

# Hezbollah's Agenda in Lebanon

by Tony Badran

**I**N RECENT YEARS, FROM THE LATE 1990S UNTIL THE PRESENT, IT HAS BECOME commonplace to read and hear arguments and speculation about what Hezbollah's agenda is in Lebanon. The broad lines of the narrative, which have become conventional wisdom for many reporters and experts, roughly revolve around points that can be broadly classified under the following categories:

*Hezbollah's Evolution:* Hezbollah has “evolved” from what was an “Iranian-backed militia” in the 1980s, into a “nationalist insurgency/resistance group” in the 1990s, and finally into a “mainstream political party.”<sup>1</sup>

*Hezbollah's “Lebanonization:”* The evolutionary argument is directly related to the theory of “Lebanonization,” offered by Augustus Richard Norton in the late 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The gist of the argument is that, during the 1990s, Hezbollah began a process of “integrating” into the Lebanese parliamentary democracy and political process, by adopting the policy of *infitah* (“openness”). This presumably paved the way to Hezbollah's eschewing of broader regional agendas and ties. As Norton put it in 1998: Hezbollah “has been transforming itself, preparing for life after resistance.”<sup>3</sup> All this was premised on the unproved notion that an organization created, built and financed by a particular state simply “moves away” from all that and becomes a normal, unarmed domestic political force. This view did, however, fit with a widespread passive conception of resistance and the politics of grievance, whereby the resistance would simply end once the grievance had been addressed.

*Rejecting or understating Hezbollah's Global Reach and Terrorism:* In promoting the “Lebanonized” view of Hezbollah, it was important to the proponents of this theory to distance Hezbollah from regional and international associations. It was especially important to reject or heavily qualify the party's terrorist label as well as to deny its

capacity for global reach. As such, academic literature systematically, and with very few exceptions, adopted the official Hezbollah party line in denying or underplaying the party membership of terror mastermind, Imad Mughniyeh, as that would have undermined the entire argument.

After Mughniyeh's assassination on February 12, 2008, Hezbollah came out in the open about the extent of Mughniyeh's ties to the organization. In fact, Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah enshrined him as one of the Party's triumvirate of venerable martyrs alongside cofounder Ragheb Harb and former Sec. Gen. Abbas Musawi (both of whom were also killed on the same day in February, the 16th, in 1984 and 1992 respectively).<sup>4</sup> In so doing, Hezbollah exposed an entire trend in Hezbollah scholarship, which had kowtowed to the Party's official line and had, up to that point, denied or minimized any organizational ties to Mughniyeh, at times even questioning his actual existence.<sup>5</sup>

The dissociation of Mughniyeh from Hezbollah had allowed some experts to place the blame for terrorist activities exclusively on Mughniyeh as an "individual"—as an agent working for the Iranians and not part of Hezbollah. At best, Mughniyeh was depicted as an individual working independently, as part of Hezbollah's allegedly "autonomous" External Security Organization.<sup>6</sup> This made it possible to distance Hezbollah from the terror attacks with global reach—for example, in Argentina in 1992 and 1994, and in Saudi Arabia (Khobar Towers) in 1996. This distancing was all the more necessary since these attacks occurred after Hezbollah's alleged "Lebanonization" process had begun.

*Hezbollah and the Islamic State agenda:* Lastly, the Lebanonization theory had to deal with the dilemma of Hezbollah's Islamic agenda. The main proponent of the Lebanonization theory at the time, Augustus Richard Norton, confidently declared that Hezbollah had "jettisoned its commitment to establishing a system of Islamic rule in the country."<sup>7</sup> Norton even dismissed any skeptical view of this assertion:

Cynics may argue that the Islamic state model has been put aside tactically in a multicomunal Lebanon, but the strategic objectives remain both unchanged and closer to achievement with Hizballah's penetration of the state. Such doubts may be understandable, but many leading Lebanese politicians who have dealt with Hizballah in parliament argue that the movement is, in fact, being co-opted into the system.<sup>8</sup>

Other more recent proponents of shifts in Hezbollah's ideology have phrased things more cautiously, positing a distinction between the Party's political ideology and its political program:

The aura and stereotyped notion of Hizbullah's advocacy of an Islamic state seems to hamper or, at least, downplay, Hizbullah's political program of *infatih* or integration in the Lebanese public sphere. ... It has been demonstrated that, in stages one and two, Hizbullah pursued the establishment of an Islamic state both from a political ideology and a political program perspective through a top-down process. However, as has been already clarified in stage three, Hizbullah's Islamic state remained a political ideology, rather than a political program.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere, the author of the above quote, Joseph Alagha, introduced yet another category in classifying Hezbollah's supposed endorsement of democratic principles; a "reformed *vilayat-e-faqih*."

The party defends democratic principles within an Islamic framework, such as political pluralism or the concept of Shura, that is to say, a consultative council.

There is no contradiction between a somehow reformed *vilayat-e-faqih* and a pluralistic and multi-confessional society like Lebanon, in the sense that the Iranian version of this principle cannot be applied in this environment.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, without a hint of irony, in the same interview, Alagha noted that in the event "the disappearance of a direct threat from Israel proves to be lasting, it is most likely that Hizbullah will turn its jihad inwards, seeking to control the Lebanese public sphere." Indeed, Alagha went on to say that Hezbollah's "clear long-term agenda" was "to dominate the Lebanese public sphere and national political arena."<sup>11</sup>

A quick perusal of this brief and rough rundown of the main theories that have dominated the literature about Hezbollah in recent years reveals that these premises, which for the most part, neatly dovetailed with official Hezbollah propaganda, have essentially collapsed despite what I call "the Great Cover-Up of the 1990s."

