

Irregular Warfare and Non-State Combatants: Israel and Hezbollah

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War in the 21st century is witnessing more and more the phenomenon of asymmetric warfare between combatants of unequal military power. This is exemplified by the mujahideen war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the war FARC is waging against the government in Colombia, and Hezbollah's insurgency against Israel's occupation of South Lebanon for more than 20 years.

In this paper I will present, assess and analyse the causes and consequences of the summer 2006 war between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Lebanese Islamist group Hezbollah. I will begin by briefly presenting Hezbollah's Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah's rationale and justification for his group's goal and vision during that war. I will then move on to give a local, regional and global analysis of the causes and consequences of the IDF-Hezbollah war. This will be followed by scrutiny of a book by Sheikh Naim Qassem in which he explains his perspective on Hezbollah's ideology, social, political and economic roles; its views of Islam and how it informs Hezbollah's overall actions both inside Lebanon and at the regional and global levels.

Nasrallah and the Summer 2006 War: An initial Assessment

In a press conference called on 12 July 2006 Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah detailed the goals and objectives of Operation Waad al Sadek (Honest Promise) against Israel. The promise was to free his party's members in Israeli jails. Hezbollah had been planning this attack since the year 2000 when Israeli troops were forced out of South Lebanon.

In this speech and other statements Nasrallah tried to convey a sense of calm and self-confidence. The Party of God chief did not consider the possibility of a major Israeli retaliation for the killing and kidnapping of its soldiers on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Nasrallah mentioned efforts made for a ceasefire "called for by the Israelis". He rejected those appeals and stated his group's "readiness for a confrontation beyond what the enemy can imagine".

A few hours after Hezbollah elements had penetrated Israeli lines to kidnap three Israeli soldiers and kill others, Nasrallah tried to downplay the event. He talked of the disarray and weakness in the ranks of the Israelis, "the Zionists and the great American Satan". By grouping these forces together Nasrallah wanted to underscore the power of the coalition he and his forces were facing in the war.

Nasrallah went on to recall that in October 2000 three Israeli soldiers were kidnapped and killed. The Israeli reaction was limited to local acts of retaliations against Hezbollah positions. In light of that reaction Nasrallah did not expect a large scale Israeli retaliation. "Usually the Israeli first says no then yes. In a week or a year Israel will finally invite us to negotiate."

The July-August 2006 war against Israel was also defined as a "divine victory". For Nasrallah this victory "was the first historic Arab victory in the struggle against the Zionist enemy. Hezbollah's victory occurred despite the "imbalance in forces on the ground" and the fact that most Arab and Muslim leaders, and the world at large, had abandoned the Islamist group to fight the war that humiliated the enemy and astounded the world.

Hezbollah's military philosophy revolves around the guerrilla-based concept of "Muslim resistance". The Islamist group considers its fighters to have both a military and civilian role. These fighters live as civilians among the population at large, but are part of a military strategy. This "defensive strategy" as defined by Hezbollah is based on an immediate retaliation to any Israeli attack against Hezbollah militants hiding within the civilian population.

The Lebanese Shia Islamist group sees its fighters as wholly integrated into the civilian population during times of peace. In times of war Hezbollah fighters become a well-trained, disciplined and well-coordinated military force. This coordination is maintained with the support of the civilian population and all this is carried out independently of the Lebanese Army or government. Hezbollah, like the PLO before it, has established itself as a state within a state. It is a transnational military and political organisation receiving direction from external powers such as Iran and Syria.

The leader of Hezbollah does not trust international laws and conventions. "Unlike many in our nation, I have never believed that there is such a thing called an international community". (From a July 14, 2006 speech). Nasrallah believes that his group had to take the law into its own hands in order to liberate the occupied land in South Lebanon and free the prisoners in Israeli jails.

For Hezbollah and its leader the world today, because of ("savage" and "imperialist") globalization, is characterised by exploitation and unequal distribution of wealth thanks to the countries of the North exploiting the poor peoples of the underdeveloped South.

