



# SMALL WARS JOURNAL

smallwarsjournal.com

## Hezbollah: The Party of God

by Roy Keyes



Viewed as both hero and villain, Hezbollah is possibly the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world today. Hezbollah's worldview is fueled by the perception that the Muslim world is experiencing a period of deep crisis and as a result, members of the organization are encouraged to strike at the forces of evil in the world in order to accelerate the final battle between Muslims and the West (Hezbollah Dossier, 2009).

In 1982-83 Hezbollah literally exploded onto the international scene with attacks on U.S. Marine and French army peacekeepers in Beirut, Lebanon resulting in nearly 300 deaths. This was followed by attacks on the U.S. embassy in Beirut which killed the top six Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives in the Middle East (White, 2006). Hezbollah then began a campaign of kidnapping westerners, primarily Americans. Two of these kidnappings resulted in the torture and murder of the CIA station chief in Beirut, as well as a Marine Colonel working for the United Nations. What made these attacks even more effective is that there was no evidence directly linking Hezbollah to these actions (White, 2006). This ability to deny any culpability protected Hezbollah and its sponsors, Iran and Syria, from retaliation. Hezbollah's ability to deny any involvement is part of its strength. It is a well known fact that Hezbollah was behind these attacks but without any ability to draw a straight line to them as the perpetrators the United States was unable to take any significant action against the organization.

Hezbollah's next phase of development is what makes the organization potentially even more dangerous because it can cover its attacks in a cloak of legitimacy. In 1992, Hezbollah entered the world of Lebanese politics as a legitimate political party. The Hezbollah candidates, supported by a massive Iranian-sponsored electoral machine, scored a victory and won eight parliamentary seats. At the same time, Sheikh Nasserallah, the leader of Hezbollah voiced his staunch commitment to the continued armed strategy of Islamic resistance to Israel (Ranstorp, 1995). The political growth of Hezbollah and their continued control of the southern part of Lebanon made the organization a force to be reckoned with in Lebanese politics. Hezbollah's new legitimacy enabled them to turn their terrorist tactics against Israel into a national resistance movement. Even while working to consolidate Hezbollah's gains in Lebanon, the international wing had grown in strength and capability. In 1992 and again in 1994, Hezbollah struck Israeli

and Jewish targets in Argentina killing 113 people. Imad Mughiyah the supposed leader of Hezbollah international is suspected of being behind these attacks. Even though, as in the past, there is no direct proof of Hezbollah's involvement (White, 2006).



**U.S. Embassy Lebanon 1983**

In 2000, Israel pulled the last of its forces from southern Lebanon, a move that further increased Hezbollah's standing in the Middle East and Muslims world wide. No Arab army had been able to stand and fight, let alone defeat Israel or any other Western army. Hezbollah was now credited with not only driving the U.S. and France from Lebanon but now the Israelis as well (White, 2006). While Hezbollah was growing its military and political strength it was also reaching out to its Lebanese brothers and sisters. This outreach included the building of schools which served to perpetuate its message to new generations. As well as schools Hezbollah supplies healthcare, builds roads and even water routes not only for its Shiite brothers, but also for a wide array of the Lebanese population (Hezbollah Dossier, 2009). These social programs are services that the Lebanese government had not been able to provide it citizens and serves to further increase Hezbollah's standing.

The rise and success of Hezbollah would not have been possible without outside support. To this end, Iran as the largest and most powerful Shiite entity in the Middle East is credited with forming, supporting, and to some great degree leading Hezbollah. It was Iran's desire for more control over Hezbollah that Sheikh Nasserallah was put into the Secretary General position in Hezbollah (Ranstorp, 1995). The support from Iran plus Hezbollah's popularity along with its armed military might have fixed them to the Middle Eastern landscape. With Hezbollah, Iran has a way to wage jihad directly against Israel the United States.

