

Hizballah and the Qods Force in Iran's Shadow War with the West

[*Matthew Levitt*](#)

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In October 2012, an Iranian-American car salesman pleaded guilty to his role in an audacious plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States. The plot, to be carried out in a Washington, D.C., restaurant, drew nearly as much attention for its clumsy execution as it did for the boldness of the target and the location. But the buzz around the assassination attempt obscured its part in a more ominous project: a large-scale campaign by Hizballah and Iran's elite Qods Force, begun in early 2010, to carry out acts of violence targeting not only Israel but also U.S. and other Western interests.

This Policy Focus -- drawn from Matthew Levitt's forthcoming book *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God* (Georgetown University Press) -- outlines the ambitious scope of this latest Hizballah-Qods Force undertaking. Among the piece's key revelations is that the quest for successful strikes has often led operatives to areas of lower operational risk, from Azerbaijan to Bulgaria to Thailand. Recent developments -- such as the 2008 murder of Hizballah commander Imad Mughniyah and Western attempts to sabotage the Iranian nuclear program -- figure prominently in this unfolding story. Most important for Western officials, however, will be heightened vigilance against what is sure to be sharper operational performance by two "strategic partners" whose prolific working relationship dates back three decades.

THE AUTHOR

Matthew Levitt is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute, where he directs the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. Previously, he served in the senior executive service as deputy assistant secretary for intelligence and analysis at the Treasury Department, and before that as an FBI counterterrorism analyst, including work on the Millennial and September 11 plots. He also served as a State Department counterterrorism advisor to Gen. James L. Jones, the special envoy for Middle East regional security (SEMERS). Widely published, Dr. Levitt is the editor, most recently, of Policy Focus 107, *Obama's National Security Vision: Confronting Transnational Threats with Global Cooperation*.