

On Iranian Influence in Africa - The Role of the Lebanese Shi'ite Community in West Africa and Hezbollah Worldwide Activities.

October 2009, prepared by L.A. Pierre KATTAR

"Death to America was, is, and will stay our slogan!" – Hassan Nasrallah, Hczzbollah Secretary-General

This package examines the Lebanese Shi'ite immigrant community in West Africa and its ties to the Lebanese homeland, to Iran, and to the party of God, Hezbollah. It also examines the financial status of that community and the impact it exerts on Hezbollah's operations worldwide, particularly closer to home in north and South America. The information below is derived from a compilation of summaries and translations of relatively recent open source materials.

To predict how the current diplomatic effort over Iran's nuclear enrichment program will play out is very difficult, not to say impossible. However, if for any reason Iran's ayatollahs decide to strike American interests across the globe and here in the US homeland, they will most likely, as they have done in the past, assign their proxies Hezbollah to launch a strategic wave of suicide bombings, and well-coordinated attacks in America. Hezbollah is undoubtedly the most effective instrument of response available to Tehran. The ideological and strategic alignment between the Islamic Republic and Hezbollah is stronger than any other alliance in the Middle East.

Approximately 250 Hezbollah fighters went to Iran from July to September 2009 for training reported a source connected to Hezbollah. While in Iran, many fighters received artillery operations training on the Fajr-5 and an upgraded Zelzal-2. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps regularly brings Hezbollah fighters to Iran for advanced training, but now, Iran is likely acting with a sense of urgency to prepare its militant proxies in case Tehran's ongoing nuclear standoff with the West worsens. Ref: Stratfor October 14, 2009.

In fact most terrorism analysts agree that in its short history, Hezbollah perpetrated several attacks against United States interests at the request and on behalf of Iran. Ref: Hezbollah, Illegal Immigration, and the Next 9/11 By: LTC Joseph Myers and Patrick Poole]

- 1- Hezbollah made its debut in April 1983 by slamming a truck laden with explosives into the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 63, including 19 Americans. After the attack, the embassy was moved to another location, which was bombed again in September 1984.
- 2- Still in its nascent stages of organizational development but emboldened by their successful attack on the U.S. Embassy, Hezbollah, receiving help from the Islamic Republic of Iran, launched another suicide bombing against the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in October 1983, causing 241 deaths. Simultaneous with the attack on the Marine forces, Hezbollah bombed the barracks of French peacekeepers. An attack on Italian peacekeepers was foiled.

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- 3- Throughout the 1980s, Hezbollah was behind the kidnapping of many Westerners in Lebanon throughout the 1980s, including the capture and brutal murder of CIA Beirut Station Chief, William Buckley. Journalist Terry Anderson was kidnapped and would eventually spend 2,454 days in captivity, along with several officials from the American University of Beirut.
- 4- In June 1985, Hezbollah terrorists seized TWA Flight 847 *en route* from Athens to Rome, and diverted the plane to Beirut. When the terrorists demands were not met, a US Navy Seabee diver on board, Robert Dean Stethem, was shot and his body dumped on the airport tarmac. Other American military personnel were savagely beaten. The plane's passengers and crew were held for 17 days.
- 5- In 1990, Hezbollah captured, tortured, and eventually hanged Marine Corps Colonel Richard Higgins, a decorated Vietnam combat veteran who was on duty as an unarmed United Nations peacekeeper in Lebanon. His body was not recovered for another year.
- 6- A Saudi Hezbollah cell was involved in providing al-Qa'ida operatives with explosives training in their June 1996 attack on the Khobar Towers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 American Air Force servicemen and injured 372 others. According to then-FBI Director Louis Freeh, in his 2002 Congressional testimony to the Joint Intelligence Committee: "The direct evidence obtained strongly indicated that the 1996 bombing was sanctioned, funded and directed by senior officials of the government of Iran."

Africa, Iran's Next Frontier

Ref: Iran's Global Ambition – by Michael Rubin, American Enterprise Institute, Middle Eastern Outlook – March 17, 2008

On October 19, 2009, Senegalese President Abdullah Wade, stressed the importance of the Iranian presence in Africa, considering that it is in the general interest of African countries and the growth of relations between Iran and Senegal, in particular.

The Islamic Republic has forged particularly strong ties with Senegal, once a Cold War ally of the United States, but now quietly turning into West Africa's Venezuela. President Abdoulaye Wade has traveled twice to Tehran to meet with Khamenei and Ahmadinejad, first in 2006 and again in 2008. During his visit, he provided a backdrop for Khamenei to declare that developing unity between Islamic countries like Senegal and Iran can weaken "the great powers" like the United States.

Wade While the Iranian leadership might be most interested in expanding a Muslim bloc--especially one that might supplant the influence of Sunni Arab states--the Senegalese leadership seems most interested in immediate economic benefits. "Energy, Oil Prospecting, Industry: Senegal Benefits from Iranian Solutions," a headline in the official government newspaper declared after Wade's first visit to Tehran.. After the reciprocal Iranian visit, Wade announced that Iran would build an oil refinery, a chemical plant, and an \$80 million car assembly plant in the West African nation. Within weeks, Samuel Sarr, Senegal's energy minister, visited Tehran and returned with a pledge that Iran would supply Senegal with oil for a year and purchase a 34 percent stake in Senegal's oil refinery. Such aid probably came with strings attached. On November 25, 2007, during the third meeting of the Iran-Senegal joint economic commission, endorsed Iran's nuclear program.

Senegal is not alone among those countries Tehran is cultivating. While Iranian officials trumpet Islam during meetings with Muslim officials, the Islamic Republic is willing to embrace any African state--Muslim or not--that finds itself estranged from the West in general and the United States in particular. Observers have reported Iranian influence in Africa gradually spreading in countries such as, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and South Africa that tuned into another Iranian regional Grateful ally for the Islamic Republic's opposition to apartheid.

But Iranian officials have been just as energetic in cultivating smaller African states. Iranian oil minister Gholam-Hossein Nozari pledged cooperation to exploit Uganda's newfound oil field. The Export Development Bank of Iran pledged \$1 million to underwrite microfinance in Uganda. Teheran also launched initiatives to expand relations with Malawi and Ivory Coast. Indeed, while the Iranian government spreads millions of dollars around Africa, its aid appears conditional upon the support of African

governments. The Iranian government has used declarations by the leaders of Lesotho, Mauritania, Mali, and Namibia to bolster support for its nuclear program.

Iran's influence in West Africa is partially based on the sizeable Shi'ite Lebanese community residing in that region of the black continent, where their illegal diamond trade is rampant, allowing Hezbollah an important source of financing and global influence. Therefore it is feasible on theory for Iran to smuggle nuclear weapons into Europe via West Africa, a far more devastating act than that of trying to hit Europe with its faulty ballistic missiles.

The Party of God's Transnational Logistical Apparatus

Ref: Le Hezbollah Face Aux Forces Armees Conventionnelles, Perspective Historique des Modes d'Action – Hezbollah in the Face of Conventional Armed Forces, A Historical Perspective of its Working Methods – by M. Alexandre GUERIN. Summary of the French text.

Hezbollah receives significant financial support from the contributions of Hezbollah supporters living abroad; particularly from Lebanese nationals living in Africa, South America and other places with large Lebanese Shi'a expatriate communities. Hezbollah developed, since the 1990s, a financial network leading to for-profit legal or criminal activities. Hezbollah's main income, according to Hezbollah Parliamentarian Mohammad Raad, comes from the organization's own investment portfolios and fundraising activities from wealthy Lebanese Shi'ites around the world.

