

## Updated: Back from Beirut: The Tank Blog

Contributed by CRNews, W.Thomas Smith, Jr.  
 Saturday, 20 October 2007  
 Last Updated Saturday, 20 October 2007

Follow The Tank Blog - Live from Beirut - as W.Thomas Smith, Jr. assesses the Current Political, Military, Regional Situation across Lebanon.

Saturday, October 20, 2007

**CAPTURE THE FLAG!** [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]I snatched a Hezbollah flag &mdash; the yellow banner with the green fist and rifle &mdash; from one of the enemy's strongholds in Lebanon recently. And when I say stronghold, I literally mean a strong, heavily defended battle position where the Lebanese Army and police dare not enter, and I had to enter covertly.

Kathryn knows about it. I'm pretty sure she thinks I'm nuts. I'm also pretty sure she might be right. But I did it for two reasons:

First, in my often flawed logic I figured that if the terrorists caught me taking the flag, they would &mdash; as expressed by a former Christian militiaman who was with me at the time &mdash; &ldquo;cut my head&rdquo; (meaning &ldquo;cut my head off&rdquo;). But the way I saw it, they would &ldquo;cut my American head&rdquo; if they caught me flag or no flag anyway.

Second, I hate those guys. Hezbollah, you'll remember, murdered 241 of my brothers when they blew up the Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 when I was just a wee-rifleman in the Corps. The enemy stronghold where I snatched the flag was not far from the site of the bombing.

Of course, because there were others involved with me in the flag capture who are still in Lebanon, I cannot &mdash; for the sake of their own security &mdash; detail the particulars of our little mission.

So what am I going to do with the flag? I haven't decided.

I actually captured two flags: a big one and a little one.

I might keep the little one &mdash; or give it to Kathryn &mdash; and give the big one to my Navy midshipman nephew, Michael. That way he and his buddies can hang it upside down (as a trophy of war) somewhere in their dorm.

Semper Fidelis.10/20 07:42 AM Friday, October 19, 2007  
 Turkey-Kurdistan Trigger [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]Walid Phares e-mails:

The Turkish army is mobilizing to move inside Iraqi Kurdistan, and Turkish experts say the invasion may go as deep as 60 KM inside Iraqi Kurdish lands. The objective is to uproot the fighters of the PKK, but the Turks may also find themselves clashing with the Peshmergas. Hence intense diplomatic efforts are needed to avoid this Turkish&ndash;Kurdish war inside Iraq. Washington &mdash; along with the Kurdish leadership in Iraq &mdash; must dismantle the PKK positions and networks, or at the very least declare an intention to do so. This is the only way to convince Ankara not to engage in such an operation.

It also must be understood that there is more to this problem than Turkey's frustration with PKK cross-border activities. According to well-informed sources, an intelligence campaign sponsored by the Iranian and Syrian regimes has so-far been successful in dragging Turkey into their present position. In fact, the PKK has been penetrated by the intelligence services since the 1990's when they were based inside Syria and the Bekaa valley of Lebanon. Tehran and Damascus have perhaps manipulated their previous influences to trigger this brewing conflict.

10/19 08:24 PM Thursday, October 18, 2007

'Cliffhanger' [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]Just checking my e-mail here at Washington Dulles and much of it says I left everybody with a "cliffhanger" yesterday. My apologies: That "Gunfire in Beirut" post was a bit Hitchcockian in that it never really concluded.

Anyway, I'm okay. A little jet-lagged, but back in the States waiting on a connecting flight.

Keep reading The Tank ... and not just my entries, but the great work of Donnelly, Schippert, Gartenstein-Ross, Lopez, Pham, Robbins, McNeal, Hegseth, others. Also, Military Roundups and other regular updates will return in a day or so. And look for forthcoming NRO features on what is actually happening in Lebanon. Lots of insider stuff from first-hand experiences and observations, conversations with numerous Lebanese Army generals, intelligence officers,

parliamentarians, Cedars Revolutionaries, and some no-kidding deep-cover guys: things that for security reasons I could not discuss there, but I can now. 10/18 03:17 PM Wednesday, October 17, 2007

Gunfire in Beirut [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; I'm hearing a lot of automatic-weapons fire in the city this morning, some of it as close as a block or two away. Also a lot of police and army sirens.

Not sure what it means &mdash; could be some sort of celebration (Hezbollah seems to want to fire their weapons everytime the moon changes), could be something more sinister &mdash; and I am alone here right now in a second-floor office in the heart of the city. My security man is somewhere else for about 40 minutes.

But I'm okay. The doors are locked (downstairs and upstairs). I have immediate access to a weapon if I need it. So I'm just sitting here wading through my e-mail, listening to the shooting, and enjoying a cold bottle of 7up. 10/17 04:18 AM Wednesday, October 17, 2007

'Marriage of Convenience' [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]Walid Phares on The Oddest of All Factional Relationships:

The oddest of all factional relationships is the open alliance between the Jihadists and the so-called "antiwar" neo-Left movement in the West. The jumble of causes thrown together is mind-bending: globalization hobnobs with the caliphate, class struggle with Wahabism, proletariat with infidels, and North Korea with Palestine.

While still shedding each others' blood, the Reds (neo-Left) and the Dark Greens (Islamists) are conducting a joint offensive against both democracy-pushing America and the democracy-craving Middle East. They are not letting old or new grudges get in their way.

...The jihadi manipulation of the bourgeois-Neo-Marxist "struggle" has played a central role in the so-called "mass demonstrations" in the West since 2002, and the demonstrations themselves are an important component of the War of Ideas against democracy. On campuses, both in North America and Western Europe, the jihadi-antiwar axis has planted deep roots, and thanks to the skills of university-based anarchist groups, the jihadists have found a cover they can hide under, instead of simply becoming members of the typical Wahabi-controlled Muslim Student Unions.

But this "marriage of convenience" with the extreme left has not deterred jihadists from conducting another, simultaneous, wedding with the extreme right. But that's another story.

10/17 02:29 AM Tuesday, October 16, 2007

Terrorists Snatched South of Here [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; The AP is reporting Suspected terrorists detained in Lebanon:

Lebanese military intelligence officials have detained members of a suspected "terrorist network" for plotting attacks against U.N. peacekeepers in southern Lebanon, the army said Monday.

The group had planted a bomb near the southern city of Tyre [where an assassination attempt was made against one of the men I am working with here two days ago] in an attempt to target a U.N. patrol, but it did not explode because of a problem with the trigger, the army said in a statement.

The suspects also admitted they planned to plant two other bombs in the area and detonate them within a short period "in order to cause maximum casualties among the forces," the statement said.

What the AP is not reporting is that the network involved includes members of:

- Fatah Al Islam (The Al Qaeda-affiliated bunch that was supposedly wiped out to a man during the recent Battle of Nahr Al Bared).
- Jund Al Sham (a terrorist group of Syrian and Palestinian origins).
- Osbat Al Ansar (a particularly nasty group &mdash; though all three are &mdash; training here in Lebanon for suicide-bombing operations in Iraq).

One of my intelligence sources here also tells me, these three groups are receiving direct operational support from Hezbollah.

This morning, I'm seeing and hearing a lot of Lebanese Army helicopters overhead.

Last night, fighters were heard screaming overhead. Since the Lebanese Air Force has no operational combat jets, it had to have been the Israelis on one of their frequent nocturnal look-sees.

