

**CHAPTER 15****The Hizballah Training Camps of  
Lebanon****MAGNUS RANSTORP**

Since its inception in 1982, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the Hizballah movement has occupied a central position as *the* "A-team"<sup>1</sup> of terrorist organizations with a global reach for successive American administrations. Prior to 9/11, Hizballah was charged with being responsible for the greatest number of American casualties worldwide in terrorist attacks following the April 1983 suicide attack against the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and the simultaneous suicide attacks against the U.S. and French contingents of the Multinational Force (MNF) on 23 October 1983, killing 241 U.S. Marines and fifty-six French paratroopers. This latter incident revealed a remarkable degree of operational innovation in fusing suicide attacks into a synchronized attack mode, a tactic that would later serve to inspire the al Qaeda hijackers on 9/11. It also underscored the close operational logistical support that the Iranian clerical establishment—and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in particular—had extended from 1982 onwards in the establishment of Hizballah in the Bekaa Valley and in their provision of a matrix of crucial guidance in the fields of recruitment, ideological indoctrination, material support, and military training in specific terrorist training camps.

**The Complex Matrix of Hizballah Terrorism**

A multitude of Iranian clerical personalities and institutions were instrumental in the actual formation of Hizballah and in providing logistical assistance in rapidly building a sophisticated terrorist capability. A series of contingents of the *al-Qods* (Jerusalem) forces within the Iranian Revolu-

## 244 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training

tionary Guard Corps were immediately redeployed from the Iran-Iraq battlefield following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Their headquarters was established in the Syrian border village of Zebdani, with an 800-man-strong contingent deployed in Baalbek and with a further 700 distributed in smaller villages in the eastern Bekaa region, most notably in Brital, Nabisheet, and Ba'albek. These elite military units provided not only the organizational basis and infrastructure for the formation of Hizballah but also imparted religious indoctrination, military training, and guidance for the terrorist active-service units, eventually crystallizing into three divisions of the Special Security Apparatus responsible for security and intelligence matters. These clandestine units within Hizballah were further supported by a range of Iranian clerics and institutions, from Iran's personal representatives in Damascus and Beirut to the Office of Islamic Liberation Movements with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, the Hizballah's clandestine security wing, the so-called Special Security Apparatus (SSA), with close Iranian coordination and Syrian patronage, abducted numerous Western hostages in Beirut between 1984 and 1990. These human pawns were used skillfully for years as a coercive leverage against the American, French, and British governments to affect change in their foreign policies against Iran and Syria.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Hizballah applied further punitive pressure on the French government outside Lebanon in a series of deadly bombings in Paris between February and September 1986. A year earlier, members of Hizballah's SSA, most notably Muhammad Ali Hamadi, Hasan Iz-el-Din, and Ali Atwa—working under Imad Mughniyeh's supervision—had hijacked TWA 847, commandeering it to Beirut and forcing Israel to eventually release 766 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the release of the passengers. All these terrorist incidents revealed a close operational relationship to varying degrees between Hizballah operatives and Iranian clerics and select Iranian security institutions, most notably the Iranian MOIS.

The fusion of active and passive Iranian assistance to Hizballah at multiple levels has assisted both Iran and Hizballah in efforts to obscure and conceal its clandestine activities, especially in ensuring "plausible deniability" in more complex operations overseas. It has also led to the common perception that the state-sponsor relationship is conceptually one-dimensional, occurring through one or a few channels in a linear fashion from sponsor to proxy. The realities on the ground are much more complex and fluid, changing over periods of time and according to context, operation, and security circumstances. A key senior Hizballah SSA operative, Imad Mughniyeh, exemplifies the complexity in deciphering the exact contours of whether the organization's principal terrorism architecture is primarily located within Hizballah's leadership or within the Iranian MOIS, or both. This complexity, combined with a highly secretive command struc-

### The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 245

ture, has made identifying the operational nerve center very difficult, particularly in terms of whether it is located in Beirut or in Teheran at any particular time. Imad Mughniyeh is by some accounts reporting directly to Hizballah's Secretary-General and serves as a conduit to Iran's MOIS operatives, operating under cover at the diplomatic missions in Beirut and Damascus and relaying instructions directly to the MOIS headquarters in Teheran. Some argue that the appointment of Jawad Nur-al-Din to the seven-member *Shura al-Qarar*, the highest-ranking elected leadership body of Hizballah, was indeed a cover name for Imad Mughniyeh himself.<sup>4</sup> It is believed that Mughniyeh travels on an Iranian diplomatic passport and always travels to Lebanon via Damascus airport to avoid being intercepted and arrested by the CIA's clandestine CTC unit, which is monitoring and tracking his potential movements worldwide.

Equally, it has been very difficult to identify with any degree of certainty the exact operational activities in Hizballah-run terrorist training camps, since relatively few operatives captured over the years have revealed their nature in interrogations. An exception to this is the 1996 case of Muhammad Hussein Mikdad, an accountant to one of the social services managed by Hizballah's spiritual leader (described later in this chapter). Mikdad was recruited for his foreign-language abilities and his Western looks and was trained in the Hizballah-run Janta training camp before being deployed from Lebanon, via Geneva, with a mission to infiltrate Israel and conduct a terrorist operation involving a sophisticated improvised explosive device concealed in a Sony radio.<sup>5</sup>

Another difficulty in pinpointing terrorist training camps has been the vast expansion of Hizballah's activities in the political, social, and military domains since the early 1990s. Unlike many other terrorist organizations, Hizballah is horizontally and vertically integrated within Lebanon and its large Shia community as an Islamic social resistance movement with hundreds of thousands of members and sympathizers. Apart from undertaking major structural reforms in the early 1990s with the creation of the *Shura al-Tanfidh* (Executive Shura) for deliberating strategic matters—operating in parallel to the supreme national *Shura al-Qarar* (Decision Shura) at the helm of Hizballah's command decision making—the movement established a "Politburo" (*Maktab al-Takhtit*), a supervisory committee in charge of coordinating Hizballah's recruitment, propaganda, and support services on the regional and local levels, and *al-Majlis al-Jihadi* (Jihad Council), responsible for all military matters.<sup>6</sup> These structures are often overlapping with each other, as operational members are recruited from the social wings into the military units and may provide further opportunities for concealment. As such, the social and military aspects of Hizballah are not separated by firewalls but serve to mutually reinforce each other in many spheres.