The years 2000-2006 were spent well by Hezbollah and Iran. During these six years, Iran and Syria increased their assistance and support of Hezbollah. Both countries regard Lebanon as their front line against Israel and Hezbollah as their strategic proxy. Iran, along with Syria has upgraded Hezbollah's military capabilities, primarily by providing the organization with rockets and constructing an arsenal of between 12,000 to 13,000 surface to surface rockets of various ranges. In addition, Iran also provides Hezbollah financing (more than \$100 million annually),

training in Iran and Lebanon, supplying state-of-the-art weaponry, and intelligence about Israel (Hezbollah as a strategic arm of Iran, 2006 ).

These weapons and training were put to use in 2006. When in retaliation for a Hezbollah raid that killed and captured several Israeli soldiers, Israel attacked Hezbollah and other Lebanese targets. Not only was Hezbollah able to survive this attack, but were in some areas, were able to stop and force back Israeli advances. During this war Hezbollah was able to keep up a steady bombardment of northern Israeli towns. Once hostilities ended, Hezbollah had not only survived, but also with Iranian assistance, helped rebuild areas of Lebanon destroyed by Israeli attacks. Again Hezbollah proved to the Arab world that the Israeli's could be fought to a stand still furthering the legitimacy of Hezbollah's military wing as defenders of Lebanon.



**Soldiers leave Lebanon (Photo: AP)**

Hezbollah's rise to prominence in Lebanon and its influence on regional matters is twofold: (1) Hezbollah's political leverage over the Lebanese government and (2) choices by Hezbollah's leaders to moderate their objectives to achieve domestic political goals (Wiegard, 2009) . Hezbollah's message has changed to match the environment it finds itself. The audience will dictate the message Hezbollah's leadership delivers.

- Jihadists: The use of militant language and holy war.
- Nationalists: Avoid jihad analogy and calls on Sunni, Shiites, Christians, and secularists to fight for Lebanon.
- Pan-Arabic: Point to Israel as a colony of the west and denounce Europe's imperial past.
- International: Cite United Nations resolutions and claim Israel violates international law (White, 2006).

The ability of Hezbollah to change its political tactics has resulted in a terrorist organization that has achieved political legitimacy. This makes directly taking on Hezbollah a challenge to Israel and the West, as it is hard to single out a legitimate political party for attack. Directly attacking Hezbollah would only increase this organization's stature as a defender of

Lebanon. While the United States views Hezbollah as a terrorist group, Lebanese Shiites, some European countries and much of the Arab/Muslim world do not (Hezbollah Dossier, 2009). It must be said that Hezbollah's support of Palestinian terrorist groups is a major reason why Hezbollah officially remains a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. Department of State and several U.S. allies including Israel, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom (Wiegard, 2009).

The growth and maturation of Hezbollah since its inception in the 1980s have brought the organization political clout and conventional military capability. This however does not diminish Hezbollah International ability to strike international targets. Hezbollah has cells operating all over the world, especially in the United States (Hezbollah Dossier, 2009). There has also been documented Hezbollah cell activity in the Isla de Margarita and the town of Ciudad del Este in the tri-border area of Paraguay (Kinsell, 2001). There has also been an Iraq arm of Hezbollah formed that has gone into combat against U.S. and coalition forces.

The question now that Hezbollah has become a major Middle Eastern force is what threat does the group pose to the United States? Hezbollah has been active with Iran in attempting to disrupt U.S. measures to bring peace and security to Iraq (Hezbollah Dossier, 2009). With both Iranian Qods force and Lebanese Hezbollah members captured in Iraq, Iran is waging yet another proxy war against its sworn enemy the United States. U.S. Air Force Colonel David Bacon stated on May 5, 2008 that coalition forces are holding detainees who indicated that Hezbollah, is training Iraqi extremists at Iranian Qods force training camps outside of Tehran, Iran. These cases first appeared in early 2007, after the capture of Ali Mussa Daqduq a Lebanese Hezbollah commander in Iraq. While Iraqi Shiite may look upon Iran as an enemy of Iraq, they view Iran as an ally against the U.S. (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs U.S. Department of State, 2008).

