



Argentina designates Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and freezes all its assets, joining other countries, led by the United States. That gives the Argentine government better tools to deal with Hezbollah's activities in Argentina and Latin America.

July 30, 2019

Overview

On July 18, 2019, Argentina designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. The announcement was made two days after Argentine President Mauricio Mauri announced a list of terrorist organizations, institutions and operatives, enabling the Argentine authorities to take punitive steps against them. **The announcement was made on the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires (the AMIA building¹), July 18, 1994,** at a time when high-ranking American officials, headed by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, were visiting the country. **The Economic Information Unit of the Argentine government then issued an order to freeze Hezbollah's assets in Argentina because "Hezbollah continues to represent a current threat to security and the integrity of the economic and financial order of the Argentine Republic"** (BBC News, July 18, 2019). **Designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization gives the Argentine government better tools to deal with Hezbollah's terrorist, criminal and subversive activities in Argentina and in Latin America in general.**

► **Argentina, which has a large Shi'ite community, is the first Latin American country to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.** In ITIC assessment, behind the move was international pressure, mainly from the United States, following the great amount of evidence regarding Hezbollah's activity in the **Tri Border area, the triangle where the borders of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet.** Thus Argentina joins the United States, Canada, Britain and Holland, all of which have designated Hezbollah, the entire organization, as a terrorist organization. **On the other hand, the EU and a number of additional European countries still adhere to the mistaken distinction between Hezbollah's**

¹ Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina

military wing (designated as a terrorist organization) and its civilian wing (which is not designated as a terrorist organization).²

► **Argentina accused Iran and Hezbollah the terrorist attack on the AMIA building in 1994, which killed 85 people and wounded more than 300. Iran and Hezbollah were also accused of a terrorist attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires two years earlier (March 17, 1992), killing 29 people and wounding more than 250.** In 2006, after a long investigation, the Argentine authorities requested international arrest warrants (INTERPOL red list warrants) for seven senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah operative (Imad Mughnieh) on suspicion of involvement in the AMIA bombing. None of them has ever been arrested or indicted.



Right: The façade of the AMIA building after the bombing. Left: Clearing the rubble.

² **Separating Hezbollah's military wing from its civilian wing has no basis in fact, because its military-terrorist wing and civilian wing are integrated into one another.** Hezbollah's military might strengthens its civilian power in Lebanon, while its civilian and social activities are exploited for strengthening its military wing and receiving the support of the Shi'ite population for Hezbollah's activity. Moreover, Hezbollah's institutions and leaders, especially **Hassan Nasrallah, determine the entire organization's policies**, including decisions relating to its military infrastructure and civilian institutions.



Seven senior Iranian officials and one senior Hezbollah operative for whom Argentina requested international arrest warrants. The bottom left picture is Imad Mughnieh, who was responsible for Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing.

► In response to the Argentine announcement, **Sheikh Na'im Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary general**, claimed the decision was in response to American appeals to several countries to carry out its program of exerting pressure on Hezbollah. He also denied any connection between Hezbollah and the terrorist attacks in Argentina (Reuters, July 18, 2019).

So far it is unclear **whether the Argentine decision will have any practical significance beyond the declarative, and whether it will lead to measures taken by the authorities against Hezbollah.** In any event it gives Argentina better tools to cope with Hezbollah in the intelligence, legal and economic spheres. In July 2018 Argentina froze the assets of 14 members of the Barakat clan in the Tri Border area, who were, according to the authorities, close to Hezbollah.³ If such measures are in fact instituted the Argentine declaration may make difficulties for Hezbollah's financial and criminal activities in Argentina and Latin America in general.

Appendices

► Three appendices follow:

- ◆ **Appendix A:** Hezbollah's activity in Argentina
- ◆ **Appendix B:** Designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization – Overview
- ◆ **Appendix C:** ITIC publications about Iranian and Hezbollah activity in Argentina and Latin America in general – Overview

³ For further information, see the August 12, 2018 bulletin by Emanuele Ottolenghi, "Hezbollah's Tri Border Area terror finance comes under fire at last."

