THE HEZBOLLAH MODEL

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ABSTRACT

On September 6, 2006 a ceasefire was recognized by the United Nations ending a fierce battle between the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and Hezbollah. For the first time, the Israelis met a force that stopped their advances and challenged conventional wisdom that the IDF was the region’s superior military force. From inauspicious beginnings as a Shiite resistance group fighting for survival in the Lebanese Civil War, Hezbollah has evolved into a potent political and military force in the Middle East. Its ascension has been met with alarm in the West and their model has been studied closely by other organizations globally.

This thesis explores Hezbollah’s organizational model from its inception, following its evolution into a power broker in Middle East politics. Before being able to explore its organizational model, it is critical to understand its past. When observing its evolution, one must understand the Shiite tradition, and the profound effect that it had on the formation of Hezbollah’s ideology. As one begins to understand its history, examining their organizational framework will begin to make sense.

The second section examines how Hezbollah established and developed its robust social services infrastructure. In order to better serve their constituents and resist against their enemies, Hezbollah members recognized the significance in developing a system to take care of their own. This integrated social service apparatus filled a
vacuum left by the Lebanese government and has earned them the trust and loyalty of their citizens.

The third section examines how Hezbollah shapes its narrative in order to highlight its strengths and minimize its weaknesses on an international stage. Its television station, al-Manar, has afforded the group with a platform from which it can project an image that accentuates the members’ good qualities while opposing any defects. In addition, the station provides them with a forum to address their constituents and encourage resistance against the Israelis and the West.

The fourth section shows how Muqtada al-Sadr and his organization have loosely followed the Hezbollah model to make steady gains in Iraq. While there is not an exact correlation between the two movements, the similarities are striking; Muqtada al-Sadr has employed many Hezbollah tactics with great success.

Finally, this thesis looks at how to deal with Hezbollah and organizations like it that have adopted their model. Anticipating how this model may adapt and develop over time will be essential in dealing with this issue. Whether or not Hezbollah will be an actor that America can deal with remains to be seen, but addressing the systemic issues that drive people toward Hezbollah will be critical in the future.
The research and writing of this Thesis could not have been completed without the support of several friends and family but a special thanks must go to Molly Reynolds whose patience and unending support throughout this process can never adequately be described, and also to my friend and mentor Dr. Ralph Nurnberger who continually challenges me and is a constant source of inspiration.

I’m not making this stuff up. 😊
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CHAPTER 1
A HISTORY OF HEZBOLLAH UNTIL 2006

The Lebanese Shiite Community

The modern state of Lebanon achieved independence from France in 1943, creating a state comprised of many religions and ethnic groups. The diversity of the populace required a unique political system that would account for each of the country’s seventeen recognized sects. Each sect was accorded with political privilege, including senior appointments in the bureaucracy, parliamentary membership and appointments to high political office in proportion to their respective sizes. The highest positions were reserved for the Maronites, Sunnis, and Shia.¹ A questionable census in 1932, the only official census conducted in Lebanon, allocated the distribution of political power. This validity of the census has always been suspect, but still laid the foundation for the upper levels of government.

The French considered the Maronites the plurality, and awarded them the presidency, the highest and most influential position in the Lebanese government. The Sunnis were granted the premiership, and the Shia received the speaker of the parliament. This hierarchy reflected stereotypes that transcended Lebanese politics and reflected many Middle Eastern religious and societal beliefs in which the Shia were relegated to a minor or subservient role. In Lebanon, the Shiite community could “yield little influence over the political system at the time as it was impoverished and

The Shiite community is viewed with suspicion, if not outright enmity, by Sunni Muslims because of their different interpretation of the successors of Islam and the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law Ali.

The focal point of contention between Sunni and Shia Muslims is predicated on the Shia belief that “Ali, the husband of the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter, Fatimah, should succeed Muhammad upon the prophet’s death.” The Shia believe that Muhammad's family and certain descendants, known as Imams, have special spiritual and political authority over the community of believers. The Sunni do not subscribe to this interpretation, and subsets of their community believe that the Shia are apostates. Based on a recent study done by the Pew Forum on Religion & the Public, the Muslim community is comprised of 90% Sunni and 10% Shia. This demographic disparity feeds into a common belief amongst Shia that they are destined to a life of exploitation and denial by ruling elites. Such a fatalistic narrative, plus their role in Lebanese society, provided an opening for charismatic leaders to emerge and galvanize the Shiite community in the years to come.

The Lebanese Shiite populace is concentrated primarily in the southern hills and valleys of the Beqaa plateau. Most Shia in this area survive as poor farmers who

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struggle to subsist on what they earn from selling tobacco, vegetables, and fruits. Farming had initially been difficult, as their goods were sold back to the government, which enjoyed a monopoly of food and agricultural markets resulting in meager returns for their labor. Adding to the Shia narrative of dispossession and oppression, they received very little support from the government which “provided piddling sums for rural development.” This lack of attention prompted many Shiites to lose faith in the political establishment.5 Shiite leaders sought to exploit the lack of competence demonstrated by the central government by providing aid directly to the populace thus further undermining the state’s credibility.

One of the first leaders to instill hope and improve the lives of the Shiite population in southern Lebanon was Musa al-Sadr, widely known as Imam Musa. Al-Sadr arrived on the Lebanese scene in the late 1950s, seeking to change the traditional, pessimistic narrative that the Shia subscribed to. Al-Sadr implored his brethren to not succumb to despair and to shake off their fatalistic outlook by realigning to their religion and its traditions. Al-Sadr believed in the inherent power religion as a vehicle to uplift his people. He said, “Whenever the poor involve themselves in a social revolution it is a confirmation that injustice is not predestined.”6 Backing up his words with actions, Al-Sadr established vocational schools and persistently lobbied Shiite politicians to provide more direct aid and support to the Lebanese south. Al-Sadr was a passionate advocate for his people, but never condoned or encouraged violence as a

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course of action. He would not live to see the fruits of his labor as he mysteriously disappeared in 1978 on a flight to Libya. Libya’s authorities claim he never landed in country and he was assumed to be a casualty of the religious and political strife that was rampant during that period.

*Lebanese Civil War*

The birth of Hezbollah can be traced to the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 until 1990. This period caused a great deal of turmoil for the Shia in southern Lebanon. The power vacuum created after the death of Musa al-Sadr was filled by two prominent resistance movements, Amal and Islamic Jihad, the latter of which became the resistance wing of Hezbollah. Amal initially enjoyed the primary support of the Shia population because they picked up where Musa al-Sadr left off, albeit with a militant rhetoric. Amal, however, lacked a clear ideological platform as they directed their primary anger at Palestinian guerillas and not the Lebanese government. The southern Shiites were weary of violence and initially welcomed the Israeli invasion in 1982 to crush the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Before the invasion the Shiites had been sympathetic to the PLO’s attacks against Israel from southern Lebanon, but when these battles resulted in the Shiite community being caught in the crossfire public opinion shifted. Shiites began to view the Palestinians as “an occupying force prone to high-handedness and brutality.”7 This strategic

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miscalculation by the PLO and its leadership left them without cover and led to departure from Lebanon.

Amal’s origins can be traced back to Musa al-Sadr as many of its leadership were early followers. In 1974, Harakat al-Mahrumin (Movement of the Deprived) was established by al-Sadr and parliamentarian Hussein el-Husseini. They believed that a change in the Lebanese political system was necessary in order to improve the plight of Shia in the South. Al-Sadr’s stated intention was to provide a voice to the “traditionally under-represented politically and economically disadvantaged,” not only in the Shia community, but in Lebanon as a whole. The militant wing of the organization, called the Lebanese Resistance Detachments, was formed in January 1975. While the group was founded by Islamic principles, it saw itself as a secular movement that had a nationalistic sense. Amal’s secular nature and nationalistic approach took precedence over religious and ideological beliefs. During the civil war, Amal and Islamic Jihad had a common foe in Israel but after the war’s conclusion their ideological differences were the subject of fierce debate.

Hezbollah (Party of God) is generally agreed to have been established in 1982 as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. The movement was nurtured by a 1,500-member contingent of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), who arrived in the Beqaa Valley with the approval of the Syrian

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9 Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 82.
government. Iran and Syria were instrumental in providing monetary and logistical support to both Amal and Hezbollah during their nascent stages. Iran’s aims were to export their Islamic revolution to Lebanese Shiites in order to gain a foothold in Middle Eastern politics. Syria’s cultivation of a proxy organization was based a form of Realpolitik in that they sought neither “eternal allies or perpetual enemies in Lebanon.” They sought to create a tactical countermeasure against Israeli encroachment rather than an ideological movement.

The militant wing of Hezbollah assumed the name Islamic Jihad when claiming credit for violent operations and they were the primary recipients of funding during the civil war. While not the first organization to implement suicide bombers, it soon became notorious for using this method during their operations. Hezbollah viewed the use of suicide bombers as “a military tactic, rather than a way to get to heaven.” The families of suicide bombers were afforded particular acclaim for their sacrifice and were compensated monetarily for their sacrifice. One of the first known suicide attacks initiated by Hezbollah was a 1983 attack on an eight-story Israeli military headquarters in the town of Tyre. A fifteen-year-old boy, Ahmad Qasir, drove an explosives-laden


11 Ibid.

12 Norton, Hezbollah: A Short History, 35.

truck to a checkpoint and detonated the vehicle, killing 75 Israeli soldiers and 14 Arabs. The Israelis had yet to experience a suicide attack and to this day, some Israelis still claim that the incident was the result of a gas leak.\textsuperscript{14}

Hezbollah still reveres Ahmad Qasir, and he is frequently cited in speeches given by their leader, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. Qasir’s story aligns well with the Shiite narrative founded on a heroic struggle of martyrs defending Islam. This historical narrative can be traced to the fate of Muhammad’s grandson, Imam Hussein. Hussein is a central and beloved figure in the Shiite tradition, cited for his “courage, self-sacrifice, and compassion.”\textsuperscript{15} Hussein’s martyrdom at Karbala, in modern Iraq, is a venerable moment in Shia history. He faced off against the Umayyad Caliph Yazid, whose forces greatly outnumbered Hussein’s and he ultimately lost the bloody ten-day confrontation. His death came on the tenth day of the Muslim calendar and the Ashura celebrations in his honor have taken place ever since are named for the Arabic word for “tenth.”\textsuperscript{16} Imam Hussein represents the belief that one should never succumb to fatalism, rather, one should fight for their dignity and the protection of Islam. Hezbollah views Qasir’s martyrdom as a modern day equivalent of Imam Hussein and the example that he set.

The celebration of Ashura highlighting Imam Hussein’s sacrifice is commemorated annually by Shia around the world. On October 16, 1983, a mistake

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 214.

\textsuperscript{15} Norton, \textit{Hezbollah: A Short History}, 35.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 50.
made by an Israeli officer cemented the antipathy of the Shiite community toward the Israeli army’s presence in Lebanon. On that day, around 60,000 Shiites were gathered in the town of Nabatiya when a lost Israeli convoy mistakenly attempted to drive through the Ashura celebrations. The incensed crowd perceived this as a desecration of one of their most venerated saints, and began to throw stones, bottles and overturn army vehicles. The Israeli soldiers panicked and opened fire on the crowd, killing at least two people and wounding 15 others.\(^{17}\)

Until the Nabatiya incident, the Shiite community had tolerated the Israeli presence in Lebanon because of their rocky relationship with the PLO. The tragedy ended an unstated truce and created a rift that led to more violence. Shiites immediately began to denounce the Israeli occupation with virulent rhetoric and increased hostilities. Many Shiite clerics warned that anyone who “trucked with Israel would burn in hell.” Amal and other militias that included members of Hezbollah competed to see who could inflict the most casualties on Israelis.\(^{18}\) These denouncements brought into focus the ever-changing dynamics on the ground for the Israelis and the Multinational Force in Lebanon. The United States was a prominent member of the peacekeeping force that would soon feel the wrath of Hezbollah via its proxy Islamic Jihad.

On October 23, 1983, one week after the tragedy in Nabatiya, a suicide bomber drove a truck laden with explosives into the US Marine Barracks in Beirut. Two-


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 180.
hundred twenty marines, 18 navy personnel and 3 army soldiers died in the blast. The attack represented the deadliest single-day death toll for the United States Marine Corps since the battle for Iwo Jima during World War II, as well as, the deadliest single-day death toll for the U.S. military since the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War, and the deadliest single attack on Americans overseas since World War II.\textsuperscript{19}

Shortly after the incident Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack. The man widely credited for planning the bombing was Imad Mughniyah, who would soon become one of the most notorious terrorist operatives in the world, a man who worked for Hezbollah.

