



# Irregular Warfare Terrorism Subject Bibliography

## No. 2: Lebanese Hezbollah in Latin America

Pamela Ligouri Bunker – IWC Research Contractor  
Alma Keshavarz - IWC Research Contractor  
Robert J. Bunker – IWC Research Contractor



*This subject bibliography is a selection of top resources on Lebanese Hezbollah in Latin America and includes journal articles, reports, books, sections of websites, and videotaped talks. The dates of the material range from 2010 to 2025, encompassing various aspects of the terrorist organization and its criminal activities which include narcotics trafficking and money laundering. The purpose is to provide ready-access resources for the study of Hezbollah and its linkages to allied organizations—both states and non-state actors—in Latin America.*

Lebanese Hezbollah is a Shiite Islamist organization established in the early 1980s with direct support from the Islamic Republic of Iran, which remains its primary state sponsor, through funding, training, and ideological support. Hezbollah has a dual identity: it is both a political party with representation in Lebanon's parliament and a militant group that maintains an independent armed wing. Hezbollah is designated—fully or partially—as a foreign terrorist organization by a number of countries and international bodies, including the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the Gulf Cooperation Council, among others. Hezbollah has been a key player in Middle Eastern regional conflicts for decades, most notably engaging in full-scale war with Israel in 2006 which surprised both Israel and the international community. Hezbollah was also critical in the Syrian civil war, with thousands of fighters sent in support of the Bashar al-Assad regime in alignment with Iranian and Russian interests. Prior to Assad's fall in December 2024, Hezbollah's operations in Syria allowed the group to expand its military experience and regional footprint.

The events of 7 October 2023, however, changed the landscape of the Middle East when Hamas launched an attack against Israel; as Israel began an extended military campaign against Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah and other Iranian-backed groups escalated tensions. In response to Hezbollah's increased involvement, Israel launched a covert operation on 17 September 2024, widely referred to as the "pager attack," involving the remote detonation of thousands of pagers and walkie-talkies distributed among Hezbollah units

*The views expressed in this research are those solely of the authors based on research and do not reflect the policy or views of the Irregular Warfare Center, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.*

in Lebanon and Syria.<sup>1</sup> The attack caused widespread casualties to the organization while also serving as a cognitive setback. On 24 September 2024, Israeli airstrikes killed Hezbollah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, which served as a turning point for the organization. His likely successor, Hashem Safieddine, was also killed in an Israeli strike on 3 October 2024. With its leadership decimated and operational capabilities significantly degraded, Hezbollah's future as a state-sponsored terrorist organization is in question.

As a result, Hezbollah may consider pivoting more towards insurgent tactics and increasing their reliance on illicit networks for funding and survival. One potential avenue is Latin America, where Hezbollah has a long-standing presence, particularly in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) where Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil converge. This region is known to have served as a hub for Hezbollah's illicit financial operations, including drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering. A new Tri-Border Area (TBA) where Chile, Bolivia, and Peru converge (Witker's model) has since been identified,<sup>2</sup> as well as an even more recent maritime one, recognized as existing between Maicao, Colombia; Punto Fijo, Venezuela; and Colón, Panama<sup>3</sup> which offer additional unlawful revenue potentials as do other lawless regions in Latin America. The group's integration into transnational criminal networks enables it to generate revenue outside of traditional state sponsorship, especially as Iran – its primary sponsor – is facing obstacles of its own. Moreover, Latin America's sizeable Lebanese and broader Arab diaspora offer a potential foundation for Hezbollah to exploit.<sup>4</sup> These communities are vulnerable to influence through familial, religious, and cultural ties. As an Iranian proxy, the organization's links to the Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA) and Venezuela also provide it with additional revenue stream opportunities.<sup>5</sup> Whether Hezbollah will disarm or evolve into a more covert insurgency remains uncertain. However, the group has engaged in large scale terrorist violence in Latin America in the past [e.g., the July 1994 Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) bombing] as well as other lesser acts of terrorism, with the potential—under the right circumstances—to threaten attacks within the United States itself.

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1 "WATCH: Pentagon holds daily briefing after Hezbollah pagers explode in Lebanon and Syria." PBS News. 17 September 2024, pp. 1-3, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-live-pentagon-holds-briefing-as-israel-vows-to-halt-hezbollah-attacks>.

