



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on August 18, 2009

## No State Sponsors, No Terror

“All warfare is based on deception.” — The Art of War, by Sun Tzu, Chinese General, military strategist (sixth century B.C.). It was late in the evening of February 12, 2008 when the bearded, pudgy, middle-aged man left a meeting at an Iranian school in the quiet Kfar Suseh neighborhood of Damascus, Syria, and walked to his car, which was parked on the street. No sooner had he climbed into his Mitsubishi Pajero than the vehicle erupted in a mighty blast, killing him instantly.



A few hours later, consumers of the morning news learned the identity of the car-bomb victim. It was none other than the elusive Hezbollah terror master, Imad Fayeز Mugniyeh, one of the most hunted — and most dangerous — men on the planet.

Unlike his better-known terrorist colleagues, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Mugniyeh shunned publicity. He didn't give interviews, pose for photos, or issue audio or video recordings to Al Jazeera media outlets. He rarely broke cover, was always on the move, and reportedly never slept in the same bed two nights in a row. Only a few photographs of him are known to exist despite his having cut an unparalleled swath of terror over the previous 25 years. Yet he was at the apex of the global terrorist pyramid, sitting with bin Laden on the super-secret Committee of Three.

Imad Mugniyeh burst onto the international terrorist scene in 1983 with a series of spectacular, deadly bombings aimed at driving U.S. forces out of Lebanon. At the time he was a mere 20 years old, but was already a veteran of many terrorist actions. The 1983 Beirut suicide bombings included the April 18 U.S. Embassy (63 killed); the October 23 U.S. Marine barracks (241 killed); and the October 23 French paratrooper barracks (58 killed). A litany of bombings, hijackings, kidnappings, and assassinations followed, with an ever increasing body count. He has been credited with masterminding and/or participating in terrorist acts ranging from the car bombings of the Israeli embassy and the Jewish cultural center in Argentina in the early 1990s, to the World Trade Center bombing of 1993; the Khobar Towers suicide bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996; the U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998; the 2000 suicide attack on the *USS Cole* in Aden, Yemen; and the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The *9/11 Commission Report's* references (pages 240-241) to “a senior Hezbollah operative” shepherding the future 9/11 hijackers in and out of Iran refer to Mugniyeh, say inside sources.

Osama bin Laden spoke admiringly of Mugniyeh's lethal handiwork and in 1993 met with Mugniyeh in Khartoum, Sudan, to form a working alliance. That historic meeting was brokered by Ali Mohamed, bin Laden's master spy/double agent inside the FBI, whose story is told in riveting detail in Peter Lance's newly released *Triple Cross* (reviewed in *The New American*, August 17, 2009).

The question that dominated the news headlines and the blogosphere in the immediate aftermath of



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Mugniyeh's assassination was: who did it? No one claimed credit for the deed. The most likely suspect, and the one most often cited, was the Israeli Mossad. Some pointed to the CIA (and/or the FBI, which had placed a \$5 million bounty on Mugniyeh). Some suggested a joint Mossad/CIA operation. However, some in the Islamic world pointed to intelligence agencies of Arab nations that had their own reasons for wanting to "take out" Mugniyeh. Considerable suspicion in the Arab-world press focused also on Syria as the perpetrator, while some speculated that Iran might even be responsible. It was reported in some press and intelligence blog accounts that on the night of his execution by car bomb, Mugniyeh had just concluded a meeting with Hamas leaders, Syrian intelligence officials, and Iran's new ambassador to Damascus, on the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the Iranian revolution (February 12, 1979). And the meeting at the school was but a short distance from a Syrian intelligence center in Syria's tightly controlled police-state.

As the most notorious operational leader of Hezbollah, with whom Israel has battled for decades, Mugniyeh was, understandably, a prime target for the Mossad. He has also been a major thorn in the sides of Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, all of which had good reasons for wanting him dead. But Syria and Iran? They were his longtime sponsors. Precisely. And as some terrorism experts have argued (Kenneth Timmerman, for one), Tehran and Damascus have been anxious that Mugniyeh's ties to 9/11 and other terror acts may be used by Washington to justify military attacks on Iran and Syria.

