

# The Party of God and its Greatest Satan

The 36-Year Confrontation Between Hezbollah and the United States

October 2018



UNITED  
AGAINST  
NUCLEAR  
**IRAN**



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## Executive Summary

Anti-Americanism has been a central pillar of Hezbollah's ideology since its founding in 1982. Drawing inspiration from the founder of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini, Hezbollah labeled America as the "Greatest Satan," and has attacked and kidnapped Americans in Lebanon since the organization's inception. Most infamously, it carried out the October 23, 1983 bombing of the American Marine Barracks in Beirut, which killed more Americans than any single terrorist attack until Al-Qaeda's attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001.

Hezbollah toned down its anti-American activities in the 1990s as part of an effort to placate Syria, which became Lebanon's official power-broker after the signing of the Taif Agreement that ended the Lebanese Civil War. Syria was seeking closer relations with America at the time. Yet, Hezbollah's enmity towards America never abated and the group continued to undermine American interests worldwide. During that decade, Hezbollah laid the groundwork for its global operations, and at the same time insisted that its focus was exclusively on fighting Israel's occupation of south Lebanon. As a result, despite a few token measures, America failed to thwart Hezbollah's growing power.

The attacks on September 11, 2001 reawakened the American focus on terrorist threats, including Hezbollah. The Bush administration ramped up efforts initiated by the Clinton administration to crack down on the group's finances, and signed the 2003 Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) – which aimed to end, among other things, Syria's occupation of Lebanon and its support for terrorist groups, including Hezbollah. In 2004, America also co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which called on Syria to end its 35-year occupation of Lebanon and for all Lebanese militias to disarm. Syria finally withdrew from Lebanon in 2005, after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri sparked the Cedar Revolution.

Despite these pressures, Hezbollah proved highly adaptable. Following a string of assassination and intimidation campaigns, the group quickly re-seized the upper hand in Lebanon, undercutting the pro-Western Lebanese government and democratic March 14 Alliance (March 14) at every turn. Moreover, by launching the 2006 war against Israel, Hezbollah tested the limits of American support for March 14 by pitting America's commitment to Israel and Lebanon against one another. America's backing of Israel's highly destructive, but overall ineffective military campaign eroded the March 14 government's confidence in American support for Lebanese democracy and demoralized the alliance and its supporters.

In 2008, Hezbollah launched an armed takeover of Beirut in response to attempts by pro-Western Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to shut down the group's telecommunications network and dismiss the Beirut Airport security chief, respectively. Absent any support from America, Siniora was forced to back down.

The Obama administration initiated rapprochement with Syria in 2009 and later signaled a desire for dialogue with Iran, while drawing down American presence in the region. America's conciliatory measures toward Iran emboldened Hezbollah to tighten its grip on Lebanon and use it as a base to threaten American regional interests.

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However, not all American efforts to counter Hezbollah over the last three decades have been failures. U.S. Treasury and State Department sanctions have at times stymied the group's ability to raise funds and American aid to the Lebanese Army is increasing that institution's credibility as the country's national defense force, which would obviate the need for Hezbollah and its so-called resistance.

To succeed, the American commitment to its anti-Hezbollah partners in Lebanon and the broader region must be seen as credible and consistent as the Iranian regime's support is for Hezbollah. America must also engage Hezbollah in the "soft war" for the hearts and minds of the peoples of the region, particularly its Lebanese Shiite base. If America can win that fight, the countdown to Hezbollah's disarmament and demise would begin.

## Part I. America's Place in Hezbollah's Ideology

### Section A. The Founding Fathers of Hezbollah's Anti-Americanism

Ayatollahs Ruhollah Khomeini and Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah are the two main ideological influences on Hezbollah.<sup>1</sup> Khomeini spearheaded Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution and Fadlallah was a leading Shiite cleric in Lebanon.

Anti-Americanism formed a central pillar of Khomeini's ideology. He dubbed America "the Great Satan," and considered it a "terrorist nation" with "anti-human" policies led by "unbelievers." Khomeini believed America was the greatest enemy of "Islam, the Qur'an and Mohammad" and was allied with the "wretched Jews" in Israel. He called on all Muslims to unite under a religious government and use all means – including the pen and rifle – to end American hegemony.<sup>2</sup>

Fadlallah held similar views of America. He considered American influence malicious, and believed its support for human rights and democracy was just a smokescreen for American imperialism. Fadlallah advocated for confronting America, but believed violent resistance should be a last resort. Like Khomeini, Fadlallah claimed to only oppose the American government – not its people. Fadlallah differed from Khomeini in that Fadlallah encouraged dialogue with America, while Khomeini publicly rejected such outreach.<sup>3</sup>

### Section B. Hezbollah in its Own Words

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/we-dont-trust-america-134479> Qasir, the Open Letter, p. 145; Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p.20 ; ibid. "Hizbullah's Identity and Goals (August 2004)," p. 60; Azani, p. 205; Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With a Vengeance*, p.70-71;

<http://www.newsweek.com/we-dont-trust-america-134479>

<sup>2</sup> Algar, p. 47, 66, 139, 142, 183, 186-189, 197, 210, 214-215, 221, 224, 238, 257-258, 267, 277, 301-302, 305-306, 335; Ruhollah Khomeini, *Al Kalimat al-Qasira*, <https://goo.gl/1o5XYa>, <https://goo.gl/T5h6vT>, [http://www.almaaref.org/books/contentsimages/books/alkalamat\\_alkesar/kalamat\\_kesar\\_emam\\_khumyne\\_1995/](http://www.almaaref.org/books/contentsimages/books/alkalamat_alkesar/kalamat_kesar_emam_khumyne_1995/), <https://goo.gl/KwFw75>, <https://goo.gl/xNEJnM>, [http://www.almaaref.org/books/contentsimages/books/alkalamat\\_alkesar/kalamat\\_kesar\\_emam\\_khumyne\\_1995/page/lesson9.htm#%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7](http://www.almaaref.org/books/contentsimages/books/alkalamat_alkesar/kalamat_kesar_emam_khumyne_1995/page/lesson9.htm#%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D8%A7); Ruhollah Khomeini, "Speech: American Plots Against Iran," *Emam.com*, November 5, 1979, January 25, 2018 (<http://emam.com/posts/view/15718/Speech>)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/05/12/anti-terrorist-plan-rescinded-after-unauthorized-bombing/bd2a869b-5b92-4efa-9f3c-740388e0b847/?utm\\_term=.73c5f7daa374](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/05/12/anti-terrorist-plan-rescinded-after-unauthorized-bombing/bd2a869b-5b92-4efa-9f3c-740388e0b847/?utm_term=.73c5f7daa374)

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Anti-Americanism permeates Hezbollah's ideology.<sup>4</sup> Since its inception in 1982, the group has considered America the "Greatest Satan,"<sup>5</sup> the "root of evil," (*al-munkar*), and the "greatest abomination of our era."<sup>6</sup> Hezbollah's ideology describes American power as merely a tool to implement "historically unprecedented authoritarian subjugation mechanisms" aimed at dominating weaker peoples and turning the world into an American-dominated market. To Hezbollah, the post-9/11 War on Terror is just a means of furthering American neocolonialism.<sup>7</sup> Hezbollah also believes that America employs subversive methods – including sowing internal discord, sponsoring international terrorism, igniting civil wars, and even exploiting its "slogans" of freedom, democracy, and human rights – to subjugate and "pillage other societies."<sup>8</sup>

The Khomeinist ideology to which Hezbollah adheres dictates that American involvement in the Middle East is motivated by a desire to steal its resources and destroy Islam. To achieve these ends, America foments all Middle Eastern conflicts, props up dictators, and delegitimizes its "resistance movements."<sup>9</sup> According to Hezbollah lore, America uses its "forward base" Israel, the "most hideous" incarnation of American terrorism, as a staging ground for regional dominance.<sup>10</sup> Hezbollah also is therefore willing to ally with any of America's foes – regardless of ideological or religious differences – to challenge the perceived American threat.<sup>11</sup>

Hezbollah wants Lebanon to assume a forward role in this confrontation against America as part of the Iranian-led "Resistance Axis."<sup>12</sup> It therefore aims to foment Lebanese mistrust of all American support, including America's anti-Hezbollah initiatives, the deployment of the Lebanese Army to south Lebanon, and the encouragement of the Lebanese state to provide essential social services to Lebanese citizens living in the south. Hezbollah claims that the real aim of such initiatives is to weaken Lebanon and make it subordinate to Israel.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://youtu.be/NJwWBqCdUz0?t=28m53s>; Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With a Vengeance*, p.70-71; <http://www.newsweek.com/we-dont-trust-america-134479>; <http://www.newsweek.com/we-dont-trust-america-134479> Qasir, the Open Letter, p. 145; Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p.20 ; *ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Alagha, *Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, p. 53. Hezbollah refers to the U.S. as "*al-Shaytan al-Akbar*," which is better translated as "The Greatest Satan," rather than the more common, "Great Satan." The latter is, instead, a translation of the Farsi, "*Shaytan-e Bozorg*."

<sup>6</sup> The term recalls the second Umayyad Caliph Yazid I, hated by Shiites for his role in the death of their beloved Imam Hussein Ibn Ali. See: Saad-Ghorayeb, p. 90

<sup>7</sup> Qasem, p. 19; Qassem, p. 392

<sup>8</sup> Qasir, p. 174-176; Qassem, p. 404, 439;

<https://web.archive.org/web/20160730021526/http://audio.mogawama.org/details.php?cid=1&linkid=22>; Audio File ([http://www.mediaspecial.org/sound/mediasave.php?filename=/hassan/real/2003/moharam13032003\\_day10.rm](http://www.mediaspecial.org/sound/mediasave.php?filename=/hassan/real/2003/moharam13032003_day10.rm) ) at 36:10-36:26

<sup>9</sup> Qasir, p. 149, 177-179,194; Ghorayeb, p. 90, 104, Qassem, p. 368-370, 392

<sup>10</sup> Qasir, p. 146-148, 150, 158, 178-179, 181, 278-280; Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, "Hezbollah's Views and Concepts, issued by al-Manar on June 20, 1997," p. 57; *ibid*, "Hizbullah's 1996 Parliamentary Elections Program," p. 70, 74; <https://youtu.be/ObgwOIJUM0iU?t=33m27s>;

<sup>11</sup> Qasir, p. 150, 177, 179; Alagaha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 31-32; *ibid*, "Hizbullah's 1996 Parliamentary Elections Program," p. 70; Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed, in *Al-'Ahd*, 21 Dhul Qada, 1404. Quoted by Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*, p. 19-20, 106;

[https://arabi21.com/story/963131/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88-%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A](https://arabi21.com/story/963131/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88-%D8%B4%D8%AE%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D9%88%D8%B5%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A;);  
<http://al-akhbar.com/taxonomy/term/6744>; <https://www.mogawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=18611&cid=199> ;  
<http://archive.almanar.com.lb/article.php?id=436829> ; Qassem, p. 376-377, 404-405, 409; <https://youtu.be/Qraklh5P4U8?t=1h22m57s>

<sup>12</sup> Qassem, p 408-409

<sup>13</sup> Qasir, p. 146, 149, 154-55; Qassem, p. . 25, 170-173, 368-370, 406-409;

Nonetheless, Hezbollah claims it does not want to destroy America or use violence against its citizens as a first resort.<sup>14</sup> Hezbollah even claims to draw inspiration from the American Revolution – which it says embodied “the will of freedom and the longing for rights, justice and peace” – in its struggle against Israel, and supports Iran’s outreach efforts towards the American people.<sup>15</sup> However, statements by Hezbollah’s leadership contradict such claims. For example, Hassan Nasrallah praised the “D.C. Sniper” in an October 22, 2002 speech, and has described Hezbollah’s conflict with America as civilizational.<sup>16</sup> Hezbollah also claims the exportation of American culture to Muslim society is a rot which fulfills “Satan’s project [of leading humanity astray] on the first day of creation.”<sup>17</sup> The group also depicts American culture and society as essentially genocidal and racist – as evidenced by the treatment of Native and African Americans, respectively.<sup>18</sup>

## Part II. Hezbollah’s Anti-Americanism in Action in Lebanon and Abroad

### Section A. Ideology in Action—Generally: Pragmatism and Gradualism

Hezbollah’s anti-American strategy has been characterized by pragmatism and gradualism. The group has historically recognized the limits of its power and has also been realistic about what is achievable. For example, in its 1985 Open Letter, Hezbollah called for achieving its ideological goals in Lebanon and beyond its borders in incremental steps.

Hezbollah recognizes that America’s vast military advantage makes direct confrontation impossible. It therefore attacks from behind a veil of obscurity, and almost always with plausible deniability. Hezbollah also views its war against America as a gradual and multi-generational endeavor, and that final victory will require patience and gradually accumulating gains.<sup>19</sup> The group believes that this process of piecemeal gains has already begun and that the actions of Hezbollah and the region’s “resistance movements” have initiated the end of American hegemony.<sup>20</sup> Hezbollah’s effort to transform Lebanon into the “graveyard for America’s project” and a center of Iran’s anti-American (*mu’adiyah*) axis is part of this process.<sup>21</sup>

### Section B. Phase I: Violent Confrontation From the Shadows (1982-1990)

The first phase of Hezbollah’s confrontation with America consisted of attacks against American citizens, including soldiers, diplomats, and civilians, as well as American targets inside and outside of Lebanon. The group used terror and guerilla tactics to compensate for the power gap with America, justifying

<sup>14</sup> Ghorayeb, p. 107, Qassem, p. 411

<sup>15</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, “Hezbollah’s Views and Concepts, issued by al-Manar on June 20, 1997,” p. 57; Qassem, p.107

<sup>16</sup> Law enforcement officials had yet to discover that John Allen Muhammad – aka “The DC Sniper” – and his accomplice Lee Boyd Malvo were behind the attacks. <http://www.mediaspecial.org/sound/mediasave.php?filename=/hassan/real/2002/almahdi22102002.rm> (37:38-38:11); <https://www.mediarelations-lb.org/article.php?id=2224&cid=124#.WnHzbJM-fOQ>; Ghorayeb, p. 88-89; Jaber, p. 56;

<sup>17</sup> Ghorayeb, p. 104; <https://www.mediarelations-lb.org/article.php?id=2224&cid=124#.WnHzbJM-fOQ>, referencing Qur’an 17:63-65. The Qur’an relates that Satan – *Iblis* – made a bargain with God upon being cast out of heaven that he would lead mankind astray.

<sup>18</sup> <https://youtu.be/Oraklh5P4U8?t=1h21m6s>

<sup>19</sup> Qassem, p. 439; Qasir, p. 179

<sup>20</sup> Qasir, p. 171; Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, “2009 Political Document,” p. 116; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5X3YrgdgRck>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZHpOn\\_fzE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZHpOn_fzE)

<sup>21</sup> Qasir, p. 151; 153; Qassem, p. 19-22, 376-377, 387, 389; Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, “Hizbullah’s 1996 Parliamentary Elections Program,” p. 74

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them as its “only way” of responding to “American aggression.”<sup>22</sup> It was a terrorist shadow war intended to expel all Americans from Lebanon.

During this period, Hezbollah did not claim direct responsibility for many attacks and kidnappings. Instead the group used aliases such as “Islamic Jihad,” “Revolutionary Justice Organization,” and “Organization of the Oppressed of the Earth.”<sup>23</sup> This policy was intended to confuse the Americans and to deny them the ability to effectively retaliate against the group during its nascent period.<sup>24</sup>

To this day, Hezbollah still denies involvement in the kidnappings and bombings against American targets in Lebanon despite all evidence to the contrary.<sup>25</sup> Hezbollah even claims to reject kidnapping on ideological grounds and to have interceded on occasion to secure the release of American hostages.<sup>26</sup>

## 1. Attacking America in Lebanon

Hezbollah’s first attack on Americans occurred on July 19, 1982. Three gunmen affiliated with Hezbollah’s Islamic Amal faction kidnapped American University of Beirut (AUB) President David Dodge.<sup>27</sup> Dodge was given over to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and taken to Tehran’s notorious Evin prison.<sup>28</sup> Syrian intervention secured his release on July 21, 1983.<sup>29</sup>

Following Dodge’s kidnapping, Hezbollah attacked the American embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983. The attack was planned by Imad Mughniyeh, a former personal bodyguard of Yasser Arafat, who defected from Fatah to the IRGC forces operating in the Lebanese city of Baalbek. Mughniyeh was a Shiite attracted to Hezbollah’s successful branding of itself as a force to end American occupation and Israeli and Lebanese Christian abuses of the Shiite community.

The IRGC tasked Mughniyeh with planning an attack on the American embassy that would have maximum impact while leaving no evidence of the true perpetrator.<sup>30</sup> Mughniyeh finalized the plan in March of 1983, during a meeting with Iran’s ambassador to Damascus.<sup>31</sup> On April 18, one of Hezbollah’s Islamic Amal operatives drove a van packed with two tons of explosives into the American embassy, killing 32 Lebanese employees, 14 passersby, and 17 Americans.<sup>32</sup> The majority of the CIA’s Beirut staff was killed in the attack, including Robert Ames, the CIA’s top Middle East analyst and Near East

<sup>22</sup> Azani, p. 208. Quoting AFP, July 3, 1990

<sup>23</sup> Alagha, Identity Construction, p. 20; <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/03/world/militia-leaders-report-arrest-of-waite.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>; Qassem, p. 381-386;

<sup>24</sup> <https://youtu.be/NJwWBqCdUz0?t=3m18s>; <https://youtu.be/NJwWBqCdUz0?t=18m4s>

<sup>25</sup> <https://youtu.be/NJwWBqCdUz0?t=6m16s> Qassem: Hezbollah as a hierarchical organizational structure and its resistance have no connection whatsoever with these bombings. Independent Islamic organizations, some of which latter joined Hezbollah and some of which didn’t, were the ones carrying out these attacks. “Operationally, Hezbollah’s leadership did not take a decision regarding these kinds of acts, nor did it promote them or did it have foreknowledge, finding out about them later like everyone else.”

