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Intelligence and Terrorism  
Information Center  
at the Israel Intelligence Heritage  
& Commemoration Center (IICC)

**In an interview granted to an Iranian TV channel, Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hassan Nasrallah's deputy, stresses that Hezbollah's policy of terrorist operations against Israel (including suicide bombings and rocket fire) requires jurisprudential permission of the Iranian leadership**

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**Sheikh Naim Qassem in an interview granted to Iran's Al-Kawthar TV channel: Hezbollah's attacks against Israel are guided by *al-wali al-faqih* (the ruling jurisprudent, i.e., Khamenei, the Iranian leader). The ruling jurisprudent is the one who allows and the one who prohibits (photograph: Ehud Yaari's report, Israeli TV Channel 2, April 16, 2007).**

## **Highlights of the interview**

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1. In an interview granted on April 16, 2007 to **Al-Kawthar**, an Iranian Arabic-language TV channel, **Sheikh Naim Qassem**, Hassan Nasrallah's deputy, presented Hezbollah's concept of the "**culture of *shahada***" (martyrdom for the sake of Allah, in Hezbollah terminology). That ideological concept, which grants religious Islamic legitimacy to suicide bombing attacks, is the cornerstone of Iran and Hezbollah's worldview, and is reflected in statements made by Hezbollah seniors and in ideological literature seized during the second Lebanon war.

2. During the interview, Sheikh Naim Qassem uncharacteristically admitted that Hezbollah does not pursue its own policy but rather **submits to the authority of the Iranian leadership, which instructs it even on such military-operative issues as the confrontation with Israel**. Such instructions are based on the ideology of the Iranian Islamic regime, set forth by Ayatollah Khomeini, whose key principle is **the rule of the jurispudent (*wilayat al-faqih*)**. The title used by Sheikh Naim Qassem to describe Hezbollah's source of authority is "***al-wali al-faqih***" (the ruling jurispudent), a title formerly used by **Ayatollah Khomeini** and presently used by his successor, leader<sup>1</sup> **Ali Khamenei**.

3. In the second part of the interview granted to Al-Kawthar, Sheikh Naim Qassem described the relationship between Hezbollah and the Iranian leadership, noting that:

a. Hezbollah was founded and commenced activities in 1982, based on a religious ruling made by **Imam Khomeini**, who considered jihad (holy war) against Israel to be an Islamic religious duty.

b. **Hezbollah is committed to receive religious instruction regarding the nature of the confrontation with Israel from *al-***

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<sup>1</sup> The Arabic term *qa'ed* refers both to an army commander and a political leader.

**wali al-faqih** (the ruling jurispudent, a title nowadays reserved **exclusively** for leader Khamenei). For example, Sheikh Naim Qassem had the following to say about suicide bombing attacks: “No one may kill himself without a jurispudent permission.”

**c. Firing rockets on Israeli civilians also requires the jurispudent permission of the Iranian leadership.**

d. Hezbollah has means to inquire (implying with the source of religious authority, Ali Khamenei) “**what can or cannot be done, what is our duty and what is subject to our own consideration.**”

4. The above statements made by Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hassan Nasrallah’s deputy, are yet another testimony that Hezbollah considers Iran and its leader Khamenei to be the **highest source of authority of its activity and policy, including its policy of terrorist operations** (even though in public statements Hezbollah often plays down the fact that its policy of terrorist attacks is set in Tehran). Based on that concept, which is unique to the Islamic revolution in Iran, Hezbollah **nurtures Khamenei’s personality cult among its operatives and among the Shi’ite community in Lebanon**, portraying the “leader” as a role model and as an example to be followed (see Appendix B). It should be noted that Hezbollah seniors, namely Hassan Nasrallah in the past and Sheikh Muhammad Yazbek in the present, have been given the title of Khamenei’s Islamic religious representative (*wakil shar’i*) in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup>
5. The meaning of the statements made in Sheikh Naim Qassem’s interview is that the Iranian leadership controls Hezbollah’s policy, including its policy of terrorist operations. While Hezbollah does not necessarily need the approval of the Iranian leadership for each and every terrorist attack, the

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<sup>2</sup> In the mid-1990s, leader Khamenei appointed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah his Islamic religious (*shar’i*) representative in Lebanon. It seems that, in recent years, Nasrallah was forced to relinquish that title, now held by Hezbollah senior Sheikh Muhammad Yazbek (even though the media and internet sometimes still attribute that title to Hassan Nasrallah).

Iranian leadership has **the ability to regulate the extent of Hezbollah's anti-Israeli activity** by allowing or prohibiting various kinds of operations at various times.

