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Hezbollah Debate

# **“The Savage Anomaly” of the Islamic Movement**

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**“Islam is no more incapable than any other ideology of adapting, or of being adapted to, new realities. The Muslim peoples, with or without Islam, can progress or go backwards, their governments can be totalitarian or liberal, their masses can be open to multiple currents of thought or fanatically attached to conformism towards ancient or new dogmas. That will depend on many factors, of which the Muslim cultural heritage, much more varied than people think, is only one element, and one which is far from being the strongest. The game has not been played, it is not lost in advance.” [1]**

### **The Tendency is Reversed**

The events of July and August 2006, which saw the Israeli project of taming the Lebanese resistance fail, represent a political earthquake. It will require considerable time to measure how much the historical frameworks of political references have been overturned by this 33-day war. Israel is today suffering from a political, military, moral, and symbolic crisis: for the first time, the Israeli army has suffered a major defeat. However, it remained one of the political foundations of the country's power, and occupied up until then a central place in the very organization of the society.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Hezrally.jpg>]

The military failure was combined with a definite political defeat: the defeat of Israel, of course, which was unable to liquidate the political-military apparatus of the Hezbollah (Party of God), but also the defeat of the United States, which was unable to impose on the international community and the Lebanese government the deployment of NATO troops, whose mandate would have been to disarm the Shiite popular militia. Resolution 1701, which is nevertheless heavy with danger for the Lebanese resistance, comes across as a minimum framework for the Western powers, including France.

Lebanon has found itself since autumn 2004 at the heart of the Western colonial redeployment: Resolution 1559, demanding Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the disarming of all the Lebanese militias, which was jointly edited by France and the United States, considerably divided the Lebanese political class and created new divisions between the communities. The Forces of March 14, essentially made up of the Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea, Christian, of the Progressive Socialist Party of Walid Joublatt, Druse, of the Current of the Future of Saad Hariri, Sunni, but also of the Movement of the Democratic Left, a split from the Lebanese Communist Party, have found themselves over the last two years the main support of the Western political offensive in Lebanon: demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops, they also argued in favour of the disarmament of the Lebanese Resistance in the south, thus indirectly satisfying Israeli demands.

The Coalition of March 8, led by the Hezbollah, and which finds most of its social base in the Shiite community, but is also supported by pro-Syrian forces who draw their support from part of the Sunni and Christian communities, responded to this offensive by re-affirming the Arab dimension of Lebanon and the need to preserve a political line opposed to American-Israeli interests in the region. For them that also meant keeping intact Hezbollah's strategic partnership with Iran and Syria. For two years, the Lebanese Communist Party tried to find a balanced anti-imperialist political line, clearly supporting the Islamic resistance in Southern Lebanon, arguing for this resistance to keep its weapons, but nevertheless demanding the total withdrawal of Syrian troops and not keeping quiet about its criticisms of the dictatorial nature of the Baathist regime.

It is on this bipolarisation of the Lebanese political scene that the Americans, the French, and the Israelis were

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counting in order to weaken the Shiite organization, which has become, since 2000 and the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, the nerve centre of popular Arab aspirations to a consistent anti-colonial resistance. The ambition of crushing the Lebanese resistance, over and above the fact that it would certainly have been the prelude to a generalised attack against Iran and Syria, also corresponded to a desire to finish for a long time with any perspective of real opposition to the American plans for the greater Middle East and to Israeli expansionist aims.

However, this was to underestimate Hezbollah's capacity to ensure the link between the building of a strong military resistance and the development of broad political alliances, capable of going beyond the logic of political and confessional bipolarisation. The building of a national consensus is a leitmotiv for Hezbollah. The 33-day war saw the combination of the politico-military resistance of Hezbollah, a broad political front in support of the resistance and a social resistance which did not have its base only in the Shiite community.

Since February 2006 Hezbollah has been engaged in a logic of political partnership with the Free Patriotic Current of General Aoun, a Christian organization which was originally fiercely anti-Syrian, and is today allied with Hezbollah to constitute a counterweight to the Hariri bloc whose rival it is, and which is now opposed to a line of political collaboration with the west. The support of part of the Christian community during the conflict turned out to be central, the strategic objective being to avoid any polarization on a confessional basis which would have weakened the capacities of the resistance in the south.

Secondly, a National Resistance Front was rapidly put in place in July 2006: it brought together the Hezbollah, the Lebanese Communist Party, which in its appeal of July 29 called to “take up arms again”, the People's Party of Najih Wakim, which is a left wing Arab nationalist organization the majority of whose members are Greek Orthodox Christians, the Third Force of former Prime Minister Selim Hoss, and other smaller Arab nationalist or left-wing forces.

