

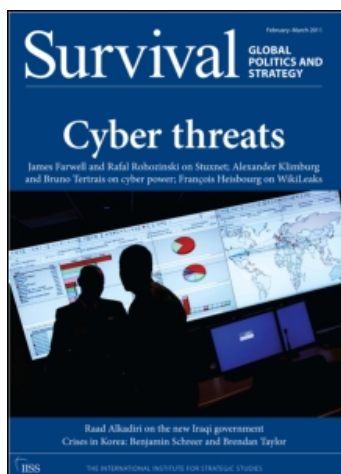
This article was downloaded by: [Khatib, Lina]

On: 5 April 2011

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Publisher Routledge

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Survival

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713659919>

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Online publication date: 30 March 2011

To cite this Article Khatib, Lina(2011) 'Hizbullah's Political Strategy', Survival, 53: 2, 61 – 76

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/00396338.2011.571011

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2011.571011>

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Hizbullah's Political Strategy

Lina Khatib

The collapse of Lebanon's national unity government under Prime Minister Saad Hariri on 12 January 2011, when more than a third of the cabinet resigned, was primarily orchestrated by Hizbullah ('The Party of God'). The party's two ministers, and eight others from its March 8 alliance, stepped down, in what was widely seen as an attempt to halt the indictment of Hizbullah members by the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon, set up to investigate the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Saad's father. But while the party sees the indictments as an existential threat, the move to bring down the government was part of a wider strategy to achieve its long-term political ends. With the formation of a new government led by Prime Minister Najib Mikati (a Sunni who had also served as prime minister for three months in 2005) without the participation of Saad's March 14 alliance, Hizbullah will for the first time be part of a ruling coalition.

In its rise from relatively humble beginnings in the 1980s to its current status as Lebanon's leading political actor, Hizbullah has followed a sophisticated and adaptive political strategy that blends military, social, economic and religious elements. While the party's day-to-day political decisions revolve around internal Lebanese issues such as guaranteeing more representation within the parliament or cabinet, its long-term political aim is to be a leader in the Islamic world. From its 1985 Open Letter to its 2009 manifesto, the party has consistently presented its vision as transcending

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Lebanon. The Open Letter was primarily addressed to Muslims worldwide, and the manifesto frames Hizbullah's outlook as global in scope: 'The Resistance in Lebanon has evolved from a Lebanese national value to an Arab and Islamic value and has become today an international value that's taught all over the world'.¹

Despite its participation in the current Lebanese political confessional system, in which power is proportionally distributed between Muslim and Christian communities and divided among various sects within them, the party's long-term aim is to reach a position of leadership through a change in the system itself. A Hizbullah MP, Mohammad Raad, said in December 2004 that he believed that a referendum would show that the majority of Lebanese supported the continuation of the 'resistance', and that one question should be 'whether the presidency should still be reserved for the Maronites'.² Hizbullah Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem said in 2008 that 'the Party's final objective, in its political jihadist vision and program of work, is not to reach ultimate ruling power within the current sectarian system'.³

Hizbullah's 2009 manifesto confirmed the party's commitment to changing the Lebanese system into a majoritarian democracy:

The main problem in the Lebanese political system, which prevents its reform, development and constant updating is political sectarianism ... The fact that the Lebanese political system was established on a sectarian basis constitutes in itself a strong constraint to the achievement of true democracy where an elected majority can govern and an elected minority can oppose, opening the door for a proper circulation of power between the loyalty and the opposition or the various political coalitions. Thus, abolishing sectarianism is a basic condition for the implementation of the majority-minority rule.⁴

The manifesto is deliberately vague about the exact nature of the majoritarian democracy the party is proposing. However, Hizbullah's declarations since 1985 suggest that it aspires to an Islamic democracy under Iran's 'Guardianship of the Jurist' (*wilayat al-faqih*) model. This was made explicit

in the 1985 Open Letter, which called on the Lebanese people to accept an Islamic state, and in Hizbullah's August 2004 declaration of identity and goals, which stated that 'another of its ideals is the establishment of [an] Islamic Republic'.⁵ Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah declared in a speech on 26 May 2008, that he was proud to belong to the party of *wilayat al-faqih*, and in a question and answer session with journalists following the speech, emphasised that commitment to *wilayat al-faqih* was an unchangeable value for Hizbullah, not a pragmatic political decision.