Another complicating factor in locating terrorist units is the evolution of

**246 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training**

Hizballah's early terrorist training camps into full-fledged guerrilla and military camps designed to train fighters for combat in southern Lebanon and across the border into northern Israel. With the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1989/90, Hizballah worked hard to progressively entrench its position as a major political, social, and military resistance movement and, as such, reoriented its energy and attention towards militarily confronting Israel's continued occupation of southern Lebanon. The presence of smaller units from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps in mobile training camps in the Bekaa Valley continued to be instrumental in providing advanced operational advice and material assistance to Hizballah's military wing—the Islamic Resistance (*al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*)—on the battlefield in its guerrilla campaign against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and its proxy, the South Lebanese Army (SLA). Supervised by senior Islamic Resistance commanders, groups of twenty Iranian training officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, each a specialist in various aspects of guerrilla warfare techniques, were deployed to various Hizballah training and bivouac camps in the Bekaa region.<sup>7</sup> In these camps, Islamic Resistance fighters were provided advanced logistical and technical assistance with a focus on infiltration techniques, explosives, and intelligence operations. As such, advanced guerrilla (and terrorist) training was extended to a highly compartmentalized core of 500 fighters in active-unit service strength and 3,000 part-timers.<sup>8</sup> This has provided Hizballah with a large potential "reserve" corps to recruit from for various missions requiring advanced terrorism and intelligence skills. Evidence exists that more novice operatives have received technical terrorist training from some of these Hizballah-run camps in Janta, Baalbek, and mobile guerrilla units in southern Lebanon. The more senior members of the small and compartmentalized SSA have longstanding security training both within Lebanon and Syria and probably from MOIS-operated camps within Iran.

The release of the final Western hostages in December 1991, masterfully brokered by UN negotiator Giandomenico Picco,<sup>9</sup> seemed to conclude a long, dark, and murky chapter of Hizballah's extensive involvement in terrorism both within Lebanon and on foreign soil. Although Hizballah focused on transforming itself into a major and permanent political, social, and military movement within Lebanon's post-civil war environment, the killing of Hizballah's Secretary-General, Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi in February 1992, by Israeli missile-firing helicopters in southern Lebanon, provided the catalyst to retaliate with a major terrorist attack against Israeli targets overseas. A month later, Hizballah cells in Buenos Aires deployed a car bomb against the Israeli Embassy, killing twenty-nine civilians and wounding over 300. Two years later, with Iranian assistance, the Hizballah carried out another car-bomb attack on the main building of the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) in Buenos Aires on 18, July 1994. The Argentine investigations into these two attacks revealed not only official

### The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 247

Iranian involvement but also the existence of an extensive Hizballah network in Latin America, stretching from Colombia to the Triborder area (where the borders of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet), primarily tapping into the Lebanese expatriate community for logistical support, fundraising, and financial support primarily through illicit trade in counterfeit property.<sup>10</sup> Again, the identity of the infamous Imad Mughniyeh surfaced and was named as a principal architect for both attacks, with extensive Iranian involvement ordered by the then-Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian (who was later indicted by German courts for his involvement in the murder of four leaders of the Kurdish opposition to the Tehran regime, known as the 1992 Mykonos affair).<sup>11</sup> In other areas of the world, Hizballah operatives were intercepted in a plot to bomb the Israeli Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1994. Less-publicized joint Hizballah-MOIS logistical activity overseas has been alleged by Matthew Levitt of the Washington Institute, cataloguing instances of Hizballah reconnaissance in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, as well as auxiliary logistical and fundraising activities in Sierra Leone and Liberia (conflict diamonds), Uganda, Canada, South Africa, and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Although Hizballah has acquired a "global reach" through its close relationship with the Iranian MOIS, its primary focus has been to combat Israel along its northern border and to extend logistical assistance to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad members inside Gaza and the West Bank. The closeness of this relationship was forged with the Israeli expulsion of 415 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad activists to southern Lebanon in December 1992. The extensive contact between Hizballah and Hamas leaders directly facilitated the transfer of the suicide tactic as a method to be used in the Palestinian theatre. The level of unity and support between Hizballah and Hamas solidified further following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000, and accelerated dramatically following the Israeli targeted assassinations of Hamas leaders Abu-Shannab, Yassin, and Rantisi in 2004. A priority for Hizballah was to logistically assist Hamas and other factions in qualitative strategic operations or "spectaculars" inside Israel. As publicly promised by Sheikh Hassan Nasserallah to Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, "Consider us in Hizballah, from the secretary-general and leadership down to our fighters and women, members of Hamas, and our soldiers under your command."<sup>13</sup>

Imad Mughniyeh and other key SSA members are suspected of playing a key role in finding avenues to circumvent Israeli security measures by recruiting foreign operatives abroad. Iranian involvement in facilitating this close-knit cooperation between Hizballah and Hamas has not been absent, as Hojjatoleslam Ali-Akhbar Mohtashamipour is spearheading these efforts in his capacity as the Secretary-General of the International Conference to Support the Palestinian Uprising (*intifada*) and as a member of the Committee to Support the Palestinian Revolution.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that

## 248 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training

the role of Ali-Akhbar Mohtashamipour mirrors his critical past and personal role in the actual creation and growth of the Hizballah movement in Lebanon during his tenure as Iran's ambassador to Syria between 1982–85. According to a U.S. National Security Agency intercept, Iranian intelligence headquarters in Teheran relayed a message to Mohtashamipour to contact Hussein Musawi, the leader of Islamic Amal in charge of the Sheikh Abdallah barracks in Baalbek, and instruct him “to take spectacular action against the United States.”<sup>15</sup> According to U.S. intelligence, this message culminated in the 1983 U.S. Marine barracks attack.<sup>16</sup>

