

MERIA

HIZBALLAH: NEW COURSE OR CONTINUED WARFARE

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Lebanese Hizballah appears to have won a success in Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. But now the organization also loses the political benefits of claiming patriotic leadership in that struggle. The group faces difficult choices over whether to try to continue the battle or to end it. Domestically, Hizballah's loss of its advantage make it more vulnerable to competition by other Lebanese parties--even within its own community--and to a need to deliver material benefits for its constituents. Moreover, Hizballah cannot take Syrian or Iranian support for granted.

On May 24, 2000, Israeli forces completed their withdrawal from south Lebanon, ending what Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak called Israel's own "Lebanese tragedy." (1). The military's definition of this pullout as "an achievement and even an extraordinary success(2) would be judged by whether the future brought peace along the border or a continued battle with Hizballah. In Lebanon, Hizballah activists led celebrations at what they considered a huge victory for the organization. After all, this struggle had been a major reason for the group's establishment in 1983 and been one of the main factors making it a leading force within the Shi'ite community in Lebanon.

One cannot easily downplay this achievement by Hizballah, since throughout the 1990s it had remained almost the sole group in any Arab state committed to implementing an armed struggle against Israel. It would be argued that Hizballah achieved what no other Arab country or army had been able to do: oust Israel from Arab territory without the Arab side committing to any concession. (3)

As an Islamist movement seeking influence and power within Lebanon in order to transform Lebanese society, however, Hizballah's victory brought it serious problems and decisions about its future. After all, it was the long, successful struggle against Israel that maintained the group, bolstered its standing within the Shi'ite community, and

made it strong in Lebanon's public opinion and political system. The same factor gave it foreign support, especially from Iran and Syria. Now that some time has passed since the completion of the Israeli withdrawal, the organization lost some of its luster in the face of day-to-day challenges from Lebanese life and the harsh choices of Lebanese domestic politics.

In its favor, Hizballah deeply rooted in the Shi'ite and Lebanese experience and had been preparing itself for a decade to make this transition. It strengthened political wing, information apparatus, and widespread system of educational, health and social services. Clearly, Hizballah will survive. The question is how the new status will affect the organization, Hizballah's own goals and tactics, the nature of its Islamist campaign to transform the country, and the internal affairs of Lebanon itself. One critical question is to what extent Hizballah undergoes a process of "normalization," become more of a political party than an armed militia and a reformist rather than a revolutionary movement. If this happens, Hizballah would be cut down to its "natural size" as one more Shi'ite communal party and interest group, making deals with rivals in the Lebanese political mosaic, vying with each other for prestige, power, and patronage.

The organization is quite aware of this danger and is trying to meet it. One potential solution would be to accept this framework

and preserve a quiet south Lebanon along the border with Israel. Another would be to renew its armed struggle, precisely to revive the past days of glory. In any event, what is clear is that an important and decisive chapter in the organization's history has ended; but its story is far from over.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (4)

Hizballah stormed onto the Lebanese scene in late 1983 with a series of attacks on Western and Israeli targets in the country that brought hundreds of casualties, leading the United States and France to end their involvement in Lebanon, and Israel to complete quickly a withdrawal of its direct presence.

The military struggle against the West, and especially against Israel, has been since the early 1980s one of the most organization's main activities. This was an expression of the influence of two major events in Middle East history that set the group on its path. One was Iran's Islamic revolution, a direct source of inspiration and role model for the organization. Already in the early 1980s, Hizballah bound itself to Tehran and since then received Iran's economic and political support. The second event was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, which led the Shi'ite community onto the path of a violent struggle against the Israeli presence in south Lebanon. This struggle became an important focal point for the organization from which it drew legitimacy and support at home and abroad.

