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Hizballah or Hizb al-Shaytan?
Recent Jihadi-Salafi Attacks against the Shiite Group
By Reuven Paz

Introduction

The exchange of prisoners between Israel and Hizballah on 29 January 2004, and the resulting victorious image of the Lebanese movement and its leader Hasan Nasrallah, created much resentment in parts of the Arab world, in particular among Palestinian circles. The most severe verbal attacks against Hizballah since completion of the first part of the deal, however, originated in Saudi Jihadi-Salafi elements that support Qa`idat al-Jihad.

The Lebanese Shiite group has never been popular among the Salafi adherents of Global Jihad, given their fundamental hatred towards the Shi`ah. The collapse of the Ba`athist regime of Saddam Hussein and the conflict between the Shiite majority and the Sunni minority in Iraq, added additional fuel to the fire of traditional Salafi enmity towards the Shi`ah. Since the start of the attempts at establishing a new government in Iraq, Salafi web sites and forums on the Internet have stepped up their attacks against the Shi`is, Iran, and Shi`i doctrines with every possible arsenal of verbal arms. Moreover, there are sporadic attacks against the Nusayri regime in Syria, which is also Ba`thist, and therefore an infidel entity in Salafi eyes. The leading web site espousing a Salafi-Jihadi ideology, Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi's *Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* even posted a special section for articles on Hizballah.¹

Yet, it should be noted that in his speech in March 2003, which was circulated on audiocassette, Osama bin Laden mentioned Hizballah, or in his words the Lebanese Resistance, in a positive light as the group that in October 1983 compelled U.S. Marines to withdraw from Lebanon. The withdrawal followed a suicide attack on the U.S. Marines Barracks in Beirut, which resulted in the death of 241 Americans. In other declarations by Qa`idat al-Jihad, the group linked itself to the bombing of the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in 1996. U.S. authorities assign blame for this attack to Iran and the Shiite Saudi Hizballah.

¹ See on-line in: <http://almaqdese.com/c?i=98>



But, the peak of these attacks so far, and perhaps the more significant, seems to be the criticism that is pointed at Hizballah, which in the sarcastic Salafi terminology is referred to as Hizb al-Shaytan (The Party of the Devil) or Hizballat, after the pre-Islamic pagan idol of the Meccan Arabs.

Accompanying the growing phenomenon of severe verbal attacks against the Iraqi Shiites and the Lebanese Hizballah are condemnations of Iran prevalent on several web sites, and initiated primarily by Saudi supporters of Global Jihad. Furthermore, in the past year there was a growing attempt by Saudi Salafi scholars and laymen to link the Shiites to Jews, both in history, and in present times.

The growing hostility towards the Shiites is important not only in the cultural or political realms. It also raises the question whether Qa`idat al-Jihad or Salafi-Jihadi groups could cooperate with Iran and/or Hizballah for terrorist purposes. American and Israeli officials and politicians raise this possibility from time to time. The likelihood of this alliance, however, is doubtful.

Hizballah and Nasrallah in Salafi eyes

As mentioned earlier, the recent prisoners swap between Israel and Hizballah led to an animosity towards the Shiite group and its leader that has been rare in its extent. One of the leading Salafi web sites and forums against the non-Sunnis, primarily the Shi`is – Al-Difa` `an al-Sunnah (Defense of the Sunnah)² – spearheaded the attacks with numerous writings, several of them by serious Islamic scholars.

This web site includes sections such as: “The actions of the murderer so-called Shiite Mahdi;” “The crimes and betrayals of the Shi`is throughout history;” and a new section – “Meetings between Shiite clerics and Jews and Christians.” Other parts of the web site sectors are dedicated to “the scandals of Shiite clerics and religious authorities,” among whom are contemporary figures such as Khomeini, Khamenei, Khoei, Sistani, and Hizballah.³

Reading the “Hizballah File” of such writings reveals one of the main reasons for the Salafi attacks against Hizballah and Hasan Nasrallah: The secretary general of Hizballah is sketching himself and sketched by others as the “New Salah al-Din al-Ayubi,” and a superior commander at the forefront of the struggle against Israel. Furthermore, as phrased by the Egyptian Islamist, Dr. Muhammad Moro: “The Lebanese resistance managed to become the Avant-garde of all the Arab liberating elements... It managed to post an ideology for all the oppressed on earth, confronting the Western civilization, which threatens the whole world.” Hizballah is taking on the role that Qa`idat al-Jihad was hoping to play as the global vanguard of Islam.⁴

² <http://www.d-sunnah.net/forum/index.php> and <http://www.d-sunnah.net>

³ <http://www.d-sunnah.net/hezb.htm>

⁴ Quoted in <http://www.d-sunnah.net/hezb.htm> from Muhammad Moro, *Al-Jihad fi Sabil Allah, Hizballah Namuzajan (The Jihad for Allah – Hizballah as the model)* (*Al-Qahirah, Markaz Yafa lil-dirasat wal-Abhath*, 1996), p. 62.



