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Lebanon

Hezbollah and Resistance

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Question: The Lebanese Communist Party is a secular party, engaged in the national resistance. What have been its relations with the Hezbollah?

Marie Nassif-Debs: There have been big changes in this relation over the last 20 years. Twenty years ago the Hezbollah began by waging a merciless war against communists. I think that the Islamic fundamentalist tendency, which was especially represented by the Da'wa - an Islamic fundamentalist party which had backing from Iraq and in Iran, made up not only of Shi'ites, but with a majority of Shi'ites - saw in the PCL a party that was opposed to it on everything. It wanted to suppress any idea of secularism, openness, different philosophy, and so on.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Lebanon_Communist_Party.jpg]

Relations began to be very tense and the Hezbollah went so far as to kill several of our comrades, especially intellectuals, cadres from the universities. For example, they killed Mahdi Amil, who had worked on the problems on colonialism and of religion and who was a very great intellectual, a very great philosopher.

And there was also Hassan Mroue, a great philosopher who wrote a very important book, which has been translated into French, and whose title is "The Materialist Tendencies of Islam". He had begun by being a sheikh, he wanted to study in Najaf in Iraq. There he discovered that it wasn't what he was looking for and he became a communist. He wrote many books.

There were small scale combats, in Beirut, in the western Bekaa, in several regions, in places where there was a relationship of forces such that one side could suppress the other. That also helped the Syrian tendency to eliminate communists from the national resistance.

There was a certain understanding between the Syrian forces and the Hezbollah, and also other forces. We were hunted, there were comrades who went to carry out resistance operations and they were killed - they had been shot in the back.

After that relations evolved in a positive way. In the Israeli prisons and camps, the communists and Hezbollah were side by side. A majority of communists and fewer Hezbollah. They got to know each other there and that created relations between the cadres of the two organizations. And after they were released the relations more or less evolved.

Furthermore, on the level of its thinking, the Hezbollah has evolved, especially after the election of Hassan Nasrallah to the position of general secretary. Because - this is a point of view that many comrades share with me - he is much more Arab than Muslim, in other words, he looks at things through the eyes of an Arab: he doesn't want to liberate Jerusalem because it is one of Islam's holy places, but because the Palestinians have to go back to the land of their ancestors, have to have their own state... He has a vision that is different from that of his predecessors. Then we had relations that were more or less mitigated, sometimes good, sometimes bad.

And now?

Our relations have especially evolved since the last Israeli aggression, where we ourselves called for the formation of a national resistance front and formed militias which opposed the entry of Israel into several villages, including certain attempts by Israeli commandos to enter them - in the Bekaa, near Baalbeck, where we stopped the commando which

wanted to move into Jameliyyah, a village with a communist majority. We had three comrades killed there.

We are still a little bit skeptical in our relations with the Hezbollah, because up to now there are points of dispute between us. For example as concerns the elimination of the confessional regime [1], they don't have a very clear position, although they have evolved.

We had a difference with them in the summer of 2005, after the withdrawal of Syrian forces. During the legislative elections the Hezbollah felt it necessary, to protect itself from Resolution 1559 [2], to make an alliance with those who were pro-Syrian and who subsequently became transformed into pro-Americans, i.e. the Lebanese Forces, Hariri (Mustaqbal) and Jounblatt's PSP. It is thanks to this alliance that the March 14 forces [3] - Hassan Nasrallah admits it - won a majority and were able to form a government. Because if the Hezbollah had made an alliance with the communists and with certain Aounists [4], that majority wouldn't have existed.

So we consider the Hezbollah as a party of resistance, which is part of a movement of national liberation on the national and Arab level, but we have differences with it on how to resolve the political and economic situation in Lebanon. But on these questions also it has evolved, especially over the last four months: it took part in a very real way in the demonstration on May 10. However, up to now they have not taken a position on many problems. They have two ministers including the Minister of Energy. At the moment they are talking about privatizing electricity in Lebanon, and he is a bit lukewarm, he is not combative.

