

Banning Hizballah Activity in Canada

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Brief Analysis

On December 11, 2002, the Canadian government banned Hizballah, labeling it a terrorist organization. Strangely, some in Canada are having second thoughts about this measure, likely under the assumption that Hizballah is not a terrorist group but a social and political organization engaged in armed struggle against Israel. Yet, evidence of Hizballah's international activity as a terrorist group of global reach is overwhelming.

Hizballah in Canada

In a June 2002 federal court ruling in Charlotte, N.C., two Hizballah operatives -- Mohamad and Chawki Hammoud -- were convicted of providing material support to a terrorist group (United States v. Hammoud et al.). Their Charlotte-based cell was part of a network responsible for raising funds and procuring dual-use technologies for Hizballah terrorist operations. The Canadian portion of this network was run by Mohammed Hassan Dbouk and his brother-in-law Ali Adham Amhaz, under the command of Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis (Hizballah'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 (e.g., credit card and banking scams). Among the items that they purchased in Canada and the United States and smuggled into Lebanon were night-vision goggles, global positioning systems, stun guns, naval equipment, nitrogen cutters, and laser range finders. The Canadian Hizballah network also sought to take out life insurance policies for Hizballah operatives committing acts of terrorism in the Middle East.

Moreover, in one conversation recorded by Canadian intelligence and presented at the Charlotte trial, Adnan Nouredine, another member of the Canadian network, told Ahmaz "when you take lenses to [Lebanon] you are helping Hizballah who would use them in operations." Dbouk's role underlined the significance of the network as well, in addition to debunking the myth that Hizballah's terrorist operations are somehow divorced from the group's other "wings." According to evidence presented at the Charlotte trial, Dbouk is a Hizballah "reconnaissance and intelligence specialist, employed by Hizballah-run al-Manar television." He learned these and other skills from the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Hizballah in the United States

In recent testimony before the U.S. Congress, the Federal Bureau of Investigation warned that "many Hizballah subjects based in the United States have the capability to attempt terrorist attacks here." Indeed, the Charlotte trial

highlighted the extent of Hizballah activity in the United States as well as Canada. Prosecutors successfully demonstrated that the members of the Charlotte cell knowingly raised money for Hizballah at the behest of the organization's military commander, Shaykh Abbas Hareke, and sent it to Hizballah leaders in Lebanon, including spiritual leader Shaykh Mohamed Fadlallah. These funds were obtained through a variety of criminal enterprises (e.g., cigarette smuggling and credit card fraud), through solicitation during meetings at the cell leader's home, and through appeals to Islamic requirements regarding charitable giving. Among the materials found in the defendants' possession were violent propaganda and photographs highlighting their sympathies for Hizballah violence (e.g., one photograph features cell leader Mohamad Hammoud posing at a Hizballah recruitment center with an AK-47 assault rifle; another shows Hammoud's cousin Mohamad Atef Darwiche in a militia photo with a rocket-propelled grenade launcher).

The Charlotte cell is not the only publicly known example of Hizballah activity in the United States. In July 1998, Fawzi Mustapha Assi was arrested in Detroit for attempting to procure \$120,000 worth of thermal imaging gear for Hizballah; he later jumped bond and fled to Lebanon. Moreover, on September 10, 2001, a Detroit jury convicted Ali Boumelhem on charges of shipping two shotguns and ammunition to Hizballah.

Al-Qaeda Ties

Hizballah's international activities are not limited to North America. In June 2002, American and European intelligence officials described Hizballah as "increasingly teaming up with al Qaeda 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. American and European intelligence officials reiterated this concern in September 2002, noting that "the most worrisome" of al-Qaeda's new "tactical, ad-hoc alliances" is with Hizballah. Intelligence and law enforcement agencies are particularly concerned about the cooperative efforts of Hamas, Hizballah, and al-Qaeda in the lawless Tri-Border area in South America, where Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina meet.

Middle Eastern Terrorism

Politicians may disagree whether Hizballah operations targeting the Israeli-controlled Shebaa Farms area along the Blue Line separating Israel and Lebanon constitute acts of terrorism. Beyond those activities, however, Hizballah both facilitates and engages in terrorism targeting unarmed Israeli civilians within Israel proper. For example:

Hizballah infiltrates its operatives into Israel to conduct and facilitate terrorist attacks. In June 2002, Israeli authorities conducting a search in Hebron arrested a Hizballah operative who had entered the country on a Canadian passport. The arrest coincided with the discovery in Hebron of a type of mine that Hizballah had previously used only in Lebanon.

Hizballah is providing Hamas and other Palestinian groups with technical expertise for suicide bombings. In the March 27, 2002, "Passover massacre" suicide bombing, Hamas relied on the guidance of a Hizballah expert to build an extra-potent bomb.

Hizballah and the IRGC are more active in Lebanon than ever; they recruited, trained, and dispatched a cell of Palestinians who killed seven Israelis in a cross-border raid on the northern Israeli community of Metsuba in March 2002. Hizballah has also recruited Israeli Arabs in order to obtain intelligence on Israel and logistical support for terrorist operations.

According to U.S. officials, shortly after Palestinian violence erupted in September 2000, Imad Mughniyeh, Hizballah's international operations commander, was assigned by Iran to help Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Mughniyeh and his deputy, Haj Bassem, personally oversaw the Iranian-sponsored operation to smuggle fifty tons of military-grade weaponry to Palestinian terrorists aboard the Karine-A in January 2002.

Conclusion

Hizballah is a terrorist group of global reach, with an entrenched logistical support network operating across Canada. The organization's reprehensible goals are clear, whether or not its officials actually articulate them. Hizballah should be banned not for its rhetoric, but for the terrorist activities -- operational and logistical -- that it conducts in Canada, the United States, South America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Canadians should be proud that their government has banned Hizballah; they can sleep better knowing that their law enforcement and intelligence agencies are now empowered to take action against the Hizballah terrorist network currently operating within their country.

Matthew Levitt, a former FBI counterterrorism analyst who served as an expert witness for the government in the case of *United States v. Hammoud et al.*, is a senior fellow in terrorism studies at The Washington Institute.

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