

Hezbollah:

A Case Study of Global Reach

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Thank you very much for your kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be here at ICT, an institution that makes such important contributions to both the academic literature available on the critical issue of terrorism and to the practical policy debates surrounding these issues as well.

Examining Hezbollah's international terrorist activity, that is its international presence and operations outside the Levant, not only illuminates the group's proactive and ongoing terror activities but provides a useful case study of a terrorist group of global reach as well.

Global Reach and Cross-group Pollination

Though the term has yet to be officially defined, "global reach" has nonetheless become the yardstick for determining whether or not a terrorist group warrants inclusion in the post-September 11 war on terrorism. Even within the "global reach" designation there exists an unstated spectrum of priorities. For example, al-Qaeda is legitimately going to receive more attention and resources than ETA in Spain or FARC in Colombia, even though both those regional terrorist groups are known for their links to other international terrorist groups and state sponsors.

To develop a more telling barometer for measuring the severity of a group's global reach, and therefore its prioritization as a potential target in the war on terror, it is useful to develop an understanding of the matrix of relationships between terrorist operatives, groups, fronts, and state sponsors. To be sure, these relationships are what make the threat of international terrorism so acute today, just as they served as the single most critical factor in facilitating the success of the devastating attacks on September 11, 2001.

Indeed, while terrorist groups remain the central structural unit in international terrorism, I believe the relationships between individual terrorists belonging to different groups are even more important. This crossover and pollination facilitates cooperation among groups -- in many cases operational, in others logistical and financial cooperation. Such links exist even between groups that don't share similar ideologies, leading to cooperation between religious zealots and secular radicals; between ideologically- or theologically-driven terrorists and criminal entities (as has been the case in several terrorist attacks in Iraq, where criminal elements played critical roles in attacks in return for monetary compensation); between Sunni and Shi'a groups; and between individuals whose

person-to-person contacts require no agreement between their respective headquarters.

A particularly interesting example is the Madrid al-Qaeda cell, perhaps the most important cell broken up since September 11. Mohammad Zouaydi, a key al-Qaeda financier and the head of the cell, not only funded the Hamburg cell but dispatched a Madrid cell member to collect pre-operational surveillance of the Twin Towers and other U.S. landmarks a few years before the attacks. At the same time he financed al-Qaeda operations, Zouaydi also transferred money to Hamas. Similarly, the cell established relationships for logistical support not only with other al-Qaeda cells but with Basque terrorists (ETA) in the north of Spain.

These relationships become all the more important to terrorists operating outside their home regions in their respective Diasporas. In the case of radical Islamic extremists, Diaspora communities in the West often serve as a radical melting pot where like-minded individuals affiliated with different groups from geographically distinct regions assist one another for the sake of their larger cause. It is not uncommon to find a Tunisian member of an-Nada helping a Palestinian member of Hamas, or any number of other combinations of radical causes. Authorities therefore need to understand that terrorists do not carry membership cards in their wallets identifying themselves as members of a specific terrorist group, and that even if they did that would not capture the full scope of the individual's terrorist affiliations.

The case of Abu Musab al Zarqawi (aka Fadel Nazzal Khalayleh) offers a particular insightful perspective on the scope of the informal links, personal relationships, and organizational crossover between disparate terrorist operatives and groups. As the Zarqawi case makes abundantly clear, such networks of relationships are both geographically and organizationally diverse.

Zarqawi's links span the globe, including strong ties to terrorist networks in Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Syria, Afghanistan, Germany, Britain, and elsewhere in Europe. The U.S. Treasury Department highlighted his ties to Hezbollah in its September 24, 2003, announcement designating him and several of his associates as Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entities.

Similar links between other Hezbollah entities and international terrorist members and groups are equally informative of Hezbollah's global reach. Take, for example, Bilal Khazal, a man now believed to be the senior al-Qaeda operative in Australia who is also suspected of ties to Hezbollah, and the al-Aqsa International Foundation, recently banned by the United States, Germany and Great Britain (though not the European Union). While al-Aqsa primarily served as a Hamas front organization, Sheikh Moayad, the head of the the al-Aqsa office in Yemen, was arrested in Germany and extradited to the United States for providing financial support to al-Qaeda as well. Moayad proudly told an undercover FBI informant that he not only funded Hamas but also raised millions of dollars, recruited operatives, and provided weapons to al-Qaeda. According to one report, one of the foundation's offices in Europe also raised funds for Hezbollah.

