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THE PREEMINENCE OF HEZBOLLAH: RISE OF SHIITE POWER IN LEBANON

by
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The opportunity to do my graduate studies at AUB is a great opportunity, but I could not have completed it without the support of my lovely wife Joyce, who cheered for me from day one, and who continues to propel me forward. I dedicate this thesis to her.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Shiites were grossly deprived and underrepresented in the young Lebanese Republic. Yet, in a relatively short period of time, they went from being the downtrodden to being one of the strongest political players in Lebanon. Hezbollah, the lead Shiite party in the country, developed from a local Islamic militia to a highly trained and well equipped army. It transformed its image from a terrorist organization to a formidable political party. It morphed into a state within a state with increasing popularity amongst its constituents. How did Hezbollah reach this level of preeminence despite historical, social and political hurdles in the face of Lebanese Shiites? This study will examine the key factors that led to Hezbollah's preeminence: political alliances, social support system, and armed resistance against Israel. The study finds that Hezbollah's masterful act of balancing political alliances, rallying public support, and flaunting the cause of the resistance are the three primary factors that led to its preeminence. Hezbollah eventually emerged as a key permanent player Lebanon, in spite of mounting pressure to disarm it.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Shiites in Lebanon underwent a radical transformation in the twentieth century. For decades, the community had suffered poverty and injustice at the hands of its own countrymen. As a religious sect in a Maronite-Druze-Sunni dominated milieu, the group maintained a quietist approach to survive. Today, Hezbollah, the leading Shiite party, represents a major power player in Lebanon, and the Middle East. In a relatively short period of time, Hezbollah evolved from a local Islamic militia to a highly trained and well equipped army. It transformed its image from a terrorist organization to a formidable political party. It morphed into a state within a state with increasing popularity amongst its constituents. The aim of this research is to uncover the strategy that Hezbollah employed to rise in preeminence. The objective of the study is to outline the measures that Hezbollah took to overcome political, social, and sectarian challenges and gradually ascend to power. In particular, Hezbollah's political alliances, social support system, and armed resistance against Israel formed a driving force to advance its goals and a safety net in the face opposition. Hezbollah has its interests in Lebanon, and it works to secure them by leveraging its political connections, rallying public support, or flaunting the cause of the resistance. If it overplays any of these three tactics, it relies on the other two to gain legitimacy and ground itself in the newly reached position. Hezbollah's controlled and guided use of violence, externally and internally, plus uninterrupted backing from Iran and conditional support from Syria, as well as a wide popular base are foundational pillars for Hezbollah's superiority.

How did Hezbollah balance between these three tactics to exert influence and at the same time defend itself against sectarian or radical charges? How did Hezbollah emerge as a key permanent player in the regional system, despite historical, social and political hurdles in the face of Lebanese Shiites, and in spite of mounting pressure to disarm it? What are the factors that helped Hezbollah succeed in driving its three-pronged strategy forward? To answer these questions, this paper will start by looking at the historical background of Shiite in order to determine their political, social, and economic status in the newly formed Republic of Lebanon. After that, key periods and events that shaped and influenced Lebanese Shiites in general, and Hezbollah in particular, will be examined as interconnected episodes that reveal the interplay of Hezbollah's strategy. Each section will discuss how the situation was favorable for Hezbollah's strategy for preeminence, and how Hezbollah utilized one, two, or all of the three tactics in its quiver to increase its popular support base, and prevent criticism from discrediting its achievements. The strategy, hypothesized in this paper, evolved over the course of Hezbollah's lifetime, and delivered Hezbollah to the height of its power in the summer of 2006, following the war with Israel. The events that followed exhibit Hezbollah's use of the same strategy, but leading to a varying degree of success, as evidenced by the May 2008 conflict.

The story of the Shiites in Lebanon date back to the Umayyad Caliphate (661 – 750), where Shiites lived in Greater Syria with great concentration in Jabal Amil, the Bekaa Valley, and Kiserwan. During the Ottoman period, Shiite feudal families held positions of power in Lebanon. In 1781, Ottoman ruler of Acre, Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar, launched a deadly attack against the Shiites for not supporting him in his war against the Druze. Shiites were thoroughly devastated by the onslaught. By the middle of the twentieth century, an

attitude of defeat and political withdrawal afflicted the impoverished community. It was intensified by the manipulation of Shiite zu'ama, and the feebleness of the Shiite clergy.

In 1959, Imam Musa al-Sadr travelled from Iran to Lebanon, the homeland of his ancestors. He rallied for the betterment of Lebanon as a nation, especially against Israeli aggression. He championed the cause of the Shiites, but not at the expense of other sects. Al-Sadr succeeded in mobilizing and politicizing the Shiites community. He founded the Movement of the Disinherited to repair structures that discriminate against the welfare of the Shiites. The Movement's military wing, Amal, was trained to protect the South's mostly Shiite residents against Israeli-Palestinian crossfire. After al-Sadr's sudden and mysterious disappearance, a great void was left in Amal's leadership, which would eventually cause a schism, and give birth to Hezbollah.

Up until 1979, Amal was the most organized representation of Shiites in Lebanon. However, that was about to change after the breakout of the Islamic revolution in Iran that year. Khomeini, the spiritual and political leader of the revolution sought to establish an Islamic state according to *velayat-e faqih*. He would do so by exporting the revolution to neighboring countries, like Lebanon. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 provided the impetus for a split in Amal and the creation of a local armed group loyal to Khomeini, namely Hezbollah. The emergence of Hezbollah could not be divorced from Iran's comprehensive sponsorship and Syria's acquiescence.

Hezbollah developed a programmatic ideology and an organizational structure that puts it squarely on the Lebanese political stage. The party rests on three primary pillars: the supremacy of Islam, jihad, and the concept of guardianship of the jurisprudent. Hezbollah looks to the Islamic Republic in Iran for guidance on the application of these principles in

Lebanon. Hezbollah masterfully balances between ideological principles and political pragmatism to reach workable compromises in Lebanon. It does so by offering a wide range of services that outclass what the government offers. Consequently, Hezbollah advanced in power and popularity as a result of people's trust in and allegiance to the party

Hezbollah's rise to power was fraught with challenges and oppositions. The period between 1988 and 1990 witnessed the greatest struggle between Hezbollah and Amal for dominance within the Shiite community. Iran and Syria intervened regularly and applied pressure on their respective clients to quell the bloody fighting and normalize relations. As the civil war in Lebanon was coming to an end, Hezbollah exploited its resistance role to keep its weapons. It successfully moderated its rhetoric to secure a legal standing in the new political system. Hezbollah was further vindicated when Israel unilaterally withdrew its troops from Lebanon. Subsequently, pressure on Hezbollah to disarm intensified.

Hezbollah had a freehand in Lebanon because it had arms supplies from Iran and the backing of Syria. However, after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, Syria was blamed for his murder, and evicted out of Lebanon. The events that followed strengthened Hezbollah's local alliances and demonstrated its power to mobilize people. The May 2008 armed conflict highlighted the party's military superiority but simultaneously tarnished its reputation as a pure resistance movement against Israel. Hezbollah's deliberate use of political violence gives more credence to the call to disarm it. Still, Hezbollah retains its weapons stockpile and it is getting increasingly involved in regional conflicts.

In conducting this research, it proved beneficial to consult the work Eitan Azani (*The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization*, 2011), Emmanuel

Karagiannis (*Hizballah as a Social Movement Organization: A Framing Approach*, 2009), Sidney Tarrow (*Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics,* 1998), and Engeland & Rudolph (*From Terrorism to Politics, 2008).* It became apparent that demographic and social changes usher urbanization and the social stratification. In developing nations, this transforms a society from being rural to industrial. The transformation is often so fast that it denies vital services to a part of the population. As a result, deprived communities grow frustrated and organize into protests movements. Azani posits that "a weak governmental system will provide more political opportunities for the growth of protest movements, which will operate to exploit the weakness of the system, build themselves at its expenses, or even capture authority or rule."[1] Movements then gain ascendency and grow in power as tension increases between elites, governments fail to appease or suppress resistance movements, or the power balance changes in the system.[2] An important factor in the development of resistance movements, which was overlooked by researchers for many years, is religion. While Islamic movements are similar in their development to non-Islamic movements, Islam brings in modes of social, political and economic behaviors unique to it.[3]

In studying the transition of resistance movements to political parties, Engeland & Rudolph examined the transition of ten movements around the world to identify common

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[1] Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 5.

[2] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 73-76.

[3] Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 45.

characteristics.[4] They emphasize the importance of looking at successful and failed transitions. They found the following characteristics to be common amongst successful transitions that analyzed: political will, ideology and programme, organization and leadership structure, policies, and internal recognition by the masses. This correlates with Karagiannis' study of Hezbollah as a social movement organization.[5] By using framing theory to explain Hezbollah's growing popularity in Lebanon, Karagiannis shows how Hezbollah uses flexible frames to communicate messages, to its members and sympathizers, which are relevant to the political and socio-economic situation at the time of communication.

CHAPTER II

SHIITE STATUS IN LEBANON

A. Introduction

"*Labaykah Ya Husayn, Labaykah Ya Husayn, Labaykah Ya Husayn."* This is what multitudes of Lebanese Shiites shout at the top of their lungs with synchronized fists

[4] Anisseh Van Engeland, Rachael M. Rudolph, *From Terrorism to Politics* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008)

[5] Emmanuel Karagiannisaziz, "Hizballah as a Social Movement Organization: A Framing Approach," *Mediterranean Politics* 14, no. 3 (2009), 365-383.

punching the air, when the secretary general of Hezbollah, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, emboldens them to fight alongside the Islamic Resistance. Lest anyone accuses the Sayyid of manipulating or brainwashing the crowds, he proclaims it publicly and make it very clear that "*Labaykah Ya Husayn"* means to proudly offer one's life and family for holy war (*Jihad)*.[6] As they hear that, the crowds proclaim their consecration for the cause of *Housien* even louder.

Many people are willing to die for what they believe in. History is filled with martyrs who sacrificed their lives for religious, political or social causes. However, the Shiite dedication and allegiance to Hezbollah is worthy of special attention for a number of reasons. In a relatively short period of time, Hezbollah developed from a local Islamic militia to a highly trained and well equipped army. It transformed its image from a terrorist organization to a formidable political party. It morphed into a state within a state with increasing popularity between its constituents. It receives endless support from a number of powerful states. More recently, it audaciously commanded its troops outside its official jurisdiction. So how did Hezbollah reach this great preeminence in a relatively short period?

Hezbollah reached high global preeminence in spite of international efforts to discredit the party and present it as a terrorist organization. This paper will outline the key stages and factors that produced today's Hezbollah. To do so, it is necessary to start at the origins of Shiite Islam. Chapter two will highlight Shiite debilitation from the outset of Islam, and how that largely prevailed in modern day Lebanon until the middle of the twentieth century. This is critical for understanding the Shiites' spectacular rise and

[6] From Nasrallah speech: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rB-3V6dBwJM (accessed Feb 21, 2014)

influence in Lebanon. The historical background will underline the difficulties that Lebanese Shiites had to overcome before reaching a climactic status through the work Hezbollah.

B. Shiite Origins And Background

There are two major denominations in Islam: Sunni and Shiite. The distinction is a result of a schism that dates back to the time of the prophet Mohammed, founder of Islam. The issue revolved on who will succeed the prophet in ruling the expanding Muslim community (the *umma*); a position that would endow the appointed caliph with temporal and spiritual power. Ali, the prophet's cousin and son-in-law, alleged that only People of the House of Mohammed are entitled to be caliphs. However, some Muslim leaders, close but not related to the prophet, disagreed with Ali. Few hours after the prophet's death in 632 AD, they met secretly and elected one of themselves (Abu Bakir) as caliph.[7] This incident planted the seed of division that will plague Islam to the present day. Ali and his partisans (i.e. the Shiites) criticized the appointment of Abu Bakir, but they did not fight or depart from the majority. The Shiites were a minority at the time, and Ali believed that resisting the new caliph would only bring defeat to his partisans and disgrace to Islam.[8]

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[7] Tabatabaie, Mohammed Hasan, *Al-Shiite fi al- Islam* (Beirut: Merkaz Baqiyat Allah al-Aatham, 1999), 25.

[8] Abbas, Hasan Hasan, *Al-Fakir al-Syasi al-Shiiye: al-Osool w al-Mabadaa* (Beirut: Dar Owranous al-Aalameya lelkitab, 2012), 334-337.

Three non-Shiites filled the caliphate seat before Ali rose to power. Ali's rule was marked by *fitna* and civil unrest.[9] Nearly five years after he became caliph, he was assassinated by a group of people that had initially affirmed his leadership. Shiites then pledged allegiance to Ali's eldest son, Hasan. At the same time, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan, a commanding Muslim military leader, and a long-time rival over the throne, usurped the caliphate and forced Hasan to sign a peace treaty according to his terms. Muawiyah did not want Hasan to compete for the caliphate, so he arranged for his murder.

Under Muawiyah's reign, Ali's partisans suffered tremendously. Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabaie, a prominent Shiite scholar in the twentieth century, writes[10] that Shiites were persecuted for their beliefs and prevented from practicing their worship activities. Transmission of their teachings was subject to punishment. Muawiyah rewarded informants that delivered to authorities people who denigrating the caliphate or the Prophet's Companions (*Aṣ-ṣaḥābah***)**. The result was that many Shiites were illicitly framed and disciplined. Furthermore, Muawiyah ordered that Ali's name be cursed from the pulpit in all Muslim regions, which remained in effect for approximately 50 years, and ended in the reign of the Umayyad caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (717 – 720 AD). Many Shiites were killed, and their heads were speared and paraded around different parts of the empire.

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[9] Housien, Taha, *Al-Fitna al-Kobra: Ali ibn Abi Talib w Banoueh* (Cairo: Dar al-Maarif, 1976).

[10] Tabatabaie, Mohammed Hasan, *Al-Shiite fi al- Islam* (Beirut: Merkaz Baqiyat Allah al-Aatham, 1999), 44.

Muawiyah did not stop at eliminating his Shiite rivals for the throne, but paved the way for his young and unruly son, Yazid, to inherit the caliphate. Firm in their stand, Shiite supporters did not pledge allegiance to Yazid, but to Ali's second son, Husayn. When Husayn was traveling to Kufa (in modern day Iraq) to consolidate his power there, he was intercepted by Yazid's army in Karbala. At the risk of being killed, he refused to swear fealty to Yazid. To pressure Husayn to submit, Yazid's army blocked Husayn's caravan access to water, and left them to suffer in the desert. Husayn and all the men with him were adamant in their refusal, and as a result they were all brutally murdered, including Husayn's brother and infant child.[11] Since then, the martyrdom of Husayn, and the Karbal narrative, symbolize for Shiites throughout the centuries tragic resistance against tyranny and righteous suffering against injustice.[12] So significant is the motif of suffering in Shiite thought that it constitutes their "basis of solidarity, resistance, and righteousness."[13]

The rift between Sunnis and Shiites was thus widened as descendants of Ali and the Prophet's daughter Fatima were deprived, by the Umayyad dynasty, from ruling the Muslim community. In the Abbasid Caliphate, Shiites participated in uprisings against the Sunni state, but their efforts were sterile, and only earned them additional persecution.[14] In

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[11] Ayhan Yalçinkaya and Reside Adal Dündar, "Karbala "Battles" Between Theology and Power," *Journal of US - China Public Administration* (2011): 1039.

[12] Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

[13] Habibollah Babaei, "A Shiite Theology of Solidarity Through the Remembrance of Liberative Suffering," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 45, no. 4 (2010).

[14] Gharib, Hasan Khalil. *Nahwa Tarikh Fikrey-Seyasy le Shiite Lobnan: Awdaa w Itijahat – Part One* (Beirut: Dar al-Konoz al-Adabiyah, 2000), 213.

the centuries that followed, Shiites were often oppressed and maltreated as a minority seeking recognition. Matters reached a climax during the reign of the Mamluks, when Ibn Taymiyyah issued a fatwa calling for the extermination of the Shiites.[15] Subsequently, Ottomans eased the pressure on Shiites only in severity, but not in discrimination. Shiites remained unrecognized or protected by the Millet system.

C. Shiites In Lebanon

There are various accounts about when and how Shiites made their way to Lebanon. Albert Hourani records that Shiite scholars from Jabal Amil (i.e. South Lebanon) trace their ancestry to Abu Dharr, a companion of the prophet, and a supporter of Ali's caliphate. [16] Some scholars posit that Shiite ancestors are Persians[17], however recent studies discredit that and prove the Arab roots of Jabal Amil Shiites.[18] What is important to establish is that in the Umayyad period, there were substantial Shiite groups throughout the land of Greater Syria, with great concentration in Jabal Amil, the Bekaa Valley, and Kiserwan.

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15 Ibid., 214.

16 Albert Hourani, "From Jabal 'Āmil to Persia," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 49, no. 1 (1986): 133.

17 Rodger Shanahan, *The Shi'a of Lebanon: clans, parties and clerics* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 13.

18 Gharib, Hasan Khalil. *Nahwa Tarikh Fikrey-Seyasy le Shiite Lobnan: Awdaa w Itijahat – Part One* (Beirut: Dar al-Konoz al-Adabiyah, 2000), 158.

The governance structure in Lebanon evolved over time, and the place of Shiites in each period varied. Below is a description of the different structures, covering the period between Ottoman times and the days of the Republic, and the place of Shiites in each one.

1. The Ottoman Period

The Ottoman Empire devised the *iqta* system to govern its provinces and collect taxes. The system distributes authority "among a number of autonomous hereditary aristocratic chiefs subordinate in certain political respects to a common overlord."[19] The Ottomans divided the province (*wilayat)* of Natural Syria into districts, or ***muqata's***, where the holder of a *muqata*, is known as *muqataji.* The *muqataji* inherited political authority over an area that was designated to his aristocratic family by the *wali.* He was allowed to retain a militia that would ensure the welfare and justice of the peasants in his jurisdiction, and enforce order when necessary. In reality, he employed that small force for coercion and personal benefit. A central function of the *muqataji* was also to collect the basic annual tax, the *miri*, on behalf of the central government. At the same time, this responsibility was frequently subcontracted to the highest bidder, known as a *multazim*. The *multazim* "collected the state taxes and made payments [to the state] in fixed installments, keeping a part of the tax revenue for his own use."[20] Since his responsibility lasted for a short period of time, a *multazim* possessed less influence than a *muqataji*. In Mount Lebanon, the *iqta*

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[19] Iliya F. Harik, "The "Iqta'" System in Lebanon: A Comparative Political View," *Middle East Journal* 19, no. 4 (1965): 405.

[20] *Encyclopedia Britannica* http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/283193/iltizam (accessed January 27, 2014)

system was dominant and it was non-confessional, but only Sunni *multazims* could bid for that tax-farming office. This decreased the opportunity for the indigenous population of Mount Lebanon, especially Shiites who had no foreign sponsor, to accumulate wealth.[21]

Shiites held position of power in Lebanon at different periods of time. In the early sixteenth century, Shiites from the Harfoush family ruled as governors of the Bekaa Valley where they mostly proliferated.[22] The Valley was a much coveted prize because it was a rich source of grains and animal products. Under the governorship of the Druze dynasty of the Ma'ns (1593- 1697), Shiites became politically connected to the princes of Mount Lebanon by extension of their control of the Bekaa Valley. The Harfoush clan oscillated in and out of power for nearly 200 years, before their final revolt against Ottoman rule in 1859 was quelled and their power subsided.[23]

Another prominent Shiite family from the Bekaa Valley was the Himadah clan. After the death of prince Fakhr al-Din Ma'n, the Himadahs were given the north of Lebanon as a *muqata* by the Ottoman governor of Tripoli. "This meant that the Ba'albak-centered Himadah had taxation powers over the Maronite-dominated districts of Bsharri, Batrun and Jubayl, the Orthodox district of Kura, and the Sunni-dominated regions of al-

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21 Iliya F. Harik, "The "Iqta'" System in Lebanon: A Comparative Political View," *Middle East Journal* 19, no. 4 (1965): 411.

22 Muhammad Adnan Bakhit, *The Ottoman province of Damascus in the sixteenth century* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982), 175.

