ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN: THE POLITICAL CREDIBILITY OF HEZBOLLAH
AND ITS IMPACT ON DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL POLITICS

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By

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ABSTRACT

Hezbollah has evolved since 1992 beyond its guerilla identity into a political identity. The sensitive period of 2000-2010 covers best the transformation from a full-fledged guerilla group to a credible political group. One caveat is in order: a guerilla group can be a political group, but for the purpose of the paper, I am using militia group to differentiate it from political group (as in part of the political system of a country in that case Lebanon). This transformation is a consequence of a strategic choice, encouraged by Hezbollah’s third Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (SHN) to integrate Hezbollah into Lebanon’s political arena in 1992. Thus, the paper will examine how has this transformation made an impact on the domestic regional and regional politics?
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# Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1

Chapter II: Background ........................................................................................................ 4

1982:1985: The Beginnings ................................................................................................. 4

1985-1992: Hezbollah’s fight for its legitimacy ................................................................. 10

1992-2000: Political transformation ..................................................................................... 12

Chapter III: 2000-2010 Hezbollah’s impact on the domestic scene.................................. 19

On the Political Scene ......................................................................................................... 19

The Politicization of Its Arsenal ......................................................................................... 30

Chapter IV: Hezbollah’s Impact on the Regional Scene .................................................... 35

Iran and Lebanon .................................................................................................................. 35

Syria and Lebanon ............................................................................................................... 37

Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Lebanon ....................................................................................... 40

Israel and Lebanon ............................................................................................................... 42

Chapter V: Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 44

Policy Implications for US National Security ..................................................................... 44

Bibliography ......................................................................................................................... 51
Chapter I

Introduction

As of January 12, 2011, Hezbollah officially entered the new majority coalition in Lebanon, after resigning from Saad el Hariri’s national unity cabinet. What started as a pure guerilla armed group in the 1980’s that targeted France, Israel, and the United States has now evolved into an undeniable political force. In its current manifestation, it is a political party with members that have been democratically elected in the Lebanese parliament.

In order to understand why and how Hezbollah evolved into a major political force in Lebanon, it is necessary to conduct a diligent and careful analysis of the impact of Hezbollah’s role on domestic and regional politics. The identity of Hezbollah has changed throughout the years since 1984. In 1992, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah became Hezbollah’s third secretary-general and unlike his predecessors Subhi Tufayli and Abbas al Musawi, he implemented a new strategy marking a shift in the party’s identity. He understood that for Hezbollah to be accepted as a credible political group in Lebanon, the party would first have to integrate itself into Lebanon’s domestic political scene. This strategy allowed Hezbollah to evolve into a credible political actor without having to abandon its military identity.

A guerrilla group can achieve political legitimacy while maintaining its militant outlook, if it becomes a part of the domestic political process of the country. To best test this hypothesis,

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1 Along with its allies: Amal, Free Patriotic Movement, and the Druzes of Walid Jumblatt.
2 I am using the term guerilla to differentiate from militia. A guerilla is a person or small group fighting an enemy often in a civil war, but not a member of an official army. [http://www.politicsdictionary.com/definition/guerrilla.html](http://www.politicsdictionary.com/definition/guerrilla.html)
This caveat is important because when the militias will be asked to disarm after Taef in 1991, Hezbollah will be kept out of it because they were not considered as one. For more information see Augustus Richard Norton, The Role of Hezbollah in Lebanese Domestic Politics, The International Spectator 42, No. 4, December 2007: 475–491
this paper will focus on how Hezbollah transformed from a full-fledged guerilla group to a Lebanese political party. The data will include the Open Letter of 1985, in which Hezbollah announced its official birth as a political group and its entry into the realm of Lebanese politics drawing on the lessons of their guerilla and military violence against Israel. In 2009, the Manifesto was amended. The Party recognized its Lebanese identity and withdrew any connotation to the formation of an Islamic state\(^3\). When coupled with Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah speeches from 1992, it is clear that Hezbollah’s primary goal was to become a political actor.

Secondary scholarly and political analytical literature, field research reports, newspapers articles from Lebanese, Arab, and international newspapers, and insider accounts will reveal more on Hezbollah’s means of operating.

The first section of the thesis will assess Hezbollah’s genesis as a guerilla group and the major challenges it had to face to acquire legitimacy in its early years (1982–1992). In particular, it will cover the major milestones of 1992–2000, which formed the foundation for Hezbollah’s transformation into a political actor, such as its first participation in the legislative elections of 1992, the resistance activities (in 1993 and 1996). Furthermore, it will highlight how the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000 from the south of Lebanon marked Hezbollah’s transition from an insurgent force to a political organization. The second section will address the impact of Hezbollah’s domestic rise on the political, social, economic, and sectarian environment. The third section will discuss Hezbollah’s transformation into a legitimate political actor on the regional scene with a close look at the bilateral relations between Lebanon and its neighbors.

Several defining moments took place in Lebanon between 2000 and 2011 that provide

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\(^3\) In Naim Qasem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, Saqi, 2010.
clear illustrations of Hezbollah’s evolution and show its rise to political credibility, such as Syria’s transition and eventual withdrawal from Lebanon between 2000 and 2005, the war of 2006, and the political stalemate from December 2006 till May 2008. The parliamentary elections of June 2009 and Hezbollah’s new status as a majority partner in Lebanon indicated that Hezbollah’s political identity is deeply grounded in the Lebanese system and is bolstered by its guerilla background.
Chapter II

Background

This section will address the beginnings of Hezbollah in the context of the Lebanese civil war that erupted in 1975. This section will also prove that the birth of the party is rooted in a more complex context than the conventional wisdom might think.

1982–1985: The Beginnings

In 1985, Hezbollah (“the Party of God” in English) was born. The party became official with the publishing of its Open Letter on February 16, 1985.\(^4\) The Open Letter marked the first shift in the formation of the party’s history, whereby it translated a political vision and program in tune with the struggles of the Shia resistance. The Open Letter, as Qassem states, was the fruit of “the party’s vision and directive as no jihad movement could separate itself from complementary political work that built on the fruits of resistance and draws the objectives nearer.”\(^5\)

Nonetheless, Hezbollah was not created overnight. Three primary factors contributed to Hezbollah’s birth: 1) the disappearance of Sayyed Musa al Sadr in 1979, 2) the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and 3) the Israeli invasion of 1982, codenamed “Operation Peace in Galilee,” which is considered to be the true catalyst that triggered the formation and put it on the forefront of Shia politics in Lebanon. The long-lasting Syrian presence in Lebanon further motivated Hezbollah to remain active within Lebanon.

*The disappearance of Sayyed Musa al Sadr*

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\(^4\) From 1982 till 1985 what would become Hezbollah was still a regrouping of nine Islamic groups.

\(^5\) In Qasem, Op. cit, chapter 3
In 1979, Sayyed Musa al Sadr, the Shia cleric who had by that time arisen as the official spokesperson of the Lebanon’s impoverished Shia population, went to Libya to visit Colonel Muammar Qaddafi and was never heard from again, leaving the Shia of Lebanon without a voice. His legacy, however, continues to this day and has played a major role in Hezbollah’s rise to political prominence in the region.

Al Sadr first came to Lebanon in the late 1950’s on an invitation from his Lebanese relatives. He successfully institutionalized the role of the Shias in Lebanese politics. The key behind his success was his aggressive immersion into Lebanese politics. He recognized how crucial it was for the Shiite community to have a voice amongst the major political players in Lebanon and consequently dedicated himself to making that voice heard. One of his first tactical decisions was to cooperate with President Fouad Chehab. This cooperation between the Maronite president and the Shia leader was the first of its kinds and laid the groundwork for a successful political relationship between the two men. It eventually translated into the creation of the Higher Shia Council in 1967, a milestone victory for the Shiite community.

The institutionalization of Shia politics meant that the zaama, which for a long time had stigmatized the Shia community, was not a legitimate source of representation for the Shia community anymore. Fouad Ajami explains in his book the feudal system that defined for long the Shia community. A zaaim or a bey, he explains “were the descendants of landed families. The leadership of the big man was the organization principle of social and political life. Based on this heritage tradition and the services, the Shiaas pledged allegiances to him”.

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6 Fouad Ajami, The Vanished Imam,
7 See the report by Al Shira magazine (Beirut), January 16, 1984: pp.20-24
8 In Ajami, Op. cit, p.63
Sayyed Musa el Sadr was an answer to the problem the Shiaa suffered throughout history. Fouad Ajami discusses the dilemma of “unclassible men” whereby Shias are “hated by the Persians and Arabs and by the Turks and Arabs as Shiites”\(^9\). The Shias were Lebanese too and had the right for a respected political representation. Lebanon was and is 
\(\textit{al balad al niha’i}\) (the ultimate country) for the Shias to establish themselves as a credible political force.\(^10\) In the years leading up to the civil war (1969–1975), al Sadr realized the double-threat that the Israelis and the Palestinians posed. The Shias had begun to flee the south and move to Beirut's outskirts.\(^11\) If Sayyed Musa el Sadr offered to meddle at first between the Lebanese State and the Palestinians he would realize early enough that the Palestinian cause was just a disguise.\(^12\) In fact they were terrorizing the Lebanese generally and the Shia community would suffer from it\(^13\). Both the Israelis and the Palestinians saw the strategic interest in the south of Lebanon.

