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Directorate of Intelligence

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Terrorism Review



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Terrorism Review **b3**

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Focus **f**

Lebanon: Implications of the Higgins Abduction **b3**

Chances that US Marine Lt. Col. William Higgins will be rescued are fading as time passes and Amal—the moderate Shia militia in southern Lebanon—comes under increasing pressure to find him. Since Higgins was abducted in southern Lebanon on 17 February, his captors have had time to reinforce security around him and shift the burden of public guilt onto Amal for trying to release a US "spy." Higgins' kidnaping is the latest in a series of attacks on the Western presence in Lebanon, and we believe additional operations targeting US and UN personnel, in particular, will continue. **b3**

The Act

Higgins, who is head of the Lebanon unit of the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization (UNTSO), was not merely a target of opportunity: he was kidnaped in a well-planned operation after he left a meeting with Amal officials in Tyre. While driving alone behind another UNTSO vehicle, Higgins was waylaid by several gunmen near the Ar Rashidiyah refugee camp south of Tyre. The gunmen apparently hustled Higgins into a car and drove him to a nearby village. The car was later found abandoned, and the terrorists probably moved him quickly to another location. **b3**

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b3 Hizballah terrorists most likely are responsible for Higgins' abduction. **b3** the on-the-scene mastermind of the operation was Khalil Harb, chief of Hizballah forces in the Tyre area, **b3** Harb reportedly owned the car used to kidnap Higgins and may have had a personal motive for the operation: Harb probably is related to a popular cleric in southern Lebanon, Shaykh Raghil Harb, who helped found Hizballah there and who was killed in 1984 by a bomb probably planted by the Israelis. Harb and Hizballah may have timed the Higgins abduction to commemorate the cleric's murder; Higgins was abducted on the fourth anniversary of the Shaykh's death. Harb also probably shared Hizballah's opposition to the UN presence in Lebanon and may have seen abducting Higgins as an opportunity to lash out at Israel, the United Nations, and the United States. **b3**

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b3 We believe that Hizballah tried to cover its involvement by issuing communiques through two other groups that took credit for the operation. The first communique, issued by the Islamic Revolutionary Brigades, was not accompanied by any authentication. The second communique, by the Organization of the Oppressed on

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Earth, was sent to a Western news service along with photocopies of Higgins' UN identification cards. The Organization of the Oppressed is a name used previously by renegade Shia terrorists who have kidnaped and murdered Lebanese Jewish hostages and

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[REDACTED]

Dim Prospects for Finding Higgins

We are not optimistic that Higgins will be found soon. His captors probably consider him highly valuable and are likely to take extraordinary security precautions. Hizballah leaders and Itan are now aware that the UNTSO commander once served as a military aide to former Secretary of Defense Weinberger, and they probably assume he has detailed knowledge of US programs and plans in Lebanon and the Middle East.

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[REDACTED]

Amal chief Nabih Barri may fear that military clashes with Hizballah in the south would expose his organization's growing weakness there, and, thus, he would not want to force a showdown over the kidnaping. Higgins was seized near Tyre, an area ostensibly under Amal control, which suggests the organization is losing its political base and ability to control security there. If Higgins is still in the south, he is almost certainly being held in a Hizballah-controlled village.

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The searches have exacerbated tensions between Amal and Hizballah, which has been waging its own campaign to win over the Shia villagers in the south. Hizballah has long opposed Amal's policy of not challenging the Israelis and the Army of South Lebanon—which Amal regards as merely another, albeit pro-Israeli, militia—in the security zone. With money and a more radical ideology, Hizballah is wooing away Amal adherents.

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[REDACTED] Sporadic fighting between Amal and Hizballah units was also reported.

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Recent Terrorist Attacks Against
Western Interests in Lebanon

	Target	Responsibility
27 January	German-Lebanese national Ralph Schray abducted in West Beirut.	Claimed by Revolutionary Justice Organization; released 2 March 1988.
2 February	Jacque Merrin assassinated in East Beirut.	Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) suspected but has denied responsibility; no arrests.
5 February	Two United Nations Refugee Welfare Agency (UNRWA) officials kidnaped near Sidon.	No claim but various Palestinian Hizballah factions accusing each other; released 1 March 1988.
16 February	Assassination attempt possibly on French military attache or US naval attache in East Beirut.	No suspects.
17 February	USMC Lieutenant Colonel Higgins kidnaped near Tyre.	Islamic Revolutionary Brigades and Organization of the Oppressed on Earth take credit, but Hizballah believed responsible.
4 March	British Middle East Director of Oxfam and his Lebanese counterpart kidnaped from 'Ayn al Hulwah refugee camp.	No claim.

Nor is Damascus likely to apply strong pressure to obtain Higgins' release. Syria pressed hard for the release of US hostage Charles Glass and made a serious effort to obtain the release of German-Lebanese hostage Ralph Schray, both of whom were kidnaped in areas in or near Beirut that are under Syrian control. Higgins, however, was abducted in an area where there is no Syrian presence, and we judge Damascus is unlikely to risk a confrontation with Hizballah or its Iranian backers for him.

The Backdrop: Renewed Terrorism Against Western Presence in Lebanon

The Higgins abduction is probably part of a larger effort by Hizballah elements to intensify pressure on the United States, France, and the United Nations to end their presence in Lebanon and to resolve Western hostage issues on Iranian and Hizballah terms.

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(UNRWA) officials and a German-Lebanese national. [REDACTED]

We believe Hizballah's leaders and their Iranian patrons consider the United States and France particularly vulnerable now because of upcoming elections in both countries. Iranian leaders believe they were able to use the US diplomats held hostage in Tehran to manipulate the 1980 elections in the United States, and Hizballah officials have already suggested that the release of American and French hostages currently held in Lebanon would depend on the US and French elections. Hizballah—or elements of it—will probably try to stage additional kidnappings, release videos, free a hostage, and seek other public relations stunts to upset the political process in both Paris and Washington. [REDACTED]

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Hizballah and Iran will also continue their efforts to eliminate the United Nations from Lebanon. The Hizballah terrorists implicated in the Higgins abduction [REDACTED] probably see Higgins as an especially attractive target because he is both a US and a UN official. [REDACTED]

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