



Spotlight on Terrorism : Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria February 3-16, 2023

Overview

- ▶ After the earthquake on February 6, 2023, Hezbollah asserted its support for the people of Syria and Turkey and announced it had launched a campaign to help the victims. It accused the United States of preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching Syria.
- ▶ A French made-for-TV documentary exposed Hezbollah's involvement in drug trafficking and money laundering.
- ▶ February 12, 2023, marked the 15th anniversary of the death of Imad Mughniyeh,¹ at the time head of Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing, responsible for many terrorist attacks against Israeli targets and considered Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's highest-ranking deputy. Many websites posted details about his life, activities and influence.
- ▶ The PLO's department of refugee affairs announced the completion of a program to assist Palestinian refugees in the camps in Lebanon.
- ▶ The PA ambassador to Lebanon met in Beirut with the deputy head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).
- ▶ The body of Elie Lahoud, head of the Hezbollah-affiliated Resistance Movement, was found in the Church of St. Elias in Mutayleb, a northeastern suburb of Beirut.
- ▶ There was an explosion in the basement of the Nabih Berri Government Hospital in Nabatieh, south Lebanon. The official cause was an oxygen leak. Patients were moved to other institutions and the hospital closed.
- ▶ An important Hamas figure visited Lebanon this past week and met with many Lebanese officials.
- ▶ Lebanese Intelligence in the Marjayoun district detained a Lebanese resident who crossed the border from Israel into Lebanon in the Kafr Qala region.

¹ Imad Mughniyeh died after a bomb went off under his vehicle in Damascus in February 2008. Hezbollah accuse Israel of killing him.

- ▶ The efforts of the committee that met in Paris to help Lebanon elect a president were unsuccessful. Saudi Arabia wanted Hezbollah to bear responsibility for the failure but France objected.
- ▶ The Lebanese foreign minister met with the president of Syria and told him Lebanon would open its ports to receive international assistance for the Syrian victims of the earthquake.

Hezbollah and Lebanon

- ▶ Hezbollah expressed solidarity with the Syrian and Turkish people and offered condolences for the deaths of tens of thousands of victims of the earthquake of February 6, 2023. It called on the entire world and international organizations "to help with extracting the victims from under the ruins and to take all possible measures to ease their suffering and difficulties" (al-Nur, February 6, 2023). Hezbollah launched a campaign for donations of equipment and funds for Syrian victims. Because of the extent of the catastrophe, it called for people to donate equipment at civil defense centers and funds at Lebanese Sharia Bank branches. According to the campaign, the funds would be transferred to the Syrian regime and its mechanisms (Telegram channel of the Hezbollah combat information unit, February 9, 2023). Hashem Safi al-Din, head of Hezbollah's Executive Council, announced the initiation of the Mercy Campaign in Beirut to help Syrian earthquake victims. The first delivery was sent to the Latakia region (al-Mayadeen, February 12, 2023).
- ▶ In the meantime, Hezbollah attacked the United States, claiming it prevented international aid from reaching the victims in Syria because of previously-imposed sanctions, and launched an Internet campaign against the American Caesar Act² (Simia Telegram channel, February 9, 2023). Sheikh Nabil Qaouq, a member of Hezbollah's Revolutionary Council, claimed the American obstacles which prevented the immediate transfer of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people more catastrophic than the earthquake itself (al-Manar, February 12, 2023).

² Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act expands the authority of the U.S. government to sanction businesses, individuals, and government institutions for economic activities that support the Assad regime's ability to wage war.



A caravan of Hezbollah trucks bringing aid to Syria. The Arabic on the sign reads, "From the people of the Lebanese resistance to our Syrian brothers" (al-Mayadeen, February 12, 2023)