Despite all this, the organization's emergence came purely from the Lebanese context, as a result of domestic processes in Lebanon and within the Shi'ite community. The most prominent of these factors were: the Shi'ite community's increasing demographic weight in Lebanon's population (from 19 percent in 1950 to more than 40 percent at the end of the 1990s); increased immigration of community members from rural regions in the Biqa' and south to slums on the outskirts of cities; and, as a result, a stronger religious identification of Shi'ites that turned Shi'ite clerics into the community's leaders,

replacing the traditional leadership based on the notable Shi'ite families. (5)

These processes eventually turned the Shi'ite community from a weak, passive, and to some extent marginal community in the Lebanese arena into an active, powerful community struggling for a central role. This effort was first led by Musa al-Sadr, a cleric born in Iran who arrived to Lebanon in 1959 to become the community's most prominent leader. In 1975, with the outbreak of civil war, Sadr founded the Amal movement as a military force to strengthen the community's bargaining power. In the wake of Sadr's disappearance during a visit to Libya in 1978, he was replaced as Amal leader by Nabih Barri, a lawyer by training and not a cleric. (6)

Even before his disappearance, there emerged those who opposed Musa al-Sadr, believing that the Shi'ites should adopt a more radical worldview. These people refused to accept Amal's moderate line, as inspired by Musa al-Sadr, to improve the Shi'ites' status based on accepting Lebanon's existing political system. With al-Sadr gone and in the shadow of Iran's Islamic revolution and Israel's invasion of Lebanon, these people established Hizballah, whose activities began in 1983. (7)

Hizballah's platform, published in February 1985, left no room for doubt regarding its long-term objectives. These focused on the establishment of an Islamic republic in Lebanon, based on the Iranian model, as a stage in establishing a united Islamic state all over the Islamic world. At the same time, there was an obvious attempt by the organization to don a cloak of pragmatism and moderation, mainly in the Lebanese domestic context. (8) This reflected its realization that it was operating within the limitations of Lebanese realities that made it difficult for Hizballah to implement its ideological concepts. Lebanese society is a mosaic of religious and ethnic communities, none of which has the ability to impose itself on its rivals. In addition, the Shi'ite community was an insignificant minority on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean,

outnumbered by a sometimes hostile Sunni majority. Finally, it seemed for a long time that it was Amal and not Hizballah that enjoyed support from the majority in the Shi'ite community.

Hizballah reached the pinnacle of its power within the Lebanese Shi'ite community in the late 1980s, when it gained both political and military control over most of West Beirut and large areas of south Lebanon. However, it was at this high point that the Hizballah found itself faced with challenges threatening its continued activities and even its very existence. First and foremost among these problems was the Ta'if Agreement signed in October 1989, ending the Lebanese civil war--during which Hizballah had flourished--marking the start of a process of rehabilitating the state institutions and disarming most of the militias. Hizballah was also forced to give up weapons, although it was permitted to continue carrying arms in south Lebanon in the struggle against Israel. Moreover, the Ta'if Agreement laid the foundation for establishing a new Maronite-Sunni order in Lebanon, with Syrian backing and support, relegating the larger Shi'ite community to the sidelines. Another challenge facing the organization was the Middle East peace process that began in 1991 and threatened to bring an end to the organization's struggle against Israel, thus seriously weakening one of its sources of legitimacy and power. (9)

In the face of these realities, Hizballah reinvented itself as a pragmatic organization, ostensibly ready to abandon commitment to its ideological concepts or at least to postpone their implementation until far into the future. At first, the organization expressed opposition to the Ta'if Agreement and was apparently responsible for the assassination of Lebanon's President Rene Mu`awad, in November 1989, as a way to prevent the agreement's implementation. (10) However, it quite quickly came to terms with the "Tai'f Republic" and began taking steps to become integrated into its institutions.

It participated in the 1992 parliamentary elections and its list "Loyalty to the Resistance" won eight seats. It also

participated in the parliamentary elections of 1996 and 2000, and in the 1998 municipal elections. (11) Throughout these years, Hizballah engaged in contacts designed to bring it into the government coalition. As the organization's Secretary General Na'im al-Qasim explained: "Our decision to participate in the parliamentary elections in 1992 meant that it was possible to participate in the government.... Depending only on what government it is to be, and so far as we are concerned it has nothing to do with any matter of principle. (12)"

In all of this, it was possible to observe a clear process of Lebanonization that the organization had undergone, as part of which it had in fact accepted the existence of the Lebanese state and had begun to work toward integration into its institutions. Already in the organization's platform for the 1992 parliamentary elections, it stated that Hizballah would work to preserving "One Lebanon," though adding that "preserving one Lebanon and its affiliation with its Muslim and Arab environment, makes it incumbent on all of us to adhere to the resistance to the Zionist occupation and the liberation of the occupied lands." (13)