Appendix A

Hezbollah's Activity in Argentina

Overview

Hezbollah carries out terrorist and subversive activities in Argentina and Latin America, as well as extensive criminal activities (drug dealing, counterfeiting money, etc.). It carried out two prominent terrorist attacks in Argentina, orchestrated by Iran: the suicide bombing attack at the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires (1992) and the suicide bombing attack at the Jewish Community Center building (AMIA) in Buenos Aires (1994). In addition, Hezbollah-affiliated operatives carry out **extensive criminal activities** to promote two objectives: **to create an independent financial channel for Hezbollah in Lebanon** (to complement the funding it mainly receives from Iran) and to finance the ongoing activity of its terrorist and subversive networks. In addition, **Hezbollah's connections the drug cartels and criminal networks in Latin America improve its terrorist-subversive capabilities in Argentina and Latin America.**

► **Hezbollah has traditionally regarded Latin America as fertile ground for its extensive criminal activities.** Hezbollah is readily accessible to the Shi'ite Lebanese population living there, and has close professional, criminal relations with the local drug cartels. Hezbollah's control of the "crime industry" in the Beqa'a Valley and south Lebanon give it additional advantages and **enable it to integrate its criminal capabilities in Lebanon with those in Latin America and other countries around the globe.**

► The focus of the terrorist activities carried out by Iran and Hezbollah in Latin America were the **two showcase suicide bombing attacks in Argentina in the 1990s.** They were orchestrated by Iran with **the help of the terrorist infrastructure constructed by Iran and Hezbollah in Argentina** and other countries in Latin America. The existence of the infrastructure enabled them to carry out the attacks within a relatively short time framework (with two years between them) and with great "success," from the Iranian-Hezbollah point of view.

Hezbollah's activity in the Tri Border Area

► **The triangle where the borders of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet is called the Tri Border area.** A large Shi'ite Muslim population lives there. Since it was declared a free trade zone in the 1950s it has become a center for smuggling and organized criminal activities. **The**

concentration of Shi'ite Muslims from Lebanon is a convenient reservoir for Iran and Hezbollah for recruiting local operatives to establish subversive and terrorist networks.

The criminal activities carried out in the free trade zone in collaboration with the drug cartels and local crime networks are a source of income for Hezbollah (the income is transferred to Lebanon or used for local activities).

► In June 2016 it was reported that the American administration had set up an agency for surveillance of Hezbollah's financial activities in the United States, Latin America and Africa. The activities included drug smuggling and money laundering (al-Nashra, June 29, 2016). On July 13, 2018, Argentina's Financial Intelligence Unit froze the assets of 14 Lebanese who lived in the Tri Border area, all members of the Barakat clan, who belonged to a criminal organization with ties to Hezbollah. Information about those arrested was collected in collaboration with the United States.

The bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires (1992)

► On March 17, 1992, a **Hezbollah suicide bomber blew up a car bomb carrying about 300 kilos (660 pounds) of TNT**. The explosion led to the collapse of a considerable portion of the building's façade. **The blast killed 29 Israelis and Argentines and wounded about 250 people**. Serious damage was also done to buildings and vehicles in the immediate area.

► An "organization" calling itself "the Islamic Jihad" (the name of a fictitious organization used by Hezbollah) claimed responsibility for the attack. It claimed the attack was in retaliation for the IDF's killing of Hezbollah leader Sheikh Abbas Mousawi (he was killed in a targeted attack in February 1992, about a month before the suicide bombing attack in Buenos Aires).



The Israeli embassy building after the attack
(tags.walla.co.il).

► In May 1999, after Argentina had conducted an investigation, the Argentine Supreme Court accused Hezbollah of the attack on the Israeli embassy and issued an arrest warrant for Imad

Mughnieh, at the time the commander of Hamas's military wing (who died in Damascus in 2008).

