

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS NOTEBOOKS SERIES

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION:

This is a [Peruvian Army Center for Strategic Studies](#)
(CEEPP) publication.

September, 2021.



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Summary

The history of Hezbollah is an evolutionary history that has made its way from the death of Imam Hussein in AD 680 until the end of European colonialism and the mobilization of the Shiite community in Lebanon during the 20th century. The martyrdom of Imam Hussein presents a pattern of encouragement and sacrifice that warns future generations of Shiites not to focus on fatalism and to act to help themselves. The emergence of Hezbollah has its roots in the religious and political movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s that united the Lebanese Shiites before the Lebanese Civil War. No one expected the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon to “uncork the Shiite element,” as Israeli academic and diplomat Itamar Rabinovich put it. With the fall of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the rise of Hezbollah, Israel was not simply trading one enemy for another. Hezbollah is recognized as one of the most significant terrorist groups in the world. In 2002, Florida Senator Bob Graham, then head of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, declared that Hezbollah was more lethal than Al Qaeda. Subsequently, Undersecretary of State Richard Armitage echoed Graham’s concern, noting that “*Hezbollah could be team A of terrorists*”, while “*Al Qaeda is actually team B*”.¹

Keywords: Hezbollah, Middle East, Terrorism, Global Jihad, Fundamentalism.

Beginnings

The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 created an exportable model for theocratic government that the dissident fundamentalist members of AMAL (a Shiite party based in southern Beirut, whose majority population was of that creed) applied within Lebanon. The relationship between emerging Islamic fundamentalists in Lebanon and Iranian clerics preceded the start of the Lebanese Civil War, which - from 1982

to 1990 – gave Hezbollah the opportunity to gain local power through its application of terrorism against external actors (mainly the US and Israel), while, on the other hand, he provided social services to his fellow Shiites. The personality of Hezbollah emerged during this period of extreme religious violence in what its current Secretary General, Sayed Hassan Nasrallah, described as “*The impact of seeing the call of God manifest during the context of the Civil War and the Israeli invasion of 1982*”.² Hezbollah was undoubtedly the result of an Iranian project to bring together the disintegrated Shiite militant groups present in Lebanon under one roof, all of them arising as a result of the regional political instability of the time. Although Hezbollah emerged after the 1982 Israeli invasion, the organization did not unify as a centralized party until approximately three years later. However, Hezbollah is as much a defender of Lebanon as it is of the Shiite Islamic community.³ Additionally, Hezbollah, the Party of God of Lebanon, is one of the dominant political parties in that country, as well as a social and religious movement that serves mainly (although not exclusively) the Shiite community in Lebanon. Hezbollah is also Lebanon’s largest militia, the only one that maintains its weapons and renames its armed elements an Islamic resistance in response to the terms of the Taif Agreement, which ended Lebanon’s civil war and demanded the disarmament of all the militias.

The formation and rapid emergence of Hezbollah as Lebanon’s dominant Shiite movement is inseparable from that of its foreign backers: Syria and, in particular, Iran, Hezbollah’s intellectual father. Hezbollah accepted Iran’s supreme leader, Ruhollah MoJomeini, as the organization’s guide, alluding to Iranian rhetoric of jihad against foreigners and aid for the oppressed. As Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli, one of Hezbollah’s early leaders, stated, Hezbollah’s relationship with Iran is “*From least to greatest... From a soldier to his commander*”. Hezbollah enthusiastically embraced Iran’s revolutionary hatred of Israel and participated as a junior partner in Iran’s ill-fated war with Iraq. Sayyid Abbas Musawi, one of Hezbollah’s leaders who became its general secretary in 1991, declared that Israel was a “cancer” and that Hezbollah would “*remove all traces of Israel*.”

However, Iran did more than provide inspiration. Iranian officials were there to sponsor the birth of Hezbollah. In June 1982, Sayyid Hussein Musawi separated from Amal and founded Amal – Islamic Call. Tehran’s ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, played a key role in encouraging this split. Iranian diplomats and paramilitary officials held senior positions in Hezbollah’s governing organization, particularly in its early years. Similarly, Iranian officials worked to unite Amal with the Union of Islamic

Students, the Association of Muslims and Ulema (Doctors of Islamic Jurisprudence), the Lebanese branch of the Dawa Party, and other small Shiite groups operating locally, thus saving to Hezbollah of the fate of Fatah, which constantly struggled with internal assassinations and threats to its flanks.⁴

For years, Hezbollah has wavered between being a client of the Islamic Republic of Iran and maintaining a distance from policymaking in Tehran. Some saw the group as a mere tool of the Islamic Republic; others as a full partner. Regardless of the dynamics of the relationship, Hezbollah's colossal influence over the politics and economy of the country of cedars, placed Lebanon within Iran's sphere of interest.⁵

Shortly after assuming power, Ayatollah Khomeini declared: "*We should endeavor to export our revolution to the world. ... [We are] going to confront the world with our ideology*". Lebanon was their greatest success, hands down. Iran sent some 1,500 members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to train and indoctrinate Hezbollah recruits. (IRGC's presence, which later declined to around three hundred to five hundred, remains to this day.) Hezbollah first established itself in the Beka'a Valley, near the Syrian border, the territory where Iran's paramilitary forces eventually established their main bases and barracks.⁶ In the camps of Iran, Shiite militants in Lebanon and around the world learned the finer points of terrorism or guerrilla warfare, such as the construction of sophisticated explosives, along with the falsification of convincing passports.