- On December 25, 2003, a "foreign relations high-ranking official of the African branch of the Lebanese Hezbollah party and two of his aides" were killed when the (UTA) Flight 141 bound for Beirut crashed on take-off from Cotonou in Benin, West Africa. According to many accounts in the press, "they were carrying US\$2 million worth in diamonds. Hezbollah reacted by sending an envoy to Benin to present condolences to the Lebanese community in Benin, translating into the special attention that the Hezbollah organization places on its contributors among the generous wealthy Lebanese expatriates to the organization's headquarters in Beirut."

- Hezbollah also resorts to import-export enterprises as well as money transfer dens for the collection of currencies in order to convey funds in transit to Lebanon.

- Finally, as in the case of several terrorist organizations, Hezbollah benefits from a large number of criminal activities. Hence, it resorts to contraband, money counterfeiting, software illegal reproduction, the trafficking of illegal drugs or diamonds, mainly from West Africa. These activities put Hezbollah in relationships with criminal networks that may serve as instruments of military or terrorist acts. As to its counterfeiting activity, it also serves as a mean to produce false passports and other official identification documents.

- The activities of the logistical Hezbollah cell, which was dismantled in Charlotte, North Carolina, offer more detailed insights of the range of criminal activities that Hezbollah engages in.

Transnational Shi'ite Islam in Africa: Lebanese and Iranian influences on converts in Senegal

Incorporating West African cases into discussions about Shi'ism and global Islam highlights social, political and cultural change in relation to migration, ethnicity, proselytizing and Muslim networking. Whereas the Lebanese Shi'ite community has been present in Senegal as early as the 1880s, a small Senegalese minority began to convert to Shi'ite Islam only recently as a result of the Iranian revolution of 1979. The Lebanese Shi'ite sheikh, brought to Senegal by the request of the Lebanese community in 1969,

changed his objective to also include the Senegalese population in his efforts, perhaps competitively encouraged by the influence of the Iranians on the religious and political ideologies of Senegalese Muslims. Like communities of Shi'a in the Middle East and Asia, Shi'a in Senegal create their own spaces, both ethnic and religious. Fluent in the Arabic language, many leaders of the Senegalese Shi'ite movement have university degrees from the Arab world and pride themselves in their knowledge of both Sunni and Shi'ite schools of thought. Drawn to the religion for many reasons - political, spiritual, philosophical, financial, or because Shi'ite scholars convincingly answered their questions about Islam - their mission is to convince others. They spread the faith in Wolof or other local languages through teaching, conferences, holiday celebrations and media publicity. While influenced by the marja's (Shi'ite religious authorities) of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, Senegalese Shi'a emphasize that their Shi'ism is Senegalese. Indeed, through keeping their feet in both Sunni and Shi'ite worlds, the Senegalese Shi'a hope to find their place in Senegal's politics of religion. This paper explores relationships between Lebanese, Senegalese and Iranian Shi'a, the location of Shi'ite Islam in national and international religious networks, and the making of an indigenous Shi'ite Islam in Senegal.

The New Lebanese

June 23, 2009 From French

Ref: French-language magazine Jeune Afrique COTE D'IVOIRE 15/06/2009 17:11:22 - Jeune Afrique |
By : Fabienne Pompey, envoyée spéciale à Abidjan

Despite of the political crisis that erupted in 2002 in Côte d'Ivoire, some 60 000 there Lebanese have kept faith in their host countries. That community is more vibrant than ever. But it is also highly heterogeneous, some members opting for a more rigorous Islam.

Since May 27, 'Abd-al-Min'im Qubaysi - better known by the name of 'Abd Al Menhem Qubaysi to U.S. authorities - is under Washington's radar. The Imam of the Lebanese community in Ivory Coast is accused by the U.S. Treasury Department to be one of the financiers of Hezbollah, which is regarded overseas as a terrorist movement. Indeed Qubaysi had "welcomed senior Hezbollah leadership members on a trip to Ivory Coast and other countries in the region to raise funds for Hezbollah. He is now banned, as in the case of Tajideen Kassim [Taj-al-Din Qasim], another Lebanese residing in Sierra Leone, from activities in the United States. Any assets they might hold there are frozen and U.S. citizens are prevented from doing business with them.

Imam Qubaysi was born in Ivory Coast and grew up in Adjame before going to Iran to study. He is now head of the Lebanese Shiite community, a community stronger and more dynamic than ever. In 2002, five years after creating the Al Ghadir Cultural Association, which watches over most of this community's activities, the Imam embarked on a project to build a huge mosque in the Marcory neighborhood, which is also known as "Little Beirut." The building is located along the highway leading to the business district of Plateau.

Regardless of the war in Ivory Coast, which broke out in 2002, or the November 2004 upheavals ... the construction of the imposing building never stopped. "That's why Ivoirians appreciate us. We've always had faith in this country, "said the Imam a few days before the United States issued the charge against him.

"The Hezbollah Mosque"

Officially, Al-Ghadir does not involve itself in politics. "We take care of our community, we do social work and organize cultural and religious activities, that's all," says Qubaysi. In his gray jalabah, wearing a white turban, the Imam gives an impression of austerity. He never shakes the hand of a woman and observes the strict rules of Shiism. He nevertheless agrees to receive a Western female journalist, provided of course that she

wears a veil over her head. He answers questions in a poised voice in oftentimes very sophisticated French carefully choosing his words.

When he is told that his mosque is called "the Hezbollah Mosque," Imam Qubaysi does not get outraged, quite the contrary. He claims that the proximity of the Lebanese Shiite community in Côte d'Ivoire with the Lebanese movement is normal, further adding, "Hezbollah is a resistance movement that transcends political and religious divisions."

Dr. Ali Bdeir [‘Ali Budayr] manages the clinic adjacent to Al-Ghadir Mosque. He also serves as the "Press Attaché" to Imam Qubaysi filtering all requests for interviews." We do not get involved in politics here, says the doctor, and Hezbollah has no representation here as a party. However, we feel a sense of solidarity with the cause. "

Roland Dagher, a Lebanese Christian, the Chief Executive Officer of a company and a member of the Economic and Social Council, who is also close to Ivorian President Gbagbo, confirms the existence of a strong current of sympathy towards Hezbollah. "They are part of a resistance movement," he explains, adding that he himself had requested the Head of State during the last major Israeli offensive in southern Lebanon in 2006 to open the doors of Ivory Coast Côte and allow Lebanese to enter the country without visas.

The Marcory district in Abidjan was spared from looting during the riots in the capital. Some residents state that Hezbollah's militia members came from Lebanon to protect the Lebanese Shiite community there. "It's much simpler than that. We just paid some neighborhood youth to patrol the streets. By paying them well, it worked very well for us," says a wealthy merchant who lives there.

"We do not provide financial support to Hezbollah. In fact, we cannot afford it. It is difficult enough for most of us to support a family here while also supporting some members of our families in Lebanon," says the Imam. The United States is however convinced that the Lebanese Shiite Diaspora in West Africa sends large amounts of money to Hezbollah. "It's not even an open secret," declared in 2004 a U.S. diplomat stationed in Sierra Leone. "West Africa is probably the main area of influence of Hezbollah outside of the Middle East, through fundraising activities, recruitment operations, and the conduct of illegal business," says Anita Gossmann on behalf of the Swiss research institute, International Relations & Security Network, in an article entitled "Africa: Hezbollah's Other Haven." [The full text of this article is reproduced below.]

