LEBANESE BUSINESSMEN AND HEZBOLLAH IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

A Report Prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the Director of National Intelligence/Open Source Center (DNI/OSC)

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Researcher: Rex Hudson
Project Manager: LaVerle Berry

Federal Research Division
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540–4840
Tel: 202–707–3900
Fax: 202–707–3920
E-Mail: frds@loc.gov
Homepage: http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/

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PREFACE

The following study surveys open-source information on the Lebanese business communities in sub-Saharan African countries and any reported interconnections with Hezbollah. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of a research agreement between the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress and the Director of National Intelligence Open Source Center.

The study responds to two general guidelines. The first, the statement of work of July 28, 2009, specified that “the analysis should identify how the group [Hezbollah] has operated/continues to operate, facilitates support and logistics networks, provides financing, develops training, and promotes the use of surrogate groups within each region or across the entire continent.” The second guideline, as stated on January 25, 2010, placed emphasis on discussing the Lebanese population in the region and its actual or potential support for Hezbollah. Accordingly, the study focuses primarily on the Lebanese communities and secondarily on the nexus with Hezbollah. The amount of country or regional information provided depends on the degree to which relevant information was available. This survey is intended as a baseline rather than a comprehensive study. It is designed as an exploratory effort that may serve as a guide for more in-depth country research.

The Executive Summary highlights overall findings and conclusions. It is followed by an overview and the regional sections for West, East, Central, and Southern Africa. Sources used can be found in the footnotes. Sources that can be found on the Internet generally include a URL address, unless they came from the Library of Congress Electronic Resources, which have on-site access only. The report ends with a select and annotated bibliography of scholarly books and journal articles.

For spelling of geographic names, the author generally has followed the United States Board on Geographic Names. Spellings of Arabic names generally adhere to the 1997 edition of the ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts, approved by the Library of Congress and the American Library Association. Thus, the phonetic spelling of “Al-Qa’ida” is used instead of the more common “al-Qaeda.” The name “Hezbollah” (Party of God) has multiple spellings, but “Hezbollah” is the most internationally used spelling.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey of open-source reporting on Lebanese communities in sub-Saharan Africa and their interconnections with Hezbollah focuses primarily on the Lebanese in West Africa. Traditionally shopkeepers and traders, Lebanese immigrants have dominated various business sectors in this region for generations. Lebanese families and clans control many businesses and industries in sub-Saharan Africa. In recent decades, younger and better-educated generations have helped to diversify Lebanese business interests by entering professions such as industry, medicine, dentistry, law, pharmacy, and mechanical engineering. For the most part, the Lebanese in sub-Saharan Africa are well off and regarded as exploitative foreigners. With rare exceptions, as in The Gambia, the Lebanese tend not to socialize or intermarry with locals. However, they are adept at cultivating business relationships with influential members of the economic, political, and military elites.

Although often denied citizenship and the right to run for political office, even if they were born in the country, the Lebanese are allowed to conduct business largely without restrictions because of their important economic role. Thus, the Lebanese, who are mostly Shi’a Muslims, rely on family and clan relationships in conducting their business activities, whether they are legitimate or not. This family/clan structure may be difficult for governments to penetrate, but Hezbollah has proven to be adept at exploiting it for purposes of fund-raising, recruitment, safe haven, proselytization, and logistical and moral support.

With the aid of its extensive social intelligence networks in Lebanon and abroad, Hezbollah knows which Lebanon-based families have diaspora relatives. Using threats or coercion when necessary, Hezbollah is able to extort “taxes” and other support from the expatriate relatives. Senior Hezbollah operatives from Beirut periodically make the rounds of capital cities to collect contributions, which reportedly amount to millions of dollars annually. In the absence of detailed information on Hezbollah’s extortion activities in sub-Saharan Africa and what the organization does with these funds, a researcher can only speculate. Although it seems likely that some of the money is used to support Hezbollah networks in the region, most of it is probably remitted or hand-carried to Hezbollah central in Lebanon. These funds likely help support Hezbollah’s various social, religious, political, or militant activities, including its military preparation for renewed conflict with Israel.
A salient pattern that has emerged in this survey is for some Lebanese financiers to assist corrupt political or military leaders in defrauding state banks or companies or embezzling other state revenues. Although conclusive and official documentation of these illegal transactions is not readily available, some news media references to them are cited in this report. A substantial amount of these embezzled funds reportedly is being sent to bank accounts in Lebanon. A few of these financiers with alleged links to Hezbollah have included Mohammed Bazzi and Salah Ezzedine in The Gambia, Ibrahim Bah in Liberia, and Jamil Sahid Mohamed and Kassim Tajideen in Sierra Leone. Other Lebanese financiers have been implicated in the past decade in the assassination of one Central African head of state and a coup attempt against another.

Other Hezbollah fund-raising activities in the sub-Saharan region in recent decades have included smuggling of automobiles, cigarettes, and other products; laundering money; trading in conflict diamonds; and smuggling Colombian drugs via West Africa to Europe. Some Lebanese families or clans reportedly also engage in these illicit activities. As noted in this survey, Hezbollah has a record of engaging in trans-Atlantic drug trafficking not only in coordination with Al-Qa’ida but also with terrorist organizations as diverse as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—FARC) and probably drug-trafficking cartels based in Colombia, Venezuela, and Mexico. This coordination involves operating or sharing drug-smuggling corridors between South America and West Africa for transshipment to Europe, as well as between South America and the United States.

The greatly expanded scope of cocaine trafficking by Hezbollah, Al-Qa’ida, the FARC, and other terrorist and drug-trafficking organizations between South America and West Africa appears to have intensified governmental corruption throughout the subregion, as evidenced by a rise in criminal cases involving charges of cocaine trafficking by state officials. Guinea-Bissau, in particular, appears to have been transformed into a narco-state serving as a transit center for Colombian cocaine traffickers working with Hezbollah and Al-Qa’ida to transport the shipments on to Europe. Hezbollah’s drug trafficking in West Africa has likely been accompanied by acts of violence, but this study found no evidence that Hezbollah is using sub-Saharan Africa for operational terrorism in the region. Nevertheless, regional Hezbollah networks potentially could be used to plan and carry out attacks against British, Israeli, or U.S. diplomatic facilities or officials, especially in the event of another military conflict in the Middle East.
This research found little substantive information on Lebanese communities in East, Central, and Southern Africa, and only scattered reports of Hezbollah activities in those regions. Hezbollah may have had a longtime presence in countries such as Sudan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and South Africa, but it has kept a low profile. Reports suggest that Hezbollah and Lebanese compatriots engage in the smuggling of arms in various countries in these regions, including in Somalia, as well as of diamonds and gold from Central and Southern Africa through Uganda or out of Liberia and Sierra Leone.

LINKS BETWEEN HEZBOLLAH AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA’S LEBANESE

The Lebanese Population

Lebanese emigration to Africa began in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lebanese took up residence in French-speaking countries such as Côte d’Ivoire and Congo and English-speaking countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa. According to one rough estimate, between 200,000 and 300,000 Lebanese currently live on the continent, most of them in West Africa. However, reliable population statistics are lacking, and this estimate may not include Lebanese with dual nationality and unregistered Lebanese. A map illustration provided by *Jeune Afrique* lists a total of only 120,000 Lebanese in seven sub-Saharan countries (Cameroon, 3,000; Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 6,000; Côte d’Ivoire, 60,000; Gabon, 5,000; Nigeria, 16,000; Senegal, 25,000; and Sierra Leone, 5,000).¹

Whatever the exact size of the Lebanese population in sub-Saharan Africa, it is a relatively small percentage of the worldwide Lebanese diaspora, which totaled 2.5 million, according to a 1995 estimate. The first wave of Lebanese immigrants to West Africa, mostly Maronite Christians, arrived in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, escaping the Ottoman yoke and army draft. By 1910 the Lebanese Shi’a immigrants in West Africa outnumbered the Lebanese Christians. However, the number of Lebanese in French West Africa in 1913 totaled only 1,000, and it took until 1936 to reach 4,500. Most Lebanese and Syrians arrived in West Africa during France’s colonial control of the region and of the Levant. During

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the postwar, pre-independence period (1945–60), thousands of Lebanese moved to West Africa, where they sold consumer goods and general merchandise.\(^2\)

Impressed by the foothold of its expatriate citizens in West Africa, Lebanon began to more actively extend diplomatic protection to them beginning in the 1950s. These emigrants had become an important source of remittance income for Lebanon, as well as a valued stimulus of Lebanese exports and business investments, such as Lebanese airlines and banks. Moreover, the Lebanese expatriates in West Africa visited Lebanon periodically and sent their children to schools in Lebanon. Until the 1967 war in the Middle East, they also deposited funds for their future retirement in Lebanon.\(^3\)

The Lebanese population in West Africa expanded from 17,000 in 1960 to 75,000 in 1970, despite obstacles to Lebanese immigration resulting from the Africanization policies adopted by many African countries during 1960–75. Moreover, by 1975 immigration was spurred by developments such as the end of French colonization in Africa (late 1950s to early 1960s) and the flight from the Lebanese Civil War (1975–92). As a result, the Lebanese opened businesses in various cities and larger towns of West Africa in the 1970s. By 1985 the total number of Lebanese immigrants in West Africa was an estimated 150,000. As their numbers continued to grow and the Lebanese business communities became economically dominant ethnic minorities, the Lebanese immigrants in West Africa became politically influential, particularly in Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. By dominating the import-export trade, Levantine Muslims became West Africa’s wealthiest social group.\(^4\)

In general, Lebanese entrepreneurs in West African countries such as Sierra Leone are seen basically as middlemen or intermediaries between large European export-import companies and African traders. However, many Lebanese reject this popular view, preferring instead to be seen as merchants or traders. Despite its unpopularity because of its perceived profiteering and price-fixing, the wealthy Lebanese community exercises considerable political influence in all the coastal states with the exception of Ghana and Nigeria. Although most Lebanese in West

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Africa claim to be Guinean, Nigerian, or Senegalese, black West Africans regard them contemptuously as foreigners who exploit their workers. A 1999 article in *Jeune Afrique Economique* noted that the Lebanese in West Africa were generally seen as being involved in illicit activities, such as the foreign currency black market, trafficking in drugs and weapons, human trafficking, prostitution, corruption, and fraud.⁵

According to a 2000 UN report, the Lebanese community in the region totaled about 120,000 members. Most of the new immigrants were Shi’a Muslims from South Lebanon, fleeing the Israeli occupation or the Lebanese draft. According to one estimate, the Levantine community in West Africa had as many as 300,000 members by the mid-2000s, but that number is more often given for the total Lebanese population in Africa. The BBC estimated in early 2010 that the Lebanese community in West Africa totals between 80,000 and 250,000 members.⁶ Such a wide range is not particularly useful and makes the UN figure seem more reasonable.

In addition to population estimates, another likely indicator of Lebanese presence in sub-Saharan Africa is the distribution of Lebanon’s diplomatic facilities in the region. Of Lebanon’s 11 embassies in sub-Saharan Africa, eight are in West African countries.

**The Lebanese/Hezbollah Fund-Raising Nexus**

The findings of this limited survey generally corroborate the book-length African survey of the National Defense University’s Andre Le Sage. He found that Hezbollah’s presence on the continent is interconnected with the expatriate Lebanese business communities in about a dozen countries, most of which are in West Africa but also in parts of Central and Southern Africa. Le Sage adds that of all the terrorist groups operating in Africa, Hezbollah has the most extensive presence on the continent. East Africa could also be included because Hezbollah reportedly has engaged in activities in Sudan, Uganda, and Somalia.⁷

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Despite its African networks, Hezbollah does not have a record of operational terrorism in the region. Although it could pose a potential threat in this regard, Hezbollah is known to have engaged only in an extortionate form of terrorism against Lebanese expatriate merchants. In an earlier decade, it was widely suspected in an airliner bombing. In September 1989, France’s Union des Transports Aériens (UTA) Flight 772 was bombed over Niger. Flight 772 had originated in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo, and was en route to Paris via Chad. According to journalist Robin Wright, French intelligence authorities suspected that cells of pro-Iranian Shi’a terrorists (i.e., Hezbollah) played “a prominent role” in the bombing. However, the consensus appears to be that Libya was responsible for it.

