

# Terrorists Renew Threats Against Lebanese Jews

By George E. Gruen, Ph.D.  
Director, Middle East Affairs  
International Relations Department  
The American Jewish Committee

The radical Shi'ite Muslim group that has claimed responsibility for kidnapping and killing seven Lebanese Jews in the past 21 months has now stepped up its campaign of terror by again threatening to kill all remaining hostages unless its demands are met.

What makes this particularly ominous is that the renewed threat by the self-styled "Organization of the Oppressed (Mustadhafin) in the World" was delivered to the Beirut paper *an-Nahar* on January 6, only a week after the terrorist group had announced the execution of three Lebanese Jewish hostages.

The Shi'ite terrorist group contended that the men had been executed because they were "spies for the Israeli Mossad" who had supplied Israel with information on the Islamic Resistance, a coalition of Lebanese anti-Israeli groups. The timing of the latest executions, it said, was "in retaliation for Israel's attacks against the south and western Beka'a (Valley) and the terrorist attacks against our people in occupied Palestine." (A spokesman for the Israeli Foreign Ministry responded that "the gratuitous murders of three innocents reveals the true nature of terrorist movements in Lebanon," and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir vowed that Israel would seek out and punish "these barbarians" who again had "used defenseless Jews as a means of hitting at Israel.")

The latest victims were reported to be Elie Srour, an electrical engineer near 50, who had been kidnapped on March 28, 1985; Youssef (Joseph) Benesti, 33, kidnapped mid-May 1985; and Henri Mann, a man in his fifties who lived alone in Muslim-controlled West Beirut. Until the publication of Mann's photograph and the announcement of his "execution" by the Organization of the Oppressed, there had been no information that he had been abducted.

The kidnapping and murder of Mr. Mann provides further evidence that the fanatical

group was deadly serious when it first declared, on December 28, 1985, that it would strike against other Jews "on whom we may lay our hands" unless its demands against Israel were met. That threatening statement was issued at the time of the murder of the first two hostages: Haim Cohen, 38, a department store accountant, on December 24, 1985; and Professor Isaac Tarrab, 70, a retired professor of mathematics, whose body was found at the end of the month.

Neither Mr. Cohen nor Professor Tarrab was involved in partisan Lebanese politics or in the Arab-Israel conflict in any way. Indeed it was precisely because they felt themselves deeply rooted in Lebanon that they and the other Jews who have become victims of Shi'ite terrorism remained behind when the vast majority of Lebanese Jews emigrated either to Israel or to join relatives in other countries during the decade of turmoil that has engulfed Lebanon. (Today fewer than 10 Jews remain in West Beirut, and about 70 in East Beirut.) Dr. Rosemary Cohen, the sister-in-law of Haim Cohen, has declared that he "was given the opportunity to go to Israel. But he did not want to go so as not to have to face the possibility of killing his Arab friends." A neighbor and former student of Professor Tarrab stressed to me that he was not a Zionist and in fact had virtually no connection with Jewish life. "He was not interested in anything but his figures and his pipe." The killing of this gentle old man, she said, was "a senseless death."

The kidnap and murder victims are of diverse backgrounds and ages. They have only two things in common: they were known to be Jews and they had the bad fortune of living in West Beirut, which made them targets of opportunity for the radical Muslim elements.

The third murder victim was Ibrahim Benesti, 34,

the brother of Joseph. Ibrahim's body was found by the police on February 19, 1986. The coroner's office reported that he had been shot twice and strangled. The body also bore signs of torture and beatings to the head. Both Ibrahim and the father of the two men, Yehuda Benesti, 70, had been kidnapped earlier in February. It is tragically ironic that when Joseph had been abducted the previous May, the father at first did not report the disappearance to the police, because he believed that his friends and customers of his shop within the surrounding Shi'ite and Palestinian communities would discreetly intervene on behalf of his son and secure his release.

The fourth victim was Dr. Elie Hallak, 58, Vice President of the Lebanese Jewish community. Dr. Hallak was one of the four Jews kidnapped over the last weekend in March, 1985. Reportedly armed men in uniform had dragged him from his home on Friday night, during the Sabbath meal. His "execution" was announced in a statement published on February 19, 1986 in the Lebanese press. The Organization of the Oppressed said that it would not release his body until Israel "stopped its criminal operations" in southern Lebanon, withdrew from "all of the occupied territories" and released "all our brothers detained in Khiyan," a South Lebanese Army detention camp. The same conditions were reiterated by the group in refusing to release the bodies of the latest three victims. It is speculated that the bodies have not been released either because the Shi'ite terrorist group does not want to reveal evidence that it had tortured them too or because they may have been killed some time ago.

Mrs. Rachael Hallak still vainly hopes that her husband may yet be alive. In public appeals to the kidnappers she has stressed how her husband, a noted pediatrician, was known as "the doctor of the poor," because he would not collect fees from those who could not pay, "whatever their religion." His patients included many Shi'ites in Beirut and in the villages of the south. His neighbors, she writes, all "could bear witness that he was totally

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