**6. Appendices:**

- a. **Appendix A:** translation of the interview into English
- b. **Appendix B:** Hezbollah's nurturing of Iranian leader Khamenei's personality cult: a selection of materials seized in the second Lebanon war

## Appendix A

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### **Translation<sup>3</sup> of excerpts from the interview granted by Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hassan Nasrallah’s deputy, to Iran’s Al-Kawthar TV channel**

**In an interview granted on April 16, 2007, to Al-Kawthar, an Iranian Arabic-language TV channel, Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s deputy, laid out his concept of “the culture of martyrdom for the sake of Allah” (*thaqafat al-shahada*), that is, suicide culture. In the second part of the interview, Sheikh Naim Qassem provided insights into the nature of the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran. What follows are excerpts from the interview in English translation.**

#### **On martyrdom culture (known as “suicide culture” in Israeli and Western terminology)**

“Regarding the culture of death [*thaqafat al-mawt*] or the culture of martyrdom [*thaqafat al-shahada*] or the culture of life [*thaqafat al-hayat*]—or whatever else we choose to call it—it is no secret that the materialist West and the infidels in general, and all those who see the power of Islam rise to influence—particularly with regard to the philosophy of martyrdom [i.e., suicide bombing terrorism]—they all take a negative stance, exerting pressure [on Islam] to make the believers abandon the culture of martyrdom [i.e., the culture of suicide bombers].

“What is the reason for that? They [the West] are looking for a purpose in this world, and they are competing on this world’s terms. They know that if we compete [on the terms of] their world, they will defeat us, because they are

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<sup>3</sup> Translated into English by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, based on excerpts from the interview as cited by MEMRI and by Ehud Yaari on Israeli TV Channel 2.

stronger than us in the material sense. On material standards alone, they will [surely] defeat us. But if they compete against us on the level of faith, we will defeat them, because the power of faith in [times of] struggle is stronger and more influential [than material power].

“They [the West] challenge us and taunt us and give us such names as “the culture of death”, as if martyrdom were death, in order to make us give it up. If we give up martyrdom, our power will become a [faithless] power with [only] arms and a few people, and then they can defeat us. [Then] our enemies can defeat us.

“Do we really believe in the culture of death? Absolutely not. We believe in the culture of martyrdom [*thaqafat al-shahada*] and martyrdom is a noble, great, holy, and honorable thing. It is not a blame [that can be laid at our feet]. It is an honor for us to be accused of martyrdom culture.

“What is *shahada*? It is death for the sake of Allah, may He be glorified, to protect what is true and righteous [in the spirit of Islam]. Can martyrdom change the fact that each man dies at a time of [Allah’s] choosing? When the time comes [for human beings to die], they will not remain [alive] for even one hour or die one hour sooner.

“We say that, whatever the circumstances, each man dies at his predestined time. My brother, instead of dying in your bed—when your time comes—die on the battlefield by martyrdom for the sake of Allah [*istishhad*]. You will profit, since you will be ending your life in a wonderful way which is accepted by Allah, may He be exalted...

“... Let us see whether the culture of martyrdom is the culture of death or the culture of life. This is the culture of life. For all those who aspire to *shahada* aspire to improve their material lives [because martyrdom—*shahada*—is designed] to prevent the enemies from occupying their lands and live their lives in pride, dignity, and freedom. [Therefore] they improve their living

conditions by preventing the enemies from realizing their objectives. Accordingly, it is the most honorable culture both in this life and [also] in the next—if [a person] ends his life [by martyrdom for the sake of Allah]...”

### On the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran

**“Hezbollah relied [i.e., and relies still] in its Islamic religious position, which has to do with its activity in general and its jihadist activity in particular, on the decision of *al-wali al-faqih* [in Khomeinist ideology, the ruling jurisprudent]. The ruling jurisprudent is the one who allows and the one who prohibits.** When Hezbollah commenced activities in 1982, it did so according to the opinion and religious ruling of Imam Khomeini, may Allah bless his secret,<sup>4</sup> **which considers the fight against Israel a duty. We are committed to his view.**

“And yet, how should we fight against Israel? What equipment should we prepare? When can we and when cannot we attack? These questions have Islamic and *shar’i* principles that may be followed whenever possible. **We have backed our stance of jihad regarding the fight against Israel by a decision made by *al-wali al-faqih*.** It is a jurisprudent decision, and as for all the other details—if we need *shar’i* counsel on what is allowed and what is forbidden on the [front] of jihad—we **ask, receive general answers, and then apply [them]. This is even true for acts of suicide for the sake of Allah [*al-‘amaliyyat al-istishhadiyya*]**—no one may kill himself without a jurisprudent permission.