As in Colombia, Venezuela, and South America’s Tri-Border Area, Lebanese trading communities in sub-Saharan Africa tend to be located in peripheral areas where the rule of law is minimal, corruption is rampant, and illicit money-making opportunities are plentiful. Douglas Farah, a former Washington Post correspondent who was assigned to the war zones of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, noted in 2006 that, as attention had been more focused on Hezbollah activities in the Tri-border Area, Africa had gained in relative importance as a Hezbollah recruitment and fund-raising area. Hezbollah has used expatriate Lebanese communities in sub-Saharan Africa as a cover for conducting activities such as recruitment, fund-raising (including extortion of the expatriate Lebanese business communities, money laundering, and smuggling—be it drugs, conflict diamonds, counterfeit products, cigarettes, or stolen automobiles), proselytizing, but rarely terrorism per se. Hezbollah’s money-making activities in the region even include trading in oil illegally siphoned from pipelines in Nigeria.

Hezbollah’s recruitment activities in the region most likely involve recruiting from the Shi’a Muslim communities. As an extremely secretive Shi’a organization, Hezbollah is not known to recruit non-Shi’a foreigners into its ranks. Hezbollah may recruit in sub-Saharan Africa

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to support its local networks. However, it probably also recruits in support of its Lebanon-based organization, as well as allied movements, such as AMAL, also known as the Lebanese Resistance Detachment, a radical Shi’a group founded in 1975. A faction calling itself Hezbollah broke away from AMAL in 1982.

**Corruption and Embezzlement**

The consensus among observers appears to be that Hezbollah’s West African network exists primarily for raising funds. The support of the generally well-off Lebanese expatriate population has facilitated Hezbollah’s presence in West Africa and other regions of sub-Saharan Africa and provided the organization with a substantial revenue source. Hezbollah collects regular contributions from wealthy Lebanese nationals in West African countries as remote as Benin, where Lebanese traders have played a prominent role in Cotonou’s used-car business in particular. According to Farah, Hezbollah is known to receive a significant amount of support from the mostly Lebanese Shi’a Muslim diasporas of Central and West Africa. He adds that U.S. and European officials as well as Lebanese businessmen generally agree that Hezbollah raises millions of dollars annually from its West African sources alone. According to scholar Matthew Levitt, U.S. and Israeli intelligence officials also reportedly agree that Africa provides a particularly fertile ground for Hezbollah’s fund-raising efforts and its money-laundering activities because of the continent’s large Shi’a and Lebanese expatriate communities and because of the ineffectiveness and corruption of local law enforcement. Levitt notes that Israeli intelligence ranks Côte d’Ivoire as the primary center for Hezbollah’s fund-raising activity in Africa, and Senegal as the secondary one.  

According to Farah’s interviews with European intelligence officials, particularly those in Belgium, whether a business is legitimate or not, the fundamental business unit involved in Hezbollah’s fund-raising activities is the Lebanese family/clan structure of the Shi’a community. These families or clans have long controlled all aspects of certain legal trades, such as those of gasoline, pasta, poultry, rice, and wine, as well as many other basic imported commodities.

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Moreover, the well-off Lebanese families use payoffs to government officials to negotiate import monopoly franchises. As a result, the families can charge more than competitive rates for specific products, thereby earning more revenue for Hezbollah.\textsuperscript{12}

Lebanese expatriate traders are known to have played a very important role in supporting Hezbollah, especially in terms of funding. This survey has found a clear pattern of several radicalized Lebanese financiers with suspected or known ties to Hezbollah ingratiating themselves with key military or government officials and even heads of state in several sub-Saharan African countries in order to become their indispensable financial advisers and confidants. They are then in a position to pilfer millions of dollars from government contracts, kickbacks, or mismanagement of state companies.

A pre-Hezbollah prototype for the model of the corrupt Lebanese financier was Jamil Sahid Mohamed in Sierra Leone in the 1960s and 1970s (see Sierra Leone section, below). Hezbollah’s Ibrahim Bah adopted this model in Liberia in the early 2000s (see Liberia section, below). Kassim Tajideen, a major financial contributor to Hezbollah, has operated a network of businesses in Lebanon and Africa, (see Sierra Leone and Angola sections, below). Mohammed Bazzi, a Lebanese entrepreneur with reputed Hezbollah ties, has been using this model in The Gambia since at least 2006 (see The Gambia section, below). Such financial plundering can easily destabilize the economy of an impoverished and unstable African government. By becoming a partner in crime with a corrupt high-level official or head of state, a Lebanese financier can assist in the looting of state enterprises and even staff a company with Hezbollah members, as reportedly has been the case in The Gambia in recent years.

By examining sub-Saharan Africa’s Lebanese business communities, one can better understand Hezbollah’s network in the region because at the grassroots level Hezbollah’s fund-raising structure is reportedly integrated into the family/clan structure of the Lebanese Shi’a community. Among the most prominent is the Nassour clan, which controls several dozen businesses in Antwerp and elsewhere in Belgium. According to Farah’s sources, members of the Nassour clan allegedly have been involved in the counterfeiting of currency, in the defrauding of ABN Ambro Bank in Amsterdam of US$87 million, and in plotting coups in Africa.\textsuperscript{13} According


\textsuperscript{13} Farah, “Hezbollah’s External Support Network in West Africa and Latin America,” citing intelligence documents.
to Farah, the Nassour and Osailly families have jointly operated a hodgepodge of family-run businesses in both Sierra Leone and Antwerp.\textsuperscript{14}

According to Farah, Belgian intelligence has spent years investigating the interconnected legal and criminal business structures of several of the more prominent West African Shi’a Muslim families. Farah has pointed out that intelligence penetration of these groups has been extremely difficult because of the close-knit ties between African and Lebanese branches of the families and clans. Nevertheless, rivalries among Lebanese families and clans in West Africa can possibly be exploited. This is because, as scholar Henry Christian Bierwirth points out in the case of Côte d’Ivoire, the loyalties of the established Lebanese families are primarily to their own families and extended family clans and not to the community as a whole. Moreover, the Lebanese communities have other fault lines. According to Bierwirth, the most significant cleavage in Côte d’Ivoire is between the established families, which have been in the country for as long as three generations, and the distrusted relative newcomers, who arrived after the Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Extortion}

As in Lebanon, one of the fund-raising mechanisms used by Hezbollah in Africa is to levy “taxes” on legitimate businesses owned by Shi’a Muslims and criminal operations run by sympathizers and militants. Merchants who resist Hezbollah’s extortion reportedly can expect to have their properties attacked. According to Farah, Hezbollah’s method of operation is to determine the income of a particular business and then notify its owners how much they are expected to pay on a semiannual or annual basis. To avoid retaliation, even Lebanese in West Africa who may not sympathize with Hezbollah reportedly contribute to the organization. Some of the contributors may have the option of “donating” to Hezbollah’s social and political wing as opposed to its military component. Le Sage also reports that Hezbollah collects funds from some members of the local Lebanese business communities. For example, in Senegal Hezbollah reportedly collects a share of \textit{khums} (an annual Shi’a Islamic tax amounting to 20 percent of a merchant’s profits). It seems likely that Hezbollah takes a cut of this tax in other countries as


well. As of 2006, according to Levitt, Israeli intelligence ranked Senegal as the “secondary center for Hezbollah’s fund-raising activity in Africa,” second only to Côte d’Ivoire.16

The relationship that has existed between Hezbollah and the Lebanese diaspora in sub-Saharan Africa may appear to be one-sided—with Hezbollah exploiting the Lebanese population for funds and other support. However, the relationship could be mutually beneficial in the same sense that mafia families better protect their own interests by collaborating with each other. The Lebanese trading and business communities in the region have a reputation for exploiting their host countries, so making regular payoffs to Hezbollah is basically a cost of doing business, and one that provides insurance against Hezbollah retaliation against them or their close family and business connections in Lebanon.

According to Farah, Hezbollah’s fund-raising in West Africa is done systematically on an annual or semiannual basis. Hezbollah usually remits the millions of dollars raised annually from these sources directly back to Lebanon either by courier or electronic transfer. When the organization notifies Shi’a businesses of the amount of contributions that are due, senior Hezbollah operatives from Lebanon make the rounds of West African capitals collecting the “taxes.” Because this travel is in aircraft chartered by the Lebanese Shi’a community, the funds that are collected can be transported in relative safety in the preferred form of cash. On occasion, however, mishaps have occurred. For example, as Levitt points out, in 1998 Lebanese expatriates in Senegal were caught trying to smuggle US$1.7 million to Lebanon from West Africa, reportedly for Hezbollah. On December 25, 2003, UTA flight 141, scheduled to fly from Cotonou, Benin, to Beirut, crashed on takeoff, killing 139 of the 161 mostly Lebanese aboard, including senior Hezbollah members, who were carrying US$2 million in donations raised in the region. According to Arab press reports, the money represented the “regular contributions the party receives from wealthy Lebanese nationals in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Benin and other African states.”17

Diamond Trading

Hezbollah is also believed to raise significant funds by dealing in so-called “blood” or “conflict” diamonds (that is, gemstones mined and sold by warring armed groups in Africa) in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). According to Farah, all factions in the Lebanese Civil War obtained revenue from the diamond trade in Angola, the DRC, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Hezbollah engaged indirectly in diamond trading in sub-Saharan countries such as Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and apparently Angola. Although well-established Lebanese expatriate businessmen had controlled the diamond trade, by 2000 this trade had come under the control of younger, violent middlemen closely tied to Hezbollah and other radical Islamist groups. According to Levitt, a July 2000 Belgian intelligence report identified specific Lebanese diamond traders and companies tied to Hezbollah. The traders included Imad Abdul Reda Bakri and Ali Ahmad Ahmad, and the companies included Afrostars Diamonds BVBA, Triple Diamonds NV, and Ezzideen Diamonds BVBA. Diamond dealers and intelligence sources told Farah that Hezbollah and other groups buy diamonds at a fraction of their value in the DRC (either from middlemen or directly from miners), smuggle them out of the country, and sell the best ones in Antwerp and the rest in unregulated diamond centers such as Mumbai, India; Dubai, United Arab Emirates; and Mauritius.18

Farah’s November 2, 2001, story about Al-Qa’ida purchasing diamonds from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a ruthless and degenerate Sierra Leonean rebel group formed in 1991 and trained in Libya, overshadowed his reports on Hezbollah’s involvement in diamond trading. For example, Ibrahim Bah had a long history with Hezbollah. In addition to being a Lebanese, Bah seems to have several nationalities. He has been described as a multilingual soldier of fortune. Born on March 31, 1957, in Senegal, he has also been reported to be a Gambian national. His militant career began in the 1970s as a rebel fighting the government of Senegal, allegedly with Libyan support. An Islamist, Bah fought with the mujahideen and Osama Bin Laden against the Soviets in Afghanistan during 1982–85. According to Global Witness,
Bah attended a mujahideen training camp near Khost. He then moved to Lebanon, where he joined Hezbollah and made several trips to Iran for terrorist and guerrilla training in the Hezbollah camps north of Tehran, where he reportedly met Imad Mughniyeh, an important Hezbollah terrorist planner and allegedly the new head of Al-Qa’ida’s African networks. Bah reportedly fought with Hezbollah against Israel in southern Lebanon. In the late 1980s, he returned to Libya, where he served as a bodyguard to Libya’s Colonel Muammar al-Qadhafi. A native English speaker, Bah acted as a liaison between the English- and French-speaking mercenaries working for the Libyan-sponsored destabilization of West Africa. He helped to foment rebellions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, with the aim of taking over Africa’s diamond mines and controlling the illegal international diamond market. In December 2001, DEBKA-Net-Weekly reported that Bah’s method of operation was to use “Al-Qa’ida’s networks in Africa and Hezbollah elements within the Lebanese community as conduits for smuggling diamonds out for sale on world markets.”