In many ways, the Hizballah-Iranian relationship has come full circle as many of the movement's command leadership and Iranian clerical personalities and institutions are almost the same in 2005 as they were in 1982–83. Some of the Iranian clerical personalities have rotated positions within the security establishments over time, while a few Hizballah leaders have been killed and its SSA operatives have blended further into the shadows. Most of the principal Hizballah leaders received their early formative clerical schooling in the Iraqi holy city of Najaf during the 1960s and 1970s, studying under the future Iranian clerical establishment as their disciples and forging close personal and trusted friendships. Some Hizballah operatives like Imad Mughniyeh worked closely with the Palestinian Fatah Force 17 as security personnel before joining Hizballah and came into contact with many Iranian clerics, who in turn received armed training from Palestinian militant factions during the 1970s. This has meant that parallel webs of personal relationships exist informally between Hizballah's clerical command leadership and the Iranian clerical establishment ensuring loyalty, trust, and security. For Hizballah's SSA, the role of clan and family affiliation became vital early on to avoid hostile penetration by enemy agents.

### **The Early Days: Arrival of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards**

The arrival of 1,500 IRGC units from Iran after July 1982 came in response to Israel's full-scale invasion of Lebanon, and was formalized in a joint Syria-Iran military agreement. However, it was decided early on in both Teheran and Damascus that any direct IRGC engagement alongside Syrian military forces was politically unwise and logistically impractical, as the relatively small size of the IRGC units would be too small for a direct combat role against the technologically superior and rapidly advancing IDF. Instead the IRGC focused on ensuring the survival and growth of Husayn al-Musawi's newly created militia, the Islamic Amal, basing itself at the Sheikh Abdallah barracks at the heart of the Bekaa Valley town of Baalbek (under Syrian military control). Alongside its support and patronage of Islamic Amal, the IRGC units, spearheaded by religious and military in-

### The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 249

structors, were deployed in late 1982 to smaller villages along the eastern Bekaa Valley to recruit and indoctrinate potential members into the newly formed Hizballah movement.<sup>17</sup> Iran actively supervised this solidifying process by merging together the Lebanese al-Da'wa, the Association of Muslim Students, defectors from the Amal movement, and other radicalized Shiite associations—all of which had a commonality of having leaders who received clerical training in Najaf, Iraq, by senior Iranian clerics.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the IRGC units, who provided military training and ideological guidance and imposed its control over residents to adhere to more strict Islamic behavior, Ali-Akhbar Mohtashamipour, Iran's ambassador to Damascus, played a critical role in the formation of the Hizballah. He had himself been pursuing theological studies in Najaf under the supervision of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, alongside future Hizballah leaders. He had also established extensive contacts with Lebanese and Palestinian elements engaged in "anti-Zionist" armed activity during the 1970s, and, in fact, in 1971 he had graduated from a military training course supervised by Palestinian groups. These early close connections between Iranian clerics and Palestinian factions, who provided military training within Lebanon in the early 1970s, influenced the recruitment of future Hizballah operatives from Fatah Force 17, Arafat's elite bodyguard unit.<sup>19</sup>

In the early days of Islamic Amal and Hizballah, the IRGC units played an all-service role in the recruitment of new members and in the provision of logistical assistance and military training.<sup>20</sup> This recruitment drive was aided by financial inducements in the form of a monthly salary, and fighters were offered special privileges, including cost-free education and medical treatment for themselves and their families.<sup>21</sup> The IRGC was supported by large Iranian funds to finance arms shipments, training, and infrastructure, and in July 1984 it had established six military centers in the Bekaa region to train Hizballah and Islamic Amal fighters.<sup>22</sup> The most notorious of these was the Sheikh Abdallah barracks in Baalbek, made famous as the operational nerve center for Hizballah's kidnappings and later as a known storage facility for some of the Western hostages. It had also an important role to play in the planning of the October 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks outside Beirut airport.

Islamic Amal's Husayn al-Musawi (a former school teacher and defector of Amal) had played an instrumental role in seizing the Sheikh Abdallah barracks from the Lebanese army in November 1982 before handing it over for operational control to the IRGC.<sup>23</sup> Husayn al-Musawi, together with his security chief, Husayn al-Khalil (the brother-in-law of Hizballah Politburo Member Ali Ammar and current close adviser to Sheikh Hassan Nasserallah) were identified as the principal operatives in an initial secret directive from MOIS to Ali-Akhbar Mohtashamipour, Iran's Ambassador to Syria, instructing them to instigate attacks against the Multinational

## 250 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training

Force coalition in Lebanon.<sup>24</sup> Instead, Mohtashamipour contacted Ahmad Kan'ani, the IRGC commander in Lebanon, instructing him to put the operation in motion, and a meeting was convened, attended by Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli (Hizballah's first Secretary-General between 1982–91) and Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi (Tufayli's successor until he was killed in 1992). In this meeting they collectively devised the plan to synchronize the twin suicide bombings using a water-delivery truck. According to testimony of one of the Hizballah operatives present, the trucks were built and equipped in an underground warehouse in the Hizballah-dominated southern suburbs of Beirut (*al-Dahiyya*), known as the *Bir al-Beid* neighborhood. The 19-ton water delivery truck packed with PETN (a bulk form of pentaerythritol tetranitrate) was driven by Ismalal Ascari<sup>25</sup>—importantly, an *Iranian* rather than a Hizballah or Islamic Amal member, which again underlines the extremely close operational relationship between Iranian military and intelligence and Islamic Amal and Hizballah in the planning as well as the execution of operations. The Iranian fingerprints were obvious given that the time scale from directive to conception and execution took less than a month. According to anonymous security officials, the Italian contingent of the MNF had also been initially selected as a potential target, but reconnaissance determined that the operation would be less effective, as some of the soldiers were housed in tents rather than collectively in a building. The exact contours of Hizballah or Iranian responsibility in this operation remains murky, especially when one considers that a Hizballah youth from southern Lebanon, inspired and directed by Sheikh Raghieb Harb, had carried out a suicide attack a year earlier when the Hizballah was in a rather embryonic stage.

