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**Bullets to Ballots: The
Lebanonization of Hizballah**

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September 2000**

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies and Research in the partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of
Master's of Arts in International Relations**



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0-612-70627-3

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In the span of two decades, Hizballah has evolved from an armed resistance movement against Israeli occupation into an efficient political party and - by extension - into a permanent fixture on Lebanon's mainstream political stage. The present analysis traces the evolution of the party from its inception and assesses its performance vis-a-vis the major players of Iran, Israel and Syria. Factors including the characteristics of the movement and the Shiite community itself, the shifting position, interests and policies of various regional actors, and the changing domestic conditions in Lebanon were isolated in order to adequately explain the behaviour and development of Hizballah. As a result, such alternatives to cultural factors (i.e the "Islamic variable") were found to be stronger explanatory factors rather than the Islamic factor. Ultimately, the essay illustrates that Islamic considerations are secondary, if not tertiary, when political decisions are to be made in different contexts. Rather, it is the interests of the more powerful actors that govern the organization's next move, in addition to the aforementioned variables. On the basis of such assumptions and findings, conclusions were finally drawn regarding Hizballah's future developments and its prospects following an Israeli withdrawal.

En l'espace de deux décennies, le Hizballah a évolué en transformant son mouvement armé de résistance à l'occupation israélienne en un parti politique efficace et donc par-là, en s'imposant comme un acteur permanent de la scène politique officielle du Liban. Cette analyse retrace les changements subis par le parti depuis sa création et dissèque ses performances vis-à-vis des tenors régionaux que sont l'Iran, l'Israël et la Syrie. Certains paramètres comme les caractéristiques du mouvement et de la communauté chiite elle-même, les changements de position, d'intérêts et de politiques des acteurs régionaux ainsi que l'évolution positive des conditions domestiques au Liban sont isolés pour expliquer de manière plus adéquate le développement et le comportement du Hizballah. En conséquence, ces explications alternatives qui contrastent fortement avec une analyse plus classique des conditions culturelles (la 'variable islamique') sont beaucoup plus fondamentales que le facteur islamique. Finalement, cet essai illustre le fait que les considérations islamiques sont secondaires lorsque des décisions politiques doivent être prises dans des contextes différents. En fait, ce sont les intérêts des acteurs les plus puissants qui gouvernent les actions politiques et même militaires de l'organisation en plus des variables mentionnées un peu plus haut. Sur la base de ces hypothèses et de leur vérifications, des conclusions sont proposées quand aux prochains développements du Hizballah et l'étendue de ses possibilités après un retrait israélien.

Introduction

Hizballah - or Party of God - has demonstrated a high degree of sophistication in both its organization and tactical maneuvering. It is not only attuned to the environment within which it operates in Lebanon, but has also consistently illustrated its understanding of the workings of Iranian, Syrian, and even Israeli politics¹. Furthermore, to dwell on the movement's past of violence obscures Hizballah's recent efforts and achievements on the political stage in Lebanon. Changes on the international and regional levels at the end of the 1980s forced the Hizballah leadership to reassess the organization's objectives and, therefore, its political strategy. As a result, events triggered a departure from initial ideological claims subsequently thrusting the movement into the mainstream of Lebanese politics, forcing it to work within a political system it previously deemed an evil to be uprooted.

The urgency in studying Hizballah is partially due to its involvement in the last active battlefield in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In addition, it has managed to dent and pierce the armor of the formidable Israeli military machine - an accomplishment never enjoyed by previous Arab armies. Moreover, its strides in the mainstream of Lebanese politics as champion of the parliamentary opposition adds to such an urgency. Since its participation in the 1992 parliamentary elections, Hizballah's success has won its counterparts' recognition for its performance and strategic political maneuvering. As a case in the study of Islamist movements, the Hizballah story may shed important insight on how, when, and why an Islamist movement may compromise revolutionary purity and

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Rex Brynen for his insight and guidance in the course of my writing this paper and to Dr. Paul Noble whose suggestions and criticism are much appreciated.

ideological integrity for pragmatism and acknowledging the reality which it was previously at pains to accept.

With indications of a Syrian-Israeli peace, and therefore a Lebanese-Israeli one, looming, Hizballah's fate comes into question. Does Hizballah have a political life after military resistance? More precisely, what are Hizballah's prospects as a political party following an eventual Israeli withdrawal from occupied south Lebanon? **The purpose of this essay is to determine what kind of political future awaits the movement, and what obstacles it will encounter in getting there. Does Hizballah possess the necessary popular and financial support required to conduct itself autonomously of its Syrian and Iranian patrons (but not necessarily against their interests)? Will Syria, the power broker in Lebanon, allow Hizballah to exist following a Syrian-Israeli peace?** These are some of the questions to be addressed in the analysis.

Framework of Analysis:

The framework of analysis will be constructed in order to appropriately address the central question of the study: What type of future does Hizballah have - does it have a role as a "serious" political party in Lebanon? Does the organization's popular support transcend its role in the resistance? And as previously mentioned, does Hizballah possess the capacities necessary for autonomous action?

In order to appreciate the strides made by the organization and to understand the underlying logic to such developments - as well to any future ones - a number of factors will be isolated so as to better explain the phenomenon at hand. Generally, factors such as the characteristics of the movement and the Shi'ite community itself, the shifting position, interests, and policies of various regional actors, and the changing domestic

conditions in Lebanon will be manipulated in order to explain the evolution and development in Hizballah's tactics. Essentially, such a research strategy will generate helpful insights in determining - as mentioned - how, when and why an Islamist movement may compromise revolutionary purity and ideological integrity for pragmatism. This strategy - coupled with the assumptions and factors outlined above - will essentially introduce alternative factors (to cultural ones such as "Islam") in explaining and attempting to understand Islamist movements such as Hizballah. With this in mind, the organization of the essay will take the following form:

The first section will comprise a description of Hizballah in terms of its goals, ideology, and activity. This will introduce the Hizballah and place the movement within the context of civil war. A thorough examination of the movement's characteristics and its behaviour will be offered in order to fully appreciate its development in the later stages of the study. Also, a historical overview of the socio-economic status of the Shia community will be offered in order to - in addition to other motives - trace its mobilization into a powerful political force and to discover the conditions under which civil war erupted in 1975.

Second, and still in the civil war phase, an introduction of the various external actors which are to play a fundamental role in the development of Hizballah will follow. The interests of these actors vis-à-vis Lebanon will be incorporated since it is their actions which, in part, shape the behaviour of Hizballah. In the same vein, the third section will address the changes in the interests and ambitions of such actors in conjunction with a treatment of the shifting domestic political climate of Lebanon. Both sections two and three are essential in that they will confirm the relationship between

Hizballah and its patrons and opponents. For instance, the reasons for Hizballah's departure from initial ideological claims and its entrance into Lebanese politics will be explored in order to illustrate the influence exerted by Syria and Iran. This will be done in order to show - in this instance - how such factors impinged on the actions of the group. In addition, the pressure exerted by Israel and the impact of the Taif Agreement will be analyzed with the same purpose in mind. Essentially, the identification of the determinants of Hizballah's behavior is crucial in order to evaluate its present actions and to advance arguments for its political future.

Fourth, Hizballah's venture into the mainstream of Lebanese politics will be discussed in addition to an evaluation of its overall performance. This task will provide some insight about what sort of future Hizballah can expect to have as a full-fledged Lebanese political party. Furthermore, an assessment of the movement's financial resources and domestic legitimacy will be instrumental in determining whether Hizballah can continue its operation as a social movement/organization and political party following an eventual Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon and a possible reduction in the roles of its backers - Syria and Iran. The potential impact of a reduced Iranian role will be considered since its result will determine to what degree Hizballah can continue to operate independent Tehran's material and political support. Though it has depended on Iranian assistance, a large part of Hizballah's resources come from Arab benefactors who sympathize with the group, as well as donations from NGOs to registered charities which fall under the group's network. As a result, Hizballah does possess the capacity to operate successfully without Iranian assistance should Iran continue to reduce its contribution or terminate it altogether. However, an Iranian retreat from the Lebanese

scene will be discussed in relation to the Syrian-Hizballah relations. In the past, Iran has acted as a counterweight to Syria's pressure on Hizballah, permitting Hizballah to carry out actions which Syria would otherwise oppose. Therefore, the absence of Iran implies a freer hand for Syria, resulting in tighter restrictions on Hizballah's movement. Such a discussion, to reiterate, will shed light on Hizballah's capacity to operate autonomously should it be given the opportunity in the future, following a Syrian-Israeli peace settlement and a normalization of relations between and within the states which comprise that particular trouble-spot in the Middle East.

In the fifth, and final, section, potential future scenarios will be considered which will permit some speculation about where Hizballah will find itself and what kind of political future awaits it. In addition, the possible changes in the interests and ambitions of the external actors (Syria, Iran and Israel) will be entertained to speculate on the possible changes in Hizballah's behaviour on the stage of Lebanese politics.

Chapter One

The first chapter will be mainly descriptive as it will lay the foundation on which succeeding chapters will be constructed upon. The focus here will be on the historical realities of the Lebanese state, with obvious emphasis on the Shia community. Such a strategy is essential since it will provide the necessary background about the various factors and realities dominating the Lebanese situation so as to place the emergence of the movement - and its subsequent evolution - in perspective. Furthermore, this chapter will introduce actors which are to play significant roles in the development of Hizballah. It is crucial to establish a relationship between Hizballah and its regional and domestic contexts since its behaviour and ideological character are reflections of the movement's perception of the domestic context, in addition to its ability to adapt to pressures exerted by regional actors.

Historical Background:

In the Lebanese state carved out from "Greater Syria" by the French in 1920, the Shia became the step-children of this new political entity. Predominantly residing in the south, they had formed the third largest religious community, following the Christian Maronites and the Sunni Muslims. In 1943, an oral agreement known as the National Pact (*mithaq al-watani*) was concluded, which made possible the establishment of an independent Lebanon. The confessional system forming the basis of the National Pact stipulated that executive and legislative posts, as well as in the civil administration, should be distributed by quotas determined by the proportionality of each confessional community. A census conducted in 1932 by the French mandatory power which placed

the Christians as a majority was to be the basis of the distribution of powers amongst the confessional groups. Thus, it was concluded that the president was to be a Christian Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the parliament a Shia Muslim. Ultimately, these arrangements guaranteed the Sunnis and Maronites leading political positions, in addition to top civil jobs. Despite being the third largest community - out of eighteen - the Shia, however, continued to trail behind the rest of the country. In fact, the government neglected them and the Shia's own feudal leaders - the zuama - were "more interested in their personal pursuit of power than the welfare of their community".² The zaim was essentially the "organizing principle of social and political life" in the country; he was protector, the main distributor of jobs and services, and overall their local potentate; the man of power in certain regions belonging to a certain community.³ Any man aspiring to get into parliament had to be approved by the zaim, in order to receive the necessary support for being elected. Hence, as the zuama ruled their communities, the formal and informal structures of rule converged and formed one single political unit.

Lebanon became a country with vast discrepancies: a booming economy in Beirut, and socio-economic misery and decline in areas which state and financial elites perceived would bring little return on investment. Consequently, the socio-economic inequalities became tied up in the Lebanese model of power structures. For instance, not only did the Shia community lack adequate representation, but the basic necessities of modern life - schools, hospitals, roads and running water. In comparison to the

² Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 10.

³ Max Wam, *A Voice of Resistance: the Point of View of Hizballah* [Online]. Available: http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324_2/hizballah/wam, 24.

prospering areas of the Sunnis and Christians, their standard of living was medieval. By the 1970s, the higher Shia birth rate transformed them from the third largest to the largest community thereby casting doubt on the legitimacy of Lebanon's political system and the forces which sustained it.⁴ However, despite this change in numbers, the Shi'i remained a distant third in political and economic power. Furthermore, "the Shia constituted the highest percentage (22%) of families earning less than fifteen hundred pounds. According to every indicator, the Shia were at the very bottom of the socio-economic ladder."⁵ The community's economic and political malaise was further compounded by widespread illiteracy and their concentration in the agricultural sector. In point of fact, the Shia were the least likely - relative to their national counterparts - to list their occupation as professional/technical, business/managerial, clerical or crafts/operatives, and the most likely to list it as farming, peddling or labor.⁶ Moreover, they suffered discrimination from their Sunni co-religionists and Maronites for years. As a result, the Shia felt disenfranchised and alienated from the mainstream of Lebanese politics, commerce and society. The influx of an estimated 100,000 Palestinian refugees as a result of the 1948-49 Palestine War further exasperated the situation. The Palestinians provided a source of cheap labour, willing to work for less than the Shi'i farm labourers.

During the mid-1960s and early 1970s the Palestinian factor became more a sore spot for the Shia following the 1970-71 civil war in Jordan which resulted in the expulsion of armed Palestinian guerillas who as a result made Lebanon their home. In

⁴ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 143.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶ Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Texas: Texas University Press, 1987), 18.

Lebanon, they managed to build an impressive military and political infrastructure for their continuing struggle against the Jewish state. The Palestinian state-within-a-state which encompassed West Beirut and south Lebanon challenged the central Lebanese authority, thereby forcing the already instable context. The Christians regarded these mainly Muslim refugees as a threat to their already questionable demographic position. On the other hand, Lebanon's Muslims sympathized with the Palestinian cause, allowing the PLO's paramilitary wing to operate freely from bases in south Lebanon in their struggle against Israel. Though the Shia initially filled the ranks of the PLO, the Shia, however, grew impatient as they continuously found themselves on the receiving end of Israeli pre-emptive and retaliatory strikes launched from northern Israel. Consequently, the conflict led to a massive Shi'i exodus to Beirut's southern suburbs - the breeding grounds of Shi'i militancy in the 1960s and early 1970s. Ultimately, new radical leftist forces, mainly Muslim, regarded the idea of a Christian political hegemony outdated and unjustified. It was within this environment that such leftist forces assailed the system and demanded drastic reforms, both socially and politically. However, the system was never altered to compensate for the demographic change of the Shia community.