To this day, the military relationship is strong, and many Israelis would agree with the description of Hezbollah's former Mossad chief Shabtai Shavit: "*an Iranian division deployed within Lebanon.*" In addition to teaching basic tactical concepts like marksmanship and how to organize an ambush, IRGC instructors turned areas of Lebanon's Beka'a Valley into a microcosm of revolutionary Iran. Women wore veils, photos of Ayatollah Khomeini were ubiquitous, and debates in Iran were mirrored in Lebanon. In fact, Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, the spiritual guide for many Hezbollah members since he was Lebanese, initially asked to defend the Islamic revolution before achieving the movement's goals in Lebanon. After 1989, it established a more independent line from Tehran, which would almost give rise to a fitna or conflict within Shiite revolutionary Islam due to the Lebanese subservience of the Ayatollah regime.⁷

Currently, Hezbollah researcher Shimon Shapira argues that the figure is probably double, and that excludes military aid. Tehran gave Hezbollah about a billion dollars to

help it rebuild after its 2006 war with Israel.⁸ Hezbollah fighters received a salary that enabled them to care for their families, no less an achievement for many impoverished Shiites living in war-torn Lebanon. Iranian backing also allowed Hezbollah to establish schools and hospitals for its fighters and their families. Possibly 90 percent of Hezbollah's budget for these social programs came directly from Iran.

Not surprisingly, many Shiites have turned away from rival groups like Amal towards Hezbollah. As academic Amal Saad-Ghorayeb argues, "even by Hezbollah's calculation, the movement would have taken an additional 50 years to achieve the same achievements in the absence of Iranian backing."⁹ An inherent source of conflict associated with Hezbollah is its ideological commitment to the revolutionary doctrine of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the *velayat-e faqih* which holds that a Shiite cleric can also serve as the supreme head of government. Thus, the group is simultaneously committed to the decrees of Iranian clerics, the Lebanese state, its Shiite community and the Shiite diaspora abroad.

Principles and objectives

Any analysis of the organization's relationship with the Lebanese diaspora requires a discussion of how Shiite Islam defines Hezbollah's image, goals, and motivations.

Hezbollah is also a pan-Shiite movement and an Iranian proxy group, both of which form the basis and context for the group's radical Shiite ideology. In 1985, Hezbollah's original political platform included the establishment of an Islamic republic in Lebanon as a central pillar, although this emphasis has since been downplayed. However, limiting Hezbollah to a strategic Tehran asset is unequivocally an error of analysis.

The relationship between Syria and Hezbollah was less friendly than the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah but, in many ways, it was more important. Although Iran inspired and guided Hezbollah, Syria was the dominant factor in Lebanon, making Hezbollah adapt to the demands of the Assad regime. Damascus saw Hezbollah as a useful tool to wrest control of the Shiites from Amal's hands after the forces of the founder of the other majority Shiite group (Nabih Berri) failed to act against the Israeli invaders. Furthermore, when Hezbollah proved to be a staunch enemy of Israel, it became useful to Syria against the Israeli Armed Forces (IDF).

Syrian support for Hezbollah is also tied to the pariah status of the Alawites, who dominate the country's leadership. The Alawites are a minority sect within Islam and many Sunnis consider them heretics or false Muslims. Like the Shiites, the Alawis revere Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin (and son-in-law), as well as Islam's fourth caliph, but their views are even further away from traditional Sunni views of Islam. Because the Shiites are generally more recognized and respected among Muslims, they could grant legitimacy to the Alawites, and the founder of the early Amal, Imam Musa al-Sadr, did exactly that.¹⁰

Syria was a much more ambivalent patron than Iran, particularly during the Hafez al-Assad rule. As Iran sought Hezbollah victory, Damascus wanted to control the group in Lebanon and use it against Israel. Asad also feared that the rise of Shiites in Lebanon could alienate Sunnis in his country, so Syrian forces have clashed with Hezbollah in an effort to assert dominance over Damascus. The roles of Iran and Syria in Hezbollah's day-to-day operations are murky, but there is no question that both countries were deeply involved.