But the party has been careful to play down in public its commitment to establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon because it knows the prospect is unattractive to at least half the Lebanese population. The lack of reference to *wilayat al-faqih* in Hizbullah's 2009 manifesto was interpreted by some as a sign that the party had abandoned this political aim, but the omission is arguably not a sign of abandonment but rather of political pragmatism.

Barriers and enablers

Hizbullah's internal organisation follows a top-down model. In the mid-1990s, efforts by new members to reform the party (adopting a dialogue-based approach towards other political entities in Lebanon and a local Lebanese agenda rather than one dictated by Iran) failed as their voices were marginalised in favour of those closer to Iran's clerical leadership.⁶ But the secretary-general is accountable to the membership: in 1992, the party's first secretary-general, Subhi Tufaili, was effectively removed from his position because he wanted to boycott the Lebanese parliamentary elections, and the Party's internal committees believed that participation in the elections would be politically advantageous.⁷

A number of external enablers and barriers have an impact on Hizbullah's political strategy, with some playing a dual role. One enabler is the Lebanese conflict-management system, which has always followed a consensus model of no winners and no losers. Hizbullah has used this system to its advantage, securing larger and larger gains every time the system has been put to the test. The 2008 Doha Accords, which gave Hizbullah and its allies the right of veto in cabinet despite not having a parliamentary majority, are the latest example. Another enabler is the weakness of the Lebanese state.

Hizbullah sees its role as a resistance force as unavoidable, as the Lebanese state is unable to defend itself against Israel. It argues that this role, as well as the mere existence of the state of Israel, justifies its weapons.⁸ On the economic level, Hizbullah criticised then Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's Beirut-focused economic plan, but would not allow Lebanese state services to directly reach its constituents in southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs.⁹ These factors suggest that it is not in Hizbullah's interest for the Lebanese state to become stronger, unless it is under direct Hizbullah control, with the party functioning both as army and economic provider.

Both Israel and the US have aided Hizbullah's rise

Nor is it in Hizbullah's interest that another entity be able to position itself as a defender of the Lebanese Shi'ites, over whom the party has managed to establish a monopoly. A third enabler is Hizbullah's relative power in Lebanon. Its political opponents, the March 14 camp, have proved unable to constrain the party's actions. Hizbullah has managed to either quell or co-opt any Shia opposition, so it also faces no internal restraints. Finally, Iran and Syria's support for Hizbullah is well documented, though Hizbullah is not an Iranian or Syrian political tool. Rather, it is a product of the

Iranian Revolution that has taken a life, identity and autonomy of its own, albeit with Iran's continued funding and support. The relationship with Syria is a partnership beneficial to both sides.

While Washington characterises Hizbullah as a terrorist organisation, and while Israel poses a potential existential threat for the group, both countries have in fact aided Hizbullah's political rise. Israel provides the party with a *raison d'être*, strengthened by the alliance with the United States. The 2006 war, which saw American backing for Israeli attacks on Hizbullah, catalysed an unprecedented level of support for Hizbullah not only among the Lebanese, but also among Arab and Muslim communities worldwide, and paved the way for the party to snare a greater degree of control in the local Lebanese scene.¹⁰

In recent years, Hizbullah has also faced a number of barriers. One was Rafik Hariri, whose economic and political programme was predicated on the success of the Middle East peace process and accommodation with

Israel.¹¹ He supported, moreover, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon following UN Security Council Resolution 1559 on 4 September 2004. The resolution also called for disarmament of all non-army entities in Lebanon. As Hizbullah regards its weapons as non-negotiable, it views implementation of the resolution as an existential threat. Another challenge for the party has been the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The tribunal's indictments are seen by Hizbullah as a conspiracy to tarnish its credibility as a resistance movement in the Middle East.