Prayers and Social Work

Imam Qubaysi, who hung in one of the corridors a portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini, also denied having formally received Iranian funding for the construction of the mosque in Abidjan's Marcory district, whose cost is estimated at 5 million dollars. According to the Imam, the Mosque was built was thanks to donations by members of the Lebanese Shiite community. With floors completely covered with marble, the mosque is located in the heart of the Islamic Cultural Center Al Zahra', a of 6 000 m2 building, as well as a place

of worship, houses a 2 500 seat auditorium, a library, computer room and several meeting rooms.

A healthcare center was built in place of the former hazardous car discharge facility adjoining the Al Ghadir Mosque. Dr. Bdeir runs the healthcare center, where a general medicine doctor treats the least wealthy among the Lebanese community as well as the needy among the indigenous Ivorian population for very little money. In addition, those who really cannot afford it are treated for free.

Each year, Al Ghadir holds the largest collection of blood in the country during the commemoration of 'Ashura, [traditionally among the Shiites, the ceremony, which celebrates the anniversary of the death of the grand-son of the Prophet, is marked by self-flagellation, Ed]. For Dr. Bdeir, who devoted much of his life to social work, there exists within the Lebanese Muslim community a "growing religious trend, which reflects a spiritual awareness." Since he went to Mecca, Dr. Bdeir no longer shakes the hands of women.

In his sports coupe car, oversized sunglasses and bling bling wristwatch, Chalhoub Uday is much less austere. His wife, a European, is not veiled and his lifestyle is very Western. This prominent businessman, who is President of the Lebanese community of San Pedro, is a childhood friend of Imam Qubaysi. Despite his youthful looks and his jet-setter mannerism, he nonetheless supports the return to traditional values. "We must exercise control over the behavior of the Lebanese. Particularly on young people, he adds. We want them to be more discreet sometimes. The entire community is responsible for its reputation," says Uday Chalhoub. He has personally contributed to building the mosque in Marcory, and he also participated in the financing of the Lebanese Al Ghadir School of San Pedro, which was recently inaugurated. Several schools have been built in this manner, including one in Abidjan Riviera. Others are planned.

In these schools, where part of the instruction is in Arabic, some female students are veiled, but it is not an obligation. "There is a radicalization of a part of the community. I will never place my children in such institutions. I certainly want my children to learn Arabic, but not in this religious atmosphere," said a leading businessman and the member of a prominent and large Lebanese family in Ivory Coast. "There exists a communitarian system that we did not witness before, a system a la Hezbollah, which do not like at all," he proceeds to say.

A Heterogeneous Community

The community is far from being homogeneous. If in this day and age, the Shiite Muslim from southern Lebanon constitutes the large majority of the community in Ivory Coast, it has not always been so. Often from rural backgrounds, recent immigrants are of more modest social status than the prominent merchant families who settled in Ivory Coast several years ago.

"There are families nearby Adjame, whose members do not eat every day and remain hungry," explains Dr. Bdeir. On the opposite extreme, "Little Beirut" is home to stunning villas hidden behind high fences. In that neighborhood, despite the crisis, many luxury buildings are under currently construction. "We have not left during the war. It is an important signal to the Ivorian indigenous population," remarked Roland Dagher. Before him, few Lebanese were openly political. Dagher openly supports Laurent Gbagbo and does not hide it. In his office, a photomontage shows an improbable couple Gbagbo and Houphouet-Boigny coast to coast, all smiles, with the caption: "From independence of a State to its nation-building." "It's a pride to be a member of the Social and Economic Council," says the businessman, who has a seat in that institution along with another Ivorian of Lebanese origin, Fu'ad 'Umays.

"There are Lebanese who die at home and ask to be buried in Ivory Coast," says Roland Dagher. Yet one cannot talk of blending in, integration remains limited and the community lives within its own circles. It still is the target of many critics, the Lebanese are too often equated to crummy traders who make little account of the indigenous local staff; they corrupt officials and behave as if they were in conquered territory. "There are black sheep in all communities," says Imam Qubaysi. And the Islamist temptation will not help to improve the image of the settled population in Côte d'Ivoire since more than one hundred years in certain cases, and intends to stay there.

April 29, 2009: From French

Ref: Le Soleil Senegalese Daily By: Babacar DRAME et Aly DIOUF

The Shi'a in Senegal: The Discovery of Another Muslim Community

The Shiites are Legitimists. They believe in the infallibility of the Prophet and the 12 imams. They are for the original Islam. This community has long been persecuted yet exists in Senegal. Its members are grouped within a well-organized community: the Mozdahir Shiite community.

"In Senegal, in addition to the Lebanese Shiite community, there is the Mozdahir community which consists of Senegalese or generally ethnic African followers" said at the outset one of its members, Alioune Badiane. The Mozdahir Shiite community is headed by Sharif Ali Mouhamed Aïdara, "an ethnic African Shiite." The Lebanese Shiite community is headed by a sheikh, but there are also a few scattered individuals of the Shiite rite who live their faith, not mixing in either group. However, it is difficult to say exactly how many followers are of the Shiite faith in Senegal. According to Alioune Badiane, the Mozdahir community is "scattered throughout the national territory, with focal points such as Dakar, Dahra Djoloff, Kolda, Ziguinchor, Saloum or Vélingara." It is in the latter department, however, that the NGO Mozdahir International Institute is located. This humanitarian organization's motto is "Education, health and development available to all." It is believed to be an integrated development project in which there are many activities and which employs several people.

There are across the country of Senegal a number of villages where Mozdahir communities live. The Mozdahir International Institute supports them by training local guides. The Institute also provides training to other individuals, who once their training completed, return to their villages and become guiding leaders and organizers within their own Shiite communities. This is the case, for example, of Shiite communities in villages such as Teyel, Foulamori or Najaf Al Ashraf founded by guide Chérif Mouhamed 'Ali AIDARA [ICST = Sharif Muhammad 'Ali 'AIDARA] in the valley of the River Gambia. In each of these villages, the Mozdahir run a school and a mosque. At Djolof Dara, the Fatimata Zahra Center acts as the regional headquarters for many Shiite schools in the surrounding villages. In the village of Al Najaf Ashraf, there is a significant Shiite community. This village houses the integrated development project of the NGO Mozdahir International Institute. This project aims to become a large multipurpose facility. For Shiites, the worship of God must go hand in hand with work and development. This philosophy was promoted by Imam 'Ali, for whom "man (who) was born free, must live free and die free," which is only possible through "independence and full autonomy." That explains the establishment of development projects nearby schools and dispensaries, hence the importance of the development dimension in the Mozdahir Shiite community. The project in Najaf Al Ashraf includes a major banana agricultural

estate, which also includes other food crops. The co-operators in the plantation, to whom the NGO provides equipment and agricultural inputs, keep 40% of revenues; the remaining 60% is used for sustaining the project and adding new investments. Farmers develop organic agriculture and the construction of structures in Nubian vaults made with local material well suited to the environment with the cooperation of technicians and workers from neighboring Burkina Faso.

Depending on their skills, members of the Shiite community Mozdahir each have a responsibility and a role to play in the organization, says Mr. Badiane. They all share the same vision and recognize Sheriff Ali Mouhamed Aïdara as their leader. The community has officially started its operations in 2000. It has to its credit several achievements such as the headquarters located in Yoff. It houses both a center of higher studies in Arabic and Islamic knowledge, which is now transferred to Daroukhane Guédiawaye to become the Al Hasanayn School. In this locality, as in all others, students at Al Hassanayn boarding schools receive a general education and also professional and Islamic classes.. It's a Franco-Arab program, which is consistent with the official Senegalese syllabus.

