

The Hizballah Security Apparatus

By Carl Anthony Wege

Abstract: There is little in the open literature concerning the intelligence and security apparatus of the Hizballah organization. Understanding Hizballah's security organ is essential in comprehending its emergence as the most successful liberation and terrorist organizations in the Near East.

Hizballah's Emergence

Political mobilization among Lebanon's Shi'a began in the 1960s with an influx of Shi'a scholars and jurists returning to Lebanon from Najaf (Iraq) after Iraq's 1968 Ba'athist coup. [1] The outbreak of Lebanon's civil war in 1975, followed by the Syrian intervention and Iran's revolution of 1979, saw this Shi'a mobilization become radicalized. Islamic Amal (Amal Al-Islamiyah) was one such radical Shi'a militia created by Hussein Musawi during the July 1982 Israeli-Lebanon war when he and approximately 500 followers from AMAL [2] moved into Nabisheet (Hussein Musawi's home town) in the eastern Lebanese town of Baalbek. They linked up with al-Quds (Jerusalem) elements of Iran's Revolutionary Guard [3] (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC, or Pasdaran) that had also entered eastern Lebanon's Bekka valley in July 1982 in response to Israel's invasion. Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, and his cadre from Lebanon's al-Dawah (the Islamic Call) movement, had already arrived in the Bekka, creating an environment conducive to the Islamist enterprise.

A coalition developed between the Musawi organization (the followers of Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli), the Association of Muslim Students, and the Association of Muslim Ulema in Lebanon. [4] The Pasdaran Quds drew from this and sired the creation of Hizballah in Baalbek in coordination with the Iranian Embassies in Beirut and Damascus. [5] Martin Kramer argued that the Pasdaran initially sought out the Shi'a clans of the Bekka, rather than south Lebanon's Shi'a, because for various cultural reasons the group had been excluded from the upper ranks of the AMAL movement. [6] Sequentially, Hizballah would be established first in the Bekka, then in Beirut, and only lastly in Lebanon's south.

The Shi'a clans of southern Lebanon, where kinship is of greater significance than in other areas of the country [7], evidenced greater continuity with the traditional Zi'am (Zu'ma) system. Consequently, they were more oriented toward AMAL's secularists than Hizballah's Islamists. Yet the AMAL militia never developed anything remotely close to the organizational coherence of Hizballah as it matured. Although Hizballah's strength in south Lebanon developed slowly, nonetheless by the time of the 2006 Israeli-Hizballah war, southern Lebanon could militarily be called Hizballahland.

The formal end of the Lebanese civil war with the T'iaf Accords in 1989 saw Hizballah evolve into something greater than a Lebanese confessional militia as it cleaved into a relatively moderate politically oriented and Islamist faction. The Islamist faction itself divided, as Sheikh Tufayli attempted to create a "Movement of the Hungry" with aspirations corresponding to Hizballah's original program for an Islamic Republic of Lebanon. It was stillborn by 1998; as a result the Islamic Resistance (al-Muqawama) became the "mainstream" Hizballah Islamist faction that no longer sought to create an Islamic Republic, but rather to force the Israelis out of southern Lebanon. They achieved that goal in 2000 with the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Hizballah's Security Architecture

In the evolution of Hizballah and its security services, it is important to look at the function of the developing security organs, rather than particular entities or nomenclature, [8] as these differ with different authors. Political authority in Hizballah flows through a clerical-security matrix rooted in lines of kinship influenced by both clan patronage and Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Therefore, formal institutional arrangements are unlikely to reflect functional organization.

Hussein al-Khalil first established Hizballah's security apparatus in Bekka [9] during the summer of 1982, coordinating operations with Islamic AMAL before it was formally subordinated to Hizballah under Hussein Musawi after 1984. [10] The Musawi and Hamadi clans became the core clans of the embryonic Hizballah organization, [11] and this structure magnified the difficulty for hostile services attempting to penetrate Hizballah. It made the exercise akin to penetrating a family. Hizballah's security apparatus reflected the configuration of Shi'a clans and Hizballah's operational emphasis in each of Lebanon's three distinct geographic regions of Shi'a dominance. The geographic regions themselves became subdivided into sectors, creating a compartmentalized operational environment. The Bekka region with the largest IRGC component was characterized by a focus on logistics and training. [12] The southern region of Lebanon had an operational emphasis on the confrontation with Israel, and the organizational focus in the Beirut region was primarily political. In all of the regions, the security apparatus focused initially on internal security, then on covert and military operations.

