

HEZBOLLAH: MADE IN TEHRAN

Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation
and
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia

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Chairman Royce, Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen, distinguished members of the
Subcommittees:

Thank you for your invitation to appear before you today. It is a privilege to discuss
the capabilities of the Hezbollah terrorist organization, and the worldwide threat now
posed by this group.

It is not possible to understand Hezbollah without exploring the group's relationship
with its midwife and chief sponsor, the Islamic Republic of Iran. Today, Hezbollah
may have carved out a unique role in regional politics, simultaneously styling itself as
the region's preeminent "resistance" organization and a legitimate Lebanese political
party. Yet ideologically, economically and politically, its fortunes remain intimately
tied to those of the Iranian regime.

IDEOLOGY

Hezbollah represents the first and most successful example of Iran's central foreign
policy principle: the exportation of the Islamic Revolution. As the organization's
ideological platform, articulated publicly for the first time in 1985, made clear: "We
view the Iranian regime as the vanguard and new nucleus of the leading Islamic State
in the world. We abide by the orders of one single wise and just leadership,
represented by "*Wali Faqih*" [rule of the jurisprudent] and personified by Khomeini."¹
More than two decades later, the ideological bonds between Hezbollah and Tehran
remain deep and durable, with Hezbollah's spiritual guide, Hassan Nasrallah, publicly

pledging allegiance to—and serving as a personal emissary of—Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.²

FINANCING

According to U.S. officials, the Iranian regime is the “central banker of terrorism,” spending hundreds of millions of dollars annually on support for radical groups and movements throughout the world.³ A large portion of those funds go toward sustaining and supporting its principal terrorist proxy. For years, the U.S. intelligence community has estimated that Iran provides some \$100 million—and perhaps closer to \$200 million—annually to Hezbollah.⁴ These funds go to support a broad range of initiatives, ranging from the organization’s dedicated television channel, *Al-Manar*, to Hezbollah’s foreign presence.

TRAINING

Iran’s powerful clerical army, the *Pasdaran*, was responsible for the creation of Hezbollah in 1982, as part of Iranian assistance to Syria in the arming and training of the Lebanese resistance as a hedge against Israel.⁵ Ever since, the Iranian regime has had a significant presence “on the ground” in Lebanon, providing oversight of and assistance to Hezbollah’s day-to-day operations.⁶ This foothold has significantly augmented Hezbollah’s indigenous know-how, and perhaps even its warfighting capabilities; hundreds of *Pasdaran* members are believed to have been involved in the recent fighting against Israel.⁷

Hezbollah, in turn, has passed along this know-how to other terrorist actors. As long ago as the early 1990s, the organization is known to have provided explosives training to al-Qaeda, as well as to Egypt’s *al-Jihad* organization, as long ago as the early 1990s.⁸ Hezbollah has also become a significant ally of the Palestinian Hamas movement; in March 2004, with Iran’s support, the two organizations signed an unprecedented strategic accord expanding tactical cooperation and coordination.⁹

LOGISTICS

As part of its cooperation with Hezbollah, the Islamic Republic of Iran remains intimately involved in the planning and execution of the organization’s terror activities. The principal conduit for these contacts is believed to be Imad Mughniyeh, the shadowy head of Hezbollah’s “special operations.” Mughniyeh is said to be an agent of Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), carrying out his operations with MOIS backing and support.¹⁰

This interaction is ongoing. As recently as January 2006, Mughniyeh is believed to have traveled with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Damascus, Syria—and to have facilitated a one-day meeting there between

Ahmadinejad and top leaders of Hezbollah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command.¹¹ It is also institutional in nature, and sustained at the highest levels of the regime. At one time, current Iranian Defense Minister Mostafa Najjar directed the *Pasdaran's* elite Qods Force and oversaw the Islamic Republic's contacts with Hezbollah.¹²

