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# Policy Focus



## 'FIGHT ON ALL FRONTS': Hizballah, the War on Terror, and the War in Iraq

Ely Karmon

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*Ely Karmon*  
*December 2003*





## *Executive Summary*

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Hizballah is an odd religious and political movement: it was born of terrorism in the 1980s, developed guerrilla warfare capabilities in the 1990s, and, by the beginning of the new millennium, had matured into an important Middle East strategic player, capable of influencing the course of peace and war in the region. At the organizational level, Hizballah has evolved significantly, from a loose, mysterious umbrella group under the guidance of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran to a well-knit, disciplined organization under the guidance of its own charismatic leader, Hassan Nasrallah.

Over the past decade, various developments—in particular, the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections, the significant internal developments in Iran and Syria, and the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000—led analysts to predict that Hizballah would transform itself from an international terrorist organization into a Lebanese political party. Despite these developments, however, Hizballah continued to use international terrorism as a strategic tool for advancing its goals. The organization regards terrorism not only as a legitimate military strategy, but as a religious duty, part of a “global jihad.” It sees itself as the vanguard of the world Islamist movement, with an obligation to lead by example and encourage weaker groups in the political and cultural fight against the West.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the concrete expression of this ideology took the form of intensive terrorist activity within numerous countries worldwide, resulting in hundreds of deaths and injuries. In the Middle East, Hizballah operatives and affiliate cells targeted several Arab countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain), often in the service of Iranian interests. Some of these attacks were aimed at local regimes, while others targeted Western interests (e.g., the bombings of U.S. embassy facilities in Beirut in 1983 and 1984; the twin 1983 suicide attacks on U.S. and French military headquarters in Beirut; the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers U.S. military complex in Saudi Arabia). In addition, Hizballah perpetrated a long string of kidnappings and murders involving Westerners in Leba-

non, including U.S. officials such as CIA bureau chief William Buckley and citizens of numerous European countries.

Hizballah's reach and anti-Western activities extended to many other regions as well. In Europe, for example, the organization was involved in a 1985 restaurant bombing near a U.S. military base in Spain as well as several 1986 bombings targeting Parisian shopping centers and rail stations. In South America, it was behind the two deadliest terrorist attacks in the continent's history: the Israeli embassy and Jewish community center bombings in Buenos Aires, which took place in the early 1990s. Hizballah also established a significant presence in the "tri-border area" (where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay converge) using local businesses, drug trafficking, and contraband networks to launder funds for terrorist operations worldwide. In Asia, Hizballah unsuccessfully attempted to attack U.S. and Israeli interests in countries such as Thailand and Singapore. And in North America, authorities uncovered Hizballah fundraising and equipment-procurement cells in both the United States and Canada.

The various key developments that have occurred in the Middle East since the turn of the millennium have only strengthened Hizballah and enhanced its reputation among sympathizers as a leading actor in the fight against Israel, the United States, and other enemies of Islam. In the wake of Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon, Hizballah leaders became convinced that they could achieve their Islamist goals by actively supporting a Palestinian terrorist campaign against Israel and by conducting their own attrition attacks from the north, a strategy supported by Syria and Iran. Subsequent developments—namely, the Palestinian intifada, the post-September 11 U.S.-led "war on terror," and the war in Iraq—have led Hizballah to escalate this strategy, reinforcing the organization's status as a threat to international peace.

Indeed, Hizballah's role in the Palestinian uprising against Israel is of broad regional and international significance, part of a wider struggle against the perceived imperialist threat represented by the United States. When the Palestinian intifada erupted in fall 2000, the organization was quick to increase its level of cooperation with Palestinian rejectionists through direct training combined with

logistical and operational support. Hizballah also put forth a significant effort toward establishing an independent terrorist and intelligence infrastructure inside both the Palestinian Authority and Israel. On the military front, the organization continued its cross-border attacks against Israeli forces in the Shebaa Farms area and expanded its arsenal of weaponry, acquiring rockets and missiles capable of reaching a greater number of Israeli targets.

Hizballah's activities on the Israeli-Palestinian front since 2000 have threatened to drag the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Asad (and Lebanon along with it) into a regional conflict with Israel. Indeed, the balance of power between Damascus and Hizballah has shifted noticeably during the young Bashar's reign, with Hassan Nasrallah assuming greater independence and demonstrating a certain charismatic ascendancy. In Tehran, Hizballah's activities during this period have helped to strengthen the hardliners and compromise the efforts of reformers who question Iranian support for terrorism and the disruption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. For its part, Iran's massive support for Hizballah has helped the organization to maintain pressure on Israel's northern border and facilitate assistance provided to the intifada and to Palestinian Islamist organizations.

Nevertheless, Syria—not Iran—has been the most important source of support for Hizballah's terrorist and guerrilla activity against Israel from the north. Without Syria's help—in the form of providing an overall strategic umbrella; specific military and political coordination; and pressure on Beirut to give the organization free rein in southern Lebanon—Hizballah could not have achieved its current status. Presently, it is a guerrilla movement with control over a “liberated” territory, it maintains a continuous supply of military equipment via Damascus, and has virtual immunity from all-out Israeli punitive measures. Indeed, Syrian aid has effectively transformed Hizballah into a strategic partner and operational arm of the Syrian army in confrontation with Israel, a transformation highlighted by Hizballah's retaliation for Israeli attacks against Syrian interests.

The events of September 11, 2001, had a major impact on the organization's strategy and behavior. The al-Qaeda attacks on the United States, the subsequent U.S. military campaign in

Afghanistan, and the ensuing war on terror all threatened to rob Hizballah of the strategic gains it had made since 2000. Moreover, the Bush administration's post-September 11 policies raised the possibility that both Hizballah and its state sponsors might eventually be targeted in a continuing U.S.-led campaign against the "axis of evil." In response, the organization decided to escalate both its attacks on Israel and its support for the Palestinian intifada as a means of fomenting instability, obstructing U.S. action in the region, and concentrating international attention on the Palestinian arena. These efforts included the (Israeli-thwarted) January 2002 *Karine-A* smuggling operation, in which Iran and Hizballah attempted to transport fifty tons of illegal weaponry to the Palestinian Authority. In addition, Hizballah's leaders began to consider cooperation with Sunni radical groups, echoing past organizational and training links to groups affiliated with the Sunni al-Qaeda movement.

Hizballah's self-assurance regarding its aggressive approach began to diminish somewhat once its leaders realized that the United States and Britain were preparing in earnest for a military campaign against Iraq. Even as they accepted the inevitability of U.S. intervention in that country, however, Hizballah and its state sponsors planned for the emergence of a post-Saddam era in which the United States would sink in the region's figurative sands; they would exploit their historical and religious ties to Iraqi Shi'is while at the same time calling for Sunni/Shi'i unity in the face of Western aggression. They seemed to believe that, given the difficulties U.S. forces would inevitably encounter in postwar Iraq, the Bush administration would be neither willing nor able to take forceful responsive action against them in the short term.

## Policy Recommendations

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Despite its far-reaching goals and vehement incitement against coalition efforts in Iraq, Hizballah is also a pragmatic movement. Even when its ultimate objectives are postponed due to strategic or political constraints, the organization does not feel compelled to renounce those objectives or the violent means it has used in the attempt to achieve them. Given this *modus operandi*, Hizballah's current short-

term strategy may be twofold: to maintain hostilities in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and to build on the American entanglement in Iraq. If Hizballah perceives the United States as having difficulty controlling the situation in Iraq, the organization could further escalate its attrition war against Israel at the northern border, inside the Palestinian Authority, and even within Israel proper. Indeed, Hizballah views the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as crucial to achieving its overall goals.

Parallel to its escalation on the Israeli-Palestinian front, Hizballah could also choose to foster a radical Shi'i "resistance" movement in Iraq, attacking U.S. and other Western interests in the southern Gulf, which is home to a large Shi'i minority. In fact, evidence of Hizballah's ties to the Iraqi opposition began to emerge early in the war, and the organization has reportedly established a significant presence of its own inside Iraq since then. Although Hizballah operatives have not yet been involved in attacks on coalition forces, they could eventually assume an active role if Iran and Syria feel that their interests in Iraq or their own territorial sovereignty are threatened by the U.S. military presence.

Hizballah is also prepared for the worst-case scenario. That is, if the Iranian and Syrian regimes feel pressured by the U.S. military presence on their borders, they could decide to sacrifice Hizballah for the sake of their own political survival. In this scenario, the Hizballah leadership has warned that any attempt to eliminate or disarm the organization—whether conducted by Israel, the United States, Syria, Iran, or Lebanon—would be met with an unprecedented "explosion."

In light of Hizballah's potentially destructive influence in the region, it is imperative that the United States and the international community take the necessary measures to curtail the organization's international terrorist activity. These measures include isolating Hizballah at the international level; maintaining relentless diplomatic and economic pressure on Syria and Iran; making the Hizballah issue the first priority in U.S. communication with Damascus; and applying diplomatic and, in particular, economic pressure to convince Lebanon to deploy its armed forces in the south and curb Hizballah's military presence there.



# Introduction

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**H**izballah is an odd religious and political movement: it was born of terrorism in the 1980s, developed guerrilla warfare capabilities in the 1990s, and, by the beginning of the new millennium, had matured into an important Middle East strategic player, capable of influencing the course of peace and war in the region. At the organizational level, Hizballah has evolved significantly: from a loose, mysterious umbrella group under the guidance of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran; to a movement collectively led by various shaykhs and warlords; to a well-knit, disciplined organization under the guidance of its own charismatic leader, Hassan Nasrallah.

Some analysts have claimed that Hizballah's focus lies primarily on the liberation of occupied Lebanese lands, and secondarily on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to one such analyst, Hizballah "has no operational interests, other than diplomatic, beyond these spheres. The party may indeed have a global reach, but for almost 2 decades that reach has not produced credible threats outside the Lebanon-Israel theater."<sup>1</sup> This view depicts the organization as simply one of many "Islamic national liberation movements," which have "little interest in operations outside their immediate environment."<sup>2</sup> Many analysts also believed that Hizballah's participation in the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections, along with changes in the posture of Iran and Syria, its two principal state sponsors,<sup>3</sup> would transform the organization into a political party.

Contrary to these assessments, however, Hizballah continued to use international terrorism as a strategic tool for advancing its goals, albeit more cautiously and clandestinely. The organization's role in major terrorist attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets in Buenos Aires (in 1992 and 1994) and against the Khobar Towers U.S. military complex in Saudi Arabia (1996) testify to this fact. Hizballah regards terrorism not only as a legitimate military strat-

egy, but also as a religious duty, part of a “global jihad.” It sees itself as the vanguard of the world Islamist movement, with an obligation to lead by example and encourage weaker groups.<sup>4</sup> Hence, even its efforts to achieve local goals—such as the establishment of Islamic rule in Lebanon—have taken on an international dimension.

The various key developments that have occurred in the region since 2000 have only strengthened Hizballah and enhanced its reputation among sympathizers as a leading actor in the fight against Israel, the United States, and other enemies of Islam. These events have also renewed the organization’s commitment to terrorism. In particular, following Israel’s May 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Hizballah’s leaders became convinced that they could achieve their Islamist goals by actively supporting a Palestinian terrorist campaign against Israel and by conducting their own attrition attacks from the north, a strategy supported by Iran and Syria. Subsequent developments—including the Palestinian intifada, the post–September 11 war on terror, and the war in Iraq—have led Hizballah to escalate this strategy, reinforcing the organization’s status as a threat to international peace.

The chapters that follow outline Hizballah’s record of international activity over the past two decades and offer a detailed assessment of the organization’s response to developments since 2000. Of particular interest is the manner in which Hizballah has attempted to exploit these developments without altering its longstanding ideology, strategic approach, or international scope.

## Notes

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1. Sami Hajjar, *Hizballah: Terrorism, National Liberation, or Menace?* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002), p. 35. Available online ([www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/pubs/2002/hizbala/hizbala.htm](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/pubs/2002/hizbala/hizbala.htm)).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
3. At the time, Iran was beginning to focus on various internal issues, while Syria was pursuing the peace process with Israel.
4. Even al-Qaeda has readily acknowledged Hizballah’s importance to the global jihad movement. For example, in an audiotape released in February 2003, Osama bin Laden cited Hizballah’s 1983 suicide bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut as the first “American defeat” at the hands of Islamist radicals. He also mentioned the “explosion in Khobar,” em-



phasizing that it compelled U.S. forces “to evacuate their big headquarters from the cities to bases in the desert.” See Reuven Paz, “Global Jihad and the Sense of Crisis: Al-Qa‘idah’s Other Front,” *Occasional Papers* vol. 1, no. 4 (Project for the Research of Islamist Movements [PRISM], March 2003). Available online ([www.e-prism.org/pages/4/index.htm](http://www.e-prism.org/pages/4/index.htm)).

