



Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria May 1 – 14, 2022

Overview

► Hezbollah's preparations for election day were the following: a particular effort was made to raise voter turnout. The first phase of the campaign concentrated on an appeal to the minds of the Lebanese, stressing Hezbollah's contribution to its supporters and to Lebanese in general in fields such as health, education and the economy. During the last two weeks of the campaign the focus was on the hearts of the Lebanese, creating a sense of impending danger and the need for closing ranks around the organization, encouraging voter turnout for the sake of the shaheeds, the wounded and the families of the shaheeds, and as an expression of personal loyalty to Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah. Shi'ite clerics also praised voting for the organization.

► **Hassan Nasrallah** gave three propaganda speeches at rallies, one in south Lebanon, one in the Dahia and one in the Beqa'a Valley. He stressed that Hezbollah would not disarm and threatened to disrupt the search for natural gas off the coast of Israel. If Israel prevented Lebanon from searching for gas off its own coasts, said Hezbollah would be on high alert throughout Israel's current military exercise, and discussed the special relations between Hezbollah and the residents of the Beqa'a Valley.

► The two first stages of Lebanon's elections have been completed, the ballots of Lebanese living abroad and of the polling station workers have been cast. General elections were held on Sunday, May 15, 2022.

► Hezbollah's civilian institutions held various functions to mark World Jerusalem Day and the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan.¹

► Hezbollah held four funerals: for a military wing operative killed in Syria in 2016 and three operatives of its civilian network.

► Nakba Day was marked in the Palestinian refugee camps with a number of "cultural events" and events condemning the death of al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh.

¹ For further information, see the May 12, 2022 bulletin, "Iranian-Sponsored World Jerusalem Day: A display of anti-Israeli anti-United States propaganda and calls for their destruction."

- ▶ Syrian regime opponents reported an increase in Hezbollah economic and religious activity in the Syrian desert and south. There were also reports of clashes between Iranian and Russian militias in various regions, represented as Iranian attempts to exploit Russia's preoccupation with its involvement in Ukraine to expand Iranian influence in Syria.
- ▶ Syrian regime opponents also reported the establishment of a new Iranian militia called the Battalions of the Imam, which will operate mainly in southern Syria near the Israeli border.
- ▶ The Syrian ministry of defense announced the death of ten Syrian soldiers and the wounding of nine others in a terrorist attack on a bus on the western outskirts of Aleppo.

Hezbollah and Lebanon

- ▶ Hezbollah's election day included the publication of notices relating to the electoral process: the identification of counterfeit ballots, the need for correctly marking the chosen list and candidate, the significance of a white ballot, how to avoid having a ballot disqualified, an explanation of the voting system and how votes are counted, etc. (Hezbollah voting system Twitter account, May 1-11, 2022). According to reports from Hezbollah opponents, the organization recruited 18,000 residents of south Lebanon to serve as its representatives at the polls and tour the towns and villages on election day, 6,000 from each of three election districts in south Lebanon. According to the sources, every representative will receive between two and three million Lebanese pounds (about \$1,326-\$1,990), and in addition to the financial incentive, help with food and fuel payments (Janoubia website, May 1, 2022).
- ▶ Hassan Fadlallah, Hussein al-Hajj Hassan, Ihab Hamada, Mohammad Raad (the faction chairman) and other members of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc (i.e., Hezbollah representatives in the Lebanese parliament) gave speeches at various events in preparation for the parliamentary elections. They stressed the fight against corruption, the importance of voting in the face of American and Israeli efforts to damage Hezbollah in internal Lebanese politics, the strong ties between Hezbollah and its supporters and the balance of deterrence between Hezbollah and Israel (al-Ahed News website and the Hezbollah campaign Twitter account, May 2-13, 2022).
- ▶ Hezbollah's election campaign distributed flyers with the slogan, "Voting is your responsibility," with picture of Hezbollah shaheeds (Gharib al-Midani's Facebook page, May 5, 2022). Subsequently, Hezbollah activists and supporters posted similar messages to the