Although Hizbullah has learnt to negotiate its way through the Lebanese political system, ultimately this system limits the party's power both qualitatively and quantitatively. This is why Hizbullah has been actively working to dismantle it. And to become a leader of the Muslim world, it needs Sunni approval beyond Lebanon. Hizbullah's pandering to Sunni perceptions extends to the way it sells its political projects, whether the Islamic state (presented as a choice not an imposition), its weapons (presented as defensive), or its relationship with Iran. The party has been aware of the need to appeal to non-Shi'ites since its inception. Its Open Letter of 1985 stated that 'it's not important that a party controls a street. What's important is that the people engage with this party'.¹² And its August 2004 Identity and Goals declaration stated that 'Hezbollah does not wish to implement Islam forcibly but in a peaceful and political manner, that gives the chance to the majority to either accept or refuse. If Islam becomes the choice of the majority only then will it be implemented'.¹³ In the case of Hariri and Resolution 1559, the decision was to fight back, but in with regard to the Sunnis Hizbullah is still trying to brand itself as non-threatening.

Pragmatism and ideology

Hizbullah is often referred to as 'pragmatic'. It learned the value of pragmatism (or at least the perception of pragmatism) early on. Although it declared its key objective to be establishment of an Islamic state, and that it did not recognise the Lebanese state as legitimate, in 1985, it soon changed its tone and began selling its mission in patriotic terms, branding itself as a national resistance movement. This 'gradualist pragmatism' means that it is not useful to look at Hizbullah as a slave to its ideology.¹⁴ To be sure, values

such as *wilayat al-faqih* are constant, but for Hizbullah, ideology is as much a political tool as a driving force. For example, in 1992, Hizbullah concluded that participating in the Lebanese parliament after the end of the civil war would be more useful than staying outside, and formally asked Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to grant permission to do so in his role as spiritual leader, thus harmonising ideology and politics. Following the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005, Naim Qassem said that Syria's withdrawal 'made us directly responsible for providing domestic protection in a better way than before'.¹⁵ This led to the decision to participate in the cabinet of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Such participation also allowed it to resist disarmament under UNSCR 1559.¹⁶

Hizbullah's approach to Lebanon's Christians is similarly pragmatic. They are no longer considered *ahl al-dhimma* (non-Muslims subject to sharia law), as in the 1985 Open Letter, but are now framed as 'partners'.¹⁷ This partnership, most prominent in the memorandum of understanding signed between Hizbullah and Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement, reflects a need for collaboration with other groups to make a claim for majority support. According to Hizbullah MP and foreign-affairs spokesman Nawaf Musawi in 2008, 'We understand the political reality of Lebanon very well ... No single group can rule by itself. The Lebanese can't be governed except by consensus, and we want a democratic and consensual country.'¹⁸

The same pragmatic approach applies to dealing with the current political system in Lebanon. In the 2008 edition of his book on Hizbullah's vision, Naim Qassem wrote that the party will accept 'consensual democracy till we can reach majoritarian democracy'.¹⁹ This position is echoed in Hizbullah's 2009 manifesto:

Yet, and until the Lebanese could reach through their national dialogue this historic and sensitive achievement, which is the abolishment of political sectarianism, and since the political system in Lebanon is based on sectarian foundations, the consensual democracy will remain the fundamental basis for governance in Lebanon, because it is the actual embodiment of the spirit of the constitution and the essence of the Charter of the co-existence.²⁰

Hizbullah's increasing participation in Lebanese state institutions is often characterised as 'Lebanonisation'. There are two principal views of this development. Optimists see it as a consequence of Hizbullah's growing domestic political role, and a mechanism that will make Hizbullah less ideological in the long term as it becomes answerable to its constituents. Pessimists see Lebanonisation as a facade behind which Hizbullah can hide its Islamist agenda.²¹ The truth is somewhere in between.

Hizbullah's 2009 manifesto is a component of this pragmatism. The party does not plan its political strategy on a short-term basis only. It recognises that it may need decades and generations to achieve its ultimate goals, and it is willing to wait. Pragmatism has led to an upward trajectory in terms of relative power. Over the past two decades Hizbullah has gained more seats in parliament and municipal councils, representation in the cabinet, and military dominance.

Hizbullah relies on pragmatic principles in Islamic jurisprudence that give it flexibility in behaviour: for example, it follows the principles of 'necessity permits what is prohibited' and 'what cannot be accomplished in its whole [should] not be left [abandoned] in its whole'.²² It also relies on five purposes of sharia: '(a) the protection of reason (*hifz al-'aql*); (b) the protection of the self (*hifz al-nafs*); (c) the protection of family and descent (*hifz al-nasl*); (d) the protection of religion (*hifz al-din*); and (e) the protection of property (*hifz al-mal*)'.²³ This provides religious justification for action against entities or developments deemed threats to any of its concepts or institutions.