While the areas of education and development for all have improved, the health component of the project is still on the drawing board, "pending completion of administrative procedures," says Alioune Badiane. The most important health project is the construction of a model hospital in Dakar. Meanwhile, Mozdahir continues to hold days of free medical consultations. The NGO has published many books, which were translated into several languages. It issues a quarterly publication named The Mozdahir. This magazine reflects on the African and Islamic life of the Mozdahir Shiite community in general.

How did the Senegalese learned about Shiism?

Mozdahir also organizes conferences, symposia and other Islamic ceremonies, at the forefront of which is the celebration of Ashura (Tamkharit), which actually is not a party as such, but a communal mourning. The Mozdahir, according Ibrahima Amadou Sakho, is very dynamic and works closely with all state departments and maintains fraternal relations with all other communities and religions.

According to Alioune Badiane, a history professor and member of the Mozdahir sect, Shiism came to Africa for a very long time ago, and its history is no different than that of Shiism in general. The Shiites, he said, are Legitimists, supporters of the Prophet's family. Since the death of Prophet Muhammad (May God Bless him and Grant him Salavation), they were persecuted to the point of living their faith in secret. In his will, the prophet had left as legacy the Holy Quran and his family which are "inseparable." Following his death, people have not complied with the recommendations expressed in his will.. They prevented his heirs from succeeding him. The descendants of the prophet, who are named the Sharif were forced to leave the Arabian peninsula to seek refuge around the world. This persecution persists everywhere except in some states like Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. According Ibrahima Sakho, they are numerous in Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia ... Africa and Senegal are no exception to the rule. The Idrissid dynasty

formed the first Shiite state in Morocco [789-974] in the African continent. In practice, this early state has influenced several regional Shiite communities in the continent. To this day, he says, some African practice Shiism unknowingly.

Shi'ism has been the subject of renewed interest with the advent of the Iranian Revolution and the arrival of Imam Khomeini to power in 1979. Through this revolution but also the Iran-Iraq War, some people including students at the University of Dakar at the time discovered the so-called "other school" of Shiism. Among them, were Alioune Badiane, Malick Gaye and Mourtada Mbow. There was buoyant excitement at the university, says Badiane, for the first time we saw someone who openly defied the West during the Cold War between communism and capitalism, Imam Khomeini offered a third way, that of a better Islam. There were, on the other hand, others like Colonel Diouf, Ibrahima Sakho, Taha Sougou (...) who, by concurrence, have converted to Shi'ism. It is through personal research that these two categories of people have acquired knowledge with regards to Shi'ism. At the university, Shiite students were excluded from the leadership of the campus mosque where in September 1989 the imam was one of them. Ultimately, this university Shia community dispersed. Professional duty taking priority, each went his

The peculiarities of Shiism

The breakthrough came with the arrival of Sharif Ali Mouhamed Aidara who has "emerged as a true guide to the Shiite community in Senegal and Africa." The sharif is a man of letters who sought out and discovered the small Shiite community, which was formed some years ago at the university. Along with some of its members, he formed the Mozdahir Shiite community, which gradually expanded, got better organized and structured, "says Taha Sougou. Mozdahir which means" something that is bound to grow, flourish, and move forward in a positive direction, was "first called "Room for all. Others continue to hide their faith until the arrival of the "Mahdi (the 12th Imam).

The way the Shia practice their faith is somewhat different from of the Sunnis. These differences can be noted in the practices of ablution, prayer, or the manner in which to fast. According Ibrahima Sakho, Shiites after the original Islam and they believe in the absolute infallibility of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima Zahra, Ali, Hussein and Hassan, but also nine other Imams. Ibrahima Sakho explains that according to Hamadou Hampathé Ba, "some African Muslims are Shiites, even if they do not are not aware of it."

A strong presence of the Lebanese Shi'ite community in Senegal

Gathered around its charismatic leader, Sheikh Abdul Monem Zein [ICST = Shaykh ‘Abd-al-Mun’im Zayn], the Shiite Senegalese community of Lebanese origin is known for its dynamism and its openness to all Muslim brotherhoods of Senegal.

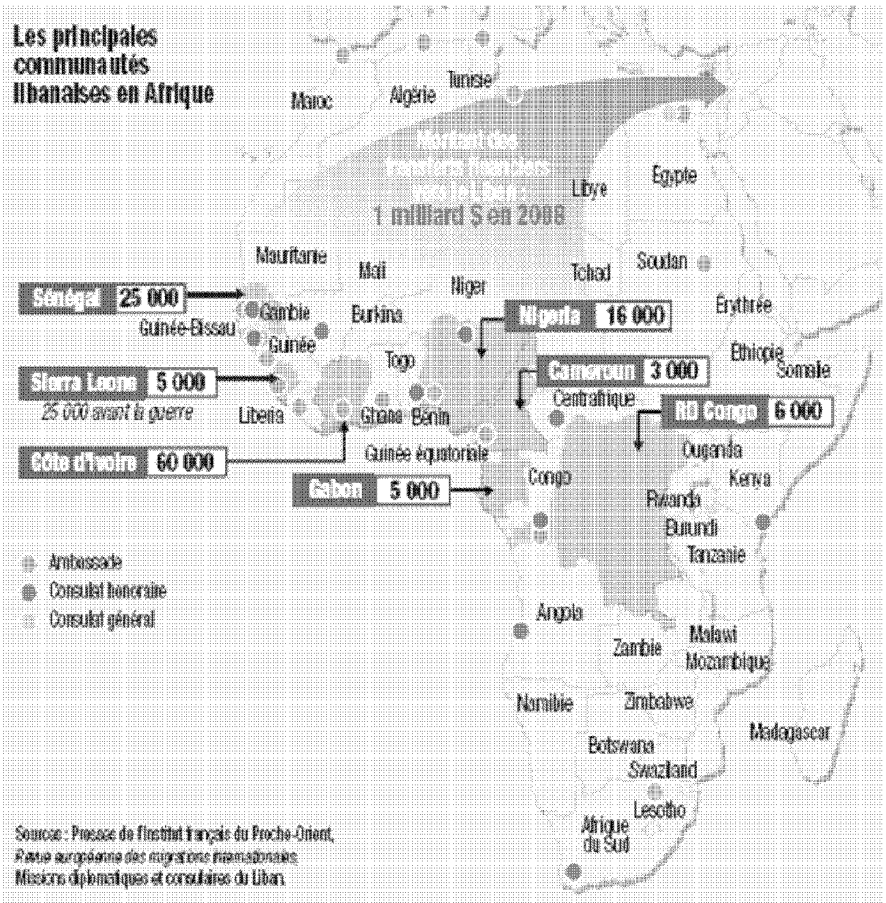
In reality, Senegal has always been considered (along with the Ivory Coast) as the epicenter of the great epic of the Lebanese community in West Africa. Estimated at nearly 30,000 people including 8,000 naturalized Senegalese of Lebanese origin, the community is predominantly Shiite. The famous rue Abdou Karim Bourgi (The King of real estate) is an obvious manifestation of this dynamism. It is not nearly enough to say that the eastern Lebanese Shiites identity is very well preserved in Senegal. A famous Senegalese sociologist recently said on the airwaves of a radio station that the Lebanese were able to dock to Senegalese values, which are different from those of Middle Eastern societies, by working hard and sharing with their fellow indigenous population the harsh living conditions, because this community has an exceptional ability of adaptation.