The second problem is that the Hezbollah has not taken a position on the question of the regime, of political reforms that go into the direction of secularism and modernization. These are two essential points of dispute. And we have a third one: we were against the re-election of the President of the Republic, Emile Lahoud, in 2004 and the Hezbollah supported Lahoud.

Do you see possibilities for a further evolution of the Hezbollah?

They are more or less grouped into two big tendencies. The tendency of the Da'wa, i.e. the one that just wants Islam. And the other tendency, the one which has evolved, which talks about sharing power, which talks about an alternative, and so on. I don't think that they have any choice but to continue evolving; we are going to continue the discussion with them and we think that if they don't evolve they will lose the fruits of victory, for the second time ... because what happened in July and August, I call that a victory. We stood up to Israel, the strongest power in the region...

We think that if the Hezbollah wants to take advantage of the victory, if it wants the Lebanese to take advantage of the victory, it has to evolve, otherwise we will go back to the same point as in 2000. In 2000 it was thanks to the Islamic resistance that our country was liberated, for the first time in Arab history. But the victory was devoured by confessionalism. I think that some of Hezbollah cadres understood that. And we hope - because there is a continual battle inside their party - that they will not lose again, by once again adopting confessional positions.

Is the national resistance front which was established during the war going to continue?

We are continuing to discuss an alliance on the political front with the Hezbollah and with the Aounists. Many of their cadres see in Aoun someone who has opposed the Christian fascists. There is a strong d Aounist groundswell among young people, especially in the universities. To start with it was a movement for freedom from Syrian control, but it is being carried along by a wave of Arab sentiment. It is which is really posing the problems that are essential

for Lebanon, and also the question of reform.

It goes further than the struggle against corruption, there is also a demand for real secular changes. That creates a possibility for a real coming together. The former Prime Minister, Sclim Hoss, is also very open, with a very Arab outlook, and she sees the essential points in this way: we are working towards a regroupment so as to establish a government of national alliance and to force fresh legislative elections, on the basis of an electoral law that would be proportional and secular, in order to subsequently elect the President of the Republic, amending the Constitution so as to suppress political and administrative confessionalism.

And you are discussing all that with the Hezbollah?

Yes! Of course we are discussing that. Because we said to them - and I think they have really understood this - that a great personality like Nasrallah, such a charismatic personality, can be an emblem for the whole Middle East (and not only for the Arab Middle East), but he can't become President of the Republic in Lebanon. If we want people to be able to occupy the essential posts in the state, then we have to suppress confessionalism. Because now, if he stood in the elections, although he would be supported by almost all the Shi'ites and although there are many Christians who like him, so even if he can have the majority with him, he cannot become President!

You can be very big on the international level but very small and very restricted on the national level with this confessional regime. Of the 128 members of the Parliament, half are Muslims and within this half there a third of Shi'ites. So the Muslims cannot increase the number of their members of Parliament, they cannot increase the number of their representatives in the government, because there are quotas.

So either we suppress the quotas and then everyone can compete in the elections on the basis of programmes that are well defined on the social, economic, and political level, and so on, making real alliances, or else it's the quota system. There are many people who are starting to think about this impasse ...Apart from the Communist Party and some left groups, all the political parties are confessional: the Hezbollah and Amal are Shi'ites, the Lebanese Forces are Maronite (there are also a few Greek Orthodox among them), the PSP is Druze, Hariri's Party of the Future is Sunni', and so on. We have a system which reproduces itself because we always have members of parliament who are elected on a confessional basis and who make laws in such a way as to preserve their interests.

There have been civil wars and they were based on religion. Although there were fundamental problems on the social, economic, and political level, these problems were swept aside.

This interview was conducted on 21st September 2006 in Paris by Mireille Court and Nicolas Qualander.

[1] This refers to the system whereby posts in the government and administration are attributed according to quotas for each religious group, i.e. the President of the Republic must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and so on.

[2] A 2004 Security Council resolution which demanded among other things, that all Lebanese militias should be disarmed and disbanded.

[3] Name given to the coalition of anti-Syrian forces.

[4] Followers of the retired Christian general Michel Aoun.