While Hezbollah maintains cells in the United States, using these cells would be a cause for retaliation directly against Hezbollah and perhaps even Iran or Syria. With its usual pragmatism this may be the reason no U.S. mainland targets have been attacked by Hezbollah. This could change if the U.S. continues to expand the war on terror by specifically targeting Hezbollah, or its sponsors Syria or Iran, then the threat level would rise immensely (Hezbollah Dossier, 2009). Hezbollah does not have to carry out any attack on the U.S. or the West directly or alone. Director Imad Mugniyah (On February 13, 2008, Mugniyah was killed in a car bombing in Damascus) of Hezbollah International is believed to have interactions with jihad groups and narcotics traffickers worldwide. This network blends Hezbollah and al-Qaeda. The existence of the international aspect of Hezbollah, according to research, proves that the organization is part of an internal jihadist struggle that uses crime and state support to wage a campaign of terrorism (White, 2006). This blending of jihadist groups Shiite and Sunnis with the same agenda is a hard target for intelligence agencies and law enforcement to track and interdict due to the fluid and sometimes short lived nature of such alliances.

Before Hezbollah is given the international legitimacy that it craves and is close to receiving. It should be remembered that Hezbollah, before 9/11 had killed more U.S. citizens than any other terrorist organization. It should be noted however that apart from Iraq Hezbollah has not launched any attacks against the U.S. partially to avoid the war on terror and partially to keep its forces intact to use against Israel. Daniel Byman, a professor in security studies at Georgetown University, says there is no question about the terrorist agenda of Hezbollah. It might have credibility in the Islamic world, but its record of bloodshed and hostility speaks for

itself. It is not a question of whether the United States should stop Hezbollah, Byman writes but how (White, 2006).

While Hezbollah's intentions may be hidden by its charities and some political legitimacy. It should be remembered that Hezbollah was founded on the idea of jihad. This jihad has included terrorist attacks targeting American and European military and civilian targets in Lebanon during the 1980s, suicide and rocket attacks against Israeli civilians and is suspected in the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in 1985 (Wiegard, 2009). With Hezbollah being supported and guided by Iran with its constant rhetoric of "Death to America" and calls for the destruction of the "Jewish Entity" there is no question that Hezbollah has been and always will remain a terrorist organization. It is only a matter of time before the world has to confront them.



### ***Bibliography***

Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs U.S. Department of State. Iraq Weekly Status Report. Status Report. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2008.

"Hezbollah as a strategic arm of Iran ." 8 September 2006. Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies. 17 August 2009 <[http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/iran\\_hezbollah\\_e1b.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/iran_hezbollah_e1b.htm)>.

"Hezbollah Dossier." Center for Policing Terrorism. 16 August 2009 <<http://www.cpt-mi.org/dossiers.html>>.

Kinsell, Jeremy. "Hezbollah Cells in Paraguay Upset the Neighbors." 21 August 2001. Jane's Terrorism & Security Monitor. 16 August 2009 <[http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdat/mags/jtism/history/jtism2001/jtism0165.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=hezbollah&backPath=http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search&Prod\\_Name=JTSM&](http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdat/mags/jtism/history/jtism2001/jtism0165.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=hezbollah&backPath=http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search&Prod_Name=JTSM&)>.

Ranstorp, Magnus Dr. "MIDDLE EAST, HEZBOLLAH'S FUTURE? - PART 2 ." 1 February 1995. Janes's Intelligence Review. 16 August 2009

<[http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir95/jir00233.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=hezbollah&backPath=http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search&Prod\\_Name=JIR&](http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir95/jir00233.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=hezbollah&backPath=http://search.janes.com.ezproxy1.apus.edu/Search&Prod_Name=JIR&)>.

White, Jonathan R. Terrorism and Homeland Security. Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009,2006.

Wiegard, Krista E. "Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party." Studies in Conflict and Terrorism (2009): 669-680.

*Roy Keyes graduated from American Military University in 2010 with a BA in Intelligence Studies Specializing in Terrorism Studies. He is an amateur military historian who concentrates on World War II and the current Global War on Terror. He runs a small blog called cowboyjihad.blogspot.com which follows events in Southwest Asia and the Middle East.*

This is a single article excerpt of material published in Small Wars Journal.  
Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2010, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our Terms of Use.

No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.



Please consider supporting Small Wars Journal.