Armed Force in Lebanon

Syria's close relationship with Iran and control over Lebanon insured that Hizballah was the only Lebanese militia permitted to keep its arms after the 1989 Ta'if Accord ending Lebanon's civil war. Hizballah maintains its own army along Lebanon's border with Israel, made up of 1,000 operatives,²⁶ together with additional reserve forces that number several thousand more. After Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon on May 25, 2000, Hizballah placed its forces along the border between the two countries, preventing the Lebanese Army from deploying there.

From the withdrawal through July 2004, Hizballah carried out over thirty attacks against Israelis; six civilians were killed, fourteen were wounded,²⁷ and one was kidnapped abroad. During the same period, thirteen Israeli soldiers were killed and fifty-three were

wounded.²⁸ The types of attacks carried out by Hizballah against Israeli targets included 105 attacks using anti-aircraft fire, forty-two anti-tank missile attacks, ten attacks employing explosive devices, five Katyusha rocket attacks, seven shooting attacks, and fourteen attempts to infiltrate the Israeli border.²⁹ More recently, Israeli Defense Forces Captain Sharon Elmakayes was killed in January 2005 when an explosive device was detonated by Hizballah on a road leading to the Israeli military post at Har Dov, which is located on Israel's border with Lebanon. A UNIFIL officer was killed, and a UNIFIL soldier was wounded in the attack.³⁰ Later the same month, Hizballah detonated an explosive device in the Har Dov area on January 14. Several days later, Hizballah exploded another device near an Israel Defense Forces bulldozer that was clearing explosives planted by Hizballah in the same area.³¹

Hizballah continues to be armed by Iran, which supplies it with military-grade weaponry that includes long-range 240 millimeter Iranian Fajr 3 and 333 millimeter Fajr 5³² surface-to-surface missiles,³³ wire-guided TOW missiles³⁴ and AT-3 Sagger antitank missiles, antiaircraft cannons, SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles, Katyusha artillery rockets, sophisticated explosive charges, and small arms.³⁵

By the end of 2004, Iran had reportedly provided Hizballah with 13,000 short-range artillery rockets and long-range missiles.³⁶ Hizballah also has acquired long-range 220 millimeter Syrian missiles. Both the Syrian and Iranian long-range missiles can reach northern Israeli cities, including Haifa, Afula, and Hadera.³⁷

Iran has provided Hizballah with more sophisticated weaponry as well. On November 7, 2004, Hizballah deployed a Mohajer-4 Iranian manufactured unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) over northern Israel. Hizballah declared it to be the Mirsad-1, Arabic for "observation post." The surveillance UAV flew into Israeli airspace at a speed of over 100 knots and at an altitude of approximately 1,000 feet. For a period of five minutes, the UAV flew over the port city of Nahariya, turned out toward the sea and then turned north toward the coast of Lebanon. It then crashed into the sea, where operatives of Hizballah reportedly retrieved it.

Iran has reportedly sold eight UAVs to Hizballah, and officers of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards have trained Hizballah operatives in using them.³⁸ Following the flight, Sheikh Nasrallah boasted, "You can load the Mirsad plane with a quantity of explosive ranging from forty to fifty kilos and send it to its target. Do you want a power plant, water plant, military base? Anything!"³⁹

On April 11, 2005, Hizballah launched a second UAV that flew over Israeli towns in the western Galilee and returned to Lebanon.⁴⁰ Hizballah claimed that the UAV flew to the Israeli coastal city of Acre and returned safely to Lebanon.⁴¹

Since the February 14 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri, the anti-Syrian movement in Lebanon has called for Hizballah's disarmament. Sheikh Nasrallah has denounced both diplomatic and public efforts to disarm Hizballah. "Two representatives of the [Maronite] Patriarch visited me before his departure [to Washington] and I told them that to take firm positions on this question would not be opportune," said the Hizballah leader. "The matter of the resistance [i.e., Hizballah's Islamic Resistance] is an internal Lebanese affair. Neither the United States, nor the UN Security Council nor anyone else has the right to raise this question."⁴²

Nasrallah has declared that Hizballah's armed status is necessary to defend Lebanon from Israel. "I am firm in keeping our arms because I believe the resistance is the best option for defending Lebanon against Israeli threats," he said. He further asserted that Hizballah would keep its weapons for "as long as Lebanon is threatened, even if we remain threatened for a million years."⁴³

Seeking Political Legitimacy

Hizballah participates in the Lebanese political system, currently holding twelve seats in the 128-seat Lebanese parliament.⁴⁴ It has sought to downplay the threat of its status as an armed presence in Lebanon by declaring that its purpose is to defend Lebanon from Israel. In March 2005 Hizballah enlisted its supporters in a show of strength to demonstrate on behalf of Syria maintaining its control over Lebanon. On March 8, 2005, Hizballah organized a demonstra-

tion together with pro-Syrian forces in Beirut to counter earlier Lebanese demonstrations that called for Syria to withdraw completely its troops from Lebanon. At the demonstration Sheikh Nasrallah denounced international efforts to pressure Syria to withdraw its troops. "We tell the whole world that we refuse the [UN's] 1559 resolution." Pointing to the crowds of Hizballah and pro-Syrian demonstrators, Nasrallah asked, "Isn't this Western democracy? The majority is rejecting Resolution 1559."⁴⁵

Hizballah has also engaged in efforts to be recognized as a political entity outside of the Middle East. In September 2004, Hizballah participated in the "International Strategy Meeting" of the anti-war and anti-globalization movements that was held in Beirut. It was the first time that Hizballah had participated in an anti-globalization conference.