On 11 November 1982, a day later than planned, Ahmad Qassir launched a suicide mission against the eight-story Israeli military headquarters in Tyre, killing seventy-five soldiers and wounding twenty-eight others.<sup>26</sup> For Hizballah, Qassir's action was pioneering, as it represented the first official suicide attack launched by the organization. More importantly, it symbolically represented the "spirit" of martyrdom in showing and paving the way for future Hizballah resistance against its enemies. As such, 11 November of every year is designated "Martyr's Day" by the Hizballah movement. However, the Hizballah leadership concealed the identity of Qassir until 19 May 1985 in order to avoid any direct reprisals on his family or the emergent public Hizballah leadership.<sup>27</sup>

In parallel to the consolidation of Hizballah in the Bekaa region under Iranian and Syrian patronage and supervision, the movement gradually spread to other areas heavily populated by Shia, including the southern suburbs of Beirut and the villages and towns in southern Lebanon. Hizballah was practically aided by the financial assistance received from an array of Iranian institutions, operating side by side with Hizballah-run social, charitable, and religious institutions, as well as by the expansion of some

## The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 251

IRGC units from Baalbek into Beirut after April 1983. Soon, Hizballah controlled the southern suburbs of Beirut with a network of neighborhood informants and security personnel to protect its senior leadership. This security blanket was assisted by continuous support and advice from Iran's intelligence operatives based in its Beirut embassy, and functions today both visibly and covertly in many places of *al-Dahiyya* (the Hizballah-dominated southern suburbs of Beirut). In many of these areas, Hizballah operates with complete autonomy in terms of security, as neither the Lebanese army nor Syrian intelligence are allowed to operate here without prior permission. This iron-clad security matrix rests on the meticulous files collected on all past, present, and new members by Hizballah's internal security branch, making it obligatory for all members to report on any meetings or contacts, especially with any "outsiders."<sup>28</sup> Any security breaches are investigated and handled by Hizballah's so-called "Engagement and Coordination Unit," headed by Wafic Safa (who acts also as the chief negotiator in prisoner exchange processes with Israel).<sup>29</sup>

Although Hizballah continued to expand its influence over the economically disenfranchised and politically marginalized Shia community, the issue of security for Hizballah members increased, especially following the 1984 killing of Sheikh Ragheb Harb in the southern Lebanese village of Jibsheets, and the 1985 failed assassination attempt on Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Hizballah's spiritual leader.<sup>30</sup> However, security concerns had always been paramount for both Hizballah and Islamic Amal in a civil war milieu, and special attention was given to carefully concealing the multiplicity of Iranian agencies at work within Hizballah and the Lebanese theater, especially Iranian military and security structures. Therefore, according to Nizar Hamzeh, the Hizballah has invested heavily in the growth and size of its internal security branch consisting today of over 5,000 personnel.<sup>31</sup>

### **Hizballah's Special Security Apparatus and the Imad Mughniyeh Factor**

The decision to create a specialized elite clandestine unit within Hizballah, the so-called Special Security Apparatus, was made early on to protect emerging senior clerical figures and leaders as the organization crystallized, as well as to safeguard Iranian security and military involvement. Like Mughniyeh, Husayn al-Khalil had spent his formative experience with Fatah during the 1970s and had defected to join Islamic Amal as chief of security, basing himself at the Sheikh Abdallah barracks. Here, al-Khalil assumed responsibility for Hizballah's security and intelligence, while other trusted operatives were recruited into the SSA's three subgroups: the central security apparatus, the preventative security apparatus, and an overseas security apparatus.<sup>32</sup>

**252 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training**

The composition of these units was primarily made up of operatives who had distinguished themselves as possessing special security and intelligence skills harnessed during their involvement with Palestinian and other militant groupings before and during the civil war. The recruitment of SSA operatives was also based on clan and family affiliation, in order to ensure secrecy, loyalty, and protection against hostile penetration. An example of this family-based structure is the case of the two Hamadi brothers: Muhammad Ali Hamadi, who participated in the 1985 hijacking of the TWA 847 plane, and Abbas Ali Hamadi, who kidnapped two German citizens in 1987 in retaliation for the arrest of his brother at the Frankfurt airport. Similarly, the Musawi clan, from the village of Nabi Sheet, became influential with three members involved.<sup>33</sup> Other SSA operatives were recruited because they were trusted close or extended family members of senior Hizballah clerics and officials or because they had worked closely with these leaders in a security capacity or even trained Iranian clerical leaders in the past. This was the case of Imad Mughniyeh, who had spent his early years with Fatah Force 17 before allegedly becoming a bodyguard to Hizballah's spiritual leader, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah.<sup>34</sup> All these SSA operatives had some autonomy or operational freedom according to security circumstances, but all were ultimately answerable to Sheikh Abbas al-Musawi, the overall head of SSA between 1982-85, and Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli, the then Secretary-General of Hizballah. This became increasingly clear as these SSA units were tasked to kidnap select Western nationalities to suit Iranian and Syrian interests and also as they relied on official Hizballah-channels to Iranian and Syrian intelligence in order to monitor the passenger manifestos of incoming flights to Beirut airport.

The concept of kidnapping foreign nationals was originally Iranian-inspired and operationally driven following the 4 July 1982 kidnapping by Lebanese Forces of four Iranians, two of whom were diplomats, at the Barbara checkpoint en route from Tripoli to Beirut. Two weeks later, David Dodge, the acting president of the American University of Beirut, was kidnapped by Iranian agents and transported across the Lebanese-Syrian border before being flown in a box to Teheran. According to Robert Baer, the IRGC intelligence chief based in Baalbek was instructed to create a layered "cut-out" structure with local trusted operatives, as Iran had been implicated through tracing Dodge's movement out of Lebanon.<sup>35</sup>

A favored and trusted instrument for the Iranians' devious policy designs became the creation of the SSA from primarily within the ranks of Islamic Amal in early 1983, which could perform multiple clandestine functions to ensure Iranian plausible deniability. Operational efficiency required Iranian collusion in the provision of high-grade intelligence on targets and financing of these kidnappings, providing assistance in the establishment of secret safe houses and hiding locations in the southern suburbs of Beirut and in Baalbek (Sheikh Adallah barracks) with loyal guards and secret modes

**The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 253**

of periodic transport. For example, U.S. hostage Terry Anderson testified that he was held for a period of his captivity in the sub-basement of military barracks occupied by IRGC units.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, suspicion of Iranian collusion came with the precision kidnapping of CIA-chief William Buckley in Beirut on 16 March 1984; he was allegedly transferred to Iran, interrogated under torture, and returned to Lebanon.