Clearly, assessing a group's global presence demands not only noting the activities of its operational activists -- those who pull the trigger, detonate the explosives or crash the airplane -- but also the logistical and financial supporters that make such operations possible. If September 11 taught us nothing else, we should all now recognize that logistical and financial support is critical to terrorist operations.

By any standard, including terrorist operations from Thailand to Argentina, logistical and financial support operations across the globe, and links to other terrorist groups, Hezbollah represents a classic example of a terrorist group of global reach and should be a prioritized target in the war on terror.

Hezbollah's Global Reach

Hezbollah holds a particularly disturbing, though often overlooked, place in the matrix of international terror. A few studies have noted Hezbollah's ties to other groups, like the Treasury Department announcement about Zarqawi,

while others, like a report of the Council on Foreign Relations' Task Force on Terrorist Financing, highlight the crossover between Hezbollah institutions and those of other terrorist groups. For example, the Council report points out that "other Islamic terrorist organizations, Hamas and Hezbollah specifically, often use the very same methods -- and even the same institutions -- [as al-Qaeda] to raise and move their money."

Published reports suggest that Al-Qaida and Hezbollah have formed additional tactical, ad-hoc alliances with a variety of terrorist organizations to cooperate on money laundering and other unlawful activities. And yet, the debate persists. Is Hezbollah the "A-team of terrorists," as Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage suggests, or is Hezbollah purely a "resistance" organization whose "role is limited to the Lebanese lands," as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad insists?

After a careful assessment of Hezbollah's global presence and operations, research I conducted in preparation of an upcoming book on the subject, I suggest that Hezbollah is indeed a terrorist group of global reach. Moreover, this conclusion is the consensus among the various intelligence professionals I've interviewed, including Israeli, Arab, American, Asian and European officials, and is also clear from the documentary evidence I've collected from sources as diverse as Filipino and Chilean law enforcement agencies.

Take, for example, a map produced by Israeli officials marking the locations of Hezbollah networks across the globe. While not necessarily indicative of an entire network in each of the highlighted countries (it may represent a single operative), the map provides a disturbing snapshot of Hezbollah's global presence.

Moreover, as the following surveillance photograph illustrates, Hezbollah operatives -- like those of other professional terrorist groups -- mold into their environments and can be very difficult to identify. This picture was taken by Canadian intelligence, and captures a Hezbollah member purchasing false identification for use in procuring dual-use technologies for Hezbollah. Unlike Hezbollah operatives patrolling the Lebanese-Israeli border, these members leave their yellow Hezbollah bandanas and flags at home.

According to U.S. authorities, concern over the threat posed by Hezbollah is well placed. FBI officials testified in February 2002 that "FBI investigations to date continue to indicate that many Hezbollah subjects based in the United States have the capability to attempt terrorist attacks here should this be a desired objective of the group." Similarly, CIA Director George Tenet testified in February 2003 that "Hezbollah, as an organization with capability and worldwide presence, is [al-Qaeda's] equal, if not a far more capable organization."

Hezbollah Modus Operandi

Though Hezbollah cells are not all identical, they do tend to display similar operational signatures in the form of typical modus operandi.

Consider a few examples:

- **Subtle Infiltration:** Hezbollah operatives are expert at gaining entry to their target locations through extremely subtle infiltration. This should not surprise, as many Hezbollah operatives receive sophisticated training both in Lebanon and in Iran from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) al-Quds Brigades. Members of a Hezbollah cell operating in Singapore in the late 1990s and into 2000 entered using a visa-waiver program similar to the one that recently suspended in the United States. Once they arrived, they quickly married local women to legalize their presence. Members of a Hezbollah cell in North Carolina, which raised significant sums of money for the group from the proceeds of an elaborate cigarette smuggling scam, entered the U.S. from South America using false documents, entered into sham marriages in Cyprus, and conducted their activities under multiple identities.
- **Fundraising:** Hezbollah cells are frequently involved in fundraising activities, even if they are primarily operational

cells. Hezbollah cells raise funds through charities acting as front organizations as well as via criminal activity like cigarette smuggling, drug production and smuggling, and credit card or other types of fraud. Hezbollah networks organize regular parlor meetings held in members' homes where a collection basket is passed around after watching Hezbollah propaganda videos, usually produced by al-Manar, the group's satellite television network. For example, the Charlotte network gathered on a regular basis to watch videos of live Hezbollah bombings in southern Lebanon before the Israeli withdrawal then collected donations to support such activities. Hezbollah operates front companies, and in South America the group is renown for pirating multimedia and engaging in Mafia-style shakedowns of local Muslim businesses.