Hezbollah's organic ties with Iran, which obviously never went away, are once again as clear as day, being explicitly proclaimed by its party leadership. For example, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah made sure, in a speech on May 26, 2008 commemorating the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon, to make the following point: "They imagine that when they say about us that we are the Party of the *vilayat-e-faqih* that they are insulting us. Never! I declare today, and it is

nothing new, that I am proud to be a member of the Party of vilayat-e-faqih; the just, the scholarly, the wise, the courageous, the honest, and the loyal faqih.”<sup>12</sup>

With regards to ties to terrorism and global reach, Hezbollah’s public apotheosis of Imad Mughniyeh (to whom Nasrallah referred as “the martyred commander” (*al-shahid al-qa’id*) embarrassed the compliant expert literature. Meanwhile, news of Hezbollah’s involvement in Iraq, its networks in Latin America and Africa, intelligence monitoring of its cells in places like Germany and Canada, and its tentacles in the Gulf States, such as Kuwait and Bahrain, all shattered the claim that Hezbollah has no global reach. Similarly, as evident, e.g., from Nasrallah’s May 26, 2008 speech, Hezbollah sees itself as directly involved in operations in Iraq and the Palestinian territories, in contrast to the theory that it is merely a “nationalist insurgency/resistance movement” strictly confined to efforts to force Israel from southern Lebanon. The most recent, and perhaps most devastating, exposure of the fallacy of this position came when the leader of a Hezbollah cell was arrested by the Egyptian authorities and accused of a host of plots from arms smuggling into Gaza, to spying, monitoring targets and planning terrorist operations inside Egypt itself. The cell’s leader’s membership in Hezbollah was openly acknowledged by Nasrallah himself on April 10, 2009, two days after the Egyptians made their accusations public.

As for the widely-held notion that Hezbollah was “integrating” into Lebanese parliamentary politics and adopting “democratic principles,” it was exposed for the sham that it always was when Hezbollah militia attacked Lebanese civilians in their homes (in response to a government decision pertaining to Hezbollah’s illegal parallel fiber optic telecommunication network). For months before that, the Party had paralyzed the political process through mobilized intimidation, making a mockery of the concept of democracy. As for its voluntary disarmament after the Israeli withdrawal, in reality, it was precisely *after* the Israeli withdrawal in 2000, and within the Syrians’ warm embrace (*contra* the theory that free-rein for Syria in Lebanon would “check” Hezbollah), that Hezbollah secretly built the massive bunker infrastructure in Lebanon’s border villages and acquired the rocket arsenal that was displayed in the summer of 2006.

Some voices have criticized the split, introduced by proponents of the “Lebanonization” theory, between the Party’s political and social activities and its military agenda, even while applauding the supposed merits of “moving beyond the terrorism label” that has allegedly “hampered the production of knowledge” about Hezbollah. Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders represented that position in a 2005 essay:

Hizbullah views its military activities as an integral part of its *raison d’être*. Even if the party is not actually engaged in combat, it still reserves the *right* to use armed force for ‘prevention and defense;’ a right, which,

in turn is constantly reiterated and disseminated through the party's social and political activities. This further explains why Hezbollah refuses to participate in the Lebanese government.

...

Consequently, the literature dealing with the transformation and the accommodation of Hezbollah into Lebanese politics has contributed to presenting it as 'a fixture of Lebanese politics, not simply an armed and violent faction.' This way, it has moved beyond the 'terrorism' label and contributed to producing knowledge about Hezbollah: the 'lebanonisation' literature acknowledged and described the functioning of the party's social activities. However, it has incorrectly situated these social activities as separate from Hezbollah's other functions, whereas Hezbollah leaders conceive resistance as much as a military undertaking as a social and political one. 'A close inspection of the party's internal dynamics reveals that it is virtually impossible to extricate the military from the political or vice versa.'<sup>13</sup>

Of course, it was scholars' aversion to ascribing the "terrorist" label to Hezbollah—noted at the beginning of this essay and which Harb and Leenders paradoxically share with the "Lebanonization" theorists—that was precisely at the heart of "the Great Cover-Up of the 1990s." It was that position, ironically, that prevented a proper understanding of Hezbollah, made evident, for example, as the literature proved to be almost unanimously wrong on Mughniyeh's ties to the organization.

Moreover, this aversion served a specific purpose for Hezbollah, as it kept it off the European Union's list of terrorist groups. The artificial dichotomy still works to this day, and is evident even in the recent decision by the British government to blacklist only Hezbollah's "military wing,"<sup>14</sup> and the British Foreign Ministry's subsequent decision to begin talks with the Party's so-called "political wing." However, Hezbollah's leadership dismissed the existence of this alleged division. The Party's second in command, Naim Qassem told the *Los Angeles Times*: "All political, social and jihad work is tied to the decisions of this leadership" ... "The same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work also leads jihad actions in the struggle against Israel."<sup>15</sup>

This "holistic"<sup>16</sup> nature of Hezbollah's conceptual framework and its networks was correctly identified by Harb and Leenders. They missed the mark, however, about Hezbollah's willingness to participate in the cabinet, which it did shortly after the publication of their article. However, Hezbollah's participation in the cabinet specifically took place in order to protect its autonomous armed status.