23 Ibid., 113.

Dinniya and ‘Akkar.”[24] The Himadahs played a leading role in non-Shiites regions of Lebanon for more than a century. Their demise came in 1773 when they were defeated by Maronite and Druze forces. What is important here to emphasize is that there was a high degree of interaction between the Shiite of the Bekaa and the population of the Mountain, long before Lebanon was declared a republic. Similarly, that Shiites of Jabal Amil were connected to the Mountain can be deduced from the decision of *wali* of Sidon to annex most of the Shiite areas in his *wilayat* to Bashir Shihab, after the Shiite sheikhs revolt against him in 1698-1699.

The connection between the two Shiite communities of the Bekaa and Jabal Amil was established during the reign of Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar, Ottoman ruler of Acre. Al-Jazzar was commissioned to reestablish control over Jabal Amil. He initially treated the Shiites justly, hoping to get their support against the Druze in the area. The Shiites refused to take his side, and chose to fortify their position of autonomy in the mountains. In 1781, after Al-Jazzar consolidated his forces, he launched a deadly attack against the Shiites that left them thoroughly devastated. Many lives were lost and crops were destroyed. Still, that did not stop Al-Jazzar and other traditional leaders to extract heavy taxes from the deeply impoverished Shiite peasants. At that point, many Shiites from Jabil Amil emigrated to Baalbek and the Bekaa in search of safe refuge. [25]

2. The Late Ottoman Period

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[24] Rodger Shanahan, *The Shi'a of Lebanon: clans, parties and clerics* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 21.

[25] Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 55-56.

In the nineteenth century, Shiites of Mount Lebanon received increasing recognition as a community separate from the Sunnis. With the introduction of the Council of the Mountain in 1841, the Ottoman governor of Beirut gave the Shiites a membership in the Council, where Shiites occupied one seat out of ten. However, the Council was dissolved after conflicts erupted between Druze and Maronites. Subsequently, Mount Lebanon was divided into two districts (*qa'im maqamiyat)* at the behest of the Great Powers: France, Britain, Russia, and Austria. To resolve the resulting conflicts of this division, Ottomans imposed the Statute of 1845.[26] The Statute created a council (*majlis)* for each district, comprising the Ottoman deputy, a judge (*qadi)* and an advisor from each of the main confessional groups. Shiites were represented by an advisor in each council, but no Shiite judges were allowed. Shiite disputes were to be resolved according to Sunni jurisprudence.

The Statue of 1845 did not survive a long time, and was replaced in 1861 by the *Reglement Organique,* following the sectarian violence between Maronites and Druze. In the new system, Mount Lebanon was dealt with as a single governorate (*mutasarifiyat),* where the governor (*mutasarrif)* was a non-Lebanese Catholic selected by the Sultan and approved by the Great Powers. [27] The *mutasarifiyat* system had a Central Administrative Council that represented the different administrative districts that Mount Lebanon was divided into. The Council had a total of twelve members, one of which was a Shiite. These

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[26] Robin Leonard Bidwell, *Dictionary of modern Arab History* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), 128.

[27] Aziz Abu Hamad, "Communal Strife in Lebanon: Ancient Animosities or State Interventions?," *Journal of International Affairs* 49, no. 1 (1995), 235.

developments reflect the bureaucratization felt by the Shiites of the Mountain, but not the larger Shiite community.

In the aftermath of World War I, Shiites surfaced as an independent community, separate from Sunni Muslims, and recognized by European powers. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, France exercised mandatory rule over Mount Lebanon. By 1920 it established the State of Greater Lebanon, stirred on by the Maronite population. France included Jabal Amil and the Bekaa in the newly formed state, which increased the Shiite proportion in the soon to be declared Republic. At that time, Shiites of the South and Bekaa did not have strong affinity towards Maronites, or those in the new capital Beirut. France determined to add Shiite dominated areas to Greater Lebanon in order to solidify that establishment and to counter the Arab Nationalist movement headed primarily by Sunnis from Damascus. France made it attractive for Shiites to be part of Greater Lebanon, as opposed to an independent Syrian Arab state, by recognizing them as a separate religious sect entitled to have a Shiite *qadi* that would judge their social and legal actions, according to Shiite jurisprudence.[28] As a result, many prominent Shiite families from Jabil Amil and Bekaa supported the new state and their new inherent rights within it.[29] However, most of the Shiites in the Bekaa, led by the Haider family, were in favor of annexation to Syria.[30]

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[28] Shiites *qadis* subscribed to the Ja'fari school of jurisprudence, while Sunni *qadis* acted under Hanafi law.

[29] Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Westview Press, 1985), 65.

[30] Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for power: the shi'a in the modern Arab world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 103.

In the end, France instituted a Lebanese national parliament, and allowed the formation of a Representative Council.

3. The Mandate Period

In the mandate period, political participation was in the jurisdiction of traditional leaders, the zu'ama.[31] The Shiite populace in particular stood little chance of making political impact, because they were predominately uneducated peasants who were accustomed to relying on traditional leaders to represent them before the government of the day. There was no urban middle class that could afford to challenge the authority of the zu'ama. There was already fierce competition between the traditional leaders themselves on who will represent the Shiites in the parliament. The zu'ama forged alliances with each other in order to share their client bases and prevent non-notables from competing for political office. Nonetheless, it should be noted that none of the zu'ama could claim to represent the entire Shiite community.[32]

In 1932, France administered a national census that stifled the cause of the Shiites. According to the census, Shiites residents were approximately 155,000 out of a total population of roughly 793,000 Lebanese; nearly 20 per cent.[33] However, that percentage was reduced after a legislation was passed to factor in emigrants residing outside Lebanon.

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[31] A za'im is a leader that leads a regional group of supporters, where a patron-client relationship develops between them.

[32] Ibid., 106.

[33] Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited. Who are the Lebanese?," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1999), 222.

This move was to bolster Christian representation, who comprised the vast majority of emigrants. Consequently, Shiite proportion was dropped to 16 per cent after emigrants were counted in.[34] Moreover, having already benefited from the establishment of a Greater Lebanon, Shiites were given a limited role in the National Pact negotiations of 1943. The final distribution of parliamentary seats settled at a Christian to Muslim ratio of 6:5; a ratio unmistakably predisposed against Muslims in general. Even the relatively unimportant position of Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies that had been reserved for a Shiite was contested by the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics. "There was little outcry over the disadvantage this posed for the Shiite, because of the powerful Shiite families with their virtual monopoly on the community's parliamentary representation understood that their leadership aspirations could be fulfilled with the number of seats allocated to the community."[35]

According to the 1932 census, the Shiite community constituted 40.2 per cent of the total Muslim population in Lebanon. And according to the National Pact, this entitles the Shiites to 18.5 per cent of the country's parliamentary representation, cabinet seats, and civil service posts.[36] Between 1943 and 1961, Shiite membership in the cabinet was proportionally represented, and was often comparable to that of the Druze, Greek-Catholics, and Greek-Orthodox.[37] However, during that same period, the Shiites were

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34 Ibid., 236.

35 Rodger Shanahan, *The Shi'a of Lebanon: clans, parties and clerics* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 32.

36 Majed Halawi, *Against the Current: the political mobilization of the Shi'a community in Lebanon* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1996), 140.

37 Ibid., 145.

discriminately underrepresented in high level governmental positions. In the early seventies, an increase in Shiite representation took place as a result of at least two reasons. First, President Fouad Shihab's effort to promote national unity by instituting fair representation in government administration, especially for the Shiite community. Second, the leadership of Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, which mobilized the Shiite community, and put their issues at the center of Lebanese politics. (This will be discussed in greater details in the second chapter)

4. Years of the Republic

During the years of the Republic, the zu'ama had to adapt to the changing nature of political life in Lebanon. In the context of parliamentary politics, blocs were formed and were a coalition of like-minded people, as opposed to a membership of strong ideological alliances. From that perspective, the zu'ama had little incentives to belong to any bloc, unless it brought benefits to them or their communal clients. At the same time, it was not uncommon to seek cross-communal parliamentary alliances. Shiite leaders in particular were keen to form alliances with non-Shiite deputies in order to advance their bid to the cabinet. Shiite zu'ama sought backing from the Maronite presidential candidate and Sunni prime minister who would influence and shape future cabinets. Ascension to the cabinet was important because it provides the za'iam with access to governmental resources, and entitles him to bestow patronage in return for services.

The participation of Shiite zu'ama in Lebanese politics helped widen the socio-economic gap between them and their already poor co-religionists. While Shiite leaders

vied for government positions, living conditions in Shiite villages deteriorated as rural poverty and debts increased.[38] In the first half of the twentieth century, Shiites of Lebanon had many disadvantages compared to the country's other sixteen sects. The Shiite population of Jabil Amil and the Bekaa were deeply impoverished. They complained about paying more taxes than the rest of the country, while getting fewer government services and resources in exchange. Basic needs such as health care, electrical power, fresh water and paved roads were scarcely met. They were deprived of educational opportunities and career aspirations, and ultimately relied on support from Shiites in the diaspora to finance their livelihood.[39]

D. Impact Of Feudalism On Shiites

Under the *iqta* system, feudal lords (i.e. zu'ama) had the power and charisma to influence events in their region. They claimed their authority from tracing their lineage, but more so from the economic strength derived from their tax collecting role. This was particularly true of Shiite zu'ama who dominated the rural regions of the Bekaa and Jabal Amil. Feudal lords maintained their power by monopolizing access to the power structures established at the time. They often struck alliances with other lords to circumvent external threats. "During the period of the Ottoman and mandatory rule and from independence until the 1960s, political participation in Lebanon was nearly exclusively the preserve of the

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38 Ibid., 90.

39 Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for power: the shi'a in the modern Arab world* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 105.

zu'ama."[40] It was very difficult for Shiite masses to challenge that because the majority were uneducated peasants who depended on the land and the mercy of their patron for their sustenance. It was risky to challenge the zu'ama establishment without any backing from a substantial client group.

Following the 1858 Ottoman *Tanzimat*, any hope of a empowering the Shiite peasants evaporated. The purpose of the 1858 land reform was to facilitate peasant private ownership, which would presumably increase productivity and commercial exchange. However, that outcome was never reached because the zu'ama (and *multazims)* dissuaded peasants from registering the land in their own names. They threatened to increase their taxes and put up their name for conscription; two destinies that would overwhelm the peasant and alienate him from his land and family. In some cases, the zu'ama pressured the peasants to give up their rights, and register the land under their name. In other cases, the zu'ama bribed the underpaid registry employees to register a peasant's land under their name.[41] As a result, Shiite masses were taken advantage of by their own leaders. They were deprived of the potential to be recognized and to fend for themselves. With little support from the inside, they would have to wait for help from outside to take them out of the pit they were buried in.

E. Impact Of Clerical Establishment On Shiites

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[40] Rodger Shanahan, *The Shi'a of Lebanon: clans, parties and clerics* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 45.

[41] Mervan Sabrina, *Harakat al-Islah al-Shiie: Ulama Jabil Amil w Udabaaho min Nehayit al-Dawla al-Othamaneyya ela istiqlal Lobnon*. Translated by هيثم الأمين (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar lelenishir, 2000), 50.

The clerical establishment was at the heart of the Shiite community. The main duties of Shiite clerics were to teach, guide, and judge. Their place in the community, however, surpassed their prescribed duties. As the official interpreters of the Quran and the Sunna, they were responsible for mediating between the vastly illiterate masses, and their earthly and heavenly surroundings. As revered scholars, they were vested with authority and potential to lead the Shiite community and improve their wellbeing. Although a parasitic lifestyle was a typical mode of living, not all clerics were rich. Some had to work to earn a living, which made them as dependent and powerless as the peasants.

In addition, a mood of quietism, which prevailed in Shiite history and contemporary thought prior to the 1960s, discouraged clerics from engaging in the political realm. Unlike other religious groups, Shiites of Lebanon could not rely on external powers to support them or protect their interests. Co-religionists in Persia were in constant conflict with the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Shiites in Lebanon, to varying degrees, were alienated. They kept a low profile in order to avoid conflict. Shiite jurists even legitimized dissimulating one's faith to avoid persecution (i.e. *taqiyya).* They had to choose between speaking up and suffering, or keeping quiet but being safe; they often chose the latter.

The supremacy of Shiite feudal families, and the cleric's weak economic standing, as a consequence of overall Shiite poverty, forced clerics to rely on feudal lords for their survival. Most clerics did not challenge the feudal lords or organize any political action that would rival their power. Instead, they helped sustain the status quo that benefited the feudal lords at the expense of the poor peasants. In exchange, feudal lords supplied clerics with money and gifts, and regarded clerics with honor and respect in public. Bahjat and Al-Tamimi, two high ranking Ottoman officials, highlight the superficial relationship between

the clerics and the zu'ama, and conclude that the lack of reverence that zu'ama had for clerics emboldened them to take advantage of the helpless peasants.[42] At the same time, there are examples of Shiite clerics who were not politically quiescent, and who were not afraid of angering the zu'ama.[43]

F. Shiite Status In The Mandate Period And After Independence

The first half of the twentieth century was laden with major geopolitical changes and promises of reform, but the status of Shiites in Lebanon was pitiful. Shiite memory was traumatized by the devastation wreaked on by Al-Jazzar a century ago. The damage, disfranchisement, and displacement caused by that episode of Shiite history convinced them of the futility of political action. An attitude of defeat and political withdrawal haunted Shiites for centuries, and it lasted throughout the mandate and independence period.

After World War I, and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Arab nationalism and infant thoughts of forming Arab secular states began to surface. Some Shiite voices rallied behind that (e.g. Muhammad Jabir, a Shiite scribe from Nabatiyya), but Ali al Zayn, an independent journalist from the South, summarized the general political stand of Jabal Amil Shiites this way: "The Shia notables and clerics did not know of nationalism and nationalist ideas. They were pessimists and sectarians – a tendency which made them stay away from

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42 Mohammed Bahjat and Mohammed Rafiq Al-Tamimi, *Wilayat Beirut. Vol. 1.(* Beirut: Dar Lahid Khatir leltebaa w al-nashir w al-tawzeea, 1987), 315-317.

43 Mervan Sabrina, Harakat al-Islah al-Shiie: Ulama Jabil Amil w Udabaaho min Nehayit al-Dawla al-Othamaneyya ela istiqlal Lobnon. Translated by هيثم الأمين (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar lelenishir, 2000), 63.

any political movement or rebellion." The French Mandate replaced Ottoman rule, and thwarted nationalist hopes. The French redrew the map of Syria and Lebanon in a bid to divide and conquer. The Shiites of Jabal Amil were appended to Greater Lebanon, and recognized as an official religious sect, separate from Sunni Islam, which appeased them and gave them no reason to rebel against the Mandate, if they had the courage to. Elsewhere in Lebanon, the Druze felt their traditional power taken away from them, and given to the Maronites, France's clients. During the Great Druze Rebellion in 1925-1927, the Sheiks of Jabil Amil sent messages to the French High Commissioner affirming their loyalty, but at the same time, they refused to form units to resist the Druze.[44] Druze were ultimately defeated, and the Shiites survived the onslaught by doing what they did best: remaining quiescent.

The French Mandate made marginal changes to Shiite living conditions. Shiite villages were disconnected from the rest of Lebanon because there were no roads to connect the coast and mountain to the hinterland. Healthcare was a luxury; until 1943, in the entire South district of about 300 predominantly Shiite villages, there were not any hospitals, but health offices in Sidon, Tyre and Nabatiyya only. Schools were scarce and higher education was reserved for the zu'amas' families and their networks. The French initiated many projects, but they were never completed. After independence, feudal lords and ministers followed suit, but with a dosage of native cunningness. Villagers were given false promises. They were told that "the waters of the Litani River would, in time, bring electricity and irrigate the harsh earth; the paved roads would come; the tobacco acreage

[44] Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 59.

that had to be licensed by a tobacco monopoly would be increased. There would be fairer prices for the tobacco crop paid out by the tobacco monopoly."[45] When things did not materialize, the feudal lords, or Members of Parliament, would promise to take matters personally to the prime minister, or complain that the villagers are not grateful.

In the newly formed Lebanese Republic, Shiites pressed between a rock and a hard place. There were two main ideologies that preoccupied Lebanese parliamentarians. On one hand, Maronites called for a Christian Lebanon, separate from the Muslim world, and rooted in a history of independence (in the Mountain). On the other hand, Lebanese Sunnis, mainly merchants in Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, associated themselves with the larger Arab world. As for the Shiites, they could not relate to either ideology. Maronites had a long history of a separate identity, and the "self-confidence" and backing to assert their independence. By contrast, Shiites had a separate identity, but their quietism prohibited them from developing a doctrine of independence and autonomy. Like Sunnis, they are Muslims, but they are considered heterodox and schismatic. Although they are Arabs, they shared the same faith as the distant Persians, which inadvertently painted them as strangers.

The situation of the Shiites in the newly formed republic was pitiable. They could not identify with the prevailing ideologies of their time, or formulate an indigenous identity of their own. They were fragmented, neglected by the government, and abused by their leaders, which left them utterly hopeless. They were on the same devastating trajectory as their predecessors. What is important to note here is that the Shiites' debilitation made

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45 Ibid., 60.

them susceptible to influence from outside the government and traditional leadership circles. The absence of a strong government that could secure adequate living for Shiites and the lack of representative leadership that cares for the people left Shiite masses susceptible to provisional hope-inspiring leadership. What is at stake here is potentially a large easy-to-persuade popular force, just by extension of the Shiite's sheer numbers. This will prove true at the hands of imam Musa al-Sadr who mobilized the Shiites, and elevated their status in Lebanon dramatically and permanently.

CHAPTER III

MUSA AL-SADR AND THE POLITICAL MOBILIZATION OF THE SHIITES

A. Introduction

It is not difficult to see Lebanon in the 1950s as the breeding ground for movements of varying and conflicting ideologies. The multi-confessional nature of its inhabitants, the long history of external patronage, the sectarian character of its constitution, and the freedom to express one's ideas and opinions publicly created a ripe environment for the formation of social and political movements; often at the expense of other groups and movements. To that extent, many political parties were born in Lebanon at that time. What is more difficult to have foreseen is the rise of today's Hezbollah from such a competitive environment, and one that is especially hostile to Shiites. In chapter one, it was made clear that despite being the third largest sect in Lebanon, according to the 1932 census, the Shiites of Lebanon could hardly be considered a cohesive community. They were fragmented and ruled by unjust zu'ama who dominated the land and subdued anyone who challenged their authority. The confessional government, where Shiites were already underrepresented, cared little about the welfare of the Shiites. Deep-rooted poverty and rampant illiteracy crippled the Shiite peasants and blinded their vision from seeing a brighter more prosperous future for them and their children.

Yet, from that same environment rose Hezbollah and succeeded in transforming the Shiite landscape for future generations. At the heart of this change is the person and work of Imam Musa al-Sadr, the precursor of Hezbollah. In chapter three, I will highlight the

circumstances that accompanied Musa al-Sadr's arrival to Lebanon in the late 1950s, and the reasons for his meteoric rise among the Lebanese Shiites. The chapter will examine how Musa al-Sadr mobilized the underdeveloped Shiite community, and eventually formed the Amal movement, and its military wing. The chapter will underscore Sadr's vision for a sovereign Lebanon, where Shiites play an integral role as coequals in the Lebanese social and political fabric. Sadr's work is instrumental for understanding Shiite dynamics in Lebanon, and the present discussion will set the stage for the formation and rise of Hezbollah.

B. A Changing Reality

In the late 1940s, most of the Shiites in Lebanon were rural people, residing in the South (Jabal Amil), or the Baalbek-Hermel corridor. Less than 10 percent of the community lived in cities, and in 1948 only 3.5 percent lived in Beirut.[46] The community was socially, culturally, and economically marginal to the rest of the country. Politically, six zu'ama families monopolized the political scene, and they regularly shifted alliance to secure their power grip. Shiites were already in a grim situation when a new reality was encroaching. In the third quarter of the twentieth century, the winds of modernity reached destructive speeds in Shiite districts. "Gradual educational advances, increased travel inside Lebanon and abroad, wider exposure to the press and television, the decline of agriculture and the expansion of the service sector - all of this greatly changed life in the

[46] Salim Nasr, "Roots of the Shi'i Movement," *MERIP Reports* 15, no. 133 (1985): 10.

villages and even urban slums".[47] In addition, villages were getting more indebted to, and exploited by, new banking networks, merchants and suppliers. Thousands of villagers crumbled under the overbearing financial pressure. They were bankrupt, and sold any property or assets they owned to travel to the city. As a result, by 1975, more than 40 percent of the rural population left their home villages and migrated to the city in search of jobs and better living conditions.[48] Many, however, could only afford life in the city slums. These socioeconomic changes uprooted the Shiite peasants and charged them with a potential for political action.