<sup>26</sup> Ghorayeb, p. 96; <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/01/world/group-beirut-says-it-hanged-us-colonel-2d-threat-issued-bush-convenes-security.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>27</sup> Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb’allah and the Hostage-Crisis Within Lebanon*, p. 88-89.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/13/world/fate-of-an-educator-kidnapped-in-beirut-remains-a-mystery.html>;

<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/07/20/world/a-us-educator-is-seized-in-beirut.html>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.csmonitor.com/1983/0722/072211.html>

<sup>30</sup> Bird, p. 331

<sup>31</sup> Kai Bird, p. 332.

<sup>32</sup> Boykin, *Cursed is the Peacemaker*, p. 303; Jay Solomon, *The Iran Wars*, p. 45; Thomas L. Friedman, “U.S. Beirut Embassy Bombed; 33 Reported Killed, 80 Hurt; Pro-Iran Sect Admits Action,” *The New York Times*, April 19, 1983 (<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/19/world/us-beirut-embassy-bombed-33-reported-killed-80-hurt-pro-iran-sect-admits-action.html>); “The Bombing of U.S. Embassy Beirut – April 18, 1983,” *State Department’s Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training*, (<http://adst.org/2013/04/the-bombing-of-u-s-embassy-beirut-april-18-1983/>)

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director.<sup>33</sup> Hezbollah had decimated America's intelligence capability in Beirut and much of the Middle East at exactly the time Hezbollah was emerging as a significant threat.<sup>34</sup>

Hezbollah subsequently bombed the American Marine Barracks in Beirut on October 23, 1983, using a truck laden with six tons of explosives. The attack, planned by Imad Mughniyeh and Mustafa Badreddine – another of the group's most notorious commanders – killed 241 Americans. The group would later describe the attack as a "chastisement" in their 1985 Open Letter, perhaps for American support for Iraq in its war with Iran.<sup>35</sup>

Hezbollah murdered AUB President Malcolm Herr on January 18, 1984 and kidnapped AUB Engineering Professor Frank Regier on February 11. Regier was rescued by the Amal militia on April 16.<sup>36</sup> By then, President Ronald Reagan had ordered an American troop withdrawal from Lebanon, but Hezbollah – as "Islamic Jihad" (IJ) – continued targeting American citizens and diplomats in the absence of military targets. For example, it kidnapped CNN's Beirut Bureau Chief Jeremy Levin on March 7<sup>37</sup> and CIA Beirut Station Chief William F. Buckley on March 16.<sup>38</sup>

Levin managed to escape from his captors. However, according to other captives, Buckley was tortured and died in captivity from illness and neglect on June 3, 1985, though IJ claimed to have executed him on October 5, 1985.<sup>39</sup> Hezbollah never returned Buckley's corpse, instead dumping it in a plastic trash bag on the side of the Beirut Airport Highway, where it was discovered by a Danish UN officer on December 27, 1991. His body, which coroners say was treated "with great disrespect," was finally laid to rest in America on December 30, 1991.<sup>40</sup>

On May 8, 1984, Hezbollah abducted Presbyterian minister Benjamin Weir, and then bombed the American embassy's new location in East Beirut on September 20, killing 23 people, including two Americans. Claiming responsibility as "Islamic Jihad," Hezbollah said the attack was fulfillment of its earlier promise "not to allow a single American to remain on Lebanese soil."<sup>41</sup> On December 3, AUB librarian Peter Kilburn was kidnapped and later executed in response to American strikes in Libya. His bullet-riddled body was dumped in the Chouf Mountains overlooking Beirut.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, p. 294-309; <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2014-featured-story-archive/flashback-april-18-1983-u-s-embassy-bombed-in-beirut.html>; <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/may/23/nation/la-na-cia-names-20120523>

<sup>34</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 453; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/31/2-slain-hostages-buried-as-heroes/952b0fb5-900e-48dd-b22e-f48c413e130c/?utm\\_term=.52d54d831647](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/31/2-slain-hostages-buried-as-heroes/952b0fb5-900e-48dd-b22e-f48c413e130c/?utm_term=.52d54d831647)

<sup>35</sup> Qasir, p. 149; Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 274; Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 453

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/19/world/university-head-killed-in-beirut-gunmen-escape.html?pagewanted=all>;  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/16/world/american-rescued-by-beirut-militia.html>

<sup>37</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 459; [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-02-15/news/mn-3167\\_1\\_american-journalist](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-02-15/news/mn-3167_1_american-journalist)

<sup>38</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 459; [http://articles.latimes.com/1985-02-15/news/mn-3167\\_1\\_american-journalist](http://articles.latimes.com/1985-02-15/news/mn-3167_1_american-journalist)

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/09/us/ex-hostage-casts-doubt-on-report-of-execution.html>;  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/28/buckleys-remains-identified/5b3bf0cc-41c2-4a1c-aa0b-27be8c3795d2/?utm\\_term=.32aacffbe3e5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/28/buckleys-remains-identified/5b3bf0cc-41c2-4a1c-aa0b-27be8c3795d2/?utm_term=.32aacffbe3e5)

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/27/world/body-believed-to-be-cia-agent-and-hostage-is-found-in-lebanon.html>;  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/28/buckleys-remains-identified/5b3bf0cc-41c2-4a1c-aa0b-27be8c3795d2/?utm\\_term=.32aacffbe3e5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/28/buckleys-remains-identified/5b3bf0cc-41c2-4a1c-aa0b-27be8c3795d2/?utm_term=.32aacffbe3e5); <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/31/world/2-hostages-slain-in-beirut-are-buried-in-us.html>

<sup>41</sup> Razoux, p. 281; <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/09/21/world/23-die-including-2-americans-terrorist-car-bomb-attack-us-embassy-beirut-blast.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>42</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 461; <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/01/world/group-beirut-says-it-hanged-us-colonel-2d-threat-issued-bush-convenes-security.html?pagewanted=all>; <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/03/world/american-is-freed-after-18-months-as-beirut-captive.html>

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On January 8, 1985, acting as “Islamic Jihad,” Hezbollah kidnapped Father Lawrence M. Jenco, the head of Catholic Relief Services, holding him for two-and-a half years.<sup>43</sup> It then kidnapped Associated Press Chief Middle East Correspondent Terry Anderson on March 16. Anderson was released six years later on December 2, 1991, making him the group’s longest-held American hostage.<sup>44</sup> “Islamic Jihad” then kidnapped David P. Jacobsen, AUB’s Hospital director, holding him for six months and then abducted two more Americans – AUB Professor Thomas Sutherland and Frank Herbert Reed, the director of a Lebanese school in West Beirut, on June 9, 1985 and September 9, 1986, respectively.<sup>45</sup> Hezbollah accused Reed of using his education, marriage to a Syrian, and even his conversion to Islam as a cover for espionage. Reed and Sutherland were released on May 1, 1990 and November 5, 1991, respectively.

<sup>46</sup>

Again acting under the moniker “Islamic Jihad,” Hezbollah next kidnapped American Joseph J. Cicippio, AUB’s acting comptroller and another convert to Islam, on September 12, 1986. Cicippio was eventually released alongside Anderson, but during his captivity, the group – now calling itself the “Revolutionary Justice Organization” (RJO) – threatened to execute him on three separate occasions and broadcast it “on all screens in the world.” The last of these threats came in 1989, along with a demand that Israel release the group’s Sheikh Abdulkarim Obeid, an influential preacher within the group and the imam of the south Lebanon village of Jibchit.<sup>47</sup>

On October 21, Hezbollah, calling itself RJO, kidnapped Edward A. Tracy, a 61-year-old American whose *wanderlust* took him to Lebanon, holding him until August 11, 1991.<sup>48</sup>

On January 24, 1987, Hezbollah – using both its Islamic Jihad and Organization of Oppressed of the Earth cover names – abducted AUB Professors Robert Polhill, Jesse Turner, Alan Steen, and Mithileshwar Singh, an Indian citizen and American permanent resident, four days after German authorities arrested TWA Flight 847 hijacker Mohammad Ali Hamadi. Singh was released on October 3, 1988,<sup>49</sup> Polhill on April 23, 1990,<sup>50</sup> Turner on October 22, 1991,<sup>51</sup> and Steen on December 3, 1991.<sup>52</sup> On June 17, 1987, Hezbollah kidnapped Charles Glass – an American journalist working at the time as ABC News chief

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<sup>43</sup> Razoux, p. 281; <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/07/26/The-Rev-Lawrence-Martin-Jenco-an-American-held-captive/9172522734400/>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/05/world/the-last-us-hostage-anderson-last-us-hostage-is-freed-by-captors-in-beirut.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/03/world/american-is-freed-after-18-months-as-beirut-captive.html>; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/11/03/us-hostage-freed-in-beirut/4caca6b-4760-4fce-99c9-01259a524181/?utm\\_term=.36722295df75](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/11/03/us-hostage-freed-in-beirut/4caca6b-4760-4fce-99c9-01259a524181/?utm_term=.36722295df75); “Islamic Jihad” initially claimed responsibility for kidnapping Reed, but later denied it had taken him. The organization that eventually released him claimed it was called, “Islamic Dawn.” See:

<https://www.csmonitor.com/1988/0120/apeg.html>; [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-05-01/news/mn-137\\_1\\_frank-reed](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-05-01/news/mn-137_1_frank-reed) ;

<https://www.csmonitor.com/1991/1213/13041.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/26/us/ex-hostage-joyfully-returns-to-the-us.html>

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/12/world/the-hostage-drama-freed-us-hostage-emerges-a-frail-and-disoriented-man.html?pagewanted=all>; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/06/10/arsenic-traces-found-in-blood-of-ex-hostage-reed/863b9a62-a17c-49e8-a3ca-019f03edc658/?utm\\_term=.04a59ed2de39](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1990/06/10/arsenic-traces-found-in-blood-of-ex-hostage-reed/863b9a62-a17c-49e8-a3ca-019f03edc658/?utm_term=.04a59ed2de39) ; <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/01/world/second-american-freed-in-lebanon-bush-thanks-iran.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/01/world/group-beirut-says-it-hanged-us-colonel-2d-threat-issued-bush-convenes-security.html?pagewanted=all>; <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/03/world/cicippio-free-after-5-years-and-eager-for-a-new-life.html> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Paj8AHJVelw>

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/12/world/the-hostage-drama-freed-us-hostage-emerges-a-frail-and-disoriented-man.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/23/world/beirut-kidnappers-free-american-55-a-hostage-3-years.html>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/23/world/beirut-kidnappers-free-american-55-a-hostage-3-years.html>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/23/world/ex-beirut-hostage-is-in-care-of-us.html>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/04/world/american-captive-is-freed-in-beirut-flies-to-germany.html>

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Middle East correspondent – in its stronghold of al-Ouzai near south Beirut, this time using the heretofore unknown cover name Organization for Free People’s Defense.<sup>53</sup> He managed to escape from captivity 62 days later.<sup>54</sup>

On February 17, 1988 Hezbollah kidnapped Col. William R. Higgins, using its Organization of Oppressed of the Earth alias.<sup>55</sup> Higgins would become the last American abducted by the group. Hezbollah is thought to have tortured Higgins before finally hanging him on July 31, 1989 when Israel seized the group’s Sheikh Abdulkarim Obeid, and then released a video of his execution.<sup>56</sup> Lebanese police found Col. Higgins’ remains on December 22, 1991 on a Beirut street after a tip from an anonymous phone call, and handed him over to the American embassy the next day.<sup>57</sup> The American hostage saga finally came to an end when Col. Higgins was laid to rest in Quantico National Cemetery on December 31, 1991 – the same day as William Buckley.

## 2. Attacking America Globally

Hezbollah also targeted Americans living and working outside Lebanon during the 1980s. On December 12, 1983, three proto-Hezbollah operatives, including Mustafa Badreddine, participated in a coordinated 90-minute attack in Kuwait on the American embassy and the living quarters for American employees of Raytheon. The motive was American support for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>58</sup> The terrorist attack, which could have been one of the Middle East’s worst, ended up killing relatively few people because of faulty rigging of the bombs used.<sup>59</sup> Then on April 12, 1985, the Shiite organization bombed the El Descanso restaurant in Torrejon, Spain, frequented by American servicemen stationed at the nearby Torrejon Air Base. The attack – claimed by “Islamic Jihad Organization” – collapsed the three-story building, killing 19 people, including 15 Americans.<sup>60</sup>

Two months later, TWA Flight 847 was hijacked by four Hezbollah operatives – Mohammad Ali Hamadi,<sup>61</sup> Hassan Izzedine,<sup>62</sup> Ali Atweh,<sup>63</sup> and Imad Mughniyeh, whose fingerprints the FBI discovered in the plane’s bathroom.<sup>64</sup> They held many of the plane’s passengers – which included 85 Americans – hostage for 17 days. During this episode, the hijackers mercilessly and repeatedly beat Navy diver Robert Stethem. When they landed at Beirut Airport, Hamadi shot Stethem in the head, and then disgracefully dumped his body onto the tarmac.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bOyGTBoOs>

<sup>54</sup> [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-08-18/news/mn-2149\\_1\\_charles-glass](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-08-18/news/mn-2149_1_charles-glass); <http://people.com/archive/newsman-charles-glass-relives-his-62-days-of-terror-as-a-hostage-in-beirut-vol-28-no-10/>; <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/18/world/a-beirut-hostage-is-reported-free.html>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZn6edxCw9U>; Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With a Vengeance*, p. 32-34

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/08/01/world/group-beirut-says-it-hanged-us-colonel-2d-threat-issued-bush-convenes-security.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/23/world/body-found-in-beirut-may-be-colonel-s.html>;

<http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/24/world/body-is-identified-as-abducted-us-marine-officer.html>

<sup>58</sup> Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb’Allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997). p.116-117; Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of the Party of God*, (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), p. 35-37.

<sup>59</sup> Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage*, p. 112-113

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/13/world/restaurant-blast-in-spain-kills-17-near-us-air-base.html>;

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/04/15/spain-names-islamic-jihad-in-bombing/2f18881b-a8b8-45ce-981a-da894e207a91/?utm\\_term=.2e7fc1db40a4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/04/15/spain-names-islamic-jihad-in-bombing/2f18881b-a8b8-45ce-981a-da894e207a91/?utm_term=.2e7fc1db40a4)

<sup>61</sup> [https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted\\_terrorists/mohammed-ali-hamadei](https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/mohammed-ali-hamadei)

<sup>62</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20161222174653/https://www2.fbi.gov/wanted/terrorists/terizaldin.htm>

<sup>63</sup> [https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted\\_terrorists/ali-atwa](https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/ali-atwa);

[https://web.archive.org/web/20051126120500/http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/wanted\\_captured/index.cfm?page=A\\_Atwa](https://web.archive.org/web/20051126120500/http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/english/wanted_captured/index.cfm?page=A_Atwa)

<sup>64</sup> Steven O’Hern, *Iran’s Revolutionary Guard: The Threat That Grows*, p. 63. (Lincoln: Potomac Books, 2012)

<sup>65</sup> Levitt, *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of the Party of God*, p. 54

## Section C. Phase II: Hezbollah Adapts (1990-2001)

Hezbollah had to contend with an altogether different reality during the 1990s. The 1989 Taif Agreement ended Lebanon's Civil War. It also installed Syria as the country's undisputed dominant power, by explicitly legitimizing the Syrian military occupation of Lebanon under the excuse of maintaining Lebanese stability and preventing the country from posing any threat to Syrian security. Headed by the shrewdly pragmatic Hafez al-Assad, Syria immediately set about eliminating all opposition to its absolute power over Lebanon. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union – Syria's patron – collapsed, leaving a unipolar American-dominated world order and Damascus seeking a new benefactor and improved relations with the West, particularly after the First Gulf War.

Hezbollah sought to avoid Assad's wrath, lest it meet the fate of other Lebanese militias and foes of Syria. Damascus had already violently suppressed the group during the 1980s for harming Syrian interests, and would do so again without hesitation if Hezbollah hindered its budding relations with America. Hiding behind aliases and pseudonyms would not suffice when it came to Syria. Hezbollah therefore halted its attacks against Americans in Lebanon in 1991. Instead, it scrupulously confined its overt military operations during the 1990s to attacking Israel, which was activity tolerated by Assad because it gave him leverage over the Jewish state.<sup>66</sup>

Though Hezbollah continued to monitor American personnel in Lebanon and maintained its ability to target them, it opted to continue its war against America via other means.<sup>67</sup> It shifted the weight of the confrontation abroad, while still taking care to minimize the scope and exposure of its international terrorist attacks.<sup>68</sup>

During the mid-to late-1990s, Hezbollah used Palestinian students in Russia to collect intelligence on American targets.<sup>69</sup> In Europe, in 1994, Germany issued a warning regarding the possible entry of a Hezbollah group sent by Imad Mughniyeh to attack American targets.<sup>70</sup> In Southeast Asia, Hezbollah recruited locals to bomb American Naval vessels in Singapore, training them to ram small boats packed with explosives into the ships – much like the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in 2000.<sup>71</sup> In 1997, Hezbollah operatives were arrested while gathering intelligence on the American embassy in Nicosia, Cyprus, and two years later, a Hezbollah network in Southeast Asia was tasked again with collecting intelligence on the American embassy and diplomats in Jakarta, Indonesia.<sup>72</sup> A year later, Southeast Asian authorities

<sup>66</sup> Harik, p. 194-195

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=81>, p. 57; <http://www.hri.org/docs/USSD-Terror/95/statespon.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1996Report/middle.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1997Report/mideast.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1998Report/mideast.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1999report/patterns.pdf#page=51>; <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2000/2438.htm>

<sup>68</sup> Azani, p. 202

<sup>69</sup> Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah: A Case Study of Global Reach," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, September 8, 2003 ([https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/ACLURM001616.pdf#page=5](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/ACLURM001616.pdf#page=5)).

