

## Hezbollah Attacks Via Venezuela

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Hezbollah presence in Venezuela feared

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August 30, 2008: The ceasefire with Hamas is holding, at least according to Palestinian standards. Since the ceasefire began June 19th, about 50 rockets and mortar shells have been fired from Gaza. About half of attacks were Kassam rockets, which can reach Israeli civilians. The shorter range (about five kilometers) mortars are aimed at the Israeli troops guarding the border fence. The Israelis no longer shut the border every time the Palestinian terrorists fire on them, but the attacks are increasing, and the ceasefire may not survive for much longer. Hamas insists that it cannot control all the Palestinian factions in Gaza.

Israel has told Lebanon that, if Hezbollah achieves its goal of taking over the Lebanese government, all of Lebanon will be a target in any future war between Hezbollah and Israel. During the 2006 war, Israeli air attacks were largely restricted to Hezbollah owned targets. Iran-backed Hezbollah has made no secret of its desire to take control of the Lebanese government, and launch another attack on Israel. Only 30-40 percent of Lebanese favor a Hezbollah dominated government, but most Lebanese favor attacks on Israel. However, most Lebanese don't want a war on Israel (that is, attacks on Israel, where the Israelis shoot back.) Stopping Hezbollah from gradually bullying its way into control of the government is only a matter of time, unless the Lebanese majority allows another civil war to develop. Hezbollah bullying has, this year, gotten Hezbollah a veto over any government decisions. Hezbollah is now pushing for outright control of the government.

The 250 kilometer border with Egypt is becoming more of a problem. That's largely because Egyptian smugglers are more active with moving illegal African migrants trying to get into Israel to find work. There's plenty of work, as Israel cannot trust Palestinian workers to cross from the West Bank without some suicide bombers coming with them. So foreign workers have been replacing over 100,000 Palestinians who used to work in Israel. Egyptian smugglers charge migrants (mostly Africans) about \$300 each to get them across the border. The smugglers also bring in illegal drugs. There are about 250,000 foreign workers in Israel (40 percent of them illegal), and at least 5,000 additional illegals get in each year. Most of those jobs would have been held by Palestinians, were it not for the Palestinian terror bombing campaign against Israel, that began eight years ago.

Israel is investigating Moslem charities in Israel and the West Bank, and shutting down those found to have connections to terrorist groups. Israel has also been encountering, and arresting, more Israeli Arabs who are trying to organize terrorist attacks inside Israel. This is hard for Israeli Arabs to do, even with access to all the "how to be a terrorist" stuff on the Internet. That's because Israeli intelligence often plugs into terrorist communications throughout the region, and has lots of Israeli Arabs who will report any terrorist activity in their family or neighborhood.

Israel believes Iranian and Hezbollah commercial operations in Venezuela (run by a leftist government that is anti-Israel and tolerant of Islamic radicalism) are a cover for teams of terrorists intent on kidnapping Jewish residents of, or visitors to, Venezuela. The captives would then be smuggled back to Lebanon and used to extract prisoners and other concessions from Israel. In neighboring Colombia, the army has captured documents, earlier this year, showing that leftist rebels had close, but secret, ties with Venezuela. It is feared that similar arrangements have been made with Hezbollah.

Israel is having increasing morale and discipline problems in its armed forces. The Golani Brigade, or of the most effective units in the army, has been a particular problem. Last week, fifteen Golani Brigade troops left their base and went home, complaining of poor treatment. Officers went to the homes of these soldiers and took their weapons, and the army plans to punish the troops. Last year, a hundred Golani Brigade left their base, also complaining of excessive discipline and poor treatment. Three years ago, several Golani Brigade troops refused to participate in operations to halt the construction and use of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Most Israeli troops are reservists, called to active duty periodically to supply troops needed for security and counter-terror operations. More and more, politics is influencing the troops attitudes towards their military duties.