Furthermore, migration to other countries increased and affected villages and Shiite centers like Nabatiyyeh, Bin Jbeil, and Tyre. Under the French Mandate, Shiites traveled to West Africa in search for work. In the 1950s and 1960s, many travelled to oil-producing countries, like Libya and Kuwait. The outflux of Shiite men altered power relations in the villages. Traditional notables and religious families lost their influence to returning migrants who purchased lands through wealth acquired while working outside. New commercial networks were formed, and spheres of influence carved. Essentially, a new Shiite bourgeoisie emerged that was eager to expand its activity where Sunnis and Maronites did not dominate (e.g. trade with Africa, real estate development…etc.). Eventually, a new Shiite elite arose, and replaced the traditional feudal families. However, by that time, in the 1950s and 1960s, many young Shiites were disenchanted with the old-

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47 Augustus R. Norton, *Amal and the Shìa: struggle for the soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 20.

48 Salim Nasr, "Roots of the Shi'i Movement," *MERIP Reports* 15, no. 133 (1985): 11.

style politics and instead were attracted to secular opposition parties, like the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and the Lebanese Communist Party.

At the national level, Shiites were deprived of their political and social rights when they were excluded from drawing the contours of the Lebanese political system, which led to the 1943 National Pact. This reflects the religious disunity of the Shiite denomination. Had the Shiites been united as an entity, like the Sunni or Maronites, they would have had a contending seat at the negotiation table, and perhaps secured some senior posts in the upper echelon of the government. Subsequently, Shiites were seeking wider political and social recognition. Many were attracted to Nasirism and to Arab Nationalism of the 1950s. In that period, the entire Middle East was galvanized by Israel's occupation of Palestine, and a number of Shiites joined Palestinian movements.[49]

Arab nationalism, as a literary movement and a political ideology, was part of Shiite consciousness from its very inception.[50] The watershed moment came in 1948 when Israel invaded and occupied Palestine. This *Nakba*, catastrophe, brought to scrutiny every aspect of Arab society: from political and economic realities to social and spiritual outlooks. Israel's infiltration of the Arab folds highlighted the weaknesss of the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslim. Out of the shameful defeat arose Jamal Abdel Nasir and the Free Officers Movement in Egypt, which culminated in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Nasir was the long-awaited hero that Arabs looked for to lead them to the glory of days past. He

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49 Rami Siklawi, "The dynamics of the Amal movement in Lebanon 1975-90," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2012): 4.

50 Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 101.

memorized the crowds with his cry for hope, justice, anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, and pan-Arabism. His personal charm, impeccable rhetoric, and successful reforms at home earned him the Arab's trust. Thousands heeded his call on the radio to go out to the streets and demonstrate against their unyielding governments. Lebanese Sunnis in particular saw in Nasr a force that could help them counterbalance what they viewed as Christian domination of the political, social and economic life of their country. Lebanese Shiites also took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction and rejection of the political system. These protests kick-started the process of politicizing the Shiites en masse and served as a primer for future civil demonstrations. However, Nasirism was growing so fast that it lacked a clear organizational structure and a program of action, which left the Shiite zu'ama with plenty of room to maneuver and overcome its impact.[51]

To summarize, on the eve of the arrival of Musa al-Sadr, the young Lebanese state was battling internal unrest due to confessional discrimination. Shiite's allotment was further depravation, which cemented the idea in their minds that they were destined to live in depravation, while other confessional groups, especially Maronites, were destined to live extravagantly. This was evident from contrasting the pitiable living conditions of the Shiites, to the affluent cooperations that the Maronites founded and linked to the State.[52] Lebanese Sunnis managed to secure some privileges for their coreligionists, especially during the Nasr era, but Maronites clung to power and were reluctant to share decision

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51 Ibid., 103.

52 Aḥmad Qasir. *Imam Mousa al-Sadr: Al-Islam al-Moasir w tejribat el-qiada al-moasasatiyya* (Beirut, 1998), 99.

making with others. From that perspective, the Lebanese social and political atmosphere was tense, held together by old feudal relations that were due to expire.

C. The Arrival Of Imam Al-Sadr

It is hard to believe that one person can elevate the status of the Lebanese Shiites in the 1960s, yet Sayyid Musa al-Sadr almost singlehandedly did that. Al-Sadr was born in Iran, but his ancestors descend from Jabal Amil. He followed the path of his forefathers and studied Islam under the tutelage of Ayatollahs in Qum and Najaf. He surpassed the clerical standard when he graduated with a law degree from Tehran University. Al-Sadr was a bright and intellectual person, with erudition and rhetoric as his primary tools for capturing the hearts and minds of the people. He had a special aura around him, a *hayba*, which distinguished him from his peers and attracted people from all walks of life to listen to him. His charismatic appeal and relevant message won him the love of his people and the respect of his adversaries.

Al-Sadr arrived in Lebanon in 1959 at a tumultuous time when global politics were changing. Anti-imperialism and independence movements were gaining ground in the Middle East, and around the world. The power of people was made manifest, and al-Sadr capitalized on the revolutionary spirit of the time to tear down the narrow-mindedness of the clerical establishment, disempower feudal families, and advance the interest of the Shiite community. When poor Shiites had given up on being treated equally, al-Sadr made it his mission to bring about social change, while combining piety with knowledge and

work.[53] He was unconventional in his attitude and approach. He defended Islam as a progressive religion, and affirmed its bond to science. He tackled the problem of poverty in all of Lebanon, not least amongst his community. He respected the multi-confessional character of Lebanon, and did not try to undermine it. He sought the welfare and betterment of Lebanon as a nation, especially against Israeli aggression. Undoubtedly, he championed the cause of the Shiites, but most importantly, it was not at the expense of other sects. He believed that for Lebanon to thrive as an equitable state, it must simultaneously represent majorities and protect minorities.

Lofty ideals are not enough to sustain the reforms that al-Sadr embarked on. Not only was he the right person for the task at hand, but he was the right person at the right time! Fouad Ajami, the unofficial biographer of al-Sadr, identified four factors that created a timely window for al-Sadr and his reforms to succeed.[54] First, al-Sadr arrived in Lebanon at a time when Shiite expatriates were returning from working in West Africa. They brought with them new money, and they were eager to found new communities for themselves, in-between the city and the countryside. They contributed to urbanization, and helped narrow the gap between the city and the countryside. As a result, peasants were less attached to their lands, and could afford the time and energy to follow the Sayyid. Second, al-Sadr arrived shortly after the 1958 civil war, where the new regime of Fuad Shihab was committed to some reforms. Third, the arrival of al-Sadr coincided with the proliferation of television sets and automobiles in Lebanon. These two technologies allowed al-Sadr to

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53 Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 132.

54 Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 82-84.

propagate his powerful message personally and frequently. Fourth, a statistical study commissioned by president Shihab to assess wealth distribution in Lebanon at the time, quantified the deep poverty of the Shiites. The chasm between the rich and the poor was no longer tolerable. The stage was set for a person of al-Sadr's attributes to challenge the status quo.

D. The Accomplishment Of Imam Al-Sadr

Musa al-Sadr first landed in Tyre to lead the Shiite community there. As a cleric, people expected him to concern himself with spiritual matters only, in a way similar to other clerics. However, al-Sadr was a reformer. He took a path that very few clerics before him trod, and none saw the end of. He demanded schools and clinics for his community, proportional representation in the government, and a larger share of the national budget for neglected villages in the South. He genuinely sought an equitable and respectable living for his people. Al-Sadr was making political demands on behalf of his community. He considered it his responsibility as an imam to lead the people spiritually as well as politically. His agenda was driven by the social needs of the people. He had the authority of a religious leader, and the rhetoric of a politician. He was revolutionary in his approach and demands. People flocked to him because he was more sincere, capable and more hardworking than his contemporaries. He filled the void that was left by government's negligence for the Shiites. Unlike the traditional leaders, he demanded for his people the rights they are entitled as equal citizens of Lebanon.

Al-Sadr was no stranger to the conditions of the Shiites in Lebanon. He recognized that the community is disjointed, and must be organized if it were to get the attention of the state. He thus constructed an organizational framework that would galvanize the community, and bring it to equal footing with the rest of the country. He started by reorienting the identity and scope of Jam'iyyat al-Bir wa al-Ihsan, a religious and charitable foundation founded by his predecessor. What followed was a myriad of institutions and programs that address problems of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and other social issues. News of his reformational thoughts and deeds reached Beirut, and caught the interest of Gregoire Haddad, a Greek Catholic metropolitan who founded al-Haraka al-Ijtima'iyya to improve the socioeconomic state of peripheral villages. Driven by the same vision, Haddad and al-Sadr joined forces. Al-Sadr joined the movement's executive council which bolstered his image as reformer committed to eradicating poverty and injustice in all of Lebanon, not just amongst the Shiites. This move ultimately provided him with an "a-confessional" platform that would help him challenge the parochialism of his day.

At the same time, al-Sadr's open-mindedness and his multi-confessional approach were not sufficient to protect the rights of the Shiites or give them a legitimate opportunity for equitable living. There was an inherent problem in the system. Shiite villages were underdeveloped, and far away from the bustling heart of the country, Beirut. The community lacked the spiritual and cultural acceptability that characterized other confessional groups. Socioeconomically, they were outdistanced in a country growing in wealth, education, and influence. In short, Shiites were a deprived community in a fast moving and competitive country. Al-Sadr recognized that to advance the case of the

Shiites, he must bring the status of the group to par with other confessional groups. From there came the idea of establishing a-Majlis al-Islami al-Shi'i al-A'la (The Supreme Islamic Shiite Council - SISC). Three years later in 1969, the council was ratified despite fierce opposition from Sunni groups and Shiite zu'ama. This was a huge advancement for the Shiites in Lebanon. The Council finally provided an apparatus for Shiites to independently govern their own affairs, defend their personal rights, and oversee their communal interests.[55]

Al-Sadr was elected chairman of the council for six years during which he mobilized the Shiite community of Lebanon in unprecedented ways. The stimulant was Israel's repeated attacks on the South. After the crushing defeat of Arab countries in 1967, the *neksa,* Palestinian freedom fighters, *fida'iyyin,* were launching attacks against Israel from the South of Lebanon. Not surprisingly, Israel retaliated with greater ferocity, inflicting major damage to villages and inhabitants of the South; houses were destroyed, people were killed, and families were displaced. Al-Sadr first responded by organizing the Committee for the Aid of the South. The Committee was made up of religious leaders representing southern communities, for the purpose of assisting the South during its plight. The committee reached its zenith on May 26, 1970 when al-Sadr called all Lebanese to a general strike to protest the danger and defenselessness the South is undergoing. The government's negligence assisted in uprooting the powerless inhabitants from their hometowns. Al-Sadr made it abundantly clear that the purpose of the strike was to pressure

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[55] Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 139-141.

the State to protect the South, and cooperate with the Arab armies.[56] Thousands flocked to the streets and shut down Beirut and its neighboring suburbs. The government obliged and provided real and tangible means to address the specific concerns of the South. The strike was an unmistakable success, but more importantly it was a validation al-Sadr's national popularity and influence.

Notwithstanding the privileges and recognition al-Sadr scored for the Shiite community, its members were still far from parity. By the early seventies, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was having a bigger toll on feeble Lebanon, and the South in particular. Domestically, the country was suffering from inflation and unemployment; two elements sufficient for exacerbating any situation. After the 1973 conflict between the Lebanese army and the PLO, Muslim leaders intensified their plea for equal participation in strategic decision making, which had been a prerogative reserved for the Maronite president. In the face of these developments, al-Sadr saw a need to change his strategy in order to accomplish his agenda. Public speeches and peaceful dialogue were proving ineffectual. With renewed fervor, al-Sadr demanded justice for underprivileged religious groups and villages. After a series of fiery speeches, protest rallies, and mass sit-ins, the top government officials heeded al-Sadr's call. "Finally, on 19 December 1974, in perhaps one of the most eloquent manifestations of communal solidarity in the country since independence, 190 public figures from various communities issued a joint declaration of support for Musa al-Sadr and for 'a movement that reaches beyond the Shiite Community'."[57] The Movement of the Disinherited (*Harakat al-Mahrumin*) was thus born

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56 *Al-Hayat*, May 27, 1970.

57 Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 155.

as an inter-faith secretariat to assist al-Sadr.[58] Its goal was to repair discriminate structures that prohibited Shiites from climbing up the socioeconomic ladder. In addition, the movement was responsible for preventing the total destruction of the South. To that end, armed groups, known officially as *Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya* – Amal – (The Lebanese Resistance Detachment), were dispatched to the field.

Al-Sadr drew a dual mission for Amal, as the military wing of *Harakat al-Mahrumin*. Internally, the group was responsible for securing the interest of the deprived South, and specifically the Shiite community, from the neglectful Lebanese government. Externally, Amal was trained to protect the South against mounting Israeli aggressions. The two mandates were connected, and at times escalated each other. In his own words, al-Sadr proclaimed that Amal was a sacrifice of those "who responded to the call of the wounded homeland…in days when Israeli assaults on southern Lebanon reached their peak while the authorities were not performing their duty in defending the homeland and the citizens."[59] It is noteworthy that *Harakat al-Mahrumin* never intended to be an exclusively Shiite movement. Rather, it was the voice of all the deprived and disinherited, crying for a just Lebanon. It was a reformist movement that upholds the national sovereignty and unity of Lebanon. Shiite predominance eventually encased the movement likely because Shiites were the most deprived in the country.

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58 Majed Halawi, *Against the Current: the political mobilization of the Shi'a community in Lebanon* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Information Service, 1996), 245.

59 *An-Nahar*, July 7, 1975

Amal was officially introduced as a militia by al-Sadr in 1975, at the dawn of the civil war in Lebanon. Amal had long sided with the Palestinian cause, and received military training from Fateh, the leading faction in the Palestinian Liberation Organization. However, sectarian division and the civil war changed the dynamics of Amal. As Palestinians were aggravating the delicate confessional balance in Lebanon, and fending off blame for instigating the war, Amal was growing as an independent nationalistic movement. The turning point came in 1978 after Israel invaded Lebanon up to the Litani River. Fateh was blamed for the invasion, and for failing to protect the South. As a result, relations between Amal and Fateh deteriorated, and many Shiite fighters who were previously in Fateh, joined Amal. Amal took this opportunity to reinforce its presence in the South. Concurrently, the destruction wrecked by Israel's invasion urged al-Sadr to visit the Arab countries in order to negotiate an end to Israel's occupation. In August 1978 he travelled to Libya to meet Colonel Qadafi, but was never heard off thereafter. His disappearance shocked the Shiite community, and left a void that could not be filled. Consequently, ties with the Palestinians deteriorated further, and Amal became more local and radical.[60]

E. The Legacy Of Imam Al-Sadr

As a stranger with broken Arabic, no one could have expected any permanent changes from al-Sadr. But that is exactly what he did! The actions that he took and stands that he made altered the fate of the Shiites in Lebanon forever. Unlike any other cleric

[60] Rami Siklawi, "The dynamics of the Amal movement in Lebanon 1975-90," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2012): 10.

before him, al-Sadr succeeded in giving the Shiites of Lebanon a communal identity. He crisscrossed the country, unperturbed by the relatively short distances (vis-à-vis Iran) between the South, Bekaa valley and Beirut, connecting people back with their Shiite roots. He persuaded them not to fatalistically accept their depravity, but to take responsibility for the dilemma they were in. "Under Imam Musa's considerable influence, religious commemorations became vehicles for building communal solidarity and political consciousness…Most importantly, he placed Shi'i demands in a culturally authentic context that bred support for the movement he led."[61] Al-Sadr recognized the potency of religious symbols. As trained cleric, he preached convicting sermons, rich with Shiite symbolism, which would capture the heats of the people and mobilize them for action.

To understand Musa's al-Sadr's meteoric rise, it is important to remember the Shiites' quietest tradition. Political science professor Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh explains that Shiites were accustomed to submission and political indifference. This attitude was encouraged by some religious leaders, which marginalized the Shiite masses. However, al-Sadr's effectiveness finds its root in his fresh reinterpretation of the traditions. "Al-Sadr recognized this and strove to reinterpret the tradition by drawing upon selected moments in the Shi'ite past, elevating them to positions of prominence infused with political meaning, and claiming that political activism was now not only necessary for preserving the Shi'ite identity in Lebanon but equally important in keeping with authentic Shi'ism."[62] Al-Sadr

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[61] Augustus R. Norton, *Amal and the Shìa: struggle for the soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 41.

[62] Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 21.

cleverly reinterpreted sacred Shiite religious symbols and experiences, like martyrdom and the occultation, to gather support and mobilize masses for social justice. He bestowed a new meaning on the suffering and martyrdom of Imam Husayn in Karbala. Instead of seeing it as an extreme act of submission and quietism, al-Sadr identified that key historical event in Shiite history as an episode of "political choice and courage". Eventually, he taught that martyrdom for the sake of securing a just and equitable public order is permissible, and even desirable if the occasion demanded.[63] From that perspective, not only were Shiites freed from being manipulated by clerics and *zu'ama*, they were encouraged to stand and fight for their rights.

Moreover, al-Sadr's star shined so brightly in the Lebanese sky because he partnered with a unique segment of the society. Many Lebanese Shiites who accumulated wealth while working in West Africa were longing to return to their homeland. They proved their capabilities abroad, and were now looking to reproduce their fortune amongst their families. However, wealth alone could not buy them the political and social stature they aspired for. They lacked the vision and the ability to guide others. And so the stage was set for al-Sadr. Al-Sadr was the missing link between the resourceful Shiite diaspora and their desires for a just living in Lebanon. He traveled to West Africa where Shiites worked to gather financial support for his campaigns. In exchange, he articulated their resentments and requests publicly in ways they could not. They trusted him because he

63 Ibid.

embodied the Shiite tradition, which they might have neglected while in Lebanon, but greatly valued after being away for a long time. Al-Sadr was the hero of their nostalgia.[64]

As alluded to earlier, al-Sadr's quick and spectacular ascent is also due to external circumstances. The regime of General Fouad Shihab was laden with social reforms. Shihab wanted to limit the power of the feudal lords, and impose taxes that will help neglected people and villages. His reforms sought to award Shiites their fair representation in the political balance. However, a Druze and Sunni uprising high jacked the scene, and robbed Shiites of their overdue rights. Still, General Shihab put in his weight as the president of the republic behind al-Sadr. He saw something different in him and thus supported him. In that context, al-Sadr had a head start in his dealing with the top government officials. His mystique and genuineness separated him from other traditional religious leaders. More importantly, al-Sadr never rallied for a Shiite or Muslim Lebanon. Instead, he advocated the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. In the era of Nasirism, this was a lonesome cry, echoed by Maronite leaders. For a long time, Maronites viewed Lebanon as their Christian estate and they sought to protect that identity from other religious groups. Yet, al-Sadr was more of a friend, than a foe. He often visited churches, and spoke to Christian congregations. Although Muslim and seeking equality for his people, he was not a threat. That is because he believed in Lebanese nationalism. His social concerns were for the entire country. Shiites in the South got most of his attention because they were the most deprived by far. Al-Sadr and Maronites shared in the state sovereignty ideal, and that certainly accelerated al-Sadr's rise.

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64 Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 99.

Imam Musa al-Sadr disappeared and to this day no one knows his whereabouts. Yet, his memory lives and is annually commemorated by the movement he founded, Amal. The future of the Lebanese Shiites will undergo a lot of turmoil before it finds its preeminence in Hezbollah. What is important to note is that the notion of armed resistance was conceived prior to Hezbollah's birth, but it will be fully developed by Hezbollah and eventually form its core identity. The ingredients for the rise of a force like Hezbollah were brewing. The Lebanese government was too weak to stop attacks from and against its territories in the South. Hatred towards Israeli force (and later Palestinian fighters) intensified. The situation of poor Shiite villages was aggravated, and many were displaced. They were in desperate need for relief. The Movement of the Disinherited did a lot to improve the welfare of the Shiites, but al-Sadr could not exploit the complex political network at the time, to empower the Movement and prevent his disappearance. Chapter four will explain the breakout of the Islamic revolution in Iran and how it took advantage of the situation in Lebanon to export the revolution, and give birth to Hezbollah.

