

Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule

Season 1

by [Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](#)

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Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/hlqt-swtyt-khrq-alcadt-aldhbyl-hzb-allh\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](#)

Matthew Levitt is the Fromer-Wexler Fellow and director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

Listen to a podcast series shining a bright light on the global terrorist and criminal activities that Lebanese Hezbollah would rather keep hidden from view.

Lebanese Hezbollah goes to great lengths to publicize its overt, social, and political activities and to conceal its covert terrorist, militant, and criminal pursuits. In the words of one operative, Hezbollah's "Golden Rule" is this: The Less You Know, the Better.

In this podcast, terrorism scholar Matthew Levitt sets out to break this rule by shining a bright spotlight on Hezbollah's global terrorist and criminal activities. Levitt has been following Lebanese Hezbollah for almost three decades in and out of government. He's written books, given expert testimony, and literally mapped Hezbollah's worldwide illicit activities in an [online interactive map and timeline \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/hezbollahinteractivemap\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/hezbollahinteractivemap).

Listen as Levitt tracks Hezbollah's evolution over the years and its operations across the globe from Lebanon to Kuwait, across Europe and Asia, then on to the Western Hemisphere from Buenos Aires to New York. Along the way, he'll speak with law enforcement officers, intelligence agents, government officials, and world-class experts from around the globe, each of whom has first-person experience confronting Hezbollah and uncovering things the group would much prefer nobody ever heard about.

[Subscribe to Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule on your favorite podcatcher app. \(https://shows.acast.com/breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule\)](https://shows.acast.com/breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule)

Trailer

Preview Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule, a podcast series devoted to shining a bright light on the global terrorist and criminal activities that the Lebanese organization would rather remain in the shadows. Coming soon to your favorite podcatcher.

Episode 1: Origin Story - 'Wild, Wild West Beirut'

On his first day with the State Department, Special Agent Fred Burton found a suicide bomber's ear in a file on his desk. The bomber had targeted the U.S. embassy in Beirut on behalf of a shadowy new group called Hezbollah. Soon, the group was carrying out even bigger attacks and kidnapping journalists and innocent civilians for ransom. Reporting on these events, a CIA report from the time referred to the area as "Wild, Wild West Beirut." Where did this group come from? Where did it get funding and support? And where would it strike next?

Guests:

Fred Burton (<https://www.officialfredburton.com/>) is a former police officer, special agent, and New York Times best-selling author. Burton's most recent book, *Beirut Rules*, follows the riveting story of the kidnapping and murder of CIA Station Chief William Buckley. His best-selling books also include his personal memoir *GHOST: Confessions of a Counterterrorism Agent*, *Chasing Shadows: A Special Agent's Lifelong Hunt to Bring a Cold War Assassin to Justice*, and *Under Fire: The Untold Story of the Attack in Benghazi*. In the 1980's and 1990's, Burton served as Deputy Chief of the Counterterrorism Division of the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service.

Dr Magnus Ranstorp (<https://www.fhs.se/sc/profile-page.html?identity=400.6cb5d10d160e26219d123e7c>) has been researching counterterrorism and CVE issues for almost thirty years. He was the first author to seriously map out Lebanese Hezbollah and its connection to international terrorism in his book, *Hizb'Allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*. He was also part of a backchannel between Hezbollah and Israel over IDF MIAs together with Giandomenico Picco in 2001. Currently, Dr Ranstorp is the Strategic Adviser at the Centre for Societal Security at the Swedish Defense University and Strategic Adviser at the EU Radicalization Awareness Network.

Show Notes:

Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule is hosted Dr. Matthew Levitt from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

It is produced by Anouk Millet from Earshot Strategies, and written by Dr. Levitt and Lauren Fredericks, a Washington Institute research assistant.

[Download a full transcript of the episode. \(/media/5349\)](#)

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Lebanese Hezbollah Interactive Map

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- **U.S. Court finds Hezbollah responsible for Beirut Embassy bombing** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/hezbollahinteractivemap/#id=1095>)
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- *The Origins of Hezbollah* (<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/the-origins-of-hezbollah/280809/>) by Matthew Levitt
- *Why the CIA Killed Imad Mughniyeh* (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/why-cia-killed-imad-mughniyeh>) by Matthew Levitt
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Episode 2: Hezbollah Goes Global

In December 1983, six blasts shook Kuwait's capital city. Two prominent Hezbollah operatives oversaw the attack. Soon, bombs were going off in Paris, Copenhagen, and Saudi Arabia. Two years later, Hezbollah operatives hijacked TWA flight 847 and murdered a USS Navy diver. What did Hezbollah want? And why was a Lebanese-based militant group conducting attacks in Europe and the Gulf?