social networks with the hashtag, #my_vote_a_sign-of_loyalty_to_[shaheed] blood. Mohammad Samaha, an activist from the al-Amana chain of gas stations owned by the Martyrs' Foundation, dedicated his vote to the "hacked-off limbs of our boys and their eyes which lost their light as they defended me and my family, my honor and my land." Mahatadi Bahamed, a wounded Hezbollah operative, dedicated his vote to his slain and wounded friends, and those who were taken prisoner while fighting in Syria (Twitter accounts of Mohammad Samaha and Mahatadi Bahamed, May 6, 2022). The Foundation for the Wounded² issued a series of statements from wounded operatives in support of voting for Hezbollah (Foundation for the Wounded Facebook page, May 8-13, 2022). In comparison, during the 2018 campaign Hezbollah encouraged its supporters to post selfies to the social networks holding pictures of shaheeds with the hashtag, #My_vote. In ITIC assessment, the objective of linking a vote for Hezbollah candidates to the shaheeds is to raise the percentage of supporters who will go to vote, representing a vote as fulfilling the desire of the shaheeds and sometimes voting in their names. It is an appeal to emotion, after most of the campaign concentrated on Hezbollah's achievements and its support for its followers. According to the al-Nashra news agency, the main objective of Hezbollah and Amal's election campaign is to increase the number of votes cast for their joint slate in comparison with the number they received in the 2018 elections, to show the extent of popular support for them and not specifically to gain more seats (al-Nashra news agency, May 7, 2022).

► Hezbollah activists and supporters on the social networks held a campaign with the hashtag, #I_will_give_my_vote, in which each social network user explained why he would vote for Hezbollah. The reasons included to deter the enemy, to defend the Lebanese and, for example, enable them to work their lands along the border "to the last meter" (Twitter account of Ali Shoeib, May 7, 2022), or because Hezbollah defended the Lebanese from the Israeli "occupation" and from the danger of a Salafist takeover (Fatma Matar's Twitter account, May 7, 2022).

► In the week before the elections Hezbollah held a series of election rallies in Tyre and Nabatieh in south Lebanon, the Shi'ite Dahia suburb of Beirut, and Baalbek, Mashghara and Rayak in the Beqa'a Valley. Speeches recorded by Hassan Nasrallah were played in which he stressed the following (Twitter account of the Resistance Forum, May 9-13, 2022):

² For further information, see the April 19, 2019 bulletin, "Hezbollah's Foundation for the Wounded: purpose, modus operandi and funding methods."

- ◆ Hezbollah's opponents will never make the organization disarm. The people who demand that Hezbollah disarm are the same ones who in the past claimed Israel was not a threat and would not attack Lebanon, that is, people who are either ignorant or who ignore reality. They are the same people who prevent the holding of a genuine discussion of a strategy for Lebanon's defense. Despite the fact that a poll held before the elections indicated that the Lebanese people's main concerns were the economy and making a living, Hezbollah's opponents stubbornly insist on disarmament. Lebanon's economic situation requires a recovery plan and Hezbollah intends to raise the issue at a serious discussion in parliament.
- ◆ Nasrallah compared the elections politically to the "war in July" [the First Lebanon War], saying it had to be won. He appealed to the people attending the rally, calling them "most noble," the same way he began his "victory speech" at the end of the First Lebanon War. He also said that what Hezbollah supporters would do on election day was "political resistance" which would make it possible for military resistance to continue.



Social media illustration in the spirit of Nasrallah's speeches: the voter's finger (in Lebanon ballots are marked with voters' fingerprints) wears a helmet and dog tag (Gharib the Midan's Facebook page, May 8, 2022)

- ◆ Regarding the search for natural gas off the coast of Lebanon, he claimed that thanks to Hezbollah, there was an "equation" in place, so that if Israel prevented Lebanon from realizing its rights to search for gas, Hezbollah would issue a threat and then no company in the world would dare operate in the region, and so Israel would also be prevented from realizing its rights. He claimed Lebanon was actually a rich country, but its treasure was in the sea and it was determined not to let Eastern

countries [i.e., Iraq, Iran, Russia, China] help it, out of concern over the United States' reaction.

- ◆ Regarding the IDF's military exercise, he said Hezbollah was on high alert and had warned Israel that if any mistake was made towards Lebanon, Hezbollah would not hesitate to deal with it.

- ◆ Despite Lebanon's unique sectarian composition, because of which the country was always in a sensitive, fragile position, it was absolutely forbidden to enter into a civil war. Instead, problems and faults had to be dealt with along sectarian lines.

- ◆ Regarding the death of **al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh** in the Jenin refugee camp, he blamed the Arab rulers who had normalized relations with Israel.

