

Donald Should Trump Hezbollah

by Michael Curtis

In an interview on September 3, 2015 presidential candidate Donald Trump confessed he could not identify the leaders of major militant groups in the Middle East. More pertinently, he added he would know the difference between Hamas and Hezbollah when it was appropriate. Trump explained, "I would know the difference within 24 hours after I got the job."

Now that Trump has the job he is well aware of the menace of Hezbollah to Israel, to US interests in the Middle East, and to himself. He is aware that Sheikh Naim Qassem, second in command of Hezbollah, has referred to him as a "racist."

Hezbollah, the "Party of God," is a Shi'a terrorist organization basically located in Lebanon whose objectives are to establish an Islamic government in the Arab world, to oppose the U.S. which it blames for many of Lebanon's problems, to liberate Jerusalem, and to eliminate the State of Israel.

The danger of Hezbollah is inherent in its origin as well as its activity. It was founded in 1982, though its roots go back to a group called Islamic Amal, as an adjunct of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, soon after the Islamic State was established. The core of the movement lay in the effort to collaborate with Iran's fighters in Ba'albek in the northern Beca'a valley to take part in the Jihad against Israel. From the Ba'albek area, Hezbollah quickly spread into Shi'ite areas in Beirut and in southern Lebanon.

The organization grew as it fought against the French and American peacemakers who were in Lebanon after Israel withdrew from Beirut in 1985. Hezbollah acquired both weapons and increasing number of recruits. It received money and weapons from the Syrian Assad regime, and therefore helps protect

Syria's political and military interests. But more important, it gets financial aid, weapons and explosives from Iran. The October 22, 1989 Taif Accord was agreed to in order to end Lebanon's sectarian civil war and called for disarmament of militias. However, it led Hezbollah to call its military wing the Islamic Resistance. It continued its guerilla war in south Lebanon, and then took part in political matters, participating in national elections in 1992.

Hezbollah's assault on Western targets and its terrorist attacks began soon after its creation. It was responsible for the truck bombings of the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983 when 258 U.S. servicemen were killed, the single deadliest death toll for the Marine corps since World War II, and 58 French servicemen. The U.S. Embassy annex in Beirut was attacked in September 1984. Members of Hezbollah were responsible for the hijacking of TWA flight 847 when a U.S. navy diver was murdered. In October 1997 the U.S. State department labelled Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

The killings continued. Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the bombing of the Israeli embassy on March 17, 1992 when 29 were killed and 242 injured, and the bombing of the Jewish organization AMIA in Buenos Aires on July 18, 1994 when 85 were killed. It also assassinated the commander of the South Lebanon Army in his home, and engaged in attacks in the Caribbean, Central America, and Bangkok, Thailand.

Because of the sectarian clashes in Lebanon in 2008, Hezbollah participated in the political process, getting the right to veto any cabinet decision. In 2009 it won 10 seats in Parliament, and became part of the unity government which it soon helped destroy.

President Trump is now well aware of the danger of this terrorist group.

The danger of it was shown during the second Lebanon war in 2006 when Hezbollah fired 4,000 rockets at northern Israel, killing 43 civilians. Now, estimates calculate it has more than 100,000 rockets, which can cover all the area of Israel.

There are thousands of Hezbollah positions, infrastructures, and weaponry in 200 villages and towns along the Israeli border. Hezbollah has weapon warehouses, rocket launchers, underground tunnels, anti-tank positions, command posts in southern Lebanon ready to strike at Israel. Hezbollah now has guided missiles with 500 kilogram warheads, and advanced air-defense systems. It has not only acquired rockets and missiles, but also capacity for naval warfare, including Russian anti-ship oniks missiles, weapons that can be used not only against maritime and land targets, but also against offshore gas rigs that Israel is developing .

Thousands of Hezbollah went to fight for the Assad regime in Syria. and more than 1,5000 died there. But it is still preoccupied with Israel. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has warned he is ready to strike anywhere in Israel.

Consequently, Israel has struck back against the advanced weaponry and rockets which are being transferred from Iran via Syria to Lebanon.

The Israel attempt to prevent air transport, as well as other forms of transport, from Iran to Syria has been limited to some extent because of Russian activity. The Russians have provided protection of Syrian air space with long range S-300 and S-400 weapons. Nevertheless, more latterly the Israeli air force has struck targets as in December 2016 when Israeli jets destroyed a convoy of weapons, including chemical weapons, and a strike at the Mezze military airport near Damascus to stop the flow of sophisticated weapons, military equipment, and weapons of mass destruction to Hezbollah .

The ambitious Hezbollah has been challenging the Sunni states,

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Countries in Yemen and elsewhere. It was responsible for bombings in Kuwait led in 1983 by Mustafa Badreddine, since killed by explosives in Damascus airport on May 13, 2016. On March 1, 2015, the Sunni Gulf countries, labelled Hezbollah which was trying to recruit members and to smuggle arms and drugs into their countries, a terrorist organization.

President-elect Trump appreciates that the real supporter of Hezbollah remains Iran, and the influence of its activities by Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds force. Trump is already aware that the lifting of sanctions on Iran in the nuclear deal was a bad mistake, and concerned that Iran not seek to dominate the Middle East. To that end, Trump should form a partnership with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States to control or overcome the activities of Hezbollah, a danger to world peace in itself and a surrogate of Iran.