CHAPTER IV

IMPACT OF ISLAIMC REVOLUTION ON SHIITE LEADERSHIP

A. Amal And The Shiites After Al-Sadr

Chapter three described how Musa al-Sadr politicized the impoverished Lebanese Shiites, and mobilized them to fight a war of resistance against Israel. The vacuum left by his disappearance could only be filled by something equal or greater than the imam's influence. Although Amal was the most organized representation of Shiites in Lebanon, it was not prepared to assume the mantle so suddenly. On top of that, the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, which had a devastating impact on the entire country, and especially the Shiites, wiped out any sense of order. Thousands of Shiites were evicted from Christian controlled areas, like *Nab'a, Burj Hammud, Dikwané, Tal al-Za'tar*[65], and many villages in the South were terrorized for supporting Palestinian fighters. Israel intensified its strikes against the South, and in 1978 it killed 2000 people and displaced 250,000, mostly Shiites.[66] Amal aligned itself with the Lebanese National Movement, which was pitted against the Christian Lebanese Front, but later withdrew from that alliance after the Syrian intervention in 1976. In subsequent years, and as a result of Syria's forceful lead, Amal lost much of its momentum and monopoly over Shiite loyalties.[67] Some Shiites joined

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65 Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2006), 42.

66 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 10.

67 Augustus R. Norton, *Amal and the Shìa: struggle for the soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 42, 48.

leftist and secular parties, including Palestinian groups, while others became members in religious groups that sprouted in the shadow of al-Sadr's movement.

By the late 1970s, Amal rose to prominence again after a number of unanticipated events. The dramatic disappearance of al-Sadr was likened to the revered imam al-Mahdi that Shiites believe disappeared in the year 873, and will return at the end of days. He became a national hero, untouchable by his critics. Al-Sadr's abrupt disappearance unified the Shiites to a great extent, as was demonstrated by the national strike in 1979 – and repeated annually – to commemorate his mysterious vanishing.[68] Moreover, Israel's invasion of South Lebanon in 1978 up to the Litani River was meant to deter Palestinian fighters from firing at Israel, and to create a buffer zone between Israel and Lebanon. As a result of the destructive invasion, many Shiite inhabitants of the South were killed and many more displaced. Paradoxically, Israel's continuous bombardment against PLO posts in the South succeeded in provoking local Shiites against the PLO. The PLO's war with Israel had been raging for almost 20 years with no measurable gain on the Palestinian side. When Shiite resentment was mounting high against Palestinians, Amal was there to welcome them into its ranks once again. With every attack involving the PLO, Amal seemed to gain new members.[69] On the political stage, the disintegration of the Lebanese National Movement served to channel Shiite fighters to Amal regiments. On top of all of

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[68] Augustus Richard Norton, "Changing Actors and Leadership among the Shiites of Lebanon," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 482, no. 1 (1985): 115.

[69] Ibid., 116.

this, the biggest assistance and most substantial sponsorship for Amal and the Shiites in Lebanon came unpredictably from distant Iran!

Links between Shiites of Iran and Lebanon can be traced back to the sixteenth century. The Safvid monarchy (1501–1736) invited Shiite clerics from Jabal Amil to help institute Twelver Shiism as the official religion of the empire.[70] Relations between the religious schools and scholars of the two peoples survived until the twentieth century. In the reign of the last shah of Iran (1941-1979), Mohammad Reza Shah of the Pahlavi dynasty sought to downplay the role of traditional religion, and disempower the *mullahs* in order to eliminate challenges to his authoritarian regime. This measure would eventually backfire and an Islamic revolution erupts in Iran and deposes the shah in 1979. The Islamic revolution will send powerful reverberations throughout the Middle East. It will have direct impact on Shiite population in Lebanon, and the formation of Hezbollah. The fourth chapter will examine the details of the revolution and the development of the relationships between Iran, Amal, and Hezbollah.

B. The Islamic Revolution In Iran

In the second half of the twentieth century, Iran was on the fast lane towards modernization. Enormous oil revenues financed remarkable socioeconomic developments. The educational system grew more than tenfold between 1953 and 1977. In the same period, the total number of factories multiplied by a factor of eight, and industrial

70 Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Ulama of Jabal 'Amil in Safavid Iran, 1501-1736: Marginality, Migration and Social Change," *Iranian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1994): 103.

production increased at a more impressive rate.[71] Considerable progress was also made in healthcare and public welfare. The standard of living improved significantly for many urban families. People gained access to modern housing, home appliances and private automobiles. The future in Iran was looking bright. However, that does not describe the entire reality. It is true that progress was being made, but it was hardly proportional to the revenues generated, or equitable to the middle and lower classes. The fact is that illiteracy remained high, health care was inadequate, rural communities were grossly underdeveloped and urban cities were polluted and overpopulated. The modernization movement was highly skewed in favor of the Shah. It alienated technocrats and intellectuals, as well as widened the distance between the rich and the poor. It is not difficult to see the Shah's modernization efforts as personal attempts to enrich himself and secure his power, at the expense of Iranians.

The reforms brought about by the Shah's regime were needed, but they were destined to fail for two main reasons. First, in 1953 the Shah overthrew the popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in a coup d'état and in the process shut down labor unions, professional associations, and political parties. Second, the regime issued policies that would benefit private acquaintances of the Shah and weaken the expanding salaried class. These measures exasperated the populace and left them without any pressure outlets to vent out against the government. News of financial scandals and government corruption aggravated the public and made them mistrust the regime. The issue was not with the

[71] Ervand Abrahamian, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports* 87, no. 87 (1980): 21.

modernization itself, but with how it was implemented to benefit the rich over the rest of society.

The one establishment that the government had a hard time penetrating and brining under its tutelage was the bazaars. Bazaars housed the traditional middle class that battled the regime-sponsored industrialization. The large number of shops that made up the bazaars created a network of shopkeepers that controlled two-thirds of the domestic wholesale trade, and monopolized 30 per cent of imports to Iran.[72] [73] The influence of the bazaar extended beyond its neighboring vicinity into the countryside, where villagers worked for absentee entrepreneurs. A distinctive characteristic of the bazaars was the strong link it had with the religious establishment.

> This establishment retained a great deal of political influence in part because it had ideological hegemony over the shanty town poor, in part because it controlled the only nationwide organization that had remained independent of the state, and in part because it could mobilize over 90,000 clergy-men – some 50 ayatollahs, 5000 hojat al-Islams, 11,000 theology students, and an unknown number of low-ranking preachers, teachers, prayer leaders, and religious procession organizers.[74]

The regime was very cautious in its dealing with the bazaar. It would have preferred to replace the small and traditional shops with large retailers loyal to the government, but disturbing the old order risked upsetting the clergy. So the government monitored bazaar affairs closely, but did not try to shut it down.

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[72] Asaf Hussain, *Islamic Iran: Revolution and Counter-Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 114.

[73] Ahmad Ashraf and Ervand Abrahamian, "Bazaar and Mosque in Iran's Revolution," *MERIP Reports* 113, no. 113 (1983): 16.

[74] Ervand Abrahamian, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," *MERIP Reports* 87, no. 87 (1980): 24.

The bazaars retained much of their independence until 1975. That year, the shah was unsatisfied with the power he had amassed over the armed forces, court patronage networks, and state bureaucracy; He also wanted to dominate the political scene. He abolished the two-party system, and instituted the Resurgence Party, ushering in a one-party state. Opposition groups were accused of sympathizing with communism and were urged to leave the country. The purpose of the Resurgence Party was to transform the military backed monarchy to a totalitarian-style state. In the process, the party intensified state control over the urban working class, salaried middle class and rural masses. More importantly, and for the first time in Iranian history, the state was meddling in the affairs of the bazaars and the religious establishment.

Rumors circulated about dismantling the old bazaars and replacing them with modern state-run supermarkets. Religious leaders were ridiculed and likened to extremists from medieval times, hindering Iran's ascent to greatness. Moreover, the Resurgence party contemptibly declared the Shah not only the political leader of the country, but also the spiritual leader. In turn, he decreed various rulings that ignored the *sharia* and disenfranchised the religious establishment. Unsurprisingly, this outraged the *ulama* and pushed them to speak out against the sacrilege committed by the regime. As a result, they were imprisoned or forced into to exile. The religious establishment viewed the Resurgence party as an instrument in the hands of the regime to weaken their influence, and destroy Islam. This became very obvious as "moral decadence" flaunted in the streets of Iranian cities, with little willingness or capability on behalf of the religious establishment to clean up the "social filth".

The irony is that the Shah's aim was to "strengthen the regime, further institutionalize the monarchy, and firmly anchor the state into the wider society"[75], but instead his Resurgence party destabilized the regime, and polarized the masses against the monarchy and the state. Despite the enormous oil revenues, the Shah could not secure a social base to support his ambitions. He alienated the intelligentsia, proletariat, and the powerful religious establishment. People were deprived of any legitimate outlets to release their frustration and express their opposition. The atmosphere was ripe for a state-wide revolution. It would take a small spark to ignite an uprising, and that is what happened when a major economic crisis hit the country in 1977-1978.[76] People directed their resentment against the regime, the military establishment, and their Western non-Islamic patrons. The Shah fled the country in January 1979 in disgrace. The revolution succeeded in abolishing the monarchy, and replacing it with the rule of traditional clergy. Subsequently, Iran was declared an Islamic republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

C. Exporting The Revolution

The ultimate objective of the Islamic revolution, as Khomeini deliberated, was to establish an Islamic state according to *velayat-e faqih*, or the rule of the jurisprudent. He believed that there is no separation between religion and politics in Islam, and in the

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75 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 445.

76 Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: from religious dispute to revolution* (Ann Arbor: UMI Books on Demand, 1995).

absence of the twelfth imam, the religious scholars, but mainly the jurists, should act as the religious and political leader of the community.[77] From that perspective, Khomeini became the highest authority in the country, and he followed two principal guidelines in leading the new republic.[78] First, non-alignment with neither East nor West, but standing for the Islamic republic; this was a reaction to the intense Westernized policies that the Shah brought to Iran. The second guideline was the drive to export the revolution. New leaders in Iran believed that with some assistance, the revolution could spread throughout the Middle East, which would accelerate the desirable establishment of *velayat-e faqih*. Iran sought to export the revolution to neighboring countries through revolutionary propaganda, financial support, and deliberate action. Khomeini was adamant on exporting the revolution, because he saw himself as the political and spiritual leader (i.e. *Amir al-Muʿminïn* or Commander of the faithful) of the entire Muslim community, and it was his duty to liberate Muslims from western hegemony. Many countries in the region witnessed the Islamic Revolution penetrate their borders. Yet perhaps no country seemed more hospitable to revolutionary ideas as much as Lebanon.

The Shiite community in Lebanon was deeply influenced by the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Links between the two countries antedated the revolution, and were strengthened by exiled opponents of the Shah who took refuge in Lebanon, and by the network of *ulema* who studied in Najaf and Qom. However, at the outbreak of the revolution, the situation in Iran and Lebanon was unfit to transmit immediate and tangible

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77 Manochehr Dorraj and Mehran Kamrava, *Iran Today: An Encyclopedia of Life in the Islamic Republic* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 510.

78 Eva Patricia Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 6, no. 1-3 (2007): 167.

effects of the revolution. Khomeini was busy consolidating his power at home, and fighting an untimely war against Iraq. In Lebanon, the situation was worsening as the civil war went on. Relations between Amal and the PLO deteriorated following the Iran-Iraq war. Shiite fighters clashed with pro-Iraqi militias, and in the aftermath plundered South of Lebanon, and alienated much of its inhabitants, before 1982.[79]

Although it is natural for Iran to support Amal and build on their Shiite solidarity to export the Islamic revolution to Lebanon, Amal was too malleable to carry that vision forward. Its members come from different parts of Lebanon, with different attitudes towards the Israel-Palestinian conflict, which is a fundamental issue for Iran's anti-Israeli revolutionary agenda. Plus, Amal's inclusive charter subsumed members with varying and opposite political ideologies, ranging from secular to Islamist. The fact that Amal was still rediscovering its identity after al-Sadr's disappearance made it an unlikely partner to Iran. Not to mention that Amal preferred to operate through the Lebanese political system. At the same time, the provisional government in Iran was struggling to stabilize the situation domestically while the new constitution was being drafted. The government was accused by leftists and Islamists of being insufficiently revolutionary. Radical Islamists, led by Ali Aakbr Mohtashami and Mohammad Montazeri who had founded armed groups in Lebanon in the early 1970s [80], formed the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) in Iran. The party was critical of the regime at home, and the Amal movement in Lebanon because of their secular stands. By 1981, Iran's support of Amal dwindled as proponents of the movement were out

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79 Asad Abukhalil,"Syria and the Shiites: Al-Asad's Policy in Lebanon,"*Third World Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1990): 11.

80 Shahryar Sadr, "Report News: Iran," *Institute for War & Peace Reporting*, July 8, 2010, http://go.iwpr.net/1Bxtdro (accessed August 26, 2014).

of office. Subsequently, Amal's secretary-general, Nabeeh Berri, was gradually disenchanted with the Islamic regime. Relations with the PLO also deteriorated, since the PLO was receiving assistance from Iraq and did not condemn its attack on Iran. Iran had to resort to more radical methods to export the revolution to Lebanon, and mobilize its large Shiite population.

D. Schism in Amal

The spirit of the Iranian revolution was high, but it was difficult navigating Lebanon's murky water in the midst of the civil war. By the early 1980s, the war had reached a tumultuous stage. A myriad of Lebanese factions and militias, PLO fighters, Syrian forces, and the Israeli army made Lebanon a battleground for their respective agenda. Igniting an Iranian inspired revolution in Lebanon would require a powerful stimulant. In 1982, events and circumstances aligned to give Iran a strong foothold in Lebanon. That period was opened with Shiite hardliner Ali Aakbr Mohtashami becoming Iran's ambassador to Syria. At that time, the more radical members of Amal, such as Husayn al-Musawi and Sayyid Subhi al-Tufayli, were becoming more critical of Berri for not embracing the revolution.

> While Berri came under attack from within, Shi'i organizations and individuals outside Amal also challenged his policies, including committees for the support of the Islamic revolution, Muslim student associations and men like Abbas al-Musawi, Hasan Nasrallah and Sayyid Fadlallah, all clerics who may have been encouraged in their opposition to a lay leader by the ascendency of the ulema in Iran.[81]

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[81] Centre for Lebanese Studies, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the last 500 years*, edited by H.E. Chehabi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 211.

Berri and Amal prevailed, but not without a rival for long. While Amal and the PLO were competing for control over South Lebanon, Israel was planning its ground invasion. On June 6, 1982 Israel invaded South Lebanon, in operation "Peace for Galilee", as a result of which most PLO fighters were driven out of Lebanon. Amal, which did not oppose the invasion, thinking that Israel would not stay in Lebanon for long, was relieved. However, the invasion had the irrevocable impact of weakening Amal and planting a seed of schism in its top level leadership.

Israel's invasion constituted a turning point in the radicalization of the Shiite political movements in Lebanon. The invasion came at a time when Iran was on the offensive in its war with Iraq, and had maintained cordial relations with Syria. As such, Iran sent a battalion of its revolutionary guards (Pasdaran) to Damascus, just six days after the Israeli attack, in order to join the war in Lebanon against Israel. Yet, Syria abstained from sending the Iranian to the battlefield, and it quickly became apparent that Syria wanted to keep them for "propaganda purposes".[82] Syria might have been reluctant to allow the experienced Pasdaran fight Israel in Lebanon, because an Iranian victory would challenge Syria's grip over the country, and threaten Syria's relations with Amal.[83] In the end, most of the revolutionary guards travelled back to Iran to resume the fight against Iraq. A few hundred were sent to the Bekaa Valley, under the directorship of Mohtashami, to train Lebanese fighters. Iranian revolutionaries finally made it on Lebanese soil without intermediaries, and little, if any, opposition from Bekaa residents. The circumstances and

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82 Ibid., 215.

83 Asad Abukhalil,"Syria and the Shiites: Al-Asad's Policy in Lebanon," *Third World Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1990): 9-13.

provision for a force in Lebanon loyal to Khomeini was impending; it was short of a political impetus to give it birth.

Israel achieved its objective in invading Lebanon, but created new enemies in the process. PLO offensive ceased for the most part after militants were evacuated to neighboring Arab countries. The arrangement was an outcome of the mediations brokered by the US to end the siege of Beirut. On the Lebanese front, Lebanon's president, Elias Sarkis, appointed the National Salvation Committee to negotiate with the US and Israel. The 5-member committee had a representative from the major faith communities in Lebanon. Nabeeh Berri approved of the committee and agreed to represent the Shiites, against the wishes of Iranian and many Lebanese-Shiites. Those against the committee opposed it on the grounds that it was an American scheme serving Israeli and Christian interests, not to mention that it legitimizes the state of Israel. Berrie's resoluteness to join the committee infuriated Islamists in Amal, who were already antagonized by his secular stance. The situation escalated, and Mohtashami was asked to arbitrate between the two factions. He sided with the Islamists, but Berrie refused to abdicate. After that, Abbas al-Mussawi went to his native village in Bekaa, and formed a fundamentalist version of Amal called Islamic Amal. He took with him 500 Amal dissenters and connected with the 1500 Revolutionary Guards that were already there.[84] This move had the consequential effect of splitting the Shiite community of Lebanon into two: a pragmatic secular group that functions within the Lebanese structures, and a radical anti-Israeli group that works towards

[84] Jamal Sankari, *Fadlallah: the making of a radical Shi'ite leader* (London : Saqi, 2005), 197.

a revolution and overthrowing the regime. The former receives its support from Syria, while the latter only accepts the sole authority of Islamic Revolution leader, Khomeini.

E. The Emergence Of Hezbollah

While it is true that the split from Amal, and the formation of Islamic Amal, is a definitive step in the inception of Hezbollah, it is important to highlight at this point that Hezbollah's nucleus was formed outside Lebanon, and at a time that predates the Iranian Revolution. Hundreds of young Lebanese Shiites travelled to holy city of Najef in the 1960s and 1970s to complete their theological training at the Islamic Hawza. Some of the students include Abbas al-Musawi, Raghib Harb, Shaykh Subhi Tufayli and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, who would eventually be part of the top echelon of Hezbollah. They were exposed to and greatly influenced by the teachings of radical Shiite ulema like Khomeini and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr. When the Najaf graduates were expelled back to Lebanon in the late 1970s, they established a number of Islamic organizations, but they were dwarfed by Musa' al-Sadr's movement. After al-Sadr's disappearance, and with the assistance of Najaf alumni Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, they joined the Committee Supportive of the Islamic Revolution. The triumph of the revolution in 1979 affirmed the young men's revolutionary ideas, and gave them a tangible model to emulate. Thus, the readiness for establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, similar to that in Iran, was present in the minds of few Lebanese Shiites, prior to the revolution.

At one point in Lebanon's civil war, there were as many as 25 different groups and militias fighting each other, or an outside power. Najaf graduates and other Shiite Islamists who were inspired by the Islamic Revolution could not identify with any of these groups.

Whatever militias or organizations existed, they all lacked the political proposal and structural format they sought.[85] Assimilating into any of these groups would require major compromise or a change of vision; two heavy concessions that they were unwilling to pay. Therefore, they started discussing the idea of forming a new group that would represents their ideology and benefit from the Iranian experience. These discussions intensified after the split from Amal, and communication channels with Iran were attuned to the same frequency. The result of these discussion was the development of a conceptual framework that guides the forthcoming Islamic organization. Such organization would be based on three pillars[86]: First, Islam is a sufficient foundation for a better life and for running the proposed organization. Second, resisting Israel in the form of *jihad* is the top priority of the organization. Third, the highest level leadership is reserved for the Jurist-Theologian, who directs the people according to Islamic sharia. To discuss the details of these pillars, a committee of nine members composed of three Islamic Amal representatives, three clerics from the Beqaa, and three members from the Committee Supportive of the Islamic Revolution, met regularly. The output was a 'Manifesto of the Nine', a document that describes the organization's principles of ideology and declares Khomeini as the rightful Jurist-Theologian.