Hizbullah embraces its own version of *realpolitik*, involving a balance between practicality and ideology in the pursuit of power. As Naim Qassem puts it, 'the dominance of interest over principles is unacceptable, but considering interests to be in the framework of maintaining principles is acceptable'.²⁴ In this sense, Hizbullah's ideology is ideal: its flexibility gives the group significant leeway in choosing its political actions.

Marketing moderation

A key method by which Hizbullah reassures its rivals is by showing them its intentions are moderate.²⁵ This presentation is particularly evident in

Hizbullah's justification for the need to change the Lebanese political system. Its 2009 manifesto presents Hizbullah as a reformist, nationalist movement working towards achieving a 'fair' state:

To conclude, it should be mentioned that one of the most important conditions for the establishment of a home of this type is having a fair state, a state which is capable and strong, as well as a political system that truly represents the will of the people and their aspirations for justice, freedom and security, stability and well-being and dignity. This is what all the Lebanese people want and work to achieve and we are a part of them.²⁶

To this is linked the presentation of Hizbullah as a natural and inevitable product of its environment that does things out of necessity. Hizbullah rose as a reaction to the marginalisation of the Shi'ites on three levels: politics, development and defence.²⁷ The party has been capitalising on those issues ever since. The 'natural and inevitable' framework is found in its 2004 declaration, particularly with reference to Israel, and echoed in its 2009 manifesto, which extends the issue of necessity into one of self-defence:

The Resistance role is a national necessity as long as the Israeli threats and ambitions continue. Therefore, and in the absence of strategic balance between the state and the enemy, the Israeli threat obliges Lebanon to endorse a defensive strategy that depends on a popular resistance participating in defending the country and an army that preserves the security of the country, in a complementarity [sic] process that proved to be successful through the previous phase.²⁸

Hizbullah has extended this framework beyond the Israeli context. The 1985 Open Letter warned others not to block Hizbullah's objectives. Since then, the party has justified its engagement in violence outside of the context of Israeli resistance as due to 'extenuating circumstances'. Hirst has argued that Hizbullah's engagement in hostage-taking in the 1980s and 1990s was seen by the party a defensive move to protect the Shia community against

Israel and the West.²⁹ The same applies to the violence of 8 May 2008, when Nasrallah declared that Hizbullah would use force to protect its possession of weapons for defence against Israel.³⁰ And it also applies to the rhetoric used in reference to the UN Special Tribunal, which is continuously framed in terms of a conspiracy against the 'resistance'. As *New York Times* journalist Thanassis Cambanis puts it, Hizbullah frames violence 'as a reluctant use of force in self-defense'.³¹

This framework also allows Hizbullah to present itself as a party reluctant to take power; any gains are merely incidental to the pursuit of justice.³² The political clout Hizbullah has earned through providing social services and defending southern Lebanon is thus downplayed. The same strategy is applied towards the Special Tribunal; Hizbullah's campaign against the tribunal is presented as being about seeking justice for Hizbullah as the wrongly accused.

Hizbullah's messages and strategies appear credible because the party has successfully cultivated an image of credibility. This has been achieved through promises of measurable aims, linking words and deeds. Examples include 'defeating' Israel in 2006 and the release of Lebanese political prisoners from Israeli jails in 2008, both Nasrallah promises.³³ Hizbullah has been able to sustain this credible image despite not always abiding by its promises, such as when it employed violence in Lebanon in May 2008. As Hirst put it, the statement that Hizbullah's weapons would never be used against other Lebanese was 'only a promise, not a guarantee'.³⁴ Media outlets close to Hizbullah also justify the use of weapons: the news site *Elnashra* published a piece on 8 November 2010 saying that Hizbullah supporters are 'comforted' by the visibility of Hizbullah's weapons in Lebanon because 'it is a sign that the Party will continue as long as it possesses weapons that allow it to defend its existence, no matter the source of threat: Israeli, Lebanese, or foreign'.³⁵

Hizbullah's 'proof' of delivering on its promises has given the party the opportunity to frame itself in exalted terms. In his speeches, Nasrallah creates an image of Hizbullah leaders as dogmatically infallible and thus

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untouchable. This exaltation was persistently communicated in Nasrallah's speeches about the Special Tribunal, in which he presented the party as innocent of any accusation of wrongdoing.