2006 was a year that saw the Land of Cedars once again take centre stage in the Middle Eastern maelstrom. This is not the first time this small Mediterranean country has been used as a convenient battleground for regional and global actors¹.

¹ For further details see the excellent book by Waddah Sharara, *Dawlat Hezbollah: Lubnaan Mujtamaa Islamiyyan (Hezbollah's State: Lebanon as an Islamic Society)* Beirut: Lebanon: Dar An Nahar, Fourth Edition, 2006. Other important books published in Arabic in the aftermath of the July 2006 war include Mohammad Husayn Bazzi, *Al Waad Al Sadeq: Yawmiyyat al Harb al-Sadisat (The Truthful Promise: Diary of the Sixth War)*. Beirut: Lebanon: Dar Al Ameer, 2006. See also, *Yawmiyyat Al Harb al Israiliyyaala Lubnaan 2006 (Diary of the Israeli War on Lebanon 2006)*. Beirut: Lebanon: Dar As Safir, 2006. This is one of the most comprehensive documentations of the war published by As Safir, one of Lebanon's major daily newspapers.

Background to the 2006 Lebanon War

There are several factors explaining the events that led to the summer 2006 war between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah:

- (1) The internal situation in Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri;*
- (2) The emergence of Iran as a major player in the Middle East following the US war in Iraq;*
- (3) The role of Syria, that has never accepted its ousting from Lebanon in the spring of 2005;*
- (4) Israel's concern with the Palestinian situation, and*
- (5) The US administration's inability to implement the "global war on terror" and the uncontrollable situations in Iraq and Afghanistan².*

Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1989) the country has gone through a period of amazing reconstruction shepherded by the late Prime Minister al-Hariri. Thanks to his contacts and global friendships, al-Hariri brought back to Lebanon a respect it had lost and a role it used to have. The major drawback was that he focused on physical reconstruction at the expense of reconciliation between the Lebanese.

In fact, reconciliation between Lebanon's various communities did not really take place. The Christians in particular wound up feeling defeated and betrayed while the Sunnis and the Shias took more control of the instruments of power in the country. Unlike South Africa and some Latin American countries, there has never been a truth and reconciliation commission to "police the past" in Lebanon.

The other major fault line in this scenario is Hezbollah's ever-increasing role and influence in Lebanon. Created following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah became a major linchpin of the resistance against the occupation. The party's leadership succeeded, thanks to Syria and Iran's help, in creating a large network of institutions to answer the various social and humanitarian needs of the population of South Lebanon.

Hezbollah, mostly dominated by Lebanese Shias, became the paramount military and social power in South Lebanon. Calls to send Lebanese troops to the border with Israel were always met with resistance. The summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah demonstrates how mistaken this was. This is why, almost one month after the beginning of the Israeli campaign, Lebanon's government offered to send 15,000 Lebanese army troops to the border.

Following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (in February 2005) UN Security Council Resolution 1559 was adopted calling for the exit of all foreign troops from Lebanon (in this case meaning Syria) and the dismantling of Hezbollah as a militia. The rationale was that Israel had ended its occupation of South Lebanon and the Hezbollah resistance movement had become moot, but this was not Hezbollah's interpretation. For the Shia-dominated militia Israel was still in occupation of the Shebaa Farms (an area of around 20-25 square kilometers in South Lebanon) and this justified it keeping its weapons.

² For a recent and thorough analysis of Lebanon see Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007)

Iran and Syria: Regional Spoilers?

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, regional politics in the Middle East have changed. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wanted to export his brand of fundamentalist Islam throughout the Middle East, the Muslim world, and Lebanon with its large Shia community became a favourite target for Tehran's entreaties.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 consolidated Iran as a major player in the region. The Shiite arc of influence now extended all the way from Tehran to Basrah, to Beirut. The Iranian regime took advantage of the fragmentation of Iraq to extend its influence and presence in southern Iraq. Hezbollah, meanwhile, is a convenient instrument for Iran's disruptive policies against US interests in the region.

