



February 8, 2013

The report issued by Bulgaria about the terrorist attack in Burgas clearly indicates that Hezbollah was involved in its planning and execution. That may hasten the European deliberation, encouraged by the United States, to include Hezbollah in its list of terrorist organizations.



The burned-out shell of the Israeli tourist bus at the Burgas airport (Photo courtesy of the ZAKA spokesman, July 19, 2012)

Overview

1. On February 5 2013, approximately seven months after the terrorist attack in Burgas, Bulgaria issued a report of the results of its investigation of the event. According to the Bulgarian authorities, **the investigation clearly indicated that Hezbollah's so-called military wing¹**

¹ In general the European Union uses the expression "Hezbollah's military wing" to differentiate between what it perceives as Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing, which carries out terrorist attacks, and its "political" wing, which is a part of the Lebanese parliament, and is integrated into the Lebanese administration. **In point of fact they are one and the**

was involved in planning and carrying out the attack. The Bulgarian minister of the interior, who presented the report to the Bulgarian National Security Council, said that **Bulgaria possessed detailed information about the infrastructure that had planned and carried out the attack.** He added that **there was reliable, well-founded information linking at least two of the three Burgas terrorists to Hezbollah** (Bulgarian News Agency, Sofia, February 6, 2013). **The report did not mention Iran,** which is behind a global terrorist campaign against Israel, using Hezbollah as its proxy.

2. According to the report, **three terrorist operatives** were involved in the attack that killed five Israelis and their Bulgarian bus driver. One of the terrorists was killed in the attack. **The other two carried genuine Australian and Canadian passports.** The Bulgarian authorities did not publicize their names or current places of residence, but did appeal to the Australian security services for help in locating one of the suspects. According to the Bulgarian investigation, the three went from **Beirut** (where they lived for a period of time) to **Warsaw** and from there took the train to Bulgaria (New York Times, February 6, 2013). The Bulgarians also stated that **the counterfeit identities and drivers' licenses found at the scene originated in Lebanon.** In addition, according to the report, **the terrorist operatives planned to use a remote control device to blow up the bus five or six kilometers from the airport, while it was en route to the tourists' hotel.** However, for an unknown reason, possibly a "work accident," the bomb detonated while the bus was still in the airport parking lot, and one of the terrorist operatives was killed.

3. **Rob Wainwright, head of the European police (Europol) said that in his opinion, the conclusion reached by the Bulgarians, namely that Hezbollah was involved in the terrorist attack, was solid and based on evidence.** He added that the forensic evidence, intelligence information and previously-used modus operandi **all indicated Hezbollah's involvement in the attack.** However, he also said that the investigation had not led to Iran or any organization with ties to Al-Qaeda (Novinite News Agency, Bulgaria, February 6, 2013).

same and there is no difference between the military and political wings. Senior Hezbollah figures have themselves denied that there is a difference between their "military" and "political" wings.

Initial Responses to the Report

The United States

4. **John Kerry**, the American Secretary of State, said in an announcement on February 5 that "The finding is clear and unequivocal: Lebanese Hizballah was responsible for this deadly assault on European soil...**The United States is acting decisively and comprehensively to curtail Hizballah's...actions** [throughout the world], and we are prepared to do all within our power to assist the Government of Bulgaria in bringing those responsible for the Burgas attack to justice. **We strongly urge other governments around the world – and particularly our partners in Europe – to take immediate action to crack down on Hizballah.** We need to send an unequivocal message to this terrorist group that it can no longer engage in despicable actions with impunity"² (ITIC emphasis throughout).

5. **John Brennan**, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, said in a statement on February 5, 2013, that "The United States commends the Government of Bulgaria for its professional and comprehensive investigation into the barbaric July 18, 2012 terrorist attack in Burgas... **Bulgaria's investigation exposes Hizballah for what it is – a terrorist group...that poses a real and growing threat not only to Europe, but to the rest of the world...**The United States will continue to provide the Bulgarian Government assistance in bringing the perpetrators of this heinous attack to justice" (ITIC emphasis).³

Europe

6. A spokesman for **Catherine Ashton**, European Union foreign minister, said that the EU was **currently examining a number of scenarios regarding Hezbollah**, among them the **possibility of adding it to the EU's list of terrorist organizations and initiating legal, political and diplomatic measures against it** (Website of the Council of the European Union, February 5, 2013).

7. British Foreign Secretary **William Hague** called on the Lebanese government to cooperate fully with the investigation, stressing that the EU had to respond strongly to the attack (Website of the British Foreign Office, February 5, 2013).