Imam Musa al-Sadr and Amal:

It was within this context of shifting social and economic dynamics within the Shia community that a charismatic Shi'i cleric named Musa al-Sadr assumed the mantle of Shi'i leadership and spearheaded the political awakening of the Lebanese Shia community. In 1957, the Iranian born Imam Musa had first visited Lebanon, which he claimed his ancestral home. He set out to establish himself as leader of the Shia

community. This is not to claim that he ignited the the Shia's political consciousness, but that he "capitalized on the budding politicization of the Shi'a, invigorating and rationalizing it."⁷ The Imam injected a sense of communal identity into a community which prior to his involvement was scattered, and in search of purpose and solidarity. The Imam's ability to view the community as a whole rather than as a people dispersed throughout a conglomeration of villages and regions helped foster this sense of identity in the community. For Musa, the community's escape from their misery and their transformation into a powerful and united force was through Shi'ism - the religion of revolution. As Norton observed, under the Imam's influence, religious commemorations became vehicles for building communal solidarity and political consciousness. In fact, "in villages with no memory of public commemorations of 'Ashura, or other significant events on the Shi'i calendar, Imam Musa's appearances often spawned their inception."⁸

The other side of the Imam was one of deep-seated pragmatism. The fact that nobody knew what was up Musa's sleeve, in addition to the very logic of his political alliances, was evidence of his pragmatism. The logic behind the Imam's political alliance with the Maronite community pays tribute to the latter assertion. He saw a common string in the communal fabrics of both the Maronite and Shia groups - they were both minorities in a predominantly Sunni Arab world. As a result, both groups regarded Lebanon as a refuge in which their sectarian identity can be preserved and security ensured. As such, the Maronites were inclined to find an ally in the Imam. The latter understood the insecurity of the Maronites by virtue of their fragile demographic/political

⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁸ Ibid., 41.

position on top a frail political system, and he further understood their need to maintain their grip on the presidency. Despite his appreciation of the dramatic demographic shifts that had made the Shi'i community the largest plurality in Lebanon, he declined to call for a new census.⁹ However, he did throw some punches in his critique of the Maronites' "arrogant stance toward the Muslims, particularly toward the Shia" arguing that the Maronite-dominated establishment "neglected the South since independence and had rendered the Shi'a a 'disinherited sub-proletariat in Lebanon."¹⁰

Regarding the Palestinian-PLO factor, Imam Musa claimed to have supported them in their plight, though his relationship with the PLO was a bittersweet one. With the influx of thousands of PLO guerillas following their ejection from Jordan, the problems of the Lebanese Shia of the south at that point had a new dimension - security. During clashes in 1973 between PLO guerillas and the Lebanese army, Musa reproached the Sunni community for their support of the Palestinians. On the one hand, he criticized the government for failing to defend the south from Israeli aggression; but, on the other hand, he condemned the PLO for shelling Israel from the South and hence provoking Israeli retaliation. Essentially, the Imam "consistently expressed sympathy for Palestinian aspirations, but he was unwilling to countenance actions that exposed Lebanese citizens, and especially Shi'i citizens of the South, to additional suffering."¹¹ Due to Beirut's inability or inaction vis-à-vis the protection of the citizens of the south, Imam Musa began to make armed struggle one of the motifs of his campaign to represent and

⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹¹ Ibid., 43.

mobilize the Shi'a. Following the 1973 Ramadan War, he declared that there was no "alternative for us except revolution and weapons."¹² The Imam had become angry.

During a speech at a March rally in 1974, Imam Musa launched his popular mass movement - Harakat al-Mahrumin (Movement of the Deprived). With this movement, he vowed to fight until the Shia's social, economic, political and security needs were met and until they would be appropriated a position in the Lebanese confessional ladder proportionate to their numbers and power. The movement drew substantial support from the growing Shi'i middle class, since the movement represented an assertive voice against the power of the zu'ama.¹³ One year later, in 1975, the country had been thrown into a civil war and by July, it was known that a militia affiliated with Musa's movement had been formed. The militia, Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniya, better known by its acronym AMAL, was initially trained by Fatah and played a minor role in the fighting of 1975 and 1976, and was otherwise affiliated with the Lebanese National Movement and its PLO allies during the first year of the war.¹⁴ However, by June 1976, Musa shifted alliances and threw his weight behind the Syrians when the latter intervened to prevent the defeat of the Maronite-dominated Lebanese Front at the hands of the PLO-led alliance.

Though the movement faded into obscurity following the eruption of the 1975 civil war, in 1978, during Israel's March invasion, AMAL enjoyed an impressive resurgence which further challenged the position of the PLO when it threw itself in the

¹² Ibid., 46.

¹³ Augustus Richard Norton, "Walking between Raindrops: Hizballah in Lebanon", *Mediterranean Politics* (Summer 1998), 85.

¹⁴ Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Texas: Texas University Press, 1987), 48.

Syrian camp. However, in that same year on a trip to Libya, Imam Musa al-Sadr disappeared - an event recalling the tradition of the Twelfth Imam (the Mahdi) who - according to Shia tradition - disappeared into occultation only to return at the end of time to establish a just government in defense of the Muslim ummah.

The Civil War:

In retrospect, the balancing act of the Lebanese identity and interests tipped as the principles stipulated in the National Pact - those of accommodation, representation, and co-optation - were no longer considered legitimate as frustrated and alienated groups began to take up arms. Basically of Lebanese nationals, the war included the Arab-Israeli, Palestinian-Israeli, Iranian-Iraqi, and Iraqi-Syrian Ba'athist conflicts, further confusing and destabilizing the country. To get a sense of the context within which Lebanon fell into with the onset of war in 1975-76, the following passage by Itamar Rabinovich best describes the situation:

"The war had turned the state into an empty shell. The authority of Lebanon's president, government, parliament and central bureaucracy was limited to a small part of Beirut. Lebanon's territory was in fact divided among external forces and local baronies."¹⁵

By maintaining a military presence in this landscape of chaos and instability, never permitting any warring faction from enjoying a decisive victory, Syria was able to uphold its own military supremacy and political influence. This political influence would facilitate its ability to play a central role on the Lebanese scene for years to come.

¹⁵ Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon, 1970-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 57.

The PLO's activities ignited two rounds of fighting with Israel - March 1978, and June 1982. Following a Palestinian hostage-taking incident inside Israel the Israeli army rolled into Lebanon in March of 1978. Labeled "Operation Litani", the invasion claimed 2000 civilian lives, and destroyed 2,500 homes through aerial bombardment. As a result, 141,000 fled the south for Beirut, further exasperating the refugee situation in the southern suburbs.¹⁶ Furthermore, the invasion realized the worse Shi'i fears with an "active campaign of air attacks, raids, kidnappings and house bombings."¹⁷ During the invasion, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) established a 100-km wide, 10-km deep cordon sanitaire in the south as a security measure to prevent attacks targeting northern Israel. The United Nations responded by issuing Resolutions 425 and 426 calling for Israel's "unconditional withdrawal" from Lebanon, and establishing the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in order to monitor Israel's withdrawal. Instead, Israel's self-declared "security zone" was patrolled by a small contingent of heavily-armed Israeli troops, assisted by approximately 3000 men from the South Lebanon Army (SLA) which was trained, financed and otherwise controlled by Israel.¹⁸

In 1979, events in Iran were to further complicate the already complex situation in the Middle East in general, and Lebanon in particular. Following Ayatollah Khomeini's triumphant ascension to power and the subsequent establishment of a revolutionary Islamic regime, Iran embarked on a campaign of "exporting the revolution" in order to

¹⁶ Asaf Hussein, *Political Terrorism and the State in the Middle East* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1988), 173.

¹⁷ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 144.

¹⁸ Augustus Richard Norton, "Israel in the Grip of the Insecurity Zone", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996), 38.

assist oppressed Muslims. This idea stemmed from Khomeini's interpretation of Islam's transnational character and the global mission of Muslims to spread Islam through preaching and example as well as armed revolution. Lebanon's Shia community became a market for the export of Iran's prime commodity when, on June 6, 1982, the Israeli army rolled back into Lebanon - this time as far north as Beirut. Although Amal resistance fighters actively opposed the continuing Israeli occupation of Lebanon, Amal had tacitly welcomed the Israeli invasion on 1982 since it expelled many Palestinian fighters from Lebanon. Amal's leader Nabih Berri participated in the National Salvation Committee created by President Elias Sarkis in order to foster dialogue among Lebanon's most powerful militia leaders during the Israel seige of Beirut. Hizballah would later accuse Amal of serving as a "bridge" for Israel and the US and it can be argued that Berri's initiative to consider a deal advantageous to Syria's enemies provoked the Syrian leadership to lend support to Hizballah as a counterweight to AMAL.

When Israel launched its invasion - called "Peace for Galilee" - Lebanon's leading Shia Muslim clerics were in Tehran attending the annual Islamic Conference. The timing was fateful: Iran immediately volunteered to help its Lebanese brethren. Iran dispatched 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards (Pasdars) to the Beka'a Valley where it trained and assisted young men willing to defend themselves against Israel. These men were to form the core of what would soon be known as the Hizballah, or Party of God.

In order to recapitulate the discussion thus far, the Hizballah was created within an environment of instability and war. Therefore, the radical posture assumed by the party was a consequence of the conditions dictating the situation in Lebanon during its war years. Hence, a discussion of the party's objectives and initial ideological make-up

within such an unstable context will ensue. This is an essential procedure for it provides a reference point with which to evaluate the overall evolution of the party.

Hizballah Emergent:

In the early 1980s, violence was the preferred means with which to operate in the country. Channels into the political system had been severed with the onset of the civil war in the mid-1970s, thereby substituting the ballot with the bullet. The Hizballah's medium of expression during the war years was officially introduced in 1985 - Islamic Resistance (*al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah*). The party's military wing was an umbrella organization under which various militant groups belonged to. This resistance network operated mainly in the south of the country against the occupying Israeli Defense Force. At the same time the party's military wing was introduced, the Hizballah issued a 32-page manifesto declaring its ideology and objectives. The party's objectives were clearly outlined as follows:

"Israel's final departure from Lebanon as a prelude to its final obliteration from existence and the liberation of venerable Jerusalem from the talons of occupation. Giving all our people the opportunity to determine their fate and to choose with full freedom the system of government they want, keeping in mind that we do not hide our commitment to the rule of Islam."¹⁹

Israel is obviously an actor which was in fact the main reason why the Iranians volunteered to send soldiers to train and form the Hizballah. In addition to the invasion, Israel's oppressive tactics against the Lebanese of the south made the Israelis the prime

¹⁹ Yonah Alexander and Walter Lacquer, *The Terrorism Reader* (New York: NAL Penguin, 1987).

enemies of the Hizballah. So strong is the Hiz'b Allah's resentment against Israel that the movement even condemns any party who wants to mediate between it and the Jewish state, because "mediation will only serve to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Zionist occupation of Palestine."²⁰

The US and France were targeted by the Hizballah in 1983 during a series of spectacular suicide attacks that forced the Multinational Force (MNF) to withdraw from the war-torn country. The US-French-Italian force, however, was seen by Hizballah as part of the problem in Lebanon - not the solution. In fact, the United States had supplied Israel with aircraft and arms and even failed to condemn Israel's 1982 invasion in the United Nations.²¹ Ultimately, the Hizballah employed Shi'i doctrines of self-sacrifice and martyrdom in the service of a jihad against oppression and injustice. The group achieved notoriety through bombings aimed at the US embassy, the French and US military compound, and businesses during 1983-1984. More than 240 US Marines were killed on an October 23, 1983 bombing of their barracks on the outskirts of Beirut. Israeli forces were similarly targeted from 1983-1985. From 1984 to the Israeli withdrawal in 1985, 90% of the attacks were carried out by the Islamic Resistance. As a result of the effectiveness of the resistance, Hizballah succeeded in acquiring a mass Shi'i constituency and so became Amal's main rival for the leadership of the Shia. In fact, the withdrawal of the MNF from Lebanon and the retreat of Israeli forces to the "security zone" enhanced the Hiz'b Allah's image as "the most effective defender of Shi'i rights and

317.

²⁰ Max Warn, *A Voice of Resistance: the Point of View of Hizballah* [Online]. Available: http://www.almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324_2/hizballah/warn. 36. See also Hizbollah Web Site at <http://www.hizbollah.org/> and Appendix A in Norton's *Amal and the Shia*.

²¹ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). 146.

interests."²² In addition to the suicide bombings, the Hiz'b Allah embarked on a series of kidnappings of most of the 15 Americans held in Lebanon between 1984 and 1991. The hostage seizures were fully consistent with Hizballah's declared goal of removing all traces of Western presence or influence from Lebanon.²³ It should be noted that the fate of the hostages was manipulated by Iran in order to serve its interests - one of them being the acquisition of spare parts for its war effort against Iraq.

In a communiqué issued following the manifesto, the Hizballah made explicit its stance regarding the country's political process. Ultimately, the group vowed "never to participate in any of the government's institutions, so long as the 'current decaying sectarian system' exists, emphasizing that no measure of reform would be considered sufficient to remedy Lebanon's political establishment."²⁴ As previously mentioned, Lebanon's political establishment - as implicit it may have been outlined in the group's objectives - was to be replaced with an Islamic state. Accordingly, any participation in the system - either in opposition or in cabinet - was out of the question, and no change in quotas and proportionality "within the framework of the rotten sectarian system can change that standpoint".²⁵ On the issue of Islamic government, Hizballah subscribes to the theory of the Governance of the Religious Jurist (*Velayet al-Faqih*) which was elaborated by Khomeini in his famous tract on Islamic governance, though it is much a

²² Ibid., 150.

²³ As an aside, an incident the hostage-taking drama was ignited in response to an incident in 1982 when four Iranians - three diplomats and a journalist - were kidnapped and killed after their car carrying diplomatic plates and escorted by local police, was stopped by the Israeli-backed Christian militia. Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 177.

²⁴ Hala Jaber, *Hizbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 61.