10/16 04:20 AM Monday, October 15, 2007

The Enemy in Beirut [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]AL DAHIYEH (the Hezbollah-controlled &ldquo;security zone&rdquo; in Beirut) &mdash; A huge banner stretched across the exterior wall of a pedestrian bridge &mdash; running above and into several huge rebuilding projects &mdash; reads (in Arabic): From the municipality of Tehran to the fighting people of Beirut.

10/15 06:50 AM Monday, October 15, 2007

RE: An Assassination Attempt [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]AL DEKWANEH &ndash; Spoke last evening with Al Sayed Mohammad Ali El Hussieni &mdash; the Shiia cleric, secretary general of the Arabic Islamic Council, and a former Hezbollah leader &mdash; who Iranian operators here attempted to assassinate less than two days ago.

Al Sayed is understandably upset by the attack, particularly since his family was also targeted. And he is unsettled by the fact that the Lebanese Interior Security Forces (ISF) refused to investigate and make a report, because, as Sayed says, the ISF did not want to enter the Hezbollah-controlled area (the outskirts of the ancient coastal town of Tyre) where the attack occurred.

Also, in a public statement released yesterday to the Lebanese press (and translated for me), Al Sayed said: ... I defy the Iranian regime with pride. I will not submit to your methods. I will never back down from my cause. Two destinies await me: Victory or death. A few days ago, I was in a car seated beside this very same man who was dressed in his long clerical robes and black headwrap (symbol of a very high-ranking Muslim cleric). Beneath his feet on the backseat floorboard was a folding-stock AK-47 assault rifle. And we were driving through HezB-controlled Dahiyeh.

There he told my security men that he was afraid of what would happen if someone saw my American face in the car. His words (translated for me): I am very concerned for his [my] safety. Here in Dahiyeh, they [the terrorists] will be very pleased to catch an American.

10/15 05:00 AM Sunday, October 14, 2007

An Assassination Attempt [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]AL BATROUN (San Stephano Resort) &ndash; Had a marvelous dinner last evening. Also enjoyed drinks, music, dancing, a Lebanese dance troupe, and some great company with my friend, Toni Nissi, his lovely wife, Hayat, and other members of the 1559 team. But as I arrived here at the San Stephano, I was informed that earlier in the day, assassins attempted to take the life of a man I've been working with closely here for the past couple of weeks.

Al Sayed Mohammad Ali El Hussien is a high-ranking Shiia cleric, who some here say was being groomed to take over the position of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah. Al Sayed was Hezbollah to be sure: He and Nasrallah butted heads on one too many issues. The competition between the two men increased. Sayed, who actually outranks Nasrallah in the Islamic hierarchy, became disillusioned with Hezbollah &ndash; particularly because the terrorist organization was implementing an Iranian agenda and not a Lebanese one &mdash; and left HezB (if you can ever really leave).

In recent months, Sayed has been on a tireless campaign, lobbying Shiia groups in Europe and the Middle East to reject the violence and distorted teachings of Nasrallah and his crowd. And his success thus far has been viewed by Hezbollah as a serious threat.

I interviewed Sayed once. Had coffee and sweets with him in his office. Conducted a reconnaissance mission with one of his armed men and two of mine in one of Sayed's cars. I rode with him during a second recon in another of his cars. And yesterday, members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (here in Lebanon) attempted to kill Sayed and his family by sabotaging his vehicle (the first one I rode in). They planted a delayed acid-weapon on his car's undercarriage, which ate through the chassis and caused the vehicle to basically break in half while he was driving.

Sayed and his family survived the attempt, barely. But the terrorists have killed others like this before.

More to come on this. 10/14 05:40 AM Sunday, October 14, 2007

Navy SEAL to receive Medal of Honor [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; I am boasting to my Lebanese friends this morning about the huge sacrifices of my own countrymen.

Two years after his death in a harrowing firefight on a mountaintop in Afghanistan, Lt. Michael P. Murphy, a SEAL from Patchogue, N.Y., will receive the nation's highest combat honor, Navy officials said.

A Navy spokeswoman confirmed Oct. 11 the decision by President Bush approving the posthumous award of the Medal of Honor, the first for the Navy for the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan.

10/14 04:00 AM Sunday, October 14, 2007

Phares - Lebanon's Forgotten Battle [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]Walid Phares reminds us of a Forgotten Lebanese battle against terrorists, which began 17 years ago yesterday:

... The Syrians executed one of the officers, Emile Boutros, by forcing him to lay down on the road and then driving a tank over him. ...

10/14 03:58 AM Saturday, October 13, 2007

Talking to the Enemy [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]THE LEBANESE-SYRIAN BORDER (In the Bekaa Valley near Al Qaa) &ndash; As I mentioned yesterday, this is one of the many hot weapons-smuggling transit points here in Lebanon. Syrian

troops are here manning outposts on Lebanese territory. Men and weapons are crossing in huge numbers, and virtually no one is stopping the crossings or demanding that the Syrians return to their side of the frontier. Worse, there are several Hezbollah and Amal cells just a few short miles behind us (and all around us). I saw hundreds of their yellow and green flags (as well as the black flag of Islam) flying in almost every one of these remote villages traveling east in the Bekaa on the way to the border.

One huge Hezbollah banner we drove beneath &mdash; it was stretched above the road and tied to two poles on either side &mdash; read (translated from Arabic):

We have proved that surrender does not exist in our dictionary, knowledge, and philosophy.

As we drove from Al Qaa to the Syrian border &ndash; the closest village to the border and just over four miles between the two points &mdash; we did not pass a single Lebanese army or police checkpoint. In fact, the closest Lebanese checkpoint I saw was 14 miles away from the border.

What I did see were a lot of Bedouin camps and shepherds with their sheep and goats. And, at the border &mdash; and still inside Lebanon &mdash; we came upon the first Syrian outpost, one of many I saw, all with Syrian flags fluttering atop.

The first one was a single-room, stone and cement block house in the middle of an arid field. The flag and several radio antennas were sticking straight up from the roof. The defenders inside were a few men led by a sleeping sergeant.

The boy soldier who left the outpost building to see who we were did not even carry his weapon. And instead of his asking us who we were, we asked the questions and he answered (see yesterday's entry). He told us among other things that his water supply was limited. They don't have enough to wash their uniforms, barely enough to drink or cook with.

This is a scary place: The gun-running smugglers have the upper hand. The Syrians, who are not supposed to be here, are here. I don't see any Lebanese troops. And Hezbollah is everywhere.

10/13 07:18 AM Friday, October 12, 2007

Syrian Soldiers inside Lebanese Territory [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]THE LEBANESE-SYRIAN BORDER (Near Al Qaa) &ndash; I previously had doubts, or perhaps I believed it to be a miscalculation. But now I am seeing it with my own eyes: Syrian troops here are manning positions inside Lebanese territory. And they're flying the Syrian colors on top of those positions.

This is in clear violation of at least two UN Security Council Resolutions that I can pull off the top of my head (1559 and 1701): There may be more.

I spent most of today tooling around the fringes of the border in a battered old Range Rover with my security man, Henry, and a couple of trusted, armed, former combat-soldiers in the Lebanese Army who, not only took me to the Syrian outposts; but drove me to the smuggling lines where large containers of weapons &ndash; rifles, rockets, stinger missiles, you name it &mdash; are regularly crossing the border. One of the men tells me he knows for a fact a huge shipment of weapons has passed through here over the past few weeks. Frankly looking at this place, I can't imagine they wouldn't be. This is simply too easy.