It was in connection to the Buckley case that Imad Mughniyeh's name first surfaced on the intelligence radar screens provided by the Algerians to the CIA.<sup>37</sup> It was probably provided earlier with the overlapping and complimentary interests between Hizballah and Iran, which motivated many of these types of kidnappings. The abduction of Buckley served Iranian intelligence interests, while Imad Mughniyeh and the Musawi clan had a personally vested family interest to create maximum pressure on Kuwaiti authorities, who had arrested two of their relatives for involvement in a group known as the *al-Da'wa* 17, which was implicated in multiple terrorist attacks against U.S. and French targets in Kuwait City. These two arrested operatives in Kuwait were Hussein al-Sayed Yousef al-Musawi (first-cousin to Islamic Amal leader Husayn al-Musawi) and Elias Fouad Saab (brother-in-law and cousin to Imad Mughniyeh).<sup>38</sup> The *al-Da'wa* 17 prisoners held in Kuwait brought Imad Mughniyeh to U.S. intelligence attention, and the case would precipitate more acts of terrorism, including the 1984 hijacking of Kuwait Airlines 221, the 1988 hijacking of Kuwait Airlines 422, and kidnappings of foreigners within Lebanon. However, this case illustrates that the Iranian intelligence machinery would assist in select operations, but it would equally provide a degree of autonomy for SSA operatives to pursue terrorist actions in consultation. Timing and operational procedures were all underpinned by a developed intelligence liaison and command structure between senior SSA members—through the *al-Qods* forces within the IRGC contingent based in the eastern Bekaa—and Iranian intelligence personnel based in both Beirut and Damascus, themselves receiving instructions, assistance, and directives from the Teheran-based MOIS machinery. These channels occurred through the intelligence officer of the IRGC contingent in Baalbek, and were later formalized as Hizballah developed and incorporated two Iranian representatives into its seven-member supreme decision-making body, *Shura al-Qarar*.

The Hizballah SSA-MOIS relationship increased in scale and depth with the practical complexities of terrorist operations, most notably when SSA's security branch operated overseas and in Europe. Muhammad Mouhajer (a nephew of Hizballah leader Sheikh Ibrahim al-Amin) and Fouad Ali Saleh (the principal leader of Hizballah's network in France), along with Iranian Embassy officials, jointly coordinated the 1986 bombing campaign in Paris. The MOIS also provided logistical assistance to senior SSA operatives, helping them avoid detection during traveling; aiding in the procurement of weapons, identities, and money; and providing local liaison

**254 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training**

assistance by identifying Lebanese expatriates as potential recruits. Talent spotting for new "foreign" recruits became a skill Mughniyeh specialized in to circumvent Israeli security. These operatives also specialized in conducting reconnaissance, searching for security weaknesses in Israeli diplomatic missions abroad. For Hizballah, MOIS represented indispensable operational support, as it was one of the largest intelligence services in the Middle East, with fifteen departments and over 30,000 employees.<sup>39</sup> This auxiliary support continues to provide Hizballah with indispensable force projection capabilities far from the Lebanese theater.

Closer to home, MOIS provided the protection for operatives traveling through Syria, seeking refuge in Teheran for security reasons and for further experience in operational tradecraft. It is alleged that Imad Mughniyeh (and one of the Hamadi brothers) spent long periods in Iran (October through December 1987 in northern Iran, and January 1988 through July 1990 in Qom) and sought refuge there for security reasons following the Israeli kidnapping of Mustafa Dirani in May 1994 and following the assassination of Imad's younger brother Fuad in Beirut in December 1994.<sup>40</sup> This security threat to its members was constant and real, as illustrated by the August 2003 killing of Ali Hussein Salah (from the Bekaa village of Brital), who was believed to be a seasoned explosives expert and worked as a security guard at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut.<sup>41</sup>

Hizballah's primary intelligence support outside MOIS channels (and its associated closer links with SSA) was through the well-oiled channels established with the local *al-Qods* forces within the IRGC contingent based in the eastern Bekaa region and across the border inside Syria. These *al-Qods* units operated alongside Iranian representatives of the Foundation of the Oppressed and Dispossessed (*Bonyade-e-Mostafazan*), the Martyrs Foundation and other charitable bodies to provide Hizballah from the outset with the necessary financing to spread its religious and political appeal and influence. These charitable contributions from Iran lessened over time as Hizballah developed self-sufficiency through a vast social network and a myriad of foundations and charities. However, the primary purpose of the IRGC expeditionary force was to act as a conduit for arms shipments for Hizballah and provide advanced guerrilla training to fighters and specialized terrorist tradecraft to some of its operatives.

While Hizballah had little difficulty in securing weapons during the civil war from indigenous Lebanese sources, many arms shipments with more sophisticated weapons were transported from Iran via air to Syria (especially through Damascus airport or military-controlled airfields).<sup>42</sup> These were then shipped over land across the Syrian-Lebanese border and redistributed to protected and concealed Hizballah-controlled arms depots. From small arms to standoff weapons, Hizballah gradually acquired an impressive arsenal, from over a thousand 122mm Katyusha rockets, AT-4 antitank missiles, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG's) to mortars and

## The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 255

antiaircraft batteries. This made it among the most sophisticated and well-armed guerrilla/terrorist groups in the world. The types of weaponry supplied by Iran reflected the shift of Hizballah's own priorities after 1991, with the end of the Lebanese civil war and the release of the Western hostages, the latter of which was facilitated by the release of the *al-Dawa* 17 prisoners following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Instead, the focus and priority became to equip its forces to fight a complex, effective and sustained guerrilla campaign against the IDF occupation in southern Lebanon and its proxy militia, the SLA.