²⁵ Max Warn, *A Voice of Resistance: the Point of View of Hizbullah* [Online]. Available: http://www.almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324_2/hizballah/warn, 89.

subject of debate amongst clerics in the Hizballah - and Iranian - leadership.²⁶

The views of Sayyid Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah are also illuminating when determining the ideological stance of Hizballah. Although he has resolutely maintained that he is not the leader, nor even a member, of the Hizballah, Fadlallah is widely regarded as its spiritual guide. He combines traditional religious scholarship with a powerful reinterpretation of Islamic history and belief. Furthermore, he emphasizes political activism and social reform. Fadlallah's message rejects quietism in the face of the oppressed status of Shi'i life and advocates struggle against social injustice. In terms of Israel the Hizballah refuses to refer to its prime enemy as "Israel" which they interpret as an admission of its legal status which they refused to recognize. According to Fadlallah:

"We cannot see Israel as a legal presence, considering that it is a conglomeration of people who came from all parts of the world to live in Palestine on the ruins of another people."²⁷

Lebanon was still at the height of the civil war when the Hizballah's welfare services were launched. They operate a range of philanthropic and commercial activities, including hospitals, medical centers, schools, orphanages, rehab centers for the handicapped, supermarkets, gas stations, construction companies, a radio station (Nur) and public service television channel (al-Manar). The Hizballah's social welfare activities won it additional members, especially after 1984, when Tehran reportedly

²⁶ Nizar A. Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hizbullah: from Islamic Revolutionary to Parliamentary Accommodation", *Third World Quarterly*, (1993), 323.

²⁷ Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 60.

financed 90% - \$10 million dollars (US) monthly - of the party's social program.²⁸ Iran's funding would enable it to exert pressure on the party and to influence its future political direction throughout and following the civil war. However, the party's commercial activities were an alternative source of capital from which the Hizballah would be able to operate independently from Iran's considerations.

In 1987, a major center was opened for providing assistance to the surrounding villages that regularly endure Israeli shelling. Open 24 hours a day, the center's dispensary issues patients with free medication. In 1993, the center treated 17,866 patients. In fact, medical facilities such as the mentioned center are regarded as "far better than those available in government hospital which the poor would otherwise have to rely upon."²⁹ In addition to medical facilities, the Hizballah has maintained a network of schools, companies, community centers and public assistance facilities such as food distribution centers for the needy. In the educational sector, the group has subsidized the schools in an effort to provide poorer families with an affordable option. Moreover, the Hizballah sponsors children and grants scholarships. According to one report, some 40,000 students are studying locally and abroad on Hizballah sponsored scholarships.³⁰ Furthermore, financial organizations have been established in order to provide financial assistance to the poor as well as to victims of Israeli bombing raids. A particular organization, the Financial Lump Sums erected in the honor of Ayatollah Khomeini, advanced \$916,149.45 to 14,151 families in 1992 who found themselves in dire financial

²⁸ Nizar A. Hamzeh, *Islamism in Lebanon: A Guide* [Online]. Available: http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324_2/islamism/shia-islam-leb.html, 2. See also John L. Esposito, *Islamic Threat*, p. 147, and Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With*, p. 154.

²⁹ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?* [Online]. Available: <http://www.mepc.org/norton58.htm>, 2.

³⁰ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 148.

difficulties.³¹

Essentially, the Hizballah derived its identity from its military and social wings. Militarily, the group reached the height of its strength at the end of the 1980s when it gained control of most of South Beirut and large sections of the south. Its celebrated role in the resistance against Israel and its ability to provide for its constituency what the central government failed to do for decades expanded the party's support base. Although it may be argued that the Hizballah's social and military wings were sufficient for ensuring its survival and success in Lebanon as an effective organization during the war years, the political context was to undergo drastic changes on the regional and domestic levels - the Hizballah was to take the necessary steps to ensure its support base and its representation of the Shi'i community persisted. Was the Hizballah's leadership going to ignore these changes and continue operating consistently with their ideological claims, or were they to compromise ideological integrity for realpolitik interests? Essentially, developments regarding the political situation both in Lebanon and on the international stage were to have profound effects on the evolution of the Hizballah, thereby altering the character of the group. Literally, the group was to undergo a period of growth - a period in which the Hizballah would mature.

Prior to examining the actual changes in the orientation of the movement, the central focus will shift towards developments within Iran and Syria - during the war years - with reference made to Israel's policy in Lebanon. This is deemed necessary because it will establish a relationship between the regional actors and the behaviour of Hizballah. This relationship will provide insight into the motivations behind Hizballah's present

³¹ Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 150.

actions, and may simultaneously offer some information about the movement's future direction.

Chapter Two

Having introduced Hizballah within its emergent context until 1987, the next task involves the placing of the organization's position and behaviour in perspective. That is, we are to introduce the various actors and discuss Hizballah's relation to them. Furthermore, the significance of the relationships will be investigated by discovering whatever limitations these actors place on the movement's freedom of maneuver. Finally, in order to appreciate the complex nature of Hizballah's environment, the interrelation between the actors will be addressed.

This particular section will comprise an analysis of Syrian and Israeli attitudes towards Lebanon. Such an approach will illuminate the various forces which created the "system" in which Hizballah had to operate in Lebanon. Moreover, events in Iran during the early- and mid-1980s will be discussed since the Islamic Republic played a role in the creation and future development of the movement. It must be emphasized at the outset that an adequate analysis of the workings of Syrian, Israeli and Irani interests and actions is required in order to attest to the claim that Hizballah has demonstrated an understanding of these actors' "politics" and that the movement has adapted accordingly to the shifting overall political climate. Essentially, one must single out the main determinants of Hizballah's behaviour which would - in the final section - permit speculation on the movement's future. In addition, an understanding of these actors' traditional attitudes is important since it shaped their behaviour in the coming years, and may - as mentioned - shed light on future patterns in the evolution of Hizballah.

Syrian Attitudes and Interests:

The Syrian attitude toward Lebanon is based on the premise of the "indivisibility" of Lebanon from historic "Greater Syria". According to a speech by the Syrian President, Hafez al-Asad stated that "throughout history, Syria and Lebanon have always been one nation.... This is what history shows."³² Thus, Lebanon's separation from Syria in 1920 under the French mandate was perceived as an historical aberration imposed upon Syria, the "beating heart" of Pan-Arabism. These attitudes should not be dismissed as mere rhetoric: in fact, Syria has never maintained an embassy in Lebanon and never imposed permanent restrictions of movement between the two countries thereby reflecting the deep-rootedness of such attitudes towards the Lebanese state. Furthermore, Syria has been vocal on the Lebanon's political scene in the election of its Presidents since the country's independence in 1943, in addition to the composition of governments, and in the selection of intelligence and security chiefs.³³ As a result, Syria has been able over the course of time and with much effort to establish a grip on the levers of Lebanon's domestic and foreign policy apparatus. Essentially, Syria's involvement in the domestic and foreign realms of Lebanese politics has - in addition to increasing Syria's regional stature - permitted Damascus to hold maximum leverage in any peace settlement in its quest to regain the Golan Heights in any negotiations with Israel.³⁴

Furthermore, Lebanon has enjoyed a significant position in the security and military concerns of the Syrian regimes over the past decades. Damascus has

³² Ariel E. Levite, Bruce W. Jentleson and Larry Berman, *The Dynamics of Protracted Conflict: Foreign Military Intervention* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 149.

³³ Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I.B Taurus, 1988), 269.

³⁴ Elie A. Salem, "Lebanon's Political Maze: The Search for Peace in a Turbulent Land", *Middle East Journal* (Autumn 1979), 457.

consistently struggled to ensure that Lebanon would not be utilized as a bridge by hostile powers against Syria. In fact, Lebanon's National Pact of 1943 contained an *implicit* trade-off between Lebanon and Syria. According to Khalidi, Syria essentially would abandon its claim to the four provinces annexed by the French to Lebanon as long as Lebanon "would not constitute a beachhead or corridor for hostile parties against Syria."³⁵ Moreover, the Syrians offered their recognition of Lebanon's independence on the condition that the Maronites - which constituted the largest Lebanese community in 1943 - respect Lebanon's Arab environment. However, Lebanese regimes after another failed to honor the deal as Beirut became a center of conspiracy and subversion against successive Syrian regimes. Damascus was, in particular, threatened by Lebanon's liberal press which was manipulated by regional enemies in order to destabilize the Syrian regime. It was not until Syria's direct military intervention in Lebanon in 1976 that they were able to eliminate the challenge associated with the Lebanese "corridor" and the stability of Syria's domestic scene.

Furthermore, Lebanon played a central role in the military realm of Syrian strategy and concerns. Their concerns stemmed from Syria's perceived threat of Israel and any of the latter's ambitions regarding Lebanon and, by extension, Syrian security interests. During the 1970s

"Syria aimed to change Lebanon from an auxiliary front whose practical involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute was limited to spheres of politics and propaganda, into a direct front which would form part of a single front extending from Ras Naquora

³⁵ Walid Khalidi, "Lebanon: Yesterday and Tomorrow" *Middle East Journal* (Summer 1989), 380.

on the coast of Lebanon to the port
of Aqaba in Jordan."³⁶

Essentially, Lebanon was considered Syria's "soft underbelly". Strategically, Lebanon's military weakness left Syria's western flank vulnerable to a swift Israeli advance via the Beka'a Valley towards Damascus or the industrial centers of Homs and Hama in the north. The potentiality of such a scenario has been a major preoccupation for Syrian military strategists since not only would Damascus be exposed in the case of war, but would enable the Israeli army to outflank the Syrian defensive lines concentrated by the Golan Heights. These military considerations involved forging a military alliance between Damascus and Beirut. Such an arrangement would have allowed for the stationing of a Syrian brigade in the Beka'a Valley thereby enabling a delay in any Israeli initiative to turn on Damascus. However, the idea never materialized due to the Lebanese government's fear that such an arrangement would pave the way for Syrian domination over Lebanon. In response to Lebanon's rejection of the Syrian initiative, the Syrians under the leadership of Asad renewed its pressures upon the Lebanese government to accept

"the entry of the Syrian army into the Eastern sector (i.e the Beka'a) and to a change in the character of the Lebanese army through its enlargement, its equipment with effective weapons, the allocation of a portion of the national budget sufficient for its needs, and a pro-Syrian orientation."³⁷

However, as fate would have it, the long contemplated military alliance would eventually materialize with the introduction of Syrian forces in June of 1976.

³⁶ Reuven Avi-Ran, *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon Since 1975* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 8-9.

Lebanon played yet another vital role in Syria's "realist strategy dictated by the limits of Syria's capabilities and the powerful constraints dominating its regional environment."³⁸ This strategy - the "Eastern Front" strategy - emerged from the ashes of the October War of 1973 and was also in response to the Egyptian-American rapprochement which resulted in the Sinai II Interim Agreement of September 1975 and the Camp David Agreement in 1978. With the "Eastern Front" strategy, Syria's goal rested upon the establishment of an "independent power position from which to conduct her regional and international policies in an autonomous fashion."³⁹ With the Eastern Front under its command, Syria attempted to undo the strategic military consequences of what it perceived to be Sadat's defection from the "confrontationalist" camp, in addition to strengthening its respective bargaining power in any future Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. Ultimately, the success of such a strategy depended on Damascus' ability to influence its immediate Arab environment consisting of Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Israeli Attitudes and Interests

Lebanon also enjoyed an important status in the strategic and security considerations of the State of Israel. In fact, before the establishment of the state of Israel, contacts between the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and some Maronite political personalities were established. It was assumed that the Maronite community, whose orientation was strongly non-Muslim and non-Arab, would

³⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁸ Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Syrian Policy in Lebanon and the Palestinians" *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Winter 1986), 11.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

sympathize with Zionist aspirations. These characteristics prompted the Jewish leadership to see the utility in the community as a useful regional link. Ultimately, Israel's attitude and objectives vis-à-vis Lebanon could be summarized with an excerpt from David Ben-Gurion's diary. He writes

"The weakest link in the Arab coalition is Lebanon. The Muslim rule there is superficial and could easily be shattered. It is necessary to establish a Christian state there whose southern border would be the Litani. We shall then have an alliance with her."⁴¹

Such attitudes were reflected in an ambitious plan in 1955 proposed by then Chief of Staff, General Moshe Dayan. He envisaged a Maronite officer launching a coup and calling upon the Israelis to intervene militarily. According to the plan, Israel would move in, annex the territory up to the Litani River, and create an alliance with Lebanon. The idea was rejected by the Cabinet.⁴¹ These attitudes were manifest in Israel's formulation of security and military policies vis-à-vis Lebanon. Though Lebanon never posed a military threat to Israel, its very weakness gave rise to fear that regional powers would transform Lebanese territory into a launching pad for hostilities targeting Israel. In order to prevent such an occurrence, the Israeli government sought to ensure the stability of the fragile Lebanese political situation so as not to provide any justification for the military intervention of a neighboring Arab state. Hence, the Israeli attitude vis-à-vis Lebanon was one characterized by restraint and caution. The Israelis were careful not to push the Lebanese into situations liable to upset the delicate domestic balance between its communities. For instance, when guerrilla attacks were launched from inside Lebanon,

⁴¹ Yair Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon: The Israeli-Syrian Deterrence Dialogue* (Sydney:

Israel retaliated cautiously in order to avoid targeting Lebanese government institutions. Such an approach, however, was not applied when considering reprisals against Damascus, Amman, and Cairo. In those cases, state targets were deliberately heavily hit as an "inducement" to the authorities to clamp down on terrorists and terrorism. However, Israel at times did retaliate "heavily" against Lebanon when the PLO consolidated its operations in the mid-1960s in the south of the country. The most extreme of cases was an incursion of Israeli units into the Beirut airport, in December of 1968, where they destroyed Middle East Airlines planes.⁴² However, by the 1970s, the Lebanese population of the South was deliberately hit in retaliation to the PLO's cross-border attacks into Israel proper.

Israeli concern with security dramatically increased as PLO attacks into northern Israel from their bases in southern Lebanon occurred with greater frequency. The deterioration in security along Israel's northern border prompted the Israelis to adopt more "appropriate" countermeasures. Thus, Israeli policy vis-à-vis Lebanon in the 1976 - and more specifically following Syria's invasion in June of 1976 - was dominated by the following three objectives:

- 1) How to cope with PLO terrorism emanating from that country
- 2) What attitude to adopt toward the Christian community
- 3) And how to react to the Syrian military presence in Lebanon.