WEAPONRY

Iran is Hezbollah's principal military supplier, responsible for establishing and preserving the organization's substantial strategic capabilities. Iran, in cooperation with Syria, has delivered thousands of Katyusha artillery rockets, as well as hundreds of Iranian-made *Fajr-5* short-range missiles, to the terrorist group over the past several years¹³—weapons that were instrumental in Hezbollah's robust military showing against Israel during hostilities in the summer of 2006. Tehran has also aided and abetted Hezbollah's efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction, providing oversight and assistance to Hezbollah's efforts to arm its arsenal of short-range missiles with chemical warheads.¹⁴

SECURITY GUARANTEES

Iran has even gone so far as to place Hezbollah under its direct protection. In early 2004, Iran's then-Defense Minister, Ali Shamkhani, signed a "memorandum of understanding" with Syria codifying Iran's commitment to defend the Ba'athist state in the event of an Israeli or American offensive. Shamkhani subsequently made clear to Hezbollah's top leadership that these guarantees also extend to the terrorist group's stronghold, Lebanon.¹⁵ (Notably, however, Iran has not acted upon this pledge, despite serious questions about Hezbollah's survivability during the opening phases of the most recent Lebanon war).

HEZBOLLAH ASCENDANT

Four years ago, no less senior an official than then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage dubbed Hezbollah the premier terrorist threat to international peace and security. "Hezbollah may be the 'A team' of terrorists," Armitage told a Washington conference at the time. "Maybe al-Qaeda is actually the 'B team.'"¹⁶ Armitage's assessment reflects a long-standing consensus in the U.S. intelligence community: Hezbollah is a terrorist group with truly global reach, and extensive asymmetric capabilities, thanks in large part to its strategic partnership with Tehran.

That estimate is even more accurate today. The War on Terror so far has done nothing to diminish Hezbollah's international stature. To the contrary, over the past

five years Iran has deepened its assistance to the Shi'ite militia, enabling the group to commence a landmark strategic expansion. This has included:

GREATER GLOBAL PRESENCE

Hezbollah has significantly widened its international presence in recent years.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Hezbollah has begun a systematic takeover of Palestinian terrorist groups, co-opting secular nationalist terrorist groups and creating an elaborate smuggling network designed to arm its growing cadres.¹⁷ According to the estimates of Israel's Shin Bet internal security service, the Lebanese Shi'ite militia directed over 50 separate Palestinian terror cells in 2004—a seven-fold increase since 2002.¹⁸ And, just weeks after the end of its month-long war with Israel, Hezbollah appears to have launched a new, more subtle terrorist campaign. According to Yuval Diskin, the head of Israel's Shin Bet internal security service, the radical Shi'ite militia has stepped up its efforts to train and arm militants in the Palestinian Authority-controlled Gaza Strip. Diskin told a closed door session of the Knesset's foreign affairs and defense committee in late August that Hezbollah's efforts are assisting a massive arms build-up by militants in the Palestinian Territories.¹⁹

With Iran's blessing, Hezbollah has also established an extensive presence in Iraq, with offices in such urban centers as Nasariah, Basra, and Safwan, and has begun substantial recruitment efforts.²⁰ This infiltration has been so successful that the Lebanese Shi'ite militia is said to have assumed police duties in some Iraqi cities.²¹

Likewise, while Hezbollah has been active in Europe since the mid-1980s, the size and pace of the organization's activity on the continent appear to be increasing. According to counterterrorism expert Matthew Levitt, Europe serves as a "launching pad" for Hezbollah; a base from which to initiate operations against Israel and to conduct surveillance of Western targets.²² Germany has emerged as a country of particular focus in this regard. In the summer of 2002, Germany's Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution went public with news that the organization was actively seeking real estate in Berlin to establish a headquarters and a "training centre" for its supporters in the country, then estimated at about 800.²³ Today, that number has expanded considerably; according to German sources, Hezbollah now controls as many as five Islamic centers, financed by Iranian funds funneled through the Islamic Republic's embassy in Germany, in the North Rhine-Westphalia region alone, as well as a nationwide network of as many as 1,000 operatives.²⁴