In April 1997, as part of its effort to establish dialogue and even cooperation with all parties and political forces active in Lebanon--including the Maronites--Hizballah's Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah declared that: "Hizballah is a movement whose members are Lebanese, its leadership is Lebanese, the decision is Lebanese and it is made by a Lebanese leadership. The movement is fighting on Lebanese soil in the cause of liberating Lebanese territory and for the honor and freedom of the Lebanese people and the nation in general....Hizballah is an Islamic-Lebanese movement." (14)

In addition to its moves in the political arena, the organization expanded its activity within the Shi'ite community. With Iran's generous assistance, it established a network of educational and cultural institutions, and also health and social welfare services. The latter included an Islamic health authority that

operated pharmacies, clinics and even hospitals where thousands of people were treated every day. The organization also established a construction company that not only built houses, mosques and schools, but also paved roads and even supplied water to Shi'ite villages. Particularly prominent in all of this was its contribution to the reconstruction of thousands of houses damaged in the battles with Israel in south Lebanon. (15) In addition, Hizballah maintained a Martyrs' Fund which provided assistance to thousands of families of the dead (shuhada), injured and imprisoned Shi'ites. (16) However, it should be borne in mind as the rehabilitation of the state institutions in Lebanon progressed, they began pushing aside and limiting the organization's activities, and it was forced to concentrate on matters of education, health and social welfare.

Of course, all this provided the basis for transferring Hizballah from a radical militia movement to a social-political organization which had at first tried to present itself as an alternative to the Lebanese state but gradually came to terms with the state's existence and slowly became part of the political order.

In view of the progress made in the Arab-Israeli peace process, and particularly between the years 1992-1996, the organization's leaders began hinting that they might be ready to accept an Israeli-Lebanese peace agreement and to end the armed struggle against Israel. Hizballah apparently wanted to adopt the approach of the Islamist organizations in Egypt and Jordan regarding the peace process. They had come to the realization that they were unable to prevent a peace agreement between Israel and the Arab regimes in their countries, but also hoped and believed they could prevent the normalization of relations between the Arab world and Israel. (17)

Nevertheless, the impasse in the peace process, especially on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks during the latter half of the 1990s, allowed the organization to refrain from reaching a decision on the question of its future character and path and to continue

to enjoy the best of both worlds. On the one hand, it worked toward integration into the Lebanese political system thus becoming a legitimate party as a part of the Lebanese political mosaic. On the other hand, it carried on the struggle against Israel, thus preserving its image and standing as a radical armed movement. There can be no doubt that the organization increased its circle of supporters thanks to its political activities, as well as its social welfare activities. But this was insignificant compared to the prestige and support gained because of its armed struggle against Israel within the Shi'ite community and Lebanese public opinion, as well as from Syria and Iran. This struggle, therefore differentiated it from its rivals in the Shi'ite or Lebanese arena, made it unique, and added to its renown and glory.

THE ROAD TO VICTORY IN SOUTH LEBANON

In view of all this, the organization's determination to ensure Israel's continued presence in south Lebanon as much as possible is understandable. Ostensibly, one might have expected Hizballah to encourage the voices that began to be heard in Israel beginning in the mid-1990s calling for Israel's unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon. All it had to do was to hint that it was ready to end its armed struggle against Israel if this happened, thus pushing Israeli policy and public debate toward a quick withdrawal. However, exactly the opposite occurred. After all, Israel's continued presence in south Lebanon allowed the organization to maintain a struggle against it that ensured the organization's relative advantage over all other Lebanese forces, especially its Shi'ite rivals.

Thus the organization spoke in vague terms every time it was called upon to discuss the question of its future in the event that Israel unilaterally withdrew from south Lebanon. Although the organization's spokesmen repeatedly claimed that its activities were focused on driving Israel out of all Lebanon's territory, they also repeated

their commitment to the liberation of all Palestine, thus implying the possibility of continued armed struggle against Israel even if the latter withdrew its forces to the international border with Lebanon. (18)

There is no doubt that the struggle that Hizballah waged for years against Israel, with Iranian moral and financial support and even weapons and military advisors, made it one of the most superb guerrilla forces in the world. (19) Israeli commanders tried to present their army as having the upper hand, pointing to successes in curbing Hizballah offensives and the gradual decline over the years in Israeli casualties as opposed to the increase in Hizballah casualties. The fact that the south Lebanese Army (SLA) and security zone survived over many years was brought as proof a Hizballah failure and an Israeli achievement. All of this happened, according to these commanders, in a situation in which they faced operational limitations due to political considerations. (20) This argument now continues in the context of claims that outcome was due more to changes of public opinion in Israel rather than military actions on the ground. (21)

