

ARAP İSYANLARI SIRASINDA HİZBULLAH'IN DİRENCİ

ÖZ

Daha çok Lübnan İslami Direniş olarak bilinen Hizbullah (Allah'ın Partisi) 'terörist' küresel erimi ve militan yüzü ile kötü bir üne sahiptir. 1980'lerde ve 1990'ların başında Hizbullah Lübnan'da Batılıları kaçırmış ve 2000'li yıllarda askeri güçleri geri çekilinceye İsrail ordusu ile savaşmıştır. Arap Baharı/İsyanlarında, Hizbullah Suriye rejimin yanında savaşmış ve Iraklı ve Yemeli Şii askeri milislere logistik destek sağlamıştır. Hizbullah pan-Arapçılık ve pan-İslamcılık parametreleri çerçevesinde bir kayma yaşarken, sahip olduğu Lübnan ulusal kimliğini merkezde tutmaya devam etmektedir. Buna rağmen, Hizbullah militanlık ve entegrasyon arasında hareket etmektedir; ilki Hizbullah'ın Arap İsyanları sırasındaki şahin politikasını temsil etmekteyken, ikincisi meşruiyet devşirdiği Lübnan'ın ayrılmaz bir parçası olmasına dayalı güvercin yüzünü göstermektedir. Bu kayma Sünni-Şii ayrışmasını yada nifakını (fitne) beslemekte, Lübnan topraklarında Hizbullah ve Lübnan ordusunun IŞİD ve Nusra Cephesi ile savaşmasının ardından ciddi bir şekilde Suriye iç savaşının Lübnan'a taşması tehdidini ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı/İsyanları, IŞİD, hegemonya, infitah (açılım); Sünni-Şii nifakı (fitnesi), güç boşluğu, Suriye, Lübnan

حركات التمرد العربية ومقاومة حزب الله

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خلاصة :

يملك حزب الله، الذي يعرف أكثر ما يعرف بالتمرد الإسلامي اللبناني، شهرة سيئة باهدافه العولمية "الأرهابية" وبما يتّصف به من عمليات ميليشياته. فقد مارس حزب الله في الثمانينات وبدايات التسعينات من القرن الماضي عمليات خطف الغربيين، مثلما حارب ضد الجيش الاسرائيلي في بدايات القرن الحادي والعشرين الى حين انسحاب قواته العسكرية. وقد حارب حزب الله الى جانب النظام السوري في احداث التمرد ابان ايام الربيع العربي، كما قام بتأمين التعبئة اللوجيستية للميليشيات الشيعية العراقية واليمينية. وبينما نجد حزب الله يعيش انحرافا في اطار معايير العروبة والاسلام، فانه يستمر في نفس الوقت في الحفاظ على مركزية هويته اللبنانية الوطنية. وبالرغم من ذلك، فان حزب الله يتحرك بين الميليشيائية وبين التكامل. وبينما يمثل اولهما سياسة الصقر لحزب الله خلال حركات التمرد العربية، فانه يظهر في الجانب الآخر وجه الحمامة المستند على كونه جزءا لا يتجزأ من لبنان الذي يجتد المشروعية في خصمه. ان هذا الانحراف يعمل على تغذية التفرقة او النفاق (الفتنة) السنية - الشيعية، كما يظهر للعلن تهديدا جديا لنقل الحرب الاهلية السورية الى لبنان في اعقاب مشاركة حزب الله في حرب الجيش اللبناني مع تنظيم داعش وجبهة النصرة.

الكلمات الدالة : الربيع/ حركات التمرد العربي، داعش، السيطرة، الانفتاح، النفاق (الفتنة) السنية - الشيعية، فراغ السلطة، سوريا، لبنان.

HIZBALLAH'S RESILIENCE DURING THE ARAB UPRISINGS

ABSTRACT

Hizballah (The Party of God), better known as the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon, is infamous for its 'terrorist' global reach and militant face. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Hizballah abducted Westerners in Lebanon and fought the Israeli Army until Israel withdrew its forces in 2000. In this Arab Spring/Uprisings, Hizballah is fighting alongside the Syrian regime and lending logistical support to the Iraqi and Yemeni Shi'ite armed militias. Hizballah seems to shift within the parameters of pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism, while maintaining its Lebanese national identity at the center. Notwithstanding, Hizballah moves between militancy and integration, the former exemplifies its hawkish policy during the Arab Uprisings, while the latter illustrates its dovish domestic face of being an integral part of the Lebanese state, from which it derives its legitimacy. This shift fueled Sunni-Shi'a divide or discord (*fitna*), threatening a serious spillover of the Syrian civil war into Lebanon after ISIL and Nusra battled Hizballah and the Lebanese Army on Lebanese soil.

Keywords: Arab Spring/Uprisings; ISIL; hegemony; infitah ('opening-up'); Sunni-Shi'a discord (fitna); power vacuum; Syria; Lebanon

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Introduction

The Lebanese political party Hizballah labels itself as an Islamic *jihadi* movement, whose primary concern is the preservation of its identity in light of the Arab Uprisings/Spring, which resulted in dramatic developments and turmoil that are rupturing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). While al-Qa'ida's offshoot *The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant* (ISIL) wrecks havoc in the MENA, especially in failing states such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria, Hizballah did not remain idle. The 'Shi'ite' resistance movement Hizballah joined the Syrian regime, and to a lesser extent, the Iraqi regime¹ in their fight against 'Sunni' transnational anathema (*takfiri*) *jihad*. Hizballah dubs as *takfiri* the Sunni militants who are nibbling the Syrian and Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity, in a regional and international war where superpowers and regional powers are contesting spheres of influence. Russia, China, Iran, and Hizballah support the Syrian regime; while the US, France, Britain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia support the moderate rebels, who have been trying to topple the Syrian regime for the past four years. After ISIL declared its war against the US and Western Europe and beheaded US and British citizens, on October 15, 2014 'Operation Inherent Resolve' was born: a US-led coalition of 40 countries, including Saudi Arabia², Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, and Jordan.

In conformity with its *realpolitik* (realist) policy to change as circumstances themselves change, one could argue that the Lebanese Hizballah is not monolithic. The party's internal structure allows it to operate on a number of levels. Hizballah is a sophisticated, complex, multifaceted, multilayered organization, composed of at least four main divisions: (1) the 'military wing': the *jihadi* and 'terrorist' branch; (2) the social services, NGOs, and civil institutions branch; (3) the 'political wing' branch; (4) the cultural politics branch or 'resistance art'.

Hizballah's Anathema

Hizballah witnessed remarkable transformations in the past three-plus decades. From its founding as an Islamic movement of social and political protest during 1978–1985, it evolved into a full-fledged social movement between 1985 and 1991, and then into a parliamentary political party from 1992 to the present.

Hizballah defines its identity as an Islamic *jihadi* (struggle) movement, "whose emergence is based on an ideological, social, political and economic

1 By November 2014, Hizballah has lost more than 1000 fighters, around 2000 wounded and many handicapped in its war of attrition against the Sunni militants in Syria and Iraq.