Smuggling of people, arms, etc. here is constant. This was confirmed by one of the many shepherds we've seen here today. Bedouins and their camps are everywhere, and most of them are Syrian.

We drove most of the day, but covered some ground on foot. We spoke to a Syrian soldier at one of the outposts so close I could have physically grabbed him. He was a young man, looked to be about 15 or 16, and appeared a bit nervous. He was wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt because, as he says, his officer, who only checks on him once a month, doesn't care. And his sergeant is asleep.

We gave the young soldier some candy before leaving.

Much more on this tomorrow.10/12 12:45 PM Wednesday, October 10, 2007

Militia Rebuilds Beirut District In Own Image [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]My piece in this morning's Washington Times on Al Dahiyeh.10/10 09:46 AM Wednesday, October 10, 2007

Black-Masked Commandos Training By The Sea [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]DBAYEH &ndash; Here on the seacoast between Beirut and Jounieh, a handful of men &mdash; dressed in black and brown utility uniforms, wearing black ski-masks (to conceal their identities), and armed with Fabrique Nationale P-90 submachine guns &mdash; rush into a small building and begin shooting terrorists. The terrorists aren't real (They are only paper targets): The bullets are.

Clearing the rooms within seconds, the Fouhoud (Panthers), members of an elite 100-man Lebanese counterterrorist strike force, check their targets. Every bullet has struck the head or the heart of several man-sized silhouette targets

placed throughout the building.

This show &mdash; along with rappelling, sniper firing, and a VIP protection and rescue demonstration &mdash; was prepared for me by the Lebanese Interior Security Forces (ISF), the national police. They want the American people to understand they are just as committed as we are to fighting bad guys in the War on Terror. The Fouhoud are also trained to storm commercial aircraft, buses, and anywhere else bad guys snatch hostages and kill people. Their performance here is pretty convincing.

As I follow closely behind the commandos into the building, their smiling, young commander, Lt. Wissam Baz, tells me (in impeccable English): &ldquo;This building has saved many lives.&rdquo;

Indeed it has. For it was in this building that Fouhoud trained for the initial raid against Fatah al Islam in Tripoli last May, which led to the now-famous Battle of Nahr al Bared.

Baz, the only man not concealed by a black calgool (mask), actually commanded the raid against Fatah al Islam, which netted 16 killed terrorists in a day-long gunbattle with no friendly losses. &ldquo;Thank God,&rdquo; he says.

Also with us here is Baz's boss, Gen. Elias Moghabghab, deputy commanding general of the &ldquo;mobile forces&rdquo; of the ISF, which also includes the anti-riot forces. I had tea and coffee with Moghabghab, Baz, a few other Lebanese officers, and my security man earlier in the general's office.

&ldquo;Terrorism has no nationality,&rdquo; the general tells me. &ldquo;Fighting them is a must, and the Americans and the Lebanese must work together in this. The terrorists are against God and humanity. They worship their own God, and their own thoughts. It is not an Islamic God. Their beliefs are a distortion of Islam.&rdquo;

10/10 09:30 AM Wednesday, October 10, 2007

A Second Reconnaissance and High-Speed Pursuit [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; Just returned from a second reconnaissance of Al Dahiyeh, the Hezbollah-controlled district in southwest Beirut. There won't be a third because my security team has determined it is simply too dangerous.

During the op, we switched cars twice, moving into the district in a sedan (I'm told it's best not to mention the make and model) with blackened windows, a Glock 9mm, and a folding-stock Kalashnikov.

Inside the zone we photographed and gathered other intelligence about the ongoing reconstruction of Dahiyeh, including Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah's new house (remember, he's in hiding) and Hezbollah's headquarters building. We also spotted several lookouts and armed militiamen inside buildings. Pedestrian and vehicle traffic was heavy, thus narrow streets were very congested and a bit unsettling at the temporary jams.

Leaving Dahiyeh we were pursued for several miles at very high speed by Hezbollah men in a Black BMW 730 zig-zagging through the streets of Beirut and along the main drag that runs past the Parliament, the HezB &ldquo;tent city,&rdquo; and the Serail. Thankfully our driver was well-trained in security/evasive driving, and after some hard maneuvers and U-turns we lost the bad guys.

10/10 04:00 AM Tuesday, October 09, 2007

Dangerous Lines [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]JOUNIEH (The coast north of Beirut) &mdash; Hezbollah is a huge problem here in Lebanon: Far bigger than I initially realized.

Granted, in the south &mdash; below the Litani River &mdash; I've seen a huge Hezbollah presence with flags, banners, posters of Nasrallah and "martyred" suicide bombers, subterranean fortifications, and entire villages loyal to Hezbollah (and Amal) &mdash; nothing new &mdash; and there are large Hezbollah-controlled districts north of the Litani. But fact is, they control much of the entire country and its infrastructure.

Take communications for instance: As I mentioned previously, HezB is monitoring and jamming cell-phone communications, and tracking phone signals. They also have their own private telephone comm lines running from the south to the Bekaa Valley, and from both regions to Dahiyeh (in Beirut) and who knows where else. The very Internet service provider I am using to post this entry is a subsidiary of a larger Hezbollah-owned or affiliated company.

Worse: Many of the Lebanese &ldquo;leaders&rdquo; here are afraid to go on the record about these issues or anything else related to Hezbollah.10/09 08:38 AM Monday, October 08, 2007

Threats and More Threats [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; In the wake of Lebanese Parliamentarian Saad Hariri's visit last week with Pres. Bush &mdash; in which Bush reaffirmed his commitment to free elections in Lebanon, rejected any hint of a compromise with Hezbollah, and warned Syria and Iran to keep their hands out of this country's electoral process &mdash; Naim Qassem, a spokesperson for Hezbollah chief (in hiding) Hassan Nasrallah said, yesterday (and I'm paraphrasing), &ldquo;If the majority 14th of March and Cedars Revolution deputies are successful in electing a president, we will consider that president to be an American president.&rdquo;

This statement was followed by Hezbollah parliamentarian Mohammad Fneich, who said, "If such a president is elected, this will give us a right to a reaction for this action."

What that specifically means is anyone's guess. But it is clearly a continuation of the ongoing threats by Hezbollah. And as I'm reminded of in an article in last week's Investor's Business Daily: Hezbollah, created and supported by Iran, is trying to stage a de facto coup in Lebanon. For those in Congress with short memories, it's the bunch that before 9/11 was responsible for killing more Americans than any other group, including 243 American soldiers [U.S. Marines in fact] in their Beirut barracks in 1983. Also pro-Syrian former minister Wiam Wahab, said yesterday, if a 14th of March (Cedars) president is elected "he will not reach the presidential palace."

I think it's fairly obvious what that suggests.

This afternoon, I am meeting with Ahmad Fatfat, an anti-Syrian member of parliament who spoke out Saturday against Nasrallah's Friday speech (remember, the Quds Day speech that stirred the Dahiye natives to a night of wild shooting over Beirut.).

More to come.

10/08 06:28 AM Sunday, October 07, 2007

We will never forget you! [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] JOUNIEH — Attended a ceremony today at the Fouad Shihab Football (soccer) Stadium where the families of the now-168 soldiers killed fighting the Fatah al-Islam terrorists at Nahr al-Bared (It's been published as 167, but another soldier died in the hospital a few days ago.) were recognized for their sons' individual sacrifices.

Security was extremely tight: Lebanese special forces troops and armored vehicles lined the highway into the city. Metal detectors and bomb-sniffing dogs were at the entrance to the stadium, and sharpshooters were positioned on all of the surrounding buildings.