Another major player is Syria. The Syrian regime has never formally acknowledged Lebanon as a sovereign entity. Proof has always been evident in the absence of embassies representing the two countries in each other's capitals. In 1976, with US and Israeli support, President Hafez al-Assad of Syria sent his troops to Lebanon to maintain a state of controlled tension. Syria played willing Lebanese factions off against each other to maintain its supremacy. With Washington's tacit support, Syrian suzerainty over Lebanon lasted for thirty years.

The late Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri challenged Syria's pre-eminent role in Lebanon. He lobbied hard with his European and American friends to have the UN adopt a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the disarming of Hezbollah. In the spring of 2005, following al-Hariri's assassination, Syria was forced to pull its troops out of the country.

Israel in the Lebanese Quagmire: Plus Ça Change!

Since Ariel Sharon assumed power in Israel and throughout his period of leadership, the Palestinian issue, and especially the demographic dimension of the conflict, became a foremost concern. Sharon decided to build a wall (or "separation fence" to use the official Israeli description) around most of the West Bank. He also decided to undermine Hamas' regional connections. Since the beginning of the Second Intifada (2001), pro-Syrian and Iranian groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah had forged a close political and military alliance. The victory of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections in early 2006 forced the Israelis to get rid of Hamas and undermine its legitimacy as a democratically elected authority. We now face the prospect of weak leaders trying to find an unattainable compromise: Ehud Olmert in Israel, Muhammad Abbas in Palestine, and Fouad Siniora in Lebanon. This does not bode well for the prospects of a lasting peace in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The US, Europe and America's Arabs

In the months preceding the war, the Bush administration's objectives of fighting terrorism and bringing democracy to the Middle East lay in shambles. Sensing a possible US decision to whittle down its military presence in Iraq, and given Iran's rising influence in the region, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided to hit Lebanon. The joint US-Israeli vision was to establish a "New Middle East". The concept is something of an oxymoron, and a dangerous one at that.

Among Arab intellectuals there was talk of the similarities between this new policy and ideas attributed to some Israeli and American circles about dividing the region along ethnic and sectarian lines: a Shia state in southern Iraq; a Kurdish state in northern Iraq; a Sunni rump state protected by Egypt and Saudi Arabia; Alawi, Sunni and Druzes entities in Syria; and,

lastly, the partition of Lebanon into a Christian, Sunni, Shia and Druzes enclaves. The purpose of this "balkanisation" - according to these circles - would be to ensure Israel's hegemony as a Jewish state in a confessionally fragmented region. Certainly, this is a prescription for disaster and will portend to never ending wars and terrorism in the Middle East and around the world.

The Summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and the Israel Defence Forces was a harbinger of the new realities emerging in the Middle East. First, the war in Lebanon was the longest confrontation between the Israeli army and an irregular militia. As a result, Hezbollah has emerged as a major player in future Lebanese and regional politics. And second, by using Hezbollah as its regional instrument, Iran has emerged as a major power, particularly as a protector of Shias in the Middle East. Moreover, Iran will be an inevitable interlocutor for the US and Britain regarding the future of Iraq.

Europe and the West had to undergo a major paradigm shift. The West's Arab interlocutors have changed. Those in the Middle East who wanted to bring democracy and liberalisation to the region have been defeated by the war in Lebanon. The West will have to learn to talk to and accept a more radical Islamist vision of the region.

Winners and Losers of the Summer 2006 War

The confrontation ended with the adoption by the UN Security Council (August 11) of Resolution 1701. In it the international community set out the principles of a lasting solution to the crisis. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 called for a "full cessation of hostilities" between Hezbollah and Israel and reiterated the international community's "strong support for full respect of the Blue Line" (separating Israel and Lebanon); It also called for the "full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taef Accord" (1989) - that ended the Lebanese civil war - and the disarmament "of all armed groups in Lebanon".

Resolution 1701 also involved the release of the abducted Israeli soldiers and the Lebanese prisoners, and the delineation of borders, especially in the Shebaa Farms area. Finally, it called for the deployment of 15,000 troops to be added to the UNIFIL contingent in South Lebanon. France, Spain and Italy provided half of this number.

