

20TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

The Associated Press

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September 20, 1984, Thursday, AM cycle

SECTION: International News

BF 2

LENGTH: 870 words

Muhammad FADLALLAH or

HEADLINE: TODAY'S FOCUS: Who and What Is Islamic Jihad? Husayn MUSAWI B

BYLINE: By SAMIR F. GHATTAS, Associated Press Writer

DATELINE: BEIRUT, Lebanon

[Original material is in Hizballah cut file]

KEYWORD: Focus- Islamic Jihad

BODY:

The anonymous phone call that follows the horrifying deed has become almost a ritual in the Middle East.

A bombing, assassination or kidnapping occurs, and the phone rings in a news office. The caller reads a carefully worded statement, never identifies himself and hangs up if asked to say more.

On Thursday the call came about 90 minutes after the explosion at the U.S. Embassy annex in east Beirut. A man telephoned the Beirut office of the French news agency Agence France-Presse to claim responsibility for the bombing on behalf of Islamic Jihad.

In the past two years, more than 30 groups have claimed responsibility for acts throughout the world that somehow were related to the Middle East. Sometimes several groups issue a claim for a single bombing or murder.

The best known and also the most mysterious of the groups is Islamic Jihad. It has claimed responsibility for a long series of attacks including the bombings at the U.S. Embassy and at U.S. Marine and French headquarters in Beirut last year that killed more than 350 diplomats, soldiers and bystanders.

Last week, a caller in Beirut claiming to be from Islamic Jihad said the group carried out a murder in Spain, then added the act showed "the extent of our operations" and ability to deal "a painful blow" within the United States.

The week before, a caller claiming to represent Islamic Jihad warned that it would strike soon at a "vital U.S. interest in the Middle East."

Generally, Islamic Jihad and the various other groups claim responsibility for attacks aimed at American or Israeli interests. Islamic Jihad, for example, claims to have kidnapped three Americans still missing from west Beirut. But the groups also have focused on France and, recently, on the pro-Western Arab governments in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

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The Associated Press, September 20, 1984

Little is known about Islamic Jihad beyond its name, which means Islamic Holy War. Some authorities believe it is just a code name used by various Shiite Moslem fundamentalists, who support Iran's revolutionary patriarch Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini but act independently.

One Western diplomat, who asked not to be identified, said Islamic Jihad and the various other groups may exist only "in the minds of two, three or four angry people."

Even Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, a fundamentalist Shiite clergyman in Beirut whom Western newspapers connected with various bombings claimed by Islamic Jihad, maintained he did not know if the organization existed.

"As an organization, we could not discover even 1 percent that it exists," he said. "It may not represent only one thing. It may represent several structures using it as a cover. They could be Islamic ... or some people who want to give Islam the brand of terrorism."

In that last category, he included Lebanese Christians or Western intelligence agencies. Fadlallah, who maintains he has no connections with violence, ridiculed Islamic Jihad's claim last month that it planted mines that damaged ships in the Red Sea.

"This organization must be immense with its sophistication that it mined the Red Sea and all world nations were unable to find a clue," he said, maintaining that the United States carried out the undersea operation as an excuse to keep its navy in the Middle East.

Iran's state-run Tehran Radio praised the attacks on Red Sea shipping, attributing them to Islamic Jihad.

Anonymous telephone callers also have said the organization was responsible for bombings last December at the American and French embassies in Kuwait and New Year's Eve bombings at the main railway station in Marseille, France, and aboard a high-speed train traveling from Marseille to Lyon.

A month later, an anonymous caller claimed that Islamic Jihad shot and killed the leading military figure in pre-revolutionary Iran — once known as "the butcher of Iran" — and his brother on a fashionable Paris street.

Law enforcement agencies in Lebanon and other countries have said that they have been unable to track down any of the telephone calls or arrest anyone.

A French official in Beirut, who spoke only on condition that he not be identified, said he believes Islamic Jihad does not exist as a unified group. "It is a word that covers for a number of religious fanatics having connection with Iran and whose trampoline is Syria," he said.

The governments of both Iran and Syria have denied any connection with specific acts of violence.