Sayyed Musa el Sadr understood that the interest of his community had to come first; therefore, he created Afwaj al Mouqawama Al Loubnaniya (AMAL) to defend against both the Israeli invader and the Palestinian internal threat.\(^14\) AMAL became the first, organized militia of the Shias.\(^15\) AMAL not only represented the right to bear arms and defend themselves, it was also a mark of their self-worth and rights within Lebanon. In addition, AMAL bore an even

\(^9\) Ibid p.56  
\(^10\) Ibid p.622  
\(^11\) In principle SMS was against the use of force and weapons. SMS at the outbreak of the civil war had “clean hands in the dirty war”. He advocated against violence. That’s why “Lebanon was with him.” in the early days of the civil war he fasted. In Ajami, Op. cit.; Chapter 4, p.172  
\(^12\) Especially the Maronite protagonists  
\(^13\) The Palestinians were rising to become the new threat  
\(^14\) AMAL or Afwaj al Muqawa al Loubnaniya stands for HOPE in English literally but means resistance.  
\(^15\) AMAL did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Shia Higher Council. AMAL did not represent all the Shias conversely to the Higher Shia Council. Not all Shias were members of AMAL.
deeper symbolic meaning as it represented the historical struggle of the Shias ever since the
advent of Islam. Michael Fisher and Fouad Ajami refer to the “Karbala paradigm” or the revival
of the “saintety of martyrdom.” These two paradigms would be at the core of Hezbollah’s

The influence of the Iranian Revolution in 1979

Historically, Iran has always been one of the epicenters of the Shiite community regarding
doctrinal and religious practices specifically at a time where Saddam Hussein persecuted the
Shia in Iraq. Most significantly, the Shia of Lebanon performed pilgrimages to Qom instead of
Najaf and Karbala. In 1979, upon the proclamation of the Iranian Islamic Republic, popular demonstrations
ensued in Beirut in support of the new Islamic Republic. In 1982, the Iranian Revolutionary
Guardsmen or Pasdarans, stationed in the Bekaa, provided military training to the Islamic
factions that ultimately formed Hezbollah. Ali Mohtachami, former Iranian ambassador to
Syria in 1982 and considered the godfather of Hezbollah, supervised the training. The presence
of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps in Lebanon introduced a new type of warfare in
Lebanon: asymmetrical warfare, or covert operations, against the enemy in which Hezbollah
became an expert. Indeed, according to a report of Matthew Levitt and David Schinker from the
Washington Institute, Imad Mughniyah, who was trained by the Iranians and was the chief

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16 “The Karbala paradigm is based on a narrative of the Third Imam, Hussein bin Ali’s martyrdom at the hands of
the Umayyad army at Karbala in 680 CE. The myth of Karbala is one of the founding myths of Shi’ism. It evokes
ideas of martyrdom, sacrifice, commitment to a cause”. In Rola Husseini, Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal; Third
World Quarterly, 31, Iss. 5: 803-815
17 In XVI century, a group of clerics from the Djebel Amil went to Iran to implement Shiism as the religion on the
instigation of the Safavid princes. In Sabrina Mervin, op.cit, ch.3, p.76
18 The Pasdarans are the elite units of the Iranian military; and the Bekaa is the Shia stronghold in Lebanon.
tactician of Hezbollah, rose as the primary suspect behind the master plot bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992.\textsuperscript{19} Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer, considered Mughniyeh the “most dangerous terrorist we have ever faced … the grail that we have been after since 1983.”\textsuperscript{20}

Lebanon became a strategic interest for the Iranians who developed a thorough action-plan. The Pasdarans financially supported the military efforts of Hezbollah. Simultaneously, Iran bolstered its diplomatic efforts in Beirut in order to consolidate its relations with the group. Moreover, the impact of the Iranian revolution in Lebanon saw a conceptual shift in the interpretation of the “Karbala paradigm.” In Iran, it translated into the “revolt against the oppressor” while in Lebanon, Hezbollah’s understanding of the Karbala paradigm was in resistance against the main enemy: Israel.\textsuperscript{21} They used numerous tactics, including suicide attacks; Ahmad Kassir was the first operative and “martyr” of the Shia “resistance” to execute a suicide mission against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Southern Command in Tyr Lebanon.\textsuperscript{22}

*The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982*

The real spark that ignited the birth of Hezbollah, after seceding from AMAL, was the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. On July 6, 1982, Israel used the pretext of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to enter Lebanon and annihilate the Palestinians as part of its “Peace in Galilee” wider operation.\textsuperscript{23} The Israeli troops faced resistance from Palestinians and

\begin{itemize}
  \item [19] \url{http://www.lebanonwire.com/0802MLN/080211804WI.asp}.
  \item [20] \url{http://mideast.blogs.time.com/2008/02/13/who_killed_imad_mughniyeh/}.
  \item [21] In Rola el Husseini, op. cit. p.4
  \item [22] In Naim Qasem, op.cit, p.173
  \item [23] Israel supported the Lebanese Forces leader presidential contender Bachir Gemayel. In an effort to support the Christians, the Israelis invaded Lebanon and the operation turned into a fight with the Shias.
\end{itemize}
the Shia militants, who used suicide operations. The success of Hezbollah’s suicide operations quickly became a threat to the Israelis who foresaw the potential of the party’s *modus operandi* to inspire and encourage the Palestinians to follow suit and carry out copy-cat attacks.

The failure of the negotiations between Lebanon and Israel during the May 17 accords signaled Hezbollah’s emerging political impact in what it considered “a complete fulfillment of Israeli conditions posting Lebanon as the police officer in charge of the occupier’s security.” It also credited Hezbollah’s rising military influence on the Lebanese government. As a result, the IDF would partially retreat on April 30, 1985 to the blue line. This first withdrawal demonstrated how Hezbollah achieved political gains through force.

The Israeli episode best exemplifies how Hezbollah’s rise as an important actor in the Shia scene led to bigger trade-offs. As the Israelis withdrew in 1985, the Syrians, who had been present in Lebanon since 1976, increased their hegemonic control.

*The Syrian presence*

Syria and Hezbollah’s relationship is anchored around Syria’s strategic interest in controlling Lebanon. The nature of the relationship can be defined as strategic rather than ideological. This original clarification made by author Olfa Lamloun shows the different nature of the relationships between Syria and Hezbollah and Iran and Hezbollah, and show how each pairing is different from the other.

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24 In Qasem, op. cit
25 Ibid p. 177
26 In Qasem, op. cit, p.170
27 Ibid p.178
In 1979, Syria encouraged the rise of the pro-Shia militias in the Bekaa so that their military presence would not be undermined in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{29} Qasem adds that the “relationship between Hizbullah and Syria was initially restricted to coordination on security issues.”\textsuperscript{30} The period between 1982 and 1990 was when Syria tried to counter and limit the rise of the newly formed Hezbollah and bring it under its umbrella. By choosing to support the AMAL Party, Syria essentially wanted to divide and rule by creating political divisions amongst the Shia population.\textsuperscript{31} The war of the camps and the battle of Fathallah, however, confirmed the rising strength of Hezbollah on the domestic scene and its resilience to Syria’s agenda in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus, the decision of Hezbollah to go public on February 16, 1985 was a result of key events: the disappearance of al Sadr, the Iranian revolution, and the IDF invasion. Their aim was simply to target the Zionist enemy and solve the dilemma of a war-torn Lebanese state. This rhetoric, centered on the invasion of Israel, was fundamental to the publication of the Open Letter.

1985-1992: Hezbollah’s fight for its legitimacy

The Open Letter made Hezbollah’s presence public, and hence an actor in Lebanon with military and political force. It also quickly created challenges on the domestic scene, specifically within the Shia camp. Over the next five years (1985–1990), Hezbollah would fight for its legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{29} Another Shia stronghold
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid p.395
\textsuperscript{31} Qasem offers a more nuanced version of Syrian troops deployment in Beirut southern suburb: “the Syrian president reassured Hizbullah leaders that its deployment of forces in Beirut’s southern suburbs was only for security reasons without any biased intentions.” In Qasem, op.cit
\textsuperscript{32} The tensions between Syria and Iran on their influence on Lebanon will translate in 2 major conflicts: - The war of the camps will oppose the Syria backed AMAL vs. Iranian backed Hezbollah - The battle of Fathallah.
and would soon understand that intra-Lebanese opposition was just as significant as the Israeli threat.

**The War of the Camps**

As a preamble to the rising tension between AMAL and Hezbollah and in reaction to Yasser Arafat’s control of the Palestinians camps within Lebanon, Hezbollah sided with the PLO against AMAL, which was backed by Syria. Hafez el Assad deployed 8,000 soldiers to counter Hezbollah’s rising military apparatus during the conflict. This deployment was also meant to be a clear signal to Iran that Syria was in charge in Lebanon and that any Shia opposition would be crushed. Nonetheless, Qassem asserts that the sole purpose of this battle was to preserve unity among Muslims against the greater evil: Israel. The war ended with direct Syrian involvement.

This episode highlighted Hezbollah’s first test on the domestic scene and the politicization of issues, such as the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. Most of all, the war of the camps forecasted the fear felt within Syria’s upper echelons from Hezbollah’s rising influence within Lebanon and its growing military role. The war of the camps also ascertained that Hezbollah had to calibrate its political expectations and that any military activity had trade-offs. The looming Hezbollah–AMAL war would only serve to confirm this reality.

**The Hezbollah–AMAL War**

The Shia community was put through a test during 1985–1990 as the rivalry between AMAL and Hezbollah heated up. Norton and Qassem provide two slightly different accounts of

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33 In Sabrina Mervin, op. cit. ch.4
34 In Qasem, op. cit
the rivalry. Kinda Chaaib\textsuperscript{35} also recounts the conflict between the two factions as being a battle for legitimacy by Hezbollah. So far AMAL was regarded as the legitimate representation for Shias. The war that will enfold between them and the strong nascent Hezbollah will confirm the opposite. Regardless of various interpretations of the struggle for power between the two, a strategic alliance ultimately ended three years of bloodshed.\textsuperscript{36}

The “skirmishes” that erupted in 1988, signaling the beginning of the war, expanded into greater clashes in Beirut (June 5 1988). The first cease-fire brokered by Syria ultimately failed in February 1989. As Lebanese leaders were convening in the Saudi city of Taef to negotiate an end to the civil war, Hezbollah refused the conditions of the cease-fire fearing the disarmament of the party in the South.\textsuperscript{37} This refusal led to the “Iqlim wars” that lasted until July of 1990.\textsuperscript{38} In 1990, the Iranian and Syrian Foreign Ministers brokered a successful deal between the two factions and brought an end to the bloodshed, fostering the AMAL–Hezbollah accords in November of 1990.

This second episode of Hezbollah’s fight for its legitimacy raises the complexity of domestics politics as they are intertwined with the strategic interests of regional powers Iran and Syria. The AMAL–Hezbollah “war” embodied Syrian and Iranian interests and their mutual desire to hold sway within the Shia camp. It also symbolized Hezbollah’s rise as the leading representative of the Shia community within Lebanon.