The problem posed by the actions of the PLO implied the immediate dealing with security concerns along the Israel-Lebanon border. The main goal, therefore, was to

Croom Helm. 1987). 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴² Ze'ev Schiff, "Lebanon: Motivations and Interests in Israel's Policy" *Middle East Journal* (Spring 1984). 220.

expel the PLO from its arena of operations in southern Lebanon. One tactic the Israelis were willing to adopt was the assistance of anti-PLO elements within Lebanon proper. The emphasis in the 1970s was placed on the military aspect of the problem posed by the PLO - there was no mention of the political liquidation of the PLO or its total eviction from Lebanon. In 1976, Syria intervened in order to prevent a Maronite defeat - a move which the Israelis supported. The Syrian intervention brings forth an interesting point concerning the Syrian-Israeli relationship in Lebanon. A situation had developed whereby the two antagonists had, at that point in the crisis, a measure of common interests in Lebanon. With American mediation, both parties agreed on an agreement in the spring of 1976 known as the Red Lines understanding.⁴³ The understanding stipulated that the Syrians would not deploy its forces beyond a geographic line stretching from Sidon in the West to Huna in the east of southern Lebanon. In addition, Syria refrained from using its air force over Lebanon and would not deploy surface-to-air (SAMs) in the country. Essentially, Lebanon was divided into Syrian and Israeli zones of influence and the Red Lines signified an explicit recognition of the convergence of interests held by Syria and Israel.

During the Syrian intervention, the Israelis responded positively to two Lebanese army majors who requested aid in order to protect Christian villages along the border which had come under attack from the PLO. In the end, two small Christian-held wedges were created in Lebanon along the border with Israel. The contacts established with the two majors and the villages under their tutelage were not the only links between Israel

⁴³ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?* [Online]. Available: <http://www.mepc.org/norton58.htm>. 7.

and the Maronite community. Contacts were also established with the Christians in the northern sectors of Lebanon. Whereas security was the underlying factor in ties with the majors in the south, more complex motives prompted Israel to establish and maintain ties with the Christian groups in the north., particularly those led by Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel. From the beginning, the political aspect impinged strictly on military considerations. During Prime Minister Rabin's term in the 1970s, Israel's overall strategy towards the Christian community was to "help the Christians help themselves." Aid was provided in the form of light and heavy weaponry and munitions, later joined by military training. Israel's underlying motive was to establish a military force in Lebanon able to balance the force of the PLO.

Ultimately, Lebanon has been of vital interest to the security concerns and foreign policy objectives of both Syria and Israel. As the remainder of the analysis will reveal, Hizballah will be bound by such interests which - as just demonstrated - run deep in the ethos of Syrian and Israeli politics.

Iranian Interests

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 was to bring about a complete turn around in Iranian policy vis-à-vis the Middle East, and the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular. For instance, when Iran functioned as a member of the Western alliance - Baghdad Pact 1955 - it found itself in bed with the pro-Western Arab states. When the revolution struck, however, it not only severed ties with the pro-Western Arab states, but sought closer ties with a number of radical states such as Syria and, to a lesser extent, Qaddafi's Libya. Tehran's support for the Shia of south Lebanon - apparent in their assistance during the

1982 Israeli invasion - was consistent with the Islamic Republic's doctrinal tenet of exporting the revolution. The Shi'i community's politics were subject to new fissures as a result of the emergence of domestic pro-Iranian elements. Amal's virtually uncontested position as guarantor of the community subsided as the radicalized segment of the community swayed in favor of the Iranian model. By the time of the Israeli invasion, Amal's orientation was essentially areligious, thereby making it ideologically and structurally ill-prepared - if not merely incompatible - to concede a role to the radicalized clergy. As a result, such elements bypassed Amal in their search for an organizational channel for their activity. So, naturally, their interests coincided with Iran's.

Moreover, the historic links between Iran and the Lebanese Shia community implied deep-seeded interests in the welfare and betterment of the Shia of Lebanon. There had been centuries of close religious and cultural ties between the Shia of Lebanon and those in Iraq and Iran, the latter countries providing religious instruction to numbers of clerics of Lebanese origin and nationality.

In relation to Damascus, Iranian interests converged with Syrian interests thereby paving the way for a durable strategic alliance between the two. It may be difficult to understand how two ideologically opposed states - one dominated by a secular nationalist ideology and the other by a transnational religious ideology - could find common ground on any issue. But as they say, politics makes strange bedfellows. Iran's motivations stemmed from its ideological hostility towards the Zionist state and Israel's previous relation with the toppled tyrannical Shah. But, more importantly, Iran sought an escape from its geopolitical constraints through its entrance into the Lebanese scene thereby extending the regional reach of the Iranian government. This was a prerequisite for its

ambitions to consolidate its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Furthermore, Iran was in search of allies in an environment which was characterized by hostility between it and its Arab counterparts. Iran had hostile relations and was therefore threatened with Iraq and with the conservative monarchies of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia who supported the Iraqi onslaught on Iran in their eight year war. Subsequently, Iran and Syria struck accord with their hostility towards Ba'athist Iraq. In addition, Iran's hostility towards the United States was an integral part of the symbolism of the revolution, and the continuing conflict in Lebanon afforded the possibility of pursuing this struggle which also served to strengthen Iran's pan-Islamic appeal. Moreover, its foothold in Lebanon provided the Iranians the opportunity of furthering its ambition of establishing an Islamic state modeled after the Iranian one.

Ultimately, Iran's entrance into Lebanon was dependent on Syria. Only through Syrian acquiescence was Iran able to obtain access and to break out from its isolation in its war against Iraq. At the time Syria was preoccupied with reversing the negative results of the Israeli invasion into Lebanon, and the risk of including Iran increased the danger of further undermining its position in Lebanon. To some extent, Iranian and Syrian interests clashed as they would compete for the same constituencies. Such occurrences were indications that the Syrian-Iranian axis was to be a bittersweet relationship, as tensions would reach near-crisis levels in the years to come. The 1985 Israeli withdrawal to the Shouf mountains signaled Iran and Syria's success in neutralizing the Israeli threat which emanated from the 1982 invasion. However, a price was paid for their success. Syria's traditional practice of balancing the scores of Lebanese groups against one another had no room for Hizballah's emergence in 1984.

The radical pro-Iranian elements formed the most effective arm of the proxy activity against Israel, but a strong Islamic movement and an Iranian involvement in Lebanese politics were potentially at direct odds with established Syrian interests.⁴⁴ Between 1986 and 1989, Hizballah's potency as a military and social organization - considering the effectiveness of its social network's educational, health and welfare services - became a bone of contention between Tehran and Damascus. By virtue of its stature and success, Hizballah posed a challenge to Syrian hegemony and its proxies among the Shia (Amal) and began to strike at the very foundation of Syrian influence and prestige. Tensions were to ignite and reach their apex in the "war of the camps" of 1985-1987. Concerned with Arafat's Fatah group's infiltration of the Beirut camps and the possibility of an Arafat-Lebanese forces partnership, Damascus gave Amal - which opposed an autonomous Palestinian presence in Lebanon - a green light to confront the Palestinians by surrounding the camps. In response, Hizballah publicly opposed the Syrian-Amal initiative despite the recent deterioration of PLO-Iranian relations since 1980 and the continuing PLO support of Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war. When Hizballah did not actively intervene on the side of the Palestinians, it provided the fighters with food and supplies. Hizballah's sympathy and commitment with the Palestinian cause ran deep and its antipathy towards Amal - both for ideological reasons, and driven by the rivalry to be premier Shi'i political organization - was profound. As an aside, Syria's relationship with Amal goes back to the early phases of the organization's inception in the early 1970s. Asad's regime was facing growing criticism from its Sunni majority regarding the non-

⁴⁴ Hussein Agha, "The Syrian-Iranian Axis in Lebanon", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace*, eds. Rosemary Hollis and Nadim Shehadi (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996), p. 26.

Islamic character of the ruling clique's Alawi inclination. Imam Musa Sadr issued a *fatwa*, or religious edict, officially recognizing Alawism as a legitimate branch of Twelver Shiism, providing the Ba'athist regime the crucial religious and political legitimacy.⁴⁵

On the Iranian front, Tehran embarked on intensive diplomatic efforts to quell the fighting. These efforts included high-level visits to Damascus and low-level ones with local parties. However, Asad made clear his determination to undermine the final pockets of Arafat's influence and power in Lebanon. Also, Syria reminded both Hizballah and Tehran of the limits to their power and influence in Lebanon.⁴⁶ Though Syria's incentive to cap the power of pro-Iranian interests within Damascus' orbit was firm, it did not hide its tolerance - and tacit approval - of Hizballah's continuing resistance against the IDF in the south. Moreover, support of Hizballah enables Syria to support an authentic Lebanese resistance. Essentially, Hizballah's violent/radical posture was consistent with its environment and with the ambitions of the Syrian regime. However, Hizballah's support of pro-Arafat groups, such as the Sunni Tawhid party in Tripoli again brought Tehran and Damascus on a collision course. Regardless of Iranian opposition, Syria clashed with the Tawhid party between 1985 and 1986, and Damascus left no doubt that it was not ready to allow radical Sunni and Shia forces with powerful external patrons to expand their power in Lebanon. In February 1987, Syrian troops clashed with Hizballah, making clear who had the upperhand. This was a clear indication to Iran that its very position in Lebanon was dictated by Syrian interests and that Tehran

⁴⁵ Asad AbuKhalil. "Syria and the Shiites: al-Asad's Policy in Lebanon". *Third World Quarterly* (April 1990), 3.

⁴⁶ Hussein Agha. "The Syrian-Iranian Axis in Lebanon", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East*

possessed little leverage in its relationship with Damascus, though Iran has served as a counter-weight to Syria's pressure on Hizballah allowing the organization a degree of freedom in its activity. This incident serves as a reminder of Syrian support of Hizballah, and further makes the point that in any event of an agreement with Israel over occupied Lebanese and Syrian territory, all Lebanese parties will have to be disciplined in accordance with such designs. Importantly, Hizballah's resistance operations do provide Syria with the desired bargaining power which would increase its position in any future negotiations with the Israelis. However, in the event of a final agreement between the two antagonists, and once Syria has satisfied its own agenda vis-à-vis Lebanon, it would be expected to prevent any further shipments of Iranian weaponry and to enforce Hizballah's disarmament. This very recognition of the limitations to its power and influence was to govern the actions of Hizballah, as well as its Iranian patron. Hizballah was quick to acknowledge the reality and was responsive by its efforts not to provoke Syria with its activity amongst the Shia community in Lebanon. The organization was aware that it did not operate inside a vacuum, and that concessions were to be expected in order not to provoke Syria as the above examples illustrate. This theme will be central in arguments presented below.

Ultimately, Hizballah is bound by Syrian, Iranian and Israeli interests. Hizballah's relation to Israel has been, continues to be, and will most probably always be one of outright hostility and violence - Israel provides Hizballah a reason to exist and plays an important role in the movement's ideological position. With regards to Syria, the relationship becomes more complex. Though Syria tolerates Hizballah's

confrontation against Israel, Damascus more than Tehran regulates its support of the organization according to the orientation in Syrian interests since Syria serves as a corridor for Iranian shipments of military hardware bound for Hizballah. For Asad, Hizballah's asset has been and continues to be military. Ideologically, they are poles apart as Syria is with Iran. Hizballah's military asset is overshadowed by Amal's value to Syria. Though Amal has not played a leading role in the effectiveness of the resistance, its nationalist secular ideology bodes well with Damascus. And, in effect, Syria has made clear its preference of Amal assuming the mantle of Shi'i leadership, as opposed to Hizballah, though it uses one as a counter-weight to the other ensuring that both tow the official political line and stay within it.

With regards to Iran, Hizballah is indebted to Tehran because it served as the catalyst for the establishment of Hizballah. Throughout the 1980s, and well into the 1990s, Hizballah depends on Iranian assistance, whether in the form of arms or cash. Consequently, Iran holds considerable leverage with Hizballah, and the latter is careful not to bite the hand which feeds it. Iranian assistance has been crucial, indeed, in making possible the construction of the impressive social network which Hizballah has managed to erect. However, the shifting of the political balance within Iran may potentially have deep consequences on the flow of assistance to Hizballah. It is the contention of the author - and the theme will be addressed in the final sections - that there are influential groups within Iran who see the utility in maintaining their present relation with an important Islamic outpost.

Ultimately, Syrian attitudes and interests are primary given its preponderant power inside Lebanon. Syria is king-maker, and king-breaker. Therefore, whatever

changes Syrian interests may undergo, Hizballah and Iran will have to adapt accordingly, lest they decide to reverse whatever strides they have made. Syrian interests and strategy may shift in accordance with the shifting power distribution on both global and regional levels. In the end, changes on the regional and global levels imply changes in Syrian strategy, which therefore imply new rules for local Lebanese groups - Hizballah being no exception.

Essentially, Hizballah derived its identity from its military and social wings. Its celebrated role in the resistance against Israel and its ability to simultaneously provide for its constituency what the central government failed to do for decades expanded the organization's support base. Although it can be argued that Hizballah's social and military wings were important for ensuring its survival and success in Lebanon during the war years, what was more important was that Hizballah was careful not to find itself in a direct confrontation with Syrian interests. However, Syrian strategy was not fixed but was highly attuned to events external to its sphere of influence. Thus, regional and global changes at the end of the 1980s signaled a change in Syrian strategy and, therefore, in its "Lebanon Rules". At this juncture, a question is raised: How was Hizballah going to respond to the upcoming shifts in the domestic political climate? Was the organization going to ignore these changes and operate consistently with their ideological claims, or were they to compromise ideological integrity for realpolitik interests? In the end, developments regarding the Lebanese political situation in Lebanon and on the international stage were to have profound effects in the evolution of Hizballah, thereby altering the character and *modus operandi* of the group.

In order to address the impact of these changes, the next chapter will point out the specific changes - domestically, regionally and internationally - and assess their affect on Hizballah's development. Alternatively, the discussion will turn to Hizballah's entrance into Lebanese politics and its impact on the organization's overall political strategy following the introduction of the Taif Accords. Essentially, the following chapter will deal with Hizballah's behavior within the post-Taif context which characterized Lebanon following the 15 year long civil war.

Chapter Three

Before proceeding into a discussion of the actual changes in Hizballah's ideological composition and their overall political strategies, an analysis of the shifts in the overall political climate is necessary. Events on the international, regional and domestic levels will be addressed with particular emphasis on Iranian and Syrian reaction to these developments. Moreover, the effects of these changes on Hizballah's behaviour and position in Lebanon will be assessed. Essentially, the factors which lead to Hizballah's acceptance - albeit a reluctant one - of the Lebanese political system will be singled out in order to further strengthen the proposition concerning the relationship between Hizballah, Syria and Iran, and indirectly with Israel. This chapter will ultimately provide the basis on which the organization's political fortunes and electoral practices will be considered in Chapter 4.