<sup>70</sup> Levitt, p. 215.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5220183>; <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw02/020609a2.htm>; <http://www.singapore-window.org/sw02/020610af.htm>

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah: A Case Study of Global Reach," *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, September 8, 2003 ([https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field\\_document/ACLURM001616.pdf#page=5](https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/ACLURM001616.pdf#page=5)); Levitt, *Hezbollah*, p. 134

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suspected Hezbollah was plotting to bomb American embassies in Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Makati City in the Philippines.<sup>73</sup>

Hezbollah also began developing its American-based networks during this decade, training them to raise funds through both legal and illicit means, conduct counterintelligence on the Lebanese-American community, and give the group a “homeland option,” but only if an absolute need arose for it to carry out an attack on American soil.<sup>74</sup> Hezbollah established a network in America by the early 1990s, with cells in New York, Boston, Los Angeles, Detroit, and elsewhere. In late 1993, aided by one of these cells, Hezbollah plotted to assassinate then-National Security Advisor Anthony Lake, requiring his removal to multiple safe houses before the threat to his life abated in 1996.<sup>75</sup> According to a 1994 FBI assessment on the New York cells, many of its members had paramilitary training, including in explosives and firearms usage, reported back to the party’s leadership in Beirut, and were conducting counterintelligence on Lebanese-American law enforcement informants. The FBI didn’t think these operatives were planning to imminently carry out an attack within America, but should the need arise, “Hezbollah [had] the infrastructure present to support or carry out a terrorist attack.”<sup>76</sup> Many of these American-based cells also made contact with Hezbollah operatives in Latin America.<sup>77</sup>

Hezbollah also continued its attacks on American interests globally, but indirectly through other terrorist groups. It was during this decade that Hezbollah also began developing ties with terrorist organizations outside of Lebanon. Hezbollah cooperated with and trained Sunni Islamist organizations – including Hamas, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and Al-Qaeda (AQ) – to attack foes in its stead, allowing the group to evade responsibility and retaliation.<sup>78</sup> Hezbollah cemented its relationship with Hamas when Israel expelled 400 of its militants to Lebanon, where they honed their military skills in what they called, “Hezbollah University.” When many returned home, they created an additional network Hezbollah could – and did – activate to cripple American peace initiatives, whose success would have threatened its existence by reorienting Syria’s foreign policy.<sup>79</sup> This was in addition to Hezbollah’s preexisting relationship with Yasser Arafat’s Fatah, dating back to the early 1980s, when Imad Mughniyeh served as Arafat’s personal bodyguard and the Iranian regime’s early friendship with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>80</sup> By establishing contact with these groups, Hezbollah could harm America indirectly, without incurring any retaliation.

Hezbollah’s relationship with Al-Qaeda is perhaps its most significant. The two groups began cooperating in 1993, when Sudan-based Al-Qaeda operatives visited a Hezbollah training camp in the Beqaa Valley. There, they received explosives, intelligence, and security training, and left impressed –

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<sup>73</sup> Levitt, p. 135

<sup>74</sup> <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1999report/patterns.pdf#page=15>; <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=81>, p. 57; <http://www.hri.org/docs/USSD-Terror/95/statespon.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1996Report/middle.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1997Report/mideast.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1998Report/mideast.html>; <https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/1999report/patterns.pdf#page=51>; <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2000/2438.htm>

<sup>75</sup> Benjamin, Simon. *Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 244.

<sup>76</sup> Levitt, p. 150

<sup>77</sup> Levitt, p. 150-152

<sup>78</sup> <https://cryptome.org/usa-v-mohamed.htm>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/18/world/israel-expels-400-occupied-lands-lebanese-deploy-bar-entry-palestinians.html?pagewanted=all>; Norton, p. 82; <https://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0922/p01s04-wome.html>; Hamzeh, p.69

<sup>80</sup> Harik, p. 170-171; Kai Bird, p. 278; <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-karine-a-affair-a-strategic-watershed-in-the-middle-east>

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particularly with the Party of God's method of blowing up buildings – taking instructional video tapes with them.<sup>81</sup> Eventually, a meeting was arranged in Sudan between Osama Bin Laden and Hezbollah's military commander Imad Mughniyeh – most likely in late March or early April 1995<sup>82</sup> – and Mughniyeh promised to train Al-Qaeda's fighters in exchange for weapons.<sup>83</sup> Bin Laden was reportedly impressed by Mughniyeh's track record, the latter having orchestrated the bombings of the American embassy and the Marine Barracks in Beirut, which led to the American troop withdrawal from Lebanon. These Hezbollah attacks convinced Bin Laden of the efficacy of suicide bombing – at the time not a practice used by Sunni Islamists or even other Arab terror groups<sup>84</sup> – and that, for all its might, America had no appetite for conflict.<sup>85</sup> From that point on, Mughniyeh also became Al-Qaeda's link to Iran, and Tehran used Hezbollah to provide Al-Qaeda with explosives and training.<sup>86</sup>

Hezbollah facilitated some of Al-Qaeda's deadliest attacks against Americans during the 1990s. The first attack was the June 25, 1996 Khobar Towers bombings in Saudi Arabia, which killed 20 American airmen and a Saudi local. The CIA allegedly held Mughniyeh ultimately responsible for the attack but there is information to suggest the bombing was a joint operation by Al-Qaeda and Saudi Hezbollah – a local branch of Hezbollah trained by its Lebanon-based counterpart.<sup>87</sup> The Sunni militants used expertise learned from Hezbollah, after Bin Laden dispatched his agent Ali Mohammad to receive explosives training from the group shortly after his 1995 meeting with Mughniyeh.<sup>88</sup> When Al-Qaeda, along with Egyptian Islamic Jihad, struck again in 1998 – bombing American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania, killing 224 people, including 12 Americans – they again employed the training Hezbollah had provided beginning in 1993.<sup>89</sup>

In October 2000, a senior Hezbollah operative – likely Mughniyeh – visited Saudi Arabia, planning to assist Al-Qaeda operatives there with travel to Iran in November (that same month, two of the future 9/11 hijackers traveled to Beirut).<sup>90</sup> Then, on October 12, Al-Qaeda bombed the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen, killing 12 Americans, using a cone-shaped charge explosive and a moldable high-explosive – Hezbollah's trademark bomb used against Israeli forces in south Lebanon that would later be introduced to Iraqi Shiite militants.<sup>91</sup> However, it remains unclear whether Hezbollah built the bomb itself, or Al-Qaeda had merely used the expertise learned from the Shiite group to do so.

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<sup>81</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Authorized Edition, 2004), p. 240 (<https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf#page=257>)

<sup>82</sup> Bird, p. 339.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Benjamin, Steven Simon. *The Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 127-128.; <https://cryptome.org/usa-v-mohamed.htm>; Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, p. 173

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, p. 186; Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, p. 331.

<sup>85</sup> Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 173

<sup>86</sup> Ronen Bergman, *The Secret War with Iran: The 30-Year Clandestine Struggle Against the World's Most Dangerous Terrorist Power*, p. 223-224. New York: Free Press, 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Freedman, *Choice of Enemies*, p. 304-305, 363

<sup>88</sup> Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, p. 330, 339; *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Authorized Edition, 2004), p. 60 (<https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf#page=77>)

<sup>89</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Authorized Edition, 2004), p. 68 (<https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf#page=85>)

<sup>90</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Authorized Edition, 2004), p. 240 (<https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf#page=257>)

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.upi.com/Archives/2001/05/20/USS-Cole-update-Hezbollah-built-bomb/3089990331200/>

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## Section D. Phase III: Burying America in Iraq and Wrestling Over Lebanon (2001-2011)

The September 11, 2001 attacks again forced Hezbollah to change tactics, responding to the American “War on Terror” with a mixture of its now-signature pragmatism and militancy. Fearful of being caught alongside Al-Qaeda in America’s crosshairs, Hezbollah reduced the exposure of its involvement in planned or executed attacks on Americans and stressed that it would only act in self-defense.<sup>92</sup> Like its Iranian patron, Hezbollah also distanced itself from Al-Qaeda and denied their previous relationship. Hezbollah also actively tried to distinguish itself from the Sunni militant group as the “good Islamists,” a narrative it maintains today.<sup>93</sup> It even issued a condemnation of the 9/11 attacks – in reality, a call for vigilance against America exploiting the terror attacks to its advantage, coupled with a half-hearted expression of sorrow over the loss of innocent American lives.<sup>94</sup> Hezbollah, however, did not change its ideology and claimed America was using “terrorism” as an excuse to spread its hegemony, leading it to demonize “national resistance” groups like the Party of God.<sup>95</sup>

While Hezbollah was eager to distance itself from its silent Sunni partner –Al-Qaeda – it doubled down in its support for its fellow Shiite brethren in Iraq and internationally. Developments at home – namely the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and war with Israel – would also prove to be a game changer in Hezbollah’s political fortunes.

### 1. Iraq

Even this limited moderation by Hezbollah was superficial. The group remained committed to its anti-Americanism and continued seeking out opportunities to harm American interests. It found such an opening when America decided to invade Iraq.

To Hezbollah, the 2003 American invasion was a threat, but also an opportunity. America’s troops, on the warpath against terrorists and their sponsors alike, were now deployed on two of Iran’s borders and to Syria’s southeast, placing Hezbollah’s two patrons in danger. However, it also put American forces within reach of Hezbollah, and the group turned the threat into an opportunity to target America with impunity. Several statements from the group’s leadership in the months and weeks preceding the invasion indicated Hezbollah may have started planning to sink America into the Iraqi quagmire soon after America announced its intentions to invade.

In an October 22, 2002 speech – a little more than a month after President George W. Bush formally announced the need to take action against Iraq<sup>96</sup> – Nasrallah “predicted” the American invasion of Iraq would embroil it in an asymmetrical war and insurgency, and mark the “beginning...of the end of the United States’ control over the world.”<sup>97</sup> Again, a week before the invasion, Nasrallah promised the

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<sup>92</sup> Hamzeh, p. 137

<sup>93</sup> Hamzeh, p. 137

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.mediarelations-lb.org/article.php?id=174&cid=74#.WpXB1BPwbOO>

<sup>95</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Identity Construction*, p. 85, 170.

<sup>96</sup> <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>

<sup>97</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20171023161134/https://audio.mogawama.org/details.php?cid=1&linkid=189> Audio Link: <http://www.mediaspecial.org/sound/mediasave.php?filename=/hassan/real/2002/almahdi22102002.rm> (41:58-43:55)

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“peoples of the region” would greet the invading American forces not with “roses, jasmine, rice, and fragrances, [but] with rifles, blood, weapons, martyrdom, and martyrdom-seeking operations.”<sup>98</sup>

In fact, only advanced planning can explain the speed of Hezbollah’s efficient entry into Iraq. It formed and deployed Unit 3800 to the country on the coattails of the invading American forces and immediately began organizing, training, and equipping Iraqi Shiite militias to carry out assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings on its behalf. It provided these groups with free and generous aid from the outset, including weapons and funds, and dispatched its top military commanders, including Mustafa Badreddine and Imad Mughniyeh, to train the Iraqis and organize them into “Special Groups” – including Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army – to confront American forces. Hezbollah also indoctrinated these groups with its Iranian-inspired ideology, giving itself and Tehran a permanent foothold in Iraq.

The key figure in Hezbollah’s efforts in Iraq was Ali Musa Daqdouq, the commander of Unit 3800’s predecessor, Unit 2800, which was responsible for spearheading special Hezbollah operations regionally. Dadqouq traveled to Iran in May 2006 to coordinate the Special Groups’ training program with the IRGC-Quds Force – the Guards’ external operations arm – and made periodic visits to Iraq. He trained them in carrying out various operations – including using mortars, rockets, and snipers, and to execute kidnappings and gather intelligence. Most importantly, they were taught how to use explosively formed penetrators (EFPs). These explosives, which Hezbollah had used to bedevil Israeli forces in south Lebanon, would become the primary killer of American troops in Iraq from 2003-2011.<sup>99</sup> Hezbollah’s tutelage also directly enabled one of these groups – Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq – to carry out the January 2007 attack on the Karbala Joint Provincial Coordination Center, kidnapping five American soldiers, and later executing them.<sup>100</sup>

## 2. Continued International Terrorism Against America

Though Hezbollah reduced its international terror signature, it didn’t entirely abandon its attempts or readiness to target American assets abroad. In 2007, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence assessed that Hezbollah would likely consider attacking the American homeland “over the next three years,” if it perceived America as directly posing a threat to Iran or the group.<sup>101</sup> In 2009, Azerbaijan sentenced two Lebanese citizens – Ali Karaki and Ali Najdmeddin – to 15 years in prison for preparing to attack the American and Israeli embassies in Baku. During questioning, the duo confessed that they were in the final stages of preparing the attack, intended to avenge Imad Mughniyeh’s assassination.<sup>102</sup>

## 3. The Cedar Revolution and War with Israel

Hezbollah also found itself under American pressure at home. The February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and suspicions of Syria’s involvement in the murder, led to an outpouring of nationalist sentiment calling for the end of Syria’s 35-year military occupation of Lebanon. This process became known as the Cedar Revolution.

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<sup>98</sup> Hassan Nasrallah, “Ashoura Speech: Speech of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on the Tenth Day of Muharram,” *Hezbollah’s Media Relations*, March 13, 2003 (<https://www.mediarelations-lb.org/article.php?id=2284&cid=124#.WnHrCZM-fOQ>)

<sup>99</sup> David Daoud, “PMF Deputy Commander Muhandis Details Hezbollah Ops in Iraq,” *Long War Journal*, January 9, 2017 (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/pmf-deputy-commander-muhandis-details-hezbollah-ops-in-iraq.php>).

<sup>100</sup> David Daoud, “Hezbollah Fighters Train Iraqi Shiite Militants Near Mosul,” *Long War Journal*, November 6, 2016.

(<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/11/hezbollah-fighters-train-iraqi-shiite-militants-near-mosul.php>)

<sup>101</sup> <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb270/18.pdf>

<sup>102</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/may/30/world/fg-shadow30>; [https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-37\\_85792,00.html](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-37_85792,00.html)

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Syrian troops finally withdrew from Lebanese territory in April 2005, leaving Hezbollah vulnerable and exposed to its political opponents and in the cross-hairs of nationalist Lebanese anger for supporting the Assad regime, which was suspected of orchestrating Hariri's murder.

## *March 14 Political Gains*

Coupled with American-sponsored efforts like the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003 (SALSRA) and UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calling on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon and on Hezbollah to disarm, the Iranian proxy group was on the defensive. The pressure intensified as the new pro-Western coalition, the March 14 Alliance, won a parliamentary majority in late May in Lebanon's first parliamentary elections after the Syrian withdrawal, and formed a national unity cabinet under Fouad Siniora a month later.

In December, the Siniora government further cornered the group by requesting international assistance in investigating Rafic Hariri's assassination. Already on the defensive, Hezbollah now had to worry that its involvement in murdering the late prime minister would be exposed. The Siniora government's request culminated in the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1664 on March 29, 2006, establishing an international tribunal to investigate Hariri's murder.<sup>103</sup>

At the same time, the Siniora government was engaged in two other American-backed efforts which posed a threat to Hezbollah. The first was laying the groundwork for the so-called "Beirut-1" conference, to secure international financial aid to help Lebanon pay off its debts. This could have enabled the Lebanese state to begin acting as a credible provider for its citizens, threatening to siphon away much of Hezbollah's popular support. The second effort would have seen America mediate the dispute between Lebanon and Israel over the Shebaa Farms, with America seemingly leaning in Beirut's favor on the issue. Had America succeeded in resolving the dispute, Hezbollah would have lost its last excuse to bear arms. Furthermore, securing an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory via diplomatic means undercut Hezbollah's entire "resistance" narrative, that Lebanon could only be liberated from Israel by force of arms. Either way, the Party of God would have found itself superfluous.<sup>104</sup>

Hezbollah fought back, with both violence and political maneuvering. But rather than confront America head-on, the Shiite organization took on America's Lebanese allies, once again opting for a more circuitous approach that would achieve the group's ends, but without incurring an American response. It exploited political disagreements in the March 14 camp to woo the opportunist Michel Aoun and his Free Patriotic Movement over to its side, enabling it to obstruct the government at almost every turn. A string of assassinations also targeted March 14 officials and other Lebanese security officials involved in the investigation of Rafic Hariri's murder.

## *Contretemps with Israel*

The penultimate blow to American efforts in Lebanon came, however, from the unlikeliest of actors: Israel. On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah launched a bombardment of northern Israel as a cover for the kidnapping of two IDF soldiers. The cross-border raid resulted in a 34-day war between Israel and

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<sup>103</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1664\(2006\); https://www.stl-tsl.org/en/about-the-stl/636-creation-of-the-stl](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1664(2006); https://www.stl-tsl.org/en/about-the-stl/636-creation-of-the-stl)

<sup>104</sup> <http://almustaqbal.com/article/173335/>

Hezbollah that ended in a stalemate, but left Lebanon devastated in its wake.<sup>105</sup> Several reasons have been given for Hezbollah’s decision to carry out the precipitous attack. The group itself claimed that it was to secure the release of Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails, including Samir Quntar. Others see an attempt to distract international attention from Iran’s nuclear program. However, one overlooked reason may have been the domestic situation in Lebanon itself. Hezbollah may have launched the war to pit American commitments to a March 14-led Lebanon and to Israel against one another, thus demoralizing Hezbollah’s Lebanese opponents when America ultimately sided with Jerusalem.