- ▶ The Shi'ite Amal Movement also sent aid from Lebanon to the earthquake victims in northwestern Syria. During the second week of February the Shi'ite Scouts Movement operated a search and rescue unit in Aleppo under the aegis of Amal's First Aid and Health Association (al-Nashra, February 11, 2023).
- ▶ On February 6, 2023, the French TV channel France5 broadcast a movie called "Hezbollah and the Forbidden Investigation." It was an exposé of American undercover DEA agents who infiltrated Hezbollah and acquired sensitive information about Hezbollah's involvement in trafficking cocaine and laundering money. Na'im Qassem, deputy Hezbollah secretary general, who was interviewed for the movie, denied Hezbollah had any involvement in trafficking drugs. In the wake of the movie Hezbollah supporters launched a campaign accusing the United States of lying (al-Arabiya, February 6, 2023).
- ▶ On February 7, 2023, the body of Elie Saadallah Lahoud, head of the Hezbollah-supporting Lebanese Resistance Movement political party, was found in a pew in the St. Elias Church in the town of Mutayleb, a northeastern suburb of Beirut. He had occasionally spoken out against Samir Jaja, head of the Lebanese Forces Party, claiming he was an Israeli official and should be killed. The circumstances of Lahoud's death are unclear. According to a Lebanese police investigation, he committed suicide, apparently because of financial difficulties and legal complaints. His death was met with both hints and clear accusations that he was killed by the Lebanese security forces (al-Akhbar, February 8, 2023; al-Nashra, February 7, 2023).
- ▶ February 12, 2023, marked the 15th anniversary of the death of Imad Mughnieh, head of Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing, considered Nasrallah's highest-ranking deputy and responsible for many terrorist attacks against Israel. Several websites posted information about his life and comments about his activities and influence. The Iranian Tasnim website claimed he was "always present" and that his influence on the perception of "resistance"

[terrorist attacks against Israel] during the Second Lebanon War led directly to the implementation of his plans after he died (Tasnim, February 12, 2023). The Hezbollah-affiliated al-Akhbar website began posting a series of reports about his life (al-Akhbar, February 13, 2023).

► On February 16, 2023, Hezbollah marked "Shaheed Day." A large stage was erected in the Khomeini Cultural Center in Baalbek where representatives of various Lebanese political parties and organizations gave speeches. Ahmed Raya, responsible for Hezbollah's public relations in the Beqa'a Valley (northeast of Beirut), said Israel had to remain an enemy whose existence had to end. Mahmoud Barake, from Hamas, said the amalgamation of the blood of Palestinians and Arabs [sic] with all free people indicated the "resistance" [anti-Israeli terrorism] was the "correct path" (al-'Ahad, February 16, 2023).



Participants at Hezbollah's "Shaheed Day" event (NNA, February 16, 2023)

South Lebanon

► On February 7, 2023, there was an explosion in the basement of the Nabih Berri Government Hospital in Nabatieh, south Lebanon. Initially, limited damage was reported (al-Manar, February 7, 2023). According to information issued later, the hospital was closed and its patients had been moved to other medical institutions. It was then reported that the cost of repairs was so high the hospital would be closed until further notice. The explosion was apparently caused by an oxygen leak, but so far no formal investigation has been carried out (Sawt Beirut, February 9, 2023).



**Some of the damage caused by the explosion in the hospital in Nabatieh
(Lubnan24, February 7, 2023)**

Palestinians in Lebanon

- ▶ As part of Hezbollah's attempts to form close relations with the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the organization published a detailed report of its activities in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Sidon region during January 2023. It also claimed to have provided for the residents of Tyre, including medicines, food and clothing; funding for hospitals, fuel, organized a clean-up operation and helped the unemployed (al-Manar, February 9, 2023).
- ▶ This past week a member of the Hamas leadership, whose name was not revealed, visited Lebanon and met with Lebanese officials. They discussed relations with Hezbollah, strengthening the "resistance" [anti-Israeli terrorism] and ways to accompany political, media and local developments. The Hamas operative was interviewed by the Lebanese news site Asas Media and said Hamas was an ally of both Hezbollah and Iran, and had no intention of establishing a military presence in Lebanon from which to fight Israel. However, he said, the Palestinian people would defend themselves in any way they could (Asas Media, February 5, 2023).
- ▶ The PLO's refugee department announced the completion of a project to aid Palestinian refugees in the camps in Lebanon. The project dealt with solving problems related to the supply of water and electricity, and the repair of old buildings in the villages of Burj al-Shamali, al-Jalil and the al-Da'ouq community. Ahmed Abu Houli, head of the department, claimed the needs of in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon were the department's prime concern and that all the residents had water and electricity problems because they did not receive services from UNRWA. He spoke in response to complaints heard in recent months accusing UNRWA of not functioning properly (PLO refugee department Facebook page, February 4, 2023).

