

Iran, Hizballah, and the Threat to the Homeland

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Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today about such a critical and timely issue. Just a few months ago, shortly after the disruption and exposure of an Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador here in Washington, D.C., I had the privilege of testifying before two of this committee's subcommittees on the subject of "Iranian Terror Operations on American Soil."¹ Since that time, more has come to light regarding Iran's willingness to target the United States and its allies both abroad and here in the United States.

On January 31, 2012, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper expressed the intelligence community's concern about "Iranian plotting against U.S. or allied interests overseas." Since then, Iran and its primary proxy, Lebanese Hizballah, have carried out a string of terrorist plots abroad. Some were thwarted, including two plots each in Thailand and Azerbaijan. Others were not, including bombings in India and Georgia. In Thailand and Azerbaijan, U.S. interests were reportedly among the intended targets, while the others focused on Israeli targets. Most recently, Azerbaijan's National Security Ministry detained 22 Azeris earlier this month for cooperating with Iran's Revolutionary Guards, receiving training in the use of weapons and spy techniques and plotting attacks on the U.S. and Israeli embassies in Baku.²

Clearly, America and its allies are already involved in a shadow war with Iran, which makes the second development since my last appearance before this committee all the more significant: it is no longer clear that Iran sees carrying out an attack in the United States as crossing some sort of red line.

The U.S. intelligence community has assessed that Iranian leaders appear to be more willing than they may have been in the past to approve attacks in the United States. DNI James Clapper not only testified about Iranian plotting abroad, he also stated that the unprecedented assassination plot targeting the Saudi ambassador reflects the reality "that some Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten

¹ Matthew Levitt, "Iranian Terror Operations on American Soil," testimony before a Joint Hearing of the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence and the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives, October 26, 2011, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=606>.

² "Azerbaijan Arrests 22 over Terror Plot Against US, Israel Embassy," *YNet News*, March 14, 2012.

the regime.”³ Iranian intelligence agents have long been active in the United States through diplomatic stations in New York and through cultural and religious centers throughout the country. I discussed Iran’s history of operational activity in the United States in my prior testimony, and I will refer members there for a discussion of that phenomenon. Today, I would like to leverage the research I have conducted around the world over the past few years for my forthcoming book *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God* (Georgetown University Press) to discuss the potential threat of Hezbollah attacks targeting the homeland.

Hezbollah’s Global Footprint

Hezbollah has targeted U.S. interests abroad in the past, including airline hijackings, the Beirut bombings, and the bombing of the Khobar Towers barracks in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Its operatives have also conducted surveillance of U.S. interests abroad and at home.

Hezbollah has long leveraged its worldwide network of members, supporters, and sympathizers to provide the group financial, logistical, military, and other types of support. Some members of this worldwide support network serve as agents in operations, but the vast majority of these sometimes formal, often informal networks are called upon not to execute operations, but to raise funds and procure dual-use items, false documents, and weapons for Hezbollah.

Hezbollah has long seen the United States as a cash cow, where it has run charities and engaged in a vast array of criminal activities to raise money and procure material for the organization. Nonetheless, according to U.S. authorities, concern over the threat posed by Hezbollah is well placed. Speaking of the rejuvenation of groups such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, then-director of the Central Intelligence Agency George Tenet warned in 2002 that “if these groups feel that U.S. actions are threatening their existence, they may begin targeting Americans directly—as *Hezbollah’s terrorist wing already does*” [emphasis added].⁴ Moreover, in February 2003, Tenet referred to Hezbollah as “an organization with capability and worldwide presence, that is [al-Qaeda’s] equal, if not a far more capable organization...they are a notch above in terms of the relationship with the Iranians. The training they received puts them in a state-sponsor supported category with a potential for lethality that is quite great.”⁵

According to FBI testimony, also in 2002, Hezbollah operatives have conducted surveillance in the United States. While Hezbollah has never conducted a terrorist attack on U.S. soil, the FBI reported, “Hezbollah subjects have reportedly been tasked with surveillance of potential targets in the United States.” The FBI found that “such tasking to date appears to have been intended as a vetting tool to establish the individual’s loyalty to Hezbollah and Iran.”⁶ Whatever the purpose, this Hezbollah surveillance enables the group to develop off-the-shelf operational planning that it can

³ James Clapper, “Unclassified Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” January 31, 2012, p. 5, http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20120131_testimony_ata.pdf.

⁴ George Tenet, “Worldwide Threat-Converging Dangers in a Post 9/11 World,” Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 6, 2002, as published in “Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States,” Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, February 6, 2002, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), p. 8.

⁵ George Tenet, “Threats to National Security,” Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee of the United States Senate, February 12, 2003, p. 60, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-108shrg91721/pdf/CHRG-108shrg91721.pdf>.

