**Hezbollah; Terrorism committed by a political party?**

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History 357

**Abstract**

Hezbollah should be classified as a terrorist organization because of the acts of terrorism they have committed from 1982 to the mid 80’s and in 1996. Hezbollah is a very complicated and complex organization with little certainty of what to classify them as, whether it is a terrorist organization, political party, or residence/militant group since its formation in 1982. This paper will go into detail about why someone would want to classify Hezbollah as a terrorist group. Since there isn’t very clear information published on what type of organization Hezbollah is, most stating they are a terrorist group, this paper will form a foundation on why pieces of literature consider them a terrorist group. The attacks this paper will mainly be focused on is the hijacking of TWA flight 847, the U.S. embassy bombing in Beirut, the bombing of the U.S. Marine Barracks in Beirut, and the Khobar tower bombing in Saudi Arabia. All these attacks are considered acts of terrorism and are believed to be carried out by members of Hezbollah, although Hezbollah has never come out and claimed official responsibility. These terrorist attacks will form the main argument into Hezbollah being a terrorist organization. To consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization we have to establish a clear definition on what terrorism is, how the Islamic Jihad Organization is connected to Hezbollah and take a look into Hezbollah as a political party. Having committed these acts of terrorism how could an organization like this be classified as something other than a terrorist organization? Hezbollah may not be as wide known in the United States as some of the other terrorist groups, but they should be. The embassy bombing, the Marine barracks bombing, the Khobar tower bombing and the hijacking of TWA flight 847 have all had American casualties. Through researching different books, archives and news articles, this paper will ultimately provide support into why Hezbollah could be considered a terrorist organization and make others views on the organization less subjective.

**Introduction**

In 1982 a Shia Muslim organization know as Hezbollah was formed after the Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon. Before Hezbollah was created Lebanon gained its Independence from France in 1943 and since gaining their independence they have never had a census of the population. Their only census actually comes from 1932 where Christians made up the majority of the population followed by Sunni Muslims and then Shia Muslims. Since Christians made up a majority of the population they were awarded the most powerful position in government with that being the President. Next the Sunnis got the Prime Minister and the Shia got the Speaker of the Parliament. Although the population has drastically changed since the 1932 Census, the way each religious group gets represented in the Lebanese government has stayed the same.

In 1975, Lebanon would be involved in a civil war. The Phalangist attack on the Palestinian bus where twenty-seven passengers were killed was the starting point of this war and which would last for another fifteen years until coming to an end in 1990. The next major event happening during this civil war was Operation Deir Yassin when a group of Palestinians hijacked an Israeli bus in return for Palestinian prisoners, but a shootout began and thirty-seven Israeli’s were killed[[1]](#footnote-1). This would lead to an Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1978 to take out the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), although this would ultimately fail. In June of 1982 Israel would once again invade Lebanon after an eleven-month cease-fire with the PLO, which would be the starting point for the creation of Hezbollah. Before Hezbollah was formed there was a group known as Amal, which had a popular presence among the Shia population in Southern Lebanon. Amal would be lead by Nabih Berri who would later go on to become the Speaker of Parliament. Amal was closely linked to Iraq through Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr until his execution in 1980. Abbas al-Musawi who was in Iraq would leave and go back to Lebanon where he would establish a religious seminary, which he would take in Hassan Nasrallah, who was an Amal representative, as his student. Nasrallah would later become the leader of Hezbollah. The Iranian revolution would become a model that Hezbollah would follow. A quote from Ehud Barak who was the former Israeli Prime Minister said, “When we entered Lebanon there was no Hezbollah. We were accepted with perfumed rice and flowers by the Shia in the south. It was our presence there that created Hezbollah”[[2]](#footnote-2). Hezbollah was backed by Syria and Iran. Iran would be the main contributors to Hezbollah although Syria saw Hezbollah as a way to keep good relations with Iran while supporting the Syrian fights against Israel and the United States.

In April of 1983 the U.S. Embassy in Beirut was bombed. A van that was loaded with explosives drove under the building and was detonated by a suicide bomber, which killed sixty-three people. A group known as the Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO) claimed responsibility for the attack, although it was widely believed to be carried out by Hezbollah. Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, who is believed to be the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, denied knowing who the IJO was. Later that same year in October the U.S. Marine barracks was bombed killing over 240 Americans. The IJO again claimed responsibility for this attack and it is believed that Fadlallah gave a religious blessing to the two men who perpetrated the attack. The Embassy bombing was the deadliest attack against the CIA while the Marine barracks bombing was one of the greatest losses to the U.S. Marines in history. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the IJO is part of Hezbollah, by providing intelligence, counterintelligence and terrorist activities.