\textbf{1992–2000: Political Transformation}

\textsuperscript{35} In Sabrina Mervin. op. cit
\textsuperscript{36} Qassem stresses on the particular relationship that bounds today both parties: “the sharing of experience becoming the bread and butter of the same household and sons of the same village”.
\textsuperscript{37} In Qasem, op.cit
\textsuperscript{38} cf. to the Iqlim al Tuffah wars in the South of Lebanon.
After the assassination of Sayyed Abbas el Musawi, second secretary general of Hezbollah, in 1991, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah became the third secretary general. Gradually, Hezbollah began to deemphasize the implementation of the Islamic state as it had initially been doing in its early years (cf.1982–1989). Author Nizar Hamzeh best explains this transformation. The credit of the “Lebanonisation of Hezbollah” goes to Hajj Hussayn Fadllalah, the marja’a of Hezbollah.39 “It is Fadlallah’s Lebanonisation of Hezbollah that greatly undermined the position of the extremists in the party.”40

Fadlallah encouraged the dialogue with the Christians (in Lebanon) and the establishment of a non-confessional system. The causality that he draws between the influence of Haj Fadlallah on the party and its rise on the local political scene that was behind Hezbollah’s transformation into a Lebanese political party. It was at this moment under the watchful eye of Hajj Hussyan Fadlallah and driven by the charismatic leadership of Nasrallah that the “Lebanonization” of Hezbollah into a political actor truly began.41

**Taef**

Understanding the Lebanese political climate after the civil war ended in 1991 is critical for understanding Hezbollah’s transformation into a political actor. In 1989, 62 Lebanese deputies convened in Saudi Arabia to sign the Taef Agreements.42 The document ended the fifteen-year-old Lebanese civil war and became Lebanon’s second constitution on September 21, 1990.

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39 The marja’a is the religious guidance of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Fadlallah was appointed by Khamenei
40 In Nizar Hamzeh, *Hezbollah*
41 In Nizar Hamzeh, op.cit
42 Also known as the Document of National Understanding.
In theory, Taef was designed to eradicate the political dogma that had been so prevalent within the Lebanese system in order to turn the page of sectarianism. Given that the country is a mosaic of eighteen denominations, the French established a tradition in the repartition of the Lebanese institutions. In 1943 the constitution of the newly independent Lebanese Republic would follow what would become a customary trend (‘erf in arabic). Accordingly, the president shall be Christian Maronite; the Prime Minister Muslim Sunni and the Speaker of the House Muslim Shia.

In reality, Taef “ratified the National Pact of 1943,”reinforced sectarianism, and exacerbated Lebanon’s intra-community problems that had been a defining feature of the pre-civil war era.\(^43\) It also enabled an election law, which to this day guarantees that all denominations are represented in the parliament on a 50–50 Christian-Muslim basis, which would create short-term alliances of convenience between the political players. These alliances are not sustainable and only make the Lebanese system weaker.\(^44\)

Strategically, the accords guaranteed Syria’s oversight of Hezbollah’s affairs. This oversight lasted until 2005.\(^45\) It was basically an extreme interpretation of the accords, which states that Lebanon would “maintain privileged relationships with the neighboring countries.”\(^46\) Under this provision, Syria was able to wield a certain level of power over Lebanon. The sectarian system had once again become an integral part of Lebanon’s politics.

*Elections of 1992*

\(^43\) In Norton, op.cit

\(^44\) 54-54 Muslims Christians ( hence a total of 108 MP)

\(^45\) In Mona Harb, *Le Hezbollah a Beyrouth*; Karthala; 2010  p.194

\(^46\) In Dany Ghossoub, *Le role du confessionalisme dans la vie institutionelle Libanaise*; chapter 2
Taef entrenched the troika structure as the dominant feature of domestic politics.\textsuperscript{47} It was under this new balance of power that Hezbollah subtly entered the political game. Nizar Hamzeh defined this move as “further evidence of the decline of Hizbullah's militant faction.”\textsuperscript{48} Hamzeh asserted that the 1992 elections saw the “stunning victory of Hezbollah with 8 seats…as it has the highest number of representatives in comparison with other parties.”

Most significantly, the elections of 1992 showed a “new face of Hezbollah” that had been evolving on a domestic scene plagued by sectarianism. In theory Hezbollah’s Chura council asked the permission of Khamenei, the Jurist-theologian of Shia political doctrine, to participate in the domestic elections. Ultimately the 12-member council took the decision to take part in the elections.

The 1992 election was Hezbollah’s third fight for legitimacy after the war of the camps and the Hezbollah-AMAL war. They turned this time to the Lebanese state and reached a level of “harmony” through diplomacy and negotiations.\textsuperscript{49} Accordingly, Hezbollah complied with the Lebanese government’s decision to disarm within the greater Beirut area in 1991 and reestablish order. The reason for this compliance was Hezbollah’s new vision that was reluctant to see its weapons being used within Lebanon.\textsuperscript{50}

This harmony raised two major caveats. First, Hezbollah benefited from the overt political cover of Syria.\textsuperscript{51} This strategic cover resulted in the guarantee from the Lebanese government that there would be no clashes between them and Hezbollah. As a consequence,

\textsuperscript{47} The troika structure means that the President (Christian maronite); the Prime Minister (Sunni); the Speaker of the House (Shia) shall govern in consensus. If one of the three disagrees with one another, then the country heads to a stalemate allowing regional and international interference to unblock the situation.
\textsuperscript{48} With the release of Western hostages by Hezbollah. In Hamzeh, op.cit
\textsuperscript{49} In Qasem, Hizbullah: The story from within. Saqi. 2010; p. 193
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid p. 190
\textsuperscript{51} According to Qasem choosing Syria from Israel was the rational choice.
Hezbollah kept its military arsenal and defended Lebanon when Israel attacked—the Lebanese military was not the only custodian of security in the country.

Second, the Taef accords highlighted the importance of Hezbollah’s arsenal and how important it was for Hezbollah’s rise as a political actor. The 1992 elections also showed how Hezbollah could not fulfill its political goals without a heavy reliance on its military arsenal.

1993–1996: Resistance activities

As Hezbollah’s political power grew, it did not downgrade its resistance activities. In 1993 and 1996, Israel launched two offensive operations in the hope of disarming Hezbollah’s military arsenal. Operation Accountability, launched on July 25 1993 virtually at the same time as the Oslo agreements, in the hope that it would provide some international political cover and consent to the operation, was the first failure of Israel to disarm Hezbollah by force.\textsuperscript{52} Israel wanted to achieve two goals: one, “attack those who directly attack us, especially Hizbullah, and to alert the population of Lebanon and (...) the government”.\textsuperscript{53} Hezbollah through its Secretary General declared themselves ready for a “long war, which will not be bound by any red lines or limits imposed by the enemy”\textsuperscript{54}. The “July aggression” ended with an oral cease-fire brokered by the United States and accepted by Syria.\textsuperscript{55}

Three years later the 10-day long Operation “Grapes of Wrath” in 1996, which started on April 11, 1996 further bolstered the credibility and the resilience of Hezbollah. The Israeli government failed again in their attempts to exert pressure on the Lebanese government (a Syrian cover at the time) to disarm Hezbollah. The 1996 aggression was mostly notorious for what

\textsuperscript{52} The Oslo agreements in 1993 were an attempt to find a final solution to the Arab Israeli war.
\textsuperscript{53} This was the statement of foreign minister then Shimon Peres. In Qasem, op. cit p.199
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid p.200
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid p.201
Hezbollah called the “Qana massacres” when 118 civilians died and 127 were injured.\textsuperscript{56} Israel wanted to achieve both political and military goals. On the one hand the Israeli thought that this campaign would “fulfill the need of Peres to record a military victory that would assist his election for prime minister”, and on the other put “an end to resistance activities, pressure the Lebanese government and threaten peace in the villages”.

Hezbollah emerged “victorious” from the offensive with the April Accords written in favor of the Resistance.\textsuperscript{57} Contrary to 1993, this time the accords were written and “tailored to the requirements of the Resistance”.\textsuperscript{58} The signing of the cease-fire took more time than expected because the Lebanese government worried Hezbollah of “being sold or betrayed”\textsuperscript{59}. Ultimately, the 1996 “war of attrition” spawned a great deal of patriotism in Lebanon and ended up uniting a vast majority of the Lebanese people in support of the resistance activities.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{1998: election of Emile Lahoud}

Hezbollah’s rising influence on the domestic scene was confirmed when it overtly backed the election of Syrian ally General Emile Lahoud to the presidency of Lebanon in 1998: “It indicated the ascendancy of the organization’s political power.”\textsuperscript{61} Lahoud, now at the helm of the Lebanese state, provided political cover for Hezbollah’s military arsenal\textsuperscript{62}. The arsenal became an integrated part of Lahoud’s rhetoric, which only bolstered Hezbollah’s credibility as a political actor.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid p.207
\textsuperscript{57} Cf: the wording “launching” and “firing”.
\textsuperscript{58} With the direct intervention of Syria
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. p.210-211
\textsuperscript{60} In Rola el Husseini, op.cit. p.806
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid p.808
\textsuperscript{62} Richard Norton, Hezbollah: a Short History
2000: IDF withdrawal from South Lebanon

The combination of resistance, political transformation, and social activism of Hezbollah led to its crowning glory: the IDF troops’ withdrawal from the south on May 25, 2000. Israel’s withdrawal was both a military as well as political victory for Hezbollah and eventually led to the party winning in the 2000 parliamentary elections.

Hezbollah’s evolution proved that resistance activities could yield concrete results, especially when they were cloaked in the rhetoric of defending Lebanon and its people. Also, Hezbollah’s parliamentary victory highlighted the southern region’s strategic importance in elections. More importantly, Hezbollah showed that the Shia voice could no longer be ignored. The leadership of Nasrallah was the spark that encouraged the transformation of Hezbollah into a political group from a full-fledged resistance group and allowed them to participate in the 1992 elections. Hezbollah then established itself into a gradual dominant political force that possessed the most capable military force in Lebanon and conveyed that the south was no longer detached from decisions in Beirut.
Chapter III
2000-2010 Hezbollah’s impact on the domestic scene

The victory of May 2000 encouraged Hezbollah to confidently pursue its political transformation. Throughout the period of 2000–2011, the socioeconomic infrastructure of Lebanon contributed to the backbone of Hezbollah’s ascendency as a pivotal political force within Lebanon. The influence of its military wing should not be discounted either, but it would put Hezbollah’s political credibility to the test with the assassination of Rafik el Hariri in February 2005. Hezbollah, however, was not only able to recover but also become stronger domestically after Hariri’s death.

