



Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria April 21 – May 4, 2023

Overview

- ▶ Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister, paid an official visit to Lebanon. He met with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and reiterated Iran's commitment to Hezbollah, and toured south Lebanon near the Israeli border. On the sidelines of the visit he met with Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah, with whom he discussed the need for measures to deter Israel from carrying out activities at sites sacred to Islam.
- ▶ Syrian sources reported Israeli Air Force attacks on Hezbollah and pro-Iranian Shi'ite militia targets in Syria. After the attacks Hezbollah forces reportedly redeployed in Syria.
- ▶ Hezbollah regards Suleiman Frangieh, who is close to the organization and the Syrian regime, as its presidential candidate.
- ▶ A Jerusalem district court sentenced an east Jerusalem dentist to five years in prison; he was convicted of spying for Hezbollah.
- ▶ The United States offered a reward for information about Ibrahim Aqil, a member of Hezbollah's jihad council, the organization's senior military-terrorist body. It also offered a reward for information about Nazem Said Ahmad, who lives in Lebanon and heads a Hezbollah money-laundering network. An Indian national was arrested in London in connection with the network.
- ▶ A new study revealed sources of Hezbollah's funding and its involvement in the international drug trade.

Lebanon

Iranian foreign minister visits Lebanon

- ▶ **Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, the Iranian foreign minister**, paid an official visit to Lebanon between April 27 and 29, 2023. He met with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, and according to reports they discussed recent regional developments, the Iranian-Saudi Arabian agreement and its regional influence, and recent developments in the Lebanese and Palestinian arenas (Janoubiat, April 28, 2023).

► Abdollahian also toured south Lebanon near the Israeli border, and was briefed, apparently by Hezbollah operatives, on the border area. He visited the town of Maroun al-Ras, where the Iran Garden is located. The site was established by the Iranian authority to support the reconstruction of Lebanon after the Second Lebanon War in a gesture of appreciation for the role played by the town during the war.¹ Abdollahian planted an olive tree in the garden, where there is a bust of the late Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps' Qods Force, and where a mosque was built resembling the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, an expression of Iran's aspiration to lead the Islamic world (al-Mayadeen, April 29, 2023).

► During his visit to Maroun al-Ras Abdollahian said they had come there to "loudly proclaim" their support for the "resistance to the occupation [terrorist attacks against Israel]." He said he had received a detailed assessment of the situation from Hezbollah claiming the situation of Palestinian and Lebanese "resistance" was better now than ever before, while the political and societal situation of "Zionist entity" was worse than ever before. He added that the Middle East had entered a new stage of overall cooperation (al-Mayadeen, April 29, 2023).



Abdollahian listens to briefing, apparently from Hezbollah operatives, near the Israeli border (al-Mayadeen, April 29, 2023).

¹ For further information about the Iran Garden in Maroun al-Ras, see the October 11, 2019 report, "Jihadi tourism: visits to battle legacy sites and shahid tombs as an indoctrination tool for spreading Hezbollah's ideology."



Abdollahian plants an olive tree in the Iran Garden, where a bust of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, is located (al-Mayadeen, April 29, 2023).



Abdollahian in front of the mosque constructed to resemble the Dome of the Rock and bearing the emblem of Iran (al-Mayadeen, April 28, 2023).

► On the sidelines of his visit to Lebanon Abdollahian also met with **PIJ leader Ziyad al-Nakhalah**. He briefed al-Nakhalah on Iranian support for the Palestinians and the need for unity among the Palestinian [terrorist] organizations, the Palestinians in general and among the Islamic governments and people in support of the Palestinians. He also said it was necessary to take measures to deter Israel from carrying out activities in the places sacred to Islam. Al-Nakhalah expressed his esteem for Iran and its support for the Palestinians in regional and international forums. He claimed the situation of "resistance" [terrorist organizations] was the best it had been in decades, adding that Israel's internal crises were "proof" of its helplessness and weakness in facing the Palestinians (Iranian foreign ministry website in Arabic, April 28, 2023).

► While in Beirut, Abdollahian spoke on the phone with **Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau**. He praised the firm stance of the Palestinians and said he was proud "the Palestinian resistance caused Israel pain and troubled its sleep." He noted the importance of Jerusalem and claimed Iran was monitoring Israel's "acts of aggression" in the city. He invited

Haniyeh to visit Tehran and meet the Iranian leadership. Haniyeh accepted the invitation and said he planned to visit Tehran in the near future (Hamas website, April 28, 2023).

► Abdollahian also spoke with **Yahya al-Sinwar, head of the Hamas political bureau in the Gaza Strip**, who expressed his esteem for the Iranian government and thanked it for its political support of the Palestinians (Iranian foreign ministry Twitter account in Arabic, April 28, 2023).

Anti-Israel anti-American propaganda

► A number of days before Abdollahian visited Lebanon, **Hashem Safi al-Din, chairman of Hezbollah's Revolutionary Council**, said at a ceremony in Bint Jbeil that the "events" [rocket attacks against Israel] in Lebanon a few weeks previously had "frightened and worried" Israel and made Lebanon need the "resistance" more than ever. He claimed they were witness to the decline of American hegemony in the world in general and in the Middle East in particular, and if local governments wanted to solve their problems they would do well to cut their ties with the United States (Lebanese National News Agency, April 13, 2023).