In 1985, TWA Flight 847, departing from Athens, was hijacked by a group of men, one by the name of Mohammed Ali Hamadi, who was a member of Hezbollah. They demanded the release of 700 Shia’s from Israel. There was one casualty, that being Robert Stethem who was a member of the U.S. Navy. Eleven years late in 1996 the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia was bombed. Again the method of attack was a truck bomb, the same as the Marine barracks bombing and Embassy bombing in 1983. Nineteen U.S. Air Force members were killed in this attack. In 2006, the U.S. court system would rule Iran to be responsible for this attack, working with members of Hezbollah in Saudi Arabia[[3]](#footnote-3).

What makes Hezbollah so appealing to the Shia population in Lebanon? Hezbollah has representation in the Lebanese government and provides social services to the Shia community. In the 2009 elections, members of Hezbollah won ten seats in the government. They run hospitals, news stations, and schools throughout Southern Lebanon. Hezbollah also provides low-income housing and has its own telecommunications network. This can be a sense of security for the poor Shia’s in the community and provide them with everything they need that they wouldn’t get otherwise. This is one of the main reasons why the support for Hezbollah is growing throughout Lebanon, especially in a time where Lebanon isn’t very stable.

Why does the U.S. consider Hezbollah a “Terrorist” group? What attacks have they carried out to be classified a terrorist group? Were all the attacks actually carried out by Hezbollah? Could Hezbollah be classified as something other than a terrorist group? Is any attack against the U.S. classified as a terrorist attack, even if it’s not against civilians? What makes an Attack a terrorist attack? What is the definition of terrorism? What does Hezbollah provide the Shia community in Lebanon? How has Hezbollah gained so much support? Is Hezbollah’s ultimate goal to establish an Islamic State in Lebanon? If the Israeli’s didn’t invade Lebanon in 1982 would Hezbollah exist? If Iran wasn’t backing Hezbollah would they still be around? Who is the Islamic Jihadist Organization? How are Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihadist Organization linked? Why is Grand Ayatollah Fadlallah linked to Hezbollah? Is there a bias on U.S. publications of Hezbollah that can affect the classification of them?

**Historiography**

What to label Hezbollah is a huge inconsistency in works related on them. Not only what to classify them as but why we should classify them that way. Are they an extremist group, a political party, a militant group, a type of welfare program for the Shia community, or how westerners describe them a terrorist group? The U.S. Department of State classified Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in the year 1997 in section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act for all the attacks they have committed killing civilian and military personnel[[4]](#footnote-4). Also according to the U.S. Department of State, with Executive Order 13224 released in 2001, Hezbollah is considered to be a specially designated global terrorist entity[[5]](#footnote-5). Hezbollah is also considered to be the most ‘technically capable’ terrorist group in the world, according to the State Department in 2010.

Before we decide to call Hezbollah a terrorist group, we have to understand the meaning of what terrorism is. Could it be any attack where lives have been lost or does is specifically have to be civilian lives? If Hezbollah is committing these attacks for a sense of security is it truly a terrorist attack? The western belief is to say anything that costs lives will be considered an act of terrorism. If this is the case then the U.S. would be classified as the deadliest terrorist group in the world with the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Civilian and military lives were lost during the atomic bombs, but is that considered a terrorist attack? We were at war with Japan so it is considered an act of war and not a terrorist attack. The U.S. is also a nation state so can you even classify such as a terrorist group? If Hezbollah were to take control of Lebanon and establish an Islamic State, would the U.S. reclassify them as a nation state instead of a terrorist group? This is why having a clear definition of what terrorism actually is can help in classifying who Hezbollah truly is. We need to look at the motive behind the attack and that will help establish a clearer definition on what terrorism is.

The key to understanding why we should classify Hezbollah a certain way is to look at what they have done throughout their formation. Looking at the attacks on the Embassy bombing, the Marine barracks bombing, the hijacking of TWA flight 847 and the Khobar towers bombing is a crucial part to knowing if they are a terrorist group. We also need to take into account whether these attacks were actually perpetrated by Hezbollah and the motive behind these attacks. Looking through databases of U.S. intelligence organizations will help better understand who actually committed these attacks. The problem with just looking at the U.S. side is that U.S. lives were all lost in each of them, so they can easily jump to conclusions and label them all terrorist attacks. This is where looking at Middle Eastern news articles come in to play, so you’re able to view both sides of the story. Al Manar Tv is a news and television station that is operated and controlled by Hezbollah and is a good place to hear their side of the story. The U.S. Department of Treasury designated Al Manar Tv as a terrorist television station with Executive Order 13224 since it is controlled by Hezbollah[[6]](#footnote-6). Looking through Al Manar Tv you will get to understand the motive behind Hezbollah since they control what will be published. A connection also needs to be established between the IJO and Hezbollah. Just because the individuals carried out the attacks were linked to Hezbollah doesn’t mean they acted on their behalf. Establishing this link will do a better job of establishing if Hezbollah was behind these attacks.