Until Syria's expulsion from Lebanon in 2005, Damascus was the viceroy of Lebanon and nothing could be done there that did not enjoy Assad's tacit blessing. Any activity that was carried out without his approval was abruptly cut off. Syria worked closely with Hezbollah to engineer its military efforts against Israel and its patronizing Lebanese militia, the South Lebanon Army, as well as Iran's IRGC. The attack on the US embassy in Beirut, for example, occurred after the Soviet Union offered Syria the information that senior CIA officials would meet there on April 23, 1983.¹¹

The history of Shiite Islam defines the essence of Hezbollah and explains its identity through the messages and actions of the organization. This branch of Islam provides a history and defines a global ideology that Hezbollah exploited through all phases of its own evolution. His tradition of fighting in the face of dire difficulties helped explain the method of control he used as the basis for legitimacy. Hezbollah popularized a story that exposed the virtue of religion-inspired sacrifice in order to overcome the oppression of a population that perceives itself as marginalized. This narrative framed the context of Hezbollah's position as the religiously legitimate protectors of the Shiite community in Lebanon and around the world.¹² Hezbollah used the history of Imam Hussein and Shiite Islam, with their devotion to the ideal of struggle and sacrifice to justify their legitimacy as the genuine, albeit oppressed, heirs of the vision of Islam for Muhammad. The etymology of the words has a specific

meaning for the organization. In Arabic, the word Islam translates as “obedience”, while the word Shi’a translates as “follower”.

This idea of an obedient follower underscores the inherent logic and explains Hezbollah’s internal identity. The founders of Hezbollah used the idea of an obedient follower, in the al-Husayn tradition, to explain how they were different from other Shiites. Its general secretary, Hassan Nasrallah, described the founding of Hezbollah in a pragmatic way, thus the militia-party being “God’s enlightenment for the oppressed Shiites.” Religiously conscious Lebanese Shiites saw the rise of Hezbollah as a purer path to representation and appealed to the religiously-inclined segment of the population that recognized piety as a beneficial attribute of the group. Popular support for Hezbollah, from its founding, resulted from the party’s effective connection between the stories of the Shiites and the struggle of modern times. Hezbollah’s religious identity reached a level of authenticity among Lebanese Shiites and provided further support through the complementary principles of Islam.

Hezbollah views Lebanon as a front on the social welfare battlefield, where the marginalized Shiite community desperately needs help from its national and international supporters. Hezbollah’s belief in religious services to provide alms to the poor caused the organization to fill the void of this population, thereby gaining legitimacy in Lebanon and abroad with the diaspora community. Due to its ability to generate charitable donations for the cause, Hezbollah is unique, compared to other Institutions in Lebanon, with respect to the scope and variety of public services that they operate. From the Lebanese civil war to the present, Hezbollah has provided effective and seemingly uncorrupted social services to the Shiite community in the absence of a legitimate state. These services require a level of organizational and information management sophistication that Hezbollah has fostered since its founding. Hezbollah established institutions, such as the Jihad al-Binaa Association, that supported the Lebanese Shiites and consciously promoted the party’s contributions to society.

These social institutions promote their narrative as the benevolent patrons of an oppressed minority. The zakat (alms) received by Hezbollah supported programs that benefited the Shiites of Lebanon and when combined with an effective narrative generated more donations and expanded the legitimacy of Hezbollah’s position as providers of an oppressed population. Zakat is part of the religious narrative promoted by Hezbollah, but it is only part of it. Hezbollah’s capacity for legitimacy within Lebanon stems from its combination with Islamic doctrine.¹³ Closely related

to zakat is the Islamic obligation to jihad. Hezbollah's religious concept of Jihad refers to both the internal struggle for religious enlightenment and external resistance against the enemies of Islam. Hezbollah was formed as a jihadist resistance group in opposition to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and in opposition to other Shiite organizations that turned away from their religious foundations. Hezbollah leaders defend the importance of jihad as the sixth fundamental pillar of Islam, which allows man the promise of salvation through service to God.¹⁴

Jihad according to Hezbollah

Hezbollah's interpretation of the concept of jihad applies as much to the internal struggle of the mind as it does to the external struggle against an enemy. The concept of a combined internal and external struggle allowed Hezbollah supporters to create a relevant religious identity in any act that contributed to the success of the organization. Hezbollah invites participation and provides an outlet for those who want jihad as part of their life. Those who participated in the jihad, through active or passive support from Hezbollah, actively resisted the forces of Israel and the West. Hezbollah's acts of resistance and martyrdom towards Israel and against rival organizations served as the latest models of jihad. By positioning itself between Israel and the oppressed Shiites of Lebanon, Hezbollah gained the benefit of a historic identity that placed the group at the forefront of the religion-sanctioned struggle. This message of resistance contributed to the overall Hezbollah narrative, garnering support from a broad spectrum of supporters and resulting in the organization's long-term legitimacy.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, revitalized the founders of Hezbollah in their quest for an Islamic State in Lebanon. The nature of Hezbollah's stated goals during its founding was pan-Shiite in character and reflected the interpretation of the Islamic State that began in Iran before the organization's founding. The early Hezbollah leaders, trained by Iranian clerics in madrasas in Karbala and Najaf, wanted to transform Lebanon from a multi-religious and divided state to a unified Iranian-style Islamic country. In exchange for the ideological alliance, Iran became a generous benefactor to Hezbollah in its early years because it was an opportunity to export the Islamic revolution to a new region and unite the global Shiite community. Hezbollah became an organization committed to the development of an Islamic State that would unify the global Shiite community due to its adoption of Shiite Islamic principles and the ideological influence of Iran.