## Chapter 1

# A History of International Activity

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Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and other parties have attempted to portray Hizballah as a legitimate resistance movement whose only goal is the liberation of occupied territories. Yet, Hizballah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah has himself argued that in order “to earn victory, we have to fight on all fronts. We have to be global and integral.”<sup>1</sup> It is not by chance that Hizballah’s emblem is a hand brandishing a machine gun against the background of the globe, under a slogan taken from the Qur’an: “Only Allah’s congregation shall be victorious.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the organization’s activities have long been international in scope.

### Regional Activities

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During the 1980s and 1990s, Hizballah targeted several Arab countries, mainly in the Gulf and usually in the service of Iranian interests. In the 1980s, roughly half of the terrorist activity dedicated to exporting the Iranian revolution was aimed at Arab states. Such activity also served to hinder Arab support to Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War. Many of these operations—particularly those targeting Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates—were perpetrated by Hizballah cells or by local Shi’i groups that had received Hizballah training or support. Such activities were carried out both inside these countries and against their interests abroad.<sup>3</sup>

For example, on January 12, 1987, Hizballah gunmen kidnapped a Saudi cultural attaché in Beirut. Two weeks later, Hizballah terrorists kidnapped another Saudi citizen in Beirut. These abductions were politically motivated, with the latter coinciding with the Islamic Summit Conference being held in Kuwait at the time. Both hostages were released in March after the Saudi government paid a ransom. On October 20 of that year, eighteen

Arab terrorists, seventeen of whom were members of Hizballah, were arrested in Spain for plotting to assassinate the Saudi ambassador and diplomats from Kuwait and Iraq. On April 27, 1988, a time bomb exploded near the Saudi Arabian Airlines office in Kuwait City, slightly injuring a security guard and damaging the office itself; Hizballah took responsibility for the attack. The previous day, Saudi Arabia had broken off diplomatic relations with Iran.<sup>4</sup>

Hizballah engaged in particularly intense terrorist activity against Kuwaiti targets during the 1980s. Much of this activity served as retaliation for Kuwait's imprisonment of Hizballah members convicted of perpetrating a series of bombings in cooperation with local pro-Iranian Shi'i groups. On December 11, 1983, the imprisoned operatives had helped set off eight car bombs against various targets in Kuwait: the U.S. and French embassies; the local offices of Raytheon, a U.S. firm contracted to install a Hawk missile system in the country; an apartment housing Raytheon employees; the air traffic control tower at Kuwait's main airport; the Kuwaiti Ministry of Electricity and Water; the Kuwaiti Passport Control Office; and a petrochemical and refining complex. Five people died and eighty-seven were wounded in the attacks. Some of the perpetrators had close family ties with Hussein Musawi and Imad Mughniyeh, leaders of the operational branches of Hizballah. The most infamous retaliatory incident took place on April 5, 1988, when Hizballah terrorists (allegedly including Mughniyeh himself) hijacked a Kuwait Airlines flight, forced it to land in Iran, and demanded the release of seventeen of the convicted terrorists held in Kuwaiti jails. Although two hostages were killed during the ordeal, Kuwait refused to release any of the convicts, and the hijackers eventually escaped.<sup>5</sup>

Hizballah continued its terrorist and subversive activity in the region during the 1990s. For example, the 1996 bombing of the Khobar Towers U.S. military complex in Saudi Arabia demonstrated the ongoing cooperation between Hizballah and its eponymous Saudi sister organization. Similarly, Hizballah and Iranian elements based in Lebanon and Syria were involved in terrorist activities in Bahrain in 1996 and 1998, even after repeated Bahraini complaints to the Lebanese authorities.<sup>6</sup> In

February 1998, Jordanian authorities arrested six infiltrators attempting to smuggle a large quantity of weapons across the Dead Sea to the West Bank for use in attacks on Israeli targets. Five of the infiltrators were Hizballah operatives from Iran, while the sixth was a Palestinian. Soon thereafter, Jordanian authorities arrested Udday al-Musawi, a Lebanese Shi'i considered to be the coordinator of Hizballah activities in Jordan.<sup>7</sup>

## Hizballah and the West

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In ideological terms, Hizballah is obsessed with what it regards as a struggle against the West for the very survival of Islam. The organization sees Islam as besieged by conspiratorial foes who act in the interest of a “global infidelity” being propagated by the West. This struggle is more than just political; according to Naim Qasim, Hassan Nasrallah’s deputy, there is also a “cultural conflict between [Hizballah] and the West.”<sup>8</sup> In light of these views, Hizballah’s mission is to take an active role, both overtly and clandestinely, in a conflict that extends far beyond Lebanon.

During the 1980s, the concrete expression of this worldview was a long series of terrorist acts against Western targets inside Lebanon and abroad, including the following:

- On April 18, 1983, a Hizballah suicide bomber struck the U.S. embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people (including 17 Americans) and wounding 88. Robert Ames, the CIA’s top Middle East expert, and William McIntyre, deputy director of the U.S. Agency for International Development, were among the dead, as were several members of the U.S. State and Defense Departments.
- On October 23, 1983, Hizballah staged twin suicide attacks on the French paratroopers headquarters and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 58 French soldiers and 241 U.S. Marines.
- On March 1, 1984, Hizballah staged a rocket attack on the French embassy compound in west Beirut.
- On July 31, 1984, Hizballah hijacked an Air France passenger jet en route from Frankfurt to Paris and forced it to land in Iran. There, the hijackers threatened to kill one hostage every hour unless the French released five terror-

ists held for a 1980 assassination attempt on former Iranian prime minister Shapur Bakhtiar, a vocal critic of the clerical regime in Tehran (the failed 1980 hit, which had taken place in Paris, resulted in the deaths of a policeman and a female bystander).

- On September 20, 1984, Hizballah bombed the U.S. embassy annex near Beirut, killing somewhere between 23 and 40 people (the death toll is still disputed).
- On April 12, 1985, 18 people were killed and 83 injured in a Hizballah bomb attack on a restaurant near the U.S. Air Force base in Torrejon, Spain.
- In 1986, Hizballah was linked to 13 bombings in Paris against shopping centers, rail stations, and trains, which killed a total of 13 people and wounded more than 250. The attacks were perpetrated by a network of a dozen operatives connected with Hizballah and led by Fuad Ali Saleh, a Tunisian citizen. French authorities did not apprehend the operatives until March 1987, whereupon they discovered Hizballah's links to the bombings.
- On July 24, 1987, Mohammed al-Hariri, a Lebanese man who had been released from an Israeli prison in May, hijacked an Air Afrique flight en route from Brazzaville to Paris and forced the pilot to divert it to Geneva. Swiss police stormed the plane after Hariri killed a French passenger; upon apprehending the hijacker, they found explosives wrapped around his waist. In addition to calling for the freeing of all Arab prisoners in Israel, Hariri had demanded that West German authorities release Mohammed Ali Hamadei, a Hizballah terrorist who had been arrested in January on air piracy and murder charges.<sup>9</sup> At the time of his capture, Hamadei had been carrying explosives in his bags, reportedly for use in France. His brother Abdel Hadi Hamadei, who held a high post in Hizballah's security command, vocally lobbied for his release.
- On March 8, 1989, a Hizballah terrorist was killed while preparing a bomb to be used against British author Salman Rushdie in London.

The 1980s also witnessed numerous kidnappings of Westerners in Lebanon, often carried out by Hizballah. As many as eighty-

seven French,<sup>10</sup> German,<sup>11</sup> Italian, American, and other nationals were held hostage, and some were killed during their captivity. Among the kidnapped were eighteen Americans, of whom three were killed, including William Buckley (the CIA's bureau chief in Beirut) and Marine Col. William Richard Higgins (who served as head of a UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon).<sup>12</sup> Most of the Western hostages were not liberated until 1991, after U.S. pressure intensified following the Gulf War.

Hizballah's enmity toward the West has persisted into the present. The United States, Britain, and France remain the organization's principal Western enemies, largely because of their perceived colonial and neo-imperial roles in the Middle East. Hizballah's anti-Western activities have also extended to several other countries worldwide. The sections that follow provide numerous examples of these activities.

*The United States.* Hizballah, like Iran, regards the United States as the "Great Satan," in contrast to other Western enemy states, which are considered merely "evil." On Hizballah's al-Manar satellite television station (accessible throughout the Arab world, North America, and Europe), the United States is depicted as "a demonic menace threatening not just the Middle East, but the entire planet."<sup>13</sup> According to Nasrallah,

The main source of evil in this world, the main source of terrorism in this world, the central threat to international peace and to the economic development of this world, the main threat to the environment of this world, the main source of . . . killing and turmoil, and civil wars and regional wars in this world is the United States of America.<sup>14</sup>

Hizballah has followed up on its rhetoric with a long history of ruthless terrorism against U.S. civilian and military targets. Its first wave of anti-American attacks began with the previously mentioned suicide bombings of the U.S. embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983. The embassy attack constituted the first suicide bombing in the history of international terrorism, a landmark and an example for other terrorist organizations. The barracks bombing was the single deadliest act of terrorism against the United States prior to the attacks of September 11, 2001. The

statement claiming responsibility for the barracks attack included the following threat:

We are the soldiers of God and we crave death. Violence will remain our only path if they [foreign forces] do not leave. We are ready to turn Lebanon into another Vietnam. We are not Iranians or Syrians, or Palestinians. We are Lebanese Muslims who follow the dicta of the Koran.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1990s, Hizballah became less active with regard to international terrorism against U.S. interests due to a series of changes in the international arena: the Communist bloc crumbled; the United States emerged strengthened after the 1991 Gulf War; and the Arab-Israeli peace process began to move forward, with Hizballah sponsors such as Syria directly involved. Moreover, following the election of reformist president Muhammad Khatami, the clerical regime in Iran began to concentrate on its internal problems and seemed to decrease its focus on international terrorism.

To be sure, Hizballah did not completely abandon anti-American attacks during this period. As mentioned previously, the organization was directly involved in the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing, which killed 19 U.S. soldiers and wounded nearly 400 people. Moreover, Hizballah has continued its efforts to establish an infrastructure on U.S. soil. For example, in July 2000, federal agents arrested eighteen alleged Hizballah supporters in Charlotte, North Carolina, on charges of participating in a ring that sent funds and dual-use military equipment (e.g., global positioning devices, night-vision technology, mine detection gear, cellular phones, blasting equipment) to the organization in Lebanon. In June 2002, a federal court convicted two of the ring's Hizballah operatives, Mohamad and Chawki Hamoud, of "providing material support to a terrorist group."<sup>16</sup>

*South America.* Hizballah was behind the two deadliest terrorist attacks in the history of South America: a car bomb that demolished the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires on March 17, 1992, killing 29 people and injuring 250; and the bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association (AMIA) community center in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994, which killed approximately 100

people and injured dozens. According to Argentinean authorities, the embassy bombing was conducted by Iranian intelligence operatives, with Hizballah playing a key role in its execution. Similarly, the head of the Argentinean intelligence services recently presented Israel with a top secret report that blamed Iran and Hizballah for the AMIA bombing. The report also claimed that both of the Buenos Aires attacks “were motivated by hatred of Israel and the Jewish people and a desire to punish the regime of Carlos Menem for rescinding the commitment of his predecessor Raoul Alfonsin to provide Iran with know-how and equipment for its nuclear reactors.”<sup>17</sup>

Hizballah also has a longstanding presence in what is known as the “tri-border area,” where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay converge.<sup>18</sup> In February 2000, Paraguayan authorities arrested Ali Khalil Mehri, a Lebanese businessman who had allegedly been “selling millions of dollars worth of pirated software and funneling the proceeds to Hezbollah.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, businessman Assad Ahmad Barakat, a Lebanese emigrant to Paraguay and “the alleged ringleader of Hezbollah’s financial network” in the tri-border area, was arrested in summer 2002 for allegedly funneling large sums of money to the organization.<sup>20</sup> In an October 2001 raid of one of his businesses, Paraguayan authorities had found numerous items linking him to Hizballah, including a letter from Nasrallah, who wrote that he was “most thankful for the contributions Assad Ahmad Barakat has sent from the Triple Border.” In November of that year, Chilean authorities alleged that two businesses owned by Barakat were Hizballah “fronts for money laundering.” Seven Lebanese citizens were arrested in connection with that investigation on charges of illegally financing a terrorist group.

Similarly, Hizballah cells based in Maicao, Colombia, have used local drug trafficking and contraband networks to launder funds that were later used to finance terrorist operations worldwide. Two clans in the area have been investigated for running combined gun and drug trafficking networks used for the same purpose.<sup>21</sup>

*Asia.* Hizballah has also used various Asian countries as platforms from which to plot against Western and Israeli interests.