\textit{Hezbollah and Violence Abroad}

Shortly after the attack on the Barracks in Beirut, Islamic Jihad, aided by the Islamic Dawa Party, targeted the US Embassy in Kuwait on December 12, 1983, detonating explosives that killed six people. A nationwide manhunt was conducted, resulting in the arrests of 17 people and blame was assigned to the aforementioned organizations. The 17 prisoners would later become known as the Kuwait 17 and their plight would become the inspiration for hijackers and kidnappers throughout the Middle East. One of the prisoners sentenced to death was Imad Mughniyah’s brother-in-law and cousin, Mustafa Yousef Badreddin. Mughniyah’s obsession with obtaining the release of his brother-in-law prompted him to attempt increasingly brazen attacks

on Western targets. These actions were not always vetted with Hezbollah and their Iranian benefactors leading to uncomfortable exchanges.

Perhaps Imad Mughniyah’s most notorious operation was the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 on June 14, 1985. Two German-speaking Lebanese men with ties to Islamic Jihad took control of the Rome-bound flight and diverted it to Beirut, resulting in two weeks of hostage negotiations. The hijackers were looking for Jewish passengers or western military personnel on the flight. Eventually, they discovered a U.S. Navy diver, Robert Stethem, on the passenger manifest. The hijackers beat Stethem, shot him in the temple and dumped his body onto the tarmac at Beirut International Airport.\(^20\) Seven other passengers from the U.S. were smuggled from the plane and held hostage in various locations around the city. The hijackers’ demands included apologies for perceived wrongdoings and the release of political prisoners including the Kuwait 17.

While the Kuwait 17 were not freed, the Israeli government did help to facilitate the release of the remaining hostages by freeing more than 700 Shia political prisoners.\(^21\) The event garnered worldwide media attention and helped to illuminate the growing relationship between Iran and Hezbollah. Mughniyah and other members of Hezbollah’s Special Security Apparatus (SSA) were linked to Iranian proxies and Revolutionary Guard members, who assisted with the “supervision and planning of the


\(^21\) Ibid.
incident itself and as an active participant in the diffusion and resolution.\textsuperscript{22} While the United States suspected Iran’s complicity in supporting Hezbollah, the hijacking of TWA Flight 847 left no doubt that a link between them existed. This clear connection buoyed Mughniyah’s burgeoning profile in the Middle East.

Hezbollah’s stature in Lebanon continued to grow during the civil war due in no small part to Mughniyah’s exploits. In addition to the high-profile hijackings like TWA Flight 847, Mughniyah directed the March 16, 1984 kidnapping of CIA Station chief William Buckley. Buckley, held in captivity for more than 10 months, was interrogated and beaten repeatedly before being executed at the hands of his captors. Terry Anderson, a reporter for the Associated Press who also was kidnapped by Hezbollah, recalls seeing Buckley tortured by men under the supervision of Mughniyah. His complicity in other high-profile kidnappings included the abduction of Lt. Col. William Higgins, a Marine Corps attaché to the United Nations peacekeeping forces in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{23}

The string of kidnappings continued in Lebanon, reaching its apex in 1986 as the Iran Contra scandal came to light. The United States under President Ronald Reagan had agreed to supply arms to Iran in exchange for the release of U.S. and western hostages in Lebanon. Mughniyah and Islamic Jihad played a prominent role in the proceedings, as they had conducted many of the kidnappings on Iran’s behalf. The

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\textsuperscript{22} Magnus Ranstorp, \textit{Hezbollah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis} (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 95.
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\textsuperscript{23} Tom Diaz, \textit{Lightning Out of Lebanon} (New York: Random House Publishers, 2005), 64.
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U.S. plan backfired and instead of a decrease the exchange of weapons led to an increase in the kidnappings. After the Iran Contra scandal was brought to light and the flow of weapons ceased, kidnappings of westerners plummeted. The decrease can be attributed to many factors including the end of the Lebanese Civil War and greater Syrian influence in Lebanon. The Syrian government was praised by the U.S. for its symbolic support of the U.S. led coalition during the 1990-91 Gulf War. At that time Syria sought to restore some semblance of order and sought to prevent Hezbollah from rashly creating unintended consequences for its regime.

While the incidents of kidnapping began to dwindle, Mughniyah and Hezbollah continued to carry out attacks against Israel expanding their primarily regional attacks to a more global one. One of their first confirmed international attacks took place shortly after the 1992 assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas al-Musawi by Israel. In response to al-Musawi’s death, Hezbollah operatives bombed the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires resulting in the deaths of twenty-nine people. The Argentinean police reacted to the bombing by issuing a warrant for Mughniyah’s arrest in absentia. Because of the operations scale and reach there was widespread, international speculation that Iran had helped facilitate the attack.

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24 H.E. Chehabi, Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years (London: Center for Lebanese Studies, 2006)

25 Norton, Hezbollah: A Short History, 78.
In 1994, Hezbollah struck a second time when a suicide bomber drove a van into the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people.26 Hezbollah was again assigned blame for the attack, and the former Iranian ambassador to Argentina, Had Soleimanpour, was detained in Britain on charges of collusion before being released due to a lack of evidence. After the two hits in Buenos Aires, Hezbollah returned their focus to attacking Israeli military targets in the region but their ability to extend their operational reach beyond Lebanon had an effect on Israel. Hezbollah’s attacks on the Israeli military remained relatively constant until 2000, when Israel withdrew from Lebanon marking the beginning of an uneasy truce. Hezbollah framed the Israeli withdrawal as an undisputed win for their cause and they began to evaluate their next course of action in the aftermath of their enemy’s departure.

Hezbollah enters Lebanese Politics

In the early 1990s, Hezbollah’s leadership began an internal debate about the possibility of entering politics. Hezbollah’s leaders had often spoken out against the Lebanese government, but were trying to decide if a foray into politics would diminish their credibility. The most influential Shia cleric in Lebanon, Sheik Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, promoted a pro-election stance because he felt that a revolutionary transition to Islamic rule was not feasible. Fadlallah felt that Lebanon’s diverse society

26 Ibid., 79.
would not be amenable to wholesale change, and would require gradual reform.\textsuperscript{27} Fadlallah thought that in order for Hezbollah to maximize its ability to resist Israel, it would need a positive relationship with the state of Lebanon as well as public support.

Though Fadlallah’s supporters revered him for his knowledge of the Koran, some Hezbollah members still opposed the movement toward Lebanese politics. Hezbollah’s first secretary general, Subhi al-Tufayli, believed that running for office would be tantamount to “selling out” and the organization would be transformed from a revolutionary force to a marginalized political player.\textsuperscript{28} In order to achieve a ruling on this contentious subject, Hezbollah consulted Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, for a ruling on the matter. Khamenei, who was not always known for his mastery of Islamic jurisprudence, approved Hezbollah’s entry into Lebanese politics. He justified this by acknowledging the importance of religion and politics. To split religion and politics was to “betray the cardinal tenet of Islam which should help Muslims to achieve an integrity that reflected the divine unity.”\textsuperscript{29} This move proved popular among Hezbollah’s constituents, many of whom had felt ignored and disenfranchised by the Lebanese ruling elite.

Hassan Nasrallah announced on July 3, 1992 that Hezbollah, for the first time, would compete in that summer’s elections. The party’s electoral platform revolved around eliminating economic exploitation, under development in Shia areas, political

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 99.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 100.

inequality, security and personal freedom.\textsuperscript{30} These issues and the candidates’ speeches were not overtly religious, but in the weeks leading up to the elections, some Hezbollah leaders utilized questionable interpretations of Islamic doctrine in supporting their candidates’ run for office. Various leaders made repeated declarations that Hezbollah supporters were legally required, literally commanded by God, to support the party and vote for its appointed candidates.\textsuperscript{31} The results of the 1992 elections yielded Hezbollah 12 seats in the parliament, establishing the organization as a player in Lebanese politics.

Having entered national level politics, Hezbollah began to participate in municipal elections to consolidate their power in the South. Their aim was to achieve popularity not only among their constituents, but also among other sects by way of their ability to provide services and infrastructure that the central government could not. Nasrallah is fond of saying that Hezbollah has, “demonstrated their expertise and commitment to improving local conditions and governance over an extended period of time.”\textsuperscript{32} This guiding principle of providing for the people is an extension of Fadlallah’s call for creating a \textit{dawlat al-insan}, or “a government for mankind.” This principle is meant to empower the people by giving them the resources to make their

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Norton, \textit{Hezbollah: A Short History}, 101.
\item Ibid., 102.
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lives and the lives of those around them better.\textsuperscript{33} Hezbollah’s ability to marshal support at the grassroots level made it a palatable alternative to everyday Lebanese people when contrasted with the central government. This public acquiescence would be challenged during the 2006 war with Israel.

\textit{2006 Lebanon War}

The 2006 Lebanon War between Hezbollah and Israel lasted 34 days and was costly to both Lebanon and Israel. The war highlighted a changing dynamic and sophistication in Hezbollah’s ability to conduct military operations. The war engulfed the region before a United Nations-brokered cease fire ended hostilities on August 14, 2006. The seeds of this conflict were sown in June 2005, when an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) unit operating near the Shebaa Farms engaged three Lebanese men whom they had identified as Hezbollah Special Forces. The ensuing firefight resulted in the death of one the guerillas, which in turn prompted a harsh response from Hezbollah. Over the following 12 months, the group made several unsuccessful attempts to abduct Israeli soldiers in retaliation for the dead guerilla.

The tenuous environment escalated on July 12, 2006 when Hezbollah launched several Katyusha rocket attacks against Israeli military coastal positions and the border village of Zar'it. The initial attacks injured five civilians, damaged six Israeli military

\textsuperscript{33} Norton, \textit{Hezbollah: A Short History}, 107.
positions and destroyed several early warning surveillance cameras. During one of
the assaults, Hezbollah Special Forces ambushed two Israeli Humvees patrolling near
Zar‘it with small arms fire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and anti-tank missiles.
The attack resulted in the injury of two Israeli soldiers, the death of three others and
provided Hezbollah with its ultimate objective, the capture of two Israeli soldiers Ehud
Goldwasser and Eldad Regev. This raid was similar to one in Gaza by Hamas which
resulted in the capture of another Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. It is very likely that
Hezbollah saw the success of the raid and sought to duplicate it.

Once the IDF received notice of the casualties and the abduction of their
soldiers, they deployed a quick reaction force to confirm the missing troops’
whereabouts. The rescue force was comprised of an Israeli tank, an armored personnel
carrier and an attack helicopter that were tasked with entering Lebanon shortly after the
attack. Hezbollah guerillas had anticipated the Israeli response and the rescue force
came under fire early on in the mission. Shortly after crossing the border, the tank
struck a land mine, killing its crew of four soldiers. The fighting was fierce and the
IDF suffered more casualties when one soldier was killed and two others injured by
artillery and small arms fire.

34 Scott Wilson, “Israeli War Plan Had No Exit Strategy,” Washington Post Online,
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/20/AR2006102001688.html
(accessed 1 February 2011).

35 Amnesty International, “Under fire: Hizbullah’s attacks on northern Israel,”
(accessed 1 February 2011).
Hezbollah announced that the attacks were the first step of a campaign entitled “Operation Truthful Promise.” They vowed to continue attacking the IDF. Nasrallah proclaimed that they were responding to Israel’s detainment of captured Hezbollah members that they had tried on multiple occasions to obtain their release through unsuccessful negotiations. Nasrallah claimed that since peaceful initiatives had not secured the release of the political prisoners, violence was the only viable alternative. In an interview, Nasrallah stated that, “No military operation will return the Israeli captured soldiers. The prisoners will not be returned except through one way: indirect negotiations and a trade of prisoners.” This was a sign that the conflict would be more complicated than a brief cross border skirmish.

Hezbollah demonstrated new tactics and methods of attack that Israel had not seen in previous conflicts. Changing course from previous skirmishes with Israel, Hezbollah did not rely exclusively on land-based attacks; instead they turned their attention to the sea. Israel had initiated a seaborne blockade against Lebanon that choked off commerce and took away a lifeline to Hezbollah. In retaliation to this tactic Hezbollah soldiers along the coast fired an Iranian produced C-802 Noor guided missile that struck the INS Hanit, killing four sailors. Israel had relied on dominance of the littoral space and the missile attack took them by surprise and prompted them to move their ships further away from the coast. This change in Hezbollah’s offensive capability galvanized them to step up their attacks within Lebanon.