- **Recruiting Locals:** Contrary to conventional wisdom, Hezbollah is extremely adept at recruiting members from local populations in areas where they have networks on the ground. In Russia, Hezbollah operatives recruited Sunni Palestinian students studying at Russian universities, while in Uganda they recruited Ugandan Shia students and sent them to study abroad at an Iranian university where they also received military training together with Lebanese recruits in the use of small arms, making explosives, counter-interrogation techniques and escape planning. Before returning home, the Ugandans were provided fictitious covers and instructed to establish an operational network in Uganda.

In Southeast Asia, members of the network that was behind an attempt to bomb the Israeli embassy in Bangkok in 1994, as well as a series of other terrorist plots throughout the 1990s, were almost entirely Sunni. The leader of the network, Pandu Yudhawitna, was himself recruited by MOIS officers stationed in Malaysia in the early 1980s, and only later became the Southeast Asian point-man for Hezbollah operations and support activities there.

After realizing that state troopers were frequently pulling their vans over for speeding on the way from North Carolina to Michigan, Charlotte cell members hired Caucasian women to drive their vans to elicit less suspicion.

- **Multi-functional:** Hezbollah cells are adept multi-taskers, responsible for a variety of logistical, financial and operational duties. They raise funds, recruit new members, conduct preoperational surveillance, provide logistical support, procure weapons and dual use technologies (for both Hezbollah and Iran), and conduct operations.

Investigators in several countries have concluded independently that security services should avoid looking for cells that are strictly engaged in fundraising, logistical support, or terrorist operations. Indeed, cells known only to have raised funds have later been found to have played active roles in terrorist operations, as was the case, for example, in the 1992 and 1994 suicide bombings in Argentina. In the words of one U.S. government official, "Hezbollah cells are always a bit operational."

Targeting U.S. Interests -- A Sampling

Indeed, Hezbollah has conducted a wide variety of operations targeting not only Israeli and Jewish targets, but also the United States. Typically, academics opine that Hezbollah has not targeting the United States since it bombed the U.S. embassy and marine barracks in the 1980's. In fact, there are several more recent instances of Hezbollah activity targeting the U.S., consider the following sampling:

- In 1989, Bassam Gharib Makki collected intelligence on Israeli, Jewish and American targets in Germany.
- In 1989 and 1990, authorities caught a Hezbollah cell operating in Valencia, Spain. The cell was caught smuggling weapons in a ship from Cyprus so they could be pre-positioned and cached in Europe. After tracking that shipment, authorities found additional explosives that had already been stashed in Europe. The cell was determined to have been targeting U.S. and Israeli targets in Europe.
- In 1997, Hezbollah was found to be collecting intelligence on the U.S. embassy in Nicosia, Cyprus.
- Throughout the mid- to late-1990s, Hezbollah recruited Palestinian students studying in Russia, and collected

intelligence on Israeli, Jewish and American targets there.

- Throughout the 1990s, Hezbollah members were active in Singapore, recruiting local Sunnis, collecting intelligence on Israeli and U.S. ships in the Malacca Straits, and planning attacks. Authorities there uncovered a suicide speed-boat attack very similar to the one that was foiled about a year after September 11 off Gibraltar.

Hezbollah Terrorist Operations Abroad

Hezbollah is well known for several international terrorist attacks, most notably the 1992 and 1994 suicide bombings of the Israeli embassy and Jewish community center (AMIA) respectively in Argentina and the 1995 Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia. These, however, represent only two of Hezbollah's foreign terrorist operations.

Europe as a launching pad: Hezbollah has used its operatives throughout Europe to help operatives use Europe as a launching pad for entering Israel to conduct attacks or collect intelligence there. Hussein Makdad, a Lebanese national, entered Israel from Switzerland under a forged British passport in 1996. He was critically injured when a bomb he was assembling exploded in his Jerusalem hotel room. In 1997, a German convert to Islam, Stefan Smirnak, flew to Israel from Amsterdam using his own passport. Fawzi Ayoub, a Canadian of Lebanese decent, infiltrated into Israel on a boat traveling from Europe in 2000. Discarding his Canadian passport in Europe, he used a forged American passport to enter Israel. He was later arrested in Hebron, right around the time Israeli authorities found a roadside explosive device in Hebron that had previously only been used by Hezbollah in Lebanon. In 2001, Jihad Shuman, a British citizen of Lebanese decent, flew to Israel from the U.K. He flew from Lebanon to Europe on his Lebanese passport, and then on to Israel using his British passport.