All the attacks listed above regarding the Khobar towers have happened during the Lebanese civil war. Ronald Reagan was the Presidnet of the U.S. during this time and discussed during author David Crist’s book *The Twilight War,* Reagan’s administration was very divided. With Reagans administration so divided, how were they able to take a firm stance and classify Hezbollah as a terrorist group? The Khobar Towers bombing happend during a different decade and can help prove that these attacks weren’t just during a time of oppression. The Khobar towers are also located in Saudi Arabia, so it is an attack that isn’t on Lebanese soil. Although TWA flight 847 took off from Athens they landed in Beirut and committed the killing of Robert Stethem in Lebanon. Committing the bombing in Saudi territory can also help prove that these attacks may not just be for Hezbollah’s gain of power in Lebanon but can prove that they were acts of terrorism.

Scholars who have wrote literature on this topic have all mostly talked about Hezbollah as being connected to terrorism or being a terrorist organization itself. Through this research paper we will establish a firm classification on if Hezbollah is an actual terrorist organization. Looking through the time frame of 1982 when Hezbollah was created to the mid 80’s and the 1996 attack on the Khobar towers this paper will develop a justified stance on why Hezbollah is a terrorist organization.

**Sources**

With Hezbollah being such a major factor in Lebanon and to the Middle East there is a ton of information to be found about the organization. Examining material through books, digital archives, newspaper articles, declassified documents, presidential libraries, U.S. government websites and Executive Orders will garner you enough information to provide evidence to your argument. The books will provide background information on Hezbollah, what they have done over the years and give you a general overview of the Middle East. Looking through newspapers articles will recall the events of the attacks as they happened and let you have insight of the media’s portrayal of the attacks from both the western and Middle Eastern view points. Using the digital archives you and government websites you will be able to find declassified documents and Executive Orders in relation to Hezbollah and the attacks, while linking them to the IJO. The Presidential Libraries will give you an oversight on how the Reagan and Clinton administrations has classified Hezbollah and provide more documents on the attacks that have happen through their presidencies.

**Bibliography**

*Primary Sources*

**Digital Resources**

Central Intelligence Agency

In the CIA database a document called “The Islamic Jihad” can be found talking about how the term Islamic Jihad can be interchangeably with Party of God (Hezbollah). This can be used as a source of connecting the two groups. Another document called “Who and what is Islamic Jihad?” can be found, again connecting Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad Organization. You will also search TWA flight 847 to get 262 results on this attack.

Clinton Presidential Digital Library

Since the Khobar Towers bombing in 1996 occurred during President Clinton’s administration, there are over 2,300 results. Many of the top articles while searching the Khobar Towers bombing listed it as an act of terrorism.

Department of Justice

On the Department of Justice’s website you can find information linking Hezbollah and the Islamic Jihad Organization. The article to look at is called “Two Men Arrested for Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah’s Islamic Jihad Organization.

Department of State

Under the Bureau of counterterrorism section on the State Departments website you will find Hezbollah designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) with section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. You will also get a description of the criteria to be considered a FTO, which can be used in your research for classifying what terrorism is. Also listed as an FTO is the Islamic Jihad Organization.

Department of Treasury

The treasury departments website will be used for enhancing the purpose of using Hezbollah run news station Al Manar Tv. You will search up Executive Order 13224 which was originally released in 2001 and then in 2006, based on this executive order the Treasury Department declared Al Manar as a satellite television operation controlled by a terrorist network (Hezbollah).

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

Under the office of records in a folder name Terrorism Groups: Hizballah, a report on Hezbollah can be found. This document discusses the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon and the influence of Iran. What makes this document appealing is the fact that the Reagan administration has labeled them as a terrorist group throughout.

WikiLeaks

The keywords you will use on the WikiLeaks database will be “Hezbollah Khobar Towers 1996”. This will come up with 197 results. If you sort by Clinton emails you will get a document from Hillary Clinton who is the wife to then President Bill Clinton. In this document you are able to see the involvement of a branch of Hezbollah in Saudi Arabia was working with Iran to conduct this attack.