⁶ “Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States,” Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the United States Senate, February 6, 2002 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002), pg. 339.

dust off and use at a future date, if it so desires. The FBI concluded: "FBI investigations to date continue to indicate that many Hizballah subjects based in the United States have the capability to attempt terrorist attacks here should this be the desired objective of the group."⁷

Hizballah has long had a substantial base of supporters in North America. This includes some operatives with military and operational training and a much larger pool of sympathizers and supporters who provide funding and some logistical support to the group but could be called upon to support operational activity should the group decide to carry out an attack here. Consider, for example, the substantial logistical and operational roles played by local Hizballah operatives in the 1992 and 1994 Hizballah attacks in Buenos Aires that targeted the Israeli embassy and the AMIA Jewish community center, respectively.

Hizballah's Perception of U.S. Actions against It

While the Arbabsiar plot against the Saudi ambassador suggests at least some Iranian leaders have decided to approve attacks in the United States, Hizballah makes decisions of its own and may not automatically jump to carry out an attack against the United States even if Iran asks it to do so. Recently, several intelligence officials have told me that there has been little cooperation between Iranian and Hizballah cells carrying out attacks abroad; there has even been some element of competition between the two. That said, there is reason for concern that Hizballah may decide to carry out attacks against U.S. interests as a result of its own decisionmaking calculus.

To the extent that Hizballah believes the United States has been involved in directly targeting or undermining the group, the potential for a Hizballah attack against U.S. interests abroad or even in the homeland becomes more likely. Over the past few years, the United States has exposed Hizballah activities in Africa, South America, Asia, and here at home. The Treasury Department designated the Lebanese-Canadian Bank as a primary money laundering entity for laundering Hizballah drug money and facilitating other trade-based money laundering schemes benefiting Hizballah. But none of this compares to the stress which the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) has caused Hizballah. Hizballah's acute anxiety over the indictments can be seen most prominently in its public denunciations of the tribunal as an American project based on false communications data fabricated by Israeli spies embedded in Lebanon's telecommunications industry. Many factors undermine Hizballah's self-promoted image as the incorruptible defender of the oppressed, but none as powerfully as the Hariri investigation. Charges of engaging in terrorism against fellow Lebanese (particularly a Sunni leader such as the late Hariri) are completely at odds with the group's longstanding position that it is first and foremost part of the fabric of Lebanese society, and only secondarily a pan-Shiite or pro-Iranian movement. Hizballah was widely criticized for occupying downtown Beirut in March 2008, when the government tried to rein in the group's airport surveillance activities and its maintenance of a private telecommunications system. At the time, many Lebanese viewed Hizballah as putting its own interests ahead of those of the country. Yet that incident pales in comparison to the implications of the charges brought by the tribunal against four Hizballah members, including Imad Mughniyah's brother-in-law, Mustafa Badreddine. Hizballah blames this turn of events on Israel and the United States: "This American-Israeli tribunal is unconstitutional, illegal, and politically motivated."⁸ Later, Hizballah chief Hassan

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Hizballah Chief Unhappy with Funding Lebanon's 'Politically Motivated' Tribunal," *Al-Arabiya*, December 1, 2010, <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/12/01/180337.html>.

Nasrallah said the STL was part of a new U.S. plot to smear the image of the popular resistance movement.⁹

Hizballah also believes the United States is behind the unrest in Syria, which threatens to topple one of its most important benefactors and the conduit through which Iranian funding and material is transported to Hizballah in Lebanon. Sheikh Naim Qassem, the deputy secretary-general of Hizballah, has said that "the unrest engulfing Syria is a foreign conspiracy fueled by the United States and its allies."¹⁰ According to Qassem, "The U.S. and its allies have openly showed their inclination to change the governing system of Syria, and this is the violation of the Syrian nation's right to determine their own destiny through holding dialogue with the system. Negotiations should lead to the establishment of political stability and security in Syria."¹¹ In the words of Nasrallah, speaking on the fourth anniversary of the death of Imad Mughniyah, "There is an Arab, Western, American, and Israeli insistence that there is no solution in Syria except toppling the Syrian government."¹² In a joint statement issued after a meeting of the Hizballah and Amal commands in the eastern city of Baalbek, the groups stated that the current turmoil in Syria was part of an "international conspiracy" targeting Damascus for its support for Arab and Muslim resistance movements in the region and emphasized their "firm support for the Islamic Republic in the face of American and Israeli threats."¹³ Recently, Hizballah accused the U.S. embassy in Lebanon of overseeing operations against Syria. Former Lebanese Information Minister Michel Samaha declared that the visits to Beirut of U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence Michael G. Vickers prove that the U.S. embassy is in "a war of espionage" with Syria.¹⁴

Finally, the odds are very strong that in the event of an attack on Iran's nuclear program, Hizballah would retaliate. Whether it would launch rockets at Israel is an open question, since that would bring a massive Israeli response. But its worldwide networks would almost certainly be called upon to execute the kind of asymmetric terror attacks that can be carried out with reasonable deniability and therefore make a targeted response more difficult. Muhammad Hejazi, the deputy head of Iran's armed forces, hinted that Tehran could order proxy militant groups in Gaza and Lebanon to fire rockets into Israel. He even implied such a strike could be used preemptively, before an attack on Iran. "We are no longer willing to wait for enemy action to be launched against us," he told Iran's Fars news agency. "Our strategy now is that we will make use of all means to protect our national interests."¹⁵ Hizballah leaders have also stated they would stand by Iran and any other person that has stood up to the Zionist regime.¹⁶

⁹ "STL Part of Psywar against Resistance," Press TV, July 2, 2011, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/187262.html>.