So there was the constitution of a political front that went beyond just the pro-Syrian parties: Aoun's current persevered with its policy of solidarity with Hezbollah, while a military coordination was established in the South and in Baalbeck in the East of the country, between the Islamic Resistance and the armed groups linked to the Communist Party and to Amal. Finally, a broad multi-confessional network of non-governmental organizations, with its base particularly among the young generation, regrouped for example in a structure called as-Samidoum, directed itself towards social work in solidarity with the Lebanese refugees on a political line of support to the resistance.

So there was an interaction between on the one hand the Hezbollah society of popular resistance made up of its political, military (the Islamic Resistance) and social (the network of foundations destined for the Martyrs, the wounded and the refugees) branches, and on the other hand a broad social and political resistance going beyond the divisions between communities and involving in particular Sunnis and Christians. It contributed to the failure of the American-Israeli plan, which was unable to find in Lebanon itself the political support that it needed to break the resistance. That represents a break with the situation of the 1970s and 1980s where Israel was able to have the support of part of the Maronite Christian community to intervene in Lebanon.

So the tendency has been reversed, and the long succession of Arab defeats, “which bends spirits and hearts” [\[2\]](#)

Georges Corm, interviewed by Youssef Ait Akdim, Tel Quel online, September 24, 2006., seems to have been able to be broken. The events of July and August 2006 have furthermore revealed the contradictions and the singularities of the Hezbollah, which now stands out from the whole of the Islamist galaxy: its capacity for developing broad alliances, on a long term basis, with secular political structures and for overcoming certain confessional divisions that are specific to the Lebanese nation, are obliging it to make large-scale strategic readjustments. As the Lebanese historian and economist Georges Corm has stressed, “the patriotic and nationalist discourse of this Lebanese

resistance should in the long term influence the different Islamist rhetorical discourses, taking them away from their delirious aspect and bringing them into the different national, local, and pan-Arab realities.” [3]

### A Plural History

Hezbollah was from the beginning a movement at the crossroads: its long gestation, from 1982 to the publication of the Appeal to the Disinherited in 1985, was the combined effect of three central events in the Middle East, which telescoped.

First of all, the invasion of Lebanon by Israel in 1982 and the occupation of southern Lebanon from 1979 onwards. Secondly, the effects of the Iranian revolution of 1979 on the Arab political landscape. Thirdly, the political affirmation of the Shiite communities in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, whether in Lebanon with the Movement of the Disinherited of the Imam Mussa Sadr or in Iraq with the Islamist Shiite party ad-Dawa of Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr. After the historical failure of Nasserite and Baathist Arab nationalism, symbolized by the Arab defeat by Israel in 1967 and by the alignment of Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat on the Americans and the Israelis, the Iranian revolution of 1979 served as a symbol for the Arab world: combining anti-imperialist and Third Worldist rhetoric with the “statisation” of an Islam that was interpreted in a fundamentalist manner, the Iranian revolution made many young left-wing or nationalist militants turn towards Islamism.

So it was that a good number of Maoist cadres, in particular those of a left wing of the Palestinian Fatah, the Katiba at-Tullabiya (the Student Brigade), little by little passed over to Islam and in part to the Hezbollah. These same student brigades suffered, by the way, from the confessionalisation of the Lebanese civil war which also affected the Left. Thus they refused to take part in the massacres and the looting of the Christian village of Damour in 1978, which was partly organized by the Progressive Socialist Party: “A Marxist current close to Maoism, regrouping mainly Palestinian and Lebanese militants, it distinguished itself by its feats of arms against the Israeli army in southern Lebanon from 1976 onwards, but especially during the first Israeli invasion in 1978. This current was also characterised by a certain intellectual vivacity, by an abundance of debates and questioning. Searching for a revolutionary theory that was adapted to the context of Arab-Muslim civilization, these militants would be led towards a rediscovery of Islam.” [4]

Beyond the Maoist and leftist fringe, many currents took part in the formation of the Hezbollah: the Lebanese members of the Iraqi Islamist Dawa Party in exile, who favour building an Islamic state by taking power; groups like the Lebanese Union of Muslim Students or the Rally of the Ulemas of the Bekaa; or the supporters of Imam Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, a particularly popular Shiite religious figure who preached in the southern suburbs of Beirut and whose theses are at the crossroads between Islamic revivalism and a form of social Third Worldism. It was Fadlallah who, in 1988, was one of the first to theorise the practical impossibility of an Islamic state in Lebanon, and who put forward at that time the concept of the Dawlat al-Insan, the “humanist state”, based on the de-confessionalisation of the Lebanese political system.

Lastly, the creation of Hezbollah is organically linked to the split that affected the Shiite movement Amal. Amal, which is an acronym for the Detachment of the Lebanese Resistance, was the armed wing of the Movement of the Disinherited of the Imam Moussa Sadr, who died in 1978. Originally, in 1974, the Movement of the Disinherited saw itself as the party of the affirmation of the Shiites as a political community. The Shiites are in fact one of the poorest confessional groups in Lebanon.