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Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert interpreted Hezbollah’s actions as an act of war and he authorized air strikes in Lebanon against Hezbollah targets. The IDF also targeted bridges and roads because they believed that the infrastructure aided Hezbollah’s ability to fight, making them legitimate targets for strikes. Both the Lebanese government and the international community condemned these Israeli attacks. On July 16, Israel clarified their position vis-à-vis Lebanon and Hezbollah in a communiqué released by Ehud Olmert and the Israeli Cabinet. The communiqué stated that, “Israel is not fighting Lebanon but the terrorist element there, led by Nasrallah and his cohorts, who have made Lebanon a hostage and created Syrian and Iranian-sponsored terrorist enclaves of murder.” While the intent was to clarify their position it did little to appease their critics.

At the onset the Israelis had received a great deal of international support, which included many Arab nations. Several countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, condemned what they perceived as Hezbollah’s unwarranted strike against Israel. The Saudi government felt that their stance would provide the U.S. with an impetus to limit the Israeli response and thus give them political cover on the Arab street. The U.S. did not limit Israel’s actions which prompted the pro-Western Arab governments to reverse their initial stance and condemn Israel in fear of antagonizing

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their people who disapproved of Israel’s actions. Likewise, the Israeli population
tired of prosecuting the war as the conflict dragged on for weeks. The IDF’s inability
to limit the number of rockets being fired at Israeli cities took its toll and drained the
public’s willingness to fight.

In mid-August 2006, a UN and Lebanese brokered cease-fire ended the
hostilities. The multifaceted plan centered on UN Security Council Resolution 1701,
which enhanced the peacekeeping apparatus in southern Lebanon along the border. The
intent of this resolution was to limit violent interactions between Hezbollah and the
IDF, but it stopped short of disarming Hezbollah’s soldiers. This has created a tricky
balancing act for UN peacekeepers, who need to be seen as impartial honest arbiters.
They cannot be perceived as acting under Israeli influence or as an occupation force as
this would alienate the local populace. Complicating things further UN Resolution
1702 specified that the Lebanese army would also be deployed in southern Lebanon to
hedge against Hezbollah’s military. The second resolution seems to have been adopted
by the UN for appearances only, as many Lebanese army soldiers are viewed by Israel
as sympathetic to Hezbollah, raising questions about their impartiality.

In the end, the 2006 Lebanon War profoundly affected geopolitics not only in
Israel and Lebanon, but in the Middle East as a whole. The war displaced
approximately 500,000 Israelis from northern Israel and 900,000 Lebanese citizens

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38 Trita Parsi, Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the US (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 2007), 277.

39 Norton, Hezbollah: A Short History, 142.
from southern Lebanon. At the conclusion of the hostilities, 43 Israeli civilians, 1,109
Lebanese civilians, 118 Israeli soldiers and 200 Hezbollah fighters had died.40 The
financial consequences were just as grave. Material losses in Israel totaled
approximately $500 million and $4 billion in Lebanon. The destruction in Lebanon
was a huge blow to the central government, which saw much of the infrastructure they
had built in the post-civil war reconstruction damaged or destroyed. This would
ultimately play into Hezbollah’s hands as the group has proven adept at providing
services and infrastructure where the government of Lebanon cannot. The rebuilding of
Lebanon after the 2006 war highlighted Hezbollah’s ability to raise money and
mobilize resources.

40 Ibid., 142.
Building Support

Hezbollah has been able to evolve as an organization because of its commitment to providing social services for its constituents and the people of Lebanon. Although most of their public persona is shaped by their military wing, Islamic Jihad Organization (IJO), their ability to fill voids left by the central government is a source of immense strength. While the bulk of the organization’s structure is Muslim in nature, it is not wholly Islamic. Hezbollah’s framework is a hybrid structure that is influenced by many different social theories. This makes it highly adaptive and simple to reproduce. The evolution of the organizational structure has contributed to the group’s longevity and effectiveness both in Lebanon and the global arena.

The birth of Hezbollah’s model can be traced back to Musa al-Sadr and his lobbying of the Lebanese government for the funding of social projects. Sadr’s work stimulated political participation in the Shia community and gave them hope for a better future. The Hezbollah model is composed of a centralized authority that is assisted by three branches – political, military, and social.¹ This hierarchy resembles previous insurgency models implemented by Mao Zedong. The Chinese leader believed that it was imperative to establish a base of support with the local populace.

Mao stated that, “Guerilla warfare derives from the masses and is supported by them; it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation.”

Hezbollah’s social branch addresses the former part of Mao’s statement. The second phase, according to Mao, concerns resistance against an oppressor by engaging in guerilla warfare. The fighting ties up the enemy and provides experience for the guerillas. In the Hezbollah model, this phase is represented by the IJO in their military wing. The third and final phase of Mao’s approach is to integrate a political component into the insurgency in order to maximize military gains. This is accomplished in the Hezbollah model by the political branch, which advances or solidifies the gains of the military branch. The important thing to consider when comparing Mao’s phases with Hezbollah’s model is that the process is not linear and does not occur in a vacuum. Hezbollah has exhibited a disciplined approach to their methodology while remaining highly adaptive to the ever-changing environment of the Middle East.

There are two possible reasons for Hezbollah’s blend of ideologies. The first reason can be found in the Hawzas, religious educational schools that abound in Lebanon. These schools are taught in the same way as those in Najaf, Iraq, and Qum, Iran, two highly respected centers of Shia scholarship. A Hawza differs from a madrasa in that it “teaches from a standard curriculum and is institutionalized and bureaucratic.” In addition, madrasas are founded by a newly-graduated cleric and will close upon his

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2 Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerilla Warfare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 44.

3 Ibid., 44.
death, whereas a hawza is permanent and is run by a board of trustees via a single clergy member.4

The second reason for the strength of the hybrid organizational model can be traced back to the attractiveness of the Lebanese Communist Party before Hezbollah’s ascendancy. At one time, the Lebanese Communist Party and other socialist-inspired organizations had a large Shia base because they provided an alternative to the Lebanese central government before Amal and Hezbollah began to compete for their affection.5 The confluence of the hawza education and the acceptance of a Marxist ideology in the Shia community led to “the hybrid Mao-Islamic organizational structure, which uses proven guerrilla warfare principles that focus on the populace to achieve its goals.”6 This adaptability is a key reason for the organization’s longevity and its ability to counteract opponents.

Shura Council

Hezbollah’s organizational model is comprised of three branches, plus an executive branch that reports exclusively to a Shura Council and this ruling body acts as the final word on all matters. The aforementioned three branches are the military and security branch, the political branch and the social services branch. The Shura Council will dictate guidance to the three organizational branches who will disseminate information downward toward regional commanders and other lower level

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4 H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, 244.


representatives for the completion of orders. This construct that relies on a Shura Council mirrors the Iranian theocracy. This is no accident.

Hezbollah’s Shura Council is comprised of seven elected members and one Iranian advisor who is generally believed to be involved with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which is an elite unit in the Iranian military. The Shura Council functions like the Assembly of Experts in Iran. It acts as the decision-making apparatus for each of Hezbollah’s three branches. The parallels between the two constructs are by design; they are a byproduct of Ayatollah Ali Khameni’s blessing of Hezbollah’s foray into Lebanese politics. The directives are disseminated by the Supreme Leader to either Hassan Nasrallah or the IRGC representative in the organization model.

While the Supreme Leader is the ultimate arbiter of a course of action, input is solicited from within Hezbollah and other interested parties in order to prevent rivalries and discontent. Before executing a decision, Hezbollah considers the reactions of Israel, Syria and Lebanon to prevent unintended consequences that could undercut the group’s ultimate objectives. The Shura Council is aided by an executive office, which serves as a conduit between the Council and the three other branches of the organizational model.

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8 Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 196.


10 Ibid., 196.
The executive office’s many interchangeable parts allow it to work seamlessly with all parties involved in the decision making process. The office provides logistical and administrative support to each of the three branches. The first arm of the executive office is responsible for external affairs and liaison with the Lebanese government, political parties and NGOs. The second arm deals with financial matters including, “collecting, accounting, auditing, and spending Hezbollah funds with the approval of the Shura Council.”11 The third and final arm of the executive office is the syndicate branch, which encourages community outreach. This organizational arm focuses on professional associations in medicine, law and politics in order to increase their visibility and stature in Lebanese society and government.12 The executive office enables the three branches to focus their roles by freeing them from administrative duties. Ultimately, this makes them more effective.

**Military Branch**

The military and security section, or Jihad Council of Hezbollah’s organizational model, generally receives the most attention on the international stage – a trend the group is looking to reverse. This branch is charged with conducting military operations within the Levant and other parts of the world as witnessed by the organization’s role in the bombing of synagogues in Argentina. While the branch has not renounced the use of violence, they have sought to shape the narrative of

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11 Ibid., 62.
12 Ibid., 61.
Hezbollah’s purpose. The military apparatus is often described as the resistance wing, and thus have eschewed high-profile leaders such as Imad Mughniyah.

Within the organizational model, the military branch is divided into two subgroups, the military unit and the security and intelligence unit. The military unit conducts domestic and international military operations through Islamic Jihad. The military is composed of “recruiting, training, and operational sections that indoctrinate, train, and field soldiers to the regional units.”\textsuperscript{13} The regional units are semiautonomous; they have little contact with other units. Unit control is decentralized, with their formation predicated largely by where they live. Everyone knows one another, which has made it difficult for Israel and other intelligence agencies to infiltrate the group.

The intelligence unit of the military branch is a covert organization. It is divided into two sections that provide Hezbollah with its information collection apparatus. The first section is focused on internal security, which safeguards Hezbollah against internal subversion by monitoring party members and the local populace.\textsuperscript{14} The second section of the unit is charged with external security, which includes collecting information on adversaries and preventing external threats from infiltrating the organization. The total force of the branch is thought to be around 8,000 soldiers and security personnel. The effectiveness of the military branch cannot be understated, as they continue to be an effective force that is not easily susceptible to infiltration.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 72.
The symbiotic relationship that Hezbollah tries to weave between the Shia populace and its military wing is significant. This can be traced back to the aforementioned adoption of Mao’s guidelines. According to Mao, there must be no discord between the populace and a guerrilla movement. He believed in three rules: “All actions are subject to command, do not steal from the people, and be neither selfish nor unjust.”\textsuperscript{15} Hezbollah has implemented a similar approach, with the important distinction that their higher authority is driven by religious motivations. The perception among their base is that they are highly disciplined and provide social assistance when necessary.\textsuperscript{16} This has bolstered their ability to operate effectively and retain the support of the populace.

\textit{Political Branch}

The political branch, or Political Council, is in charge of overseeing two important subsections – the parliament bloc and the Information Council. The Council advises the Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and the Shura Council. In addition to their advisory role, they “prepare the party for campaigns, and develop political strategy and alliances within competing groups.”\textsuperscript{17} The parliamentary bloc was established in 2000 to ensure that any party messaging was consistent with the Secretary General’s messaging. Because elected Hezbollah officials are not allowed to

\textsuperscript{15} Tse-Tung, \textit{On Guerilla Warfare}, 92.

\textsuperscript{16} Chehabi, \textit{Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years}, 277.

\textsuperscript{17} Hamzeh, \textit{In the Path of Hizbullah}, 196.
act as individuals, their messages must be in concert with the official party line.\textsuperscript{18} This unity of message is also present in the party’s social projects. The bloc will inform the Political Council on projects that their constituents value, and in turn, the politicians will ensure that these projects are a part of the bigger strategy and addressed in political messages.

The second section of the political branch, the Information Council, shapes and transmits Hezbollah’s narrative. Through the years, their media strategy has become more complex and comprehensive, allowing them to reach not only their constituents but millions of people worldwide.\textsuperscript{19} They currently own and operate the television station Al Manar (“The Beacon”) in addition to four radio stations and five newspapers. Al Manar continues to be the most effective medium for dissemination of their message because while it is used for traditional programming, its primary purpose is for broadcasting their narrative.

The television station was particularly successful during the 2006 war when it broadcast messages and footage of the war in an attempt to demoralize the Israeli population and curry support from the international community. They broadcast footage of Hezbollah guerillas clashing with the IDF and showed civilian buildings that were damaged by Israeli airstrikes. While their authenticity could not always be verified, the results nevertheless were effective in disseminating their narrative to

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 58.
friendly and hostile audiences alike. Al Manar, while not a deciding factor, was an important strategic asset to Hezbollah’s cause. The Political Council utilized the platform provided by Al Manar to claim a victory over the Israeli’s, even though they were defeated militarily.

**Social Services Branch**

The most important piece of the Hezbollah organizational model is their Social Service Section. This branch has been essential to maintaining their support with the local populace. In 2007, the year after the war, it received an estimated 50% of the group’s total budget. Hezbollah has realized that without a central government, investing in the infrastructure of the populace will give them the latitude they need from their supporters in their resistance against Israel. Their Social Service Section gives them credibility and promotes longevity because it provides them with political cover when they are criticized by Israel and the West. In addition, many of their organizations are legally registered NGOs with the Lebanese government giving them legal protections and political cover for people worried about Hezbollah’s reputation.