2 The Saudi King vehemently bashed ISIL and its medieval mindset, arguing that their particles have nothing to do with Islam, which preaches tolerance and acceptance of the other.

mixture in a special Lebanese, Arab and Islamic context.”³ Its roots can be traced back to 1978, which coincided with the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr⁴ and the first Israeli invasion of Lebanon. By the efforts and under the auspices of leading Iranian hard-line clergy and military figures such as ‘Ali Akbar Muhtashami and Mustapha Shamran, combined with the endeavors of the first and second Hizballah Secretary Generals, Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli and Sayyid ‘Abbas al-Musawi, Hizballah’s nucleus was established. With the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, many Lebanese Shi’ites saw in Imam Khomeini their new leader. During the same period, Sayyid ‘Abbas al-Musawi officially founded ‘The Hizballah of Lebanon’, supported by his students and other leading *‘ulama* (religious scholars).⁵

In the 1980s, Hizballah pursued the establishment of an Islamic state from the perspectives of both religious ideology and political ideology. This era was characterized by Hizballah’s religious capital⁶ (Iranian *marja’iyya*, or authority of emulation); political capital⁷ and symbolic capital (Islamic Resistance’s war and suicide/ ‘martyrdom’ operations against Israel in the south and the *Biqa’*, northeastern part of Lebanon); economic capital⁸ and social capital⁹ (social institutions targeting only Shi’ite grassroots); and Islamic Jihad’s acts as symbolic capital (honour and dignity). Symbolic capital corresponds to someone’s

3 ‘Identity and Goals’ is Hizballah’s 2004 self-description. See Joseph Alagha, *Hizballah’s Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), p. 60.

4 Musa al-Sadr, one of Hizballah’s ideologues, was a charismatic and distinguished leader, who mobilized the Lebanese Shi’ites in the 1960s and 1970s and was able to channel their grievances into political participation. Al-Sadr never called for an Islamic state, rather for equality and social justice among the various denominations, which form the myriad of the Lebanese multi-confessional system.

5 Tawfiq Al-Madini, *Amal wa Hizballah fi Halabat al-Mujababat al-Mahaliyya wa al-Iqlimiyya [Amal and Hizballah in the Arena of Domestic and Regional Struggles]*. Damascus: Al-Ahli, 1999, 172.

6 According to Pierre Bourdieu, religious capital refers to the way religious knowledge is appropriated and disseminated. Bourdieu used the term religious capital in ‘Genèse et structure du champ religieux’, *Revue française de sociologie*, Vol. 12, 1971, pp. 295-334. See also the English translation ‘Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field’, *Comparative Social Research*, Vol. 13, 1991, pp. 1-44.

7 ‘Political capital is everything that enables leaders to get anything done. It’s their reputation, their ability to make the newspaper, their statutory role, their friends in the community, the amount of money they can raise, the number of people who support them, the length of time people are willing to pay attention to them and a lot more than that as well’. See <http://www.theaesthetic.com/NewFiles/capital.html> (Accessed 5 July 2005). Thus, political capital is present in both Hizballah’s political ideology and political program.

8 Economic capital corresponds to ‘stocks and shares but also the surplus present in very high salaries’. Brigit Fowler, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory of culture’. *Variant*, Vol. 2, Summer 1999, p. 2. According to Kane, ‘economic capital refers to material wealth in the most common sense of the word’. Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition*, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 22.

9 Social capital is ‘the network or influential patrons that you can use to support your actions’. (Fowler, ‘Pierre Bourdieu’s...’, 2). Simply stated, social capital is contacts, acquaintances, and the practice of durable social networks.

reputation, honour, distinction, and prestige. Bourdieu defined symbolic capital as the 'degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honor [dignity, possessed by someone and] founded on the dialectic of knowledge and recognition'.¹⁰

Fragmented public spheres existed in Lebanon as cantons – confessionally based mini-states within the Lebanese state. During the mid-1980s, the issue of establishing cantons along sectarian lines was high on the agenda of many political parties, including the Christian ones. For instance, Habib Matar¹¹ stated in 1986 that his call to the Vatican of establishing a Christian state in Lebanon should not be viewed as a call for the disintegration of Lebanon; rather, he clarified that the Christian state would be erected on all the Lebanese soil. Matar questioned, 'Why don't the Christians in the East have a shelter or a small state?' When he was asked what the Muslims should do, he replied: 'It's their own problem. There are a lot of vacant areas in the Arab world [where they can go], or let them be governed by the Christian state, and this is better for them'.¹² A similar view was earlier announced by the Phalangist Leader, the late ex-President Bashir Gemayyel who said in 1982 that the Maronites were aiming at converting Lebanon into a Christian state where all the Christian Arabs could reside.¹³

In Hizballah's case, founding a Shi'ite canton in the areas under its control, would have implied establishing a replica of an Islamic state in miniature. For instance, unlike the Lebanese Forces and Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)¹⁴, Hizballah neither established a mini-state – with its own ports, airports, taxation, and civil administration – within the Lebanese state, nor did Hizballah call for federalism. In 1986, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Hizballah's current Secretary General, stressed that the Muslims have no right whatsoever to even entertain the idea of a Muslim canton, a Shi'ite canton, or a Sunni canton... Talking about cantons annihilates the Muslims, destroys their potential power, and leads them from one internal war to another. Only the Islamic state upholds their unity.¹⁵

10 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 7.

11 Back then, the deputy president of the National Liberal Party (*Hizb al-Wataniyyin al-Ahrar*). See <http://www.ahrar.org.lb/news.asp?id=120>

12 *Al-Masira* last week of March 1986.

13 As to the borders of the alleged Maronite state, Z'aytir claims they are constantly expanding. See Muhammad Z'aytir, *Al-Mashru' Al-Maruni fi Lubnan: Juzuruha wa Tatawwuratuhu [The Maronite Project in Lebanon: Roots and Development]* (Beirut: Al-Wikala Al-'Alamiyya lil-Tawzi', 1986), p. 14. Since this book contains 1136 pages of severe political-ideological bashing against the Maronites, it is officially banned in Lebanon. (The book's cover portrays a blue map of Lebanon with a black cross situated in its midst).

14 See respectively <http://www.lebanese-forces.com/> and <http://www.psp-lb.org/>

15 *Al-'Ahd* 95 (9 *Sha'ban* 1406/ 18 April 1986), 11.

The second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was the spark that reignited Hizballah and led to its formation as an Islamic *jihadi* movement. The Islamic Resistance, Hizballah's military wing, made some breakthroughs in the face of the Israeli army that advanced towards Beirut and led a campaign of resistance against the Israeli Forces (IDF)¹⁶ after they occupied the Lebanese capital. Leading Hizballah cadres such as Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, the current Secretary General, Sayyid Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, the current head of Hizballah's political council (Politburo), and Husayn al-Musawi¹⁷ were all AMAL¹⁸ members. These, among others, were later totally against AMAL joining the Lebanese cabinet.¹⁹ Therefore, these radicals abandoned AMAL and joined the ranks of existing Islamic Shi'ite groups – including members of the *Hizb Al-Da'wa Al-Islamiyya* ('The Islamic Call Party'), *Itihad al-Lubnani lil Talaba al-Muslimin* ('The Lebanese Union of Muslim Students')²⁰, as well as independent active Islamic figures and clerics – and established Hizballah to oppose the Israeli occupation, with the material support of Iran and backing from Syria.²¹ These groups came together in fighting the Israeli occupation and built the backbone of the party, and most importantly its 'resistance identity'. Their later achievements in addressing the socio-economic grievances, resulting from the Israeli occupation, gained the party a solid ground among the grassroots of Lebanese society.

After operating for some years anonymously underground for security reasons, on 16 February 1985, Hizballah became a noticeable player in the Lebanese political system when it publicly revealed its Political Manifesto or Open Letter, which disclosed its religio-political ideology, thus signalling its open engagement in Lebanese political life.²² In the Open Letter, Hizballah disclosed a radical-militant approach that regarded the Lebanese political system as infidel by nature, and considered the Lebanese government as being an

16 Ironically, Hizballah notes that the name 'IDF' is itself a euphemism since the 'aggressor' is labelled as the 'defender'.

17 At the time, he was head of the Islamic AMAL, and later served as Nasrallah's aide for municipal affairs. Currently, he is a member of Hizballah's parliamentary bloc.