An October 2007 report by the International Crisis Group made that point well:

The presumed dichotomy between politics and resistance is misconceived. Far from being a substitute for armed resistance, Hizbollah's political involvement has become its necessary corollary.

...

It follows that the movement's relation to the central state has always been assessed in terms of its impact on the resistance... with an eye toward safeguarding its weapons and special status.... Hizbollah participated in the 1992 legislative elections in order to protect its weapons.<sup>17</sup>

However, the purpose of this so-called "integration into Lebanese institutions" was far from just "safeguarding." It also served to subordinate official Lebanese institutions to serve Hezbollah's external military operations. The most recent, and most blatant, evidence comes from the episode of the Hezbollah cell in Egypt. After arresting the cell's leader, the Egyptian government charged that official institutions deeply infiltrated by Hezbollah and headed by officials with close ties to the Party, such as the General Security division and the Foreign Ministry, were complicit in forging official documents used by the cell's leader to enter Egypt and later by his defense lawyer.<sup>18</sup>

As such, the idea that Hezbollah was "preparing for life after resistance," put forward by Norton, has not only been shown to be empirically baseless, but the premise itself has been exposed as being utterly flawed.

In fact, Norton got Hezbollah's agenda exactly backwards. "The Islamic Resistance," which was intentionally put forward to replace the overtly Khomeinist "Islamic Revolution" logo, encompasses a much larger and more ambitious program. Once that is understood, all of Hezbollah's decisions in the 1990s, which were interpreted as linear and evolutionary by some, would be seen in a different light entirely and would help us understand what Hezbollah has in mind for the future.

## The Resistant Society

IN JUNE OF 2007, NAIM QASSEM PENNED A VERY IMPORTANT ARTICLE IN LEBANON'S leading newspaper, *An-Nahar*. The title of the article said it all: "How Does the Rest of Society Integrate into the Resistance?"<sup>19</sup> "The question," Qassem wrote, "no longer was whether the Resistance will remain or not." Rather, "the question is, how does the rest of society integrate into the Resistance, and for the sake of what project do some not want it to continue?"

Qassem went on to lay out what this vision of a "Resistant Society" (*al-mujtama' al-*

*muqawim*) entails. It is worth noting that in his description of the Party's vision for a Lebanese state, the word "democracy" never once appeared in the entire article—not even the term "consensual democracy," sometimes used to describe the Lebanese system:

Resistance for us is a societal vision in all its dimensions, for it is a military, cultural, political and media resistance. It is the resistance of the people and the *mujahidin*, it is the resistance of the ruler (*al-hakim*) and the *umma*... We have always called for building the society (*mu-jtama'*) of resistance, and we never settled for a band (*majmu'a*) of resistance... So those who would be chasing the band of resistance would tire greatly, because they would be facing the society of resistance.

In other words, this was a totalitarian vision encompassing society on every level. While Harb and Leenders had touched on the Resistance Society in the course of their treatment of Hezbollah's "holistic" vision and networks,<sup>20</sup> they seem to have confined it to the Shiite community, when it is clearly of a much broader scope.

Qassem also made sure to impart timelessness to the Resistance, emphasizing repeatedly that it was not a "passing" (*ani*) or "temporary/circumstantial" (*dharfi*) and "reactive" (*radd fi'l*) reality. Rather, the historical context he placed it in extended back, in his words, to "the prophets and the apostles," acquiring an eternal religious mandate and a sacredness—something that Nasrallah and other Hezbollah figures regularly emphasize. It was all, as Qassem laid out, part of the "project of the path of God (*mashru' sabil Allah*)," which is "far more total (*ashmal*) than mere fighting."

A year later Qassem repeated this synthesis that effectively undercuts the passive grievance argument:

The Resistance is not an armed group (*majmu'a musallaha*) that wants to liberate a piece of land, nor is it a temporary/circumstantial performance (*ada'an dharfiyan*) that ends when the pretext disappears. Rather, the Resistance is a vision and a method (*ru'ya wa manhaj*), and not merely a military reaction (*raddat fi'l*)... The building of the Society of Resistance (*mujtama' al-muqawama*) provides strength for Lebanon and enhances its independence and sovereignty in the manner that we want, not in the manner they want to impose on us."<sup>21</sup>

A couple of days later, Hezbollah's "Loyalty to the Resistance" parliamentary bloc issued a statement making the same point: "The Resistance is a belief (*i'tiqad*), a *jihād*, a national belonging (*intima' watani*) and a religious responsibility (*mas'uliya shar'iya*)."<sup>22</sup>

These concepts were laid out in Qassem's book on Hezbollah where he wrote, using identical terminology, "The Party is Islamic ... and carries a methodology for life in its totality (*manhajan li l-hayat bi shumuliyatiha*)."<sup>23</sup>

As such, the Party's current vision and mission remains as totalitarian as ever. Moreover, Resistance, in Hezbollah's conceptual universe, is its own *raison d'être*. It is an absolute, circular concept. Or as Nasrallah alternately put it in his May 8, 2008 address, as his militiamen invaded civilian neighborhoods in Beirut, "the weapons will be used to protect the weapons."<sup>24</sup>

Both Qassem and Nasrallah—indeed this is a standard talking point for all Hezbollah officials—posit the Resistance as standing "at the side of" (*ila janib*) the state. Or, if you like, it stands parallel to the state, both inside and above the state, where—and this too has been a standard talking point—the state would "coordinate" (*tansiq*) with the Resistance.