In some of these cases, authorities have determined the operatives entered Israel to conduct operations, while in other cases it remains unclear if they entered Israel just to collect pre-operational surveillance, assist other operatives already on the ground, or conduct attacks themselves. Significantly, each of these operatives is believed to have been trained by elements tied directly to Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's chief operations officer.

Operations in Southeast Asia: Hezbollah operations in Southeast Asia throughout the 1990s are almost too many to count. Like the infiltrations into Israel from Europe noted above, Hezbollah infiltrated at least one Malaysian operative into Israel to collect intelligence. After being recruited and undergoing Hezbollah training, Zinal Bin-Talib entered Israel, collected intelligence, and returned home without the knowledge of Israeli authorities who only discovered the successful penetration much later. Hezbollah has conducted significant fundraising in Southeast Asia; nearly succeeded to bomb the Israeli embassy in Bangkok in 1994; and collected intelligence on synagogues in Manila and Singapore. Hezbollah members procured and cached weapons in Thailand and the Philippines, and checked on them periodically to make sure they were still working in case they were called upon to conduct an attack at any given time. They collected intelligence on the El-Al office in Bangkok, on ships arriving in Singapore, and on U.S. Navy and Israeli merchant ships in the Malacca Straits. The Southeast Asian Hezbollah network recruited many local Sunni Muslims, and sent several to Lebanon for training. They procured false and stolen passports, and recruited and trained local operatives to conduct potential attacks in Israel and in Australia.

Operations in Africa: Hezbollah operatives in Africa help finance the group's activities by dealing in conflict diamonds in Sierra Leone and Liberia, a practice now conducted by al-Qaeda using the model and contacts established by Hezbollah. According to David Crane, the prosecutor for the Special Court in Sierra Leone, "Diamonds fuel the war on terrorism. Charles Taylor is harboring terrorists from the Middle East, including al-Qaeda and Hezbollah, and has been for years." A telling example of the personality types involved in this activity is Ibrahim Bah. Bah is an affiliate of deposed Liberian strongman Charles Taylor, as well as a commander with the RUF rebels in Sierra Leone. Bah underwent military and terrorist training in Libya, Lebanon (where he fought with Hezbollah

units), and in Afghanistan. Over the course of his career Bah also served as a personal bodyguard to Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and fought with Hezbollah units in the Beka'a Valley in the 1980s.

Hezbollah conducts extensive fundraising operations in Africa -- as it does in other corners of the globe like South and North America -- not only through trading in illicit diamonds but by raising funds from the local Shi'a expatriate community as well. In some cases Shi'a donors are unwittingly conned into funding Hezbollah, while in others they are knowing and willing participants in Hezbollah's financing efforts.

As noted above, in one particularly interesting case in 2002, Ugandan officials disrupted a cell of Shi'a students who were recruited by Iranian intelligence agents and sent on scholarships to study at the Rizavi University in Mashhad, Iran. Upon their return, one student recruit, Shafri Ibrahim, was caught, while another, Sharif Wadulu, is believed to have escaped to one of the Gulf States. The two were trained by the MOIS, together with new Lebanese Hezbollah recruits, and sent home with fictitious covers to establish an operational infrastructure in Uganda.

Operations in other locations: Hezbollah activity in South America has been well documented, including its frenetic activity in the Tri-border area. The group's activities received special attention in the wake of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires and the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center there. The recently released Argentine indictment in the AMIA bombing reveals an extensive Hezbollah operational presence in South America. What is less well known, however, is that Hezbollah is also active in Chile, Venezuela, Cuba, Panama and Ecuador. Of particular concern to Law Enforcement officials throughout South America is Hezbollah's increased activity in free trade zones, especially under the cover of import-export companies.

Intelligence officials are equally concerned about Hezbollah activities in such diverse places as Romania, South Africa, Canada and Thailand.

Hezbollah and Iranian Commanders

The most significant modus operandi that runs through all Hezbollah global operations -- financial, logistical and operational -- is that all Hezbollah networks are overseen by and are in contact with senior Hezbollah and/or Iranian officials. In Charlotte, North Carolina, Hezbollah operatives were responding directly back to Sheikh Abbas Haraki, a senior Hezbollah military commander in South Beirut. Members of the Charlotte cell received receipts back from Hezbollah for their donations, including receipts from the office of then-Hezbollah spiritual leader Sheikh Mohammad Fadlallah.

The Charlotte cell was closely tied to a sister network in Canada that was primarily engaged in procuring dual-use technologies such as night vision goggles and laser range finders for Hezbollah operational squads. The Canadian network was under the direct command of Hajj Hassan Hilu Lakis, Hezbollah's chief military procurement officer who is also known to procure material for Iran.