### **Whose Man Was He?**

So, did Mugniyeh's death represent a victory by Israel, the United States, or an Arab state over a longtime, implacable foe? Or was it a clean-up operation by Syria or Iran? This writer does not claim to know, though it would seem the preponderance of evidence points toward Tel Aviv. But a far more important question than who killed Imad Mugniyeh is: who was he working for? Terrorism is a form of warfare, the ultimate in asymmetric, unconventional warfare. And to it, Sun Tzu's maxim that "all warfare is based on deception" applies in spades. Terrorists do not wear uniforms, carry their banners openly, fight on the open battlefield, or directly confront the military of their adversaries; their entire modus operandi is one of secrecy, stealth, and deception, especially in this age of satellite surveillance, computer data mining, and pervasive electronic eavesdropping. They are particularly conscious of protecting their subterranean networks and concealing all trails that might lead back to their state sponsors. And their state sponsors, mindful of the global reach of assassin teams and GPS-guided precision missiles, are even more highly motivated to maintain "plausible deniability" by structuring their ties to terrorists through several layers of surrogates.

Thus we have witnessed for years an ongoing charade in which Iran and Syria have claimed to have no ties to Mugniyeh and other wanted terrorists. And Hezbollah, mimicking its masters, has voiced the same absurd denials. "For its part, Hezbollah has consistently denied the existence of any relationship with Mugniyeh, direct or indirect," notes Judith Palmer Harik in her 2005 book *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*. "As a matter of record," she continues, "from the time of the party's inception, all Hezbollah officials have emphatically denied ever knowing a person by the name of Imad Mugniyeh." But as Harik points out, it is "impossible for any member of Hezbollah's present leadership to deny knowing Mugniyeh, since all of them are known to have been intimately involved with the day-to-day functions of the Baalbek training camps," where Mugniyeh played a major role in preparing terrorist cadres for their deadly trade.

However, at Mugniyeh's funeral, all those who had been denying connections to him for years —



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Hezbollah, Iran, Syria — let their masks fall (partially) to claim him as their own and eulogize him as a martyr. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad eulogized him as “an outstanding leader from Hizballah.” Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei praised him as “an example for the young generation to follow.” Lebanese Hezbollah’s General Secretary, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, used Mugniyeh’s funeral to threaten a retaliatory all-out war against Israel. “With this murder, its timing, location and method — Zionists, if you want this kind of open war, let the whole world listen: Let this war be open!”

The deception regarding Mugniyeh is duplicated again with regard to Hezbollah’s ties to terror, as well as its crucial ties to Damascus and Tehran. According to its leaders, as well as its many advocates in the press, academe, and the United Nations, Hezbollah (in Arabic, the Party of God — sometimes spelled Hizbullah or Hizb’Allah) is not a terrorist group at all, but instead a social welfare, charitable organization, providing food, schooling, and medical care to the poor and downtrodden. Swedish terrorist expert Magnus Ranstorp notes it is perfectly understandable that the terrorists and their state sponsors would lie about their actions, intentions, and connections. “Less understandable,” he says, “are the many academics who allowed themselves to be misled about Hezbollah’s clandestine wing and its use by Iran and, at times, Syria.... They preferred to believe that Hezbollah could not possibly harbor a secret structure involved in terrorism, when its above-the-board operations — social, political and military — were so effective and (according to some) so noble and legitimate. And so Hezbollah was allowed to have its cake and eat it too.”

### **Deniable Assets**

Much the same can be said for PLO-Fatah and Hamas, as well; their apologists in the media, academia, and influential policy circles claim they are no longer terrorists (some insist they never were). At any rate, they have transformed (or are in the process of transforming) into legitimate political groups. Any terrorist acts attributed to them, say the apologists, are actually the work of “rogue elements,” shadowy “splinter groups,” or mysterious groups of unknown origin and makeup.

This phenomenon is nothing new; Yassir Arafat, the Crown Prince of modern terrorism, proved himself the master of deception in this regard with his creation of the ultimate ruse in “plausible deniability”: Black September. It is now an established fact (though still not sufficiently well known) that the Black September terrorist group, which carried out the Munich Massacre at the 1972 Olympics and other terrorist acts, was created and controlled by Arafat as a “deniable asset” to perform dirty deeds for which he did not want to be held accountable. Arafat publicly disavowed any connection to Black September and theatrically condemned their actions, while privately congratulating his terrorist minions for mayhem well done. Black September was purely Arafat’s operation, just as he, in turn, was the deniable asset of communist Romania’s intelligence service, the DIE, which, in turn, was the deniable cat’s paw of the Soviet KGB.