[Download a full transcript of the episode. \(/media/5369\)](#)

Guests

Dr. Hans-Jakob Schindler (<https://www.counterextremism.com/press/cep-spotlight-hans-jakob-schindler>) is senior director at the Counter-Extremism Project. He is a former German security official who served at the German embassy in Tehran from 2005-2011 and later as a member and coordinator of the ISIL, al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Team at the UN Security Council. Dr. Schindler has followed Hezbollah closely for years, in and out of government.

Hans-Georg Engelke (<https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/ministry/state-secretaries/hans-georg-engelke/hans-georg-engelke-node.html>) is the State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community. He previously served inter alia as the head of the Counterterrorism Department for Germany's federal domestic intelligence agency.

Nader Uskowi worked as a journalist in Iran during the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In 1982, he emigrated to the United States. There, he continued to write about regional developments and began advising U.S. policymakers, eventually serving as a senior political advisor in Afghanistan for the U.S. Department of Defense, before working at the Pentagon. Nader's book, *Temperature Rising* (https://url.emailprotection.link/?bvpS5C8dwMNdmYbwoqTf0toHGgbjNXXxf6TvlDd-RmDlkibhqvuQpdC3zPVZv9yeKOT7DR1z0fJ-0SUIwnX-p3N9QVlqLfp_wthLzQYeR7ouIlepSeLlbV0ZMuRlBRo3ZlIx9r0wsdyvLlqSTsap7v7XmC15reSmTFwyLGPSzo8tMOgfrRUCa402d_FrY6P1xprik3FFxKMXH-uhARv16gFTYCzgxCTeW5WSLq3cUj3ybVFehHC_o2Ux6YMrfsBX8N-VIAwDB4MoicFD1zXjSy_zAc0wb6iDi6nAeHsgkMti7Ja2oIPTrjsgHifRS8B0gyU-w14aulmgXvi4COGqDKWGU0iXDgPPVTv7M9ZPx97wGBrV7ehlxuROfHXkxjQ_LBbMUr6-W-WCnMW2ckHF4c29WYPIcJg_YF76Ucmfi9m1iT-06biRQ_Q7MTHT1AF3NK-bwqcCUfhdmCOLNmrS000xhuHqB3-nuthcN5mNTXGPM6oy5fdhSBh0eRw7rjxw0YJv-Z8y9hOCTk-oZ2QKafwq_Q_oq1Q_noD-RBE-), explores the role of the IRGC Quds Force in Iran and across the Middle East.

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- [A Paris reset on Hezbollah? Implications for French interests and Lebanese security \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/4120\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/4120) by Matthew Levitt
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Episode 3: Crime and Terror in South America

South America's Tri-Border Area has been described as "the United Nations of crime." Along the porous borders of Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil, counterfeiters scheme, narco-traffickers move product and launder funds, and criminals sell fake or stolen goods on the open market. Since the 1980s, the area has also been a hotbed of Hezbollah criminal and terrorist activities. Nobody seemed to notice—until Hezbollah operatives carried out two bombings in under two years in Buenos Aires.

[Download a full transcript of the episode. \(/media/5379\)](/media/5379)

Guests

Christian Vianna de Azevedo has been a Special Agent with the Brazilian Federal Police for the past 20 years. He currently serves as the Under Secretary of Justice and Public Security focused on intelligence and integration in the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil. He was recently deployed to the Middle East region to investigate transnational terrorism threats and terrorism facilitation.

Mariano Federici served as the head of Argentina's Financial Intelligence Unit from 2016 to 2020. Prior to this, he worked as senior counsel for the International Monetary Fund's legal department. Today, Mariano serves as a managing director at K2 Integrity in its Washington, D.C. office.

Robert Clifford spent 23 years in the FBI as a special agent, serving domestically as well as in South America, Europe, and the Middle East. In the mid-1990's, Clifford was Acting Chief of the Iran-Hezbollah unit at FBI headquarters. From 1997-2000, he served as the supervisor of counterterrorism/counterintelligence

in the FBI's Charlotte Field Office. Clifford retired from the FBI and is now president of Robert Clifford Consulting, an international security and investigations consultancy specializing in domestic and international law enforcement and intelligence training. His most recent projects have been in Somalia and Ukraine.

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Episode 4: Hezbollah Support Networks in America

In Charlotte, North Carolina, a gang of Hezbollah criminals smuggled cigarettes across state lines to raise funds. But on Thursday nights, they gathered and watched Hezbollah martyrdom videos. When the FBI began to surveil the group, agents saw the men conducting firearms training and feared they could “go operational” at any time. The ensuing investigation, dubbed Operation Smokescreen, exposed the inner workings of a Hezbollah network in the American heartland.