Farah cited two Lebanese diamond merchants in particular, Aziz Nassour and his younger cousin, Samih Osailly, who—after being arrested in 2002—both admitted their involvement in diamond trading in the DRC and Sierra Leone. According to Farah’s sources, both began diamond trading with three Al-Qa’ida operatives (Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed) in Sierra Leone in 2000, using Liberia as a smuggling corridor. Nassour and Osailly had helped Al-Qa’ida diamond merchants purchase and smuggle large quantities of diamonds in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the months prior to the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC. Farah reported that both Nassour and Osailly had served as middlemen for various Islamic organizations. Both Nassour and Osailly were reported to be long-time Hezbollah supporters. Nevertheless, Osailly, when interviewed by Farah in 2001, denied Hezbollah membership, blaming his former wife for fabricating the story during a custody dispute over their children.

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After Belgian police arrested Osailly on April 12, 2002, they confirmed his Hezbollah connection, when they discovered an end-user certificate in his apartment allowing him to ship 113 tons of Ukrainian weapons to Côte d’Ivoire. In the past, Nassour would pay for arms that were brought into Liberia for Sam “Maskita” Bockarie, a senior RUF rebel. Nassour was involved in the May 2002 shipment of arms from Bulgaria to Liberia. Both Osailly and Nassour were found to be associates of ASA Diam, an Antwerp-based company controlled by Nassour but owned by Osailly. ASA Diam served as a front for Al-Qa’ida’s diamond purchases in Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to Belgian investigators, bank records showed that ASA Diam earned an estimated US$1 billion in 2000. Investigators also documented ASA Diam calls to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran. Both Nassour and Osailly were convicted of illicit diamond smuggling in Belgium in 2003. Osailly served several years in prison, but Nassour was able to flee to Beirut, where he continued to do business from the Sheraton Hotel, under the protection of Nabih Berri, the leader of Lebanon’s AMAL militia and, in the mid-2000s, the speaker of the parliament. According to Farah, Nassour traveled extensively, using aliases and phony passports, despite being on the United Nations list of persons banned from international travel.22

Connectionivoirienne.net, citing a *Quest-France* (Bretagne) article of October 31, 2009, on a U.S. Department of State investigation, reported that Hezbollah’s diamonds come from Guinea through Sierra Leone. They also come from Côte d’Ivoire, even though this country did not officially export any diamonds in 2008. The French newspaper also reported on the work being done by an expert on behalf of the United Nations on the funding of guerrilla groups in Africa. *Quest-France* explained that a Côte d’Ivoire zone under the control of the former Ivorian rebels is heavily involved in this illegal diamond trade, and that the ring is reportedly controlled by an unnamed Lebanese who is close to Hezbollah and operates from the Odienne region in northern Côte d’Ivoire to Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, an area that constitutes the crossroads of this business. A Belgian diamond merchant also confirmed the existence of the Ouagadougou–northern Côte d’Ivoire route used for trafficking the precious stones.23

23 Charles D’Almeida, “Côte d’Ivoire: Violation de l’embargo: Comment les Forces nouvelles échangent le diamant contre les armes: Le Hezbollah et un Israélien cités dans ce trafic” [Violation of the Embargo: How the New Forces...
Money Laundering and Smuggling of Drugs and Weapons

Researcher Steven Ellis has pointed out that Lebanese smugglers have been using West Africa as a transit point for transporting heroin to the United States since 1952. His observation that the Lebanese in the region have been operating a trans-Atlantic drug-smuggling corridor for the past six decades suggests that the Lebanese have operated discreetly and with impunity.24 Whether Hezbollah also has been using the same trans-Atlantic corridor used by the Lebanese drug-trafficking families is unclear, but close collaboration between Hezbollah and other expatriate Lebanese smugglers would not be unusual.

There have also been reports of collaboration in trans-Atlantic drug trafficking between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Hezbollah. Citing reports from Interpol and United Nations agencies, author Marco Vernaschi, who conducted research in Guinea-Bissau on a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, reported that “cocaine traded through West Africa accounts for a considerable portion of the income of Hezbollah.” Vernaschi notes that Hezbollah is using the Lebanese Shi’a expatriate populations in South America and West Africa to manage this transcontinental operation. As explained by Vernaschi, “Most of Hezbollah’s support comes from drug trafficking, a major moneymaker endorsed by the mullahs through a particular fatwa. In addition to the production and trade of heroin in the Middle East, Hezbollah facilitates, for a fee, the trafficking for other drug-smuggling networks, such as the FARC and its cocaine trade.” Vernaschi reported that these cocaine shipments are transported in heavily armed convoys of four-wheel-drive vehicles across the Sahel, the zone stretching from east to west across Africa south of the Sahara Desert. He explained that, because these Sahel regions, including Mauritania, “are controlled by a network of terrorists associated with Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb,” the drug smugglers make payments to Al-Qa’ida cells based in the Sahel for allowing the smugglers to transit their territories. As recently as August 2010, a Gambian opposition newspaper raised the question as to whether Hezbollah is using The Gambia as a cocaine-smuggling route. For example, on June 4, 2010, British and Gambian police seized more than two tons of cocaine linked to South American drug traffickers.25

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Rick Dubin, vice president of the Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC), suggested to the Toronto Star in December 2009 that Hezbollah may be involved in selling, in Africa, high-end vehicles stolen in Canada, or using them to barter for drugs and weapons. According to Dubin, the vehicles can be sold for twice their Canadian value in West Africa, particularly Ghana or Nigeria.26

Apparently in connection with activities such as arms and drug smuggling, several Lebanese financiers in the past decade have been implicated in an assassination of a Central African head of state and a coup attempt against another. Héritier Bilal, a Rwanda-based Lebanese financier with ties to a Congolese general, is a suspect in the assassination of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) head of state in 2001 (see subsection on DRC, below). Lebanese-British billionaire Ely Claude Alan Calil, who has roots in Nigeria, was implicated in financing a failed 2004 coup plot in oil-rich Equatorial Guinea against the head of state (see Equatorial Guinea).27 Just three months before Guinea’s head of state was seriously wounded in a failed assassination attempt in late 2009, Lebanese businessman Roda Fawaz was linked to arms smuggling with Brigadier General Sékouba Konaté, who was serving as vice president and minister of defense and who succeeded the wounded president as interim head of state (see Guinea subsection, below).28

WEST AFRICA


communities of 3,000 and 5,000 members, respectively, and Benin and Mali, which have smaller Lebanese populations.

Hezbollah terrorism against Israelis in West Africa remains a potential threat. In recent years, the Israeli intelligence community has made its view known that Hezbollah has established a presence in West African countries such as Nigeria and could pose a threat to Israeli interests in the region, particularly Nigeria. During a visit to the Israeli Embassy in Abuja on August 5, 2008, Mike Okiro, the inspector general of police, learned from the Israeli ambassador to Nigeria, Moshe Ram, that Hezbollah was planning to attack a West African country, possibly Nigeria, and that Israeli embassies in West Africa were facing “a security threat from Hezbollah.” The ambassador informed the Nigerian official that “We got a security threat yesterday from Hezbollah that our embassies in West Africa will be attacked.” No Hezbollah attack actually materialized, possibly as a result of heightened security measures.

Nevertheless, Israelis in the region apparently remain on alert. According to an anonymous Israeli official quoted by Geo-Strategy Direct, “Hezbollah has long had a presence in West Africa, but it wasn’t an operational presence. We believe that has changed.” According to Israeli officials, the Israeli alert also extended to West African countries with Lebanese Shi’a populations, such as Côte d’Ivoire, Mauritania (actually in North Africa), and Sierra Leone. Israel’s Counterterrorism Bureau reportedly believed that Hezbollah in Mali posed a threat to Israelis traveling in that country and issued a travel warning to that effect in February 2010.

Burkina Faso

A Lebanese-controlled network for smuggling rebel diamonds out of Côte d’Ivoire has been identified in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Hezbollah reportedly has been involved in this network since Ahmed Bakri, a Shi’a businessman working out of Burkina Faso, dealt in diamonds from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a

Independência Total de Angola—UNITA), which fought in the Angolan war for independence (1961–75) and in the subsequent civil war (1975–2002). Ahmed Bakri may be a relative of Imad Abdul Reda Bakri, who was identified in a July 2000 Belgian intelligence report as a Lebanese diamond trader tied to Hezbollah.\(^{32}\)

Another Hezbollah connection in Ouagadougou in 2000–2001 was Ibrahim Bah, who was maintaining a home in that capital city. As a very wealthy individual, Bah enjoyed political influence and government protection in Ouagadougou and was able to travel under various false passports. In a meeting with two U.S. officials at the Ministry of Security on November 29, 2001, Bah acknowledged doing some diamond business with Aziz Nassour and Samih Osailly, both linked to Hezbollah, out of a rented house in Monrovia but denied any role with Al-Qa’ida. On December 23, 2001, Burkina Faso security authorities reportedly deported Bah to Abidjan. Over the next year, Bah reportedly received lucrative offers from intelligence agencies for his Al-Qa’ida information.\(^{33}\)

**Côte d’Ivoire**

Although Côte d’Ivoire is known to host the largest Lebanese community in Africa, its membership of about 60,000, as cited by *Jeune Afrique*, may be an outdated estimate. Researcher Christian Bierwirth estimated between 60,000 and 70,000 Lebanese in the early 1990s. Recent news media figures can be as high as 130,000 Lebanese.\(^{34}\) In short, estimates vary widely.

By the early 1980s, the Lebanese community, working in commerce and business in many towns, controlled much of the country’s retail trade and urban real estate such as hotels and restaurants. Bierwirth confirmed that Lebanese entrepreneurs controlled the major shares of the manufacturing and wholesale industries, including one-sixth of Ivoirian consumer retail businesses. By the first half of the 1990s, Lebanese controlled at least 50 percent of national manufacturing companies. Moreover, they owned more than 50 percent of the modern buildings in Abidjan and 80 percent of those in the interior cities.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{35}\) Bierwirth, *Like Fish in the Sea*, 29, 31.
In its effort to counter a popular perception of the Lebanese as a foreign economic elite, the Lebanese community sought to assure the Ivorian leadership of its loyalty and its commitment to national goals by public declarations and by charitable contributions in support of cultural and sporting events. Nevertheless, dramatic increases in business corruption were attributed to the Lebanese. Félix Houphouët-Boigny (president, 1960–93) began issuing warnings to Lebanese merchants in particular about engaging in customs fraud and monopolistic practices. In 1986 a prominent French-Lebanese businessman, Roger Nasra, accused of embezzling more than US$1.5 million from the Ivorian treasury, escaped from police custody and fled to France. After being extradited by France in May 1998, Nasra was rearrested in Abidjan. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison for embezzling US$1.7 million. Nasra testified that he had given the money to a treasury official to be used in the election campaign of Henri Konan Bédié (president, 1993–99), but the official naturally denied the allegation.36

In general, the economic wealth of the Lebanese has not amounted to political power or social acceptance among Ivorians. On the contrary, the Lebanese have remained generally isolated and unassimilated in Ivorian society and perceived as foreigners. Moreover, only about 10 percent of the Lebanese had acquired Ivorian citizenship, according to Bierwirth, and therefore most Lebanese could not even vote much less run for political office and thus remained politically marginalized. According to Bierwirth, the number of Lebanese-Ivorians with Ivorian citizenship in the first half of the 1990s was about 5,000, while an equal number had French citizenship. Bierwirth has reported that the Lebanese attitude of superiority had become evident not only from their interaction with Ivorians as employees or customers, but also from their minimal intermarriage, much to the resentment of Ivorians.37

The uprising of November 2004 prompted several dozen members of the Lebanese community in Côte d’Ivoire to flee the country along with the French and members of other foreign communities. However, most Lebanese remained in the country, visibly conspicuous as the largest percentage of the white population of Abidjan, especially in the Treichville District, where many shops and businesses belong to Lebanese. Regarded as more integrated with the local population and less arrogant than the French, the Lebanese felt secure enough to remain in

37 Bierwirth, Like Fish in the Sea, 32–33, 35, 182–83.
country during the crisis. Moreover, the Lebanese control the distribution sector, including the supermarkets and commercial centers, and therefore had a stake in protecting their massive investments.\textsuperscript{38} By paying youths to protect their properties, the Lebanese merchants minimized damage.