Hizbullah tries to paint the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in terms similar to those in which it paints Israel. Hizbullah has built a reputation for being the only serious resistance to Israel in the region. Since 2005, the party has been framing those who try to stand in its way as traitors and Israeli collaborators. Nasrallah has repeatedly used the phrase 'cutting the hand' to refer to the punishment awaiting those who stand in Hizbullah's way. In a speech on 25 May 2005 he said that 'if anyone tries to disarm the resistance, we will fight him the way the martyrs fought in Karbala [and] consider any hand that tries to seize our weapons an Israeli hand, and cut it off'.³⁶ In his 8 May 2008 speech he described the internal crisis as

a declaration of war ... against the resistance and its weapons for the benefit of America and Israel. The communications network is the significant part of the weapons of the resistance. I said that we will cut off the hand that targets the weapons of the resistance ... Today is the day to carry out this decision.³⁷

This was followed by a speech on 3 August 2010 in which he threatened Israel, saying that the hand of anyone who touches the Lebanese army would be cut, and another on 11 November in which he used the same language with regard to anyone trying to get to members of Hizbullah (a reference to Special Tribunal indictments).

Hizbullah thus sets its Lebanese political opponents on the same level as Israel or, more precisely, as an extension of the Israeli threat. After the 2006 war and just before the resignation of six pro-Hizbullah ministers from the Saniora cabinet in an attempt to bring down the government, Nasrallah said that 'what has happened since the end of the war ... is an extension of Israel's war against Lebanon. And just as we fought in July and August, so we will fight today, but with other weapons and other rules.'³⁸ MP Ali Fayyad, director of Hizbullah's think tank, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, echoed this, saying that 'Hezbollah ... has managed during

the [2006] war to crack Israel's deterrent power. However ... that alone wouldn't assure a Hezbollah victory in the regional context unless the Party of God could manage to fend off internal threats to its authority.³⁹

Hezbollah has worked systematically throughout its existence to cultivate loyalty to the party among Shi'ites, especially in southern Lebanon. In the south, Hezbollah has used what amounts to a 'clear, hold, build' strategy: clearing the area of Israeli troops, holding it militarily and building an indigenous physical, social, political, economic and military infrastructure. When political tensions rose following Hariri's assassination in 2005, Hezbollah became more reliant on sectarian loyalty, forming an alliance with the other Shia party, Amal, in that year's parliamentary election. This alliance allowed moves against Hezbollah to be cast as moves against Shi'ites in general.⁴⁰

Hezbollah has wide support among the Shi'ites, but it would be mistaken to assume that all Shi'ites blindly follow the group. Shi'ites rally around Hezbollah partly because out of conviction and partly out of fear.⁴¹ The party successfully silenced Amal in 1988 after a three-year war.⁴² Since then, no other Shia faction has challenged it. The voices of dissidents are simply not heard, and the party has intimidated its constituents to achieve compliance.⁴³

War as politics

Hezbollah has engaged in several defensive wars over the past three decades. Defensive war works for Hezbollah for two reasons: militarily, because, as Carl von Clausewitz pointed out, it is more likely than offensive war to succeed in the face of a much bigger enemy; and in terms of image, because it fits within the framework of necessity and self-defence.⁴⁴

But war is also a political tool for Hezbollah. In 2006, as Hezbollah felt cornered by growing support for the Special Tribunal and for the March 14 alliance, it sparked a war with Israel by kidnapping two Israeli soldiers, a move framed as an 'act of resistance'. Hezbollah emerged from the war and its aftermath more powerful, both politically and militarily, and with heightened popularity across the Middle East.

