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Responses to Information Requests

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4 November 2013

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Lebanon: Recruitment practices of Hezbollah, including instances of forced recruitment; consequences for those that refuse to join and their family members, including instances of torture; state protection (2010-October 2013)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

Sources provide various descriptions of Hezbollah [also spelled Hizballah, Hizbullah]:

- a group that "characterizes itself primarily as a resistance movement" (US 8 Oct. 2010, 10);
- a Shiite [also spelled Shia] military, political, and social organization (Australia 11 Nov. 2011, 1);
- a "radical" Shiite group (Canada 20 Nov. 2012);
- a group that "maintains an extensive security apparatus, political organization, and social services networks" and is "often described as a 'state within a state'" (CFR 22 July 2013,).

An Australian Refugee Review Tribunal's Country Advice Report references the *New York Times* which describes Hezbollah as Lebanon's "'pre-eminent political and military force [with] an armed military more powerful than the Lebanese Army and a sprawling infrastructure that delivers welfare to its Shiite constituency'" (11 Nov. 2011, 2). It is classified as a terrorist group by the US (US 31 July 2012), Canada (Canada 20 Nov. 2012), and the European Union (CFR 22 July 2013). Hezbollah operates mainly in the south of Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley (CFR 22 July 2013; European Forum 13 Sept. 2013), and parts of Beirut (CFR 22 July 2013).

The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a US think tank on international affairs (CFR n.d.), indicates that Hezbollah was founded in 1982 (CFR 22 July 2013). However, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity indicates that it was its militant branch that was founded that year (13 Sept. 2013). Hezbollah's goals are:

- the liberation of Jerusalem (Canada 20 Nov. 2012; *PHW* 2012, 822);
- the withdrawal of Israeli military from the South of Lebanon (ibid.);
- the "destruction" of Israel (Canada 20 Nov. 2012);
- the establishment of a revolutionary Shiite Islamic state in Lebanon (ibid.).

Hezbollah is reported to have links to Iran and Syria (CFR 22 July 2013; US 31 July 2012; *PHW* 2012, 822). According to the *Political Handbook of the World (PHW) 2012*, its budget is estimated at \$100 million and reportedly mostly supplied by Iran (ibid.). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2011* indicates that Hezbollah also "receives funding from private donations and profits from legal and illegal

business ... [and] Lebanese Shia communities in Europe, Africa, South America, North America, and Asia" (31 July 2012).

According to sources, Hezbollah is led by Hassan Nasrallah (CFR 15 July 2013, 3; Blanford Oct. 2011). The CFR indicates that Hassan Nasrallah has led Hezbollah as general secretary since 1993 (22 July 2013). The *Political Handbook of the World* notes that in recent years, Hezbollah has tried to "reinvent its image" from a militia to a "more conventional political movement" (2012, 822). Sources report that in the 2009 elections, Hezbollah obtained 13 seats in the 128-member Lebanese Parliament (European Forum 13 Sept. 2013; *PHW* 2012, 822). According to sources, is estimated to have several thousand supporters and members (US 31 July 2012; CFR 15 July 2010).

2. Military Activity

Reuters reports that Hezbollah has "an Iranian-trained strike force numbering around 7,000 with some 20,000 reservists" (26 Sept. 2013). The CFR states that in mid-2013, "Nasrallah publicly pledged his forces to the survival of Syria's Assad regime" (22 July 2013). An article in the Canadian *National Post* dated 15 Sept. 2013 reports that Nasrallah sent Hezbollah troops to fight for President Bashar Al-Assad. On 7 September 2013, the Lebanese newspaper *The Daily Star* reported that Hezbollah had mobilized "tens of thousands of fighters" in preparation to this conflict. The *National Post* reports that "one of the main reasons for Hezbollah's Syrian involvement is its need to use [Syria] as a pipeline ... [as] Iran and Syria provide the largest chunk of funds and weapons to the organization" (15 Sept. 2013). On 14 February 2013, Yiftah Shapir, in a report for the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, noted that "in recent years, Syria has been Hizbollah's main arms supplier ... [it] has received weapons purchased by Syria for its own military, as well as weapons brought from Iran, with Syria in this case acting only as a pipeline." Reuters reports that "[w]eapons are moved from Lebanon into Syria with high frequency and little difficulty, given the control that the Syrian regime and Hezbollah wield over the border crossings" (26 Sept. 2013). Sources indicate that in January 2013, Israel attacked targets in Syrian territory which were reported to be a convoy of weapons heading from Syria to Lebanon (Shapir 14 Feb. 2013; Reuters 30 Jan. 2013).