The Social Service Section is an all-encompassing entity that seeks to influence all aspects of Lebanon’s Shiite population. After the civil war ended, Hezbollah saw social services as, “a vehicle to bolster its ranks, provide a humanitarian shield to the organization, increase influence within the Lebanese government, and combat its Shia

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rival – Amal.”\textsuperscript{22} Hezbollah’s Deputy Secretary General, Naim Qassem, described the power of social services, saying:

Hezbollah paid particular attention to social work. Not one aspect of aiding the poor was neglected as the party worked towards achieving joint social responsibility, answering the urgent needs, and introducing beneficial programs. Such work was simply considered Party duty, and concentrated efforts towards raising funds and making available social service resources served towards achieving these goals. The Party worked to the best of its capabilities, cooperating with official institutions to respond to societal needs.\textsuperscript{23}

Qassem highlights the importance of the local populace building trust in them, and draws attention to how social services can be the vehicle that drives popular support. It is prudent to notice that while tithing is an important part of being a good Muslim, this is not mentioned in the paragraph.\textsuperscript{24} The passage is devoid of religious undertones, rather, it highlights the pragmatic viewpoint that Hezbollah takes on many subjects. It makes practical sense to proactively promote social services when Hezbollah competes against Amal and the Lebanese government for support.\textsuperscript{25}

What separates Hezbollah from its rivals – Amal and the Lebanese government – is their holistic approach to dealing with the needs of the populace. After the civil war and centuries of feeling disenfranchised and fatalistic, the Shia had grown accustomed to being neglected. Hezbollah decided to take a comprehensive approach to social services and sought to leave no issue unaddressed. Hezbollah created six

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Chehabi, \textit{Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years}, 322.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Naim Qasim and Dalia Khalil, \textit{Hizbullah: The Story from Within}, (London: Saqi, 2005), 284.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Love, \textit{Hezbollah: Social Services as a Source of Power}, 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Chehabi, \textit{Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years}, 322.
\end{itemize}
subsections that specialized in different areas, “The Jihad al-Binaa Development Group (JBDG), Islamic Health Organization, the Martyr’s Foundation, the Women’s Association, the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, and the education division.”26 Like other parts of the organization, these six subsections have similar and sometimes identical counterparts in Iranian society.27

**Jihad al-Binaa Development Group**

Jihad al-Binaa Development Group (JBDG) is one of the most important and effective subsections of the social services branch. In peaceful times, the JBDG develops projects that seek to improve citizens’ quality of life; after periods of war, they are tasked with rebuilding. Since its inception in 1985, the group has occasionally assisted the Lebanese government’s efforts, in addition to its own projects. The JBDG capitalized on the vacuum left by the government when it concentrated on bigger cities instead of the Shia towns in the south of the country. One of its notable contributions took place in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, when JBDG “single handedly revitalized the water and sewage systems to the southern suburbs.”28 While the group concentrates most of its energy on Lebanon’s Shia population, they have also openly assisted other religious groups and sects, which has legitimized the group among a

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variety of demographics.\textsuperscript{29} Iran shortly after its own revolution encouraged the idea for this type of group. It was well received after the overthrow of the Iranian Shah. The success of the program prompted Iran’s group to transport the same model to Hezbollah, who used it to rebuild Shia neighborhoods in Beirut, southern Lebanon and the Bekaa.\textsuperscript{30}

The group has proven its strategic value with goodwill projects that emphasize the flexibility of Hezbollah, which contrasts the customary ineptitude of the Lebanese government. JBDG maintains a cadre of experienced workers, including “over a thousand civil engineers, architects, demographic experts, electricians, plumbers and other specialists.”\textsuperscript{31} Most of them are educated abroad. If they do not seek employment elsewhere, they may find that Hezbollah is one of the best employers in a lean job environment. The scarcity of employment prospects has been Hezbollah’s gain; they have been able to attract and retain a large quantity of highly-trained professionals that “deflect attention away from the terrorist activities of the IJO, Iranian influence, and military activity on the Israeli border.”\textsuperscript{32} This was never more evident than after the 2006 war.

After the conclusion of the 2006 war, Hezbollah embarked on an ambitious and unprecedented reconstruction plan that did not include assistance from the Lebanese

\begin{footnotes}
\item[30] Chehabi, \textit{Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years}, 322.
\end{footnotes}
government. The government proved to be unable to handle the situation, and lost a valuable opportunity to provide leadership and enhance their legitimacy. Hezbollah seized the opportunity. They shrewdly recognized that the situation provided them with the ability to bolster approval through effective and timely support for the people most affected by the war. They offered this assistance to every afflicted citizen, regardless of politics or religion. This enhanced JBDG’s credibility and cultivating the human terrain.

Many of Hezbollah’s post-war efforts garnered both local and international attention. Rana Moussawi received $10,500 to cover rent for her son’s apartment. Her gratitude was evident in her response: “If it was not for Jihad al-Binaa, my family and I would be sleeping in the street.”33 Another man, Imad Khalil, was a young secular entrepreneur with no ties to Hezbollah prior to conflict. He told a similar story. After the ceasefire, a Hezbollah representative surveyed his damaged commercial property and instructed him to go to a facility to receive $5,000 in compensation. He described the interaction, reporting, “I really believe that what they gave me was accurate to what was damaged during the air strikes. I must say that this gives me a whole different impression of Hezbollah.”34 These two stories show the positive impacts that the JBDG had on the populace and the intangible benefit to its reputation. The increase in publicity also came with a downside – they received more scrutiny abroad.


34 Ibid.
Hezbollah’s ability to generate such a quick and well-funded response to the destruction was a red flag to many in Lebanon and the international community. The leader of the Druze Christian community in Lebanon, Walid Jumblatt, publicly questioned where Hezbollah received the suspected $190 million dollars they were said to have in reserve.\textsuperscript{35} There is little doubt that Iran had a prominent role in the funding. The head of the JBDG, Kassem Aleq, stated that most of the funds were raised by “donor campaigns inside Lebanon and from its Diaspora in Europe and Africa.”\textsuperscript{36} The U.S. government began to examine the group; on January 1, 2007, they placed it on the Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list.

The list was established to “assist the public in complying with the various sanction programs that have been administered.”\textsuperscript{37} This has made it difficult for the group to raise funds, but has not deterred the group’s effectiveness or popularity in the region. The funding they receive has not only enabled them to engage in military activities but has also been very important to their other social services especially the health apparatus of their organization.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37} United States Department of Treasury, Office of Foreign Asset Control: List of Specifically Designated Nationals, 2007.
Islamic Health Organization

The Islamic Health Organization’s (IHO) origins are very similar to that of the JBDG; its origin also can be traced back to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and was exported to Hezbollah in 1984. The IHO offers a variety of solutions for the medical needs of its constituents. It provides health and medical services that include clinics, medications, casualty evacuation and food distribution. The size and scope of the IHO has grown since its inception; it now operates three hospitals, 12 health centers, 20 infirmaries, 20 dental clinics and 10 defense departments.\textsuperscript{38} The patients predominately hail from the low income Shia population, but the IHO does not turn away other low income patients. Plus, they charge only a nominal fee for services rendered.

The IHO has an established reputation for the administration of their facilities. They have at times been asked to assume the operation of governmental hospitals in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley.\textsuperscript{39} In addition, they are involved in innovative initiatives that seek to provide free health insurance and prescription drug coverage in conjunction with pharmacies that are sympathetic to the IHO. The Lebanese government has also attempted to provide universal health care to its citizens, but the system is rife with complications. In the Lebanese government model, citizens must petition a government official to call in a favor and get them a bed at a hospital or


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
This quid pro quo system comes with the understanding that political loyalty will be afforded to the politician by the patients and their families.

Many of Hezbollah’s rivals, such as Amal and the Progressive Socialist Party, will gain access to government resources and, “selectively provide for the needs of their constituents, thereby gaining their loyalty.”

Hezbollah stands apart from the government and their rivals because they do not overtly ask for their patient’s loyalty. While a tacit understanding pervades that political support for Hezbollah would be encouraged, the fact that the patients can retain their dignity and not have to request favors has a powerful effect that benefits Hezbollah. The ineffectiveness of the government and rival groups is clarified by a Hezbollah staffer describing their NGO:

If there is a problem in one region, for the government to move with its bureaucracy, it would take like a month. For us, we move the very next day. In one village, there were 340 cases of typhoid, so we took our medical teams, medicine, and our equipment and went there, and we stayed for a week, 10 days, until we finished the case. So while the government was busy dealing with the political problems, we were on the ground and started working.

Hezbollah has found a way to turn ineffectiveness into a strategic narrative for good and ill.

In addition to gaining support through the IHO’s good works, Hezbollah also has injected their resistance narrative into the group and its work. All of Hezbollah’s actions have a purpose – to resist against both the oppression of the Shia and

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persecution from Israel. Nowhere is this ideal more pertinent than in a speech from the IHO’s Health Minister Dr. Karam Karam:

The services provided by the Islamic Health Committee strengthen the heroic efforts of fighters and reduce their worries about who will take care of those who support them. This network is a shield that protects the resistance fighter and assures those in need and protects those fighting for dignity, for the country and for sovereignty.\(^{42}\)

The support for the community, and more importantly for the military fighters, is interwoven with the well-being of their family if they should die in battle.

**Martyrs’ Foundation**

Hezbollah’s Martyrs’ Foundation, like other sectors of the social services branch, finds its genesis in Iran. Iranians established the Bonyads, which were used to distribute money to the families of martyrs. Most martyrdoms result from the ongoing military struggle between Israel and the Islamic Jihad Organization. The Foundation offers financial assistance, health and social support to families who lose loved ones in combat.\(^{43}\) In addition to the support of martyrs, the Foundation works closely with the Foundation for the Wounded, which helps fighters and civilians who are injured in Israeli attacks. The Foundation for the Wounded works in conjunction with Iran’s Khomeini Support Committee, which provides similar assistance (albeit not for attacks by Israel).

**Women’s Association**


\(^{43}\) Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, 196.
The establishment of the Hezbollah’s Women’s Association is something of an anomaly in Middle Eastern society. It correlates directly to the Martyrs Foundation. The Association was founded to be a champion for the widows of martyrs, also known as Armalat al-Shaheed, who are afforded more rights than traditional Islamic law, dictates. Widows of martyrs are treated with pronounced respect by the community. These widows used to be required to live with their in-laws and were oftentimes mistreated.

Through the auspices of the Women’s Association, Hezbollah would build houses for the widows who did not want to live with their in-laws. If a woman remarries, she vacates the house and it returns to the Hezbollah widow’s trust. This is a pragmatic move on Hezbollah’s part, as allows them to assure potential martyrs that their wives would be cared for. Likewise, it earns Hezbollah the gratitude of their female supporters.

*Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts*

The formation of the Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts is yet another example of the all inclusive approach that Hezbollah takes with their resistance movement. The organization was established in 1985 to give the Shia youth of Lebanon an outlet. It teaches them discipline and aims to keep them out of trouble. The organization also is used to “indoctrinate the younger generations into radical Shiite Islam centered on

\[44\] Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*, 162.
Hezbollah’s principles and those of the Wali al Faqih.” The program is designed for youth between the ages of eight and 16. It provides Hezbollah with a steady stream of recruits that bolster their support base and are transferred to the military wing when they turn 17. Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts go on camping trips, provide community service, and learn skills like scouts in other countries, all the while being educated about Hezbollah’s ideology and resistance narrative.

**Education Division**

The benefits of education for the youth of Hezbollah’s organization cannot be understated as they provide a pool for recruitment of potential members. Between 1996 and 2001 the organization invested approximately $14 million dollars on scholarships and financial aid. Like in other areas of social service Hezbollah continually competes for legitimacy with the central government and in this case they have made strides in marginalizing the Lebanese Department of Education. The curriculum developed by the group is tailored to fit the resistance narrative espoused by leadership and begins at kindergarten and goes all the way through college. Tuition for education is provided at a reduced rate or free to those that choose to attend the schools with the costs being subsidized by Hezbollah’s education branch.