Many Islamic groups disbanded their existing organizations and adopted the manifesto of the Nine. Collectively, they formed together what came to be known 'Hezbollah', or the Party of God. In effect, Hezbollah was a unification of members from

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85 Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance (*New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 48-49.

86 Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story From Within.* Translated by Dalia Khalil (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 19.

Amal, Islamic Amal, the Lebansese Da'wa party, the Association of Muslim Ulama, the Association of Muslim Students, the Committee Supportive of the Islamic Revolution, plus other alienated Shiites. In coordination with Syria, Iran's Revolutionary Guards, who were stationed in the Beqaa, offered arms and advanced military training to the new members. Soon afterward, fresh recruits were coming in and were enlisted in training camps.

The emergence of Hezbollah could not be divorced from Iran's sponsorship and Syria's acquiescence. The diversity in the fledgling group warranted tensions between the various members. To resolve that, top decision makers in Iran met regularly to discuss reports from the Revolutionary Guards about the situation in Lebanon, and to provide a way forward. The general direction that Iran took was to channel its full support behind Hezbollah, while gradually ostracizing Amal. Ties with Amal were not severed, but were significantly weakened because of Amal's secular approach to Lebanese politics and irreligious fighting against Israeli aggression. Hezbollah fighters received extensive military training to defend Lebanon, and assist Palestinians in reclaiming their land. Moreover, Iran went beyond military training and sought to transform cultural reality in Lebanon. "Among the Revolutionary Guards were clerics who tried to indoctrinate the Lebanese in the religio-political theories of Ayatollah Khomeini and who engaged in recruitment among Bekaa ' Valley Shiite"[87]. For example, revolutionary messages were translated from Persian into Arabic, strict Islamic dress-code was enforced in the Bekaa region, and Western style behavior was punishable. Ultimately, Hezbollah was the successful product of Iran's determination to export the Islamic Revolution to Lebanon.

87 Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: the politics of the western hostage crisis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers, 1997), 34-35.

The group's clandestine activities in the first three years delayed its debut on the Lebanese scene. It was not until 1985 when Hezbollah published its founding document, the Open Letter, that it was deemed a distinct force to be reckoned with. The Letter describes Hezbollah's ideology, and unambiguously pledges total allegiance to Iran's Khomeini.

Chapter four makes it clear that the Islamic revolution in Iran is the unambiguous sponsor of Hezbollah. Military training and weapons were delivered to Hezbollah recruits in a bid to export the revolution. From its inception, Hezbollah had a strong alliance with Iran and it will be strengthened as Hezbollah proves reliable and capable of carrying military operations. The alliance with Iran, as a strong regional sponsor, will form a main pillar in Hezbollah's strategy for preeminence. Hezbollah depends on Iran for political, financial, and military support. Lebanon was already drowning in civil war when Hezbollah's leaders were plotting with Iran, and did not possess the power to thwart that alliance. In addition, what gave Hezbollah legitimacy and a place amongst the warring factions in Lebanon is its call to resist Israel. By fighting a common enemy of Muslims and Arabs, and at a time when animosity against Israel intensified because of it its indiscriminate attacks, Hezbollah evaded entanglement in sectarian issues and secured its longevity. That reality provided Hezbollah with the second tactic to rise to preeminence. For as long as Israel is attacking and occupying parts of Lebanon, Hezbollah could rally local support for its military operations, and by extension its existence as a resistance movement. In chapter five, Hezbollah's ideology will be expounded to demonstrate its link to Ayatollah's Khomeini's vision, and how Iran supplied Hezbollah with unlimited support to gain a foot in Lebanon, and by that establish its third tactic to preeminence.

CHAPTER V

THE FORMATION OF HEZBOLLAH AND IMPACT ON LEBANESE SHIITES

A. Introduction

Hezbollah's swift emergence as an Islamic resistance movement against Israel speaks of the prominent features of the group's identity. Based on chapter four, one could argue that if the Islamic revolution did not take place in Iran, and Israel never invaded Lebanon, Hezbollah would not have existed. Yet, far from being a mere reactionary or ephemeral movement, Hezbollah developed a programmatic ideology and an organizational structure that puts it squarely on the Lebanese political stage. Its initial focus on conducting military operations and preservation of the resistance delayed its public appearance. However, few years before its official participation in the Lebanese parliament in 1992, Hezbollah consolidated its identity and refined its individuality. This was a very critical step in the life of the party; one that risked isolation and predetermined its course of action.

The objective of chapter five is to explore the opening and formative years of Hezbollah. Understanding how the party functioned after its birth, and how it adapted to its surrounding, will be key to unraveling its preeminence. The chapter will discuss the basic pillars of the party's ideology, as well as its underlying structure. In addition, the chapter will highlight Hezbollah's initial resistance operations and social services, which earned the organization a great deal of solemnity and popularity. No other party in Lebanon provided

what Hezbollah did for its constituency, but that monumental task was not free of obstacles. The chapter will finally underline the internal and external challenges that Hezbollah encountered in its bid to win the hearts and minds of Lebanese Shiites.

B. Hezbollah's Ideology

In February1985, Hezbollah published an "Open Letter", addressed to the oppressed in Lebanon and the world. In it, the group defines its identity, beliefs, mission, and stand on a range of pertinent subjects. The main topics covered in the letter, which are central to understanding Hezbollah's ideology, are: the concept of the oppressor and the oppressed, the establishment of an Islamic Iranian-like state in Lebanon, the place and treatment of Christians in such a state, jihad against anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism, and the call for unity under the banner of pan-Islamism. The language of the letter bespeaks of an angry offended Muslim warrior who was humiliated, but now vows vengeance against oppressors in the world, mainly the US and its Western allies. The letter is "a programmatic document rather than an explanation of the components of Hizbullah's ideology… [it is] a manifesto to evoke a broad appeal rather than a systematic doctrine of Islamic activism and government."[88] Nevertheless, the letter is a self-declaration, of the group's ideology, worth analyzing. Although Hezbollah changed some of the basic details of its vision following the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989-1990, its

[88] Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 27.

intellectual foundation and background was not severely altered.[89] As such, there are three primary pillars on which Hezbollah is based: belief in Islam, jihad, and the concept of guardianship of the jurisprudent.

1. Belief in Islam

Muslims believe that Islam is God's final message to humanity. It is purportedly a comprehensive religion that addresses all the earthly and spiritual needs of individuals and societies. Therefore, at the intellectual level, any system of laws or beliefs, which conflicts with Islam, is automatically flawed. It may be appropriate, but it is inherently suboptimal. Only Islam provides a perfectly holistic way of life. As such, there is no separation between religion and politics in Islam. On the contrary, establishing an Islamic state is the ultimate objective of devout Muslims, though not by compulsion. Hezbollah does not hide its belief in the supremacy of Islam as a governing system, but it recognizes that others may have diverging opinions. The Open Letter unambiguously "call[s] for the implementation of the Islamic system based on a direct and free choice of the people [in Lebanon], and not through forceful imposition as may be assumed by some."[90] Although Shiites in Lebanon constitute the largest confessional community, they are unable to democratically establish an Islamic order. Other confessional groups vehemently oppose the Shiite's petition for Islamic polity, and are clinging to the country's archaic constitution to fend their

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89 Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Pallas Publications, 2006), 22.

90 Ibid., 45.

constituency. Still, Hezbollah will never retreat on its bid to establish an Islamic state, because it cannot revoke what is religiously sanctioned.

Unlike Sunnis, Shiites do not seek to emulate the *statehood* founded by Prophet Mohammed, and propagated by his immediate followers. Nor do they look for any historical period that manifests the ideal Islamic state. Only at the return of Imam Mahdi will their conceptualization of an Islamic state be realized. Until then, Shiites look to the Islamic Republic of Iran as the only Islamic government in contemporary times, and the closest approximation of the ideal state. As a result, much of Hezbollah's state theory is borrowed from the supreme leader of Iran, Khumayni, and his Najef companions, Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr, and Muhammad Husayn Fadlu'llah. It is important to note that Hezbollah believes establishing an Islamic state is not an end in itself, but a means for instituting justice.[91] This explains the party's lax pursuit for an Islamic state, and focus on social work.

2. Jihad

Jihad is one of Islam's five pillars, and one of the eight ritual practices (*'Ibadat)* of Shiite faith. It is often translated Holy War, but the word literally means to struggle or strive. According to Hezbollah's ideologues, "jihad is demonstrated labor and energy in confronting or standing up to the enemy, for the purpose of defeating him and achieving the goals set by God."[92] In view of that, Hizbullah speaks of jihad in two ways: the greater

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91 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 36.

92 Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hezbollah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 36.

jihad, and the lesser jihad. The greater jihad is a personal struggle against the self and its desires. It is about overcoming the temptation to indulge in the world's transient and unsatisfying pleasures. By contrast, the lesser jihad is a struggle against the enemy. According to Hamzeh, it subsumes two sub-modes: elementary jihad, and defensive jihad.[93] The former, also known as holy war, or offensive war, is called for to establish global hegemony. Shaykh Qasim affirms that only the Prophet or the infallible imam can issue such a call, but since neither one is present elementary jiahd is impossible. On the other hand, defensive jihad consists of defending one's self, country, and Islamic *umma* against enemy oppression. This type of jihad can be an armed struggle, involving martyrdom, or unarmed which involves political, economic and cultural means.

The relationship between the greater jihad and the lesser jihad is interdependent. Only those who defeat the self in the greater jihad will be able to face death triumphantly in the lesser jihad. At the same time, it is inconceivable to practice the greater jihad (against the self) and avoid the military (lesser) jihad, for the purpose of the greater jihad is the lesser jihad. Put succinctly, "the jihad with the self is only greater than the military jihad in the sense that it is its precondition."[94] The main point is that every Muslim is required and capable of practicing a form of jihad. From that perspective, Hezbollah launched its armed resistance to free South Lebanon from Israeli occupation, and continues to hold arms to free the Muslim lands from ongoing Israeli oppression. While not every person is capable of military jihad, it is the right and duty of every one under occupation to resist in every other

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93 Ibid.

94 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 123.

field, such as political, economic or cultural. Hezbollah's armed resistance stems from its religious conviction, and will therefore continue for as long as Islamic ideology is adhered.

3. Guardianship of the Jurisprudent

Traditional Shiite doctrine asserts that the prophet Mohammed transferred the authority (*wilaya)* of interpreting Islamic sharia and monitoring its application to the infallible imams. After the occultation of the twelfth imam, and in the absence of the infallible, a contention arose on whether that authority had devolved or could devolve to others. By the 16th century, jurists (*fuqaha)* concluded that limited authority was passed onto them collectively.[95] It was Khomeini in the 1970s who advocated the expansion of the *wilaya* beyond the spiritual sphere into the political realm. He claimed what no *faqih* ever claimed in Shiite history, that the leading *faqih* is also the Leading Guardian of the Muslims (*Wali Amr al-Muslimin),* with supreme authority over the entire *umma,* including other *fuqaha*. Khomeini developed the concept of the Guardianship of the Jurisprudent (*Wilayat al-Faqih*) based on his belief in the necessity of establishing an Islamic state, in order to spread justice.

From its inception, Hezbollah subscribed to the doctrine of *Wilayat al-Faqih,* and in particular, Khomeini's leadership as deputy of the twelfth imam, and the chosen jurisprudent. Hezbollah affirms that this is an 'intellectual' commitment to a religious Islamic head, not a political allegiance to a national head of state, even though the *wilayat*

95 Mahan Mirza, Patricia Crone, and Gerhard Böwering, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 208-209.

is a religious and political institution.[96] In other words, Hezbollah's loyalty is primarily to the *faqih,* and secondarily to the Islamic Republic *in* Iran (not the Iranian government). Hezbollah sees no conflict between being a Lebanese political player and an Islamic resistance movement submissive to the *faqih,* because the *faqih* only issues general guidelines for political action. He provides direction on politically strategic issues that concern the entire *umma,* such as *jihad,* and the identification of enemies, the obvious example being Israel. At the same time, the *faqih* may arbitrate on national religiously-problematic issues if invited to. Such was the case when Hezbollah debated whether to participate in the 1992 Lebanese general election. Hezbollah deliberated the permissibility of participating in a non-Islamic political system, and *faqih* Khamini'i blessed the move on the ground that it averts the cause of evil, and promotes Islamic interests. Finally, Hizbullah's strong connection to Iran should be seen in light of its pan-Islamic allegiance to the *faqih,* who led the Islamic revolution and founded the Islamic republic in Iran. As such, Iran provides a practical and contemporary reference for Islamic leadership.

C. Hezbollah's Organizational Structure

Hezbollah calculatingly transformed itself from an Islamist, clandestine resistance militia to a mainstream Lebanese political party, with a resistance wing.[97] Unquestionably, Islamic resistance forms the backbone of Hezbollah's identity. In a war-prone religiously

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96 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 66.

97 Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).

diverse context, such hallmark can be a stigma that plagues any party's dealings with, and integration in, society. Nevertheless, Hezbollah masterfully balances between ideological principles and political pragmatism to reach workable compromises in Lebanon.[98] To that end, Hezbollah's leadership apparatus and organizational structure differ from conventional secular parties in that it revolves around clerical leadership for direction and strategic decision making. Ahmad Nizar Hamza's original work reveals Hezbollah's organizational structure in a detailed fashion.[99]

At the top of the leadership hierarchy is the Consultative Council (*majlis al-Shura),* composed of six clerics and a single lay member. This obvious disproportionality reflects the party's emphasis on Islamic ideology and its approach to ensure it remains that way. Needless to say, all party leaders must pledge allegiance to Hezbollah's basic tenets. The Consultative Council is elected by the Central Council (*majlis al-Markazi)* for a period of three years. The Central Council, which is a large group of founding leaders and cadre, nominate a number of candidates, after they have been thoroughly evaluated for election into the Consultative Council. The chosen council will be responsible for providing direction and making major decisions, which will be binding on all party members. In case the seven members are in a sharp disagreement, *wali al-faqih* in Iran, is then asked to arbitrate and provide a final irrevocable resolution.

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98 Nagi Dagher. "Defense Magazine." Official Website of the Lebanese Army. January 1, 2008. http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/news/?18041#.VCqpxxZr6So (accessed September 30, 2014).

99 Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

The Consultative Council oversees the work of an executive administration that is managing the actual work on the ground. Five councils make up the executive administration: Executive Council, Politburo, Parliamentary Council, Judicial Council, and Jihad Council. Each one of those administrations is headed by a member of the Consultative Council. This reflects the far reaching influence of the leading clerics, and homogeneity in the organization. The Executive Council (*Majlis al-Tanfizi)* and the Politburo *(Majlis al-Seyasi)* have the most impact on the party's activities. The Executive Council supervises the daily work of the party. This covers social welfare services, healthcare, educational support, media outlets, syndicate affairs, external relations, financial matters, and general (not complex) security issues. The Politburo looks after the party's election campaigns, and manage the party's political image, interest and alliances. It serves the Consultative Council in the capacity of an internal think tank on local political issues. The Parliamentary Council coordinates between Hezbollah's members in the Lebanese parliament. In Hezbollah's world, the Members of Parliament are not above the Consultative Council, but in fact they are bound by the decision made by the Council. The Judicial Council is Hezbollah's designated body for settling disputes between party members, and conflicts in Hezbollah controlled areas. It rules on violations of the sharia as well as civil issues. Finally, the Jihad Council is in charge of determining the best jihad strategy in any given situation, excluding armed jihad which is reserved for the party's military apparatus. This involves assessing the political climate, identifying dangers facing the party, calculating impact, and determining a course of action.

Furthermore, a Military and Security clandestine apparatus exists, and functions directly under the command of the Consultative Council. Due to the nature of its

operations, much of its organizational structure is inscrutable. Yet, Hamzeh highlights two agencies that are spoken of publicly: The Islamic Resistance (*al-Muqawamah a-Islamiyyah)* and the Party Security (*Amn al-Hizb).* The Islamic Resistance includes the enforcement and recruitment section, and the combat section. The former recruits fighters and indoctrinates them with the party's ideology. The latter provides various levels of martial arts training and weaponry. Fighters are placed in the field based on their compliance and performance in those two sections. A distinguishing mark of the Islamic Resistance is the "semiautonomous-ness" of its members; fighters are mainly civilians who blend naturally in their environment, but if one is identified or arrested, the military operation is not jeopardized and others are not easily discovered. Concerning the Party Security agency, it is presumably tasked with preventing enemies from penetrating Hezbollah's units and also addressing any dissension among party members. At the same time, the agency counters espionage activities by internal and external enemies. It is suspected that Iran's Revolutionary Guards assist Hezbollah directly in the Military and Security apparatus.

No one knows definitely the number of Hezbollah members. What is certain is that all members are Shiites. The party runs a meticulous process for recruiting and orientating candidates. "The major characteristic that sets Hizbullah apart from the conventional or secular parties is that the latter rely on universalism rather than particularism."[100] Membership into Hezbollah most often occurs from the bottom up. Recruits are screened by regional officers before they undergo a two-stage transformation. The first stage is

[100] Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 75.

reinforcement, where recruits are indoctrinated with Hezbollah's ideology and culture. They are taught to follow the party's interpretation of Islamic texts. The topic of martyrdom figures prominently in the stage. Only those who demonstrate obedience and loyalty to Hezbollah's doctrines, have a chance of becoming members, but not before passing the second stage. The second stage is ordered discipline. Candidates are trained to endure various physical and military drills. Performance in this stage affirms membership and determines what position each person will serve in: either on the field or in political or social units. At the same time, Hezbollah makes exceptional arrangements for needed members with special skills. Such members will not go through the same recruitment process, but they must demonstrate faith in Hezbollah's teachings and causes. Letters of recommendations from clerics are sought to substantiate the candidate's standing. Examples of exceptional membership come from the fields of medical doctors, engineers, university professors, and computer and media technicians.

D. Hezbollah's Political Work

As reflected by its organizational structure, Hezbollah gives considerable attention to social work. Islamic Resistance may form its backbone, but without its wide ranging services in the public and social arena, Hezbollah would hardly be as popular as it is today. While offering services to gain people's support is not a new strategy, what distinguishes Hezbollah from other parties, and Islamic movements in general, is that its goal is to gain legitimacy in Lebanon's pluralist system, not replace it.[101] This is exceptionally important

[101] Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 81.

for Hezbollah because its ongoing war with Israel requires a sustainable relationship with the state, and a stable popular base. As such, Hezbollah's range and scope of social and public services outshines other political parties and NGOs in Lebanon. In Hezbollah's stronghold areas, like the southern suburb of Beirut, the party's services preceded and continue to outperform those offered by the government. More significantly, Hezbollah's services, with substantial aid from Iran, are continuously evolving to offer what is relevant and needed in a professional manner. That will surely garner support from the growing Shiite population.

Towards the end of the civil war, Hezbollah was consumed with resisting Israel and fighting Amal for control. Offering social services did not occupy its agenda in the early days. Nonetheless, standing for the oppressed, poor, and downtrodden figures prominently in Hezbollah's manifesto. Social services were first catered to meet the needs of fighters fighting Israel, and to their families. Gradually, those services were expanded and extended to needy civilian families in areas under Hezbollah's control.[102] On that point, Hezbollah was unlike other militias and parties, in that it did not exploit government resources to meet its constituents' needs. Instead, most of the services were funded by the oil-rich Islamic Republic of Iran. Wealthy charitable organizations in Iran, managed by the clergy, designated large sums of money to spend abroad, in support of the mission to export the revolution. Ultimately, Hezbollah's constant cash flow and professional administration, in particular contrast to Amal, set it apart as a reliable and 'clean' patron of the Shiites.

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[102] Judith Palmer Harik, *The public and social services of the Lebanese militias* (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1994).

Notwithstanding al-Sadr's genuine efforts to alleviate the misery of Lebanon's Shiites, poverty loomed large over the widely neglected community. The tragedy of the civil war and enduring struggle with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) exacerbated the state of the Shiites and left them in a desperate socioeconomic condition. A great multitude fled their homes in the South in search for refuge, and settled in the mostly agricultural inexpensive suburbs of South Beirut. Understandably, the feeble, war battered Beirut infrastructure could not handle the strain of serving approximately one-sixth the population.[103] By the end of the civil war, Hezbollah was in a critical stage: the condition of the Shiites, Hezbollah's support base, was worsening, competition with Amal did not cease, relationship with Syria was contentious, Khomeini's death dampened the revolutionary fervor, and the IDF was still occupying Southern Lebanon. To survive, Hezbollah had to reinvent itself. Thus, it embarked on a process of branding itself as an indigenously Lebanese political organization, rather than a Shiite, Iranian-sponsored military one. Consequently, Hezbollah filled the vacuum left by the inert Lebanese government to become one of the country's most competent and professional service provider. Services ranged from basic ones such as delivering drinking water, garbage collection and snow removal (in the Bekaa Valley), to more advanced ones like high quality schooling, affordable healthcare, housing rehabilitation, business consultation, lines of credit, and social security facilities. By the mid-1990s, Hezbollah functioned as a state within a state in Shiite dominated areas: Dahiyeh, Bekaa Valley, and the South.