¹⁰ "U.S. Bloc behind Syria Unrest: Deputy Hizballah Chief," *Tehran Times*, November 29, 2011, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/92727-us-bloc-behind-syria-unrest-deputy-Hizballah-chief>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Hizballah Accuses US, Israel of Fuelling Unrest in Syria," Press TV, February 16, 2012, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/227085.html>.

¹³ Hussein Dabrouk, "Hizballah, Amal Stand By Iran, Syria against U.S., Israeli Threats," *Daily Star*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Nov-22/154847-Hizballah-amal-stand-by-iran-syria-against-us-israeli-threats.ashx#axzz1p1YIRDAI>.

¹⁴ "Hizballah Accuses US Embassy in Beirut of Espionage against Syria," Press TV, March 13, 2012, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/231402.html>.

¹⁵ Adrian Blomfield, "Iran Threatens to Use 'All Means' in Pre-emptive Strike on Israel," *Independent*, February 22, 2012, <http://features.rr.com/article/06tXfWiaof64W?q=Hamas>.

¹⁶ "U.S. Bloc behind Syria Unrest: Deputy Hizballah Chief," *Tehran Times*, November 29, 2011, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/politics/92727-us-bloc-behind-syria-unrest-deputy-Hizballah-chief>.

A 1994 FBI report summarizes the concern about the threat of Hizballah attacks in the event the group believes the United States threatens its interests:

The Hizballah leadership, based in Beirut, Lebanon, would be reluctant to jeopardize the relatively safe environment its members enjoy in the United States by committing a terrorist act within the U.S. borders. However, such a decision could be initiated in reaction to a perceived threat from the United States or its allies against Hizballah interests.¹⁷

Four Threat Scenarios

In light of Hizballah's perception that the United States is actively targeting it and its allies, it is worth considering how the group might pursue an attack in the United States should it decide to do so. There are four ways the group could leverage its passive sympathizers and active networks to support such an operation. First, Hizballah could leverage local networks to carry out a foreign-directed attack. Second, Hizballah could call on individuals or networks to provide support to undercover operatives sent in from abroad to carry out an attack. Third, Hizballah could call upon its working relationships with criminal elements to either provide support for an attack or possibly even to carry one out (the Qods Force appears to have done just this when it reached out to an assassin tied to Mexican drug cartels through Mansour Arbabsiar). Finally, in the event of an attack on Iran or Hizballah, they could simply issue a public call for sympathizers and supporters to carry out acts of "resistance" in solidarity with them in the hope of inspiring acts of homegrown violent extremism on the part of radicalized Shiite supporters of Hizballah and Iran.

1. Leverage local networks. Historically, within the larger community of people sympathetic to Hizballah here in the United States, there have been Hizballah militants with terrorist and military training. According to a 1994 FBI report, "Should the decision be made to strike within the U.S. borders, Hizballah has the infrastructure present to support or carry out a terrorist act. Certain Hizballah members in the United States have received paramilitary training, including explosives and firearms training."¹⁸ Consider just a couple of examples:

On Feb. 4, 2001, Mahmoud Youssef Kourani was smuggled across the U.S.-Mexican border in the hidden compartment of a smuggler's car. After paying a Beirut consular official \$3,000 for a Mexican visa, the Lebanese carpenter paid another \$4,000 to be smuggled into the United States. Settling in Dearborn, Michigan, Kourani reportedly raised at least \$40,000 for Hizballah.¹⁹ But he was no mere fundraiser. Court documents indicate that he was not only a "member, fighter, recruiter, and fund raiser," for Hizballah, but also the brother of Hizballah's chief of military security for southern Lebanon. Moreover, before coming to the United States, Kourani not only received "specialized training in radical Shiite fundamentalism, weaponry, spy craft, and counterintelligence in Lebanon and Iran," he was also a Hizballah recruiter and fundraising solicitor

¹⁷ "International Radical Fundamentalism: An Analytical Overview of Groups and Trends," Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, November 1994, declassified on November 20, 2008, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/469.pdf>.

¹⁸ "International Radical Fundamentalism: An Analytical Overview of Groups and Trends," Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, November 1994, declassified on November 20, 2008, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/469.pdf>.