Their charismatic leader Sheikh Abdul Monem Zein [Shaykh ‘Abd-al-Muni’ m Zayn]

Senegalese Shiites of Lebanese origin have adopted some form of organization that forces respect and admiration by cohabiting harmoniously with the indigenous Senegalese Shiite. They have mostly been able to find behind the qualities and prestige of a guide endowed with a very substantial religious and intellectual attribute, Sheikh Abdul Monem Zein, who also heads the Institute of the Islamic Society. The man has gained all votes on his side at the point of being awarded the title of Khalifatoul Ahlou Baity Rasul (Caliph of the family of the Prophet Mohammed, May God Bless him and Grant him salavation) in Senegal. In fact, the religious leaders, Serigne Saliou Mbacke (Caliph at that time General Mourides), Serigne Mansour Sy (Caliph-General of Tidjanes) and Sheikh Mohammed Bou Kunta (at the time of Caliph Ndiassane) who awarded him this most honorable title.

Main Lebanese communities in Africa

Les principales communautés libanaises en Afrique



The Lebanese in Africa

Ref: Jeune Afrique 13/10/2009 14:53:32 | par Marianne Meunier

Africa: the long march of the Lebanese

Not truly African, the Lebanese diaspora gradually had to invent its own identity. Beyond its undeniable economic success, the remaining frontier yet to conquer is that of the political and civil society.

Claire is 23 years and claims two loves. In the order of her lifeline, Ivory Coast comes first, the country of her mother and earliest memories, because that's where she was born and spent her early childhood. Then comes the Lebanon, the stronghold of her father, in the Muslim Shiite south, where between the age 7 and 15, she has lived as the "darling princess" pampered by her grandparents. With her soft voice and elegant manners, Claire is now the beautiful fruit of these two lands. With a bi-national identity, Claire speaks Arabic, French and Dioula, one of the Manding languages spoken in Ivory Coast. She is familiar with both sides of her family and their households of uncles, aunts, and cousins, equally well, and notes with the same severity the of the - often identical - faults of the two people which she identifies in her own life: the Lebanese, "Racists, when they did not really digest that her father married an Ivorian woman, and her black family in Ivory Coast, "becoming suspicious" of her mother after her marriage to a fair-skinned man. » But at age 23, the student in finance and economics at the prestigious HEC School in Abidjan has made her choice: "My future is in Ivory Coast."

More than a century after the arrival of the Lebanese pioneers in Africa - the first being Younis Elias Khouri, a Maronite Christian from northern Lebanon, who has landed in Nigeria in the 1880s - most of the Lebanese who now reside in Africa, like Claire, do not envision returning to the land of the cedars. Unlike their great-grandparents, who had prepared for an African digression waiting for better days in their homeland, the new Lebanese only visit there during their vacations. While some do send money to their families backing the old country, their lives are in Africa, they assert.

"Sometimes I do go to Lebanon, but only for two or three days, states Hassan, 36. Of Lebanese mother and father, this diamond dealer, a Shiite Muslim, lived in Conakry since 1992. There he was educated in French schools. Previously, he had spent ten years in Sierra Leone with his parents. They had gone back to the old country, but he decided to stay on. "If I feel Guinean? But of course," " he says. No matter of the political instability of Guinea and its daily hassles (fluctuating exchange rates, electrical power cuts...) my center of gravity is in Conakry.

A community numbering 200 000 to 300 000 people

Until the end of the civil war that had engulfed the country from 1975 to 1990, the Lebanese landing in Africa were always fleeing something. At first, it was the Ottoman oppression. These were the first waves of emigration, which range from the late

nineteenth century to the early 1920s. Maronite Christians for the most part, these adventurers were not very numerous in West Africa: in 1913 there were 1 000 Lebanese in French West Africa (FWA). Then came the French mandate over Lebanon (1920-1943) and the myth of the African gold mine: The dry and rocky areas of southern Lebanon seemed very stingy compared to the rich African lands colonized by the mandatory power, mostly Shi'ite peasants from South Lebanon embarked on liners headed for Dakar, Abidjan, and to a lesser extent, Central Africa. Others took the direction of British colonies: Nigeria, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. They were very much encouraged by the colonizers who were delighted to populate their empires with immigrant workers deemed to be hardworking and industrious. The presence of Lebanese in the "colonies" began to grow: in 1936 they were 4 500 in West Africa. If arrivals continued (in 1960, there might have been 17 000 Lebanese in West Africa), the third wave of immigration was caused by the civil war in Lebanon. Fleeing conscription and the Israeli occupation, the inhabitants of southern Lebanon, Shiite Muslims for the most part, joined in mass their African cousins whose economic significance had gradually increased.

Finally, today's estimates indicate the presence of about 200 000 300 000 Lebanese in West Africa. The largest contingent is in Côte d'Ivoire, with 60 000 people. Then 25 000 in Senegal, 6 000 in DR Congo, 5 000 in Gabon ... But these figures are uncertain.

Medicine, commerce, engineering, real estate, information technology, food processing, catering, and banking: over the years, their range of economic activities now covers the whole spectrum of possible jobs. The simplistic image of the Lebanese small-trader standing in his shop between a counter and a wall lined with rolls of cloth or medication is no more. Today, it's an old cliché forgetting that in Senegal a Lebanese family has built the flagship of Senegalese industry, the cookie-making manufacturing plant of the Wehbe family, created in 1946. It forgets that the Lebanese in Angola are mostly engineers, that in Côte d'Ivoire they are credited with owning 60% of the housing stock, 80% of distribution activities, 50% of industry, 70% of packaging and printing; in Guinea they have created the largest number of computer companies ... While on the other hand some share the misery of their fellow Africans living in the downtrodden outskirts of Dakar and Abidjan.

In short, the new arrivals are now rare, the Lebanese today, especially of the younger generations, are part of the landscape as well as their "indigenous compatriots." So why leave when you do not feel foreign? When, in 2004, animosity toward the French was at its height in Abidjan, Claire was often mistaken for being one of them. "Patriotic Ivorian militants, assuming I was French, thought to target our house." Yet, feeling at home in Côte d'Ivoire, that's where she will stay.

Entries to the palace

This is the paradox: while most Lebanese look upon themselves as Senegalese, Guineans, Nigerians, local Africans do not see them as compatriots. They continue to isolate them into clichés that make them strangers... "Their behavior with the workers is incredible;

they mistreat them, that's the word!" Peter, a journalist in Lagos, gets angry... Low wages, inhuman working conditions, verbal abuse: Lebanese bosses are monsters ... The scarcity of mixed marriages does not help: "The Lebanese take African women as girlfriends, but even if they have children by them, they will always remain their mistresses "says Claire, whose parents are married, and according to her she is an " exception ".

In fact, the Lebanese see themselves as "African" while cultivating their own identity, a combination that puts them as a citizen group apart. Lacking a physical presence, their emotional ties with the Levant are persistent. During the Israeli attacks in July-August 2006, the shock of bombs was felt from Brazzaville to Dakar. People cried and sobbed watching television. They reacted similarly with visceral solidarity throughout the Lebanese Shiite Diaspora when on December 25, 2003, 130 Lebanese who were returning to Beirut by the end of the year lost their lives in the crash of a Boeing 727 crashed at sea off the coast of Cotonou. To feel African does not mean that they forget that they are Lebanese, and does not prohibit that they can run or eat at the restaurants where they serve Lebanese food... or building their own mosques - most Lebanese Muslims in Africa are Shiites, while Africans are Sunni Muslims... or building their own health centers, which primarily treat their Lebanese brothers ...