They are politically under-represented, grouped mainly in the South of Lebanon, but also in the East, around the town of Baalbeck, and in the southern suburbs of Beirut. There is no clear ideological orientation in Amal, which regroups Shiites without distinction, from the most conservative Right to the far Left. However in 1982, nearly 500 militants grouped around Hussein al-Mussawi left Amal and created Islamic Amal, which would constitute one of the

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backbones of the Hezbollah. They contested both the secular line of the new leader of Amal, Nabih Berri, and his turning against the Palestinian and Lebanese resistance from 1982 onwards.

The new formation then benefited from the military training and the political cooperation of the Iranian Guards of the Islamic Revolution, mainly installed in the plain of the Bekaa. From here comes the profoundly hybrid nature of the Hezbollah, resting on the two bases of Shiite Islamism and the national question: it has inherited political cadres who do not all come from the Islamic matrix, but who turned towards a political reading of Islam after the failure of the Left and of nationalism, and towards the re-appropriation of a Shiite cultural grounding which they consider as perfectly capable of being mobilised in the struggle against the occupation.

The proclamation of the Appeal to the Disinherited, in the Bir al'abd mosque in the south of Beirut on February 16, 1985 thus bears witness to this double nature of the Hezbollah: while it is a party working for the liberation of the territories occupied by Israel, it also recognises its political and ideological affiliation to Khomeini and to Iran, which gave its approval to the text. The Appeal argued for an Islamic state on the Iranian model but nevertheless renounced “imposing it by force”. It thus called to “preserve Lebanon from any dependency on East or West”, to “defeat the Zionist occupier” and to establish “a political system emanating from free popular choice”.

At that time it attacked militants of the Lebanese Communist Party who were engaged in the National Front of the Lebanese Resistance, and was probably responsible for the death of two of its most brilliant intellectuals: Hussein Mroue and Mahdi Amil. At the same time it found itself opposed to Syria and to its main ally Amal, when the latter took part in the War of the Camps against the PLO in 1985. It then explicitly took a position in favour of the rights of the Palestinian in Lebanon, at the risk of provoking the hostility of the regime in Damascus.

It was only little by little that the nationalist profile of Hezbollah came to dominate its fundamentalist aspect: its integration into the Lebanese parliamentary system following the Taef peace agreement in 1990 was one of the major signs of this. As the only political party authorised to keep its weapons, it de facto took the political and military leadership of the resistance in the occupied South: that is why it felt at that point the need to come to terms with the rest of the Lebanese political spectrum, the building of a national consensus to protect the resistance being a condition sine qua non for its existence as a politico-military organization.

It was in the course of the 1990s that its new general secretary, Hassan Nasrallah, pushed forward a more open line and officially abandoned the perspective of an Islamic state in Lebanon. So there is a close relationship between the Hezbollah's progressive opening up to other Lebanese political and social forces and it being propelled to the title of first party of the resistance.

Relations with the left-wing and nationalist organisations started up again at this time and Hezbollah called a Conference of Support for the Resistance in the Bristol Hotel in Beirut on August 18, 1997, which brought together 27 left-wing and nationalist organisations. In the military domain, the creation of the Lebanese Brigade of Resistance to the Occupation made it possible from 1996 onwards for young militants of other religions or other political orientation to take part in resistance activities in the South alongside the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of the Hezbollah.

Comprising more than 2,000 members, the Brigades were then composed of 38% Sunnis, 25% Shiites, 17% Christians, and 20% Druses, whereas the composition of the Hezbollah remains exclusively Shiite. Lastly, the Hezbollah took part in 1994 in the creation of the Nationalist and Islamic Conference, a pan-Arab structure bringing together Islamist, nationalist and left-wing organisations with the aim of finding points of tactical and programmatic agreement between different groups who had previously been opposed to each other. It still meets every four years. When in May 2000 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak took the decision to unilaterally withdraw his troops from South Lebanon, the Hezbollah drew the political dividends from it: a large part of the Lebanese people considered then that without the resistance of the Hezbollah the Israeli withdrawal would never have happened.