Because of decades of war and lack of infrastructure Hezbollah’s model has proven extremely effective at educating the youth of Lebanon. The central government

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47 Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, 55.
has to deal with a paucity of funds and Hezbollah’s ability to fill that void and continue to construct new schools has given them a distinct advantage. Their education branch has employed a forward thinking model that doesn’t merely focus on higher education, but also on vocational institutions that reach a wider demographic. The education branch covers all the logistical aspects of the schools from “coordinating with school construction, staffing the schools, developing and implementing a Shura-approved curriculum, and covering publishing costs.”\textsuperscript{48}

While it is difficult to quantify the exact amount of benefit received by Hezbollah’s social services it is apparent that they are having a positive effect. By providing services and opportunities to the population where the government has failed to do so has given the group political support and a sense of legitimacy. The political success of the organization has given them an additional platform and cover from groups that seek to restrict their growth. Hezbollah has seized upon this shift and continues to build on it through the local and global media. They have a talent for shaping their narrative and projecting it to as many recipients as possible.

CHAPTER 3
SHAPING HEZBOLLAH’S MEDIA NARRATIVE

Early Development

The significant role of the media and its global reach in today’s society cannot be understated. The advent of the 24-hour news cycle has changed the way in which we live our lives, and also how conflicts are covered. This is not a new concept as it has been seen in countless conflicts back to the Vietnam War and to present day in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. military neatly sums it up when they refer to a “strategic corporal,” who is the face of the war for the news. The actions of even a junior enlisted soldier can have ramifications that will not only be felt on the battlefield but may also reverberate around the globe. This hyper-charged environment has caused many military actors to form their own media outlets to shape the narrative that they want presented to a worldwide audience. Hezbollah has accomplished this task with the founding of their television station, al-Manar.

Al-Manar (“The Beacon”) initiated its first broadcast on June 3, 1991, and since that time it has become a station with a global presence. It effectively shapes and projects the narrative that Hezbollah wants presented to the world. The station’s first general manager, Ali Dahir, commented in 1992 that his programming sought to “express the views of the oppressed and advocate a mass media that respects Islamic morals and Muslim traditions.”\(^1\) In 1997, the station officially registered as the

Lebanese Media Group Company, but it is operated by members of Hezbollah. Most content is either vetted or guided by Hassan Nasrallah’s office.²

The origins of al-Manar reflect the complexity and divisions within Lebanese society, as the station operated outside of any regulatory control from the government during its first few years. After the civil war ended, the Lebanese state sought more control over the media and, in November 1994, it passed laws requiring licenses to broadcast.² Only five television stations received licenses and all other channels were required to close. The Lebanese government stated that the move was done in order to demonstrate their “determination to put an end to years of media anarchy and partisan propaganda which emerged during the war.”³ The decision was not well received by the population, who felt that the rationale behind what stations to keep open was based on politics and sectarian divides.

Al-Manar and several other stations elected to continue their broadcasts anyway, which prompted the government to censure, and in some cases use force, to drive the stations to cooperate. However, this climate was untenable; some stations, including al-Manar, elected to appeal the government’s decision. According to a previous general manager, Nayef Krayem, the station, “put pressure on parliament and

² Ibid., 20.
⁴ Ibid.
utilized outside sources, which also put pressure on the government.”\(^5\) Hezbollah, in a move that underscored their closeness to the television station, sent a delegation to appeal to Syrian president Hafez al-Assad for permission to broadcast in Lebanon. This gave al-Manar the political chip that allowed them to obtain an operating license on September 18, 1996.

The headquarters for al-Manar are located in the southern Beirut, in the poor Shiite neighborhood of Harat Hurayk. The town is known for its conservative populace that is sympathetic to Hezbollah; they are viewed as the antithesis of western Beirut’s more liberal, Western-influenced society.\(^6\) Much of the station’s target audience resides in south Lebanon, from where Hezbollah derives much of its strength and popular support. Among the many reasons for the station to focus on the Shiite population is simply presenting their views in the Arab world. Much of the Arab voice comes from a Sunni perspective. Al-Manar attempts to provide a Shiite narrative, and in doing so redefine the discussion. Even with this ambitious goal, the station did not lose its desire to attract a larger audience.

Al-Manar currently has bureaus in Egypt, Iran, Jordan and the UAE.\(^7\) This expanded access has allowed the station, and more importantly Hezbollah, to construct a narrative beyond its own borders in Lebanon. This capability to project beyond

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\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 20.

Lebanon reached another level on March 9, 2000, with al-Manar’s announcement that they would launch a satellite channel. This plan signaled that it was outpacing its Lebanese competitors, as well as a call to regional stations that the Shiite perspective would be in the larger conversation.

The station’s declaration of their intention to launch a satellite channel coincided with the Israel’s decision to withdraw from Lebanon on May 25 of that same year. Initially, al-Manar had planned to launch the station in July, but the opportunity to score an additional propaganda victory was too much to pass up. They were able to get the channel operational on the day that the Israelis withdrew. This symbolic launch of the station wove itself into Hezbollah’s resistance narrative, helping to shape the perception that the group had driven the Israelis out of Lebanon both militarily and through al-Manar.

The symbolic nature and “expulsion” of Israel that occurred with the launch of al-Manar complemented the station’s image of itself – one of a “station of the resistance” which also claimed to be “the station of the Arabs and the Muslims.” With these ambitions, the al-Manar sought to find ways to increase their market share and hours of operation. It began to offer more programs and expanded on existing ones, so that they could eventually offer up to 24 hours of non-stop programming. In the process of sustaining this type of coverage, the station had to agree with one of the

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9 Ibid., 25.

10 Jorisch, “Al-Manar: Hizbullah TV, 24/7”.
leading satellite companies in the Arab world, ArabSat, that they would not press a sectarian agenda.

In order to receive ArabSat’s blessing, the station calculated that they would achieve more from adopting a strategic approach. Hezbollah decided that a pan-Arab stance versus a sectarian one worked out better from a broadcasting perspective and fit their tactic for the region. However, Al-Manar would broadcast their sectarian programming to regional audience. Altogether, their satellite broadcasts would reflect a diverse set of options that would cater to a broader audience.\(^{11}\)

Included in that broader audience is, perhaps surprisingly, the State of Israel. Al-Manar has crafted a nuanced message for that demographic. Since launching their satellite, channel officials have stated that they will begin “broadcasting news and other programming in Hebrew in order to expand the station’s sphere of influence among Israelis.”\(^{12}\) Al-Manar’s targets in the Hebrew population consist of three demographics, the IDF, Israeli civilians and political analysts who shape public debate. While each group receives considerable attention from the station, the IDF seems to be the primary target for propaganda.

Al-Manar has made a concerted effort to shape the narrative in a way that will demoralize the IDF and make them less inclined to fight. The station has boasted that their coverage has prompted the IDF to leave their posts in Lebanon, contributed to an increased number of suicide attempts among soldiers and led to an increase in the use

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 27.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 30.
of drugs among IDF troops.\footnote{Hezbollah to Set Up Hebrew TV Station, Web Site, al-Istiqlal, November 18, 1999, BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, December 3, 1999.} While the station’s claims of successes demoralizing the IDF are difficult to prove, the perception of resistance toward the IDF, and Israelis as a whole, has garnered support from al-Manar’s primary viewers and led to its increased popularity in the Arab world.

**Funding**

Most experts regard al-Manar as the third-most popular television station in Lebanon during times of stability; it rises to number one when conflict breaks out in southern Lebanon or the Palestinian territories.\footnote{John Daniszewski, “Onetime Fanatical Menace Now Savior to Many Lebanese,” Los Angeles Times, 11 May 2000.} The station’s aim to appeal to a broader viewership, one that transcends sectarian lines, appears to be working in the West Bank and Gaza. In these places, al-Manar is well received along with the well-known, Qatar-based al-Jazeera. In fact, in a 2003 Jordanian survey, al-Manar beat out al-Jazeera 28.8% to 27.5% as the most popular choice for news about “Palestine and the Palestinians.”\footnote{Shibley Telhami, “Arab Country Media Survey,” poll conducted in Jordan in cooperation with Zogby International, 12 March 2003.} The popularity in the West Bank and Gaza has prompted al-Manar officials to speculate that they rank among the top five television stations in the Arab world, garnering approximately 10 million viewers per day.\footnote{Neil MacFarquhar, “Hezbollah Becomes Potent Anti-U.S. Force,” New York Times, 24 December 2002.} The rapid rise in prestige...
and popularity can be attributed to many things – but the station’s contentious budget is the most-cited reason.

Funding for al-Manar comes from a variety of sources, both overt and covert in nature. The method of obtaining financial backing is relevant because Lebanon has laws that stipulate the amount of resources that may come from foreign donors. Since its inception, it is believed that Iran provided a substantial amount of seed money for the station’s original budget of approximately one million dollars.\textsuperscript{17} The station’s operational cash has increased considerably; it is thought to be in the range of 15 million dollars, a growth spurt widely attributed to an increase in Iranian funding.\textsuperscript{18} While al-Manar routinely denies these allegations, real concerns exist that the station is not complying with Lebanese law.

The station has been able to mitigate some of these allegations by claiming that they receive funding from advertising along with contributions from Hezbollah. Any financial contributions from Hezbollah are compliant with Lebanese law, but many view this as a clever legal maneuver by al-Manar. Since Hezbollah receives a large amount of its budget from Iran, the general perception is that they are still aiding the station by proxy, and breaking the law by default. Though ascertaining how much of Hezbollah’s support is directly attributable to Iran is difficult, the station points to its other revenue streams from advertising and viewer donations.


Advertising has become a valuable, if controversial, revenue stream for al-Manar as it has grown. The station experienced internal dissent regarding advertising. While it was allowed eventually, it came with stringent restrictions. According to station officials, al-Manar turns down roughly 90 percent of prospective sponsors because they utilize promiscuous advertising techniques that include alcohol and “women as temptation.”19 Even with these limitations, the channel did have American companies like Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Proctor & Gamble and Western Union as advertisers as late as July 2002, but they eventually ceased their support after their inclusion became public.20 This withdrawal of American companies did not prevent al-Manar from accepting European investment and the station continued to advertise Western products.

In addition to advertising revenues, the station has received support via donations from Shiite viewers and others around the Arab and Muslim world that support Hezbollah.21 The support is not limited to only the Arab and Muslim countries – donations have come from the Diaspora in the West, including Europe, Canada and the United States. Often, solicitation for donations comes during breaks in their programming, when viewers are encouraged to send their checks to Hezbollah, which presumably will distribute to the station accordingly. These donations illustrate another

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20 Ibid., 33.

example Hezbollah’s ability to promote a resistance narrative. Donors are resisting by providing support to al-Manar, and the station shapes the story that Hezbollah wants to project to the international community.

**Resistance Programming**

Al-Manar’s programming provides Hezbollah with a forum to present a carefully-sculpted narrative that will present them in the best light possible. The station has evolved and developed a system that mirrors many other successful stations around the world using a format that appeals to a broad audience. Al-Manar’s has adapted a plan, through trial and error, which has empowered them to offer indigenous shows that create the bulk of their primetime schedule. This course has made them less reliant on other organizations for programs, giving them more editorial control over what they put on their airwaves.

Primetime programming is devoted to four genres – music videos, talk shows, drama series, and news programs – that each use approximately 25% of the allotted airtime. Approximately 70 percent of the station’s primetime shows are in-house, a trend that steadily increased from al-Manar’s earlier days where they relied heavily on outside sources. In its nascence, the station struggled to fill airtime, so they would air series from Iran and the Arab world, along with shows from the U.S. that were censored for content. The movement toward in-house programming is no accident.

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Hezbollah has championed this idea because it preserves “the integrity of Islamic and cultural programming.”

As the station evolved and was able to dictate its editorial content, its managers had more freedom to shape a narrative that subscribed to their worldview. The resistance theme was a strategic tool that both focused on enduring issues and reacted to current events. In 2000, as Israel was withdrawing from southern Lebanon, the station began to produce music videos that included footage of military operations against the Israeli targets. This promoted the perception that the Israelis were being driven out instead of withdrawing voluntarily. During this same time, Israel was dealing with the Palestinian intifada and Hezbollah interspersed their music videos with al-Manar’s coverage of the violence. Hezbollah meant to portray the similarities between the Palestinians and their clashes with the IDF to increase their standing in the Arab world.

Al-Manar’s role in assisting Hezbollah with its militant activities is important; not only as a forum but also as an institution that proclaims that these methods can ultimately be successful. The station provides Hezbollah with a platform to justify their use of violence in their actions and also to celebrate those who have died for the cause. The coverage of martyrdom operations is a powerful tool and valuable for recruitment. Al-Manar manages to weave resistance and martyrdom into much of its programming, offering a compelling and consistent message that reaches its viewers.

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24 Jorisch, Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizbullah’s Al-Manar Television, 36.