And then there's the place of politics, which usually feeds fantasies. The Lebanese do not run after positions in sight. Monie Captan, a native of Tripoli, Lebanon, became Minister of Foreign Affairs in Liberia (from 1996 to 2003,) was one of the few ministers of Lebanese origin in Africa. His Lebanese countrymen generally prefer to play the discreet roles of advisers: former Kazem Sharara with Abdou Diouf, Hassan Hejeij with Omar Bongo, today Hajal Massad and Roland Dagher in Cameroon or Cote d'Ivoire have open access to the palace. But they do it with a clearly safe inclination, by always remaining on the side of power, not hesitating to contribute generously to political campaigns. This was witnessed during the presidential elections in Congo - Brazzaville in July, and in Gabon in August. A special case, however, is that of the shady businessman Elie Khalil. Close to the Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha (ruled from 1993 to 1998), he was appointed by the mercenary Simon Mann as one of the architects of the attempted coup against the Equatorial Guinean President. Teodoro Obiang Nguema, in 2004. This is an exception that confirms the fact that the Lebanese presence in Africa covers the whole spectrum of available professions.

Lebanese Africans in their Home Country of Lebanon

Ref:13/10/2009 14:58:00 - Jeune Afrique |By: N. Marmie, special correspondent to Beirut and Tyre

Lebanon: "Our dear compatriots! » "

Considered "new rich" with marked sympathy for Hezbollah, the "Lebanese Africans" are not always welcome.

"Tonight, I will not come. I am organizing a yassa evening with friends, and I am cooking." It's been fifteen years that Ghassan 51, who was born in Dakar, lives in Beirut, but his heart remains in Senegal. "It must be said that the "Lebanese-Africans" are not really welcome when they return home. "These are often families of modest origins, with little culture and come back to spend their money ostentatiously to flaunt their success. We have not seen much of them during the war," says Karen, an elegant French-speaking Christian bourgeois woman of the neighborhood of Ashrafieh in Beirut. For behind the mascara and Botox, often oozes contempt for these "new rich" from Africa, as opposed to the prominent Christian families whose adventurous members chose exile in France, Canada, the United States and especially Brazil.

Clannish families

In a Lebanon plagued by sectarianism and religious clannish families, everyone knows that the Lebanese Africans are overwhelmingly Shi'a from the south. "My father left Lebanon in 1916 to avoid conscription into the Ottoman army, he thought joining Argentina from Marseilles, he found himself in Dakar," says Abdehalim Sehlab, 78, originally from Tyre. He worked in all trades; he sold fish, indigo, butter, "says the old man who has continued the family saga by engaging in trading of fabrics in the years 1960-1970.

"These were the good times. There were no bribes as today. I did my business on tennis courts, and sold my goods throughout West Africa," recalls the octogenarian sipping his espresso in a trendy café at a luxury hotel in Beirut's Hamra district. "My brother is the owner of this hotel. He still has business in Dakar. I too will always remain 100% Senegalese, I have Senegalese citizenship, I speak Wolof and I want to be buried there," he whispered while swallowing a petit-four. It's bath time at the shore, Abdehalim has his driver take him to the beach in Beirut facing the nine-storey building he bought in 1969 and whose square meter is worth no less than \$ 7 000.

Originally from Tyre, Wael, 37, is part of the new generation of migrants. In 1989, with an associate degree in business from Strasburg, France, he tries his luck in Nigeria, as manager of the hotel owed by a cousin in Benin City. He finds Nigerian workers hard at work and courageous," and he married a Nigerian woman. Father of three young mixed-race kids, he is currently the head in Freetown, of the leading fishing company in Sierra Leone and exports seafood across the African continent.

On holiday in Beirut, Wael harshly judges his countrymen who "behave badly" towards Africans, they sometimes call them 'abid (slaves). Is business good? Wael smiles: "I can't complain, but I'm not a billionaire..." It is true that the wealth of Lebanese Africans is as coveted as it is opaque. The decay of the National Tax Administration, the fluidity of the banking system, the many circuits of money laundering in what was formerly called the "Lebanon, Switzerland of the Middle East" contribute to this opacity. According to a study by the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese Diaspora repatriated in 2008, some 4.5 billion dollars, of which about 1 billion from Africa.

The religious and family solidarity makes out of the Shiite southern Lebanon, which is controlled by Hezbollah, one of the regions most affected by this money coming from Africa. Tyre, the Lebanese southern capital, bears traces of that African tradition. The avenue along the shore lined with palm trees and all the banking establishments is named "Avenue du Senegal." And between two checkpoints of the Lebanese army, by simply venturing into the mountain villages around the ancient Phoenician port, one discovers the amazing and luxury villas built by the godfathers of the Diaspora inhabited only a few weeks per year. The town of Jouaya, whose main street is named Nigeria, is one of the most ostentatious rural capitals where the tasteless architecture is displayed along with posters portraying Hezbollah's martyred heroes, Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shi'a Speaker of the Lebanese National Assembly, Nabih Berri.

The presence of Lebanese Africans is also visible in Tura, Abbassiyeh or Borj Rahal: Malls (Ghana Center, Ivory Coast Shopping Center Shopping) have emerged amid the banana groves and the countless car dealers located on the coastal road leading from Sidon to Tyre, where they sell German sedans. "It is to launder money. A car is not only for moving around, it is also a bank account," says Jihad, a restaurateur. Especially because Shi'ites are increasingly struggling to invest in lucrative real estate developments in downtown Beirut, jealously controlled by Sunnis and Christians.

Since Hezbollah has become a major player in politics and that Iran has engaged in a standoff with Israel and the West over the nuclear issue, Shiite money is monitored, at least at the international level. The UAE, United Arab Emirates, recently ordered the deportation of hundreds of Lebanese Shi'ites suspected of financing the organization. The investigation conducted in September by the Lebanese justice system on Salah Ezzedine, [Salah 'Izz-al-Din] a famous businessman close to Hezbollah, could also lift a veil on the opacity of the "African Treasure". Portrayed by the press as the "Lebanese Madoff," Salah Ezzedine proposed investments paying 40% interest. He should be dragging along in his fall some of the financial inner workings of the Diaspora. The Lebanese in Africa are well aware; their sectarian generosity arouses much envy in the Lebanese political Mikado.

Iran: Ensuring Hezbollah's Loyalty

Ref: Startfor October 6, 2009

The recent fall of Hezbollah's financial kingpin, Salah Ezzedine, has put a major dent in the Shiite militant group's morale and has given rise to speculation that Tehran may not be able to rely as strongly on Hezbollah as before in a future conflict. However, STRATFOR sources report that Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has been hard at work this past month performing the necessary damage control to maintain a tight grip over its most prized militant proxy.

A wave of terror swept through Hezbollah's top ranks the day a check written by Lebanese Shiite billionaire Salah Ezzedine bounced in early September. The \$200,000 check was written to Hussein Haj Hassan, a Hezbollah member of parliament and adviser to Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. Once Ezzedine's elaborate Ponzi scheme was exposed, Hezbollah immediately withdrew \$500 million worth of investment from his portfolio and Ezzedine hightailed it to the Beirut airport in an attempt to flee.

