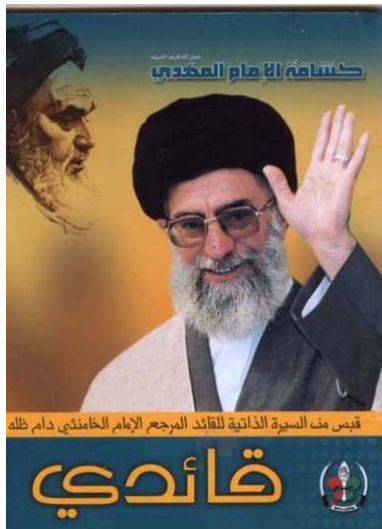




Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

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Two rare statements about Iran-Hezbollah relations: Ali Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Supreme Leader Khamenei, admits Iran fully supports Hezbollah. Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary general, says Hezbollah derives legitimacy for its activities from Khamenei.



Supreme Leader Khamenei, a source of authority for Hezbollah. The cover of a booklet entitled *My Leader*, seized by the IDF during the second Lebanon war. Khamenei is depicted as a role model for youth and as an example of a devoted jihad fighter who contributed greatly to the Islamic revolution in Iran.



Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general, speaking at a ceremony held at the Iranian embassy in Lebanon on the anniversary of the Ayatollah Khomeini's death (Al-Manar TV, June 3, 2009). He again told Al-Jazeera TV that the Iranian leadership determined Hezbollah's policies.

Overview

1. Recently two statements were made, one by a top Iranian official and the other by a senior Hezbollah figure, about with Iran-Hezbollah relations: **Ali Akbar Velayati**, advisor to the Supreme Leader Khamenei on international affairs, again stated that Iran provided Hezbollah and Hamas with full, comprehensive support,¹ and that Hezbollah was indebted to the Iranian leadership. **Sheikh Naim Qassem**, Hezbollah deputy secretary general, admitted that the Supreme Leader Khamenei was a source of legitimacy for the organization, which received Islamic directives from him on every matter of principle, including attacks against Israel.

Interview with Ali Akbar Velayati

2. In a rare admission, on July 25 **Ali Akbar Velayati**, advisor to the Supreme Leader Khamenei, told Al-Jazeera TV that Iran gave Hezbollah and Hamas full, comprehensive support, and that without it they would not have “won” the second Lebanon war and Operation Cast Lead. He said that “we fully supported Hezbollah and took responsibility for Hamas during the [Israeli] attack [Operation Cast Lead] on the Gaza Strip. **I can tell you with complete sincerity that Iran fully and comprehensively supported Hezbollah, and Hezbollah feels indebted to the [Iranian] leadership.** Of course, the leadership of Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah is extraordinary. He always said that without Iranian support they would not have won [the second Lebanon war]. **Some of the resistance of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip is [possible] thanks to Iranian aid and support.** The resistance in Bosnia was also supported by Iran and all that happened under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khamenei. Iran under the supreme leader, with his determined stance, stands shoulder to shoulder with all those factions of the resistance which support the Palestinians.”

3. Ali Akbar Velayati clearly reflected Iran’s interest in providing support, including military support, for Hezbollah and Hamas as a result of the great importance it gives to both terrorist organizations. Iran regards Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip as **two important local points of power** which can be used to further its strategic goals, central to which is its **desire for regional hegemony in the Middle East.** Iran can use Hezbollah and Hamas to threaten population centers in northern and southern Israel, increase its influence in the Arab-Muslim world, damage the Israeli-Palestinian Authority peace process and subvert the pro-Western Sunni states, especially Egypt (which exposed a subversive Hezbollah network and considers the Hamas control of the Gaza Strip as **threat to its own**

¹ “Full, comprehensive support” is a way of saying that Iran also provides Hezbollah with military support without specifically admitting it.

security and that of the entire region). It is possible that Ali Akbar Velayati's rare statement was meant to send a message of power to Israel, in view of the current tension between Israel and Hezbollah manifested in the media battle between the two during the past few weeks.

Interview with Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general

4. On July 30 Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general, was interviewed by the Lebanese daily *Nahar al-Shabab*. He was asked about the relations between the Iranian leadership and Hezbollah, and answered that Hezbollah was a Shi'ite "political-religious party" which had to receive political and religious [Muslim] legitimacy from the [Iranian] leadership. He added that as a party, Hezbollah regarded the **Imam Khomeini** as a "guardian jurist" and a leader providing the organization with legitimacy. He added that after Khomeini, the **Imam Khamenei**, was the one who "**decides general guidelines for us, which free us from blame and give us legitimacy.**"

5. He gave examples of the importance of the religious Islamic instructions Hezbollah had to accept from Khamenei. For example, if Khamenei tells Hezbollah that fighting Israel is a religious duty, and "whoever is killed fighting Israel is considered a *shaheed* [a martyr for the sake of Allah], as far as we understand." However, should Khamenei decide a war was forbidden, then "the dead person would go to hell because he was forbidden to participate in that war." Therefore, he said that **Hezbollah would not wage war on Israel without religious authorization from the "guardian jurist" of Iran, who was a clerical authority,**² but as a guardian jurist he was not supposed to **enter into the details** regarding how the decision was carried out (timing, necessary weapons, etc.), which was in the hands of Hezbollah.

6. **Sheikh Naim Qassem has made similar remarks in the past.** On April 16, 2007, he admitted in an interview with the Iranian Arabic TV station **Al-Kawthar** that Hezbollah **did not determine its own policies**. He said the organization was subordinate to the authority of the Iranian leadership and received Muslim religious guidance from it regarding every facet of the fight against Israel (giving as examples rocket fire or suicide bombing attacks, which required Muslim religious authorization from the Iranian leadership). Referring to what Hezbollah regarded as its source of authority, he frequently used the term *vali-ye faqih* (guardian jurist) when speaking about Khomeini and his heir, Khamenei.

² *Vali-ye faqih*, the guardian jurist, was the title given to the Ayatollah Khomeini and was passed along to his heir, the Supreme Leader Khamenei.

7. The significance of Sheikh Naim Qassem's remarks is his admission that Hezbollah receives its political instructions from **Iran**, despite the fact that Hezbollah is not only a terrorist organization but also a Lebanese political party represented in the Lebanese Parliament which is actively pursuing to the right to veto any decision made by the Lebanese government. He again made it plain that Hezbollah needed the **authorization of the Iranian leadership** to carry out any matter of principle, including waging war, firing rockets and suicide bombing attacks. He claimed that the Iranian leadership did not enter into details regarding how its instructions were carried out, but in our assessment, there is no doubt that the Iranians have both the ability and tools to keep the heat turned up, should Iran decide to do so, on Israel's northern border.