With the Lebanese Army band playing martial music and Gazelle helicopters thundering overhead, thousands of Lebanese troops divided into platoon-sized formations passed-in-review — The infantry marching (arms swinging wide similar to the way the British Army marches): The Rangers, Marine Commandos, and counterterrorism strike troops prancing in a high-step jogging march (weapons clutched at the port-arms position, but close to their chests) — before Minister of Defense Elias Almur, Gen. Sleiman, other generals (including a few foreign military officers), and the families of the dead. The parents, grandparents, and wives of the 168 were presented decorations for their sons and husbands. Speeches were made, people wept — but with respectable restraint — and soldiers shouted in unison, three times, "Lan nansakoum abadan!" ("We will never forget you!")

Keep in mind, this is an army of Sunni, Shiia, and Druze Muslims, Maronite and Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, and other smaller Christian sects (Mostly Lebanese Muslim soldiers were killed at Nahr al-Bared fighting the largest force of Muslim fanatics in this army's history). It is an army that — despite its small size, marginal technology, and virtually no air force — continues to stand as an amazingly cohesive force in the midst of so much political uncertainty. And, as evident by all the army crests and soldiers pictures taped to car windows, it is a source of enormous pride for the Lebanese people.

So much for those who suggest religiously mixed armies in the Middle East won't fight shoulder-to-shoulder.

10/07 02:18 AM Saturday, October 06, 2007

The Natives Are Restless Tonight [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] . . . at least they are in Al Dahiye.

JABAL LUBNAN — On a terrace in a safe house on one of the many hills overlooking Beirut and the sea, I am sitting here having dinner and enjoying the magnificent view of the city lights. All at once I hear automatic-weapons fire crackling from the city center. A stream of red tracers arcs up into the night sky. This is quickly followed by the familiar 'pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, pop' of Kalashnikovs. Some red tracers, some white, lots of automatic weapons fire.

My bodyguard and friend, Henry, makes a quick phone call then tells me it's Hezbollah celebrating Quds Day (Jerusalem Day, an anti-Israeli day marked on the last Friday of Ramadan) and a televised speech being made by their secretary general (in hiding I might add), Hassan Nasrallah.

Meanwhile, we are watching the Hezbollah militiamen shooting up into the sky from their positions in Al Dahiye (the HezB security square we covertly entered and moved through during our reconnaissance last week.).

Henry steps back into the house from the terrace and switches on the TV. Sure enough, there's Nasrallah, flanked by the Hezbollah flag and the Lebanese flag with some background images of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. He's waving his hand and railing against Israel, the United States, and who knows who else.

“He wants to be the king of Islam,” Henry laughs.

Later, after I've gone to bed, Henry has to leave for about an hour. But not before coming into my room and waking me.

“Tom, here's your friend,” he says, as he gently places a loaded 9mm pistol on the nightstand next to my Bible and flashlight.

I listen as he locks the door to the house on his way out. Then I go back to sleep. 10/06 01:00 AM No Compromise with Terrorists [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] JABAL LUBNAN – Toni Nissi, head of the 1559 Committee, issued a press release (which was published in several Lebanese newspapers yesterday) vigorously rejecting any compromise between the majority pro-Cedars members of parliament and Hezbollah. Apparently, a compromise has been considered between some members of the majority, and 1559 is fighting hard against it.

A portion of the release reads:

... The leaders of 14th of March and the leaders of the Cedar Revolution understand very well that any settlement with Hizbollah, Syria, Iran (or any other country or organization dealing with the axis of terror) done at the expense of the Cedars Revolution and the UNSCR implementation will be like letting go of the Cedars Revolution goals and international community support. Moreover this settlement will move Lebanon from being a partner to the international community, in its war on terror, to becoming an ally of terrorism.

We are confident that those leaders know their duties toward the Lebanese people, the Cedar Revolution and the international resolutions. Therefore we believe that none of these leaders will accept any settlement as the one advertised for by the anti-Cedar Revolution front especially if this stand will shift Lebanon's government and its system from a partner of the international anti-terrorism campaign to a terrorist country.

Finally we assure the Lebanese people that in coordination with the United Nations and the friends of Lebanon, we will not allow any settlement at the expense of the Cedars Revolution and at the expense of the Lebanese people's interests. We will not allow the Lebanese people to become hostages of terrorism. Moreover, we will not accept Lebanon's getting a president which shifts it [the country] to the axis of terror. Indirect threats have been made against Toni since publication of the release.

10/05 12:14 PM Friday, October 05, 2007

Nobody Lives Here Anymore [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] NAHR AL-BARED (Near Tripoli) – Drove north today with a Lebanese soldier in a Plymouth Neon (a folding-stock Kalashnikov on the backseat and a Fabrique National 9mm pistol tucked beneath the front) to an army camp in Tripoli. There I met with Gen. Majzoub Moustapha, commanding general of the north region of Lebanon.

The general briefed me regarding the battlefield at Nahr al-Bared, near his camp, and what I would see today as the first American journalist to visit the site of Lebanon's defeat of Al Qaeda-affiliate Fatah al Islam.

“It's still very dangerous,” Moustapha tells me. Bombs and boobytraps are everywhere throughout the vast burned-out, blown-up and bullet-riddled landscape. And it is believed there may still be some Fatah al Islam fighters hiding among the ruins.

At first Moustapha only wanted me to tour the cleared areas. But after some persuasion on my part, he agreed to allow me full access into the uncleared areas: with a colonel and under a heavily armed escort of course.

Here at Nahr al Bared, I am at once reminded of what I had seen six years ago at Ground Zero in lower Manhattan a few days after 9/11. The difference being Nahr al Bared seems endless in terms of distance from one end of the battlefield to the other. Of the 8,000 destroyed buildings that have not been completely reduced to concrete rubble and twisted steel, everything is full of bullet and blast holes. Many of the bodies of the killed Fatah al Islam fighters have been removed (you'll remember, I was invited to the burial of more than 100 yesterday), but there are still more bodies here decomposing in the uncleared area I am in now. The stench at times is unbearable. Flies buzzing around us constantly. Stray cats crawling throughout the ruins. Shell casings – from 7.62 and .50 caliber rounds to mortar casings to the big 105 mms – are strewn all over the place. I see furniture (or what's left of it) destroyed cars, trucks, and scooters, cigarette cartons, water bottles, books, papers, clothes, and a tiny girl's shoe with a smiley face on it.

No one is to blame for this but the terrorists. The Lebanese soldiers went to great lengths to protect the lives of women and children here, often permitting the civilians to leave Nahr al Bared before and during the fighting, providing them with food, water, and medical attention. Meanwhile, the Fatah Al Islam fighters used the breaks in fighting to regroup, set traps, and blow holes in the closely constructed buildings to create battle corridors.

There is so much more to this story, including an experience I had today in a nearby Sunni village when my army driver (himself a Muslim) had to lock the doors of our car and reach for his pistol in our defense. Actually, I've had many such

experiences in this country. But today was &mdash; for me personally &mdash; the most unnerving yet. 10/05 10:58 AM Thursday, October 04, 2007

With the Commander of the National Police [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] BEIRUT (Headquarters of Lebanon's Interior Security Forces) &mdash; Had tea this afternoon with Maj. Gen. Achraf Rifi, the commanding general of Lebanon's national police forces, the Interior Security Forces (ISF).

