

President of Yemen: The Hezbollah organization is supplying military and logistical training to the Yemenite Al-Khawthi group, which is striving to topple the regime

Background

During the past year, Lebanese Hezbollah operations outside of Lebanon have been exposed. It would appear that this exposure is the result of Hezbollah's concerted effort to perpetrate a revenge attack, against the backdrop of 'Imad Mughniyye's assassination attributed to Israel, and is also due to the increase in coverage of the organization.

At the end of 2008, a Hezbollah network operating in Egypt was exposed.¹ The network intended to perpetrate three large simultaneous attacks against tourist sites in Egypt: Taba, Nueiba, and Dahab, where many Israeli tourists visit, and to attack ships in the Suez Canal in order to ruin the Egyptian economy.² For this purpose, members of the network rented real estate along the Canal, as their base for perpetrating the attacks, which facilitated their ability to gather intelligence for the operation and carry out surveillance.³

It was recently made public, that an additional Hezbollah network was exposed in Azerbaijan. According to the reports, in May 2008, eight members of a Hezbollah terrorist cell were arrested in Azerbaijan, intending to blow up the Israel embassy in Baku, in retribution for the assassination of 'Imad Mughniyye. The detained included four Lebanese and four Azerbaijanis. Two of them were particularly significant: Ali Karaki, who is considered a specialist in Hezbollah's overseas operations unit and Ali Najm Al-Din, an explosives expert. They are suspected of traveling at the beginning of 2008, from Baku to Iran and Lebanon and back again, on Iranian passports. In Baku, they stayed at high-class hotels, and prepared the infrastructure for carrying out the attack. In addition, the

¹ Nasrallah himself admitted that a network sent by Hezbollah had operated in Egypt. But he said that only 10 of the 49 men detained by the Egyptian security forces, belonged to this network, and they had intended only to attack Israeli targets and not Egyptian: <http://www.wa3ad.org/index.php?show=news&action=article&id=42032>. See also:

http://ict.org.il/Portals/0/Internet%20Monitoring%20Group/JWMG_Hezbollah_Egypt.pdf

² <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=89842>.

<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=516408&issueno=11105>

³ Al-Yaum Al-Sabi', edition 27, April 21 2009, p.9.

investigation raised the likelihood of senior members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards being involved in planning the terror attacks.⁴

The Lebanese Hezbollah's operations in Yemen were also exposed. The President of Yemen publicly accused Hezbollah of supporting the terrorist group operating in Yemen, as demonstrated below. Hezbollah's modus operandi of supporting terrorist organizations and Middle Eastern terrorist groups is not new: Their dedicated 1800 unit carries out operations directly against Israel, as well as by recruiting, aiding, training and supporting Palestinian terrorist organizations or Israeli Arabs. American security officials have for years been reporting Hezbollah's involvement in instructing and building infrastructures for attacks in Iraq, using unit 2800.⁵ In the 1990s, Hezbollah was involved in the attack on the Khobar Towers in 1995 in Saudi Arabia⁶, as well as the attempt to smuggle arms from Jordan into the Palestinian territories in 2001.⁷

Hezbollah's Operations in Yemen

In an exclusive interview granted by the President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Salih, to the London daily Al-Hayat, on 28 March 2009, before the Arab summit in Doha, he referred to a number of issues, including the security problem in Yemen. He stated that the activities of terrorist organizations in his country, such as Al-Qaeda and another important terrorist organization, the Lebanese Hezbollah, which until now had not been fully exposed, are prominent.⁸

Since 2004, a bloody conflict has been raging between the Yemenite government forces and the Zaydi Al-Khawthi⁹ group in the Sa'ada district in the north of the country.¹⁰ This group seeks to forcefully topple the secular regime in Yemen and will use any means to achieve its aim. This conflict, and other security problems in Yemen, has opened the door to the involvement of foreign elements in the

⁴ <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=521360&issueno=11142>

⁵ Shannon W.Caudill, "Hizballah Rising: Iran's Proxy Warriors", *JFQ*, Issue 49, 2008, pp.128-134.

http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i49/32.pdf

⁶ <http://www.ict.org.il/NewsCommentaries/Commentaries/tabid/69/Articlsid/138/currentpage/8/Default.aspx>

⁷ <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=132>

⁸ Al-Hayat, March 28, 2009 : <http://www.alhayat.com/special/dialogueS/03-2009/Item-20090327-493b6d70-c0a8-10ed-000c-e0bb323a44f6/story.html>

⁹ See growth of this group: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79410>, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/04/17/33578.html>. See also appendix at the end of the document.

¹⁰ The Sa'ada region which is 250 kms. north of the capital Sanaa near the Saudi Arabia border, has for 1,200 years been the main Zaydi stronghold in Yemen. This region is the birthplace of many Zaydi religious clerics.

country, who are trying to take advantage of the situation to advance their own narrow interests.

According to Salah, "Lebanese Hezbollah activists are giving wide-scale aid to the Al-Khawthi group in Yemen. They are providing military and logistics training: The Al-Khawthis received training from a number of specialists and entities associated with Hezbollah, in assembling bombs, mines and explosives." Salah added that a number of members from the Al-Khawthi group were sent to learn in Lebanon.

Salah is apparently taking a cautious stand when referring to the Hezbollah aid: "I do not think that Hezbollah has adopted this issue officially, but rather a number of people who are associated with them." He claims that "radical people who perhaps are not associated with the Hezbollah leadership" are trying to get close to the Al-Khawthi group in order to persuade them to move from their Zaydiya faith to the Shiite Twelver faith, to which Iran and the Hezbollah organization subscribe.