- ◆ In the speech given in the Beqa'a Valley, Nasrallah praised the local residents, claiming that despite Israeli bombing over the years, they had not expelled Hezbollah operatives from their towns and regions, and compared the situation to today, which he called a "political, media, economic and financial bomb." In addition, he mentioned the effort invested by Hezbollah in defending the Syrian-Lebanese borders during the Syrian Civil War, which prevented the Salafist organizations from attacking the local Christians and gave them a choice: to vote for "the gun and the hand that raised it to fight in the Beqa'a Valley" or "the hand that gave the gun to those who would kill you and enslave your women." He also mentioned the contribution of the residents of the Beqa'a Valley to Hezbollah in all the battles throughout all the years, and their many shaheeds.³

- ◆ Nasrallah promised to promote the construction of the Beirut-Damascus tunnel, which will make it easier to travel between Beirut and the Beqa'a Valley and elaborated on the efforts already made by **Ali Hamia, the minister of public works**.

³ For further information, see the February 23, 2019 bulletin, "Estimate of Hezbollah's fatalities during the Syrian civil war and the conclusions arising from the analysis of their identity."



**Hezbollah election rallies in south Lebanon in Tyre and Nabatieh on May 9, 2022
(Twitter account of Ali Shoeib, May 9, 2022)**

► After Nasrallah's speech in the Dahia a motorcycle convoy rode around the streets waving Hezbollah flags to show the support of the tribes in the Beqa'a Valley. Stickers were distributed in the Dahia with the old Hezbollah logo reading "The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon" instead of "The Islamic resistance in Lebanon" (Twitter accounts of Mahatadi Bahamed and Hussein Khazem, May 9-10, 2022). The old logo stresses the connection between Hezbollah and Iran, and represents it as a branch of the Islamic Revolution.



Stickers with the old Hezbollah logo, reading "The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon," distributed in the Dahia for election day, May 10 (Mahatadi Bahamed's Twitter account, May 10, 2022)

► Senior Shi'ite clerics publicly expressed opinions considered quasi-religious injunctions, regarding casting votes for Hezbollah and Amal in the upcoming elections. For example:

- ◆ The senior **Shi'ite Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Qablan** called the elections "a national and moral duty," claiming that "someone who does not vote is like someone who has not performed the greatest religious duty." He declared it that "according to religious law forbidden it is to hesitate. Turning one's back on the elections is contrary to religious

law. Casting a white ballot [a blank ballot] is contrary to religious law" (Lebanon24 website, May 5, 2022).

◆ **Ibrahim Amin al-Sayid, chairman of Hezbollah's political council**, claimed the elections were "an opportunity to worship" and compared voting to "praying in a mosque" (Lebanon24 website, May 5, 2022).

◆ **Sheikh Ahmed Jumaa**, whose Twitter account profile picture is Hezbollah's election slogan, published a short explanation of the possible types of Shi'ite religious law: duty, desirable, allowed, undesirable, forbidden. He claimed that choosing the resistance slate was advantageous and should not be ignored, and therefore it was both a religious and rational duty (Sheikh Ahmed Jumaa's Twitter account, May 6, 2022).

◆ In his Friday sermon **Sheikh Ali Damoush, deputy chairman of Hezbollah's Executive Council**, said remaining neutral, hesitating and not voting for the option of resistance were the same as abandoning the resistance, which was the most noble, generous and loyal in Lebanon's history. Not voting, he said, was a lack of loyalty to Lebanon's victims and the blood of the shaheeds, and would allow Lebanon's enemies to realize their plans (al-Ahed news website, May 13, 2022).

◆ **Sheikh Hassan al-Baghdadi, a member of Hezbollah's Executive Council**, said that participation in the parliamentary elections was a religious duty because it dealt a strong blow to the corrupt and their enablers, who were plotting against the country (al-Alam TV website, May 14, 2022).

► In ITIC assessment, the special status of Shi'ite clerics among Hezbollah supporters ("resistance society") can perhaps be compared to that of the shaheeds,⁴ and was what caused Hezbollah to use their statements to encourage votes for the Shi'ite slate.

► **Abd al-Salam Musa, general information coordinator of the Future Movement**, claimed that leaders and certain important people were of the opinion that not voting would lead to putting the reins of power in Lebanon into the hands of Hezbollah. The Future Movement, on the other hand, was of the opinion that voting in the elections would give Hezbollah the legitimacy it had been looking for for years. Therefore the Future Movement adhered to its decision that Sa'ad al-Hariri had to freeze political activity (al-Nashra news agency, May 2,

⁴ According to Wadhah Sharara, *The State of Hezbollah: Lebanon as an Islamic Society (Arabic)*, pages 260, 288.