In Southeast Asia, the Hezbollah network operating there throughout the 1990s was under the command of a senior Mughniyah deputy named Abu Foul. As noted above, Iranian MOIS agents stationed in Malaysia originally recruited some of the Hezbollah operatives there. Senior Hezbollah operatives and Iranian agents were also involved in the 1995 Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia, in Hezbollah's efforts to smuggle weapons to Palestinian terrorists through Jordan since 2000, in Hezbollah operations in South America (including the 1992 and 1994 bombings), and in the recruitment of students like those in Uganda. Throughout these and many other cases, a key common thread is the direct contact each cell maintains to senior Hezbollah and/or Iranian intelligence operatives.

Crossover Between Terrorism and "Resistance"

According to many, Hezbollah is merely a "resistance" organization responding to Israeli occupation of disputed land. The distinction is, appropriately, lost on most Western experts, given that the "resistance" groups in question

employ acts of terrorism such as suicide bombings to achieve their goals. But no goal, however legitimate, legitimizes the use of terrorist tactics and the killing of innocent civilians.

Moreover, even by Hezbollah's own definition the group's acts of terrorism and resistance are not purely compartmentalized. Indeed, the same Hezbollah operatives are frequently involved in the group's terrorist activities and its support for Palestinian "resistance" (i.e. terrorist) groups like Hamas.

For example, Yousuf Aljouni and Abu al-Foul, two of the masterminds of the failed 1994 effort to bomb the Israeli embassy in Thailand, were subsequently apprehended in Jordan for smuggling weapons to Palestinian terrorists in 2001. In another case, Mohammad Dbouk, the one-time head of the Canadian procurement cell, underwent terrorist training in camps in Iran before serving Hezbollah in Canada and, upon his return to Lebanon from Canada, provided pre-operational surveillance for Hezbollah attack squads working under the cover of Hezbollah's satellite al-Manar television station. The pre-operational footage he took was used to plan Hezbollah attacks on Israeli positions prior to the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, and the live footage of the actual attack was then used to produce propaganda videos of the type seized in the homes of the Charlotte cell members. Perhaps the most blatant example of this crossover between terrorism and resistance is the case of the Karine-A weapons smuggling ship. The failed effort to supply 50 tons of military grade weapons to Palestinian terrorists was subcontracted to Hezbollah by Iran and was overseen by Hajj Bassem, a senior Mughniyah deputy.

West Bank Foothold and International Plots

Recently, Hezbollah has proactively mixed its "resistance" and terrorist activities by establishing a network of its own Palestinian cells in the West Bank. Hezbollah's West Bank foothold not only threatens Israel with terrorist attacks there, but in at least one case a Palestinian Hezbollah recruit sought to supplement his terror activities in Israel with attacks abroad.

Ghulam Mahmud Qawqa was arrested in 2003 for his role in al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade bombings in Jerusalem. Subsequent investigation determined he was also behind two international plots that were set in motion in late 2002. In one, he tasked a Lebanese woman living in Berlin to conduct surveillance of the Israeli embassy there in an effort to target either the embassy or the Israeli ambassador to Berlin, Shimon Stein. In a second operation, Qawqa asked a Jordanian friend living in China to help facilitate his travel to China, and, at the same time, sought the assistance of a Hezbollah operative in planning a mission to assassinate the Israeli ambassador to China, Yitzhak Shelef.

Avoiding Past Mistakes

Hezbollah maintains ad-hoc, person-to-person contacts with al-Qaeda terrorists, but this is not the main reason for prioritizing the group as a target in the war on terror. Its own activities are far more significant. As all of the above cases and many more make clear, Hezbollah is indeed a terrorist group of global reach. Current intelligence assessments from a variety of security services concur that Hezbollah remains capable and intent on attacking Israeli, American and other Western targets and therefore poses a current, serious threat. Hezbollah officials like Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah make this perfectly clear in their bellicose, threatening statements. In the wake of the Iraq war, these threats have become even more pronounced, venomous and unqualified.

Past experience teaches that failure to deal with the real and immediate threat Hezbollah poses today will have severe and painful consequences for the future. It took the international community more than a decade to get up to speed on the threat posed by al-Qaeda. In that time, al-Qaeda successfully built an entrenched and sophisticated international logistical and financial support network of the kind that eventually facilitated the attacks of September 11. There is no question that Hezbollah is engaged in exactly the same infrastructure-building today. Given our experience in September 2001 it should be abundantly clear that we ignore such activity, and the acute security

threat it represents, at our peril.

Thank you very much. ❖

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