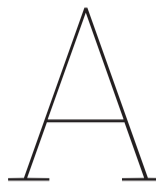


## Opinion

## Editorial

## On the dangerous implications of illegal migration



just-released Europol-Interpol report dispels any doubt, if there was any, about the lucrative business that illegal migration provides to criminal networks. It also raises questions about the dangers of the problem.

According to the report: "Migrant smuggling is a highly profitable business entailing low overall costs... and persisting high demand for services."

For 2015, the estimated turnover from migrant smuggling was \$5 billion-\$6 billion.

Migrant networks are well-organised. They provide "facilitation" to more than 90% of the migrants who enter Europe. They use modern technologies and social media to publicise routes, services and prices.

Smugglers are often involved in drug trafficking, document forgery, property crime and various forms of human trafficking. Through money laundering, they channel their revenues into the economies back home, which has a nefarious effect on many of the societies, the economies and even politics of countries in North Africa and the Middle East. It is at least partly to blame for the bloated informal economies of the region.

The *modus operandi* of the smugglers and the revenues they reap can benefit terrorist networks in the Middle East, North Africa and beyond.

The report warned that "illegal immigration routes and networks may be used by radicalised foreign fighters wishing to return to the EU or by terrorist organisations as a source of funding".

The report does not elaborate on the tragedy of underage Arab migrants living precariously on the streets of European capitals. In a recent article, the Associated Press (AP) revealed how "thousands of underage migrants live in shadows across Europe". About 90,000 asylum seekers in the European Union in 2015 were minors, a nine-fold increase in just three years.

The AP report depicted how young Arab and Muslim teenagers are drawn into drug trafficking or forced to accept illegal and exploitative labour to survive and send money back home.

Migrant smuggling to the European Union took a big blow in April along "the South Eastern route" through Greece or Bulgaria. According to the European border agency Frontex, the number of migrants arriving on Greek islands dropped by 90% in April compared to the month before, mainly due to the Turkish-EU agreement reached in March.

Germany, which registered more than 1 million asylum seekers in 2015, is seeking to reduce the number. In May, the German lower house of parliament declared Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia "safe countries of origin", which makes it easier to send Maghrebi asylum seekers back home.

"The Central European route" through Italy may become more active as the weather improves over the summer months.

In 2015, more than 150,000 illegal migrants, mostly Africans, used this pathway and about 800,000 people are reportedly waiting on Libyan shores for the opportunity to cross to Italy.

Europe's migration crisis cannot be resolved by unilateral security or border control measures. There must be a long term-strategy that considers the need for socio-economic development, peace and stability south of the Mediterranean and Africa. Europe cannot be impervious to geography.

As UN envoy for human rights François Crepeau recently said: "I think there is a lack of vision at the EU level. There is no long-term human rights-based migration policy. We need a generational strategy of where we'd like to be in ten or 20 years."

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## Hezbollah: From national heroes to regional villains



Claude Salhani

The killing of Mustafa Badreddine, the top Hezbollah military commander in Syria, adds greater pressure on the Lebanese Shia movement and its secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, at a time when both friends and foes are questioning its policies and procedures.

Over the past several years the movement went from being regarded by the majority of Lebanese citizens as national heroes to being frowned upon as a misused regional military force and international villains.

The group first rose to heroic status in the eyes of the Lebanese and other Arabs because of its staunch and at times fierce resistance to the Israeli military occupation of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah's relentless attacks against the Israeli military eventually forced the Jewish state to withdraw all its forces from Lebanon.

Following the forced departure of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and dozens of splinter groups from Lebanon after Israel invaded the country in June 1982, Hezbollah quickly rose to prominence. It became, in the absence of the Lebanese state authority, and thus the Lebanese Army, the *de facto* military force in the south and eventually expanded its reach over much of the country.

The Lebanese Shia group became known as "the resistance" and rose in prestige in the eyes of a great majority of Lebanese, including Christians, who not too long before that were engaged in fighting fellow Arabs during the Lebanese civil war.

Hezbollah succeeded in pushing the Israeli military war machine out of occupied Arab territory, something that no other Arab force had been able to accomplish since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

For a brief period, Hezbollah basked in the limelight across the Arab world and was cheered as liberators from Aden to Casablanca.

Egged on by its success, the group made two monumental mistakes. The first came when various Lebanese militias convened in Saudi Arabia and agreed to give up their weapons. Hezbollah, arguing that it was a resistance group and that

Israel still occupied tracts of lands in southern Lebanon, convinced the others that it should retain its weapons.

That alienated many Lebanese, who resented giving up their weapons while the Shia movement continued to acquire heavier and more sophisticated weapons, mostly supplied by Iran.

Then came the Syrian war and Hezbollah's second and potentially fatal mistake. Had the group chosen to give up its arms when the other Lebanese factions gave up theirs, the history of Lebanon's modern-day politics could have been very different.

Without its weapons, Hezbollah would have had to pursue dialogue and that would have encouraged Lebanese political parties to seek a just solution to their political differences through peaceful negotiations and not through strong-arm tactics, threats of violence and the like.

By allowing itself to be manipulated by Syria and particularly by Iran, Hezbollah transited from a position of heroism to one of international villain. In looking back, could it be that the organisation might have taken on a greater role than it could manage? Or should it have not become involved in the Syrian conflict?

The number of casualties the group suffered in defending Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime has made many of the group's supporters question the logic behind a move that has turned Hezbollah into a regional terrorist group implicated in conflict beyond its borders.

According to sources familiar with the Shia community in Lebanon, there is now open criticism of Nasrallah's decision to support Assad in Syria and fear among some that this will drive a wedge between the Lebanese Shia community and the Syrian people, who are not about to forget Hezbollah's position during the war.

With the killing of Badreddine in Syria, Nasrallah lost a major asset who carried enormous prestige and clout within the military high command. His death is a big blow to Hezbollah in general and to Nasrallah in particular. It strengthens the Iranians' position in Syria and weakens Hezbollah's autonomy, if it ever had any.

Claude Salhani is the Opinion Editor of The Arab Weekly. Follow him on Twitter @ClaudeSalhani.

“Egged on by its success, the group made two monumental mistakes.”