25 Ibid., 38.
In Shiite tradition, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein is a seminal moment that still resonates, and is best witnessed during the celebration of Ashura. Al-Manar provides a compelling medium which both rallies Hezbollah supporters and offers an enduring legacy to a culture that honors those who make the ultimate sacrifice. The station seeks to accommodate clerics who are supportive of the culture of martyrdom. One such cleric, Sheikh Babil al-Halbawi, argued on an Al-Manar program, “To those who say that jihad against Israel and America is suicide, I say to these people that abandoning jihad is actually suicide.”\textsuperscript{26} Sheikh al-Halbawi is from Damascus, Syria, which in the past would have limited his exposure – but through al-Manar he can influence a broader audience.

Suicide as a form of martyrdom is a contentious subject in Western societies, and also in the Muslim world, where arguments are made for both sides. While Hezbollah has employed the method with grim success, in recent years they haven’t utilized it as often as their Sunni counterparts. Hassan Nasrallah discussed the tactic on al-Manar by alluding to Imam Hussein and others who:

\begin{quote}
Gave life to Arabs and humanity through their blood and death like all nations throughout history made life and dignity through death. That is what Prophet Muhammad, may God’s peace and blessings be upon him, taught us. This is the culture of resistance. The culture of martyrdom is the strongest weapon.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Nasrallah’s interpretation of the Quran may be problematic for some Islamic scholars, but it resonates with many of Hezbollah’s supporters. The Shiite identification with

\begin{footnotes}
\item[26] Ibid., 81.
\item[27] Ibid., 82.
\end{footnotes}
Hussein’s martyrdom provides a powerful example to the audience of persevering against all odds; thus, al-Manar is used as a vehicle for Hezbollah’s interpretation of the suicide bombers as a legitimate weapon.

In shaping Hezbollah’s view of martyrdom, al-Manar has adopted an effective strategy which praises those that have made the ultimate sacrifice by killing themselves. The station affords a great deal of respect to martyrs, displaying images of previous suicide bombers during propaganda music videos in order to inspire others to join the resistance. In addition, the station has aired shows that discuss martyrdom, along with videos made by soon-to-be martyrs. In these films, the bombers tell their stories and justify their actions knowing, that their families and friends will be able to see their last words. Finally, the station has shown footage from successful suicide attacks with patriotic music playing. This cycle reassures those who are about to die that they will not be forgotten. It serves as a valuable recruitment tool for future martyrs, who draw inspiration from those that came before them.

In order to retain its capabilities and expand on its vision, Hezbollah relies on al-Manar to assist them with their efforts to attract new members. A large portion of the station’s programming is dedicated to supporting Hezbollah’s military operations against Israel. This focus dates back to 2000 when the station portrayed Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon as a victory for Hezbollah. Even though much of the international community recognized that Israel acted alone, Hezbollah supporters

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28 Ibid., 83.
subscribed to al-Manar’s portrayal of the events. The station reflects Hezbollah’s assertion that Israeli presence near Shebaa Farms is an illegal occupation and an impetus for military action against the IDF. Al-Manar does not miss an opportunity to highlight the dispute. It covers both military and political altercations in the disputed area.

The political dimension to the Shebaa Farms dispute is complicated because the Lebanese government is wary of further hostilities with Israel. Conversely, the government must contend with an ever-growing Hezbollah political contingent. Above all, the government still caters to public opinion that primarily values Lebanon’s territorial sovereignty. A Hezbollah politician, Hussein al-Haj Hasan, commented to al-Manar, “No matter what the Americans or Israelis say, we will continue to fight until we recover the Farms. We have the right to continue our resistance until we get it back.” These sound bytes are popular; with them, al-Manar seeks to exploit political rhetoric and other methods to legitimize Hezbollah’s claims.

The use of music videos has long been a favored method by al-Manar when disseminating Hezbollah’s message to a wider audience. They augment political rhetoric with their own propaganda, which sends a powerful message to galvanize their base. One music video aired on al-Manar addressed the issue with lyrics like:

It is my right to defend my land and kick out occupiers; it is my right to declare my freedom and raise a flag for the oppressed; it is right to recover Shebaa and all the captured fighters. We would not leave you with the rapist, even if many years pass.

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29 Ibid., 84.
30 Ibid.
The video is accompanied by footage of Hezbollah’s military operations against Israel. This mixture of politics, paired with marketing it to a wider audience, is a crucial component of exporting the resistance narrative. These videos have a broad appeal among their followers, particularly the younger generation who download the videos or buy them from street vendors.

The younger generation in Lebanon is a focal point of Hezbollah’s strategy of resistance; so much of al-Manar’s programming is devoted to this crucial demographic. One effective method employed by Hezbollah is the use of military parades for propaganda purposes. These parades routinely have large groups of children marching with their adult counterparts. The adults march in unison, armed with rifles and militant clothing that is often emblazoned with political messages. The children, ranging from elementary school to high school ages, are in turn dressed like the adults and at times even the youngest will carry rifles. These are deeply symbolic moments that either are captured live by al-Manar or presented as edited footage by Hezbollah afterward. The appeal to children is obvious, and adults are urged by both Hezbollah and al-Manar to encourage this behavior in the youth.

In its programming, al-Manar portrays resistance and the act of martyrdom as a family affair and advocates support from parents. The television program “Mothers of Martyrs” is an example of how al-Manar weaves the importance of family support to the resistance. On the show, mothers are interviewed regularly speaking about their son’s accomplishments and they are portrayed as “pillars of both the faith and the
community.”  

The program also shows videos, photos and mementos from past and current volunteers. The reenactment of martyrdom operations in school productions and plays also serve to justify the child’s actions. In addition to television programs aimed at garnering family support, Hezbollah has devised other ways to guide kids to their military apparatus.

Hezbollah developed a video game as another medium to encourage children to take up the resistance. The popular game called *Special Forces* has widespread appeal in both Lebanon and the Palestinian territories; it is frequently advertised on al-Manar. The first-person shooter game involves a young fighter that is tasked with defending Palestine and conducting a series of missions against the IDF, which culminates in the assassination of the Israeli prime minister. It is similar to other first-person shooter games in the United States in that oftentimes the player is more concerned with advancing to the next level than with what they’re seeing. Hezbollah’s website markets it as a game that provides “all that an anxious person dreams of in order to participate in facing the Zionist enemy,” and it makes them “a partner of the

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This virtual environment is a stepping-stone toward the real-life version of the game.

In the southern Lebanese town of Dahiyeh, Hezbollah built a paintball facility that they named “Special Forces,” which is modeled after the popular video game. It is designed to mirror a real battlefield, complete with barbed wire, military uniforms and guns similar to their real counterparts. A local youth named Rami described the park as a place that “gives you a feeling of readiness for war. You are trained to defend yourself by engaging in a battle that is almost real.” By inculcating children with ideology early in life and providing entertainment and opportunities conducive to this creed, Hezbollah has developed a pipeline of future fighters for the resistance.

The juxtaposition of providing youth with realistic virtual and physical outlets of violent resistance with frequent homage to Hezbollah fighters on al-Manar is indeed a powerful recruitment tool. The station lionizes Hezbollah fighters by depicting them in victorious poses on hilltops and conducting attacks against the IDF. The station is afforded unprecedented access because many of their correspondents are former guerillas. Their prior service allows them to integrate with fighters during operations so they can show soldiers “storming enemy lines, hurling grenades, firing weapons, and conducting rocket attacks against Israeli convoys.” This footage is used for

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36 Ibid.
broadcasts, often as propaganda set to revolutionary music and speeches by prominent Hezbollah leaders.

The music videos depict the fighters as larger than life heroes who are cast as “Lebanon’s benevolent protectors, showing viewers that Israel would not dare invade the country again for fear of Hezbollah’s presence in the south.” These videos are bolstered by coverage of Hassan Nasrallah, whose speeches get extra attention and highlight Hezbollah’s triumphs resisting Israel and the West. Al-Manar cultivates Nasrallah’s image and presents him in a “wide array of favorable poses, including waving Hezbollah flags, visiting hospital patients, meeting supporters at rallies and delivering inspirational speeches.” Coverage of Nasrallah’s visits to wounded fighters is meant to highlight Hezbollah’s commitment to those who resist. By showcasing the financial and medical support to wounded fighters, Hezbollah hopes to encourage potential recruits to join knowing they will be cared for after their service.

Al-Manar has provided Hezbollah with television shows that highlight their benevolence toward wounded fighters. In addition to their music video programming, they produced a show called “In Spite of the Wounds,” which follows soldiers who were wounded as a part of Hezbollah’s Foundation of the Wounded in Lebanon. The program shows the viewers the progression of the fighter’s life toward resistance and

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38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 87.
details how the fighter was wounded. The second part of the show focuses on the recovery process and highlights how they continue to resist. The show is a powerful recruitment tool, similar to many non-profit organizations in the U.S. who promote hiring wounded veterans.

One example of how powerful the show can be occurred in an episode on March 4, 2002, showcasing the lives of two brothers who were wounded in combat. The brothers, Khalil and Samir Mahna, were injured during battle but received a loan from Hezbollah to start their own construction business. The brothers’ dedication to Hezbollah and resistance is obvious; the program showcases their business motto of “Together we resist, together we build.” The loyalty the Mahnas exhibit to their cause underscores the importance that Hezbollah places on retaining the constituency as well as their use of television as a medium to promulgate their best stories. In addition, it shows the intertwining nature of the military and social services apparatus. Both programs complement each other and are self-sustaining.

Another equally powerful program is “My Blood and the Rifle,” which focuses exclusively on fighters who have become martyrs. The program shows the family of the martyred fighter and portrays them in the most favorable light possible, often highlighting young idealistic fighters who have similar motivations. The program, like “In Spite of the Wounds,” is a powerful recruitment tool because it plays to the yearnings of the younger generation who are a key demographic for Hezbollah. The

\[\text{\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.}\]
program evokes the memory of Imam Hussein and glorifies those fighters who resisted for a cause that was greater than themselves.

“My Blood and the Rifle” highlights the diverse backgrounds of prospective fighters. While some of the fighters hail from poverty, there are many episodes that show fighters who joined Hezbollah after graduating from college, debunking the myth that only the poor and uneducated are recruited. Regardless of their upbringing, fighters are always portrayed as idealists who were drawn to Hezbollah because of the righteousness of their struggle. Al-Manar provides Hezbollah with a strategic advantage over its adversaries because it is a platform for fusing social, political and military issues into one easy-to-disseminate message. The fusion of this message into the fabric of everyday life allows a person to resist not only for a short period of time, but for a lifetime. This is a powerful mobilizing force because it gives everyone the ability to participate. The success of this model is unique in the Muslim world because it has foiled the Israelis. This simple fact has prompted other organizations to take notice and many have begun to emulate Hezbollah.

\[42\] Ibid.
CHAPTER 4

THE SADRIST MOVEMENT & HEZBOLLAH MODEL

The Origins of the Sadrist Movement

Muqtada al-Sadr is a complex Shiite politician in Iraq whose stature has risen, to the surprise of experts in the West and Iraq, since the U.S. occupation in 2003. Before his precipitous rise in popularity, Muqtada was an afterthought generally known for his family name and two prominent family members who were important to the Shiite community in Iraq. Muqtada’s rise to prominence occurred due to fortuitous circumstances; one can see a certain parallel in his strategy to the model Hezbollah has employed successfully in Iraq. While not perfectly equivalent to Hezbollah’s model, al-Sadr has adjusted it in a way that has consolidated his power and made him an influential broker in the future of Iraq. In order to understand how he rose to prominence, it is important to examine his family lineage.

In Iraq, the Shiite population suffered immensely under the rule of Saddam Hussein’s Sunni-led government. Even under this oppression, many Shiite voices rose above the tumult to advocate for their faith and the support of their constituents, because while the government was Sunni, Iraq is a predominantly Shiite nation. Two prominent Shiite voices belonged to Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who were Muqtada’s father and uncle, respectively.¹ Both men came to

represent a change from the traditional “quietist” view that Shiite clerics would stay out of politics, providing council and acting as arbiters of disputes. One of the most prominent quietist leaders today is Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who, despite his advanced age, is a vital figure to the Shiites in Iraq.

Muqtada’s uncle, Baqir al-Sadr, was one of the first clerics to challenge the quietist movement by presenting radically new ideas that sought to erase the strict divisions between clerics and politics. Baqir al-Sadr had seized on the Islamic concept of *velayat-e-faqih*, which means, “government of the jurisprudent.” It would afford a religious scholar supreme authority over a country run under the auspices of Islamic shari’a law.\(^2\) This is the same type form of government used by Iran. Baqir al-Sadr’s advocacy for it shocked and threatened many of the Shiite clerics who supported the hands off approach. The quietist clerics felt that a politicized clergy was incongruous with Islamic law. Hussein’s secular regime shared their concerns with al-Sadr but he was undeterred and continued to speak his mind.