Hezbollah promotes the candidacy of Suleiman Frangieh for president of Lebanon

► The Hezbollah leadership expressed support for the candidacy of Suleiman Frangieh for president of Lebanon. **Na'im Qassem, deputy Hezbollah secretary general**, said that "either Frangieh is appointed president or the political vacuum will continue." His remarks led to internal arguments in Hezbollah between those who want to exert direct pressure to have Frangieh appointed and those who are willing to wait for him to be elected. Later on Qassem moderated his rhetoric after pressure had been exerted on him and said he did not want to represent Frangieh to the world and to the Lebanese as a Hezbollah puppet in a way that would damage his election (al-Akhbar, April 28, 2023; al-Sharq al-Awsat and naharnet.com, May 2, 2023; the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, May 1, 2023).

► Interviewed by al-Jadeed TV, Frangieh said he wanted to be elected president but was in no hurry. He said that if elected he would act to preserve Hezbollah's strength as a deterrent to Israel and would oppose Hezbollah's disarmament. However, he said he would work to create connections with the world in a way that would give Lebanese a better life and ensure that Hezbollah's weapons would not be turned against them.

► Frangieh said he agreed to negotiate with all the political factions in Lebanon, adding that he would operate within the limited framework of presidential powers and Lebanese law. He

said the success of the elected president would depend on international and inter-Arab developments, and a balance would have to be achieved between Iranian and Saudi Arabian interests.

► Frangieh said he wanted economic cooperation with the rest of the world and had good relations with France and the Syrian regime, and was respected by the Americans. He denied he frequently visited Bashar Assad, as had often been claimed, although he did admit to being a close friend. He claimed he was loyal only to Lebanon and would work to return the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to their own country (al-Jadeed, April 26, 2023).²

Palestinians in Lebanon

► Hezbollah sent condolences for the death of PIJ operative Khader Adnan, who died in an Israeli jail after hunger striking for 86 days. In its offer of condolences Hezbollah called on international and humanitarian institutions to expose "the [alleged] crimes of Israel in its jails." Hezbollah also said it supported all the measures taken by the Palestinian organizations in response (al-Manar, May 2, 2023).

► **Walid al-Qutati, a member of the PIJ's political bureau**, claimed the Iranian-led "resistance axis" [Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and the Shi'ite militias] was prepared to coordinate a response if Israel renewed its targeted killings of the Palestinian [terrorist] organizations affiliated with the axis. He said they had the means to respond and were untied against "the occupation." He quoted Hassan Nasrallah as saying Hezbollah would coordinate some of the responses if Israel assassinated a "resistance" commander (SANA and al-Quds, April 26, 2023).

East Jerusalem resident who spied for Hezbollah sentenced to five years in prison

► On April 24, 2023, the district court in Jerusalem sentenced Ahmed Zahara, 34 years old, a dentist from east Jerusalem, to five years in prison for spying for Hezbollah. According to the indictment, in 2013 he began working for Hezbollah when he was in Lebanon, where he made contact with a released prisoner who lived in Lebanon. He told the prisoner he wanted to work in Israel on behalf of Hezbollah. He was asked to carry out various tasks, such as monitoring the daily affairs of high-ranking police and army officers. He was sentenced after

² The two million Syrian refugees in Lebanon are a source of societal and political problems for Lebanon.

he confessed to his crime (Haaretz, Israel HaYom, Ynet and the Jerusalem Post, April 24, 2023).

Syria

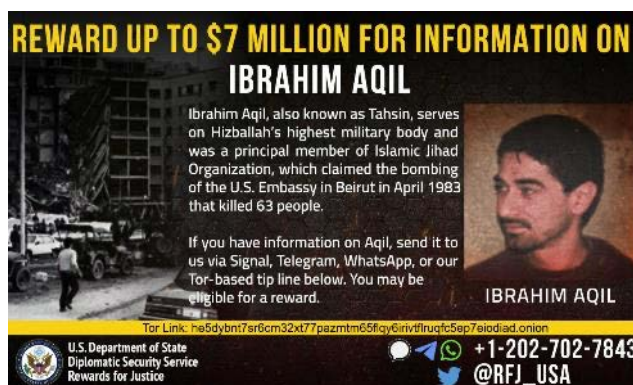
► **Three aerial attacks against Hezbollah and the pro-Iranian militias in Syria were attributed to Israel:**