The biggest losers of the war included the Israeli government, the Lebanese people (initial assessment of the direct costs of the war amounted to 2,464 billion dollars), the Bush Administration's "global war on terror" and the US campaign to promote democracy in the Middle East.

For many US, European and Middle Eastern observers the major winner was Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Nasrallah became a hero in the Arab world by succeeding in confronting the most potent army in the Middle East for more than four weeks.

The Summer 2006 war a major wake-up call to the Israeli government and army. Ehud Olmert's policy of unilateral disengagement from Gaza and the West Bank had received a major blow and lost credibility in Israeli public opinion. Israel will not accept the current status quo and will do its best to mete a major defeat to its bitter Shia enemy in Lebanon.

After the Lebanon War: Trends and Outlooks

Lebanon will have to be rebuilt once again. An ironclad guarantee will have to be put in place that its southern borders will never be used as a launching pad against Israel. This means the introduction of a major international peacekeeping force or expanding the current UN troops (UNIFIL) mandate, placing it under UN Charter Chapter VII.

The 2006 war led to a new realignment in the region. Iran succeeded in maintaining its influence both in Iraq and Lebanon and will do its utmost to maintain its nuclear weapons program. These factors will be Iran's trump card for a possible negotiation or confrontation with the US.

A possible redrawing of regional influence, with Iran being allowed a right of suzerainty over Iraq, especially its Shia-dominated region, may come about. Israel would be allowed to maintain its control of what is left of the West Bank, while Egypt and Jordan could meanwhile be brought in to somehow participate in this condominium. The regime in Syria will survive, but with clipped wings and some kind of indirect influence in Lebanon.

The implications for the US and the "global war on terrorism" were that there were more recruits available to Al-Qaeda and its cohorts, especially following the disasters in Lebanon and Iraq. This is why it was of utmost urgency for the US and the international community to end the Israel-Hezbollah war in Lebanon and help the country get on with reconstruction. Lebanon urgently needs a strong central government with a well-trained army. The big challenge now is how to create a lasting solution that would satisfy all factions.

The Lebanese still have to reach a final agreement on three basic issues:

- (1) The viability of the Taef Accords and whether they are still applicable in the current situation, especially in light of the changes brought about by the 2006 war;*
- (2) The role Lebanon should play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;*
- (3) Whether Lebanon should implement economic policies reflecting a situation of war or peace.*

There is going to be a period of instability until a new President is elected in October. As a playground for regional and global tensions, Lebanon will have to await the outcome of the following events:

- (1) The results of the current Iranian-Saudi talks;*
- (2) Syria's struggle to get out of its isolation and what kind of role Damascus will play in Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine;*
- (3) A stronger Israeli leadership;*
- (4) The results of the current debate in the US over what course to follow with the Iranian regime: diplomacy or military action³.*

³For further details on Hezbollah and the June 2006 war see Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 2007. See also Franck Mermier and Elizabeth Picard, *Liban: Une Guerre de 33 Jours*, Paris, France: Editions La Decouverte, Paris 2007.

Hezbollah's Foundation and Origins

As previously stated, one of the purposes of this study is to look at the military and religious philosophy guiding Hezbollah. To tease out the Lebanese Islamist group's visions and goals I have relied extensively on a seminal book written by Sheikh Naim Qassem, a founding member of Hezbollah who has been the party's Deputy Secretary General since 1991.⁴

In the early 1960s, Lebanon witnessed the beginning of a new clerical movement that served to reinvigorate Islam's key principles in both clerical and political terms. The three leading Shia clerics were: Imam Mussa al-Sadr (who founded the "Movement of the Oppressed" as well as "The Ranks of Lebanese Resistance" [Amal]), Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine (who dedicated most of his life to intellectual work as well as leading the Shia community) and Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Hezbollah's spiritual guide. Each one of them had their own approach, practical logic and plan of action, but they all shared a belief in the necessity of taking action to trigger a change in the prevalent living conditions of Lebanese Shiites.