Hezbollah believes that its implementation of religious authority, through the concept of an Islamic jurist, is a key component in creating an Islamic state that transcends borders. Since its founding, Hezbollah leaders have consistently supported the belief that Lebanon's future includes adapting its vision of a unified Islamic State for the country. Where rival groups, such as AMAL, saw the need to reform Lebanon from within through secularist means, Hezbollah advocated for internal religious reforms that would launch other religious revivals and shift the current international system in search of an Islamic state. The use of religious imams as leaders made Hezbollah a transnational organization from its inception. From its first secretary general, Abbas al-Musawi, to the current leader, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah assigns the responsibility of leadership to the Imams to solve the secular challenges they face through religious solutions - authorized by the jurist - that they consider divinely legitimate.

Hezbollah uses the authority of recognized jurists throughout its history to maintain its position as the legitimate representative of Lebanese Shi'ism. Different Shiite leaders throughout Lebanon's recent history have influenced how Hezbollah views itself internally and portrays itself externally while different leaders had to grapple with the realities of their time, Hezbollah's organizational goal of an Islamic state remained constant throughout its history. The evolution of Hezbollah's leaders and backers, from founding figures like Al-Sadr and Khomeini to operational leaders like Musawi and Nasrallah, is reflected in the organization's different priorities and methods.¹⁵

Ayatollah Khomeini's religious teachings - which led to the Islamic Revolution in Iran - along with his subsequent strategy of exporting the revolution, provided the ideological foundation for his students to try to transfer that model to Lebanon. Khomeini is the most important Islamic jurist in Hezbollah history because he provided the organization with its goals and its underlying form. Khomeini shaped Hezbollah's religious vision, exported the feeling of the Islamic Revolution from Iran to Lebanon, and instilled in the group a vision of an Islamic State that would oppose the forces of Israel and the West. Hezbollah's search for an Islamic state, based on Shari'a under the guidance of a renowned jurist, was the ultimate purpose of the organization's struggle within Lebanon and came directly from Khomeini.¹⁶ The combination of Islamic doctrine and Lebanese cultural heritage under the leadership of a renowned Muslim leader and jurist, resulted in the concept of an Islamic resistance against Israel and the West. Islamic resistance was therefore the end result

of the Hezbollah religious system. These elements provided justification and meaning to the organization's continued militant opposition in southern Lebanon and to terrorist activities globally. The Islamic Resistance of Hezbollah, with its religious foundation, identified three important characteristics of the organization such as its identity through the definition of what it is not, religious authenticity and continuing relevance. By declaring itself an enemy of Israel and the West, Hezbollah defined itself through opposition to the doctrine of its external enemy (Zionism and colonialism).

The Islamic Resistance offered a sanctioned religious path, through fighting, for the Lebanese Shiites that would result in future salvation for the oppressed population. Hezbollah's message about the perceived persecution of Islam - in general - and the Lebanese Shiites made Islamic resistance a long-term strategy to ensure relevance among sympathetic populations who accept its narrative. Hezbollah's rejection of the previous Lebanese political structure and the Israeli attempt to shape the future of the country established a new potential for the Shiites to form their own leadership. Hezbollah's adherence to a militant Islamic resistance to Israel and its supporters became the primary method by which they would express the party's commitment to Islam and the Shiite community. Consequently, Hezbollah's concept of Islamic Resistance not only satisfies internal conflicts but also describes the external strategy and objectives of the organization against its enemies. Its Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah described the Islamic resistance as: *"The long-term strategy is clear and requires no further explanation. It involves fighting Israel and liberating Jerusalem, as well as Imam Khomeini's proposal to end Israel as a state. We see the Israeli enemy in a different light, as its existence in the region represents a constant threat to Lebanon as a whole, even if it withdraws from the border area."*¹⁷.

The study of Islam provides insights into the logic, form, and function that provide Hezbollah with continued relevance and appeal. Hezbollah, as an organization, derives its vision and structure from the traditional teachings of Islam, influenced by the Shiite clerics who brought these lessons to Lebanon. Hezbollah's narrative that it is the rightful defender of the Lebanese Shiites stems from Islamic history, traditional Islamic principles, and recognized Shiite school authority figures. The manifestation of the combination of history, doctrine and leadership is the Islamic Resistance towards Israel and the West, which is the defining characteristic of the organization because it presents a coherent history, based on the past, and which promises a hopeful future for the Lebanese Shiites.

The common thread of Hezbollah's actions and messages is Shiite Islam. Religion provides the underlying logic to the form and capabilities exhibited by Hezbollah. Islam, as personified by Hezbollah throughout its existence, is more than a religious practice: it is a complete control system that orders the lives of its followers. However, several Islamic groups with similar ideologies arose and disappeared in the same period without achieving the success of Hezbollah, since this organization has the additional component of Lebanese culture. The clan bond and family relationships inherent in Lebanon, combined with the ideological foundation of Islam, allowed Hezbollah to emerge and prosper around the world in just a few decades.

