

## Writing the Resistance: Recent Books on Hizbullah from Lebanese Perspectives

*Jon Hoover\**

Hizbullah's 1985 Open Letter explained its "Islamic Resistance" to Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, called for an Islamic state, and shunned cooperation with the Lebanese government. Hizbullah advocated this exclusionary ideology up to the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990. Then, in an apparent about-face, Hizbullah opened up to Lebanese society and participated in the 1992 parliamentary elections. It has retained its place as a major player in Lebanese political and social life ever since.

Making sense of Hizbullah and its policy shifts in the early 1990s is at the heart of five recent books published in English by authors who are either Lebanese or have had long experience in Lebanon. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb's *Hizbu'llah: Politics & Religion* (2002) is first in order of publication.<sup>1</sup> Saad-Ghorayeb was until recently a professor at the Lebanese American University and is currently a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. Her book explores the alleged tension between Hizbullah's radical Islamic ideals and its pragmatic politics in the Lebanese arena. Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (2004), is less interested in ideology and construes Hizbullah's activities as a function of the wider political dynamics of the Middle East, particularly Syrian hegemony in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> Harik is an American who was professor of

\* Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies, Near East School of Theology, Beirut.

1 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics & Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

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

political science at the American University of Beirut from 1981 until 2003. Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, author of *In the Path of the Hizbullah* (2004) and formerly professor at the American University of Beirut, returns the focus to ideology. Unlike Saad-Ghorayeb, however, he sees no contradiction between Hizbullah's Islamic ideals and practical politics. Hizbullah's diverse activities are entirely a function of its jihad ideology.<sup>3</sup> The fourth book, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within* (2005), is a detailed apologetic for Hizbullah's actions and positions from the pen of its Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem, second in command to Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah.<sup>4</sup> In the fifth and final book, Joseph Alagha, a native of Beirut and a professor at the Lebanese American University, proceeds historically, seeking to explain changes in Hizbullah's thinking in *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology* (2006).<sup>5</sup>

The five books under review are the most thorough discussions of Hizbullah published in English between 2002 and 2006, but they are not the only recent works on the organization. None of the authors reviewed here take it upon themselves to build a case for action against Hizbullah.<sup>6</sup> Nor are these books the latest on the topic. Just out—and unfortunately unavailable for this article—is *Hezbollah: A Short History* by Augustus Richard Norton, a long-time observer of Hizbullah at Boston University.<sup>7</sup>

- 3 Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004).
- 4 Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, trans. Dalia Khalil (London: Saqi, 2005). This is a translation of Na'im Qasim, *Hizb Allah: Al-Manhaj, al-Tajriba, al-Mustaqbal* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 1425/2004).
- 5 Joseph Elie Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program* (Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006). Also available at [http://www.isim.nl/files/Dissertation\\_Alagha.pdf](http://www.isim.nl/files/Dissertation_Alagha.pdf).
- 6 One work of this type is Avi Jorisch, *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizbullah's Al-Manar Television* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004), which argues that the US should contain Hizbullah's Manar television station.
- 7 Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). Also soon to be published is Nicholas Noe, ed., *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayed Hassan Nasrallah* (New York: Verso, 2007), which provides English translations of Hasan Nasrallah's speeches.

Additionally, numerous works not focusing on Hizbullah directly nonetheless provide valuable insights into its world. A fine example is the recent anthropological study on the lives of religious women in the southern suburbs of Beirut by Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern* (2006).<sup>8</sup>

### **Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics & Religion***

Amal Saad-Ghorayeb provides the fullest investigation of Hizbullah's ideology among the books under review. Although the book's publication date is 2002, the body of the text was written before the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Employing a cultural anthropological approach, Saad-Ghorayeb pieces together Hizbullah's worldview of the late 1990s from party publications, televised statements, and personal interviews with party figures. In rich detail, the book shows how the organization rationalizes jihad, opposition to Israel and the west, and participation in the Lebanese political arena.

In the first chapter, Saad-Ghorayeb asks why Hizbullah does not advocate violent revolution against the non-Islamic state of Lebanon. Before answering, she describes Hizbullah's division of the world into the oppressed and the oppressors. The oppressed in the first instance are Shi'i Muslims displaced by Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. However, this category is not necessarily limited to Shi'is or even Muslims. Hizbullah has been known to express support for other third world liberation movements and even the Republicans of Northern Ireland. The arch-oppressors are Israel and the United States, but they include others as well, especially those who align themselves with the Israelis and Americans.

In this view of the world, the Lebanese state, by virtue of its periodic flirtation with the Israelis and its non-Islamic character, comes down on

---

<sup>8</sup> Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

the side of the oppressors. Yet, Saad-Ghorayeb argues, Hizbullah does not take up arms against the state because of its strong aversion to chaos, which is oppressive in its own right. Hizbullah permits violence only against an oppressor when the oppressor shuts the door to dialogue and political participation or, as in the case of Israel, threatens the very existence of the oppressed. In this light, Hizbullah's jihad against Israel is justified while violent action against the Lebanese state is not. As there is no bar to political participation and dialogue with other sectors of Lebanese society, Hizbullah can work within the state so long as it does not pursue peace with Israel.