STRONGER TERRORIST TIES

Simultaneously, Hezbollah has deepened its alliances with other terrorist organizations considerably. This collaboration has included assisting elements of al-Qaeda to put down roots in Lebanon, helping Hamas in the development of an

indigenous missile capability, and coordinating anti-Israeli and anti-American activities with an assortment of extremist groups.²⁵

GREATER PUBLIC OUTREACH

Although today's international terrorist organizations have become increasingly media- and Internet-savvy, it was Hezbollah that originally pioneered the field of terrorist public outreach. Since its founding in 1991 with seed money from Iran, Hezbollah's dedicated television station, *Al-Manar*, has become a media powerhouse, broadcasting around the clock via satellite to an estimated 10 to 15 million viewers daily throughout the world.²⁶ And, while European nations have undertaken a major effort to silence *Al-Manar* in recent months, the station has proven resilient. *Al-Manar* still claims to have the ability to reach a potential 200 million viewers worldwide,²⁷ providing Hezbollah with a global platform from which to spread its radical message.

FUTURE ROLE

Back in the year 2000, Israel's withdrawal from its long-established security zone in southern Lebanon created a political vacuum in a 350-square mile area on its northern border. Hezbollah was positioned to quickly fill this void, in the process becoming the area's dominant political and strategic force and leading many to conclude that the organization would soon give up its arms and turn its attention to development and civil society.

As the recent month-long Lebanon war has shown, however, Hezbollah's new political role has done little to soften the organization's radicalism. Today, the organization boasts virtual autonomy in what some have termed "Hizballahland"²⁸ and occupies no fewer than fourteen of the Lebanese parliament's 128 seats. Yet, while its day-to-day activities may focus on the banalities of civic rule and confronting its immediate enemy, Israel, Hezbollah—like its progenitor, Iran—remains ideologically committed to Khomeini's extremist vision of a Shi'ite-dominated caliphate in the region, and of confrontation with the West.

Indeed, Hezbollah is poised to take on even greater regional significance in the near future. Ongoing U.S. difficulties in Iraq, coupled with the nuclear advances made by the Iranian regime over the past several years, have catalyzed a growing wave of Shi'a empowerment in the region. Hezbollah has been a principal beneficiary of this trend, a fact manifested most dramatically by its kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers on July 12th—an incursion that touched off a month-long war between the organization and

Israel. Little in Hezbollah's calculus has changed, thanks in large part to the group's military successes against Israeli forces during recent hostilities. As one regional expert has put it, "Hizbullah is in a unique position to confront the U.S. agenda which if successful will be, by extension, a victory for Syria, Iran and Hamas."²⁹

U.S. policymakers should keep this perception in mind as they formulate regional policy. They would also do well to remember the dictum of Hezbollah's spiritual leader, Hassan Nasrallah: "Death to America is not a slogan. Death to America is a policy, a strategy and a vision."³⁰

NOTES:

¹ As cited in Center for Special Studies, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Support For Hezbollah Provided by Iran and Syria, Two Countries Sponsoring Terrorism," June 2003, http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/hizbullah/chap_c.doc.

² Center for Special Studies, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, "Hezbollah: Profile of the Lebanese Shiite Terrorist Organization of Global Reach Sponsored By Iran And Supported By Syria," July 2003, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hezbollah.htm#B; Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Shadow Government in Lebanon," Washington Institute for Near East Policy *Policywatch* no. 1124, July 19, 2006, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2489>.

³ "Iran Called 'Central Banker of Terror,'" Associated Press, August 28, 2006.

⁴ Matthew Levitt, statement before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia and the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, February 16, 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/Iran-Testimony-2-16-05.pdf>.