18 AMAL, the Lebanese secular Shi'ite political party with a military wing, was founded by Imam Musa al-Sadr at the outset of the Lebanese civil war in 1975.

19 Nabih Berri, the current leader of AMAL and the Speaker of the Lebanese parliament, has repeatedly stated that AMAL gave birth to Hizballah.

20 Established in 1966. See Waddah Sharara, *Dawlat Hizballah: Lubnan Mujtama'an Islamiyyan [The State of Hizballah: Lebanon as an Islamic Society]*, (Beirut: Al-Nahar, 2006, Fourth edition, pp. 87). It is worth mentioning that Shaykh Na'im Qasim, Hizballah's current deputy Secretary General, was one of its leading founding members.

21 Talal Salman, *Sira Dhatiyya li Haraka Muqawina 'Arabiyya Muntasira: Hizballah [An Autobiography of a Victorious Arab Resistance Movement: Hizballah]*, (Beirut: Al-Safir, June 2000), p. 7.

22 'Ali Al-Kurani, a Hizballah middle rank cadre, was the first to expose the social movement's mobilization strategies in his book entitled, *Tariqat Hizballah fi Al-'Amal Al-Islami [Hizballah's Method of Islamic Mobilization]*, (Tehran: Maktab Al-'Ilam Al-Islami: Al-Mu'assa Al-'Alamiyya, 1985), pp. 183-203.

apostate, that should be uprooted by a top-down revolutionary process and be replaced by the rule of Islam.

Hizballah's reputation as an Islamic resistance movement has been marred by the West's accusation of 'terrorist' operations of global reach; the majority of which were claimed by the Islamic Jihad.²³ Some of the hard power attacks which made Hizballah gain global attention were the US embassy suicide attacks on 18 April 1983²⁴ and 20 September 1984; the 23 October 1983 twin-suicide attacks that led to the death of 241 US marines²⁵ and 58 French paratroopers; the Buenos Aires bombing of the Israeli embassy on 17 March 1992²⁶; and the holding of Western hostages. The Israeli government and the US Administration claim that Hizballah's Islamic Resistance constitutes a semi-clandestine organization and that Islamic Jihad is its clandestine wing.²⁷ In an endeavor to ward off the charges of terrorism, Hizballah's ideologues, leaders, cadres and intellectuals voice a consensus that has systematically and constantly denied any connection or link to Islamic Jihad or acts it has claimed as its own.

Since its inception, Hizballah has adopted Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the jurispudent) as its ideology in the Lebanese social and political conditions. Khomeini's *wilayat al-faqih* was imported to Lebanon, serving as a blueprint for a progressive Islamic state to be emulated by Hizballah in its constituencies. Illustrating the vital importance given to becoming a member of 'Ummat Hizballah', a Hizballah cadre told me, on condition of anonymity, that a person who tried to join the party but failed the process of screening (*ta'tir*) that Hizballah's prospective members undergo three times returned with an assault rifle and killed his recruiting

23 The now defunct 'Islamic Jihad' was at the time the spearhead of radical Shi'ite military factions mobilized on the ideology of fighting Israel, the US, and the West. This Shi'ite 'Islamic Jihad' should not be conflated with the Sunni Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian organization founded by Fathi al-Shaqaqi and Abd al-Aziz 'Awda in Syria during the 1970s.

24 According to US political analysts, this incident served as a blueprint for the Marine's bombing six months later. On this basis, it ought to have served as an omen to the CIA to try to prevent the Marine's bombing. Brent Sadler, 11 GMT News, *CNN*, 23 October 2003. The death toll of the US Embassy in West Beirut was 63 people, out of whom 17 were Americans, including the entire Middle East contingent of the CIA. Ann Byers, *Lebanon's Hezbollah - Inside the World's Most Infamous Terrorist Organizations*, (London: Rosen Publishing Group, 2003), pp. 26-35.

25 The same sources claim that the 12,000 ton explosion was the largest non-nuclear device that resulted, in one instance, in the largest number of US casualties since WWII. Until now, the US holds Iran and Hizballah responsible for the incident. *Ibid.*, 28-33.

26 In retaliation to Israel's assassination of Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, Hizballah's second Secretary General, on 16 February 1992.

27 Shaul Shay, *The Axis of Evil: Iran, Hizballah, and the Palestinian Terror*, (London: Transaction Publishers, 2005), pp. 89-100; Byers, op. cit, pp. 36-49; Ely Karmon, *Fight on all Fronts: Hizballah, the War on Terror, and the War on Iraq*, Policy Focus, no. 46, (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2003), pp. 1-29.

officer. Another member told me that as a practice of indoctrination and as an initiation ceremony, new Hizballah recruits had to repeatedly state: 'If the jurisprudent told you to kill yourself, then you have to do it'.²⁸ This illustrates not only indoctrination but also the total obedience to the *faqih*.

In the early 1980s, Khomeini instructed 'Ali Khamina'i, who was at the time Deputy Minister of Defence, to take full responsibility of the Lebanese Hizballah. Since then, Khamina'i has become Hizballah's 'godfather'. That is why, since its inception, Hizballah, based on a religious and ideological stance, fully abides by the ideas and opinions of Khomeini as communicated by Khamina'i. During that initial period, the religious/ideological bond between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Lebanon could be examined from the following declarations by Hizballah and Iranian officials—Shaykh Hasan Trad: 'Iran and Lebanon are one people in one country'; Sayyid Ibrahim Amin Al-Sayyid: 'We do not say that we are part of Iran, we are Iran in Lebanon and Lebanon in Iran'; Ali Akbar Muhtashami: 'We are going to support Lebanon politically and militarily like we buttress one of our own Iranian districts'; Shaykh Hasan Srur: 'We declare to the whole world that the Islamic Republic of Iran is our mother, religion, *Ka'ba*, and our veins'.²⁹

In the 1980s, Hizballah advocated the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon and maintained the *ahl al-dhimma* category with respect to non-Muslims.³⁰ In spite of its exhortation of Christians to convert to Islam, Hizballah did not seek to impose this conversion by force. Rather, the party applied its theory of tolerance to those Christians living in its constituencies, as well as to other Christians, as long as they were not 'treacherous or aggressive'. In conformity with the Prophetic tradition and the Qur'an, Hizballah stressed that there should be 'no compulsion in religion' (Qur'an 2:256) and an 'equitable world' (Qur'an 3:64) or common ground that should guide relationships between Muslims and Christians. As such, it emphasized that the common ground between *ahl al-dhimma* and Muslims involves the social values of mutual tolerance, respect, brotherhood, and solidarity. On this basis, Hizballah recognized the human freedom, that is, social and religious freedom, of Christians but *not* their political autonomy, as was the case in the 1926 French Mandate Constitution and 1943 Independence Constitution. Thus, in the 1980s, contrary to the Prophetic tradition that granted non-Muslims partnership in political structures, Hizballah's 'tolerance' or 'inclusiveness' excluded Christians from political life, which could be regarded as a discriminatory practice. Hizballah's then policy seemed to imply that toler-

28 Mahdi N. and 'Abdallah S., interviews by the author conducted in Beirut, October 21 and 25, 2004, respectively.

29 *Al-'Abd* 8 (21 Dhul-Qadah 1404/August 17, 1984): 6.

30 Minorities, such as Christians and Jews, were treated as residents holding limited rights and required to pay a poll tax in lieu of almsgiving (*zakat*).

ance is the responsibility of the 'majority' and integration is the responsibility of the 'minority'.