¹⁹ Pauline Arrillaga and Olga R. Rodriguez, "The Terror-Immigration Connection," MSNBC, July 3, 2005, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8408009/ns/us_news-security/t/terror-immigration-connection/;

"Hizballah Fundraiser Sentenced to Prison," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jun/15/nation/na-Hizballah15>.

in southern Lebanon.²⁰ In 2005, Kourani pled guilty to conspiring to support a terrorist organization in exchange for a four-and-a-half year prison sentence.²¹

In the summer of 2000, while investigating an interstate cigarette smuggling case, investigators stumbled upon a Hizballah cell based in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mohamad Hammoud, the cell's leader, was convicted of racketeering and providing material support to Hizballah.²² During the trial, evidence was presented that members of the cell worked closely with Sheikh Abbas Harake, a Hizballah military commander in southern Lebanon. In a letter seized by the FBI, Harake called Hammoud "a dear brother who has not forgotten his field of work," and in an intercepted phone call with Harake, Hammoud repeatedly declares "we're at your service."²³ Personal photographs of his militancy—Hammoud at the Hizballah Center in Beirut, Hammoud and other co-conspirators posing with weapons, and Hammoud proudly standing in front of portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and Hassan Nasrallah—were presented at trial, along with evidence of immigration fraud by him and members of his extended family, some of whom entered the United States illegally via Venezuela and Cyprus by way of false visas and fraudulent marriages.²⁴ In an undated letter to Hammoud, Sheikh Abbas makes clear how the group feels about the United States:

Peace be on the pleasant blood that was shed and irrigated the tree of Islam in the east and west, to include the blood of the noblest of the Islamic Resistance's martyrs Mr. Abbas Al-Mousawy. As I greeted the virtuous ones, I must damn the evil ones. Damn America the criminal, and the arrogant Israel that commits injustice and hostility; and Allah, you are the everlasting over the enemies of Islam.²⁵

While Hammoud awaited trial, federal authorities discovered a notional plot to murder the prosecutor, First Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth Bell, and bomb Charlotte's federal courthouse.²⁶ An intercepted letter from Hammoud to a government informant referred to someone whose "assignment is to put bullets into the skull of the arrogant, bastard prosecutor."²⁷ Alternatively, the unknown operative who would carry out this assignment should "annihilate with massive explosives the evidence against us...There is no room for error. Too much depends on this operation." Hammoud wrote, "I am filled with hope and anticipation."²⁸

²⁰ United States of America v. Mahmoud Youssef Kourani, "Indictment," U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division, Criminal No. 03-81030, November 19, 2003, <http://f11.findlaw.com/news.findlaw.com/cnn/docs/terrorism/uskourani111903ind.pdf>.

²¹ "Hizballah Fundraiser Sentenced to Prison," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 2005, <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jun/15/nation/na-Hizballah15>.

²² David E. Kaplan, "Homegrown Terrorists," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 2, 2003, <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/030310/10hez.htm>.

²³ United States of America v. Mahmoud Youssef Hammoud et al., United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte Division, Docket No. 3:00-cr-147.

²⁴ United States of America v. Mahmoud Youssef Hammoud et al., United States District Court for the Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte Division, Docket No. 3:00-cr-147.

²⁵ Letter from Sheikh Abbas Alaa to Mohamad Hammoud, Federal Bureau of Investigation, transcribed January 29, 2001, case number 265B-CE-82188, ID number S04055011.

²⁶ U.S. Attorney Anne M. Tompkins, Western District of North Carolina, Department of Justice press release, January 27, 2011, <http://www.justice.gov/usao/ncw/press/hammoudsentence.html>.

²⁷ "Smuggler May Have Plotted to Kill Prosecutor," *Star News*, November 11, 2002, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1454&dat=20021111&id=GrtOAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=aR8EAAAAIIBAJ&pg=2429,3123944>; David E. Kaplan, "Homegrown Terrorists," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 2, 2003, http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/030310/10hez_4.htm.

²⁸ "Smuggler May Have Plotted to Kill Prosecutor," *Star News*, November 11, 2002, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1454&dat=20021111&id=GrtOAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=aR8EAAAAIIBAJ&pg=2429,3123944>.

One of the other people indicted in the Charlotte case was Mohammed Dbouk. According to U.S. investigators, Dbouk is an Iranian-trained Hezbollah operative and “an intelligence specialist and propagandist [who] was dispatched to Canada by Hezbollah for the express purpose of obtaining surveillance equipment (video cameras and handheld radios and receivers) and military equipment (night-vision devices, laser range-finders, mine and metal detectors, and advanced aircraft analysis tools).”²⁹ Several indicators suggest that he ranks as a significant Hezbollah operative. For example, U.S. Attorney Robert Conrad, whose office successfully prosecuted the Hezbollah case in Charlotte, testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee that according to human source intelligence, “Dbouk is such a major player in the Hezbollah organization that on five separate occasions his application to be a martyr was rejected.” Asked to explain why his application to be sent on a martyrdom mission (that is, a suicide or other mission from which he would not, or would be unlikely to, return) was rejected, Conrad replied, “He was rejected five times because of his significance to the organization.”³⁰ With his intelligence, military training, and expertise in information operations, Hezbollah officials apparently saw Dbouk as too valuable a commodity and too significant a player to expend on a martyrdom mission. According to the CSIS intercepts, in a conversation with someone named Said (last name unknown), Dbouk tried to discuss politics, and Said stated that he wanted to be careful about what they discussed on the telephone. Ignoring this kind of operational security protocol for which Hezbollah is well known, Dbouk responded that “he did not care about anything and was committed to securing all the items for the brothers at any cost; he was attempting to avoid going to hell and secure a place in heaven by so doing.”³¹