2 Alma Keshavarz, "Iran and Hezbollah in the Tri-Border Areas of Latin America: A Look at the 'Old TBA' and the 'New TBA.'" Small Wars Journal, 12 November 2015, pp 1-12, <https://archive.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/iran-and-hezbollah-in-the-tri-border-areas-of-latin-america-a-look-at-the-“old-tba”-and-the->

3 Joseph M. Humire, "Hezbollah's Maritime Tri-Border in Latin America" at the 24th Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum, Panama City. Center for a Secure Free Society. YouTube, 24 February 2023, 5:27 Minute Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgytdhOx1jQ>.

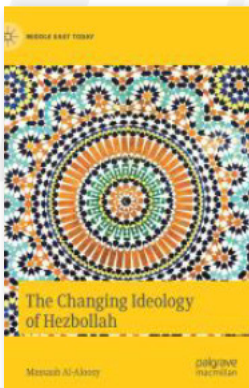
4 Warren Bratter, "The Lebanese in Latin America." Un Poco De Todo. 6 July 2020, pp. 1-4, <https://sites.hofstra.edu/un-poco-de-todo/2020/07/06/the-lebanese-in-latin-america/> and "U.S. Treasury Sanctions Latin America-Based Hezbollah Financial Network." Foundation for Defense of Democracies. 13 September 2023, p. 1, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/09/13/u-s-treasury-sanctions-latin-america-based-hezbollah-financial-network/>.

5 Jorge Paredes Esteban, Penetration and Influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Latin America. Herzliya: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), June 2023, pp. 1-43, [https://ict.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Paredes-Esteban\\_Penetration-and-Influence-of-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran-in-Latin-America\\_2023\\_22\\_11-1.pdf](https://ict.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Paredes-Esteban_Penetration-and-Influence-of-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran-in-Latin-America_2023_22_11-1.pdf).



Massaab Al-Aloosy, "Insurgency, Proxy, and Dependence: How Hezbollah's Ideology Prevails Over its Interest in its Relationship with Iran." *International Journal*, Vol. 78, Iss. 1-2, 25 May 2023, pp. 24-40, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00207020231175679>

**Annotation:** This article sets out to explain why Hezbollah maintains its close commitment to Iran even though it has the potential for economic and military autonomy. Due to fluctuations in Iranian support because of sanctions, Hezbollah has learned to diversify its income globally through direct donations and illicit economic activities. Furthermore, there is evidence that the transmission of expertise is now from Hezbollah to Iran, with its training of the IRGC and the Syrian army rather than the reverse. The author contends that it is Hezbollah's ideological commitment to the concept of velayet-e faqih—with the supreme leader in Iran also the supreme leader of Hezbollah—that maintains the unwavering connection between the two. Its core belief that Iran is the "nucleus of the world's central Islamic state," continues to make that state its source of moral and ideological support and this is not expected to change.

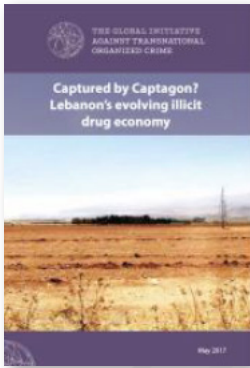


Massaab Al-Aloosy, *The Changing Ideology of Hezbollah*. Middle East Today Series. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2020, pp. 1-210, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-34847-2>

**Annotation:** The work is part of the Middle East Today series and traces the changing ideology of Hezbollah—viewed as an insurgent movement—from one of religious fervor which seeks to create an Islamic (Shia) State in Lebanon, destroy Israel, and liberate Jerusalem to one based on more imposed pragmatic objectives. While Israel is still the designated enemy and rule of jurisprudence (velayat-e faqih) represents central ideological component, the relationship between

Hezbollah (the client) and Syria (a patron state) have dynamically changed over the four periods of the group's historical evolution—to the point where the client is actively helping to ensure the survival of a patron. Additionally, Hezbollah's integration into the Lebanese political system (rather than co-opting it) and active support of Iran (and Shia worldwide) provide an additional layer of ideological interdependencies to its activities.





