

Is Hezbollah Eating the Iranian People's Bread?

by Yves Mamou

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Without Iranian money, Hezbollah would not exist. At least, not exist as an Iranian foreign legion, militarily engaged against Israel and in other Middle East regional conflicts. Without Iranian subsidies, Hezbollah would be just a narco-mafia.

Hezbollah has developed deep connections to Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, directly to facilitate the distribution of drugs throughout the Middle East and the US.

In the holy city of Qom in Iran, on December 30, 2017, anti-regime demonstrators shouted "Death to Hezbollah", "Aren't you ashamed Khamenei? Get out of Syria and take care of us", and "Not Gaza, or Lebanon".

In an Islamic country, whose official slogan is "Death to America" and "Death to Israel", to see Iranian people shouting "Death to Hezbollah" is totally surreal.

By wishing "Death to Hezbollah", Iranians demonstrators were not only protesting a "rise of the price of eggs" as the Ayatollahs' propaganda machine tried to claim. The demonstrators were demanding that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei spend Iranian money for Iranian people -- and only for Iranian people.

Ironically, Iran's receiving more than \$100 billion in frozen assets for the hapless "nuclear deal" succeeded in breaking the solidarity between Iranian people and the Ayatollahs' regime better than the sanctions did. During the tough time of sanctions, the Iranian people stood by their leaders. The people only broke with their leaders when they saw that the "liberated" money was benefiting everyone but them.

Is Hezbollah eating the Iranian people's bread? The answer is yes, absolutely. Hezbollah is an Iranian foreign legion, a tool of an imperialist Shia war being

conducted in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and against Israel. This Arab Shia army was created in Lebanon by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1982, right after Israeli defense forces expelled the PLO from Lebanon. The aim of this Arab Shia legion was to demonstrate to Sunni Muslim Arabs in the Middle East that Shia Iran was a better fighter against the "Zionist entity" than any Sunni regime.



Pictured: Portraits of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (left) and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (right) in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2006. (Photo by Marco Di Lauro/Getty Images)

Over the years, the small militia of 1982 grew to an expensive army, with more 150,000 missiles targeting at Israel, and able to defeat ISIS in Syria.

How much money is Hezbollah costing Iran? Before quoting an amount, please remember that Hezbollah is not only a 30,000 to 50,000-man fighting army. Hezbollah is also a social system with hospitals, welfare institutions, well-

diggers for farmers, religious schools for boys and girls, a media conglomerate (television channels, radios, websites), a private telecommunications network inside Lebanon, and with the cyber-warfare capability to destabilize countries or companies. Hezbollah, in other words, is a state within the state of Lebanon, and the "patron" of the Shia community there.

Until 2005, experts guessed that Iran was giving about \$200 million a year to Hezbollah. Matthew Levitt, a specialist on Hezbollah, wrote: "Recently, Western diplomats and analysts in Lebanon estimated Hezbollah receives closer to \$200 million a year from Iran... Some of this financial support comes in the form of cash funds, while much is believed to come in the form of material goods such as weapons. Iranian cargo planes deliver sophisticated weaponry, from rockets to small arms, to Hezbollah in regular flights to Damascus from Tehran. These weapons are offloaded in Syria and trucked to Hezbollah camps in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. In the wake of the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Hezbollah reportedly received an additional \$22 million from Iranian intelligence to support Palestinian terrorist groups and foment instability."

Different Iranian "charitable" foundations, many of them controlled directly by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, also fund Hezbollah's hospitals and charities in Lebanon. The amount of money difficult to quantify because it does not appear in any official budget. It certainly represents many millions of dollars.

Of course, as the military role of Hezbollah expanded, the cost of funding it increased, from \$300 million to \$1 billion annually.

In short, without Iranian money, Hezbollah would not exist. At least, not as an Iranian foreign legion, militarily engaged against Israel and in other Middle East regional conflicts. Without Iranian subsidies, Hezbollah would be only a narco-mafia. It is a characteristic of this Shia militia to have been able to find alternative financing to compensate for the ups and downs of Iranian financing each time it was necessary.

Another source of Hezbollah's funding is cocaine-trafficking. Over time, Hezbollah has developed deep connections to Mexican and Colombian drug cartels, directly to facilitate the distribution of drugs throughout the Middle East and the US. The Obama administration quashed a huge Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) investigation into drug-running, arms-smuggling, human trafficking, and other criminal enterprises from which Hezbollah was profiting

around the world, according to a bombshell report by Josh Meyers in Politico in December 2017. For the Obama White House, blocking the DEA investigation was a decisive move to help finalize its "nuclear deal" with Iran.

How much money does Hezbollah make from cocaine? Again, it is difficult to say. From 2007 to 2011, for example, Hezbollah networks were involved in a \$300-million scheme purchasing used vehicles in the U.S. to ship to West Africa for sale. Earnings from the car sales were commingled with drug profits and sent to currency-exchange houses for laundering.

Among other trafficking, according to Interpol, Hezbollah also counterfeits goods (car brakes, clothes, pharmaceuticals, money). As early as 2003, Interpol warned of links between counterfeiting and terrorism, and between counterfeiting and Hezbollah : "In documents prepared for his testimony on 16 July before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations,

INTERPOL Secretary General Ronald K. Noble, said the problem may become more serious in future and he called for enhanced efforts, including a new partnership between industry and police, to combat it... "The INTERPOL document presented to the Congressional Committee indicated that a wide range of groups - including Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Chechen separatists, ethnic Albanian extremists in Kosovo, and paramilitaries in Northern Ireland - have been found to profit from the production or sale of counterfeit goods."

Hezbollah also raises funds from the Shia diaspora communities in Africa, Europe, Northern America and is running "an extensive network of commercial and illicit businesses around the globe, including in South America and Africa, which may morph into new enterprises to avoid scrutiny. By using shell companies, and by renaming companies to avoid U.S. sanctions, Hezbollah-linked groups can continue to access the international financial system and transact with an ever-growing network of companies. The U.S. Treasury Department has designated dozens of Lebanon-based firms for supporting Hezbollah, including real estate firms and auto care companies. It is likely the group will continue its money laundering operations, growing into new fields and businesses in the future."

Even if Iran cuts its subsidies to its proxy, Hezbollah's 150,000 missiles will presumably remain in Lebanon as a permanent threat against Israel.

Meanwhile, the Hezbollah Shia drug cartel will just have to work harder to feed its fighters.

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