Hizballah developed multiple and overlapping security organs aimed at maintaining organizational integrity. Hizballah's operational security requires a strict separation between Hizballah's political and military wings. Consequently, the ability of Hizballah's political wing to exercise administrative control over the military wing and its security organs is problematic. Additionally, Hizballah is, at least in part, heavily influenced by Iran, which has created divisions over any external political and administrative control over the military and security components of the organization. Because the impetus for the creation of Hizballah was Iran's Revolutionary Guard, administrative control over the Hizballah's military and security components are divided between both the Hizballah political leadership and the Pasdaran. Iran's objectives were to further Shi'a Islamist revolution, while Syrian President Hafez al-

Assad facilitated Pasdaran operations in the Bekka to immunize his troops in Lebanon against Shi'a militants.[13] Al-Assad's support of both AMAL and the Hizballah was important because of the greater affinity of Assad's Alawite tribe for the secularists of AMAL.

A common element across all of Hizballah's security entities is their reliance on fighters drawn from the Shi'a communities throughout Lebanon. The initial model for Hizballah's security services was Fatah's Jihaz al-Razd and the AMAL security entity based loosely on it. [14] Because Hizballah is not a state, a basic intelligence dilemma that faces the organization is the problematic task of establishing and maintaining secure territory and secure facilities. The problem is ameliorated somewhat by using secure facilities in territories of friendly states like Iran. [15] Hizballah's first security concern was necessarily a counterintelligence function [16] to maintain organizational integrity. Hizballah counterintelligence capabilities were influenced by the Pasdaran Quds and applied by Hizballah to local Lebanese circumstances in the context of Syrian occupied Lebanon. Hizballah has successfully executed both defensive and offensive counterintelligence operations. Successful defensive counterintelligence operations are documented as far back as the middle 1980s, when Imad Mugniyah disrupted United States operations involving Lebanese nationals working the Lebanese-Cyprus ferry lines. [17] By 1997, Hizballah counterintelligence could effectively use double agents to mislead the Israelis, successfully executing operations against 13 Israeli Shayetet naval commandos near Sidon, leaving 12 Israelis dead [18] The Hizballah kidnapping of Mossad operative Colonel Elhanan Tannenbaum in 2000 illustrates a more recent successful defensive counterintelligence operation. Tannenbaum had apparently tried to run a "false flag" operation against Hizballah from Europe by claiming to represent a European country. Hizballah lured Col. Tannenbaum to Beirut, where he was taken into custody by Hizballah security personnel. [19]

There are also several known instances of successful Hizballah offensive counterintelligence operations. Hizballah, for example, managed to compromise IDF Lieutenant Colonel Omar al-Heib, who traded surveillance data on IDF military installations for narcotics later distributed by al-Heib's organization. The IDF believes that data compromised by Lt. Col. al-Heib allowed for successful Hizballah targeting of Mt. Meron [20] at the outset of the Israel-Hizballah war of 2006.[21] Recently, Hizballah successfully placed Nadia N. Prouty in the CIA. In a classic operation reminiscent of the U.S-Soviet Cold War, Prouty legally entered the U.S. and then gained citizenship through a sham marriage. She thereafter applied for work and successfully infiltrated the FBI and used that position to leverage a job at the CIA. [22]

Western services have also seen achievement. The defection of Abu al-Kassam Misbahi (Farhad, a co-founder of Iran's VEVAK intelligence organ) in Germany during the middle 1990s [23] was a significant accomplishment. The 2007 defection in Ankara of General Ali Reza Ashgari [24] of Pasdaran Quds, who was instrumental in building Hizballah's organization in Bekka during the early-middle 1980s, was also important. Most recently, the February 2008 assassination of Imad Mugniyah (Hajj Radwan),

presumably by Mossad's Kidon element, was a significant coup for Western intelligence. [25]

Hizballah's intelligence collection abilities have improved over time as well. Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon taught Hizballah the importance of tactical intelligence collection, precipitating Hizballah's careful and ongoing effort to understand how the IDF conducted operations in southern Lebanon. Intelligence collected by Hizballah respecting IDF operational methods prior to the IDF withdrawal in 2000 paid off with the Hizballah victory in the 2006 war.