Some members of the Lebanese community in Côte d’Ivoire are known to be radical Islamists. In May 2009, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated Abdul al-Menhem al-Qubaysi (alias Kobeïssi), the imam of the Lebanese community in Abidjan, as a financier of Hezbollah. Until his expulsion from the country on August 6, 2009, al-Qubaysi was reportedly a Côte d’Ivoire-based Hezbollah supporter and the imam of the immense Fatima Zahra Mosque operated by the Al-Ghadir Cultural Association, located at the entrance to Abidjan’s Marcory District. According to a member of the Ivoirian counterespionage unit, Defense and Security Forces (Forces de Défense et de Sécurité—FDS), al-Qubaysi had been under surveillance since 2006 and was known to be recruiting youths to fight in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{39}

*L’Expression* criticized the deportation, asserting that Al-Qubaysi is an Ivorian who was born in Côte d’Ivoire. *L’Expression* reported that all the Islamic associations, including the Al Ghadir Cultural Association, the National Islamic Council (CNI), and the Superior Council of Imams (Cosim), voiced their solidarity with the deported imam, claiming that it was unjust to expel a naturalized Ivoirian citizen who had been residing in the country since 1979. According to *Jeune Afrique*, Al-Qubaysi, age 45, was born on January 1, 1964, in Beirut. Thus, Al-Qubaysi is also a Lebanese national. Moreover, he is also reportedly a citizen of Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{40}

In explaining the deportation to *Jeune Afrique*, Côte d’Ivoire’s Directorate of Territorial Surveillance (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire—DST), or counterespionage office, only


cited “reasons of security.” However, a DST member told *Jeune Afrique* that Al-Qubaysi had been under close watch since 2006. “We have had information that the imam mobilized the youths of his community to go to fight in Lebanon,” the DST source told the magazine. As an imam and the personal representative of Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah secretary general, Al-Qubaysi communicated with Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon and hosted senior Hezbollah officials traveling to Côte d’Ivoire and other parts of Africa to raise money for Hezbollah. *Jeune Afrique* reported that Al-Qubaysi “received some top-ranking Hezbollah officials who traveled to Côte d’Ivoire and other parts of the region to raise funds for Hezbollah.”

In his role as a spokesman for Hezbollah in Côte d’Ivoire, Al-Qubaysi spoke at Hezbollah fund-raising events and helped establish an official Hezbollah foundation in Côte d’Ivoire in about 1997 called the Al-Ghadir Cultural Association. It has been used to recruit new members for Hezbollah’s military ranks in Lebanon. In 2002 Al-Qubaysi began building the Fatima Zahra Mosque, which is also known as the “Hezbollah Mosque.” The imam reportedly received US$5 million in Iranian funding for the construction of the 6,000 square-meter mosque, which is located in the heart of the Al-Zahraa Islamic Cultural Center. At the time of Al-Qubaysi’s deportation, the Ivorian Defense and Security Forces (Forces de Défense et Sécurité—FDS) had planned to search the Al-Ghadir Mosque. However, at the last minute the head of state, Laurent Gbagbo, reportedly ordered the FDS not to do so to avoid provoking any crisis with the Lebanese community.

**The Gambia**

The Gambia is mainland Africa’s smallest country and one of its poorest. Were it not for its short Atlantic coastline, which makes it a popular destination for European tourists, the country would be a riverine enclave within Senegal, which otherwise surrounds it. By 2009 the Lebanese population of The Gambia totaled about 2,400, most of whom lived within the capital, Banjul. Most of the Lebanese in The Gambia are Shi’a who originated from South Lebanon (Kana, Nabatiyé, Tyr, and Bazourieh). Some are Christians from North Lebanon (Tripoli and

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41 Mieu, “Côte d’Ivoire: L’imam libanais lâché par les Ivoiriens,” 77.
42 Mieu, “Côte d’Ivoire: L’imam libanais lâché par les Ivoiriens,” 77.
43 Pompey, “Côte d’Ivoire: Les nouveaux Libanais.”
The Lebanese may be less separated from the Gambian population than in other West African countries, having strongly mixed with native Gambians through marriage.45 The Gambian government has looked favorably on the economic activity of the Lebanese, who are involved in various sectors, particularly buying groundnuts, importing manufactured products such as automobiles, medicine and other pharmaceutical items, and Lebanese foodstuffs, and reexporting them to Senegal. Other Lebanese produce candy and biscuits or are involved in vegetable production, mango plantations, and poultry farming. The Lebanese also build and operate hotels, profiting from European tourism, including riverine and forest tours.46

Concerned over incidents involving Lebanese, representatives of the country’s Lebanese community requested and were granted a meeting with the Gambian leadership on May 12, 2006. On that occasion, Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh asserted that since he became president in July 1994, persons of Lebanese origin had held and continued to hold many important portfolios in the country and the government.47

One of the Lebanese favored by President Jammeh has been Muhammed Bazzi (alias Bassi or Bashi). According to Freedom Newspaper, an independent Gambian newspaper opposed to the Jammeh government and published online in North Carolina, Bazzi, whose family had long been involved in trading in Sierra Leone, had been deported from that country for trading in conflict diamonds and meddling in domestic politics. Another Lebanese businessman, Tarik Musa of TK Motors, helped Bazzi to get established in The Gambia, giving both him and President Jammeh many business tips before moving to Dubai. By 2007 Bazzi appeared to exercise much control over The Gambia’s energy, telecommunications, and utilities sectors. Such was Bazzi’s influence with President Jammeh in 2008 that he was also serving as The Gambia’s consul general in Lebanon.48

Freedom Newspaper reported that President Jammeh and Bazzi wholly owned Gam-Petroleum (GEG), supposedly a state company. With President Jammeh’s consent, Bazzi reportedly had ordered all of the country’s oil and gas imports, including Castrol oil. Freedom

Newspaper found that Jammeh treated Bazzi like a confidant, even assigning him, in October 2007, a full-time paramilitary guard and escort by the Police Intervention Unit. GEG threatened to sue Freedom Newspaper at that time, charging that the paper published false information concerning Gam-Petroleum and its CEO, Bazzi, but nothing apparently came of the complaint. According to Freedom Newspaper, Bazzi’s Spectrum Group defrauded the Gambian government in the purchase of new generators from China for GEG’s Brikama project in the village of Mandinering, near Kombo Lamin.49

By 2007 Lebanese sole-proprietor companies already owned Africell and Comium—two mobile cellular telecommunications firms and Internet service providers. On August 1, the highly rated Gambian Telecommunications Company (Gamtel) and its subsidiary, The Gambia Cellular Company (Gamcel), signed a secretive partnership agreement with the little-known Spectrum Investment Group, Ltd, a Beirut-based Lebanese company. The agreement allowed Spectrum to purchase 50-percent shares of both Gamtel and Gamcel, thereby putting almost all the country’s telecommunications sector in Lebanese hands, much to the concern of many Gambian citizens. According to Freedom Newspaper, President Jammeh and several Lebanese nationals, including Bazzi, co-owned Spectrum. The modern GEG Storage Facility was part of Muhammed Bazzi’s Spectrum Group when it opened in 2008 in Mandinari, near the mouth of the Gambia River. Yet, at the time of Spectrum’s takeover of Gamtel/Gamcel, the Gambia Journal, a Banjul newspaper, was unable to find Spectrum’s name in any Lebanese business directory. According to Freedom Newspaper, the company’s contact information was in one of Beirut’s most prestigious neighborhoods.50 Rather than a modern headquarters office, however, Spectrum in 2008

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50 Specifically at Verdun, Rachid Karamé, Centre Verdun 732, 17th Floor, Beirut, Lebanon.
reportedly consisted of a small rental unit with a couple of tables, a telephone, and a fax machine, according to a Banjul-based critic.\textsuperscript{51}

Immediately after its Gambian telecommunications acquisitions, Spectrum’s CEO, Bazzi, replaced the top management of Gamtel/Gamcel, sharply cut the pay of employees, and hiked phone rates sevenfold. According to \textit{Freedom Newspaper}, Spectrum subsequently remitted all funds derived from the sale and 75 percent of Gamtel’s budget to Lebanon in dollars. The paper added that most of the funds generated by the Spectrum Group through Gamtel and NAWEC “are wired through the Standard Chartered Bank Banjul Branch to Arab countries.”\textsuperscript{52}

According to \textit{Freedom Newspaper}, as of October 2007, President Jammeh had created controversy by welcoming Hezbollah fighters to The Gambia in the name of investment. Citing a “reliable source working with Spectrum Group Gambia,” \textit{Freedom Newspaper} found that Bazzi invited the Hezbollah militants, who dispersed across the country, supposedly handling Spectrum’s business activities and other official errands. One “former member of Hezbollah,” a relative of Bazzi and a former Hezbollah member, was assigned to head Spectrum’s offices in Brikama. According to the paper’s source, Bazzi was bringing Hezbollah members into the country on a regular basis, using Spectrum as a front. The paper reported that half of Bazzi’s workers were Hezbollah members. According to the article, The Gambia has become “a terrorist recruiting ground.”\textsuperscript{53}

This survey cannot assess the credibility of \textit{Freedom Newspaper}’s allegations against Bazzi and President Jammeh. Nevertheless, they are presented here as opposition viewpoints.


\textsuperscript{53} PNMBAI, “Hezbollah Storms Gambia.”
which, in the case of The Gambia, can be published only outside the country, given the government’s suppression of press freedom. By contrast, the online paper published GEG’s refutation of the allegations made against Bazzi, according to which Bazzi is neither the chief executive officer of Spectrum nor affiliated with Spectrum. Instead, GEG acknowledged that Bazzi is a shareholder in Comium, a telecommunications competitor of Gamcel, in which Spectrum is a major shareholder. In addition, GEG identified Bazzi as the major shareholder and managing director of a group of companies in The Gambia, namely GEG; the new power plant in Brikama; Gam Veg, an edible-oil refinery; and Royal Residence, a Europe-based prime real estate developer.54

The GEG was presumably correct in stating in October 2008 that Bazzi was not associated with Spectrum, for he had apparently dropped out of the company by then. This is because in late July of that year, the Office of the President, complaining that Spectrum had failed to honor the terms of the agreement with Gamtel/Gamcel and that the quality of service had declined significantly under its management, gave the company 72 hours to explain Gamtel/Gamcel’s financial condition. At the expiration of the ultimatum, on August 1, the government declined to renew its contract with Spectrum, effective November 7, thereby allowing Gamtel/Gamcel to end their year-long exploitation by the so-called company.55

A few other members of the Lebanese business community with reputed Hezbollah ties also reportedly have been involved in questionable business practices and even an alleged coup attempt. Both Salah Ezzedine and Youssef Ezzedine reportedly helped President Jammeh amass a fortune. Salah Ezzedine, the owner of the East Line Company, is a prominent but notorious financier in Lebanon. Known for his closeness to senior Hezbollah leaders, he used to personify the ideal Hezbollah supporter. However, as of September 2009, Salah Ezzedine reportedly was bankrupt and accused of defrauding thousands of Shi’a investors in South Lebanon and Qatar through a Bernard Madoff–like Ponzi scheme. Estimates of the money that Ezzedine lost have ranged from US$500 million to US$1.9 billion. Hezbollah officials Mohammed Raad, Amin Sherri, and Hajj Wafiq Safa reportedly lost significant amounts in Ezzedin’s bankruptcy, as did Hezbollah lawmaker Hussein Hajj Hassan. Hezbollah reportedly questioned Ezzedine before

54 Barry, “Gambian Government Accuses Spectrum Group of Economic Exploitation.”
turning him over to Lebanese authorities on August 31, 2009. Hassan Nasrallah, in an attempt to disassociate Hezbollah from Ezzedine, denied in a speech that Hezbollah had any links to him. Ten days after his arrest, Ezzedine was charged with embezzlement. In March 2010, the Jammeh regime charged Lieutenant General Lang Tombong Tamba, a former Gambian Army chief of defense staff, and two businessmen, including Lebanese financier Youssef Ezzedin (alias Rambo), with conspiracy to commit treason through a coup d’état.  