Winds of Change

Powerful winds of change on the global and regional levels were waiting that naturally brought about spin-off effects on Lebanon's domestic stage. A New World Order emerged at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, with the US as its sole enforcer. For Hizballah, like all other Lebanese and regional actors, this implied a totally new situation. In a 1988 visit to the Kremlin, Syrian President Asad was rebuked by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev on the issue of Soviet arms transfers. No longer able to bank on Soviet largesse, Asad was brought to accept the imperative of coming to terms with Israel and the United States.⁴⁷ Syria's ambition of attaining

⁴⁷ Augustus Richard Norton, *The Challenge of Inclusion in the Middle East* [Online]. Available:

"strategic parity" with Israel was to be curtailed, if not altogether made impossible.

Within Lebanon, the signing of the Taif Accords in 1989, and its implementation in 1990-91, meaning the end of the civil war, was to construct a new context in Lebanon, and therefore a new situation for Hizballah. The Taif Accords require closer examination since it would establish the political climate presiding over Lebanon, and the rules which will dictate this new order. The accords pronounced the extension of Lebanon's state authority over all of its territory, the disarming of the militias, and the realization of reforms within the confessional system in order to attain a state of equilibrium. With regards to the disarmament of militias, the Hizballah refused stating that it was not a militia, but a "resistance movement" against Israel. As a result, Hizballah was allowed to remain armed with Syrian influence, of course. In addition, a solution between Syria and Iran allowed the movement to remain as an armed force as long as Israel remains on occupied lands in the south. Constitutionally, the accords modified the distribution of parliamentary seats, allocating an equal number of seats to both Christians and Muslims, as opposed to the 6:5 ratio favoring the Christians as previously stipulated in the National Pact.⁴⁸ In addition, the accords paved the route for parliamentary elections to be held in 1992 and 1996. Ultimately, the accords called for law and order, governmental control and domestic peace, as opposed to the years of chaos and instability characterizing the years of war since the mid 1970s. Furthermore, the Taif Accords institutionalized Syrian hegemony, thereby allowing it to dictate the situation in Lebanon by implementing its

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/29/016.html>. 4.

⁴⁸ Max Warn, *A Voice of Resistance: the Point of View of Hizballah* [Online]. Available <http://www.almashriq.biof.no/lebanon/300/320/324.2/hizballah/warn.91>.

rules of the game - Hafiz al-Asad's rules became the rules of the game. The Accords showed the extent of Syrian influence in Lebanon. Syria's privileged position is no more obvious than in the Treaty of Cooperation between Lebanon and Syria on May 20 1991. The bilateral agreement provided Syria with the legal foundation for its continued presence in Lebanon.

The broker behind the equilibrium established by the accords was and is Syria. As Rosemary Sayigh has shown, whatever the "apparent shifts or hesitations in Syria's policy toward Lebanon, its strategic objectives have been consistent and sure. Put negatively Syria has been concerned to prevent a Maronite rightist takeover of Lebanon in alliance with Israel, or a radical Lebanese-Palestinian nationalist takeover threatening both Israeli retaliation and the destabilization of Syria." Furthermore, Sayigh writes, on the positive side "the objectives are in line with Syria's ideology of extending Ba'athist pan-Arabism to ensure its security interests and to keep some sort of strategic parity with Israel."⁴⁹ These objectives reflect Syria's traditional view regarding the vulnerability of its interior to an Israeli offensive and its ambition to obviously neutralize the threat.

The accords did not represent much of a departure from previous attempts to save the faltering Lebanese political system. The accord, which was approved by 58 of the 62 deputies who converged on the Saudi resort of Taif, represented the end of efforts to jettison the National Pact of 1943. In fact, the Taif Accords implicitly ratifies the National Pact with its emphasis upon confessional compromise and intercommunal

⁴⁹ Graham Usher, "Hizballah, Syria and the Lebanese Elections" *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Winter 1997), 60.

cooperation.⁵⁰ It should be mentioned, however, that deconfessionalization is stated as an explicit goal in the agreement, but without a specified deadline or timetable. The accord effectively concedes the futility of any serious attempt to expunge political sectarianism in Lebanon, at least in the foreseeable future. With any change in political landscape, there are prices paid by political participants. The big losers were the Maronites and the Shia. The political supremacy the Maronites once enjoyed was no more. By the same token, the claims of the fast-growing Shia - who constitute a third of the country's population - were blunted in the Ta'if Accord in favor of the Sunni community.⁵¹ Although no community comprises a majority in multi-confessional Lebanon, there is a de facto working majority, backed by "Shi'i-phobic" Saudi Arabia, and comprised those non-Shi'i Lebanese who oppose the domination of the state by the Shia. Despite their status as the plurality in Lebanon, the Shia only obtained three of the new appointive seats putting them at an equal footing with the smaller Sunni community, both holding 22 seats.

From Hizballah's perspective, Taif was to diminish whatever freedom the group enjoyed during the war and under Syrian patronage, and posed the first major threat to the organization - that is, the threat of being disarmed along with all militias. To Hizballah, Taif did not solve much - if any - of the country's problems. Instead, Taif itself was part of the problem. The accords failed to eliminate the shortcomings of the old system as it maintained a sectarian character and the factors which sustained the "rotten" political order in the country. The initial reaction of Hizballah to the Taif was perpetual all-out

⁵⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, "Lebanon After Taif: Is the Civil War Over?" *Middle East Journal*, (Summer 1991), 461.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 464.

confrontation. However, their memories of the war of the camps were still fresh in their minds and offered a crucial lesson: Syria would not hesitate to use brute military force in dealing with Hizballah if the latter did not submit to Syria's designs, and Taif obviously played into Damascus' favor. Moreover, Iranian officials convinced the Hizballah leadership that it can only preserve its hardwon gains by coexisting and accepting the rules laid down by the Taif in order to avoid being marginalized and pressured as a movement. Nonetheless, opposition to Taif was to be a recurring theme in Hizballah's future dealings and position in the years to come.

During the second Gulf War of 1990-91, Syria supported the Bush Administration's onslaught against the Syrian regime's rival - Ba'thist Iraq. In return for Damascus' support, the United States returned the favor by turning a blind eye to Syria's campaign of ridding Lebanon of the last vestige of Syrian opposition - General Michel Aoun. Aoun was a Maronite General who, supported by Iraq, militarily challenged Syria's presence. He attempted to upset the status quo and force external intervention to bring about Syria's withdrawal. However, this backfired and Syria was able to enlist strong Iranian support and evict the general from Lebanon and into exile in France. The Gulf War would also provide evidence of Iran's political development. Though hard-line mullahs called for Iran's entrance into the war on the side of its one time enemy - Saddam - in the name of Islam, the more moderate factions succeeded in holding onto a policy of neutrality.

Events in Iran were also to have a profound effect on the developments of the Hizballah. Iran - creator, financier, and advisor to the movement - had begun charting a more pragmatic course in politics after the death of Khomeini. To clear the way for

improved economic relations, Iran's new government sought to resolve outstanding disputes such as the disposition of Iranian assets impounded after the 1979 revolution and the seizure of foreign hostages by pro-Iranian terrorists in Lebanon. Iran's new president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, cut back on Iran's support for Shia factions like the Hizballah and sought the release of US hostages in Lebanon. With regards to finances, it has been previously mentioned that, prior to the death of Khomeini, the group received \$10 million a month. It has been speculated that following Khomeini's death, the group's finances have been cut drastically. Regardless, whatever figures are given concerning financial assistance are speculative since Hizballah nor Iranian officials do not speak freely of such facts. Despite the unavailability of reliable data at the time, it suffices to say that the changing political climate has induced change in Hizballah's status. Ultimately, the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the encroachment of the 1990s were to bring about primary external changes - compounded with internal developments - which were to eventually shift Iran's orientation and assist its assumption of a more accommodative stance which was to signal a change in its overall policy in Lebanon and, therefore, in Hizballah's development.

Hizballah's Period of Growth

Iran successfully manipulated the emergence of two "schools" within Hizballah in accordance with Tehran's ambitions concerning the organization's political future. Two factions had emerged at the center of the debate. The first was led by Sheik Subhi al-Tufayli, Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi (killed in February 1992), and Sayyid Hussein al-Musawi. This group claimed that it was futile for the party to continue its jihad against

the West when Iran itself was calling for a truce. Subsequently, they advocated rapprochement with other fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist groups and so favored the insinuation of the movement into the mainstream of Lebanese politics. On their side was Iranian President Rafsanjani.⁵² On the opposite side was a group represented by Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah and Sayyid Ibrahim al-Amin. They advocated tighter party discipline and sought to keep the organization in a state of perpetual jihad against all those who opposed their vision of a Khomeinistic state. It was this group that worked closely with Iranian Revolutionary Guards to maintain their grip over the foreign hostages.⁵³

Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah favored with the first group and was behind what is called the "Lebanonization" of Hizballah. That is, Hizballah's orientation was shifted from a transnational one to a national one - the Muslim ummah was being replaced by the Lebanese community. Essentially, Fadlallah urged the organization to seek and establish a foothold in the Lebanese political system and to reach out to political leaders outside the "fundamentalist" camp.⁵⁴ Consequently, this process of "Lebanonizing" the organization has greatly undermined the radical camp. This was clearly evident with the July 1991 election of Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi to the post of Secretary General. Moreover, the continuing political decline of Mohteshami and the victory of Rafsanjani's supporters in the 1992 elections to Iran's Shura Council, have served to virtually eradicate the power and influence of the militant/radical faction within Hizballah. Furthermore, the complete release of hostages in 1992 was yet another

⁵² Nizar A. Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hizballah: from Islamic Revolutionary to Parliamentary Accommodation". *Third World Quarterly* (1993), 323.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 324.

indication that the faction's position was further undermined by the moderates. An indication of Hizballah's commitment to the newly established political line came with Nasrallah's election to the post of Secretary General in 1992 following the assassination of Abbas al-Musawi. A member and leader of the radical camp, Nasrallah stuck with the pragmatic political attitude and did not deviate from it. In fact, despite his militant background, he urged and encouraged the organization to participate in the Lebanese parliamentary elections, claiming that "it is important for the party to be represented in the Lebanese parliament in order to contribute to the elimination of political confessionalism which is one of the party's goals."⁵⁵ Hizballah realized that "unless it participated in the rapidly changing political scene in Lebanon, it could end up being isolated and lose its official backing and representation."⁵⁶ As a result of such awareness, compounded by Syria and Iran's encouragement, the group abandoned its earlier objections to participate in the country's political process and entered the country's 1992 elections. Ultimately Hizballah was clearly admitting not only the realities of the Lebanese system, but also that the road to Islamic governance could be a model of participation in elections rather than the revolutionary approach. Essentially, Hizballah has undergone a drastic transformation relative to its initial stages of development. As a political party, it has successfully adapted to the rules of the political game resulting in the moderation of its stance and the espousal of an overall pragmatic strategy and outlook with regards to its objectives and agenda.

Further signs of the group's departure from initially developed ideological claims and objectives have become visible in other areas of the Hizballah's composition. The

⁵⁴ Ibid., 324.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 325.

Hizballah leadership departed from its manifesto by declaring that the "goals of liberating South Lebanon and Jerusalem are two different enterprises. Armed struggle is the only way to deal with the occupation of South Lebanon, but Jerusalem is a Palestinian issue."⁵⁷ This was the result of a general reluctance in the south to pursue armed confrontation with Israel after an IDF withdrawal from the south. It should be kept in mind that the people of the south have experienced war, crises and conflicts dating back to the early 60s if not earlier. There is only so much a person can tolerate such instability in daily life. In terms of the peace process, although the Hizballah denounced the Oslo Accords, as did Iran, the group was making a "realpolitik accommodation to the fact that the train was moving whether Hizballah liked it or not."⁵⁸ Yet another striking evolution in the group's objectives, Hizballah modified its definition of confrontation with the West since the publication of its manifesto. As previously demonstrated, the group embarked on a campaign of removing Western targets from Lebanon violently. Hizballah currently speaks of "resisting the West on 'cultural and political levels'". However, the military actions of the Islamic Resistance remain justified in the face of a direct threat posed by the Israelis. Yet, the party's approval of German mediation following Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath in 1996 - which culminated in the Grapes of Wrath Understanding - was in clear contrast to the Hizballah's earlier position that mediation by a third party would be interpreted as acknowledgment of the "Zionist entity's" right to exist. This reflects what Fadlallah has called for in a 1996 interview in which he emphasized the need for dialogue, especially with one's enemies.

⁵⁶ Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 72.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵⁸ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?* [Online]. Available:

The adoption of a pragmatic perspective vis-à-vis its political environment has allowed Hizballah to persevere and maintain the strides it had made throughout the war years of the 1980s. By trading its subversive and violent attitudes towards the Lebanese state for one of uncompromising - but legal - opposition to successive Lebanese governments, Hizballah has succeeded in safeguarding its credentials as an anti-establishment movement. As May Chartouni-Dubarry observes, this undoubtedly gives an advantage over its Shi'i rival Amal and its leader Nabih Berri. His position as Speaker - while giving him a degree of leverage in Shi'i politics - could in the long run restrict Amal's influence to his traditional base.⁵⁹ In the end Hizballah has clearly illustrated a pattern of continual moderation in its political stance. As an aside, Hizballah fits into the category of other Islamist movements participating in their country's political processes such as in Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia which shows a willingness on their part to play by the rules. More significantly, as Ellis points out, "the process of inclusion promotes pragmatism and moderation; service in government politics tend to reduce radicalism."⁶⁰ This is a theme to be explored at length in Chapter 4.

Concerning the rule of Islam, the Hizballah came to terms with the realities of Lebanon and discarded its commitment to the establishment of an Islamic state. Despite its integration into the Lebanese political system, Hizballah maintained its claim for an Islamic State born from revolutionary upheaval which will transform society for the better. However, "Khomeinism" was not embraced with revolutionary zeal by a great

<http://www.mepc.org/norton58.htm>, 7.

⁵⁹ May Chartouni-Dubarry, "Hizballah: From Militia to Political Party", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace*, eds. Rosemary Hollis and Nadim Shehadi (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1996), 61.