On the Political Scene

As of 2000, Hezbollah’s popularity had become such a reality that traditional players like Hariri had to endorse the resistance activities of Hezbollah, although prior to 2005 it had not belonged to any official cabinet.

Under the careful watch of Nasrallah, he catapulted the Shia representation to a new level. The Shia deputies, members of the Politburo of Hezbollah, accessed the parliament if the voters elected them and not because they belonged to in the hope of ending the Lebanese tradition of hereditary politics and fight sectarianism, which thus far defined Lebanese leadership dynamics. The Gemayel family, the Tueni, the Hariris, the Jumblats were all a product of the discriminative sectarian politics enforced by the French in the 1920’s.63

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63 Hezbollah was, and is, virulently opposed to neo-feudalism, that one could access politics only if he was elite and considered to be a plague on Lebanese politics.
On another note, the political deadlock that stemmed from the reelection of Hariri in 2000 as prime minister and his rivalry with Syrian-backed president Lahoud was a turning point in Lebanese political dynamics. Since the Assad regime was the guarantor of Hezbollah’s arsenal, Hariri clearly expressed discomfort when Syria engineered a three-year extension to Lahoud’s mandate as president in 2004.

This obvious interference from Syria triggered widespread international discomfort and condemnation, particularly from France and the United States. It led to the UN Security Council resolution in September 2004, which called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the disarmament of all militias hinting to Hezbollah’s military arsenal. Indirectly, the UN resolution 1559 paved the way for Hariri to rethink his stance toward Syria’s mingling in Lebanese affairs. Given Syrian support of Hezbollah, this attitude change blew up any hope of rekindling the Hariri–Hezbollah relationship.

On February 14, 2005, Hariri was assassinated in a car bombing, which also claimed the life of 22 other citizens. His murder created a wave of protest demanding the withdrawal of the Syrians from Lebanon. Hezbollah remained very cautious during the demonstrations as its allegiance to Lebanon and Hariri’s legacy were both put to the test. This struggle in 2005 signaled another important shift in Hezbollah’s political identity. In June of that year, the party was rewarded by being the key to the victory of the anti-Syrian coalition led by Saad el Hariri, heir of his late father’s political heritage.

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64 Lahoud as Norton rightly describes in his chapter was Bashar el Assad man in Lebanon. He thus did everything in his power to impede on the role and stature of the Prime Minister that was Hariri.
66 Qasem and Harb discuss this point at length. It is around that time that the conventional wisdom that thought of Hezbollah being a Syrian proxy would be reconsidered.
The Quartet agreement, which rallied Hezbollah, the Druzes of Walid Jumblatt, the Future Movement, and the Lebanese Forces of former warlord Samir Geagea was an electoral alliance for the June 2005 elections. The coalition “pledged to uncover PM Hariri assassins.”

It seemed then that the March 14 coalition and Hezbollah shared the same goals. Yacine Nenzy, journalist at Liberte magazine, gives a thorough understanding of these alliances: it is the product of the consensual democracy, which is the founding tenet of Lebanon.

The enemies of the past turned out to be allies in the elections of 2005: “one candidate on Mr Hariri's Beirut list, for example, is Solange Gemayel, the widow of Bashir Gemayel. The Druze chieftain, Walid Jumblatt, whose fighters fought vicious battles against Christian forces in the war, included George Adwan, who once led a radical right-wing Maronite militia, on his list in the Druze-dominated Shouf region. Hezbollah, generally seen as pro–Syrian (and pro-Iranian), ran candidates on both Mr Hariri's and Mr Jumblatt's lists.

In the aftermath of the June 2005 elections, Hezbollah entered the government of Siniora for the first time henceforth creating a new balance of power. By entering the government, Hezbollah demonstrated its commitment to Lebanon’s stability and its trust in the viability of the system.

*The road to the opposition*

In November 2005, a sudden shift occurred that ended up terminating the Quartet agreement. Hezbollah entered the opposition thereby restructuring the balance of powers once

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67 In Qasem, op.; cit, p.28-29
68 Yacine Nezy, Liban chroniques d'un pays en surcis;
69 Bachir Gemayel founded the Lebanese Forces and was briefly the country's president before being assassinated in 1982 following the ruinous siege of largely Muslim West Beirut by Israel, which Mr Gemayel encouraged.
70 In Harb
again. The ruling coalition lost an important strategic ally.\textsuperscript{71} The political war of the two camps began at its crux the presidential crisis between the “official majority” in the parliament and the “real majority” on the ground.\textsuperscript{72}

This frustration would push Hezbollah to rethink its alliance strategy. A milestone in Hezbollah’s Lebanonization was its alliance with General Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), which established “a bridge of communication”\textsuperscript{73} between the two parties.\textsuperscript{74} The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed on February 6, 2006, underlined the mutual feeling of resentment that the two parties shared at having become outliers from the government as well as towards the consequences of the overstated “Cedar Revolution.”\textsuperscript{75} As the polls of the elections of June 2005 showed, Hezbollah and Aoun were the two biggest numerical winners in their respective electoral districts; the former for the Shias and the latter as the largest Christian\textsuperscript{76} block in the parliament.

The outcome of the MOU was clear. Aoun’s display of unlimited support to the Shia during the July war translated into Christian villages welcoming Shia refugees into their homes in the south. What has started as an “entente” or understanding grew into a strategic alliance. Counterarguments posit that this alliance is proof of the “dhimmis” (second-class citizens) status

\textsuperscript{71} Per the Taef Accords hence the constitution, any major community that is not represented in the government, makes the Lebanese government lose its legitimacy.

\textsuperscript{72} Yacine Nenzy, op. cit, p.124

\textsuperscript{73} Qasem, op. cit, p. 32

\textsuperscript{74} “Hezbollah the founder of March 8 movement, and the Aounists, known for their anti-Syrian position became strangely associated together in their opposition to the government of Fouad Siniora.” In Yacine Nezy, op. cit

\textsuperscript{75} Especially as it pertained to the late journalist and political thinker Samir Kassir assassinated on 2 June 2005. He talked about the “Unfinished Spring of Beirut” (Le Printemps inachevé in French) In Nezy, op. cit, p.110.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid
This argument, however, does not hold since Lebanon is a consensual democracy whereby, and per Taef, no denomination can forcefully take over another. This strategic MOU was the prelude to the opposition-majority power struggle. The return of Hezbollah to the opposition offered the chance for the majority coalition to raise the issue of Hezbollah’s arsenal hence making its weapons a national,”

*Sectarianism*

Since 2005, Hezbollah’s involvement in the Lebanese government kept on growing and deepening to reach the current point of their direct significant role in the decision-making of the country. Nonetheless, the assassination of Hariri in February 2005, which led to the rising tensions between Hezbollah and the 14 March coalition, highlighted the loopholes in the Lebanese political system and how easily the country could be paralyzed.

The other reason why the Lebanese system is struggling is because of the lack of ideology that stigmatized the governance of the 14 March coalition. Indeed, what permitted Hezbollah to paradoxically gain more grounds and become more attractive as a political model was its “clear agenda and easily described ideology that counterbalanced the Axis of Moderation.”

The 14th March coalition had lost a golden opportunity in 2005, after the withdrawal of the Syrians, when “the United States and Saudi Arabia assured them they were in the right”, to translate their promises made to the Lebanese people: invest into serious military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a stronger political program, and protect the new Lebanese government from any renewed Syrian unwelcomed intervention in the domestic...
affairs\textsuperscript{79}. So while the 14\textsuperscript{th} March coalition, at its helm Saad el Hariri, struggled to find a winning formula to govern effectively, Hezbollah kept on growing stronger, receiving “undiminished help from Iran and Syria” affecting the viability of the already feeble political system.\textsuperscript{80}

The events of the battle of Nahr el Bared in the summer of 2007 and the political crisis that ensued a year later sums up the vulnerability of the political system. Disagreements between two parties turn the country into an unlimited stalemate, salvageable only by regional and foreign interventions. Nahr el Bared perfectly embodied the lack of unity in the government, the responsibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to carry on a full fledged counterinsurgency operation without the overt support of the Lebanese government until the last days as well as the hesitation of Hezbollah at the onset of the battle.

However, the Nahr el Bared episode underlined an alarming recurrent problem: the chronic crises in the government and the lack of consensus on what to do among the concerned parties. Since Taef, Lebanon’s political life has been weak and prone to regional and international interventions. It has become a familiar feature of the country’s domestic politics, and its emphasis on sectarianism brought to light the many shortfalls of the accords.\textsuperscript{81} Taef’s sectarian formula encouraged “peculiar”\textsuperscript{82} electoral alliances for the purpose of getting elected.

Like its peers Hezbollah adapted easily to sectarianism. More particularly, as of 2000, Hezbollah engaged in this game of mix and match and became a “victim” of sectarianism and

\textsuperscript{79} Campanis p.203
\textsuperscript{80} Idem
\textsuperscript{81} Philosopher Theodor Hanf explained: it is not a real majority that governs Lebanon rather a large coalition of sects whereby each of them could veto a law it did not deem in the interest of its community. Thus hard decisions could only be reached trough consensus and unanimity instead of a simple majority vote; in Dani Ghossoub, “Le role du confessionalisme dans la vie institutionelle Libanaise (Confessionalism in the Lebanese institutional life); Atelier National de reproduction des theses; Lille France: p.141
weak political alliances.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, as a Shia movement within parliament Hezbollah could only seek the chairmanship of the House, along with its ally AMAL.\textsuperscript{84}

This sectarianism bias led to political deadlocks, especially when the speaker of the House was at odds with the president and the prime minister.\textsuperscript{85} According to Qasem, the political behavior that the Lebanese politicians display defines them de facto as being sectarian.\textsuperscript{86} The Lebanese political life is engulfed in a “sectarian trap.” He goes even further by pointing out that Lebanon lacks an institution capable of determining if one group is genuinely sectarian or not.\textsuperscript{87}

Under the Syrian occupation (1976-2005), the Assad regime intervened overtly and directly in the formation of friendly Lebanese governments to protect and guarantee the vitality of its interests in Lebanon and the sectarian system played in their favor. Cambanis talks in his book on how Syria successfully engineered the creation of an effective police state including a network of “hit men, thugs and spies and informants”\textsuperscript{88}.

