

Smearred in Blood, Hezbollah Fingerprints All Over Globe

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Jun 9, 2003

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The UN operates by consensus, a major counterterrorism handicap given that several of its members are proactive state sponsors of terrorism. Hezbollah poses a threat to Australia and threatens others with support of members in Australia. The Australian initiative to ban Hezbollah, despite the group's absence from the UN Security Council's terrorism list, is therefore critically important.

As was the case when Canada banned Hezbollah last December, some oppose the Australian measure, arguing that Hezbollah is not a terrorist group but a social and political organisation engaged in armed struggle against Israel. Yet evidence of Hezbollah's international activity as a terrorist group of global reach is overwhelming.

While Hezbollah may be more likely to use Australia as a base for logistical support operations than a target, Hezbollah's threat to target Australians over the country's role in the liberation of Iraq is not the only reason the group should be banned. Terrorism experts concur that Hezbollah is one of the most active international terrorist groups in Australia. Indeed, Australia is one of only seven countries where a Hezbollah video game glorifying terrorism was successfully marketed. According to the game's designers, it is intended to instil Hezbollah "values" by giving supporters a virtual opportunity to participate in the attacks they fund and laud from abroad.

Hezbollah poses an international threat, but does the presence of Hezbollah sympathisers and logistical and financial supporters pose a direct threat to Australians themselves? Absolutely.

Terrorism scholar Rohan Gunaratna notes Hezbollah operatives have attempted to recruit Malaysians and Indonesians to carry out terrorist attacks in Israel and Australia. Moreover, Hezbollah has a long track record of plotting terrorist attacks in southeast Asia.

On March 17, 1994, Hezbollah terrorists attempted to bomb the Israeli embassy in Bangkok, Thailand. The attack failed because the terrorists got in a car accident and fled the scene. Authorities later discovered C4 explosives in the car.

In 1995, Hezbollah operatives began surveilling Singapore's coastline. Two years later authorities thwarted the group's plans to blow up US Navy ships passing through the Singapore Straits or berthed in the city-state's harbour. The cell included Hezbollah operatives who infiltrated the region with visa-waivers and married local women.

Hezbollah operatives have been arrested in Thailand, Singapore, and The Philippines. The group has also been

active in Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Korea, and has infiltrated Islamic charitable societies throughout the region.

The conviction of two Hezbollah operatives in the US Federal Court last year highlighted the links between these types of support networks and senior Hezbollah military leaders, as well as radical Iranian elements.

In June 2002, brothers Mohamad and Chawki Hammoud were convicted of providing material support to a terrorist group. Their Charlotte, North Carolina-based cell was part of a network responsible for raising funds and procuring dual-use technologies for Hezbollah terrorist operations. Mohammed Hassan Dbouk and his brother-in-law, Ali Adham Amhaz, ran the Canadian portion of this network under the command of Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis (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 (eg, credit card and banking scams).

Among the items that they purchased in Canada and the US and smuggled into Lebanon were night-vision goggles, global positioning systems, stun guns, naval equipment, nitrogen cutters and laser range finders. The Canadian Hezbollah network also sought to take out life insurance policies for Hezbollah operatives committing acts of terrorism in the Middle East.

Hezbollah's international activities are all the more dangerous in light of the group's ties to al-Qa'ida. In June 2002, US and European intelligence officials described Hezbollah as "increasingly teaming up with al-Qa'ida on logistics and training for terrorist operations". This alliance, described as "ad hoc", "tactical", and "informal", was said to involve mid and low-level operatives. US and European intelligence officials reiterated this concern in September 2002, noting that "the most worrisome" of al-Qa'ida's new "tactical, ad-hoc alliances" is with Hezbollah. Hamas, Hezbollah and al-Qa'ida members co-operate in the lawless tri-border area in South America, where Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina meet; similar co-operation has been noted in Asia, as in the cases of Abdul Nasser Nooh (who facilitated both al-Qa'ida and Hezbollah operations) and Muhammad Amed al-Khalifa (a Hezbollah member linked to a shipment of explosives sent by a company tied to al-Qa'ida and confiscated by Philippine police).

To be sure, Hezbollah is a terrorist group of global reach, with an international logistical and financial support network stretching to Australia and beyond. Hezbollah runs operational and logistical support cells in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, South America and the Middle East. Canberra must protect Australians against the kinds of attacks Hezbollah operatives successfully executed in Argentina and attempted in Singapore and Thailand; it must also do everything in its power to prevent Hezbollah supporters in Australia from funding and facilitating the group's attacks targeting others. ❖

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