Therefore, in the 1980s Hizballah became a closed sectarian social movement. Through heavy reliance on a strict application of Imam Khumayni's *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship by the jurispudent), 'Hizballah – The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon' emerged as an internally strong organization with limited following. Al-Tufayli repeatedly stressed Hizballah's aim of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon as part of an all-encompassing regional Islamic state, headed by Iran. This unprecedented commitment to the Islamic state in Lebanese political discourse backfired domestically alienating Hizballah from other political and social movements, and from an effective position within the Lebanese political sphere. Thus, Hizballah's policies were counter-productive, leading to the failure of its integration into Lebanese political life.

Since 1985, there developed a number of changes in Hizballah's ideological identification with Iran's ruling elite. Hizballah argued that during the early phase of its formation, it needed a unifying religious-political ideology, rather than an elaborate political program. Thus, it based itself on *wilayat al-faqih* and regarded Khomeini as the jurisconsult of *all* Muslims.³¹ In the beginning, the organization was, ideologically, completely dependent on Khomeini. Later on this dependency witnessed some leeway, in the sense that Hizballah did not blindly follow the Iranian regime; rather, it had some specificity (*khususiyya*), since in his capacity as the Supreme Leader (*Rahbar*), Khomeini was endowed with the sole right to determine the legitimacy (legitimate authority) of Hizballah. Khomeini highlighted certain precepts within which Hizballah could move freely; however, he left their implementation to the party's discretion. Thus, although Hizballah was ideologically dependent on the Iranian regime, it had some room to maneuver in its decisions pertaining to some cases in Lebanese domestic affairs. Even though the fragmentation of religious authority, that is, the multiplicity of *marja's* among the Shiites, continued after Khomeini's death, in Hizballah's case the issue of *marja'iyya* was determined on the doctrinal-ideological basis of following the official *marja' al-taqlid*, who is recognized by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Thus, Hizballah's religious authority was and still is the Iranian *faqih*. This made the transition after Khomeini's death smoother.

Up until 1991, Hizballah considered the Qur'an as the constitution of the Islamic Umma and Islam as both a religious and a governmental order (*din wa dawla*). The party enjoined Muslims to strive, using all legitimate means, in order to implement the Islamic order, wherever they might be.³² In the

31 Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, *National Broadcasting Network*, July 21, 2002.

32 'Ali al-Kurani, op. cit. ; Muhammad Z'aytir, *Nazra 'ala Tarh Al-Jumburiyya Al-Islamiyya fi Lubnan* [A Look at the Proposal of the Islamic Republic in Lebanon] (Beirut: Al-Wikala Al Sharqiyya lil-Tawzi', 1988).

period 1985–1991, Hizballah regarded the Lebanese political system, which was dominated by the political Maronites (Catholic Christians), as a *jabiliyya* (pre-Islamic pagan) system. It applied this classification to every non-Islamic system: be it patriotic, democratic, or nationalistic, even if it were governed by Muslims.³³ In other words, Hizballah pursued the establishment of an Islamic state from the perspective of religious and political ideology. The religious ideology, as Hizballah's leading cadres argued, enjoined adherents to instate God's sovereignty and divine governance on earth through *hakimiyya* and to execute God's law by instituting an Islamic order as a *taklif shar'i* (religious and legal obligation). According to the political ideology, Hizballah did not want to impose an Islamic order by force unless an overwhelming majority of the Lebanese voted in its favour through a referendum. This should be taken with apprehension since Hizballah's rhetoric was different from what it was actually doing on the ground; it was actively engaged in preparing the way for establishing an Islamic order, through a bottom-up process, at least in its constituencies.

Hizballah's Integration in the Political System

In its third stage of evolution, from 1992 onwards, Hizballah has experienced a considerable ideological shift. Hizballah succeeded in adding electoral politics to its political capital (Sunnis and Christians on Hizballah's electoral slates). Hizballah's clandestine military organ, the Islamic Jihad disappeared from its symbolic capital; the prominent role was given to Hizballah's semi-clandestine military wing, the Islamic Resistance. Finally, Hizballah accumulated more social and economic capital by way of the benefiting of Sunni and Christian grassroots from its NGO's services, which could be regarded as one of the measures or social dynamics of the Party's *infitah* ('opening-up') policy. Thus, Hizballah reinterpreted its seemingly irredentist³⁴ ideology and evolved, more and more, into an 'ordinary' political party, with an extensive network of social services (open to both Muslims and Christians), and participated in parliamentary, municipal, and governmental work.

As a prelude to contesting the 1992 legislative elections, Hizballah gained more resources, moderated its discourse, initiated several policies to broaden its appeal to a larger constituency, and embarked on further institutionalization. Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi, Hizballah's second secretary-general, initiated a policy of openness (*infitah*) and dialogue toward the Lebanese myriad³⁵. Af-

33 Muhammad Z'aytir, *Al-Mashru' Al-Maruni fi Lubnan: Juzuruhu wa Tatawwuratuhu*.

34 Because of Hizballah's adherence to, and following of, *wilayat al-faqih* – which is a transnationalist ideology. Irredentism refers to the 'dissatisfaction with the incongruity between territorial borders and [Benedict Anderson's] "imagined communities"'. See Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Policy of Middle East States*, (Boulder, Co.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 7.

35 The Lebanese myriad or mosaic refers to the ethnic composition of the Lebanese communities that comprise Lebanon, including the officially recognised 18 sects.

ter al-Musawi's death, his student and successor Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, the third secretary-general, continued this process of mobilization and organization at the grassroots level to support advocacy in and outside of parliament.³⁶

The year 1992 was a central year in shaping Hizballah's evolving identity. The party faced a challenge in deciding whether to participate in the parliamentary elections or not. Hizballah's twelve-member committee took a positive decision after much heated internal debate and discussions, followed by Iranian arbitration (*tahkim*). Since the *faqih* is the one who determines 'legitimacy' (even in practical political matters), Khamina'i had to intercede and grant legitimacy for participation. This caused a considerable schism within Hizballah, because Subhi al-Tufayli, Hizballah's first secretary-general, contested the decision and pursued a confrontational stance with the party and the Lebanese state. Al-Tufayli held a high post in the leadership of Hizballah in the early 1980s. Nevertheless, he later created minor dissent in the party for reasons that apparently were socioeconomic ('Revolution of the Hungry' in 1997) but, in fact, involved control of the Ba'albak region. Al-Tufayli today represents that category of Hizballah member who still upholds the Iranian revolutionary ideology of the 1980s. He repeatedly accused Hizballah of 'protecting the borders of Israel' since it prevents *jihadis* from targeting it or crossing the border, and he criticized Iran for 'serving the interests of the US'. Al-Tufayli emphatically stated, 'This is not the Hizballah I founded, and this is not the Iran of Khomeini'.³⁷

Asef Bayat has noted that Islamic movements like Hizballah are constituted of many layers and orientations that make up a collectivity, but one that is fluid and fragmented. This collectivity remains coherent when its leaders are successful in creating a hegemonic reading of events that gains consensus among its followers. This means that there is always a danger of losing adherents due to integration or moderation. This can lead the more radical elements of the social movement, such as al-Tufayli, to leave the movement because they disagree with the course it is taking.³⁸

By giving an extended interpretation to the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* – i.e. applying it to the Lebanese multi-confessional, multi-religious society, rather than to 'monolithic' Iran, with its predominantly Shi'ite majority – the committee strongly recommended participation in the elections. This was in harmony with Hizballah's holistic vision, which favored living up to the expectations of the people by serving their socioeconomic and political interests. The committee added that Hizballah's greater *jihad* and dedication to addressing

36 Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizballah's Ideology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 38–42.

37 See Subhi al-Tufayli, interview by Tha'ir 'Abbas, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* 9067 (September 25, 2003).