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[103] Mona Fawaz, "Agency and Ideology in Community Services: Islamic NGOs in a Southern Suburb of Beirut," Edited by Sarah Ben Nefissa and Nabil Abd al-Fattah. *NGOs and Governance in the Arab World* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005).

E. Hezbollah's Social Work

In principle, Hezbollah extends its services to everyone in need, but in reality, its main target audience are the Shiite poor. This is because in a religiously-divided country like Lebanon, where sectarianism runs high, it is more politically feasible to operate in Shiite areas. In mixed areas of the South that were impacted by Israeli aggression, Christians and Sunnis received services from Hezbollah. As a result of this wide and diverse service provision, Hezbollah attracted a big following and formed a solid constituency, which earned the party a place in the parliament. Yet, Hezbollah maintains that it is a movement for the poor; that it offers social services based on religious beliefs and motivations, and not for political rewards. This is evidenced by the party's service provision early on, before joining the parliament in 1992, and having no access to government funds. Poor Shiites have come to believe that Hezbollah genuinely cares about them, and is committed to providing them the services they need with no hidden agenda.[104] In a sense, Hezbollah practiced the spiritual wisdom of 'you shall reap what you sow'. In exchange for doing good works, the party obtained the loyalty of the people, which manifested itself in occupying increasing number of political offices in various municipalities, the parliament, and the cabinet.

In addition to the range and number of services, what distinguishes Hezbollah's social services is the efficiency with which it is done. The Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* estimates that about 350,000 people, or 10 per cent of the Lebanese population receive a

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104 Elizabeth Picard and Franklin Philip, *Lebanon, a shattered country: myths and realities of the wars in Lebanon* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2002).

form of Hezbollah's services.[105] While the accuracy of that number cannot be verified, it is believed to be reasonable. In that case, it requires great efficacy to manage the volatile supply and demand dynamic. Flanigan & Abdel-Samad observe that "the source of its [Hezbollah's] efficiency lies in the organization of its NGOs and motivations of its social-service employees."[106] Many of the party's employees are in fact volunteer workers who sacrifice their time out of a deep conviction in the morality of what they do. Moreover, the party cultivates a culture of resistance through its charity organizations. NGOs affiliated with Hezbollah adopted a mission of building the resistance society. As such, the provision of social services is a form of social jihad, which parallels armed resistance on the battlefield.[107] Another factor that contributes to Hezbollah's efficiency is its constant readiness to go on the field. Party members and social services providers are continuously preparing for new threats, especially from Israeli attacks. For that reason, workers are trained to react quickly to arising problems.

With regards to Hezbollah's strategy for preeminence, Hezbollah's manifesto provides ideological foundation for armed resistance against Israel, and a religious obligation to provide social support and create a just society. As such, Hezbollah's leadership could urge Shiites to participate in jihad, and volunteer for relief and social work. ***It is clear, that Hezbollah's social services improved living standards of many Shiite communities. While it cannot be proven that its social programs were intended to***

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105 "Who Receives the Services?" *Ha'aretz*, July 26, 2006

106 Shawn Teresa Flanigan and Mounah Abdel-Samad, "Hezbollah's Social Jihad: Nonprofits as Resistance Organizations," *Middle East Policy* 16, no. 2 (2009), 131.

107 Ibid., 134.

win people's votes, the result is the same: Hezbollah advanced in power and popularity as a result of people's trust in and allegiance to the party. As long as the government remains absent or incapable of providing basic services for its citizens, Hezbollah will have more room to expand its social services and earn the people's trust and votes. As for Hezbollah's troublesome connection to the Islamic revolution, Hezbollah will learn to downplay that in future by highlighting its social services and resistance duty. *Chapter **six will explain the challenges and oppositions that Hezbollah faced as it*** **was ascending to preeminence**, and how it turned them into stepping stones for further success.

CHAPTER VI

CHALLENGES AND OPPOSITIONS

A. Introduction

In chapter five it became apparent that Iran formed Hezbollah as the vanguard of the Islamic resistance in Lebanon, and influenced its organizational structure. Through its diverse social services and 'clean' political programs, Hezbollah increased in power and popularity. It is inconceivable to have reached the level of power and popularity that Hezbollah did in the 1990's without challenges and oppositions. Chapter six will discuss domestic opposition and regional challenges faced by Hezbollah between 1988 and 2000. The objective of this chapter is to show how Hezbollah ultimately triumphed over Amal movement and Israeli occupation by leveraging its weapons, and in the end secured the trust of the majority of Lebanese Shiites.

Chapter six will explore the roots of challenges faced by Hezbollah, and how it overcame them. The struggle against Amal posed a serious threat to Hezbollah's credibility amongst the Shiite community. As the two main Shiite parties in Lebanon, a fierce competition pitted Hezbollah against Amal for the hearts and minds of the Shiites. The chapter will also discuss the unmistakable role Iran and Syria had on influencing the status of Hezbollah and shaping its future. Moreover, the chapter describes the obstacles Hezbollah had to overcome to establish itself in the Lebanese political system. In the second part of the chapter, the antagonism between Hezbollah and Israel is brought to the

foreground in a discussion on the challenge to disarm Hezbollah, and the subsequent July 2006 war against Israel.

B. Hostility Between Brothers: Hezbollah & Amal

Remarkably, few years after its emergence in the summer of 1982, Hezbollah transformed itself from a local anti-Israeli resistance movement to a major contender in the regional and international system. With direct support from Iran, Hezbollah rapidly expanded its activities in Lebanon, and became more institutionalized. Hezbollah's quick growth alarmed Amal, Hezbollah's main Shiite rival, and Amal's regional sponsor, Syria. Although Syria did not oppose the Revolutionary Guards training camps in Lebanon, it could not allow a mounting Iran-Hezbollah strength to threaten its hegemony in Lebanon. The local rivalry between Hezbollah and Amal was thus a reflection of the power struggle between Iran and Syria for control of Lebanon. Iran's mission to export the revolution and establish an Islamic state in Lebanon through Hezbollah threatened the influence of Hafiz al-Asad's regime in Lebanon. As a counterbalance, Syria strengthened Amal as its political arm in Lebanon, and as a "peacekeeping" force in the South; Syria did not want Hezbollah's raids in the South against Israel to give Israel a pretext to reinvade Lebanon. In exchange, Amal would have the power to prevent a radical Shiite victory to be scored by Hezbollah.

The period between 1988 and 1990 witnessed the greatest struggle between Hezbollah and Amal for dominance within the Shiite community. Hezbollah's various activities and services won the Shiites' favor in Beirut and relegated Amal to second place. As discussed in the previous chapter, Hezbollah was increasingly recognized as a powerful organization with considerable military, political and social prowess. However, it did not

perform as well in South Lebanon. The Amal movement, although lost considerable support from the public because of the atrocities it committed against the Palestinians, was still dominant in the South. In what later became known as War of the Camps (1984-1989), Amal besieged and attacked Palestinian refugee camps to prevent Palestinians from establishing a base in Lebanon after the PLO's evacuation in 1982. Amal's roots in the South were too deep to be uprooted because of battles with Hezbollah. As such, Amal was deemed guardian of the South, and the main force of resistance against Israel. To protect its popularity, Amal sought to monopolize resistance activities in the South, and curb Hezbollah's attacks. Distancing Hezbollah from the Israeli border (i.e. battlefield) posed an existential threat to the Hezbollah's core being, which is resisting and defeating Israel. As a result, both Hezbollah and Amal fought to cement their wobbly position in the South and South Beirut, respectively.

The hostility between Hezbollah and Amal stems from a contradistinction of perspectives on at least three main issues. Subhi Al-Tufeili, Hezbollah's former secretary general, identified those issues in 1989 as liberating Palestine, the stance towards Israel, and the welfare of the Shiite community.[108] First, Hezbollah strove to liberate Palestine by fighting the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Lebanon, and by disseminating revolutionary propaganda amongst Muslim nations. Amal, on the other hand, played a passive role and did not consider liberating Palestine to be one of its top priorities. Second, Hezbollah did not recognize Israel and refused to negotiate any settlements. Rather, Hezbollah was adamant on resisting Israel at home, and abroad. In contrast, Amal was open to negotiation with Israel and thought it could drive Israel out of South Lebanon diplomatically. Third,

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108 *Al-Shark Al-Awsat*, April 1, 1996.

Hezbollah wanted to end feudal leadership and instigate free elections amongst Shiites. Amal raised those ideals as well, but behaved contradistinctively by cooperating with the government to formulate the Tripartite Accord and the Taif Agreement.

C. Brothers at War for Power and Influence

The struggle between Hezbollah and Amal escalated into a bloody and cruel war in February 1988. The spark that ignited the war was the kidnapping of U.N. staff Colonel William R. Higgins of the United States. Members associated with Hezbollah abducted Higgins somewhere between Tyre and Naquora, which was an Amal-controlled territory, believing he was a spy. Regardless of the cause, the incident challenged Amal's reputation as the security keeper in the South. In response, Amal arrested and interrogated a number of Hezbollah activists, which led to a series of violence in South Lebanon. By April 1988, it looked like Hezbollah had the upper hand. It attacked Amal checkpoints in the South, destroyed Amal position and offices in Nabatia, and kidnapped a number of Amal members.

Amal intensified its counterattack and by September it evicted almost all Hezbollah activists from villages in the South. The war was bloody and involved heavy weaponry as well as psychological warfare. For example, at a moment of triumph, the winning party claimed to be the powerful and rightful representative of Shiites. If Amal was losing ground, it would accuse Hezbollah's leaders of abusing their clerical position to issue fatwas that server their party's agenda. On the other hand, if Hezbollah was on the defensive, it would reprimand Amal for attacking fellow Shiites, instead of Israeli enemy forces. As it was, both parties exploited victories and defeats to shape and influence Shiite

public opinion. At the heat of the struggle between Hezbollah and Amal is who was going to champion the cause of the resistance. Founded as a resistance movement, particularly against Israel, Hezbollah could not allow its reason for existence to be diluted by allowing Amal to share in the fighting of Israel. For that reason, Hezbollah was keen on eliminating any militias that was fighting Israel.

Eventually, the intercommunal Shiite struggle expanded from south Lebanon to Beirut's southern district. Both warring parties saw that as an opportunity to serve their interests. "Amal hoped to exploit the momentum of its victory in the south to expand into Hezbollah territory. Hezbollah, on the other hand, wanted to salvage its reputation in the community's eyes, to avenge its humiliation in the south, and to create conditions that would allow it to return to the south."[109] The ensuing war was more violent than fighting in the South. Hundreds of houses were destroyed, and thousands were left to survive under very poor conditions or homeless. In the end, Hezbollah came out as the victor, and Amal was expelled from Beirut's southern district.

D. Iran and Syria Interfere

Confrontation between Hezbollah and Amal resulted in a stalemate. Hezbollah demanded political recognition and military freedom to conduct its resistance operation in the South, but Amal vehemently denied. On the other hand, Amal demanded a stronghold in Beirut and that the Supreme Shiite Council would be accepted as a higher authority that would arbitrate between the two parties to end the conflict. Needless to say, Hezbollah

109 Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 78-79.

rejected. Before letting the war between Hezbollah and Amal spiral out of control, Iran and Syria intervened to mediate between the two sides. The intervention did not immediately halt the war activities. In fact, Syria had to use force at one point to deescalate the situation. In January 1989, violence erupted in the hilly side of Iqlim al Tufah, which extends towards the security zone. The region is of great significance to Hezbollah because it serves as a strategic location to launch its resistance activities against Israel, as well as an expedient headquarter for regaining control of Nabatia, and the South in general. Amal was aware of Hezbollah's agenda and the threat it posed, which led it to conduct an aggressive plan to eliminate Hezbollah from the region. Syria and Iran joined hands to exert pressure on the two groups to sign a cease-fire agreement and normalize their relations in all areas. Finally, on January 30, 1989 the four players signed the first Damascus Agreement bringing about a comprehensive cease-fire. A framework was developed that would allow Hezbollah to return to a limited number of villages in South Lebanon, and would enable Amal to function in Beirut.

Both sides took steps to implement the agreement, but that soon faltered. Villagers in the South protested against the return of Hezbollah fighters. A new wave of fighting broke out between Hezbollah and Amal, and mutual accusations resumed. At that point, Syria spoke of rapprochement with Iraq in a way to pressure Iran to command Hezbollah to halt its attacks on Amal's positions. In November 1990, the second Damascus Agreement was signed and it was going to be implemented with support, involvement, and under supervision from Damascus and Tehran. The agreement entailed "immediate implementation of the cease-fire; cessation of propaganda; release of captives and prisoners; handing over of responsibility for security in Iqlim al Tufah to the Lebanese

Army; and the return of all displaced persons, from both sides, to their homes."[110] The agreement permitted the return of Hezbollah to the South, in return for the deployment of Syrian troops in the southern suburbs of Beirut. This episode demonstrated Hezbollah's limited power vis-à-vis Syria and its proxy militia Amal. Hezbollah's unlimited support from Iran could not grant it unlimited power in Lebanon. The Amal-Syria alliance proved tenacious, and Hezbollah must learn to befriend it before it rises in greatness.

At the end of the 1980s, the political climate in Lebanon and the region was changing: crisis in the Persian Gulf was escalating, the Aoun government was coming to an end, and signing of the Taif Agreement was forthcoming. Hezbollah was eager to reach a settlement with Amal and return to the South. The Taif Agreement, accepted by the majority of the civil war leaders, required all militias to disarm. Hezbollah insisted that it was a resistance movement, not another Lebanese militia, since its weapons were reserved to fight Israel. So, in order to keep its arms and secure its longevity, it had to quickly return to the battlefield in the South and resume its resistance operations against Israel, which constituted its primary tactic. Yet, local challenges did not cease as shall be seen in the next section.

E. The Political Challenge

The 1989 Taif Agreement marked an end of Lebanon's civil war, and the beginning of a new era. The agreement formulated the principle of "mutual coexistence" between Lebanon's different sects, and reoriented Lebanon's identity towards the Arab world, especially Syria. More importantly, the agreement stipulated the disarmament of all

110 Ibid., 81.

Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. All militias agreed to disband except Hezbollah. Hezbollah maneuvered its way out of the militia-disarming accord by branding itself as a resistance movement, not a civil war militia. However, that did not automatically qualify it as a legitimate player in the new Lebanese political order; a point that Amal kept rubbing in Hezbollah's face. Amal was secure in presenting itself as a secular national Lebanese movement that supported the authority of the new government. In contrast, it used Hezbollah's ideology against it, and charged it with being a narrow minded fundamentalist organization that seeks to overthrow the Lebanese government to establish an Islamic state. By participating in government institutions and simultaneously defaming Hezbollah, Amal sought to increase its power base and influence in the Shiite community.

Doubtlessly, Hezbollah recognized the impending threat to its survival, and challenge to its popularity within the community. As a result, Hezbollah embarked on a number of initiatives to alter the image imposed on it as Iran's client. To minimize the impact of Amal's sabotage, it focused on championing the cause of the resistance, and accordingly increased its attacks against the IDF. Hezbollah masterfully exploited its resistance role to earn political dividends. In addition, and as a gesture to pacify Amal, it took steps to transfer control of Beirut's southern district to the Lebanese army. Furthermore, Hezbollah's leaders changed the tone of their dialogue and the substance of their message to win the public-opinion war. A clear example of this is replacing the party's motto, "Islamic Revolution in Lebanon", on its signature yellow flag with "Islamic

Resistance in Lebanon".[111] Most importantly, Hezbollah participated in the 1992 parliamentary elections to give the resistance legal standing in the political system.

Notwithstanding Hezbollah's preparedness to contest elections, the party had an insurmountable challenge of toning down its ideology of the supremacy of Islam, jihad, and jurisdiction of the jurisprudence to widen its support. Its political program and speeches had to sound moderate to dispel the mistrust of non-Shiites about any hidden radical agenda. At the same time, they had to be consistent with previous messages to avoid losing core supporters. With a high degree of ideological flexibility and exceptional rhetorical skills, Hezbollah overcame those challenges. Sayyed Fadlallah, a Lebanese widely-respected *merja* and purportedly Hezbollah's spiritual mentor, explained how "Lebanon's objective condition was not conducive to Islamic governance and that jihad would have to be waged on the personal, political and social level…Fadlallah's conciliatory interpretations and explanations…served to soothe those who feared Hezbollah's present positions were merely tactical."[112] On another front, Hezbollah embarked on an openness policy (*infitah*) to secure Christian understanding and support. Its leaders engaged with Christians in several socio-political discussions to garner their support for the resistance. Herein lies a manifestation of Hezbollah's strategy for greatness. Hezbollah recognized the multi-confessional nature of Lebanon, and rather than oppose it, it sought its endorsement. By establishing ties with non-Shiite groups, Hezbollah was gaining acceptance and legitimacy in post-Taif Lebanon. Ultimately, Hezbollah won 12 out of 128 seats in the 1992

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111 Hussain Abdul-Hussain. "Hezbollah: A State within a State." *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 8 (2009).

112 Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 69-70.

parliamentary elections, and nine in 1996, making it the largest single party block both times.[113] Evidently, Hezbollah demonstrated superior ability in overcoming domestic challenges. Their tenacity proved just as effective on the regional playfield.

F. The Islamic Resistance Against Israel

Unapologetically, one of Hezbollah's primary goals, as relayed in the Open Letter, is to obliterate Israel from existence. The party's proud identification as the "Islamic Resistance in Lebanon" – first against Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and the West Bekaa , and second against the influence of Israel's allies (i.e. the West) in the region – bespeaks of its abomination against the Zionist regime. The nature of Hezbollah's resistance is to use any and all means available to push Israel out of Lebanese territories. Armed resistance, as opposed to non-violent means of confrontation, topped the list of Hezbollah's strategies. From the beginning, and it became increasingly evident over time, resistance against Israeli occupation characterized Hezbollah and constituted its *raison d'être*. Armed resistance stood as the top and invariable priority which preoccupied the party, even ahead of abolishing the sectarian political system in Lebanon, establishing an Islamic republic, or securing political power. In fact, during the 1992 and 1996 elections, at a time when Hezbollah could have independently won elections in the South, it acquiesced to Syria's demands to enter into an electoral alliance with its rival Amal, in exchange for maintaining its resistance cause and activities. Evidently, the resistance serves Hezbollah's political activities, and not the other way around. This interplay

[113] Harik points out that these elections do not accurately reflect Hezbollah's popularity amongst Shiites since competition was restricted in "resistance areas". (pg. 95)

between political alliances and flaunting the cause of the resistance will pay off dividends to Hezbollah in the future.

To Hezbollah, armed resistance against Israel is a religious obligation to fight oppression, but inconspicuously, it is also a logical counteroffensive to end the occupation. History is pleated with accounts of occupational forces that were defeated and driven out at the hands of ferocious fighters. With that awareness, Hezbollah wages its war against Israel, hoping to ignite a dividing debate in Israeli society about their long term presence in Lebanon. In the meantime, the resistance effectually deterred Israel from expanding its settlements in Lebanon. Three years after occupying Beirut, Hezbollah's strategy of enraging the Israeli populace worked, and forced Israel to retreat in 1985 from larges areas of the country to the 'security zone'; the price was 640 Israeli troops killed by Hezbollah.[114] Hezbollah's war of attrition against Israel was so effective that in 1999 Israel announced that it would unilaterally withdraw from the occupied zone by July 2000. On May 24, 2000, more than six weeks before the stated date, Israeli forces pulled out from Lebanon almost completely, keeping the Shebaa farms. The early withdrawal was considered a long-awaited victory by Hezbollah.