### Hizballah's Centers of Learning: Tactical Agility and Innovation

The presence of IRGC-Hizballah training camps in the eastern Bekaa region served not only to provide the Islamic Resistance fighters with necessary weapons training and guerrilla techniques, but also served as a gateway to select recruits with potential for regular Hizballah infantry battalions, higher-ranking officers, or even for special operation selection. These fighters went through rigorous family background and screening checks by the (counter) intelligence units within the Islamic Resistance in concert with Hizballah's internal security wing. In exceptional circumstances, this was a potential pathway into service with SSA, initially as protective detail or technical specialist. The emphasis was naturally on patient and controlled talent spotting of trusted and exceptionally gifted individual operatives who had successfully passed through Hizballah's two-year stages of recruitment.<sup>43</sup>

For security reasons, the command structure of the Islamic Resistance was effectively compartmentalized from field operations in the seventy-five different sectors comprising the three regional commands in southern Lebanon, the Bekaa region, and the southern suburbs of Beirut.<sup>44</sup> Hizballah's combat units were almost impossible to infiltrate, as its squads were composed of no more than three to four members deployed on infiltration missions in southern villages from rear bases in the Bekaa region or in other areas adjacent to southern Lebanon. A senior Islamic Resistance official headed many of the training and bivouac camps in the Bekaa region and supervised groups of twenty IRGC training officers in each camp, each providing specialist expertise in different aspects of guerrilla warfare.<sup>45</sup> This tactical training embraced studying and learning ambush techniques, concealment and detonation of roadside bombs, mortar attacks, advanced reconnaissance and intelligence, infiltration methods, and aspects of psychological warfare.<sup>46</sup> Some of the more battle-hardened and seasoned fighters assessed each mission with their Iranian advisers to bolster the degree of surprise and effectiveness in preparation for the next one. Recon-

**256 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training**

naissance work, planning, and intelligence gathering meticulously underpinned Hizballah's combat missions.

The Islamic Resistance fighters were highly skilled at reconnaissance and intelligence gathering in the field, often remaining invisible from Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and managing in the wadis and hills of south Lebanon to evade ground surveillance radar, infrared sensors, motion detectors, and roaming Israeli special forces (*Egoz*) units along guerrilla-infiltration routes. These fighters were also highly innovative in using roadside bombs—the deadliest weapon employed by the Islamic Resistance as it claimed over half of all IDF and SLA casualties annually. These roadside bombs grew in technological sophistication and innovative concealment. Hizballah developed sophisticated electronic remote-detonation devices using photocell and mobile phone technology and often disguised these bombs inside fiberglass garden rocks to make them “invisible” in the surrounding countryside.<sup>47</sup> Iranian assistance in driving technological and tactical innovation was even extended to the sea and air, as diving equipment and eight Iranian-produced unmanned airborne vehicles were provided to Hizballah in August 2004.<sup>48</sup>

Auxiliary channels for the procurement of dual-use technology by Hizballah extended even to the United States. In 2002, Hizballah members Mohamad and Chawki Hammoud, based in Charlotte, North Carolina, were convicted of providing material support to Hizballah through a multimillion-dollar cigarette-smuggling operation. In this case, the Hammoud brothers reported to Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis (Hizballah's chief military procurement officer) in diverting the profits from the cigarette-smuggling operation in order to acquire night-vision goggles, global-positioning systems, advanced aircraft-analysis and -design software, stun guns, nitrogen cutters, naval equipment, ultrasonic dog repellers, and laser range finders from U.S. and Canadian retail and military supply stores.<sup>49</sup> Much of this material arguably was designed to enhance the organization's guerrilla activity in southern Lebanon, but this example provides a rare “snapshot” insight into the range and level of ingenuity and sophistication of Hizballah's tactical thinking and adaptation to a constantly changing security environment. This versatility cascaded throughout the entire structure of Hizballah, especially in security and intelligence matters.

As a complement to Hizballah's primary focus on accelerating its guerrilla warfare in southern Lebanon against Israel and in the sphere of infiltration, Imad Mughniyeh and the SSA wing began studying weaknesses in Israel's border security in the early to mid-1990s. This option had been elevated following Israel's decision to expel 415 Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas activists to southern Lebanon in December 1992. As several Hamas leaders from Gaza and the West Bank told this author in interviews, they immediately forged internal tactical and strategic relationships between members (as many had worked within Hamas and PIJ but had never per-

**The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 257**

sonally met before) and more broad relationships with Hizballah command leadership and members. In turn, this encounter influenced the decision by Hamas and PIJ to gradually adopt suicide operations as a preferred method.

The priority to assist the radical Palestinian Islamist organizations logistically to amplify their violent campaign led the Hizballah, after Iranian consultation, to adopt the decision to find suitable candidates for infiltration missions into Israel beginning in 1996. During that year, Hussein Muhammad Hussein Mikdad, from the Lebanese village of Farun, was recruited as an operative primarily on the grounds of his foreign-language abilities and his Western appearance, enabling him to pass as a British national. Mikdad, an accountant in one of Sheikh Fadlallah's charitable foundations, received instructions in terrorism tradecraft and counterinterrogation techniques at the Janta military training camp in the eastern Bekaa region, along with seven other terrorist candidates. After receiving a stolen British passport in the name of Andrew Jonathan Charles Newman and spending a few days at the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, Mikdad was routed to Geneva, Switzerland, before arriving at and passing through the Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel. After renting a car in Tel Aviv, Mikdad proceeded to travel to east Jerusalem and checked into the Lawrence Hotel on Salah Eddin Street. Spending three days in the hotel, Mikdad began assembling an improvised explosive device (with less than a kilogram of the chemical cyclotrimethylenetrinitramine, or RDX), to be hidden inside a Sony multiband radio with the detonation switch in the antennae. The explosives prematurely detonated in Mikdad's lap, causing him to lose both his legs and one arm.<sup>50</sup>