During the early years of Hezbollah, the name of Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah was closely associated with the Party. He was a symbol of many ideological concepts within the Party, guiding Hezbollah through a mature vision of Islam and of the Islamic movement, and supporting Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Revolution's leader in Iran.

Even though he was often considered by both local and international media and political observers as Hezbollah's spiritual leader, Sayyed Fadlallah always refused any participation in organised Hezbollah activity and opted to remain a cleric supporting those Party directives that he deemed harmonious with his views. Lebanese Islamists divided their allegiances among Amal (the only political movement at the time), the various Islamic committees, the missionary faction and the independents.

*In 1979, the Iranian Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini found victory, which came in tandem with a rising and insistent need for political revitalisation in Lebanon. Soon Ayatollah Khomeini was deigned the leading religious authority within the Shiite congregation (where "interpretative judgement" - *ijtihad* - is possible and where subjects are required to follow the religious interpretation of the more learned among the living clerics) and the concern for a need to build a united Islamic organisation emerged.*

*Thus a number of representatives of the main Islamic groups began discussions about their perceptions of Islamic activity in Lebanon. Results of these discussions were summarised in a final document, the "Manifesto of the Nine", which declared the following three objectives: (1) Islam is the comprehensive, complete and appropriate programme for a better life; (2) Resistance against Israeli occupation requiring the creation of jihad (holy war); (3) The legitimate leadership is that of the Jurist-Theologian (*wilayat al-faqih*) who is considered to be the successor to the Prophet and the Imams. This document was presented to Ayatollah Khomeini, who granted his approval, thereby bestowing upon himself custodianship as Jurist-Theologian. Various Islamic groups then adopted the manifesto thus dissolving their existing organisations in favour of this new framework, which later came to be known as Hezbollah.*

All of these developments took place at a time of Iranian solidarity with Lebanon and Syria. Syria agreed to the passage of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard into Lebanon, and training camps were set up in the Western Bekaa Valley district.

⁴ Sheikh Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah: Al Manhaj...Al Tajriba...Al Mustaqbal* (Hizbullah: The Method, The Experience, The Future). Beirut, Lebanon, Dar Al-Hadi, Third Edition 2004. This book is also available in English, Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*. London, England: SAQI, 2005. Most of the quotes in this study are taken from the English version of Qassem's book.

Thus the three main objectives that represent the main pillar on which Hezbollah is founded are: (1) Belief in Islam; (2) Jihad; and (3) Jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian.

(1) Belief in Islam

Hezbollah considers Islam both as a conviction and a code of law. As a code of law, the Sharia is thus considered to be clearly described in both the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's Noble Mores (Sunna) and to cover all of humankind's needs.

In contrast to the Sharia's permanent rules, Shiites allow a wide margin to accommodate change, and keep pace with any place and age. Islam has, for example, sets guidelines for a "good" governor or leader while leaving the choice of government framework up to that leader. As such, the question of forming a government is left free of strict rules and electing a president could be through direct popular vote or through a parliament.

Even though Sharia appears, on an intellectual level, to call for the establishment of an Islamic state, on a practical level Hezbollah considers that such a state should be based on free public choice. The Party aspires to be in a position to unify Islam's various schools of thought, an undertaking in which various religious jurists have failed over hundreds of years, but Qassem considers the quest to find common ground on a political level more important. "The requirement is for us to be together in the confrontation of challenges and not to dissipate time trying to determine the gender of angels while our land is being robbed and our future is under the menace of world hegemony".⁵

(2) Jihad

Jihad (or holy war) has its root in the verb "to struggle", or "to strive". It signifies endeavouring and making every effort to battle against the enemy. It is considered to bear a great influence on the trajectory of a Muslim's life and considered to be an integral part of one's true belief.

"The Prophet (PBUH) expressed this meaning upon his reception of a group of Muslims just back from combat: 'Welcome to a troop that has fulfilled that smaller jihad (battle) and whom the bigger jihad still awaits.' When asked of that bigger challenge, the Prophet (PBUH) answered: 'Jihad with the soul'."⁶ It is thus considered the duty of all believers of Islam to "refuse and confront oppression, and to struggle with their inner selves towards the victory of virtue, justice, human rights and uprightness" for which they are promised reward on the Day of Resurrection⁷.