For example, according to Singapore's Internal Security Department, the organization planned to bomb American and Israeli ships docked there:

Hizballah operatives had recruited five Singaporean Muslims in the 1990s, who were to assist with surveillance and logistics. . . . The five reportedly were selected from a group attending Muslim religious classes, and later met with Ustaz Bandei, a radical Islamic preacher . . . wanted by Indonesian authorities for the 1985 bombing of the Borobudur temple in Indonesia. . . . The Hizballah cell—comprised of Ustaz Bandei and three others—was still active as late as 1998, and continued to conduct surveillance of possible targets.<sup>22</sup>

In Thailand, Hizballah attempted to carry out a suicide bombing attack against the Israeli embassy in Bangkok in March 1994. The attack failed, however, when the terrorists' explosives-laden truck was involved in an accident on the way to its target.

*Canada.* The previously mentioned Hizballah fundraising cell in Charlotte, North Carolina, was linked to a Canadian cell run by two men under the command of Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis, "Hizballah's chief military procurement officer."<sup>23</sup> 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)."

*Sweden.* In October 2001, the Swedish SAPO intelligence agency identified fifteen people in Sweden with direct links to al-Qaeda and Hizballah. Specifically, the suspects were accused of assisting the terrorist organizations with information, communications, and financing.<sup>24</sup>

## Notes

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1. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *El Mundo* (Madrid), December 18, 2001.
2. The emblem appears on the group's official website ([www.hizbollah.org](http://www.hizbollah.org)).
3. Most of the following information on terrorist incidents during the 1980s is based on Edward Mickolus, *International Terrorism in the 1980s: A Chronology of Events*, 2 vols. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988–1989).
4. Riyadh severed ties with Iran following a mob attack on the Saudi embassy in Tehran, which led to the death of one Saudi diplomat. The embassy attack had been the latest in a series of incidents and issues that strained relations between the two countries, including diplomatic disagreements

regarding navigation rights in the Persian Gulf and violent clashes between Saudi authorities and Iranian pilgrims demonstrating in Mecca. See "Saudis Break Iran Diplomatic Ties," *Chicago Tribune*, April 28, 1987.

5. On April 8, the hijackers had demanded that the plane be flown to Cyprus. The next day, they killed Muhammad al-Khalidi, a Kuwaiti hostage, after Cypriot authorities refused to comply with their refueling deadline. On April 10, the hijackers threatened to kill their U.S. and French hostages if a military rescue was attempted. On April 11, the hijackers killed a second Kuwaiti hostage. Eventually, they left the plane in Algiers after reaching a deal with the Algerian government. According to U.S. officials, one of the hijackers was Hassan Izzidin, who, like Mughniyeh, was already wanted for the killing of U.S. Navy diver Robert Dean Stethem during the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847.
6. In June 1996, Manama "publicly announced the discovery of an active Bahraini Hizballah cell that was recruited, trained, and supported by Iran." U.S. Department of State, "Middle East Overview," in *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1996* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1997); available online ([www.usis.usemb.se/terror/rpt1996/middle.html](http://www.usis.usemb.se/terror/rpt1996/middle.html)). Moreover,

minor security incidents continued to plague Bahrain in 1998. Bahraini security forces in November arrested several Bahraini and Lebanese citizens, seizing weapons and explosives, in connection with a plot to attack public facilities and other installations in Bahrain. Bahraini prime minister Shaykh Khalifa claimed the operation was planned in Lebanon, where members of the group reportedly had received military training. Some of those arrested allegedly also confessed to conducting arson attacks.

U.S. Department of State, "Middle East Overview," in *Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1998* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1999); available online ([www.fas.org/irp/threat/terror\\_98/mideast.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/terror_98/mideast.htm)). See also Daniel Leshem, "The Unholy Trinity: Hizbullah, Syria and Iran," Policy Paper no. 94 (Ariel Center for Policy Research, 1999); original Hebrew version published in *Nativ* 12, no. 6 (November 1999).

7. Hasham al-Khalidi, untitled report in *al-Hadath* (Amman), March 9, 1998.
8. Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 56.
9. The charges were in connection with the previously mentioned 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847 (see note 5). The U.S. government unsuccessfully sought Hamadei's extradition for his role in that hijacking.
10. For example, on March 8, 1986, Hizballah gunmen kidnapped a four-man French television crew in Beirut. The kidnapping coincided with the previously mentioned string of Hizballah-linked bombings in Paris. Ironically, the television crew had traveled to Lebanon in order to do a story on four other Frenchmen who were being held hostage there.

11. German citizens in Lebanon became primary targets for kidnapping following the previously mentioned 1987 arrest of Hizballah terrorist Mohammed Ali Hamadei by West German authorities.
12. According to a U.S. government report, the Organization of the Oppressed on Earth, a Hizballah front, "claimed it executed Higgins in July 1989. But he may have died several months earlier after being tortured." "Heroes Murdered by Terrorists Honored," Voice of America, January 3, 1992. Transcript available online ([www.fas.org/irp/news/1992/40718886-40721538.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/news/1992/40718886-40721538.htm)).
13. Avi Jorisch, "Al-Manar and the War in Iraq," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 5, no. 4 (April 2003). Available online ([www.meib.org/articles/0304\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0304_11.htm)).
14. Hassan Nasrallah, speech broadcast on al-Manar Television, March 21, 2002.
15. William Claiborne, "Marine Chief 'Totally Satisfied' Beirut Had Adequate Security," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1983.
16. Matthew Levitt, "Banning Hizballah Activity in Canada," *PolicyWatch* no. 698 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 6, 2003).
17. Yossi Melman, "Argentine Intelligence Report Details Iranian Hand in Buenos Aires Bombings," *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), March 11, 2003.
18. See Ambassador Francis Taylor, "The Presence of International Terrorist Groups in the Western Hemisphere," testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, *Hearing on the Western Hemisphere's Response to the September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attack on the United States*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., October 10, 2001. Available online ([www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2001/5674.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2001/5674.htm)).
19. Blanca Madani, "Hezbollah's Global Finance Network: The Triple Frontier," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (January 2002). Available online ([www.meib.org/articles/0201\\_12.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0201_12.htm)). After being released temporarily after his capture, Mehri fled Paraguay and is presumed to be residing in Syria.
20. *Ibid.* Previously, Barakat had fled from Paraguay to Brazil to evade capture. After his arrest in Brazil, he was eventually extradited to Paraguay to face trial on various charges, including tax evasion and criminal association (these charges were considered substitutes for Paraguay's lack of formal laws specifically prohibiting financial donations to organizations like Hizballah).
21. Fabio Castillo, "The Hizballah Contacts in Colombia," part three of the investigative series "Tracking the Tentacles of the Middle East in South America," *El Espectador* (Bogota), December 9, 2001.
22. "Hizballah Planned to Attack U.S. and Israeli Ships in Singapore," International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, June 9, 2002. Available online ([www.ict.org.il/spotlight/det.cfm?id=790](http://www.ict.org.il/spotlight/det.cfm?id=790)).

23. Levitt, "Banning Hizballah Activity in Canada."
24. "Fifteen with Links to Terrorist Organizations Identified in Sweden," *Politiken* (Copenhagen), October 13, 2001.

## Chapter 2

# The Impact of the Israeli Withdrawal

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Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon on May 24, 2000, was regarded as a major victory by Hizballah, one that enhanced its regional reputation and strengthened its commitment to terrorism as a strategic tool. As Hassan Nasrallah, the organization's secretary-general, rightly remarked,

One cannot easily downplay this achievement by Hizballah, since throughout the 1990s it had remained almost the sole group in any Arab state committed to implementing an armed struggle against Israel. It . . . achieved what no other Arab country or army had been able to do: oust Israel from Arab territory without the Arab side committing to any concession.<sup>1</sup>

Four months after the withdrawal, the Palestinian intifada erupted, and Hizballah was quick to lend its support. The organization's role in the Palestinian fight against Israel is of broad regional and international significance. Hizballah sees its active involvement in the intifada as part of the inevitable struggle against the imperialist threat represented by the United States. Hence, the organization consistently depicts Israeli policy toward the Palestinians (as well as toward Syria and Iran) as part of an American conspiracy to subdue the Arab and Muslim worlds. According to Nasrallah, Hizballah must therefore "assume [its] responsibilities . . . and never [allow] the Palestinians to fight alone."<sup>2</sup>

This strategy is consistent with Hizballah's strategic vision regarding the Islamization of Lebanon. The organization believes that this goal will be impossible to achieve as long as Syria has a clear interest in maintaining its grip on Lebanon, and as long as a balance of power exists between Lebanon's various religious communities. According to Hizballah leader Hussein Musawi,

altering these prevailing conditions requires armed struggle “for the liberation of all the occupied Palestine and the Holy City of al-Quds.”<sup>3</sup>

### Military and Terrorist Activity against Israel

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In October 2000, Hizballah leaders and various Palestinian factions opposed to the peace process held a series of meetings in Beirut, Damascus, and Tehran. Soon afterward, Hizballah announced the formation of a central committee composed of Lebanese and Palestinian nationalist and Islamic elements that rejected any settlement with Israel. One goal of this committee was to prevent other Palestinian factions from using the intifada as leverage to facilitate peace negotiations.

Since that time, Hizballah has increased its level of cooperation with Palestinian rejectionists through direct training as well as logistical and operational support. It has also continued its own cross-border military activity against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the Shebaa Farms area.

On the military front, Hizballah has expanded its arsenal of weaponry during the intifada, acquiring armaments capable of reaching a greater number of Israeli targets. Currently, the organization is estimated to have some 9,000 rockets and missiles. These include the SA-7 surface-to-air missile and the Fajr-5 surface-to-surface rocket (which, with a range of forty-five miles, is capable of reaching the Israeli cities of Haifa and Hedera).<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to its open military activity, Hizballah has put forth significant effort toward establishing an independent terrorist and intelligence infrastructure inside both the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel. In the territories, the organization has recruited Palestinian operatives for training at Hizballah camps in Lebanon. It has also worked with Lebanon-based operatives from Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in recruiting a network of rogue Fatah Tanzim elements. Members of this network, called the “Shiva Brigades,” serve as Hizballah’s West Bank cadres, significantly expanding the organization’s targeting capabilities and political reach.<sup>5</sup> Hizballah terrorists have also attempted to infiltrate Israel in recent years.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, since November 2000, authorities have uncovered several cells of Is-

raeli Arabs recruited by Hizballah for intelligence and terrorist missions.<sup>7</sup>

## The Role of Syria and Iran

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Hizballah's military and terrorist activities in Israel and the PA have greatly enhanced its standing in the Arab and Muslim worlds, giving the organization greater independence and bargaining power. These gains hold significant implications for Syria and Iran in particular. In Damascus, Hizballah's activities threaten to drag the regime of young President Bashar al-Asad (and Lebanon along with it) into a regional conflict with Israel. In Tehran, Hizballah's achievements have helped strengthen the hardliners in their adventurous anti-Israeli and anti-American policies, compromising the efforts of reformers looking to produce significant changes on critical issues such as Iranian support for terrorism and disruption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The balance of power between Damascus and Hizballah has shifted most noticeably since the death of former Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad. This change is often attributed to the strange (some say hypnotic) relationship between Bashar and Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah. During Bashar's reign, Nasrallah has assumed a greater amount of independence and demonstrated a certain charismatic ascendancy—indeed, Bashar is said to look at him “like a starstruck teenager.”<sup>8</sup> According to one observer, the nature of this relationship “testifies to Bashar's weakness in the Lebanese arena.”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, Syria—not Iran—has been the most important source of support for Hizballah's terrorist and guerrilla activity against Israel from the north. To be sure, Iran has given Hizballah the ideological legitimacy and all the political, financial, propaganda, and military support it needs. Yet, without Syria's help—in the form of an overall strategic umbrella, specific military and political coordination, and pressure on Beirut to give the organization free rein in southern Lebanon—Hizballah could not have achieved its current status as a guerrilla movement with control over a “liberated” territory, a continuous supply of military equipment via Damascus, and virtual immunity from all-out Israeli punitive measures.<sup>10</sup> Syria provides the organization with logis-

tics, instruction, technological aid, and weapons (including 220-millimeter rockets with an estimated range of eighteen to forty-five miles). Such aid has transformed Hizballah into a strategic partner and operational arm of the Syrian army in the confrontation with Israel.<sup>11</sup> Damascus has permitted Hizballah to wage war against Israel as a means of putting pressure on the Jewish state to withdraw from the Golan Heights under Syrian conditions.