Ghana

After a failed coup attempt by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings and several members of the air force on May 15, 1979, the Lebanese community in Ghana gained some notoriety. During the court martial of the coup’s seven plotters, Rawlings justified his action in part by charging that Syrian and Lebanese businessmen living in Ghana had gained control of the country’s economy at the expense of the African majority. A subsequent military coup freed Rawlings. By 1990 Lebanese were among the resident foreign businessmen who were jailed and held without formal charges and without benefit of trial. According to one estimate, the Lebanese community in Ghana numbered at least 5,000 members in the late 1990s.

Guinea

The day after Lansana Conté (president, 1984–2008) was killed on December 22, 2008, military officers seized power in Guinea, with Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, the number two of the ruling National Council for Democracy and Development (Conseil National pour la Démocratie et le Développement—CNDD), declaring himself president of the republic. Guinea’s


minister of defense, Brigadier General Sékouba Konaté, the number three of the CNDD, as the son of a Muslim Malinke father and a Lebanese-Guinean Christian mother, is known to have important connections within the influential Lebanese business community. Lebanese members of Konaté’s network include Roda Fawaz, the managing director of the Katex-Guinée Company; and Ali Saadi, Guinea’s honorary consul in Lebanon.58

In September 2009, Konaté appointed Fawaz as Guinea’s honorary consul in Morocco. Both Konaté and Fawaz were linked to collaborating in arms smuggling. Konaté, who is known as “the Tiger,” traveled with Fawaz to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, on October 11. They negotiated the delivery of US$33 million to US$45 million worth of light weapons, which were offloaded some days later in Conkary port. Although Fawaz has also traveled on behalf of Guinea to countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, in 2009 he reportedly spent most of his time in Conakry, where he attended diligently to Konaté, collaborating with him in trading in rice, petroleum products, and miscellaneous equipment. On December 3, 2009, an aide-de-camp wounded Camara in the head in a failed assassination attempt. After Camara was evacuated to Morocco for medical treatment, Konaté began serving as interim president.59

According to U.S. officials cited by the Los Angeles Times in late 2009, informants and suspects indicated that the lawless region around the Gulf of Guinea had become a trans-Atlantic crossroads for Colombian and Mexican drug traffickers, Colombian guerrillas, Al-Qa’ida, and Lebanese militant groups. The latter clearly includes Hezbollah because the U.S. Department of State reported that Hezbollah controls significant diamond smuggling in Guinea. According to the October 31, 2009, issue of France’s online newspaper Quest-France, as cited by Connectionivoirienne.net, the department discovered “a ring of diamond laundering between Guinea and Lebanon through which the Hezbollah has been financing itself thanks to the many deals.”60

Guinea-Bissau

One of the poorest countries in the world, the small, lawless, and politically unstable country of Guinea-Bissau has little economic activity other than agriculture. However, in recent years Guinea-Bissau, an archipelago of 90 islands, has served as a transit hub for as much as one-fourth of all the drugs (cocaine) smuggled from South America to Europe. On March 1, 2009, suspected drug-trafficking violence reached the highest levels of the military and the government, with the assassination of the army chief of staff, General Batista Thagme Na Waie, followed hours later by that of João Bernardo Vieira (president, 1980–1998, 2005–9), who was assassinated by a group of renegade soldiers. As of May 2010, Rear Admiral José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto, reputedly a major drug trafficker, was widely believed to have become the country’s de facto strongman.61

According to Vernaschi, the Bissau-based Lebanese network conducts drug-trafficking business directly with the FARC in Colombia on behalf of Hezbollah. He explained that this network uses Bissau as a staging point for subdividing cocaine shipments from Latin America “into smaller consignments that are then sent by fast boats to the coasts of Morocco and Senegal or moved in trucks through Mauritania and across the Sahara to the Mediterranean coast.”62

Reports of Lebanese activities in Guinea-Bissau have been fragmentary. Suspected drug-related violence struck the Lebanese community in Guinea-Bissau on December 13, 2008, when a team of killers that reportedly included foreigners invaded a private residence in downtown Bissau and assassinated Hassan Zein and Ali Nazal, two Lebanese men belonging to the same family. Nazal was owner of the Mansour Company, an automobile dealership. Police suspected that the slayings were linked to drug trafficking. It was the first time in the 40 years since Lebanese began doing business in the country that Lebanese citizens were murdered. A few days
later, police arrested five individuals, including a Guinean, two Nigerians, a Liberian, and a Lebanese, and charged them with the assassinations of the two Lebanese.63

On February 9, 2010, Guinea-Bissau authorities arrested a Lebanese, Jean Hal Jaal, and charged him with illegal importation of firearms equipped with silencers and 20-round ammunition clips, along with 200 rounds of ammunition per weapon. There was no reported evidence that Jean Hal Jaal was linked to drug traffickers or Hezbollah. He was reportedly working with Nilton César Teixeira Barbosa, a fugitive Cape Verdean criminal, who escaped from the Judiciary Police jail in Bissau in early May 2010.64

Liberia

Lebanese traders, some of whom have been in the country for several generations, currently control nearly all of Liberia’s commerce, including the main automobile-import companies, one of the largest mobile phone companies, supermarkets, restaurants, printing presses, textiles, construction works, factories, and other production-based companies. Two Lebanese companies import the country’s staple food, rice. A popular perception of the Lebanese in Liberia is that they engage in corruption, inflate prices, send their profits overseas, and hire mostly family members instead of Liberians.

Liberia’s civil strife has affected even the relatively well-off Lebanese. Before the Liberian civil war began in 1990, Liberia had between 7,500 and 10,000 Lebanese. In 2005 they reportedly totaled 4,000. Moreover, despite being born in the country, Lebanese are denied citizenship rights because of Liberia’s Naturality Law and are categorized as foreigners; the Lebanese cannot vote or own land because Liberian citizenship is restricted solely to people of African descent.65

In exchange for “taxes” on their earnings, the regime of President Charles Taylor (1997–2003) sold monopoly franchises not only of diamonds but also of petroleum products, rice, timber, and vehicle importation to various organized crime groups, including Lebanese families, as well as to Al-Qa’ida and Hezbollah. Opening a diamond-mining business (taxed at one-third of earnings) required a down payment to Taylor of US$100,000.66

Liberia-based Lebanese businessmen who trafficked in arms or diamonds on behalf of President Taylor included Talal el-Ndine and Abbas Fawaz. El-Ndine, a close Taylor aide, served as one of his middlemen for arranging shipments of rifles and ammunition from Eastern Europe in exchange for diamonds; El-Ndine also served as Taylor’s diamond trader in Belgium. From his office in Old Road, Monrovia, El-Ndine negotiated payments to arms shippers and brokers, as well as to the mostly Russian or Ukrainian pilots and crew of the aircraft used for clandestine shipments into or out of Liberia. Ndine also sought out foreign investors willing to cooperate with the regime in legitimate business activities as well as in weapons and illicit diamonds. Fawaz was also suspected of supplying arms and ammunition to the Taylor regime to attack neighboring Ivory Coast. The Independent Commission on Human Rights linked Fawaz to a massacre in River Gee County, Liberia.67

Under Taylor’s dictatorship, Hezbollah greatly benefitted from the Lebanese community in Liberia. According to Farah, based on his review of a report prepared by a UN-backed Special Court, his interviews with eyewitnesses, and banking and telephone records that he had seen, President Taylor sold diamonds to Hezbollah, Al-Qa’ida, and Russian organized crime. According to David Crane, prosecutor for the Special Court in Sierra Leone, for years Taylor harbored terrorists from the Middle East, including Al-Qa’ida and Hezbollah.68

Several Lebanese traders with reported Hezbollah connections have operated in or out of Liberia in recent decades. One of Hezbollah’s earliest operatives in Liberia was Ibrahim Bah (for

background, see subsection on Diamond Trading, above). After meeting Charles Taylor in Libya, Ibrahim Bah became the trainer for Taylor’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which instigated the Liberian insurrection at the end of 1989, and was promoted to RUF’s general rank. By the late 1990s, President Taylor and RUF were using Bah as their weapons dealer and primary diamond handler. In about July 2000, according to Farah, Allie Darwish, a small-time Lebanese diamond dealer in Antwerp, earned US$50,000 by introducing Bah to Hezbollah supporter Aziz Nassour, whom Bah then contracted to handle large quantities of diamonds on behalf of RUF and Al-Qa’ida.69

In late 2000, Nassour began spending part of his time in Monrovia in order to purchase weapons for President Taylor. According to Belgian investigators, Nassour (alias Alpha Zulu) was also using his satellite telephone to communicate with Al-Qa’ida in Afghanistan. Citing Cendor Reeves, a member of Taylor’s inner circle, Farah reported that Nassour and Arab diamond clients created a weapons-smuggling route. In February 2001, Nassour rented a house for his Al-Qa’ida associates, sent his established couriers to Monrovia, and arranged to have his nephew, Samih Osailly (alias Sierra Oscar), handle business. The diamonds flowed through a company called ASA Diam in Antwerp, controlled by Nassour but owned by his cousin, Osailly. By obviating the need for Al-Qa’ida to open new companies, this arrangement allowed Al-Qa’ida to maintain a low profile.70

By 2001 Bah reportedly was using Al-Qa’ida’s networks in Africa and Hezbollah elements within the Lebanese community as conduits for smuggling diamonds out for sale on world markets. Bah brokered the strategic and financial ties between Al-Qa’ida and the Sierra Leone rebel leader, Sam Bockerie, apparently when the two Al-Qa’ida operatives, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, met with Osailly and Darwish in Monrovia on December 26, 2000. These parties then drove by caravan to Sierra Leone. By mid-January 2001, the two Al-Qa’ida operatives had returned to Monrovia, and Darwish to Antwerp. For the next few months, while Ghailani took care of diamond shipments with couriers at a safe house,

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Mohammed spent most of his time in the diamond fields organizing and transporting the stones.\textsuperscript{71}

In about April 2001, Osailly departed Monrovia for Antwerp, having been fired by his cousin, Nassour, for his playboy lifestyle, whereupon Nassour stopped shipping RUF diamonds to Antwerp and began sending them directly to Al-Qa’ida operatives in Lebanon. Consequently, investigators became suspicious that Nassour’s ASA Diam account in Antwerp continued to receive large deposits even though the company had stopped reporting diamond sales in Antwerp. After Belgian police arrested Osailly in April 2002, they learned from his computer “…that $20 to $50 million passing through the ASA Diam account was the money that Al-Qa’ida operatives paid for diamonds.”\textsuperscript{72} In 2006 a United Nations panel reported that Lebanese nationals under the travel ban imposed on key Liberian officials and their associates by the United Nations Security Council in 2001 and renewed annually “often evaded the sanctions.”\textsuperscript{73}

More recently, in December 2007, state security headed by the Ministry of Justice arrested and detained the chief executive officer of the Haddad Group of Companies, George Haddad, for his alleged involvement in the sale of a huge deposit of iron ore in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, during the regime of the National Transitional Government of Liberia headed by Charles G. Bryant.\textsuperscript{74}

Nigeria

By 1985 Nigeria ranked fourth in West Africa with a Lebanese population of 16,000 residents. They constitute only a tiny fraction of the country’s estimated 5 million Shi’a. Inheriting the businesses formerly operated by the Europeans, Americans, and indigenous entrepreneurs in the early twentieth century, the Lebanese established their businesses in Nigeria’s industrial cities such as Lagos and Kano, dominating businesses in Kano in particular.


