Hezbollah International Airport

Contributed by Michael Rubin
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After an airport worker opened fire on U.S. airmen at Frankfurt’s airport, killing two, there is once again attention on the vulnerabilities of airlines and their passengers to airport workers who embrace terrorism. While European airports must get their acts in order, they are only the tip of the iceberg. Rafik Hariri International Airport in Beirut may look more like its European counterparts than other Middle Eastern airports, but since 2008 it has been under the control of Hezbollah, a terrorist group.

Hezbollah has long justified its refusal to disarm because it defines itself as a resistance movement. After the United Nations certified Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon complete, Hezbollah manufactured the Shebaa Farms controversy to continue the fiction that its aim was “resistance” rather than power and terror.

In the aftermath of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, in which Hezbollah’s unilateral actions saddled Lebanon with a huge cost in terms of infrastructure and lives, the Lebanese government sought to extend its own control over major infrastructure; the cost of letting Hezbollah run rampant was too high.

After the Lebanese government — then dominated by the March 14 movement — sought to assert control over the airport, however, Hezbollah turned its guns on fellow Lebanese, casting aside its fiction of resistance. Beirut’s airport was simply too important for the crates of weaponry and supplies that rolled out of the cargo bays of Iranian airliners.

It was against this backdrop that the Bush administration acquiesced to reward Hezbollah for its bad behavior. By 2008, Bush had surrendered to State Department insurgents and ceased to base policy on principle, instead returning to the moral relativism of the Clinton years. Condoleezza Rice supported the Doha Accords, in which Hezbollah received veto power over Lebanese government policy in exchange for a promise of stability. Having won its battle with the Lebanese government, if not militarily than diplomatically, Hezbollah returned to the Rafik Hariri International Airport, albeit in the uniforms of the Lebanese army.

Today any number of international airlines — British, French, German, and Middle Eastern — fly into Beirut. Airport workers load the planes with bags and cargo that get transferred across the world, including to the United States. They pass through X-ray machines run by Hezbollah operatives or their sympathizers, and they board planes loaded by Hezbollah airport workers. At any time it sees fit, Hezbollah can place a bomb on a plane originating in Beirut rather than simply remove them from the planes landing there. If there is quiet now, it is only because Hezbollah does not want attention over its airport activities in the limelight, for the airport is a key resupply hub.

Two American servicemen dead is a tragedy, and my heart goes out to their families, and those of the wounded. But one day, the West will be facing another Lockerbie-style incident, with a return address this time in Lebanon rather than in Libya. American and European diplomats understand the vulnerabilities of the Beirut airport but live under the fiction that it is secure. Doing nothing and pretending everything is OK is always the path of least resistance. Fictions may make for diplomatic niceties, but ultimately they lead to fatalities.

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