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Finally, like other Islamic movements, the Hezbollah progressively built a hegemony within the Lebanese population, which made it a social as well as political actor. Its work was in reality oriented towards four domains: political, military, social and cultural. Its political leadership involves a complex structure, composed of three organs; a Political Bureau, an Executive Committee and a Majlis ash-Shoura (Consultative Assembly), in addition to which there are several local commands. The Islamic Resistance, its military wing, comprises between 3,000 and 15,000 militia fighters, according to various estimates, to which should be added its own intelligence networks. It looks like a guerrilla movement, but the operations in July and August 2006 showed that it also acted as the embryo of a regular army, and that it was capable of sustaining prolonged ground combats. [5]

The society of resistance is also backed up by both a media apparatus, - the al-Manar television channel and an-Nour Radio - and a whole series of social and charitable institutions which make up for the failings of the Lebanese state, and which the Hezbollah itself in fact describes as “public services”: the Jihad al-Binaa, whose role is the rebuilding of destroyed villages and neighbourhoods and supplying water to the southern suburbs of Beirut; the Islamic Health Organisation runs several dozen dispensaries; the ash-Shahid Institution takes charge of families who have lost members in combat or as result of the air raids, etc.

This political, social and cultural hegemony of the Hezbollah in Lebanese society is paradoxically a hegemony without domination, insofar as it seems to me no longer to form part of a strategy of taking power and crushing political forces which are opposed to it. The development of the society of resistance is, besides, indissociable from the financial aid brought by Iran to Hezbollah, the total amount of which is not known, but is estimated at several tens of millions of dollars per year.

However, the Shiite organization has its own autonomous financial resources, which come essentially from its fund-raising campaigns aimed at Lebanese and foreign donors, coming in particular from the Gulf and the Lebanese diaspora in Africa, from the annual collection of the Zakat (alms), as well as from revenue generated by its investments in construction projects.

### **Contradictions and points of convergence**

For Ali Fayed, member of the Political Bureau of Hezbollah, who is in charge of the Consultative Centre for Study and Research, the Lebanese movement's think tank, “Hezbollah has national, pan-Arab and Islamic dimensions. The fourth dimension is a Shiite dimension. This dimension is a purely doctrinal and ideological dimension. These dimensions are illustrated at different levels. Its national dimension is illustrated by its relations with other Lebanese forces. Its Arab dimension is illustrated by its relations with Syria and other Arab political forces. Its Islamic dimension is illustrated by its relations with Iran. The points of convergence with the other forces are essentially the Palestinian cause and the struggle against American imperialism”. [6]

However the plurality of political identities that the Hezbollah itself affirms raise some questions, because it engenders a certain number of contradictions, which are characteristic of Islamo-nationalist organizations:

– The Hezbollah has made the tasks of national liberation its principal leitmotiv: still today, its obstinate and legitimate attachment to the question of the territories occupied by Israel, namely the Shebaa Farms and the Kfar Chiouba Hills, and its defence of the rights of the Palestinians, make it one of the principal Middle Eastern organisations that has a political practice that is entirely oriented towards national and anti-colonial objectives: nevertheless, the Hezbollah remains a Shiite confessional organisation.

So it has to defend the fact that its social and militant base remains exclusively Shiite, and that a non-Shiite cannot join the Hezbollah. Certainly, there exist circles of sympathisers which are close to the Hezbollah: the Lebanese

Brigades of Resistance to the Occupation were one example. Its parliamentary group includes Christians and Sunnites. But that remains limited. So the Hezbollah finds itself symbolically propelled, in the popular and political imagination, to the rank of premier Arab resistance organisation; its popularity goes far beyond the religious and political divisions that are characteristic of the Arab world, whereas its structure and its composition remain purely Shiite.

– The Hezbollah officially advocates the abolition of the Lebanese confessional and communitarist system, and has done so since it first took part in parliamentary elections. Already in 1992, its electoral programme posed as a double priority – the liberation of Lebanon from the Zionist occupation and the abolition of political confessionalism”. Demanding the creation of “a single electoral district in Lebanon”, the electoral programme of 1992 also demanded “the abolition, on the administrative level, of recruitment based on a sectarian or confessional level”. It is this system which in part encourages clientelism and corruption, the whole of Lebanese political and social life being based on a mechanism of sharing out posts of responsibility and elected positions on the basis of confessional quotas.

Now, once again, the paradox is as follows: the Hezbollah, which has made the abolition of the Lebanese communitarist system one of the key points of its political programme, nevertheless remains one of the main beneficiaries of this system. So it has not engaged in a frontal battle against political communitarism, not hesitating to re-elect or to call for a vote for the defenders of confessional sectarianism, particularly during the last Lebanese legislative elections in spring 2005. That is again one of the main reproaches that the Lebanese Communist Party, which has moved closer to it on many other questions, addresses to the Hezbollah. For Khaled Hadadé, general secretary of the PCL, the relationship with the Hezbollah is ambiguous, because “the Hezbollah has two faces: a positive face which is the resistance and another face which is that of its religious and Islamic confessional affiliation. If today the Hezbollah is defeated, it would be the resistance of Hezbollah which is defeated.

