

Lebanon: The killing of Hezbollah's Imad Moughniya

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Imad Moughniya's death, like his life, will remain shrouded in mystery and secrecy, but what few things we can learn for certain about this person's life we already have. First, the image of the man created in the Western media, especially the US corporate media with its typically superficial, and simplistic "good vs bad" story lines should be dismissed as a largely fictional account.

The focus on a single, elusive, shadowy figure lurking somewhere in the dark preparing to kill Americans and Jews in cold blood is good for ratings, and compatible with the overall anti-Arab, anti-Muslim bias that characterizes US news coverage but can hardly be considered reliable journalism. This Hollywood-type approach is not new. Before Moughniya, Carlos "the Jackal" and Abu Nidal were featured stars in the sensational news-entertainment industry. As a result we do not have an accurate picture of Moughniya (which may not be possible anyway), but more importantly, we have been presented with a distorted reality of the decades-long, bloody struggle between Israel and Hizballah.

Second, the history of Hizballah, founded in 1982 soon after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon is mainly a history of resistance (Hizballah also has a network of social services catering to the needs of a large segment of society traditionally ignored by the Lebanese state) to the Israeli military occupation of Lebanon, and contrary to prevailing propaganda, was conducted ethically.

We also know that since its inception not a shred of evidence that Hizballah was involved in any act of terrorism outside the borders of Lebanon has ever been offered. The self-righteous rhetoric of the US and Israeli governments — both of which have killed many more innocent people in the last couple of years alone than the combined total of victims in all the alleged attacks of Moughniya and Hizballah — is not evidence. All of the allegations against Moughniya dating back to the second half of the 1970's when he became a member of Force 17, the Special Forces unit of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, and into the 1980's when he joined the emerging Hizballah in the wake of the Israeli invasion fall into one of two categories. They are either, by definition, not acts of terror, such as legitimate acts of armed resistance against a foreign occupying power, or they are acts of terror that have never been linked to him. Any objective observer familiar with the lawlessness and chaos that prevailed in Lebanon and the proliferation of armed groups during this period would readily admit it's probably not even possible to determine who was doing what at the time. Hizballah has always denied any involvement in the terrorist acts and usually other smaller groups actually did claim responsibility for many of the attacks attributed to Hizballah.

Third, what we do know with certainty about Hizballah is that it is a highly organized, well-disciplined, civilian militia made up of five to ten thousand Lebanese living on their own land which waged a successful resistance campaign against the Israeli occupation army and won,

twice. In the year 2000, after years of guerilla warfare, the Israeli occupation forces suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Hizballah fighters under the command of Moughniya, and were sent scurrying back across the border with their tails between their legs. In Israel's 2006 onslaught on Lebanon it again failed to win, and according to most analysts (including Israelis), suffered its worst strategic defeat ever. Facing off, once again, against Hizballah fighters under the command of Moughniya Israel this time was not capable of gaining even a foothold in Lebanon. In 2006 the myth of Israel's "invincible" army was shattered completely, and whatever deterrent power it may have claimed in the past evaporated bringing the Zionist-Apartheid state's long-term prospects for survival into question even by Israelis themselves.

The 2006 war on Lebanon also reinforced the image of Israel as a garrison state and proxy for Western imperialism. It was a war fought on behalf of the US (and its neoconservative agenda), the enabler of all of Israel's actions, and which blocked all efforts to bring it to an earlier end, encouraging Israel to continue even after it was prepared to cut its losses and quit. And this is the real crime of Hizballah that Israel cannot forget and the West cannot accept. During the war over one thousand Lebanese, mostly civilians, were killed including hundreds of children. On the Israeli side around 160 were killed of which the overwhelming majority were soldiers. It was in the midst of this war, while the Lebanese were pulling the lifeless, mangled bodies of their children out of the rubble of deliberately-bombed homes that Condoleezza Rice made her infamously, tasteless remark about the "birth pangs of a new Middle East."

The reality of Hizballah's conduct over the years belies the image of the ruthless, terrorist organization portrayed in the US media. Getting back to Moughniya, it is within this history of Israeli occupation and continuous war on Lebanon, and the non-stop, Lebanese resistance (which predated the forming of Hizballah) that the personal story of this man unfolded. We will never know if Moughniya committed any acts of terror. We should not accept Israeli and US government assertions, neither one of which has any moral authority, as a substitute for proof. We are also unlikely to learn with any certainty who killed him or the exact circumstances surrounding his death. Israel, as the only country in the region with an official policy of extra-judicial assassinations (currently on almost daily display in Gaza), and with its long history of organized state terrorism, for which we have an abundance of evidence, is naturally on the top of the list of suspects. It's also possible the commonly overrated and often bumbling Mossad had nothing to do with it. In either case, it is clearly a crime under international law. This did not prevent a US State Department spokesperson, too arrogant to recognize the hypocrisy of his own words, from interrupting his usual drivel about human rights and rule of law to welcome the news saying "the world is a better place without this man in it."

What we know for sure is the pro-Israel, mainstream US media which accepts the Israeli narrative as the basis for all its coverage of the Middle East cannot be relied upon for an accurate and reliable portrayal of Moughniya or Hizballah. We also know Moughniya was an effective commander of a lightly-armed civilian militia that waged a successful guerilla campaign against a much stronger and brutal enemy army and won. It's also safe to assume that his role and importance has been greatly exaggerated by all sides for different reasons. The killing of Moughniya and its surrounding circumstances is obviously a serious security blow to Hizballah, but while it has provided Hizballah's enemies some momentary satisfaction, it is unlikely to diminish its operational capability in the future.

The most unrealistic and misleading aspects of news coverage of Lebanon, Palestine, and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general is the focus on single individuals or groups as the root cause of conflict, and the characterization of all of Israel's enemies as terrorists. The same approach has been applied in covering Hamas and other Palestinian resistance factions in occupied Palestine. All these organizations were products of the Israeli occupation and they were created to resist and thus enjoy widespread popular support. To continue to reduce such groups and their leaders to nothing more than crazed terrorists is not only false and counterproductive, but, in its dismissal of the vast majority of Lebanese and Palestinians as murderers and supporters of terrorism, is also racist.

The Arab-Israeli conflict will continue for the foreseeable future. According to reports, Imad Moughniya has already been replaced, and in short time, the media will find another shadowy, intriguing figure to focus its attention on while continuing to ignore the prevailing conditions that inevitably gives rise to both legitimate acts of resistance, and terrorism. Israel continues to occupy Palestine, the Syrian Golan Heights, and parts of Lebanon. It is holding over 11,000 kidnapped Palestinians, and several Lebanese in jail. It is arguably committing a form genocide in Gaza, and it recently launched an attack on Syria. It continues to deny the Palestinians their inalienable right of return and may be preparing for its next military adventure. It is only within this context of ongoing warfare that people like Moughniya will come to be known, and can be understood.

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