

American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research



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**Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on Near
Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs**

**“Assessing the Strength of Hezbollah”
June 8, 2010**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, At the outset, let me say that I spent more than a decade working on the subject of today's hearing as a staff member of this committee; I'm a bit more accustomed to sitting in the chair behind you than the one in front of you. I am grateful for your invitation to testify today – because this feels like a homecoming, and more importantly, because I know from personal experience the important role this Committee can play in addressing this vital issue.

Despite a heightened awareness of terrorism and terrorist groups since 9/11, American policy toward Lebanon, Syria and Hezbollah remains confused -- a mass of mixed signals and inconsistent approaches. Despite more than \$1.6 billion in economic and military assistance to Lebanon since FY06 (including requests for FY2011), despite a concerted effort to reach out to the Assad regime in Damascus, and despite a willingness to overlook the increasingly dominant military and political role played by Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Obama administration has little to show for its efforts in the Levant.

In the wake of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 – a murder in which Hezbollah was reportedly involved -- the international community took a relatively hard line against Syria and its proxies. The resulting end to the Syrian military domination of Lebanon gave many of us hope that Lebanon was at last on track to regain the independence lost in 1976. Certainly, it seemed that Washington, at least, would no longer tolerate the exploitation of the Lebanese people by both Tehran and Damascus.

In the years that followed, there were troublesome developments that should only have fueled our commitment to helping Lebanon protect itself from Syrian and Iranian predations. In 2006, Hezbollah crossed Lebanon's southern border with Israel and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, sparking a war between Israel and Hezbollah that resulted in substantial loss of life, including among Lebanese civilians. How was it possible that one armed group could, without consultation or compunction, drag a nominally democratic nation into war?

Worse still, Hezbollah's performance in that conflict revealed that what some in Israel and the U.S. had dismissed as a ragtag group of terrorists was a sophisticated, well trained and very well armed fighting machine.

The subsequent passage of U.N. Security Council resolution 1701 and its call for "no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon" appeared to be another silver lining to the summer war – much as the aftermath of the Hariri murder led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops. But the resolution has been all but ignored in the face of repeated and flagrant violations.

And there were more frightening signs: revelations that Syria was pursuing a nuclear weapons capability; a series of assassinations of anti-Syrian politicians in Lebanon; the collapse of the March 14 movement; Hezbollah's 2008 armed take-over of Beirut, and the subsequent capitulation of March 14 to Hezbollah's demands for a veto over government decisions.

During this political turmoil, Iran and Syria continued to rearm Hezbollah. Transfers, which were slow in the immediate aftermath of the 2006 war, ramped up quickly, and Hezbollah is now significantly better armed than it was in 2006, according to Defense Secretary Robert Gates “Syrian and Iran are providing Hezbollah with rockets and missiles of ever-increasing capability [and] we’re at appoint now, where Hezbollah has far more rockets and missiles than most government in the world.” Consider the developments reported on AEI’s Iran Tracker site from this year alone (citations and sources can be found on the site):

- The *Times of London* reports that Israeli and American officials believe Syria transferred two Scud missiles into Lebanon, where they are suspected to be in an underground storage facility in the Beqa’a Valley. (Israel reportedly planned to attack one of the Syrian trucks transferring weapons to Hezbollah as it crossed the Lebanese border, but held back on American request. American officials are still hoping that Syria can be convinced to stop supplying Hezbollah with weapons without military intervention. According to the report, satellite imagery shows one of the secret arms facilities in Adra, Syria, where Hezbollah militants have living facilities and trucks to transport the missiles to Lebanon.)
- Hezbollah sources told the Kuwaiti paper *al Rai* that the group had the capability to launch 15 tons of explosives at Israel every day in the case of another war between the two sides, going on to claim that Hezbollah possesses a wide range of missiles with a heavy payload, including the 1-ton Zilzal missile and half-ton Fateh 110 and M600 missiles.
- The Israeli Foreign Minister said that the arms seized from a cargo plane in Bangkok in December 2009 were destined for Hezbollah and Hamas. Thai authorities said that the plane, with weapons believed to have originated in North Korea, was carrying 35 tons of weaponry including rockets and RPGs.
- Reports in early May suggest that sometime in the last year, Syria supplied Hezbollah with M600 missile. (The M600 is the Syrian version of the advanced Iranian Fateh-110 missile. The missile’s range would allow Hezbollah to hit Tel Aviv from southern Lebanon.)
- In January, a busy month, the Washington Post reported that Hezbollah placed long-range rockets deep into Lebanon and the Beqa’a Valley; Hezbollah terrorists fired an anti-tank rocket at an IDF bulldozer that was clearing a minefield along the Israeli-Lebanese border, killing a soldier; and the Israeli navy seized an Iranian ship en route to Syria carrying weapons destined for Hezbollah from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez; the Kuwaiti papers reported a U.S. official saying that Hezbollah operatives trained in Syria on SA2 anti-aircraft missile batteries; and finally UN peacekeepers uncovered 660 pounds of explosive devices near the border with Israel (this happened in December, but was reported in January).