2022). The office of **Lebanese parliament member Bahia al-Hariri** said in a statement that it did not support any candidate, neither covertly nor overtly (al-Ahed news website, May 12, 2022).



Picture by Mohammad Nur al-Din published as part of Hezbollah's election campaign. A vote for Hezbollah's campaign slogan, "We continue to defend and build," a continuation of the 2018 campaign slogan, "We defend and build," the fingers squashing Hezbollah's Lebanese and regional enemies: the United States (Dorothy Shea, the American Ambassador to Lebanon), Israel (a soldier with a Magen David on his helmet) and the Gulf States (an Arab in traditional dress) (Maha Alouli's Twitter account, May 6, 2022)

► The Martyrs' Foundation⁵ issued a video of parents and children of Hezbollah shaheeds showing support for the organization as the elections approached, expressing their personal loyalty to the Hassan Nasrallah. They represented a vote for Hezbollah as a continuation of the path of the shaheeds and their family, and paying their debt to them (Martyrs' Foundation Twitter account, May 10 and 13, 2022; al-Ahed news website, May 12, 2022; Resistance Forum and Hezbollah election campaign Twitter accounts, May 14, 2022). In ITIC assessment, Hezbollah wants to exploit the special status of the families of shaheeds in "resistance society" to raise the percentage of votes cast and to ensure broad support.

⁵ For further information, see the March 14, 2019 bulletin, "Hezbollah's Martyrs Foundation: purpose, mode of operation and funding methods."



The mother of a shaheed participates in the Hezbollah election rally in the Beqa'a Valley carrying a picture of her son and his shoe (Mahatadi Bahamed's Twitter account, May 13, 2022). Objects belonging to shaheeds have a special status in "resistance" society, and are treated as almost sacred

► **Overall, 60% of the Lebanese living overseas** (in Iran and nine Arab states) voted in the first round of elections. The highest voter turnout was in Syria with 84%, followed by Iran with 74%, Qatar with 66% and Saudi Arabia with 49%. On May 8, 2022, the polls opened in 48 additional countries around the world (al-Alam TV website, May 7-8, 2022).

► Given the rate of voting abroad, Mohammad Samaha said that Lebanese who support Hezbollah and live abroad went to vote in secret or did not vote, fearing they would be abducted or expelled or subject to sanctions. He claimed that every Shi'ite in "exile" who supported Hezbollah, particularly those who live in the Gulf States and countries which consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization, was regarded as a suicide bomber when he went to vote (Mohammad Samaha's terrorist, May 8, 2022).

► In ITIC assessment, he was attempting to create a sensation of personal danger to unite Hezbollah supporters abroad and encourage them to vote. The rate of voting among polling station employees, who voted a day or two before the general elections, was 84%, with the highest percentage in the al-Batran region, 96%, and the lowest in Bint Jbeil, 68% (al-Alam TV website, May 13, 2022).

► **Mohammad Raad, chairman of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc**, recently met with an EU delegation for the oversight of the elections in Lebanon. They discussed internal Lebanese developments, stressing that Hezbollah was determined to hold the elections, because in Hezbollah's perspective it was preferable to a political vacuum or an artificial extension of the term of the current government (al-Akhbar, May 12, 2022).

► Hezbollah supporters on the social networks expressed satisfaction with the May 5, 2022 terrorist attack in the central Israeli city of Elad, and tied it to Hezbollah's election campaign.

For example:

◆ "My vote goes for the option of the axe, not the option of normalization" (J. Had's Twitter account, May 5, 2022).

◆ "A knife stab in the right place is more successful than a thousand rockets" ("The radical's" Twitter account, May 5, 2022).

◆ "There are already four dead at the hands of the brothers of the [Lebanese] forces and the phalanges [the Maronite Lebanese parties, Hezbollah's rivals] in the settlement of Elad (Ibrahim6205's Twitter account, May 5, 2022).

◆ "There is no point in publishing the names and pictures of the men the occupation claims carried out the action in Elad at the current time, so we at least don't participate in Zionist propaganda and encourage their arrest, and so that we act, even in a minimal way, against the occupation's decision to publish information about them" (Yunes al-Zatari's Twitter account, May 6, 2022).

◆ [Next to a video of the widow of one of the Israeli civilians killed in Elad] "Soon the mothers in the 'Lebanese forces,' especially those who carried out the al-Tayouneh slaughter [Hezbollah and Amal operatives shot at by Christians in Beirut in October 2021]" (Sakatrama's Twitter account, May 6, 2022).