\textsuperscript{72} Farah, \textit{Blood from Stones}, 74–75, 79.


Lebanese businesses still had a significant presence in various Nigerian cities in the late 1990s, despite a popular perception of them in the country in general as “exploiters” and “cheats.”

One indication that the Lebanese in Nigeria are seen as well off is that they are subject to kidnapping for ransom by Niger Delta militants. In late August 2006, State Security Service (SSS) agents in Delta State tracked down and arrested three suspects who came to Asaba, the state capital, to collect an N4.5 million ransom (about US$30,000) that they had demanded for the release of a Lebanese abducted on August 18 in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The victim, an employee of the Homan Engineering Company Port Harcourt, is the brother of the chairman of the Lebanese community in Rivers State. On June 3, 2008, gunmen kidnapped two Lebanese employees of Setraco, a local engineering company, near the town of Amassoma. In March 2009, Lagos recovered an N30 million ransom (about US$198,000) when they killed the six kidnappers of a Lebanese man. On October 6, kidnappers murdered a French citizen and abducted a Lebanese. Rivers State police announced on April 8, 2010, that more than 10 men wearing military uniforms and armed with automatic weapons had kidnapped six foreigners, four Syrians and two Lebanese, at Umuatoru–Etche road bridge area near Port Harcourt. One of the Lebanese was identified as Ghassan Germany. The victims were working in the construction sector.

Nigeria has long been known as a hub of West African drug-trafficking, and elements of the Lebanese community in the country have been linked to various smuggling activities. In 2008 a DEA investigation codenamed Operation Titan uncovered a Lebanese-controlled merchandise-smuggling network linking members of Lebanese diaspora communities in North and South America and Nigeria with their associates in Lebanon.

A Lebanese financier named Gilbert Chagoury served as the financial adviser to General Sani Abacha (president, 1993–98), who stole an estimated US$3 billion of Nigeria’s public assets during his presidency, including at least US$1.6 billion that was deposited in Swiss banks. Swiss investigators showed how Abacha family members and their advisors set up front

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companies and channeled hundreds of millions of dollars in stolen state funds through established Western banks, including Credit Suisse, Merrill Lynch, and Goldman Sachs, with few questions asked. Chagoury and the Swiss-Israeli banker Gabriel Katri used their sway with international institutions to open accounts for the Abacha brothers using false names.\(^78\)

According to Jane’s, a United Kingdom–based company specializing in open-source information related to national security issues, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), formerly called the Muslim Brothers, is Nigeria’s most vocal Shi’a political group and an ally of Hezbollah. Sheikh Ibraheem Yaqoub Zakzaky, a radical cleric, founded the IMN in 1981. Based in Zaria, the IMN operates more than 300 religious schools around the country. On July 21, 2006, after a news report that two unidentified Nigerians had been killed in an exchange of artillery fire between Israel and Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, some IMN members demonstrated peacefully by marching through the major streets in Kaduna and Zaria, urging all Muslims in the world to rise up and wipe Israel off of the world map. The marchers carried a large placard and portrait of Sheikh Ahmed Nasrallah, the spiritual leader of Hezbollah, and Sheikh Zakzaky and chanted “Allahu Akbar” (God is great) and “Allah Ya tsine Obasanjo and Bush” (May God curse Obasanjo and Bush). Meanwhile, in Kano, hundreds of thousands of Shi’ā Muslims led by Sheikh Turi Mohammed burned the Israeli flag in protest against Israel’s military attack against Hezbollah of Lebanon.\(^79\)

U.S. scholar J. Peter Pham told the Voice of America in early 2010 that “there is a Nigerian branch of Hezbollah that has occasionally staged parades in various northern states. There are radical groups that have increasingly penetrated the area, financed often by money coming from outside of the area, but they are clearly present.”\(^80\)

**Senegal**

By 1985 Senegal had 26,000 Lebanese residents, the second highest number in West Africa, according to scholar Mara A. Leichtman, an assistant professor of anthropology and


Muslim studies at Michigan State University.81 More recent estimates have not exceeded 30,000. For example, a 2009 *Jeune Afrique* article noted that the country’s Lebanese population had declined from 50,000 in 1970 to fewer than 30,000 in 2009.82 Leichtman pointed out that 95 to 97 percent of the Lebanese community in Senegal resides in Dakar, and that the other significant but relatively small Lebanese community in the country, consisting of 400 to 450 members, resides in Kaolack.83

Leichtman found that there is generally little socializing between Lebanese and Senegalese, with the exception of some upper-class Senegalese frequenting Lebanese-owned facilities such as clubs, casinos, or restaurants. For the most part, Dakar’s Lebanese merchant community keeps to itself near its stores in the city center. The Lebanese speak a mixture of French and Arabic among themselves, but they speak Wolof with their Senegalese employees and clients. Although the Lebanese are more integrated economically with the local society than Lebanese in other parts of Africa, the relationship is one of employer to employee, while socially there is little integration other than with some upper-class Senegalese at Lebanese establishments. Leichtman’s depiction of the Lebanese in Senegal as an economic elite seems to clash with *Jeune Afrique*’s most recent report that 60 percent of the Lebanese in the country are poor people living in small towns or in Dakar’s outskirts, such as the Pikine and Guédiawaye sections.84

Lebanese diversification into the professions began in the late 1960s. According to Leichtman, Lebanese now can be found in all of Senegal’s economic sectors with the exception of banking and insurance, which the French monopolize. University-trained second- and third-generation Lebanese in Senegal have been entering industry, which is concentrated just outside Dakar on the Route de Rufisque, and professions such as medicine, dentistry, law, pharmacy, mechanical engineering, and haberdashery. Lebanese dominate the cosmetic, paper, and plastic industries and have a share of the African cloth industry. One Lebanese-owned advanced plastics factory visited by Leichtman stamped its products, ranging from furniture to cosmetic cases, as “Made in the USA.” Leichtman noted that the industries and the professions are the future for Senegal’s Lebanese because of the increasing competition faced by the traditional Lebanese

83 Leichtman, *A Tale of Two Shi’isms*, 70.
84 Leichtman, *A Tale of Two Shi’isms*, 61, 70–75; Sow, “Sénégal–Liban: La face cachée de l'intégration.”
merchants, who were no longer able to compete with informal-market prices offered by the Mourides, who are members of a large Islamic Sufi order.85

Since he arrived in Senegal in the early 1970s, Sheikh El-Zein (alias Sheikh ‘Abd al-Mon’im al-Zain), a charismatic Lebanese and protégé of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini who calls himself Caliph Ahl al-Beit, has worked to radicalize Dakar’s Lebanese Shi’a. Sheikh El-Zein founded the Lebanese Islamic Institute in Dakar’s Plateau neighborhood in 1978, providing the first Shi’a institutional presence in the country. Serving mainly the Lebanese community, the institute received nongovernmental organization (NGO) status in 1985. In June 1979, the Lebanese community provided substantial funding for the construction of the large mosque of Tivaouane, and one of Senegal’s most prominent Lebanese, Abdou Karim Bourgi, helped to build Dakar’s largest mosque. According to scholar Saïd Boumedouha, these fund-raising efforts won greater protection of the Lebanese community by the Senegalese elite, “and a few wealthy Lebanese became active members of the Parti socialiste (PS), the ruling party.”86

Leichtman pointed out several educational institutions financed by the Lebanese. These include the Islamic Social Institution (l’Institution Islamique Sociale), which serves as the principal institution of the Lebanese Muslims in Senegal. Apparently, the Islamic Social Institution is the name of the larger complex housing the Lebanese Islamic Institute and other facilities, including a clinic. Established in 1984, the Collège al-Zahraa, also built with Lebanese funds, teaches mostly (98 percent) Shi’a Muslims. Instruction in the Arabic language and Qu’ran moved from the Islamic Institute to the Arab Language Institute (Institut de La Langue Arabe), when it opened in 1998. In 1996 the Lebanese established a nonprofit, secular organization called Alliance for the purpose of promoting Lebanese integration in Senegal.87 Considering the sizeable and relatively well-off Lebanese community in Senegal, it is not surprising that, as noted in the Corruption and Embezzlement subsection above, Israeli intelligence, according to Matthew Levitt, ranks Senegal as Hezbollah’s second most important fund-raising country in

Africa, after Côte d’Ivoire. Levitt suggests that this is because Hezbollah is able to engage in its money-laundering and “tax” extortion activities in Senegal.88

**Sierra Leone**

In the mid-1960s, certain Lebanese diamond traders were able to attain highly influential positions in the government. For example, during 1965–67, Jamil Sahid Mohamed, an Afro-Lebanese and a member of the South Lebanon group, was the top Lebanese diamond trader in Kono. Mohamed’s South Lebanon rival, Henneh Shamel—described as flamboyant, ostentatious, and boastful of his political influence—was able to temporarily displace him in April 1968 with the help of the government opposition leader. However, Mohamed regained his former position after Shamel fled the country in January 1970, accused of organizing the diamond robbery at Hastings Airfield in November 1969.89

During the rule of Siaka Stevens (prime minister, 1967–71; president, 1971–85), Jamil Sahid Mohamed was one of the dominant figures in Sierra Leone as the dictator’s right-hand man, who enabled the regime to monopolize the Sierra Leonian diamond trade. As a head of state, Stevens was prohibited from engaging in commerce, so he relied on Mohamed to act on his behalf as a diamond trader. In 1971 Stevens, as prime minister, created the National Diamond Mining Company, which operated under his auspices and that of Jamil Sahid Mohamed. Mohamed’s influence with Stevens also allowed Sierra Leone’s Lebanese merchant community, which controlled the majority of the unofficial diamond trade as well as a portion of the official diamond trade, to become increasingly influential and to hold key government positions. Stevens even employed Lebanese security guards. In 1979 *Africa Confidential* reported that Lebanese financial groups dominated public finance in Sierra Leone to the extent that Lebanese middlemen approved all major contracts and manipulated them to their own advantage and that of foreign contractors. By 1984 Jamil Sahid Mohamed himself controlled most of the country’s diamond production, having bought all the shares of the De Beers monopoly. Mohamed’s smuggling of Sierra Leonian rare gems and minerals reportedly earned him more than US$30 million (apparently per year).90

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88 Levitt, “The Hizballah Threat in Africa.”
89 Van der Laan, *The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone*, 207.
Mohamed became a particularly important Hezbollah contact in Sierra Leone as a childhood friend of another Lebanese born in Sierra Leone, Nabih Berri, the pro-Syrian head of Lebanon’s AMAL party and militia, speaker of the Lebanese parliament, and an ally of Hezbollah. According to Freetown’s *Concord Times*, Mohamed and Berri regarded Sierra Leone “solely as a source of exploitation,” and Mohamed’s loyalties were with the country’s Lebanese merchant minority. Thanks to Berri and his diamond-trading connections, AMAL reportedly excelled at fund-raising in Sierra Leone, more so than Hezbollah.

By 1985 Sierra Leone had West Africa’s third-ranked Lebanese population of 25,000 residents. This Lebanese population was considered sufficiently large for Middle East Airlines to inaugurate a weekly flight between Freetown and Beirut in 1987. Stevens’s successor, Joseph Saidu Momoh (president, 1985–92), the former head of the Sierra Leone armed forces, entrusted Jamil Sahid Mohamed, who also owned the Precious Meter Mining Company, with even greater control of the government.