Despite Saad-Ghorayeb's smooth analysis, I suspect that aversion to chaos is only part of Hizbullah's rationale for cooperating with the Lebanese state. As we will see below, Joseph Alagha highlights a more positive and comprehensive ideological framework when he shows how the Islamic legal concept of benefit (*maslaha*) functions to explain Hizbullah's pragmatic politics. This is at least implicit in Saad-Ghorayeb's presentation when she argues that Hizbullah "has adopted a strategy of self-preservation, which entails indefinitely postponing the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon" (p. 16).

Saad-Ghorayeb takes up the Islamic state in her second chapter. The state envisioned by Hizbullah is essentially the Iranian model of Khomeini, but for ideological and pragmatic reasons Hizbullah is not yet calling for an Islamic state in Lebanon. To develop her analysis, Saad-Ghorayeb here embraces an apologetic distinction that Hizbullah makes between its "political" and "intellectual" allegiances. At the pragmatic or political level, Hizbullah respects the realities of the Lebanese context—including Syrian limitations on its actions—and works within the political structure to ensure its own survival. At the ideological level, Hizbullah appeals to the Qur'anic maxim, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Q. 2:256) to explain that Lebanon may only become an Islamic state when a large proportion of its citizens consent to it. Since the public will for an Islamic state does not currently exist, Hizbullah will work with

democracy as “the next best system” (p. 55). According to Saad-Ghorayeb, the net result is that Hizbullah has a “sincere commitment” to democracy at the political level even though it does not uphold democracy at the “intellectual” or ideal level.

Saad-Ghorayeb then explores the tensions between Hizbullah’s loyalty to the Lebanese state and its adherence to Ayatollah Khomeini’s notion of the guardianship of the jurist (*wilayat al-faqih*) (Chapter Three) and a pan-Islamic ideology (Chapter Four). Khomeini’s doctrine charges Muslim clerical jurists—scholars of Islamic law—with administration and leadership of the state, as we see in clergy-ruled Iran today. At the head of this state is the Guardian Jurist (*al-wali al-faqih*), currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who succeeded Khomeini when the latter died in 1989. Hizbullah comes under the authority of Khamenei, and to explain how this works Saad-Ghorayeb again draws on the organization’s distinction between the intellectual and political realms. Hizbullah locates its Islamic loyalty to the Guardian Jurist in the intellectual realm while at the pragmatic political level it expresses loyalty to Arabism and Lebanon. Thus, in Hizbullah’s view, its political loyalty is first to Lebanon and not to Iran, and there is no conflict between its allegiance to the Guardian Jurist and Lebanon’s national interests. In fact, Hizbullah claims to be among the most patriotic of Lebanese because it has sacrificed to defend the territorial integrity of the nation.

Hizbullah’s distinction between the “intellectual” and the “political” is deft, but it does not effectively negate the fact that its intellectual commitments still have political import. Saad-Ghorayeb does not make this point as strongly as she might, but she does observe that the Guardian Jurist sets the broad outlines of Hizbullah’s political and military engagement. It is upon his authority that Israel is designated the enemy. Also, Hizbullah’s military strategy of martyrdom missions initially required the Guardian Jurist’s authorization, and his guidance was sought when Hizbullah had difficulty deciding whether to enter the Lebanese elections in 1992 (p. 67).

Saad-Ghorayeb's fifth chapter explores Hizbullah's antipathy toward the west, especially the United States. She explains that Hizbullah's differences with the US and its allies are not merely political but also "civilizational" in the strong cultural and religious sense outlined by Samuel Huntington in his well-known "class of civilizations" hypothesis. According to Hizbullah, the US conspires against Islam, employs double standards in dealing with Muslims and is the greatest purveyor of terrorism in the world. The problem with the US and the west is not Christianity as such but its materialism and the hypocritical claim to be Christian.

Saad-Ghorayeb clarifies that Hizbullah's rejection of the west is neither unqualified nor anti-modern. She notes for example that Hizbullah prefers to speak of its "dispute" with the west instead of the more confrontational "conflict." Differences with the west are not intractable and may be ameliorated with adjustments in the west's behavior. Additionally, the organization regards technology and western style education highly, and, as evidence of this, Saad-Ghorayeb cites the large number of Hizbullah sympathizers studying at the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University.

As noted above, Saad-Ghorayeb's text dates to before Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000. This becomes most obvious in Chapter Six on Hizbullah's resistance to Israeli occupation. Saad-Ghorayeb observes that resistance to Israel is Hizbullah's *raison d'être*. Moreover, its political activities serve its resistance effort, and not the other way around. Yet, Saad-Ghorayeb writes—before the Israeli withdrawal obviously— "Once Israel withdraws from the occupied zone, Hizbu'llah will become synonymous with other political goals and priorities" (p. 117). This of course did not happen, ostensibly because Israel still occupied the Shebaa Farms. As we will see below, Saad-Ghorayeb changes her prognosis of Hizbullah's future priorities in concluding remarks written after the withdrawal.