Hezbollah keeps a close eye on political developments on the local Lebanese scene and has shown itself savvy in turning them to its advan-

tage. For example, after the Ta'if Agreement of 1989 called for dissolving all militias in Lebanon, Hizbullah launched a public-relations campaign to present itself as a resistance force, not a militia, to rationalise its retention of weapons.⁴⁵ It also relies heavily on cultivation of an image of popular support. In November 2004, the party organised a 'million man march' (only 100,000 attended) in support of Syria and rejection of Resolution 1559, which in effect challenged Hariri's group, but which was marketed as a popular march against foreign interference in Lebanese affairs.⁴⁶ On 8 March 2005 Hizbullah (along with Syria) orchestrated a pro-Syrian demonstration in downtown Beirut, and set up protest camps in downtown Beirut in 2006–07 calling for the government's resignation.

Nasrallah is a master of spin

The withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon in 2000 and the survival of Hizbullah following the 2006 war have both been branded as great victories in an appeal to Lebanese, Arab and Muslim public opinion. Nasrallah tailors his speeches to appeal to Shi'ites, Arabs and Muslims and their aspirations, while using anti-sectarian rhetoric to appeal to Sunnis in the Arab world. Hizbullah also emphasises consensus in its rhetoric, which sounds appealing but glosses over the fact that consensus can be reached through both violent and non-violent means, as Hizbullah has demonstrated through its relationship with its constituents.

Nasrallah is a master of spin, and markets even those Hizbullah activities that challenge the sovereignty of the Lebanese state as justifiable. In a speech after the 2006 war, following criticism over Hizbullah's kidnapping of Israeli soldiers without the Lebanese government's knowledge, Nasrallah justified the action: 'Should I tell the government that I'm going to conduct a kidnap operation? I'd be giving it a huge responsibility.'⁴⁷ This justification for ignoring state authority also involves the argument from necessity: in Hirst's words, 'when the state fails in carrying out some of its functions, society must help the state in carrying them out – even if the state doesn't ask'.⁴⁸

Although Hizbullah's Lebanese opponents have access to a wealth of public-relations resources, Hizbullah has an advantage in Nasrallah's public performance. Saad Hariri lacked Nasrallah's charisma and public-

speaking experience, and was often relegated to reacting to Hizbullah, whereas Hizbullah has successfully used pre-emptive attacks in its public-relations campaigns (such as the one against the Special Tribunal). Saad Hariri's rapprochement towards Syria, for example, took place through an article in a Saudi newspaper (*Alsharq Alawsat*), whereas Nasrallah conducts his battles with a domineering screen presence that is increasingly using communication technologies in dazzling displays, such as a multimedia speech attempting to prove that Israel was behind Rafik Hariri's assassination.⁴⁹

In public speeches and other public-relations efforts, Hizbullah increasingly relies on visual displays of power. From graphic billboards depicting Israeli defeat in 2006, to the Spider's Web exhibition in 2007 displaying ransacked Israeli military vehicles, to the permanent display of those vehicles at the Mleeta visitor centre in southern Lebanon, this visual display serves as a challenge to both Israel and local political opponents. It is also a display of prowess, boosting the morale of Hizbullah's supporters and reassuring them of the party's strength.

Hizbullah consistently operates on two parallel tracks, within and outside the state system. For example, Shia ministers boycotted the cabinet for six weeks starting in December 2005, until Hizbullah was granted exemption from Resolution 1559 through government designation as 'national resistance' rather than a militia.⁵⁰ This was cemented in the Doha Accords of May 2008, with the army and the resistance characterised as mutually independent yet complementary entities. But, as the May 2008 events showed, Hizbullah has also resorted to an outside track in its efforts to keep its weapons. The same can be said about the Special Tribunal. Hizbullah has sought to challenge the tribunal through the state system by pushing the Lebanese government to formally revoke it, but has also used unilateral means to counter it, such as the attack on tribunal investigators at a clinic in Beirut's southern suburb in November 2010.

* * *

Hizbullah's political strategy, though largely successful, is not without its weaknesses. One is a tendency towards overreliance on individual achieve-

ments. Hizbullah has been riding on the success of its 2006 confrontation with Israel to appeal to the Arab world for a number of years now. Touting this success gives Hizbullah leeway to engage in violence when it sees the need, as in May 2008. But the 'divine victory' of 2006 begins to fade as other challenges loom and the dangers of Hizbullah's reliance on force clearly manifest themselves. The fact that the party believes it managed to emerge from the May 2008 fighting relatively unscathed, coupled with the lack of restraints on its power, may lead it to engage in similar, possibly more ambitious actions in the future, risking a loss of popular support in the Arab and Muslim worlds (especially if it is seen as engaging in an unprovoked attack on Lebanon's Sunni community). Hizbullah's growing ego could prove to be its undoing.