Hizballah covert operations are carried out using multiple descriptors for its security apparatus. Hizballah followed some early Fatah conventions wherein Fatah's Jihaz al-Razd security entity operated using the Black September Organization moniker during the 1970s. The creation of Hizballah in the summer of 1982 under IRGC guidance necessarily saw preliminary operations limited to the coalescence of Hizballah's constituent entities under multiple names. Hizballah's only opposition at that juncture were small scale actions aimed at controlling territory and organizing personnel with AMAL and other local militias. [26] The security apparatus was then focused on a very narrow core of Hizballah operations, organized with fighters drawn primarily from the Hamadi and Musawi clans. These same fighters conducted operations using different organizational names. The core functions were configured and nurtured by elements of the Bekka's Pasdaran Qud's [27] sustaining Hizballah's Lebanese operations. The attack on the U.S. Embassy in the spring of 1983, and attacks on both the multinational forces and the Israeli intelligence center established in occupied Tyre in the fall of that year, were Hizballah's first major operations against foreigners. These covert operations executed by the security apparatus initiated an operational pattern characterizing subsequent major events. The pattern was direct IRGC support in financing and logistics facilitated by Syrian non-interference [28] in Hizballah operations. During the middle 1980s, this pattern was followed by the security apparatus in its management of kidnapping operations directed against foreigners. [29]

As Lebanon became relatively more stable, the tasks of the security apparatus evolved to include security functions supporting Hizballah's social and political operations as well as military operations. With Hizballah's emergence as a political party representing the bulk of Lebanon's Shi'a, the security apparatus accrued some functions analogous to an Interior Ministry. Police functions became necessary to maintain both the integrity of the party and Lebanon's Shi'a body politic in territories controlled by Hizballah. Within this "domestic" side of the security apparatus was an entity Amad Hamzeh described as an "engagement and coordination unit" under the authority of Hajj Wafic Safa. [30] It eventually turned ordinary criminals threatening Hizballah persons or property over to Lebanon's ostensive authorities. [31] The security apparatus thereby divided functionally between these police functions and functions supporting military and covert operations. Additionally, about two hundred Hizballah fighters operate in a preventive security apparatus under Mahmud Haidar (Abu Ali) in an executive protection role modeled on Fatah's Force 17 that provides security for Hizballah politicians. Elements of the security apparatus also served as an asset for the IRGC Quds. Hizballah's Unit 1800, for example,

was established primarily to serve Iranian foreign policy goals by coordinating Hizballah assistance to multiple Sunni Palestinian Islamists organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. The operational genesis was rooted in the deportation by Israel of four-hundred Hamas militants into southern Lebanon in 1992. Those Sunni Palestinian Islamists were housed and indoctrinated through the good offices of Hizballah. This allowed ties to be forged across the not so insignificant religious division between Shi'a and Sunni Islamists. The Sunni have historically seen the Shi'a as an illegitimate heretical sect, and much blood has been shed between the two main sects of Islam throughout the centuries over these religious disputes. In this instance, however, Israel's role as a common enemy, superseded the two sect's theological differences, and this coordination against Israel facilitated a rarely seen cooperation between the Sunni and Shi'a.

Conclusion

The security architecture created by the Hizballah organization reflects its development in Lebanon's operational environment. The structure of the security apparatus was a function initially of the kinship patterns within the Hamadi and Musawi clans and their associated Islamist groups welded to a security architecture created by the Pasdaran Quds within Syrian and Israeli-occupied Lebanon. Additional Shi'a clans and families were incorporated into Hizballah as the organization expanded. Hizballah's security architecture evolved with the reconstruction of Lebanon in the 1990s and the changing role of the Shi'a in Lebanese society. The emergence of a more developed and assertive Shi'a polity saw the expansion of the Hizballah security apparatus into a more nuanced and sophisticated organization even as relations between Hizballah and Iran strengthened.