In Chapter Six Saad-Ghorayeb also outlines Hizbullah's doctrine of

the greater and lesser jihads, *al-jihad al-akbar* and *al-jihad al-asghar*. Most fundamental is the greater or inner jihad against the soul, while the lesser jihad is defensive warfare, in this case against Israel. Offensive warfare is not currently permitted because it may only be authorized by the Hidden Imam whom Twelver Shi'is expect to return at the end of time.

The martyrdom operations for which Hizbullah is well known are included in the lesser jihad. Saad-Ghorayeb explains that Hizbullah pursues martyrdom operations as ends in themselves, with the premeditated martyrdom of Imam Husayn as the great exemplar and certain Paradise as the reward. This would seem to confirm the impression of some observers that Hizbullah glorifies martyrdom above all else. Yet, Saad-Ghorayeb notes, martyrdom is fundamentally instrumental in that it must be undertaken in the service of defensive jihad. Otherwise, it is suicide. Naim Qassem's book confirms this analysis. Qassem speaks of a "culture of martyrdom" based on belief in life after death and cultivated especially by women in their children. Yet, Qassem is also very clear that the martyrdom operation is strictly a military strategy of last resort in the face of overwhelming oppression. Even then, it is legitimate only if it hurts the enemy severely. Its ultimate purpose is to break down a radical imbalance of power (pp. 43-50).

The books under review differ on how Hizbullah links its political activities to jihad. On the one hand, Hamzeh quotes Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah to the effect that both the military and the political struggle come under the lesser jihad (pp. 38-9). On the other hand, Saad-Ghorayeb says that Nasrallah includes Hizbullah's political and cultural activism under the umbrella of greater jihad (pp. 122-3). Joseph Alagha notes this as well, explaining that Hizbullah's participation in Lebanese elections is part of its greater jihad (pp. 189, 196-7). Naim Qassem unfortunately does not speak to this question, and the lack of clarity in our other authors suggests that further inquiry is needed, perhaps with more extensive reference to Shi'i legal theory. Perhaps, as well, modern political activity does not easily find a place within traditional Shi'i jihad categories.

In Chapter Seven, Saad-Ghorayeb again employs Hizbullah's intellectual/political distinction in her analysis of the party's view of Israel. At the intellectual level, Hizbullah maintains that the state of Israel constitutes an illegitimate occupation of Palestine and has no right to exist. Moreover, in Hizbullah's eyes, nearly all Israelis are Zionists who are duplicitous and cynical in their very essence. In line with this, Hasan Nasrallah accused the Israelis of orchestrating the 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in order to smear Hizbullah's name and generate sympathy for the Israeli cause. At the practical or political level, however, Hizbullah would never start a war it could not win, and it acknowledges that liberation of Jerusalem and Palestine may be a long way off. It also tacitly accepts that there may someday be a cold Lebanese-Israeli peace, but it could never tolerate reconciliation with Israeli occupiers of Palestine and is committed to undermining efforts to normalize relations.

Hizbullah's firm stance on Israel and Zionism leads Saad-Ghorayeb in her eighth and final chapter to interrogate the organization's abhorrence of Judaism as a religion. Forestalling charges that Hizbullah is unequivocally anti-Semitic, she argues that the organization does not excoriate Jews as such—it is not anti-Semitic in a racial sense—but it does detest the Jewish religion for its alleged racism, deviant belief, and responsibility for spawning political Zionism. Saad-Ghorayeb explains Hizbullah's anti-Judaism as a politicized expression of "traditional Islamic anti-Judaism" found in the Qur'an. At times, her elucidation of Hizbullah's hatred by appeal to an ancient text borders on historical anachronism. At the least, however, it cannot be denied that Hizbullah employs such texts to corroborate its sentiments against Judaism.

Unlike the rest of the book, Saad-Ghorayeb's Conclusion was written after Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000. Here the author reiterates that Hizbullah has kept its ideals but adapted at the political level in order to survive. However, she believes that this balance between the intellectual and political is "precarious" and ultimately unsustainable.



In view of Hizbullah's activities after the Israeli withdrawal, Saad-Ghorayeb goes against the grain of much written in the previous chapters and projects that the organization will ultimately tip the balance in favor of its "Islamic identity and role as a revolutionary exemplar" for the wider Islamic community (p. 191). Local Lebanese identity will take second place.

Despite the passing of several years and a number of major shifts on the Lebanese political scene, Saad-Ghorayeb's remains a solid introduction to Hizbullah's ideological worldview. Its primary weakness is to take Hizbullah's distinction between the "intellectual" and the "political" a tad too seriously. A strong antidote for that is found in the book by Hamzeh to be examined below. The political analysis of Judith Palmer Harik considered next also offers a different interpretative frame.

### **Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism***

Harik's *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* is a lively and well-written book that covers events up to fall 2002. Of the books under review, Harik gives least consideration to ideology and most attention to the regional power dynamics driving Hizbullah's "transformation" into a "mainstream" political player. The result is a persuasive realpolitik explanation of Hizbullah's actions.