The confessional dimension will remain intact and that will be a pole of attraction for the reconstruction of Lebanon on confessional lines. We were worried before, but we are less so now, because the fact that the Hezbollah is resisting and maintaining itself will make it evolve towards a greater openness in internal Lebanese questions. We have not yet been able to work out with the Hezbollah a common vision of Lebanese society. At the last election they allied themselves with Walid Joumblatt's party, with Hariri's party and the present majority and with the Lebanese Forces. The only party that stood against these parties in the south was the Communist Party. But I think and I hope that the present situation will lead the Hezbollah to evolve, including in its vision of the internal organization of Lebanese society and in the direction of a reform of institutions”. [7]

– Its socio-economic orientation oscillates between several tendencies. On the one hand, it went into the Siniora government in 2005, whereas this government situated itself in the neo-liberal continuity of the period of Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister who was assassinated, and who systematically subordinated Lebanon to the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank. On the other hand it committed its forces to the demonstration in defence of public services on May 10, 2006, alongside the Free Patriotic Current of General Michel Aoun and the Lebanese Communist Party, and contributed to the success of the mobilization, which involved for the first time several hundred thousand people. Basing itself on a poor social base, it stands officially on the line of a strong social state, of a Keynesian type, and of general policies of redistributing national wealth. For Ali Fayyad, “the state should have a role in the protection of the popular classes. Islamic economic thought does not accept the market economy without any constraints.

“Nor is it favourable to the statist economy such as we saw it in the countries of the Eastern bloc. Let us say that the spirit of the Welfare State is closest to the spirit of the Islamic model, it is the idea of a strong social state and a regulated market. Of the three phases of capitalism: liberalism, the Welfare State and unrestrained neo-liberalism, the phase of the Welfare State is the closest to ours. (...) We want a state which takes the side of the poor, against the multi-nationals, against the international economic institutions, against the logic of unlimited productivist and capitalist accumulation”. [8].

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According to Ali Fayyad, the Hezbollah thus seeks to identify with a certain form of anti neo-liberalism. It is furthermore the only Islamic movement to have taken part in the World Social Forums since 2003 and to have translated and circulated the documents of the WSF to its leadership. Its research centre has furthermore had translated into Arabic the writings of Latin American liberation theology. It does not however hesitate to collaborate with political forces which are opposed to it on everything, whether it is on the question of the occupation or on the question of the political and social reform of the Lebanese state.

Rafiq al-Hariri's sister Bahia was elected on its electoral list, whereas she is opposed to the Hezbollah both politically and economically and is a typical representative of the Lebanese bourgeoisie. One question remains posed: will the Hezbollah break out of the classical practice of Islamic movements, which only see the social question from the angle of charity work, or will it succeed in having a political practice that is directed towards those that it claims to defend, that is the most disinherited classes, which besides make up its social base? That would then imply for the Hezbollah breaking politically with some of yesterday's allies and defining more distinctly its political alliances.

We also too often forget that throughout the years 2004 and 2005, and following on the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, the confrontation between the Forces of the 14th of March, which are anti-Syrian and pro-Western, and the Hezbollah and its allies, also covered a social cleavage which will continue in the future: “The partisans of the Hariri family regroup today the ultra-liberal branch of Lebanese society, in other words, the world of business, no matter from what community, hostile in principle to any state that is strong and redistributes wealth. On the side of the supporters of the Syrian presence however, it is clearly a state that is strong and that redistributes wealth that is being called for by the Shi'ite parties Hezbollah and Amal and by the secular Baath party which supports Syria”. [9] The fault line that was opened up after the death of Rafiq al-Hariri does not therefore involve only the national question, the weapons of the resistance and the role of Syria. It is much broader and covers the social question.

– One of the last contradictions certainly remains the question of Hezbollah's foreign supporters: tactically linked to Syria which sees in the Hezbollah a sure means of continuing to exert pressure on Israel and on Western governments, in particular concerning the question of the occupied Golan, the Shiite nationalist organisation also remains politically and ideologically linked to Iran. But there too, things turn out to be more complicated: the Hezbollah maintains relations with all the components of the Iranian regime, from the reformists around Khatami to the most hard-line conservatives.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/hezrally2.jpg>]

Above all, the Hezbollah neighbourhoods and villages can in no way be compared to Iran: there is no longer the imposition by the Hezbollah of an Islamic model in the neighbourhoods and you can see in the southern suburbs of Beirut veiled women and non-veiled women mixing together without any problem. Just as it is common in the zones controlled by Hezbollah to be able to express differences: the Lebanese Communist Party and Amal have a recognized political existence in Southern Lebanon. And “Hezbollahland” is in no way a piece of Iranian territory in Lebanon.

Its social and charity institutions are open to all Lebanese communities. The Hezbollah is no longer an anti-democratic party of social repression, and this is because of its pragmatism, which requires that it build a national consensus around it to protect the arms of the resistance. Its political and military collaboration in the south with the Lebanese Communist Party, in the framework of the Resistance Front, in July and August 2006, also demonstrates this.