► On February 6, 2023, Ashraf Dabour, the PA "ambassador" to Lebanon, met with Jamil Muzaher, deputy secretary general of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and other members of the terrorist organization. The meeting was held in Beirut in reaction to the IDF's recent activities in Jenin and Jericho (Palestinian refugees' portal, February 6, 2023).



**The PA "ambassador" to Lebanon meets with PFLP operatives
(Palestinian refugees' portal, February 6, 2023)**

Lebanon

Lebanese army activity on the southern border

► During the early morning hours of February 13, 2023, two Israeli boats were identified which had entered Lebanese territorial waters by about half a kilometer off the coast of Ras al-Naqoura. No mention was made of a Lebanese army response but according to reports the issue is being monitored in coordination with UNIFIL forces in Lebanon (al-Nashra, February 13, 2023).

► On February 12, 2023, according to reports, the IDF examined the surveillance equipment positioned north of the border security fence in Kafr Qala and after that west of the northern Israeli city of Metulla across from Marjayoun. The IDF forces did not cross the blue line but met with Lebanese army and UNIFIL forces (al-Nashra, February 12, 2023).

► Lebanese intelligence in the Marjayoun district detained a man, apparently a Lebanese civilian, who crossed the border from Israel into Lebanon in the Kafr Qala region. Investigation revealed he had crossed the border into Israel in June 2000 and was apprehended when he returned to Lebanon in June 2002. The following month, in July 2002, he again crossed into Israel in the Kafr Ajar region and was apprehended and taken for questioning (al-Nashra, February 6, 2023).

Administration and presidential elections

- ▶ The five-member summit meeting of representatives from the United States, Egypt, France, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who met in Paris on February 6, 2023, was unable to find a way to resolve Lebanon's political crisis. According to available information, the gaps between the various points of view were great, especially between France and Saudi Arabia, neither of which was willing to compromise. Saudi Arabia insisted that the meeting's summary statement assign responsibility for the crisis to Hezbollah and reject any Hezbollah-affiliated candidate for president, which was opposed by France (al-Akhbar, February 7, 2023).
- ▶ A senior Lebanese official claimed the Americans and French were convinced they would find it difficult to enforce a solution and decided to tell Lebanon it had to choose its own president. It was also claimed that the lack of agreement reflected a lack of genuine desire to resolve the crisis (al-Akhbar, February 8, 2023).
- ▶ Regarding the summit meeting in Paris, at a ceremony organized by Hezbollah in the town of Jaba', Lebanese MP Muhammad Ra'ad, head of the Loyalty to the Resistance bloc, said they were determined to choose a president "of all Lebanese," suited to their aspiration, and who would strengthen unity and not take orders from anyone [i.e., neither Europe nor the United States] (al-'Ahad, February 11, 2023).

Lebanon's financial crisis

- ▶ Banks were burned on Badaro Street in Beirut to protest Lebanon's financial crisis and protesters demanded residents receive their money. The banks burned were the Fransabank, Awda Bank, Byblos Bank, Credit Bank (al-l'timad al-Masrafi), and the Beirut and al-Balad al-Arabia Bank (Hussein Murtada's Twitter account, February 16, 2023). The events led Lebanese interim Prime Minister Najib Mikati to hold an emergency meeting with Energy Minister Walid Fayad, Minister of the Economy Amin Salam, and fuel distribution representative Fadi Abu Shaqra (al-Nahar, February 16, 2023).



Bank burns in Beirut (Hussein Murtada's Twitter account, February 16, 2023)

Humanitarian assistance for Syria

► Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib met in Damascus with Syrian President Bashar Assad. He told Assad Lebanon would open its sea ports and airports to receive aid for Syria from every country and political party in the world, and said the Lebanese government had decided to help with rescue and extraction operations (Syrian president's office Telegram channel, February 8, 2023).