“As the **Shura [Council],<sup>5</sup> we have the authority to give instructions regarding acts of suicide for the sake of Allah [*al-‘amaliyyat al-istishhadiyya*]**, and then transfer it to operative channels in order to carry it out. [However,] if a Lebanese civilian decides to carry out an act of suicide without consulting anyone, it is not known whether he commits a duty

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<sup>4</sup> In the original: *qaddas sirrahu*, a blessing used by followers to refer to Khomeini.

<sup>5</sup> The highest body in Hezbollah’s organizational structure, headed by Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah.

according to religious laws. He might be committing a felony, for despite the holiness of such an act, he needs to receive [the Shura's] permission. Also needed are operative channels [to carry it out] and someone able to assess whether the act will be beneficial or harmful, since it is a question of life and death.

**“Even when it comes to firing rockets on Israeli civilians, when they [Israel] bombed the civilians on our side, to put pressure [on Israel], even [that decision] requires an in-principle jurisprudential permission [*ijaza shar'iyya*].**

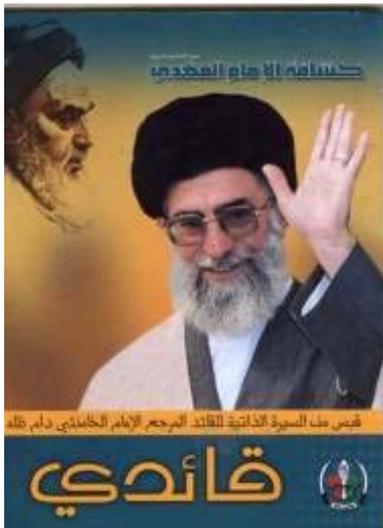
“As for Hezbollah, it receives its general approvals from *al-wali al-faqih* [i.e., leader Khamenei], and if it has questions on matters pertaining to religious law, **we have [communication] channels to determine what can or cannot be done, what is our duty and what is subject to our own consideration.**”

## Appendix B

### Hezbollah's nurturing of Iranian leader Khamenei's personality cult: a selection of materials seized in the second Lebanon war<sup>6</sup>



**Posters with images of the Iranian leader, Ali Khamenei, and the architect of the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, displayed in rooms used by Hezbollah operatives in the village of Shihin (right) and the village of Bint Jbeil (left). Underneath the posters on the right is a large signboard with the text "Al-Wilaya" (i.e., "the rule" of the jurispudent, which is a central component in Khomeini's teachings)**

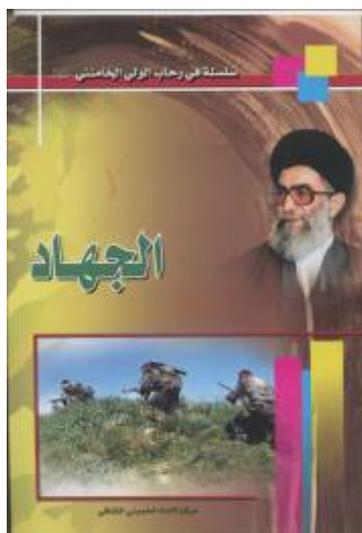


**A booklet titled "My Leader" (*Qa'id*), the title of Iran's leader Ali Khamenei, seized by the IDF in the village of Yaroun. The booklet was published by Hezbollah's boy scouts movement (The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts). In the booklet, leader Khamenei is portrayed as a role model for teenagers to follow and as an example of a faithful jihad warrior who contributed much to the Islamic revolution in Iran.**

<sup>6</sup> See Information Bulletin titled "Hezbollah publications found during the second Lebanon war in south Lebanon inculcate the radical ideology of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and glorify jihad, *shahada* (death as a martyr) and the personality cults of the Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Khamenei", October 10, 2006.

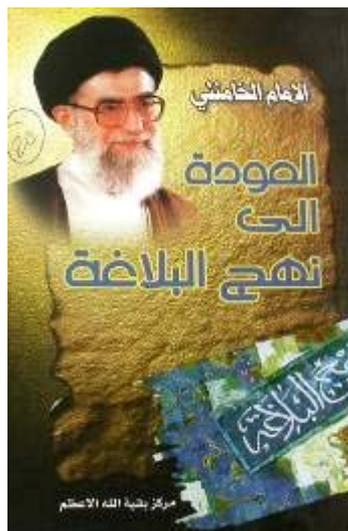


**The April page of Hezbollah’s 2006 calendar. The image of leader Khamenei is in the upper left. The writing in the center says “Leader Day”, celebrated in the month of April.**