Officially recognizing the Marja'ya [10] of the Iranian conservative Khomeini, it is nevertheless the case that the militants of the Party of God are still close to the more open positions of the Imam Fadlallah, who remains opposed to a number of Iranian theses, notably that of the wilayat al-faqih, the theory of the jurist-guide arbitrarily imposed by



Khomeini, which wants to guarantee to the Iranian leadership the political leadership of the whole Shiite world.

So there is a growing gap between the practice of the Hezbollah, its internal profile, and its external, Iranian affiliation. “The Hezbollah officially follows Khomeini, in whom it sees the party's Marja'ya, and it has maintained warm relations with Iran since the 1980s, at the time when Iran contributed to arming and training the militia which would become the Hezbollah. It regularly consults with the Iranian leaders (...). Iran has furthermore continued to give military aid to the Islamic Resistance, providing in particular the rockets that it has in its arsenal. However, these relations in no way signify that Iran is in anyway dictating the Hezbollah's policies or the positions that it adopts, nor that it is capable of controlling the party's actions.

Besides, the Iranian efforts to infuse into the Lebanese Shiite milieu an Iran-centred pan Shiite identity have run up against their Arab identity and have only reinforced the Lebanese nationalism of the Hezbollah itself” [11]. The links with Iran seem to be today more practical and strategic than ideological. They are still religious but most certainly political.

## Political Recomposition

The 33-day war has confirmed the political centrality of the Hezbollah in the Middle East. This centrality began in 2000 after the withdrawal of Israeli troops and today it has become particularly stark, because it expresses the different kinds of political recomposition in the Middle East.

The Islamist current finds itself today obliged to put on the complex clothing of nationalism, which puts it face to face with real contradictions: by taking over a large part of the historic objectives of movements of national liberation, it is now forced to re-adjust its program, its objectives, and even its programmatic basis. The nationalisation of Islamic movements, or the formation of national movements inspired by religion, has been concretised both by the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections of January 2006 and by the symbolic and political victory of the Hezbollah in July and August 2006.

So the comparison with Islamic movements of the 1980s is difficult to maintain: since the 1990s we have seen both an islamisation of the nationalist discourse and a nationalisation and Arabisation of the Islamist discourse; what is more, the frameworks of collaboration between the Left, the nationalists, and the Islamists have multiplied, because of the non-resolution by these three currents of the national question in the Arab world. There is today an increased transversality between these three currents which do not exist in the past.

The speeches of Nasrallah during the conflict gave more place to Lebanese and Arab questions than to those of a hypothetical Muslim Umma.

There is now a dynamic circulation, systematic passages between a new form of anti-colonial pan-Arabism, a territorial nationalism (Palestinian, Lebanese), and a political Islam which is being mobilised as a cultural weapon in the framework of the struggle against the occupation. The Hezbollah itself situates its discourse at the intersection of several identities: confessional-Shiite, national-Lebanese, transnational-Arab, religious-Islamic. The left Nasserite, editor of one of the principal Lebanese dailies, al-Akhbar, Joseph Samaha, considers that “if we look at the situation now, if we look at the state of the Arab world, the Arabs today are expressing a great demand for a national or patriotic current. And after the defeat of the Arab nationalist current, we thought at a certain moment that the left could fill this vacuum.

And it did not do so. It is gradually the Islamists who have filled this vacuum, with all the transformations that they have experienced, in the 1990s, with the end of the Soviet Union, with the end of the war in Afghanistan, with the

change in American policies, and with the cadres who came from left-wing movements and from the Arab nationalist movement. (...) Since I know quite well the Hezbollah and its cadres, every time that you discuss with them, you have the impression that they are nationalists, and what is more: that this raw material, that this raw material could have been, that this raw material could be, that of a big movement of the Left”. [\[12\]](#)

So it is more a nationalism in the process of being recomposed than the simple rise of Islamism that the Hezbollah is expressing: the new transversality between Islam and nationalism on the one hand, the change in generations symbolized by the death of Yasser Arafat and the rise to power of cadres who are less than 50 years old (the Prime Minister Ismael Haniya in Palestine, Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon), also mean that the symbolic leadership of Arab nationalism is passing from Sunnism to Shiism, all that expresses a change of period whose consequences have not yet all been drawn.

The qualitative change in Islamist movements that is symbolised by the Hezbollah means that we should not draw excessive analogies with the frameworks of the 1970s and 1980s, in particular with the Iran of Khomeini: whereas the Iranian revolution developed in a country with a Muslim majority, in a period of strong growth of Islamic fundamentalism, the period opened by the 1990s and the 2000 decade marks the rise of Islamism in places where it is obliged to come to terms with a social, political, and confessional context which pushes it to accept a certain democratic consensus and to come to terms with other forces: “In Lebanon and Iraq the Shiites are narrowly in the majority, with an important complex of minorities, and in Palestinian Hamas is only one of the four most important factions.