Spoke at length about his country's internal security problems &mdash; who's responsible for the assassinations, etc. &mdash; as well as the ISF's counterterrorism capabilities (which we'll discuss in detail here at NRO).

The Lebanese national police, General Rifi tells me, number some 23,500 officers, including 2,900 anti-riot police and the super high-speed Fouhoud (Panthers), a crack force of 100 men trained in hostage rescues, direct action and other &ldquo;specialties&rdquo; directly related to counterterrorism.

&ldquo;Most countries' true elites are 100 or fewer,&rdquo; says Rifi. &ldquo;And the Fouhoud are our elite.&rdquo;

The Lebanese Army is well-trained and proficient, he tells me, particularly the special forces (which I spent time with yesterday). &ldquo;But unlike the army in many instances, we [the national police] always have to be very precise in our work,&rdquo; he says. &ldquo;The police are the anti-inflammatories: The army is the antibiotics.&rdquo;

Tomorrow, U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon Jeffrey Feltman will meet here at ISF headquarters with Rifi to sign a protocol pledging \$60 million for the ISF for equipment and training.

Also tomorrow, I'm scheduled to move up north with the Lebanese Army.

In a few days, at the invitation of General Rifi, I'll be with the Interior Security Forces, including the elite Fouhoud. 10/04 12:30 PM Thursday, October 04, 2007

Fatah Al Islam Fighters Buried Today [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] BEIRUT (The Ministry of Defense) &mdash; Just left a private meeting with Gen. Francois Hajj, director of operations for the entire Lebanese Armed Forces.

As I entered his office &mdash; his desk covered with several huge maps of Lebanon, a couple of cell phones, and a single pack of Marlboros &mdash; Gen. Hajj was discussing something (unintelligible to me because it was in Arabic) with another general. The other general and I shook hands, he left the office, and Hajj ordered coffee for the two of us.

We discussed everything from current security operations in Lebanon to the recent fighting at Nahr al-Bared. He then showed me an exclusive video tape &mdash; not seen by outsiders &mdash; of the fighting at Bared, including some truly grisly images of killed Fatah al-Islam fighters.

At one point, Hajj's phone rang. He answered. Though I could not understand what he was saying, I recognized the word &ldquo;Israeli&rdquo; mentioned three times.

Continuing our conversation, Hajj invited me to attend the burial this afternoon of 103 dead Fatah al-Islam fighters at a cemetery somewhere in Tripoli.

I wanted to attend, but had to decline as I am meeting with a key counterterrorism official today here in Beirut.

The Fatah fighters will be buried in less than two hours (as of this writing). No ceremony, according to Hajj. They were enemies of Lebanon. 10/04 06:42 AM Wednesday, October 03, 2007

&ldquo;We want to fight Al Qaeda!&rdquo; [W. Thomas Smith Jr.] BROUMANA SPECIAL FORCES CAMP &mdash; Nestled here deep in the mountains beyond east Beirut &mdash; between the summer village of Broumana and Mar Shaaya, a Maronite Christian monastery &mdash; is a rugged tract of land where the Lebanese Army is training to fight Al Qaeda.

Lebanese special forces &mdash; including a Ranger regiment, a Marine Commando regiment, and an air-assault regiment &mdash; all come under the Lebanese Army (that will soon change, and I'll explain it in greater detail here at NRO).

As I watch the young commandos battling their way from room to room in a roofless killing-house constructed of stacks of old tires, their commander, Lt. Col. Marwan Issa tells me, &ldquo;Our soldiers &mdash; because they come from the mountains &mdash; are tougher in many ways than other countries' special forces soldiers.&rdquo;

They have to be.

Training here is severe: Each volunteer &mdash; whether for the Rangers or the Marines &mdash; must go through a three-week test to determine if they have what it takes to endure the three-and-a-half months of special forces training (air-assault training is only six weeks). There is no sleep for the first week. During the next two weeks, only one hour of

sleep is permitted per night, maybe.

Once the men get through the three-week test, they are told to go home for 24 hours. Then they return here to Broumana and the real training begins.

Issa tells me only 30 men out of 300 will become Lebanese Rangers or Marine Commandos. But of those 30, every man will fight to the death if necessary. "Without a doubt, even if he knows he will probably die, he will fight," says 1st Lt. Nizam Bou Fakeddine, who fought against Fatah al-Islam at Nahr al-Bared.

At one point, I stood with a group of these young men and asked them if they were afraid to fight Al Qaeda. "No!" they shouted in unison.

"Never," another said, "We want to fight Al Qaeda!" 10/03 10:24 AM Wednesday, October 03, 2007

RE: Lebanon Burning [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT — The Civil Defense Corps is getting the fires under control here.

Officially, Brig. Gen. Darwish Hobeika, who commands Lebanese Civil Defense operations, says:

It's a 95 percent possibility that the fires were caused intentionally by people trying to obtain charcoal as a cheaper substitute for fuel.

But nobody is buying that. No one here that I've spoken to — and I've talked with lots of people over the past 24-plus hours since the fires started — believe that fires were started "by people [all across the nation] trying to obtain charcoal" at exactly 8:00 p.m., Tuesday evening.

It is indisputable that the timing was exact. The fires were deliberately set. They burned from one end of the nation to the next. And Lebanese leaders are saying from behind closed doors that the hand of Syria is all over it.

"The fires are a message," everyone says.

Much more to come.

Right now I'm heading out to be with the Lebanese Army's special operations forces.

10/03 02:10 AM Tuesday, October 02, 2007

Lebanon Burning [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT — It's been confirmed by the Lebanese Civil Defense Corps that the nationwide fires — now numbering over 200 since last night — have been deliberately set. And some of those fires are reaching the outskirts of Beirut. 10/02 12:04 PM Tuesday, October 02, 2007

Fires Raging Across Lebanon [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT — Fires were set simultaneously across the entire country of Lebanon a few hours ago.

We don't know why or the exact number yet. The papers are reporting eight. But we know there are at least 32 (probably more) burning from the south to the north, and from the coast to the Bekaa Valley.

Just got off the phone with Camille Chamoun, the grandson of the late Lebanese president of the same name.

He tells me:

This is not a coincidence. This is the work of our neighbors. The Syrians have a lot of operators here, and this puts extreme pressure on our government.

He adds:

This could be a possible diversion [of the police and military forces] to launch a coup d'etat.

10/02 06:34 AM Tuesday, October 02, 2007

Two Terrorists Arrested Here [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT — Yesterday, two terrorists — Nasser Ismail (the secretary general of Fatah al-Intifada) and Ismail's bodyguard — were arrested at Beddawi, a Palestinian refugee camp near Nahr al-Bared, about 60 miles north of my position. They've since been transferred here to Beirut where they are being interrogated.

Fatah al-Intifida — a Syrian supported offshoot of the PLO — is the political wing of the Al Qaeda-affiliated militant group, Fatah al-Islam, which was wiped out earlier this month after weeks of fighting at Nahr al-Bared. (Some here say Fatah al-Islam is a splinter group of Fatah al-Intifada.)

The leader of Fatah al-Islam, Shaker Al Abssi, escaped and is still on the loose (re-read some of Walid Phares' analysis here at "The Tank" for background).

Lebanese Armed Forces commander&mdash;in&mdash;chief, Gen. Michel Sleiman, who I met with privately a few days ago, believes Al Abssi is hiding somewhere in Lebanon.

The general tells me:

He [Al Abssi] fled, and a leader must never flee. He is a coward. He is a traitor to his people. He is a zero! I hope to find him.