38 Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

the plight of the people did not contradict its priority of a smaller military jihad for the sake of the liberation of occupied land. As such, participating in elections would lead to the achievement of good political results and could also be regarded as a leading step toward interaction with others. By this, Hizballah presents a novel experience in the *infatih* ('opening-up') of a young Islamic party. The committee stressed that this participation was in accordance with the Lebanese specificities (*khususiyat*) as well as the nature of the proposed elections, which allowed for a considerable margin of freedom of choice. In short, the committee concluded that the sum total of the pros (*masalih*) outweighed the cons (*mafasid*) by far. That was why participation in the parliament would be worthwhile, since it was viewed as one of the ways of influencing change and making Hizballah's voice heard, not only domestically but also regionally and internationally through the podiums made available to the members of parliament.³⁹ Thus, it seems that political circumstances, the Ta'if Agreement-Lebanon's new 1990 constitution- and the end of the civil war forced Hizballah to adjust to a new phase in its history by propagating a matter-of-fact political program and by merging into the Lebanese political system.

A further shift occurred in the interpretation of the authority of the jurist-prudent (*faqih*) when Hizballah argued that it did not consider the current regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran as the jurisconsult of all Muslims and, in consequence, not all Islamic movements had to abide by the orders and directives of the *faqih* or the regime.⁴⁰ Religious capital was consolidated when, in May 1995, Imam Khamina'i appointed Nasrallah and Shaykh Muhammad Yazbik, head of the religio-judicial council, as his religious deputies (*wakilayn shar'iyyan*) in Lebanon. This move granted Hizballah special prerogatives and delegated responsibilities (*taklif shar'i*) that reflect a great independence in practical performance. Thus, Hizballah consolidated its financial resources, since the one-fifth religious tax (*khums*)⁴¹ imposed on those Lebanese Shiites who followed Khamina'i as their authority of emulation (*marja'*), as well as their alms (*zakat*) and religious (*shar'i*) monies, would pour directly into Hizballah coffers, instead of being channelled through Iran, as had been the case.

39 Na'im Qasim, *Hizballah: Al-Manhaj, Al-Tajriba, Al-Mustaqbal* [Hizballah: The curriculum, the experience, the future], 7th rev. and updated ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Mahajja Al-Bayda', 2010), pp. 337–343.

40 Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, *National Broadcasting Network*, August 4, 2002.

41 One-fifth: a 'religious tax' comprising 20% on a person's surplus of income over necessary living expenses according to the Shi'ite interpretation of the Qur'anic verse (8:41): {And know that whatever booty you take [in war], the fifth thereof is for Allah, the Apostle, the near of kin, the orphan, and the wayfarer, if you really believe in Allah and what We revealed to Our servant on the day of decision [battle of *Badr*, decision between the forces of faith and unbelief], the day when the two hosts meet. Allah has power over everything}. Half is paid to the *marja'* (religious authority) as the representative of the Imam (*sahm al-Imam*), and half to the Sayyids. Noteworthy, the more followers a *marja'* has, the more powerful he is, both financially and religiously.

The interpretation of authority took another dramatic shift after the Syrian withdrawal in April 2005. In conformity with its policy to change when circumstances change, Hizballah switches from Iranian to local authority when it suits its purposes. Although the watershed decision to participate in the Lebanese cabinet ideologically required the *shar'i* judgment and legitimacy of the *faqih*, Hizballah set a precedent by securing religious approval and legitimacy from Shaykh 'Afif al-Nabulsi⁴²—at the time, the head of the Association of Shi'ite Religious Scholars of Jabal 'Amil in south Lebanon—and not Khamina'i, a move that indicates even more independence in decision making.

Thus, Hizballah heeds Lebanese religious authority in addition to the Iranian one, and therefore, its participation in the Lebanese cabinet was relegated to an administrative matter, not a doctrinal one. Consequently, Hizballah's leadership was capable of taking independent decisions. Instantly, Hizballah joined the cabinet with two ministers and proliferated in Lebanese state institutions and the administrative structure just before the conservative Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and his government were sworn to power in Iran. This led to increased Lebanonization that is more in line with the specificities (*khususiyat*) of Lebanese society, rather than blind adherence to Iran.

Therefore, Hizballah moved from complete ideological dependency on Khomeini to much less dependency after his death. The party gained more independence in decision making, not only in practical political issues but also in military and doctrinal issues, to the extent that it seems as if Hizballah exercised almost independent decision making, at least in some cases. Even in military matters, Hizballah does not always heed Iranian orders if they do not serve its overall interest (*maslaha*⁴³). Two cases in point that illustrate this trend are Sharon's 'April 2002 West Bank counterterrorism offensive' and Barak's December 2008–January 2009 'Operation Cast Lead' in Gaza. Iran strongly urged Hizballah to open the northern front across the Lebanese–Israeli border in order to release pressure on the Palestinians,⁴⁴ but Hizballah adamantly refused because such a move was considered detrimental to its national interest (*maslaha*). This trend continued after Ahmadinejad won a second term in the controversial June 2009 presidential elections, and president Ruhani's ascension to power in 2013.

42 Al-Nabulsi argued that from a political standpoint there was a certain wisdom and interest (*maslaha*) that called upon Hizballah to participate on the basis of the maxims of Islamic jurisprudence. He added that the political situation lifted any prohibition on Hizballah's participation since it safeguards law and order in Lebanese society (*National News Agency*, 10 August 2005; and see Lebanese daily newspapers the next day).

43 *Maslaha* has an Islamic connotation. It refers to one of the maxims of Islamic jurisprudence (*qawa'id al-fiqh*), which states that the avoidance of vice is always preferable to any benefit that might accrue from the act.

44 This information is based on interviews I have conducted with high-ranking cadres, including members of the Consultative (*Shura*) Council.

Although Hizballah was inspired by the Islamic Revolution, it operates like any ordinary political party functioning within a non-Islamic state and a multi-religious confessional and sectarian state. Hizballah cannot go beyond being a political party operating within the Lebanese public sphere. That is why, for instance, in the parliamentary elections, it reached out and allied itself with secular parties and former enemies on the Lebanese scene, like any political party that accommodates protest via negotiations and bargaining, making compromises on some doctrinal aspects. In the process, Hizballah moved from separation to integration into Lebanese society, eventually becoming part of the national state. Hizballah's voting behaviour in the legislature progressively shifted from (1) voting against granting confidence to the cabinet between 1992 and 1996 to (2) abstaining between 1998 and 2004 to (3) voting for confidence since 2005, the year the party joined the cabinet. Thus, Hizballah granted its approval only after it participated.

These changed framing processes and new mobilization tactics are evidence of Hizballah's attempts to transcend communal boundaries by creating imagined solidarities and having partially shared interests with other communities.⁴⁵ This is necessary since the existing Lebanese political system mandates intercommunity cooperation, which suggests that Hizballah has learned to operate within the established political framework. Furthermore, the party needs to be careful not to revert to its extremist image because this could lead to a loss of the resources it gained due to its moderation. Hizballah as a social movement gained political power in this stage of its evolution. This empowerment reinforces its identification with its national context, though not at the expense of its regional and transnational solidarities.

Hizballah shifted its political strategy from a gradual integration in the Lebanese public sphere in the 1990s, to attempting to manipulate the Lebanese public sphere after the assassination of PM Hariri and the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, and to endeavoring to exercise hegemony over the Lebanese public sphere after the 'Second Lebanon War' in the summer of 2006 by means of changing the political system through obtaining veto power in the cabinet, the main executive branch of government.