Hezbollah must share power and come to terms with the Sunnis, the Christians, and the Druses, and in the same logic, in Iraq the Shiites must share power and come to terms with the Sunnis and the Christians; in Palestinian Hamas must share power and come to terms with Fatah, the Islamic Jihad, the FPLP and the FDLP. In this framework, the Islamists in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq are exactly the opposite of the Islamists in Iran (...). The formidable demographic diversity of Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine works very much in favour of the development of a pluralist society and a cosmopolitan political culture” [\[13\]](#).

Thus it is that the Hezbollah must itself be understood in a framework that is both Lebanese and Arab: because it is the social and multi-confessional reality of Lebanon and the profoundly Arab nature of its popularity that impose on it practical and theoretical adjustments, in the same way that it is the historical, social, democratic, and secularist composition of Palestinian society which is forcing Hamas to integrate into political nationalism in a consensual way. So it is a question of painting the Hezbollah neither in red nor in brown [\[14\]](#) but can be above all the expression of a radicalisation, derailed and deformed, of the national and democratic struggle (...). [\[15\]](#).

The Islamist movements are often understood as having a mass base composed both of the radicalised middle class and petty bourgeois layers and of the most popular and most oppressed classes. With a social base that is made up of the poor rural classes of the South and the East and of the insecure and urbanized social layers of South Beirut, it would be quite difficult to decently argue that Hezbollah represents the interests of the Lebanese elites.

All the more so in that in spite of its colossal fortune, the Shiite movement has rather distinguished itself by the simple and honest way of life of its leaders and by their renunciation of material privileges, a fact which contributes largely to their political credit and which stands out from the endemic corruption of the great Lebanese political families.

That is why the principal criticism from the left that can be addressed to Hezbollah in the present period is to not sufficiently link up the national question and the social question, whereas it claims precisely to be the representative of the disinherited of Lebanon. On two occasions, in 2000 and 2005, it finally held out its hand to the Christian and Sunni Lebanese elites, whereas these people have unceasingly overtime stabbed it in the back and renewed their alliance with the West, demanding that it be disarmed and capitulating totally over Lebanese national demands.

## “The Savage Anomaly” of the Islamic Movement

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The PCL and the national Left think that the Hezbollah partly dissipated the fruits of victory, following the Israeli withdrawals in 2000 and 2005. They would like to see it taking up the fight once and for all against the Lebanese confessional system, which is part and parcel of the mode of neo-colonial domination in Lebanon.

The whole question is to know whether a movement like the Hezbollah, as a result of the profound evolutions it has gone through, is capable of that. Because the movement itself is divided between a conservative tendency that comes more or less from the former cadres of the Dawa Party, still attached to a conservative and reactionary view of social relations, and the tendency that is younger and more open, having been formed more in the framework of the struggle against the occupation and of the national question than in the framework of the historical fundamentalist matrix. The speech by Hassan Nasrallah on September 22, 2006 seems in fact to outline a ferocious criticism of the Lebanese government, calling for a new government and for a correlation between a just and protective state and a strong resistance.

The question of the evolution of the Hezbollah is posed by Nasrallah himself: “I imagine that it will be possible on the basis of the experience of this last war to rethink many of the ideas and the programme of the Hezbollah. (...) This new situation will certainly leave a very deep mark on the mentality of the Hezbollah, on its understanding of things, on its functioning, on its action, and on its relations”. [16] What is more, since the end of the war the Hezbollah and the forces that have supported the resistance, from Michel Aoun to the PCL, are trying to find a political expression and perspective that is internal to the dynamic of the national resistance, by discussing together a minimum program of transition towards a state that would combine resistance and social development.

Which necessarily supposes, for the PCL, the abolition of the confessional system and of quotas. No one knows yet if these discussions will succeed, but we have to take note of the ability of Hezbollah to allow itself to be questioned on these issues.

The war in Lebanon was also deeply revealing of the political and ideological alignment of the bourgeois or aristocratic elites on the projects of the Americans.

The invitation to Tony Blair by the Lebanese government of Fuad Siniora, hardly a month after the end of the conflict, furthermore deeply offended Hezbollah. The breaks that it will or will not be capable of carrying out, the recognition of its real opponents and its real allies, will be decisive tests in the coming months and years. They will also determine the future of Islamo-nationalism and of new forms of Arab nationalism, which now find themselves obliged to define their political, economic, and social content: “the aim of a left wing policy is certainly the neutralisation of the reactionary dynamics which speak in the name of Islam; but it is not only pure denunciation, confrontation, frontal war (...). It is also positive interaction, exchanges back and forth, controversy, reflection, practice. (...) So perhaps there will be born a transversal dynamic of resistance to present modernity, a dynamic which transgresses it and goes beyond it.