Baqir al-Sadr’s declarations and popularity rose in 1979, which coincided with Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini’s successful revolution in Iran. The Iraqi government, fearful of Shiite rebellion, acted swiftly and brutally. The Hussein administration systematically killed hundreds of Baqir al-Sadr’s followers before he was summarily executed at the hands of the regime.\(^3\) While his death was a tremendous loss to his followers in the Shiite community, the lack of outcry or denouncement from the

\(^2\) Nasr, *The Shia Reviva*, 125.

quietist leadership is still a point of contention to this day. The challenge to the quietist movement was far from over; it would soon have a new champion, Muqtada’s father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.

After being placed under house arrest following the death of Baqir, Sadiq al-Sadr became a central figure in 1993, when the Iraqi regime decided they could work with him on Shiite-related issues. Sadiq al-Sadr was given charge of the Shiite seminary in Iraq, where he exercised substantial influence in the interpretation of curriculum. The Iraqi regime calculated that Sadiq al-Sadr had learned from Baqir’s death. They were wrong. Sadiq al-Sadr felt that the quietist’s leadership approach was a primary reason that Shiites remained impoverished and under-represented. He felt that a clergy who advocated for change in the political arena was best, and if that did not work, Shiites would need to adopt a more militant approach. He rejected the notion that the clergy should act as secluded academics. He demanded that clerics take an interest in social issues and involve themselves directly in politics.

The Iraqi regime followed Sadiq’s ascension with growing alarm, realizing that his popularity was a threat to national stability. In addition to his advocacy, Sadiq al-Sadr lived in Baghdad’s Saddam City, a desperate Shiite slum. Its proximity to nexus of the regime spurred them to action. In spite of repeated warnings, Sadiq al-Sadr continued on his path until February 1999, when he was murdered by gunmen who purportedly were acting on orders from the regime. The gunmen fired at Sadiq al-

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4 Ibid., 3.
Sadr’s car, killing him and his two eldest sons, Muqtada’s brothers.\(^5\) Violent demonstrations followed his death. Sadiq al-Sadr’s base verified the widespread appeal and frustration felt by the Shiite population of Iraq. His sacrifice evoked memories of Imam Hussein’s martyrdom and cemented Sadiq’s legacy in Iraq. It provided important step in Muqtada’s ultimate ascension into the upper echelon of Iraqi politics.

**Muqtada’s Rise to Prominence**

The 2003 United States-led invasion of Iraq was destabilizing in many ways. One of its unintended consequences was the emergence of Muqtada al-Sadr as a political player in Iraqi politics. The fourth son of Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada was not considered to be a viable replacement to his father after his death. He was not known for his religious scholarship; his failure to complete a seminary education was surprising, considering his family’s religious credentials. While at seminary, he received the nickname “Imam Atari” because of his propensity for playing video games when he should have been studying.\(^6\) His family suffered after his father’s death because the government seized the “khums,” or alms that Sadiq received as a clergyman. His father’s quietist rivals did nothing to assist the family, instead sustaining their indifference toward the al-Sadr family.\(^7\)

After Baghdad fell, the U.S. did not have the resources to secure the city. Widespread looting and sectarian violence was rampant. Muqtada found himself in a

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\(^5\) Ibid., 4.


unique position to influence much of the Shiite populace because of both his group’s mobilization and his family’s reputation. One of his first forays into politics came in the form of a fatwa issued to the looters, wherein he said that, “looters could hold on to what they had expropriated as long as they made a donation (khums) of one-fifth of its value to the local Sadrist office.”  

This fatwa caused widespread alarm among the quietist clerics and the Shiite upper class because they felt it was a tacit acceptance of blatantly criminal behavior. As a large number of the looters came from the poorer classes, his fatwa was seen as a reprieve. It engendered their good will towards Muqtada.

The instability prompted Muqtada to form his own government in Sadr City, which replaced the former Saddam City after Hussein’s departure from Baghdad. He formed his own militia, Jaysh al-Mahdi, which would become notorious to the Iraqi population and U.S. coalition forces. The quietist clerics and politically active clerics were surprised at Muqtada’s early popularity, mainly because of his youth and lack of religious credentials. They viewed him as living off the reputation of his father, an “ignorant child” whose popularity would wane as time passed and he was exposed as a fraud. They, however, underestimated his appeal to poor Shiites. He effectively used his father’s social services apparatus to fill the vacuum left by the Saddam’s ouster.

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The quietist movement was also well-mobilized and did a credible job retaining their sway over the Shiite population, but the lack of faith in their rule of law played into Muqtada’s hands. The Sadrist movement gained momentum due to the previously-mentioned amnesty of looters, but it also had negative consequences. Muqtada relied on his supporters to staff his militia. Many of those conscripts were pulled from the looting group. This led to a lack of discipline within the movement; militia members were accused of using overwhelming force without merit and for abusing their newfound power.\textsuperscript{11} This violent undercurrent began to manifest itself in attacks on the group’s many rivals, often with disastrous consequences.

Much of the violence perpetrated by the “Mahdi army” was in response to decades-old persecution by the former regime. This manifested itself in the looting of Sunni and Baathist homes and businesses, and the killing of former party members who wronged Shiites. The group would intimidate Sunnis, regardless of their previous affiliations. They also would punish those who helped the U.S. and its allies, as these were viewed by the Sadrists as occupiers. While many clerics in the quietist movement had lines of communication open with the U.S., Muqtada initially refused to have any contact with them. His stance was in concert with his father’s policies – Muqtada felt that the occupation prolonged the oppression that had begun with U.S.-backed sanctions, which had disproportionately hurt impoverished Shiites.\textsuperscript{12} These grievances


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 10.
were exacerbated by the lack of U.S. political outreach to Sadr and the absence of reconstruction in Shiite areas. This fed the narrative of a dispossessed people.

Muqtada began to make audacious speeches denouncing the U.S.-led coalition and other agitators within Iraq. He backed up these remarks with attacks on coalition forces in Baghdad and southern Iraq. In the spring of 2004, Jaysh al-Mahdi began to operate in multiple parts of the country, which alarmed U.S. forces and the still-nascent Iraqi government. On the fifth of August, members of the Mahdi army attacked a police station in the southern Iraqi town of Najaf. The assault touched off a fierce battle that would last for three weeks and feature heavy street fighting between coalition forces and the Mahdi army. The ferocity of the fight, which surprised the Americans, proved to be a strong recruiting tool for Muqtada because the battle took place in one of the holiest Shiite cities in Iraq.

The battle elevated Muqtada from a national figure to an international player, as news coverage showed Mahdi army fighters providing a stiff challenge to coalition forces. During the battle, rumors swirled that Muqtada had been killed, though he would continue to appear at different points in the battle to encourage his fighters. One story had Muqtada engaging a U.S. tank with a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), despite a heavily bandaged hand. Muqtada and his followers also did a masterful job in portraying the Mahdi army as heroic resisters fighting the occupying American forces in a battle steeped with religious undertones.

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13 Cockburn, Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq, 151.

14 Ibid., 152.
Shiite politicians had mixed feelings about Muqtada’s battle with U.S. forces. There were some who quietly supported the defense of the Shiite city of Najaf and respected him for standing up against the Americans. Conversely, many Shiite clerics and politicians felt that Muqtada was jeopardizing the political gains that Shiites were about to realize in the new Iraqi government – gains that they could scarcely imagine under the old regime.\textsuperscript{15} Ali al-Sistani played an intermediary role between the Americans and the Sadrists, helping to negotiate a ceasefire that stopped well short of the U.S. goals. Muqtada agreed to end hostilities when Sistani led a peace march to Najaf to ensure the safety of Shiite holy places, but he refused to disband the Mahdi army. In doing so, he was able to secure a strategic victory that served him far better than the tactical defeat he suffered.

While Muqtada al-Sadr’s rise to prominence occurred much faster than Hezbollah’s in Lebanon, the similarities between the two are striking. Much like Hezbollah, Muqtada initially gained popularity by fighting against a foreign occupation and succeeding where others had failed. Even though he suffered tremendous setbacks in the battle of Karbala, he achieved a victory in public opinion, and in doing so, he burnished his credentials amongst his constituents. Much like Hezbollah, his increased visibility and popularity afforded him legitimacy that allowed him to adopt a more nuanced approach, which ultimately led him to politics.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 161
**Entrance into Politics**

Fresh from his “victory” in Najaf, Muqtada and his Sadrist followers began to organize politically so that they would have a voice in the formation of the new Iraqi government. He described this shift in strategy by saying, “The Sadrist movement first resorted to peaceful resistance, then to armed resistance, and finally to political resistance. But this does not present any problem: every situation requires its own response.”\(^{16}\) What he lacked in religious credentials, Muqtada sought to compensate for in the political arena with a demonstrative public presence that was befitting of his family’s legacy. Muqtada felt most comfortable fighting his battles in a political environment, but his erratic behavior was manipulated by a variety of actors, including Hezbollah, Iran, and other Shiite politicians.\(^{17}\)

Ali al-Sistani found Muqtada to be a useful tool for achieving his own aims in dealing with the Americans because his quietist approach contrasted sharply with Muqtada’s populist rhetoric. Sistani oftentimes used Muqtada in a “good cop/bad cop” situation, earning himself credibility at Muqtada’s expense.\(^{18}\) Muqtada, in turn, realized that he would have to concede in order to achieve political legitimacy in the eyes of Shiites. Sistani had been successful in convincing the U.S. government to hold two elections and one referendum in 2005, which gave the Shiites more power than


\(^{17}\) Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 191.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
they had ever realized during the old regime.\textsuperscript{19} Though he had reservations about the validity of the elections he nonetheless joined the other Shiite parties under the auspices of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA).

Though he had to publicly denounce the armed resistance, joining the UIA paid off when his bloc, Office of the Martyr Sadr, won 32 out of 275 seats in the elections.\textsuperscript{20} Muqtada successfully lobbied the UIA for control of the service ministries in the new government, including the ministries of health and transportation. This was a shrewd political move for a variety of reasons. First, it highlighted his passionate advocacy for the poor and downtrodden and gave him the resources necessary to ensure that support for years to come. Second, he was able to avoid more sensitive posts like the ministries of defense, interior, and foreign affairs. He felt these posts were undesirable because they necessitated working with the coalition and also that public expectations for the positions were so high it would be impossible to meet them.\textsuperscript{21} By sticking to service-oriented ministries, he would be able to gain popular support while staying away from the underbelly of politics.

Muqtada’s reluctance to get his hands dirty in politics reflects a pragmatic approach in line with his father’s ideology, and yet similar to the quietist movement. While he subscribed to his father’s principles of an advocate cleric, he also wanted to have it both ways by presenting himself as a spiritual guide who does not delve into

\textsuperscript{19} Cockburn, \textit{Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq}, 165.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 165.

partisan politics. This idea was the same model employed by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Iran. Muqtada went so far as to ban the use of his picture by Sadrists when campaigning – he suggested that the image of his father, Baqir al-Sadr, be shown instead.

As his stature rose in political circles, Muqtada looked to expand his diplomatic reach to other hot spots in Iraqi politics. On December 1, 2005, he organized a conference in Najaf that brought together most of the Shiite parties and factions in Iraq. At the conference, he convinced them to sign a “national pact of honor” that sought consensus on broad issues including the withdrawal date for U.S. forces and the independence of the ministries of defense and interior. After the conference, he embarked on a regional tour in January and February of 2006. He visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, where he sought to portray himself as an impartial mediator between Iraq and its neighbors. While the long-term success of the trip is questionable, Muqtada increased his popularity among his base and achieved a degree of legitimacy in the region.

With his regional profile enhanced, he then focused on bridging the gap with other Shiite groups who had opposed him in the past. The Sunni insurgency was taking a toll on the country and the Shiite population was being targeted by horrific acts of violence. Muqtada sought a détente with his rivals. While it can be argued that many of

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22 Ibid., 14.

23 Ibid., 16.
these agreements were done solely for face value, they allowed him to focus on combating Sunni insurgent groups like al-Qaeda.