Hezbollah's social presence

Additionally, Hezbollah expanded its popularity by developing a social services institution that catered to the needs of the Shiite community. Thus it became more than a militant organization when it began to build hospitals and schools in the last years of the civil war. Its military and social victories led to the impression among Lebanese Shiites and their families in diaspora communities around the world that Hezbollah is a legitimate alternative to a failed system of government in Lebanon. The election of Hezbollah political figures to the Lebanese Parliament in 1992 performed legitimate government functions that continue today. Hezbollah, however, faced an identity crisis within its own ranks in relation to its participation in the upcoming national elections and its perception among Sunni and Christian blocs regarding its terrorist record.

Western researchers, beginning in the mid-1980s, continue to this day, analyzing the fundamentals and actions of Hezbollah, but always focusing on organizing within a context of specific events that lead to a reductionist view of the group. The literature on Hezbollah from Western secondary sources emphasizes its terrorist capabilities, which separate the religious and cultural logic of its goals from the way it achieves them. Western authors such as Judith Harik, Matthew Levitt, and Augustus Norton analyze Hezbollah's religious foundation in detail, but they tell very similar stories in all of their works. The preponderance of Western authors frames the history of Hezbollah as an armed religious movement that strives to export the concepts of the Iranian Revolution to Lebanon.¹⁸

This reductionist view of Hezbollah misses the group's religious and cultural nuances. A deeper understanding of Hezbollah's cultural and religious aspects explains how the group developed a multi-dimensional identity while retaining an ideological logic. The different faces of Hezbollah resulted in increased legitimacy in a diverse population, allowing them to access inclusive Lebanese policies, this being the true history of the organization. The Middle Eastern and Lebanese authors bring together the literature produced by the organization and prominent Western authors. These authors, including Hala Jaber, Eitan Azani, Robert Rabil, underscore the cultural significance of the organization, reinforcing the narrative desired by Hezbollah. The Lebanese authors, through their experience framed by Middle Eastern culture, paint a much more nuanced picture of Hezbollah rather than the simplistic militia that created a political wing narrative. Rabil and Azani specifically identify the cultural attributes of Lebanon which, together with an understanding of Islam, explain the factors that enabled Hezbollah to rapidly grow and become relevant among the global Shiite population. Understanding the relevant narratives about Hezbollah among regional authors precludes reducing the contributing causes of the organization into simple reductionist theories.¹⁹

Hezbollah has captivated the Arab world with a radically new belief, decisively changing the dynamics of an entire region and paving the way for a long series of conflicts. In short, Hezbollah convinced legions of ordinary men and women that Israel can be defeated and destroyed, and not just in the distant future, but soon. More successfully than any other Islamist group, Hezbollah leveraged modern politics and warfare to mobilize millions of captivated supporters and moderate sympathizers under its banner of resistance against Israel. Theirs is not a quixotic quest for dignity but a symbolic but condemned struggle for the sake of empowerment. Hezbollah's militancy has had concrete consequences for Israel and unleashed a new Islamist wave. The group achieved military success in nearly three decades of guerrilla warfare against Israel, first expelling the Israel Defense Forces from the "security zone" it occupied in southern Lebanon for nearly two decades and subsequently thwarting the Israel's targets in the 34-day war in Lebanon in July and August 2006. The organization persuaded a growing swath of Arab society to follow suit: militarize and confront the enemy at every opportunity. The majority of the population has given him their moral approval.

In 2006, Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and sparked a war that left Lebanon in ruins; however, the Islamist group emerged victorious from this conflict by

resisting in its fight against Israel longer than any Arab army. His militia had thwarted Israel's ground advance, and the Hebrew state failed to achieve any of its stated war goals: freeing its captured soldiers, preventing Hezbollah from firing rockets on its territory, and dismantling allied militias along the border. Hezbollah moved from the back benches to the center of power within the Lebanese government and its rise thwarted carefully crafted plans by the United States for a friendly, secular, and liberal Lebanon at peace with Israel. Today, Hezbollah preaches humility to its followers while acting slowly to expand its power and influence in the Islamic world. Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's secretary general and charismatic supreme guide, is more popular in the Middle East than any other leader. Unusual among militants in the region, he has often shown restraint and political understanding, but Nasrallah has found his greatest political success through confrontation.²⁰

Entering the new millennium, Nasrallah and Hezbollah wove a new reality for their followers, based on ideology, identity, faith and practice. Hezbollah brought tangible social gains for its supporters, such as the \$ 400 million reconstruction of southern Beirut, completed in 2007 (just one year after the end of the war on Israel), replacing refugee neighborhoods with gleaming glass residential towers that resembled luxury hotels. Additionally, it achieved tactical military victories against Israel, unlike other Middle Eastern regimes that ineffectively criticize the Hebrew state. As a growing movement with transnational appeal, Hezbollah erased the monolithic traditions of Arab politics to create a large partisan platform that responded to the worldly aspirations of the people: economic reform, affordable health care, 24-hour electricity, efficient courts, and community aid. Most important of all, however, Hezbollah changed the norms of Middle East politics with its ideology of perpetual war, which would spread rapidly. Hezbollah was reinforced during the Israeli occupation. Israel occupied roughly one-tenth of Lebanon's territory from 1982 to 2000, a swath in the south of the country that Israel euphemistically called "the security zone." The first generation of Hezbollah fighters came of age during two decades of guerrilla warfare against Israel. When Israel left the occupied area under fire from Hezbollah in May 2000, it left behind thousands of collaborators, including men who had beaten and tortured its fighters or affiliates on behalf of the Israelis. Hezbollah's rivals expected a series of summary executions, but Nasrallah ordered his followers not to wage a vendetta against the collaborators, leaving their judgment to the Lebanese courts.²¹

