

# *Confessions at a Funeral*

**Barry Rubin**

A funny thing happened at the funeral of Imad Mughniyah. Those who had for years been denying any connection with him and his international terrorist activities – Iran, Syria, and Hizballah – suddenly admitted that he was one of their favourite people.

At the same time, other critical points came out. Mughniyah's critical position as the link between those three allies, in their conduct of terrorism and subversion, stood out clearly. In addition, Mughniyah's career as an international terrorist, who often operated against Western targets, showed how Hizballah – along with its backers in Tehran and Damascus – were second only to al-Qaeda in their global operations of violence.

Let's first look at the record of the man who Iran, Syria, and Hizballah were so eager to praise and ready to revenge. Mughniyah, a Lebanese citizen, first worked with the PLO and then with Hizballah, leading the latter group's main terrorist operations. During the 1980s alone, Mughniyah was involved in killing 340 American and French soldiers in a peacekeeping force, 63 civilians in bombing the U.S. embassy in Beirut; kidnappings and sometimes executions of Westerners living in Lebanon; attacks on the U.S. embassy in Kuwait; hijacking an American airliner in which a U.S. citizen was murdered; killing two U.S. officials in Lebanon; and hijacking two Kuwait Airways' planes.

In 1994, he organized the bombing of a Jewish Community Center in Argentina, killing 86 civilians. The official Argentinean investigation concluded Iranian intelligence had hired Mughniyah and his unit for this job.

As a result of his activities, Mughniyah was on the U.S. list of ten most wanted terrorists, with a \$25 million reward on his head. Interpol had an extradition warrant against him due to the Argentina attack. But travelling between Lebanon, Iran, and Syria – protected and often working for the latter two governments – Mughniyah continued his career of violence up to the day of his death.

With the exception of the September 11 attack, Mughniyah was probably responsible for more terrorist violence and killings than any other individual over the last quarter-century.

How did Iran's rulers respond to his demise? They all praised him. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei called him, 'An example for the young generation to follow.' Powerful former president and current Expediency Council Chairman Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani referred to Mughniyah as a 'great figure' whose actions Iran did not consider terrorism. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad eulogized him as, 'An outstanding leader from Hizballah,' though up to his death that organization denied Mughniyah held such a post.

Hizballah's own leader, Hassan Nasrallah, used his funeral oration to threaten to wipe out Israel, paralleling what many Iranian leaders say. If Iran obtains nuclear weapons that threat becomes most plausible. But Hizballah hopes to achieve the same end through lower-level violence. Nasrallah declared 'open war' on Israel and boasted he would launch attacks anywhere in the world, presumably against anyone he deemed to be standing in the way of his destructive dream.

As for Syria, where Mughniyah was repeatedly given help and safe haven, he was being protected in a highly secure area under government control. An Iranian television station reported he was killed near a Syrian intelligence base at a time a major meeting of Palestinian groups was taking place, including Hamas leader Khalad Mishal, who is based in Damascus. Two respected Arab newspapers claimed Mughniyah was the guest of top Syrian leaders and had been meeting with them and Hamas chiefs to plan the kind of bloody deeds he was so good at doing.

Revenge was also threatened by such pro-Mughniyah groups as Hamas, the Muqtada Sadr forces in Iraq, and Fatah's al-Aqsa Brigades. Not all Arabs reacted in this way. In Kuwait, for example, it was pointed out that Mughniyah had been involved in the murder of many Arabs and Muslims, in Kuwait, Lebanon, and Iraq

A Lebanese newspaper backed by Syria and Hizballah noted that Mughniyah's Death was the hardest blow to Hizballah ever. Ironically, however, many in the past had refused to condemn Hizballah as a terrorist organization – including the EU – because they said there was insufficient evidence of such involvement.

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As one expert on Hizballah, Magnus Ranstorp, retorted, too many had ‘allowed themselves to be misled’ about Hizballah’s use of international terrorism and its use by Iran and Syria. ‘And so Hezbollah was allowed to have its cake and eat it too’ since it could carry out terrorism without any significant international price or punishment.

When Iran, Syria, and Hizballah embrace such a person as a great hero and role model they are:

- Openly admitting their association with many past acts of terrorism.
- Making clear that they favor murderous attacks deliberately designed to kill civilians.
- Showing their past denials of involvement to be lies.
- Urging people to commit many more such attacks in future, include genocide against Israel and its people.

Now that Hizballah, Iran, and Syria have ‘taken credit’ for Mughniyah’s past killings and urged many more in the future, the world should confront the fact that these groups are engaged in a systematic terrorist policy and react accordingly.

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