

BEHIND HAMAS AND THE HEZBOLLAH LIE THE SHADOWS OF SYRIA AND IRAN

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It would be wrong to view the war that is gradually taking a grip on the Near East as a simple « police operation » by an Israeli army seeking to rescue its hostages. It is in reality a regional conflict that runs the risk of degenerating and pushing the Near East into a new war. Iran and Syria would derive the greatest benefit from this and it is Damas, and to an even greater extent, Teheran, who are manoeuvring behind both Hamas and the Hezbollah.

We will certainly not deny that a local explanation for the escalation in violence over the past few days does exist, at least as far as the « Hamas » side of the crisis is concerned. Less than six months after the elections that brought Hamas to power – because, let us remember, of the large-scale corruption of the Fatah representatives – their experiment is on the verge of failure. The government has been placed in international quarantine, public sector workers have received next to nothing in wages and the fratricidal confrontations between Fatah and Hamas have brought the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority to the brink of civil war. In view of this situation, the Haniyeh government had begun to take a few timid first steps towards recognising, at least in fact, the Hebrew state – one of the conditions set by the international community for agreeing to negotiate with it. **This forced the most militant wing of Hamas, whose members blindly follow orders transmitted from Syria by Khaled Mechal, to resume control. To launch an operation that could not fail to provoke a strong Israeli response was, therefore, a clever tactic.** We need only take one step further before concluding that this local motivation was the only cause, but we will leave it at that. In fact, Mechal has taken refuge in Syria and is closely linked with the Assad regime, just as he is also close to the Iranian mullahs and **this alliance is convenient for both Syria and Iran.**

In the case of the Hezbollah, the situation is even clearer. It is only the political fiction that has ruled supreme in Beirut since the end of the so-called « civil » war (and which was not a « civil » war at all, having been triggered and sustained by Fatah and Damas) that enables this terrorist organisation to assume the title of «National resistance». It was on this account that the Hezbollah remained the only militia that was authorized to hold on to their weapons and to assume a political role after the end of the « civil » war; and since September 2004, they have been in direct confrontation with the UN, which has required the disarmament of all non-government forces in Lebanon.

The Hezbollah has nothing to do with any «national resistance». **Whatever the reality of its establishment in the south of the country and in the poor suburbs of Beirut (a presence that can be explained to a great extent, as is always the case with Islamic fundamentalists, by the social shortcomings of the state), the Hezbollah has never been, and still remains to this day, more than a political tool wielded by Teheran and, to a less extent, a tool used by Damas in order to maintain pressure over Lebanon.** It is obvious that the

Hezbollah is its own master when it comes to firing a rocket or two against northern Israel, but no one should imagine for an instant that this is also the case when the organisation launches an intrusive operation into Israel, kills three soldiers and takes another two hostage. The size of the operation was obviously designed to provoke a decisive and massive response from Israel. It could only have been decided in Teheran and Damas.

It is definitely in Iran's interest to turn the world's attention away from the crisis surrounding its nuclear programme. As for Syria, it would be an understatement to claim that anything that destabilises Lebanon is good for it, particularly since Rafic Hariri's assassination. Just to comment on the « justification » for this terrorist act: to force the release of Arab prisoners in Israel. This is all very well, but **what about the tens (hundreds) of Lebanese prisoners who are rotting in jails in Damascus, some of whom have been there for decades? Neither the Hezbollah, nor even the Lebanese government, seem particularly concerned about their fate.**

Unfortunately, **the whole of Lebanon has now been caught up in this spiral of violence and will have to pay the price for the Hezbollah adventure.** It is a shame for the country, but **unfortunately, whatever they are saying in the European chambers of power, totally justified.** The Lebanese government cannot possibly be exonerated from all responsibility: first of all, to state the obvious, the government and the government alone is responsible for supervising and securing its international borders. The fact that the Lebanese army is incapable of controlling its southern border, thereby allowing terrorist commandos to infiltrate Israeli territory directly implicates the government leadership. The Hezbollah also participates in the Lebanese government directly (through Mohammad Fneich, Energy Minister) and indirectly (Faouzi Saloukh, Foreign Minister and Trad Hamadé, Labour Minister are «close » to Hezbollah, as is said discreetly). **This makes things much clearer: a militia controlled by part of the government attacked a neighbouring country and took soldiers from the Hebrew state hostage. Twenty-four hours after this armed attack, the Hezbollah still remains in a government that cannot find words harsh enough to condemn the Israeli « aggression ».**

The Lebanese national motto proudly states that « *My country is always in the right* ». Today, the « official » Lebanon appears to have chosen to be in the right by standing together with a terrorist organisation. The time has come to make a choice. But we can be sure that in Damascus and Teheran they are rubbing their hands in glee.