Jeremy Arbid, *Captured by Captagon? Lebanon's Evolving Drug Economy*. Geneva: The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, May 2017, pp. 1-48, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/captagon/>

**Annotation:** The Global Initiative (GI) report, with financial support from Norway, concerns the evolving drug trade in Lebanon with a focus on the production and distribution of Captagon (an amphetamine) which represents an estimated \$1 billion-dollar illicit regional industry tied to Hezbollah and the Assad regime (in Syria). While Captagon seizures spiked in 2014, the report downplays Hezbollah's involvement in this activity given lack of data, the byzantine nature of Lebanese and UN politics, and related blowback potentials. The report is a follow on to the earlier *The Nexus of Conflict and Illicit Drug Trafficking: Syria and the Wider Region* (GI, November 2017).



János Besenyő, Attila Gulyas, and Darko Trifunovic, "Hezbollah and the internet in the twenty-first century." *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2022, pp. 669-685, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363681795\\_Hezbollah\\_and\\_the\\_Internet\\_in\\_the\\_Twenty-First\\_Century](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363681795_Hezbollah_and_the_Internet_in_the_Twenty-First_Century)

**Annotation:** The authors argue that the internet (as part of a media empire) is viewed as one of the three components of Iran's and Hezbollah's "resistance society" which also encompasses a military infrastructure and a network of large-scale civilian institutions. The full spectrum of media increasingly leverages the internet (a new technology) to shape public opinion, to gain supporters and sympathizers, to raise funds, and for information warfare purposes. Cyber-espionage, "Fake News" media camps, and Hezbollah links to money counterfeiting and Dark Web transactions (via TOR, I2P, Freenet) are also highlighted as part of the picture of their overall internet activities.



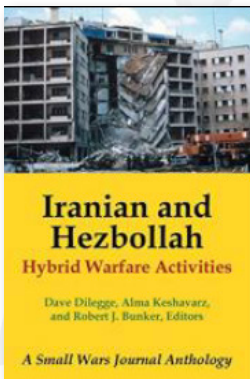
Leonardo Coutinho, "The Evolution of the Most Lethal Criminal Organization in Brazil- the PCC." *Prism*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2019, pp. 56-67, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1943465/the-evolution-of-the-most-lethal-criminal-organization-in-brazilthe-pcc/>

**Annotation:** This article explains how the Premeiro Comando da Capital (PCC), which originated as a prison gang, became dominant with its emphasis on unity and, using a trade union model, was exported to other prisons and ultimately to society at large. It then consolidated as a "second generation gang," expanding into the economic arena through drug trafficking and bank robbery. Originally denying its existence, the government unwittingly helped the group expand by continuing to break up the group and send members to other prisons. As it increased in its ability to influence the state and gained transnational ties, it became what is known as a "third generation gang." At that point, it began embracing terrorist tactics, ultimately signing a truce which led to formal political involvement as members won local elections. As the largest of 27 active gangs in Brazil, it has been linked to both FARC and Hezbollah.



“Hezbollah.” *Diálogo Américas*, <https://dialogo-americas.com/?s=Hezbollah>

**Annotation:** Per the site overview, ‘DIÁLOGO is a professional digital military magazine published by the U.S. Southern Command’ with the addition of images, videos, and other elements. It contains dozens of articles focusing on Hezbollah’s involvement in Latin America since March 2019 as well as even more involving Iranian activities. More recent Hezbollah articles have focused on their recent expansion in Latin America, the likelihood of the group expanding its illicit operations to help finance itself after the loss of much of its leadership networks in Lebanon, and the increasing threat of terrorist attacks (against Jewish targets) in the region (such as Brazil where two Hezbollah operatives were arrested in November 2023).



Dave Dilegge, Alma Keshavarz, and Robert J. Bunker, Eds., *Iranian and Hezbollah Hybrid Warfare Activities*. Small Wars Journal Anthology. Bloomington: iUniverse, 2016, pp. 1-780, <https://www.amazon.com/Iranian-Hezbollah-Hybrid-Warfare-Activities/dp/153200866X>

**Annotation:** The anthology contains sixty articles published between 2007 and 2015 at Small Wars Journal focusing on hybrid warfare activities engaged in by Iran and its proxy Hezbollah. The book is divided into sections on Iran’s military capabilities and nuclear ambitions, Hezbollah’s global operations, Iran and Hezbollah’s involvement in the Middle East, Iran and Hezbollah’s activities in Latin America. Alma Keshavarz’s discussion of the ‘New Tri-Border Region’ of Latin America (based on Witker’s model) is highlighted in Chapter 60 of the publication. In addition to this work, SWJ (<https://smallwarsjournal.com>) and El Centro (<https://smallwarsjournal.com/category/el-centro/0>) have numerous post-2015 articles focused on the tri-border areas in Latin America and Hezbollah (and Iranian linked) activities in the Western hemisphere and other regions of the world.