[Download a full transcript of this episode. \(/media/5393\)](#)

Guests

Frederick Fife (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/fredfife/>) is a former FBI special agent and currently a major in the New Jersey State Police where he serves as Deputy Branch Commander of Investigations. His career includes eight years assigned to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force in Philadelphia where he traveled to more than a dozen countries conducting counterterrorism operations against Hezbollah. Fife, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, has been honored by the FBI, US Intelligence Community, the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation and the Navy League of the United States. In 2010, Fife was named New Jersey State Police Trooper of the Year.

Robert Clifford (<https://www.robertcliffordconsulting.com/about/>) spent 23 years in the FBI as a special agent, serving domestically as well as in South America, Europe, and the Middle East. In the mid-1990's, Clifford was Acting Chief of the Iran-Hezbollah unit at FBI headquarters. From 1997-2000, he served as the supervisor of counterterrorism/counterintelligence in the FBI's Charlotte Field Office, where he managed and directed Operation Smokescreen. Clifford retired from the FBI and is now president of Robert Clifford Consulting, an international security and investigations consultancy specializing in domestic and international law enforcement and intelligence training. His most recent projects have been in Somalia and Ukraine.

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Episode 5: Hezbollah Attack Plots in Cyprus and Bulgaria

In July 2012, police arrested a well-trained Hezbollah operative named Hossam Yaacoub in Cyprus. Less than two weeks later, a Hezbollah suicide bomb killed 5 Israelis on a tourist bus in Burgas, Bulgaria. But the group wasn't done in Cyprus. Another operative was stockpiling explosives—and waiting to act.

[Download a full transcript of this episode. \(/media/5423\)](/media/5423)

Guests

Dr. Magnus Norell is a senior policy advisor at The European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels and an Adjunct Scholar at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He is also a research associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies in Brussels. From 1997 to 2000, Dr. Norell helped to create a back channel between Hezbollah and Israel to facilitate the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. He previously served as an analyst for the Swedish Secret Service and Swedish Military Intelligence.

Carter Burwell is the former counselor to the Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Finance Intelligence. Prior to his role at the Treasury Department, Mr. Burwell served as one of the top lawyers on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee. During the Cyprus investigation, Burwell served as Assistant U.S. Attorney in the National Security and International Crimes Unit in the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Eastern District of Virginia. He currently practices law at Debevoise & Plimpton.

Nickolay Mladenov is the former UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process. Mr. Mladenov served as Bulgaria's minister of defense from 2009-2010 and as the minister of foreign affairs from 2010-2013. Today, he is the Segal Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Washington Institute and director of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy in Abu Dhabi.

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Episode 6: Operation Cedar: Hezbollah Narco-Money Laundering

European authorities weren't looking for Hezbollah when they investigated a massive money laundering network operating across at least seven EU countries. But when they reached out to their close partners at the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the DEA came back with startling information: the gang included high-ranking Hezbollah operatives and sent its profits back to Lebanon to fund Hezbollah terrorist activities. Why would Hezbollah risk drawing additional attention from law enforcement?

[Download a full transcript of the episode. \(/media/5452\)](/media/5452)

Guests

Quentin Mugg was a French police captain in a unit specialized in organized crime and money laundering (OCRGDF) at the Judicial Police Central Directorate

from 2005-2015. In 2016, Mugg helped establish the Counter Terrorism Financing unit at the Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), and today he works at the EU Drugs Unit in Europol. He is the author of *Argent sale: la traque*, published in French by Fayard in 2021.

Benedikt Strunz has been an investigative reporter with the German public broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) since 2011, where he reports primarily on white-collar and organized crime. He leads international investigations for NDR and has contributed to multiple international research projects for the International Consortium for Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), and Forbidden Stories, including the "Luxemburg Leaks," "Panama Papers," "Paradise Papers," and "Swiss Secrets." He is also the editor responsible for the podcast "Organised Crime - Investigating the Hidden."

John Fernandez is the former DEA Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the Special Operations Division's Counter-Narcoterrorism Operations Center, in which he oversaw interagency support to field investigations concerning Hezbollah's global criminal support network. Previously, he worked as a Staff Coordinator at the Special Operations Division. He has also worked for the DEA's San Jose, Madrid, and Los Angeles offices, and as an Intelligence Analyst with the CIA's Africa and Latin America Division.

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Episode 7: Hezbollah 'Black Ops' in Western Hemisphere

On June 1, 2017, U.S. authorities arrested two Hezbollah sleeper agents. The operatives had created targeting packages with ready-to-go-plans for possible attacks, in the event Iranian or Hezbollah leaders deemed them necessary. They traveled on their American passports when Hezbollah sent them on missions in Asia and South America. Where were their targets? Who was their handler? And what were they sent to do abroad?