The various Hizballah security entities interact today with external services which necessarily shape the configuration of Hizballah's security apparatus at any given point in time. Hizballah's fundamental intelligence challenge is filtering analysis through an Islamist veneer thereby degrading the analytical product. Hizballah has emphasized Hebrew language skills for some of its fighters, yet comprehending Hebrew is not the same thing as grasping Israeli thought. Archie Roosevelt [32] argued long ago that a lust for knowing which seeks understanding unclouded by worldview must animate the intelligence enterprise. Hizballah's security apparatus must lust to know Israel even as it understands Hebrew. In a larger sense, the Hizballah security apparatus must create a *raison d'être* that goes beyond moribund dreams of a Lebanese Islamic Republic or its utility furthering Iran's imperial ambitions. Hizballah's security apparatus must affirm Shi'a political and social aspirations in Lebanon to survive.

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NOTES

[1] Shapira, Shimon "The Origins of Hizballah" *Jerusalem Quarterly* 46 (Spring 1988): 116. The secular Ba'athist parties in Iraq and Syria opposed to the Islamist's who later created Lebanon's al-Dawah (the Islamic Call) movement.

- [2] These were primarily al-Dawah members who had infiltrated AMAL earlier intending to maneuver the organization in an Islamist direction. AMAL was created by Musa Sadr in 1974 and is generally considered the first Shi'a militia. Its goals were to protect the Shia community and it was a relatively secular organization with an initial focus on Lebanese political and social reform.
- [3] Hussein Musawi initiated the split within AMAL during the Fourth Congress in Tyre during March of 1982. See Sankari, Jamal. *Fadlallah: The Making of a Radical Shi'ite Leader*. London: Saqi Books, 2005. pg. 196.
- [4] Shapira, "The Origins of Hizballah." p. 124.
- [5] See Aboul-Enein, Youssef and Rudolph Atallah. "Hizballah: A Discussion of Its Early Formation." *Infantry*, 94 (3) May / June 2005 pg. 24. See also Al-Muharrar, Lebanon 28 July 1989.
- [6] See Kramer, "Hizballah: The Calculus of Jihad," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, May, 1994, p. 25. These Bekka clans included the Hamiya, Musawi, Aqueel, Shahadehs, and Ezzedeens.
- [7] See Al-Itihad 13 September 1988.
- [8] This is analogous to Americans still referring to a Directorate of Operations or D.O. rather than a National Clandestine Service irrespective of changing organizational structures.
- [9] Al-Khalil (who holds a degree in mathematics oddly enough) is now more of a politician and has less involvement in operations. However, like Imad Mugniyah, he started out as a member of the Palestinian Fatah's Force 17 and commanded Fatah military formations in Tyre during the 1978 Israeli invasion. In the 1982 Israeli invasion he fell back to Beirut with PLO forces and after the Palestinian evacuation to Tunis he migrated to Hizballah where he managed security for Hussein Musawi. Al-Khalil would briefly be in charge of Hizballah foreign operations and then Hizballah counterintelligence. He also maintained a parallel political role with election to Hizballah's Shura (decision making) Council in 1985. See *Intelligence Online* 22 December 2006.
- [10] Ranstorp, Magnus. *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. P. 66. Khalil would later become chairman of Hizballah's Politburo.
- [11] Some Hamadi clan branches had roots around the southern village of Sawaraneh as tobacco farmers. It claimed between two and three hundred members many of whom migrated to Beirut. There are also Hamadi clan branches based in the Hermel plain between Baalbek and Syria proper. Clan members have been prominent across the social spectrum from Sabry Hamadi, a long serving Speaker of Parliament to Hamadi clan elements prominent in the Hashish industry. Across several decades the Hamadis and Assads acted as Shi'a dynasties with alternating service as Parliament Speaker.
- [12] In 1990 the IRGC began rotating Quds trainers after discovering that Mossad had compromised three of them. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat* 16 July 2006.
- [13] This policy was continued by Bashar Assad as President of Syria after the death of his father Hafez al-Assad in 2000.
