

# Another Path to 'Martyrdom'

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Articles & Testimony

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**In this excerpt from his new book on Hezbollah, Matthew Levitt explains how the group procured equipment in Canada and the United States.**

**H**ezbollah has long maintained a particularly active weapons-procurement effort in Canada. Not only does the group have a significant pool of members, supporters and sympathizers in Canada, but the country's strong position in industry, trade, and finance make it an attractive place to procure dual-use items.

The immigration case of Mohammad Hussein al Hussein, who was ultimately ordered deported from Canada in 1994, sheds significant light on Hezbollah's presence in the country. Interviewed by Canadian security officials, al Hussein provided information both on Hezbollah attacks abroad and on the group's presence and activities in Canada. He specified that "Hezbollah has members in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto -- in all of Canada." Referring to the situation in Montreal, al Hussein implied that he could provide Canadian authorities information about cigarette and weapons smuggling if the Canadian government would cut a deal with him.

Mohammad Hassan Dbouk and his brother-in-law, Ali Adham Amhaz, ran the Canadian portion of Hezbollah's funding and procurement network under the command of Haj Hassan Hilu Laqis (then Hezbollah's chief military procurement officer). Their activities were funded in part with money that Laqis sent from Lebanon, in addition to their own criminal activities in Canada.

Under the win-win scam, they procured materials for Hezbollah and still made a profit: While their credit card and bank frauds covered the cost of the items they bought for Hezbollah, they still received 50 cents on the dollar from Laqis for the materials they procured.

The items that the Hezbollah procurement network purchased or discussed purchasing in North America for smuggling into Lebanon were used, according to a defense specialist who served as an expert witness, to increase Hezbollah's tactical capabilities on the battlefield. Commander James Campbell, a former U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency counterterrorism intelligence officer, said the list was ambitious and indicative of Hezbollah's increasing

military sophistication: night-vision devices (goggles, cameras, and scopes), surveying equipment, global positioning systems (watches and aviation antennas), mine and metal detection equipment, camera and video equipment, advanced aircraft analysis and design software, and a variety of computer equipment including laptops, high-speed modems, processors, joysticks, plotters, scanners, and printers.

Commander Campbell pointed out to a jury several video clips -- from videos seized at the home of Mohammad Hammoud, a convicted Hezbollah member who is now serving time in a North Carolina prison -- of Hezbollah militants using the kind of equipment Dbouk's network procured for Hezbollah in Canada. Such examples were not coincidental, given that Hezbollah sought specific items its fighters needed in the field. For example, the procurement network was asked to send specific compasses because "the guys were getting lost, you know, in the woods, or whatever, and they need compasses."

In one instance, Said Harb, another convicted member of the North Carolina Hezbollah-support cell, provided Dbouk with \$4,000 toward the purchase of such items. As Harb later recalled in testimony, Dbouk once asked him, when the two met in Canada: "Would you like to get anything, you know, for the guys?" Instructed to explain this more clearly, Harb elaborated: "We were talking about Hezbollah. Hezbollah has social, military, political, different branches within Hezbollah. We were talking about the military branch. You know, The Resistance."

In support of its procurement efforts for "the Resistance," the Canadian Hezbollah network considered supplementing its income through other schemes, including importing counterfeit \$100 bills from Lebanon. But the network already had more money than it needed through basic credit card bust-out schemes.

The Hezbollah network also considered trying to take out a life insurance policy in Canada for a prospective Hezbollah fighter in Lebanon who might be killed carrying out a suicide attack, or otherwise engaging in combat from which he would not return. Concerned a Canadian insurance company would not honor the policy of a suicide bomber, Dbouk suggests a death certificate could be produced falsely claiming the person was a civilian killed while "sitting in his village."

In the years since Hezbollah's 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah's procurement program has taken on renewed importance as the group has spent much of its time replenishing its weapons stocks. Big-ticket items, like missiles, have been provided by Iran and sometimes Syria. But other items, from small arms and ammunition to shoulder-fired rockets and dual use items, are also procured globally through Hezbollah networks. According to Sheikh Nabil Qaouq, a Hezbollah commander in southern Lebanon, "the resistance is using this period to prepare, to train, to strengthen capabilities, and the enemy itself can attest to this."

Speaking in December 2011, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah himself underscored the group's procurement efforts. "We will never let go of our arms," he said. "Our numbers are increasing day after day, and we are getting better and our training is becoming better and we are becoming more confident in our future and more armed. And if someone is betting that our weapons are rusting, we tell them that every weapon that rusts is replaced."

In 2001, Mohammad Dbouk was indicted in U.S. federal court under Operation Smokescreen. 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." According to information collected by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) during its investigation into Mohammad Dbouk's activities in Canada, first in Montreal and then in Vancouver, Dbouk was acting under the direction of Hezbollah's then chief of procurement, the aforementioned Haj Hassan Hilu Laqis, who was based in Lebanon. Mohammad Dbouk reportedly lived in the Detroit area for about six months, taking his activities to the U.S. side of the Ambassador Bridge linking Michigan and Ontario.

Dbouk solicited the assistance of his friend Said Harb to help facilitate the purchase of dual-use equipment and to

test a scheme to use counterfeit credit cards to purchase these materials. According to CSIS intercepts, in 1999 Dbouk informed an unidentified male that he had known Harb for more than 15 years and that the two had been jailed and beaten together (presumably during the Lebanese civil war). Harb was already at the center of a laundry list of criminal enterprises and frauds, but it was his relationship with Dbouk that brought him to the attention of CSIS agents who were already monitoring Dbouk's activities.

U.S. Attorney Robert Conrad, whose office successfully prosecuted the Hezbollah case in Charlotte, testified before the U.S. Congress that according to intelligence he'd examined, "Dbouk is such a major player in the Hezbollah organization that on five separate occasions his application to be a martyr was rejected." Given his overall intelligence, his military training, and his expertise in information operations, Dbouk was too valuable a commodity to expend on a martyrdom mission.

Dbouk appears to have accepted Hezbollah's refusal to send him on a martyrdom mission, and dove into his procurement responsibilities in an attempt to secure a place in heaven through devotion to his assigned task. According to the CSIS intercepts, in a conversation with someone named Said (last name unknown), Dbouk tried to discuss politics; but Said said he wanted to be careful about what they discussed on the telephone. Ignoring the 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."

**Excerpted from *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God***

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