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Hizbullah

The Reut Institute – Concepts and Terms

Definition

This term refers to a Shia-Lebanese movement composed of a military branch, socio-cultural institutions and a political party, whose ideology derives from the Iranian Revolution. Hizbullah's primary objectives include the establishment of an Islamic state within Lebanon and the destruction of Israel.¹

Background

Hizbullah was founded in 1982 under the influence of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and Imam Khomeini. However, the birth of Hizbullah has to be understood in the broader context of the rise of the Lebanese-Shia movement that since the early 70s had been struggling to achieve greater political participation and power within the Lebanese political system.²

¹ Hizbullah's transnational Jihadist platform is unambiguously expressed in its 1985 program: (...) We do not constitute an organized and closed party in Lebanon. (...) This is why whatever touches or strikes the Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines and elsewhere reverberates throughout the whole Muslim Umma of which we are an integral part. (...) In the Hizbullah Program, the organization further clarifies its priorities: To expel the Americans, the French and their allies definitely from Lebanon (...) (c) (...) We call upon all of them to pick the option of Islamic government which, alone, is capable of guaranteeing justice and liberty for all. Only an Islamic regime can stop any further tentative attempts of imperialistic infiltration into our country." And regarding Israel: (...) Our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognize no treaty with it, no cease fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated. (...) We vigorously condemn all plans for negotiation with Israel (...) All these passages are taken from The Hizbullah Program, The Jerusalem Quarterly, number Forty-Eight, fall 1988. (In a May 2006 speech, Hizbullah's leader Hassan Nasrallah reiterated the the anti-Israeli/American platform of his organization and the military element in his rhetoric: (...) we can not achieve a balance with the enemy except through a popular resistance. Such resistance needs to coordinate with the Lebanese Army to have the ability to effectively move, without holding the State responsible for the performance of any popular resistance) (... Highlights of Sayyed Nasrullah's defensive strategy, Al Moqawama, May 17, 2006).

² Since the early 1970s the Lebanese Shia had been asking to enjoy greater political rights within the Lebanese political system. This was the main goal of cleric Musa as Sadr's movement, the Harkat. Following the beginning of the civil war (1975) and Sadr's mysterious disappearance in Libya in 1978

Hizbullah is organized under a hierarchical structure, and it is headed by the Majlis al-Shura, or Consultative Council, led by Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, appointed in 1992.³ Within Lebanon, the organization also recognizes Sheikh Fadlallah, a Shia cleric, as its religious mentor.⁴

Military and Terrorist Activity

Hizbullah was founded in 1982 through the assistance of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, and it was composed of members of the umbrella organization Islamic Jihad, active since the 80s.⁵

Hizbullah's was originally established as a reaction to the Israeli presence in Lebanon. Its tactics ranged from conventional attacks against the Israeli army, to suicide and car bombings against both Israeli and other foreign targets, to international terrorism.⁶ Following the 1985 Israeli partial withdrawal from Lebanon, Hizbullah established an extended military network which exercises control all through southern Lebanon.

Hizbullah's military apparatus was heavily based on strategic support from Iran. Also, the Syrian presence in Lebanon, regulated by the Taif Accords (10/89), granted Hizbullah support and allowed it to maintain its militia.

Although the stated goal of Hizbullah was to end the Israeli presence in Lebanon, even after Israel's full withdrawal from Lebanon (5/00), Hizbullah continued to attack Israel

, Harkat died out, and it was partially replaced by Nabih Berri's "Amal". As stated above, Hizbullah was established on the background of the Israeli presence in Lebanon few years after the establishment of Amal. Sadr can be considered as the inspirational figure behind both Amal and Hizbullah, although Berri's movement lacked the radical revolutionary and religious ideology of Hizbullah. (See Stephen C. Pelletiere, *Hamas and Hizbollah: The Radical Challenge to Israel in the Occupied Territories*, University Press of the Pacific, Honolulu, Hawaii USA, 2004).

³ Nasrallah was appointed in 1992, after previous Secretary General Sayyed Abbas al-Musawi was killed by the IDF. SITE Institute, Group Profile: Hizbullah.

⁴ Hizbullah's other major leaders include: Imad Fayeze Mugniyah, head of the military wing, indicted in the US for participating in the 1985 Hizbullah's hijacking, and currently on the FBI's most wanted list. Mugniyah was also allegedly involved in the 1983 Beirut bombing, and in the 1994 Buenos Aires attack, and he is believed to work closely with the Iranian intelligence and government elite. In January 2006 Mugniyah was allegedly seen in Damascus with Iranian president Ahmadinejad and Syrian Bashar Assad. (See SITE Institute, Group Profile: Hizbullah, Biographical information as posted by Hizbullah's website. Accessed August 7, 2006, FBI's Most Wanted List, Accessed August 8, 2006, Meghan Clyne, Most-Wanted Terrorist Is Spotted in Syria, New York Sun. January 25, 2006, and MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database. Group Profile: Hezbollah).

⁵ MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database. Group Profile: Hezbollah.

⁶ In the past Hizbullah has been involved in both local terrorist attacks against foreign targets, as well as international terrorism. Hizbullah's most lethal attacks include the October 1983 bombing of the multinational force barracks in Beirut, which caused the death of 241 American Marines, the 1984 suicide attack at the US Embassy, which killed 17 US citizens, and the 1985 hijacking of a US commercial airliner which led to the death of a US military officer. Moreover, Hizbullah was also involved in the bombings of the Israeli Embassy in Argentina in 1992 and the Israeli cultural center in Buenos Aires in 1994, which caused the death of 29 and 85 people. (See MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Database. Group Profile: Hezbollah, and Lourdes Herdia, *Todo listo para juicio sobre la AMIA*, BBC News, September 24, 2001. Accessed August 7, 2006, available from: (translated from Spanish).

occasionally (see Permanent Resistance), by launching rockets. With Iranian assistance, the Hizbullah established a massive missiles array in south Lebanon.⁷

Hizbullah publicly supports the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas and to some extent, radical factions of Fatah.

