

## Assessment of Imad Mughniyeh's Death

**Incident: In-Vehicle Bomb Blast**

**Location: Damascus, Syria**

**Date : 12<sup>th</sup> February 2008**

**Casualty: Imad Mughniyeh**



### Details of the Incident

Imad Fayez Mughniyeh, a key senior commander in the Shiite Muslim Militant group, Hezbollah, was killed in a car bomb on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, 2008, in the Syrian capital of Damascus. The bombing is being investigated by the Syrian authorities. He was attending the party at the Iranian cultural centre marking the 29th anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's Iranian revolution with the leaders of various Damascus-based militant groups were represented. He left the function at 10.35 pm planned to head for home. After he bade farewell to the host of the function, Hojatoleslam Ahmad Musavi, the newly appointed Iranian ambassador to Syria, Mughniyeh proceeded to board his silver Mitsubishi Pajero in a nearby street when the bomb was triggered, ripping the car apart and killed him instantly.



Left: The aftermath of the blast that killed Mugniyeh.

No group has claimed responsibility for the incident as yet. According to Israeli intelligence sources, the headrest of the driver's seat was replaced by another containing a small high-explosive charge. It is not known how the bomb was triggered though there have been reports in the media that it was triggered by remote.

Mughniyeh is a key person to the military operations of Hezbollah and is responsible for several kidnappings bombings and hijackings targeting westerners in Syria & Lebanon in the late 1980's till the early 1990's. He was placed on the FBI's most wanted terrorist list with a US\$5 million bounty for being behind 1985 hijacking of the TWA flight. His list of significant activities also includes:

- 1) **The suicide car bombing of the American Embassy Beirut**, which killed 63 people (1983).



2) **The attack against the Marine command center in Beirut, which killed 241 Marines (October 1983).**



3) **An attack on the French Unit of the multi-national force: killing 40 French soldiers (October 1983).**

4) **Attacks against the American Embassy in Kuwait (1983, 1984).**

5) **Abduction and murder of William Berkley, CIA resident in Lebanon (1983).**

6) **Murder of Colonel Higgins, who served with the UN observers in south Lebanon (1988).**

7) **Hijacking two Kuwait Airways planes (1984, 1988).**

8) **Hijacking a TWA flight and murdering one of the passengers, an American citizen (1985)**

9) **Abductions of dozens of Western civilians in Lebanon: murdering many of them (1983- late 1980's).**

10) **The attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, which killed 29 people (March, 1992)**

11) **The attack on the Jewish Community Center (the AMIA building) in Buenos Aires (July, 1994) (Below)**



### Implications for Hezbollah

Imad Mughniyeh's death is significant to Hezbollah in a number of ways, as he has been a key figure in Hezbollah's military operations. His death would leave vacuum in Hezbollah's top leadership which is unlikely to be filled by anyone of a similar capacity in the immediate future. However in the long run, the organization is likely to groom someone to replace Mughniyeh in running Hezbollah's military and tactical operations. The party is likely to also use the death of Mughniyeh to galvanize the South Lebanese population, where they have a stronghold, against Israel.

### Implications for Israel

There have been reports in the media that the Israeli Mossad is behind the assassination of Mughniyeh. However the Israeli government officials have denied responsibility. Though they have denied responsibility in the assassination, they have in the past attempted to track him down and kill him along with several other top Hezbollah leaders. Hezbollah believes that Israeli forces are behind the attack and Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General have vowed to avenge the death of Mughniyeh and threatened Israel with "open war" in his speech after the attack took place. ICPVTR assess that based on Israel's previous attempt at tracking and assassinating Hezbollah key leadership, it is likely that Hezbollah will be planning in revenge attacks against them. However the magnitude of the revenge attacks carried out by Hezbollah is unlikely to trigger a repeat the 2006 summer war with Israel as it would be extremely costly to both the wider Lebanese and the Israeli populations. An "open war" with Israel would also adversely affect the popularity of Hezbollah as a political entity in Lebanon.

## References

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