Certainly, Hizballah waged its own effective propaganda campaign, using press, radio and television stations and even Internet web sites, which provided real-time reports of battles including harrowing pictures of Israeli casualties. (22)

Of note in this connection is the balance of terror and fear that was created between the Israeli army and Hizballah. Since the early 1990s, Israel refrained from attacking the organization's leaders and its headquarters because of the organization's retaliatory action took against Israeli and Jewish targets outside Israel in reaction to the killing of `Abas Musawi, the organization's secretary-general in March 1992. Following Operation "Accountability" and Operation "Grapes of Wrath," which, as will be recalled, did not end with a clear decision, Israel refrained from attacking infrastructure targets in Lebanon for fear of harming Lebanese civilians (such as happened in Kafr Kana in April 1996) as well as concern that Hizballah

would in retaliation train its weapons against Israeli settlements along Israel's northern border.

Thus Hizballah gained the image of defending the Shi'ites of south Lebanon, effectively preventing Israel from causing them any serious harm or at least taking revenge for any such act when it does occur.(23) This situation reached its peak toward the end of the 1990s, when the residents of northern Israel decided on whether or not to go down into the shelters based on announcements made by Hizballah Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah on his organization's plans to react to attacks on Lebanese civilians by either Israel or the SLA. (24)

In the weeks before and after the Israeli withdrawal, the organization became a symbol and object of admiration to many over the Arab and Muslim world. Even the Lebanese government, which had viewed the organization as an element undermining its sovereignty, recognized it as an organization representing Lebanese patriotism and thus worthy of support. A clear expression of international recognition was the meeting between UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Hasan Nasrallah during the UN Secretary's visit to Beirut in June 2000. Annan explained the need to hold this meeting, because of the central role the UN had played and would play in the future with Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon. (25)

Thus, the withdrawal from south Lebanon allowed the organization to hold victory celebrations and take up the positions Israel had evacuated. Hizballah's activists became lords over the region, while the Lebanese government was wary of deploying its forces and enforcing its sovereignty there. The organization even began organizing visits of Lebanese as well as Arab tourists to areas in south Lebanon from which Israel had withdrawn, during which the big thrill for tourists was organized stone-throwing at the Fatma Gate toward Israeli soldiers across the border. Nevertheless, the organization was careful to preserve order and calm along the border, and even prevented acts of vengeance

against SLA soldiers who surrendered to it. These soldiers were turned over the Lebanese authorities who put them on trial. (26)

Thus, the organization was considered to have done the impossible- Israel's expulsion from south Lebanon without Israel's receiving any quid pro quo for its withdrawal. It was no wonder, then, that in Syria, and even among the Palestinians, there were those who called on the late Hafiz al-Asad and Yasir `Arafat to speak to Israel in "Lebanese." (27)

A FALSE VICTORY?

However, this alleged victory over Israel may be revealed as a false one and may mark the beginning of Hizballah's decline in standing and prestige. After all, having no battle with Israel may in the future cost the organization some of its dynamism, uniqueness, and foreign support. It was the struggle against Israel that had effectively prevented the organization from sinking into the Lebanese political quagmire, and becoming just one of many political parties operating in Lebanon.

An example of the serious problem already facing Hizballah was provided several weeks after the withdrawal from south Lebanon by the death of two Hizballah fighters in the village of Markaba in south Lebanon during a battle against the rival group, Amal, for control over the area Israel had left. The leaders of both groups were quick to calm things down and to present the incident as a local affair. Yet such clashes could occur many times in the future, and the struggle for influence will remain intense.(28)

Amal is indeed emerging as a serious rival of the Hizballah in the battle over the control of the Shi'ite street. Amal has a certain advantage over Hizballah in that it is a more deeply entrenched organization headed by a pragmatic, moderate leadership. Amal's approach reflects recognition of the Lebanese reality and its readiness to use that framework for promoting Shi'ite interests can make it a more effective lobbying group. Many Shi'ites do indeed prefer Amal and view Hizballah as too radical. Amal's largely secular leadership

also appeals more to many individual members of the community.