⁶⁰ Kail C. Ellis, "Lebanon: The Struggle of a Small Country in a Regional Context", *Arab Studies Quarterly* (Winter 1999), 7.

number of Shia. Rather, it was Amal gunmen who limited the march of Hizballah and Khomeinism during fratricidal battles in Beirut and the south between 1988 and 1990.⁶¹ In a 1995 interview, Fadlallah stated that the group "should be part of Lebanon's secular, multi-sectarian government" claiming that an Islamic state in the country would be "counterproductive because of the many Christians and other minority groups."⁶² And the lesson learned from the civil war and the history preceeding it is that no one religious group can subordinate the others and secure for itself a position of predominance. The theory of the Islamic state would therefore remain within the party rank and file and it would not be publicly emphasized as an immediate goal, because it was viewed with suspicion by Sunnis and not acceptable at all to the Druze and Christians. As a result, therefore, the Islamic Revolution in Iran is now taken as an inspiration more than a model to be emulated in Lebanon and consider Khomeini's concept of velayet al-faqih as an intellectual ideal, rather than a political option.

Ultimately, the Islamic Resistance wing was once certainly the Hizballah's *raison d'être*. However, since its entrance into politics in 1992, the Hizballah no longer depends on its military force for its identity. With a potential Israeli withdrawal, the group anticipates that it will be the beneficiary of an Israeli withdrawal given its celebrated role in the resistance - such a scenario is evidently influencing any decisions taken by the Hizballah regarding its future role. Initially founded as a liberation movement, Hizballah has evolved into a political party, maintaining a vast social network and a military wing

⁶¹ Giles Trendle, "Hizballah: Pragmatism and Popular Standing", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace*, eds. Rosemary Hollis and Nadim Shehadi (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1996), 66.

⁶² Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?* [Online]. Available: <http://www.mcpc.org/norton58.htm>, 7.

which has been gaining the upper-hand in the battle for the South against a formidable Israeli military machine. In essence, over a span of 16 years, the movement has transformed itself into a state within a state. Such an evolution is primarily due to the organization's demonstrated ability to learn from past experiences and to adapt to the present political climate and to acknowledge its sustaining factors. Furthermore, the party has shown sensitivity to change both on the domestic and regional levels. Hizballah's position and tone following the termination of the civil war was congruent with the period characteristic of post-war Lebanon. In addition, it has performed suitably on the Lebanese stage while respecting Syria's presence in the country. In fact, Syria and Hizballah have been enjoying a relationship for a number of years which has satisfied Syria's search for countervailing political currents in Lebanon. Hizballah, on the other hand, has acted in concert with the required political line as dictated by Damascus, thereby providing the former the benefit of having a special understanding with the country's political hegemon - though the party has pushed the limits on some occasions. Furthermore, the party's importance for Syria is found in its usefulness as a bargaining chip which the latter can manipulate in its objective of acquiring the Golan Heights in any security arrangements concluded with the Israeli government regarding south Lebanon. In fact, the possibility of disarming the group following a potential security agreement with Israel is a scenario which Hizballah has been preparing for since its party congress in July 1995. Until then, the group's current strategy is to continue conducting limited operations against the IDF and SLA targets of opportunity in the "security zone" while awaiting developments concerning the withdrawal.

At this point in the analysis, Hizballah's dependence on regional actors and a

shifting domestic context has been clearly illustrated throughout the general discussion. As has been also shown, the party's success in surviving outside the context of war stems from its ability to accommodate to the changing times and circumstances, in addition to acknowledging the supremacy of certain actors and its respective reliance and dependence on such forces. In the following section, an assessment of the party's electoral behavior and fortunes/misfortunes will ensue. This task will inevitably shed light on the future prospects of the party in the years to come.

Chapter Four

Having addressed the various factors and developments which were conducive to Hizballah's entrance into the mainstream of Lebanese politics, the focus now turns to a survey of the party's electoral performance and parliamentary behavior. This will shed further light on the obstacles facing Hizballah's political career and will also lend credence to the relationship between the party and its patrons. In addition, the high skill of Hizballah as a serious political player will be demonstrated in this chapter.

Parliamentary Elections: 1992

Hizballah's first electoral experience was in the country's 1992 parliamentary elections. The results were remarkable in that the party obtained eight seats (out of the parliament's 128 seats) giving Hizballah the highest number of representatives in comparison to other parties.⁶³ Furthermore, the success of four candidates loyal to Hizballah (two loyal Sunni MPs and two Christian MPs having a political understanding with the party) made the bloc the largest in parliament with a total of twelve seats. According to Nizar Hamzeh, there are several factors which proved crucial for the success of the party. It should be mentioned beforehand that an adequate discussion of these factors is justified since it would reveal relevant characteristics about the high degree of sophistication in the political behaviour of the party. First, and foremost, extensive preparations were made by the party prior to the elections. The party had assessed the cost-benefits of running independently against entering into coalitions with other contenders. As a result, this provided the leadership the ability to pinpoint strengths

⁶³ Nizar A. Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hizballah: from Islamic Revolutionary to Parliamentary Accommodation", *Third World Quarterly* (1993), 321.

and weaknesses of the various alternatives available to them. Based on such evaluations, Hizballah decided to form complete lists in some districts, run as independents in others, and enter into coalition lists in yet other districts. For example, in the Bekaa where Hizballah is very strong and has an estimated 10,000 members, the party decided on forming an electoral list, called La'iha Mutaharikah (moving list) in the mainly Shi'ite district of Ba'albek-Hermil, against the list of Husayn al-Husayni (former speaker of the Chamber).⁶⁴ In negotiations with al-Husayni, Hizballah suggested a coalition list, in which it would nominate only two candidates. Al-Husayni, on his part, insisted that Hizballah nominated only one. It was then that Hizballah decided to form its own list and to fight al-Husayni. According to Hamzeh, the purpose of the moving list was to nominate a fixed number of party candidates and leave vacant places for nonparty members. Alternatively, Hizballah nominated only four party members out of six allocated to the Shi'i in the district of Ba'albek-Hermil, thus leaving two seats empty for the purpose of political manoeuvring and compromises with all factions and tribal families which exist in the region.

Second, Hizballah's welfare system has improved the daily lives of thousands of deprived Shiites, thereby increasing the popularity of the party. As a result, during the elections many felt that the party had provided valuable services to the impoverished regions at a time when the unemployment rate was high and public utilities were neglected by Beirut. In addition, the monthly distributions of food rations to thousands of families helped a great deal. Third, the large number of party members distributed across the geographic areas of the Beka'a, al-Dahiyyah and the south definitely helped. Since

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

there are no exact figures about the number of Hizballah members, the activities of the party in election campaigns puts the figure at at least 10,000 in the Bekaa alone. Contrary to widespread belief - or hope - the number of party members (according to al-Ahad) is somewhere in the vicinity of 20,000 with two-thirds of eligible voting age and the rest active among the people.⁶⁵

Fourth, Hizballah's electoral machine was highly skilled and efficient, and rendered impressive results. The electoral network was formed one month prior to the elections and had established headquarters under direct supervision of the leadership. There were reports that Iranian secret intelligence specialists monitored the operations from the main headquarters, beginning with the Bekaa, and moving to Beirut and Ba'abda, and ending up in the south. An estimated 600 party members skilled in techniques of campaigning and thousands of male and female party workers comprised the electoral machine. They worked around the clock contacting eligible voters and transporting needy voters, especially those residing in remote areas. The electoral machine also covered the travel and lodging expenses of the people.⁶⁶

The machine also provided security services in order to ensure the proper and "fair" functioning of the elections. Hizballah operatives worked - in cooperation or in conflict - with the scores of Lebanese police and soldiers who were assigned to patrol the election centres. Many reports surfaced accusing Hizballah of foul play such as allegations that Hizballah operatives interfered many times with voters making sure they were holding the "right" ballot card and voting for Hizballah candidates. Other reports claimed that Hizballah members paid/offered thousands of dollars to government

⁶⁵ Ibid., 332.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 333.

employees to release hundreds of ID cards of deceased citizens to be used by Hizballah members.⁶⁷ Whether these allegations are true or not is irrelevant. What is relevant, rather, is the point that no Lebanese party or traditional leader has ever created as effective an electoral machine as that of Hizballah.

Fifth, the propaganda machine was working overtime issuing fatwas calling on all members and supporters to vote for Hizballah candidates. One such fatwa went as follows:

"Every man will be asked about his vote on judgment day - any adherent to the supreme Islamic interest should hold high the list and drop it as is in the voting box - and it is illicit to elect anybody who is on the list".⁶⁸

Sixth, and more a result of circumstance, the low voter turnout in the 1992 elections was significant in the success of Hizballah. The Lebanese Christians of Mount Lebanon, Beirut and the Israeli-controlled "security zone" boycotted the elections demanding that legislative elections be held after the withdrawal of *all* foreign forces from Lebanese soil. As a result, Hizballah enjoyed a distinct edge. That is not to say that had there not been a boycott that Hizballah would not have won. Rather, it could still have won, but most probably not in Beirut or Ba'abda and with fewer seats in Ba'albek-Hermil and the southern districts.

Hizballah's first parliamentary experience was significant in the party's political objective vis-à-vis the Lebanese system. In association with its four allies, the party formed the most cohesive and strongest political bloc in the 1992 elected parliamentary

⁶⁷ Ibid., 333.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 333.

assembly, known as Wafa' lil Muqawama. Close coordination between the deputies and the party before and after every parliamentary session ensured and enhanced the overall coherence of Hizballah's political position. It was crucial that any potential differences amongst the leaders were never leaked or displayed so as to protect the party's cohesion.⁶⁹ Although the bloc has not represented a threat to the government, it has opposed it as far as possible while remaining within the parameters established by Damascus known as the Saqf al-Sury, or "Syrian Ceiling". For instance, the bloc twice refused - in 1992 and 1995 - to pass a vote of confidence in Hariri's government and rejected a 1996 budget which it deemed "anti-social".⁷⁰ Moreover, Hizballah focuses on corruption which it claims pervades state administration at all levels. It rarely brings up Islamic-related claims, whether on political or merely ethical grounds, focusing much more on constitutional matters, such as denouncing the infringement of public freedom or lack of respect for parliament's prerogatives.

Ultimately, Hizballah has illustrated a political skillfulness which in itself is evidence of the high level of politicization of its leaders. In fact, Lebanese intellectuals or politicians - who are not Hizballah sympathizers - admit that the party is the only militia which has successfully converted into a political party. Furthermore, the party is not "two-faced" - that is, dark and fanatical one moment, pragmatic and reassuring the next. Alternatively, the party has shown itself to be consistent in its stance and careful not to project any hint of uncertainty in the group's political objectives. With regards to the continuing resistance in the south, it has become the basis of Hizballah's domestic

⁶⁹ May Chartouni-Dubarry, "Hizballah: From Militia to Political Party", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace*, eds. Rosemary Hollis and Nadim Shehadi (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1996), 61.

strategy concerning its eternal rivalry with Amal. Subsequently, the resistance has become an integral part in its objective of keeping its Shi'i rival in check. Furthermore, *Operations Accountability* (1993) and *Grapes of Wrath* (1996) have closed the gap between Hizballah and its national and political environment. To borrow words from Dubarry, it can be said that the resistance not only boosted the party's "Lebanonization" process, but it also succeeded in "Lebanonizing" the resistance in the south. Overall, Hizballah's success in the 1992 parliamentary elections indicated the degree of evolution in the Lebanonization process of the organization. According to Augustus Richard Norton, Hizballah's success in 1992 signaled the party's acknowledgement that Lebanon is "sui generis, and that imported Iranian models, however inspiring for certain perspectives, may not be applied in Lebanon."⁷¹

Amal's political position and practices have been an unlikely source of continued success for Hizballah. As Amal gained a major role in the Lebanese political system (Amal leader Nabih Berri is Speaker of parliament), it adopted the very patronage practices of the *zuama* which it first emerged to uproot from the Shi'i community. As a result, many of the organization's supporters felt alienated and betrayed, therefore prompting them to support Hizballah. By the same token, many of the Shia have shifted their support to Hizballah for prosaic reasons: Amal is corruption-ridden and inefficient, whereas Hizballah has demonstrated a fine-tuned sensitivity to its constituency's needs and has sustained a reputation for clean dealing.⁷² It must be noted, however, that these

⁷⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁷¹ Augustus Richard Norton, "Walking Between Raindrops: Hizballah in Lebanon", *Mediterranean Politics* (Summer 1998), 93.

⁷² Augustus Richard Norton, *The Challenge of Inclusion in the Middle East* [Online]. Available: <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/29/016.html>, 3.

shifts in political affiliation do not imply a sudden surge in the Shia community's religiosity. Rather, many of the party's Shi'i supporters - especially among the middle class - are relatively casual in their practice of religion.⁷³ This brings very significant findings regarding the support base of Hizballah to the fore of the discussion. According to Judith Palmer Harik, Hizballah has developed a well-defined and broad-based constituency in Lebanon. The failure of her hypothesis (which states that deep religiosity and political alienation are directly related to support of Hizballah) raises the possibility of other factors characterizing and explaining the party's support base composition.⁷⁴ These factors are important for they will guide any discussion (in Chapter 5) regarding the future growth and direction of Hizballah.

Based on her findings, Hizballah's support base is mixed-class which is related to the territorial dimension of Lebanese politics. Therefore, the influence established by the party's leaders and deputies over various areas - Beirut, Beka'a and the South - envelops all inhabitants regardless of social class.⁷⁵ Wide distribution of benefits - possible through funding - compounded by Amal's failure to convince many of the Shia of the political and economic opportunities of befriending Amal further consolidates the support on which Hizballah stands.

Along the same lines of argument, Norton states that claims made by various observers and analysts concerning the support of Hizballah are inaccurate. Many observers claim that Hizballah enjoys little support with estimates ranging from 20-33%

⁷³ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Pragmatism to Radicalism* [Online]. Available: <http://www.mepc.org/norton58.htm>, 6.

⁷⁴ For more information see Judith Palmer Harik (1996), 62.

⁷⁵ Judith Palmer Harik, "Between Islam and the System: Popular Standing for Lebanon's Hizballah" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (March 1996), 62.

of Shi'ites. Norton retorts arguing that there is no question that the resistance in the south is extremely popular among the Shia, and dismisses claims to the contrary as mere "conjecture" and not based on proper fieldwork, if any at all.⁷⁶ However, whatever the estimates, it must be kept in mind that it is not at all uncommon for political loyalties to be shared between two or more organizations, or not to be lent to any group at all. This factor subsequently hampers any precise estimate of the party's support. This is not to say that arguments concerned with the depth and the durability of Hizballah's support base must be precluded because precise estimates are difficult to ascertain. For the present purpose, though the number of supporters is important, it is irrelevant in the present discussion. What is important is the point that Hizballah's support is strong and runs deep. This is the point which will have implications in upcoming discussions.