Military jihad is considered by the clerics to take two forms: (1) Groundwork jihad, which is confrontation between Muslims and others, and entry into others' lands for reasons not tied to the reclamation of land or the fighting off of aggression. This form of jihad is not considered applicable in our present day. (2) Defensive jihad, which is the defence by Muslims of their land, their people or themselves upon facing aggression or occupation. This latter is not only considered legitimate, but also a duty of all true Muslims⁸. The woman's role in this context is to give support and help with recruitment. No religious commandment requires from women this form of sacrifice given the sufficient number of men.

On the issue of martyrdom, Qassem writes: "All that the enemy is capable of is implanting the fear of death in us. When we halt this fear, we render the power of death with which he menaces us futile... martyrdom fills a significant gap in the imbalance of power. Attempting to defeat the enemy with the minimum possible bloodshed is a duty."

⁵ Qassem, p. 32

⁶ Qassem, p.34

⁷ Qassem, p. 36

⁸ Qassem, p.39

(3) Jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian (*al-Wali al-Faqih*)

Muslims believe that the Prophet is the messenger, the bearer of the holy doctrine of the Sharia, who has been inspired to see to its execution and to define the nation's path towards fulfilment. Following the Prophet in referential supremacy are the infallible Imams, starting with the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb and ending with Imam al-Mahdi⁹.

Their role is to interpret and clarify the various aspects of the Message, and monitor its proper execution. In the absence of such interpretations given by the Imams, experts and clerics are charged with clarifying what falls under the realm of duty and what it excludes, what is approved of and what is forbidden.

Implementation is considered to take two forms: One is individual and linked to forms of worship, treatment of others and all that is related to personal and daily life. The other is general and pertinent to the nation as a whole, its interests, its wars, peace, and overall direction.

Shiites consider that only through the Jurist-Theologian's guardianship and custodianship can the preservation and the implementation of Islam be achieved, since it is him who is charged with defining a clear path to bring the nation together. It is him who has the authority to decide on issues of war and peace. He is also custodian of the nation's wealth as collected through *zaqat* and *khums* and other sources. He sets the guidelines for any Islamic state upon its inception, guiding it towards abidance by doctrinal jurisprudence and to preservation of its constituents' interests in accordance with Islam¹⁰.

Following Islam's implementation by the Jurist-Theologian, the tasks of "administration and oversight of details and particulars; implementing procedures; daily political, social and cultural work; and jihad against Israeli invaders" are considered the responsibilities of Hezbollah's leadership. Such authority is reflected in substantial independence at the practical level, not necessitating direct or daily supervision by the Jurist-Theologian.

The Relationship with Iran

Regarding its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qassem writes that since its creation, Hezbollah saw a possibility for achieving its goals and aspirations through the backing and reinforcement offered by the Republic. Qassem sees many reasons behind the success of the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah of which he considers the most important to be the following: (1) The common framework of international leadership legitimacy (since both Iran and Hezbollah believe in the jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian, and that Imam Khomeini was himself that leader); (2) Harmony at the theoretical level (although the detailed application of general guidelines is subordinate to the particular characteristics of each country); (3) Common political views (specifically those concerning the support of all liberation movements, especially those aimed at resisting Israeli occupation).

Qassem stresses that the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah is not one in which a weaker party is consecrated to the will of a stronger one, but in which the aims of both are realised through independent action.

⁹ Qassem, p.51

¹⁰ Qassem, p.54

Relations with Syria

Throughout the reign of the late Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, Syria adopted a policy of holding back Israel's projects, promoting Arab solidarity, supporting resistance against occupation and cooperating with all allies towards this end.

After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Iran declared its support for Syria and its readiness to carry out the orders of Imam Khomeini and dispatch its Islamic Revolutionary Guard to support Lebanon in its confrontation of the occupation. President al-Assad agreed to this, and the Guard passed via Syria into Lebanon to train the youth who were to form Hezbollah and fight the Israeli occupation. Thus the relationship between Hezbollah and Syria was initially restricted to coordination on security issues, facilitation of the movement of activists and their arms and handling any emerging problems. It did not extend to a political relationship.