The problem for Lebanon and the entire Middle East region is that camps like Beddawi are off-limits to the police and the army, unless they are invited in (or given special authority by the Lebanese government). Thus, the camps have become safe havens and weapons depots for terrorist groups like Fatah al-Intifada and Fatah al-Islam. Apparently, a deal was cut, and Ismail and his bodyguard were delivered to the Lebanese authorities.

10/02 05:30 AM Monday, October 01, 2007

Lebanon Appealing to the International Community [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; Senior parliamentarian Walid Jumblatt, under heavy security, appeared on Lebanese television last night and sent letters to several heads of state appealing for help in completing the presidential elections under UN Resolution 1559.

The letter, according to Ya Libnan, was sent to:

Saudi Arabian king Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, Jordanian King Abdullah II, US President George Bush, Russian president Vladimir Putin, French president Nicholas Sarkozy, Chinese president Liu Chimeng, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Zapatero, Italian Prime minister Romano Prodi, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President of the European Parliament, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Mun, political coordinator of the European Union, Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Arab League, members of the US Senate, the American House of representatives and a number of party leaders and the European Socialist International.

The letter reads in part:

The People of Lebanon, more than ever, are in dire need of the support of the international community, your respective governments and parties to ensure that its people and leaders survive the rampage of Syria's assassins whose main target is to destroy Lebanon.

It's simple: The situation here is critical, and Lebanon is strategically vital to the national security interests of the United States.

10/01 11:00 PM Monday, October 01, 2007

My Midshipman Nephew [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &mdash; My sister sent me a few pictures of my oldest nephew and godson, Michael, who is a first-year midshipman in Navy ROTC at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

No one can possibly imagine the pride I feel right now unless they've ever seen a photograph of a handsome, young future Naval officer in his summer whites ... and knowing he belonged to them.

10/01 07:54 AM Monday, October 01, 2007

No One Trusts Anyone Here [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]JABAL LUBNAN (Mount Lebanon, just east of Beirut) &mdash; Having a cup of Starbucks this morning with my bodyguard and new friend Henry Daoud. He's teaching me (attempting to teach me is a better way to say it) Arabic and Aramaic while I'm pulling together my notes from the interview last evening with Paliamentarian Wael Bou Faour.

Speaking of which, I've learned from a very reliable source who was not with me last evening, that the security forces defending the Phoenicia are concerned because I was asking questions last night about security. My questions were very simple: Typical things &mdash; which would mean nothing to U.S. military and police forces &mdash; like the significance of specific unit emblems and uniform colors.

I asked the questions. Some security officials have since expressed fear (needlessly I might add) to other parties. Those parties have informed other parties who have informed me.

Nevertheless, I will continue asking questions.

No one trusts anyone here. 10/01 04:52 AM Sunday, September 30, 2007

Under Siege [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT (the Ain El-Mreysseh district) &mdash; Lebanon is one of the most crucial fronts &ndash; perhaps the most crucial in its strategic sphere &ndash; in the war on terror. Yet a majority of the current Lebanese parliament is under siege, literally.

The armed forces are still functioning: Lebanese soldiers &ndash; at the individual and small unit level &mdash; are as sharp, bright, courageous, and committed as any I have ever served with or observed. And I say this without any reservation whatsoever (I've also said this about Israeli Defense Force soldiers, because I've observed them at the small unit level in the past, and they too are superb soldiers. Which disheartens me somewhat when considering the fact that good men on either side of the fence are spring-loaded to destroy one another, 24/7.).

There are only 50,000 Lebanese soldiers (including the Lebanese Army, Navy, and Air Force), and as is the case with any nation's combined military forces, only a marginal percentage of Lebanon's soldiers actually carry rifles and kick-down doors. And the country has virtually no air force &ndash; no serviceable fixed-wing aircraft, no attack helicopters.

Worse, Lebanon is crawling with Syrian and Iranian-supported &mdash; and Al Qaeda-affiliated &mdash; terrorists. Most are operating covertly. Many are actually in the streets, controlling sectors (where the legitimate army and police do not enter) and they are armed.

As I mentioned a few days ago, a Hezbollah militia camp has been set up between the Lebanese Parliament and the Serail. And more than 50 pro-Cedar Revolution parliamentarians (there are 68 pro-Cedar members of parliament, a majority of the country's total 127 MPs), struggling to elect a president, are holed up in the Hotel Intercontinental Phoenicia in Beirut's Ain El-Mreysseh district less than one mile from the HezB tent city. This doesn't include those parliamentarians elsewhere under very heavy security.

The MPs know they are under threat of death. Their cell-phone calls are being monitored and the signals tracked. It's believed MP Antoine Ghanem, who was killed less than two weeks ago (I've actually seen what's left of his blown-up car) was tracked by his cell-phone signal.

The Hotel Phoenicia is surrounded by internal security force counterterrorism commandos and Army special forces armed with assault rifles and submachineguns, and supported by armored vehicles with light and heavy machineguns.

Earlier this evening &ndash; after going through multiple layers of security (I was searched six times. My camera bag was x-rayed three times and thoroughly searched four.) &ndash; I met with pro-Cedar MP Wael Bou Faour in a small room in the Phoenicia where we chatted one-on-one about his country's inability to elect a president and who's to blame. Also present were three security men: his two and my one.

During our conversation &ndash; the subject of another piece that will appear in NRO &ndash; Bou Faour blamed the recent assassinations and the threat of more killings on Syria. &ldquo;If you are [Syrian President] Bashar Assad, you kill just as easily as if you were giving someone a raise in their salary.&rdquo;

Much more to come.09/30 03:24 PM Saturday, September 29, 2007

On the Lebanese-Israeli Border [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]MAROUN AL RASS &ndash; Today, standing atop a windswept Lebanese Army outpost overlooking the border between Lebanon and Israel, I watched &mdash; through a pair of binoculars &mdash; two Israeli Defense Force Humvees racing west along the border road.

I was touring the Lebanese defenses at Maroun Al Rass with General Rafic Hammoud, commanding general of the 11th Brigade (nine companies of light mechanized infantry). Hammoud and his officers tell me there have been no IDF probes or border crossings here on the &ldquo;blue line.&rdquo; But as Col. Kheir Freiji, the 11th Brigade's intelligence officer tells me, &ldquo;Israeli Air Force [jets] penetrate our airspace almost everyday, and sometimes all the way up to Beirut.&rdquo;

Another intelligence officer, Major Fawzi Chamoun says, they are flying up to and across the border into Lebanon &ldquo;every day, every night.&rdquo;

Gen. Hammoud adds, he would shoot them down if he had adequate anti-aircraft systems.

Earlier this morning &mdash; before two soldiers drove me from Beirut to Maroun al Rass &mdash; I met with Lt. Col. Edmund Homsy, the senior intelligence liaison between Lebanon's military intelligence services and other foreign intelligence agencies worldwide.

I met Homsy for about an hour in his office at the Directorate of Intelligence 'Strategic Branch' at the Ministry of Defense. The Directorate of Intelligence, by the way, is Lebanon's highest-level intelligence service, responsible for foreign intelligence and matters of internal security. The Directorate also has a counterterrorism and espionage branch, as well as a "strike force," as he says.

We discussed several sensitive points for clarification regarding my previous day's meeting with Gen. Sleiman. And this will be detailed in forthcoming NRO pieces.

Prior to leaving Homs's office, he told me I was the first American journalist in the history of Lebanon to enter the Directorate headquarters, and he presented me with a small, gold Lebanese military shield.