Hezbollah security officers arrested Ezzedine on his way to the airport and coerced him into transferring his remaining financial assets to the group before turning him in to Lebanese authorities. In return, Hezbollah negotiated with the Lebanese prosecutor general to label the case as "negligent bankruptcy," which warrants a prison term that can last anywhere from three months to three years, as opposed to a "criminal bankruptcy," which carries a seven-year prison term.

But the damage had already been done. Ezzedine, popularly referred to as the Bernard Madoff of the Middle East, was handling the finances of Hezbollah members, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials and a number of other wealthy clients in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Ezzedine had his hands in a number of (often shady) business enterprises that stretched from Lebanon to Russia. Running on a reputation as a pious Shiite, Ezzedine had a business to organize Hajj pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia, a publishing and radio business that also traded oil and owned factories across Eastern Europe, real estate throughout Lebanon and major holdings in the blood diamond trade in west Africa. Ezzedine would offer his clients anywhere between a 35-40 percent interest on their investments, which typically came from money laundering, drug trafficking and auto theft. Many Hezbollah officials would also divest Iranian and Qatari financial aid into Ezzedine's business enterprise.

Africa: Hezbollah's Other Haven

Ref: By Anita Gossmann in Cape Town Apr 16, 2009

Weak governance, porous borders and limited security make Africa a haven for Hezbollah, which has been active across Africa since its inception in the early 1980s. More than anything, Hezbollah dominates the illicit gem trade in Africa.

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Over the last year, and particularly since the assassination of Hezbollah leader Imad Mughniyeh in February 2008, there has been much talk of the possibility that Hezbollah could launch attacks on Israeli interests in West Africa.

Hezbollah's virtually unchecked presence and activities on the continent pose a security threat and works to further entrench illegal and corrupt practices in some of Africa's weakest states and key industries.

Following its recent successes against Israel, Hezbollah has expanded its presence within and beyond the region. Perceived as the liberators of southern Lebanon from Israeli occupation, Hezbollah's popularity was boosted after Israel withdrew from Lebanon in 2000, and again following its perceived victory over the Jewish state in 2006. Hezbollah has since been able to make great inroads into the more traditional Amal Movement support base among the Shiite community in West Africa.

Although the distinction between Amal and Hezbollah in Africa has at times been negligible, Amal (Afwaj al Muqawama al Lubnaniyya or Lebanese Resistance Detachment), a rival Lebanese Shiite militia, has enjoyed longstanding support among local Shiite communities, with key Amal aligned families controlling the diamond trade from Freetown to Kinshasa.

While closer political ties between Amal and Hezbollah have further blurred lines of affiliation in recent years, broader support among local communities for Hezbollah has been crucial in bolstering fundraising and allowing Hezbollah to tap into established local Lebanese business operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In more recent years, the group has also been reportedly active in Senegal, Cameroon, Mali, Guinea and Namibia.

Diamonds, a militant's best friend

Hezbollah's notoriety in Africa stems from its involvement in the illicit trade in rough diamonds. Amal- and Hezbollah-affiliated Lebanese dealers and buyers have traditionally been at the center of the trade in conflict or "blood" diamonds in West Africa and the DRC.

It is believed that Lebanese dealers and brokers continue to make use of illegal networks with Beirut, Antwerp, Tel Aviv, Dubai and Mumbai. Lebanese buyers are active in all key diamond centers, as well as in more remote areas in diamond-rich West and Central African states. From Kono in eastern Sierra Leone to Mbuji-Mayi in southern DRC, buyers make themselves accessible to informal, alluvial miners otherwise subject to cumbersome, expensive diamond regulations; corrupt bureaucracy and inaccessible trading centers. While heavily reliant on these local networks in West Africa, Hezbollah is rumored to have moved beyond them in the DRC, where the group reportedly buys directly from local miners and middlemen.

More recently, evidence was revealed in a PAC report suggesting Lebanese involvement in smuggling rough diamonds out of Zimbabwe to Dubai and Mumbai. Both diamond smuggling and official diamond exports have increased as the country's economy has collapsed. Diamond fields have been seized by the military, informal miners killed or driven away, and local residents living in the vicinity forced to dig for diamonds. According to the report, Zimbabwean diamonds are now considered unclean and a key source of financial support for the regime of Robert Mugabe.

In turn, Hezbollah benefits from established local networks, porous borders, poor internal security and limited state capacity to enforce regulations on the diamond trade.

Hezbollah plays a key role in embedding illegal practice within national diamond industries and entrenching corrupt political elites.

Rather than terror attacks on foreign business interests, the more pressing security threat posed by Hezbollah is its predominant role in facilitating a currency by which bad leaders and corrupt regimes are propped up, and war easily sustained by even the most ragtag of rebel militias.

Closer to Home.

Ref: Steven Emerson is executive director of The Investigative Project and author of 'American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among US' (Free Press).

Hezbollah's achievements as a multinational terror organization right here in the United States offer a glimpse into how the group functions. Our nation's porous borders with Mexico and Canada give Hezbollah operatives easy access to carry out fund-raising and recruiting operations. High-level Hezbollah agents have conducted complex, interstate criminal enterprises, raising millions of dollars and enabling the organization to purchase high-tech weaponry and materials to be sent to the group's Lebanese headquarters. These networks demonstrate clear chains of command and engage in a wide array of activities, including cigarette smuggling, human smuggling, drug trafficking, counterfeiting and "charitable work."

Perhaps the best-publicized Hezbollah fundraising scheme in the United States involved a Charlotte, N.C., cigarette-smuggling ring. Operatives bought cigarettes in North Carolina and resold them in Michigan without paying Michigan's higher taxes. Mohamad Youssef Hammoud, the group's ringleader, was convicted in 2002 on several charges: conspiracies to launder money and traffic in contraband cigarettes, immigration law violations and attempted bribery. Evidence in the trial revealed links between ringleader Hammoud and Sheikh Nasrallah, including a photo of the two men together. The case demonstrated the ease with which illegal immigrants take advantage of the U.S. system, raising money from illicit activities to support both an American Hezbollah cell and the group's headquarters in Lebanon.

The most high-profile case of a Hezbollah trained fighter on U.S. soil involved Mahmoud Youssef Kourani. In March 2005, Kourani pleaded guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization, and in June 2005, he was sentenced to 54 months in prison. The FBI affidavit in the case alleged that Kourani had sent \$40,000 to his brother Haidar, Hezbollah's chief of military security in southern Lebanon. An informant told the FBI that Mahmoud Kourani claimed he had trained in Iran on behalf of Hezbollah and was a member of the Hezbollah unit responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Marine Lt. Col. William Higgins in Lebanon in 1988. According to government documents, "On approximately Feb. 4, 2001, Kourani surreptitiously entered the United States by sneaking across the U.S.-Mexico border in the trunk of a car. He reached Mexico by bribing . . . an official at the Mexican consulate in Beirut to give him a Mexican visa."

In addition to human smuggling, Hezbollah financiers have engaged in large-scale drug operations in North America. A federal indictment in January 2002 charged 36 individuals nationwide, including Ohio resident Mohammad Shabib. Investigators believe

that since the early 1990s, Shabib managed to deposit roughly \$8 million skimmed from drug sales into Chicago bank accounts. Part of the loot is believed to have benefited Hezbollah activities.

A New Front: Hezbollah operatives have frequently sought out sympathetic members of the Lebanese Diaspora to assist them, several of whom have owned and operated Lebanese restaurants. Salim Boughader Mucharrafille, owner of Cafe La Libanesa in Tijuana, Mexico, was arrested in December 2002 for running a ring that allegedly smuggled at least 200 Lebanese compatriots into the United States, including an employee of Al- Manar, Hezbollah's television station. Although it was never confirmed, Boughader was suspected of having helped Kourani to slip over the border. Last May, a Mexican judge sentenced Boughader to 14 years in prison for organized crime and human smuggling.