Intelligence sources also have linked a radical Lebanese Shiite militia named "Hezbollah" (Party of God) to the bombing of the French and American military forces.

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Sheik Fadlallah is believed by some to be a senior " Hezbollah" official.

He denies that, but has said that various groups "consult" him. His house has sand-bagged sentry posts and is guarded by men with automatic rifles.

In discussing motivation for attacks on Westerners, he said "jihad" in Islam's early days meant rallying people to preach the Islamic religion. " Islamic jihad now is equivalent to struggle in the political world," he added.

Religious "jihad" sometimes resorts to violence, he said. "Violence is considered an international and a civilized method. Violence is humanitarian when it comes to facing violence," he said.

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Syria and Iran. These links were cited last night in a CBS-TV news report that the explosives used in yesterday's bombing originated in Iran and were trucked overland to Syria, where they were turned over to the terrorists.

The link between Iran and the U.S. Embassy bombing in Kuwait last December was firmly established by Kuwaiti authorities. Some of the terrorists involved in the operation as well as their weapons entered Kuwait directly from Iran. U.S. and Israeli intelligence sources also believe that the precise orders to carry out the attack were delivered by a courier from Iran. Following the capture of those involved in the bombing, Tehran radio repeatedly demanded their release and threatened Kuwait with retaliation if they were tried and punished.

The Kuwaiti investigation also revealed that the embassy bomber who died in the attack was a member of an Islamic sect, Al Dawa, which is based in Iran and which has been linked -- again, circumstantially -- to the bombing of the Marine headquarters in Beirut.

This connection centers on Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, a Lebanese Shiite Moslem leader who, some years ago, founded the militant Hezbollah (Party of God) in Beirut. He incorporated the Al Dawa sect into his party and, according to American and Lebanese intelligence authorities, gave a religious blessing to two terrorists the night before they set out to bomb the Marine headquarters. One of Fadlallah's followers and military allies is Hussein Musawi, who the intelligence authorities believe was also implicated in the Marine bombing. One of Musawi's cousins is said by these authorities to have been involved in obtaining trucks for the bombing and to be the active head of a group called the "Hussein Suicide Commandos."

The ties among these men, the Syrians and the Iranians are the subject of other reliable intelligence reports that have implicated 14 individuals in the Beirut bombings of 1983. In addition to Fadlallah and the two Musawis, the 14 include a Syrian Army colonel, a former security officer for the Palestine Liberation Organization, Syrian members of the Syrian-controlled Saiqa (Thunderbolt) PLO faction and veterans of other terrorist groups.

The circumstantial evidence of the involvement of these people in the bombings of the Marine headquarters and the U.S. Embassy was substantial, according to the intelligence services. But it was insufficient, according to one ranking intelligence officer, to make an ironclad court case and was thus insufficient to support retaliatory strikes.

Sheik Fadlallah, who is often linked to Islamic Jihad in press speculation, recently granted an interview on the subject to an Associated Press reporter in Beirut, Samir Ghattas. Fadlallah insisted to Ghattas that he has no connections with violence and said he was not convinced that the Islamic Jihad organization actually exists. "As an organization," he said, "we could not discover even 1 percent that it exists. It may represent only one thing. It may represent several structures using it as a cover. They could be Islamic . . . or some people who want to give Islam the brand of terrorism." Those people, Fadlallah said, could be western intelligence agents or Lebanese Christians.

Last month Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for planting mines in the Red Sea. Fadlallah ridiculed that claim: "This organization must be immense with its sophistication that it mined the Red Sea and all world nations were unable to find a clue."

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The lack of unambiguous information about the Beirut bombers has been blamed, in part, on deficiencies in the American and Lebanese intelligence services. A recent study indicated that the CIA, in particular, has been making serious efforts to remedy some of these deficiencies by devoting more money and more people to the effort, by creating small "strike forces" that could respond to terrorist attacks and by establishing a center for evaluating intelligence on terrorism.

But there is still no indication that either the CIA or other agencies have resolved the mystery of Islamic Jihad -- who or what it is or where or when it might strike next.

GRAPHIC: Picture, An American marine is carried away from the bombing at the U.S. Embassy annex yesterday on stretcher. AP

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