All these details and more can be found on the Iran Tracker site – www.irantracker.org. But stop for a moment and ponder that fact that this is only news from 2010.

In short, Hezbollah is effectively a state within a state in Lebanon, with an ever growing and ever more sophisticated long range arsenal. It is untrammelled by the Lebanese government to which it belongs and answerable to no one in that nation, but rather to the dictatorships in Damascus and

Tehran. Sadly, hopes that Lebanese leaders answerable to the Lebanese people – and not to foreign powers – would regain control have not been realized. There is no more poignant symbol of that failure than the fact that as Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri was meeting with our own President Obama and his team, Lebanese President Michel Suleiman appeared on Hezbollah's television station, al Manar, praising Hezbollah and "calling on all Lebanese to embrace and protect [Hezbollah's] arms."

According to the Pentagon, Hezbollah receives up to \$200 million in subsidies from Iran each year, in addition to weaponry. Other reports suggest they may receive even more. The group also raises money in the United States, including through criminal activities, and there have been several arrests of Hezbollah fundraisers and supporters in the United States, including one in Ohio last week.

Hezbollah receives training from the elite Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and in turn provides training to a variety of terrorist groups at its bases in Lebanon. The Pentagon reported in April that "Lebanese Hizballah has trained Iraqi insurgents in Iraq, Iran and Lebanon, providing them with the training, tactics and technology to conduct kidnappings, small unit tactical operations and employ sophisticated improvised explosive devices (IEDs), incorporating lessons learned from operations in southern Lebanon."

In short, Hezbollah is capable of waging war on its own behalf, has a wide network around the world, growing particularly in Latin America, has forged operational alliances with a variety of other terrorist groups, including Sunni groups and affords Iran the opportunity to open a second front in any conflict. And it is able to do all of this behind the façade of "national resistance" in Lebanon, playing the role at once of defender of Lebanese sovereignty, of terrorist training group and of political powerhouse with two seats in the Hariri cabinet and a veto over national decision-making.

What this means for Lebanon is the continued erosion of the state, its subjugation to foreign interests, a loss of independent will and democracy and a potent threat to American allies and American interests. In the years since the Hezbollah-Israel war, the United States has pursued a policy aimed at bolstering the Lebanese state at the expense of Hezbollah. That includes arms sales that top half a billion dollars and substantial aid. It is not entirely clear what either those arms or that aid have bought. If we had hoped it would buy the disarmament of Hezbollah, we were wrong. If we hoped it would buy independence from Syria or Iran or an end to terrorist training camps – camps whose teachings have resulted in the death of American soldiers – we were wrong.

The Obama administration has pursued a determined policy of engagement with Lebanon's overlords in Damascus. Others have said that this is the right policy, affording the U.S. an opportunity to talk directly to the Syrians about our concerns. I would counter that we have talked to the Syrians repeatedly, through both our embassy in Damascus and via regular visits from high level administration officials. And that hasn't paid off. Indeed, Damascus continues to pursue

policies anathema to our interests, and some suspect the Assad regime is continuing to develop nuclear weapons.

Rumors abound lately that the Obama administration is considering the wisdom of reaching out directly to Hezbollah to establish a dialogue. Recently, John Brennan, the White House's top counter-terrorism official, suggested the United States needed to find a way to "build up the more moderate elements" within Hezbollah, which he termed "a very interesting organization".

His statements stand in stark contrast to those of other administration officials, including former DNI Denny Blair, who earlier this year refused to rule out a possible Hezbollah attack on the United States.

These mixed signals from Washington are dangerous, and we should have little doubt that we are perceived in the region as weak – by our friends as well as our enemies.

The time has come to reassess our relationship with Lebanon and the challenge posed by Hezbollah. I do not believe we will be served by greater rapprochement with Damascus or with their terrorist proxies.

Finally, at a certain moment it will be necessary for us to ask whether U.S. taxpayer dollars going to Lebanon are helping our friends, or subsidizing our enemies. If the support to Lebanon's army is not going to secure Lebanon's borders, and it's not going to rid Lebanon of terrorist groups, one might reasonably ask what it is going for. That's a question Congress has asked in years past, when Lebanon was a center of kidnapping, hijacking and murder. Thanks to Hezbollah, it is time to ask again.