On 20 April 2002, one of the leading clerics of the Saudi Salafis, Sheikh Abdallah bin Abd al-Rahman al-Jabirin, issued a Fatwa (religious decrees) against Hizballah, saying:

It is prohibited to assist this rejectionist [Rafidhi]⁵ party, nor to follow their command, or to pray for their success. We advise the Sunnis to wash their hands off them, and desert whoever joins them. They [the Sunnis] should elucidate their [the Shi`is] animosity to Islam and the Muslims, and their damages in the past and in modern times for the Sunnis. The Shi`is will always keep their hostility towards the Sunnis. They will always do their best to present the disadvantages of the Sunnis, to discredit them, and manipulate them. Therefore, whoever follows them enters their control, since Allah has said: whoever enters their command becomes one of them.

The younger Islamists taking part in the Jihadi forums allow themselves to sharpen their pens and nails far beyond their clerics, aiming directly at Nasrallah in person. One of them wrote a long venomous article in the Jihadi forum of Al-Erhap on 7 February 2004, titled “Hasan Nasrallah, leader of Hizballah – The most famous and corrupt traitor in the history of the nation.”⁶ Once again, what makes these Islamists so outrageous against the Lebanese leader is his popular image as the “Salah al-Din of our times.” “Many Muslims ignore the truth about this *Rafidhi* criminal, enemy of the *Sahabah* [Companions of the Prophet] and the mothers of the believers, Hasan Nasrallah, who is in the midst of the illusionary victories of the agreements with the so-called State of Israel. This mixture resulted in the on-going polish of Hizballah, as if they are the anticipated Jundallah [the army of Allah] what makes people name Nasrallah “Salah al-Din of the 21st century... How odd is whoever supports him, while he is one of the worst enemies of the Companions and believers. These last events are nothing but clear treason by the agreement with the Zionists, about whom he said he was respecting and appreciating them... Don’t be misled my Muslim brother, by this *Rafidhi* malignant who wishes to own the heart of the Muslims by illusory slogans...”

The prisoners exchange deal

On 3 February 2004, another attack was published by the Global Islamic Media, an offshoot of Qa`idat al-Jihad, through an unsigned article titled “We are not that simple-minded to celebrate the ‘achievement’ of Hizballah.”⁷ The article severely criticized the deal with the “Zionist entity,” but attempted—despite its sarcastic language—to present a reasonable and respectable criticism rather than a poisonous attack. “The illusory ‘achievement’ of the party, whose celebratory echoes have resounded throughout all the capitals of the Arab “belt” states and Tehran, the international political *Qiblah* of the Shi`is, raises a lot of question marks, and have not received any reasonable answers from the illusionists of Hizballah.”

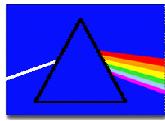
Among the more important points of criticism and question marks over Hizballah are:

- The strategic Israeli interest to grant Hizballah and its leader such popularity in the Arab world.

⁵ A traditional term for the Shi`is by their Sunni rivals. In the early Islamic history it was used for part of the Shi`is, but during later periods it became a term of disgrace for all the Shi`is, and mainly the mainstream of the Twelvers (*Ithna `Ashariyyah*).

⁶ <http://www.alerhap.com/vb/showthread.php?threadid=6136>

⁷ *Lasna Mughfalin li-darajah takfi lil-ihtifal bi-injaz Hizballah*. See on-line in:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/globalislamicmedia/message/313>



- The use of German mediation.
- How come Israel did not exert military pressure on Hizballah as it does vis-à-vis the Palestinian groups?
- Is there an ideological approach between the Shi`is and the Jews against the Sunnis?
- How did the United States approve the negotiations with a group listed as a terrorist entity, although refused to negotiate with the Taliban, who are not on the terrorism list, prior to the war in Afghanistan?

The anonymous author attempts to answer these questions. His main motif is the historic alliance between the Jews and the Shi`is, which began with the Persian king Koresh II, about 2500 years ago, and thus long predated the arrival of Islam, and until the Shiite support for Israel against the Palestinians during the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 1982. The approach between the Shi`is and the Jews is not just political, but also religious, and includes a reference to the link between the 12 Jewish tribes and the 12 Imams (sic!). The Germans also receive their share of sarcastic criticism, as German Protestants such as Martin Luther and Karl Marx (sic!) are added to the Shiite-Jewish alliance.