August 28, 2008: In Lebanon, a Hezbollah gunman opened fire on a Lebanese army helicopter, killing one of the Lebanese soldiers on board. The Hezbollah man thought it was an Israeli helicopter landing commandos for a raid. The next day, the gunman was handed over to the Lebanese government, as Lebanese politicians openly asked whether the country had really become two separate states, one of them controlled by Hezbollah. This is something Hezbollah strenuously denies, despite the fact that Hezbollah does have check points on roads leading into territory that Hezbollah troops control, and limits access by Lebanese soldiers and police.

August 22, 2008: Two more Kassam rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, landing in wasteland.

<http://www.strategypage.com/qnd/israel/articles/20080830.aspx>

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### Hezbollah presence in Venezuela feared

The Lebanese Shiite militia, linked to deadly attacks in Argentina in the 1990s, may be taking advantage of Chavez's ties with its ally Iran, terrorism experts say.

By Chris Kraul and Sebastian Rotella, Los Angeles Times Staff Writers

August 27, 2008

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA -- Western anti-terrorism officials are increasingly concerned that Hezbollah, the Lebanon-based Shiite Muslim militia that Washington has labeled a terrorist group, is using Venezuela as a base for operations.

Linked to deadly attacks on Jewish targets in Argentina in the early 1990s, Hezbollah may be taking advantage of Venezuela's ties with Iran, the militia's longtime sponsor, to move "people and things" into the Americas, as one Western government terrorism expert put it.

As part of his anti-American foreign policy, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has established warm diplomatic relations with Iran and has traveled there several times. The Bush administration, Israel and other governments worry that Venezuela is emerging as a base for anti-U.S. militant groups and spy services, including Hezbollah and its Iranian allies.

"It's becoming a strategic partnership between Iran and Venezuela," said a Western anti-terrorism official who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the issue's sensitivity.

Several joint Venezuelan-Iranian business operations have been set up in Venezuela, including tractor, cement and auto factories. In addition, the two countries have formed a \$2-billion program to fund social projects in Venezuela and elsewhere in Latin America.

Those deepening ties worry U.S. officials because Iranian spies around the world have been known to work with Hezbollah operatives, sometimes using Iranian embassies as cover, Western intelligence experts say.

In June, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas A. Shannon said Iran "has a history of terror in this hemisphere, and its linkages to the bombings in Buenos Aires are pretty well established."

"One of our broader concerns is what Iran is doing elsewhere in this hemisphere and what it could do if we were to find ourselves in some kind of confrontation with Iran," Shannon said.

Fears about the threat from Hezbollah's global networks intensified after the slaying in February of Imad Mughniyah, a notorious leader of the militia, in Damascus, the Syrian capital. Hezbollah and Iran accused Israel and promised revenge, putting Western authorities on guard against attacks on Israeli or Jewish targets around the world.

Although the Bush administration is embroiled in political conflict with the Chavez government, allegations that Hezbollah and Iranian spies operate in Venezuela date to the 1990s, before Chavez took office.

The most concrete allegations of a Hezbollah presence in Venezuela involve money-raising. In June, the U.S. Treasury Department designated two Venezuelan citizens as Hezbollah supporters and froze their U.S. assets.

Treasury officials formally accused Ghazi Nasr al Din, a Venezuelan diplomat of Lebanese descent, of using posts at embassies in the Middle East to support financing for Hezbollah and "discuss operational issues with senior officials" of the militia.

Nasr al Din "facilitated the travel" of Hezbollah members to and from Venezuela and to a "training course in Iran," according to Treasury officials. The president of a Shiite Muslim center in Caracas, he served as a diplomat in Damascus and later in Beirut, authorities say.

The second Venezuelan targeted by Treasury is Fawzi Kanan, a Caracas-based travel agent. He is also alleged to have facilitated travel for Hezbollah members and to have discussed "possible kidnappings and terrorist attacks" with senior Hezbollah officials in Lebanon. The Treasury allegations did not specify whether the alleged discussion involved plots for

kidnappings in Venezuela or elsewhere.