The tug-of-war between the Hizballah-led opposition (March 8 Group), on the one hand, and the Lebanese cabinet and its supporters (March 14 Trend), on the other, led to bitter polarization, which plunged Lebanon into 537 days of stalemate and political deadlock, from December 1, 2006, to May 21, 2008. Tensions reached unprecedented highs and the snowball exploded in May 2008 into violent military confrontations in the streets of the Lebanese capital and Mount Lebanon.

45 Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26.6 (2005): 891–908.

The 'Doha Accord' of May 21, 2008, between March 14 and March 8, negotiated by the Arab League, granted Hizballah veto power in the next national unity thirty-member cabinet by a margin of eleven ministers, while March 14 acquired sixteen ministers, and the president, three. Hizballah ended its sit-in in downtown Beirut and dismantled its tent city. After six months of vacuum in the seat of the presidency, the consensus president, army commander general Michel Sulayman, was elected on May 25, 2008, by 118 votes out of 127 MPs.

Hizballah flexed its military muscle in order to gain veto power, which proved to be a short-term political gain. However, the experience was negative in the cabinet since it led to the paralysis of the state institutions, an eventuality that convinced the party to discard this newly gained political capital. The hegemony wave subsided after the Hizballah-led opposition lost the 2009 legislative elections. Hizballah took a reality pill and contended itself with minor political gains for the sake of upholding the fragile consensual democracy, the fulcrum of the political system.

Hizballah as a Major Player in the Lebanese Fabric

While pursuing policies that work within the electoral fabric of Lebanon, Hizballah did not abandon its rhetoric vis-à-vis the *wilayat al-faqih*. In fact, it legitimized its political program of working within a multicultural, multi-religious country with reference to *wilayat al-faqih* without encroaching upon its doctrinal-ideological, Islamic-religious convictions.⁴⁶ In May 2008, after March 8 gained veto power in the Lebanese cabinet, Nasrallah reiterated, I am honoured to be a member of the party of *wilayat al-faqih*. The just, knowledgeable, wise, courageous, righteous, honest, and faithful faqih... *Wilayat al-faqih* tells us [Hizballah] that Lebanon is a multi-confessional, multi-religious country that you have to preserve and uphold.⁴⁷

With this unshakable commitment to *wilayat al-faqih*, Hizballah reformulated what it meant by an Islamic state by making a categorical distinction between *al-fikr al-siyasi* (political ideology), which it maintained, and *al-barnamaj al-siyasi* (political program), which it promoted. From an ideological perspective, Hizballah is committed to an Islamic state, and it will not be dropped as a legal abstraction. However, the party's political program has to take into account the political status quo and the overall functioning of the Lebanese political system. Hizballah characterizes the Lebanese political situation as a complicated mould of sectarian-confessional specificities that prohibit the establishment of an Islamic state, not only from a practical perspective but also from a doctrinal one. Hizballah's political ideology stip-

46 Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, cited in Hasan 'Izzeddine, "How Is Hizballah Looked Upon and How Does It Introduce Itself?" *Al-Safir*, November 12, 2001.

47 *Al-Intiqad* 1267 (May 30, 2008).

ulates that an Islamic state should be established on solid foundations having full legitimacy and sovereignty from the people. Since the general will of the Lebanese people is against the establishment of an Islamic state, then it is not plausible to establish one.

In an atmosphere of optimism, Hizballah revealed its new political platform on 30 November 2009 when it reconstructed its identity by forging a second Manifesto, which presents a complete overhaul to its 1985 founding document, the Open Letter.

Although the 2009 Manifesto neither mentions the Islamic state nor refers to *wilayat al-faqih*, Nasrallah affirmed that there is no contradiction/opposition between Hizballah's belief in *wilayat al-faqih*, on the one hand, and the erection of a strong institutionalized Lebanese state, on the other. On the contrary, *wilayat al-faqih* sanctions and allows Hizballah's integration into the political system. Not only that, in line with the Vatican's position and papal guidance, Nasrallah added that Hizballah believes that Lebanon is a blessing and has accomplished great historical achievements. He reiterated Imam Musa al-Sadr's stance that 'Lebanon is the definitive nation to all its citizens', which is in conformity with the Lebanese constitution.⁴⁸

Thus, Hizballah shifted its position through its acceptance of and engagement in the democratic process under a sectarian-confessional political and administrative system. More dramatically, Hizballah's political program modified its demand for the abolition of political sectarianism and adopted the political Maronite discourse, which stresses the abolition of political sectarianism in mentality before eradicating it in the texts. In line with the Ta'if Agreement and its earlier election programs, Hizballah's 2009 Manifesto called for the establishment of a 'National Body for the Abolition of Political Sectarianism', since sectarianism is perceived as a threat to consensual democracy and national coexistence.⁴⁹ Although Nasrallah deemed the sectarian system a tribal system, he clarified:

Let us be realistic. The abolition of political sectarianism is one of the most difficult issues and cannot be accomplished overnight. . . . [N]obody can dictate how to abolish it in a sentence or two. Rather, if after years of debate, ranging from five to thirty years, we find out that political sectarianism cannot be abolished, then let us be bold enough to say that what we agreed upon in the Ta'if Agreement cannot be realized. However, till then, the Lebanese need to found the 'National Body for the Abolition of Political Sectarianism' in order to initiate the debate in a constructive manner.⁵⁰

48 Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, press conference, broadcasted live on *Al-Manar* TV, 30 November 2009, at 13:30 GMT.

49 Alagha, *Hizballah's Documents*, 32.

50 Nasrallah, press conference, 30 November 2009.

The 2009 Manifesto delineates an almost complete Lebanonization of Hizballah, at least in discourse, since it no longer included transnational links such as wilayat al-faqih and the Islamic state in its primary frame of authority. Furthermore, it gives primacy to the national political arena for achieving national goals that would be beneficial to all Lebanese. Moreover, the manifesto represents Hizballah's ideological shifts in assimilating into the political system to accomplish its goals through political initiatives and continued cooperation with other parties. It seems this manifesto might signify Hizballah's trajectory toward a post-Islamist trend in practice, thus transcending Islamism, its exclusivist platform, and evolving in the pluralistic political reality of Lebanon, even though certain Islamist rhetoric might still be voiced and although Hizballah's political interests keep it an ally of the Islamist regime in Iran.

Hizballah laid the groundwork for this precept of practice earlier. On 26 May 2008, the party celebrated the eighth anniversary of the nearly complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon through a fiery speech delivered by Nasrallah, who stressed that Hizballah abides by the Ta'if Agreement, will honour the Doha Accord to the letter, and will continue to participate in the political system as it is. Nasrallah's stance remained the same after the fiasco of March 8 to acquire the majority of the seats in the June 2009 legislative elections. Hizballah gave up its veto power and helped to broker a national unity cabinet on 9 November 2009, based on the previously agreed-on power-sharing formula: fifteen seats for March 14, five seats for the centralist coalition of the president, and ten seats for March 8. Although Hizballah ruled Lebanon by democratic means in 2011 when it obtained majority in the parliament and the cabinet, it represented itself with only two ministers, while it gave its Christian allies 12 ministers, including the ministries of defense and interior. Since then, in the recurring cabinets, contrary to its military power and demographic strength, in an endeavor to uphold consensual democracy, Hizballah contented itself with two ministers and ceded other ministerial seats for the sake of national unity and coexistence. Further measures of political compromise, such as conceding ministerial quotas to Sunni and Christian representatives in the cabinet, suggest that Hizballah remains committed indeed to a mode of governance that is inherently communal, pluralist, and representative.