After extensive hospitalization and subsequent interrogation by the Israeli Shin Bet—during which he revealed that he had planned to detonate the device either onboard an El-Al flight departing from Tel Aviv or in a crowded Israeli market—Mikdad was imprisoned and later returned to Lebanon in a prisoner-exchange deal. Although the high-risk operation ultimately failed and would have likely been detected in El-Al's special security screening procedure at Tel Aviv's airport, it nevertheless illustrates the meticulous planning and preparation undertaken by Hizballah's SSA with likely Iranian MOIS assistance. As Israel heightened the security at its border and port entry points, Hizballah revised its infiltration techniques by recruiting and harnessing foreign nationals for actual suicide missions or for auxiliary reconnaissance in support of future terrorist operations occurring inside Israel. The Mikdad incident had taught Hizballah operational planners that foreign nationals who had converted to Islam, if properly screened and indoctrinated, would be ideal to target as recruits, as they reduced the risk of detection. These recruits also increased the organization's mobility within Israel, and logistical assistance could be provided from inside Israel by Hamas or PIJ rather than brought in from outside the country.

The next opportunity to find this type of foreign recruit came in Ger-

**258 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training**

many, one of Imad Mughniyeh's favorite recruitment grounds, when Hizballah talent spotters identified Steven Smyrek at a mosque in Braunschweig. After four years in the German Bundeswehr before entering crime and serving a short prison sentence as a drug courier, Smyrek had converted to Islam in 1994 and adopted the name Abdel Karim while working in a Turkish-owned pizzeria and becoming involved with an Egyptian Muslim woman. His virulent hatred for Israel was quickly noticed, and two Hizballah contact men, Fahdi Hamdar and his cousin Mohammad, eventually approached him and suggested a visit to Lebanon to join Hizballah and undertake military training. To show his level of commitment (and prove that he was not an informer) the Hizballah handlers insisted he visit them. In August 1997, Smyrek arrived in Beirut where he was extensively interrogated and pressured before being sent to a terrorist/military training camp in southern Lebanon. After two months of training, Smyrek was sent back to Germany to receive a new clean passport. In November, he purchased a ticket on El-Al to Israel from Amsterdam. Dutch authorities detained him briefly on departure, as the German security service had him under surveillance following intelligence received by the Israelis. Smyrek was released after questioning, but missed the original El-Al flight and reportedly contacted his handlers, who instructed him to board the next available one.<sup>51</sup> On arrival at Ben-Gurion, Smyrek was arrested by Israeli intelligence and found to be in possession of \$4,000 in cash and a camera provided by Hizballah to conduct surveillance photographs on key potential Israeli targets. Smyrek confessed in his interrogation that the second part of his mission was going to be a suicide mission against civilian targets in Tel Aviv or Haifa. Hizballah had requested that he video record a "martyrdom" message where he announce his desire to be a *shaheed* (martyr) and denounce the Zionist enemy.<sup>52</sup>

The arrests of Mikdad and Smyrek did not deter the Hizballah SSA from identifying other suitable operatives to deploy on infiltration missions. In early January 2000, another Hizballah operative with dual Lebanese-British nationality was arrested in Jerusalem, close to the residence of the Israeli Prime Minister. Jihad Aya Latif Shuman, a graduate of the American University of Beirut in computer studies, had routed himself through London before entering Israel. In London, Shuman had acquired a mobile phone enabling him to communicate from Israel to his handlers in Lebanon on a regular basis. It is unclear whether Shuman was purely on a reconnaissance mission, as he had a *kippah* (a traditional head covering) and several cameras and a video camera in his possession, was on an attack mission involving the assassination of an Israeli politician, or was preparing a suicide attack.<sup>53</sup>

Mikdad was released in a 1998 prisoner-exchange deal between Israel and Hizballah, brokered by German intermediaries and Wafic Safa (Hizballah's chief prisoner negotiator), while Smyrek and Shuman were returned

### The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 259

in a similar exchange process in 2004. These three cases of recruitment of “foreign” operatives for infiltration, reconnaissance, and attack missions inside Israel revealed that Hizballah placed a high priority on developing an advanced intelligence gathering capability inside Israel. For Hizballah, according to Daniel Sobelman’s incisive study, this priority reflected broader sophisticated strategic planning on developing a “databank” on future potential military and infrastructure targets inside Israel. It also reflected a contingency measure, as an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon would constrict “legitimate” areas of Hizballah’s military engagement with Israel.<sup>54</sup> This alternative channel was not just limited to infiltrating its own operatives into Israel, but also involved the development of a network of indigenous collaborators, extending from increased cooperation with Palestinian militants in Gaza and the West Bank to the recruitment of Israeli Arabs. Often Hizballah utilized monetary incentives to recruit operatives for conducting reconnaissance missions. It also utilized drug smuggling channels on the Israeli-Lebanese border to supply arms to Palestinian or Israeli-Arab agents of influence. In addition, Hizballah intensified efforts to provide logistical assistance and arms to a variety of Palestinian factions, ranging from the notorious Karine-A affair (when an investigation into a ship carrying weapons revealed Iranian-Palestinian collusion to smuggle 50 tons of weapons into the hands of the Palestinian Authority through the offices of Hizballah) to providing the blueprints for the development of the al-Qassam rockets to the military wing of Hamas.<sup>55</sup> Some Palestinian operatives have received extensive training in Hizballah-run military training camps, usually for three-month courses, teaching them how to operate small arms and explosives and conduct intelligence and countersurveillance.