That, ultimately, is Hezbollah's vision of the defense strategy and the "Resistance project" and everyone is "invited" to join in and accept this state of affairs.<sup>25</sup> This was summarized succinctly by Hezbollah politburo official, Mahmoud Qomati:

What we want from the national dialogue is not to negotiate over whether the weapons [of Hezbollah] remain or not, nor is it to negotiate over whether the Resistance integrates into the Armed Forces or not. Rather, what we want is the completion of this strategy on which we were established, and for the official Lebanese decision making to join us, side by side (*janban ila janb*) in order to fortify Lebanon.<sup>26</sup>

## The Resistance Project

IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR US TO RECOGNIZE THIS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AS AN integral part of Hezbollah's Islamic state agenda. The Islamic state, in Hezbollah's understanding, always was conceived as a clone of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary regime, as it stands under the command of the Supreme Guide and its *vilayat-e-faqih* doctrine.

The Islamic Republic, after all, has elections and affords its religious minorities representation in parliament. It even has a regular army. But it also has an entirely parallel structure in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps,<sup>27</sup> Hezbollah's parent organization, and the paramilitary *Basij* who ensure, as Hezbollah did in May 2008, that the revolutionary agenda is secure and that society remains in check behind it.

This agenda is precisely what is meant by the "Resistance project." This is what

Qassem referred to as “the project of the path of God” (*mashru‘ sabil Allah*), which he lays out in detail in his book in a chapter entitled “Jihad in the Path of God” (*al-jihad fi sabil Allah*). This comprehensive concept of jihad is, as Harb and Leenders put it, “essential in building a resistance society unified around specific meanings with which it identifies.”<sup>28</sup>

But in Qassem’s formulation, jihad for Hezbollah is directly tied to the leadership and the decision of the jurist (*al-wali al-faqih*), which once again organically binds the Islamic Resistance to the Islamic Revolution in Iran.<sup>29</sup>

The resistance in Lebanon encompasses the Islamic Revolutionary paradigm and structure. Just because “the Islamic Revolution in Lebanon” was altered to “the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon,” it does not mean the agenda has changed. By seeing Hezbollah in this broader sense of cloning the Islamic Revolutionary structure, one can appreciate the steady steps it continues to take towards its declared goal.

In the socio-economic, educational and cultural realms of this “holistic network,” as Harb and Leenders dub it, the various institutions are not just organs to disseminate the principles of the Islamic Revolution. They are organic clones of their Iranian counterparts.<sup>30</sup>

As for the inseparable religious element, it permeates the areas that Hezbollah controls in the Shiite community,<sup>31</sup> and is integrated into the institutions, from boy scouts, to various charities, to book fairs and publishing houses and so on. These are all part of “redefining the structure of society (*i’adat siyaghat tarkibat al-mujtama*).”<sup>32</sup> A recent report by Robert Worth in the *New York Times* exposed this process well:

There is a network of schools—some of them run by Hezbollah, others affiliated with or controlled by it—largely shielded from outsiders. There is a nationwide network of clerics who provide weekly religious lessons to young people on a neighborhood basis. There is a group for students at unaffiliated schools and colleges that presents Hezbollah to a wider audience. ... “It’s like a complete system, from primary school to university,” said Talal Atrissi, a political analyst at Lebanese University who has been studying Hezbollah for decades. “The goal is to prepare a generation that has deep religious faith and is also close to Hezbollah.”<sup>33</sup>

Worth also captured the “holistic” integration of the religious, the social, the educational and the military, in Hezbollah’s networks, such as the Mahdi Scouts.

# Integrating Society into the Resistance

SEEN IN THIS LIGHT, THE PARTY'S *infatih* (OPENNESS) POLICY SHOULD NO LONGER be understood as Hezbollah's becoming integrated into the Lebanese political system like everyone else. Rather, as shown above, it is about integrating others into its project. This reverse integration echoes the conclusion reached by Patrick Haenni: "Hezbollah has a real interest in making the state part of its global project."<sup>34</sup>

This is where people like the Christian politician Michel Aoun fit in, along with his "Memorandum of Understanding with Hezbollah" signed in February 2006. It is important for the Party, and for Iran, to showcase multi-sectarian window dressing for its agenda, using them to lend cross-religious cover and social legitimacy to the Resistance agenda. As Saeed Jalili, Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, explains, Lebanon offers a good example of resistance and coexistence between different religions and ethnic groups.<sup>35</sup>

In a recent session of the roundtable "National Dialogue," discussing which defense strategy Lebanon should adopt, Aoun presented a proposal that was effectively a carbon copy of Qassem's 2007 article.<sup>36</sup> Aoun's proposal, like Qassem's, essentially establishes a *Basij* order in Lebanon. As I have suggested, it advances an essential aspect of Hezbollah's Islamic state redefined as the Resistant Society.