The bombing of the Jewish community center (the AMIA building) in Buenos Aires (1994)

► On the morning of July 18, 1994, there was an explosion at the Jewish Community Center (the AMIA building) in Buenos Aires. **The blast killed 85 people in or near the building, and wounded more than 300.** A large part of the building's façade collapsed and nearby structures were damaged. Investigation revealed that **a car bomb had been detonated, driven by a Hezbollah suicide bomber** (the same modus operandi used in the bombing of the Israeli embassy). The vehicle was estimated to have been carrying about **400 kilograms (880 pounds) of explosives.** Because of the extensive damage done to the structure of the building, the removal of the bodes took several weeks.



Right: The façade of the AMIA building after the blast. Left: Clearing the rubble.

The murder of Argentine Special Prosecutor Alberto Nisman

► On October 25, 2006, Special Prosecutor Alberto Nisman and Prosecutor Marcelo Martínez Burgos presented the findings of the investigation of his team. The report was more than 800 pages long, and its highlights were presented at a press conference. It **unequivocally determined that the decision to bomb the building had been made by the Iranian regime's leadership and that Iran's proxy Hezbollah had been charged with carrying it out.**

► On **January 18, 2015**, Alberto Nisman was found in his home with a bullet in his head. He was apparently murdered because of his stubborn rejection of attempts made by the Argentine administration to whitewash Iran's responsibility for the two terrorist attacks in

Buenos Aires. On **January 14, 2015**, four days before his death, he published a 300-page report that also included SIGINT. It detailed his accusations against the Argentine president and foreign minister at the time. It said that close advisors of both officials had opened a secret channel with Iran for a deal that would normalize relations between the two countries. **As part of the deal, Argentina was supposed to retract the request for INTERPOL red flags against the senior Iranian officials.** In return, **Argentina would receive economic incentives**, including the import of oil from Iran in exchange for the export of its wheat.

Alberto Nisman was supposed to participate in a closed-door hearing at the Argentine congress on **January 19, 2015** (the day after he died). It would have dealt with his accusations against Argentine President Christina Fernandez de Kirchner and Foreign Minister Hector Timmerman for **attempting to reach an agreement with Iran which would take Iran's involvement in the terrorist attacks off the agenda in return for civilian-economic advantages.**



Special Prosecutor Alberto Nisman

Appendix B

Designating Hezbollah as a terrorist organization – Overview

► As part of the war on terrorism and terrorism-funding, governments received the authority to designate organization, bodies and individuals as terrorists. Once so designated, all the assets belonging to the terrorist organization are confiscated by the government. Individual operatives designated as terrorists or terrorism sponsors can be tried and sentenced to prison terms. Hezbollah was designated as a terrorist-criminal organization by several countries, led by the United States. **However, various European countries still have not changed their mistaken distinction between Hezbollah's civilian and military wings.** That can make it difficult for them to take practical measures against Hezbollah.

► In the case of Hezbollah, **the distinction between its civilian and military wings is artificial and in reality does not exist.** In effect, **the two wings are integrated and Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah heads both.** They interact with one another, in that Hezbollah's military might strengthens its civilian power in the internal Lebanese arena, while its civilian and social activities are exploited to strengthen its military-terrorist infrastructure. In fact, in the past **senior Hezbollah figures publicly admitted that it was impossible to distinguish between the organization's civilian and military wings.**⁴

So far, all Hezbollah, both its civilian and military wings, has been outlawed by the United States, Britain, Canada, Holland, and now Argentina. The United States has also designated it as a leading international criminal organization.⁵ On the other hand, the EU, including France and Germany, still maintain the mistaken distinction between Hezbollah's military and civilian wings, leaving an opening for Hezbollah operatives to continue operating in those countries.

The United States

► The United States designated **Hezbollah as one body**, a terrorist organization responsible for more than 300 American deaths, 200 of them Marines killed in a Hezbollah attack in Lebanon in 1983 (American Department of Justice website). Since then America has modified

⁴ For further information, see the March 4, 2019 bulletin, "Reactions to Britain's decision to ban Hezbollah."