Mohamed’s plundering of Sierra Leone suffered a setback in 1987, when Momoh deported him for plotting a coup d’état. Police officers found a weapons cache in Mohamed’s villa that included rocket launchers, M–16 and AK–47 Kalashnikov automatic assault rifles, and 49,000 rounds of ammunition. Mohamed continued to influence Sierra Leonean politics and pursue his business activities in that country from his new base in London. Nevertheless, Mohamed’s exile basically sidelined him and other AMAL-backed merchants, giving Hezbollah a free hand to take control of diamond-trading revenue. Mohamed remained in exile in London until his death in January 2000, after a long illness.

By the early 1990s, four Lebanese businessmen reportedly controlled 80 percent of Sierra Leone’s diamond business. Lebanese also controlled 60 percent of the business sector in general.

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92 Jalloh, “Sierra Leone: In Retrospect – APC’s Lebanese State.”


In April 1998, the government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah (president, 1996–97 and 1998–2007) ordered the deportation of more than 20 foreigners, mostly Lebanese businessmen, for engaging in antigovernment activities in collaboration with the former military regime. In December 2000, a United Nations Security Council report identified several arms dealers, including a Lebanese businessman named Talal el-Ndine, whom it called the “paymaster” of Liberia’s Charles Taylor and his inner circle. As of August 2001, another Lebanese businessman suspected of involvement in blood-diamond trafficking was Bassem Jamil Sahid, the son of the late Jamil Sahid Mohamed, who reportedly had a diplomatic passport and whose Freetown house had been under surveillance by authorities for some time. However, nothing more has been reported about him since then.

As of November 2001, the Washington Post’s Douglas Farah had identified Ibrahim Bah, supposedly a used-car salesman who carried a satellite telephone, as a Hezbollah financier serving as a Lebanese middleman between the Sierra Leonean rebels and the Al-Qa’ida network. Bah’s name was first mentioned in a report drafted by a panel of United Nations experts responsible for investigating how the conflict diamonds were being exported from Sierra Leone through neighboring Liberia. According to Le Monde, a photo published in a Sierra Leonean daily, Awoko, on about November 10, shows Bah with Charles Taylor and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Monrovia, Liberia, in April 1999, on the occasion of a meeting of Sierra Leonean religious leaders with the Liberian president. Bah had fought in the ranks of Taylor’s RUF, in support of Foday Sankoh, the Sierra Leonean army corporal who headed the RUF, from the beginning of the Sierra Leonean rebellion in 1991, when the RUF first invaded Sierra Leone from neighboring Liberia, until 1996.

After the Lebanese Civil War ended in 1992, Lebanese traders reestablished themselves in Sierra Leone, which experienced its own war during 1991–2002. In a 2002 Senate hearing on

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96 Farah, “An ‘Axis’ Connected to Gaddafi; Leaders Trained in Libya Have Used War to Safeguard Wealth,” A22; Smith, Kouamouo, and Roche, “La justice belge soupçonne Al-Qaïda d’être impliquée dans le trafic des ‘diamants de sang’ sierra-léonais” [Belgian Authorities Suspect Al-Qa’ida of Being Implicated in the Trafficking of Sierra Leonean ‘Blood Diamonds’].
the links between conflict diamonds and terrorism, Joseph Melrose Jr., a former U.S. ambassador to Sierra Leone, and John Leigh, a former Sierra Leonean ambassador to the United States, both confirmed that diamonds mined in Sierra Leone finance the activities of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Al-Qa’ida.97

A report released by the Canada-based research group, Partnership Africa Canada, in November 2002, details how the Lebanese business community in Sierra Leone helped to finance various factions in the Lebanese Civil War, such as Hezbollah and AMAL, with revenue from diamonds smuggled out of Sierra Leone. The report also discusses alliances made by Lebanese traders with corrupt Sierra Leonean politicians. The report explains that “because they have external contacts and access to greater resources than indigenous Sierra Leoneans, the Lebanese dominate the diamond industry at all levels.”98

In early 2008, the International Analysts Network’s Mark Silverberg reported that the U.S. Embassy in Freetown published a report noting that Hezbollah had raised millions of dollars since about 2003 by selling diamonds in Europe mined in Sierra Leone. The embassy estimated the annual value of diamonds smuggled out of the country for the purpose of buying and smuggling weapons for terrorist groups at between US$70 million and US$100 million. Silverberg added that “the UN and Belgian police believe that Hezbollah sold at least $19 million of the stones on the Antwerp diamond market in the year before the September 11, 2001 attacks.”99

In May 2003, Belgian judicial police arrested Sierra Leone–based Lebanese businessman Kassim Tajideen in connection with fraud, money laundering, and diamond smuggling. A few weeks later, police also arrested his wife, Huda Saad, on similar charges. Belgian authorities accused the pair of “large-scale tax fraud, money laundering and trade in diamonds of doubtful origin, to the value of tens of millions of euros.” After spending some time in prison, Tajideen and his wife were released on bail of €125,000. Belgian companies owned by Kassim Tajideen

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include the Antwerp offices of Soafrimex, a Lebanese export company; Luanda-based Golfrate Holdings Ltd., reportedly Angola’s leading producer and distributor of essential consumer goods; and Afroliner NV. He also is on the managing boards of companies such as Congo Futur, Afribelg, and Arosfran. Golfrate is also owned by Kassim Tajideen’s brother, Hassan Tajideen, and Nasser Eid.¹⁰⁰

Designated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury as a financier of Hezbollah, Tajideen operates a network of businesses in Lebanon and Africa, and he and his brothers run cover companies for Hezbollah on the continent. Born on March 21, 1955, in Sierra Leone, Tajideen has dual Leonean and Lebanese nationality. According to U.S. officials, Tajideen has contributed tens of millions of dollars to Hezbollah and has sent funds to Hezbollah through one of his brothers, a Hezbollah commander in Lebanon.¹⁰¹

In the past few years, a few incidents involving Lebanese in Sierra Leone have been reported. In late October 2007, young Sierra Leonean men looted more than a dozen shops owned by Lebanese traders in Freetown after reports that a Lebanese man had raped and killed a Sierra Leonean woman. In 2009 the government of President Koroma ordered Lebanese diamond dealer Ahmed Mackie to return a sizeable amount of his earnings. However, Mackie returned only 4.176 million leones (about US$1,000). In February 2010, the Office of National Security forwarded a complaint to President Koroma regarding an allegedly falsified shipment of commercial products in the name of Lebanese importer Ibrahim Moshen’s company, Ibrahim Hussein and Sons, of 11 Sani Abacha Street, Freetown. President Koroma subsequently ordered the arrest and detention of Moshen on charges of falsifying a declaration of containers and goods, to serve as a warning to anyone involved in the transaction.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ “Treasury Targets Hizballah Network in Africa.”
EAST AFRICA

Evidence of current Hezbollah or other Lebanese activities in East Africa is not available. The only indications of Hezbollah activities in the region appear to have been in Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda, but the information is dated.

Somalia

Regional experts have expressed skepticism of reports of Hezbollah activities in Somalia, including supplying weapons to insurgents. Nevertheless, according to a report by a United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia, Hezbollah and 10 nations were violating an international arms embargo by supplying weapons to Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys’s Supreme Islamic Courts Council regime in Mogadishu, an Islamic militia that controls much of Somalia. One reason why some regional experts doubt Hezbollah’s alleged involvement is that its fervently Shi’a ideology clashes theologically with Al-Shabaab’s Salafi orientation. A particularly contentious assertion made by the report was that Somalia’s Islamic Courts Union had sent 720 fighters to Lebanon to support Hezbollah in its conflict with Israel during the summer of 2006.103 For what Hezbollah’s denial is worth, one of its officials, speaking on condition of anonymity dismissed the report as “totally baseless.”104

Sudan

Sudan has been known for three decades as a safe haven for Hezbollah. Hezbollah’s ties to the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime began in the 1980s, when Hezbollah trained many of the NIF’s military cadre and leaders in Lebanon. After Omar al-Bashir’s National Islamic Front seized power in Khartoum in 1989, Sudan became a sanctuary for various Islamist fighters, including Al-Qa’ida and Hezbollah. Ali Mohammed, a former U.S. Army sergeant charged in and convicted for Al-Qa’ida’s bombings of two U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998, has testified that in the early 1990s he arranged security for a meeting in Sudan

between Osama Bin Laden and a Hezbollah leader, and that “Hezbollah provided explosives training for Al-Qa’ida and Al-Jihad.” Hezbollah attended a conference of 300 militants from 80 countries held in Khartoum in early April 1995 under the sponsorship of Sheikh Hassan al-Tourabi. Although Hezbollah may engage in fund-raising, propaganda, political, or religious activities in Sudan, it is not known to be engaged in any operational activities in that country.

Uganda

There are indications that a Lebanese diamond-smuggling network has operated from Central Africa through Uganda and possibly has involved Hezbollah as well. An article in The East African, a Nairobi newspaper, in February 2010, noted the Lebanese role in a Central and East African network for smuggling gold, diamonds, and weapons. According to the United Nations Panel of Experts on Illegal Exploitation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), dated October 16, 2002, Uganda had established a “Congo Desk” run by a Lebanese diamond trader, who was supported by comptoirs (middlemen) in Kisangani in the neighboring DRC. The article also reports that various types of militias made up of mafia networks of Lebanese and Indian traders support these middlemen. One Lebanese diamond trader known only as “Khalil” was implicated in a 2001 report on the plundering of DRC resources by senior Ugandan army officers. The report details Major General James Kazini’s activities in the DRC, particularly in diamond smuggling with the help of Khalil.

Substantive evidence of Hezbollah involvement in Uganda is lacking, but scholar Matthew Levitt reported in 2004 that Hezbollah had a cell in Uganda assigned “to collect preoperational intelligence on U.S. and Western interests.” According to Levitt’s source (an Israeli intelligence report), Ugandan students studying at Iranian universities were being

107 Matthew Levitt, “The Hizballah Threat in Africa.”
recruited and trained to serve as Hezbollah operatives or intelligence agents for Iran. For example, Shafi Ibrahim, a cell leader arrested by Ugandan authorities in late 2002, confessed to attending the same course in Tehran given by the Iranians to Lebanese Hezbollah members.108

Although a group in Uganda calling itself “Hezbollah” is reportedly associated with the Al-Qaeda–Al-Shabaab alliance in Somalia, no evidence appears to have emerged linking it to the Lebanese Hezbollah. According to The Independent, a Kampala paper, an April 21, 2010, intelligence report to the chief of police stated: “A number of the Al-Shabaab in collaboration with the Al-Qaeda has established yet another clique called the Hezbollah. This group is training and has integrated the former ADF [Allied Democratic Forces], People’s Redemption Army (PRA) and some UPDF [Ugandan People’s Defence Force] veterans, by giving them money into the Al-Qaeda Network. They are basically targeting Western interests in Kampala, Nairobi, Bujumbura and Johannesburg.” Somalia-based Al-Sahbaab, which aligned itself with Al-Qaeda in February 2010, took responsibility for the twin terrorist bombings that killed more than 70 people, including a number of Westerners, in Kampala on July 11, 2010.109

CENTRAL AFRICA

Regarding Central Africa, indications of Hezbollah or Lebanese activities can be found in the DRC and Equatorial Guinea. Of these two countries, Hezbollah reportedly has had a presence in the DRC for a longer period (at least two decades).