Omer Dostri, “Hezbollah: A Worldwide Criminal Organization.” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Summer 2023, pp. 1-9, <https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/hezbollah-a-worldwide-criminal-organization>

**Annotation:** The work provides a basic overview of the complex criminal web that has been developed by Hezbollah over the course of decades to generate illicit revenues. It highlights the Iranian-Hezbollah partnership that exists and the global nature of the criminal activities taking place. Further, various criminal groups Hezbollah is cooperating with are discussed, along with key personnel identified who are involved in its criminal network tied to the shadowy Organization for External Security (Unit 910), with key cases highlighted (including cartel money laundering) which have disrupted its illicit economic activities.



R.Evan Ellis, “Security Implications for the United States from Iranian and Hezbollah Activities in Latin America.” SSI Website: HDIAC Webinar. 18 December 2024, 1:02:46 Hour Video, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Recent-Publications/Article/4009666/security-implications-for-the-united-states-from-iranian-and-hezbollah-activities/>

*Annotation:* This Homeland Defense & Security Information Analysis Center (HDIAC) webinar is provided by a research professor with the U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) whose expertise is on Latin American security. He discusses the activities of Iran and Hezbollah, one of its key surrogates, in Latin America within the larger global context. Six detailed power point slides are provided with the webinar. One of the questions he asks is “Could escalation in [the] Middle East change [the] Hezbollah posture in Latin America.” A good historic overview of Hezbollah regional activities is provided along with some limited Q&A. Written transcripts of the webinar can also be accessed.



Jorge Paredes Esteban, *Penetration and Influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Latin America*. Herzliya: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), June 2023, pp. 1-43, [https://ict.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Paredes-Esteban\\_Penetration-and-Influence-of-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran-in-Latin-America\\_2023\\_22\\_11-1.pdf](https://ict.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Paredes-Esteban_Penetration-and-Influence-of-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran-in-Latin-America_2023_22_11-1.pdf)

*Annotation:* Written by a Spanish researcher who served as an intern with the ICT, the report discusses the motivations for Iran’s penetration of Latin America and their overall objectives and strategies, and how they maintain their ongoing influence. The religious, political, and ideological components of their activities are also noted with the incremental recruitment, indoctrination, and proselytizing (Shia conversion) of citizenry in targeted areas. This comprehensive overview of Iran’s activities in Latin America includes Iran’s ability to leverage the Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA) to further embed itself in the region and its use of Hezbollah. The Rabbani network case study further portrays how Hezbollah operates as an espionage and intelligence organization leveraging Iranian diplomatic and cultural venues and Shia mosques in Argentina.





“Hezbollah in Latin America,” *Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD) Website*. Washington, DC, <https://www.fdd.org/issue/iran-in-latin-america/>

*Annotation:* A keyword search at this website related to “Hezbollah in Latin America” produced a listing of work by the FDD going back over a decade, ranging from podcasts to policy briefs, from congressional testimony to articles in publications such as *Foreign Policy* and *The Hill*. FDD staff producing these products primarily include Emmanuele Ottolenghi along with John Hannah and Juan C. Zarate. Hundreds of works focusing on Hezbollah and Iran are also available through the website, with a dedicated FDD Iran Program (found under the Projects heading) providing ongoing and detailed research and comprehensive policy recommendations. Almost all the Hezbollah in Latin America research, however, is pre-7 October 2023—except for a Spanish podcast on Hamas and Hezbollah in the region (9 March 2024)—making it less relevant to Hezbollah’s recent shifts in strategy.