The IDF's withdrawal proved that Hezbollah's resistance logic is sound, and that violence, not negotiations, is the most effective, if not only, approach to deal with Israel. Hezbollah observed that land-for-peace negotiations with Israel are pointless since "Israel's withdrawal to the security zone in 1985 was directly attributable to 'the presence of the

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[114] Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam* (New York: Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1995), 69.

mujahidin's attacks' rather than any negotiations or international agreements."[115] Hezbollah learned that it can attain its demands unconditionally through the blood of its fighters, and it would rather do that than succumb to futile negotiations with Israel.

At home, the Lebanese government had little leverage over Hezbollah's resistance activities. Hezbollah's resilience and perseverance during Operation Grapes of Wrath (1996) demonstrated the party's determination to keep the resistance alive, at any cost or consequence for Lebanon.[116] Of course, speaking against the resistance would be considered taking Israeli' side, which is tantamount to political suicide. The general consensus was that if Israel with its superior military power cannot stop Hezbollah's operations, how could the Lebanese government?

G. Anti-Zionism and Israel

Hezbollah's birth, core identity, and fate are directly linked to the existence, belligerence and future of the state of Israel. Hezbollah depicts Israel as absolute evil that must be wiped off the face of the earth. It is important at this point to talk about the deep roots of aversion that Hezbollah has for Israel. While Israel's occupation of Lebanon in 1982 is widely considered the main impetus for the formation of Hezbollah and the *casus belli* for the ongoing war, Saad-Ghrayeb posits that the occupation of Palestine and indeed the very existence of the state of Israel is the real cause of the hostility and never ending

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115 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 119.

116 Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 118.

conflict.[117] Therefore, even if Israel withdraws from the occupied Shebaa farms, Hezbollah's inbred abomination for the Zionist entity will not cease nor will it recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli state.

Hezbollah views Israel's usurpation of Palestinian lands as an act of aggression that must be reversed, regardless of how many years pass by. Thus the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel is an existential struggle. Peace or reconciliation are not prospective solutions. What follows, in principle, are three possible outcomes: the disintegration of Israel and complete liberation of the lands of Palestine; utter defeat of Hezbollah and clipping its military wing; or perpetual conflict separated by periods of intermittent truce. What fuels Hezbollah's hostility towards Israel is the latter's contemporary political and military activity. Israel's continuous aggression against Palestinians is viewed by Hezbollah as acts of oppression against the Muslim *umma,* which must not be tolerated. However, Hezbollah downplays Israel's occupation as an attack on the *umma*, to avoid reducing the war into a religious-sectarian battle.

For Hezbollah, world Zionism embodied by the state of Israel, is a cogent threat to the livelihood, values and civilization of Arab and Islamic identity. Hezbollah believes that Israel aspires to Judaize all of Palestine at the expense of the Muslim inhabitants. This is evidenced by the influx of Jewish immigrants from all over the world into the land of Palestine. Israel's ultimate goal is the realization of the Zionist dream as described in the Old Testament, which is the judaization of the region between the Nile and Euphrates rivers; this includes Lebanon in its entirety. So, from Hezbollah's point of view, Israel's

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117 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "Factors Conductive to the Politicization of the Lebanese Shi'a and the Emergence of Hizbu'llah," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14, no. 3 (2003).

occupation of South Lebanon was only the first step in seizing the whole country. Hezbollah vindicates this perspective by pointing to Israel's refusal to abdicate Lebanon in the summer of 1982 after the PLO were forcibly expelled, which was presumably the reason for their invasion in the first place. Israel's occupation of South Lebanon is thus a proof of their undeclared intention to expand its territory in the region. Hezbollah goes as far as claiming that all the social, political and military problems of the world, not just the Arab-Islamic world, are attributable to world Zionism.[118] This, however, must be seen as an attempt to vilify Israel, and win the world's support for the resistance.

Hezbollah is convinced that armed resistance offers the only solution to end Israel's domination in the region. While Hezbollah's military capabilities were incomparable to those of Israel, the party established a retaliation policy of firing katyusha rockets into the security zone when Israel violated the undeclared rules of engagement. At the risk of being destroyed by Israeli forces, Hezbollah was successful in achieving a "balance of terror" against Israel. Between 1990 and 1996, Hezbollah increased the number of missiles it fired, and the quality of its accuracy. As a result, Hezbollah's status was raised in the Lebanese public opinion. Israel was dissatisfied and it posed the most challenging threat to Hezbollah, which, ironically, was the regional peace process.[119] A successful peace agreement with Syria and Lebanon would neutralize Hezbollah, and render its military arsenal unnecessary. In response, Hezbollah increased its violent activity and rejected any peace treaty with Israel. When Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath to damage

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118 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 142.

119 Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 197.

Hezbollah's ability to launch missiles and cause strife between it and the Lebanese public, the strategy backfired and Hezbollah emerged as a national hero. Israel finally pulled out of South Lebanon, but was still determined to disarm Hezbollah.

H. The Challenge to Disarm Hezbollah and the 2006 War

The unilateral withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces from south Lebanon in May 2000 was a cause of great celebration in Lebanon, and to a lesser extent in the Arab world. Victory over the archenemy of Arabs and Muslims, at the hands of a meager resistance movement, gave citizens of the Middle East hope for liberation from the West's Neo-imperialism. However, a number of significant events in the region occurred following Israel's withdrawal that had direct impact on Hezbollah's place and activity in Lebanon. The Second Intifada in October 2000, the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, America's war on terror and invasion of Iraq in 2003, and Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 changed the dynamics of the Middle East system. Consequently, Hezbollah was forced to revise its policies to cope with internal and external pressures aimed at disarming it.

The unilateral withdrawal of the IDF without an agreement was perceived by the regional system as victory for Hezbollah. It seemed that Hezbollah fulfilled its mission, and that it no longer needed to maintain and develop its military array. By extension, Hezbollah's armed presence in Lebanon was viewed as a threat to the regional security complex, in at least four ways.[120] First, it compromised Lebanon's internal stability due to

120 Brent J. Talbot and Heidi Harriman, "Disarming Hezbollah," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (2008).

religious and political division in the country. As a Shiite movement, Hezbollah destabilizes Lebanon's fragile system by strengthening its own sect to a disproportionate measure. Hezbollah acts with a great deal of autonomy in large parts of Lebanon, which challenges the authority of the state institutions. Second, Hezbollah's armed presence empowers Syria and Iran to have destabilizing influence beyond their borders. Syria and Iran provide Hezbollah with military strength and political support. As a result, Hezbollah acts as proxy force for the two regional powers in their struggle for hegemony in Lebanon and the Middle East. Third, Hezbollah's military posts south of Lebanon delay peace with Israel. Israel is unwilling to make peace with Lebanon as long as Hezbollah can effectively launch attacks against its northern cities. At the same time, Lebanon is unwilling to make peace with Israel before it is convinced that Israel will not reattempt to invade, occupy or attack Lebanon; Israel's occupation of Shebaa Farms stands as a proof of Israel's ill-intentions towards Lebanon, even if the farms' Lebanese identity is disputed. Fourth, Hezbollah's military apparatus interferes with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Hezbollah often distracts Israel's from its war with Palestinians. Plus, there is evidence that Hezbollah supplies militant groups in Palestine, especially Hamas, with arms, military training and revolutionary ideology. As such, many serious attempts were made by domestic and international forces to disarm Hezbollah, until the matter escalated and led to the second Lebanon War in 2006.

The pressure on Hezbollah to disarm increased considerably after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and Syria's pulling out from Lebanon in April 2005. Nevertheless, Hezbollah steadfastly refused to lay down its weapons, claiming that in Syria's absence, the Islamic resistance is the only formidable force that could stand in the

face of Israeli aggression. On the Israeli side, political and military leaders were fed up with Hezbollah's retaliatory attacks. Since the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah advanced a masterful propaganda that elevates its image in the public's eye and depicts Israel as a weak and crumbling force. Tension between Hezbollah and Israel had been escalating for months before the outbreak of the July war. Attacks and counter attacks revolved on the release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails. One day in May 2006, Hezbollah launched an attack that left behind a wounded Israeli soldier. "A typical response to such an incident [*according to the unwritten 'rules of conduct'*] … would have the Israeli army shelling a few Hezbollah positions and command and control centers. In this instance, however, Israel opted for a more robust response, shelling twenty Hezbollah positions along the border and destroying many of them."[121] Hezbollah raised the stakes by firing eight Katyusha rockets at the location of the Israeli army's northern headquarters. War was imminent.

On July 12, 2006 Hezbollah launched a daring raid on Israeli soil that killed three and captured two IDF soldiers. The attack was intended to display Hezbollah's fierce offensive capabilities, while at the same time remind its critics in the Lebanese public of the need for its existence. Upping the ante provoked Israel to respond more relentlessly. Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, declared war against Hezbollah with the objectives to rescue the two Israeli soldiers, put an end to Hezbollah's attacks on northern Israel, remove Hezbollah from southern Lebanon, and to pressure the Lebanese government to deploy its

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[121] Augustus R. Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 134-135.

army along the border with Israel.[122] Essentially, Israel took the kidnapping incident as an opportunity to declaw Hezbollah, and reaffirm its reputation as a ruthless and deterrent force in the region. However, Hezbollah was barely able to withstand Israel's onslaught, and at the same time inflict substantial damage to IDF forces that warrant a UN-and Lebanon-brokered cease-fire. Both parties paid a heavy price for the wary. In the end, "both Israel and Hezbollah went to war to bolster their credibility and perceived ability to deter enemies, yet in neither case did they fully succeed."[123] There is little doubt that both parties underestimated each other's response.

The war that lasted for 34 days, and cost 1,400 Lebanese lives, and billions of dollars in infrastructure damages was translated, by most critics, as an elusive victory for Hezbollah. Hezbollah's aim was to deny Israel its war objectives, and to shatter the IDF's image of invincibility. By merely surviving the war, Hezbollah deemed itself triumphant. However, critics of Hezbollah point out that since the 2006 war, "quiet has prevailed along the Israeli-Lebanese border such as has not been known there since the late 1960s".[124] Although failure to wipe out Hezbollah's military capability was marked as a defeat against the IDF, in the long run Hezbollah's image as a Lebanese movement was tarnished. Hezbollah's popularity skyrocketed in the Arab world in the aftermath of the war, yet the party also reaped heavy domestic criticism for conducting the kidnapping operation, which

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122 Iver Gabrielsen, "Military Strategy and the Conduct of the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War," *Comparative Strategy* 32, no. 5 (2013), 435.

123 Augustus R. Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 143.

124 Eyal Zisser, "Nasrallah's Defeat in the 2006 War: Assessing Hezbollah's Influence," *Middle East Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2009).

ignited the war and led to major human and economic losses. More than ever before, Hezbollah was increasingly viewed as a tool in the hands of Iran to advance its agenda in the region. Hezbollah's Lebanese political rivals renewed their attempts at disbanding the party's military arsenal. Hezbollah might have won the challenge against Israel, but its war for survival as a military organization was not over.

At this point, Hezbollah reached the pinnacle of its greatness. Hezbollah's reputation as a powerful party was recognized as a result of a direct backing of Iran, and Syria's acquiescence; two alliances that form the backbone of Hezbollah's strategy for preeminence. It reached climactic supremacy after it held its ground in the war against Israel; a war that Hezbollah has been fighting for more than two decades and has been capitalizing on to rise in greatness. These two elements set Hezbollah apart from other parties and movements in Lebanon. Chapter seven will reveal how these two elements that elevated Hezbollah's status will be the cause of trouble for the party.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHANGING FACE OF HEZBOLLAH AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

A. Introduction

The July 2006 Lebanon-Israel war was brief, but it had an enduring impact on Hezbollah, Lebanon, and the regional system. In the aftermath of the war, pressure increased on Hezbollah to disarm. Yet, from Hezbollah's perspective, the war demonstrated Israel's disposition to attack Lebanon, and thus the need for armed resistance in the absence of a well-equipped national army. The Lebanese were divided on how to appropriate the weapons of Hezbollah. The issue continues to harass Hezbollah to this day, and particularly as it enlarges its stockpile of weapons and expands its military operations outside Lebanon. How Hezbollah handles the explosive issue reflects its great preparedness and ability to refine its image.

Chapter seven explores Hezbollah's pragmatism in dealing with domestic and regional opposition. The chapter will address how Hezbollah escaped to the quicksand of Lebanese politics, and came out on top. Hezbollah's use of political violence, is discussed to highlight the changing face of the party. Still, by leveraging its political connections, rallying public support, and proclaiming the cause of the resistance Hezbollah balances public opinion to its advantage. In the end, it will be clear that Hezbollah planted deep roots in Lebanon and that it is going to remain a strong political player in the Lebanon, despite circumstances and efforts to uproot it.

B. A House Divided

The call for Hezbollah to disarm characterized much of the political debate in the early 2000s in Lebanon. Israel pulled out its troops from south Lebanon under internal pressure from the left wing and the street. The war in Lebanon was a losing ticket in its hand, and eventually dumped it. After the withdrawal of the Israeli army, the Lebanese government did not dismantle the resistance. The government abstained from sending the army, and Hezbollah was allowed to fill the power vacuum. In fact, Hezbollah called for a national unity government and for supporting the resistance. The party emphasized its victory and explained that its work is unfinished as long as Lebanese captives are held in Israeli jails, and the Shebaa Farms are under occupation; not to mention the occupation of Palestine. Hezbollah was not going to easily give up one of its key tactics to preeminence, namely fighting Israel. Nasrallah assured the Lebanese that the party would never use its weapons internally, and that they were intended to assist with the protection and security of the country. Therefore, any discussion about disarming the resistance can only be held once it is clear that the resistance's weapons are no longer needed.[125]

Nasrallah emphasized that the liberation of the south should be seen as a triumph for all of Lebanon and all its citizens, not just residents of the south or particularly Shiites. By presenting the resistance as a national ally to the state, Hezbollah was trying to forge alliances with antagonistic voices, and dispel the fears of those skeptical about the party's intentions. Nevertheless, Hezbollah's military superiority made many groups inside and outside Lebanon restless. Leading journalists and lawmakers spoke out against Hezbollah

[125] Ayoub Hussien and Faris Kashan, "Al-Safir tuhawir Nasrallah Nasrallah hawl al-mostaqbil: al-Moqawama w al-Hizb w al Solta," *Al-Safir*, June 28, 2000.

bearing arms, but in the end fled the country for safety or they were assassinated. The idea and possibility of Hezbollah establishing a form *wilayat el faqih* in Lebanon by force was threatening, especially to Christians who imagined themselves to be treated as second class citizens in the new state. Regional powers saw Hezbollah as a rival for influence in the region. Voices grew louder and more critical of Hezbollah's weapons and the need to disarm the party.

In late 2004, the issue concerning the disarmament of Hezbollah reached a new height. The United Nation Security Council adopted resolution 1559 in September, which reaffirms resolution 425 (1978) and calls upon all remaining foreign forces (i.e. Israel and Syria) to withdraw from Lebanon. It also calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.[126] The Lebanese government was divided on implementing the resolution. On one hand, the camp in favor of the resolution claimed that the government must establish its sovereignty over all Lebanese territories, and protect its borders by relying on the national army, not the Islamic resistance. On the other hand, the Lebanese government and senior officials rejected the call to disarm Hezbollah, considering it a partner in defending Lebanon. They retorted that the discussion about disarming Hezbollah should be conducted in cooperation with Hezbollah and not under international pressure or intervention. As for Hezbollah, it had no qualms about the question of giving up its arms, insisting that the Security Council's resolution does not apply on it because it is not a militia force. The fact of the matter is, Hezbollah had a freehand in Lebanon because it had the backing of Syria.

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126 *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004).* http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1559(2004) (accessed January 15, 2015).

In October 2004, prime minister Rafic el Hariri and his government resigned from office as an act of protest against Syria's intervention in Lebanon, and its sponsored extension of the tenure of president Emile Lahoud to a third term. Four months later, on February 14, 2005, Hariri was killed in an enormous car bomb that shocked the entire country. Swiftly following the massive motorcade explosion, Syria was blamed for perpetrating the assassination of Hariri. Hariri's murder is significant because he was more than just a politician. He was the maker of post-civil war Lebanon. Heavily supported by Saudi Arabia, he restored the image of Lebanon as "Switzerland of the East". He rebuilt the heart of Beirut which was completely destroyed during the civil war, and converted it to a bustling city center. He stabilized the economy by creating jobs to serve his rebuilding projects, and by attracting foreign investors. Under his premiership, he brought a measure of stability to political life in Lebanon. He was a symbol of a new Lebanon that is freeing itself from Syrian influence.

Hariri's pro-Western stands weakened Syria's grip on Lebanon. Syria was blamed for his murder, because it was looking to terminate his influence. The result was a complete reversal. Although Hezbollah members, and pro-Syria supporters in Lebanon assembled in the streets to show their support to Syria, their gathering could not rival the anti-Syrian revolution that took place one month later. Syria was ultimately forced to pull out its troops in April 2005, ending its 30 years presence in Lebanon. Domestic players and regional powers competed to fill the power vacuum in the Lebanese system. Two major blocs emerged: the March 8, and the March 14 alliances. The former is composed of Syria's allies, which are predominantly the Shiite parties of Amal and Hezbollah, plus a large segment of the Christian population under the leadership of General Michel Aoun.

The pro-Syrian group received the backing of Iran. On the other hand, the March 14 alliance was a coalition of Sunnis, Druze, and right wing Christians forces. Its policies were pro-Western and it was favored by other Sunni powers, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. What is noteworthy here is the alliance between Hezbollah and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, which stand on opposite ideological ends. The agreement signed between the two parties in 2006 puffs up Hezbollah's place in Lebanese politics, at the expense of Maronite Christians.[127] Moreover, Hezbollah's struck alliance with Amal, with whom it fought a bloody war in 1998-1990, reveals its pragmatism and ability to forge strategic alliances that would elevate its stature.

C. The New Face of Hezbollah

Astonishingly, Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon and the division in the Lebanese government did not weaken Hezbollah, but served to show its real power. In May 2005, the March 14 alliance formed a new government, headed by Fouad Siniora, with 72 out of 128 parliament seats. By merely looking at the numbers, it appears that the anti-Syrian camp was wielding the power. However, the composition of the government reflects the Shiites' rise to power, and especially Hezbollah's rise to power, since this was the first government that includes two Hezbollah ministers. In addition, Hezbollah and Amal ministers acted as members of one bloc. Moreover, there was an increasing awareness amongst Hezbollah's top ranks about the need to be involved in governmental decision

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127 Hilal Khashan, "Lebanon's Shiite-Maronite Alliance of Hypocrisy," *Middle East Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (2012).

making, in order to protect the interests of the resistance and prevent international powers from forcing the Lebanese government to disarm the party.

When Prime Minister Siniora insisted on establishing an international tribunal for investigating the killing of Hariri, pro-Syrian factions in the government objected. Syria was widely blamed for the murder of Hariri – as well as a number of other high-profile assassinations – which had the potential of incriminating its allies in Lebanon. In response, Sayyid Nasrallah, joined by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, issued a statement threatening to march to the streets in peaceful demonstrations to force change. The fact that Hezbollah could command such large peaceful demonstrations reflects its popular base support, which is a result of its extensive social support system. Hezbollah loyalists and sympathizers would heed the call of the party leaders to assemble in the streets. This gives Hezbollah a strategic, and perhaps unparalleled edge as a powerful player not just against Israel, or in government, but also on the street.

Hezbollah accused Siniora's government of being a U.S. puppet and of acting against the interest of the Lebanese public. Nasrallah demanded that Hezbollah and its allies be given a third of the seats in the cabinet, which would grant them veto power to block government decisions. He was counting on his "success" in the July 2006 war against Israel to leverage the support of the majority of the Lebanese. When the anti-Syrian Siniora majority government refused to give Hezbollah the political representation it demanded, five Shiite ministers resigned. This move ended Shiite representation in the government, which according to the Taif Accord suspends the government's ability to ratify decisions – of most relevance here is the decision to summon the international tribunal.

The events that followed the Shiite ministers' resignation demonstrate Hezbollah's power on the domestic field. On December 1, 2006, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators obeyed Nasrallah's call the day before to assemble in downtown Beirut and peacefully protest against the government of Fouad Siniora. The crowds, urged by Hezbollah and its allies, demanded Siniora to resign claiming that his government was corrupt and that he was conspiring with Israel.[128] A series of protests and sit-ins paralyzed the country and literally trapped cabinet members in ministry offices. Demonstrators pitched their tents in downtown Beirut, virtually occupying the seat of government and halting lawmakers from making decision. Despite increasing Sunni-Shiite tension in the country, demonstrations were overwhelmingly civil, and reflected the large degree of influence that Hezbollah had over mobilizing and restraining its supporters.