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The DRC (formerly Zaire) reportedly hosts 6,000 Lebanese residents, who make up a high proportion of retail traders. A number of the Lebanese traders in the DRC have been involved in diamond trading. According to Levitt, Belgian intelligence reports have tied the Congolese diamond trade to the financing of various terrorist groups, including Hezbollah. Farah noted in 2006 that an unidentified diamond dealer in Kinshasa, DRC, is commonly known among his peers as the Hezbollah dealer. Before he relocated to Beirut in about 2003, Aziz Nassour, a Hezbollah supporter, was for many years the chief diamond merchant and confidant for Mobutu Sese Seko, the dictator of Zaire (now the DRC). Born on April 30, 1961, in Sierra

Leone, Nassour lived for several years in Zaire. According to Farah, Al-Qa’ida operatives preferred to work with Nassour because he was known throughout the diamond-trading world as someone who could move large amounts of conflict diamonds to Europe and had strong political connections. Nassour later bragged that he was smuggling US$25 million a week in diamonds from Africa to Europe during the height of his efforts in Zaire. Nassour’s political connections extended to Lebanon, where he was an active supporter of the AMAL militia. Both Nassour and his younger cousin, Samih Osailly, have admitted their involvement in diamond trading in the DRC (see also Sierra Leone, above).110

The DRC government suspects Héritier Bilal, a Lebanese based in Kigali, Rwanda’s capital, of playing a role in the assassination of Laurent-Désiré Kabila (president, DRC, 1997–2001) in January 2001. Bilal is the brother of Bilal Abdul Kalim Bakizi, a Lebanese businessman in Goma. Both Hérítier Bilal and Elisabeth Uwasse, wife of General Laurent Nkunda, a former Tutsi warlord and general operating in the province of Nord-Kivu, managed money on behalf of the National Council for the People’s Defense (Conseil National pour la Défense du Peuple—CNDP), using US-dollar banks in Rwanda that were in turn using U.S. correspondent banks.111

### Equatorial Guinea

Oil-rich Equatorial Guinea has an estimated 1,000 Lebanese residents, who have a dominating presence in the trading sector. Responding to popular resentment of the expatriate Lebanese because of their dominance and wealth, the government tightened security controls of the community in 2008, an action that prompted the visit of Lebanese diplomats to express their concern.112 Information on any Hezbollah activities in Equatorial Guinea was unavailable for this survey, even though it would seem that, like Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea is the kind of

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politically unstable country with a well-off Lebanese community that would be attractive to Hezbollah.

At least one Lebanese financier has attained notoriety in Equatorial Guinea. Ely Claude Alan Calil, an oil trader who has dual Lebanese and British nationality, was jailed for his role in a failed 2004 coup plot against long-ruling Teodoro Obiang Nguea Mbasogo (president since 1979). When he stood trial in Malabo in July 2008, Calil was accused of being the main architect and financier of the plot. Calil claimed that Gabon’s late President Omar Bongo Ondimba had played a role, as did other business interests, in financing the plot through front companies established in Guernsey and other tax havens.\(^\text{113}\)

Born in Nigeria to Lebanese parents on December 8, 1945, Calil was privately educated in Europe, including at Oxford University. At age 20, when his father died, Calil inherited a fortune worth £20 million from the family’s groundnut oil business. Calil built up his own fortune in Nigeria’s emerging crude oil industry, and he expanded into manufacturing batteries and even building and selling trucks. A secretive magnate, Calil reportedly has cultivated contacts among Britain’s most prominent politicians.\(^\text{114}\)

London’s *Telegraph* reported that the Equatorial Guinea government presented the Metropolitan Police with a dossier of evidence claiming that Calil gave up to £700,000 (about US$1 million) to support the overthrow of its president, Teodoro Obiang Nguema. Calil was accused of paying £150,000 (US$250,000) from a personal bank account to Logo Logistics, a fund or front company established to install Severo Moto Nsa, an exiled Opposition leader, as Equatorial Guinea’s new president. In the view of the Equatorial Guinea government, Calil would have been given substantial oil rights in the West African country if Moto had been installed as president. French authorities once arrested Calil and are still investigating “illegal commission” payments made through him via a subsidiary of the oil company Elf Aquitaine.”\(^\text{115}\)


SOUTHERN AFRICA

Hezbollah and other Lebanese diamond-trading activities have been reported in Angola and Zimbabwe, and Hezbollah extremist activities have been reported in South Africa. However, most reporting seems dated and spotty.

Angola

Angola’s Muslim population includes Arab immigrants from countries such as Lebanon. Hezbollah’s involvement in Angola’s diamond trade may have begun as early as the 1980s. In early 1993, a reporter for a Canadian paper noted the landing at Kinshasa’s N’jili international airport of 20 Lebanese diamond smugglers on an unscheduled late-night flight from the Angolan border. According to the pilot of the aircraft, they were carrying US$2 million worth of gems and freely paid out bribes in US$100 bills. After calling Zairian generals and officials on their cellular telephones, the Lebanese received authorization for an early morning departure.116

Until his death in February 2002, Jonas Savimbi, the leader of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola—UNITA), was known to have sold diamonds to Hezbollah traders. Ahmed Bakri is one of Hezbollah’s diamond dealers known to have worked with UNITA.117 According to researchers J. Anyu Ndumbe and Babalola Cole, African and Western intelligence officials, including Belgians, “reported a link between several Lebanese diamond traders” and noted that “these diamond traders bought diamonds from UNITA in violation of Security Council sanctions.”118

Lebanese and Indian businessmen reportedly control Angola’s wholesale and retail distribution networks. According to government officials and privately owned press reports, several foreign-owned companies, including Lebanon-based Arosfran, fix prices and restrict competition. Kassim Tajideen, a businessman of Lebanese-Sierra Leonean nationality, moved to Angola in 1990 and opened a warehouse that grew into a large trading company. Kassim

Tajideen and his brother, Hassan Tajideen, along with Nasser Eid, own Golfrate Holdings, Ltd., reportedly Angola’s leading producer and distributor of essential consumer goods. Since about 1997, one of the Tajideen Group’s subsidiaries in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been the Congo Futur Group, a leading importer of foodstuffs and vehicles. One of Congo Futur’s companies is Trans-M Bois, a major timber producer in the country, with titles covering 746,000 hectares. Hassan Tajideen, the administrator of Arosfram, an Angola-based food company, and four other Aerosfram staffers, were among the 20 Lebanese nationals on board the Ethiopian Airlines plane that crashed into the sea on January 25, 2010.119

In the late 2000s, the Islamist threat to Angola was increasing, according to China Confidential, as Hezbollah and Al-Qa’ida sought to destabilize the country with the aim of disrupting the supply of oil, controlling the Angolan diamond industry, converting Angolans to Islam and Islamism, and sabotaging Angolan–Israeli relations. Both groups reportedly had established cells in Angola.120

South Africa

Foreign groups with a longstanding presence in South Africa include Hezbollah. As early as 1995 in the post-apartheid era, there were reports that Hezbollah had contacts with the People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), an Islamist militant network that emerged in Cape Town. In the mid-1990s, the Qibla organization, an offshoot of Iranian Shi’a fundamentalism and a PAGAD ally, was considered the most extremist Islamist organization in the Western Cape. The South African Hezbollah formed as a breakaway faction of Qibla, and there were various press reports of secret Hezbollah cells operating in the country, particularly in the Western Cape and in Durban. According to Hussein Solomon, director of the Centre for International Political Studies, University of Pretoria, in early 1996 Israel lodged a formal complaint with the South African government regarding the existence of five Hezbollah training camps in the country.121

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In the past decade, Hezbollah and Iran have been rumored to have ties with PAGAD and Qibla. PAGAD has boasted of its ties with Hezbollah and Iran, where some PAGAD militants were sent for military training. Others joined Hezbollah in its conflict with Israel. Police sources in South Africa have consistently maintained that PAGAD receives a lot of its financial support from Tehran.122

According to Andre Le Sage, Hezbollah has continued to maintain ties with individuals in South Africa in order to raise and launder funds."123 Although Hezbollah clearly has a known presence in South Africa, it is unclear whether South Africa has a significant Lebanese community. Apparently, enough Lebanese are living in the country to warrant a Lebanese embassy and consulate in South Africa.

Zimbabwe

Given Zimbabwe’s minuscule Muslim population, Arab diamond traders tend to attract the attention of authorities. In 2008 Zimbabwean intelligence officers reportedly were aware of “an unprecedented influx into Mutare and Marange of nationals from Arabic countries such as Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria."124 The officers reportedly suspected that these suspicious-looking Arabs could be using Zimbabwean diamonds, which are being illegally extracted and smuggled from Chiadzwa and Marange, to fund international terrorist operations conducted by Hezbollah. Chiadzwa is reported to be a ward in the country’s Mutare District and Mutare West constituency and home to the Marange diamond fields, which are an area of widespread small-scale diamond production in Chiadzwa and Mutare West.125

As of early 2010, Lebanese diamond traders reportedly were dominating the new diamond rush in the Manicaland Province areas of Chipinge, Chimanini, and Chiadzwa (the

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122 Islamic Fundamentalists Broader their Targets in South Africa.”
123 Le Sage, “Terrorist Threats and Vulnerabilities in Africa,” 27.
previous rush was in 2006). Most of the diamonds were being taken to Mozambique’s Manica Province, where they can be sold. According to Africa Confidential, in early 2010, Lebanese diamond dealers also had a strong presence in a former spa known as Hot Springs, located 100 kilometers south of Mutare.126

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Monographs


This article describes the Lebanese population of Côte d’Ivoire and how it is generationally divided, socially marginalized and unassimilated, and vulnerable to political pressure and manipulation.


This dissertation contains useful and reliable historical and more recent information on the Lebanese community in Côte d’Ivoire.


Boumedouha provides some useful historical information on efforts by Lebanese financiers in the late 1970s to win favor from the government by funding the construction of mosques. He explains that, even though a few wealthy Lebanese were active members of the ruling party in the 1980s, no Lebanese was allowed to aspire to government office, such as mayor of Dakar.


Campbell, a free-lance journalist, provides a firsthand account of Sierra Leone’s trade in conflict diamonds and the role of Lebanese diamond traders and Hezbollah.


As a Washington Post reporter, Douglas Farah investigated how Al-Qa’ida and Hezbollah funded themselves from the trade in West African conflict diamonds. His informative volume provides an essential source of background information.

The somewhat brief article discusses Hezbollah’s networks in both Latin America and West Africa. It points out that Hezbollah’s basic structure is patterned after the family/clan organization of the Lebanese expatriate communities—a topic discussed in much greater depth in the Global Witness report entitled For a Few Dollars More: How al Qaeda Moved into the Diamond Trade (see next entry).


Global Witness (http://www.globalwitness.org/index.php) has done extensive reporting on diamond trafficking. Although this authoritative, in-depth study could not be closely examined for this survey, it provides what may be the most detailed analysis of the Hezbollah and Lebanese networks that were involved in this trade in the early 2000s. It includes diagrams identifying and linking the key actors.


This is an informative report on Lebanese diamond traders in Sierra Leone. Douglas Farah has cited it in his reports.


Labaki found that Lebanese immigration to West Africa, which totaled about 150,000 in the mid-1980s, helped to diversify the West African economies. However, the loss of Lebanese skills as more and more Lebanese residents move on to Europe and North America has important economic implications for the region.

Le Sage’s chapter makes a few references to Hezbollah in West Africa, noting that it “does not maintain a substantial presence and has never used the area as a base for terrorist operations” (p. 25).


Leichtman’s informative chapter discusses funding by members of the Lebanese community of the establishment of Shi’a educational and religious institutions in Senegal.


Leichtman’s dissertation thesis contains useful and reliable historical firsthand information on the Lebanese community in Senegal and the radicalization influence of imams from Lebanon and Iran on the Lebanese community and Shi’a Senegalese converts.


The article provides some useful background information on Lebanese diamond trader Jamil Sahid Mohamed and his business ties with two Sierra Leonean heads of state.


This study contains very useful and reliable background information on Lebanese traders in Sierra Leone.


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