- [14] Prior to the rise of the Shi'a Islamists, Lebanese Shi'a tended to migrate into the Lebanese Communist Party or Fatah (even though the Shi'a and Palestinians would have strained relations in later years). The first exposure many Shi'a had in the 1970s to guerrilla training was under Fatah instructors.
- [15] Mustafa Badreddine faced this problem when he assumed command of Hizballah's counterintelligence directorate in the early 1990s and formalized at the seventh Hizballah Congress in 1991. Badreddine is a son-in-law of Imad Mugniyah and one of the Kuwait prisoners Hizballah was trying to free in the middle 1980s. He escaped Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion in 1991 and made his way to Beirut in 1992. Badreddine would later become the mayor of Nabitiyyah.
- [16] Counterintelligence is divisible into offensive and defensive activities. Offensive counterintelligence would refer to operations run against rival organizations such as the Prouty penetration of the CIA by Hizballah. Defensive counterintelligence has its focus on internal organizational security.
- [17] See "Iran's plans in Lebanon" *Foreign Report* 12 November 1987, pg. 3. Also in the fall of 1994 Hizballah prevented a CIA kidnap operation aimed at Hassan Ezzeddine who ran Hizballah foreign operations prior to its disbanding in 1995. The operation had been facilitated through a compromised AMAL official who managed to escape to the Cyprus station and from there went to the United States. See *Intelligence Online* 26 October 1995.
- [18] See Jones, Clive. "A Reach Greater than the Grasp: Israeli Intelligence and the Conflict in South Lebanon 1990-2000." *Intelligence and National Security* Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 2001), pg. 12. Israel had organized an appendage to its South Lebanon Army (SLA) proxy militia called Unit 501. This ethnically mixed unit was intended to gather intelligence on the Islamic Resistance but was used instead by Hizballah to gather information on the South Lebanon operations of the IDF.
- [19] See *The New York Times* 17 October 2000.
- [20] An Israeli Air Force surveillance center is located there.
- [21] See Col. David Eshel. "Hezbollah's Intelligence War" www.defense-update.com Accessed 12/11/2007.
- [22] In a response also reminiscent of some cold war penetrations the United States allowed her to plead guilty to some minor charges thus avoiding government embarrassment in open court.
- [23] The historic ties between Germany and Persia, dating to the 19th century, also provide an entrée into Hizballah via the German BND.
- [24] General Ashgari apparently helped identify Nada Prouty (al-Quar) penetration of CIA in 2007.
- [25] It is likely that General Ashgari provided relevant information here as he had a relationship with Mugniyah very early on.
- [26] Although formed in response to the Israeli invasion of 1982, the IDF was preoccupied with the Palestinians and aware of little more than the arrival of the IRGC into the Bekka.
- [27] The mission of Quds is to export the Shi'a Islamic revolution and it is functionally divided into geographically defined departments. The Lebanon / Palestine Department has been the most successful.
- [28] Syria's Alawite regime found it useful to maintain an alliance of sorts with the Twelver Shi'a of Iran. Iran gained access to Lebanon's Shi'a community and a point of confrontation against Israel while Syria gained political and economic support that partially replaced that lost with the collapse of the USSR.
- [29] Domestic kidnapping and other criminal activity was a money making enterprise for dozens of Lebanese militias in those years.
- [30] Safa was one of the founders of Hizballah and has extensive security experience. During the middle 1990s Safa's deputies included Hassan Ezzeddine, Hamze Zakaria and Abdul Hadi Hamadi. See *Intelligence Online* 16 March 1995. Abdul Hamadi was himself assisted by Mustafa Chehade, Talal Hussein Hamadi, and Nabil Kaouk (who ran Hizballah security in south Lebanon). See *Intelligence Online* 14 September 1995.
- [31] See Hamzeh In The Path of Hizballah, pg.65.

[32] Roosevelt, Archie. *For Lust of Knowing: Memoirs of an Intelligence Officer*. Boston: Little, Brown and company, 1988.

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