More important to Hezbollah and Iran, however, is the cooptation of Sunnis. The benefits of this process are multiple, bestowing cross-sectarian Muslim legitimacy, especially in the so-called "Arab street." This is useful since both the Iranians and Hezbollah consistently maintain a strict separation between "peoples" and "state;" they pose as the champion of the former against the weakness, corruption and illegitimacy of the latter. The cooptation of Sunnis affords Iran an entry point to undermine leadership in the regional Sunni states, especially in the Gulf and Egypt, and allows it to position itself as the leader of Islamic "dignity," and of militancy as the defender of the Arab Muslim cause of Palestine.

Hezbollah is an integral part of this policy, especially as it has acquired great popularity across the (Sunni) Arab world. The term "Islamic Resistance" (as opposed to the overtly Khomeinist "Islamic Revolution") has allowed Hezbollah (and behind it Iran and Syria) to project an Islamic pan-Arab message. Here its television station, *Al-Manar*, has played a central role.<sup>37</sup> And in many respects, this narrative is further propagated by the Qatari *Al-Jazeera*, in part reflecting Qatar's alliance with the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah-Hamas axis.

In Lebanon, Hezbollah and Iran's policy has long sought to reach understandings

with Sunnis that would coopt and neutralize them by securing their support for the Resistance agenda. Under the Syrians this was easy, as the Sunni leaders were emasculated and simply served as cheerleaders for Hezbollah's program. After Rafiq Hariri's 2005 assassination, the subsequent Syrian withdrawal, and especially after the May 2008 attack on the Sunni neighborhoods in Beirut, Hezbollah's standing among the Sunnis plummeted dramatically.<sup>38</sup> It became a liability for even pro-Syrian Sunnis, like Tripoli politician Omar Karami, to take an unqualified pro-Hezbollah stand, especially during the summer 2008 clashes in Tripoli between Hezbollah- and Syria-allied Alawite factions and Sunni factions. Soon thereafter, Hezbollah tried to forge an understanding with a minor group of Salafis, but the pressure from the other Salafi and mainstream Sunni circles to abrogate it was too strong. Hassan Shahhal, the Salafi figure who signed it, had to back away from it.

But Hezbollah and Iran have cultivated ties with militant Islamists like the Islamic Action Front's Fathi Yakan, who is at once an open Bin Laden and Zawahiri supporter, an ally of the Syrians, and a benefactor of Iranian largesse. He was officially received in Iran in March 2007 and his fighters train with Hezbollah.<sup>39</sup> Twenty-one of his men were recently arrested where they told the authorities that they were en route to training with Hezbollah. Hezbollah intervened on their behalf as comrades and supporters of the Resistance. It has also done the same with marginal Druze figures, such as Wi'am Wahhab, who now openly boasts of being a client of Iran along with his other status as Syrian messenger.<sup>40</sup> Hezbollah also has longstanding ties with militant Sunni Islamist groups based in Palestinian camps.<sup>41</sup>

Aside from its strategic purpose, this "Sunni policy" has a tactical element as well—to squeeze and emasculate the most prominent Sunni political figure, Saad Hariri, with the elections looming in June 2009. Ultimately, however, Hezbollah would like to force Hariri to get with the program, as his father was forced to in the '90s under the Syrians.

In his May 26, 2008 address, Nasrallah laid forth his offer to Hariri, which he also did, tellingly, in his press conference after the cross-border operation on July 12, 2006. He proposed a return to the status quo of the 1990s—specifically the framework of the 1996 April Understanding with Israel. That agreement offered Hezbollah legitimacy not just as a Resistance but also as a recognized interlocutor (while the state was not allowed to negotiate with Israel, directly or indirectly), and provided a cover for its military activity, with Syria as the local guarantor, much to Syria's delight, as it eliminated Lebanon entirely as an actor.<sup>42</sup> This is what both Hezbollah and the Syrians seek to restore today, after its termination in 2006 and its replacement with UNSCR 1701.

Nasrallah's offer was euphemistically presented as a marriage between the agendas of development (Hariri) and resistance (Hezbollah): Rafiq Hariri "was able to

combine the project of development (*i'mar*) and the state and the project of Resistance (*mashru' al-muqawama*) ... [Lebanon] with the Resistance beside it (*ila janibihi*)." Then, using very sensitive language taken from the lexicon of Lebanon's national pact of communal *convivance*, Nasrallah added, "This was the formula (*sigha*) which we lived and through which we coexisted (*ta'ayashna*) as a Resistance." The terms "formula" and "coexistence" are common code words for the Lebanese political system, and thus Nasrallah's words could be read as an ultimatum: Hezbollah can "co-exist" with the Lebanese state only if it adopts its "project" and allows it to continue operating parallel to (*ila janib*) the state.

In other words, Hariri's money and connections would be allowed to play around, but Lebanon's security and foreign policy would be in Hezbollah's (and its patrons') hands. In essence, this was a reformulation of the pre-2005 order, which dovetails precisely with Syria's objectives and interests. The "March 14" parliamentary majority has rejected this proposal.

