

Hezbollah: Danger Ahead

by Michael Curtis



President Donald Trump has been accused of many dire acts and devious intentions. One of the most absurd, the latest, comes from Hassan Nasrallah, the head of the terrorist Hezbollah organization, in a television interview in his bunker in Beirut on February 16, 2017. As if to give credence to the remark of the famous Jonathan Swift that if a lie is believed for only for an hour, it has done its work and there is no further occasion for it, Nasrallah claimed that Trump was responsible for giving Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "the green light to wage a war on Lebanon."

Trump of course bears no responsibility for this flight of fantasy, but it is an indication of the increasing brazenness and self-assurance of Nasrallah and his organization Hezbollah. It is telling that symbolically, the television address marked the anniversary of the death of the master Hezbollah terrorist and head of security, Imad Mughniyeh, assassinated, probably by his own group, in Damascus on February 12, 2008. At one point, Mughniyeh held the record of

having killed more Americans than any other terrorist. His record was eclipsed by Mustafa Badreddine, also assassinated by internal rivals in Hezbollah on May 13, 2016 in Damascus, and who was behind the bombing of the U.S. Marine Corps Barracks in Lebanon in 1983 that killed 241 marines.

Nasrallah is not one of the world's leading experts on the nature of Jews or on the nature of Israel. Rather he is the messenger of antisemitism. He informed the world that "throughout history the Jews have been Allah's most cowardly and avaricious creatures... you will find no one more cowardly, weak in psyche, mind and religion, miserly or greedy than they are." It comes as no surprise that he is a Holocaust denier: he believes "Jews invented the legend of the Nazi atrocities."

Not surprisingly, he sees Israel as the state of "the grandsons of apes and pigs...the Zionist Jews. Israel is and will be an illegal state...Israel is a cancer that must be eradicated."

Hezbollah (the Party of Allah) emerged in the 1980s. Palestinians terrorists using Lebanese territory had attacked Israel which responded by invading their bases in Lebanon in 1982. One of the consequences was the creation of this radical Shi'a group, led by clerics, and part of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, aiming at an Islamic government in the Arab world, the liberation of Jerusalem, and the elimination of Israel. Terror would be used to attain political objectives.

Though Hezbollah is regarded as a terrorist organization by a number of countries, including the U.S., France, the Arab League, and Gulf States; others including the UK, Russia, and the EU are hesitant and regard only the military wing of Hezbollah, Islamic Resistance, as terrorist.

The Lebanon war began in 2006 after the Hezbollah attack on an Israeli border patrol that killed three soldiers and kidnapped two IDF soldiers. This sparked the second war as Israel

reacted immediately to the kidnapping. During the war Hezbollah fired more than 4,000 rockets into Israel. Although Israel hoped to crush Hezbollah it did not deliver the crushing blow it wanted.

This was made plain in the very critical Winograd Commission report submitted on January 30, 2008 to the then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and to the minister of defense, Ehud Barak. The report questioned Israel's military superiority and concluded the Lebanon campaign of 2006, had ended without a clear military victory for Israel. The report was severely critical of the failings and shortcomings in Israeli decision making, both political and military. Hezbollah had resisted the much larger Israeli force that had air superiority.

The war ended with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 of August 11, 2006. The Resolution called for full cessation of hostilities, for Israel to withdraw its forces from Lebanon in parallel with withdrawal of Hezbollah and UNFIL soldiers in South Lebanon, and with some provisions for a long term solution. It stressed the importance of full control of Lebanon by the government of Lebanon, and not by other forces, and the territorial integrity, sovereignty, and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders. It also called for addressing the unconditional release of the abducted Israeli soldiers.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on March 10, 2017 in a periodic report on the implementation of the UN Resolution objected to the belligerent statements of Nasrallah against Israel which "increased the risk of tension and could lead to renewed war." Guterres rejected the argument that Hezbollah threats are justified as a need for deterrence. This rhetorical threat of the use of force destabilizes the relative calm and stability in the region.

Part of the Guterres report was an appeal to the Lebanese President Michel Aoun to get agreement among Lebanese

political parties to remove weaponry from Hezbollah and other armed groups. It made clear that the retention of arms by Hezbollah and other groups undermines the state's authority. Already, UN Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2, 2004 called on "foreign forces," Israel and Syria, to withdraw from Lebanon, and for all militias, that is Hezbollah, to disband.

Guterres's plea regarding Resolution 1701 is unlikely to be implemented since Aoun, a Maronite Christian and former general, elected President in October 2016, signed a "memorandum of understanding" in 2006 between his Free Patriotic Movement and Hezbollah, which backed him for president. According to the Lebanon constitution the president must be a Maronite.

Most importantly, the Guterres report condemned the threats launched by the Hezbollah leader against Israel on February 16, 2017 to strike Israel's Dimona Nuclear reactor which is for Hezbollah a military target. In any case Nasrallah called for Israel to dismantle it.

Nasrallah also called on Israel to remove the large ammonia tank from Haifa Bay and boasted of his success in the events regarding it when on March 30, 2017 a Haifa district court ordered the Haifa Chemicals Ltd firm to close it. Israeli environmental groups had for some time pointed out the danger of the large ammonia tank, a "weapon" of highly toxic gas when exposed to the open air and thus with enormous destructive potential. Nevertheless. Nasrallah claimed credit for the court's decision saying it showed the strength of Hezbollah.

Indeed, that strength has been increasing. Hezbollah has increased its military arsenal. It now has more than 150,000 missiles, longer range and guided missiles, capable of hitting Israel. It is probable it also has advanced weapons such as surface to surface weapons. Most of its weapons come from Iran which has trained its militants and gave religious instruction

to them.

Hezbollah essentially remained a guerilla force until the Syrian civil war, but has become more active in its support of Assad, and collaboration with Iran in defense of Shiites. Hezbollah, fighting in Syria may have devised the battle plan for Aleppo, and changed the civil war in favor of President Assad.

Hezbollah threatens to invade Galilee, "liberate" Palestine, and the Golan Heights to harass Israeli civilians living near the border with Lebanon, and is forcing the IDF to build defensive tunnels on the northern border.

It should not be forgotten that Hezbollah also runs a prosperous business enterprise based on drugs. In 2011, the US government seized the drug profits linked to Ayman Jouma, drug trafficker linked to Hezbollah. In April 2013, the US took action against Hezbollah as a drug cartel and in 2016 a number of its members were arrested for working with a South American drug cartel. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 2017 announced it had uncovered major international criminal activity by Hezbollah using funds from drug trafficking operations, especially from cartels in South America to buy weapons and fund its other activities.

As a presidential candidate Donald Trump confessed he did not know the names of some terrorist leaders, such as Nasrallah. As President he does know them and one expects he will take appropriate action to deal with the Hezbollah leader who once called him an "idiot."