**Newspapers & Periodicals**

*Al Jazeera News*

*Al-Manar TV*

*BBC News*

*CNN*

*The Guardian*

*The New York Times*

*The Washington Post*

*TIME Magazine*

Newspapers will be used to recall the events of the attacks believed to be perpetrated by Hezbollah. Both U.S. and Middle Eastern newspapers will be used to receive a viewpoint from different areas of the world. Specifically Al-Manar TV, which is a Hezbollah sponsored news station, will be used to get Hezbollah’s side of the story. Having the different viewpoints will let you establish who was actually behind the attacks.

*Secondary Sources*

Crist, David. *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America’s Thirty-Year Conflict*

*with Iran,* 123-58.New York: Penguin, 2012.

Through pages 123 to 158 some information on Hezbollah can be found. The author discusses Hezbollah’s martyrdom missions and suicide bombing attacks. Also discussed in this section is TWA flight 847 which we are using as one of the attacks Hezbollah has carried out in our research. You will also be able to read about Iran’s influence and backing of Hezbollah.

Daher, Joseph. *Hezbollah: The Political Economy of the Party of God*. London: Pluto

Press, 2016.

To better understand who Hezbollah truly is we will need to take a look at the political aspect of the organization. We need to see what Hezbollah offers to the Lebanese people. This book will also provide details of how the political setup of Hezbollah is. If we are going to classify Hezbollah a certain way we need to figure out what other type of organization they could potentially be classified as.

Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East.* New

York: Nation Books, 2010.

A book on the history of Lebanon. Since Hezbollah is based in Lebanon, you need to familiarize yourself with what is going on in Lebanon. The Author also goes into depth about how Hezbollah was formed and its conflict with another Shia organization known as Amal.

Jamieson, Perry D. *Khobar Towers: Tragedy and Response.* Washington, D.C: Air

Force History and Museums Program, 2008.

This book will be used as a history to the bombing on the Khobar Towers in 1996. Since this research paper talks about attacks committed by Hezbollah the Khobar towers is one to look at. Other attacks listed in this research paper are focused in the 1980’s which is when Hezbollah was formed, by looking at an attack in the mid 90’s we will be able to establish an argument that attacks by Hezbollah weren’t just committed around the time when it was founded but in later years too. This is also an attack that occurred outside of Lebanese territory, which can be key to classifying them as a terrorist organization.

Levitt, Matthew. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God*.

Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013.

This book is a good source of the violence that Hezbollah has use domestically and abroad. This is another source that talks about Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and the attacks they have committed. Also talked about in this book is the use of other insurgencies that Hezbollah has trained and used to help fight for them. We will be able to use this as a reference to connecting all these insurgencies and attacks to Hezbollah.

Norton, Augustus Richard*, Hezbollah: A Short History.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton

University Press, 2014.

This book will be the foundation for this research paper. Through this book you will learn more on the history, the formation, the political aspects and the violence of Hezbollah. You will also get a sense of who a Shia Muslim is and what the religion entitles. The main chapter to look at in this book is chapter 4 where it discusses Hezbollah and terrorism.

Norton, Augustus Richard. *Hizballah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane*

*Politics.* New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2000.

Since we are using this author’s book as our core to our paper, we need to take a look at other works he has published. Since this piece has come out 14 years before his other book, we will be able to compare and contrast what has changed over that time frame. This will allow us to build a stronger argument of considering what type of organization Hezbollah is based on the information the author has gathered over the years.

Wright-Neville, David, *Dictionary of Terrorism.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.

To establish a firm definition on what terrorism is we will take a look at this book. This book goes into depth on the roots of terrorism. Having a definition to what terrorism is will help us decide in our research if Hezbollah is truly a terrorist organization or if they are classified as something else.

1. Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East,* 118*.* New York: Nation Books, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Norton, Augustus Richard*, Hezbollah: A Short History*, 33. Princeton, NJ: Princeton

   University Press, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "Iran Held Liable In Khobar Attack." The Washington Post. December 23, 2006. Accessed April 21, 2018. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/22/AR2006122200455.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations." U.S. Department of State. Accessed April 21, 2018. https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. "Two Men Arrested for Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah's Islamic Jihad Organization." The United States Department of Justice. June 08, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2018. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-men-arrested-terrorist-activities-behalf-hizballahs-islamic-jihad-organization. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. "U.S. Department of the Treasury." U.S. Designates Al-Manar as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity Television Station Is Arm of Hizballah Terrorist Network. Accessed April 22, 2018. https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/js4134.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)