In the afternoon, driving along the coast road to south Lebanon with my two soldier-friends (one armed with a folding stock AK-47 and 75 rounds of ammunition), I passed through numerous towns and villages &mdash; many flying the fist-and-rifle flags of Hezbollah and the colors of Amal &mdash; and one Palestinian refugee camp. Also, lots of huge billboards and posters of Hassan Nasrallah, the Ayatollah Khomeini, the faces of Hezbollah &ldquo;martyrs,&rdquo; and banners with phrases like &dash; translated to me &dash; &ldquo;Israel is the only enemy&rdquo; and &ldquo;We will never forget the Hezbollah martyrs.&rdquo;

The truly nuttiest, most contradictory thing I saw was a military surplus store, deep in Hezbollah country, called &ldquo;Delta Force.&rdquo;09/29 04:00 PM Saturday, September 29, 2007  
Hezbollah's 'Show of Force' [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &dash; Hezbollah is rehearsing for something big here. Not sure what or when. But a few days ago, between 4,000 and 5,000 HezB gunmen deployed to the Christian areas of Beirut in an unsettling &ldquo;show of force,&rdquo; positioning themselves at road intersections and other key points throughout the city. Two additional objectives were achieved: First, the operation served as a probing action to determine local reaction. Second, it served as an exercise to gauge the time required (speed, synchronization, etc.) to achieve the key points and intersections.

Amazingly, there was no response from the police or the army.

HezB is also jamming cell-phone signals almost daily. Their lookouts are everywhere, at least from my vantage point, because they are watching the people I'm with and me.

HezB is also far better armed, equipped, and tactically proficient than most Americans might realize. They are terrorists to be sure: But they are also a very strong Iranian-trained guerrilla force here in Lebanon, and they seem to be getting a pass from far too many people in high places.

Last night, an anti-Hezbollah &ldquo;weapons expert&rdquo; said to me, smiling, &ldquo;Lebanon needs about 25,000 U.S. Marines.&rdquo;

This morning, I'm returning to the Lebanese Defense Ministry for a second meeting with General Sleiman. 09/29 02:34 AM Friday, September 28, 2007  
With the Commander of All Lebanese Armed Forces [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT (The Ministry of Defense) &dash; This morning, I spent two hours in a closed-door one-on-one interview with General Michel Sleiman, the commander-in-chief of all the Lebanese Armed Forces, which includes the army, navy, air force, and special operations forces.

Sipping Turkish coffee with Sleiman and one of his aides (a colonel with the Directorate of Intelligence), I asked the general questions ranging from Iranian soldiers training Hezbollah in Lebanon to the recent counterterrorism operation at Nahr al-Bared, all of which will be discussed in a forthcoming piece here at NRO.

At one point during our conversation, Sleiman shared with me a discussion he had with some of his officers on the first day of the fighting at Nahr al-Bared: One of his commanders expressed concern that the estimated number of soldiers killed in action &dash; 250-300 &ldquo;martyrs&rdquo; as he called them &dash; might be too great if the Lebanese Army attacked in great strength. Sleiman responded, &ldquo;We are an army of 50,000 soldiers. If we lose 1,000, we will remain 49,000. But if we don't attack, we will not be an army and we will not be soldiers.&rdquo;

In the end, Sleiman lost 167 men.

Much more to come.09/28 09:24 AM Friday, September 28, 2007  
Iranian Soldiers in Lebanon [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT &dash; Relaxing tonight with two bodyguards at a safe house on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean. Tomorrow I will meet one-on-one with senior commanders from the Lebanese Army.

Earlier, as we were leaving the 1559 Committee offices, Toni pointed out two Hezbollah lookouts positioned nearby. One was a young man on a scooter. After five minutes of watching us (as we waited for one of the security men to bring Toni's car around to the front of the building), the lookout left. Another driving a small hatchback took up the scooter-man's position, watched us, made a cell-phone call and waited for us to leave before he left.

One of the Committee leaders &mdash; whose name I prefer not to disclose (because his family doesn't know) &mdash; received a telephoned death threat a few hours earlier. &ldquo;You don't have much time,&rdquo; the voice on the line said. These threats I've learned are frequent, as are the Hezbollah lookouts and cars 'tailing' cars out on the roads.

As you may know, the greatest concentration of Hezbollah ("Party of God") fighters worldwide is here in Lebanon. Hezbollah is also outfitted and trained by Iran.

Here are some facts:

Between 2,000 and 3,000 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (Pasdaran) are currently in Lebanon. Here, these Iranian soldiers are supporting Lebanese Hezbollah fighters &mdash; actual numbers are unknown &mdash; with weapons, military equipment, and cash. They are also training them in camps (at least five such camps in the Bekaa Valley and two or three in southern Lebanon) in a variety of infantry/commando operations and terror-bombing techniques.

The closest of these camps in the Bekaa Valley is about 30 miles from here.

Currently, there are approximately 2,000 Hezbollah fighters under arms in Lebanon. Another 25,000 are capable of being mobilized.

Some of these newly trained Lebanese Hezbollah fighters are being sent to Iraq, crossing Syria to enter that country.

This does not include the approximately 10 Palestinian refugee camps (located throughout the country) which have been inhabited for six decades by Palestinians now numbering in the tens-of-thousands. Also inside those camps &mdash; essentially hiding behind the civilian populations &mdash; are various terrorist cells.

One of the best-known is Fatah Al Islam, the Al Qaeda affiliate that was recently defeated by the Lebanese Army north of here at the Palestinian refugee camp, Nahr al-Bared. Our friend Walid Phares, who incidentally is one of the senior leaders of the Cedars Revolution (certainly a founder), detailed much of this in previous analysis here at &ldquo;The Tank.&rdquo;

I plan to be reporting from Nahr al-Bared within a few days.09/28 02:32 AM Thursday, September 27, 2007  
My Bodyguards and House Resolution 548 [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT (an undisclosed neighborhood) &ndash; Lebanon is extremely dangerous for Americans right now. In fact, some top officials within the 1559 Committee (essentially the heart and soul of the Cedars Revolution ... for a free Lebanon) believe some sort of dramatic terrorist event is going to take place here in Lebanon between now and mid-October. This is not a gut feeling, but a calculation based on intelligence analysis and chatter from the street.

Tony Nissi, the 1559 Committee chief here in Beirut (whom you'll recall from previous entries), has reason to believe Hezbollah knows who I am. So I am deliberately not staying in hotels: Instead, I'm spending nights in friends' houses &mdash; safe houses if you will &mdash; and always with bodyguards.

Last night, I stayed in a beautiful home situated on one of the many hills above the city. Henry Daoud, a 42-year-old former Lebanese infantry soldier with quite a bit of combat experience and who trained for several months with U.S. Army Special Forces, was with me all the time. I slept in one of the bedrooms. Henry was up all night in the living room near the front and back doors.

Whenever I am on the road, it's usually with Cedric Achkar driving. I'm sitting in the front passenger seat. Henry is in the back.

You'll remember Cedric: He's the affable 25-year-old &mdash; also a black belt in taekwondo &mdash; who Toni considers to be his right arm. Henry is Toni's left.

I've bonded easily with these guys (you learn to trust or distrust quickly in this part of the world). We're always exchanging war stories, laughing and joking, and talking about how beautiful the Lebanese women are: And they truly are. Cedric and Henry also are teaching me a lot about Lebanon &mdash; more in two days than a student might get in one semester &mdash; about its religious diversity and its history stretching back to the Phoenicians.