Hezbollah's ideology might seem incoherent if it weren't so successful, but God's Party managed to market its ideas effectively because such success sells. The perpetual war

strengthened the movement, the Islamic resistance empowered its adherents, and Hezbollah's network of integrated institutions, including courts, schools, militias or hospitals, dramatically raised the standard of living in its community. Its armed wing truly believes in war against Israel, but Hezbollah backs up that abiding belief with the formidable material resources it spends to rebuild its communities after every war or conflict. As long as he continues to comply, the number of followers of the party will continue to grow. Simply put, Hezbollah teaches a kind of Islamist prosperity agenda, a doctrine of militant empowerment. People must live with dignity, and that means taking the offensive at all levels: against Israel, the bearer of all the evils suffered by the land of cedars, against poverty, against immorality and against ignorance. Power is the antidote to impotence, Hezbollah advises. It is a compelling gospel of self-improvement, and is easily translated into specific recipes for demoralized societies, especially members of the Shiite sect of Islam. Hezbollah lectures on everything from sex and hygiene education to family responsibilities and financial planning. Individual power, in the ideology of the party, comes from the Ummah or community. The more powerful the Ummah, the stronger are its members. Hundreds of thousands have joined the Hezbollah community, volunteering their time or donating their money to the Party of God, adopting its militia and bureaucracy as an extension of their own families. Millions more extend their sympathy and political support for the Islamic Resistance.²²

The jihad against Israel intertwines these multiple ideological threads. Anger toward Israel unifies Hezbollah supporters in the face of internal contradictions that could otherwise sink the movement. An almost primitive and simple ruling informs and sometimes overshadows everything else for the Hezbollah community: the resistance. Nasrallah regularly reminds his millions of listeners across the Arab world that Hezbollah and its allies, the "Resistance Axis", won more concessions from Israel by force than the pro-Western "Negotiating Axis" through decades of negotiation. Hezbollah supporters have accepted the idea that it is better to fight and die with dignity than to live assuming the current status quo. By assuming the leadership of the region's militant revival, Hezbollah has capitalized on diffuse anger over Israel's policies toward Gaza and the West Bank, including the growth of settlements. The failure of the Palestinian Authority to reach an agreement with Israel nearly twenty years after the signing of the Oslo Accords has weakened proponents of the compromise, while strengthening Hezbollah's "resistance field". But Hezbollah also draws on a deep hatred of Jews, intertwining it - knowingly and cunningly - with bubbling anger at Israeli policy.

Still sensitive to international opinion, Hezbollah leaders speak explicitly about Israeli policies, rather than “Jewish” ones, in their speeches. Since an infamous speech in May 1998, Nasrallah has avoided anti-Semitic rhetoric. On that occasion, he bellowed against the “*historical catastrophe and tragic event*” of the founding of the “*state of the Jewish Zionists, the descendants of apes and pigs.*” Since then, Nasrallah’s rhetoric has been restrained, carefully reiterating that Hezbollah’s attitude is against “Zionist politics” and not against Jews in general or the Hebrew religion. Whether sincere or not, the party has removed hatred of Jews from its official doctrine. In November 2009, Nasrallah presented Hezbollah’s new official manifesto, his first update since the “Open Letter” published in 1985. “*Our problem with them is not that they are Jews,*” Nasrallah said, reading a document that was debated for months by the party leaders. “*Our problem with them is that they are occupiers who have usurped our lands and holy places.*” The Hezbollah leader went out of his way to call the Jewish state by name, Israel, in addition to making the usual references to “the Zionist entity.” Throughout the Arab world, many people use the words “*Israeli*” and “*Jewish*” interchangeably when discussing the Middle East conflict.²³

In the modern Middle East, racist attitudes thrive, including among peacefully coexisting populations, including Arabs and Jews living within Israel’s pre-1967 borders, and among the region’s sometimes violently opposed sects or ethnicities. (Kurds, Turkmens, Armenians and Arabs; Shiites and Sunnis, Christians and Muslims). Many Hezbollah supporters professed to harbor no malice towards Jews, only towards the specific Israelis who had wronged them. But not infrequently, some followers fell into racist generalities or even scathing anti-Semitism, which was still a disturbing ambiguity that has contaminated Hezbollah since its founding. Islam has been on the rise for a century, spreading the idea that political life is subsidiary to a particular interpretation of the Islamic faith. Islamist groups have experimented with approaches ranging from peaceful demonstrations to maximalist violence. If any group today can claim the mantle of revolutionary Islam in the Middle East, it is Hezbollah. Iran’s Islamic Revolution has calcified into a rigid and orthodox theocracy. Hamas is waging a quixotic war against Israel from its isolated and crumbling enclave of Gaza. Al Qaeda thrives on the limited ranks of Salafi fanatics. On the contrary, Hezbollah, on a bumpy journey, has become a quasi-state within the framework of Lebanon’s failed governmental apparatus. The Party of God has become a power that it comfortably wields, ruling its own acolytes without losing its revolutionary pedigree.