But Hezbollah could also deploy operatives who might not fit a typical profile for Lebanese Hezbollah, the FBI has warned. In the first instance, they may not be Lebanese. At one point, the FBI informed, an Iraqi Shiite cleric in Texas who had ties to Iran positioned himself in a leadership role for Hezbollah in the United States. Hezbollah members could come from several countries, the FBI noted, especially Iraq and Iran. In general, the FBI reported, “Hezbollah is particularly interested in recruiting non-Lebanese Shiites, since they do not fit the normal Hezbollah profile and are less prone to surveillance and detection.” Hezbollah also had made initial contacts with African American Muslims to discuss mutual cooperation, the FBI reported. In addition, Hezbollah members in the United States reached out to overseas members of other terrorist groups, including Sunni Hamas and the Lebanese Islamic Group (not the Egyptian group by the same name), for the purpose of cementing agreements promising to carry out joint attacks against the United States or Israel should Islamic interests be threatened.³²

Hezbollah operatives in the United States have also demonstrated security consciousness, suggesting they could bring a level of operational security into play in the event they were instructed to carry out an operation here in the United States. According to the FBI, “members of one West Coast cell reportedly initiated a ‘neighborhood watch program’ in order to alert cell

²⁹ Robert Fromme and Rick Schwein, “Operation Smokescreen: A Successful Interagency Collaboration,” *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 76, no. 12 (December 2007), <http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/2007-pdfs/dec07leb.pdf>.

³⁰ U.S. Attorney Robert J. Conrad Jr., Western District of North Carolina, testimony before Senate Committee on the Judiciary, “An Assessment of the Tools Needed to Fight the Financing of Terrorism,” November 20, 2002.

³¹ “CSIS Summaries, Redacted Copy, Trial Testimony,” United States of America v. Mohamad Youssef Hammoud, et al., U.S. District Court, Western District of North Carolina, Charlotte Division, Docket No. 3:00-cr-147, p. 11.

³² “International Radical Fundamentalism: An Analytical Overview of Groups and Trends,” Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, November 1994, declassified on November 20, 2008, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/469.pdf>.

members of an FBI presence.” In another case, a Hizballah cell in New York was instructed to divide into teams as a security precaution. “Teams were not to discuss Hizballah matters outside of their team,” the FBI reported. “Secret communications could no longer be carried by courier, and letters could not contain details such as the names of members.”³³

2. Import professional operatives. Another option available to Hizballah would be to bring in outsiders to carry out an attack, using local sympathizers and operatives only for support functions. This is Hizballah’s more traditional *modus operandi*, which it employed in Argentina in 1992 and 1994, in Thailand in 1994, and more recently in Azerbaijan, Turkey, Thailand, and elsewhere over the past few years.

Take the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. Within weeks of the attacks, Argentinean federal police released a composite sketch of the suicide bomber to the local press that was based on the testimony of several witnesses, including a door-to-door survey of neighborhood residents shortly after the bombing. Other sketches were publicized of the person who parked the van used in the bombing in a nearby garage three days before the attack.³⁴ But as quickly as authorities produced these sketches, and as useful as they would later be in definitively identifying the perpetrators as members of a Hizballah hit team, they were too late to help apprehend them before they escaped the country. The Iranian diplomatic support network left the county in waves in the weeks leading up to the attack. The exception was Mohsen Rabbani, an Iranian who had lived in Argentina for eleven years and was the primary architect of the plot. Just four months before the attack, Rabbani suddenly became an official Iranian diplomat, complete with Iranian diplomatic credentials and immunity. As for the Hizballah operatives brought in to execute the bombing, Argentinean law enforcement and intelligence officials would later determine they left the country about two hours prior to the actual explosion.³⁵

While some of the operatives, including the suicide bomber, entered the country at Argentina’s highly unregulated border crossings in the Tri-Border Area where Argentina meets Brazil and Paraguay, others arrived—presumably with false documents—at Ezeiza International Airport on July 1, 1994, and left the morning of the attack through Jorge Newbery Metropolitan Airport, some on flights to the Tri-Border Area.³⁶ Investigators would later trace phone calls placed from pay phones at these airports, as well as calls from pay phones near the AMIA building during their stay, to a cellular phone in Foz de Iguazu, on the Brazilian side of the Friendship Bridge spanning the Parana River in the Tri-Border Area. From Foz, as it is locally known, a network of Hizballah supporters coordinated the activities of the terrorist cell members operating in Buenos Aires.

³³ “International Radical Fundamentalism: An Analytical Overview of Groups and Trends,” Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, November 1994, declassified on November 20, 2008, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/469.pdf>.

³⁴ The sketches were published in the Buenos Aires newspaper *Clarín* on August 1 and 6, 1994, and again on September 28, 1995; see copies of the paper and details in written answers to Question for the Record for Ambassador Philip Wilcox, testimony at a hearing on “Terrorism in Latin America/AMIA Bombing in Argentina” before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, September 28, 1995, pp. 111-117.

³⁵ Report by the Investigations Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, “AMIA Case,” signed by District Attorney Marcelo Martínez Burgos, Attorney General Alberto Nisman, and Secretary of the Office of the Attorney General Hernán Longo, October 25, 2006.