In comments to a Venezuelan reporter, Kanan dismissed the charges as lies. The Venezuelan government has strenuously denied that it is harboring militants.

In March 2007, the intensified ties between Venezuela and Iran led to the start of weekly IranAir flights from Tehran to Caracas, the Venezuelan capital, that stop in Damascus.

The flights were highlighted in the State Department's annual assessment of global terrorism, which noted in April of this year that Venezuelan border officials at the Caracas airport often neglected to enter the arriving passengers into their immigration database and did not stamp passports. The Venezuelans have since tightened up on their procedures, informed sources say.

Despite those improvements, the IranAir flights also feature in recent intelligence gathered by Western anti-terrorism officials. Agents of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah have allegedly set up a special force to attempt to kidnap Jewish businesspeople in Latin America and spirit them away to Lebanon, according to the Western anti-terrorism official. Iranian and Hezbollah operatives traveling in and out of Venezuela have recruited Venezuelan informants working at the Caracas airport to gather intelligence on Jewish travelers as potential targets for abduction, the Western anti-terrorism official said.

The allegations were reinforced by a statement last week by the Israeli government, issuing an alert to citizens warning that Hezbollah plans to kidnap Israelis around the world to retaliate for the Mughniyah assassination.

Hezbollah has long operated in the Lebanese communities of Latin America. In addition to receiving a multimillion-dollar infusion from Iran, the militia finances itself by soliciting or extorting money from the Lebanese diaspora and through rackets such as smuggling, fraud and the drug and diamond trade in South America and elsewhere, Matthew Levitt, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told Congress in 2005.

Three years ago, police in Colombia and Ecuador broke up an international cocaine-smuggling ring that functioned in Latin American countries, including Venezuela, and allegedly sent profits to Hezbollah in Lebanon. The lawless "tri-border" region connecting Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina has been a center of organized crime activities and finance linked to Hezbollah, Western anti-terrorism officials say.

Hezbollah operatives based there participated, along with Iranian spies, in the car bombings in Buenos Aires of the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and a Jewish community center two years later that killed a total of 114 people, an Argentine indictment charges.

In the aftermath of that indictment, filed in 2006, Hezbollah and its Iranian sponsors, chiefly the Revolutionary Guard, decided to shift from the increasingly scrutinized tri-border area to other countries, including Venezuela, Western anti-terrorism officials say.

"It preserves the capability of Hezbollah and the Revolutionary Guard to mount attacks inside Latin America. . . . It is very, very important to Iran and Hezbollah right now."

chris.kraul@latimes.com

rotella@latimes.com

Kraul reported from Bogota and Rotella from Madrid.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-venezterror27-2008aug27,0,3877203.story>

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The Dangers of Hezbollah in Latin America

The Los Angeles Timestoday carries an interesting story on the growing ties of Hezbollah in Venezuela.

As the article points out, such ties are not new, but what is more worrisome is the vast amount of cocaine being moved through Venezuela that passes through areas where the Hezbollah presence is most pronounced.

The issue is, of course, Iran's growing presence in the region, something the administration has paid surprising little attention to as the Iranian diplomatic and intelligence presence has mushroomed, not only in Venezuela, but in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua.

Even Colombia, one of the few countries that is a strong U.S. ally in the region, has felt the need to allow the Iranians to open an embassy in Bogotá, in large part to have some idea of what that country is up to in the region.

It is passing strange that a socialist revolutionary (Hugo Chavez) and a radical Shite leader (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) have become such fast strategic allies.

It is more strange that Iran is investing billions of dollars and expanding its diplomatic presence throughout Latin America, a region where it has almost no economic ties, no national interest and no historic presence.

This growth, not just in Iranian presence but in the availability of the diplomatic infrastructure to give immunity to activities of Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guard, will be a destabilizing factor in the region for years to come.