Marzia Giambertoni, “Hezbollah’s Networks in Latin America: Potential Implications for U.S. Policy and Research.” Santa Monica: RAND, 31 March 2025, pp. 1-20, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA3585-1.html>

*Annotation:* This Rand insight piece shows concern for the lack of scrutiny regarding Latin America given the shift in U.S. priorities toward China and Russia. Collating a variety of academic and investigative reporting along with congressional transcripts and governmental documents, it sought to identify patterns in Hezbollah’s Latin American operations but found a distinct lack in recent congressional attention (ending in 2015), outdated government reports (post-2016), limited recent comprehensive academic studies (beyond Rand’s 2023 financing study), and “few publicly reported joint operations or intelligence sharing efforts.” Documenting Hezbollah operations in at least 12 of the 20 Latin American countries and noting Iranian soft power efforts there, the author sees potential for its return to retaliation against its enemies in the region, exploitation of cross-border vulnerabilities, manipulation of trafficking routes, and utilizing criminal networks for intelligence gathering—all of which could directly impact the U.S. and its interests. She finishes with three key recommendations to address any such shifts or operations before they come to fruition.



Rex Hudson, *Terrorist and Organized Crime Crime Groups in the Tri-Border (TBA) of South America*. Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, July 2003 (Revised December 2010), pp. 1-87, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/terrorist-and-organized-crime-groups-tri-border-area-tba-south>

**Annotation:** This fused open-source report was prepared under an interagency agreement between Federal Research Division, Library of Congress and the Crime and Narcotics Center Director of Central Intelligence (CIA). It primarily spans the 1999 to mid-2003 era, with partially updated information later provided through 2010. The report

focuses on the activities of organized crime, terrorists, and narcotics traffickers in the lawless TBA where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay intersect. This has been popularly characterized as a ‘Star Wars Bar’ environment type of criminal enclave, where state capacity and oversight are extremely low and this permissive political, social, and economic environment is conducive to Hezbollah illicit activities. The work is considered an influential primer on the region and the terrorist group (using the Hizballah spelling) is extensively covered within it. Further, the Appendix provides detailed information on five operatives belonging to Islamic fundamentalist groups (primarily Hezbollah).



Joseph M. Humire, *The Middle Eastern Origin of the Venezuela Crisis: The strategic threat from Iran, Hezbollah, and the Maduro regime to the United States*. Washington, DC: The Institute of World Politics. YouTube, 26 November 2019, 1:02:20 Hour Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdauCQ-9UIk>

**Annotation:** The brief provides a strategic perspective on the topic of Iran, its proxy Hezbollah, and their interactions with the Maduro regime in Venezuela (which is essentially a narco-state). Middle Eastern migrations to Latin America (and vice versa), key inflection points, and changes in revolutionary thought are highlighted. Venezuela has turned itself into an air bridge for Iran and its allies. The speaker is at a podium in the video with a PowerPoint slide show on a screen also visible. About twenty minutes of Q&A are provided. This is the first time this presentation, which is a variation of a longer US and allied governmental non-public brief, has ever been given publicly where it has been recorded.





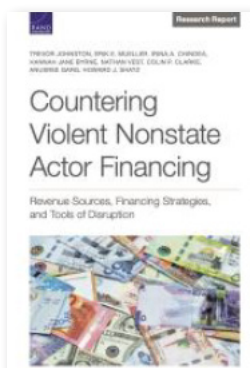
Joseph M. Humire, *The Maduro-Hezbollah Nexus: How Iran-backed Networks Prop up the Venezuelan Regime*. Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council, October 2020, 1-23, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-maduro-hezbollah-nexus-how-iran-backed-networks-prop-up-the-venezuelan-regime/>

*Annotation:* This Atlantic Council sponsored report unpacks the layers by which Hezbollah has shifted its identity in Latin America from terrorist group to one of the region's top five transnational criminal organizations. Focusing on Venezuela and its robust diaspora population due to waves of immigration from Lebanon and Syria, it outlines three major familial clans now assimilated into the Maduro regime's political apparatus and illicit economy. Members of the Saleh and Rada clans operate as financiers while the Nassereddines serve as 'fixers' (offering deniability) in an interwoven logistical network spanning Caracas, Damascus, and Tehran. Policy recommendations include applying maximum pressure at all convergence points and delegitimizing Hezbollah both in Lebanon and among its diaspora populations. For background and context see Joseph M. Humire and Ilan Berman, Eds., *Iran's Strategic Penetration of Latin America* (Lexington, 2014).