**The Surge and Muqtada’s Exile**

In February 2006, Sunni extremists bombed one of the holiest Shiite sites in Iraq, the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra. This event is widely believed to have sparked the civil war that plunged the country into chaos. The Mahdi army was often cited as instigators of sectarian conflict. As a result, Muqtada’s reputation suffered. While he would routinely call for unity between Shiites and Sunnis during his speeches, many felt that he was either disingenuous or did not have control over those who fought in his name. Making things more complicated was the perception, held by many Sunnis, that the heavily Shiite-populated Iraqi Police Force and Iraqi Army were infiltrated by Mahdi soldiers who led Sunnis-targeted death squads.24

As the violence spiraled out of control, the U.S. eschewed the conventional wisdom of the time and, under the guidance of Army General David Petraeus, committed an additional 20,000 troops to the region.25 Along with the influx of troops came a new strategy that centered on U.S. troops living amongst the population and protecting them from sectarian battles that were being waged in 2006 and 2007. This announcement of the U.S. led surge was met with hostility in the Sadrist camp for a variety of reasons. The increased troop presence reminded them that Iraq was still

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25 Ibid., 124.
occupied, which limited the movement of the Muqtada’s Shiite militias. Initially, Muqtada ordered the militias to maintain a low profile and not antagonize U.S. forces.

The neutral posture taken by Muqtada made sense at first, as he was still trying to consolidate his political gains and realized that open warfare with U.S. troops would seriously endanger his foothold. This showed a practical side of Muqtada al-Sadr, but it also opened him up to criticism from his constituents, who wanted him to be more aggressive when dealing with the Americans. This led to infighting amongst the Mahdi army, causing some groups to go out on their own. It forced Muqtada to conduct attacks on his enemies while retaining deniability.

The infighting reached a head on August 28, 2007, when 50 Shiite pilgrims were killed in a sectarian battle that took place in Karbala, Iraq. Two days later, Muqtada ordered the Mahdi army to suspend offensive operations for six months in response to the tragedy. The news caught the Iraqi government and coalition forces off guard. Many were skeptical that the ceasefire would hold because of the group had become severely fractured since the surge. Muqtada made the decision both to try and rein in elements of the Mahdi army that had moved beyond his control and to install more discipline in his soldiers. In addition to the ceasefire, Muqtada, feeling pressure both internally and externally, went on a self-imposed three year exile to Iran so that he could polish his religious credentials and wait for things to cool off in Iraq.

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Return from Exile and a New Government

While Muqtada served his self-imposed exile in Iran, the violence in Iraq began to decline precipitously from the pre-surge levels, but political reconciliation was still elusive. Muqtada would make periodic visits to Iraq between 2008 and 2010 to ensure that he remained a viable political candidate. He played a role in major decisions by his political bloc, the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS). His return trips were important because factions were growing within the OMS that challenged his right to lead. While he retained a loyal following within the OMS, there were many hardliners who opposed him because of truces he brokered with the Americans and his absence from Iraqi politics. Moreover, the sins of the Mahdi army during the days of sectarian fighting and looting left a stain on him that even the disbanding of the militia in 2008 could never fully erase.

Muqtada found a political opening in 2010 when the Iraqi national election took an unexpected turn, turning his party into the kingmaker. The two most prominent candidates, Nouri al-Maliki and Ayad Allawi, could not secure a majority of seats to gain the prime minister position and thus had to bring other parties into their orbit to win. The OMS had won 40 out of the 325 available seats in Parliament and they ultimately helped al-Maliki secure a second term in office.

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.
seen just how big of a role Muqtada played in the process, his political caché increased as a result, and he and the OMS received multiple concessions that strengthened their position in the Iraqi government.

Perhaps the biggest gain for Muqtada was an implicit “right of return” to Iraq for an outstanding 2003 arrest warrant. The OMS then secured the deputy speakership of parliament and several ministries including construction and housing, planning, labor and social affairs, and water and irrigation. While these were considered mid-tier posts in the Iraqi government, they were in line with Muqtada’s aim to be above messy politics. These posts gave them access to positions in government that would allow them to take care of their constituents and build patronage.

While the Sadrists still enjoy a loyal following, many Iraqis are suspicious of the Sadrist movement and some fear that they will destabilize Iraq’s future. The Sadrists, in particular the OMS, have undertaken many steps to improve their image in Iraq. Fathal Namaa, a Sadrist political director, described the group’s new approach, saying, “We want to show the world we are a modern people, an intellectual people. We don’t want to be radical Islamists.” The group has begun to field lawmakers from a variety of backgrounds, including lawyers, engineers, and accountants. While these are encouraging signs, there are also representatives like Mohammed al-Khafaji, a

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30 Ibid.

former bodyguard for Muqtada, whose official biography says that he “participated” in fighting against the coalition “occupiers.”

The Sadrist movement is even now following a similar playbook to that of Hezbollah when they were entering into politics. While the OMS initially placed a premium on loyalty to the Sadrist cause, they have now begun to realize the importance of fielding candidates who have technical skills that will serve them well in government. The Sadrists understand the microscope that they are under; they have adapted accordingly. One of the most striking examples of this is Iraq’s minister of planning Ali Youssef al-Shukri. He is an academic who spent time in the United States on a State Department program for international leaders. He is also a Sadrist. This practical approach is something that Hezbollah has employed with great effectiveness in Lebanon.

Muqtada al-Sadr’s evolution since the 2003 invasion of Iraq has been instructive for a number of reasons. While the comparison is not perfectly congruous to that of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the similarities between Muqtada’s rise and the Shiite movement are telling. Like Hezbollah, al-Sadr’s role began as a resistance movement that utilized violence in order to achieve its objectives. Like Hezbollah, he focused considerable attention on social services and caring for his constituents when the central government could not or would not take care of them. Even Muqtada’s entrance

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32 Ibid.

into politics looked remarkably similar to Hezbollah’s entry in Lebanon. It is important to watch and learn from these developments, because whether we like it or not, they likely represent a trend that is not likely to end soon. Learning how to deal with these organizations or preventing their ability to attract recruits will be important in the future.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Hezbollah’s Evolution

Hezbollah’s rise to prominence in Lebanon, and their continued regional and global expansion, is a stunning achievement for an organization that just 30 years ago consisted of a few resistance fighters. The evolution of the movement has been impressive, as they blended Shia Islam with other ideologies when beneficial to the group’s objectives. From providing social services to an oppressed people when the government could not, to entering politics with the blessing of an Islamic state, Hezbollah has demonstrated its pragmatic approach to forming a viable and lasting organization. The glue that holds it together, though, is the idea of resistance. Everything that they do is geared toward continuing the struggle against their enemies in Israel and the West. While this has been a powerful unifying concept, it does beg the question, what would happen if resistance was no longer necessary?

Many observers have wondered how Hezbollah could move forward if its foundation was altered and its grievances satisfied. The members’ forays into politics have been met with mixed reviews, as many in the Lebanese government worry about their motivations. Some of these concerns arise from sectarian quarrels between Shiites and Sunnis. Hezbollah’s close relationship with Iran is another primary irritant. Another area of concern developed from the recent United Nations Tribunal, which indicates that Hezbollah operatives were involved in the 2005 assassination of former
Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. While Hezbollah ardently denies involvement, blaming the indictment on Israeli and Western influences, it is difficult to believe that the group had nothing to do with Hariri’s death, especially when one looks at all of the evidence to the contrary.

Hariri’s death crystallizes the unique dichotomy of Hezbollah; it is not only a political party in a representative government, but also has its own military force under its purview. While Hezbollah insists that the military is necessary for the defense of southern Lebanon from Israeli incursions, it also serves as a powerful bargaining chip when dealing with rival political parties. In addition, the presence of their forces in southern Lebanon and skirmishes with the IDF are a constant flash point that could lead to a repeat of the 2006 Lebanon War. A second conflict could prove to be more destructive than the first, since Israel will likely hit harder than they did before in order to prevent another loss. This ubiquitous tension does not bode well for the stability of Lebanon or the region.

This leads back to the question of whether or not Hezbollah needs a conflict in order to survive as a group. It is not an easy question to answer. Plenty of examples could lead one to take both sides of the argument. Hezbollah has effectively created its own state within a state because of its ability to take care of its constituents and has been able to fund its operations through a variety of means. Iran is often cited as Hezbollah’s biggest benefactor. When it comes to foreign aid, that statement is true, although the organization has sought other means to underwrite their activities. Iran
continually has been a target of international sanctions that at times have limited its income, so Hezbollah has sought alternative ways to fund their organization.

While they vehemently deny involvement in the drug trade, international law enforcement has made multiple connections tying Hezbollah to narcotics. Hezbollah’s outreach to Africa, Latin America, and even Mexico has been documented; it demonstrates the complexity of the organization and the international reach that it has achieved. Allegations of narcotics trafficking have plagued the group’s efforts to achieve global legitimacy and have at times galvanized countries to act against them. While the U.S. has designated the group as a terrorist organization, other countries, particularly in Europe, have been wary of attaching this label to them. They do, however, pursue Hezbollah if its members are violating the law. This is a subtle, but important, distinction.

In addition to its illicit activities, Hezbollah continues to push its resistance movement outward, sparring with Israel and the U.S. in Iraq. While no large scale engagements between the IDF and Hezbollah have occurred, several border skirmishes have kept both sides on their toes. In Iraq, several Hezbollah members have been taken into custody by U.S. and Iraqi forces when they were caught on the battlefield. These actions, coupled with previous attacks by Hezbollah against American troops, and their close ties with Iran, have made it difficult for the West to have open dialogue with Hezbollah. In order for the U.S. to effectively counteract Hezbollah, it will need to minimize the impact of areas that make the organization popular.
Suggestions on dealing with Hezbollah

Challenging Hezbollah’s message has always been difficult for the U.S. because its countermeasures are not comprehensive enough to weaken the organization. The U.S. will oftentimes focus on one piece of the puzzle instead of looking at its entire network and targeting each one specifically. The U.S. and its allies need to take a more holistic approach when challenging Hezbollah. They need to act against one pillar of strength while simultaneously weakening another area of its model in order to have a lasting effect. America can no longer take a laissez-faire approach to dealing with the group. Throwing money at the problem simply will not do. By harnessing its resources, the U.S. can take steps to limit Hezbollah’s effectiveness, and in doing so rein in their dangerous activities.

Hezbollah derives a tremendous amount of its popularity from its robust social services programs that were discussed earlier in this thesis. These programs are effective because the Lebanese government cannot or will not provide basic services that are critical to a well-run society. Improving the quality of governmental institutions in Lebanon would be a good first step in offsetting Hezbollah’s advantages. Egypt under the Hosni Mubarak regime effectively deployed a governmental countermeasure with great success when it was trying to work against the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian government improved its quality of health care and made it more affordable to citizens, which provided a counterbalance to Muslim Brotherhood-run clinics. The U.S. should take an active role in supporting basic institutional
changes that could have far-reaching effects on average citizens. This action could chip away at Hezbollah’s vast constituency.

In addition to going after social services, the U.S. should continue to target Hezbollah’s money supply. The U.S. has taken a few steps in that direction with their sanctions against Iran, but it needs to do more because Hezbollah continues to find other income streams. Hezbollah’s willingness to engage in illicit activities presents a challenge to the Department of Justice and the Department of Defense, but America could secure the support of other countries. Many nations are wary of supporting the U.S. in their Global War On Terror, but have proven to be much more helpful when it comes to law enforcement.

Counter Threat Finance is growing in the U.S. government, and cooperation among other countries has started to bear fruit in targeting Hezbollah’s criminal enterprises. Continuing to focus on these efforts will diminish the organization’s cash flow, and in the process will limit their ability to purchase weapons and provide free social services. By hindering Hezbollah’s ability to resist militarily and provide basic services for their constituents, the U.S. could deprive them of two critical recruiting tools. If the U.S. were successful at weakening their recruiting, it could also create an opening that could help minimize Hezbollah’s narrative.

The U.S. will have a difficult time challenging Hezbollah’s narrative because of its recent history in the Middle East – but that doesn’t mean that it will be impossible. The U.S. will need to work with and through their allies and the Lebanese government
so that the message that is presented will have more credibility. One potential example
would be to highlight Hezbollah’s duplicitous interpretation of the Arab Spring. Al-
Manar’s coverage of the uprisings has been extensive, and they have been effusive in
their praise of the demonstrators with the exception of those opposing the Syrian
government. Hezbollah has supported the Assad regime at the expense of the
protestors, who are being subjected to a brutal crackdown; this fact should be exploited
and broadcast to the Arab populace. While this may not dissuade Hezbollah’s current
supporters from sustaining the organization, it may prevent others from joining when
they see the group’s hypocritical handling of events.

While these suggestions are steps in the right direction, it will take continued
diligence and a determined effort to confront Hezbollah and organizations like it.
Hezbollah has proven to be a clever and adaptive group that seems to be ahead of the
curve in dealing with Israel and the West. It is important that America focuses on the
root causes that drive people toward Hezbollah and concentrate on how to solve these
issues, or at the least mitigate them in order to diminish its number of supporters.
These issues are difficult to solve, but it is essential that the U.S. finds a way to deal
with them because other organizations are beginning to imitate the Hezbollah Model.
We ignore these developments at our peril.
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