Harik's first chapter credits failing secularism, government corruption and resentment toward Israel with paving the way for Islamism in the Middle East from the 1970s onwards. Harik sets Hizbullah alongside Islamist initiatives throughout the region, and, compared to both Hamzeh and Alagha below, she makes little effort to distinguish their Sunni and Shi'i variants. Chapter Two tells how Iran worked with Syria to set up Hizbullah to oppose Israeli occupation in the 1980s, and Chapter Three describes the 1990s transformation of Hizbullah into a major player in the Lebanese political arena.

In these chapters, Harik's wide view on the politics of the region

shows Hizbullah's activities to be largely a product of Syrian-imposed realities. Under Syrian pressure, Hizbullah exchanged its "Islamic state" rhetoric of the 1980s for the opportunity to become the Lebanese "national" resistance in the 1990s onward, and, by participating in the 1992 elections, Hizbullah signaled to the world that it was fitting into the Lebanese political game. The Lebanese government for its part—again under Syrian tutelage—kept its forces away from the southern border with Israel and gave unswerving support to Hizbullah's resistance. Syria was thus free to use Hizbullah to put pressure on Israel as needed without deploying Syrian or Lebanese government troops.

Harik's next two chapters continue the theme of Hizbullah's integration into Lebanon's political system. Chapter Four examines how the party "managed" the "true believers" in Hizbullah's jihad ideology as it made the shift to a mainstream party. Chapter Five discusses how Hizbullah reached out to others, especially Christians, to win their support. Among other things, Harik highlights Hizbullah's use of "ideological ambiguity" and "opportunism," both features of the Lebanese political system more generally. By "opportunism" Harik refers to Hizbullah's willingness to forge political alliances with any group, even the rightist Christian Phalange Party, to further its pragmatic aims. The only limitation is that the momentary ally not support Israel. "Ideological ambiguity" means that Hizbullah has not renounced its objective of an Islamic State but does not discuss it openly in public. Instead, it interprets the resistance and its political participation in terms of Lebanese national interests. According to Harik, these strategies have proved effective in keeping both Hizbullah hardliners and the general public on board with the organization's agenda.

Chapter Six of Harik's book surveys Hizbullah's extensive social service programs, and Chapter Seven recounts its savvy pragmatism in the 1992 elections. As we will see below, Hamzeh reads these activities as a rather sinister effort by Hizbullah to supplant the state and ingratiate itself with the Lebanese public. For Harik, however, Hizbullah is just picking up

the slack of a weak government. Otherwise, Hizbullah's resistance priority, the sectarian character of the Lebanese political structure, and Syria all limit how far the organization can work itself into the fabric of Lebanese life. Throughout these two chapters, Harik relishes the opportunity to show how Hizbullah breaks stereotypes of what a fundamentalist organization supposedly does. She delights especially in pointing out that Hizbullah even has a football team that plays in a national league.

The eighth chapter details the argument that Hizbullah is a tool in Syria's strategy of trying to get Israel to negotiate a peace deal that would return the Golan Heights. Harik shows how Syria exploited Hizbullah's social and political activities on the one hand and its efforts to liberate Lebanese territory on the other to keep the otherwise wary Lebanese government on board. The government and Hizbullah could pursue their own respective goals so long as they stayed within boundaries assigned by Syria and did not resort to traditional patrons beyond Syria, Iran in the case of Hizbullah and France in the case of the government. Keeping the government and Hizbullah on the same track was also important to ward off Israeli and American attempts to divide them to their own advantage.

In Chapters Nine and Ten, Harik narrates the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 and its aftermath. She argues convincingly that the withdrawal changed nothing politically. The Syrian-Lebanese side said that Israel had not withdrawn fully since the Shebaa Farms—a tract of land adjacent to the Golan Heights—remained under Israeli control. The dual Syrian policy of Lebanese state/Hizbullah resistance continued on as before. Hizbullah was permitted to reap the reward of its success against Israel with a large victory in the fall 2000 elections. However, the sectarian character of Lebanon's political system prevented this from becoming an Islamist takeover, and Syria remained firmly in control. It made sure that the Lebanese government kept supporting Hizbullah's resistance and did not succumb to American post-9/11 attempts to isolate the party.

In both the Introduction and the final three chapters of the book,

Harik's examines the debate over whether Hizbullah is a terrorist organization (American and Israeli view) or a legitimate resistance (Lebanese, Syrian and Iranian view). Harik explains that Hizbullah has worked hard to dodge the "terrorist" label by employing two strategies. One is its transformation into a mainstream political party that works entirely within the Lebanese system. The second is to conduct its resistance operations fully within the internationally recognized legal framework of guerilla warfare against foreign occupation. To this end, Hizbullah has never undertaken a terrorist operation against Israeli civilians and has restricted its attacks to military targets. Harik judges these strategies to have been highly successful. She argues that the Americans and Israelis, to be convincing, need to come up with clear proof that Hizbullah has been involved in terrorist activities and successfully prosecute the perpetrators. Otherwise, labeling Hizbullah a terrorist organization comes off as "an attempt by the American administration to settle old scores and relieve pressure on its ally as it grapples with the ongoing Palestinian uprising" (p. 2).