It is plausible that Hezbollah essentially used the IDF to weaken the country on its behalf. The group provoked Israel into war at a particularly sensitive time in Lebanese politics, when there was disagreement on virtually all issues, including how to go about economic recovery.<sup>106</sup> Lebanon had just begun economic recovery, and was preparing for the “Beirut-1” conference – to secure international financial aid to help Lebanon pay off its debts – which had been delayed several times for political reasons, including by Hezbollah allies.<sup>107</sup> America had signaled its backing and readiness to participate in the conference.<sup>108</sup> At the end of the war, however, Lebanon was devastated and its economic recovery and development were set back 15 years, mooting the “Beirut-1” conference.<sup>109</sup> Hezbollah and its allies continued to obstruct Lebanon’s political recovery, opposing the “Paris-3” successor conference to “Beirut-1”<sup>110</sup>

The Israeli campaign’s failure shattered America’s vision of the war in Lebanon heralding the beginning of a more democratic Middle East. Hezbollah, while battered, reemerged to rearm and continued threatening American regional interests and allies. The war also torpedoed any American effort to resolve Lebanese-Israeli territorial disputes via diplomacy, thus reinforcing Hezbollah’s narrative that only “resistance” – and specifically its brand of resistance – could liberate Lebanese lands.<sup>111</sup>

### *The Scrambling of Lebanese Politics*

After the war, Hezbollah continued forward, and its actions drove home the message that America would not aid Lebanon or its pro-Western allies, no matter how far the group went. The pressure continued with a sit-in beginning in December 2006, aimed at toppling the American-backed Siniora government and forming a national unity government that would give Hezbollah and its political allies control over Beirut’s decision-making. It culminated in an armed putsch in Beirut in May of 2008 when the Siniora government fired Beirut International Airport’s pro-Hezbollah security chief and moved to shut down the group’s telecommunications network. The result was a capitulation of the country’s pro-

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.fuadsiniora.com/politicalresistance>

<sup>106</sup> <http://almustaqbal.com/article/187691/>

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.spa.gov.sa/374170>; <http://almustaqbal.com/article/185845/>; <http://almustaqbal.com/article/177965/>;  
<http://almustaqbal.com/article/183587/>; <http://almustaqbal.com/article/179483/>; <http://almustaqbal.com/article/173507/>;  
<http://almustaqbal.com/article/170574/>;

<http://almustaqbal.com/article/177303/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%82-%D9%84%D9%83%D9%86%D9%86%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9%86-%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%87%D8%A7-%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7>

<sup>108</sup> <http://almustaqbal.com/article/174816/>; <http://almustaqbal.com/article/174258/>

<sup>109</sup> <http://almustaqbal.com/article/186953/>

<sup>110</sup> <https://www.okaz.com.sa/article/76167/?page=1>

<sup>111</sup> <http://almustaqbal.com/article/173335/>

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Western forces to Hezbollah's demand with the Doha Agreement of May 21, 2008. All the while, America gave its Lebanese allies little more than words of encouragement.

Three years later, Hezbollah again undercut Lebanon's American-backed political forces, this time from within the government. On January 12, 2011, in a move calculated to humiliate Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the group spearheaded the collapse of his national unity government over the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigation into his father Rafic's murder while he was in the midst of a meeting with President Barack Obama.

## Section E. Phase IV: The Arab Spring, ISIS, and the JCPOA (2011-present)

The chaos of the Arab Spring initially provided Hezbollah with a much-needed respite. The world's attention was focused on the upheavals and political changes sweeping the Sunni world, with less attention being paid to the group and its patron Iran. That was particularly so with America, which under President Barack Obama's administration had decided to disengage from the Bush administration's Middle Eastern entanglements and conduct outreach to foes, including Tehran.

Initially, Hezbollah vocally backed the sweeping popular call for change and the downfall of the Arab world's autocratic regimes. It particularly voiced support for the removal of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, one of America's closest allies in the region and the leader of the one Arab nation with sufficient cultural, political, and military power to challenge Iran, or at least keep it at bay. However, it wasn't until the upheaval reached the seat of its sponsor in Damascus that Hezbollah made an about-face. The collapse of the Assad regime in Syria posed an existential threat for Hezbollah and threatened Iran's regional strategic interests, and therefore saving the regime took precedence over all of its other activities, including its war with America.<sup>112</sup>

The group again turned a threat into an opportunity, exploiting the Syrian Civil War and the rise of extremist Sunni-inspired terrorist groups to effectively conquer Syria, just as Iran was doing in Iraq via its other proxies. While during this period Hezbollah deprioritized its anti-American activities – busy as it was effectively fighting for its existence in Syria – it still found ways to undercut America. It accused America and its regional allies of creating, equipping, and propping up ISIS. True to its propaganda that America is the source of any and all dangers to Hezbollah, the group framed any American diplomatic or military intervention in the region – particularly against Assad or Iran – as a cover for supporting the so-called Islamic State.<sup>113</sup> By the same token, it painted all factions in the Syrian Civil War opposed to Assad as “takfiri,” terrorists no different from ISIS or the Nusra Front, an Al-Qaeda offshoot.

Meanwhile, the group continued posing as the “good Islamists,” finding common-cause with the West in fighting the peril of ISIS, even as it accused America of propping up the extremist group. This served, again, to keep Hezbollah (and Iran's other clones) outside of the international dragnet to “degrade and defeat” Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's self-described Caliphate. At the same time, Hezbollah proceeded to undercut America's regional interests and allies. It continued its rearmament and preparations for a future war with Israel, and backed the Iranian supported Houthi rebels in Yemen to squeeze Saudi

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<sup>112</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/trump-anti-isis-campaign-spare-assad-will-only-empower-hezbollah-528559>

<sup>113</sup> Qassem, p. 438

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Arabia and seize the strategic Bab al-Mandeb strait. It also tightened its grip on Lebanon, by weakening its pro-Western foes and forcing them into one concession after the next, including by having its preferred candidate serve as president and inserting support for its resistance activities in the new Hariri government's policy statement.<sup>114</sup>

## Section F. Hezbollah's Ongoing Soft War

Throughout its 36-year existence, Hezbollah has altered the form of its confrontation with America to suit the demands of the moment. However, one constant throughout these almost-four decades has been the "soft war" waged by the group against America as part of employing all means to combat alleged hegemony. The "soft war" goal is multifold: dissuade Lebanese Shiites from living in America; increase their suspicion of any American initiative for Lebanon or the region; and prevent them from taking any form of American aid.

Hezbollah's "soft war" tools span the spectrum of activities. Per its own admission, the group "raises its youth to be hostile to America"<sup>115</sup> through its schools, scouts, and youth programs.<sup>116</sup> Its Cultural Committee mobilizes Hezbollah-affiliated professionals to resist American educational and cultural influences.<sup>117</sup> The group also uses music to stir up anti-American sentiment among Lebanese Shiites. It has produced several anti-American *anasheed* (religiopolitical songs set to martial tunes), including "Allahu Akbar, America is the Greatest Satan," – encouraging anti-American resistance as "path of the free [peoples]," and defeating America "with death"<sup>118</sup> – and "America, We Only Fear the Lord of Lords" – describing America as a "force for injustice, an army of occupying invaders," and calling it the "mother and symbol" for terrorists. The video additionally describes America as "the land of holocausts, not [pleasant] fragrances or flowers," and a usurper whose land is filled not with "parks, but fire, death, and graves."<sup>119</sup> The song is overlaid onto a video of alleged American atrocities across the world – including Vietnam – and of Israeli attacks as well.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/hezbollah-won-lebanese-presidency-520317>; <http://www.newsweek.com/hezbollahs-latest-conquest-lebanons-cabinet-541487>

<sup>115</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion*, p.88, quoting *Al-'Ahd*, 10 Safar 1406.

<sup>116</sup> Levitt, p. 160

<sup>117</sup> Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, p.67

<sup>118</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcXfCNwobPw>

<sup>119</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6pE5dRzhyE>

<sup>120</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6pE5dRzhyE>



## Part III. America Responds: The History, the Mistakes, and the Successes

### Section A. Pre-9/11

#### 1. Ronald Reagan (1981 – 1989)

America first confronted Hezbollah during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. The first deployment of forces to Lebanon came after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. American forces arrived in the country to oversee the withdrawal of Yasser Arafat and his Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to Tunisia, and departed shortly thereafter. However, soon after, the Lebanese government formally requested that America return, after the assassination of President-Elect Bachir Gemayel, Israel’s violent invasion of West Beirut, and the massacre at the Sabra-Chatila Palestinian refugee camp by Gemayel’s loyalists.

America complied, sending a small contingent of 1,200 lightly-armed Marines, as part of a multinational peacekeeping force meant to oversee the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, and the restoration of its complete territorial sovereignty. However, America re-entered the Lebanese fray ill-equipped to deal with the country’s complex problems. Hezbollah fully exploited this dynamic to carry out its string of attacks against American personnel and assets, suffering virtually no consequences.

Several factors contributed to giving Hezbollah the upper hand. America deployed its forces to Lebanon with little understanding of the country’s political and social divisions. Nor were American forces in Lebanon equipped or trained to achieve victory in their mission. Particularly between 1984 and 1987, a critical moment in Hezbollah’s rise, America felt itself “confused” about Lebanon, and placed the country low on its list of priorities.<sup>132</sup> Hezbollah and Iran exploited this American confusion to make headway against its interests in Lebanon, carrying out several hard-hitting attacks against American assets during the early 1980s.<sup>133</sup>

America did not even begin to attempt to push back against Hezbollah until the *second half* of the 1980s – partially by pressuring Iran and Syria to cut off its funding, and partially by retaliating militarily.<sup>134</sup> However, a lack of intelligence made America’s military responses largely ineffective or counterproductive. Also, by the time Hezbollah announced its existence with the Open Letter on February 16, 1985, the group had already inflicted a string of political and military defeats on America. Finally, America failed to understand and counter Syria’s influence in Lebanon and its use of Hezbollah to foil American interests in the country, albeit on a low-key level.

#### *Misreading Lebanon: America as the Enemy of Islam and the Shiites*

The American deployment was an effort to prop up an ally it thought in good faith to be the legitimate government of Lebanon.<sup>135</sup> However, the new Lebanese President Amine Gemayel – Bachir’s older

<sup>132</sup> Elie A. Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon*, p. 242-243 (New York: I.B. Taurus Publishers, 1995).

<sup>133</sup> Salem, p. 242.

<sup>134</sup> Azani, p. 202

<sup>135</sup> Jaber, p. 79

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brother and successor – was less a consensus president and more a sectarian warlord with little legitimacy beyond his followers. By backing him, America appeared to be siding with Gemayel's Maronite Christians against the Muslims in Lebanon's Civil War.<sup>136</sup> Continued missteps only reinforced this view. Though the Marines were initially ordered to be strictly neutral, over time they ended up deepening this impression by increasing support for the government and its forces. Hezbollah exploited this haphazard deployment into Lebanon and ignorance of the country's intricate sectarian patchwork and the complexities of the Civil War to paint America as a self-interested enemy of Lebanon's Muslims.

Beginning in November 1982, the Marines' mandate was extended to provide non-combat support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), including providing weapons and training. By February 1983, they were engaging in joint patrols and checkpoints, which sometimes forced the Americans into direct armed conflict with other groups and militias – like Walid Jumblatt's Druze Progressive Socialist Party – in order to support Gemayel's LAF.<sup>137</sup> Exacerbating matters, Gemayel's loyalists – the Phalangists – were murdering Muslims in areas of Beirut under the nominal control of American Marines, a fact which Hezbollah would exploit to claim America was ultimately responsible for “encourag[ing] the Phalangists' crimes.”<sup>138</sup>

Beirut's Shiites – including Imad Mughniyeh – who had suffered from the Christian militia attacks were receptive to this message, blaming America for their difficulties.<sup>139</sup> A clear lack of daylight between American and Israeli positions also opened America to charges of complicity with the IDF and its actions, a charge exacerbated by American pressure on Gemayel's Lebanon to sign the May 17, 1983 peace agreement with Israel. At the time, few Lebanese had any appetite for a peace agreement with the Israelis, particularly one which did not call for Israel's full withdrawal from Lebanon. Syria exploited this to dig in its position, and Hezbollah pounced on the opportunity to present the Americans – particularly to the Shiites – as serving Israel's interests at the expense of Lebanon's.

Though American forces tried to restrain the worst excesses of their allies – including the Israelis and their Phalangist proxies – this was *ad hoc* and hopelessly divorced from an overall policy. Its effectiveness was therefore limited, and often the Marines had little choice to but stand by even as they were subjected to stray fire from the IDF or intentional abuses from Israeli soldiers.<sup>140</sup>

### *Mission Impossible: Victory Was Not an Objective*

The Marines' deployment had an inherent weakness from the outset: they would be immediately withdrawn if attacked.<sup>141</sup> Hezbollah realized this, and exploited it. The group was not killing Americans for the sake of it, but calculated correctly that America could be prompted to act in a certain way if the costs of its policies became too high. Hezbollah wanted America out of Lebanon, as a preliminary step towards forcing an American global retreat.

American forces were also sent into a war for which they were unprepared, according to a Department of Defense (DoD) Commission convened in December 1983. The Commission stated that America's

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<sup>136</sup> Robert O. Freedman, *The Middle East After the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, p. 79; Jaber, p. 79

<sup>137</sup> Robert O. Freedman, *The Middle East After the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, p. 304-306

<sup>138</sup> Qasir, p. 150; Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, p. 287;

<sup>139</sup> Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, p. 287

<sup>140</sup> Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, 295-296; <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/02/03/world/a-marine-pistol-drawn-stops-3-israeli-tanks.html>

<sup>141</sup> <https://fas.org/jrp/threat/beirut-1983.pdf#page=48>

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armed forces overall were ill-equipped to fight a counter-terror war, and the Marine contingent in Lebanon was “not trained, organized, or supported to deal effectively with the terrorist threat.” It recommended the “development” – indicating its near absence at the time – of counterterrorism “doctrine, planning, organization, force structure, education, and training necessary.”<sup>142</sup> But by this time, Hezbollah had already carried out several attacks against American targets in Lebanon, and it took an additional 11 months for Secretary Caspar Weinberger’s Defense Department to even begin correcting “some of the deficiencies.”<sup>143</sup> DoD, in the end, only accepted some of the recommendations on enhancing counterintelligence by the investigative team sent to Beirut in 1983.

Infighting between Weinberger and Secretary of State George Schultz also hindered a concerted American response to Hezbollah. The defense secretary, wary of a repeat of the botched 1979 attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran, objected to using force in Lebanon without clearly defined goals and objectives. He therefore rejected retaliation that was not part of a clear and inclusive government policy. Schultz, by contrast, wanted to respond wherever preliminary counterintelligence indicated a threat to American assets existed.<sup>144</sup>

### *Bad Intelligence: America Couldn’t Hit Back Effectively*

Hezbollah’s April 1983 attack on the American embassy in Beirut killed the CIA’s Station Chief Bob Ames and destroyed the Agency’s intelligence-gathering capability in Lebanon and throughout much of the Middle East.<sup>145</sup> Bachir Gemayel’s assassination on September 14, 1982 had already left the CIA reeling and scrambling to rebuild its intelligence assets, and now they were completely blind, crippling America’s ability to prevent or effectively retaliate against future Hezbollah attacks.<sup>146</sup>

A demonstrative case in point was the intelligence failure leading up to Hezbollah’s attack on the Beirut Marine Barracks on October 23, 1983. An intelligence build-up between August and October indicated that something would happen, but lacking the assets, the Americans couldn’t figure out what. On September 26, 1983, the National Security Agency (NSA) intercepted electronic messages from Iran’s Intelligence Ministry instructing their ambassador in Damascus to order Hussein al-Musawi – the head of Hezbollah’s Islamic Amal faction and Mughniyeh’s boss – “to take a spectacular action against the United States Marines.” Unfortunately, the message was not discovered until October 25, two days after the bombing of the Barracks.<sup>147</sup>

America attempted to respond, but – in the words of Secretary of State Schultz – was confused and “paralyzed by self-doubt,” in the immediate aftermath of the bombing.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, President Reagan deployed reinforcements to Lebanon and ordered retaliation. On December 4, 1983, U.S. jets bombed Syrian SAMs and Hezbollah positions around Beirut. Despite the damage, two American jets were downed, and an American navigator – Lt. Robert Goodman – was captured by Hezbollah, transferred to Syria, and then released weeks later.<sup>149</sup> The American show of force was largely

<sup>142</sup> <https://fas.org/irp/threat/beirut-1983.pdf>

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/05/world/us-military-tries-to-catch-up-in-fighting-terror.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>144</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/interviews/cowan.html>

<sup>145</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 453; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/31/2-slain-hostages-buried-as-heroes/952b0fb5-900e-48dd-b22e-f48c413e130c/?utm\\_term=.52d54d831647](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/31/2-slain-hostages-buried-as-heroes/952b0fb5-900e-48dd-b22e-f48c413e130c/?utm_term=.52d54d831647)

<sup>146</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 453

<sup>147</sup> Kai Bird, *The Good Spy*, p. 336-338

<sup>148</sup> Bird, p. 324

<sup>149</sup> Robert O. Freedman, *The Middle East After the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, p. 80

ineffective, and Hezbollah responded days later with the attacks on its assets in Kuwait. America again responded, on December 14, 1983, with the U.S.S. New Jersey shelling Hezbollah positions on the Lebanese coast. The New Jersey again targeted Hezbollah positions on February 8 and 26, 1984--this time in the Beqaa Valley. But that was the end of the response. Without accurate intelligence, the military action was of limited effectiveness.<sup>150</sup>

The Reagan administration was also helpless against Hezbollah's kidnapping campaign, with American intelligence at a loss regarding the hostages' whereabouts or how to rescue them. The CIA, for example, went to great lengths to rescue William Buckley, but lacked the necessary intelligence to carry out any of its rescue plans.<sup>151</sup>