The most significant episode of cooperation between these organizations dates back to the early 90s, when Hamas and PIJ's leaders received military training and imported suicide terrorism tactics from Hizbullah.⁸

Since then, intelligence reports indicate that there have been later instances of mutual logistical and operational support .

Hizbullah and al Qaeda are currently not operating jointly. However, in the early 90s, Hizbullah provided operational assistance and training to Bin Laden's group.⁹

Hizbullah has a worldwide network of followers which support the organization on a mostly logistic-financial level. The organization has clandestine cells in Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and South America.¹⁰

These cells have also been operationally active abroad, for instance in the 1992 and 1994 bombings against the Argentinean Jewish Community.¹¹

Hizbullah is designated by the US as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, and it is considered as such by both Canada and Israel; but not by the European Union.¹²

The Social Infrastructure

The social network of the Hizbullah is a major source of its popularity. Welfare services are offered to the poor Shia communities in Lebanon, with the aim of winning the hearts and minds of the population .

⁷ Hizbullah's pretext for continuing its attacks against Israel has been the claim that Israel has not fully withdrawn from Lebanon, since it maintains control over the Shebaa Farms. There is currently a dispute over the status of the Shebaa Farms, and whether they are Lebanese or Syrian. The international Community's latest stand considered them as part of Syria.

⁸ In 1992, Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin expelled over 400 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad members from the Palestinian Territories. A large group of them went to Southern Lebanon, where they received training and support from Hizbullah's militias. By the time they returned to Gaza and the West Bank, they had absorbed Hizbullah's tactics, including suicide bombings.

⁹ According to the 9/11 Commission Report, in 1993 al Qaeda's senior officers went to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon to receive training in explosives devices and truck bombs by Hizbullah. (See 9/11 Commission Report, p. 61). This was also confirmed by Ali Mohamed in his 2000 testimony. (See United States District Court, Southern District Of New York, US vs. Ali Mohamed, October 20, 2000)

¹⁰ US-Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations.

Former CIA Director George Tenet, in February 2003, underlined the operational and strategic capability of the organization, and he specified: "Hezbollah, as an organization with capability and worldwide presence, is [al-Qaeda's] equal, if not a far more capable organization." (See Matthew Levitt, Islamic Extremism in Europe: Beyond al-Qaeda - Hamas and Hezbollah in Europe).

¹¹ List of Organization designated as Terrorist Entities by the Government of Canada.

¹² "EU not to place Hezbollah on terrorist list, for now: presidency," EU News, August 1, 2006, accessed August 8, 2006.

The means the movement uses range from the creation of a broad welfare system, to charity-work, and they allow the movement to strengthen social ties with the population.¹³

In addition, Hizbullah has an effective propaganda division that facilitates the instilling of the organization's messages and ideology. The group uses the global media, through the Internet and through its satellite television channel, Al-Manar.

The Party of "The Party of God"

A major turning point in the organization was its 1992 decision to take part in the official Lebanese political system.

Currently, the Hizbullah's political council and parliamentary bloc, headed by Mohammed Raad, holds 14 out of 128 seats in the Lebanese Parliament, and, after the latest 2005 elections, Hizbullah also hold two seats in the Lebanese cabinet.¹⁴

External Assistance and Funding

Hizbullah's economic sources can be divided as follows:

Iran – the vast majority of the social and economic array of Hizbullah is sponsored by Iran, which transfers substantial amount of money to Hizbulla.

Economic enterprises – the organization is a partner or holder of several profitable economic enterprises that bring into its coffers large amounts of money. The construction company of the organization is a prime example, as is the partnership with the Lebanese airline company.

Service fees – not all of the social activities of the organization (hospitals, schools, summer camps and kids' activities and lending organizations) are free of charge. The organization takes a sliding-scale fee for part of these services. Most of the organization's social activities take place in the south .

Donations from private persons – mostly from Shia communities in Africa and South America.¹⁵

Charitable Institutions – Hizbullah operates a network of charitable institutions outside of Lebanon that brings money into the organization.

Sabrina Tavernise, "Charity Wins Deep Loyalty for Hezbollah," The New York Times, August 6, 2006.

¹⁴ Agence France Presse, Hezbollah wants seats in new Lebanon cabinet, July 4, 2005.

Hizbullah's Ministries in the Lebanese Cabinet are: Mohammad Fneish (Ministry of Energy & Water), Trad Hamadé (Minister of Labor), independent-candidate who was later endorsed by Hizbullah, Fawzi Salloukh (Minister Foreign Affairs). (See "Lineup of Lebanon's new Cabinet," YaLibnan, 20 July, 2005).

¹⁵ Outside the United States, Hizbullah is present in most European countries, including Belgium, Bosnia, Britain, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and Ukraine\ According to a German intelligence's estimate approximately 800 Hizbullah followers are currently living in Germany, where the organization also issues a weekly newsletter, al-Ahd (See Levitt, Islamic Extremism in Europe: Beyond al-Qaeda Hamas and Hezbollah in Europe, Testimony before the Joint Hearing of the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats April 27, 2005).

Organized crime – The organization operates criminal networks both within Lebanon and abroad that deal with money laundering, drug trafficking, and other types of smuggling and financial bribery .

Like Hamas, the organization's social network is a source of substantial popular support for the organization. The assessment is that Hizbullah supplies approximately 10% of the services to the Lebanese public.

Sources:

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