For the most part, Hizballah has embraced this role. In a speech delivered at a ceremony marking the first anniversary of Hafiz al-Asad's death, Nasrallah promised Bashar that, in addition to liberating the Shebaa Farms through blood and jihad, Hizballah would "receive the victory flag from Palestine and the Golan."<sup>12</sup> The latter promise was made as if it were Hizballah's duty to liberate the Golan, not just Syria's.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Hizballah's leaders have reacted to Israeli "aggression" against Syria even more vociferously than has Damascus. On October 5, 2003, one day after a deadly suicide bombing in Haifa, Israel launched airstrikes against a terrorist training camp near Damascus—its first attack on Syrian soil in nearly three decades.<sup>14</sup> Soon thereafter, Hizballah described the Israeli strike as "a treacherous aggression and a very serious breach of all red lines and rules of the conflict for nearly three decades."<sup>15</sup> The organization also declared its "absolute commitment to the commonality of the battle and destiny with steadfast and proud Syria, its leadership and people," promising "to confront the existing and coming challenge with all that is necessary" in order to avert "the disastrous consequences of the terrorist and aggressive policies of Sharon, US President George Bush, and all this state-terrorism camp."

Syria's role notwithstanding, Iran's massive support to Hizballah has been critical in cultivating the organization's terrorist capacity against Israel. This support is meant to help Hizballah maintain pressure on Israel's northern border, prepare itself to launch a major attack at the appropriate moment, and facilitate the Shi'i movement's assistance to the intifada in general and to Palestinian Islamist organizations in particular.

Paradoxically, relations between Iran and Hizballah seemed to improve after the June 1997 election of reformist president Muhammad Khatami.<sup>16</sup> Hizballah leaders did not feel that his



election would alter the level of Tehran's support to the organization. Nasrallah described the election as an internal Iranian event, while Shaykh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the organization's spiritual leader, went so far as to declare that Hizballah and the new administration in Tehran shared common points of view on many issues.<sup>17</sup>

Since 2000, however, many Iranian reformists have declared themselves unwilling to, in a word, "be more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves" by backing Hizballah's attempts to escalate the conflict with Israel. Similarly, some reformist newspapers have criticized hardliner support of tactics such as suicide bombings. The apparent two-track Iranian approach to Hizballah became even clearer when Kamal Kharazi, Khatami's foreign minister, paid a surprise visit to Beirut in April 2002 in order to help ease tensions along the Lebanon-Israel border. As though in response, Hizballah carried out a major attack on Israeli positions in the Shebaa Farms the day after Kharazi's visit. In light of this background, some have argued that Hizballah trusts Syria more than Iran because Tehran, "with its traditional opportunistic policy," would be more likely to sacrifice the organization for political reasons (e.g., within the framework of a deal with the United States).<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

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1. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, al-Jazeera Television, May 27, 2000.
2. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *El Mundo* (Madrid), December 18, 2001.
3. As far back as the late 1980s, Musawi stated that "Hizballah's victory in Lebanon depends upon more struggles and confrontations with American imperialism and Zionism . . . [and] a prerequisite for establishing an Islamic government in Beirut is victory over the Zionist regime." Quoted in Martin Kramer, *Hezbollah's Vision of the West* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1989), p. 30.
4. Gary Gambill, "Hezbollah's Strategic Rocket Arsenal," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, no. 11 (November–December 2002). Available online ([www.meib.org/articles/0211\\_12.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0211_12.htm)).
5. For a detailed account of this expansion, see Matthew Levitt, "Hizballah's West Bank Foothold," *PeaceWatch* no. 429 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 20, 2003).
6. One of the earliest examples of such infiltration occurred in 1996, when Hussein Mikdad, a Lebanese Shi'i terrorist, blew himself up while trying to make a bomb in his room at an east Jerusalem hotel. He had entered

Israel a few days earlier with a forged British passport. A member of Hizballah, Mikdad had served as accountant to Shaykh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the organization's spiritual leader, before being chosen for terrorist training.

Since 1996, at least two other Hizballah operatives have attempted to infiltrate Israel and gather information on behalf of both the organization and Iran. In 1997, Hizballah member Stefan Smirks, a German citizen and convert to Islam, was arrested in Israel following a tip-off from German intelligence. Similarly, Lebanese-British citizen Jihad (or Gerard) Shuman was arrested in January 2001 while attempting to enter Israel in order to take photographs of potential targets. See Isabel Kershner, "The Changing Colors of Imad Mughniyah," *Jerusalem Report*, March 25, 2002.

7. The first such cell was uncovered in November 2000, when seven residents of the Western Galilee village of Abu Snan were arrested "on charges of spying for Hezbollah and plotting to abduct Israeli soldiers on its behalf." In June 2001, three Israeli Arabs from Yafi'a and Kfar Kanna were indicted "for plotting to steal weapons from an [IDF] base and send information to Hezbollah." In September 2001, four Israeli Druzes in Rama and Daliat al-Carmel were arrested "on charges of smuggling weapons into Israel from Lebanon." In June 2002, Israeli citizen Nissim Nasser, a Lebanese Jew, was "indicted on charges of spying for Hezbollah"; specifically, he had attempted to provide the organization with photographs and maps of Israeli targets for large-scale terrorist attacks. In July 2002, "Israeli officials announced that they had uncovered a Hezbollah plot to kidnap Israelis abroad," an operation devised by an Israeli Arab who had moved to Lebanon in 2000 and become a Hizballah operative. Also that month, Israeli authorities arrested "four Arab Israelis who smuggled weapons and transmitted intelligence to Hezbollah in return for drugs." All quotes from Gary Gambill, "Hezbollah's Israeli Operatives," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, no. 9 (September 2002); available online ([www.meib.org/articles/0209\\_12.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0209_12.htm)). See also Arieh O'Sullivan, "Hezbollah Recruiting Israeli Arabs," *Jerusalem Post*, February 19, 2002.
8. Gary Gambill and Ziad Abdelnour, "Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 4, no. 2 (February 2002). Available online ([www.meib.org/articles/0202\\_11.htm](http://www.meib.org/articles/0202_11.htm)).
9. Eyal Zisser, "The Return of Hizbullah," *Middle East Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (Fall 2002); available online ([www.meforum.org/article/499](http://www.meforum.org/article/499)). See also Yossi Baidatz, "Bashar's First Year: From Ophthalmology to a National Vision" (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).
10. See Ely Karmon, "A Solution to Syrian Terrorism," *Middle East Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (June 1999), pp. 23–34.
11. See Gambill, "Hezbollah's Strategic Rocket Arsenal," and Lenny Ben-David, "Iran, Syria, and Hizballah—Threatening Israel's North," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 2, no. 3 (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, July 17, 2002).
12. Hassan Nasrallah, remarks broadcast on Radio Damascus, June 10, 2001.

13. This stance may help explain why Hizballah expanded its shelling of Israeli positions in March–April 2002 to include IDF bases in the northern part of the Golan. See Gal Luft, “Israel’s Response to Lebanese Border Skirmishes,” *PeaceWatch* no. 376 (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 16, 2002).
14. The training camp had been used by various terrorist organizations, including Islamic Jihad, which had claimed responsibility for the Haifa bombing.
15. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, “Lebanon: Hizballah Says Israeli Attack on Syria Breaches ‘All Red Lines,’” October 7, 2003, translation of an untitled, unattributed report that originally appeared on the website of *al-Nahar* (Beirut), n.d.
16. A. William Samii, *Iran Report* 1, no. 3 (December 7, 1998). Available online ([www.rferl.org/iran-report/1998/12/3-071298.html](http://www.rferl.org/iran-report/1998/12/3-071298.html)).
17. According to analyst Sami Hajjar, most experts have assumed that Fadlallah is Hizballah’s spiritual guide or that the organization is his brainchild. Both Fadlallah and Hizballah have denied such an association, arguing that the shaykh is an eminent religious scholar who may be regarded as a source of inspiration rather than a spiritual mentor. See Sami Hajjar, *Hizballah: Terrorism, National Liberation, or Menace?* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002). Although Fadlallah is indeed a source of inspiration to many Lebanese, Iraqi, and even Iranian Shi’is, all evidence shows that he is in fact the spiritual leader of Hizballah as well. For example, his strategic and political analyses, as presented in regular columns on his website ([www.bayynat.org](http://www.bayynat.org)), are extremely close in wording and timing to statements made by other Hizballah leaders (although Fadlallah is somewhat more careful in his statements because of his high religious standing).
18. Khalid Khalil, “Egyptian Media Interview Nasrallah on Hizballah’s Stance, Relations with US,” *al-Arabi* (Cairo), May 19, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0525), May 25, 2003.

## Chapter 3

# Hizballah and the War on Terror

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The events of September 11, 2001, played a major role in galvanizing Hizballah to intensify its strategy and violent activities. The group's spiritual leader, Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, acknowledged that "the stage after September 11 is similar to a major earthquake" and that "Islam is living a crisis that it never witnessed in all of its history."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States, the subsequent U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan, and the ensuing "war on terror" all threatened to rob Hizballah of the strategic gains it had made following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The Bush administration's post-September 11 policies also raised the possibility that both Hizballah and its state sponsors might eventually be targeted in a continuing campaign against the "axis of evil." In response, the organization decided to escalate both its attacks on Israel and its support of the Palestinian intifada, primarily as a means of obstructing U.S. action in the region and concentrating international attention on the Palestinian arena.

### From September 11 to Afghanistan

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In the days following the September 11 attacks, a cautious Fadlallah declared that "no religion justifies such action" and that the suicide terrorists did not die as part of a holy war.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Hizballah released an official message expressing regret for "the loss of innocent lives."<sup>3</sup> At the same time, however, the organization claimed that the United States had brought "this level of hate" upon itself because of its "oppressive" policies. Hizballah also warned Washington against taking advantage of the attacks in order "to practice all sorts of aggression and terrorism."<sup>4</sup>

Despite these statements, Hizballah's leaders appeared reassured by the U.S. approach during the first weeks after September

11. The Bush administration, eager to find allies in its fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, courted both Iran and Syria despite their presence on the State Department's list of countries supporting terrorism. Washington also reportedly proposed to acknowledge Hizballah's social and political role and "forget" the past "attacks on American citizens, soldiers, and interests . . . if the party confine[d] its activity to domestic work . . . stop[ped] attacks in Shebaa Farms, and stop[ped] its support for the Palestinian intifada."<sup>5</sup> Lebanese sources even claimed that U.S. representatives had asked to meet with Hizballah leaders, but were rebuffed.

Hizballah's attitude and language became much more aggressive after the United States began its campaign in Afghanistan. U.S. relations with Iran became more strained, and the State Department placed Hizballah on its Foreign Terrorist Organizations list. Washington also designated three of the organization's most senior operatives (including the infamous Imad Mughniyeh) as most-wanted terrorists. In response to these and other measures, Fadlallah accused the United States of engaging in "a precautionary offensive to stop Hizballah from supporting the Palestinian Intifada and from resuming its military operations against the enemy."<sup>6</sup> Hizballah leaders took a self-confident, accusatory, and threatening stance against Washington, declaring their resolve "not to be afraid [of] the American campaign."<sup>7</sup> Hassan Nasrallah warned the United States that it would "make a big mistake if it chooses our field for its forthcoming war against terrorism, because all Arab and Muslim countries support the resistance and the intifadah."<sup>8</sup> He pointed out that "the weapon of martyrdom"—the suicide bomber—was Hizballah's most potent asset, one that could be used to "defeat the enemy and terrify it in its heart."

Hizballah's self-assurance was based on the active support of Syria and Iran as well as the Lebanese government's firm commitment to the organization's stance against Israel. Beirut denied that Hizballah's influence extended beyond Lebanese territory and refused to freeze the organization's financial assets, claiming that it was merely a local political party whose primary goal was resistance against the Israeli occupation. Even Arab League secretary-general Amr Moussa declared that U.S. policy toward Hizballah was not binding on any Arab country.<sup>9</sup>

## Escalating the Intifada

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As discussed previously, Hizballah increased its activity in the Israeli-Palestinian arena following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, largely in order to achieve a strategic breakthrough and realize its goals more quickly. This activity took two forms: an attrition war against Israel from the north (under a deterrent umbrella of long-range rockets and missiles), and increased support to, and operational involvement in, the Palestinian intifada. Hizballah hoped that this double pressure would break the resolve of the Israeli people and government, leading to the dissolution of the “Zionist entity.”

After the fumes of Ground Zero dissipated and al-Qaeda and the Taliban were routed in Afghanistan, it became clear that the United States was feverishly preparing the next stage of its global war on terror and intensifying its stance against rogue regimes hungry for weapons of mass destruction. Growing evidence of an impending military campaign against Iraq showed Hizballah, Iran, and Syria that they might be targeted more quickly than expected. Consequently, Hizballah sought a strategy that would obstruct the continuation of the war on terror and the advance of U.S. forces close to its borders, thus impeding developments that could place it and its sponsors under enormous diplomatic, economic, and military pressure.