Salah also subtly criticizes Iran's involvement in his country's affairs. He believes that the lack of Arab solidarity and the lack of unity in the Arab world regarding burning Arab issues, such as the Palestinian issue or the war in Somalia etc. are the root of the Arab states' problems. One of the worst consequences of this is the rise of Iran as a regional power, which is becoming more and more involved in the region against the Arabs' interests: "We honor Iran because it is an Islamic country, but preference to solving our problems must first and foremost be given to ourselves – the Arabs."

Salah also refers to the terrorist problem in his country. He believes that three main factors facilitate the expansion of terrorist operations in his country:

1. Harsh territorial conditions, such as deserts and mountains
2. Luring uneducated youth into the ranks of the terrorist organizations
3. Poverty and a difficult socio-economic background

However, Salah states that there is close cooperation between the Yemenite and Saudi Arabian regimes in the security field: "There is coordination, speedy exchange of information and extradition of wanted people and those involved in terrorism." This collaboration, he said, has produced considerable achievements,

such as capturing infiltrators, arms and drug smugglers. The United States is also mentioned as a central factor in training the Yemenite security forces to counter terrorism.

Against the background of the Yemenite president's remarks regarding Hezbollah's support of the Al-Khawthi group, it should be pointed out that a booklet published by the Ministry of Interior in Yemen, on the internet website www.moi.gov.ye, under the title *Yemen's Efforts in the Fight Against Terrorism*, states that the Hezbollah flag was found on the body of Hussein Bader Al-Din Al-Khawthi, one of the prominent leaders of the Al-Khawthi group, who was killed in October 2004, after several months of fighting against the Yemenite security forces.

	
<p>The so called Hussein Bader Al-Deen Al-Hothi Leader of the terrorist armed organization which carried many terrorist acts in the province of Saada He was killed on the 10th. October 2004</p>	<p>The so called Ibrahim Sharraf Al-Deen Leader of the Sanaa terrorist cell He received a death penalty for carrying out a number of terrorist acts in Sanaa, planning to attack the US embassy and attempting to assassinate the US ambassador</p>
	
<p>Flag of Hizbullah hoisted and used by the killed Hussein Al-Hothi and his terrorist organizations</p>	<p>Motto of the terrorist organizations of Al-Hothi</p>

Page 9 from the booklet: **Yemen's Efforts Fight against Terrorism**

Appendix – The Yemenite Al-Khawthi group

The Zaydi first appeared in the 9th century after it left the main stream in Shiya, following the disagreements regarding the identity of the imam who was to follow. The Zaydiya was formed by the supporters of Sayd bin Ali, the grandson of Hussein bin Ali, who led an unsuccessful revolt against the Khalifa Hisham in 740 A.D. The Zaydiya, as opposed to other Shiite streams, is closer to Sunna, particularly to the Hanafi school of thought, and is therefore considered to be a tolerant Shiia. For example, in contrast to other Shiite streams, it does not exaggerate in bestowing upon Imam Ali super-human capabilities, does not believe in the imams immunity, believes that every Muslim has good qualities and that not only the offspring of the Prophet can lead the Muslim community, rejects the principle of Taqiyya etc. The Zaydiya believe in their right to revolt against unfair imams and to forcefully act to bring about a just and fair regime.

During the 9th century, the Zaydiya succeeded in establishing two states; the first in Tabaristan in 864 A.D. on the Caspian seashore, which did not last long, and the second in Yemen in 893 A.D. Yemen was the only country where the Zaydiya imams succeeded from 893 A.D. until the revolution in 1962, with various intervals.¹¹

The Zaydis today comprise 30% of the Yemenite population and 70% of the population belong to the Sunni Shafa'i school of thought.¹²

The Zaydi Al-Khawthi group was established against the background of the departure of a number of members from the Al-Shabab Al-Muamin movement, whose leader was Sheikh Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Khawthi¹³, due to internal differences in the movement, particularly their desire to topple the existing regime forcefully, as they were dissatisfied with its performance. According to Muhammad Azan, one of the founders and Secretary-General of the movement (at the beginning of the 1990s), the movement is an "educational and religious institution whose purpose is to educate the youth in spiritual and cultural matters and it is not a political or military organization", whereas the Al-Khawthi group demonstrates a violent character atypical of the Zaydis. The initial cracks began to appear in the "Believing Youth" movement in 1996, and worsened in 1999,

¹¹ See: Davud Thomas Gochenour, *The Penetration of Zaidi Islam into Early Medieval Yemen*, Harvard University, Ph. D. 1984.

¹² See: Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.89-118.
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

¹³ Sheikh Hussein Badr Al-Din Al-Khawthi served as a member of the Yemenite parliament between the years 1993-1997. His father was considered to be one of the senior Zaydi religious scholars in Yemen.

inter alia, because of differences regarding the movement's path and the desire to rebuff the interference of government religious clerics in the schools' curriculum. The climax was reached with the departure of the Al-Khawthi group from the movement in 2001. As of 2002, one could see the believers of the Al-Khawthi group preaching in the mosques in Yemen against the U.S. and Israel and their attempts to attack the government and targets identified with the west. In the summer of 2004, the tension between the Yemenite government and the Al-Khawthi movement spilled over into a long bloodbath, during which Sheikh Hussein Badr Al-Din al-Khawthi was killed.¹⁴

¹⁴ The full interview with Azan can be seen on <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/04/17/33578.html>. See: Al-Hayat (London) 10.7.08, 11.7.08 for comprehensive review in two parts of the conflict between the two sides.