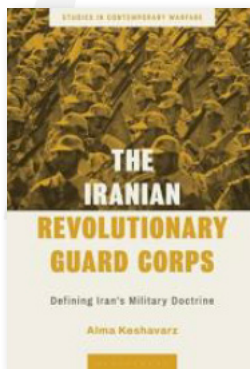
Joseph M. Humire, "Hezbollah's Maritime Tri-Border in Latin America" at the 24th Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum, Panama City. Center for a Secure Free Society. YouTube, 24 February 2023, 5:27 Minute Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgytdh0x1jQ>

*Annotation:* The newest Tri-Border Area (TBA) in Latin America, which is maritime based, is highlighted by the speaker at a security forum in Panama. It exists in the Caribbean in the intersecting area of Punto Fijo, Venezuela; Maicao, Colombia; and Colón, Panama. The speaker, the Secure Free Society (SFS) Executive Director, presents at a podium along with maps, images, and documents being shown in the video. He argues that Hezbollah is replicating its criminal model as it expands its support networks and leverages its diaspora, and, further, now has the ability in the new TBA to engage in money laundering in U.S. dollars via Panama.



Trevor Johnston et. al, “Appendix D: Lebanese Hezbollah” in *Countering Violent Nonstate Actor Financing: Revenue Sources, Financing Strategies, and Tools of Disruption*. Research Report: RRA687-1. Santa Monica: RAND, 2023, pp. 219-239, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA687-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA687-1.html)

*Annotation:* The report, sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-3/5/7, U.S. Army, seeks to identify, examine, and provide tools to counter Violent Nonstate Actor (VNSA) financing. The appendix case study encompasses Hezbollah’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) origins, ideological components (based on its tenets and three elements: Shia Islam, rule by the jurist, and duty of jihad), financial streams (licit and illicit), the evolution of the organization’s financial strategy, and both kinetic and non-kinetic tactics used to counter it. Various operations against Hezbollah’s finances are touched upon and as is the importance of the Lebanese diaspora to its global operations.



Alma Keshavarz, *The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps: Defining Iran’s Military Doctrine*. London: Bloomsbury, 2023, pp. 1-226, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/iranian-revolutionary-guard-corps-9781350255654/>

*Annotation:* The work is one of the few to specifically focus on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its more secretive Qods Force which specializes in unconventional warfare activities—more so for what it means from a U.S. policy perspective given the author’s first-hand knowledge of federal governmental institutions. The book covers the establishment of the IRGC, its development politically and increasing influence within Iran, its relationships and activities with Shia militias and the Hezbollah terrorist organization (which it initially founded from personnel sent to Lebanon), and its activities in Iraq and Yemen. It also provides an analysis of its hybrid warfare capabilities.



Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah's procurement channels: Leveraging criminal networks and partnering with Iran. CTC Sentinel, Vol. 12, Iss. 3, March 2019, pp. 1-9, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/hezbollahs-procurement-channels-leveraging-criminal-networks-partnering-iran/>

**Annotation:** Even though it has been traditionally funded and well supplied with weaponry by Iran, Hezbollah continues to partner with criminal operatives to procure weapons and other equipment for its own use as well as sometimes for Iran itself. Using data from US investigations over the past 20 years, this article looks at the channels for this procurement as well as the role of Iran's Quds Force in the process. In 2006, for example, an operation exposed the way in which—through intermediary criminal enterprises—weapons would be mislabeled and shipped to Hezbollah controlled ports in Syria. Later, beginning in 2009 and with operational evidence up until 2018, sanctions and declining oil prices in Iran led Hezbollah to institute a multitude of illicit financing and procurement efforts across the globe—a specific portion of which went directly to Iran. These various operations revealed that Hezbollah both opportunistically and proactively sought out sensitive technologies (such as GPS missile guidance and specialized UAV adaptations) along with replacement weaponry (especially Western-manufactured and reliable) for use in Syria. Along both Hezbollah and Quds Force channels, these items then moved across Syria and to stockpiles in Lebanon.



Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah's Criminal Networks: Useful Idiots, Henchmen, and Organized Criminal Facilitators," in Hilary Matfess and Michael Miklaucic, Eds., *Beyond Convergence: World Without Order*, Washington, DC: National Defense University, October 2016, pp. 155-177, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D5-PURL-gpo76875/pdf/GOVPUB-D5-PURL-gpo76875.pdf>

**Annotation:** In this book chapter, the author outlines Hezbollah's 'nodal' method of criminal enterprise. He offers insight into where Hezbollah operates as a coherent structure as a terrorist organization and the

ways in it which leverages a single individual with high-level Hezbollah connections in its criminal operations. These operations are intentionally informal, relying on convergence points shared by the breadth of criminal networks. Participants range from 'useful idiots' (small scale criminals who donate part of their profits) to 'henchmen' (Hezbollah operatives or close associates) and 'facilitators' (individuals well-placed and willing to open doors for the group's criminal activities) who provide leverage with other organized criminal groups. The lack of a single model serves to obscure both the illicit nature of its activities (including narcotics trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering, counterfeiting, and fraud) as well as its liaisons with partners of convenience (such as Israeli drug smugglers) which may not play well with supporters. The author suggests that—if they can be identified—targeting the super-facilitators would prove a fruitful strategy for the U.S.





Adriana Marin, *The Convergence of Terrorism and Organised Crime: An Examination of Hezbollah's Activities in Latin America from a Crime-Terror Nexus Perspective*. Doctoral Dissertation. Coventry: Coventry University, September 2022, pp. 1-279, <https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/the-convergence-of-terrorism-and-organised-crime-an-examination-o>

*Annotation:* The dissertation focuses on Hezbollah operations in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. It takes a modified theoretical “black hole syndrome” approach which allows a crime-terror nexus (convergence) to develop outside of failed (fragile) states in lawless border zone areas. While the work focuses on criminal entrepreneurship and the conditions (drivers) that function as enablers, the specific case study used has value for its focus on the specificities of Hezbollah, the investigation of the group’s decision-making process concerning its operations in the initial TBA, and its involvement in organized criminal activities. The study utilized twenty-five semi structured interviews of experts and empirical data collection for research purposes.



Demetrios Marinides, *Hezbollah in Latin America: A Potential Grey Zone Player in Great Power Competition*. Perry Center Occasional Paper. Washington, DC: National Defense University, September 2021, pp. 1-24, <https://wjpcenter.org/document/hezbollah-in-latin-america-a-potential-grey-zone-player-in-great-power-competition/>

*Annotation:* This occasional paper shows how Hezbollah as a hybrid terrorist organization serves to bridge different tiers of grey zone conflict and thus could play a key role for anti-western powers seeking a foothold across Latin America. It outlines the historical context of Hezbollah’s infiltration of the initial Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina, its strategic shift to Venezuela, and its subsequent move into other free trade zones such as the ‘new TBA’ between Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. Its positioning has dovetailed with the soft power expansion by Iran which has established diplomatic ties and founded mosques and cultural centers across the region. The work holds that Russia similarly has made inroads into the region and, while publicly distancing itself from Hezbollah, uses its political links to Venezuela—as well as via the Russian mafia and other TCOs— through which to engage with the group. The piece concludes that both Iran and Russia—via Hezbollah— are now in a position of strength from which to project their power against the interests of the U.S.



Josh Meyer, “The secret backstory of how Obama let Hezbollah off the hook.” Politico. December 2017, pp. 1-61, <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>

*Annotation:* A somewhat sensational but mostly accurate investigative journalistic piece on the Drug Enforcement Administration’s operation codenamed Project Cassandra which targeted Hezbollah’s global illicit finances and revenues—with a focus on cocaine trafficking out of South America—which was shut down by the Obama Administration to improve US-Iranian relations to further the Iranian nuclear (anti-weapons proliferation) agreement. The top-secret operation ran from 2008 through 2016 and was supported by thirty U.S. and foreign counternarcotics and security agencies. It initially identified Hezbollah’s criminal networks (including the massive West African used car money laundering scheme) and then began to increasingly target them when it was shutdown.