On another note: There is quite a bit of excitement here regarding the U.S. House's passing of H.R. 548. In summary: Condemns: (1) the attempts by Hezbollah and other pro-Syrian groups to undermine the government of Lebanon; (2) the assassination campaign targeting members of parliament and public figures in favor of Lebanese independence; and (3) Syria and Iran for their ongoing roles in arming Lebanese militias. Confirms U.S. support for U.N. Security Council resolutions concerning Lebanon, and the clear and binding mandate of the international community for the arms embargo and disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon. Expresses appreciation to the countries whose military personnel serve in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Urges the government of Lebanon to request UNIFIL's assistance to secure the Lebanese-Syrian border. Affirms U.S. support for efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the terrorist bombing of February 14, 2005, and both prior and subsequent politically inspired assassinations. Pledges continued support for the government of Lebanon and the Lebanese people against the

campaign of terror directed at the Lebanese people and at political and public figures opposing Syrian interference in Lebanon. Commends the many Lebanese who continue to adhere to the principles of the Cedar Revolution. Applauds the government of Lebanon's efforts to fully extend Lebanon's sovereignty over the entire country.

On the first and last pages of H.R. 548, the resolution recognizes the Cedars Revolution by name, and says:

Resolved, That the House of Representatives commends the many Lebanese who continue to adhere steadfastly to the principles of the Cedar[s] Revolution and support the democratically elected and legitimate government of Lebanon.

In a few hours I'm leaving on another intelligence-gathering mission.

Much more to come, and we're only beginning.

09/27 06:28 AM

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

A Reconnaissance in Al Dahiyeh [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT (the Al Dekwaneh and Al Dahiyeh districts) &ndash; Like Iraq, Lebanon is a country at war . . . and a huge front in the global war on terror. Though not nearly as kinetic in terms of high-intensity combat, it is embroiled in a complex set of interrelated conflicts from key-leader assassinations and other acts of terror to intelligence collection and counterintelligence operations.

The enemy is Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and any number of other terrorist groups and state sponsors of terrorism with a footprint in Lebanon, all hoping to wrest control of the government from the legitimate electors of that government: the Lebanese people.

I've been observing and operating with the good guys: those working toward a free and independent Lebanon.

My covering the work of the Lebanese Army, originally slated for today, has moved to a few days from now. In the meantime, I'm in the field with a few Lebanese counterterrorism experts and operators.

UPDATE: Before posting this entry, I emailed Kathryn informing her I could not discuss any of the details of a mission I was involved in today. But I just received clearance to discuss &ldquo;briefly&rdquo; one of our intelligence-collection operations.

It was a basic photo-reconnaissance where we observed, listed particulars, and shot photographs of Hezbollah militiamen and the general infrastructure in the Al Dahiyeh district of southern Beirut. There, Hezbollah controls a &ldquo;security square&rdquo; (where no Lebanese soldiers or policemen dare enter), basically a multiple-block square of high-rises in a mixed commercial-residential sector with very high population density. We entered in a thin-skinned SUV armed with only a couple of pistols, a Canon Rebel, and a couple of notebooks. Earlier I mentioned the Hezbollah tent city near the government district. That was something altogether different. In the Dahiyeh district, I observed Lebanese militiamen dressed in khaki uniforms and armed with AK-47s. Buildings in Dahiyeh &mdash; particularly the Hezbollah General Assembly building destroyed by the Israeli Air Force during the 2006 war &mdash; were being rebuilt (that money is coming from somewhere). Lookouts with walkie-talkies manned street corners, as did roving patrols of young men on scooters.

No Lebanese police or other legitimate authorities were in the area: just Hezbollah fighters on the streets, and a few on rooftops.

We drove through the district taking one route, safely exited. Then regrouped and moved back in along another.

At one point we were blocked in traffic on a very narrow side street: not a comfortable position to be in &mdash; particularly without armored protection &mdash; but we continued photographing and taking notes.

In fact, I was so close to groups of armed and uniformed Hezbollah men I could have hit any one of them in the head with a softball. And, in all the traffic, they never knew I was there.

09/26 03:02 PM

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

Face-to-Face with Hezbollah [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]BEIRUT (The Christian Sector) &mdash; Last night, following a briefing by Toni Nissi, who runs the 1559 Committee here in Beirut and is one of the founders of the Cedars Revolution;

he, team members Carol Sokhen and Alexi Capucci, and I, left the offices and drove through the streets of the city.

Soldiers were everywhere. Carol was a bit nervous & responsibly cautious might be a better description & because Toni had been watched leaving his office and then followed by Hezbollah men only a few days earlier. And it has been less than a week since parliamentarian Antoine Ghanem was killed on the same route.

All I could think about was how easily the passenger-side door closed, reminding me that we were tooling around the Lebanese capital in a thin-skinned, unarmored SUV.

Toni knows his life is in danger. But as he says, "What are you going to do?"

I slept at Carol's house. The committee's chief researcher, Carol lives in a charming flat in the Christian section of Beirut. French doors to my room opened to a six-story terrace overlooking other residence buildings & spruced up with lovely hanging plants and flowers & all pock-marked with bullet holes and shrapnel scars from previous fighting. Down below on the street was a Lebanese soldier slowly passing through the yellowish glow of a street light. A foreboding-looking solid black figure at first: as he moved through the light, I could see his camouflaged army uniform, green beret, and folding stock AK-47. I slept with the doors open, watching the clouds and listening to the street noise & screeching cars, a few scooters, and a barking dog & for a few minutes before drifting off.

Today, back on the road with Cedric Achkar, special assistant to the general coordinator (basically Toni's right arm). Cedric is only 25-years-old, but well-respected, educated (a couple of engineering degrees), always with a solution (never a problem), and bears the jaw scars of a Kalashnikov rifle-butt. We drove all over Beirut this morning, passing near the Hezbollah camp and literally a few feet from several Hezbollah militiamen who gave us the hard stare.

Hezbollah are not the only terrorists operating here in Lebanon: There are also Al Qaeda affiliates like Fatah Al Islam (they were not totally wiped out at Nahr al Bared), as well as Jund al Sham (Soldiers of Damascus), Jundallah, Hamas, and & though few Americans are aware of this & operating elements of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps on the Lebanese side of the Lebanese-Syrian border. These are just a few of the problem groups here: All operating under the auspices of Hezbollah.

In a few hours, I'm slated to meet with several senior Lebanese military commanders, and will go with them into the field.09/26 04:48 AM

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

Reporting from Lebanon [W. Thomas Smith Jr.]ON THE GROUND IN BEIRUT & Arrived here less than two hours ago (after 25-hours of travel and layovers). Now relaxing here in the Al Dekwaneh neighborhood-offices of the International Lebanese Committee for UN SCR 1559 (more on that later).

Between the airport and the committee's office, we (my escorts and I) passed by the sprawling Hezbollah tent city & some 200-plus heavily armed Hezbollah militiamen & positioned between the parliament and the Serail, basically the headquarters of the prime minister, his deputies, and all the cabinet members. Of course, today's presidential elections were thwarted & postponed until November & a result of recent assassinations and threats of assassination, as well as the fact that the assembled deputies failed to meet the required number to hold the election proceedings.

Beyond the Hezbollah camp, Lebanese soldiers can be seen guarding all major roads and intersections. Time for food, sleep. More to come.

09/25 09:59 AM <http://tank.nationalreview.com/author/?q=NDE5Nw==>

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