⁵ For further information, see the November 4, 2018 bulletin, "The United States recently designated Hezbollah as one of the five leading transnational criminal groups and approved bills intensifying the sanctions imposed on Hezbollah and on those supporting it."

the designation to include a list of groups and individuals associated with Hezbollah. In August 2012 the United States imposed economic sanctions on Hezbollah and froze its assets because of its support for the Assad regime in Syria (Department of Justice website). With the current administration's change in policy towards Iran, on October 11, 2018, Congress passed two bills broadening the scope of the sanctions on Hezbollah and supporting the 2015 bill.

► In October 2018 the American administration passed a series of laws **against Hezbollah and anyone who supported it**. The proposed bills received broad bipartisan support in both Houses of Congress and were signed by the president. **They gave American law-enforcement agencies improved tools in their struggle against Hezbollah and the war on international crime, in which Hezbollah is involved**. Moreover, **they express the American government's deep commitment to prioritize the struggle against Hezbollah as part of its overall campaign against Iran**.

► The main measures were the following:

◆ **Two laws that broadened the sanctions on Iran** (October 11, 2018): One extends the economic and financial sanctions of the 2015 law regarding Hezbollah and anyone who supports it and its international criminal activities (individuals, companies, government agencies). The other **imposes sanctions on Hezbollah and Hamas operatives who use human shields**, and on their facilitators (senior officials, institutions and states).

◆ **Including Hezbollah in the list of the five leading international criminal organizations and the appointing of a task force to deal with them** (October 15, 2018): The American secretary of justice announced the inclusion of Hezbollah in the list of the five leading international criminal organizations. **The other four were drug and crime cartels** whose activity is based in Latin America. To conduct the campaign against them, **a task force was appointed, headed by the deputy attorney general** and including prosecutors and experts with experience in the war on drugs, terrorism, organized crime and money laundering.



The American secretary of justice holds a press conference to report on the five leading international criminal organizations, one of which is Hezbollah (Justice Department website, October 16, 2019).

Canada

► Canada outlawed **all Hezbollah** on October 12, 2002, without making a distinction between its civilian and military wings (Canadian government website).

The EU

► On July 22, 2013, the EU's council of foreign affairs voted unanimously **to add Hezbollah's military wing to its list of terrorist organizations**. The decision would be reexamined every six months (official announcement A395/13 of the EU council of foreign affairs, July 22, 2013). According to media, the significance of the decision was that it would prevent the 28 EU member states and the governments from transferring funds to Hezbollah, the organization's assets would be frozen and Hezbollah operatives could not move freely in Europe. However, **the announcement did not include Hezbollah's civilian wing**.

Britain

► Outlawing Hezbollah in Britain was done in stages. Since 2001 Hezbollah's military wing has been designated by Britain as a terrorist organization. Its external security unit was designated as a terrorist organization in 2008. **On March 1, 2019, both houses of Parliament agreed on a bill to recognize both wings of Hezbollah as terrorist organizations**. Thus Hezbollah's civilian wing and its members who are ministers and members of the Lebanese parliament are terrorists. Britain's minister of internal security and other ministers explained that there were difficulties in distinguishing between the organization's civilian and military wings, and **therefore the entire organization had been designated as a terrorist organization** (British government website, and Sajid Javidi's Twitter account, February 25, 2019).



**Tweet from Sajid Javid, British minister of the interior,
February 25, 2019.**

France

► **France outlawed only Hezbollah's military wing.** In response to Britain's outlawing the entire organization, French President Emanuel Macron, said France would not designate the civilian wing as a terrorist organization because France refused to include members of the Lebanese government on list of terrorists.

Germany

► Germany does not have its own list of designated terrorist organizations and embraces the EU list. On January 4, 2005, after a Hezbollah operative was deported from Germany, a court in Dusseldorf determined that Hezbollah leads its struggle [sic] against Israel "**with a brutal disregard for human life.**"

Holland

► Holland designated Hezbollah as one body as a terrorist organization.