This process of deception and deniability was perfected by the Soviet Union as it launched successive waves of terror in the 1960s, ’70s, and ’80s. The Kremlin’s hands were usually well hidden, its KGB and GRU handlers working through their subsidiary Czech, East German, Bulgarian, or Romanian intelligence services, which, in turn, operated through Libya, Yemen, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and North Korea, whose agents, in turn, interfaced directly with the terrorists: the Red Brigades, the Baader-Meinhof, the PLO, PFLP, IRA, FMLN, etc. Yet, so massive and extensive was the global terror war that the accumulated evidence of Moscow’s direction of the entire effort became overwhelming, despite all attempts to conceal it.



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Studies in the 1970s and '80s — such as *The Terror Network* by Claire Sterling, *Terrorism: The Soviet Connection* by Ray S. Cline and Yonah Alexander, *KGB: The Secret Work of Soviet Agents* by John Barron, and *Red Horizons* by Ion Mihai Pacepa — made it impossible for reasonable people to continue ignoring the elephant under the doily. What became strikingly clear was that there wasn't a single significant terrorist group that could legitimately claim to be independent and self sufficient; all relied on the intricate Soviet-directed network for arms, explosives, communications, training, intelligence, funding, sanctuary, passports, identification papers, and much more.

Without state sponsorship terrorism would wither and die. Thus, any genuine effort aimed at eradicating terrorism *must* confront the ultimate state sponsors. Otherwise one will be reduced to ineffectually striking at branches instead of the root, or to use another analogy, wasting one's energy and resources putting out endless fires, rather than arresting the arsonists.

### **Evil Twins: Syria and Iran**

When it comes to state sponsors of terrorism Syria and Iran are the evil twins: communists and Khomeinists. Although Damascus has been in the terror business longer, it has been surpassed by Tehran, with its new brand of Islamo-Leninism, a blend of Marx and Mohammed. Syria is still run by the communist Baath Party, which took over in a coup d'état in 1966. In 1970, Syrian Air Force officer Hafez al-Assad, who had been trained in the Soviet Union, took over in an intra-party coup. He was to rule with the proverbial iron fist for the next 30 years, until his death in 2000. At which point, in a fashion similar to the Kim Il Sung communist monarchy in North Korea, Hafez passed on the throne to his son, Bashar al-Assad. Hafez al-Assad quickly established himself as Moscow's most loyal ally in the Middle East. So much so that Soviet boss Leonid Brezhnev, in his keynote address to the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1976, praised Syria's Baathist regime and declared that the two countries "act in concert in many international problems, above all in the Middle East."

In the 1970s, the Soviet Union began shipping Assad huge amounts of war materiel — tanks, rockets, fighter jets, small arms, explosives, radar, communications equipment — in addition to thousands of military and intelligence personnel, from Cuba, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, North Korea, and East Germany, as well as the Soviet Union. By mid-1980, more than 500 KGB advisers were training Syrian intelligence officers at a base near Damascus.

Syria quickly became a key base for avowed Marxist-Leninist terrorist groups such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO), and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Somalia (DFLS). It later also became a base for Islamo-Leninist groups (both Shia and Sunni) such as Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Hamas (Hamas chief Khaled Mashaal has lived in Damascus since 1999, along with other top Hamas leaders), and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, while an even broader assortment of terrorists has been trained (and is being trained currently) at Syria's terror camps in Lebanon.

In its 2006 Lebanon incursion, Israel's vaunted armor columns took surprising casualties from Hezbollah forces equipped with sophisticated armor-piercing, laser-guided, anti-tank missiles from Russia — by way of Syria. In one overrun Hezbollah position, Israeli forces captured a cache of Russia's top-of-the-line Komet missiles. The label on each missile read: "Customer: Ministry of Defence of Syria. Supplier: KBP, Tula, Russia." This and other evidence belied Syria's continued denials that it was involved in the Lebanon terror.