Little by little, the Party of God emerged from the shadows, winning the loyalty of the Shiite community in Lebanon and claiming the leading role in the anti-Israeli resistance in occupied Lebanon. In the two decades that followed the founding of Hezbollah, God's Party methodically refined a messianic theology and political philosophy that appealed to frustrated people throughout the Levant, a confusing and volatile area. Diplomatically, Hezbollah forged deep and lasting relationships with the governments of Iran and Syria, both of which were largely responsible for its creation. In turn, Hezbollah exported its own revolution, sharing knowledge and material with radical movements of all sectarian and political persuasions, including secular Palestinians, Hamas, the Shiite Mahdi Army in Iraq, the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan, and even, supposedly, with Latin American communist guerrillas. Militarily, Hezbollah has become a classic guerrilla warfare organization, discarding the initial tactics that branded it a terrorist organization in the eyes of the United States and Israel.²⁴

The ideology about the combatant - martyr

Although it cultivates a vibrant culture of martyrdom among its supporters, the party has not launched a suicide attack since December 30, 1999, when a Hezbollah fighter dropped a car bomb at an Israeli military convoy. In the 1990s, its suicide bombers attacked only military targets. US intelligence warns that Hezbollah sleeper cells could attack in the West, but Hezbollah has not been convincingly linked to an international attack since 1994 (AMIA bombing of Buenos Aires on July 18 of that year). Hezbollah questions the Western definition of terrorism and yet has tried to keep its military tactics within Western norms. Unlike the Salafi extremists who feed groups like Al Qaeda, Hezbollah leaders comfortably navigate modernity. They defend an Islamic way of life in conjunction with contemporary customs. Hezbollah leaders tend to lead Spartan lifestyles, but are happy to see party supporters turning to trade, getting rich and living well. A prosperous electorate makes it a healthy Islamist militant party, increasing its leadership.

Lebanese rivals including Christian militias and the Amal Shiite Party in the past built impressive but unsustainable networks to provide social services, jobs and benefits without approaching Hezbollah's level of success. In that sense, Hezbollah has had the luxury of unceasingly obtaining - since its inception - funding from Iran, receiving a minimum of \$ 200 million a year from Tehran, according to some estimates, even in

times of financial crisis. But that funding alone cannot explain Hezbollah's continued growth over several decades: Hezbollah's overriding appeal and sustained popularity stem from the deliberate and patient cultivation of the group's ideological loyalty. Party activists are "God's shock troops," and they can choose to wage war not only by developing bombs but also by designing buildings, teaching schools, babysitting or paving roads. Most of Hezbollah loyalists are engaged in social projects, to which they apply the same militant fervor as a guerrilla. Hezbollah does much more than just fight, but without that fight, it would lose its pietistic identity. This is Hezbollah's secret: its followers believe, ideas matter to them. Hezbollah has imbued them in a consumerist way of thinking about God, their neighborhoods, their habits, and the ever-present enemy. The party's followers redefined their personal goals and habits in accordance with the party's ideology, a fusion of the political idea of resistance with the religious idea of fully engaging with God.²⁵

The most devoted members of the Hezbollah community are passionately engaged in a messianic Shiite mission to bring the Mahdi, the last Shiite imam or spiritual leader, out of hiding to rule the land with blameless justice. Far greater numbers have embraced the ideology of Islamic resistance, which resonates with the notions of restoring pride, dignity and self-determination to the dispossessed. The largest number of all party supporters, the million or more in the outer ring, have found in Hezbollah a path to a restored sense of strength or stricter Islamic faith, without fully subscribing to Hezbollah's political project. Faith and ideas draw people into the Hezbollah fold; prosperity and services keep them there. The material benefits of the Hezbollah community grease the engine, but they do not make it work. At the heart of Hezbollah are constructive elements, such as a vision of Islam as self-empowerment, which requires volunteerism and discipline from every member of the Hezbollah community. Alarming, they are matched by destructive elements such as perpetual war, authoritarianism, and the conviction that force comes only from military superiority and a strong current of political anger. Their influence is growing: the militant Palestinian Islamist organization Hamas has remodeled itself on the example of Hezbollah. In the 1990s, Hezbollah taught Hamas how to carry out suicide bombings; today, Hezbollah openly advises the Palestinians on general tactics and strategies. Hezbollah's political and military teachings were evident in the January 2009 war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Somehow, Hezbollah, an organization that is neither Sunni nor Palestinian, has assumed a leadership position among Palestinian militants. Nasrallah's party has taken advantage of a deep thirst among