The lead role in Harik's account is played by Syria with the Syrian-Israeli conflict at the heart of the matter. Hizbullah and the Lebanese government are simply sidekicks doing Syria's bidding. This analysis makes good sense of Hizbullah's actions through to fall 2002 when Harik's narrative ends. But much has changed since then. With Syria's military pressured to withdraw from Lebanon in 2005, Syrian policy in Lebanon has unraveled, at least partially, and after two years of political and military crisis, it still remains to be seen what new equilibrium will take its place. In this light, the strength of Harik's fine book may be its primary shortcoming. By embedding Hizbullah deeply in the fabric of Syrian policy, it becomes less clear how Hizbullah might behave on its own in other circumstances. By way of contrast, Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh portrays Hizbullah as a more autonomous actor.<sup>9</sup>

---

9 For correction of some minor factual errors in Harik's book, see the last paragraph of the review by Robert Brenton Betts in *Middle East Policy* 12.2 (Fall 2005): 160-162.

**Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah***

Of the books under review, Hamzeh's 2004 *In the Path of Hizbullah* is the most accessible introduction to the organization. It is sleekly organized, economically written and supplemented with numerous helpful tables and charts. Hamzeh disputes the analyses of scholars like Saad-Ghorayeb who perceive a contradiction between Hizbullah's militant ideology and its pragmatic Lebanese politics. Hamzeh sees no contradiction at all: Hizbullah is fundamentally a jihadist organization that "leaves the precise dosage of [armed and unarmed] means to pragmatic consideration" (p. 39). Whatever the method, its aim is ultimately an Islamic state.

Hamzeh locates the pragmatic flexibility of Hizbullah in the great juristic authority that Shi'is bestow upon their clerical elite, an authority which, according to Hamzeh, is on a par with God's revelation. He argues that Sunnism lacks comparable flexibility because it is tied firmly to the traditional consensus of the Muslim community. While Hamzeh introduces the Shi'i legal theory in play here and Joseph Alagha and Naim Qassem discuss it to some degree as well, this key dimension of Hizbullah's ideology deserves fuller and more analytical elucidation than our authors give it. It suffices to say here that in Twelver Shi'ism the leading jurists of the day hold decisive religious authority, and, in sharp contrast to Sunnism, appeal to the rulings of a dead cleric for religious guidance is disallowed.

In a discussion of Hizbullah's "operational choices," Hamzeh further advances his argument that the organization pursues one aim along two tracks. He explains that Hizbullah employs military means under favorable circumstances and pragmatic non-military means otherwise. Whether from the top-down or the bottom-up, the goal is the same: an Islamic state. On the military or top-down side, Hamzeh notes that Hizbullah took advantage of the chaos reigning in Lebanon in the 1980s to attack the state, seize state institutions and impose Islamic Law, especially in the Baalbek-Hirmel region and the southern suburbs of Beirut. To

support this contention, Hamzeh provides a full discussion of Hizbullah's court system. Similarly, Hizbullah has used the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory to justify its guerilla operations and possession of arms.

Like Harik, Hamzeh links Hizbullah's pragmatic turn to imposition of Syrian hegemony at the end of the Lebanese civil war, but he ties it more directly to shifts in Iran following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Iranian President Rafsanjani and Ali Khamenei, the new Guardian Jurist, moderated Iranian policies and dictated that Hizbullah take a more pragmatic course as well. Hamzeh observes that Hizbullah hardliner and first Secretary General Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli seems not to have comprehended the Guardian Jurist's new two-pronged policy of armed and unarmed jihad, and this led to his break with the party.

Under the rubric of "gradualist pragmatism," Hamzeh provides detailed analysis of Hizbullah's successes at the polls in parliamentary and municipal elections from 1992 to 2004, as well as reflection on the organization's response to 9/11 and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. After 9/11, Hamzeh explains, Hizbullah calculated that it could not survive a war with the US and so carefully maneuvered to dissociate itself from al-Qaeda. Likewise, Hizbullah did not call for jihad in Iraq, took care not to side with either Saddam Hussein or the Americans and advocated national Iraqi reconciliation.

In his final chapter, Hamzeh argues that Hizbullah's goal of an Islamic state "has become a real possibility in Lebanon" (p. 142) and that it will be realized in due time if the organization continues along its present trajectory. As evidence, he cites the party's long string of successes over various rivals both Shi'i and non-Shi'i, the failures of Lebanon's sectarian system, the already existing enclaves of Hizbullah governance in the country, and Hizbullah's increasing demographic advantage. In a spirit very different from that of Harik above, Hamzeh also gives the decisive role in determining Hizbullah's future to Iran and not to Syria. Yet, Hamzeh avers, Hizbullah is mature enough to exist on its own even if Iran were to collapse. Hamzeh concludes that, if the Lebanese state is to

survive in the face of Hizbullah, it must work effectively within the current sectarian system and bring economic prosperity, especially to the poor “regardless of sectarian affiliation” (p. 151).