The case of Rady Zaiter, a.k.a. David Assi Alvarez, is an example of drug-running activities designed to benefit Hezbollah, using a restaurant as a front. In June 2005, Ecuadorian police broke up an international drug-trafficking ring led by the owners of El Turco restaurant: Zaiter and his partner, Maher Hamajo. The restaurant in Quito served as the logistical center for the ring's activities. Drug mules carried cocaine in double-bottomed suitcases bound for other countries in South America, as well as Europe and the Middle East. According to investigating authorities, Hezbollah received at least 70 percent of the drug money. Additionally, officials confiscated more than \$150,000 and 2,000 euros. Further arrests were made in Brazil, Syria and the Dutch Antilles, bringing the total apprehended to 19 people. El Turco, like the Detroit-area restaurant La Shish that was recently allegedly linked to Hezbollah, was a very popular restaurant, appreciated by the locals.

In May 2006, Detroit-based restaurant owner Tala1 Khalil Chahine and his wife, Elfat El Aouar, were indicted on federal tax-evasion charges. They allegedly concealed more than \$20 million in profits from their La Shish restaurant chain and funneled some of those funds to Lebanon . In 2002, Chahine attended an Al-Mabarrat charity event in Lebanon at which he and Sheikh Fadlallah served as keynote speakers. Chahine admitted he attended the charity fund-raiser, reinforcing federal prosecutors' statement that he has "connections at the highest levels of ... Hezbollah." According to the Department of Justice, "Chahine was the representative at the (Al-Mabarrat Lebanon) event of a worldwide group of fund-raisers." Federal prosecutors also alleged that agents searching Chahine's Michigan house discovered a letter thanking him for his sponsorship of 40 Lebanese orphans - a term the Department of Justice considers "a euphemism used by Hezbollah to refer to the orphans of martyrs."

Al-Mabarrat has a U.S.-based branch headquartered in Dearborn, Mich. Founded in 1991, the Al-Mabarrat Charitable Organization-USA, Inc., has repeatedly changed its name over the past 15 years. Although Al-Mabarrat acknowledges on its Web site that it works in conjunction with the Al-Mabarrat Association in Lebanon (whose logo it shares), it omits the fact that Al-Mabarrat Lebanon is run by Sheikh Fadlallah. Despite Al- Mabarrat

USA's direct link to a Fadlallah-controlled organization, the U.S. branch continues to operate unfettered.

Hezbollah's use of Al-Mabarrat as a fund-raising front is a savvy strategic move, mirroring a tactic long exploited by terrorist groups operating on U.S. soil. By utilizing charities, terrorists can generate popular support by providing some legitimate services, attract contributions from donors both unwitting and aware, and attempt to obscure financial trails. But such operations extend far beyond the United States.

Worldwide Reach. Hezbollah revealed its strong South American presence to the world with the 1992 bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires . The attack killed 29 people and wounded more than 240. The group struck again in the Argentine capital in 1994, killing 86 at a Jewish community center in the largest terror attack against Argentina to date.

Hezbollah has long used parts of South America as a training ground, in particular the tri-border area where Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay meet. It has demonstrated a keen interest in extending its activities to other parts of Latin America, including Venezuela, Cuba, Panama and Colombia.

The best example of the extent of Hezbollah's South American reach is the 2002 arrest of Assad Ahmad Barakat in Brazil. Designated by the U.S. Treasury Department as a Hezbollah fundraiser, Barakat has been called one of the terrorist organization's most prominent and influential members. He is believed to have transferred up to \$50 million to Hezbollah since 1995. Two of his businesses - Casa Apollo, a wholesale electronics store, and Barakat Import-Export Ltd. - were used to launder terrorist money and facilitate the movement of Hezbollah operatives. Both have been designated by the U.S. Treasury Department as terrorist fronts.

Although Europe has thus far been exempt from Hezbollah attacks, numerous intelligence experts and officials assert that the group's operatives maintain cells across the continent. German authorities, in particular, have expressed concern about the presence of several hundred Hezbollah members in their country. Hezbollah has established several front charities, mainly operating from Great Britain and Germany, to raise funds earmarked to support the group's members in Lebanon . For example, the British-based Lebanese Welfare Committee, HELP Charity Association for Relief and Abrar Islamic Foundation are among the charities suspected of channeling funds to Sheikh Nasrallah and Hezbollah.

Reports of an increase in Hezbollah recruiting have emerged in eastern European countries, specifically Slovakia, Bosnia and Russia . And over the past few years, Hezbollah has sent operatives with European identification papers to Israel in order to collect intelligence for future attacks. Efforts by European authorities to curtail Hezbollah's influence have included France 's 2004 ban of Hezbollah's television station and chief propaganda machine, A1- Manar, from that nation's satellite television providers. Spain and the United States have made similar moves.

Finally, Hezbollah has been actively fund-raising in Africa for the past two decades, tapping a pool of Shiite Muslim communities, especially in Senegal and the Ivory Coast . The organization engages in mafia-style extortion, all the while receiving money from its large sympathetic donor base. The money generated from the group's African operations alone runs well into the millions of dollars. The Ivory Coast is used not only for fund-raising but also as a safe haven for Hezbollah operatives on the run. Iran has also stepped up its Ivory Coast presence, financing mosques and sending imams to preach in them.

While al-Qaeda has long utilized the African "blood-diamond" trade to facilitate its operations, Hezbollah has recently begun taking its own share in various West Africa countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Togo and Sierra Leone. A blood diamond, also called "conflict diamond" or "war diamond," refers to the precious gem mined in war-torn countries of western and southern Africa, and sold, often clandestinely, in order to finance insurgents, rebels and terrorists. The extortion of diamond merchants is believed to be a tactic adapted by Hezbollah from its South American experience.

New Alliances. One issue with wide-ranging implications for U.S. consumers is the growing alliance between Hezbollah, its regional sponsors, and emerging elements in Latin America - notably Venezuela , where the terrorist group is calling for a stronger relationship with President Hugo Chavez.

After Chavez visited Lebanon last summer, a Hezbollah official told an Indian newspaper, "Mr. Chavez is closer to us than any other Arab leader, and we hope that we will be able to benefit, as he has, from this particular experience (in Lebanon)." The affection seems mutual. On a trip to Iran in July to meet with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Chavez said, "The brave resistance of the Lebanese people and Hezbollah symbolizes their indomitable spirit and reveals how the Islamic and Arab world is fed up with U.S. policy in the region."

Venezuela, an OPEC nation, owns CITGO Petroleum, identified on CITGO's Web site as a "wholly owned subsidiary of Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A., the national oil company of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela ." Filling up at any of the 14,000 CITGO gas stations across the United States thus funds a government that is on the record as being a strong supporter of Hezbollah.

Criminal activity in the United States has raised millions of dollars for Hezbollah as well. The question remains whether Hezbollah members and supporters within our borders possess the wherewithal to carry out attacks if ordered to do so. Although no direct evidence exists of an imminent attack, their presence, as well their ability to conduct illicit operations often undetected by U.S. border security and law-enforcement officials, presents a significant threat to U.S. national security and the safety of American citizens.

Steven Emerson is executive director of The Investigative Project and author of 'American Jihad: The Terrorists Living Among US' (Free Press).