Hizballah’s leaders quickly decided that further escalation of the intifada would be more effective than wearing Israel down through gradual attrition. From their perspective, the last hope of preventing U.S. action against them was to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a crisis point that threatened regional stability. This assessment was reinforced by the reactions of the various players in the Middle Eastern drama:

- Arab regimes were frightened that the bloody events in Palestine, as transmitted by al-Jazeera and other media outlets, would enflame the Arab masses and lead to political instability.
- Al-Qaeda began to put more emphasis on pro-Palestinian slogans and activities, particularly in leaked videos of Osama bin Laden and his deputies.
- Israeli leaders publicly declared that they would strive to avoid a “second front” at all costs.

- The Bush administration asked Israel, Arab leaders, and European allies to help keep the Israeli-Palestinian arena quiet, at least until the slowly mounting Iraq crisis was resolved.

From the outset, Hizballah seemed quite assured that its strategy was working. The situation in the West Bank and Gaza steadily deteriorated as militants from Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine became increasingly involved in terrorist activity alongside suicide bombers from Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Israel was unable to find an operational solution to this growing threat. In fact, under the constraints of U.S. regional interests and international pressures, the Israeli government initially hesitated to respond in force to escalating Palestinian violence.

Hizballah also stepped up its military support to the Palestinian Authority (PA) and various Palestinian factions via weapons smuggling. For example, the organization was involved in the Iranian attempt to transport fifty tons of weaponry to the PA on board the *Karine-A*, a ship captured by Israeli Navy commandos in the Red Sea in January 2002. Had these weapons reached their intended recipients, they would have “dramatically . . . widened the scope of terror against [Israel] for a long time.”<sup>10</sup> Around this same time, Hizballah also attempted to smuggle katyusha rockets to the Palestinians through Jordan.<sup>11</sup>

From Hizballah and Iran’s point of view, even the *Karine-A* fiasco had some positive consequences. The ensuing crisis between the Bush administration and the PA, along with the resultant marginalization of Yasir Arafat, served to strengthen Hamas, PIJ, and the more radical elements in Fatah and Tanzim. These developments also removed the risk of Israel and Arafat reaching any sort of peace agreement.

### Cooperation with al-Qaeda?

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In January 2002, U.S. secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld claimed that Tehran had helped al-Qaeda and Taliban members escape from Afghanistan through Iranian territory. Soon thereafter, media reports claimed that a senior al-Qaeda operative had met with Hizballah leaders and discussed relocating al-Qaeda’s base of operations to Lebanon.<sup>12</sup> Both Nasrallah and Fadlallah

deny having any sort of links with al-Qaeda. According to Fadlallah, Hizballah's Shi'i goals are different from those of al-Qaeda, a radical Sunni organization that considers Shi'is "a renegade faction of Islam."<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, cooperation between Hizballah and al-Qaeda is quite feasible. Leaders from both groups share links from their past stays in Sudan, a country that has harbored members of many different terrorist organizations over the years. For example, Ali Mohamed—a former Green Beret sergeant and one of several individuals indicted in connection with the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania—testified that he had been sent to Sudan between 1991 and 1993 to organize a meeting between bin Laden and senior Hizballah operative Imad Mughniyeh. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss "their common goal of forcing the United States to withdraw from the Middle East."<sup>14</sup> Mohamed also added "authority to earlier reports that Iran's Ministry of Information and Security had called a terrorist conclave in Tehran in 1996 that included [Mughniyeh] and a senior aide to [bin Laden]." Indeed, Mohamed's testimony served as "the first credible, public evidence not only that [Mughniyeh] and [bin Laden] have been collaborating, but that Iran has been backing them."

In addition, Hizballah opened its training camps in Lebanon to members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) of Algeria, two terrorist organizations that have provided al-Qaeda with some of its most important operatives. For example, according to one of the GIA's founders, the group at one point sent two teams to receive training in such camps.<sup>15</sup>

On the ideological front, Hizballah leaders have often belied their claims of sectarian differences with al-Qaeda by calling for cooperation between Shi'is and Sunnis, particularly in light of recent developments in the region. In March 2002, Fadlallah stated the following:

I call upon the Muslim Religious Scholars to consolidate Muslim unity among the two major sects of Sunni and Shiite. We should transform the political and jihad unifying positions into cultural and ideological meeting places . . . . [T]he Muslim



religious scholars must wage a campaign to call for Islamic unity in all public occasions, and concentrate on the common issues that have to do with Muslims' fate, especially [now] that the arrogant powers have put both Muslim sects of Sunni and Shiite in the same category as being part of 'the axis of evil.'<sup>16</sup>

In November 2002, Nasrallah warned of "the great dangers that are threatening our region and nation at this stage," particularly the "American-Zionist project" to redraw the region's "political map."<sup>17</sup> Given these factors, he argued, "We are coming across a time in which the Moslems, all Moslems, especially the Shiite and Sunnite, need to unify and cooperate, while each one may maintain his ideological thoughts, concepts, and religious matters. They all must cooperate in order to restore al Quds and defend the Palestinian people, their religion, and their prophet Muhammad."

In this framework, it is interesting to note the formation in Lebanon of a new movement, "Muslims without Borders." The organization, which was created in August 2003 after a series of consultations between nineteen Islamic movements and groups in Lebanon, considers itself "another point of view on Islamic reform."<sup>18</sup> It announced its official birth "at a political-religious festival at which a number of clerics and political figures spoke about 'Islamic unity.'" The makeup of Muslims without Borders "suggests that it is a type of solidarity movement between a team from the Islamic Group (Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyah) and the Islamic Unification Movement in cooperation with (Sunni) religious figures and Hizballah." The movement claims that "it is moderate, and does not promote fanatic or outmoded ideas." At its inaugural "festival," however, the imam of the Jerusalem Mosque in southern Sidon asked the audience, "Is it acceptable for anyone to despise Hizballah's sacrifices simply because it is Shiite? And is it acceptable for us to despise Usama Bin Ladin because Saudi Arabia has stripped him of his Saudi citizenship?"

## Notes

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1. "His Eminence Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah's Reading of the Developments in the Region, Praising 'Iranian Rationality' and Assurance about Hizballah's Fate," from Fadlallah's official website (available at [www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/EventsCom/mustakbal.htm](http://www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/EventsCom/mustakbal.htm)).

The article summarizes undated interviews with Fadlallah conducted by Qassem Qassir for the Beirut-based *al-Mustaqbal* newspaper.

2. Robert Fisk, "Taliban Find They Have Few Muslim Friends," *Independent* (London), September 18, 2001.
3. Zeina Karam, "Hezbollah Regrets Lives Lost in Terror Attacks, but Blames U.S. Policies," Associated Press, September 16, 2001.
4. Ibid.
5. Nicholas Nasif, "Writer Views Resistance 'Crisis' for Lebanon, Syria; Notes Hizballah 'Mistakes,'" *al-Nahar* (Beirut), December 27, 2001, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2001-1230), December 30, 2001.
6. See note 1.
7. Ibrahim al-Amin, "Article on Hizballah's Reaction to Inclusion in U.S. Terror List," *al-Safir* (Beirut), November 14, 2001, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2001-1114), November 14, 2001.
8. "Hizballah Chief: U.S. Makes 'Big Mistake' If It Chooses Mideast for Its War," *al-Safir* (Beirut), November 27, 2001, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2001-1127), November 27, 2001.
9. Untitled report from the Middle East News Agency, November 21, 2001.
10. Arie O'Sullivan et al., "'No Doubt Arms Ship Is PA's,'" *Jerusalem Post*, January 6, 2002.
11. Nasrallah proudly declared that the Palestinians had requested the weapons and that Hizballah considered it a religious duty to provide them as a strategic deterrent against superior Israeli military power. Hassan Nasrallah, interview by Hiyam Shahud, *al-Majallah* (London), March 24–30, 2002.
12. Michael Evans, "Al-Qaeda in Secret Talks with Lebanon Terror Group," *Times* (London), February 1, 2002.
13. Hussein Dakroub, "Muslim Cleric Rules Out Al-Qaida-Hezbollah Partnership," Associated Press, July 7, 2002.
14. Milt Bearden and Larry Johnson, "A Glimpse at the Alliances of Terror," *New York Times*, November 7, 2000.
15. Omar Chikhi, interview, *al-Majallah* (London), January 14–20, 2001.
16. "Islamic Unity and Sectarian Differences," from the "Our Stand This Week" section of Shaykh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah's website, March 26, 2002 (available at [www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand120123.htm](http://www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand120123.htm)).
17. Hassan Nasrallah, "Word of Secretary General of Hizballah His Eminence Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on the International Day for al Quds," November 29, 2002. Available online ([www.nasrallah.net/english/hassan/khitabat/khitabat069.htm](http://www.nasrallah.net/english/hassan/khitabat/khitabat069.htm)).

18. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, “Media Debut in the Absence of ‘Al-Jama‘ah al-Islamiyah’ and ‘Dar al-Fatwa’: Muslims without Borders—Islamic Moderation Which Repudiates Violence,” translation of an untitled, unattributed report that originally appeared in *al-Safir* (Beirut), August 11, 2003.

During much of 2002, Hizballah appeared to consider opening a “second front” against Israel from southern Lebanon either before or parallel to impending U.S. action against Iraq. Well armed and assured of active support from Tehran and Damascus, Hizballah certainly had the means to implement this scenario. The organization’s leaders no doubt hoped that Arabs and Muslims would support such a strategy and put pressure on their governments to do the same. Hizballah may also have hoped that an opportunity would arise to drag Syria and other Arab states into an all-out regional war with Israel and the United States.

It is against this background that one should view the escalation in Hizballah’s military activity in March–April 2002. On March 12, Hizballah-backed Palestinian infiltrators crossed the Lebanon-Israel border and attacked nonmilitary vehicles in northern Israel, killing five civilians and one member of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). This incident—the first infiltration from Lebanon since the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal—occurred two weeks before Hamas’s deadly Passover suicide bombing in Netanya sparked the IDF’s Operation Defensive Shield, Israel’s first major ground operation inside the Palestinian Authority. In other words, Hizballah had already decided to escalate its operations well before Israel launched its harsh response to increasing Palestinian violence.

Hizballah’s attempts to destabilize the region and impede Israel’s massive operations against the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure peaked from March 30 through April 13, 2002, when it conducted a campaign of katyusha and mortar attacks on IDF positions in the Shebaa Farms and, for the first time, the Golan Heights. The organization began this campaign the day after a

meeting between Hizballah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah and Syrian president Bashar al-Asad. According to various diplomats and analysts, “This escalation was Syria’s way of demonstrating its continued influence over Middle East stability.”<sup>1</sup> The timing of the campaign “was also connected to the peace initiative proposed by Crown Prince Abdallah of Saudi Arabia and adopted at the Arab summit in Beirut at the end of March.”<sup>2</sup>

In April, Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Damascus and asked the Syrian leadership to prevent further escalation, warning of the potential for Israeli military retaliation. For the next several months, both Syria and Hizballah seemed to heed Powell’s message.

At the same time, however, Hizballah spiritual leader Shaykh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah portrayed Powell’s visit as “part of a coordinated plan” with Israel and as evidence that Washington feared a “second front” more than the Israelis did because of its potential effects on “the second phase of the ‘War against terrorism’”—that is, the looming war against Iraq.<sup>3</sup> Fadlallah emphasized the need to develop a “counter-plan” that would include “all the parties of liberation and resistance, in coordination with the states that confronted the American pressures, especially Lebanon, Syria and Iran.” He also claimed that Washington’s failure to impose calm on the Israeli-Palestinian arena would “constitute the beginning of the failure of the second phase of America’s war against Muslims and Arabs, and the actual start of the fall of Sharon’s project.” “Therefore,” he concluded, “the support of the Palestinian people is currently more vital than ever.”

Two months later, Nasrallah declared that, when the right moment came, Hizballah would use “all the bullets in its possession” in a wide-ranging regional conflict.<sup>4</sup> Soon thereafter, Fadlallah summoned his high religious and moral standing among many Iraqi Shi‘is and called on “the Iraqi opposition to study the American project,” claiming that one of Washington’s goals was “to weaken Iraq as a potential enemy for Israel.”<sup>5</sup> Fadlallah acknowledged that the Muslim world was passing through “one of the most dangerous stages.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, he argued, Muslims were “capable of changing the present stage

of pressure and siege into a better one” by undermining U.S. plans for Iraq:

The Nation still possesses the resources and the forces that made her produce a resistance that fought the occupier in Lebanon and forced it to withdraw unconditionally. It also produced a state of Jihad and popular resistance in Palestine. . . . There are many factors that might reshuffle the cards and enable new states of resistance to be born. Such fronts may not be noticed now by the arrogant powers.