The first ideological and political discussion between Hezbollah and Syria, which took place after the clashes between the Amal militia and Hezbollah in June 1988, led Syrian forces to infiltrate Beirut's southern suburbs under the banner of separating the fighting parties and re-establishing security. In the meeting requested by the Hezbollah leadership, President al-Assad reassured the Party leaders that its deployment of forces in the region was only for security reasons and there was no intention for Syrian troops to side with Amal, as Hezbollah feared. This first meeting between Syria and Hezbollah leaders laid down the foundations for continuous political discussions over common issues, primarily related to the conflict with Israel.

The US, Europe and the United Nations

The United States:

With the fall of the USSR in 1989, the US became the most influential power in the region and gradually removed France and Britain from their colonialist status, imposing its policies in all areas.

Qassem sees the problem plaguing any relationship or dialogue with the US since then in the "political supremacy of this single world power".¹¹ Furthermore, the US categorised the Islamic resistance in Lebanon as a form of terrorism, further reinforcing the inequality that characterises relations between Hezbollah and the US. He stresses that the US also instigated an internal attack in Lebanon in an attempt to distract the resistance and ensured that the occupied zone in Lebanon would play a key role in any security guarantees or political agreements to be signed with Syria or Lebanon¹².

Qassem says that, until recently, Hezbollah considered calls for meetings and dialogue from some US Congress officials to be futile, and thus rejected them despite frequent requests conveyed through both Lebanese and non-Lebanese officials. "The US does not take any detailed step or perform any action whatsoever unless this directly feeds the pre-drawn policy of supporting Israel" he argues.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Qassem, p.247

The European West:

Even though the French and British attempted to benefit from their colonial past in the Middle East by maintaining roles there, the European influence in the region has steadily declined over the past two decades with the rise of the US as a unilateral world power. In contrast to its relations with the US, Hezbollah has been able to maintain relations with Europe, largely because the Party doesn't feel there is any threat of direct aggression from Europe.

Hezbollah perceives the role that Europe has chosen to adopt as a catalyst for tempering US unilateralism and thus representing a different Western role, notwithstanding the lack of support for human rights manifested by Europe after the Jenin massacres and other Israeli violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories¹³.

According to Qassem, Hezbollah considers that given the mutual interest in developing positive relations between the Party and Europe (even if Hezbollah is somewhat cautious about Britain's pro-US policy) channels should remain open.

The United Nations Security Council:

Regarding relations with the United Nations and its Security Council, Qassem writes that Hezbollah does not question the importance of having an international forum for resolving international disputes and considers that international issues need a coordinator at such a level.

It criticises the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council, however. Thus, like many members of the UN today, Hezbollah urges "the reconsideration of the rights of certain countries to use the power of veto" as well as "the substitution of this decision-making mechanism with another that serves to reinstate international justice".¹⁴

Hezbollah's Assessment: One Year On

In an extensive interview with the Lebanese newspaper As Safir (September 5, 2006) Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General, gave his own assessment of the July 2006 war¹⁵. Nasrallah began by expressing his distress that the results of his party's "divine victory" would be lost in the Byzantine meandering of Lebanese politics. The war did not receive unanimous support among the Lebanese. Some officials in the Lebanese government, and other sectarian leaders, expressed their total opposition to Hezbollah's decision to kidnap the Israeli soldiers and wage an all-out war against a powerful military opponent. But even though there were divisions within the Shia community, they were put aside to rally behind Hezbollah's war effort.