² <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/02/203796.htm>

³ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/05/statement-assistant-president-homeland-security-and-counterterrorism-joh>

Hezbollah and Iran

8. Sources within Hezbollah made it clear that **the organization did not intend at this point to respond to the Bulgarian accusations**. The response, said the sources, would be made by Hassan Nasrallah in a speech delivered on February 16 at the ceremony marking the anniversary of the deaths of Sheikh Ragheb Kharb and Abbas Musawi. However, Hezbollah's deputy secretary general said, without directly mentioning the findings of the Bulgarian investigation, that **Israel was waging a "scare campaign" against Hezbollah throughout the world after having failed to overcome it militarily**. He said that such accusations did not influence the organization and would not change its agenda, whose first priority was its "resistance to the occupation" (Al-Nahar, Lebanon, February 6, 2013).

9. **Gholamreza Bageri**, the Iranian ambassador to Bulgaria, denied any connection between Iran and the explosion in Burgas. He added that Iran opposed every form of terrorism, and strongly condemned terrorist activities. He emphasized that Israel's charges against Iran were baseless (Mehr News Agency, February 8, 2013).

Lebanon

10. Lebanese Prime Minister **Najib Miqati** said that Lebanon was prepared to cooperate with Bulgaria to shed light on the circumstances leading to the terrorist attack. Lebanese President **Michel Sulaiman** said an agreement had been reached to finish the discussion of the issue after the relevant documents had been received from the Bulgarian attorney general (Lebanese News Agency, February 5, 2013).

11. The **Secretariat General of the March 14 forces** (a camp of Hezbollah opponents led by Saad al-Hariri) met to discuss the Bulgarian report and the possibility of including Hezbollah in the EU's list of terrorist organizations, which was liable to damage Lebanese interests. The Secretariat announced that **the Lebanese were not prepared to be hostages of Hezbollah and have their own interests confront those of the rest of the world** (Al-Nashra, Lebanon, February 6, 2013).

Appendix

Inclusion of Hezbollah in the EU's List of Terrorist Organizations

1. Despite the many terrorist attacks carried out by Hezbollah on European soil, **so far the EU has not put Hezbollah on its list of terrorist organizations, although both Britain and the Netherlands have outlawed it in their own countries.** The EU's stalling, led by France, is motivated by **political considerations**, among them the following:

- 1) The Europeans' concerns that their influence in Lebanon and relations with it might be harmed if Hezbollah were designated as a terrorist organization;
- 2) In our assessment, although not prominently mentioned in public, the Europeans are concerned about the safety of the UNIFIL forces and the security of various Western targets in Lebanon (with the Iranian and Hezbollah terrorist campaign in Lebanon and Europe in the 1980s still at the back of their minds);
- 3) Another argument stated publicly is that Hezbollah cannot be designated as a terrorist organization because in addition to what is referred to as its "military wing," it also has a political party which is represented in the Lebanese administration (parliament, government, etc.).

2. Given Hezbollah's active military support for the Assad regime in Syria, and the fear that the Syrian crisis might trickle into Lebanon, **in recent months the discussions regarding the inclusion of Hezbollah in the EU's list of terrorist organizations were renewed.** A more assertive stance regarding Hezbollah, **encouraged by the United States**, seems to be growing.

3. That encouragement was marked by the speech given in Dublin by **John Brennan**, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, **in which he called on the EU to include Hezbollah in its list of terrorist organizations.** He called Hezbollah the **number one joint American-European security challenge** and called on Europe to join the United States as "counterterrorism partners." He said that while Britain and Holland had taken steps against Hezbollah's "destabilizing activities," they were insufficient, and that the rest of the EU should take similar steps. He called on the international community to be aware of Hezbollah's true nature as "an international terrorist organization actively supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps - Quds Force" and of its "terrorist and criminal activities," and to make attempts to condemn and disrupt those activities. He added that the European refusal

to do so made it difficult for the United States to protect its citizens, and in certain instances had prevented Hezbollah suspects arrested for "plotting in Europe" from being prosecuted on charges of terrorism.⁴

4. It is possible that the findings of the Bulgarian ministry of the interior, which clearly indicate Hezbollah's involvement in the terrorist attack, will strengthen recognition of the need to include Hezbollah in the EU list of terrorist organizations and hasten a European deliberation of the issue. The findings may reinforce the statement made by the Cypriote foreign minister, currently president of the EU, immediately following the terrorist attack in Bulgaria, who said that **the EU might change its mind if presented with "tangible evidence" of Hezbollah's involvement in terrorism** (Agence France-Presse, July 24, 2013).

5. For an in-depth analysis of including Hezbollah in the EU list of terrorist organizations, see the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center study "[Portrait of Hezbollah as a Terrorist Organization.](#)"

⁴ <http://london.usembassy.gov/europe070.html>