Since 2005 and till today, no significant change has occurred. This also impacted the intelligence services in Lebanon that overlapped between the Syrians, Hezbollah and the Lebanese intelligence services. This is why the assassination of Hariri could not but point to

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} The Shias before Taef and per the National Pact of 1943 did not have access to a fair representation in the parliament and other government institutions. Sunnis were the official voice of the Muslim denomination. Although the speaker of the House was a Shia, he was a zaaim and came from a certain social standing.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Since 1992 the Speaker of the House is Nabih Berry chairman of the Amal movement and strongly backed by Hezbollah.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Taef engineered the three presidencies following the “troika” model or triumvirate. If the 3 presidents did not agree the country was drawn into an unlimited deadlock. This fragile balance of power was put to the test most recently in the fall of 2007 when the Speaker of the House Nabih Berry refused to convene the Parliament to vote for a President after the end of the mandate of Emile Lahoud. The Prime Minister at the time Fouad Siniora and Berry were at odds and the lack of consensus contributed to the ongoing 2006-2008 political crisis.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid, pp.351-352
\item \textsuperscript{87} According to lawyer Issam Sleiman Taef mirrored “the confessional and clannish structure of Lebanon”; in Ghoussoub; op. cit.; p.140
\item \textsuperscript{88} Campanis, op. cit p.204
\end{itemize}
these “three big players” that control closely the intelligence networks, and who, by their “shifting alliances and allegiances”, complicated the picture of who’s to blame in the assassination plot.\textsuperscript{89}

\textit{Rafic el Hariri}

Up till the death of Rafic el Hariri, the relationship between Hezbollah and Hariri was one of both “love and hate.”\textsuperscript{90} Hariri, the twice-elected prime minister (1992–1998; 2000–2004) and an entrepreneur, was in charge of rebuilding Lebanon after the civil war. Right after the civil war ended in 1992, Hariri launched his landmark project of the reconstruction of Beirut Solidere, which raised a lot of contention on the legitimacy of the reconstruction and also raised property land-related legal questions. He collaborated with Hezbollah when the circumstances were mutually beneficial. Hezbollah was not supportive of Hariri’s first government because he did not back the resistance. Hezbollah also saw Hariri as a poser for the Syrian government.\textsuperscript{91}

The problem of the reconstruction of the Dahye also illustrates another the struggle: the Lebanese government to enter Hezbollah’s strongholds and provide public goods. The 1996 post-war Elyssar reconstruction project was a stark sign that would hinder the already sensitive balance of power between the Sunni billionaire and the ascendant Hezbollah on the one hand and how hard it is for the Lebanese government to monitor activities in Hezbollah’s strongholds on the other hand. In an attempt to rebuild the southern suburb of Dahye, also known as the stronghold of the Shia community, Hariri tried to expand his influence beyond Beirut’s central districts where Solidere was already launched. He aimed his ambitions toward Dahye. A

\textsuperscript{89} Cambanis, op. cit, p.204
\textsuperscript{90} In Norton, op. cit: p.124-132
\textsuperscript{91} For more information on the subject see Harb, op. cit: p. 206- 222.
successful AMAL–Shia alliance, however, frustrated his effort. The alliance was formed to ensure that Elyssar would not be turned into a Solidere-like project. Hariri did not enjoy a good reputation in the Dahye because of his performance as a Prime Minister. As an official representative of the Lebanese State, the Shias of the Dahye were already accustomed to the poor performance of the Lebanese state in their region and answering their concerns.

Hezbollah developed a system whereby it can survive economically, and be self-sufficient even if the state institutions are paralyzed. “The Party did best when the government did least”92 is also “the culture of resistance”, a system that revolves around two center themes. One, the culture of martyrdom, and second the Islamic identity cultivated through a widespread network of schools mainly the Mahdi schools and the Scouts. Hezbollah reached out to all the Shia along the Lebanese territory to preach Hezbollah’s mission. The schools Al Mahdi best illustrate how Hezbollah, like its peers, contributed to the “development of sectarian education in Lebanon.”93

The rationale behind developing this network of schools is: 1- the institutionalization and 2-perpetuating the mobilization to the party by educating the second generation.94

One must examine the social services in the context of the dual nature of Hezbollah, and of a weak Lebanese government plagued by the absence of strong, central authority.95 Hezbollah appeared through these services to “understand the limitations of relying too heavily on its military

92 Cambanis, op.cit p.228
93 Christian schools; Sunni schools; the educational system in Lebanon is defined by a religious identity. A special department within the party oversees and manages this network of schools, and exercises today a deep influence on the Lebanese sector of education.
94 In Sabrina Mervin, op.cit
95 Authors Myriam Catusse and Joseph Alagha remind us Hezbollah’s mission was double; achieving resistance and social justice.
component.\textsuperscript{96} Hezbollah’s social services primarily targeted the Shia population. This strategy is anchored in the party’s duty to achieve “social responsibility towards their supporters\textsuperscript{97} and another way of resisting the enemy.\textsuperscript{98} This awareness was enough of an incentive for Hezbollah to conceive a different program. As a consequence, Hezbollah benefited from the support of the civilian population in the municipal elections of 1998 and 2004.\textsuperscript{99} These elections saw Hezbollah emerge as the “preeminent representative of the Shia community.”\textsuperscript{100}

This formula of religious identity and propaganda relies on important material resources, which are more significant for the latter. The aim remains the same: to cultivate hatred towards Israel.\textsuperscript{101} The war of 2006 brought to light this complex yet impressive economic and social structure, and proved to be efficient during the reconstruction of the South and the Dahye in the post-war period. They are capable of living in austerity because their survival is primordial in a region where Shias are a minority. An eye witness during the 2006 conflict recalls: in less than 24 hours thousands returned to their home villages and show the world that they are here to stay\textsuperscript{102}.

Today, the consequences of the current political situation are not to be discounted. Economically, Lebanon is dependent on the third sector to sustain its economy. Hence by

\textsuperscript{96} Rodger Shanahan, “Hizballah rising: the Political battle for the Loyalty of the Shia of Lebanon”; The Middle East Review of International Affairs 9, No. 1 GLORIA center, Interdisciplinary center, Herzliya, March 2005
\textsuperscript{97} The hospital Al Rasul Al A’zam is a trademark in Hezbollah’s sanitary resources; Jihad al Bina, which is the reconstruction institution; and the Martyrs Foundation that provides services to the family of martyrs are few examples on how deeply Hezbollah’s social services are anchored in their environment. Hezbollah organizations also include health, urban planning and research. In Sabrina Mervin, op. cit
\textsuperscript{98} In Qasem op.cit p.165
Qasem talks about the logic behind the social services as “it represents the root and the provision of direct public services at the level of small entities”. In Qasem, op.cit: p.334
\textsuperscript{100} Shanahan, op.cit
\textsuperscript{101} Cambanis op. cit; p. 226
\textsuperscript{102} Idem, p.178
keeping on delaying the formation of the government, Hezbollah is held responsible, in the eyes of the public, for the deteriorating economic situation. According to the French speaking newspaper L’Orient Le Jour, commerce and trade have been at their worse since January, and the outcry of shop owners had made the headlines: “we haven’t sold anything since”.103

Hezbollah is not to be blamed alone. Again, it is the consequence of a political system and constitution drafted and adopted hastily in 1990 to end the civil war. Lebanon is bearing the consequences today. If Hezbollah does not feel affected by the economic situation, that’s because of the wealth and resilience of its social and economic networks within Hezbollah’s own strongholds. Since its genesis, Hezbollah has been accused of erecting a state within a state104. A caveat is in order: it is a parallel to the Lebanese state. Indeed, Hezbollah is not affected if Solidere’s shares did not generate any revenues, or if the shops in Beirut and its surrounding areas are struggling or not.

Via its social services network, Hezbollah conveyed the image of modernity in its community and that to an extent it had grown financially independent from Iran, which was contrary to what conventional wisdom suggested at the time.105

The financing of Hezbollah

Martin Rudner defines the socioeconomic programs as a product of “the financial support, which Hezbollah receives from its Iranian and Syrian patrons.”106 He further unveils how much the external factors contribute in aid: “about US$ 100 million of the $500 million is

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103 In L’Orient Le Jour; April 2011
104 Walid Jumblatt in Campanis book talks about Hezbollah being a state within a state; p. 208
105 Harb, op. cit p.135
106 In Martin Rudner,
said to derive from Iranian government and semi-governmental sponsors.”

On the contrary, Sabrina Mervin and Mona Harb refute this statement by saying that Hezbollah has emancipated from Iran and independently runs its economic and social-based finances. It is hard to acquire a true estimate of Hezbollah’s financial wealth. The Syrian–Lebanese border is a vital route to transport the financial aid. In addition, the Iranian embassies, NGOs such as the “Islamic Resistance Support Association,” the Shia diaspora, and drug trafficking are just few aspects of Hezbollah’s support to its institutions. The Al Manar television is also a big financial resource. It is “funded by Iran and Shiite communities abroad, as well by other Muslim communities in Europe, the United States and Canada”. Ultimately, 30 years after the civil war Hezbollah has become one of the best social service providers in the country.

The Politicization of Its Arsenal

By 2005 Hezbollah became an important political actor of the Lebanese domestic scene. Despite being in the ranks of the opposition, two factors would demonstrate that Hezbollah’s role could not be discounted. Using the issue of Hezbollah’s arsenal to discredit the political status of the group would prove to be a failed strategy. The war of 2006 and the political stalemate of December 2006–2008 were stark milestones in where the ruling coalition used Hezbollah’s

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107 Ibid
108 JL Marret, “Un exemple de parti politique avec bras arme: Le Hezbollah” (case study of a political party with a military wing: Hezbollah); 21000 signes.
109 In Rudner, op. cit
arsenal as a mean to achieve political ends. Ultimately the politicization of Hezbollah’s arsenal would confirm the ascendancy of the party on the domestic scene.