The power balance and Amal's advantages over Hizballah may be seen in the parliamentary elections of the 1990s, and in the 1998 municipal elections in which Amal's candidates gained control over many Shi'ite strongholds in south Lebanon and the Biqa'. One of these was the city of Tyre, the largest Shi'ite concentration in the south, and even in Baalbek, the largest and most important town in the Lebanese Biqa' which until then had been considered Hizballah strongholds(29).

However, the struggle against Amal is only one of the series of challenges facing Hizballah. In July 1997, Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, former Hizballah secretary-general who left the organization when he lost in the campaign for its leadership, announced the founding of a new organization called the "Revolution of the Hungry." Tufayli had hoped through this movement to lead a campaign of civil disobedience for the purpose of advancing the Shi'ite community, which he claimed had been neglected by the governing institutions as well as by the leaderships of both Amal and Hizballah(30).

The new movement's founding was a kind of coming full circle for Hizballah, and also for Amal. After all, both were founded as protest movements by sectors of the Shi'ite community dissatisfied at the high-handedness and ineffectiveness of the current leaders, viewing them as part of an indifferent establishment. Hizballah's own creation expressed the criticisms of many Shi'ite clerics to Amal's moderate position and readiness to integrate into the existing Lebanese order. In addition, the founding of Hizballah was also an expression of frustration by many in the Shi'ite community who had not gained influence or leadership in Amal institutions. Thus, Hizballah was not just a militant group but also a fascinating coalition of forces and interests within the Shi'ite community working towards advancing their status and interests under the guise of a comprehensive effort to improve the status of the Shi'ite community(31). Yet now Hizballah had also become

institutionalized and the object of criticism by those who felt left out by its composition.

As Musa al-Sadr had before him, Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the spiritual leader of Hizballah, held these elements together, assisted by the anti-Israel struggle as a political and ideological glue. (32). However, it is clear that among these political and social forces that have joined together in Hizballah, there are fissures and differences of opinion on political and personal grounds which have until now been pushed aside because of the priority granted to the struggle against Israel but are now liable to break out onto the surface.

One problem, which also affects Hizballah's relationship to Iran, is Fadlallah's pretensions to the role of Shi'ite's Supreme Spiritual Leader (Marj'a Taqlid), a position that became vacant with the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeyni in 1989. In this ambition, Fadlallah found himself in confrontation with Iran's Spiritual Leader 'Ali Khamene'i. Thus far, the organization has indeed avoided involvement in this confrontation but at the price of distancing itself somewhat from Fadlallah. (33) The unresolved question of religious leadership over the Shi'ites remains unsolved and could cast a threatening shadow over Iranian-Hizballah relations and even over the organization's internal cohesion.

However, Hizballah's main problem is rooted, as with Amal, in the fact that the group has become a part of the Lebanese political establishment. This is illustrated by its willingness, even eagerness, to join the Lebanese government. It is therefore, no wonder that now Hizballah is being accused of no longer reflecting the misery and distress of the Shi'ite community in Lebanon, a claim on which Tufayli wants to build himself. There is no doubt that the emergence of Tufayli caused Hizballah considerable embarrassment. Indications of the organization's difficulty in directly facing up to Tufayli can be seen in its readiness to support the Lebanese government's moves against Tufayli and his movement.

The Lebanese government issued a warrant for Tufayli's arrest and took steps to prevent his supporters' activities. However, this was not enough to prevent Tufayli from continuing his efforts, although maintaining a low profile and for a time even going underground(34). Moreover, in July 2000 he appeared at the graveside of the late Syrian President, Hafiz al-Asad, in Qurdaha on the Syrian shore for a condolence call and prayers for the soul of the departed. This showed Tufayli's aspirations to continue an active role in the Lebanese scene but also, more important, of the fact that he enjoys the support and backing of Syria, which apparently wishes to use him as a card against the Lebanese regime and Hizballah. (35)

THE FUTURE

Hizballah, of course, remains a well-established, deep-rooted organization with broad support from the Shi'ite community, not to mention backing from Syria and Iran. Yet if Hizballah neither provides its constituents with the passion of anti-Israel struggle nor its patrons a useful card in regional conflicts, how might this base be eroded?

Israel's withdrawal brought to the fore other issues on the Lebanese agenda. For some, especially the hard-core Maronites, the new focus is on the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and voices have already been heard calling for the departure of the Syrian forces from Lebanon(36).