On 9 June 2013, Al Jazeera reported that Hezbollah had united clans in the Bekaa Valley and that the clans and Hezbollah were working in "close coordination" along the Lebanese border (Al Jazeera 9 June 2013). Al Jazeera stated that the clans "stop and search [suspicious people], and then hand [them] over to Hezbollah who will conduct investigations" (ibid.). The article adds that clans in the Bekaa Valley "are increasingly playing a security role" in the towns and villages, with numbers in the tens of thousands, while "the big operations" are left to Hezbollah (ibid.). The Daily Beast, an online breaking news and commentary website from the United States (Daily Beast 2013), references "backing for Hezbollah" by individuals in the Bekaa Valley and engagement with Syrian rebels along the Lebanese- Syria border (20 Oct. 2013).

The *Political Handbook of the World* indicates that Hezbollah "received scorn [from the Lebanese population] for its continued support for the Assad regime in Syria" (2012, 822). Al Jazeera reports that on 9 June 2013, in the capital Beirut, "a protest against Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war turned violent with one demonstrator shot dead" (9 June 2013). On 4 June 2013 Open Democracy, a "digital commons" on human rights and democracy (2013), reports that "within Lebanon, Hezbollah's active military engagement in Syria has weakened the most recent and current prime ministers - formally backed by Hezbollah - who have proven largely unable to moderate or influence the group's behaviour". The *National Post* reports that the involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian civil war has had a negative impact on support for Nasrallah (15 Sept. 2013).

3. Recruitment Practices of Hezbollah

The US Congressional Research Service (CRS) notes in a report on Hezbollah that membership to the organization is based on "allegiance to the organization's ideological program" (US 3 Jan. 2011, 10). The CRS further states that members are recruited by the Jihad Assembly, which "manages resistance activity including 'oversight, recruitment, training equipment, security' and other activities" (ibid. 8 Oct. 2010, 11). Further information on the Jihad Assembly could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In his October 2011 book about Hezbollah's thirty-year struggle against Israel, Nicholas Blanford, a Beirut correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Times* of London, , states that motivations for joining Hezbollah include "religious observance, hostility towards Israel, and the Shia commitment to justice and dignity. Blanford adds that "many young Shias naturally gravitate towards an organization that has helped empower their community in Lebanon and [Hezbollah] has earned respect for its martial exploits over the years" (Oct. 2011). In an issue brief for their work on armed violence in Lebanon, the Small Arms Survey references an academic paper from 2007 on the structure of Hezbollah by Professor Salamey and Professor

Pearson who state Hezbollah also receives informal backing from poorer Shia communities. The Small Arms Survey references the academic paper which states that

[i]n the absence of strong Lebanese state authority in most Shi'ite areas, and with the financial backing of Iran, the party was able to develop an elaborate social welfare network in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods and assist in the rebuilding of communities destroyed or damaged by Israeli bombardments. (May 2010, 4)

Blanford states that Hezbollah recruiters are sent to every village and neighbourhood "where the party wields influence to look out for likely prospects among the local young men and women ... looking for ... individuals who could fit into Hezbollah's way of life" (Oct. 2011). Recruiters observe a potential recruit for a period that ranges from months to years and then approach the individual to see if he or she would consider joining Hezbollah (Blanford Oct. 2011). Blanford explains that "[i]f the person accepts [the invitation], there follows an intensive initial phase known as tahdirat, or 'preparation,' lasting up to a year, in which recruits are taught the ideological foundations of Hezbollah" (ibid.). Nicholas Blanford and Bilal Y. Saab, in an analysis paper for the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Washington-based Brookings Institute, indicate that new members receive "basic training at camps in the Bekaa Valley and advanced training in Iran" (Aug. 2011, 9). *The Jerusalem Post*, Israel's English language newspaper, reports that the Saudi newspaper *Al Watan* quotes a source in the Lebanese government who reported that training of Hezbollah troops by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard starts in barracks in "Baalbeck [Lebanon] and concludes in Iran, where the fighter is trained in guerrilla warfare, as well as use of sophisticated weapons" (9 Oct. 2013). *Al Watan* reports that since the 1980's, the "Iranian Revolutionary Guards have trained more than 30,000 Hezbollah fighters in training camps in Iran and Lebanon" (*The Jerusalem Post* 9 Oct. 2013).