- ◆ According to Syrian sources, on the night of May 30, 2023, the international airport in Aleppo and the nearby al-Nayrab military airport were attacked from the air. Reportedly, the airport in Aleppo was damaged, and an ammunition warehouse in the area, apparently belonging to Hezbollah and the pro-Iranian militias, went up in flames. One Syrian soldier was killed and seven soldiers and two civilians were injured (SANA, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights Observatory (SOHR) and al-Jazeera, May 1, 2023).
 - ◆ On the night of April 28, 2023, a military airport (located about 20 kilometers southwest of Homs and nine kilometers east of the Lebanon-Syria border) was attacked. A Hezbollah ammunition warehouse was destroyed (SOHR, April 29, 2023). According to other reports additional attacks were carried out in the Homs area. A Sky News commentator said that in recent weeks six IRGC planes had landed in Syria bringing ammunition and advanced weaponry. He said it was assumed Israel had attacked the arms deliveries (Sky News, April 29, 2023). According to the SOHR, it a Hezbollah arms warehouse was also attacked on April 2, 2023 (SOHR, April 29, 2023).
 - ◆ On April 24, 2023, more than 20 artillery shells were fired at a post manned by operatives of the **Syrian Resistance for the Liberation of the Golan** militia. The post was located in the Quneitra region near the Israeli border. The post was built by Hezbollah and operates under its authority. No casualties were reported (SOHR, April 24, 2023).
- According to reports, an arms warehouse near the village of Assal al-Ward in the Qalamoun Mountains was emptied and its contents were moved to houses in the village of Hosh Arab, at the foot of the mountains northeast of Damascus, near the Lebanese border. The contents of the arms warehouse in al-Qusayr, on the western edge of Homs, was moved to the villages of al-Ghassaneyah and al-Salumiyyah, to the southwest of Homs (SOHR, April 16, 2023).

International Activities against Hezbollah

The United States offers \$7 million for information about a Hezbollah operative

► The United States is offering a reward of up to \$7 million for information on **Ibrahim Aqil**, also known as Tahsin, **who serves on Hezbollah's Jihad Council, the organization's highest "military" body**. He participated in bombing the American embassy in Beirut in 1983, which killed 63 people, and in other terrorist attacks. In 2015 the United States Treasury Department imposed sanctions on him as a terrorist working for Hezbollah. In 2019 the American State Department designated him as an international terrorist operative (American State Department, April 18, 2023).



The American offer of a reward for information about Ibrahim Aqil (American State Department, April 18, 2023).

International Hezbollah money-laundering network exposed

► The American State Department offered a reward of up to \$10 million for information on **Nazem Said Ahmad**, a resident of Lebanon who has double Lebanese and Belgian citizenship. He heads a network which funds and launders money for Hezbollah through trading blood diamonds, works of art and luxury items.

► According to the State Department, the network has **52 branches** and includes family members and auxiliaries in Britain, Lebanon, the UAE, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Angola, the Ivory Coast, Belgium and Hong Kong. Economic sanctions were imposed on him by the Treasury Department in December 2019 (State Department website, April 18, 2023; dailymaverik.co.za, April 20, 2023).

REWARD UP TO \$10 MILLION FOR INFORMATION ON NAZEM SAID AHMAD

Nazem Said Ahmad is a prominent Lebanon-based money launderer and significant financier of the Hezbollah terrorist organization. Ahmad is one of Hezbollah's top donors, generating funds through his longstanding ties to the "blood diamond" trade. He also launders money through fine art.

Do you have information on Nazem Said Ahmad? Submit your tip now. You could receive a reward of up to \$10,000,000.

Tor Link: <https://torlinkhe5dybnt7sr6cm32xt77pazmtm65fiqy6irivtflruqfc5ep7elodlad.onion>

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The American offer of a reward for information about Nazem Said Ahmad (American State Department, April 18, 2023).

- ▶ Two days after the reward was offered, an **Indian national named Sundar Nagarajan, 66 years old, was detained in London** at the request of the United States on suspicion of connections to Nazem Said Ahmad (Times of India and firstpost.com, April 20, 2023).

Study published on Hezbollah international drug-dealing network

- ▶ On April 25, 2023, a study dealing with Hezbollah's participation in global drug dealing was published.³ According to the study findings, the organization plays a significant role in drug dealing, from the international cocaine trade, which begins with the South American cartel (including Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Venezuela) and smuggling drugs in the Tri-Border area (where the borders of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet) to dealing the synthetic drug Captagon, manufactured along the Syrian-Lebanese border.
- ▶ According to the study, Hezbollah has varied sources of income, including \$700 million which it receives annually from Iran (as of 2020); donations from supporters in the United States and Europe, estimated at several million dollars a year; extorting Lebanese businessmen living abroad, especially in Africa and Latin America; commercial activity and agricultural deals belonging to organization supporters, enabling Hezbollah to use them to launder money; exploiting the Lebanese banking system, such as the Lebanese Canadian Bank, for economic crime which enables Hezbollah to launder hundreds of millions of drug dollars. In addition, Hezbollah launders drug money through banks in the United States and Hezbollah's direct involvement in crimes such as drug dealing and cigarette smuggling.
- ▶ The study also revealed that Hezbollah is involved drug smuggling in the Tri-Border area. Black cocaine, according to the study, "is the result of a chemical process through which [it] is turned into charcoal briquettes to be mixed with legitimate cargo, making it a very effective

³ <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/hezbollahs-global-networks-and-latin-american-cocaine-trade>

method to conceal [cocaine] and move it through the international trade system."⁴ In addition, the Turkish authorities found ties between Hezbollah and Turkish drug dealers. The courts in the United States found that Hezbollah was involved in smuggling cigarettes to the United States.

⁴ Ibid