Nasrallah also made sure to introduce an additional caveat to ensure that his militia is not tied down, even rhetorically, to a strictly "defensive" strategy, which would imply an end to offensive operations. He thus added a "liberation strategy" alongside it, leaving the door open for future operations. Hezbollah's recurring statements rejecting the Blue Line as an international border could be read in this light,<sup>43</sup> as could the Party's adamant rejection of any proposal for indirect negotiations between the Lebanese government and the Israeli government in order to settle their territorial dispute. Hezbollah also rejects the clause in the Taef Accord regarding the Armistice Agreement with Israel, something on which March 14 insists.

All of this functions to preserve Hezbollah's margin for offensive maneuverability, as well as to affirm Hezbollah's doctrinal rejection of any accommodation with the state of Israel. Moreover, the dichotomy of "defensive" and "liberation" (hence, "offensive") strategies is a reflection of the doctrinal duality of "defensive jihad" and "initiated jihad," which are both linked to the ultimate decision-making of the jurist (*al-wali al-faqih*) who has exclusive authority in this matter.<sup>44</sup> Nasrallah, from a doctrinal point of view, cannot accept a government decision to forgo jihad against Israel, nor can he submit the "defense strategy" to the sole authority of the Lebanese central government.

However, given the Israeli government's declarations regarding how it would respond to any provocation from Hezbollah, one ought to consider what the domestic repercussions would be to another Hezbollah adventure. This is especially true in the post-May 2008 environment, with sectarian tensions running extremely high. The consequences for inter-sectarian relations, in the estimation of several astute observers, could be dire and violent.

# Conclusion

Everything for Hezbollah—society, culture, economy, politics, alliances, media—is in the service of the totalitarian vision of the “Resistant Society.” That conceptual universe is tied to *vilayat-e-faqih* and the Islamic Revolution. Hezbollah uses the ambiguity of its hybrid nature to tactically navigate towards its strategic goals without having to abandon any of its options. This is what the Syrians managed to do in Lebanon in the 1990s—to have their cake and eat it too, affording Hezbollah the same.

If we are to believe Naim Qassem, Hezbollah cannot be anything else and remain Hezbollah. As such, the Iranian-sponsored group will continue to pose a challenge to Israel, although Israel is well equipped to deal with it. The challenge is far more severe, and perhaps fatal for Lebanon. Lebanon’s system—dysfunctional as it may be—has prevented the rise of an indigenous totalitarian regime. But the challenge Hezbollah poses is new in certain key respects. The experience of the Palestinian “Fateh Land,” parallel state of resistance in the 1970s led to war. This may well be in store once again for Lebanon. Hezbollah, by its very nature and platform, will prevent the rise of a normal, independent, peaceful state in Lebanon and will continue to be a source of instability for its security, its system, and its citizenry—all talk of “Lebanonization” notwithstanding.

## NOTES

1. See, e.g., Andrew Exum, “Imad Mughniyah is dead,” *Middle East Strategy at Harvard*, February 13, 2008. [http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/02/imad\\_mughniyah\\_is\\_dead/](http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/02/imad_mughniyah_is_dead/)
2. See Norton, “Hizballah: from Radicalism to Pragmatism?” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, 1998. See also Norton’s “Hizballah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics,” (A Paper for the Muslim Politics Project), Council on Foreign Relations, 1999.
3. “Hizballah: from Radicalism to Pragmatism?” <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah/norton.html>  
See also, “Hizballah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics,” p. 3. “Hizballah has been transforming itself into a political party. In short, it has been preparing for life after resistance, while simultaneously exploiting its commitment to liberate the south in order to sustain its impressive political constituency whose loyalty is by no means irrevocable.”
4. See David Schenker, “Beyond Rhetoric: Hizballah Threats after the Mughniyeh Assassination,” *PolicyWatch* #1347, February 28, 2008. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2723>
5. I provided a rundown of the literature in an online essay, “Paging Norton and Other Hezbollah