As the story noted:

In June, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas A. Shannon said Iran "has a history of terror in this hemisphere, and its linkages to the bombings in Buenos Aires are pretty well established."

"One of our broader concerns is what Iran is doing elsewhere in this hemisphere and what it could do if we were to find ourselves in some kind of confrontation with Iran," Shannon said.

Hezbollah has a long history of two things that thrive in Venezuela, often in conjunction with the FARC in neighboring Colombia: kidnapping and drug trafficking. The FARC is on the ropes and looking for allies, and, according to senior Colombian officials. Chavez, while publicly distancing himself from the FARC, still allows their leadership movement and access in Venezuela.

Ecuador, on the other side of Colombia, remains an important military rearguard area for the rebels. It is not hard to see how these groups, with a common set of enemies (Colombia and the United States) can form tactical alliances that are useful to all.

There are other causes for concern, on all these fronts, as the story pointed out:

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The region is volatile, and yet receives almost no attention from policy makers in either party. I believe in a short time we will be forced to pay attention, whether we want to or not.

posted by Douglas Farah

<http://www.douglasfarah.com/article/390/the-dangers-of-hezbollah-in-latin-america.com>

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US designates two Hezbollah operatives in Venezuela as terrorists

By Bill Roggio

June 19, 2008 1:30 AM

The US Treasury Department has added two Venezuelans to the list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists for their support of Hezbollah. Ghazi Nasr al Din, a Venezuelan diplomat, and Fawzi Kan'an, a businessman, both provide support for the Lebanese-based terror group.

Ghazi Nasr al Din was born in Lebanon who currently serves as a Venezuelan diplomat and the president of a Shia

Islamic center. "Nasr al Din served until recently as Charge d' Affaires at the Venezuelan Embassy in Damascus, Syria, and was subsequently appointed the Director of Political Aspects at the Venezuelan Embassy in Lebanon," the US Treasury reported in a press release.

Nasr al Din used his diplomatic cover to meet with senior Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon and fundraise for the terror group. "Nasr al Din has counseled Hezbollah donors on fundraising efforts and has provided donors with specific information on bank accounts where the donors' deposits would go directly to Hezbollah." He also helped Hezbollah operatives get to Iran to "attend a training course."

Fawzi Kan'an is businessman who runs two Venezuela-based travel agencies. He was born in Lebanon but is a naturalized Venezuelan.

Kan'an is described as "a significant provider of financial support to Hezbollah" who also uses his business to funnel money to Lebanon and assist in the movement of operatives.

Treasury also implicates Kan'an as an operational planner who may have plotted kidnappings and terror attacks. "Kan'an has also traveled with other Hezbollah members to Iran for training," Treasury stated.

His two businesses, the Biblos Travel Agency the Hilal Travel Agency, have been designated as Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entities.

The Wednesday announcement by the Treasury Department was the first direct link by the US government between the nation of Venezuela and Hezbollah. "It is extremely troubling to see the Government of Venezuela employing and providing safe harbor to Hezbollah facilitators and fundraisers," said Adam J. Szubin, the Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the Treasury Department.

Hezbollah has long had inroads into South America. Hezbollah has used the tri-border region between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay to recruit, train, raise and launder money, and plot attacks.

In 1994, Hezbollah bombed a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Eight-five people were killed and more than 200 wounded in the bombing.

Argentina implicated Hezbollah and Iran in the attacks. In October 2006, Argentine prosecutors charged former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, former Hezbollah military commander Imad Mugnyiah, and six others with plotting and executing the attacks. Mugnyiah was killed in a car bombing in Damascus, Syria, in February 2008.

"We deem it proven that the decision to carry out an attack July 18, 1994 on the AMIA (the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association, a Jewish charities association headquarters in Buenos Aires) was made by the highest authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran which directed Hezbollah to carry out the attack," said Argentine chief prosecutor Alberto Nisman.

[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/06/us\\_designates\\_two\\_he.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/06/us_designates_two_he.php)

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