► The Sons of Harqub organization expressed surprise that the issue of the occupation of the Shebaa Farms and other Lebanese territory were not part of the election (Twitter account of Ali Shoeib, May 4, 2022).

► On May 1, 2022, Hezbollah's Sports Mobilization⁶ provided the finale for World Jerusalem Day activities in and around Sidon with a friendship soccer game between the Sidon Sports Club and the Mieh Mieh refugee camp Sports Club. The game was attended by Sheikh Hatem al-'Ilani, the imam of the al-Ghafran mosque in Sidon, Sheikh Ziyad Dhaher, in charge of the region for Hezbollah, Hajj Samir Nasser, senior figure in sports in Lebanon, Ali al-Zino, regarding for the Ayn al-Hilweh Hezbollah branch, and senior Fatah figures in the Sidon area. The Sports Mobilization also held other activities to end World Jerusalem Day, including a ceremony presenting belts at the al-Baqer karate club, a soccer tournament in the town of

⁶ For further information, see the July 15, 2019 bulletin, "Sports in the service of terrorism: Hezbollah's Sports Mobilization conducts extensive sports activity, using it for indoctrinating and preparing youth to join the ranks of Hezbollah."

Na'afoul in south Lebanon and a ping-pong championship for the Sidon area (al-Ahed news website, May 1, 2022).

► The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association⁷ organized a series of events for World Jerusalem Day on the Lebanese-Israeli border and at various locations in south Lebanon, where Palestinian flags were waved, Israel symbols were destroyed and people vowed loyalty to Khamenei and Nasrallah (al-Ahed news website, May 2, 2022).



Imam al-Mahdi scouts salute the Palestinian flag and walk on the Israeli flag during World Jerusalem Day events (Facebook page of the al-Mahdi Scouts in the al-Hajir region, May 2, 2022)

► The Hezbollah women's organizations⁸ in south Lebanon continued marking Ramadan with various activities, including a World Jerusalem Day ceremony in Sarafand, a rally in solidarity with "Palestine" in Dir al-Zahrani, the distribution of [new] clothing to break the fast in Zawtar al-Gharbia (Facebook page of the women's organizations in south Lebanon, May 1, 2022).

► In the south Lebanon town of Ayta al-Jabal a funeral was held for "shaheed" **Abbas Hussein Murthada**, a Hezbollah operative killed in battle in the suburbs of southern Aleppo in 2016 whose burial site was unknown. Hezbollah recently managed to retrieve his body (Martyrs' Foundation website, May 1, 2022).

⁷ For further information, see the June 20, 2019 bulletin, "The Imam Al Mahdi Scouts Association: Hezbollah's youth movement which indoctrinates youth with Iranian radical Shiite Islam and serves as a source of youngsters who join Hezbollah."

⁸ For further information, see the August 11, 2019 bulletin, "Hezbollah's Women's Organizations Unit."



**The funeral held in Ayta al-Jabal for Abbas Hussein Murthada
(Martyrs' Foundation website, May 1, 2022)**

- ▶ The Jihad al-Bina Association⁹ held workshops for the manufacture of candy to celebrate the end of the Ramadan fast, working in collaboration with Imam al-Mahdi scouts. The candy was distributed to needy families (Jihad al-Bina Association Telegram channel, May 2, 2022).
- ▶ The "Help one another" mutual aid network¹⁰ of Hezbollah supporters declared it was extending its activities. It began with a drive for donations of food, clothing and medicines at the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, expanding its activity to gathering medicines and distributing them to the needy. It now expects to begin connecting young people who need work with employers who need workers. According to Afif Shuman, who heads the network, the activity will begin with the families registered as receiving support from the network and if a suitable form of employment is found for a family member, the family will be removed from the list because it will be able to support itself (Afif Shuman's Twitter account, May 3, 2022).
- ▶ The town of Tamnine al-Tahta in the Beqa'a Valley held a funeral for **journalist Mahmoud Raya**. In information relating to the funeral, Raya was called "a martyr to jihad and the resistance," and "a jihad fighter journalist," and called an investigative reporter for Chinese and international matters. He was buried in a formal Hezbollah ceremony, wrapped for burial in a Hezbollah flag with al-Mahdi scouts and senior Hezbollah figures in attendance. The electronic and information unit of Hezbollah's combat information¹¹ issued a mourning notice (al-Ahed news website, May 5, 2022).

