

**Opening Remarks for Joint Hearing with ITNP
“Hezbollah’s Global Reach”
Thursday, September 28th, 2006 at 10:30 p.m.
Room 2172 Rayburn**

I would like to thank the witnesses for testifying today on this very important issue.

I would also like to thank Ed Royce, chair of the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation for holding this joint hearing with the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia.

This hearing builds nicely upon a recent briefing the Middle East Subcommittee held recently with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on Iran, Syria and Lebanon, where the Hezbollah connection to these states was raised.

Hezbollah has been a malicious presence and a threat to societies throughout the world since its establishment in the 1980’s.

The group’s deadly activities did indeed start in the Middle East.

On April 18, 1983, an explosives-laden van driven by a homicide bomber was rammed into our embassy in Beirut, killing 63—including 17 Americans—and wounding over 100.

Six months later, on October 23, 1983, a truck bearing the equivalent of six tons of TNT smashed into barracks housing U.S. Marines in Beirut.

As a result, 241 American servicemen died that day, as did 58 French paratroopers targeted in a near-simultaneous attack nearby. At least six Lebanese civilians were killed as well.

It was the single deadliest day for U.S. Marines since the Battle of Iwo Jima and remains the deadliest post-WWII attack on Americans overseas.

U.S. agencies have determined that Hezbollah was behind both attacks.

More recently, Hezbollah has adopted the cruel and cowardly tactic of targeting Israeli civilians in their homes, firing thousands of rockets indiscriminately towards villages, towns and cities of Northern Israel, as well as using Lebanese civilians as human shields.

But Hezbollah has not limited its murderous activities to the Middle East.

On March 17, 1992, a pickup truck driven by a homicide bomber slammed into the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires.

The blast took the lives of 29 and wounded over 200, most of them Argentine citizens.

A nearby Catholic church and school building were destroyed, as well.

Two years later, on July 18, 1994, a van containing powerful explosives was driven into the AMIA Jewish Community Center of Buenos Aires, killing 85 and wounding over 300.

These, too, were carried out by Hezbollah.

News reports also refer to Hezbollah supporters conducting black market activities in parts of Central and South America.

To address increasing reports of Islamist terrorist activities in the Western Hemisphere, I introduced a resolution recognizing the threat that these entities, their supporters and financiers pose to the U.S. and our allies in our Hemisphere.

While acknowledging the efforts undertaken thus far by some governments in the region to deny the use of their territory to Islamist terrorist organizations, the Resolution also:

- urges the President to direct our representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) to seek support for the creation of a task force to assist governments in the region in combating the proliferation of Islamist terrorists;
- urges OAS member countries to designate Hezbollah, among others, as terror organizations;

This resolution was overwhelmingly passed by the House in June of this year.

We hope this serves to focus our efforts on strategies that will help prevent an escalation of the threat.

I look forward to hearing Mr. Kavanagh's assessment of Hezbollah's activities in the tri-border area of South America, as well as what steps are being taken to confront these operations.

Hezbollah's operatives continue to spread their venom in Europe, where the group's terrorist infrastructure and fundraising apparatus are alive and well.

It is of grave concern that the EU continues to oppose placing Hezbollah on its terrorist list, even after witnessing all that the terror group has done.

In fact, the EU's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, has stated that there is no sufficient data to determine whether Hezbollah can be included in the list of terror organizations.

In the aftermath of the recent conflict in the Middle East, where Hezbollah initiated the attacks against Israel and violated, not just Israeli territory but Lebanese sovereignty, causing much death and destruction, the EU should immediately reconsider its policy toward Hezbollah.

When it comes to Hezbollah, one cannot be on the side-lines and expect the threat to disappear on its own.

Hezbollah activities have even reached the United States.

In 2002, two Lebanese men were convicted of financing Hezbollah with \$2 million in illegal cigarette sales in the U.S.

It is no wonder that former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage in 2002 referred to Hezbollah as the "A-Team" of international terrorism.

We must never forget who is behind Hezbollah and on whose behalf its twisted actions are taken.

The recent conflict in Lebanon, triggered by an unprovoked attack against Israel by Hezbollah, proved exactly how intensely involved Iran is in supporting Hezbollah with weapons and ideology.

During the conflict, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard actively participated in Hezbollah's terror activities in Southern Lebanon and all evidence indicates that vast amount of Hezbollah's weapons, including long-range missiles, were provided by Iran.

I would be interested to hear from the witnesses their assessment of Hezbollah's strength, capabilities, and image in the aftermath of the recent conflict.

Hezbollah draws its bitter hatred, its poisonous ideology, its resources and its arms from Iran.

The Iranian regime has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into Hezbollah with the express purpose of harming Americans, Israelis and other Western civilians and further destabilizing an already troubled Middle East.

On February 12, 2003, Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, stated that Hezbollah: "[A]s an organization with capability and worldwide presence [it] is [al Qaeda's] equal if not a far more capable organization..."

He added: "They're a notch above in many respects, in terms of their relationship with the Iranians and the training they receive, [which] puts them in a state-sponsored category with a potential for lethality that's quite great."

One can only imagine the untold horrors Hezbollah may some day perpetrate, should its patron state achieve its coveted goal of nuclear weaponry.

We must intensify our efforts to effectively eradicate the Hezbollah threat and the hateful ideology that drives it.

I would once again like to thank the witnesses testifying today and look forward to their testimonies.