³⁶ Nisman and Burgos’s 2006 report states the suicide bomber likely came in through the Tri-Border Area. And in an August 16, 2009, interview with the author, a senior Argentinean law enforcement officer confirmed the investigation had “definitively” determined that the suicide bomber, Ibrahim Berro entered through the Tri-Border Area.

Frequent calls were made between phones in Argentina and the cell phone in Foz as preparations for the bombing progressed. Then, the day of the attack, the flow of calls suddenly stopped.³⁷

In terms of infiltrating operatives into the United States, Hizballah's ability to procure high-quality false passports is of particular concern. According to the FBI, "In an ongoing effort to bring more members into the United States, Hizballah also alters or steals travel documents, passports and visas. In one such operation, Hizballah members presented photo-substituted passports and fraudulent visa applications at a U.S. Embassy. Eighteen individuals successfully obtained passports in this manner."³⁸

Sometimes, Iran helps Hizballah operatives obtain high-quality forged travel documents. In March 1996, Hussein Mikdad walked into the Iranian embassy in Beirut to have his photograph taken for a forged passport. Iranian experts apparently doctored the passport, a legitimate passport that was stolen in France and then acquired by Hizballah operatives in Europe on the black market. Mikdad successfully entered Israel on his false passport and in April 1996 was severely injured when the explosive device he was preparing in his east Jerusalem hotel room exploded prematurely. According to Israeli intelligence, "Hizballah members operating in Europe invest many resources in this activity and succeeded in acquiring many passports that are used by the organization's activists in their travels all over the world."³⁹

Mahmoud Kourani and Mohammed Dbouk are hardly the only examples of hardened Hizballah operatives who made their way to the United States or Canada. Consider the case of Fawzi Ayub, who lived in Canada but also maintained an address in Michigan. In mid-2002, Israeli authorities conducting a search in Hebron arrested him; he had entered the territories by sea using a forged American passport in the name of Frank Mariano Boschi. In Ayub, Hizballah planners secured a Canadian passport and a Hizballah veteran who had taken part in sensitive operations abroad in the past. In the mid-1980s, he was convicted by a Romanian court for his role in a Hizballah plot to hijack an Iraqi airliner set to depart from Bucharest and negotiate the release of Shiite clerics detained in Iraq in exchange for the Iraqi passengers.⁴⁰ Ayub immigrated to Canada in 1988, where he was welcomed by family members already there, and he became a Canadian citizen in 1992. At first glance, Ayub led a normal life in the Toronto area. He married a woman from the Detroit area, just across the Ambassador Bridge linking Detroit to Windsor, Ontario. At some point he lived in the Dearborn area just outside of Detroit, according to U.S. prosecutors.⁴¹ He studied in the evenings and worked at a grocery during the day. But all the while, Ayub remained an active Hizballah agent, according to Israeli officials. In the words of one such official, "It's very easy for a guy like Fawzi to live inside Europe, to live inside Canada, and do things that are not exactly legal."⁴² While in Canada, Israeli officials maintain, Ayub "maintained contact with senior

³⁷ Report by the Investigations Unit of the Office of the Attorney General, "AMIA Case," signed by District Attorney Marcelo Martinez Burgos, Attorney General Alberto Nisman, and Secretary of the Office of the Attorney General Hernan Longo, October 25 2006, pp. 14-15.

³⁸ "International Radical Fundamentalism: An Analytical Overview of Groups and Trends," Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, November 1994, declassified on November 20, 2008, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/469.pdf>.

³⁹ "Hizballah's International Terrorism and the Penetration of Hizballah Activists into Israel," undated Israeli intelligence report received by the author August 5, 2003.

⁴⁰ Stewart Bell, *Cold Terror: How Canada Nurtures and Exports Terrorism to the World* (Wiley, 2004), p. 81.

⁴¹ USA v. Faouzi Ayoub, indictment, case 2:09-cr-20367, filed under seal August 5, 2009, unsealed July 2011; see also Robert Snell, "Dearborn Man Accused of Bomb Mission on FBI's Most Wanted List," *Detroit News*, July 6, 2011.

⁴² Bell, *Cold Terror*, pp. 81-82.

Hizballah officials and carried out operations."⁴³ Asked by an Israeli judge if he told Canadian authorities about previous charges of attempting to carry out an act of terrorism, Ayub replied, "They never asked."⁴⁴ A sealed indictment was issued for him in Michigan on August 5, 2009, which was unsealed two years later in July 2011.⁴⁵

3. Leverage criminal ties. In light of the counterterrorism measures Western security and intelligence agencies have implemented in the years since September 11, it is now much harder than it was before to carry out attacks in general, and in Western, developed countries in particular. This affects the operational capabilities not only of al-Qaeda but Hizballah and all other groups. One way Hizballah has tried to counter this new operational reality has been to reach out to local criminal networks with whom its operatives have established connections for the purpose of raising funds and procuring dual-use or military material, and to leverage those relationships for operational purposes as well. By some accounts, Hizballah started to make this shift even before 9/11 and simply accelerated it afterward. The group reportedly used criminal elements as operatives for some of its activities in Europe when it kidnapped retired Israeli military officer Elchanan Tannenbaum in the fall of 2000. Whenever the trend first started, it is now in full swing. And Hizballah has developed a robust network of criminal associates in the United States, Canada, and now Mexico.