Hizbullah will no doubt hold on to its weapons as a tool against Israel and Lebanese opponents alike; arms are the guarantors of Hizbullah's political clout. It will also continue pursuing its goal of changing the Lebanese political system through gradualist pragmatism. But Lebanon, long used to a sectarian and pluralistic power-sharing agreement, may prove more resistant to change than Hizbullah anticipates, necessitating the prolonged use of force by the party.

Recognition of Hizbullah's complexity – characterised as a terrorist group, a militia, a popular resistance movement, a political party, or a state within a state – is important to understand the group and its ambitions. Hizbullah should not be seen as primarily driven by a desire to engage in an endless war with Israel. Ultimately, Hizbullah wants to be recognised as a legitimate political actor on the global level, and its track record suggests it is likely to survive. It will not be satisfied with compromises within the current Lebanese sectarian political system, such as extra seats in parliament or a three-way division of power between Christians, Sunnis and Shi'ites. Only a strong, sovereign Lebanese state that represents all its constituents without quelling the voice of minorities, with strong institutions that uphold the rule of law and provide the required social and economic services, will be able to stand up to Hizbullah's political strategy.

Notes

- 1 Amin Elias, 'Qira'a fi wathiqatayy tayyar al-moustaqbal wa hizbillah: al-watan al-ghamidh', *An-Nahar*, 25 October 2010, available at <http://www.annahar.com/content.php?priority=9&table=main&type=main&day=Mon>; Hizbullah Manifesto, 2009, reproduced in Ziad Majed, *Hezbollah and the Shiite Community: From Political Confessionalization to Confessional Specialization* (Washington DC: The Aspen Institute, 2010), pp. 21–4, http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/pubs/LRF_AW_digital_1122.pdf.
- 2 Quoted in Nicolas Blandford, *Killing Mr Lebanon: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and its Impact on the Middle East* (London: IB Tauris, 2009), p. 190.
- 3 Naim Qassem, *Hizballah: al-manhaj, al-tajribah, al-mustaqbal* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2008), p. 290.
- 4 Hizbullah, 'Manifesto', p. 23.
- 5 Hizbullah, 'Identity and Goals', 2004, reproduced in Joseph Al-Agha, *Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, doctoral dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam, 2006, pp. 244–6 (p. 245), available at <http://dare.uvu.vu.nl/bitstream/1871/10197/1/6746.pdf>.
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- 7 Thanassis Cambanis, *A Privilege to Die: Inside Hezbollah's Legions and Their Endless War Against Israel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).
- 8 David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010).
- 9 Blandford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon*.
- 10 Richard Burkholder, 'Lebanese See Hezbollah as Politically Stronger after Conflict with Israel', Gallup News Service, 17 November 2006, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/25489/lebanese-see-hezbollah-politically-stronger-after-conflict-israel.aspx>.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 12 Hizbullah, 'Open Letter', 2005, reproduced in Fayez Qazzi, *Min Hasan Nasr Allah ila Mishal Awn: qira'ah siyasiyah li-Hizb Allah* (Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2008), p. 186.
- 13 Hizbullah, 'Identity and Goals', p. 246.
- 14 See Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), p. 30; Hirst, *Beware of Small States*.
- 15 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 313.
- 16 See Blandford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon*, p. 191.
- 17 Al-Agha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, p. 202.
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- 20 Hizbullah, 'Manifesto', p. 23.
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- 22 Al-Agha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, p. 164.
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- 24 Qassim, *Hizballah*, p. 279.
- 25 Cambanis, *A Privilege to Die*.
- 26 Hizbullah, 'Manifesto', p. 22.
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- 28 Hizbullah, 'Manifesto'.
- 29 Hirst, *Beware of Small States*, p. 231.
- 30 For an English transcript of Nasrallah's speech, see http://yal-ibnan.com/site/archives/2008/05/nasrallah_justi.php.
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- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
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