In reading Hamzeh, one gains the distinct impression that an Islamic state in Lebanon is imminent. Perhaps fear of that happening was a factor motivating Israel to blockade Lebanon, cut off transport routes and bombard Hizbullah positions from July 13 to August 14, 2006. Whatever the case, Hamzeh helpfully underlines Hizbullah’s link to Iran and, more importantly perhaps, reminds us that it has a mind of its own.

#### **Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within***

The book by Hizbullah Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem was first published in 2002 in Arabic and then again in 2004 with additions. The 2005 English edition is a translation of the 2004 Arabic text. Qassem’s book is unique in that it comes from an articulate spokesperson inside the organization. It is also unashamedly theological. Whereas our other authors ground their analyses in the social sciences, Qassem appeals to the power of God and the truth of Islam to make his case. That said, the book still aims to speak to those who may not believe everything that Hizbullah stands for. I suspect that it was written primarily for a Lebanese—even Lebanese Shi‘i—audience. It explains Hizbullah’s viewpoints in clear—if slightly stilted—language and speaks to numerous questions and objections that have long lurked in the minds of the Lebanese populace.

Qassem’s first chapter outlines its three pillars: Islam, jihad and allegiance to the Guardian Jurist. The basics of these elements are much as we find them described by our other authors, but the theological element is now to the fore. Qassem grounds Hizbullah’s mission in the authority of the Qur’an and the Guardian Jurist, and he traces Hizbullah’s concern for uprightness, its sacrificial spirit and its success to firm expectation of a paradisiacal afterlife. He contrasts this with a western

materialist outlook which clings to this earthly life because there is no other. Qassem also credits Hizbullah's success in recruiting followers to getting Islam right: "Hizbullah succeeded at recruitment and mobilization efforts because the Party was harmonious with Islam's teachings" (p. 43).

Chapter Two of Qassem's book surveys Hizbullah's structure and briefly describes its political involvements and social services. Among other things, Qassem here explains why Hizbullah entered Lebanese political life only several years after its founding. Reasons include the need to develop military capability, maintain secrecy in the face of the enemy and take time to mature as an organization. The chaotic Lebanese political situation through the civil war also played a key role. But most fundamentally, and confirming Hamzeh's analysis above, jihad is Hizbullah's primary mission, and political action is but an instrument serving that end: "'Hizbullah is a *jihad* movement having as a primary mission to undertake jihad against the Israeli occupier'; and 'intelligent and wise political effort could and should be a pivotal support for such a *jihad* movement'" (p. 80). Qassem's further discussion of Hizbullah's political involvements in Chapter Five confirms the priority of resistance. He explains for example that talk of Hizbullah's "Lebanonization" is only a ploy to pry it away from its foundational principles.

Chapter Three explains and lauds Hizbullah's actions against the Israelis and touches to a lesser degree on internal Lebanese events such as the Amal-Hizbullah wars of the late 1980s. Chapter Four addresses the Palestinian question. Two themes are consistent throughout. One is Hizbullah's noble and tolerant actions on the Lebanese front, not taking revenge, for example, against Lebanese collaborators with Israel. The second theme is that only violence and the threat of violence truly work against the Israeli occupiers. Negotiations are only a distraction. Only violence has preserved Palestinian identity, and nonviolent resistance strategies such as those of Mandela and Ghandi are irrelevant in this circumstance. Also, according to Qassem, the Palestinians do not need massive military capabilities to resist Israel. Rather, "Belief in the Lord



and the will for martyrdom turn humble military means into operative and effective power” (p. 173).

Of special interest here is Qassem’s appraisal of the 2000 Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. Most fundamentally, it was an act of God, a “divine blessing, an honour bestowed by God on the devoted and the oppressed” (p. 130). The victory was also a “turning point” in the region showing, among other things, that negotiations and the armies of Arab states have gained nothing against the Israelis. He explains that Hizbullah’s resistance against Israel continues because the Shebaa Farms have not been liberated and several other issues remained outstanding. He argues as well that the Lebanese army should not be deployed along the border with Israel. The Israeli front is best left in the capable and effective hands of Hizbullah. The 2006 war, of course, forcibly displaced Hizbullah from the Israeli border, and the area is now patrolled by United Nations forces and the Lebanese army. Yet, Hizbullah survived the war, calling it a “divine victory.”

In Chapters Five and Six, Qassem discusses Hizbullah’s involvement in Lebanese politics, its rejection of responsibility for the hostage ordeals of the 1980s, its call for an end to the sectarian political system of Lebanon, its relations with Iran, Syria and the US, and a number of other issues. Throughout, Qassem frames the issues with clear Islamic conviction and portrays Hizbullah as a wise, powerful and autonomous agent under the blessing of God. If Hizbullah finds itself close to Syria and Iran, it is not because the party is subservient to foreign control but because their interests and convictions converge.