In the end, desperation forced America to rely on other sources of dubious reliability. After Ames' death, they turned to the Israelis. America essentially lacked any independent ability to verify or reject the information received from Israel, and was forced to see Lebanon through its ally's lens, which had its own particular interests in Lebanon that differed markedly.<sup>152</sup> Another source of information was Manucher Ghorbanifar. The Israelis may have conveyed information in good faith, but Ghorbanifar was a swindler, and led America into the Iran-Contra scandal to retrieve its hostages from Hezbollah.<sup>153</sup> The arms-for-hostages deal backfired on the Reagan administration, turning American hostages in Lebanon into a valuable commodity that could be traded for arms, funds, or anything else Hezbollah – or its patron Iran – wanted.<sup>154</sup>

The lack of credible intelligence also allowed America to be used by certain Lebanese actors to settle their own internecine scores, like the March 8, 1985 Bir al-Abed bombing, which was planned by a rogue element within Lebanese military intelligence aiming to settle sectarian scores and killed dozens of Lebanese Shiite civilians.<sup>155</sup> Hezbollah exploited the incident to the fullest extent: After the bombing, Mughniyeh and other Hezbollah operatives hung a white sheet over the bomb site, proclaiming in black letters, "Made in America" and the botched attack continues to factor heavily in Hezbollah's anti-American propaganda.<sup>156</sup>

By February 14, 1984, public pressure had forced President Reagan to order a withdrawal of American troops from Lebanon.<sup>157</sup> Left in the decision's wake were hundreds of American casualties and dozens of hostages, a trail of failed military retaliations, and Lebanon's Shiites being angrier at America than

<sup>150</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 455

<sup>151</sup> Razoux, p. 278; Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 455; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/11/25/captive-cia-agents-death-galvanized-hostage-search/42ae59d0-b3f8-4684-bdb4-d65c55f8210a/?utm\\_term=.4329f28a06bf](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1986/11/25/captive-cia-agents-death-galvanized-hostage-search/42ae59d0-b3f8-4684-bdb4-d65c55f8210a/?utm_term=.4329f28a06bf); [http://articles.latimes.com/1986-11-25/news/mn-13168\\_1\\_hostage-crisis](http://articles.latimes.com/1986-11-25/news/mn-13168_1_hostage-crisis); <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/27/world/body-believed-to-be-cia-agent-and-hostage-is-found-in-lebanon.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/31/world/2-hostages-slain-in-beirut-are-buried-in-us.html>

<sup>152</sup> Kai Bird, p. 322

<sup>153</sup> Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes*, p. 453

<sup>154</sup> Razoux, p. 281; Wiener, *Enemies*, p. 360-362; Ross, p.212 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/28/buckleys-remains-identified/5b3bf0cc-41c2-4a1c-aa0b-27be8c3795d2/?utm\\_term=.32aacffbe3e5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/12/28/buckleys-remains-identified/5b3bf0cc-41c2-4a1c-aa0b-27be8c3795d2/?utm_term=.32aacffbe3e5); Norton, Hezbollah, p. 74

<sup>155</sup> Bird, p. 325-328; [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/05/12/anti-terrorist-plan-rescinded-after-unauthorized-bombing/bd2a869b-5b92-4efa-9f3c-740388e0b847/?utm\\_term=.e3170aa7d79e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/05/12/anti-terrorist-plan-rescinded-after-unauthorized-bombing/bd2a869b-5b92-4efa-9f3c-740388e0b847/?utm_term=.e3170aa7d79e); [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/06/23/cia-denies-part-in-bombing/49955967-2ce9-4b0b-bedc-540ba39f9026/?utm\\_term=.b96f83a6d06b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/06/23/cia-denies-part-in-bombing/49955967-2ce9-4b0b-bedc-540ba39f9026/?utm_term=.b96f83a6d06b)

<sup>156</sup> The Good Spy, p. 355; Azani, p. 208, quoting Reuters, March 13, 1988; Qassem, p. 183

<sup>157</sup> Boykin, *Cursed is the Peacemaker*, p. 311; David Daoud, "Hezbollah Since the 1983 Beirut Barracks Bombing: Adapted but Unchanged," *UANI Blog*, November 6, 2017. (<https://www.unitedagainstinucleariran.com/blog/hezbollah-since-1983-beirut-barracks-bombings-adapted-but-unrepentant>);

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before—precisely Hezbollah’s desired outcome. Hezbollah meanwhile was virtually unscathed. It had exploited America’s weaknesses, earning its first victory against the “Greatest Satan.”<sup>158</sup> The attacks and failure had a broader impact on the American psyche, influencing the level of American involvement in Lebanon (and the Middle East more broadly) from then on. For a while at least, it put an end to America’s more active policy, part of which was encouraging Arab-Israeli rapprochement, especially after the Egypt-Israel peace accords, and left America in a paralyzed, defensive position.<sup>159</sup> The only beneficiaries of this outcome were Iran and Hezbollah.<sup>160</sup>

## *The Syrian Spoiler*

America also failed to realize early on that Syria was the ultimate power-broker in Lebanon during the 1980s. It was only through Damascus’ graces that Iran was able to establish Hezbollah in the first place. Understanding this dynamic would have been particularly helpful during the times when America had leverage over the Assad regime, for example at the outset of the Israeli invasion in June 1982.<sup>161</sup>

However, the American withdrawal under fire cost its remaining leverage in Lebanon and the confidence of Lebanese allies. This vacuum left Syria unrivaled in its domination over Beirut which, in the long-term, benefited Hezbollah. Ever the realist, President Amine Gemayel immediately abrogated the American-brokered May 17, 1983 peace accord with Israel – one of Hezbollah’s stated goals – upon the Marines’ withdrawal. America thus left Lebanon with nothing to show for its efforts. The American-backed Gemayel then turned to Syria’s Hafez al-Assad in April 1984 for talks that, over the succeeding years, would lead to substantial accommodations to the reality that Damascus was the dominant power in Lebanon, and it alone could hold the country together.<sup>162</sup> After all, Syria had acquiesced to Hezbollah’s operations against the Americans and the Israelis, ultimately forcing both to withdraw from all or most of Lebanon. Assad’s army was also battering remaining PLO forces in Tripoli. Seeing that Syria held the ultimate reins, in part, was why Gemayel was trying to enlist Syria’s help in doing what America seemed incapable of: reining in Hezbollah.<sup>163</sup>

America acquiesced to this reality, hoping Damascus would play a constructive role, despite all of the disruption it had caused.<sup>164</sup> It thus applauded Syria’s reinvasion of Beirut on February 20, 1986, hoping Damascus would rein in Hezbollah.<sup>165</sup> This also placed Syria in the position to demand concessions from America, which viewed Damascus as central to regional peace and wanted to use Hafez al-Assad’s ambivalence towards Iran and his unease over Hezbollah’s growing power to pry Syria away from Tehran.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East*, p. 132-14; Judith Palmer-Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*, p.36-37; Pierre Razoux, *The Iran-Iraq War*, p. 277

<sup>159</sup> Azani, p. 207 <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/interviews/cowan.html>

<sup>160</sup> Azani, p. 208

<sup>161</sup> Elie Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon*, p. 136-137

<sup>162</sup> Robert O. Freedman, *The Middle East After the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, p. 305, 307; Elie A. Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon*, p. 233

<sup>163</sup> Salem, p. 217

<sup>164</sup> Robert O. Freedman, *The Middle East After the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, p. 80-81

<sup>165</sup> Salem, p. 233

<sup>166</sup> Salem, p. 243

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But the American-Syrian dialogue did not go as well as expected. During a September 11, 1987 meeting with American delegation, Assad disclaimed any responsibility over Iran's actions in Lebanon, saying it was a "sovereign country. My authority does not extend there."<sup>167</sup>

During the entire decade, America never took advantage of the nature of the Hezbollah-Syrian relationship. When Hezbollah emerged, Syria was ambivalent.<sup>168</sup> On the one hand, the group bridged Syria's relationship with Iran, allowing Damascus to keep pressure on Israel, America, and its Lebanese allies – like Amal. On the other hand, Syrian-Iranian relations were still rocky in the 1980s. Though Damascus shared Tehran's interest in thwarting American influence in Lebanon, Syria was highly suspicious of Iran and its protégé Hezbollah throughout the decade.<sup>169</sup> As the group's strength grew, Hafez al-Assad periodically moved to keep it in check – by killing its members and supporting its rival group, Amal.<sup>170</sup> Assad would have dismantled the group had its existence become an intolerable thorn in the side of Syrian interests. But given the American withdrawal from Lebanon and the aforementioned policy failures, America lacked meaningful leverage on the ground to exploit this power dynamic.

## 2. George H.W. Bush (1989 – 1993)

When George H.W. Bush took office, Hezbollah was still holding several American hostages and the Lebanese Civil War had yet to end. Much as America had tried to disconnect from the country, it still had interests there. However, America's missteps during the previous decade squandered any advantage it had in Lebanon, to either bring Hezbollah to heel or reassemble the country so Beirut could fulfill the task itself. It therefore begrudgingly turned to Syria to carry out these tasks.

Nevertheless, the influence America had lost in Lebanon was more than regained internationally, particularly with the collapse of the Soviet Union leaving America as the world's sole superpower, and regionally, by curbing Saddam Hussein. Moscow's fall from power left Damascus desperate for a new sponsor, but America failed to position itself as Syria's new patron the way it had done with Egypt after it made peace with Israel. America also failed to capitalize on the reality that it was benefiting Syria by reining in its Baathist rival in Iraq to extract any concessions on Lebanon.

### *The New World Order's Road to Beirut Runs Through Damascus*

The Bush administration's sense of powerlessness in Lebanon, and its concern over the fate of American hostages in that country, led it to seize upon the first opportunity to recreate a central Lebanese government as an interlocutor: the 1989 Taif Agreements. It even begrudgingly accepted Taif's establishment of Syria as Lebanon's new hegemon, in the hopes that Damascus would piece Lebanon back together, as a *quid pro quo* for its token participation in the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein.<sup>171</sup>

Syria, however, felt no reason to serve American interests. Without America offering enough carrot and threatening enough stick, Syria simply set about transforming Lebanon's key institutions to its own liking. This included remolding the LAF into an impenetrably pro-Syrian institution and downgrading its mission from national security to a low-intensity internal security role that fit Syria's foreign policy

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<sup>167</sup> Deeb, Marius, *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*, p. 140 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

<sup>168</sup> Hamzeh, p. 102

<sup>169</sup> Norton, Hezbollah, p. 35, 73

<sup>170</sup> Norton, p. 73; Jaber, p. 32-33

<sup>171</sup> Azani, p. 207-209; Jaber, p. 73; Robert O. Freedman, *The Middle East After the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, p.81; <http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/15718069720847889>

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priorities. In contrast to America, Hezbollah knew how to adapt to the new situation.<sup>172</sup> It couldn't threaten Syria or its hegemony, and instead made itself an indispensable asset to the Assad regime by becoming its leverage against Israel to regain the Golan Heights. Thus, Syria allowed the group to retain its arms and forced it to the forefront of taking over the role of Lebanese national security. In the long-term, this robbed the LAF of building up national security credentials or experience – ceding that role to Hezbollah – and by the time Syria finally withdrew from Lebanon, the LAF (and by extension, America) was at a decided disadvantage vis-à-vis Hezbollah.<sup>173</sup>

## *Madrid's Failed Middle East Peace*

America used the momentum gained from the Gulf War to convene a regional peace conference between October 30 and November 1, 1991. The conference included two separate tracks aimed at Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian peace, and Hezbollah was at the heart of both. Had America been able to reconcile these decades-long foes – particularly Damascus and Jerusalem – then Hezbollah would have outlived its usefulness.

America did, in fact, pressure Syria to curb Hezbollah during the conference. However, Israel wanted guarantees that this would not be a temporary and that Damascus would not allow the group to resume its terrorism after the IDF exited south Lebanon or returned the Golan Heights. Conversely, without any concrete reciprocity from Israel regarding these territories, American pressure tactics seemed to be one-sided in Jerusalem's favor, eroding America's leverage.<sup>174</sup>

The reality is that America failed to understand the Syrian relationship with Hezbollah and with Lebanon generally. Assad was a shrewd pragmatist, and Damascus' Lebanese alliances were governed by *Realpolitik*. This applied to Hezbollah as much as to any other Lebanese faction. Initially allied with Amal, Syria had shifted its alliance to Hezbollah because of its far greater ability to keep pressure on Israel in south Lebanon.<sup>175</sup> Hezbollah's leadership understood and remained mindful that their relationship with Damascus was one of convenience, despite their rhetoric.

The group was well aware that Damascus was capable of wiping it out – and willing to do so if necessary – in the late 1980s.<sup>176</sup> Syria even feigned a rapprochement with its arch-rival Saddam Hussein to get Iran to curb Hezbollah and acquiesce to Damascus' dominance over Lebanon. Because of this dynamic, Hezbollah rightly saw Syrian peace with Israel and a shift into the Western orbit – much like Egypt's after the 1978 Camp David Accords – as a direct threat.<sup>177</sup> As such, Hezbollah tried brand itself as indispensable to accomplishing Syrian objectives – specifically that the group could do more for the Assad regime than any peace conference.<sup>178</sup> Hezbollah also escalated tensions at critical junctures during the Madrid talks to ensure their failure, appealing to the Lebanese people and government via propaganda and scare-tactics, because it perceived the very real threat in the talks to its continued existence.<sup>179</sup> In Hezbollah's view, this latest initiative could “cause the downfall of the Islamic nation.”<sup>180</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Salloukh, p. 160-161; Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With a Vengeance*, p. 32

<sup>173</sup> Bassil Salloukh, , *Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, p. 126

<sup>174</sup> Azani, p. 209

<sup>175</sup> Norton, Hezbollah, p. 23

<sup>176</sup> Hala Jaber, p. 35

<sup>177</sup> Norton, p. 35

<sup>178</sup> Jaber, p. 73; Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, p.26

<sup>179</sup> Azani, p. 211-

<sup>180</sup> Azani, p. 211

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Meanwhile, Secretary of State James Baker and President Bush were not sympathetic enough to Israel's genuine concerns over south Lebanon and the Golan Heights becoming staging points for attacks on the Galilee. The Israelis also saw that the Americans were all too eager to acquiesce to Syrian demands, and unwilling to leverage their advantage over Damascus. America was thus unable to reassure the Israelis enough to convince them to grant Syria what it wanted, which would have obviated the need for Hezbollah.

### 3. Bill Clinton (1993-2001)

President Bill Clinton took office during the idyll of the 1990s, with America recognized as the world's sole superpower. Amidst the euphoria over American-brokered Israeli-Arab peace talks bearing fruit, America paid little attention to Hezbollah's terrorism. By the group's design, this was seen almost exclusively as a problem tied to Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, with few implications for American national security.<sup>181</sup>

But America still made political missteps during two Israeli military campaigns against Hezbollah, which weakened its bargaining power in Lebanon and simultaneously served to further legitimize Hezbollah. The Clinton administration also treated Hafez al-Assad, Syria's president, as an honest interlocutor, even as he set about strengthening Hezbollah's position in Lebanon to use against both American and Israel interests.

In the end, beyond pioneering piecemeal American sanctions targeting Hezbollah, the Clinton administration never succeeded in implementing a comprehensive strategy to thwart the organization.

#### *Failing Israel and Lebanon*

Twice during the decade, the Clinton administration failed to balance its commitments to both Israel and Lebanon. In 1993 and again in 1996, Israel launched two massive operations against Hezbollah, which also intentionally wrought havoc on the country's civilians and infrastructure, as a means to pressure Beirut to rein in the group. During the first of these Israeli operations, dubbed "Accountability," America persuaded Lebanon not to complain to the United Nations Security Council, instead allowing its Secretary of State Warren Christopher to negotiate a ceasefire. The outcome, however, was an agreement that was tantamount to American acknowledgement of Syria's dominance over Lebanon because Syria was essentially able to exploit the tensions to set ceasefire conditions that would continue serving its interests.<sup>182</sup>

In April 1996, America backed Prime Minister Shimon Peres' "Operation Grapes of Wrath" after its efforts a month earlier to restrain Hezbollah and encourage Israeli restraint failed. In fact, officials within the Clinton administration claim America gave Israel the green light to launch the operation, on the condition that the Israelis were on their own if the operation went awry. And it did. On April 18, 1996, Israel shelled a UN compound in the south Lebanon village of Qana, killing 106 Lebanese civilians. The gruesome aftermath of the Israeli strike was forever seared into the Lebanese psyche as evidence of the Jewish state's inherent criminality. Until Qana, the Clinton administration had little to say about Israel's

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<sup>181</sup> Benjamin, Simon. *Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 220

<sup>182</sup> Palmer-Harik, *Hezbollah*, p. 115-116

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conduct of the operation, instead defending Jerusalem's right to self-defense and blaming Hezbollah.<sup>183</sup> But, Qana cast American support for Grapes of Wrath in a negative light, and set back its standing in the region.<sup>184</sup>

America continued talks with Syria, Lebanon, Israel and – indirectly – Iran to find an acceptable solution. The outcome was a summit in Damascus of representatives from America, Russia, Iran, France, Hezbollah and Lebanon, making it difficult for America to unilaterally set conditions.<sup>185</sup> Warren Christopher and Dennis Ross were sent to the region, securing a ceasefire and the so-called April Understandings of 1996. Essentially, the April Understandings repeated and reaffirmed the 1993 agreement, including its mistakes. It even went one step further by placing Hezbollah and Israel on equal moral footing. No side – including the Israelis themselves – challenged Hezbollah's "right" to attack Israeli soldiers in south Lebanon. The Understandings gave tacit international imprimatur to the notion that Hezbollah was a "Lebanese national resistance movement," fighting against the occupying IDF – strengthening Hezbollah's position in Lebanon.<sup>186</sup>

Another outcome was the creation of a supervisory committee that ultimately enabled Damascus to withstand future American pressure to disarm Hezbollah, making it more difficult for Clinton to pressure Syria into restraining the group. This new reality – which remained in place until Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in May of 2000 – came back to haunt Clinton during later Syrian-Israeli peace talks, and the newfound reality provided Hezbollah with cover to continue its existence and growth even after the IDF's withdrawal.

