



Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God

Matthew Levitt

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This comprehensive analysis of Hezbollah is meticulously detailed and made gripping by a flowing narrative.

Few non-followers of Shi'a fundamentalism would consider Hezbollah "the party of God." Although recognized as a legitimate Lebanese political party, Matthew Levitt rightly claims that Hezbollah must be judged on all its actions—and its record documented here is not pretty. The author researched this book for ten years, making extensive use of interviews with policy makers and officials and examining recently declassified CIA and FBI records to describe Hezbollah's criminal and terrorist actions throughout the world. The result is an eye-opening, exhaustive, and convincing investigation, crammed with details that will reward readers able to navigate the oceans of facts, names, and events—not an easy task.

The author, in fascinating, yet plodding, style, traces Hezbollah's evolution from a pro-Iranian faction in 1982, during the Iran-Iraq War, to an international party that promotes violence to rid the Middle East of Western imperialism and Zionist tyranny. Hezbollah remains largely a well funded Iranian proxy that is responsible for such terrorist actions as the 1983 bombing of the US embassy in Beirut, which killed sixty-three people, and the bombing of US marines and French army barracks that killed almost 300 marines and soldiers that same year.

The stories of Hezbollah's growth as a terrorist force in Europe and South America are gripping, as Levitt recounts the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847, planned by Mohammed Hamadi, and Hezbollah's 1994 murderous bombing of an Israeli community center in Buenos Aires, which killed eighty-five members. Some African nations provide an enticing base for Hezbollah, Levitt notes, because of a strong Shi'a presence, lax security, and a lucrative diamond industry that employs many Israelis. The author lucidly shows how Hezbollah exploited these conditions in Sudan, Somalia, and Uganda to raise funds for Iran through hostage taking and smuggling.

Much of the book discusses Hezbollah's North American connection, in which the author portrays "the party of God" as the "gang that couldn't shoot straight" that nonetheless remains a potentially lethal presence. Active Hezbollah cells in Ontario and Detroit have become centers of Hezbelloh fundraising. One of the more intriguing stories tells how Mohammed Youssef Hammed gained US residency through a sham marriage and made millions for Hezbollah by selling untaxed cigarettes. Large sums have also been raised through Hezbollah's cooperation with drug cartels along the Mexican border. In addition, Levitt convincingly shows that American intelligence has been very good, helping to foil at least twenty Hezbollah actions during 2011 and 2012, including an attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the US.

Levitt directs the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, has been widely published in journals and newspapers, and has authored *Hamas: Politics, Charity and terrorism in the Service of Jihad* and *Negotiating Under Fire: Preserving Peace Talks in the Face of Terror Attacks*. The author uses his impressive credentials to achieve convincingly the goal of his book: to provide documentation for a dialogue on how Hezbollah's international activities must be assessed and responded to. When the author lets the narrative flow naturally without tossing in a stew of names, dates, and repetitive detail, he compellingly accomplishes this.

KARL HELICHER (Fall 2013)

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