Parliamentary Elections: 1996

However, bumps and detours were to emerge on Hizballah's road to political inclusion. One such obstruction was to emerge in 1996 - the country's next parliamentary elections. These elections provide information on how little head room the party has under the Saqf al-Suri. Essentially, the 1996 elections were yet another reminder of how careful Hizballah had to be in its political dealings not to upset Damascus. Whatever leverage it would obtain on the Lebanese political scene was insignificant and could be instantly reversed if Syria was not in approval.

⁷⁶ Augustus Richard Norton, "Walking Between Raindrops: Hizballah in Lebanon" *Mediterranean Politics*, (Summer 1998), 96.

The elections of 1996 were defined by Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri as a "battle between moderation and extremism" - it was rather clear who the enemy was. By the end of the election, Hizballah lost two of its seats - one in Mount Lebanon, the other in Beirut - as a result of the combined weight of Amal and Hariri supporters, whether by strength or electoral fix.⁷⁷ Two weeks prior to the crucial south Lebanon electoral show-down between Hizballah and Amal, an editorial in the daily al-Nahar adequately grasped the feeling of Hizballah's leadership: "Hizballah is facing a merciless war by three powerful leaders (the other is Druze leader Walid Jumblatt)...aimed at clipping the wings of the bird that has outgrown all others so fast that all now panic."⁷⁸ Ironically, Hizballah started to panic also. On September 3rd, Nasrallah counterattacked, claiming that Hariri and his allies were waging an open war on Hizballah, and warning of the consequences should Amal try to rig the the polls against the party in the south. In a show of Syrian mastery, Nasrallah was summoned to Damascus. It was the Syrian position that the so-called "merciless war" had gone on long enough. As a result, Nasrallah and Hizballah eventually submitted to a joint list with Amal.

Clearly, this demonstrated that Hizballah is not fully autonomous in its political dealings. This also brings back the central proposition regarding the relationship between Hizballah and its patrons, especially Syria. As mentioned above, Hizballah is walking a fine line - it has to recognize Syrian influence and adapt its objectives accordingly lest it wants to undo its past political achievements on the political stage. Hizballah will have to keep an eye on the situation unfolding in Syria - and what the Syrians want the

⁷⁷ Graham Usher, "Hizballah, Syria and the Lebanese Elections", *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Winter 1997), 65.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

organization to do - as it continues to conduct itself in accordance with its own political ambition. According to Paul Salem, a Lebanese political analyst, "Hizballah's choices are still governed by Iranian-Syrian relations, and on what these powers agree should be Hizballah's ascribed role in Lebanon."⁷⁹ Clearly, for the foreseeable future, that role is to remain what it has been in the past - less a political challenge to Amal's hegemony over the Shia and more a military resistance to Israel, to be supported and restrained in line with Syrian diplomacy. In light of this, an interesting question surfaces: If Hizballah's worth stems from its military aspect, why would Syria allow or encourage Hizballah's insinuation into Lebanese politics if such a development would potentially jeopardize Syrian interests vis-à-vis Amal? It can be argued that Hizballah's political inclusion serves Syrian interests in that once the party enters the political game, it will eventually be tamed by the raw forces of "politics", thereby facilitating Syria's dealings with the party. In addition, the official political landscape is probably the only semblance of order in which Hizballah can be restricted and monitored. The other alternative would be for the party to be concentrated in the lawless south in its continual resistance against the IDF, thereby weakening Syria's hold on the organization and also increasing the likelihood of a collision between Syria and Israel. The party's conversion into a political player has served Syria well. As the 1996 elections demonstrate, Syria can cut Hizballah down to size if it deems Hizballah's activities detrimental to its Lebanon policy. Many analysts interpret Hizballah's poor(er) performance in 1996 a result of the threat the party posed to Amal (and therefore to the Taif) rather than any future Israeli-Syrian peace agreement. In

⁷⁹ Ibid., 65.

the end, Syria clipped the "wings" of Hizballah, keeping it in check and in line with Syrian interests.

Municipal Elections: 1998

In 1998, Hizballah participated in Lebanon's municipal elections - the first the country held in 35 years. Politically, Hizballah illustrated its ability to function as a grassroots organization with a well-greased electoral machine in various jurisdictions, notably in the Bekaa and the south. Moreover, the party also scored surprise victories in two major Beirut suburban municipalities administratively linked to the mohafaza of Mount Lebanon, despite a coalition led by Berri and Hariri aimed at barring Hizballah's way.⁸⁰ Resorting to tactical alliances, the party's leaders did not rule out joining the Prime Minister's "consensual" list in Beirut due to its higher chance of victory for Hizballah in contrast to the opposition list. However, tight battles were fought in the south between Hizballah and Amal. Hizballah claimed the city of Nabatiyyeh while Amal conquered Tyre. In other villages and towns in southern Lebanon, both parties made inroads into the other's territory, placing both on almost equal footing with one another, but with a slight advantage in favor of Amal.⁸¹ Ultimately, the case of the 1998 municipal elections demonstrates the propensity of Hizballah to bounce back and to recollect itself in the event of political shortcomings such as in the 1996 parliamentary elections. In addition, the party's ability to muster a strong showing in the country's municipal elections is yet another indication of the solidity of Hizballah's support base in Lebanon. Though it does

⁸⁰ Carole Dagher, "Lebanon Holds First Municipal Elections in 35 Years", *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, (1998), 56.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

not enjoy the political backing which Amal enjoys with Damascus, Hizballah can rely on a support cushion which has proven itself loyal to its party.

At this point in the analysis, Hizballah's evolution has been traced from its inception at the end of the 1980s continuing well into the 1990s. This evolution within the process of "Lebanonization" has been accelerated with the organization's insinuation into Lebanon's political establishment. The movement's performance within the landscape of Lebanon's reality thus stretches from its role as a military resistance movement and a social welfare organization to a political party integrated in the legislative powers proving the extent of the evolution of Hizballah. The analysis thus far has assessed the evolution and its impact along several lines - ideologically, and politically both vis-à-vis Syria and Iran and with respect to its political behaviour in the mainstream of Lebanese politics. Essentially, Hizballah has evolved into a serious political player and has therefore learned the rules of the game - both the implicit and explicit - and has illustrated a clear understanding of them via its parliamentary behaviour.

This discussion brings in the theme concerning the effects of inclusion into a country's political system on an organization such as Hizballah. According to Norton, even in fully free and scrupulously conducted parliamentary elections, Islamist movements are unlikely to win 25%-33% of the seats.⁸² Clearly, Hizballah falls into this category, especially when considering Lebanon's structural constraints, in which all Muslim seats account for only 50% of the parliament. The opportunity to participate

⁸² Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism* [Online]. Available: <http://www.mcpc.org/norton58.htm>, 11.

tends to encourage pragmatism and compromise. Given the logic of minority decision-making, any party holding less than 51% of the votes must make bargains in order to get its work done. This certainly applies to Hizballah in Lebanon, which has controlled less than 10% of the seats in Lebanon. Ultimately, Hizballah has "often built political alliances in parliament on pragmatic grounds, while they are the most outspoken members of the dwindling opposition."⁸³ Furthermore, Hizballah has developed a well-defined and broad-based constituency which has enhanced the party's influence. However, the support base which the party enjoys must be put into perspective in order to avoid any erroneous assumptions. A generous estimate places Lebanon's Shia at 40 per cent of the country's population and, of these, a significant percentage do not support Hizballah. In addition, though there are some crossover votes - as in the Beka'a Valley - very few are likely to vote for the party. Therefore, despite the existence of a "broad-based and well-defined" constituency, Hizballah's support base is limited to a minor portion of the country's population. Yet, the party remains the only one that has managed to increase its constituency as a result of its social welfare services. In reference to Hizballah's performance as a political party, they have been able to establish an "efficient and responsive organization that meets many of the needs of its constituents, while avoiding the tag of corruption that taints its political rivals."⁸⁴

Those mentioned factors and realities set the parameters within which Hizballah operates as a political party. As a result, the continual evolution of Hizballah can be directly attributed to the logic of minority decision-making and the aforementioned

⁸³ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 10.

factors associated with it. The more "Lebanonized" Hizballah becomes, the more will its evolution continue, provided - that is - the general political climate residing in the region is favorable for accommodation and compromise amongst the various participants. By extension, it is crucial to keep in mind the claimed relationship between Hizballah and its patrons, in order to appreciate the high degree of sensitivity of Hizballah to regional developments, and, as such, the interconnectedness between events inside Lebanon and regionally. By that logic, any negative developments - be it regionally, or domestically - will have adverse affects on Hizballah's politicization.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Implications

At this point in the analysis, it would be appropriate to recap the discussion thus far and to reiterate crucial elements and points brought forth above. In so doing, the platform will be set for advancing concluding remarks regarding the future of Hizballah. Also, the case study of Hizballah will be assessed in terms of the role of Islamic ideology and its significance in studying Islamist movements elsewhere in the Middle East. This discussion will provide strength to the posited relationship between Hizballah and Syrian, Iranian and Israeli interests and actions. **That is, the dismissal of Islam as an explanation of Hizballah's past, present and future behavior will increase the validity of the relationship advanced in this analysis and the factors isolated to explain the relationship.** Having done so, two major scenarios will be considered in an attempt to determine the future course and status of the organization. Both scenarios are premised on the eventuality of an Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon. However, the difference lies in the Syrian-Israeli dimension to the withdrawal. That is, whether an agreement has been reached satisfying both Israeli and Syrian demands: namely, security along the northern border and the return of the strategic Golan Heights, respectively. Therefore, the first scenario to be discussed is a *unilateral* IDF pullback *without* an agreement with Lebanon and Syria. The second will deal with an IDF withdrawal in conjunction with a comprehensive peace deal satisfying the needs and interests of the involved parties. The implications of the scenarios on Hizballah will be discussed in ending the overall analysis.

The Recap

To summarize the discussion thus far, it is important to note the overall evolution of Hizballah following its inception in 1982 until the present. Having emerged as a resistance organization in reaction to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Hizballah has developed into a social welfare organization – with the launching of its services in 1987 – and later into a political party with Lebanon's parliamentary elections in 1992. The organization is definitely a multi-dimensional actor with activities, interests and objectives spanning a wide and diverse field on the Lebanese domestic stage. Hizballah has emerged as a virtual state-within-a-state providing, defending and representing a people too long ignored by the Lebanese government. Parallel to its evolution, Hizballah has developed a keen sense of politics in that it has demonstrated its ability to understand the dominant political context and conform to the interests of the powers which desire the preservation of such an order - a characteristic which rejects the argument concerning the apparent "irrationality" displayed by Islamist movements. Namely, Hizballah has recognized the supremacy of Syria's position in Lebanon and Damascus' designs regarding the Lebanese. With this in mind Hizballah has been careful not to spoil Syria's designs which would clearly antagonize Damascus. When it was necessary, Hizballah compromised its ideological imperatives in order to stay within the lines dictated by Syria. For instance, the organization's entrance into the political mainstream in Lebanon was seen as its understanding of Syrian and – without a doubt – Iranian interests and objectives. Likewise, Hizballah has been careful not to bite the Iranian hand which is the organization's creator, financier and weapons supplier. Also, despite its enmity towards Israel, Hizballah recognizes the latter's power and ability to inflict hits of destructive

proportions on its infrastructure and the general infrastructure of Lebanon proper. Ultimately, the relationship between Hizballah and its Syrian and Iranian patrons, and with its Israeli foe, has been clearly demonstrated in the preceding analysis.

The multi-dimensional nature of the movement has provided Hizballah with a broad foundation which will guarantee its survival following an Israeli withdrawal. That is, with the cessation of armed conflict, Hizballah will possess its social and political activities thereby ensuring the organization's continued existence. Essentially, its *raison d'être* is not limited to its military resistance to Israeli occupation. With regards to its social arm, it has positive implications for the party's future development. The organization's services have provided the party the ability to develop and maintain a constituency which has enabled it to perform successfully in the country's parliamentary and municipal elections. Hizballah's social activities have provided it with another reason to exist on the Lebanese stage. Ultimately, when considering the party's evolution, it should be noted that the group was established with one major goal, reason or purpose, but has adopted two other major ones along its way.

Hizballah obviously receives a great deal of its legitimacy from its ability to deliver goods to areas and peoples which the central government has not attended to in the past. However, what of the organization's long-term prospects as a major provider of social services? As mentioned, the continuation of the party's social activities depends on the Lebanese government's ability to provide for the Shi'i community what it failed to over the past decades. In addition, a regional peace may have a considerable effect on the amount of support the party enjoys from foreign sources. For instance, the tasks of reconstruction which follow the period of war – especially those in the Shi'i areas – are

so enormous that the assistance of private groups and NGOs will be vital for a considerable period of time if a repeat of civil unrest and war is to be avoided. Another factor to consider is how the reduction or the obsolescence of military activities in the south – evident following a future security arrangement between Israel and Syria – may not necessarily disrupt the party's foreign assistance. Even if Tehran's assistance is reduced further – which is a possibility entertained in the paper – Hizballah's performance vis-a-vis its opponents will remain adequate to maintain and expand its network of believers and beneficiaries, due to the fact that most Lebanese are still suffering from the pinch of the country's postwar economic problems. Furthermore, according to some sources, Hizballah has been busy securing funds and material made available by NGOs to registered Lebanese charities and welfare organizations such as those within the network of the party.⁸⁵ Once again, such information is speculative, but its possibility should not be ruled out altogether since its actuality is not totally infeasible. Furthermore, contributions from expatriate Shia – in addition to Hizballah's own commercial enterprises – now constitute a far greater proportion of the party's finances.⁸⁶ According to the same source, the number of Shia clerics residing in Africa since the beginning of the civil war and numerous Arab benefactors have been filling the organization's coffers. Arab benefactors, for instance, who apparently find the peace process inimical to their political agendas consider the party's links with Hamas of Palestine a nexus worth supporting. Therefore, the better the party's ability to extract funds assistance from sources other than Iran, the less dependent will they be on Tehran

⁸⁵ Judith Palmer Harik, "Between Islam and the System: Popular Standing for Lebanon's Hizballah", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* (March 1996), 63.

thereby providing freedom to operate with minimal consideration of Iranian policy (if the organization so wishes). Essentially, as long as the Lebanese government does not meet the needs of the Shia community, Hizballah will enjoy the necessary base from which to gain sufficient support should its military operations be terminated. The issue of financial support brings Iran's role into question. What are the implications of Iran's supposed reduction in financial support to Hizballah? Obviously, Iran will not enjoy the same privileged level of influence over the organization as in the past. As a result, Hizballah will be able to function independent of Iranian interests if it so desires to. In the end, Iran's role will be reduced to a symbolic one, though this is not to say that they will not possess any leverage over Hizballah. Rather, Iranian relations with the organization will not be severed and its political support of the organization will not subside in the near future. Ultimately, Iran will provide Hizballah with the legitimacy it requires in order to become an influential regional player and to mediate in any disagreements between the organization and Lebanon or Syria..