On August 29, after four months of tense calm, Hizballah launched a new attack on Israeli outposts in the Shebaa Farms. This attack was probably timed to coincide with several developments: increased U.S.-Israeli pressure on Syria and Lebanon on the eve of U.S. Congressional discussion of the Syria Accountability Act, the escalation of Washington’s rhetoric regarding Iraq, and Iraqi vice president Taha Yassin Ramadan’s visit to Lebanon. Its objective was to send a “swift and hot message to the U.S. administration and the international community from the Lebanese-Syrian-Iranian axis,”<sup>7</sup> as well as a “reminder and warning to Israel that it cannot go far in its aggression against the Palestinians while Washington is preparing for an attack against Iraq.”<sup>8</sup>

Hizballah’s self-assurance regarding this approach soon began to diminish, however. Once it became clear that the United States and Britain were serious about a military campaign against Iraq and that they had convinced several Arab Gulf countries to support their coalition, Hizballah realized that it could no longer seriously challenge Washington’s determination to oust Saddam Husayn’s regime, even with the help of Syria and Iran.

As a result, Hizballah changed its strategy to one of passionately exhorting Arab and Muslim leaders to abandon the U.S. camp and support the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples. The organization portrayed U.S. military moves as a future threat to existing Middle Eastern regimes, particularly those in Cairo and Riyadh. When it became obvious that Arab leaders did not intend to challenge Washington, Hizballah turned its appeals to the people, asking Arab Muslims throughout the region to confront both the United States and their own regimes.

In November 2002, congressional elections in the United States demonstrated clear popular support for the Bush administration's policy toward Iraq. This policy was further reinforced when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1441 on November 8, essentially making an invasion of Iraq inevitable. In the wake of these developments, Hizballah, Syria, and Iran seemed to settle on yet another strategy. Although they accepted the inevitability of a U.S. war in Iraq, they predicted the emergence of a post-Saddam era in which the United States would sink in the region's figurative sands, allowing them to exploit their historical and religious ties to Iraqi Shi'is.

### The Iraqi Shi'i Asset

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One little-known fact regarding Hizballah is that the Lebanese branch of the Islamic Da'wa Party—an Iraqi organization that has acknowledged Fadlallah as its spiritual leader—was among the group's founders in 1982, along with the Lebanese Islamic Amal movement and a group of radical clerics with roots in the Shi'i holy city of Najaf, Iraq. As described previously, many of the terrorist operations against Gulf states during the 1980s were perpetrated by Hizballah cells or by local Shi'i groups that had received Hizballah training or support (see chapter 1). The Iraqi Islamic Da'wa Party was involved in several of these operations. Indeed, Hizballah has close historical, ideological, and operational ties with many of the Iraqi Shi'i organizations that opposed Saddam's regime.

Iran has a special relationship with the Iraqi Shi'i opposition as well. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), led by Mohammad Baqer Hakim, was formed in Iran in 1982 in order to foster Iraqi opposition to Ba'ath aggression against Iran. Eventually, the organization's aim became toppling Saddam's regime.

In light of this background, it came as no surprise when Hizballah began to direct its exhortations at the Iraqi Shi'i opposition once momentum toward war accelerated in late 2002. On October 14, Nasrallah deputy Naim Qasim urged them to avoid falling into "a state of fear or psychological collapse" in the face of "U.S. plans to attack the region" because, as he put it, "some

plans might fail, and others might face obstacles.”<sup>9</sup> He also warned that “Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iran” might become U.S. targets “after the occupation of Iraq.” On October 22, Nasrallah declared that even if the Americans brought “all of their armies and fleets to Iraq and the countries of the region, they will be unable to stay for a long period.”<sup>10</sup> He claimed that such a war would bring about the end of America’s global “dominance” because it would open “a field of confrontation . . . within which the people are the leaders, officers, and soldiers,” in contrast to a conflict with a state or organization, either of which the United States could confront through direct pressure or indirect measures such as financial sanctions. Three days later, Fadlallah advised Iraqi opposition members, especially those from Islamic organizations, to avoid the “logic of treason” and instead demonstrate “a decisive Islamic stand.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite this rhetoric, Hizballah began to proceed much more cautiously with regard to the Israeli front. In January 2003, the organization indicated that it had no intention of attacking Israeli targets during a U.S. offensive against Iraq. Nasrallah declared that Hizballah would not respond to Israeli “provocations” on the northern border unless Israel attacked Lebanon.<sup>12</sup>

## The War

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During the first days of Operation Iraqi Freedom, launched in March 2003, Hizballah leaders were encouraged by the coalition’s difficulties in adapting to unexpected developments (e.g., Turkey’s refusal to permit use of its territory for a northern front; the absence of an anticipated Shi’i revolt in the south). Naim Qasim asserted that if the opposition showed sufficient motivation, “the U.S. invasion will face difficulties and suffer great losses . . . and international protests will disrupt the enemy’s plan.”<sup>13</sup> He also revealed that Hizballah leaders had held discussions with some Iraqi opposition factions regarding “possible options,” but that they had been “careful not to interfere and keep differences over certain details from going public [in order to] avoid a crisis between the party and the Iraqi opposition.”

Soon thereafter, Fadlallah became the first widely known Islamic figure to issue a *fatwa* (religious ruling) prohibiting Muslims from helping the United States in its war on Iraq. He was also the



only prominent Shi'i cleric to come close to declaring support for the Iraqi regime, claiming that even though Saddam was an enemy of Islam, the United States was a greater foe and should therefore be resisted. Moreover, in an April 7 interview, he continued to disseminate the conspiracy theory that Saddam was simply one of many U.S. "crimes" because it was the United States that had "made him dominate the Arab and Islamic world."<sup>14</sup> Fadlallah also exalted "the incredible resistance of the Iraqi people against the U.S. invasion" and predicted that Muslims would not recognize a U.S.-installed government.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, in a belligerent interview on April 6, Nasrallah claimed that America's "arrogant aggression" was based on mistaken presumptions and false information provided by the British.<sup>16</sup> According to him, Washington had wrongly assumed that the invasion would spark a popular Iraqi uprising, and the U.S. strategy had therefore failed. Nasrallah also claimed that Shi'i resistance to U.S. forces had already begun. Accordingly, he exhorted Iraqi factions and Arabs throughout the region to ensure that the United States paid a high price for its invasion, whether through direct resistance or by pressuring Arab regimes to support the opposition. In his view, by employing tactics that inflicted heavy casualties on the occupying forces (e.g., suicide bombings), the opposition would drive the United States out of Iraq and cause permanent damage to its standing as a bullying superpower.<sup>17</sup> In light of this evaluation, Nasrallah confidently dismissed any fears that the United States would attack Iran and Syria.

Hizballah fell silent temporarily following the quick fall of Baghdad and the lack of any serious Iraqi military or popular resistance. The organization's self-confidence and aggressiveness soon resurfaced, however, due to the observance of Shi'i rituals in Karbala, Iraq, which had been prohibited under Saddam. In Nasrallah's eyes, the influx of Shi'is into Karbala would mark "the countdown for ending [the] U.S. presence in Iraq."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, on April 20, he hinted that

the U.S. military intervention in Iraq might encourage Islamic activists to carry out reprisal operations against American interests. . . . The American policy in the region encourages this

kind of reprisal. . . . I believe the continuation of this policy will turn all Arabs and Muslims into enemies of the United States. There are 1.4 billion Muslims worldwide. Many groups will see the light, not necessarily [the] al-Qa'ida organization, and it will be impossible to bring all of them to trial.<sup>19</sup>

## The Postwar Response

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In mid-May 2003, Iranian president Muhammad Khatami visited Lebanon in an attempt to strengthen bonds with regional allies in the face of growing U.S. threats. In the wake of this visit, analysts offered conflicting assessments of Khatami's approach to Hizballah. Some assumed that Iran had reconsidered its position and was reducing its support for the organization in light of the perceived U.S. threat. According to this view, Khatami's remarks at the time—particularly those regarding the need to maintain stability in the Middle East and deny Israel an excuse to use overwhelming force—were an implicit call for Hizballah to curtail resistance activities mounted from Lebanon and within Israel proper.

Other analysts, however, argued that Iranian policy toward Hizballah had not changed at all. According to media sources close to Hizballah, Khatami did indeed emphasize the serious pressure that Washington was applying to Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinians in the wake of the Iraq war. At the same time, however, he stated that these partners must

confront it and remain cohesive and steadfast. Those who have the right must defend it, and nothing should stop them from doing so, no matter what others say about terrorism and so on. . . . Resistance work, therefore, is a natural reaction . . . in the face of terrorism.<sup>20</sup>

He also claimed that Hizballah is “a Lebanese reality” and “a part of Lebanon’s defensive force,” and that “the people of Lebanon would not deprive themselves of a resistance force to defend their territory so long as they continued to feel threatened.”<sup>21</sup>

Iranian foreign minister Kamal Kharazi gave his own nuanced explanation of Tehran's stance. Although he stated that “the enemy [Israel] wants war and we must not give it a chance to launch

war,” he also argued that active resistance played a “major role” in preventing aggression against Lebanon.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, he stated, “no one is calling for ending or disarming the resistance because the enemy knows that this would enable it to attack Lebanon.”

Syria’s postwar stance regarding Hizballah was similarly nuanced. In a May 25 interview, for example, President Bashar al-Asad was asked about Secretary of State Colin Powell’s request that Syria put a stop to Hizballah operations. In response, Asad claimed that Hizballah was “a Lebanese resistance party” that had a “political role” as well; hence, the organization’s activities were “a purely Lebanese issue . . . confined to Lebanese territory.”<sup>23</sup> He also maintained that Hizballah would not halt its resistance actions until “Israel stops its continuous provocation and attacks.” According to Asad,

Hezbollah does not provoke attacks. It is ‘Israel’ that provokes attacks, and they reply to them. So long as action is within this context, we will continue to support this party. Hezbollah does not present any other concept. It does not say that it wants to remove ‘Israel.’ It also does not say that it is against Syria in the peace process. We have not heard any such ideas from it. . . . Even the Lebanese people are not against Hezbollah. Had the Lebanese people been against it, Hezbollah would not have been able to carry out what it has done.

Ten days earlier, Bahjat Sulayman, director of one of Syria’s intelligence services and a close associate of President Asad, had presented a more complex outline of Syria’s postwar views. According to him, once the United States had shut down the Iraq-Syria oil pipeline and pressured Syria into closing its border with Iraq, “the Americans appeared as if assured that Syria’s interest in Iraqi affairs largely diminished and no longer threatened their military presence and their strategic and economic interests in Iraq.”<sup>24</sup> Consequently, Sulayman argued, U.S. demands on Damascus had shifted to preventing war between Syria and Israel. In spite of this pressure, he claimed that Syria could “find a wide margin to maneuver, rearrange priorities, and change or amend options depending on the developments of the local, regional, and international situation, especially . . . the situation in Iraq.” Although he acknowledged that the balance of power in

the region had momentarily tipped in favor of Syria's enemies, he also offered the vague warning that these enemies were themselves "governed by a historical inevitability" and would be unable to "avoid the fate that the laws of history impose on them."

The most striking part of Sulayman's article concerned Hizballah and the situation in Lebanon. According to him, "the deadlock in the peace process, the increase in the Israeli brutality against the Palestinians, and the occupation of Iraq have created a climate for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism" in Lebanon, allowing "fundamentalist forces" to become much stronger than they were even during the Lebanese civil war. Therefore, despite repeated U.S. calls "for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon," Sulayman felt that Washington did not actually want such a withdrawal to occur, "for the simple reason that it fears that south Lebanon might turn into one of the fronts of the still-open struggle against the Israeli enemy." Moreover, he claimed, Damascus would not be held responsible for Hizballah activity following a Syrian withdrawal, nor would it prevent Palestinian refugees from leaving Syrian territory for Lebanon and "creating a strong and effective presence, stronger and more effective than their presence there between 1971 and 1982." Consequently, a Syrian withdrawal could result "in the emergence of a fundamentalist geopolitical map in south Lebanon grouping Hizballah, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad." According to Sulayman, such conditions would ensure "a new bitter experience there" for the United States and Israel, especially given Hassan Nasrallah's recent disclosure that he had been "preparing for a more vicious confrontation since [Israel's May 2000 withdrawal]." In other words, concluded Sulayman, the need for a Syrian military presence as a balancing factor in Lebanon will only "grow stronger."

Finally, regarding the possibility of Damascus supporting a "nationalist" struggle in postwar Iraq, Sulayman felt that Syria's only means of doing so would be by abetting "Iranian support for the Iraqi people's resistance against the occupation." In this context, he noted Ayatollah Ali Hossein Khamenei's April 11 declaration that Iran would not "remain neutral between the Iraqi people and the occupiers." Nevertheless, Sulayman argued, Syria would remain cautious about providing such support, particu-

larly as Iran considered its own response to “American warnings against its interference in Iraq’s internal affairs.”