- Experts,” *Across the Bay*, February 15, 2008. <http://beirut2bayside.blogspot.com/2008/02/paging-norton-and-other-hezbollah.html>
- See also, Martin Kramer, “Imad who?” *Middle East Strategy at Harvard*, February 14, 2008. [http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/02/imad\\_mughniyah\\_who/](http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/mesh/2008/02/imad_mughniyah_who/)
- Virtually all the authors with recent books on Hezbollah, spanning a decade between 1997 and 2007, endorsed the Party line one way or another on Mughniyah. Those include Hala Jaber, Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, Judith Palmer Harik, Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, and Augustus Richard Norton. One exception is Magnus Ranstorp, who had detailed Mughniyah’s membership in the Party in his book, *Hizb’allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, (London: Macmillan, 1997).
6. See, e.g., Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 78.
  7. “Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?”
  8. “Hizballah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics,” p. 21.
  9. Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, And Political Program*, ISIM Dissertations, (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006) pp. 209-210.  
 In a recent article, Bilal Saab made a somewhat similar distinction between “Hezbollah’s Islamic order in theory” and “in practice.” But Saab also made a categorical statement regarding Hezbollah’s ambition: “[T]he Party of God is first and foremost a Lebanese Shia Islamist group whose *raison d’être* is to pursue its ideal of establishing an Islamic order in Lebanon, whether by force or by persuasion, as dictated by circumstances.” See “Rethinking Hezbollah’s Disarmament,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Fall 2008, pp. 94-98.
  10. “Lebanon: Hizbullah, a progressive Islamic party? - Interview with Joseph Alagha,” *Religioscope*, 17 May 2007. [http://religion.info/english/interviews/article\\_317.shtml](http://religion.info/english/interviews/article_317.shtml)
  11. *Ibid.*
  12. *Al-Nour* radio. Translation by this author.
  13. “Know thy enemy: Hizbullah, ‘terrorism’ and the politics of perception,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2005, p. 186.
  14. “UK ban on Hezbollah military arm,” BBC News, July 2, 2008.
  15. “Lebanon’s Hezbollah savors increasing legitimacy,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2009. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-lebanon-hezbollah13-2009apr13,0,5664917.story>
  16. This is somewhat parallel to what Dany Badran has termed “hybridity” in analyzing Hassan Nasrallah’s speeches, noting how Nasrallah blends political, religious and military discourses and produces a “hybrid genre” which “helps construct constantly shifting audience roles with varying effective power.” “The Discourse of Conflict or the Reader of Conflict: A Pragmatics of Rhetoric,” a paper presented at the PALA International Conference, Sheffield, UK, July, 2008.
  17. “Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis,” *Crisis Group Middle East Report N°69*, 10 October 2007, p. 15. The report goes on to provide a quote from the vice president of Hezbollah’s research center which perfectly summarizes the Party’s position and strongly discredits the “Lebanonization” and “integration” argument: “[P]aradoxically, some want us to get involved in the political process in order to neutralize us. In fact, we intend to get involved—but precisely in order to protect the strategic choice of resistance and political participation.” *Ibid.*
  18. See, *Al-Hayat*, April 21, 2009. [http://www.alhayat.com/arab\\_news/nafrica\\_news/04-2009/Item-20090420-c50d61d4-c0a8-10ed-00fa-e78fc131003a/story.html](http://www.alhayat.com/arab_news/nafrica_news/04-2009/Item-20090420-c50d61d4-c0a8-10ed-00fa-e78fc131003a/story.html) and *Al-Hayat*, April 22, 2009. [http://www.alhayat.com/arab\\_news/nafrica\\_news/04-2009/Item-20090421-ca4195b6-c0a8-10ed-00fa-e78f8c145a5a/story.html](http://www.alhayat.com/arab_news/nafrica_news/04-2009/Item-20090421-ca4195b6-c0a8-10ed-00fa-e78f8c145a5a/story.html)
  19. “*Kayfa yankharit baqi l-mujtama’ fi l-muqawama?*” *An-Nahar*, June 8, 2007.

20. "Know thy enemy: Hizbullah, 'terrorism' and the politics of perception," pp. 189-191.
21. NOW Lebanon, June 22, 2008. <http://nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=48252>
22. NOW Lebanon, June 25, 2008.  
<http://www.nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=48705>
- Cf. Harb and Leenders, pp. 189-191.
23. Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: al-manhaj, al-tajriba, al-mustaqbal*, (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2002.)p. 364. Harb and Leenders also note this quote, but offer a slightly different translation. See p. 189.
24. *Ash-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 9, 2008. <http://www.asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&is-sueno=10755&article=470025&feature=>
25. See Nasrallah's address on May 26, 2008.
26. NOW Lebanon, February 16, 2009. <http://nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=80152>
27. Cf. Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps, Inc.," *PolicyWatch* #1273, August 17, 2007. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2649>
28. "Know thy enemy," p. 189. In this sense, Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh had it right when he defined Hezbollah as "first and foremost a *jihadi* movement that engages in politics, and not a political party that conducts *jihad*." See his *In the Path of Hizbullah*, Syracuse: (Syracuse University Press, 2004), p. 44.
29. *Hizbullah*, p. 51. "The decision of Jihad is tied to *al-wali al-faqih* ... who determines the rules and restrictions of confrontation (*qarar al-jihad murtabit bil-wali l-faqih ... alladhi yuhaddid qawa'id al-muwajaha wa dawabitaha*)."
30. See Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Shadow Government in Lebanon," *PolicyWatch* #1124, July 19, 2006. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2489>  
 Overviews of these institutions can be found in a number of works, including Qassem's *Hizbullah*, Hamzeh's *In the Path of Hezbollah*, as well as Harb and Leenders' essay. See also the recent study, "Exporting the Iranian revolution to Lebanon," published by the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center (IICC), December 8, 2008. [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/iran\\_e003.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/iran_e003.htm)  
 For a layout of the organizational structure, see Robert Rabil, "Hezbollah: Lebanon's Power Broker," *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, Fall 2008-Number 15. <http://www.securityaffairs.org/issues/2008/15/rabil.php>. See also Magnus Ranstorp's *Hizb'allah in Lebanon*.
31. Where, for example, Hezbollah has been taking over traditional Shiite shrines and "Iranianizing" them. Noted in Hussain Abdul-Hussain's presentation for the panel, "Hezbollah and Iran: Destabilizing Lebanon and Israel." *The Hudson Institute*, November 19, 2008.
32. Harb and Leenders, p. 190. Authors' interview with the vice-president of Hezbollah's Islamic Institute for Teaching and Education.
33. Robert F. Worth, "Hezbollah Seeks to Marshal the Piety of the Young," *The New York Times*, November 20, 2008.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html?\\_r=1&hp=&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/world/middleeast/21lebanon.html?_r=1&hp=&pagewanted=all). For more on the Mahdi Scouts, see "Hezbollah's Shi'ite youth movement, 'The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts'," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies (CSS), September 11, 2006. [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/hezbollah\\_scouts\\_e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hezbollah_scouts_e.htm)
34. "Talking To: Patrick Haenni," NOW Lebanon, October 12, 2007. <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=16115>
35. "Jalili says Iran wants cooperation and information exchanges with Lebanon," NOW Lebanon, November 25, 2008. <http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=68515>