*The war of 2006*

The hostilities of the July 2006 war sent a serious sign that a significant percentage of the Lebanese population were opposed to Hezbollah’s strategy and its arsenal, and did not want to be dragged into a conflict they felt did not concern them. The legitimacy of Hezbollah’s arsenal faced its first challenge especially since the government believed Hezbollah to have engineered the operation behind its back. Siniora displayed his surprise on national television on the first night of hostilities. Although the government tried to stick up for Hezbollah, the recent WikiLeaks cables confirm what many speculated over the last four years: the Siniora government had wanted to get rid of Hezbollah during the hostilities.111

Ultimately, Hezbollah emerged politically stronger than ever from the conflict its arsenal was in fact legitimized in the eyes of a great deal of the Lebanese people who deemed that Hezbollah weapons defended them against Israel. The end of the war, however, did not soothe the tension between the government and Hezbollah. On the contrary, it paved the way for the 2006–2008 crisis.

*The political crisis of December 2006–May 2008*

To date, the 18-month political stalemate that had almost brought the country on the threshold of civil war confirmed the importance of Hezbollah as a domestic political actor and the political and military might that it could unleash when challenged. By turning its weapons “inward” Hezbollah demonstrated the strength of its military coercion.

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111 See www.tayyarforum.org
Moreover it justified that the deepening struggling of the Lebanese system is because of the lack of ideology that stigmatized the governance of the 14 March coalition. Indeed, what permitted Hezbollah to paradoxically gain more grounds and become more attractive as a political model was its “clear agenda and easily described ideology that counterbalanced the Axis of Moderation.”  

The 14th March coalition had lost a golden opportunity in 2005, after the withdrawal of the Syrians, when “the United States and Saudi Arabia assured them they were in the right”, to translate their promises made to the Lebanese people: invest foreign and regional meddling into serious military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), a stronger political program, and protect the new Lebanese government from any renewed Syrian unwelcomed intervention in the domestic affairs.

So while the 14th March coalition, at its helm Saad el Hariri, struggled to find a winning formula to govern effectively, Hezbollah kept on growing stronger, receiving “undiminished help from Iran and Syria” affecting the viability of the already feeble political system. The consequences were dire for the March 14 ruling coalition who did not learn from their mistakes.

Already in 2007, in the midst of the presidential crisis, and government standoff, the 14th March coalition hedged all their bets on the Americans and assumed that Washington would help them plead their case. Unfortunately, their assumption was not satisfied and MP Mohammed Kabbani, in an interview with Cambanis, confessed: “the US did not back the majority the way

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112 Cambanis, op. cit p.207. The author refers to the 14 March coalition as the coalition of Moderation.
113 Cambanis op. cit, p.203
114 idem
they were supposed to… they could have recognized a new Lebanese president chosen by a simple majority thereby putting Syria and Iran on the defensive”.  

That is to say that power politics in Lebanon particularly are a chess game and not based on “high-flying rhetoric”.  

On the contrary, the outcome bolstered the credibility of Hezbollah. Indeed, the party was central to the success of the Doha Accords (May 2008), which corroborated the role it played and continues to play on the Lebanese scene and validated the legitimacy of its weapons.  

Hezbollah grasped the complexity of the Lebanese system by gaining momentum.  

Directly after the changing events of 2005 the 14th March coalition failed while Hezbollah seized momentum to “stoke the anger of its base” against what they judged to be the complacency of 14th March, hence taking the streets, asking for less meddling, and portraying themselves as being vulnerable and in constant struggle. Ultimately this strategy paid off in May 2008 after the tragic events that took place in Beirut. Hezbollah or “the Axis of Resistance was on top”.  

As a result of the 2006–2008 crisis, which thwarted the sensitive National unity, the June 2009 elections affirmed the division among those who approved of Hezbollah’s actions and those who didn’t. The March 14 bloc won the elections with a slim majority whereas the opposition was granted a comfortable number of deputies. The 2009 elections outcome clearly demonstrated that despite the events of May 2008 Hezbollah still enjoyed a popular basis. The

115 Kabbani is a member of the Future movement, and close to S. el Hariri
116 Cambanis, op. cit p.209
117 See the International crisis group article.
118 Campanis, op. cit p.251
119 44% for the opposition and 55% for the majority
active participation of Hezbollah in the government of Saad el Hariri in the summer of 2009 until their resignation in January 2011, anchored the perception that Hezbollah’s impact on the domestic scene had never been greater.

Ultimately, one could expect a remake of the same scenario with the current ongoing stalemate since January 2011. The appointment of centrist Nagib Mikati, judged by the 14 March coalition media and press to be close to Hezbollah, best illustrates the aforementioned tendencies in driving Lebanon to the crisis when majority and opposition disagree, in this case Hezbollah and the pro-Hariri.

Hezbollah is at a vantage point in this case because they are the new majority and this head-to-head with the fallen majority only makes their case more credible in that the delay in the formation of the government is due to the regional and international meddling justified by the loopholes in the political system. One thing is for sure. Hezbollah is not backing off until they form a government the way they see it fit. Nasrallah recently stated that a government full of technocrats cannot survive in a political environment like Lebanon, because for a government to function, the appointed ministers ought to have some sort of political allegiance.

In the meantime, U.S. and Western European diplomats are reluctant to the formation of a pro Hezbollah-FPM government since it jeopardizes their interests in the region. Since the end of the civil war, every succeeding cabinet did not present a serious threat to the western presence in Lebanon. For the first time since 1991, there will not be an allied government per se in place. On the contrary, Hezbollah and their allies have pledged to form a cabinet that will be independent from any kind of regional or international interference.
Chapter IV

Hezbollah’s Impact on the Regional Scene

As much as Hezbollah impacted domestic politics, it has also been interesting to follow the evolving relationship among Hezbollah and region’s power brokers: particularly Syria, Iran, and the rising tensions with Egypt. Israel is also an integral part of this analysis. The constant evolution within the Jewish state is intrinsically related to the war of July 2006, which introduced a new balance of power in the Middle East. Nonetheless Syria, Iran and Egypt strengthened the political identity of Hezbollah and how it impacts Lebanon’s relationship with its regional neighbors.

Iran and Lebanon

If in the initial phases of its formation Hezbollah was completely dependent on Iran, the situation changed in 1989. Khomeini died and his successor President Rafsanjani initiated a political climate focused primarily on the consolidations of Iran’s national interests instead of “exporting the revolution.” What would also push Hezbollah to mature on the Lebanese scene was the Khatami presidency (1997–2005). Thus, Hezbollah was able to develop its “Lebanese” identity that was also strengthened by the reformist trend burgeoning in Iran at the time.

In 2005, however, the presidential election of Mahmud Ahmadinejad restored the overt presence of Iran in Lebanon. The resurgence of the Iranian flag on the domestic scene following

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120 The latter preached a politic of overture towards the Lebanese, particularly to the non-Shiite’s factions. As a result, Prime Minister Rafic Hariri was invited to Iran three times during this tenure as Lebanese PM. In Sabrina Mervin, op. cit
the July 2006 war provided the best example. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Hezbollah returned to obeying Iran. On the contrary, the relationship between the two became more nuanced: Iran and Hezbollah would herein share the same foreign political views in regards to Israel and the United States. Qasem makes it crisp and clear: “Hezbollah is not involved in the events taking place inside Iran” but it has a “genuine relationship” that offers “great benefits for Lebanon.”

The military relationship that ties the group to Iran shall not be discounted since it remains a very important factor in understanding what binds the two. The al Quds forces are a special unit within the IRGC, which is in charge of conducting unconventional warfare overseas, supporting groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Al Quds (Jerusalem) forces are “the leaders in transnational terrorist activities.” They have provided training to Hezbollah since their beginning and oversee the training via their offices in Iranian embassies. The Al Quds forces have been fundamental in encouraging Hezbollah to develop into the sophisticated guerilla group it is today.

This brings into question the concept of “wilayet el Fakih.” In the XIX century Shiite ulema created the concept of the marjaaiya: that in the absence of the Imam a faqih has the legitimate power to rule in his name on political and religious affairs. As it applies to the Iranian

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121 Ibid
122 In Qasem, op. cit, pp.387-392
Mona Harb emphasizes on the dependence of Hezbollah to Iran and Syria in that despite the Lebanonization of the party, there remains some political and ideological factors that Hezbollah has no control over. In Harb, op. cit p.196
123 Cordesman report on IRGC and Al Quds forces; CSIS; 2007
124 Ibid
Islamic Republic: Khomeini inspired by the XIXth century philosophy, will incorporate his own views which will become known as “wilayet el fakih”.

In practice, *wilayet el fakih* cannot be installed in Lebanon because: 1) Lebanon is not an Islamic state, 2) Lebanon is driven by sectarian politics, whereby each denomination needs to be part of the political system 3) thus for *wilayet el fakih* to be installed in Lebanon, it cannot be imposed by force because it should be requested by consensus from the Lebanese people, Christians and Muslims. It remains an ideological concept within Hezbollah. In other words, because of the complexity of Lebanese politics and the legitimacy crisis it created in Iran, it cannot be applied in practice in Lebanon.

Ultimately, the Iranian-Lebanese relationship today should be analyzed within the realm of regional frictions. For Iran, the catalyst was the Israeli invasion and the birth of Hezbollah.

**Syria and Lebanon**

The relationship with Syria after the death of Hafez el Assad in 2000 underscored the strategic necessity of such an alliance to face “the major regional obligations.” His successor and son, Bashar el Assad, was already familiar with the Lebanese file, which he had handled in 1995. His

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125 For more information see Sabrina Mervin, op. cit: 207-212

126 Author Sabrina Mervin makes a good argument in explaining the causality between wilayet el Fakih and the impact on the nuanced relationship between Iran and Hezbollah. Following the death of Khomeini, both the political (wali) and religious (marja’a) figure, Khamenei his successor was not recognized in Iran as the legitimate marja’a. He tried to impose the latter abroad on Hezbollah for instance. It is the legitimacy crisis of the wali in Iran that is at the core of the deep changes in the Iran-Hezbollah relationship. In Mervin, op. cit

What further mitigated the influence of the wali on the Hezbollah is that Khamenei knew little about Lebanese affairs to be able to provide guidance. This gave SHN the opportunity to rise as a political and religious authority internally, thanks to his charisma which transcends his role of representative (wakil) of Khamenei.