⁹ For further information, see the June 12, 2019 bulletin, "Jihad al-Bina Association in Lebanon: A Hezbollah social foundation engaged in construction and social projects among the Shiite community, being a major component in Hezbollah's civilian infrastructure."

¹⁰ For further information, see the April 2, 2020 bulletin, "Hezbollah's coping with COVID-19: A test case of the conduct of the mini-state established by Hezbollah in Lebanon."

¹¹ For further information, see the September 1, 2019 bulletin, "Hezbollah's Media Empire."

► **Dr. Abbas al-Hajj Hassan, the Lebanese minister of agriculture**, sponsored a forestation project in the Arab Salim nature preserve in south Lebanon. The opening ceremony was attended by Qassem Hassan, the director of the Jihad Construction Association in south Lebanon (al-Ahed news website, May 7, 2022).

► Hezbollah issued a condemnation of the terrorist attacks against an Egyptian army unit in the Sinai Peninsula. Hezbollah expressed solidarity with the people of Egypt, and claimed that the terrorist groups were attacking Egypt's stability and security to distract attention from the Zionist terrorism in "Palestine" and to renew a regional civil war (al-Ahed news website, May 8, 2022).

► On **May 9, 2022**, the new branch of the al-Nur Warehouse¹² supermarket chain was set to open in Beirut. According to the advertisements it was the chain's largest store and in addition to food would have a drugstore with Iranian medicine and an electrical appliance and plumbing departments, (Abbas Khilf's Twitter account, May 8, 2022). It can be assumed the date was not random but rather coordinated to be close to the date of the elections.

► Hezbollah's information unit issued a mourning notice for al-Jazeera reporter **Shireen Abu Akleh** in the Jenin refugee camp on May 11, 2022. It referred to her as the "reporter of the resistance" and she was praised for her coverage of the "crimes of the Zionist enemy against her people." The notice condemned "the Israeli occupation's aggression against journalists," and demanded international media organizations and the UN condemn Israel and prevent it from attacking media personnel (Hezbollah's information unit, May 11, 2022).

► A funeral was held in the village of Younine in the Beqa'a Valley for Hajj Majed Zagheib, the director of the al-Emdad Center for Treatment and Rehabilitation in Baalbek, who died of cancer. The notice for the funeral referred to him as "a casualty of jihad and care-giving activity, a jihad fighter" (al-Ahed news website, May 12, 2022). The use of such terms is another clear indication that for Hezbollah the distinction between civilian and military activity is considered artificial, because in reality even a person like Zagheib, whose activities were completely civilian, still received military descriptions.

► The United States Attorney of the Southern District of New York [City] announced the conviction of Alexei Saab, aka Ali Hassan Saab, Alex Saab and Rachid, for "receiving military-type training from a designated foreign terrorist organization, Hizballah, marriage fraud

¹² For further information, see the January 4, 2021 bulletin, "Hezbollah's response to the economic crisis in Lebanon."

conspiracy, and making false statements... In approximately 1999, [he] attended his first Hizballah training...[and in 2000] entered the United States" (United States Department of Justice website, May 11, 2022). The attorney general of Kuwait handed down an indictment for 11 Kuwaiti citizens and seven foreigners operating as money changers, in a case related to funding Hezbollah (al-Nashra new agency, May 12, 2022).

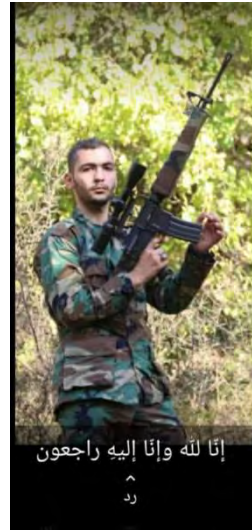
► On **May 13, 2022**, the sixth anniversary of the death of the shaheed Mustafa Badr al-Din, his portrait was painted on the wall along the border between Israel and Lebanon, near Metulla. There was an inscription reading, "The resistance is the legitimate right of all people whose land has been occupied" ("The radical's" Twitter account, May 13, 2022).



Portrait of shaheed Mustafa Badr al-Din painted on the wall along the border between Israel and Lebanon, near Metulla

► On **May 13, 2022**, the death of **Ali Mahmoud Karim** was announced, a Hezbollah operative who died after being mortally wounded (Janoub24 website, May 13, 2022). Although he was described in the mourning notice as a "commander in the scouts, he received the titles "the jihad fighting brother," "a casualty of knowledge and jihad," and "a shaheed of the jihad and the resistance." A picture was posted of him in military uniform carrying a sniper rifle (Hezbollah's Education¹³ Mobilization website, May 13, 2022). The use of such terms is another clear indication that for Hezbollah the distinction between civilian and military activity is considered artificial, because in reality even a person like Karim, whose activities were completely civilian, still received military descriptions.