[Download a full transcript of this episode. \(/media/5463\)](#)

Guests

Emil Bove is a Member of Chiesa Shahinian & Giantomasi PC, where he works in the firm's White Collar Criminal Defense, Government Investigations, and Cybersecurity Groups. Prior to joining the firm, Emil was a co-chief of the national security unit at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, where he worked for nearly a decade. Emil was a member of the team that tried that Kourani case, and he has extensive experience in cross-border matters involving money laundering, foreign corruption and bribery, economic sanctions, cybersecurity, espionage, terrorism, and international drug trafficking.

Mitchell Silber served as the Director of Intelligence Analysis at the New York City Police Department from 2005-2012 where he was a principal advisor to the Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence on counterterrorism policy and analysis. He supervised the research, collection, and analysis for the Intelligence Division's entire portfolio of ongoing terrorism related investigations. Today, Mr. Silber is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs. He is the author of *The Al Qaeda Factor: Plots Against the West* (<https://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/14934.html>).

Rebecca Weiner is the Assistant Commissioner for Intelligence Analysis at the NYPD Intelligence Bureau, with executive oversight over counterterrorism, criminal, and cyber intelligence analysis and production. She manages and oversees the Intelligence Bureau's Intelligence Operations and Analysis Section and is one of the principal advisors to the Deputy Commissioner for Intelligence and Counterterrorism. In 2010, she became the first representative of local law enforcement to serve in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence's National Intelligence Council. She previously served as Legal Counsel to the Intelligence Bureau's Intelligence Analysis Unit and as team leader for the Middle East & North Africa.

Ambassador Nathan Sales served as Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State from 2017-2021. In this position, he led diplomatic engagements to persuade a dozen key partners in Europe and the Americas to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in its entirety. Concurrently, Ambassador Sales served as acting Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights. Formerly a tenured law professor, Ambassador Sales previously was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Homeland Security. He also worked on counterterrorism policy in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Policy. Today, Ambassador Sales is the founder and principal of the consulting firm Fillmore Global Strategies, and a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

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Episode 8: Undermining Stability in Lebanon

Hezbollah's deep penetration of the Lebanese financial system threatens the legitimacy and stability of the state it claims to protect. After all, when Hezbollah engages in money laundering and narcotics trafficking around the world, where does the dirty money go? Back home, to Lebanon. And critics beware—vocal opposition to Hezbollah's activities can be a fatal enterprise. Even for a former prime minister.

[Download a full transcript of this episode. \(/media/5476\)](#)

Guests

Danny Glaser served as Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes in the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence from 2011-2017. Glaser was responsible for helping to formulate and coordinate counterterrorist financing, anti-money laundering, sanctions, and other counter-illicit finance policies. Prior to his time at Treasury, he served as the head of the U.S. Delegation to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) from 2001-2011. Today, Glaser is the global head of jurisdictional services at K2 Integrity and head of its Washington, D.C. office.

Hanin Ghaddar (/node/10634) is the Friedmann Fellow in the Washington Institute's Program on Arab Politics, where she focuses on Shia politics throughout the Levant. The longtime managing editor of Lebanon's NOW news website, Ghaddar shed light on a broad range of cutting-edge issues, including the evolution of Hezbollah inside Lebanon's fractured political system. Prior to joining NOW in 2007, Ghaddar wrote for Lebanese newspapers *As-Safir*, *An-Nahar*, and *Al-Hayat*, and worked as a researcher for the United Nations Development Program regional office. She is the author of the 2022 Institute study, [Hezbollahland: Mapping Dahiya and Lebanon's Shia Community \(/node/17338\)](#).

Ambassador Nathan Sales served as Ambassador-at-Large and Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the U.S. Department of State from 2017-2021. In this position, he led diplomatic engagements to persuade a dozen key partners in Europe and the Americas to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in its entirety. Concurrently, Ambassador Sales served as acting Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights. Formerly a tenured law professor, Ambassador Sales previously was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy at the Department of Homeland Security. He also worked on counterterrorism policy in the Justice Department's Office of Legal Policy. Today, Ambassador Sales is the founder and principal of the consulting firm Fillmore Global Strategies, and a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.

Quentin Mugg was a French police captain in a unit specialized on organized crime and money laundering (OCRGDF) at the Judicial Police Central Directorate from 2005-2015. In 2016, Mugg helped establish the Counter Terrorism Financing unit at the Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), and today he works at the EU Drugs Unit in Europol. He is the author of *Argent sale: la traque*, published in French by Fayard in 2021.

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Lebanese Hezbollah TWI Map

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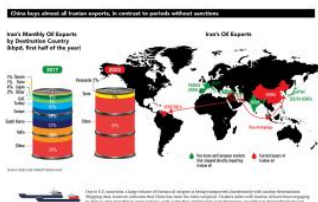
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