## *Trusting Assad*

As part of his regional peace-making efforts, Clinton pressed Assad to make peace with Israel and normalize relations. He also tried to force Damascus to withdraw all of its forces from Lebanon and respect its independence as part of a comprehensive Middle East peace deal. Assad seemed receptive, which Clinton credited to a newfound need for Western support after the collapse of his Soviet patron.<sup>187</sup> Syria's attempt to get closer to America weighed heavily on the Syrian-Iranian alliance, which reached a low-point in 1995 during the progress of Syrian-Israeli peace talks.

But Clinton's failure in securing the broader peace deal that could have taken Syria out of the pro-Iran orbit and led to Damascus forcibly disarming Hezbollah resulted from both misreading Assad and not leveraging America's advantage. In fact, Clinton's memoirs show an almost fawning respect for Assad.<sup>188</sup> The president seemingly failed to grasp that the Syrian president was a brutal, cunning, and shrewd dictator concerned primarily with self-preservation. Assad wanted continued Alawite rule in Syria, and everything else – including his Baathist ideology, lip-service to "resistance," alliance with Hezbollah and Iran, and the Golan – were simply a means to that end.

Towards the end of his term in late 1999, Clinton tried to revive Israeli-Syrian peace talks, and initiated talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa. During his

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<sup>183</sup> <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-18237508.html>

<sup>184</sup> Jaber, p. 193-195

<sup>185</sup> Azani, p. 220

<sup>186</sup> Norton, p.85; Ross, p. 263; Harik, p.122-123; Azani, p. 221

<sup>187</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 575

<sup>188</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 576

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electoral campaign, Barak had promised to end Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, either unilaterally or through a peace deal with Syria. But while Barak signaled a willingness to be very flexible on Syrian needs, Hafez al-Assad had other concerns.<sup>189</sup> Advanced in age and realizing the end of his rule was near, he was grooming his inexperienced son Bashar to succeed him, and realized that a peace deal with Israel might jeopardize the family's legitimacy and the prospects of a peaceful transition of power from father to son. He therefore didn't want to appear weak in negotiations with Israel, and when Barak pressed for some gesture to sell to a skeptical Israeli public, Assad balked and abandoned the talks altogether.<sup>190</sup>

The next (and last) time Clinton met Assad was in March of 2000 in Geneva, gifting him a tie and a generous Israeli compromise, namely offering more Israeli concessions on the Golan Heights.<sup>191</sup> But Assad cut off the lame duck mid-presentation, taking a hardline stance that contradicted his earlier positions. Barak's new offer, said Clinton, was respectable, but perhaps too late.<sup>192</sup> In May, Barak – realizing there was no hope for peace with Syria – delivered on his campaign promise and abruptly ordered the IDF to withdraw from Lebanon. Hezbollah claimed victory for itself and resistance over diplomacy in “liberating Lebanese territory” – and by extension, over America.<sup>193</sup>

The unilateral Israeli withdrawal also increased Syria's stakes in retaining Hezbollah as an asset in Lebanon. It now lacked any leverage over Israel to pressure it to return the Golan Heights, and thus prodded the puppet government of Selim al-Hoss in Beirut to proclaim the Shebaa Farms as Lebanese and that the Israeli occupation had therefore not ended.<sup>194</sup> Damascus thus gave Hezbollah's “resistance” a new contrived lease on life, and an excuse not to disarm, in order to keep a form of pressure on Israel to be able to regain the Golan.<sup>195</sup> Assad was soon replaced by his inexperienced son, Bashar, who treated Hezbollah and Iran as equals.

The “Lion of Damascus” had been a thorn in America's side for decades, but that was motivated by self-interest, rather than any ideological commitment. Syria had yet to cede its sovereignty to Iran or Hezbollah in the 1990s, as it would effectively do after the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. In fact, Damascus held the upper hand in both relationships at the time, and Assad refused to even treat Tehran or its Lebanon-based proxy as equal partners.<sup>196</sup> They were subordinate tactical allies, and failing to pressure Syria back then to disarm Hezbollah cost America a historical opportunity that was perhaps permanently lost after 2011.<sup>197</sup>

## *Breathing Room*

Though at the time Hezbollah did not rank high on the list of perceived threats to the homeland, Hezbollah was building alliances with al-Qaeda and other terror groups and attempting to undercut America and its interests. To its credit, the Clinton administration was the first to begin sanctioning the group. The first measure came on January 25, 1995. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets

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<sup>189</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 884-887

<sup>190</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 884-887

<sup>191</sup> Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon*, p.71-72

<sup>192</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, p. 903-904; Blanford, p. 71-72

<sup>193</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 884-885

<sup>194</sup> Blanford, *Killing*, p. 74, 78

<sup>195</sup> Blanford, *Killing*, p. 74, 78

<sup>196</sup> Elie A. Salem, *Violence and Diplomacy in Lebanon*, p. 243.

<sup>197</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=119>, p. 95; <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentaryanalysis/552197-the-devil-you-dont-know>

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Control sanctioned Hezbollah pursuant to Executive Order 12947 in response to the group “threatening to disrupt the [Middle East] peace process.”<sup>198</sup> The State Department then designated Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization on October 8, 1997.<sup>199</sup>

These were positive moves, indicating an increasing awareness of the threat posed by Hezbollah. However, they were not part of a comprehensive American strategy to combat Hezbollah, and therefore insufficient and mostly symbolic, having overall little effect on the group or its ability to undercut American regional policies. Coupled with American diplomatic failures that strengthened Hezbollah’s hand – like the April Understandings of 1996 – the group emerged from the decade stronger than before, with its ability to threaten America and its allies undiminished.

## Section B. Post-9/11

### 1. George W. Bush (2001 – 2009)

The September 11, 2001 attacks defined the Bush presidency more than any other event. Having taken office on a platform of disengagement from the Middle East, terrorism – particularly Hezbollah’s, which was not directly targeting America – was a low priority for the Bush administration. However, 9/11 brought an about-face, not only in the new administration’s attitude, but also its actions internationally. It renewed interest in Hezbollah, and created an environment where America could begin to work in concert with other nations against Hezbollah, in contrast to the previous decade. Defining the group as a terror organization was once again up for discussion in the international arena.

However, American and Israeli diplomatic efforts to achieve this end met with little success, with only two more countries defining the group in whole as a terrorist group, and Australia only listing its “terrorist wing.”<sup>200</sup> The lack of concerted international pressure was one factor that allowed Hezbollah to withstand both UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1701 and avoid being disarmed.<sup>201</sup>

Internationalizing the fight against Hezbollah was just one of many lost opportunities to curtail the group during this decade. America also squandered opportunities created by the invasion of Iraq, the Cedar Revolution, and Israel’s Second Lebanon War. By the end of the Bush presidency, Hezbollah was no weaker in Lebanon or regionally than it had been before the “War on Terror,” and arguably its regional footprint had expanded considerably.

### *The War on Terrorism and Hezbollah*

Hezbollah wasn’t directly linked to the 9/11 attacks, despite its prior relations with Al-Qaeda.<sup>202</sup> Nonetheless, 9/11 renewed American focus on the group, and the Bush administration opted for

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<sup>198</sup> <http://www.ustreas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/reports/tar2002.pdf>; <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/12947.pdf>

<sup>199</sup> [https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/terrorist\\_orgs\\_list.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/global/terrorism/terrorist_orgs_list.html); <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-1997-10-08/pdf/97-27030.pdf>

<sup>200</sup> Azani, p. 237

<sup>201</sup> Azani, p. 238

<sup>202</sup> Age of Sacred Terror, p. 127 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-qaeda-hezbollah-relationship>; Ely Karmon, “Fight on All Fronts,” Hizballah, The War on Terror, and the War in Iraq,” p. 11, 14, *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, January 12, 2003 (<https://www.ict.org.il/Article.aspx?ID=1137#gsc.tab=0>); James Worrall, Simon Mabon, and Gordon Clubb, *Hezbollah: From Islamic Resistance to Government*. p. 17

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confrontation with Hezbollah, unlike its predecessors.<sup>203</sup> In fact, it seems that only after the War on Terror was declared did America begin to grasp the magnitude of the threat from Hezbollah and its global terrorist reach, as indicated by a 2002 State Department report. Though America went to war with Al-Qaeda, it considered Hezbollah the “A-Team” of terrorists.<sup>204</sup> Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, on October 08, 2002, described Hezbollah as “one of the most highly developed and dangerous networks,” that was “functioning in many continents,” and highlighted its support by Iran and Syria, and cells and operations in Africa, South America, and Asia.<sup>205</sup> He added, “[w]e are certainly watching it, conscious of it, and it is one of the key international terrorist networks; there’s no question about that.”<sup>206</sup>

9/11 also renewed American focus on Hezbollah’s activities in the Tri-border region of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, where the group has raised “millions of dollars annually via criminal enterprises.”<sup>207</sup> This area has long been considered a hub for arms and drug trafficking, contraband and smuggling, document and currency fraud, money laundering, and pirated goods – all enterprises with which Hezbollah has become deeply involved to finance its global activities.<sup>208</sup> Evidence also shows the presence of Hezbollah “members or sympathizers,” in other Latin American countries, including northern Chile, Colombia near the Venezuelan border, in Venezuela, and in Panama.<sup>209</sup> Lebanese businessmen in the area transfer millions of dollars to Hezbollah – its operatives, “charities,” and other entities worldwide – via local cover businesses.<sup>210</sup>

But targeting Hezbollah as part of the War on Terror wasn’t a foregone conclusion. The group was initially excluded from Bush’s EO 13224, signed on September 23, 2001, which blocked the assets of terror-linked organizations, due to an erroneous belief that Hezbollah lacked a “global reach.” Most troublingly, this view indicated an intelligence gap related to Hezbollah’s capabilities. Eventually, after much debate within the administration, Hezbollah was added to the list on November 2, 2001, over the objection of leading officials, including Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.<sup>211</sup>

From there, the perception of Hezbollah’s threat to America only grew. In February 2002, the FBI – which had been tracking Hezbollah’s domestic networks since the early 1990s – testified that its investigations indicated “many Hezbollah subjects based in the United States have the capability to attempt terrorist attacks here should this be a desired objective of the group.”<sup>212</sup> A year later, CIA Director George Tenet testified to Hezbollah’s superiority over Al-Qaeda, and its global reach. In 2006, Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte testified before the Senate Intelligence committee that Hezbollah was capable of attacking American interests to protect Iran.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, 190.

<sup>204</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hezbollah-a-team-of-terrorists/>

<sup>205</sup> [http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2002\\_10\\_08\\_OEF\\_Update.pdf](http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2002_10_08_OEF_Update.pdf)

<sup>206</sup> [http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2002\\_10\\_08\\_OEF\\_Update.pdf](http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2002_10_08_OEF_Update.pdf)

<sup>207</sup> “Patterns of Global Terrorism: 2001,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=72>

<sup>208</sup> “Patterns of Global Terrorism: 2001,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=72>, p.48

<sup>209</sup> “Patterns of Global Terrorism: 2001,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=68>, p.44

<sup>210</sup> “Patterns of Global Terrorism: 2001,” <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf#page=69>, p.45, 49

<sup>211</sup> Norton, Hezbollah, p. 76

<sup>212</sup> <http://www.iranwatch.org/sites/default/files/us-hirc-middleeastsub-levitt-prepared-021605.pdf#page=2>

<sup>213</sup> <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings/current-and-projected-national-security-threats-united-states>

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Assassinating the head of Hezbollah's international operations, Imad Mughniyeh, was perhaps the Bush administration's greatest success against Hezbollah. America had been hunting the elusive Mughniyeh for decades. The CIA, in fact, mistakenly thought they had tracked him down in Paris in 1988. On April 7, 1995, they again suffered a near miss. After learning he was aboard a Middle East Airlines flight from Khartoum to Beirut that would transit through Riyadh, they asked the Saudis to detain him. However, fearing a backlash, an unknown Saudi official ordered air traffic control to wave off the plane, and Mughniyeh escaped again.

Seven years after putting him on the FBI's most wanted list, America – with help from Israel – finally caught up with Mughniyeh in Damascus on February 12, 2008 and assassinated him.<sup>214</sup> The move damaged, but didn't cripple Hezbollah, divorced as it was from a concerted strategy to pressure and degrade the group.<sup>215</sup> Hezbollah, whose chain of command is such that no single person is solely responsible for important decisions, quickly rebounded and transformed Mughniyeh into a martyr.<sup>216</sup>

## *Iraq—America's South Lebanon*

The South Lebanon Conflict is often called "Israel's Vietnam," the most dangerous consequence of which – according to the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin – was letting "the Shiite genie out of the bottle."<sup>217</sup> If so, then Iraq was America's South Lebanon and, like the Israeli misadventure, provided the opportunity for Hezbollah and Iran to rouse Iraqi Shiites against America.<sup>218</sup> With 15 years of hindsight, the Iraq war can be described as a mixed bag at best. However, America possessed a perhaps unintended advantage at the outset of the invasion. On the offensive, American forces were now deployed on two of Iran's borders – Iraq to the west, and Afghanistan to the east – and on Syria's eastern frontier. Both Hezbollah and these two sponsors had good reason for concern, since the Bush administration had dubbed them as state sponsors of terrorism. Some American officials had even described Damascus, the Iranian regime, and Hezbollah as "low-hanging fruit" in the War on Terror.<sup>219</sup>

Hezbollah's fear of an American presence in Iraq was evident long before the invasion. Nasrallah had repeatedly voiced his opposition to toppling Saddam Hussein's regime, despite his group's – and his Iranian patron's – historical enmity with Baathist Baghdad. He encouraged the Iraqi opposition – namely Shiites – to convene a national reconciliation conference, which did not endear him to his Iraqi Shiite co-religionists, who had suffered the brunt of Hussein's brutality for decades.<sup>220</sup> Hezbollah understandably felt threatened in those early days, and wanted to step out of American crosshairs. In the period leading up to the American invasion of Iraq, Hezbollah may have raised its rhetoric, but meanwhile its behavior became more circumspect, and it restrained even its provocations against Israel.

America needn't have invaded Syria or Iran, but the possibility of it doing so gave America an advantage that it failed to exploit in never demanding the dismantling of Hezbollah. This lack of pressure allowed Hezbollah time to regroup and implement its plan to sink America into the Iraqi quagmire through

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<sup>214</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-and-mossad-killed-senior-hezbollah-figure-in-car-bombing/2015/01/30/ebb88682-968a-11e4-8005-1924ede3e54a\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.917e8f005387](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-and-mossad-killed-senior-hezbollah-figure-in-car-bombing/2015/01/30/ebb88682-968a-11e4-8005-1924ede3e54a_story.html?utm_term=.917e8f005387)

<sup>215</sup> Jaber p. 51

<sup>216</sup> The Good Spy, p. 341

<sup>217</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/another-summer-another-siege-israels-war-p-l-o>

<sup>218</sup> Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 164; Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*, p.33

<sup>219</sup> Blanford, p. 86; Norton, 119-120.

<sup>220</sup> Hamzeh, p. 138

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raising and training of Shiite militias that bedevil American forces to this day. Though America pressured Syria to lower the profile of Palestinian terror groups headquartered in Damascus, it failed to do the same with Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>221</sup>

Lastly, the Bush administration placed too much trust in Nouri al-Maliki, Iraq's newly elected prime minister. Overconfidence in Middle Eastern allies paying lip service to democracy was one of the hallmarks of the Bush administration, but al-Maliki was particularly undeserving. America trusted the new prime minister to counter Iranian influence in the country, as well as that of its Shiite militia proxies.<sup>222</sup>

Al-Maliki, however, had other ideas in mind. In fact, key leaders of Iraq's Iranian-backed Shiite militias – including Kataeb Hezbollah's Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis – have revealed that al-Maliki was aware of Hezbollah's presence in the country and its budding relationship with local Shiite militants from the outset, and “down to the minute details.”<sup>223</sup> And rather than calm Sunni-Shiite tensions, he exacerbated them. This provided an entry point for the Sunni extremist groups which would later evolve into ISIS, ultimately benefiting Iran and providing it an excuse to expand its regional footprint.

### *Blinded by Freedom's Light in Lebanon*

The Bush administration acted to end Syria's military occupation of Lebanon. On December 12, 2003, it signed the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA), which, among other things, called on Damascus to end its support for terrorism and withdraw its troops from Lebanon.<sup>224</sup> America soon followed up with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, a joint effort co-sponsored with France that also called for Syrian military withdrawal and for Hezbollah to disarm.

These international instruments, coupled with American military presence on Syria's border and the threat of toppling the Assad regime, put teeth to the Lebanese anger at Syria after the assassination of Rafic Hariri. The problem was a lack of American follow-through, and ignoring the other source of Lebanon's problems: Iran. The Bush administration also underestimated Hezbollah's ability to rebound from the loss of the protection of Syrian dominance which had allowed it to flourish in Lebanon for almost two decades.<sup>225</sup>

America was also too optimistic about the nascent March 14 movement's ability to assert itself on its own. President Bush credited the success of the Cedar Revolution to international diplomatic pressure and the Lebanese desire “to be free,” alone.<sup>226</sup> After succeeding in pushing Syria out and a parliamentary electoral victory in Lebanon's first free elections since the onset of the Civil War, America thought Lebanon's nationalist forces could stand up on their own. However, 35 years of Syrian dominance had prevented the rise of a credible civil society, robust counter political movements, or a strong Lebanese army.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Simon, Benjamin. *Age of Sacred Terror*, p. 458-459.