Others, especially members of the Shi'ite community have an entirely different agenda and order of priorities. They are well aware that the new Lebanese order arising from the Syrian-backed Ta'if Agreement has left Lebanon a country under a Maronite-Sunni hegemony. The balance of power between these two communities, which have ruled Lebanon together since the founding of that state in 1943, has become more equal. Nevertheless, the Shi'ite community, which is now the largest community in Lebanon, has remained discriminated against in everything that has to do with apportioning of financial and regime resources.

Therefore, it may be assumed that the Shi'ites will make their voices heard demanding a fair share of the Lebanese national pie. Experience teaches that these demands could develop, sooner or later, into a violent confrontation, especially since they represent not just hunger for political power and resources, but also real economic distress of Shi'ites in the urban slums, Biqa' and the south. It may be assumed that in such a situation in the future, the Hizballah will play a substantial, albeit not exclusive, role in the Shi'ite community's struggle. Yet with Syria opposing its ambitions, Iran reluctant to become too entangled in internal Lebanese politics, and other groups fighting Hizballah (instead of cheering it on against Israel), this would be a far more difficult period for the organization.

Of course, it cannot be assumed that the group's struggle against Israel is over, especially since such a strategy has certain attractions. Yet if Hizballah were to be responsible for renewing a cross-border war with Israel (on behalf of the unpopular Palestinians) and for bringing Israeli attacks on the south (bringing new flights of refugees and a halt or even reversal to reconstruction), an anti-Israel battle would be far less popular than it was in the past.

The death of Hafiz al-Asad undoubtedly upset the apple cart from Syria's point of view. The Syrians had a clear interest in encouraging Hizballah to continue its struggle against Israel along the Israeli-Lebanese international border. After all, in Syria's view, shedding Israeli blood in south Lebanon gave Syria the only powerful bargaining chip it had in pressuring Israel to accept Damascus's conditions for an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement. Hafiz al-Asad had raised this kind of use of violence to gain his political objectives to a fine art. He did not eschew brinkmanship, prepared to deal with possible escalation and flare-up.

With Asad's passing, though, and given his son and successor Bashshar's clear interest in firmly establishing his status at home, Syria's interest or temptation in risking a border war that could escalate into a direct

Syrian-Israeli confrontation, has diminished. Israeli spokesmen have on more than one occasion warned that any escalation along the border will force Israel to strike with unprecedented force against Syrian targets in Lebanon, with all that would mean(37).

As to Iran, its distance from the Israeli-Arab arena of confrontation spurred it on to ignite fires there. After all, it was Iran's regime that reaped the fruits of Hizballah's achievements-which comprised the Islamic revolution's only foreign success- without paying any price at all for them. Thus, Iran has a basic interest in fanning the flames along the border, though this might be limited by that country's own internal struggle.

Nevertheless, the final decision was, and remains, in Hizballah's hands. The organization is aware of the great profits it could gain with the renewal of the struggle against Israel, but it also knows what harm might be done to its image and status inside Lebanon if its actions created a conflagration that could spread all over Lebanon. In such an event, it could lose a great deal of its legitimacy both inside Lebanon and in the international arena, as well as the support of the Shi'ite community, which might come to see it more as provocateur than as protector.

It is, therefore, too early to assess where the organization is headed, and whether it will give up so easily--as things appear now--its continued struggle against Israel. The organization preferred to remain vague and to spread contradictory messages regarding its future path. For example, at funeral services for members of the organization killed in the clashes with Amal in Markaba in July 2000, Hizballah's Deputy Secretary-General Na'im al-Qasim declared, "There are those who tell us how nice things are at present, is peace not sweet and is reaching an understanding with Israel not logical and desirable? On the other hand, there are those who now wish to turn into revolutionaries although they were not like that in the past, and they ask why we are not shooting at Israeli soldiers standing opposite us....We answer all of these people that we believe in Jihad and resistance and we will not deviate from this belief, but we will

choose our own tactics and will not be dragged along by provocation. We conduct ourselves with wisdom, intelligence and Jihad, in a manner that incorporates all of this. Therefore we will not show our hand." (38) On another occasion, Na'im added: "This stage [in the struggle against Israel] has not finished, in view of the fact that the Palestinian [track of the peace negotiations] is in troubles, the Syrian track is stuck and the other elements of the Arab-Israeli conflict have also remained unchanged." (39)