A dynamic in which will participate popular currents defending an Islam that breaks with its reactionary interpretations. While it is hypocritical to call on Islam to adapt to the present day it is absolutely necessary to call for a political Islam that is open to the future and that can go beyond its time. But that lesson also applies to the Left.” [17]

Nonetheless, it will take time to understand what has changed: a symbolic relationship of forces can find a new equilibrium, a pan-Arab nationalism undergoing thorough change, an Arab world which is perhaps regaining confidence in itself, political movements which, whatever they are, from the Left to the Islamists, are now confronted with new questions, new orientations, new strategies. And the rules of the games have perhaps changed: fear has been conquered.

- [1] Maxime Rodinson, “Islam, doctrine de progres ou de reaction? Â» in *Marxisme et monde musulman*, Editions du Seuil, 1972, p. 129.
- [2] Rashad abu Shawar, Â« Tous les elements de la victoire Â» (Â« All the elements of victory Â»), pan-Arab daily al-Qods al-Arabi, August 9, 2006.
- [3] Georges Corm, interviewd by Youssef Ait Akdim, Tel Quel online, September 24, 2006.
- [4] Walid Charara and Frederic Dumont, *Le Hezbollah, un movement islamo-nationaliste*, Editions Fayard, 2004, p. 93.
- [5] To this must be added the arsenal of rockets, still estimated at 20,000 according to its general secretary, as well as all the long and medium range missiles provided by Iran, which are not usually part of the “classical” arsenal of guerilla movements.
- [6] Ali Fayyed, interview with the author, Consultative Centre for Study and Research, Haret Hareik, Beirut, February 10, 2006.
- [7] Khalid Hadadé, interview with the author and with the international delegation in solidarity with Lebanon, Beirut, August 2, 2006.
- [8] Ali Fayyed, interview with the author
- [9] Charles Abdallah, Â« Un printemps, oui, mais pour qui? Â» (Â« Yes, a spring, but for who ?”) in “Ou va le Liban ?” (“Where is Lebanon going?”) *Revue Confluences Mediterranee*, number 56, Winter 2005-2006, L'Harmattan, p 32.
- [10] The marja'ya is the Shiite religious leadership. There are several marja'ya among the Shiites, the best known one being that of the Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq. The Hezbollah officially follows that of Iran and of Ayatollah Khomeini, although its militants remain close to the Lebanese Imam Fadlallah, one of the theoretical inspirations of the Hezbollah.
- [11] Lara Deeb, Â« Une introduction au Hezbollah Â» (Â« An introduction to the Hezbollah Â»), <http://bellaciao.org/fr/article=31950>, August 4, 2006.
- [12] Joseph Samaha, interview with the author in the headquarters of as-Safia, Hamra, February 17, 2006. Joseph Samaha is an important intellectual personality of the Lebanese nationalist Left and he was for several years in charge of the left-wing daily as-Safia. After a violent political conflict within Safir, throughout the year 2005, he was invited to take over the former daily of the PCL, al-Akhbar, in order to make it the new tribune of left-wing ideas in Lebanon, but also of all the currents attached to the resistance. The first issue of al-Akhbar came out right in the middle of the war.
- [13] Hamid Dabashi, “Lessons from Lebanon: rethinking rational liberation movement”, *al-Ahram weekly*, 7th-13th September 2006.
- [14] According to the well-known expression of Gilbert Achcar, “neither fascism nor progressive”. On condition of also considering, parallel to this, that history remains open to both negative and positive possibilities, depending on the present conjuncture, and of not “essentialising” Islamic or nationalist movements in an eternal medium-term., but of really understanding all of its contradictions and potentialities as a nationalist movement of religious inspiration. Because as Gilbert Achcar writes, “the growth of the fundamentalist current, in many if not most cases, is not primarily the expression of society swinging to the right, as was the rise of fascism in Europe (...)
- [15] Gilbert Achcar, *L'Orient incandescent. Le Moyen Orient au miroir marxiste*. Editions Page Deux, 2003, p 50.
- [16] Hassan Nasrallah, interview with Talal Salman, *as-Safir daily*, September 27, 2006.
- [17] Sadri Khiari and Mohamed Cherif-Ferjani, Â« Trajectoires et paradoxes de l'islam politique. Contre l'orientalisme et l'orientalisme inverse Â» (Â« Trajectories and paradoxes of political Islam. Against orientalism and inverted orientalism Â»). In *Contretemps* no. 12, February 2005, Editions Textuel, Paris.