Consider, for example, the November 2009 indictment of ten individuals, including a member of Hizballah's Political Bureau back in Beirut, Hassan Hodroj. The network's criminal schemes were varied, including selling counterfeit money, stolen money, and fraudulent passports; weapons procurement; and selling stolen goods such as cell phones, laptops, Sony PlayStation 2 game consoles, and cars. The stolen goods were shipped from Pennsylvania to places where Hizballah is known to have a foothold, including Lebanon, Venezuela's Margarita Island, and Benin.⁴⁶ But the network was also involved in weapons procurement, including Colt M4 Carbine machine guns, pistols, and rifles. When the government's cooperating witness (CW), who was the network's source for weapons, insisted on being assured by high-level Hizballah officials that the weapons were bound for Hizballah and would be intercepted, one of the indicted conspirators, Dib Hani Harb, immediately picked up the phone and got a senior Hizballah official on the line to give the necessary assurances. Later, the CW met with Dib Hani Harb's father-in-law, Hassan Hodroj, who is identified in court documents as "publically recognized and acknowledged as a member of Hizballah's Political Council." Hodroj explained to the CW that even though he was a senior Hizballah political official, he was "involved in weapons and technology procurement for Hizballah." He demurred when the CW offered to procure Glock pistols for Hizballah, stating instead that Hizballah needed "heavy machinery," which would be used "in their fight against Jews and to protect Lebanon." Hodroj said Hizballah also needed "communications system equipment and spy

⁴³ "Intensive Intelligence Operation by the ISA Arrested in June 2002 Senior Hizballah Militant," press release communicated by the prime minister's advisor, October 30, 2002, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Archive/Press+Releases/2002/10/Spokesman6728.htm>.

⁴⁴ Bell, *Cold Terror*, p. 81.

⁴⁵ United States of America v. Faouzi Ayoub a/k/a Frank Mariano Boschi, indictment, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Michigan, Southern Division, August 5, 2009, http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1599.pdf; Corey Williams, "Mich. Man Accused of Seeking to Set Bomb in Israel," ABC News, July 7, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=14013301>.

⁴⁶ United States of America v. Sadek Mohamad Koumaiha et al., U.S. District Court, Eastern District, Pennsylvania, 09, November 23, 2009.

systems from the United States.”⁴⁷ Further to the discussion above about Hizballah’s procurement of false passports, three of the defendants reportedly also generated additional funds for Hizballah by selling fraudulent passports. “The CW and the defendants participated in the purchase of two fake passports—one from the United Kingdom and one from Canada—for the benefit of Hizballah.”⁴⁸

Also in November 2009, Dani Nemr Tarraf—a Lebanese-born German citizen and businessman—was arrested for paying a \$20,000 cash deposit to an undercover officer in an effort to purchase and ship anti-aircraft missiles, 10,000 machine guns, night-vision equipment, and shoulder-fired Stinger missiles to Hizballah.⁴⁹ Further, from January 2007 to November 2009, Tarraf obtained and conspired to obtain FIM-92 Stinger Missiles, Colt M-4 Carbines machine guns, Glock pistols, sniper-detection technology, night-vision and thermal-imaging equipment, wireless network equipment, lensatic compasses, and two-way radios.⁵⁰ According to U.S. officials, the weapons Tarraf sought to procure were to be shipped to either Iran or Syria for use by the “resistance.” At one point, Tarraf insisted he wanted to purchase guided missiles that could “take down an F-16.”⁵¹ Tarraf ultimately gave a full confession to the charged offenses and admitted to being a member of Hizballah and to receiving military training from the group.⁵²

Further, consider the case of Jamal Yousef, a former member of the Syrian military and international arms dealer, who was charged in 2009 with participating in a narcoterrorism conspiracy. According to U.S. prosecutors, Yousef planned to sell the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) a cache of military-grade weapons in exchange for hundreds of kilograms of cocaine. Yousef and his partners claimed that “the weapons had been stolen from Iraq and were stored in Mexico” at the home of Yousef’s relative, an active member of Hizballah.⁵³

The possibility also exists that Hizballah could press unwilling individuals into operational activity through intimidation and threats of violence. In at least one instance, the FBI reports, “Hizballah members have attempted to wrest control of a mosque through intimidation and threats of violence. Members of the mosque were told that if they did not embrace the beliefs of Hizballah, they would be forcibly prevented from admittance.” In other cases, while most donations to Hizballah are given willingly, the FBI reported, “most Lebanese nationals in the United States have family members still living in Lebanon, thus availing themselves to extortion.”⁵⁴

⁴⁷ FBI Supervisory Special Agent Sameul Smemo Jr., Affidavit in Support of Application for Arrest and Seizure Warrants, November 20, 2009, http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/case_docs/1466.pdf.