The organization's Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah explained in an interview that: "Hizballah is based on opposition to the Zionist project in our region. Hizballah adheres to this idea....The expulsion of Israel from the region and the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem form the Hizballah's principal belief, and as such they are more sacred than a set goal....However, the question before us is our order of priorities in the next stage. There is no doubt that Hizballah enjoys a certain status in the Arab world. We want to preserve this and harness this status in favor of the awakening of the entire nation, to reinforce the condition of hostility towards our Israeli enemy to ensure that Israel was and has remained our enemy. Towards this end, we will invest efforts in formulating our opposition to normalization, and in order to perpetuate the isolation and siege of Israel, at the level of the people and after that at the cultural and economic level." (40)

However, the organization did take care to retain a pretext to continue its struggle against Israel, at the time and the place it chooses. This pretext focuses on the claim that Israel's withdrawal is not complete, since it has retained some Lebanese territory. Reference is mainly to the Shabha Farms, which Lebanon claims form part of its lands. Israel claims, however, and the UN agrees, that they are part of the Golan Heights, in other words part of Syria, and therefore Israel does not have to withdraw from them in the framework of UN Resolution 425. Hizballah can hardly count on Syria to agree that this land should be given to Lebanon.

The issue of the Lebanese prisoners being held by Israel as leverage to obtain the release of a captured Israeli airman--`Abd al-Karim `Ubayd and Mustafa Dirani-have remained an open issue for the organization. Moreover, Hizballah's military wing continues to operate and is deployed like any army along the border with Israel. It has established observation points and armed patrols along the border. (41)

A major regional crisis as a result of the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations or the lack of any progress in the Syrian-Israeli track may encourage Iran and Syria, Hizballah's main allies, to pressure it to resume military struggle against Israel. The organization may chose as an alternative option the resumption of terror activity against Israeli and Jewish targets outside Israel, or use Palestinians living in Lebanon. Indeed, according to Israeli intelligence sources, Hizballah has been training Palestinians, mainly members of the Islamic Jihad under Ramadan Shalah, for this purpose. Some of these individuals already took part in the beginning of 2000 in some Hizballah attacks against Israeli targets in south Lebanon.(42)

To conclude, The Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon should be considered as a big achievement for the Hizballah. At the same time this achievement faces the organization with a difficult dilemma: to end its military struggle against Israel and become an ordinary Lebanese political party or to continue the struggle against Israel with all its consequences. Within this choice is embedded an equally hard, though less obvious, problem, forcing Hizballah to transform itself from a revolutionary to a reformist group in trying to make Lebanon an Islamic state.

Choosing armed struggle abroad and revolution at home would isolate Hizballah and reduce its base of support. But selecting an end to foreign struggle and reformism at home takes away Hizballah's past political advantages and opens it to splits and complaints that it has failed or become an establishment group. Thus, the possible

"normalization" of Hizballah may become Israel's revenge on the organization that first helped force it to remain on the south Lebanon battlefield and then helped force it to withdraw from that area.

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For previous MERIA Journal articles of interest on issues involving Israel, Lebanon, and Hizballah, see, Habib C. Malik, "Is There Still a Lebanon?" MJ Vol. 2 No. 1 (March 1998); Eyal Zisser, "Hizballah in Lebanon: At the Crossroads" MJ Vol. 1 No. 3 (September 1997); Yosef Ben-Aharon, "Negotiating With Syria: A First-Hand Account" MJ Vol. 4 No. 2 (June 2000); Barry Rubin, "Understanding Syrian Policy: An Analysis of Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara's Explanation", MJ Vol. 4 No. 2 (June 2000); and Eyal Zisser, "Decisionmaking in Asad's Syria," MJ Vol. 2 No. 2 (May 1998). There are also two MERIA Research Guides on these issues, both by Lawrence Joffe, Syria after Hafiz al-Asad, and A Guide to Syrian-Israeli Peace Talks on the Web.

NOTES

1. Ha'aretz, May 25, 2000.
2. Ha'aretz, July 28, 2000.
3. See Hizballah's Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah's interview to al-Jazira TV, May 27, 2000; see also <http://www.moqawama.org> (Hizballa's official website).
4. For historical background on the Hizballah see Eyal Zisser, "Hizballah in Lebanon - At the Crossroads," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Efraim Inber (eds.) Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East (London: Frank

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7. See Shimon Shapira, pp. 77-133. .