From Terrorism and Global Reach to the Arab Spring

Hizballah is infamous for its 'terrorist' global reach and militant face. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Hizballah abducted Westerners in Lebanon and fought the Israeli army, until Israel withdrew its forces from Lebanon in 2000, after 22 years of occupation. Hizballah reaped political capital and boosted its pan-Arab and pan-Islamic credentials as being the only guerrilla movement that forced Israel to withdraw and return land, while regular Arab armies succumbed to Israel's military might. In the wake of the 2011 Arab Revolutions,

the new policy shift resulted in Hizballah's loss of most of its accumulated pan-Arab and pan-Islamic capital since the party was viewed as a sectarian movement aiding Shi'ites, irrespective if they were oppressors or oppressed. In this Arab Spring/Uprisings, Hizballah is fighting alongside the Syrian regime and lending logistical support to the Iraqi and Yemeni Shi'ite armed militias. So, how could such a radical organization continue to exercise militancy and deplete its resources in regional wars, while at the same time it plays a prominent role in Lebanese domestic politics, thus ironically earning it legitimacy for its regional adventures from the Lebanese state and its institutions?

Hizballah's Stance on the Arab Spring

Hizballah was elated by the Tunisian and Egyptian street politics and youth power. In this Arab Spring, Hizballah issued political declarations blessing the Tunisian and Egyptian people, in particular, and the Arab masses, in general, for their drive for 'freedom and dignity.' Hizballah's Secretary General Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah added, 'This is the true path when people believe in their resolve... this is the new Middle East created by its own people.' He concluded, 'Your Spring has begun; no one can lead you to another winter. Your belief, vigilance, and resilience will overcome all difficulties and make you triumphant.'⁵¹

Hizballah supported the Arab street with the exception of Syria, where it adamantly stood by the Syrian regime, its indispensable strategic ally. Hizballah lent its coreligionist Bahraini populace unwavering support in the face of the Sunni ruling elite. This stance led some political analysts to criticize such 'double standards'. Being on the defensive, Nasrallah tried to defend, justify, and legitimize Hizballah's policies. In terms of geopolitics, Hizballah has repeatedly stated that it would not interfere in any military attack targeting Syria and Iran, unless there is an existential danger facing the two regimes, whereby Hizballah's joining the fight would tilt the balance in favor of the aggressed upon parties. Therefore, Nasrallah repeatedly stated that Hizballah will only resort to fighting in Syria in case of extreme necessity.

Hizballah's Involvement in the Syrian Crisis and the Lebanese Repercussions

On May 25, 2013, Nasrallah deemed it an existential necessity and blatantly announced that Hizballah has entered the Syrian fight on the side of the regime. Invoking the 'Divine Victory' legacy of 2006 July War with Israel, Nasrallah emphatically promised his constituency another victory, which materialized on June 12, 2013, when the party 'liberated' *Qusayr* from the Syrian opposition fighters.⁵²

51 Joseph Alagha, *Hizballah's Identity Construction*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 188.

52 <http://www.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27814&cid=141#.UaXNXaFKSSo>

Employing anti-takfiri discourse, Hizballah interfered in the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria in order to protect its back and fend off the militant Sunni fundamentalist threat originating from there. Of course, Hizballah's military involvement was welcomed by its strategic ally, the Syrian regime, which considers it a boost in its fight against 'armed gangs' South Lebanon Army (SLA) and 'international terrorism' or 'jihadis affiliated with al-Qa'ida', as the Syrian regime labels the military opposition. Hizballah accused the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as being traitors, collaborators with the 'enemy', as the defunct SLA did during the IDF occupation of southern Lebanon. As such, Hizballah accused the FSA of furthering the Israeli-US agenda in the Middle East, or of creating the 'New Middle East of Condoleeza Rice', the ex-Secretary of State.

Domestically, Hizballah traded accusations with the Western-backed *March 14* coalition, which compared Hizballah's military intervention in Syria with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) occupation of Lebanon in order to protect Israel from the attacks of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance. According to *March 14*, Hizballah behaved like the IDF by invading and occupying land and encroaching on the 'sovereignty and territorial integrity' of Syria, a UN member country, in order to protect its back.. Furthermore, *March 14* argued that Hizballah's involvement in the Syrian civil war is diminishing its availability across the Lebanese-Israeli border and is distracting its vigilance in dealing with any Israeli imminent threat.

Due to its strategic interest and its fear of losing its backyard, its 'vital space' (élan vital), as well as an easy weapon's supply route, Hizballah involved itself in the Syrian quagmire. It sent fighters, in spite of the heavy blood price it has to pay and the fear of depleting its human and material resources, especially after losing fighters everyday. Sayyid Nasrallah conceded Hizballah's limited capabilities and argued that his party cannot change the outcome of the Syrian war, but can offer logistical and material help to the Syrian Army and train it for guerrilla warfare: 'We went to Syria to defend Lebanon... we did it by a personal decision, rather than heeding an Iranian order.' Nasrallah accused Saudi Arabia of waging proxy wars in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and more importantly in Syria by its material and military support of radical Islamist groups fighting the regime.⁵³

In addition to many radical Lebanese Sunni Islamists volunteering to fight against the Syrian regime, jihadi Salafis such as the Shaykh Ahmad al-Asir of Sidon and Shaykh Salem al-Rāfi'i of Tripoli sent fighters en masse. The Sunni-Shi'a strife (*fitna*) in Lebanon appeared to be unavoidable. On June 23, 2013, violent military clashes in Sidon erupted between Hizballah and

53 See his interview with *OTV* on December 3, 2013, and his speech of December 20, 2013, commemorating the assassination of Hassan al-Laquis, a leading cadre of the Islamic Resistance, Hizballah's military wing.

Shaykh Ahmad al-Asir supporters. After many dead and wounded fell, the Lebanese Army intervened and ended the fight, but at a high price. Al-Asir's headquarters were destroyed and many of his supporters were arrested. Al-Asir fled and his whereabouts are unknown to date. My omen became a painful reality when, on November 19, 2013, two supporters of al-Asir conducted a twin-suicide operation against the Iranian Embassy, located at *Dahiya* – the heart of Hizballah's den and stronghold of the southern suburb of Beirut, killing 23 people. Previously, the *Dahiya* was targeted by rockets and two massive explosions: the first on July 7, 2013 led to a few deaths, while that of August 15, 2013, killed 31 people, after which Hizballah agreed to the deployment of the Lebanese Army and security forces. On January 16, 2014, a suicide bomber detonated a car in *Hirmel*, Hizballah's stronghold in the *Biqā'*, killing two and wounding more than 46. For the next two days, the Syrian Islamists continued to target *Hirmel* with sporadic rockets. On January 21, 2014, another suicide bomber detonated a car in *Dahiya* killing three and wounding 35 people.

On September 28, 2013, violent confrontations erupted between militant Sunnis and Hizballah fighters in the *Balbaak*, in the outskirts of the Eastern *Biqā'* valley. As was the case in *Dahiya*, this eventually led to the deployment of the Lebanese Army and security forces in the city, thus returning sovereignty to the state after the apparent failure of private security measures for a second time. On August 23, 2013, two car bombs targeted two Sunni mosques in Tripoli, north Lebanon – the second largest Sunni city after Beirut. Regular skirmishes and seven mini-wars in Tripoli erupted between the Sunnis, who support *March 14*, and the 'Alawis, who support the Syrian regime. In short, unfortunately, what *Hizballah's DNA* admonished against two years ago – namely that the Syrian uprising will spill over to Lebanon with drastic and detrimental consequences, the most salient of which is the feared *fitna* – became a painful reality.