⁴⁸ “Four Indicted for Conspiring to Support Hizballah; Six Others Charged with Related Crimes,” U.S. Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Pennsylvania, November 24, 2009, <http://www.fbi.gov/philadelphia/press-releases/2009/ph112409.htm>.

⁴⁹ MaryClaire Dale, “Lebanese Man Accused in Arms Buy to Be Detained,” Associated Press, December 8, 2009; Randy Pennell, “Man Arrested in Anti-Aircraft Missile Plot,” Associated Press, November 24, 2009.

⁵⁰ Superseding Indictment, United States of America v. Dani Nemr Tarraf et al., U.S. District Court, Eastern District, Pennsylvania, 09-743.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Pretrial Detention Order, United States of America v. Dani Nemr Tarraf, U.S. District Court, Eastern District, Pennsylvania, 09-743-01, December 3, 2009.

⁵³ Indictment, United States of America v. Jamal Yousef, Case No 1:08-cr-01213-UA, U.S. District Court Southern District of New York, July 06, 2009

⁵⁴ “International Radical Fundamentalism: An Analytical Overview of Groups and Trends,” Terrorist Research and Analytical Center, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, November 1994, declassified on November 20, 2008 <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/469.pdf>.

4. Homegrown violent extremism. Finally, the possibility also exists for Hizballah sympathizers or others without formal ties to Hizballah to carry out acts of lone-wolf terrorism in solidarity with Hizballah and/or Iran. This trend, which to date has been limited to violent Sunni Islamist extremism, could manifest itself in the event of a direct confrontation with Hizballah or Iran.

Consider, for example, the case of Hani al-Sayegh, a member of Saudi Hizballah who was involved in the bombing of Khobar Towers in 1996. Like most of his co-conspirators, al-Sayegh fled Saudi Arabia after the attack. He took a circuitous route to Canada, traveling from Kuwait to Rome to Boston to Ottawa. Confessions from his co-conspirators and intercepted telephone conversations convinced Canadian, American, and Saudi officials that al-Sayegh played a key role in the bombing and had maintained contact with Iranian officials—both in Iran and Canada—since the attack. For example, while in Canada, al-Sayegh spoke with his wife in Saudi Arabia and, speaking in Persian, with Iranian officials in Iran. “In these conversations he makes oblique references that suggest a possible involvement in the Dhahran bombing, and he intimates that some of his cohorts fled at one time to Iran.” In one conversation, he referred to co-conspirators being “in the country of Rafsanjani,” a reference to Iran’s then-President Hashemi Rafsanjani.⁵⁵

On March 18, 1997, Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrested al-Sayegh at the Queen Mary convenience store on joint orders of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the Solicitor General on the grounds that he posed “a security risk to Canada.”⁵⁶ In May, al-Sayegh met with American officials and after first insisting he knew nothing about the Khobar bombing, he soon confessed to having once been a member of the Saudi Hizballah cell that carried out the bombing. Al-Sayegh informed that he was recruited by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and had participated not only in the Khobar bombing but in another unspecified operation directed by IRGC Gen. Ahmad Sharifi.⁵⁷ He agreed to assist U.S. officials investigating the bombing as part of his plea bargain. But once he arrived in the United States, he reneged on his agreement and sought political asylum here. That effort failed, and in October 1999, al-Sayegh was deported to Saudi Arabia. Concerned that Hizballah might retaliate against U.S. interests for deporting him, the State Department issued a worldwide warning advising U.S. citizens “to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness to lessen their vulnerability.” The potential existed, U.S. officials maintained, that “someone might try to take retaliatory action” for returning al-Sayegh to Saudi custody.⁵⁸

Conclusion

It is by no means a foregone conclusion that Hizballah would carry out an attack in the homeland in the event of an attack on Iran, or if Hizballah’s interests were otherwise threatened by U.S. action. It is still far more likely that Hizballah would attempt to carry out attacks targeting U.S. and allied interests in places where counterterrorism measures are not as robust, as it has over the past few years in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Egypt, and Thailand. Hizballah and Iran both prefer to carry out attacks for which they can claim reasonable deniability, and Hizballah recognizes that executing an attack on American soil would put the group squarely in the crosshairs of America’s

⁵⁵ Thomas Friedman, “Stay Tuned,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1997.

⁵⁶ Elaine Sciolino, “U.S. Rebuffed by Syrians over Bombing,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1997; Anthony DePalma, “Canada Links Pro-Iranian Group to Saudi Attack on U.S. Barracks,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1997.

⁵⁷ Louis J. Freeh, with Howard Means, *My FBI: Bringing Down the Mafia, Investigating Bill Clinton, and Fighting the War on Terror* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2005), p. 19.

⁵⁸ “Suspect in Khobar Towers Bombing Fights Deportation to Saudi Arabia,” CNN.com, October 5, 1999.

ongoing struggle against international terrorism, something the group has studiously avoided since 9/11. That said, in the event Hizballah leaders decide an attack on American soil is in their interest, they do have the capability to execute terrorist attacks here in the homeland.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to answering any questions you may have.