36. “*bayna su’al Qasim wa tasawwur ‘Awn.. fariq zamani la akthar*,” NOW Magazine (electronic supplement), November 13, 2008. The report laid out Aoun’s paper parallel to Qassem’s 2007 article, highlighting their similarities. See also, Hanin Ghaddar, “A community of resistance,” NOW Lebanon, November 13, 2008. <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=66884>
37. The former Iranian ambassador to Syria, Mohammad Hossein Akhtari, told *Asharq Al-Awsat* that Iran and Syria both interfered directly to assist Hezbollah establish *Al-Manar*. *Asharq Al-Awsat*, May 15, 2008. <http://asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10761&article=470798>
38. See Patrick Haenni’s assessment already in October 2007: “Hezbollah can no longer recruit the Sunnis at the same level as its main-stream competitors. Basically they lost influence.” “Talking To: Patrick Haenni,” NOW Lebanon, October 12, 2007. <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=16115>
39. See MEMRI Special Dispatch—No. 1518, March 23, 2007. <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Area=sd&ID=SP151807&Page=archives>  
See also, Zahra Hankir, “Degrees of Separation,” NOW Lebanon, March 26, 2008. <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=35876>
40. NOW Lebanon, October 24, 2008. <http://www.nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=64189>
41. For a historical look at Iran’s and Hezbollah’s outreach efforts with Lebanese and Palestinian Sunni groups, see Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam Among Palestinians in Lebanon*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007) pp. 27-69. More currently, see Nidaa Qabalan, “A call to arms: three Palestinian militant groups,” NOW Lebanon, November 6, 2007.
42. Naim Qassem reflects Hezbollah’s delight in the April Understanding in his book, where he describes it as “tailored to the Resistance’s demands.” He also notes Iran’s role, alongside Syria, in the formulation of the Understanding. *Hizbullah*, pp. 166-167.
43. “Hezbollah disputes the legitimacy of the Israel-Lebanon international border,” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center (IICC), November 19, 2008. [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/hezbollah\\_e005.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/hezbollah_e005.htm)
44. Since Hezbollah abides by the doctrine of al-wali al-faqih, it cannot submit to the position, advocated by the “March 14” parliamentary majority in Lebanon, that the Lebanese central government alone should control the decision of war and peace (*qarar al-harb wa as-silm*). Naim Qassem specifically states in his book that the al-wali al-faqih alone possesses the authority to decide war and peace (*huwa lladhi yamtalik salahiyat qarar al-harb wa as-silm*), along with the authority “to make the major political decisions related to the interests of the *umma*” (*ittikhadh al-qararat as-siyasiya al-kubra allati tartabit bi masalih al-umma*), even when operational application “does not require daily follow-up by al-wali al-faqih.” *Hizbullah*, pp. 72, 76. Also, see Shmuel Bar, “Iranian Terrorist Policy and ‘Export of Revolution,’” pp. 14-17. Paper distributed at a conference hosted by *The Hudson Institute*, entitled “Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas: Tehran’s War against the West by Proxy?” November 19, 2008. Bar incorporates instructional material captured by the IDF during the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

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BEIRUT (Reuters) - Hezbollah and its political allies made significant gains in Lebanon's parliamentary election, official results showed, boosting an Iranian-backed movement fiercely opposed to Israel and underlining Tehran's growing regional clout. The leader of Shiite Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, called the result a "very big political, parliamentary and moral victory for the choice of resistance". The number of Hezbollah MPs was the same or little changed, but candidates supported by the group or allied to it gained in major cities. Hezbollah and its political allies won just over half the seats. In Lebanon, Hezbollah has gathered unique and mind-boggling war experience during the last five years of war against the extremist groups of al-Qaeda and ISIS, fighting alongside two classical armies on multiple fronts: the Syrian Army and the Russian superpower Army. The US now seems willing to increase pressure on the Lebanon to further cripple its economy. These sanctions will likely affect Lebanon more than Hezbollah itself. The US put on its "terrorist list" the owners of currency exchange offices in Lebanon known to have exchanged Euros received from Iran for dollars. It has arrested a woman - "Hezbollah" (separated from "Amal" in the 1980s and is now a part of the 8 March Coalition). Supports Iranian and Syrian positions. The party participated in the liberation of Syria from ISIS (a terrorist organisation that has been banned in Russia). A semblance of a multiconfessional status quo is upheld in Lebanon: experts note, that the proportional system is meant to ease interconfessional problems during the elections. What is more, a "clannish" way of thought has a strong influence on the country's political processes. It is interesting to note, that in Lebanon, a Christian can run for president, a Sunni Muslim for prime minister, and a representative of the Shiite community for speaker of the house.