Overall, Hizballah, Iran, and Syria seemed to believe that, given the difficulties U.S. forces would encounter in postwar Iraq, the Bush administration would be neither willing nor able to take forceful action against any of them in the short term. Therefore, they had a great deal of space in which to maneuver, provided they behaved cautiously. In a May 2 interview, Fadlallah explained this view in response to a question regarding whether Hizballah would face “official demands for its dissolution” in the “next stage” of Washington’s plans for the region:

The issue of Hezbollah and the Islamic resistance is linked to the Palestinian issue; therefore, this issue is not expected to progress with the same urgency as the Iraqi situation. . . . Launching a strike against the Islamic resistance in Lebanon would create an Arab Islamic shock, which the United States would not be able to absorb. Therefore, I imagine that these threats to the resistance are preemptive ones to prevent the resistance from launching military operations against Israel and create a fait accompli of insecurity in the region.<sup>25</sup>

Days later, Nasrallah deputy Naim Qasim predicted that the sensitive postwar period would be “difficult and complicated,” but “not a stage of direct aggression.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Nasrallah himself acknowledged the mounting U.S. pressure on Lebanon and Syria but ruled out substantive changes in the two countries’ stances on key issues. Rather, he expected “the resistance and intifada in occupied Palestine to continue,” in part because the Palestinians had no other option.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

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1. Nicholas Blanford, “Fears of a Second Front: The Lebanese-Israeli Border,” *Middle East Report Online*, April 23, 2002 (available at [www.merip.org/mero/mero042302.html](http://www.merip.org/mero/mero042302.html)).
2. *Ibid.* The Saudi proposal, which first came to light in mid-February, “offered Israel full normalization with the Arab world in exchange for a full withdrawal from all territory occupied . . . since 1967.” Yet, Syria did not want to give up “its bargaining card in future negotiations” by promising normalization before Israel withdrew from the Golan Heights. Hence, although Syria joined twenty-one other Arab League states in endorsing the

proposal, Hizballah “rockets began flying over the border two days later” (Blanford, “Fears of a Second Front”).

Moreover, Hizballah’s leadership was quick to denounce the very notion of a compromise solution soon after the Saudi proposal surfaced. In early March, Husayn al-Khalil, Nasrallah’s political assistant, warned the Palestinians against “falling in the trap of truces and entering the game of polarization,” calling on them to “stick to their rights and not to get involved in the games of international politics” (“Ra’d: Resistance Has Right to Support the Palestinians,” *al-Nahar* [Beirut], March 12, 2002). Then, on March 24, three days before the Arab Summit opened, Nasrallah called for the continuation of the Palestinian armed struggle, declaring that the “conflict must end with the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea.” He also called for a national conference “to resist the settlement” of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. See Hasan Nasrallah, interview by Hiyam Shahud, *al-Majallah* (London), March 24, 2002; and Jubran Tuwayni, “Lebanon’s Role,” *al-Nahar* (Beirut), March 21, 2002.

3. “Fadlullah: Powell’s Visit to the Region Aims at Accomplishing the Political Goals of Sharon’s Military Invasion,” from the “Our Stand This Week” section of Fadlallah’s website, April 16, 2002 (available at [www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand040223.htm](http://www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand040223.htm)).
4. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, Middle East Broadcasting (MBC) (Dubai), July 12, 2002.
5. “The Good among You Are Those Who Call You to the Good,” from the “Friday Sermon” section of Fadlallah’s website, July 19, 2002 (available at [www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/Fridayspeeches/ke19072002.htm](http://www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/Fridayspeeches/ke19072002.htm)). Interestingly, Nasrallah deputy Naim Qasim made similar claims regarding U.S. intentions during the 1991 Gulf War: “The most important reason Iraq was instigated and encouraged to enter Kuwait [in 1990] was to find an excuse to destroy Iraq’s ability and send foreign and U.S. forces to the Gulf Area and subsequently rid Israel of a source of power that could be disturbing for it.” Ibrahim al-Amin, “What Is Required of Hizballah,” *al-Safir* (Beirut), June 30, 2001.
6. “Sayyed Fadlullah Calls for Rallying All Arab and Islamic Resources to Face Pressures and Plots: The Palestinians Are Still Able to Inject the Nation’s Veins with the Spirit of Giving,” from the “Our Stand This Week” section of Fadlallah’s website, July 30, 2002 (available at [www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand30072002.htm](http://www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand30072002.htm)).
7. George Alam, “Lebanese Writer Discusses ‘Message’ of Hizballah’s Attack 29 Aug,” *al-Safir* (Beirut), August 31, 2002, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2002-0901), August 31, 2002.
8. “Lebanon: Hizballah Attack 29 Aug Linked to Iraqi, Palestinian Developments,” summary of reports appearing in *al-Safir* (Beirut) and *al-Mustaqbal* (Beirut), n.d., Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2002-0830), August 30, 2002.

9. "Hizballah Deputy Leader Says Israel's Threats over Water Project 'Worthless,'" *al-Anwar* (Beirut), October 14, 2002, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2002-1014), October 14, 2002.
10. Hassan Nasrallah, "The Secretary General of Hizballah His Eminence Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah Addresses the People on the Birthday of the Redeemer Imam al Mahdi, Lord of the Epoch," October 22, 2002 (quotes taken from the website [www.nasrallah.net](http://www.nasrallah.net)).
11. "Do Not Boast or Differ with Your Brothers," from the "Friday Sermon" section of Fadlallah's website, October 25, 2002 (available at [www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/Fridayspeeches/ke25102002.htm](http://www.baynat.org.lb/www/english/Fridayspeeches/ke25102002.htm)).
12. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), January 9, 2003.
13. Imad Marmal, "Hizballah Deputy Leader: Iraqi Army 'Motivation' to Decide Course of War in Iraq," *al-Safir* (Beirut), March 27, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0327), March 27, 2003.
14. Shaykh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, "We Don't Trust America," interview by Tom Masland, *Newsweek*, April 7, 2003.
15. "Lebanese Cleric Fadlallah: Muslims Will Not Recognize U.S.-Installed Govt. in Iraq," Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), April 6, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0406), April 6, 2003.
16. Hassan Nasrallah, interview, *Akhbar al-Khaleej* (Bahrain), April 6, 2003.
17. Despite its rhetorical support for the opposition, Hizballah was subject to criticism from certain Iraqi Shi'i factions during the war. For example, the group Atba Ahl al-Bayt (Followers of the family of the Prophet) asked Nasrallah to stop interfering in Iraqi Shi'i affairs and accused Hizballah of doing "its best to protect the former Iraqi regime" ("Report on Plans for Iraqi 'War Crimes Tribunal,' Hizballah Interference in Iraq," *al-Watan* [Kuwait], April 16, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia [FBIS-NES-2003-0416], April 16, 2003). Similarly, SCIRI chairman Mohammad Baqer Hakim criticized Hizballah's al-Manar television network for giving insufficient airtime to the Iraqi Shi'i opposition and devoting significantly more coverage to members of Saddam's regime (Mohammad Baqer Hakim, interview, *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* [Tehran], April 29, 2003).
18. "Nasrallah: Countdown for Ending U.S. Presence in Iraq Starts," *al-Bawaba* (online), April 23, 2003.
19. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, "Hizballah Leader: Iraq Invasion Might Encourage Islamists to Attack U.S. Interests," April 22, 2003.
20. Ibrahim al-Amin, "Lebanon: Report Details Discussions between Khatami, Hizballah Delegation," *al-Safir* (Beirut), May 14, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0514), May 14, 2003.

21. BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Iran's President Says Israel Should Disarm," translation of remarks made during a press conference in Beirut, originally aired on Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1, May 14, 2003.
22. Ibrahim al-Amin, "Iran's Kharrazi on Talks with US, Iraq, Terrorism, Road Map, Hizballah," *al-Safir* (Beirut), May 15, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0515), May 15, 2003.
23. BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Syria's President Bashar al-Asad on Iraq, Hezbollah, Reforms, Arab Ties," translation of an interview originally posted on the website of the Syrian government newspaper *Tishrin*, May 25, 2003.
24. Bahjat Sulayman, "Bahjat Sulayman Article Discusses US-Syrian Relations, Notes Syria's Ability to 'Maneuver,'" *al-Safir* (Beirut), May 15, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0516), May 16, 2003.
25. BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Shi'i Cleric Fadlallah Comments on Iraq Situation," May 4, 2003, translation of an interview originally published in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), May 2, 2003.
26. "Hizballah Officials Reject US Demands, Insist on 'Resistance,'" *al-Nahar* (Beirut), May 5, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0505), May 5, 2003.
27. "Hizballah Leader: US Pressure 'Extremely Serious,' 'Resistance' Will Continue," *al-Safir* (Beirut), May 8, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0508), May 8, 2003.



## Conclusion

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Throughout its twenty-five-year history, Hizballah has demonstrated quite clearly that it is an ideologically driven movement with strong leaders, a clear vision of its strategic goals, and extensive experience in terrorism and guerrilla warfare. The current leadership, under the guidance of the charismatic Hassan Nasrallah, is convinced of the righteousness of the organization's aspirations and methods, and, until recently, believed that its goals were within close reach. The perceived victories of the Islamist cause during these two-and-a-half decades—victories in which Hizballah was an active participant—only reinforced this conviction. In particular, the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 instilled the organization with an almost messianic assurance that it would achieve final victory over its enemies.

Hizballah is also a pragmatic movement, however. It maintains awareness of the difficulties ahead, makes plans to overcome them, and waits for the right moment to act, while exhibiting great patience and a strong sense of history. Therefore, even when its ultimate objectives are postponed because of strategic or political constraints, Hizballah does not feel compelled to renounce its goals or the violent means it has learned to use so well.

Given this *modus operandi*, Hizballah's current short-term strategy may be twofold: to maintain hostilities in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and to build on the American entanglement in Iraq. Specifically, if Hizballah perceives the United States as having difficulty controlling the situation in Iraq, it could escalate its attrition war against Israel at the northern border, inside the Palestinian Authority, and even within Israel proper. Such escalation would also be aimed at sabotaging any sign of progress in the peace process.

Indeed, Hizballah views the continuation of the violent conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as crucial to achieving its

overall goals. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the website of Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, the organization's spiritual leader, posted his views under titles such as "The Palestinian Cause Is Where We Stand or Fall"<sup>1</sup> and "Palestine Is the Battlefield on Which the Future of the Region Will Be Decided."<sup>2</sup> Aware of the enormous international pressure that the Palestinians were facing to halt the violence, Fadlallah advised them "to be cautious as they try to thwart this new scheme [i.e., the Quartet Roadmap for Israeli-Palestinian peace]. They have to play different and concerted roles that they will divide among them, and they have to uphold their national unity . . . to hold on to what they have so far achieved."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Nasrallah declared that Hizballah would remain engaged in the Palestinian issue because

it is also an Arab cause and an Islamic cause. The holy shrines in Palestine are not the Palestinians' alone. They concern all the Muslims. . . . Consequently, every Muslim throughout the world is concerned with this issue one way or another. . . . [Hizballah's] concern is to be present and perform this duty.<sup>4</sup>

Parallel to its escalation on the Israeli-Palestinian front, Hizballah could also choose to foster a radical Shi'i "resistance" movement in Iraq. Although such activity would not transform Iraq into a second Vietnam, various Islamists have speculated that the country could become the equivalent of another Chechnya or southern Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> Some analysts have taken this view a step further:

If, under a nationalist/Islamist banner, the Iraqis chose 'liberation' above 'building,' and armed resistance really took hold, that would have a catalyzing effect throughout the region, stimulating all those popular forces in Arab societies that are in a state of latent rebellion against what they see as an intolerable, American-supported existing order. The effect would be most dramatic in Palestine. . . . It would be a great boost for Hizbullah. Syria would be tempted to back it both as a means of refurbishing its badly tarnished nationalist credentials and regaining some of its now drastically eroded strategic influence.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, Hizballah could decide to foster this scenario of region-wide unrest by attacking U.S. and other Western interests in the

southern Gulf, which is home to a large Shi'i minority and numerous strategic oil fields.