The loquacity of such nonsense repeats itself in the rest of the article. The author cannot ignore the heavy Israeli losses by Hizballah. These operations, however, were carried out “for the party, not for Allah.”

The position of the Salafi scholars

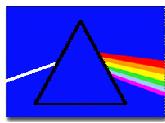
The most important positions against Hizballah are those of the Salafi-Jihadi scholars. Recently, one of the most influential among them is Abd al-Mun`im Mustafa Halimah “Abu Basir,” of Syrian origin (he stems from the Syrian city of Tartus, and is hence sometimes referred to as “Al-Suri” or “Al-Tartusi.”) As a result of the long arrest of the two Palestinians Abu Muhammad al-Maqdesi in Jordan and Abu Qutadah in London, the arrest of several radical Saudi clerics since the explosions in Riyadh in May 2003, and his age, Abu Basir became a leading figure of the Jihadists in Arabia. He is known for his courage in criticizing colleagues and other Islamist movements, as well as for his attacks against every secular national Arab government. Two years ago, in January 2002, he sharply criticized Hamas and the Qassam Brigades for defending Yaser Arafat while he was besieged by Israel in Ramallah.⁸

A recent article by Abu Basir published in 2 February 2004, titled “The Lebanese Hizballah and the Export of the Shi`ite Rejectionist School,” is a sort of affidavit against the movement and its leader.⁹ The article was circulated in most Jihadi forums on the Internet, and by Global Islamic Media, an offshoot of Qa`idat al-Jihad.

Hizballah in Abu Basir’s eyes, is “the large gate of the global Shi`I movement, and for the export of Shi`ism in the entire Muslim world. The way for Hizballah to do so is by using

⁸ *Ma Hakaza Yakun al-Jihad ya Kataeb al-Qassam* (This is not the way of Jihad, Qassam Brigades). See on-line in: <http://www.abubaseer.bizland.com/refutation/read/f40.doc>

⁹ Abu Basir, *Hizballah al-Lubnani wa-Tasdir al-Madhab al-Shi`I al-Rafidhi*, 2 February 2004. See on-line in his web site: <http://www.abubaseer.bizland.com/articles/read/a65.doc>



the Palestinian issue and playing on the Palestinian string. The main points in the affidavit against Hizballah are:

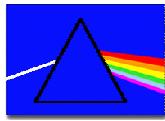
- Its loyalty not only to infidel Iran, but also to Syria and its Ba`athist `Alawi regime, which is fighting the Islamic elements in Syria.
- Its role in the national Lebanese scene, and its alliance with the Maronites to maintain the Lebanese man-made constitution and to defend only the Lebanese interests. Therefore, the party is not Islamic Jihadist.
- Nasrallah's neglect of hundreds of Islamist prisoners in Guantanamo, and thousands in Iraq during the recent prisoner exchange deal with Israel, while turning the issue of the Lebanese Druze prisoner Samir Quntar into the highlight of the next stage of deal.

According to the criticism, Hizballah is exploiting the popular Arab way of thinking that whoever has any interest in the Palestinian issue, and shows sympathy and solidarity with the Palestinians, is noble and heroic, even if he is in fact a liar, and a bigger one at that than the devil himself (*Iblis*). Through dealing with the Palestinian issue, Hizballah managed to muster significant support from the Palestinian public and groups for itself, for Iran, for Khomeini, and for Shi'is at large.

The Jewish-Israeli dilemma

A stumbling block for the critics of Hizballah is its violent struggle against Israel. But, Abu Basir has found a way to overcome this problem. The hostility between Hizballah and Israel is just a reflection of the political conflict between Israel and the two sponsors of the Lebanese movement – Syria and Iran. According to Abu Basir, post-Khomeini Iran stopped the export of the Islamic revolution to its neighboring countries to fight their governments, and started exporting Shi'ism through the attempt to gain popularity among Arab publics. They do so by focusing on the exchange of cultures, principles of pluralism, and mutual acceptance. By doing so, various governments regard them as less dangerous and more acceptable. Furthermore, it seems that there is no real conflict now between Iran and Israel and the United States. On one hand, Iran is assisting the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. On the other, the Americans and the “Zionists” know that Iran's main problem is with the Sunni majority of the Muslim world. “On that basis, they deal with Iran by seeking cooperation, understanding, and as a treacherous fifth column in the body of the Muslim nation.” Furthermore, the Syrian regime has its own interests, both towards Israel and the United States on one hand and towards Iran, on the other.