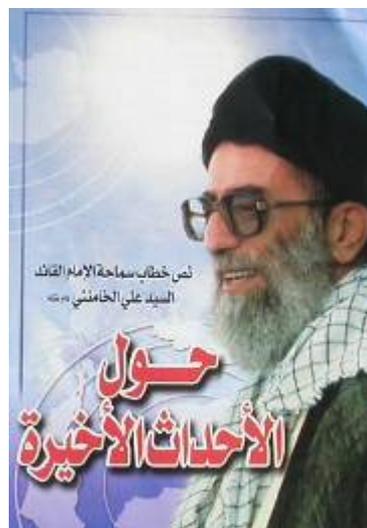


**In the course of the second Lebanon war, IDF forces operating in Maroun al-Ras seized four copies of a booklet titled “Al-Jihad”. Published in 2004 by the Imam Khomeini Culture Center<sup>7</sup> in Beirut, the booklet analyzes the significance of jihad based on Ali Khamenei’s worldview. Khamenei also stresses the revolutionary message of jihad and portrays it as a central component of the Islamic revolution.**

<sup>7</sup> A center for spreading Ayatollah Khomeini’s teachings. Based in Iran, it has branches in Lebanon.

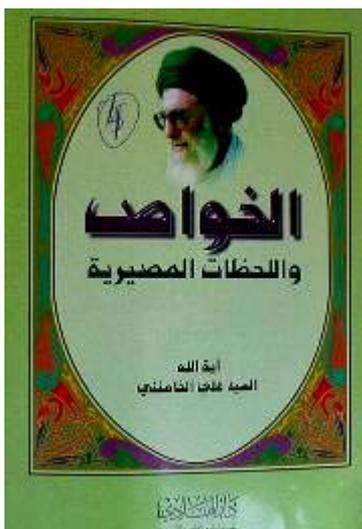


**Right: the cover page of a booklet titled “Reviewing the Path of Eloquence”, seized by IDF forces in Kafr Kila (in the upper left is Khamenei’s image). The booklet includes three lectures by Ali Khamenei. Left: the back cover of the booklet, featuring a selection of Khamenei’s books published and distributed in Lebanon. The booklet was originally written in Persian and translated into Arabic in the Iranian city of Qom, the seat of the Iranian religious leadership.**

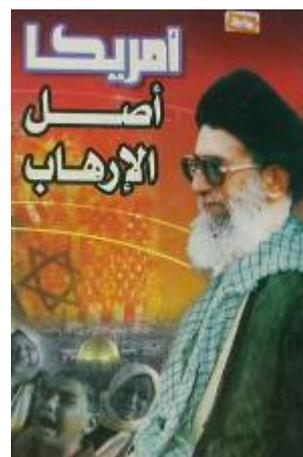


**Hezbollah’s emblem**

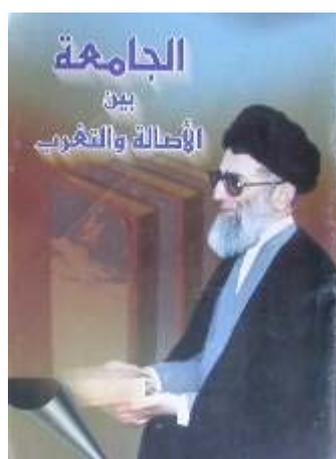
**A leaflet titled “The Text of the Speech Given by the Honorable Imam Commander Al-Sayyid Ali Khamenei, May He Prosper, On Recent Events”. Right: the cover page; left: a copy of the last page, which contains the Hezbollah emblem. The leaflet was seized by IDF forces in the village of Rajmin and was probably published in 2003. In the speech, Khamenei incites against the US and blames it for striving to dominate the world.**



The cover of a book titled “The Elite and the Critical Moments”. The book, written by Ali Khamenei, was seized in the village of Einata. The book was published by Hezbollah’s publishing house and it deals with Khamenei’s teachings. It places particular emphasis on the idea of jihad.



The cover page of a booklet titled “The US is the Source of Terrorism” (portrayed prominently on the right is Ali Khamenei’s image). The picture shows burning US and Israeli flags, beneath which are Palestinians crying against the background of the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem.



The text of a speech given by Ali Khamenei (March 2001) in which he criticizes the US and discusses the rule of the jurisprudent and the values of the Islamic revolution.



The text of a speech given by Ali Khamenei (date unknown) on the occasion of the month of Muharram (the first month of the Muslim year). The speech places emphasis on martyrdom in Islam (*shahada*) and the importance of the Islamic revolution.