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9. Eyal Zisser, pp. 99-107; see also William Harris, Faces of Lebanon (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1996), pp. 237-326.

10. William B. Harris, "Lebanon," in Ami Ayalon, MECS (Middle East Contemporary Survey) Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991). Vol. 13 (1989), p. 524.

11. Ibid., Vol. 16 (1992), pp. 598-608; Vol. 20 (1996), pp. 490-495; Vol. 22 (1998), pp. 414-416; see also Nizar Hamseh, "Lebanon's Hizballah: From Islamic Revolution to Parliamentary Accommodation," Third World Quarterly, vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 321-337.

12. Radio Nur, November 3, 1997.

13. Radio Nur, August 5, 1992.

14. See an interview with Hasan Nasrallah, al-Sharq al-Awsat, March 16, 1997.

15. Hala Jaber, pp. 145-168; Shimon Shapira, pp. 140-149. Da'irat al-'Alaqaq al-'Ammal wal-Ilam fi Mu'assasat Jihad al-Bina', Sit Sanawat min al-Jihad wal-Bina' (Six years of Jihad and of Construction) (Beirut, 1994).

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17. See Shimon Shapira, pp. 205-213; Eyal Zisser, pp. 101-108; Richard Augustus Norton, "Walking between Raindrops: Hizballah in Lebanon," *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 81-102. See also *Al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, Safahat `Izz, `Ard waTawthiq li`Amaliyyat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya Khilal `Amm 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 (Pages of Glory, The Islamic Resistance Operations during the years 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997) (Beirut, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997).
18. See Nasrallah's interviews with *Der Spiegel*, October 30, 1997; see also Mahmud Suwayd, *al-Islam waFilastin*, Hiwar Shamil ma`a al-Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (the Islam and the Question of Palestine, a Dialogue with Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1998).
19. *Voice of Israel*, November 27, 1998; *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, September 29, 1999, June 8, 2000.
20. *Bamahane*, October 23, 1998; *Yediot Aharonot*, October 22, 1999;
21. See an interview with Lt. Gen. Ya`alon, who was head of the intelligence branch, *Ha'aretz*, July 14, 2000; see also *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, June 8, 2000.
22. For Hizballah's web sites see <http://www.moqawama.org>; <http://www.hizballah.org> (Hizballa's official websites); <http://www.almanar.com.lb> (Hizballa's TV station's website); <http://www.alnour.net> (Hizballah's radio station's website); <http://www.alahed.org> (Hizballah's newspaper's website).
23. See *Ha'aretz*, March 27, May 22, 23 2000.
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26. See *al-Nahar*, July 20; *Ha'aretz*, July 28, 30, 2000.
27. *Al-Watan* (Duha, Qatar), 25 May 2000; *MBC TV*, May 26, 2000; *Radio Damascus*, May 29, 2000.
28. *R. Beirut*, July 16, 17, 2000.
29. William B. Harris, "Lebanon," in Bruce Maddy Weitzman (ed.) *MECS*, Vol. 22 (1998), pp. 415-416.
30. William B. Harris, "Lebanon," in Bruce Maddy Weitzman (ed.) *MECS*, Vol. 21 (1997), p. 411.
31. See Waddah Sharrara, *Hizballah's State, Lenbanon- an Islamic Society*; Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah, Born with a Vengeance*; Shimon Shapira, *Hizbullah between Iran and Lebanon*.
32. for more on Fadlallah see Martin Kramer, *Fadlallah, haMatspen shel Hizballah* (*Fadlallah: The Compass of Hizbullah* (The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African studies, Tel Aviv University, 1998).
33. See Shimon Shapira, pp. 192-199.
34. William B. Harris, "Lebanon," in Bruce Maddy Weitzman (ed.) *MECS*, Vol. 21 (1997), p. 411.
35. *Al-Nahar*, July 20, 2000.
36. See for example articles by *al-Nahar's* editor, Ghassan Tuwayni, *al-Nahar*, June 5 and 8, July 10, 2000.
37. See declarations by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Israel Defense Force's Chief of Staff, Sha'ul Mofaz, *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 2000.
38. *Radio Nur*, July 23, 2000.
39. *Al-Mustaqbal*, July 22, 2000.
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42. *Ha'aretz*, February 25, 2000; May 26, 2000.