For the most part, Hizballah's leadership has been quite vocal regarding its stance on Iraqi Shi'i resistance. Fadlallah, whom many Iraqi Shi'is regard as their own spiritual leader, called on them "to uphold their internal unity" and "confront all the arrogant attempts to incite internal strife that would defeat them before they even go to war."<sup>7</sup> He also asserted that Sunnis and Shi'is were united in their "verbal rejection" of the occupation, claiming that this sentiment could intensify "when the United States makes mistakes."<sup>8</sup>

In addition, both Nasrallah and his deputy, Naim Qasim, have addressed the question of whether Hizballah itself would play any role in Iraqi resistance. Near the end of the war, Qasim claimed that the organization would not interfere in "internal Iraqi affairs."<sup>9</sup> Yet, when pressed to comment about what Hizballah would do if the situation in Iraq "develops into something that looks like an intifadah," he replied, "Let us wait and see the developments first, for we do not know what the circumstances will be." Soon after the war, Nasrallah offered a more detailed explanation, claiming that Hizballah would consider joining an Iraqi insurgency against U.S. forces, but that it was

a matter first for the Iraqi people to decide. . . . All Arabs, Muslims and honorable people in the world should support a people that decides to resist the occupation. Hezbollah is part of the Arabs and Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, he qualified these remarks by asserting that Hizballah "should not be expected to take action for which it was not armed or prepared." Interestingly, statements of this nature reflect the same strategy that Hizballah has used in the framework of its terrorist and military activity against Israel: leaving the enemy in the dark about its real intentions while hinting to its constituency that it intends to strike at the right moment.

In any case, Hizballah's actual connections to the Iraqi opposition have been evident since early in the war. In late March 2003, the Oman daily *al-Watan* claimed that the Shi'i opposition in Iraq included "the newly formed Iraqi Hizballah, whose emer-

gence has raised questions about its links with its Lebanese counterpart,” which itself “has become increasingly involved in the Iraqi issue.”<sup>11</sup> According to another report, “The Shi‘a Hizballah-Iraq organization, which is led by Abu-Hatim al-Muhammadawi, claimed that on 5 April it battled and defeated elements of the Iraqi Army and Saddam Fedayeen in Al-Amarah Governorate, and it added that this was the first military action by a Shi‘a opposition group since Operation Iraqi Freedom began on 20 March.”<sup>12</sup> In June, the London-based *al-Quds al-Arabi*, whose sympathies in Iraq lie mainly with the Sunni opposition, reported that Hizballah had initiated secret contacts with supporters in Iraq to form a group that would serve as the organization’s arm in Iraq.<sup>13</sup> In August, a new Iraqi jihadist group, Hadithah Mujahedin, vowed attacks on U.S. forces and called on the “brother mujahedin in Palestine and Lebanon” to “derive lessons of jihad . . . from the mujahedin of Hizballah in sisterly Lebanon.”<sup>14</sup>

By November, Hizballah had reportedly “established a significant presence in Iraq,” including “a security team of up to 90 members.”<sup>15</sup> According to Bush administration officials, the intent of this presence was unclear. Because Hizballah members did not immediately participate in attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq, administration officials speculated that the organization’s goal could be “to help the Iraqis politically” or to act as a deterrent in case Washington attempted to unleash the Mujahedin-e Khalq, an Iraq-based Iranian opposition group, against the regime in Tehran. One former U.S. official even argued that the Hizballah presence in Iraq was a calculated move by Tehran: “[The Iranians] want a dialogue with us, and they are signaling they can help us or hurt us.” Indeed, given Hizballah’s history, it is difficult to view its current role in Iraq as merely “political”; rather, the organization may just be waiting for the right moment to strike.

In general, Hizballah has expressed great expectations in light of the various postwar developments in the region. Nawwaf al-Musawi, the organization’s head of foreign relations, outlined these expectations as follows:

Is Hizballah a rebel without a cause? This question would have been permissible if it were asked after a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict that resolved all the concerned

issues. But now, anyone who follows up the situation would be able to give a long list of pending issues, for which we believe are worth continuing to struggle. Moreover, the list of issues might instigate one to adopt a priority system to decide what should be focused on first and what could be postponed.<sup>16</sup>

Here, Musawi referred to Hizballah's guerrilla activities in southern Lebanon as well as to its support of the Palestinian intifada. He continued:

We have to bear in mind that Hizballah now enjoys a high capability of continuing to act, a capability that stems from the dynamics of the Lebanese and Arab realities. This means that even if there were no formation called 'Hizballah,' there would have been a need to establish something called 'Hizballah.'

The regional "dynamics" that Musawi mentioned—that is, the conditions that would allow Hizballah to continue its activities in the Israeli-Palestinian arena—were based on his perception of Washington's short-term plans: "The US priority in the current stage is the issue of Iraq, which is a critical, difficult, and complicated file. The second priority after this is the road map." Indeed, various Lebanese sources have echoed these sentiments:

Hizballah is convinced that the United States cannot target it militarily, either directly or covertly, because of the increasing military action its forces are encountering in Iraq as a result of their inability since the war ended . . . to establish stability and provide basic services. It is also convinced that it has greater freedom to return to military resistance. Second, it is convinced that Syria does not oppose its resumption of resistance against Israel because of Syria's ambiguous stance on events in Iraq, whether this ambiguity is intentional or not.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these raised expectations, Hizballah is also prepared for the worst-case scenario. That is, if the Iranian and Syrian regimes are confronted with the pressure of a U.S. military presence on their borders, they could decide to amend their foreign policies and sacrifice Hizballah for the sake of their own political survival. In the past, Hizballah has demonstrated a willingness to challenge any enemy, including the United States, France, and Israel. Hence, if it felt that Syria was on the verge of turning against

it, Hizballah could employ a potent ideological weapon against Damascus, namely, rallying militant action against a secular regime responsible for the killing of thousands of Muslim Brotherhood activists. Moreover, the organization's arsenal of long-range weaponry could reach Damascus as easily as it can Haifa.

This posture was articulated well before the war in Iraq. For example, one year after Israel's May 2000 withdrawal, "a number of prominent [Hizballah] figures" discussed the fate of the organization in light of a campaign of suppression to which it had been subjected recently because of its actions in Lebanon, "the Palestinian intifadah, and other such matters."<sup>18</sup> By discussion's end, all had agreed that if Israel, the United States, Syria, or Lebanon ever attempted to "stop the resistance, disarm it, and obstruct its role," the result would be "an explosion that would not be an ordinary one either to us or to the others."

Finally, Hizballah has another weapon of last resort in its arsenal: the revival of its largely dormant infrastructure abroad followed by a return to international terrorism, allied with al-Qaeda and perhaps leading part of the worldwide struggle against "the enemies of Islam." Hizballah's global reach, its history of international terrorist activity, and its potential to join forces with al-Qaeda all make it a dangerous threat to peace in the Middle East and to the continuation of the war on terror.

## Recommendations

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Although Hizballah will probably maintain a relatively low profile in the near future, it will doubtless do everything it can through clandestine channels and crossborder attacks to exacerbate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, sabotage any progress in the peace process, and destabilize the situation in Iraq. The longer it can stave off diplomatic and military pressure to change its violent activity and surrender the huge arsenal of weapons it has amassed over the past three years, the more it will try to take advantage of developments on the Israeli and Iraqi fronts for the benefit of itself and its sponsors.<sup>19</sup> In light of Hizballah's potentially destructive influence in the region, it is imperative that the United States and the international

community take the necessary measures to curtail it, including the following:

- *Isolate the organization at the international level.* This can be accomplished through increased efforts to officially designate it a terrorist organization and block its financial and material assets, as the U.S., Canadian, and Australian governments have done.
- *Maintain heavy international diplomatic and economic pressure on Syria and Iran, Hizballah's two main supporters.* Martin Kramer perhaps put it best when, in reference to U.S. deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage's characterization of Hizballah as the "A-team" of terrorism, he stated, "If Hizbollah is the A-team, Iran is the team owner and Syria is the coach."<sup>20</sup>
- *Make Hizballah the first priority in U.S. dialogue with, and pressure on, Damascus.* Syria provides the organization with a strategic umbrella and controls the land and air corridors through which it receives its weapons. Hence, Damascus is the only regional player that could put real military pressure on Hizballah and disarm it.
- *Apply diplomatic and, in particular, economic pressure on Lebanon to deploy its armed forces in the south and to curb the Hizballah presence there.* Such pressure should be employed despite the fact that the Lebanese government is not independent in its decisionmaking.

## Notes

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1. From the "Our Stand This Week" section of Fadlallah's website, April 8, 2003 (available at [www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand08042003.htm](http://www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand08042003.htm)).
2. From the "Our Stand This Week" section of Fadlallah's website, April 22, 2003 (available at [www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand22042003.htm](http://www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand22042003.htm)).
3. "The Enemy's Conditional Acceptance of the Road Map," from the "Our Stand This Week" section of Fadlallah's website, May 27, 2003 (available at [www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand27052003.htm](http://www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/standthisweek/stand27052003.htm)).
4. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, "Egyptian Magazine Interviews Hizballah Chief on Lebanese, Regional Issues," translation of an article that originally appeared in *al-Musawwar* (Cairo), June 13, 2003.

5. See B. Raman, "Making Iraq the USA's Chechnya," paper no. 606 (South Asia Analysis Group, February 17, 2003). Available online ([www.saag.org/papers7/paper606.html](http://www.saag.org/papers7/paper606.html)).
6. David Hirst, "The Arab World, Divided and Humiliated, Asks: 'Which Way Iraq?'" *Daily Star* (Beirut), June 7, 2003. Available online ([www.casi.org.uk/discuss/2003/msg02980.html](http://www.casi.org.uk/discuss/2003/msg02980.html)).
7. "Commemorating the Martyrdom of Imam al-Hussein (a.s.): A Mission for All Times," from the "Friday Sermon" section of Fadlallah's website, April 25, 2003 (available at [www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/Fridayspeeches/ke25042003.htm](http://www.bayynat.org.lb/www/english/Fridayspeeches/ke25042003.htm)).
8. BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Shi'i Cleric Fadlallah Comments on Iraq Situation," May 4, 2003, translation of an interview originally published in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), May 2, 2003.
9. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, "Hizballah's Qasim Speaks on Links to al-Qa'ida, 'Infiltration' of Iraqi Officials," April 24, 2003, translation of an interview that originally appeared on the website of *al-Nahar* (Beirut), n.d.
10. Sam Ghattas, "Hezbollah May Help Iraqis If They Decide to Fight Americans," Associated Press, May 8, 2003.
11. "Liberating the People of Iraq by Massacring Them: An Arab Press Review, Daily Star, 3/28/03," available on "The Revival" website ([www.therevival.co.uk/articles/liberating\\_iraq\\_massacring\\_people.htm](http://www.therevival.co.uk/articles/liberating_iraq_massacring_people.htm)).
12. Bill Samii, "Iraqi Shi'a and a Post-Saddam Iraq," *Iraq Report* 6, no. 17 (April 10, 2003). Available online ([www.rferl.org/iraq-report/2003/04/17-100403.html](http://www.rferl.org/iraq-report/2003/04/17-100403.html)).
13. "Sunni Muslim Resistance Groups Reportedly Regroup in Iraq to Attack US Forces," *al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), June 6, 2003, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES-2003-0606), June 6, 2003.
14. Remarks broadcast on the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation satellite channel (LBCSAT), August 18, 2003.
15. James Risen, "Hezbollah, in Iraq, Refrains from Attacks on Americans," *New York Times*, November 24, 2003.
16. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, "Hizballah Official on Necessity of Armed Resistance, US Middle East Policy," translated summary of an interview originally published in *al-Safir* (Beirut), August 21, 2003.
17. U.S. Department of Commerce, National Technical Information Service, World News Connection, "Commentary on Israel, Terrorism in U.S.-Syrian Relations," translation of Sarkis Na'um, "Terrorism or Israel Separating Syria and America?" *al-Nahar* (Beirut), August 13, 2003.
18. Ibrahim al-Amin, "What Is Required of Hizballah," *al-Safir* (Beirut), June 30, 2001.



19. For example, Hizballah was quick to exploit recent prisoner-release negotiations with Israel in order to enhance its image in the region. In November 2003, Israel tentatively agreed to free hundreds of Arab prisoners (most of them Palestinians) in exchange for kidnapped Israeli businessman Elhanan Tannenbaum and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers killed by Hizballah three years earlier. Although the deal has been subject to numerous delays, Nasrallah's aggressive and boastful demeanor during the negotiations has enhanced his standing as an important regional player. His demands have also damaged Israeli relations with Amman and Cairo, given the presence of Jordanian and Egyptian terrorist suspects among the prisoners slated for release. Moreover, the liberation of so many Palestinian prisoners would clearly strengthen Hizballah politically, psychologically, and strategically, reinforcing its reputation as a model to be admired and imitated. The prisoner deal could even inspire rogue Iraqi elements to kidnap coalition soldiers and civilians, as Hizballah did in Lebanon during the 1980s.
20. Martin Kramer, remarks made during a conference titled "The Terrorism of Hizbollah: Ideology, Scope, Threat," at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., January 16, 2003.