¹³ For further information, see the July 2, 2019 bulletin Hezbollah's "Education Mobilization: An institution engaged in the indoctrination of Shiite students in Lebanon's state and private educational systems, in preparation for their joining Hezbollah upon graduation."



Right: Ali Mahmoud Karim, called a "commander in the scouts," armed and in uniform, (Zazu's Twitter account, May 13, 2022). Left: Ali Mahmoud Karim in his Imam al-Mahdi Scouts' uniform (Facebook page of the al-Mahdi scouts in the al-Hajir region, May 13, 2022)

Palestinians in Lebanon

- On **May 9, 2022**, a Palestinian legacy festival was held for Nakba Day in Khan al-Afranje in Sidon. The festival's theme was "For the love of Palestine." It was organized by the Institute for Palestinian Return and the Institute for the Palestinian Legacy, and it was attended by hundreds of Palestinian refugees and several public figures. There were artistic presentations illustrating "traditional life in Palestine," including stories and songs (Palestinian refugees' portal and Palinfo, May 9, 2022).
- On **May 10, 2022**, dozens of Palestinian refugees gathered in Maroun al-Ras on the Israeli-Lebanese border to mark Nakba Day; their theme was "We will meet in Jerusalem." The event was organized by Intamaa', an international campaign whose objective is to preserve Palestinian identity, in collaboration with the Palestinian Popular Committee Abroad and other institutions (Palestinian refugees' portal, May 11, 2022). In the Palestinian refugee camps of Albas, Mieh-Mieh and Nahar al-Bader there were activities for children and Nakba Day rallies (Palestinian refugees' portal and Palinfo, May 13, 2022).



**Some of the families who gathered for the event in Maroun al-Ras
(Palestinian refugees' portal, May 11, 2022)**

► The PLO leadership in the Beirut area forbade the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to leave the refugee camps on election day from Saturday evening, May 14, till the morning of Monday, May 16, 2022. The leadership also called on the refugees not to participate in gatherings during the above days (Palestinian refugees' portal, May 11, 2022). The popular committees and Palestinian factions in the various refugee camps joined the call and issued instructions not to leave the camps on the stated days (Palestinian refugees' portal, May 14, 2022).

► Rallies to condemn the [alleged] "assassination" of al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh were held on May 11 and 12, 2022, in the Palestinian refugee camps and the PA embassy in Beirut. A rally was held in the Burj al-Shamali refugee camp in Tyre in south Lebanon where dozens of Palestinians lit candles. The rally was attended by representatives of the Palestinian factions and popular committees (Palestinian refugees' portal and Palinfo, May 12, 2022). A symbolic funeral was held for Abu Akleh in the Shatila refugee camp while her funeral was being held in Jerusalem (Palestinian refugees' portal and Palinfo, May 13, 2022).



**A symbolic funeral held for al-Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in the Shatila refugee camp
(Palestinian refugees' portal, May 13, 2022)**

Iranian Activity in Syria

- ▶ According to reports from opponents of the Syrian regime, before the breaking of the Ramadan fast the markets in Deir al-Zor in the Syrian desert were flooded with candy and pastries made in Iran. According to "Syrian channel" sources, since they were smuggled goods their prices were low, which contributed to their widespread sales, even in areas controlled by the Syrian regime and the "democratic Syrian forces" (Syrian channel website, May 1, 2022).
- ▶ Mahruqat, the Syrian Company for the Storage and Distribution of Petroleum Products stopped sending gasoline to the gas stations in the city of Abu Kamal, claiming Iranian forces had taken control of the region's oil fields. The company referred gas station owners to senior Iranian officials in the area to provide them with gasoline (Syrian channel website, May 3, 2022).
- ▶ Lebanese Hezbollah and al-Nujaba forces were redeployed from the regions around Damascus to the outskirts of Homs on direct orders from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). They erected roadblocks on the roads between the regions to block the spread of militias supported by Russia (Thaqa website, May 3, 2022). It was later reported that serious clashes had broken out between the Iranian and Syrian militias in the city of Palmyra near eastern Homs, which ended with the intervention of the Russian forces and the militias of Maher al-Assad (al-Darar al-Shamiya website, May 4, 2022). It was then reported that large Russian army forces and IRGC reinforcements had been sent to the region (orient.net, May 7, 2022).
- ▶ Dozens of Iraqi Shi'ite pilgrims entered Syria on their way to the Ayn Ali shrine in al-Mayadeen near eastern Deir al-Zor. After a visit to the shrine they continued on to Damascus. According to a report, their buses were joined on the road by covered trucks accompanied by vehicles mounted with anti-aircraft guns which went to IRGC military centers in Abu Kamal. According to the report, the pilgrims' entrance was exploited for deliveries of weapons and ammunition (Sy24 website and the website of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, May 5 2022).
- ▶ A new Iranian militia is reportedly being formed in Syria, called the **Battalions of the Imam**. According to the report, the IRGC aspires to increase its influence in Syria, and chose to exploit the fact that Russia was currently preoccupied with the war in Ukraine. The new