In the final chapter on Hizbullah’s future, Qassem addresses a frequently asked question: will the organization give up its weapons once all Lebanese territory is returned? Qassem responds that Hizbullah does not answer this question in order to keep its options open. He explains that the Israelis do the same. Hizbullah would only be playing into Israeli hands to provide any assurances. Qassem affirms as well that there will be resistance of some kind or another so long as there is Israeli occupation of

Palestinian territory. He is clear that Israel in its entirety must be dismantled: "Hizbullah believes in the duty of completely liberating all occupied Palestinian and other Arab lands, considering that the implantation of the Zionist entity in the region is illegitimate" (p. 267). Qassem is convinced that resistance efforts are not only divinely sanctioned but preparatory to the arrival of the eschaton. He argues that the future bodes well if believers are certain that their actions "pave the way for Imam al-Mahdi's emergence" (p. 270). The Mahdi for Twelver Shi'is is the Hidden Imam who will return at the end of time to rule in justice.

Qassem's book is a confident apology for Hizbullah that builds a coherent narrative of its history and mission and responds thoroughly and thoughtfully to its critics. As contemporary Islamist discourse goes, it is of very high quality. Even those who disagree with its message cannot deny the clarity and ingenuity of its argumentation.

### **Joseph Elie Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology***

*The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology* is Joseph Alagha's doctoral dissertation recently completed at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) in the Netherlands and published apparently without revision. As such, the book would have benefited from extensive editing to reduce repetition, clarify the argument and correct stylistic and typographical errors. An index would also have been useful. Nonetheless, the book makes some valuable contributions, as well as some not uncontroversial claims. It also provides a detailed chronology and translations of Hizbullah's 1985 Open Letter and its election platforms in the appendices.

The key to the book's structure is found in the tripartite subtitle *Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program*. According to Alagha, Hizbullah's Shi'i religious ideology of jihad and allegiance to Khomeini as Guardian Jurist was to the fore from 1978 to 1985 when

Hizbullah promulgated its Open Letter. More will be said below about 1978 as the year of Hizbullah's founding. Political ideology calling for an Islamic state in Lebanon dominated the second period extending from 1985 to 1991. In the third period, stretching from 1991 to 2005, Hizbullah no longer rejected the Lebanese state but gave precedence to implementing its political program within the state's political structure.

Chapter One of Alagha's book outlines a history of these three periods. Chapters Two, Three, and Four treat the dominant ideologies of the three periods in succession, and Chapters Five and Six consolidate the findings of the preceding chapters. Alagha concludes that, while Hizbullah has not renounced its religious and political commitment to an Islamic state and will not do so in the future, it has become a regular political party among others in Lebanon. In his words, "Hizbullah put its political ideology in the drawer and practiced a down-to-earth pragmatic political program" (p. 201). Alagha argues persuasively that Hizbullah has had to do this in order to retain its viability and broaden its constituency in the Lebanese context. Employing resource mobilization theory, the author explains that Hizbullah has undertaken to insure its survival and establish its legitimacy by delivering on issues of concern to the Lebanese electorate.

Alagha covers much of the same ground as our earlier authors: the doctrine of the Guardian Jurist, relations with Iran and Syria, the jihad against Israel, and so forth. However, among the books under review, Alagha makes a unique contribution by turning to Islamic legal theory to illumine Hizbullah's rationalization of its pragmatism. Foundational to Islamic legal theory are principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) that specify the authoritative sources of the law and the methodology by which it should be derived. Beyond these principles, Muslim jurists resort to legal maxims and the purposes of the law (*maqasid al-shari'a*) to justify their rulings. Maxims include notions such as the following: necessity renders prohibited things permissible; one should perform the more important duty when two duties conflict; and warding off vices takes precedence over seeking interests or benefits. Among the *maqasid al-*

*shari'a* are interests such as protecting property and preserving soundness of mind. Most fundamentally, the *maqasid 'al-shari'a* provide a teleological or benefit (*maslaha*)-oriented framework in which to undertake Islamic legal reasoning.

At a number of points, Alagha highlights how legal maxims and *maslaha* give Islamic legal justification to Hizbullah's pursuit of pragmatic Islamist ends within the sectarian Lebanese system. A clear example is found in Hizbullah's 2005 decision to join the Lebanese cabinet for the first time. In what Alagha takes to be a sign of Hizbullah's increasing independence from Iran, the organization turned not to Guardian Jurist Ayatollah Khamenei but to Lebanese scholar 'Afif al-Nabulsi for an Islamic ruling on this. On the basis of the *maslaha* of preserving the Resistance and Lebanese law and order, al-Nabulsi argued that it was within the purposes of Islamic Law for Hizbullah to join the cabinet. Alagha concludes that Hizbullah is guided in general by *maslaha* in its actions and public statements, a characteristic he finds as well in Iranian political discourse.

Throughout the book, Alagha makes assertions that should have been better defended or explained. I will treat three here. First, Alagha estimates that Shi'is constitute 55% of the Lebanese population, a percentage much higher than the 40% or even 30% cited by other sources (p. 26). In an endnote, Alagha explains that his estimate was based on 2005 Lebanese Ministry of Interior sources and that he counted as Lebanese only those who held no other passport. Given the large number of resident Lebanese who hold dual nationality, it is questionable whether this exclusion is warranted.