In August 2014, the most serious spillover of the Syrian civil war occurred when takfiri jihadis from the "Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) and "Victory Front" (*Jabhat al-Nusra*) raided and occupied the border town of *Irsal*. The Lebanese Army intervened. After a few days, the takfiris were defeated and they headed back to Syria, but they were able to kidnap 30 Lebanese soldiers and security forces personnel. To the time of writing this article, the takfir's executed four Lebanese military, threatening more executions if the Lebanese government does not comply with their demands and release a number of hardcore Sunni militants responsible for earlier deadly confrontations with the Lebanese Army. On December 2, 2014, the takfiris ambushed seven Lebanese Army soldiers – near the arid boarder area of *Ras Ba'albak* – killing six and wounding one. Therefore, the tendency of targeting the Lebanese Army and Security Forces is on the rise.

Power Vacuum in Lebanon in Light of the Syrian Crisis and the Regional Dynamics

Domestically, the Syrian civil war led to a political deadlock/stalemate and an unprecedented political paralysis. Lebanon was witnessing a power vacuum, the paralysis of institutions, and the hovering omen of civil unrest. Hizballah benefited from the Arab Spring in order to spread its hegemony over Lebanon through democratic means. In January 2011, the party and its allies forged a majority in the parliament and formed a cabinet. The cabinet collapsed two months before Hizballah's overt acknowledgement of involvement in the Syrian quagmire on May 25, 2013. Although a national unity cabinet headed by PM Tammam Salam took the helm of government in February 2014, the Syrian quagmire made it difficult for it to operate efficiently. Nominal power vacuum has been reigning in Lebanon, where there are no properly running institutions and the rule of law is compromised. In March 2013 and November 2014, the parliament extended its mandate twice – something unprecedented since the end of the civil war in 1990 – thus, down trotting popular will and sovereignty. The office of the President has been vacant since May 2014. This situation increased sectarian tensions, especially the Sunni-Shi'a divide or discord (*fitna*). In spite of the relative stability of Lebanon, like the Arab Uprisings, the country lacks a clear ideological vision, unified leadership, and has serious problems with institutionalization and constitutionalism.

It seems that power vacuum in Lebanon serves Hizballah's interests, although the discourse of its leading cadres is otherwise. Hizballah is buying time until the tide changes in its favor: it engages in diplomacy, negotiations, bargaining, and is ready to make concessions in the power-sharing Lebanese 'consociational'/consensual democratic political system.

Conclusion

Hizballah witnessed remarkable transformations in the past three decades: from its founding as an Islamist movement of social and political protest anathematizing the political order and regarding the Lebanese state as an apostate in the 1980s, to a parliamentary political party since 1992. The party has indeed reformulated some of its central ideas and strategies. In response to the Lebanese national context, the country's multi-religious realities, and the new post-civil war possibilities of successfully operating within a democratic system, prompted Hizballah to integrate into the Lebanese political system. Its political ideology changed in so far as its leaders meanwhile concede that the establishment of an Islamic state would need the full legitimacy and sovereignty from the Lebanese people. Hizballah's former top-down strategy of forcibly imposing an Islamic state against the will of significant parts of the Lebanese society has changed toward an integrative, bottom-up strategy. Hizballah's metamorphosis could be attributed to changed historical and social

circumstances and, more importantly, to the results of interactions with other political actors. Thus, the objective, sociological, and political reality of Lebanon compelled this originally Islamist movement onto the post-Islamist path, even though such post-Islamism remains inconsistent, selective, and pragmatic. It seems Hizballah is still experimenting with the tenets of post-Islamism.⁵⁴

Through heavy reliance on a strict application of Khomeini's *wilayat al-faqih* in the 1980s, 'Hizballah—The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon' emerged as a strong internal organization with a limited following. Subhi al-Tufayli's firm, uncompromising political discourse, and his repeated references to the establishment of an Islamic state, which was unprecedented in Lebanese political discourse, backfired domestically, considerably alienating the party from other political and social movements and from the Lebanese public sphere. Thus, Hizballah's policies were counterproductive, leading to a failure to integrate into Lebanese political life, especially after the party's initial vehement criticisms of the Ta'if Agreement.

Since the early 1990s, Hizballah regarded founding an Islamic state as a 'legal abstraction' and dropped its demands for its implementation in Lebanon. This paved the way for the party to employ the concept of *muwatana* (citizenship) instead of *ahl al-dhimma*. Hizballah's intellectuals based this current practice on a novel interpretation of the Prophetic tradition, as sanctioned by Shi'ite jurisprudence. Thus, since the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, Hizballah has made great strides forward in acknowledging the human, civil, economic, social, cultural, and most importantly, political rights of the so-called *ex-dhimmis*, recognizing their right to full citizenship, as citizens of equal status and rights. This is not a rhetorical shift; rather, it is a major policy alteration, which is being implemented, and it is aimed at making the 'other' secure in a shared Lebanese polity that might one day be dominated by the Shi'ite majority. With this new policy of alliances, diplomacy, negotiations, and bargaining, Hizballah has been able to spread its wings and flanks to a tangible part of the Christian constituents of the country.

Hizballah's commitment to the Arab Spring seems to be selective, pragmatic, contextual, and circumstantial. Hizballah is consistent in its discourse of maintaining its ideological alliance with Iran and its strategic-political alliance with Syria, as its 2009 Manifesto states.⁵⁵ The party is a strong advocate and practitioner of *realpolitik*. As a thoroughgoing realist, Hizballah changes as circumstances themselves change: the party neither hesitates to go against the concept of popular sovereignty nor to interfere, or encroach upon, the sovereignty of other states, regionally (Syria) and internationally (Hizballah's alleged 'terrorist activities' and 'global reach'). It seems Hizballah is facing

54 Joseph Alagha, "Hizballah's Infitah: A Post-Islamist Trend?" in *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam*, ed. Asef Bayat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 240-254.

55 Alagha, *Hizballah's Documents*, 129-131.

the dilemma of asserting *raison de la nation* (pan-Arabism/pan-Islamism) or *raison d'état* (state sovereignty). Most likely, its 'strategic' intervention in Syria has compromised both, including its ideology of supporting the 'oppressed' over the 'oppressor.' Through fuelling Sunni-Shi'a discord (*fitna*), Hibullah has weakened its pan-Islamic credentials by buttressing the state sovereignty of the Syrian regime at the expense of people's sovereignty. This seems to be in accord with the international community, which prefers a weakened Syrian autocratic regime to stay in power to radical Islamists ruling the country. After more than four million refugees⁵⁶ fled to Syria's neighboring countries of Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon⁵⁷, Iraq, and Egypt, the international community has done little to help. If a political settlement is difficult to broker, then the efforts of the international community ought to converge on solving the humanitarian crisis. Still not enough aid is being delivered, and many Syrian refugees, especially children, are dying in the cold and suffering from malnutrition and diseases. In the beginning of December 2014, the U.N.'s World Food Program suspended its aid to the Syrian refugees due to lack of funds. In order to preclude a humanitarian and security crisis, Lebanon called for a 'crisis response plan' aimed at dealing with the 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees residing in the country. Ross Mountain, the U.N. resident coordinator in Lebanon, made the case of an urgent need to deliver aid to keep the county with the highest percentage of refugees to its population stable. Ninette Kelley, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Lebanon, reiterated Mountain's concern of lobbying the international community to donate the estimated \$2.1 billion needed to keep the crisis at bay. Will the international community deliver? Alternatively, will its costly war on ISIL preclude such a humanitarian commitment?

56 Only 1.7 million are registered at the UN.

57 By the acknowledgement of the international community, there are one million and 50 thousand officially registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon (*LBCI*, December 15, 2013). On January 15, 2014, the Lebanese Caretaker PM Najib Miqati announced in Kuwait – at the Second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria – that the Syrian refugees are estimated to number one-fourth of the Lebanese people. See Lebanese daily newspapers the next day; *Al-Afkar* 1640 (January 20, 2014): 30.

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