Nasrallah defended his actions by stating that the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers was an attempt by Hezbollah to pre-empt an Israeli plan to attack Lebanon in October 2006. "We made them lose the element of surprise," he explained. "We forced on them timing other than what had been precisely prepared. We were ready and mobilised and they were not."¹⁶

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Qassem, p.258-259

¹⁵ Yawmiyyat al-Harb al-Isra'iliyya ala Lubnaan 2006, op.cit

¹⁶ Ibid, p.248-259

Conclusions and Recommendations

The war between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Lebanese Shia militia Hezbollah is a harbinger of future wars in the Middle East and other parts of the world. Unlike conventional war, it saw the most powerful army in the Middle East battling against a popularly supported insurgency movement. What distinguishes this war is the question of feasibility that arises over the use of conventional warfare against an insurgent group relying heavily on guerrilla warfare and religious convictions. The other dimension that is worthy of attention is its regional implications, especially with regard to the Iranian factor.

Since the inception of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the coming to power of Ayatollah Khomeini, a new factor has been added to the concept of military warfare. The Iranians used classic guerrilla warfare tactics to spread their Islamic teachings and extend their influence, while the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 marked the beginning of a new era in Iranian-Israeli hostilities through proxies.

What distinguishes Hezbollah from a regular army is its manipulation of the fragmented reality in Lebanon. For a long time South Lebanon was abandoned to the leadership of feudal politicians who did not care much about the fate of the local population. The emergence of Imam Mousa al-Sadr (a Lebanon-born cleric who lived much of his life in Iran) gave the Shiite community in Lebanon hope that their status, as a downtrodden forgotten community, would change.

Hezbollah played on the weakness of the central government in Beirut and the alienation that the PLO had created throughout its years of military operations against Israel, to become a major military and political actor in Lebanese politics. The question is how do you deal with a terrorist group that has popular backing. How do you wean the Shia population in Lebanon from Hezbollah's influence? This is a fundamental question that only a strong central government in Lebanon can answer.

Today we face a very interesting situation in Lebanon. On one hand there is the regular Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) fighting a war against Fatah al-Islam, a small terrorist group. The battles waged in the spring of 2007 by the LAF against this group in Tripoli (northern Lebanon) lasted almost four months and marked the worst period of internal violence in Lebanon since the end of the 1975-1990 civil war. On the other hand, there is the presence of Hezbollah, which now has both military and political capacities. Unlike Fatah al-Islam, Hezbollah is heavily armed, well-trained and is supported by two regional powers: Iran and Syria.

From a military perspective the June 2006 war has led to a major rethink in Israeli war-making. One of the major stumbling blocks of the Israeli operation in Lebanon was its failure to identify and pinpoint Hezbollah's military positions and movements. The other shortfall was the lack of military preparation.

Lessons to be learned include:

- (1) You cannot defeat an insurgent group that has popular backing.*
- (2) To isolate Hezbollah you have to strengthen the central government in Lebanon and bring in moderate Shia leaders that are currently excluded from the political process. Today Amal and Hezbollah, groups that are supported by Iran and Syria, speak exclusively in the name of the Shiites of Lebanon.*
- (3) The US could try to encourage the integration of Hezbollah militias into the Lebanese Armed Forces. This could happen only if Lebanon was not influenced by Iran and Syria, however.*
- (4) Waging another war against Hezbollah could lead to more destruction and the end of Lebanon as a state. Partition of Lebanon into various sectarian territories will not solve the problem.*
- (5) A regime change in Syria and Iran may be considered desirable, but the costs remain unknown and are likely to be very high. A pragmatic route is the best solution for now.*

In a recent report prepared by the British House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee¹⁷, the following recommendation was made to the British Government regarding Hezbollah:

"We conclude that Hezbollah is undeniably an important element in Lebanon's politics, although its influence, along with Iran's and Syria's, continues to be a malign one. We further conclude that, as the movement will realistically only be disarmed through a political process, the [British] Government should encourage Hezbollah to play a part in Lebanon's mainstream politics. We recommend that the Government should engage directly with moderate Hezbollah Parliamentarians. The Government should continue to refuse to engage with the military wing of Hezbollah."¹⁸

There is currently no such thing as a military or a political wing within Hezbollah. The challenge lies in finding a way to drive a wedge between the two.

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¹⁷House of Commons. Foreign Affairs Committee, Global Security: The Middle East, August 2007

¹⁸Global Security: the Middle East, op.cit. p.53