These interests, according to Abu Basir, dictate to Hizballah much of its policy toward Israel, and explain the use of Hizballah due to Syria's interests inside Lebanon. The Syrians meanwhile, are playing off the Palestinian groups that have offices in Damascus, according to Damascus' interests with regard to Israel. Hizballah thus acts as a guard on two fronts. On the one hand it guards the Lebanese border with Israel for the Syrians. But, on the other hand it guards Israel by preventing operations by Palestinian groups against Israel through the border. All this is happening, Abu Basir writes, while the Lebanese authorities, Hizballah, and Syria, turn a blind eye to the violent clashes between Palestinian groups.



If that is the story of Hizballah, asks Abu Basir, how come Israel withdrew from Lebanon and gave Hizballah the control over the South? The answer is simple: Its Maronite agents disappointed Israel, so the Jewish state replaced them with Hizballah. The only difference is that the Christians served Israel openly, while Hizballah does so secretly.

Therefore, Abu Basir concludes, the struggle of Hizballah with Israel is a virtual one.

Hasan Nasrallah

According to Abu Basir, Nasrallah exploited the exchange of prisoners solely for his and his organization's goal of spreading Shi`ism throughout the Arab world. The exchange created heroes that have never fought, such as Sheikh Obeid, the Iranian leadership, and Nasrallah. Furthermore, during the Hajj to Mecca, the reporter of Hizballah's TV station, Al-Manar, did not interview pilgrims about the ceremony, but only about the effect of the exchange upon them. It was another example of the real motives of the movement.

His conclusion is that if Hizballah were the party for justice and the right path, then the United States would have never let it act freely, without oppressing its leaders. "They would live on the ground, in the caves, and in prisons, rather than luxury beds, driving fancy cars." "Don't mix up right (*al-Haqq*) with wrong (*al-Batil*), truth with lies, loyalty with treason and collaboration. I warn you that you will be the organs of the infidels and their people."

Abu Basir's article, unlike other writings against the Shi`is in general or Hizballah in particular, is practical and reasonable. There are no historical claims, real or made up, and it is done with a logical political reasoning. The article leads to the conclusion that in the eyes of the Salafi Jihadi movements of Global Jihad there is no room for Hizballah. The Lebanese Shi`i group is disqualified not for being simply *Rafidhah* or anti-Sunni, but for being national, serving either local interests or being a tool in the hands of Syria and Iran, each for its different interests.

Conclusion

The severe attacks against Iran and Hizballah, and the fervent hatred expressed towards the Shi`is, both in Iran and Iraq, raise an important question: To what extent might there be a real cooperation between Qa`idat al-Jihad and its affiliated Salafi-Jihadi groups, primarily in the Arab world.

In the history of modern terrorism, there have been some odd collaborations between groups of different ideologies. In the 1970s, Western terrorist groups enjoyed assistance of various factions within the PLO in Lebanon. Even Islamist groups such as Hamas—which, since it belongs to the Muslim Brotherhood, had traditionally criticized the Islamic revolution in Iran—enjoys the support of Iran by means of training, offices, and financing, since 1994. The Mujahidin in Afghanistan, a part of whom formed al-Qaeda, had been allies of the United States in the 1980s, when they shared a common enemy, the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, another common enemy to them were the Serbs during the war in Bosnia. Theoretically then, the Salafi-Jihadi school of Global Jihad, whose roots lie in the



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puritanism of orthodox Wahhabism, could find itself in an alliance with Shi'ite Iran if and when it will suit its interests.

Yet, given the background of the present direction of the strategy of Qa`idat al-Jihad, namely to focus on the Arab world and create affiliated groups in the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq, this eventuality seems unlikely. The article by Abu Basir, the most serious of all the attacks against Hizballah, could also indicate that in the field of the fight against Arab governments, and the attempt of Qa`idat al-Jihad and similar groups to infiltrate into the Sunni Iraqi population, an alliance with Hizballah, Syria, and above all Iran, is unlikely to happen. For the enthusiastic Islamist youngsters participating in Islamist forums on the Internet, the main superficial battlefield is over the prestige of the modern “successor” of Salah al-Din – Bin Laden or Nasrallah. In the writings of serious scholars and clerics like Abu Basir, however—those who give ideological backing to Global Jihad—there is a deep gap between the political worldview of the two sides. Therein lies the struggle between Global Jihad and Iran. As long as Iraq and Saudi Arabia become the front lines of Qa`idat al-Jihad, we can expect that this gap will not be bridged, even if the “worst” enemies – the United States and Israel – remain “great Satan.”

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