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Although Hafez al-Assad's Baathist regime in Syria had a nine-year head start in the Soviet-sponsored terror business, Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic of Iran would soon eclipse him. The overthrow of Shah Pahlavi by Soviet-backed street radicals and the Carter administration in 1979 was a seismic shift of epic magnitude. Iran was flipped, virtually overnight, from being the most pro-Western, most moderate Islamic power in the region, and a critical roadblock to Soviet regional hegemony, to a force for global revolution and terror. Khomeini's militant fusion of Marx and Mohammed would resonate with millions of Muslims who could not accept the secular socialist tenets of the region's other Soviet client-states: Syria, Libya, and Iraq. Khomeinism was the perfect made-to-order fit for the Andropov Paradigm: the plan to craft and promote a radicalized, Leninist form of Islam to infect millions of Muslims worldwide with fanatical anti-American hatred. Yuri Andropov (head of the KGB, 1967-1982, and head of the Soviet Union, 1982-1984) assured Romania's spymaster, General Ion Mihai Pacepa, that "the Islamic world was a waiting petri dish in which we could nurture a virulent strain of America-hatred, grown from the bacterium of Marxist-Leninist thought.... Their illiterate, oppressed mobs could be whipped up to a fever pitch."

Ayatollah Khomeini fulfilled Andropov's wildest dreams. Upon taking over in Iran, the Ayatollah affixed the label of "the Great Satan" to the United States. The Soviet Union was viciously persecuting the Muslims of neighboring Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (and would soon invade Afghanistan), but Khomeini insisted that Muslims see the United States, not the Soviet Union, as Satanic. When Russia later invaded Chechnya and slaughtered Muslims by the tens of thousands, Khomeini's successors in Tehran gave tacit approval, thereby blunting expressions of outrage by other Islamic countries.

Training terrorists became a primary order of business for Khomeini, and terror camps at Manzarieh Park in Tehran, Marvdasht camp near Persepolis, Bushehr air base, and Dowshan Tappeh air base were soon set up with communist instructors from North Korea, Vietnam, Bulgaria, and East Germany. These were joined by over 300 Farsi-speaking KGB officers from the Soviet Union. The modern wave of suicide bombing was about to begin, thanks to these foreign trainers, who fortified their expertise in traditional brainwashing techniques with new advances in mind-control drugs. The man who developed the Ayatollah's pharmaceutical "martyr" program is Dr. Aziz al-Abub (real name, Ibrahim al-Nahdhir), a psychiatrist who was trained at the Soviet Union's KGB-run People's Friendship University and schooled by the notorious terrorist Abu Nidal. Aziz al-Abub became a founder of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Iranian-directed Hezbollah; he remains a key player in their terror program.

In June 1996, Iran marked a new milestone in the global terror war with the launch of Hezbollah International (HI), to be a central command uniting both Shia and Sunni Islamists. A secret summit was attended by leaders of al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Change Movement, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. The summit concluded with creation of a Shia-Sunni Hezbollah International, headed by a Committee of Three: Imad Mugniyeh (Hezbollah, Shia), Osama bin Laden (al-Qaeda, Sunni), and Ahmad Salah (Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Sunni).

Sitting above HI's Committee of Three is Dr. Mahdi Chamran, chief of Iranian external intelligence, head of international terrorism, and mayor of Tehran. Mahdi and his brother Mostafa (killed in 1981) were communist radicals at California universities in the 1960s, where they created "Red Shiism," a fusion of Marx and Mohammed. Among Khomeini's earliest acolytes, the Chamrans got in on the ground





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floor of the Iranian revolution. Mahdi Chamran, who holds a Ph.D. in nuclear physics, also has been in charge of Iran's nuclear development program from the start, where he works closely with the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean scientists and technicians who are building Iran's nuclear facilities and missile program. Of course, his Hezbollah International work requires him to work closely with the intelligence services of those three countries as well. To keep things rolling on that score, one of Chamran's most important assets is Imad Hadj Hassan Salame, who heads the HI special operations unit (Muntamat al-Jihad al-Islami, or MJI) in Moscow. Salame's Moscow MJI unit provides the crucial interface with Russia's FSB and GRU for arranging the transfer of arms and other critical materials from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Balkans.

Clearly, Russia is the ultimate state sponsor of terrorism; Iran, Syria, North Korea, Cuba, Kosovo, Lebanon, and other terrorist facilitators are merely proxies. Putin and the current rulers of the Kremlin are continuing the "Islamic" terror option outlined by Andropov more than three decades ago, as KGB defector Anatoliy Golitsyn has repeatedly warned. "U.S. policy makers have recklessly accepted the premise that Russia and China are no longer their enemies, but are rather potential allies and partners fully deserving U.S. support," Golitsyn wrote in his 1990 book *The Perestroika Deception*. "Only countries like Iran, Iraq and North Korea — which (ironically, in this context) work secretly with Russia and China — are still considered potential adversaries."

All of which should call to mind Sun Tzu's sober comment in *The Art of War*: "It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle."



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