At the event, Hizballah was praised as "one of the leading welcoming organizations [and] an example of successful, targeted, and organized resistance." A member of Hizballah's Central Council, 'Ali Fayad, stated that the message of Islam is one of unity and collaboration, not division, and declared that the conference was held in Beirut because Lebanon's resistance [i.e., Hizballah] "defeated the Reagan project for the Middle East in the 1980s ... [and] liberated the land from occupation."⁴⁶

Hizballah has also recently engaged in self-styled efforts at inter-religious dialogue to boost its legitimacy. In October 2004, Sheikh Nabil Qauq, Hizballah's leader in south Lebanon, met with members of a delegation from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Hizballah used the encounter as part of its propaganda broadcasts on its Al-Manar television station. Al-Manar is broadcast in Lebanon and via satellite throughout the Arab world. Until recently, the station also was aired via satellite in the United States and in Europe,⁴⁷ but the broadcasts were shut down or blocked due to Al-Manar's programming content, which promoted Hizballah's ideology and glorified acts of terrorism.

Al-Manar broadcasted a clip of the meeting in which Sheikh Qauq delivered a diatribe against American foreign policy: "The

American policy today is similar to an owl bringing bad tidings. All we hear from Bush are words of war, evil, destruction, killing, siege, and threat. This aggressive inclination is a real danger to all monotheistic religions, and it harms Christianity."⁴⁸

Of particular interest to Al-Manar's viewers was the response of Presbyterian Church representative Elder Ronald Stone: "We treasure the precious words of Hizballah and your expression of goodwill towards the American people. Also we praise your initiative for dialogue and mutual understanding. We cherish these statements that bring us closer to you. As an elder of our church, I'd like to say that according to my recent experience, relations and conversations with Islamic leaders are a lot easier than dealings and dialogue with Jewish leaders."⁴⁹ The leadership of the Presbyterian Church USA denounced the meeting and repudiated Stone's comments.⁵⁰

More recently, Al-Manar and New TV, a Lebanese television station, broadcasted a report from an anti-Israel convention that was held in Beirut in February 2005. Held by the "International League of Members of Parliament Defending the Palestinian Cause," the theme of the conference was "The Right of Return for the Palestinian People." Among the invited participants were members of the Jewish extremist organization Neturei Karta, which opposes the existence of the State of Israel.

Lebanon's New TV interviewed Hizballah's 'Abdallah Qusseir, a member of parliament in Lebanon, who praised the participation of the Jewish representatives as legitimization of Hizballah's desire to destroy the State of Israel:

The participants from the Jewish community are not Zionists—they are even anti-Zionists. They support the [Palestinian] Right of Return, and oppose the existence of the State of Israel. We consider this the convention's trump card. Hizballah has never been against religions. Hizballah supports all religions, it supports interfaith dialogue, and it has no problem with any religion. Hizballah considers Zionism to be the enemy, not the Jews as a people or a religion.⁵¹

In a similar vein, Al-Manar broadcasted a statement of one of the Neturei Karta participants: "Well, our message is always the same.

The Jews in Israel must return to their roots and must observe the Torah and the teachings of Judaism. They must leave this Zionist state, which violates the Jewish religion, and stop persecuting these [Palestinian] people. This way all problems will be solved."⁵²

Conclusion

As Hizballah seeks greater legitimacy both within Lebanon and internationally, it continues to operate as a tool of Iran and continues its efforts to spread its Islamist totalitarian ideology. Throughout its twenty-three-year history, Hizballah has maintained its efforts to propagate its totalitarian vision, not only in Lebanon but to adherents all over the world. Hizballah has also continued its terror activities on a scale that is far beyond that of any localized terrorist organization. Hizballah engages in mega-terrorism: It not only carries out acts of terror itself, but provides weapons, training, and logistical assistance to like-minded terrorist organizations. Iran's creation of Hizballah and its continued support for it ensures that these activities will continue.

Hizballah is employing a long-term strategy by which it uses all means at its disposal to indoctrinate and support its followers in the belief that they will make Hizballah eventually realize its vision. For Hizballah to truly metamorphose beyond a terrorist organization, it would have to stop being Hizballah. It would have to disarm, renounce the propagation of its totalitarian ideology, and, ultimately, completely change its ideology.

At the present, however, Hizballah's participation in Lebanese politics and its self-styled efforts at interreligious dialogue are only being used to empower it in its current form and to legitimize its radical vision and its ultimate goals. Those who provide legitimacy to Hizballah with its ideology and present form intact are engaging in a misguided effort at granting it political inclusion. Hizballah continues to destabilize Lebanon and carry out terror attacks against Israel across its northern border and from within the Palestinian Authority territories. Together with Iran, it has set its sights on the nascent democracy in Iraq and on the American forces operating there.

Hizballah must be recognized for the threat that it is. It must be disarmed of its weapons and its totalitarian ideology.

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**Other publications by Yehudit Barsky
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