The Islamic Factor

As an Islamist movement, analysts would be tempted to consider an understanding of Islam in order to understand the actions of Hizballah or other Islamist groups, for that matter. However, as the preceding analysis has aptly demonstrated, ideological considerations are secondary, if not tertiary, when decisions concerning political moves are to be made in different contexts. Instead, it is the interests of the more powerful actors that govern the organization's next move. Measures are taken to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 63.

adapt to new situations even at the expense of ideological integrity and consistency between ideological claims and actions. Islam, rather, serves as a powerful force with which to legitimate and mobilize policies and masses, respectively. Imam Musa's example is a case in point. He realized the mobilization of a previously dormant Shia community through the symbols of Shi'i Islam and its various religious practices, with 'Ashura being the most potent tool. However, Islam did not dictate his political moves and alliances, but a deep-seeded pragmatism which made it difficult for others to predict his moves. Therefore, it is fundamental to recognize that Islamic ideology cannot predict the actions of Islamist movements or offer concrete insight about such organizations or individuals. Flexibility in the face of changing political circumstances is crucial for the success of movements whereas considerations of ideological integrity do not provide the necessary freedom to maneuver in altering contexts. As a result, departures or reversals from initial ideological claims would be expected when deciding to adapt and succeed or resist and fail.

As the Hizballah case has illustrated, departures from initial ideological claims were initiated in order to adapt to new and different circumstances and conditions. Such behavior has facilitated the party's success in accommodating itself to the very situation which emerged following the termination of the civil war in 1990 and the introduction of the post-Taif order. The realization that the party's ideology and overall objectives were no longer feasible following the war was the reason which compelled Hizballah to make necessary adjustments that eventually facilitated its absorption into the mainstream of Lebanese politics. As a result, the likelihood of a "bright" life after resistance was enhanced. Ultimately, since ideological integrity tends to be substituted in the face of

change for realpolitik considerations, the ideological component of a movement therefore cannot serve as an accurate predictor or indicator of actions or future developments of such movements. Rather, factors such as the shifting position, interest, and policies of various regional actors, the changing domestic conditions in Lebanon, and the characteristics of the movement and the Shi'ite community itself play greater roles in the calculus of such groups as the essay has shown.

Hizballah's Attitudes towards Withdrawal

Before proceeding in entertaining the proposed scenarios, it would be necessary to address Hizballah's attitudes towards an Israeli pullout from south Lebanon. As mentioned above, Hizballah has shown its skill in its dealings and therefore – by extension – it understands the rules of the game in Lebanon. Subsequently, the organization's leadership understands that political decisions are a reflection of cost and benefits and relative power. By this logic, Hizballah acknowledges that as long as Israel possesses the capability to respond disproportionately to attacks emanating from the south, it would not be rational to carry the resistance south of the Israel-Lebanon border. Also, there is a marked reluctance amongst the Lebanese – especially the south Lebanese – to continue the conflict following a withdrawal. Aware of the population's reluctance and overall fatigue with the ongoing conflict, Hizballah realizes that provoking Israeli retaliation to cross-border attacks would be a reversal to all the fortunes and successes amassed by the organization over its eighteen year existence. The latter assertion stresses the point that as a political party, the organization is bound by public opinion. If it wants votes (which it obviously does), it must act in accordance with the desires of its

constituency. Ultimately, their refusal to lay down its arms and to give up on destroying Israel would be irrational and self-destructive and the organization's past abandonment of their claim to destroy Israel bears testimony to this realization.

In the past, Hizballah's leadership has maintained a position of "calculated ambiguity" in its presentation of its political motives. Such a tactic has served the organization's purpose by providing it with the flexibility necessary to keep up with changing circumstances, thereby making it harder to locate any sense of contradiction or inconsistency in its political stance. Consequently, such a tactic has made it difficult to accurately and confidently ascertain the organization's moves. However, with the likelihood of an Israeli withdrawal on the horizon, Hizballah's future intentions have begun to emerge from the shadows of obscurity. In an article in *Ha'aretz* dated February 23, 2000, Hizballah's Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah has been quoted as claiming that the organization will conduct political activity within Lebanon and fight with all its strength against normalization – "our clubs will not be a stage for their intellectuals and our markets will not be a place of trade for their goods".⁸⁷ Ultimately, there are indications that Hizballah will continue its resistance, but through a political, rather than a military, medium – Hizballah will continue to be the embodiment of political activism domestically, regionally and internationally.

The Scenarios

All indications point towards an eventual Israeli withdrawal from the occupation zone in south Lebanon. In fact, on March 5, 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak

⁸⁷ Zvi Barei, "Mubarak and Asad Clip Coupons," *Ha'aretz*, 23 February 2000, 2.

won unanimous cabinet backing for his election promise to leave Lebanon by July 2000.⁸⁸ Whether this is yet another unfulfilled election promise is irrelevant. The question is not *if* a pull back is going to happen, but *when* it will materialize. However, the complexity of the matter is in whether a deal is to be made between Damascus and Tel Aviv and the outcome of their dealings on Hizballah.

On this basis, the first scenario deals with a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon without a peace deal with Syria. Syria has insisted that it will not let Israel enjoy its security goals unless the return of the strategic Golan Heights is completed parallel to an IDF pullback from Lebanon. Damascus has utilized the conflict in south Lebanon to apply pressure on Israel to meet and satisfy Syrian interests and demands. The Hizballah chip has served an instrumental purpose for Damascus signalling Asad's satisfaction/dissatisfaction with Israel's policies. Subsequently, Syria's influence over Hizballah raises the former's value as a negotiating partner in future (or present) negotiations. Now, if Israel withdraws without a deal, it is likely that Hizballah will be ordered to fill whatever vacuum may result from a withdrawal and possible dismemberment of the SLA. Syria does not want a collision with Israel and knows that disorder in the South may prompt a nervous Israel to retaliate against Syria. Therefore, Hizballah will be given the green light to play "cop" in the south as long as it makes sure its foot doesn't cross the line into Israel. In the meantime, Syria will have to reconsider its objectives and its strategy in dealing with the Golan. Although Israel has officially claimed that it will withdraw regardless of a deal, there are strong currents in Israeli society calling for a deal with Syria in order to obtain the security assurances the state so

⁸⁸ Aluf Benn, "It's official: IDF ordered out of Lebanon by July," *Ha'aretz*, 6 March 2000, 4.

desires. In the event of such a scenario, it would be safe to assume that Hizballah's future development or position in Lebanon will be put on hold and will enter a period of uncertainty as Syria attempts to achieve its strategic objectives. However, the organization will benefit greatly in near future elections due to its role in the resistance, which may force the central government to consider Hizballah a partner in future development projects in the south. As long as Syria's objectives regarding the Heights are not met, however, Hizballah will continue to be a pawn in Asad's checks and counter-checks to Israeli moves and initiatives thereby temporarily limiting the organization's future development.

The second scenario involves an Israeli withdrawal under the provisions of a Syrian/Lebanese-Israeli agreement. The likelihood of this scenario lies in the fact that many powerful interests have been and are being invested in ensuring its occurrence. Syria and Israel both desire a stable Lebanon – a theme which recalls the two actors' traditional attitudes towards Lebanon. It is in their interest that the stability of Lebanon is guaranteed, which also guarantees their respective security concerns. In addition, Syria and Israel both hold the keys to the strategic security concerns of the other. These factors are compounded by the fact that the United States and France – among other Western states – desire the normalization of relations along the Lebanon-Syria-Israel axis.

At this point, what is to be expected in the development of Hizballah in the event of a "positive" outcome to the 22 year long stalemate in the south? Once Syria has satisfied its agenda vis-a-vis Israel and Lebanon – dependent on an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese and Syrian territory – Damascus would be expected to turn off the weapons supplies to Hizballah and enforce the group's disarmament. According to Giles

Trendle, Hizballah's Nasrallah, who is fully aware of Syrian influence and power in Lebanon, "privately accepts this scenario for peace whereby Syria would give the necessary assurances to Israel on his behalf that his party would cease its military activity once Israel agreed to a withdrawal."⁸⁹ Ultimately, withdrawal and disarmament would take place simultaneously. According to Norton, it will be a relatively simple matter for the Lebanese Army to disarm Hizballah due to the aforementioned fact that the organization's *raison d'être* is not limited to bombs and bullets.⁹⁰

The role of Hizballah following the withdrawal will without a doubt be limited to its social and political wings. That is not to argue that its importance will fade or that the organization will disappear altogether. The party's organizational roots now penetrate the Shia community and they are not easily uprooted. Even with a withdrawal, Hizballah's reputation will benefit from its leading role in the resistance, which is widely admired in Lebanon, especially among the Shia.⁹¹ In fact, it will continue to counter Amal's influence in the Shia community. Though there are players who wish to see Amal predominate within the community, Hizballah enjoys strong enough support to spoil Amal's goals and objectives for its ambitions of uncontested leadership in the community. The Amal-Hizballah rivalry brings forth an interesting point. With the assertion that Syria clipped Hizballah's wings between the parliamentary elections of 1992 and 1996, there is the possibility that the Syrians and Israelis might very well

⁸⁹ Giles Trendle, "Hizballah: Pragmatism and Popular Standing", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace*, eds. Rosemary Hollis and Nadim Shehadi (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1996), 64.

⁹⁰ Augustus Richard Norton, "Israel in the Grip of the Insecurity Zone", in *Lebanon on Hold: Implications for Middle East Peace*, eds. Rosemary Hollis and Nadim Shehadi (London: Royal Institute for International Affairs, 1996), 40.

collaborate, each for their own reasons, in strengthening AMAL within the community. The likelihood of such collaboration is not far-fetched when considering the convergence of interests of the two during the civil war. And, as previously mentioned, Hizballah's asset is military and – therefore - the organization may well become disposable in Syria's eyes following an Israeli withdrawal. Though the prospect of Syria eliminating Hizballah should be ruled out since it would disrupt the communal balance in Lebanon, Damascus may, however, seek – with Israel's help – to weaken Hizballah. The weakening of Hizballah would serve two extended purposes. On the one hand, a weak Hizballah would entail a strong Amal at the head of the community ensuring the "proper" integration of the community into the mosaic of Lebanon's confessional identity. In addition, a Shia community under the leadership of the secular-nationalist Amal would be more in tune with the ideological and, hence, Syria's political-strategic designs for Lebanon. With regards to Israel, Amal is the lesser of two evils in that a secular organization is the preferred opponent rather than a religiously motivated movement with strong links to a hostile Iran. In a similar vein, weakening Hizballah would undermine Iran's leverage and reach into Lebanon and – in general – into the region. This would eliminate any source of opposition or friction to/with Syrian motives. Also, the possibility of bringing the two rivals under the same umbrella should not be ruled out as well. It would not be surprising to have Syria broker a deal between Hizballah and AMAL in coming elections so as to thwart political violence and prevent either party from gaining the upper hand in the strategic south.

⁹¹ Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizballah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?* [Online]. Available: <http://www.mcpc.org/norton58.htm>, 13.

Ultimately, Hizballah is to enjoy a life after resistance. However, this is not to say that the life will be void of challenges and battles. There are many forces that would prefer the weakening of the organization. But the movement is well prepared with its deeply entrenched foot in the Shia community and its well-established presence in the Lebanese parliament to remain on the scene for some time. In addition, Hizballah is sufficiently consolidated – internally – to avoid any such factionalism with regards to its future trajectory. Following the “defection” of Sobhi al-Tufayli in 1998, there is no evidence of dissent within the rank of Hizballah. However, it would be difficult to adequately address the issue since the party has been careful to prevent any signs of internal dissent to tarnish its image publicly. The new political theory of continuing the political jihad and the yielding of armed hostility with Israel has been well ingrained in the organization and accepted as the future course to be charted. Essentially, pragmatism and self-interest now determine the behavior of the organization and it is being understood that the interests of the movement rest in the acceptance of the newly emerging political context. With the strengthening of the central government and Lebanon’s emphasis on internal security, Hizballah is aware that opposing these political currents is too costly.

On the regional level, the continuing emergence and consolidation of the moderate line in Iran, especially with the election of President Mohammed Khatami in 1997 and the reformer’s recent success in the country’s 2000 parliamentary elections, have contributed to the continual evolution of Hizballah’s pragmatic behavior. Conversely, if the regional dynamics were to evolve in a negative direction, however, especially if the prospect for a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace were to deteriorate, it

would have an adverse effect on Hizballah's attitudes and positions in the sense of reversing the trend toward pragmatism.

At the moment, the future of the organization is in limbo as both Syria and Israel continue to play the game of move and counter-move with the goal of getting the most out of the other without igniting a fire waiting to be lit. For now, Hizballah will have to continue to play the role of the keen observer and to be careful not to spoil any potential gains for its Syrian master, and by extension, for itself. The party will continue to use its celebrated role in the resistance in order to further entrench itself in the Shia community and to prepare itself for its political life following the proposed Israeli withdrawal in July 2000. As Hizballah continues to "Lebanonize", the logic of force it understood and advocated is gradually and inevitably being replaced by the logic of the ballot box, majority rule and democracy. The battlefield is slowly moving away from the villages and mountains of South Lebanon to the Lebanese Parliament. Hizballah may have been successful in overcoming a major hurdle in its development, but it will have to keep its head up as it will inevitably encounter more as a full-fledged Lebanese political party.

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