⁵ Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'Allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 34; Gary C. Gambill and Ziad K. Abednour, "Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, no. 2 (2002), http://www.meib.org/articles/0202_11.htm.

⁶ During the 1980s, this presence was estimated to be as large as 2,500. Beginning in the early 1990s, however, this presence was scaled down substantially, to 200-300 active *Pasdaran* operatives. Gambill and Abdelnour, "Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus."

⁷ Ira Stoll, "Hundreds of Iranian Troops Fighting in Lebanon," *New York Sun*, July 19, 2006, <http://www.nysun.com/article/36326>.

⁸ *United States v. Ali Mohamed*, no. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (SDNY), October 20, 2000, 28.

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- ¹⁰ See, for example, Isabel Kirshner, “The Changing Colors of Imad Mughniyah,” *Jerusalem Report*, March 25, 2002, 25.
- ¹¹ “Iran’s Global Network In Focus,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, March 17, 2006.
- ¹² “Iran’s DM Oversaw Ties With Hezbollah,” *Middle East Newslines*, August 15, 2005 (author’s collection).
- ¹³ “Iran Continues to Train Hezbollah,” *Middle East Newslines*, April 7, 2002, http://www.menewslines.com/stories/2002/april/04_07_2.html; “Iran Establishes Rocket Training Centers in Lebanon,” *Middle East Newslines*, August 8, 2002, http://www.menewslines.com/stories/2002/august/08_08_2.html.
- ¹⁴ “Hizbullah Suspected of Storing CW,” *Middle East Newslines*, May 27, 2002 (author’s collection).
- ¹⁵ Amir Taheri, “An Axis Resurgent,” *New York Post*, February 28, 2004, <http://www.benadorassociates.com/article/2297>.
- ¹⁶ Richard Armitage, “America’s Challenges in a Changed World,” remarks to the United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, September 5, 2002, <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rm/2002/13308.htm>.
- ¹⁷ Amit Cohen, “The Hezbollah Within Us,” *Ma’ariv* (Tel Aviv), March 5, 2004, <http://www.maarivintl.com/dev/index.cfm?fuseaction=printArticle&articleID=4106>.
- ¹⁸ Amos Harel, “Hezbollah’s Terror Factory in the PA,” *Ha’aretz* (Tel Aviv), January 11, 2005, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/525429.html>.
- ¹⁹ Michael Hirst and Clancy Chassey, “Hezbollah Is Arming Gaza For A New War On Israel,’ Says Israel’s Spy Chief,” *Daily Telegraph* (London), September 3, 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/09/03/wmid03.xml>.
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- ²¹ See, for example, Raymond Tanter, “Iran’s Threat to Coalition Forces in Iraq,” Washington Institute for Near East Policy *Policywatch* no. 827, January 15, 2004, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1705>.

- ²² Matthew Levitt, testimony before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats, April 27, 2005, http://wwwa.house.gov/international_relations/109/lev042705.pdf.
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- ²⁴ Bruno Schirra, “Extremism—Tehran's Secret Fighters—The Shiite Terror Organization Hizballah Also Has Adherents in Germany,” *Welt Am Sonntag* (Berlin), July 23, 2006.
- ²⁵ See, for example, Isabel Kirshner, “The Changing Colors of Imad Mughniyah,” *Jerusalem Report*, March 25, 2002, 25; Dana Priest and Douglas Farah, “Terror Alliance Has U.S. Worried,” *Washington Post*, June 30, 2002, A01; Matthew Levitt, *Targeting Terror: U.S. Policy toward Middle Eastern State Sponsors and Terrorist Organizations, Post-September 11* (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2002), 114.
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- ²⁸ Gal Luft, “Hizballahland,” *Commentary* 116, no. 1 (2003).
- ²⁹ As cited in Nicholas Blanford, “Israeli Strikes May Boost Hizbullah Base,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 28, 2006, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0728/p06s01-wome.html>.
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