<sup>222</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p.459-460

<sup>223</sup> David Daoud, “PMF Deputy Commander Muhandis Details Hezbollah Ops in Iraq,” *The Long War Journal*, January 9, 2017 (<https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/pmf-deputy-commander-muhandis-details-hezbollah-ops-in-iraq.php>)

<sup>224</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/108/plaws/publ175/PLAW-108publ175.pdf>

<sup>225</sup> Blanford, *Killing*, p. 148

<sup>226</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 410-412; Azani, p. 218; [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16780-2005Mar8\\_3.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16780-2005Mar8_3.html)

<sup>227</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 337-340, 432; George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, 410-412

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This belief held firm despite the fact that newly elected March 14 Prime Minister Fouad Siniora warned Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of his limited ability to counter Syria's and Hezbollah's influence.<sup>228</sup> To a certain extent, the Americans realized that their Lebanese counterparts needed their help, but they never followed through in the necessary ways.<sup>229</sup> The Bush administration had too much faith in Siniora, considering him tough and competent, and even, "long[ing] for similar leadership in Afghanistan and Iraq."<sup>230</sup> However, Siniora simply did not have the capability to turn the tide against Hezbollah alone, or merely with encouraging American rhetoric.<sup>231</sup> By contrast, Hezbollah had almost two decades to grow, become better organized, funded and armed, and able to sustain the long-term mobilization of its supporters. It also had a patron – Iran – willing to go to virtually any lengths to ensure its continued dominance in Lebanon.

At the same time, Hezbollah exploited America's failure to remedy the already-emerging fractures within March 14. This allowed the Shiite group to peel away the popular Michel Aoun and his Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), with their 21 parliamentary seats, from the pro-Western coalition. Aoun's Christian rivals, realizing they would be overshadowed by his popularity, did not invite him to join a government or agree to back his presidential ambitions.<sup>232</sup> Aoun was an opportunist who had set his sights on the presidential palace decades earlier, and the Hezbollah-led March 8 took advantage of this to bring him and his massive Christian following into their orbit, nearly giving them parity with March 14's numbers and, with time, allowing them to create further fissures within the pro-Western alliance.<sup>233</sup>

The opportunistic Aoun, having learned from failing to reach out to Shiites and placate the Syrians in the late 1980s, readily obliged and entered into an alliance with Hezbollah in 2006.<sup>234</sup> Twelve years on, this has become one of the longest-lasting and most durable political alliances in Lebanese history. It has allowed Hezbollah to set the tone of Lebanese politics ever since and – particularly after the onset of the Syrian Civil War – to gradually replace Syria with Iran as Lebanon's new hegemon.

During this period, America also neglected to strengthen Lebanon's state institutions as credible alternatives to Hezbollah. This was particularly true with the Lebanese Army, which, according to a 2005 American assessment, was not equipped or trained to "succeed in anything but the most basic tactical missions against minimal and irresolute opposition, and is still fragile due to a cultural loyalty along confessional lines."<sup>235</sup> The LAF required a multi-year "sustained period of intense" training to be able to fulfill its responsibility of asserting the Lebanese government's control within its own borders.<sup>236</sup> These deficiencies were on particular display as challenges began to emerge which the LAF was unqualified to confront, having been sapped of its strength by decades of Syrian dominance.

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<sup>228</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 432

<sup>229</sup> Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 374; Bassil Salloukh, *Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon*, p. 113

<sup>230</sup> Rice, p. 432

<sup>231</sup> Rice, p. 485

<sup>232</sup> Norton, p. 129.

<sup>233</sup> Norton, p. 129-130

<sup>234</sup> Norton, p. 129

<sup>235</sup> Salloukh, p.113

<sup>236</sup> Salloukh, p.113

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The Bush administration also mistakenly looked to Syria as the sole source of Lebanon's woes. It failed to account for the fact that the vacuum created by Syrian withdrawal would be replaced by the only country in the region with a Lebanon-based proxy: Iran. The immediate aftermath of Syria's withdrawal left Hezbollah as the most powerful actor in Lebanon, and it readily replaced Damascus' mercurial support with that of its patron. America missed an opportunity to simultaneously squeeze Iran, along with Syria, in the wake of the Cedar Revolution, to cut off Hezbollah's continued sources of support.

Likewise, America did not back credible Shiite alternatives to Hezbollah which could siphon support away from the group and in favor of March 14. After all, though Shiites were the pro-Syrian March 8 Alliance's backbone, they were not particularly fond of Syria's occupation of Lebanon, because it facilitated the entry of Syrian workers and their economic competition with the traditionally poor community.<sup>237</sup> However, Amal and Hezbollah supporters – together, the vast majority of Shiites – feared the implications for their community of replacing Syrian influence with that of America.<sup>238</sup> But dissenting – and influential – voices existed.<sup>239</sup> Anti-Hezbollah Shiite dissent arose in the wake of both the Cedar Revolution and the group's entry into the Syrian Civil War. Both times, the party moved to effectively quash this internal threat. And America did little to bolster this independent Shiite voice.<sup>240</sup>

Finally, the Bush administration undermined its own credibility as an ally of March 14 against Hezbollah at critical junctures. This was perhaps most starkly demonstrated when Hezbollah invaded and occupied Beirut, in response to the Siniora government's decision to shut down its telecommunications network and remove Beirut Airport's security chief who was tied to the group. As Hezbollah responded with force, the LAF stood by fearing its involvement would spark a civil war, and so did America.

To end the crisis, Lebanon's pro-Western forces were finally forced to meet for a summit with their political foes in Doha. There, they capitulated to Hezbollah's demands for veto power over the government's decisions. They had little option when the extent of the support that America was willing to offer was dispatching Secretary Rice to Qatar to "to show support for the March 14 politicians."<sup>241</sup> Rice conceded that America hadn't done enough for its Lebanese allies, but seemed to qualify this concession by being resigned to chaos being Lebanon's fate. "But that was Lebanon: a country in a perpetual state of instability and deadlock."<sup>242</sup> Instead of any concrete measures of support to demonstrate to March 14 that they would not be going it alone against Hezbollah and its Iranian patron, she settled for symbolic moves like landing her plane at Beirut Airport in a show of defiance against Hezbollah's "ownership" of it.<sup>243</sup> Somehow, she was still convinced that America's Lebanon policy succeeded on balance, only because the March 14 Alliance still managed to win the 2009 parliamentary elections.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Blanford, Killing, p.119

<sup>238</sup> Blanford, p. 158

<sup>239</sup> Blanford, Killing, p. 160

<sup>240</sup> Salloukh, p. 169-170; Alagha, Identity Construction, 151-152

<sup>241</sup> Rice, p. 665

<sup>242</sup> Rice, p. 665

<sup>243</sup> Rice, p. 665

<sup>244</sup> Rice, p. 666

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## *Lebanon and Israel: Mission Not Accomplished*

The Bush administration placed undue trust in Israel's war strategy and goals in its 2006 war with Hezbollah. It viewed the IDF's military response as positive, believing it could uproot the Shiite organization and solve the problem bedeviling both Lebanon and the Jewish state. It therefore kept delaying a ceasefire to give the IDF time to finish the job. Yet, despite initial successes against Hezbollah, Israel's war effort began to flounder quickly, and two days into the war the Israelis themselves doubted their ability to accomplish their goals.<sup>245</sup>

President Bush and Secretary Rice saw the war as an opportunity to bolster the Siniora government's authority.<sup>246</sup> But this depended on a swift Israeli campaign that did minimal harm to Lebanon and its civilians while seriously damaging Hezbollah.<sup>247</sup> To that end, America counselled Israeli restraint. But Jerusalem, largely for domestic political reasons, struck Lebanon hard, but failed to even dent Hezbollah.<sup>248</sup> Nonetheless, America still acted to delay a ceasefire, hoping – in retrospect, unrealistically – that the IDF would succeed in disarming Hezbollah. There was immense overconfidence in Israel's ability to accomplish in a matter of days what the IDF had failed to do in the course of an 18-year occupation of south Lebanon.<sup>249</sup>

Then Israel made a critical mistake. On July 29, in the midst of full-throated American support for the Israeli military campaign, the IDF carried out an erroneous strike in Qana that was reminiscent of the 1996 bombardment of the south Lebanese village's UN compound. A tug-of-war ensued in the Bush administration on whether to continue supporting the war, with President Bush finally siding with Secretary Rice that to do so would mean that "America will be dead in the Middle East," and Siniora – caught between Hezbollah and the IDF – might be toppled.<sup>250</sup> As the IDF's campaign floundered, Bush and Secretary Rice realized that continuing to support the Israeli war effort would mean American support for one Security Council veto after the next, ending with American – and not Iranian or Syrian – isolation. He then began pushing the Israelis to wrap up their campaign prematurely.<sup>251</sup> The outcome was UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which effectively forbade Hezbollah from operating south of the Litani River and called for disarming the group, but – because Israel and America had squandered their advantage – it fell short of fostering either outcome.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration wouldn't front the bill for reconstructing Lebanon, pledging only \$770 million to overall reconstruction efforts. With Iran's help, by contrast, Hezbollah's Jihad al-Bina contributed \$4 billion for rebuilding efforts.<sup>252</sup> For good measure, the group made sure to line the reconstructed streets with its own and Iran's flags, emphasizing that the destruction was caused by America and its Israeli proxy—further thwarting American influence on the ground.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Freedman, *Choice of Enemies*, p. 479

<sup>246</sup> Ross, p. 329; *Decision Points*, 412-413

<sup>247</sup> Ross, p. 329

<sup>248</sup> Rice, 475-477; Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S. – Israel Relationship From Truman to Obama*, p. 328

<sup>249</sup> Ross, p. 329; Elliot Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, p.180; Rice, p.480

<sup>250</sup> *Decision Points*, 412-413; Rice, p. 480

<sup>251</sup> See: Rice, p.487-488

<sup>252</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, p. 125

<sup>253</sup> Rice, p. 556

## 2. Barack Obama (2009 – 2017)

If excessive trust in American allies was the hallmark of the Bush administration's Middle East policy, then unjustified confidence in America's adversaries was President Obama's primary failure. Obama began his presidency with an outreach campaign towards America's most implacable regional foes – Iran and Syria. In the process, he strengthened Hezbollah.

### *Rapprochement with an Unrepentant Syria*

Barack Obama initiated a policy of rapprochement with Syria almost from the outset of taking office, relieving the pressure applied on Damascus by his predecessor after the invasion of Iraq. This included reappointing an American ambassador to Damascus, the first since the Bush administration recalled Margaret Scobey on February 16, 2005.<sup>254</sup> Several American officials also traveled to Syria to engage Bashar al-Assad in dialogue aimed at restoring bilateral relations.<sup>255</sup> Yet, America demanded nothing in return for these important gestures. This not only encouraged Syria to reassert its dominance over Lebanon through indirect and covert means, but also further demoralized the already-battered March 14 Alliance and reinvigorated Hezbollah. It was because of these overtures that Prime Minister Saad Hariri felt the need to travel to Damascus for reconciliation talks with Bashar al-Assad, the man accused of ordering the assassination of his father Rafic.<sup>256</sup>

### *The ISIS Crisis and the Syrian Civil War*

The Obama administration appeared to reverse course with the onset of the Syrian civil war and the Assad regime's heavy-handed response to popular protests demanding political reform. America resisted calling for Assad to step down outright for months, but began imposing limited sanctions on Syria as early as April 2011.<sup>257</sup> Months later, administration officials, including President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, began calling for Assad to step down.<sup>258</sup> But pressure on Assad to abdicate power never went beyond rhetoric. Even Assad's use of chemical weapons in late 2012, crossing the "red line" set by President Obama, barely elicited a response from America.

Assad's downfall would have removed one of Hezbollah's strongest supporters. Ever since being forced to withdraw his troops from Lebanon, he had relied on the group even more to continue Damascus' control over Beirut, and thus worked to ensure Hezbollah's hegemony over his western neighbor. His downfall would have permanently removed the shield behind which Hezbollah had hidden for years to grow its dominance in Lebanon would have physically cut off the group from its patron Iran.

But, as Hezbollah, pro-Iranian Shiite militias, and Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps poured in by the thousands to rescue Assad's regime, America gave token support to the opposition. Over time, the Free Syrian Army and other moderate rebel factions fractured and were overtaken by extremist Sunni groups like the Nusra Front and ISIS. With the regime's victory in the December 2016 battle of Aleppo, Assad and his allies were able to permanently turn the tide of the war in their favor. Although the Syrian Civil

<sup>254</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8519328.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8519328.stm)

<sup>255</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8519506.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8519506.stm); <http://damascus.usembassy.gov/media/pdf/press-releases-pdf/spector-pr.pdf>

<sup>256</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-lebanon/hariri-holds-constructive-talks-in-syria-idUSTRE5BIOUB20091219>

<sup>257</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/how-the-us-message-on-assad-shifted/2011/08/18/gIQAfPZxNJ\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/how-the-us-message-on-assad-shifted/2011/08/18/gIQAfPZxNJ_blog.html)

<sup>258</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/how-the-us-message-on-assad-shifted/2011/08/18/gIQAfPZxNJ\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/how-the-us-message-on-assad-shifted/2011/08/18/gIQAfPZxNJ_blog.html); <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/08/18/president-obama-future-syria-must-be-determined-its-people-president-bashar-al-assad>

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War remains far from over, Hezbollah was able to breathe a sigh of relief and declare victory in September 2017.<sup>259</sup> Instead, America focused its efforts exclusively on “degrading and destroying” ISIS. While eliminating the extremist Sunni group was a laudable goal, without a simultaneous strategy to prevent Hezbollah and the broader Iran-led Resistance Axis from benefiting from the resulting power vacuum, it only served to strengthen an equally-implacable and arguably more dangerous long-term American foe.<sup>260</sup>

## *Selling Out Lebanon*

The Obama administration also did very little to give pro-Western forces within Lebanon confidence that America would provide them with genuine support were they to confront Hezbollah. Seeing America receding from the region and reengaging Syria, and still hurting from the tepid American response to Hezbollah’s takeover of Beirut in May 2008, March 14 began its own attempts to reconcile with the Assad regime.

Hezbollah and its political allies even managed to collapse American-allied Prime Minister Saad Hariri’s first government on January 2, 2011 in the midst of a meeting with President Barack Obama, without eliciting a strong response from the Obama administration. Hezbollah then plunged Lebanon into a two-year presidential vacuum and political crisis, where pro-Western forces struggled against the group without any American support. In 2014, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon David Hale even reportedly favored the election of Hezbollah’s ally and preferred candidate Michel Aoun for president, thinking he could thus be lured away from his alliance with the Shiite group if Saad Hariri voted in his favor.<sup>261</sup> But with Iran as the ascendant regional power – and, by extension, Hezbollah in Lebanon – Aoun had little reason to abandon his alliance with the Shiite group in favor of Hariri, who lacked any determined foreign backing. In fact, Aoun remained committed to his alliance with Hezbollah even after Saad Hariri crowned him as president in October, 2016.

Meanwhile, Hariri had permanently fractured the already-demoralized March 14 while attempting to end the presidential vacuum and spare Lebanon the continued damage from the country’s political crisis. Though he was reappointed as prime minister by President Aoun, Hariri continued giving in to one Hezbollah-inspired demand after the next, realizing that the alternative could once again lead to political deadlock or – if he pushed back too hard against the Shiite group – civil war. Disheartened by America abandoning the Syrian rebels to fight the Iran axis alone – and by its increasingly tepid responses to Hezbollah in Lebanon – Hariri opted to maintain his country’s stability. He realized that if he were to opt for fighting Tehran and its Lebanon-based proxy, he’d have to go it alone, and he simply lacked the capability to do so. Hariri realized that Lebanon alone would suffer the consequences of a confrontation between Hezbollah and pro-Western forces, and that the Shiite group would end up winning anyway.<sup>262</sup>

## *A Nuclear Deal with Iran at Any Cost?*

The Obama administration also eased its pressure on Hezbollah as part of an attempted rapprochement with Iran. It is not that Obama had any illusions about Hezbollah. In June of 2010, the administration described Hezbollah as the “most technically capable terrorist group in the world,” adding that it was a

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<sup>259</sup> <https://www.unitedagainstnucleariran.com/blog/despite-declaring-victory-syria-hezbollah-not-ready-for-war-israel>

<sup>260</sup> <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/09/10/president-obama-we-will-degrade-and-ultimately-destroy-isil>

<sup>261</sup> <http://eng.majalla.com/2014/04/article55249734>

<sup>262</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbrSLn9EIVs>

“continued security threat to the United States.”<sup>263</sup> The administration was also acutely aware that Hezbollah’s drug-smuggling activities – particularly in Latin America – posed a threat to American national security.<sup>264</sup> But easing up on Hezbollah was part of the price Obama was willing to pay to secure a nuclear deal with its sponsor, Iran. To this end, Obama was much less willing than his predecessor to describe Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.<sup>265</sup> In fact, rumors began to emerge in 2013, based on anonymous sources of direct and indirect contact between American officials – from CIA and DoD – and Hezbollah. These anonymous sources denied these contacts were in any way related to nuclear negotiations with Iran, and the American embassy in Beirut denied their existence outright.<sup>266</sup> However, unnamed March 14 officials also claimed that the embassy was indirectly engaging Hezbollah, with relations “improving steadily.” These same sources claimed that U.S. Ambassador to Beirut David Hale had signaled American acceptance of Hezbollah’s place in Lebanon’s political pantheon, telling his Lebanese interlocutors that “no government can be formed in Lebanon without Hezbollah in it.”<sup>267</sup> The administration even allegedly indirectly passed on information to Hezbollah about planned ISIS attacks, and securing the deal with Iran may have also influenced the administration’s decisions when it came to targeting the group’s international drug-smuggling activities, even as it was allegedly funneling cocaine into America.<sup>268</sup>