Second, at the end of his final chapter, Alagha states that Iran uses *maslaha* to guard against *salafism*, which he defines as "extremely militant Sunni fundamentalism." He then says, "It seems that Iran is serving the interests of the US by warding off and curbing Sunni Islamists through stopping the diffusion of the *salafist* Bin Ladenist-Zarqawi fundamentalism." It follows for Alagha that the US could view Hizbullah

in a similar light: “US policy might prefer that Hizbullah keeps its arms in order to perform a similar job as Iran, namely, to protect Lebanese society and American interest there from the resurgence of Sunni fundamentalism” (pp. 219-220).

Some political analysts may find this suggestion preposterous while others may see sense in it. Either way, it comes unexpected at the end of a book that deals only marginally with American policy toward Iran and Hizbullah and not at all with militant Sunnism. More problematic, however, is the very narrow reading of *salafism* upon which Alagha builds his argument. The term *salafism* properly denotes a restitutionist, Protestant-like hermeneutic that voids the authority of accumulated tradition and seeks to return to the original teachings of the early Muslims. Just as Protestants differ widely over the meaning of the Bible, *salafis* differ over what the early Muslims taught and how those teachings should be applied today. Thus, *salafism* appears in very diverse forms, and the term cannot be equated solely with extreme Sunni militancy. Moreover, *salafis* such as the Egyptian scholar Rashid Rida (d. 1935) have been leading proponents of *maslaha* in modern Sunni legal reform, and appeal to *maslaha* is widespread among *salafi* oriented Sunnis today. Thus, a political argument in favor of Hizbullah cannot be based so simplistically on an appeal to *maslaha* over against *salafism*. That argument will have to be developed on other grounds.

The third matter is Alagha’s view on the date of Hizbullah’s founding. The story of Hizbullah’s emergence begins with the historic political and economic marginalization of Lebanese Shi’is and their subsequent mobilization in the 1960s and 70s. A leading figure in this process was Imam Musa al-Sadr who founded Amal, then a militia and today a major Shi’i political party. After al-Sadr mysteriously disappeared in Libya in 1978, Shi’i political activism in Lebanon developed along separate secular and Islamist paths. The Islamists emerged out of activist scholarly networks in Najaf in Iraq that included Ayatollah Khomeini and Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, as well as Hizbullah founders Sayyid

‘Abbas al-Musawi, Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, Shaykh Naim Qassem and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah. The question is when these figures founded the organization.

Harik does not venture a precise date. Saad-Ghorayeb and Hamzeh give the date as 1982 after the Israelis occupied southern Lebanon. On their reading, Amal leader Nabih Berri alienated the Shi‘i Islamists by participating in a new Lebanese government that cooperated with Israel. With Iranian and Syrian assistance, the Islamists formed Hizbullah to resist Israeli occupation.<sup>10</sup> Corroborating this, Naim Qassem’s description of Hizbullah’s origin places it firmly in the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion (p. 19-20), and Qassem implies or states clearly that 1982 is Hizbullah’s founding date elsewhere in his book (pp. 98, 209, 246, 261 n. 1). Qassem notes, however, that the organization only adopted the name “Hizbullah” definitively shortly before publishing its 1985 Open Letter (p. 76).

Despite all this, Alagha states categorically that “Hizbullah was founded in 1978” (p. 191). He asserts that “Hizbullah absolves itself from abiding by a specific date for its birth” (p. 33), and he thus feels justified in tracing the beginning of the organization or—and this is a key qualification—at least its ideology to a 1978 Iraqi crackdown on Shi‘i clerics congregating in Najaf. Iranian clerics opposing the Shah, Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Musawi and other Lebanese clerics fled to Beirut and developed close contacts with Amal. Khomeini himself gave spiritual support to the movement but could not help militarily as he had not yet come to power in Iran. Generally speaking, our other authors are not unaware of these facts, but they do not take them to constitute the founding of Hizbullah. While the organization was certainly in the making at the ideological level from 1978 onward, it seems best to retain 1982 as the date of Hizbullah’s founding.

---

10 Amal Saad-Ghorayeb argues this case at greater length in, “Factors Conducive to the Politicization of the Lebanese ‘Shi‘a and the Emergence of the Hizbu’llah,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14 (2003): 273-307.

### Conclusion

To sum up, the books reviewed here contain a wealth of information, illustrate different ways of interpreting Hizbullah within the Lebanese context, and point up the complexity of the organization. Two key variables emerge in the course of reading: the degree to which Hizbullah is beholden to external powers and the extent to which its actions are governed by ideological considerations. Additional research is also warranted on Hizbullah's resort to Islamic legal theory and on the integration of political activity into its theory of jihad.

A few things are clear, however. Hizbullah is an armed Islamist organization that skillfully seeks to extend its sphere of influence. Moreover, Hizbullah's persistence, ingenuity and depth of conviction command admiration and respect. Nevertheless, like the Zionism and the American imperialism that it opposes, Hizbullah thrives on a narrative of justified violence, a story in which violence and the threat of violence are legitimate and effective means to achieve desired ends. It is not obvious to me at least that any narrative justifying violence is completely true. Moreover, it seems that only when stories of this kind cease to enchant and enthrall will there be durable justice and peace in the Middle East.