

WebMemo



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The U.S. Should Oppose Hezbollah and its Iranian and Syrian Masters in Lebanon

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As President Bush prepares to travel to the Middle East, Lebanon's survival as a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational state is at stake. Hezbollah, the Shi'ite terrorist army "made in Iran," demonstrated its force by occupying the capital, Beirut. Fierce fighting is reported in Tripoli in the north of the country, and in the mountain districts of Shouf and Alei east of Beirut. Forty-four people were killed and 128 wounded in fierce fire fights, yet the Lebanese Army refused to intervene. Iran and Syria are quickly changing the balance of power in the Eastern Mediterranean, while the West and moderate Arab states appear almost paralyzed.

The Struggle for Power. The crisis erupted last week when Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's regime demanded that Hezbollah shut down its fiber optic network, which the terrorist movement calls "the weapons of the revolution"—a reference to Ayatollah Khomeini's Shi'a Islamic revolution in Iran. The network is used by Hezbollah, outside of the Lebanese government's control, to run terrorist operations and a drug trade worldwide, and to maintain illicit communications with Tehran and Damascus.

Another issue that Hezbollah used to attack the government was its decisions to fire the pro-Hezbollah military officer in charge of the Beirut International Airport's security and shut down Hezbollah's video cameras at the airport. Hezbollah forced the government of Lebanon to back down on both issues, returning to *status quo ante*. The Lebanese Army, whose commander, General Michel Sule-

iman, is Syria's candidate to become the next Lebanese president, and has either supported Hezbollah or sat out the confrontation.

The violence in Lebanon demonstrates the impotence of its democratically elected government in the face of the powerful Hezbollah "state-within-a-state" bought, paid, trained, and armed by Iran's oil windfall profits.

Hezbollah's Real Targets. The U.S., European Union, Israel, and the Sunni Arab states are the real targets of the muscle-flexing by Hezbollah and its Syrian and Iranian sponsors. The leaders and the forces that really need to be dealt with to stop the violence and back off from the democratically elected government of Lebanon are not located in Beirut. They are in Tehran and Damascus.

This is not about Lebanon, but about the U.S. presence in the Middle East, its diplomacy, and its allies. The U.S.-backed order in the Middle East is at stake against relentless Iranian probing. Tehran wants to teach President Bush a lesson, or as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said in April, "smash the U.S. in the nose." Iran is also trying to show the Saudis, Jordanians, Egyptians, and others in the region who is boss.

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Presently, the U.S. attention is focused on Iran's training of Shi'a terrorists who attack our troops in Iraq and move against the Iraqi government. According to the *London Times* and *U.S. News & World Report*, Hezbollah provides trainers and security for their terrorist camps. Tehran is signaling to Washington that if the U.S. attacks guerrilla training camps in Iran, U.S. allies, such as Lebanon, will suffer. According to Western and Israeli military sources quoted by the *Los Angeles Times*, Hezbollah is also preparing a massive missile attack against Israel.

Syria is involved, too. The pro-Syrian Amal militia, a Hezbollah ally, also took part in the fighting. Furthermore, President Bashar Assad is under pressure from the United Nations, as his senior officials are the main suspects in the U.N. investigation of the murder of Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, father of the current coalition leader, Saad Hariri. This investigation has been dragging on for some time.

It is no accident that Hezbollah targeted and destroyed the offices of the Future TV channel. It is owned by Hariri and presents the views of the movement he heads, called The Future. Hezbollah fighters also shot rockets at Hariri's home and took positions nearby, as well as threatened the home of the anti-Syrian Druze leader Walid Jumblat.

Syria and Iran are attempting to topple the Siniora-Hariri government using Hezbollah as a battering ram. By doing so, they are quickly undermining President Bush's legacy of promoting democracy in the Middle East.

Lebanon, with its 2005 Cedar Revolution, was the democratization flagship. Syria and Iran have been behind a campaign of targeted assassinations of Lebanese democratic politicians ever since. And in places such as Egypt and the Palestinian territories, where the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, respectively, won elections, the democratization policy is already in shambles.

Hezbollah's freedom to arm and operate in Lebanon also demonstrates the failure and impotence of two multilateral organizations: the Arab League, which has attempted for months to mediate between the Siniora government and Hezbollah, and the U.N., which completely failed to prevent Iran and Syria from resupplying Hezbollah with

27,000 rockets and building a new network of bunkers and fiber optic communications. Nor has the U.N. tribunal been capable of bringing the Rafiq Hariri murder investigation to a much-needed end by indicting the true powers behind that bloody assassination.

U.S. Middle East Policy at Stake. The United States must recognize that America does still have allies in the Middle East, especially when it comes to containing Iran. Saudi Arabia, the Sunni Arab Gulf states, as well as our European allies all understand what is at stake. Yet, to pursue a policy of Iran containment, the United States must make it clear that it will stand by its allies.

Washington therefore should:

- **Design and implement** a comprehensive policy that includes military, covert, economic, diplomatic, and public diplomacy components to decisively and quickly weaken and roll back Iran and Syria. They have assets and interests that can be frozen or confiscated. They also have officials and businessmen who travel throughout the world and should not be welcome anywhere as long as their policies remain disruptive in Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza, and elsewhere. Any Syrian and Iranian officials involved in financing, training, supplying, and facilitating terrorism, and specifically Hezbollah, should be placed on the visa boycott list.
- **Work with the European allies** so that they declare Hezbollah a terrorist organization, put it on the EU terrorism list, and freeze their economic activities, fundraising, and financial assets throughout Europe, the Middle East, and around the world. Placing Hezbollah on the EU terrorism list will also help stabilize Lebanon. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559, jointly sponsored by France and the United States, calls for the disarming of all militias in Lebanon. Yet EU toleration of Hezbollah fundraising operations inside its own borders enables efforts to finance the purchase of arms and ammunition for the biggest and most dangerous militia in Lebanon. Adding Hezbollah to the EU terrorism list would be an important step toward disarming its militia and restoring the rule of law in Lebanon. Hezbollah enjoys Iranian subsidies and Syrian arms

supply. However, Hezbollah is allowed to operate openly, including fundraising and profitable businesses in Europe. This must stop immediately. The State Department and anti-terror arms of the United States and Arab states need to work with the Europeans to ban Hezbollah's activities on the continent.

- **Halt arms shipments** and spare part supplies to Hezbollah's TV and radio channels, telecommunications, businesses, and vehicles. These supplies originate in Europe, the U.S., Japan, and other Far Eastern locations, and are shipped through Beirut and the Gulf. The U.S. should initiate a concerted effort to stop military re-supply of Hezbollah. The United Nations should be urged to do a better job implementing Resolution 1701, which envisages disarmament of all Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah, and halts the arms supply to it, especially by Iran and Syria. The U.S. should also work with allies in the Middle East and Europe to halt non-military supplies to Hezbollah's businesses and telecommunications operations.

Conclusion. Tehran cannot be handed a victory that can destroy Lebanon's remaining cohesion, nor should Hezbollah take the civilian population of Lebanon hostage, transforming it into the human shields that Hezbollah will hide behind to rain rockets once again upon Israel.

Iran and Syria cannot be allowed to overthrow the government of Lebanon and establish a Hezbollah-controlled stronghold in the Eastern Mediterranean. This would intimidate moderate Sunni Arab states and will present a major setback for U.S. policy in the region. Lebanon has suffered enough. Too much is at stake for the West and the Arab states to allow the Iranian mullahs and their Hezbollah henchmen to unleash yet another Lebanese civil war and destabilize the region.

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