127 In Mervin, op.cit
knowledge of Lebanese politics, as described in Caroline Donati’s book “L’Exception Syrienne,” underlies a sense of continuity unbeknownst to the average leader who would think that the arrival of Assad to power marked the beginning of the end for Syria in Lebanon.  

February 2005 and the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in April of that year sparked a new regional conflict of interests in regards to the changing balance of power in the Middle East: Washington versus Damascus. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the death of Hariri in 2005, Syria “lost its immunity.” This was compounded by other regional factors: notably the Arab–Israeli conflict and the war in Iraq.

For Assad, Lebanon was of strategic interest. On the ground, Assad’s men in Lebanon Rustom Ghazale and his predecessor Ghazi Kenaan, tightened the grip that Syrian security control exerted on the Lebanese, who soon after the Israeli withdrawal would start contesting the brutality and the presence of Syria in Lebanon. It is only the international reaction, among them the Syrian Accountability Act signed by the Bush administration that would exert pressures on the Syrian regime to leave Lebanon. It aimed at “halting Syrian support for terrorism, ends its occupation of Lebanon, and stop is development of weapons of mass destruction(…) and for the serious international security problems it has caused in the Middle East.”

The effective withdrawal of the 8000 army men from Lebanon inflicted a heavy blow to the regime.

The mismanagement of the withdrawal from Lebanon by the Syrian regime ignited heavy criticism from his peers and launched a three years diplomatic isolation that would eventually be

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128 In Donati, op. cit, p. 136
129 In Donati, op.cit, p. 161
130 Ibid ; p.162
131 The Syrian Accountability and Lebanon Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) of December 2003 initiated the strategic change in the Syrian-American relationships; p. 167. For more information about the act itself see http://www.coherentbabble.com/PublicLaws/HR1828PL108-175.pdf
132 The death of Hariri left Assad no choice.
broke by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. Syria defied the international isolation by perpetuating the Lebanese presidential crisis “the politics of the empty chair” (November 2007), and the political stalemate that ensued (December 2007–May 2008). What Syria was trying to achieve was to remind the Lebanese that the stability of their country lay in their hands.

The relationship of Hezbollah with the Syrian regime keeps on showing its resilience but comes with it lot of tensions. Domestically, especially after the July war of 2006, Hezbollah acted with more restraint than other pro-Syrian parties to Assad’s encouragement for instability in the country. The party stood wary of Assad’s regime conduct during the war of 2006.

Despite these tactical complications, Syria tacitly supported Hezbollah and its allies throughout the political turmoil of 2006–2008. This strategic support highlighted the evolving relationship between Syria and Hezbollah in which the former only “intervenes with Hezbollah when its vital interests are at stake. It no longer meddles in daily matters.” Syria remains an important “transit route” for the Iranian weapons to reach Hezbollah’s strongholds. Anthony Cordesman gives a thorough description of these weapons. The IRGC supplied Hezbollah with AT-3 antitank guided missiles, and Fajr-4; Fajr- 5 long-range rockets and Iranian-made Mohajer unmanned vehicles.

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133 August-September 2008: the Mediterranean Summit launched by President Sarkozy aimed at bringing back Syria to the forefronts of regional politics and restore its position as a powerbroker among the regional forces rising in the Middle East like Qatar.
134 On 15 August 2006 Bachar el Assad in a virulent speech accused the Siniora government to be an agent of Israel. Lebanese Syrian allies: e.g the Lebanese Democratic Party and the National Social Syrian Party backed the Syrian President statement and “lashed out at the prime minister”. Hezbollah acted in contrast with greater restraint. In ICG report, op.cit. p.20
135 Interview, Akram Tleiss, Beirut 3 May 2007, in ICG report, op. cit
136 “The Fajr- 5 have a range of 75km and a payload of 200 kilograms” according to Cordesman’s report, op. cit
The nature of the relationship with Syria cannot be fully analyzed without including Iran. It is a three-way relationship along with Hezbollah. The Lebanese political crisis displayed a more profound regional trend: the strategic alliance of Assad and Ahmadinejad engineered to defy the international pressures and isolations that befell on Syria. In June of 2006, a defense accord tied Syria to Iran. Iran mandated that the security of the Alawite state is as important as its own. Facing them were the United States as well as traditional regional allies like KSA and Egypt.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Lebanon

Three years—2005, 2008, and 2011—are milestone dates that put the traditional, regional balance of power to the test and ended up impacting the bilateral relations with Lebanon’s Arab neighbors.

In 2005, following the death of Hariri, the Saudi government started to criticize Syria and broke away from the Assad regime. In 2008, the Sunni–Shia rifts that erupted on 7 May 2011 were brought to a halt by Qatar. A week into the political unrest the Qatari government hosted a conference to broker a deal between the ruling majority and the opposition (Hezbollah; Free Patriotic Movement; Amal).

The Doha accords stipulated the election of General Michel Sleiman as Lebanese President and the formation of a National Unity government in where the opposition will be rightfully represented. Hezbollah was granted the right to veto any law they did not agree with.

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137 Ibid
138 The Bush administration would call this front: the axis of evil.
139 The major political Lebanese factions reached an agreement in Qatar on May 21, 2008. It is Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, the Qatari Prince who brokered the agreement
The Doha agreements ended the 18 months political stalemate, soothed the Sunni-Shiia tensions and averted a civil war.

It seemed that Saudi Arabia was losing its influence on Lebanese affairs. Choosing to negotiate with Qatar in 2008 sent a strong warning to the traditional deal brokers in the region: Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In the meantime, Egypt started contesting the regional influence of Hezbollah in 2009. The Mubarak regime unveiled that Hezbollah was attempting terror plans against their country. An Egyptian court convicted the alleged suspects on a trial in 2010. Nonetheless, the dramatic changes that were witnessed over the course of January 2011 in Egypt and the return of Sami Shehab and his companions to Lebanon proved that the accusation had more political than legal dimensions. Finally, 2011 saw a turning point in the Lebanese-regional balance of power. The failure of the Saudi–Syria entente aimed at avoiding a Hariri–Hezbollah deadlock, proved that underestimating Hezbollah and choosing to play the belligerents against the Party of God could have serious consequences.

The bilateral relationship between Lebanon and its Arab neighbors is based today on the assertion that Hezbollah is an integral part of the Lebanese politics and that any regional ambition that would challenge the legitimacy of Hezbollah would be countered. The events of May 2008 best illustrated this case. It reasserted Lebanon’s commitment to refuse to compromise internal stability to the ambitions of its regional neighbors. Other events in 2005, 2008 and 2011 illustrate how Lebanon’s neighbors attempted to create internal unrest so that the Lebanese

140 http://www.stratfor.com/memberships/136014/analysis/20090415_egypt_taking_public_stand_against_hezbollah
142 The two countries recovered from the cold in their relationship
would turn their backs on Hezbollah. Paradoxically, Hezbollah rose politically victorious in the aftermath of these three events. In 2005, Hezbollah was part of the ruling majority. In 2008, it successfully participated in the Doha Accords. Finally, Hezbollah most recently became the new majority coalition in charge of forming the new government. Hezbollah could not reach this level of primacy in Lebanese politics without the backing of Syria and Iran who had both forced an environment of deterrence to guarantee Hezbollah a positive outcome.

Israel and Lebanon

The war of July 2006 came unexpectedly to the region especially to Hezbollah who did not expect that catching two Israeli soldiers would turn into a full-fledged military operation. The post-Iraqi Freedom operation in 2003 created the illusion that Israel was beyond fighting major wars with the gratifying and comforting presence of the United States in neighboring Iraq. As Israel was focusing on its national security issues, Lebanon was left out of the picture and with it Hezbollah optimizing its strategy against them. Tsahal\textsuperscript{143} and the rest of the IDF had not mounted any maneuver exercise in a long time and they lacked: equipment and training.

As Cordesman articulated in his report on the Lebanese war: “Israel also pushed proportionality to its limits by attacking civilian targets that were not related to the Hezbollah in an effort to force the Lebanese government to act, and failed to explain the scale of the Hezbollah threat in defending its actions.”\textsuperscript{144} Surprisingly the IDF was unable to regain

\textsuperscript{143} Israeli army ground forces
momentum over the course of operations, a task it brilliantly performed in the 1973 war against both the Syrians and the Egyptians but failed in 2006.

The war against Israel did not stop in 2006. Hezbollah’s leadership overtly supported the Palestinian factions in their “jihad” against Israel even though in theory Hezbollah and its Palestinian counterparts are sceptical of one another. This friction engineered alliances of convenience. As Paul Salem director of the Carnegie Center confirmed: Hezbollah has been training Hamas in their fight against Israel. The Gaza war of 2009 illustrated this security-military based relationship.¹⁴⁵

Since 2005, Hezbollah’s influence on the balance of power in the Middle East hints at a more complex and strategic consequence: the ongoing arms race between Iran and Israel.¹⁴⁶ If today Lebanon is in a status of stalemate with Israel then it is a result of the July 2006 conflict. A deeper analysis, however, will show that beyond Hezbollah’s victory, the balance of power in the region is set by its major players: Syria, Iran and Israel to name a few.

Israel in the future might hinder the “political alliance” between Syria and Hezbollah and reengineer the balance of power in the region. For Iran, the tie is more ideological and is especially strengthened after the Iraq war in 2003 during which Iran overtly supported Shia groups and guerillas. The regional context is an apt illustration of the nature of the relationship with Hezbollah. As it pertains to Lebanon, however, the strategic interests of Syria and Iran maintain the resilience of the link with Hezbollah.