## Part IV. The New Trump Administration: Conclusions and Recommendations

### Section A. Trump and Hezbollah

When President Donald Trump took office, Iran’s – and by extension, Hezbollah’s – prospects were on the rise, and American allies across the region were on the defensive against Tehran. Trump’s campaign rhetoric promised to roll back the Islamic Republic’s influence, but it also provided loopholes for Iran and its Lebanon-based proxy to exploit. Chief among them was Trump’s softness on Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, and his acquiescence to Russian interference in Syria, both critical factors to Hezbollah’s survival.<sup>269</sup> In fact, Trump’s approach to the Middle East was almost identical to President Barack Obama’s, even if it was phrased more bluntly: disengagement from the Middle East, an almost-exclusive focus on defeating ISIS, and hinting at a belief in the potential for common-ground with Iran’s “Resistance Axis” – at least Bashar al-Assad’s Syria – in achieving that goal.<sup>270</sup> Assad was receptive to this

<sup>263</sup> <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2006/82738.htm>; <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111shrg62141/html/CHRG-111shrg62141.htm>;

<sup>264</sup> <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-111shrg52620/pdf/CHRG-111shrg52620.pdf#page=61>

<sup>265</sup> James Worrall, Simon Mabon, and Gordon Clubb, *Hezbollah: From Islamic Resistance to Government*. p. 17;

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13537121.2012.717395?journalCode=fisa20>

<sup>266</sup> <http://www.aljoughouria.com/news/index/109179?> December 13, 2013; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/109751>;

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/ar/104521>

<sup>267</sup> <http://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/arabic-international-news/lebanon-news/420178/04-11-2013-%D9%87%D9%84-%D9%82%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%B2%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9>; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/104305-report-indirect-talks-between-hizbullah-u-s-over-government-formation>

<sup>268</sup> <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24751093.html>; <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>; <https://lawfare.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/staging/2018/FINAL%E2%80%93Levitt%20Paper.pdf>

<sup>269</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INRdArhOAUqs>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJHgA4\\_OCAo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJHgA4_OCAo);

<http://www.newsweek.com/trump-anti-isis-campaign-spare-assad-will-only-empower-hezbollah-528559>

<sup>270</sup> <https://youtu.be/INRdArhOAUqs?t=2m2s>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJokWMRNIGQ>; <https://youtu.be/YHYk0K7iszo?t=1h24m17s>

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approach, and repeatedly voiced support for Trump and his policies, calling him a “natural ally” for Syria, “the Russians, the Iranians, and many other countries.”<sup>271</sup>

The Trump administration, in its first year, deviated from his campaign statements on Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, but this has largely been rhetorical. A concerted strategy of tackling Hezbollah – or the broader “Resistance Axis” – has yet to materialize, and the efficacy of what measures have been put in place remains to be seen. So far, the new administration has largely continued down the road of its predecessors.

On the positive side, State and Treasury Departments have continued taking action against Hezbollah leaders, figures, and financiers, respectively issuing rewards for information leading to their capture and sanctioning them.<sup>272</sup> Congress has also called on Lebanon to continue pushing Hezbollah out of the Lebanese financial and banking system, as part of a concerted American effort to target the group’s finances.<sup>273</sup> American support for the Lebanese State and army has also remained constant.<sup>274</sup> President Trump hosted Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri at the White House to reaffirm American support for Lebanon and a desire to roll back Hezbollah.<sup>275</sup> The support continued through Hariri’s surprise resignation in protest of Hezbollah’s harmful activities in Lebanon in November 2017, and former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s February 2018 tour of the Middle East.<sup>276</sup> The Trump administration also emphasized the continued threat Hezbollah poses to the homeland.<sup>277</sup>

More recently, Trump withdrew America from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8, 2018, emphasizing American opposition to Iran’s terrorism and regional activities, in which Hezbollah plays a central role.<sup>278</sup> The following week, the administration followed up with a cascade of Treasury Department sanctions on Iran’s Central Bank, members of Hezbollah’s top leadership in the Shura Council, and several Hezbollah financiers.<sup>279</sup>

Nonetheless, this is not the concerted strategy for dealing with Hezbollah the president promised to produce within 24 hours of his July 25, 2017 press conference with Saad Hariri.<sup>280</sup> American financial sanctions on the group – particularly its leadership – are largely symbolic in effect. These sanctions will also do little to curtail the group’s finances so long as its non-military entities are permitted to conduct

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<sup>271</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71QegBqTFMg>; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/225560-trump-travel-ban-targeted-terrorists-not-syrian-people-assad-says>; [https://www.npr.org/2016/11/10/501537279/assad-regime-hopes-trump-would-cut-u-s-support-syrian-rebel-groups?utm\\_campaign=storyshare&utm\\_source=twitter.com&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.npr.org/2016/11/10/501537279/assad-regime-hopes-trump-would-cut-u-s-support-syrian-rebel-groups?utm_campaign=storyshare&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social)

<sup>272</sup> [https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/fuad\\_shukr.html](https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/fuad_shukr.html); [https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/talal\\_hamiyah.html](https://rewardsforjustice.net/english/talal_hamiyah.html); <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/10/274722.htm>

<sup>273</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-economy-hezbollah/u-s-stresses-lebanon-must-cut-hezbollah-from-financial-system-idUSU5S.KBN1FC35Y>

<sup>274</sup> <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/02/278339.htm>; <https://twitter.com/StateDept/status/938941992276561920>; <https://twitter.com/DavidADaoud/status/968604470564282369>; <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/237249-gen-aoun-meets-head-of-us-central-command-in-washington>

<sup>275</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQ-MQI28SbA>

<sup>276</sup> <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/11/275454.htm>; <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/02/278367.htm>; <https://twitter.com/StateDept/status/96419277155178497>; <https://twitter.com/StateDept/status/964182695239565312>

<sup>277</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2017/10/10/politics/us-warn-hezbollah-threat/index.html>

<sup>278</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goE77-rY78g>

<sup>279</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0388>; <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0387>; <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm0385>

<sup>280</sup> <https://youtu.be/fQ-MQI28SbA?t=11m>

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financial and fund-raising activities on European soil and elsewhere while only its military “wing” is criminalized.

The Trump administration’s policies also remain inadequate when it comes to Hezbollah’s enablers: Iran, Syria, and Russia. In the case of Bashar al-Assad, although President Trump has now twice targeted the regime for its chemical attacks in Khan Shaykhun and Douma, both retaliatory strikes were largely symbolic and not part of a concerted and consistent policy meant to increase American leverage in Syria, or to properly keep Assad in check.<sup>281</sup> Moreover, Trump’s isolationist reorientation of American foreign policy and reduction of Middle Eastern involvement repeats the mistakes of previous administrations, but on a more explicit scale, and it will continue to embolden Iran despite the American withdrawal from the JCPOA.

One of the main American failures in confronting Hezbollah has been a lack of involvement and proactive action against the group. For America to signal a retreat from the region means less direct interest in Lebanon, the main battleground between Hezbollah and America. For pro-Western forces to succeed in rolling back the group’s influence in the country, they will need active support and their adversaries must know that America is behind them. Otherwise, Hezbollah will overwhelm them with its own power and the unconditional and comprehensive Iranian support it receives.

## Section B. Recommendations

### 1. America must combat Hezbollah in a holistic manner

Much of the American effort against Hezbollah has been targeted at cutting its funding. Even that tactic has met with only limited success, as evidenced by the continued and exponential growth of the group’s military and social services apparatus. In order to defeat Hezbollah, America must begin to study and understand the root causes of Hezbollah’s strength and growth, and strive to undercut it in all of those ways simultaneously. America must target Hezbollah at every level—monetarily, militarily, ideologically, socially, and politically—and wage a grassroots war to turn the hearts and minds of Lebanese Shiites against the group, while also thwarting its suppliers, enablers, backers, and sympathizers. Simultaneously, America must support alternatives and rivals to the group, and must show the same unwavering commitments to those groups that Iran shows to its Lebanon-based proxy.

**Monetarily:** Much of the American effort to dry up Hezbollah’s funding has been targeted at its funding from Iran, and its financing – either directly or via affiliated businessmen – through illicit means. But Hezbollah also calls upon a vast network of fundraising that would be otherwise legitimate, but for the fact it is run by a terrorist organization. This includes investments, legitimate businesses in and outside of Lebanon, and a well-organized system of charitable donations and contributions from supporters and sympathizers in Lebanon and elsewhere.

**Militarily:** America must find ways to undercut Hezbollah’s military strength. This does not have to take the form of kinetic operations by U.S. forces against Hezbollah in or outside Lebanon, unless done in self-defense. It should instead be focused on depriving Hezbollah of arms. Methods of accomplishing

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<sup>281</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/06/world/middleeast/us-said-to-weigh-military-responses-to-syrian-chemical-attack.html?mtrref=www.google.co.il&gwh=B0F236536653DE1B74ADF786518C12BD&gwt=pay>

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this can be the extension of UN Resolution 1701 and UNIFIL's mandate to the Syrian-Lebanese border. America should encourage British and German support for the Lebanese Army's Land Border Project to be contingent on preventing *all* weapons smuggling across the border from Syria into Lebanon, and not just to Sunni militants.<sup>282</sup>

America should also increase intelligence-sharing with the Israelis on any overland weapons shipments to Hezbollah via Syria that Israel may not have intercepted itself, including the location of alleged underground weapons-transfer tunnels across the Syrian-Lebanese border. America should additionally aid and strengthen the capabilities of the Israeli, Saudi, and Egyptian navies to detect and intercept any sea-borne weapons shipments to Hezbollah that may come near their territorial waters. Lastly, America must diplomatically and financially pressure Russia to control the flow of weapons to Hezbollah in Syria, and if any weapons are making their way to Hezbollah overland via Iraq, the government in Baghdad must be held accountable and pressured to improve control of its borders.

Most importantly, however, America must go after the source: Iran, by applying pressure on Tehran to limit its ability to transfer weapons, military materiel, or weapons-manufacturing knowledge to Hezbollah.

**Ideologically:** America cannot directly counter Hezbollah's ideology, because it is couched in the legitimacy of Shiite religious doctrine. However, Shiite Islam is not a monolith, and many of Shiite Islam's highly-respected scholars oppose Iran and Hezbollah's *Wilayat al-Faqih* ideology. But they lack the resources to disseminate their message as widely as Hezbollah. Lacking any armed force, they are also intimidated into accommodating Hezbollah and Iran, despite what they may think of them privately.

America must assist these clerics in obtaining a wider platform to compete with Hezbollah's ideology. They are bound to find receptive ears, as Lebanese Shiite society is not uniformly pro-Hezbollah and would likely welcome an authentic Shiite alternative that is both faithful to tradition but also does not require them to sacrifice their lives on the altar of Iran's regional ambitions.

**Socially:** America must encourage and aid in the development of a genuine Lebanese Shiite civil society that acts as a nationalist Lebanese alternative to Hezbollah's vast social and political services apparatus. However, as with the ideological approach, in order to be credible, this must not appear to be a pro-American effort. Instead, America must encourage the development of a confident and independent Lebanese Shiite voice, one that adequately addresses the community's political, social, and economic concerns, but that owes ultimate loyalty to Lebanon alone. Washington and New York cannot replace Tehran and Qom. Moreover, decades of American blunders, support for some of Israel's miscalculations, and Hezbollah's propaganda have combined to create an understandable level of distrust among Lebanese Shiites of anything "Made in the U.S.A." Therefore, this must appear to be as non-American an effort as possible, and support can even be funneled through credible American allies – like France or others – which the Shiites do not mistrust.

**Politically:** American allies in Lebanon, the March 14 Alliance, are disunited and demoralized. This is partially due to Lebanon's traditionally fractious politics and in part because of the inconsistent and

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<sup>282</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-german-mou-in-support-of-the-lebanese-army>; <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-military-aid/lebanese-military-gets-u-s-british-aid-for-defending-border-with-syria-idU.S.KCN0WX1HY>

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seemingly half-hearted nature of American support since the Cedar Revolution. America's goal must be to strengthen, re-unify, and reinvigorate March 14, particularly Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his Mustaqbal Movement.

It must also try to peel away the Amal Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement from Hezbollah by making the group as less attractive political partner, or at least making the costs of an alliance with Hezbollah outweigh the political benefits. After all, these two parties, to which Hezbollah currently owes much of its political strength, are not its natural or ideological allies. America can do this by supporting credible and dependable rivals to Hezbollah in Lebanon, within and outside the Shiite community. The goal of these rivals must be to provide the Lebanese as a whole – but particularly the Shiites – the same benefits and legitimate rights they derive from Hezbollah, but with ultimate loyalty being owed to Lebanon and its interests rather than to Iran.

## 2. America Must Lead an International Effort Against Hezbollah

Hezbollah has classified America as its primary enemy, therefore it is only fitting that we take the lead in degrading and destroying the group, with our partners taking on secondary roles. Several American allies – including Israel and the Gulf States – share America's opposition to Hezbollah and the desire for the group's demise. However, their efforts often operate at cross-purposes with one other – for example, with the Israelis threatening to target the Lebanese state and its institutions in a future war with Hezbollah, pro-Western Lebanese political forces constantly demonizing the Israelis, and the Saudis and the Gulf States withdrawing their support from Beirut altogether. By taking such actions, each party not only undercuts its own efforts against Hezbollah, but also handicaps American interests and policies.

A coalition effort must prevail, instead of the current haphazard and *ad hoc* approach to combatting the group, which has left Hezbollah much room to maneuver over the decades. Just as America formed coalitions to defeat Al-Qaeda and ISIS, so too must it do so regarding Hezbollah, with the unmistakable message that this is an American-led effort. Each of our partners must fall in line with an overall policy designed by America, with each country and partner assuming a role that plays to their strengths vis-à-vis Hezbollah.

Specifically, America must lead an *international* effort to criminalize all components and subsidiaries of Hezbollah and must work to end the artificial distinction between Hezbollah's so-called "political" and "military" wings practiced by the EU, the U.K., and other countries. American partners across the globe must be made to understand that all aspects and components of Hezbollah act in an interlocking and mutually reinforcing manner – as the party itself readily admits – and that allowing one component to continue operating freely would provide the most destructive aspects of Hezbollah's ideology and actions a continued lease on life. Money, after all, is fungible and charitable funds raised by the group's political components often make their way into the hands of its "resistance" fighters. Hezbollah can also use its non-military entities to continue disseminating its ideology and propaganda, gaining sympathizers and recruiting foot-soldiers, and thus continuing to expand its footprint in Lebanon and elsewhere. Without an international effort to put an end to all aspects of Hezbollah, the overall effectiveness of any American action will be limited. Without an international blanket ban on any and all Hezbollah and Hezbollah-related activities, the group will simply continue to survive and grow.

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Israel's role would be primarily military and intelligence based. As part of maximizing Israel's role, America must pressure Jerusalem to end its bellicose rhetoric against Lebanon and its state institutions. It must also push the IDF from its traditional heavy-handed approach to fighting in the Lebanese arena, and jointly lay down a smart war strategy that maximizes damage to Hezbollah while minimizing the harm to Lebanon and its civilians, and thus the group's ability to use the Israeli war effort for its propaganda. America must ensure that any future war undertaken by the IDF will be measured – a scalpel, and not a sledgehammer – and not work at cross-ends with American interests in Lebanon.

While Israel can serve as the “eyes and ears” of America against Hezbollah, past experience has shown that Jerusalem – like any other country – has interests of its own in Lebanon that naturally do not fully coincide with America. America must therefore develop its own intelligence assets in the country, at the very least, in order to verify the information received from its allies.

The Gulf States' role is primarily financial. The Saudis must aid in rehabilitating and rebuilding Lebanon and its institutions, including in south Lebanon and among the Shiites. They have done so in the past, particularly in the wake of the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, but they were not as vocal as the Iranians or Hezbollah in doing so. This was a mistake, since the fight with Hezbollah is also one of symbolism and perception. Saudi and Gulf efforts in Lebanon must be made public—even going as far as festooning areas with their flags and national symbols. In this way, the Gulf States will impress upon Lebanon's Shiites that they have their best interests at heart and, unlike Iran, will not ask them to act as cannon-fodder for their regional ambitions, or wars.

European, Latin American, African, and Asian partners must also play a role, primarily by helping to dry up Hezbollah's sources of funding on those continents, tightening sanctions against the group, and hindering the ability of its members to move across their territories. Where America lacks the clout to encourage countries in these continents to take these measures, our Arab or Israeli partners can help fill that role.

The largest burden, however, will be upon Lebanon itself. All of this effort will be for naught if Beirut does not prosecute efforts on the ground to counter Hezbollah socially, ideologically, political, financially, and – finally – militarily. While America must take into consideration Lebanon's social and military limitations, that should not become a *carte blanche* for wholesale Lebanese inaction. While the Lebanese government may have little choice but to make allowances for Hezbollah's political activities or electoral fundraising efforts – because to do otherwise would anger many Lebanese Shiites by giving them the impression that their voice is being silenced – there is still much else Lebanon *can* do. Beirut must be held accountable for areas where it is able to act without heading down the slippery slope to a civil war, but chooses not to. America must encourage its Lebanese partners – through a combination of carrots and sticks – to undertake all actions of which they are capable, and provide them with the confidence that we will credibly support them every step of the way. Joint American-Lebanese commissions can be established to determine exactly where the Lebanese can safely push back against Hezbollah, and how most effectively to do so.

Above all else, the effort against Hezbollah will require patience. Destroying the group will not happen overnight or in one fell swoop. It is too entrenched in Lebanon and its Shiite community for that to be

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realistic. Instead, Hezbollah's demise will come through a slow process of erosion, a reversal of the gradual approach assumed by the group allowing it to reach its current strength.

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