Daniel Odin Shaw, “Beyond necessity: Hezbollah and the intersection of state-sponsored terrorism with organized crime.” *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 12, Iss. 4, 11 April 2019, pp. 582-604, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17539153.2019.1592074>

*Annotation:* This well-researched academic work seeks to evaluate theoretical explanations for the lesser studied phenomenon of ‘state-sponsored’ terror groups who become involved in organized crime. Coming from the position that social movement theory can be fruitfully applied to terrorist and organized crime groups as ‘contentious

collective actors,’ the author finds two basic differential approaches exist explaining their behavior: economic necessity vs. opportunities and constraints. Applying these concepts to the test case of Hezbollah, the article concludes—with caveats—that four of the five causal factors tested for the opportunity-based theory were present whereas necessity-based factors were poorly substantiated.



Rashmi Singh and Jorge M. Lasmar, *Regional Hubs of Illicit Trade: The Tri-border Area*. Washington, DC: Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC), May 2024, pp. 1-68, <https://traccc.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Final-TBA.pdf>

*Annotation:* A detailed and in-depth study on the initial TBA by two leading researchers in Minas Gerais, Brazil which was part of the larger Hubs of Illicit Trade Project out of George Mason University. Hezbollah’s ongoing presence in the TBA is highlighted in this TraCCC report as well as their use of shell-companies for trafficking and laundering purposes

(Barakat, Farhat, and Hijazi linked networks). The increasing involvement of corrupt business elites with Hezbollah is discussed as is the group’s smuggling of cocaine made to appear as shisha charcoal. The study makes extensive use of helpful visuals (tables, figures, et al) and important distinctions are made concerning key types of licit, grey, and illegal commodities distributed through the Tri-Border Region and the illicit goods routes utilized.



Southern District of New York, “United States of America v. Adel El Zabayar.” Criminal Complaint, 5 March 2020, pp. 1-50, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/press-release/file/1279391/dl?inline=>

*Annotation:* The Adel El Zabayar complaint details the criminal activities he and his network of co-conspirators engaged in, spanning in/about 1999 through in/about 2020. It levees narco-terrorism conspiracy (count one), cocaine importation conspiracy (count two), possessions of machineguns and destructive devices (count three), and conspiracy to possess them (count four) charges against Hezbollah (and others including the Venezuelan leader Maduro Moros and the Cártel de Los Soles) related to their ongoing illicit operations taking place in Latin America, the United States, and the Middle East. The strategy of “flooding” the U.S. with cocaine is highlighted as is the support provided by the FARC and Hamas in this activity.



Vice, “How the US Failed to Take Down Narco-terrorism.” War on Drugs Series. YouTube. 2 July 2023, 12:26 Minute Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6l796cTNGfg>

*Annotation:* An episode in the Vice series ‘The War on Drugs’ which focuses on the role that the para-military terrorist group Hezbollah plays in global narco-trafficking. The Beqaa valley hashish industry, Syrian linked captagon (amphetamine) smuggling, and cocaine trafficking out of Latin America are discussed with a focus on the DEA’s Operation Titan (2008) which uncovered Hezbollah’s direct links with the Zetas cartel and the follow-on multi-year Operation Cassandra, whose success resulted in its being shut down by the Obama administration for endangering the Iran nuclear deal. The commentator cuts in and out of the fast-paced video with news imagery of Hezbollah fighters and its leaders, narcotics, and weaponry, and expert interviews are also interspersed within it.



Washington Institute, “John Fernandez: The DEA’s Targeting of Hezbollah’s Global Criminal Support Network.” YouTube. 9 January 2020, 1:18:03 Hour Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50G6eFGxuCO>

*Annotation:* The presentation is provided by a supervisory level DEA special agent with the Counter-Narco-Terrorism Operations Center (CNTOC) and past CIA Latin America intelligence analysis experience. The video offers great context and a recent historical overview of DEA targeting of Hezbollah’s global criminal support network. Presentation slides are provided highlighting convergence (and related) threats, Lebanese Hezbollah (LH), individuals arrested (Project Cassandra), Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) designations, and a snapshot of the LH global criminal support network with a presence in Colombia (via the DTOs), Venezuela, and the initial Tri-Border Region identified. About a forty-minute Q&A session also took place, including those concerning international political nuances, criminal funding amounts, the role of Iranian embassies, and Hezbollah sleeper cells in the U.S.