Blanford indicates that "the process of mobilization and radicalization of [Hezbollah's] potential recruits begins at an early age. Children as young as six or seven are encouraged to participate in Hezbollah's youth movement" (Oct. 2011). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Lebanese Centre for Human Rights (Centre libanais des droits humains, CLDH) indicated that women are certainly recruited "on a voluntary basis" to Hezbollah but the CLDH has "never heard about minors being recruited, although some activities directed towards children such as scouts may be a channel of future recruitment" (President 28 Oct. 2013). Blanford adds that "Hezbollah generally does not accept combatants into the Islamic Resistance below the age of eighteen, but basic military training and familiarization with weapons does begins at a much younger age" (Blanford Oct. 2011). Summer camps led by the Hezbollah-run Imam Mahdi Scouts are reportedly held in southern Lebanon and the northern Bekaa (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy similarly indicated that "Hezbollah has social networks for women and children, like the Mahdi Scouts - Hezbollah's militant version of the Boy Scouts" (Director 25 Oct. 2013). The *New York Times* reports that the Mahdi Scouts were founded in 1985 and their goals include "educating a younger generation to continue its struggle against Israel" (*The New York Times* 21 Nov. 2008). According to the *New York Times*, the Mahdi Scouts are part of the party's religion-themed youth and recruitment programs and are reported to be "a feeder for Hezbollah's armed force" (ibid.). The youth programs aim "both to build [Hezbollah's] own support base and to immunize Shiite youths from the temptations of Lebanon's diverse and mostly secular society" (ibid.). The *New York Times* also reports on "a network of schools - some of them run by Hezbollah, others affiliated with or controlled by it - largely shielded from outsiders" (ibid.). According to Reuters, "Hezbollah pays salaries to 60,000-80,000 people working for charities, schools, clinics, and other institutions in addition to its military and security apparatus" (26 Sept. 2013).

3.1 Recruitment Efforts

Blanford and Saab report that "[s]ince the end of the 2006 war, Hizballah has undergone the largest recruitment and training drive in its thirty-year history, swelling its ranks with dedicated cadres and reviving its former multi-sectarian reservist units" (Blanford and Saab Aug. 2011, iii). However, they add that "the rate of recruitment into Hizballah's regular forces ... appears to have slowed from 2010" (ibid., 9). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Forced Recruitment to Hezbollah

In a 3 January 2011 report, the US CRS indicated that "[f]ull party membership [to Hezbollah] is offered to applicants and recruits on the basis of allegiance to the organization's ideological program" (10). Nicholas Blanford indicates that "there is no compulsion to join Hezbollah. The party seeks only those who are unreservedly committed to its ideology Recruits who remain unconvinced after weeks of educational courses are free to leave" (Oct. 2011). The President of the CLDH indicated that "to [their] knowledge, recruitment by Hezbollah is based on voluntariness"; she said that the CLDH was unaware of instances of

"forced recruitment" (28 Oct. 2013). The Director of the Stein Program indicated that "[i]t would be a rare occurrence for Hezbollah to forcefully recruit someone, but it is possible for someone to be pressured to do things for Hezbollah they would prefer not doing, from donating money to other activities" (25 Oct. 2013). The Director of the Stein Program explained, however, that "Hezbollah is known to reward families that support it and pressure those that do not" (25 Oct. 2013). The President of the CLDH said that "[s]ocial pressure can be exerted within chi'ite families or in remote villages against individuals not willing to become members of Hezbollah, or expressing opposition to the party" (28 Oct. 2013).

4. State Protection for Victims of Forced Recruitment

The President of the CLDH explained that the "Lebanese state implicitly acknowledges the practices of Hezbollah and does not offer any protection to people that fear that they will be victims of violation perpetrated by Hezbollah" (President 28 Oct. 2013). She indicated that her organization "sometimes hear[s] about persons fearing Hezbollah because of their differing obedience" to the group, but added that these persons "usually leave Hezbollah's zones to settle in other Lebanese regions" (ibid.). She President noted that [n]o case of violations against people who simply refused to become members of Hezbollah was reported to our organization. Nevertheless, people suspected by Hezbollah of actively undermining the resistance to Israel (alleged spies, alleged armed activists) are at risk of being arbitrarily arrested, investigated and possibly tortured and detained by Hezbollah. (ibid.)

...

If [the persons fearing Hezbollah] are Lebanese, they reportedly do not face harassment once they are out of Hezbollah-controlled regions. It has to be noted that Lebanese from Hezbollah-controlled zones might face a problem of discrimination if they try to move to other Lebanese regions.

If [the persons fearing Hezbollah] are foreigners, they are more at risk of being arrested and potentially tortured by the security services, or simply arrested for illegal stay, including if they are UNHCR refugees (Lebanon did not sign the 1951 Geneva Convention on the refugees' status).

But it has to be noted that in case of serious threats on behalf of Hezbollah (or any other party/individuals) against an individual, the Lebanese security services will generally not ensure the protection of the victim. (ibid.)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral Sources: Attempts to contact the following persons and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Carnegie Middle East Centre; Director of Beirut Office, Human Rights Watch; OHCHR Middle East Regional Office, Researcher, Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies; Senior Research Fellow, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University.

Internet sites, including: Al Arabiya; Amnesty International; Canada – Canadian Border Services Agency; Canadian Security Intelligence Service; CNN; ecoi.net; Factiva; Freedom House; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Institute of Strategic Studies; International Crisis Group; Jamestown Foundation; *Jane's Intelligence Review*; *Jane's Terrorism Security Monitor*; The Muslim World; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START); *The Telegraph*; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld; US – Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State, National Counterterrorism Centre.

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