militia is being formed in the Syrian desert to avoid being monitored and to hide its real objective, which is to operate in the southern Syrian provinces of Daraa, al-Suwayda and al-Quneitra, **near the border with Israel** under the Syrian flag, and along the strategic Damascus-Homs road, considered the lifeline of the Iranian presence in Syria. Iranian advisor Soleiman al-Abassi was appointed to oversee the formation of the militia, which in effect is being carried out by Lebanese Hezbollah operatives Ziyad Hussein al-Hassan and Sabr al-Khalil. The militia will consist of former operatives of Hezbollah, the al-Nujaba movement and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq from the areas around Homs, al-Raqqa and Deir al-Zor who will undergo a 60-day course of intensive military training before joining. Each militia fighter will receive a salary of 650,000 Syrian pounds (about \$260) and commanders will receive 850,000 Syrian pounds (about \$340), much higher than the salaries in other militias, to attract recruits from the southern districts. Other methods for attracting recruits include a promise not to send them to other fronts or to searches of the Syrian desert. In the meantime, the IRGC are preparing centers in Daraa, al-Suwayda and al-Quneitra for the militia, which will be moved there as soon as they have finished training. So far the new militia has between 50 and 60 recruits who are being trained in operating artillery and machineguns (al-Nahar al-Arabi website, May 8, 2022).

► Al-Jazeera TV quoted the claim of an unofficial Iranian source close to the IRGC, which stated that **Syrian President Assad** visited Tehran¹⁴ for purposes of coordination, following the withdrawal of some of the Russian units from Syria to redeploy them in the war against Ukraine. According to the source, Russia began withdrawing its forces from 30 military positions; they were replaced by Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah operatives (al-Jazeera TV website, May 9, 2022).

► Opponents of the Syrian regime claim that for the past two months Iran has been increasing its strength in various regions in Syria, include in the southern part of the country. They did not specifically refer to increasing its military presence, rather to an increase in its economic activities, such as buying real estate through a network of intermediaries and agents Iran established in the region, and to security activities, such as assassinations, including of operatives and commanders of the 8th Brigade, which is sponsored by Russia and deployed mainly around eastern Daraa (Zaman al-Wasl website, May 12, 2022).

¹⁴ For further information, see "Spotlight on Iran, April 28 – May 12."

►The Syrian ministry of defense announced the death of ten Syrian army soldiers and the wounding of nine others in a terrorist attack on a bus near western Aleppo. Opponents of the Syrian regime claim the attack was carried out by the faction of Ahrar al-Sham which takes its orders from the National Liberation Front (al-Manar website, May 13, 2022). The Twitter account of either a Hezbollah supporter or operative posted a mourning notice for the slain soldiers, each of whom received the title "shaheed, jihad fighter," and the salutation, "Peace to our brothers in arms, peace to Hezbollah in Syria, peach to the shaheeds [of the siege] of Nubl and al-Zahra" (al-Rabat al-Hilal's Twitter account, May 13, 2022). A Syrian named Ahmed Shams al-Din, who supports the Iran axis, posted a video from the funeral held for the soldiers with the hashtags #Nubl_and_al-Zahra and #Hezbollah (Ahmed Shams al-Din, May 13, 2022). According to another Twitter account, the soldiers who were killed belonged to the "popular defense" of Nubl and al-Zahra (Nasser Abel's Twitter account, May 13, 2022). In ITIC assessment, the posters belong to the Syrian militia operating under Hezbollah sponsorship in the Shi'ite towns of Nubl and al-Zahra near Aleppo.