Arabs for revenge and redemption. Unlike other Islamist movements, Hezbollah has convinced the wealthy and oppressed to make great and repeated sacrifices for the party's militant messianic ideology. The Hezbollah people are not submissive or demoralized; they are contradictory individuals, poor, but empowered, activists who shine with religious fervor. They love martyrdom, but they also love life. Their parents lived on the fringes, their sect was oppressed, and now, in what seems like a flash, they have inherited the future. The success of Hezbollah does not come from any great figure, but from the legions of men, women and children who have congregated in the movement, giving their lives, but also their moments of leisure, their fervor and frenzy, all this coupled with their daily devotion.²⁶

Conclusions

To understand Hezbollah, its threat, its potential, is to understand the fighters and engineers, the women who raise the martyrs and the foresters who plant trees, the clergymen and members of the Politburo, the principals of the schools, to the nine-year-old girls who watch over the objections of their less devoted parents, to the jihad against Israel or to the community task of rebuilding the buildings damaged in the multiple armed conflicts. It is the people who have endowed Hezbollah with its power. His devotion and humanity seem poised to give him a long life for generations to come. Their stories, on the battlefields of southern Lebanon or in the ghettos of southern Beirut, answer the question of why Hezbollah grew so fast and wielded so much influence over the Shiite, Islamic and Arab worlds.²⁷

Hezbollah is a terrorist group, but using just that term is misleading. It is also a guerrilla force, a political party, a social service provider, and an ideology. By working with Iran, Hezbollah has a vast social network of foundations and charities that extend their reach throughout Lebanon, providing money and assistance through the “Martyrs Agency”, the “Construction Office” and the “Agency for the Mutilated”, among other institutions. The “Construction Office” instructs farmers on how to improve their crop yields, and Hezbollah provides clean water daily to much of southern Beirut. As in Hamas, the different wings of the party-militia work together. These organizations help Hezbollah win allies at the national level and provide new venues to promote its ideology of resistance. Their services are vital in Lebanon, particularly in southern areas where the government does little (or nothing) for its citizens. Hezbollah recruits its military units from its social wing. Its politicians, who called its parliamentary bloc

Loyalty to the Resistance, announce the group's achievements on the battlefield when they run for office. For the Shiite community in Lebanon, Hezbollah was and is more than just an Islamist party. Hezbollah provided food and medicine to the poor, helped rebuild neighborhoods devastated by civil war, and ensured safety in a country where none of these assistance existed. Most importantly, his fighters had driven Israelis out of much of Lebanon. The tough fighting and the emergence of Hezbollah's success against Israel gave the movement credibility. The secretary-general's son since 1992 (Hassan Nasrallah), Hadi, died fighting the Israelis in 1997, a sacrifice that gave Nasrallah, unlike any other Arab leader, the figure of personal sacrifice.

Due to Hezbollah's involvement in international terrorism, the US Department of the Treasury listed the group as a terrorist entity in 1995. Two years later, the US State Department designated Hezbollah as a foreign terrorist organization. In 2001, in line with Executive Order 13224, the United States named Hezbollah a specially designated global terrorist entity. In an interview on Lebanese television a few months after the appointment, the US ambassador to Lebanon, Vincent Battle, reiterated the US position that "*Hezbollah is on the list of terrorist organizations because it is considered an organization that leads to carries out terrorist acts and is capable of staging them [with] great global reach.*" Hezbollah's ability to attract substantial Shiite supporters over the past two decades was in part the result of its adaptation to democratic forces in the public sphere, of its successes military against the occupation and their efforts in social and economic aid in many contexts, coercion and conflict are necessary for admission to the public sphere. Between the late 1980s and 2000, Islamist civil arenas brought greater inclusion of fringe groups, particularly displaced rural Shiites and lower-class advocates of public Islam. Islamists forged links with both secular and religious groups that supported the Palestinian cause and the elimination of state corruption. Enthusiasm for Hezbollah in the public sphere was overwhelming on the eve of liberation in 2000. However, as of 2005, this image began to change with the start of new social processes.

Hezbollah's political agenda became more focused on protecting its vertical power against growing national and American-Israeli demands for the organization's dissolution. Major historical incidents, such as the assassination of Rafik al-Hariri in 2005, and the use of armed force against civilian neighborhoods in 2008, alienated many Hezbollah enthusiasts. On the one hand, Islamists' concern with the secular apparatus of the modern nation-state also carries an anti-modern element. The sharee'a used by Islamists to organize this life and the afterlife contradicts the secular legal

processes instituted by the modern state in relation to the family, education, defense, the economy, leisure and others. On the other hand, Islamists' critique of Western modernity partially converges with postmodernists. Islamists, like postmodernists, confront a local system of domination and challenge the foundations of secular democracy and the supposed "triumph of reason" in human history. But insofar as Islamists insist on final truths, where God and religious morality are the main sources of human meaning and happiness, these are foreign to postmodernity. Therefore, Islamist modernism carries irreconcilable tensions and characteristics that continue to develop in relation to the new historical conditions. There will undoubtedly be more experimentation with ideas derived from Shiite legal and doctrinal traditions and attempts to reconcile them with the social demands and secular procedures known to the modern state. Future Shiite "graduates" from Hezbollah schools and seminars will likely shape another historical phase, which will produce another Islamic understanding of the relationships between power, modernism and shari'a.²⁸

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Strategic Analysis Notebooks Series - September, 2021