Nearly one year later, the political situation in Lebanon looked like it reached a stalemate. Hezbollah supporters camped day and night in front of the Grand Serail turning the once vibrant Beirut city center into a ghost town. Although there was a real risk of plummeting into a civil war, neither Hezbollah nor the March 14 alliance, led by the Sunni Future Movement, backed away from their demands. The situation was escalated in November 2007 when no decision was made on whom to replace outgoing president Emile Lahoud. "March 14 leaders claimed that under the constitution, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora would take over until a new president was named and a government formed. The opposition, led by the Iranian-backed Shiite militia Hezbollah, said it considered Siniora's

128 Hassan M. Fattah, "Despite a Lull At Holidays, Beirut Digs In For a Struggle," *New York Times*, December 29, 2006, final edition.

government illegitimate and Lahoud could decide who would take over."[129] Essentially, this was a battle between Washington-Riyadh and Tehran-Damascus for regional influence. The deadlock was broken when the Siniora government crossed a Hezbollah redline. The government dismissed the airport security chief, who was a close ally of Hezbollah, and proceeded to dismantle Hezbollah's illegal private communication network, which provides the party with secure communication channels across large parts of the country. Nasrallah likened the government's move to declaring war against the resistance.

On May 8, 2008, and in sync with a national strike by the Lebanese General Workers Union, Hezbollah-led groups closed off roads leading in and out of Beirut. The highway to the airport was shut down, and so was Beirut's commercial district. Armed clashes erupted between March 8 and March 14 coalitions, which ran the risk of an open warfare. The Hezbollah led offensive quickly defeated the pro-government militias. Leader of the Druze, Walid Jumblatt, and leader of the Sunni Future Movement, Saad Hariri, were besieged in their homes. Of great significance is the professional and deliberate Hezbollah-led attacks against March-14 aligned TV station and newspaper, which signaled Hezbollah's capability to destroy the pro-government infrastructure. The Lebanese army did not intervene to resolve the conflict because it feared that getting involved might cause a split in its ranks along sectarian lines, which would fuel a wider civil war. Hezbollah said it will continue to occupy central Beirut until the government reverses its decision to dismantle the party's telecommunication network and reinstate the chief of security at

129 Borzou Daragaghi and Raed Rafei, "Political void in Lebanon," *Newsday*, November 24, 2007, final edition.

Beirut's airport. Hezbollah was effectively unopposed and in the end passed control of the city to the Lebanese army, which reversed measures taken against Hezbollah's networks.

The 18-month-long political crisis finally came to a close on May 21, by a deal brokered by Qatar. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb told the Globe and Mail that the deal was essentially what Hezbollah was asking for the last two years.[130] The Doha Agreement led to the election of General Michel Sulieman, the army chief, as Lebanon's next president. In addition, the Agreement calls for the formation of a unity government, which gives the opposition (i.e. March 8 alliance) veto power by assigning them 11 out of 30 seats in the cabinet. While the Agreement calls for the Lebanese state to establish its sovereignty over all Lebanese territory and forbids the use of weapons and violence to score political gains, it does not call Hezbollah to disarm. When Hezbollah was on the edge of losing its armed resistance tactic, he relied on the other two: mass support to block the city, and alliances with other political party militias to control the streets. At the end of the day, it was clear that Hezbollah might have bolstered its image as powerful political and military force, but its use of the violence, which left dozens dead, exacerbated the tension between Shiites and the other sects.

D. Hezbollah's Use of Political Violence

That Hezbollah emerged from the 2006-2008 political crisis as the major winner is a fact that few people will question. The party won major concessions from the Lebanese government that empower it to block any motion that calls for its disarmament. However,

130 Andrew Mills, "Deal boosts Hezbollah's fortunes," *The Globe and Mail*, May 22, 2008, final edition.

the fact that Hezbollah used violence against other Lebanese to maintain its security should not be underrated. When Hezbollah's strategy of organizing nonviolent protests did not deliver the political representation they demanded, and the Siniora government crossed a security redline for the resistance, Hezbollah resorted to political violence. Hezbollah gunmen took over Sunni-dominated West Beirut through skirmishes that left at least 65 people dead and more than 200 wounded. This was the first time since the end of the civil war that Hezbollah used its weapons domestically to gain political concessions.[131] Hezbollah accused the pro-Western government of conspiring to disarm it by probing its telecommunication network. Incongruously, Hezbollah used its weapons to defend its privilege to use them. It used political violence as leverage to pressure the Siniora government to reconsider its demands.

Hezbollah's deliberate use of political violence was a major decision that will haunt the party to the present day. By turning its guns inwards, Hezbollah tarnished its own reputation as a pure resistance movement against Israel. It set a precedent for using its arsenal against domestic rivals for political gains. The move also caused embarrassment to Hizbullah's Maronite ally, General Michel Aoun, who stood by Hizbullah as a nonsectarian national resistance movement. The May 8 attacks demonstrated that Hizbullah is ready to use violence against local citizens to defend its military infrastructure. The attacks proved that Hezbollah has the strongest militia and that it is able to protect its weapons and use them for political gain.

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131 Krista E Wiegand, "Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 8 (2009).

After six days of negotiations, the Doha Agreement was reached on May 21, 2008 by the major Lebanese parties. Five main issues were discussed, two of which have a direct impact on Hezbollah's future. First, the parties agreed to elect Michel Suleiman as president of Lebanon. A week later, during his first public address, Suleiman said that in the future Hezbollah's weapons should only be used against Israel, thus implying that Hezbollah will not be disarmed in the near future. He called for a national dialogue to discuss the development of a national defense strategy, which would determine the role of the army and by extension Hizbullah. Hence, he made it clear that the issue to disarm Hizbullah is an internal one, and should be discussed between parties without external pressure. Second, Hezbollah attained veto power in the new government, which means that it could block any decisions against its disarmament, and against the establishment of an international tribunal to investigate the death of Hariri. Although the Doha Agreement signatories agreed not to use any armed force in the future to resolve domestic problems, and Nasrallah publically proclaimed, after the election of president Suleiman, that Hezbollah does not seek control over Lebanon, the party's formidable arms collection could hardly be overlooked. "To some, the resistance's actions were an armed coup, a step that will be consolidated by an increase in Hezbollah ministerial portfolios."[132] Hezbollah's preeminent armed force over Sunni amateurish fighters of Saad Hariri's Al-Moustaqbal play on the growing rift between Sunnis and Shiites in the Middle East.[133]

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132 Alistair Harris, "Half Full or Half Empty: Assessing Prospects for Peace in Lebanon," *United States Institute of Peace*, 2008.

133 Raed Rafei, "Successful Hezbollah has image problem," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 2008, final edition.

Whichever way one looks at it, Hezbollah elevated itself to a position that attracts more enemies than friends.

Hezbollah's use of political violence was a risk that the party had to take, or else forfeit its secret intelligence network, which is too valuable to replace. Hezbollah's performance during the 2006 war with Israel, and 2007-2008 political crisis gave the party a relatively stronger position in Lebanon and the region. It is hard to predict if Hezbollah will use political violence in the future as a coercion strategy. However, it is important to remember that Hezbollah does not rely solely on violence to increase its political influence. Rather, it is the balancing act of leveraging political alliances, rallying public support, and flaunting the cause of the resistance, which Hezbollah has mastered are the three primary reasons for its preeminence. There are other factors that distinguish Hezbollah from other political players, such as the party leaders' charisma and moderations of its objectives, most notably Nasrallah, plus Hezbollah's apt use of the media. Investigating those elements goes outside the scope of this paper, and will need to be researched, in addition to other elements, to provide a comprehensive understanding of Hezbollah's preeminence.

EPILOGUE

The rhetoric of the Doha Agreement reaffirmed the Lebanese government's support of the Resistance. Hezbollah's military wing gained more national legitimacy. As a result, and in an effort to replenish its arsenal following the 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah rebuilt its military infrastructure and acquired new missiles with far reaching capabilities. Effectively, Hezbollah was preparing for another war with Israel. At the same time, current developments in and around the Middle East drew Hezbollah's involvement in ways contrary to its resistance raison d'être and Lebanon's policy of disassociation; Escalating turmoil in Iraq, Arab Spring demonstrations throughout the Arab world, new sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, and spillover of Syria's internal battles destabilized the region and pushed Hezbollah to act outside Lebanon to secure its position in Lebanon.

Since America's invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Al-Quds Force, and Hezbollah leadership were collaborating to support Iraqi Shiite militant groups against American presence there. US Intelligence affirms that Hezbollah created Unit-3800 which is composed of a limited number of special operations personnel for the purpose of training Iraqi fighters. Hezbollah acquired a great level of field experience in guerilla warfare from the years fighting the South Lebanon Army. According to a 2010 Pentagon report, Hezbollah provided local Shiite groups with training, tactics and technology to conduct kidnappings and use sophisticated explosive devices.[134] Hezbollah justifies its involvement abroad by claiming to defend fellow Shiites and Shiite shrines. Such operations do not necessarily overstretch Hezbollah's fighting manpower because it mostly

[134] Matthew Levitt and Nadav Pollak. "Policy Analysis." *The Washington Institute*, June 25, 2014. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-in-iraq-a-little-help-can-go-a-long-way (accessed February 18, 2015).

involves experienced trainers who train others. That way, Hezbollah can hold its ground in Lebanon while expanding its operations outside its frontiers.

The situation in Yemen is different than Iraq but it still has Hezbollah's fingerprints on it. Since 2004, a violent struggle raged between the Yemeni government and Houthi groups, closely linked to Shiites. "In March 2009, in an interview with the London *Al-Hayat* newspaper, the Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Salih accused Hezbollah of extensively helping the Houthi rebels in training and in the transfer of information on the assembly of bombs in Yemen and Lebanon."[135] In February 2015, Mohammed Ali al-Houthi became the de facto leader of the country after the Houthis toppled the sitting government. Nasrallah praised the move, describing the Shiite Ansarullah movement as "rightful", "brave" and "wise".[136] An Iranian official likened the Houthi group to Hezbollah, suggesting direct or indirect influence from Hezbollah.[137] Once again, Hezbollah lends itself as an example of Shiite uprising in the Arab world, which upsets Sunni powers.

The other Arab country that accuses Hezbollah of interfering in its affairs is Bahrain. In 2011, popular Shiite protests inspired by the Arab Spring rose up in Bahrain against the Sunni ruling monarchy. The Bahraini government put the blame on Iran and its ally

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135 Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God: From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

136 IA/NT/AS, "Middle East: Lebanon," *PressTV*, February 17, 2015. http://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2015/02/17/397905/Hezbollah-fighting-ISIL-in-Iraq-Nasrallah (accessed February 17, 2015).

137 Saleh Hamid, "News: Middle East," *Al Arabiya News*, January 26, 2015. http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/01/26/Yemen-s-Houthis-similar-to-Lebanon-s-Hezbollah-Iran-official.html (accessed February 18, 2015).

Hezbollah for promoting dissent in the country. "Bahrain has accused the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah with seeking to overthrow the island-state's ruling family, in a report to the United Nations, escalating the growing cold war between Sunni Arab states and Shiite-dominated Iran."[138] The report also asserts that many Bahraini Shiites received military training from Hezbollah. US intelligence ceased a series of communications between Hezbollah officials and Bahrani opposition groups. For its part, Hezbollah's Nasrallah did not hold back from supporting the protests. He criticized the regime in Bahrain for suppressing peaceful demonstrations and violating human rights. The Bahraini people's praise of Nasrallah make it clear that Hezbollah is not absent from the Bahraini scene.

Since the Arab Spring protests, no crisis rocked the integrity and future of Hezbollah as the situation in Syria. The Syrian regime was not exempted from the popular protests that flourished in the Middle East, in early 2011, and sought to oust old tyrannical rulers. Demonstrations in Syria started out as civil nonviolent movements demanding political reform. The Assad regime was quick to use force to break out the protests, making it very clear that it was not going to enter into negotiations with demonstrators. Four years later, the regime's use of violence to stay in power resulted in the death of more than two hundred thousand people and the displacement of millions of Syrians.[139]

The regime may be fighting for its survival, but it is not doing that alone. It is no secret that Hezbollah reached preeminent status in Lebanon and the Middle East by relying

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138 Jay Solomon, "Middle East News," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2014, http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703907004576279121469543918 (accessed February 18, 2015).

139 *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.* February 8, 2015. http://syriahr.com/en/2015/02/death-toll-in-syria-rises-to-over-210000-in-four-years/ (accessed February 24, 2015).

on the Syrian regime to cover its back. When the ground started shaking underneath the Assad regime, Hezbollah could not afford to lose one of its major and few allies in the region. At the outbreak of the protests, Hezbollah, along with Iran, were supplying the Syrian army with information about the opposition, and intelligence from ground missions. As violence intensified, Hezbollah was keen to prevent a military defeat of the Assad regime at any cost. However, as a national Lebanese party, getting military involved in Syria would jeopardize the party's integrity as a Lebanese resistance movement. So initially, Hezbollah denied its involvement in Syria, but when the death toll of its fighters could not be contained, a befitting narrative was weaved to justify its operations across the border. [140] Nasrallah explained Hezbollah's intervention in Syria using religious and security language: Hezbollah's objective was to protect Shiites shrines in Syria, which if destroyed, would propel a regional sectarian war; and to ward off Sunni extremist groups that were establishing a foothold in Northern Syria and encroaching into Lebanon. According to Nasrallah, this was a defensive and preemptive war that they did not choose.[141]

Hezbollah has a lot to lose but little to gain from its participation in the Syrian war. If the Assad regime triumphs, Hezbollah will retain an ally that it had little risk of losing. On the other hand, losing Assad "would undermine Hezbollah's regional strategic posture

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140 David Hirst, "Commentary," *The Daily Star Lebanon*, October 23, 2012. http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2012/Oct-23/192380-hezbollah-uses-its-military-power-in-a-contradictory-manner.ashx#axzz2AJrVn2Ik (accessed February 24, 2015).

141 "Lebanon Pulse: Hezbollah Campaigns for Preemptive War in Syria," *Al-Monitor.* May 22, 2013. http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/fr/originals/2013/05/hezbollah-preemptive-war-qusair-support-base.html# (accessed February 24, 2015).

and embolden its domestic opponents to challenge its military status."[142] Hezbollah is already entangled with the case of the assassination of Hariri, and UN resolution 1559 that calls it to disarm. It does not need an additional battle to fight, and certainly not one that attracts the attention of the international community. It is true that Hezbollah's military operations in Syria offer it a unique battlefield experience, but that does not offset the damage to its credibility in Lebanon and the Arab world.

Despite the eccentric intervention in Syria, Nasrallah is still able to mobilize and command Hezbollah's troops. Yet, not all Lebanese are swayed by Nasrallah's charisma. At least two reasons could be given for the disillusionment of some Lebanese Shiites with Hezbollah. First, Hezbollah's top priority should be to resist Israel and defend Shiites in Lebanon. The war in Syria distracts Hezbollah from its objectives and depletes its resources. Second, as a Shiite force in a majority Sunni world, fighting in Syria against Sunni extremists will likely rub salt into the old Sunni-Shiite wound. Religious minorities in the Middle East should tread carefully when confronting Sunni movements. Other Lebanese are split on whether Hezbollah's involvement in Syria preempted war in Lebanon or conversely sealed its inevitability. Spillover from Syria already resulted in several car bombs and suicide attacks in the country. At the same time, Hezbollah's defense of the borders prevented the infiltration of terrorists groups into the country. Either way, according to Nasrallah, Hezbollah will continue to fight alongside the Syrian regime until the "existential" threat subsides.

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142 Randa Slim, "Hezbollah and Syria: From Regime Proxy to Regime Savior," *Insight Turkey* 16, no. 2 (2014).

There is no shortage of opinions on the subject of Hezbollah's future. Numerous scenarios have been drawn and analyzed to determine the fate of Hezbollah. In his 2005 book, Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary-general, was cautious not to prescribe a definitive future for the party. He simplistically affirmed that despite continuous US and Israeli intimidation and competition for regional hegemony in the Middle East, Hezbollah will continue to exist. Qassem counts on Islamic ideology, Hezbollah's strong structures, and loyalty of its members, to sustain the party's permanence. While he recognizes that changes in the international system impacts Hezbollah's future, he trusts God that in the end Hezbollah will prevail, because it is doing the will of God by paving the way for Imam al-Mahdi's emergence.[143]

Putting God's favoring aside, political analysts generally agree that Hezbollah's decision to send its fighters to Syria was a gamble. Hezbollah's commitment to back the Alawite regime against Sunni extremists carries the risk of fanning the flames of sectarianism, rather than extinguish them. If the Assad regime falls, Hezbollah loses its military land-supply-route and its strongest ally in the Arab world. What Hezbollah will do as a result depends on the policies of the regime that replaces Assad. However, there is little doubt that Hezbollah will seek absolute power in Lebanon. Nasrallah understands that no single party or sect can rule Lebanon alone. Eventually, Hezbollah will be cornered politically to make concessions regarding the shape of the next Lebanese government. Unless provoked, it is highly unlikely that Hezbollah will use its arms internally for political gains. Even if Bashar Al-Assad remains in power, many in Lebanon worry that

[143] Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story From Within.* Translated by Dalia Khalil (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 268-270.

Hezbollah's additional weapons and combat experience will make it, and consequently all of Lebanon, a target for power-brokers to shoot down. Hezbollah's main objective from walking into the Syrian quagmire is to secure its weapon stockpile and land-supply-lines through Syria. To that end, Hezbollah must use its weapons to keep them!

In response to the spillover of instability from Syria into Lebanon, Hezbollah has few options and all of them are costly. Hezbollah could withdraw its troops from Syria and let the Syrian regime fight for its survival alone. This would earn Hezbollah more respect at home for simply 'minding its own business'. It will help the party focus on its priorities at home without being engaged on multiple fronts. It might also spare it a defeat if the Assad regime is toppled. However, if Assad remains in power after Hezbollah pulls out from Syria, the party would have betrayed its strongest ally in the Arab world and turned it into a vengeful enemy. Alternatively, Hezbollah could place all its political achievements on the line to prevent Assad's overthrow. This entails more use of violence, which will smear Hezbollah's image as a resistance movement. Fighting alongside the Syrian regime will vindicate a suspicion that Hezbollah is serving the agenda of Iran, the chief sponsor of both. In addition, a prolonged role in Syria will inevitably cost Hezbollah more fighters, which are not easy to recruit and train. Locally, Hezbollah will be blamed for bringing the war home, and its opponents will have more reasons to demand its disarmament. Regionally, the rhetoric of a Shiite-Sunni war will intensify and increase the prospects of an open war. Globally, Hezbollah's capability to attack Israel, and thus destabilize the region, will get more spotlight and condemnation from international powers. In spite of it all, there is one advantage of Hezbollah fighting alongside the regime, which outweighs the drawbacks. The friendly Assad regime to Hezbollah and Iran provides a secure channel for the transfer

of arms from Iran to Hezbollah, especially heavy rockets that are difficult to ship over air or sea. Since there is little chance, let alone a guarantee, that a new regime in Syria will maintain the existing cordial relations with Hezbollah and Iran, Hezbollah fights to keep Assad in power.

From that perspective, Hezbollah opts to fight alongside the Assad regime for its survival, rather than gamble on what it is unknown. The war in Syria will eventually end, and Hezbollah will have to redefine itself in light of the final outcome of that war. Regional players and international politics will play a key role in the process. Until then, Hezbollah will need to balance between its domestic politics and regional involvement to avoid pushing itself into an unfavorable position. In the end, Hezbollah's pragmatism and adaptability skills will ensure its survival in the future. It is difficult to determine what Hezbollah will look like after the war in Syria, but this much is true: Hezbollah will remain a strong political party in Lebanon. It rooted itself so firmly in the Lebanese political system by forging various alliance. It built a solid party structure that revolves on armed resistance to Israel; an issue that generally unities Arab and Muslims. Through its social support network, it established a wide popular base that makes it an integral part of any future power sharing formula in Lebanon.

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