Hizballah’s focus on developing an operational terrorist infrastructure inside Israel and the Palestinian territories has revealed three emerging patterns. First, Hizballah’s SSA has prioritized finding new and ingenious methods of kidnapping Israeli citizens abroad, following the successful abduction of retired IDF officer Elhanan Tannenbaum in October 2000, who was lured to Beirut via Brussels and Abu Dhabi under false business pretences. The principal architect of this operation was Kais Obeid, an Israeli Arab hailing from one of the wealthiest families in Taiba, and whose grandfather served as Labor Member of Knesset (Israel’s parliament) from 1961 to 1973. Obeid’s father and two brothers had been arrested during the 1980s and sentenced to prison for smuggling drugs from Lebanon to Israel. Obeid’s close friendship with Tannenbaum provided the vehicle of trust for the kidnapping operation, and he left Israel in September 2000 for Beirut and resurfaced as a close adviser to Hizballah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasserallah.<sup>56</sup> It is alleged that Obeid is in charge of “Israeli” affairs within Hizballah and is tasked with providing liaison between Hizballah and Tanzim/al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hizballah’s financial connections to

## 260 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training

the Palestinian territories, and the recruitment of Israeli Arabs.<sup>57</sup> It is also believed that Obeid has become Hizballah's chief "abduction agent" of Israelis. This suspicion was elevated when reports emerged that Kais Obeid had contacted a number of Israeli citizens in 2002, attempting to lure them with business ideas to travel to the Lebanese border and to Europe.<sup>58</sup> The successful series of prisoner exchanges, following the 2000 abduction of three IDF soldiers and the Tannenbaum kidnapping, made this option attractive for the Hizballah, who drew up a target priority list of Israelis, among them the former Israeli Energy Minister Gonen Segev.<sup>59</sup>

Second, Hizballah is investing a great deal in increasing its capacity to infiltrate its own agents inside Israel and in cultivating collaborators for reconnaissance missions and the establishment of sources capable of acquiring weapons and explosives inside Israel. This forward contingency planning enables Hizballah to compress the time from when decisions for terrorist missions are taken by the leadership to when it is carried out by its operatives.<sup>60</sup> Towards these ends, the Hizballah has specialized in recruitment of "foreigners" with European Union passports as demonstrated by the January 2005 arrest of a Lebanese-born Danish citizen, who allegedly was tasked to document and photograph security installations, IDF troop movements and in identifying potential recruits. According to this operative, if successful he would have been given a more complicated future task.<sup>61</sup>

A third pattern emerging is seen in the desire by Hizballah to acquire high-grade intelligence on military and critical infrastructure inside Israel, to monitor IDF troop movements, and to develop a targeting matrix of gas and electricity installations. This was underscored by the Israeli indictment of Nissim Musa Nasser in June 2002, charging him with acquiring detailed maps of some of Tel Aviv's gas storage facility and electricity substations on behalf of the Hizballah. This followed closely the May 2002 failed operation by Hamas against the Pi Giliot petroleum and gas storage facility in the densely populated area of Herzeliya, narrowly averting a major catastrophe as a bomb, planted on the undercarriage of a fuel tanker and activated by mobile phone, exploded but failed to ignite other storage facilities. The Pi Giliot facility supplies over 70 percent of gasoline and diesel fuel to Israel's gasoline stations and is situated at the busiest highway juncture in the country. Similar efforts were made by Hamas in a foiled plan to target one of Tel Aviv's skyscrapers, and in the March 2004 Ashdod port incident, in which two suicide bombers using high-grade plastic explosives may have intended to target chemical storage facilities.<sup>62</sup> All these incidents, combined with Hizballah efforts to acquire intelligence on Israel's critical infrastructure, have elevated fears of a "megaattack" in the future. Hizballah will continue to collect intelligence on these types of targets, in order to evaluate and identify potential vulnerabilities as a contingency for future operations in case the organization's leadership and

## The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon | 261

position is comprehensively targeted, severely pressured, and existentially threatened. An attack of this nature will only be activated as a means of last resort and if Hizballah could manage to reduce or conceal its operational signature.

### Conclusion

Since its foundation in 1982, Hizballah has developed a highly complex and multifaceted terrorist infrastructure under Iranian guidance and support and with Syrian patronage. In many ways Hizballah has been pioneering the tactical repertoire of terrorist groups worldwide, and few can match the complexity as well as the concealment of its overall command structure and terrorist missions. Like a spider's web, Hizballah's operational contacts stretch far and wide into the inner vortex of Iran's security establishment, through individual Iranian clergy and multileveled relationships with Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Few Hizballah SSA operatives have ever been caught and brought to justice for alleged terrorist atrocities stretching back over two decades, despite massive U.S. intelligence investment of resources towards these ends (at least prior to 9/11). Underpinning this difficulty in locating operatives has been the absence of actionable intelligence and human intelligence sources, compounded by the killing of Robert Ames, the CIA's station chief, in the 1983 U.S. Embassy bombing in Beirut and the lengths to which Iranian intelligence have gone to ensure plausible deniability in its involvement with Hizballah's SSA.

Another difficulty in understanding the contours and structure of terrorism within Hizballah has been its ability to conceal and embed this architecture within crevasses of its massive social and military infrastructure and its political legitimacy within a large proportion of Lebanese society, suffering from a longstanding civil war (1975–1990) and successive Israeli military occupation of Lebanon. Although Hizballah has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure continued asymmetric confrontation with and within Israel, it has also exercised a degree of self-imposed constraint, as its terrorist violence is carefully calibrated to suit the political interests and calculations of its own position as well as that of its two major patrons, Iran and Syria. This balancing act between contending interests has been a hallmark of Hizballah's unparalleled sophistication and ability to maneuver.

As demonstrated in this chapter, Hizballah's training camps within Lebanon have served multiple political and operational purposes over time, extending from solidifying its structure in the early 1980s to providing very advanced guerrilla and terrorist training to its own and other selected fighters from Palestinian factions. Gradually, Hizballah has acquired an impressive weaponry arsenal and a high degree of interoperability between its

## 262 | The Making of a Terrorist: Training

military and terrorist wing, especially with the expert assistance of Iranian military advisers and instructors. This interaction drives innovation and agility in learning from past missions and mistakes towards constantly devising new operational terrorist methods with a highly developed degree of surprise and impact. In this lethal enterprise there are few organizations as capable, precise and dangerous.

## 364 | Notes

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## 366 | Notes

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