¹⁴⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/05/world/middleeast/05hezbollah.html
Chapter V

Conclusion

Hezbollah has evolved from a ragtag guerilla group in the Beqaa Valley into a major Lebanese political party with a decisive on domestic and regional politics. Over the past 30 years, Lebanon and its neighbors have seen Hezbollah’s significance steadily increase. Today, there can be no doubt that Hezbollah is an ineradicable part of Lebanese society, and that it will be around for the long haul.

Moreover Hezbollah will still represent a security threat for the West as long as it benefits from unraveling public support who also trust the party’s record “of governance and public service” and their ability to deliver promises like it did during the war of 2006. The war of July only confirmed the resilience and the seriousness Hezbollah took in fighting the Israelis. Again, the ideology of Hezbollah is the cornerstone of the viability of the party. Behind this agenda lies the modus operandi, simple but complex. “Never lose” which translates into “staying fast and surviving”. Additionally the future and the popularity of the party depends on Hezbollah’s ability to make war against Israel, and so far the end is no where near.

As this essay demonstrated, the US, Israel and other powers in the Middle East will be required to deal with that fundamental reality.

Policy Implications for US National Security

147 Campanis, op.cit p. 274
148 idem
Beyond Hezbollah’s rise as a pivotal force in Lebanon, for the first time since the Yom Kippur war of 1973, the US administration is facing an unprecedented challenge: how to manage the wave of democracy that engulfed the Arab world beginning with Egypt in January 2011, while staying loyal to its traditional allies. What does this mean for the United States National Security interests that are deeply intertwined with the situation in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Bahrain who particularly have thwarted the status-quo of the post Yom Kippur war?

The uprisings which ended three decades of status quo will definitely impact US interests in the region and its major ally in the Middle East: Israel. The current security context calls to be very careful.149 Suddenly, the situation with the bordering countries of mainly Egypt and Syria have returned to the stalemate of pre-1973, when both countries where at war with Israel. On the one hand with the resignation of Egypt strongman Hosni Mubarak, in February 2011 Israel lost an important ally, which helped normalize the security situation in the Middle East since the 1980s.

A country that was undermined in the Middle East security equation until recently was Bahrain. Right after the Egyptian revolution, the Bahrein protest unfolded on the Shia majority requesting more rights and representations in a Sunni-monarchy ruled country. The stability of this small kingdom is firstly core to the stability of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and secondly to the Middle East countries.150

On the other hand the public saw in his resignation the chance to fuel the Arab-Israeli conflict with more anger from the Arab side and a reason to keep on fighting the Jewish state.

149 For more information see http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/world/middleeast/31israel.html
Israel is now standing alone in the midst of never seen political uprising in the Middle East. An attack on Lebanon particularly, can be seen as the last chance for Israel to defeat and dismantle Hezbollah considered by the Jerusalem government a terrorist organization.

Both sides have promised that the conflict to come would be a surprise in terms of military strategy, maneuvers and tactics. The increasingly hostile posturing of Israel and Hezbollah has led to increased tensions along the border and within Lebanon itself, for as long as Israel poses a threat to the integrity and independence of Lebanon, Hezbollah will not disarm.

Internally, beyond Israel, Hezbollah has increasingly relied on a domestic issue to justify its massive arsenal: the Palestinians living in the camps. One has to understand that the issue of Hezbollah’s arms cannot be dealt with once and for all if the Palestinian camps issue is not addressed seriously. Hezbollah ally and former Prime Minister General Michel Aoun make it very clear: the fear of the Palestinians get the Lebanese citizenship is still a very present threat.

If the Palestinians get the nationality, it would thwart the demographic quotas between the Shias and the Sunnis. The Hezbollah arsenal would be dealt with once a credible solution is found for the Palestinians and the Right of Return to their homeland is guaranteed. They are intrinsically linked which further complicates the matter of a fast disarmament. For Lebanon, dealing with the external threat that is the Palestinian arsenal is more urgent than the Hezbollah arsenal.

Any Israeli war with Hezbollah, (and by default Lebanon) will no doubt arouse the anger of Syria. If and how Syria would intervene in such a conflict is dependent on the

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151 Check Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on war [http://www.nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?page=3&ID=53737&MID=0&PID=0&FParentID=0&FFParentID=0](http://www.nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?page=3&ID=53737&MID=0&PID=0&FParentID=0&FFParentID=0)
outcome of the revolt that’s been sweeping through all over the country since March 2011. Since the political and military outcome of the revolt is yet unknown one could not weigh the impact it will have on Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian leadership based in Damascus.

Indeed any change in Syria and as it has been the case throughout history, will have repercussions in the neighboring countries where the Assad regime has vital interests.\(^{153}\) Despite expressing support for the Assad regime, the unrest is Syria has actually made Hezbollah more cautious in their actions and overt support for their troubled patrons.\(^{154}\) Hezbollah is and should be worried. If Syria withdraws its support then Hezbollah would not meet the military and political promises it has pledged to assume.

Thus the mass movement of protests that is calling for change and democracy in Syria raise several questions: if the Assad regime falls, what regime type would succeed? Would it be a moderate Sunni regime, hence close to KSA and the United States or would it be a Salafi regime? Beyond that, if the situation calms down and Assad stays in power would he resumes the peace talks with Israel, that have started in 2008 after 5 years of international isolation? This strategic move would impact the relationship between Syria and Hezbollah. The support for the Shia party and especially its military arsenal would diminish. The Damascus highway, considered the supply route for Hezbollah’s weapons, would be cut off, thus greatly impacting Hezbollah’s operational capabilities, regardless of their current arsenal.

If Syria signs peace with Israel, the Americans will be the first beneficiaries because they do not wish to see Syria becoming a destabilizing link in the region. On the other side of the coin the big question is: what would happen to the strategic relationship that bounds Syria and

\(^{153}\) [http://www.economist.com/node/18620700](http://www.economist.com/node/18620700)

\(^{154}\) Article in now lebanon
Iran? What will be then the role of Iran with Syria becoming a less reliable ally? Would Iran be able to support Hezbollah without the consent of Syria? As demonstrated before the strength of Hezbollah relies on the entente between the two regional powers: Iran and Syria. None of these two countries would like to see Hezbollah escape from their control. If Syria signs peace with Israel, Iran would be left alone and would have no choice than to comply with the UN sanctions, since Syria would not be there anymore to support it. It would turn into a zero-sum game\textsuperscript{155}.

However the strategic considerations are not limited to Hezbollah’s status today. It is important to think about the broader strategic considerations that pertain to the survival of Hezbollah in the next stage, when Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah will not be around anymore to lead his party.

There are two major gaps in the current literature. First current studies do not make the crisp and clear difference between Al Qaeda and and Hezbollah. Hezbollah chose to integrate the state and not challenging it, hence becoming “actors and not objects”.\textsuperscript{156} Its clear and simple ideology appealed to other admirers in the Arab world. Recently the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood in English) in Egypt, after the ousting of Mubarak, demonstrated their commitment to integrate the Egyptian state, like the Sayyed did with Hezbollah in 1992. The Ikhwan proved not to be a threat in Egypt or an extremist party like the conventional wisdom thought of them during all these years; but “a safe valve for moderate islam”\textsuperscript{157}. It is a tangible proof that Nasrallah’s vision has prevailed and became an example to follow in the Middle East.

\textsuperscript{155} \url{http://www.lebanonwire.com/1104MLN/11042710AF.asp}
\textsuperscript{156} Campanis op.cit p.226
\textsuperscript{157} \url{HTTP://WWW.NYTIMES.COM/CFR/WORLD/20070301FAESSAY_V86N2_LEIKEN_BROOKE.HTML?PAGEWANTED=PRINT}
Second the current literature falls short of analyzing the relationship between the persona of Sayyed Nasrallah and the evolution of the party so far. Who will inherit a soon to be 20 years legacy? After all it is Nasrallah who engineered the modernization of Hezbollah. Given the ample data and resources on the subject, it is imperative for scholars and security specialists to use this platform, which will allow them to foresee in what direction the party is heading in the future. The future leader could be as charismatic as Nasrallah or his total opposite.

Moreover on the regional level yes the intertwined relationship with Syria and Iran is important to factor in but it should not be the only scenario to examine. What are the other credible avenues that Hezbollah could adopt if the Assad regime falls? Hezbollah already surprised the security experts militarily in 2006. They might as well be surprised politically because one cannot undermine the leadership of Hezbollah, which throughout its history has demonstrated successful political continuity and has survived the political assassination of al Musawi.

The actual political senior leadership within Hezbollah is very wary of the risks that Nasrallah is facing today. Hence the element of surprise is what will determine the future of the party. It is thanks to their their sheer organization that the “element of surprise” fed its purpose, allowing them to establish a strong political identity on the domestic scene. They learned from the mistakes of the past that has targeted other communities, the death of Lebanese Forces leader Bachir el Gemayel and the destruction of a united Christian leadership being the best example.

After 2006, and their ascendant role in the government, Hezbollah’s actions came under heavy scrutiny, and their leverage of autonomy is not the same as before 2006, because any action that the 14 March coalition deems doubtful can play against Hezbollah’s bonafides.
Hezbollah has come a long way. In order for the Party of God to be accepted by all Lebanese and exercise power without being constantly persecuted, Lebanese lawmakers have to remedy to the situation by amending Taef.

Fixing the loopholes in the law that led to the December 2006-May 2008 crisis and the ongoing one; addressing the frequent regional and international interference in domestic affairs; and stopping Hezbollah from shortcutting the government and resorting to its own institutions when Lebanon is in crisis, will be the first step towards bolstering National unity, which have been hampered for the sake of personal political affiliation so far.

Amending Taef will protect the Lebanese from chronic setbacks, protect and bolster the government institutions and strengthen the Lebanese economic system. Ultimately it would protect Hezbollah from itself and the greed of power. It would permit Hezbollah to stay true to Nasrallah’s vision: the Lebanonization of the party and integrating the government; and not force upon the Lebanese people anything that would question Hezbollah’s allegiance to the Lebanese state. An amendment of the law would be a democratic way of protecting Hezbollah from wanting to gain more power, irrational power that could only harm their so far legitimate ascendancy on the political arena.
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1 http://www.stratfor.com/memberships/136014/analysis/20090415_egypt_taking_public_stand_against_hezbollah


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