The Arab states

► **Various inter-Arab forums, most of the Arab states designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization without distinction between its military and civilian wings.** On November 19, 2017, the Arab League held an emergency meeting of its foreign ministers in Cairo at the request of Saudi Arabia. It was held to discuss Iran and its proxies' meddling in the internal affairs of the Arab states. The summary announcement of the meeting strongly condemned Iran and its proxy the "Lebanese Hezbollah terrorist organization."

► The Arab League summary announcement included Article Nine, which said, "**...holding the Lebanese Hezbollah terrorist organization – which participates in the Lebanese**

government – responsible for supporting terrorism and terrorist groups in Arab states with advanced weapons and ballistic missiles. Hezbollah must stop disseminating extremism, sectarianism, and its meddling in the internal affairs of states, and stop sponsoring terrorism and terrorists in the [Middle East]."



**Emergency meeting of the Arab League foreign ministers in Cairo
(Arab League YouTube channel, November 20, 2017).**

Appendix C

ITIC Publications about Iranian and Hezbollah activity in Argentina and Latin America in general

- ▶ **August 12, 2018** – "Hezbollah's Tri Border Area terror finance comes under fire at last," by Emanuele Ottolenghi
- ▶ **January 22, 2015** – "The Cover-Up of Iran's Responsibility for Terrorist Attacks on Argentine Soil: Alberto Nisman, Federal Prosecutor Who Accused Argentina's President of Conspiring to Sabotage Inquiry Linking Bombings at Israeli Embassy and the AMIA Building to Iran, Found Dead "
- ▶ **February 18, 2013** – "Argentina and Iran have agreed to hold a joint investigation of the terrorist attack on the Jewish Community Center (AMIA) building in Buenos Aires in 1994. They have done so even though the formal investigation conducted by the Argentinian authorities clearly indicated Iran and Hezbollah's culpability."
- ▶ **December 18, 2012** – "Hezbollah: Portrait of a Terrorist Organization," Appendix II, pages 92-97.
- ▶ **April 18, 2012** – "Latin America as an Arena for Iran and Hezbollah's Terrorist, Subversive and Criminal Activities"
- ▶ **August 30, 2009** – "The report issued by the Argentinean Attorney General regarding the suicide bombing attack at the AMIA building in Buenos Aires in 1994 in which Ahmad Vahidi, Iran's new designated defense minister, played a central role"
- ▶ **August 26, 2009** – "Ahmad Vahidi, wanted by Interpol for participation in the 1994 terrorist attack in Buenos Aires, is the new designated defense minister of Iran (still unratified by the Parliament). His nomination signals the increasing strength of the Revolutionary Guards and Ahmadinejad's intention to continue defying the West and subverting the Middle East."
- ▶ **April 19, 2009** – "Iran increases its civilian and economic presence in Latin America, defying the United States and attempting to undermine American hegemony. It also foments radical Shi'ite Islamization and exports Iran's revolutionary ideology, using Hezbollah to establish intelligence, terrorism and crime networks, liable to be exploited against the United States and Israel."
- ▶ **November 14, 2007** – "Iran as a terrorism-sponsoring state: Interpol rejected Iran's appeal and issued international arrest warrants for five senior Iranians (and one senior Hezbollah

operative) who were involved in bombing the Jewish Community Center in Argentina (AMIA) in Buenos Aires in 1994."

► **March 28, 2007** – "Following an appeal from the Argentinean Attorney General, Interpol issued international extradition warrants for five senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah operative. The charge was involvement in the suicide bombing attack of the Jewish community center building (AMIA) in Argentina in 1994."

► **November 14, 2006** – "Argentina accuses Iran of responsibility for the Hezbollah terrorist attack which destroyed Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, 1994. The Argentinean Attorney General's office announced it had found Iran responsible for the terrorist attack and an Argentinean judge issued arrest warrants for seven senior Iranians and one senior Hezbollah member."